



Woman Printmaker Of Bombay School: Navjot Altaf: Study Of An Art Work Process In Different Contemporary Techniques Of Print Making

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Abstract

There have been very few women artists in the early years of modernism in Indian art. The conservative social structure confining them to the preserve of the household. Today women artists in India find themselves in a peculiar position. Not only do they have to articulate a language and reflect a modern situation like their male counterparts but also have to assert their right as individuals in a society dominated by men.

This paper focuses on the contribution of woman visual artist, print maker Navjot Altaf from Bombay School in different contemporary techniques of print making according with thought process and different aspects. She creates a space for empowerment through the use of multi mediums in interactive works of art and becoming inspiration to eminent artists and young generation. The history of visual arts and print making of Bombay School in particular cannot be written without acknowledgement of her contribution as multidisciplinary artist.

Navjot Altaf's struggle for an identity and growing personalisation of an image is obvious in her artwork. Her art work process is to engage people in a theoretical debate that challenges the cultural conservation. The work of Navjot allows greater subjectivity and shows a shift in expression, introspection, investigation of her own being and position in society by the way of complex and elaborate methods of print making like silk screen printing, Digital Printing and one can see the beauty by the way of technical skill and graphic elegance, which is often concealed for hidden messages.

Keywords: History, Visual art, Print making, Woman print maker, Multidisciplinary artist.

Introduction

Print making or Print is work of art which allows multiple impressions in exact/ identical forms of the original image. Impressions, pictograms, symbols have played very important role to give evidence of development of civilization of human being. General handprints on walls are stamped or airbrushed by mouth to blow pigment. It appears that there is close relation to the signs and handprints. Pictorial multiples have been in wide use since fifteenth century as a means of visual communication to serve the needs of the church or the monarch. Prints and illustrations of religious themes are known to have made their beginning in Europe in the 15th century or earlier. In International context, printmaking in India started making its mark almost a century after the 'Gutenberg's Bible' (1456) which is the earliest major book printed by using mass produced movable metal type in Europe.

Print making was introduced in India to create printers and Illustrators to develop native narratives and visual vocabulary. By the middle of the 18th century printing started in a big way in Bengal, when the British East India Company officially established its political control in 1765 in Calcutta(Kolkata). They recorded their impressions of the people and the land through the print media. The Bombay School was founded in March 1857, and Mr. M. Agyer followed with the opening of Sir J.J. School of Art and Industry which was named after Sir Jamshetjee Jeejibhoy, a businessman and philanthropist who gave donation for its endowment. Sir Jamshetjee Jeejibhoy always wanted this school to be an industrial design center for arts. So, it had no tradition in print making as expressive medium in Bombay school like other schools until 1938.

In the decades of 50s and 60s of post-independence, the idea in print making of Bombay school strongly revolves around Indian modernism in art, and in 1962 print making subject started in syllabus by support of Vasant Parab after continuous struggle of graphic art class by Y K Shukla from 1947 in Bombay school. Bombay school has diverse records of the key events, excursions, various communities and castes who studied here. After Independence if we see Bombay school there have been remarkable and admirable women print makers i.e. Lalitha Lajmi, Prafulla Dahanukar, Navjot Altaf, Shakuntala Kulkarni, Durga Kainthola, Vishakha Apte and many others who remain insufficiently investigated or appreciated where Bombay was one of the flourished center economically, geographically, politically, social and culturally. Here this paper focuses on the print making works of Navjot Altaf- Print maker, multidisciplinary artist of Bombay School and different aspects behind it. The works show a shift in expression by the way of complex and elaborate methods. It can help to understand the role and different aspects of women by artistic expressions in different mediums and techniques of print making.

Literature review

The book, **Indian print making today 1985-** Jehangir art gallery publication-2000 has compilation of creation of leading artist who are working in different mediums of print making from 19th century. In the Catalogue of annual exhibition of Sir JJ School of Art **Roopa-Bheda 160th Annual Art Exhibition 2016-17** gives diverse records of the institute. In this particular issue 'Feminine perspectives: Women artists of Sir JJ School of art (1880s to 1970s) there is a reference to women artists, print makers, their career and works written by Dr Manisha Patil.

'Compilation of women artist of Sir JJ School of Art from 1980 to 2002' is an article written by Abhijit Gondkar which gives brief about revolution period of this institute. The women artists of this period who were working on social aspects through their art came to the fore. Use of variety of materials, new emergence of art market, exhibitions, magazines, writing on art incited change toward equality.

'Tracking History of Female Printmakers from Sir JJ School of Art' is an article written by Madhulika S Verma and Tanuja Rane which gives history of print making of Sir JJ School of Art and women Printmakers of this institute who created complete new vocabularies by their work, acceptance and depiction of new mediums i.e. digital technology. But there is a brief analysis about their expressions and different aspects in print making medium.

Navjot Altaf: A women printmaker of Bombay School

Navjot Altaf is born in Meerat in 1949. Her parents Prithvi Singh and Ripudaman were from Punjab but lived in Kashmir for long duration. Navjot Altaf did schooling in Jammu, Udhampur, Dalhousie, and finally in Meerut in Durgabari A.V. Girls Inter college, which was based on the Shantiniketan pattern of education. Navjot Altaf admitted to sir JJ school of Art, Mumbai in 1967 for both the streams, Applied Arts & Fine Arts, and completed in 1972. While the final year of studies at sir JJ school of Art Navjot met Altaf Mohamedi she drawn to and influenced by the committed Marxist artist in Altaf. Her commitment to society is expressed through various activities like working at a school for the physically challenged & working in day care units for small children.

