



Sheela Gowda
Remains

EN

Pirelli HangarBicocca

Public Program

6 April 11 am | *From Distance to Intimacy*, itinerant conversation between Jessica Morgan and Sheela Gowda.

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Pirelli HangarBicocca

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FREE ADMISSION

Sheela Gowda, *And That Is No Lie*, 2015. Installation view, Pérez Art Museum Miami, 2015-16. Courtesy Pérez Art Museum Miami. Photo: Oriol Tarridas

Sheela Gowda *Remains*

4 April – 15 September 2019

Curated by Nuria Enguita and Lucia Aspesi

Pirelli HangarBicocca



Sheela Gowda in her studio, Bangalore, 2012

Sheela Gowda

In the last thirty years, Sheela Gowda (born in Bhadravati, Karnataka, India, 1957; lives and works in Bangalore) has developed a practice grounded on a thoughtful and perceptive gaze into the world accompanied by an awareness of the symbolic and communicative value of matter, objects and remains. Emerged in the 1980s as a figurative painter, at the beginning of the 1990s she started a gradual process of abstraction through a radical shift from the conventional medium of oil on canvas to the use of everyday materials, in an engagement with the process of defining form as a way of transforming meaning.

Sheela Gowda initially trained in painting at the Ken School of Art, Bangalore and later at the M. S. University of Baroda and Visva-Bharati University in Santiniketan. At the time, the academic context was shaped by the most remarkable Indian modernist tradition, alongside a retaking from the language of classical painting and craft traditions, from the vernacular and popular imagery.

After her return from London in 1984, where she carried out postgraduate studies in painting at the Royal College of Art, Gowda progressively abandoned the pictorial dimension to work three-dimensionally, breaking the “frame” within her practice. This approach was in part a response to the political situation in India occurring between the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, marred by violence caused by the rise of reactionary politics and its coercive practices. It was a response through direct manipulation and a quiet but

tenacious confrontation with a series of new materials such as cow dung, tar drum and human hair that Gowda gradually included in her works. In the artist's words, this practice arose «from the "encounter" with matter, not only as a medium but also as a purpose with no a priori ideas. The new media necessitated the change of form and language as well. It was an adventure with materials with unforeseeable consequences. Ideas needed to find validation with the medium and vice versa. It was a fight with the materials and its cultural and historical implications.» This process embedded labor in the making of it: the urge of "laboring" originated from an idea which had to be acted out within the emotive and formal scope of the material. Gowda had developed this working method already as a painter; after the instinctive doing she had started taking a distance from the artwork in order to critically view it later on. As Gowda affirms: «Handling a material makes me understand its limitations and its potential... I therefore do not outsource the physical aspect of art-making.»

The nature of her work seems to rely on situations that are common and extraordinary at the same time, where the "immediate" information given from a material—such as its texture, smell, substance—is in direct dialogue with the systems in which they are mediated, and in which we are used to perceive them: economic, political and ritual. In this respect, the case of cow dung, a polyvalent material within the Indian economy of ritual, work and survival, is exemplary. In India cows have come to be thought of as being sacred animals by sections of Hindu society and as a symbol of non-violence. They also provide milk and their excrement is used in rituals, as well as fuel and binding material to cover floors and walls

or to create folk sculptures and toys. Mostly handled by rural women it is a truly malleable material, with special qualities of color, texture and form. Against the backdrop of political agencies using religious symbols for conservative ends cow dung, with its sacred tag while also being excrement, became a means for political comment while allowing the artist to identify with its other social implications and uses.

The use of cow dung marks the introduction in her practice of everyday and familiar objects and materials with potentially metaphorical meanings. In *Behold* (2009) for example—a large scale installation made with 4.000 meters of hair rope that hang, clump and meander across the wall and ground like a sculptural drawing holding up 20 steel car bumpers—she brings together the ritual (hair offered as sacrifice for a vow taken), the quotidian (talismans to protect drivers) and the commercial (wigs for world markets). By incorporating these materials Gowda underlines situations that do not have a singular meaning; on the contrary, they raise questions to an active audience. Everyday realities are inscribed into the materials that she selects and uses for the creation of her works, pointing to the negotiation between the elements and their configuration, their individual characteristics and their relational meaning within the installation as it is in *Of All People* (2011), a work made up of thousands of wooden chips roughly carved by craftsmen as semi-votive objects that the artist arranged within a composition of vividly colored used door and window frames.

