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NEELLOHIT BANERJEE | December 8, 2017 10:23 pm



Clement Greenberg, the single most influential art critic in the 20th century had said, "All profoundly original work looks ugly at first. Originality is an essential ingredient in art, which results from the power of imagination." Shombit Sengupta, a renowned Franco Indian artist who signs as Sen, is an India-born French contemporary artist who started experimenting with a new style in the mid-1990s. A painter inspired by French aesthetics and Indian colours he has created Gesturism Art, a new art current that has paintings and "désordre" installation works.

Sen has participated in exhibitions in Carrousal du Louvre in Paris, the 19th century artists' village of Barbizon, Venice, Milan, and Tokyo. French, Italian and Finnish art critics and magazines have already recognised and acknowledged Gesturism Art as a totally new unpublished art current. He revealed his life experiences, beginning with his childhood in Bengal, right up to his settlement in France and eventually inventing a new art form. Excerpts from an interview:

Q.What urged you to go to France and learn about art?

From a very early age I started to practice drawing and clay modelling in the squatted refugee camp called Shohidnagar in Bengal where I was born. My parents were forced to flee here from East Bengal, leaving everything behind during the partition of India. For livelihood generation, some East Bengal refugees used to make mud dolls, idols, different pottery items and shell ornaments. These artisans were my artistic inspiration.

By spending time with one Shubinoy uncle, I learned about artistic sense and imagination. He used to say that to become an artist the brush, colour, palette, canvas and the mind need seamless convergence. At that time I did not understand the depth of what he was saying, but later these words have stayed embedded in my mind. He remains, till today, my real mentor.

In the 1960's, Soviet Russia used to send illustrated books for children to the Communist party written in Bengali. My father would often bring a few for me. I found lots of stories on French revolution, human rights, French communism and the world of

art. This was my initial introduction to French art and society. From those books I discovered there was a French territory in Chandannagar. The French -architecture in Chandannagar was exotic and subconsciously unparalleled visual attraction for me.

On being admitted to Calcutta Government College of Art, I started to discover Victorian Bengal and compared that with French Bengal of Chandannagar. Once a college friend took me to the American library, then housed at SN Banerjee road. That's where I discovered, in a glossy art book, the artist who changed his colour palette due to French influence that my father had seen a film on. It was Vincent van Gogh who painted the dark "Potato Eaters" in Holland, and on arrival in France he painted the bright "Sunflowers". Here I also discovered that 600 years ago Leonardo da Vinci immigrated to France at the end of his life. This is the way I yearned to drown myself in the French artistic world.

Q.For those who are unaware about Gesturism, what is it all about?

I don't like the idea of death. Why don't we live long, even for 200 years? My Gesturism ideology is the representation of human life from birth to death. People live with varied gestures in life. Living human beings are always in movement. In the same way, my Gesturism style of painting has huge movement, which I make with big size brush strokes on canvas.

I use colours irreverently and with spontaneity when painting a subject. I never use any digital aspect in my paintings, as digital art is not fine art, it is reproduction. Sometimes I get comments from some intellectual sects that my paintings have excessively bright colours. I totally disrespect such views because wild nature is composed without human interpretation, and abundance of colour exists here. Art has started before civilisation. So indoctrinating art is a kind of dictatorship on art, the way Hitler in his time termed modern art as degenerated art.

Q.You have showcased your paintings in Kolkata and had an exhibition in Mumbai. How well has India received the Gesturism art?

Well, when you are an artist painter you don't look at how people take your work. Fine art is not entertainment, cinema or video shows. Fine art always constructs a certain vision for the future for the society to step forward. I cannot express how well India has received Gesturism art, but I have seen a lot of elaborate media write-ups about my exhibitions in Mumbai and Kolkata, for which I am humbled, grateful and appreciative.

Q.Who are the artists you draw inspirations from?

I am highly inspired by painters like Giotto, Leonardo da Vinci, Jean Francois Millet, Van Gogh, Max Ernst and Man Ray. French and Bengali writer philosophers have highly inspired me too. The deep influence on me is from French littérateurs Baudlaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud, Marcel Proust, Guy de Maupassant and Victor Hugo, Bengali writers Sarat Chandra Chatterjee and Manishankar, and the Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud, among a few others.

Q.What will be your advice to someone who wants to pursue art?

Nobody can choose fine art as a profession that will help compensate the money spent on education. Art has a different skill and profession unlike other subjects. Although you should make enormous money with art, you cannot start to practice fine art with the idea of earning a livelihood and lifestyle. Your passion has to be to draw a visionary ideology through visual art. When you have visionary ideology with distinct differentiation of skill and imagination to produce art consistently, you will automatically sell your paintings and earn. But you will also be burdened by societal non-understanding where an artist can be considered a vagabond initially. So you have to prove yourself with your passion, determination and hard work that this is not true.

Q.Kolkata is blessed with a rich history of art and culture. In what ways is the city different from France in this aspect?

Actually comparing a city with a country is not analogous. You cannot even compare the manifestation of art between France and of Bengal. After the Renaissance, France had taken the art world to the different level. In Bengal we think we are very advanced culturally. We always say we have two Nobel Prize winners in Rabindranath Tagore and Amartya Sen, and we continue to create headlines about these two individuals.

France on the other hand has produced 68 Nobel Prize winners but there is no frequent hype over them in the news. We can definitely say Bengali people have great inclination toward art, although that could be the by-product of Bengal being non-industrialised. The grain of creativity in society should come from the collective sensation that art creates, and not from always citing and comparing any aspirant to the two Nobel laureates.

Q.Are you planning for any exhibition in India soon?

I am extremely busy with forthcoming exhibitions in France, Canada, the US and Italy up till the end of 2018. Yes, there is some discussion happening for expos in Bangalore, Delhi and Kolkata.

