

VasudhaThozhur: The Artistic Journey for four Decades

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Abstract

It's onerous to make artworks that incorporate completely different or varied mediums like oils, waters, photography, prints, short films and lots of additional work. However, artist Vasudha Thozhur is the unique creator who dares to make artworks that aren't finite with single mediums that's why she is taken into account joined to the team as some versatile artists. There is never a shortage of idea for a creative mind by showing versatility in her artworks. She is an ideal holder and immensely versatile creator, therefore, her life and her working methodology into different style segments so it becomes simple for the viewer to search out a modification in her artworks. The artistic journey of Thozhur and her artworks with in-depth research (as a student, as a faculty member and as an artist) of one of the famous contemporary artists Vasudha Thozhur. It investigates the nature of artworks of the artist and the kind of elements she has used in her artworks. The scope is limited to provide knowledge about relevant issues projected in the artist's work and the type of work or body of paintings artist has produced in her journey of four decades. Assessing, refining and developing an idea about the issues of female, society or self-immolation, into an artistic concept is the primary motive of this research paper.

In this research paper, the aim of the researcher is to introduce to a creative mind of an artist and to introduce the way she has projected the issues of the society (include: -caste taboos, self-immolation) and other feminine issues. The scope is limited to provide knowledge about relevant issues projected in the artist's work and the type of work or body of painting artist has produced in her journey of four decades.

Key words: Unique creator, versatile artists, working methodology, different style segments, society or self-immolation, journey of four decades.

Introduction

The emotion is expressed in a way since time immemorial¹. Without emotion and inner urge art will not be expressed. Through this research paper, the intent is to make it easier for the reader to know about the contemporary artist Vasudha Thozhur and her art works which are mostly based on the issues occur in the society, and the way she has projected the issues in her art works. Vasudha Thozhur is currently based in Delhi. She was born in Mysore in 1956 and educated at the College of Arts and Crafts, Madras, and at the School of Art and Design, Croydon, UK. Also, she worked in Madras for many years, between 1981- 1997. The genius/ versatile artist Vasudha thozhur has done several winning shows each solo and cluster like-: the voice against violence, the anatomy of celebrations or the party plot, edge of desire, ‘beyond pain: An afterlife’, the presence of the past, ‘ new narratives: contemporary art from India’, diverge and lots of additional works and every single show is completely different from another in term of medium, concept, techniques, nature etc. The main objective of this research paper is to provide knowledge about the artist’s creative mind by showing versatility in her contemporary art works. Since the beginning it is tried to provide an easy package of knowledge about vasudha’s art work. Social issues and artist’s self-projection in the art works are all the basic features that are required before sharing the idea. After providing a general knowledge about artist’s art works and artistic journey for four decades, this study tries to give an overview of what contemporary art is by online or other resources. Artist Vasudha thozhur started making art when she was spending her Vacations in Mysore, with her maternal grandparents. At her ancestral home there, she was surrounded by reproductions of Ravi Varma’s (artist) paintings, and by the originals, which were housed in Jagan Mohan Palace, a stone’s throw away. For artist Vasudha thozhur it was a fascinating place with a valuable collection of art and artifacts. Apart from the traditional Mysore paintings, there was a significant body of work from the Bengal School including the paintings of K Venkatappa (artist), a series of Roerich’s mountain scape’s and a few European masters. All these paintings/ art works left a deep impression on artist Vasudha thozhur. Artist’s sister and Vasudha thozhur own self used to try to copy them. The narratives of the epics that were depicted were fascinating for them as children, and a stimulant to the imagination.

Vasudha’s Inspiration from VidyaBhushan and Dakoji Devraj both are Iconic Characters in the Indian art scene.

Artist Vasudha Thozhur was recollecting that she is indirectly attached to many techniques of Prof. VidyaBhusan(1923-1996)who was Vice Principal of the JNTU College of Fine Arts & Architecture which transmitted through artist's aunt in Hyderabad, who studied under VidyaBhushan and DakoijiDevraj. Vasudha inspired bythe visual vernacular of animalistic and phantasmagoric imagery of DakoijiDevraj. Devrajafter finishing studiesfrom the JNTU College of Fine Arts & Architecture, he enrolled at the M.S. University, Baroda, to study processes of printmaking. Andhra Pradesh Lalit Kala Academi gave a scholarship to Dakoiji to go to Chelsea School of Arts London for postgraduate studies in 1975. In 1976 -77 Dakoiji travelled extensively in England and Europe. Transmission of knowledge about art and aesthetics given her an actual sense of Maturity. Her studio for artist Vasudha Thozhur was a yet another version of heaven. The materiality of paint, of oil and soft pastels, charcoal and canvas, the colors, textures, fragrances and the sensations they evoked -were an indescribable pleasure as a child which she got at that time. So we can say that it was a turning point for the artist Vasudha thozhur. After this she started thinking more about the art world.

