CHAPTER – 3
HEMA UPADHYAY’S JOURNEY OF THOUGHTS

In this chapter, the topic of discussion is the sequence of famous Installation artist Hema Upadhyay’s ideas and thoughts which are behind her creative work, stimulus vision, her work and also the style or technique, process, materials, her exhibitions, workshops, residencies. The focus will be on installation art, the artist and her stunning work, her memories and incidents, changes in her work during the last decade, her perception and her technique, her contribution to the art world, impact of her work etc.

Hema Upadhyay was an art-genius, she needs no superlatives. She has a secure place in the chronicles of Indian art world on account of her distinctive style, adherence to contemporary art and her effort to do the very best in these fields. As an innovative artist, she has made a special mark and has carved a niche in the spheres of art world.

She is undoubtedly a perennial source of inspiration to the young artists and the art-lovers alike. The nation is proud of her achievements. Her life and works are beacon lights to the contemporaries and a guiding star to the generations that are yet to be born. A glimpse into the story of her life will enable us to see the greatness of the artist in her and the magnitude of her creation. Winning laurels for her extraordinary contribution to the world of art, she has not only received national/ international, state and public awards but has also won universal love and recognition in every nook and corner of the country. Geniuses like her are not born every day.
Art is totally connected to the artist’s inner memories and thoughts. And a person, who has creative eyes and thoughts, presents her/his memories and thoughts in her/his artwork. If we say it in easy words, behind every artwork, there are memories and thoughts of the artist that play a major role.

Hema Upadhyay- (1972 – 12/2015), Lived and worked in Mumbai, India. She did Bachelors of Fine Art & Master of Fine Art from M.S. University Baroda. She completed Masters Degree (M.F.A. - 1997) in Printmaking.¹

The artistic expression of Hema Upadhyay is the distillate of a long period of struggle. It is not only the struggle of a beginner artist; it’s really a tough journey for her being a female.

**Motor Idea in Her Installation Art**

Hema’s Stimulus Vision – In the last chapter we came to know about the personality of Hema Upadhyay. She was a genius and her work is also stunning and eye catching. When we see her work, some questions arise like – what was her thought? What was her stimulus vision? How did she see the surroundings in a creative way? How the things of her surrounding did affect her work? What are the thoughts behind her work? How do her memories play a major role in her work? Does she have a unique vision and point of view? All the above questions are important to know about Hema Upadhyay and her work.

We can say that she had a creative sight since from her early days but still she needed academic education, to improve her skills. During her graduation or B.F.A., she became aware of different resources for which, till then, she couldn’t see any
imaginative purpose or worth. It was a turning point in her third year of study that she became conscious of her continuous use of these materials, and the narrative in her work. During her academic education, she improved her vision. It was then that she started observing everything that surrounded her and that she started including them in her work. And also some incidents of her private life took on an extraordinary consequence, essentials of which recur regularly in her work. These incidents and these stories became the main resource for her work.

**Impact of Surroundings on Her Work**

From her academic education, she understood the value of surrounding things and visuals; she understood that her creative view to see the things and visuals are very important in her work in order to represent her ideas and thoughts, which move in her mind. Impact of the surroundings plays a major role in her work.

After completing her education, Hema Upadhyay decided to settle in Mumbai (1998), “her tumultuous experience as a secret migrant, both in historical (Hema’s family originally belongs to Pakistan) and real time, in the exigencies of metropolitan living. Globalization also accentuates a ‘new metropolitan archipelago’ where enormous consumerism in the middle of underprivileged populations only serves to create divisiveness of economy, infrastructure and unfair access to civil rights. Hema Upadhyay interrogates the concept of a ‘global’ city that Mumbai aspires to be, often based on the models of Shanghai or Dubai. The straight up (skyscrapers) and the horizontal (slums) design of the city, the money matters of space and real estate, the construction of surplus labour and universal capital via migrants, who often live in urban poverty and dislocation, raises existential dilemma for the artist of what the ‘home’ means in such explosive demographic shift. Such a construction of space has
reflective implication: to whom does the city belong? Via the realist/surrealist language, self-portraiture and domestic narratives, Hema Upadhyay investigates the ‘within’ and ‘without’ of existing in such uncertain socio-spatial systems and how do we comprehend our ‘place’ in the inclusions/exclusions that mark our fragmented times and its commoditized structure”.2

Reflection grows out of the thoughts, being transformed through art associations and own experience. The character of human existence is metamorphosed through this amazing gift of the artist's creative impulse. All these incidents and accidents affected her work.

**Technique and Medium**

**Style, Technique or Medium with Description of Hema Upadhyay’s Work**

For understanding the style or technique of Hema Upadhyay’s work, first we have to know that - What is style or technique, and how it helps to know about someone’s personality. To understand this let us site some definitions regarding style and technique. (See Chart – 3.1)
**Style** – A particular procedure by which something is done; a manner or way. Design or make in a particular form.³

The style is the sequence of arrangements and methods which is repeated frequently and makes a unique identity. And the art world uses this technique for making artwork in unique style.⁴

**Technique** – The way of doing a particular task, especially the execution or presentation of an artistic work or a scientific method.⁵

Now we discuss technique and style. Technique means doing work in a particular way step by step. Technique or Method is almost common in everyone but the uniqueness of the style is the reflection of personality. Everyone has one’s own unique personality and style (like applying colors, making texture, different materials, conceptual representation, etc.) for working and presenting their thoughts and feelings. From working style and technique we know and define someone’s work; otherwise it will be difficult for us to define the work of art and also recognize the artist. In that case, if everyone works in the same style and technique we can never identify any special or individual artist and also her/his work. Hema Upadhyay also possesses a unique style or technique for representing her conceptual thoughts.

