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Debanjan Roy: Experiments With Truth



No, your eyes do not lie: This is Gandhi at a call center. This is from the exhibit [Experiments in Truth](#), at the Aicon Gallery here in [New York](#).

I saw this work at the pre-convention reception for SAJA's 15th anniversary, and immediately wanted to know more about how it was made, and who was behind the large, striking exhibits. That's a life-sized Gandhi; I could have sat down next to him and put on a headset, taken a call. (I sort of wanted to.)



Here we have Gandhi sharing music with another person. This, too, is life-sized. As though I could have leaned over to the two of them, plucked out an earbud, and said hello. (Do you think they are listening to [the Kominas](#), Taz? What do you think would be on Gandhi's iPod?)

The pieces are striking not only because of their size, but also because of their precision and, of course, their colors: candy red and metallic silver. (Roy also had some prints and acrylics on display—all prominently featuring Gandhi. There were also [other Gandhi sculptures](#), including [a smaller Gandhi wearing cargo pants, talking on a cell phone, and walking a dog.](#))

The Aicon gallery provided the pictures above, and was also kind enough to set up a chat with Roy, who told me a little bit about the exhibition.

To make the sculptures, first, Roy draws what he envisions the final piece will look like. Then he makes steel skeletons for clay models that are the basis for the sculptures. He uses these to make molds; then he uses the molds to make the sculptures, which are fiberglass.

One of the big sculptures takes about a month and a half to make. The smaller ones—Gandhi's head, for example, which you can see in the Aicon link—might take a couple of weeks.

Roy also told me how Gandhi came to play such a big role in the exhibit.

"If I think of India as a house, in Indian context," Roy said, "the father is the main person of the house and he is representing all the good and bad things."

Roy sees Gandhi as the father of India, and his death as the real beginning of Indian-on-Indian violence. Before this, others were responsible for violence: The British and the Moghuls, for example. But Gandhi himself was killed by an Indian. Today, Indians hurt Indians, and India faces many problems. In a certain way, every day, Gandhi is murdered—and so some of the sculptures are red.

So why are some of the others silver? I asked. The silver points to modernity, technology, industrial metal. It's "smart," and "shiny," and "fresh-looking," Roy said. The material's commercial look and the Gandhi figure speak to the interconnectedness of technology and Indian politics. Indeed, the exhibit features computers, call centers, cell phones, Bluetooth, iPods...

All this said, in the end, the exhibit grabbed me not because of the size of the sculptures, or their bright colors, but because of the art's interaction with the concept of time. I was walking around the exhibit with a friend who observed that Gandhi was a bit of an anachronism in his own time; so what if he was an anachronism in our modern era? When I repeated this to Debanjan, he shared with me his idea of Gandhi as the continually hurt, continually exploring Indian. As I moved around the exhibit, I saw [his](#) calendars, and his split images of Gandhi as he had changed over time. And of course, this means something different if you decide that Gandhi as India doesn't stop changing at the moment of his death. He keeps going. And in almost every image that Roy presents, Gandhi is open-faced, sweet—full, still, of possibility.

Get thee to the Aicon Gallery. Roy's art will be there through August 1.