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GALLERY

Picture stories: Energy across the canvas

By Marjorie Husain
Sunday, 03 May, 2009 | 03:41 AM PST |

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Many of Qamar Siddiqi's pictures are occupied by strange, mystic figures. The large scale, narrative work rendered in oil and acrylic paint on canvas was recently exhibited at Chawkandi Art Gallery, where its powerful impact was strangely disturbing. His subjects are forms symbolic of the artist's anguish evoked by his views of the world he inhabits. Siddiqi's expression is described in painted images addressing the opposing views of rampant materialism and philosophic reasoning. Defined by tableaus formed by monumental figures, their message is identified by the symbols which create atmospheric images of varying interpretation.

A former student of the Karachi School of Art, Siddiqi is one of the outstanding graduates of his generation. He works in sequences linked by themes of universal interest. Each canvas contains a continuation; a complete story inspired by considered beliefs. In earlier series the artist pondered on the mysteries of birth and death and the fleeting measure of time between these happenings. His recent work is collectively referred to by the title 'Purity', in which he conveys the social tragedy of man's obsession with material gains. This is expressed as a factor that he feels ensures the continuation of the cycle in subsequent generations.

The serious subjects Siddiqi chooses to explore are beautified by the diversity of the textural elements of the work, moving from transparency to layered figuration, infused with a visually pleasing addition of design. He examines the question of reality in a universally changing world without, 'as he sees it', the assurance and traditions of peace and progression. In a profound personal expression, Siddiqi observes the material goals predominant in the world around him. He shares concerns for the human existence illustrated by figures outlined with an accomplished mastery of line.

One of the most seductive paintings in the collection portrays three female figures; one predominantly scarlet is pattered with diverse design elements. Standing beside her is a soberly dressed figure but illuminated with rays of light; the third figure is dark, surrounded by a deep shadow. All the visuals are open to interpretation and may vary in meaning according to the experience of the viewer.

His idiom includes motifs that he chooses to link his sequences, the all-seeing eye, a graceful plume or quill, keys, flowers, the tempting apple; lines resembling scrambled text. The disciplined palette he favours is enhanced by cross hatching, using brush and palette knife to articulate volumes on form and diversity while using limited elements of colouration.

A number of vertical canvases in the exhibition depict figures in close proximity. At first glance they appear to be aesthetically defined forms deeply absorbed in each other, only the colours clue the observer in to the struggle underway in the purifying of materialism in the psyche. Siddiqi confides that he spends hours each day reading philosophy and creating in imagination each of his composition before beginning his work.

Explaining his work as literature he related: "The paintings are a book and each one must be explained, written down in detail."

Relating to his years as an art student, Siddiqi fills the role of thesis adviser to students of Karachi School of Art, and otherwise divides his time between his family and his studio where he spends hours at work, thinking, sketching, painting, and mixing colours.

Articulating his inner feelings and convictions forcefully, each artwork is carefully thought out to offer articulated syntheses of materialism, philosophy, spirituality and learning. His is also a message of peace, incorporating motifs of his quest for worldwide understanding, tolerance harmony and peace.

Siddiqi is a dynamic young artist who spreads energy across the canvas in his urgency to voice his views on life, and the future of mankind.

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