

Indian Express May, 2008

AMAZING VIEW

By Richa Bhatia

Ranbir Kaleka's exhibition marvellously brings together elements of painting and sculpture.



Ranbir Kaleka's one-man show at Nature Morte Gallery, "Reading Man" marks the decisive shift from his complex video installations, brightly coloured acrylics overlapped on video and hand-coloured films. Here, the Delhi-based artist marvelously brings together elements of painting and sculpture "It is almost theatrical, like a stage where a set of events could happen. Here the paintings have a physical presence," says the 50-something Kaleka.

What stays is the fantastic, dreamlike quality of the works, inviting the viewer to enter the metaphysical space and the "calendar colours" which carry an emotional charm. You have to almost adjust your body to look at the aluminium-wire figures that make up the mammoth main piece "Reading Man". While the split aluminium suit is hung next to a naked man carrying a javelin as if for a hunt, in the corner, a clock ticks away, marking the passage of time. The multihued triptych spills onto the floor as well, engaging the viewer on another level. "It's not liner it is many things at the same time," says Kaleka.

Meanwhile, the wart-faced bearded man with the peculiar turn of the nose in the "itinerant Librarian's Dilemma of Choice and Refusal" seems to roll his beard ever so slightly and blink. The work, acrylic and oil based on canvas, is based on 9/11 after which "people with long beards faced problems, especially with immigration."

“Concerns about my going to England were voiced by my travel agent and she often asked me to shave my beard. The work shows one’s identity is in danger,” says Kaleka, who earlier divided his time between London and Delhi, but has cut short the visits. And as you take a peek into the mirror panel from the right hand side, one of the multiple images could be of you cutting the beard.

The naked man with a stylised head sitting next to a pair of flamingos in Storyteller 2: White Shadows appears familiar. It could be because you have seen him in a lush erotic landscape with a woman or in the mist of a bustling city. “I spend considerable time with my paintings and revisit them, touching up here and there,” says Kaleka. This time, the man, engulfed by a fiery landscape, is seen sitting next to an old machine.

There are five works on display and three paintings have sculptural elements in the form of window panels, mirrors or aluminium sculptures.

The exhibition is on till April 18.