

A Brush with Contemporary Artist of Punjab

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Abstract:

This research paper is a very humble endeavor towards the understanding and exploring the Contemporary art of Punjab and making its recognition on the international art scene, after the post independence period with its immense impact on the world art scene. The artists born in Punjab have made their deep impression with their outstanding concepts and modern techniques with their exceptional intellect and psyche. This is the first ever kind of paper to be presented with the various facets and pursuits in exploring the life and art of Prem Singh- a well known Punjabi Contemporary artist.

Keywords: *Contemporary Art, Cultural Heritage, Government College of Art, Chandigarh, Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh, Gandhara Sculptures, The Veiled Woman, Alliance Francaise, National Gallery of Modern Art, Raagmala, Keen William Ltd.*

Introduction

Punjab stretched its boundaries from Afghanistan to Delhi enriching its religious, spiritual and cultural heritage. The Contemporary Art of Punjab is the offshoot of its deep rooted inheritance of art and culture; and bold and powerful as the people of Punjab who are full of vigor, strength and vitality. The art of Punjab has traditionally been very vibrant with myriad colors. Today the Contemporary artists of Punjab have made a significant contribution to the upsurge of creative movement to the national as well as international art scene.

Prem Singh- an eminent Contemporary artist of Punjab, born on 15th April, 1943 in Patiala (Punjab) to mother Mohinder Kaur and father Arjan Singh was amongst four children. He was brought up in the joint family with all the teachings and values of life. He had enjoyed his childhood closely associated with his people around which made him to learn and understand life from very closely and enjoyed every small aspect of it. His keen interests in creativity was motivated and developed gradually with exposure to various activities of his early life. This boosted his interest and kept him practicing and exploring new vistas. He had always enjoyed festivals, music, fairs and street culture which made him to learn art from his early life and used to get inspired by folklores and beliefs which he celebrated and enjoyed, and these had been a great delight for him. The myriad colours which are expressed by emotions had shaped his aspirations and dreams. His contemplative spirit continued him to understand art. He had a great fascination for lion since his childhood which he had found in the forms of toys, woven durries and on the walls of the palace of Maharaja of Patiala, which were all distinct in themselves yet it was the same lion. This quest made him to search his own lion and identity; he started his own search in the journey of life.

He studied from Government College of Art, Chandigarh to achieve his aspiration of life and enlightened seeing creativity. He was further strengthened by his exposure to Government Museum and Art Gallery at Chandigarh with its rich collection of Gandhara sculptures, miniatures and Contemporary paintings at college premises. He got recognition in an art exhibition organized by Keen William Ltd; a company based at Calcutta. This show had increased his interest and had his exposition at Tagore Theatre at Chandigarh. This exposure had encouraged him by having his work selected for the permanent collection of Govt. Museum & Art Gallery, Chandigarh by Chief Commissioner. This was a considerable achievement which boosted his dedication and exposure gradually through his hard work, meaning of life and nature in a humble way. He experienced and explored through the history and nature from a very simple manner and move to his own world of imagination. He had given ample emphasis on hands and facial features instead of emotion and sensuality. Consequently he advanced his own world of imagination, "*The Veiled Woman*" with all her grace and modesty.

The 1984 riots shook the world and left with it deep impact on the heart of society. He breathed the riot hit air in Delhi and tried to express his anguish and agony of victims through “*The Veiled Woman*” series of ink drawings.

In 1985, he showcased his drawings under the title of images from the sacred city at Alliance Francaise, Chandigarh. The year 1990 was observed as the death centenary of Vincent Van Gogh (30th March 1853- 29th July 1890), a Dutch Post-Impressionist who was recognized for his distinguished sensibility and creative perception. Artist Prem Singh was highly influenced by his emotional and spiritual state of honesty expressed in his work. He took an imaginary flight to his time and met him as a tribute to his genius. One of his works of this series is housed in National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi for its permanent collection.¹

Prem Singh started believing that art is an expression which is gained with experience and conception of ideas. It works side by side with aesthetic means and art principles. One needs to go with present concept rather than of era gone to express. He is of the opinion that art is not the expertise but the intellectual quest and an artist needs to be aware of the past, present and concern for the future. An artist needs to create what strikes to his mind without any stress.² He reveals his special interest for the glittering around him the various forms of embroidery done in zari, tilla, gota-kinnari and salma sitare attracted him and gave him immense joy and delight. The shining crowning capitals of shrines reminded him of divinity power. The embellishment of the walls with flowers and leaves in gold and silver gave him immense peace to mind and became passion for him which is attached with royalty and grandeur. He was moved with the thought to produce with gold, silver, copper and bronze beyond its conventional use and explore with new possibilities. In this process, he discovered in the web of his brush strokes a new rhythmic movement underneath. In vast body of arrangement, he registered and composed by outlining them with the use of charcoal. Soon his canvas occurred with new tones and tunes. His new creation entitled all that shines the viewers find the play of gold, silver, copper, bronze and pearl in a different manner as possible. As the shine of moon and sun changes the day and night into a spectrum of various emotions and feelings, he tried to invoke the same through the shine and sparkle of various colors, an organic feel of silent activity of nature. Intensive chirping of the birds in the twilight of the morning and evening, the transcendental music of light with much more is an integral part of his creative quest. Light plays a very important role in his paintings and display of changing tones forms the Ragamala of its own. The shine and sparkle of this visual Ragamala indicates the realization of his growth. **(Plate No.1)**

