

## Why Subodh Gupta Uses Metal Utensils to Make Art

**Image no: 1**

**Caption:** Biplab Sau, *A Woman Cutting Vegetables*, Envato Elements.

**Link:** <https://www.pexels.com/video/a-woman-cutting-vegetables-5464612/>

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**Image no: 2**

**Caption:** *Tiring Indian Dal Yellow with Hand*, Envato Elements.

**Link:** <https://elements.envato.com/tiring-indian-dal-yellow-with-hand-MMG7ZEU>

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**Image no: 3**

**Caption:** *Closeup Slow Motion Shot of Making Steaming Hot 'Dosa' on a cast iron pan at a hotel*, Envato Elements.

**Link:** <https://elements.envato.com/closeup-slow-motion-shot-of-making-steaming-hot-do-DQWW82G>

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**Image no: 4**

**Caption:** Subodh Gupta, *Family Nest No. 3*, 2012, Stainless steel cabinet, stainless steel utensils, found old aluminium and brass utensils, enamel coated steel utensils, wood, 172.7 x 139.7 x 68.6 cm, Courtesy of the artist and Hauser & Wirth.

**Link:** <https://www.hauserwirth.com/artists/2787-subodh-gupta/#images>

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**Image no: 5**

**Caption:** Subodh Gupta, *Known Stranger*, 2014, Mixed media, 383.5 x 165.1 x 183.3 cm, Courtesy of

the artist and Hauser & Wirth.

**Link:**

<https://www.hauserwirth.com/hauser-wirth-exhibitions/5214-subodh-gupta-seven-billion-light-years/#images>

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**Image no: 6**

**Caption:** Subodh Gupta, *Spill*, 2007, Stainless steel, 170 x 145 x 95 cm, Saatchi Gallery, London, Published in “Subodh Gupta Builds Sculptures From Household Utensils”, Amusing Planet, 11 September, 2010.

**Link:** <https://www.amusingplanet.com/2010/09/subodh-gupta-builds-sculptures-from.html>

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**Image no: 7**

**Caption:** *Photograph of Subodh Gupta*, 2022, Courtesy of the artist and Nature Morte, New Delhi.

**Link:** N/A

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**Image no: 8**

**Caption:** Subodh Gupta, *Black Galaxy*, 2010, Brass, pigment, 61 x 120 x 34 cm, Photographed by Sergei Illin, Pinchuk Art Centre, Ukraine.

**Link:** <https://www.hauserwirth.com/artists/2787-subodh-gupta/>

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**Image no: 9**

**Caption:** Subodh Gupta, *Gandhi's Three Monkeys*, 2008, Bronze, steel, and brass utensils, Katara, Qatar Museums.

**Link:** <https://qm.org.qa/en/visit/public-art/subodh-gupta-gandhis-three-monkeys/>

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**Image no:** 10

**Caption:** Subodh Gupta, *High Life*, 2002, 139.7 cm diameter, Devi Art Foundation, Gurgaon.

**Link:** <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/high-life/WAGArcPSOW4TxO?hl=en-GB>

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**Image no:** 11

**Caption:** Subodh Gupta, *A Glass of Water*, 2011, Photographed by Martin Argyroglo, Monnaie de Paris, France.

**Link:**

<https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/subodh-gupta-a-glass-of-water-subodh-gupta/OgFFv4e8yi4dxA?hl=en>

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**Image no:** 12

**Caption:** Subodh Gupta, *5 Offerings of the Greedy Gods*, 2006, Stainless steel, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Published on Art.Base, 2016.

**Link:** <https://art.base.co/event/7909-subodh-guptaeveryday-divine>

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**Image no:** 13

**Caption:** Subodh Gupta, *Dada*, 2013, Stainless steel, 900 x 700 x 276 cm, National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi. [CC-BY 4.0](#).

**Link:** [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Steel\\_tree\\_-\\_with\\_utensils.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Steel_tree_-_with_utensils.jpg)

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**Image no:** 14

**Caption:** Subodh Gupta, *Very Hungry God*, 2006, Hundreds of stainless steel containers, 360 x 280 x

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330 cm, Photographed by Martin Argyroglo (2018), Monnaie de Paris, France, Published in “Why did Subodh Gupta create his skull sculpture Very Hungry God?”, *Public Delivery*, September 22, 2019.

