

ART PROBE

ISSUE

#10

- Shristi Sainani

Exhibition : *RED (Group Exhibition)*
(14 January –31 March 2021)

Artists : Somnath Hore, Anita Dube, S.H. Raza, Sosa Joseph, Gieve Patel, Anju Dodiya, C.K Rajan, Abir Karmakar, Siji Krishnan, Arun K.S, Nicola Durvasula

Venue : *Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke (Mumbai, India)*



Abir Karmakar; *Surface*, 2020 (detail)

Source : Ocula , Courtesy Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke.

A gallery that usually brings about extra-ordinary exhibitions, based in Mumbai (India) is Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke. Their latest exhibition curated by the renowned curator and poet, Ranjit Hoskote is called *Red*; which runs from the 14th of January up till the 31st of March 2021. Putting forth the work of 11 artists, the exhibition is an artist's response to what the colour means to them keeping in context the ongoing unprecedented times of the pandemic and socio-political unrest of India.

Hoskote writes for the press release — *To the artists participating in this exhibition, the valency of red emerged from their response to their immediate environment, as well as to their reflection on their own state of mind, during the long year of pandemic and lockdown that 2020 was...Red, to them(the artists), is the temperature of crisis. It is the atmosphere of peril. It is the emotion of resistance. It is a wall peeling on solitude, a mind taking stock of itself in isolation, preparing for remedial action. Red, to the artists in this exhibition, is anything but a pigment that drops readymade on a palette*".¹

¹ RED Part 1, 2021

To critique *Red*, it is essential scrutinise the artists involved, and the trajectory of their careers —

Somnath Hore (b.1921) worked in mediums of painting, sculpture, woodcuts and print making. Influenced by Chinese Socialist Realism and German Expressionism, as Hore evolved his figurative pieces became simplified. His lithograph, *Hunger* (1968), on exhibit is one such work. Hore was a recipient of the Indian civilian honour of the Padma Bhushan. He died in 2006.²

Anita Dube (b.1958) produces art in the mediums of sculpture, photographs, videos, performance and installation. Her work is informed by memories, history, mythology and phenomenological experience. For *Red*, Gallerie M+S put forth three Dube works, all made in 2021 using automotive paint, votive enamelled eyes mounted on wall called — *Keywords 1, Keywords 2 and Resistance*.³

S.H. Raza (b. 1922) began with expressionists landscapes to eventually turn to his famous geometrics painted on canvas. He was one of the founders of the Progressive Artists' Group, along with K.H Ara and F.N Souza. On display for *Red*, one comes face to face with his oil on board painted in 1969 called *La Croix*. He died in 2016.⁴

Sosa Joseph (b.1971) fabricates figurative pieces usually oils on canvas. For *Red*, Gallerie M+S show *Pieta* (2020), a quintessential Joseph work, that has a washed out vibrancy where subjects expel an anxiety-ridden quality similar to works of Edward Munch.⁵

Gieve Patel (b.1940) is a poet, playwright, artist and physician. Patel draws his inspiration from various human situations. For *Red*, Patel paints an acrylic on canvas portrait called *Mary, my patient* (2020)

Anju Dodiya (b.1964) is a two-time nominee for Sotheby's prize for contemporary art and is definitely an Indian artist to watch for. Her work gives the viewer access to moments lifted from "the private discourse that goes on within oneself when one is alone".⁶ For this exhibit, one sees two *Dodiya* pieces (2020) — *Pillow Bearer* and *Red Wind*.

C.K Rajan (b.1960) is a part of the Kerala Radical Group and is known for exhibiting politically charged collages. His recent piece, on show for *Red*, uses a synonymous name as the colour. It is an oil on canvas painted in 2020.

Abir Karmakar (b.1977) exhibits three oils on canvas (2020) for *Red*, called — *Surface, Surface 1*, *Surface 2*. He is known for his self-portraits; although in the *Surface* series, seems to be taking an abstract stance.

² Somnath Hore, n.d.

³ Anita Dube, n.d

⁴ S.H Raza, n.d.

⁵ Sosa Arts, 2020

⁶ Anju Dodiya, n.d.

Siji Krishnan (b. 1983) to produce her pieces, uses sheets of rice paper of different textures, which she layers, building up a thickness that absorbs the numerous washings with lighter and darker shades of watercolour. For *Red*, Krishnan's *Untitled* (2020) work is presented.

Arun K.S (b.1984) uses pages of the bible to wash it with water colours to produce his pieces. For *Red*, he uses the same process to put forth a painting-sculpture duo which is *Untitled* (2020).