The line, as an abstract form, has been an ongoing pre-occupation for the artist, and is present in works such as

And... (2007) and *Mortar Line* (1996), both being shown in Pirelli HangarBicocca. For the artist, abstraction is not the absence of representation and subject, but the recognition of their possible multiple interpretations despite the cultural specificity of the material itself. It is not the kind of abstraction that only operates in the realm of ideas or of aesthetics. On the contrary, her work retains the human element and is in direct relation to the scale of the body. For example, in the work *Darkroom* (2006) she uses tar drums as an architectural space around a prototype that is inspired by the temporary shelters built by itinerant road workers in India which accommodates the human body to the available scale of the shelter rather than its reverse.

The use of modular forms as in *Kagebangara* (2008) is recurrent in her practice. The given forms in actual living environments are taken as a point of departure. This is also to keep the identity and history of these elements intact. So working processes like cutting, flattening and assembling to give shape to diverse compositional possibilities in height and volume, explorations on proximity and distance and chromatic organizations are particularly challenging with these self-imposed rules of doing. In other installations such as *Collateral* (2007), shown here at the very end of the exhibition path, incense forms are burnt into ash, ephemeral and fragile, evoking the passage of time, memory and remains of things. In a paradoxical way the heavy granite spice grinding stones in the work *Stopover* (2012) also evoke similar moods of contemplation.

Another aspect of Sheela Gowda's recent works that dialogue with her past engagement with figurative forms, are the images taken from the media, which are extrapolated from newspapers and reworked by the artist in different ways. The reasons for their choice are varied. Starting sometimes as an emotional response to a picture, the artist then proceeds to understand what is intrinsic to the image through a measured reading of its components and context. As stated by curator and art historian Grant Watson on the images of violence, she seems to engage with questions that touch and remind us daily: «What does it mean to look at images of violence? What might be an appropriate response? What are the possibilities for action, for empathy or even comprehension?»

Sheela Gowda redefines within her work the *pathos* of things, the feelings and affections they evoke, a relational condition between objects, their reasons for being and their behaviors: a «moment of encounter» understood not as a moment in time but as a kind of force that allows for a particular set of circumstances to come together.

The Exhibition

“Remains” presents a broad selection of works by Sheela Gowda, bringing installations, sculptures, prints and water-colors realized from 1992 to the present day together with new, site-specific works conceived for Pirelli HangarBicocca. Like traces that resist the passage of time, the works are set along the Navate space, defining different moments in the exhibition experience and fostering new outlooks on the artist’s practice and on her use of different materials.

Gowda’s way of making art, which combines a delicate, ephemeral approach with careful consideration of the more concrete dimension of the creative process, emerges throughout the exhibition narrative in Pirelli HangarBicocca, underlining the poetics and political meanings of her work.

The site-specific feature inherent to her practice is fully expressed in the exhibition at Pirelli HangarBicocca, for which the artist is currently creating a new installation based on experimentations with materials and objects. These include rubber as a media, that has been provided by Pirelli in collaboration with its research and development center. As the artist is still working on the new production at the moment of the printing of this guide, the details of this piece included in the present publication may be updated at a later date.



- 1** *And That Is No Lie*, 2015
2 *It Stands Fallen*, 2015–16

The entrance to the show is shaped by the artist through a large-scale installation that merges two different works—*And That Is No Lie* and *It Stands Fallen*—both realized in 2015.

The installation consists of yards of rough red cotton fabric that has been stitched together to create a large canopy. The central section of the canopy has been cut out in a zigzag line, leaving behind an outer border that resembles triangular buntings and is hung from the ceiling by ropes. The central large area with the serrated cut edges is lying collapsed on the ground. Several dark iron poles are arranged across the space in different ways and some of them create a self-standing skeletal frame. A shelter-like structure, the installation thus creates an articulated composition both on the floor and suspended from above.

The use of the canopy recalls the traditional Indian tent known as *shamiana* or *pandal*, a temporary structure still employed for social gatherings during secular, religious and political events. For the exhibition at Pirelli HangarBicocca, linear and tactile elements of this sculptural work dialogue with the architecture, evoking opposite dynamics—such as collapse and ascension—taking shape and inhabiting the space simultaneously as a whole volume.

