

ART MUSINGS

FEASTING  
& FASTING



SMRITI DIXIT

## A HAND-MADE TALE

The art of Smriti Dixit is born out of her experiences with everyday life. Drawing on small moments and intimate interactions, she fashions objects carefully, using handmade techniques, engaging in the tactility of her materials, becoming familiar with their specific properties. Dixit's art is an indelibly feminine procedure, finding its foundations in the process of its creation as much as in its final form. The activities which go into creating this diverse body of works are as varied as stitching, quilting, adhering and even distilling distinct elements which are brought together. It is necessary to note, however, that Dixit's art cannot be dissected into a celebration of femininity. Instead, it acts as an antidote to a reified archetype of the feminine experience. Her work is not a condensed simplification of feminine interiority, but instead emerges in collision with the world outside.

Dixit describes her experiences in the city that is her home, Mumbai. She visits temples, watching individuals at prayer. She passes through bustling markets and commercial areas, where sellers display their wares by the multitudes. Her activities at home take her through the movements of her private life, which follow the familiar hums of a well-trodden routine. From these banal moments, germane to the lives of most city dwellers, Dixit distills profound observations about the order of things.

The swift weaverbird styles its nest with twigs and leaves. It utilizes the excesses of the tree to form its home, which hangs like a bulbous orb from a chosen branch. Although the male bird constructs these nests rather than the female, he does so with elaborate care, creating an open entrance for his mate. Dixit's own nests are inspired by the poetic adaptability of the bird, whose environment has changed with a rapid pace. The weaver flies smoothly above its surroundings, instrumentalizing what it can. The heavy burden of human consumption is elegantly absorbed by the bird, who seamlessly incorporates pieces of plastic, paper and other manmade waste into its home.

It is an indication, the artist observes, of how deeply commodity objects have permeated natural processes.

Dixit's nests, unlike the weaver's, are composed entirely of interlinked plastic loops, used for attaching price tags to garments in shops and markets. Purchased in bulk quantities, this material produces different effects as it is carefully and deftly woven into the form of large hanging nests. The decidedly homogenous plastic loops take on an organic quality and shape, punctuated by the irregularity with which they are intertwined. Forming thick walls for Dixit's nests, the delicacy of the shape and form belies the tough, industrial strength of the actual material. The artist allows some of these links to hang below the nest like chainmail, as it draws attention to the details of the structure she creates with her hands.

Dixit continues her investigation of weaving plastic in Trap, a site-specific installation which encompasses an entire room. Mimicking the intricate web of a white spider, she creates an uneven tunnel. While the gossamer strands of a web are invisible to the spider's prey, Dixit's work speaks of the laborious process of its making, intricately expanded and protracted to engage the space around it. The fragile and seductive quality of the web conflicts with the pernicious undertones of its purpose to ensnare and devour.



*"If we die of repetition we are also saved and healed by it."<sup>1</sup>*

Dixit explains the importance of finding a rhythm when she is making her complex works. The act of continuously stitching, embedding and weaving involves a repetition of unconscious compulsions, similar to an obsessive need to retell the same story over and over again until it has passed through the different gradations of memory. With fabric, found objects, and mass-produced materials, the artist initiates the painstaking practice of creating her works on canvas. Dixit's works on canvas are splintered endeavors, full of folds and sutures overlapping and mingling. She calls these works quilts, which is indicative not only of the fabrics she includes in these compositions, but of the method of their production. It is impossible to behold Dixit's works without sensing the deeply instinctive pleasure the artist obtains from her materials. The edge of the canvas is indefinite and infinite, as her gestures continue to run off the sides in raw excess.

As a series, Dixit's Quilts are assemblages of objects brought together to suggest particular visual and visceral moments that she extracts from her own experiences. In Red Quilt, a series of globular red buds dot the surface of the canvas. Overlapping and pressing against one another, they almost seem to be fighting to come to the surface. The eruption of bulbous forms seems almost bodily, bursting forward like cells or organs brimming with blood red. Dixit procured the fabric for her Quilts at temple markets, appropriating the garments used to dress religious deities and reimagining them. Within the quilts, she creates a web of stitches and woven thread to contain the objects, which she collects. These are usually associated with worship: a diya, white cotton, or articles for protection. These objects, like the plastic links, are mass-produced in large quantities and contain little intrinsic value when they are decontextualized. The artist, however, draws notice to the properties these items can attain through belief and custom. As plastic is transformed and inscribed with a new value and meaning by Dixit's hand, the temple objects similarly contain the potential for transmutation. In Blue Quilt, a section of bright saffron implies holy rituals and the magnetism of faith.

