

Visual Arts Practices of the Indian Radical Painters' and Sculptors' Association: Expressing the Dynamic Political View

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Abstract--The Indian Radical Painters' and Sculptors' Association, known as the Radical Group, emerged in 1980s India as a significant art movement aiming to challenge dominant artistic traditions by creating socially and politically relevant art. Influenced by Marxist ideologies, the group sought to use art as a tool for social change and critiqued the elitism and commercialization of the art world. Their artworks conceptualised pressing social issues such as poverty and political corruption using bold colours, powerful imagery, and innovative techniques. Through exhibitions, workshops, and manifestos, they engaged with the public and other artists to convey their vision for art and society. This paper is to find out if the members of the group are still actively contributing to such new ideas, which will fill the gap after the group dilutes. The group's impact resonates in the work of contemporary Indian artists who continue to challenge conventions and push boundaries in their artistic practice.

Keywords-- Indian Radical Painters' and sculptors' Association, visual arts, social, political circumstances, exhibitions.

I. INTRODUCTION

The vibrant cultural heritage and rich artistic traditions, the visual arts scene in where the Radical group of artists were born, are also influenced by the political landscape of the region. Artists in Kerala often use their work to comment on and critique on political issues, social justice, and environmental concerns. The research study identified that the state has a long history of political activism and social movements, which is reflected in the art created by local artists. The Kochi-Muziris Biennale, for the example, has become a platform for artists to address pressing political and social issues through their artworks. The biennale has featured works that highlight issues such as gender equality, environmental sustainability, caste discrimination, and political corruption. Artists in Kerala are not afraid to engage with controversial topics and challenge the status quo through their art. The visual arts community in Kerala also actively participates in social and political movements, using art as a form of protest and activism.

Whether through art projects, street art, public installations, or exhibitions, artists in Kerala are vocal about their opinions and actively contribute to the discourse on important societal issues. Overall, the visual arts scene in Kerala is not just a reflection of the region's cultural heritage and artistic prowess but also a platform for political expression and social change. Artists in Kerala are constantly pushing boundaries and using their creative voice to address the pressing political and social issues facing the state and the country as a whole (Balakrishnan, 2023).

II. THE EMERGENCE OF THE INDIAN RADICAL PAINTERS' AND SCULPTORS' ASSOCIATION

During the late 1970s to 1980s, a group of artists from the Government College of Fine Arts in Kerala were deeply influenced by Marxist ideals. This ideological framework led them to embrace radical thinking and dissent, as they sought to challenge prevalent issues such as neo-colonialism, superstitions, an outdated education system, and the commercialisation of art. Their art became a form of rebellion, reflecting their strong beliefs and desires for change. The Indian Radical Painters' and Sculptors' Association, also known as the Radical Painters' and Sculptors' Association, the Kerala Radicals, or the Radical Group, was a collective of leftist artists primarily comprising Keralites working in Baroda. This group unofficially originated from the 1985 exhibition titled Seven Young Sculptors before evolving into an active collaborative of artists who actively engaged in artistic endeavours and exhibited their works between the years 1987 and 1989. The group disbanded following the tragic suicide of sculptor and leader K. P. Krishnakumar, marking the end of their artistic collaboration. Noteworthy members of the Indian Radical Painters' and Sculptors' Association included K. M. Madhusudhanan, CK Rajan, Alex Mathew, and Anita Dube, the lone female and non-Keralite member of the group. Their collective efforts and artistic contributions contributed to the vibrant art scene of the period, showcasing a blend of leftist ideologies and artistic expressions.



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The group's activities and exhibitions shed light on the diverse and experimental nature of contemporary Indian art, reflecting the social and political contexts in which they worked (Wyma, 2007).

