

Indians and Danes: Co-create Now



Rina Banerjee is an Indian born, New York based artist of international repute who contributes to the 'India: Art Now' exhibition at Arken Museum of Modern Art in Copenhagen, Denmark, from 18 August 2012 to 13 January 2013.

In this interview, Rina Banerjee explains about her artwork, transformation processes and politics of identity.

By Mathias Ussing Seeberg

"Who decides what we are? How you are identified can become so important that people believe in it to the point of a religion. A navigation of people's identity allows those who rule a kind of safety away from those who do not.

The politics of identity govern our lives, constrains and colors our achievements. A colored person in a white world still worries about being plucked off into the deep hole of persecution and violence. We are a socially, economically segregated community. We believe there is not enough for everyone that some shall have and others will suffer. Can we escape this assumption? Can we evolve out of this structural disability?

It takes a valuable amount of time and patience to reach out and contemplate these things.

My artwork is about a fiction that looks real, feels concrete. Art commands a magnetic awareness of our humanness, describes an awkward evolving beauty.

I think by having art around us and supporting the movement of art in the global world we try to create a reality that there is something real that is bigger than what we understand or can see. The bigger is a destination we come near to, a location where hope lies."

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Your sculptures comprise a vast number of different objects. What are your thoughts on the objects and materials you use?

“People’s relationship to materials and objects is sometimes dissimilar and it is in this lost translation that my thoughts about objects dwell heavily in. The world of miscommunication is a creative gray area, where ideologies can be tested, submerged and new ones emerge. I am interested in the gap between cultures and disagreements within a culture or community. Both physical dislocation through migration away from motherland and homeland as well as a clinging to this space as a longing, as if a death had occurred. The materials and objects I choose often have archaic, nostalgic, romantic, sentimental baggage attached to it. Like barnacles they leave residue – even time and migrations weather their very existence.

The meaning of objects never finds stability, because as long as people continue to migrate, travel away from their homes, look away to see new perspectives, the objects they once knew become unhinged, live.

People are naturally full of tricks and when the powerful world presses hard, people get more oily, inventive and what was a terrible itch can become a triumphant molting. This is how we manage to transform. I am not what I appear to be in my own reflection and inquiry. Can objects continue to be the same. Sameness is imagined, fabricated. Difference is also imagined.”

You are not only a sculptor of materials, but very much also a sculptor of words. Your titles are often long poem-like sentences, that seem as much “the work” as the actual sculpture and not something added afterwards to be able to tell two crates in a storage apart. Could you explain your understanding of the relationship between sculpture and title in your work?

“I like the sound a text makes when we are mouthing the words. Like colors they can contrast, harmonize, create dissonance, cacophony or stray away from the language being used. Text is trusted to mean what it is saying and hence you cannot easily deny its voice, its direction. We, as a culture here, have grown to become averse to the intellectual and art. Initially, I thought of this as an American phenomena, but lately we have seen an Americanised India. We are suspicious of lengthy anything. Minimalism and Pop culture is the rage, new tradition, is dominant. I am very aware that I speak the English language, because I am Indian, and that it’s not mine, so I like toying with it, making it bend, stretch, reach.

I sometimes think that impatience and clever convenience dominate most titles. I am interested in sharing something I think or feel that adds to the image or sculpture you see before you, neither directs it or commands it, and certainly does not explain it.

My corruption of the English language is not just a small rebellion but my attempt to massage it to speak for a vast number of people who use it sparingly, awkwardly, creatively under the pressures of globalisation, colonisation and commercialisation of English culture. I am laying ownership to this language to make it cooperate with my vision and imagery. I work my titles to do somersaults, acrobatic feats and create a space that is imprecise.”

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Mathias Ussing Seeberg is curator of the exhibition 'INDIA : FASHION NOW' at ARKEN

*The interview is published with courtesy of the artist and Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris-Brussels.
Rina Banerjee was born in 1963 in Kolkata, India, and moved with her family to the UK and then to USA.
She completed the MFA degree program at Yale University School of Art in the area of Painting in 1995.
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