



BACK TO THE BASICS

Gyan Panchal sensitively coaxes material into bearing evidence about the tension between natural and synthetic worlds, observes **Kamayani Sharma.**

Paris-based sculptor Gyan Panchal debuted in Mumbai at Amrita Jhaveri Projects from the 18th of January to the 3rd of March. The show seemed like an eerie collection of mysterious relics. Curious about the adversarial histories of man and material, Panchal looks to peel back the layers of civilisation and discover matter in its original form.

Steered by inspirations garnered from the Arte Povera movement, Panchal's way of engaging in art production is premised on interrogating everyday materiality, its manifestations and status. An admirably non-committal, almost forensic attitude informs his works. But, of course, they are haunted by inescapable political and environmental concerns and questions. Panchal probes the past of our material culture without obsessing about its future. The tension between the natural and the synthetic here is not resolved but examined, making Panchal's works studies in restraint.

The first piece on display, *prai* (2012) looked like a pair of granite jaws, one reddish piece resting on an upturned grey one, a bit like a see-saw. The stone at the bottom had smears of red ink as if doing a bad impression of the one that rested on top of it; the crescent shadow of their aligning contours had a sinister air. Of the three works involving marble, the most striking, *cicami* (2012), comprised four slabs, three lined from wall to floor in one area and the fourth propped up against the adjacent wall. The topmost slab hung by a nail on the wall and, in trying to ape a decorative posture, gave away the piece's attempt at parodying a manmade template

of how material should behave. A poignant performance of the intense relationship between parent and child, *wedhneumi* (2012) juxtaposed the delicate crinkles of moistened paper with the forlorn wrinkles of the tree bark used to make it. Yellow parchment, processed and regal, hung behind a folded-up, torn and stained tree skin resembling an old unwashed cloth. In *qotred 1* (2012), a faded khadi sheet was put out to dry, its faint green borders barely visible, attempting to achieve simplicity in spite of its complicated ancestry.

Panchal's political abstinence grants the works their appeal but the economic status of stuff in an era of excess and the movement of material cannot be ignored. While Arte Povera sought to rescue material from post-War damage and rehabilitate it in the context of the white cube, bringing material from the street and factory into the gallery is no longer a fitting response to the condition of an increasingly wasteful and decadent world.

The odd names of Panchal's pieces were in Proto Indo-European, an ancient root language. In coming up with this spare, deeply troubled yet apolitical show, he

mined prehistory to recover the silences of newborn matter at the time of their birth and tried to decode its language in this age of noise.

Gyan Panchal. *wedhneumi.* Bark of a palm tree, paint, paper. 220 cms x 50 cms x 24 cms. 2012.

