



ARTS ILLUSTRATED

Natal

Editor's note

It was a rainy Sunday afternoon, a rarity in water-starved Madras. The room, a small one with divans in the corner, recliners at the back, bean bags, cane and wooden square stools strewn around, was full. It was a Pop Philosophy class – Episode 5 to give it the full Star Wars effect – by Warhorse, a group of young, dynamic change-makers trying to revitalise the space of education and learning. This particular episode of Pop Philosophy (the series was about finding connections between philosophy and pop culture) was whimsically titled 'Ai-Ai-O' – it was on artificial intelligence and the questions it raised about ethics, morality, and, well, humanity, while we are at it.

I was drawn into this world of science-fiction-meets-reality, of human-like robots and robot-like thoughts, of impossible ideas becoming possible futures, and of a time where everything can be simulated, even our senses.

It seemed like serendipity, that I was there in this man-made world (a whole new meaning to that phrase now) with this issue of Tactile Art fermenting in my head. Were we looking at this idea of 'sense perception' from a soon-to-be-obsolete platform or did it just up that urgency quotient on memories, ancient like the earth, that reside inside our skin, in our bones, in our blood? And more importantly, did it even belong to us?

We looked at this aspect of tactility, and therefore its manifestation in art, through myriad lenses – through nostalgia, movement, visual suggestions, through the politics of identity, the power of legacy, the promise of technology, and even the subtlety of music. And through words, of course. In each of our stories, the individual has collided with the collective in unpredictable ways, like asteroids briefly stepping out of their orbits, showing us unexpected beauty in the destruction of platitudes we often surround ourselves with, and a tenderness with which to arm ourselves for the future we are heading towards.

This issue of AI (the irony does not escape me) is like that assiduous earthworm going in and out, in and out, the entire physicality of its being making the soil soft and moist, so ideas can be planted better.



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Cover Artist



When I started my journey with clay, I found it rewarding to make pots people could use. The anatomy of a bowl, its size, proportions and points of transitions allowed for endless discovery of balance and rhythm. Gradually, as I focused more on the form and character of the pot, utility and function took a back seat. My work became more sculptural. I started to 'reinvent' things from nature with my own visual language. The works are often a delicate balance between wheel-thrown components and slab-constructed additives. Developing these two methods simultaneously allowed a fresh creative approach that promotes exhibiting the contrast of the medium – wheel-thrown representing symmetry and rigidity; and hand-built components showing the organic and fluid nature of the clay.

For the cover of this issue of Arts Illustrated, I have used the terracotta clay fired to 1020 degree centigrade. I have brushed stains and white clays, as well as used gold-leaf on the surface. My process of creation manifests a kind of behaviour that is a potent mix of the ritualistic, intuitive and spontaneous. It involves the unconventional use of ordinary objects and motifs. The process becomes evident in the art work itself. I have referenced familiar, yet mundane, domestic objects, which are repurposed in the overall rendition. The ultimate aim is the dematerialisation of the form... 'nirguna' or the attribute-less. The clay object has picked each dent and slap, creating undulations and cracks, creating an experience open to be interpreted. Is it a microscopic detail of something organic, or is it a spatial view of a landscape? Is it a sculpture, or is it a painting? It asks to be felt, giving a glimpse into how I created the piece, albeit a fraction of it.



Rahul Kumar

