



ARTIST MEGHANSH THAPA : SPIRIT AND NARRATIVES/ BLACK AND WHITE

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ABSTRACT:

KEYWORDS:

There is much to say about the route and the conceptual diversion and progress of Meghansh Thapa's paintings, but the work also confront the audience towards two directions one that of complex metaphysical ideas and the other towards the path of simplicity. On the fact of it, the works show a versatile technique and imagery for which it seems that a unique feature in the unconcealed reference to the Indian Mythology and propitious symbols which he derived from religious conviction and Meghansh is already well know about but. Although Mythological references are in his works but they were predominated from his personal journey of life.

The study proposes to begin exploring the visual language that Meghansh uses, secondly to discuss the thought processes he uses to guide the making of his paintings and finally the wider chronological framework from which he both produced his works and which he think will occupy a significant place.

SPIRIT AND NARRATIVES/ BLACK AND WHITE

At the very first glimpse of the Meghansh's paintings, we become aware of his unfolding narration of story telling; they verbalize his thoughts and beliefs. With the help of strong narratives he reflects his purest being in a true spirit. His works are his own reflections which keep on transforming, sometimes static, veiling, unveiling and changing as he progresses. The paintings are the silhouette of his inner self. Meghansh Thapa works from personal memories and reflections, but in order for these personal thoughts to have pertinence in the public realm they must be transformed by the language of art. His works communicate through his figurative creations. The normal experience of the self includes and the belief that its identity is made up of a body, of thoughts, feelings, ambitions, plans, ideals, values, impulses, desires, actions, qualities, and so on is expressed in almost all his painting. In the painting titled *Bonding with Loved One*, all the

figures are represented as an archetype. Most of his paintings embodies a bonding of mankind and humanity, and the journey of the artist form one phase to another. His '*self*' takes itself to be all these things, like feelings, ambitions, plans, values and so on which is integrated and organized in his work of art and the overall view of '*self*', cannot separate from the other figures which he represents in his work. His paintings are a narrative of black and white and a journey of experience of the '*self*' towards mysticism. Mysticism for the artist does not mean a path to sainthood by renunciation from the materialistic world but it is the journey of spiritual path where he acquires new experiences in all direction.

Meghansh Thapa's Black and White paintings are an approach where he presents a traditional and spiritual morality into visual perspective. But he is not a thinker in context to philosophy and his approach is as an artist. His works emerges from personal quest and for which the most suitable medium and material which he finds is the best way that expresses his '*self*' is charcoal on rice paper and canvas. The experimental journal of his in context to art is a long way; the shifting to black and white from colour was a challenging voyage as he is expected to show the colour of life through black and white. And he successfully presents his black and white art work to the viewers expected to be viewed in the manner it portrays. His work process goes with the flow of his thoughts. Sometimes ideas emerge gradually through the mundane life he is enveloped in, at other time he under goes through a long thinking process for days before he starts exploring his visual concepts on the canvas.

Before he even starts his representation on canvas, for Meghansh there is an approach of form pre-conceived in his mind and the technique and the medium he will work with. He almost replaced brush with that of charcoal since the year 2008 because of a chalk and cheese situation. That

year was the black phase for the Country due to the Mumbai terror attack which whacked his inner psyche and he became conscious about the importance of relationship of compassion, family value, verve and existence. At length, after a long break he decided to get back to work; he could see a 'black' canvas in front of him and the first attempt over that canvas with charcoal which he used only for the purpose of outline went beyond and he realized that he could not stop himself from completing the entire canvas with charcoal. Thus, from then till now he almost presented his artwork in black and white. Meghansh explored the transubstantiation in the metaphor was possible through charcoal as he felt that charcoal is a medium where he "sees himself". For him the medium charcoal has a metaphysical meaning and he says... *"Charcoal inspires me, sometime I feel it also thinks on behalf of me. Charcoal gives boldness to my Drawings; it gives the process of construction and growth."*

It is rather a very complex medium to handle but he keeps on exploring the possibilities of using the charcoal. Several layers are applied with charcoal and to fashion a tonal difference and generate a white space on the canvas he uses brush and water. Along with canvas he finds rice paper a very comfortable medium to explore his creativity. *"I relate rice paper to my personality; its corroded, absorbent, textured surface is something that gives you the result from a very first stroke."* as he states.

