

## LOS ANGELES

### Sandeep Mukherjee at Margo Leavin

In his first solo exhibition—and one of the best of the season—L.A. artist Sandeep Mukherjee used startlingly subtle means to evoke a sensuousness worthy of his show's title, "Redolence." The drawings, all untitled, depict multiple versions of the artist's nude body, torso and bald head, floating or tumbling through space or pools of water. Creating a delicate surface tension, he augments the lightly colored pencil drawings by scoring and embossing the paper or vellum supports. These lines create tattoo-like effects that seem to displace the drawings' fields into a kind of abstract space.

The multiple-view self-portraits suggest a fantastical, airy interior realm where rarefied self-consciousness manifests itself in pure physicality. In one work, repeated incised whirlpools seem to propel waist-up depictions of the artist through a flat blue acrylic field. In another, dusky rose nudes dive and fall against a cream-colored background. A smaller work depicts a daisy chain of round heads on a fleshy orange field.

The showstopper, a nearly 8-foot nude self-portrait, is overlaid with a sparse array of embossed, lozenge-shaped leaves impressed from both the front and back of the paper. Occasionally overlapping as if they were raining over the fig-

ure, the variously textured leaves create a shallow depth of field. The serene, gorgeously articulated nude stands with arms relaxed at his sides, his mouth open as if exhaling in a slow yoga breathing exercise that is in sync with the falling leaves.

The lightly applied pencil shadings and crisp embossings make even the large-scale drawings intimate works that demand close-up viewing, and all are so delicately drawn that they defy photographic representation. On their lightweight supports, the drawings seem to present a kind of struggle into being, as if registering an unsettled quality of self-portraiture. While consummately self-involved, they appear to be products less of narcissism than of a rarefied self-revelation. They suggest a bare-bones spirituality made manifest in depicted flesh. For Mukherjee, the act of drawing regenerates and reaffirms the self.

—Michael Duncan

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**Sandeep Mukherjee: Detail of Untitled, 2000, acrylic, color pencil, needle on paper, 42½ by 92¼ inches; at Margo Leavin.**

