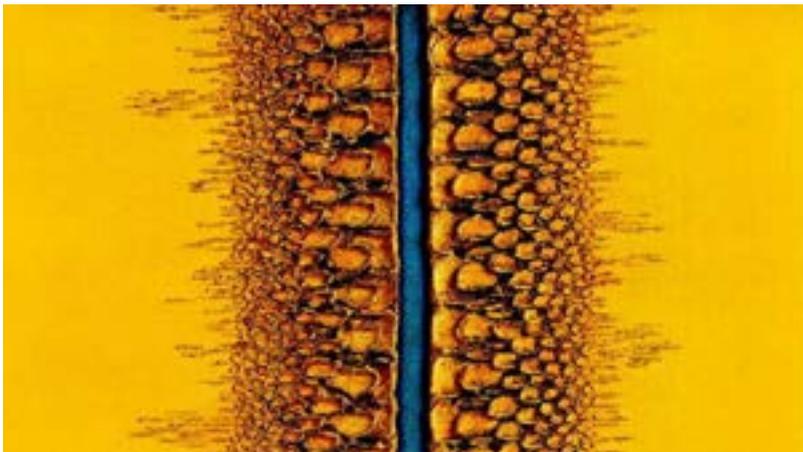


KUMAR GALLERY

THE HINDU

The art of nothingness

A solo exhibition of Sohan Qadri's works brings back memories of the celebrated artist



REFLECTING THROUGH ART A work on display

“It just happened one day that I was thinking and it struck my mind ‘where is Sohan Qadri?’ As the works of other artists of his time like S. H. Raza were present everywhere and were being talked about, it seemed to me that we had forgotten the legacy of this celebrated artist who had achieved so much name and fame in his time. And, it was at this particular moment I decided to put together a show to celebrate his vast and rich oeuvre,” reveals Sunit Kumar, the director of Kumar Gallery.

So with a single-minded focus, Sunit sifted through his personal collection and approached private collectors to put together a large body of works that represents Qadri's preoccupation with tantric art and states of deep meditation. Highlighting the artist's deeper engagement with spirituality is the ongoing exhibition, “Celebration: Paintings by Sohan Qadri from 1970-2010” in the Capital.

“This is the first time after his death in 2011 that a large body of works, covering nearly four decades of his practice are being shown in a solo show,” says Sunit. Talking about the exhibits, he adds, “The major important works include oil impastos on canvas from 1970s and 80s to his later works of the 90s and the new millennium that was done using ink dyes and incision on paper.”

Interestingly, the exhibition also coincides with the 85th birth anniversary of the artist who spent the major part of his life abroad, mainly in Copenhagen for almost 30 years. His trips to India were occasional, and he was never part of any coterie. In fact, Sunit points out, that unlike many artists of that era he was not “outgoing”, and this, perhaps, was the reason he has been being viewed as a “reclusive artists” by many.

“Some of the artists of that time were great socialites and were good in the art of self-marketing and promotion. But, he wasn’t like them. His art reflected what he imbibed and believed in. He wasn’t a recluse, but he was never a part of any circus either,” says Sunit.

Citing an instance, Sunit recalls, “I had met him several times at his studio in Copenhagen. We have broken bread together. So, I know him as a puritan-Indian who came across as a typical Punjabi boy. He also used to meditate and run a centre for yoga...and all this reflected through his works. If one looks closely, there is a tremendous amount of Indianness in his art, and most of his works are about nothingness or ‘shunya’.”

Qadri was born as Sohan Singh in Punjab, India in 1932, and was initiated at the age of 14 in yoga, tantra, dance and music by Guru Bhikham Giri of Phagwara. These spiritual beginnings left such a lasting impression on his mind that he never painted anything else, but abstract representations of yin and yang.

“None of the modern masters have ever mastered a thought with so much consistency as Sohan in his language of expression,” points out Sunit.

There are 50 works on display, several of them already spotted a red dot, implying that they have been sold, on the day of the opening is an affirmation of the confidence art aficionados have in his works. The resplendent use of bold colours like blues, mauves and reds lend a meditative energy to the artworks.

Sunit knew the artist for close to 40 years and taking a leaf out of their personal moments, the gallerist fondly recollects how in 2002 in New York, Qadri himself chose a particular moment to explain the thought behind his abstracts.

“We were in New York and there was a power breakdown. Everything had come to a standstill. People were on streets and it was being touted as the doomsday. We had to reach 73rd street and it was already dark, so we had to find our way through the darkness. This was the time when millions of people were walking in the darkness and he just said ‘this moment just describes my art of nothingness, of shunya. Right now, the meaning of life is just limited to shunya’. This is what I have been representing through my art.”

(On till February 5 at Kumar Gallery, Sunder Nagar, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.)

By SHILPA RAINA