

BOMBAY SHOWCASE

Juxtapositions of a natural kind



[Aatish Nath](#)

MARCH 14, 2016 00:00 IST

SHARE ARTICLE



'Gardens of the Mind' places Swapan Nayak's contemplative black and white prints alongside Gilles Bensimon's colourful, abstract studies of flowers submerged in water.

A photography show that displays contrasting works centring around nature is worth exploring, says Aatish Nath

Juxtaposition has often been used to comment and link two viscerally different themes. This is most apparent at Tarq's ongoing show, 'Gardens of the Mind', which places Swapan Nayak's contemplative black and white prints alongside Gilles Bensimon's colourful, abstract studies of flowers submerged in water that are larger and much more immediate.

Spread across the bi-level gallery, the show groups Nayak's images into eight chapters, each of which has a collection of photos that are thematic.

Bensimon's larger images are spread through the gallery, often drawing your gaze to them, before Nayak's grouped works call on you to dwell on the relationship between different aspects of the natural world to each other, and to the meaning that we ascribe to them.

Nayak's work, which was made over a span of three years in northern and eastern India, is a part of his series 'Radha: A Love in Eternity', while the prints of Bensimon's work come from his series, 'Watercolour'. The show, which has travelled to Kolkata, Bangalore and Ahmedabad before its Mumbai debut, is presented by Tasveer Arts. Its next stop will be New Delhi.

Bensimon's works are provocative: a riot of colours that abstract the flower, submerging the blooms takes the trope of the still life and inverts it. With that, the attention to detail is lost, exposing viewers instead, to the tints and shades with which nature paints on a daily basis. However, as variations on a theme with, if you'll excuse the pun, not enough depth, the colourful prints begin to blur into a larger abstract whole.

In the curatorial note, Bensimon explains his thoughts, "As soon as the flower is cut, it dies; even though it retains its inherently life-like characteristics. But when I plunge them into the water, they are briefly reborn. It is as if I am bringing them back to life; the water helps me capture the essence of their living beauty one last time before they wilt and fade."

Nayak's work though, rewards the time and energy put into it, with each crisp medium-format image highlighting the natural beauty that has captured minds from the days of the Mughal miniature to Monet's Impressionist 'Water Lilies' series. The series of photos has been inspired by his reading of Vaishnava Padabali, a nearly 700-year-old Bengali text that narrates the myth of Radha and Krishna and their eternal love.

Nayak's photos force you to confront the stillness of nature, and the organic nature of its beauty. In isolation, a Y-shaped branch curving across a photo probably doesn't have the same resonance as when we see the leaves that arise from it fill in the blank space of the tonal grey frame. This relationship, between all aspects of nature, almost holds up a mirror to the relationship between Radha and Krishna and the purity of their love. For Nayak, a former photojournalist, it makes sense that he uses a documentary style of photography to bring to the fore his notions on purity, the nature of the self, and the divine. The use of black and white creates a visual language that lets viewers tease out the relationship between images that are placed next to each other, as well as the depth that most of the photos have.

To see both side-by-side though is to get a glimpse into the mind of two completely different practitioners of photography.

Bensimon, as the former art director of Elle , is used to shaping the world to match his vision, whether that be working with models such as Cindy Crawford or Naomi Campbell, or clients that range from Maybelline to Clarins.

For Nayak, it seems like his work — which spans three solo exhibitions and photojournalism for magazines such as Time and Newsweek — is a cerebral expression of the quite solitude of shooting, and the rigour that it requires.

As a result, the gardens that have bloomed in both minds are different, but worth exploring.

Gardens of the Mind shows at Tarq till Thursday March 17

The author is a freelance journalist