

Sumakshi Singh's art on the wall peels

Vandana, August 8, 2012



Her painted imagery is centrifugal, like it wanted to jump out of the borders of the painting and splatter itself onto the wall. So, what began with orchids and mushrooms sprout out of the walls in breath taking beauty, one plateau delivering another plateau on a wall- in a fine balance of colour and form, has lead to multiple visuals criss-crossing space. Even wall- peels bloom to glory in stages of visual evolution. Sumakshi Singh's eye invites you to share her ability to perceive harmony even in decay and accidents of time and nature. And in letting visions migrate into each others' territories. The viewing of her works demands a de-bracketing of visual attention: like infants that zoom in too close or too far to frame what they "are supposed" to see. "This un-framing/de-conditioning of vision, enables viewers to carry this way of looking out of the gallery and into (a re-evaluation of) their familiar visual landscape, blurring the boundaries between the white cube space set aside for witnessing

intellectual/cultural activity and mundane space," says Sumakshi.

Sumakshi (31) grew up in several towns of India, because of her father's transferable job. What she attributes to her 'squirrel gene from a previous birth', made her generate a collection of miniscule twigs, sepals, insect wings etc on a daily basis from her school to home journeys, which took hours observing every micro detail on the ground. This childhood habit has found voice in her works by constructing sculptural interventions-like

mushrooms, orchids, nests, plateaus etc. sprouting from the floor, walls, and ceiling in various spaces. The second category of her works emerge from her early fascination with physics and math. Though Sumakshi found science very stimulating, and did extremely well academically, she chose to practice art. Her fascination with science sneaks back into her art practice, by way of mapping a space-time hiccup through her perceptual installations like Adam, Stitched Images etc.



Sumakshi went to MSU, Baroda for undergrad and The School of the Art Institute of Chicago for Grad school, where she later taught for about five years. She now lives in Gurgaon for about half of the year, and works on projects in Europe (France, Italy and Switzerland) and the USA for the rest. As a result of her multi-cultural journey she generates layered perspectives, reflected well in her latest installation at India Art Summit 2010 titled 'Animated Suspension: Halfway Here' which was a show stopper, and was sold!



Her works, moving from India to urban USA's artificially constructed 'natural' environments, Singh's work began responding to the uninvited weed in the sidewalk as a welcome perversion of manicured space. Appropriating micro-cosmic activity, her installations call for a slowing down and re-reading of visual information, de-privileging the culture of immediate gratification. In *Peel till they Bloom*,

2008, viewers in Switzerland approach the peeling, splitting space to discover meticulous layered paper constructions along with subtly placed, miniature interventions like Urban Fungus and Plateau made of painted polymer clay, moss, fungi, metal, plaster and other materials.

In her other installation displayed at MAC (Museum of Contemporary Art) Lyon, France, the viewers enter a seemingly empty or perhaps recently de-installed gallery space. The sterile architectural surfaces transform into proliferating, saturated membranes via the accompaniment of deliberately amplified/created flaws and miniscule scars. These activate what are

presumably transitional voids between “pieces”; letting them migrate into each others’ territories, resisting efficiency in viewing, decoding and digesting and making it impossible to decide where the art begins or ends. Remnants of what seem like flaking islands of images from old Italian frescoes seem to peel of the walls and ceiling while tiny holes in the ground and walls reveal meticulously created stop-motion animations where the characters from the afore mentioned frescoes move through actual landscapes interacting with some of Singh’s polymer clay micro-interventions. For example Adam and Eve walk out of Fra Angelico’s painting into an actual apple orchard in France or Botticelli’s Primavera occurs in an actual wildflower field.

Her cross- cultural encounters spill over emotional, nostalgic spaces. Returning yearly to her grandfather’s home, Sumakshi familiarized herself with his carefully collected objects, seemingly frozen in time. After his death, with the referent gone, these objects demanded a renegotiation of her relationship to them. In *Mapping the Memory Mandala*, 2008, CASSIS, FRANCE, she maps the illusion of her grandfather’s living room in dry pastels onto pre-existing objects and architecture of her studio. Viewed from the entrance this perceptual space obliterates the “real”.

Sumakshi has shown works in almost all continents of the world. Her works traverse lines between metaphor, reality and illusion and range from plays on space-time theories to cultural, historic and physical critiques of place, manifested in various media. This lends a special appeal to her works in a globalised art scenario. Despite her young years her works have earned a place along with veterans of contemporary art like Subodh Gupta and Sudarshan Shetty in the prestigious cross- continental traveling exhibition India Highway IV Show.