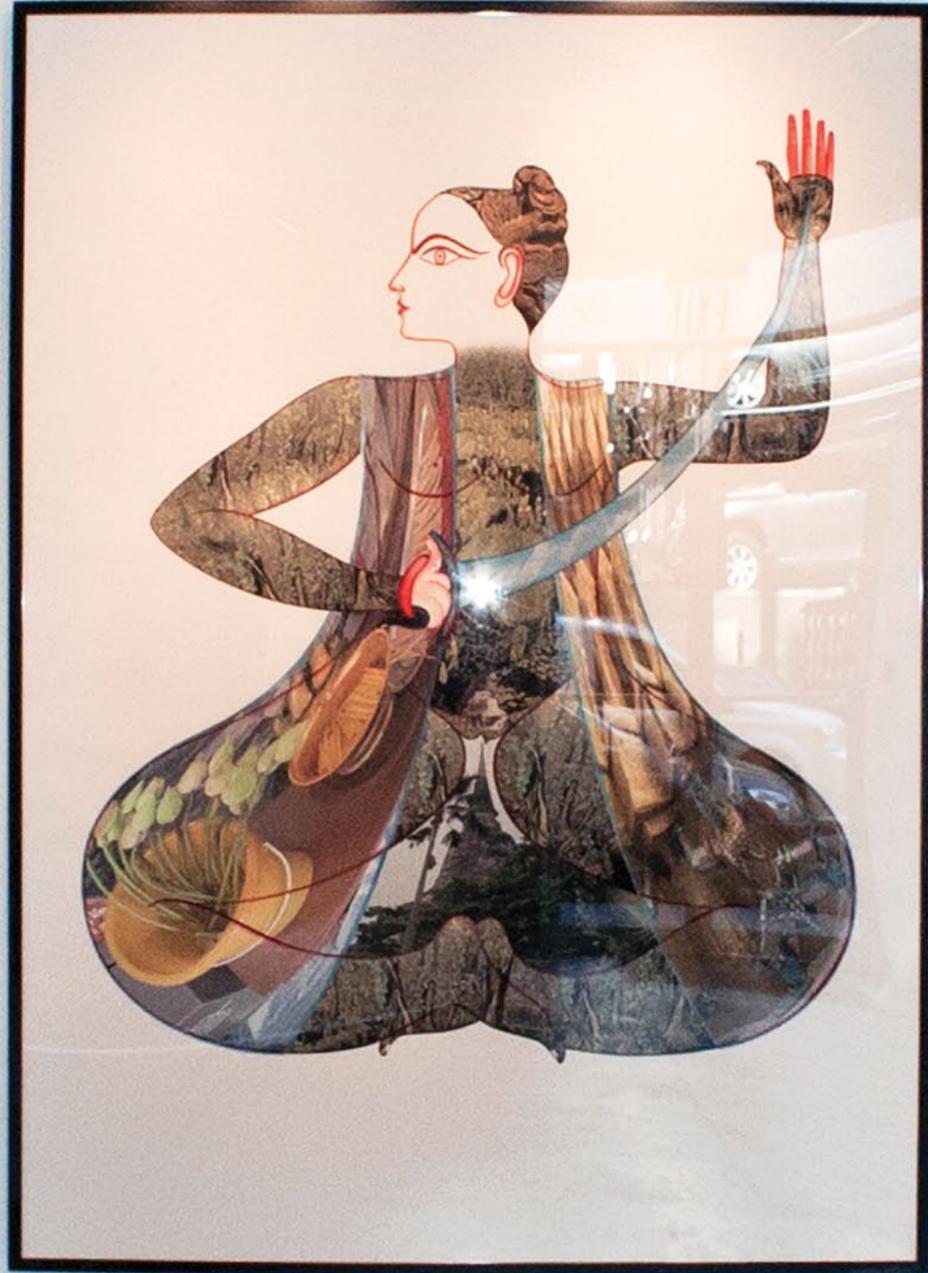




REKHA RODWITTIYA /
The Rituals of Memory:
Personal Folklores & Other Tales
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The Rituals of Memory: Personal Folklores & Other Tales

Sequencing time: A monologue of a personal history
pieced together in reverie

Rekha Rodwittiya
Baroda 2016

I hold a universe in my hands.

**The maps of these memories
filter journeys that bring to light
new discoveries to behold,
that lead me closer to the well
of my heart.**

**To search for comfort alone will
surely obscure the true nature
of life's complexities,
and so the doors of myriad
experiences are always left ajar,
to let the flow of energies come
and go at will.**

**Fertile and fecund, I bear the
fruits of my mother's garden
in the pride of a female
ancestry.**

EARLY YEARS AS A CHILD

The privilege of receiving an education in a country where the disempowered struggle for basic survival impacted itself on me from a very young age as being something never to be taken for granted. This, coupled with being a much-desired girl-child, prompted me to distinguish for myself a context of accountability. I believe that I have carried the legacies of a female history with a conscious alertness, which led me very early in my personal journey to a space of belonging where the bedrock of my feminist beliefs could take root. Though we are all individuals, we nonetheless belong within larger collective responsibilities of existence. This dual space we inhabit, of the personal and the collective, becomes important to examine when seeking to understand what conjoins and what separates them, and whether both these territories can hold the imprint of our purposefulness with equal vigour.

My upbringing has been non-conformist and without a singular ethnic community being an influencing factor. My parents came from backgrounds where western classical music and literature were studied, and so we grew in the shadow of their interests. I also grew up isolated, as I was home-schooled until I was seven years old. In those early years of my childhood I lived mostly on remote air-force bases with my immediate family as my only social companions. This seclusion led me to find an imagination that became my escape into a larger world of belonging. From the age of five I knew I wanted to be an artist. I remained with this fervent desire throughout my childhood and teenage years. Perhaps this was because I spent many hours drawing and painting and it became a space of great solace and release for me where I could give form to the realm of the imagined. I lived in different cities of India during the early part of my childhood till we arrived as a family in Baroda in 1967, where after a series of circumstances this city became my permanent home and remains so to date.



Left: *Don't Rock the Boat*, 1985, Watercolor and gouache on paper, 15 x 11 in.; Center: *The Cloaked Night*, 1985, Ink and gouache on paper, 15 x 11 in.; Right: *The Acrobat*, 1985, Ink, colored pencil, gouache and graphite pencil on paper, 30 x 22 in.

ENTERING ART COLLEGE IN 1976

In tracing my evolution as an artist, I have always maintained that what has been seminal in shaping my articulation was the years of study undertaken at the time I was an art student. I studied painting under the principal guidance of Jyoti Bhatt and Nasreen Mohamedi when I was a student at Baroda, and it is from them that I learnt about the value of ethics and the correlation of a personal politics offering a deeper insight into knowing oneself more astutely.

It was those initial years of imposed insistence to comply with a structured methodology of imbibing the rudimentary basics of art, which provided me a rock-solid plinth from which to craft my pictorial language, and to take it through different ideational explorations over the years. However irksome these conventional procedures sometimes appeared, they helped provide me with a fluency in areas of observation and translation. I was also exposed to the powerful combination of imbibing aspects of art from both the traditional as well as deciphering the challenges of an evolving modernity, which then set the stage for me to engage in examining how to locate my personal history within the larger framework of a cultural context.

LEARNING AT THE FACULTY OF FINE ARTS, M.S. UNIVERSITY OF BARODA

The preparatory foundation course was mandatory and was aimed at providing a holistic overview of art in which painting, printmaking, sculpture, pottery, applied arts, art history and aesthetics was taught. Studio practice offered lessons in skills of two-dimensional representations, perspective, three-dimensional forms, design, colour coordination, balance and harmony, and perhaps most importantly initiated the process of learning how to conceptualize. Teaching strategies emphasized communication as a means to provoke enquiry, and without the gizmos of new technology and the world of internet connectivity, the methods of discovering information were through independent research and reading. The library and the archives became places where answers were sought and more questions arose; and this perpetuated a rhythm of self-motivated learning.

In those days the teaching was more structured than it appears today, and perhaps more importantly there was no interference of market forces and other external commercial influences to sidetrack or confuse the process

of learning. The expectancies of the teachers for students to deliver work of quality were unapologetically stringent. Though intellectual dissent was encouraged, the overall climate of the faculty focused on nurturing the application of studio practices and creating an engagement with the study of art history, aesthetics and art theory without too many other distractions. Right-wing conservative politics was not seen encroaching so blatantly on art college campuses back then, with agendas to propagate skewed nationalist sentiments, nor were there attempts to usurp the autonomy of governance of educational art institutions with the desire to infuse conservative, non-liberal methods of teaching art. There was a genuine regard for education in India that pre-dated the liberalization of our economy. The values of the middle class were still noticeably rooted in respecting forums of learning as the route to self-achievement and therefore the commitment of imparting and imbibing knowledge held greater accountability and desire on either side.

THE IMPACT OF STUDYING ART

The Baroda Fine Arts College attracted many students from all parts of India and, with no reservation quota for local students in those days, the selection process for the entrance examination was solely on merit. The idea was to provide an integrated system of different areas of specialised study with an emphasis on inter-disciplinary learning. Most departments had teachers who were of eminence within their fields, which resulted in discussions of cultural importance as a normative practice within the pedagogic space when I was a student. The agenda of teaching was to use the syllabus to create a stimulating interpretation of its guidelines, thereby making art education relevant and contemporary to the issues of the day, both nationally as well as globally.

The college was like a womb that nurtured. The rigors of the program produced a unique environment. The candor of friendships amongst senior artists showcased their preoccupations as professionals and allowed students of that era to witness the changing scenario of Indian art as a lived

phenomena. Classroom instructions were reinforced through seminars, field trips, study tours to monuments, heritage sites and museums visits, making oral instructions bring history to life.

