



TARA SABHARWAL

IN OTHER ROOMS
A SOLO SHOW OF TARA SABHARWAL

SEPTEMBER 2013

ART ALIVE GALLERY
S-221, PANCHSHEEL PARK, NEW DELHI

art**alive**
GALLERY



Grey Tree

I first met Tara when she was a student at MS University, Baroda, India.

Over the years our paths have crossed in India and now in New York, where she has been part of the community of painters and printmakers for the last 23 years.

Since art school, she has been working consistently to develop her personal expression, painting in a variety of mediums and making prints. She studied woodcuts in Japan and continues to make etchings with multiple-color plates. Her work responds to her surroundings and the passage of life.

Color is essential to her practice as an artist, in her new body of work the exuberance of colors gives a vitality to organic forms.

I have confidence in her talent and wish her well in at the upcoming shows in US, Europe and India.

– Zarina Hashmi

Zarina Hashmi was born in India. She graduated from MU Aligarh, India, where she studied science. She is represented by Luhring Augustine Gallery in New York, Galerie Jaeger Boucher in Paris and Gallery Espace in New Delhi. She lives and works in New York City.

In other rooms

by Yehuda Emmanuel Safran

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 into 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

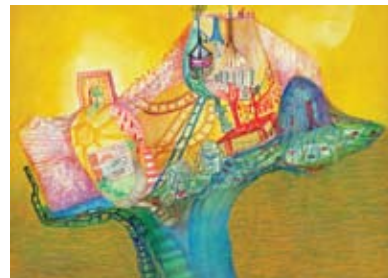


Animal Eyes

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 had the good fortune 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 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 the subsequent developments. The result is that her



Webs

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 everything 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 the air, leaves, skins, objects and bodies of all sorts, embracing the worlds of humanity, animals, plants, and stars, permeates her canvases.



Pleasures of Rootlessness/Balance

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 an identity and force from their new abode in this canvas, and in this canvas alone.

Yehuda Safran studied at Saint Martin's School of Art, the Royal College of Art and University College, London, Art, Architecture and Philosophy respectively. Currently he lives and works in Paris and New York. He is a consultant to Steven Holl Architects; Director, Potlatch Art and Architecture Research Lab and teaches architecture and theory at the Graduate School of Architecture at Columbia University, New York City.

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.



Childhood Home

A LAYERED WORLD



Layered World Watercolour and Sumi-e Ink 22" x 30" 2010



Hidden Within Watercolour, Sumi-e Ink & Collage 22" x 30" 2012



White Rain Watercolour, Sumi e Ink & Collage 22" x 30" 2013



Birdland Watercolour and Sumi-e Ink 22" x 30" 2009



Each Breath Its Own Watercolour and Sumi-e Ink 22" x 30" 2009

In other rooms, I find myself

Roobina Karode, Art Historian/Curator

A growing mainstream interest in imagined worlds has drawn us in recent years to engage with stories of spirits, aliens, fairies or ghostly apparitions, where unusual occurrences of the psychic phenomena are allowed to reveal their mysterious presences/energies. For Tara Sabharwal, this could well be the world she creates by indulging in fantasy, visions, nostalgia and reverie. As one sifts through the fuzzy contours of her work, one meanders through the zigzagging paths amidst dense nature that often remind us of the fairytale world- the wizard's castle with bare masonry and its curiously haunted corners. For Tara, these encounters have been a preoccupation since

adolescence, and continue to be a relentless pursuit in her art. She allows the psychic interior to flood out on the surface in imagery that is both real and fictitious. The title of the exhibition hints at this unexpected occurrence. In other rooms, I find myself, could easily



Night Terrace

extend to mean- I find myself in other worlds. Tara is drawn to architecture quite like poets and dreamers who indulge open terraces to gaze at

the moon and stars in the sky, windows, to reach out to distant hopes and faraway lands, lonely corridors that long human presence, canopies and verandahs as places ideal to wander, dream, desire and seek wish fulfillment. What we encounter in Tara's painted world is a certain precariousness, be it the bird land, solitary islands, dense forests or city-fragments. Figures are magically fused into the topsy-turvy dreamscape, easy to be missed amidst dense creepers, roots, vines or a sea of eyes. Visually deceptive, the paintings employ tropes of disguise and mutation that unfold the surprise rather slowly, demanding curiosity as well as attention from the viewer.

