

Optimism hidden in oddities

BY JYOTI KALSI
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Oddities and hybrids — this is how Bita Fayyazi describes the sculptural pieces in her latest show, which is titled *Obscure Stream of Life, But I'm Still Having My Afternoon Cuppa*. The Iranian sculptor and installation artist has used various found materials, such as yarn, synthetic hair, cotton wool, wire mesh, needles, chimney hoods, metal sheets and funnels, fibreglass, resin, plaster and armatures, to create these pieces. The part-human, part-animal figures with no facial features and various-coloured fluids oozing out of them look quite grotesque and absurd. But these twisted, deformed mannequins represent the crippled, dysfunctional society the artist sees all around her. Bound tightly with yarn, with the life force being squeezed out of them, these faceless figures make a strong and witty statement against social, political and emotional tyranny.

"I call these pieces oddities because when I began this project I had absolutely no idea or theme in mind. I decided to just work from my subconscious and express my moods and emotions spontaneously. I went to my studio every day with an open mind and began working with the materials that were lying around without thinking about what I wanted to do. But as the pieces took shape, I became aware of the rage that was pent up inside me and which I had to let out of my system because it was suffocating me. So, essentially, these artworks help me vent my feelings about the unhappiness, chaos and disorder I see in the world," Fayyazi says.

The intriguing title she has chosen for the show was inspired by the thoughts of the legendary poet Omar Khayyam. "I used to

Iranian sculptor Bita Fayyazi's grotesque figures convey a deeper message of hope

worry a lot about what is happening in the world and about the future. But then I came across a book, where Khayyam has said that we must live in the moment and not think about the future, which is unknown. These words had a deep impact on me. I realised that the past is past and the future is not in our hands, and that worrying about these just paralyzes us and prevents us from doing anything. I understood that despite everything, life goes on. And even though I am caught in this obscure stream of life, I can still enjoy good moments such as my afternoon cup of tea, and I can still paint. So this exhibition is about the duality that exists in our lives. It reflects the absurdity and the uncertainty of our lives. But above all, it is about living in the moment," the artist says.

Although her sculptures were created spontaneously in the here and now, they carry the past and future within them. Each piece is complex and layered, incorporating various currents from the stream of life. The very first piece she created in this series is a figure titled *Statue of Liberty*. It has a horn-shaped head symbolising the history that we all carry with us. Its protruding belly is a reference to the unknown future that is waiting to burst out. Precariously perched on one leg on top of a metal funnel, the figure reminds us that we are always living on the edge and must be focused on maintaining our balance at the moment. The entire fibreglass body and face are tightly wrapped with red yarn, alluding to the suppression of our desires, thoughts and freedom. But a slimy resin-

ous fluid oozing out of slots cut in the base suggests that our life juices cannot remain suppressed and will find an outlet.

