

Gesturism: Artist Shombit Sengupta's take on gender equality and India

Sapna Mathur, Hindustan Times, Mumbai Updated: Nov 11, 2016 08:38 IST



Breathing France, one of the paintings by Shombit Sengupta that is on display at his ongoing exhibition, **Gesturism**, in Mumbai.

While growing up at a refugee camp near Kolkata in the 1950s, artist Shombit Sengupta, who claims to have founded a style of painting called Gesturism, would enjoy reading illustrated story books. Made in Soviet Russia and distributed in Kolkata by the Communist Party of India, these books introduced him to major historical events such as the French Revolution.

The books and Sengupta's interest in the work of local artisans contributed to his ambition to become an artist. Two Van Gogh paintings, *The Potato Eaters* and *Sunflowers*, however, inspired Sengupta to leave India and move to France. "My mother sold her gold bangles and paid Rs 2,700 for a return ticket to Paris. I landed up there in 1973, with \$8 in my pocket," says the 62-year-old artist. And of course, he never used that return ticket.

High on colour



One of Sengupta's paintings, titled **Ferociously Brave**.

Fast forward to the present, and we are seated at the Institute of Contemporary Indian Art, Kala Ghoda. Sengupta is exhibiting his artwork at a solo show in India, called **Gesturism**, after 1998. "My Hindi is really bad. But I'm fluent in French," he says. To us, he speaks in broken English as he talks about his new paintings.

Sengupta chiefly works with two subjects — women and nature. Meanwhile, Gesturism is his effort to represent living things. “When you were born, you had to cry to prove that you are a normal baby. [That was your] first gesture... and until your death, you will give so many gestures. I try to capture them. Any living element will have multiple compositions of the gesture... and they will be different for each person,” he says. In effect, Sengupta’s paintings are vividly colourful and dense with layers upon layers of strokes. The subjects aren’t well defined, but rather seem to move around on the canvas.



Lust, by Shombit Sengupta.

Talking about his portrayal of women, Sengupta says, “Women really carry the emotion for me,” adding, “Men dominate the world too much. What is the difference between a man and a woman? It’s only the muscle (body) that is different. Apart from that, there is no difference intellectually. This division, that the woman should only do particular things... I hate that. I believe in a society where women are liberated.”

Moreover, one of the artist’s signature pieces is the Désordre — a number of small canvases that make up one big painting. These smaller pieces are scrambled up, like a jigsaw puzzle, and viewers visiting the exhibition are encouraged to place the smaller canvases onto a frame in the correct order. Once again, colour dominates these pieces, and what seems to be an abstract artwork has specific subjects. “India is a country of disorders. You don’t have, for example, proper electricity [in all parts of the country].



American Plastic, a 2016 painting that is reminiscent of Kolkata.

But I found that in this disorder (chaos), there is beauty. The colour in my art is dedicated to the colours of India. In the West, things are too well composed. I think Indians try to communicate something through these colours, and I love that,” he says.

VISIT: Gesturism will be on display at the Institute of Contemporary Indian Art, Kala Ghoda, until November 22, from 11am to 7pm.

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/art-and-culture/gesturism-artist-shombit-sengupta-s-take-on-gender-equality-and-india/story-aT2QSG9cehbFPi2R5E00M.html>