

In other rooms

Tara Sabharwal.

The star of Tara Sabharwal is in a constellation all of its own. The years in which she has cultivated her craft were the years of Magic Realism in literature, but in painting there are never easy parallels. Ever since Perseus destroyed the Gorgon by looking at her indirectly, through the reflection in his shield, we have learned to see in painting the reflection of the most exhilarating and the most difficult passages of our life. It is therefore not surprising to find in Tara's oeuvre such a wealth of material completely reinvented and mixed with images drawn from the vegetal and sometimes even built environments. But the dominant motives are those which exist nowhere but in the paintings and the prints themselves. She was fortunate enough to come in to contact with painters who could only inspire her with a confidence in her own way, particularly Ken Kiff at the Royal College of Art in London. Indeed, it was there, some time ago, that I had the good fortune to encounter her work for the first time. Throughout this long voyage extending over three continents and cities, New Delhi, London and finally New York, she was able to expand her imagination to provide canvas and paper with an astonishing wealth of material, color and forms that are never, never, never but her own. This was my overwhelming experience when I was fortunate to see her work once more.

We could easily ask ourselves, how is singularity possible? Such a degree of inner self-regard, or inner dialogue, is as rare as it is difficult. It is solipsistic, on one hand, and totally open to the world

on the other hand, all at once; at the same time it represents something perfectly communicable and totally opaque. In such dream-like states we regain complete autonomy. This sovereign autonomy is the essence of Tara Sabharwal's paintings. Indeed, what emerges at first on the canvas is bound to be treated in a way which will alter the original in its interaction with the other elements arising in subsequent developments. The result is that her singularity of approach, what becomes part of her painterly language, is entirely her own. As I have written above: this is rare and difficult as all excellence is ultimately bound to be. This is of course linked to the element of surprise in these paintings. They perform again and again the repetition of the unrepeatable. They are so near to each other thematically and in their subject matter and yet they are so different from each other as the particularity of each canvas gives it a reading all of its own. As if this very language has to be reborn each time, has to be always at the beginning again. This produces the likeness and dissimilarity, the familiarity that encourages the viewer to take so much for granted which will be then frustrated only to make room for the newness of the unfamiliar. And then of course there are the colors. They are hardly ever naturalistic. In her work one sees a palette of earth and sky and every thing in between intimately and closely related to our possible experience of color in the world. As the embodiment of a constant tension between above and below they are the mediation of light above all. Distilled light, filtered through air, leaves, skins, objects and bodies of all sorts, embracing the worlds of humanity, animals, plants, and stars, permeates her canvases.

Her use of color gives painting the quality of crystals, mineral layers of earth, water and air. In Tara Sabharwal's pictures the air itself is to be felt in all the other elements. Where ever these images and configuration are coming from, world soul, archetypal human psyche, or nature, evidently, the moment they have

appeared in her extrapolation they undergo such a radical treatment and transformation, they are no longer what they were, but acquire identity and force from their new abode in this canvas, and in this canvas alone.

We will never know the ultimate source of our imagination. What we do know, however, is that some of us are given the gift of communication with the source. Tara Sabharwal seems to have this gift, which is also her gift to us, in offering these myriads of reflection of our lives in misery and happiness, in pain and pleasure. There is hardly a greater gift than this.

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New York 13.April.13

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