

Jeremy Sharma: Artists As The Arbiter of Knowledge in The Information Era | COBO Social

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Jeremy Sharma: Artists As The Arbiter of Knowledge in The Information Era



JeremySharma. Photo © Andrea Benedetti



Jeremy Sharma, Terra Faktura (black band), 2014, courtesy Primo Marella Gallery



Jeremy Sharma – ORBITER AND SONATA 3. Installation view, Michael Janssen, 2016



Studio Installation by Jeremy Sharma. Residencies OPEN at Art After Dark, 29 May 2015. Courtesy of NTU CCA Singapore. (Photo by Olivia Kwok)



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Jeremy Sharma residency CCA Singapore, installation view, courtesy CCA

17

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[Naima Morelli](#)

22

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Naima Morelli is an art writer and curator with a focus on contemporary art from the Asia Pacific region. She has written for ArtsHub, Art Monthly Australia...

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Jeremy Sharma's work is highly experiential and draws directly from science. Collaborations with scientists, data collectors and fabricators are an integral part of his art. The Singaporean artist has just completed a residency at Stelva Foundation in Italy and talks with us about the new ideas he is exploring.

TEXT: Naima Morelli

IMAGES: Courtesy of the artist



JeremySharma. Photo © Andrea Benedetti

I first encountered the works of Singaporean artist [Jeremy Sharma](#) on the walls of his Italian gallery Primo Marella. In the beginning, I looked at them as pieces of formal art; abstract installations. Those modular white waves were caressing the eye and were juxtaposed to a peremptory line of colour of a shinier material. There was something musical to it, and also something of a landscape.

The question when faced with highly-interpretable, highly mysterious works like the ones of Sharma, is always the same: how does an abstract piece of art is born in the mind of an artist? Did he have a particular outcome in mind when he started working on it? Are there any rules he follows? How much is programmed and how much is determined by chance?



Jeremy Sharma, Terra Faktura (black band), 2014, courtesy Primo Marella Gallery

Turned out the starting point for that particular series of work, called *Terra Faktura*, is what we could define as "poetic science". The surfaces were nothing else than the tridimensional reproduction of radiographs of pulsars – stars that emit electromagnetic radiation at regular intervals.

While the *Terra Faktura* and all the Pulsar-inspired work are definitely the most iconic produced by Jeremy, it would be unfair to reduce the eclecticism of the artist to just one single series. Experimenting with video, photography, drawing and installation, Jeremy is also a musician, having performed and recorded for albums, gigs, theatre and radio.

Jeremy's last artistic investigations were developed during a residency at Stelva Foundation, at Desenzano del Garda, Italy. In this interview he tells us about his latest line of research, and his creative process.

Did you have some art background in your childhood?

When I was a child I really enjoyed drawing, it was my way of escaping and expressing myself, but I never thought I would become an artist. I was in a school which had an emphasis in science and math, not so much on art. Back then art was seen as a minor subject. I did very bad in school (laugh) and decided to become a graphic designer. In my first painting class at LaSalle we were

painting raw chicken parts and I felt that I loved it. I loved the experience of translating meat as paint. So that's when I started thinking about art seriously.

You started with figurative painting. Back then how important was the subject versus the formal element?

I guess back when I was doing figurative painting the subject matter was more obvious. I think now the subject is a bit more invisible. In the past it was less conceptual as well, there was not the same interest in science. I was more exploring painting, it was a lot more physical, as being a painter means engaging intimately with the canvas. Today it is a little more collaborative, in the sense that I work with people that allow me to go beyond my own set of skills. If I work with data, I'd talk to a scientist that collects them and create something from there. In the past I wasn't so advanced conceptually, I was mainly trying to get stuff out of my system, it was more of a cathartic experience. But I think going through phases is important, you realize what you are after.



Jeremy Sharma – ORBITER AND SONATA 3, Installation view, Michael Janssen, 2016

It's interesting that you used the expression "being after something". In other interviews you refer about your art practice as a quest..

I think a lot in an abstract sense, for example about time or anything that can occupy space. Anything can be a form, even thought, and when it materialize it becomes something you can go after. But for my Terra Faktura paintings, it was this whole idea of trying to manifest the idea of death and time with the data of dying stars and materialize them as lines of form, as shapes. And then along the way, it always intersects with your life. In these days I don't work so much in my studio, I visit the workshops of people that help me create my art, and when I'm there I always get ideas from their process and the technology are they using. So I get curious about sculpture, about making, about collaboration. It always fills me with interest; where something can go or lead to some other thing. It is a never-ending investigation of things around me and it is experiential.

As you mentioned earlier, in works like *Terra Faktura* there is the whole back story of pulsars, which is really fascinating. At the same time, a viewer looking at the work won't know the story. Do you see that as problematic at all?

You can experience my work also only visually. When you read about it helps with the context and become more interesting, but it is not necessary. This is the kind of art that can only happen now, because we live in an information age and that influences how we see art now. I think an artist is

the arbiter of knowledge and form in a time where you are bombarded with information. You collaborate through long distances, you are not meeting a person. Only today you can work this way. In my art I want to acknowledge the world we live in. In works like *Terra Faktura*, which have been carved by robots, I explore the idea of technology and information. Perhaps the works remind to traditional woodcarving and yet they are not realized in a traditional way, there is an interaction between a human and technology, and this creates a new species, or form. Something alien.



