

Pi Artworks London: Tayeba Begum Lipi
“NEVER BEEN INTIMATE”
27.02.2013 - 31.03.2013

In Tayeba Begum Lipi’s first solo show in London, the Bangladeshi artist presents works that exemplify her very literally cutting-edge artistic practice. Running from 27 February – 31 March 2013, *Never Been Intimate* will be on show at Pi Artworks, London after debuting at the gallery’s Istanbul location in late 2013, also marking the artist’s first show in the Turkish capital.

Overlapping panels of shiny silvery metal take shape as everyday items, encompassing a bath tub, baby pram, picture frame, woman’s handbag and even a bra in what at first appears to be a smooth, tantalising and luxurious surface – as if each item were encased in its very own suit of expensive armour. Closer inspection, however, exposes a deadly beauty as each metal panel reveals itself to be a razor blade, the light reflecting off its honed edges. Meanwhile, as the eye focuses on a bikini seemingly comprised of soft gold mesh, one finds that it is instead made up of a matrix of tightly woven safety pins, the points of each mercifully encased in the catch.

With titles such as *The Stolen Dream* and *Trapped*, Bangladeshi artist Tayeba Begum Lipi’s works belie in turns an air of sadness and danger. She turns regular everyday objects into items with an unearthly beauty. Simultaneously she manages to embed deep emotion within a seemingly cold material. “Over the past two years I have been working with objects that I feel to be really intimate, yet are not intimate to me,” explains the artist. “There is a distance between me and the object, yet at the same time, I feel close to them.” *Let’s Take a Break*, a bathtub made of razorblades, exemplifies one such desire – how often do we promise ourselves we will take a break, maybe soak in the bath and then never manage to do so? Similarly, *Comfy Bikinis*, made of safety pins is rendered sterile, no longer a sensuous item of clothing.

The artist’s use of the razor blade dates back from her childhood. One of 12 siblings, the young Lipi was surrounded by the growing families of her older brothers and sisters. A local midwife would attend to the impending arrival of each new addition to the family. Lipi recalls how each was accompanied by the purchase of a brand new razor blade, which would then be sterilised in boiling water. “This image has stayed with me,” she says, “I was rather scared of the whole thing.” It was later, as an adult at a residency in Pakistan that she stumbled upon black razor blades at the local market. Intrigued by the idea of combining black and ‘white’ (silver) blades, she debuted her work *Edge*. “What struck me was that everybody wanted to touch the work,” she says. “These were real razor blades, they were incredibly sharp, yet there was something tempting about the work and its shininess. I found a strong connection with this element.” Safety pins soon followed, partially inspired by the fact that they, like other sharp items, can be used as self defence items for women – keys, sharp pens, pins – these are all small items that women may carry with them or clutch in their hands. “The one thing that always comes to mind when I think of that is the idea that women are carrying these sharp objects and saying ‘OK, touch me, and you are going to hurt,’” she smiles.

It was at the suggestion of her husband, fellow artist and long-time collaborator Mahbubur Rahman that she began fabricating her own razor blades, allowing her to work with different sizes and bend and manipulate each blade as required. The result was *The Bizarre and the Beautiful*, as part of the Bangladesh Pavilion at the 54th Venice Biennale in 2011. Since then, razor works have encompassed items that represent Lipi’s desires (bath tubs, bikinis), social observations (women’s handbags and their social status) and personal stories (children and family). “The handbag in particular is new,” she explains, “as it is such a personal item for a women, not even my husband knows what’s inside my handbag! And yet there is a craze for women to have extremely expensive handbags, so I thought, OK, there’s something witty and fun I can play with here.”

The exhibition at Pi Artworks Istanbul will showcase a selection of Lipi's new works, from 2012 and 2013, and with their evocative titles, including *The Nighty*, *Touch Me* and *Personal Entity*, are both alluring and deadly, angry yet sad, drawing in yet pushing away. They are a testament to Lipi's extremely personal stories and observations, and yet, in their cold, white beauty, embody a tenderness that one could never hope to hold.

About Tayeba Begum Lipi: Bangladeshi artist Tayeba Begum Lipi (1969) creates her iconic reflective sculptural works out of dangerous, yet everyday items such as razor blades and safety pins. This imbues her beautiful creations with a deadly undercurrent, rendering each delicate item with a sinister, and at times, melancholy, undertone. Receiving her MFA in Drawing and Painting from the Institute of Fine Art University in Dhaka (1993), she has exhibited extensively throughout her native Bangladesh, and as far and wide as Finland, Holland, Italy, Indonesia, the UK and the USA. Seminal exhibitions include the group show *No Country: Contemporary Art for South and Southeast Asia* at the Guggenheim. Curated by June Yap, the show has traveled to Singapore and Hong Kong. She also represented Bangladesh at the country's national pavilion at the 54th Venice Biennale in 2011. Lipi's work can be found in major public collections around the world, including the Samdani Art Foundation and Devi Art Foundation, while awards include the 2004 Grand Prize at the 11th Asian Art Biennale in Bangladesh. Her first exhibition in Turkey was held at Pi Artworks Istanbul, where it ran from 1 November – 30 December 2013.

About Pi Artworks: Pi Artworks was founded by Yesim Turanli in 1998 in Istanbul and for the past 15 years, has been introducing Turkish and international artists to the primary market. Since its founding, Pi Artworks has been committed to showcasing the best of Contemporary Turkish and international art to Istanbul's growing art scene, alongside providing an international platform for its roster of artists to showcase their work. The gallery is located at the famous historical Misir Apartmani in Istanbul and in October 2013 Pi Artworks London opened on 55 Eastcastle Street, in the heart of London's bustling Fitzrovia.

Exhibition: "NEVER BEEN INTIMATE"

Location: 55 Eastcastle Street, W1W 8EG, London, UK

Dates: 27 February - 31 March 2014

Hours: Mon-Fri 10am - 6pm; Sat 11am-6pm (Sundays closed)

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