

Woman Song | Looking Back

Vasundhara Tewari Broota

A gaze upon a gaze, found upon looking into a mirror or writing a diary, has the heady effect of a self meeting itself, moving beyond the physical into the psychic contours of what the form holds within. Vasundhara Tewari Broota's decades-long painting practice emblemizes such a deconstruction of the figurative tradition. Her feminist oeuvre reclaims the nude form of the female body as a site of potency and process, envisioning its rhythms, movements, vagaries and fluctuations through the unadulterated ebb and flow of life cycles. At the outset, Broota's renderings featured parts of the female body disassociated from their structural whole in a gradual rebellion that feels both quiet and purposeful, wresting the woman out of, say, the *ghoonghat* or the *burqa*, or in other words, the social fabric meant to contain her. In time, Broota's scale grew to represent the full figure in its unabashed glory and deviant boldness, but with an unexpected twist. Often reclining, often erect, the figures appear as powerful participants in the compositional landscapes that posit them, transforming, in feeling, into inner landscapes themselves. The figures conjoin with each other or select verdant elements in theatrical settings prioritizing the expression of deep emotions that acknowledge the sentient influence of shared spaces. It is only in this interplay that the radical hope to be free stands a chance, because relationship is a precursor to transcendence. Broota further challenges the mundanity of an everyday world, which holds distinct connotations for and an asymmetric authority over the lives of women, particularly those belonging to certain generations, regions and communities, by including flourishes of the fantastical and surreal. Her instinctive plotting results in an articulate vocabulary for the feminine experience – a flower becomes the womb, a yogic pose becomes a liberation. The complexity she evokes is of the inner character that is resolved, self-determined, yet perhaps still in a constant state of flux, in many ways concomitant with the greater world and its relentless unknown. Her process, too, follows such a notion of layering, often making use of silver leaf and silver paint on a saturated ground to mimic the warps and wefts water might make if caught on a flat surface. This voice Broota accords her protagonists is both ode and ballad: a woman's song of being.