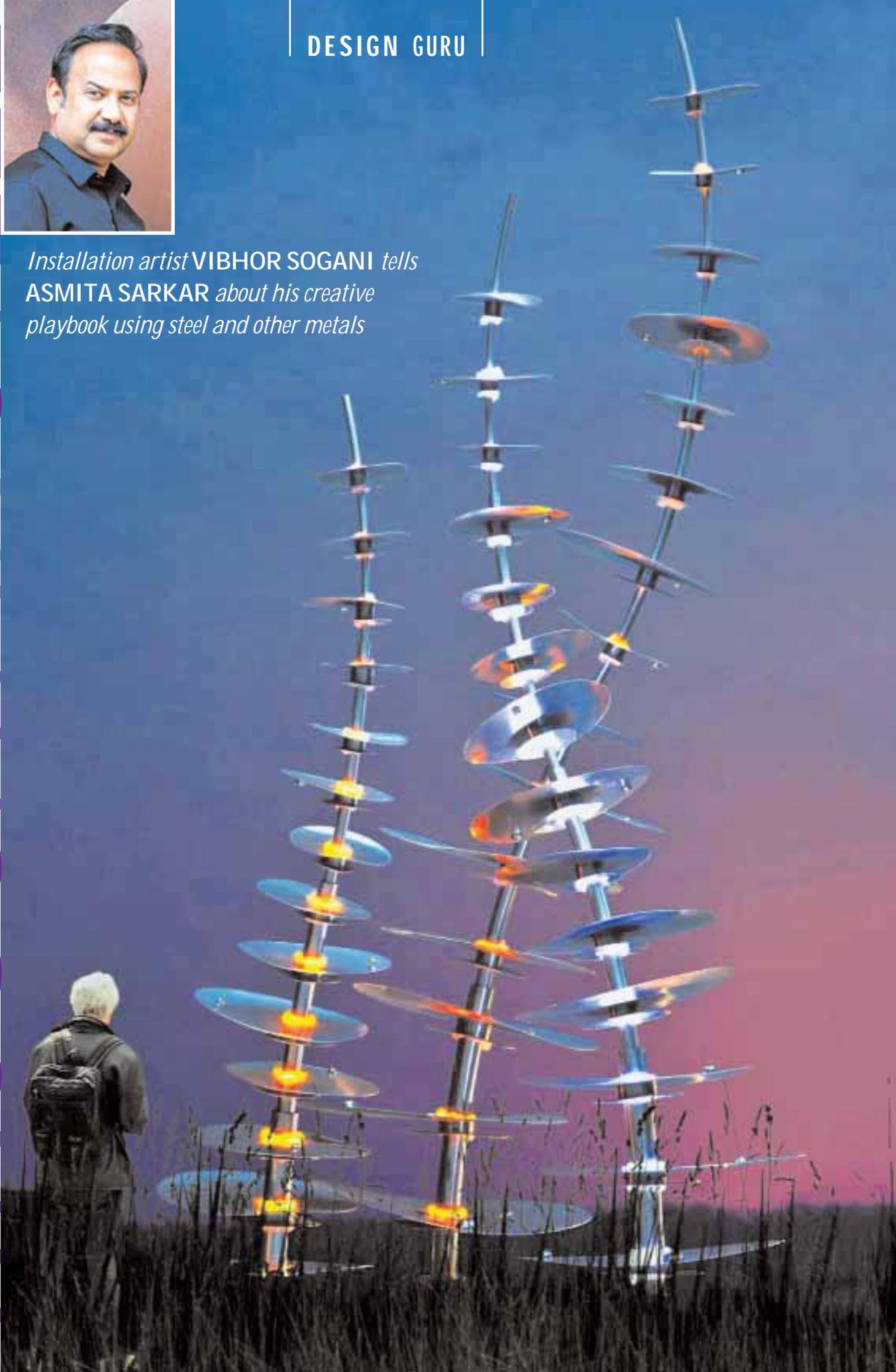


WROUGHT IN STEEL



DESIGN GURU

Installation artist **VIBHOR SOGANI** *tells*
ASMITA SARKAR *about his creative*
playbook using steel and other metals





WALK ing down the lawns at the Italian Embassy recently, I came upon multiple Vibhor Sogani creations that reflect different parts of the natural environment. From a *Slice of Sky* to swans walking in a *Flock* to a Baya weaver's nest called *Casa*, his creations bring the tangible and the intangible into the physical realm for viewers to explore and reflect on.

"I love metals, all kinds of them," says installation artist and lighting designer Sogani, a man whose works defy categories. Stone, leather, stainless steel, iron, aluminium, brass, copper, these materials make up his design language but what is more visible is stainless steel, which he sources mostly locally. However, some of it is imported when a certain grade is not available in Delhi.

Motifs from nature are prevalent in his creations whether it is the *Flock*, *Casa*, *Ferns*, the

famous *Sprouts* or his lighting installations like *Cascade*. He doesn't believe that metals are diametrically opposite to his designs, inspiration for which springs from nature. "I think metals are a natural material. They all behave differently but I see them as part of nature. Steel and water for example. When representing water what can be better than steel, since water has a sheen to it," he says.

