

ART & DEAL

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TANTRIC ART

Redeeming Tradition: Velu Viswanathan's Yantric Interplay
Performers At The Sacred Arts - Goa Photo Festival



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SHANTA'S TREASURE TROVE

A recurring touch of nostalgia is seen in Shanta Samant's sculptures. Interestingly, it traces her journey from early childhood and adolescence to womanhood. Here, we find Shanta displaying a stunning quality of exuberance expressed with playful abandon. A high note of passion and spontaneity are the quintessential elements that mark these figurative sculptures.



Shanta Samant

Inspired by sculptures from Khajuraho temples and equipped with a deep understanding of the Rasas, Shanta's "Shringara" series sculptures are sensuous and magnificent, celebrating feminine grace and beauty. Another interesting feature of Shanta's sculptures is the subtle idea of precariousness and balance as seen in these. Besides, the hues of the patina created by her integrate very well with the overall aura of the lyrical economy present in all her works.

Painter and art critic, Sumati Gangopadhyay (SG) spoke to Shanta concerning her work and the inspiration that lies behind her creative quest.

SG: You mentioned, once, that your early life was spent at Haldia, and then in Baroda. Any reminiscences?

Shanta : I have always experienced a township life as my father worked for the Indian Oil Corporation. I went to St. Xavier's School at Haldia, managed by Father E. Gales who was also its founder. It was a great experience as Father Gales was an amazing communicator and always made each one of us feel special. Later on we came to the Gujarat Refinery at Baroda. I lived in the refinery township with my two elder sisters. A lot of my early work reflects this happy carefree time of childhood where I grew up pampered and loved by all in my family. Being the youngest, I was the boisterous one, always up to pranks and full of fun.

SG: What were your experiences as a student at the Baroda Fine Arts Faculty?

Shanta : I was extremely fortunate. When I joined, I studied under Chhatpar Sir whose lessons in object drawing, head study and life study are unforgettable. He was a great teacher. Then I also studied under Raghav Kaneria Sir who was so encouraging and gentle in the way he directed us. He always filled us with new enthusiasm and confidence.

I also got the opportunity to interact with Dhruva Mistry who, as we all know, is a creative genius. I also saw one of his marvelous sculptures in Glasgow. So all in all this was a very fruitful time of my life.

SG : I want to know if there was some particular reason for your love for metal and bronze, in particular, as your medium?

Shanta : I love bronze for its aesthetic beauty. There is a timeless quality about it and its sheen is attractive. But I plan to work with other media as well.

SG: What made your visit to U.K. a memorable one?

Shanta : My visit to sculptor Andy Scott's studio in Glasgow was an unforgettable experience. I had never seen such large works before.

I was hugely impressed by his outlook and dedication. He strongly believes in doing a lot of work himself. Only when absolutely necessary does he engage assistants to help him. He often does large commissioned works.

One of his works, "Heavy Horse", is an amazing piece of public art work for the motorway M8 which lies between Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Andy sees the horse as a metaphor for the city of Glasgow. Interestingly, this particular breed, the Clydesdale, is a working horse. Originally used for agriculture and the steel industry, here, it is dressed up for a show. Glasgow, known as a working city, but now it is sometimes considered a 'show city' focusing on culture and leisure. And Andy always tries to create works that operate at varying levels of interpretation and, in this case, one can also see the subtle reference made to the surrounding heavy goods transport, agriculture and steel industries.



Bronze sculpture by Shanta Samant

SG : Which other artistic site or artwork in U.K. had impressed you?

Shanta : My visit to the Mackintosh Museum in Glasgow was also a wonderful experience. There was so much sensitivity in the way things were displayed.

Charles Rennie Mackintosh was a Scottish architect and designer, leader of the Glasgow school of Art Nouveau. His furniture design and interior decoration were spectacular examples of understated art and influenced many artists and architects even in Austria and Germany.

SG : What do you think of the Renaissance period Master sculptors like Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci? Do you find them relevant today?

Shanta : Of course, they will always be relevant. They created magnificent and immortal art, but now I have noticed that many art students today don't care much about these great

masters. They are least interested in studying them in depth. This is a sad situation as there is so much to learn from them.

SG : Who has inspired you the most for the creation of your own work?

Shanta : The art of the Khajuraho temple has inspired me in a tremendous way. The boldness and beauty of those figurative sculptures are really mind boggling.

Where the conceptualizing of concepts is concerned, I have drawn ideas and cues from my own life as a girl-child and a woman.

SG : Which contemporary sculptors impress you the most on both sides of the hemisphere?

Shanta : Oh, there are so many, but amongst the modern sculptors I like some of Anish Kapoor's work for their monumental and abstract language. I respect and admire Sankho

Choudhury's work, I like its lyrical quality. Ram Kinkar Baij's art has a very striking rugged charm and he has created a tremendous impact using very simple materials like sand, cement, etc. There is a certain honesty in his work which I very much admire.

Incidentally, I love Rodin's works, especially "The Burghers of Calais". I admire Rodin for his courageous attitude and conviction. I'm also fascinated by the Rumanian sculptor Brancusi's works which are superb examples of minimal art at its best.

SG : What does Picasso mean to you?

Shanta : Picasso remains an all-time favourite for most of us. He was a visionary and far ahead of his time. Picasso's "Head of a Bull Metamorphosis" made of the saddle and handle of a bicycle, reflects his creative genius. His versatile range of art works includes "Guernica" apart

from many other amazing forms of the female persona created by him.

SG : Which contemporary sculptors impress you?

Shanta : I like Eva Hasse's work. She's a Jewish artist who lost her family in the Holocaust. The main theme in her art is pain.

Sara Lucas's works on feminism is thought provoking. Louise Bourgeois's works in metal, stone and soft mediums like cloth is very interesting. Shantamani M's works in charcoal are impressive.

SG : Are you excited about the London Group show coming up in May?

Shanta : Yes, the show is called 'Indian Summer' and is curated by Vaishali Thakkar. It will be held at the Taj, London.

SG : Does literature interest you?

Shanta : Yes, Rabindranath Tagore's 'Shishu' is what I love a great deal.

SG : Do you have anything to say about cinema art?

Shanta : I love Ray's 'Charulata' and many of his other films. Charulata is a superb example of a bold theme handled with great sensitivity.

SG : Does good music touch you?

Shanta : Good music, I feel, always reverberates in my heart and brings out the best in my creative quest. It's an ethereal experience.

SG : Now that you are the acting head of the sculpture department of the faculty, what kind of work culture would you like to bring about in your department?

Shanta : I'm a bit disappointed with the attitude of instant, result-oriented, short-cut methods of creating art, seen in many young artists today. Sculpture demands very hard work, and the knowledge of many mediums and handling of various tools is a must. I believe over dependence on readymade work and labour-saving devices may ultimately affect the artistic quality of the completed work of art. I hope to bring in some positive change through talks, seminars and workshops.

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Shanta Samant, Lady with a Pankha, Bronze