**Link:** <https://publicdelivery.org/subodh-gupta-very-hungry-god/>

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**Image no:** 15

**Caption:** Subodh Gupta, Detail, *Very Hungry God*, 2006, Hundreds of stainless steel containers, 360 x 280 x 330 cm, Photographed by Fred Romero (2018), Monnaie de Paris, France. Published in “Why did Subodh Gupta create his skull sculpture Very Hungry God?”, *Public Delivery*, September 22, 2019. CC BY 2.0.

**Link:** <https://publicdelivery.org/subodh-gupta-very-hungry-god/>

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**Image no:** 16

**Caption:** Subodh Gupta, Detail, *Very Hungry God*, 2006, Hundreds of stainless steel containers, 360 x 280 x 330 cm, Photographed by puffin11uk (2010), Chatsworth, United Kingdom. Published in “Why did Subodh Gupta create his skull sculpture Very Hungry God?”, *Public Delivery*, September 22, 2019. CC BY 2.0.

**Link:** <https://publicdelivery.org/subodh-gupta-very-hungry-god/>

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**Image no:** 17

**Caption:** Subodh Gupta, *Very Hungry God*, 2006, Hundreds of stainless steel containers, 360 x 280 x 330 cm, Palazzo Grassi, Venice, Photographed by Tracy Elaine (2007), Wikimedia Commons. [CC BY 2.0](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Subodh_Gupta_-_Very_Hungry_God_(public_installation).jpg).

**Link:** [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Subodh\\_Gupta\\_-\\_Very\\_Hungry\\_God\\_\(public\\_installation\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Subodh_Gupta_-_Very_Hungry_God_(public_installation).jpg)

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**Image no: 18**

**Caption:** Subodh Gupta, Detail, *Very Hungry God*, 2006, Hundreds of stainless steel containers, 360 x 280 x 330 cm, Photographed by Fred Romero (2018), Monnaie de Paris, France, Published in “Why did Subodh Gupta create his skull sculpture *Very Hungry God*?”, *Public Delivery*, September 22, 2019. [CC BY 2.0](#).

**Link:** <https://publicdelivery.org/subodh-gupta-very-hungry-god/>

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**Image no: 19**

**Caption:** Subodh Gupta, *Very Hungry God*, 2006, Hundreds of stainless steel containers, 360 x 280 x 330 cm, Photographed by Prateek Gupta (2018), Monnaie de Paris, France, Wikimedia Commons.

**Link:** [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Subodh\\_Gupta,\\_Very\\_Hungry\\_God,\\_2006.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Subodh_Gupta,_Very_Hungry_God,_2006.jpg)

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**Image no: 20**

**Caption:** Subodh Gupta, *Very Hungry God*, 2006, Hundreds of stainless steel container, 360 x 280 x 330 cm, Photographed by Fred Romero (2018), Monnaie de Paris, France, Wikimedia Commons. [CC BY 2.0](#).

**Link:** [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Subodh\\_Gupta\\_-\\_Very\\_Hungry\\_God.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Subodh_Gupta_-_Very_Hungry_God.jpg)

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**Image no: 21**

**Caption:** Subodh Gupta, *Ray at National Gallery of Modern Art*, New Delhi, 2012, Stainless steel and stainless steel utensils, 400 x 600 x 400 cm, Courtesy of the artist and Nature Morte, New Delhi.

**Link:** N/A

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**Image no: 22**

**Caption:** Subodh Gupta, *When Soak Becomes Spill at Salisbury Cathedral*, 2008, Stainless steel, 600

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(h) x 300 cm (diameter), Photographed by Richard Avery, Wikimedia Commons. [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).

**Link:**

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:When\\_Soak\\_Becomes\\_Spill,\\_Salisbury\\_Cathedral\\_Close.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:When_Soak_Becomes_Spill,_Salisbury_Cathedral_Close.jpg)

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**Image no:** 23

**Caption:** Subodh Gupta, *Touch, Trace, Taste, Truth*, 2015, Brass, steel, barbed wire, enamel paint, 304.8 x 304.8 x 162.6 cm, Courtesy of the artist and Nature Morte, New Delhi.

