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Karishma D'Souza

Karishma D'Souza shares with us moments of rest via her paintings. She exhibits this fall in Dapiran Art Project Space in Utrecht.

Do you remember a particular lazy day last summer? When it was quiet and nothing happened? Probably not. We can still report on large events taking place last years later, but ordinary, everyday moments of peace and tranquillity are much harder to recall. Luckily, the paintings of Karishma D'Souza recall just that state of mind and are therefore are a pleasure to watch.

Overlapping wings

A description of a painting of Karishma D'Souza (Mumbai, 1983) sounds a bit chaotic. Her works consist of picture elements that you might describe as wings and decor cloths that sometimes overlap and sometimes overflow and thereby defy all the rules of central perspective. This creates a work of art that allows you to start a journey of discovery.

Take for example the watercolor *Mirror Curtain: warmth and a gift* (2015), that could be seen last September at the fair Amsterdam Drawing. On the left you see sort of a corridor that leads to a door. On the floor is a carpet with roses that all have approximately the same size. You look from a high vantage point onto the floor, like you could tumble down easily. But the door reveals a green grass landscape with a high horizon, what must mean we're on the ground. Where are we? But that's not all. Because it seems that in front of the corridor there seems to be a kind of transparent curtain, or maybe it's a PVC strip curtain like the ones you can find in the butterfly garden in the zoo. One can recognize a few white line drawings of roses on the curtains. Behind the transparent curtain is yet another landscape, now with trees that partially surround a green meadow. When put into words, this all sounds chaotic, but it actually looks calm. That is partly due to the distribution of flat surfaces (the carpet, the grass, the wall). The doors are open, you hope that the long-awaited sigh of wind will bulge the curtains. A warm, still day. A time you want to hold on to.

Magic drawings

Karishma D'Souza has been painting since childhood, she e-mails from her home in Goa, India. She spent a large part of her childhood on a ship at sea, because her father was a captain, and there she discovered the magic of drawing. She marvelled at the way her father could connect two squares with just four diagonal lines and thus create a cube on a two dimensional plane. Or how he could conjure an elephant by just using a pencil, although they were on a ship in the middle of the ocean. She still likes looking at people making art. Karishma started painting herself to document all impressions of the places she visited and the stories she read or heard.

Initially, her paintings described specific places or memories, but gradually her works become increasingly symbolic and allegorical.

Mondriaan

She lived and worked from 2012 to 2013 as a resident at the Amsterdam Rijksakademie and while staying in the Netherlands she had the chance to see her favourite art works in real life. This would lead to a more pronounced geometric plane division in her art. Karishma cites Piet Mondrian as one of her sources of inspiration, especially the way he kept moving shapes and colours to create the desired rhythm in the picture.

Melange

That field division allows her to create a balanced mix of memories and stories. In 2013, Karishma painted on one canvas not only the botanical gardens in Amsterdam, but also the salt plains in Kutch, India, and a friend who is drawing peacefully. The common denominator of all these scenes: they are memories of moments of rest. The painting *February* (2013) could be seen then as an archive of testimonies. It documents stories and memories while ensuring that they cannot be forgotten, and what's even more: can actually be seen by everyone. Each scene has got his own place in the picture, but there is no hierarchy. One story is not more important than the other story, making the work look very open.

References

Karishma's work is full of references. She paints large solid flat areas, for example in the lower half of *February* and in the white refrigerator behind the drawing person, to create pauses in the picture. These solid surfaces are similar to a rest between two words, they are indeed a pause of paint. Karishma explains that she recognized this trope in Indian manuscripts. Furthermore, she lends the grid of, inter alia, Christian iconography, thus creating a kind of comic-like format. The repetition of forms, such as drops in the watercolor *Healing Home* (2015) was inspired by Buddhist murals. Karishma explains that some landscapes in her recent watercolors are based on descriptions from the poem *Fire and Ice* by Robert Frost, or the novel *Comment c'est* of Samuel Beckett. She regularly selects passages from poems and translates the imagery to her paintings.

Compass

Does this mean that you need much knowledge of literature or Indian culture to appreciate her work? And that you need to know the artist to value the autobiographical elements? This knowledge may indeed be useful signposts that help you to navigate through the painting, to see more. But you can also spontaneously dive into the dreamy paintings and let yourself get lost. The works are abstract enough to allow their own interpretations, and after all, the images tell about general human feelings. Hopefully, we can all recall moments of rest and peace. Our own memories and fantasies are the ultimate compass to experience the magic of Karishma's stories.

The exhibition 'Bridges' is from October 31 to December 19, 2015 in Dapiran Art Project space in Utrecht. www.dapiran.nl