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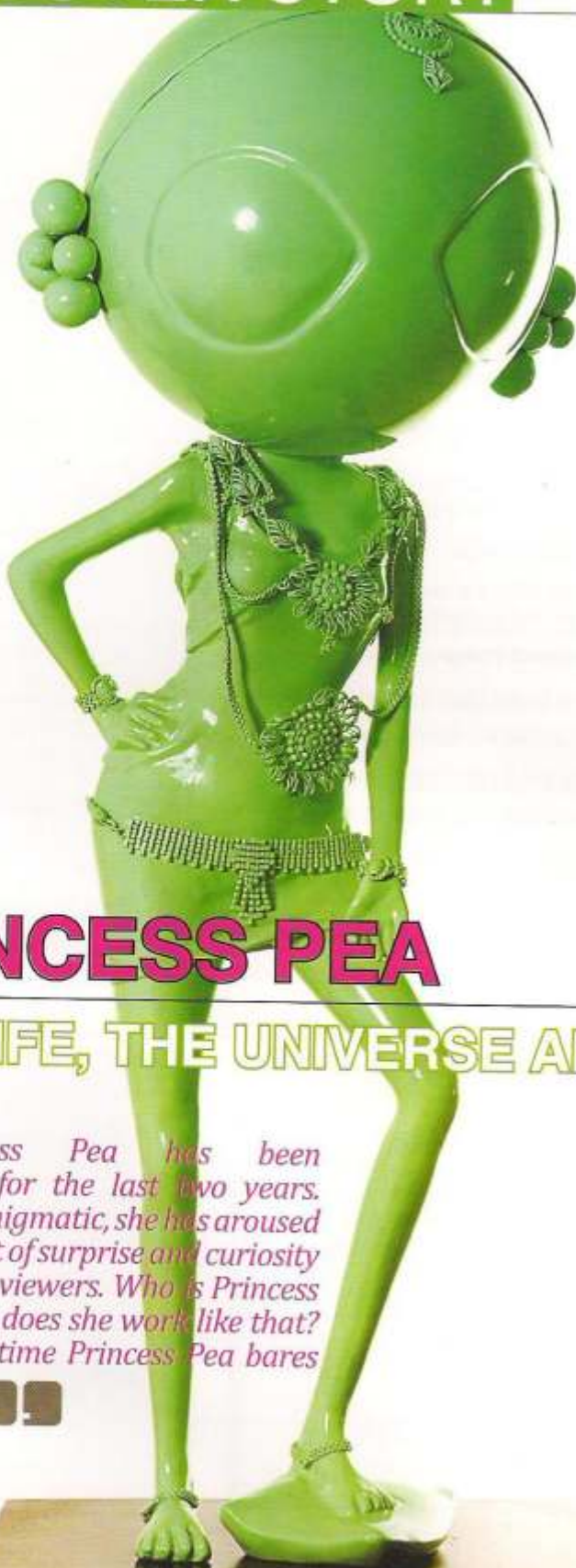
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PRINCESS PEA

CHHAYA INTERNATIONAL



PRINCESS PEA

THE LIFE, THE UNIVERSE AND THE CUPCAKES

“Princess Pea has been everywhere for the last two years. Playful but enigmatic, she has aroused a fair amount of surprise and curiosity amongst the viewers. Who is Princess Pea and why does she work like that? For the first time Princess Pea bares her secrets.”

A play may be captivating in performance but dull to read and so as an artist I find it hard to talk about my artistic practice. For me it sounds a little bit like going to the theatre to find actors just handing out copies of the script to the audience before taking a bow and going straight home.

I suppose I always hope that instead my art will speak for itself and without being simplistic that it approaches ideas in a straightforward manner. Perhaps before Princess Pea appeared my art sometimes I had tried too hard to be 'artistic' - it is natural for students fresh from art school to work like that but then this figure appeared again and again in my work and however hard I tried, she appeared in doodles and crept into my canvases, onto collages and even onto my studio wall...

COVER STORY



Princess doing sringar in the blue lounge, 2011



Princess Pea as Princess Elizabeth of Bavaria, 2011

From the beginning it was always about my appearance, being the thinnest I was always wondering what it meant to be beautiful or physically perfect. I was teased for being too thin for my head being too big and so the physical characteristics of Princess Pea evolved from me the artist and my relationship with my sister and formed for me the perfect alter ego. At the artistic and personal level it gave me a barrier from the real world and gave me the confidence to play with ideas freely. The works created from this basic premise portrays a world where Princess Pea is the star. The memorabilia series was my first attempt to follow this idea where images from childhood are used and distorted then ideas sprouted from there.

Life of Princess Pea:

I think that world of Princess Pea treads a fine line between the world of fairytale and the mundane; this balancing act is what I hope gives the work some depth. For me the best international contemporary art challenges perceptions about our preconceived notions of the self and so as Princess Pea I try in some small ways to raise my own questions (often without offering any answers!). As Pea I present to the world my alter ego in the form of a 'living doll' an anime style figure that inhabits a fictional world that passes quiet comments on the real.

