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Shock of the Mundane: Tracing the Miraculous Afterlife of Waste in the 21st c. Visual Art Through a Material Culture Approach

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Abstract: The transgressive art form of the early 20th c. anticipated the dissolution of barriers between life and art; hence, objects of every sort became materials for the new expression of art. Consequently, the proliferation of a multitude of objects and environments in art and the rapid move towards multi-sensory experiences questions the visual dominance prevalent in art historical analysis. Thus, enormous experimentation in terms of unconventional (banal/non-art) materials calls for art analysis to transition from the domain of visual culture to material culture studies in order to understand the aspects of contemporary life. Since Picasso's collages of synthetic cubism, art has witnessed the 'shock of the mundane,' specially with its use of waste or refuse. The realm of visual arts unveiled the aesthetic potential of trash, reassigning it a new purpose, thereby altering its social and cultural value. Since then, artistic practices have predominantly evolved with their preoccupation with waste or refuse, challenging the hierarchies of accepted materials in art.

The 21st c. global India's relentless drive towards material excess led to excessive experimentation with waste in Indian art. Artists have transmogrified the waste into unimagined constructions, from using it as signifiers to alienating it entirely from its

functionality and identity. From urban industrial excess to the lowest form of waste, the corporeal waste, Indian artists of the 21st c. have potentially surprised and disturbed the audience at once. By engaging with these idiosyncratic practices, the study takes a material culture approach to explore the myriad ways and artistic strategies in order to understand the cultural significance and effect of materials in artistic expression. With the help of case studies, it intends to build on the growing interest into the role and meaning of materials in art. The study will be a critical analysis, looking at multiple narratives and discourses of trash in the 21st c. Indian art.

Keywords: ***Visual Art, Visual Culture, Material Culture, Indian Contemporary Art, Art and Waste.***

Introduction

"The world at once present and absent which the spectacle makes visible is the world of the commodity dominating all that is lived" (Debord, 1970: 37). "This is the principle of commodity fetishism, the domination of society by "intangible as well as tangible things," which reaches its absolute fulfilment in the spectacle, where the tangible world is re- placed by a selection of images which exist above it, and which at the same time are recognized as the tangible par excellence" (Debord, 1970: 36).

Situationist Guy Debord (1970), in his polemic work 'The Society of the Spectacle,' presents a powerful critique of the contemporary consumer culture and commodity fetishism. Debord problematizes our technology-driven modern society, lacking an authentic social life, and instead is a mere

representation of it. According to him, social life has declined from 'being' to 'having' and 'having' into 'appearing.' Debord profoundly reveals how mass media has drastically invaded our society and pacified human behavior, thoughts, and rationale. Commenting on the superficial manifestation of mass media, he asserts, "the spectacle is not a collection of images but a social relation among people mediated by images" (Debord, 1970: 4). This proliferation of images marks the dominance of visuals and hence that of visual culture studies that involve contextual and formal analyses of cultural images. Alongside relying on images to decipher the cultural expressions, visual culture studies also take into consideration the prevailing tendency and the obsession to picture our modern existence.

However, this restricted understanding of the culture dominated by visual senses alone ignores the increasingly multi-sensory aspects of cultural forms and expressions. Thus, the study argues for embracing material culture studies for a holistic and multi-dimensional understanding of cultural expressions. As anthropologist Augustus Lane-Fox Pitt-Rivers (1906: 23) describes material culture as "the outward signs and symbols of particular ideas in the mind", in the form of any "human-constructed or human-mediated objects, forms, or expressions" (Bolin and Blandy, 2003: 249). Material culture studies encourage cultural interpretation through sensory engagement with artifacts and expressions. Further, the realm of visual arts has long transcended the boundary of visual representations to embrace tactile and multi-sensory expressions, becoming the defining feature of contemporary art. This being the case, studying art from a material culture perspective offers advantages over visual culture.

