

## Transgress

3<sup>rd</sup> December to 18<sup>th</sup> December 2004

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“Transgress” was curated by Priyasri Patodia an experiment with an iconoclastic attempt to liberate the painting from the confines of canvas and evolve into distinctive signatures for objects around us. Artists such as Jagatath Panda, M Pravat, B V Suresh, and others were a part of this show.

Once I bought few ceramic bowls done by an artist friend of mine from an art exhibition. Bringing home those works put me in a dilemma. Where should I keep them; in the kitchen cabinet or in the drawing showcase? I kept them under the wrappers, unpacked and waited for my friend to visit me so he himself could place them in the appropriate space. He came one day for dinner. After the dinner I offered him ice cream in plastic bowl. Then all of sudden he asked me. “Where are the bowls you bought from my exhibition, why don’t you serve the ice cream in them?” I said I wouldn’t dare to

Diwali is here. I see the bazaar overflowing with beautiful saris, drawing room decors, and monumental hoarding boards declaring the bumper sales of cars, diamonds and jewelry. People leave their office earlier to hit the bazaar. The market now looks like a railway station in vacation season. The art galleries however have a deserted look. Where has the public gone? Art is not in their shopping list.

The question however arises that whether art has ever been in the shopping list of common man? The answer may vary according to the person addressed to. If ‘Art’ is understood as canvas painting, Bronze and stone sculptures then the answer is never. Oleographs of Ravi Varma was in the list of common man’s shopping list for a while not any more. Common man sees art as a distant thing appreciated only for its aesthetic value. Popular art like posters, portraits of cine artists, national leaders, photographs of sports stars are acceptable for them. Ganapati in any form is acceptable. The so called “Art” [according to art history and art criticism] is still a taboo.

Indian system gives importance to the myth value of any object. Our queries are many times subjective. What is it, what is the meaning of it, what is the use of it? These are the usual FAQs. Once in a workshop I asked a group of design students to bring one reproduction each of a good design and art up to their discretion. Their selection really fascinated me for the same reason that they had chosen the best design for their function/utility value and the art for its curious, obscure and symbolic value. The same students who appreciated the design for their objective, scientific value had chosen art for its subjective, symbolic and mythic value. I think the same happening to the diwali shopping list. The commodities having “user and exchange value” have made it to the list while “art: lacking both these have been omitted.

Why should one discuss functionality of objects and Diwali shopping list in the context of an art exhibition called “Transgress” ? Dictionary meaning of Transgress/Transgression is to violate, encroach , the tabooed areas. It has an inherent meaning of blasphemy. What space is violated by these artist? Whose space are they encroaching into? Which is the blasphemy being committed here? Transgression here is a cross-over from one mode or model to the other. It is a crossing over of the disjuncture between ‘art’ and the popular aesthetics. Cross- over not by emulating the popular language but aestheticising the utility objects.

History is eloquent about many such attempts of transgression, many times with the voice of dissension. Famous being the dadaist who proposed the object of art should not restrict to the gallery space and exhibited found objects and ready mades. The system however maintained its elite status by keeping the very same object in the ‘aesthetic realm’ which made Marcel Duchamp lament in a letter to Han Richter thus, “I threw the bottle rack and the urinal into their faces as a challenge now they admire them for their aesthetic beauty “. As Peter Burger states “The provocation depends on what it turns against: here, it is the idea that individual is the subject of artistic creation. Once the signed bottle-drier has been accepted as an object that deserves a place in a museum, the provocation no longer provokes; it turns in to its opposite. If an artist today signs a stove pipe and exhibits it, that artist certainly does not denounce the art market but adapts to it”.

Who is responsible for the statuesque which appropriated the voice of dissension? Dis the commoner ever heed to the war cries of avant-grade artists? K G Subramanyan maps this distance between the mass and art thus, “In a modern situation as it automatically develops, art and poetry are centered round individuals; so they have a relatively small place and their reach is small. They do not any longer have the power, as Plato once thought, to subvert society and sow madness in human hearts, at least on wide scale.” The Bauhaus school suggested the purposeful art practice locking together the aesthetic and functional art. It achieved its goal closing in the disjuncture between the art and the mass. Through the designs of functional object they lured the common man to the precinct of elite art. One should also acknowledge many attempts in the Indian art scene, to bring art to the commoner with unconventional means like creating objects which did not have tag of “art”.

Here I am not suggesting that the present exhibition “Transgress” proposes an alternate. Many Indian artists have worked with non artists to organize and participate in exhibitions for social cause. Artist community has voiced their opinions much audible against communalism, fascist tendencies of the regime to silence individual expressions and gender biases. “Transgress” is not a war cry against any systems either. It is an experiment of an alternate within the perimeters of the gallery to address the non-connoisseur. Transgression here is not of breaking the taboos of space but of the fundamental ‘mythical value’ of art.

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“You might ask, what now?” writes Cory Bell, “OK, now (not tomorrow), we have versions on this business of art. One says this: Art is creativity, curiosity, new things happening in your mind and life. It’s an emerging surprise, it’s even a sudden shock; it’s liberation. The danger it confronts is death by

Museum, the imprisonment of the curator's frame. To avoid it, it needs to keep on the move, nomadically in step with new resources and technologies. The other voice say : Creativity and Curiosity belong everywhere. But there is one strange thing with this species, and that is the way it can wrap its hand and heart and eyes around a piece of inert matter and coax it into life."

"Transgress" seem to address both these voices through the voice of its own.

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