

A. S. Chan

KALA SUTRA

2015 | HONG KONG

A Social Perspective of Visual Connectivity





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Curated by **Arun Ghose**



CURATOR'S NOTE

A SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE OF VISUAL CONNECTIVITY

A universally accepted definition of art hardly exists. No one however disagrees with the fact that it often results out of particular application of human skill that could produce elements of beauty. Question however remains on the comparative assessment of beauty or its absence, a concept that varies from person to person, from one society to another and gets complicated even further when one takes the concept to a much wider spectrum to encompass various eras of human civilisation.

In sharp contrast to the chaotic variation in opinion, on the subject of beauty, one finds a genuine unanimity on the need of art. Art in life is like salt in cooking. A pinch of salt more, or less, spoils the taste of food. The same is equally true about the role played by art,

with a difference. Unlike salt we do not usually recognize its omnipresent role in daily life. This unforced ignorance about art around us, however, seldom prevents any to succumb to the supremacy of art in daily life and voluntarily (also universally), agree to be ruled by it while remaining unaware of art controlling their life-style. Even a little mismatch in the sartorial preferences, for instance, compels one to spend hours in front of their wardrobes to set things right. An unseen yet omnipresent inner voice always control all human activities including how to dress, talk to others of unequal age and rank, and even decorate our interiors to feel happy. These rules are neither seen nor written in textbooks to copy from and yet they manage to control living standards of human beings, unseen

and inescapable. Another thing to be aware of is the fact that art reflects and belongs to the period and culture from which it is spawned.

For a group of artists, academics, and philosophers from Moscow and St. Petersburg, the war against the Russian government started nearly a decade ago, when they formed an underground art club called Voina (which means “the war”). Their motto was to declare war against police abuse and the government’s highly publicized authoritarian methods. Internationally, Voina’s ideology—defined by the group as “an anti-consumerist lifestyle marked by alternative living strategies, such as dumpster diving”—is publicized more significantly worldwide than it is at home. Giant “Voina Wanted” banners

can be seen in the U.S., the U.K., and Germany. As German film director Artur Zmijewski, a Voina supporter at the Berlin Biennale, put it, “Art is free, and Voina activists are not just saying words, they act to prove the idea.” Last November, the Berlin Biennale appointed Voina’s activists, including Vorotnikov, Sokol, and their son, as the festival’s curators. That, of course, was before they burnt the police truck.

A radical example of art in contemporary life would be a series of protests that this group of artists in Russia today are staging to air their protests against their own Government in power. They recently did put a phallus on a bridge that opens up from its middle. Their idea was to project the rising bridge, with a giant phallus stuck

on it, to appear as the organic erection of a brutal genitalia representing the oppressive elements of the ruling elite. They even went out and burnt a police truck on New Year's Eve to represent their gift to fellow artists languishing behind the bars in the midst of a festive season. Can they truly call their protests art is a question beyond the scope of the present discussion. What is of importance is to note how art encompasses our life, daily.

Art that shocks one's perception of things around him or her and attempts at channelisation of slumbering minds into guided pathway of radical thought, like burning of a truck for instance, surely lies at the extreme opposite to art created following the age-old accepted formats. What distinguishes the two extremes lies solely on the visual forms adopted and almost exclusively

on the methods used and materials employed to achieve the desired outer appearances. In spite of employing such an extreme degree of visual differences one seldom fail to notice the existence of a chain of thought that threads the two together. A protest is a protest, no matter how it is painted or assembled, or perhaps staged as in VOINA's burning of police trucks. Seneka Senanayake's lyrical depiction of the beauty of Sri Lankan Rain Forest also voices its protest against the perpetrators of environmental pollution with no less intensity though garbed in a language that do not aim to create any element of shock. Artistic expression is mystical and sacred but these are not arbitrary. All work of art bears a conscious, and often pre-meditated, statement and that statement is made by inventing images. There is no art without images and the purpose of images in art is to

visualise such statements in the form of visual symbolism – aimed at clarifying the unknown by means of the known. And that in essence is the real meaning of KALA-SUTRA, now being visualised in a series of exhibitions to show-case its various facets. The present edition of Kala-Sutra aims to examine the social perspective underlying its visual connectivity.

