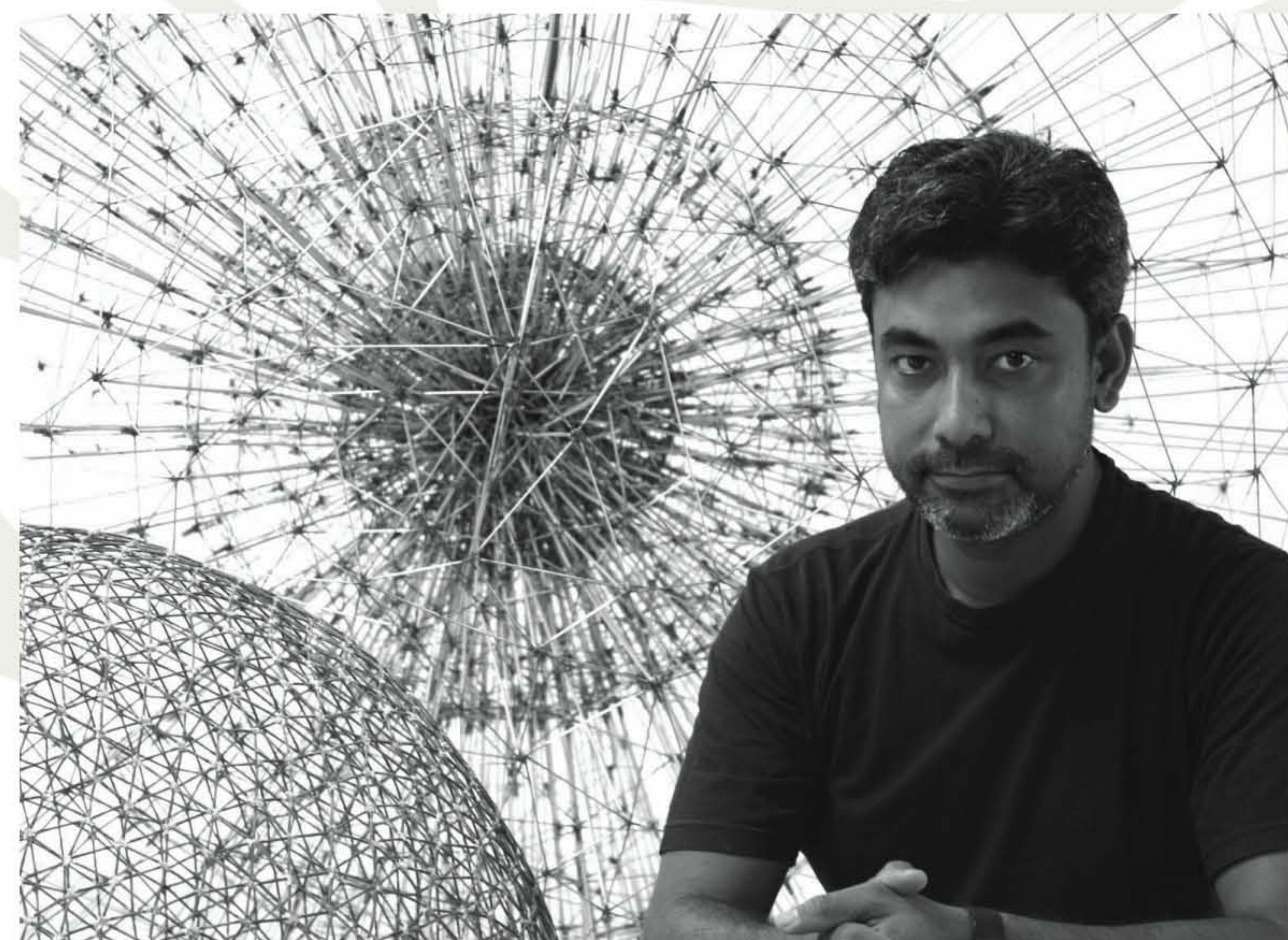


Making sense out of nothing at all

There's more than meets the eye in the works of Alwar Balasubramaniam. The question is whether you can look beyond the physical to see what's not there. BY LISA-ANN LEE



at New Delhi's Talwar Gallery, is a continuation of the themes that have followed him in his career.

"Works are like footprints; they are isolated and different from each other but also a continuity of the same source. When I began 20 years ago, it was about traces, and what pushed me were invisible spaces. The works in *Nothing From My Hands* mostly explore hidden spaces and traces of the body. It is a continuation of the work I was doing earlier except they push the boundaries further," he explains. "The intention is to create the moment in which one becomes aware of that which exists but that we fail to see."

Can the person sitting beside you change your life?

Bangalore-based sculptor Alwar Balasubramaniam thinks so. After all, if it wasn't for a conversation he had with a stranger on a train when he was 13, the thought of enrolling in art school probably wouldn't have occurred to him. "So you know, maybe whoever's sitting next to you can change your whole life – it's possible. It is that we need to be open and fine-tuned."

Keeping an open mind is a requisite when it comes to viewing Balasubramaniam's works. Indeed, his fascination with the invisible and inexpressible may frustrate museum-goers accustomed to more tangible works. His art – which often includes trademark sculptural pieces that evoke disembodied anatomical parts (cast from his own body) and emerge mysteriously from walls –

constantly raises philosophical questions about our notions of self and the way we perceive reality. Explaining this, he says: "It is with limited senses that we conceive reality, but we are not getting the full picture. Consider the elements essential to our life: light, gravity, electricity, air... all of them are invisible, but that doesn't mean they aren't there. We know our senses are limited yet we are always trying to define things."