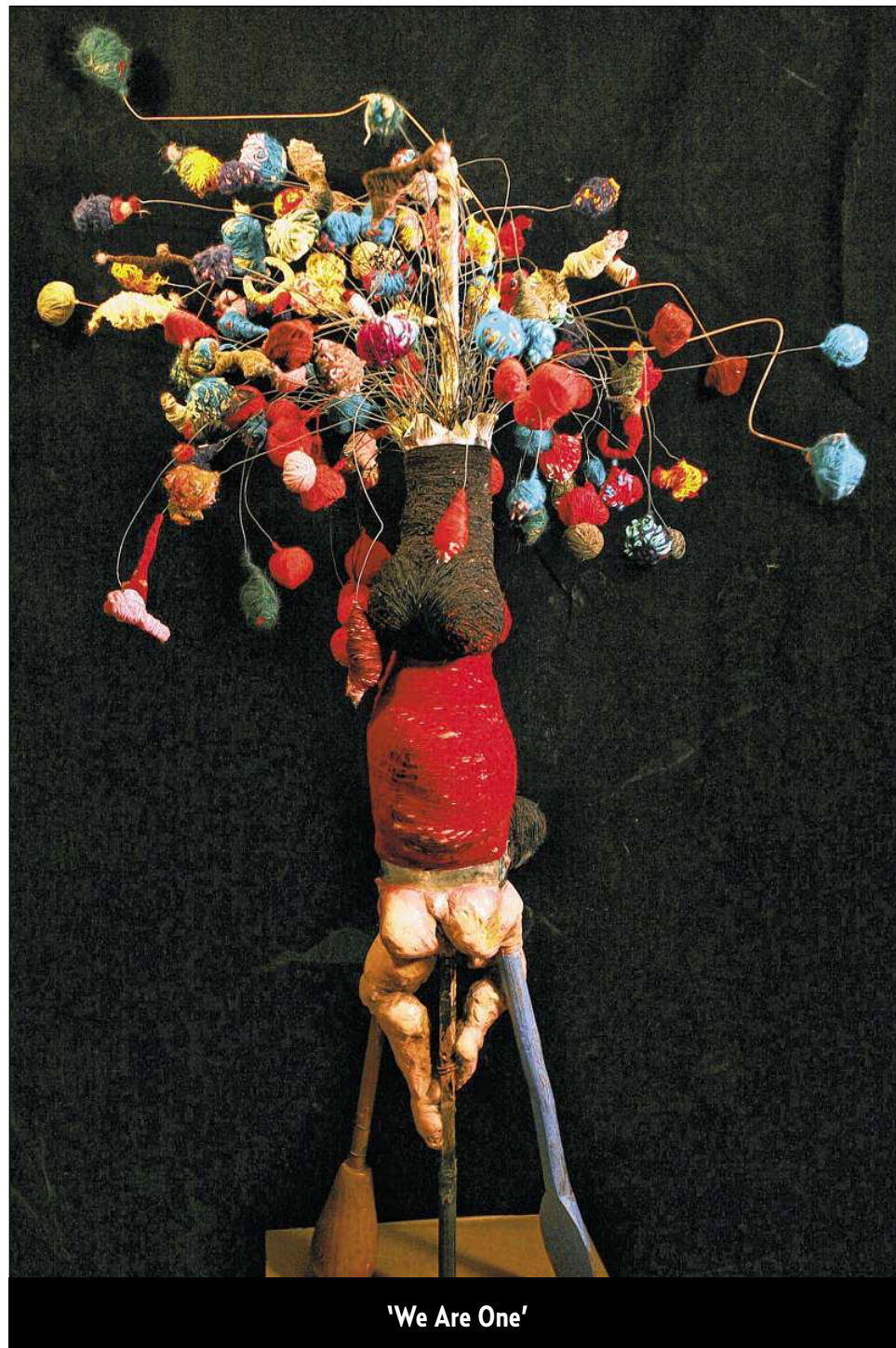
The idea of life juices being squeezed out of suffocated bodies or that of suppressed life juices of freedom and independent thought finding an outlet is a recurrent theme in most of the pieces. Other themes include gender, power and the self-destructive nature of contemporary society. For instance, two pieces titled *Crowned Head* present the contrasting lives of men and women. The female head wears a crown made from a chimney pipe, from which emerge balls of various-coloured yarns representing her stifled fantasies, memories and dreams. The crown on the male head appears strong and powerful. But various signs suggest that this is a lion with no teeth, no authority and no courage. And the figure's rabbit feet indicate that in times of trouble, this lion will flee like a rabbit.

A piece titled *The Thief, the Obscurantist, the Miser* comments on tyranny in various forms. The whip-like hand of this figure implies aggression and violence. And its swollen head symbolises its attempt to amass power, knowledge or wealth without sharing it with others. But the juices oozing out of the figure clearly say that try as they may, these tyrants will not be able to keep their hold on these things for ever.

Fayyazi's dark and intimidating sculptures reflect ugly realities, but also offer hope that things will change. These oddities and hybrids depict the absurdity and duality of life. But they also dare us to embrace life and live every moment to the fullest.

Jyoti Kalsi is an art enthusiast based in Dubai.

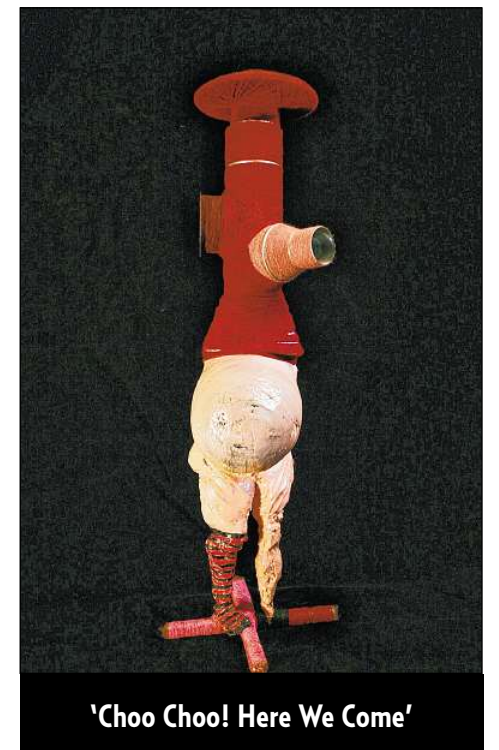
Obscure Stream of Life, But I'm Still Having My Afternoon Cuppa will run at Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde until December 1.



'We Are One'



'Let's Ooze Out'



'Choo Choo! Here We Come'