

# Truth, Beauty and Me

Laila Sharmeen

Endless emptiness everywhere; perilous, all-pervading materialism; uncultured, uncivilized and uncouth eyes staring at you—all these make me blue; I am made dystopian by them all.

As far as I can see, there is no light or air. This is a catacomb. In fact, living in this catacomb, or what Baudrillard calls hyperreality, I try to arouse myself: I murmur to myself: are you beautiful Laila? What do you want?

Looking for answers to these questions I went to Paul Ree, Nietzsche's soul mate, to "My Last Duchess" by Browning; after a long restless journey I tried also to see myself in the mirror of the Atlantic. She said, 'You are beautiful; you are flexible and open to illumination.'

Even amidst the squalor of this world, my 'magic mirror' gleams at me. It stimulates my conscience. In the installation 'Things fall apart/ the centre can not hold' I lament the loss of reality and the incorrigible depthlessness that surround me.

In the 'Spontaneous Beauty' series there is an element of pantheism that I see as an antidote to the materialist greed of the world. I have included in my exhibition the works of my nine-year old daughter to show how children draw they do so with a mind not weighed down by the anguished images of a Sartre or a Cy Twombly. Her work is spontaneous, uninhibited.

'Who has chained me in the golden cage? My spirit tries to break free from mindless consumerism.

Madame Sosostrise, the false soothsayer in line with all failed shamans, is not given space in my picture-world.

In the play *Fly*, Jean-Paul Sartre's imagined Les Erynies as flies who live in the pus of the society. In my Arcadia the Erynies appear in the form of snakes.

The 'Golden stick and Silver stick' installation is inspired by Michelangelo's statue of Night.

In my 'Death' series sperms are blue; the moon, too is blue, while the color of rain black. Because of a series of deaths in my family, I have been shattered. For me, rain is no longer romantic; the moon has become blue in pain. And even the sperm, the first flag carrier of life, is death.

My canvas is full of fish, Kash flowers, fireflies, hyacinth flowers, boats and rivers of Bangladesh, paddy fields swaying in the gentle breeze, butterflies, the vast expanse of the sky and birds. All these are symbol of truth and beauty and humanism and images that I yearn for to oppose the sadness and tawdriness of contemporary life.