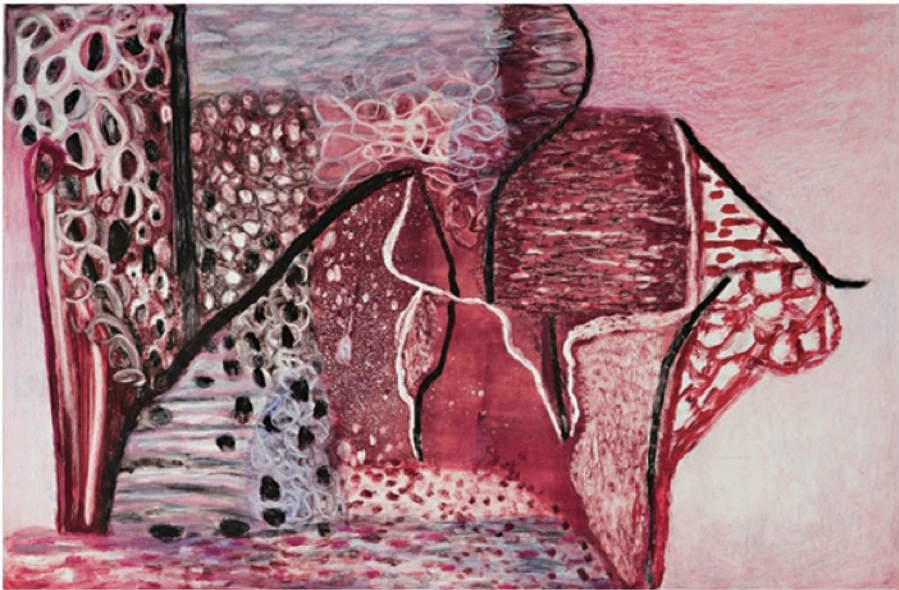


DECONSTRUCTING COLOUR



VIVID: (Top Left) 'Lush Lands' and (Top Right) Subterranean; (Bottom Left) Boundaries; (Bottom Right) Dive (ghost of Solid Ground) painted by Tara

PHOTOS: TARA SABHARWAL & ELLIOT SCHNIDER

TAUGHT AT THE WORLD-RENOWNED GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM AND TRAINED UNDER PADMA VIBHUSHAN KG SUBRAMANIAN, TARA SABHARWAL NOW DIVIDES HER TIME BETWEEN THREE DIFFERENT CONTINENTS — USA, UK AND INDIA. SHE TELLS US HOW HER SHOW, 'THE OPEN WINDOW', IS AN ODE TO HER LOVE FOR COLOUR

Drishiti Vij

SIXTY-YEAR-OLD Tara Sabharwal has spent more than half her life as a painter. Her inspirations are multifarious, just like her homes. Dividing her time between India, USA and UK — Tara seeks inspiration from several maestros: Norwegian artist Edvard Munch for the emotional urgency of his paintings, French painter Pierre Bonnard's for his vibrant colours, Spanish painter Francisco Goya for his invisible structures and Bengali polymath Rabindranath Tagore for the modern outlook he had towards literature and music.

Yet, none of them resonate with her like Indian artists: Arpita Singh, Nasreen Mohommedi, Zarina Hashmi, Nilima Sheikh and Madhvi Parikh do. "Many of my favourite artists are women. They have come a long way, and they have a hard time making art along with wearing many hats at once. Women have to be clear that they want to dedicate their life to art and then things follow," says Tara.

Her recent show, 'The Open Window' marks her return to the awareness she sometimes felt as a child. "I set my brush free, and

observe my thoughts until my mind begins to shut down. As I painted, a moving world of colours and shapes emerge and dissolve at an open window, transcribing the unseen, unknown within," she says.

"After showing in New York, London and Dusseldorf, I felt I was ready for a change. I spent all year experimenting and finally, through making mono prints, I arrived at a new expression. At a Printmaking workshop in NYC, I'd take a spontaneous colour expression from a large plate by wiping out oil-based inks, going negatively instead of positive. Then I develop the image in my studio, very delicately, stitching in subtle transparencies with watercolour. This is how the new work got conceptualised. It is not a linear development from my earlier works, but a kind of departure or a game changer," she explains.

Colour is almost a way of life for her, as she points out how it's also form and space, object and background. "Colour is my way of reaching out to myself. Before I begin a new work, I close my eyes and meditate (often in the train on my way to the studio) and get in



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Tara Sabharwal

touch with an interior energy. What comes to me is usually colours, or a feeling that transcribes itself into a colour. This becomes my anchor and guides me in beginning the painting. Once it is mid-way, it takes a life of

its own, and moves towards its own resolution. It is the crown, and needs line, tone, form, texture, space and composition. Everything is a structure for it to be celebrated," she elaborates.

Her love for colour drives her to use water-based mediums like watercolour, ink, case in, egg tempera and acrylics. Her present work also combines water-based and oil-based inks, that are suitable for paper as their pigment content is high. "I enjoy using these two mediums together, one for its boldness and the other for its subtlety," she says.

Unlike many artists, who dive into the realm of their own art, Tara also utilises her time to teach. She has taught at the Guggenheim Museum — a landmark for 20th-century architecture and home to modernists like Pablo Picasso and Piet Mondrian.

She believes, "Both teaching and art-making require listening. Painting is a way to reach into oneself and access one's deeper self. It is a solitary activity, a form of meditation or *sadhana*, that can help one shed one's ego to reach open awareness that we knew as children. To enter into this space one

Art galleries she loves:

- ◆ Art Heritage in the 80s when Mr and Mrs Alkazi encouraged the arts
- ◆ Gallery Espace as Renu Modi has a good eye
- ◆ Art Alive, my own gallery, where Sunaina Anand is inspiring and a pleasure to work with

needs to be quiet so we can listen to whispers from within. Teaching requires a similar tuning in. When one can reach out to others, be it teaching students or studio visits with colleagues, it is deeply and mutually satisfying." Born in Delhi, Tara went to MS University, Baroda to study painting under professors like KG Subramanian, and Gulam Mohammad Sheikh after Delhi Public School. After graduation, she received a scholarship from the British Council to do her Masters at the Royal College of Art, London post which she returned to India. In India, she took part in three solo shows in Delhi and Mumbai and then went to London. Following this, she got two-year-long-residencies in England. In 1990, she moved to New York City. ■