



maïa tēresa capacchione baba-dalī tarot 2010

Private life and artistic research coincide for Baba Anand so much so that his art changes and grows with him yet maintains a thin profound fil rouge that always makes it recognisable. And so all the names given to Baba so far – ‘The Indian Heir of Andy Warhol’, ‘Child of Pop art’, ‘The Symbol of Indian Kitsch’ – are all true, but since 1999 when he participated in his first collective art show in Delhi at Peter Nagy’s gallery, until to today, Baba’s work has gone beyond all this and ‘Anand-Dali Tarot’ is a testimony to this.

At the beginning of his ten-year career Baba won us over with his collages that he loves to define as ‘collisions’ in which he uses images of Raj Kapoor and Amitabh Bhachan and those of Lord Krishna or of the goddess Lakshmi making them three-dimensional thanks to the use of materials like cloth, feathers, paillettes. With time his work has evolved. With ‘Indochine’ (2007) Baba took total possession of his work, from the photo to the passe-partout as well as the frames, following the whole artistic process. Today ‘Anand-Dali Tarot’ the artistic process, the process of internal research has undergone taken a step further. If the exploration of the spiritual world has ever really been latent in Baba, in this last work, the charm of mysticism and esoterism that subtend every religion is the point of departure. Thus the mystery of Tarot and the passion for Salvador Dal are at the heart of this new work. Why has an artist who has accustomed us to the dazzling images of Bollywood stars and Hindu divinities ventured into the mysterious world of tarot? In reality, as we were saying, the passion for Dali and the occult are the other face of the same coin of Baba’s profound and complex personality that loves to look beyond the mere appearance of things.

Ten years ago a friend of Baba's gave him Dali's Universal Tarot: a deck of 78 tarot cards, in an elegant case, that sat on a shelf for a long time. One year ago Baba happened to pick this deck up and looked at it from a new perspective discovering its charm, beauty and complexity. Was it chance or destiny? Probably a road the artist had started down long ago and found in these cards a natural means of expression.

Baba's work focuses on the 22 cards in the deck that represent the Major Arcana. They are, in fact, the most important cards - those with the most symbolism and meaning. The Magician, Justice, the World, the Devil, the Lovers, Death, each of them contains numbers and letters in Hebrew and each is linked to a zodiac sign or a natural element - the Emperor to Earth, the World to Taurus, Temperance to Aquarius - images that could be dark and disquieting with their load of mystery become sumptuous, full of light and take on life thanks to their tri-dimensionality. As if Baba, before figures who demand respect and admiration, could not resist the temptation to pay them homage in the proper way for a Hindu by embellishing them with precious ornaments. Here, even the images of The Emperor, The Devil, Death, though they demand a sense of respect, magnificence and awe, become somehow more human and approachable. The expressive force of these figures is one of the aspects that caught Baba's imagination. Indeed, more than the contemplative force, these cards express action that is expressed through the subjects' posture and the vivid colours Dali used in the background or in the figures' clothing. Like the Popess who, leaning forward with gazing eyes, seems to be asking the reader the questions rather than the one being questioned.

In this way, Baba Anand has delved into this world of mysteries and symbols reinterpreting Dali's cards, repainting them and this is indeed the explicit reminder of the poetic expression in his previous work that

we know him for – decorating his work with paillettes, sequins embellishing them with 24-carat gold leaf. Unlike the time when he was defined as an exponent of Indian kitsch, Baba no longer tries to surprise the spectator with this refined, delicate and detailed work. In fact, his work is almost classical in style. Baba pays attention to every detail of the work from the painting to the collage, even the handmade embroidery. In the fine detailing in the decorative elements in his works, we find the coherence and the story of Baba's life – his passion for fashion that is transported into his art. The love for decoration, the use of precious materials are the elements that Baba succeeds in transforming into his artistic technique in an original way, be it when applied to the re-interpretation of Hindu divinities, Bollywood stars, portraits, Chinese dolls or even the tarot cards we see today.