



s h a r a t h k u l a g a t t i

figment

sharath kulagatti

works on paper

23 May - 2 June 2007

rob dean art

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Untitled, 2007, Water colour on acid free paper, 31" x 43"

I'm not sure what 'coming out right' means. It often means that what you do holds a kind of energy that you wouldn't just put there, that comes about through grace of some sort. ~ Jasper Johns.

*And the rest of our lives will the moments accrue,
When the shape of their goneness will flare up anew,
And we do what we have to (re-loo re-loo),
Which is all you can do this side of the blue. ~ Joanna Newsom*

They Already Exist

The quest for beauty has driven artists to women, freshly-dug graves, national flags, and many other things. In the lines, curves and chiaroscuro, the artist looks for, and sometimes finds, a certain purity of form and simplicity of expression. Sharath Kulagatti hunts for beauty in the flea markets of his home in Vadodara, India. He spends hours scanning the crowded streets, abuzz with the chatter of eager sellers and lazy small talk, and comes back home without any of the marble sculptures and ornate woodwork that sellers try to tempt him with. His muses are pieces of rusted machinery and twisted metal. They seem useless but for Kulagatti, they are shiny with promise.

There is no governing logic behind Kulagatti's choices at the flea market. He selects intuitively and then paints them. For *Still Alive*, Kulagatti's solo show in Mumbai in 2006, he worked with ink on paper and the monochromatic works were literally larger than life. They hung on walls like monuments from an archaic time that, for all their delicacy, towered ominously over the viewer. This time, Kulagatti's paintings are smaller and he's chosen colour over the minimalism of black and white. "There is a sense of layering in watercolours which I wanted to add to these objects. The colours add volume, layer by layer, tone by tone," explained Kulagatti. The found objects sat in his studio and Kulagatti patiently waited for a revelation. "Sometimes I will wait for days," Kulagatti laughed and said. "I don't really know what I'm waiting for but when I finish, the way they look changes. It becomes beautiful."

Beauty has been a thorny subject in the world of philosophy and aesthetics. Debates may continue about the relevance of the aesthetic and the anti-aesthetic in modern art but what is clear is that the aesthetic is not limited by conventional notions of beauty. The beautiful has taken a variety of forms in contemporary art and its unusual avatars have deepened our understanding of artistic practice, perspective and possibilities. The history of art has seen artists negotiate and renegotiate their relationship with their subjects. In the twentieth century, Marcel Duchamp celebrated indifference with his readymade subject. The other major inspiration in contemporary art has been the found object, what Andre Breton called *trouville*. The two share some basic similarities – a lack of obvious aesthetic quality and little intervention from the artist so far as its form is concerned – but the perspective that each carries is starkly different. While the readymade subject is indifferent and mass-produced, the found



Untitled, 2007, Water colour on acid free paper, 33" x 43"

object is singular and often irreplaceable. The found object contains in it visual residues and with the artist's agency, it can be a vehicle for an experience that has not yet been represented. Just with the act of being found, the object becomes charged with a subjective appeal.

An intimacy develops between Kulagatti and his objects over the time that an object spends sitting in his studio. It is palpable in his work. The objects become his companions and as time passes, they accrue fragments from the present and shyly reveal secrets from a forgotten past. What ultimately emerges in Kulagatti's paintings is a delicate portrait, brimming with romanticism.

He paints a tangled piece of metal the colour of suntanned skin. Touches of pink further hint at the softness of flesh while unexpected washes of green make the piece seem grass-stained. His palette is a subtle device to curtain the industrial nature of the metal behind the pastoral. In another painting, the dense solidity of metal turns fragile as Kulagatti shades the geometric shape in shades of pale grey, navy blue and black. A pair of callipers boasts of a bright red handle. Focus on the handle and the callipers are charged with a noticeably phallic eroticism. Undercutting this is a dangling part of the callipers on the other side, tinged with a darker red like discoloured skin. With the focus on this bruised end, the tool is transformed into something eerily reminiscent of a human figure on its hands and knees.

