

sullivan+strumpf

KANCHANA GUPTA
458.32 SQUARE METERS

Curated by Savita Apte

12 October — 10 November 2019

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The deliberately restrained and intentionally opaque title *458.32 Square Meters* belies the empathy, vulnerability and anthropocentric impulse behind Kanchana Gupta's body of works. Even as it invites a multiplicity of interpretations, the title functions as a summation of the intricate journey that her art making takes — from transient hypotheses teased out of the subconscious depths of her mind to the conscious materiality of the finished object in front of the viewer, it alludes to the multifaceted meanings and methodologies that shape her signature visual language.

The exhibition, Gupta's first solo at Sullivan+Strumpf, Singapore, showcases the artist's precisely crafted sculptural forms, displayed in a seemingly Minimalist aesthetic and evidences her ongoing investigations into the materiality and transformation of oil paint. Gupta's meticulously constructed works manifest the spiritual rigour and ultimate serenity of ritual, where processes, repeated with passion, precision and expertise, lend a new significance to objects and encounters.

Gupta's work encapsulates her enduring fascination with rapidly changing urban-scapes in general and her concern with the particularities of the environments she inhabits as reflections of her own diasporic existence. Throughout, Gupta is engaged in a critical contemplation of her personal trajectory vis a vis the meta narratives of urbanisation, migration and globalisation. She parses her movement away from the comfortable confines of joint families to the amplified anxieties of nuclear families, from the constrictions and convictions that define small town living to the anonymity of megapolises, from the homeland, to the land that is now home.

It is entirely appropriate that Gupta accedes to a Minimalist aesthetic: in critical writings, Minimalism is often used to structure the passage from Modernism to Post Modernism in art theory and functions as a moment of shift and thus resonates completely with Gupta's own impetus. More importantly, situating Gupta's practice within this moment of shift, permits the works to be framed within social, cultural, ideological and political paradigms in addition to unquestionable physical attributes of sculpture — mass, volume, gravity and materiality.

Edges and Residues 12 - Neutral Grey on Black and Steel Blue Grey is one of four monolithic painterly works which uses jute as a starting point: the material most commonly employed on building sites, to contain or camouflage

the debris of destruction, the undesirable rawness of construction and to guard against the detrimental desiccation of construction material. Jute, which forms a conduit between Gupta's earlier practice of incorporating tarpaulin, operates as a signifier of the urgency of urbanisation. Speaking to the conditions of creating art over a sustained period of time, Gupta painstakingly and repetitively assembles layers of paint on the jute carapace.

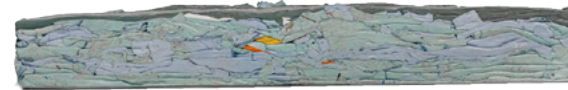


Kanchana Gupta, *Edges and Residues 12 - Neutral Grey on Black and Steel Blue Grey*, 2019

Whilst gravity exerts its force, the painterly accumulation is subjected to heat, manual manipulation and further peeled, torn and ripped from the exoskeleton. Delicate skins are transformed into autonomous fragile fragments. The vulnerability and unpredictability of a network of cracks, crevices and clefts is uncovered, revealing how the surfaces of daily life may disappear and reappear bearing the traces of their previous lives. Inherent imperfections and subtle colour changes within layers help to generate a visual variety and depth and annotate a temporal progression. What lies exposed is the intimacy of mark making — which, by the process of inversion has become public rather than remain private.

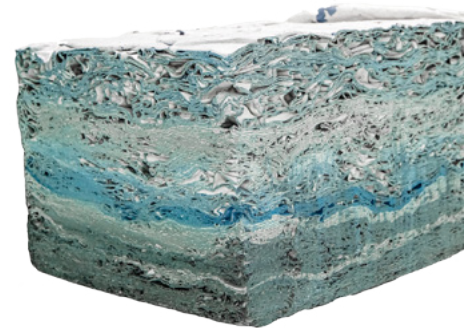
Whereas the *Edges and Residues* works present material which is variously layered, affixed, ripped, torn, peeled, burnt and subjected to extreme manual duress within the studio setting to expose raw emotion, the *Compressed Slab* series establishes the consequences of mechanical compacting and industrial compression. Together with *Compressed and Cut*, these works echo the ballast of social, emotional, mental and physical pressures

