

Chapter 5

ART AND ARTIST

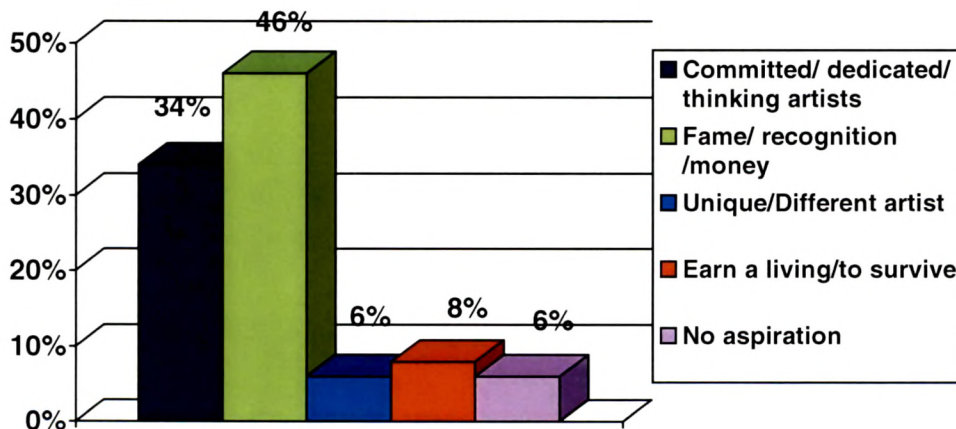
The World of the Creator

Dreams and aspiration in the initial phase of the career

It is a common belief that the artists are secluded from the materialistic consideration that life has to offer. Researches have shown that aspirations influence the educational attainment, career choices and future earnings. It is imperative to locate the dreams of artists of different generations and to see whether they translate them into aspirations. Aspiration can be defined as a strong hope or wish for achievement or success. Dreams in this context would refer to imaginings which are the ideal and are linked with aspirations. In the initial phases of career people have dreams and aspirations, which motivate them to enter a particular field. Though other professions and occupations carry more promise of security and prestige, many artists believed in their ability and choice of career. Some of the artists agreed that they had stars in their eyes when they joined the art school, just like many youngsters joining different professional streams of higher education.

The respondent artists had varied responses regarding their dreams and aspirations in the initial phase of their career. The responses have been categorized into 'dedication', 'fame', 'uniqueness' and 'survival'. Dedication reflects their unflinching commitment to their art, irrespective of their prospects of earning. Fame and recognition refer to the desire to become a celebrity and lead a life like the rich and famous. Unique or different refers to the aspiration to be different from others by charting own style or path and thus gaining a name. Survival or earn a living is just to earn enough through paintings so that they do not have to look for other sources of earning.

Figure 8: Respondent artists' dreams and aspirations in the initial stages



Contrary to the popular belief that artists are not affected by fame, money and recognition, nearly half (46 percent) of the artists aspired to attain fame, recognition, or money, or all the three in their initial years as professional artists. Interestingly, out of these, fifty six percent of the respondent artists belong to younger group, thirty one percent belong to middle group and only twelve percent belong to senior group. This reflects the growing desire amongst the younger generation to attain fame and money early in their career. The other difference that is visible is the wide gap between the aspirations of female and male artists over the same issue. Against eighty eight percent of the male artists aspiring to attain fame, recognition and money only twenty one percent of the females, have categorically claimed that they aspired for the same. This projects that majority of the women artists had no proclivity for material and non-material rewards especially as a aspiration for entering the field of fine arts. (Not a single female artist belonging to the senior group has mentioned fame, money or recognition). Interestingly, thirty four percent of the respondents aspired to be committed and dedicated fine artists, out of which majority of them were female respondents. In most of the cases their sincerity got reflected through their emotive responses and passion for the art emerged as a strong reason for continuing in this field.

Table 7 : Male-Female differences in response to dreams and aspirations in the initial phases of their career.

Categories	Males N = 47	Females N = 23	Total N = 70
Committed/ dedicated/ thinking artists	11	13	24
Fame/ recognition /money	<u>28</u>	<u>4</u>	32
Unique/Different artist	2	2	4
Earn a living/to survive	5	1	6
No Response	1	3	4
TOTAL	47	23	70

There are certain patterns that become visible with the responses of the male artists. It is possible to believe that art was used as a benevolent means to earn a living. This benevolence varied with degrees depending upon miscellaneous underlying factors like wealth of the artist, the wider acceptance of art in the society besides the talent. The senior male artists show that they were not keen so far as the fame, money and recognition was concerned. They painted from their heart and what followed next was not what they had sought for. Though it was natural for them to enjoy the fame

and recognition that they eventually got. In those times fine arts was an imminent field which to a degree relegated into the background with other professions gaining impetus and prominence.

On the other hand the middle group artists were divided in their approach towards their dreams and eventual aspirations. Their aspirations were more or less largely connected to their surrounding social and economic environs. The group largely belongs to that age when India was opening to the global economy. Though career wise there were more opportunities, yet very few conventional options like doctor, engineer etc were socially acceptable. An unusual option like fine arts was still not completely acceptable. Therefore there were few middle group artists who adopted the profession of fine arts because they were passionate towards it and others who hoped at some level for fame, recognition and money.

The artists belonging to the younger group had very different stand. They appear to be on the same wavelength with their contemporaries in other professions. They have a professional approach than their older counter parts as reflected in their aspirations. Most of them categorically stated that they wanted fame, wealth, glory and whatever other benefits that

are accrued in the profession of fine arts. Passion for art is a priority only when all the above ambitions have been fulfilled. A young male artists in a confident manner, stated after showing me his latest paintings, *“Some of my recent works which I consider exceptional are packed in those papers (points to the opposite wall which has huge canvases wrapped in paper) and I do not want to show them to anyone at this point in time. (Me: its like hording your paintings)...yes sort of I know my current works will fetch me a good price and these works, I intend to display only after the price of my paintings rise...the market (art) has boosted art sale so I’m confident of my paitings fetching good value for them”*

One of the reasons for the younger generation adopting such a professional stand is because today the various creative fields have become competitive and also attractive owing to the media exposure. Over the past decade the print and the audio-visual media has given a face and a voice to the artist. In India, the renowned artist, M.F.Hussain has become synonymous with success and money. In its cover story, one of India’s leading magazine, India Today reported, ‘Going by today’s prices an average Hussain painting fetches anything between Rs 75 lakh and Rs 2 crore’(Kalidas 2005 : 61). When such enormous amounts of money are paid

to buy a Husain painting this creates a similar desire amongst others especially the younger breed of artists who desire to gain fame and money by selling their paintings as well. In a way it is similar to Sachin Tendulkar's success in cricket, as now every aspiring cricketer dreams of making it big and earning like Tendulkar. In the not so distant past, an artist conjured up image of being someone who was bohemian, and who lived off meager earnings. He was completely involved in his art and oblivious to the world around him. Currently this has undergone a change; and the artist is seen as someone who is creative, respectable and an icon of the culture industry. Hence it is not surprising that the younger group of artists had expectations such as fame, money and recognition in the beginning of their career. 'In spite of all the fantasy and extravagance which it allows, art is just as indissolubly bound to reality as is science, although in a different way; its structures are always built of bricks of reality, even if their plan is removed from reality' (Hauser, 1982:7). A few artists mentioned with conviction that it was these dreams and aspirations, which have enabled them to not only survive in this field but also become successful in their chosen profession. The above indicates that for almost half of the respondent artists there was a strong wish to achieve success in terms of fame, recognition and money, which are the societal indicators of success today. To achieve these goals

artists have to undergo various stages of struggles. These stages are the social processes that artist has to experience to achieve their dreams and aspirations.

Initial Struggles as an Art Student

The first stage of struggle within the wide society is that of an art student. The responses were categorized into the following: (i) Financial struggle, (ii) Struggle with their art (technique and/or style), (iii) Struggle convincing family about their career choice, (iv) Difficulty in choosing between applied and fine arts and (v) Difficulty in adjusting to new college atmosphere and demands of art education.

The responses concerning the initial struggles were varied and multiple and for the purpose of the analysis only the first mentioned struggle was considered. As shown in Table 8, none of the female artists mentioned financial struggle, as either family or relatives financially supported female artists. This indicates that the women from upper and upper middle class families (barring a couple almost all women respondents came from affluent or financially well off backgrounds) were supported financially in their study of fine arts.

Table 8 : Initial struggles as an art student.

Categories	Males	Females	Total	Percent
Financial struggles/ Work & study	20	-	20	28
Struggle with style, technique in art	12	10	22	32
Struggle convincing family about the career choice	5	2	7	10
Struggle related to the choice between Fine and applied arts	3	1	4	6
Struggles adjusting to the new college atmosphere/demands of the art education	1	2	3	4
No struggle	6	8	14	20
Total	47	23	70	100

So far as the responses of the male artists were concerned, almost forty three percent of male respondents mentioned that in the initial years as an art student they had to face financial constraints. Many of them did commission work, gave private art tuitions and a few did menial jobs as well to be able to afford the art education. A few artists mentioned that colors, canvas and other art material were expensive. They had to be generous at

times with the use of colors, because to attain what they want on a canvas they had to expend a lot of art material; and financial constraints would at times restrict their art and creativity. A senior group male respondent Jyoti Bhatt narrated his struggle, *'When I joined Faculty of Fine Arts I had to support myself as I was the eldest of the eight children and could not burden my father with my education expenses... he was a laborer.... not earning enough to educate all of us.... so I worked as a sweeper, washed vessels and even worked in the mess and got one free meal per day...'* Struggles of this kind reflect the intense desire of persons to devote their lives to creative field. In spite of financial struggles and the onus of taking up the responsibility of the family in future, few of the artists continued their pursuit of fine arts irrespective of the ambiguity in the field of fine arts.

