

Of Butterflies, Dead Pixels and Other Ideas

Posted on Oct 18, 2014 in Chennai

Express News Service



Renowned artist Jaret Vadera's art talks about several issues in the present day that are layered and interconnected at various levels, taking inspiration from his childhood experiences

CHENNAI: Paradoxes, the immigration wave, the digital age and the politics of identity and race— Jaret Vadera's art speaks of layered issues of our times. An interdisciplinary artist and cultural producer based in New York, Jaret's cultural influences are many — a childhood and early education in Canada, an Indian parent, a master's degree at Yale University.

"I like stories with missing pieces," he says, as he shows his work at IIT-Madras, in conversation with artist Meenakshi Thirukode, creative director of DakshinaChitra

Growing up in a working class family in Toronto, he worked with everyday objects like telephones and put them together in a different way, with pieces missing. And his work today too, does not show all— photographs that are airbrushed and layered with flexiglass giving it a blurred sheen and hazy outlines, with just a hint of what there is. "Photographs sometimes become a licence to forget," he says with a laugh.

Jaret's work is strongly influenced by the digital. "Infographics, visual culture, programming— this is where we live," he says. He works with video installations, where the space becomes the art which one can walk into. "Even technology can be a way of experiencing the sublime, it needn't be just nature," he adds. His art uses these influences from technology- X-rays, algorithms, infographics and maps.

Identity and race too make their way into his concepts, as social engagement is a parallel part of Jaret's life. As a non-white person studying at Yale, the social conditioning and prejudices brought about several challenges for him. "If you are a person of colour, you are considered a representative of your race," he says, talking about stereotyping of under-represented communities.

One of his experiments involved taking different national flags, which he believes, make strong cultural statements, and mixing up their colours to see the result. "The result was the colour of band-aid, that always was labelled in crayon boxes as 'skin colour'. But this is not the colour of my parents' skin, I used to think while growing up," he says.

With a lot of talk and analysis of art today, it is no longer left for the audience to just 'know' when they look at a work. "I would like to speak less about my art," he adds with a laugh, but believes that with the pluralism in society today, it is important to explain the context of a work of art.