

Priyasri Patodia

Presents

DIARY OF AN IDLER

A solo show by

Abhishek Narayan Verma

Text By

Oindrila Maity Surai

Exhibition dates- 23th February – 15th March, 2018

Timing 11:30 am - 7:00 pm

Venue: Priyasri Art Gallery,

42 Madhuli 4th Floor, Shiv Sagar Estate,

Next To Poonam Chamber, Worli, Mumbai 400018

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Concept Note –

The imagery in my paintings, drawings and prints have continuously stemmed from constantly changing and demanding society. The works revolve around ideas of dysfunctionality, Social conditioning, memory recall, Personal insecurities arising out of one's circumstances and anxiety, which I inject into my characters. I collide personal, social and political in a dramatized/theatrical setting using stark contrasts or subtleties where the lighting also becomes hallucinatory. These settings reflect the mental states, becomes an investigative process through a selection of "what if's", building the arrangements in reaction to my own image-making. It's like a strategy to which ideas and thoughts are constantly being added and subtracted to find the right amount of affect. There is satirization of situations, of characters, of myself, while making use of popular idioms, myths and stories. The irony is a provocation of thought that uses humour to portray struggles & mistakes. Humour and irony is a potent force for me to destabilizing and transforming the power structures of the dominant. It punctures a hole into anxiety.

Many images, for example in ***Game of Permutations & Combinations*** and ***Black Stars are Shining Very Bright***, are inspired by some of the – the odd events - Socio-political conflicts happening all around and combining these with my personal affairs. By making these elements face to each other, I am trying to explore the insecurities of one's existence arising out of the

constantly conflicting identities within while being desirous of reconstructing that very identity through satire.

My artistic process seeks to both question and play with these concerns. Translating the Real, theoretical, and the fictional into the visual is my concern as an artist. While the image itself depicts a lot, using text in my works create new associations beyond the initial impact of the imagery. It gives a direction of thought, either amplifying one's impressions, or forcing a reroute.

Excerpts from the conversation between Oindrila Surai Maitry (An independent writer) and Abhishek Narayan Verma.

'I was born in a tiny village called Guthani in Bihar in the year 1988 where I saw electricity at the age of fifteen. I had a nomadic childhood. I was later sent to my relatives in Bokaro (Jharkhand) who assured my parents of supporting my studies but it was the bleakest moment for me. I was abused regularly as my farmer father was considered to be a prodigal son who lived proudly like an idler. I was forbidden not to follow his footsteps. I spent three bad years with them till I was sent back. We lived in a joint family and I have watched my folks fighting like beasts over trivial things despite being 'gold medalists' and hailing from a family which was considered 'reputed'. I was forbidden not to make friends with boys from the lower castes. We belonged to a middle-class family. Most of my friends, even today, are from the rungs considered 'lower' than my own'.

'I used to watch signboard painters paint and write on hoardings and tried to mimic them secretly after coming from Bokaro and spending one year in a village school. I also started draw and copy drawings of local deities at about the same time. These probably were my earliest encounters with visual arts. The writings, novels and poems of Harishankar Parsai, Ramdhari Singh Dinkar, Phanishwar Naath Renu, Premchand – all famous contributors to Hindi literature have always been inspirations for me. Especially the writings of Harishankar Parsai. I was fascinated by the works and life of Vincent Van Gogh in my early years as a student'