The study advances on Jules David Prown's ideas laying benefits of studying artworks from a material culture perspective. According to him, works of art are "direct and often overt or intentional expressions of cultural belief" (Prown, 1982: 2), possessing "theoretical complexity (as opposed to technical or mechanical complexity), embodying by definition aesthetic and even ethical decision making" (Prown, 1982: 12). The meanings and associations of artworks are shaped and, in turn, shapes society's culture. He further proposes that we can "use the work of art as an autonomous artistic sign, as an affective link with the culture that called it into being, because of our shared physiological experience as perceivers and our sensory overlap with the maker and the original perceivers" (Prown, 1982: 16).

In this commodity-driven world, visual art is arguably an essential constituent of material culture studies, especially since visual art anticipated the dissolution of barriers between life and art. Hence, objects of every sort became materials for the new art expression since the early 20th c. Artists carried enormous experimentation, especially in terms of material, reinscribing the everyday products of the culture back into culture with different artistic potentials and intentions. The use of often overlooked banal objects in art provides the rich potential of capturing the essence of our everyday existence. As Latour (1993) unveiled in his polemical work, to understand society, we must relearn to ascribe power to non-human agents in the field, i.e., to 'things.' Such art expressions offer valuable insights, "that does not pertain to things, even when they are represented in the work, but to a certain attitude toward things, a certain attitude on the part of man toward the entire reality that surrounds him, not only to that reality which is directly represented in the given case" (Mukařovský, 1978: 228). Thus the material components of the

artwork are the key to understanding its cultural implications. "The ways in which materials are combined or modified into things allocate to them meanings that are culturally determined" (Yonan, 2011: 244).

Through the works of Picasso and other cubists in 1912, art witnessed for the first time, what I call, the 'shock of mundane' in terms of employing the most banal materials of everyday life and vernacular culture. Picasso's collages appropriated industrially manufactured refuse symptomatic of the modern industrial age. As Gioni (2007: 11) wrote, "collage is a dirty medium, infected as it is by waste. It appropriates residues and leftovers, trafficking with what is deemed to be valueless." In resistance to the rigid modernist aesthetics, Duchamp introduced the anti-aesthetic concept of readymades (unassisted and assisted readymades) with his heterogeneous collection of found objects since the early 1910s. As Ganotis (2017: 54) notes, "found object is a fragment of everyday life becoming part of a new reality which depending on the artist's purpose and inspiration can be oneiric, disruptive, debunking or denouncing." The cubist collages and Dadaist readymades (excluding first-hand purchased objects) are the primary and vital constituents in the genealogy of trash art, which evolved more complex with unrelated permutations of waste material in the works of surrealists in the 1930s. The collage ideas further expanded into Kurt Schwitter's environmental assemblages (Merzbau) since the 1920s. The Duchampian boom broke again in Neo-Dada, exemplified in the assemblages of Robert Rauschenberg (combine paintings) and many other significant artists of the late 1950s. From newspaper cuttings, discarded bottle racks, use of dust as a means of coating to even artists' shit, waste/residue in all its form has been embraced in the realm of art since the early 20th c.

In a similar vein, there is an underlying presence of trash sensibility in the material evolution of the 20th c. Indian art. With the earliest experimentations in the 1930s, Ramkinkar Baij's earthy monumental sculptures made of local natural materials like pebbles, cow dung, cement, etc., do not solely portray his experimental zeal but also the third world's intuitive logic of resourcefulness. Subsequently, since the 1950s, Nek Chand's mega construction, Rock garden, exploiting tons of everyday industrial and discarded household waste, was emblematic of the burgeoning industrialized and commoditized New India. As Sambrani (2008: 5) notes, "the process of excavation, recycling, and reassembly serve to explore the ruptures and sutures that characterize modernity and its immanent experience of turbulence." Vivan Sundaram, a pioneering figure, explored the hysteria of waste through his astonishing body of work (1990s-2010s), both materially and conceptually derived from the trash. Throughout the 20th c. a plethora of artists challenged the hierarchies of art materials by embracing this new genre of material (waste/refuse) whose very essence lies in constant and infinite transformations and unprecedented growth.

