

It was the night of the alligators
the pure, pulsing night
of snouts sticking out of slime
and from the drowsy swamps
the dull noise of scale armor
goes back to the origin of the earth.

And in the depth of the great water
like the circle of the earth
is the giant anaconda
covered with ceremonial paint,
devouring and religious.

From "Some Beasts" by Pablo Neruda

A hybrid fan like structure, a powerful beast, possible in the process of moulting and writhing out of its primordial and ancient armour takes center stage in Sakshi Gupta's installation. Straddling a nebulous line between machine/ animal, impenetrability/ vulnerability, solidity/ephemerality and passivity/ agency, the installation plays with the process of transformation in the modern world. The intensely felt sense of dense materiality and its light intuitive use by the artist suggests several conjoint aspects of contemporaneity which suffuse the work. We observe the mighty creature at a moment of vulnerability though, the sloughing off of the past, and the weariness associated with its burden. Yet, it is raised (or has it raised itself?) and its rusty weight looks down from a higher, remote vantage point, and in doing so imposes some of the terror and obeisance ceremonially accorded to both the mythical and religious beasts of traditional society and the machines of war today.

In its hybridity and its blurring of the distinctions living and not living, one can sense an echo of the move from the economies of heavy industry to the weightless world of information and the technologies of cybernetics. In the early twenty first century, the idea of the cyborg, part machine-part organism is no longer simply the province of science fiction but increasingly reflected in humankind's appropriation of nature and technology to its own ends. Yet this creation is different and paradoxically in some senses, more real. Unlike a typically conceived cyborg, created sui generis, without history and having no self identification with nature, here is something which is intimate and vulnerable, shedding itself from a rusty prehistory and an unknown origin. To be truly alive requires, perhaps, to have and to recognize one's history.

Arjun Jayadev, 2008

