

“Indian Red”

16th-17th April at Kitab Mahal

19th-30th April at Evergreen Industrial Estate

JAGANNATH MOHAPATRA

“Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once he grows up” said Pablo Picasso. My dear friend Jagannath Mohapatra hails from a humble family in Orissa. He struggled his way up to the best art schools like Ravindra Bharti University and Maharaja Sayajirao University, Baroda and his quest for becoming an artist made him fight for making ends meet. Today he is a successful artist with many successful shows to his credit. His solo show “Indian Red” captures the playfulness, innocence and intelligence of a child while also narrating tales of his encounters with child laborers. It takes a man such as Jagannath, who possesses a heart just like that of a child’s, to be able to capture these subtle nuances of children so effectively in his paintings.

“The need for an extra family wage earner has driven millions of families to pull their children out of school and put them to work” says Jagannath. He felt that he was speaking to young adults when he tried to talk to these children, who were either forced to work or started work early in life out of choice or circumstances. He was left with mixed feelings after talking to them. “Of course exploiting children or making them work which damage them is the grossest of crimes” says Mohapatra, but he is not convinced that it hurts a child physically or morally to make him work if the work is allotted fairly, besides it is better than begging. The artist is not trying to fight for any issue or promote any particular agenda, he simply tells his tales through his paintings and leaves you, the viewer, to mull it over and draw your own conclusions.

He is fascinated with the way children take up responsibility at an early age, whether it is working at a chai stall or pursuing an academic career. In his work on “NH No. 8”, the child is oblivious to the fact that it could be a danger to her life when she crosses the national high way each day to reach her school. In “Store Room”, he narrates a story where he met a young girl carrying a paddy bag from a wholesaler’s warehouse so that she could sell it in the market and earn some money. The artist was touched and almost amused at the industrious nature of these children at such a young age. Jagannath has used construction sights and architectural backdrops as a symbol. Children today, regardless of their background, are under pressure to build their lives and their careers, but this does not change the fact that a child remains innocent, egoless and absolutely natural towards every situation. Jagannath’s work, though showcasing some sensitive issues, is not disturbing but rather therapeutic.

Fictional narrations developed on some one's experienced/witnessed events do have a relation with the reality of life. The relation of reality and fiction could be of either strong threads or of few strings. That is displayed through real like visual figures or on themes alone. Jagannath's paintings make the viewer strongly relate to the reality of the world seen around on the figuration as if they are like photographed events of life. But he wrapped those figures in the frames of a thematic story narration and explained through a few and minimum number of images. His narrations are on the emotional expressions of children's life he is viewing around him.

'Prathamashanti' is one of the celebrations of his region where the young children of five years are given new cloths to celebrate symbolically. One of his painting compositions is depicting the jubilant pleasure of a young girl holding her new cloths. Form of that girl is depicted as if one is looking from a different lens and she is appearing like a young bird about to take its first fly. Other compositions, narrating a young girl who is appearing for her examinations and her innocent face is radiating both tension about her examinations as well as enthusiasm, another canvas is on young boy's who are working as tea-sellers or on other labor work and their ambition to envisage their growth of success is symbolized by architectural frames.

All his images are having a strong base of reality as its platform. It is like a theatre play written on the reality of the society as a non fiction. It is the reality itself that is depicted but narrated to depict the emotions behind the bars and hidden in the mundane life. Red-Indian has a specific reference of known meaning and the change of placing the words/figures is changing the meaning and context. 'Indian-Red' is the title he has given to those children who will be making the 'future-India'.

Balamani M.

Art Critic.

6th April 2007