



'Duck Farmers' by Sosa Joseph.

COURTESY GALERIE MIRCHANDANI + STEINRUECKE

I am what moves me: Sosa Joseph

The artist is driven by the very act of painting rather than a theme or concept

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What matters to me in a painting is painting; what's vital is challenging myself as a painter," artist Sosa Joseph had noted during a series of conversations with writer John Mathew in Kochi, Kerala, and Bengaluru between 2019-2021 "My only concerns, quests and considerations are formal and aesthetic; what is more important to me than what I paint is how I paint it." This pretty much encapsulates the Kochi-based artist's continuing commitment to the medium of painting, especially at a time when some of her contemporaries may have veered towards new media.

And one can see different facets of her style at the exhibition *Where Do We Come From?* at Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke in Mumbai, on till 5 March. Joseph never starts out to paint with a concept, theme or agenda in mind. "Themes manifest; they present themselves based on who I am, what my world view is, or what moves me. It's not a conscious choice I make for each canvas. Art, at least for me, is not driven by an agenda," she had explained during the conversations with Mathew. Joseph paints the scenes from a deeply personal vantage point. The city, the books she reads, newspaper cuttings and the childhood influences of growing up with a Syrian Christian mother and a father who was a Marxist can all be felt in her art. Her works are imbued with layers of meaning.

According to Ranjana Steinruecke, director of the gallery, the artist has borrowed the title of the show from Paul Gauguin's *Where Do We Come From?* (1897). Unlike Gauguin's spiritual quests, however, her adoption of the title is more personal—it is more of an exploration of who she is. And memory plays a huge role in this inward-looking journey.

Both her father and grandfather were ferrymen in Kerala. "Beyond the river, where my father took his boat, the world ended. To my mind, he was like a space traveller: a man who paddled up to the edge of the earth and looked at what lay beyond!" Joseph had said in the conversations. Her memories of her father coming home, walking through the sugar-cane fields by the river, and the party marches that often formed a serpentine red river, had a huge impact on her. According to Steinruecke, her paintings recall the geography of her village, and the people and events that have been imprinted in her memory. Joseph has often talked about how she was literally raised by the river and the village beside it. This also influenced her aesthetic vocabulary.

However, there has been a dramatic shift in Joseph's practice during the pandemic. "There has been a new opening of larger painterly surfaces and a heightened use of colour. *Duck Farmers* has expanded from a single panel into a diptych in these two years, unfolding into a grand narrative, while paintings such as *The Ferryman* and *Jaundiced Child* and *Gift From The River-II* demonstrate her ability to give centre stage to the human figure in all its enigmatic glory," explains Steinruecke.

Where Do We Come From? can be viewed at Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke, Mumbai, till 5 March, 11am-7pm (Tuesday-Saturday).