

A Piece of Masterpiece: Contribution of Wasim Kapoor in The Field of Contemporary Art

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Abstract

This research paper is about the contemporary artist of Kolkata, Wasim Kapoor, and an analysis of his painting series, such as Rikshaws, Burkha, Prostitute, Victims and Silence, Adam and Eve, etc (Kolkata, 2004-2022). He was among the eminent artists of India who passed away recently on January 24, 2022. He was the son of Padam Shri recipient Salik Lucknawi, a renowned artist in his own right. Kapoor's upbringing in an artistic household and his early exposure to the art world significantly influenced his creative journey. He was a selfless activist who never backed off from injustice and fought for it himself. His paintings also focus on the subject of harsh reality and slavery in society. Wasim Kapoor always talked about the wrong things in society and how it should be ended. He believed in the young artists of today's generation for a change. Wasim Kapoor expresses his emotions through his paintings. His skilled hands have contributed a lot to this society. Some of his important series are the Burkha series, Jesus series, Prostitute series, Hand Rikshaw series, and Krishna series. There will be a proper discussion on his paintings' subject matter and concept. He said himself that 90% of his paintings are possessed by dark emotion and suffering. His childhood was full of illness and pain, which made him spend most of his childhood and teenage life in hospital beds. He started learning paintings in hospital beds. This paper is based on a personal interview with the Artist Wasim Kapoor on 1st March 2020, which was documented in mobile recording. It will explore the artist, his paintings, and the concepts behind his artworks.

Keywords: Wasim Kapoor, Artist, Contemporary Art, Indian Artist



Figure 1, 'Hand Rikshaw' series by Wasim Kapoor



Figure 2, "Mother Teresa" painting by Wasim Kapoor

Introduction

The subject matter of this research paper about the contemporary Indian artist Wasim Kapoor and his paintings as well as their concepts. We have gone through many volumes of art to gain knowledge but have not learned the proper definition of Indian contemporary art. Many art critics have already given different opinions on Indian Contemporary Art, which is why it's challenging for us to provide a specific description of Indian Contemporary Art. Contemporary is a universal term that shows creativity started in the past is still going on in the present and will be long-lasting in the future. Painting in the contemporary period depicts the emotions and feelings we observe around us. This mainly refers to the present time, when artworks change according to people's and society's habits. This research is about critically analyzing an Indian contemporary artist, Wasim Kapoor. In this research paper, I will discuss his paintings, subject, medium, title, purpose, size, and meaning according to the artist. There will also be an empirical study based on my opinions and observations. The central part of this research is the "Plate Discussion" on the painting series by Wasim Kapoor. Wasim Kapoor is the masterpiece and mastermind of contemporary art. He is a true artist who speaks through his paintings for the poor and helpless people. Wasim Kapoor also encourages young artists to paint more. If we observe the artworks of Wasim Kapoor, we can feel the expression and pain he has tried to show us. If we follow his artworks, we can think that the same thing is happening in our social environment. Wasim Kapoor's emotions are tied up with his paintings. Wasim Kapoor's subject matter of paintings is slightly different from other artists. His paintings mainly depict slavery; he paints with his own opinion against slavery and unnecessary struggle. He is against the torture of Indian girls or women, and he feels the torture against poor men and women who are helpless in society. In the "Burkha" series, he wanted to show us the struggle of Muslim women, which is very brutal and unnecessary. Wasim Kapoor's paintings have inspired many artists of Kolkata. His praise towards young artists and other artists' artworks made me feel great respect for him (Kapoor, 2020).

Short Biography:

Wasim Kapoor was born in 1951 in Lucknow, is a master artist, and has always remained the central figure on the Indian art scene. He was the son of Padam Shri Salik Lucknawi, who was a great poet. Wasim Kapoor got a diploma in Fine Art from The Indian College of Art and Draftsmanship. Wasim Kapoor's subjects of paintings are fascinating and essential in society. He is an artist with dark emotions of pain,

suffering, and loneliness. All of his paintings are related to slavery and Indian women involved. Wasim Kapoor has many series, including Christ's crucifixion, which earned him quite a fame. His victim series 1984 depicts the hardship of prostitutes who have been mistreated and abused. Among his famous paintings, the ubiquitous rickshaws of Kolkata reflect torment at the hands of a cruel society.

