

# **BLACK LANDSCAPE**

21<sup>st</sup> December, 2006 – 12<sup>th</sup> January, 2007

ALOK BAL

“I wanted to become a professional footballer, though due to injuries I couldn’t pursue that dream but all along I spent a lot of time drawing. So I began to study painting.” The canvass is just another playing field for the artist. Alok Bal studied Fine Arts at the Faculty of Fine Arts, M.S. University, Baroda. In the beginning he was much influenced by the British Pop-Artist and their American counterparts, but soon found his own language extremely playful and sometimes ironic but never stereotype.

“I sketch and do a lot of drawings before I start painting. I don’t start a work directly on a canvas. I love to draw”, says the artist. The strength in his line reflects in his works. In these liberal times of multimedia, Bal continues to doodle fleeting thought, fantasies, experiences and images that he gathers from his relationships and surroundings before he transfers them to the canvas after much of pondering.

In his first solo show “Black Landscape” he speaks in rather satirical but humorous tone about his fascination and disillusionment of a life in a metro. “We humans should learn to appreciate and accept the harmony present in nature” says Alok Bal, who is also involved with a project in the Gir forests. His large canvasses are a fascinating portrayal of the changed reality and the landscape of a present metropolitan city almost abstract yet so figurative skillfully woven around his inner urges.

Priyasri Patodia

(Curator and Art Gallerist)

Jairam Paudwal

## **Black Landscapes**

Alok Bal’s landscapes bring into memory what Jean –Pierre Criqui wrote on the photographs of Jean Marc Bustamante [Art Forum, Summer 1993, Page 72] which reads, “Most of the pictures contain no human figure. But traces of humanity are everywhere in these scenes of roads, planted fields, telephone poles, shelters of different kinds and

houses (sometimes under construction, their materials displayed like letters in some invasive alphabet). These sites are anything but urban, but you know somehow that the city is never far away – that these are edges borders, zones of demarcation”.

Alok usually deals with the themes which he himself associates closely with, whether it is a wild life watch or a football game. These sudden shifts of the themes may perplex one who is following his oeuvre of art but it comes naturally to Alok who himself prefers to be a wanderer. Seeing his recent works one wonders, what was his association with the landscapes and that too with these devastated sorts? Alok has been living and working in Baroda ever since he joined the Faculty of Fine Arts as an undergraduate student. These many years’ Barodites including Alok has seen the growth of city beyond its periphery. The undulating landscapes one used to see earlier has completely changed into construction sites.

Alok probes into the issue and the icons of urbanization. He does not invite the viewer to preserve them in their memories but urges them to probe into the root cause of these devastations. These scare-crows of urbanization are a constant search for the person/mob that is responsible for the devastation. Within these representations of devastation Alok also scoffs at the attempts to iconize the nature and tradition whether it is the Hanuman with the concrete alternate of the life saving mountain, or the cow with cement udder waiting to be milked on a pedestal.

The landscapes of Alok are the evidences of displacement. The landscapes yearn for inhabitation but are left frozen in time. The dumping grounds of the city authority have given way to construction sites where the soil itself has the synthetic content or in Alok’s own words, is the “synthetic landscape”. Here a mutation and preservation is happening simultaneously. Alok calls these landscapes as Black Landscapes, conscious of the subversive denotations of it.

Jairam Paudwal