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CREATING 'SOMETHING OUT OF NOTHING' IN THE 'HERE & NOW' IS THE LOCUS OF 'SELF-TRANSFORMATION' FOR THE MONK OF ABSTRACTION CALLED PRABHAKAR KOLTE

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**Abstract**

*Kolte's unique language, influenced by urban culture, features prominent, frail marks and textures, contrasted with thick, dabbled chromatic pigment leaving brush marks. At times, flat colour fields ran over the large area of the canvas which would sometimes ooze, seep, emanate, dribble and even splash within the composition and drip out of the canvas itself. All those are coming together to speak of the modernist consciousness and an urban ethos. In his considerable time-spanning paintings, Kolte appears as instantaneous, spontaneous and transitory. Without being purposive about conceptual belongingness to erudite principle, wandering on his canvas like a capricious child Kolte comes out as quite a cultured gentleman and an artist with unparalleled creative boldness yet sober antique. The large overwhelming colour-field areas of single colour, are sometimes vibrant and at times are in grayish tone having subunits of peeping chromatic window breaks into various geometrical shapes in deformed notes juxtaposed with organic forms. The resoluteness of Kolte's creative lexicon seems to be taking a stringent stand that abstraction is considered alien to society as it lacks the conventional verbosity of day-to-day life. The fact is that society has lost its sense of laconicism. This paper elucidates how the minimalistic approach towards colour-field while experiencing 'nothingness' in the 'here & now' turns Prabhakar Kolte into the monk of abstraction.*

**Keynotes:**

*Color-field Abstraction, Representation, Mimesis, Nothingness, Identical Forms, Self-Identity, Completeness, Here & Now, Pictorial Space, Upanishad, Eternal-Immanent Self*

**Kolte's Splash of Color as the Beginning of the Painting**

We've heard about American Abstract Expressionists who would spend hours contemplating their canvases before suddenly making a few seemingly inadvertent marks on it and then mulling it over. Similarly, Prabhakar Kolte sometimes starts with a bold splash, using one dominant colour while, others play a minor but promising role, to express his ideas and emotions that have been building up over time.

Kolte's paintings often feature a magnanimous and humble color field, with a dominant, vibrant color covering most of the canvas and small windows with vibrant colors. This chromatic symphony reflects Kolte's compassion and passion for art, as seen in his watercolour on paper, acrylic on canvas, and serigraph on board works.

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## Abstraction as Seeing the Painting Without Identification of Representational Form and Self-Identity.

Although all abstract arts don't sport representable forms or forms which are recognizable and non-recognizable both, through which we identify ourselves and our lived experience. However, it is not the subtraction of the representation or likeness that is left after the elimination of something but it is "what is hidden, there are so many things which are not there even in the figurative, so what is hidden; in abstract art we excavate them" (Kolte, 2020) Actually since the time immemorial art being dependent on objective and subjective identification of the likeness yet the intentionality concern with art was questioned by the phenomenality. This phenomenality made the difference and then given the freedom to the individual it was his/her intuition of noumenal that constantly deviated art from its illusionary bonding with the phenomenal, it was probably then that art went abstract in the Western context. But in the Indian context, the illusionary relationship between phenomenon and noumenon was pre-discovered from the time yogis had discovered and had a revelation about the truth of impermanence; the illusionary bonding between body and mind (the correct combination in the Indian context would be body and spirit). This is why in India there had neither been any painstaking struggle to master the 'corporeal' with the *mimetic* intent nor had there been any revolution towards eluding from the same in aversion; in the name of abstraction. In the West, this was eventually abstraction in art, as there was no reason to be disillusioned from the 'apparent' because the 'occult' had not been as mastered through introspection or contemplation as in India. If only we had removed *Yoga, Tantra* and *Dhyana* from the Indian culture then it would have faced the similar problem of abstract-figurative or abstraction-representational oxymorons of the West. This is why Indian art education once adulterated by colonial schools lost its link to the greatest discoveries of contemplated disillusionment in the past. As a result, subject-object, abstract-concrete dualism, of which the pre-independent India was well aware of handling through its veteran wisdom in the non-dual, came to be treated as axiomatic oxymorons. It has been the cultural backup of *dhyana* or contemplation in India, that enabled the *yogis* and *dhyani* to transcend self-identity. Thus, there has been a futility of 'mimetic representationalism' in Indian art and culture because phenomenal representationalism has been already celebrated simultaneously with the abstraction of noumenon. Religious rituals during the numerous festivals of the East are the testimonials of this fact. Abstraction and representation are experienced simultaneously in these celebrations, and this is the strongest reason for the absence of any artistic revolution on 'Abstract Art' as in antagonism with Representational or Figurative Art in Indian art and culture. Indian abstraction is concentric due to perennial awareness of its performer whereas Western abstraction is eccentric due to their awareness. In the context of validating abstraction, it may be argued that in today's time, the performer of abstraction, should be well aware of perennial and ephemeral awareness both. Prabhakar Kolte possesses the qualities of ephemera and perennity. Kolte's art is his awareness of abstraction, a perennial awareness of the native collective consciousness.

