

Trajectories

Manu Manjesh Lal



Exhibitions

College of Fine Arts Exhibition, 1998
Government College of Arts, Kerala, India.

Naval Base Art Exhibition, 1999, 2000, 2001
Kochi, India.

Artists in Botswana, 2005, 2006, 2007
Gaborone, Botswana.

Unisa Gallery, 2007
Advanced Diploma Exhibition
Pretoria, South Africa

Open Lab 2017
NIROX, Gauteng, South Africa

'Sticky-Time' ROOF-TOP IX, 2017
Brooklyn, South Africa.

Art as Destination: Co-creation of Culture, 2018
Pretoria, South Africa.

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Education

2018
Masters in Visual Arts
UNISA, Pretoria, South Africa

2012-13
Diploma in Education
North-West University NWU
Mahikeng, Republic of South Africa

2007-2008
Post Graduate Diploma in Contemporary Art
Unisa, Pretoria RSA

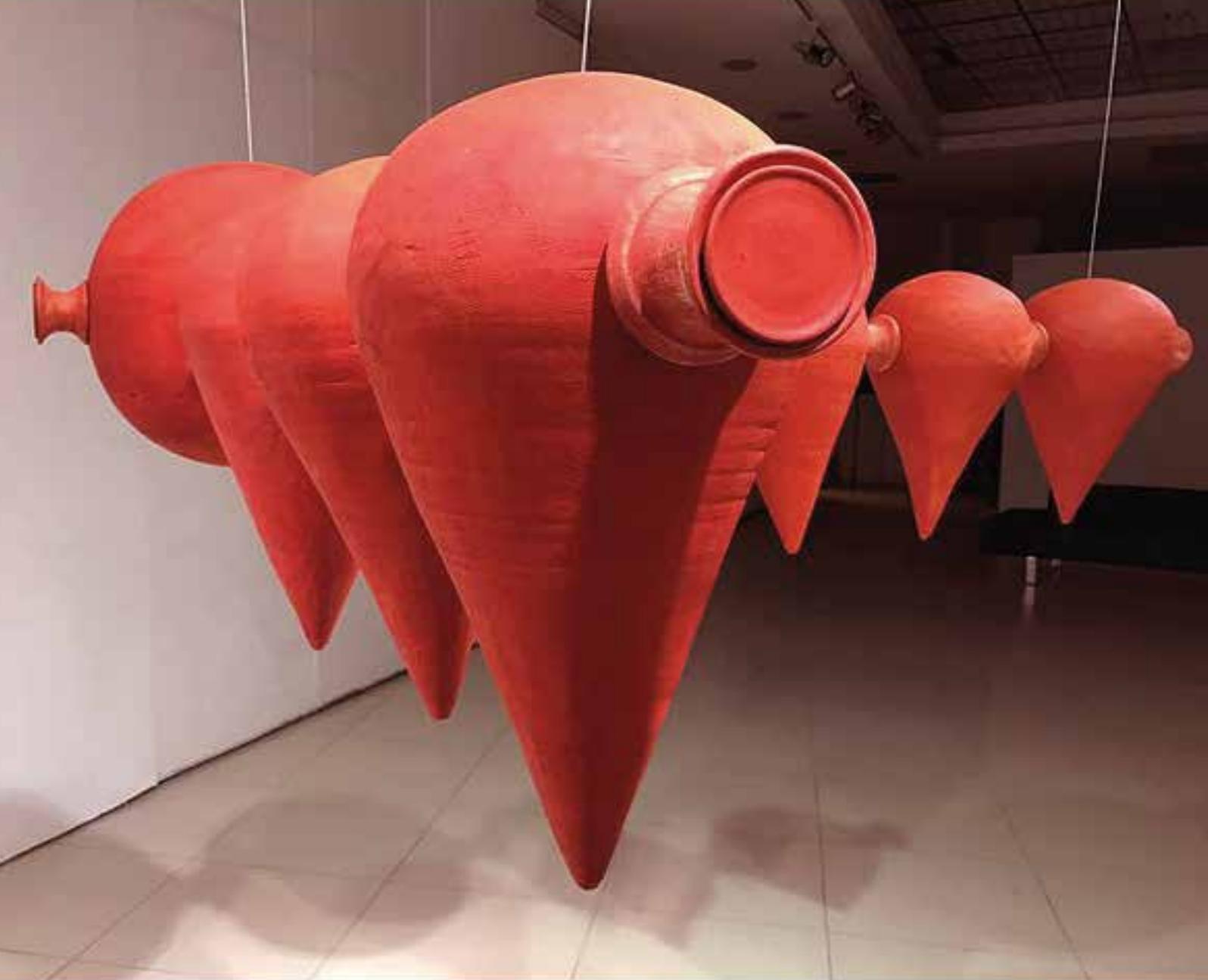
1994-1998
Bachelor of Fine Arts : BFA
University of Kerala Trivandrum, INDIA

1990-1993
BSc PHYSICS
University of Kerala, Trivandrum, INDIA

1988-1990
Pre Degree Course
St' Stephen's College
Pathanapuram
Kerala INDIA

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The catalogue is produced in conjunction with the requirement for Masters in Visual Arts degree and is accompanied by a dissertation and forms part of the exhibition 'Trajectories'.