3 *Kagebangara*, 2008

In an open dialogue with the primary color red that pervades the work at the entrance of the exhibition, blue and yellow hanging tarpaulins are the primary colors that predominate in the work *Kagebangara*—an installation that resembles a modernist painting or a tableau. The tarpaulins play out as intense chromatic areas against the rusty darkness of metal sheets that are formally arranged as a jigsaw of rectangles around a small house structure. At the entrance to it are placed beaten lids of drums that serve as metal bowls, holding flat sheets of mica (a mineral used in constructions for its properties as an insulator) that fill it to the rim, like water collected from a leaking roof. Inside, a tar sheet covered



Kagebangara, 2008. Installation view, Artes Mundi 5, National Museum Cardiff, 2012. Photo: Wales News Service

with flakes of mica is arranged in folds to create an illusion of a sea by night. In the front are two columns made of stacked drums, one standing and the other fallen, besides which three tar drums lean on each other on the ground. A peep into one slanting drum shows a segment of mica sheet that looks like water collected after a rain.

A reflection on the basic shapes and colors, *Kagebangara* can be perceived as a three-dimensional abstract composition, using modular elements as a starting point. However the seeming incidental juxtaposition of the sheets and drums also references a construction site where manual labor and materials encounter each other in a relationship that is not given, one of adjustment and ingenuous use of available resources. Similarly, also in the case of the house the size and the modular use of the drum sheets dictates the extent to which the human body can stretch within it.

4 *Stopover, 2012*

This site-specific installation was conceived by the artist for the first edition of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, Kerala (India) in 2012. It is composed by around 200 spice grinding stones—once essential tools in the Indian tradition—that were extracted from the floor of old-fashioned kitchens and abandoned in the streets of Bangalore. Considered sacred, they were therefore left behind but not destroyed, laying in the streets as invisible presences between the clutter and flow of urban life, settled into a kind of non-space. Each stone is roughly chiseled on five sides, while the sixth side has a deep hole

carved into it; the outer periphery of this side is ridged. The artist chose to present the blocks alone for their abstraction and raw form, and not to stress their phenomenological evidence. The movement of the stones from the inside of the houses to the outside was furthered by the artist when the 200-kg-heavy granite blocks were collected and placed outdoors and indoors on the floor of a disused warehouse in Fort Kochi, once a key historic spice-trading hub, where they were in dialogue with a grid traced on the walls. They thus became visible once again in another sphere of perception. In Milan, the stones are arranged in the Navate space over a rectangular white grid marked on the floor while a vast swathe of white cloth hung as a curtain acts as a backdrop on one side.

The installation is related to a previous work titled *Ground Shift*, presented at the Lyon Biennale (2007), that consisted of 17 stones placed in various outdoor locations. The blocks arrived in France from India after a long journey from Chennai through the Arabian Sea, the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean. In Lyon the installation included hand-drawn maps that documented the streets of Bangalore from which the stones were collected. For the installation in Pirelli HangarBicocca, a map is drawn on the floor, distant from the mass of stones as a remnant of a past iteration. The 200 grinding stones that have been shipped in containers from Bangalore to Milan have made a new journey, crossing borders of “customs,” physical and contextual thresholds.



5 *Mortar Line*, 1996

An early work using cow dung as sculptural matter, *Mortar Line* is a floor-based work consisting of a curved double line of bricks made exclusively of cow dung that is held together by a mortar of cow dung paste. The cavity between the two rows of bricks is filled with *kumkum*, a red pigment traditionally used in rituals, making a red sculptural line.

As art historian Grant Watson affirms, «Sheela Gowda selects materials taken from her surroundings, often noticed first for their abstract qualities and utility rather than their connotations.» Far from being exotic, dung is a common element used in everyday life in India. Having been a painter, the artist initially saved and used cow dung in a diluted form as a painting medium. In this work Gowda uses it in its raw form as a sculptural material. *Mortar Line*, in which the curved line of bricks seems to connect with the minimalist experiments of the 1960s, brings to mind one of the most famous series of Carl Andre's sculptures *Equivalent*, composed by assembling common industrial materials arranged into a simple geometric pattern. However, far from being industrial, these bricks are laboriously hand-constructed stacking layers of wet cow dung and drying them several times over. While speaking of the filling (mortar) between two bricks, the title of the work also alludes to "mortar attack" in warfare, creating a curved red line that looks like a trajectory, a red scratched line or a gash.

