

## FRAGMENTS AND WHOLE

**Manisha Kumar** spots cartoon characters and figures from classical paintings rubbing shoulders in Raghava KK's works.

Weaving stories through a complex scatter of motifs and elements borrowed from cartoons, memes and paintings of Indian and Western masters, Raghava KK presents *Ridiculous Copycats*. Comprising watercolours, paintings in acrylic and a few drawings, the show opened at the Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai, on August 19<sup>th</sup> and continued at Art Musings, Mumbai, from August 25<sup>th</sup> to September 20<sup>th</sup>.

Each work by Raghava tells an independent story and multiple works entering the field of vision also tell a story, much like an ensemble film where disparate narratives converge in a common idea, reinforced by each segment.

Steering clear of controversial topics, he seeks to convey ideas of evolution, mutation, dominance and subjugation of species in a cyclical repetitive process. The Red Queen hypothesis formulated by Leigh Van Valen leads Raghava to believe that evolution "is not a ladder but a treadmill". Environmental factors, external interactions and changes caused by deviance or errors in code cause a constant shifting of identity and character. These shifts sometimes result in improved evolutionary outcomes. Raghava attempts to establish that errors are not always unsavoury. Copies may have different meanings arising from differences in context or adaptation. Many of his works show anthropomorphic figures signifying a kind of metamorphosis.

The Pedobear in *Another Knot In The String Of Time, A Good Three Minutes Ahead Of Me*, refers to the horror of paedophilia and the unintended and undesirable objectification of children. The Powerpuff girl, the mini-Rajinikanth and the Golliwogish figure, among others, suggest ways in which the world of cartoons impacts our lives and imaginations. Though the horse is supposed to signify speed, it suggests the Trojan virus that entices, infects, restructures and propagates.

Many recurrent elements in the works tell their own story, independent of the larger narrative. These intended narratives may not always successfully communicate themselves to the viewer. The titles of the works may not always assist in their interpretation. This is 'the whimsical' that Raghava talks about, explaining the title of the show.

In *The Real Vandals Are The Restorers*, a re-imagined Venus from Botticelli's famous painting emerges against yawning wings that form a crucifix. By conjuring up objectification and liberation at the same time the artist comments on the problems of censorship. This work draws from a game that Raghava has put together – without this crucial bit of information, viewers might not be able to appreciate the work.

In *As Sure As The Prehistoric Fish Grew Legs*, Raja Ravi Varma's stately lady with a black eye sits in a classic pose in a lunar landscape with a cheekbone exposed. She shares space with a growling animal astronaut, the Air India Maharaja, Casper the friendly ghost and Felix the cat, among others, creating an atmosphere that is both intimate and sinister. In another work, Raghava sends Picasso's *Guernica* for a spin as the images journey from the Spanish Civil War to Mahatma Gandhi's India, carrying the message of war and destruction.

The visual opulence of *Guernica 2.0*, *Another Knot In The String Of Time*, *A Good Three Minutes Ahead Of Me* and *As Sure As The Prehistoric Fish Grew Legs* do not dilute the message carried. Is Raghava piggy-backing on works by the masters for easy reference or is he being brave in re-contextualising their works? Using the resources of pastiche, he creates a blast from the past that helps us see the transforming reality around us in a strange new light.



Raghava KK. *Another Knot In The String Of Time, A Good Three Minutes Ahead Of Me*. Acrylic on canvas. 68" x 115". 2015. Image courtesy Art Musings.