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‘Art that unites: An ongoing group show in the city features the creative expressions of South Asian artists from all over the world.’

By Riddhi Doshi



The ongoing intriguing group show titled *Delicate Bond of Steel* is a result of the unique exchange between Chatterjee & Lal in Mumbai and Aicon Gallery in New York. The latter’s first gallery show in the country, hosted by the South Mumbai exhibition space, features works of several South Asian artists based out of Australia, the U.S., Bangladesh and India.

With the ongoing political tensions, the exhibition is a reflection of all things that unite the region — for instance, political tensions, social makeup and environmental concerns. “Whether it’s in arts, literature, movies or television, political boundaries tend to be a little more blurry because of the commonalities in language, music and visual language of the region,” says Projjal Dutta, one of the founding partners of Aicon Gallery. Dutta has also curated the ongoing show with Andrew Shea.

So, for instance, in the twin portraits titled ‘Pastoral Bird I’ and ‘Pastoral Bird II’, late artist Rajan Krishnan, to whom the show is dedicated, talks of environmental degradation. “These works discuss the resort town Kumarakom (in Kerala) and how so much sand has been taken out of this riverbed to build resorts that the Bharathipura river which once flowed from here is now dead,” says Dutta.

Then there’s a piece that fuses an AK-47 gun with delicate Shola flowers (considered auspicious in Bangladesh); it’s an effective juxtaposition of the dangerous with the desirable. The untitled work by Bangladeshi artist Promotesh Das Pulak talks of danger and fragility and draws attention to the Shola flowers, which are fast disappearing due to global warming. “There is an entire community in Bangladesh that makes Shola flower crafts. But as the growth of the flower dwindles due to climatic conditions and its cost goes high, the craftsmen find themselves looking for other odd jobs,” says the artist.

Using currencies from different countries to make a statement on the global economy and common aspirations is the work of Australia-based artist Abdulla Sayeed, who is originally from Karachi.

Another highlight is Lahore-born, Vienna-based artist Anila Quayyum Agha's 'Hidden Diamond'. A large stainless steel powder-coated cube casts a beautiful shadow all around the space. "In her work, the cube in black is reminiscent of many things — robust, opaque, masculine and the Kabbah (building at the centre of Islam's most sacred mosque). It could also just be minimalist and modernist art," says the co-curator.

With *Delicate Bond of Steel*, the gallery hopes to build bridges, meet and interact with more people and offer a wider collector base for the in-house artists, which wouldn't happen otherwise. Of course, there would be the delicate matter of highlighting Pakistani artists. "There is actually no Pakistani artist in the show," says Dutta. "If you ask me do I show works by Pakistani artists in New York, my answer would be, yes."

It shouldn't really matter though, and yet it does. "We are quite focused on the arts. We have one Bangladeshi artist in the show and from the Bangladeshi context, he is a minority Hindu, which has its own challenges. But it just so happens to be that way." The curator adds that it's the artistic voice they're after. "It's not really about Pakistani art or anything like that. It all melts into art production, and from my experience, artists tend to be all quite liberal in their own contexts and milieu," he says before concluding that artists are not searching for what separates. It's unification that they're looking for.

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Delicate Bond of Steel is ongoing at Chatterjee & Lal till 24.