

Invoking Light – Viveek Sharma

In a day and age given over to quick digital results, with many an artist barely touching a work that bears his or her signature, it is comforting to see the work of someone like Viveek Sharma. Weaving a symbolic mix of western aesthetics and Indian cultural symbolism, his compositions reflect his gestures in every fleck and line of paint. His subject matter is about humanity in all its different shades: relationships, shared spaces, everyday life and mundane happenings. Everything attains an element of drama heightened by his use of colour and a deep understanding of light and shadow. His work is not mimicking the real world, but rather transforming isolated moments filtered through his own aesthetics to transcribe a world beyond reality. In his paintings there is no room for chance, every tiny element of paint has its place in a bid to perfection.

Inspired by the ways and techniques of the Dutch masters, Sharma has built up a repertoire of work that places an emphasis on form and texture. His works are often larger than life, accentuating the detailing of material – skin, sky, grass or fabric, stone or metal – every stroke adding to the appearance and volume of an object. He layers the paint in such a way so as to intensify the experience of light, radiating and diffused through the atmosphere, as seen in the work “Weaving (viewing) the economy basket”. Made in a sepia tint like an old photograph, the composition has an interesting mood capturing a silent pause in the chaotic activity of a market. Based in Mumbai, a city of intense extremes, the artist has a plethora of inspiration, and sifts through it for moments that touch his heart and evoke a response. For his work ‘Milky way’ he pens,

“A new awakening

Dawn of the day

A new journey

Our daily Milk

The empty cans

Crowding the van

Happy smiles

Deliverance unto thee

Our daily Milk

One journey ends

And another begins

For Viveek continues

With his daily sojourn

In the Milky way

For discovery of the soul cream

In the embodied milk”

Viveek Sharma believes there are integral values to be absorbed from classical art – those of patience, practice or *riyaz*, of embodying the self within, and yet seeking selflessness in creation. He works almost in a meditative state, ‘listening’ to what the painting says, processing a dialogue with the work before it proclaims itself complete. He is unafraid to change a painting over and over, until every element is in harmony and the expression is whole. Sometimes this process takes months, and he constantly questions his own ideas on art, on painting, making way for fresh impulses and inspirations in his artistic journey. His work is also a means through which he sometimes places himself as a player. In the ‘Birth of a Father’ strong arms are shown gently holding a baby – the identity of the person is anonymous, his head being beyond the frame, and the focus is on the dynamic red cloth that drapes the tiny form that brings new life to others. The muted monotones of the background contrast sharply with the figure in the forefront, creating a visual and psychological impact on the viewer. There is a deep intimacy observed within the frame, that finds place in many of the artist’s works; a frozen moment that becomes separated from the clockwork motion of time. Sometimes, the core of his representations comes from photographs, which he uses as foundation upon which to build his narratives.

Whether clear daylight pervading the scene, or partial light from an ambiguous source, the depiction of light is what characterises the works, suggesting three-dimensionality, evoking the ambient mood, and leading the eyes through the imagery. Even the most commonplace scenes depicting an old vendor, a typical roadside snack seller or a child at a public tap, are turned into elaborate tableaux by the capture of light, bestowing them with dignity and grace beyond the real. It is a view enriched with a deep love for all things living, sometimes taken to the extent of being able to seduce the viewers’ eye with the sumptuousness of colour and the uber-reality of texture. Interlocking areas of colour and form, and the almost scientific technique of (pointillist) layers of tonalities define his recent works. The images are poetic, and filled with metaphors, drawing the viewer to relate to his or her memory and experience.

Sharma has come a long way in his two decades of practice; he has experimented with varied subjects, working his canvases in my myriad styles. However, one thread has remained established throughout and that is his language of realism that has taken him on a journey of self discovery. As he philosophises in synchrony with the painting “Sweet Nothings”,

Who am I

The external quest

Does it matter?

Just listen to me

Echoing your thoughts

Share my food

It fuels your thoughts

Discovery of self

The absolute truth

The nothingness of all

The sweet nothing

In Viveek's works

Potatoes are sweet

Nothing else is!

Lina Vincent Sunish 2013

Viveek Sharma was born in Mumbai in 1968, lives and works in Mumbai, India. He received his master degree from the well-known J. J. School of Arts in Mumbai in 1994. Since then he has held several solo shows and been part of numerous group exhibitions of national and international stature.