He seeks inspiration from nature mostly but the larger universe or humans is not out of the purview either. The *Cascade*, a light installation, for instance is inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright's *Fallingwater House*, and he got inspiration for the *Infinity* when he saw hundreds of helium balloons flying up in the sky.

"Balloons were the inspiration for it. I use a lot of spheres, mirror finished, and the minute you tie a ribbon to a sphere it seems like a balloon. So, for this installation, I created a glass light on top which had an infinity feeling and the balloons stuck



on it," he says. Also a definite place and time could strike a chord. For instance, when he visited Brittany in France, an idyllic hilly peninsula with a rugged coastline left a lasting impact. The absolute lack of definition in a space like the universe, which has led to the *Orion* and *Infinity* series, is both conceptual and over-arching.

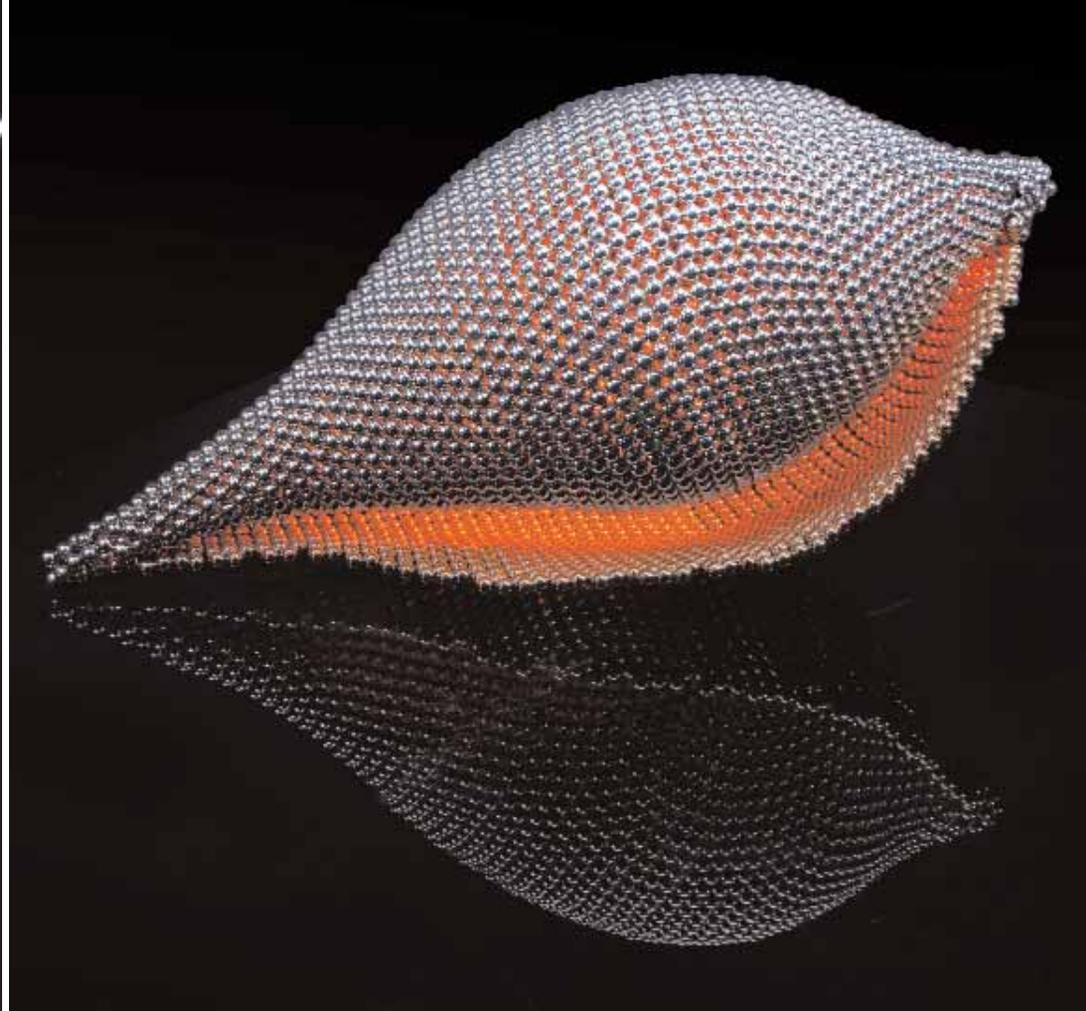
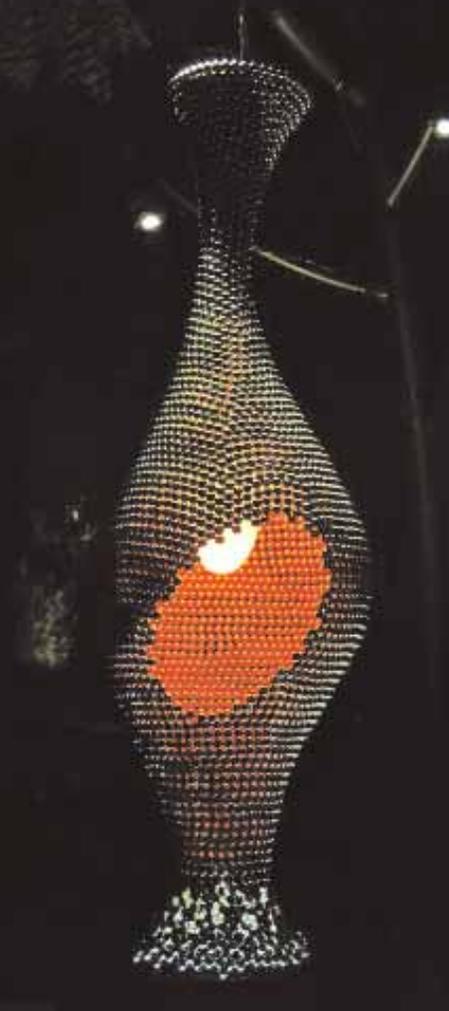
The varied language he speaks through his works can't be truly described, he feels. "Every artist has a style I can't truly describe my own but people do that job better than I do. They would look at a piece and ask if that was mine so they are good at recognising that language," he says, adding, "There is a language that I have, it's very fluid, in my opinion. It keeps changing. I keep getting inspired by various things and those lead to twists in the language. I tend to get bored very fast so I deviate too. If I were to put it in words, I would say less is more is my language."

