

Mithu Sen

ELI AND EDYTHE BROAD ART MUSEUM

547 East Circle Drive, Michigan State University

April 25–August 31

Commissioned by the museum, and conceived of as a tongue-in-cheek “collaboration” with the museum’s architect, Zaha Hadid, Mithu Sen’s playful but unsettling *Border Unseen*, 2014, opposes the brutally rigid and abstract geometry of Hadid’s building by tracing a soft, fleshy line in the space. Rising up gradually from the floor, the eighty-foot-long hanging sculpture consists of a narrow ridge made from carefully poured pink dental polymer that is topped with a seemingly unending row of false teeth, which are held in place by drips of gooey, hot glue, and sits atop a thin metal beam. In a quintessential feminist gesture, the abject interior of the human body is transfigured into both architecture and landscape.

Though the arrested fluidity of Sen’s materials recalls Lynda Benglis’s famous poured-latex sculptures from the 1970s, here the scale and effect is more intimate than sublime. The sculpture simultaneously evokes various body parts—spine, tongue, tail—in addition to an impossibly long and straight gingiva. Firmly anchored high on a far corner wall, it also resembles a parasitic worm more than it does a discrete external threat.

Interspersed among the fake teeth, which are occasionally arranged in circles or ellipses to possibly suggest vagina dentata, are other similarly sized objects: pointy shark teeth, tiny cartoon skulls, and miniature train set figurines. These details encourage close looking along the sculpture’s length and introduce the possibility of narrative. Transforming the materials used to build oral prostheses into a floating fantasy landscape, Sen’s sculpture manages to combine the sensibilities of two distinct periods of our lives—the young and the old—incorporating childlike play to take the edge off our impending mortality.



Mithu Sen, *Border Unseen* (detail), 2014, mixed media, dimensions variable.

— Murtaza Vali