Through my eyes, I can see the profound impact of Wasim Kapoor's art on contemporary Indian society. His paintings serve as a powerful tool to raise awareness about the issues of slavery and darkness. I chose to study Kapoor's art because I was deeply inspired by his painting skills, concepts, and use of color. But more than that, his compassionate mind, which reflects the pain of the underprivileged, truly resonated with me. My interview with him further revealed his deep understanding of the suffering of Indian women and poor people, which he often portrays in his art. Wasim Kapoor is one of India's leading artists. He is a masterpiece that no doubt has existed. He took art to a different level of voice for the society. His subjects are not just unique; they are intriguing. Observations of Wasim Kapoor are exceptional from others. He observes the dark side of life and the dark sides of humanity, especially Indian women. His unique perspective and choice of subjects make his works a compelling study for any art enthusiast. Wasim Kapoor's composition is always bound by a free space or sky, which makes the subject more vulnerable. He is a true artist who thinks for others than himself. Wasim Kapoor does not run behind money. He always thinks about painting the bitter truth of society and his contribution to Indian art, which is essential and rare. It takes a lot of courage to stand against the injustice in today's environment. He was taught Painting accidentally in the hospital, where he stayed for 12 years, and painting changed his life forever. Wasim Kapoor is unsatisfied with his works and gets depressed by the thought that he cannot paint a good painting even after all these great paintings. He wanted to present a more meaningful and powerful painting to society and express his point of view.

Kolkata is a city and one of India's main art hubs. Wasim Kapoor was born in Lucknow but later practised his art in Kolkata. He has become the leading artist of Kolkata. Kolkata is also the center for strikes and raising voices against the wrong things. The influence of Kolkata in his paintings can be seen clearly. Many art galleries in Kolkata keep Wasim Kapoor's collection of art. He was a guest at almost every art event in Kolkata. He has exhibited his artworks in groups or solo for over 30 years (Kolkata, 2004-2022). Wasim Kapoor became popular in a short time for his excellent paintings. His motivational speech has inspired many young artists and children to practice art. His hands are skilled in painting. Wasim Kapoor's painting style was figurative and close to realistic. A few paintings can be termed as surreal. But most of his paintings are realistic. Wasim Kapoor used to paint women figures in Oil color and conte drawing. The colors of his paintings are almost the same in each painting. The colors are not very vibrant. Most of his paintings are in Black, Brown, and Ochre color. The paintings are monochromatic. Wasim Kapoor created a series of Conte drawings in which he painted the canvas with Yellow Ochre acrylic color and then drew with Conte. The painting background of Wasim Kapoor is filled with white and dark clouds, which give it a surrealist effect. Also, the light and dark effects get closure to the Dutch paintings, and he admits that his paintings are a little inspired by the Dutch artists (Kolkata, 2004-2022). Another interesting fact about Wasim Kapoor is that his outfit is always "All black": a black jacket, black kurta, black shirt, black coat, and pants (Kolkata, 2004-2022).

Eminent artist Wasim Kapoor has received many awards and respect for his skilled paintings, such as the Shiromoni Award by Asian Paints in 1985, the Birla Academy of Art & Culture, and the Academy of Fine Arts (Kolkata, 2004-2022).



Figure 3, Picture of Wasim Kapoor painting in his studio

Plate Discussion

Prostitute series, oil on canvas by Wasim Kapoor, 2007 [4.6 ft. x 4 ft.]