The 21st c. global India's relentless drive towards material excess led to accelerated experimentation with consumerist debris in Indian art. From using it as signifiers to alienating it completely from its functionality and identity, Indian artists have transmogrified the waste into unimagined constructions. From urban industrial excess to the lowest form of waste, the corporeal waste, Indian artists of the 21st c. have potentially surprised and disturbed the audience at once. By engaging with these idiosyncratic practices, the study takes a material culture approach to explore the myriad ways and artistic strategies in order to understand the cultural significance and effect of

discarded material in artistic expression. It intends to build on the growing interest in the role and meaning of materials in art. By looking at the works of four individual artists, it seeks to understand the range of narratives and discourses of trash in Indian art, located within diverse social, cultural, and geographical contexts. Waste, an elaborate database of our contemporary material culture, metaphorically and materially, will reveal the complex structures of our cultural and social existence. "One place where the character of most cities can be felt is in the waste" (Odoh et al., 2014: 2).

Cosmopolitan Waste: Introspecting the Rift Between Nature and the City Through Arunkumar HG's Works

French author Marcel Proust beautifully articulates, "The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes" (Rafi and Ahmed, 2016: 169).

Arun Kumar HG exposes the obscure forms of domination underlying the often ignored and trivial aspects of the banal, making our everyday consumption culture and disposable lifestyle hypervisible. As Lefevbre reveals, "things do not call attention to themselves — they are so integrated in our lives, being at the same time the most obvious and the best hidden" (Olsen, 2003: 94). 'Things' often go unnoticed until the byproducts of our consumer existence haunt us in the form of ceaseless and monstrous trash. Hailing from a farmer family in Karnataka, much of Arun's practice deals with ecological issues that arise out of his experiences of negotiating as a city dweller and a native of rural Western Ghats. Arun's expansive oeuvre includes photography, sculptures, performative works, and other collaborative initiatives equipped with multi-layered meanings draws references from his

extensive research and lived experiences. Arun's ideas are manifested in his careful choice of material, where meaning is always inclusive of the work's materiality. As the artist notes, "I have learnt to address the issue effectively through the choice of materials and medium, which is evocative…. materials have a history or a story to support the artist's thought process" (Quadri, 2018). Feeding on the everyday rejects from scrapyards, roadside, trashcans, Arun's works repurposes the solid waste, evoking the concept of 'recuperative husbandry' (Wyma, 2018a).

"The sea lovingly washes, polishes, takes away all utilitarian vestige and deposits the trash ashore so that it may reincarnate in a life not pragmatic, but aesthetic" (Cabanillas, 2015: 46).

In 2015, Arun presented a powerful critique of the burgeoning disposable lifestyle and the depleting water bodies through a monumental installation Droppings and the Dam(n) (Figure. 1) made of plastic lids. The form reminds of Richard Serra's gigantic works where the phenomenological experience becomes crucial to the work's meaning. Arun's work encourages the viewers to move in and around, demanding kinaesthetic involvement. However, painstakingly made by manually connecting around one lakh discarded plastic bottle caps, the work defies Serra's industrial fabrication; it rather gradually weaves into a tapestry of the detritus of our society. The work's scale and material are evocative of the volume of plastic waste precipitously ending up in the water bodies. Overwhelmed by the disposable plastic culture, the artist collected the lids from his neighborhood for over a year, culminating in this gigantic plastic mound. "Plastic has become emblematic of economies of abundance and ecological destruction" (Gabrys et al., 2013: 3).

Figure 1: Arunkumar HG, Droppings and The Dam(n), 2015, Nearly 100,000 plastic bottle tops and steel wire.

In 2018, Arun's recent body of work was eventuated in a mega exhibition CON-struction (Figure. 2). The title carefully applied in the context of encroachment brings forth the commentary on the unapologetic exploitation of natural resources by the intrusion of a human-centered society. By looking at the inherent ecological cost of metropolitan development and global production, Arun directs our attention to adopt 'recuperative husbandry.' The same is manifested in Arun's thoughtful appropriation of waste as his dominant material. As he notes, "waste is a painful reality we see each day of our lives, and I was struck with the idea of viewing it as potential material" (TERI, 2018: 28). The choice of material and its treatment provokes additional layers of meaning. The majority of works in the exhibition were made from reclaimed wood of large packaging cases used for shipping that Arun collected from industrial sites and pavements of Gurugram. His works deliberately evoke the absent histories of material origin, the under acknowledged natural resource, the forest. While Arun's huge human and animal forms are suggestive of historical and

