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Rahul Bhattacharya reads **Sabrina's** 'Fragments Of Fading Memories' by Sabrina at the Art Heritage as a site where one can locate challenges to contemporary skills of consumption and analysis.

'Fragments Of Fading Memories' an exhibition of assemblages and collages by Sabrina at the Art Heritage (Triveni Kala Sangam) showcases a body of work located between two very attractive but (probably) misleading tropes, which almost premeditate our viewing. The tropes referred here are those of the artist gender and her use of materials. Indeed most readings and interpretation around Sabrina's work assume a primal importance for these tropes. Of course Sabrina can be looked at primarily through the category of a 'female artist' (or placed within such an interpretational space), and the thematic nature of her work encourages one to see her works through a 'woman artist's autobiographical mode) and establishes linkages with the kind of narratives we have learnt to employ for artists like Frida Kahlo. It is also true that her rich and diverse use of material provide an enchanting perching point of the viewer...from where an 'entry' into her works seem obvious.

At this moment let us pretend that Sabrina's gender is invisible. (Even though one must admit that analysis through [Kantian hierarchies](#) will lead to the body of works displayed at Fragments Of Fading Memories being read as 'feminine'). And conversations with the artist reveal that (by and large) her use of materials is deeply incidental (but highly integral) to her practice. It comes from her reaction to the 'academic' insistence on the 'hand painted' and that there is hardly ever a symbolic association with materiality. Thus there is enough elbow space to squeeze out into the realms of two (alter) tropes...to look into the concaves of her gender and the materials that she uses and in such a temporarily suspended space try to reengage with the installation / collages constructed by her.

[Sensual, tranquil, vulnerable, fragile... were words that came to mind as one began an initial engagement with Sabrina's works.](#) It is a relief to realize that there is no gender 'intrinsically' built into any of the above four sense categories. However at this juncture one is confronted with certain methodological doubts... how does one deal with such personal readings of a body of work in an era which is extremely hesitant about notions of 'authorship' 'biographical' and the 'narrative'. The immediate context of this body of works provokes one into the bio-narrative mode (2005, visit to Leh in a self declared peace and calmness rescue operation; her encounters with vastness, tranquility and other such sense metaphors) Indeed one can look at 'objects' constructed by the artist as montage re-memberings of her Leh experience. At least now the artist's gender has ceased to matter (a significant break within the biographical mode?); her camera (may have) shot Ladakh through the lens of a transgender tourist, traveling out... searching answers to questions dying within.

Of course one learns to connect 'montage re-memberings' with Dadaist techniques especially in the manner in which Sabrina uses her (mixed) media," *methods of combination, accumulation and chance relations*" (as observed in Rubina Karode's catalogue essay, unedited, unpublished

version. However it is also possible to realize that the process through which ‘accumulation’ is trans-montaged into ‘combination’ is done in an internationality ridden process, and the resultant ‘chance encounters’ just do not have the same ideological significance in Sabrina’s artistic practice as it enjoys in Dada-Surrealist ideological frameworks.

The artist’s ‘found object bank’ is a crucial point of entry into her works. Objects ‘just picked up’, memorabilia, discarded objects and ‘bought objects’ are headings under which one may be able to archive Sabrina’s object bank....bought objects forming a sizeable part of this imagined archive. It is conventional to underplay the section of ‘bought objects’ in an artist’s object bank (even though painters ‘can’ – obviously – buy paints and brushes), as though a structural void will be created if we start saying “this artists buys objects and sticks them on the surface”. It seems to be more appropriate to assume that he/she has certain personal relationship with the objects. Somehow a twig picked up because (it probably) engaged the artist aesthetically seemed to be capable to carrying more cultural capital than a small piece of something the artist has bought (picked up through a financial transaction) even though (possibly) the reasons were the same (aesthetic engagement). Similarly a fabric having a memory significance (associatable with childhood/marriage or other social metaphor) seem capable of carrying more cultural capital than a piece of fabric that the artist just ‘bought’ from the market.

Sabrina challenges the autobiographical in her works by blurring boundaries between found and bought objects, using them ‘equally’ towards the construction of her object-images. [It must be admitted that there are pockets within Sabrina’s body of work, which deploy polemic usage of ‘personal objects’]. Sometimes, it may be useful to bypass a direct engagement with materials used and concentrate on the ‘gestural’ that inform the construction of her visuality. Gestural as an analytical category is primarily used in the context of painting, performance, drawing or sculpture... rarely used to engage with object installations constructed out of found objects and digitally manipulated imagery. Sabrina’s object images are primarily constructed out of ‘acts’ like sewing, sticking and cutting. These techniques and their possibility of encoding gestures play an important constructional role in Sabrina’s art and the nature of lines and patterns that bind her works Formally (here one is not dealing with lines and patterns in the images, materials and fabrics used). It is these gestures that are at the performative core of Sabrina’s practice... deeply informing how the artist visually (re) constructs her image and object bank into enchanting, fragile image objects.

Even though over the decade Sabrina has struggled with the technical challenge of attaching objects, images, fabrics to surfaces... very often a lot of her artistic energy taken up by the need to introduce some degree of permanence to the (sometimes) extremely fragile objects used, Sabrina has chosen to stay within the realm of the ephemeral. The ‘decision’ to not work within the realms of the ‘archival’ has to be seen as a certain resistance to investment/ market demands for everlasting and permanent. It is a pleasant change in our schizophrenic times when artists imagine and celebrate the ephemeral be works produced on archival paper.

In fact, initially it seemed problematic that Sabrina’s brittle, fragile, ephemeral object-images had to be housed within glass frames to make them (quasi) permanent ...fit for exhibition display. However, when one got to see her works post framing, it seemed a new semiotic

dimension had got (unwittingly?) layered on her works... fragility encased and protected within glass boxes. Suddenly one gets reminded of her visit to Leh and her discovery of / fascination with the pristine protected spaces offered by Buddhist monasteries... her repeated use of the ovular form (as a symbol of enveloping and hence protection...).

The last observation is of course completely arbitrary.