

**Sandeep Mukherjee**

Margo Leavin Gallery

812 N. Robertson Blvd.

Los Angeles, 90069

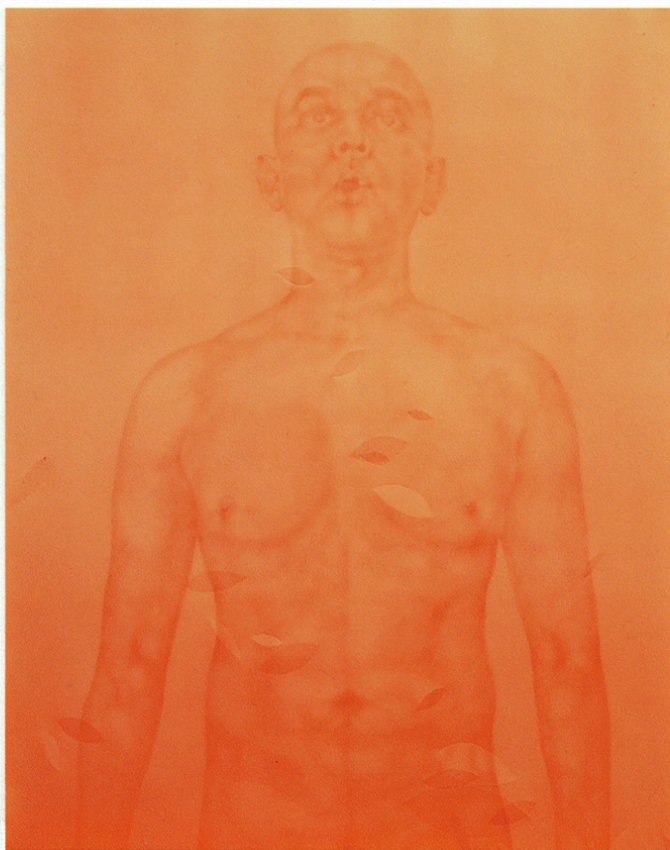
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Sandeep Mukherjee's show "Redolence" merged exquisite draftsmanship with the subtle interplay of ambient light that delineated the creased and pierced topographies of the surfaces on which the artist draws. The 12 pieces exhibited are the sum total of a year's worth of work and present a chronology made apparent through the detailed layering of fine Prismacolor hatching and lace-like perforations.

The work flirts closely with self-portraiture; indeed all the images are versions of the artist's own form.

**Sandeep Mukherjee**

*Untitled* (detail), 2000. Acrylic, color pencil, needle on paper, 93 1/4" x 43 1/4". Courtesy of Margo Leavin Gallery.



Mukherjee reworks a still image in a variety of twisting, floating, and falling poses into surprisingly pliant, almost magical works. Executed variously on paper primed with pastel-colored gesso and interleaved sheets of semi-transparent vellum, the works avoid the trap of narcissism by deliberately formalizing both the figure and the context within which it is placed. For example, in the largest untitled work on display, which is 93-by-43-inches square, Mukherjee's full frontal nude form stands amidst a pastel orange field sprinkled with the needle-incised, ovoid forms of buoyant, suspended leaves. Irreverently referred to by the artist as "leaf blower," the idealized figure, mouth pursed open in anticipation, is depicted as heroic. More a Kouros than an exercise in photorealism, the work involves viewers in a homoerotic seduction without the guilt of feeling like they actually know the subject. In part this is because familiarity with the drawings is made intentionally elusive, as it depends

largely on the viewer's physical positioning with regards to an optimum viewpoint. The works are framed and covered in glass, so that viewers are uncannily aware of their own observation of the work in the reflection caught on the shiny, protective surface, a mirroring of desires which seems completely intentional.

Most of the larger works encompass drawing, piercing, and creasing of the paper. The pieces work best when the pierced marks accentuate the near weightless quality of the line work. In one glorious piece, the artist's form is seen suspended aloft gushing fountains of water-droplet shapes that have been pierced into the paper. In another are images of the artist's head in a circular wreath seen from above, which is made entirely by the perforating action of a needle breaking the surface of the yellow-toned paper. The pierced marks push through the pigment leaving a tiny ridge of "scar tissue" around the periphery of the mark so that the light illuminates the bejeweled surface of the forms. Perhaps less successful are works executed on sheets of vellum, where the transparency of the material tends to weigh down the floating images.

Born in India, Mukherjee has managed to merge an understanding of Eastern illuminated texts with the visual vocabulary of a Western art education. That this is done across the body of the artist himself is remarkable in its refusal to invoke the fragmented body as a metaphor for postcolonialism. Instead of centralizing politics through image production, Mukherjee prefers to bewitch his audience with beauty so that the redolence announced in the title of the show refers to the lingering perfume of entrancing images glimpsed, but held on the periphery of recognition.

*Jacqueline Cooper is an artist and writer currently living in Los Angeles.*