

New Contemporary

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Jogen Chaudhury has suddenly emerged as a most striking and original painter in recent years. In a technique which is a combination of drawing and painting, with its intrinsic limitations he has infused a subtle but most emphatic form of expression. Largely mono-chromatic but stained with colour, the images are set against a dark backdrop of ink which turns them into a shade of liquid ivory. The images are real and recognisable (as 'Nati Binodini' and 'Ganapati') in appearance but partly repulsive and restive in their physical countenance. Their bodies seem to fall like their clothes and inflate like cushions, while cushions and clothes assume sensuous dimensions of human limbs — the interchangeability of these forms is unnervingly realistic.

Jogen draws the contours of his figures as fluidly as the movement of a thread and then through incessant hatchings, stitches them into skin. Any affinity with Dubuffet or the loose drawings of some surrealists seems superficial as this is transmuted and subtly transformed.

The series of dream-pictures Jogen has painted have surrealist undertones with poetic fancy. The fish and plant flow in a gyrating rhythm, their edges moist and crisp at the same time. His 'Ganesh' series are challenging and powerful. Here the godliness of the benign and benevolent deity is cast into the mould of an ageing mortal, whose limbs have begun resembling drooping wrinkled forms of certain plants and vegetables and at the same time recall metal and leather alike. Elsewhere he fills up the frame with the god's ungainly physique, who squints and peers through an increasing number of eyes. In 'Life II' and 'Man on sofa' he has dealt with bodies as they counteract the dents and bumps of musty, decadent upholstery and 'Life I' shows enormous phallic cushion upon the erotically articulated folds. In 'Nati Binodini' (a well-known prostitute of the Tagore era) he has created a fantastically archaic and erotic image modelled on the Bengali type of the times.

Jogen's work is moving and disturbing at the same time without being didactic or overtly dramatic. The highly original manner of drawing (which verges on caricature) absorbs and unifies disparate elements into a complex and rich image.

Excerpts from:

'New contemporaries' an article published in 'Marg' in connection with exhibition also titled 'New contemporaries' organised and curated by G.M. Seikh, Bombay, 1978.