India’s prominent artist Hema Upadhyay also has her unique style of work. When we see her work then we find out that there are two streams of fine art in which she works with her unique style and technique –

1. Painting
2. Installation
Painting

Hema Upadhyay is a well-known name in the Indian art world. She was very hard working artist. And because of her continuous practice and work, she has a very different style which is very unique. She has created self-images for background of her works and also used self-photos for representing her thoughts, all these forte we see in her work ‘Sweet-Sweat Memories’ 2001. (See Plate No. 3.1)

“It would be also worthwhile to explore Hema Upadhyay’s deployment of the body and self-portraiture, within the area of feminist art practice. The engagement with the body and its presentation in her art has been a slow but regular process. Hema Upadhyay has made a critical distance from open presentations of the feminine self, and in her earlier work, the body emerges as a present deficiency, via emblematic objects, that marked individual traces and stories of surroundings. Self-portraiture and womanly subjectivity is a difficult art in the chronological genre, framed by the male gaze and objectified according to the norms of a patriarchy ideal of beauty. Hema Upadhyay crafts out a very uncharacteristic approach towards the body, resisting stereotype of femaleness and transgress gendered construction of the female body. Stepping out of self-absorbed portrayals, she adopts an almost predictable presentation, engaged in everyday gesture, locative in the larger socio-cultural terrain. Her self-portraits don’t paint, but photograph herself, portraying not as the central character of her compositions, but in multiple minuscule, symbolic and performative acts. The self-confronts certain individual phobias and shortcomings; while engaging with other reality of identities and spaces, both public and private that are hierarchically structured within the division of class, caste, religion, and gender”.
(See Plate No. 3.2)
In her multifarious layered paintings, she changes the mind and way of seeing the spectator/viewer in the efficiency of the parameter for the human shape in comparison with the metropolitan scene. Working space as irregular, juncture as momentary, parameter as undetermined; cluster phobia and nervousness - all these are the markers of a concerned metropolitan lifestyle; penetrating in the way of numerous layering in Hema Upadhyay’s work. “Tough profitable norms of feminine beauty, as endorsed in the visual society of billboards, her choice of such a portrayal is an act of repossession; a presentation of the ‘Real/Everyday’ body with its frown, reaction, fat, weariness and signs of corrosion, in its circumstantial identity. The images may sometimes describe emotional aspects of domestic entrapment, but she moves beyond inflexible and rational analysis of feminist theory, in a quest of new equations and significations of feminist subjectivity. The use of multiples is also an indication from the Mewar miniatures where there is a continuous narrative; the artist employs these visual clues in a modern context, imploding the narratives of selfhood”.7

(See Plate No. 3.3)

Descriptions from prevalent civilization and majority of creations are compiled in her works; conceptualization of her artwork is equally done by Hema, in the language of an advertise artifact. “Such deployments allude to Pop Art in the combination of object, image, and profitable product, with the focus on a particular image, blowing it up beyond human scale, in a subversive evaluation of the urban consumerist occurrence. She creates a storyboard of her thoughts, scripting the metropolitan landscape in color and form, then photographs herself and superimposes minuscule clone cut-outs on the painted picture, in variable pictorial angles; she merges and emerges in the pictographic space, obscure, real and predictable mappings
of the city. Hema Upadhyay articulates observer-participant dialectic, taking viewers away from conventional trajectories and jolting them into a new awareness of city landscapes. We find her insecurely leaning on the edges of terrace on skyscrapers, ready to leap into a surrounding blue abyss, scramble up the facades of superior terrifying buildings (In Between B413/414 and A2-403, 2001) (See Plate No. 3.4), high above the congested cityscapes, looking for organic breathing space, cleansing the ‘black’ accumulate foam on human teeth in a simulated image of a ‘white’ toothpaste commercial (Sweet Memories 2001), or enact the labored lives of urban working women who travel on Mumbai’s frothing local trains juxtaposed against the imagery of restricted apartments (Urban Landscape, 2004)”. There is an unrelenting engagement, to borrow from Walter Benjamin, with both the “physiognomy of the city, (as a space to be read) and its phenomenology (as mythology, history, politics, and text)”.

