

Art



Hair raising "Used Dicks", a 2009 installation by Shine Sivan

Queer by design

Shine Sivan's latest solo is a fashionable affair of constructed dresses and queer identity, says **Phalguni Desai**.

Shine Sivan's work stands out in the Mumbai art aficionado's memory for being explicit, yet thought-provoking. In the hypocritical morality that has recently underlined the city's social structure, Sivan's in-your-face exploration of his sexual identity has been known to overwhelm his viewers with a sense of shock and wonder, yet has managed to keep offence at bay. His work "queers" masculinity, invoking fresh imagery of feminised manliness through interpretations of his own experiences: his 2009 single-channel video, "Sperm Weaver" had Sivan roll about in frothy liquid, reminiscent of a number of images of Bollywood actresses in the throes of passion.

In his as-yet-untitled body of work, which will be on view at Gallery Maskara this fortnight, Shine furthers his artistic and theoretical constructs of exploring homoerotic masculinity

with an all-out experiment in fabric. Inspired by designers such as Dolce & Gabbana and Alexander McQueen, Sivan creates sculptural dresses from fabric and found and collected objects, modelled after aboriginal art, voodoo, the south Indian temple culture and its rituals as well as architectural and design elements from the Mughal period. This multiplicity of references creates a map into Sivan's mind, turning the viewer into the puppeteer who found the doorway into Malkovich's head. In some ways, Sivan allows you to live out your desires and fantasies and fears, through his own, by presenting them in an experiential hyperbole.

In this collection of 18–20 hand-tailored "dresses", we see Sivan's work mature along with his own considerations of the homoerotic male. He considers, of course, sexual desire and partnership, but

he also weighs in on views of family and parenthood. Sivan, whose close relationship with his parents, especially his mother, often makes an appearance in his work – for instance, he used his mother's hair in the installation "Used Dicks" (2010), where he replicated nests of the Baya weaver birds, built by the male of the species. Sivan attributes a lot of this body of work to his mother. "My mother has been very important to my creative process," he told *Time Out* in an interview. "She has been incredibly supportive of my choices, and my work both mentally and physically," and even lends her the title of the co-creator. This intimacy with his parents crosses over into his contemplation of homoerotic relationships beyond the romantic or sexual, and towards a more mature implication of family and settlement.

Clearly, in this body, Sivan

is thinking of progeny, but not in the most traditional sense of the word. For instance, one of the dresses shows the visual of a man holding what Sivan terms a "dream-baby", a child with an adult's head. The work is suggestive of various emotions the artist sees himself dealing with, as a homosexual man looking at the idea of parenthood – not just fatherhood, but also motherhood – through a Freudian construct. This exploration is furthered by the mango seeds stitched on another dress, referring to the mythic fertility powers of the mango (Kamadev's most potent missile holds a mango blossom; the impotent Dashrath impregnates Kaushalya by feeding her mangoes.) The resulting image certainly invokes stronger feelings than Katrina Kaif's tryst with the fruit in a TV commercial.

Sivan also explores the effects of an intimate and yet highly violent relationship, hoping to normalise prevalent archaic views of BDSM as the refuge of the perverted and the psychopathic. The well-read and forward-thinking will concur it is not, but Sivan speaks of it with reference to his own experience. He explicitly puts forth a Gothic corner in the world he felt compelled to explore in his own interactions, only to have found the joy and liberation that is also at the heart of a BDSM relationship. He further questions the long-term acceptance of relationships without the feminine presence, and considers the ways in which this absence is dealt with, by questioning normative roles in relationships, as being homosexual, female, male, or simply human. Yet another dress sports a fountain of hair that holds a number of bottles with figures compressed in them, suggesting the multiple sexual and asexual beings that live in our heads, their multiple tongues offering up a multiplicity of being.

The prospect of being witness to Sivan's maturity of thought and work is tremendously exciting, as he is a young and highly expressive queer voice in a society that is slowly opening up to everything that is different and queer.

The exhibition opens on **Thur Jan 10** at **Gallery Maskara** See Exhibitions.

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