

Raqib shaw's essay



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Raqib Shaw's work is the kind that just looks so beautiful it is impossible to dislike. His paintings, no matter what way you look at them, naturally look exquisite and his use of largemmm varieties of textural materials make his works stand out and look exciting. What appeals to me about his work is its mythical, mystical and colourful style.

Any art that tells stories will be interesting to look and this is a fact I like. His reminds me of the things that are often described as 'ornate' such as intricately carved frames, antiques, ornaments, things that surprise you by their detail. Shaw was born in Calcutta on the outskirts of India into a family of carpenters and was raised a Muslim. Religion was an influence to him from the day he was born, he became a Muslim educated by a Hindu teacher at a Christian School. This range of religion influencing from a young age could inspire, yet a child being exposed to all these conflicting religions could have offered contradictions within a mind. It is easy to see how his Indian upbringing has influenced his later work, his use of all things delicate and pretty is heavy, the rhinestones, glitter, colour and much more would have all been influenced by Indian tradition.

At school he displayed in affinity with English Literature; Wordsworth, Coleridge, the Brontes, Wilde, Hardy are named favourites. At the age of 24, in 1988, he entered the Central St Martin's School of Art in London to study his BA then MA, but on arrival he was treated a 'noble savage'. Moving to London resulted in Shaw developing an interest in Renaissance paintings and being astounded by some paintings in the National Gallery including Botticelli's Adoration of the Magi and Bronzino's 'Allegory with Venus, Cupid and Time. The painting 'Ambassadors' inspired him to not go into the family

business to earn consistent money, but to follow what he wanted to do and paint. Recently after graduating, his first solo show consisting of eighteen drawings and five paintings sold out, then again at New York's Armoury Show, where every piece sold out in the first day.

Shaw was a success; his unique style boasting intricate detail, rich colour, and jewel-like surfaces, all masking the intense violent and sexual nature of its imagery resulted in beautiful paintings that intrigues the public. He began by using oil paints but he struggled with the fact he was only creating pieces that looked like those that already existed, nothing new. Realising that he could not, and did not want to, compete with the history of paintings he began to study industrial materials. The technique he has perfected and uses now is precarious, as one mistake can mean the whole painting must be restarted.

Shaw's paintings can take months to complete, beginning as an elaborate drawing onto tracing paper before being transferred onto wooden board, where the outlines are covered by a type of gold paint used in stained glass windows. These outlines create a slightly raised up barrier, to which pools of enamel and metallic paints are poured into and then manipulated to the desired effect with a porcupine quill, which creates the numerous minute details in his paintings, especially on elements such as coral, feathers and flowers. As this type of paint dries so fast, only small areas of his paintings can be worked on at once, these being built up section by section. Finally, Shaw embellishes the paintings with tiny Swarovski crystals. He often paints long into the night, rarely leaving his studio and keeping his music and dogs as company.

Shaw was equally influenced by England. When he arrived in London he was amazed by work in the National Gallery, such as work by Hieronymus Bosch and Holbein. Shaw painted his own version of Hieronymus Bosch's painting; *The Garden of Earthly Delight*, in which the painting depicts a world free of moral restraint. Shaw's version, *Garden of Earthly Delights III*, sold for \$5.

49 million, making it the most expensive artwork by an Indian artist sold in auction. After Anish Kapoor, he is the only second Indian artist to have gained fame in Western Society. His studio is a former nursery on the outskirts of London in Islington, a light and airy habitat divided into smaller rooms by muslin drapes and decorated with mirrors, ornaments, 5000 artificial butterflies and 8000 artificial birds. The original school canteen has been replaced by stocks of wine and champagne, and on the countertop Shaw's collection of antique Victorian china which he uses to serve exotic teas, including 'kahwa', a tea from his birthplace. Incense, candles and fresh flowers, varying according to season, blooming and decaying as he works decorate the studio with arrays of colour. This forest of plants summons up a peculiar version of the Himalayas.

All these inspirational decorations draw attention away from the ventilation, needed largely to clear away fumes from the toxic materials; automotive paint and strong adhesives, that Shaw uses in his delicate paintings. Shaw's art is likeable for its pretty appearance but the meanings that are personal to him are the to be noted and interpreted. He has stated that he aims to create the perfect painting, but notes that no-one ever will be able to as we all see the flaws in our own work. His work ranges, although being all in the same style, from historically influenced paintings to one's that are to him,

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biographical. The painting of Anne of Cleves, in which the historical story goes Henry VIII was to be married to his fourth wife whom he had seen a picture of and decided to claim her as his wife.

However, on arrival from France, she did not look at all like her picture and was extremely ugly. Henry VIII could not get out of marrying her, but divorced her as quickly as was possible. Shaw has manipulated her portrait so she resembles a monster with other faces spawning out of her. I enjoy Shaw's art mainly for its appearance but it is also a good element that relates back to my direction, he portrays stories of his life from his subconscious in his paintings. Although these stories may not be distinguishable to the public, the public can still appreciate his work for its beauty.

Also, the meaning is still there for him, he understands what he was painting about even if it is not obvious. He has utterly mastered his own technique of painting and his technique is appealing to the eye, despite the underlying visions of more dark activities occurring within them.