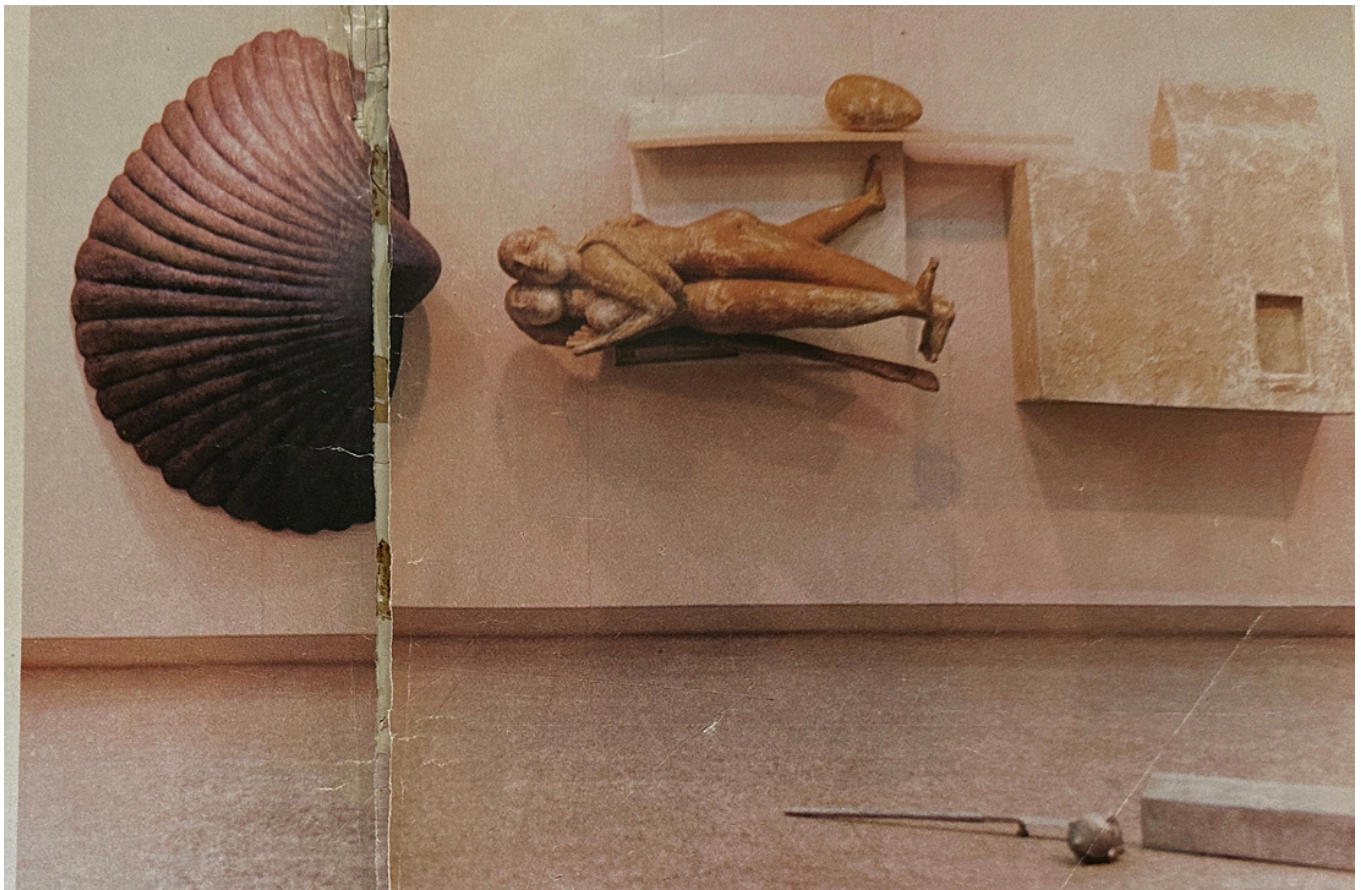


ARTIST'S SKETCHBOOK

**This  
Conundrum:  
The Sculpture of  
NIN RIMZON**

Written by Rasna Bhushan





Towards the attaining of an absolute state of being, it is the state of non-being that must be experienced. Perhaps all acts that seek transcendence harbour a notion of ground zero, that original void that contains a potential for continual regeneration. Art, in so much as it is seen as 'the most active metaphor for the spiritual project in the modern era', (Susan Sontag in *The Aesthetics of Silence*) can be both the means and the obstacle— by virtue of its materiality and the historicity of its language— to transcendence. To expose, dismantle and reach beyond the constructions of 'knowledge', seeking that intuition of 'unknowing', that reflexive consciousness: this is the project of art.

