

The history of contemporary Indian art is marked by a multiplicity of styles. There are various dominant themes which are criss-crossed by paths made by individual artists. In other words, the personal style of an artist often traverses two or three different styles and an eclectic one moves in and out of quite a few if only for, from time to time, to seek a change in artistic climate. All the artists in this show 'construct their present' as particles on those artistic and art historical trajectories that emanate from those fixed points. An idea of these points and radiating lines and the places where they meet and merge would perhaps give the most accurate picture of the current contemporary Indian art scenario. This is somewhat difficult to verbalize bearing in mind the extent of repetition, contradiction and ambiguity.

There is a frenzied sense of energy about Manjari Chakravarty's pictures, an almost overwhelming sense of oneness or connectivity with the elements where the constituent parts of the image appear to dissolve in order to return to a more primeval state. They not only offer succour but portray the unfathomable and magical relationship between the artist and her creation. They are also enticements, albeit sometimes heavily veiled, to seek a hidden reality shimmering beneath the surface, portals to a vibrant interior landscape brimming with possibilities, hopes and desires. The elements appear to inform, inspire and direct the work and as with any deeply personal oeuvre, there is also a sense of mystery. The images elicit all manner of sensations in the viewer, from the superficially optical to the deeply emotional.

Tapati Chowdhury has what in philosophical terms can be described as 'a passion for the real'. This transcends mere artistic rendering or realistic posturing. It is a desire to remove the layers of falsity obfuscating the modern condition and lay reality bare with all its hopes and, more importantly, fears and phobias. At times this may appear brutal but it is born out of a yearning to jostle the viewer out of visual fatigue or apathy. In fact, the power of these pictures derives largely from not what they portray directly but in what they allude to. They draw attention to what the viewer does not necessarily experience within the sanitized white cube space that is the gallery: real alienation, real conflict, real fears. By harnessing this absence, the artist conveys to her audience the notion of representation as a form of insulation from direct emotional conflict.

Chhatrapati Dutta's works are enthralling and vivid explorations of themes of both individual and collective significance. They mesh personal history with the political and the accessible with the mysterious. Abundant in detail and imagery, his works have both philosophic and lyrical substance. He also critically evaluates the national character and institutions, history, identity and the environment. Also, his visual humour is wry, self-mocking and pervasive which, because it is not deafeningly proclaimed, works.

The aesthetic evaluation of decontextualized and recontextualized objects has been a popular theme in contemporary Indian sculptural practice. SC Gopinath is very much a part of this tradition which interrogates and interprets notions of ideology and identity as well as constructions of the popular through direct influences, unintentional resemblances or fundamentally shared material qualities. He invites viewers to first consider the objects in their original contexts, with their concomitant social or political functions,

while questioning whether their interest is merely aesthetic. The act of creating a sculptural arrangement requires an understanding of the discourse surrounding and constituting the objects as well as the spatiality of the exhibition space. The artist uses this together with his understanding of the dual 'inside' – the gallery space as a whole and the space within the installation – to create a space which invites the viewer in to enjoy the interaction of objects.

Jehangir Jani seeks to create a new language in order to satisfy his creative longing and aspirations. The desire to express man's alienation from the natural world is the chief element of this iconography. Mere representation is not his purpose, instead he seeks to find equilibrium of inner animalistic feeling and outer experience. His heads are, thus, symbols of reconciliation, of appeasement. They are bridges between the worlds of feeling and perception, giving definition to feeling and form to perception. The works convey a sense of familiarity, security, permanence and, above all, sensual and sensuous enjoyment. They are affirmations of man's deepest instincts when faced with inhuman forces.

Mahababur Rahman's paintings are deceptively naïve and use simple visual tricks to entice the viewer into accepting the works at face value before realizing the sense of excess and chaos amidst the order, humour and derision. He highlights the absurdity of the human condition and uses bright colours as a counterpoint to the darkness of his visual content. The works are an intriguing exploration of identity, memory, introspection and popular culture set within a conceptual context. One gets the sense that the plethora of images and colours is not really meant to be understood; instead it is a tool to stimulate the viewers' dreams, nightmares and imagination. Furthermore, the gory quality of the imagery somehow seems to invoke the denial of destructiveness and the creation of a constructive, albeit very macabre, artistic experience.

