



The Old Restaurant gets a new Wing 1981
127 x 152 cm
50 x 60 inches
oil on canvas

Gallery Chemould's 25 Years
Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai

by Peter de Francia

The work of Ranbir Kaleka strikes me as being exceptional for several reasons. First and foremost it is in the manner in which his paintings – and especially his more recent work – reflect an ability to incorporate personal experience with wider and more general issues. But in addition, the pictorial language that he is in the process of developing, seems admirably suited to express what I take to be his increasing preoccupation with myth.

By this I do not imply that he paints about mythological subject material. Myths cannot be transcribed through written language. Nor, in the latter part of the twentieth century can they be described by pictorial means. A myth, in terms of its essence, can only be projected through another myth. A verbal interpretation of a myth, however faithful, is bound by its very nature to be based on some form of scientific methodology and thus becomes analytical. For this reason it cannot embody a dialectical interpretation and is thus separated from any philosophical concept.

The earlier paintings of Kaleka dating from the seventies and, with the exception of two works, unfortunately known to me only through reproductions, reflect a view of the world that is highly internalized and appear to place much reliance on the juxtaposition of improbabilities. In this sense they are to some extent dependent on certain aspects of Surrealism. Morphological and visceral forms cohabit in an enclosed space with sharply rendered manufactured industrial components. They depend on a kind of lucid spacial transparency in which an element of levitation is frequently hinted at. The family of artifacts and figure featured in these pictures is curiously weightless and thus to an extent implies an absence. Realism is however affirmed through an exactitude of technique in which every part of the painting is projected with the same degree of focussed intensity.

A degree of evolution in Kaleka's work can be found in the untitled 1981 painting that he showed in the exhibition of Contemporary Indian Art held at the Royal Academy in London in the following year. It not only makes use of larger and freer forms, notable in the case of a petalled canopy straddling the center of the picture. The treatment of the imagery is wider and, compared to works done in the previous decade, the painting is altogether more expansive and the content less dependant on psychological stress. The artifacts found in his pictures of the seventies have virtually disappeared.

Within the following six years Kaleka's vision has broadened and his concerns have centered on the depiction of myths that aspire to incorporate collective beliefs. His paintings are wide ranging and prospective works. What strikes me as most impressive is that they have lost none of the personal presence of the artist. But the balance has shifted. His range of interests now seeks to invite the viewer to empathize with the world in general, with nature in terms of clouds and water, with the mood of people or the times of day. They are not narrative paintings in the narrow sense in which the word is so frequently used. But they invite speculation on a whole range of emergent situations and possible transmutations stemming from the power and inventiveness of his imagery.

Kaleka's 1984 pictures, titled *The Old Restaurant gets a New Wing*, and *Family* stresses his predilection for making use of a pictorial language that induces contemplation and a deep impression of serenity. In the context of the clamour made by the claims of most contemporary art, Ranbir Kaleka's works offer a reassurance of the permanence and continuity of these essential qualities.



Family I 1983
198 x 211 cm
78 x 83 inches
oil on canvas



Fish Dreaming of its Holy Captors 1986
244 x 152 cm
96 x 60 inches
oil on canvas

Peter de Francia: authority on Leger: Fernand Leger-The Great Parade, Cassel, 1969. Principal of Fine Art Dept., Goldsmiths' College, 1970-72, Professor of Painting, RCA, 1972-86