



Unsettled bodies

VISUAL ARTS

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The premise of *Friends*, curated by Geeta Kapur at Akar Prakar, is deceptively simple: to bring together Vivan Sundaram's sculptural works from *Postmortem* and Tapan Bhattacharyya's paintings. Both practices unsettle the body as a stable entity. Sundaram's death in 2023 lends their encounter another dimension: the friendship remains, but now one friend is missing from the conversation. Sundaram and Bhattacharyya met in 1997, when the latter assisted with Sundaram's *History Project* at Victoria Memorial. Their friendship grew through this collaboration, as did Sundaram's interest in Bhattacharyya's watercolours and gouaches, works few galleries had shown.

Arranged across the floor, Sundaram's sculptures reconfigure anatomical models into strange figures. Organs loom large, familiar structures are dismantled, and fragments of the body acquire unexpected relationships. In one work, dentures clamp around an irregular, bone-like mass; elsewhere, kidneys and blood vessels make unfamiliar figures. By bringing together anatomical parts that do not ordinarily belong together, Sundaram unsettles the logic through which the body is understood. The works hover between grotesque comedy and mortality. On the walls, Bhattacharyya's figures are no less disquieting. Limbs curl into ornamental loops; hands and feet disappear, while noses and eyes become emphatic. In one painting, a headless body stands beside a flower bearing a human face. Elsewhere, figures sprout tails. His creatures inhabit an ecology where recognition keeps slipping.

The arrangement sets sculpture and painting in dialogue. Sundaram's objects occupy our space; Bhattacharyya's bodies remain within the picture plane. Neither medium secures the body's boundaries. One dismantles the logic of anatomy; the other lets the body spill into plant and animal life.

Beside *Echo*, a shelf-like sculpture, an accidental play of light brought two shadows together on the wall. The projecting elements cast a shadow suggesting a face; beside it, a spectator's shadow formed another. The recognisable faces emerged from amorphous, almost bodiless shapes, appearing to speak. The conversation seemed to extend to whoever stood before the work, continuing in Sundaram's absence.