

Anonymous? by Shanu Lahiri

In the 1990's, artist pedagogue and veritable magpie, Shanu Lahiri, conceptualised a singular initiative of bringing together established and emerging artists creating a collective challenge to test the very process of mark-making and critical reception. By deconstructing conventional structures of exhibiting and viewing art, the viewer was invited to question the language and consumption of art itself.

Taking cue from Shanudi's own conception of art, the works on display here are a reflection of her artistic process, wide ranging experiments with materials, styles and scale. Her seamless transition from expansive, large-scale works to more intimate, spontaneous drawings, sketches, doodles reveal dynamic, playful aspects of the artist's daily practice. In her art we witness an exuberance of expression, where every little surface available becomes a prompt to visually articulate an acute sense of the other through an economy of line and colour. The works attempt to initiate an understanding of the tautly layered transactional nature of being. It is an eclectic selection whose charm lies in its very avoidance of a rigid order. Shanudi's art and compulsive archiving evolve around her deep connection with the world of humans, non-humans, and the environment they inhabit. A quiet radicalism pervades her approach to people, places, and an enmeshed way of living.

As a visual practitioner, Shanudi's attempt to grapple with art's capacity to provoke thought, stir emotions, and address social dissonances, without conforming to expected standards is truly inspiring. Especially in today's world it is imperative to recalibrate the context within which we experience art and attempt to understand the entanglements of individual practices — the notion of what art can be, to move beyond the narrow confines of a market-driven engagement into a broader, more profound realm of creative enquiry.

This exhibition gives us a glimpse into the scope of Shanu Lahiri's artistic process by juxtaposing never-before-shown works along with signatory frames. Writing about the 1996 'Art Anonymous' initiative, art historian Tapati Guha-Thakurta says, "...let the viewers engage with each work purely on their own visual terms. Let them in the process, develop their independent, intuitive faculties of reading an art language, and delving into its complex vocabulary. Let critics too have the opportunity to openly evaluate and criticise." These words encapsulate Shanudi's own relation with her creative practice and ring true for her entire oeuvre and attitude to life itself.

Curator - Nobina Gupta

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