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## *The City and Popular Culture*

**EXHIBITION: Avantika Bawa's graphics on display at the IIC—May 9 to 12, 1996.**

**T**he city, according to modern conventions, is the centre of trade. It is a place filled with various objects, images, sounds and pollution. Advertisements and vehicular traffic are the most expressive signs of a city. Along with it, a pop culture has developed. Superficiality — in other words, living a life according to the fluctuations in the sensex and ephemeral fashions, guides city life. While engaged in this cultural network, a self-conscious human being either has to respond to it critically or playfully.

Avantika Bawa, a young artist from Delhi, takes the typical post-modern attitude of playfulness in her responses to city realities. By making a parody of advertisements, MTV imagery and making use of the comic book picture-style in an expressionist language, the artist gives a personal reading of realities.

Images of snails, octopus, dogs, caterpillars etc., in these works work symbolically. They suggest the political or cultural scenario rather cynically. For instance, her four works under the title *Wishes and Vices* deal with our

manner of conserving nature, and the modern dish (antennae) disease which spread with the emergence of various TV companies.

Even though Avantika uses pop imagery she denies the super realism of Pop Art. A major set of her images

There is no difference between the frame and the pictorial surface in the paintings of this artist. That means there is no exterior or interior, nor is there any centre or periphery. What we see is a variety of images in different colours and forms freely floating.



refer to the city culture that changed after the liberalisation of the economy. Now we feel the vitality of water through the bottles of mineral water, and thirst through the bottles of Coca-Cola and Pepsi. This is a wild world as we see it in comic books.

The artist has used straightforward compositional means and her colours are impulsive.

— M RAMACHANDRAN

(reprinted from The Statesman)