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## Nature as Inspiration and Nature Within the Individual as Completeness in Kolte's Abstraction

Abstract Art or American Abstract Expressionism is rather a universal phenomenon, Kolte's comment "*Abstract art is very much ingrained in Indian philosophy. It has been a part and parcel of our thought process and got mentioned often like*" as he conspicuously quotes *॥अपूर्णांमदःपुनीमिनदंपूर्णत्विपूर्णमुदच्यते॥पूर्णस्यपूर्णमादायपूर्णमिवावशिष्यते॥॥॥अशांतिः ॥शांतिः ॥शांतिः ॥*, meaning "Aum, That is complete, This is complete. If complete is removed from complete; what remains is also complete." This indicates at nothingness while Kolte divulges "what draws me to my work is the intention and passion to make something out of nothing. I explore the empty space as the arena where the void of nothingness takes shape and form". Further quoting from Ishavasya Upanishad "यस्तुसर्वाणिभूतानिआत्मन्येवानुपश्यति।सर्वभूतेषुचात्मानंततो न विजुगुप्सते॥" meaning "one who finds everyone in himself and himself in everyone, cannot hate anything" Kolte justifies "my art practice evolves and revolves around this philosophy. With such a kind of understanding when one shapes his thoughts, other thoughts also get shaped". The discussion offered in this catalogue highlights the fact that, while art writing with a Western orientation consistently portrayed abstraction as eccentric, abstraction as an endogenous action is concentric,

Dr. Kallol Roy takes a dig here "*the field of art history with its roots going deep into the European humanist tradition*" and argues, "*has dominated the canonical narratives of art all over the world (...) it considers all critical interventions elsewhere of Europe as part of the derivative discourse. Western art, in taking itself as the fountainhead of different global modernism refuses to recognise the voice of others as authentic interlocutors in a shared dialogue*". The catalogue came out to be so resourceful in the core idea of the hypothesis of this paper and quite informative on the development of abstraction in contemporary Indian art.

### Kolte, the Monk of Abstraction, says "I paint and then see" applies Colour and line and treats the Pictorial Space in the "here & now" for "Nothingness"

After coming upon Paul Klee and Mark Rothko the first thought that struck Prabhakar Kolte's post-institutional autodidacticism that "*there doesn't exist subject?*" because "*subject-based painting is past now as it was the time when it was necessary to prescribe subjects to the students to paint on them in order to learn, but down the years due to our stagnated notion we kept clinging to the subject which continued as a habit.*" (Kolte, 2020) Kolte's this statement in an interview stress on the fact that whole life wouldn't be enough to paint being subject-bound for "*life is short and subjects are infinite so is it to say that art is all about exhausting the life only painting the subjects?*" Ibid. It was then that Kolte was disillusioned from the art's orientation with subject with a revelation that "*if I see all the scientists, poets and the artist of Europe they though started with the subject but they never continued with it but the vision of thought*" and "*similarly there artists painted vision of thought (...) it was Cezanne's vision of thought to see geometrical shapes in the nature and he painted the nature in the geometrical shapes.*" (Kolte, 2020) It was from then that Prabhakar Kolte was exposed to the "process of

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*materialization of vision of thought” and thus declared “people see and paint but I paint and then see.....my painting is something out of nothing, and not of something, because I didn’t fix what to paint (....) and painting without subject is a subject which is across-the-board”(Kolte, 2020)Kolte could connect his idea of “painting and seeing” got its due support from Paul Klee, Mark Rothko and Cezanne. Kolte's use of the medium's flexibility to his advantage serves as evidence of his core idea of “painting and seeing,” which is just as irrational and lively as a youngster of seven years old. Since the child's reality of “being child” comes to protect him from all frowns, the extremely unpredictable nature of its sort occurring during child-play may always be seen without a frown, “my earliest works always had some forms that was recognizable, maybe a distorted human figure or a mug or a window. They were not clear, but you could still make them out. But later, I realized that I have to free myself from this need to represent existing forms and be totally like a child. We all have a child inside us and we kill it. I recognized the child and since then I’ve taken care of it. When I paint, I paint like a child.” (Pillai, 2020) And so true is that child plays eventually to result in ‘nothing’ but ‘inner necessity,’ it is the so-called elders who expect ‘something’ over that significant ‘inner necessity,’ whereas the beauty of which rests in the very intention to find ‘nothing.’*