The faculty encouraged artists and scholars to visit, and interactions with them often occurred in alternative locations other than only on the college premises. The residency bungalow was one such *adda*. A rambling old colonial style house from the days of the Gaekwad's rule, it was segmented into separate areas and served as living quarters for the teaching staff of the university. It is here, in the right hand corner of this dilapidated building with a small garden patch in front of it, that Gulammohammed and Nilima Sheikh lived and worked for many years. And it is here in this once regal abode of yesteryear that they hosted many an interactive session with cultural luminaries. Film screenings, discussions, slide shows and opportunities to meet with curators, artists and historians occurred within these informal gatherings. Students who were also invited to attend would sit in awe whilst listening to the rumbustious conversations of passionate engagement, and learnt from these interludes that the practice of art was a commitment of sustained endeavor which demanded rigorous hours of hard work without compromise or excuse. This focused intensity of an art community investing in its cultural history was the initiation to art I received as a student in the seventies.

FACTORS OF INSTRUCTION & IMBIBING

The figurehead in those years at the Baroda Fine Arts College was unequivocally K. G. Subramanian. As the head of the painting department he was by far the most dynamic personality on campus during my college years. He had close associations with the corridors of cultural power at the center in the capital, and his expertise and knowledge was widely acclaimed internationally. His scholarship as a writer and his experiences with working within the handloom industry, along with his ingenuity as an artist, provided the institution with a leadership that has never been replicated to date. He brought to the classroom a teaching of traditions that included workshops by

traditional crafts people, and of course the legendary Fine Arts Fair.

The presence of stalwart artists like Jeram Patel from the 1890 group, who headed the applied arts department, provided the college an atmosphere that was radical and experimental. Gulammohammed Sheikh and Ratan Parimoo, who studied abroad, taught art history on their return and contributed significantly to developing the department of art history and aesthetics that attracted reputed historians like Karl Khandalawala, Mildred Archer, Partha Mitter and many more to attend seminars and deliver lectures. Krishna Chhatpar taught sculpture to this foundation course. His method of instruction was to invite you to find your curiosity. His quiet conversations held many stories that were often anecdotal and which allowed you to recognize how to enter into the world of art from the personalized spaces of experience and identification, and to notice the small things around with more detailed attention. Nasreen Mohamedi was also assigned to the first year preparatory students for teaching drawing. Hand picked by K.G Subramanian to teach at the faculty, she was one of the finest teachers the college has ever had. She approached each student at their respective level and trained their aesthetics away from popular normative taste. Almost ascetic, her spartan lifestyle and esoteric interests along with her minimalist art practice provided an insight for her students to understand the value of questioning prevailing trends of influence around them more critically. Within the highly charged environment of an emphatically figurative climate, she positioned a valuable polemic of linguistic difference that dealt with the tension of the metaphysical—conceptualizing abstract realms fleshed from the physical. Interestingly the artists who were propounding the Baroda school of figurative narration as the new avant-garde movement recognized that her art could not be ignored.

Jyoti Bhatt taught painting to the first and second year painting students whilst I was studying at the college. His knowledge of art provided a bridge between the contemporary world of

image-making and folk traditions of art practice, which came from his personal deep interest in archiving performative rituals and the lifestyles of rural India. This was very instructive for many students, whose naïve ignorance often led them to imagine contemporary culture to be represented only by what was seen in urban India. It was under the guidance of Professor Jyoti Bhatt that I learnt all about photography, as it was a subject offered as an optional choice in the bachelor's program at that time. I learnt to develop black and white film and printing techniques in the dark room. I would wander around Baroda taking photographs of street-life, which is perhaps the most obvious instinct most people have when they first use a camera. Learning photography however also provided me the means to economically support myself, which was crucial to the choices I was making in my personal life at that time.

Part of the curriculum was the encouragement to travel and see important exhibitions. I remember my first field trip in 1978 was to see the Indian Triennale hosted by the Central Lalit Kala Akademi in Delhi. I grew up with access to art limited to books and reproductions. Therefore this sudden bonanza of art from around the world on one's doorstep, to be seen with the leisure of time and observe how different mediums produced language and content was a very impactful experience for me.

ALTERNATIVE TEACHING PRACTICES

Activities like the fine arts fair gave students the opportunity to work outside of classroom pedagogic structures alongside their teachers in a revised format of apprenticeship. The pendulum of exposure swung between the traditions of past art practices and new ideas bringing folk art and craft forms to be introduced into the repertoire of learning, thereby providing lessons that found adaptation of differing cultural practices. Jewelry, toys, artifacts, masks, weaving, lampshades, bags, enamel work, along with print portfolios, sculptures and paintings all jostled together with equal importance to be exhibited. Puppets were constructed for shows, and theatre production brought out writing skills, direction and acting, as well as garment

designs for these performances. The synergy of activity created a *mela* environment. It was also a learning ground where the students were exposed to the commerce of art, as well as being introduced to lessons of collaboration where the role of the individual as the sole creator becomes altered.

The generation of students fortunate to have Nasreen Mohamedi as their teacher learnt both lessons of art and life that stayed with them forever. Discipline was an important principle for Nasreen, and in her very quiet but assertive way she demanded that every student she taught understood the value of this. She opened up our observations to challenge our perceptions and made us alert to the politics of choice. Nasreen offered simple lessons of learning, and like a Zen teacher she would then wait to see when and how the truth of the lesson would permeate.

THE FOCUS OF DEBATE

My reason for elaborating the importance of the Baroda art college during the seventies and the eighties is because it created a segment of contemporary art history that I belong to. One is able to see the influences received from this premier art institution and how movements were born from its premises that challenged older canons of aesthetic orders. How new trends were established and alternative conceptual and theoretical frameworks of impact became centre stage, thereby making Baroda a very important and powerful cultural hub for two decades. The seventies and eighties were the golden decades of a cultural renaissance in India. Definitive debates addressing issues of modernity opened up new perceptions by which art was to be viewed. The insistence of the West that contemporary Indian art was derivative of Western art practices became an old cliché that was no longer entertained. Instead the local/the vernacular became areas of focus. Intermingling the past with the present also brought into play pluralistic influences of India's cultural practices. Art history offered ancestries for personal appropriation without apology. Seminal to this period is group of artists from Baroda, Mumbai and Delhi who banded together to create a movement known as the Baroda narrative school of art, in which a figurative

language that employed episodic narrative devices was used. The figure became the central leitmotif within the discourse on human predicament, which was recorded through the filter of personal histories mythologized.

COMING OF AGE

I have always been an advocate of pro-choice and believe that all women should be economically self-reliant, as I see it as imperative to a feminist philosophy; and so from the age of eighteen I have been financially independent. I did commercial photography and sold my art works at nominal prices through alternative venues such as pavement exhibitions organised by students, and through architect friends in Baroda who were purchasing for interior projects they were doing for clients. I worked part-time jobs at the local art gallery and at textile and craft exhibitions that came to the faculty premises. I was keenly aware of the need to structure my life in a practical and decisive way that could focus on raising my son, and simultaneously honing my aptitude as a painter, all the while consciously implementing my feminist position within my lived experiences.

My insistence on economic independence was not a result of any family discord whatsoever, but was in fact a tribute to the upbringing that had nurtured these ideals of women's empowerment since I was born. I grew up in post-independence India in an urban nuclear middle-class family. I was embraced by liberal attitudes and intellectual freedom that supported informed opinions in a household where we as teenagers were expected to experience life without having to conform to conservative protocol. My parents were encouraging of the directions I chose, trusting me to know myself without apology. Opting to become a parent at a young age due to medical reasons, offered me invaluable experiences that propelled my energies with more focus than if I had been absent of such responsibilities. I met the challenges of being divorced and a single parent, and as my son was a much desired and planned addition to my life, there was therefore never any quandary regarding this lifelong commitment to the responsibility of being a parent.

I live my life undeterred by the dictates of a patriarchal society, and so the attitudes of traditional mindsets that adhere to conservative conformity continuously make a challenging backdrop to the realities of my own existence. In doing so I have had the opportunities to re-examine and reformulate life more purposefully than if this had not been the case. Marginalised spaces are always more fraught with tensions, yet it is this precise area of conflict that obliges one to conjure the ability for greater clarity to be achieved.

SEQUENCING TIME

On completing my undergraduate program in 1981 from Baroda, I realised I wanted to find a post-graduate course that could engage my enquiries with gender politics in an informed manner. In the interim, whilst I applied for scholarships, I joined the masters program where I was granted permission by Jyoti Bhatt to work separately in a staff studio that was situated close to the library. This year was like a sabbatical from formal instruction and provided me the space to reflect upon my pictorial language with no interference of academic agendas, and instead to discourse about my art with selected teachers, as equals. I produced a series of small imaginary portraits in watercolour which was a radical departure from my oil paintings. I was awarded the first Inlaks scholarship for art and chose, out of a number of admissions secured in the United State and Britain, to enroll at the Royal College of Art London. This decision was prompted by my interest to study under the tutelage of Prof. Peter De Francia whose knowledge of India, its socio-political cultural history, and his awareness of contemporary Asian art allowed me to adopt new areas of learning without forsaking my cultural moorings.

STUDYING AT THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF ART LONDON

It was in London where I began to re-examine more exactly my figuration and the narrative techniques that I was employing. I drew and painted exhaustively for two years, creating a vast body of two hundred art works. The large watercolours that were

seminal of this period dealt with a kaleidoscopic and splintered space which was crammed full of an almost cartoon like language and were tableaux that depicted the under belly of violence and the hierarchies of power play, in the world as I saw it.

Peter de Francia's methods of teaching were brutally insistent that one should demand an honesty of oneself, leaving little or no scope for excuses or whimsical attitudes to prevail in his relationship with you. He abhorred indifference and superficiality, and was deeply passionate about holding self-accountability and aesthetic standard to scrutiny. What I learnt as valuable lessons were that the perusal of excellence comes from the rigors of hard work, and that there is never reason to be apathetical with one's engagement with the world.

The Royal college of Art had some of the best British artists as teachers during my time, whose diverse opinions made interesting critiques to engage with. Ken Kiff, Jennifer Durant, Frank Whitford, Keith Critchlow and John Golding were on the faculty, and my degree display was presided over by Gillian Aiyers. Though globalisation was not the buzzword then, there was an opening-up to non-western-centric influences. The engagement in discourse with varied cultural histories was prevalent, as many overseas students' works reflected/dealt with their cultural contexts. With the painting department housed in a wing of the Victoria & Albert museum, the proximity of access to world art facilitated wider debates of pluralised thinking.

