

Renuka Sondhi Gulati

The Phoenix Woman



Power and women are curiously connected; often in their mutual exclusion. There have been historical and mythological evidences from all over the world for this dialectical relationship between power and women. It is said that most of the world wars, both in history and mythology were fought over women, however, when it comes to the actual exercise of power, women are excluded from its privileged zones in the public as well as private domains. It is not that there are no powerful women in all walks of life; but their presences are not deemed as a rule but as exceptions. Today, after almost a century of prolonged struggle for equal rights and justice, women have achieved some kind of respect in the society; but mostly through the help of law making and its stringent implementation. However, a right thinking person would wonder why it has been so. When a woman artist in our contemporary times puts paint on the canvas, whether she wants it or not, the aspects of struggle for equal rights and justice appear in it in various forms, metaphors and expressions. It is not necessary that a woman artist should be sloganeering in her works; but they could be subtle suggestions towards her freedom, there could be sharp responses or even there could be strong positioning. A thinking woman artist who consciously and sub-consciously understands this societal subjugation of her gender cannot escape from such expressions. The works of a woman artist, however pleasing and mild they look, are subtle reminders of a rebellion that has been taking place within the zone of her femininity. It does not call for an artist to be overtly inclined to feminist ideologies because a woman today naturally carries the ideas of political as well as cultural feminism in her as a part of her collective consciousness.

Renuka Sondhi Gulati paints to exist and sculpts to underline her existence. Her works vivify the journey of a woman from birth to death, undergoing all the pangs of ageing and feeling all the bliss of maturing, and also they capture how a woman becomes a natural split personality when she exists within the society, family and above all in history. A woman's role, especially in this ideologically male dominated world, is that of a bahuroopi (who assumes different roles and shapes to eke out a living). She handles various roles at various stages of life. Renuka's concern is not about chronicling all these events. Instead, in her paintings she creates two selves as mutual reflection of the same personality and places them

on the same pictorial plane. One character does not look radically different from the other, however, a closer look reveals that they represent oppositional identities; one of them is active and the other one is passive. Perhaps, in the social and domestic spheres, a woman could be passive in one of these areas. But at the same time, both these contradictory entities of her own self seek freedom and Renuka, though it is not her autobiography, identifies with this aspiration for freedom in a metaphorical dove perched on the shoulders of the women or flits between them in the given empty space. For Renuka, the dove is a metaphor filled with a lot of ironies. While we generally say that doves are the embodiment of innocence, peace and freedom, and as a metaphor it is often connected to angels and women, the society in general does not allow any freedom to women.

Space is an aesthetical remedy that Renuka conjures up for the ills meted out to women in general. This space that we see abundantly in Renuka's works is a mental space where the self of women could move freely. At times, the artist makes this space pure white and at times daubs them with a golden sheen. When they are white or golden she adds certain marks with silver strokes. They are like the footprints of an unknown traveller who has walked these spaces. Whether there is a woman protagonist in these works or not, by adding these abstract footprints, Renuka emphasises that women walk through all the imaginative spaces possible; also she underlines that transcending the boundaries, walking through uncharted spaces and facing dangers of accidental encounters are not the exclusive privileges of men alone. Such celebration of freedom makes Renuka's works worth pondering. In some of the paintings, Renuka portrays women protagonists curling up to themselves. For the artist, it is not just about escaping from responsibilities of crucial decisions. The coiling is all about being one with one's own self. At the same time, the artist shows equal verve to portray them in complete abandonment and acrobatic postures. In one of the paintings, perhaps filled with a sense of pathos, Renuka contemplates on the life of a woman, often uncelebrated, from birth to death; she is a yet to be born baby in a space (womb) and soon she becomes an old woman wrinkled by time and struggles. Connecting them is a line that runs through the space.

Renuka, like artists do in extremely difficult situations during political and social oppressions, finds some interesting metaphors and narratives in order to portray the idea of power. A chair clasped by a pair of hands is one of the

pivotal images that she uses in her paintings. In some of the works, where the central space is dominated by the presence of women protagonists, one could see in a corner certain suggestions of a chair, a roller at its leg etc. They are almost invisible however the scant presence itself is quite menacing. That means even the private spaces of a woman is watched over the by the seats of power. Renuka retaliates on such power positions by making some of her paintings completely in red and paints the woman protagonist in her most provocative self. According to her, such sanguine paintings make a deep impression on the viewers and they cannot forget the painting for a long time as they titillate and disturb at the same time. Her subtle rebellion as an artist does not come with a package of remedies. She says that a community that holds its hands together irrespective of gender and age could solve the problems of the world. Holding hands together is a form of meditation, says the artist and as a part of visualizing her philosophical solution for world problems she paints clasped hands, folded hands, holding hands, cupped palms and so on in her works using various mediums, including charcoal.