Metaphors of evacuation, stasis, silence, absence and death are used in a work of art in strategic relationship with the dynamic of affirmation, of life. Paradoxical conditions collide, provoking new meanings: 'Beautiful as the chance encounter of an umbrella and a sewing machine on a dissecting table'. (From Lautremont's poem *Chants de Maldorer*).



Manja  
Sankirthanangal, 1991  
Painted fiberglass

Manja Sankirthanangal. *Yellow Psalms*. The sculpture comprises three object-units. A life-size lovemaking couple float horizontal about three feet off the floor. Above a raised leg of the female figure hovers a four feet long wooden plank on which balances a large egg. A monumental blue shell, five feet diameter, balloons on the left of this unit while on the right a schematised house hangs almost flat against the wall. All three units hang about one foot away from each other, the entire sculpture spanning twenty feet of wall.

Manja Sankirthanangal.

*Yellow Psalms*. The two words of the title seem to cancel each other out.

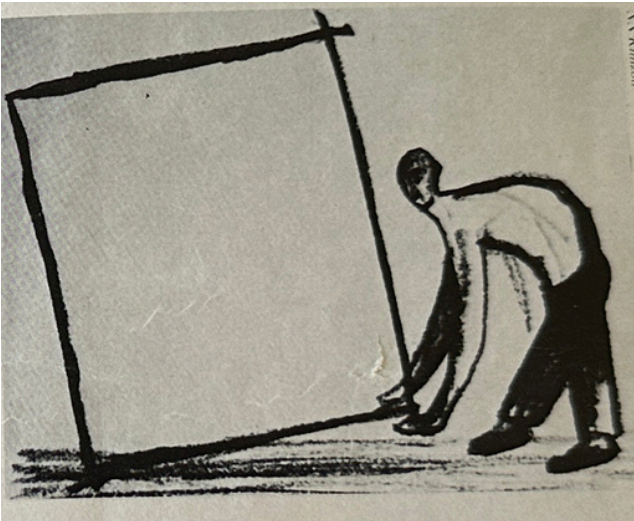
*Yellow*. Not saffron, though possibly. *Yellow*: as in yellow writing, evoking weakness, lacking in conviction, even a lying claim.

*Psalms*: sacred songs, evoking divine authority, holy scriptures.

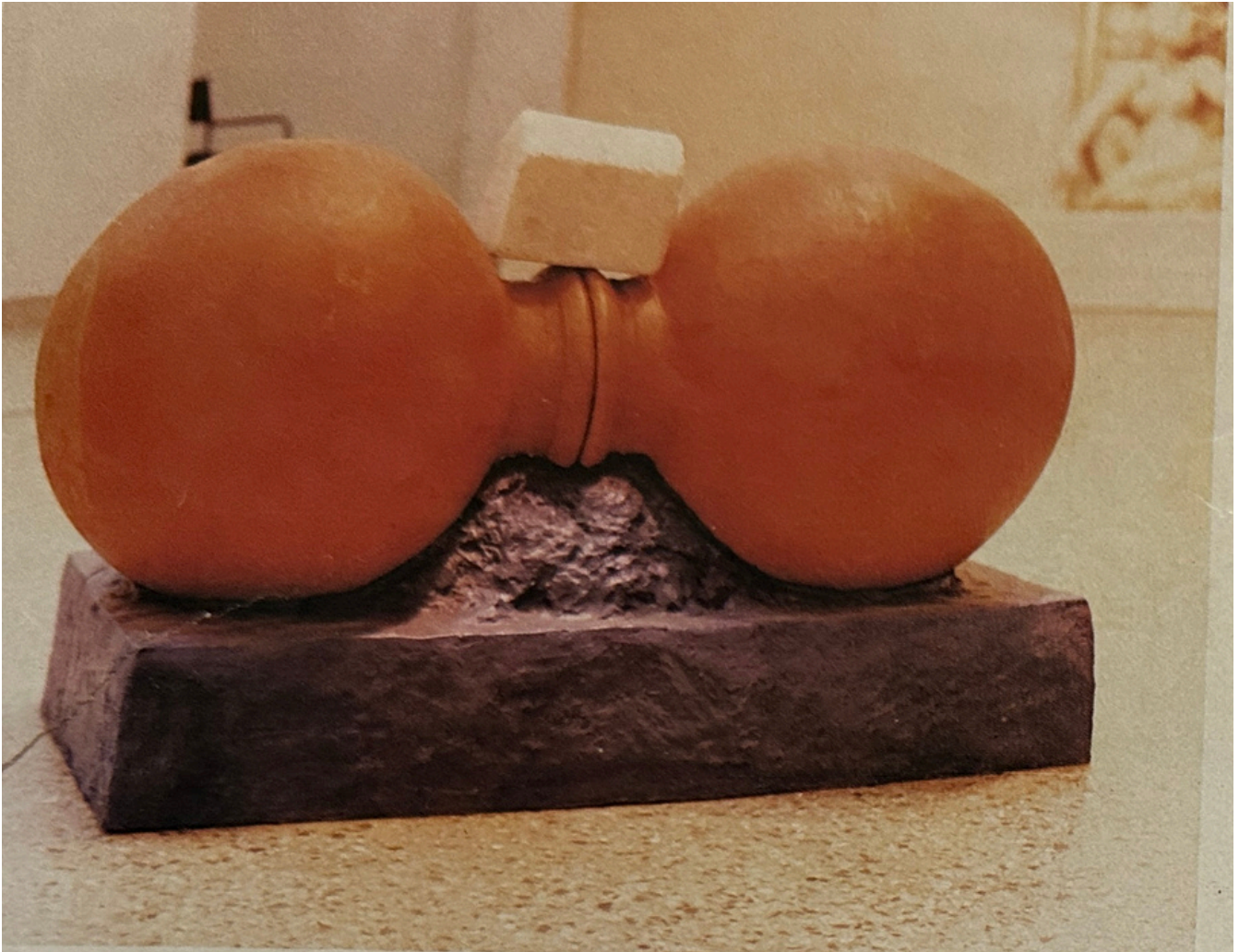
*Rimzon: I don't believe in a title for my works. But a work must have a title. The title should mislead. Because it can never really say what the work actually is.*

