

SPOTLIGHT SCULPTURE TODAY

5 Things to Know About Sculpture Right Now

1 SCULPTURE TODAY

Contemporary artists make careful choices about the materials they use and the ways they use space and scale. Often the ideas they explore reflect current events and social issues. Subodh Gupta (suh-BOHD GUHP-tun) is one of the most famous artists in India. His dazzling stainless steel sculptures are crowd-pleasers. But works like his 2012 *Ray* are also rich with messages about contemporary consumer culture in India.

“The objects are my material, they are like my clay or canvas, they are never the work itself.”
—Subodh Gupta



2 MATERIALS

Some contemporary artists use traditional materials—such as metal or stone—in innovative ways. Others introduce unconventional materials—like found objects. The materials they use influence the work's meaning. Gupta makes sculptures, like *Ray*, with stainless steel cooking utensils found in junkyards. These objects are familiar to anyone who lives in India, where they are standard tools in kitchens. By using these commonplace objects in a new way, Gupta plays with the meaning already attached to them.

3 SCALE AND SPACE

A sculptor can emphasize his or her message through the scale of the work and the space where it's installed. Standing nearly 20 feet tall, *Ray* is a monumental sculpture and its scale is significant. Imagine how different the work would be if it were only 5 feet—or even 2 feet—tall. The impact would be far less dramatic. Gupta also installed the work outdoors. The pots and pans spill across a grassy lawn, creating a connection between the manufactured objects and the natural environment.



4 MESSAGE

When artists make careful choices about how to use materials, scale, and space, the results can be stunning. With pots and pans pouring from a monumental bucket in *Ray*, Gupta refers to a horn of plenty (also called a cornucopia), a traditional symbol of abundance. With more than 1.3 billion residents, India is densely populated and waste is a big problem. Gupta's transformation of large quantities of utensils common to every home in India makes a powerful statement about waste. The artist uses the work's monumental scale and the contrast between the stainless steel objects and the natural environment to represent the effects of human consumption on Earth.

5 THE FIGURE

Some contemporary artists continue to find new ways of sculpting the figure—but not all do. Gupta's sculpture doesn't include a representation of a figure, but the figure is still an important part of this work. That's because the viewer is the figure! Imagine standing next to this 20-foot-tall sculpture. You would probably feel very small by comparison. By encouraging his viewers to think about their own size relative to the scale of this sculpture, Gupta emphasizes his message about the negative effects of consumer culture.



Why might Gupta incorporate a symbol of abundance into a work about waste?

Subodh Gupta (b. 1964), *Ray*, 2012. Stainless steel. 20 feet tall, 5 feet wide, 5 feet deep. (C) 2012 Subodh Gupta. All rights reserved. Photograph by Robert N. VandenBerg/Getty Images.

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