

## **HIGHRISES OF THE INWARD EYE**

As a critic, writing in good faith, it is impossible for me to make any too tall claims for works done in the contemporary period (the 'contemporary' being synonymous only with the life time of each living person). Further, if modern art existed within a fixed tradition, it would be possible to judge it by standards of technique and sensibility derived from that tradition. But modern artists usually are not governed by traditional rules accepted by themselves and their critics. What is meant by tradition is highly disputable, because the strength of tradition in the arts has a certain relation (admittedly a difficult one to define) to its claims to present a picture of contemporary life. When life changes violently as now, then the tradition either becomes academic and remote from life, and therefore loses its force and in that sense ceases to be traditional, else transforms and adapts itself to life, thus preserving the traditional relationship to society (which is, incidentally, the most important aspect of tradition).

In brief, it is the future alone, which can judge the arts of the eternal 'Now'. That is, the future alone can make those ruthless simplifications which we ourselves cannot afford to make as we examine each work of modern art closely and admire it for that complexity which the future may not bother to cognize or hold in importance. So, even when we have recognized the limitations of our judgments, there are good reasons for our absorptions in contemporary works. For, excepting when the day's many well meaning but non art, else propagandist exercises are passed off as art, the true art moments can still boast memorable images, as well as highly individual, very exciting dancing rhythms.

The artistic persona of Sangeeta Gupta (one whose works in process I've watched for a decade or more) appears increasingly to gain in weight. If we do not fall into the trap of making exalted claims, we should not, either, be too modest. The critic who dismisses the whole of modern art as worthless is more likely to be wrong than those who can only interest themselves in it if they are assured of its greatness and permanence. Well at least in the case of this painter one comes upon evidence of things truly and sincerely created. Here there are clear signs of a restless mental energy, of lively invention, of strong spontaneous feeling.

Quite as with genuine creating people, we note that this mental energy is transformative of a crass urban material such as we meet from day to day in our city centres. If Ramkumar tackled nature creatively for decades, this painter engages similarly, but in her case with concrete and mortar. Yet look

what she does with it. She makes the lifeless, living by simply breathing on it her own life-generating passions. Each non-descript view from her window is infused with intoxicating movement, nay with animation. Her seeing eye is just not static, it is too restless for that. It is sheerly active, bent upon mellowing the heartless stuff of metropolitan actuality. Surely, she sets herself a wager to outsmart the unyielding tedium of squares and rectangles, as of the forbidding officialese. Thus, all that becomes charged most like a forward moving film made out of moribund stills. Sangeeta's kind of personality is not dreamy, but resolute, meaning 'business' (and this strident trait you notice in her poems most compellingly). So, she has no uses for mere description, or for cloying figuration. She, in sum, makes no concessions, her aim being clear, the target plain as a pikestaff. For her, the job is enhancement of self. The dialectic process of her personal or professional life makes her the more jealous to ride necessity by force. Therefore, her artwork is the result of a spirited being, which is unambiguous. In this way, like all genuine artists she is busy renewing tradition through her own life space and that without any artistic manifestos or missionary pretensions. Never letting go of her commonsense. The upshot brings conviction to her chosen canvases: nothing mushy there, nothing spurious spiritually, as so often these days.

I began this brief essay by dwelling on our opinions on art, on tradition, and whatever is termed modernity. But that was for a good reason, namely, that any who opine on another must put down their cards on the table, for those are the obligatory credentials, so to speak. It is not as though one passes the test thereafter, but the reader should have an assurance that judgments on art not made lightly but with much care. Looking at works from day to day, and doing behind the scene homework, I can say with a sufficient lack of hesitance, that artists, who work on their works amidst the thick of life pressures, are a credit to the community. Sangeeta is among those, who salvage us by filling the functional and the commercial brimful with the sop of feeling. Her finest canvases attest to this claim.

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