



SWEET DREAMS china series,
soda fired stoneware and porcelain
photo - Marco Saroldi, Auroville

ADIL WRITER

Every body's looking for something

Dhani Muniz

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 channelling it with an imperfect human hand. The hand has remained the same since then but the light has undeniably changed, 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 presents 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,



LA CORONA FAMILIA, soda fired stoneware and porcelain, h max 20 cm photo - Marco Saroldi, Auroville

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 in a diametrically opposite way 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 is 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 mould for each head before integrating them into the larger compositions themselves; a process of boundless re-contextualisation. “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. Self-contained art in our age is something to be savoured.

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 centre of gravity. Art suggesting a state/experience without beginning or end, without knowledge of its own unexplored boundaries, a state of original, pristine cognition quite removed from “time” as measured by

HEY RAM, Sodafired stoneware photo - Marco Saroldi, Auroville



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 savoury 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,

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BIRTHDAY PARTY 11, soda fired porcelain & stoneware and found objects photo - Vimal Bhojraj, Auroville

these sculptures originate as dead-ringer replicas 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.

DHANI MUNIZ

is of Brazilian-Indian heritage. He is a musician who grew up in New York and now lives in Auroville, an international experimental community tucked away into the dry evergreen forests of South India.

His band recently released its debut album, Chimu Fiesta.

(<https://linktr.ee/suithetheexpatriate> to help support truly "homegrown" music.)

Adil Writer

Writer's CV reads like a travel retrospective. "Wanderlust" is what he says takes him across the world for invited residencies, workshops and exhibitions. Adil is an architect with a Master's degree in architecture from the University of Houston, Texas. He worked in Bombay as an architect before reaching Golden Bridge Pottery to learn ceramics. Since 2000, he has been a partner at Mandala Pottery in Auroville, where he strikes a fine balance between making functional tableware and his own sculptural ceramic work, which is usually soda/wood-fired. Writer's ceramics and large-scale unfired clay & acrylic paintings have been showcased at several solo and group exhibitions in Japan, China, India, Indonesia, Australia, Estonia, France and USA. In 2013, Writer was instrumental in arranging a residency for a group of 18 Indian ceramists to Fuping that led to their making works for the proposed Museum of Contemporary Indian Ceramics in China. He revisited Fuping in 2019 as an invited artist at the International Sodafiring Symposium that culminated in an exhibition in Xian, The Poetics of Fire.

At Shigaraki, Japan, Adil culminated his three-month invited residency with a solo show titled Himitsu Te Uso. He has also featured in Six by Six: Interpreting Craft in Gondwana, a path-breaking Indo-Australian show at the Australian Triennial in Canberra featuring three Indian and three Australian ceramists; the show was subsequently hosted at a gallery in Yingge, Taiwan. This spirit of dialogue and interaction has led to In Collaboration, a duo show with celebrated artist, Laxma Goud, at Pundole Art Gallery in Mumbai. The lockdown years saw Adil collaborating with Janet Abrams on a project *Quartz Inversion* which captures the work and reflections of over 60 international ceramists during the global Coronavirus pandemic. (www.quartzinversion.com) With Shayonti Salvi, Adil co-curated two all-India exhibitions, *Table Manners-2* and *Clay: Off the Wall during the pandemic years*. Writer is a member of the International Academy of Ceramics, Geneva.

photo - Shuchi Kapoor, Chennai