



ARTS ILLUSTRATED

Death by Wool

Death by Caption

Death by Freezing

Death by 3D

Death by Candlewax

Death by Caption

Death by Overdose

Death by Xerox

Death by Sharpener

Death by Stencil

Death by Dental Floss

Death by Teabag

Death by Fire





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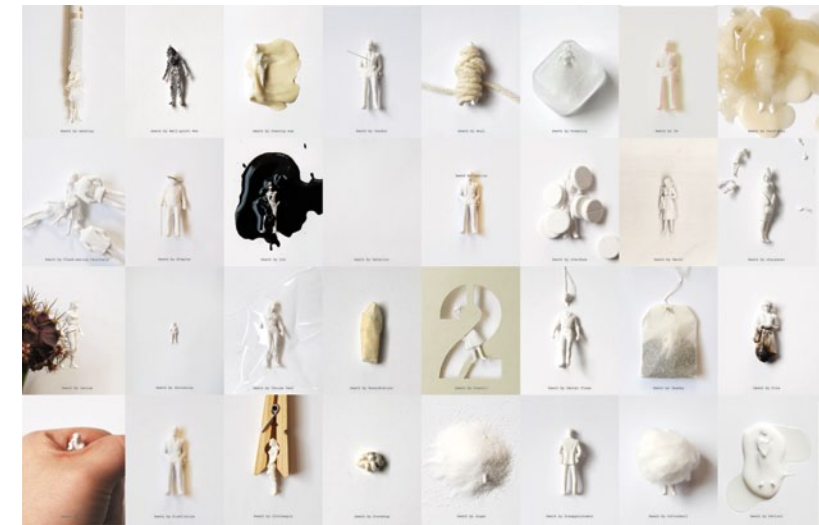
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Cover Artist - Tara Kelton



'Death By...' is a project Tara initiated while she was at Yale. 'I found these small plastic architectural figures in a New Haven art store, and amused myself by destroying one of them in a new way, every day, for a period of three months,' she says. This resulted in a series of images of these tiny 'people' dying in immediate ways ranging from being sharpened in a sharpener, taken apart with pliers, to the more metaphorical like 'disappointment', and 'deletion', and elaborate ones, like 'electrocution' and 'freezing'. This was a quick and spontaneous process for Tara, and a lot of the 'ways to die' ended up being things that she found around in her apartment. She recalls 'When I cooked one of the figures on the stove, tiny bits of plastic flew up in the air and straight into my nose...it was almost death by inhalation, but this time for me and not the figurine!'

For the cover of this issue on Humour, Tara chose 32 images from the original series of 95. 'I was able to quickly narrow it down to my favourite 32, but I always find the act of sequencing quite daunting and I can be a bit obsessively compulsive about trying every possible option before

deciding. I thought about how many possibilities there must be mathematically.' Tara actually asked a mathematician friend and when she learnt that there are approximately 260-billion-trillion-trillion possible ways to combine the 32 images (that's 26 plus 35 zeroes), she was hoping for us to give her the time to try each of those. But when that was not possible, she just used instinct and arranged them quite quickly, visually.

The size of the figure within the frame is kept consistent across the series. She consciously uses a limited and neutral palette. While most of the 'deaths' were analogue, they were broken up with some digital gestures like 'Death by Pixelation', 'Death by Blur', and 'Death by Caption'.

'Death By...' seems quite removed from the rest of Tara's practice, but on a closer inspection many parallels are found, like the incorporation of both the analogue and the digital, and blurring the line between humour and darkness, something that can be observed throughout her work.

Conceptualisation of the cover and text above by Rahul Kumar.



The Walls That Breathe

Arts Illustrated's new column takes you into the world of art collectors and connoisseurs, giving you an exclusive peak into the lives of the artworks from the other side, so to speak and deconstructs the tenuous bond between the artist, artwork and collector. We begin with artist Manisha Gera Baswani and her husband Rahul Baswani who believe theirs 'is a living collection, ageing with them'.

RAHUL KUMAR

Photographs by Shantanu Prakash

I did not have to look for their number on the second floor in an apartment complex in Gurgaon to know the house of Rahul Baswani and Manisha Gera Baswani. Artworks cover up the façade wall, right from the lift lobby of their house. Rahul is an executive coach and corporate trainer and his wife, Manisha, is an established artist. Together with their two sons, they live – literally live – with an envious collection. It includes works of some of the most significant artists, from India and Pakistan and beyond, and also crafts from

various parts of the world.

Himmat Shah heads in bronze share a corner with traditional Tanjore paintings.

Monochromatic works of Jeram Patel, Nasreen Mohamedi and Zarina Hashmi seem as though they are having a comfortable conversation in the living room. Manisha's artist-portraiture project takes up a full wall in the television-lounge and yet another corner has a floor-to-roof shelf with hundreds of owl sculptures collected from across the globe. 'The first show that Manisha and

I saw together was an FN Souza show curated by E Alkazi. Her brother was a friend and because he bailed out that evening, he sent Manisha instead and Manisha offered to "entertain" me at this show. Our fondness for each other grew and we ended up seeing many shows together; in fact, art galleries became the natural dating haunts,' says Rahul.