cultural icons, the material and surface treatment at once rescues the viewer back to the tethering ecological issue. Though he uses recycled material like paper pulp, packaging wood, etc., the industrial method of casting the figures from mold directs our attention towards the homogenizing effect of assembly-line production. He often renders his organic forms like that of trees, animals, and humans in a rather industrial morphology, strikingly juxtaposing the natural and synthetic. Thus Arun's eclectic approach towards materials and forms is encoded with multiple histories and references. Kathryn draws parallels between Arun's practice and object lessons in the exhibition catalog essay. "Object lessons once promoted an acute awareness of origins through a step-by-step analysis of a given commodity that wove through visual descriptions, localities of production, propagation, cultivation and manufacture and trade" (Wyma, 2018b).

Figure 2: Arunkumar HG, Con-struction I, 2018, Reclaimed packaging wood from an industrial scrap yard, recycled paper pulp, cement, wood glue etc.

Gendered Waste: Narratives of Contested Identity Through Shine Shivan's Practice

"Read as impurity and disorder, the most virulent subset of dirt—feces—coalesces the most emotional and extreme reactions to filth and manifests in the figuring of excrement as shit—low, horrifying, disgusting" (Morrison, 2015: 30).

Charting the conflict between entrenched conventionalism and idiosyncrasy, Shine's bold metaphorical language of work proudly embraces waste in almost all its forms. From the old glittery sequins and beads to the most repulsive dead animals, fresh bones, hair, and animal feces. Extracted from their familiar or intimate surroundings, the materials and objects are represented as fetishistic appropriations. Shine's astonishing use of everyday material and unpredictable formats simultaneously seduces and repulses the spectator. As Nikos Papastergiadis (2010: 33) notes, "In the new art there is both sensuous absorption with the present, a shameless fascination with the abject, and a candid representation of the banalities of everyday life." Shine's staggering body of work deals with fraught issues like gender identity, perceptions of beauty, and gender roles, redefining the experiences and roles associated with masculinity. Often depicting an aggressively masculine yet androgynous identity, Shine explores homosexual and homo-social desires, where he projects gender as a social construct rather than a biological given. Having spent childhood in Kerala's lush green landscape, Shine's connection with nature has only grown since he shifted to Faridabad with his family and started spending most of his time in the Aravalli forest. While forests are the storehouse for Shine's organic material, all other found and waste objects in Shine's

work come from his extensive practice of collecting and preserving things for years until he discovers the significance of the same in his works. He amalgamates mythological references and his personal experiences with surroundings, nature, forest, and its artifacts. As Olsen (2003: 88) notes, "things, objects, landscapes, possess 'real' qualities that affect and shape both our perception of them and our cohabitation with them."

In two sensational solo shows, Sperm Weaver and Suck Spit, Shine presented a post-feminist position. Concerned with the vulnerable masculine and homoerotic identity, Shine cleverly tweaks the supposedly feminine elements by his symbolic use of the material and role reversal. In work titled Used Dicks, Shine painstakingly weaved a layer of his mother's hair (her mother collected and gifted him) over several abandoned baya weaver nests, which he collected for years from the forest. Although weaving is assumed to be a domestic, feminine activity, in the case of baya weavers and Shine, the roles are reversed, thereby subverting the ascribed gender roles. Though the act is feminine, the form in most of his works is phallic. While discussing his source of inspiration and references, Shine conveys that "the works are loaded with Freudian implications" (Shine Shivan, 2019, personal communication). In most of his work, the discomfort of the material itself served as a constant reminder of the pressing issue. In Sex Fumes, thousands of glazing black beads, meticulously arranged in a monumental wall panel, demand close introspection. Drawn close by its visual complexity, the spectator encounters tonnes of dear feces that Shine has collected around the Aravalli hills. Though repulsive but the excrement becomes the vehicle of multi-layered meaning. While discussing such unconventional character of contemporary art, Stallabrass (2004: 1) asserts, "there flourishes a strange mix of

carnival novelty, barbaric transgression of morals, and offences against many systems of belief, alongside quieter contemplation and intellectual play."

