

Iconic Reverberations

The Architectonic Ceramics of Vineet Kacker

TAKING THE OPPORTUNITY TO alter a quotation from Socrates, "The art which is unexamined is not worth making" is relevant in the case of Vineet Kacker's contemporary architectonic ceramic artwork. There are different roles that ceramics as a medium plays in our lives. Artists are influenced by their contexts, beliefs, histories, emotional dispositions, physical needs, communities and the world that they interpret is a world of constant change. Kacker has persistently asked questions that have interested him and has evolved a new way of thinking on the nature of materials and of examining essential concepts that permeate everyday awareness in Indian life.

As a citizen of the world, Kacker examines his roots and people's cherished beliefs about themselves. His world of ideas is both illusory and sensory as it contains imperfect copies of the ideal forms of Indian iconography. In Indian philosophy the ideal forms of the gods and elements in our minds are manifest in human aspects of perfection. Kacker explores how the immutable and eternal exist simultaneously within an urban cosmopolitan capitalist bubble in a seemingly changing world. His ceramics entice the spectator to the contemplation of interpretation and associations – simultaneously intensely personal and global in reference. In this article we will attempt to be a flare of light while we walk down the street alongside Kacker,



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experiencing his thoughts on the nature of his inspiration, methods and materials.

"Functionality no longer dictates the way I approach the making process. I use the material for a deeper exploration of personal ideas and imagery." Kacker's earlier lidded vessels such as the *gopuram* from South India and the temple jar and *chorten*, are directly inspired by visual imagery from the upper Himalayan region (especially Ladakh) and a fascination for Buddhist artefacts; the philosophies of Buddhism mingling with his exposure while growing up to the rituals and spiritual traditions embraced in his home. His earlier vertical *Sutra* stones represent all Asian civilisation. The most iconic of these resemble the minimal totems of the artist Jun Kaneko.

His recent works combine and contrast the visual qualities of the starkness of the high Himalayan landscape and the monasteries, which are like jewelled oases of culture, serving as focal points within a dry matt surface streaked with natural vegetative ochres, warm reds and cool greys. Forms now become more abstract, minimal and simplified – the spirit markers on the footsteps to self discovery. These *Monastery* and *Temple* pillars (the smallest are three feet in height) were first shown in 2006 in Mumbai and Delhi. They since have been growing steadily more monumental (the recent ones seven feet 6 inches high) an indication

perhaps of the individual's aspiration towards higher consciousness. They are made in three parts, the base, the middle section and the *chorten* or godhead on top. Here is Kacker's lexicon repertoire of symbolic stamps of animals, meditating figures, vertical stripes as references to temple walls and horizontal embellishments creating signposts. In his most recent body of work, the markers now have copper and brass horizontal strips at intervals with the attachment of small temple bells resonating with the soundless universal energy. Finding a contemporary personal meaning within the iconography of the subcontinent, Kacker's *Road to Revolution* markers are signifiers and metaphors of a lifetime of search, the importance of the journey and the clarity of perception.

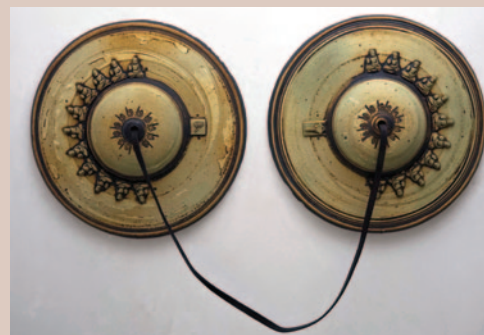
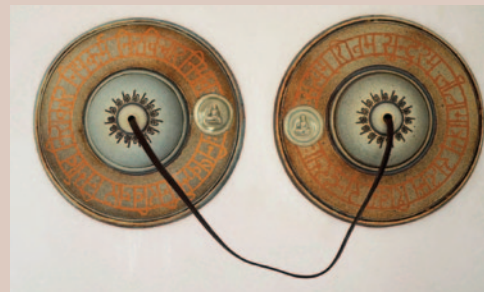
Kacker's use of the Devanagari and Sanskrit script on his wall plaques, markers and totems hearken to a graffiti tradition of signposts along the well-travelled medieval Indian Grand Trunk roads which formed the famous Silk Route link from West to East, as well as writings on rocks and edicts found from ancient times. The meanings are obscure but when he chooses to make a point, as in the sms (short message service) text in the series *Mysteries of Love*, or the tongue-in-cheek comment on mass ornament in popular culture artefacts, this is Kacker at his most satirical, showing the wonderful sense of humour and irony that he is known for on a personal level. Kacker uses text in a way that establishes a connection with the viewer at a level other than the purely visual and he has credited his short apprenticeship with lusterware master, Alan Caiger Smith of Aldermaston Pottery, UK, for his use of the flat brush in making script and calligraphic embellishment on his ceramics.

