

## Rite of Passage

By Megha Joshi at Studio Art, New Delhi

Like living beings carry emotions, objects carry connotations. Through its historical purpose or personal associations, an ordinary everyday thing communicates sentiment and sensation.

For Megha, elements used in religious rituals became her media to express. A sense of the philosophies of *Bhakti* and Sufiism seem evident when experiencing her works. The use of incense sticks, cotton wicks, and *rudraaksh* beads become means to find meaning for her.

There are striking dichotomies at play, however, in the very media used and the images they create. What at first may appear to be objects of *Hindu* ritualistic practices, collectively form distinctly Islamic motifs. This interplay of a layered interpretation is a significant aspect in her artistic practice.

The painstakingly laborious process that she undertakes herself, makes the act of creating a meditative one. Themes of gender remain a constant parallel in her art. An ongoing investigation, ideas of feminism and the body have played pivotal role in Megha's previous work. It is ironical that she is not trained in (so called) feminine skills of sewing and stitching, yet she uses thread and alters these very processes as a maker. Fascination for handwork and tools also find their origin in her career as a set designer. Creating aesthetically pleasing, yet temporary spaces sow the seeds of ephemerality as well as working on an immersive scale. Megha often creates installations that activate spatial contexts.

The recent body of work were created over the past two years, at a time when the world was beginning to emerge out of the global pandemic. The quiet and solitude of the lockdown immensely motivated the very approach of art making for her. She focussed on the 'doing' without the concerns of meaning-making. The process was repetitive and meticulous, while surrendering to the dictats of these chosen materials.

Devoid of opinions or conscious thought, Megha engaged in creating a series of 108 drawings. Each rendition of the form of a *rudraaksh* bead, however, conveyed of her emotion the moment the pen touched the paper. Bold lines emerged when she felt angered and fleeting whispering marks when she felt vulnerable. This imagery is juxtaposed with *jaali* patterns that were sourced from memory of growing up playing in the gardens of the Humayun's Tomb in New Delhi. It is then providence that she draws parallels of these lattices to the ornate ceiling of mosques.

The sheer curtains while adding a dynamism to 'dwaar/darwaza', veil the doors and simultaneously add a mystical quality to them. She emphatically clarifies that she has no interest in dwelling upon the teachings of any religion. Her modest attempt is to 'save faith from religion'.

Repurposing objects, recontextualizing processes, and reinterpreting meanings are at the core for Megha. Elements from Islamic architecture, using a *hena* application cone to create intricate designs on her sculptures, and repetitive occurrences of prayer-bead form are all intended to question our preconceived notions. The works do not shy away from being aesthetically beautiful and carry with honesty the key references they are fundamentally created from. Neither are they tentative about the dichotomies. Much like Megha's own beliefs and being, her art unabashedly celebrates this delicate fabric of our contemporary times.

**Rahul Kumar**

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