Delirium // Equilibrium

Videos, Films and Kinetic Objects from the KNMA Collection

A figure dressed in white navigates the water rowing a boat of ice until it melts, and she struggles to stay afloat; A famous mathematician withdraws from the pressing needs of everyday life, into an abandoned train coach in wilderness, and as a recluse pursues truth through phantom visions from within the depths of different forms of darkness; A historian and a boxer become key figures in revisiting the complex shaping of the Non-Aligned movement and its dissonance; A young woman feverishly moves, convulses in the privacy of her bedroom, in pain or pleasure one doesn’t know; An unscripted dialogue between young orphans and a fictional maternal character who speaks gibberish is registered; The blue-throat god (Neelkanth)tries hard to gulp down the toxins produced by the city blurring our sense perceptions; The unnatural speed of the rotating zoetrope, an ancient predecessor of cinema, pays homage to a renowned opera performer, her multiple images infusing in the character a new life.

These montages come rather close to capture the distressing pulse of a schizophrenic world shaped by the pandemic and civil wars, ongoing ecological crisis, and economic meltdown. Equilibrium itself would appear to take on delirious dimensions – that brief moment of stability which appears and disappears without any explanation in the chaotic order of things. The balance of forces, be they geopolitical or psychological, lies in accepting this inescapable pandemonium, even as it leaves the dead unburied to the trauma of the living, and civilizations at the mercy of algorithms and drone swarms. Such a state of collective insecurity and anarchy would understand only one language: the mad laughter of the prophets of doom. But what should one say about the practitioners of art, and their affirmation of creativity in the face of destruction?

Is not the very idea of art itself is a vision of survival and resistance, a hope for a better tomorrow?

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In the year-2018 when the world was still amiable and people continued to believe in their agency and communality, KNMA took a dizzy virtual journey into the underbelly of the city and the mind, language, and objects via the exhibition *Delirium/Equilibrium*.

The participating artists, through their videos, films, and kinetic objects that were displayed in the black boxes of the museum, presented blurred visions of broaching life, illuminating the need for a rewiring of the world. Today, when the meaninglessness and dispensability of the human race are utterly exposed and the retreat into oneself has become the new civic duty, KNMA is revisiting the exhibition – accentuating the importance of introspection over intervention, reflection over recreation. Here, the desire for equilibrium gives way for an elegy for the desire itself.

When the stagnation of time and the darkness of the present appear to be inescapable, the spectral artist articulates a self-image through the flickering contours of moving pictures. As the enveloping black boxes of the physical exhibition spaces get replaced with the handheld/desktop display devices, new sensory infrastructure and visual poetics take shape.

In this intimate space of virtuality overriding social distances, the possibility of survival is sought, with all its creative madness and meditative stillness – Delirium/Equilibrium.

The characters in the exhibition are accompanied by an equally enigmatic set of devices, objects and props: The bizarre machines and everyday home appliances laid out on a long table denying functionality and service; An eight-fold narrative based on Gogol’s short story, Shostakovich’s opera, and other literary references, revolving around a Russian peasant proverb on guilt and exoneration; A two-channel narrative from Karachi and London with layers of voiceover and images, referring to the prayers of *namaz* offered through ethereal sunlight; A rhetorical depiction of historical forces and conflict surrounding the Strait of Hormuz; An unfolding of suspense through virtual navigation and exploration, deliberated to solve the mystery set in the backdrop of Kalimpong.

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The viewer may find it unsettling to witness objects that are either discomforting or mysterious along with the diverse characters that the exhibition brings to the center stage – the struggling ascetic, the autoerotic dame, the recluse mathematician, the absent rag picker, the blue-throated god, the argumentative historian and the patient boxer… The list is endless just as the stories narrated and the apparatuses displayed. But each of these figures – with their isolated props and stand-alone episodes, their hysteric struggle and will to survive – speak to the collective unconscious, and bring into awareness, our innermost anxieties and secret desires.

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