

Glossy magazines, razor blades, ball point pens, rubber stamps, and adhesives...

Upendranath has always made his own path, while he appreciates good company; he's not a follower, nor does he expect to be the leader. He is an explorer. And like any good explorer he is interested in others understandings as much as he is compelled toward his personal experiences and discernment.

The whole process of exploration is as important as any revelation that may result from it. Upendranath's approach is free of convention, restrictions of academic structure or value within the marketplace.

His methods and his choice of mediums are reminiscent of 'Art Povera', a movement (or perhaps an anti-movement) popularized by the Italian art critic Germano Celant, in the late 1960's. Artists such as Alighiero Boetti, Lucio Fontana, and Roger Ackling to name a few, are associated with this art/process through their use of unconventional mediums, styles and approaches to their work. The works and or processes were generally subversive, anti-bourgeois, anti-establishment in nature. They explored the framework of art-making itself, the role of the gallery, as well as the world beyond the gallery, contemplating the relationship between art and life.

As early as 1988, Upendranath began creating paper collage artworks. The process involved collecting discarded high end glossy magazines, flipping through their pages, and cutting out and storing large blocks of unidentifiable single colors that were later worked further into layered compositions. Upendranath's rebellious nature at that time compelled him to the extreme of using only recycled sharpened blades for paper cutting. This private detail was not exposed, or evident in any of the hundreds of flawless compositions he created and cautiously preserved. Today Upendranath continues to deliberately use mundane, readily available materials such as ball point pens and rubber stamps.



Upendranath's studio provides further insight into his eccentricities and approach to the creative process. The space is tidy and utilitarian, the floors curiously covered with silver foil like paper from a local supplier of surplus paper. He personally designed and built all the easels, table, benches and paint trolleys for maximum mobility. And thousands of artworks are grouped into like sizes and meticulously enveloped in this same silver floor paper that bounces light into every nook and cranny where these artworks are stored.

His art practice is an end in itself, but Upendranath has preserved vast number of his trials. The removal of obstructions is the key to understanding what we see. The sheer volume of his work represents the exhaustion of an idea so as not to burden his next. The personally designed tools required to support his work remove the need to have an assistant in his space; he works alone. The paper covered floor is simply a practical device to eliminate the disturbing concern of spilling paint, a block in his process.

For Those Who Remain

Upendranath working on the massive gallery installation created during May-June 2006 in Kashi Art Gallery, Mattancherry, Kochi



Upendranath's choice of mediums and techniques challenge academic and socially laudable art practice. His work involves endless investigation; reflective journeys into personal, hard to reach, spaces within each of us, questioning the here and now and why, as reflected in the titles of his solo exhibitions – Manifestations of Emptiness (1998), Those Who Remain (2006) and Caged (2007).

A self-taught artist; a working class philosopher

As a young man, Upendranath quietly began visual exploration within the only private space he had – his six by eight foot room in the family house. This continued to be his only studio long after he invited his benevolent wife, Dhanya, to share the small space. Outwardly, more important than his creative experimentation that time, Upendranath earned his living as a post office franking machine mechanic and later assisted in the sale and production of polymer seals; India's ubiquitous rubber stamps. It was not his intention to be an 'artist', his visual language developed out of a need to explore ideas.

Upendranath's choice of materials could be interpreted as a strictly practical monetary decision, but a closer look at his sources points to something more significant. He used bits and pieces from expensive magazines that had been discarded by their elite readers, made available to him by cart pushing paper peddlers. In some later collages he used paper and text from only Art Colleges, university brochures or advertisements. With these materials he destroyed and recreated convictions, examined beliefs and questioned pathos.

The rubber stamps that have found their way into Upendranath's works in the last two or three years are also self-reflective. Seals carry connotations of government approval or some form of a sanction granted by 'higher' powers. Upendranath uses stamps repetitively in innumerable random patterns ultimately mocking their significance.

It would be unbecoming to view Upendranath's art without a pause to deliberate on personal processes associated with spiritual refinement. Upendranath today is an accomplished and established artist. His works reflect the complexities of his intense involvement in life, unhindered by convention, expectations of others, his own personal success or the concept of art itself.

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July 2009