UNISA Art Gallery, Pretoria
01 to 22 April 2017

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Artist's statement

“Translation is not a matter of words only:
It is a matter of making intelligible a whole culture.”

Anthony Burges

Conventionally we accept that an individual is constantly affected by his/her living conditions and environment. Considering the increase in modern day travel, employment opportunities as well as worldwide political disruptions causing dispersions, questions arise such as; what part would globalization contribute to the change in one's outlook? How would such changes translate itself in one's behavior and cultural products?

It seems that in our current multi-cultural society individuals subject themselves to a never-ending process of adoption and adaptation in the subconscious desire to 'fit-in'. Circumstances warrant the necessity to change 'outside-in' and 'inside-out' due to external pressure. In this regard the cultural theorist, Nikos Papastergiadis (2007:12) explains that currently “the shift in subjectivity is not only linked to a destabilization of the cultural codes that distinguish between places of origin and reverence, but to a border rupture in the sense of belonging and the perception of destiny within an individual's life narrative”. So, with this exhibition I have tried to touch upon the pulse of change and the sense of belonging in our contemporary society.

Therefore my artworks are trajectories resulting from my own exposure to post-colonial and contemporary multicultural communication and counter hegemonic beliefs. The motivation for this exhibition and research comes from an innermost impulse to understand and translate my own existence, as a migrant (from Kerala, Southern India to Botswana, Southern Africa) because I am constantly exposed to heterogeneous experiences as a participant in what is commonly known by the term - 'cosmopolitan global culture'.

Accordingly, the visual interpretation of my hermeneutic search for meaning has been manifested by artworks in this exhibition, which are a personal expression of the ambivalence and the complexities of abovementioned conditions. As a consequence of my diasporic experience, my art practice gradually began to incarnate racial and cultural permutations. This mainly involves my Indian heritage and the African influences of Botswana. My view is that new experiences enrich artmaking because they offer alternative concepts, materials and technical probabilities; augmenting what we already know.

My concept is further expressed by multiple materials obtained world-wide. The layers of processed plywood, at the core of most of these artworks is a contemporary wood of convenience that seems for me to accentuate the layered cosmopolitanism of today's multicultural society. Furthermore the limitation of the trapped space, underneath and inside all the sculptures, becomes a metaphor for the person trapped in a foreign situation. The wood is still there (as part of the process whilst forming the surface layers) thus metaphorically the person's heart, soul and heritage remains partially hidden, even if the cavity is covered by a veneer or camouflage of paint and gloss. Via this body of work I have tried to demonstrate how, for a migrant, cultural translation happens from the 'inside-out' and the 'outside-in'.

I visually interpret my intercultural pairing as 'forms or shapes' that tend to compliment, echo and sometimes juxtapose each other. In my drawings and sculptures there are allusions to Indian musical instruments suggesting a blend of rhythmic ciphers, phrases, and semantics which in turn contextualises the notion of translation. Superimposed patterning, and contours of hybridised African receptacles and calabashes often assimilate to become united as a gesture of reciprocity, fusion and hospitality.