Out of the total, thirty two percent mentioned inner struggle of creativity, style, technique or creating one's identity as a major struggle during the student days. This was very normal as the shift from boundless expression of art to a more disciplined form of art was not easy for some of the artist. As Alok Bal mentions *" as a student there is the beginning of this inner turmoil over creating something different...unique and throughout your student life you are trying to create your own distinguished style...this*

may continue even after you complete your education but I felt it was major struggle during the student days itself". Ten percent of the artists said it was a struggle to convince parents and friends (well-wishers) regarding their choice of taking up fine art education. A few said that parents were unhappy, hence would try to demoralize them and even in a couple of the cases requested them to discontinue in the first year of art college and join another educational stream.

Hard work, continuous practice that was expected out of them was initially difficult according to four percent of the artists. As in the first year they were expected to make hundred to two hundred sketches per day. The first year of the art school is common to all students and they have to make a choice between applied and fine arts in the second year. Six percent mentioned that making this choice was extremely difficult for them because applied arts has more lucrative prospects, since applied art education caters to advertising. Whereas pursuing fine arts involved risk and there was no financial stability. Further the pressure to do well in society is tremendous especially since success is measured in monetary terms, yet these artists chose to embark on a path which was uncertain. Some of them had not yet discovered their true inclination within the art field, whereas a couple of the

younger artists candidly reported that they did not have an aptitude towards advertising and so the choice was straightforward.

Struggles to Establish as an Artist

Once the artist is out of college the second stage of struggle begins. Nearly all of the artists after passing out of an art college accepted commission work to sustain them selves; some even did commissioned work while being a student. Majority of the young artists are still struggling to establish themselves; but these young artists are hopeful that they can at least survive on the income they get through sales in exhibitions or through the contracts they have with art galleries. Most of the male respondents have mentioned that earning a living in the initial years of you career was a formidable task. Middle and senior group of artists emphasized that prior to the year 2000, the art scene was bleak. It was only in the last few years that art has shown positive signs and is flourishing. One senior group respondent mentioned reflecting on the current demand for art in the market, *"this field really tests your patience ...we hoped that tenacity and our hard work will pay off one day, may be now it may really pay us"*. One of the middle age group female artist spoke about the initial struggle *"After we got marriedafter graduating we, me and my husband both being fine artists just*

wanted to paint...but though I was unwilling I had to work in a school as a art teacher in order to run the house... even my husband had to look out for a job that would bring in money...in those days surviving just on selling your paintings was impossible". She also mentioned that in the current art scenario there are several opportunities to exhibit and sell paintings, which was not the case about a decade back.

For a majority of the artists their first exhibition either a solo or group is a big step. It is a matter of far reaching effect as to with which gallery or with whom your works are exhibited. Most of the respondents mentioned that the first exhibition of their art works is a big day and even though all the works may not get sold, appreciation from any quarter really boosts the morale of an artist. We can draw comparisons of the first exhibition of an artist with the opening day (premier) of a new movie in a theatre of a debutant actor. This day holds significance for both as they are putting forth their art to be judged by the audience. As is the case with the films, even if it does not become a commercial success the appreciation can motivate the actor so also the artist can gain tremendous motivation from the audiences' appreciation even if all the art works are not sold.

Many of the respondent artists mentioned the serendipity factor. They said that if you are at the right place at the right time, things can click; thus sponsorship for a solo exhibition is possible and having solo exhibitions is extremely important. *“Once you have a gallery sponsoring your show things start looking up but getting that first opportunity is difficult.... now a days its better.... as many gallery representatives visit the annual display of the Faculty of Fine Arts and buy the works of students who they think shows promise or offer them sponsorship for their exhibition”* responded a young female artist Sharmi Choudhury.

There are other issues that the artists have to face. These were concerns related to space for their artworks. A few artists mentioned, that the place in which they lived was one tiny room, which also acted as their studio, this indeed limits their space of work to a small area. Besides that they were also concerned about the place to store their works. They felt that such spatial restrictions in the initial years affected the number, size and magnitude of their paintings. A young group male artist Ajay Sharma talked about the restrictive nature of the space available to him, *“Initially I began painting huge canvases, the grandeur of a huge canvas always attracted me and I would think and imagine painting only large canvases...in the*

beginning we all dream of selling our paintings immediately, you know...I would daydream that even before I finish my painting there are buyers wanting to buy it...(laughs)...soon I realised I was cramped for space as there were several paintings that were finished but lying around and I did not know where to keep them. Then I realised that working on smaller canvases would be a better option ...so I now consciously have to restrict myself...not think on large scale...all for lack of space. At that time I did not have enough money to rent another place for storing my works... I think I may be able to in the future....so may start painting huge canvases again...I am optimistic.” Such constraints show the determination and hope that the artists especially those who are in their initial phases of career have. Their desire to sustain in trying times gets tested and they may eventually triumph over their circumstances.

Sustainability in the Profession of Fine Arts

The initial struggles can dampen the determination to continue in the field of fine arts. It then becomes pragmatic to join advertising agencies or some other creative firms that provides economic stability. Many fine art graduates preferred commercial jobs that gave them good income. Financial instability or insecurity is a major cause for fine artists turning to do

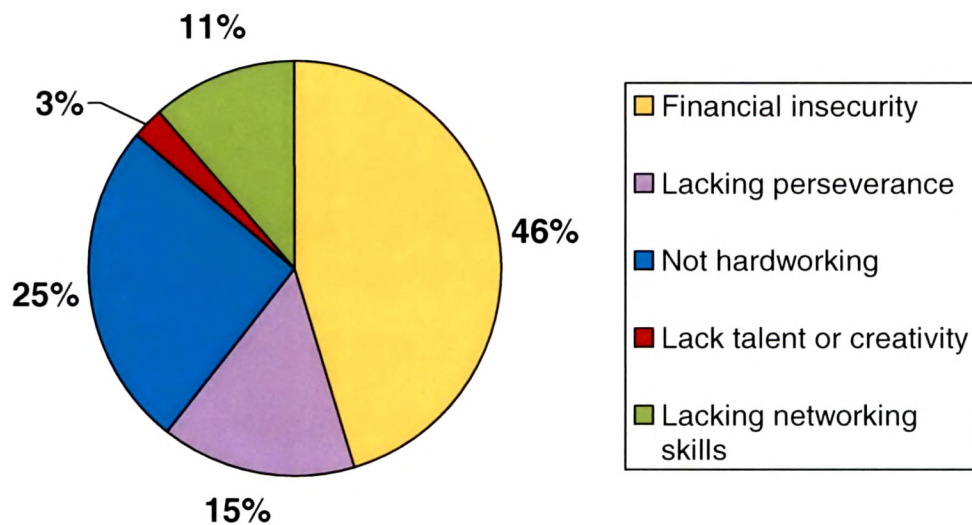
commercial art jobs in advertising or designing fields. The artist who works on commission has to abide by the clients tastes and demands. Complete freedom is lacking in such works as compared to a fine artist who may visualize, execute and create or paint according to his/her own imagination or his/her individual choice. At times a commercial artwork may also enable an artist to have enormous scope for creativity and individual freedom; but seldom does an artist get work of such nature where he is not pressured by the demands of the client or the market.

Consequently sustaining oneself in the sphere of fine arts is a grueling task particularly in the preliminary phases of an artist's career. An artist needs to seek sources of financial support to sustain while still continuing to be creative. There are various social adjuncts that make the tasks of continuing in the field of fine art difficult. The societal pressures of finances that are the driving force to survive, by and large would affect the artists. It would be considered reasonable if such societal pressures drive the artist but in the process the innate character of fine art loses its essence and does not befit the process of creativity. In order to understand the social implications of surviving in the field it is imperative to locate the reasons that make

sustainability in the profession of fine art difficult. The reasons that appeared when artists were asked why many fine artists chose commercial fields are :

- Pressure to earn or financial insecurity or economic constraints;
- Lack of tenacity, perseverance, patience or confidence in their own art;
- Not hardworking or serious about the profession
- Lack talent or creativity;
- Lack of public relations or networking skills or lack influence to market themselves and their talent.

Figure 9 : Reasons for non-sustainability of others in the field of fine arts.



Some of the respondents mostly from younger group do take up commission art jobs (for instance a couple of respondents took to creatively

painting the interiors of restaurants, commercial places or making sculptures for corporate gardens). They try to strike a balance between such commercial jobs and their commitment to fine art. The social pressure to earn a living is formidable and unavoidable and hence most of the artists find themselves doing this at the beginning of their career. Some of the younger group of artists voiced their fears that over a period of time they may become commercial artists if they were unable to sustain themselves in the profession of fine arts. In the words of a senior faculty member of fine arts *"many students today want instant fame and money ...if they don't get it then they become disillusioned and give up their art for more lucrative jobs, many even today try to strike some balance between commission work and their art. But it is difficult... there is the possibility of losing one's focus in the process"*. Some artists have a compelling vision and creativity and their work gets immediate attention of art galleries, museums and big corporations. However many artists are not able to fulfill this ideal.