The time spent in London not only nurtured my growth as an artist but was also equally a watershed for me to decipher my belonging within a feminist history. India with its oppressive patriarchy had offered little scope for gender discourse, and I often felt smothered as a student by the overriding socialist and Marxist preoccupations of my colleagues that completely excluded women's issues from consideration when addressing ideas pertaining to human rights and personal liberty. In contrast, Britain in the 80's was fecund with literature, cinema, theatre, music, performance, theoretical studies and protest that

focused very prominently on feminist concerns. Being able to engage with women's issues as a designated area of study offered me experiences through which I could establish the parameters of my own feminist affiliations. Social, cultural and political histories informed my work as well, and these factors all came together in an analytical convergence, providing me the territory of my subject and the discovery of a collective feminist space that could accommodate my personal legacies.

The festivals of India brought to the doorstep of England and Europe the coming of age of India's modernity with contemporary art exhibitions that were widely acclaimed by the critics and scholars of art. Indian contemporary art was finally being viewed with the parity it deserved in the West. Studying in London at this time allowed me to observe this shifting perception first hand, and in some strange way it felt like a personal validation of a truth well known, finally coming full circle.

PROFESSIONAL ALLEGIANCES

Stepping out of art school brings with it challenges of a different kind and sets the stage for decisions on priorities to be established. In order to preserve my autonomy as an artist, I kept my studio as a private space where clients were not entertained. It became a choice therefore, from the inception of my career, to have my art handled by gallery professionals. My association of working within the gallery system began in 1984 on the eve of my departure from London, when Mr. Ebrahim Alkazi invited me to exhibit at the Art Heritage gallery in Delhi. Art Heritage also established a link-up with Cymroza Art Gallery in Mumbai which was run by Pheroza Godrej.

It was through Art Heritage that my work was acquired by Chester and Davida Herwitz, the American collectors who lived in the United States of America and who visited India each year to expand their collection of Indian Contemporary art. They were committed collectors with a zealous passion who set about building one of the most serious and sizeable collections of Contemporary Indian art in the world. It was perhaps the only collection in which the chronology

of time and the varying stages of the evolution of each of the artists were documented through the acquisition of major works. The Herwitz were unique collectors because they built up intimate and lasting friendships with each of the artists whose work they were collecting, believing that in doing so their understanding of the work would be further enhanced.

BARODA MY CITY

A fighter pilot in the air force, my father's posting brought us to Baroda, and my education was the reason my mother and I continued to reside in this city for many years thereafter. I chose then to make it my permanent home on my return from London because it is a city I grew up in and where I feel most comfortable. It is a small enough city to navigate easily, and has a multi-cultural atmosphere with the university and industry bringing in people from all over India and abroad as its residents. With its proximity to Mumbai many artists have made Baroda their home and live and work here. This has lent the city the ethos of being viewed as a cultural centre where the artist community can avail of the benefits of the interdependency of collective engagement as well as preserving their individual privacy when required. Baroda, being an old Gaekwad principality, is already a city deeply seeped in a rich cultural heritage of the past, and which showcased its progressive ideas by establishing the Maharaja Sayajirao University, an educational institution of world renown, way back in 1881. Baroda, or Vadodara as it is known today, with the old city at its epicentre and the ever-expanding urban planning of flyovers and new roads re-scripting its topography, is a symbol of how ancient histories adapt to new appendages that reconfigure their shape and form. Amidst the chemical smog that lights up the skies at sunset with magical colours of a painter's palette, I hold this lingering image of the Lakshmi Vilas Palace etched as a silhouette of exquisite beauty, looming large at dusk. This talisman of familiarity offers me a strange comfort. I recognise through this live postcard image that India holds its cultural heritage with practised ease as it jostles with the new age of technological progress and scientific

developments. I am acutely aware of how important it is for me to be located within these evolving cultural histories that connect me to the new India that I belong within, and which teaches me about a past that holds my ancestry—both of which accommodates my grafting into its chronicles of time, as a daughter of its soil.

ELEMENTS FROM LIFE TRANSPOSED

My work has always dealt with concerns that I filter from life around me. Line and colour are prominent elements in my pictorial language. The preliminary preparation for any work I make is processed directly in my mind, and I sort through various permutations of a single idea before settling on one that I decide best contains my intention. The process of elaboration on this idea continues once I define what it is I am seeking to evoke—what the territory of the idea is, and how direct or subverted I may want the readability to be. Strident and insistent, the colour palette that feeds my work is informed by cultural traditions and factors of influence that corroborate the ideas I am pictorially translating. The female figure, often in isolation, represents the perpetuity of their life-giving force that bears witness to the passage of time unfolding. I view the female form as being emblematic of energies vital to sustaining life, and so I place these iconic figures with a centrality to command their rightful importance as forces of *Shakti*—indestructible and omnipotent. The unflinching gaze and frontal postures of confrontation of these female protagonists demand that the viewer is obliged to acknowledge their powerful presence. Stark and arresting in demeanour, these figures stand like protective guardians of the universe—spanning all emotions of human strength and fragility—but never disempowered of the will to survive.

My work celebrates all aspects of womanhood and explores the many *avatars* that female empowerment embraces. Though gender equality is far from the norm in India, there are voices that stridently call to attention the need to dispel the bigoted stereotype of gender bias, and fight to seek change that we know to be possible and real for women. In a world where atrocities are committed against women in the name of upholding traditional values,

a focus to redress this is vital if we are to define true liberty for all humanity. Mature art holds radical positions that are not about sensationalizing for mere effect alone. Art is a space that strategizes arguments, problematizes as a method of introspection, is confrontational, is often used as a subversive tool, and is not a space that is designed to entertain the consent of another to validate its existence. This is what independent authorship and artistic autonomy must mean within a democratic space of a secular nation. The world that we place ourselves central to becomes a tapestry patterned by incidents and histories that demand our participation willingly or otherwise. As artists we often become the *sutradhars** of larger narratives that hold both the particularity of our lives as well as a wider world of information. I hold as consistent the desire to examine the feminine space of survival, the spirit of female endurance and the empowerment of pride and self-dignity that centuries of feminist oral histories are infused by, as the territory from which my work takes shape.

I understood that the most liberating lesson learnt is that one's own sense of belonging is held in multiple histories that form the stories of the world, and it is the curiosity of wanting to know about the unfamiliar that invites us through the doorways of many new discoveries. I also learnt the importance that, like any sensible traveller, each of us must always carry along, in our journeys as artists, the memories of our own origins in order to collate without renouncing what is specific to who we are when adapting new influences into our consciousness. I understood the power of art but equally understood the manipulations of art history and the power lobbies at play in deeming certain histories as relevant to shaping the progress of civilization. Art documents change, and articulates positions of affiliation or resistance. These cultural sequences compile new legacies to be conjoined within the compendium of other histories. The feminist history is one of them.

I am an artist because it is the best tool that facilitates my desire to interpolate with an outside world. Primeval and tested, it allows me to translate and



The Pinball World, 1985, Watercolor and gouache on paper, 11 x 15 in.

India never will allow me to ferment in the sleep of my own desires; but keeps me ever wakeful to a consciousness that embroiders patterns that decorate my body and my soul, and anoints me as the bride of its soil. Born wrapped in the placenta of many cultures, I breathe a life of knowingness uniquely different from those with chaste tongues of scriptures and divides. From the gullies and shanties dark shadows pattern the cities like the fake lace of a bridal gown, whilst the wail of sirens block out the screams of the innocent whose spilt blood are the only reminders of their vanquished dreams. Legacies of a past cannot hold the brace of my spine upright, nor does the stoop of my weariness find me my bed of comfort. As my body wrinkles and my breasts become heavy with the stories of all those I carry close to my heart, I listen wakeful ever, just for the smallness of hope.

transpose both fact and imaginative devices of communication, and traces the outer world to the inner consciousness and vice versa, thereby making an elaborate tapestry of my own personal belonging. Art is about transmutations. The configuration of an imaginative play with forms is often arrived at from what we desire to evoke through them. Art is a space where the recognizable alters itself to become the receptacle of new meanings, and where human experience then becomes the bridge of empathy that allows the viewer to find their connectivity. Nuanced into the characters of each articulated figure are the histories of both my cultural self, and the autobiographical that lends voice to the process of my empowerment and emancipation. Conceiving an idea that gets elaborated via visual articulation does not formulate itself without the symbiosis of both the heart and mind being in tandem. What gets suggested and evoked in the works are the conflicts, polarities, reaffirmations, and a host of other nuances of the challenge of living, which blueprints my own existence within a larger universe of collective histories.

My work is informed by the personal politics that govern my life and employs the use of metaphor and allegory to formulate its content. In many instances the subject of a work of art invokes nuanced experiences from the worlds we inhabit. The narratives in my works are never direct stories but are territories that hold parables through which meanings are inferred. My art often employs myth and legends as territories of references from which the notion of life, viewed as a journey of assimilation, is explored. The photographic image reappears after I put down my camera twenty-eight years ago. A series of personal occurrences brought back the connection I had to take photographs once again. The bodies of my female protagonists now become the site of retrieval of personal histories. Traced like mapped terrains, the contours

of these figures are extracted from previous paintings, archived as though from an archaeological site. The montage of images lace together quite literally to become the second skin. The painted faces of these figures become the masks to an otherwise intensely personal space of deliverance. Tall and erect these female figures invoke the space of reflection and memories.

The forms that I create or re-phrase becomes a personalized visual lexicon invested with specific symbology, that, over time, maps the preoccupations and arguments that constitute the ideological premise of my identity. Site specific and project related works, travel and residencies infuse my art practice with spaces of confrontation that challenge my own vulnerability in different ways, and which force new devices of approach and resolution to be considered. These spaces become alternative playgrounds of notional strategies where displacement is intended. These locations are somewhat like ephemeral love affairs that are not intended to be conclusive, yet pitch your senses to become exquisitely aroused.

