

The Memory Crucible

Artehelka / April 9, 2015

REVIEW : Reliquaries – The Remembered Self / Sushma Sabnis

Tarq gallery, Mumbai presents a two person show titled, 'Reliquaries – The Remembered Self' of works by artists Rithika Merchant and Suruchi Choksi. One could view this show as a photo album of a distant past which evades definitions and a present which we witness as constantly turning into a past. Reliquaries could also be seen with a hint of magic in the eyes and a fair sprinkling of one's own fairy dust, observes Sushma Sabnis.

When one browses through the numerous albums titled 'old photo collections' freely available on the internet, it strikes an evocative cord within. A sense of familiarity and a detachment ensues for no logical reason. For example a sepia tinted picture of a pile of spectacles and glasses belonging to Jews killed during the holocaust, which probably were preserved in some museum later. From a historical perspective, every museum acts as a reliquary – a container for sacred objects as the dictionary defines it. But how does one validate the sanctity of the enduring human being who probably is the best reliquary? A container in mind, body and soul of that which is sacred and profane, imprinted in genetic hieroglyphs, silently carrying forward, generation after generation the torch of Past, Present and a Future.



Works by Rithika Merchant

There is a distinct lyrical, illustrative quality in the works of Barcelona based artist Rithika Merchant. Rithika weaves a multi cultural tapestry in her involving narrative works. Each work, either a drawing or a paper collage is in itself a story teller. The works evoke a wonder in the viewer about folklore and fables they conceal within their intricately painted surfaces replete with anthropomorphic and/or feminine forms. If one were to look at an exquisitely carved sword, one is awe-struck by its form, design, the very strength of it and then a realization of the wars waged with it for power and in the name of loyalty descends slowly into focus. The awe is replaced by questions about the history and legends associated with it. Viewing metamorphoses from a simple detached 'looking' to a deep realization. Rithika's works have this ability to draw the viewer's attention and then take them on an enchanted journey. This journey could be to unknown realms or the completely familiar yet forgotten memories of the self. The artist illustrates and paints myths from all over the world, and her works often resonate with the feminine narratives from each milieu. While the viewer is captured by the numerous intricate forms in the work, their inter-connectedness deems the possibility of other such stories faintly mirrored in some other culture or a reminiscence. This also anoints Rithika's works with a subtle global narrative which could at some stage appear in continuum with multiple myths from all over. The reflective element of Rithika's work is not restricted to stories or fables from

various sources, but could also be seen as refractive looking glasses of imagination of the people these myths generated from. Hence the humane fabric of these works clothe every mind that glances upon it with innate regional, national and international essences at once blurring the lines of historical and geographical origins.



Work by Suruchi Choksi

In Mumbai based artist Suruchi Choksi's works, one encounters a possibility of a past reflected on the aluminum sheet surface of the works. Suruchi's works are mystical, abstract, at the brink of loss of complete definitions of an image, be it the protagonists in the image or in a distant memory of it. Suruchi's works are prints of old photographs from her own collections which have been distressed intentionally or by nature, to produce partial obscurity in the visual. Unlike the reverse movement one encounters in photographer Candida Hoffer's works as the protagonists have just exited an imminently crowded scene moments before the capture, Suruchi's protagonists disappear in fragments from the frame, almost like an ongoing slow ageing process. One would see this as an actual picture which is susceptible to nature and age, or this could be seen as a metaphor of the human memory which also is susceptible to nature and ageing. A slow vanishing of a moment, which is kept alive when retold in numerous instances each time with varying embellishments depending upon the person who retells them. Suruchi's works could be seen as totems /markers of a moment gone by, an incident or event lived and cherished. These works also hint at how stories, folklore and legends are born and live enchanted existences of their own in personal and collective memories. This displaced human self from the stories becomes an intangible entity veiled and concealed within the intricate mazes of the mind. The mind becomes a labyrinthine repository of such totems of the self, only to be resurrected if summoned over the next reunion. One of her other work is a table specially designed as a multiple video installation. Each drawer and shelf of this memoir-table acts as an individual stimulant for the familiar, the seen and heard. A metaphor of the cognizant mind and its working.



RITHIKA MERCHANT
Doctrine Of Signature
Gouache & Ink on Paper
25.6 x 27 inches
2013

Work by Rithika Merchant

While art made by women automatically becomes categorized as 'feministic' art, these two artists manage to pull off a Houdini act as far as strict feminism is concerned in their works. The visual language appears feminine, yet the subjects broached and the story line intermingles with a broader global perspective and relatability. Without diving too deep into a conscious feministic dialogue, this show brings forth two perspectives which play out a synchronized visual dance in varied mediums. There are tones of cultural hybridity within the works as Rithika's works traverse different corners of the globe to bring forth her narratives in her unique illustrative style, while Suruchi's works address this aspect with actual imagery visibly embedded within the softly evaporating photographic works open to the viewer's interpretations.



SURUCHI CHOKSI
Memory Trace #20
Print on Archival Paper
Dimensions Variable
Edition 1 of 5
2014

Work by Suruchi Choksi

What holds everything together is the thread of time. Every story, every past, present and future are woven tightly like chromosomes. This thread could be made of nature, dreams, love, events, experiences, memories, often intersecting, forming loops, and conjoining at will, comprising the very complex loom of Life. Somewhere in this tightly woven fabric are relics, triggers which adorn the

cherished memory like embroidery on this fine fabric of Time. This three dimensional weave exists untouched in time and space, as life itself is a crucible of everything – a reliquary of defined moments.

The show is on view till 10th April 2015.

(Images Courtesy – Tarq Gallery, Mumbai)