

Date:17/01/2007 URL:

<http://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/mp/2007/01/17/stories/2007011700310500.htm>

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Old technique, modern images

Kathleen Scarboro's works are about life and the Indian artistic tradition



FOR 'PERFECT FINISH' PICTURES A painting by Kathleen Scarboro

Living between two capital cities — New York and Paris — Kathleen Scarboro, who is showcasing her works at Artworld, is a muralist, sculptor and a traditional painter. Traditional painting is a process of creating pictures, which dominantly includes the method of Renaissance apparatus of perspective, foreshortening, chiaroscuro and the technique of oil painting. This is directive of her strength in drawing and rendering to create 'perfect finish' pictures.

Kathleen exudes passion and sensitivity to the process of mediating with oil painting as it evolved during the Renaissance to execute pictures of religion, history, myths, portraits and civic life with natural or interior settings. By reviving and refreshing this technique, the artist attempts a translation of the laborious process to establish the truth that though technology is privileged by majority of artists, she will try to bring back into painting the aesthetics and beauty that today is lost in a vortex of stereotypical imagery derived from the visual media.

With her extensive travels across India, her repertoire is the life and the Indian artistic tradition. She juxtaposes the imagery of life on the streets of the metropolis in India with iconic representations of gods, nayikas, geometric and organic ornamentation appearing on the walls of temples and stone screens of Islamic architecture. Though her technique is traditional, her approach is contemporary. The inherent realism dictated by this technique underpins her style, and it is worked through different layers, from transparent to opaque.

The technique as Kathleen explains is dependent on the pigments, which she uses and a

particular brand of oil paints that offers her the choice of hues, tones and values in the 'vibgyor' range. She lays out the entire range of shades and tones on her palette gradually building a composition, allowing each layer to dry before she applies the next coat of paint and glaze. Hence, each work is time consuming, taking as much as three months to finish. Her paintings have a vocabulary that is figurative, derived partially from Renaissance and the Indian cultural milieu, building bridges to her connectivity between the East and West. Her compositions are dramatic with light source focussed on the protagonists and framed with decorative collage within.

Her prime concerns are located in the feminine charm which she particularly finds sustained here, whether she is a diva, filmy icon, a housewife or a fruit/vegetable vendor. To explicate this reference, she juxtaposes the Indian woman with an apsara to draw parallels that despite advances in ideologies of feminism and modern technologies the Indian woman remains full-bodied.

The exhibition also has portrait drawings in pencil, perfectly rendered by guest artist Pamela Winfield, who is Kathleen's student. Pamela's works are intended to convey the message that oil painting technique, which she mediates with, cannot happen without the foundation of perfect drawing and rendering.

The exhibition is on at Artworld till January 24.

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