

CHORAL MONOLOGUES

A Solo show of recent works by Artist **Devidas Agase**

Curated by **Sushma Sabnis**

Venue: Jehangir Art Gallery,
Gallery 3, Kala Ghoda, Mumbai - 400001

Date: 24th September 2019 - 30th September 2019
11:00 am to 7:00 pm

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A Painter of Disquietude

There are definitive lines of separation between mythology and history. However in the Post Truth times, one can never ascertain the differences between the two, to the point that fact and fiction exchange places and propaganda is being peddled as 'scientific proof'. As the science of the conscience is stifled to administer control over a perennially conflicted populace, the dissenting voices are forcibly muted or converted into an assenting chorus heralding the dominant fad of peddled beliefs. In such circumstances of monitored and metered living, one has to adapt and adjust on a regular basis or drown in the apathy of a fanatically driven system. One ends up playing the role/s that they are expected to emote, however clichéd; the selfless farmer, the clueless millennial, the enthusiastic officer-goer, the corporate stooge, the overambitious corporate cartel, the sedate fence-sitting artist, the benevolent conformist worker, the obedient homemaker, the devoted party workers, the spokes in the money wheel and the faith peddling human kiosks etc. At any given time an individual is playing at least two or more of these roles if not all of them, metamorphosing themselves into puppet like entities; human at birth, but robotic in existence. Artist Devidas Agase finds his inspiration in these multi faceted puppet-like robotic humans, and their interdependencies to create his new works for the show.

While Devidas tips his hat to the infallible adaptability of the metaphoric puppet forms he creates, it is also very important to question the cause of these forced adaptations. In nature, adaptations of any kind are devised by either a predator or the prey. In the case of human beings however, the predator and prey are also interchangeable positions reflecting power. In such a case, the protagonist in the works, becomes a puppet with many hands and legs and sometimes even heads. The motif represents a cross section of humanity whose whole and sole aim in life is survival at any cost. This new suite of works adhere to the patent puppet form, one or many in certain cases, to further a distinct narrative which has been on the artist's mind especially in recent times.

The two suites of works on display could be broadly demarcated as the Mythology series and the Farmers series. While the protagonists of the works remain a constant, the perspectives change just enough to evoke various responses from the viewer. An ability to adapt to different situations also means subjection to that many stressful situations and the unwilling/willing suspension of the primal instinct of fight or flight. The artist dwells deep into these psychological compulsions and comes up with numerous perspectives and the utter miscalculation of human perceptions. In doing so he inadvertently unearths the throbbing hypogea vein of conflict and the brutal power struggle for survival by the suppressed in society.

The Mythology series revisits known mythological narratives of Indian origin as points of departure in the works. As one can see closely, these works are not merely illustrative of the dominant and accepted narratives. They are depictive of today's times as the narratives have been rebuilt to create a new visual closely adhering to contemporary situations. The mythological stories of Navagraha, Dashavatara, gods and goddesses of water, earth and other elements inhabit the works, however their purpose seems to be different from their earlier job profiles. Some works circle around the world wide looming concerns for diminishing water resources. The god of rain Varuna is shown playing hide and seek with distraught farming communities battling drought and famine in some of the works and in others ruinous

wrath of floods render the lands uncultivable. One has seen news reports of calamities world over, most of them related to various stages of the water cycle caused by climate crises; Devidas deftly portrays these dangerous situation in the most subtle of ways.

Agriculture is a community activity with social, economical, political and cultural apron strings. There is a long line of bowls which demand filling and often the one that ploughs the land is left with an empty bowl. Devidas, coming from an agrarian background understands the orchestra of an empty bowl and an empty stomach and addresses it in some of the works. This superimposition of social issues of today, upon the parochial mythological narratives of yesteryears creates a synergetic transmutation. The works take on a life of their own, where the puppet human is tested for an endurance quotient against mental and physical assaults either caused by socio-religious or political stressors or self inflicted by social conformity and pressures. The unaccountable farmer suicides in our country is an alarming statistic which corresponds to the failure and ineffectuality of a system towards its population and has been addressed in an astute way in the works.