Every artist has its own purpose to make an art workin the same way Artist Vasudha Thozhur has her own purpose to create an art work so she once stated that "I make art because it keeps me close to a reality which is beyond the transience of life." This statement is totally justified because as we can see in her most of the artworks all are connected with the truth and are about the reality. She truly believes that visual language is more expressive than any other medium. Artist Vasudha always tried to give aesthetic expressions/methods to be able to express her own self to the reality which is clearly visible in her artworks. In most of her art work which includes many mediums like paintings, photography, mix media, she has tried to provide a visual dimension. As her core discipline is drawing and painting artist Vasudha thozhur did many solo and cluster shows in her life time and all her artworks are the reflection of the society and the artist herself. A gallery is always a vision of the persons who runs it.

Art is a great way to express your emotions and feelings. Many Artists use colors, lines, and other elements of art and principles of design to create feelings, such as anger and happiness in their art. Art is usually about self-expression because artists have to feel strongly enough about something to try and put it into a form that they, and others, can come to terms with. This product of their self-expression can help others because there

will always be people who feel the same way, but cannot express it themselves or some artists choose to focus on ordinary objects, and most people do not think a lot about it.

Every artist has his own inspiration/purpose behind their art works, without any inspiration or without any specific purpose I don't think any artist creates an art work. And on the other hand, if we talk about artist Vasudha thozhur inspiration behind her artworks she stated that "Language is of great importance to my thinking, because it is at the root of communication and therefore community. The possibility of a language which goes beyond the structures of intellect and analysis, which includes the emotive and the sensorial, which harnesses all the senses towards such communication, would enable us to live and share our lives to the fullest. Art provides us with this opportunity, and in addition creates the necessary time and space. Most importantly, I also think of art as an antidote to war and destruction, precisely for the reasons stated above."

Moreover, if we talk about the elements of arts, if she enjoys working with any of it the most she stated that "In terms of the practice of painting, perhaps the silence – and the peace that goes with it. Of course, with projects that are partially situated in the public realm, there is a little less of this, but one constant is the freedom to follow, uninterrupted, the flow of one's thoughts and the direction that organically emerges. There is a price that one pays for this freedom, no doubt – financial instability, and a lack of certitude in terms of security, whether material or emotional. But it provides a far more valuable proposition that of individual empowerment and realization in the truest sense of the word, and the confidence that one can survive on the basis of a certain capability combined with resourcefulness. It abolishes slavery more categorically than any law or policy!!"

It is seen that most of the artist's work in a specific medium, but the artist Vasudha Thozhur has explored many mediums to create an art work when I asked her in which medium she is most comfortable working with or which is her favorite medium she stated that "There are no favorites, but Painting forms the basis of my practice as it provides a framework for self-knowledge, actualization and transformation. This in turn brings to bear on what one does in the world – in a more public capacity even. Within the studio one can internalize what is external and process experiences with a view to growing, to taking the next step, conceptually and practically. It is economical in terms of infrastructural requirements and one can continue to work in spite of limited resources, ill health, age, and so on. Ideas manifest in different media, especially today, when there is such a proliferation

of the latter. There are images or moments that one captures with a pocket camera or mobile phone for instance, which one cannot translate into any other medium without a loss of authenticity and consequently, meaning. Therefore, from this perspective, I have no favorites, I prefer to allow expression to emerge through the circumstances or the material/technology that gives rise to it.”

First Phase (her student life in college of art and craft in India and Abroad)

The materiality of paint, of oil and soft pastels, charcoal and canvas, the colors, textures, fragrances and the sensations they evoked an indescribable pleasure in the mind of the artist Vasudha thozhur when she was a child. As she was growing up, she was pretty much about her art career as a path was already being created before she took a conscious decision. She started thinking more about the art world, and enrolled to college of art and craft, Madras, India in 1979. After completing her undergraduate course, she moved to School of Art and Design, Croydon, UK for post-graduation course in 1982.

