

Pirelli HangarBicocca

Sheela Gowda
Remains
Curated by Nuria Enguita and Lucia Aspesi

Press Conference April 2, 2019, 12 PM
Opening April 3, 2019, 7 PM
From April 4 to September 15, 2019



Sheela Gowda, *And that is no lie*, 2015. Installation view: Pérez Art Museum Miami, 2015–16.
Courtesy the artist and Pérez Art Museum Miami. Photo: Oriol Tarridas



Sheela Gowda, *Kagebangara*, 2008. Installation view, Artes Mundi 5, 2012
Courtesy the artist. Photo: Wales News Service

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Pirelli HangarBicocca presents “Remains,” Italy’s first major solo show of works by Sheela Gowda. Featured in the monumental and undivided space of the Navate, the exhibition is a unique opportunity to discover more than twenty years of Gowda’s production. In addition to new works, the show includes a wide selection of site-specific installations and sculptures, as well as watercolors and prints, ranging from 1996 through the present day, giving shape to an unprecedented experience of her practice.

Sheela Gowda (born in Bhadravati, Karnataka, India, 1957; lives and works in Bangalore) has developed her practice through a constant dialog and exchange between local artistic traditions and international forms of art. She initially trained in painting at the Ken School of Art, Bangalore, at M.S. University, Baroda, and at Visva-Bharati University at Santiniketan. At that time, these academic contexts were shaped by a remarkable Indian modernist tradition, along with a contemporary interpretation of classical Indian art and an interest in vernacular, popular imagery and craft traditions.

Returning from London in the mid-1980s after completing her postgraduate studies at the Royal College of Art, Gowda started her transition from the pictorial space to three-dimensional works, definitively breaking the “frame” within her practice. On the one hand, this transition responded to a personal need to reach beyond representation and intervene directly within the space. On the other hand, it responded to the artist’s determination to actively include the audience within her artwork. More importantly, it was a response to the unstable sociopolitical situation in India in the 1980s and 1990s, associated with the rise of rightwing politics and acts of violence throughout the country.

The artist addressed these concerns through direct manipulation and quiet but tenacious confrontation with a series of new materials that she gradually added to her work, such as cow dung, which became the basic material for her paintings and sculpture. Considered sacred, this polyvalent material is a common element of life in India and widely used in rural India for construction and as a fuel. Thus, its presence in her work is not exotic, but dictated by the cultural environment in which Gowda works. **Mortar Line (1996)**, a floor-based sculpture consisting of a double row of cow dung bricks that form a curved line, is one of the first works in the artist’s sculptural production to experiment with this material.

In the early 1990s, Gowda began using other everyday objects and materials with highly metaphorical and political meaning, including tar drums, ritual pigments, hair rope, needles, thread and rubber. In the human-hair-based works for example, ropes made from bits of human hair—remains of the large quantities of hair collected as offerings from thousands of people at pilgrimage sites—are a reference to ritualistic use (as sacrifice for a vow taken), the quotidian (as talismans on motor vehicles) and the economy (the sale of human hair in world markets), presenting it to the audience as a community. Another distinctive feature of Gowda’s practice is the making process itself, resulting from intensive labor, as in the case of **And... (2007)**, an installation that consists of three cords displayed in the space, each made by threading 270 meters of red thread through sewing needles and anointing them with a paste of glue and *kumkum*—a pigment used in rituals. The cords are hung vertically and meander across the floor as well. Works such as **Kagebangara (2008)** and **Darkroom (2006)**, inspired by the shelters built by itinerant road workers in India, are architectural structures built from recycled metal tar drums that have been opened and flattened into rectangular sheets. In **Kagebangara** the tar sheets and drums are used as modules and arranged in the space in such a way that they recall modernist painting and tableau. The generative sources behind these works are manual and artisanal practices, forging an ongoing dialog between labor, economy and ingenuity in the face of deprivation and necessity. For Gowda, the weight and scale of objects and structures determine audience movement through a space, as can be experienced in the massive installation **Stopover (2012)**. This work consists of 200 cubical granite stones—traditional spice-grinding kitchen tools—that the artist collected after they had been abandoned in the streets in Bangalore, then arranged over a grid traced on the exhibition floor.