Described by *The New York Times* art critic Holland Cotter as "young, savvy and in the middle of a spurt of growth," Balasubramaniam has found admirers around the world, and his works have been exhibited in places such as New York's Museum of Modern Art, Austria's Essl Museum and the inaugural Singapore Biennale in 2006. His latest exhibition, *Nothing From My Hands*, on show recently

While artists are typically categorised based on genre or time period, Balasubramaniam has deliberately eschewed such

🌀 UNTITLED

A subtle crack – a trace is exposed on the wall – employing the architecture of the space as medium in the work.



ALWAR BALASUBRAMANIAM. COURTESY OF TALWAR GALLERY, NEW YORK/NEW DELHI

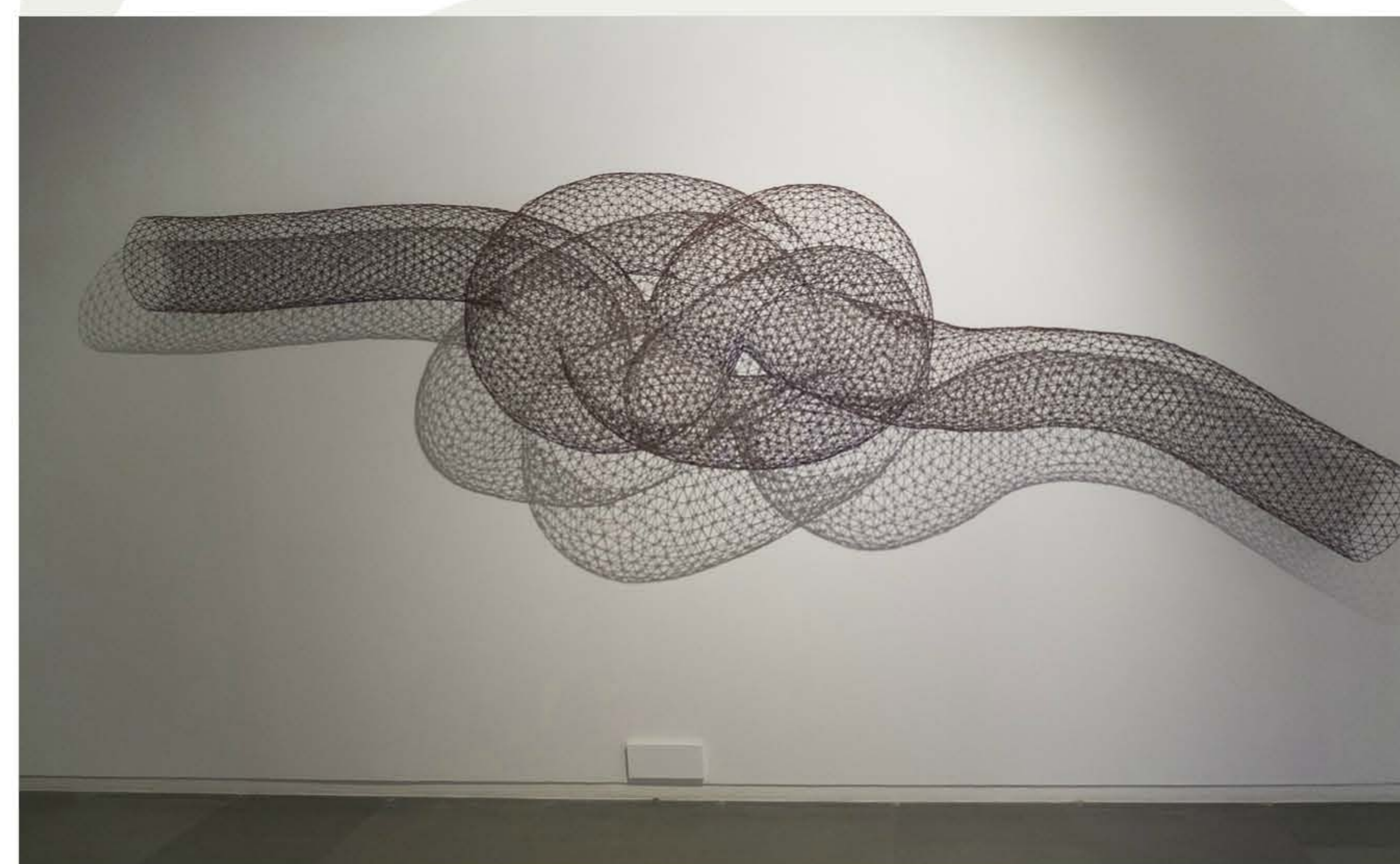


🌀 DEAD-LINE

The line is suspended, lifeless in space, simultaneously lending the large metal piece an air of lightness and mass.

🌀 HOLD NOTHING

Forms emerging from the body reveal themselves in unexpected and ethereal formations, allowing the experience of the imperceptible.



🌀 KNOTS

Twisting and folding into itself, the inside and outside – which represent the self and the other, respectively – are merged together to exist as one.

🌀 NOTHING FROM MY HANDS

In casting the unseen space between clasped hands, Balasubramaniam captures and materialises a form which ceases to exist when the hands are opened.



categories, preferring to be known as someone "who creates art." His refusal to give audiences easy answers means there are those who leave without being any wiser about his intent. Indeed, art critic and head of India's prestigious Skoda Art Award prize selection committee Girish Sahaney believes that this may be one of the reasons he isn't as popular as some of his contemporaries. "He has not gotten his due since he is not one of the more prolific and visible artists. His work is not that easy to appreciate."