There is a generational difference in the type of jobs the artists have or are doing as seventy percent of the senior group artists worked as teachers in school or college before their retirement. A young male artist, Amarnath Sharma lamented *"I struggled a lot in the initial years after completing post*

graduation, I went to many galleries in Mumbai with my portfolio but the response was disappointing. They were not even willing to sponsor my show. Then I came back here and took up art teaching in art classes for initial survival...I have worked really hard to survive the competition". This was prior to the year 2000 but the prospects of getting sponsorship are brighter today. Further, twenty four percent of all the respondents are either working or have worked as art teachers. Ten percent of the respondents were also engaged in commission artwork, art journalism, and photography. Two percent mentioned doing odd jobs or giving art tuitions.

In comparison to younger group of artists, middle and senior group of artists were mostly engaged in the teaching profession besides painting and exhibiting their work in art galleries. This could be firstly, because the avenues open to fine artists in those times were very few. Secondly, teaching art is a good option as it would provide a stable income and one can be in touch with the art field. Some of the senior artists also mentioned that they incidentally entered the teaching profession. The institutions in which they worked were schools, art classes, art colleges and a couple of them gave private tuitions in art. Some also mentioned that their working spouse supported them for sometime. It is evident that surviving just on sale of

paintings is not enough. This trend is also apparently changing as many artists today have contracts with specific art galleries.

Many of the younger artists may be regarded as a good investment, well-established dealers make artists “theirs”, acquire a monopoly on the sale of their work by contracting for their entire output in return for a monthly stipend on which the painter can live, work, and buy materials (Becker 1982 : 116).

Thus in present times, when art is getting appreciation and has become investment venture sustainability may not be a formidable task. Yet continuous creative output may require inspiration that needs to be examined.

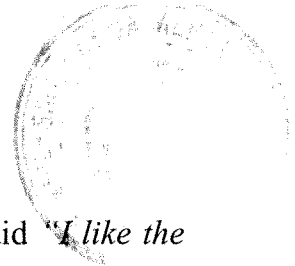
Inspiration and Motivation

The artist has to survive competition and other social predicaments so as to continue to create new artworks. The artist were asked what inspires or motivates them the most to create something novel, or express in a unique way. The responses were diverse and they have been classified in four major domains, psychological need, societal events and issues, personal experiences and market driven forces.

Table 9 : Inspirations to paint

Categories	Frequencies	Percentage
Psychological need	32	46
Societal events and issues	15	21
Personal experiences	11	16
Market driven forces	8	11
No specific response	4	6
Total	70	100

A majority, forty six percent of the artists felt that painting for them is a desire, a need, is an urge, or a drive to communicate and express. It is like meditation or doing ‘*riyaz*’ (practice). For these artists the motivation comes from within and self expression leads to their paintings and most of these belonged to senior and middle group artists. It was more of a psychological satisfaction that they derived from giving an expression to this desire or drive. One young female respondent, Sharmi Choudhury in a sensitive tone said *“I enjoy the experience of painting on a canvas...I can talk and cry in front of a canvas, I paint everyday....its almost a habit....sometimes I spend hours in front of a canvas doing nothing or I may just paint a small patch in one whole night but the experience gives me immense satisfaction.”* Another



middle group female artist, Shantana Gohain in similar way said *"I like the feel of the texture of the canvas, the unevenness which gets created when I paint... (thinks)...you know there is a different feel to it when you apply coats of paint and it may not be visually appealing to the viewer but I feel the canvas, the paints and the experience of painting is inexpressible and the satisfaction indescribable."*

Twenty one percent mention events, social issues, and things happening around them that make them express their stand on such issues on the canvas. Many of the artists reacted to the 2002 riots in Gujarat in a way that could best depict their feelings by painting and exhibiting their work. The works were thought provoking and reflected artists' interpretation of violence and its repercussion on society. A senior male artist said: *"I do not feel we can do anything beyond wielding the brush and expressing our anger and concern on the canvas. And I don't consider it as some remarkable contribution but it does help create sensitivity towards issues"*.

A few (n = 4) even mentioned that the need to earn a living makes them paint. Sagar*, a young male artist says, *"since this is my bread and butter I cannot think of any other way which can motivate me more than*

earning a living at the moment. If days together I do not work then I have to force myself ...otherwise I will have to find work somewhere...which I do not wish to do....so for my survival I automatically paint... ”

Sixteen percent mentioned their personal experiences in life, their frustrations, joys and happiness inspiring them to paint. A young female artist, Hiral Trivedi, expressed how personal feelings and experiences get translated onto the canvas *“After my son was born my works revolved around motherhood, Mother Nature and nurturing... what I was experiencing was getting depicted in my art...”* Women artist were more vocal about getting affected by personal experiences as they face change in their physical as well as mental constructs. The physical changes are visibly the life stages of adolescence, marriage and motherhood which get reflected in their paintings.

A few artists (n =3) pointed out appreciation from people as an inspiration to create more art. A young male artist Rahul Mukherjee, has this to say about it, *“I am a people’s person, I like interacting with the art audience and their appreciation gives me self confidence. Now-a-days the artist does not have to be present through out when his works are on*

display, earlier it was common...I like to be present just so that I can see the reactions of the viewers...or maybe interact with them...". Eleven percent said desire for fame, competition or even demand from art galleries is motivating to produce art work. Besides societal appreciation that is the non-tangible element, more corporeal elements such as art galleries also work as a catalyst. The younger artists mentioned that demand from art galleries gives tremendous motivation partly because of the financial returns that they can hope for in the immediate future. One of the popular male artists responded, *"I can finish work on a huge canvas overnight if there is demand from a gallery... I prefer to paint huge canvases and sometimes have to take the help of younger art students to fill in color... for such (pointing towards small boxes on the canvas which formed the backdrop for a masculine figure on canvas) small painting jobs there are younger students ready to help you...you may even give them some money ...its not something new, you know I did this when I was a student myself...hota hai (it happens).... but demand for my work is itself motivating."* If handled alone, this emerges as a solitary act. Therefore it is important to locate the functional aspect of the paintings for artists.

Do paintings have Utility?

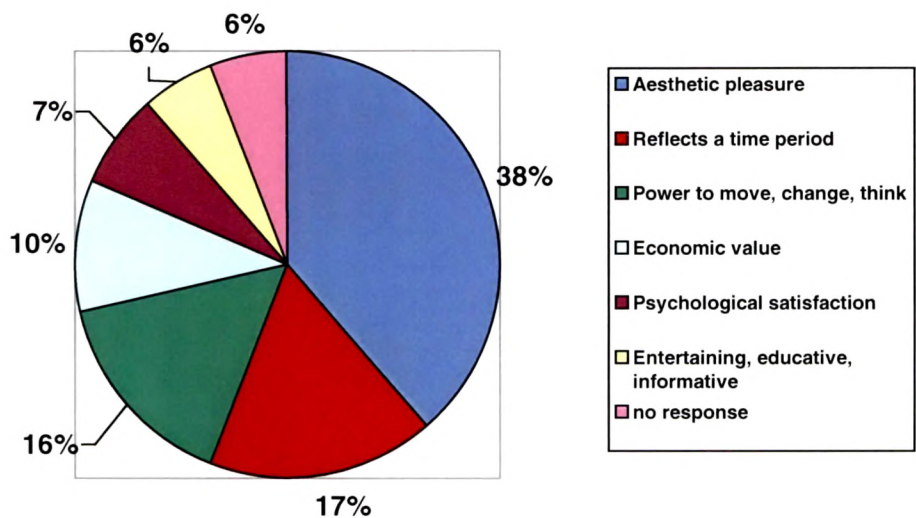
The struggles that the artist undergoes to be inducted into the art world, leads us to question the utility of paintings. According to K.G.Subramanyan,

With the large presence of art all around us, in the museums or in homes and collections, and of such quality and power as to still move our hearts, we should think that they did, in the past. Such works could not have been made unless people enjoyed making them and they could not have enjoyed making them unless they had some sense of security in their lives and a sense of freedom in professional practice (Subramanyan 2007: 118).

The words of this prominent artist conveys the significance which art symbolizes in the present world. The artists pondered over the utilitarian aspects linked with art and most of them had opinions which were categorized into varied domains.

The figure below reflects the opinions of the artists regarding the utility of the paintings. Thirty eight percent of the respondents attributed aesthetic value to the paintings. They felt that creating art serves aesthetic function, it gives pleasure as you bring into form ‘something from nothing’.

