

Scoop : from India Text : Abhijeet Tamhane



water colour on paper.



water colour on paper.

Interview with Maya Burman.

"I belong to what I build..." an interview with Maya Burman.

Maya Burman has a peculiar biographical position: she was born in Paris, and her father (Shakti Burman) and mother (Ma'f Deltell) are both artists. Her paintings, mostly acrylic on paper, evoke a dreamlike rhythm and are melodious. What she asserts as the 'value of emotions' is attained by a transitory passage with each work, letting one move with and within the painting. This very aspect drew her from a formal training in architecture to take up painting. Her trip to India was an important moment for this shift in her life. At the age of 26, Maya decided to practice as a painter. Her solo shows are rare in India, and yet she is known to Indians. My questions, on an email interview as she lives in France, had a bit of my curiosity about her decisions. Also, I was inquisitive about why do her paintings look as they do? What are her explanations, and what are her positions on the image she makes.

Abhijeet Tamhane : Does 'being brought up in a family of painters' change or assert the course of life as a painter? Does it enhance, or even affect decisions taken as an independent painter?

Maya Burman : Being born in a painter family is important and can assert the course of a life. I was brought up with painting around me. I was playing in my father's studio while he was baby-sitting! I had to continue to live with this rhythm. So much so that this childhood affected my career decision. I decided to be a painter, when I was all set to be an architect.

My painting is a blend of everyday life subjects and surrealistic items that give an oniric (dreamlike) spirit to my painting. This spirit can be found also in my parents work.

That is not made purposely. It's may be a part of education of inner personality that appears into the painting.

A. T. : Critics have wrote about the 'tapestry like effect where everything is subordinate to patterning, reminiscent of the French art nouveau tradition' would you agree with this observation?

M. B. : Some people find in my work a reminiscence of the French 'art nouveau'. They are right but it is something I never thought about. As in 'art nouveau', you see a lot of details (geometrical and floral) in my work. All those sources of inspiration are there in my painting, but nothing is done purposely. They are like food that a painter needs to get energy to paint again, to achieve more to go beyond what might be an expected moment while painting.



A. T. : A reference to Picasso (during his return from war and his afterlife in Spain) also finds place while critics talk of the healthy-and-innocent adolescents in your paintings. While such an evocation for a viewer is accepted, you might have some different explanation for the boys and girls, women and men that populate your painting. Will you please elaborate?

M. B. : A reference to Picasso is in a way right. He is a painter whose work I appreciate a lot. When we talk about Picasso, that is not just 'Guernica': I tend to prefer the earlier works which are more innocent.

I see my work like a theatre play. With a lot of characters moving everywhere. I see my work also as a journey of life. Nothing is static. You should not get focused on a central subject. All the details have their importance for the work to be balanced.



A. T. : While you diffuse the centrality of the subject, you also see to it that all characters in your theatre of paintings get equal attention. In doing this, the division of space that occurs to your paintings reminds an Indian viewer like me of the miniature painting tradition. The perspective looks different (you do not choose to show 'closer and far away objects'), as it evokes similar intimacy as that of miniature painting. Would you regard Indian miniature tradition as a source of your artistic memory? What are the other sources that inform your oeuvre?

M. B. : Miniature painting and Medieval European painting are important to me. The naive aspect and symbolic aspect of these paintings, in particular, informs my oeuvre. The organization of the space invites the viewer to come close to the painting and analyze all the details. He cannot be just passive but has to participate if he wants to



water colour on paper.

discover all the secrets of the painting.

A. T. : How do you build such an interplay of emotions?

M. B. : I spend a lot of time on each work and I go through a large range of emotions by the time I complete one. My work is like a kaleidoscope of those emotions, materialized on paper.

A. T. : What are you more akin to: 'Pattern' or 'Naqsheeh'? While one knows both mean the same, the question is about your cultural sense of belonging, and longing...

M. B. : Being half Indian and half French, my life and my work are just in between. I'm a Parisian girl who is still surprised to find so much echo in her when she is in India! I belong more to what I build than to a peculiar part of the world.

A. T. : Visual artists who retain and manifest their

positivist worldview are fast becoming a rare species. In a world full of political art, what does your persistence mean?

M. B. : So I'm not politically correct but who cares? I paint first for myself. Painting is an everyday battle for me. Therefore, when I reach my studio, I want to appreciate the time I have to paint in its totality. So I don't spend that time saving the world or talking about politics. I put in my painting what is dear to me, what is creating emotion. I believe in the personal or esthetic value of emotions.

Abhijeet Tamhane is an art critic based in Mumbai, India. He has been a commentator on the post-1997 scenario of visual arts in India. A believer in the potential of languages, he also writes in Marathi. While he writes in English with many magazines and webzines, his Marathi writings are mainly with Maharashtra Times, a newspaper where he works as a chief copy editor.