



GALLERIA CONTINUA

SAN GIMIGNANO BEIJING LES MOULINS HABANA

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SUBODH GUPTA

In This Vessel Lies The Philosopher's Stone

Opening: Saturday May 13th 2017, Via del Castello 11, 6–9pm
Until 28.08.2017, Monday–Sunday, 10am–1pm, 2–7pm

Galleria Continua is pleased to present a new solo show by **Subodh Gupta**, one of the leading artists on the international art scene today. The project comprises a series of new works – sculptures, installations and watercolours – especially conceived for this show and for the gallery spaces housing it. They explore themes that have always been dear to the artist, and at the same time offer new formal solutions which open up various perspectives of inquiry and interpretation. In so doing, they set in motion a narrative that is simultaneously symbolic, cosmological and enigmatic.

While often Gupta, an artist based in New Delhi, uses form and content emanating from an Indian milieu as initial points of reference, these works are far from nostalgic, nativist or even culturally specific. They serve instead as universally relatable ruminations on the physical, the metaphysical, and their interconnections.

The title of the exhibition, *In This Vessel Lies the Philosopher's Stone*, is a citation from the writings of the Indian poet Kabīr, from the 15th

century, who is one of India's most celebrated mystics and venerated by Hindus and Muslims alike. The complete poem reads as follows:

*Iss ghat antar baag bagiche
Iss hi mein sirjanhaara,*

*Iss ghat antar saat samundar
Iss hi mein nau lakh taara,*

*iss ghat antar paaras moti
iss hi mein parkhan haara,*

*iss ghat antar anahad garje
iss hi mein urat phoohaara*

*kahat Kabīr suno bhaai saadho
iss hi mein saain hamaara.*

In this vessel lie groves and gardens
In it, too, lives the creator,

In this vessel lie the seven seas
In it, too, the nine hundred thousand
stars,

In this vessel lies the philosopher's
stone
In it, too, the appraiser,

In this vessel unstruck sound
reverberates
In it, too, bursts forth the
fountain

Says Kabīr, listen dear wise men
In this, itself, is the Supreme Being
we seek.

Kabir identifies a humble vessel, a trope for the human body, to be the carrier of everything – the earth, the universe, and the divine. Subodh Gupta's most recent works are a meditative exploration of both the literal and metaphorical implications of these verses. The quotidian pantry has long been Gupta's artistic realm where he finds material and meaning. But rather than expressing earthly horrors and delights, he has moved into capturing the cosmic in the everyday, resulting in a body of work that is simultaneously minimalist and exaggerated. For Gupta, the steam that escapes a boiling kettle suggests a new galaxy emerging, the sparks that scatter out of a wood stove appear to represent the birth of new stars, and the metallic banging of a hammer crushing aluminum suggests the celestial big bang. As the domestic is superimposed on the cosmic, astrophysical wonders are minimized to the mundane, and mundane earthly objects out into inter-stellar awe.

The phrase *paaras or paarasmani*, mentioned in the verses by Kabir, refers to an oddly universal mythological object that is able to transmute ordinary materials into precious metals or imbue them with extraordinary powers. The western equivalent to this mystical gem is known as the philosopher's stone. The power of the philosopher's stone is uncannily similar to an artist's power to elevate an ordinary object into a prized possession, simply by rendering it in an artwork. Subodh Gupta's work is particularly analogous to this alchemical act of transmutation and this is evident throughout his works, most literally perhaps in the work titled *Only One Gold*, which shows a humble potato seemingly transformed into a lump of gold.

While other works in the exhibition are perhaps not quite so literal in their use of the artistic philosopher's stone,

the transformation of something ordinary to something extraordinary is nonetheless quite evident. The alchemical elements used by the artist are brass, steel, terracotta, plaster, stone, and sometimes the objects themselves. Regardless of material, however, Gupta's aim to transcend the object in order to create forms of majestic beauty, cosmic significance, and astrological import is undeniably palpable throughout the show.

Subodh Gupta was born in Khagaul, Bihar, India in 1964. He lives and works in New Delhi. Recent solo shows include: *From Far Away Uncle Moon Calls*, Warwick Centre for Arts (UK) in 2017; *Unstruck*, Famous Studios, Mumbai (India), *Ali Baba*, Galleria Continua Les Moulins (France), *Guests, Strangers, and Interlopers*, SCAD Museum of Art (USA) in 2016; *When Soak Becomes Spill*, Victoria & Albert Museum, London (England), in 2015; *Everything is Inside*, MMK Museum fur Moderne Kunst Frankfurt am Main, Frankfurt (Germany) and the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi (India), in 2014; *The Imaginary Order of Things*, Centro de Arte Contemporáneo, Malaga (Spain), *Spirit Eaters*, Kunstmuseum Thun, Thun (Switzerland), in 2013. The artist has participated in many group shows, including: *No Place like Home*, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem (Israel), in 2017; Singapore Biennale, *Fellbach Triennial of Small-Scale Sculpture*, Alte Kelter, Fellbach (Germany), *Megacities Asia*, Museum of Fine Arts Boston, Boston (United States), in 2016; *Follia Continua! Les 25 ans de Galleria Continua*, Le Centquatre, Paris (France), *Arts and Foods*, Milan Triennale, Milan (Italy), *After Midnight. Indian Modernism to Contemporary India 1947/1997*, Queens Museum, New York (United States), *ArtZuid 2015*, Foundation ArtZuid, Amsterdam (Netherlands), *Art Strikes Back!*, Fundació Gaspar, Barcelona (Spain), in 2015; *By Destiny*, Arario Museum, Tapdong Cinema, Jeju (Korea), *Made by Brazilians*, Cidade Matarazzo, São Paulo (Brazil), *Art Lovers – Stories of Art in the Pinault Collection*, Grimaldi Forum, Larvotto (Monaco), *The Body in Indian Art*, National Museum, New Delhi (India), Sapporo International Art Festival 2014, Sapporo (Japan), in 2014.

For further information about the exhibition and for photographs:

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