

# EVERY tuesday

One Week in One Day

5 A Tribute to Chetan Datar

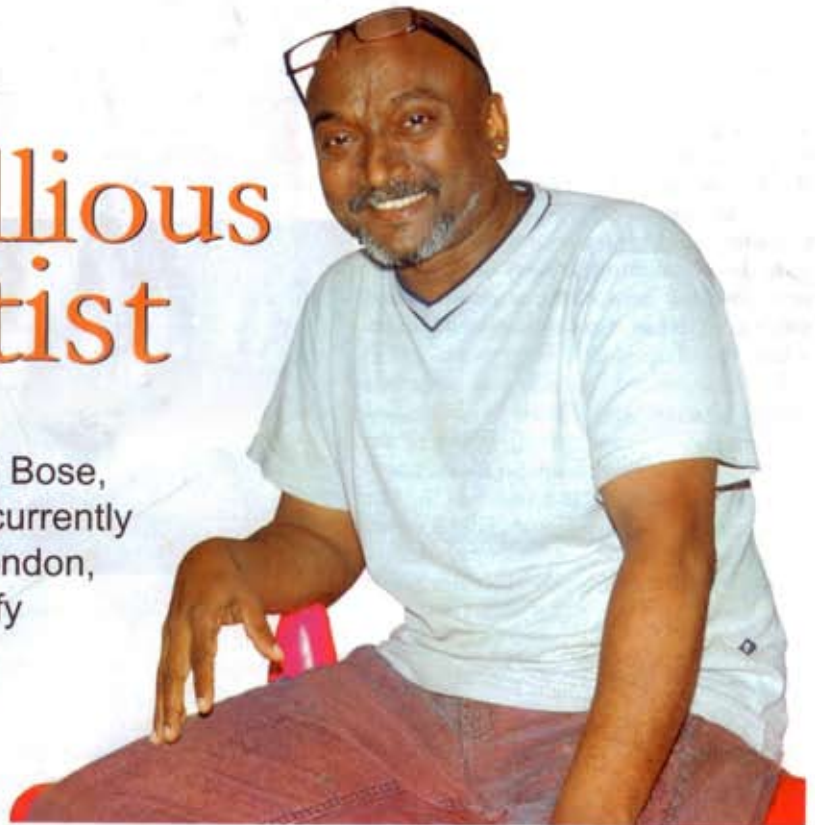
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## The rebellious artist

Every  
Tuesday  
August 12  
2008

Krishnamachari Bose,  
whose work is currently  
on display in London,  
continues to defy  
categorisation,  
says **Rajendra**



**K**rishnamachari Bose, who has exerted immense influence on the way art was created and perceived since the early 90s, was voted as a 'face of the year' in 1993 along with the likes of Sachin Tendulkar and Shahrukh Khan in their respective fields. Interestingly, he continues to defy categorisation. His artistic vocabulary includes abstracts, figurative, photographic images, found objects, installations, sculptural assemblages; he has handled all the media you could possibly imagine. The experimental and conceptual methods that are considered to be two extremes in any creation, are handled by Bose with equal ease; he is a seeker in his experimental innovations, whereas a finder in his conceptual means. His first UK solo exhibition 'Ghost' is on at Aicon Gallery, London; **Rajendra** talks to him on the occasion.

**Rajendra :** Your solo show 'ghost', currently on display at Aicon Gallery, London, is the same as 'Ghost: Trans-memoir' you held at the Gallery Arts India, New York in 2006, or is it an extension of it?

**Krishnamachari Bose:** The video part is different; it is a combination of the show I had at New York and Boston, and the one at Milan and

Amsterdam. The 'Ghost' is all about 'Mumbaikars', the memories of the city, the energy with which Mumbai pulsates day and night and it is shown symbolically in tiffin carriers or the *dabbas* used as the icon. One can feel 'Amchi Mumbai' in one tiffin box. There are interviews of different classes of people, talking about the city, played in different loops in the small LCD monitors fitted inside the *dabbas*. I came here to study art from Kerala without any kind of language other than painting and survived; Mumbai gave me wisdom; poor and rich co-exist in Mumbai and there is a contrast everywhere in Mumbai; however everyone survives. That is what I am trying to show through the 'ghost'. Apart from installation, there are six portraits and a panel of 108 portraits of different Mumbaikars whom I am familiar with.

**R :** It has been a long journey since your first solo show in 1990, which featured abstract work in minimalist style. Your painting used to be sold for Rs 40,000 to Rs 50,000 till 2001-02; they are now sold for forty times of that price! How do you map your journey in retrospect?