**Installation**

The second stream, in which Hema Upadhyay has worked, is Installation Art. In 1st chapter, we described Installation art. Installation art is a three dimensional work, which is compiled with various materials and found objects. Installations art is mainly divided to in two parts – Interactive Installation and Immersive Installation. In interactive installation the viewers interact with the artwork, they touch and feel them and are a part of that site-specific installation and another one is immersive installation, which is virtually displayed like audio and video installations, viewers only feel this kind of artwork. Hema Upadhyay is a famous name of India, who is always remembered for glorifying this technique with her creative thoughts. She is the perfect combination of traditional and contemporary technique. Her installations...
are the perfect examples of contemporary art scenario. She does both kinds of installations – Interactive and Immersive. If we talk about her work we find a variety of installation art like one of her work ‘The Space in Between You and Me’ 2002 (See Plate No. 3.5) which is based on a letter, which she never sent to her father. She creates this site specific-Installation as an alphabetical form on earth from the local seed Ragi, which she found easily from the local market of that place. Another of her installations one is also an amazing work which is ‘BYE’ 2002- 2003(See Plate No. 3.6). In this site-specific installation she created alphabet ‘BYE’ from seeds and involved pigeons as an important part of her installation. When we see her work we find the various materials, found objects, which make her work very innovative and stunning. She did many installation artworks in her unique style which is unforgettable and from this technique of artwork she accrued a higher place in heart of art lovers of India.

**Tools and Material**

Material and tools play a very important role in artwork of any artist. And tools are that equipment which is used for doing work easily and properly in a manner. Example - pencils, brushes, hammer, nail, thread, glass etc. (Chart – 3.2, 3.3)

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*Image of a chart showing the categorization of tools for painting and installation.*

**Chart – 3.2**
If we see Hema Upadhyay’s work, we find different variety of objects; materials and tools, which are used in her work. She has used various tools for completing her work and representing her thoughts. In one of her site-specific installation ‘The Nymph and The Adult’ (2001) (See Plate No. 3.7), she used such material as was available very easily in the surroundings - m-seal, acrylic, gouache, wire, hog hair and varnish, size variable, for making different sizes of cockroaches to symbolize death, aging and decay. In one of her works, ‘BYE’ (2002-03), she represents her thoughts with pigeons and seeds, site-specific installation (*Soonapan*) – A site specific workshop, Kishangarh, Rajasthan. In another of her work ‘Bleeding Hearts’ (2005), she has used acrylic, gouache, graphite, dry pastels and photographs on arches paper. In another of her installation ‘Dream a Wish, Wish a Dream’ (2006), in this installation, she used car scrap, aluminum sheets, plastic sheets, enamel paint, resin, m-seal, found objects, and hardware material. In another of her work ‘8’ x 12’’
(2009), (See Plate No. 3.8) she used car scraps, aluminum sheets, plastic sheets, m-seal, enamel paint, found objects, resin, and hardware material. She created the lot of other works in which she used different kinds of materials and tools, which make her work creative and smooth.

From her college time, Hema Upadhyay has explored the medium of installations, momentary (The Space between You and Me 2002), singular (Loco-Foco-Moto 2003, Dream a Wish, Wish a Dream 2004) and mutual (Made in China 2003-2004), while exploring a range of material from found things to photograph, transparent materials to wood, and also sound. ‘The Space between You and Me’, explores the trajectories of memory and history, letter decorated on the earth with local crop (Ragi) seeds. She writes a letter to her parents, articulates thoughts that she might have never shared with her family members. After some time the seeds give birth to words/personal feelings of the artist, left to growth, change and death under natural circumstances. Via the use of moment in time as an artistic medium, Hema Upadhyay subverts issues of form and anti-form and the possibilities of erasure of histories, semantics of language and the ephemeral of the body/life itself. It is in its very rhythmical expression that this work becomes conceptually and materially operative.

‘Loco-Foco-Moto’ is one more significant sculptural installation, which is made by Hema Upadhyay and in this work she created the chandelier, which is made from matchsticks. In our society a chandelier is a class icon, while matchsticks are frequently used by the common people for everyday use; matchsticks are made from chemicals to generate fire, which has both useful and negative functions;
“Aesthetically built chandelier made from flammable material, Hema Upadhyay brings in different issues of class conflict and the flammable and often fragile psychological terrain of an urbanite struggling to ‘live and provide’ in the city; Hope, despair and endurance, life and death, the subjectivities of the fraught urban populace dreaming of chandeliers in their personal homes, the strength of violence in our everyday lives is entrenched in this powerful work. Like a time-bomb, this part remains suspended, waiting to explode into flames at any point of time”.9

“In ‘Dream a Wish, Wish a Dream’, (See Plate No. 3.9) the unexpected change of ambience in a street within the space of a few meters; the apparent division of a city into zones of separate psychic atmosphere is explored, where she reconstructs a rolling microcosm of Dharavi, (which is both Mumbai’s and Asia’s biggest slum), out of aluminum foils, crumb, metal, plastic, and hardware objects, key in the double-edged dimension of industrialization, modernity, relocation and existential dilemma. A metropolis also witnesses and contains within itself, the most important economic, political and social problems of our times, its many subcultures, and conflicts of class, displacements, identity disaster, metropolitan poverty and chaos. An aspect of civilization debris and lost homes, of cities and societies under siege, of dreams transforming into nightmares, the practice of the living body, unnatural space and scale are evoked in this particular realistic piece. One could also read this to be a compassionate expression of a migrant’s life in a slum, who is often persecuted by the various repressive forces of the State, despite contributing to the surplus labor units of the city”.10
When we see her compiled set of collaged artwork, (Underneath 2004) (See Plate No. 3.10) we find the “tearing herself, discontinuity, suppression, sexual individuality, aggression and continued existence are both openly and secretly presented; seductively coated in complex creation of a bed-cover, the realm of the personal and the communal being in a repetitive of fluctuation state. In a populace of divided automaton, even love becomes display simply; sponsored programs of states and riot become easily elapsed history. National dystopia, cultural uniqueness, violence, politics for the command and position, narratives of the self and the nation, materialize in numerous register” ¹¹ (Bleeding Hearts, 2004) (See Plate No. 3.11).