Practicing art was almost a taboo in the family. To my parents and relatives, doctors and engineers were the ultimate choices. After facing so many ups and downs I finally qualified the entrance examination of the district school. Fortunately enough, the JawaharNovodayaVidyalayas was an initiative by the Rajiv Gandhi government undertaken by the Ministry of Human Resource and Development, which imparted free education to residential students from 6th to 12th most districts during those times. I was lucky to have good teachers in every accord. I became more interested in sports and arts. Sports remained with me until my years at Baroda. I took part in the School Game Federation of India I was also played volleyball at the national level. At school, my art teacher was the inspiration for me and created my zeal for the visual arts. Though I acquired firsthand knowledge from him, after completing school it was very difficult to convince my conservative parents about joining the fine arts. I was persuaded to qualify for engineering being a student of science which I refrained from. I came to know about College of Art, New Delhi through my maternal uncle. I left for Delhi keeping my mission a secret from my parents. I stayed with my friends and qualified for the entrance examination. I ranked first in the Otherwise Backward Class (OBC) category which ensured low fees and a scholarship. During my admission, I was told that the government would soon send an approval about the reservations. After a long wait, we were denied admission in the OBC category for some unknown reason. There were five of us who had applied in the same category. We finally went to the OBC commission, met Chief Minister and ran from post to pillar. Lastly, we went to the High Court where we won after five months and got ourselves admitted to the college. We did great throughout the year. After facing so many hurdles and coming from a state which is known for its strong political beliefs and which was once a place of scholars. While living in such situations I tried to respond to my very predicament’.

‘My grandfather, who’s ninety-three now, was a freedom fighter. I have heard stories of his time from him. I have been taught about moral values, stories from our epics and lots of other things, dos and don'ts of life. On the other hand, my experience of cruelty and violence began from my family. I was unable to come to a conclusion about ‘what is the ideal’.

‘The movies directed by Fellini like Casanova, movies of Charlie Chaplin are always an inspiration for me and which allows me to think, look and react towards the situations around me in a more powerful way with a sense of dark humor and satire. Which I think helped me sometimes to challenge my own perception of certain things and push me to see the other faces of my social, cultural and political reality. Later on Pieter Brueghel, Goya, William Blake’s drawings and poems, Daumier, Edward Hopper and William Kentridge’s work interested me a lot. The works of Kara Walker, one of my favourites, helped me look into my own social and cultural history and respond.

As a child, I had a great attachment to nature. I loved swimming in the river with my friends for long hours. As far as I remember I was a fun-loving child and sensitive, too’.

‘I don't think I have tried to break entirely free from academic/traditional practices, for these have been my strength. But I often tried to break the notion of perspective, general ideas about image making, sense of false light and shadows. I tried to question traditional teachings whenever it inhibited my free thinking in the process of image making and followed my own ways. This, I believe, helped maintain a certain tension as well as balance in the visuals. In spite of it all, I am a great admirer of what I have been taught at the Bachelor and Master degrees. There is a certain difference in the practices of both the institutions – the College of Art, Delhi and Faculty of Fine Arts, MSU, Baroda. Baroda helped me to think, contemplate and work. The sense of using narration at work developed here. People, about whom one reads in books or their reviews in magazines thronged the place (Baroda) and were easily accessible. People like Jyoti Bhatt, K. G. Subramanian, Ghulam Mohammad Sheikh, Neelima Sheikh, Surendran Nair, BhupenKhakar. You cannot easily escape the history of this place. There is every chance of getting inspired by them and by the very atmosphere of Baroda’.

After coming from painting background it was very difficult to start with a new medium like printmaking during my master's. But it developed as an asset for my practices. When I was shifted to Baroda I was afraid and confused because of different thought process as well as practices. But at this time my diary helped me a lot. I kept drawing my thoughts and write poems or simply my thoughts. I had jotted down a lot of village nightscapes in my diaries and that was what the initial start in printmaking. Printmaking helped me to develop my drawing skills. I feel manual or conventional printmaking has a quality to keep you connected throughout the process and we have to remain intensely involved (physically and mentally) at each and every step of the process. It allowed me to experiment with many ways, to see the various moods of a single image through inking, burnishing, erasing and layering depth.

In the years to come, I would like to focus majorly on printmaking and the idea of "home" with respect to aspirations and expectations of middle-class families and how this synthesis interacts with the construct of urban spaces and the socio-economic structure of our times. I wish that my perseverance in its practice will lead me towards a kind of creation that will resonate with its historical value and mode.