**K. B. :** My first work sold in Mumbai, priced at Rs.1,000, was bought for Rs. 500 by Sarayu Doshi;

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that was in 1989-90, exhibited at Artists' Centre. I had a show in Kerala in 1989, but none of the work was sold. My first show in Mumbai (1990) was a total sell-out, maybe because I was very active in the college, Sir J. J. School of Art, organising poetry readings, symposiums, workshops, meeting with filmmakers and all that. It was a great experience being with different people. I believed in my art, remained true to my own self and things went on... an artist never gets the entire amount... the price you mentioned may be there in the secondary market, but almost half the amount goes to the gallery....

**R:** Krishnamachari Bose is a painter, an installation artist and a curator; which one of these roles do you enjoy more?

**K. B.:** Everything is important in life; being with your kids, travelling with your friends; I don't differentiate between these roles; whatever I do, I enjoy it; otherwise I should not do it...

**R:** You maneuver between diametrically opposite genres effortlessly, whether it is abstract idiom, photo realistic portraits or installation; it may sound conservative, but how come such opposite poles co-exist in a creative output of an artist?

**K. B.:** I believe in 'what you feel, you should do it' principle. There is a school of thought and everyone believes in one or the other kind of school. I don't believe in any kind of school; I am an iconoclast. In one of my early shows 'AmUseuM' (1992) I used all kinds of terms, architecture, design, music, poetry, theatre and even market. It

was since a long time that I started accepting different art forms into a painting or a sculpture. Michelangelo started as a painter, but did a lot of work in architecture; Da Vinci was a scientist, but turned out to be an excellent painter; they believed in themselves and did what they feel; why don't we think like that? I don't believe in the school of thought of consistency; I do believe in visual mutual changes in art forms; I don't want to get into cloning; it leads to monotony...

**R:** The exhibition 'AmUseuM' you mentioned and the other exhibition 'De-Curating' in Sakshi Gallery (2003) were critically acclaimed for different reasons; The former marks your radical approach in respect of notions of a gallery space while the latter highlights your leaning towards traditional portraiture art; what inspired you for such a reverse journey?

**K. B.:** I thought that there were not much books and there was really a vacuum in terms of informative books on the people who are



in my own field, the artists; so I thought of making a kind of archival project 'De-curating' which featured 94 portraits of contemporary Indian artists; it wasn't exactly an archival thing but making a portrait with your hand is more personal; it was like paying a tribute to this 'whole time worker' - an artist. The title 'De-curating' of course came from the lack of curatorial expertise in that period of time; now things have improved to a certain extent...

**R:** Who do you think are the best curators in India at present...

**K. B.:** Peter Nagy (Delhi) is doing a fantastic job; theoretically Ranjit Hoskote (Mumbai) and Suman Gopinath (Bangalore) are also doing fine and making good use of the gallery space...

**R:** You were an ideal student in J. J. School of Art, passed out with a gold medal in 1990; but you were expelled from the school later during your short tenure as a lecturer. What is the reason behind the transition from an ideal student to a rebellious artist?

**K. B.:** I was good at academics but was never an ideal student; it is just a notion. When I started teaching there, I realised what is lacking in the school and criticised the functioning of the institution openly, which was published in the newspapers; then I was chucked out of the school.

**R:** You did BFA from J.J. School and MFA from Goldsmiths College, London. Did you find academic training at both these institutions radically different?

**K. B.:** Definitely, they are very different; J.J. School is stuck with the same pattern whereas others have moved forward with time. We don't have any institutional kind of support if you look at J.J. School even today. In Goldsmiths College, well-known artists and curators, who curate exhibitions at Tate, visited my studio; the college invited them and paid them for the visit. It was just to get a student an opportunity to discuss his art with them; then the student had to submit papers on the visit and there were discussions with remarks of the visitors if any, about 'what was lacking in his art'. It's a revolutionary way of practising art; they don't call it painting course, but call it a visual art practice.

**R:** Coming back to your art practice, your multihued abstract series, 'Stretched Bodies', uses a spectacular combination of bright colours, texture and contrasting design; one of the contemporary art critics of our times, Johnny ML, has described you as a 'Chromo-Maniac' Bose Krishnamachari. What attracts you to bright colours and contrasting design?

