

The intrigue of inner landscapes

by Manjula Ramakrishnan

September 27, 2013

 Print  Send to Friend


There is a certain intrigue in "The Hidden Courtyard", an exhibition of Simrin Mehra-Agarwal's artworks being held at Empty 10 and JAMM Art. The event, in association with 1X1 Art Gallery, has been curated by Caterina Corni, and runs from Sept.22 through Oct.14.

Striking a brilliant balance between tradition and modernity, Simrin's repertoire bears interesting characteristics of emerging contemporary art. Similar balance is witnessed in her life too. Originally from Kolkata, she pursued her education both in India and Europe. Imbibing the best of the both, she developed her own language, using her skills to conjoin two apparently opposite realities. She has retained her original roots while absorbing Western training, thereby creating a body of work that is completely original.

Ruins still show signs of life and this is central to Simrin's theme and body of work. Simrin's black and white light boxes feature architectural glimpses of an era gone to ruin. While the works hone in on the development of shapes depicting the stages of "ideal form to ultimate deterioration", the choice of framing and minuteness of detail remind one of the etchings by Piranesi.

"My work critically examines, through visual histories, the phases of transition in India – from royal grandeur to decline; from medieval to the post-colonial era; from monarchy to democracy," says Simrin. Her work provides visual cues to the changing process of time and history where objects, architecture and demography are all subject to transformation. It documents the changing customs and values.

Born in Kolkata, the maternal side of her family lived in Jhargram, a remote village surrounded by forests. Her ancestors, who were originally from Rajasthan, set up a kingdom in Jhargram, and hence Simrin grew up hearing stories of past glory and grandeur, power, wealth, wars, maharajahs, zamindars, palaces, temples, hidden courtyards, royal coaches, antiques and artifacts. The old albums of her ancestors in traditional Rajput ceremonial attire, bejewelled and carrying large swords, and the volatile political constructs of her native land strongly shaped her visual vocabulary, which in turn is reflected in her work.

"There are palaces in India that are now in a derelict and dilapidated condition and need

immediate attention of the government to turn them into heritage buildings," Simrin urges. "My work comprises cross-sections of heritage buildings, pillars, ancient sculptures, antique objects – functional and dysfunctional – which are all clubbed together and placed randomly out of their original historic context.

"By this tabular arrangement the work itself becomes an imaginary museum of things so as to stimulate an appreciation for all things antique. The work brings out the geometry and grandeur of ancient structures, which were once appreciated but have now become pieces of junk. I study the journey of these forms from conception to degeneration."

Despite the dereliction, mesmerising glimpses of the glory and legacy of the bygone era still remain. And within these lie stories waiting to be unfurled, of valour, beauty, romance, deceit and sacrifice. "My work brings back memories of the grandeur of the hidden inner courtyards of the palace and gives an insight into the personal lives of its inhabitants. There is a deep sense of nostalgia and loss, which consequently leads to an attempt to immortalise my ancestors and their stories through personal photographs, diaries, letters, cartes-de-visite or cabinet cards and state stamps that bore their portraits. These images and documents help us trace the visual history of this period."

The women in her work represent her ancestors, powerful icons of their times and who have had a lasting influence on Simrin's life. They stood as symbols of progressive values and embodied the aspirations and fantasies of urban elite. Simrin's work represents the power of women who are not portrayed as mere objects of visual aesthetic pleasure.

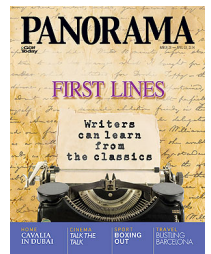
FRONTPAGE



GALLERY



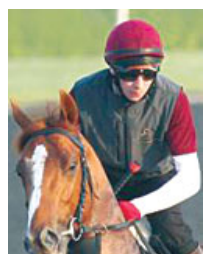
PANORAMA



TIME OUT



SPORT



"Unfortunately, due to the wear and tear of time and improper archiving, the pictures have been damaged to a great extent," Simrin rues. "So, I have recreated these images by reconstructing, restoring and completing the missing sections. However, in certain parts of the images, the damage and fading have been so extensive that it has been impossible to recreate them. I have included the wear and tear as part of the work. This time, my works delve deeper – both conceptually and technically – into my continual passion for restoring, archiving, and attaching new meanings to objects that teeter on the verge of oblivion."



Add this page to your favorite Social Bookmarking websites

| Share

Comments

Post a comment

| | |
|----------|----------------------|
| Name: | <input type="text"/> |
| Country: | <input type="text"/> |
| City: | <input type="text"/> |
| Email: | <input type="text"/> |
| Comment: | <input type="text"/> |



5926656

Type the text

[Privacy & Terms](#)



Post Comment