**Impact and Description of Hema Upadhyay’s Artwork**

Hema Upadhyay (1972 – 12/2015, India)

Hema Upadhyay was an Indian artist who lived and worked in Mumbai from 1998 to 2015. In Hema’s word – “My dream city! The land of promises and dreams come true!

But once I shift to Bombay, I must admit that no work had been done for six to seven months. The city was just too difficult to grasp. It looked so easy from the outside. But when I became a part of it, then I knew the process of waiting to be accepted, needing to understand the body language and attitudes of the people and the city, and dealing with the often hostile environment of this city. And my work was affected too much because of these reasons.

Bombay is a very noisy city, and this became a reference for my work, for ‘Sic’. Coming from a city like Baroda, where large areas are still relatively
uncongested unlike Bombay, one does not have to confront unwanted sound forcibly”.

She chooses the medium of photographs and sculptural installations to represent her ideas of dislocation and memories. If we see Hema’s work, we find many things and memories behind her every single work. Her memories and surroundings are an important part of her conceptual work. Lots of major and minor things, memories and surroundings affect her work like the migration of her parents, her father’s mishap, her neighbor’s death, her Mumbai shifting, and lots of other incidents and things stay a long time in her mind and they all emerge out through her conceptual work. Her observation power to see the surroundings is very strong and creative. I have divided her work according to her subjects in 4 major parts like – Memories, Migration, Social and Political Issues, Commercial.

![Chart 3.4](image)
Here I am describing some selected works of Hema Upadhyay in which we see all the above subjects in her unique style and in a creative way.

‘This Space In Between You and Me’, 2002 – This is a site specific installation; Hema Upadhyay writes a letter to her family and friends using Ragi seed. A letter usually tries to make up for the absence of a person, we usually write letters to our loved ones to somehow remain a part of each other’s lives. This letter deals with the artist’s relationship with her loved ones who are still with her but she no longer shares the same space with them as she used to earlier; it also shows how distances sometimes truly alienate us from our kin and how we remain on a superficial level. Having never written to them, here the artist writes to them a letter that would never posted; it perished with the passage of time similar to how relationships change. In this site-specific installation, her memories and thoughts are displayed very beautifully.

‘BYE’, 2002-03 (Soonapan – A Site Specific Workshop, Kishangarh, Rajasthan) - The idea of this workshop was to explore the lop-sided changing socio-political and economic dynamics of India; hence it was held in the small town of Kishangarh. This town is an ideal example of the superficial development that is rampant in India; it is a town full of contradictions where on the one hand there are power looms and thriving businesses, while on the other, there is an abandoned fort and a lack of basic infrastructure. It gives the entire town a feeling of soonapan or abandonment.

In this workshop, the artist tries to understand her own migration. She has been looking at this phenomenon and tried to understand its relation to development.
During her stay there she realized that though there are businesses in Kishangarh, a majority of the population still goes to other cities (mostly Ajmer) to earn a living. They migrate. They may not have a permanent home in their place of work but for all practical purposes, they depend on this other city. The artist made a big symbol of BYE, with pigeons and seeds. Behind this installation, her migration and memories played a very important role, and this work is also a perfect example of socio-political and economic issues. For this fascinating work, the artist has tried to involve pigeons in her work with the use of local seeds.

‘Bleeding Hearts’, 2005 - Bleeding Hearts’ deals with the confrontation of personal phobias, shortcomings and other realities like that of identities and spaces, both public and private which are hierarchically structured amongst class, caste, religion, and gender. Where the body becomes a site of receiving or reaction to these elements, where the self-balances like a see-saw with the idea of rejection and acceptance. ‘Bleeding Hearts’ was an arrangement of flora and fauna (Bouquet made with artificial materials) against the backdrop of paintings with tiny cutouts photographs of the (Self) artist incorporated in the paintings. The bouquet holds the fountain, which in turn will continuously drip (Liquid in red color) from flowers on the bowl holding the bouquet (It will be a continuous flow). This stunning work is the perfect example of the social issue and memories. For this work, the artist has used acrylic, gouache, graphite, dry pastels and photographs on arches paper.

‘Dream a Wish, Wish a Dream’, 2006 - This work was one of the first instances from where Hema Upadhyay directly moved from paintings to installations; it has been an extension of a painting she has made in 2001 titled Visitors 1972 until
1998. It was very realistic not only visually but also in the materials used. This work talks about migration especially related to Mumbai. This urban landscape talks about the socio-political complexities of migration in Mumbai. Mumbai has large temporary housing areas, which are called slums but actually function as cities within a city. They have their own set of rules with regard to politics, society, and economics. For Hema Upadhyay, these slums are one of the best examples of the politics of migration. The very fact that these dwellings are temporary speaks a lot. It automatically gives rise to a sense of alienation, a sense of being lost, an urge to belong and be accepted.

