

# **SUBODH GUPTA**

## EVERYDAY DIVINE

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*Subodh Gupta: Everyday Divine* is an exhibition of works by one of India's pre-eminent contemporary artists, drawn from the private collection of Larry Warsh, New York.

Subodh Gupta was born in 1964 in the Indian province of Bihar, which has remained the poorest and least developed area of India since independence. From this humble beginning, Gupta has become the most iconic contemporary artist in India, widely renowned for his ambitious works of art.

Gupta's work celebrates the visible traces of everyday life for many Indians. Having grown up in a devout Hindu household – a religion that considers everything around us, and everywhere, to be imbued with the divine – Gupta elevates the objects found in domestic and street life to a position of spiritual worship. By so doing the artist provides an opportunity to appreciate, relish and celebrate the humble, and to reflect on our place in the world.

Exhibition essay available at [ngv.to/essay](http://ngv.to/essay)

# Hungry God

2005–06

stainless steel

Collection of Larry Warsh, New York

*Hungry God* is emblematic of the creative ambition that has led to great international acclaim for Subodh Gupta. The work is made up of an enormous number of stainless-steel kitchen utensils, stacked in a mound as a quasi-religious offering, at a scale that inspires awe. The artist likens the modern-day kitchen to that of a secular temple and its implements to idols. Through this major work he offers a multitude of tiffin-pots, and no doubt the food they might produce or carry on a daily basis, to satisfy a 'hungry god'.

# **Magic wands**

2002

chrome-plated aluminium

Collection of Larry Warsh, New York

Gupta draws on the concept of the readymade, inaugurated by French artist Marcel Duchamp, whereby, through the act of taking an existing object from the everyday and transposing it into the art gallery context, the object becomes art. This relocated phalanx of leaning poles, cast in aluminium, would be recognisable to anyone who has visited India, where bamboo poles are used to construct temporary structures employed in the market or by street vendors.

# **This side is the other side**

2001

bronze, aluminium, stainless steel

Collection of Larry Warsh, New York

# Curry

2006

stainless steel

Collection of Larry Warsh, New York

Cultural references resonate within the make up of this artwork: the use of stainless steel in bowls, plates and cups is synonymous with the modernisation and economic development of India in the twentieth century. Replacing *kansa* (or bell metal, a brittle bronze featuring a high proportion of tin), stainless steel came to transform the kitchen and eating utensils used in everyday life in India in the 1950s and 1960s. The nod to the multitudes of India is made in this work, where straightforward, comparatively small individual elements are brought together at such a scale that they transcend their everyday nature.

# Fly with me

2006

aluminium, steel

Collection of Larry Warsh, New York

The act of travelling is the subject of *Fly with me*, featuring shelves of aluminium luggage pieces. The work nods to the formation of independent India and the lived experience of the seismic event, in 1947, of partition of the colonial British Indian Empire and the creation of the independent countries of India and Pakistan. A mass-movement of people took place across the new countries along religious and political lines, with between 14 and 15 million people displaced.

This work also references the recent increase in Indians travelling overseas for study or work, and to dreaming, in entrepreneurial ways, of how to transcend one's economic situation, caste or place.

# Cow

2003

bronze, aluminium

Collection of Larry Warsh, New York

These cast bronze and aluminium sculptures of a life-sized bicycle and motor scooter, both accompanied by milk pails, represent the travels and travails of everyday village life. The casting of modest modes of transport in bronze is intended to revere them, in the tradition of historical sculpture, as well as to transform them into a material synonymous with idols worshiped in temples across India. 'The bicycle is like a mechanised cow in the city', explains Gupta. 'In the country if I wanted milk, I would go to the cows to get it; in the city it is delivered to you by bicycle.'



# Gober Ganesha

2004

bronze, aluminium

Collection of Larry Warsh, New York

With this work, comprising a vessel of bronze-cast cow patties, the artist again points to the familiar objects of village life, elevating the simple dried cow pat to further consider its symbolic and practical value in that context. It can be considered symbolic, in terms of cow dung being imbued with a sacred nature (on account of the Hindu reverence of the cow), and practical, in terms of cow patties' potent medicinal qualities and use, when dried, as fuel on a fire for heat and cooking.