

# 'EGGS'EMPLARY WORK

MUHAMMAD YUSUF DESCRIBES THE WORK OF A SCULPTOR THAT EGGS YOU ON TO THINK IN UNORTHODOX WAYS



Arnaud Rivieren

One of the enduring, unsolved, puzzles is the question "which came first — the chicken or the egg?" Philosophers have scratched their heads and crossword aficionados have scratched their pens over the question ever since philosophy and crossword puzzles became part of life.

But sculptor Arnaud Rivieren laughs his way through the question. In an amazing talent tour, this Belgian-born and Dubai-based self-taught sculptor held a show titled *The Hatching* at Dubai's B21 gallery some time ago, where the centre of attention was the humble egg. Alongside the "eggs-cellent" display, he also showed an art series titled *Trophy*. Together, they turned the gallery into a space where the sublime and the ridiculous rubbed shoulders. The two-in-one exhibition not only forced the viewer to think but also to laugh.

The capacity to evoke thought via the mundane is given only to a gifted few and Rivieren is definitely among them. The egg is of course the very beginning of creation. It is our ancestor and our womb. It has deep theological significance and resounding religious overtones. For Rivieren, the egg is a lovable monstrosity made of stainless steel in which medium he had crafted his sculptures. In alarming sizes that sometimes had to be moved with a forklift, the eggs were framed (like ancestors' photos), caged like a pet parrot, hammered into a cage with a just-hatched child, laid out on grass



like an outdoor sculpture, hung in the air and once even made to mock their historically famous Faberge cousins (instead of decorating the egg, Rivieren ornamented the stand).

It is to the artist's credit that he

made us think of so many things via the smooth exteriors of his eggs. But Rivieren's reverie did not end with eggs. He also had a few pieces in his *Trophy* series, which poked fun at the hubris of man as Hunter. There were ele-

phant tusks, deer antlers and rhino and buffalo horns made of steel, in exact, life-like measurements.

This made us think that if we can make these trophies — which, by the way, are more long-lasting than natural ones — with our hands, why should we spend so much time and energy in killing helpless animals? The whole sport of hunting, with its blood, gore, agony and upper-class pretensions, was thus killed swiftly by Rivieren.

His novel take on the prized spoils of the hunt and his not-so-light-hearted criticism of the age-old pastime of hunting was an indication of his amazing originality and inventive spirit. In fact, his *Trophy* series should be sent to PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) or the SPCA (Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) as souvenirs and publicity material. "Some animals have the dignity to hide their victims, but man finds the need to hang them on a wall," he says. In short, according to Rivieren, man displays his own cowardice as a trophy!

He is undoubtedly the Alexander of the Stainless Steel Sculpture. Once, when the Grecian king was faced with apparently unsolvable puzzle of the Gordian Knot, the unravelling of which had defeated many, Alexander simply took out his sword and cut it apart. Rivieren does much the same to many an unsolvable, philosophical and bloody mystery with his sculptures.

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