

## Sacred and Profane: T. Venkanna

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T. Venkanna, *Untitled Beauty*, Oil and acrylic on canvas, 96" x 144" (Diptych), 2009.

MUMBAI: What makes the wholeness of T. Venkanna's visual representations is the closely knit up dissolution of its counterparts. In almost all the visuals of *Sacred and Profane*, show held from 15 March - 15 April, 2010 at Gallery Maskara, Mumbai, the base layer of his works proposes disintegration.<sup>1</sup> In his collage and mixed-media painted works Venkanna takes references from various European modernist and postmodernist art works. His reference to these works is more than mere quoting a particular time/artist from the history. He imagines a comprehensive representation employing words, symbols and art-historical references within which sexuality, through a phallic-presence, maps the relocation of a modernist identity to contemporary times taking into account the alienation of sexual identity.<sup>2</sup> If 'modernism' created a fetish by capitalizing on 'beauty' or female-body, Venkanna's admittance to the Dadaist/postmodernist attempts uphold its sinister side in depiction of a sexual fantasy. In *The Real Self-Portrait* Venkanna closely embarks upon 'pixillation' as a unit or inevitably dense component of a computer image. In this work, by minimizing the scale of self-photograph within the image of phallus, Venkanna adds to the anonymity of self-portrayal - the way repeated imagery in Andy Warhol's works lead to the desensitization of the *Accident* it projects; Venkanna's work leads to self-dissension on fetishizing sexuality.

In the large diptych *Untitled Beauty* one side features a painted collage in Dadaist style of the various parts of the female face which are constantly fetishized by the media and by society at large. This idea of collective beauty is but a fragment of the whole. The work makes reference to artists like Andy Warhol,

Jean-Michel Basquiat, Damien Hirst and Paul Cezanne. The painterly quality is brought out in this haunting depiction of beauty that is at once horrifying, yet arresting in its presence and permanence.<sup>3</sup>

There is an undercurrent of sexual politics at work in the sculptural interventions by Venkanna. Often

the sculptures portray hybrid human animal (human figures with masks) in a posture of sexual intercourse with an animal.

'The lion heads the food chain in the natural world. He has ownership of both biological and sexual power. Man has assumed such a role and superseded all biological hierarchies within nature. Venkanna expresses dismay at such a violent and deviant shift with this work and calls for a return to order... Too Hungry Lion depicts what modern man has made of the natural order. He has wrested all power from the lion, as shown in his wearing a lion's mask, and he now commands and abuses all innocent underlings (human or animal) not only sexually, but completely'.<sup>4</sup>

Venkanna's works could be viewed through some of the above mentioned frameworks, where a social disintegration is proposed. There is no utopian vision, rather it confronts the world which might have been so, and come to interweave a sinister system within it. Fundamental to the quality of Venkanna's works is the trope of sexuality which he intervenes through his child like energy.

Footnotes:

[1] 'In the modernist work, the elements were fully integrated. Each element spoke only as a part of the whole, without a separate voice. In the realist-narrative work, the second-order parts as we called them had a life of their own, leading to a more open ended and less autonomous structure. In the new collage inspired works the elements are experienced as fragments, their internal relations

strained, distanced and at times uncanny. To bring such fragments together as parts of a work of art, the artist has to devise a structure of even greater openness. The structure has to have the resilience and breadth, and the wit, to somehow hold together the fragments of authentic meaning available to us today, without denying their reality as fragments...' Sudhir Patwardhan in "The Work of Art in these Past Few Decades", *Embarkations, The Millennium show at Sakshi Art Gallery, Mumbai, January 2000*

[2] In *Man Playing with Two Pipes* a singular demon like caricaturist black-figure with an autobiographical reference is painted with implied wit on to the backdrop of a sexual kitsch - a digital transfer of 50s and 60s British pin up magazines, construing a wit around entwined meanings of the numerical '2' and the pipes (one being the ejaculating penis while the other the blowing musical pipe).

[3] Abhay Maskara in the Press note for *Sacred and Profane*

[4] *Ibid.*

## Construct - Deconstruct: Puja Kshatriya

Jigna Padhiar



Puja Kshatriya, *Floating Men* - Construct-Deconstruct Series, Oil with Blade Scraping on Canvas, 50"x60".

MUMBAI: Puja Kshatriya exhibited paintings and sculptures at the Museum Gallery, Mumbai from December 7 to 13, in a show titled, 'Construct - Deconstruct'.

Kshatriya's interest in illustrating the human face and body continues from her earlier shows, namely 'Mapping the Terrain' (2007) and 'Reality and Metaphor' (2005). 'Construct - Deconstruct' comprised of eight paintings and five larger than life sculptures, aptly layered with references and metaphors, both personal and external to human.

A shift from, more to less, complex to uncomplicated, from youthful faces to the ageing and the frail, from the last show to this, Kshatriya seemed to have made a conscious effort in discarding complex elements and employed cleanness and austerity.