

'How To Get There: Recent Works by Vanita Gupta'





PUNDOLE
ART GALLERY

presents

'How To Get There: Recent Works by Vanita Gupta'

28 February - 5 March 2013

Hirjee Gallery
1st Floor, Jehangir Art Gallery
161 Kala Ghoda, Mumbai 400 001

cover:
Untitled
brass, gold leaf
6 x 2 x 2 inch
2009

HOW TO GET THERE

Recent Works by Vanita Gupta

Ranjit Hoskote

The expressive curve of artists who articulate baroque, maximalist and ceaselessly additive impulses is easy to grasp. We follow their immersion in a diversity of experience, and their consequent encounters with varied and often mutually incompatible modes of emotion; we map the artistic practice across its moments of archival gathering and technical experiment; we research the life of a studio that shuffles disparate codes of symbol-making, materials, idioms of visuality and scale. By contrast, it is difficult to gauge the relationship between the visible external operations and the internal shifts of gear among artists who are committed to minimal and ceaselessly subtractive impulses, to the deceptively simple elegance of classical gestures. In trying to account for the pace, texture and outcomes of change for this latter kind of artist, we must more often follow the pattern of all that is trimmed and refined away, leaving behind a taut vocabulary of forms retained and deepened, a set of methods honed or recalibrated to the point of precise yet enigmatic delivery.

An abstractionist, Vanita Gupta has chosen this latter journey. For over fifteen years, she has devoted her attention to the minimal, most relevant and perennially compelling forms: her paintings, drawings and mixed-media works have been developed around the edge, the fold, the crimp, the wave, and the wash. Her forms do not record an artistic desire to remain bound to the elementary, or an absence of curiosity about the figure or the object. On the contrary, they are the precipitates of a meticulous process during which Gupta has adventurously investigated various kinds of retinal and sensory testimony, and explored several symbolic repertoires, before paring her findings down to what is most essential. Gupta's forms do not enshrine the preordained shapes of a destination; rather, they are an education in how to get there.

These forms spring from the artist's attentiveness to how we breathe, how we think and act in time, how we attempt to register our being, indeed our *presence*, in an unstable present that is continuously dissolving into the future or being swallowed by the past. In the context of an artist's awareness of the paradoxical human predicament of being both narrator and hostage of time, the critic and curator David Sylvester's 1955 meditation on the compressed, attenuated yet vital sculptures of Alberto Giacometti offers a relevant insight: "Transience is everywhere, nothing can ever be recaptured. Yet merely to think of a happening is to try and recapture it, as our very awareness of it pushes it into the

past. The days pass and all awareness is nostalgia. The sense of the transitory in these sculptures is a sense of loss." [1]

*

If nostalgia for the transient informs Gupta's recent work, so too does another and opposite quality: I mean, here, the adroit tenacity with which it seizes the rapture and anxiety of the moment of self-location in a turbulent world. Realised between 2008 and 2013, this recent work comprises two suites of sculptures and a video work. In consonance with Gupta's long-established approach, the sculptures, about twenty-seven objects in all, are miniature in scale. However, they are not maquettes intended as a sculptor's drafts or preparatory sketches towards larger work. They project a specific intensity and presence even as objects that could easily be held in the viewer's hand. The video work, in similar spirit, is a little over one minute long, in which brief duration it achieves a memorable meditation on breath, time and the ephemeral nature of existence.

Although sculpture is not a medium that Gupta has so far essayed, her work has long been animated by a sculptural energy. The paper works in an early body of her work, 'Trace Elements' (1996-1998) were, in fact, sculptural objects: cut-outs washed, stained, marked, and subjected to varied degrees of painterly handling. And while she has practised an idiom of lyrical gestural abstraction, her preparatory techniques have often involved the intensive reshaping of her paper surfaces in ways that can only be described as sculptural: through the use of glue and water, the sponge and the steam iron, the acts of pulping and drying.

For her recent work, though, Gupta has apprenticed herself more formally to the tradition of metal sculpture. One suite of her new sculptures consists of objects made from folded and beaten sheets of German silver; the other suite consists of objects cast in brass and presented in conjunction with inflated balloons of various shapes. The artist's palette shuttles here between the raw gleam of exposed metal to the shocking pink or green of rubber, between occasional touches of verdigris that speak of weathering and the glow of gold leaf that suggests transcendence. The very different and distinctive *oeuvres* of Dashrath Patel and Anish Kapoor may be discerned in the background to these works.

