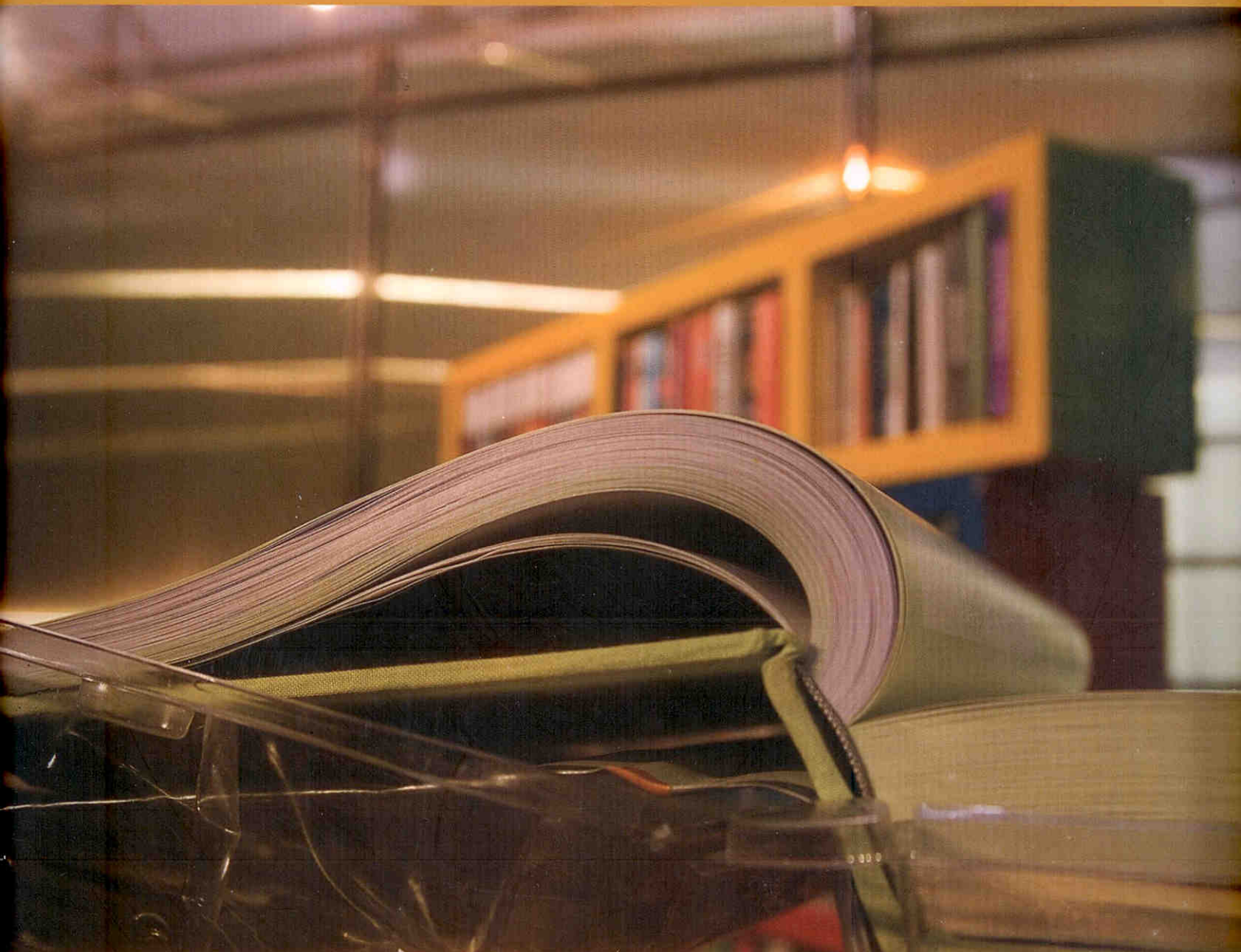


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THE WORKS OF SHINE SHIVAN, T. VENKANNA AND PRIYANKA Choudhary, lately showcased in solo shows at Gallery Maskara, Mumbai, had little in common in terms of what Meyer Schapiro calls 'object matter', but in essence, they all evoked and represented the corporeal.