Figure 10: Utility of paintings

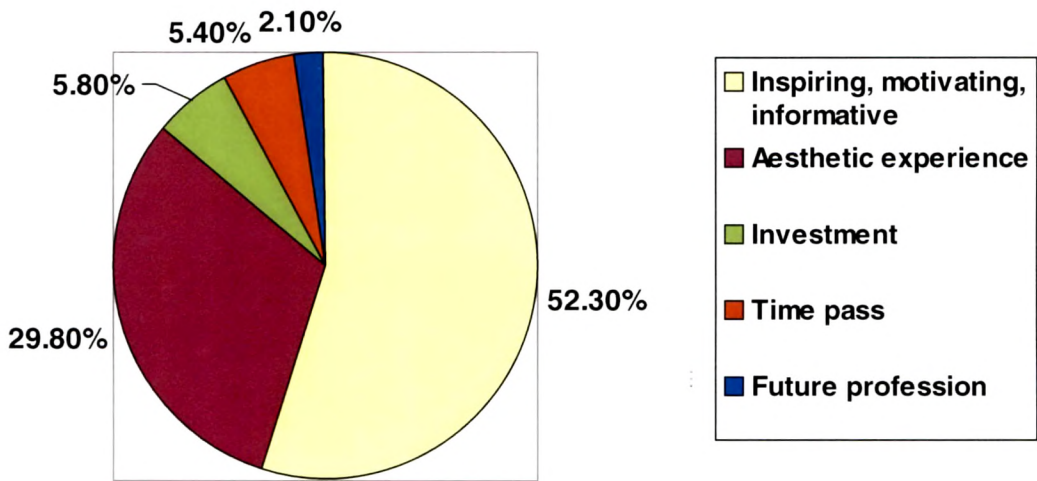


(A few of the artists gave multiple responses but for the purpose of statistical analysis only their first reaction was considered.)

Seventeen percent mention that paintings capture through images a time period; they can be useful in documenting/ recording histories, people and their culture. Historical evidence is greatly dependent on the art works of the past. Sixteen percent state that they have a power to change, move and may provoke people to act or react. According to ten percent of the respondents it holds economic value, especially today as investment in art has gained momentum. Seven percent feel that it can give you psychological satisfaction, artists visualizes and expresses it, which come out on canvases

and this gives according to the artists psychological satisfaction. Finally six percent mentioned that it is entertaining, educative, and informative.

Figure 11 : Art gallery visitors responses to viewing art



A comparison between the artists point of view and the perceptions of the art gallery visitors regarding the utility of paintings is presented here. Art gallery visitors responses to the question of what does viewing paintings in art galleries give them has brought about numerous responses.

Almost half of the art gallery visitors were of the opinion that viewing art gives inspiration and motivation to create or become creative, and a few also said it was informative in the sense of enlightening one of the technique, style, medium and the theme of the art works. When artists'

perception of utility of paintings was compared with the art audience, the artists weigh aesthetic pleasure more in terms of utility and majority of the art audience find the paintings the paintings that they view as inspiring, motivating and informative.

Artists and their Art

The contemporary Indian artist is inspired by several mediums, styles and themes. Newer styles and experiments are continuously emerging on the art scene. It is difficult to classify artists and their art in a singular manner. In fact there have been attempts of doing so, one way of classifying artists is on the basis of the mediums that the artists use, such as, acrylic, oil, water colors, or it could be terracotta sculptures, installation art and so on. But most of the artists have dabbled in various mediums simultaneously or at some point in their career hence such a classification would not give an understanding of their art. Another way of classifying the artists and their art styles would be in terms of the region of their origin which is sometimes used to define an artists style or his/her school of art such as Calcutta, Baroda, Bombay and Delhi. For some of the artists of the present study their region of origin and the art school they have attended are not only different but some of them have been influenced by many regions and schools they

have attended. Further artists move from one region to another and may not want to be associated with any one particular school of art, so such a classification would not suffice. The artists are of the opinion that their art is a journey and so destinations, and their mode keep on changing.

Majority of the artists mentioned that their art is sometimes an expression of personal experience, at other times it is their views or stand on social issues. The themes could vary according to their individual experiences. A young male artist, Barun Choudhury, says this about his art, *'my work is not an expression of an individual, it represents the feelings of an entire generation which is living in a vacuum'*.

Another young male artist, Abir Karmakar expresses his journey in art, *'during my post-graduation days I was into creating three dimensional art works...unconventional installation...but installation does not sell, they may gain appreciation but it does not bring in the bread...I was also doing commission work to survive at that time...Later I realized I was appreciated more for my paintings and not many were interested in installation art. I remember Geeta Kapoor (eminent art historian and critic) had visited my studio in Mumbai and showed enormous interest in my paintings...then*

onwards I have been concentrating on painting. Even in my paintings there have been phases...few years back I was doing nudes...at that time I received both appreciation and was ridiculed. Currently I'm using photorealism as a tool to give a real feel but in my paintings...see here [shows me the huge canvases] I have painted my image but as a woman...I have used the concept of 'ardha nareshwar' (the traits of a man and a woman)...see, canvas is a virtual reality where I can be another person...I am a man but on canvas I can be a woman that excites me... I identify with the woman in my paintings, I am not a tall woman but a short man and in my works I can become someone else...' Plate: 2 and 3



Plate 2

Abir Karmakar



Plate 3

Abir Karmakar

There are a few respondents from younger group who are working in a particular style called photorealism¹⁶, which is the current trend and they candidly stated that works in this style sell and therefore they prefer to work in this style. These younger artists were keen on having buyers for their paintings and hence did not mind flowing with the trend as it was a practical thing to do according to few of them. A few of the artists were influenced by

¹⁶ Using photographic references to create a painting. The artist works from a photograph or images from magazines using a grid. The images are metaphors with string of ideas associated with it.

the tele-visual and cybernetics, and their art reflects the media images. Ashutosh Bharadwaj a young artist used the 'Zoom' channel logo and matrix in his series of paintings and transcreated in his paintings a blend of visual imagery Plate: 4.



Plate 4: With the Narcissist (2005)

Ashutosh Bharadwaj

There are other younger artists who have chosen alternative styles of painting. A young male artist, Farhad Hussain's art is a satirical and playful. His 2005 solo exhibition depicted a spoof on society and relationships within

it. His artworks are bright and colorful with juxtaposed cross-projection of male-female identities Plate: 5.



Plate 5: Untitled

Farhad Hussain

Uday Mondal from the younger breed of artists has chosen 'action painting' and has made it his forte. Action painting denotes a style of painting in which the canvas is usually laid on the floor and paint and other materials are dripped, flung or sprayed over it. The action of the painter thus

creates the painting, which is abstract, though often with accidental effects

Plate 6 and 7.



Plate 6: Uday Mondal demonstrating action painting



Plate 7 : Whats the Story? (2005)

Uday Mondal

A few artists (n=7) had graduated from other educational stream and then turned to fine arts, their education in certain ways has influenced . As Maneesha Doshi, a middle group female artist who completed her graduation in psychology and then pursued a diploma in painting said that her paintings are a reflection of the conscious as well as subconscious understanding of herself and her surroundings.

Another female artist, Shruti Nelson, who graduated in zoology and then pursued fine arts has insects and animals depicted in almost majority of her paintings. The animal kingdom fascinates her and the influence of her zoology studies are evident in many of her art works Plate : 8.

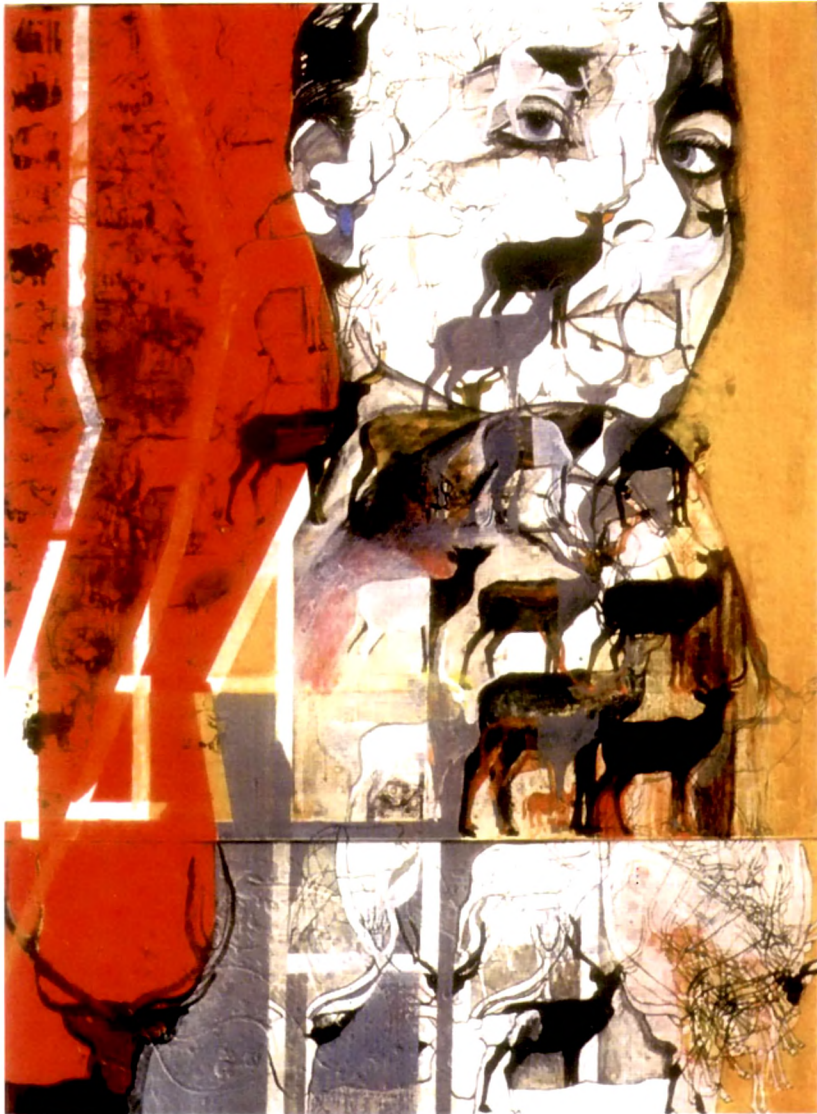


Plate 8 : “imprints on me” (2005)