Sculpture is another area where Renuka expresses her creative abilities and socio-cultural concerns. Her sculptures are inspired by her own paintings. The protagonists in the paintings take the three dimensional forms and manifest in the physical space in various mediums. She likes to work both in bronze and fibre glass. The polished surfaces and defined contours make these sculptures a 'painter's sculptures'. Unlike in the paintings, the sculptures also bring forth male protagonists and at times women and men are seen as couples. Perhaps, sculpture as a medium helps her to play around the ideas of love, family, being together and physical and spiritual union. Renuka Sondhi Gulati feels that as an artist she does not need to do anything else to be focussed, responsible and rebellious other than doing her works. The works, for her are the junctures of meditation and as she has been working ever since, she is in a constant state of meditation. If anything could be a meditative process, even a rebellion could bring in the same effects. Most of the women meditate with/through their silent rebellions. Out of them, some cut vegetables, some go to office, some fight at borders, some go underground, some just dream; and some women create works of art. Renuka Sondhi Gulati is one who creates art.

JohnnyML
Art Critic

The Phoenix Woman

An exhibition of recent works

Painting & Sculptures

by

Renuka Sondhi Gulati

opening on

Thursday, 6th March, 2014

at 5.30 pm

Daily 11am to 7 pm

at

Shridharani Gallery

Triveni Kala Sangam 205, Tansen Marg,
New Delhi - 110001



Silent Prayer | Oil and Acrylic on Canvas | 48" x 48" | 2013



The Flying Time | Oil and Acrylic on Canvas | 48" x 72" | 2013



Feeling the Freedom | Oil and Acrylic on Canvas | 48" x 72" | 2013



The Prayer Way | Oil and Acrylic on Canvas | 48'' x 60'' | 2013



Kissa Kursi ka | Oil and Acrylic on Canvas | 48'' x 36'' | 2014



On Duty | Oil and Acrylic on Canvas
73" x 30" | 2014



Illusions at Rest-2 | Oil and Acrylic on Canvas | 36" x 48" | 2011



 The Cycle of Life | Oil and Acrylic on Canvas | 48" x 60" | 2013



The Cycle of Life | Fiber Glass | 9" x 8" x 14" | 2013



Freedom | Bronze | 7" x 6" x 16" | 2013
(Two views of same sculpture)



Expansion | Bronze | 15" x 11" x 11" | 2013



The Bonding | Bronze | 15" x 16" x 16" | 2013



Flight of Thoughts | Fiber Glass
45" x 25" x 18" | 2013
(Two views of same sculpture)



 Esoteric 3 | Fiber Glass | 17.5" x 17" x 10" | 2014

Renuka Sondhi Gulati

SOLO SHOWS

- 2014 The Phoenix Woman Shridharani Gallery, New Delhi March 2014
- 2013 The Divine Grace Taj Palace Hotel, New Delhi, 18-24 Feb 2013
- 2013 The Divine Grace Indian Council for Cultural Relations, Azad Bhawan, IP Estate.1-6 Feb, 2013
- 2011 Life..a Journey. At Hotel Taj Palace 31st Oct -13th Nov 2011
- 2010 Mystical Resonance, Triveni Kala Sangam, New Delhi, Mar 2010
- 2007 ‘Elements in Space’ Triveni Gallery, Triveni Kala Sangam, New Delhi, August 2007

