

1989. Stephanie Brown in Art News Magazine

Tara Sabharwal - Paintings & Drawings 25 January - 4 March

Having recently completed a year as Myles Meehan fellow at Darlington Arts Centre and now working as artist in residence at Durham Cathedral, Tara Sabharwal is rapidly making her presence felt in the North East. This exhibition offers a chance to become acquainted with one of the most individual artists currently practising in the region, and it features a varied selection at work including watercolours, oils, drawings and mixed media pieces, all produced over the last four years.

Tara's art is based on an intriguing fusion of Eastern and Western idioms – the result of moving freely between two cultures. Born in New Delhi, she completed her BA in painting at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Baroda, India in 1980, and then spent two years travelling in America and working in New York and Chicago. This was followed by an MA in painting at the Royal College of Art, and in 1985 she went back to India, returning to England again in 1988.

In alternating her contacts with India and the West, Tara allows neither to dominate her vision. Nor does she use her work as a vehicle for the sort of polemical statements made by many young artists whose experience of different racial contexts or cultural dualities becomes the overt and exclusive content of their work. Rather than making explicit references to India, the UK or the USA, Tara's pictures explore the countries of the mind – regions of reverie, enchantment, alienation and uncertainty.

The dominant dream-like quality of the work is evident both in the imagery and execution. Elusive and enigmatic activities and relationships occupy the wrath-like figures which float across quivering landscapes or embrace in ambiguous interiors. Everything appears in a state of flux on the point dissolving and reforming into new configurations everything suggests the capacity to become everything else. A figure's streaming hair becomes another's robe and in turn this merges into the ocean.

A tree takes root in a human cranium while its leaves fly like birds. Nothing defined by solid boundaries. The images are built up with marks which are tentative and nervous or fluid and sweeping so that the compositions convey a sense of openness and immediacy.

Although personal and intimate in quality. Tara's paintings and drawings are also rich in allusions to Eastern and Western art. Indian mythology, particularly as expressed in miniature painting can be seen as an important influence and there are general evocations of European artists such as Munch, Redon and Chagall as well as little quotes taken directly from painters like Bosch or Goya. The result is an art which is both delightful and disturbing and Tara herself has described the process of making

pictures about memories, dreams and illusions as having the wonder and abandonment of play, but also the desperation of escape.

This is a touring exhibition organised by Darlington Arts Centre.