

The Oeuvre of Janine Shroff

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Born in a “small tin shack in Juhu”¹ to artist parents and trained in the lesser-known Jamnabai School of thought, Shroff is a minority artist of immeasurable talent. Her adolescent experiences of being forcefully ensconced on the beach by the heterosexual Hindu male body, the formative National Institute of Design rejection, as well as the reductive educational milieu forced upon her in her school art class, have shaped her Parsi-lesbian artistic practice.

Her work seeks to foreground what she calls the *besharam*. The formation of her own subjectivity can be seen through the lense of the *besharam* – the drawing of nudes, sex and animal-human hybrids, reify her “discomfort” with her own body. Through her ongoing obsession with the alien persona of Tilda Swinton as well as her bird-people, she pushes the boundaries of what is human, and what is animal. In that sense, her work can be called autobiographical. Her illustrations explore the relationship between synaesthesia and bodily cultures. With influences as diverse as E-News and This American Life, they capture the new tensions distilled from both opaque and transparent discourses of pop culture.

Shroff’s highly vivid work on the relationship between patriarchal transport practices and the eroticization of the violent everyday is a masterpiece of enigmatic exactness. In the *Rape Rick* (Figure 1.1), she shows how everyday forms of mobility intersect with subjective paranoia transmitted along lines of kinship: i.e. from mother to daughter. Through the garish colours and bodily objects, the work is a problematisation of the relationship between the ideology of feminist protectionism and the expression of sexualised corporeality. However, careful dissection of the relationship between the “divisibility of communicative interaction and the systemization of the gaze suffers from its artist’s almost complete ignorance of the Frankfurt school.”² Her most incisive critiques of gender and the performance of feminism can be read in her phantom journal ‘Habits and Hijabs’.

Figure 1.1: Rape Rick



¹ Kale, A. 2014. Interview: Janine Shroff. *Astray* <http://astray.in/interviews/janine-shroff>

² University of Chicago. 2014. <http://writing-program.uchicago.edu/toys/randomsentence/>

Janine occupies a particular kind of spatial habitus. Frequented by Lesbians and Leo, it is a space within which she exerts cultural capital as well as symbolic power. It is a virtual space, dominated by social media and a multitude of irreverent blogs, one where “crotch shots” and “vagina posts” are uploaded with alarming alacrity. It is through the production of this space, that Janine most firmly asserts herself and her politics. In this space Shroff demonstrates her fundamental and violent opposition to the global problem of the ‘culture of breeding’. This is further elaborated in her dystopian work, *The Breeders* (Figure 1.2). Here, the juxtaposition of the industrial factory and domestic body, creates a simulacra of body as a baby-producing machine and engenders disgust from the viewer. It is precisely this heteronormative gaze that the piece challenges through a semiotic rejection of the child-producing normative ideal.

Figure 1.2: The Breeders



Shroff's work has been well received in both the mainstream and the fringes of the art world. Scholars and critics have referred to her work as “disturbing,” “arresting,” “surrealistic and fantastic”. Her work can be found for viewing at www.janineshroff.co.uk and for adornment at Kulture Shop, Bandra and Society 6.

References

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