

The Long and Short of Things

The myth of the viewer as an outsider is disrupted as one enters the gallery ‘housing’ the ‘*objects d’ art*’ done by Mario D’souza. The display fascinates the onlooker, as the ‘space’ forms an integral part of the show. The orange dots on the wall reverberate with the art objects signifying a concurrent performance as ‘*Handle’s Messiah Oratorio*’ plays in the background. A unique venture interacting with diverse influences, contemplations and trends all subsumed within the selfhood of the artist. A personal experience ‘framed’ in the gallery space.

The artists’ persona reveals a friendly charismatic countenance; and after talking to him, discloses an uncertainty subjected to the changing scenario in art today. He talks of his growth from an academic enthusiast, trained as a sculptor, making figurative terracotta sculptures to a more mature human being, in his short career as an artist. The experience of surrendering to the demands of changing times. Applying skills learnt from his academic career in sculpture, from Bangalore/ Baroda, along with his creative insight, Mario sought to invent different possibilities in art making. He used materials like terracotta, silk, wood, along with porcelain, orange stickers, wool and galvanized iron, that produced effects, which were ‘contemporary’, & ‘design oriented’

To describe Mario’s work, it is suitable to say that the space is the ‘dominant’ of the entire display. It is within this area that his individuality, cultural influences and the formal training he has undergone are juxtaposed together and organised to form ‘a single entity’ or more appropriately an ‘unifying force’ present in all the works. The sort of ‘assemblage’ brings to mind Fredric Jameson’s view of calling the ‘*post-modern space a period*’. A period that incorporates various styles-history-contemporary and future into what is called art today. This artist attempts to fit in his beliefs, dreams and influences within the territorial restrictions of the gallery.

The philosophy of life embodied in the ‘Bauhaus Legacy’ in the early 1920s in Germany, concerns Mario’s work. The connection between ‘building’ and ‘society’; the question of uniting the arts, crafts and the public; of getting art to the mainstream, or more so, an interface formed between art, design, society & the gallery.

Also disturbing the hegemonic discourse of the ‘gallery’, by ironically submitting the gallery space to suit his requirements. The single color, orange gives a ‘flatness’ to the three dimensional forms. A deliberate attempt to create a ‘depthlessness’ in the ‘individual’ works, akin to the new trends in art practice. Understanding, demonstrating and questioning the ‘actuality’ of our times. The works speak more as a whole unit, than on their own.

But creativity today seems a practical uncertainty. As economics constitutes the basis for survival today, art has to assert its composure to fit in with the present scenario. The installation done by Mario D’souza displayed in the Time & Space gallery in Bangalore pitches itself in the global arena, which has no firm frame. The ethics of anti-commodification that go with installation art is detached significantly by the clever and attractive display of the works, which are furniture and “*artistically*” fabricated objects.

The show titled “Something Big something Small”, is all inclusive of what constitutes the arts today. A ‘modernity’ backed with a confident stance of the artists’ identity. A realisation or reconciliation to the vast opportunities laid down by the influences of globalisation.

Talking about his work on a more personal level, the artist seeks to create a utopia appropriate to his belonging. Inspired by a desire to shift from his home, a water obstructed area-Ejipura in Bangalore – *due to heavy rains*, to live in a luxurious realm of the city. The artist creates furniture and other forms/objects that signify to him, the comfort of a ‘home’ and ‘shifting’ them into the gallery space. Thus portraying the fulfillment of an unachieved dream, so Mario lives his dream for ten days! Subversion to the norms created by the circumstances in our society.

The works are made out of wood and are painted in a luminous vermilion color, bearing religious implications. Religion is very important for Mario. Being a part of this materialistic world he has very significantly objectified his religion. To name a few works; Veneration, Tabernacle, Coronation, Crucifixion, disclose idioms suitable to his strong Christian beliefs. It is with these ideologies that he has captured his contemporary space, giving it a philosophical bent, through his work.

His work, titled ‘Scapula’ which signifies a religious cord tied around the neck, is a ‘tie’, which he feels is a necessity of the corporate intellectuals today, a sort of ritualistic obligation.

A pair of spectacles with different frame sizes, is titled “Veneration”, which questions the suspicious/insecure mind of today’s individual, a ‘blind’ faith in religion or just a formal submittance to it. The narrowing down of religious acceptance, in today’s fast-paced world.

Sizes create differences. A comparison, an experience. Mario deconstructs the ethos of the hierachial structure of the ‘bigger’, through one of his works, which consists of two chairs of ‘highly’ disparate sizes. The work questions the existing criterion of the ‘bigger’ as the ‘winner’. The two chairs have two cushions in different sizes. The larger cushion on the smaller, signifying comfort. The smaller cushion looks ‘smaller’ on the ‘bigger’ chair. An ironic subversion to the ‘believed’ status of contentment.

This is not only a personal achievement but also has a political fervor to it. A political consciousness is drawn with the not so political works. Using a vivid color like vermilion, the conceptual context is his personal one. He feels a sacred color like orange is now becoming political and defies this guise through his work. A family of ‘orange’ objects made out of wood in two different sizes reveals a clandestine strength to mock at the existing paradigms created by the classes.

In retrospect it is ironic to see that Mario through the ‘objects’ of his works recoups a personal concept and a universal subject, as often represented today. Questioning the ‘gallery framework’, class divisions, economic hierarchies and playing with popular Christian idioms to question the cynical mind of people today, through the minimalist installations. An endeavor to re-link art to the everyday world of social and political life;

a deliberate attempt to reveal the established ideology of a middle-class urbanised individual, which forms the artists' self-image. To re-enter, re-establish and ironically 'topple' over the existing norms of 'high-art'. It is not a statement that he aspires to make to the masses, but rather a self-realisation, an artistic convention, which interprets simple everyday occurrences towards broader perceptions.

References

Douglas Nash, **'The Politics of Space'** Architecture, Painting and Theater in Postmodern Germany, 1996, Peter Lang Pub. Inc., New York