

EXHIBITION REVIEWS

Wednesday, December 19, 2007

Of 'Different' Classes

Surya Singh visits **Gallery Nature Morte**, New Delhi, to have a look at the new works by Anita Dube, Samit Das, Raqs Media Collective and Seher Shah.



Seher Shah, City 4 From the Portfolio of Prints by City Unknown

'There is a pause . Be careful. The schedule has been suspended. Journey is broken. There has been change of plan. Of course, you can't move ahead without having an acute observation. Yes, there was a must see show by four artists of international repute at Gallery Nature Morte, New Delhi. In fact there are three individual artists – Tahera Seher Shah, Anita Dube and Samit Das. The fourth one is Raqs media collective a collaborative and multidisciplinary name for a versatile troika of Indian culture industry namely Jeebesh Bagchi, Monika Narula, and Suddhabrata Sengupta and active in documentary film making, photography, new media art and writing.

Founded in 1991, Raqs Media Collective was a signature art event in Indian art as a radical departure which has broken several boundaries of saturated

mainstream art and its conventionalism of medium, style, trained visual artists and their uniqueness and individualism. Raqs media collective are the initiator in Indian art who pushed the art out of hallow precinct of galleries, museums and some specific space meant for exhibition of creative energy. They are the artists of new-technology in the time of technological reproduction.

Primarily known for working on virtual space and urban culture, they are with two works in series here - 18 prints of letters from the video installation "The K.D. Vyas Correspondence Vol.1" and "There Has Been a Change of Plan" (a series of 4 photographs). Forsaking all the claims, these letters, founded in dead letter office, have no need of verification and authenticity check. With reasonable concordance between the sets of letters, Raqs are heavily encoded with messages regarding urban space and its discursive nature. Extending Roland Barthes' phrase "those who fail to re-read are obliged to read the same story everywhere", Raqs affirm that there is nothing new in new media art until one treats images as tools for knowledge rather than objects of knowledge. These prints (photographs) are exchanged as letters between Raqs and Krishna Dwaipayana Vyas who is told to have seen all the Mahabharata and has written extensively about; provoke to re-think about certain fraternity between traditional text and new media. The term letter itself is a signifier of exchange of some information which can't be restricted to some confined space. Not following legislative protocol of citizenship or citizenry with restricted identity Raqs emphasis on inter-subjective relationship and establish nomads as real heroes.

"There Has Been a Change of Plan" is a series of four photographs of airplanes, clicked from the other side of fence and through the cracked window of a vehicle. The journey has been abandoned midway and airplane has landed on another side of territory. It sits on a wooden platform like a funeral pyre. The displacement of journey and location is obvious. They are nomads and threaten the established order of all frontier and territories.

Tahera Seher Shah, belonging to 1.5 generation who left their home land in their teens, is with a series of digital prints from 'Jihad Pop', 'City Unknown' etc. The series is meant to explore the issues of identity and association by layered motifs from architectural references and through Islamic symbols, calligraphy and iconography. Addressing issues with overt political statements in larger context she introspect the personal identity and history. She puts, with great attention, the architectural parts and motifs amid field of sheer black and white. Covering larger geographies of persisting history, she highlights several architectures from India also (for instance Jama Masjid, Fatehpur Sikri, Qutub Minar etc.).

Anita Dube uses more intimate and personal aspects of history as a trajectory from personal to public arena. She is with some black and white photographs

with copper eyes on hand that have been used earlier in 2000 in her installation "River/Disease." These were the different eyes from different perspective to analyze the discursive nature of history and locations.

Samit Das has managed to create very unique architectural structure with his photographs, collages, and drawings. Sometimes he assembles (combine) all together to give very tactile impression. In fact he relies on 'kitsch' to explore the inexorable growth of cities that are shown as no ending of history and no pre-planned cities with restricted borders. His juxtaposition of photos and drawings show the complex relationship to the time and space. His cities are meant for not saturated or stable space but are very dynamic by their very own nature.

In brief, for all of them, cities are not pre-planned structures or pre-defined categories, but the coming together of a number of disparate and seemingly unconnected events, both in the raw material of experiences and in trained (ready-mades). It grows and happens according to human relationship. It unites different classes...

New Works by

Anita Dube, Samit Das, Raqs Media Collective and Seher Shah

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Gallery Nature Morte, New Delhi