

Toying with Colours

'So come with me, where dreams are born.

And time is never planned. Just think of happy things, and your heart will fly on wings in Never Never Land'

From the play 'Peter Pan' by J.M.Barrie

The above quote from Peter Pan is intimate to Sudha's Art as well as her persona. As the fable recites, in Never Never land, people may cease to age; thus Neverland is often used as a metaphor for eternal childhood and innocence. Likewise Sudha's probe into her childhood memories assembled through objects such as toys rendered with popular bright colors has varied connotations. Freud describes toys as the child's first contact with an art work. Sudha paints plastic toys and portraits of people she knows personally. While the toy paintings work as someone confronting her own space in the world, the faces satirically questions assumed notions of portraiture. The brightly colored paintings, displaying plastic birds, monkeys, horses or frogs with their singular functions appear as recollections and reconciliations of her past. 'Social' kitsch objects' popular with the majority of Indian middle class are transformed into fantasies or pluralities in the child's mind. Using bright colors, she manages to retain the plasticity of the toys but ironically, with a similar coloring and rendering her portraits look like 'real' people and not plastic.

Her formative years resonate through her paintings; hers is a previous association with toys, thus an abiding subject is these childhood models maneuvered over a period of time, and then distilled in imagination through paintings. Rendered on canvas with acrylic, they are invariably the subject of scrutiny, and a hint of celebration. An ordinary object gets a power through an artistic expression as it is re-established beyond its inherent playful context. However she renders each toy after careful consideration based on her association with them. She carefully collects the 'artifacts' from different sources, by making frequent visits to the market place in Vadodara, the city she is now staying in, recreating activities which resound her childhood days in Bihar.

The blatant solitary toys pose in minimal plain backgrounds for the viewer to imagine or recollect their associations with their recent or distant past. By not incorporating other objects in her paintings, that could function as specific indicators of the influences she has undergone, the works attempt to make no space for associated memories or further visual reading. The glitzy coloring done in acrylics, illuminate the plasticity of the object as she depicts toys which are almost immediately deciphered as less expensive or crass objects; the sincerity of the artist is elucidated; as the colors, forms are nakedly or simplistically conveyed. No pretenses, just 'pure' expressions in collecting these symbols of childhood. But questionable are notions of 'purity'. The choice of picking up a toy, a symbol of childhood and innocence from the hustle bustle of everyday life is picking up the silver of reality against hardships or 'real' realities encountered in everyday existence. It is not innocent, but a carefully constructed move which elucidates the sensibility of the artist.

Sudha discusses through her work, that memories are built, reinvented and transformed. The significance of her art is a very simple postmodern phenomena. To narrate her past and to reinvent it in the present. As in today's scenario, changing milieu, new market ideas and fast-paced globalization, an Art work exerts assorted signifiers. Likewise these works, within the context of Indian Art, has few elements which are definite indicators of contemporary Art practice – the prevailing combinations of the individual, the social and the kitsch.

Our society is changing. All societies that have come under the new era of globalization have inculcated changing attitudes, creating and breaking myths. What is needed is a consistency, a wish to remain and recollect, a nostalgia for what is lost. Sudha's paintings tickle the viewer even as they gawk at him or her. Her visual language appears as a dialect between her personal experiences compromising of her move to Vadodara, the influence of various Contemporary Art idioms and ideas along with inculcating common occurrences from her previous surroundings at home in Jharkhand, Bihar. But through it all, the plain brush strokes, the obvious and maneuvered contour lines, the dominant role of singular staring objects occupying the flat space, which is devoid of detailed renderings and austerity; present bright vivacious color jostling and layering with similar moods and intentions, accentuating a perkiness which is so vividly Indian.

Nirali Lal
