

Press Release. Tara Sabharwal. Twelve Gates gallery 2021

Viewing Tara Sabharwal's hybrid paintings is like being transported to a strange ethereal world. Her composite works, made by combining one off oil based monoprints with delicately painted layers of water color and pastel, evoke organic shapes, undersea, tangled intestines, and peculiar creatures. But there is nothing creepy or disconcerting about her forms that plumb the subconscious and prod our memories and experiences. In fact, Sabharwal's evocative imagery of abstracted shapes is brought to life by her brilliant eye for color. Bright hues of cherry, pumpkin, gold, and azure animate her canvasses and compel intricate narratives woven into her web of forms.

Take 'Cascade,' 2016. Luminous shades of sapphire and royal blue highlight what appears to be a cavernous pathway below the sea. Transparent bubbles and white light create a halo around the entrance, beckoning us to enter. Jagged, dark, moss green marks that resemble rocks suggest a hidden mountainous terrain way below the earth. Time stands still as one is lured into this dreamscape that is as mysterious as it is ominous.

Narratives abound in Sabharwal's world that walks a fine line between abstraction and figuration. 'Subterranean,' 2015, also evokes a body of water mushrooming with biomorphic forms. Part vegetation part amalgamations of odd looking creatures, this composition of textured and flat surfaces in shades of blue, green, and red, that appear to move and stand still at the same time, speaks to Sabharwal's ability to create palimpsests that constantly provoke inventive story lines. Like Yayoi Kusama's hallucinatory dots, here too, the lush other worldly terrain filled with little dots enhances its surreal quality. One becomes enraptured by these figures that bring back memories of high school labs, plants in the ocean, and primitive shapes embedded in our mind's eye.

The drama of moving shapes plays out in 'Evening Rush,' 2016, and 'Hibiscus,' 2016. Swathed in lustrous hues of honey and amber, chili red and salmon, the two paintings create a marvelous interplay between movement and stillness. A jumble of squiggly lines in 'Evening Rush,' remind one of fast moving computerized images of traffic, or just data gone amuck. The painting gives off a peculiar kind of frenzy, yet one that is strangely exhilarating. Even in 'Hibiscus,' two suspended kidneys connected to a web of arteries and veins conjure activity and quiet at the same time.

In the black and white monoprint 'Anniversary,' 2016, Sabharwal's tonal manipulation amplifies the constant exchange between the foreground and background. A translucent slithering amoebic shape in the foreground seamlessly transforms into a bed of eyes floating in from the back. This endless play between depth and surface that is created through her sense of composition and light triggers the tug between the familiar and the uncanny in her art.

But there is never a moment when the sense of spontaneity is lost in her work. Indeed, one is drawn to Sabharwal's paintings for its numerous possibilities, and promise of unpredictability. The same versatility with technique, color, and shape can be seen in her series of miniature etchings. Years of experimenting after her initial training at Baroda University in India, and the Royal College of Art in London, has led to a mastery that makes her unearthly configurations look like a capricious sleight of hand.

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