Urban sophistication and rural simplicity, complexity of pictorial metaphor and readability of painted text, dimensional presence of elegantly crafted sculpture in the art of Satish Gujral, and liquid distillation of animated consciousness in the art of Neeraj Goswami, along with the works of ten more chosen to represent the best in the sub-continent, constitutes the present version of Kala-Sutra. They, with their varied age-profile

and equally divergent technique to painterly illustrate the issue of symbolic representation of observed reality in different idiosyncratic style that shares a common link with the art of their ancestors. Hovering between docufiction and intimism, this curated assemblage positions the contemporary art of Southeast Asia in its true perspective. Artists on show are, besides M F Husain and Satish Gujral, Seneka Senanayake and Thota Vaikuntam, Laxma Goud and Lalu Prasad Shaw, Paresh Maity and Neeraj Goswami, Sujata Bajaj and Jayasri Burman, Manu Parekh and Maya Burman. Our relationship with the object is one reality but their juxtapositions of objects (and eventual idiosyncratically creative transformation in line and colour) are aimed to take the viewer to another dimension. May be this is the true vocation of art.

A brief re-look at the twelve artists chosen for this show should start with none other than Maqbool Fida Husain. I knew him when he was alive and kicking and was proclaiming to a reporter of the Daily Telegraph in London "they can put me in jail, I shall still create". Arguably the most famous painter in Indian Contemporary Art, he had developed his sweeping brushstrokes and bright palette from his early experience as a street-artist when he painted movie billboards in Mumbai with a can of paint in hand and a ladder on his frail shoulder. He had playfully exploited the formal lessons of European modernists like Cézanne and Matisse, and utilised the same along with the simplification that came to his art through billboard advertising in which direct communication of intended message is a must. The New York Times, in their obituary notice, had described

him as 'an artist whose modernist reinterpretations of mythic and religious subjects made him India's most famous painter'. His art has 'converged' a lot of India's artistic heritage and what emerged had retained the vigour of story-telling in idiosyncratic fashion. "I am like a folk painter," he told the BBC. "Paint and move ahead."

Art, like music, eventually clothed itself to assume the role of a coded language and communicable only to those initiated in decoding such hieroglyphics in the same way the acceptance of classical music depends upon the training of the ear to discern its musical excellence. Abstract art, in the West, mainly grew out of the need to develop a personalized image of spiritual feelings that, in its core, is essentially formless. Something similar also happened in Neeraj's art. For him

subjects do not matter. What matters are the complete visual form he manages to visualise and the visual experience of that form that keeps him engaged in the process. Titles are given after he complete the works just to facilitate the viewer to connect with the work of Art so that he or she can associate themselves with the painting and then experience the hidden meaning in the form. Spirituality, in its core, is uniquely personal and conceptually abstract. Neeraj, in his art, has successfully found a way to incorporate his feelings in terms of pictorial metaphor. Heritage of art, past and present and from the East and the West, has converged in his subconscious out of which surfaces such forms, intensely spiritual with timeless continuity.

Laxma Goud was born 1940 in Hyderabad and Vaikuntam followed him two years later, in 1942. The two

had a few things in common like going to the same art school in Hyderabad followed by advanced studies at the M S University and sharing the privilege of being tutored by K G Subramanyan in Baroda. Laxma has excelled in almost all branches of art and has recently moved into sculpture with his series of high-reliefs in multiple-hued terracotta, often transformed into bronzes of limited editions. His fame however rests almost entirely on his graphic rendering of contemporary life in and around the rural India, mostly near his home town. He, in his art, had successfully injected a broader, philosophical yet personal, perspective of life. His ability to raise a particular individual to the level of a contemporary visual icon, as is evident in his clever infusion of humour in the projected relationship of a woman with her pet goat and thereby generalizing the role of procreation in nature, has positioned his art at an unique niche in

contemporary Indian art. His deft use of a linear mode of representation in lyrically graphic lines also offers adequate visual link to art of India in the past.

Vaikuntam, hailing from a similar background, has also highlighted the ethnic quality of life around him but has developed a unique mode of representation by accentuating the design-quality of caste-marks and ethnic attire of local populace. He utilizes his signature-like style of representation and elevates the status of people he paints into a deistic level, like the positioning of a rural couple to mirror the accepted imagery of the proverbial union of Sri Radhika with Lord Krishna, happily playing their hand-made bamboo flute. Staging of dramatic art in rural India, with men acting as women using distinctive yet colourful make-up, thus acquires an altogether different meaning in his art and, at the same time,

reveals the continuity of artistic tradition from rural hinterland to urbanised India converting tradition into modernity.

