

ART

Uncoiling corroded reality

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Sculptor Ritesh Meshram's metal works are a delicate balance between the fierce and the fragile, says Sonali Bhagchandani

A gallery morphs into a museum of abandoned objects, deceptively familiar-looking. Time is silent. But as you look closer, every work begins to un-define itself. This is the moment of entry into artist Ritesh Meshram's isolated realm of sculptures dubbed, 'In the Womb of the Land'. Girish Shahane refers to these works as 'Unfound Objects' in his note on Meshram's work. The artist's sculptures resemble a montage of deserted, rather mundane objects like chairs, tables, tools or toys. Perhaps they were once owned and then thrown away – until the artist found them. You soon realise that each object is actually a unique sculpture created from scratch and manipulated with careful intent. The rust on a distorted table is not an effect of time, but only an illusion of it.

Inside an illusion

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cool green (or even seen in aged elevators), lies clapped on the floor, unable to move. The grey safety mesh of a window occupies a corner, but what can it hide? It can neither conceal nor reveal. Another work forms the skeleton of chair caught mid-decision as it tries to turn into an obscure apparatus. Scraps of metallic paper attach themselves to the handle of shovel, is it a sculpture unearthing the political undertones of metal as a material?

Meshram twists this materiality of his works into a metaphor, inviting the viewer to uncover their hidden meanings. The essence of each work lies in their provenance. He uncoils a corroded reality, often neglected, by giving form to his preoccupation with metal. How often does one ruminate over the genesis of objects? In the artist's eye, the plight of a miner resides along invisible crevices inside each stone. Meshram argues that metal "despite its density, its malleability allows us to exploit, to manipulate as one desires. The metaphor that then captivates me is that of iron ore. For me, the journey of the miner and the metal draw parallels."

Artistic juxtapositions

Conflict is apparent within each piece, as the work simultaneously appear to be part of an integrated whole, yet remains isolated. Meshram's probe into earth's core excavates a duality – the nature of metal and the way we perceive it. A material that emulates strength is created by being scorched in a fire. The metal melts and is beaten into its present form. The process feels violent yet the finished work is delicate and elegant. The work, 'In between the lines' takes the form of a thin column contrived of hammer parts. This association of destruction is juxtaposed with the stabilising function of a column. Such works hint towards unsettling truths – as the fierce reveals itself to be fragile.

Some of the works find themselves in the genre of the absurd. They can't seem to attain a purpose or lack one. The series, 'Collection of Toys' are placed on a table much like artefacts belonging to an unknown museum. Except that these toy-like sculptures cannot be played with. They are frozen in time. The work 'Piece of Land' echoes a distorted table. It continues the struggle to be a table in vain.

Through such interventions Meshram's show evokes dissolution between the absolute and the imagined – as he explores a deeper way of seeing.

Ritesh Meshram's *In the Womb of the Land* is ongoing at *Chemould Prescott Road, Fort* until October 11