

## Cosmic Mambo – Amin Gulgee’s On-going Dance with Gravity

Cosmic Mambo, Amin Gulgee’s latest exhibition of new sculptures at Wei Ling Contemporary - his fourth solo outing in Malaysia - firmly places this internationally acclaimed sculptor from Pakistan within the territorial purview of a Malaysian modern art movement.

Following his expansive 2009 survey exhibition at Galeri Petronas, and his two earlier solo outings at Wei Ling Gallery, both of which were hugely popular with local art audiences and ardently subscribed to by Malaysian collectors, Amin is no more seen so much as a foreign visiting artist but more and more as one of our own. The artist has attained his richly deserved artistic presence in the region through his successful exhibition runs, finding relevance through signature works with dramatic aesthetics and meaningful content that seems to connect on many levels with local audiences.

Quite simply, his art, steeped in an overt spirituality and contemporary philosophies draws inspiration from a synergy of ‘Hindu mythology, Buddhist asceticism and Islamic calligraphy’ under an umbrella of the artist’s own Sufi faith, has inspired us all. Amin’s art strikes a chord with our own aspirations for unity through diversity.

Using a myriad of narrative devices from the autobiographical to the ancient, from the culinary to the scriptures, Amin seems to subscribe to the marriage of a common system of values all humanity shares – free of fear or favor - as central to the meanings in his works. A common system of values that we, the viewer, refer to as well, when we interpret the meanings within his art.

Whether relying on the manipulations of the perfect roundels of the humble Chapati; the revitalizing properties of the Leaf in the new Char installations; the realistic masks of babies in his Sun Dried wreaths, totems or garlands; and always, the return to the sacred word in his calligraphic masterpieces... God is Great, God is Great, God is Great... Amin the sculptor continues to search and find and misplace the underlying spirituality of man.

And again - that appeals to us all.

Then there is Amin Gulgee’s rich aesthetic sensibility. The sculptor’s prowess in manipulating bronze; in constructing structures in a Brancusian state of precarious balance while specifically merging a rich abstract quality with strong symbolic allusions to the representational or realistic always in the details culminates in forms of great purity.

With Cosmic Mambo, this purity is best expressed in his wonderfully geometric Folded

Chapatis' or the heart wrenching baby-heads in Wreath, organic rings and towers of severed baby heads that are at once beautiful as they are wrenchingly sad and horrifying. The wonderfully titled Cosmic Chapati – the perfect form – on the tiniest base boasts this purity only to be surpassed by the geometric balance and innovative reinvention of the humble circle in the Folded Chapati dangerously poised on its points. Then the artist immediately reinvents the circles again folding and folding his bronze circles to give us the gravity defying complex arrangement of Four Quarter Chapatis that boast the same harmonious dignity of the single cosmic original.

In their earliest manifestations, Amin used body parts - wired hands and facial masks (eventually self-portraits) as part of larger flora-fauna dominated works decorated with colored glass. These elements were especially recurrent in earlier works like Climbing and in his Body & Soul exhibition. There is an almost single-minded austerity in the new memorial day type Wreaths of the current series. As usual Amin is obsessed with the graceful, precarious balance that marks his gravity defying sculptures. These bronzes, dense with beautifully sculptured babies heads – unapologetically titled Sun-dried Heads – are contradictory in many ways. They are at once heavy yet light despite their monumental scale. They defy gravity and refuse to topple. The heads are at once grotesque and decapitated and then they are fragrant and delicate like purple or blood red hydrangeas. But they are a constant reminder of human frailty in the world we live in.

But almost as a hopeful gesture as a gentle reprieve, Amin also includes his Spider Sketches. In this newest outing Amin's Spider Sketches, an extension of his signature calligraphic series take a new organic stance, boasting a complex weave of line and curve to convey a richness of movement that in turn may philosophically refer to the relevance and evolution of Faith within our contemporary contexts.

The Char Bagh installation, inspired by the Islamic tradition of architecture and metalwork, claims the space it lives in. A field of 64 copper leaves, perhaps tea as implied by the title, configured in four corners dissected by a cross configuration, Char Bagh is part of an installation work made in collaboration with Malaysian architect Lim Cho-Wei and literally sets the stage for what one hopes will be the seminal performances Amin is famous for.

In creating these various states of gravity, Amin gives us a view of the world – none of it literal; some of it allegorical; vaguely autobiographical; deeply spiritual; skillfully turned in bronze but always heart-wrenchingly felt.

Cosmic Mambo marries with great harmony, four distinct bodies of works, that try to arrive at truths about the world we live in, expressed in the rich bronze and gold and black shaped by the artist in his own exquisite visual and symbolic vocabulary.

Augustine Brancusi, the patriarch of modern sculpture when he described ways of making and seeing... he said. `What is real is not the external form but the essence of things.... It is impossible for anyone to express anything essentially real by imitating its exterior surface.'

Amin Gulgee always manages to find that essence of things in his Sculptures – combined with his deep love for form and material the results are nothing short of breath taking. Far from tipping over, they literally defy gravity.