



A world of fantasy: By Mirela Radulescu.

Mirela Radulescu manages to transcend the apparent cultural identities in her work on display in Lahore

By Quddus Mirza

artreview

Usually the realm of culture and the field of sports are considered to be two separate worlds. If the former is regarded as the manifestation of sophisticated human expression, in the shape of craft, art and literature, the latter is understood as an occasion to demonstrate physical strength, tactics and a sense of competition. In a strange manner, both activities are converging these days. As it has become normal to glimpse the evidence of national culture on the openings of international sports events. May it be Olympics, Commonwealth games or the World Cup football, the regional culture, including music and dance (in traditional costumes) is fully performed on the inauguration and on the last day of these tournaments.

The need to present — rather show off — a national culture arises from the structure of these events. Emphasising specific culture is linked to the issue of

identity. The urge to invoke one's identity turns into a dire necessity, when a nation or a person is faced with other people/countries. The encounter with others, sometimes in the form of comparison, brings forth the local traits and vernacular features. Hence in the presence of athletes and teams belonging to various states, the host country likes to display proudly and profoundly its national culture. (And undoubtedly the live coverage via TV, around the world, has also influenced and accelerated this phenomenon).

This does not happen in the sports only, but takes place in the domain of art as well. An artist tends to be engaged with the concept of identity more when he/she is in contact with others, especially after being dislocated from the place of origin. The act of migration poses two options. First is to remain adhered to one's culture, to rediscover its visual ingredients and utilise it in one's creations — while residing in an alien land. Many artists in this situation overtly concentrate on the indigenous symbols in their art.

The examples of it can be found in the popular usage of calligraphy, Islamic patterns and miniature painting in the works produced by the individuals from our region, surviving in the West.

The other course is to incorporate the aesthetic elements of the other societies. The displacement from one's own place and adapting a new environment cause an awareness and fondness for the culture of that area. As the painters, sculptors and photographer who visit or decide to reside in the exotic land of the Orient employ all those visuals, which signify local heritage and tradition. Several names can be quoted in support of this happening.

But Mirela Radulescu, an artist from Romania, does not get trapped in these easy devices or solutions. Living in Pakistan since November 2000, she does not focus on the obvious cultural stuff. Instead, her work denotes a different attitude. It manages to transcend the apparent cultural identities. And this is not a lesser achievement, knowing the kind of art being prepared in every corner of the world.

Art News 16.6.02

An intimate encounter

bears/bares the cultural marks.

The subjects of her mixed-media paintings (on display till June 18 at Rohtas 2, Lahore) are of an intimate nature. (Interestingly the more intimate the images are the more global appeal they have). These works could have been created, exhibited and viewed anywhere in the world. She takes references, but in a subtler fashion, from a variety of visual sources. The *bindiya*, lotus flower, crown, swirling clouds (from the Byzantium art) and winged faces (angels, from the same period) intermingle in such a way that the spectators do not notice the presence of one particular tradition.

In fact, her work is more about the depiction of a personal realm through the medium of paint and ink on the paper. In her work, the figures and faces of male and females are shown on colourful backgrounds. It appears that she tries to construct a world of fantasy; as well as to fabricate a surrealist atmosphere, with the help of floating figures, winged people, and angels hovering above the large faces. A motif that repeats in various works is the angel crouching on the right shoulder of a person. This illustrates our myth of two angels occupying the side of every human being — noting down the good and bad deeds. Explaining the origin of this image, the Romanian artist disclosed that people in her country share the same belief.

Her work in the current exhibition can be divided into two groups: large scale paintings with multiple colours, and the small mixed-media on paper with minimal hues. Both sets of works have common imagery, but indicate a difference in *artist's formal approach*.



In bigger pieces, the face of a man or a woman, or both are composed in the centre of the picture. Or the two torsos are painted next to each other. The usage of pure colour and the method of drawing features, like elongated eyes, nose, and lips, look contrived and repetitive. Similarly other elements — birds, fish and clouds — are rendered in a stylised manner. Only the works titled 'Music Series books 5 & 6' do not follow a for-

mula and are executed in bold lines and emotionally charged brush strokes.

However, the smaller works are endowed with a looseness of mark-making and an ease in picking and assembling the visual components that suit the theme of her paintings. The imagery in these works seems to reflect the instances in dreams (and not surprisingly most of these have people the sleeping people). The unusual aspect of

these works is the composition of figures. In a few paintings, men are sitting on clouds, circling around the earth or riding on elephants. Angels, besides on the shoulders of human beings, are placed inside the big figures. Likewise flying females, mermaids and the imaginary birds, enrich the extraordinary character of these environments.

In order to complement the phantasmagoria in her art, Mirela uses the materials in a corresponding way. Instead of working on a single sheet, she pastes the tiny pieces of paper of diverse sorts (including tissue paper) on her surfaces, to evoke a tactile sensation. Similarly the manner of handling the mediums, such as acrylic and pastels, and ink (to depict the figures), imbibes the painterly essence rather than merely imitating the reality as seen every day. These, formal qualities infuse the unrealistic — or super real — dimension in the work.

The smaller paintings by Mirela portray the artist's enjoyment in interweaving numerous types of marks and her preference for romantic substance. The little lines, specks of paint, thin layers of colours and the combination of sharp and diffused lines enhance the narrative about love. Frequently made image, of heart outside the chest, reaffirms this reading. Also the bright colour scheme and spontaneous drawing add the sense of delight in the making and viewing this body of work.

Perhaps the most important characteristic of her work is its gayness. A feature that could have been an ordinary component of a work of art in other circumstances, but in relation to the art from our surroundings — amidst the fear of a nuclear war — this is a rare trait.