Whenever I travel I am always keenly observant of the peculiarities of cultural difference. Perceiving these differences reinforces the ethnographic/anthropologic truth of cultural diversity and teaches us to comprehend culture specificity. I call attention to such observation because in the efforts to homogenize or adapt ourselves we often relinquish those unique differences in order to fit in or belong. We lose out in recognizing how much there is to learn from areas of the unfamiliar that we encounter. Interestingly all societies that encourage freedom of expression have contemporary cultural practices which have absorbed varied influences and have created new trajectories from ancient traditions, which in turn with time get absorbed into the established mainstream. What becomes important as an artist is to know why one places the space of openness to examine, and

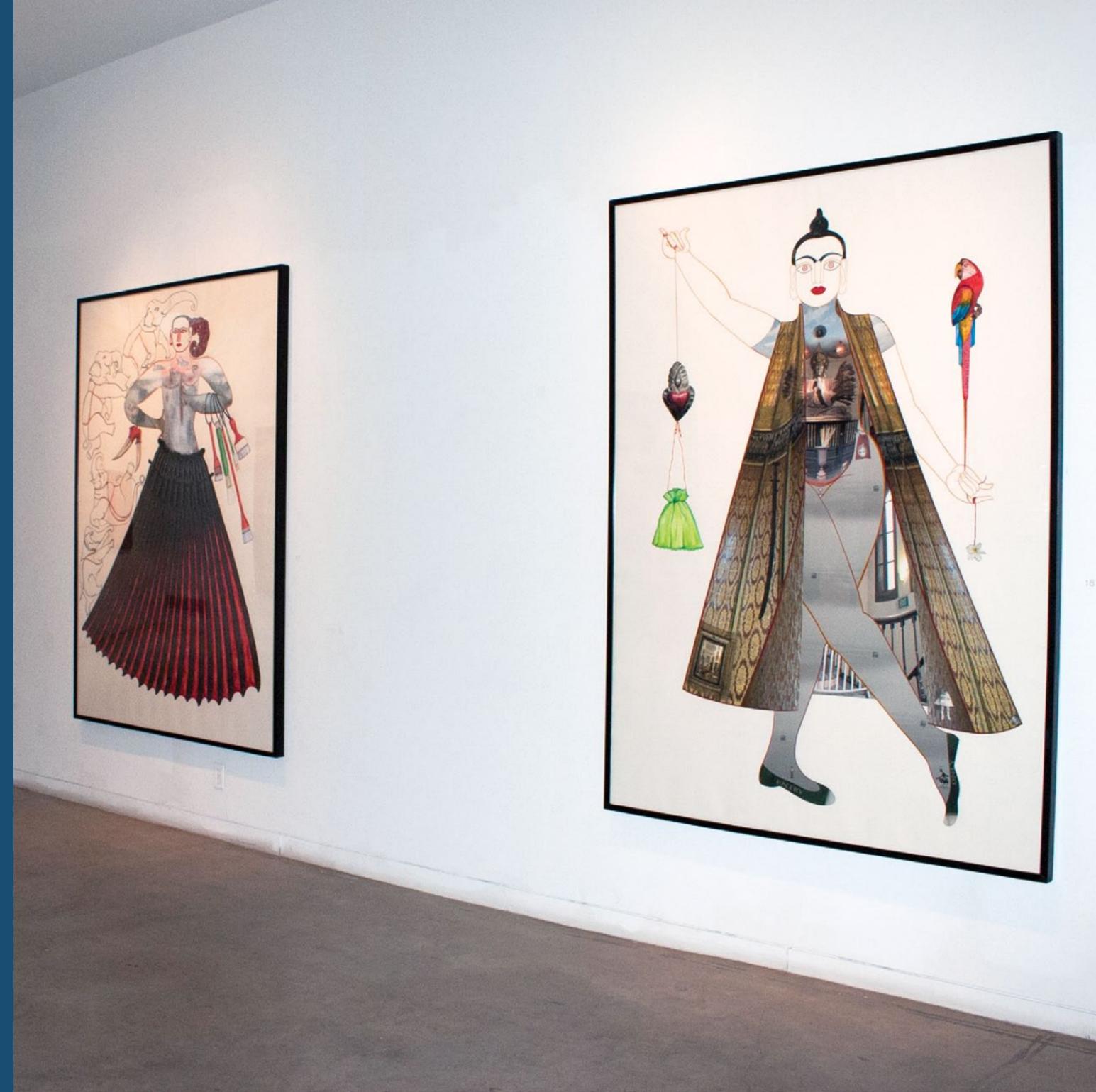
what it is that one may choose to resist when negotiating varied influences. In holding this consciousness we apply our knowledge with greater insight to invest our art practice with conviction.

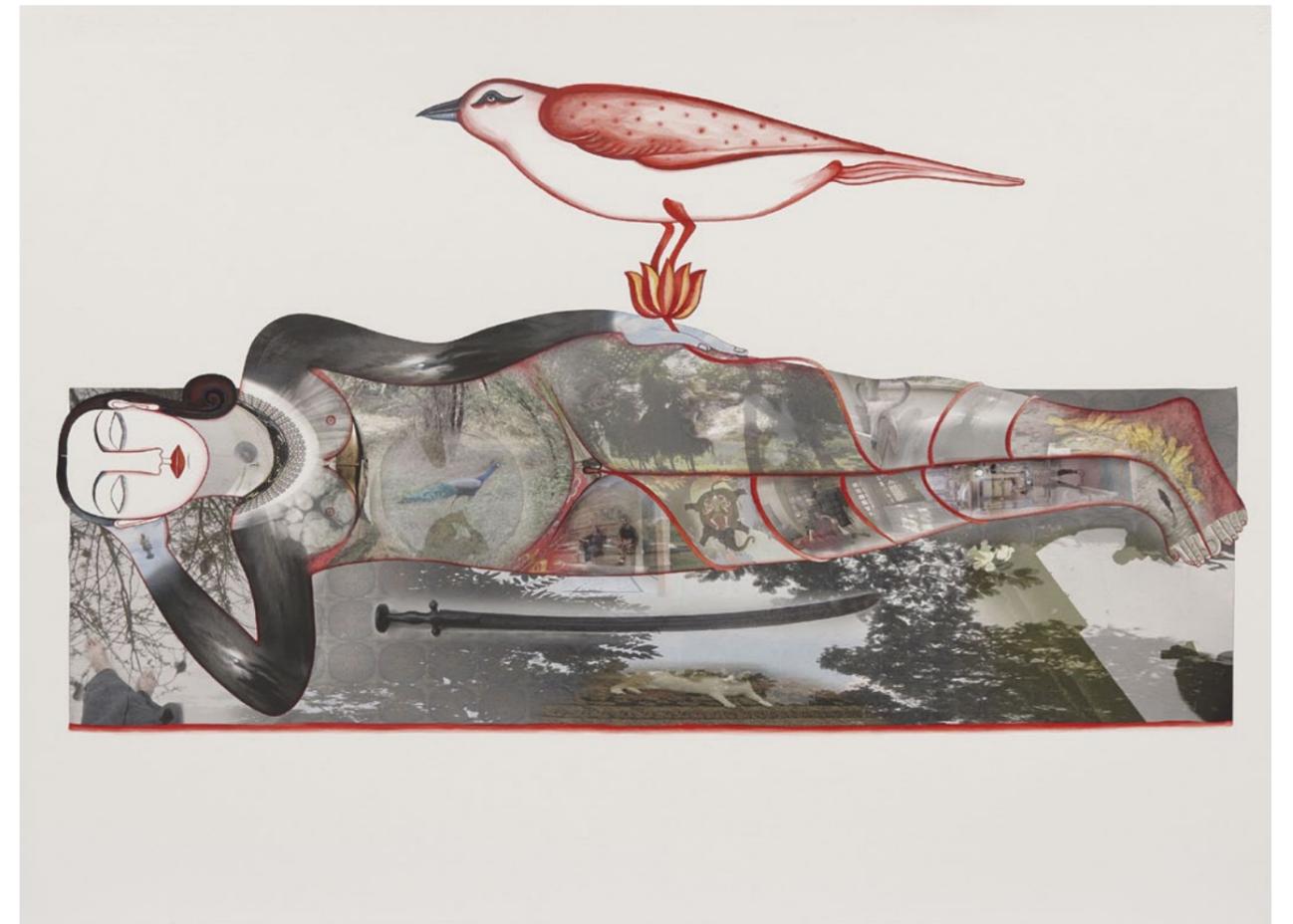
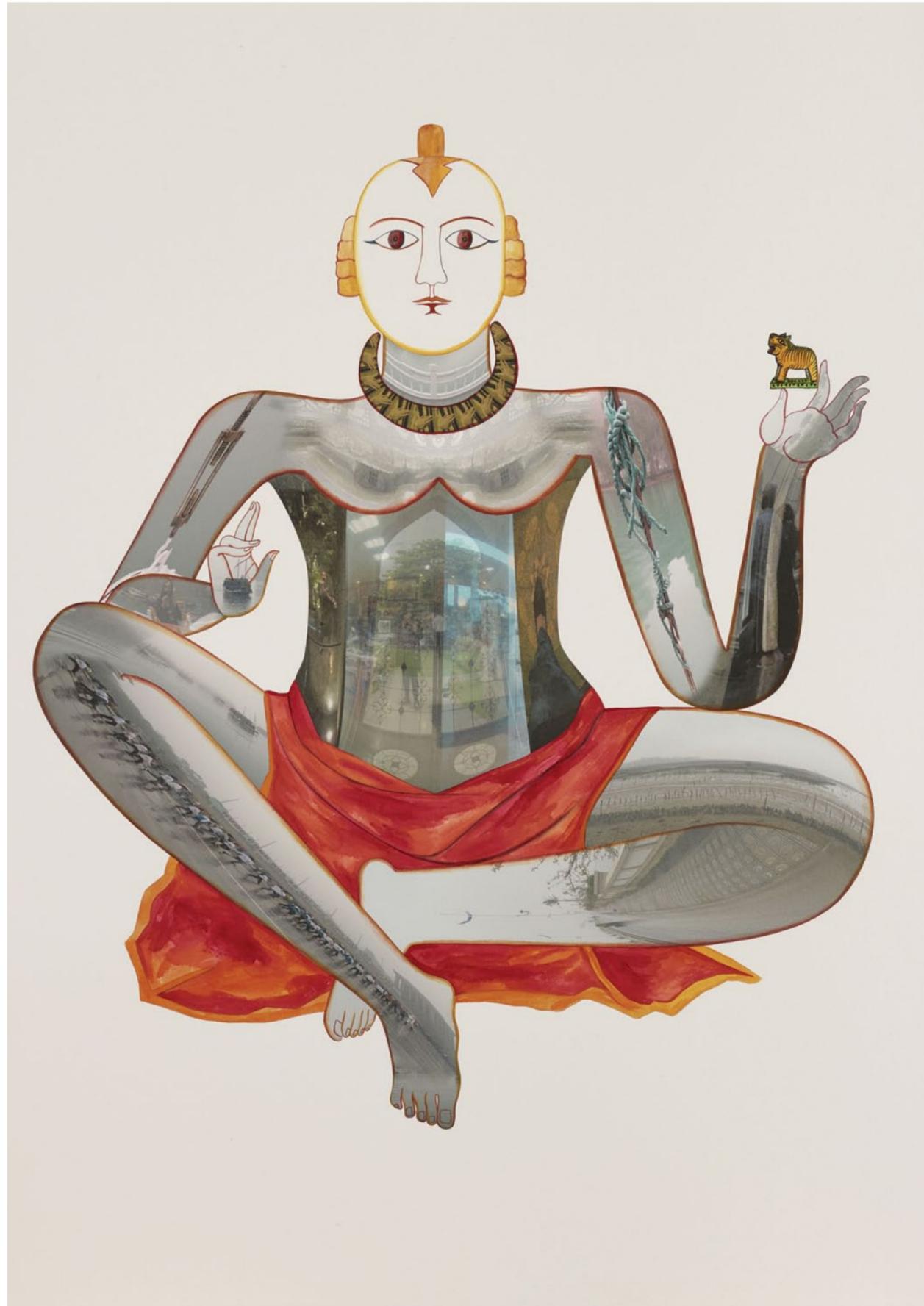
MY SPACE OF BELONGING