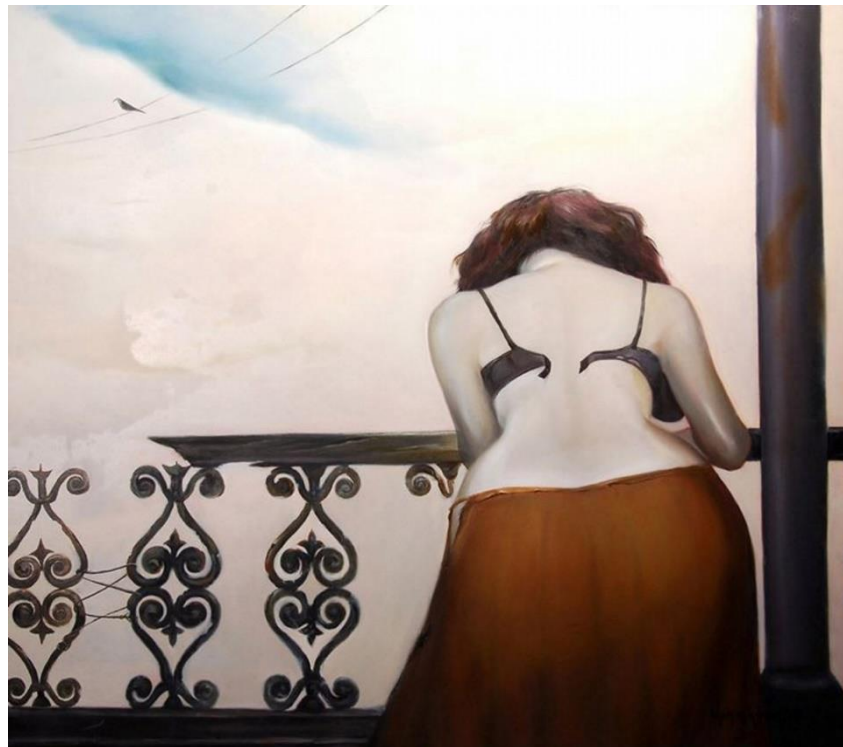


Figure 4, the "Prostitute" series by Wasim Kapoor

This painting is exceptional and excellent among all other series by Wasim Kapoor. The title of this painting is "Victim VII". The subject of this painting is dedicated to the prostitutes. Prostitutes play a significant role in our society, yet nobody in this society openly accepts them or respects them. The untold

story of every prostitute remains hidden from the ancient period. Even in the Indus Valley Civilization, the excavation of Dancing Girl is believed to be the symbol of prostitutes of that period (Academy, n.d.). The color combination of this oil painting is slightly brownish towards a monochrome style, creating an unbounded mysticism. The curves of this female body in the painting show the beauty of the creator. The subject of this painting describes a heartbroken woman standing by the railings of an upper floor. Suppose one looks at the sky background of the painting. In that case, they can witness a small bird sitting on the electrical wire, representing the city scenario and giving it a symmetrical yet well-balanced space division. The light brown clouds in the blue sky behind the figure hold the total weight of this painting. This background and spacing make it similar to the paintings of surrealism. The folds of her skirt were painted with a genuinely skilled hand. It is appreciable how Wasim Kapoor captures the dark side of their life in this extraordinary work; after releasing this artwork, Kapoor has to face the fools who argue about Indian culture. Indian citizens always argue about the Indian culture as opposed to “sex”. However, the origin of Kamasutra and Khajuraho sculptures is also from India. People all over the world know India for the extraordinary erotic sculptures of Khajuraho temples and the “Kamasutra” treaty written by sage Vatsayana (Anand). Wasim Kapoor succeeded in making the audience feel the same as himself. His beliefs have opened some people’s blindfolds. This beautiful prostitute series is one of Wasim Kapoor’s favourites (Staff, n.d.).

This artwork also belongs to The Prostitute series of Wasim Kapoor. In this painting, a woman is sitting backwards on a broken chair with her head down, showing the upper part of her head symbolizing the down social status of the prostitutes. The oil color painting is monochromatic in brownish mysticism. The background of the painting seems like a sky full of cotton clouds. The artist painted it with a lighter shade of brown and highlights by mixing flake white

into it. The figure in this painting is wearing transparent attire.

Here, the realistic skills of the artist can be seen. As shown in the image, Wasim Kapoor is an excellent contemporary artist who creates proportionate realistic figures.