The Farmer series finds its origins in the mythology series, not just in style or the figures, but also in the way the artist chooses to articulate the narratives. One could infer that the Farmers series is an extension of the Mythology series in the naturally progressing art process of the artist. The Farmer series employs the puppet figures to address the issues faced by the agrarian communities in the country and the world today. Social issues are known to invoke a sharp response from the artistic temperament and while Devidas clearly responds to it, his visual language stays subtle and eloquent. The artist uses mythological narratives as a tool, a lexicon to articulate a contemporary world. In doing so, he breaks the barrier of conformity of the time anointed narrative itself and deftly introduces the contemporary narrative. Even in the Mythology series works, there is an ingrained contemporaneity which seeps through. While this could be seen as a silent socio-political critique, it is done inconspicuously, quite like the vivid literary style of satire used in Vidamban kavita in Marathi literature to critique a system from behind a veil of humour or masterfully timed metaphorical tales.

Another aspect of Devidas' works is that one is reminded of puppetry, more specifically shadow puppetry traditions in India and the world over. Shadow puppetry has been around since prehistoric times and has been the precursor to theatre, film and other visual art mediums. However, unlike in traditional shadow puppetry, here the joint-limbed figures are not lit from behind the screen for projection, but laid out on the screen inviting the clear gaze and interpretation by the viewer, in the light. The reason why this whole unconventional set up is still reminiscent of shadow puppetry traditions is because of the shadow of doubt successfully cast into the viewer's minds. A sense of disquietude fills the atmosphere within which prodding questions beg to be answered. The other obvious shadowing is seen in the deliberate use of vibrant colours in the compositions using pigments, a metaphor of a populace disguising their torment behind the 'shadow' of vivid colours while being constant targets of conflict and inner turmoil. We can fathom this incongruity in the works titled, 'King', 'Deserved king', 'Polymorphic Tree', 'Couple', 'Dream', 'Society'.

In the works, the protagonists' faces are often left featureless or is substituted by farming equipments like ploughs, rain clouds, trees etc intentionally to give an identity to people living with absolute dependency over a system governed by the whims of power. In some works the eyes are shown weeping or angry and listless, as a way to deflect a gaze directed at them, while some have no eyes as

they seem to be exist without any identity and are mere numbers in a state demographic. In the background however, Devidas paints rows of eyes, the sentinels, voyeurs, the Big Brothers, the cc tv-monitoring agencies keeping a close watch on the hapless masses.

There are certain works in the Farmers series which have a slightly serious undertone as compared to the rest. Here the works take on issues of drought and the plight of the farmers, the nationwide protest rallies by the agrarian communities of the country, the Farmer's March being the reference of these works. In other works, Devidas addresses the factors which give rise to the drought situations, deforestation, mining and environmental pollution being the main focus of these works. Within these bigger narratives one finds the linked subaltern narratives in urban or rural situations, intertwined to form the complete picture. The pollution of rivers, the drying up water resources, the political, social and economic muscle which exploits the flow of resources in the name of progress and globalisation are portrayed in the works.

For this show, Devidas also creates a sculptural installation work which is like the carotid to the cause of farmers' issues. A long 2ft x 8ft x 1.5ft row of 36 marching figures, placed as a metaphor of the Farmer's March. The material used is paper pulp and white cement and the works carry small farming equipment made of m-seal. This work is a silent protest, and a tribute to the farmers' issues in the country and a depiction of the artist's solidarity with their cause. There is a huge power in silent protests and one is reminded of large crowds gathering in human rights protests through time from the world over. There is a kind of innate solidarity one would feel with this work and how it transcends boundaries of geography, causes and even time, to stand together in protest of injustices meted out by the state.

