

BRIDGES:

EXPLORING NEW PARADIGMS:

At the heart of Indian art, lies the fragility of human experience, the understanding of myriad hues and the essence of artistic response in the light of the diversity of intensity. Bridges becomes the thread that establishes a link, between a set of established names in the art mart and those who are finding their own positions on the curve of graphic gains. While each artist works within the personal paradigms of their own individual sensibility, it is indeed an experience to behold when you look at 45 works that can afford a painterly and sublime insight into the underlying themes of artistic lingua franca. Look anyway, begin from whatever catches your ruminating fancy and you will be able to engage in a novel sensation, of possessing an immediacy of execution that mirrors the unpredictability and delicacy of existence.

Perhaps one should begin with the abstract master S.H.Raza who uses the leitmotif of symbolism in geometry to bring forth a *Shantibindu* and a *Tamshunya* that speak in the tenor of the silent soliloquy. Long ago in Gwalior when he laid the foundation stone for the Abstract Museum of Art, Raza spoke of the importance of 'the third eye' the eye that lay within the inner recesses of the mind and he said: The rationale behind the quest for symbolism lies in the Advaitya philosophy.' Raza waxed eloquent on the whole proposition that lay between illusion and reality. In his *Shantibindu* and *Tamshunya* he brings alive the very tenor of the cosmic forest that he sought to explore. *Tamshunya* is the revelation of that Maya. It is the cosmic illusion that subscribes to the notion that a description can suffice for reality or is an eternal reality. The primary colours form the sensation of the physical. The physical universe is the projection of Maya that is ultimately transitory. Maya is unconscious and unreal: the power of advaitya through which it veils itself--included in non-dual nature: positive when it projects the world, negative when it veils the being; the creator then stands in between dream and absolute reality--real from the standpoint of the world, unreal compared to the person: the relative and finite forms of the being get translated into the *Shantibindu*.

Move from that silent vibration to the watercolours of Akbar Padamsee often referred to as the inveterate modernist. The process of form and formation is one of 'appearance and definition' he said about his works. Refracted through the prism of modernism his heads have about them an incandescent gravity and a quiet elegance not quite seen in the hands of artists. Padamsee's forms bounded by the line and created from an assemblage of soft and delicate strokes on the surface are both real and metaphorically transcendent. His early experiments with the Chinese method of 'ku fu' have also lent his figures an agile grace. Of course there is no denying that in that exquisite contour the forms carry an expression of ineffable sadness, which somehow seem to express the essence of infinite time.

Three small works from the famed Manida, K .G. Subramanyan are a hallmark of his ability to create works that speak about the relationship between the artist and his subject. Though these works are small they have the luster of small jewels for the intricacy of the power of the line and the felicity of the master. In an interview years ago he had said: 'A sketch... records something that happens between the artist and

the object. Now closer to the artist, now closer to the object, but still hanging in the tension in between. Or the memory or recall of that tension. A composite of line, scratches, smears, swabs and dots that recreates an object, it learns its rhythm in the process. And becomes an object by itself. The artist sometimes keeps it to the essentials; at other times he dresses it up and makes it play a role. Set sail a narrative. And take one to new shores of experience. This uncovers new images. So this ceaseless doodling; the unraveling of what is, then its reknitting into novel composites.'

In that vein of the modernist journey is Prabhakar Kolte who plays the colourative phenomenon against the sweep of aesthetic stirrings to give us an expressionist *entendre* of the fusing planes of abstractionist pictorial space. The heightened colour and surface tension that he creates in the flatness of the sweep gives his work a sense of aerial freedom. Shakti Burman the alchemist of fantasy enthralls with his two works that weave in the magic of the elements of accompaniment within the figures that speak on the tone equivocal rendition. The weaving of the narrative between the reality and the illusory become the most important criterion in his works that seem to speak about unearthing the mysteries that lie far beyond what we see. Paritosh Sen's pregnant woman with the cell phone and the pregnant goat both have about them a sense of candidness and illustrative humour for the manner in which he creates the bountiful allegory with the abundance of the linearity of the contour woven into the passion of colour. For Paritosh Sen the meaning of his images go beyond the culture specific, they are conditioned by the time in which they have been created.