Figure 5, "Prostitute" series by Wasim Kapoor

Untitled, conte on canvas by Wasim Kapoor, 2019. [24" x 24" inches]



Figure 6, "Untitled" conte drawing by Wasim Kapoor

This painting was done by Conte on canvas by Wasim Kapoor in 2019. It is a human female body, as recognized by its nude posture. He seems to have done many paintings about the infinite untold pain of women, mostly Indian women. The current society of Indians created some myths and beliefs, which has become the reason for Indian Women's suffering. In this painting, he shows every woman's dream to feel free on earth. This woman's expression in Wasim Kapoor's painting depicts the feeling of peace and satisfaction. One can see the relaxation of the face made of Conte leads to unrealistic happiness for any girl. The look of this art piece shows a moist air blowing in underneath the sky, which seems to appear similarly in other paintings of Wasim Kapoor. By observing the part of the hair in this painting, one can quickly get the feeling of blowing. The fresh air of freedom of every woman's dream is still lacking in India. Here, Wasim Kapoor's signature plays a significant role in balancing the whole composition.



Figure 7, "Burkha" series by Wasim Kapoor

Burkha series, Oil on Canvas by Wasim Kapoor, 1983. [5ft. x 4ft.] This masterpiece painting of Wasim Kapoor merely represents the tropical rituals of Muslim society, where every married woman has to wear a Burkha for the sake of their rituals. There is no doubt about the medium; it is of oil and excellent study with an excessive flow of concept.

In this painting, there are two figures of women of different ages, the older figure holding the younger girl to maintain the same rituals as her. It's passed down from generation to generation. The Painting is narrative, and the concept is clearly visible to its audience. Color balance is extraordinary, just like the other pieces of art. It's also a monochromatic painting with black, white, blue and grey shades. As always, there is an open space; a peaceful sky full of clouds refers to the freedom beyond those women's catch.

Wasim Kapoor personally discussed the subject of this painting during the interview. He said that this painting leads to great danger when released; the whole Muslim society cursed him, and he managed to make them understand the pain every Muslim woman faces in their daily life. Wasim Kapoor has an old friend who has discussed her problems and begs for imprisonment. These women have to wear "Burkha" even in a hot region. The background color of this painting is darkened down. It creates heaviness in the

painting. It is visible that the girl child is wearing a white “Burkha”, creating dominance or a centre of attraction in the painting.

Rikshaw, oil on canvas by Wasim Kapoor, 2007. [66” x 54” inches]



Figure 8, "Hand Rikshaw" series by Wasim Kapoor

This painting of Wasim Kapoor has received many awards and respect. Hand Rikshaw is a kind of symbol of Kolkata. Hand rikshaws were mostly available for transportation on Kolkata city roads. But nowadays, many inventions have taken place and developed the vehicle. The rikshaw puller abandons the rikshaw, his livelihood, for quicker and less strenuous means of transportation; this intense Wasim Kapoor's painting talks about the loss of a slice of culture and a class of individuals who once dotted the roads of all cities in the country. The sensitivity of this painting is shown in the single ghungroo bead, which pierced through the silence of those roads of yesterday. The main subject of this painting is not The Rikshaw, which is painted oil on canvas, but the central theme of this painting depicts the suffering of those still in the hand rickshaw business in Kolkata. The Artist wants this activity to stop as soon as possible. He could not take the pain of those carrying their passengers with bare hands when other developed rikshaws were available at almost the same price. And then, the passenger argued about lowering the price. Artist Wasim Kapoor is irritated with this idea of the people. The People's artist Wasim

Kapoor never left any area to think and raise his voice for the people who are suffering under the so-called happy society (CHATTOPADHYAY, 2022). The audience can observe the free space painted as a cloudy sky, which is the speciality of Artist Wasim Kapoor. Wasim Kapoor has continued this Rikshaw subject for a long time. He wanted this change in the streets of Kolkata to band hand rikshaw.

Like the other paintings of Wasim Kapoor, this is also a monochromatic painting painted with black and white shades. A surrealist behaviour can be seen in this piece by Wasim Kapoor. The centre subject of this painting is the hand rikshaw, which seems to be falling apart, creating an illusion of shaking. A ghungroo bead is hanging from an ordinary stick. The cloudy sky background gives the space a look of a scene beyond imagination. At the bottom of the painting, tiles like Kolkata streets are painted with a darker tone of grey to balance this painting. It's one of the paintings in the "hand-rikshaw" series. There are more of this popular series by Wasim Kapoor.

