

You can interpret art in the same way that you read a novel, says young 'veteran' Jaideep Mehrotra



'Abstracity', one of the works that Mr. Jaideep Mehrotra displayed at the last meeting

Azim Premji to speak on December 11; AGM on December 18

The annual general meeting of the Rotary Club of Bombay has been rescheduled. It will now be held on December 18 (instead of the earlier announced date of December 11).

On Tuesday, December 11, Mr. Azim Premji, the head of Wipro, will address a joint meeting of the Club in association with the Rotary Club of Bombay Mid-Town.

While the AGM will now be held on December 18, there is no change in programme as far as the speaker previously billed to address that meeting is concerned.

Prof. Charles Plotz will address the Club on December 18 on "The medical stakes - India vs. US". The AGM will be held at 1.00 pm on that day.

He had his first solo exhibition at the age of 13, has been painting for 40 years and doesn't look a day over 45 years of age.

Oil is his forte but he is equally at ease with other media like acrylic, water colours, ceramics, resin and fabrics sculptures, digital lithography, mixed media and site-specific installations.

That's Mr. Jaideep Mehrotra, the eminent artiste, who made an interesting presentation of some of his works, styled "Tracing the trajectory", at the last meeting.

He has held several exhibitions, solo as well as group, in India and abroad, since the age of 13 and has one going on at the Jehangir Art Gallery since December 26.

Some of Mr. Mehrotra's works form part of the collections of companies and individuals (including Sterlite Industries, "The Times of India" and film star Shah Rukh Khan).

He is considered a pioneer in the field of painting in digital medium. He is the first Indian artiste to have his own website and also the first to have a catalogue in an interactive CD-ROM format.

Mr. Mehrotra said a lot of passion and thought went into every work of art. His own effort was to contribute (through his paintings) an alternative insight into the mind of an artiste in contemporary India.

The first work he described was called "Polaroid" (1988) which was allegorical and also showed the influence of the surrealistic movement on his work. There were two aspects to the work - sport as well as evolution.

He had noted that man's love for sports came from his food habits. Since animals were now bred for food, the instinct to hunt had returned in another form, viz., sport. In football, hockey and cricket the analogy was clear - that of hunters chasing after a ball, the animal, and clubbing it to death. Even mild sports



Strange but true - Mr. Jaideep Mehrotra held his first exhibition at the age of 13 and has been painting for 40 years

like badminton used a shuttle cock, a symbol for birds.

The second aspect was evolution; the game of polo epitomised the inherent violence in people's lives... an innocuous polo game looked like a battlefield. Though there were no guns, bloodshed, or dead bodies, the underlying thought was that within the natural structure of the sport lay the potential for militancy.

Polo dated back to the 6th century. It originated in Persia and was a war game used for the training of soldiers. It was refined and reintroduced by the British in the 19th century.

He worked on two planes to distinguish between the apparent and the arcane. The images and the paintings were interwoven at two levels, depending on how a view looked at them; for example, a white rock on the landscape became the cap and the face of the rider and the ground or terrain below the horse became the head of a horse.

"As you keep looking at the imagery, you will see the various planes that emerge from it," Mr. Mehrotra said.

"Exploding Myth" highlighted the disintegration of village life.

A third, "Rain Blind", was an elaborate work that took a year to

complete. It also worked on two planes, showing how "we, as human beings, confine ourselves under umbrellas and therefore even though we interact socially, there is a little space that we are individually wrapped in".

(See painting on next page).

Another piece of work, done for an individual buyer was called "Study Study".

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Forthcoming meetings

November 27, 2007

"The Science of Vaastu", a presentation by Dr. Poornachandra Rao.

December 4, 2007

"Cosmetic surgery" by Dr. Mohan Thomas.

December 11, 2007

Mr. Azim Premji, chief of Wipro, to address a joint meeting of the Club with the Rotary Club of Bombay Mid-Town.

