

A WOUNDED PERSPECTIVE

Wounds seen and unseen, raw, oozing and painful, festering resentment; this is the reality that painter Mona Rai hopes to change, towards charting "*the new Map of the world*". Beslan, Bosnia, Godhra, 9/11, and the Gulf war are just some of the wounds her canvasses evoke. The rest, the personal disappointments and sorrows that we each grieve for silently everyday, may not merit public attention for they do not present the magnitude of pain of these calamities and tragedies, but these are the essential wounds that add to the well of grudges that motivate the senseless and frustrated acts of terror that we are seeing being perpetrated around us. She believes that if we each look inside, into ones deeper self, then we will have the will, the purpose and the power to change the world.

This painter presents to us the soul of the world, covered with gauze bandages and slashed canvasses with roughly sewn edges, not lamenting the pain but celebrating it. The gold and silver leaf, the glitter and sequins add a dimension of hope, to the ugliness of the happenings of our world and the pain we inflict upon each other. In the realm of learning about the spiritual dimension, we are often told that what needs to be healed emerges first, for its negativities to be seen before the healing can take place. In this context, the celebratory aspect speaks of the artist's optimism in this regard. She presents a sensitive side to a body of humanity that could be deemed callous and unthinking, if daily newspaper reports are anything to judge by.

Painting as a medium, is constantly being challenged today by the emergence of new media and also by renewed interest in the old. In addition, Design and craft are gaining considerable significance as modes of creative expression, making the 'variety' awesome and seductive but Mona is not enamoured. She works stoically on the conventional canvas. While her choice of materials does not necessarily define her as a painter, neither can you question her use of canvas or the materials that she works with, on this. Fabric plays an important role in Mona's vocabulary as do its making and processing materials and techniques. She 'dyes' the fabric. She sews it. She uses glitter, beads, buttons, mirrors and threads, but works essentially as a painter and not in the mode of a conventional Fiber Artist. She does not revel in the making and use of the materials of fabric and its fibre, as the latter would, however she uses particularly, the same kind of materials, to express specifically, a particular point of view. Rai is a collector of the mundane and the useless. In her studio, she has accumulated a variety of bottle caps, coins, cutters, pencils, washers that have been discarded, along with mud and sand as well as sequins, beads, glitter, powder colour and much more. She is inspired by the use of fabric and with materials associated with the world of textiles. She has a very refined sense of dress too, but for her, fabric is merely the medium and not the essence of her expression. This allows her a certain irreverence in the handling of the material that makes the eventual 'canvas' visceral, violent and macabre, imbuing it with a sense of repulsion which is often what attracts Mona's attention to many aspects of life.

She is admittedly fascinated by the crass vulgarity of Kitsch, festivals and carnivals and B-grade South Indian cinema, of materials that are “so shiny they squeal”. However her canvasses are distinctly spartan by comparison. All the references are there but distilled and pertinently mentioned to offset and highlight the austerity of the backdrop she is talking about. Through this she questions the contradictions and paradoxes of life and attempts to put the world around her into some kind of rational perspective. She says that she is concerned about the abuse of power and is wary of its negative consequences. She mentions specifically the atomic bomb as an example of an invention intended for constructive purposes that was used to wreak havoc and destruction, to elucidate the point that power needs to be re-evaluated and its potency reconsidered for the world to be a better place – to pave the way for *the new Map of the World* . Her working methodology and environment are not systematic and pristine. The artist at work spatters and thrashes around. This mode is evocative of her impatience and inner rage as she attempts to make some sense of the madness around her. The finished painting draws upon this emotion but is not fully charged with it. The sentiment is finessed with an understanding of the larger perspective of things and a renewed hope that change is imminent.

Her canvasses are large but they do not speak larger than life. The message is there for those who are in synchronicity with the nuances she brings forth. She does not impose her ideas but is concerned about the festering wounds she has presented in this body of work displayed at the *Nature Morte* gallery in Neeti Bagh New Delhi. Here we see ‘uncensored’ images of brightly coloured fabric pulled through holes in the canvas surface. The violent gnashes in the ‘fabric’ are barely disguised by the layers of gold and silver leaf, while the implication of dripping paint does not leave the viewer unmoved. The unlikely glitter on layers of gauze bandages arouses curiosity and the inevitable questions. She wants us to think and she succeeds. Mona Rai, the artist, compels us to re-evaluate our world and its system of values. A native Delhite, Mona has a master’s degree in psychology and has been painting for more than four decades bringing forward ideas that are inexplicable yet articulate, that elude words but leave indelible impressions.

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