Shruti Nelson

An eminent middle group female artist, Rekha Rodwittiya whose life and art is guided by feminist beliefs draws upon a wide variety of Indian painting traditions, she works within existing genres, while rejecting those

parts of traditions that justify the subordination of women. According to her *'Every person has a window through which they perceive, and that acts like a filter through which you decode and disseminate which becomes your grid-its my DNA. The politics of my life is that my work is not meant for approval, not even an identification, automatically this DNA is going to leave its imprint on everything and the choices you make, the senses of empathy you feel, the places or positions you locate your self in will be that which makes meaning for you and therefore life is about a process of selections, its also about exclusion.'*

The senior artists have over the years experimented with diverse themes, styles and mediums. Painter and art historian, Ratan Parimoo's paintings in earlier phases of his art career reflect childhood reminiscences. His works in 1950s depict his own early days in the Lotus Valley, Kashmir. Having been brought up in Kashmir some of his works, shows the beauty of Kashmir valley such as his painting in Plate 10. His works of 1960s are devoid of his native place memories and his paintings took an abstract expressionist turn, leaving behind the artist's native Kashmir hangover. His art over the years has evolved and changed, with fresh perspectives and novel expression in his art emerging with each passing day.



Plate 9 : Lotus Valley (1957)

Ratan Parimoo

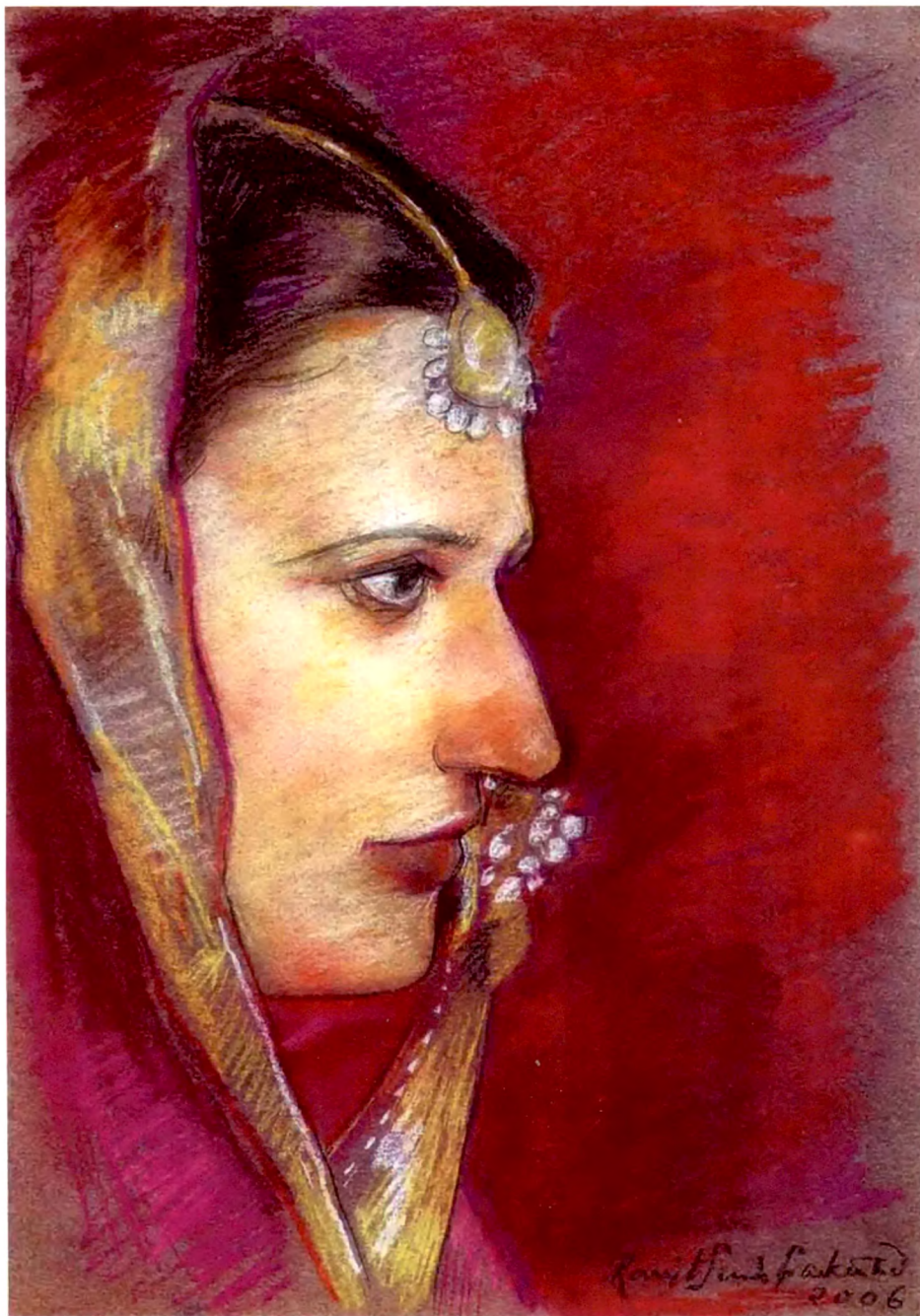


Plate 10: The Bride

Ranjit Singh Gaekwad

The art works of Ranjit Singh Gaekwad show a 'softer' royal personality than is expected. He is not only a trained and accomplished musician but also a full-fledged trained painter. The artist in him tends to establish his own humanity through the people he has painted, delineated, described, in the stances, postures and expressions they assume (Parimoo 2007) Plate:10

Jyoti Bhatt, a renowned artist has this to say about his recent (2004-2005) works, *'throughout the years, I have been using different kinds of visual images, such as the works of well-known artists, as well as unknown ones from villages and towns. For instance, I have used traditional, secular and ritualistic drawings made mainly by women on walls and floors; signage; designs and signboards painted by trained and untrained artists and vendors; graffiti on walls or urban ghettos and historical monuments and lines of sentimental poems written on rear side of trucks and rickshaws. I have borrowed and used these as quotations for their graphic qualities and potential to effectively convey my thoughts.'* Plate: 11.

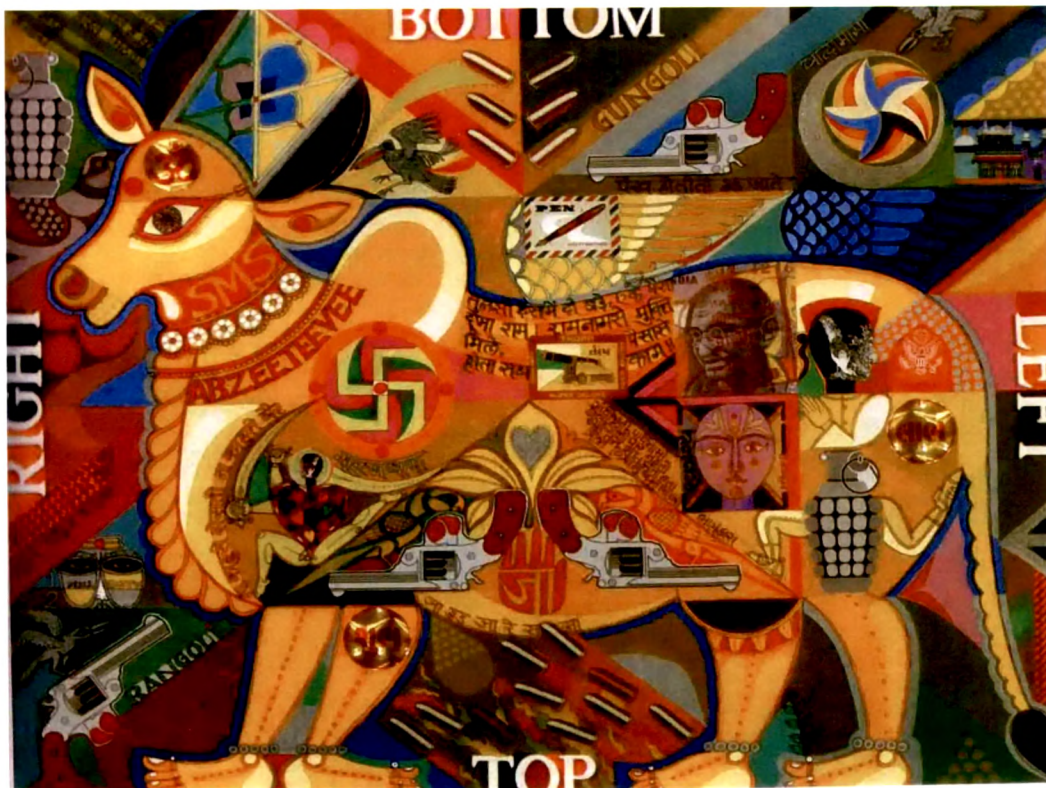


Plate 11: Untitled

Jyoti Bhatt

Artist's passion for art can make them surmount the gravest of hurdles. One such senior artist, Govind Nimbalkar, has conquered his almost complete blindness as he continues to paint and create with a just a shaft of light and minuscule vision. He is an artist who lives in the world of inner beauty as he continues to bring form and color (he cannot recognize colors physically due to his diminished eyesight) to a blank canvas Plate: 12