My studio has always been within my home, and it is the central hub from which all things get managed as I multi-task continuously, handling both my professional and personal worlds simultaneously. Adaptability to circumstance is critical for one's survival and it is in recognizing this that I have taught myself to become a much more imaginative person. I work long hours with a disciplined regularity and life intervenes into this rhythm with practiced deliberation. My studio is a precious space of belonging for me. I have personal articles of cherished memories accumulated over the years that surround me here, and cupboards full of art books that are like special friends who know when I need them most. My library is my private space of mediation into a world of conversations and ideas. These interventions help me from becoming overly insistent on a singular way of perceiving an idea, and instead provide me a space of distance to reflect with more objectivity, thereby honing my critical faculties so that I purge my mind of any stiltedness.

*The literal meaning of *sutradhar* is "thread-holder". This is a central character in Sanskrit theatre and occupies the central place on stage. He was responsible for auspiciously conducting the commencement of the show and to keep the production on the right track. He is analogous to a modern director, stage manager and producer. Some scholars argue that the term originated in the ancient art of puppetry in a very literal sense as "string-puller".

Works on Paper













Interview

Daniel Herwitz in conversation with **Rekha Rodwittiya**

Daniel Herwitz: First, let me just say, how totally delighted I am to see you after 20 years and the work is more beautiful than ever. And also to thank, I'm sure for both of us, Prajit Dutta and Aicon Gallery for putting together these extraordinary exhibitions. I think the quality and character of the work, especially this exhibition, is a testament to the importance of thinking about contemporary Indian art from the perspective of figuration. The importance of figurative traditions becoming distinct to some of the wonderful abstract artists that have been recently featured in museums—that has meaning—to think about the role of the figure. I certainly want to talk about that. So I thought I'd begin by asking questions about the show and take it from there. If one looks at some of the smaller watercolors from your earlier period, let's say 20–30 years ago, those pictures are full of fragmentary forms, which are quite expressionistic. The female figures in some of those pictures are in a state of anxiety. They're predatory spaces in a way, with wolves and other animals in them. There is no easy way to locate oneself in them yet they are beautiful and in their own way quiet and not over-cluttered, which I think is very important. But it's interesting to compare the earlier work and think about the journey to the marvelous work on this side of the gallery. The work here is pristine...single figures in their own quiet beautiful spaces and I was wondering if you could speak to the journey that's led from the earlier *Heads* work to these new large paintings.

Rekha Rodwittiya: Before I start, I would also like to say thank you so much to Aicon Gallery and the team here. As I

said to the management at Aicon Gallery that no show is ever really complete unless you have a wonderful team of people around you who contribute to making the show possible. So thank you all so very much. It is interesting Danny that you position the question as viewing it as a space of a journey. I think as a painter it is a word that is important to me. As a student in India in the 70s, it was a very exciting and fecund time with the height of figuration being reinvented especially in Baroda. And I think that my entry of discourse started within this location. But what I needed to problematize for myself was how to locate my context within this evolving scenario where the reality of my personal history held significance. Interestingly, I come from mixed parentage, and so things that were taken for granted as the usual norms of what could be defined as Indian for others often became cumbersome and purposeless for me because my points of reference were eclectic. For example I didn't speak a vernacular language as English is my mother tongue, and my upbringing was a cosmopolitan/westernized urban one. So as an art student there was a desire on my part to examine how I could address these larger narrative histories where I could uphold facets that I deemed as representing my India/my history/my space of belonging and make this the center stage of my discoveries. So my commencement in the art world from where my journey could be defined as beginning is this umbilical point—this rooting within a contemporaneity of my context. Also there was an overriding conscience amongst my generation in the India of that era to engage with socialist and Marxian politics. And although my political



Rekha Rodwittiya, *At Work in Her Studio*, 2015

affiliations were of a similar nature, what I found nonetheless irksome was that there was no place within this politics that accommodated the issues of gender equality as a pressing and urgent need that required special attention. Why I stress this point is that in all the discourses that were happening around that time which focused on the issue of examining the ideas of identity, in all the paradigms of these explorations, gender issues did not merit being ever addressed. So when I went to London the separation from my country allowed me to look at India with a critical distance, not only as a nation, but also as a socio-political-cultural space. This is because as an artist I was looking at my belonging as being held within my own cultural ethos therefore obliging me to examine it more closely. Regarding my pictorial language, I chose a kaleidoscopic fractured articulation within which the underlying face of violence within life was portrayed. I created a kind of theatre of events—a spectacle to be witnessed—(within those works from the 80's), which gets carried over into these works, which we see in this exhibition at Aicon so many years later, in a very different way. The thread that remains within my approach to my work is the frontal centrality that creates this tension of confrontation with the viewer. So I don't know whether that's the journey of entry that you refer to.

DH: Yes very much so. In fact, let's talk about some of this recent work. Early in the conversation you described a sense of almost a secular aura. My sense of these figures is that they are without clothes but their bodies are very much their own. They are the owners of their own bodies. Even their proportions are quite beautiful. Someone earlier referenced classical ballet, and here is an almost classicist beauty about these. However, even with these beautiful, and to a certain extent erotic proportions, you never doubt for a second that it is the woman who is in control of her own figure, her own body; and she has the space to do it too. Which is quite an extraordinary achievement. And earlier today you used the phrase the nude versus the naked, and I'm wondering if you'd want to elaborate on that.

RR: I'll come to that in a moment. What I would first like to point out is that I moved away from the agitated and gestural to adopt a more static theatre of representation, as a method to underline more emphatically the content and intentions of the work. People often ask me about how I construct my figuration and why the subject is

center-staged. And I think my answer to that is I initially began by talking about situations from reality, pertaining to violence against women and issues regarding oppression and subjugation faced by women. I then shifted to focus on the celebration of female empowerment. I think is very important to my art and to myself as an individual to look at and reflect upon the celebration of empowerment and the courage of resistance that women endorse through many areas of their lived life. I perceived it as relevant to the feminist discourse. In my figuration I iconize the female figure—to remove the palpable corporality and instead diagrammatize her body—so that it does not become a commodity for lustful consumption, but instead is viewed as a source of life giving energy. And so therefore to address your earlier inquiry about the difference between using the word naked and nude—for me “naked” becomes a metaphor for openness—it positions vulnerability and strength as two sides of the same coin. The female figures as I portray them, are like guardian figures that stand as a testament of female endurance—having been witness to anguish and pain, yet where the spirit to survive with dignity at all cost cannot be extinguished. And this desire that women have to stand tall, cuts through all castes and creeds, becoming a secular space of resistance. Women have always been at the forefront of resistance always believing that the space of dissent is an entitlement to bring about change and progress.

DH: Your treatment of time is very interesting because if one looks at some of these figures, one has the sense first of all, that they are completely seeped in tradition. They carry the resonances of huge amounts of time but they seem to be figures that very much exist in their own space, meaning that they're not subjected to time. Rather they seem to have the capacity to pass through time with a certain serenity, almost like Buddhist sculpture in a certain way. This idea of being able to pass through time (we could move over to the other side of the gallery), because you said something very interesting earlier about some of these works involving photomontage. You suggested that the actual figures are almost like a map that seems to refer to earlier figures that in fact you have made. And I'm wondering if we can talk about that process and what it means to you.

