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Home, shelter and belonging



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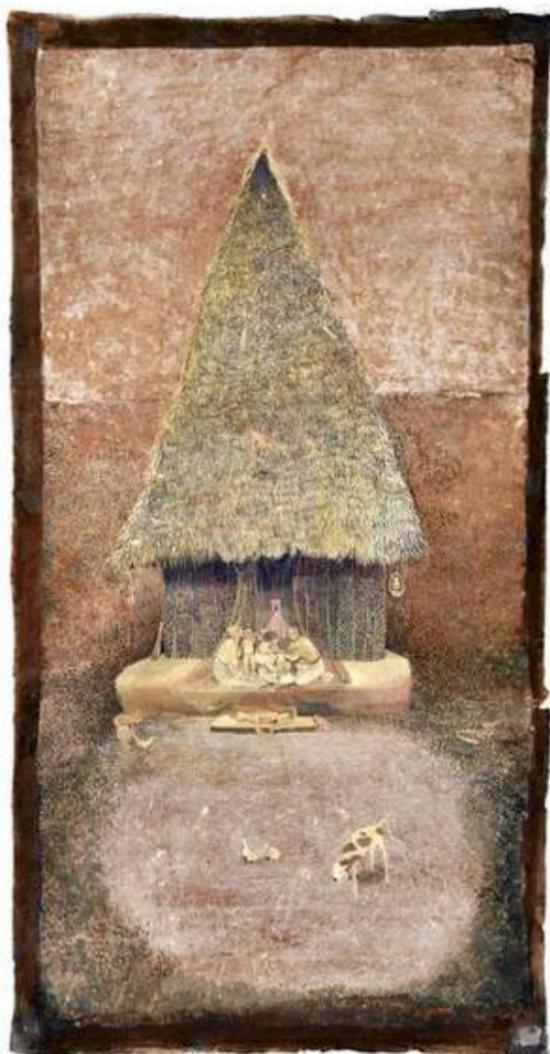
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**Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke's
10th anniversary show explores the
idea of what a dwelling can mean to a
citizen and a refugee**

We live in precarious times. It's a time when the problems of shelter and belonging have been deeply magnified as demonstrated by the ongoing Syrian refugee crisis.

Cultural theorist, poet and curator Ranjit Hoskote examines this idea of dwelling and home in the first of the two-part series at the Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke's 10th anniversary show, which brings together works by 12 artists.

Hoskote took The Hindu on a curatorial walk through the exhibition to talk about the different concerns the 12 artists have engaged with in their works.

"As a curator," he says, "I draw something that works from the practices of the artist. I saw this idea of dwelling, location and belonging in the works of these artists, and thought it's a good place to start."

We begin the walk with Anita Dube's famous work '132 Tara', a set of intimate photographs of objects from her home, when she had just moved in years ago.

"The objects speak to Anita about a sense of belonging in this house in a complex in Delhi designed by Charles Correa. It talks about what defines your personal space," says Hoskote. Alongside the older works are a set of newer photographs from her process of leaving the house. "These map the art of her life of dwelling literally."

Next to Dube's work is Aji V.N.'s untitled work, an image of his home amidst Kerala's green landscape. "For me, this work is how one deals with nature as a subject. It's amazing how domesticity is set into nature and is not in a classic confrontation as a modernist, in a sense of rupture with the nature," says the curator.

Atul Dodiya's triptych 'Koodal' pays homage to the late master Tyeb Mehta's experimental film by the same name. Koodal in Tamil means confluence, coming together. Dodiya relays crucial images from Mehta's film, including a eunuch's made-up eye and the bullet marks left by Gandhi's assassin. It ties together with a meditation on the nation and whether it is a hospitable or an inhospitable space for its citizens now.

Another provocative work is that by young artist Varunika Saraf, 'The cries, too, fall like rain in summer'. The title comes from German poet Bertolt Brecht's poem 'When Evil-Doing Comes Like Falling Rain', which speaks of the horrors that a tyrannical regime can impose on its citizens. At the centre of the work is Edvard Munch's famous painting 'The Scream', surrounded by images and titles of all the tragedies that have unfolded in India since 1947.

Hoskote says, "Her work is like a representation of Shah Jahan's Mughal paintings, where the emperor would be in the centre and portrayal of different instances in the kingdom around it. Here, she develops an architecture of contemporary politics, talking of the destruction of Babri Masjid, the Turkman Gate tragedy among others."

According to Saraf, "Ranjit asked me what does it mean to be 'dwelling'. It's not just about buildings, we must learn how to dwell and only then building is possible. Only then can we think about co-existing."

Saraf decided to draw India's trajectory of political disasters and violence from 1947: "When something goes wrong in the nation, it doesn't just happen. It has some antecedence, and hence I decided to build this from Independence, a key moment for all us Indians until now." "The Scream' as the central image of the detailed work encapsulates the strife that contemporary India is currently experiencing, Saraf says.

Moving from the macro to the micro, artist Sosa Joseph imagines a community as a carnival, a procession. In his work 'What Must Be Said', he also highlights how different kinds of self-performances are played out within the community. "He talks about how you craft a sense of collective from differences," says Hoskote.

Young artist Siji Krishnan, in her work 'Portrait of a Hut', partially reveals the mysterious inner lives of her rural protagonists. "In Kerala, where I come from," she says, "we store rice in this long hut. This portrait and the figures – the mother and father – are all created from memory of living in Kochi." Hoskote was intrigued by how an architectural element is treated as a subject of portraiture in the work. "This series of self-portraits makes you think how to craft a portrait of an inanimate [object]," he says.

Closer home is artist Sudarshan Shetty's video work of an old sanatorium in Ghatkopar. Over the years, it was transformed into a chawl, and is now going to be demolished. "The work is about precariousness of habitation and also how somehow the space also portrays poetry and music even in difficult circumstances," says Hoskote.

The other participating artists include C.K.Rajan, Gieve Patel, N.S. Harsha, Nicola Durvasula and Tanya Goel. Part two of the series will showcase works from 12 more artists.

The author is a freelance journalist