

VISUAL ARTS

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Simplicity wins the day

Galleries are popping up all over the city with such amazing frequency that it would not be very unfair to compare these with fungal growth. But installations do not figure anywhere in their scheme of things for the simple reason that these cannot be sold, not in this city.

So one is pleasantly surprised that Akar Prakar has taken the risk of inviting Chhatrapati Dutta to turn the entire gallery space, which includes a tiny open air patch of green, into an installation entitled *Objects, Images Spaces* (Aug 20-Sept 7). Actually, it is an assemblage of six site-specific installations, each telling its own story, which, in turn, is Dutta's comment on the current social milieu.

Dutta uses various artefacts, assembly-line toys, fibre-glass figures, plumbing pipes, video film and a room lined with mirrors where he displays on a pedestal the fibre-glass carcass of the sheep Dolly with innards of tiny electric bulbs. Damien Hirst? This doesn't have the shock value of a real carcass floating in formaldehyde and Dutta's concerns are different. Replication and consumerism are his targets.

Dolly also stands for the hybrid culture that globalization has unleashed. Indian culture is nothing if not syncretic, but what is

developing today defies logic. This is underscored here by the Barbie doll in the ceramic Durga head.

When he uses fibre-glass figures, Dutta tends to go a little

overboard. The idea behind *Percy Brown's Donkey in Continuum* is great. Brown was famously principal of Government Art College and had introduced a stool — "donkey" — still

in use for making sketches. Dutta, who was trained there but has, thereafter, tried to reject its hidebound curriculum, uses the figure of a man in polo gear riding a donkey with his head facing the beast's back (a punishment once meted out to fools) as a symbol of the continued colonization of our minds.

In *Bonemill Tales*, named after Kantakal, the neighbourhood where Rabindra Bharati

University (where Dutta used to teach art till recently) is located the individual becomes a victim of the judicial system. Dutta alludes to personal experience. But the stacked law books and the human body cut into pieces by a giant pair of scissors are victims of literal-mindedness.

His most successful experiment is the one in which he uses little more than a framework of lead pipes with photographs of those unsung men who lost their land and livelihood to "development", and a twist of rope resembling a noose. It speaks volumes for the efficacy of simplicity.

Dutta exhibits two videos. Of these the one showing the green paddy field swaying with great deliberation under lowering skies has the mark of a poetic sensibility. Wish one could say that of the work as a whole.