In a way, this work is a tribute to Bombay, a city of migrants that gives hope and courage to millions to have a dream and to strive to make it come true. This work is the perfect example of migration and social or political issues. For this work, she has used aluminum sheets, car scrap, enamel paint, plastic sheets, found objects, m-seal, resin and hardware material.

‘Loco-Foco-Motto’, 2007 – Hema Upadhyay has always felt a strange emotional bond with Pakistan due to her ancestral associations with the country “Her family migrated from Karachi during partition”. As is well documented in the histories of both these countries, partition led to massive rioting and bloodshed. Even today the relations between the two countries are quite hostile. When she was at the residency, though she wanted to make works that dealt with this situation she did not want to use imagery that was considered typical to represent it. Therefore she thought of making a sculpture with matchsticks. The structure itself is very delicate and fragile. It is shaped like a chandelier, a contraption, which merges beauty and functionality perfectly. It tries to look at the tensed and fragile environment that exists between the
two countries; both of which she was connected to. This work is the perfect example of migration, social and political issues, memories, for this the artist has used matchsticks, white glue, lassani board. Hema Upadhyay first made this work in 2003 at the Vasl International Artists Residency in Karachi, Pakistan. And in 2007, this work was exhibited in Urban Manners at the Hanger Bicocca, Milan, Italy”.

‘Mum–My’, 2007 - This work is a collaboration between Hema Upadhyay and her mother. It emerges not only from issues related to migration, identity, and belongings but also from a very strong bond which she shared with her mother. It was a very personal work, which made her understand the complexities of time, gender, society and identity, which begin at home. This work represents her memories and her thoughts or the bonding between her mother and herself. For these works the artist has used acrylic, gouache, dry pastels and photographs on arches paper and white crochet thread, 72 x 48 in [paintings], 120 in diameter [crochet tablecloth].

‘Glass House’, 2007 - In her mesmerizing presentation (Glass-House 2007), Hema Upadhyay continues to explore urban subjectivities of migration, isolation, and displacement, via the personal self. The binaries of nature and culture, industrialization and technology, virtual and real spaces are explored via the metaphor of glass-house, which is a modern architectural material, seductive and transparent but fragile/breakable and dangerous/threatening at the same time. The modern individual functions in ‘cells’, separated by transparent walls, disconnected from the community; the artist articulates such metaphors of loneliness and seclusion, equating the contemporary human condition too fragile illusions. One has to excavate like an archeologist to discover the many secrets that her works withhold from the viewer. In
her visual sociological views, Upadhyay scripts a human predicament that is now constituted by an interconnected series of religious, political, economic, and social dilemmas. To ‘live’ the city is to engage in some symbiotic relationship with it, to listen to it and speak to it, but above all to wander through it and experience its spaces. Hema Upadhyay both inhabits the city and formulates aesthetic trajectories of escape, resisting clichés of representation. Her experiential dialogues where pasts and presents converge encompass the epic, the intimate and the cosmic, that become operative as ‘auto-conversations’, interweaving into the urban configurations. In this work we see both the subjects – memories and social-political issues very clearly, for this work the artist has used acrylic, gouache, dry pastels and photographs on arches paper and some of other things in her unique style.

‘Killing Site’, 2008 - Hema Upadhyay comes from a history of migration. Her parents migrated from Pakistan to India during the partition of 1940, and Hema migrated from the small town of Baroda to the burgeoning city of Bombay [Mumbai] in the 1990s. Her work, thus, concerns migration, often to big cities, and constantly deals with ‘urban chaos’. Her work, ‘Killing Site’, speaks of the changes that are taking place in the largely metropolitan city of Bombay, a haven for migrants within India. Mumbai is currently in the throes of cultural change, brought in by the large numbers of malls that have sprung up in the last few years. These malls are often on large pieces of industrial land, after the sudden demise of cloth mills that thrived in the city till the early 1990s. The closure of mills cost thousands of migrants living in Mumbai for their jobs, leading to great amounts of poverty. Social issues and migration thoughts played a very important role in this work, all these memories hide behind this artwork, to create this work the artist has used acrylic, gouache, dry pastel
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Installation Art and an Indian Installation Artist – Hema Upadhyay

and photographs on arches paper, aluminum sheet, car scrap, enamel paint, plastic sheet, found object, m-seal, resin and hardware material.

‘Acrobats and their Scenes’, 2008 - Hema Upadhyay’s works in general move around the notion of trauma as a socio-political and economic product. She speaks (about) the ‘unspeakable’. Looking at the traumatized people as the victims of a breached social contract, Hema articulates the unspeakable through many palatable narratives, visually surrogated as appealing but complicated designs and as repetitive grand patterns consciously trying for symmetry. The artist doubles herself up as a narrator and listener, in the same way the traumatized people transpose their roles within in their own jumbled narratives. She assumes the role of a participant and that of a clinical analyst simultaneously. In this work social issues are raised by the artist. She was very sensitive to these kinds of issues. In this work, she used gouache, dry pastels, acrylic and photographs on arches paper and creates the artwork in her unique style.