Navjot an accomplished print maker, multidisciplinary artist has persistently pushed the boundaries of material and form to express social involvements. In her 1970 and further works there is use of a grid pattern, suggesting the restrictions & impositions of reality and from 1978 her works are more reflective of the self. The work allows greater subjectivity and shows a shift in expression by the way of complex & elaborate methods. She has done much work in silk screen printing and digital printing techniques.

Cultural and Socio-political aspects in Navjot Altafs work

In the 1970's and 80's Navjot Altaf and some of the artists not only worked towards the possibilities to interact with people from their own field & from different disciplines, like theatre, academics, journalism, films, activists/activism, to discuss artists dealing with cultural & socio-political issues through their art works but also participated in political activities organised by the progressive social groups with the consciousness to create grounds for a dialogue. There was need to engage or invite the public in the process of making art. In a workshop space, through personal and extended interaction with individuals and groups of youth and women as participants, in Labour camps in Mumbai she and some of artist group learnt about people problem as migrants, their histories and their struggle in a city like Bombay.

Mediums and techniques of printmaking used for self-expressions of artwork

Navjot's work expresses impermanent and dialectical approach to issue like unfortified, corporate mining, communal riots, and genocide. The work of Navjot allows greater subjectivity and shows a shift in expression, introspection, investigation of her own being and position in society by the way of complex and elaborate methods of print making like silk screen printing, Digital Printing and one can see the beauty by the way of technical skill and graphic elegance, which is often concealed for hidden messages.

Screen printing technique was predominantly used for commercial applications. It is widely used today for mass production in graphics such as posters, display stands/ boards. Navjot Altaf has used this process as an expression of creativity and artistic vision in work Fig.1 'They clean our compound' printed on paper in bold black colour. Interaction with broader & diverse people helps understand the issue and questions relevant to their lives. Navjot Altaf work is based on these experiences. Navjot in her work, whether digital print, photograph, sculpture or video exposes the injustice practiced against weaker sections of society, social injustice and violence.

Navjot has done work both in traditional and digital printmaking processes to construct images. We can see new digital printing and output possibilities with working and thought process in different ways where techniques and content are inextricably linked. The matrix or plate or block functions as a translator of artist-generated or defined information whether it is drawing, photographic images or data sets. Digital inkjet print involves stages such as input, image manipulation and output. Here images are resolution independent and can be scaled to any size and printed without any loss of edge quality.



Fig.1, They clean our compound, silk screen print, 1977, 21X14 inches

Fig.2, Sisters, silk screen print, 1989, 35X69 inches

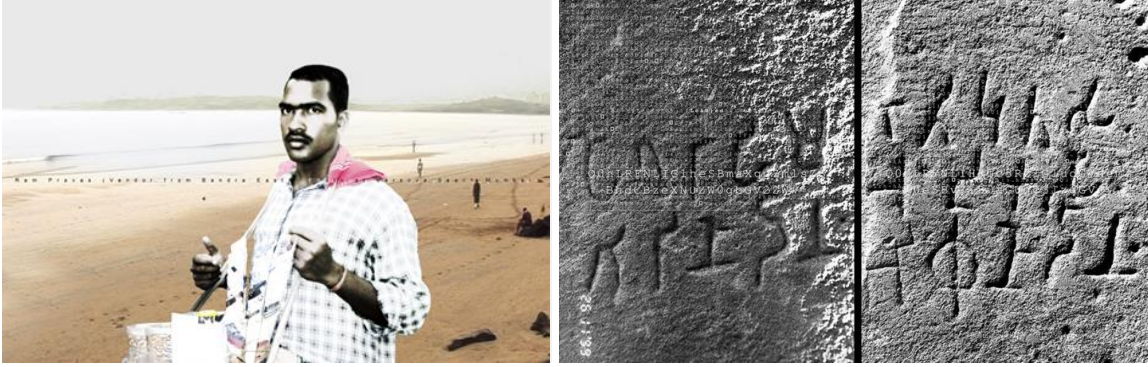


Fig.3, Bombay Shots, 2007-08, digital photomontage archival printed on hahnemuhle fine art pearl paper, edition of 5, 15.5 x 23.5 inches

Fig 4. Lost Text, 2017, 25.5 x 20.5 inches, Digital print on Canson platine fibre rag paper pasted on archival conservation board PVC transfer on acrylic, Edition-3

Image Resources: Artist

In "Lost text " (2017), digital print on fibre rag paper, Navjot turns a technical computer glitch that disorganized all her research into unreadable code resulted a series of abstract, monochromatic digital prints which resemble geological and archaeological forms inlaid with disorganized typographies. Series of digital prints 'Lost Text' is visual aesthetics to create a dialogue interaction and play between memory (autobiographical, cultural, historical, digital) and text of ancient scriptures and digital technology of data-mining, photographs of ancient hieroglyphs. This work is digital encodes generated from a corrupt computer hard-drive which had Navjot's Bastar diaries documentation. The process of the photographic image and the digital text together is the transfer of these divergent memories across time and space with the possibilities of digital technologies.

Conclusion:

Women artists expressed themselves with a different and concerned voice on modernity and social responsibility, interweaving personal histories with collective memories. Navjot Altaf's work process and subject addresses issues of social injustice and violence in India through a unique feminine perspective. While Navjot exhibited works in galleries and museums worldwide, she consistently looks for audiences beyond traditional art spaces. Her work at alternative public spaces allows young people to meet and engage with each other creatively. She creates a space for empowerment through the use of multi mediums in interactive works of art and becoming inspiration to eminent artists and young generation. The history of visual arts and print making of Bombay School in particular cannot be written without acknowledgement of her contribution as multidisciplinary artist.

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