

I M A G E S

When art and nature intersect

Shambhavi Singh's 'Lonely Furrow', shown recently at the Talwar Gallery, New York, represents the drama of creation and regeneration.

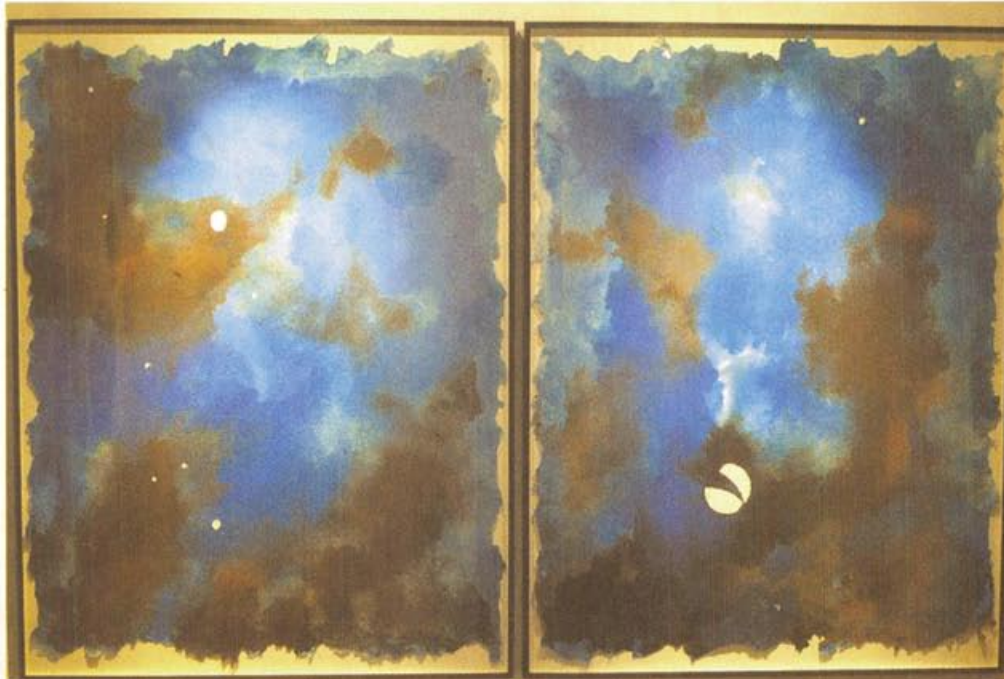
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Paintings establish a play with visually and narrative, speaking of compositions in terms of their landscapes and how they simultaneously attempt to connect many elements into inescapably fragmented narratives. Having worked on paper, canvas, sculpture, print, Shambhavi engages in what could be called "drawing in the expanded field". She establishes a strategy in conflating the rituals of life and art from her earlier work 'a bird and two thousand echoes: paintings 2001-2006 where she mapped her journeys to South Africa incorporating imagery of "vessels", earthen jugs or transport vehicles... through time and place or in "Lulaby", 2008 focusing on the migrant labourers' from the artist's homeland in Bihar.

Aesthetic experience

"Lonely Furrow", on the other hand, orchestrates an aesthetic experience at the intersection of art and nature. Appropriating and distorting the pristine pictorial elements deployed by symbolism, where Singh succeeds in making their legacy contemporarily relevant. "Lonely Furrow is my constant engagement with the life and struggles of the farmer. Brought up within a principally agricultural family I spent a major part of my childhood on farms of my home state of Bihar. Through this I understood that the farmer across the world despite being central to our lives is increasingly leading life on the periphery. Almost forgotten...hence, my work is pre-occupied by the farmer's life and his existence...."

The rural landscape, the farmer, the earth, is addressed in her hauntingly beautiful and masterfully executed works on paper and print. These land-



QUIET AND GRACEFUL OEUVE: Shambhavi Singh's "Hathiya/Elephant cloud" (left) and "Beej Brahmaand Do". PHOTO: COURTESY: TALWAR GALLERY, NEW YORK/NEW DELHI

