



## Drawing Room: Why Ayesha Singh loves Sakshi Gupta's works

Story by Noor Anand Chawla • 1mo • 3 min read

Some exhibitions give us a bodily jolt, goosebumps. They spark a Eureka moment, a shift in our thinking. I cannot produce a long list of artworks that have done that for me, but Sakshi Gupta's Spaces of Being is certainly one.

The work is a life-size sculpture made with reclaimed industrial metal, and depicts the many compartments of a packed chicken coop. It contains hundreds of birds – baby chicks, hens, roosters – all attempting to break free from the confines of the grid they are stuck within. In their struggle, they overlap the coop frames, converse with each other, and resist the forces at play. Some birds lay in deep crevasses between or behind others, and a few lay outside the frame. They appear in all sizes, shapes, with varied feathers and scales, some are young and others are old, and parts of the work have fragments of dismembered limbs. Gupta defines them as "irrational, grotesque, pathetic and simultaneously seductive, poetic and even comical – all at once," in her note on the 2023 show *If the Seas Catch Fire*, at which the work was exhibited.



↳ Sakshi Gupta's art is all about the details, like this piece from the 2017 series *I Marvel At Your Forgiveness*.  
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The artist speaks about the work as neural pathways, the grid as the human mindspace. Here, each bird represents thoughts, memories and mind tricks fighting for space. It questions how we recognise and reconfigure our patterns of thoughts to deal with the daily angst of life, the pain we endure and often embrace. Gupta asserts that things familiar to us that provide comfort, can often make it tough to move out of the spaces assigned to us or those which we assign to ourselves. The common sight of trucks transporting poultry in cities evokes many feelings – of curiosity, confrontation, nausea or suffocation – echoing our silent thoughts and the characteristics of human behaviour.

I saw this work at the Mumbai gallery, Experimenter, and spoke to the artist about the work I had been admiring earlier in photographs. When one initially approaches the sculpture, made of four bruised metal sheet quadrants found at an industrial scrapyard, it may be argued that its back is towards the entrance. You first step onto its shadow on the floor, which perhaps is an intentional move, because it pulls your attention towards the better lit corner of the room. There lies the 'front' of the work, engulfed in the complexity of form, its painstaking detailing, the still movement of sculpted feathers and the scent of metal.

As an artist who works with metal welding, I revere the expertise required to create this work, the attention to detail and hours spent on a work of this nature. "Can I touch it?" was my first question! Each form has been constructed using fragments of metal – beaten, shaped, welded onto rods that hold the shape of each feather and pattern on the animal. The work is contained yet explosive, it's haphazard yet meticulously planned. It exists the way many of us do, attempting to tame the chaos in our minds.