

SHARLENE KHAN

Jug & water

"...who detected what could result from relating concrete words of great resonance, with forms which deny or at least do not rationally correspond to them."

André Breton on René Magritte

Claudia Shneider's work has intrigued me from the first moment that I saw it. I can only guess at the impulse that drives Shneider's brush but her imagery seems to be a blending of feelings and thoughts that shapes itself into images that are thought-provoking, sometimes frivolous, recollective, even absurd.

For me, one of the most interesting aspects of her works is the effect it produces on the viewer. Approaching a work one finds a form that is vaguely familiar. In an instant, if allowed, memories, feelings, histories leap into remembrance or remain lingering. A sensation of things occurred, observed, held. Often one walks away with a smile, having accessed something deep within the recesses of one's own mind, an unexpected memory stirring afresh.

Some confront the work, expecting another analytical discourse into all that has gone wrong in the universe, see a jug and water, read the title *Jug & Water* and leave with irritation, disgust. That art from African artists has regressed to a point that only scating socio-political commentary or exoticism is deemed valid is indeed disgusting. These attitudes perhaps also spring from an irritation that so many of us seek to find a simplicity of form and colour that at times remains unattainable for all but children and the insane. A few among us do manage to reach that state though. Shneider has. When I look at Shneider's work, the works of these artists spring to mind. Picasso's line drawings in his later years are exemplary for the ease with which his subject matter was conveyed by a single line that exuded a feeling of supreme control and mastery. Claudia's forms convey this ease to me as well: not so much a control of form as much as a release of it from all academic indoctrination. A form released from the stifling constraints of proportion, context, background, realistic colour.

I have not always connected with Shneider's subject matter. I feel no shame in this as I have still been pleased with the symmetry of the forms, the haphazard stroke, the resonating colour, much as I have felt in front of a Rothko painting. I have enjoyed the physiological effect of the work on my mind and body. I have gone away feeling I had "experienced" the work in a different way than I have others and there is no shame in that for the human brain experiences many things that cannot be fathomed or articulated, yet experienced nonetheless. This is not to say that political, socio-economic and historical influences cannot be traced in the musings of Shneider, for no human can deny the social context which influences them. Indeed, Shneider's work can be deceptive social commentary as her still-life objects become signifiers for a variety of human relationships. A Coke bottle could bring back personal frivolous memories, yet in terms of history and political systems it could signify the cultural hegemony that the USA still exudes on much of the Third World.

What makes Shneider's work different though is that one is not inundated with socio-political commentary for the sake of fame and fortune. One gets the feeling that the struggles of love, hate and questioning in these images are more personal expressions of a person who has lived in Africa, who is African. On the other hand, while cultural analysis is much needed in today's increasingly errant world, isn't it wonderful once in a while to walk into an exhibition space and see *Jug & Water* and seek refuge from it all into the wonder that is human relations and surroundings?