Despite facing financial challenges and lacking dedicated studio spaces, these artists persisted in their pursuit of art, finding ways to support each other and collaborate. Their collective efforts challenged and problematised the discourse of Indian art in the 1980s and '90s, ultimately leaving a lasting impact on the artistic landscape of their time. In a charged atmosphere, as per the information of the India Today article (Parekh, 2016). The record of William Robinson of Christie's auctioned a painting by Vasudev Santu Gaitonde (1924- 2001) in Mumbai on December 15, 2015. The artwork, created in 1995, sold for a record-breaking Rs 29.3 crore, setting a new benchmark for modern Indian art. During the same period, Kiran Nadar Museum of Art (organized an exhibition titled 'Pond Near Field' featuring five artists from Kerala - C.K. Rajan, K.M KNMA, 2016). Madhusudhanan, K.P. Krishnakumar, N.N. Rimzon, and Surendran Nair, acclaimed for their unconventional approach to artmaking. They were not confined by traditional materials or techniques, often using unexpected mediums like tissue paper and cigarette packets for their sketches and paintings. This experimentation demonstrated their willingness to push boundaries and explore new possibilities in their artistic expressions. Also, a talk was presented by KM Madhusudhanan and N.N. Rimzon, where they spoke about their early struggling phase and how they moved from Kerala to Baroda and Shantiniketan for higher studies. 'Pond Near Field' 15th November 2015 to 31st July 2016, each artist had a distinct style and voice, reflecting their individual perspectives and interests. Madhusudhanan's charcoal drawings evoked a film-like quality, while Krishnakumar's figures exuded a tragic heroism (Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, 2020). N. N. Rimzon discussed about a secular platform of works and experiences that often depicted a circular shape as a mandala in his sculptures and drawings. And he also discusses and relates his works with the surrounding beauty of Kerala, which connects the world or part of a cosmos. The material he used, such as circular shapes made on coconut trees, Ponds, Stars, coconut trees etc. He stated "People may ask where is the politics in it?" the answer is this is a human trait by experiencing those things, we have to reschedule people and the human aspect is the central to any politics otherwise there will be no politics exist. The idea of politics means is not just only revolution in a sense of holding pistols or violence. That idea of politics is old (Rimzon, 2016).

While Rajan's collages incorporated political wit and satire. Nair, on the other hand, infused his art with whimsical and quirky elements, playing with words and imagery to create visually engaging pieces.

Their material experimentation, the artists were heavily influenced by literature, cinema, and theatre. These influences seeped into their work, infusing it with storytelling elements, symbolism, and a sense of theatricality. Collaborating and sharing ideas, they exchanged stories, techniques, and experiences, enriching their artistic practices and deepening their bond as a collective. KM Madhusudhanan's 'Panalcolony' ongoing project comprising drawings, sculptural installation and video installations, selection of 35 drawings shown at the 56th Venice Biennale, Italy: 'All the World's Futures', Curated by Okwui Enwezor: 9 May 2015 - 22 November 2015 the Nigerian- born curator, made waves at the prestigious Venice Biennale, becoming the first person of African descent to take on the role of chief curator. Known for his emphasis on political art, Enwezor has revived a tradition of activism at the event, drawing inspiration from a past exhibit that boldly protested a political coup in Chile. His belief in the transformative power of art to illuminate the complexities of our world shines through in this year's exhibition. Among the thought-provoking works featured are a live reading of Karl Marx's "Das Kapital," pieces incorporating the potent "Black Lives Matter" slogan, and an installation evoking the tragic struggles of migrants. These artworks challenge viewers to engage critically with pressing social and political issues, urging us to reflect deeply on the state of our contemporary world. Enwezor's curation marks a significant moment in the history of the Biennale, emphasizing the vital role of art in shaping our understanding of society and encouraging meaningful discourse on global challenges. Also, Mariam Suhail, an artist based in Bangalore, is known for taking everyday objects and images and showing us their hidden meanings and purposes (Narayan, 2015). She was part of the biennale in 2015 Suhail challenges us to look closely at things we often overlook, like textbooks and newspapers, making us see them in a new light. She likes to play with digital editing to change found images. In her

"Working Drawings" series from 2014, she modified pages from a drawing booklet, turning shapes into something else to show how traditional books are being replaced by technology. Suhail's art makes viewers think about the past and present connections to old objects. By turning common things into art, she preserves their history and significance for both today and tomorrow.