The works of artist Devidas Agase are more an adept portrayal of the anxiety ridden mental jugglery that each individual undergoes in today's times. The burden of political preferences, religious belief systems, social status or economic prowess etc have conjured up a millennial identity which is impossible to mirror, yet governing agencies and corporate muscle succeed in careful indoctrination of this false identity by means of consumerism and rampant advertisement. The uniqueness of individuals is blotted out and in its place is created a work force, which fuels the agenda of the nexus between industry and political power. Devidas tries to bring forth the fall out of such discriminatory ideologies and the subtle / direct applications of these hierarchies which build divisive systems. Such systems exploit the resources and the working class to forward their agendas without a thought for the ones who helped create it. The best example is of the farmers' plight in the world and how it effects the entire world in the long run. "History helps remedy the loopholes to ensure the efficient working of a system; Myths merely create rainless dark clouds to gloss over eyes with dimming hope. "

Sushma Sabnis
Mumbai
September 2019



Thakur ka kuan | Dry pigment and water colour on paper | 18X24 inch



Untitled | Dry pigment and water colour on paper | 14X19 inch



Inner conflict (Installation view) | Dry pigment and water colour on paper | 13X140 inch





Researchers | Dry pigment and water colour on paper | 26X32 inch



Navgrahas with yama | Dry pigment and water colour on paper | 10X14 inch each



Dream | Mixed media on cloth | 60X84 inch



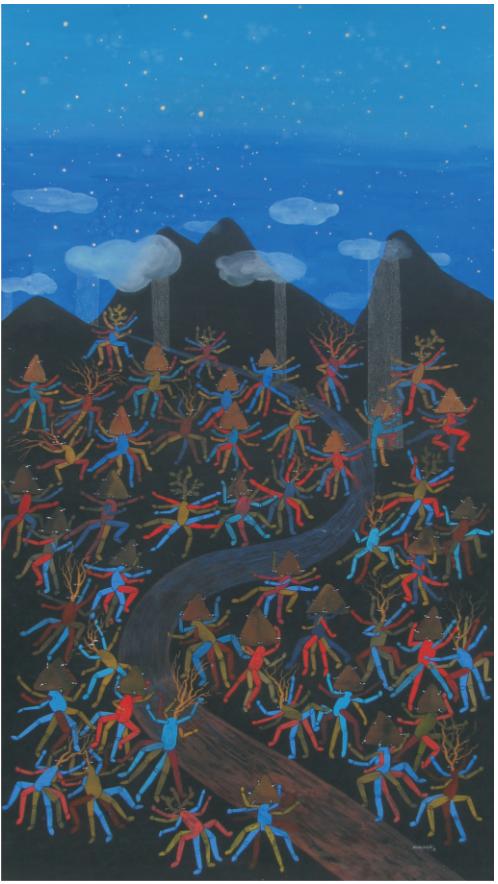
Contemporary incarnation | Dry pigment and water colour on paper | 10X14 inch each



Deserved king | Dry pigment and water colour on paper | 10X14 inch



Society II | Mixed media on cloth | 36X36 inch



Joy of arrival I | Dry pigment and water colour on paper | 60X32 inch



Joy of arrival II | Dry pigment and water colour on paper | 60X32 inch



DEVIDAS AGASE

BORN 09 AUG 1986

EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION

B.F.A. (PAINTING) - SIR J. J. SCHOOL OF ART, MUMBAI 2011

M.F.A. (PORTRAITURE) - SIR J. J. SCHOOL OF ART MUMBAI 2013

SOLO SHOWS

2019 - CHORAL MONOLOGUES JEHANGIR ART GALLERY

2018 - " THE STORY OF THE SILENCED " ICCR AZAD BHAWAN ,DELHI

2017 - POLYMORPHISM ARTIST CENTER ART GALLERY MUMBAI

GROUP SHOWS

2019 -"BODY" CURATED BY JOHNY M.L. SHANGHMUGHUM ART MESUEM, THIRUANANTHAPURAM..

