

Marta Jakimowicz

Hybrid worlds

After a year of living in Bangalore, Lilian Hasler's exhibition at Sumukha (March 31 to April 5) fleshed out her aesthetic-existential encounter with India. This mid-generation Swiss artist who does large, rough wood sculptures using chainsaw, conscious of being a woman confronts areas of masculinity delving into the mystery of human-animal hybrids. The head-on approach, energy and frankness whose brutality merges with personal involvement, empathy and warmth lets her discover and appropriate tentative similarities or resolutions in contradictory phenomena. It suits, perhaps complements, the nature of Indian reality with its exposed rawness, clashes and vitality that is ever ready to occupy whatever the space around.

The immense eyeball of stained glass and fibre seems sharp, a little eerily excited and sensuous, as if about to roll and invade into things it is watching. The "Cultural Encroachment" show, indeed, revealed the process during which the artist faced and ingested the realities here, reflected on those in a way where objectivity mingled with an intimate, subversive and self-imposing commentary. The composite world here was confronted by a composite identity — alien and yet akin. The installation with bamboo poles and pink and blue tube-lights referred to construction scaffolding as a metaphor and a literal frame of expanding life, its chaotic, makeshift structure nevertheless containing firmness and thrust. The element of kitsch and humour dormant in the previous works surfaced in a raw manner over the field of lingas. The sacred symbolism of the male and female principles, quite in tune with the contemporary ethos of the country, translated into the obvious and commonplace of bright plastic pots topped by fibre balloons that looked somewhat like breasts.

If the array of photographs of Bangalore were perceptive but not exceptional hinting at the source of Hasler's art, her ample water colours proved a delight as well as a stimulus for serious thought. Conceived as 'Indian Phantasies', the miss-spelt pun intended, the paintings had a whole menagerie of feminine-animalistic hybrids where ordinary fluidity of identities mingled with motifs from divine iconography, with scenes that verged

on circus or cabaret modes but incorporated topical street violence and diary jottings. The culture clash became the most intense there but also the most integrated in its apparently separate strata, as erotic moods and sexual aggressiveness permeated exuberant, amusing naughtiness along with grace, lightness and poetry. The lyricism of the fluid, translucent wash fulfilled rather than contradicted the harshness of the residual realism. The spectator appreciated and largely identified with the authenticity of the artist accepting the coarse yet beautiful reality into her and shaping it from within to both build understanding and bridge.