



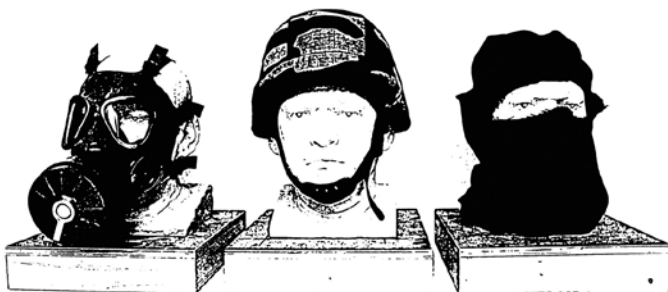
# Subodh Gupta

is one of India's most visible contemporary artists, presented prominently in "Sequence 1," an exhibition of the François Pinault collection at Palazzo Grassi in Venice this year. Also in 2007, Gupta had solo shows at BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art in Gateshead, UK; In Situ / Fabienne Leclerc, Paris; and Bodhi Art, Mumbai. Included in numerous group exhibitions, he curated "Regional Race," featuring artists from his home state Bihar, for Bodhi Art, New Delhi.

I know what's happening. It feels like you're walking in a beautiful breeze and you're afraid because you don't know when it's going to end. Good or bad. Success is frightening because you don't want to lose anything and artists have to be fearless in order to create. Here's the dichotomy.

Living in a third world country growing beyond its own cultural boundaries and losing them; a country with overwhelming poverty that has become tantamount to a cliché in the international media and yet continues because of politicians' inability to control corruption; a country divided by social stigmas and hierarchies; a country in a state of religious tension with its neighbors: all this competes to make India electric.

Today big politics is religion and the result has been yet more wars of faith. We have a long history of killing each other in the name of God. Hurtful religious sentiment has turned into a modern day witch-hunt for many people.



These masks make me anxious, maybe they make everybody anxious. But who is behind it? Who made them wear these masks? It's not complicated because we already know the answer.

Both sides made mistakes...I don't want to go down that path

now. But my art is something else. It's about me and how I see what's happening around me. Mine is a real world devoted to long relationships with people who feel and respond with manifestations of their achievement.

We've got everything today, maybe too much, certainly more than we can handle. In the art world that means everything is upside down.

Power will kill. Politics will change soon enough and the powers that be will see new realities as economies and standards of value change. The planet is changing already and art will change more and more. More surprises will come.

Yesterday art and the art business were only for artists and art lovers. Today the art business seems to have fewer art lovers and only business.

The history of contemporary art in India and its neighboring countries is not long. The way China has grown in the contemporary art world and the fact that some very good Asian artists have gained international recognition is a sign that Asia has become a cultural center. These artists are not only creating art but also participating in the evolution of the international art scene. For example, some of most powerful galleries in Europe have opened spaces in China; that shows how the art world is ready and willing to change.

India has a long way to go. There are very few artists operating in a tiny art world among a huge population and we seriously lack a proper art infrastructure. We also face the rise of rightwing politics that curbs freedoms in our country; sometimes it seems that we are going backwards. One of our living artistic legends, MF Husain, who was a key pioneer of contemporary art, is living in exile due to the contents of works he painted 40 or 50 years ago. Even today, India's secular government is unwilling to protect him and guarantee his safety at home. That shows how powerful the right wing is; this is a matter of serious concern. All around the world we see the rise of the right wing and increasing intolerance.

India has an aggressive domestic art market driven by speculation, yet no one cares that we don't have a single contemporary art museum or a decent national museum.

Yet only 10 years ago, the art world knew nothing about Indian art, and today at least we feel that if we speak, people have to listen. I am part of a small art world, watching to see what the future will bring.

Illustration by Subodh Gupta