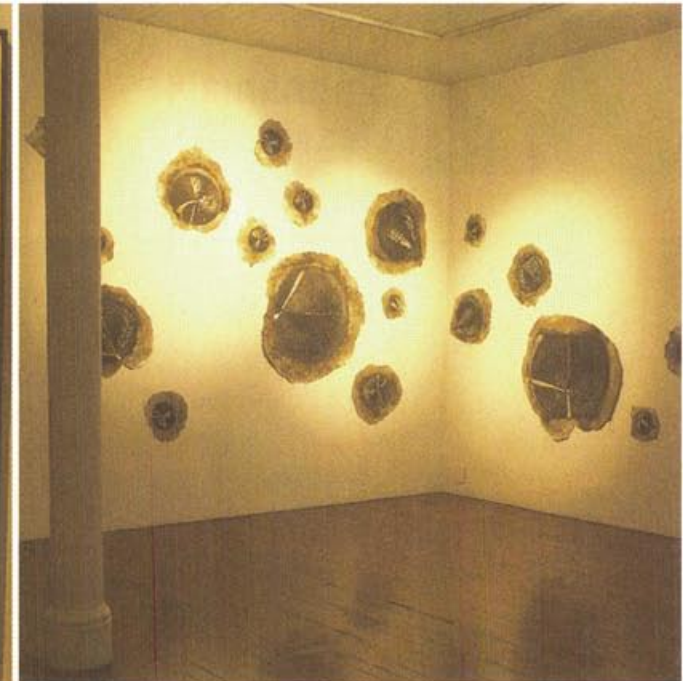
scapes have more to do with process than with place, as they pictorialise the drama of creation and regeneration. The seeds, the clouds, the rain, chart the formation of the earth in its continuing evolution. What appears as large white sheets made from handmade cast paper pulp that dissolve into the whiteness of the gallery wall, leaving the image floating in space is "Khet Kyaari/Furrow", creating a singularly resolved surface or membrane. The choice of the sickle as a metaphor is also extremely important, the image being central to Shambhavi's current body of work, illuminating its socio-historical context. The patterned image is tightly layered, exposing the façade to come faintly to life in a breathing rhythm. The artist dissolves the form boundary between painting and sculpture, based on gesture in "Griha Ek/Sanctum" suggestive of the mud walls in rural homes, with a single niche; absent of the object, a crack which ruptures the surface, that which documents the metamorphosis of thought into form. The vibrant use of monochromatic yellow

low creates as irradiated effect. Shambhavi solves the problems visually, by analysing the artist's reversal of the reductive modernist mandate through acts of appropriation and transformation.

Creative geometries

Her work internalises the need to aim at essential things, to remove redundant effects, to elaborate concepts and fundamental ideas in elementary structures, simultaneously being in touch with the everyday world around her which she inhabits. These various sources have inspired the creative geometries of her work. "Living in a world in which food arrives in magical, plastic packets where children believe that grains are manufactured in factories I, through my art, want the world to remember the farmer.... The sacred nature of the farmer and his family's commitment to earth and the natural cycle..."

"Beej Brahmaand Do/Cosmic Seeds Dark" further explores the ideas of spatial organisation, repetition of form to redefine space. Extending her use of tactile handmade paper pulp, thread and etchings, the work anchors itself on the upper and lower walls of the gallery, creating a stationary web for the interwoven geometric earth-bound forms (seeds) and



those that float in the air above them (stars). The surfaces not only demand extra viewing, but also actually respond to the act of looking. Slowly scanning the image causes one's eyes to adapt to the graduated contrast shifts, which in turn causes the peripheral patterns to shift and simmer, 'it's like breathing on skin' - the effect of the contractions and expansions is like a vibration or pulsation that matches, and so makes conscious, the rhythm of viewing.

Prints demonstrate the shift that occurs when the marks are evenly weighted, coloured and embossed. The paper is accordingly adjusted in tone and texture to harmonise with the image so as not become a sculptural object in itself. These patterns resonate with a chromatic intensity between image and medium rather than the textural vibration of the surface drawings. Shambhavi's, "Hasiya/Sickle" a sulphur tint lithograph on paper stands at the limit of abstraction without jeopardising the subjective elements of emotion, communication and imagination.

In both these works she has imbued the sickle and the seed with endless meanings - each holding a world of possibilities - thematic, conceptual, formal and sometimes spiritual.

"Hathiya/Elephant Cloud", "Barkhaa/Rain" works in pigmented paper pulp explore the theme of creation and metamorphosis and the cyclical nature of life. The leitmotif that courses through the artists' work is her ability to achieve a dynamic equilibrium in all mediums, subtracting while adding, work that engulfs space in its symmetry and asymmetry, open and filled spaces meet in harmony and disharmony, all in perfect turn.

Indeed, Shambhavi's quiet and graceful oeuvre is a deliberate counterpoint to the increasingly aggressive and intrusive nature of images and technology in our everyday lives. Her practice is a testament to the value of unqualified concentration, both in the repetitive gestures that create her subtle compositions and in the enhanced awareness they call forth from the viewer.