RR: About 5 or 6 years ago I decided that I wanted to engage in looking at the female figure as I have delineated it in my past works, and to extract the out lines of these figures from my works with the intention of looking at them as sites of retrieval. And so those areas then became almost like spaces of excavation for me to renegotiate with. One of the things that interests me is the phenomenon of displacement—because existing within the continuity of time one tends to sometimes look back because there is a space of comfort that one gets from past associations—and yet in the retrieval of anything, you are obliged to renegotiate with it in the “here and the now” of who you are. I'm 57, and as one grows older, you place your experiences to pose more questions. My areas of enquiry still remain specific to women's issues but the reinventions that one continuously engages with—the continuous idea of examining and reexamining ideas of concern—forces and obliges you to come up with something that is re-structured and doesn't therefore allow it to remain static. So that's what I mean by dealing with the here and



Rekha Rodwittiya, *(Installation View)*, 2016, Aicon Gallery, New York

now, whether it has to do with technology or whether it has to do with approaches to an affiliation with an ideology. As an artist you need to change your vocabulary to articulate your concerns in order that they remain alive, because if you don't, then you can sometimes sabotage yourself.

DH: Let's talk about the process behind the photomontage pieces. They're quite extraordinary because they seem set aside from anything personal, almost abstracted in a kind of space slightly distant from any specific person, almost anonymous. And yet, if you actually look at their bodies where the color is, you've described these colored areas as being highly personal, full of narratives and stories about your own experiences. And so the juxtaposition between the initial anonymity of the faces of the figures and the very personal nature of their bodies being filled with memories is quite arresting. To what extent do you think these works do, in fact, carry personal stories and narratives and things like that?

RR: I think it's a bit like a pendulum—a sort of swinging back and forth of how you base yourself within your own traditions. First of all, I'd have to say that I think for myself, one of the largest playgrounds is the area of world art history. And maybe from the kind of education that I had, or maybe from my own personal interest, I think the desire not to pigeonhole myself only into belonging to certain areas of tradition has liberated me early on in my art practice. In my paintings the idea of holding the figure in a space that is almost eternal fascinates me. I don't ever think of the space that foregrounds the figure as a background or as a backdrop. I think what one is really talking about is evoking the idea of an infinite or divine space of existence, where the timelessness of the female spirit speaks both of being a witness of time past and prophesizes about the future. I think that all human existence seeks to find contextualized placement and meaning. Interestingly the personal belongs within the collective—ancestries hold personal stories as well as hold the stories of others—and it is that continuous mediation that allows the personal to find its space in broader histories.

DH: You mentioned that the photography in these works refer to trips to Thailand and elsewhere. Could you discuss the significance of travel to your work?

RR: I have been economically independent since I was 18 years old and I am very proud of it. I think as an Asian Indian woman, I found it very necessary to determine my economics and therefore my independence and my empowerment. Why I mention this is because it is directly related to the process of these works. I earned my living as a young student and as a young professional by taking professional photographs. And then when I got my scholarship to go to London to do my M.A., I put down my camera. I loved photography but I put down my camera and I never touched it again. However with the advent of the smart phone I began taking tons of photographs of my cat that I dote on. And so, one day my partner Surendran Nair, who is also an artist, decided to surprise me with a present—and he gifted me this professional camera expecting me to take more photographs of the cat, which I did for a while. However I then found myself looking at photography as a medium that I needed to reinvent for myself, and that happened not with any difficulty but in fact with great ease. So I decided that I would begin using the camera again, however this time to take photographs whilst I travel. This is important to note because I had chosen never to take photographs as a traveller once I had put my camera aside. This was because I wanted to cultivate the discipline of memory. As an artist, I wanted to be able to record in my mind's eye, things of relevance. Whether I was in a museum or whether I was in situations that were significant for me, I wanted to record them mentally, to imprint them from the space of memory—and it was a discipline that I cultivated and I think a discipline that served me well. So when the camera came back into my life I then decided that I would make this a project for myself. I began to choose specific destinations in different parts of the world and travel to them with the project as a specific agenda. I take photographs with a seeming randomness, but in fact that actually isn't the case. Every artist has a certain vocabulary, not just stylistically but also in what makes up the context of the work. Objects I use reveal my relationship and my discourse with the world at large, and in particular. They are possessions that I own, and so there is that personalized space through which I extract metaphors and formulate a personalized symbolism from these objects that surround me. This is of extreme importance to me. Therefore when I look through the lens of my camera, I am searching for those connections of personal identification with objects, especially in museums, other than merely recording whatever I see randomly. I was raised as a Roman Catholic until I distanced myself completely from any religious affiliations when I was 13 years old. So there is this residue left behind from this association that is stitched within my own identity forever. Therefore when I visit a museum, I feel at once drawn and comforted by the Christian iconography that I encounter and I pick and thief and lift and gather with my camera, claiming objects from the outside world to become part of my personal narrative. Their imprint of association allows these objects to lend themselves to become mythologized within my personal visual lexicon. I often take myself into the unfamiliar to find things for myself. So travel therefore is very important for me within the search to know myself.

DH: Is there an intention with these pictures for there to be a constant sense of the suggestion of the story without being able to read it? In what way is the personal meant to translate itself to the viewer?



Rekha Rodwittiya, (Installation View), 2016, Aicon Gallery, New York

RR: I think that's an interesting question because figuration inherently suggests narrative possibilities. I would even go so far as to say that anything captured as an image possess multiple meanings that allows readability through experiential planes. However do I tell stories within my work? No. What I do is I create territories that provoke and prompt you to find something you can identify with, as I want for you to then bring your experiences to it, to decipher it. My art is of course invested with personal histories that give shape into my visual vocabulary. For example, one of the recurring motifs I use is my sister at her first communion, holding my hand. It has become a leitmotif that I have used repeatedly, placing this image on the cusp of doorways or hidden behind things, or meshed within other images. For me this image is indicative of many suggestive meanings.... that of innocence or like a talisman of protection. All images offer us readability that lies beyond the original meanings they possess which is what interests me the most.

DH: There's meaning but there's no narrative key...

RR: Yes...precisely.

DH: I mean, there's nothing you can put on the wall and say, 'Oh, that's what it's about'. And that may be a relief for Americans in that there is no sentimentality. There's no gushing NPR story core on a Friday morning where somebody talks about going into their daddy's garage, finding his old tools and weeping. There's no American memoir in all of this. In fact, some of it is deliberately ironic. Some of these heads that are filled with the flowers you described are almost like the flowers of a funeral. When someone has a heart attack and they're lying in a hospital bed, there are a hundred thousand lilies in the room and there's sort of the consumerist brain and endless rows of shoes, coats and so forth. And so to a certain extent, the narrative element is descriptive without being excessively sentimental. Would you like to share your process?

RR: The images are not intended to be descriptive as their meanings get automatically altered through the transposition that occurs when they are placed within other permutations of belonging. I would like to talk about the process of my work by sharing the way I perceive. I am someone who dislikes

perfection. I think the most important thing for me in a lot of my work is how I paint. I do everything myself as I work without assistants by choice. It is important for me to use my hand and so the act of making a painting and allowing it to have its flaws, is in fact essential to this factor of process we are talking about. The end result of my paintings appear as though I know, right from the beginning, exactly what the completed image will become. However this isn't true. What is true is that I know the territory that the work is going to reveal. There are certain things about each individual artist's methodology and process which perhaps holds subtle inflections that cannot be completely described, which becomes what the magic of painting is really all about.

DH: So, I'm curious to hear you talk about what you got from contact with the British figurative painters during your time in London in the 1980s. And what it meant to come back to Baroda. In those days Baroda really was revolutionary in modern Indian art because the first generation of progressives within the late 1940s and 50s were really returning to the Indian past and its mythological traditions as a reference for a way forward as a new nation; Husain's subjects from the Mahabharata and so forth. And Baroda was really breaking with that moment of nationalism and mythology. The excitement being that there were no rules basically. How to work between figurative work and tradition was entirely up to the artists. So I'm wondering what you got in London in the light of this and how you brought it back.

RR: I think the most important thing for me, working in London, was the separation from India. I found it exhilarating because it allowed me, like a truant child, to be able to appreciate where I'd come from and what I'd learned from India. However, I was always very clear that I would be returning to India. It has always been my political choice to live and work in India. I have to say that, because there were many things that were very seductive about making the choice to stay abroad, but I chose instead to come back to India. To answer your question more pointedly, the rigors of the Baroda School, which I am eternally grateful to, was not just about a studio practice, but also the rigors of a kind of pedagogic space of learning art history and a detailed imbibing of both Western and Eastern aesthetics. And I think that this grounding created a relevant plinth upon which

one could build new discourses. Because as you very rightly point out, modern Indian art was being re-energized through discourses that were initiated by scholars and artists who were articulating concerns revolving around new ideas. This collective space of concern was producing an articulation that was vital as it was inclusive and not a mere monologue. These debates on Indian modernity within the contemporary art practices of India were something that I carried with me when I went as a student to London. I firmly believe that wherever you go, and hopefully without stubborn rigidity, it is important to know yourself and not give up your identity merely to fit in. To carry in a way of speaking, some little baggage with you, because in doing so it keeps you from getting completely lost in the seduction of everything that's new and exciting. So what you need to do is to formulate the essentials that matter to you and keep it clearly in focus. This was something that paid off for me. For example, I remember in the first week of being at the RCA I was told by a professor that I did not know how to draw. I did not react with any anger, however I was equally very clear that since I wasn't interested in the British academic style of drawing that I was not going to draw in that manner just to prove my credentials. And so instead I created an awareness regarding the influences that shaped my approach to drawing without becoming defensive about it. I also think that the process of learning should be one where you're open to the ideas of what is happening at that time in a particular place, but to know what you want to take from it. The 80's in London were so exciting. It was exciting because there was an entire new wave of the movement of New Figuration, as you rightly pointed out. But what this movement was dealing with was different from my own ideational preoccupations. However that didn't matter to me because the excitement lay in being exposed to different types of art practices. The tutors at the RCA approached their teaching via a communication with the students to engage with what the students brought with them as knowledge, as they believed they too could learn from such interludes. So what I perhaps was gifted to receive at the RCA was the space to learn how to articulate and ideate with absolute abandon, and most importantly, with no apology whatsoever. I had several tutors with diverse approaches to my work to interact with and I enjoyed the robustness of the program that demanded you to stand tall. I believe you also have to become the part you want to be in your own life. There is a kind of performative space in everybody's life where you take on a role that you decide what you want to be and you sort of enact your beliefs ...and that's what develops them and brings greater credibility to it, for yourself. So I completely swam in the waters of that time and I did two hundred works in two years whilst I was studying at the RCA. And it is personal achievements like these that push the boundaries for oneself and which excites you to find yourself. Also, when one is away from the familiar ones alertness is much more heightened. In London I was dealing with diverse disciplines as well as a multicultural environment that demanded me to find my plumb line of placement right from day one, which was very challenging. I had left my three and a half year old son behind in India with my parents to do my MA in London, and as a single parent this two year separation was the toughest personal sacrifice I had to contend with—but at the end of the day I think the journey was hard won for me and I think, therefore, precious.

