

<https://www.thehindu.com/entertainment/art/figments-of-reality/article25371775.ece>

Solo Show : A Summer Night's Dream, made in collaboration with the NGO-Khushii.
Tao Art Gallery, Worli, Mumbai - (19 October 2018 - 10 November 2018)

Review : Figments of Reality by Zahra Amiruddin



Rulers of The Magical Kingdom | Lightbox | 54.2 x 36 inches

Artist Ranbir Kaleka merges imagination and real life scenarios in single frames

Behind the glass windowpane that overlooks the sea shore of Haji Ali, exists a world of swirling prima ballerinas, cheetahs admiring their own reflections, and galloping unicorns. The alternate universe is cased in various canvases and light boxes across the room, flitting from one imaginary story to another. The digital mixed-media paintings are part of artist Ranbir Kaleka's new solo show, A Summer Night's Dream, made in collaboration with the NGO-Khushii.

Magical realism

Known for his multimedia works that often surround the themes of animals, sexuality, space, and tactility, Kaleka's most recent show combines both, fantastical and realistic elements. For example, in a painting titled 'My Sacred Space,' Kaleka draws his studio scattered with flamingos, a monkey riding on a camel's back, the Roman Colosseum, and a green Vespa. While the scene looks surrealistic, the artist is in disagreement. He'd rather term it as magical realism. "What I create is in the realm of possibility, unlike say, depicting an elephant with wings!" Kaleka exclaims.

Over the course of a year, the artist ideated closely with the Khushii foundation, with whom he has been involved with since 2006. The NGO works for the upliftment and development of underprivileged children, women, and vulnerable families. To ensure the collaboration, Kaleka left the naming of the pieces to

members of the foundation. Spotting influences of a Shakespearean era, dripping with tales of fantasy, the NGO thought it would be fitting to play along the lines of Shakespeare's, A Midsummer Night's Dream.

Personal motifs

During Kaleka's MA course at The Royal College of Art in London in 1985, he was taught to question his own art. One of his professors asked his classmate whether the horror painting he was creating was successful in scaring himself. Learning from that, Kaleka explains, "When I create, I have to be mystified myself. There is never a fixed meaning to my artwork. That's what intrigues me."

That possibly explains why one can see random elements strung together in Kaleka's art, ranging from phases of a new moon, planetary cycles, peacocks, elephants, lions, and zebras. Teapots, tables, boats, and abandoned picnics also make an appearance in the same frame. One of Kaleka's favourite elements is a woman's lone sandal lying in the grass. He comments on how different times change the reading of a work. "In a more romantic era a lone sandal in the grass may evoke something completely different to the dread we feel today imagining a gruesome scenario," says the artist.

Art and technology

Since Kaleka is excited about experimenting with different forms, he has created these particular artworks through digital collaging, and archival inks. Some paintings are made by collaging over 2,000 layers on a computer screen, with hints of oil paints added to the canvas after printing. But what the artist is particularly proud of are his Duratrans Lightboxes, a technique invented by Kodak in the 1970s. The same digital paintings are illuminated by backlit graphics, making them light-and-up appear to be 3D.

When asked about his artistic process, Kaleka says that he doesn't work with completely new thoughts. "These things have lived with me for a long while," he says. And like any artistic mind swimming with ideas, he waits patiently, with bated breath, for the scene to come together, and the stark white to fade away. The show is ongoing at Tao Art Gallery, Worli until November 14