

Allegorical Spectrum – 14 Proverbs - Ratnadeep Gopal Adivrekar

The difference between the proverbs and the paintings is that of the verbal and the visual. The physical view assumes that things in themselves are changeless but their relations change, finds Abhijeet Gondkar.

'Every Move brings a Change' – The change which the proverb undergoes in the course of its evolution in the work passes from a subtle to a gross state – the existence of the manifold, is the oeuvre of Ratnadeep Gopal Adivrekar's exhibition titled "Proverb In(ter) ventions", at NUS Museum, Singapore. For the artist living in Mumbai a metropolis, a melting pot where the world's great religions are practiced brings along its own cultural baggage but wisdom is one familiar occurrence which cuts across these several practices. Much new knowledge is admittedly remote from the immediate interests of the commonplace man on the street. The void of these academics is completed by one liner

Ratnadeep Gopal Adivrekar, *Every Move Brings a Change*, Oil on canvas, 48" X 68", 2007.



wisdoms or proverbs. The universality and philosophies in these proverbs was what got Ratnadeep interested. Proverbs embrace the wide sphere of human existence: the philosophical antiquary may often discover how many a proverb commemorates an event which has escaped from the more solemn monuments of history, and is often the solitary authority of its existence. Amongst the 18 large canvases and 8 studies on paper displayed are strong streak magical realism, where irrational image settings are painted tediously (photorealist to an extent), “reconstruct histories the juxtaposition of ordinary moment or sometimes interaction’ with objects with an extraordinary event to create a comparative...”

The exhibition “Proverbial in(ter)vention” was conceived around 14 proverbs its familiarity and omnipresent use in mundane context belies its complexity. Proverbs are truths based on experience of mankind but yet often contradict one another because of their metaphorical nature. Ratnadeep trusts with the viewer with a brilliant attempt at seizing the paradox of the union of opposites. For him painting proverbs is not merely an exercise of the thinking power and thought of man, but of his whole being it is a way of life. All knowledge he recognizes, involves a process which comes to fruition not in concept but in a state of being. Like in the painting titled ‘Every exit is an entrance someplace else’, with images of felicitation of Yuri Gagarin and line portrait Kashmir Malevich against his supermatist composition hung in an interior wall with doorway, where the mental model must be seen not as a static library of images, but as a living entity, charged with energy and activity. It is not that we passively receive from outside. Rather, it is something we actively construct and re-construct from moment to moment. Restlessly scanning the works with our senses, probing for information relevant to our needs and desires, we engage in a constant process of re-arrangement and updating. There is no self-sufficient and obstructive fragment no divisions which cannot be linked by the viewer into a kind of narrative. And the narratives that the work invokes internally, as it were, readily move out of the work itself into a consideration of other larger narratives. After Graduating at Sir J.J. School of Arts, Mumbai, Ratnadeep compiled concepts based on time, journey, cities and people

in his work, right from his early exhibitions ‘Memoirs of Unreal City’(1998) based on T. S. Elliot’s work Wastelands to ‘Refraction of Ideas’(2004). His work stems from a kind of visual synthesis, layered with scientific documentation, allegories, mythology, symbolism, documentary footages and history. Leading one to revert to narrative explanations as a way of grasping the status of the art work and its gestures as a socially symbolic act or illustrate a series of overlapping and over determined social constraints, reasons and responsibilities. One of the work titled, ‘If you understand, things are just as they are; if you do not understand, things are just as they are.’ has group of people staring rather ambiguously at a Necker cube which can be interpreted in two different ways. When a person stares at the cube image, it will often seem to flip back and forth between the two valid interpretations like a proverb. It also provides a counter-attack against naïve realism which states that the way we perceive the world is the way the world actually is. The Necker cube seems to disprove this claim because we see one or the other of two cubes, but in actuality, the cube itself is metaphorical: representing only a two-dimensional drawing of twelve lines. The condition is that the painting should stand as a barrier to interpretation, should throw the reader away from the construction of readily graspable meanings, Ratnadeep’s paintings always send the viewer towards a process of contextualization or narrativization. In fact, many of his own comments about his works are strategies of defending against definitive interpretations or the setting up of barriers to understanding. All that said, Ratnadeep’s paintings establish interpretative traps for the viewer. The proverbs attached to his paintings act as a line of defense against interpretation. The “titles” behind the canvas does not supplement and yet belongs to this huge canvas, despite its minuscule relation to the visual work, it is entrusted with an extensive and paradigmatic function. He implies this linguistic bait as process of seduction, a way of drawing the viewer into the puzzle of the picture, like the newspaper puzzle where answers are given at the back. The title then immediately offers itself as a semiotic lure – which is not to say that an inventive reader could not construe some relation between it and the visual, but that most readers will eventually have the

good sense to recognize that they have been deliberately thrown off. The technique can best be summarized as heteroglossia, or a multiplicity of narrative voices housed in a single “form.” The idea that art’s content is ultimately determined not only by its creator’s intention but by all the possible interpretations and misinterpretations it prompts is basic to contemporary aesthetics. The paintings then become more like poetry- suggesting rather than exclusively revealing. “I’m interested in the associational nature of thinking itself and sometimes a deliberate act of misunderstanding that can become poetry, because

Consciousness without word is comparable to light without illumination. Since word refers to something beyond itself and is thus by its constitution relational, all knowledge is therefore relational and determinate. In context to the proverbs in the work it is more important to be imaginative and insightful than to be accurate. The maps of the world drawn by the medieval cartographers were so hopelessly inaccurate, so filled with factual error, that they elicit condescending smiles today when almost the entire surface of the earth has been charted. Yet the great explorers could never have discovered the New



Ratnadeep Gopal Adivrekar, *The Map Is Not The Territory*; Oil on canvas, 33" X 68", 2007.

then you have to imagine its elements. Systematic-chaos or chaotic-system either works for me..." marks Ratnadeep, "In quest of knowledge I am self contradicting".

The proverbs in the exhibition are accompanied by a string of qualifiers – ifs, ands, buts, and on other hands. Yet to enter every appropriate qualification in an exhibition of this kind would be to bury the viewer under an avalanche of maybes. Rather than do this, the artist has taken liberty of expression trusting that the intelligent viewer will understand the stylistic problem. The proverbs applied to the works need to be taken with a grain of judgement.

Worlds without them. Nor could the better more accurate maps of today have been drawn until men, working with the limited evidence available to them, set down on paper their bold conceptions of worlds they had never seen. Even error has its uses, thus we explore the works like the ancient map-makers, and it is in this spirit that the concept of Ratnadeep’s work and the proverb theory are presented here – not as final word, but as a first approximation of the new realities. The exhibition will be held at the NUS Museum, Singapore from 5th June to 21st July 2009 offering an in-depth analysis of Ratnadeep’s creative intellectual process.