



Artist Sakshi Gupta's new exhibition is all about mapping the mindscape

In Sakshi Gupta's solo, the messiness of our minds takes a sculptural form



Sakshi Gupta's 'Spaces of Being' (2023). Courtesy: The Artist & Experimenter

By Riddhi Doshi

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If the chaos of our thoughts could get a tactile form, it would manifest as Sakshi Gupta's sculptural works. Thirteen metal installations, created from industrial scrap, make for her show *If The Seas Catch Fire*, at Experimenter, a contemporary art space in Mumbai. "As a teenager, I have always been curious about our life, what our purpose is. I have had many existential questions," says Gupta. For the 44-year-old sculptor, the struggle with these questions has only intensified with time. "This comes from the feeling of disjointedness (with one's self), which creates a sense of turmoil."

Gupta hopes the exhibition, whose title comes from the late American poet E.E. Cummings, will become a space to reflect, to see where we are and bridge the gap in the sea of consciousness that we are all part of.

There are two sides to her installation *Spaces Of Being*. The plain side of the large, metallic chicken coop is like a mask, or façade, that we present as social beings, projecting ourselves as composed individuals. The other, more dramatic side is the reflection of our mindscape. Several chickens and hens navigate a crowded, complex grid — messy thoughts clashing, struggling to find a voice. "We acknowledge the need to organise them, yet it's almost impossible to do so," says Gupta. Then comes acceptance.

Give Yourself To The Air, To What You Cannot Hold fills a room where you can see palm fronds hanging from the wall and ceiling, with two lying on the floor, like discarded layers of the self. It is reminiscent of the shavings of a human shell, or even a skeletal structure, portraying a moment of letting go, or an inability to hold on. "It embodies a vulnerable instance of feeling exposed to the bone. Through its inertia, and just 'being' rather than 'doing,' the work exudes qualities of stillness and surrender," says Gupta.

In another room, a metal carpet, crumpled, takes centre stage. Titled *As Small As A World And As Large As Alone*, it is a tangible rendering of a saturated mind, with creases, folds, ruffles and gaping holes. The metal threads appear fettered to the surface, invoking notions of resilience and tenacity. "The carpet is like a portal that allows one the space to be with each strand of their thoughts and emotions, and view them as seeds planted in a sea of consciousness," says Gupta. "An overworked state of mind compels us to take a pause, re-examine our belief systems, and see the design we may be subconsciously fabricating," she adds.

Another work highlights what a city discards, and how this takes on a life of its own. For Gupta, the banal existence of gunny bags has a pervasive presence in the cityscape. Lying abandoned around construction sites, these embody and reflect the sentiments of the city and its inhabitants. "They assume the form of frustrated dreams, disappointments, and the sensitivity that gets trampled and pushed aside." *For Beauty Is Nothing But The Beginning Of Terror* is a pile of metal gunny sacks in different shapes and sizes, stacked against a wall. On a second look, they appear like dishevelled creatures trying to break free.

Still, we move on. From one dream to another, one thought to another, to finally accept the way it all is.

'If The Seas Catch Fire' is at Experimenter, Colaba, Mumbai, till 26 October, 10.30am-6.30pm (Tuesday-Saturday).

Riddhi Doshi is a Mumbai-based journalist and a Kathak student.