

Creative Expressions - Another Dimension, a new vision

Art practices have changed to include many unconventional ideas and media. Today one finds artists working with such unlikely materials, using staples, human hair, gauze bandages, lentils and more. This variety of media is a significant indicator of the ingenuity of the human mind to explore and reveal facets of being and its materiality in innovative ways.

In recent exhibitions held in Delhi, one saw explorations through collage work, embroidery, food grain, human hair, paper pulp, unspun cotton and woollen fibre, among others. The tactile nature of the media seemed to evoke ideas and emotions in a more direct and tangible way than if the artists had used the more traditional canvas to paint upon. But this exciting diversification of material to 'Paint' or express with, can be distracting precisely because of its newness.

When Rameshwar Broota scrapes away at his layered canvas to etch his images and thoughts, there is so much conviction in the way he works and its resultant communication, that one would never think in terms of saying it any other way. However when Mithu Sen uses human or false hair (*Khoj* and *Fair and Furious*, *VAG*) one isn't really convinced about either the medium or the message. Human hair has fascinated mankind across the globe, from tribal societies to the contemporary artist. Anne Wilson's (U.S.A) preoccupation with this material and notions of inquiry about hair presents work that intrigues and repulses but her absorption and obsession with human hair ensures that the medium is never



PHOTOS: ANNE WILSON

Fiber art has travelled through various lanes and bylanes of enquiry and the present day explorations are enthralling, for fabric has transcended its primarily utilitarian aspect to reveal many facets of textile making. However, what appeals the most, is not necessarily the grandiose works on a monumental scale, but the detailed, embroidered narrative of some of its practitioners which take us back to earlier decades/centuries in rural India. Then, villagers stitched in 'Kantha', 'Sujni' or 'Phulkari' to depict and express nuances of their lives. These hand-crafted practices of leisure have been developed to form an important part of how they earn their livelihood today, but the practitioners compete with faster and cheaper mechanical processes that could put an end to a rich and vibrant practice of hand-crafting that India rests her laurels upon, because socio-economic factors cannot encourage its revival as a leisure activity in rural areas.

irrelevant. Being different certainly has its place, but in itself it is not necessarily something of distinctive merit. In some ways, using the old in newer ways can be more interesting and enduring than using different media to say the same old things, especially where a fresh perspective has not been found. For beyond exploring the material that they work with artists should also have something substantive to say.

The boundaries that once defined various genres of art are diminishing. Material and technology that was once the sole fascination of the Fiber Artist is today also being explored by artists from a Fine Arts background. The qualities of textiles, their fibre and textile making techniques are engaging the minds of artists such as Surendra Pal Joshi, Smriti Dixit, Sandip Paradadkar and Shobha Broota, to name a few.



Fiber Art, as the world knows it, evolved through a preoccupation with design rather than art. It has grown through the work of practitioners such as Abakanowicz, Shiela Hicks, Ed Rossbach and many others to include much more than just textiles. Val Hunt, an artist from Coventry (U.K), works with used beer cans to craft ingenious pieces of jewellery and hats. Jerry Bleem, a Franciscan priest, with an M.F.A. from the Art Institute of Chicago works with corrugated cardboard, beeswax and uses some 30,000 staples in a single piece of work. He has changed the way that I now view the hitherto mundane staple pin, which to my mind was meant to do nothing other than keep my papers neatly pinned/ stapled. The success of a work is determined considerably by its capacity to redefine an idea to give it an altogether different dimension. This is an essential aspect of art making. An artist who is a true seeker will always be able to reveal another vision, another perspective because the medium or idea discloses its greater potential only through passionate enquiry and pursuit.

Contemporary Fiber artists such as Renie Breskin Adams, Holly Story and Tom Lundberg, through their work in embroidery are redefining an age-old tradition by bringing us back full circle to practices that were and somewhat still are rooted in our cultural ethos. They are highly educated artists who live and work in economically developed countries such as the U.S. and Australia, whose work does find resonance in India when put through the perspective of representing or preserving a tradition, for they bring forth another dimension to the practice of embroidery. Thus, in the context of contemporary urban Indian art practices, embroidery is intriguing for it presents the potential of a new vision. The concept is nascent but being given fillip by the work of Sandip Paradkar, Nita Thakore, Smriti Dixit and others, Art making is not divorced from life. Ideas such as this, make ancient practices and their wisdom, relevant in our modern times, for being much more than just another way to 'paint'.

G O P I K A N A T H