

Embracing Unpredictability

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Laxma Goud and Adil Writer : Collaborators; conspirators; irreverent provocateurs; artists; impresarios and myth makers.

Laxma, with roots in rural India, earthy and uninhibited, a printmaker, and in his own words, "now a clay worker". A clay worker, seduced by the material. A clay worker, influenced by his own teacher, K.G. Subramanyan. A clay worker, harking back to his indigenous roots. Laxma draws constantly. In notebooks, on scraps of paper, forceful lines, each one put down with care and deliberation, and yet, flowing with a spontaneity. Sometimes teeming with pattern and detail, at others, sparse and evocative. He travels constantly too. Excited by new possibilities, always willing to explore and push boundaries. And yet, he sees himself as conventional. His idiom established, his aesthetic well charted and secure. Methodical, certain of his roots and his direction.

Adil, the urbane parsi from Mumbai, the world is his oyster. An architect, a clay worker, a painter, the quintessential magpie, interested in everything around him, gathering influences, allowing them to seep into his own work, gradually transforming them to something unmistakably his own. A profusion of heavily textured surfaces, Adil's work is materiality incarnate. What better medium than clay then, to express with.

Laxma and Adil. The one who will not let the village be taken out of him, the other who carries the world with him. Peripatetic both. Fearless and curious. One, an exemplary draughtsman, the other an intuitive painter. I am struck by how alike the two men are in their unfettered, spontaneous personalities. Brought together serendipitously, the encounter has sparked a collaboration that is breathtaking in its possibilities.

Laxma has been working with clay for a decade now, travelling to studios where he can use the facilities and get technical support. Always amenable

to new and interesting opportunities, he enthusiastically accepted the proposition to work with Adil in his studio. Enamoured as he is of the "voluptuousness of clay", all he really cares about is to feel the material metamorphose in his hands. Approaching clay from his position of nostalgia for his rural childhood, coupled with his love for pattern, Laxma's clay work has thus far comprised of murals and "heads", predominantly in terracotta. Whether free standing or relief on slabs of clay, they seem to embody the abstract power of icons, far removed from the pagan world of his prints and drawings.

Adil, gregarious and generous was happy to have another artist visiting and working in his studio. Clay bodies, slips and glazes, firing with wood or gas or now adding soda vapour glazing to his repertoire, Adil has the technical knowledge and support system well established. Repositories of myriad and ever changing meaning, dependent entirely on what he might be engaged with and excited by in that moment, Adil makes forms which are simultaneously abstract and representational.

And so this unexpected journey has begun. For Laxma, the idea of collaborating was a new proposition. To Adil it appeared to be the most obvious outcome. Fascinated by Laxma's village tales, tales of a raw sensuality and fertile imagination and not having seen much of Laxma's earlier work, Adil recounts how during a chat in his studio, he gave Laxma a leatherhard slab of clay and a needle and requested him to draw something. Something reminiscent of his early works. Those drawings and prints peopled with his memories of growing up in a village. Peopled with concupiscent men and women, fertile fish, strutting roosters and full uddered cavorting goats. The ease, the spontaneity and freshness of those drawings then led him to expand the scope of the collaboration. Why not present Laxma with his own forms? "The Books and Boxes of Love" thus emerged. Adil's Books and Boxes, which have been made with different clays on several continents, fired in different kilns, now offered up for an exploration, to an artist who draws with the ease and unselfconsciousness that comes from a lifetime of observing the world around him and recording his impressions.

I am struck once again, by the responsiveness of the two men. By Adil's letting go of his forms, to allow them to be transformed by another hand, and by Laxma's ability to accept the challenge presented by having to work within the confines of another's imagination. In Laxma's own words, "if it is my own cube, I already know what to do with it". Looking at these boxes, books, shields and cubes you would not believe it was anything but as simple as breathing!

In his studio at home in Hyderabad, Laxma has cupboards crowded with things he has made. Little objects made with wood, painted in white and black and ochre, graphic lines and dots and swirls; clay heads, some fired to 1200 degrees centigrade, others only bisqued, still others cast

in bronze. Work that he refuses to part with. Toys with a lively playfulness. Heads with the power of totems. Tucked in behind these, a small papier mache and bamboo bottle form, made using an old bowl as a mould and painted in white and ochre. His form. Someday, I hope it will be reincarnated in clay. Perhaps this experience of drawing and painting on another's three dimensional forms will spark another direction in his clay work. One that brings together his love for clay with his strength in the two dimensional.

Adil meanwhile continues to produce Boxes, Books, Cubes and Shields, their surfaces suddenly teeming with Laxma-esque drawings in addition to the text, texture and "red dots", so characteristic of his own work.

The symbiotic partnership, the exchange of ideas and energy, has led to the emergence of new work by both the artists. Adil's excitement is palpable. He says he has always been keen to explore the figurative, but hesitant. This collaboration has quite obviously liberated him from that hesitation.

"People who see our fired works at the studio ask me, 'whose work is this? Whose idea was this series?' And all I say is look at it and judge it for what it is. This collaboration has taken me one step ahead with my own work. Laxma ji's wonderful vibe, humility, willingness to share thoughts...and seeing his focus, are things I will forever cherish", says Adil.

A successful collaboration requires the ability to embrace unpredictability, an eager receptivity, and a certain amount of humility to be able to let go of old ways of seeing and making and engage in the process of a joint exploration of ideas. Laxma and Adil the ideal collaborators epitomise these qualities. Whether the journey continues or not, and what direction it takes remains to be seen.

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(Aarti Vir is a ceramic artist based in Hyderabad)

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