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A. Balasubramaniam, *Studies of a Shadow of a Shadow*, Fibreglass, wood and acrylic, 150" x 17" x 19", 2007.

The Inner of the Outer



A. Balasubramaniam explores metaphysical thought, corporeal presences and abstract absences in his investigation of spaces as **Ella Datta** watches enthralled.

A. Balasubramaniam, *Aagya Devalli*, Fibreglass, wood, acrylic, Dimension variable (four parts), 2006.

A. BALASUBRAMANIAM'S survey of a world that is beyond the commonplace continues. He relentlessly delves into his self and surroundings to record experiences that are intangible – spaces that are beyond measure and echoes that can barely be heard by the human ear. One encountered this quest for a meta-reality, yet again, in the exhibition *(In)Between* from August 22nd to November 21st at Talwar Gallery in New Delhi.

In the dozen or so sculptural installations and some graphic works, Balasubramaniam experimented with space, forms, material and scale. He has worked with fibreglass, magnet, wire, metal, stone and the like in the past. He says, "I always question what I see." At the same time, he engages the viewer in a mysterious journey seeking the "invisible aspect of life."

Questioning the unseen and the unknown have been recurrent themes in his work, over the last ten years.

Balasubramaniam often used to make small works that were austere and grid-like with diverse objects like pins and address tags. From pure abstraction to the gradual discovery of the body, from sensory organs to other organic forms, his excursions into an unpredictable terrain have yielded exciting works. The most engrossing sculptural installation at this show was *Kaayam* (2008), a set of four pieces, depicting the dissolution of the human body. Balasubramaniam has been casting his own body in plaster since 2002. A life-sized seated figure done at that time called *Self in Progress* encapsulated the notion of a journey. Over the years, Balasubramaniam has used body-casts in many ways. In *Kaayam*, the collapse of the physical self, shown through four figures in different stages, also incorporates the notion of time. The fascinating folds and planes of the figures, sharply delineated at first and then dissolving in a heap, display an intricacy of technique.

Balasubramaniam casts himself in plaster first and then makes a rubber mould from that cast. "It is the process that is important. The image that emerges is only a by-product," he says. As Balasubramaniam engages with the nature and the limits of the corporeal, he gets absorbed



A. Balasubramaniam. *Shell as Body*. Fibreglass, wood and acrylic. 18" x 8" x 21". 2007. IMAGES COURTESY TALWAR GALLERY NEW YORK/ NEW DELHI.

in metaphysical speculations – the idea of the container and the contained, for example, exercises him quite obviously. *Shadow of a Shadow of a Shadow* (2007) addressed the notion of the container effectively. It explored the forms of an open cardboard box and the way it transcended the limits set upon it by its structure. The work referred to Balasubramaniam's early Minimalist constructs. The concept of a core, an inner being and an outer casing recurs in much of his work.

Continuing his experiments with spatiality, Balasubramaniam appropriated architectural elements within a couple of installations as well. In *Outreach* (2008), two arms stretched and struggled to keep two adjoining walls from colliding and collapsing. Similarly, in *Link* (2009), a filament was tensely stretched, both to connect the adjoining walls and to

mark out a terrain: this work reminded one of an earlier work, *Rest in Resistance* (2007). On the opposite wall, there was *Shell as Body* (2007) – a cast of a conch revealing the void within.

Despite the philosophical aspect, Balasubramaniam's work does not preclude the sensuous; it includes a large measure of wit. The crevices, the orifices, the sensory organs and the various forms invited the viewer to a mysterious journey full of unmapped experiences. *Shell as Body* and *Energy Field* bore ample testimony to these possibilities. *Shell as Body* held the promise of profound experiences, and at the same time, was layered with tantalizing nuances. *Energy Field* (2009), made with magnets and rust, had forms that looked dredged from the depths of the subconscious – the work was witty and monstrous at the same time.

Hints and multiple clues are very much a feature of Balasubramaniam's works. In the silk screen print *Orifice* (2008), one responded to the possibility of many narratives buried in the red spatters. One saw the artist moving between the representational and the abstract with ease in most of the works – this is definitely one quality that sets him apart from many of his contemporaries.