Mortar Line, 1996 (detail). Cow dung, pigment, 17.5 x 11.25 x 450 cm



6 *And...*, 2007

As seen in *Mortar Line*, the line as an element drawn from the pictorial dimension is transposed into the spatial one. *And...* is an installation of three cords made by threading a needle with 300 meters long red string and repeating this process for 108 needles and an equal number of lengths of thread. Doubling up the threads together, with the needles at one end, the resulting amassed threads are anointed with a paste of red pigment (*kumkum*), glue and neem oil. The blood red flexible cords are then installed site-specifically creating a network of serpentine sculptural lines. An artwork based on the dynamics between its simple and minimal components, it is made intense by the laborious process—a sort of private performance for the artist—of its making, that is to say the passage of the needles through the entire length of each cord. The blood red cords and its linear form at once bring to mind visceral body connotations, industrial cables and organic growths. The appearance of the cords arranged within the architectural context of Pirelli HangarBicocca is monumental and yet fragile. Conceived by the artist from the previous work *And Tell Him of My Pain* (1997), *And...* takes on and adapts to the massive scale of the Navate, and the particularity of the exhibition space.

7 *Darkroom*, 2006

If on the one hand the site-specific installation *And...* appears like a resting body of ropes anchored to the building's structural beam, on the other hand *Darkroom* stands as a reflection on volume within and on its relation to the human body. This in-

stallation is a sculptural entity constructed as an architectural space itself. The work is made from recycled metal tar drums and sheets that have been cut open and flattened under road rolling machines. The sheets are then used as walls to bridge six columns—three on either side, each with three drums stacked one above the other. Visitors can access the inner space by crawling through a low doorway at the front. Once inside, they can stand upright in the dark interior—covered with a carpet of bitumen—and look upward, to see a starry sky simulated by punching holes in the metal sheets of the roof.

As for other artworks, for *Darkroom* Sheela Gowda employed materials and forms as she found them in the urban landscape of Bangalore. Having seen a colony of dwellings that had come up near her house, Gowda was fascinated by the use of residual materials of road making—the tar drums—flattened and used by road workers to make temporary dwellings. On top of these, they piled up their basic possessions of clothing and cooking vessels, while the inside was used to sleep in a curled up position. As stated by the artist: «The inside-outside nature of the shelter was an image, an impression which kept coming back to me. I was interested in the way the material defined the space and I wanted that to happen in my work as well.» The tar drums included in the piece, where bought directly from the road makers in Bangalore. The surface bears the marks of the entire process but projects a perfect symmetry of form and modular architecture.

8 *Breaths, 2002*

For this installation made of a long wooden table the artist has arranged 18 cylindrical elements of varied sizes with no apparent order. Each of these is made by combining many strings of cotton, each strand bound together with a paste of *kumkum*. These cylindrical forms are then covered in black gauze, which is then coated with a mixture of charcoal powder and glue in many layers leaving the extremities to show the cross section of the red cotton strands. The result is a series of elements similar to logs of different shapes, length and thickness, that lay like an extinguished stake. In some cases, the gauze extends like a sheath beyond the body or gets clumped together into a black linear form. Whereas the ordinary nature of the materials is still visible, these elements are suspended in a transformation process, which shows the metamorphic nature of matter that evolves to become process.

9 *In Public, 2017*

In this work the figurative and narrative dimension is as present as in Sheela Gowda's early practice. The starting point of *In Public* is in fact a newspaper photograph of an accident that occurred at the City Civil Court in Bangalore in 2012. After several months of rising strains between lawyers and local media, the situation degenerated into violent and chaotic clashes where the police intervened and tried to enforce order. Gowda has enlarged the original photograph to life-size scale, bringing the viewer on a par with the characters within. The pixelated image, having the drama and expanse of a

history painting, ironically captures a moment of suspended chaos: policemen in khaki uniforms holding batons stand next to the lawyers in black robes, some rushing to confront the police while some others pick up rocks to throw. A media car on one side and the journalist that photographed this image are the only representatives of the media. The logo on the car, as well as the eyes of some of the lawyers, have been partially concealed by black censor bars usually employed to obscure sensitive information and the identity of a person. On either side of the full image, broad vertical black areas have been added, with a narrow, truncated strip of the image on its outer edge, which gives it a film strip quality, as if another frame of the drama is unfolding.

On the floor the artist has arranged a few rocks, similar to those in the photograph, giving the image a more tridimensional and realistic appearance, as if the violence represented in it is being spread also in the exhibition space. The title of the work recalls a provocation that took place "in public," the outrage to something that has been integrated as a shared social behavior.