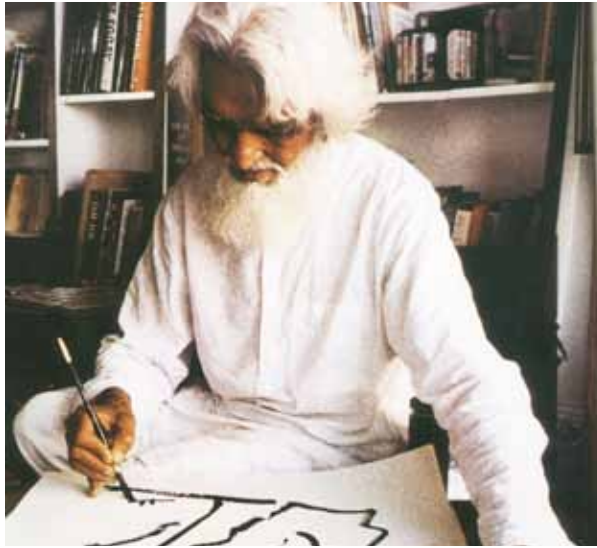
Lalu Shaw, yet another veteran who had been experimenting, and successfully creating, a visual walkway in which one can travel back and forth from past into present, between tradition and modernity, offers additional visual proof of the surmise that brings the art of the twelve selected artists into a cohesive statement. Company School of art that developed in pre-independent India, along with the traditionally simplified format of Kalighat Pat and vintage photography in nineteenth century India (in which photographers often doubled their role as artists by touching up the images both in the negative and on the bromide print itself), have 'conflued' into Shaw's art with an uniqueness seldom witnessed before.

Maya Burman, in Paris differs from the rest in both their chosen style of depiction and the things they wished to depict. A personal dream-scape, in the delicate stylization of Maya, attempts to draw the viewer into its spiritual depth, something that is missing in the conflict-ridden life in an urban metropolis. Her art simultaneously offers an eyeful of mental bliss while, at the same time, makes one aware of the same flora and fauna vanishing out of our life with ever-increasing greed of modern civilization.

A painting is essentially static. Dynamism lies in the way it is painted. Art of Paresh Maity is a classic example of how best to unite the sublime bliss of rural lifestyle, with joy of Nature as the static foundation in their life, and yet visualise the dynamic penetration of urbanity in rural life. Sujata Bajaj, living and working in Paris, is like a tree with aerial roots firmly planted in diversified

soil. The sap that flows in from such a varied degree of essential nutrient gets transformed into a comprehensible mix and results in a fruit in which the taste of visual connectivity remains intentionally unmistakable. Jayasri Burman offers the same ideals but manages to elevate her art into a special status resulting in an urbanised folk idiom all her own while Manu Parekh approaches the same from its visual opposite. Each artist in this show serves as a visual link that forms a continuous chain in which dynamic rhythm vibrates with static vigour. Continuity of this thread re-establishes the strength and Indianness of Indian art, today.