2018 - AMPAS ART GALLERY NEW DELHI.

- "FINDING MEANING" INDIA HABBITAT CENTER NEW DELHI

2017 - AFFORDABLE ART FESTIVAL GOA.

- "ARIEL VIEW"JEHANGIR ART GALLERY MUMBAI.

- "PST-AGE" ARTIST CENTRE MUMBAI.

- ART 35 NINEFISH ARTGALLERY MUMBAI

2016 -"POWWOW" CURATED BY PROF. ANIL NAIK JEHANGIR ART GALLERY MUMBAI.

2015 - LALIT KALA ACADEMY NEW DELHI.

- "FOUR MINDS" JEHANGIR ART GALLERY

2013 - 18TH INDIAN OIL ART EXHIBITION RAVINDRA NATYA MANDIR MUMBAI

- 2012 - CYMROZA ART GALLERY MUMBAI.
- ARTIST CENTER ART GALLERY
2011 - "ART FOR CONCERN FOUNDATION" LEE SUTRA GALLERY MUMBAI.
- JEHANGIR ART GALLERY MONSOON SHOW MUMBAI.
2010 - NEHRU CENTER MUMBAI.

AWARDS AND ACHIVMENTS

2016 - MONIQ ART GALLERY AWARD

2013 - TIMES AND STYLE MAGAZINE AWARD

2012 - ART SOCIETY OF INDIA "NARENDRA SETH REALISTIC LANDSCAPE AWARD"

2011 - AWARDED BY TIME N STYLE (TIMES OF INDIA)

- PIDLITE FINE ART AWARD (J.J. SCHOOL OF ART)

- "50 YEARS OF MAHARASHTRA" AWARDED 1,00000 CASH

2010 - RASHTRIYA KALARATNA AWARD, DADAR.

- SIR. J.J. SCHOOL OF ART ANNUAL EXHIBITION MERIT CERTIFICATE.

2009 - TIMES OF INDIA CALENDAR PRIZE.

- GYAN PRABHODHANI AWARD, PUNE

- STUDY-TOUR LANDSCAPE PRIZE (J.J. SCHOOL OF ART)

- MONSOON LANDSCAPE PRIZE (J.J. SCHOOL OF ART)

2008 - CAMLIN PRIZE, 2008 (SIR.J.J. SCHOOL OF ART)

CAMP / WORKSHOPS

2017/18 - 'KRISHI KALA USTAV BY NATIONAL ACADEMY OF AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH MANAGEMENT HYDRABAD .

2016 - "PARIDHI" FOLK & TRIBAL ART CAMP NEW DELHI.
- CENTRAL INSTITUTE OF FISHERIES EDUCATION VERSOVA MUMBAI.

- CARTIST ART FESTIVAL JAIPUR, RAJASTHAN.

2011 - LANDSCAPE CAMP, SILVASA (GUJARAT GOVERNMENT)

2010 - NEHRU CENTER ORGANISED (LANDSCAPE CAMP)
- PARTICIPATION IN "SAMHITA 2010" (NATIONAL LEVEL SEMINAR-CUM WORKSHOP) DELHI.

PARTICIPATION

2010 - PRADARSHAK ART GALLERY MONSOON SHOW.

2011 - ARTIST CENTER MEMBERSHIP EXHIBITION.

2012/13/14 - THE BOMBAY ART SOCIETY , THE BOMBAY ART SOCIETY - TIMES AND STYLE MAGAZINE GROUP SHOW BEYOND ART GALLERY - PRADARSHAK ART GALLERY MONSOON SHOW.

2016 - THE LALIT HOTEL CHARITY SHOW.



Untitled | Mixed media | 15X12X12 inch

Special Thanks To:

*Mr. & Miss. Nikam, Sushma Sabnis, Johny M.L., Po10tial Teem, Vrushali Mundwa, Roshani Agase,
Teachers, Friends and Family*