Krishna, oil on canvas by Wasim Kapoor, [36" x 60"]



Figure 9, "Radha-Krishna" painting by Wasim Kapoor



Figure 10, "Radha-Krishna" painting by Wasim Kapoor



Figure 11, "Radha-Krishna" painting by Wasim Kapoor

This subject of Wasim Kapoor is slightly different from his other paintings. Wasim Kapoor painted some mythological paintings of Krishna and Radha; this is one of them. Krishna was the god of love and seduction in Hindu mythology. He was known to be Arjuna's companion when Pandavas went to war. The whole Bhagwat Gita is full of wise sayings of Krishna to Arjuna while he was fighting the battle with the Kauravas. However, Krishna is the god of Love and Romance, and when he plays the flute, the Gopikas who took after the cows would leave what they were doing to come and listen to Krishna playing the flute. Here, Wasim Kapoor beautifully captures Krishna with his love, Radha. Here in the painting, the color combination becomes very interesting. There is not much variety in color, but the way Wasim Kapoor applies color makes it look mysterious. The artist expresses the feeling of the flute playing so that the visitors can even listen to Krishna playing the flute in this painting. Wasim Kapoor handles the subject in a very contemporary manner, unlike the ornate rendition of Krishna & Radha that come across. He used golden color for only part of the flute, bangles, and leaves, which creates an intense romanticism. The hairs of Krishna are blowing to the other side of the flute, giving it balance and smoothness when watching. The artist played with the clouds and gave it the most of it. This painting series is not monochromatic like the other series; the audience can see a vibrant use of blue and golden, which totally breaks the monochrome environment.

Jesus, oil on canvas by Wasim Kapoor, 2016 [5.5 ft. x 5.5 ft.]

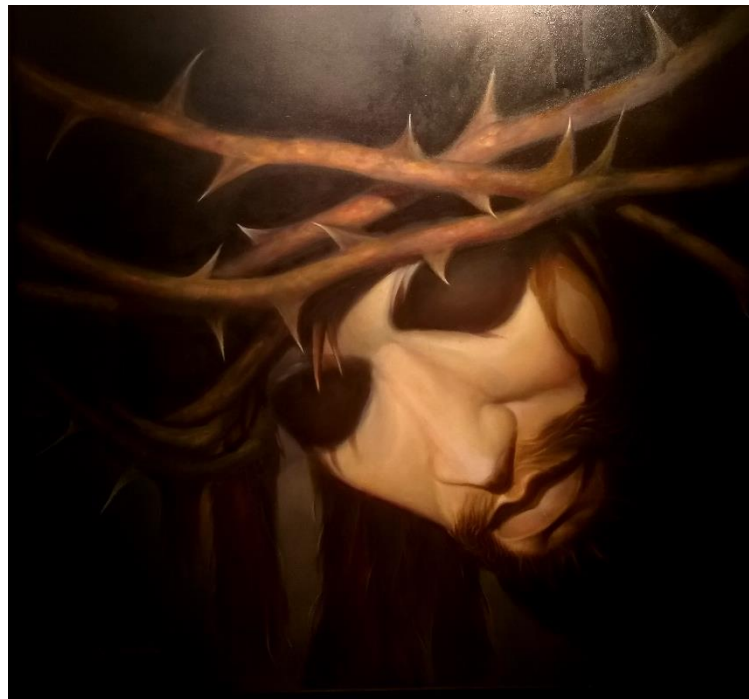


Figure 12, "Jesus" series by Wasim Kapoor

Jesus is identified on the canvas by the barbed wire that crosses his forehead and eyes. Below, I will provide some quotes from Wasim Kapoor regarding his Jesus series.

"My Jesus will, of course, also not be religious. He represents suffering to me. But such suffering cannot be separated from rage. Anger directed against the general deterioration of ethics and morals. However, he stands straight and silently carries everything—a picture of suffering before which all internal conflict vanishes.

