

PAIN & PLEASURE IN CREATION

“Nature is true,
Such truth in her Silence
If only we would listen to her intricacies.
Then there is no difference in sound and vision”*

Until a few decades ago, when one talks of a ‘sublime’ creation, one is compelled to understand its meaning, as what is cultured through earlier putative notions affirmed by the Western Romantic scholars namely Burke, Kant in the early 19th century. Constructing the ‘sublime’ as a ‘total experience’... a ‘masochistic affair’... restricted to the ‘cultivated few’... or an experience which ‘organises notions of positive shock and horror’.

Around the 1960-80’s this meaning expressed a variance. In the light of a new venture in art which realises the need of establishing a ‘parental’ societal significance, with the inclusion of innumerable signs and instances, art has to manifest itself to support a fresh and demanding audience. Scholar Paul Crowther(NY) theorises the sublime as the ‘transcending of the mundane’, or a more recent description of the sublime as a constant ‘reconfiguration’ of the ‘overall field of meaning’. Various signs and forms relate to contiguity between the artwork and the persona of the artist. A ‘sublime feeling’, I would deduce, relates to the abundance of inferences united/reconfigured resulting in an altogether different/higher premise of feeling.

It is through my recent experience of seeing Reji’s works, that leave no ambient translations of the word in my mind. His works signify a complete new activity in terms of aesthetic practice. It is not to say that Reji adopts a new material language where the practice of painting is concerned; rather he resumes the conventional mode of the oil painting practice..., it is the finished painting that results in an altogether plural “subjectivity”; The “rural” colors amalgamated with ‘universal’ forms displayed romantically in the painting.

A hybrid creation, which intervenes, various instances in paintings created at present, or rather situates itself, significantly in today’s space. Created within an allegorical framework, the work represents the presence of the artist, giving room for a symbolic intervention. Inspirations are drawn from his roots, and are cultivated in the present, all nurtured through his painting.

It contains both the pleasure of recollecting and the pain of longing resulting in an altogether sublime creation.

Reji’s paintings are necessarily the ‘signs of the state’ of his present being; Harboring a nostalgic desire to include the past, implying a ‘subaltern personification’ (term coined by Geeta Kapur on Frida Kahlo & Amrita Sher Gill).

Originally from Kerala, Reji completed his Bachaelor/Master’s degree in Painting from the Faculty of Fine Arts, M.S.U. Baroda, 2000. Proposing the fruitful development of small town individuals changed into new urbanised artists, in terms of a complete

transformation in thought and practice; Reji's positivity is in his diasporic state; which establishes a firm stand to the original inspiration or rather influences from his earlier existence, recollected through a fresh vision. Each painting recalls his past either in the motionless stance of the human figures or in the mystified backgrounds on which these forms are grounded.

The subjects in his paintings figure people from a rural social strata. The working class and their simple pleasures of existence. Applying a mode of expression, using compositional structures from artists of the old Western Schools (like Pieter della Fransa and Bosch), Reji attempts to invoke a geometrical structure encountered by these old masters; an effort to create an universal existence in the working class. The figures are on the move..., and the move is captured... as if till eternity in Reji's painting. A 'charged' communication between the motionless backgrounds and the still figures, resulting in an ambiguous gesture.

His love paintings are done with a very personal approach but definitely not a private one. The works involve manifestations of the natural' and the cultural'. Embodied in the subtle reflexes of the protagonist(s), the paintings illustrate simple common instances, which enjoy a lasting value in a lover's mind. The protagonist(s) in the paintings are usually the common working people who are involved in their routine curriculum. Reji captures moments of innocence, or unusual movements, reactions between their common duties, which are synchronized resulting in a communicability of love. These 'love paintings' are very important to the artist, as it is these feelings he believes, are enshrined in the individuals' mind. The inspiration for his paintings is sought through prose/poetry and literary classics(e.g. Marquez's explorations), and also films. It is the fleeting movements..., like a gust of the wind, subtle glances and unprecedented moments that embellish his ideas.

In one work titled 'Kalasipalyam', i.e. a busy location in the Bangalore city, where the artist is presently working, displays a rhetorical feat in terms of painting. Reji draws the basic shape and lets the viewer decide its subjectivity/identity. The work hinges on the threshold of his past and present, clearly spelled out through the forms. Reji chooses elephant forms as the central objects of concentration... Where 'their' being is maneuvered by human forms. Thus illustrating the ideological stand of the individual, displaying an evolutionary trace in the newly urbanised artist. It is very interesting to note that the paintings display a non-hierarchy of space. The forms and the background are aligned judiciously on the painting surface, creating perfect balance. Reji works with a certain logic; Still figures in motion, the play of light and shade defined together on each form and the construction of the entire composition in a grid-like format.

In another truly remarkable work titled, 'The Goat Carrier' it appears as if the central human form is advancing towards a New World of enlightenment or to achieve a utopian ideal. The form though stunted has tallness reminiscent of a mountain, in the ethereal background. Missions to complete or rather continue a never possessing goal. The goat, which forms the hand of the human figure, seems dependent and helpless. (This painting was executed keeping in mind, the 'Tribute to Picasso' show held in February 2002 at

'The Guild' gallery, Mumbai.) He balances forms with their backgrounds like a trapeze artist. A perfect position for the forms. In few of his earlier works like 'Peddler', 'Taste Seller', this facet is very nakedly portrayed. He has displayed construction workers doing their balancing act. A grid like composition where the lines are converging or diverging playing along with the viewers eye, building a composition in their minds.

Reji 'performances' though fixed to his roots, cannot be called autobiographical as they include a space which consumes the unimaginable. As a conclusive statement, it would be appropriate to recur and reflect on the beginning verse, which talks of the soft silent 'voice' of nature... and likewise it is the natural and the simple that inspires Reji, which he paradoxically 'tackles' in unique/unheard ways!

References

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