

Media-Ting Art

If, Van Gogh, presumably the most committed artist of our times, had lived in the late twentieth century, he would have corrected his famous dictum about the art practice. That instead of saying 'not a day without a line', he would have altered it with 'not a day without the telly'. Mainly because the television has become such indispensable component and inseparable companion of ourselves; that now living without this perpetually fluctuating screen is not conceivable. This box activates the emotions, feelings and thoughts of a silent majority – all of us, the viewers.

As the French cultural theorist, Jean Baudrillard noted that TV is not a media of communication, since the act of communication demands two participants, both conveying their concepts to each other. Whereas, TV is about the transmission of ideas from one source to other (the spectator), which is the passive one. To the extent that it is not involved in deciding the sequence, timings or the content of programmes, and has to see whatever is shown – often simultaneously to the millions of spectators around the world.

Due to its structure and system, TV has become a major instrument to influence, shape and transform a public. It is utilized to negate, camouflage or fabricate reality, by the rulers and other powerful people/institutions. Not only TV, but all the other forms of media (including film, FM radio) have such an impact on society, that in contrast to media being a reflection of reality, now the reality is being lived as an after effect of the media.

In that situation, where TV is the supreme and omni-present entity, one wonders about its link to the visual arts. Although, by its essence, the TV screen shows images in a frame (a process not much dissimilar to painting or photography) yet it has a peculiar relationship with the visual arts – in its depiction of art and representing artists, especially in our country.

Long before the introduction of numerous private and foreign channels on our TV screens, the Pakistan Television Corporation used to enjoy absolute monopoly on the air time. The public was forced (in the real sense of the word) to watch the programmes made without much imagination or touch of innovation. Probably the only exciting segment at that time was the national news (mainly because of regularly changing ministers and frequently shuffled Prime Ministers!). However there were other programmes about various activities and spheres of life, but the visual arts were always portrayed in a miserable fashion. Either the documentaries on art were too scarce or plays were made in such a way that the artists appeared as the imbeciles, incompetents and odd creatures. Or if a programme on art was prepared, it conveyed absurd and completely irrelevant notions of art. One example of this attitude can be viewed these days on PTV Sunday transmission (as well as in some other programmes scheduled for every morning). In this programme, filled with pop songs, fashion tips and medical suggestions, a small section is called 'Art in Pakistan'. It starts with a few lines about an artist, and then a demonstration is given on how to draw portrait, still life, landscape and other subjects of art. This programme caters a general public, who is keen to know about the

artists and the process of making art, but it is a hopeless exercise, since no one can learn anything substantial from it.

First, because the brief introduction of an artist does not supply any images of his/her creations, nor it includes clippings of his/her interview. So for an ordinary viewer, it does not hold much interest or credibility. Along with that, the lessons in drawing are outdated and useless. For instance in one programme, the landscape drawing was taught to the audience. However, the teacher, without bothering to step out of the studio and looking at the nature, tried to construct trees, path and fields from his imagination. Understandably that picture – drawn in a manner that had nothing to do with the actual study of nature, offered a poor, rather amateurish example to follow. Simply because the division of light and dark shades, the scale of trees, and the placement of plants in relation to the fields, were in contrast to the natural phenomenon/settings. In fact the complete drawing and the scheme of making it revealed the lack of skill and a limited vision of the instructor. But more than that, it reflected the mindset of PTV officials, policy makers and programme producers. They still rely on redundant notions and obsolete methods of teaching art, whereas the new techniques and strategies of art education – that are based upon the observation of reality and its rendering in a creative way – are now available and practiced in various schools. This negligence is not connected to their lack of awareness, but it is associated with the absence of a real interest or genuine insight in the visual arts. So whatever is being proposed or prepared – is presented on our national network, without caring if it fulfils the purpose in a positive manner or not. Actually the visual arts are not considered significant or serious enough, so the programmes about this subject are not sophisticated either.

The other reason for this state of affair is related to our artists also. Due to their shyness, self indulgent behaviour or general disinterest in the world beyond studio and gallery; they prefer to remain away from the circle of media. They hardly contribute towards improving the standard of programmes on art, since this means dealing with the strangers, such as the script writers, cameramen and directors (a difficult endeavour for our creative individuals who are well set and busy in their small realms populated by other artists and collectors). Consequently, the large milieu is dependent upon TV professionals and on their half baked knowledge to get information about art. All of this leads to a basic need for revitalizing the programmes on art in our media. It is crucial, because – unlike some developed countries – we do not have any introduction/education on art in our schools. Hence a person after studying law, medicine or accountancy, emerges totally ignorant about art. So the generations of educated people are produced, who are not 'cultured' in the realm of visual arts. They may be interested, but do not possess the tools and means to understand art. In these circumstances, TV, being a powerful medium (including its private and government channels) can compensate that lack of (early) exposure to art. By transmitting art programmes, which are useful, informative and exciting. In that way our public – especially the youth be able to

know art – as it learns the facts of life (which are not taught in the schools) through CDs that are banned – apparently!

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