

# CREATIVE CUSTODIANS

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Subodh Gupta, 50, ARTIST AND SCULPTOR

HEMANT CHAWLA



The Arts

## Man of Steel

His family in Patna didn't care a drop of paint about art. He did. Years later, now a Delhi artist lionized both on the gallery and the social circuit, Subodh Gupta rewrites art history in style and steel. As he turns 50, the man who loves to wear eclectically coloured trousers and typical thick-rimmed glasses is known for his flamboyant representation of humble household articles in steel and the use of brass to tell a monumental story of matter, mind. As destiny would have it, Delhi, the city where Subodh had to struggle a lot to make a beginning as an artist, sees often the spectacular retrospective show of sculptures, installations, video art drawings and paintings.

He says, "My initial days in Delhi were of struggle. When I arrived here, I had no place to stay. I lived in the Lalit Kala Akademi hostel."

The symbolic fruit of Subodh's 20 years of labour and art practice, *Dada*, blooms at Delhi's Jaipur House. It is a gigantic installation in his favourite metal, a *Bargad* (Banyan) tree of shiny pots and pans that connects to the agelessness in Subodh's work as well as his roots. And *Dada* became a landmark in Delhi's sparse public art scene. Subodh had put up his first group show in 1999 at Nature Morte gallery owned by Peter Nagy. The solo show came in 2001 to the Hauz Khas Village. "Nature Morte realised this project. And I thank Peter for that. 'Ghar ki Murgi Daal Baraabar', they say. But Peter has been very supportive. There are a number of galleries I have to thank but Nature Morte has been very active in showing my work," he says.

The mind and heart of Subodh's art resides in his mother's kitchen back home. An embryonic idea developed, of using pots, pans, plates, spoons, tongs, commodes, tiffin carriers, cycles, fans, boats, mountains of old, rugged twisted, scraped, sorry-looking aluminum utensils. It found character in Delhi. "My studio was my home. My family and kids lived there. My babies would play there. Everything would be in the same apartment and I would be cooking there. One day I was looking at all the shiny utensils and took some of them to the dining table. I wondered whether these could form material for my work. I realised I could really express myself through these utensils. I have still a long way to go," he adds.

### HAVE YOU EVER STOLEN ANYTHING?

A luggage trolley from an airport after the idea of using trolleys in my work struck me while waiting for my plane

### YOUR WACKY FOOD INTEREST?

Unwashed dishes. During a Europe trip, I was taking pictures of food-scraped dishes. They looked both beautiful and interesting

### HOW DO YOU REMEMBER IDEAS?

I store them on my phone and scribble them on my notepad