Everything Tara paints has the presence of intense imaginings, and seems to be caught in a state of slow



Web Field

awakening, breathing on the surface, unsettled as yet in its own body. The 'strangely familiar' and the 'familiarily strange' are all prompted by the everyday life but acquire composite dimensions so that the inadequacies of the self can be overcome. For instance the human body acquires wings to fly or turns into a tree blossom, or becomes a weightless shadow that effortlessly floats around, appearing and disappearing at will. Tara withdraws from the precincts of the external world, suspends reason for the undirected chain of thought to take over, allowing the painting to emerge through bizarre juxtapositions that are both enchanting and unnerving. In the nocturnal landscape, the ambience of the twilight is amplified with fleeting shadows that signal the dark hour. It is time to step out of hiding places and enter those rooms where one can meet oneself, without any inhibitions or disguise.

This is perhaps the place where many identities, memories and paths collide, and the protagonist attempts accessing her true self. What comes together then in these works alludes to the notions of 'self' in a private hinterland. It is through this, that a gender thrust in her work is also revealed. More so, the imagery that Tara configures defies the conventional notions of perception, excavating and pushing forth the fertile realm of the underground, the hidden, and the invisible.

Early in life, Tara had watched a cat disappear in a drain on the street. She could not get over the incident for a long time, returning several times to the drain with the hope

that the cat would surface. In her yearning for the cat to be alive, she convinced herself of a whole world thriving under there. Over the years, Tara's fascination for worlds that lie hidden below the ground hasn't diminished and she often transposes herself to places other than the visible and empirical. This is sometimes expressed in the act of splintering the earth surface to reveal stalks of plants/trees as they stand above and below the ground, connected and rooted. Tara invariably reads and responds to Rumi's poetry and I quote from the wisdom of Rumi –"everything you see has its roots in the unseen world. Forms may change but essence remains the same".

After having lived in cities located in different continents— London, New York and New Delhi, for Tara, her travels are rich sources for new material that she engages with. Past themes gain new meanings, for instance, the idea

of rootlessness that gets most pronounced with her recent personal loss and long spells of solitude. Homes, paths, journeys recurrently appear in her small intimate watercolours, amplifying the invisible roots that now seem to



Yellow Building

be growing and sprouting above the ground. She is the migrant bird, who deals with homes left, lost, revisited or reinvented. In the painted imagery, we encounter homes that now hang as loops, anchored as if in the sky as colonies of hanging nests woven out of leaves by the baya (weaver bird) - cosy and sheltered, but sometimes dark and deserted. The intricacies of experienced ambiguity pertaining to self and home are revealed through feelings of rootedness and displacement, shelter and fragility, confinement and freedom, interior and exterior, pleasure and pain.

On her last trip to India, from the terrace of her Neeti Bagh home in Delhi, Tara looked at the city that looked unreal/surreal in the moonlight. The concrete houses appeared like blocky airtight containers, akin to beehive-like structures and tall tight buildings claustrophobic against the breezy and free forms of nature.

Tara's formative years of art training at the Faculty of Fine Arts, MS University of Baroda were the most influential in fostering her individual creativity. She was there at a time when the institution was at its finest, with an illustrious group of teachers KG Subramanyan, Gulammohammed Sheikh, Jeram Patel, Nasreen Mohamedi and Jyoti Bhatt to name a few. Equally significant was the presence of Bhupen Khakhar who was very close to the artists of the Narrative school. Tara credits Bhupen's influence in her approach to painting the human form. She expresses, "Bhupen showed us through his work that form does not have to be anatomically perfect and can be sloppy, saggy and weightless for expressive purpose. His naively simple forms



Secrets / Hiding Places 2

were fascinating." She further adds, "Gulammohammed Sheikh's great lessons in art history opened before us a range of pictorial possibilities, and immersed us in the depths of Indian miniature traditions, the nuanced treatment of figures, flora and fauna and imaginative compositional devices". She noticed in Sheikh's own work, elements from Mughal miniatures reinvented on his large canvases to weave personal narratives and the locale of the everyday, capturing seasonal and native ambiances through luminous colours. From K G Subramanyan she learnt the importance of finding her own voice over norms of knowledge and from Jeram Patel a lesson on controlled spontaneity. Tara fondly remembers Nasreen Mohamedi and her emphasis on artistic sincerity in her students and the need for conviction and commitment to their work.

