

Liminal Geographies

Recent Works by Paramjit Singh

There is a haunting quality in Paramjit Singh's paintings, an intangible sense of the unknown that is so persuasive, it allows the artist to take the viewer on a journey of discovery amidst strange terrains or neighbourhoods, guided by a mysterious light that cuts through the countryside. This, the path untrodden, is saturated by a frisson of discovery. What lies ahead? Where will it lead? Does it have a destination? Or is it the infinite path of a seeker's endless quest? In inviting the viewer into the painting's innermost realms, Paramjit Singh conjures up landscapes that inhabit the fringes of our subconscious. With him, we are content to test its limits – and be tested by it, in turn.

The liminal mind is rife with the possibilities of unseen sightings. But Paramjit Singh's landscapes belong to the seen, rendered unfamiliar by his imagination in which he, as companion and co-traveller, coaxes you to take the path less trodden, that which lay neglected but always awaited detection. For, as French novelist and literary critic Marcel Proust said, 'The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes.'

Paramjit Singh equips us not just with new eyes but also with ways of seeing: that first discovery accompanied with a sense of hesitations about the unfamiliar. The surreal had informed his work from its very start, when still-life, landscape and the shadows of old structures resulted in a language of dark and light and shadows that held their secrets close. That fantastical world imploded one sunny afternoon in the Himalayas when traceries of light, filtered through tree branches, fell on an undergrowth of fall leaves—and Paramjit Singh's canvases were never the same again. Abandoning his earlier interests, he made the landscape his own in ways that are improbable and magical.

Light and colour and its myriad possibilities have formed the lexicon of Paramjit Singh's works ever since. Using the repositories of memory like a bag of secrets in which reality merges with imagination, he has gone on

to recreate images that exist in the realm of possibility rather than visibility. These are landscapes not of loneliness but of the less travelled, paths where strangers might have traversed moments ago, their imprints fading into sepia nostalgia. The unknown ahead relies on the thrill of uncovering the invisible – places and people, real or imagined, known or unknown. ‘The vision of the viewer, his presence in the painting,’ Paramjit Singh tells me, ‘is part of my process. The viewer is always with me in my compositions.’

At the start of his ninety-first year, Paramjit Singh’s oil paintings of the last year have changed, dictating yet again to the artist a metamorphosis in his style. Almost entirely eliminating the brush from his compositions, Paramjit Singh now works mostly with just his palette knives, the spatula forming the increasingly tactile surfaces that create his compositional terrains. ‘The effect of the knife on the surface of the canvas, the character and feeling it imparts, the layers of pigments, the messiness of working with oil paints, the concentration on the visual quality – these guide the making of my paintings,’ he says. Paramjit Singh has never relied on accidental effects in his paintings, each stroke of paint, each slash of the spatula, intuitively but deliberately calculated and placed.

Liminal Geographies introduces, once more, the realms that Paramjit Singh’s mind has glimpsed and inhabits, places he has travelled to, but which exist beyond reality – landscapes where impossibilities are possibilities: of tangerine skies and magenta meadows, marigold paths and ashy hills, cyan fields and indigo ranges. Rain-washed trees and sun-drenched undergrowths dazzle, the radiance of the seasons creating an opulence of hues – reds amidst greens, pinks conversing with lemons, skies and seas reflections of the other, both felt and seen, experienced and touched.

Paramjit Singh’s unique landscapes are spaces of intimacy as well as distance, from close as well as afar – often simultaneously. His unique ability places the viewer both within as well as outside the composition, as participant as well as observer, an interloper into a place of silence

and solitude but also of nature's ceaseless drama, its theatre made possible through maneuverings of colour and light. There is an atmospheric intensity one senses, moods brought about by the movement of colour as it rustles through grass, windswept vistas marked by detours that dip and disappear, diversions that arise across vast expanses into which one is lured through a contouring and manipulation of light. Dimension itself bends to Paramjit Singh's command in which rolling grasslands furrow a serpentine course, cirrus clouds trail in laggard patterns across a cerulean sky, water gloams with a sense of expectancy, a breeze causes a rustle through riparian fields, mosaics of colour spatter across the composition – an abundance celebrated through minimal strokes that hide more than they reveal: a kaleidoscope that quickens to life as the sun slides across the horizon, replacing a golden glow with a silvery radiance.

In these works, Paramjit Singh has traversed once more into places of familiarity that he presents to us as unfamiliar as only he can succeed in doing – an endless discovery of nature's whispered moods, encompassing path and park, water and land, foliage and brush, the wild and the manicured, buds and blooms, spring and autumn, tranquil and torrential, the stormy soliloquies of nature... The endless juxtapositions of his imaginings cede to canvas where they find a place in which the echo of a remembrance becomes something tangible, a presence of a place birthed by an artist whose landscapes speak of wonder and mystery, discovery and spirituality. And, increasingly, as the nonagenarian painter continues to risk newer explorations, he has come to another departure in his career: an increasing inclination towards abstraction, as these paintings indicate.

'Art takes nature as its model,' said Aristotle. That model, one might add, is a gift to nature by an artist of limitless possibilities. Paramjit Singh's *Liminal Geographies* await our wanderings and discoveries.