



Saccharine vs wit

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Anahite Contractor finds **Samir Mondal** *cloyingly sweet* and **Mithu Sen** *masterful*

Art review

Two exhibitions, which have opened in the city, are in complete contrast with each other — thematically, formally and in terms of the work philosophies of the artists. We refer to Samir Mondal's paintings and Mithu Sen's mixed media paintings and three-dimensional objects.

Both artists have explored the irreversible continuity between art and the 'real world'. Both have delved into the discomfort of imitating that 'reality' in their work.

Samir Mondal celebrates 25 years as an artist. This exhibition is yet another example of fine draughtsmanship which lacks spirit. Mondal has consistently produced powerful portraits, still-life images and other representative forms in their truest colours.

However, his language remains bland and somewhat cloying in its sugary sweetness. Life had to be reproduced in its pristine 'real' form many centuries ago. Then art galloped forth in various directions. If reality is to be sabotaged in a painting, it must hold the power to make its viewer cogitate. If it fails to do so, it falls short of being art.

Mithu Sen has portrayed a palpable slice of life through her generic forms. At an obvious level, they are phallic representations of images which are not actually so. Common objects, images and forms are transposed to connote sexuality. Classic models of recognisable forms genuflect in surrender to the eccentric world of Mithu Sen.

There is a Dionysian excess and ornamentation in her work. There is a horribly gaudy lingo verging on the kitsch, but Sen has complete control over her expression. She has an astute sense of design which is prominent in the objects she has crafted: a journal which flares up with angel wings inside, as well as quirky safety-pins and cushions.

The details of paintings often travel far beyond their given boundaries, crawling on their frames or spilling over on the wall, the ceiling and any part of the architecture that would contain them. Every detail is meticulous and well-thought: the blood-red wall, the juxtaposition of various media and their relevance to the form they clothe.

In this rare show replete with mastery and composition, Sen voices her ideology, but in subtle whispers. Her work is multi-layered and her message may be heard with gentle acoustics even as her approach seems to be bawdy and irrepressibly witty.

Drawing Room by Mithu Sen at Gallery Chemould till January 31; 2 by Samir Mondal, Jamaat till February 7.

