

A magnanimous artistic commencement

Surendra Pal Joshi does not need an introduction to the people who have acquaintance with the Indian Contemporary Art. Joshi has dedicated more than three decades exploring and unleashing creativity and meticulously trying to bring the best out of it. A true artist, never bound by any barricade-region, language, medium or mode of expression, has continuously meditated into this domain observing and capturing the minute changes, the beauty and the brutality of the nature through his art.

Trained in painting from Art and Craft College, Lucknow, Joshi evolved as a multidimensional artist. Starting his career as a figurative artist he later decided to explore and blend up abstraction and explore new means of expression for his creative pursuit. He had served as an assistant professor (1988 – 2008) in the Fine Arts Faculty, Rajasthan School of Art, Jaipur. He is the recipient of a number of Fellowships, Scholarships and International Awards and has exhibited his works in many solo and group exhibitions and Biennales at national and international level.

Currently settled in Jaipur and actively working for the advancement of the art and culture of Rajasthan region, his umbilical cord has always been attached to his native place Uttarakhand – which is termed as an abode of God. The land of Uttarakhand has an esteemed stature in religion and mythology, a terrain of natural beauty and had been a source of inspiration for many artists since generations but could not develop as a significant art centre. Joshi has actively tried to explore the opportunity to build a decent platform for the art and artists of that region.

Finally with the support of the state government he has conceptualized the **Uttara Museum for Contemporary Art**, a museum of contemporary art completely dedicated to the art and culture of Uttarakhand.

The task of art today is to bring chaos into order. – Theodor Adorno

Natural calamities or social circumstances not only change our lives but our art as well. With the devastation that took place in 2013 in Uttarakhand, the world has witnessed and stood up to support the victims and survivors of this natural calamity. People of that region and nearby have succumbed to this fierce incident. Lakhs of people got displaced along with casualties of few hundred people and many more got affected due to flood, landslide

and its repercussion. Thousands of pilgrims became hostage of this situation due to sudden disconnect from the road networks resulting out of the flood. Indian government has actively brought various segments of forces including the air force to help the stranded people. Their bravery has saved many lives even at the cost of their own life, which was truly saddening at one hand and sacrificial triumph at the other.

As we all know that the creative people observe the situations not only through their vision but with various other senses and it remains in situ their mind until it outpours through their inventive idiom. Every person who has seen this disaster was moved by its horrific condition. Joshi who has a close alliance with this holy place was totally shaken by the incident. It had a big impact on him as a person and as an artist, and he responded to it with some subtler works of a different nature. Leaving his known mediums and style he has vowed to create something unique which will essentially satisfy his soul and will act as an artistic documentation to this horrendous occurrence.

“Painting is just another way of keeping a diary.” — Pablo Picasso

Uttara Museum for Contemporary Art will also house works depicting the incident from 2013 natural disaster. Joshi has interestingly chosen some important aspects of the entire incident and worked upon it, presenting them in a moving and intriguing way that would narrate the horrific episode which had been witnessed by the people of the region and seen by others through the digital communication mediums.

The artist created some dynamic works made out of unconventional medium like safety pins. The chosen medium of safety pins shows the confidence of the artist and his commitment to deal with such a tiny object to inculcate it into a measurable size sculptural installation. He created an 8 feet long steel Indian Air Force helicopter using safety pins close to one lakh in number. This work has been done in reverence to the Indian army who had shown immense effort and courage to protect the lives of the people during the 2013 Kedarnath disaster. Another striking work titled *Paani* is made out of safety pins, beakers and water. It depicts a cascade spawning into a fanciful vision but at the same time it also reminds the wrath of nature that killed thousands of Indian pilgrims in the disaster. These works are astonishingly rich in its complexity and magnitude.

His painting *Basant vi* epitomise the holy Kedarnath temple which is known for its sanctity and holds a great faith in Hindu religion. In spite of massive destruction around the main sanctum, the icon of lord Shiva remained intact. He also did some amazing drawings as *Disaster series*, a direct contemplation of the loss and catastrophe and some portrait drawings of local people from the hills of Uttarakhand region.

Art is not what you see, but what you make others see- Edgar Degas.

