

Inappropriated: The Toy Gandhi

October 2nd – October 26th, 2019
Press Preview & V.I.P. Reception:
Wednesday, October 2nd,
6:00-8:00pm

Featuring a lecture by Prof. Sumathi
Ramaswamy, starting at 6:30pm

On the occasion of the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, on October 2, 2019, Aicon Contemporary is pleased to open “**Inappropriated: The Toy Gandhi**”, a solo exhibit by the Kolkata based sculptor **Debanjan Roy**.

The opening will feature a lecture by **Prof. Sumathi Ramaswamy**, the James B. Duke Professor of History, and Chair of the History Department, Duke University. Prof. Ramaswamy is a cultural historian of South Asia and the British Empire. Her research over the last few years has been largely in the areas of visual studies, the history of cartography, and gender. She has studied and written extensively about Gandhi and his role in India's visual culture.



Debanjan Roy, *Toy Gandhi 1*, 2019

American civil rights activists have marched on Washington wearing his signature cap. Dictators have issued postage stamps with his picture on it. Restaurant owners have named their all-you-can-eat-buffet establishments after him. Indeed, the organization his assassin belonged to, has recently co-opted his legacy. Gandhi, the icon, if not the man, has become all things to all people, a veritable toy.



Debanjan Roy, *India Shinning I (Gandhi and the Laptop)*, 2007, Fiberglass and paint, 27 x 46 x 30 in.

Although the toy theme is new for Roy, Gandhi as a subject is not. Niru Ratnam, UK based curator and art historian, wrote this about Roy's earlier solo show "Experiments with Truth": "He has produced a series of works which take Gandhi ostensibly as their subject but this is a Gandhi who is seen holding or interacting with incommensurably contemporary objects; a cell-phone or an iPod for example. This incommensurability is at the heart of Roy's project—how do we

square India's history with its present and its future?"

The diversity of claimants on Gandhi's legacy, seem to find manifestation in the diversity of language of the toy (sculpture) making. Whereas in previous art work, Debanjan Roy retained a strong and consistent visual vocabulary, shiny poppy human forms painted glossy automotive red, this work wanders, visually. From Russian dolls, where different stages of Gandhi's life (and of his longtime partner and wife, Kasturba) are housed inside of each other, to bobble head sculpture, and marionettes, Roy runs over large swathes of sculptural terrain. Yet, through all the ground that he covers, his grounding in clay forming and wood-carving come through consistently. This is an artist most at home in the narrative and the literal. The power of suggestion is employed not in form making, but in letting the viewer, perhaps uncomfortably, come to terms seeing a familiar icon in a very unfamiliar setting. Perhaps, the viewer even asks herself if she is complicit in disparaging a pillar of modern mankind.

This uncomfortable zone is where Roy thrives. Personally, he is very comfortable in making the viewer uncomfortable, as he is a big fan of Gandhi, but not the toy Gandhi has become—a plaything for anyone with an agenda. In this making us think, making us revisit our own relationship to Gandhi, lies Debanjan Roy's genius.



Debanjan Roy, *Toy Gandhi 2*, 2019