

Boben M. Mammen

**The One who, himself without colour,
By the manifold application of his power
Distributes many colours in his hidden purpose...
Svetasvatara Upanishad 4.1**

The rich, thematic quality of Boben M. Mammen's work is a product of a profound physical, spiritual and cultural journey. Since establishing himself in Queensland in 2007, the Indian artist is receiving recognition for his instinctual and introspective sensibility that mines the expansive diversity of his trans-national experience.

Mammen's career as an artist was written on the riverbanks of Kerala in south west India, where he would gather driftwood and pebbles to furnish his creative imagination. The child of a Christian family with Malayalam as their mother tongue, Mammen witnessed the dramatic shift in traditional values, politics, religion and culture of the Malayali people as they were often forced to flee a stagnant economical climate to seek a more secure lifestyle elsewhere.

While his father sought work in Bangalore, Mammen remained in his home state to embark on his formal training as an artist. After graduating in Fine Arts (Painting) from the College of Fine Arts in Kerala, Mammen completed a brief stint as an art teacher before establishing a studio for his work as a political graffiti artist. Experimenting with an assortment of medium, Mammen explored his creative instincts, inspired by the social and political events of the period.

The burgeoning success of India's advertising agencies lured Mammen to Bangalore, where he began his commercial career as a junior artist under one of the industry's most successful creative directors. His talent was quickly recognised and he climbed the ranks to become a Visualiser within just two years. Mammen soon launched his own design studio that was appointed to create numerous works for many of India's major manufacturing companies, while also serving as an avenue to pursue his own artistic passions.

An unexpected job offer in Bahrain presented Mammen with the opportunity to travel outside India for the first time. It was a pivotal event that marked the start of an extremely successful career in advertising in the Middle East, while also exposing him to the extremes of the human condition. For twenty years, Mammen accumulated a plethora of artistic and technical skills that resulted in his rise to the top of the industry ladder as a corporate art director. He also participated in a vast range of art exhibitions, including several solo shows that enjoyed critical acclaim.

However, his time in Middle East was greatly influenced by scenes of desperation and poverty, contrasted brutally by the region's excessive wealth. "People would be dying on the streets and suicide was common. The sense of wretchedness was ubiquitous amongst the poor. Yet the Arab's simple philosophies and their spirit of endurance was still a source of great inspiration," said Mammen.

Over two decades in the Middle East, Mammen travelled extensively throughout its many countries meeting an eclectic range of people from the world's richest sultans to the remote 'badu' tribe in the remote Oman region. His time with both Shias and Sunnis gave him a valuable insight into the beauty of religious conviction and the destructive power of intolerance, which is a recurring theme in his work.

Boben Mammen married Anila in Kerala in 1993 and their two sons, Sharath and Hrithik, were born in the Middle East. After twenty years 'that passed like an eastern wind', the Mammens resolved to migrate to Australia. Cherishing the mesmeric stories of a primary school teacher who had returned from an Australian holiday, Mammen always felt the country played a key role in his fulfilling his destiny. He and Anila recognised that opportunities for a higher quality of education for their children lay in migration, and so in 1996 they bid farewell to the Middle East.

While the artist and his family never doubted their decision to relocate to Australia, they faced many challenges in the journey to forge a new life. The process of finding accommodation and jobs often tested their spirit, yet their commitment to each other and their Christian faith provided a firm foundation to persevere. Humbled by the generosity and kindness of the Australians they met during their early months, the family soon embraced their new life. They secured a house on Queensland's Sunshine Coast, the boys adapted easily to their new school, and Anila was offered a position within the Queensland Justice Department.

"If I start praising things about this country and its people, I would have no time left to paint," said Mammen.

In Australia, the artist finally has the opportunity to direct his energy and passion into his work, as well as contributing his talents to a variety of local events. Mammen produced the complete marketing material for the 2008 FESTURI Multicultural Festival as well as design collateral for the Indian Association on the Sunshine Coast.

Utilising a variety of medium to ensure a fluid approach to his subjects, Mammen's work reflects the thematic concerns that surround the shift from one cultural sphere to another, as well as universal themes of identity, mindset, conflict and faith. His work challenges the temporal boundaries that constrict insular viewpoints, while offering a rich, meditative quality that rewards the audience with its multi-layered dimensions.

Achievements

Highly Commended Certificate in painting by Kerala Lalithakala Academy (1990)
Very successful career in advertising, working in various top advertising agencies in Sultanate Oman (Muscat), Kingdom of Bahrain (Manama), United Arab Emirates (Dubai) & India, encompassing approximately 20 years as Visualiser Graphic Designer/ Art Director/ Restaurant Conceptualiser

Exhibitions

1988 - 1995 Kerala Lalithakala Akademy Exhibition 1988 to 1995.
1998 Uvajanamela Exhibition at Idukki
1989 National Exhibition of Arts by Kala Samsarika Kendra, Cochin
1993 Solo show at Jahangir Art Gallery, Bangalore
1994 Exhibition of Purogamana Kala Sahitya Sangam, Mahi, India
Solo show at Indian Fine Art Sociey, Bahrain
1995 Group show sponsored by Kalakshetram, Coimbatore
Solo show at Muscat, Sultanate of Oman (part of Indian Independence Day Celebration)
Participated in Kerala Samajam Art Exhibition Tour in Salalah, Sur, Sohar, Muscat in Sultanate of Oman
1996 Participated in Oman National Day Exhibition in Muscat Inter Continental Hotel
1996 Outer State Exhibition of Kerala Lalithakala Academy in Madras
Exhibition at Ooty by Central Lalithakala Academy Regional SOLO Exhibition Centre, Madras
1997 Participated in Al Shabiba National News Paper 'Annual Art Exhibition'
Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
1998 Solo Exhibition at Al Omaniya Art Exhibition Centre, Muscat International Shopping Festival, Seeb, Sultanate of Oman Participated Salalah Festival, Sultanate of Oman
1999 Group Exhibition at Al Harthy Complex, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
Jawahir Oman Art Exhibition, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
Participated in Kargeen Art Exhibition, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman
2000 Ahlan Wa Sahlan Art Exhibition Manama, Kingdom of Bahrain
Bahrain Fine Arts Society Annual Exhibition Manama, Kingdom of Bahrain
2001 Kerala Samajam Onam Exhibition, Kingdom of Bahrain
2003 - 2004 Surya Fine Arts Society Exhibition, Kingdom of Bahrain
2009 Solo exhibition, Sunshine Coast Library, Maroochydore