Arun Ghose / Kolkata



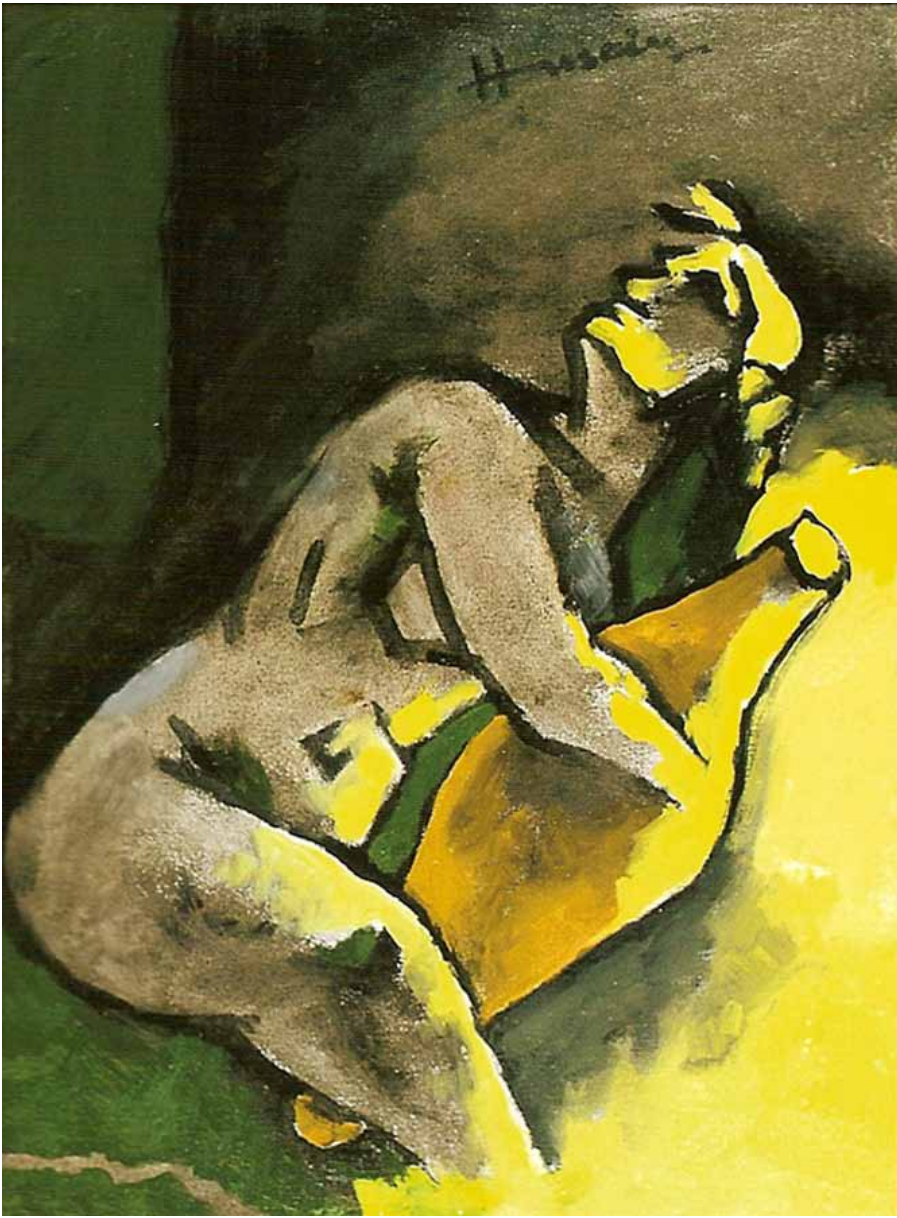
Maqbool Fida Husain

1915 - 2011

Maqbool Fida Husain is one of the most celebrated artist in International arena from India in the twentieth century who continued to reign supreme well into the twenty first. His ability to create pictorial metaphor at will, coupled with his mesmerising ability to draw and paint in any medium, had always placed his name in the forefront of Indian contemporary art. Museums and internationally acclaimed collectors chased him with lucrative offers to paint for them. He was also an avid film-maker and had directed several films that received critical acclaim in various platforms of world cinema.



M F Husain | Untitled | Oil on Canvas | 24" x 30" | 2003



M F Husain | Untitled | Oil on Canvas Board | 30" x 20" | 2003



M F Husain | Untitled | Oil on Canvas | 24" x 20" | 2003



Satish Gujral

b. 1925

Painter, Sculptor, Muralist, Architect & Writer Satish Gujral may easily be described as a living legend; one of the few who have consistently dominated the art scene in India during the entire post independent era. He was born in 1925 and, during 1944-47, came into contact with the Progressive Artists Group in Bombay, which included S.H. Raza, F.N. Souza, P.N. Mago, Jhangir Sabavala, M.F. Husain and others. Satish Gujral could not accept the PAG's total adaptation of techniques and vocabulary of European Expressionism and Cubism. He searched for a kind of modernism rooted in Indian traditions.



Satish Gujral | Untitled | Acrylic and Gold on Canvas | 36" x 24" | 2007



Satish Gujral | Untitled | Acrylic on Canvas | 24" x 24" | 2011



Satish Gujral | Untitled | Acrylic on Canvas | 42" x 42" | 2011



Lalu Prasad Shaw

b. 1937

Equally at ease with hard-edge abstraction and period-style figuration, Lalu Prasad Shaw has earned his name and fame by remaining faithful to past tradition in Indian art with hints of its colonial past. His painted characters communicate with calibrated eloquence by his chosen style which is derived from the era when Indian artists were drafted to paint to meet the needs of colonial rulers and early photographers took the hint as well. A close contemporary of Pyne and Jogen, his contribution in modern Indian art can hardly be under-estimated.