When Tara left India in 1982 for London and the Royal College of Art, she had already started developing a language that indulged colour as its primary force,

attempting its delicate layering that later on made her shift from the viscosity of oil to the airiness of watercolour and ink. Under the tutelage of Ken Kiff, her teacher at the Royal College of Arts in London, Tara's interest in colour and its structural and expressive abilities peaked and her radiantly coloured landscapes emerged out of a loose constellation of brushwork. Perhaps Kiff's approach to painting gave her the courage to bypass the thinking mind and the definite contours of forms. One can of course connect Tara via Kiff to Marc Chagall and his playful spirit, but more to Paul Klee's poetic economy and his belief in the intuitive process by which images arise out of gestural marks and the materials used.

The recent series of works carry the painted vocabulary further to touch upon the elusive aspects of experience through soft washes, light feathery touches of colour and sprinkling of radiant dots. Often one finds juxtaposed minutely sketched imagery against forms painted to faintly register. Transparent layers heighten the hide and seek between leaves, bodies and objects scaled minutely or magnified in detail for certain effects. Things start appearing and disappearing in the painterly maze of marks, strokes and linear forms, fading and emerging through the painterly treatment of atmospheric layers. The long years of working in sumei ink and watercolors display a poetic sensibility that distinctly complements Tara's naïve yet sophisticated

visuality, poised between delicacy and resilience. Colour exudes light as experienced underwater on forms or by forms in the lowly illuminated moonlight. The faint liquid tones interspersed with sharp details create the distance between things through emotive scaling. Even a matter of fact image gains an aura in its blurry presence.



Free to Fly

One of the images that stays with us is of a haunting face that appears from nowhere through a transparent curtain. Its unsettling presence makes us think about both, fantasy and reality as slippery concepts. One is tempted to ask- Is there a split between them? Do strict boundaries exist between them? Even if they did, artists do dare to cross the line and inhabit worlds that are not so easy to dissect or untangle.

Tara Sabharwal is one who enjoys embodying this ambivalence in her art.

Roobina Karode has post-graduate specializations in Art History and in Education from the MS University of Baroda. She is an art educator, writer and curator and has over the years been involved with the teaching of Art History, both Indian and Western at various institutions in New Delhi. Karode lives and works in New Delhi.

DELHI TIME



A Short Visit Home Watercolour and Ink
Composition of 18 works - 5" x 7"each 2010

OUTSIDE ROOMS



In Other Rooms I Meet Myself Watercolour & Egg Tempera 15" x 11" 2012



Two Homes Watercolour & Egg Tempera 15" x 11" 2011



City Hoarding Watercolour & Egg Tempera 11" x 15" 2013



Holding Together Watercolour & Egg Tempera 15" x 11" 2011

“In other rooms I meet myself”

One of my earliest memories is of watching a cat disappear down a drain in the street. I imagined little homes and bright avenues under the ground. This image stays with me.

When I was thirteen I had a head injury while playing basket- ball. After many days of staring out of the window, I saw raindrops fall on leaves. The next day, I painted water in a glass and decided to become a painter.

Multiple realities and the overlapping of time fascinate me. We live the time past in the time present, colored by visions of the time to come; as the present, riding the waves of chance, slowly unfolds itself.

Life has taken me from my birthplace in Delhi to many new places and identities. My pictures of homes left, lost, remembered, revisited and continually reinvented narrate the story of my own migration and a search for myself through it.

