

KANYA CHAROENSUPKUL'S WORK : HIDDEN FORCE BEHIND A CALM SURFACE

Chetana Nagavajara (Exhibition Catalogue "*Lithograph-Ink Painting by Kanya*", 1987, pp. 4-5)

Those who have been following Kanya Charoensupkul's work will not deny that it never remains static both from the point of view of the force expressed in the individual works and the new directions that the artist brings to the fore. The lithographs from her "Chicago period" attracts one's attention through a kind of explosive blossoming that does not yet reveal a discernible system. The mixed media of the ensuing period are challenging as experiment, being experimental in both the mode and the medium of expression, so much so that we the public sometimes could not help wondering whether she is moving towards a state where the **medium** is becoming the **message**. The works on view at the present exhibition may give answers to some of the questions that may have been lingering in our mind for some time, but they, at the same time, pose new riddles for us to think over.

The charm of Kanya's work lies in that pleasurable uncertainty whereby we cannot distinguish between what is intentional and what is "improvised" (in a way comparable to the performing arts). Let us admit from the outset that her works are not easy, but they are certainly not boring, for they lend themselves to various interpretations. Kanya can be enigmatic, such as in *Statement, Jan'86, No.2* in which the script is written in inverted form. We can assume that this is deliberate. But certain brush-strokes or black spots scattered about in multifarious forms in her lithographs seem to demonstrate that she is trying to concretize the "accidental" as an artistic principle. Admittedly, the most troublesome problem about art remains as to what extent the "intentional" or the "accidental" can serve as a guarantee of artistic quality. The present exhibits offer themselves as an exercise in critical thinking to all art-lovers.

One distinct characteristic of Kanya's work can be described as artistic "abstinence", in this particular case, an abstinence from colours that culminates in a profession of faith in black and white. These works look smooth and simple, but they lack neither depth nor power. In a way, Kanya's art attracts our attention because it provokes our thinking as well as it fires our imagination,

and all this is achieved by being loosely non-mimetic. But it would be unfair to jump to a hasty conclusion that her work is a total negation of the concrete world. Certain works remain committed to the real world, such as in the case of *Statement 1*, that, whichever way one looks at it, is a depiction of an animal perched on cliff. Be that as it may, it would be futile to ask the artist whether all this happened “intentionally” or “accidentally”, for the answer could well be : “What about the man in the moon?” This is precisely that kind of pleasure we can derive from Kanya’s works.

As for the “movement” inherent in the works, those drawn with Chinese ink capture our imagination to the point where we almost feel bewitched by the brush-strokes and lose ourselves into those powerful black lines. We may enjoy these works so much that, instead of merely appreciating the finished products, we have integrated ourselves into the creative process which is going on. We have become, as it were, a brush, enticed by the white space to such a degree that we cannot resist touching it. We have become the artist’s instrument, coming into contact with the smooth white surface at a particular point, lifting ourselves up, the strokes being light or heavy at the artist’s command. What has been said here is not an attempt to get behind the artist creation or to describe rationally her working process. It is merely an expression of a blissful experience at a point where the artist, the work and the beholder have become **one**.

Kanya’s works do not strive to create an illusory counterpart of the real world, and hence possess a high degree of existential autonomy. We all know that the concept of “model” has become highly problematic in the criticism of modern works of art. Kanya’s work never denies its debt to the materials used in the creative process : it goes even further in placing its confidence in the world of materials for it knows how to appropriate them and put them to good use. Her lithographs re-inforce the impression that these certain patterns and forms can only be created on stone-surface. When all is said and done, we realize that the artist is still in full command : she administers the material world in her own way, giving it a fair measure of freedom, a freedom that, strangely enough, harks back to the real world. *Statement, May 2, '86* is a work that refuses to admit total abstraction. The rough, ragged surface reminds one of the moon seen through a telescope, or elephant skin or even that of an octogenarian. Did the artist will it this way? Or did the stone print and the chemicals, independently of human dictate, conspire to create such an image?

Are we then to assume that Kanya’s work only “accidentally” relates to real life? Do we derive pleasure from these works only when we can identify them with the world “out there”? In fact, their value can be gauged not necessarily through an exclusively visual communication. There exists an immense hidden force behind these works that impel us to think and to imagine further. There can be no ready-made formula to explain such an experience, for it must remain inevitably

subjective. If we expose ourselves to these works without prejudice, without preconceived ideas, we shall receive a profound and forceful message via these somewhat enigmatic images. The present writer is convinced that Kanya's work can communicate directly with the beholder, a mind speaking to another mind without recourse to any intermediary of rational explication. What matters is that we shall have to give ourselves a chance, and more precisely, ample time to tune our "receiver" to the "wavelengths" transmitted by the artist.

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