Artist Vasudha thozhur was once mesmerized when she first saw the art work of great artist Ravi Varma's at her ancestral home, it was a very captivating area with a valuable collection of artwork and artifact's for the artist. Apart from the normal Mysore paintings, there was a giant body of work from the Bengal School consisting of the art work of K Venkatappa, a collection of Roerich's mountainscape's and a few European masters. These left a deep influence on the artist's mind. Without any doubt she must have experienced different perception towards art because she pursued her education both in India and abroad. Because it is obvious that there is a difference of perception in art cultures if we talk about nationally and internationally. As in India art history consists/enriched of many elements, principles and other stuffs but if we talk about the western art there is obvious a difference. But despite off all these differences she was pretty much clear what she wants to depict in her art works and how she wanted to create an art work.

After finishing her education artist Vasudha thozhur worked in Madras/Chennai for many years, between 1982- 1997. During this duration of time, she did her residency at Shaddon Mills Visual Arts Centre, Carlisle and Gasworks Studios, London. And in 1988, she acquired the Central Lalit Kala Academy Research Grant, and in 1989 she obtained the Ministry of Culture Fellowship for Artists. And moreover, in 1996, she grew to become the recipient of the French Government Scholarship and The Charles Wallace Grant.

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Artist Vasudha Thozhur exhibited her first solo show in 1983 at Woodstock gallery London, and in India she exhibited her first solo at Sakshi Gallery in 1987. She stated that “It was an exhibition of paintings – they were neo-expressionist, focusing on the human anatomy in a sense – what goes on beneath the skin and outer surface of the body”. Which we can say was a mixture of Indian and western art perceptions, which she received during her student life. Vasudha thozhur made a debut in her artistic career with her first successful solo show i.e. – “SECRET LIFE” in 2001, at Art Inc. Gallery, New Delhi and Sakshi gallery, Bangalore. Secret life is a body of paintings made between 1997 and 2001 and displayed in March 2001 in Delhi.

Working Process of the Artist in her first successful Solo-Show.

Vasudha thozhur has planned her work in a narrative sequence involving temporal progression from one frame to another. Like most of the artists creates paintings which only consist a single panel of canvas but, she has not created paintings on a single panel of canvas instead her most of the narrative panels consist of two or more frames that is why most of the works are often tended to refer as diptychs or triptychs. Most of the narrative panels or frames were composed was based on the idea of a house with its many rooms, its different kinds of space, which essentially reflects the artist’s “personal space”.

While making this body of paintings Vasudha thozhur believed that the limits of a single frame are insufficient to contain the complexities of what she wishes to engage with, so she evolved/developed a working process or a method of display that is elastic enough. The height of the paintings is about 8-9 feet it is as much as she can handle, physically and most paintings are composed of two or more frames. As her most of the works are diptychs or triptychs, the entire body of work can be hung closed together and considered as one painting or we can say one piece of narrative.



Figure 1- secret life, “Veda”, 1999, oil on canvas (3 panels), maximum height (approximate) 225 cm

Second Phase (Teaching life and The Himmat Workshops)

Likewise, a career in the arts, Artist Vasudha thozhur joined the teaching profession because she truly believed that “Education is the most active form of political intervention, as it shapes the minds and values of the generations which succeed us”. With keeping the above latter in her mind she continued teaching and currently she is Associate Professor in the Department of Art and Performing Arts at Shiv Nadar University. Before that she has additionally taught as visiting faculty at MS University Vadodara, National Institute of Design Ahmedabad and Indian Institute of Crafts & Design, Jaipur.

Artist Vasudha thozhur has worked and contributed in art field for more than three decades so when I asked Artist Vasudha thozhur “According to you, in what ways has the art world changed or it is still the same”? The artist stated that “Things have changed since the digital and technological revolution and with so-called globalization and corporatization in all spheres. Whereas in the earlier decades of the twentieth century, world events such as wars, famines and colonization created radical new forms of responses, like Dada, Expressionism, and the awareness of cultures other than European, post the first market boom during the eighties, auction houses and finance began to exert a far greater influence on artists. While it is encouraging that there is more financial support, it has proved detrimental in other ways.

There has been an addition of dissolution of boundaries between what artwork is and what is not. The discipline has continually been inclusive, and rightly so; however there is additionally the risk of a loss in phrases of parameters of evaluation.

The glamour introduced during the market booms still lingers, and attracts aspirations which have very little to do with art, however broad the interpretation of the term.