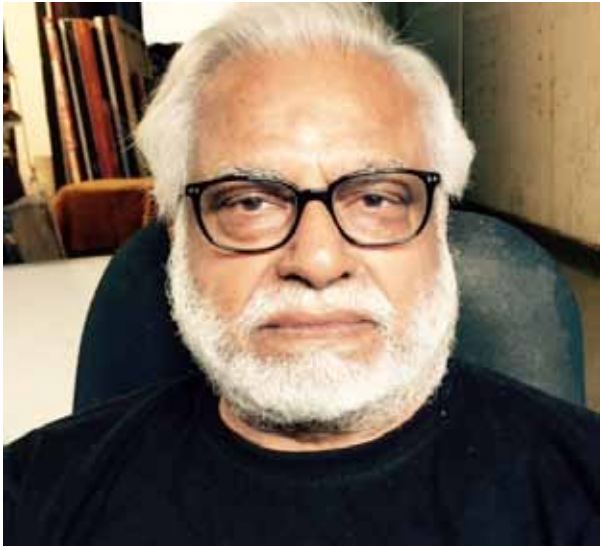
Lalu Prasad Shaw | Untitled | Tempera | 23.5" x 21" | 2014



Lalu Prasad Shaw | Babu | Tempera | 13" x 19.5" | 2008



Lalu Prasad Shaw | Untitled | Tempera | 19.5" x 14" | 2011



Manu Parekh

b. 1939

Manu has multiple roots and deftly managed to implant them in locations poles apart, in Gujarat where he was born and initially grew up and in Bombay where he learnt his art to start with. It was Kolkata and Santiniketan, however, when nature and its artistic manipulation got revealed to him in the art of Rabindranath and Ramkinkar and the effect, more on a perceptual level, stayed with him ever since. His roots in European modernism also led him to re-discover the existing co-relation of inherent sexuality in organic forms while the holy city of Banaras took his art to yet another level, towards unity in contradicting diversity.