Alongside architecture, nature is a recurrent theme in my work. In some pictures, rain becomes an apt metaphor for grief – an uncontrollable outpouring, but also a cleansing and rejuvenating catalyst for renewal. Other pictures celebratethe moods of nature, the beauty of leaf and flower, the resilience of roots and the wonder of life.

– Tara Sabharwal

INSIDE GARDENS



Primary Flowers 1 Watercolour, Gouache & Collage 11" x 15" 2012



Primary Flowers 2 Watercolour, Gouache & Collage 11" x 15" 2012



Garden / Sky Tree Monotype, Ink, Watercolour & Cine Colle 22" x 30" 2013



Garden, Pomegranate Monotype, Ink, Watercolour & Cine Colle 22" x 30" 2013



Web Field Watercolour & Gouache 11" x 15" 2013



Hill Watercolour & Gouache 11" x 15" 2009



Bird Watercolour & Tempera 11" x 15" 2011



Fall Watercolour & Tempera 11" x 15" 2011



Secrets/ Hiding Places 1 Casein 22" x 30" 2011



Secrets/ Hiding Places 2 Casein 22" x 30" 2011

EYES/PARTNERS



Partners Casein 30" x 22" 2010



Red Eye / Fragment 1 Watercolour & Tempera 22" x 30" 2013



Red Eye / Fragment 2 Watercolour & Tempera 22" x 30" 2013



Left Eye, Right Brain Monotype, Cine colle' & Watercolour 22" x 30" 2013



Yellow Eye/ Renew 1 Watercolour & Tempera 22" x 30" 2013



Right Eye/ Left Brain Monotype, Cine colle' & Watercolour 22" x 30" 2013



Yellow Eye/ Renew 2 Watercolour & Tempera 22" x 30" 2013

A PARTNERS



Morning Rain



Night Rain

Hand Printed Colour Etching Limited Edition of 20 6" x 6" each 2013



Rain River Loop 1



Rain River Loop 2



Sacs 1



Sacs 2



Stairs 1



Stairs 2



Foliage 1



Foliage 2



Bouyant 1



Bouyant 2

*I marvel not why someone dies
outside his lover's tent*

*I marvel though when someone loves
and still goes on with life*

– Sheikh Saadi



Dense Rain 1



Dense Rain 2



Red Rain 1



Red Rain 2



Elliott Schneider

Tara Sabharwal

Tara Sabharwal was born in Delhi, studied painting at MS University, Baroda and completed her Masters from the Royal College of Art in London on a British Council scholarship. As a student in London, the Victoria and Albert Museum bought her work and she showed at Bernard Jacobson and Christopher Hull galleries.

On returning to India she had solo shows at Art Heritage and Cymroza galleries and after three years left for the UK on the Myles Meehan fellowship. This was followed by the Durham Cathedral fellowship and shows at the Laing Art Gallery, DLI Museum, and the Darlington Art Center along with teaching in Newcastle and Sunderland Art colleges.

In 1990 Tara visited New York and since then lives between India, UK and NY, making paintings and prints and continuing to show internationally. She has had solo shows at Harewood House, Mercury, La Monte, East West and Rebecca Hossack galleries in London; Galerie Scherer, Michael Oess, Galerie Schwerpunkt and Martina Janzen in Germany; Henry Street settlement, John Jay,

Stephen Harris and Gallery 678 in New York and Art Heritage, Cymroza, Nazar, Sakshi and Art Alive Galleries in India. She has shown at HISHIO, Japan, Orvieto arts festival, Italy and Versailles, Chamalieres and Duoro Print Triennials in France and Portugal. In 2013 she has had solo shows at Arts Karsruhe (Germany), Idler gallery (London), Martina Janzen gallery, Dusseldorf and later at the Manhattan Graphic Center, NYC.

She has taught art at the Guggenheim Museum, Cooper Union, Studio in a school, City University (CUNY) and the Rubin Museum of Art. She has received the Henry Street fellowship, International Cultural Collaboration Grant, Cooper Union Residency, Hishio International Exchange Residency in Japan and her work is in the collection of the British Museum and Victoria and Albert Museum (a second collection) in London, the Peabody Essex Museum in Boston and the Library of Congress in Washington DC.

Credits

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GALLERY

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