**K. B.:** I call this series 'Stretched Bodies'; this word 'stretched' came from Mondrian. A friend of Piet Mondrian once asked him why he was painting one line over and over again; he said I am 'stretching' the line. I really liked that. Craig Martin, very influential professor in Goldsmiths College, who is behind Goldsmiths as it stands today, once told me on seeing my painting that 'why don't you stretch and go little more towards extreme'; he gave me an example of Vermeer's figurative painting and explained how Vermeer has gone extreme in the composition. That really got into my head; since then I am trying to go extreme in my art practice; extreme form, extreme texture and extreme colours! 'Stretched Bodies' is an amalgamation of all these extremities!

**R:** Most of your work is conceptualised, imbued with international spirit. What do you think is more important, 'form' or conceptualisation?

**K. B.:** Conceptualisation! Content is more important, form will come later. Why I pick up to draw the portrait of a *dabbawala* or portrait of my driver is important...

**R:** You have had a show titled 'Exist', spread over two galleries, Museum and Jehangir art gallery in 2005. It was treated as a self-styled retrospective, though it wasn't exactly a retrospective, but featured a remake of your old work. You never shied away to wear your heart on your sleeves, even to prove your existence and contribution to Mumbai's art world...

**K. B.:** Yeah, 'Exist' was a kind of reaffirming myself. I had gone through a bad phase and it was due to curatorial practice. I am a good artist, I do good stuff, this is the way I have practised, so please see it; and all that work was a kind of re-made work; there were different kinds of work, from minimal to music of the cubes and all that; so I wanted to reaffirm myself, just to say I 'Exist'!

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**R:** What is it that fascinates and inspires you more - Mumbai's frantic life or Kerala's beautiful, serene backwaters?

**K. B.:** I believe beauty comes from chaos; chaos is an order actually, from chaos we make an order; my work is also an order, but it comes from chaos; and I love chaos, the energy of chaos! That's Mumbai's beauty; The Mumbaikars do the great management of chaos and only Mumbaikars can do that kind of magic; that's the greatness and beauty of Mumbai! My inspiration comes from my people, my streets, my city, Mumbai! Kerala is beautiful, but I can't stay there; that doesn't inspire me.

**R:** Who are your three favourite Indian artists?

**K. B.:** (laughs)...(Pause)...if you look at the contemporary art practice, Riyas Komu, Sudarshan Shetty and Subodh Gupta; these three young people are doing amazing work...

**R:** The artists you mentioned Riyas, Sudarshan, or even Jitish Kallat, Atul Dodiya, and yourself have studied art in J. J. School and believed to have given a new turn to the school's painterly traditions since 90s. What do you think are the reasons behind this shift in art practice?

**K. B.:** J J School's failure was in that abstract school of thinking, they are stuck up there and nobody knows about international art practice; most of the teachers are not practising artists; they used to talk about the



old school of thoughts, like paint for yourself and always murmur two-three names of artists like Palshikar and Paul Klee. All these artists you mentioned, Riyas, Atul and others are well read; if you talk to them, they talk about life, talk about politics, literature, philosophy and on a wide range of issues. Of course opening up our economy in 90s

hastened globalisation and shift occurred in art practice with a strong intellectual base...

**R:** Your photograph, taken against a board of Dubai Art Fair 2008, beautifully contrasted with red and black, dominates the eye-catching cover page of last issue of 'Art & Deal'. How does it feel to be on the cover page?

**K. B.:** (laughs).....It is a nice feeling *yaar!* Now I feel I 'Exist'! (laughs)...

**R:** Any exhibitions and projects in the near future?

**K. B.:** There are no museums in our country to show art permanently. There are only galleries! I have planned to make a museum. I have acquired 1.5 acres of land for it. It's a beautiful place, called Aluva, very close to a waterfront, some 10 km away from Kochi. I don't have money to support construction cost of the entire museum which is close to eleven crores; let us see how things take shape. There are lots of projects in hand; I will be curating a show in November at the Willem Baars project, Amsterdam. I will be curating a show for Bodhi Space and Bodhi Gallery every year from January 09. Arte Contemporaneo, Madrid has invited me to curate the Indian galleries section for ARCO-09 and there are a couple of group shows coming up in Delhi and Mumbai curated by Gayatri Sinha and Shaheen Merali...

(Ghost, Krishnamachari Bose's solo show will be on view at Aicon Gallery, London till August 18, 2008)

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Editor and Publisher:  
Shashi Vyas  
Advertising and Marketing:  
Vinit Ganjwala  
Distribution and Public Relations:  
Vaibhav Patil  
Editorial Co-ordination:  
Menka Shrivastava and Raju Kane  
The Source, 107, TV Industrial Estate, Worli,  
Mumbai: 400018.  
Tel: 24901330  
e-mail: everytuesday@editsource.com

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e-mail: everytuesday97@gmail.com

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