**Link:** N/A

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**Image no:** 24

**Caption:** Subodh Gupta, *Cosmic Battle (II)*, 2017–2019, Brass, steel, pigment, motor, found stone, 305 x 305 x 166 cm, Courtesy of the artist and Nature Morte, New Delhi.

**Link:** N/A

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**Image no:** 25

**Caption:** Subodh Gupta, *Touch, Trace, Taste, Truth*, 2015, Brass, steel, barbed wire, enamel paint, 304.8 x 304.8 x 162.6 cm. Published in “Subodh Gupta: in the studio”, *The Telegraph*, 22 March, 2016.

**Link:**

[https://www.telegraph.co.uk/content/dam/art/2016/03/17/Touch%2C\\_Trace%2C\\_Taste%2C\\_Truth%28side-view%29%2C\\_2015\\_trans\\_NvBOzONjv4Bqeo\\_i\\_u9APi8RuoebjoAHt0k9u7HhRJvuo-ZLenGRumA.jpg](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/content/dam/art/2016/03/17/Touch%2C_Trace%2C_Taste%2C_Truth%28side-view%29%2C_2015_trans_NvBOzONjv4Bqeo_i_u9APi8RuoebjoAHt0k9u7HhRJvuo-ZLenGRumA.jpg)

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**Image no:** 26

**Caption:** Subodh Gupta, *Installation View of Touch, Trace, Taste, Truth*, 2015, Brass, steel, barbed

wire, enamel paint, 304.8 x 304.8 x 162.6 cm, Courtesy of the artist and Hauser & Wirth.

**Link:**

<https://www.hauserwirth.com/hauser-wirth-exhibitions/5572-subodh-gupta-invisible-reality/>

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**Image no:** 27

**Caption:** Darcy Moore, *Handi Pot*, 2017, Flickr. [CC BY 2.0](#).

**Link:** <https://www.flickr.com/photos/darcymoore/31608262324/>

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**Image no:** 28

**Caption:** Subodh Gupta, *Cosmic Battle (II)*, 2017–2019, Brass, steel, pigment, motor, found stone, 305 x 305 x 166 cm, Courtesy of the artist and Nature Morte, New Delhi.

**Link:** N/A

---

**Image no:** 29

**Caption:** Subodh Gupta, *Touch, Trace, Taste, Truth*, 2015, Brass, steel, barbed wire, enamel paint, 304.8 x 304.8 x 162.6 cm, Published in “What are contemporary artist Subodh Gupta’s plans for the future?”, *Vogue*, 16 November, 2016.

**Link:**

<https://www.vogue.in/magazine-story/what-are-contemporary-artist-subodh-guptas-plans-for-the-future/>

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**Image no:** 30

**Caption:** Subodh Gupta, *Cosmic Battle (II)*, 2017–2019, Brass, steel, pigment, motor, found stone, 305 x 305 x 166 cm, Courtesy of the artist and Nature Morte, New Delhi.

**Link:** N/A

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**Image no:** 31

**Caption:** Subodh Gupta, *Cosmic Battle (II)*, 2017–2019, Brass, steel, pigment, motor, found stone, 305 x 305 x 166 cm, Courtesy of the artist and Nature Morte, New Delhi.

**Link:** N/A

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**Image no:** 32

**Caption:** Subodh Gupta, *Cosmic Battle (II)*, 2017–2019, Brass, steel, pigment, motor, found stone, 305 x 305 x 166 cm, Courtesy of the artist and Nature Morte, New Delhi.

**Link:** N/A

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**Image no:** 33

**Caption:** Subodh Gupta, *Chanda Mama door ke (From Far Away Uncle Moon Calls)*, 2015, Photographed by Dia Bhupal. Published in “Review of Subodh Gupta: Invisible Reality at Hauser & Wirth, Somerset”, *Aesthetica Magazine*, 27 February 2016.

**Link:**

<https://aestheticamagazine.com/review-of-subodh-gupta-invisible-reality-at-hauser-wirth-somers-et/>

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**Image no:** 34

**Caption:** Subodh Gupta, *Birth of a Star*, 305 x 305 x 330 cm, 1278, Courtesy of the artist and Nature Morte, New Delhi.

