

A Page from '*Narrative Suggestions*'

The three of us got together just about a year ago. Coming from our lively backgrounds yet tempered with our own anxieties, we sought to collaborate and create '*Narrative Suggestions*', a group show which included two painters, Rahul Chauhan and Nirali Lal (me) and a sculptor, Shailesh Ojha. We set out on this journey with an eagerness to validate our work together. As we proceeded we realised the various dimensions beyond our art practice in studios, and recognized the dynamics involved in creating an exhibition, which is actually a part and parcel of the art practice. As artists creating and displaying our work, we became curators, designers and at times, our very own 'PR persons'. At first I was under the impression that the struggling phase in an artists' professional life is only the initial preliminary stage. Now it seems that this initial preliminary phase is extended and many a times convoluted. For emerging artists who are yet grappling to create an artistic idiom with their works, it is challenging to garner the requisite resources both at a physical and mental level. As 'new' artists are not backed by galleries, the challenges they face are various. Beginning with the creation of artworks from their own budget to conceptualising the show, each step presents its own unique complications. Following this, the next step involves renting the appropriate space, 'writing' about their works and of course designing invitations, posters and e-catalogues. The enormous effort necessary to create an art show includes the availability of financial resources, goodwill, luck and an adequate amount of expertise! Preceding many of these experiences was the discussion around announcing our show in the print media. I realised that in a metro like New Delhi such press announcements cannot be made without paying for them. A PR agency quoted Rs. 60,000 - 70,000 just to briefly announce our show in the city's leading newspapers. So we instead opted to make phone calls and use the affordable free space on the web.

In this context, it is worthwhile for me to mention what is undoubtedly a new trajectory in the Indian art scene. This is the recent practice of private galleries renting out institutional spaces for their own championed shows. This trend creates a new dynamic for the artists who get involved, and also for the spectators and the walk in buyers who seem to be reassured with picking up works backed by a gallery.

Yet the experience of putting up an art show and viewing our works in a grand space makes the effort a worthwhile challenge. We hosted our group show in April 2012 at the prestigious venue of Lalit Kala Akademi in New Delhi, an attractive space which caters to several artists seeking to display their works.

We chose to call our show '*Narrative Suggestions*' not relying on any association to a place or to any specific context but on the actual literal meaning of the words. Each of us come from very different circumstances and only met last year at a residency at the NIV Art Centre in New Delhi. Sometimes people's ideas just connect. Rahul and Shailesh recently graduated from Art schools in New Delhi

and are passionately involved in discovering nuances and suggestions in their own respective art. I, Nirali Lal restarted painting in Baroda on a full-fledged basis since 2006 after finishing a stint with the web portal Saffron Art in Bangalore. While Rahul gathers different metaphors in his paintings symbolically suggesting his experiences, Shailesh skilfully softens the hard surface of stone with yielding sensations. My ideas associated with the camouflage theme tend to meander on the surface that I adopt for my painting.

The works we put up co-existed, almost like a fulfilling and complete experience. The creations though varied in style, instantly associated with each other. As if the works were having a pleasant conversation like three friends talking to each other. It seemed like Rahul Chauhan's rich treatment in oil related with my playful allegories and Shailesh's punning stones, and the show stood as a one complete whole, adjacent to the bare walls in the neighbouring gallery space. This in a way put the show in a soliloquy diminishing its otherwise vast potential. Yet I should not complain, the exhibition did show many rich possibilities. The keen interest displayed by various members of the general public, and those essential art connoisseurs, intellects and artists, gave us a lot of scope for further discussions and demonstrations of our art practice. Meetings with unique individuals from varied fields who analysed our works in their beautiful and sometimes naive manner, made us realise that our art generates tremendous energy and has now been allotted a little bit of significance in this very vast world. A number of paths can open up when one does a successful exhibition. I do understand that an artist is not really trying to reach anywhere, but the meaningful purpose is to constantly think, create, exhibit and feel the same energy and then to do the whole sequence again, and then again, to relentlessly travel these journeys in a circle towards a complete whole...

Nirali Lal