Although they may seem inert at first glances, Kulagatti's objects shimmer with a latent energy. His use of colour brings them to life and they hover delicately in the white cube he places them in. Kulagatti uses the sensuality of red in many of his paintings. In some objects it lends tactility; in others it gives a sense tumescent violence. The occasional touches of blue lend accents, emphasising the forms of the objects. Shades of blue run across many of the surfaces, recreating the polished shine of a well-worn material like the rubber of an old-fashioned horn.

Kulagatti chooses a background an unblemished white surface that feels almost futuristic. It carries no traces of anything. The only things that touch the whiteness are the watery shadows of the objects that even when unrecognisable carry a distinct aura of antiquity. Some, like the pliers and callipers, are instruments that are out of sync with the current times. Others are mysterious parts that have been taken out of a whole. It is not important to understand their old utility. What Kulagatti is emphasising with his meticulous detailing of metallic ridges and internal wheels is that these are outdated man-made creations, unlike the sleek microchips of today's instruments. Yet, in spite of having been abandoned, turned into artistic abstractions, they exert a certain pull over the viewer. The power dynamics is suddenly subverted the seat of power goes from the human creator to the lifeless creation.

They may exist now as pieces of exhausted machinery but hidden in their crevices is the memory of having once been useful, if not essential. These man-made objects may have been discarded since the days when they were celebrated as living proof of human ingenuity but through Kulagatti, these pieces regain vitality. Infusing the crippled form, covered in memories of times past, with vibrancy, Sharath Kulagatti gives it new life. A new life in which once again the object excites the human imagination, but not because of its utility this time, but its unexpected beauty.

Deepanjana Pal

Deepanjana Pal is a writer based in Mumbai. She has completed her Masters in Postcolonial Literature in English from University of Warwick and currently works as art critic for Time Out Mumbai.



Untitled, 2007, Water colour on acid free paper, 36" x 43"



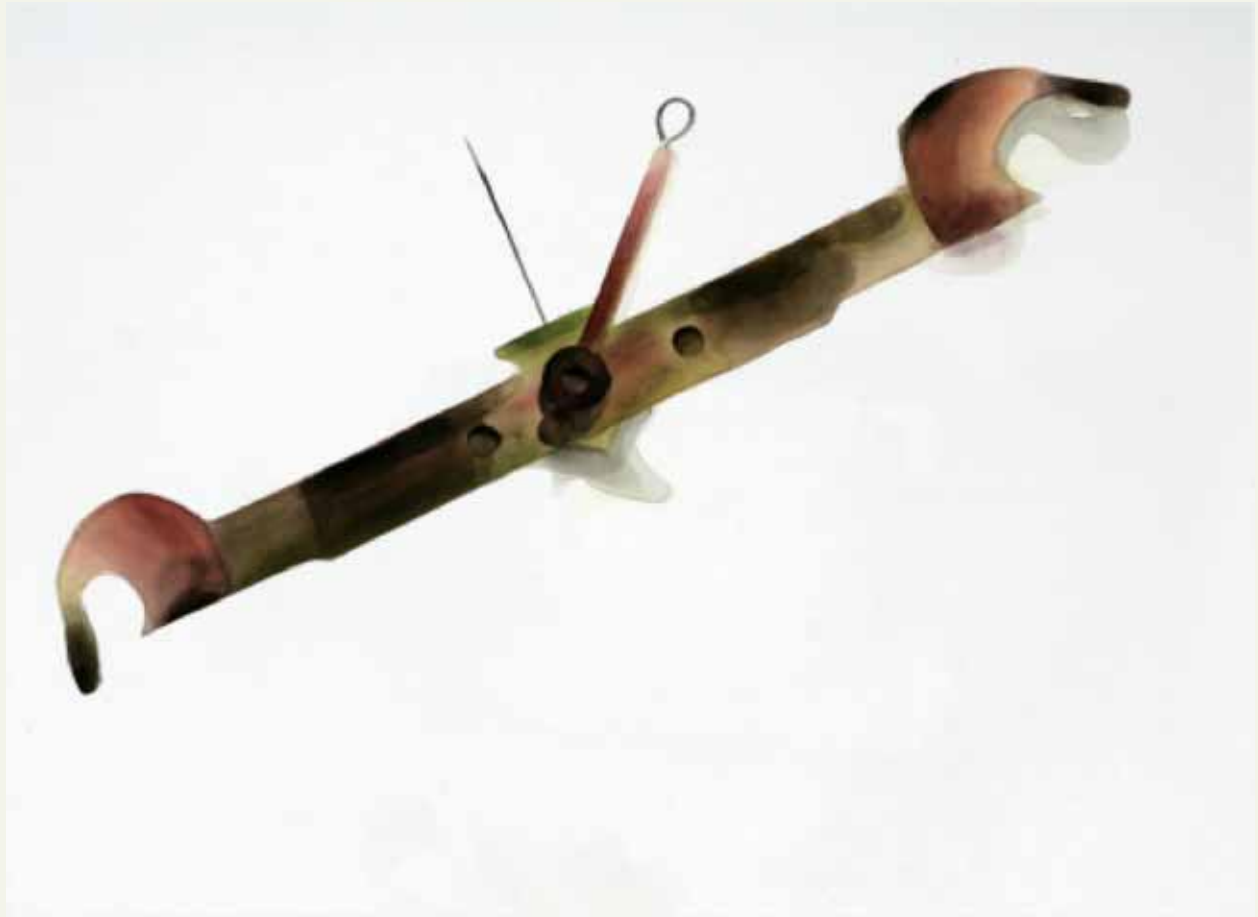
Untitled, 2007, Water colour on acid free paper, 32" x 43.5"