10 *What Yet Remains, 2017*

This large installation consists of recycled metal drum sheets in various colors, some of which are hand-punched through individually with 8 disc-like holes. These sheets are the leftover of the handmade traditional production process of

Following pages: *What Yet Remains, 2017*. Installation view, Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, 2017. Courtesy Ikon Gallery, Birmingham. Photo: Stuart Whipps



bandlis, the typical round bowls used in India to carry construction materials (such as sand, cement, concrete slurry) at construction sites. The *bandlis* are made from the discs cut out from the sheets, pressed into bowls and then hand-beaten to fold in the edges. In the installation, the sheets, in vibrant red, green and blue, some whole and uncut and others with circular holes, play out an orchestrated sculptural arrangement on the floor. Overlapping or folded sheets change the circular forms into other geometries. The *bandlis* share the floor alongside the sheets, sometimes rising sculpturally from the flat disk cavities of their origin. The original colors on the metal sheets and *bandlis* have been mostly left untouched as traces of their previous usage. Some of them show subtle interventions by the artist, the most visible being a black square painted on a *bandli*, recalling through a discrete gesture in Kazimir Malevich's (1879–1935) seminal artwork, *Black Square* (1915).

The *bandlis* allow the road workers to lift and carry manageable quantities of building material on their head or passing them by hand, and in their scale and proportion they bear a strong relationship to the body, the limits and extent of energy of the workers that carry them. Though concrete and physical elements, the *bandlis* acquire within Gowda's work an allegorical value recalling the industry and production system, as well as the constant and alchemical transformation of the material they are made of from a physical state to another.

11 *Untitled (Cow dung), 1992–2012*

12 *Stock, 2011*

Untitled (Cow dung) is one of the first works in which Sheela Gowda experimented with the manifold usage of cow dung. This material represents an emblematic element in her shift from the pictorial to the tridimensional space. She uses and manipulates it through several shapes, techniques, and spatial dimensions, as a painting medium, or by including cow dung as found object in her works. Consisting of around 900 pats, each having a diameter of the length of a hand, and 25 bricks that are similar in size to construction bricks, *Untitled (Cow dung)* is a coming together of two periods in the artist's production. The pats are made by pressing a ball of cow dung against a wall surface and allowing it to dry. The surface of each element therefore bears the impression of the palm on it. The artist made pats to replicate those that are seen in rural areas of India, where the women engage in collecting cow dung and making pats on a daily basis. The bricks are made through a laborious process of application of several layers to form a solid block of cow dung. As Sheela Gowda explains, «Painting is not just about canvas and pigments, it is about the materiality of the paint, about touch, it is about space, about pictorial space, the space between you and the canvas, between you and the viewer; there are many dimensions to it.»

This reflection on the space is included in another later work made from the same material. *Stock* is a sculptural installation consisting of several cardboard boxes of different dimensions filled to the brim with a multitude of cow dung balls of varying sizes. The containers are arranged one next to the

other or on top of each other in compact groups. Shaped by the artist in different diameters, the round forms have been roughly marked and pierced with simple holes that could be read as anthropomorphic traits.

13 *Protest My Son, 2011*

This found-image-based work was created from a newspaper clipping of a demonstration in Bangalore that Sheela Gowda enlarged to a “wall-size poster”. The work depicts a group of people, including many children, seen with raised arms, shouting and appearing keen to be photographed. Their bodies are mostly bare except for loincloths, beads and feathers. The people seen protesting are members of Hakki Pikki, a semi-nomadic tribe from southern India who is seeking land rights. In the background there is a red flag and a blue banner that is affiliated to a political outfit that is inspired by Ambedkar, a dalit (a lower caste group) and the chief framer of the Indian Constitution. In daily life, the Hakki Pikki wear urban clothes and are known for their ingenious ways of making a living not only by selling forest produce and self-made herbal oils, but also fake animal parts such as tiger claws and elephant hair which they sell to the gullible, both in India and abroad. The group in this photograph is also presenting their tribal self in an exaggerated manner. Placed on the larger image is a smaller duplicate version of the main photograph; an image within an image that Gowda transformed by painting on the figures tattoos, head-dresses, body paint, and other details that are visual markers of tribal groups around the world such as Maori, American

Indian, Maasai, Yanomami. The raised hand of a man in the larger image holds a string of fake tiger claws that the artist acquired from the Hakki Pikki community close to Bangalore.