So surprisingly such elders are nonchalant and doubtful of the child living her/his age daring enough to relish aesthetic pleasure incorporating whatsoever ‘unpredictabilities’ and ‘chance encounters’ in the process of creation yet are marvelled over a trained mature artist in doing so. Here is the leeway of the paradox Kolte discovers for himself that the difference between the 7-year-old child and the 70-year-old artist is that the former plays many things for ‘nothing’ whereas the latter paints ‘something’ out of ‘nothing,’ as he says “*something’ out of ‘nothing’ and not of something, I don’t know what would happen in the next moment, I never think about the next moment, I think of now and here and now.*” Ibid. This is the plinth of Kolte’s abstraction which indicates the contemplative state of mindfulness in witnessing the moment and not trying to interfere with it, but keep watching as an outsider. Perhaps this is why his final disclosure “*perhaps so would happen that I might deviate from the thought itself, it may happen*” Ibid. confirms the artist Kolte. It would not be out of place to consider Kolte as a monk of abstraction in disguise of an artist who lives the moment rather and doesn’t hold it because by doing so he is not weighing further karma.

*“Life is available only in the present moment.”*

*“No one has ever lived in the past or the future, only the now.”*

*“The present moment is filled with joy and happiness. If you are attentive, you will see it.” -Thich Nhat Hanh (Hanh, 2020)*

And thus, Kolte’s line, color, textures, tones, pigments and space all came as elements sacrificed towards the manifestation of ‘nothingness.’ Although all of Kolte’s paintings begin with ‘thought’ through ‘thoughtlessness’ vanishes into ‘nothingness,’ his paintings evoke this sense.

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So fortunately, Kolte is found, supporting the reason for creation rather than creation as a habitual routine without vision, *“There is no room for philosophy in our art schools. People think artists only work with their hands and eyes, but it’s more than that. Each artist also has to be a philosopher, philosophy gives you a reason to paint. One can have an art practice, but creating something is a different thing altogether. For example, portrait painting is a method, a job that you can easily do. But learning to create a new form is very difficult because you are creating a form that belongs to you alone. It’s not copied from anywhere else. Beyond paper, canvas and paints, an artist needs to have a vision. This can be shaped on the surface of a canvas. Your idea is the seed which you plant on the canvas and the painting grows from that idea.”* (Pillai, 2020) Paul Gauguin, the 20<sup>th</sup> century Postimpressionist acknowledges the integral interrelationship between art and philosophy *“Art requires philosophy, just as philosophy requires art. Otherwise, what would become of beauty?”* (Gauguin 1978) The quote is part of the essay *“The Writings of a Savage”* authored by Gauguin which was published posthumously.

### **Living the Painting with Spontaneity, Caprice and Vivacity of a Child but with Awareness of a Master**

We see freedom, impulse, intuition, and lark as the virtues when removed from Prabhakar Kolte’s painting his entire oeuvre will be annulled, for these are the qualities which replenish his creativity and these are the atomic particles which form Kolte. If we see his way of working, we would realize the vivacious and capricious child in him, in 1978 he records in his diary, *Human mind is a mini cosmos, where, as a child one has to witness faithfully one’s experiences.* Be it a sage of a hermit or a child into play the only common element is effortlessness. It is the effortlessness of the *elan vital* that applies to both learning and creativity, the quote by Picasso, *“I begin with an idea and then it becomes something else”* indicates the fact that painting itself has an intention, it has an eye, *I have been thinking that painting should govern my seeing. Let such seeing alone grasp what painting shows in the process let growth of effortless seeing and understanding be free from fixed concept,”* says Kolte in one of his slide shows *‘Mumbai Local with Prabhakar Kolte: Teaching without Teaching,’* (Kolte, 2020) It is the ‘occurring in the instant’ which concerns Prabhakar Kolte for it is in the instance of the occurrence and evaporation of thoughts which is similar to that of the child. This is why children are always afresh after their play and, thus playfulness of the experienced master is adroit in making aesthetic nuances of those spontaneous, capricious and vivacious marks performed through the masterly moves *“my painting is just a painting. I believe in seeing real not the reality, as reality protrudes ugly pleasures but the real sprouts a beautiful pain, I wish to encounter in my painting the real again and again with numerous eyes all over my mind.”* Artists have a primal connection to their childhood subconscious, which influences their later karma. Honest, sincere individuals manifest their “becoming” in their being, allowing them to explore themselves intuitively. Kolte’s childhood encounters with art and life narratives greatly influenced his art.

