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ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

Art | Tayeba Begum Lipi, 'This is What I Look(ed) Like,' Sundaram Tagore New York

On display are sculpture, photography and video installations that explore issues of female identity in contemporary life

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Photo Caption: Tayeba Begum Lipi, Unveiling Womanhood, single channel video projection, 'This is What I Look(ed) Like,' Sundaram Tagore New York

Sundaram Tagore New York has a penchant for exhibitions that are both sensorial and deeply stirring. In an epic culling, the acclaimed Bangladeshi artist Tayeba Begum Lipi will explore issues of female identity in contemporary life as she presents an array of sculptures, photography and video installations. Pain, passion and tenderness oscillate between entangled tensions seen through the lens of gender. She weaves in more than a thousand stories of gender practices and peculiarities that have never been addressed, in her show, *This is What I Look(ed) Like*, which opens May 2 at the Chelsea gallery.



Photo Caption: Tayeba Begum Lipi, 'Not For Me,' 2019, stainless steel, 7x10x 6 inches | Photo courtesy of Sundaram Tagore Gallery

Multidisciplinary Practice

Dhaka dweller Lipi's multidisciplinary practice includes painting, prints, videos, and installations, but she is perhaps best known for her sculptural works that re-create everyday objects, including irons, bathtubs, strollers, handbags, and sewing machines, all made from safety pins or stainless steel razor blades. The artist activist surfaces in her provocative choice of material that speaks of the violence facing women in Bangladesh and questions the representation of women's bodies and the history of their social roles.



Photo Caption: Tayeba Begum Lipi, The Italian Black Heels, 2019, stainless steel, 6x10x8 inches | Photo courtesy of Sundaram Tagore Gallery

Female Identity

Lipi's recent razor blade sculptures are a moving testimony through which she includes a selection of women's wardrobe accessories, ranging from shoes to undergarments. In an interview in 2014, she had said: I am the 11th of 12 children. During my childhood, someone in my family was always giving birth at home. My brothers would always be sent to the shop by the midwife to buy new razor-blades because that was what she would use if she had to cut the baby out. One of my strongest memories is of those razor-blades boiling on the stove. If I close my eyes, I can still hear the water bubbling."



Photo Caption: Tayeba Begum Lipi, The Tank Top, 2019, stainless steel, 22x12x6 inches | Photo courtesy of Sundaram Tagore Gallery

Memory Line

With this body of work Lipi explores the commodification of art, but here she takes the idea further by addressing the paradox of subversive art created by women that speaks directly to issues of female identity, yet is ultimately absorbed into the patriarchal structure of the art world. “The series of work I’m doing these days are related to the memory line,” says Lipi. “I am completing one chapter of my life and moving to a new chapter and ageing is one part of that.” This show will unveil an autobiographical perspective, as Lipi considers transitions in her own life as her springboard of inspiration.



Photo Caption: Tayeba Begum Lipi, The Swing, 2017, stainless steel, 46x24x24 inches | Photo courtesy of Sundaram Tagore Gallery

Existential Duality

Lipi fuses intimate subject matter with aggressive materiality, and reflects on the personal and political perils of a stifling society. “My work always expresses a paradoxical human condition that a human being experiences in a country like Bangladesh,” she explains. “Being in such a society as a woman, your experience is completely different than the experience of a man.” The duality that she identifies in her environment is translated viscerally into the experience of her work; her sculptures are luminous, delicate, and precious from afar, while startlingly ominous—and almost pain-inducing—up close.



Photo Caption: Tayeba Begum Lipi, Together, 2018, stainless steel, 43x57x14 inches | Photo courtesy of Sundaram Tagore Gallery

Story of a Girl

Lipi's titles are full of associations that embrace memories through time. She has often said she wrote poetry and short stories in student days. *Story of A Girl* was shown at the Shanghai Modern Art Museum last year—it captures the brevity of life in ten images. In a series of staged photographs of Lipi, taken by French artist Awena Cozzanet in 2003, we see her through the various stages of life, from the carefree days of youth to the unknowns of marriage and eventually, death. The images are presented in altar-like wooden frames designed by the artist and fabricated by local carpenters.



Photo Caption: Tayeba Begum Lipi, The Rack I Remember, 2019, stainless steel and razor blades | Photo courtesy of Sundaram Tagore Gallery

Growing Pains

Other photographic works include the series that inspired the title of the show *This is What I Look(ed) Like*. Set inside mounted light boxes are an assortment of self-portraits of the artist from 2004 juxtaposed against current images where she is posing in a similar manner. Viewed side-by-side, these images express the pain of growing older—a universal experience, but one that is especially profound for women, as the manifestation of fading beauty become a reality.



Photo Caption: Tayeba Begum Lipi, Replicated 1, 2019, stainless steel, 20x11x8 inches | Photo courtesy of Sundaram Tagore Gallery

Unveiling Womanhood

Additionally, Lipi will be showing several video installations, including Unveiling Womanhood, a single-channel video projection in which the artist, wearing a hijab made of stainless steel razor blades, slowly and methodically removes small white crystals that conceal her face. The video was inspired by a growing trend in Bangladesh of women covering their heads in public, something that is not traditionally part of Bengali culture and is perhaps being appropriated as a form of fashion rather than an expression of religious observance.



Photo Caption: Tayeba Begum Lipi, Mirror, 2017, stainless steel, 48x24x16.7 inches | Photo courtesy of Sundaram Tagore Gallery

The Mirror

Equally eclectic is her sculpture *The Mirror*. This is one of her razor blade works in which two female figures face each other, Lipi says: “When I see things through my heart, when I have a conversation with another woman or when I listen to someone’s stories, I sometimes find the reflection of my own mind in that mind. We are as different as we live our lives, but we always find some similar issues or stories that are never spoken out ever.”

Tayeba Begum Lipi, ‘This is What I Look(ed) Like,’ will be on at Sundaram Tagore New York until June 1.