The title plays an ironical role here. It tells you what the sculpture is not. It is not about the sacred. It is not about the profane. Yet, between the denials that are meant to fob one off, one hears whispered clues.

**Man with a square,  
1989. Charcoal on  
paper**



**Black Bird, 1989.  
Charcoal on paper**



Yellow Psalms. The truths of sacred songs rung hollow, demolished. Yet, truth that transcends its own collapse, insistent, emergent in every sham.

**From the Ghats of Yamuna, 1991.  
terracotta, fibreglass,  
marble**

Yellow Psalms. The opaqueness of the lie and the transparency of truth; the knowledge of what we look unto and the realisation of what we see through.

This chant of contradictions. This conundrum.

In a split second the viewer becomes aware of denials, assertions, ambiguities that strain his encounter with the sculpture. The objects hold back, close in on themselves; motionless and silent they seem to deny the presence of the spectator. Motionless and silent they seem to appeal for their own abolition. Even as the sculpture represents objects, denotes to them a word, (this shape and form has a name: shell, house, man, woman) its silence evacuates them of the elements of speech, blanking out language. Memory as a tool of identification suffers from amnesia. Similarly, stasis, in so far as it signifies non-life, negates the beingness of the sculptural body. It creates a space of the missing or absent. To actually view each object one is compelled to **stop**, look frontally at it from a distance of several feet and even as one simulates the freeze of



**From tje Ghats of  
Yamuna II, 1991.  
Charcoal, pasted on  
paper**



**Blue Moon in October,  
1989. Plaster, metal,  
wood and charcoal**



the image, the body stilled, mirroring stasis, one is aware of the release of associations that cross-refer, conflict and overlap. Then, as the gaze scatters between disparate objects, the release gathers momentum.

Silence and stasis. With their effects of disidentification these dislodge the objects from the here and now — and by extension the spectator who occupies their common space— setting them afloat, as in a dream.

**Hut, Egg and Sword,  
1991. Charcoal on  
paper**

'Because it is in a dream that men, at last reduced to silence, commune with the signification of things and allow themselves to be touched by enigmatic, insistent words that come from elsewhere'. (Michel Foucault, *This is Not a Pipe*).

*Rimzon: I want you, the spectator, to feel as if you are seeing a dream, and it is invading your mind. We have a tendency to rationalise but there are things we cannot understand rationally. We must find other means. Imagination, intuition — that's the key. I bring forth images from my unconscious. It is not the dream-like image that I want but the experience of a dream. It's that sort of transformation that I'm interested in.*

With the disembodiment of the image from objective reality and its re-embodiment in the realm of dream where they are recast by the artist's desire, the psychological is introduced in the work. Here, objects exist as metaphors marking the intersection of material reality, idea and desire, yoking separate phenomena by the peculiar 'logic' of imagination.



