



# Subodh Gupta

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TRANSFORMING INTO SOMETHING NEW.**

**SUBODH GUPTA**

*"I see art as a dimension from which we should all draw as much enjoyment as possible. I see it as a glass of water, in which the liquid can be seen inside because the outside is transparent.*

*When you add a drop of coloured water, something happens: the colour spreads through the water and its initial nature gradually changes, transforming into something new. The same thing happens with art.*

*New ideas arrive and start to spread. Everyone has the chance to observe and investigate this expansion".*

SUBODH GUPTA

Being born in a small village on the border of an economic empire close to the capitals of globalisation does not have to be a disadvantage - quite the reverse.

The eclectic, extravagant and versatile talent of Subodh Gupta (India) is proof of that. Born in the rural village of Khagaul in Bihar province, his native land sparkles in his works like a precious jewel, leaving us with the vivid impression of a community still directed by ancient rituals and sacred traditions, where the pace of life has not yet been overtaken by technology and whose slow rhythms are characterised by fatigue and strained by the ineluctable advance of progress.

**B**efore history sweeps everything away and leaves a *tabula rasa*, Gupta is busy immortalising the familiar attributes of a society which sees everyday objects, steel utensils, cakes of animal dung, bicycles and scooters hung heavy with milk churns,

as the familiar, distinctive signs of a world that is gradually changing (disappearing?).

The artist does not comment on these objects, nor does he celebrate, alter or interpret them:

*he freezes their identities, transforming them  
from an everyday object into an *objet d'art*.*

The best examples are taken out of the kitchen and the street, and into the halls of a museum.

Humdrum, insignificant parts of the visual landscape are decontextualised and transformed into monuments loaded with meaning.

By being displayed in a museum and winning public acclaim, that little patch of earth still governed by ancestral, atavistic rituals, is consecrated and finds ultimate salvation.

To define Gupta's work as "pop art" is to give it a restrictive label that is not entirely accurate. Even the choice of steel is not a casual one: it is such a reflective material that it seems precious, despite its popular, decidedly "non-élite" usage.

Its surface appears luminous, despite the fact these objects are used continuously for menial tasks throughout the day: a bowl of milk in the morning followed by household chores and dinner in the evening.

Gupta himself has admitted that steel encapsulates a large number of symbolic meanings, one of which lies in this cyclical repetition of actions which start anew each dawn and end as the sun sets, in what seems to be an eternal, mystical sequence.

Steel declares a state of belonging while also testifying to the short-circuit that is currently taking place between archaic and modern cultures, tradition and innovation.

The utensils can be displayed theatrically, betraying the artist's former profession as an actor, or they can become part of a mosaic of newly invented shapes. Each object loses its individual status to become part of an unusual creation: the monumental installations *God Hungry* and *Giant Leap of Faith*, both from 2006, did not go unnoticed, nor did *27 Light Years* from 2007, nor the unforgettable *Very Hungry God* placed outside Palazzo Grassi in 2006. It was an imposing sight: a skull of disturbing proportions, made from tins and steel pans, proudly glittered and sparkled on a platform on the Grand Canal in Venice.

**THIS SIDE IS THE OTHER SIDE**, selected for *Steellife*, is removed from excess and oversized formats. With disarming simplicity, it presents a fragment of rural life characterised by an ancient charm that gives an honest insight into a difficult environment, humble yet honest.

There, milk is not bought from the supermarket but requires a perilous trip along a rough, bumpy road at breakneck speed, on a Vespa laden with dozens of milk churns, making a pilgrimage from one stable to another, from one cow to the next.

There, I am sure, the milk tastes rich, satisfying, delicious.

It is not just milk, it is the adventure of a recurring conquest, which may be tiring but is also experienced with joy and satisfaction.

This work is not some fetishistic exaltation of the relics of a disappearing society. Rather, Gupta is suggesting that the apparent simplicity of certain gestures, the seeming insignificance of certain everyday objects can become vehicles for our emotions.

They help to intensify and layer our memories, becoming milestones along our path that will always lead us home, no matter where the whims of destiny take us.