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Including artist Chiharu Shiota's the Key in the Hand at the Japanese pavilion, Adam Pendleton's "Black Lives Matter" and total 136 artist from the globe participated. In Panikkar lecture, he mentioned another important point is who held from the same background as like Krishnakumar was N N Rimzon. Somehow, Rimzon and Surrendran Nair was not included in the group (Panikkar, 2023). The artworks in "The Round Ocean and the Living Death" reflects Rimzon's lifelong quest to create an artistic language that combines the ancient beliefs and traditions of India with the complexities of modern Indian life. Through his simple yet powerful works on paper and canvas, as well as his thought-provoking sculptures, Rimzon invites viewers into a meditative space for contemplation. One of his monumental sculptures, "*The Round Ocean and the Living Death*," features a mother-goddess figure sitting at the centre of a circle, radiating a sense of calm strength. The deity figure, with her seven breasts and outstretched hand, symbolizes both creation and protection. This same deity figure appears in one of the paintings in the exhibition, which, despite its simplicity, contains intricate symbolism and perspectives.

Rimzon's art transcends specific beliefs or knowledge, providing a space where viewers can connect with a time before divisions based on colour, religion, or nationality existed. And a group show of three artists N N Rimzon, Alwar Bala Subramaniam, and Ranjani Shettar in Delhi at Talwar Gallery the exhibition "FROM THREE, TWO" showcases works on paper and canvas by three acclaimed artists known for their innovative sculpture and installations. The exhibit demonstrates how these artists' engagement with space, volume, and three-dimensional form is enhanced rather than diminished when working in two dimensions. The artworks range from paintings to drawings, silkscreen to woodblock prints, each highlighting the artist's unique exploration regardless of the medium. Together, the works emphasize the importance and creativity of two-dimensional art with in each artist's practice, showing that it holds just as much significance as their three-dimensional work. Ck Rajan showcased his collages alongside Kerry James Marshall at "Documenta 12" in Kassel in 2007. The exhibition encouraged viewers to think about important themes such as life, art, and ethics. Although some felt the presentation lacked visual impact, the show had a strong social message and featured works by lesser-known but talented artists. Before Documenta 12, many people in the art world were unfamiliar with the artists involved. Despite this, the exhibition brought attention to these lesser-known talents. The selection of artists was diverse, with only a few well-known Euro-American artists included.

One of the most interesting things about 'Documenta 12' was its unique approach, breaking away from traditional Western art norms. It offered a fresh perspective on international art, showcasing artists from various parts of the world. The exhibition included artists from India, Africa, and other regions, bringing a global representation that differed from other art shows of that year.

III. CONCLUSION

I have visited in Kochi-Muziris Biennale 2022-23, curated by Shubigi Rao, my observation has proven to be a resounding success, drawing in a significant number of visitors despite initial delays. The exhibition, with its theme 'In our veins flow ink and fire,' has showcased the diverse talents of 90 artists from around the world, highlighting the festival's commitment to fostering global artistic discourse. Additionally, 'Sea A Boiling Vessel' has further enriched the cultural landscape of Kochi with its collaboration with twenty-two artists, including the late K P Krishnakumar, whose poignant sculpture serves as a powerful critique on self-impotence and historical self-reflection. Organized by Aazhi Archives Kochi, a collective of artists, writers, and scholars, these events not only offer a platform for artistic expression but also promote education and dialogue on Kerala's rich history and cultural heritage. Through their research, art projects, writing, and curation efforts, Aazhi Archives facilitates a holistic exploration of Kerala's past, culture, politics, and society, both digitally and physically. I have found a group named Trespasses based in Kerala and discuss with my friend Pranav Pravakaran, he expresses about this group as he is the part of the group inspired from Radical Group members. This group created by some young artist from Sri Sankarachariya Sanskrit University, Kaledi. After completing their degree, they wanted to extent their practice to public space for common people also. The first work has been successfully completed 2019 before pandemic in the entrance of market area in Kaledi (Pravakarn, 2024). By bridging knowledge, art, and the public, they effectively engage audiences in discussions and research projects that aim to connect people with art and interact with it.

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