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PRESENT

NEW WORK OF MAHENDRA YASA

Feb.12 ~ Mar.03 . 2018
Gallery I, Langgeng Art Foundation

Open Mon-Sat. 11.00-18.00
Closed on Sunday & Public Holiday

Gede Mahendra Yasa, Born 1967 in Singaraja, Bali.
He's a conceptual painter. He has been intensively learning about the history and discourses of Western painting. He always finds other meaning in the conventions of artistic practice in painting. His intensive study on the realism approach and the concepts of the modern masters has taken him to a unique method of appropriation, an achievement which is evident in the works he has created so far. Now, in his latest work, he leaves the analytical, logical, and appropriate aspects by experimenting in a new medium; encaustic.

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Gede Mahendra Yasa:

THE EROTIC OF PAINTING

Essay by TONY GODFREY



GEDE MAHENDRAYASA
Lamotrigine
Encaustic on Canvas
200 x 160 cm
2017

If Mahendra Yasa's paintings were cool and dispassionate, conceptually considered and planned, those that he began making in 2017 after his fiftieth birthday were not. They were not only different from his previous work, but quite unlike anything else being made in Indonesia.

When I asked him soon after he started this body of work how he approached it he said that he, "just lets loose and thinks when it is half way done. So, for example, the black lines and dots on *Lamotrigine* are added much later. With *Lithium* the images were added very late. I am trying to be irrational – to explore what is unknown in my visual memory. If I see something familiar appearing I destroy it."

The titles of many of these paintings are the names of the medicines he has to take for his bi-polarism. He titles them thus because he is painting on drugs – or sometimes painting without taking them. Previously he would have to desist from his medicines only if he wanted to do the "irrational" element of a Pollock type painting. Now rather than keeping his moods fixed, attempting to be in control, being logical always, the superego firmly with the reins in its hands, now he uses his moods, and his drugs, to do different types of painting

It must be emphasised that Mahendra's new paintings are very far from chaotic or innocent. He talks of always building an internal frame with paint. Perhaps he has been studying for thirty years to be able to do this. Perhaps these are the true culmination of his studies in colour.

Against that internal frame he can improvise and allow chance or happy accidents: the black dots in *Lamotrigine* are random and unplanned. The mistake at the bottom left is deliberately not erased..

How do these new paintings of Mahendra's fit into a wider narrative of painting, both figurative and abstract?

Let's begin with the material and process: encaustic.

Encaustic has been a method for him of keeping the paint clean and bright, of keeping it as fresh as when it came out of the tube or can. This is a way to paint quick without the paint getting muddy. Encaustic allows, as with Jasper Johns, for the history of the making to be left partially exposed. But, otherwise this is not how Jasper Johns used encaustic.

Why did he turn to encaustic? He has been for some time very interested in paint and types of paint. At one point in 2016 he was obsessed with making his own lead white paint (the sort of lumpy paint Lucian Freud had used) and that cannot be bought commercially because it is so poisonous. He had first heard of encaustic when reading of Jasper Johns who had in 1954, aged 24, destroyed all his earlier work and started using encaustic after reading about the technique in a book.¹ Mahendra's encaustic paintings are more directly about the body and what marks the body makes, than those of Johns.

But above all it is *Fayum* paintings that matters to him even though it is with Johns he first heard of encaustic. What or where is *Fayum*? Paintings of people's faces that covered their heads buried in the desert near Fayum in Egypt. These paintings made between about AD40 and 250 constitute "the largest collection of colour images of real people to survive from the ancient world."² The wax preserved them and kept as it were their liveliness.

If we look at a painting like *Lithium #2* we can see not just marks made with big and small brushes, but jabs and touches made with the flick of the wrist, bigger, bolder strokes made from the elbow and then large sweeping gestures that come from the shoulder or from the whole body.

He tells me he is interested in the first generation of abstract painting because of their spiritualism. But like a lot of other artists he is also looking back to that era after the advent of Conceptual art around 1968 when painting supposedly had died, especially abstract painting.

The meaning of *Suicidal but Happy?* Being able to live with his condition, panic or delirium always kept in the key of ecstasy.

