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AN INITIATIVE BY

STIR



Bijoy Jain
Immediate Landscapes, 2018



Pic: Shantanu Prakash

ART-ITORIAL

Just the other day I was having a rather animated and intense discussion with two fellow artists on how technology is changing the way the new-gen approaches how they learn and work. The observation of one of my friends, a teacher at a Mumbai based architecture college, is from close quarters. "I was aghast when one of my students replied in a very matter-of-fact way when I asked why they prefer watching a movie than reading a book," she shared. Any guesses? It is sad and simple - "One has to imagine too much while reading a book! Something that is easily provided in a film." This phenomenon is applicable to consuming just about anything, especially in the creative space. The biggest joy of seeing art, for instance, is its discovery and interpretation. And if this very thing about it is the pain-point, then little can be done. As an artist with clay as my medium of choice, I know that there is absolutely no escape to dirtying my hands! I cannot avoid babysitting a kiln over a twelve-hour long firing process, and if it is forty-five degrees in the peak of summer, then so be it.

The process of art production itself varies widely, most requiring tedious and meticulous renditioning. There are however art practices that utilize the ready-made as components for the work they create. Is the objective to simplify the very process of making art? While the use of the machine-made product to make hand-made work of art itself is not new neither uncommon, in this issue we delve into the overlapping spaces of art and product, in context of architectural spaces and design processes. Marcel Duchamp used the readymade, as did the Dada artists in as early as 1910. The idea was a mockery of art by teasing and rejecting logic and reasoning, and to critically question its value in a rapidly industrialized world. "The real point of the readymade was to deny the possibility of defining art," said Calvin Tomkins, the biographer of Duchamp. In the contemporary context, is it the functional associations of the mass-produced objects that are relevant to artists? Or is it the visual form and texture of these impersonally manufactured things? Further, we investigate the vice-versa - use of art in the mass-produced (or at-least mechanically produced, in multiples) functional products.

Johann Goethe called architecture frozen music. Dance, then, can be described as painting in motion. Sculpture, a section of prose.

Crafting (or creating) is the basis of all art. Architectural and design practices are paying more attention to aesthetics along with functionality than ever. Are the lines blurring between creative disciplines? Maybe, the lines never existed and were only a figment of our imagination.

Rahul Kumar

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“The moment we define our practice, we are dead,” says Sumir Tagra when I asked how they would characterise the “art practice” of the duo under the name of Thukral + Tagra. Their work is research-based, often conceptual, multi-disciplinary, almost always experiential, but above all, experimental. Their ‘Think Space’ at a residential complex in Gurgaon, not far from their studio, is surrounded with their art, Mac computers, and team members, a sort of a mix of a gallery and office space. We sip on homemade lemonade over an intriguing discussion.

Pics: Courtesy of Thukral & Tagra studio

THE INCORRIGIBLE DUO

*A collective that refuses to be typecast, Thukral & Tagra have partnered to produce monumental works that evoke contemplation for the viewer. **Rahul Kumar of mondo*arc india|STIR** speaks with **Jiten Thukral** and **Sumir Tagra** about their journey so far.*

Jiten Thukral was born in 1976 in a village near Jalandhar, Punjab. He graduated from the Chandigarh Art College in 1998 and enrolled for a Master’s programme at the Delhi College of Art in 2000. Sumir Tagra, born in 1979 did his Bachelor’s degree at the Delhi College of Art in 2002, where the two met. “We met at Delhi College of Art at a ragging session. Thukral was my senior and I was in the queue to submit my application form. He spoke to me as an applicant himself, innocent, as if someone who knew nothing about the college,” shares Tagra. They became friends and discovered a similarity in objectives, that of breaking away from the traditions and trends in the art they wanted to produce. Later, they worked together at an advertising agency but Tagra moved on to do a Master’s program at the National Institute of Design (NID), Ahmedabad. “It was a tough call for me. I had a well-paying

job, and to leave that to study was not an easy decision,” he says. They had already embarked on a journey of working together. The first formal collaboration was an e-magazine, launched in 2003. It was available through a web portal they established, called BoseDK.com. After the first three issues, the project was abandoned. Gallery ecosystem, they feel, only supports when the art produced is sale-able. They realised that the final work had to be something that could hang on walls. “Our first show under the name Thukral & Tagra was in 2006. We wanted to continue with BoseDK, but our gallerist, Peter Nagy, wanted that to change,” says Thukral. “We are always keen to respond to shifts and are rather comfortable with keeping everything we do very experimental in nature,” he continues. Since college days, T&T, as they are popularly referred to, have been interested

in the idea of pushing a thought and looking at things with a new lens. They respect individual space between each other. “There are times when I may not fully understand or even agree with certain ideas that Sumir wants to pursue, but that does not stop him in any way to develop it further. Likewise, I get all the freedom to think independently. And at some point, things converge and we both bring it to fruition,” explains Thukral. This process of working together, layering the views of both, and finally negotiating aspirations in how a project will finally rendition is evident in their works. ‘Sound Sculptures’, for instance, is a series of factory produced porcelain vases. They studied the possibilities with clay, not technically, but visually. They imagined non-conventional forms, layered with imagery, and juxtaposed with customised metal cast components. “We ended up having the pigments sprayed on the surface to get



THE SOUND SCULPTURES

The series is imagined as dream-set with ramifications about the past and the future. The Sound Sculptures have no real sound to it. The attempt is to twist the narrative with the absence of real sound waves. The material evokes certain emotions and lets the viewer imagine instances, triggering it with the imagery juxtaposed on the pieces. One can weave stories with their experiences. There is no present. We live in past or in future.

