

## photography

## THE NATURE OF THINGS

Flowers in full bloom or the stark beauty of jungles, two photographers interpret nature in contrasting ways

Soma Das

soma.das@hindustantimes.com

Flowers submerged under water creating a palette of magical colours; unadorned black and white images of leaves floating in the water or in thin air; branches of trees drooping to the surface of the pond and casting endless reflections — these are some of the images that adorn the walls at Tarq gallery. They are part of the exhibition, Gardens of the Mind, which marks the 10th year anniversary of Tasveer. On display are black and white works by Kolkata-based photographer Swapnan Nayak and photographs in colour by British lifestyle photographer Gilles Bensimon juxtaposing two different approaches to shooting the natural world.

Bensimon's series, titled Watercolours, highlights the beauty of flowers in an innovative manner. The photographer, who has shot the biggest of celebrities as the former art director at Elle magazine, chose a more abstract theme here. He submerged volumes of freshly cut flowers into pools of water to create surreal hues that, in his words, "blur the demarcation between abstraction and representation."

"As soon as the flower is cut, it dies, even though it retains its 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," says Bensimon.

Nayak's black and white minimalist images are the counterpoint for Bensimon's images. A former photo-journalist, Nayak shot images of flowers, plants and jungles over the last three years, in Eastern and North East India. Unlike Bensimon's floral shots, Nayak's are more contemplative.



■ Gilles Bensimon



■ Untitled Number Thirty Three, 2011, Gilles Bensimon

His series, titled Radha: A Love in Eternity, explores notions of purity, the nature of the self and divinity. The series is inspired by his reading

of Vaishanava Padabali, a 700-year-old Bengali text that narrates the love story of Radha and Krishna. "While shooting, I tried to stay away from

■ Untitled Number One, 2011, Gilles Bensimon

PHOTOS:  
TASVEER,  
HAMILTONS  
GALLERY

## ART FOR THOUGHT

Gardens of the Mind is on from February 26 to March 17, 11am to 6pm

📍 F35/36  
Dhanraj Mahal,  
CSM Marg,  
Apollo Bunder,  
Colaba

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■ Mathur #1, from the series Radha: A Love in Eternity, 2011-2014, Swapnan Nayak



■ Man #6, from the series Radha: A Love in Eternity, 2011-2014, Swapnan Nayak



■ Sombhog #4, from the series Radha: A Love in Eternity, Swapnan Nayak

technique and instead focused on the Vaishnava philosophy," he says.

He explains how the Padabalis (poems) describe the lila (romance) of Radha and Krishna. "There are interpretations, which say that Radha is self-representation and Krishna symbolises the supreme power. There are 8 to 9 steps described as a means to reach God, including Purvarag (hearing of each other), Abhisar (tryst) and Mathur (separation), which are also the titles of the images. As an artist, this is my quest for divinity or sadhana through art."

To shoot these images Nayak visited jungles across West Bengal, Sikkim, Meghalaya, Assam and Jharkhand for three years. He also stayed clear of digital photography, choosing to work on silver gelatin prints manually developed in a dark room.

"The idea behind Gardens of the Mind was to look at the diversity offered by photography to express

similar subject matter and its capacity to reinterpret, reinvent, and (re) produce reality. The exhibition was also meant to touch upon the significance of the botanic world in the visual arts. It also shows the ways in which two contemporary artists

produce newer meanings within existing paradigms of representation," says Shilpa Vijayakrishnan, research associate at Tasveer Arts.

On the surface, the works seem diametrically different but Vijayakrishnan maintains that they complement each other.

"They break away from simple and figurative representation in favour of abstract representation that produce the familiar world in new, graphic ways. By juxtaposing two distinct styles, it highlights the diversity offered by photography in interpreting and representing reality," she says



■ Swapnan Nayak