

## Nature Born

*Artist/Curator Conversation; between Curator Joanna Lee and Artist Parvathi Nayar for the show Nature Born, LANGGENG CONTEMPORARY ART FESTIVAL, 2006, Indonesia*

Joanna Lee: Over the past two years since being in London you've shifted your interests from the Zodiac series to what I'll call for now close studies of material phenomena exemplified by the Traces of Presence, and the Location/Locality series, which are pencil drawings worked within a circular frame. I will also extend the same observation to other recent paintings from the Inroad Portraits and the Untitled Narrative series. There is a quality of detachment - or perhaps the illusion of objectivity might be a better way of putting it - in these recent works when compared the highly personal meanings and illusionary fantasies that you invested the Zodiac series with. What brought about this change of interest and indeed, to your approach in art making, and why the strategy of close studies?

Parvathi Nayar: For me the act of drawing and painting has always been rooted in the personal and in the phenomenological. In other words. the impulse to create is a transmission of some intensely experienced desire or response, which has been sifted and processed through aesthetic/ conceptual/technical conduits. The eventual resolution of the work has also been an important consideration. It is not fashionable to talk of the pleasure principle of art-making, but it is something that kicks in. The making of the mark is not a loss. or imperfect material representation of the purity of the idea. Idea' execution are intrinsically interlocked like the mind-body construct; a continuum; the creation of a pleasure-space where brain. hand and the mark come together. At one level, I suppose, one never stops querying the form - and necessity - of art-making; a back-of-the-brain activity that moves and changes as one does.

In London and post-London, the essential conceptual change that occurred is this: that, with my art, I began to want to negotiate the real world rather than art-fully created worlds. I continued to want to

query the complexity of what it means to live in this time/place, yes, but now through an interaction with, and re/presentation of, the material objects of our material universe, fragments of things from the world, to depict the fragmented narratives of our lives. The work continues to be personal, no doubt, and viewed through the prism of personal interests, but I guess with these drawings there is the quality of objective reality for I use the found image, and fragments thereof. Not quite "death of the author" for I freely acknowledge the element of conscious choice, nevertheless a certain detachment is part of the deal when you work with the found image as indexical mark. It is to do with stumbling across this thing of the world, as found in the world, and appropriate it. But there are "games" being played of course – the images seem abstract but in truth they are as close as I can get them to the originals. They skew perceptions by delving deep into the substance of things or by pulling far, far back to view the thing from an unusual perspective. These are things that we see yet don't see.

The strategy of close studies-which is a great term you use - could perhaps be explained by looking at a related device: the miniature. Susan Stewart in *On longing* writes of the miniature as a metaphor for interiority that attracts, that draws you into its world. She says of the miniature: "A reduction in dimensions does not produce a corresponding reduction in significance". Close studies draw you into their world to create impact-rather than the exteriority of the giant or gigantic image.

JL: You are showing the Traces of Presence and Location/Locality series in the exhibition, so let's give specific focus to them. The formal devices you've used for them are similar - circular frame, pencil for medium, monochromatic schema. These series are also dealing with images that appear 'abstract' in as much as their references are not immediately familiar or recognisable. They are however representations, or more precisely reproductions, of material phenomena, reproduced in part and portion within a suspended circular frame. Could you elaborate on their conceptual basis and formal devices please?

PN: Yes there are certain formal or even formalistic aesthetics at play in Location/Locality but that is just one reading; for there are other visual games being played, here, too. In other words, the circular construct that holds and protects the world Of the image from exterior contamination is not exactly a reference to geometric perfection (of the circle), but to the instruments of seeing -the lens of the eye/camera/telescope/microscope etc., to the act of seeing. Technique and subject are inextricably linked in these works, what is created is as much a result of how it is created. These are a series of graphite on wood drawings that look at issues of trace, presence and sight; the use of mechanical devices to see and record the everyday play of nature, but in ways that are familiar yet unfamiliar. What are the links between the act of looking, and locating? The drawings are obsessive renderings that play with ambiguity and familiarity, of the world as we know it to be, physicists and astronomers - and photographers.

JL: The drawings in the series are made as single pieces and not intended to be presented as a group such as an installation. although you will show them in pairs in the exhibition. Is there a unifying or common index/rationale for your choice of subject matter and images in these two series. and in showing them in pairs, are you projecting the paired pieces as thematically dialoguing pairs?

PN: Location/locality as a piece of work is not finite, and in that sense perhaps more modular than serial? In the Location/Locality series there are certain almost whimsical binaries that come into play, the work was created as pairs that set up subtle dialogues of perspectives or relationships 'but I did not intend them to be necessarily controlled by this reading. And there is a larger dialogue, I believe, between the drawings as a group -about scale, the very big and the very small presented on parity with each other, for instance.

JL: Let's put some identifiers to the reproduced image(s) in the two series, by that my question is related to the how, why and what of the

images and your appropriation thereof.

PN: I do look for the mediated image which offers possibilities of unusual perspectives.

There are rules which determine what I pick but I try not to force it with too rigid a set of rules. The images cannot be just anything.

There is a basic construct in my head I guess, of finding images that fit with the idea of using the scientific image as a tool for talking of the world. It needs to be an image of sufficient complexity that will allow me to be completely indexical, yet also allow me to find the poetics of that scientific image.

JL: I'd like to make an observation and a comment on the aesthetics of your drawings *vis* your paintings in the recent series. It seems to me that the close study paintings of your Untitled Narrative series are deliberately lush, and I suspect the lushness comes with intentions of exaggeration and augmentation, as if to make the images of nature in the series hyper-real such that one might ascribe them parodic and even a fetishistic intent. But the drawings from *Traces and Location* appear clinical, detached, obsessively detailed as if to mimic the qualities of mechanical reproduction. Yet there is a kind of innate beauty about the drawings not in the same way as the exaggerated lushness of the paintings, but in the delicacy of your technique and your fidelity in representing subjects that are, one might say, formally beautiful as how nature is formally beautiful in its creative logic. Do you wish to comment on my observations?

PN: Art critic Barry Schwabsky said that "rational planning and utopian fantasy have always been surprisingly difficult to disentangle"; and added, "both take form above all in drawing." In a way that says it, doesn't it! The carefully precise commitment to the execution of the indexical mark moves over into an act of obsession in the drawings, - and the result of this is a certain beauty. The aesthetic experience in today's world is not limited to the experience of beauty, but then, neither should beauty be eliminated from the

aesthetic experience, you know? I think your observation of the formal beauty of nature's creative logic is an example. Beauty is an act of generosity and an invitation to enter the interiority of the work.

JL: What is it you wish to convey or draw out from viewers of the series?

PN: I guess, banal as it may sound, to re-look the world differently; to question responses and beliefs in received and pre-conditioned ideas.

*Endnotes*

<sup>1</sup>The interview was conducted through a set of initiating questions posed by Lee to Nayar between 11-13 June 2006.