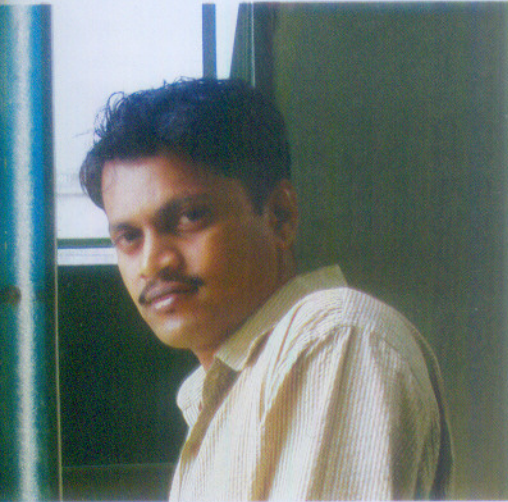


On artist trail

Nilesh Shilkar

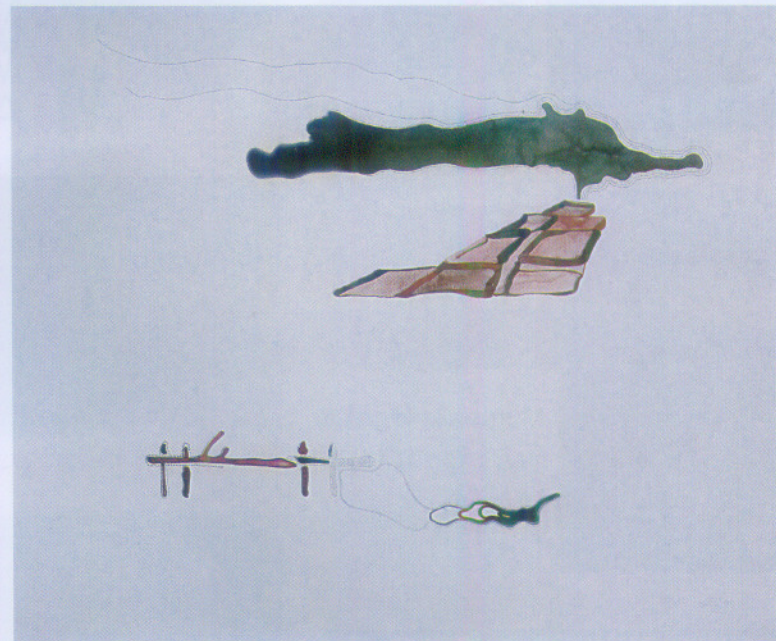


The minimal expression, shown in Nilesh Shilkar's work initially resembles Braille scripts; on closer inspection, the shapes reveal themselves as cells. "I'm concerned with mutation," Shilkar says, "and the idea of something beautiful, like a cell, mutat-

ing into something treacherous." Indeed, the painting is disturbing and mesmerizing, like a portentous medical report. For the viewer, that portent is Braille. But Nilesh Shilkar also sees his work as addressing other issues: that come with the visual and the sensation in effect, what baby boomers have always felt exempt from. "I want to deal with the beauty and fragility of our lives how vulnerable we are," he says. Shilkar's artistic mission has been no less ambitious than an attempt to represent the structures of knowledge and belief that we use to understand and visualize it. Shilkar's works are continually expanding and evolving and stems from his imagination, and is catalogued in a conceptual chart replete with allusions drawn from occult practices, traditions, and scientific elements and principles. The works delineate the universe's formation as well as the attempts and limits of human consciousness to comprehend its vastness. His work deals explicitly with the idea of information being on the surface and information the subject of his work. Shilkar creates works on paper, pricking the paper for three-dimensionality which ties the sprawling works together into a narrative structure. Offering a fresh perspective on the fusion of cultures, practices, and aesthetics, Shilkar has reenergized everything from the comingling of street culture and fine art to the grassroots workshop. Shilkar's key to understanding his work, draws attention to forms of culture on the fringes of the mainstream and reveals hidden personal histories within the context of what he himself has experienced. He was brought up in Shil near Ratnagiri, where he still lives. Shilkar's talent lies in examining his surroundings in an almost anthropological fashion. Many of his installations reflect how communities in Mumbai have appropriated elements of mainstream culture and mimicked, altered, and even parodied it to make it their own. For "Projekt Thebaw," an exhibition on view at the Thebaw Palace, Shilkar pasted a large world map and inserted with a large trowel at the centre. The piece is now part of Thebaw collection; but the earlier projects, such as **Mumbai Shanghai, 2005**, and **Complimentary Dish, 2006**, make clear the link between Shilkar's incisive analyses of contemporary culture and conceptual political art more generally, often resulting in humorous and insightful observations on the hierarchies of art and life. The images, bodies, objects, maps, decorations and all spoke of a cartography in which the history of colonialism makes evident that its anxiety for power and possession of wealth encompasses the globe.

This impression is due to the stratification of compositional levels: layers of large and regular chromatic planes studded by small drawings and by digressions in calligraphic style are overlaid with miniature figurative openings and sinuous abstract drawings are added. The accumulation of overlapping layers, colors, and images uniformly covers the surface, becoming indifferent to the boundary

with the pictorial stratification conferring depth to the paper, the various elements that make up the work appear to occupy a volumetric space, while the images and colors seems to be the result expressed in three-dimensions. The pictorial density, in which the figurative elements are interwoven and mingle, and sometimes are superimposed upon others, is thus revealed as an expression of the artist's cultural condition. The initial impression of a chaotic and uniform density is substituted by a curiosity that leads the viewer to the exploration of three-dimensionality as a visual translation of memory and time. A three-dimensionality in which the stratification corresponds to the intersecting or the melting in one's mind of memories more or less recent, to the battle between the urgency of the present and the evocative force of the past. Elbowing for space on paper are pictorial styles and visual data mediated by tradition, as one can make out in the tiny landscapes that invade at several points, iconography or personal memories seen with the eye of the artist's original culture. The compositional hierarchy: the figuration uniformly supports, and the material has evidently undergone a strong selection by the artist, allowing some elements to take precedence. For this reason, the works on paper appear as a more evolved emotional form - where memory, no longer obsessive, seems to be driven into a structure and a defined meaning.



In his painting there is no insistence on reinventing time, nor is there an attempt to make the past present, for past and present are shown completely. Memories shift among nostalgic motivations; they are mirrors of ourselves that envelop us like whirlwinds. Few artists are able to develop like Nilesh Shilkar have the ability to show coherence and freshness in painting based on the symbolic elements of a historical reality. Freeing himself of the imposing and limiting sense of a mere transposition of images and symbols, he realizes a subversion of the imagination stemming from the inheritance manifested in the implicit power relations. Subversion often begins through references that extend inside or outside the space of the paper. The artist gives a new dimension to painting as he approaches or distances himself from the two-dimensional plane: the images decompose into a dissociating effect that transforms the pictorial matter into intoxicating condensations, into contractions, and into impulses.