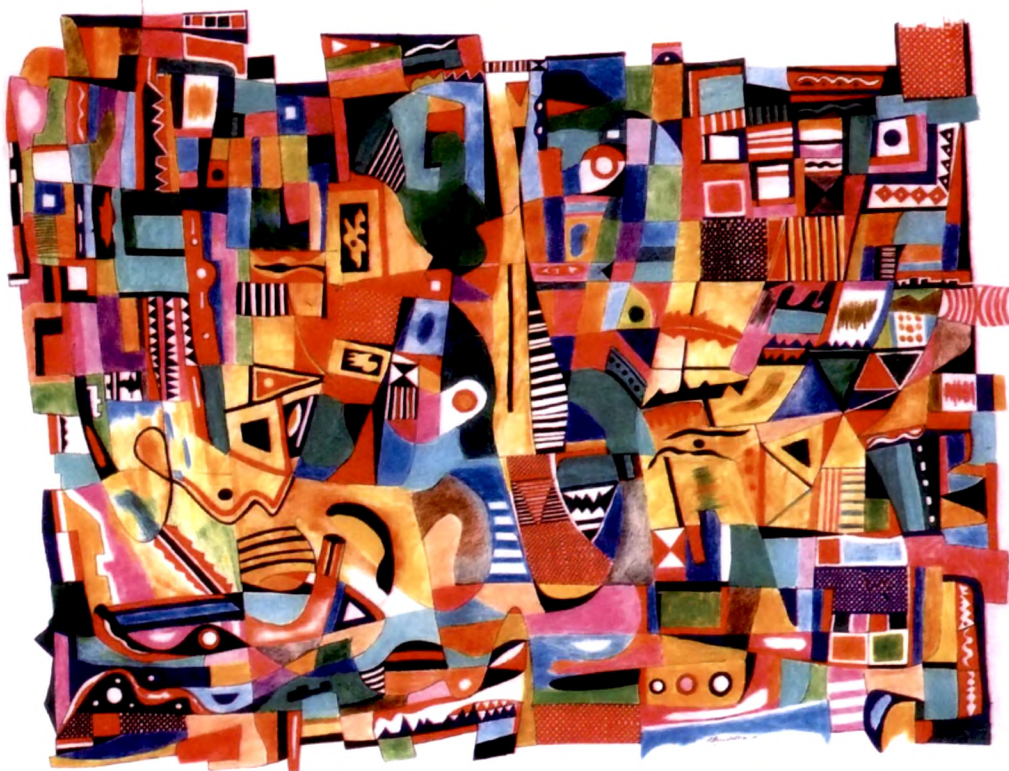


Plate 12 : Inner Beauty

Govind Nimbalkar

The artist is continuously experiencing, interacting and getting influenced by the socio-cultural milieu within which s/he lives. The present society releases numerous images that one constantly views and interprets. Personal histories and experiences too have an everlasting existence in the conscious and subconscious mind of an individual. These and many such aspects influence the creativity, depiction and outburst of visual imagery through the artworks of the artists. Thus multiplicity of art trends and styles

coexist in contemporary India. The artist is forever creating, recreating and inventing.

Myriad of art themes, mediums, forms and styles reflect the contemporary Indian art fabric and there is evidence of globalized trends being portrayed along with rich folk traditional art. There is amalgamation of the two even on one canvas and this shows that the artists today are creating newer styles in art forms. Some of the younger group of artists have consciously altered their art style to flow with the current trend whereas there are others who have allowed their intrinsic creativity to decide the style and medium of their art works.

Women and art

To realize one's potential in the areas of one's artistic interests and skill, one must have access to basic training systems as well as opportunity for public exhibition and sales. These are necessary ingredients for professional success in the arts. Historically and politically, various institutions such as guilds and academies have controlled the access. There were various criteria for inclusion in the artistic establishment. Male artists had to conform to be included, but they were always eligible for access to

the important established institutions and systems necessary for successful career building and individual recognition. On the other hand, women artists have automatically been denied this access simply on the basis of gender (Niceley 1992). The few who overcame these male - hegemonic directed systems did not merely have to conform to certain stylistic and goal-directed basis; they had to fight against the tradition to gain even meager access into the art domains. 'Indian art may have gone global but inside international auction houses there seems to be a gender gap when it comes to putting up lots under the hammer. In the genesis of Indian modernism women artists are on the back burner' (Nair 2008). Such neglect of the women artists makes it imperative to explore the world of art from women's perspective.

'Why had art historians chosen to ignore the work of almost all women artists? Were successful women artists exceptional (perhaps to the point of deviance) or merely the tip of a hidden iceberg, submerged by the demand of patriarchal culture that women produce children, not art, and confine their activities to the domestic, not the public sphere?' (Chadwick 1990). It can be adequately claimed that women artists have been excluded from historical artistic discourse. Has the exclusion caused an inhibition in women from venturing into and adopting the profession of an artist? In the

social context, the artist in image is usually male, the model female. He makes, surveys, imagines; she poses, reposes and inspires. The symbolic apparatus is male mastery and power, which is opposite to female passivity and resignation. This also can be understood in the general social context whereby man desires and woman satisfies, thereby man sees, woman is seen. He is active, she is passive, he is visible, and she is invisible. Certainly these are oversimplifications, but they; outline nonetheless societal construction of the artist as intrinsically male. To understand whether these paradigms which have been an intrinsic part of history, hold true in the present times, and to establish a relationship between the society, art and women it is important to understand gender construction in its basic form. Social relational contexts are of interest here because; as we shall see the process of defining self in relation to others evokes hegemonic cultural beliefs about the gender. The implicit prominence of these beliefs, in turn, acts as a background frame that under specifiable circumstances biases the behavior, that the way the sex composition of a student-teacher interaction implicitly evokes gender beliefs will shape not only the way the individuals enact their roles but also how they evaluate each others performance in that situation. In addition to this, gender beliefs have a hierarchal dimension of status inequality. Men are viewed as more status worthy and competent overall

and more competent at the things that “count most” (e.g. rationality). Women on the hand are seen less competent in general but “nicer” and better at communal/domestic tasks even though these tasks themselves are less valued in terms of social status. Amongst the artists, the women fine artists are still marginal. There are only a couple of names in the reckoning in the international art circuit. Amongst the well-known, renowned and famous artists only a handful of women artists have featured in the international art market. The art market has become the indicator of a person’s status and recognition, as that is the ‘real world’, the mainstream of society.

Though in this study the women artists have been regarded in same line along with the male artists, yet this section attempts to treat them deservedly exclusively. Essentially the term ‘women artists’ is contested as it leads to the dilemma of women either being stigmatized or privileged as artists. Two thirds of the female artists did not want to be labeled as ‘women artists’ as it would mean either less stringent evaluation or they feared being placed into a category which is judged differently than men. As succinctly stated by art historian, Dave-Mukherji (2003: 191), ‘The term ‘women artists’ throws open, a basic asymmetry between men and women, which permeates the very language we use. ‘Women’ here becomes a qualifying

term without which the word 'artist' simply means 'male artist'. In fact feminist art historians claim that women's non-inclusion was 'systematic and structural to the discipline itself, (*art history*) which operated with the assumption that the very domain of fine arts as opposed to crafts was a masculine one' (*ibid.*). In the popular histories women more than often featured only as the object. But in the arts there is a visible shift of women as object to women as subject; 'The favoured theme of 'women in Indian art' is gradually giving way to the new theme of 'Indian women artists' (Guha-Thakurta 1999:171).

At the global level the inquiry into the existence of prominent women artists in art history began in 1971 when Linda Nochlin wrote, 'Why have there been No Great Women Artists?'. The first generation of women artists and art critics recognized that women were underrepresented in exhibitions and galleries, and female experience was neither validated nor even addressed in mainstream art (Gouma-Peterson and Mathew 1987: 326,332). In India also it was only in the nineteen seventies that women artists were discussed. In fact global history has accepted that traditionally women artists were overlooked and were not considered to be a part of the art world as their entry into art guilds and academies were restricted. But there are

references in the ancient Indian scriptures of women artisans and also as accomplished painters. In fact in the ancient times the field of art was not divided along gender lines and recent feminist scholars have also mentioned names of important women patrons of art (Dave-Mukherji 2003 : 201). In India, women in early nineteenth century were just beginning to come out from the closed walls of the home to participate in the varied professions and art was one such creative endeavour. 'The first public exhibition by the Bengal school artists in 1919 included two women artists, one of whom was Sunaina Devi of Tagore family' (Sinha 1996 : 15). However it is also apparent that the first woman artist of India who got global recognition, Amrita Sher-Gil, underplayed her gender as in those times the professional field was a male's domain. In contemporary India, we do witness progress during the last few decades as there are women artists who are equally committed and professional. The present study however shows that artists who were women were still apprehensive about being considered as 'women artists'; and a majority of them preferred being called just 'artists'.

