

AICA JAPAN CONGRESS 1998

Symposium "TRANSITION : Changing Society and Art "

■ Colloquium I *Memories and Visions : From Tradition to a New Identity*

Session 1 : *The Dialogue Between East and West*

M.A.Greenstein(USA)

Down Memory Lane : The Bollywood-Hollywood Connection

Bollywood-Hollywood: Brahmins, be they from Delhi or Boston, might sneer at the poetic association, but art produced in the two cinematic capitals of the world offers more in the way of cultural tradition than meets the futuristic eye. Indeed, what may be the most intriguing aspect of art, given the current bi-continental condition of producing cinematic reality and psychopompic fantasy, is that art as a cultural practice is pressed upon to contend with the cinematic gaze by enacting cultural memory and the traditions that recapitulate ethnic identity. Bombay artist Atul Dodiya and L. A. artist Tom Knechtel are clearly up to the challenge as we find the pop cinematic imagination filling their paintings with signs of anxious nostalgia, self-reflexive reverie, and passionate criticality.

This paper will discuss specifically the eerie presence of cinema and pop culture in the work of the two artists named above, both of whom seriously address cultural memory by mixing art historical references, and whose work is energized by cross-cultural references. In the case of each artist, painting has become the primary means of negotiating personal memory and exoticizing fantasy, opening up a formidable space in which to transform culturally-specific recollections into meaningful signs of hybrid projection. This paper will speak to artistic similarities while at the same time, point to grave differences that surface by way of cultural geography and cultural identity. Though nagging questions of appropriation and emulation loom respectively in the background of comparative cultural discourse, the disparate facts of borrowed "traditions" and "memories" appear to be transparent in each artist's work and are the logical outcome of cross-cultural influence brought about by Media, tourist travel, and the global marketing of fine art culture.