



ALWAR BALASUBRAMANIAM, *Into One*, 2011–14, cast aluminum, patina and lacquer, 183 × 122 × 107 cm. Courtesy the artist.

Layers of Wind, Lines of Time

ALWAR BALASUBRAMANIAM

MEENAKSHI THIRUKODE
TALWAR GALLERY



ALWAR BALASUBRAMANIAM, *Here and There*, 2015, plywood and acrylic, 61 × 61 × 33 cm. Courtesy the artist.

The “gestural” exists as a shallow act of mere rhetoric—one that lacks what novelist and social critic James Baldwin described as the “integrity of the artistic practice”—and as a poetically precise and self-aware act, which we are so desperately seeking in order to move away from the fraught contexts that the art world often becomes immersed in. If there is a certain overarching narrative that exists within the global contemporary, it is that the discourses which artists, curators, critics and institutions partake in often broadly relegate the “gestural” as jargon, and not language. “Jargon” creates contexts that often belie a lack of truthfulness or depth in an artist’s practice. “Language,” on the other hand, demands rigor from both its communicator and receiver to achieve understanding.

Our present is immersed in a giddy state of self-absorption and imbalance, where one hopes not to fall off the edge. In this world, “stillness”—in terms of geography, thought and being - is a position of privilege, and one that is acutely sentient. Such a space, both literally and metaphorically, can be entered through the many chapters of Alwar Balasubramaniam (Bala)’s artistic practice. His solo show, “Layers of

Wind, Lines of Time,” at Talwar Gallery in New Delhi, functions essentially as a conduit into a larger narrative that Bala has been constructing over the years in his works. In what is seemingly an object-based practice, Bala’s strength lies in the materiality of his pieces. His process and ethos is the closest thing we have to the notion of gesture as “language.” His is a practice that makes us acutely conscious of the imperceptible—it is not so much a revelation as it is a reminder of how frayed our sense of perception is.



Installation view of **ALWAR BALASUBRAMANIAM**’s “Layers of Wind, Lines of Time” at Talwar Gallery, New Delhi, 2015. Courtesy the artist.

In the midst of various forms of the “invisible” within the gallery space, one is forced to consider this particular realm of the present. Every piece adds to Bala’s lexicon of the unseen—wind, sun, light and time. One of the strongest pieces in the show, *Into One* (2011–14), a large, blue-black cast aluminum sculpture, is inspired by the subtractive process that nature takes in changing its forms. Bala created this work through the act of removing that which is palpable. Like most forms we come across in nature, from sand dunes to sedimentary rocks, the abstract shape of *Into One* reminds us of the limitations of our own senses of perception. The visible forms and contours of the sculpture direct us to the negative spaces within and outside of it. It demands the viewer to consider the process of looking—the act of true observation—as an unlearning of how we see. While works like *In Conversation* (2014), a sculpture that resembles stratified rock, seems to work as a standalone piece, through its juxtaposition with a work like *Here and There* (2015)—in which a jagged hole drilled through the gallery wall revealed sedimentary layers of acrylic—it projects an interesting crisscrossing of meanings that lie in between the binaries of the visible and invisible.

In essence, Bala’s is a practice that demands viewers to engage with works that are from various points of a continuing journey. He also requires his viewer to move further beyond the inherent constraints of formats set within the systems that present his work. As an artist who has oftentimes been asked—like many of his contemporaries—where the “Indian-ness” of his practice lies, opaqueness is central to his language, in that his works demand to be read. One has to work hard to gain from them, rather than take a superficial route.

“Alwar Balasubramaniam: Layers of Wind, Lines of Time” is on view at Talwar Gallery, New Delhi, until August 30, 2015.