

EVERY BODY'S LOOKING FOR SOMETHING

For all the subtle technical differences between contemporary art forms- with photography, installations, and video art joining the venerable likes of sculpture and painting- the *intentions* behind individual creations might just carry the most weight afforded to personal sentiment since the early days of Christian art. Once, the Artist was a mirror, reflecting the perfection and glory of God and channeling it with an imperfect human hand. The hand has remained the same since then, but the light has changed undeniably; for, in a post-truth world such as ours, the artist no longer has the luxury of His steady white illuminations- it is increasingly up to those willing chroniclers and storytellers (all artists are storytellers) to stitch together idea and experience, piece by piece, in the great search for Continuity amongst ever-increasing Fragmentation.



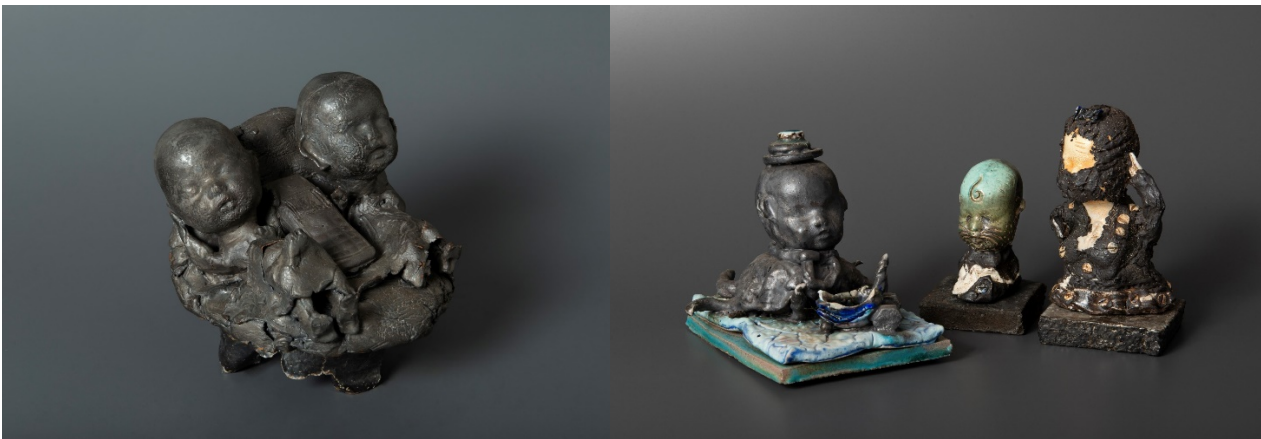
In the way it exposes itself, Adil Writer's latest series *Sweet Dreams* is the exact opposite of much of today's art. In the case of something by Lucio Fontana or Yves Klein, one is more likely to first exclaim "huh!", before eventually 'getting it'- whether that entails creating meaning for it from personal experience, or just reading about it. Here, the shock factor is the first thing that strikes- a sort of ice-cold bath before the "huh!" hits you. Instead of drawing you in with a grand statement of absurdity and then rationalizing it with words and context, Writer's work starts out as completely rational, as something normal and correct, before our overcrowded brains start short-circuiting and tempt us to view it as 'disturbing'.



Is it though? Or is this temptation merely a by-product of our social mores? Surely many adults find the likeness of a baby in any state but pristine to be undeniably negative, yet, according to Adil, children themselves seem to take to his new series. "Looking at or holding a baby is a very universal, basic instinct. It evokes the sacred... touches self-preservation... My friend's children respond diametrically opposite to their parents who try to shield them from my work. Kids will come and play with the most mangled figurine and smile, talk to it, cradle it. Isn't this human conditioning?"



