

Gazed a Gazely stare

Non-Gaze Chronicles—Recent works by the members of Ocular at Birla Academy of Art and Culture, 2-7 February 2016

Sharanya Chattopadhyay

The latest show by the members of the group Ocular explores the realms of reality and experience through varied experimentation of mediums. Burdened by the riddles of philosophy - the idea of the mind of life and of death - these artists have ventured into grounds which successfully invite the viewer to experience and confront their own narrative of reality.

The catalogue essays prepared by individual artists force those who care to read to go into the depths of philosophical investigation and experimentation of ideas explaining experience and truth. But the works displayed show far more clarity than the amalgamation of myriad quotations and ideas of poets and philosophers punched in between the wad of A4 sheets. The unique language that each artist, Sabyasachi Mullick, Prithwiraj Sen and Sayak Mitra, has developed over the years finally started to show a great deal of refinement and boldness. Their art and their ideas have matured into provocative and unapologetic dialogue.

Sabyasachi Mullick confronts the viewer with dynamic range of ideas and mediums. He describes his practice as "To carry out this task art needs to be freed from the lure of sensual pleasure, from poeticism, from aesthetics to give precedence to its inquisitiveness at the cost of as much austerity, and conceptual rigor it may take? He feels that his works are somehow not self-sufficient and needs the support of the book that he had published 'Art Concerning Its Being Experienced.' This very idea that there lies a guide to the elaborate concepts of his works makes the process of viewing a problematic job. Knowing that there is copious amount of literature which one needs to be well versed with before approaching Sabyasachi's work, it becomes a tad difficult to

form an intimate relationship with the displayed objects. But nonetheless the artist deserves the same level of sincerity from the viewer that he himself has shown through his art and literature.

The major work which deserves mention is his installation piece 'How can I call it sacrifice?' Sabyasachi points out while describing the work "... its surpassing the personal and in its concerns about ethical experience."

One would like to categorise this work as an installation piece but its root lies in the forms and structures of performance art. The artist had burned objects which were intimate and personal articles of possessions and had displayed their ashes in china plates. Just hearing about it one might think that the work is pretentious and vain, whereas it is anything but that. This idea of pretention comes from the failure of the language system which we are using here to describe a work which if not experienced in its entirety becomes nonsensical. Sabyasachi creates this work with such simplicity that one can't escape being captivated by it and engage in a meditative exploration through the layers of ideas and emotions.

Rarely one gets to see a work which so brilliantly expresses rage and vulnerability in such clinical display.

Prithwiraj Sen assembles an array of mediums to build up narratives which is to "unfix concepts from their lawful' philosophic place, subjected to a violent 'mutation of meaning' and turned back against the sovereignty of reason." Again the viewer hesitates to explore into the work which has such a claim humbly presented as an 'attempt' by the artist. The works when seen unburdened by the catalogue essay interacts with the viewer with ease, almost inviting him /her to explore deeper. Each work breathes more freely in the exhibition space than it does in the artist's head. But this is exactly the way Prithwiraj confronts the viewer almost dangerously provoking a response. He challenges the viewer whose nature is more like a smartass than that of an innocent curious spectator. He successfully creates a conflict with the expectation that the confusion will lead to a brawl. Pictorial images layered under acrylic sheets

disrupt the very space that confines them. This disruption starts to make sense when one realises that the artist looks at his "... artworks as writings i.e. the concept of writing not reduced to its normal graphic or inscriptional sense but as 'free play' or element of un-decidability within every system of communication."

The place where Prithwiraj almost devours the viewer is when a wall of open eyes starts exploring into the soul of the viewer. The smartass viewer is not safe in their bubble anymore. In-front of him lays ashes of charred bodies. The viewer can no more fake his/her reaction since there is no way one can escape those eyeballs looking straight out. It is in works like these where the artist forcefully disrupts the relation he shares with the viewer. The artist fights back and almost refuses to be subjected to any form of scrutiny, instead he scrutinises back. He is holding the viewer hostage adamant to stir out the last ounce of fear that one may have hidden in the depths of their heart.

Sayak Mitra loves playing the role of a voyeuristic outcast. He manipulates his surroundings according to the contrast that he experiences as an alien intervenor. In today's time where declaring one's religion is somewhat politically incorrect thing to do, since it attracts affiliation of all the negative nature, Sayak looks beyond such petty bindings and traces his experience and will to explore to his Hindu upbringing. He has "grown up with a religion which involves many rituals". He has also grown up within the construct of a popular culture which constantly comes in conflict with conservatism. He traces these conflicts from the standpoint of a naïve viewer, sometimes being too naive where greys of the society drains away. The role of the intervenor always faces the threat of becoming an imposer but Sayak uses this threat to bring clarity to his visual expression. He abandons his safety lines and plunges into direct statements on illiteracy, poverty, gender inequality and rule of the powerful and the privileged. The satire that he tries to balance out sometimes deprives the works from the complexities that they deserve.

Sayak's venture into the discipline of Video Art and to installation of moving objects like a bicycle which brings forward the necessity of motion that the artist surely felt lacking

earlier. For an artist whose work is 'on your face' and who consciously avoids ambiguous inspirational origins Sayak's attempt in Video Art promises to bring a paradigm shift to the whole discipline. To put it plainly Sayaks vibrant attempt is not the standard boring and unintelligible form of Video Art which tests the patience of the viewer. On the other hand his bicycle wrapped in stickers of pictorial images from popular culture carries little possibilities. The object which the artist selected signifies motion, the artist insists that people engage with the object but since he confines it within the gallery space and takes away the very possibility of motion it becomes nothing more than a sculptural work half realised.