

HOUSE OF GORE



Shine Shivan. *Glimpse of Thirst*. Installation view at Gallery Maskara, Mumbai, 2013. Photo by David de Souza.

We've come to associate Shine Shivan with penises. We admit that it is a rather crude connection that undermines the range of Shivan's engagement with sexuality but one that we can't shake off given the titles of his exhibitions – *Sperm Weaver* (2008), *Suck Spit* (2011), and his most recent solo, *Glimpse of Thirst*, which was held at Gallery Maskara, Mumbai, from the 10th of January to the 28th of February.

Yes, there were many penises in *Glimpse of Thirst* and even a video in which the artist pleased himself while embracing trees in a verdant forest in his...ahem...natural state. The biggest departure in the bulk of Shivan's new body of work was his inclination towards a fashion-driven aesthetic. The artist created a cast of characters with costumes and props that framed a fascination with fatherhood, homosexuality and violence. A profusion of colours, sequins, skeletons, fake eyes, dentures and flamboyant fuschia flourishes gave each of the sculptures a kitschy flavour that seemed more garish than horrific.

Through these grotesque titillations and provocations, Shivan sought to offer fluid depictions of masculinity and its relationship with femininity. The use of violence and seemingly deviant behavior was meant to "illuminate the anxiety of being categorised or being judged". But, the creations born of Shivan's painstaking labour – each of the costumes was exquisitely worked upon – seemed to have severed their conceptual connections with an exploration of sexuality. The "amorphousness of gender differences" that the wall-text highlighted appeared to have been subsumed by the hyperbolic personas of the characters.

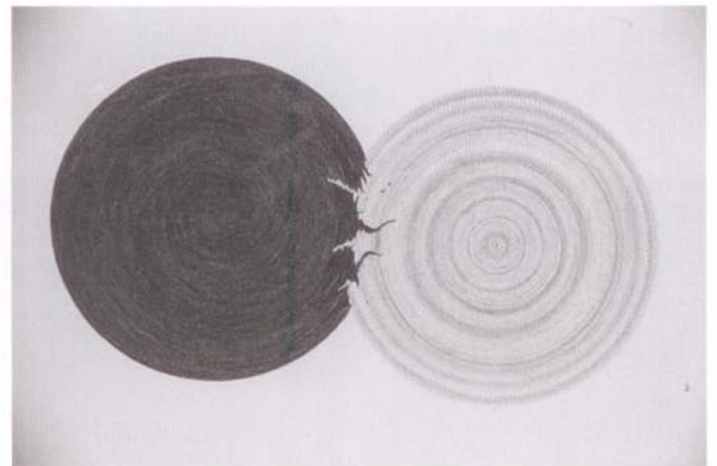
Shivan's skill of working with unusual materials – of organic and animal origin – was on abundant display in *Glimpse of Thirst* but where earlier works featured subtle suggestions, the new series appeared simplistically gory.

ZEENAT NAGREE

ON THE DOT

Pakistani artist Waqas Khan returned to Mumbai with his second solo, *Dance of the Retina*, which was mounted at Lakeeren between the 8th of November and the 31st of December. Khan's practice combined the traditional pointillist method of Bardhakhat, used in Mughal miniatures, with abstract forms. Using a 1 mm rapidograph pen to make dots, the artist created stark patterns on large sheets of wasli paper with a view, according to the catalogue, to "making these forms...that dance".

There were spurts of dynamism – *Axis of Verticality* was a jagged, dully coloured oblong set against a black background. Sharp-edged with a wavy brown shape widening out and tapering up from the base, the work was expressive and kinetic. A closer look revealed a certain rhythm in its composition. Seeing the minuscule dots painstakingly aligned, the brown ones momentarily resembling scales of a tiny reptile, made the artist's intention clearer. Similarly, the formal finesse of the fingerprint-like *Red Sun* was noticeable when one paid attention to how it had been made. Another work that manifested Khan's desire to represent the energy of his shapes was *Conjecture*, which featured black and white concentric circles with the former extending two ominous tendrils onto the latter's surface.



Waqas Khan. *Conjecture*. Rapidograph pen on wasli paper. 70 cms x 53 cms. 2012.

The level of meticulousness and craftsmanship was impressive of course, but one wondered how to view a work such as *Lines of Force II* which comprised a series of horizontal red lines on a white background and looked like something one might see in a doctor's lab. The question of the difference between the artisanal and the artistic reared its head here. One was bound to think of how the history of a traditional practice loomed over a unique one. Bardakhat was used in miniatures and wasli paper was the material the miniaturists drew on. How do form and content interact in the case of a practice that draws on a centuries-old technique but bears on imagery that it wasn't intended for?

KAMAYANI SHARMA