Untitled, 2007, Water colour on acid free paper, 33" x 43"



Untitled, 2007, Water colour on acid free paper, 43.5" x 33"



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Untitled, 2007, Water colour on acid free paper, 43" x 32"



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Untitled, 2007, Water colour on acid free paper, 43" x 33"



Untitled, 2007, Water colour on acid free paper, 43" x 33"



Untitled, 2007, Water colour on acid free paper, 31.75" x 43"



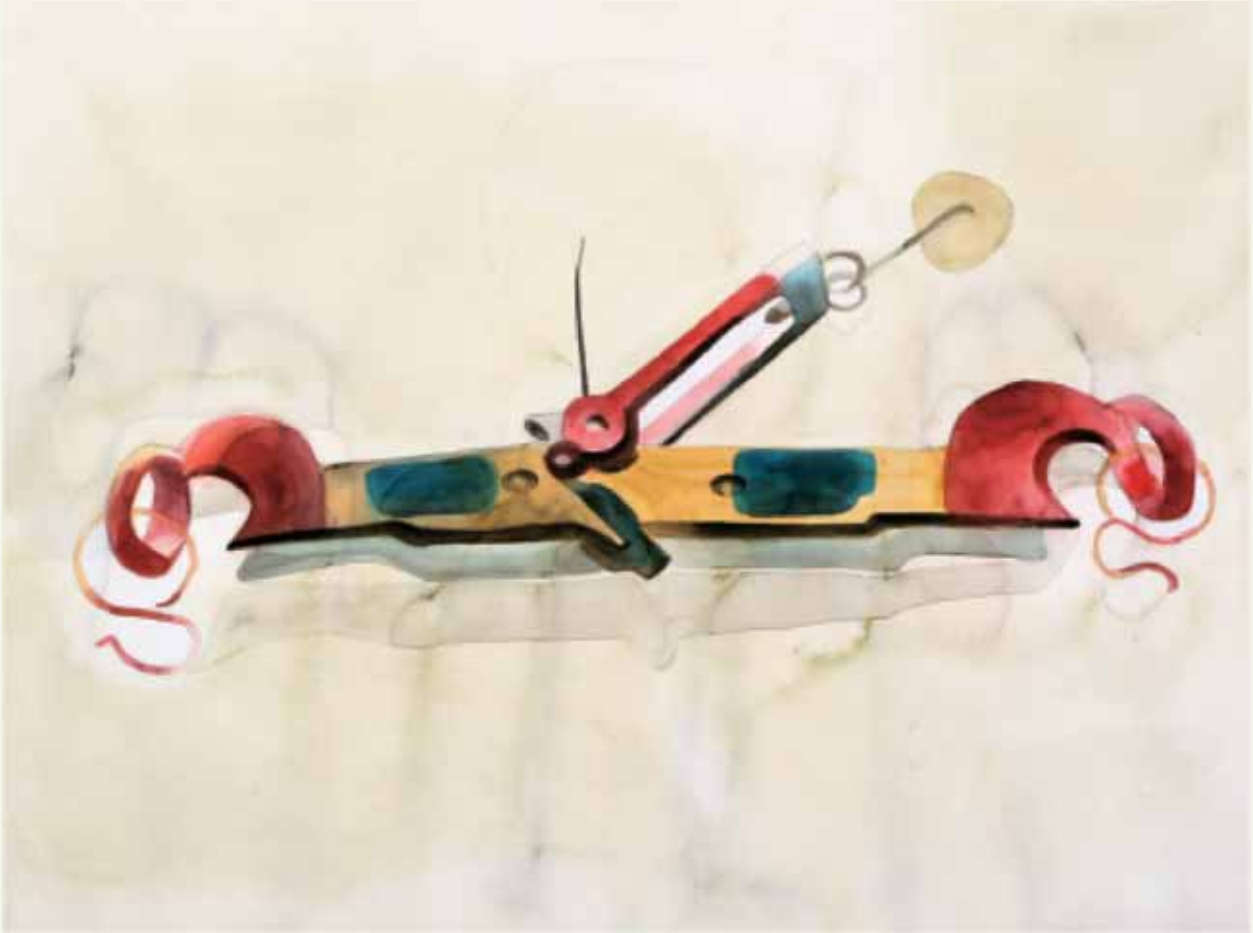
Untitled, 2007, Water colour on acid free paper, 43" x 60"



Untitled, 2007, Water colour on acid free paper, 60" x 43"



Untitled, 2007, Water colour on acid free paper, 43" x 33"



Untitled, 2007, Water colour on acid free paper, 33" x 43"



Coke, 2005, Lithograph, 23.5" x 15", Edition of 4



Gloves, 2005, Lithograph, 16" x 23.5", Edition of 6



Shaving Brush, 2005, Lithograph, 24.5" x 16", Edition of 6



Comb, 2005, Lithograph, 14.5" x 21", Edition of 6



Untitled, 2005, Lithograph, 18" x 16", Edition of 6



Untitled, 2005, Lithograph, 22.5" x 17", Edition of 6