‘8/12’, (96 x 144 x 96 in) 2009 - Hema Upadhyay’s installation work titled 8 feet x 12 feet tries to incorporate the idea of the sublime. Since 2004, Hema has been depicting cityscapes mostly influenced by Bombay to put forth her ideas and understanding of the concepts of migration and displacement. These installations have evolved over the years engaging the viewer at different levels like the work that was exhibited in Lille in 2005 made the viewer face the politics of migration and while the one in the Mori Museum in Tokyo in 2008 made the viewer compare two different cityscapes from two very different cultures. Hema constructs her installations from aluminum sheets, car scrap, hardware and discarded objects; this medium plays an
important role in Hema’s works as she aims to put forth the cramped living condition of a migrant population. Often misunderstood, as direct representations of the poor in the city, Hema’s works are actually quite transcendent, she does not intend to convey statistics but wants to make her viewer aware of the chaos that exists in a society by depicting its landscape. Her works speak at different levels, the installation itself is awe-inspiring and meticulous in detail, and however, she believes that by studying a landscape of a city one often understands the demographics of it. Most low-cost housing projects are homes to migrants, who come to large cities to make a better life. Hence in many cases geography inadvertently supports the class system, leading to a kind of ghetto like structure. This installation work is the perfect combination of memories and migration. In this work aluminum sheets, car scrap, enamel paint, plastic sheets, found objects, m-seal, resin and hardware material has been used by the artist.

‘Only Memory has Preservatives’, 2011 – This is one of her beautiful installation work. In this work Hema Upadhyay made site-specific installation with a transparent acrylic sheet and copyright free images of leaves to represent her thoughts and memories.

‘Extra Ordinary’, 2012 - In this repertoire of paintings, titled ‘Extra-Ordinary’, Upadhyay explores the subtexts that these two disparate words propose the ordinariness of an ‘extra’ life that the metropolis offers its citizens. Unlike the overall decorative patterning of her earlier work (often used as a visual camouflage) within which the body/city converted, the fluid design appears at the edges of these paintings, framed within frames of overlapping narratives. Fixed at the center in somber dark
hues of polluted gray and sleazy black, the decaying city emerges out of a bordered beauty. The actual and fictive, the imagined and the remembered city are evoked through personal and social worlds of the artist; she frames the canvases with the Bombay skyline that are seen in picture postcards and advertising lingua franca and zooms with imaginary binoculars onto real issues of environmental degradation and the apathy that governs our existence.

The works are an amalgamation of painted surfaces and photographic cutouts, shots of the real city encounter imaginary worlds, the artifice of globalization creating a bizarre beauty that holds onto itself through delicate threads. “The onslaught of metropolitan life and our struggles to preserve our subjectivities give rise to an ontological insecurity, in the production of cities lie the hidden workings of desire and fear. Through the tropes of doubling and concealment, Hema Upadhyay brings together politics and poetics, urging us to understand the darkness of our lived moments, questioning the future of her city that lies threatened with the destruction of its own discovery. This bunch of artworks represents her memories and thoughts in very a different and fascinating style; the artist was famous for this unique style. In this work acrylic, gouache, dry pastels, photo cut-outs and photographs on arches paper are used by the artist.

One of Hema Upadhyay’s last completed works is with the farmers in Mumbai, getting readied for display at the India Art Fair, Delhi in January 2016. Another of her work is on display in Goa. Hema Upadhyay’s work ‘Evening (Home Coming)’ was planned to exhibited at India Art Fair in Delhi 2016.
Work of Early Days

Sweet Sweat Memories

‘Sweet Sweat Memories’ was the first solo show of Hema Upadhyay which was presented at Gallery Chemould Prescott road (Mumbai), in 2001. In this show, the work consisted of mix media on paper. In those works, she has used her own self-images to represent her ideas of migration, having moved to Mumbai in 1998. Hema’s artworks are generally characterized by the inclusion of miniature collage pictorial self-portraits. Tiny images of herself in a variety of positions, she has used them in her symbolic landscapes allowing them to interrelate with the pleasing eye and fictive environment. (See Plate No. 3.12)

‘Sweet Sweat Memories’ speak of a sense of alienation and loss and at the same time a feeling of awe and excitement one usually feels when in a new place. The large mixed media on paper works on display were inspired by the suicide of one of her neighbors as well as the confusion that arose in her as a result of living in an urban sprawl where dreams and aspirations are both excited and forcefully repressed. The title work in this show encapsulates these feelings perfectly. It is a close-up of a mouth, wide and smiling; only to reveal the decay and decadence that lurks everywhere.

In 2003, she did a collaborative work titled ‘Made in China’ (See Plate No. 3.13), which spoke about mass consumerism, globalization and a loss of identity through this. Her next collaboration was in 2006 when she collaborated with her mother, Bina Hirani, the work was titled Mum-my and was shown at the Chicago Cultural Centre.13
**Museum Exhibitions**

Hema extended her language to represent her thoughts with comprising installations in her work; from 2004 onwards her creative work or installations have been part of many groups shows at the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art Beijing, China; National Portrait Gallery Canberra, Australia; Centre Pompidou, Paris, France; Museum on the Seam, Jerusalem, Israel; MACRO museum, Rome, Italy; IVAM, Valencia, Spain; Mart Museum, Italy; Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan; Hanger Bicocca, Milan, Italy; Chicago Cultural Centre, Chicago, USA; Ecole Nationale Superieure des Beaux Arts, Paris, France; Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Fukuoka, Japan; Japan Foundation, Tokyo and the Henie Onstad Kunssenter, Oslo, Norway.