In the first suite, Gupta's handling is artisanal; we feel the pressure of the shaping hand as well as the presence of the tool or ritual object born in response to existential urgencies. The axe, the adze, the anvil, the cleaver and the knife are memorialised in the vocabulary of these forms; at the same time,

some of them suggest the votive object, ritual utensil or scripture, especially a hinged form covered in gold leaf and set in a niche or alcove. As she shapes multiple folds, crimps, fins, hinges and gnomon-like edges, Gupta conducts an inquiry into the first principles of the sculptor's art: these objects dramatise the relationships between continuity and rupture, gravity and lightness, the potentially infinite extension of shape and the concrete finitude of mass. We realise, as we look at them, that they also attest to the sustaining paradoxes of being and aspiration, belonging and mobility.

In the second suite of sculptures, the artist probes the porosity of brass objects cast as broken and permeable rather than smooth and perfect; reminiscent of toys discovered at archaeological sites, clad in gold leaf, with balloons of various sizes and colours drawn through them, these objects demonstrate the interplay between heaviness and volatility, body and breath. They are related to Gupta's video work, 'Pranayam' (1 min 6 secs), which substitutes a balloon for the body and charts the cycle of inbreath and outbreath, stasis and release.

How strangely like relics they seem, these cast brass objects, as if freshly disinterred from the earth of lost cities; and yet it is not nostalgia that we feel when we look at them. It is a hope, a resurgent and uneven hope, not unmenaced and yet resilient: the kind of hope we invest in a balloon, believing, wanting to believe that its distended contours will hold its claim to air for as long as possible, as long as we have fixed our gaze on it.

Notes

1. David Sylvester, *About Modern Art: Critical Essays 1948-1997* (London: Pimlico, 1997), p. 53.

Ranjit Hoskote is a poet, cultural theorist and curator. He is the author of more than 20 books, including *Vanishing Acts: New & Selected Poems 1985-2005* (Penguin, 2006), *Die Ankunft der Vögel* (Carl Hanser Verlag, 2006), and *I, Lalla: The Poems of Lal Ded* (Penguin Classics, 2011). Hoskote has authored nine artist monographs, including *Zinny & Maidagan: Compartment/ Das Abteil* (Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt/ Walther König, 2010). With Ilija Trojanow, Hoskote has co-authored *Kampfabgabe* (Blessing Verlag, 2007; in English as *Confluences: Forgotten Histories from East and West*, Yoda Press, 2012). With Nancy Adajania, Hoskote is co-author of *The Dialogues Series* (Popular/ foundation b&g, 2011). Hoskote writes a column, 'Atlas Bombay', for *Art in America*.

Since 1993, Hoskote has curated or co-curated more than 25 exhibitions of contemporary art, including a mid-career survey of Atul Dodiya (Japan Foundation, Tokyo, 2001) and a lifetime retrospective of Jehangir Sabavala (National Gallery of Modern Art, Bombay and New Delhi, 2005-2006). Over 2000-2002, he co-curated the trans-Asian project, 'Under Construction' (Japan Foundation: Tokyo and other Asian centres). Hoskote was co-curator, with Hyunjin Kim and Artistic Director Okwui Enwezor, of the 7th Gwangju Biennale (Korea, 2008). He curated India's first-ever national pavilion at the Venice Biennale (2011).

