

A feminist take on the commodification of art



Never Tried 1, Stainless Steel, 2018, by Tayeba Begum Lipi.

Vanity Fair, a solo exhibition by Tayeba Begum Lipi, is now on view at Delhi's Shrine Empire Gallery.

Lipi's recent body of work addresses the irony embedded in the commodification of art, especially, art that represents movements that are staunchly critical of the economic circuits that they are likely to traverse.

Known for her feminist art practice that has over the years called into question the brutal ways by which overarching patriarchal structures have confined women, and subjected them to physical as well as psychological violence, the artist is also self-conscious of the way her own work, as well as the work of other explicitly political artists are being subsumed and appropriated by the logic of the capital in an art context that is undeniably yet to shake off deeply rooted sexism. While the presence of such work is subversive in itself—to be seen, recognised and heard—making emancipatory dents in the system, this exhibition goes a step forward in acknowledging the toxic masculinity that is easily able to appropriate and divert resistance movements to its own benefit.

And art is not alone. This logic of technocratic late capitalism seeps into civilian movements as well. In the current context that we occupy, who is able to completely ameliorate cultural production to a position where it is completely untouched by the neo-liberal patterns of production and consumption that unconsciously inform our thoughts, behaviour and aspirations?

The exhibition is an introspection of this conundrum. During the show will mimic a shop, in the most literal sense of the word. Visitors are invited to browse for a brand of resistance.

Lipi, an artist from Bangladesh, explores feminist issues of marginality and representation of the female body, addressing societal contradictions, often questioning the sexual stereotypes that dominate women's lives around the world.

Tayeba Begum Lipi recreates everyday objects, such as bathtubs, baby perambulators, picture frames, and handbags, appearing as if they are encased in their own suit of metallic armor. Closer inspection reveals that their polished surfaces are comprised of gleaming stainless steel razor blades, carefully welded into these rigid yet fragile structures.

In a complementary series of works, Lipi fabricates items of clothing, such as bikinis and nightdresses, from gold plated safety pins through a process of interlinking them into a mesh as pliable as fabric.

Tools of precision and security, the safety pins and blades transform quotidian objects into items imbued with luminosity and an atypical beauty. Yet, the implication that they have become a protective armor for their implicitly female users adds a sinister and at times, melancholic

undertone. The air of danger embedded within these objects as a result of their sterile material is further enforced by titles such as *The Stolen Dream* and *Trapped*.

Lipi's relationship with her materials date back to the artist's childhood, during which the evergrowing families of her eleven older siblings preoccupied her life. Her work reflects her visceral memory of purchasing and cleansing sparkling new razor blades and pins, as the crucial, often only, tools available to the midwives assisting with the arrival of each new addition to the family.

The show, curated by Anushka Rajendran is on view from 29 January till 1 March