GROUP SHOWS

- 2013 Centurion 2013 Second Edition, Group Show in Visual Art Gallery, India Habitat Center
- 2013 United Art Fair II, Pragati Maidan, New Delhi
- 2013 Group show at Shridharani Art Gallery by Creativity Art Gallery, Oct 2013
- 2013 HIFA Awardees Group Show at Punjab Kala Bhawan, Chandigarh, July’13
- 2013 ‘An Escape Route’ show by Smanvaiart at Jaipur, May 2013
- 2013 WAMA paintings of Women Artists of Delhi, March 2013.
- 2013 Triad Sculptures, Lalit Kala Akademi, March 2013
- 2012 All India Art Exhibition at AIFACS, Rafi Marg, New Delhi, Dec 2012
- 2012 Twelve Together, at Sridharani Gallery, Triveni Kala Sangam Nov 2012
- 2012 Oct, Jism: The Divine Truth, Open Palm Court, India Habitat Centre, New Delhi
- 2012 United Art Fair I, Pragati Maidan, New Delhi

- 2012 June, Summer Art Show at Sridharani Gallery, Triveni Kala Sangam
- 2012 March, Haryana Institute of Fine Arts Group Show at Lalit Kala Sangam
- 2012 July, Jism: The Divine Truth, at AIFACS, Rafi Marg, New Delhi 110001
- 2011 9th International Art Biennale at Malta, Italy, Switzerland, Portugal, France, USA and Germany from 8 Jan to 31st Dec 2011
- 2011 The Magic of Gifted Hands at India International Trade Fair 14th-27th Nov.
- 2011 All India Art Exhibition at AIFACS, Rafi Marg, New Delhi
- 2011 Centurion 2011 Group Show at The Visual Art Gallery, India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road, New Delhi
- 2011 The Lavanya Art Show, Studio Vasant, Delhi. Jan 2011
- 2010 All India Art Exhibition at AIFACS, Rafi Marg, New Delhi
- 2010 One World, at Hotel The Lalit, New Delhi. (Organized by Smt. Menaka Gandhi)
- 2009 All India Art Exhibition at AIFACS, Rafi Marg, New Delhi
- 2009 Summer: Work displayed by Burland Galleries in UK
- 2009 ART SHOW by Alshine Art Forum, Rajendra Park, New Delhi
- 2008 ‘Empyrean Revelations’ at AIFACS, September 2008
- 2008 Art Mall, Shivangi Marg, Moti Nagar, New Delhi
- 2008 June Work exhibited at India Habitat Centre by Aditya’s Centre for Art
- 2008 3rd India Contemporary Miniature, Paintings & Sculpture Exhibition at Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi
- 2008 Oct Exhibition organised by “Khushii” India on Canvas show at the French Embassy.
- 2007 All India Art Exhibition at AIFACS, Rafi Marg, New Delhi

- 2007 Women Art Show, by the Art People. 4/6 Sirifort Industrial Area, New Delhi
- 2007 Art from Heart Show, World Wildlife Fund(WWF), India Lodhi Estate, New Delhi
- 2006 Art People Show Travancore Art Gallery, New Delhi
- 2006 Poorva Sanskriti Kendra, New Delhi
- 2005 Agnipath, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi

AWARDS/RECOGNITION

- 2012 Sculpture selected at All India Fine Arts & Crafts Society New Delhi
- 2012 March, Award “Honourable Mention” Haryana Institute of Fine Arts Award “Honourable Mention”
- 2011 Won ‘Sculpture Prize 2011’ at 9th International Art Biennale at Malta Europe.
- 2011 Painting as well as Sculpture selected by AIFACS, Rafi Marg, New Delhi
- 2010 Sculpture selected by AIFACS, Rafi Marg, New Delhi
- 2009 Sculpture selected by AIFACS, Rafi Marg, New Delhi
- 2009 Work selected in Rang Rasia Art competition
- 2007 Painting selected at National Level AIFACS, Rafi Marg, New Delhi
- 2006 Bronze Medal at Agnipath, National Level Competition & Exhibition at Travancore Art Gallery, New Delhi
- 2005 Gold Medal at Agnipath National Level Competition & Exhibition at Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi
- 2000 Awarded as a Teacher of Great Talent from Young Envoys International, Hyderabad.
- 2000 Guru Dronacharya Samman from Avantika – A Group of Indian Contemporary Artists, Visual, Vocal and Instrumental
- 2000 Won ‘Puraskar Award’ from Korasala’s Wonder Art World International

WORKSHOP/ ARTIST CAMP

- 2013 IILM Camp in Noida
- 2011 September (16-30) North Zone Cultural Centre, Chandigarh
- 2011 February (5-15) Sahitya Kala Akademi, Delhi Painters Workshop
- 2008 Workshop Conducted By “KHUSHII” (NGO)
- 2007 TMZ group Connaught Circus, New Delhi.