Untitled
brass, gold leaf
5 x 12 x 1 inch
2013



Untitled
brass & rubber balloon,
gold leaf
3 x 16 x 3 inch
2012



Untitled
copper & paint
8 x 4 x 2 inch
2009



Untitled
brass, gold leaf
9 x 7 x 2 inch
2009



Untitled
german silver
5.5 x 3.5 x 9 inch
2010



Untitled
brass & rubber balloon,
gold leaf
3 x 14 x 2 inch
2012



Untitled
brass, gold leaf
5 x 14 x 3 inch
2013



Untitled
brass & rubber balloon,
gold leaf
7 x 9 x 3.5 inch
2012



Untitled
brass, gold leaf
6.5 x 5.5 x 2.5 inch
2009



Untitled
brass & rubber balloon,
gold leaf
9 x 13 x 6 inch
2012



Untitled
german silver
6 x 11 x 3 inch
2010



Untitled
brass, gold leaf
7 x 2 x 1.5 inch
2009





Breathless
mov format
49 sec.
2012





Pranayam
mov format
66 sec.
2012



Untitled
iron & rubber balloon
8 x 5 x 3 inch
2012



Untitled
brass & rubber balloon,
gold leaf
9 x 2 x 2 inch
2012



Untitled
german silver
7.5 x 10 x 2 inch
2010



Untitled
brass & rubber balloon,
gold leaf
4 x 16 x 2.5 inch
2012



Untitled

iron, gold leaf

15 x 1.5 x 1.5 inch

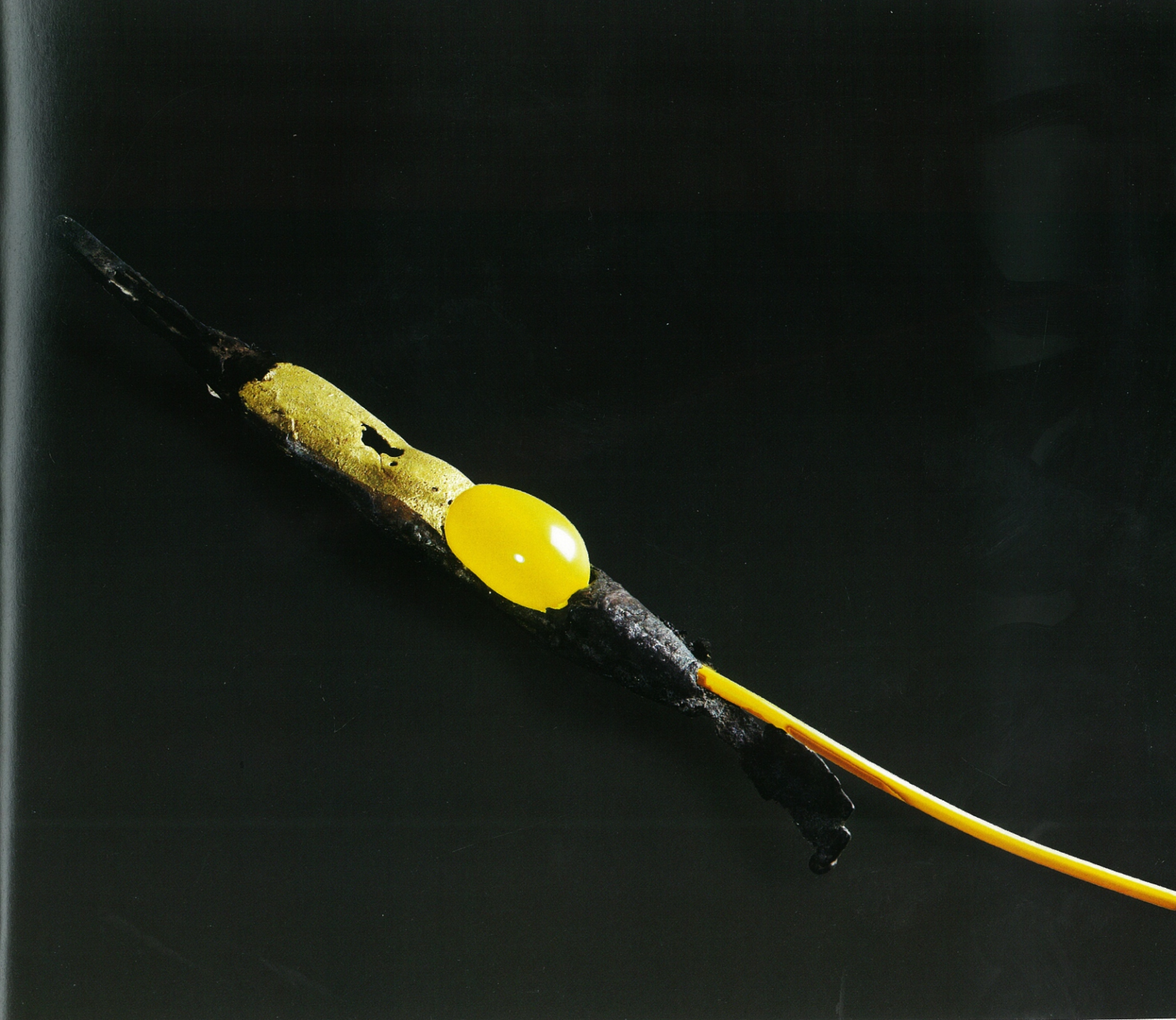
2011



Untitled
brass, gold leaf
5 x 15 x 2 inch
2013



Untitled
brass & rubber balloon,
gold leaf
3 x 19 x 2 inch
2012



Untitled
german silver
7.5 x 15 x 5.5 inch
2010



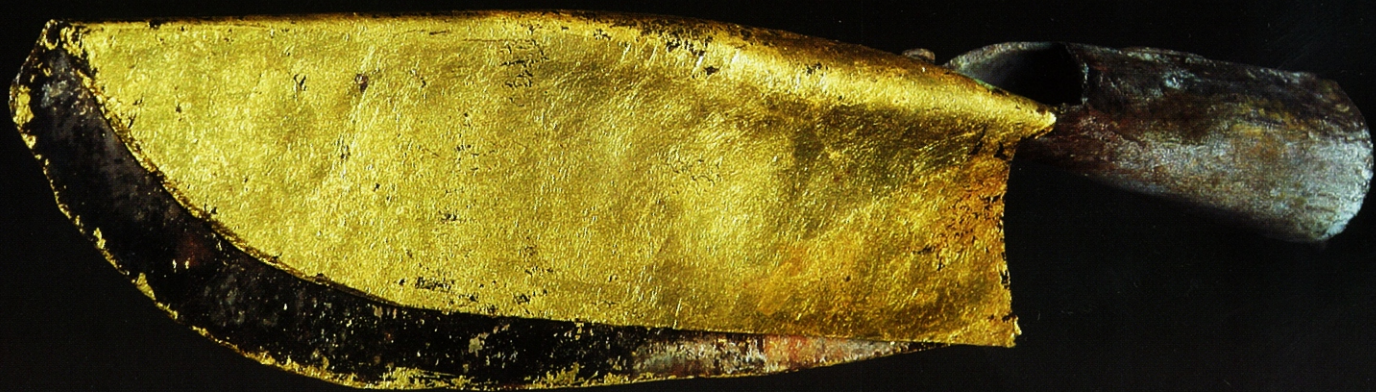
Untitled
brass & rubber balloon,
gold leaf
11 x 5 x 3 inch
2012



Untitled
german silver & paint
10 x 7 x 3.5 inch
2010



Untitled
iron, gold leaf
2 x 9 x 1 inch
2011



GUPTA, Vanita

1992 Passed G.D/ Fine Arts / Painting, L S Raheja School of Art, Mumbai

Solo Exhibitions:

- 2007 The Gallery at Red Church Street, London, presented by Pundole Art Gallery and Rob Dean Art, London
- 2006 Jehangir Art Gallery, presented by Pundole Art Gallery, Mumbai