This figurative work reveals the artist’s interest and inquiry on the role of images and the matter of factual representation that refers back to her education and early practice as a painter. As for *In Public*, the way she approaches found pictures is to begin with a reading of its various components. She then modifies them by blurring, blowing them up, hiding some parts, inserting sculptural elements, or painting over them. In this sense, the presence of the watercolor can be seen within the image with some differences from the original picture, playing with stereotypes and premeditated ideas of the meaning of “exotic”. That the people in the image self exoticize to become visible and be heard allowed the artist to take liberties with their identity. The painted image collaged on the printed surface along with the hanging claws gives the work a sense of illusion and depth and creates a tension between the image and the artist’s intervention.

14 *If You Saw Desire, 2015*

This installation is made of three stainless steel poles that stretch diagonally across the pillars of the Navate exhibition space, intersecting each other at oblique angles. On innumerable smaller steel branches attached to each pole are hung flag-like sequined fabrics sourced in Hong Kong markets, the city where the work was made and first presented at Para Site. The sequined fabrics are in different colors,



If You Saw Desire, 2015. Installation view, Para Site, Hong Kong, 2015.
Courtesy Para Site, Hong Kong

abstract patterns and shapes (triangular, rectangular and swallowtail), their excessive bling adding to the shininess of the stainless poles, as if the “weight” of their excess seem to justify the half-fallen nature of the poles.

15 *A Blanket and the Sky*, 2004

16 *Chimera*, 2004

A Blanket and The Sky is the first work in which the artist uses tar drums as a base for a vertical structure, the prototype house that recreates a worker’s temporary shelter—an image also conveyed by a dark blanket placed inside it. The upper story of the house is a double sheet height space that has a

“doorway” at its side. Its floor is cut up into T shapes that are then folded like origami to form a colony of miniature replicas of the prototype structure below it. The dark space inside is almost claustrophobic, but looking upward in through this doorway the confinement by the metal structure finds release into an illusion of the vastness of a starry sky above the colony of houses, that is created by puncturing the metal sheet roof with tiny holes allowing the visitor to experience inside the exhibition space an ephemeral topography.

In *Chimera* the artist uses a single drum. After bringing the drum back to shape, the artist then carved out a spiral on the top covering of the drum, letting it fall inside all the way to the bottom. The actual rimmed lid of the drum still held within the spiral gets centered to the bottom plane of the drum. This circular shallow plate is filled with mica flakes, a material commonly used on tar sheets for waterproofing. The work draws visitors to look inside the dark depth of the barrel, like into a well, to encounter an illusion of a moon shining subtly with the light. The illusory reality perceived by the observers is recalled in the artwork title.

Gowda retains the identity of the found materials and objects, intervening minimally to dwell on the nature of reality and its representation.



17 *Sanjaya Narrates, 2004*

In this set of watercolors a newspaper photograph depicting a moment of violence and atrocity has been fragmented into 14 images. The scene, captured in Palestine, is taken immediately after a crossfire attack; a woman holds out a mortally wounded child to a man, while two other women are seen in an extremely agitated state. The artist dissects a found press image capturing partial details by zooming in on certain sections that then become non-narrative and fragmented, not allowing the image to be immediately grasped as a whole. The watercolors are displayed edge to edge and in a sequence. Blurred faces, isolated feet and hands are juxtaposed and framed at different scales. All the watercolors are in color, except the one representing the dead child, which is in sepia tone. The title evokes the character Sanjaya from the *Mahābhārata*, the ancient Indian epic poem of the war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. Sanjaya, charioteer and adviser to king Dhritarashtra, having received the gift of divine vision, to see events elsewhere, narrates to the blind ruler the war events as if he was in the battlefield.

As the artist affirms, «Responding to such a tragedy in the course of the daily reading of the newspaper could mean that the reader could involuntarily become a voyeur. The role of the photographer, a “Sanjaya” of a personal tragic moment taking place far away in a politically charged country also comes into question.»

*A Blanket and the Sky, 2004. Tar drum sheets, blanket, 262 x 157 x 88 cm.
See p. 28*



Sanjaya Narrates, 2004 (detail). 14 watercolors on paper, 25.5 x 33 cm each.
See p. 31

18 *Best Cutting*, 2008

This work is composed of news clippings gathered for over a decade by Christoph Storz—the artist's husband—and digitally assembled for the artist as newspaper spreads. Resembling the inner pages of a newspaper, the title *Chronic Chronicles* is printed on its right corner, while the bottom has the color palette scale typical of professional proofs. The content is replete with political statements, news of politicians, religion mixed with politics, accidents, violence alongside the comic, carefully selected advertisements that have an ironic reading in the midst of serious news. However, the

artist treats these spreads as mere paper, by drawing tailoring patterns for blouses and a trouser over it with red and green pencils. The newspaper as a source of information is challenged by its materiality, as mere paper, to be cut along the lines of the drawn pattern, thus constantly shifting the attention between the two.

