A whirl with water

Julia Centre has the artwork of six artists in an exhibition called Watermarks. Watermark, dedicated to the people who faced drought and floods with equanimity.

"This exhibition came out of a chance conversation with artist THEYMONE Memon. It is about this perennial concern we have and the oscillation we face between possibility and excess of water; water being such a primal element. This is a Chennai-based experience. For people who live in this city, the resilience of those who have had to face this kind of constant oscillation, what is their response and how varied. This response is to what is a local and global phenomenon because Chennai is not an exception by any stretch of the imagination. One part of it is how we deal with these vagaries of the weather but also, in terms of individuals, from birth to death, there is a connection (with water)," shared Balthasar Jolliet, director, Infini Centre.

And every conversation/response is unique. Where one would expect only blues and whites on the wall, there’s a kaleidoscope of palettes instead. The exhibition showcases the work of six city-based artists — Amina Memon, Gita Badshah, Jacob Jeevarath, Karnavita Prasad, Shalini Bold, and THEYMONE Memon — who express interventions on the element with a sprinkle of their own roots.

A new outlook

Amina Memon sees it through series of bright colours. Pink, blue, green and yellow jump out from her canvas, paintings that have an almost childlike quality in contrast to the weighty subject matter. In her work titled ‘Suicide note’, the artist paints the words ‘suicide note’ in monochromatic black on white or white on black on canvas, her paintings depict the water as a savior and destroyer. The black on white artwork is startling, even eerie in some ways but leaves you engaged in noting little details among the buoy surface.

While unusually, the two artists were not present at the venue, the two walked us through their artwork and inspirations. With a play on space, Jacob Jeevarath’s artworks bring connection to water restoration, pattern and movement. The same are named Water Way. Inspired by the philosophy and vision of a philanthropist Dr. K. Bhuvaneswari of the Theosophical Society, ‘his philosophy is that water can fit into any shape. It can flow into a river, transform into a small stream, get into a farmer’s land, and become something else. Water has its own ways’ explained. One of his artworks is also inspired by water restoration, particularly one of the first attempts by Karikal Cholan some 1,000 years ago. They observed water patterns and decided upon a barrier where they can make a reservoir for further cultivation, he informed.

Where Jacob’s work highlights the movement, Karnavita’s canvas speaks in layers. Her art showcases stark differences with one essence prevailing, and another chase. Both feature symbols related to the element — a crescent, crocodile, fish, and more but one coalesces with its blue hues and another with its brownish hues. She started as a water colourist and think like one still. I have drawn upon water as an element, as ancient Indian epic speak of it. For me, water is mediative, because when you look at it, you don’t see only the water. You see reflections, you see light and you see dambs parts as well. What I have drawn is not by looking or something but with the memory of looking at it,” she said.

Texture trails

Some artists take from larger, shared phenomena and others build out of personal experience. Raised in Kamaruka, Shalini was used to the rainfall nearly half the year but his move to Chennai brought another reality where “there are no rains, there is only flood” as he puts it. Playing with water colours and negative space, Shalini’s work looks delicate and brings in a human element to plays with the other aspects. “My paintings always have two elements and there is always tension between the like the North and South Pole. I started creating tension between the humans and its surroundings” he shared. He opens up on his thoughts during the process of painting from recognizing that water is not flows, to swing the strength of the element when it rains pours in the paper laying around in his house.

Humans elements feature on Shalini’s canvas but on THEYMONE’s, they take insinuate routes. With her work she chooses to use caps. She creates images relevant to our reality ‘I have worked with pens and pens because that is what you see but they also show the deeper meaning of the beginning of the life. Pen indicates female and indicates male. There is also flora growing out of the plant which is all about; the beginning of all life, flora and fauna is because of water,’ explained. One of her artworks shows a birds eye view of pens on the floor and upside looking seeking it, an interesting take on perhaps scarcity and drought.

We may share the element of water; what it being all around and inside us but is it evident that while we see the same thing, we take back different interpretations. The exhibition will be on display till 30th September at Infini Centre, Apollo, Infini. The same will be released on Pintes for those who would like to view it online.