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ANOLI PERERA

“Sometimes, the materials themselves inspire me to work in unison to create a work,” says Perera.



LONG WALK

Made from fabric, cotton stuffing, PVC pipes, magnifying lenses, and printed Images



WORKING WITH MATERIALS

“I enjoy the texture of cloth, and mirrors to give optical illusion, and magnifying lenses to see something almost hidden.”

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**THE SHROUD****THE LEFT BEHINDER**

“The ‘Left Behinder’ touches on the emotional anxieties pertaining to a long distance relationship, centering around my own relationship with my mother.”

SHOWCASE 08 Jan 2019

CQ Interviews: Sri-Lanka-based artist Anoli Perera on exploring materials in her works, at KMB

Materials, along with their historicity and metaphors, metamorphose Lanka-based artist Anoli Perera's exquisite works. Perera has been materials surrounding her, with the situations and experiences in the context she lives in. We speak to her about the use and significance materials in her work and about the two artworks she is currently exhibiting in the ongoing Kochi-Muziris Biennale 2018, curated by Anita Dube.

About the concept of 'bricolage' in her work.

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PERERA'S WORK FOR KMB 2018

'The Left Behinder' consists of 12 tapestries made out of cloth and a 20-foot-long book art.



THE LEFT BEHINDER

means putting together found/diverse materials to make a work.

My work is created mostly from the materials that surround me, and combined with what I remember or have memorialised over time. You ask me about the medium I use or whether I am a painter or a sculptor, it's difficult to answer because my work incorporates all of that. My work has many layers, and the material I use almost always retains its historicity. In fact, it's because of its history in relation to women and colonialism in Lanka. If I use cloth/stitching work, it's because I have a family background of women doing extensive needlepoint work as a home-making element. This practice connects to this history.

Some of the most interesting materials she's used

Anoli: I have used many materials. I enjoy the texture of cloth, and the play of light and shadow, and optical illusion, and magnifying lenses to see something almost hidden. I was first trained as a stone carver and have used various junk materials like spare car parts in the past. More recently, I have used printed images, overlapping it with other transparent material. This is seen in the work I'm currently doing at the ongoing KMB.

Textiles especially have played a significant role in your work. How has your relationship with textiles as an artist evolved over the years?

Anoli: I started experimenting with textiles after I saw an exhibition of **Bourgeois's** work with big spiders in 1998 in Sweden. This really changed my approach to art-making, and I started using cloth and cloth-related materials extensively.

And after I shifted to textiles, I fully understood the language and how it was embedded in this medium. I realised that textiles have a tendency to be class and gender indexed, while they also hold many histories in themselves. This reconnected me with the oeuvre, metaphor and aesthetic practice of women who have been engaged in needle-art in the past generations of my family. I felt liberated because of the depth and breadth it provided me in terms of memory, meaning and metaphor. It connected me to a historical lineage that I can easily find affinity with.

“Textiles have a tendency to get ethnic, class and gender indexed, while they also hold many histories in themselves.”

About the two works you are exhibiting at KMB 2018: 'Possibilities for a Non-Alienated Life'

Anoli: The 'Left Behinder' touches on the emotional anxieties pertaining to a distance relationship, centering around my own relationship with my 86-year old matriarch who is losing her memory. Her sewing book is a fetish object, my source of proximity to her.

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AT KMB 2018 WHICH OPENED ON 12 DECEMBER
Installation View of the 'The Left Behinder'



I LET MY HAIR LOOSE: PROTEST

“‘I Let My Hair Loose: Protest’ deals with the politics of the gaze and the portrayal of female subjectivity in a particular way.”

borders are made fluid, cities fall, and frontiers are dismantled when exodus takes place forcefully or voluntarily, looking for new homes, and dreams. In all of this, human relationships become the casualty, scattered, memories are selective, and histories get erased.

Negotiating connectivity, proximity and access becomes painful and self-preservation becomes primal. Love suffers. We, who are in a ‘connected but disconnected’ age, have become the victims of this dichotomy. We are made to hold on to objects rather than humans, and memorabilia become fetish, a compromised comfort in the absence of presence.

I have taken the title ‘Left Behinder’ from a poem by the Sri Lankan poet Arasanayagam, who comes from the Eurasian community, large numbers of whom migrated to Australia and other places post Sri Lanka’s independence. The poem reminisces of the pains of disconnection and the lamentations of the diaspora community. The poem resonates with the emotional core of the work which consists of 12 tapestries made out of cloth and book art.

“My work has many layers, and the material I use always retains its historicity.”

And what inspired the other work ‘I Let My Hair Loose: Protest’?

Anoli: It’s a photo-performance by me. This series deals with the politics of the gaze and the portrayal of female subjectivity in a particular way. It is inspired by the memories of me gazing at the stone-faced women in the old house of my grandmother’s house as a child.

The work uses female hair as a means to arrest the male gaze which is directed at the female sitter. The use of the hair as a covering for the face gives meaning to the work. Hair in its proper place is seen as a mark of femininity, but hair out of place is seen as a signification of hysterical, uncontrollable, and unpredictable behaviour (alluding to Medusa’s hair). Therefore, using hair to cover for the face goes beyond the idea of a protective veil. It is a defiance to let the male gaze rest on the woman’s face, and an obstacle that does not allow the completion of the voyeur’s process of enjoyment. The hair-covering manifests into a protest.

Kochi-Muziris Biennale 2018 is curated by Anita Dube, and is on view from 15th March, 2019. This is the first in our series of articles covering Kochi Biennale 2018.

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