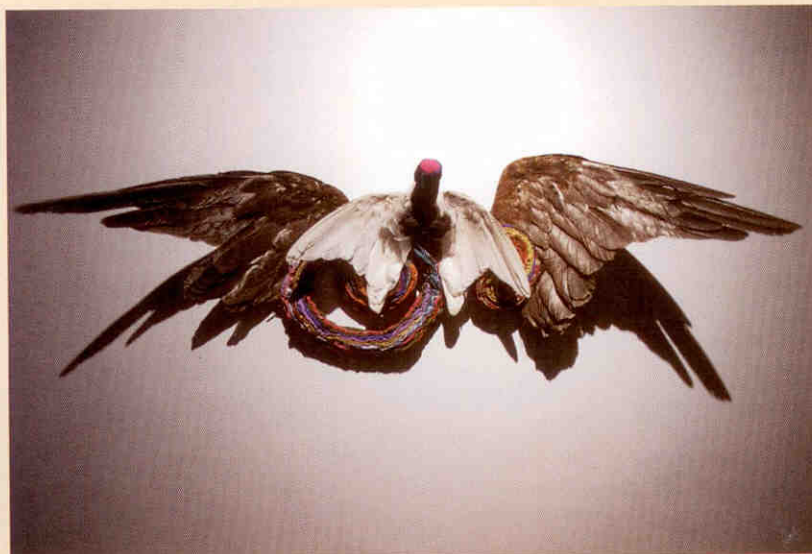
Shine Shivan's show, *Sperm Weaver*, which ran from the 17th of December last year to the 29th of January this year, was all about subverting the normative socio-taxonomic standards of 'masculinity' and 'femininity'. Shivan is a celebrant at the High Mass of virility and male fecundity. For the work, titled, *Psycho Phallus* (it should have been phalluses), Shivan recreated a couple of large wattle-and-daub structures simulating the *bitora* used to store dung cakes in North India. By appropriating the role of women who traditionally create this structure, Shivan 'queered' his male identity and made a homo-social statement about the right men have to engage with the organ – other than their own, that is. Shivan's challenging of gender norms manifested itself in references to transvestism. Some of his photographic stills were redolent of *haute mode* images of diaphanous tulle dresses with fantastic trains, worn by female models. Shivan's works exuded an atavistic sexual energy, which was particularly detectable in the tribal-fetish-like installation *Rape of Ganymede*.

The Phallus Fallacy

Reuben Varghese plays the voyeur at three shows at Gallery Maskara – all of which deal with some pleasures and pains.



Shine Shivan. *Sperm-Weaver*. Gallery View. 2009.



Shine Shivan. *Rape of Ganymede*. Installation view. 2009.



