

BIG ART

The art, artists and everything in between.

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MEERA DEVIDAYAL | WATER HAS MEMORY



At the Edge (acrylic and digital print on canvas; 2017)

Water has memory. Of the constantly transforming facets of land; of the persistent negotiations; of itself being overpowered and spurned, and gradually abused by the massive civilizational agendas. Water has seen the advancements and continues to watch the interminable alterations made to the geography, simultaneously getting tarnished. Water buries these vicious affairs deep within its placid self, but does not forget. Occasionally this water retaliates, destroys and devours, but like the multiplying cells of fungi in a dampened environment, civilization reinstates its motive. Water yet again retreats only to retrace and emerge unapologetic in this causal relationship. While expansions and disruptions remain a constant across the landmass, nothing remains still in water. The game is unrelenting: water reflects the structures, while the glass-faced and mirrored facades of these structures reflect the water in return. This conflict continues until either one tries to swallow its own reflection.

Meera Devidayal recounts these ordeals through visual metaphors with her series of 'found images'. Different incidents from the everyday are juxtaposed and/ or superimposed to stitch together numerous narratives; every other visual alliance seems like it can result in the telling of a new story. For Meera, making water her protagonist was incidental.

"I was in my husband's office at Nariman Point, when he pointed out reflections of the sea in some of the windows of the neighbouring building. The fact that the real sea, which was behind both buildings, and not visible from where I was, made this image really surreal. Also, that because of the nature of each window (blinds, shutters, film) the sea looked different in each. I was fascinated by the visual, but didn't know how to convert it into art. So I went back many times to photograph the windows, and depending on the time of day, the tide cycle, the light, the season, it was different every time. When I saw people working, with the sea around them, unknown to them, but which I could see, my story started emerging."

Mumbai plays host to these many instances within which Meera explores to construct her own interpreted exposition. Construction sites, moderate buildings, polished skyscrapers, these stark contradictions grow higher and higher perhaps in order to contemptuously confront the vast ocean and its distant horizon? But the higher they go, the lower they sink: the sea engulfs.



Mirage (digital print, acrylic and charcoal on canvas; 2018)

The exhibition comprises drawings, photographs and videos installed to urge the spectator to experience the enormity of these evidence. While water is represented through anecdotes framed within concise graphite drawings interwoven with weighty text and lucid poetry, the ongoing and imminent position of the materialistic mortal is sensed in a surreal state of despair only on watching the large video installations and photo stills. Video becomes her material over all others, to be able to capture the course of this feud.

Mirage is contained within a room to present the viewer with a medley of visual and sensory experiences. Three of the walls entirely covered in large digital prints of a stagnant urbanscape, face the fourth wall with a video projection of a grey sea interchanging with apparitions of a city on its horizon, as if to reiterate a memory. At one bizarre moment, the video demonstrates an entire skyscraper suddenly transforming into a block of ice. At that, Meera recalled her visit to the Sassoon Docks where she came across trucks carrying large blocks of ice that were then manually fed into the ice-crushers. The paradox: while water sustains life, crushed ice preserves dead fish. For Meera, the tall blocks of ice resembled the high-rise buildings of Mumbai: "the whole idea is of the impermanence of grandeur, these tall buildings turning to ice and melting into the sea."

Or like toys, these buildings are constructed using vibrant building blocks, but the matchbox housing is only too fragile and combustible to last. The eventual obliteration of the landscape happens when the seismic wave, like a fishing net, captures its oppressors.

The sea as a 'passage' and the idea of migration is implicated across the body of works. The sea we look into for hope, stopover for rehabilitation, submerge in to cleanse oneself and journey across for a better life: "we are in its hands, and the sea will decide whether to get us across or not. It contains both nectar and poison in equal measure."

Images: ©Chemould Prescott Road

Where: Chemould Prescott Road, Mumbai

When: On view from 17th April to 12th May 2018