Spend time examining Manjit Bawa's painting and what might appear initially to be a chunk of matte paint slips into a rich, light absorbent field of soft velvety -lavender fused into a bush gray. His painting of Ina Puri in a yogic stance, speaks in its evanescence; so, a glance at the work from the side shows that the painting is all surface — a smooth plane of soft, lush color laid atop the exposed feminine aesthete who is in deep rumination. Manjit's works always entice for the technique and prowess of application, made from layer upon sequential layer of paint in the way he plays with the *odhini*, in the manner of its draping sensuousness. Looking back around at the front, another surprising optical shift unfolds: the color-plane begins to open up into deep, seemingly infinite space. Or it starts to close off into a visually impermeable mass. Two dimensions become three, three evaporate into four. Perceptual meditation assumes qualities both startling and serene; it is almost a treading on the fine line that throbs between spirituality and sensuality.

Jogen Chowdhry's works always have the ability to offer a tempered analysis on the socio-cultural milieu. Even in the most lucid of distorted contours he gives us the abstract formulations of his own perceptions of the human form. The figurative genre is Jogen's intuitive construct, and his image always has that passion that serves to be a touchstone long after it has been created. Distinctiveness is his intensity; it is also the very abacus of Indian identity which he often wants to present as a single aspect. The two works in this show reveal Jogen's capacity to draw out the

larger and universalism implications of the image in question—a deftness of hand ensues, that makes Jogen a remarkably cosmopolitan individual. Of course talking with Jogen for a few hours clearly puts him in the class of intellectuals, because his thought process gives us hints of the classical political nuances and also offers social criticism on a few subjects. It is that critical eye that unfolds here, in the large work that he creates there is indeed a cultivation of the summation of tradition and the singular image resonates like a living resource to be looked at.

Paresh Maity's chromatic paintings are made by slowly, methodically, repetitively dragging a wide, paint-loaded brush from the top to the bottom of a carefully prepared canvas. A horizontal canvas might suggest the landscape, but it is the people who become the narrative in the orchestration of poetics in colour, with its wide lateral sweep, while a vertical one might reflect the presence of a person standing before it; by contrast, the equilateral dimensions of a square objectify stability. The woman with the pankha is an eloquent and enduring testimony to the summer night under which she distills the emotive essence of time. The lantern becomes the companion and it is her gaze that refurbishes. The larger painting is a summation of the yatra, the sojourn that speaks in its very being in the dictums of the carved out journey that unravels like a carnival in its crest of momentousness. The painting locates itself between nature and culture, between window and mirror, between object and illusion — between the world and you.

An artist who encourages, a new generation of art criticism to question hierarchies of taste, between fine arts and decoration is Jayasri Burman. She makes it harder to separate that classic male struggle in art history from women's work. In fact, in her large work, a study of the couple, she suggests a transcendence of an opposition between, on the one hand, accounts of Modernism centered on formal devices, great artists, and a new vision of space and time and, on the other hand, revisions based on feminism, social class, and devices of appropriation. It is the earthy sensibility that she weaves into her subjects, the fine eye for detailing and the accompanying strokes of verdant tropicana that indeed invites one to celebrate. The aspect of human existence has fascinated Jayasri for a long time and it is this aspect of recall that she plays with. The end result is two works that are intensely uplifting; you look at the countenance and acknowledge an intricacy of articulated rhythm.

Yusuf Arakkal's penchant for creating the diabolic suggestion with his ardent use of the abstractor realist planar divisions brings the emotive flair that reveals the technical finesse and the sense of tumult in the singular image that rests in soliloquy. Treated more like a still life it is Yusuf's handling of the foreground and background that brings on a virtuoso rendering in the entire chemistry of colour and perspective. Textured, rugged brushwork harks back to the lonesome image as well as the recurrence of the trials of urban stress. Yusuf's two books that have been created from his sketch books and his ruminations give us an insight into his scrapbook days and his natural efforts at sketching in the semi realist styles.

