

A constantly evolving canvas

Artist Boshudhara Mukherjee's fourth solo show is testament to how old work can inspire and even become part of new art

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For an artist, the act of creation stems from an in-built desire to physically manifest their thoughts, ideas and feelings. And when old work serves as a canvas for new creations, you're privy to your own process of evolution. In her ongoing show titled *Canticle*, artist Boshudhara Mukherjee's experiments with mixed media from previous paintings and new to create 12 woven canvases. Using acrylic, oil, paper, cloth, plastic and tape, Mukherjee follows the pattern of paint, cut, and weave to make and remake unexpected forms. Even though the word 'canticle', is related to hymns from the Bible, Mukherjee chooses to see it for its metre-less characteristics rather than place it in a religious context. The show has been dubbed so by the artist's father in reference to the non-rhythmic but repetitive lines and the resonance he sees in the Biblical verse and Mukherjee's work.

Closing spaces

Since 2013, Mukherjee has attempted to merge the gap between art and craft. The artist draws inspiration from the delicate lines of a miniature painting, abstract expressionism, geometric patterns of neo-plasticism, repetitive patterns of architectural screens, as well as her grandmother's saris. In the end, Mukherjee recycles her works to bring forth fresh connotations that pertain to her current mood. "The story that my work tells is not something I intentionally put there, but something that slipped out of my heart and mind, through my fingers and into the work unconsciously," she says.

As a child, she always had to keep her hands busy, whether it was in the form of *batik* painting, crochet, stitching or even by taking the toaster or printer apart and putting it back together. And even though she studied painting at the Maharaja Sayajirao University in Baroda, Mukherjee's tryst with the practice hasn't been as easy as it has with her craft. "Painting and I have a difficult relationship, and I think the work is born out of that conflict and a need to control the medium," she says.

An emotional connect

In the gallery where *Canticle* is on display, Mukherjee's work is brimming with intricate patterns and shapes. The surrounding lit installations only serve to accentuate the drama and personality of the canvases. Each piece of art exudes a different mood: some mellow, some dark, and others vibrant. The work has taken the artist three-four months to complete, and there's an array of emotions, moods, and stories built into every one. For instance, the piece



TELLING STORIES: Boshudhara Mukherjee's works are brimming with intricate patterns and shapes, and there's an array of moods built into every one. — PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

'Feb' is cold, but pleasant nonetheless, a throwback to the location it was created in: Mukherjee's home in Kurseong, Darjeeling, during a cold but sunny winter. "February is an interesting month. It starts off bare, but as it progresses you see the leaves and flowers start to bud, and by the beginning of

March, they all start to bloom. While painting, I wasn't consciously thinking about all these aspects, but when I look at the work now, it has a sense of coldness about it."

Choose their own way

While some pieces are large and cover an entire

wall, others are fairly smaller with edgier shapes. The artist explains that it's something that comes instinctively as she chops and negates sections of the canvas. She says, "Like in the case of 'Loss', which started off as really huge, about three times the length it is now, but ended up tiny. I guess each

Taking apart the canvas to free it from its claustrophobia is something that inspires Mukherjee

work is the size that it chooses to be."

Mukherjee's interaction with each canvas involved the use of her entire body, as the process of creation meant literally sitting on the work or standing on a ladder for hours, days and months. She believes that her installations don't require a standard signature, since it contains a biometric one. "It is quite literally blood, sweat, and tears, with all the blisters and calluses each work gives me." Several of the paintings and weaves are born from muscle memory and the right breathing pattern. She believes that while the brain takes certain decisions, it's the hands and body that control the rhythm. "It's almost like yoga or meditation, your body and mind need to be in sync for every single line."

The process of creation, taking apart the canvas to free it from its claustrophobia, is something that inspires Mukherjee to paint. Another aspect that urges her to create is boredom. "Unless one gets tired of doing something, why would you want to do anything different?" So after making more than a thousand straight lines, the need to cut a curve suddenly overtakes the artist and "voilà! a new door of possibilities opens up."

Like any other creative mind, the artist views all her work as her children. The only difference, she believes is that just because you created them, doesn't mean you can completely predict who they will grow up to be.

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Canticle is on at Tarq, Colaba, till November 26