His exposure to Indian perennial wisdom, Perennial Philosophy, *Veda* and *Upanishad* through his childhood drawing teacher Jayant Datar who taught him Drawing and Music, “ *this combination of the two different subjects, I found like echoes of each other described in an Indian philosophy - Upanishad- as ‘*॥केनेषितांपतित्प्रेषितमनः।केनप्रणः प्रथमः प्रेतियुक्तः॥केनेषितांवचमिमांवदन्ति।चक्षुः श्रोत्रंकउदेवोयुनक्ति॥’ pointing at the unique relation between eyes and ears (meaning: at whose instruction the conscience (मन) gets attracted towards the subject matter? At who’s will the soul unified with the body earlier departs? At whose inspiration the sense of speaking works? And which God unites the function of eyes and ears?’” (Suman, 2020) Perhaps this is the internal discourse happening within Kolte that as an individual participating in the pursuit of Indian avant-garde like other few ‘Indian Artists of the Abstract’ enabled him to see ‘abstraction’ as the true Indian spirit of contemporary art and with a very Indian understanding which is never in antagonism with ‘representation;’ otherwise a devotee in front of the arresting ‘Significant Form’ of the idol of Devi Durga with her arcane ten hands holding different weapons sitting on the lion, after relishing a considerable period wouldn’t have closed his eyes for an ‘अन्तर्धान्’ or contemplation towards the innermost-self. This action could be argued to be ‘from representation to abstraction’ or ‘from concrete to abstract to concrete.’ If the deity’s ‘form’ was enough then there was no need for a take-off to the ‘formless’ or ‘nothingness.’ The shloka from the Upanishad and this argument replace the Cartesian discourse of ‘mind-body’ dualism with ‘spirit-body’ dualism.

However, in the Indian context, it is witnessed that some or other trans-empirical techniques like Yoga, Tantra and Dhyana keep the mind informed about the temporary or ephemeral relationship between soul and body, spirit and matter. The Upanishadic revelation seems to be reverberating from time immemorial in the collective unconscious in the Indian culture. Kolte qualified as one of the most legitimate avant-garde exceptional individuals. Junghaving studied Indian transcendentalism happened to be the first official rebel against the typecast Western ego-centric philosophy of psychology commanded by Sigmund Freud “*the self is the archetype of the psychical totality or the wholeness. It is not identical with the ego but placed somehow above or in other words in the midst between ego consciousness and unconscious (....) The realization of the Self is the ultimate goal of the individuation process (...) The Self is actually a conjunction (union) of the consciousness and unconsciousness.*” (Jung, 2020) It is this discovery of unconscious into consciousness that is understood in Indian field of ‘knowing’ as transcending the material world in the very state of existence, a state of *Bodh* or realization beyond ‘meaning,’ an abstraction which Kolte applied to his work *Saundarya bodhor* “aesthesis” which is realized between the capricious-vivacious unconscious of the child and spontaneous consciousness of the master, “*one should not search for the meaning in my painting but feel visual impact that lies beyond meaning. If any painting does not transcend the material world then it’s not a painting,*” writes Suman in a blog of Sutra Gallery (Suman, 2020).

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## Conclusion

Prabhakar Kolte liberates by liberating abstraction from the clutches of representational bounds constantly hovering in the Indian air and by doing so he reverses its intimidating rigidity into a magnanimous and bountiful boon as what Kapila Vatsyayan calls *Brahmananda*, the Absolute Bliss. In the individuation process of 'becoming' in the 'being' Kolte undergoes self-transformation. This self-transformation plays an integral role in dissolving 'subject-object,' to qualify as locus of 'lived experience' witnessing 'occurring in the instant' of 'essential abstraction.' Prabhakar Kolte revalidates abstraction by transcending boundaries towards attaining transcendental-sublime wherein the antagonism between 'abstract' and 'concrete' doesn't exist, he is a monk experiencing "nothingness" in the "here and now" significant avant-garde exceptional individual as 'Indian artist of the abstract' in the changing context of Indian Contemporary Art constantly contributing renewed visual lexicon. The 'perennial awareness' in Kolte qualifies him as an '*eternal immanent self*' as an 'ontic referent' for positing himself as an 'impersonal performer of abstraction.' Therefore, the minimalistic approach towards colour field becomes the locus for creating 'something out of nothing' in the 'here & now' for Prabhakar Kolte inspiring him to undergo the process of self-transformation that turns him into the monk of abstraction.

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