

Beyond familiar grounds

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Artist Arpana Caur working on a canvas

After a break of 11 years, artist Arpana Caur showcases an unseen collection of small format paper works and etchings She is known for her large canvases and her metaphorical works. But after 11 years, artist Arpana Caur presents the art world her unseen collection of paper work with a solo exhibition titled “Crossing 60”. The exhibition includes around 100 small format paper works created during the last 35 years comprising etchings, pen drawings, pastels and gouaches. Arpana says, “I wanted to hold this exhibition last year when I turned 60 but couldn’t due to personal reasons. So, I decided to do it now when I have crossed 60 and that’s why I called it ‘Crossing 60’. About 95 per cent of the works on display have never been showcased. I have also borrowed some work from collectors and galleries to present a chronological order of my artistic journey.” She adds, “I am known for my large canvases and I still like to work on a large scale. But I like to surprise my audience through my work. This exhibition

showcases some of my exclusive drawings and etchings. Most of my artist friends were also surprised with my etching collection.” The work on display ranges from early graphite on paper and pen and ink on paper to zinc plate etchings from the 1990s, a set of gauche on paper made during her visit to Ladakh, and a collection of soft, dry-pastels that were made in the 2000s. Talking about not having a grand opening of the show she says, “I didn’t want to subject people to travelling such long distances and suffering horrible traffic jams. Also, people don’t focus on art but are busy with each other. It becomes a social gathering and obligation to make small talk. I want people to come as and when convenient, to celebrate art.”

One would think that most of her work deals with subjects like the environment, spirituality and communalism. But she differs, “Not all my works are issue based. I have also done work on subjects like love, time and based on my personal experiences. My ‘Soni Mahiwal’ series captures the tragic love story while ‘Bending Time’ presents how one could bend time and make it an eternal phenomenon. My works depict every-day life and most of the social issues come from there only.”

The exhibits include three pastel works, which were done after her bypass in 2002. One of them shows her heart’s ECG with dancing feet above them bursting into colour titled ‘More Time Please’. “The bypass surgery added more meaning to my life and made me ensure that I utilise my time efficiently and create more art,” shares the artist.

The oldest works exhibited date back to 1981. These are etchings of a woman blindfolded and a little girl in the middle of a chaotic traffic created using pen and ink and watercolour. Also, on display is an old metal plate made in 1985. She says, “There are about 30 etchings done between 1981 and 1995 but I lost 25 plates. Only five remained with me, of which I took out an edition of 12 a month ago. Of others I have only one or two prints unfortunately.” She adds, “I have been careless with my etching plates because

in those days nobody used to buy art and nobody used to buy prints anyway.”

Her famous ‘Night and Day’ series celebrates the labour of construction workers, while ‘The Water Weaver’ depicts a woman weaving a garment out of water. Caur’s ‘Widows of Vrindavan’ is another fascinating series. The series got popular for its large-scale canvases but the artist recorded the actual impact of her visit on paper first. Talking about the series she says, “During my visit to Vrindavan in 1987 I first witnessed the miserable condition of widows. Before that Vrindavan signified a sacred place celebrating the divine love of Radha and Krishna.”

Half the works displayed in the show are not for sale as some have been borrowed, while others she does not wish to part with. The exhibition will be travelling to Chennai and Kolkata too.

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