

Multiple echoes from life

Emamichisel Arts' recent annual was both a babel and a barometer. Because, with a total of 200-plus works from as many artists—160 or so in the competitive section—what you were likely to get was a babel of voices, though a common denominator of the art scene could be sensed. Inexplicably, however, the competition wasn't exclusively for young talent in need of exposure and recognition, with several established names jostling with lesser-known ones for awards.

First, the competitive section. It became apparent that though new media have been creeping in, it is yet to unseat traditional methods. For example, drawing and printmaking have retained their importance. Nirmal Chakraborty, Suroj Sarkar, Tanurima Dhar and Arup Dey were confident of their pen-and-ink lines but Surajit Biswas's understated drawing relied, interestingly, not on lines but on minute dots, leaving the negative space to emerge as an image gently laden with atmosphere. Malay Saha's calligraphic fluency of ink strokes and Santanu Dey's spry smudges deserve mention. And Prasenjit Pramanick's blurred scenes in watercolour and blobs of ink radiated a fetching simplicity.

If the woodcuts of Shipra Rani and Shreya Sur were in low, muted tones, Aditi Dani and Indrani Gos-

wami preferred lively colours. Daimalu Brahma's chiaroscuro and Sourav Poddar's litho of three impassive figures were noticeable as well. Ratna Das combined etching, aquatint and woodcut with wry humour, while Sangita Maity accented a period appeal in her photo etching. Tapan Saha and Bivas Bhattacharjee revealed a fine eye for composition.

Landscapes of rich ambiguity appealed to several painters. For example, Santanu Roy, whose varied strokes contrasted light with darkening shadows; Pradyut Paul with his subtle play of greens in gouache; Tapan Mitra, who distributed seductive images of breezy spontaneity on two layers of what seemed to be acrylic sheets, with the front casting shadows on the back; Sudhangshu Bandyopadhyay, whose Expressionist abstraction was an anthem of virile chaos; Diplekha Dey, who combined different media imaginatively; Rajendra Malakar, meditating on the rains in whispering browns; and Pulak Ghosh, with his vision of arcadia.

Kashinath Das's sweeping view of *Haridwar* (picture) with lofty spires and milling specks for people lent it an exhilarating sense of place. A blend of meticulous craft and surreal fantasy marked Abhijit Pa-

VISUAL ARTS

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ul's futuristic cityscape. Bibhas Baidya's stark lines brought to mind the brusque figuration of Kartick Pyne, while Mihir Kayal's attenuated heads trapped in tumultuous paint bespoke a debt to Kandinsky. Prakash Roy ridiculed the hyperbole of ads, and Sumantra Mukherjee mined Pop art for a trenchant vocabulary.

The quirky sport of Deblina Laha resulted in a pattern of threadbare woollen stockings. Esha Mukherjee wove a more elaborate and quite riveting tapestry with wool, jute and thread. Monojit Samanta was amusing both with his material—hair to conjure a fish net—and his message, *Jamai*

Sashthi. Arpita Pradhan's quaint, three-panel narrative squinted at the irony of urban imperatives in cornering river water. Suprakash Nath caught the eye with hefty, Op Art letters that spelt "truth", perspicaciously acknowledged as *Elusive*. The gaunt structure of sketchy bands in Samir Saha's mixed media work; the enigmatic architectural suite of Magritte-like stillness in Bharti Verma's canvas; and the strident palette of Manish Moitra should also be cited.

Bansari Khan, Chaitali Chanda, Barun Pramanick and Mrinal Kanti Gayen indicated that dramatic narrative tableaux in bronze are now popular among sculptors. Bikram

Das invoked the spirit to soar, but Sujit Kumar Karan's references remained somewhat inaccessible in his lively bronze. Conceptually, Jayanta Bhattacharya's installation was as much of a ho-hum as the rhetoric he wished to lampoon, but the fibreglass figure was kitschy in a Jeff Koons manner. The arrangement by Tarak Nath Das could have been inspired by Isa Genzkin, as much in its artful fusion of different material in constructing trolley bags as in the chance elegance of its disarray, yielding multiple echoes from contemporary life.

Among the guest participants you noticed Sunil De for his barely-there textures and Pradip Rakshit for his seascape of graded tones. The patchy green of Ganesh Haloi's landscape, bordered with quick, calligraphic strokes, turned it into an arcane parchment. Niren Sen Gupta's rough geometry of colours seemed to simmer with imminent fissures. Sekhar Roy's diptych was a strange, affective phantasmagoria of labyrinthine steps, vertiginous space and crumbling structures. The impact of Ashoke Kumar Verma's paper collage came from the rugged power of the figures. And if Vijendra Sharma's oil was amazingly photographic, Chhatrapati Dutta's photographic print was teasing in its subtle play of different substances—skin, netting, wooden bars—and an unstated erotic charge.