DH: The extraordinary thing about Baroda, and you mentioned this, but I want to come back to it, was that it was an environment in which there was tremendous innovation steeped in tradition, but everybody was doing something that was bold. You were doing something bold. And Nalini Malani and a lot of other people were at the same time, and you mentioned that it was really where Indian art criticism, modern Indian art criticism arose. The first generation Indian modernists really believed their ideas came from Gandhi, nationalism, decolonization, and some things about what it meant to be a modern artist. The career of these modern artists and some debates about Indian nationalism, Gandhi versus Savarkar and such, were not particularly theoretical, and those involved had very little trouble with that. But it was in Baroda where people were reading Walter Benjamin and Geeta Kapur and the interesting question is how that material, that was so much being discussed, contributed to events artistically, that's something worth thinking about.

RR: Sure, but we would have to give credit to the build up of this discourse on modernism to the time of around independence in India that bred the climate for modern Indian art to emerge. The ideas about modernism propagated by Tagore and other cultural nationalists set the stage to examine the effects of colonization on our art practices. In the 50's artists like Souza and Raza were making their departures from India, choosing the west as their base. In the 70's and 80's, we see important exhibitions such as Timothy Hymen's "Place for People" in which issues of identity were discoursed. Indian art began to also be seen on an international platform through the festivals of India, which were being presented on a grand scale. There was this new opening up of a cultural awareness in India, where many things were happening to create a flux for new situations to manifest. I think that most importantly language and content in Indian art no longer had to validate its self to find parity within world art. It was a kind of shaking off of the burden of western centric perceptions on art and aesthetics dictating our placement within the chronicles of art history, and I see this as being an important change within the cultural context of the 70s in India. The historicizing of contemporary Indian art became something that was taken over by Indian artists and the critical space and theorizing by intellectuals and scholars; and the pedagogic space therefore was something that addressed all of this with great vigor.

DH: I just have one more question. This is from one of the interviews where you said something very striking, and I wonder if you've said it in passing, or how deep it goes with you and also what it means, you said I'm a feminist but not a feminist artist. I'm wondering what that means to you.

RR: Yes, I'm not a "feminist" artist as I see that kind of label as restrictive. I'm an artist. And the world of everything that concerns me that I pay attention to, and that I wish to address, is what I paint about. However I'm a feminist by the very DNA that makes up my existence, I live and breathe and think from this space of gender affiliation that I perhaps have been gifted by the legacy of where I was born, and the empowerment of the women that made up my family. I don't know how else to put it more emphatically except to reiterate that I live and breathe as a feminist so therefore that is the prism through which I perceive everything around me, and so therefore it would patina my art as well. But the label "feminist artist" seems incongruous to me. Instead I would state—I am a feminist and I am an artist.

Works on Canvas



Nayika (Blue), 2009, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 24 x 24 in.

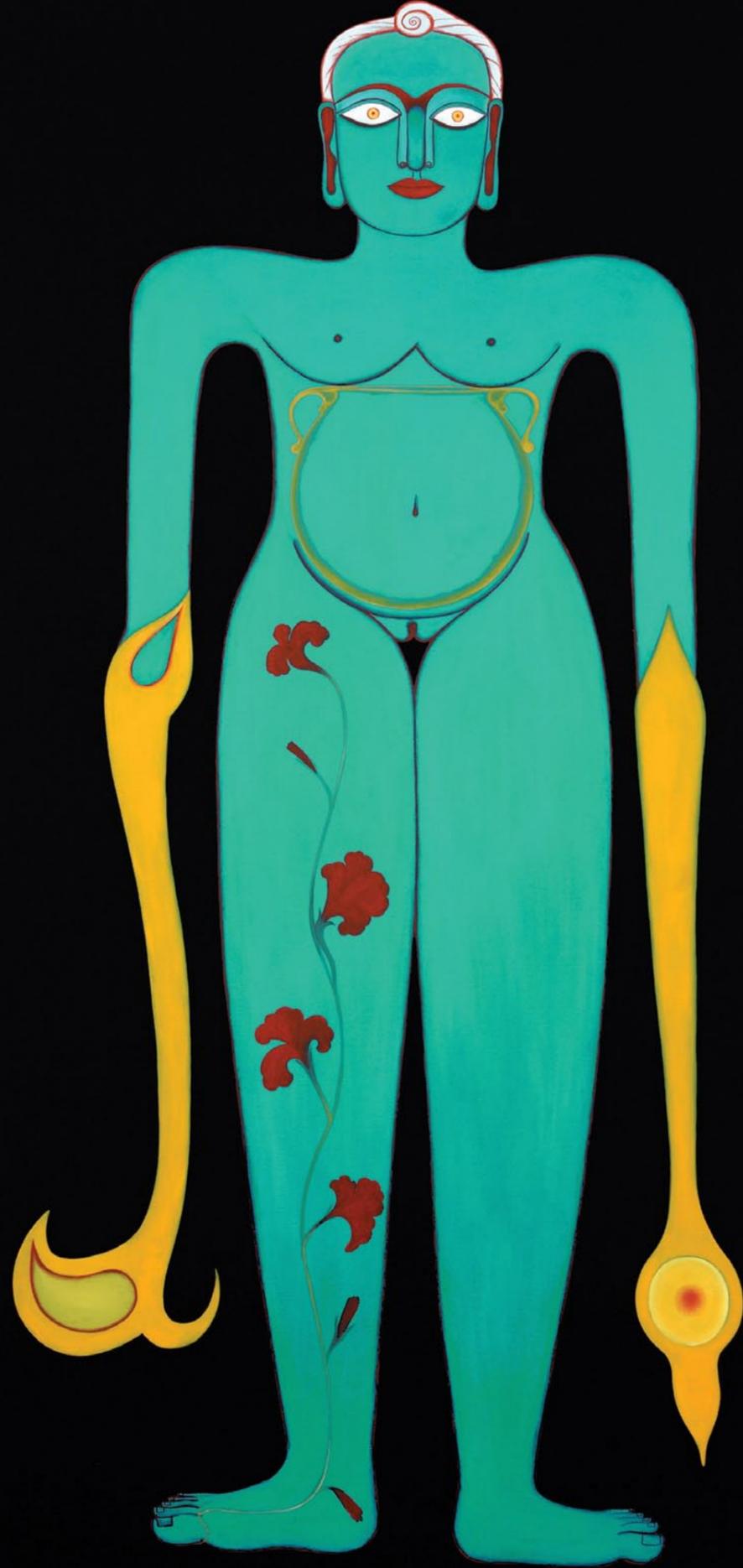


Nayika (Orange), 2009, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 24 x 24 in



Nayika (Red), 2009, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 24 x 24 in.





Rekha @ 50 (Teal), 2008, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 72 x 48 in.



Rekha @ 50 (Orange), 2008, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 72 x 48 in.



Rekha @ 50 (Blue), 2008, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 84 x 60 in.



Nayika/Guddiya (Blue), 2009, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 36 x 24 in.



Nayika/Guddiya (Purple), 2009, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 36 x 24 in.



Nayika/Guddiya (Red), 2009, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 36 x 24 in.