Manu Parekh | Banaras Landscape | Acrylic, charcoal on canvas | 45" x 56" | 2015



Manu Parekh | Evening light at Banaras | Acrylic on canvas | 24" x 36" | 2015



Manu Parekh | Morning light at Banaras | Acrylic on canvas | 24" x 36" | 2015



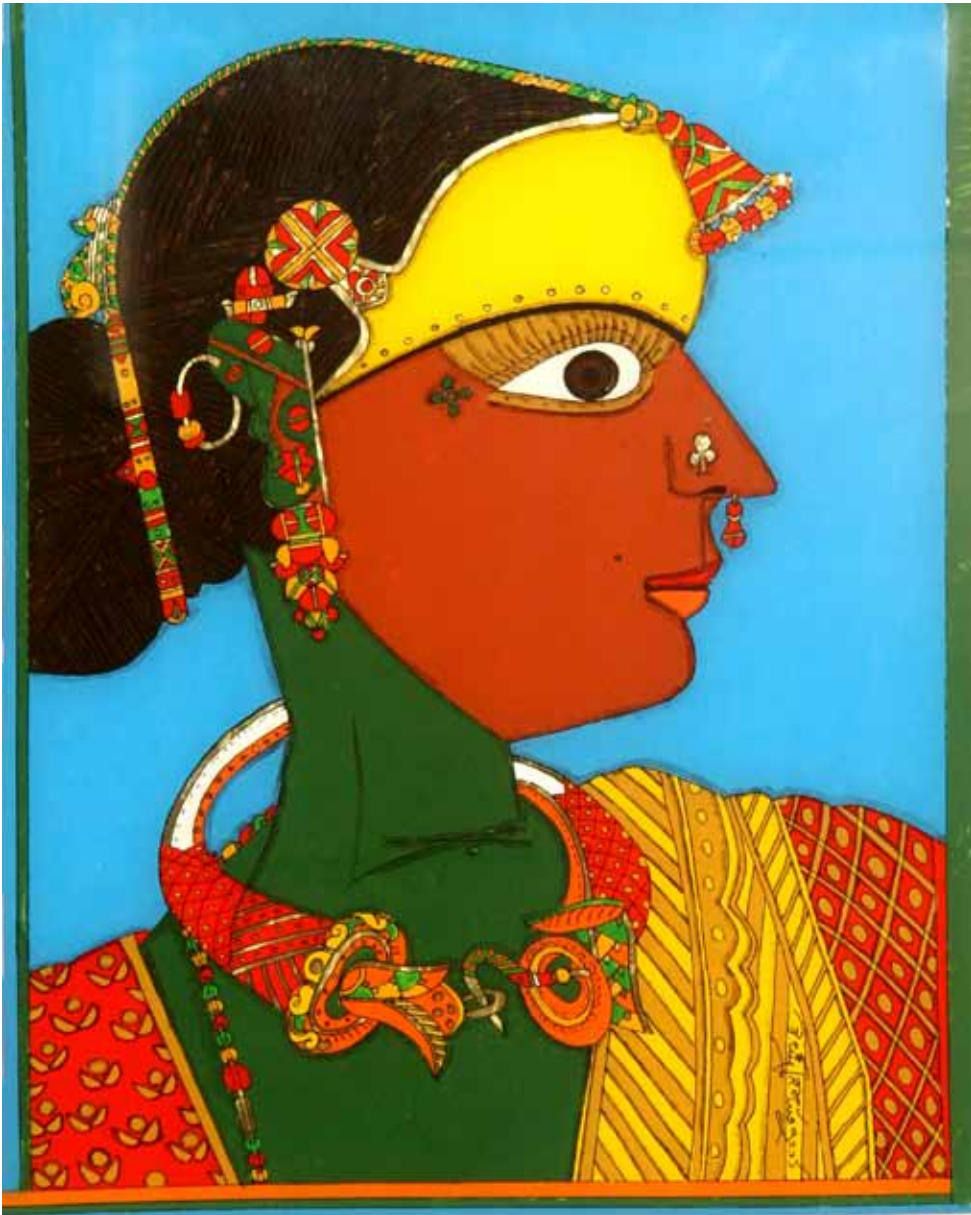
K. Laxma Goud

b. 1940

Born in Nizampur, Andhra Pradesh, K. Laxma Goud is undoubtedly the most versatile and complete painter of his generation. His portraits of men and women represent the dynamic Indian ethos rather than particular individual identities. Most of Goud's art is centred on the rural, recreating landscapes and seems that are frozen in time and etched deep in his sub-conscious yet alert psyche.



K. Laxma Goud | Untitled | Mixed Media on Paper | 12" x 16" | 2010



K. Laxma Goud | Untitled | Acrylic On Glass | 13" x 10" | 2008



K. Laxma Goud | Untitled | Water Colour and Pencil | 9" x 12" | 2009



Thota Vaikuntam

b. 1942

Thota Vaikuntam hails from Andhra Pradesh, in South India, since childhood he was obsessed, and fascinated, by the male artists who used to impersonate female characters in the travelling theatre groups that performed in his village. He drew inspiration from their loud make-up and admits finding the women of his village very sensuous and that he only attempts to capture their vibrancy. Vaikuntam's art has a sense of strength to it, a power that emanates from the paint or charcoal that he applies to the surface, from his controlled lines, and from the fine strokes that he executes. He has elevated art of his generation to newer heights.



Thota Vaikuntam | Untitled | Acrylic on Canvas | 36" x 48" | 2014



Thota Vaikuntam | Untitled | Acrylic on Canvas | 36" x 24" | 2014



Thota Vaikuntam | Untitled | Acrylic on Canvas | 24" x 18" | 2015



Senaka Senanayake

b. 1951

Senaka Senanayake, during his illustrious career in art, spread over the last five decades or more, has single-handedly voiced a collective concern for the preservation of our past for future. His intimate knowledge of the vanishing rain-forest on his own backyard has led him to paint a series of personal dreamscape that resonate with a truly global view on the issue of environmental concern. His art, armed with an idiosyncratic and sophisticated technique, easily reflects a very old heritage in Western Art and effortlessly mixes the same with the Eastern miniaturist's traditional emphasis on details.