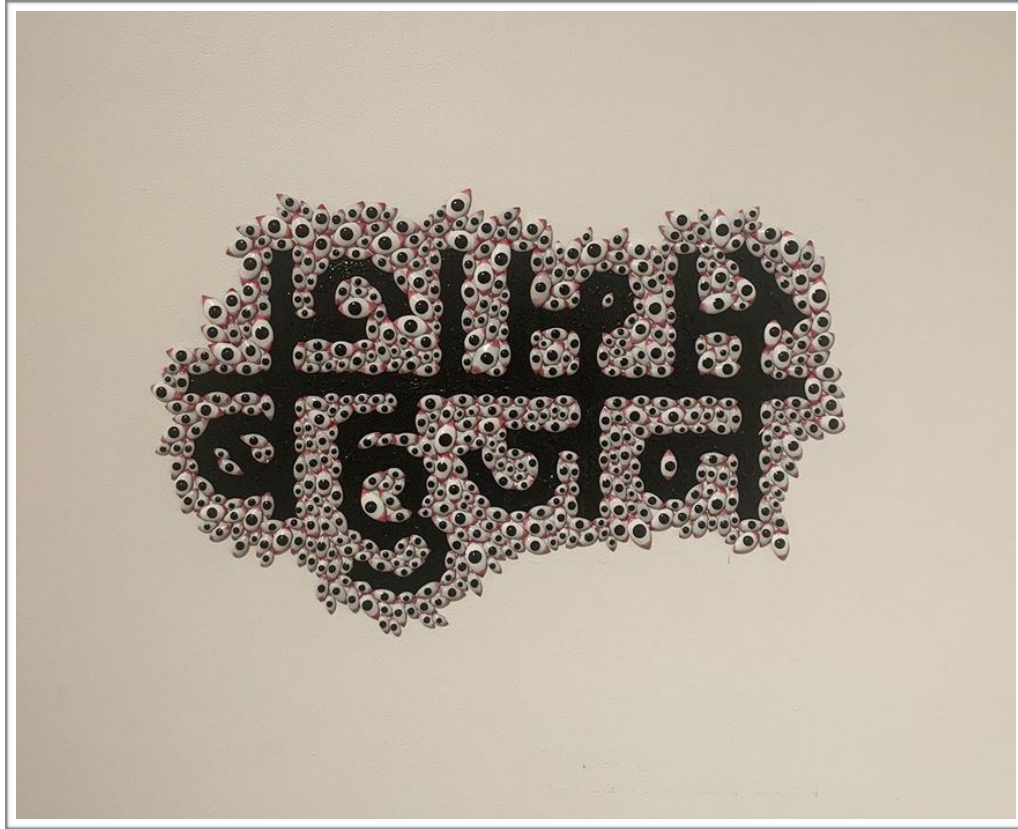
Nicola Durvasula (b.1960) is the only non-Indian national showcasing her work at Gallerie M+S. She was born in Jersey, British Isles. She lives and works in Walmer, Kent. *Red*, presents her wheel thrown, glazed red earthenware (*Untitled*, 2020)

Considering Hoskote mentions the production of pieces to be a result of '*reflection on (the artists') own state of mind, during the long year of pandemic and lockdown that 2020 was*'; one can't help but question the intent of exhibiting Raza and Hore's work as a part of *Red*; since both faced demise much before the pandemic hit. Is this a commercial strategy (especially as both were sold almost instantly)? Was the curatorial stance taken with a partial view? Or perhaps, there were empty walls, post the design of the exhibit. We do admit selective pieces forming *Red* are beyond beautiful, but it must be noted that there lies a gap in the coherence of the exhibit.

Some of my favourite pieces from the exhibition, 'RED' were:

1) **Keywords 1, 2021**

Artist : Anita Dube



Source : Ocula, Courtesy Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke.

The first work chosen from *Red* is an Anita Dube piece, fabricated using automotive paint, and votive enamelled eyes mounted on wall, called *Keywords 1* (2021). The work reads in the language of Hindi; '*Bahujan*' which is read upright which means 'the many', or 'the majority'. It is a Pali term, once found in Buddhist text, uttered in contemporary times to refer to present day Scheduled Castes (SC/*Dalits*), *Adivasis* (Scheduled Tribes/ST/Indigenous) and *Shudra* (peasant) castes of India.

Alternatively, laying upside down, is the word '*Samaj*' which translates to society or community.

This Anita Dube is a political work, hinting at the crisis India has faced in the past and continues to tackle i.e the neglect and suppression of SCs, STs and the *Shudra* community. '*Bahujans*' are the most vulnerable community in a country which serves a higher pedestal to *Brahmins* — essentially the people of the 'purer' caste. Caste, locked down by social and religious norms, dictates at instances privileges an individual may or may not have access to.

2) Red Wind, 2020

Artist : Anju Dodiya



Source : Ocula, Courtesy Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke.

Anju Dodiya's charcoal, watercolour, fabric collage on padded board, called *Red Wind* measures 141 x 70 cm hangs across the gallery modestly beside the gallery door. What one sees in the piece before them is a collage like quality of multiple, visual allegories sitting on a single dimension. There is the padded, satin fabric with green lining, an underlying layer beneath it, of a scarlet textile. Next to it are sketches in charcoal, one with what seems to be divine, passerine being floating; another of a night fantasy dreamt by the women snuggling on the bottom-right.

An interesting choice is also made by adding in a white, printed section of a fabric with three chairs on the left hand side of the board. Possibly, giving a stance of equilibrium to all the three subjects. Overall, the composition is balanced but it is the three chairs that draw viewer's attention, giving it a prominent role in the reading of the work. One is prompted to question why that particular selection was made.

3) **Untitled, 2020**

Artist : Arun K.S



Source : Ocula, Courtesy Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke.

The strength of Arun K.S as an artist is his process and materials. For *Untitled*, 2020 he produces a duo; a sculpture and a triptych. He uses found wood, sandstone and brass to produce the sculpture. Whereas, for the painting aspect he employs natural pigments, watercolour and ink on raw canvas primed with rice paper and Bible pulp.

The triptych carries a minimal status, it has a small grained texture covering the substrate. Complementing the painting, one sees the sculpture. The head of the sculpture is an ornate, traditionally carved piece; while the body is an unfinished chunk of wood. Both sitting on opposite sides of the aesthetic spectrum, yet graciously joined by linearity. The vertical structural form of the pillaring object does not brawl with the horizontality of the painting; rather one enhances the other.

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