Shine's fascination for the dead is evident in a costume made of thousands of cock heads and another work titled Cock Dump (Figure. 3). It consists of a large number of taxidermied cocks (used as a symbol of masculinity) arranged in a manner of dreadful contortion, with body parts broken and distorted by the conquering feminine quilt. The installation defies the traditional taxidermy ornamentation, instead relies on abjection to evoke Shine's ideas. As a New Zealand-based artist Angela Singer says, "the aim should be to create botched works that are transformative, that shock the viewer into a new way of seeing and thinking about the animal" (Johnson, 2016: 78). Shine's encounter with the dead dates back to his childhood, as he shares, "selling dry fish was my father's part-time job. I have seen rooms filled with fish and how my father used to preserve it. So I feel this experience of the dead and need for preservation subconsciously arrived in my works" (Shine Shivan, 2019, personal communication).

Figure 3: Shine Shivan, Cock Dump, 2011, Taxidermy, steel, wire, used blanket.

Unlike other exhibitions, Glimpse of Thirst predominantly employs found objects that Shine had collected and stored in his collection for years, every material and object having a personal narrative or a story behind it. Used dentures, used fabric, artificial hair, latex, sequins, beads, marbles, old mannequins, the objects are reminiscent of our voguish modern existence. It is an elaborate series of hybridized fictional characters draped in flamboyant sculptural garments. Through transvestism and role-playing, Shine rejects binary oppositions associated with gender, exemplified through Shine's pregnant man and other antithetical imagery. The disfigured characters having undercurrents of violence reminds of Chapman brothers' (members of Young British Artists) grotesque and abrasive imagery. Glimpse of Thirst "represented an obvious brutality like his other works which often have an undercurrent of violence in them" (Grewal, 2015: 1801). Materials become the driving force of Shine's exploration, where waste itself acquires a gender symbolism.

Materiality Matters: A Formal Exploration of Waste in Manish Nai's Practice

"The artist perpetuates his culture by maintaining certain features of it by 'using' them. The artist the model of the anthropologist engaged" (Kosuth, 2008: 182).

"Hidden behind Nai's work is his love for Mumbai, and his passion for finding value and desire in discarded elements of the city, from its blank billboards to undervalued everyday objects" (Art Fervour, 2019). Hailing from a family of jute traders in Mumbai, Nai started exploring the artistic potential of jute when his father's business suffered loss and left them with an abundant

stock of jute. In such cases, "artists are more likely to shop at home-improvement rather than art-supply stores" (Costache, 2012: 34). Since then, Nai's intimate engagement with the material has been manifested in his intricate and tactual ensemble. Scarcity of supplies steered Nai's imagination to embrace a vast array of discarded objects where "the recuperation of trash as art… exemplifies a strategy of resourcefulness in a situation of scarcity" (Whiteley, 2011: 7). Nai's choice of cheap, ubiquitous materials comprising discarded clothes, old newspapers, discarded packaging cardboard, metal, and burlap is not arbitrary. Instead, it is a means to extend his inquiry into the texture, materiality, and dimensionality with precision. Nai's preoccupation with humble and quintessentially Indian material and the very industrial process of his work is emblematic of Nai as a city dweller coexisting with the 'stuff' of a hyper-consumerist Mumbai. "Foregrounding material factors and reconfiguring our very understanding of matter are prerequisites for any plausible account of coexistence and its conditions in the twenty-first century" (Coole and Frost, 2010: 2). From earthen jute, old romance novels, judicial manuals to newspapers in nineteen vernacular languages, Nai sift through the endless pile of raddiwallas, Chor Bazar, and other informal traders, procuring these various cultural markers.

