

# Memories, dreams and maps

*An exhibition by Josephine Balakrishnan*

By SHABNA CADER

In eastern culture a dream can be a map; the dreamer a vehicle of the Divine. In western culture dreams refer to the psyche's expression of the ego. In "Memories, Maps and Dreams," Josephine Balakrishnan deciphers the mystery of dreams. We see the western symbols that unlock the psyche and the messages. Balakrishnan ponders, "Do we live to dream, or dream to live?" The prints and paintings in this body of work address the question, "Why do we need maps when we always have a thread of memories and a myriad of dreams to lead us through each passage?" With colours and birds flying, this show provides not only maps of moons, images of lovers walking, and references to the past and future, but seeks to reveal our own internal maps.

She's talking about dreams by the time I rush and make my way towards the Barefoot Gallery. I'm half an hour late and I know I've missed bits and pieces of explanations of her current exhibition. I'm somewhat dismal about it and then Nazreen Sansoni adds that what I missed was very interesting. I want to sulk but it's hard to do so with someone as bright and chirpy as Josephine Balakrishnan. All I need to hear are a few words on how Egyptians deciphered their dreams and I am hooked into the conversation; woven tales of how dreams are made, what they mean (if they mean anything at all) and what comes next.

## The unconscious

When it comes to dreams, they are mostly what is in your unconscious mind. They are thoughts that are hidden but manifest somewhere in the mind and come alive when the mind is at rest. Therefore I also believe that what you dream might be of old memories, something you've seen, of someplace you've been to, of someone you've met and something you might have heard. They are fused along with fresh ideas, people, places, words and sounds that are also unfamiliar and new. That is the beauty of dreaming dreams and the connection between dreams and memories. So I ask her if she



are often taken into consideration and deciphered.

She talks of a book she was reading on Egypt and how Imams were called to decipher whether the dreams are divine or not. Well who is to know if birds falling out of the sky or a thousand fish dying in the sea have anything to do with God or a higher power or not?

So what do dreams have to do with maps? "One painting looks like I've made a cartoon, a bad cartoon but I've drawn on top of a map. Well, there are a couple things to do with maps; a map is not a territory. You think that a map is something but actually a map is what you believe it is. The most horrible thing

continues; we talk of what happens when she has to go to someplace unknown and obviously will need a map and she admits I do have a point. I ask her of her background and when she started painting and she says that it was her mother who stuck a crayon in her hand when she was little. She is an artist who has dabbled in all forms of artistic expression including video and sculpture.

There are plenty of symbols, colour and a strong sense of underlying means of expression in her work. On her website she says her work encompasses a story, a narration that needs a sense of more than one culture to decipher and she stays true to that. Each painting is a narration that tells a story.

One of her works titled 'maps and dreams' has the face of a woman, a handful of birds, a tiny human figure on the top right corner and a map on the background. I know that the colour blue in one's mind personifies a sense of balance. Often when people meditate they say that the mind radiates an aura that is blue. In the painting, the connection, the sense of balance lies between the dream itself and the map.

'The bird of freedom' bears no