

Negotiating Space

The paintings of Bhubaneswar-based artist, **Ramakrishna Behera**, are most certainly landscapes and are inspired by real places: the caves of Ajanta, the mountains and monasteries of Ladakh, the countryside of Orissa and even the interior of the artist's home. Yet the works employ distorted perspectives and fold in images of outer space to become something more like psychological maps or hallucinatory visions. While their palette of colors is realistic, their spaces certainly are not.

Bose Pacia Kolkata is currently showing Behera's recent paintings in their Kolkata gallery. **Koel Mitra** reviews the show.



We do not intend to read Behera's work; but to interpret it. This decision has been

taken after viewing his solo painting exhibition at the Bose Pacia Gallery, Kolkata. He has broken off viewership positions, enlarged space and distorted them. An experiment, that is worth to be taken by a chemical engineer of IIT-Roorkee. Only a few paintings in this exhibition lack the presence of the cosmos. Almost all paintings represent the cosmos through stars, often also through other tiny illuminating bodies. What is fascinating to that effect is the fact that even the position of the cosmos keeps changing; upside, sideways, underneath or above; expecting the viewer to resonate himself/herself with the fluidity of free space. Pin-drop silence surrounds his work, the silence sometimes emanates from a coffee mug (“A Cup of Coffee” 2007; oil on canvas; 137 x 145cms), sometimes through silent temples (“64 Yoginis Temple at Hirapur, Orissa” 2009; 142 x 168cms) or landslides (“Landslide on Way to Ladakh” 2007; 194 x 128cms). Very few visual mediums have the capacity to engage with the element of sound. To toughen the proposition, it is even more difficult to deal with silence; a work that Behera has done successfully.

An immensely huge effect of black does more to excavate the rough and gestural brush strokes in his works. Strangely enough, he creates the focus of his works from a panorama, slightly deviating to the diagonal left. He gathers a kind of Foucaultian power position to establish the pan-optic viewpoint in his works. But this left does not merely remain a denotative positional hierarchy. It reaches to the further realms of the political connotation, where his critique of the pastry in the plate perhaps justifies his left(ist) position-construct.

The other undeniable aspect of his work is his play with time. He expands time, often beyond what the cognitive faculty can perceive. And he creates ‘time within time’. No wonder he tributes Andrei Tarkovsky in two of his works, in the years 2007 and 2008. Time sometimes visually gets impaired into a phase of distortion, sometimes it very deliberately expands and becomes inexplicable. Remember Tarkovsky’s film *Sacrifice*? The house gets burnt in an uncut shot yet we do not know how the house could get reduced to ashes in about five minutes of reel time. The real time creates magic with reel time. Behera tries to create a space of negotiation between the two, real cognitive time and framed abstract time. In due process, what comes out is a montage of the entity of a ‘third time’. A time, that

is neither messianic and iconic, nor homogenous and empty. It becomes value-loaded yet abstract; perhaps the originating moment of playful postmodernism. Stages that have traversed far from religiously developed art movements and stepped into the ephemeral structure of the personal find pride of place in his works.

His works does not annihilate the self, does not predominate the self either. It remains single, silent, conspicuous, yet sublime. No analysis can perhaps be sufficient to attribute his works to an archetype. He uses colours, not light, sometimes even dramatically. The colours step out of the canvass and reach to the extensions of the frames, almost always. A big space of lyric springs up with small narratives sometimes. They do not give us stories, just moments. Images that become paramount to gather larger than life motives accumulate in his paintings. However, literary and cultural theories at times pose problems for a historically vague materialist critical practice, like that of his. Hard it had to become, because culture studies captures historicism, it can never gather ahistoricism in the way it cannot capture a 'Caucasian chalk circle'. This is because history cannot comment on infinity. It cannot comment on the spatiality of the endless; the cosmic force; a force that becomes a leitmotif in the artist's work. History interprets the political. What if the work refuses to entangle itself into the fetters of spatial politics? Once again, they remain single like Ramkrishna Behera's works.

New Works

Ramakrishna Behera

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Bose Pacia Kolkata