

# BIG IDEAS

## Loco-Foco-Motto

Hema Upadhyay (Mumbai, India)

**WHO MADE THIS SCULPTURE?** Hema Upadhyay was born and raised in Baroda, India. Her grandfather, Kishoomal Hirani, introduced her to the arts by taking her with him to art fairs and competitions. Inspired, she began to create her own work and soon her bedroom walls were decorated with her own creative ventures. In 1991, Hema applied to the Faculty of Fine Arts in Baroda with the intent of pursuing a degree in Applied Arts because she was intrigued by the glamour and excitement of the advertising world. Her parents persuaded her to study fine arts instead, and she was admitted into the painting program. During her first two years of study, Hema learnt new skills and was introduced to different materials, styles, people, teachers, and theories. As her artistry developed, she became more aware of her work's purpose as well as the materials and mode of expression she wanted to use. By her third year of study, the narrative in her work began to take shape and she became more conscious of the materials she was using continuously.



1



2



3

**HOW WAS THIS SCULPTURE MADE?** In shaping her work, Hema relies more on the form of written ideas rather than sketches. Once the idea she is developing becomes clear in her mind, she prepares the background and builds a storyboard around it much like preparing a script. As she works through her creative process, much can change.

As part of the exhibition, *Loco-Foco-Motto* was built on-site, under Hema's direction, by artists and many volunteers at the Richmond Art Gallery and Aberdeen Centre, also located in Richmond, BC. The work is comprised of a number of chandeliers made out of treated combustible fiberboard and matchsticks.



4



5

**WHAT IDEAS ARE BEING EXPLORED IN THIS WORK?** The title of the work, *Loco-Foco-Motto* refers to materials which will ignite when they come into contact with another substance. Chandeliers, often ornate with dozens of lamps and intricately cut crystal prisms, have traditionally symbolized wealth and status. By combining these two ideas, Hema creates an environment of anxiety, tension, and danger. The artist often places shadows on the floor and the wall underneath the chandeliers; depictions of herself posing as someone who possesses these objects of rank. The structure, inspired by the artist's life in Mumbai, explores the idea that within a violent and fragile environment, a "light of hope" is to be found.

**HOW DOES THIS WORK CONNECT WITH THE ARTIST'S OTHER WORK?** The narrative in Hema's work is autobiographical, where choosing the self becomes a gradual process. The self that at one point confronts certain personal phobias and shortcomings, and at another confronts other realities like that of identity and space, both public and private, that are hierarchically structured within the divisions of class, caste, religion, and gender. Where the body becomes a site of receiving or reacting to these elements, where the self balances like a see-saw between the poles of rejection and acceptance. Hema's works are often in mixed media and explore themes based on such issues as migration and the Diaspora in India. Imagery of Indian religious symbols and feminine references are frequently incorporated into her work. For example, Hema's work, "Sweet Sweat Memories", speaks of Mumbai, a multi-cultural metropolis and one of the largest in India. Here, hundreds of people have migrated to the city, a dream destination that speaks its own rhetoric of Acceptance and Rejection, where the idea of acceptance is wrapped up with the idea of rejection. With her work, the artist plays both the role of the victim and the role of the narrator.

Source: interview by Amrita Gupta Singh for [artconcerns.net](http://artconcerns.net)



5



6



7

**TO LEARN MORE:**

[www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk/artists/hema\\_upadhyay.htm](http://www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk/artists/hema_upadhyay.htm)  
[www.artconcerns.net/2006/html/interview\\_hema.htm](http://www.artconcerns.net/2006/html/interview_hema.htm)

**WHO PUT THIS SCULPTURE ON DISPLAY IN RICHMOND?** This sculpture is part of Vancouver Biennale 2009-2011 Exhibition. The Vancouver Biennale is a non-profit charitable organization that celebrates art in public space. Each exhibition transforms the urban landscape into an Open Air Museum, creating globally inspired cultural experiences where people live, work, play and transit. The Biennale features internationally renowned and emerging Contemporary artists that represent a diversity of cultural perspectives and artistic disciplines including sculpture, new media, performance works and film. The objective is to use great art as a catalyst to transformative learning and social action.

The Vancouver Biennale also creates supporting public programs, events and publications including the award-winning BIG IDEAS Education program, the International Artist Residency Program inspired by Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream", the CineFest LIVE documentary film festival and the Tour de Biennale and BIKennale arts & culture cycling events.

**TO LEARN MORE** you can search the terms **BIENNALE**, **PUBLIC ART** or **OUTDOOR SCULPTURE PARKS** on-line. Also Visit the Vancouver Biennale website at [www.vancouverbiennale.com](http://www.vancouverbiennale.com)

**IMAGE CREDITS:**

- 1 Artist portrait; Dan Fairchild
- 2 *Loco-Foco-Motto*; Dan Fairchild
- 3 *Loco-Foco-Motto* (installation, Aberdeen Centre, Richmond, BC); Dan Fairchild
- 4 *Constellation*; Artconcerns.net
- 5 *Dream a wish 3*; Artconcerns.net
- 6 *Hopes of conversation on a locked terrace*; Artconcerns.net
- 7 *The space between you and me 2*; Artconcerns.net
- 8 *I have a feeling that I belong* ; Artconcerns.net

Author: Katherine Tong  
Editor: Reema Faris  
Designer: Julie Rudd