FEATURE

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On a journey...

View of London from top of Tate Modern gallery

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By Susan Griffith-Jones, Exclusive

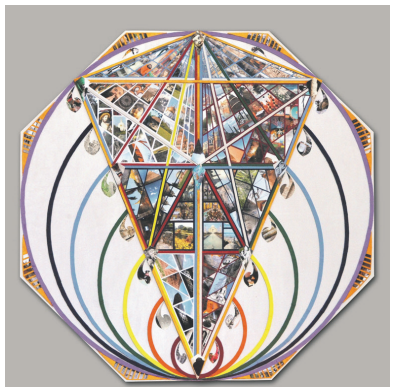
On the way back from Dartmoor, we stop at the hospital to see Mummy, who's settling in better now. She's semi-resigned to this limbo state and thinks it's a hotel. It's much more refreshing to visit her when she's relaxed. We enjoy a game of cards and I continue the random length of knitting I'm doing with odds of wool I've found in the cupboard at home. It's a way to keep me both rooted there as well as partially distracted from the reality of the situation and the angst it makes me feel.

One day I will do an exhibition here...!_ Susan at entrance to Tate gallery

Jamyang and I need to make a decision. Our flight back to India is scheduled for next week. Whether we're staying in England or not much depends on what's happening with Mummy and the hospital is not yet giving any indication of her discharge. The big question now is whether she'll be going 'home' or 'into a home'. I am not happy with either extreme of this unbalanced seesaw. To 'go home' means facing loneliness much of the time and largely ineffective care workers coming in now and again, who she refuses help from, so she goes downhill fast and 'going into a home' means losing every part of her own life structure, but at least receiving the care she needs.

Suddenly we get a message that she'll be transferring into respite care home for a month, so we know that our stay here is necessary. Another phase of limbo. I start to make other plans and delve deeper into follow-up work from my exhibition. One of our visitors, an Indian lady running a dance heritage group here in the UK, invites us to a cultural presentation and discussion on Indo-British relations at the House of Commons. Afterwards I meet each of the panel members, comprising Members of Parliament and the House of Lords, journalists, musicians etc… The main conversation is about keeping the Indian culture strong within the third/fourth generation of young British-born Indians, growing up in the UK.

I mention that my children are half-Indian, half-British and children like them are bridges between the two countries. I describe how Samuel's UCAS application form to study Politics and International Relations reads, "…If I walk into a room full of Indians, I know how they are feeling and the same goes for a room full of British…" Indeed, it is this quality of empathy that makes it possible for us to live successfully in the 'small world' of today. Otherwise, even though it's perhaps a chance to get to know each other better, being 'closer' to other is quite dangerous in the sense that we also have more chance of misunderstanding each other! Samuel is coming home from Peru in a few weeks' time and one journalist on the panel requests me to ask him to pen down his ideas about young British Indians keeping Indian culture, traditions and language alive, in an article.



Susan's latest Photo Collage Art piece, Key of Life

I get a call from Alexi, who's now in Bolivia, but will be coming home next week. This is an unexpected turn of events and very refreshing. Neither of them had initially been planning to come, but some force of attraction is bringing them across the Atlantic and back here for Christmas time. Right now we are in a soup of unsettled energy over here with Mummy going into respite care. Energy doesn't need to be in front of your face for you to feel it. They are connected to the situation, simple as that.

Jamyang and I attend the New Moon of Sagittarius evening at the London Kabbalah Centre. Good news, as the lady giving the astrological update says it's going to be a much calmer month than the last of Scorpio. I like the openness and genuine quality of the people and discussions here, always leaning towards helping others and suppressing egotistical attitudes, the bottom line of all spiritual traditions. However, I 'm interested to get deeper into the Kabbalistic meaning of the Ten Sefiroth, as this is a similar theme for my photo collage art piece, 'Key of Life'. I haven't replicated it in exactly the same way that Kabbalists would probably have done so, but it all boils down to a similar expression of the emerging and dissolving of matter within dimensions or layers of existence that we partake in, how much that space is real in the sense of actually appearing there and how much of what appears within it is but an illusion or trick of our own perception believing itself to have validity.

I need some time out and spend an afternoon at the Tate Modern gallery on London's Southbank. Someone has suggested that I approach them about doing an exhibition and my initial reaction is to say that my work is not good enough for such a location, just an automatic perceptive reaction embedded in my psyche that I'm coming to recognize more and more as nothing but an uncontrolled response. How many countless number of times do we have to be slighted, rejected, told to be more modest or realistic or whatever, for all those occasions to turn into low self-esteem and a sense of self –worthlessness. I smash it from my mind. I know it is not true. I need to exhibit my work to as many people as possible.

There are Indian Cultural Centres located in many countries of the world and The Nehru Centre is going to recommend my exhibition to other venues within their group. I am happy to explore the potential of my work within different environments, generally show it to a gathered crowd while exposing the meaning of the pictures. I am not pricing them in monetary terms right now, as by virtue of their very nature pointing to the fundamental meaning of our reality, they are priceless in terms of spiritual wealth. And ultimately, I know that I have to expand them into a much bigger sense than just showing them. They need to be experienced.

There's an immersive experience called 'Anywhen' going on in the Tate's downstairs Turbine Hall, designed to 'challenge your perception of Time and Space'. I lie down on the spread of carpet there and wrap myself in a provided blanket, absorbing myself into the scene. It's an absolutely massive space and I imagine my pictures as huge 3 dimensional holographic pieces with people walking inside them, experiencing their meaning rather than just reading about them on information boards and seeing them on flat surfaces. This is a massive leap into the future of my artwork and requires big investment, but if it is conceivable, then it must be feasible too, I just need to find the way. Afterwards, I check out the innovative exhibitions and show pieces in the rest of the gallery, and my photo collage art pieces twinkle onto the walls here, perfectly fitting in. But most importantly of all, in a huge high ceilinged room, I find a place for a very large version of 'The Circle of Immortality'. My imagination is running amok.

Heady and giddy with excitement, I ascend to what they call the 'viewing platform' on the 10th floor and encircle the 360 degree deck around the building, feeling a little vertigo as I peer directly over the edge to the pavement below. The sun is setting across the city, low winter light filling the deep blue sunset sky. There's a sense of mastery in the air. Layers and layers of history piled on top of each other lie before me, pointed buildings piercing the vastness of open space, and the simplicity of the river flowing in between scrapers and church spires, her inundation held back by floodgates. A cluttered-up patriarchal society of who can be taller, higher, better, the best, the proverbial male attempt to capture the soft and simple female elements is there, visibly written upon the face and in the skyline of London.

To be continued...

Susan's website may be found at www.pyramidkey.com

Nrityakala Dance Heritage Indian dance at House of Commons

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