They are not series, he tells me, but a suite: independent pieces but each sharing the same key and mood. Often exuberant, sometimes angry, sometimes cool, on a plateau, letting things be. Letting go, but never losing control, always able to step back and consider.

(Endnotes)

1. Apparently "...a big book from Marboro's on artist's techniques" Ex. Cat. *Jasper Johns*, MOMA, 1996, p. 124
2. Paul Roberts, *Mummy Portraits from Roman Egypt*, BMP, London, 2008, p. 7

*) Extracted from a book on Mahendra Yasa written by Tony Godfrey and to be published in June 2018

ENCAUSTIC, BIPOLAR 2, & NON-FIGURATIVE

Gede Mahendra Yasa's Artist Statements

Encaustic

Encaustic (mixed beeswax + dammar resin gum) and egg-based tempera are said to be the oldest binder/medium. It uses long before linseed oil, acrylic resin etc. Commonly used. The oldest data is found in Fayum mummy portraits (1st century BC to 3rd century AD) in Egypt in the Coptic Christian era. Applied to a portrait painting on wood panel coffin. So this medium includes a very archaic medium. Talking about the archaic (old fashion), we are talking about history. I am very interested in history. Here I started playing metaphors and associations.

Looking at the present context, we know what happens to the Coptic Christian minority in Egypt. They were expelled and massacred by ISIS-affiliated groups. Personally, the selection of this encaustic medium for me is not just an option to be different but it is a choice for my clear and firm position against ISIS, the Khilafah and the application of sharia law. I hope the selection of this medium can be a "symbol" of my political position.

By the way, in the neo-dada era Jasper Johns revived this medium, even though in its development it has never been a mainstream medium. Although inspired by Johns, the reason I choose encaustic differs from him.



GEDE MAHENDRAYASA
Lamictal
Encaustic on Canvas
200 x 150 cm
2017



GEDE MAHENDRAYASA
Litium #2
Encaustic on Canvas
200 x 150 cm
2017



GEDE MAHENDRAYASA
Diary of a Seducer after Arshile Gorky after Soren Kirkegard
Encaustic on Canvas
200 x 150 cm
2017



GEDE MAHENDRAYASA
Cenotaph for Dead Fucking Maestro
Encaustic on Canvas
200 x 150 cm
2017



GEDE MAHENDRAYASA
Pacman
 Encaustic on Canvas
 200 x 160 cm
 2017



GEDE MAHENDRAYASA
Suicidal but Happy
 Encaustic on Canvas
 200 x 160 cm
 2017



GEDE MAHENDRAYASA
Bipolar Demon
 Encaustic on Canvas
 200 x 160 cm
 2017

Type II Bipolar Disorder

Since the beginning of the painting, I always try to using ratio, planning, pre-meditation, calculating, tactical, full of strategy in preparing/processing painting. Simply, I want to put forward a more “conceptual” and “cerebral” art. But at the age of 50, I decided to turn 180 degrees by taking the opposite path. I prefer to use more intuition, mood, sensibility. This is related to type II Bipolar disease that haunts me since the age of 16 years. For whole 34years I tried to compensate mood disorder by practicing logical thinking, and I exhausted, and I finally gave up. From now on, in my work, I choose to ride wherever my mood guiding direction. I choose to speculate by following what my mood is. There are times when I surrender and become deterministic in doing my life. Let it flow ...



GEDE MAHENDRAYASA
Lithium
 Encaustic on Canvas
 200 x 160 cm
 2017



GEDE MAHENDRAYASA
Lithium #3
 Encaustic on Canvas
 200 x 160 cm
 2017



GEDE MAHENDRAYASA
Amygdala
 Encaustic on Canvas
 200 x 160 cm
 2017

Non-Figurative

Non-figurative art is said more essential, direct, symbolic, spiritual, universal. Cliché really. But there is one aspect that I have proven to be incorrect, namely, the tendency of universalism that non-figurative artists believe in the early phases such as Malevich, Mondrian, Kandinsky and af Klint. Also unlike the minimalists (Stella, Judd, Andre etc.) who are very materialist-objectively see non-figuration. What I find non-figurative art is very personal. A kind of personal spiritual transcendence. Gnostic religiously but very spiritually via visual art.