Untitled, 2005, Lithograph, 22.5" x 17", Edition of 6



Screw, 2005, Lithograph, 19" x 26.5", Edition of 6



Untitled, 2005, Lithograph, 22.5" x 17", Edition of 4



Untitled, 2005, Lithograph, 14.5" x 21", Edition of 6

Sharath Kulagatti

Born : May 1978

2005 : Master of Fine Arts (Graphics), M.S University, Baroda

2000 : Bachelor of Fine Arts (Painting), Karnataka Chitrakala Parishath, Bangalore

Exhibition : Solo

2006 : " Still Alive..." ,Pundole Art Gallery, Mumbai

2003 : "..... and life will go on" , Karnataka Chitrakala Parishath, Bangalore

Exhibitions : Group

2004 : "Urban Confluence" ,Sharan Apparao Gallery, New Delhi

2002 : "Verbal Passage" ,Easel Art Gallery, Chennai

2000 : "Exposition 2000" ,College of Fine Arts Chitrakala Parishath, Bangalore

Awards

2002 : "AIFACS" , All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society, New Delhi

2000 : "Exposition 2000" ,art exhibition by College of Fine Arts, Bangalore

1999 : First Southern Region Camlin Art Exhibition, Mumbai

Workshop

2004 : "Samitha" ,College of Fine Arts, New Delhi

Lives & works in Baroda

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