

PSAM Docent Study-Paper: Close-Up on “Osho”

Basics

- Selected artwork: *Osho* – by Faig Ahmed (Azerbaijani / b. Sumqayit 1952)
- Legal: PSAM purchase with funds provided by Donna MacMillan
- Medium: Hand-woven wool carpet
- When/where completed: 2015; Baku, Azerbaijan
- Reflecting: Contemporary conceptual sculpture in an off-beat (oft-beat!) medium

Background

Decidedly *not* your grandparents’ oriental, *Osho* is a large (perhaps 8’ x 6’ x 3’) work in which a wall-mounted ‘rug’ – more-or-less conventional both in shape (apart from a deep center-notch) and in content (with age-old stylized flowers and other elements) – is intimately linked with a free-form rug on the floor below, thanks not only to each rug’s utilizing the same yarns but also by a number of mostly-thin vertical stripes (effectively a third rug) quite literally tying the colors together in a dynamic interplay of all the rugs.

Still, beneath the playful surface more serious thoughts may flow. Given Azerbaijan’s dramatic growth in other sectors (especially oil), carpetmaking – though a craft practiced in that country for some three millennia – no longer looms as significant economically as it once was. As a result, the museum’s didactic label (noting that the upper rug’s “intricate design seems to melt as it pours itself down the wall and onto the floor”) may prompt some to read *Osho* as an elegy for a traditional culture’s going, as it were, down the drain; others might go on to see in it a dystopian commentary upon modern life generally. With the ‘flow’ viewed differently (as I prefer), however, *Osho* affirms the artistic process, with rich source-material bubbling within what Jung called the ‘collective unconscious’ (accessed by Ahmed and his artisans at a tribal level) and giving rise, when embraced playfully by the artist, to his culture’s archetypal flying carpet!

Alluding visually to kimono-form, *Osho* adopts as its title the honorific accorded to a Buddhist priest who heads his own temple, and indeed Ahmed’s website reflects his interest in “world religions, mystical practices, ancient scripture, calligraphy and patterns.” Noteworthy, too, is his online ‘artist-statement’: “What influences and inspires me the most are all kinds of travel. By saying travel, I mean either physical travelling to other countries where I can find and explore traditions and cults spread on this certain territory; or travelling in my subconsciousness, different practices and meditations.”

At once playful and thought-provoking, *Osho* stands to appeal to museum visitors across a broad range of interests and ages – including, of course, this docent.

Sources

- PSAM wall-label and *Insight* (vol. 11, no. 1; Oct 2016–Jan 2017)
- Faigahmed.com
- Smithsonian.com
- Wikipedia.com (‘Azerbaijan’ and subsidiary articles; ‘Oshō’)

Ray Warman, 30 Nov. 2016, revised 8 Feb. 2017