At the time when figurative rendition dominated Indian art, Nai's early experiments revived minimalism and abstraction to create a complex, idiosyncratic language. Starting a meticulous engagement with the warp and weft of the jute, Nai created complex collages by pasting multiple layers of jute cloth onto the canvas. Having an appearance of embossed embroidery, Nai's collages are instead crafted by his rigorous extraction of warp/weft, unveiling the layers underneath, thus giving a three-

dimensional illusion. The extracted jute from the collages instinctively acquired space in his three-dimensional sculptures. After almost a decade, Nai began to explore the sculptural dimension in his work by repurposing discarded material. Though mostly organic, Nai's material acquires a somewhat geometric industrial refashioning, locking the ephemeral malleable objects into solid concrete forms. The mundane objects are de-familiarized by systematic compression into cubic molds, which once de-molded ejected vibrant cubes and cuboids (Figure. 4). Nai's procedural practice refers to the historical antecedent of 1960s Italy, Arte Povera (poor art). His geometric forms and the use of discarded clothes are a striking reminder of Michelangelo Pistoletto's "Little Fabric Walls," critiquing the triumphant of the consumer society of the glorious sixties.

Figure 4: Manish Nai, Untitled, 2018, Used clothes and wood.

Nai's obsession with space, time, and materiality is evident in his works, where the city of Mumbai is a constant source of visual and material inspiration. His fascination and engagement with the city is distinguishably captured in one of his work resembling a series of high-rises of Mumbai. Made of recycled books, hues of yellows and ochres stacked one over other with a subtle tonal play and scrupulous symmetry. Natasha Ginwala (2018) beautifully

articulates in the catalog, the books "come to stand in for bodies cramped in chawls and being tightly packed inside hurtling local train compartments—there is a folding of scale and disfiguration in order to coexist as a mutant urban organism". Nai's abstracted minimal yet complex ensemble brings forth a formal inquiry of the material remainder of our consumer society. "An apparent simplicity of materials and forms notwithstanding, Nai's prescient works lay bare our profligate tendencies forcing us to reflect on the complex challenges of the Anthropocene" (Shah, 2019: 85).

Waste as the Contingent Object of Reality: Exploring the Fragile Experiences and Objects Through Prashant Pandey's Practice.

"Trash is as resilient as cockroaches, but less repugnant to some people and much less alien to human nature: we universally share (and fear) the fate of trash; we understand putrefaction, because putrefaction, ultimately, is what awaits us" (Zubiaurre, 2015: 38).

Through his critical commentary on modern life, Prashant Pandey rekindles our perception of life in poetic fancy. Love, death, desire, loss, the fragile experiences of human life is what fascinates Pandey. In his eloquent orchestrations, the spectator encounters the inevitable yet obscure human conditions and the by-products of their existence. From the artist's urine, expired chocolates, blood-stained glass slides, cobwebs to thrown away cigarette buds, all become evidence of our corporeal presence. The perishable material and contingent character of Pandey's work advocates that "rubbish is a metaphor for life itself" (Assman, 2002: 77). "The material both literally shapes the work as well as figuratively assists in telling the story of the work through symbolism imbued in the material and its process of

inherent weathering" (Kromholz, 2016: 18). Pandey's sheer artistry of elegant forms distorts and defamiliarizes the material, drawing the viewer closer, and only on close encounter does one experiences repulsion and surprise.

In a solo show, Shelf Life, as the title suggests, Pandey reincarnates materials that have been doomed to oblivion. The perishable material questions the resilient nature of human experiences and the effect on the environment. Commenting against female infanticide, Gift (Figure. 5) is a large deformed skull of an infant, giving much an appearance of glittery diamond-studded Damien Hirst's skull. On close inspection, one's own materiality drives disgust and discomfort when confronted with a mosaic of hundreds of little pouches filled with the artist's urine, sweat, and tears. As Adorno (1982: 133) expresses, "Life is merely the epitome of everything about which one must be ashamed." Pandey continues to deceive the viewer's perception in Universe, a flower tapestry meticulously knitted to create a lacework-like pattern, reminding of an old Victorian doily. The seemingly tiny flowers are flattened cigarette buds with hues of white, yellow, and ochre that the artist has collected over months. Material obsolescence also becomes a premeditated and integral part of some works. In an Untitled sculpture, Pandey constructed a headless boy entirely covered with slabs of expired chocolate. Echoing Baudelaire's idea of ephemeral as an eternal condition of modernity, the melting of chocolate slowly reveals the inner armature, much like our life is always in a state of flux. As Kromholz (2016: 18) states, "the temporary artwork's material is therefore structure and signifier in its presence, and also in its absence.

