

Of art, memories and new interpretations

Artistic memory is spreading itself beyond the brain, says noted Mumbai-based poet, art critic and curator Ranjit Hoskote, whose show 'Retrieval Systems' in the capital, featuring five leading contemporary artists, deals with the 'nature of memory and how it preoccupies artists'.

'I tried to look into memory as a resource and how artists are parking it in external tools like computers, archives and sub-cultures -- which also serve as a memory database by documenting the evolution of life and civilisation -- and thereby restoring many lost memories in the process,' Hoskote told IANS.

'The brain is being augmented by the external memory storage facilities. And how can artists remain unaffected by this changing landscape of memory and information?'

The show at the Visual Arts Gallery in the India Habitat Centre features a body of interesting photographs, installations, sculptures and paintings by Alex Fernandes, B. Manjunath Kamath, Baiju Parthan, G.R. Iranna and Tina Bopiah. Presented by the Art Alive Gallery, the exhibition opened Nov 18. It will close Nov 23.

The approach of the artists, Hoskote says, 'is based substantially on the secreting of clues and patterns that add up to larger bodies of remembrance; encoding of referential traces and reconfiguring of mythic materials inherited from the variety of pasts to which the contemporary image-making sensibility is the heir.

'Simplified, it means I have through sustained discussion and interactions with the artists tried to probe the memory sources, histories and influences that have moulded and honed their artistic perceptions.'

The title of the exhibition, said Hoskote, was taken from information technology, and 'refers to electronic data storage and access devices that extend our memory'.

'I would use the term retrieval systems to refer, metaphorically, to the archives of memory and reference that sustain the contemporary artistic imagination, whether it is data flow from the Internet, mythology from various cultures, or the repertoires of art history,' Hoskote said.

The works draw on 'image archives, transfigured iconographies and the persistence of dream experience in waking life', said the curator, who researched for over two years to put the show together.

Goa-based Alex Fernandes captures 'shifting terrain between portraiture and anthropology presenting a series of metaportraits of 'Tiatrises', performers who have kept alive one of the most popular of Goan local folk theatres. 'It is a mixture of Goan (Konkani) festival songs and Italian light opera documented in photographs,' Hoskote said.

B. Manjunath Kamath performs an archaeology of family and community memory in his sculpture installations and digital composites with humour. 'He captures family and evolution of sub-cultures using a blend of solid forms and digital technology,' explains the curator.

Baiju Parthan documents an 'Indo-Iberian' monument in his 'multi-part photographic installation'. It is full of 'auto-biographical meaning' for the lensman.

G.R. Iranna's sculptures are mythical motifs like a disfigured boat and a Buddha -- which refer to the present,' says Hoskote. Tina Bopiah's paintings in the 'egg tempera' medium represents 'private fantasy'.

The curator is working on a project on Hind Swaraj which will open in [Mumbai](#) next month. 'I am in talks with five politically committed photographers -- Dayanita Singh, Samar Jodha, Ram Rahman, Ravi Agarwal and Sonia Jabbar -- to put together their views and images of Hind Swaraj, an ethos propounded by Mahatma Gandhi at the onset of the last century,' Hoskote said.

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