Kacker's forms offer a delightful lattice of the organic and the structured. Symbols are carefully



drafted and cut out in clay (a connection to his earlier architectural education) and then embedded in randomly textured and stretched out clay slabs. While the subject matter of the work is the ancient and the timeless, this is juxtaposed with an urban-contemporary approach in the making. Often moulds are made from cheap and kitschy figurines sold on the street. This harmonising of opposites is reflected in the surface decoration as well, where rough textures and matt glazes may contrast with shiny celadon covered porcelain inserts.

His latest works are the *Soundless Sound Cymbals*, probably the most abstract of his



Facing page: *Monastery Pillar*. 2010.
10.5 x 10.5 x 91 in.

Left: *Monastery Pillar with Bell*. 2010.
10.5 x 10.5 x 88 in.

Both pillars are high-fired ceramic with metal.
Top and above: *Soundless Sound Cymbals*.
2011. High-fired ceramic with leather and porcelain inserts. 19 x 3.5 in/ea.

work, which play with the concept of the interchangeability of seemingly opposing energies. In his own words, "An overdose of nectar can be poisonous, on the other hand a tiny bit of poison



can be life saving. Just as all dualities come out of the One, so too does all sound allude to the underlying silence." In Indian thought, the *karm leela* (what you reap you sow) a play dance versus word play, is a cultural reference for the transmutation of the soul. Kacker's work embodies India's secular traditions of a search for self-awareness and the discovery of a higher consciousness. The soundless sound cymbals use a leather strap, an actual horse rein, to connect them as wall mounted artworks. There are swirls of dark slip showing peeling ageing layers and the use of small discrete strips for impressions:

Like other Indian ceramics artists, Kacker's large scale commissions for public open spaces have given him the forum for expansion and thematic independence and context of his artwork that have gone from the single object framed by the human scale to something monumental in an installation. His recently completed commission at the Westin Spa Hotel lobby in Gurgaon, Haryana, India, had all the classic Kacker elements (pillars, spirit markers and sutra stones) but revealed in an effective contextual manner as a charged space with wholly Indian resonances of inner landscapes.

Vineet Kacker's particular contribution to post modern ceramic art in India is firstly his technical skill and mastery over the clay using wholly Indian materials and unparalleled skills in making, glazing and firing. He epitomises the small artist's studio with little physical assistance in an approach that is both conceptually and technically strong. His ideation on intensely personal concepts encompassing the nature of the material in India's cultural philosophy is profound and deeply personal. He makes use of his satirical whimsical approach to outline urban incongruities in contemporary India, with its absurdities and



Facing page: Monastery and Temple Pillars Installation. 2010–2011. High-fired ceramic, metal and thread. Various heights.

Left: Monastery Pillar with Bell. 2011. High-fired ceramic with metal. 10.5 x 10.5 x 88 in.

Top: Temple Pillar Top. Porcelain inserts in stoneware body with thread.

Above: Soundless Sound Cymbal (Detail).

double-edged stance between tradition and modernity. His art epitomises the transformative power of the creative force: the spectator returns repeatedly to experience his single transcendental moment, which changes one's gestalt and suddenly everything, though outwardly the same as before, is experienced with a completely different consciousness.

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