

asian pop

Ketna Patel tells Janice Seow she hopes to give Asia and the Third World an alternative voice for artistic expression

PHOTOGRAPHY DAN ONG, D4 STUDIO GALLERY

STOP

Asians ahead

IN HER FINAL YEAR AS AN ARCHITECTURAL STUDENT,

Ketna got hooked on globalisation and how this could be rendered onto three-dimensional forms. The 38-year-old African-born British Indian and Singapore permanent resident believes that culture is not static and has to be constantly nurtured, and hopes to encourage a dialogue through art.

You have lived in various parts of the world. How do you identify yourself in terms of nationality?

I like the feeling of anonymity... to belong anywhere and yet not be limited by any one cultural concept. Emotionally I do have a pull towards places like India. But there I'm limited because I don't necessarily know how to read or write Hindi. I wouldn't say I am Indian only. Neither am I British or African. Call me a nomad!

KETNA PATEL



Bed of Pure Silver lounge bed, collaboration with H&C & S&K PTE LTD, Singapore

BELOW LEFT **ASIAN** Good

KEETNA PATEL **ASIAN** **ASIAN**



But your work focuses on Asia, so do you see yourself as essentially Asian then?

Definitely. I am attracted to the emotional temperature of countries that are warm. One senses a larger connection to an individual's rapport with their environment, and the boundaries between public and private seem more blurred. The ability to get in and out of the houses of relatives and neighbours shows our inter-connectedness as a society, which is a quality that has to be admired.

What is your ongoing project Planet Pop about?

Well, in this global market context, we are becoming increasingly dependent on each other. As corporations control the world economy more and more, we often forget to acknowledge the ordinary, everyday individual in the street. There are more farmers and fishermen than there are suited individuals in boardrooms, yet we hear more about the latter. I have always been fascinated by popular street culture, as this is the place where one can 'map' and 'measure' the social, economic and cultural manifestations of a country at its most honest. One cannot understand the spirit of a country through statistics, but can gain valuable insights from spending time on the streets and interacting with the people.

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You have talked about the shift from Art to Advertising. Tell me more.

I think the visual stimuli of our generation has changed somewhat. We are greatly influenced by new media — cable TV, advertising banners, and advertising campaigns that get translated into huge global presences. Advertising is almost like a compelling parasite. It is beginning to change the way we look at things and lots of times traditional art forms are the casualties. What seems to be celebrated more now is individuality and originality. So if you combine that and advertising, I think there has been a serious shift in the way we respond to things.

How does this come into play in your work?

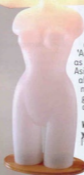
I think one of the hidden attributes of this new type of visual conditioning is its temporariness, and it is this that I want to explore in my art. For the first time in years, I've deliberately not used oil on canvas as a technique, exploring instead

Ketna's in-car studio space

LEFT Ketna posing with her artwork, *Java Indonesia*; Part of 3 commissions by Saemoo Foundation, Jakarta

BELOW *Play for Goddess Lamp*

BOTTOM LEFT *Jan Chakri*; *Muchelpran*; *By camera*



other techniques that emulate advertising and new materials. I've nicknamed this 'Artvertising'. I also look to domestic surfaces as possible canvases to say something about Asia and about the Third World. All my work is about the Third World because I feel they have not been given enough expression in the last generation, and we haven't celebrated who we are in a hurry to become 'Western'.

What are you hoping to achieve through your art?

I'm trying to extend the ongoing conversation or debate about how Asian Culture is in danger of erasing its visual references in the hurry to get ahead.

Ketna Patel's studio is located at 33 + 35 Jalan Puteh Jerneh. Tel: 6479 3736. Website: www.ketna.patel.com. Strictly by appointment only.