



Monica Jain cordially invites you to solo exhibition of

# MANISH SHARMA

# Modern Fetish

VIP Preview

**02 FEB 23, Thursday**, 7-9 pm

exhibition is on view till 02 MAR 23

*exhibition essay written by*

**Rahul Kumar,**

*Curator, Art Journalist and Artist*

Art Centrix Space

Jain Farm, Behind Sector D2, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi  
9811040289 | info@artcentrix.com | www.artcentrix.com

MANISH SHARMA, Clouds, Tenebrosity, 14x10x9inch; Brass, White Metal, 24ct Gold Leaf, 2022



# MANISH SHARMA MODERN FETISH

*A solo exhibitions of paintings & installations*

**SAT, 11th March | 5 pm**

Please join us over high tea for a Curatorial Walkthrough by

**Rahul Kumar**

*Curator, Journalist & Artist*



Behind Sector D2, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi | 9811040289 [www.artcentrix.com](http://www.artcentrix.com)

## Modern Fetish

By Manisha Sharma at Art Centrix Space, New Delhi

Do we need to preserve the past? Anthropologists and cultural theorists alike vouch for the study of history to make sense of our contemporary times. Past has an intrinsic value and when we erase it, we can never really know exactly what we are getting rid of. On the other hand, many believe that we need to look at the future with a fresh perspective. Evolution is a never-ending cycle.

Degeneration is an absolute and integral process that leads to regeneration. For Manish Sharma, we are never separated from our histories. It is embedded in our roots and it is the true identifier of the characteristics we possess. He believes that giving way to the 'new' is not the same as forgetting the old, or erasing the essence of our heritage. Historical objects and constructs are markers of time. They tell the tale of what was. His art practice is deeply rooted in references of his traditional cultural inheritance. His recent body of work titled *Modern Fetish*, celebrates these cherished memories.

Sharma was born and raised in the small border-town of Bikaner in Rajasthan. He is a witness to the rapid development and urbanisation of the city over the years. And in the process, he has seen the erasure of some of the most iconic symbols, altering architecture, and vanishing customs. His works aspire to communicate to his audience the act of 'vandalism of our culture'. The art documents the cannibalised heritage as a testament to the hollow skeletal-remains of what was once a rich culture of the city. And in doing so, Sharma keeps a non-cynical and positive posture. Many of his works emerge out of active research of documenting the history of the city. Iconic stepwells not only served a critical purpose to collect and store water for the summer, they were also majestic architectural monuments. They became points of coming-together for exchange as part of the daily ritual for the village locals. They were escapes. They were celebratory. While stepwells are no longer a 'need' for any of the above, erasing them takes away far more than the mere physical and structural presence of it. The stepwell and memories of the majestic *havelis* are a recurring theme in Sharma's art. There are distinct architectural allusions in his *Blue box series*. The box frame is brightly painted and formed akin to the traditional wall-shelves. Straight lined geometry gives way to the ornate Indo-Islamic style. Within each of the 'boxes', one finds objects. In shimmering golden metal, they evoke a sense of precious and preserved memory. Sharma leaves it for his viewers to decide whether they are objects of desire or objects of conflict. There is a definite sense of yearning, but the juxtaposition of the old with the new in how it is presented makes the works nostalgic rather than a critique of development itself. Elements of step-well, utensils used in erstwhile kitchens, trees and cloud forms, all indicate a pensive mood, sans a judgement of the contemporary. Sharma does not shy away from calling his works somewhat literal. The choice of symbols and icons are meant to be understood by an audience group that includes the uninitiated. Or, the ones who may not be as familiar with the cultural history of the region. It is important for him to not alienate anyone who desires to engage with his work. Esoteric references are often lost in translation or get miscommunicated. For Sharma it is a trade-off between limiting the interpretations, yet keeping easy points of entry into his art. Ideas of nostalgia need the support of the recognizable. Through his art, he would rather allow the journey to be longer in diving into the emotions expressed, than to find ways to find a common connect with the work. The concepts of loss also originate through displacement. Urbanization and migration – both voluntary and involuntary have meant a radical change in lifestyle, values, and customary practices. There is a satire at play to see these diminutive objects in contrast to the capitalistic productization of curious. These mass-produced souvenirs ironically fill urban homes, as though taking the inhabitants back to their homelands. Is this



exploitation of the culture and heritage by the 'industry'? One is compelled to wonder while beholding Sharma's sculptures.

Sharma's artistic process involves making visual notes through sketches. These often culminate into a basic layout of what he desires to create, but almost always it ends up being a spontaneous process that evolves the work. He also uniquely chooses to work in varied mediums. What remains prime for him is the concept he wishes to explore. Media, or a blend of it is employed to best support the execution and to visually manifest the underlying thought. He does confess to be experimental in his approach. Stumbling upon something new is always fascinating. Dichotomies are also at play when he uses contemporary and industrial material and processes to express ideas of traditions. His art showcases the transformation of the media into precious objects while also displaying transformation of the times.

*Modern Fetish* straddles multiple media to create a cohesive experience. He aims that his audience will respond to the apathy of the destruction of the cultural heritage with the hope for a social and eventually a political change to take steps to protect it. The central theme of cloud transients throughout the body of work. It is a metaphor for the fleeting moment, just as drifting memories...or dreams may be. The icon of cloud is also significant for the inhabitants of the arid region, most of which is desert that receives minimal rainfall. Painted clouds are a common site on the façade of houses in his town as an ode to please the rain Gods. Sharma reminisces this imagery from his childhood. Is it commoditisation for a consumeristic society? Or what remains as a memory of today is a myth of the past...the past that does not exist anymore and the present seems de-linked from it. This exhibit invites us to behold, imagine, and act.

- Rahul Kumar  
(January 2023)