Even if women artists enter the field with determination to be committed, there are many social distractions in her way which a woman artist has to combat with. The question of marriage and family can become a

dilemma for a woman artist. It is more acute for her than for a male artist because of the expectation of child-birth and homemaking which are present across the globe and especially so in the socio-cultural context of India. Reactions to this among the women artists have varied from total rejection of marriage and family to a fruitful combination of family and creative career. Another point of view was also that in some cases male artist became famous or successful; the wives or partners of artists have been sidelined.

This is better understood when a deeper analysis of various female artists belonging to all the three groups is carried out. The senior group of women artists, which consisted of three artists, were married to artists and had children who are doing well in their lives. All the three of them are practicing artists and are still exhibiting their paintings. They have both physical (studio and art galleries) as well social-space (approval and appreciation). According to them being married to artists gave them the required opportunities which were scant a few decades ago. However these women artists had a 'constrained' practice of art in comparison to their husbands. This could probably be because their creativity took a back seat at certain times due to the familial responsibilities especially those of being a mother and a wife. In the words of Naina Dalal, a senior female artist, who

could not practice art regularly , ‘even as a young mother during late nineteen sixties, much of time was taken up in looking after my two daughters, my drawing habit never stopped’ (Parimoo 1999). In a catalogue (Images of compassion) of works and life of a Naina Dalal the balance that a woman artist has to establish if she desires to cater to both her family and art is visible in the following words, ‘(*The Artist*) has waded her way through raising and imparting values to them and at the same time creating art with great skill, struggling sometimes, failing sometimes, gathering courage and beginning afresh. She has withstood social and political resistance, damaging critical reviews and lack of funds and studio facilities at times’ (Parimoo- Krishnan 1999 : 10) Plate: 13 & 14 depicts graphic art centered around mother and child.

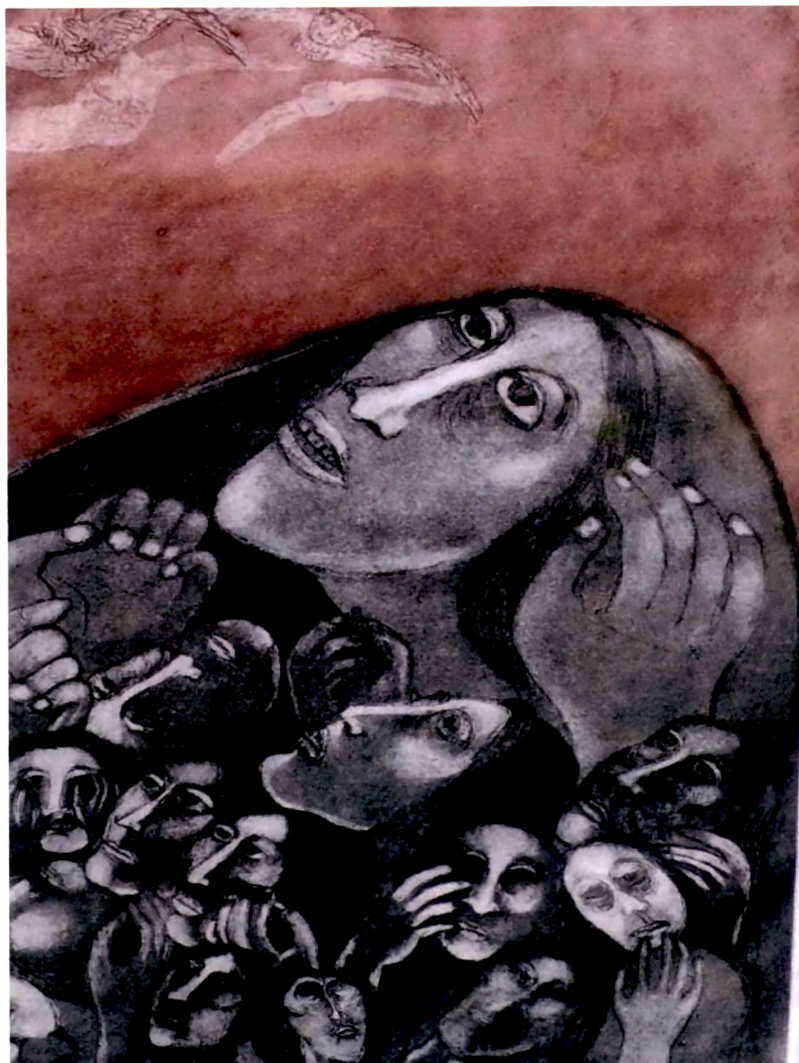


Plate 13: Mother (1994)

Naina Dalal



Plate 14: 'Girl Child is Born'

Naina Dalal

The central theme for the senior women artists is 'a woman' whether it displays problems of domesticity, pregnancy; social issues like female infanticide, dowry and many such concerns that is a part of a woman's life.

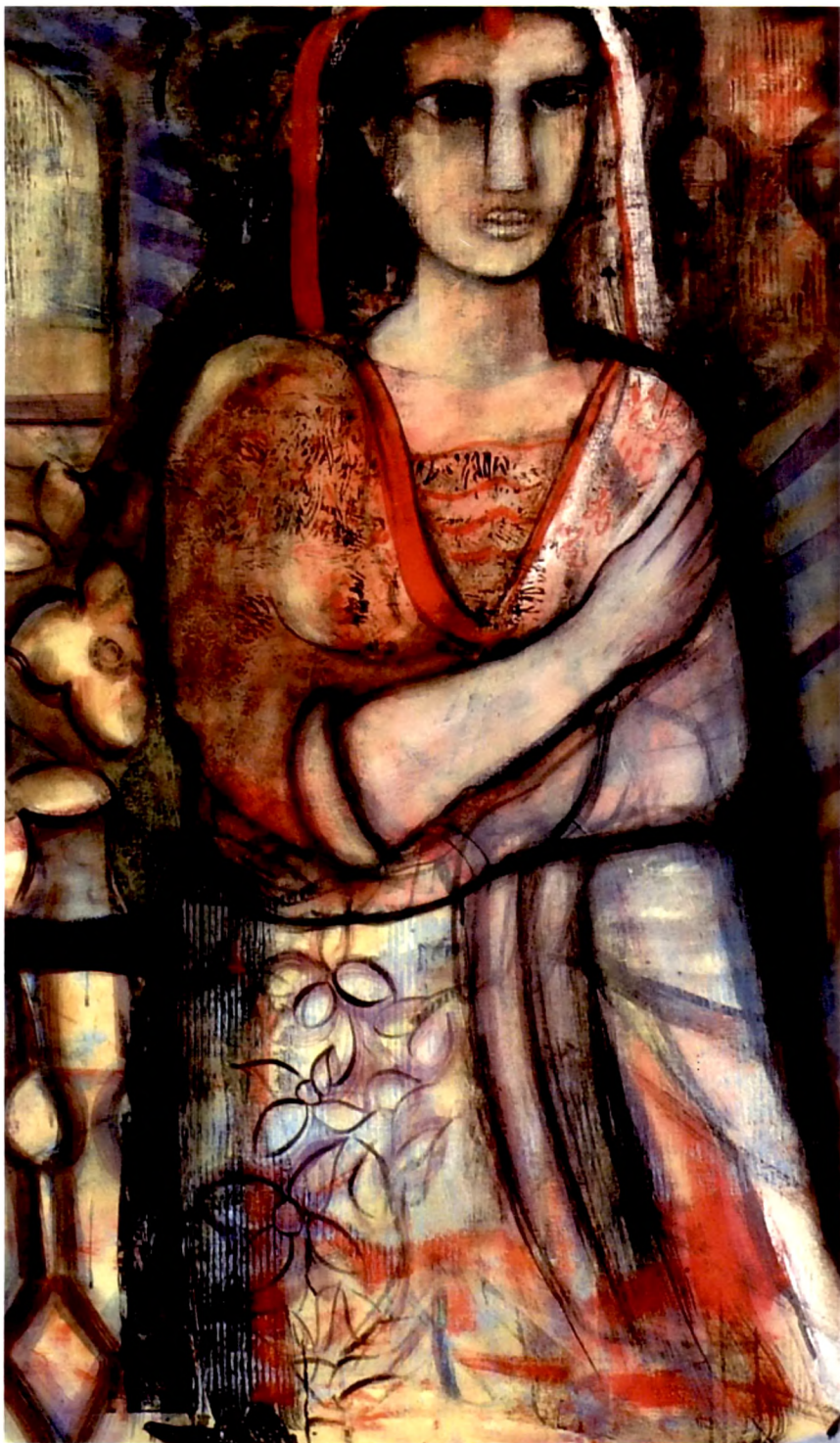


Plate 15: 'A Feudal Past'

Rini Dhumal

Rini Dhumal, senior female artist through her art looks inward and tries to grapple with the traumas, triumphs, displacements and struggles which each individual faces. However the focus of her art is predominantly female protagonist. Plate: 15. It is said about her art that, ‘..her understanding of the numbness of routines and ritual and the yearning of self-renewal makes Dhumal a perceptive story teller. She reveals underlying unpalatable truths of everyday happenings’ (Srinivasan 2002). Art created by these artist focuses mostly on the themes on womanhood or the various experiences of womanhood

The middle group of women artists are the ones who, like their male counterparts, lived in a developing India which was moving towards liberal thought processes, at least in certain social domains. The freedom that women enjoyed in terms of career and other choices were still limited. Consequently an analysis of their career paths would enable us to value the struggles, which these women had to go through to reach present level. In comparison to the senior women entering into the field of fine arts, the number of middle group women is larger. However it is still lesser than their male counterparts. While compared with the middle group male artists, the ratio is disparate twenty-one male artists to thirteen female artists. This is an

obvious indication of the fact that the difference was ample and women's entry into the profession of fine art was limited. The male artists have a large social canvas and equally larger career possibility. Some of the women artists of the middle group on the other hand have probably been socially conditioned to think, to dream and to create in a restricted way.

