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Real frames, unreal city

ONE OUTSTANDING landmark of our civilisation that amazes and enthralls is the 'city'. And among cities themselves, Mumbai, despite not being a country-capital fascinates the mind like no other. Not just visitors but those who have made their home too find its spell overpowering.

Among them, falls Ratnadeep Gopal Advrekar, the artist who won both the Bendre Hussain Scholarship and a National scholarship from the Lalit Kala Academy this year. With so many artists having touched upon the city concept, the subject becomes rather dreary and overdone. Advrekar realises this fully. That is perhaps why he has brought in history into his present series on Bombay enigmatically titled 'Memoirs of the unreal city' at the Crimson Art Gallery.

Advrekar has attempted to portray both 'Mumbai today' and 'Mumbai yesterday'. Yesterday refers to the freedom struggle era. His approach towards the two is different. In 'Mumbai today', Advrekar has used his palette to capture images in the form of a narrative rather than a snippet of time.

One exception is based on a photograph of a public meeting in progress. A young Gandhi, and Tilak leading the meeting with multitudes of people swelling in the place is the exception. The photograph was shot by Vinayak Veerkar, freedom fighter who documented with his camera a good portion of the freedom struggle.

One of the narratives has the image of Raphael's 'hall of fame' paint-

ing that clearly has all the great minds of different eras from Socrates and Plato to Archimedes in one hall under one roof. In the bottom half of the canvass, Advrekar has juxtaposed a classroom of the JJ School of Arts, Mumbai, with a class in progress. The work suggests obviously the possible future for the students. A figure seems to be walking into the frame.

"Yes, that is me", Advrekar says with both modesty and confidence, referring to the figure.

The unreal city? "The city is

nantly used for 'Mumbai past' sets them off and identifies them with the past unmistakably as would a fading black and white photograph.

The touch of red in the metro train that is running into the station in one of his 'Mumbai present' works again adds both dynamism and pins it firmly into the present. Most of the works have had their origin or at least the image compositions based in photographs. Advrekar doesn't find it passé. Rather, he views it as a challenge.

"Photographs have their own mechanical language. It is a moment in time captured by a machine. It is interesting to transfer it to a painting and expand its time frame to a narrative", Advrekar avers.

Symbols also serve Advrekar's narrative style well. He has used images of Chinese puzzles, and the folding paper puzzles that children play with as if to say, discover my thoughts. He concedes the interesting possibilities of digital art and installation art, but still says that his eyes are firmly on the tradition paint and canvass format.

"I might experiment with these things one of these days", he says. By presenting narratives, however, Advrekar tends to negate his stated intention of presenting a coded proposition through imagery, rather than presenting a fixed idea. However, 'the deliberate degree of suggestion' in the works expand the time duration captured as concept within the painting, as would a book.



• Hema Vijay

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