

Interview with Sophia Zucher, 2015.

**What can I expect from your show at Dapiran art Project Space (and Amsterdam Drawing)?**

15 works: nine drypoint prints and six watercolours are in transit to Dapiran Project Space for Amsterdam Drawing. The oil paintings planned for the exhibition at Dapiran Project Space in October are still works in progress. In the watercolours for Amsterdam Drawing I have used the form of the mandala as a visual device to begin the work with a demarcation between home and the other, the journey to places unvisited, and I have kept the circular form of division fluid. These works refer to the five senses. They also refer to seasons, specifically to certain periods of time which lend themselves to particular work and growth cycles, remembering the tradition of the Book of Hours.

**We talked about 'political quietness' before. Is this something we can see in your new body of work ( that you will show at Amsterdam Drawing or at Dapiran Project Space)?**

These works move into transformations towards the positive, and especially invocations of what is loved. Simultaneous to the systemic narrow decision making in politics, a robust media and increased internet connectivity has constantly reported the ramifications which has led to an increasingly connected, alert and discerning public. Both the bodies of work, at Amsterdam Drawing and at Dapiran Project Space holds imagery which carry invocations and thanksgivings, as in the images of engaged conversations, rain, and green fields.

**Last time you told me you refer to the illumination schools of India in your work. Can I read this in the styles as well as the painting technique?**

I do not use the painting techniques of Indian illuminations but much of the visual devices, as well as a few from Buddhist murals in these works.

From Indian illuminations:-

- 1) the use of white as a positive colour, as opposed to denoting blank space
- 2) the motif of two people in conversation, or sharing quiet presence, in settings like a garden setting.
- 3) In the visual documentations of specific local landscapes, as well as landscapes described in texts personally, or as ancestral memory imagined by the author of the texts or the painter. For example, certain imagery from texts and paintings which have stayed with me are
  - i) the depictions of fantastical rock formations in Mughul paintings which are memories of the artists homeland in Iran, rock formations which are not found in India, combined in the paintings with North Indian flora and fauna.
  - ii) The poem 'Fire and Ice' by Robert Frost
  - iii) The imagination of the desolate flatland in 'How it is' by Samuel Beckett

- iv) The ice landscape which runs through chapters in Ursula Le Guin's 'Left Hand of Darkness'
- v) Flattened space with flatness emphasized by the use of line in Indian painting traditions
- vi) The use of colour is also sometimes symbolic, as it is in Indian imagery.

From Buddhist monastery murals (Alchi Monasteries, Ladakh): The use of repetition of form as invocation is a reference to the repetition of the Buddha image in Buddhist mural cycles. In the painting 'Home healing', the repetition is of tears which transform into raindrops while moving across the landscape.

### **Do you remember when you started painting? What was it about making art that appealed to you?**

I began painting at an early age, possibly from the age of three. Much of my childhood was spent on merchant ships, as my father is a master mariner, and painting was a sustainably absorbing activity, which could later also document the continuously changing stimuli of new places visited, stories read and listened to. I could name four childhood memories which were very impactful.

- 1) The first experience of the magic of drawing was of my father drawing four lines which joined two disconnected squares to form a cube on a 2-dimensional surface, as well as the rapidity with which he could draw an elephant while we were on a ship in the middle of an ocean. Image making has a magical element to it and multiple authorships, or authorship which is much wider and more ancient than the obvious maker of the work.
- 2) A visit to the pyramids at Giza at a young age. Human made and immovable, they were beyond my comprehension as a whole, and my interaction was with one stone which was part of the pyramid base, which in itself was higher than I could scale. I was not tall enough to see beyond a few rows of stone steps, standing at the base of the pyramid, and being told that the structure was of a pyramid (and explained to about the shape of a pyramid) one had to imagine what one couldn't see but believed/knew to be true.  
A similar feeling of awe was triggered by a photograph I had seen of Ayers rock. I later read that people circumnavigate the rock walking. This reminds me of a story narrated to me by a friend a year back, about a man who repeatedly walked along the circumference of a small island but who never saw the same landscape twice, the inability to document or catalogue anything in its entirety or know something completely.
- 3) The two paintings, seeing photographs of these made me want to be a painter, were Chirico's 'Mystery and Melancholy of a Street', and 'The Scream' by Edvard Munch. Both these paintings highlighted chosen aspects of nature (light) and a psychological connection when it moves through the human experience. Both these works gave me the experience of forgetting the self, a feeling only matched by the experience of the ocean from a ship, of the self sublimated.

- 4) The fourth experience which comes to mind was a visit to a painting studio in Rajasthan, run as a guild, with joint authorship of the paintings, in fact the works weren't even signed. The author completely disappears from memory. There was a feeling of strong concentration and focus, to the extent that the painters were undistracted by moving lines of visiting tourists. One of the painters worked with a very fine brush, bringing the white skirt of a tiny figure in the painting to life, denoting folds with repeated fine lines equally spaced. He worked with a steady hand. I continued painting in order to grow this state of mind which was found in these experiences from nature and equally strong human reflections.

### **How has your work evolved over the years?**

The body of work over the years has many threads which continue to run through them when it comes to content. Earlier a documentary approach was foregrounded, as odes, celebrations of daily life, the paintings documented absolute specificities of location, places I had moved through myself, documentations of memories of places which held fragile, easily dissolvable moments of peace.

Lately the works are increasingly allegorical and symbolic with the use of motifs which speak of specific situations or places, but which aren't anymore exact visual descriptions.

The narratives in a single painting have increased in number and are able to co-exist. This has led to the visual also turning more yielding to this multiplicity.

### **How has your work changed (subject matter/style?) after your residency at the Rijksakademie?**

The exposure to art in Europe that I absolutely loved was incredible, as were the interactions with colleagues at the Rijksakademie.

Some examples of works which were wonderful:

- 1) Manon de Boer's video work at the Kassel Documenta 2012; the duration of a man blowing one long breath into a flute, one note of the time-period of one breath extended for as long as the flute player could humanly manage, like an archetype of a breath standing for life, human endurance, striving.
- 2) Hannah Darbovan's work on one wall of the Stedelijk, a vast repetition of forms on paper which looked like musical notations.
- 3) And the works of Piet Mondrian, the craft behind the building of the rhythm of an image.

My paintings after Amsterdam and during the residency at the Rijksakademie had more emphasized space divisions and I felt a stronger abstract, geometric foundation, like a terrain, which could later hold an increased amount of narration without the visual crumbling.

## **What do people need to know to understand your work?**

The works do have references from personal history and specific local issues of society and environmental problems of the place I live in, Goa. However these issues have been global, and the personal experiences are common human experiences. References of images from certain Sufi poems or partly mythical stories also speak about shared human conditions. Through ones own personal memories one is able to have references that can be drawn on to see one thing or image in multiple ways, and with different and changing personally chosen focuses.

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