From India, she was the only artist who participated in the inaugural exhibition for the reopening of the Macro museum, Rome. Luca Massimi Barbero curated this exhibition. In this exhibition Hema created and presented her installation titled ‘Where the Bees Suck There Suck I’.

**Residencies and Workshops**

“Hema was invited for a residency in 2010 at Atelier Calder, Sache, France. At this residency, she completed the work ‘Only Memory has Preservatives’ (See Plate No. 3.14). This work was inspired by the natural surroundings in Sache, but also reflected ideas that have been part of her practice. Hema tried to replicate the forest in her studio, though not in the literal sense. Using copyright free images of certain trees found in the area, she created a landscape work without using materials from nature. The work is a process based experiment in trying to understand the inside - outside dichotomy. She has also been a part of residencies where she has explored
displacement related issues with an autobiographical approach. In 2003 she was part of the Vasl residency in Karachi, where she made a work titled ‘Loco-Foco-Motto’ (See Plate No. 3.15) (which she later in 2007 exhibited in a group show at the Hanger Bicocca, Milan, Italy) that spoke about the India-Pakistan divide keeping in mind her own family history related to the partition of India. The works were also a break from her trademark symbolism, they were more craft oriented as she used matchsticks and glue to make chandeliers. Constructed of thousands of un-ignited matchsticks assembled into elaborate chandeliers, these pieces embody an important element of Hindu ritual, symbolizing creation and destruction, a trend in her work, which explores violence co-existing with beauty”.

In her middle - age works; she brought about some positive changes in her work and introduced an additional layer as a sculptural element. In this time period of her work she was frequently utilized decorative surfaces, which too much resemble Indian religious iconography and traditional textile designs (See Plate No. 3.16). Hema’s marriage of these surfaces with her own image is meant to touch on themes of migration and displacement in South Asia and also reflect upon the existential plight of the artist as sole creator. Her use of shading and her depiction of smoke-like elements give the impression of claws of destruction; the theme is elucidated by the titles, ‘Killing Site’.

In one of her recent presentation, ‘Glass-House’ (2007), Hema Upadhyay continues to explore metropolitan subjectivities of immigration, isolation, and dislocation, via the individual self. The binaries of nature and culture, industrialization and expertise, virtual and real spaces are explored via the symbol of glass-house,
which is a modern architectural object, seductive and transparent but delicate/
breakable and risky/threatening at the same time. The modern individual function in
‘cells’, divided by transparent walls, detached from the community; the artist
articulates such descriptions of loneliness and privacy, equating the existing human
condition to the delicate illusion. One has to exhume like an archeologist to determine
the many secrets that her works withhold from the spectator. In her visual socio-
graphics, Hema Upadhyay scripts a human quandary that is now constituted by a
consistent series of spiritual, political, monetary, and social dilemmas. To ‘live’ the
city is to engage in some symbiotic relationship with it, to listen to it and converse
with it, but above all to wander from the beginning to the end and experience its
spaces. Hema Upadhyay both inhabits the city and formulates aesthetic trajectory of
escape, resisting cliché of representation. Her experimental dialogues where pasts and
presents come together include the epic, the cherished and the cosmic, that become
operational as ‘auto-conversations’, interweave into the urban configuration.

The use of photographs, the pictures of herself, was also a process of
documentation of the fact of the happening changes in the human body, the deteriorate
body. A pimple, a frown easily told the tale. On the process of her work, many people
have questioned her on the use of photographs. Why doesn’t she paint in the figures?
She answered all these questions in her bold and unique style - “I seriously feel that
painting the figure brings in some distortion, especially with the body language, or in
the facial expressions, which is not what I wanted to communicate”\(^{14}\).

The description of her work is autobiographical, where choosing the self-
becomes a gradual process, the self that at one point confronts certain personal phobias
Installation Art and an Indian Installation Artist – Hema Upadhyay

and shortcomings; and at another confronts other realities like that of identities and spaces, both public and private, that are hierarchically structured within the divisions of class, caste, religion and gender. Where the body becomes a site of receiving or reaction to these elements, where the self-balanced like a see-saw with the idea of rejection and acceptance, her work, ‘Sweet Sweat Memories’, speaks about Mumbai: one of India’s largest multicultural metros of India. Hundreds of people migrating to the city; a dream destination speaks its own rhetoric of acceptance and rejection; where the idea of acceptance is wrapped up with the idea of rejection. Here, one is constantly confronting issues related to migration.

While creating artworks, the concept becomes foremost. And whatever medium transports this concept to its destination she herself negotiates with that. Thought process is never drastically different when she has used various material or mediums, the approach to utilize those is certainly very different and that lets different works of art to lend themselves to different interpretations.