19 *Margins*, 2011

This installation is made of found architectural wood objects (door frames and door shutters) typical of south Indian vernacular architecture (blue, light green, pale and deep yellow). The colors were further enhanced by the artist's use of oil painting. Common door frames have been dismantled and rejoined with flexible joineries to turn them into linear structures. These are then hung from the ceiling with chains or along walls creating varied angular articulations and tensions, in relation to each joint and its resistance based on the length of each frame. Thus, they create a connection between both the vertical and horizontal dimensions.

The subtle line between the media of painting and sculpture, and the different functions of everyday materials and their abstract significance are some of Sheela Gowda's concerns in the realization of this work. The doorframe as a marker of the passage from one room to another when disjointed and linear liberates the spaces they once guarded. The

Following pages: *Margins*, 2011. Installation view, GallerySKE, Bangalore, 2011.
Collection of Kiran Nadar Museum of Art



ephemeral and precarious nature of the dismantled wooden doorframes creates a connection between the domestic scale of the original architectural proportions and the spatial dimensions of the volume of the Navate, where the installation acquires a new connotation.

20 *Collateral, 2007*

The site-specific installation featured in the Cubo space is composed of numerous rectangles made by stretching gray metal mesh over wooden frames. Varying in dimensions, they are placed next to each other on small pedestals beneath them giving them a floating lightness. On each of these surfaces, the artist arranged and aligned forms of all sorts that she molded using a paste by mixing a particularly sticky tree bark powder with charcoal, materials traditionally used to produce incense sticks. By lighting each of these forms, the dried material burns slowly to ash, still retaining its original shape. These very delicate and ephemeral geometric patterns of squares, rectangles, oval and linear forms have their own markings created in the process of burning, with a color palette in subtle gradations of black, beige and grey tones.

Sheela Gowda's poetics and practice aims to weave together modes and shapes, materials and concepts. In *Collateral* the passing of time evoked by the slow burning of the incense results in fragile forms that settle on the flat surface of the metal mesh beds, arranged horizontally within the space of the Cubo. The burning of the incense that has taken



Collateral, 2007 (detail). Ash (incense material), steel mesh, wood frames, variable dimensions

place during the opening of "Remains" generates a sort of silent event that the visitors get to experience in a multi-sensory way.

21 *In Pursuit of, 2019*

22 *Black Square, 2014*

For the exhibition in Pirelli HangarBicocca Sheela Gowda has conceived a new work in relation to the architectural features of the Cubo space. Installed on the two opposite walls of the room, the work is made of approximately 15 km of hair rope which hang at a little distance from the wall. On

one side is arranged a rectangular area that has the same dimensions as the entrance door frame of the Cubo, while on the left wall the artist has created a square form. Its shape dialogues with another work—*Black Square*—that is displayed elsewhere in a corner. It is made of a sheet of rubber sourced from the Amazon forest, on which the artist has painted a black square that gets distorted when the rubber is stretched on the wooden frame. Also this work refers to Malevich's 1915 *Black Square* which is acknowledged as a singular act that pushed the boundaries of modernist abstraction.

Sheela Gowda: Selected Exhibitions

Sheela Gowda (Bhadravati, Karnataka, India, 1957) lives and works in Bangalore. Her works have been exhibited in numerous solo shows at international institutions, including Ikon Gallery, Birmingham (2017); Pérez Art Museum, Miami, Para Site, Hong Kong (2015); Centre international d'art et du paysage, Vassivière, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Lunds Konsthall, Lund, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven [travelling exhibition] (2013–14); Iniva (Institute of International Visual Arts), London (2011), Office for Contemporary Art (OCA), Oslo (2010). Sheela Gowda has also taken part in major group shows, including 31st São Paulo Biennale (2014); 1st Kochi-Muziris Biennale (2012); 53rd Venice Biennale, 9th Sharjah Biennale (2009); 9th Lyon Biennale, documenta 12 (2007).

Recently Gowda was awarded with the 2019 Maria Lassnig Prize. In October 2019 an adapted version of the show at Pirelli HangarBicocca will travel to Bombas Gens Centre d'Art, Valencia.