SYMBOLS AND LEXIS

It is clear in philosophy that the world that we 'see' around us is not the real world (Kant's **thing in itself**) but our mind's representation of our senses. The sky is not blue; this is something that our minds create. Now this opens up interesting possibilities to explore Meghansh's works for as our mind represents reality, likewise his works are predominantly created by representation. His artwork has the potential to correct the errors of our mind's representation of reality, by a further representation of his work that overcomes these naive real illusions to 'see' things as they truly are. His paintings present metaphysical foundations such as space and time which he explains by the use of elements like the boat, crescent moon, rosary, and fish to name some. These symbols unify the conceptual diversity of symbols and language and give a totality to the paintings by juxtaposing the visual with the tactile language. Meghansh's wanders into an imaginary space discovering spiritual connections with the symbols some of which strains into conscious thoughts and become the subject of his works. Therefore, it is not surprising then to find languages of symbols and images free floating in the infinite space of his canvas. Meghansh do not use those symbols only for design purpose or to fill in the space of the canvas but he uses them to represent a visual language. The *Birthing -3* is both a symbol of representation and a symbol of journey. It mirrors the inherent drive for connectedness of relationship of infinite with the real, the accord of black with white, the unity the '*prakriti*' and the '*purusha*' as the title suggest so. The essential identity is not present in this work; what is there is the memory of

the feeling of 'self' connected with the essential identity. The rosary (*mala*) in one of the hand of the figure is symbolically represented by Meghansh, he portrays it to indicate that it is meant to be used for chanting and meditation. Portraying that meditation is the final gateway to realisation.

In almost all his figurative paintings figures representing *Param Purush* are quite visible. For example, in the painting *Creator* where a *Param Purush* image maintains his identity with his supreme self while he is engaged in the world of perceptions, emotions and thoughts. Meghansh tries to tell the audience that the image he portrays separates the pure unconditioned consciousness underlying this conditioned world of names and forms. The use of auspicious symbols as well as the iconography gestures of Images are inspirational to his works but are incorporated with elements of contemporary art such as the use of symbols which are visible of 'the time'.

The crescent moon is an important subject for discussion if we are to read Meghansh's works and which cannot be ignored, because this symbol dominates in almost all his paintings. As it is obvious that the crescent moon is a symbol associated with the Hindu iconography, specifically Within Puranic and Tantric Hinduism. But Meghansh as an artist presents this symbol in a narrative way and is more tangible than just visual. This symbol hardly takes time to affect the viewers and get a tactile sensation. He uses this form to create a pulse of holiness and spirituality. Meghansh bring into play the moon to represent various heavenly bodies travelling in *Nirakar*. Along with the aesthetic beauty Meghansh finds the different perspectives of the moon which have a motion to reveal. Therefore, when he paints the moon in different perspectives the symbols sometimes conceive form of vague, sometimes it denotes the day and the night and at times it gets transformed in 'time'.

The quest again rises for the use of fish as a symbol. Again if traced back fish is another archetype form of Lord Vishnu, but is it that Meghansh is using this form to portray the presence of the Devine? His works are not only image of portraiture but is also a way to portray the 'self'. He represents the fish to relate it with the presence of water in a symbolic manner. In addition, he represent this symbol as a vehicle for the viewers to focus his or her attention, on that particular part in a form more easily visualized and held in the mind and tell a very small part of the narrative and also to signifies the presence of water.

PARAM PURUSH / IDENTITY

"Because I paint from my life on the canvas, it is very important to know each and every influence that affects my personality and my thought process. From my childhood my association with the saints had drawn my devotion towards spirituality,

And I became devotee of the Formless God. I could not stop my self from depicting this "The Very Great Experience of my Life" in my canvas." Without a doubt, in almost all his painted canvases there are images of Saints with gestures

of blessings or carrying the symbol of the crescent moons in their hands. Each and every human form reflects the image of Formless infinite God; *Param Purush*, the conceived form of formless/omnipresent god. It is fascinating to observe in some of his works some old and wrinkled images which stand for authority and maturity that comes with an age in contrast to the ageless *Param Purush*. His images showcase figures having more than one head, symbolising all-pervading quality of *Param Purush* and three or four hands is the symbol of efficiency, and where as several legs of the image represents stability. Due to his sculptural background at times the metaphors painted by Meghansh possess a sculptural effect with mention to the volume and weight displaying a chiselled result.

