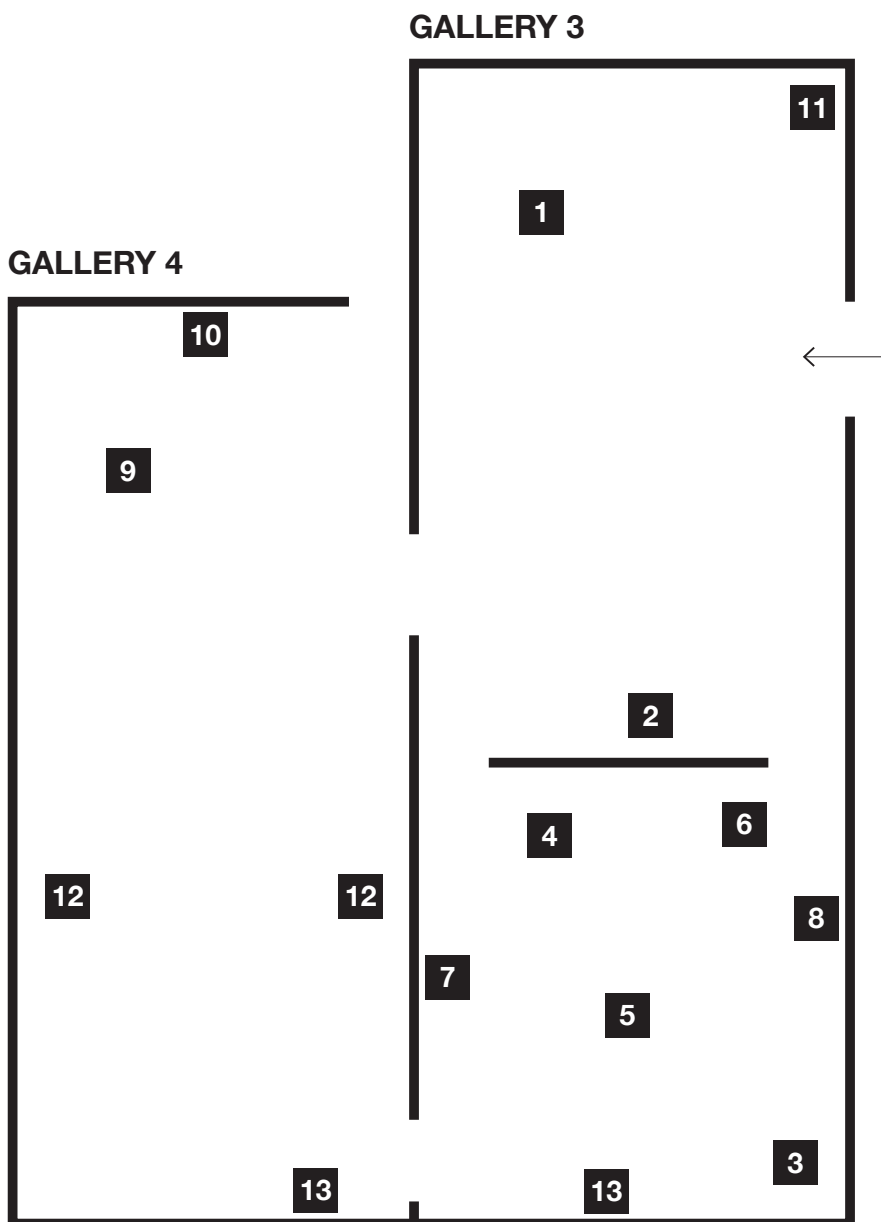


Sheela Gowda

Remains



1 *And...*

2007
Thread, needles, pigment (*kumkum*)
Variable dimensions
Courtesy of the artist

This installation continues Gowda's profound reflection on the line as an element that escapes from the pictorial surface. *And...* is an installation of three cords made by threading a needle through a nearly 300-metre red string, a process that is repeated with 108 needles and an equal number of lengths of thread. Doubling up the threads together with the needles at one end, the resulting amassed threads are anointed with a paste of red pigment (*kumkum*), glue and neem oil. *Kumkum*, which is related to religious mythology in India and used in traditional celebrations, is mixed together with glue and applied on the cords, resulting in a tone and materiality that evoke body organs.

A previous edition of this work, *Untitled (9 cords)*, 1997, belongs to the Per Amor a l'Art Collection, Valencia.

2 *Kagebangara*

2008
Tar drum sheets, tar drums, mica tar sheet, mica, tarpaulin
Variable dimensions
Collection of Sunitha and Niall Emmart

Two primary colours — blue and yellow — are the main compositional features of *Kagebangara*, an installation that is assembled as a modernist painting and tableau. The tarpaulins play out as intense areas of colour against the rusty darkness of the metal sheets, which are formally arranged as a jigsaw of rectangles around a small structure. Inside, a tar sheet covered with flakes of mica is arranged in folds to create the illusion of a sea by night. In the installation, as a result of a specific form of manual labour, the precarious arrangement of tar drums leaning against each other reference the metal-sheet constructions used by road workers in Bangalore as temporary shelters to sleep and store their property.

