



Tuesday, May 01, 2018



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The Body as their Canvas

An exhibition explores the body and its historiography through the works of 14 artists

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Written by **Pallavi Chattopadhyay** | Updated: April 30, 2018 12:00:38 am



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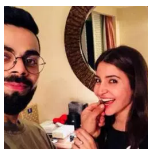


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Over the last decade, Los Angeles-based artist Ariana Page Russell has learnt to be so comfortable with her skin condition — dermatographia, where even the slightest scratch causes raised red lines on the skin for nearly 30 minutes — that she is now experimenting with it to create art. In a photograph titled Flora, for instance, she has pink patterns of flowers drawn on her abdomen, made using a stylus.

Among her other works on display at Shrine Empire gallery in Delhi, as part of the exhibition “Caressing History: A Draft for Body-based Historiography”, is Index, which

has text running across her thighs, with words ingrained on her skin as if scribbled in a notebook, using a blunt knitting needle. Pointing out how the skin condition

drawing attention to the sensitivity of my skin (and many others with sensitive skin).”

The exhibition, featuring works by over 14 artists, explores the history of the body and how it embodies the past, through memories of touch, dreams, reveries and intimate moments. Talking about the concept, curator Adwait Singh says, “We are looking at how body-based historiography is formed, and exploring how the body has been divorced from accounts of history. My aim is to reinstate it in historical accounts and visualise it as a medium.”

A magnifying glass is required to read Baroda-based artist Khushbu Patel’s diary, placed near the entrance of the gallery, capturing feelings and experiences that often go unrecorded. The diary appears to be that of a young girl recalling her memories of attraction, and her first menstruation, as a blood-stained mattress features among her many drawings. Her painting *That Smallchasers*, of a body that appears bleeding, scarred and with an uneven surface, serves as a reminder of the imperfections of the skin and the aging process, as if signalling the onset of wrinkles and freckles. It acts as a direct commentary on the obsession with the “myth of beauty”. Singh says, “It deals with old age and recognises how we fail to come to terms with our own imperfections.”

Bringing flashbacks of Bollywood’s obsession with flowers brushing against each other during the ’80s and ’90s to depict intimate moments between couples on the big screen, is Delhi-based artist BR Shailesh’s *Kama Muta*. In the watercolour, he charts a botanical journey of a cactus mushrooming with flowers, reflecting how plants in Rajasthani miniature paintings have often been used in art history as a metaphor for sexual acts. “Like how the plant appears cruel, yet has beautiful flowers on top, we can see beauty and ugliness in our own body. The attractiveness of our physicality and negative thinking can coexist,” says Shailesh.

In the work titled *A Month of a Woman’s Face* — where cotton pads with makeup marks are enclosed in a glass box — artist Iwona Demko from Poland has rendered an alternate calendar envisioned from the feminine point of view. Appearing as if the makeup was removed after a hard day’s work or a glamorous event, the artwork reflects how makeup has become an integral part of the female experience. Moving away from the documentation of time through the official calendars set up by regimes, Demko chronicles how time is lived and experienced by different people, and how one needs to make room for such experiences.

The exhibition is on at D-395, Defence Colony, till May 15

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