COLLECTION

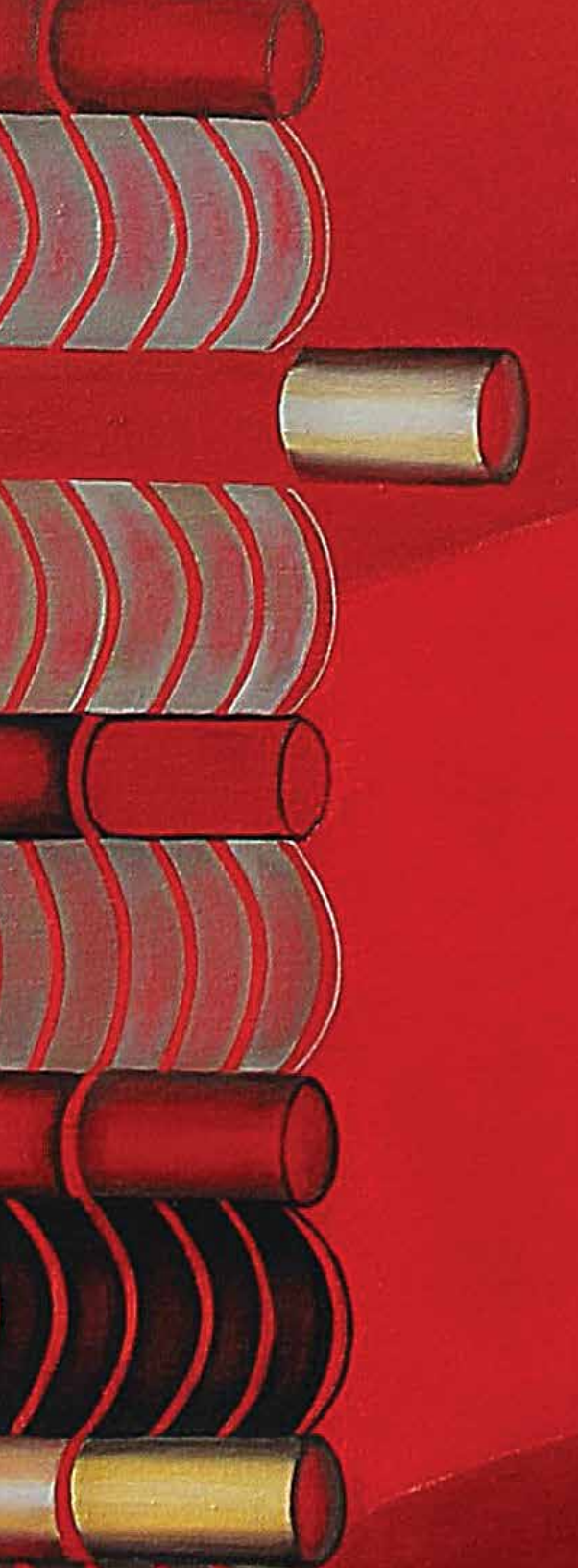
- North Zone Cultural Centre, Chandigarh
- Sahitya Kala Akademi, Delhi
- Novica Galleries
- Burland Galleries Scotland, Ati Gallery;
- Omaxe Builders
- Spaze Builders
- Burmans
- Mural 40’x11’ made for OMAXE’s Faridabad Project 2008
- Shri M. Hamid Ansari, Vice President of India Galleries and private collections in India & Abroad

GENERAL:

- Engaged in Social work with an NGO AAPSI co-founded by her husband Sunil Kumar Gulati, IAS, Chief Vigilance Officer, Delhi Development Authority
- Areas of Activity:** Preventing female foeticide (Beti Bachao Andolan) and Care of Elderly.
- Studio:** Art Dept. Triveni Kala Sangam, 205 Tansen Marg, New Delhi
- Studio Gallery/Residence:** 7/5 Bhagwan Dass Road, New Delhi110001,
- Email:** renukasondhi@yahoo.co.in,
- Website:** http://www.renuka.aapsiindia.org
- Mobile No.:** 09810286824
- Tel.:** 011-23385886, 011-26446824

Renuka has spent the best years of her life studying art at Triveni Kala Sangam, under the tutelage of Sh. Sanjoy Roy and Sh. Rameshwar Broota





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