In some of his images and symbols resembles the sanctity of the presence of the Devine- a kind of transformation in the way the images are represented. The "human" or physical representation of the Creator symbolically stands for the vehicle for the viewers to travel towards the real world. It should be noted, however, that there may be a range of different ways by which Meghansh represents the figures, particularly when the figure is seen to represent several different virtues. In some cases, symbols are used to show that a figure belongs to a particular 'family': i.e. the metaphor plays different responsibility in different paintings, sometimes taking the character of a father, a son, or a holy spirit and sometimes as *Param Purush*. Meghansh portrays *Param Purush* with his adorn spread all over like a canopy to symbolize that he is our guardian angel and is directing the virtuous path to the figures portrayed in the canvas. His paintings cannot be seen as a single display it has a narrative to tell us. Meghansh's seems to have traveled into a deep mythological perspective, since last few years his outlook became more spiritual and this reflected in the figures he painted since the year 2009 till date, the figures became more astute like and he drifted his focus on the symbols which he used in more significant manner. The multiple headed images in his paintings convey different sense. Like the four faces of Brahma represent the four Vedas, and symbolise the functioning of the inner personality (*antahkarana*) which consists of thoughts; the mind (*manas*), the intellect (*buddhi*), ego (*ahamkara*) and conditioned-consciousness (*chitta*), so too, the multiple headed images Meghansh's represents symbolises the four ways in which thoughts function. They have a sensuousness of the manifestations of the un-manifest Consciousness.

His role as an artist is like a seeker who desires to realise his godhead and for which one must first go through spiritual discipline. Meghansh's female figures are the representation of a mother, the Earth, *Prakriti*, and the beloved. The image of women for him is his mother and his treasured wife who is also the mother of his children. For him 'She' in any form is very vital for his existence and bears equal or sometimes higher status than him.

One can observe the affectionate bonding of the male image with the child and also how minutely Meghansh

captures every small activities of the child in the canvas. He portrays himself like a Creator who nurtures their lives by performing his duties towards them. The overwhelmed he feels by performing his duties of fatherhood is a sheer reflection.

The characters which are represented are not static in their activities and give an idea about different gestures they are showing such as bestowing of boons by the creator, wellsprings of fertility as seen in the *Birthing* series where the god man image is holding a plant of life. Meghansh represented the images in a way as if their bodies hold the oceans and the forests and as if the entire universe is assimilated inside the metaphysical images. Meghansh's Black and White paintings transmits to us the world seen through his vision, and as if he is the *sutradhar* of the metaphor and provides us a kind of film to watch about him and his world and people with whom he is bonded with.

SELF-REPRESENTATION AND OCCURRENCE

The work of art must seize upon you, wrap you up in itself and carry you away. It is the means by which the artist conveys his passion. It is the current which he puts forth, which sweeps you along in his passion.

The pain passes, the beauty remains. (Pierre-Auguste Renoir)

Meghansh pursue a natural desirability of connectedness. It is perhaps a result of his close bond with his family and the traditional upbringing. For him his past is much alive as his present, however his sense of individualism is confident and strong, tampered only by his own history, spirituality and materially. He invests connotation in the most ordinary and everyday episode. He blissfully represented 'us' and the cultures we live in where there is no possible to trace any boundaries between reality and self-representation. Because the self represented in almost all his paintings is the product of a process of selection and choice, in many ways to represent the self is, often simultaneously, to create the self and negate the self. Meghansh achieves the necessary realism by perceiving the god man images in his imagination, as a form with which he can represent himself. Not in a self portrait mode but as a total identification with the milieu. For him this kind of visionary perception is vital, and so his working process is developing in such a way to continually provide access to it. Because the process of self-representation cumulates in a tangible result and given that any representation of the self is necessarily a construct which aims to render visible or knowable in concrete form the unseen and unknown. Many issues affect the artist's self-representation, both as process and form: the medium through which the self will be represented, the motivation for representing oneself, and the role of the audience, to name only a few relevant factors. In Meghansh's search for the path of faith through black and white paintings, his works takes on the characteristic of straightforwardness due to the black and white colour and the subject he put on view. This can be described as a desire for the perfect work of art, an art work that cannot be improved by subtraction

of any element; in such a work, every detail is condensed to what is essential. This discipline has a moral dimension too, in that it implies a certain calming of the ego and a rejection of worldly concerns suggesting a similarity to the precepts of religious art with its tendency to respond to existential questions about meaning of life. It questions about the self identity and a meaning of life. The images therefore answers the meaning of 'self' identity, and speaks about the modification of the religious forms so that they function effectively in the present, in a sense, paradoxically, finding the new in the old. Meghansh do not suffer a loss with the incorporation of a new concept and medium which he chose to work with. He does this without sacrificing clarity, by playing of tone against shape; shape against the monochrome. We can read the objects the symbols as existing in front or behind the others at will as there is a play of translucent upshot. He can be said to be a lyrical painter who would express his emotions and experience but also the passions, joys, contests and pathetic dilemmas of humanity, because his paintings also reflects the pain and agony he experiences in different situations. He is opposed to impersonal art which is considered with the artist's language and attempts to express in purely visual terms, things which are not simply visual experiences, but the experiences of life. Meghansh's paintings are a meeting between human and physiological forces dramatised in the slightly whimsical demi personages whom we can more or less distinguish.