**Story told by a Rat,  
1988. Painted plaster**

It is important that the images in Manja Sankirthanangal are not fantastical. They are clearly recognisable images rendered in exact resemblance to a shell, human body, archetypal house. However, certain elements are made to work as shifters from object-reality. Distortions in scale make a shell larger than life-size human figures, and a hut disfunctionally reduced. There is a play of analogy and contrast: the object is analogous to a shell; the altered scale and its juxtaposition with the other images contradicts the analogy. This is other than a shell. Released from its singular identity the shell multiplies; becomes a marker for 'otherness' pointing now towards the object, now towards the spectator.

Further, there is no linking narrative, no coherent motif. The images are discrete, separated from each other by an entirely neutral space of wall. We stare transfixed at each solitary and static object, then shift our eyes to another with a slight slip into nothingness. Alterations in scale and the absence of a narrative logic, work as pointers to the strategic discontinuity of experience. Meanings are produced precisely by retaining a visual authenticity in the simulacrum, and then through methods of dislocation creating a gap in the actual space shared by the sculpture and the spectator. A fissure in the rational order is opened up. This breaks habits of perception, exposing cultural stereotypes and the mythology of the real they create.

Stumbling upon the unexpected object is a matter of pure 'accident'; the surprise created by the interruption of the everyday. This chance encounter acquires the drama of a revelation.



*Rimzon: I roam the streets looking for material. It could be something very ordinary — like a clay pot. But at that moment I get a very strong feeling from it. Back in my studio I leave it around to transform in interaction with the other things around while I daydream over it. This is like alchemy. Objects react with the unconscious from where the images emerge. There is no rationality here. I want my objects to hit your soul.*

The found object as a thing-in-itself has no meaning, its significance is **willed** by the artist. The 'surprise' encounter between object and viewer is the site where unconscious desires of the viewer coincide with the revelatory potential of the chanced upon object. This encounter is an allusion to the belief that the world outside, of which the found object is representative, contains within it an alternate reality and is, in fact, transformable.

I want to foreground the **encounter** between object and viewer. An encounter that is located in that space that the sculptural object projects as some sort of theatrical stage for the dramatic interplay of experiences.

Sculptural language must tackle the problem of excavating meanings through material even as it works inversely by casting 'the material' as a manifestation of desire; as a sign. Material here has a similar function as the found object in offering itself as notational to another reality. Materials trigger a relay of associations in the viewer that are essentially non-corporeal, thereby dematerialising the sculptural body, transferring its bodily presence into a perceptual experience. In a mirror condition the viewer disembodies himself replicating the non-physicality of the work and meeting it in the field of supreme imagination. Bodies, then, become conduits of transference creating a 'fiction of non-presence' to borrow Rosalind Krauss' words.

The challenge therefore, is to body-forth concept - to create a continual flux between bodily experience of reality and a reflexive consciousness. With the dissolution of 'objectness' the programme is one of rendering the spectator as a 'desiring subject' and the image as manifest desire, both these put up as conceptual constructs.

Take the sculpture Blue Moon in October. Propped against the wall a plaster relief has figures of a man and woman in erotic embrace, the ripe swelling forms and open sensuality recalling a 'mithuna' couple from ancient Indian sculpture. Encased in a wooden box, the unit marks itself within a certain framework: tradition institutionalised, a museum exhibit. Balanced above this, a crusty metal bumper of a vehicle bends as an arc of a potentially encircling form. Picking up the impulse, a charcoal line draws full circle on the wall, hovering mirage-like, an



anticipation of both a completion of impulse in the solid matter of the metal arch and a negation in its own imminent erasure.

*Rimzon: I am consistently trying to prove that sculpture is the perfect tool to interpret reality. But to do this I had to not make art. For, if one seeks to create art one ends up making objects. So I decided not to make any more 'sculpture'. The answer lay in the realisation of the concept. That is the most important thing.*

**Artist's studio, Royal  
College of Art, London,  
1988**

This illusory condition is contained and transformed into a force by the gravitational energy of the metal arch and passed through to the relief below, recharging it. The fresh impetus provokes a re-experiencing of the art historical vignette: an ancient crack on a face bleeding red, stylised torso awakening to warm, fleshy tones, the figures swelling out of defining frames. The entire installation works like an ideogram and its components are meticulously put together. There is a conflation of direct sensuous experience — the physics of material — with the reading of visual texts.

Now imagine the work dismantled. The charcoal circle wiped off the gallery's wall, the car bumper lying around the artist's studio, the plaster relief shelved. I am reminded of Marcel Duchamp's positing of the art object as the 'composite effect of the interplay of its visual appearance, title and cultural context'