Similar to the group of the senior women artists, these artists also have their creative focus in and around themes related to women. Since women live in a patriarchal society, some of the artists visually represented in their paintings the oppressive nature of patriarchy by using powerful metaphors. A couple of artists favored autobiographical representations in their paintings. A middle age group female artist, Swaroopa Shah mentions the balancing act which she performs saying '*I have managed the home and my art together with ease because my painting space is this space (shows me a corner in a room with easel, brushes, colours etc.) which I call 'my mini studio' as you see it is adjacent to the kitchen...and I have managed to take care of both, initially I also wanted a separate studio just like my husband (whose is also an artist) but I realized it was a wishful thinking....In fact today I cannot work if I do not hear noises from the kitchen, you know like the cooker whistle blowing, vessels being washed and so on.*' Many of the

women artists have accepted, compromised and balanced their dual roles of home-maker and a working woman as innumerable women do elsewhere in the world.

However there are women artists who are mavericks and have been able to create their own distinctiveness without the traditional adjuncts. One such prominent artist is Rekha Rodwitty. She has used and made art a powerful medium to understand the nuances of the lives of the women. Her paintings can have multiple perceptions. Rekha Rodwitty also in her work as well otherwise has created a fascinating aura around herself, which can be seen and felt. According to her '*the politics of my life is that my work is not meant for approval, not even an identification*'. Her focus in art shifted with time. In the nineteen eighties her focus in paintings was on herself as a person. The paintings were titled as 'Forty Days and Forty Nights' which combined the elements of dream, familiarity, myth, and mundane elements of everyday life. In the early nineties, 'A genetic monumental female type emerged as the central subject', the solitary female figure was often depicted engaged in a domestic task emphasizing the special link by the way of femininity and creativity'. Late nineties her focus shifted to a not so feminist area, wherein she worked on the theme of 'In shades of Red', where red was

used a background for a suite of paintings which signified ‘sacrifice, passion, desire and protest’.



Plate 16: ‘Bye Bye Baby’

Rekha Rodwittiya

In 1998, she reverted to themes centered around women “Stories from the Womb”. In 2003, she worked on the theme of “Bye Bye Baby”, is about the loss of innocence and can be perceived in multiple ways. Such as a young girl leaving her mother and going to ‘sasural’ (in-laws home) or an abortion of a child. Thus the viewer can attach several connotations to the art. Her works and life symbolize the boundless expressions that a woman artist can depict. Her art symbolizes womanhood to the hilt. Plate: 16

There are few who chose to live within the mainstream stereotypical social environment and yet have been able to create extraordinary art. These middle group female artists have adopted various genres of art. They varied largely from the traditional focus on feminism or issues related to women and their lives to other sublime trends like nature, objects, images and words etc. The middle group women artists also had acceptance from their family to pursue the career of their choice similar to the senior women artists. They had relative space and freedom and less social and professional pressures than the women artists of the present times. Therefore had entered the field to create a niche for themselves in the art world. The artists belonging to this group cannot be classified in one genre as each has worked in variety of modes. Kim Kyoung Ae’s art displays a blend of ‘Korean ink brush

landscapes to the detailed arabesques of Moghul miniatures. It harbours well that the new India of multicultures can host the assimilations of yet another trajectory of influences and embraces that into its folds of unity.’ (Rodwittiya, R. 2004). Another woman artist Anjum Chatuvedi in one of the exhibition titled Being/Believing comments that she experiences a compulsive need to create art, she says, *“I would think that there are some images which have collected over some time now in my mind and have arisen out of the palpable need for my hand to exercise its right to create”*. She puts forth on the canvas certain misgivings that emerge due to the woman’s journey in a certain phase ‘These were also moments of reaffirmations and rebuilding simple truths of just ‘being’ and ‘believing’ in myself. Thus I chose to begin with two very obvious facts that I had about me - my Body and that it is Female...Witnessing my body travel from the reckless realm of infinite and enter the sacred sphere of the finite, see it through its wear and tear, its moments of highs and lows, has been a quiet amazing journey in itself. Her art focuses on the act of procreation that becomes the inherent part of a womanhood who often is made to feel socially incomplete if she is not endowed with this role’ (Chaturvedi 2005).

The above discussion has centered by and large around the art of various middle group women artists. The art created by them had different dimensions and concerned various issues. Their social set up was by and large the same, the freedom of which is reflected in their art. Their art has a special uniqueness that is a prerogative of being born as a woman. It appears as though this group has created art out of their free will and without any social or professional pressures. The social institutions like family, marriage has acted as a stimulating agent, which is once again reflected in their art. These free expressions emerge as a special trend and is visible in the works of young group of female artists.

The young group of female artists have better social acceptability. Their concerns are little different from the group of senior and middle group artists. Most of them have maintained the social fabric and have not diverted from it. However there is different individuality, which is witnessed in their artwork as well. To begin with the earlier trend of carefree style and themes of women artists has transcended from their generation to the next one that is reflected in the works of some of the older female artists in the young group. For instance the art work of Heeral Trivedi revolves around women. According to Nancy Adjania 'Trivedi's politics of representation stresses

small transcendences emanating from anonymous acts of women labour’ (Adjania 2005). Heeral Trivedi attempts to bring up the women lost in history through her paintings. ‘Trivedi’s politics of representation stresses small transcendences emanating from anonymous acts of women’s labor. The invisible maid, the seamstress in drudgery and the mother, the gratis element of all households, features regularly in her paintings’, Plate 17.



Plate 13 “Twin Sharing”

Heeral Trivedi

In her earlier paintings she uses images to make her private experiences for public consumption. In her words *'the feeling of becoming pregnant and becoming a mother has evoked unusual feelings and it is expressed in my paintings....women have a boon of motherhood which is so very special'*.

In the cases of younger women artists there is a change that is visible. Women artists are asserting themselves and becoming much more visible in the public art establishment. This new era is ushered by adopting new and exciting movements such as 'Abstract Expressionism', etc. The leanings of the young women can be understood from the review written by Sharmila Sagara (2005), of the works of three young female artists and their paintings, where she comments on the embarking of a new era, *'...(young artists) are aware of the present times and are trying to recognize it. At the same time they respond to the reality of ground beneath their feet. And sure, the responding tone is not against the existing ground or the time yet there are raised eyebrows and a desire to cross the barbed line to travel and ensure reality on the other side'* (Sagara 2005). A young woman artist who is resplendent with her style, which though focuses on women, yet has a distinctive perception. Jignasha Ojha poses different questions through her

art, questions on modernity, on casteism and class divisions. Her art has derivations from televisions and cinema, which is typically a modern notion. Jignasa Doshi her contemporary has focused on photorealism which is a lucrative medium and is the latest trend of modern art (*ibid.*) and this style was by and large a male domain. However she has maintained the trend of woman as one of the central subject though with a changed mode. Apart from her none of the female artists ventured consciously to paint in photorealism style. Most of the other young artists are still striving to establish themselves.

The above discussion reflects that women artists have an inclination to convey through their art works their unique experiences as women and to depict images which they experience being women. These experiences and ideas are unique and need to be highlighted for a special viewing by the public. It is found that 'A whole body of recent research in psychology, literature, art, music, sociology, and education indicates that women perceive reality differently than men, for whatever reasons, and therefore have different expectations of and responses to human experience.' (Gouma-Peterson and Mathew 1987 : 334). Carol Gilligan in her work '*In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*' states

‘Given the self and morality, women bring to the life cycle a different point of view and order human experiences in terms of different priorities’ (1982: 22). In fact an academic debate of whether the female sensibility is biologically determined or is purely a social construct has been ongoing for decades. The several studies explored by Gouma –Peterson and Mathew in their article *‘The Feminist Critique of Art History’* have concluded ‘gender is a factor in how women create and interpret images, not for biological reasons, but because their experiences of the world are different from those of men’ (1987 : 337). The need is not to emphasize on their womaness but to bring to the fore their distinctive struggle and triumph in a male dominated profession and a patriarchal society.