

Critical Appraisal by Uma Nair, Art Critic (Asian Age): 'Dreams have No Titles'

Think of windows opening out into expansive realms. think of works that invite the viewer to plunge through, keeping a veil always-structuring a barrier of sorts, maybe keeping you wondering about the hooded reality of images that frame her canvas.

Laila Khan's works are a reflection of the fragility and fleeting reality a woman's beauty, maybe images that echo a cinematographic editing that seems to be close to a form of written narrative. Also, amply clear that when it comes to reflecting women some as iconic as Marilyn Monroe, some like a goddess - one can have long vistas and close-ups one after the other. And lastly, because the relationship of the female face to its public. It's in the dark. there are people together and yet each is thinking and looking alone at a work of art.

'I am exploring beauty in my images,' says Laila, 'it's fragility and impermanence...hence each work is sealed with a rose...'

Nurtured by her own childhood with reservations where visions were accepted as a natural part of reality, Laila's works are the dreams she chooses to reflect upon, each work is created in a haunting and evocative manner so much so that they resonate between the physical world and the world of dreams. Here, for the first time, her large full color paintings have been gathered together. One of the first women painters to move beyond traditional themes and styles of painting, Laila Khan continues to draw inspiration and a rich, symbolic vocabulary from the conversations with a peopled terrain that figure prominently in her paintings. Alive with women who could either pass off as deities; or cinematic dreamtime images; they could also be mythological beings born of the imagination and lore of many ages and lands.

Mirrors of Struggle

'The portraits are mirrors of the internal struggles within ourselves,' says Laila. 'The conflicts with one's own personality, the self-doubts, the conflict between being an artist and a woman ... for me painting a nude is no different from painting a flower, it freezes in a unique moment in time, the before and after, where and when is upto the viewer.'

This work of Laila's has vast conceptual scope and yet a profoundly sensual intimacy. There is something banal in the way she transcribes photorealist into drawings and something sublime in the result. Strange how she makes her art so packed with contradiction so as to induce such questioning, even, and hint at so many different origins: optical, visceral, physical, cerebral. It's almost as if we are looking at a work with glorious gloom.

Pathos and Placelessness:

'The women who emerge from my canvas are strange and ambivalent creatures,' says Laila. They are full of life but trapped in doll like lifelessness.'

The images are not just drawn but seem to have been culled out of her own memory with tiny scalloped desires, as if perforated, and affixed in the manner of real life imagery to the faux stage of life. Such conceptual tricksterism threads through Laila's work, deepening its self-reflexive thoughtfulness and leavening it with a bit of visual play in the veiled impact.

'The veil I think partakes of the struggle, the fear that keeps things concealed thought it wants to reveal,' says she. However, over the years the veil is thinning itself out. And the portrait is becoming clearer. 'I want to paint the impossible,' says Laila. 'A limitless unique moment in space, hence I don't impose the limitations

of titling my work as I want the viewer to have the freedom and not the burden of being shown the way, rather than finding it... ‘

Sad Refrain:

In the vertical works Laila lays down fine dark strands against a grainy brightness. In the rest, the values are reversed, a mesh of pale lines (the absence of charcoal like striations) floating in dimness.

The webs in these works have broad metaphoric import, but their entire forms can be contained within the page. In the way they engage with space, the images of webs feel the converse of the larger horizontal works and even the compositions. They corral the gaze, bringing it back home from the great

beyond. In a beautiful confluence of essences, the webs and images are the same: surfaces woven of line, tautly constructed actions, means of capture, assertions of place. Laila is a terrifically skilled illustrator who is best with her oils, and strokes.

In her own words in her last show she wrote: ‘The transience and mortality of man threads the fragility of life and reveals its truth and yet the signs of the world having gone is everywhere. I represent in my work the blood of this immortality whose secrets emerge and appear on my canvas as if hidden in the sand ‘