associated with metropolitan life and urban aspiration. The resulting largely monochromatic polyhedral sculptures like *Compressed Slab - 002 - 75 cm* evidence the marriage of the artist's painstaking interventions with the uncanny vagaries of the unintended. Gupta's focus on manipulation, reconstruction and transformation is informed by a multiplicity of local narratives which impel the artist to explore the layered and manifold concepts of temporality, memory, domesticity and identity incorporated in the plasticity and rigidity of the tempered fragments.



Kanchana Gupta, *Compressed Slab - 002 - 75 cm*, 2019

Manually cleaving dense cuboid works produces *Compressed and Cut - 001* which exposes a contour map of cultural, economic and developmental strata of the city within which the artist compacts a multiplicity of languages and expressive ranges. Gupta's practice is concerned with excavating the contradictory relationships, rampant in urban centres where inhabitants feel the overwhelming weight of emotional duress while simultaneously experiencing emptiness. Seen against this backdrop, the *Composite Slab* as well as the *Compressed and Cut* sculptures should be read as artefacts of transformation — at once opulent and tragic they serve as monuments that commemorate urban duality.

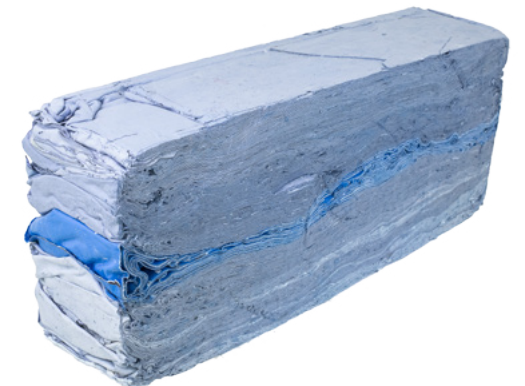


Kanchana Gupta, *Compressed and Cut - 001*, 2019

The elongated brick like forms of *Compressed Slab* recall confined living quarters which are cast in predetermined moulds and speak of tamped desires, restricted articulation and crushed dreams. Gupta uses these polyhedral sculptures to nonjudgmentally parse the foundational relationships between the conditions of labour and the larger structures of capital as she encounters and experiences them.

The sculptural series proposes tactical interpretations of the title of the show. *458.32 Square Meters* speaks to the aspirations of economic migrants and city dwellers and evokes the floor area of lavish residences in dense urban centres. The pursuit of these external indicators of success, manifests itself in a willingness to be pressured, manipulated and moulded rather like the sculptures themselves. More innocuously, the title indicates the total amount of material incorporated in the art works displayed in the exhibition.

Embedded in Gupta's work is the understanding that knowledge is produced as much through rituals as oral histories and that these processes may be harnessed to convey a simultaneous sense of the possible and the sublime. The exhibition itself is at once a site of presentation and concealment, of place and displacement, of staging and happenstance, an agglomeration of individual history connected through personal experience to the grander narratives of displacement, diaspora and migration and delineates the artist's intriguingly poetic and political perspective of the world.



Kanchana Gupta, *Compressed and Cut - 004*, 2019

Contrary to the appearance of outward perfection, Gupta's sculptural practice is crafted to disrupt the certitudes of life and art. Drawing from her own disparate interests and fields of knowledge Gupta explores the notion of communicating commonalities but does not attempt a facile resolution. Rather the artist delights in foregrounding the questions that continue to concern her. How can people from different social and cultural backgrounds coexist harmoniously in the contemporary metropolis? How can such disparate metropolitan inhabitants address the unfamiliar, the foreign, the different? Can art be deployed to facilitate the construction of cohesive communities?

Savita Apte is an independent researcher working with modern and contemporary South Asian art. She holds a postgraduate diploma in Asian Art and a Masters in Post War and Contemporary Art and her doctoral thesis is on the Progressive Artists Group and Modernism in India.