

APPRECIATION OF PAINTINGS: A Commoner's Musings:

We might say that, as with many other objects of art, the beauty of a painting rests in the eyes of the beholder. Attached herewith are images of some famous paintings of different genres.



A painting worth our deepest admiration is Ravi Varma's 'Mohini-Rukmangada Courtroom Scene' shown above. In this scene, the vicious second wife of an exasperated king demands that, in order to fulfill a wish granted to her by him, he should take the life of his son born to his first wife (who lies incapacitated on the floor). This painting belongs to the classic genre, and its extraordinary beauty lies in its portrayal of subtly different expressions on the face of each character.

Connoisseurs of modern art would counter any exalted appreciation of this painting with the oft-repeated argument, "If perfect reality is expected, where is the need for a painter? A camera would do the job better! What then is the role for creativity?" One can retort that a camera cannot go back in time and show the Mohini-Rukmangada courtroom scene! Jokes apart, should there not be a 'fine line' demarcating the extent to which the creativity of a painter can transgress realism?

Now, consider the famous Leonardo da Vinci classic painting 'Mona Lisa' shown above. Its style is realistic, yet it captures a moment of such intriguing expression on the face of its subject that many volumes have been written on it, immortalising the enigmatic 'Mona Lisa smile'.



Next, let us consider Picasso's famous painting 'Seated Woman', shown at left, belonging to the genre of modern painting. This painting, done in 1930, has a price tag of \$ 4,290,000.

Does this painting recognize the responsibility of a painter to stay within a 'fine line', as discussed earlier? Certainly not! And, protagonists of modern painting would retort, "No need to!"

There are unconfirmed reports that Picasso, in his later years, admitted to some close friends that he did attempt to fool connoisseurs of modern art in a few of his modern paintings! We don't know whether he made this comment with the painting Seated Woman in his mind.

Let us strip the aura of Picasso from the Seated Woman, and compare it with the painting shown below.



Okie and Joe are two gorillas in Franklin Park zoo, Boston. They have been trained by their trainer to paint with their hands. Their paintings are in good demand, and are even available on eBay. The painting at left is by Okie, and has a price tag of \$ 1,500.

How does this painting compare with the Seated Woman? Which is more pleasing to a commoner? Again, the answer lies in the eyes of the beholder!

Appreciation of modern painting has become such an elitist enterprise that a commoner often feels bewildered. There have been a few actual incidents where modern paintings were inadvertently hung upside down in museums, and nobody noticed anything amiss for several months!

A commoner like me is inclined to mutter:
"Enough is enough with modern painting!"

-- Anonymous, Jan. 2014.