

Debanjan Roy

Born 1975, Kolkata, India.

Debanjan Roy is engaged in an ongoing process to articulate the changing social realities of day-to-day India. He has produced a series of works which take Gandhi ostensibly as their subject but this is a Gandhi who is seen holding or interacting with incommensurably contemporary objects; a cell-phone or an iPod for example. This incommensurability is at the heart of Roy's project – how do we square India's history with its present and its future?

Roy is part of a generation of artists who has witnessed India's transformation into a nascent global superpower and like many, is keen to interrogate this process. Also of interest for Roy is the rise of the Indian middle class, and its social and environmental ramifications among others. Others of his generation use the signifiers of Indian domesticity (steel utensils in Subodh Gupta's work for example) in order to generate a dissonance between material and statement. Roy uses the key figure in 20th century Indian history – Gandhi is used as a signifier of the history of India, a history of resistance and self-emancipation. His language is pop – he is one of the few Indian artists operating at the moment whose visual idiom very deliberately reference Pop Art, with his shiny repeated figures of Gandhi recalled Oldenburg's outsized signs of American culture or Warhol's repetition of American icons, most obviously, Marilyn Monroe. If Warhol's repetition of Marilyn emptied out her face of its personal qualities, mirroring perhaps the emptying processes of celebrity, then Roy's repetition of Gandhi empties Gandhi of reverence. Instead he is seen posed in increasingly confused, yet happy poses – a large bird perches on his head in one of Roy's works. Yet Roy seems to be ambivalent about what this process means – his use of 'India Shining' repeatedly in his titles does not suggest a whole-hearted belief in the rhetoric of India's march to global superpower.

The artist lives and works in Kolkata, India.