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# Hues in harmony

**ART** Devendra and Mun Shukla's works belong to different cultures and traditions. Yet, they are a confluence of creative minds

The painted canvases on the walls at Forum Art Gallery are both figurative and quasi abstract. At a glance, they appear like a homogenous body of works by one artist. But this is where the exhibition titled "Confluence" marks its posture of difference. For, on display are the works of artist couple Devendra and Mun J. H. Shukla Kumar from Delhi.

A common thread linking their works is their shared art education at Beijing, China. Mun Shukla is a Korean by birth. Her art education in Korea and Beijing, predicated on water colours and the ink wash technique, comes through with clarity, while Devendra's works display a strong Indian sensibility evident in the way he uses colours, though his technique is fluid with an affinity for Chinese water colours.

Spontaneity seems to be another hallmark of their works. The images and forms are ambiguous, relying to a great degree on imaginative response from viewers. Ambiguity seems to be their underlying aesthetic, since there is a free play of brush strokes and colours, which, according to Umberto Eco, is 'poetics of the open work and the creation of works that are deliberately open to the freedom of the reader's reaction'. The works provoke different readings because of pictorial complexity. Mun's canvases are gestural, indicating powerful emotional energies both in terms of colour as well as brushwork. Devendra's canvases are replete with identifiable and not so recognisable forms but there is an inherent structure to his composition with the colours relating to his cultural context.

## Subtle layering

Mun's compositions invite by their monochromatic subtle layering and fluid drips of



**SPONTANEOUS STROKES** The artists with one of their works in the background

colour and brush work. Her sensibility connects to her culture and its environment in Korea, where winters are harsh and depressing yet dramatic in their violent chiaroscuro. Yet she has moved beyond to assimilate her present cultural milieu which comes through in passionate reds juxtaposed with sky blues (Rhapsody in Red). Her emotional responses are mediated through colours with their varied subtle tones and, of course, most convincingly through her brush strokes that vary from being brick-like to soft smudges to daring drips that flow with abandon. The inherent spontaneity that characterises her works emerges from her controlled mastery of the wash technique, allowing a freedom to make her two-dimensional canvas space a vast ground for a play of her feelings, thoughts, sentiments, passion and, perhaps, nostalgia. The

subtleties of tones perhaps mark an evocative site of memories as she plunges into her subconscious in a reverie which is her private world.

Devendra's approach to the creative process is to confront the tabula rasa of his canvas with an 'empty' mind, free of thoughts and ideas. According to the artist, "art for me has to be an experience in its purest form. Mind is polluted with many conditionings, and I do not want any planning before I begin to paint, because I want to paint a particular moment, after the first coloured stroke goes on the canvas." He characterises his strokes as loaded with emotional energies in the portrayal of his soul and spirit. Thus every colour and stroke is intuited by Devendra and when he becomes conscious of his environment, then an image slowly creeps into his work as a car or an aeroplane. Working at

two levels, the subconscious and the conscious, the artist blends the images of these diverse realities to create the surreal. Nevertheless, the forms in his works are not limpid or amorphous. Rather they have a structure and hence, he straddles both the states of mind with equanimity. His colours are vivid and optimistic, passionate and controlled. The chromatic range goes from sea blues and greens to sand ochres, pure whites and dull greens.

Despite the inherent differences, their works are consanguine and the inter dialogue they have created in their works marks them as a confluence of two creative minds, who though from very different traditions and culture, have been able to strike a chord of harmony.

The show is on at Forum Art Gallery until July 31.

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