Madhavi Parekh's Kali and Durga become the development of perceptive potentialities to accept and utilize in an enriching manner the powerful symbolism of visual materials present in mythic references and cultural practices. Madhavi's use of the folk idiom and her growing interest in multiple images leads to the mystique of the painted moment and subject. Spatial tensions around the original contour become the most vital part of her sculpturally sensitive works. Sujata Bajaj known for her colourative expressions in the abstract idiom regales in her use of the symbiosis of the chromatic and colourative planes of emotive realities. Sujata seems to have moved towards stronger reflections of the pictorial space, colours that were soft and somewhat flowing have now taken on a stodgy stolid appearance. Intriguing in tone and the artifice of the human countenance is the work of T.M. Aziz who created two oils that bring out the feel of mystery as well as the element of curiosity in the suggestion of the anonymous who has been created in an aura of ambiguity. It seems as if Aziz is making a comment on modern day practices and this whole practice of the losing of identity.

The fascination of the surreal in the sense of finality and expression becomes the leitmotif of Shibu Natesan who gives an evocative translation of the ram's heads in a terrain of detailed grandeur. Shibu's brilliance at the cohesion of imagery allows to let surfaces and textures veer suddenly into the things themselves or art to pun on art. This is where the works of Veer Munshi and Pooja Iranna come in. Veer creates artifice with the juxtaposition of his own image between the aeroplane wings and the image that lies on the surface is one that celebrates the identity of the divisional plane of perspectives in time. Satirical innuendoes are very much a part of his sensibility. Pooja on the other hand hones her felicity with the architectural panorama that comes in a computer generated print atop which she juxtaposes her sinuous veneer of lithe languorous strokes.

Subba Ghosh's oils and his 15 minute video speak about the power of the equivocal tenor of an artist's frame of thought that blends chance encounters with the language of history and the simultaneous journey the mind makes and keeps on making even after the physical journey is over. Subba Ghosh has in the past always created works that build up a drama of sorts in the wake of a realist figurative genre and the cognizance of the modern day dichotomy of politics and the subconscious idiom of thought. The political landscape in the realm of the fantasy of the icon becomes Subba's Portrait of Passerby 1&2. Drawing the viewer into the grip of his sensibility is what Subba is adept at.

Apurva Desai's work presents the chaotic climax of urban kinetics. The swiveling power of the convoluted matrix suggests the potent power of the feel of technology in its tenure of development and life. Walter D'Souza gives us a series in his mixed media; his is the comment on the levels of degradation vis-à-vis the ecological process of emaciation that occurs. In his series he portrays the influenced turn of the century with a perspective of modernizing iconicity. Debnath Basu's is the art of subtracting from the whole so that the subject becomes a diffused narration of the painterly value. Maite Delteil the daughter of Sakti Burman gives us the forest in its all its glory with the family as well as the single image of the young girl. Maite's heightened use of colour and her ability to play with details of the foliage becomes the most important characteristic of her prowess. Sanjeev Senpimpire juxtaposes the

doll and the child to create a satirical comment on the high level of expectation as well as the thought of having grown up and not belonging to infantile stages anymore. Sajal Sarkar's human images that zoom into the figurative construct seem to personify angst in the elements of the human journey. and Dharmendra Rathore uses the panache of colour to create distinctively simple gestures infused with metaphor and symbolism.

In many ways Bridges is the exemplified sensibility that meanders within the individual silent, beauty of the explored paradigm that is swamped by a heart-shaped sea of instincts, which acts as a powerful allegory for the relentless pursuit of happiness within the confines of our own mortal predicament. The drama of juxtaposition continues in the works that revel in the unpredictability and richness of life. As the infinite layers of paint expand across the picture surfaces in wave after wave of chromatic splendour, the erupting spontaneous energy of the paint is dynamically contained within the soothing geometry of the canvas, the paper or the video that runs into complex subconsciousness. The viewer is left with the delicate miasma of images loaded with realistic and literary allusions, that cope with the uncertainties of the times. In more ways than one Bridges is that juncture of time that reflects contemporary parallels.

UMA NAIR  
ART CRITIC ASIAN AGE