Rajeshwar Rao makes a forceful statement that in contemporary visual culture the difference between high and low art is utterly insignificant. An infectiously insouciant, deeply antiauthoritarian spirit guides his creative enterprise in which freedom is to be achieved in recognizing that hierarchical values are not inherent in a work of art but are, instead, products of social conditioning. It is indeed laudable that despite being kitschy, the artist and his art are neither vacuous nor vulgar. The cacophony of the imagery never subsumes, the symbols produce a quiet chuckle without rendering the symbolism laughable. He captures the subtle irony of historicity, myth and the recognizable icon. He exhibits technical mastery over his medium and it is this obsessive attention to detail and craftsmanship coupled with his irreverent treatment of familiar subjects that distances him from banality and provides evidence of his artistic wit.

Tanmoy Samanta's works brim with lyricism, obsessiveness, passion, seductiveness and symbolism. His somewhat zany but deeply felt creations bear testimony to an idiosyncratic vision. He is particularly adept at deliberately and systematically cultivating the fragment in which the shape evokes the totality of context in time and space. The collision between the animate and inanimate is also particularly fascinating and he playfully creates a colourful and fantastic bestiary where fragmentation appears

inextricable from representation and alludes to a crisis of identity. His colours are beautiful and powerful yet tender. He allows the viewer access to that much sought after space within the image by offering a different mode of comprehending reality, one that does not succumb to the treachery of representing reality inherent in its pursuit.

In Partha Shaw's works the image does not represent but facilitates, it does not merely reflect upon but also opens doors to worlds unseen. The visual narcosis is entirely metaphysical: it lies between the rational and the insensible, the comprehensible and the unfathomable, the quantifiable and the endless. It is simply visual metaphysics found on the tectonic perimeter of logic and abandon. It also requires a degree of intelligence and experience of the viewer without which all appears to be an empty universal. His emphasis is on the revelatory powers of abstraction; nothing is withheld, all is laid bare. Naturally, there are limitations to this approach, but, most importantly, fresh ground is broken with intelligence, style and finesse. Here is a deeply committed craftsman and thinker who creates integrative images which unite body and soul.

Deepak Tandon's exciting expressions bear testimony to his vision of reducing art to its purest and most primeval state. His images display a unique understanding of light and shade. Painstakingly created, his focus is on the form, content and style of his intensely private and personal art. Such works clearly affirm art as a spiritual discipline without worldly reference. These dense, all over compositions in masterful colours echo shifting planes of thought and also convey a strong feeling of spatial depth. These are calm images, expressions of a spiritual ideal unfettered by grand illusions about surface or intensity. These are the works of an artist who has channelled all his emotional, intellectual and artistic energy into the creation of art, one in which existential questions are recognized but held in balance.

Babu Xavier's dream-like works go beyond depicting mere subjective sensations. His realization of the inherent, though not quite apparent, structure of his motifs gives substance to bold conceptual and perceptual images. Unusually serene, he concentrates on light as well as movement and moves effortlessly between one mood, or attitude, and another. These brightly coloured works depict the artist's visual feelings, which may appear illusory, but are, in fact, a manifestation of a notion of subjective truth but can equally be read as symbols or signs for such experiences. His balanced colour sensibilities, rhythmical articulated interplay of forms and unity of composition and conception mark him out an unusually sensitive artist.

Thus, all this artists in the show, to a lesser or greater extent, look at how the gap between optimistic ideas and harsh reality is shaping artistic practice. This integration and intersection of politics, philosophy and art within the contemporary Indian context is the cornerstone of this exhibition and makes the point that even within the context of globalization, where mass media and the internet have, to a large extent, done away with boundaries India retains certain distinct and complex characteristics and contradictions which can best be articulated through the visual arts.

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