

# Galerie Daniel Templon

Paris

SUDARSHAN SHETTY  
CNN (CNGo.com) , October 4, 2010

## Artist Sudarshan Shetty's spectacular multi-media mash-up

*High-concept contemporary art entertains the masses at Mumbai's oldest museum*

By Deepika Sorabjee 4 October, 2010



*Tasneem Mehta, the BDL's honorary director, has revived the museum's engagement with contemporary art in Mumbai.*

There is a singular, remarkable effort going on at Mumbai's [Dr. Bhaui Daji Lad Museum \(BDL\)](#) in Byculla.

The oldest museum in Mumbai is restoring a tradition from a time when the posts of museum curator and Sir J.J. School of Art principal were held by the same person and works of artists from the school would be put on display at the museum.

In a rare public-private endeavor in the arts, Tasneem Mehta, the BDL's honorary director, has revived the museum's engagement with contemporary art in Mumbai and created a unique opportunity to see art of the present in an historic space.

Currently showing through October 31 is contemporary artist Sudarshan Shetty's exhibition "this too shall pass." It is the first of a series of exhibitions planned by the museum through a residency program that invites eminent artists who have studied at the Sir J.J. School of Art to work with the museum's sumptuous space and legacy of historical objects.

At Shetty's opening on September 26, all original colors of embellished surfaces from ceiling to ornate balustrades blazed under the evening lights.

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It's a tough proposition bringing contemporary art into such splendor; a challenge to both artist and viewer. Restored gloriously by conservation architect Vikas Dilawari, the museum's collection – in handsome old display cabinets – shares space with some objects you may quite not expect here.

### **Museum as gallery? Art as entertainment?**

A couple of years ago, during the art boom, when Indian art was being touted as the new Chinese art, artists were featured in the celebrity pages of newspapers. One artist whose work was more visible than his quiet self was Sudarshan Shetty.

Represented by [GallerySKE](#) in Bangalore, Shetty worked with existential questions – away from the hype.

His art marked time consistently and steadily around the world, finding an audience beyond a local market.

Shetty has long-standing connection with the BDL museum, located amid the botanical gardens surrounding the Mumbai zoo. He grew up nearby and would come to the gardens regularly for walks with his mother.

This is where Shetty realized that art was treated as "entertainment" by the majority of the public.

I agree with him. Watching the non-gallery going crowd at the museum, it was clear there was no distancing them from the displays. Their willingness to actively engage the art was refreshing.

I met Shetty for a guided tour of his exhibit the Monday after opening weekend. He observed that objects when placed in a museum acquire value but also that "objects are ultimately redundant, as their meaning changes over time."

"Art in India," he said, "is larger than life," a "spectacle" which he observed as his father, a Yakshagana artist, practiced his craft.

The idea took hold that everything, like spectacle, has its moment and passes. And that his art, as the Sufi inspired show title states, "too shall pass."

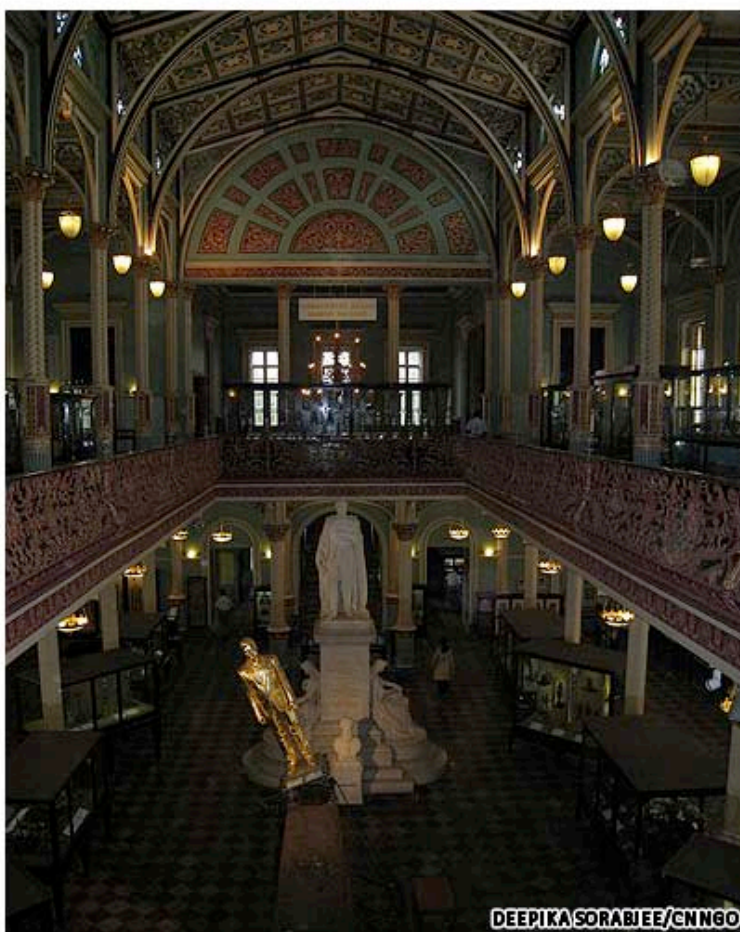
### **"this too shall pass": Shetty in his element**

In irreverent relief against the marble statue of Prince Albert in the main hall of the museum stands a life-sized statue titled "Sudarshan Shetty: 1961-2010."

Like a monument to a toppled leader, angled at 45 degrees, it is balanced with a weighted box. Fill the box with enough coins and the statue stands upright.

A simple act easy for all to do, a cause and effect that makes the installation participatory. It's an old custom to weigh a monarch against gold proffered by his subjects; here a democratic power resides with the people who decide if one can resurrect fallen figures.





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find a second life.

Found objects are treated conceptually. Bloodied and placed in corner rooms, they take on new respectable histories.

Shetty likens these pieces to Hitchcockian suggestions – happenings you don't see – a fallen canopy spilling pixelated blood across the room is particularly potent. A rocking horse stands still, its size and skeletal form precluding play and rendering it useless.

My favorite piece is a feather in relentless rotation, rhythmically striking the glass vitrine it is encased in, but moving on and on in a relentless, mechanical cycle of humdrum existence.

Shetty poses questions in his works through executions that involve materials and mechanisms in a sense of derisive play. A deep sense of loss and impermanence binds them all.

Here placed in cheeky juxtaposition with museum displays, the artist makes you ponder the ephemerality of it all. You don't necessarily come away with firm answers.

*"this too shall pass" runs until October 31; 10am to 5.30pm; Wednesdays closed. At Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum, next to Byculla Zoo, 91A Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Road, Byculla (East); tel. +91 (0) 22 2373 1234.*

Shetty was keen to bring Indian oral traditions into the museum space.

In a corner room is an audio work, its narrative and haunting song taking its place among small paintings from the museum's collection of early Mumbai settlers.

There are several neon-lit texts scattered around the museum that denote the transient nature of human life – seeing something, traveling somewhere, a life lived and moved on. Memories are made and taken away. Like the museum's visitors, they come and go.

In galleries on the first floor are works that truly mark Shetty's oeuvre.

Working with craftsmen the artist brings traditional, whimsical and improbable connections into a contemporary piece. For example, an elaborately carved wooden archway with a tree of life motif is easily associated with traditional Indian craftsmanship, yet has a deathly sword swinging across its opening, like a metronome counting time ominously.

A carcass of a car carved in wood swivels amid the pristine museum exhibits; an object discarded trying to

