



Solitude: An exhibition celebrating serenity

Cinefan, the Festival of Asian cinema, in New Delhi, focused this year on the notions of solitude as described and captured by the moving image. To complement this Dr. Alka Pande curated a show exploring solitude within the ambits of the Visual Arts. The line up of artists was impressive, with works by Somnath Hore, S.H. Raza, Muzaffar Ali, Nazreen Mohammedi, Shobha Broota and many more.

"How can the depth, magnitude and extent of solitude be fathomed in a visual exploration? How can solitude be explored through the juxtaposition of colour, line, shade and form? How does solitude descend as a mantle upon the visual offering, bringing forth new insights and perspective? Is it a kaleidoscope that catches different patterns at different angles?" The questions of significance raised by Dr. Pande were explored through the exhibition held at the Visual Arts Gallery, India Habitat Centre, New Delhi, supported by the Apparao Galleries, Chennai.

Solitude means different things to different people and even to the same person, in a different state of mind. Solitude usually conjures up images of aloneness, loneliness, sadness and a sense of pain. It was therefore very surprising to find among a palette of largely white, the colourful, chaotic canvasses of Jayshree Chakravarthy. At a first glance, it seemed to detract from the quietude presented by the rest and disturbed me. But, on a reflection, I realised that I had walked in with a preconceived notion of solitude, perhaps because the literature that abounds on the subject, had conditioned me to believe that solitude is about serene moments of quietude. These works opened up a whole new window into a solitary moment, where the artist has not been afraid to articulate the cacophony and confusion of her thoughts and feelings of feelings that possible torment. Her work is probably unusual in this representation, because in quiet waters you expect to see thoughts reflected calmly and this turbulence was disturbing.

But, as one turned the corner, Sandeep Paradhar seemed to raise the same issue, using different strokes. He chose the medium of stitch to wound the paper surface, tantalising the tear or rent with the comforting softness of unspun cotton dangling from the ends of the thread, close enough, but yet afar. The marks were akin to Kantha embroidery, in concentric circles, reflecting the kind of confusion that Jayshree articulates and agonizes over, albeit in a quieter, more controlled way.

The concrete figure had also found favour in Shobha Broota's "Homage to Solitude" where layers of soft white cotton were embellished with fluffy little convoluted commas, placed inversely. In this and her other works, Shobha has brought forth poignantly, how difficult it is to say things with paint and brush, that which the texture of fabric and fibre do so effortlessly. This shift in medium for Shobha has been successful, as its communicate about ideas on solitude where

"wandering on... no one to share a happy moment I devote myself to climbing...." Perhaps this traveller's thoughts will evolve on to speak through another voice, discovered through this exploration of solitude, for only "in quiet waters do things mirror themselves undistorted" to reveal facets of being that we are otherwise inhibited to explore.

However, the pencil and ink drawings on paper, of Nazreen Mohammedi, intrigued me the most. The minimalism, the delicacy of thought, the subtle nuance of solitary moments that always have the shadow of another's words and deeds, was so poetic, heartfelt and dignified that despite the small scale, they impacted me and left me feeling comforted in knowing that when " I am going insane form solitude" and need "an insane nk companion", I will have one in thought, pen, pencil, ink and in the memory of those finely etched lines.

The exploration of solitude has brought forth many insights and perceptions on the subject, leaving plenty of food for thought, but I cannot walk away just yet. Not without a mention of those raw wounds that I would love to forget, but cannot, in the face of their brilliant depiction by Somnath Hore, where so much pain has found such beauty in truth. Never before has less meant so much more. Never before has paper pulp seemed so wounded. Never before have I seen pain expressed without a guise or excuse. Such daring introspection can only reveal itself in deep solitude, oblivious of another soul, oblivious to judgement, oblivious to everything, but its gnashes, in the serenity of solitude.