The multimedia artist doesn't bother about following a single philosophy in his works. Instead,

he looks for something exciting in all his projects. Once he's zeroed in on the idea, his effort is to simplify and deconstruct until he reaches the crux and the essence of it. "The ability to translate that spirit of anything when you break it down to basics is when I'm comfortable. Till then I am in the process of simplification so that there are not many complicated forms or things that would bother you or your senses. It gets reduced to an easy form or work of art," he says.

There is definitely a nature component to his work, he acknowledges, but even the word called life and what it means to him could be the launchpad for a world in metal that only his hands and mind could create. "Inspirations come from all quarters and I don't really clamp it down. Even an artist could be my inspiration. There's a work of mine called *Cascade* it's inspired from Frank Lloyd Wright his architecture has inspired me," he says.

His love for steel remains supreme. "Steel with the shine probably looks highly glistening



and great to portray water, steel looks like..." Before he completes his sentence I offer "post-modern" but his immediate response is that he doesn't want to "compartmentalise but it is open to interpretation." He clarifies, "I don't think in those lines."

But as an installation artist, it is not inspiration alone that guides him. "I do what I think touches me but if there's a commissioned project then there is the space in which it has to go which gives me my leads and connects. If there's an architectural project, the architect has the thematics and then I try and relate to that. I am not trying to stick to certain style of art," he says.

Asked if there was any conflict between him the artist and the lighting designer, his response to it is that those two parts of him are seamless.

"Each influences the other, subtly and seamlessly so. My lightwork influences my art and it's woven in. For example, the *Shell* becomes very subtle and if the light is switched off you will say

something is missing. *Casa* is inspired from the Baya weaver bird's nest. I take away the egg or switch off the light it looks very incomplete. Light actually seamlessly becomes part of my installations. Though there are installations without lights as well like *Sprouts*," he says, lamenting that he feels miserable since the public installation is not cleaned.

Among his lighting design, he used crystals for *Orion* to reflect the cosmic space while *Cube* is completely form driven by the geometric shape.

Among his newest works are *Casa*, meaning home in Italian, and *Shell*, which is made of 3,500 balls of steel each joined together. An amber light inside it bounces off the spheres and makes them look like crystals in the night. "These spheres joined together make an entirely different form is my new language," he says.

His other work, *Slice of Sky*, reflects the sky in the day and at night. In the evening glow, the light and colours worked together to show the viewer a



fantasy version of the sky. The *Fern*, which was made a little earlier, while inspired from the eponymously named tree, deviates from the scientific representation and instead uses discs of gradually increasing size with little balls that look like a droplets of water.

Right when you enter the passage that leads to the lawns at the Embassy you are welcomed by square arches that guide your eye to the *Echo* at the end of the line of sight. A large circle of light finds resonance as it moves outwards. "What is echo? Sound goes out, here light will echo out and sound too. If you stand and talk in front of it you can hear the echo," he says. The piece has been made in steel and iron. He mixes media to bring out duality, which are great if you want to communicate something.

Another installation called the *Flock*, literally a

group of swans, is meant to be markers or bollards to light up a passage. "It's a very fun piece. In the day time, the steel picks up the sky and bit of green, which are then reflected in the body of the swans," he says.

For him, any light installation piece serves two purposes. One when it is off and one, at night, when the lights come on and the static piece of the day takes on a life of its own. Its true character is visible only when the natural light dims and the veil falls. As an artist, he also has to take care about the functionality of a piece but more often it is his natural instinct that acts as the guiding light, which is why elements of nature like a waterfall or birds and their abodes are repeated often. The chiaroscuro that he creates with his works has stood out over the years and captured popular imagination. He has given life to the inanimate.