Part of the series will be showcased at the First Indian Ceramic Triennial at Jaipur later this year.

Glaze fired porcelain vases with brass cast components mounted on ornate wooden tables, 2012



MEMOIR BAR, 2016

Top Left Shredding of memory paper

Top Right Tile moulding of shredded paper

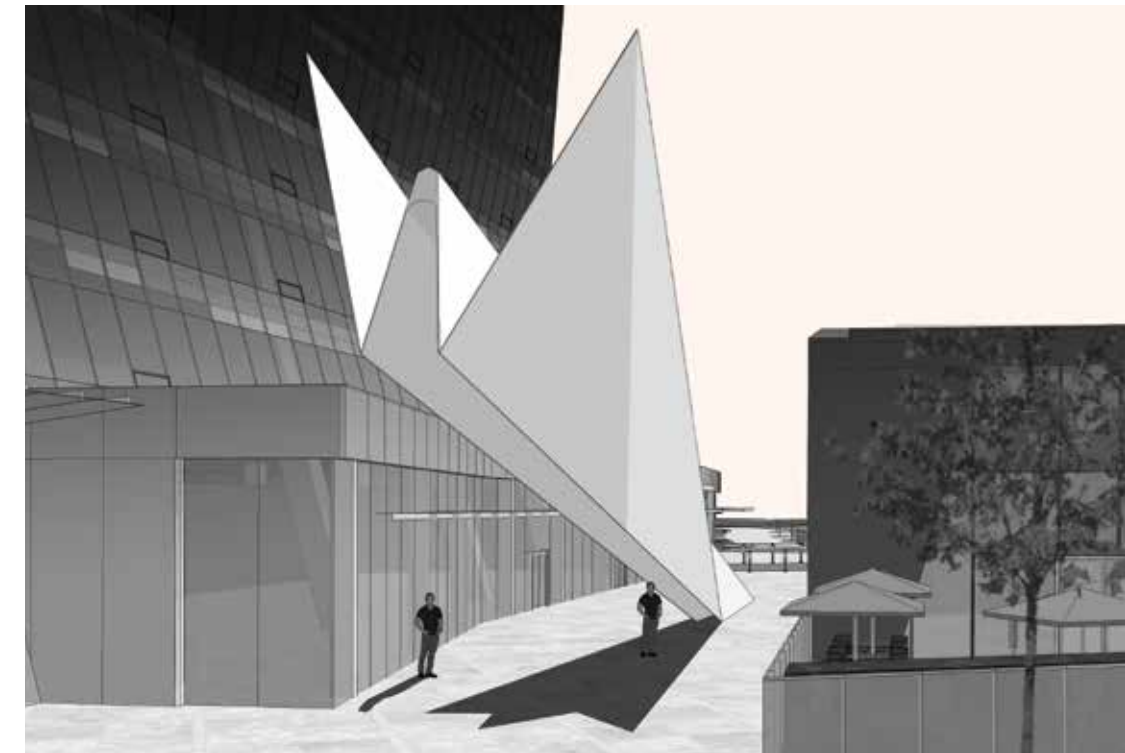
Right Memoir bar library of constructed tiles

Bottom Illustration of a proposed permanent open-air structure to install memoir bars



a gradation in colour. Something that was not really attempted by the production unit ever. We are excited to be able to showcase a part of this series in the First Indian Ceramic Triennial at Jaipur later this year," shares Tagra.

Being visual artists, they do not see objects as material, especially in the context of using the readymade to produce their art. The aesthetics and physicality (form, colour, texture, scale) are more significant in contributing to the possibilities. "The readymade acts as a symbol as it embeds a particular history, cultural understanding, and timelines. These associations make the object rich, and its value can be weighed accordingly. We see these as objects of knowledge and try to use the pre-conceived notions for making a discourse," explains Thukral. The core motivation is how the objects are finally used to convey a certain message and raise certain questions. Their projects vary in nature, sometimes





Above Play Pray, installation at Chatterjee & Lal gallery, Mumbai, 2017

Left Play Pray, installation at Bikaner House, New Delhi, 2017

Top Right Play Pray, still from a performance at Bikaner House, New Delhi, 2017



“We met at Delhi College of Art at a ragging session. Thukral was my senior and I was in the queue to submit my application form. He spoke to me as an applicant himself, innocent, as if someone who knew nothing about the college.” – Sumir Tagra

even demanding the physical involvement of the audience. The work and the approach are humble in essence. They are presented keeping in mind that the work should completely resonate with their process. “We procured 80,000 Ping-Pong balls from amazon.com for a project titled ‘Set Point’, which was an extension of an earlier exhibit called ‘Play Pray’. The project culminated into a performative presentation. For another one we used empty Hershey’s bottles,” continues Thukral. The immediate idea of the function of the product being used ceases to exist, however, those connotations are still useful in deriving the meaning and evoking certain emotions for the viewers. They used the demonetized currency bills to create ‘Demonetization Bars’. And in yet another interactive part of the very making of the work by using

personal memories as the currency. ‘Memoir Bar’ was created by visitors writing their own personal memories on paper notes. These were then shredded and based on the emotion of the memory, coloured plaster was poured into moulds to bury the shredded paper, creating a library of preserved memory bars. “We have several thousand bars now, safely stored away. We had proposed a monumental structure in the form of a paper plane to install these tiles for a specific location, but we are still waiting to find the right space and time for this,” says Tagra. For site-specific works, both the work and the space have to marry and sit together. There has to be a complete consensus. There are aspects of the site, like why was the site made, what does it say, how does it compliment any work, and what kind of work will fit the best. www.thukralandtagra.com