

Miles, Christopher, "Sandeep Mukherjee", *Artforum*, January 2006, p 229.

## Sandeep Mukherjee

### SISTER

Since 1997, when he was studying for his MFA at UCLA, Sandeep Mukherjee has exhibited subtly dynamic drawings made by embossing Duralene—a stiff, vellumlike material—with motifs of flowers, leaves, starbursts, and rippling water. Populating these works are faint yet precise pencil drawings of the nude figure of the artist strolling, floating, or hurtling through dreamlike space. Mukherjee has deviated from his successful formula only occasionally, making his latest offering all the more surprising and impactful.

Sister played host to just a few works, all untitled, and all from 2004 or 2005. One large piece dominated the narrow downstairs space. Eight feet high and nearly twenty-five feet across, it is made up of five sheets of the artist's signature material. Each Duralene panel is embossed with lines that radiate from a single point, creating a system of shallow, refractive, hard-edged furrows. The lines in each panel make sudden, hard turns as they meet those of the neighboring section, resulting in a stuttering linear progression across all five. With the loose delicacy of crepe paper wound around the spokes of a bicycle wheel, rings of color spiral out from each epicenter. These are applied with felt and Q-tips in acrylic ink that maintains a sense of fluidity and captures the luminosity of the support. The density of the ink is varied, creating a modulated glow further punctuated by painted spots of light. The results are like passages of music, each capitalizing on, colluding with, complicating, and in subtle ways even compromising or contradicting the others. Introducing a little discord into this negotiated harmony, all five

monochrome spirals—in shades of indigo, burgundy, brown, and green—are truncated even as they appear to expand.

Though small works of the kind that were hung in the upstairs gallery could easily have been used to fill the wall facing Mukherjee's massive composition, the space was wisely left blank. Work of such impressive size has a tendency to both draw one in for a closer look and push one back in hopes of a broad overview, and allowing the space opposite to remain empty was helpful in that it provided a surface upon which to lean back and meditate. The latter term is apt given the work's obvious debt to spiritual abstraction, a nearly obsolete classification among Mukherjee's generation.

Appropriately, a retrospective of the work of Lee Mullican opened across town at LACMA while the show at Sister was up. An obvious forebear, Mullican successfully pursued the fusion of spirituality and modernism at a time when the idea had a number of other proponents—Mark Rothko, Clyfford Still, Gordon Onslow Ford, and later Jay DeFeo among them. Mukherjee is now relatively isolated in his aims, though his oeuvre does have an oblique relationship to those of Olafur Eliasson and Roy Dowell. That so many of his kin are of generations past might seem like an indictment to some, but more likely it is Mukherjee's work that indicts our own neglect of modernism's visionary aspect.

—Christopher Miles

Sandeep Mukherjee, *Untitled (detail)*, 2005, acrylic ink and needle etching on Duralene, 8 x 25'.

