

Religare Arts.i

PUBLICATION	DATE	REGION
Time Out	16h – 29 th October '09	NCR

Blast from the past



Dilliwalas are in for a treat. Vadehra Art Gallery, in collaboration with Emami Chisel Art, Kolkata, has organised a retrospective of the late artist Bikash Bhattacharjee's works. There are about 36 artworks on display, most of which were sourced from Kolkata, said Sonia Ballaney, the director of the gallery. They include not just his gorgeous oil paintings, but also pen-and-ink drawings, lithographs, water-colours, gouache and pastels, paper prints, silk screens on paper, etchings and conte on paper. Unfortunately, what's missing is the fine collection of oils from our very own National Gallery of Modern Art. Ballaney told us that the show had been planned for over a year. "The reason we're doing this is because there hasn't been an exhibition of his works in a very long time," she said.

When you do go visit the show, which you must, pick up the beautifully produced catalogue – you'll think of it as a book – that's been released to compliment the retrospective. Apart from glossy pictures of the artworks on display, divided chronologically by decades, there are also essays by artist Sanat Kar and art critics Pranabranjan Ray and Manasij Majumdar. There is a section on invitation cards, with invites dating from 1965, and on certificates and press reviews, including his 1962 certificate from the Indian College of Arts and Craftsmanship and newspaper clippings from *The Statesman* and *The Indian Express*, among many others.

Also interesting is the photographs section of the book. It begins with a black-and-white portrait of Bhattacharjee and also has images of him receiving numerous awards, of him at his wedding, at Santiniketan, and group photos of the Society of Contemporary Artists, of which he was a member. Retrospective ongoing at Vadehra Art Gallery, D-40 Defence Colony (2461-5368), Mon-Sat 11am-7pm. Catalogue Rs 1,000.

Reviews

Home Sweet Home

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The poster for this show uses a powerful image – a little house made of six matchsticks, with the stick in the middle burnt and charred. While on the outside, things seem sturdy, the interiors may tell a different tale. *Home Sweet Home*, comprising mixed media works by ten artists from across the globe, seeks to narrate and explore these stories of domestic violence. As you enter the gallery's display area, New York-based Ultra Violet's pencil on paper drawings greet you at the door. These images of an engorged phallus with a gun within do not, however, set the tone for the show. Delhi-based Gopika Chowla's oil painting titled "Arsenal" is far more subtle, and in many ways, more effective. The canvas shows nine mundane everyday objects – a hanger, ladle, shoe, scissors, rolling pin, belt, cigarette, twine and matchstick – each painted as "negatives", which gives them a rather eerie appearance, tainted with traces of blood. Even more disturbing is a cradle, suspended from the ceiling, holding fibre glass female babies by Mumbai-based Chintan Upadhyay.

Naturally, a large number of the works deal with issues of women and the home. In "Oh, I'm So Happy", one of Swede Cecilia Lundqvist's four video works, we meet a middle-aged woman who tries to convince viewers, and herself, of how happy she is at home and in the kitchen. The camera pans out of the close-up towards the end to reveal her sitting amidst a sea of bottles. The installation and photo-based works comprising "The Peacock Wallpaper" created by New York-based Shelly Bahl explore issues of psychological violence as well as the "historical" phenomenon of "female hysteria". A small, claustrophobic bedroom done up in the Colonial style is installed in a corner of the gallery. There are beautiful black-and-white photos on the wall and in an "album" on a table. The huge bed stands imposingly empty and seems to take up too much space. Over hidden speakers, the artist relates an adapted version of "The Yellow Wallpaper", a short story

about domestic psychological abuse and madness by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. On the wall are tiny handwritten scrawls (excerpts from the same story) that speak of the inhabitant being forced to "take rest". Outside this installation is a video work by Italian Giulia Cairra, which shows a woman constantly being pushed back into a corner by invisible hands. The two works, although separate, seem linked at a very deep level, which is a testament to New York-based Ombretta Agrò Andruff's curatorial skill.

Working on a larger scale, Kolkata-based Sanchayan Ghosh throws up issues that rural Santhali women face through his

ing together as a family, of sharing a space with other people you love and also, sometimes, hate. His children's book-style illustrations titled "Power Games" show a family of four playing together as well as physically hurting each other. One image, very disturbingly, shows the mother and her children feasting on the father's body. Inspired by children's cookery books, Maetamm also has a series of "recipes" titled "The Little Family Cookbook" on display.

These are beautifully illustrated and written out in graceful, cursive handwriting, which only adds to the horror when you discover that

the recipes call for

ingredients like "A pair of adult male legs" and the instructions read "Find out the most comfortable way to kill your daddy (Chef's tip: do not use poison)".

Continuing with this children's theme, he also has a series called "Little Object" comprising miniature doll's house items with dolls using them to

commit suicide – a doll figure with his head stuck inside a doll oven, a doll drowned in a bathtub (complete with yellow rubber duck) and a doll smothered by a pillow on a tiny bed, for example. Also brilliant are his short video works – "FAMILY" and "THE RIDE" – that use simple paper cut-out figures. In the former, the father chases his family with an axe yet harms only himself when he hacks at them. In the latter, the father voices his frustration – that he's going through a mid-life crisis and calling his kids vampires – through an internal monologue while he and his family ride silently in a car.

It isn't the easiest show in the world to digest, and it certainly isn't light. But you'll be thinking about what you've seen long after you've left the gallery. *Janice Pariat*



installation "Aakil Aarsi (Mirror of Realisation)". The work is made up of a Santhali handwoven mattress surrounded (in the shape of a hut) by papers on which incidents of violence against these women are noted. Striking a more personal note is Neapolitan-born Betty Bee's video "Lionetti Luigi Classe 1920", which captures (via a hidden camera) her aged father taking a bath in her bathroom. Physically and mentally abused by him as a child, Bee uses this work to expose him as vulnerable and helpless, and so takes her "revenge". The act becomes, in a way, liberating.

The works by Estonian Marko Maetamm, however, are the only ones that comprehensively deal with the very basic difficulty of liv-