Senaka Senanayake | Heliconias | Oil on Canvas | 36" x 48" | 2015



Senaka Senanayake | Banana Grove | Oil on Canvas | 36" x 24" | 2015



Senaka Senanayake | The Macaws | Oil on Canvas | 36" x 24" | 2013



Sujata Bajaj
b. 1958

Sujata Bajaj precociously entered the Indian art scene with her first solo show at the age of 25. After completing her Ph.D in tribal art of India, she focused on the challenge to convert the multifaceted ancient Indian heritage into a pictorial language, drawn from modern sensibilities and techniques picked up while working in Paris. Thus her art also took an international dimension. Sujata's rich palette is dominated by earthy ochres and a strikingly powerful use of reds that not only reveals her strong connection to colors per se, but also to the colorful state of Rajasthan where she grew up. Her art in some way continuously pays a concealed tribute to Rajasthan. Through her very personal and abstract take, Sujata's work has acquired a distinct and strong identity which raises it easily among the best in Indian



Sujata Bajaj | Untitled | Acrylic on Canvas | 39.3" x 39.3" | 2015



Sujata Bajaj | Reds | Acrylic on Canvas | 39.3" x 39.3" | 2015



Sujata Bajaj | Fragments | Acrylic on Canvas | 19.6" x 19.6"



Jayasri Burman

b. 1960

Armed with the sensitive empathy that typifies success in female artists in all ages, and more so in modern times, Jayasri has experimented with various art forms before settling down with her preferred idiom that openly proclaims her admiration to Indian folk tradition in visual art. Her bronzes, in recent years, bear her inimitable style and together, with her paintings and drawings, convey her concern for Indian womanhood poised at the cross-road of tradition and modernity. Her art, in perfect sync, easily combines complex imagery with charmingly simplified visual metaphor.



Jayasri Burman | A Palette of Delight | Watercolour | Pen & Ink on Paper | 12" x 12" | 2015



Jayasri Burman | Daily Devotion | Watercolour, Pen & Ink on Paper | 36" x 36" | 2015



Jayasri Burman | Flight of Fancy | Watercolour, Pen & Ink on Paper | 12" x 12" | 2015



Jayasri Burman | Maternal Embrace | Watercolour, Pen & Ink on Paper | 36" x 36" | 2015



Jayasri Burman | Moonlight Fantasy | Watercolour, Pen & Ink on Paper | 12" x 12" | 2015



Neeraj Goswami

b. 1964

Neeraj's painterly journey starts deep inside his mind, during his daily meditation, in which images emerge in his purified soul. His paintings reveal this gradual growth taking place on the surface of his canvases with ever-increasing clarity of thought and matching execution. His palette, and simplified rendering of meditative humans, together portrays a unique tradition in Indian art in which spiritual feeling predominates. Tradition and modernity of painterly style co-exists in his art that carefully conceals his complex method of applying paint and drawing lines, leaving only a surface of infinite bliss.



Neeraj Goswami | The Leela-Play | Acrylic on Canvas | 36" x 36" | 2015



Neeraj Goswami | Emerging | Oil on Canvas | 36" x 24" | 2013



Neeraj Goswami | The First Step | Acrylic on Canvas | 36" x 48" | 2014



Paresh Maity
b. 1965

Over the last two decades and perhaps even more, art of Paresh Maity remains singularly devoted to exploit the beauty of lines, fluid and rigid together, that easily reveals the continuity of lyrical quality of line in Indian art of the past era. His mastery over colour has added the right balance to his art which visibly pulsates with the love and warmth of the land and life he witnessed in the desert flats of Rajasthan. Exhibited and awarded almost all over the world, Paresh has established himself in the world of art today with solid foundation and mesmerising skill.



Paresh Maity | Reflection on Water | Oil on Canvas | 60" x 60" | 2015



Paresh Maity | Double Crown | Oil on Canvas | 47" x 39" | 2015



Paresh Maity | Quadratic | Oil on Canvas | 36" x 48" | 2015



Maya Burman

b. 1971

Maya Burman comes with an artistic lineage; parents Sakti Burman and Maite Delteil, both being very prominent artists. She works mainly in pen and ink, and watercolor; her paintings are delicate and usually have a strong fantasy element. The striking thing about her paintings is the amount of detail in them. In formal terms Maya Burman's paintings is reminiscent of the French art nouveau tradition and European Middle Age architecture interlaced with mythical and folk inspired imagery somewhat akin to miniature painting, that stem from her Indian ancestry, the work makes an interesting melting pot, a meeting ground between the two cultures.