Hema's works reflect her assumption of the position of a migrant in Mumbai and her negotiations interrogate the multi-layered experiences of that, which is part of urban living. Her autobiographical positioning of herself as the protagonist also makes it possible for the work to be read as a gendered comment on space, her works interrogate the middle-class situation, which reflects the contexts in which they live, work, analyze and create. One of Hema's engagements is with the modern idea of the heterosexual couples and the pressures that can be exerted in public contexts. This can be read as a self-conscious act of negotiating the loss for private space for couples in the city and the pleasure of stolen moments, of private niches of intimacy in the city.
“Elsewhere, in an attempt to understand the ways in which the private inserts itself into the public, I have sought to examine the threat posed to conservative agendas by the presence of couples carving out an anonymous and very intimate space for themselves within public spaces”.15

Imagery from popular culture and mass manufacture are culled in her works, Hema Upadhyay conceptualizes her work similarly in the language of an advertising creation. Such deployment alludes to Pop Art in the fusion of object, image, and profitable product, with the focus on a singular image, blowing it up beyond human scale, in a dissident critique of the urban consumerist phenomenon. She has created storyboard of her ideas, scripting the urban landscape in color and form, then the photograph of herself and superimposes minuscule cloned cutouts on the painted image, in inconsistent pictorial angles; she has merged and emerges in the pictorial space, obscure, real and imagined mappings of the city. Hema Upadhyay articulates observer-participant dialectic, taking viewers away from predictable trajectory and jolting them into a new awareness of urban landscapes. We find her dangerously leaning on the edges of terrace on skyscrapers, ready to leap into a surrounding blue deep hole, scramble up the facade of lofty horrifying buildings (In Between B413/414 and A2-403, 2001), in the air above the crowded cityscapes, looking for organic breathing space, purification of the ‘black’ accumulate foam on human teeth in a simulated image of a ‘white’ toothpaste advertisement (Sweet Memories 2001), or enact the labored lives of metropolitan working women who travel on Bombay’s frothing local trains juxtapose against an imagery of overcrowded apartments (Urban Landscape, 2004). There is an unrelenting engagement, to borrow from Walter
Benjamin, with both the “physiognomy of the city, (as a space to be read) and its phenomenology (as mythology, history, politics, and text)”.

Self representation, itself an inconsistent and iterative construction, is as much psychological and aesthetic; locating the ‘I’ in the empire of the ‘Other’, Hema Upadhyay places herself in a psycho-physical area, with the body situated, dislocate and relocated, interweaving private and social experience with the worlds of imaginings and cities. She navigates the empire of the politics/poetics of remembrance in a surrealist/post-modernist language that combines presentation in painting while also amalgamate photos, collaborative and site-specific Installations; she deploys the body/self as a subject and object in art. For Hema Upadhyay, the engagement with her own body and its presentation has been a slow but sure process, exploring physical and psychological process seen through her personal eyes. Hema Upadhyay has maintained a serious distance from explicit presentations of the feminine self, and in her earlier work, the body emerges as a present nonappearance, via emblematic objects that marked human traces and story of habitation. As an artistic subject who enters into a discussion with herself as the art object, with the outer world as a space of differing possibilities and encounter, Hema Upadhyay hides as much as she reveals, resisting narcissistic portrayal and gendered construction of the female body.

Since she has chosen to narrate the routine sounds by modifying their pitch, speed and also reverse some sounds, the work at some point appears surreal. The sound was also more of a response to the space chosen for the show. The Fine Art Corporation, Mumbai has a basement space, so for an observer to walk underground into a very quiet area, and yet hear the same traffic sounds or food preparation or
people talking, became one of the disconnected points from the every day. The volume was kept quite high, so that it hovers over the viewer at different interval to make a discussion difficult.

At the same time, she also worked on a group exhibition called ‘Sic’, an audio-visual installation in which she and her spouse wished to call attention to the surface of their daily observation so that they become aware of the complexity that prowls underneath. This show brought together four artists to create a body of work that retains individual histories and ideological affinity; they chose ‘Urban Metropolitan Space’ as the theme for the show. Chintan Upadhyay was also a part of that show, and that was the first time she realizes that Chintan and she were looking for to explore the possibilities of verbal communication in one language. They shared some ordinary ideological position, too, about cultural creations and their instant atmosphere. From here as a couple and as artists they started many of their other mutual projects, discussion, accepting and rejecting many other issues.

**Place of Hema’s Work in Art World**– Taking a very short time to established herself, she has built up her career (MFA - 1997) in a creative field, after completing her education she took a gigantic step and established herself very confidently among the new generation of Indian contemporary artists.

Hema Upadhyay received a National Scholarship from the Ministry of Human Resources, and also received Annual Awards from the Gujarat Lalit Kala Academy and the national Lalit Kala Academy for her creative and stunning work in the tenth International Triennale which India hosted in New Delhi.
To gather creative works in personal and business collections, Hema’s works have been acquired by museums in India and abroad. She was a well-known painting or Installation artist of India and has represented India at the Biennale, Triennials in New Delhi. She was a renowned artist of India at National and International platforms too. She has been invited by the many countries for residencies and workshops. Our Nation is proud of her for her achievements. She has achieved a special place in India and also at international level in art field with her creative works.
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