

Degenerative Disarrangement

UAE-based artist Vikram Divecha, winner of this year's Middle East Emergent Artist Prize, shares the process behind his award-winning project

Launched in 2013 by Maison Van Cleef & Arpels and independent art space Tashkeel, in partnership with the annual design fair Design Days Dubai, this year's edition of the Middle East Emergent Artist Prize was themed around the creative process itself.

Titled 'Turning Point', the prize awarded UAE-based Indian artist Vikram Divecha the top honour for his piece 'Degenerative Disarrangement'. The installation work used pavement bricks uprooted from a Bur Dubai bus station and then relocated to the courtyard of House 33 in Al Fahidi Historical Neighbourhood.

The artist responded to the theme of Turning Point by observing and recreating the arbitrary rearrangement of pavement bricks that occurs during repair work on the city's streets. Scrambled patterns inadvertently occur, as workers are unable to reassemble the original patterns under such rapid work conditions. 'Degenerative Disarrangement' was created by masonry workers within the demanding time constraints they routinely face. The artist had no control over the arrangement.

The process opens up a dialogue on how cultural identities disintegrate, ideologies pixelate and changing times threaten preservation.

Maison Van Cleef & Arpels rewarded Divecha with a trip to Paris to attend courses at L'ÉCOLE Van Cleef & Arpels.

Q&A

With Vikram Divecha

Why did you decide to participate in the Middle East Emergent Artist Prize?

The exhibition invited artists to reveal crucial turns in their practice, which is what interested me. I have been revisiting and reviewing my work via critical discussions, and this exhibit was an opportunity to dismantle the various stages of an artwork to reveal the turning point.

The prize asked artists to submit works in progress. What were your initial thoughts?

Well, the premise of the exhibit was intrusive in an interesting sense. My works confront one with their formal values, and call for inquiry to unearth their socio-political context. So, there was a hesitance to unfold things from my end, but I also saw this exhibit as a window to speak about how I negotiate with the city to make my work.

Tell us about 'Degenerative Disarrangement'.

It's attempting to speak about the loss of original context, about the fluctuating environments we reside in today, where finding identity is a struggle. At the original location, the uprooted pavement bricks ran in parallel yellow lines, but once relocated they formed a chaotic mosaic.

What inspired the project?

One often comes across disarranged bricks on the city streets after road repair works. I came across a massive patch of one such distortion, which quite stumped me. I had an eye opening conversation with a contractor, which is what I underlined at the exhibition. He explained that they have to repair roadworks rapidly, because they can't keep a thoroughfare blocked, and they have to work within a given budget. This creates a time constraint within which the mason must operate, which leads to the bricks being disarranged. What I found interesting was that once a brick is shifted, it is most likely to be misplaced forever, which says a lot about our shifting times.

In what ways is 'Degenerative Disarrangement' a response to your own experiences?

The notions I explore often revolve around shifts in various structures, which stems from the fact that I've resided against a landscape of fluctuating socio-economic climates: the civil war in Lebanon, globalisation in India and the financial and construction crisis in Dubai. The turns within each city further inform and complicate this equation.



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