Perhaps the most suggestive aspect of Dixit's work is her ability to transmit her ideas into different mediums. Through a painstaking process of study and experimentation, the artist has crafted a perfume to evoke a middle class ethos and sensibility which quietly moves along with the day-to-day rituals of existence in India today. A first application arouses a memory of hot cooked rice, and the comforts of home. As the complexities of the aroma continue to emerge there are hints of incense and smoke. The tones at the surface of cooking and upholding the pillars of domestic life often fall squarely on the shoulders of women, who often form the field upon which cultural sparring occurs. Scent, which marks a space that is invisible while still being highly evocative, encapsulates a similar blind spot to feminine activities; while they may not be visually accessible, they have a ubiquitous presence.

Avni Doshi  
Mumbai, August 2012

Avni Doshi is an independent art historian living between Mumbai and New York. After a BA in Art History at Columbia University in New York, she did her Masters in the History of Art from University College London. Avni writes for several publications including Art Asia Pacific, Art India and Take on Art as well as the website ArtSlant.com. Avni curated a group exhibition 'Loss for Words' at Art Musings in January 2012.

<sup>1</sup>Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (Continuum International Publishing Group: 2005) p. 6.



NEST

installation view, polythene polypropylene, size variable, 2012





RED QUILT

mixed media on canvas, 48 x 48 inches, 2012

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BLUE QUILT

mixed media on canvas, 48 x 48 inches, 2012





WHITE QUILT

mixed media on canvas, 48 x 48 inches, 2012





detail

## QUILT QUILT

mixed media on canvas, 64 x 34 inches, 2012



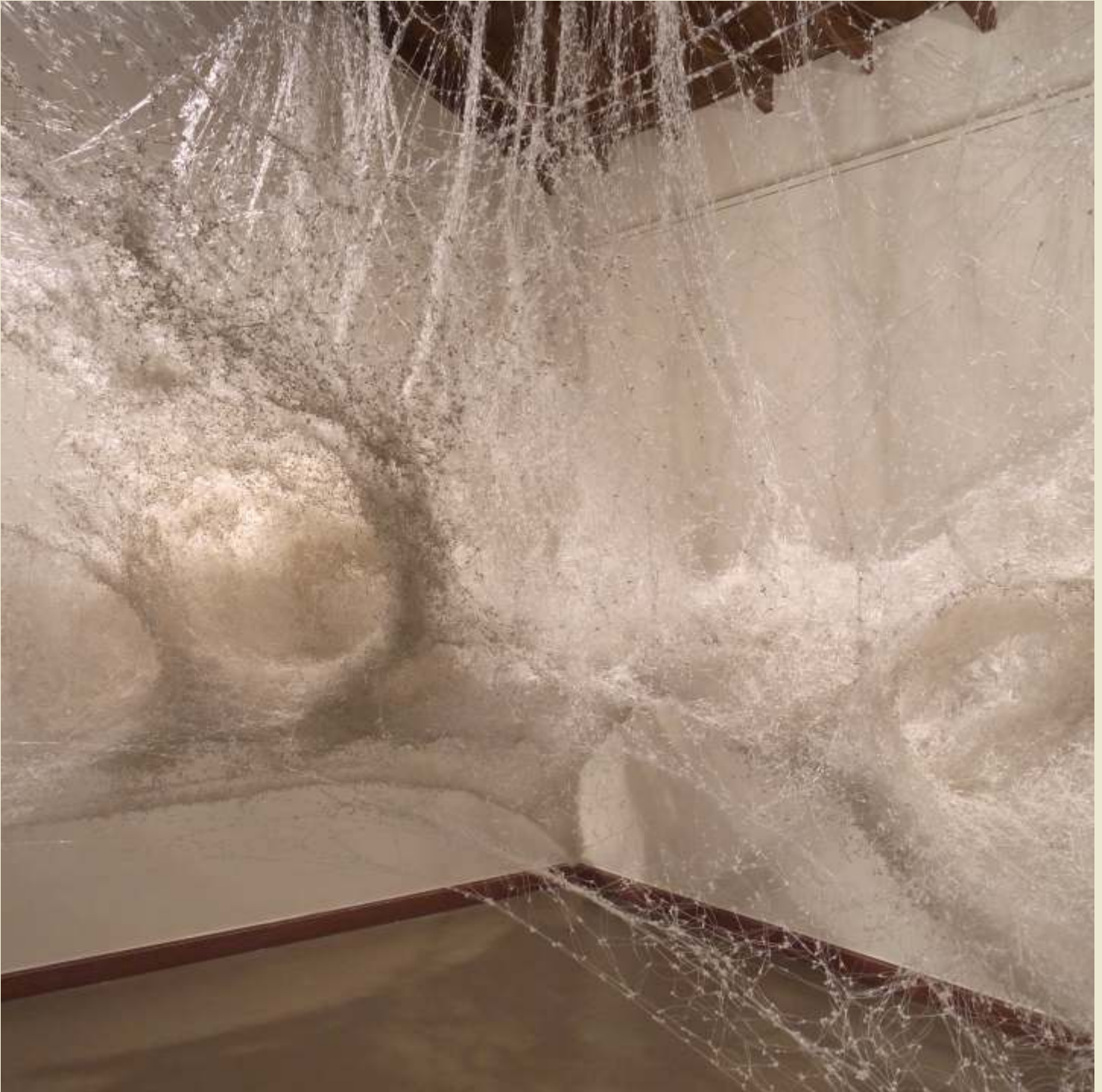


HOW I WONDER...  
installation view, mixed media, size variable, 2012



HOW I WONDER... (detail)  
mixed media, size variable, 2012





TRAP

installation view, polythene polypropylene, size variable, 2012



TRAP

installation view, polythene polypropylene, size variable, 2012





### **SMRITI DIXIT**

1971, Bhopal, India

1993/94 B.F.A. in Maharaja Sayajirao University, Baroda