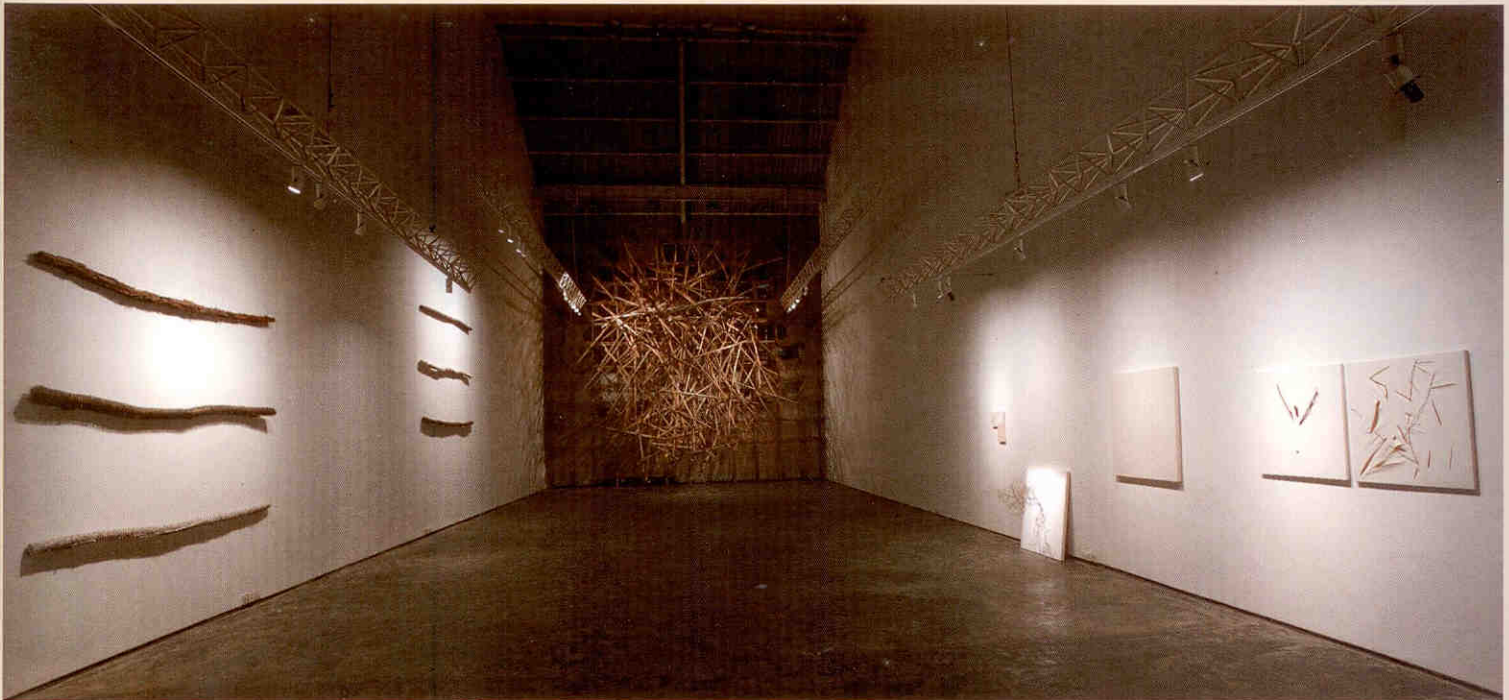
Shine Shivan. *Sperm-Weaver-I*. Digital C-print. 24" x 31.5". 2009.

In a similar vein, T. Venkanna's solo *Sacred and Profane*, which was on view from March the 15th to April the 15th, was also about sexual identity and fantasy. Venkanna has a penchant for quoting from art history thereby making him an example of Fredric Jameson's idea of the Post-modern artist. As Jameson said in his 1985 essay *Postmodernism and Consumer Society*, "In a world in which stylistic innovation is no longer possible, all that is left is to imitate dead styles, to speak through masks and with voices of styles in the imaginary museum." Venkanna's canvas *Too Hungry Lion* was a sort of deconstruction of Henri Rousseau's painting *The Hungry Lion Throws Itself on the Antelope*. Here, the lion subduing the antelope was a highly sexual image, with the lion and the antelope symbolizing male and female principles respectively. The large canvas was juxtaposed with a series of toy figurines, arranged next to it, depicting inter-generic love. These figurines from Venkanna's bestiary trespassed against the food chain and the 'normal' order of things making Venkanna a flower child, displaced in time. His oil and acrylic on canvas, *Untitled Beauty*, could well be understood as a kind of post-modern Vanitas.

In contrast, for her show *NUL to Now*, from the 2nd to the 23rd of August, Priyanka Choudhary worked in an abstract, minimalist mode. Utilizing plaster, red clay, muslin, thorns and twigs, her canvases exemplified a stark aesthetic – a starkness that was compounded by the industrial space of the gallery. Opposite the canvases and facing them, were textured logs reminiscent of the crossbeams of crucifixes. There was a latent violence in Choudhary's works thanks to all the nailing and slashing that went into their creation. Occupying pride of place was *Pubic*, a large installation of bamboo scaffolding that seemed frozen in time. Dynamic in potential, it was like a large angry crotch, with curare darts embedded in its hollow crevices. The work seemed to speak about the violence women and their bodies suffer in contemporary society.



T. Venkanna. *Too Hungry Lion* (Detail). Oil and acrylic on canvas and sculptural installation made with acrylic on wood, encased in individual acrylic boxes. 2009.



Installation view of **Priyanka Choudhary's** *NUL to Now*. 2010. ALL IMAGES COURTESY GALLERY MASKARA.

Erratum: The *Special Report* on three shows at Devi Art Foundation by Deeksha Nath in Issue 1, 2010, did not carry her final edits.