The subjects of his paintings show flexibility in religious thinking, which proves the artist's intelligence and knowledge in a society of uneducated beliefs. The artist used his favourite color black, in the darkest way possible. He gives the spotlight to Jesus's face, darkening his eyes to show the pain Jesus is bearing. There are thick wires on his head of a brownish color with a yellow-ochre touch. Wasim Kapoor realistically paints the face, uplifting the prominent lips and the top of the nose and cheeks with light shading,

Jesus, Conte on canvas by Wasim Kapoor, 2019, [24" x 24"]



Figure 13, "Jesus" in conte drawing by Wasim Kapoor

This Conte drawing is from Wasim Kapoor's Jesus series. This series is all about the unnecessary torturing of innocent lives who have done no harm to others yet are suffering from the torture. One can observe the portrait of Jesus bounded with barbed wire. Here, Wasim Kapoor drew the same character as Jesus to depict the ordinary person of our society living in almost the same situation in a similar position as Jesus. The character is innocent but trapped in society's dirty politics, leading him to suffer and feel immense pain like the mythological character Jesus.

There is a yellow overcoat underneath the subject, which makes the subject come out loudly. Observation for this piece seems to be a skilled drawing of Wasim Kapoor, who makes the area of eyes a dark shadow to represent the blindness of the torture that happens to humankind. This piece is one of the famous artworks of Wasim Kapoor's conte drawing on acrylic coated canvas.

Duet woman, conte on canvas by Wasim Kapoor, 2019. [41" x 41"]



Figure 14, Duet Women, conte on canvas by Wasim Kapoor

This piece by Wasim Kapoor is a recent work of art, Conte on canvas. Wasim Kapoor's painting subject is slightly different. He paints the unwanted tolerance of innocent lives, and in the above painting, Wasim Kapoor represents a duet woman using two types of characteristics possessed by a single person. Here, Wasim Kapoor uses brown conte to draw this piece. The space division for this conte sketch is exceptional in my eyes. My sharp observation of this painting tells me it may go beyond two different characteristics. Instead, it leads to two different personalities surrounded by distinguished situations, even though women have mostly become the prey for slavery and pain. As Wasim Kapoor mainly depicts the dark side, this must be for the same reason. And as usual, there is an open atmosphere in this conte drawing. Wasim Kapoor shows three stripes of horizontal and vertical to compose this piece. Just like the Jesus series he

uses dark eyes to represent the pain. Here wavy hairs play a great role in creating the interesting rhythmic composition and smoothness in the sketch. As usual the signature at the bottom of this piece is balancing the whole composition (Kapoor, 2020).

Conclusion



Figure 15, "Untitled" painting by Wasim Kapoor

Wasim Kapoor is truly remarkable in the field of Contemporary Art. He is a compassionate and emotional artist, and I am honored to have made this research paper about Wasim Kapoor. While doing this research, I learned more about Wasim Kapoor and got inspired by his extraordinary paintings, which must be viral; his concepts and compositions are gorgeous and purposeful. He has a purpose in life, and his existence is now clear to me (Kapoor, 2020). He also got so many awards for his masterpieces. Artist Wasim Kapoor experienced the negative emotions of loneliness, agony, depression, and suffering. All his subjects, whether simple Indian women involved in daily tasks, Jesus Christ, or even the ubiquitous Kolkata rickshaws, reflect angst & torment at the hands of a cruel society. For that reason, he had to face dominant religious people who troubled him with his painting subjects that attacked the unnecessary religious rituals. He says, "Ninety percent of my work is about the suffering of women and their problems. "Although he humorously believes it's because of the underworld-like way he dresses ("All my life my attire has always been black. I wear a black coat, black jacket, black kurta & and carry a silver stick.") Others think that it's the controversies he seems to be ever-embroiled in from his portrayal of the Burkha-clad women to supposedly agreeing to paint a nude portrait of the actress. His last painting was a portrait of Kaifi Azmi. Wasim Kapoor is known as People's painter because he had a way of uplifting the actual sufferings of people (CHATTOPADHYAY, 2022) (Kapoor, 2020).

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