

Smart
Designers

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Srila Mookherjee pg 08 | Photographed by Yamini Mookherjee

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PLAY OF LIGHT

*Installation artist and designer
Vibhor Sogani illuminates
spaces with his striking creations*



*1,2. Aura Royal
3. Pepsi Cup trophy - designed for
international cricket matches*

diversity - not just in materiality but in its manifestation as well. For the first ten years, I was largely providing design consultancy services. In 2002, however, I launched my signature collection of table top accessories. This moment marked a major point in my career - a shift from the service industry to design and creation. Thereafter the range expanded into lights and furniture. This shift also led me to create my own manufacturing set up. I work on commissioned light installations and art installations; and provide customized design solutions for chandeliers.

How would you describe your style?

VS: The style has changed over the years. 'Simple is beautiful' seems to work in my approach. It never goes out of fashion. It can never get boring. And it is very difficult to achieve. Maybe that is why it's timeless. Whenever I manage to strike a simple chord with my creation, be it designs or an artwork, it gives me a sense of achievement.

Tell us about your NID days.

VS: Memories of NID, where I studied Industrial Design, are of stress free and relaxed living. It was truly fun, and learning happened so subtly that I barely felt it. Design got seamlessly integrated with our way of life and our way of thinking. The foundation program in the first year was very effective. My time at NID was never about any specific side of design - it was a well rounded exposure to various facets of the design world. The learning came from watching and talking, and through books. Perhaps that's why it happened without me

realizing the growth and the evolution. The journey continues. I still like to do things my way, but the foundation ensures that the process comes naturally and without any pressure. Creative thinking has truly become an integral part of my life and existence.

What led to your signature brand 'Sogani'?

VS: After graduating, I worked with a couple of industries. I felt terribly constrained in those environments and decided to open my own studio in 1994 with the intent of getting involved in a wide range of design projects that open up avenues of exploration and



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Do you have a preference for working with steel?

VS: I connect with steel in a personal vein. My relationship with the medium can be compared to an affair – challenging and frustrating at times, but passionately exciting for the most part. I have shaped a variety of materials in my career, such as wood, iron, aluminum, brass, copper, and silver, and I am constantly eyeing new ones. However, the complexity of crafting steel throws up a challenge because it requires intelligent amalgamation of new technology and hand skills. The range of textures, finishes, and reflections that it offers continuously draws me.

How do you market and distribute your products?

VS: Our clientele is mostly boutique, niche, and focused on commissioned pieces. Our model is mostly project driven. Professionals in the industry (architects, designers, builders, even individuals) connect with us for their varied upcoming and current projects.

What was the most offbeat brief you ever received?

VS: The Chief Minister of Delhi gave us a one-line brief to showcase Delhi 'from walled city to world city'. After much deliberation, 'Sprouts' came about. The underlying theme was 'when the seeds begin to sprout', subtly indicating India as a growing nation. New age material, technology and esthetics were used to depict it. The project was special in many ways.

Another interesting brief was for the Samsung Cup for the India – Pakistan cricket series. In 2004, India was going to Pakistan after 14 years. The nation was waiting with anticipation and hype around the event was immense. In line with the sentiment, the brief was to create an iconic trophy and the look of the event on the lines of FIFA (football world cup trophy). This project eventually became a turning point in my career.

Which projects are you particularly proud of?

VS: Each project gave me a high while it was being pursued. The journey of creation is always a bit of a roller coaster ride. There is always a phase of deliberation and even frustration. But, this is what leads to creation, and the joy of creation is immense. Some projects that are more challenging invariably give that extra sense of fulfillment. The installation series on 'Mahatma Gandhi' was perhaps one of my most challenging projects, as I needed to deviate from my natural pattern of thinking. The trophies I designed for mega cricket events gave me an adrenaline rush. The exploration and experimentation involved in creating the sculptural and unusual trophies was challenging, gratifying and gave me visibility in the public domain.

Do awards make a difference?

VS: Achievements, awards and media bring recognition and add to credibility. In 2002, when I first launched my signature brand with table top accessories, the show received the 'Best applied art show' at IHC. This gave me a boost to increase my design portfolio. In 2004 the Samsung trophy and event received international awards. In 2014, I was honored as 'Indian Art Icon of the year' in Singapore.

Achievements also come in the form of appreciation and recognition of your work by the general public. Getting invited to various national museums and galleries abroad also bring a sense of achievement and international recognition. When you are running your own show, these bring in a sense of reassurance, which is crucial.

How has the journey from industrial design to art been?

VS: The journey was seamless and very interesting. Initially the shift was not felt as I moved from one 'commission'

to the other, each being a real life, client based assignment. And soon I felt ready and confident to deviate and launch my own range in the design domain and have a solo show in the art world.

What, in your opinion, turns conceptual art into a commercial success?

VS: When doing a conceptual deviation in your regular language of style, you can never be sure. The years of exposure and experience are what guide you. In the end, you may not always be right, but what the heck... that's the beauty of it!



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ART



What are your plans for the future?

VS: By nature, I cannot plan in advance. I tend to go with the flow - a step at a time approach. So far the career growth has been very organic and definitely unplanned. If I were to make choices I would say that I'd like to do many more projects in the public domain - public art at a global level. On the design front, the intent is to constantly enlarge the collection and make a distinct mark globally.

What is the one piece of advice that you live by?

VS: 'The biggest risk in life is, not to take a risk.' When I am at crossroads, wondering whether to take a leap, this is what I tell myself.

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