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LIFESTYLE

IDFAIR 2023: Stoneware sculptor Saraswati's ensembles

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Uma Nair

Critic and Curator Uma Nair has been writing for the past 33 years on art and culture. She has written as critic for Times of India and Economic Times. She believes that art is ... [MORE](#)

At the ID Fair Living Traditions is curated by Farah Siddiqui and Natasha Mehta. Amongst the few artists in the curation, the stoneware ensembles of Saraswati of Auroville are small architectural wonders that seem more like little houses. Saraswati who was part of the International Ceramic Triennale in 2018, is a brilliant ceramic artist who travels the world being invited to many international workshops.



Glaze and grain

These ensembles of hers look like little stables that at once draw our attention not just to glaze and grain of stoneware but also to the beauty of form and hand holding in stoneware techniques.

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Stoneware as a material has its own properties but Saraswati creates her many storied wonders in anagram firing at her studio in Auroville. In an email she says: As an everyday practice I am trying to follow a sparkle from inside where ideas always come in a visual form. Since it gives me an uplifting experience, I hope for my audience the moment of receiving this energy will also be uplifting, and this is what Art is meant to be from my point of view."



Sunrise (porcelain) is a favourite work as you look at its lighter and darker tints as well as the beauty of the flowers and the many little elements. Precision, perfection and a sense of folded animation all come into play in her articulations of individual works. Spontaneity and love for exploration and experimentation are the key to her many little forms. Earth tones are her elixir.

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She elucidates on her style and love for architecture. "The main question is why my spontaneous act of creation often turns into constructing a tower-like form. I am looking for an answer myself. I always admired architecture. I often lived in a city or near the mountains and now I miss that vertical visual support. But I think the magic of the game of building something tall shared by all the children is the cause. This became a meditation."



Anagama firing

Anagama Firing in stoneware is tricky and requires experience and deeper knowledge of firing modalities. Saraswati balances the rudiments of the wood fire and drops of ash to create her stoneware wonders. Rocking Together looks at a life lived within circumstances of moving and shifting and accommodating things in life. Saraswati explains the process.

“I work either with porcelain or stoneware. Porcelain, I fire in my electric kiln and stoneware works are lucky to be fired in the anagama kiln of my friend Indrani Singh Cassime. Anagama firing is always a teamwork, and the result is unpredictable. The God of Fire gives us what She thinks we deserve after a 72-hour marathon of wood firing. Electric firing is more of a solitary practice, but even here there is a room for surprises.

Basically, I talk about the subtleness and fragility of all the things we value.”



According to Saraswati: “These objects/houses with all their nomadic/unsettling spirit – are built well and moulded to reflect to our world and all over the absence of illusions.”

True ceramicists work by feel, and intuition. Saraswati's small intriguing installations of architectural wonders 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 stoneware and porcelain that hinges both on reality and fantasy.



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