



Baiju Parthan,
Milljunction1 (Soft Graffiti),
 Oil, Acrylic, & Gel on Canvas,
 48 x 96 Inches (Diptych),
 2009

EXPERIENCE OF LOSS

Baiju Parthan's works in his recent show at Aicon Gallery addresses the shift in social perception vis-à-vis Digitisation and Virtualisation

Baiju Parthan's solo show *Milljunction*, that was held earlier this year in New York at Aicon Gallery, brought together a body of work that included painted canvases, digital prints as well as works on paper. That's a fact. It was a physical materiality and an extension of an artist, an individual, a thinker, a philosopher, a being, a thought, a breath.

The predominant emotion that was an underlying element in this body of work was that of loss. As Parthan explains, "Milljunction is a reference to

the old Bombay of textile mills. It is about 'Bombay/Mumbai' as a city that exists in retrospect, solely as memory or recollection. Aside from that, these works are also about how these (collective and personal) memories get erased or modified through technology and social change. From the formal\conceptual position, I am trying to explore the 'image' within the information space. The paintings in this show are about how a digital image which has no actual materiality or substance, acquires undeniable physical existence when painted onto a canvas.

And then it is defaced/violated/obscured with computer code graffiti, to declare the experience of loss."

In '*Lunch Break*' Parthan creates a panoramic view of Mumbai's cityscape. In the first of three similarly titled digital prints on paper, a lone shadowy rock seems to be on a self-implied path to destroy what looks like a fantastical landscape, something created by piecing together a melancholic memory of one's city, perhaps a city that one calls home. It permeates the thick dark, almost damp environment from outside of the boundaries of the canvas, floating and

yet reiterating a forward movement with a sole purpose to obliterate. In *Lunch Break 2 and 3*, a hand holds this rock, which lends a sense of danger that looms much closer to home than some outside force as we tend to associate with *Lunch Break 1*. In fact there are signs of life here. People move and cars assemble, not in a reality that seems familiar, but one that looks dreamlike.

Parthan points out to some specificities, "These works came out of my pondering over the fallout, when almost all our social interactions are going to occur in the realm of the virtual, through social networking sites and emails, and video conferences, online gaming etc... What would happen when you have multiple identities, and surrogate personae which are accumulating personal history across chat-rooms and online gaming venues... How about super realistic gaming environments built of virtual objects simulating actual cities and locations where you can commit arson and mass murder with no compunctions, within the safety and privacy of your living room etc. In the

Baiju Parthan, *Milljunction2*, (Soft Graffiti), Oil, Acrylic, & Gel on Canvas, 24 x 72 Inches (triptych), 2009



Baiju Parthan, *passage 3*, Acrylic on Arches Paper, 22 x 22 Inches, 2010

end would these accumulated 'virtual experiences' manifest as some kind of Pavlovian conditioning? I wonder if this is what is behind the campus shootouts and high school kids going on shooting rampages etc. In these works I am assuming that the thrill of vandalism could be equivalent to that of being in a first person shooter game environment, where you have been absolved of the ethical and moral consequence of your actions."

His work tells me that those words you type in to create a "profile" in social networking sites and those images you put in to flesh out your "profile" do not really exist (it's virtual). Yet so much of our physical self outside of the virtual depends on the negotiations we make with these personifications that





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distinctions are ambiguous. The lines that demarcate, that define are transient.

Now within Parthan's *oeuvre* he explains his own stance about the idea of "virtualisation of reality", a key element within the evolution of his practice. He says, "Digitisation and virtualisation happens quicker in areas where a high degree of transaction occurs. I think the best example is money, and how it got virtualised so quickly. Probably the next in line is the cell phone, already the phone is going through a major identity crisis as it is now a camera, a mailing device, word processor, accounting device, calculator and so on. It becomes a platform that can virtually incorporate all these diverse functions. The result is a blurring of boundaries, a gradual vaporising of the boundaries that define functions and thus the experience of solidity... This is probably the tip of the iceberg. Especially if we consider about how our experience of distance/space has shrunk with the cell phone and email. So in short, the art I produce addresses this shift in perception we are undergoing. Probably nobody gives it a second thought. But as an artist observer I end up making art that comments upon this situation. Though I am all for this shift in perception, I am also (being an artist) aware of the loss of tactility that I personally experience".

Multiplicity becomes our simultaneous realities. In Parthan's canvases, we see compositions of what are his realities, his familiar surroundings, in particular the sights and sounds of Mumbai in a composition that is both formally and conceptually, "multiple". I find the conceptual idea to be strongly resonating in his canvases because it is an entity that lacks

Bajju Parthan, Lunch Break 2,
Digital Print in Archival Paper,
23 x 65 Inches, 2010

physicality. Just that you don't see, feel, taste, hear or can speak of them within the structures that define our experience of reality as defined by the laws of this planet.

Parthan's work epitomises a reconciliation sought within this idea, such that one's individuality or singular sense of reality might still be maintained. He says, "I am very attached to the very old-fashioned idea/ notion of the artist as a solitary figure operating on the outer boundaries of the known. I see the artist as someone who is almost a technician of perception, a homegrown phenomenologist, but who has the capacity to wrestle out meanings and new layers of significance from the everyday reality. And I have (foolishly/ stubbornly) maintained that solitary state in my artistic process -avoiding assistants and helpers, because I do believe that it is not the end product, but the process that defines me as an artist. The new-media works are also produced all by myself, with the coding, 3D sculpting, animating and all the rest done single-handedly, all of which takes months to complete."

There is poetry to such a state of being. Each one of us has our own unique way of finding a sense of peace. Your five senses react to it. Your mind and intellect can engage with it within the purview of a history that is known, written and debated within our three dimensional planetary existence. It is this materiality that's of value within our system.