

1883

RADHIKA AGARWALA

ART

Combining the *sacred* and the *secular*, the figurative and the geometric, Radhika Agarwala's work explores the different ethics and visual languages between Asian and Western cultures, taking inspiration from a varied as well as wondrous range of sources – ranging from *Kalighat Paintings* from Bengal, sixteenth century *Mughal miniatures* to illuminated manuscripts of the *Italian Renaissance*.



Born in Calcutta in 1985, Radhikahas earned her BFA in Painting from Rabindra Bharati University, Calcutta in 2007, Post Baccalaureate in Painting from School of The Art Institute of Chicago, U.S.A in 2009 and MFA Fine Art from Goldsmiths College, University of London in 2011. Represented by ArtEco Gallery, London, Radhika has been exhibiting in many venues in the UK, USA and India; her most recent exhibitions include:

Encounter, ArtEco Gallery, London (2012),
Allegories, Art Konsult Gallery, Delhi (2012);
Heartbeat Gallery, Sheffield, 2012;
Who Do You Think We Are?, Hanmi Gallery, London (2011);
The Tomorrow People-Artists of The Future Now show, The Elevator Gallery, London (2011);
Selected by Snoozie Hexagon and Simon Rueben White (2011);
Goldsmiths MFA Degree Show, Goldsmiths, University of London (2011);
London Original Print Art Fair, Royal Academy of Arts, London (2011);
Mostyn Agored Open, Llandudno, Wales-Selected by artist Richard Wentworth (2011);

FlaMfa, Tioga Art Center, Tioga, Florida (2010);
Drawing Lab, Group Show at Tempus Projects, Tampa, Florida (2010);
Miami Independent Thinkers Show, Wynwood Art District, Art Basel Miami Beach (2009);
Gainesville Benefit To Build Hope House, Movie Screenings, Randy Batista Photography Gallery, Gainesville, Florida (2009);
42nd Annual Exhibition, Birla Academy of Art and Culture, Kolkata, India (2009).
1883 caught up with Radhika; here's what she told us.



As a first question, can you briefly introduce yourself to our readers?

I grew up in Calcutta, a hustling bustling metropolis, known as the creative capital of India. I studied for my BFA at Rabindra Bharati University from my hometown and then received a scholarship to pursue Post Baccalaureate at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, further studied masters at University of Florida. Then I lived in New York City for a while and finally moved to London to study MFA at the Goldsmiths and presently live and work from here.

Was there a moment in your life when you realised you wanted to be an artist?

I think some things just happen by destiny. I would always draw on anything that I found from childhood. As a child, I spent most of my evenings in my uncle's art gallery in Calcutta surrounded by art and music. From the very beginning, I think, I wanted to be an artist and after going to the art school it was a sure thing. It has been a path full of struggle and surprises that probably keeps me going, the more I strive, the more exciting it seems.

Who are your favourite artists at the moment?

The list keeps changing but some of my favourite artists are Kiki Smith, Anju Dodiya, Wangechi Mutu, Chris Ofilli, Raqib Shaw, and Grayson Perry.

Where do you get your inspiration from for your artwork? I read your sources are extremely varied, ranging from Nineteenth Century Bengali Kalighat paintings to manuscripts of the Italian Renaissance.

I find inspiration everywhere, things that I encounter in trains or even while walking to my house, traveling and living between various cultural environments, I always find something unique to hold on to. I'm reading a lot about tarot cards and occultism at the moment and enjoying looking at the iconography and ancient symbology that encompasses a lot of the texts and the next series of works could show a greater understanding of it. Mythology and folklore interests me a lot, anything outside the white cube or the conventional really... I would visit the *pandals* every year as a child to celebrate Durga Puja, a religious ceremony that marks the victory of good over Evil and one can see beautiful depiction of religious icons and narratives of mythological creatures and gods created by local artisans. This practice began from my city from the 1500's, things like this fascinates me. The everyday experiences and images from my hometown remains to be the biggest source of inspiration. The further we go from our roots, the closer we actually become!



How do you approach a new work? Can you walk us a bit through your *creative process*?

I do not have any rules for approaching a work, it really depends on what I'm looking and researching about. I draw all the time, sometimes a painting or a sculpture just evolves from them, sometimes layered from my collection of resources in my studio, and sometimes a work created on impulse.



Your work explores the different ethics and visual languages between Asian and Western cultures through a pictorial language that effectively combines the *sacred* and the *secular*, the figurative and the geometric; can you tell us a bit more about this process of *hybridisation*?

Having studied and lived between two opposite cultures and countries, there is a constant confusion that I feel and an urge to revisit history and tradition and hence to build unfixed narratives through that process of my journey and imagination, so there is a feeling of fiction and fantasy within the works. The historical sources are a mere starting point, the images created ultimately become quite complex, playful and absurd. The hybridisation is actual and represented through all this baggage of information and comments on the social narratives, and my experiences. I enjoy the tension that my work suffers floating between Western and Asian vocabularies and the shift of the two, old and new cultures.



As a last question, what's next for you?

My works will be part of an auction for Arts for India organized by SternArts in Mayfair, London next week, a solo show in ArtEco Gallery, London next year 2013 and few shows lined up in Delhi in December 2012.

Further information can be found [here](#).

Words by Jacopo Nuvolari