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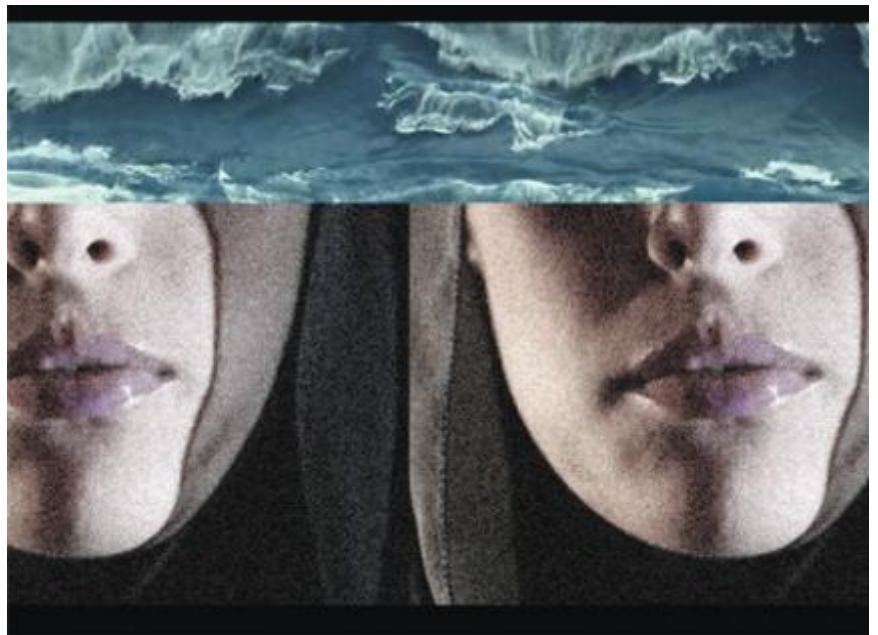
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Artist's first public installation in home city themed on exile

By *suraj.alva*

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A common thread of exile, displacement and search of homeland runs through Dubai-based artist and filmmaker Owais Husain's works. His first installation in the city of his birth, which is being displayed as part of the seventh edition of contemporary art organisation ArtOxygen's public art festival '[en]counters', is no different. The visually arresting piece comprises his mesmerising short film 'You Are Forever', which is projected onto a curious screen — a pile of chrome-glazed aluminium trunks that are stacked in a V formation.



When this correspondent caught up with the multifaceted artist last week at the JJ School of Arts — where the unique artwork was on display, among others — for a tête-a-tête, he said the genesis of the project was a piece of poetry of the same name.

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A still from 'You Are Forever' by Owais Husain

Talking about his relationship with the city, Husain says he always felt the need to come back. Explaining the symbolism of trunks, the multi-media artist says, "They are a storehouse of memories that are forgotten or cherished. They're also the vehicle of movement, whether it is migration, travel or displacement. This is something relatable to the Indian diaspora."

Throwing light on the underlying mythology of the film, an art form he considers liberating, Husain says that the narrative of the video centres on three rivers that are reincarnated as three sisters. "One of them has gone missing and the other two are on a quest to search for her. We don't know whether she was real or not, whether she was a figment of imagination, whether she's just a myth... but their quest is real. Their sense of loss is real, but we don't know how real their history is.

The only witness is the sky, which is benign but in its silence eloquent... Their quest takes them through these cities and metropolises. (It is) the whole effect Bombay had on me. It also made me seek other metropolises in a similar vein in other parts of the world," he says.

Elaborating on his approach towards creating art and how he pushes the boundaries within various mediums, Husain says, "I've never worked with a formula. I've always enjoyed surprising myself. I tend not to enter the space with too much playing on my mind other than the grammar of the medium. I submit myself completely to its laws and then I can meditate on thoughts which come in on various levels."

Husain, who began as a figurative artist, says he has always sought abstraction. "Abstraction is something that is undefined in a common linguistic sense. Definition is the key word. For me the abstract is something that is intangible in a way or rather it's tactile but intangible. So, you can feel it to a certain extent in certain moments. Everybody is searching for the truth... that truth I find deeply embedded in abstraction. I've explored it through experimenting with music and sound. In that, I know it's there because I know it has something to do with resonance and juxtaposition of image, which is not necessarily static... an image which is effervescent like cinema, which is light playing on your eye."

Though he maintains that art cannot save lives, Husain firmly believes that it opens windows. "Not only is art an intellectual exercise, it is an extremely emotional exercise whether you're talking about art born from critical thinking or art as a purely popular cultural form of entertainment or communication," he says.

'You Are Forever' will be on display on Platform 8 of Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus on October 22-23 from 10 am to 5 pm.'

Arts Daniel Pinto

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