

ISSUE 29 . SEPTEMBER 2023 . ₹500

TAKE

TAKE

ON ART

SUSTAINABILITY

SUSTAINABILITY, ISSUE 29, SEPTEMBER 2023, ₹500

RNI NO.DELENG/2015/60525

Review

13 - Kolkata

THE DREAM OF AN IDIOT

Rituparna Roy



↑ Sibaprasad Karchaudhuri, *The Dream of an Idiot - 1*, Acrylic on canvas, 60 in x 42 in, 60 x 84 in, overall Diptych, 2009, Santiniketan, Signed in Bengali and English (lower right and lower left). All Images Courtesy: Emami Art and the artist. All Images Credit: Vivian Sarky.

The Dream of an Idiot, a survey show of artist and pedagogue Sibaprasad Karchaudhuri, curated by Ushmita Sahu, Director and head curator Emami Art, covers significant phases of Karchaudhuri's very productive career across four decades in the diverse mediums he has worked - including tapestry, painting, drawing and prints.

The title of the exhibition is taken from an eponymous work by the artist. Two in the series, *The Dream of an Idiot 1* and *The Dream of an Idiot 3* (a diptych), adorn adjacent walls in the Exhibition space of the gallery. They are fine examples of the abstract in art, something he was attracted to ever since his student days and which stayed with him. As he himself says:

In my artistic career, I have worked with many styles but have been primarily influenced by primordial shapes and figures. My works revolve

around these primary forms, creating a sense of nearness and distance. I wanted to expand myself to the areas of unknown mystery, to an alternative reality.

Of the primary forms, the triangle predominates in his work. One could argue that the evolution of his artistic practice can also be understood in terms of this geometric figure. For his long artistic journey can be said to rest upon his learning from a triad of institutions: his initial training at the Government College of Art and Craft in Kolkata, from where he graduated in 1966 with a specialization in Applied Arts, was the base on which stood the later superstructure of two equally important learning experiences from two aligned institutions - NID and WSC.

In 1968, while working at the Calico Mill in



↑ Sibaprasad Karchaudhuri, *Rising Upward*, Cotton, wool and hemp fiber, 72 in x 40 in, Circa late 1990s to early 2000s, Santiniketan, Unsigned.

Ahmedabad, he was sent for training at the Textile and Fibre Arts Department at the National Institute of Design, where he came under the guidance of two influential textile designers – Nelly Sethna and the Finnish Helena Perheentupa. They would play a pivotal role in his understanding of design and textile weaving. That understanding would further deepen while working with professional weavers over the next two decades, as an art designer in the Weavers Service Centers (WSC) of Varanasi, Bhagalpur and Kolkata. In the mid-80s, he would also study printmaking under Geoffrey Bowman at San Jose University, California.

The exhibition displays two curtain designs that young Karchaudhuri had created for the NID auditorium; some representative examples of his designs for the WSC's he had worked in; as well as several of his artworks in black and white.

Though Karchaudhuri had taught at NID, it was at Santiniketan that the pedagogue in him would find full expression – when he joined the Design Department of Kala Bhavan in the 1990s and revamped its creative design section, based on a syllabus created by KG Subramanyan.

It was also during this period that he embraced the frame loom as part of his art practice. This loom is a square frame where the warp yarns are held in tension, while the weft yarns can be hand knotted with tufts of organic fibre. The result can be stunning

tapestries, four examples of which constitute the show stoppers at the Emami exhibition.

Hung in two rows, spaciouly apart, these four tapestries – *Steps in Colour*, *Rising Upward*, *The Diamonds - I*, and *Sun and Moon with Dotted Space* – attest to a wide range of design even within this medium. They are all made of cotton, wool and hemp fiber, and were created by Karchaudhuri in Santiniketan between late 1990s and early 2000s.

Nine horizontal rows frame *Steps in Colour*. One notices a tripartite division in the tapestry, with, as it were, a distant mountain on the top and curved valleys below. Slanted lines and triangles (straight and inverted) make up the middle ground of this topography. The upper third grabs the viewer's attention with its three distinct rows: a sunburst of colours in bright red and orange, light up the peak of the mountain in the first row; giving way to brownish-peach and bluish-grey hues in the second; and finally underlined with black in the third.

Rising Upward is aspirational in tone: one can imagine a huge swarm of birds taking flight, crowded together closer to the ground, as they take wing, but dispersed further apart as they rise in the sky. There is a simple yet striking elegance in this design, with the singular use of black against the brown of the hemp.

Diamonds - I are black and white rhombuses (with multiple triangles within) against a black, blue and grey background, like stars on a moonlit night. While viewing it, one could, if one listened carefully, hear Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata* playing in one's mind!

Sun and Moon with Dotted Space is a veritable geometry lesson in tapestry, with its riot of lines and shapes – straight lines, straight and inverted/incomplete triangles, squares and circles. It is very dense in the upper half but more spread out below, where one finds an echo of *Steps in Colours*.

All the four tapestries explore space, especially in the realm of the sky. They are governed by an aerial perspective. That could be one interpretation of them. This exhibition, it is hoped, will create room for more and varied interpretations of the artist's work, and contribute to a greater recognition for him, even as his tapestries find place in the upcoming British Textile Biennial this year in an exhibition curated by Uthra Rajgopal.

The Dream of an Idiot, Solo Show of Sibaprasad Karchaudhuri, curated by Ushmita Sahu, Emami Art, Kolkata, 14 July - 30 September, 2023.