

The Unruly Syntax

Ravikumar Kashi

I have lived most of my life in Bangalore city and have seen it changing constantly. The nature of visual markers around me have changed. Some changes manifest like waves while other transformations are incremental and slow. But when new trends appear, old visuals are not completely wiped out; they survive in pockets. Upon close observation, one can locate remnants of different times as visual markers. This palimpsest, where new visual markers are overwritten and layered on old images, is very interesting because it can reveal layers of time.

My solo show 'The Unruly Syntax', which was held from 4 December to 22 January 2022 in Gallery Sumukha in Wilson Garden is inspired by Bangalore city as Palimpsest. To achieve this sense of layering I have used hand-painted billboards seen on highways as visual references. When these billboards are left unattended, outer layers peel off revealing inner layers of fragmented images, texts and patterns. The grid seen in these billboards also becomes an ordering structure in my works. Together they become a visual metaphor for my city experience.

The changing visual culture of Bangalore that I have documented is the source of imagery for this photo essay. Digitally designed and printed posters, banners, signboards are sweeping the city, but hand-painted images have survived in many parts. Similarly hand-painted images on vehicles are seen alongside digitally generated stickers. It is not just image production methods but the changing beliefs, value systems, economic structures and politics that are visible in these images. I have tried to capture the multiple voices and intertextuality that provide rich, nuanced meanings that allude to a layered sense of time. This results in works that are not neatly sorted, orderly and simple but a complex imagery almost on the edge of chaos which creates 'The Unruly Syntax'.



'Traces 2', Oil & Acrylic on Canvas, 30" x 60", 2020



'Traces 3', Oil & Acrylic on Canvas, 30" x 60", 2020



'Traces 5', Oil & Acrylic on Canvas, 36" x 48", 2020



'Traces 7', Oil & Acrylic on Canvas, 48" x 48", 2020

'Gandhi walks away from Johnny Walker
Inky ribs lacerate a textbook blue bow-bearing Ram
An earthen pot overflows with milk
'KEEP DISTANCE OK'
Moist lips open like a Bougainvillea petal
Meet the Google God
Half-tone traces, Printing errors, Ghosts in the machine
'Dekho Magar Pyar Se'.

The city unravels in a patchwork of mismatched fragments - a heap of broken images - in Ravi Kashi's The Unruly Syntax. The paintings knot the chaos of the urban sprawl into a rag-tag band of cutouts held together with the cacophony of their difference. These are pages from a logbook, notes from a visual ethnography of the constantly changing miasma of signs that are scattered through a Bangalore suburb. They are excavations of different Bangalores from different times, disinterred, layer by layer, memory slapped onto flex, magazine clippings, stickers, wall and shop signage.

Can you tell the countenance of a city, its arcs and desires, both sacred and profane, quotidian and hyperreal, from a cross section of its plastered signs - the way you can tell the age of a tree by its rings? Can you tell which way the wind is blowing, how a community breathes, by the way it makes images?'

- Excerpt from 'The Painter of Signs' (Aranya, 2021)

Related readings

Aranya (2021). The Painter of Signs. Indian Contemporary Art Journal (25). pp.16-18 <https://indianartjournal.com/>

Kashi, Ravi (nd). Webpage of Ravikumar Kashi's works. <http://www.ravikashi.com/>

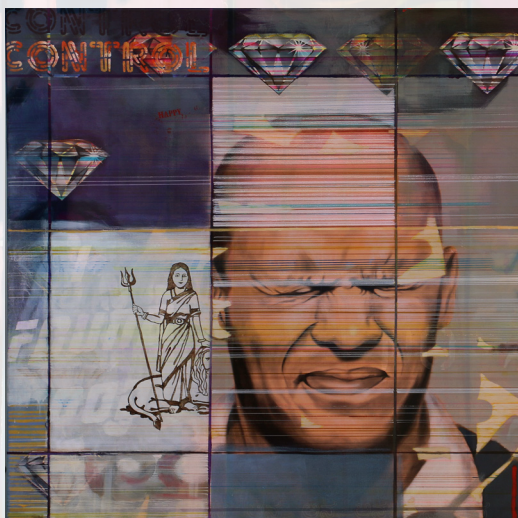
Gallery Sumukha. 2021. 'The Unruly Syntax' exhibition at Gallery Sumukha (04 December 2021- 22 January 2022) <https://www.sumukha.com/details?section=exhibition&id=366&ref=/exhibition>



'Traces 16', Oil & Acrylic on Canvas, 48" x 60", 2020



'Traces 20', Oil and Acrylic on Canvas, 48" x 72", 2021



'Traces 13', Oil & Acrylic on Canvas, 48" x 48", 2020

Ravikumar Kashi is a Bangalore-based multidisciplinary artist whose work spans painting and drawing to photography, installation and artist books among other mediums. Ravi's work articulates individual and collective experience of contemporary socio-political and cultural identities. Email: ravikumarkashi@gmail.com