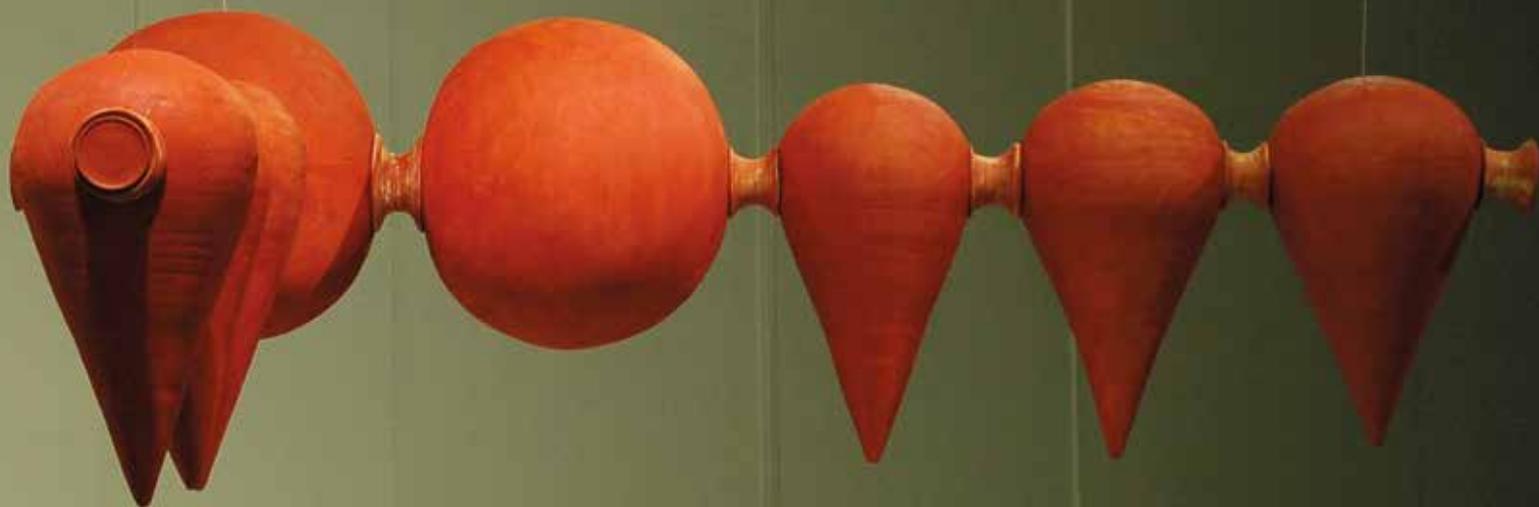
As a strategy I applied glossy automotive paint and reflective membranes, over the fiberglass to prompt the reflections of the surrounding location as well as the viewer. I have hoped to emulate, in a given moment, the experience of the foreign, the unknown or unfamiliar, through the encounter between the viewer and my works to create an element of precariousness like a first connection with an Other. Not only by the distorted reflections of the viewers, but also through the incongruity of the hybrid structures. Such an encounter demands a mental shift and an ultimate fusion of horizons between the viewer and the stranger/artist/artwork. Such a confrontation can be (to a certain measure) equated to the experience of one's displaced identity, where a person slips into the 'third space' and a moment of in-betweenness, a limen.

The creation of in my sculptures inadvertently result in unexpected sensuality and, as the theorist Gayatri Spivak (cited in Landry & Maclean 1996:269-270) proposes: 'The ideal relation to the Other is an embrace, an act of love'. Spivak's definition of such an "ideal relation" resonates in my belief that my personal contact with new ethnicities and racial and cultural permutations does not sublimate my own culture, but is a reciprocal arc. Hence the primary focus of my exhibition was on the process of inter-relatedness, transfiguration and the resultant convergence or cultural hospitality and the fusion of horizons which often results in hybridity.





Trajectory- exhibition view



Mafoko a Utlwetse

Mafoko a Utlwetse translates from Setswana language into English as 'Words that have fallen into my ears'. The concept of this work addresses the influence of culture and the resultant misinterpretation. The idea of narrative plurality and the uncertainty of meaning in translation is visually represented in this work as similar as in the children's game of 'broken telephone'- Chinese whispers. The sculpture is a series of clay pots (made of processed termite-hill clay), connected in a visual formation that alludes to a cultural object evocative of crafted beadwork.

Bahir-gamana

The notion of the state of duality of belonging and alienation of being is explored in the sculptural work Bahir-Gamana.

Comprising a hybrid of two distinct objects; the levitated and the gravitated, the work is in a continuous, rhythmic state of dissension, yet united as an object of singularity. The work evokes the moments in which one understands what a dual entity is. It is similar to the concept of 'anomie' that address the circumstances in which individuals are unable to connect their own practices with broader social values and thus are left in a state of relative normlessness, a continuous state of imbalance, inner conflict and uncertainty.



Interstice

Interstice, playfully resembles a vacuum pump that can extract the condensed air within, from one side to the other and vice-versa, and thus represents an illusory movement. The lengthy tube between the two blue orbs makes a conspicuous turn between a right angle and an obtuse angle. This tubular structure carries inherent references to the polarities at both ends and sustains the boundary between the two. The bright yellow wooden piece mediates between these polarities and accentuates the interstice in the sculpture. In my view, interstices are neither a simple interaction nor consensual or disensual feature of two polarities. Interstice as a work, is an attempt to create an awareness of boundaries and its complex negotiations.