- 2006 Singapore Art Fair, presented by Gallery Threshold, New Delhi
- 2006 Alliance Francaise, Delhi, presented by Gallery Threshold, New Delhi
- 2004 Pundole Art Gallery, Mumbai
- 2002 Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai, presented by Gallery Beyond, Mumbai
- 1998 Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai
- 1994 Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai

Group Exhibitions:

- 2012 *Videoholica*, an international video art festival, Varna, Bulgaria
- 2012 *Aviram*, a Raza Art Festival, Habitat Centre, New Delhi
- 2010 *Contemporary Drawings* Gallery Art Motif, New Delhi
- 2009 *Art Alive*, the Raza Foundation Awardees art exhibition, New Delhi
- 2008 *Mapping Memories-2* Gallery Threshold, New Delhi
- 2007 *The Eye Within Shrine* Art Gallery, New Delhi
- 2005 *Edge of Abstraction* Gallery Threshold, New Delhi
- 2004 *Women Artists: Ideas and Images* National Gallery of Modern Art, Mumbai
- 2004 *National Exhibition of Art* Lalit Kala Akademi, Kerala
- 2003 *Art for Heart's Sake*, a fund-raising auction conducted by Bowring's Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai
- 2001 *National Exhibition of Art* Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi and Ahmedabad
- 2000 *Ideas and Images* National Gallery of Modern Art, Mumbai
- 1999 *Art Jamboree* Lakeeren Art Gallery, Mumbai
- 1998 *Art Access* Birla Academy, Mumbai
- 1998 *Essays in Time* Nehru Centre, Mumbai
- 1997 *50 years of Art in Bombay* National Gallery of Modern Art, Mumbai
- 1993 *Monsoon Art Show* Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai

Awards:

- 2007 The Raza Award for Art
- 1992 Certificate of Merit for Self Portrait Bombay Art Society, Mumbai

The artist lives and works in Mumbai.



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