

Subodh Gupta

Selected Works
March 23 to April 30, 2011



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RL Fine Arts is pleased to present an exhibition of selected works of Subodh Gupta. The exhibition will be on view from March 23 through April 30, at 39 West 19 Street, Suite 612. An opening reception will be held at the gallery on Wednesday, March 23 from 6:30 to 8:30pm.

Subodh Gupta has emerged as one of the leading artists of the contemporary art scene, not only in his native India, but also worldwide. His practice includes painting, installation, sculpture, video and photography.

During the past decade and a half, the cross-currents of much that is happening in contemporary India, socially, culturally and artistically have been dexterously located in his art. India is rapidly developing within itself and to take its place in the global economy, but there is much that is restrained by centuries old tradition and many that miss out on these modern developments. Coming from the eastern state of Bihar in India, a state often crippled by natural disasters, Gupta voices the daily experience of many travelling workers and migrants, from his state and also throughout India.

Utilizing the vocabulary of Marcel Duchamp's 'ready-mades' and also his direct descendant, the art of Pop art, Gupta has selected mass produced items from daily life and by placing them in the context of art, has effected a transmutation into a unique and coveted art object with its own 'aura'. The 'bartan', or common kitchen utensil, has become, in his hands, a glittering, reflecting, luminous artwork that approaches that of a deluxe artifact. The bartan in India is found throughout all households and castes, knows no classes or boundaries, and is also a site of ritual and sacred meaning, that by anointing it as art, successfully creates not only a new modern Indian art, one that resonates with the contemporary world but also showcases the many different facets of modern life and also tradition in a nation grappling with modernity. His sculptures, composed of many pieces, speak to different aspects of the 'one' - an idea that permeates so much Vedic philosophy; their abundance in number contrasts and yet compares with the monolithic 'one' of the work of another artist, Jeff Koons, who also explores the desires of contemporary consumer culture in his every

day objects recast according to strict high-art standards, and in whose gleaming reflective surface we see ourselves; the bartan pieces speak to the dreams, desire and hunger, not only for daily sustenance, but also to survival and advancement in this land of a burgeoning middle class that has become an avaricious monster of consumption - the simple kitchen utensils, in use for centuries, remind us of the basics. Works such as **Feast for one hundred and eight gods III**, on display in the exhibition, showcase Gupta's careful positioning of these kitchen utensils to create a chaotic feel of precariousness as if they will tumble down at any moment in their shining abundance, but yet, conversely radiate the timeless tranquility and meditation more akin to a Hindu temple. Consumption is of course the new religion, and ready-made replaces the hand-made.

Gupta's paintings continue his exploration of these themes. Apparently deriving from photographs, they are painted in a seemingly realistic style but which on closer examination reveal themselves to be masterful combinations of figuration and abstraction, with certain details brought into clear focus and others deliberately left opaque - a snapshot of reality, the supposed domain of photography - but yet here diffused and uncertain and alluding to a timelessness. The two 'bartan' works in the exhibition show the change of style in Gupta's treatment of this theme over the years. The **Untitled** (2004) has an expansive composition and depth of shadow and light and color that puts the viewer in the picture, the consumer surveying the goods. The **Untitled** (2007) takes us further into abstraction as the glowing silver tiffin (food) carrier struggles for place with the spill of paint, the tiffin fighting to impose its presence in the face of the flatness of abstract expressionism, where the paint is the paint is the paint, and should refer only to itself. But even those sly Abstract Expressionists charged their flat canvases with so much spiritual baggage, that Gupta perfectly captures that idiom of grand posturing through supposedly self referential means, the magnificence of the silver tiffin as majestic as the American West or as permanent as the range of Himalayas that looms over Indian mythology and history: the tiffin as Mount Everest.

One of Gupta's other important themes that he has explored in painting, sculpture and video, is that of travel. Many young men from his home state Bihar, and throughout the country, travel out of state and travel out of country, to find jobs, money, new lives. It is a nation of migrants, either to the big cities or abroad. At every airport, station, bus depot, one is witness to the countless shifting of man, seeking, searching, returning laden with treasure. Gupta's 'Saat Samunder Paar' (Across the Seven Seas) series attests to this constant travel. Broken down taxi cabs are piled high with the returning booty of national and international travel, all a family's hopes collected in anonymous wrapped packages pushed on broken trolleys. Again, expressing these images in both painting and sculpture, Gupta crystallizes the flux of all migrants and travellers. In the painting **Untitled** (2004) the ubiquitous ambassador taxi cab is the background for the endless narrative of negotiation between two personages in the process of travel. It seems like a clear picture, but much is left unclear - only the endless joust of leaving, returning, arguing, paying, charging, providing, buying, gifting...the loaded taxi is the loaded symbol of our consuming desires and dreams.

Subodh Gupta, born in 1964, lives and works in New Delhi, India.

Solo Exhibitions in 2011 and 2010

2011

Sara Hildén Art Museum, Tampere, Finland

Hauser & Wirth, New York NY

Hauser & Wirth Outdoor Sculpture Southwood Garden, St.James's Church, 'Hauser & Wirth Outdoor Sculpture: Subodh Gupta', London, England

2010

Hauser & Wirth, Zurich, Switzerland

KÖR am Kunsthalle Wien project space Karlsplatz, 'Et tu, Duchamp?', Vienna, Austria

Arario Gallery, Cheonan, Korea

Arario Gallery, Seoul, Korea

Pinchuk Art Centre, 'Faith Matters', Kiev, Ukraine