INSPIRETATION-THROUGH INNER AND OUTER BEING

Inspirations.....yes, he is indeed inspired by K.G Subramanyam and Paul Gauguin. The allegory, the composition, the use of symbol bears reminders of them; the human and animal forms easily put side by side as 'oneness', the lush frames of foliage, parables presence of a new born child in a family. It can be said that some of his works are a tribute to K.G Subramanyam and it is also an expression of contemporary identity. And for this context it must be mentioned that he is a re-creator not mere imitator. We are never forced to neglect the main intension of Meghansh's work where the reflection of his inner spiritual physic and the outer application of black and white complement each other. He can be ranked among those artists in our Country who expresses in black and white because he has a marvelous eye and a wonderful hand; a marvelous eye for knowing how common objects could be made a hundred times more interesting by being arranged and spaced and lightened in a certain way; a marvelous hand for translating into the medium he chose to express not simply the appearance of the images but also their 'feel'. His paintings also portrait indoor subjects and in those works there is a feeling of cool light coming from the picture itself, he is successful to either a bright beam or a rich glow into the midst of deep shadow with the foreplay of charcoal. Meghansh knew the final secret of 'finish' in his paintings he know where to draw a final line

before it is over done. He is exceptionally sensitive but is also able to communicate his sensitivity to others because if our sensitivities are dull we remain under-developed and become no better than human clods. Meghansh is an extremely sensitive and imaginative person and all his faculties sharply alert: he sees more, he hears more, he thinks more, imagines more. He does not appreciate cruelty, meanness and violence and the capability of experiencing all these sensations made him go through a fuller wider and deeper life of understanding. It can be said that he is leading to a path of spirituality through the journey of his paintings. Fascinatingly the monochrome works of Meghansh do have a flowing movement. In view of the fact that, monochrome works are challenging to work upon so to save it from monotonous he uses the motifs, images and the application of the charcoal which provides a rhythm which is defiantly unbroken movement. The flowing movement in his work has variation in space as well as variation in time. That reminds of one of Shakespeare's sonnets begins:

Like as the waves make towards the pebbles shore,

So do our minutes hasten to their end....

The illusion of reality was one of Meghansh's prime objects and he seems to be moving around the circumference of a time circle for which his art is governed by aesthetic austerity. *His works* tries to communicate with the viewers his own private emotions and sensation – not so much as his eyes see, as the effect on his inward being when he looks at particular things. His work forsake representational paintings but aims to communicate personal sensation, and we must be careful not to get into the way of supposing that these different aims are entirely separated as they are able to give us representations, communication and spirituality.

To conclude, we are after all, in an art world of the 21st century, what does it have to with a path of faith? But in assessing about what the path of faith could be i.e. a direction toward spirituality, righteousness, a secret path, a direction toward the union of oneself with the Devine, or a "path of learning" or a "path of art". What is it that this "path" is of such vital importance to our lives? Surely it is not the material things which he represents, but rather the "ideas" with which they are merged in such significant form, ideas about the very essence of life. The individual "self" is not self contained; it is related both within its immediate context and in terms and the meaning of humanity, whose "family bonding" includes all of us in an immense and complex organism. He represents the image of a "higher self" which includes his loved ones...he is conscious for his relationships as much as he is conscious about himself. Meghansh's message through his art works is that we are related through mankind and spiritually with each other and we should take care to maintain these relationships in equilibrium. Our evolved relationships with the Spiritual One suggest a range of energy, like Nature herself, and in the consciousness that our present is the phenomenon of our past; we must also acknowledge responsibility for building our future. In trying to

articulate the thoughts about the works of Meghansh Thapa, one is driven to examine, not only the works themselves, but also the relationship the artist has with it, during its fabrication and when it is finished.

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ARTIST: MEGHANSH THAPA



TITLE: UNTITLED, CHARCOAL ON CANVAS

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