Maya Burman | Untitled | Mixed media on paper | 20" x 20" | 2014



Maya Burman | Evening Sonata 4 | Mixed media on paper | 9.6" x 9.6"



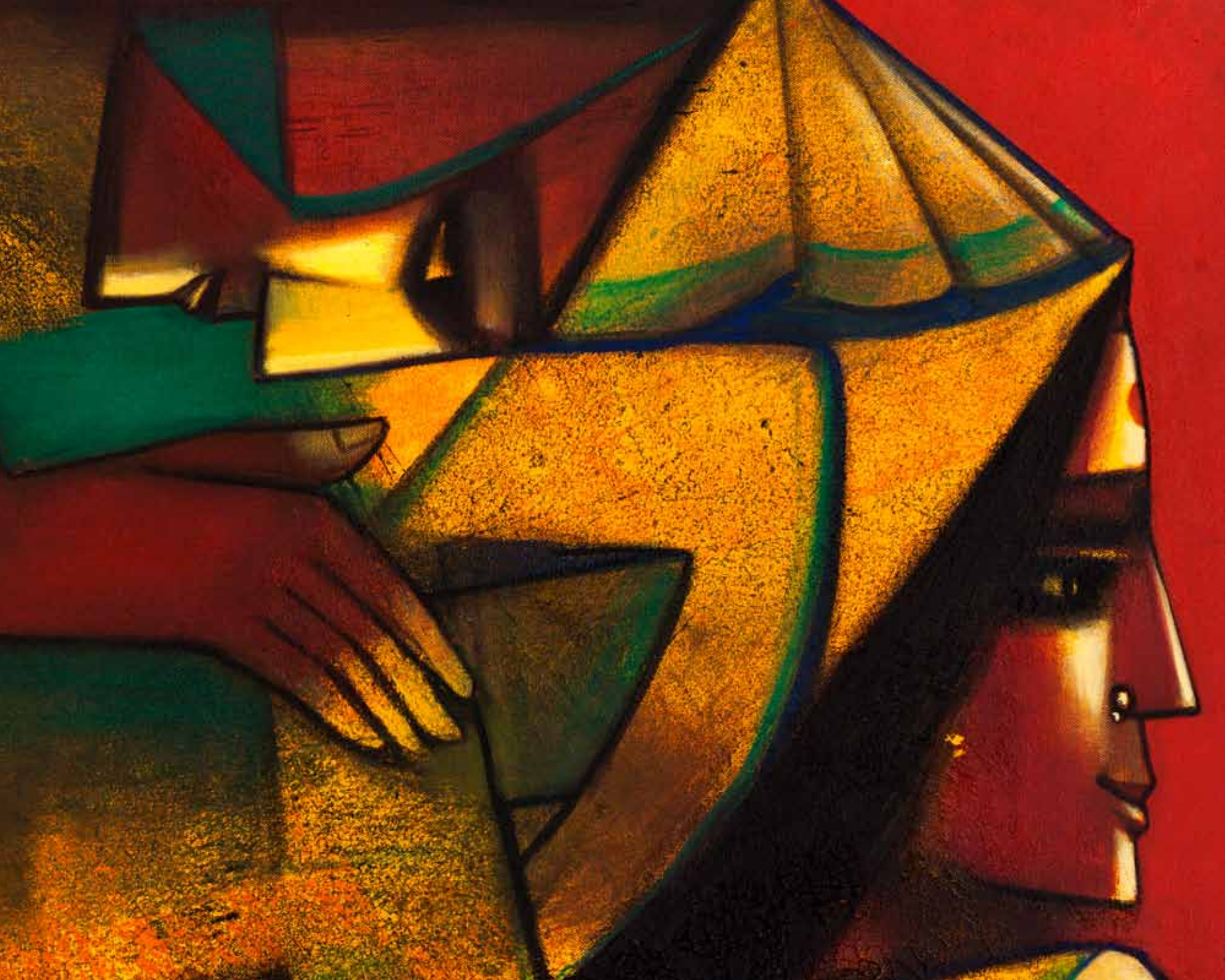
Maya Burman | Evening Sonata 1 | Mixed media on paper | 9.6" x 9.6"



Maya Burman | Untitled | Mixed media on paper | 20" x 6" | 2014



Maya Burman | Untitled | Mixed media on paper | 20" x 6" | 2014





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