

Sumakshi Singh
at the exhibition



SHEKHAR YADAV

IN HER MOTHER'S MEMORY GARDEN

Artist Sumakshi Singh explores the concept of fragility, transient life and time at Chennai exhibition

By ASHRAFI BHAGAT

Floral representations accompanied by bees and birds were exhibited within glass cases and frames at Art Houz in Chennai. Visually, these challenged the viewer in its identification as either line drawings or prints. But a closer look revealed embroidery as a medium, which was

made from silky threads on a base that was almost invisible. Artworks by internationally acclaimed artist and educator, Delhi-based Sumakshi Singh, 36, were exhibited in her show titled 'In the Garden'. Singh's approach to creation was grounded in her empiricism that made her engage with experiences. She says, "For me, ideas often arrive as a combination of a visual and the

feeling it will generate. Then I determine the materials I need to use to get a clearer picture. So I don't really work 'concept down'; in fact many times the last thing that gets sharpened is what the artwork is about." The exhibition was "sort of a homage to my mother and her love for gardening". Singh lost her mother three years ago. With her father getting frequent trans-

fers, she has lived in most Indian cities, including Chennai. On moving to a new place, her mother's first work would be to lay out an artistic garden. With a versatile and creative mother as a role model, Singh from the age of two wanted to be an artist. The exhibition explored the concept of fragility, transient life, time and memories. It was divided into three sections with an in-

teractive video installation of painted flowers in motion to reveal the live garden.

When asked if these works were experiments, she says, "I don't really think of it as 'I am experimenting'—even though I use a variety of media because somehow the underlying urge is the same. For me, making something is one of the fullest, most satisfying and nuanced ways of processing feelings. As I start making things, some understanding of where I am within myself gets more refined. In this processing of everything, ideas arrive unexpectedly taking me on a new adventure."

The love for craft inherited from her mother made her close to embroidery. She says, "The idea came when I was embroidering, and felt that it should have a levitating character, which the structure of the cloth prevented by making it heavy. Perhaps cut work would have extended the idea, and I was unhappy. This let me try out forms on a gossamer material." Hence, her emotions and thoughts trans-

lated, corresponding with her visual language. The end-product became an extension of memories as transient time with spatial saliency of fragility, airiness, lightness, and the flowers became memories of her mother. The first embroidered work she created was the letter written by her mother, in which she had sent flowers. These flowers were like palimpsest trapping time and space, equivalent to hovering thoughts and experiences. With this two-dimensional referential point, her form of embroidery mandated that the base material remain invisible.

The translation of her idea through the craft medium was not only challenging but equally dynamic in its presentation. Through almost invisible threads she had flowers such as Sweet William, Orchids, Milk Thistle, Hydrangea, Water Lettuce, Sea Algae, Lotus, Pitcher Plant and African Violets. The aesthetics of delicate linearity, of non-chroma crafted in black and white, the intricate play of positive and negative spaces, the gossamer weightlessness and the small dimensions of forms established her exploration of the medium of embroidery—elevating craft to art, leaving the viewer wondering where art started and craft ended.

Singh partially did her schooling in Chennai, and later studied BFA at the MS University, Baroda and obtained her master's from the Art Institute of Chicago, where she also taught for five years. She has mentored residencies for the Victoria and Albert Museum and was a visiting artist advisor at KHOJ Delhi.