December 18, 2007

Annual General Meeting of the Rotary Club of Bombay.

Prof. Charles Plotz to throw light on "The medical stakes - India vs. US".



Saying it in so many words, even when a picture is worth a thousand words. (From left) Mr. Jaideep Mehrotra answers questions at the last meeting; Ritu Prakash Desai introduces the guest speaker; and Kekoo Gandhi proposes the vote of thanks



This is 'Rain Blind'. But no viewer can remain blind to the vibrant colours and the strokes in this painting that says so many things



Another work by Mr. Mehrotra, christened 'Time Will Tell'. A closer look reveals innumerable elements in this fine piece of work



'Division That Multiplied', an outstanding work harking back to the partition of the Indian sub-continent, executed by Mr. Jaideep Mehrotra

'Great art comes directly from the heart, not from the mind'

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The largest work that he had done – 2 feet by 14 feet – was executed for Sterlite Industries and called "Sculptor's Studio". He worked at night and the company had to construct special ladders to help him complete his work, *a la* Michelangelo.

Mr. Mehrotra also showed some of his other works, such as "Beyond Benaras"; a series reinterpreting Indian iconography embodying cultural learning and symbolism; Shiva, the "Nataraj"; "Flash Back"; "Blue Period"; "Veil"; "Mile High Club"; "Draupadi's Spouses"; "Two Minutes of Fame"; "Holy Colours of India";

"Image Makers" (now with Shah Rukh Khan); "Memorabilia"; "The Division that Multiplied"; "Shadow Play"; "Ardhanari"; "Conversations Within"; "Fine Balance"; "Blood Line"; and "Clowning Glory" which was part of a series he made for "The Times of India" based on the circus, using a socio-political commentary.

Mr. Mehrotra said around the time that he was busy with two-dimensional work, he was also doing three-dimensional work.

Starting with wood sculptures, he went on to fibre-glass and fabric sculptures. Many of these were light and hung by a single thread – "It talks about the fragility of life, the precarious nature that we live in. And yet we are always in the pursuit of something that evades us."

In another case, the sculpture had a "skin quality", with the fabric being used to impart the desired effect of skin quality. "It's interesting because it works... at night you could have a light behind it and in the daytime the sheen reflects the surface of the sculpture."

After Mr. Mehrotra completed his presentation, Kamal Bulchandani asked why artistes "distorted" faces and figures. "A layman like me finds it difficult to interpret your work. Is it necessary to disfigure the subject? Doesn't that place us at your mercy, (we have to ask you) to know what the painting represents?" he asked.

The painter said all art was based on aesthetics. Secondly, the artiste employed the language of pictures rather than words and tried to tell an entire story through a mute frame, restricted only by the edge of the canvas.

"Now, when they are 'distorted' you are doing two things: You're adding aesthetic and flexibility. If you saw Michelangelo's 'David', he's standing in a certain position. Why did Michelangelo paint him or sculpt him in that position? Nobody ever questions that. You try standing in that position for five minutes and you would understand why he took that.

"There's always a reason behind why an artiste uses certain iconography or certain visual language and it would help to ask the artiste if you didn't fathom it; a lot of people like to use their own imagination.

"It's like reading a novel. When you read a novel, you find some scenes in the book which you 'see' in your own light, not necessarily as the writer had written them. It's the same with artistes and their language."

Kekoo Gandhi, who proposed the vote of thanks, recalled that at a discourse in Delhi, Swami Muktananda was asked by a well-known artiste, "Can you explain what is great art?"

Pat came the reply: "I think that is great art where the artiste faces his canvas and, with his brush or quill, effortlessly transcribes what ought to be there." In other words, it was not a mental effort but something that came from the heart. "The great artiste was baffled," Kekoo added.

Winding up the meeting, President Dr. Rumi Jehangir made a pithy comment. He said: "Art is often likened to a spouse. When you cannot understand it, just appreciate it."

Ritu Prakash Desai introduced the guest speaker.