A far more positive development in recent times has however been the increasing emphasis on the notion of artistic research as opposed to mere production, and to socially engaged practices that flesh out the potential of art to work against violence and destruction. This has been prompted to no small degree by the collapse of markets and the fading promise of capitalism. This turn of events has created a very real future for the arts, and a replacement for the kind of anchoring that tradition and religion had earlier provided, that is no longer viable given current-day life-styles. It is a difficult transition, but will open new doors”.

She created another bodies of paintings entitled as “Beyond pain” exhibited at Sakshi Gallery & Project 88, in 2013. This physique of work was once supported as a lookup venture entitled as “The Himmat Workshops” and for this, she obtained a grant from the India Foundation for the Arts, Bangalore which regarded at approaches of rooting art exercise in floor realities as experienced in India. It concerned participating with Himmat, an activist agency primarily based in Vatva, Ahmedabad.

Beyond pain is a physique of work which is totally primarily based on the 2002 Gujarat riots, additionally acknowledged as the 2002 Gujarat violence, was once a three-

day period of inter-communal violence in the western Indian state of Gujarat. Following the preliminary incident, recounts how the Hindu mobs attacking Muslim neighborhood's used rape as a weapon towards women—including the Hindu ladies they believed were responsible of associating with Muslims. "The struggles of Gujarat's rape survivors and different women had to also battle for their dignity in their personal communities as many women had been raped.

Art is created and loved via many humans for many reasons. When new visual thoughts are first delivered through the artist, they are frequently considered as shocking, and possibly even as incomprehensible. However, with time the satisfactory and most high quality of these thoughts are accepted. There is nothing harder than trying to grasp what was shocking or illuminating about certain images, or ways of making images, once the shock is gone, and we have all absorbed this bit of visual data into our own vocabularies. Artists show us new ways to see familiar things, and how to interpret new situations and events through various kinds of visual shorthand².



Findings

Artist Vasudha Thozhur artworks are linked with conceptual and intellectual rather than visual. After her first successful solo show i.e. “secret life”, Artist Vasudha thozhur started creating art works which are not only bounded with the canvas and traditional painting medium i.e. Oils, but she introduced new mediums in her artworks.

Being a contemporary artist Vasudha Thozhur stated “that we should be careful about an ‘anything goes’ kind of attitude. If we decide to be inclusive, we should also have certain parameters of evaluation in place, or allow time for consideration, for new entrants to find their balance within the existing dynamics. I think also that not all artworks/ genres can be judged by the same criteria anymore, because they perform vastly different functions. They have to be seen in the light of their particular form of intervention within the cultural sphere. A lot of the time, there are comparisons being made between say painting and new media, or socially engaged practices versus the studio, which are truly facile and reductive. Furthermore, they create hierarchies where none exists in reality”. Artist said that things have changed since the digital and technological revolution and with so-called globalization and corporatization of all spheres of life.

Conclusion

It has been observed artist Vasudha Thozhur’s artworks reciprocate her concern over changes of the global art scene and formation of various art groups, school and forums with their philosophy and motif. There is a strong influences brought prominent impact on her life and career. Whereas in the prior decades of the last century, world incidents such as wars, famines and colonization created radically new forms of reactions, movements like Dada, Expressionism, and the awareness of cultures other than European, context, globally the first art market boom during the eighties, auction houses and finance enables to bring influences on art and artists. While it is encouraging that there is more financial support, it has proved detrimental in other ways. There has further been a suspension of boundaries between what art is and what is not. The field has always been inclusive, and rightly so; but there is also the danger of a loss in terms of parameters of evaluation. The glamour introduced during the market booms still lingers, and attracts aspirations which have very little to do with art, however broad the interpretation of the term.

References

- 1 Artist interview (questioner method) “Thursday, January 10, 2019”
- 2 Catalogue for the body of paintings “SECRET LIFE”(1997-2001)
- 3 Catalogue for the body of paintings “UNTOUCHABLE”(2001- 2007)
- 4 www.saffronart.com/artists/vasudha-thozhur

(Footnotes)

- ¹ Sarkar, S K. (2016), A Glimpse of Scroll Narrative Art: Survival of Pata Painters, *The Achievers Journal, an International Peer-reviewed Research Journal of English Language, Literature and Culture, Vol.2, Issue.1 (ONLINE) 2395-0897/ISSN (PRINT): 2454-2296*
- ² Jirousek, Charlotte. (1995) “The Evolution of Visual Art In the Modern Era“, *Art, Design and Visual Thinking*. <http://char.txa.cornell.edu/art/introart.htm>