3 *Untitled (cow dung)*

1992-2012
Cow dung
Variable dimensions
Courtesy of the artist

Untitled (cow dung) is one of the first works in which Gowda experimented with cow dung, a material that was emblematic in her shift from the pictorial to the tridimensional. She used and moulded this material through several shapes, techniques and dimensions, painting surfaces with it or including objects made of cow dung in her work. The pats are made by pressing a ball of cow dung against a wall surface and allowing them to dry. Their surface, therefore, carries the imprint of the hand. The pats made by the artist replicate those that can be seen in rural areas in India, where women collect cow dung and pat it to dry and use later as fuel.

4 *Mortar Line*

1996
Cow dung, pigment
17,5 x 11,25 x 450 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Mortar Line is a floor-based sculpture consisting of a curved double line of bricks made of cow dung, held together by a mortar of cow dung paste. The cavity between the two rows of bricks is filled with *kumkum*, a red pigment traditionally used for *bindi* and in rituals, which acts here as a sort of cement to hold the spinal progression together. Cow dung functions here, as in other works by Gowda, as a basic element, while the curved line on the floor dialogues on the one hand with her research on the practice of drawing, and on the other with the Minimalist experimentations of the 1960s. Such simple abstract form retains the economic, aesthetic, political and craft values of the materials that constitute it, namely the everyday work of rural Indian women.

5 *Breaths*

2002
String, pigment (*kumkum*), charcoal powder, gauze, table
18 elements
85 x 365 x 55 cm
Collection of Sunitha and Niall Emmart

Breaths consists of a long wooden table on which the artist has arranged 18 cylindrical elements of varied sizes in no apparent order. All pieces are made by combining strings of cotton bound together with a paste of *kumkum*. These resulting cylindrical forms were then covered in black gauze, which was coated with layers of a mixture of charcoal and glue, leaving the ends to show the cross-section of red cotton strands. The result is a series of elements similar to logs of different shapes, lengths and thicknesses, which appear to be parts of a burned post or the extremities of a body. In some cases, the gauze extends like a sheath beyond the core or gets clumped together into a black linear form. Whereas the nature of the materials is still perceptible, they are suspended in a process of transformation, revealing the metamorphic nature of matter.

6

Chimera

2004

Tar drum, mica flakes

50 x 50 x 87 cm

Collection of Sunitha and Niall Emmart

This sculpture is made from an emptied tar drum that Gowda obtained from road workers. After bringing the drum back to shape, she then carved out a spiral on its top lid, letting it fall down inside. The rimmed lid of the drum, a circular shallow plate, still holds the spiral, and sits at the bottom of the drum. The lid has been filled with mica flakes, a material commonly used on tar sheets for waterproofing. The work draws visitors to look inside the dark depth of the barrel, as if it were a well, and there they might encounter the effect of a moon subtly shining. The illusory reality perceived by the observers is referred to in the artwork's title.

7

Sanjaya Narrates

2004

Watercolour on paper

14 paintings; 25,5 x 33 cm each

Collection of Sunitha and Niall Emmart

In this set of watercolours, a newspaper photograph depicting a moment of violence and atrocity has been fragmented into 14 images. The scene, captured in Palestine, takes place immediately after the crossfire: a woman holds out a fatally wounded child to a man, while two other women appear to be extremely agitated. The artist dissects a found press image, capturing partial details by zooming in on certain sections that escape narrative and become partially abstract. Though the watercolours are displayed edge to edge, in a sequence, each of them represents a single moment. Blurred faces, or isolated feet and hands are juxtaposed and framed at different scales. All the watercolours are in full colour, except the one showing the dead child, which has been rendered in sepia tones. The title evokes a character in the *Mahābhārata*, the ancient Indian epic poem of the war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. In the poem, Sanjaya, charioteer and adviser to king Dhritarashtra who possesses the gift of divine vision, narrates the war to the blind ruler, making him feel as if he were in the battlefield.

8

Best Cutting

2008

Digital collage, glass-marking pencil, inkjet print on paper

55 x 29 cm; 55 x 35 cm

Courtesy of the artist

This work is composed of news clippings gathered for over a decade by Gowda's husband and digitally assembled for the artist as three and a half newspaper spreads. Each has the title *Chronic Chronicles* printed on its top corner, while the bottom has the colour scale typical of professional proofs. The content consists of political statements, news about politicians, about religion mixed with politics, and about accidents both violent and comic, sitting alongside carefully selected advertisements that have mostly ironic tone. Gowda treats these spreads as paper on which she draws tailoring patterns for blouses and a pair of trousers, with red and green pastels. The newspaper as a source of information is challenged here by its materiality, as mere paper to be cut along the lines of the drawn pattern, and thus the viewer's attention constantly shifts between the two.

