

Of the hour glass and the moving images of eternity in the works of Sangeeta Gupta

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It is more difficult to write or talk about the abstract painting than about any other painting because the content is not in a subject matter or story, but in the actual painting activity.

Ad Reinhardt

The works of Sangeeta Gupta goes beyond the temporal physical space; it's the retinal sensation of surfaces which comes after intellectual sieving. She doesn't directly paint what she sees around herself, the forms are not describable. While one tries to trace the sources of the images one reaches at the actual painting activity or the non-objective arrival of the patterns, textures and splashes. Paul Klee in his *Thinking Eye* speaks about the artist's mission to penetrate as far as may be towards that secret ground where the primal law feeds growth. If one extends the word primal one is also reminded about the word essential/elemental. She mentions about the Panchatattva: Kshiti, tej, ap, marut, vyom, the five constituents of nature which is being represented by her rather than the entire objective presence of the world. She moves away from her early figurative works, looks away from the particular body to the idea of its presence. Borders are fluid between sensation, imagination and memory. She does not perceive the objects as they are but how they act upon her, her responses to them. Memories of Gaitonde, Nasreen, Raza and Swaminathan often pass in a fleeting moment. Their attempts of gleaning from the philosophical traditions of Zen, Sufism and other philosophical thoughts find a resonance in the works of Sangeeta Gupta. She engages with diverse creative forms like painting, photography and films. She learnt painting from Sanat Roy while she was posted in Kolkata and also had her first solo there in 1995. She is also an avid reader of poetry and philosophy and has quite a number of publications to her credit. Her job which makes her travel from one place to the other informs her about the varied experiential realities which get registered on the surfaces of her canvas. The textures often play the dual role as the physical presence of the paint or the deliberations of a painter in formal experiments of mark making tracing the remnants of her visual journey in Benares of the rich textiles, the memories of the warp and the weft and the textured woven drapes.

She often brings the painter's practice of translating the optical perceptions to the pigments which she rubs with her own hands, erasing any mediation of the tools like

brushes or spatula. Meticulously she works with the textures derived from various forms of nature. She erases and renders, forms are done and undone on the surface, forms are visible, floating sections of vast colour fields. They are all beyond boundation speaking about the artist's aspiration to reach that meditative peak. Layering of colours one above the other often shows the luminescence hidden beneath those strata. The multitude of forms swarm as textures of various shapes. It's not only about the natural forms but the innumerable material objects with various textural and formal possibilities through her canvases. My abstract world: a series from her digital works speak volumes about how a beehive is being analysed in metric rhythm, there takes place dematerialization, how they disperse and liquefy into diverse forms, jewellerys lose their contours, what they leave are the textures and shapes in numerous imprints. Gaitonde said, 'the humblest of things, when meditated upon, can give rise to the most astounding moments'. She connects the objective material world to the non-objective eternity. The positioning of the self and the world and the pictorial space speaks of pure mental engagement, of the transcendence to virtual space of imagination from the real spatial values. She writes-Who is one

Bare corporeality:

Pure mentation:

A cipher in the grand total

Of the inexorable human collective:

Or rather, all these, in summation?

To scratch, and research

through the heavy matter of the heart

Like Monet she tries to capture the world but not as it appears in the ordinary sensual manner but as it is understood by her. The Sufi theory of Tajaddud-I-amsal talks about the renewal of like by like that is every moment a world comes to an end another similar ones come to being. This seamlessness suggests the seriality of her works. She tries to explore in each of the works and hence keeps on working like the repetition in the Japa tradition. Images from her travel are recollected, remembered and transformed to essentials. The changing times, the dismantling of forms, the pervading terror and destructions are referred in her works, there are transformations from concrete and compact images to more minimal and abstract arrangements.

The recent works for her solo, Song of the cosmos, express the inner absorption of her regular experiences as seen in her earlier works which are further enriched in Kashmir where she was posted for two years. The flora, fauna and the intellectual tradition of

philosophy and aesthetics inspire her. Abstraction for her connects to the meditative process with which she is deeply involved. This reminds of Abhinavgupta an important Kashmiri Shaivite scholar who mentions--the creation and dissolution of the world are dependent on the vital energy, which in its turn depends on consciousness and pure consciousness without an object is the great goddess, the supreme. The Vajras also speak about the object emptied world of abstract consciousness, Lal Ded says-When the mind melts away, what's left? A void mingles with the void. Hence rather than the iconic or imitation of appearances she searches for the more meditative pictorialization of imagined visual experience. The divine is expressed not in any form of idolatry but in a non-objective pictorial cosmos, a realm of supra-physical reality For her the shift is from ocular sensations to visualization, the saksatkara as explains Abhinavgupta. Ladakh :knowing the unknown is a collection of her photographs on Ladakh.They show the eye of the painter in each of the frames .Ladakh which is an important centre of Buddhist practice connects her to her contemplative journey.However they reside in a different realm of expression than her paintings which are the distant reminiscences of those traversed paths. She keeps on changing her strategies in order to stop stagnation. The textures now cohere to have certain forms which are again non-descriptive. The brushstrokes are more varied and traces of calligraphic watery strokes emerge. Rich textures pulsate creating volumes breaking the regularity of the flat surface, making the surface a visual field of mark making, manipulating the remembered forms: the snowflakes, the uneven mountainscapes and the ripples from the valley. All of it appear as recollections in the subtlest forms flowing unrestrictive, immersive, locating the artist in space, light and intuitive images of the world.