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An art show explores the changing relationships between man and beast

PHOTOS: AMIT MEHRA



VANDANA KALRA

THE bond between man and animal has kept art curator Marta Jakimowicz wholly occupied for two years. She has spent the time contemplating this relationship with artists from across India, and those discussions have taken the shape of artwork that feature in an exhibition titled *The Human Animal*. Taking place at Religare arts1, the subject acts as the common link in the display that has each of the 22 participating artists putting forward a different interpretation—from metaphorical to literal, harmonious to conflicting.

If Debanjan Roy plays on the beastly temper of man in his life-size installation titled *Man With Six Dogs*, Arunkumar HG pays homage to the bovine. In his untitled triptych, he projects human dependence on the cow for sustenance and how the animal itself has come to feed on artificial nourishment. Sitting on a steel *dholi*, his Nandi bull titled *Loam* is paradoxical. Symbolic of reverence, it is also depicts the place of the bull in the agricultural hierarchy.

"There are several aspects to the relationship between man and animal. We worship animals and also depend on them for nourishment. At the same time, there are negative connotations," notes Arunkumar.



Across the room, Jagannath Panda seems to have elaborated on the same irony. His untitled watercolour, with goats grazing on sparse bushes, is reflective of the urban milieu where the animal is a victim to rapid construction. They are projected as objects of consumption in Aku's artwork, where the leather udder, presented in the shape of a baseball glove, and the goat, dressed in leather skin, question the exploitation. For George Martin, man is the new-age Satan. Seated above a pile of tyres with an airplane as a symbol of development at its base, Martin's installation titled *Animated Holocaust* projects gross oppression behind artificial glamour.

The animal instincts, meanwhile, too find representation in the display. While Viraj Naik turns to the nomadic in his paperwork, Jehangir Jani reflects on their shared instincts in his metal sculptures. In Ved Gupta's fibre glass installation titled *Mutant Companion*, the animal represents human behaviour. A red couch stands for the society and a Dalmatian seated on it is the person in power. "We choose the people in power but our trust is always belied. Power corrupts," notes Gupta, pointing to the black patches on his red couch. "This depicts how the aspirants make several promises to please us, but once in power, the true colours come out." Glancing across the gallery, he does seem concerned about several layers that define the theme. "There is so much to explore," he notes.

The exhibition at Religare arts1, Scindia House, is on till April 8. Contact: 43727000

Gupta's *Mutant Companion* (top); Arunkumar's *Loam*