It's hard to disagree. Adil's successive soda firing techniques lends a depth and age to the 'babies' that is subjective in the best way. Depending on where your head's at, the image is a haunting one of decay, or an even more haunting one of agelessness. This dichotomy is present in many things ancient and beautiful, yet perhaps reaches a logical climax here, unburdened by the weight of histories and mythologies which now take up the greater portion of dialogue on even modern art. Here, there is only the Image, as real and in-your-face as possible, and one that refuses to go unnoticed or be hemmed into a 'style' or ideological talking point. It is above all a reflection. Writer likes his art to be useful in more ways than one, and here he succeeds in transferring his own function within the artistic process- reflection- to his work. *Sweet Dreams*, then, is the ultimate pocket mirror.



It is important to note that these are not 'intricate compositions' in the formal sense of the term. Adil isn't making sketches of them from every conceivable angle before carefully getting to work, rather working with the same small mold for each 'head' before integrating them into the larger compositions themselves; a process of boundless recontextualization. "In today's contemporary art scene, I detect a constant tension between contradictory stylistic art and more thematic tendencies..." muses Adil. "I'd much rather see a well-made, well-thought-out piece by *just looking at it* than read text all over a wall telling me what a piece is doing there in the room." Well, who wouldn't, really? As in the best jazz, themes here are extended and stretched in unprecedented ways, with the infant playing the part of the innocuous pop song leaving itself to science; the mushrooms and honeycombs growing out of one of the compositions suggest a primeval innocence, while "*Hey Ram*", a piece based on the tale of the ten-headed Ravana, with its stoic aviator looking on at the demon-king transformed back to infancy, gives off more than a pungent whiff of irony. The mood of the pieces can still be gauged without knowledge of

such references, however, and this is what truly makes them stand out. A self-contained art in our age is something to be savored.



In the end, *Sweet Dreams*, jazz, Kerouac's blues poems, these all point in the very same direction; improvisation on a theme, an orbit threatening to spiral out of control but stuck together with an expressionless center of gravity. Art suggesting a state/experience without beginning nor end, without knowledge of its own unexplored boundaries, a state of original, pristine cognition quite removed from 'time' as measured by the Royal Observatory. Writer's own thoughts about his work reflect this attitude uncannily: "In my own way, I am exploring the surrealist representation of sweet and savory dreams and desires with my figurative abstractions, where *the same expressionless face of one object* is multiplied into various forms and avatars... their tableaux endlessly epitomizing life-affirming creativity and a sense of positive independence."





I said at the beginning of this article that all artists are storytellers- this is true to different degrees. It brings to mind a few lines from an old song:

*Storyteller makes no choice,
Soon you will not hear his voice,
His job is to shed light
And not to master.*

There is a certain brand of artist whose passion comes from an acceptance of their own innate human inability to 'master' the world. So they treat their art as a stand-in for the infinite, using whatever tools and skills they have at their disposal to shed light on the unknown, to try and create as big a picture as possible so that everything- even those things outside the 'frame'- might fit in. With *Sweet Dreams*, Adil Writer has done just that. His work poses many questions, yet also gives up answers if approached with utmost honesty. Perhaps part of the initial shock and anxiety that some people have experienced while viewing them have something to do with the way they seem to mirror the processes of life. Like real live humans, these sculptures originate as dead-ringer replicates of each other, perfect copies with nothing to differentiate them; only in the process of gestation- whether in the womb or the kiln- do they eventually enter the cycle of becoming, *and stay there*. Writer's unwillingness to explain his creations is indeed a blessing- explanations are now something to keep the questions down and keep the children away. Whatever other forgotten codes *Sweet Dreams* manage to conjure up from person to person, mind to mind, the overriding statement of these strange, almost-yet-not-quite-alike objects of infinite potential seem closer to a universal artistic call- to strip the literature away, and let the child speak.

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DHANI MUNIZ, AUROVILLE 2021

Dhani Muniz of Brazilian-Indian heritage is a musician who grew up in New York and now lives in Auroville. His band recently released its debut album '*Chimu Fiesta*'. (<https://linktr.ee/suitetheexpatriate> to help support truly 'homegrown' music.)



(Above) *La Corona Familia*, made during the 21 day lockdown in India, April 2020.
Photo credits upon request.

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