So as Pea I try to question ideas of identity, notions of perfection, self worth, the conflict between traditional and contemporary roles of women in Indian society initially through the ever prevalent issues raised by the cult of the celebrity both in India and abroad. Angst always stayed with me from my childhood as I was persistently told that I was too thin and my arms too skinny or 'her head is too big'. The works create a contemporary dialogue with the past and everything is possible in the imaginary world so I turned the world on its head (literally) and made head enlargements the most desired of cosmetic surgeries! Silly I know but a wish fulfillment of sorts and equally at an artistic level it offered me a new tool to explore my environment in a way that worked for me.

This process is a part of my commentary on the changing norms and values of Indian society that appears throughout my works, most markedly in the Front Cover Series. In this world Pea poses on covers of top fashion magazines. Next to playing around with the concepts of popular culture, the works give an ironically intricate view on the science of perfection questioning the relationship between traditional and contemporary views on beauty. A Series of drawings called fact sheets evolved at a similar moment in the studio which shows mathematical formulas for the

ideal pea-like shape and proportions of head and facial features - perfect almond shaped eyes, with suggestions for cosmetic surgery to achieve Pea Perfection. Another sheet goes under the surface defining the anatomical layers of my alter ego starting with Aura Celebritalis, "a natural undefinable air of celebrity that often appears to glow at parties". Layer by layer, you can go all the way to the Emotional core full of fluid creative impulses without forgetting the fiber glass layer protecting oneself from the cruelty of life. I think these come from being bored in geography class at school but I think they make sense, I hope others respond and even feel tempted to create their own fact sheets!

From these simple ideas the work became categorized simple exercises - I suppose a little bit like homework for the evolving artist. Each idea is often quite simple but they get more complex when the different exercises start to fuse together. So as a summary:

Basic Premise or Exercise no- 1, Doodles and Drawings on my notebooks on magazines on everything including the walls - Big head small body!

Exercise no- 2, Princess Pea, Supercalifragalisticexpialidocious - a sneak preview of things to come and my first public appearance at the Delhi Art Summit - I shared cupcakes with my loyal subjects.



Princess Pea as Bani Thani, 2010

Exercise no- 3

The Front Cover Series that presents perfectly recreated cover shots of well-know Indian magazines for a fantasy fashion magazine 'Vague'. The images and text provide a tongue and cheek critique of the fashion industry and the ideals of beauty that they promote by comparing them to more the conservative values of earlier generations or ancient Indian texts and poems.

Exercise no- 4, Sculptures, dancing girl, Salabhanjika, two contemporary sculptures that are influenced by classical Indian sculpture but with Princess Pea as the ideal form of classical beauty.

Exercise no- 5, The fact sheets - A breakdown of the Pea proportions and emotional layers.

Exercise no- 6, The Miniature series. Princess Pea stars as the heroine in paintings inspired by the classical Indian miniature tradition

Exercise no- 7, Film, (8'clock; Video; ed. 1/3; 6:02 mins; 2011) that explores aspects of our sensory world through the eyes of Pea's loving agent and loyal friend her dog. The short film presents a dog's eye view of a blissful morning spent with Princess Pea. The dichromatic filter reflects the manner in which dogs see the world and the camera



Princess Pea blues

presents the rush and excitement of every aspect of a suburban garden explored by an inquisitive dog. The film provides a surprising insight into the loving world of a dog, where interest in different aspects of the garden is momentary but frequently re-explored. One is drawn into the sensory experience of the dog where the seen world is less clear but where the other senses of taste and smell become dominant. The central focus of the film even from Bob's perspective remains the figure of Pea who is lovingly greeted licked and sniffed.

Participating from the dog's perspective the audience can be surprised that the dog's view of life is far more intimate than we frequently assume. Princess Pea's hand, ankle or bare thighs are closely scrutinized by the dog in a manner that for human interaction would be considered semi erotic but for the dog is a normal experience of life. At times the dog appears to gaze off into space staring for prolonged moments at the sky, the grass or a plant and these moments of calm seem almost Zen-like in approach before there is a return to the rushed and excited exploration of the world around him.

Exercise: 08 (My most recent works) Portraits and Metamorphosis. The idea of perfection goes further in my

Metamorphosis series. A portrait was classically thought to be a statement of power, a projection of moral and physical attributes. In classical Indian art it is expressed by 'the pleasing aspect of a high forehead, the refinement expressed in a raised brow, the aristocratic curve of a nose and the severity or gentleness of a chin and jaw line'

These portraits of Pea are inspired by 19th century western counterparts and are painted in the very conventional style of miniatures on silk with natural pigments. The faces can be seen going through a metamorphosis from traditional to modern and then to a virtual world. The attempt here is to work on an historic image and document the process of evolution and distortion. The conceived images are result of a playful act to challenge perceived notions of proportion and perfection - an artistic process maybe that has just naturally evolved in my work.

To go back to the beginning I still feel uncomfortable talking about artistic process as ultimately I hope the works can be in dialogue with their audience without me - perhaps that's why I chose Princess Pea to have no mouth I like her to be silent but I hope that my work will say a lot! Let's see I am still young so is Pea we are all evolving. 🐶