**Link:** N/A

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**Image no:** 35

**Caption:** Subodh Gupta, *All In The Same Boat*, 2012–2013, Mixed Media, 44 x 140 x 1161cm, 0247a2, Nature Morte, New Delhi, Courtesy of the artist and Nature Morte.

**Link:** N/A

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**Image no:** 36

**Caption:** Subodh Gupta, *Ali Baba*, 2011–2016, Steel, kitchenware in stainless steel, steel cable, found tapestries, Dimensions variable, Courtesy of the artist and Nature Morte.

**Link:** N/A

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**Image no:** 37

**Caption:** Subodh Gupta, *Cooking the World I at Art Basel Unlimited*, 2017, Courtesy of the artist, Galleria Continua and Hauser & Wirth.

**Link:** [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uPeA0PgY-Rc&ab\\_channel=GALLERIACONTINUA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uPeA0PgY-Rc&ab_channel=GALLERIACONTINUA)

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**Image no:** 38

**Caption:** Subodh Gupta, *Cooking the World*, 2017-2022, Aluminum utensils, steel, cable, wood, kitchen appliances, Dimensions variable, Photographed by Agostino Osio–Alto Piano, Cipriani, A Belmond Hotel, Venice, 2022, Courtesy of the artist and Galleria Continua.

**Link:** <https://www.galleriacontinua.com/special-projects/cooking-the-world-166>

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**Image no:** 39

**Caption:** Subodh Gupta, *Cooking the World I at Art Basel Unlimited*, 2017, Courtesy of the artist, Galleria Continua and Hauser & Wirth, Zurich. Published in “Subodh Gupta’s Cooking up a storm at Art Basel”, *Architectural Digest*, 14 June 2017.

**Link:** <https://www.architecturaldigest.in/content/subodh-guptas-cooking-storm-art-basel/>

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**Image no:** 40

**Caption:** Subodh Gupta, *Cooking the World at Cipriani Venice*, 2022, Aluminum utensils, steel, cable, wood, kitchen appliances, Dimensions variable, Photographed by Marco Valmarana, Courtesy of the artist and Galleria Continua.

**Link:** <https://www.galleriacontinua.com/special-projects/cooking-the-world-166>

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**Image no:** 41

**Caption:** Subodh Gupta, *Cooking the World at Cipriani Venice*, 2022, Aluminum utensils, steel, cable, wood, kitchen appliances, Dimensions variable, Photographed by Marco Valmarana, Courtesy of the artist and Galleria Continua.

**Link:** <https://www.galleriacontinua.com/special-projects/cooking-the-world-166>

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**Image no:** 42

**Caption:** Subodh Gupta, *Cooking the World at Art Basel*, 2017, Aluminum utensils, steel, cable, wood, kitchen appliances, Photographed by Peter Hauck, Courtesy of the artist and Galleria Continua.

**Link:** <https://www.galleriacontinua.com/artists/subodh-gupta-33>

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**Image no:** 43

**Caption:** Subodh Gupta, *This is not a Fountain*, 2011, Old aluminium utensils, water, painted brass taps, PVC pipes, motor, Dimensions variable, Courtesy of the artist and Nature Morte, New Delhi.

**Link:** <https://naturemorte.com/artists/subodhgupta/selectedwork/9957/>

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**Image no: 44**

**Caption:** Subodh Gupta, *Line of Control*, 2008, Brass and Copper Utensils, 500 x 500 x 500 cm, Published in “Subodh Gupta: Railway boy”, XIBT Contemporary Art Magazine.

**Link:** <https://www.xibtmagazine.com/2020/04/subodh-gupta-railway-boy/>

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**Image no: 45**

**Caption:** Subodh Gupta, *Jal Mein Kumbh, Kumbh Mein Jal Hai*, 2012, Photographed by Martin Argyroglo, Monnaie de Paris.

**Link:**

<https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/subodh-gupta-jal-mein-kumbh-kumbh-mein-jal-hai/EgFCBV4ai53hZg>

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**Image no: 46**

**Caption:** Subodh Gupta, *Terminal*, 2010, Brass, thread, Dimensions Variable, Published in “Subodh Gupta: Terminal – Installation Time Lapse”, National Museum of Asian Art, USA.

