

Aspiring to fly

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Artist Saraswati Renata's petite house-like structures represent people, her porcelain stables are as fragile and imperfect and vulnerable as humans

UMA NAIR

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Sublime touchArtist Saraswati Renata at work; “AntiGravity”, porcelain, glazes, oxides, electric firing, 2018Marco Saroldi



...ths, they look like architectural stabiles. The vessels are so weightless, they seem vulnerable to a passing breeze; surfaces as malleable as silk, patted into patterns of mesh, ripples and furrows that defy the laws of physics; and pastel hues — sky-blue, with a sharp yet delicate chromatism more often delivered by ceramics. This is the world of Puducherry dweller Saraswati Renata whose installation reflects the adage — “small is beautiful.”

Experiments with porcelain

Saraswati says she was obsessed with architectural forms since childhood, but started making larger structures about three years ago. The biggest was done at Art Zhizhal Ceramic Symposium in Belarus, 2017 as their requirement was a one-metre tall sculpture (made of local grogged clay). “I decided to do something similar for the Porcelain show in Delhi, 2018,” says Saraswati.

“The porcelain available in India at the moment is not resistant enough to the higher temperature. And the condition put up for the Porcelain show was cone 10/1300 degree Celcius. So, I added cellulose for the additional strength. It worked out well. I actually wanted my tower to look alive, so I purposely made it look little melted. For the Triennale, I decided to emphasise the advantages of the material - it always looks lighter and more fragile than it actually is. So, I made the structures bottomless, on the thin (if you look upfront) 'legs'. Initial sketch had some additional flying over details, later I opted for the suspension of one of the pieces.” Porcelain stabiles

Saraswati’s petite house-like structures represent people, her porcelain stabiles are as fragile and imperfect and vulnerable as humans. She explains her evolution of thought.

“ If you see the final picture submitted for the Triennale, all the six structures are seen as one line , they are joyful and alive and due to the open space visible at the bottom look very light, aspiring to fly.”

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Peter Nagy, the main curator of the Triennale exposition, wanted to place them differently – spontaneously crowded, directing all the sides, visible from all around. “Suddenly they formed a dystopian urban landscape, looking quite Indian as well. I really liked this switch too. However, I am not able to think of something sad or dystopian on my own as my statement is always to aspire for a higher reality which always brings joy. If I would conceive anything too serious, I would never finish it as my only fuel is joy and humour in each detail,” she adds.

Glazes and firing

When asked about the firing process and glazes used, Saraswati answered, “I fired to cone 8-9 this time as I learned the hard way that this material vitrifies already at 1260 degree celcius and may collapse at 1300 degrees. Used quite a few transparent and semi-transparent glazes as well as pigments/oxides/underglazes sprayed over by quite thin layer. I wanted to preserve the whiteness of porcelain but not the same white all the time to highlight the diversity of life and to make it warm.”

All studio ceramicists will tell us that among all materials porcelain is difficult and treacherous.

Saraswati explains, “It pays for the trouble. I like the fact that the pieces made of porcelain become alive easier and reveal the colours beautifully. The experience of looking at the fired porcelain becomes more personal, reduces the distance between the observant and the piece. More smooth.

More skin-like. I make each piece directly on the kiln shelf, so the kiln loading doesn't bring breakage. And I am ready to embrace the slight changes that come with melting,” she admits.

Intriguing installation



rough nap as if soaked in shadow lead us to suspect Saraswati has a fair bit of sophisticated tools. In a world of precision, she is spontaneous, creating an unruffled, oneiric quality of her presence, as she creates a suite that is infinitely tranquil and meditative to the eyes. True ceramicists work by feel, and intuition. Saraswati's small intriguing installation reflects her need to feel something. A bit more like this. A bit more like that.

The remarkable, wafer thin surfaces of her work are only possible because she works in long hours of perseverance, to pursue a rare method of working to create poetic porcelain.

At the Ceramic Triennale in Jaipur Saraswati's anti gravity defying porcelain stables are incredibly tactile, and when she says she has been doing porcelain for five years you know that what keeps her ahead of the pack as it were, is her fetish for perfection and explorations in the alchemy of firing and making jewellery and slip casting.

(Breaking Ground, India's First Ceramic Triennale runs till 18th November 2018 at Jawahar Kala Kendra in Jaipur.)

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