### **Select Solo Exhibitions**

- 2012 - *Feasting & Fasting*, Art Musings, Mumbai, India
- 2010 - Apparao Gallery, Chennai
- 2007 - *Exile From Symmetry*, Art Musings, Mumbai, India
- 2006 - *Stitching Together*, Aicon Gallery, Palo Alto, USA
- 2006 - *Real World*, Apparao Gallery, Delhi, India
- 2004 - Art Musings, Mumbai, India
- 2004 - Apparao Gallery, Delhi, India
- 2002 - Apparao Gallery, Mumbai, India
- 2002 - Apparao Gallery, Chennai, India
- 1999 - Apparao Gallery, Mumbai, India
- 1992 - M.P.Kala Parishad, Bhopal, India

### **Select Group Exhibitions**

- 2012 - 13 - Pollock Jackson Grant
- 2012 - Art Summit, Chennai, India
- 2011 - *Quarto*, Art Musings, Mumbai, India
- 2011 - Art Residency in Kodaikanal, India
- 2011, 2012 - Art Summit, Delhi, India
- 2010 - Group show, Viewing room, Mumbai, India
- 2009 - Art Summit, New Delhi
- 2008 - Aicon Gallery, New York, USA
- 2008 - Singapore Art Fair, Singapore
- 2007 - Miami Art Fair, USA
- 2007 - Tao Art Gallery, Mumbai, India
- 2007 - *Roop Adhyatma*, Delhi, India
- 2007 - Ayya Gallery, Mumbai, India
- 2006 - Absolute Abstract, Ati Art Gallery, Delhi, India
- 2006 - *Roop Adhyatma*, Bodhi Art, Delhi, India
- 2006 - *Roop Adhyatma*, Bodhi Art, Singapore
- 2006 - Basant Show, Bodhi Art, Delhi, India
- 2006 - Abstract Expression, Bodhi Art, Delhi, India
- 2006 - *Confluence2006*, Gallery Arts India, New York, USA
- 2005 - Abstract Visions Galerie Muller and Plate, Munich, Germany
- 2004 - Art Musings, Mumbai, India
- 2003 - Performative Textures, India Habitat Centre Visual Art Gallery, New Delhi, India
- 2003 - *Solitude*, Visual Art Gallery, Delhi, India
- 2002 - *Tomorrow's Blue Chip*, Chennai, India
- 2002 - *Tribute To Picasso*, The Guild, Mumbai, India
- 1997 - Cymroza Art Gallery, Mumbai, India
- 1997 - Lalit Kala Academy, Delhi, India
- 1997 - Young Artist Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal, India
- 1997 - *Directions*, The Art Gallery London, UK
- 1996 - Vadhera Gallery, Delhi, India
- 1996 - Ravindra Bhavan, Delhi, India
- 1996 - Biennale, Bharat Bhavan, India
- 1994 - Tattooed Space, Ravindra Bhavan, Delhi, India
- 1994 - Dhoomimal Art Gallery, Delhi, India
- 1993 - Sadbhawna, Bhopal, India
- 1992 - I.F.A.C.S. Delhi, India
- 1991 - *Do Pay Do*, Bhopal, India