**Link:** <https://asia-archive.si.edu/exhibition/subodh-gupta-terminal-installation-timelapse/>

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Across Indian households, metal utensils are a common sight. What does it mean for these domestic items to find their way into works of art? Subodh Gupta's practice reveals to us how they can be used to explore important themes in light of pressing contemporary issues.

*"I initially used these objects primarily as embodiments of nostalgia, family, ritual, and home. Then, I slowly began to see them as encompassing more poignant world issues, such as starvation, migration, and environmental crises."*

Let's look a little closer at some ways in which he adopts and transforms ready-made objects to create unique forms and interventions.

### **Commodities and Consumerism**

From a distance, this work takes the form of a glittering skull, as we see here. A closer look reveals how it is made up of buckets, spoons, bowls, plates and lunch boxes. These stainless steel objects that are commonly used by people from different class positions in India, appear instantly legible to a majority of its population. In this work, however, these objects convey more than what meets the eye. On the one hand, as shiny, mass-produced items, they represent the capitalist temptation of new commodities. On the other, the utensils associated with food and sustenance are all empty, suggesting a state of hunger, as also indicated by the work's title, *Very Hungry God*. Gupta effectively highlights the paradoxes that exist in a consumer society, where poverty co-exists with excess. It is no wonder that the work takes the shape of a skull, a symbol of mortality and death.

Gupta's sculptural installations like *Ray* and *When Soak Becomes Spill*, as we see here, continue his critique of over-consumption and commodification.

Let's now turn to another strategy that Gupta adopts in his reference to metal utensils.

### **Playing with Scale**

In works like these, Gupta sculpturally creates oversized handis or cooking pots suspended from ceilings. Across kitchens in India, the cooking pot is used both to

cook as well as to serve. In these brass works, they take on more dramatic forms challenging their traditional functions. As we see in these images, they have a commanding presence, and invite audiences to look at them from all angles. Their gleaming exteriors are juxtaposed with hollow, void-like interiors representing Gupta's interest in interrupting beautiful objects with something 'disturbing' or 'ugly'. These contain within them, in one instance, a web of barbed wire, and in the other, two smaller pots with one holding a found piece of rock. The works also reflect Gupta's interest in the 15th century mystic Kabir's poetic references to the vessel as metaphor for the human body, which can be a container of the earthly, cosmic and the divine.

*“Iss ghat antar baag bagiche, isi mein sirijanhara / Iss ghat antar saat samundar, isi mein nau lakh taare.” (“Within this vessel are bowers and groves, and within it is the creator. / Within this vessel are the seven oceans and the unnumbered stars.” - Kabir*

Through the exaggerated representation of ordinary objects, Gupta's works reveal to us how the mundane can be used to invoke something as grand and macroscopic as the universe itself.

The theatrical quality of his installations echoes across several of his works. Recalling his background in performance, these also reflect upon issues concerning shifting cultural norms, displacement of communities and migrant issues. In particular, his works that address food consumption and preparation have drawn great attention.

### **Community, Performance and Object Histories**

Gupta's work *Cooking the World* highlights the symbolic importance that food and eating rituals hold across the world. Presented at Art Basel in 2017 and as a collateral event at the Venice Biennale in 2022, this performance was held in an immersive open hut constructed with used aluminium utensils. Inside, he prepared food, as a way of building a community. By creating the performance site from vessels discarded by previous users, Gupta also bridges individual histories of objects within a collective space. Interactive and participatory, this work invites audiences to consciously think about some of Gupta's larger preoccupations surrounding inclusivity.

Through his use of unconventional yet popular materials with a conceptual and large-scale approach, Gupta has been recognised as a pioneering figure in contemporary Indian art. His works reveal how factory-made, utilitarian objects can invite considerations of bigger ideas, from the societal to the cosmic.

### Postscript

Born in 1964, in Khagaul, Bihar (eastern India) where he was raised before moving to New Delhi, Subodh Gupta's early works have reflected his experiences of growing up in a small town in India, reckoning with issues such as poverty, illiteracy and caste-based inequalities. These themes continued to inform his installations that — as we've seen in this video — have further considered questions surrounding class, globalisation, migration and capitalism.

Gupta's works have been prominently exhibited in museums across India and the world, and his mid-career survey was held at the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi in 2012. Several of his installations, such as 'Very Hungry God' have been exhibited in a variety of sites and contexts in different iterations.

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