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“Remains” brings these works together, ranging from different periods and constructed using various materials and scales, along with a selection of image-based works such as ***Sanjaya Narrates* (2004)** painted in watercolors, a medium Gowda has occasionally returned to in recent years.

The exhibition attempts to highlight both Gowda’s poetic and her political practices, grounded on a thoughtful and perceptive view of the world, accompanied by an awareness of the symbolic and communicative value of matter, objects and their remains. This selection of artworks also conveys her engagement with the process of defining form as a way of transforming meaning. As the artist explains: *“An artwork is the result of decisions taken, choices made. It is true that my work comes from certain specific contexts, but the final nature of the work is shaped to a level of abstraction: the kind of abstraction I am talking about is not only an aesthetic proposition, but one which does not disembowel the work of meaning and allows for a multiplicity of readings.”*

For the artist the liturgy—the transformative ritual that occurs during a highly performance-based process of manipulation, confrontation and conversation with her materials—remains fundamental. Sheela Gowda redefines the *pathos* of things, their feelings and affections; a relational condition between objects, their reasons for being and their behaviors. It is a “moment of encounter,” understood not as a moment in time but as a kind of force that allows a particular set of circumstances to come together.

The exhibition is curated by Nuria Enguita, Director of Bombas Gens Centre d’Art, Valencia; and Lucia Aspesi, Assistant Curator at Pirelli HangarBicocca.

In October 2019 an adapted version of this show will travel to Bombas Gens Centre d’Art, Valencia.

Public Program

On Saturday 6 April at 11 AM, Pirelli HangarBicocca will present a walk through the exhibition “Remains” in the company of the artist Sheela Gowda and Jessica Morgan, Director of Dia Art Foundation in New York. The dialog will follow the exhibition display in a strict relationship with the artworks, offering the public a unique opportunity to discover Gowda’s oeuvre through her own words, accompanied by the vision of one of the most distinguished international curators of recent years.

The Exhibition Catalog

“Remains” is accompanied by a catalog raisonné dedicated to the exhibition and to Sheela Gowda’s production from the early 1990s through the present day. The publication features critical essays by art historian Geeta Kapur and writer and curator Pablo Lafuente, a text on the show by the curators Nuria Enguita and Lucia Aspesi, as well as the installation views at Pirelli HangarBicocca. An extensive section of the book is dedicated to a wide selection of works—including those in the show—accompanied by a selection of texts by curators, art critics, art historians and writers who have worked with the artist and studied her work in previous years. Contributors include Roger M. Buergel, Grant Watson, Anthony Downey, Abhishek Hazra, Jessica Morgan, Zehra Jumabhoy, Marta Kuzma and Tobias Ostrander.

Selected Exhibitions

Sheela Gowda’s 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, 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, a biennial award that recognizes midcareer artists.

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Exhibition Program

“Remains” is part of the 2019–20 artistic program conceived by the Artistic Director Vicente Todolí together with the curatorial department: Roberta Tenconi, Curator; Lucia Aspesi, Assistant Curator; and Fiammetta Griccioli, Assistant Curator. The program will continue with exhibitions by Daniel Steegmann Mangrané (September 2019–January 2020); Cerith Wyn Evans (October 2019–February 2020); Trisha Baga (February–July 2020); Chen Zhen (April–September 2020); Neil Beloufa (September 2020–January 2021); and Steve McQueen (October 2020–February 2021).

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Pirelli HangarBicocca is a non-profit institution dedicated to the promotion and production of contemporary art that reflects the corporate culture of Pirelli and its commitment to research, innovation and the dissemination of contemporary languages. Pirelli HangarBicocca stages a rich program of solo exhibitions by major international artists that have made their mark through research and experimentation, in addition to a calendar of cultural events and insights, guaranteeing visitors free access to the space.

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Info Sheet

Institution	Pirelli HangarBicocca
Artist	Sheela Gowda
Title	“Remains”
Curated by	Nuria Enguita, Lucia Aspesi
Press Conference	April 2, 2019, 12 AM
Opening	April 3, 2019, 7 PM
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Admission	Free
Catalog	Skira Editore
Workshops	During the week for schools During the weekend for families
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