

An Unlikely Worldmaker

On Pramodbabu Ramteke's Practice

Ramteke's work is poetic. His colours and shapes convey depth and vivacity. He is an artist who tries to create his own world with an apt and personal visual language that transpires throughout his art. Ramteke is however an unlikely worldmaker.

Pramod Ramteke undertook his formal fine arts education at Sir J. J. School of Arts, Nagpur University and Model Art Institution, Dadar, Mumbai. Ramteke is reputed as a portraitist of great poise and mastery. However, a closer examination of his more recent works would suggest that his aim now exceeds simple formalistic pursuit. His skills become resources that can be drawn at command and this ease allows the artist great liberty. In a way, the artist learns in order to forget.

The artist's practice and identity bring together many keywords that may prove contradictory. Indigenoussness and aesthetics are some that come to mind. Ramteke occupies the awkward place of being strongly affiliated with a scholarly and pedagogic role in the art world while coming from a radical tradition. In some sense, he is not enough of an outsider to Marathi ways nor orthodox schools or styles of Indian art. Unlike Picasso who discovers African masks, Ramteke does not have the luxury of declaring this untouched distance that lends independence to an interpretation. One might ask, what is therefore the artist's position?

On the contrary, the viewer could also ask what is another way of looking at Ramteke's art without this canonical baggage. If we view his practice as a palimpsest of inspirations at a confluence, we could evaluate Ramteke's own visual expression freed from the bounds of schools and precedence's. It would also introduce the liberty of drawing other comparatives than the Western tradition and the will to pinpoint the artist for comprehension.

This month, we celebrate Pramod Ramteke's retrospective at the National Gallery of Modern Art in Mumbai. One might want to look for influences of modernism in Ramteke's work. Of course, where you look, you find. From Cubism to dreamscapes reminiscent of Chagall, from heavy textured impasto to watercolours, the artist demonstrates his familiarity with the discipline. Ultimately, Ramteke is to come to his own style. In that way, one can easily recognize him as an artist for artists. Despite the romantic vision modern art evokes, these global genres are rather alienating categorizations, and cannot be easily applied to different art worlds.

Untangling the equation does not negate the possibility of parallel evolutions. The decorated house becomes art in Esther Mahlangu's *Magiciens de la Terre* and Trinh T. Min-ha's *Living is Round*. This same phenomena is observed in Ramteke's practice. Platography uses aluminium as a base to develop mono-print images. A similar technique with aluminium foil is also used for radical printmaking on the move in East Asia. We have no need to adhere to the program of a canonical West, which Partha Mitter fittingly denotes as the Picasso Syndrome.

Who then has a claim to indigenoussness? If the artist spends a long career in pedagogy, could he? What are the qualities we look for in an artwork? There are inherent scales of

values imbued to certain characteristics. Oftentimes, when we try to make an ethnographic or aesthetic claim, we feel the need for some discourse to back it up. Ramteke's rare gift is to stay true to his instincts and create with a child's carefree playfulness. Instead, perhaps the aesthetic can be felt as an experiential revelation.

Ramteke's art speaks a specific and universal language. It is a universe contained in itself. Whether simple or complex, the artist's confidence transpires through the composition and colours of his works. They have come out of the dichotomy of representation or abstraction as objective. Ramteke's confidence inspires openness. His works engage with the viewers, sometimes with the inviting look of a whimsical creature and other times with the expanse hidden behind the colours. This lyrical and oneiric world is accessible. The viewer enters a world of colours, shapes and beings imbued with spirit resonance. The Chinese literati would claim that this is the highest form of achievement. Spirit resonates with all its vividness and naïveté.

The artist comes back to the essence of the artwork as an artwork, where its physicality is manifest and can be savoured in detail. Ramteke's work indeed instils a philosophical return. The artist conjures power to create his own visual world in order to question his audience on the nature of the world and world-making. The world Ramteke makes is not a land of obscurity closed to others, but its own mythological becoming sparks exploration.

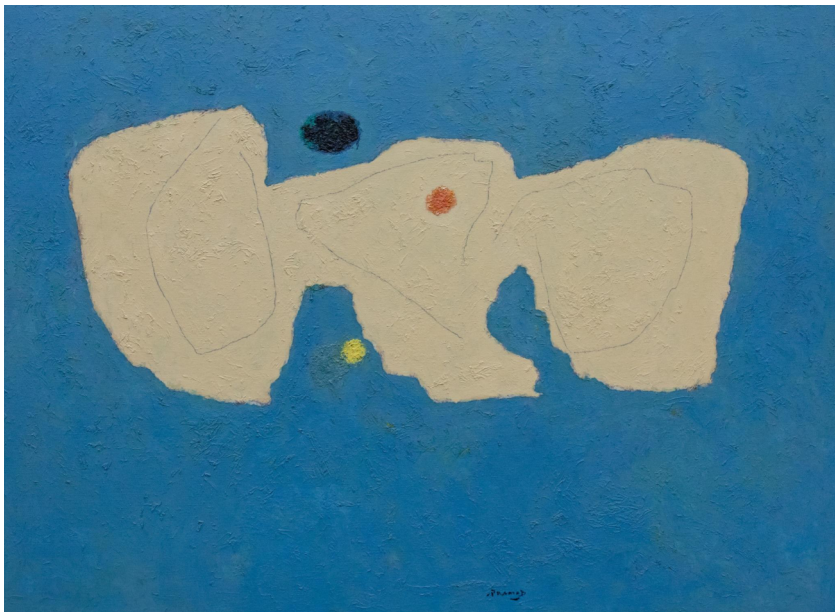
Lou Mo
Curator, Taipei
September 2021.



Untitled | Oil on Canvas
62" x 60" | 2004



Bird | Iron Scrap | 8" x 13" x 4" | 1987



Peace & Harmony | Oil on Canvas | 49" x 60" | 2021