Nature is his foremost topic to work with, where life pulsates and expresses in various vibrant colors. His works are full of delight and the force from the phenomenon of life. According to him, “*The creative pursuit is not only the splashes of colours but a do*

or die battle, one needs to have constant dialogue while creating the work.” He had been the water colourist and a landscape painter but with deep understanding of art, he gradually shredded the extra load of line and form and inclined towards abstract expression which had communicated the language of art. He considers that art is a humble attempt to have the grip of joy of life.³ **(Plate No.2)**

Artist Prem Singh’s expertise is carefully used to enhance the character of his paintings and gets familiar with the traces of mystics in his skilful strokes of his perception. Painting for him is like breathing which pulsates in his work manifest of the unknown world. There is always an enigma of uncertainty of nature flowing effortlessly in his work. One can find a volume of drama created by textures and natural phenomenon with colours.⁴ **(Plate No.3)**

There is nothing in the shape of form one observes yet get engrossed and discovers the imagination of his soul. Prem Singh has mastered his imagination in search of his lion, expressed through his inner aspirations through soft flowing strokes creating delicate lyricism. He is well versed with his artistic language to express and pronounces it with his light and his flight of imagination.

Artistic world come together with earth and spirit. Prem Singh is a painter enriched with the wings of imagination flying high and capturing every small aspect of existence and at the same time deeply rooted to the soil. His work with rhythmic strokes discovers the depth of emotions and sensibility through his pure colours in his way of expression. He never believes in mixing the colours and achieves tonal variation hidden in each other. In this process of creation, his soul is transformed in a tiny plant that keeps growing remaining rooted in the soil. This encourages him to have utmost silence of timelessness. **(Plate No.4)**

India is known for its tradition of Miniature Painting. The advent of technology and its outcome has given sensibility, a new vision of art all together. Right from the middle of nineteenth century to the present, a new wave of freedom of expression culminated into art with individual creative perception and innovative technique. Freedom of expression was researched to its extremity, where size has nothing to do with expression. With this thing in mind, he commenced preferring painting in a small format. It was with a challenge to think of one’s inner voice. Deep within him, he heard a voice which gave him strength and stimulated him to paint and was the joy holding painting close to his beat of his heart. He could hear his inner voice clearly and paint the essence of the spirit of experience through form, line and colour. Though his pleasure may be small in size yet it has a power to expand beyond. He had been a recipient of many outstanding laurels of national and international levels which is a matter of great proud to the state and the country.⁵

References

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Plate No. 1

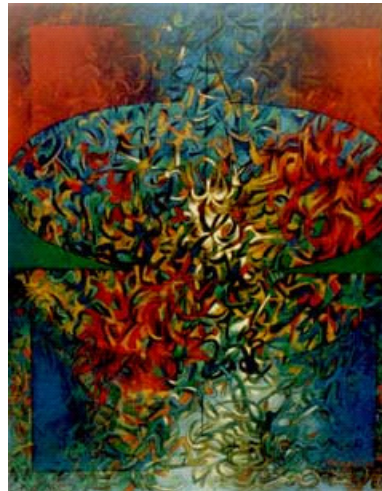


Plate No. 2

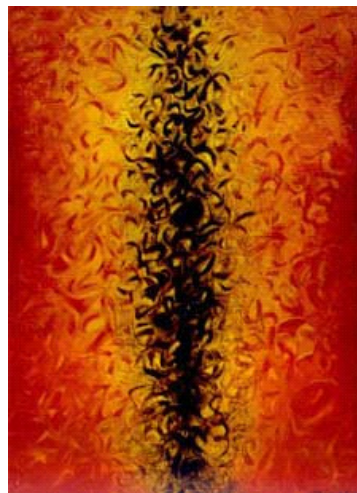


Plate No. 3

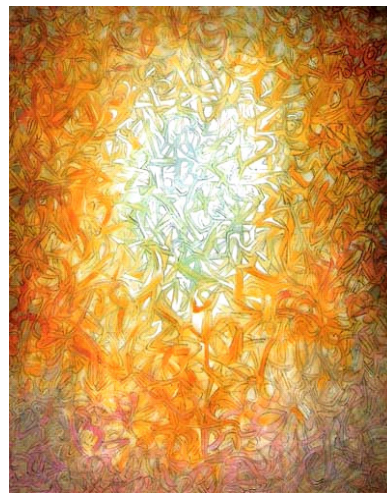


Plate No. 4