

The Promise of Life

Over the years, one has seen a growing tendency for overlapping the painterly with the sculptural as a result of which artists are taking a wide range of liberties with the three dimensional form, rendering it as an object to hang against a wall; denying it a circumambulatory function. Rituals often involve a circulatory path wherein the object of contemplation becomes a part of a performative engagement. The sculpted object against a wall on the other hand, privileges sight, asking for a full visual engagement that leaves no room for partial absorption and angled evasions of the image. It is one sense a renewal of engagement with architecture; a return to the fused form of the "Indian" sculptural tradition that saw no distinction between the built form and the sculpted image.

Truth to material may have been the credo for many a sculptor in the modernist era but with the invention of new materials like plastics and fiberglass, the possibilities of sculpting have also opened up, extending the vocabulary of sculpture like never before. Casting and building, moulding and adding, today gives the sculptor a sense of control that allows him to experiment, to take risks, to discard and start afresh; all the qualities that were once rare in sculptural material.

In this recent body of work primarily made in fiberglass, Prasanta Mukherjee shows a substantive affinity with organic elements, using circumscribed motifs added together to build larger forms. Over the years he has evolved a style of working that pushes the idea of sculpture in all kinds of unexpected ways, positing the frontal high relief image as a repository of philosophical questions about life through which he lays bare his social engagement with the world around him. The wall-mounted relief thus becomes a condensed, contained statement about his conceptual concerns.

The environment and its impending collapse is a consistent worry. His works register his anxiety about the state of the natural world and its slow erosion in the hands of the unconcerned by creating iconic images of its very inverse: the life holding seed sprouting to life. Blending several mediums together and then using fiberglass to obtain the final form, he creates subtle variations on the theme of organic growth, citing forms from nature that provide him a metaphor for the renewal of life. Clean, clear cut forms, painted over with his signature colour red; a symbol of latent energy, the gently swelling mass in the centre appears to gestate life, waiting to take birth at any moment.

The spherical or circular objects contain within themselves the promise of life. These are further embellished with vegetal and floral forms that twist and turn, imparting a sense of elemental energy. While high modernists have consistently renounced all association with natural phenomenon, Prasanta harnesses modernist formalism towards metaphorical ends, for the physicality of his bulbous forms are filled with allusive references. It is one sense a subversive responsive to modernism itself. In fact his ability to do away with all references to the gestural element that might betray some element of the purely personal, universalizes his work, giving it the ability to speak for itself.

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