And, through cups of tea and animated conversation, more of the anecdotes and stories come tumbling out, each as distinct and memorable as their collection itself.



Edited excerpts from the conversation

I was the collector and she the advisor...and, well, a co-financer.

The first work that we ever bought was a small etching by Amitava Das. Preima Kurien ran a gallery called Art Inc. She must be credited with putting us on the path of collecting art. She would show us small works, so that they remained affordable for us to buy. She would also constantly guide us and warn us not to go overboard. 'Learn to savour what you have,' she would often emphasise.

When I started collecting, I rarely went beyond the headline; but later we developed a method to this impulse.

I can now say that it's good to know about the background of an artist, his experiences and concerns. It helps to understand the story behind the work and as a viewer one can recount the magic. But when I first started to buy art, it was pure impulse. I would see a work and if I reacted to it, I would try to acquire it. Art in those days did not have the kind of economic value it has now. It was still an indulgence, though. As Manisha and I started to see shows and make decisions jointly, we arrived at a method to assess and shortlist. We would go to a show and walk in opposite directions, mentally marking the works we liked. We would then exchange notes and walk the show together. The shortlist would only be the ones that would overlap in both our lists!

We went to the framer to get a pre-preview of a show, and at another time got the biggest surprise when we took one work to reframe and got back two!

Since we were never seriously buying to build a commercial collection, we did not consciously try to invest in one artist or a few. What happened was very natural. With Manisha's influence, we were following a genre and therefore organically went deeper into a few practices. Himmat Shah was one artist whose works we seriously invested in to get a broader representation of his practice. But there were times when as a gesture of encouragement we would buy from a heartbroken and dejected artist, whose show did not fare well; but later realised that was not the ideal way to buy. The step change for me was that I would first buy art and then get to know the artist. But when most of our buying became collaborative, we bought work of the artists we already knew. We once actually went to the framer who was preparing works for an upcoming show just to get the first pick! And then there was a recent incident that was the biggest surprise ever. We had bought a work of Nasreen Mohamedi many years back. Since the frame was old and no one really bothered to put acid-free mount in those days, we decided to have it reframed. While at the framer, we had the work opened...and to all our surprise, it actually had a whole different work at the back! These things don't happen often!

We moved to a rented house just to get more wall space, but at the same time our art purchase slowed down.

We moved from our own house to a rented space, primarily to get more space to accommodate Manisha's studio, but also to have our collection get more wall space. We wanted to have the works breathe! Sadly, over the past decade, the art market became organised and the players focused on the commerce of it. This marked the end of our serious art buying. The whole relevance of owning art was lost for us. Ironically, many of those players don't even exist now. What remains is very high entry points and all the pressure around valuation of works. Indulgence of impulse and love for a work ceased to exist.

Our collection is a living one, kids played while art hung on the walls and pets ran around the house. Works have been torn and glued back...they age as we do.

Significant portions of the works we own are hung in our house. From lift-lobby to hallways, even in our wash-rooms! Ours is a living collection, not a museum collection. The works have had our children and their friends play cricket around them. We have had pets running around the house. The collection is "used" and, like our bodies, the works are ageing with us. Torn works have been glued right back. We never collected art for its commercial value or as a mechanism to add to our monetary wealth. Maths and





art never talked to each other when it came to our buying decisions. We were buying to really fill our home with art. We do have many works that are stored, but they are mostly miniatures and oleographs that require a more intimate viewing; they have a more academic value of reference for Manisha and her art practice. Given how expensive it has become to frame, we actually designed removable frames where we change the works ourselves, to view more of our works without having to invest in separate frames! We have considered insuring the collection, but never got down to it. We respect each work and make efforts for their conservation, like ensuring no seepage on walls and not placing paper or canvas works in direct sunlight. We take a pragmatic approach to this.



Manisha Gera Baswani and Rahul Baswani

Ramachandran has been a father figure...

If we are forced to just take one work with us and run, it will have to be a watercolour on paper by AR Ramachandran hanging in our bedroom. It is a beautiful work, but more importantly reminds us of the person he is. He is the guiding philosophy for Manisha and her art, and honestly the source code for both of us. If we were given a change to take a second work, it will be Manisha's work titled *Kyoto*. I feel attached to it since I witnessed the work taking birth, from the inspiration of glaciers and temples in Japan to its final rendition.



Manisha Gera Baswani. *Kyoto*, Watercolor, Tea Water, Pencil Colors & Gouache on Paper, 41" x 31", 2008



Death by Smoking



Death by Ball-point Pen



Death by Chewing Gum



Death by Voodoo



Death by Flesh-eating Cannibals



Death by Stapler



Death by Ink

Death by Deletion



Death by Cactus



Death by Shrinking



Death by Vacuum Seal



Death by Mummification



Death by Glass



Death by Pixellation



Death by Clothespin



Death by Stovetop