Studio Installation by Jeremy Sharma. Residencies OPEN at Art After Dark, 29 May 2015. Courtesy of NTU CCA Singapore. (Photo by Olivia Kwok)

How did you first learn about the pulsars?

It was from the "Unknown Pleasures" album by Joy Division. When I first saw the cover I immediately did a research on the design of Peter Saville. He appropriated the drawing from a scientific encyclopaedia, it was the first pulsar discovered by a British scientist. I wanted to go a bit deeper, so I collected all the known data of pulsars that have been recorded. They all have different characteristics, and the wave form you see is everywhere. It's a very sort of contemporary thing, you see it a lot in design and in architecture. There is something quite soothing to it. I was also interested to retain a vertical scroll, which is also the way the scientific journals present the data of pulsars, on a strip. It reminded me of these brush paintings on a scroll, so it connected to art history in a way. I'm also thinking of artists such as Castellani, and his white paintings, or Manzoni.

Right, there was a period in art history, in the '60s and '70s, when a lot of monochromes were produced.

In Germany there was the Zero movement looking at new materials, avant-garde and technology. In Japan Gutai and Mono-ha were also working with monochromes. It seems that today there are many people that are doing monochrome paintings as well. I think in a way we all relate to one another.



Studio Installation by Jeremy Sharma. Residencies OPEN at Art After Dark, 29 May 2015. Courtesy of NTU CCA Singapore. (Photo by Olivia Kwok)

Monochromes of course look alike, but it's interesting to observe the different motivations that push artists to realize them. You were doing monochromes too, earlier in your career. How did you approach them?

Many think monochrome is a style, but it is not. I feel that you don't start with monochromes as an artist, you arrive to monochromes. A common thread would be to let go of yourself, because you don't have to articulate an expressive language. For me it is more about the material. It is more about how it reminds of sensations and sounds. So perhaps colour it is not important, it can be just white, or just primary colours.

Having the chance to bounce ideas with your fabricators in their workshops, do you feel contemporary art should be more inclusive?

I used to be more elitist in the way I saw art, thinking it was only for the few that understand it. But I completely changed my mind on that. I think art is for everyone who wants to appreciate it. So that is why in my work I have always been about something a bit more primal, a bit more experiential. Something you don't have to explain. It connects to the senses and our basic needs. I try to use a language that can connect with anyone, and see if people can find meaning, appreciation or engagement. Also it helps people slowing down, and get in touch with something again. This is much needed, especially in Singapore, where everything moves so fast.



Jeremy Sharma residency CCA Singapore, installation view, courtesy CCA

Last year you were invited to do a [residency at CCA](#), where you developed work around the ideas of time, capital and the economy in our present society, how did you worked in that space?

I consider myself to be quite spatial and I like the space I had at CCA. Because it had no windows it felt like a laboratory, an incubator for the artist. This had an influence on the work, which played with signals and frequencies. It was really abstract and I don't know if the public really understood what was going on, but I think that was the point, it was more sensorial. You didn't need to read about it, you just experienced it. You hear, you sense, you see, you feel.

One last big question. What kind of legacy would you like to leave with your art?

I try to not be so self-important! Perhaps what I'm most interested in is how people see art. If you look at the greatest artists, they contributed to the way you think about art, and expanded the definition of what art can be. So in some way you want to be part of that, even if you are a small voice in that huge landscape. Of course, I feel I'm only starting and I have a long way to go.

About the Artist:

Jeremy Sharma obtained his Master of Art (Fine Art) at the LASALLE-SIA College of the Arts / Open University, United Kingdom in 2006, and his Bachelor of Art (Fine Art) with High Distinction from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), Australia in 2003.

Over the past nine years, he has had a number of solo exhibitions and presentations in Singapore, that includes Mode Change (2014) with Michael Janssen Gallery, Terra Sensa at the Singapore Biennale 2013, Apropos (2012) at the Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore, Variations (2011) at Art Forum Gallery, The Protection Paintings – Of Sensations and Superscriptions(2008) at Jendela, Esplanade and End of A Decade (2007) at The Substation Gallery. He has participated in numerous group exhibitions in Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Hong Kong, Bangladesh, Italy, Switzerland, England and the United States.

Sharma has had overseas residency programmes, and received several awards, including Royal Overseas Travel Scholarship Award (2007) JCCI Arts Award with art collective KYTV (2005), Studio 106 residency Award (2004 Singapore), Finalist in the Philip Morris Singapore Arts Awards (2003), The Lee Foundation Study Grant (2002) and the Della Butcher Award (1999).

His work has been the subject of critical discussion in catalogues of exhibitions in which he has participated and has been widely reviewed by the local press.

His work is part of a number of public and private collections, notably the Singapore Art Museum, National Library Board Singapore, Ngee Ann Kongsi Singapore, The Westin Singapore and Societe Generale. He currently teaches in the Faculty of Fine Arts at LASALLE College of the Arts.

Naima Morelli is an arts writer and curator with a focus on contemporary art from the Asia Pacific region. She has written for ArtsHub, Art Monthly Australia, Art to Part of Culture and Escape Magazine, among others, and she is the author of "Arte Contemporanea in Indonesia, un'introduzione" a book focused on the development of contemporary art in Indonesia. As a curator, her practice revolves around creating meaningful connections between Asia, Europe and Australia.

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