

CULTURE

Tayeba Begum Lipi's Singapore show is a personal commentary on a world riddled by a virus

Tayeba Begum Lipi's razor blade sculptures to be on display at the Singapore Art Week and Art SG at her show "Melancholy" is both a narrative and a commentary on the pandemic.

By Uma Nair

9 January 2023




Sundaram Tagore Gallery

When women artists speak to or about women, the dialogue is both distinct and stirring. Tayeba Begum Lipi's enigmatic razor blade sculptures will once again draw both female and male glances at Sundaram Tagore Gallery's unveiling in Singapore coinciding with Art Singapore 2023.

Her show "Melancholy" unravels both as a narrative and a commentary on the Covid-19 pandemic. The exhibition is an amalgam of Lipi's sense of self-observation laced with the politics of gender. Each blade sculpture in this unique exposition is about personal stories and experiences. Lipi is both an avid listener as well as a storyteller; she becomes the voice of the voiceless, as she lends an ear to women from her surroundings, especially from family and friends. These narratives contribute to a subtle yet strong relatively larger political statement of a community.

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Knotted 2, 2022, Stainless steel 17.7 x 31.1 x 31.1 inches 45 x 79 x 79 cm Sundaram Tagore Gallery

Blade Baby Shoes and Buttons

In Delhi last month, she sat across the table at India International Centre and described her soon-to-open solo in Singapore. “My show has two new sets of blade works inspired by objects of childhood—there are life-sized re-creations of strollers, high chairs, dresses and small, cute palm-sized baby shoes. The pandemic created so many contradictory twists and turns in our life. We lost several close family members, and we welcomed the addition of a baby boy, the child of one of my studio fabricators who lives with my husband, Mahbubur Rahman and me. The beauty of the role brought about so many feelings and emotions. Suddenly the baby belonged to all of us. The small, simple, everyday chores and sounds awakened a new chapter and I found the experience very satisfying.”

“Being engaged with work as practising artists, my partner and I almost forgot about the life every couple dreams about,” she confesses. “But time flies and your wounds are healed; you do not look back, but look forward to the extended positive vibes of life.”





It's Dinner Time, 2019, Stainless steel 33.1 x 18.1 x 25.2 inches 84 x 46 x 64 cm Sundaram Tagore Gallery

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Small Intimate Elements

The second group of sculptures is a response to the lockdown and Lipi's close examination of what she describes as "the small, intimate stuff" around her. Lipi plays with scale in witty and dramatic ways as she creates small, mundane objects, including buttons, safety pins and sewing-machine parts, in monumental sizes. Surreal and filled with soliloquies, each sculpture speaks in different tones and tenors. The dress of a woman is an oversized proportion, while it aims to capture the pain and violence experienced by women anywhere in the world.

Lipi juxtaposes the violent threat of these objects, traditionally associated with the feminine, with the metallic gloss of consumer choice. When asked about her dresses and bikinis that have been part of her oeuvre for the past decade, she states, "The dress of a woman is many things to many people. For me, the best way to give wings to your inner being is to wear it as an outfit and let people see it and read it. In the same way for me, my work is an extension of my inner being."

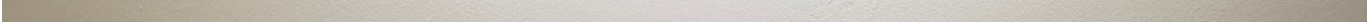
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Low Oxygen-No Oxygen, 2020, Nepali Lokta fabric and thread 18 x 29 inches 45.72 x73.66 cm Sundaram Tagore Gallery

Nepalese Lokta Fabric

This exhibition at Singapore with the Sundaram Tagore Gallery is an experience that showcases many parts of a lived history in a parallel but conceptually shared platform. “I went to Nepal in search of the famous lokta fabric, and then had these embroidered ensembles done as a collaboration. Nepal, for me, is important because it is a living example of histories and memories. The beauty of collaboration in six hand-embroidered drawings is that it makes us focus on slowing down. The time taken for the completion calms your entire being and you look at the creation of something unique with the coming together of human hands. In these six pieces of embroidery, the images of human organs are stitched onto Nepalese lokta fabric. I liked the delicacy of the fabric—it has so many possibilities, it also conveys how fragile life is when exposed to a virus such as Covid.”



Bleeding (2), 2020, Nepali Lokta fabric and thread 29 x 18 inches 73.7 x 45.7 cm Sundaram Tagore Gallery

Visual and Political Reality

“Melancholy” is a juxtaposition of the visual reality and (very personalized) political reality. The skimpy dress of blades is both subject and object. It creates contradictory revelations physically and psychologically in a pattern of paradoxes. The deadly sharpness of the material keeps the viewer at a distance from the art piece, but at the same time, the pale lustre of shine and its beauty draws the viewer towards the work. Lipi plays with the reciprocal residue of emotions and evocations that bring together the grey area between resistance and acceptance. The blade, as a medium of sculptural ethos, is also an edifice of a shiny sharp puzzlement that becomes a standalone wonder. The baby's stroller turns into an engagement, in which the viewer finds both conversations as well as commonalities.

Lipi's use of razor blades references a tool commonly used in childbirth, and to the violence women often face in Bangladesh. As a Bangladeshi contemporary artist, Lipi has created her own orbit of collectors all over the world, making her art enviable in the current global art scene ever since her first solo in 1998.

“Melancholy” at Sundaram Tagore Gallery coincides with the ART SG Art Fair, which will be on display from 12-15 January, and at Singapore Art Week, from 6-15 January.

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By Uma Nair



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