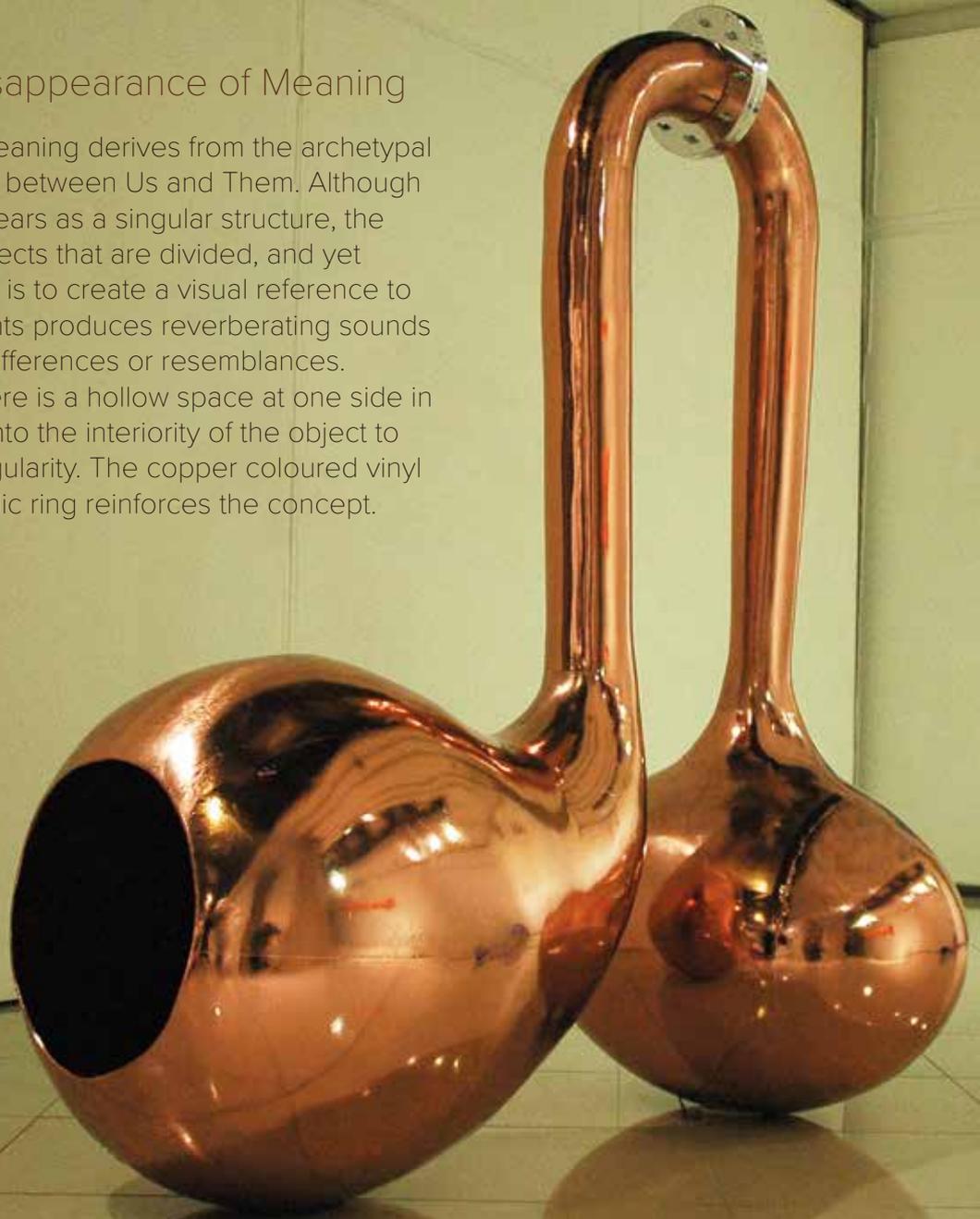


Rebirth

Rebirth is a direct representation of the Hindu symbol of 'punar-janma' or re-incarnation. In Hinduism the egg symbolizes the origin, cradle of life and the entire creation. I used this metaphor to create this sculpture. The egg is a liminal expression of life where the possibility of another life is kept as a residuum within, arguably in a 'third space'. An important aspect of the life of a diasporic identity is debriefed in Rebirth. Resembling an attempt at translation, it reciprocates the environment, whether it is placed inside the gallery or in a space outdoors. I have overlaid a vinyl design that depicts the mythological aspects of the coitus as an emblem of potential. Rebirth metaphorically infers the step between two cultures in displacement.

Co-Disappearance of Meaning

Co-Disappearance of Meaning derives from the archetypal example of demarcation between Us and Them. Although the entire sculpture appears as a singular structure, the work consists of two objects that are divided, and yet joined together. The aim is to create a visual reference to music. Musical instruments produces reverberating sounds of unity irrespective of differences or resemblances. Similarly, in this work, there is a hollow space at one side in which a column opens into the interiority of the object to resonate a sense of singularity. The copper coloured vinyl skin and the silver metallic ring reinforces the concept.



List of illustrations

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Page 11	Mafoko a Utlwetse (2017).
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Back cover	Interstice (2017).

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photography, layout & design : Manu Manjesh Lal