



ART OF A DIFFERENT TYPE

An installation at Godrej & Boyce pays tribute to the era of typewriters. Navroze Godrej throws light on this initiative

BY MARIA LOUIS

1. The 13ft tall metallic Lotus, formed using parts from 60 typewriters, was inaugurated at the Hubble by Navroze Godrej and his mother, Pheroza.

2. Navroze Godrej, executive director and head of Innovation & Strategy, Godrej & Boyce.



PHOTOGRAPH: CHIRODEEP CHAUDHURI



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Arts and Raffles Design Institute, who worked with Jeremy to create the lotus and the smaller mandalas.

Would you consider the sculpture unveiled at the Godrej Hubble a masterpiece? Why?

This is a first-of-its-kind sculpture in India. Its grandeur and magnificence captures the golden era of typewriters. Being built from only typewriter parts, it also immortalises the machine. For us at Godrej, this sculpture is a true masterpiece – a tangible reminder of these beautiful machines for generations to come, a medium for us to restore history in an innovative way.

Was the result what you envisaged? If not, in what way was it different and why?

It has definitely turned out the way we had envisaged it. Jeremy had the complete liberty to be creative. We trusted his vision and he has created something which is aligned with

6. The artist worked with Godrej Interio to introduce motion into the sculpture.

7. Mayer does not solder, weld or glue these assemblages together; the process is entirely cold assembly.

ABOUT ARTIST JEREMY MAYER

While Jeremy Mayer has no formal art training, he disassembles typewriters and then reassembles them into unique sculptures. He does not solder, weld or glue these assemblages together; the process is entirely cold assembly. He also does not introduce any part to the assemblage that did not come from a typewriter.

Mayer collects typewriters (all vintages) that are in very rough shape, more-often-than-not completely unusable or beyond reasonable repair. He then disassembles the typewriters, very carefully backing out screws, pulling pins and unfastening springs. He doesn't use power tools to do this, because he doesn't want to damage the parts or their finish. Someone could take 99% of the parts that he uses in his sculpture, and put them back into a typewriter – if so inclined.

After disassembly, he carefully sorts all the parts according to colour, appearance, use, size, etc., and puts them into bins. He also uses typewriter cases as storage for larger bits and for large numbers of repeating parts – such as type bars (the little metal piece with the backwards letters that contacts with the paper to form the words on paper). He tends not to clean the parts and doesn't paint them, preferring to leave the patina of age and the traces that the typewriter users left. He likes to think that the DNA of the typist is marked on the components.

Once he has got everything disassembled and categorised, he simply starts playing with these parts. He takes two parts in each hand, has them facing each other and "they have a little conversation about what they're going to be." Sometimes, he knows how he is going to use a component as soon as he takes it off the typewriter; at other times, it depends on the part that gets assembled before it. He uses existing holes in components to run screws and pins through, and to attach springs. He does not tap new threads – he simply (or not so simply) digs through his bin of screws to find a suitable length of screw with the matching thread. He occasionally reams a hole in a component with a drill, but only as a last resort and in a way that is invisible to the viewer.

After almost 20 years of doing this work, he has become proficient at building forms in his mind. Sometimes, he will do an entire sculpture simply because he finds one part that is so compelling as a part of the anatomy – say, for instance, a component which very much resembles a jawbone, that he builds the whole sculpture starting from that one piece. Most of the time, he knows how the sculpture is going to look when it's done – but because the process is accretive (one part of the assemblage depends upon the previous), there is a great deal of surprise and many "happy accidents." Mayer lives and works in California, USA.

Godrej's ethos. He chose to create the Lotus, India's national flower, because the life cycle of a Lotus reflects the lifecycle of a typewriter. The way seeds of a Lotus can be revived after 1,300 years, similarly the parts of old typewriters have been 'revived' to create this sculpture. We are delighted with how this visionary artist has sculpted this marvelous piece of art.

How complicated was it to include the mechanics of motion into the work?

When Jeremy told us that he would like to add the mechanics of motion into the Lotus, we knew it can be done in-house as we had expertise as well as the set-up. We put him in touch with Godrej Interio, who had not only the experience of making tubular furniture – but also hospital beds that have adjustment mechanisms. Both teams collaborated to make the petals move, and the result was quite magnificent. **END**



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The city's intellectual and creative set stood transfixed as the Lotus unfurled in the atrium of the Hubble at Godrej & Boyce in Mumbai last month. Undertaking the pleasant task of unveiling the sculpture that "re-imagines" the last batch of Godrej typewriters was Navroze Godrej (executive director and head of Innovation & Strategy, Godrej & Boyce) and his mother – eminent art patron and gallerist, Pheroza Godrej.

The approximately 13ft tall metallic Lotus has been formed using parts from 60 typewriters and consists of 15 petals, with each petal being made with more than 200 parts from the typewriters. In 2009, Godrej made the last manual typewriter that that was sent to the Godrej Archives.

This marked the end of manual typewriters. Subsequently, the last batch of Arabic typewriters manufactured at Godrej was not introduced in the market, and the machines remained on the campus as a silent reminder of a bygone era.

Using these discarded typewriters, Jeremy Mayer – the world's only known typewriter sculptor – created this magnificent sculpture for Godrej & Boyce under its Artist-in-Residence programme. The masterpiece by Mayer serves as a tribute to that golden era of typewriters.

How did the idea of a sculpture to 'immortalise' the last batch of typewriters originate?

The typewriter has always intrigued me for being one of the earliest design-led technologies that India has witnessed. The Godrej typewriter, launched way back in 1955, was a result of Godrej's steadfast determination and courage to succeed against enormous odds to make an all-Indian machine that the whole of India could be proud of. Thus, when we decided to shut the production of these magnificent machines, it evoked a lot of nostalgia for us at Godrej. Since the closure of production, they were kept in the Godrej Archives as a silent reminder of that legendary era.

Early this year, we came across this very unique American sculptor, Jeremy Mayer, who was celebrated for giving a new lease of life to typewriters by creating magnificent sculptures using different parts of the typewriter. Since art has always been a medium through which we have showcased our passion for design and innovation, Godrej Archives went ahead and collaborated with Jeremy for not only celebrating the 54 years journey of manufacturing typewriters, but also to inspire and nurture imaginative thinking that drives innovation and develops futuristic technology. This was in line with our archives' philosophy of 'Restore. Reflect. Reimagine'.



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With this particular initiative, Godrej & Boyce has launched the Artist-in-Residence programme that invites artists from India and across the globe to create art that will inspire the current generation to build a better future.

Tell us about the process involved in its creation. How involved were you in this process?

We offered Jeremy absolute freedom in terms of creativity. The only brief we gave him was to create a sculpture that was aligned with the values and beliefs of Godrej. Jeremy worked out of our studio for five months to create this unique sculpture. We also collaborated with the JJ School of Arts and Raffles Design Institute, and had their students work with him through these five months at the Godrej Archives studio.

What Godrej resources were involved in translating the vision of the artist into practice?

Jeremy stayed with Godrej for about five months. During this time, he was introduced to our culture and values. Simultaneously, we ensured that he was provided with everything necessary for his work. In the making of the Lotus sculpture, a total of 60 typewriters were used, and each of these belonged to the last batch of Godrej Prima typewriters. In addition to providing machines, our Archives team provided consistent support in terms of the product history and talent from our workshops to help him build this piece of art. As mentioned earlier, we also collaborated with students of the JJ School of

3. Jeremy Mayer with interns, Janak and Aditya, at the Godrej Archives studio.

4. An artistic display of the different typewriter parts.

5. Mayer contemplating the various parts before he begins assembling them.