**This publication accompanies the exhibition "Remains"
by Sheela Gowda**

Lenders

+91 Foundation; Collection of Kiran Nadar Museum of Art; Collection of Sunitha and Niall Emmart; Collection of Thomas Erben, New York; Collection Masureel, Belgium; Sheela Gowda

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List of the Exhibited Works

- 1** *And That Is No Lie*, 2015
2 *It Stands Fallen*, 2015–16
Metal, fabric, rope, wire
Variable dimensions
- 3** *Kagebangara*, 2008
Tar drum sheets, tar drums, mica tar sheet, mica, tarpaulin
Variable dimensions
Collection of Sunitha and Niall Emmart
- 4** *Stopover*, 2012
Granite stones, tape, fabric
200 stones, 60 x 60 x 60 cm approx. each
Variable dimensions
- 5** *Mortar Line*, 1996
Cow dung, pigment
17.5 x 11.25 x 450 cm
- 6** *And...*, 2007
Thread, needles, pigment
Variable dimensions
- 7** *Darkroom*, 2006
Tar drums, tar drum sheets, asphalt, mirrors
235 x 260 x 300 cm
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- 8** *Breaths*, 2002
String, pigment, charcoal powder, gauze, table
Variable dimensions
Collection of Sunitha and Niall Emmart
- 9** *In Public*, 2017
Print on vinyl, stones
Variable dimensions
- 10** *What Yet Remains*, 2017
Metal drum sheets, metal bowls
Variable dimensions
- 11** *Untitled (Cow dung)*, 1992–2012
Cow dung
Variable dimensions
- 12** *Stock*, 2011
Cow dung, cardboard boxes
Variable dimensions
Collection Masureel, Belgium
- 13** *Protest My Son*, 2011
Watercolor on print on paper, print on vinyl, horn, fur
424 x 287 cm; 90 x 60 cm
Exhibition copy (2019) from a work in the Van Abbemuseum collection, Eindhoven
- 14** *If You Saw Desire*, 2015
Sequined fabric, stainless steel
Variable dimensions
- 15** *A Blanket and the Sky*, 2004
Tar drum sheets, blanket
262 x 157 x 88 cm
Collection of Thomas Erben, New York
- 16** *Chimera*, 2004
Tar drum, mica flakes
50 x 50 x 87 cm
Collection of Sunitha and Niall Emmart
- 17** *Sanjaya Narrates*, 2004
Watercolor on paper
14 paintings, 25.5 x 33 cm each
Collection of Sunitha and Niall Emmart
- 18** *Best Cutting*, 2008
Digital collage, glass-marking pencil, inkjet print on paper
55 cm x 29 cm; 55 x 35 cm
- 19** *Margins*, 2011
Wood, enamel oil paint, metal
Variable dimensions
Collection of Kiran Nadar Museum of Art
- 20** *Collateral*, 2007
Ash (incense material), steel mesh, wood frames
Variable dimensions
- 21** *In Pursuit of*, 2019
Hair ropes
15 km approx.
Work specifically conceived for the show
- 22** *Black Square*, 2014
Rubber, paint, wood frame
31 x 31 x 3 cm
- 23** *Tree Line*, 2019
Rubber
Variable dimensions
Work specifically conceived for the show. Produced by Pirelli HangarBicocca

* The benches arranged in the exhibition path are elements from the installation *Dripfield* (2009) realized by the artist for the 9th Sharjah Biennale

For all works, unless otherwise stated: Courtesy Sheela Gowda



Behold, 2009. Installation view, Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach, 2013.
Photo: Achim Kukulies

Pirelli HangarBicocca is a non-profit foundation, established in 2004, which has converted a former industrial plant in Milan into an institution for producing and promoting contemporary art.

This dynamic center for experimentation and discovery covers 15,000 square meters, making it one of the largest contiguous exhibition spaces in Europe. It presents major solo shows every year by Italian and international artists, with each project conceived to work in close relation to the architecture of the complex, and explored in depth through a calendar of parallel events. Admission to the space and the shows is completely free of charge, and facilitators are on hand to help the general public connect with the art. Since 2013, Vicente Todolí has been the foundation's Artistic Director.

The complex, which once housed a locomotive factory, includes an area for public services and educational activities, and three exhibition spaces whose original twentieth-century architectural features have been left clearly visible: *Shed*, *Navate*, and *Cubo*.

As well as its exhibitions program and cultural events, Pirelli HangarBicocca also permanently houses one of Anselm Kiefer's most important site specific works, *The Seven Heavenly Palaces 2004-2015*, commissioned for the inauguration of Pirelli HangarBicocca.



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