Figure 5: Prashant Pandey, Gift, 2010, Urine, sweat, tears, formaldehyde and iron.

Though the starting point of Pandey's investigation is waste, in Shelf Life II, he explores the by-products and discards in a new light. Elucidating the fact that "waste is not a stable category," Pandey explores the experiences of attachment and detachment attached to objects (Uccia, 2018: 9). By reclaiming and subverting the mundane by-product of human activity like marble blast stone, road tar, used copper wire, etc. Pandey proclaims that waste is the "matter out of place" (Doughlas, 2002: 36). He evokes the implications of shifting value inherent in objects that surrounds us. Coming from a family of traditional stone carvers in Jaipur, Pandey's Love, a massive heart made up of marble blast stone, is evocative of his childhood fascination and engagement with marble chips. He revisits the old family craft but only to embrace what was regarded as the discarded and impure, the by-product of the sacred sculpted deities. Pandey's practice acknowledges and conceptualizes waste, not in terms of celebrating recuperations; he instead alters our commonplace perception of it.

Conclusion

"Understanding of the world is often fuelled through representations that mirror cultural values or established social practices. Encounters with these representations, whether they

occur along the avenues of mass media, the sites of social media, or within the esteemed spaces of the art gallery have the capacity to crystallise issues and catalyse judgements about a set of topical issues" (Wyma, 2018b).

As observed, visual art representations are the approximations of the critical rethinking that contemporary artists are calling. "Society and culture are inextricably intertwined, and their study cannot and should not be isolated" (Prown, 1982, p 5). Bringing visual arts in dialogue with material culture provided a holistic and emancipatory understanding of the contemporary culture we live in. An account of the production, artist's intention, spectator's encounter, and reception, as well as the economic, cultural, social, and ideological context of the artworks, enlightened the readings of our late-capitalist culture, thereby offering a potential answer to the mysterious and ubiquitous waste and associated stigmas. The artists brought forth myriad histories, discourses, and narratives of waste in Indian art, rooted in individual geographical and cultural contexts. One man's trash became another man's treasure through a broad spectrum of expressive and sensory appropriations, reinscribing value to the obliterated or repulsive waste.

By challenging the hierarchies of accepted materials in art, visual artists of the 21st c. passionately embraced the banal, every day, and the non-art, both materially and conceptually. As Lefebvre emphasizes,

"The concept of everyday life can illuminate the complex ways in which subjects exercise their potential to be emancipatory and critical." Thus, "making art by taking what is close at hand. Thinking about the biggest philosophical abstractions from the

position of our most intimate experiences" (Papastergiadis, 2008: 70-74).

In these myriad ways of exploration, there lies a shared principle of bricolage. Claude Levi-Strauss invoked the concept of bricolage, projecting an ancestral lineage of combining the leftovers of the immediate culture and interrogating "all the heterogeneous objects [objets hétéroclites] of which his treasure is composed" (Johnson, 2012: 363). The process and ideological base of bricolage deal with the mundane, the leftover, and the residue of human activity. Through repurposing and recycling, the artists do not intend to celebrate the utopian faith in recycling; instead, they lay bare a genre of material whose very essence lies in infinite transformations and ceaseless growth. As Žižek (2010: 35) beautifully writes,

"The properly aesthetic attitude of the radical ecologist is not that of admiring or longing for a pristine nature of virgin forests and clear sky, but rather of accepting waste as such, of discovering the aesthetic potential of waste, of decay, of the inertia of rotten material that serves no purpose."

The material culture approach relocates attention on the material practices and process of the increasingly multi-sensory artistic expressions within the purview of visual arts. It lay forth the complex interaction of the materials, ideas, and bodies at play in every art process.

The study urges the discipline of art history to advance from stylistics and iconographic analysis of visual representation to having direct knowledge of processes of making and encountering the material manifestations for a holistic understanding of cultural expression. Because artworks convey the artist's attitude towards

reality and society's belief system at large not only through visuals but also through their physical presence.

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