9

Margins

2011

Wood, enamel oil paint, metal

Variable dimensions

Collection of Kiran Nadar Museum of Art

This installation is made of found architectural wooden objects – door frames and door shutters – painted in typical colours of south Indian vernacular architecture (blue, light green, pale and deep yellow). The colours have been further enhanced by Gowda's use of oil painting. A common doorframe has four sides, but the five doorframes used have been dismantled and reassembled with flexible joints, in order to turn them into linear structures. They have subsequently been hung from the ceiling with chains or along walls, creating varied angular articulations and tensions, or resembling gigantic animal legs. The fine line between the media of painting and sculpture, and the different functions of everyday materials, their abstract significance and their potential anthropomorphism are some of the concerns manifested in this work.

10

Protest, My Son

2011

Watercolour on print on paper, print on vinyl, horn, fur 424 x 287 cm; 90 x 60 cm

Exhibition copy (2019) from a work in the Van Abbemuseum Collection, Eindhoven

This found-image work was created from a newspaper clipping of a demonstration in Bangalore that Sheela Gowda enlarged to a wall-size poster. The work depicts a group of people, their bodies mostly bare except for loin cloths, beads and feathers. They are members of the Hakki Pikki, a semi-nomadic tribe from southern India who is fighting for their right to their own land. In the background there is a banner and a red flag from a political movement inspired by B.R. Ambedkar, a Dalit and the father of the Indian Constitution. In their everyday, the Hakki Pikki wear urban clothes and are known for their ingenious ways of making a living by selling forest produce and self-made herbal oils, but also fake animal parts such as tiger claws and elephant hair. The group in this photograph is also selling the idea of the tribal self in an exaggerated manner. Placed on the larger image is a smaller duplicate version of the main photograph: an image within an image that Gowda transformed by painting tattoos, headdresses, body paint and other details that are visual markers of tribal groups around the world, such as Maori, American Indian, Maasai or Yanomami. The raised hands of a man in the larger image hold a string of fake tiger claws that the artist acquired from the Hakki Pikki.

This figurative work reveals Gowda's interest in the role of images and representation, which can be tracked back to her education as an artist and her early practice as a painter. The way she approaches found pictures is assertive and manipulative, as she modifies them by blurring them, blowing them up, hiding some parts, inserting sculptural elements or painting over them. In this sense, the presence of the watercolour can be seen as a way of creating differences from the original picture, playing with stereotypes and inherited ideas of the "exotic".

11

Black Square

2014

Rubber, paint, wood frame

31 x 31 x 3 cm

Courtesy of the artist

This work originates from the site-specific installation *Those of Whom* (2014), created on the occasion of the 31st Bienal de São Paulo. It consists of a rubber sheet produced in the Amazon forest that Gowda has used to cover a wooden frame, fixing it at the four corners. A square has been painted in black watercolour in the middle of the rubber surface, so when the material was stretched to adhere to the wooden support, the quadrangular form became distorted and its sides curved because of the elasticity of the canvas. Evoking the Russian icons and the celebrated painting *Black Square* (1915), by Kazimir Malevich, the work is placed against a corner.

12

What Yet Remains

2017

Metal drum sheets, metal bowls

Variable dimensions

Courtesy of the artist

Large metal drum sheets in various colours have been punched through with a series of circular holes. These sheets are the remains of the traditional handmade production process of *bandlis*, the typical round bowls used in India to carry construction materials (such as sand, cement or concrete slurry). The *bandlis* are made from the discs cut out from the sheets, pressed into bowls and then hand-beaten to fold in the edges. In the installation, the sheets, in vibrant red, green and blue, some whole and uncut and others with circular holes, play out an orchestrated sculptural arrangement on the walls and the floor. The original colours on the sheets and *bandlis* have been mostly left untouched as traces of their previous use. Through concrete and physical elements, the *bandlis* acquire within Gowda's work an allegorical value, recalling the industry and production system, as well as the constant and alchemical transformation of the material they are made of. The *bandlis* allow the workers to transport with ease a considerable amount of building material. That is, their proportions maintain a strong relation with the body of the workers that carry them.

13

In Pursuit Of

2019

Hair ropes, 15 km approximately

Courtesy of the artist

Made specially for the rooms of Bombas Gens Centre d'Art, this version of *In Pursuit Of* continues Gowda's exploration of human hair as a material. The hair carries ritual meanings, for example when it is cut as part of a sacrifice, but it is also important within India's economy, because the country is the biggest exporter of human hair worldwide, for wigs and other uses. It is also present in the local economy, when three-metre cords made up of shorter hair are sold in the south of India to be used as talismans, tied to car bumpers for protection. In this piece, as is the case with her work in general, an abstracted form gathers and amplifies several aesthetic and political meanings.