Memories from ones childhood still come back to inspire. They cannot be erased. The significance of a state of mind or object changes with time. Yet even in the unconscious, deeply embedded influences recur and return to take place in a present context. His painting *Celebration II*, acrylic on canvas reflects his fascination for textile and fabric. The technique of achieving a textile like feel is particularly his own, which he developed on his own over a period of time by exploring and experimenting with the medium. This inclination came from his childhood memory of his mother dealing and weaving with wools and yarns.

In the chosen array of works the artist has worked in many mediums which include small format drawings to huge canvases, sculptures leading to sculptural installations as per the demand of the subject and the story he wanted to depict for a clear understanding of the viewer. Each creation showcases the artist's coalition to his roots and everything the artist loves and fears about.

Apart from the works addressing the incident of flood and disaster in Uttarakhand, some of them are also dedicated to its regional heritage and culture. Another interesting work from the lot includes a huge 10 x 20 feet double storied wooden building, a representation of the traditional wooden house from the hills of Uttarakhand. In today's globalized world where cultures are getting hybridised and changes are inevitable it is imperative to preserve some of the traditional entities for the generations to come. This change is the constant realization that possesses the artist's mind and canvas and that is best how a creative person can adjoin. Joshi's works are a recollection of these swinging times.

Most of his inspiration comes from the surroundings that include nature, living creatures or any non-living matter which he mostly portrays in his

non-representational style. Instead of tantric or spiritual tinge, his abstracts are personal and rooted in reality. Works are incited by his life and journey, stirring for a search may be a search for his origins. Looking at his canvas is like reading a storybook, but here a lot has been hidden between the lines. The works are open to multiple readings from various subjective standpoints. It depends on one's sensibility and mood, the same sensibility men and women from his native village use when they decide the colour of their yarns, the weave and warp of their looms.

His abstract layering with paint echo many concealed gist where the signs and textures reveal his modernist consciousness. In his early works the artist mostly refrained from using any recognizable forms, and never linked or referred to anything that has a natural appearance in his canvases. His choice of colours has a close alliance to nature, the blue, greens and reds including yellows and browns giving it a raw earthly feel. Joshi's command over the use of interesting patterns, textures and lines induces one to be drawn to his non-representational imagery as it transcends the objective world and celebrates the power of textures, forms, lines and colours. The artist reconciles the quest for the intangible and formless, with layers and textures. At every level, the artist draws upon energies released by these conflicts of imperative, evident in the engagement between structural austerity and unabashed colouristic opulence. In fact, Joshi's paintings are a seamless blend of history, memory and everyday life. As an observer, one can try and interpret the algebraic play with forms and tonal play with colours as if one can actually see between the lines, longitudinal and latitudinal, the hues, reds and blues but the allusion are a storyteller's play to try and create a curiosity about the content.

Joshi has been working for more than two years creating a series of works based on the central theme of the Uttarakhand calamity. The museum will house these works by Joshi in order to understand the artistic genius of exploring the subject with unusual mediums and, moreover, acting as a documentation tool for the public. On one hand this museum will create awareness among the masses of the region and on the other, the state of contemporary art and its understanding will definitely ameliorate by housing these masterpieces on display. The young generation of artists would get an opportunity to interact and learn with these works and also would get an encouragement to use the artistic medium to respond to the social issues rather than only producing the commercial decorative pieces.

In recent times Indian art has reached to the global platforms and has been getting recognition and appreciation from the international galleries and collectors. But when we look at the entire art ecosystem of our nation we feel that we actually need much more amplitudes in every sector of this creative industry in order to make ourselves resourceful at par with the Western art circuit. In many developed and developing countries of the West or even in nearby East, there are a number of art centres, museums, government initiatives and corporate support which are playing a pivotal role in the upkeep and development of this creative industry.

Many countries in the West have entire museum dedicated to an artist showcasing their creative journey of lifetime. For example, Picasso Museum in Paris, Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, Munch Museum in Oslo and many more like that. This actually helps common people to understand the significance of this stream and also motivates them to choose art as a career. We have ample resources but we are unable to mobilize them in the form of a resource centre which could help others. India also needs many more museums and art centres which can work as tools for the betterment of this industry allowing the exchanges between the regional level initiatives and major centres in India and beyond.

Joshi's initiative and active involvement in the establishment of this state museum will definitely carve out a path for the persisting and also upcoming artists of culturally rich Uttarakhand region and it could also act as a role model for similar initiatives in other states which can help in nurturing and making the future masters of our nation.

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