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presents

दूर-दराज़ (Dūr-darāz)
By Awdhesh Tamrakar

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On View till 14th Jan 2023

दूर-दराज़ (Dūr-darāz)

If you are reading this, you have already pronounced this word in your head. Say it out loud. How does it roll off your tongue?

Now try,

ठठरा (Ṭhaṭherā)

and,

मठर (Maṭhār)

What is the sound that these make?

Maṭhār is the repetitive sound of metal striking metal—once heard so often in Awdhesh Tamrakar’s community of Ṭhaṭherās from Shahgarh in Madhya Pradesh, known for their brass and copper utensil-making. In recent times, however, this hammering sound has grown so dūr-darāz or distant that it is rarely heard as the younger generation of Ṭhaṭherās seek out different career paths and better socio-economic prospects.

How do you measure distance by sound?

Can pictures hear?

Does metal hold the memory of the sound of its beating?

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Now say,

ताम्रकार (Tāmṛakār).

Awdhesh's surname literally means craftsman of copper. Material, then, does not form the crux of his practice simply for aesthetic or artistic reasons, but is an identity marker of his family, community, and place of belonging. Material is political.

The Ṭhaṭṭherās' iconic craft of brass, copper, and its alloys, is currently in a state of decline, having to compete with cheaper metals like aluminium and steel in an economy of mass-manufactured goods.

It is through material, therefore, that Awdhesh traces his roots back to a place called Pancham Nagar in Madhya Pradesh—once home to the Shahgarh Ṭhaṭṭherās but now lies desolate with only some ruins of a fort wall left. To him, a native landscape in decay or a practice in decline can mean the same thing for the Ṭhaṭṭherā identity.

And so, Awdhesh sandblasts and acid-etches Pancham Nagar's topography into ceramic tiles and brass like a denudation. But the lines are clean and the surface, shiny, like the industrial products that have been sustaining the Ṭhaṭṭherās economically for years.

Awdhesh unearths his heritage—so dūr-darāz in time—from his family archives and local oral histories. It is this memory, recovered in fragments, that he sculpts into fragmented pieces of land mass from recycled paper-pulp in *Muted Ground*, harkening to a time when Pancham Nagar was known for its paper board (gaṭṭā) factory as well as its metalsmiths.

But don't mistake his deployment of landscape for nostalgia as it is not a longing for the past. It functions rather, as a place-holder for the present discourse on the dis-enfranchised and the forgotten; It is to articulate loss without lament.

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Can the maṭhār sound be captured in a picture?

Awdhesh attempts this—not so much to preserve as much as to salvage—by recreating the aesthetics of crumpled photographs from his father’s photo-studio in *Pital-Khana*, literally meaning a brass workshop. His deliberate mutilation of the surface and the terrain-like undulation of the creased paper denies the viewer an easy view for there are no easy answers here.

As we vaguely make out hands working the metal in some of these works, we wonder if they would one day become as abandoned as Pancham Nagar’s ruins.

What would this mean in the coming years, when children are taught to say,

‘ठ से ठठेर’ (Ṭh se Ṭhaṭherā)?

- Priyanka D’Souza

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Artist Bio:

Awdhesh Tamrakar was born in Shahgarha (small town in between Khajuraho and Sanchi) Madhya Pradesh in 1989. He completed his Bachelor and Masters in Sculpture from the Faculty of Fine Arts, M.S. University Baroda, in 2013 and 2015 respectively.

Tamrakar holds a Gold Medal from the Department of Sculpture, Faculty of Fine Arts, Baroda 2015, Chinmoy Pramanik Memorial Award, Faculty of Fine art, Baroda 2015, Emerging Master Award, Sarjan Art Gallery, Baroda 2014.

He had two solo shows, Muted Mathaar: Supported by The Raza Foundation on the occasion of 100 years of S H Raza, held at Triveni Art Gallery, New Delhi, 2021; and Unfasten Association, Exhibition Hall, faculty of fine arts, Baroda 2015. And Some of his recent group shows and projects include Thinking matters, curated by Mario Dsouza, Space Studio Baroda, 2020; Heads in the cloud, Five Million Incidents, conceived in collaboration with Raqs Media Collective and organized by Goethe Institute/ Max Mueller Bhawan New Delhi and Kolkata, 2020; Art and Science Dialogue, Collaboration project with TIFR Hyderabad, 2018; Madhyama curated by Akhilesh, Raza Foundation, Delhi, 2018; ID-ENTITY Curated by Zero Gravity Collective, New Delhi, 2018; Displaced Places, Utsha Foundation, Bhubaneswar, Odisha 2017.

Tamrakar has been teaching as a Guest Faculty in the Department of Fine Arts, S. N. School of Arts and Communication, Central University, Hyderabad since 2018.

Awdhesh lives and works between Hyderabad and Baroda.

About Shrine Empire:

Shrine Empire was created in December 2008 from a merger of two existing entities. Prior to this, both had worked together on exhibitions in India and Singapore separately, known then as The Shrine Gallery and Empire Art. Shrine Empire is based in New Delhi and its directors, Anahita Taneja and Shefali Somani have envisioned the gallery as a platform for presenting and promoting contemporary visual art practices. Since its inception, Shrine Empire has consistently focused on encouraging a dialogic approach with a range of emerging and eminent artists with sustained, innovative and engaging practices, and curators in order to produce exhibitions and special commissioned projects. The mission of Shrine Empire is to promote artists, curators and art-writers who are invested in redefining the boundaries of contemporary art practice. The various curatorial narratives that have emerged from the space over the years have made Shrine Empire known for its critical engagement with political and social concerns of the contemporary.

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