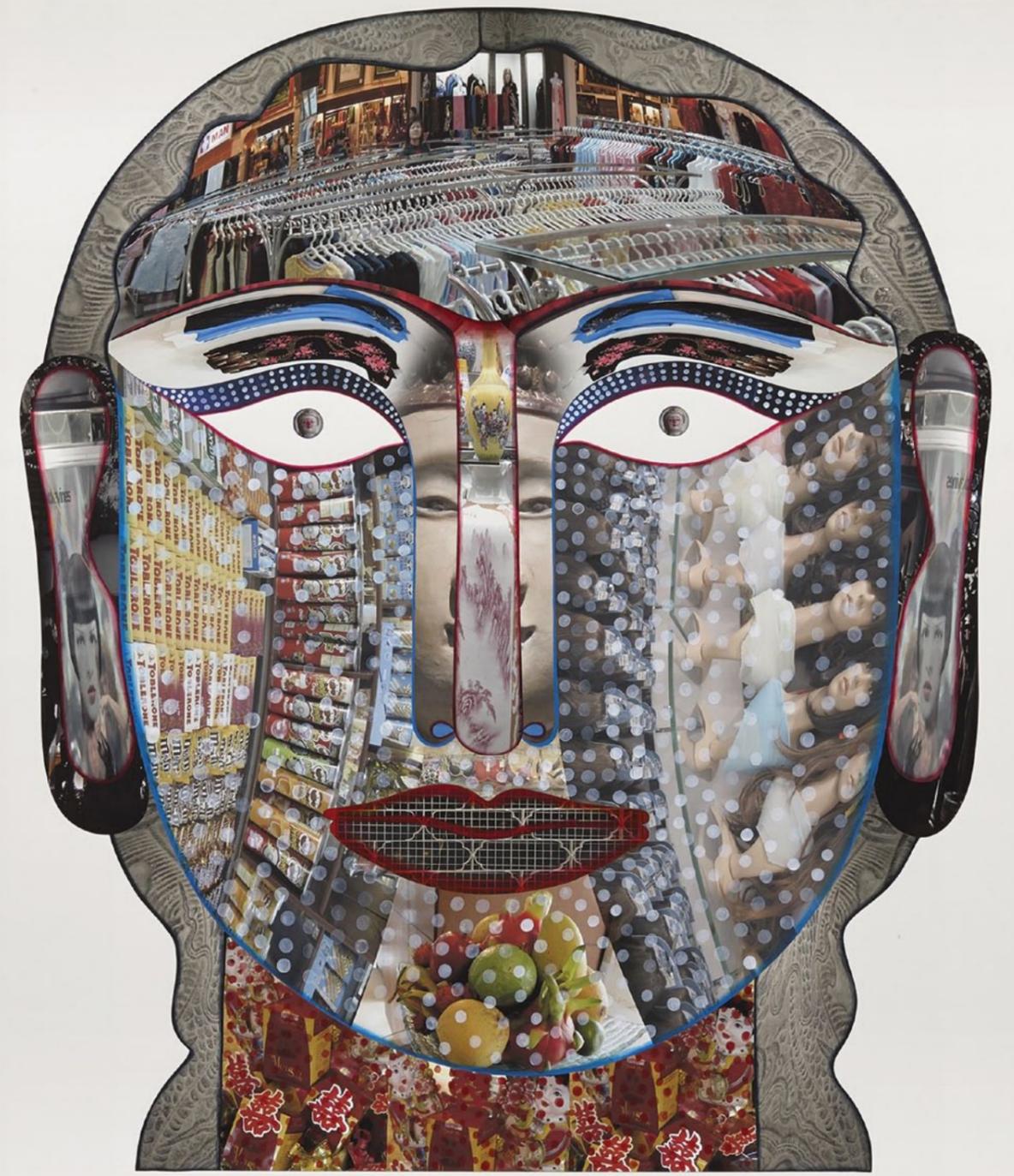
Matters of the Heart



Matters of the Heart (Head II), 2013, Digital inkjet print with auto-biographic photo images and hand-painted watercolor on paper, 60 x 60 in.



Matters of the Heart (Head VI), 2013, Digital inkjet print with auto-biographic photo images and hand-painted watercolor on paper, 60 x 60 in.



Matters of the Heart (Head IV), 2013, Digital inkjet print with auto-biographic photo images and hand-painted watercolor on paper, 60 x 60 in.



Matters of the Heart (Head VI), 2013, Digital inkjet print with auto-biographic photo images and hand-painted watercolor on paper, 60 x 60 in.



Matters of the Heart (Head I), 2013, Digital inkjet print with auto-biographic photo images and hand-painted watercolor on paper, 60 x 60 in.



Matters of the Heart (Head III), 2013, Digital inkjet print with auto-biographic photo images and hand-painted watercolor on paper, 60 x 60 in.

Works

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- Page 7 (Center): *The Cloaked Night*, 1985, Ink and gouache on paper, 15 x 11 in.
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Rekha Rodwittiya

Education

1982-84	MA (Painting) Royal College of Art, London, UK. Awarded a distinction for my thesis "A Painful Journey". Received The Unilever Painting Prize at the degree show.
1982-83 1982	Studied Film & Video at the Fulham Institute, London, UK Awarded Inlaks Scholarship to study at the Royal College of Art London, U.K
1978	Studied & practiced photography under the guidance of Prof Jyoti Bhatt
1976	BFA Painting, Faculty of Fine Arts, MS University, Baroda, India

Solo Exhibitions

2016	'Love done right can change the World'- To be presented at Vadehra Gallery, Delhi 'The Rituals of Memory: Personal Folklores & Other Tales' To be presented at Aicon Gallery, New York
2014	'The Guarded Megalopolis of the Feminine Heart', Sakshi Gallery, Mumbai
2013 2011	'Matters of the Heart,' Sakshi Gallery, Mumbai 'Intangible Interlocution: An Anthology of Belonging', Sakshi Gallery, Mumbai
2008 2007	<i>Rekha@ fifty</i> Sakshi Gallery, Bombay <i>Second Skin</i> , Air Gallery & Sakshi Gallery, London, UK <i>Second Skin</i> , Maya Gallery & Sakshi Gallery, London, UK
2006 2005 2003	<i>Once Upon A Time....</i> , Sakshi Gallery at Shridharani, Delhi <i>Encrypted Soliloquies</i> , Sakshi Gallery at Art Folio, Singapore <i>Bye-Bye Baby</i> , Sakshi Gallery, Bombay <i>Old Fables : New Myths</i> , Sakshi Gallery in collaboration with Sarjan Art Gallery, Baroda
2001 1999 1998 1997	<i>Subtexts</i> , Sakshi Gallery, Bangalore <i>Time Zones: Home & Away</i> , Sakshi Gallery, Bombay <i>Evocations</i> , Studio Barbieri, Venice, Italy <i>My Body - My Land</i> , Sakshi Gallery, Bangalore <i>Re-Inscribing Ancestries</i> , Nazar Gallery, Baroda <i>Borders/Territories</i> , Apparao Galleries at Gallery 678 New York, USA
1996 1994 1993	<i>In Shades of Red</i> , Sakshi Gallery, Bombay Sakshi Gallery, Bangalore Art Heritage, Delhi
1992	Cymroza Art Gallery, Bombay Sakshi Gallery, Bangalore Seagull For Arts, Calcutta
1991 1990 1989 1988 1987 1986	Sakshi Gallery, Chennai Cymroza Art Gallery, Bombay Art Heritage, Delhi Gallery Sassi, Stockholm, Sweden Art Heritage, Delhi Sarala Art Centre, Chennai Cymroza Art Gallery, Bombay
1985	Art Heritage, Delhi Cymroza Art Gallery, Bombay
1982	Urja Art Gallery, Baroda, India

Selected Group Exhibitions

2015	Sakshi group exhibition at the Park, Chennai
2014	<i>In-Between</i> , Sakshi Gallery, Mumbai
2013-14 2013	<i>Forgotten Figures'</i> , Aicon Gallery, New York <i>The Sakshi Show'</i> , presented by Sakshi Gallery at The Park, Chennai
	<i>First Edition</i> , presented by Sakshi Gallery at Taj Krishna, Hyderabad
	<i>Mapping Gender: Bodies and Sexualities in Contemporary Art across the Global South</i> , Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi
	<i>The Possibility of Being</i> , Exhibit 320, New Delhi
	<i>In house</i> , Sakshi Gallery, Mumbai
2012	<i>Diva</i> , Sakshi Gallery, Mumbai <i>Contemporary</i> , Sakshi Gallery, Mumbai

	<i>Contemporary</i> , presented by Sakshi Gallery at The Park, Chennai
	<i>Looking Back, Looking Forward</i> , Sakshi Gallery, Mumbai
	<i>Daya/On Kindness: An Australia India cultural exchange</i> , RMIT Gallery, Melbourne Australia
	<i>Narratives of the Self</i> , Gallery Espace, New Delhi
	<i>Back to School: Baroda 1979-89</i> , Tao Art Gallery, Mumbai
	<i>Anecdotes</i> , Sakshi Gallery, Mumbai
	<i>Daya/On Kindness: An Australia India cultural exchange</i> , India Habitat Centre, New Delhi
	<i>Review</i> , Sakshi Gallery, Mumbai
	<i>Pause: A Collection</i> , Sakshi Gallery, Mumbai
	<i>High-Light</i> , presented by Sakshi Gallery, Mumbai at The Oberoi, Gurgaon
	<i>Back to School: Baroda 1979-89</i> , Palette Art Gallery, New Delhi
	<i>A Collection</i> , Sakshi Gallery, Mumbai
	Gallery Collection, Sakshi Gallery, Mumbai
	<i>Roots</i> , 25th Anniversary Exhibition of Sakshi Art Gallery, Mumbai at The Park, Chennai.
	Sakshi Gallery, Mumbai
	Dali's Elephant, Aicon Gallery, London
	International Ceramic Centre Baroda - Exhibition at ABS Baroda and at Art & Soul Mumbai- <i>Wired at the Heart</i>
	<i>Singularities</i> , RL Fine Arts, New York
	<i>1.2.3.4.5...In the Line of Fire</i> , Lemongrasshopper, Ahmedabad
	Inaugural Show, Sakshi Gallery, Taipei
	<i>Arco '09</i> , Sakshi Gallery, Madrid , Spain
	Gallery Collection, Sakshi Gallery, Mumbai
	'Collection of works,' Sakshi Gallery Mumbai
	<i>Zip Files</i> , Tao Art Gallery, Mumbai
	<i>Finding India</i> , Sakshi Gallery, Seoul, South Korea
	<i>Long Gone & Living Now</i> , Gallerie Mirchandani & Steinreucke, Mumbai
	Art Taipei, Sakshi Gallery, Taiwan
	Gallery Display, Sakshi Gallery, Mumbai
	Sakshi moves to Colaba, Inaugural Show, Bombay
	Art on the Wing, An exhibition to support VCARE an animal shelter, Sarjan Gallery, Baroda
	Invited to exhibit in a show curated by Paternlab, <i>The Teardrop Explodes</i> , London, UK
	Art Miami, Sakshi Gallery, Miami, USA
	Making of Divinity: curated by Ina Puri, Sakshi Gallery, Bombay
	2004 <i>Tiranga, rights and responsibilities</i> , curated by Peter Nagy for Shallu & Naveen Jindal, Jehangir Art Gallery, Bombay
	6 part painting titled <i>A chanced meeting between Nukata No Okimi and a serendipitous yayavar</i> , installed at site in the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum and displayed for six weeks, Fukuoka, Japan
	2003 <i>Un passage dans la lumiere</i> " curated by Philippe Mouillon for the Laboratoire in Algiers.
	<i>The Said & the Unsaid</i> , Apparao Galleries, Bombay
	<i>Cinema Stills</i> , Apparao Galleries, New Delhi
	<i>The Sheen of Metal</i> ", The Palette Art Gallery, New Delhi
	<i>Nav-Nayika</i> , Tao Gallery, Bombay
	<i>Figures in my Mind</i> , Gallery Espace, Delhi
	<i>Palette 2001</i> , Delhi
	Indian Contemporary Fine Art, Saffron Art & Apparao Galleries, Los Angeles, USA
	2000 <i>Embarkations, The Millennium Show</i> curated by Yashodhara Dalmia, Sakshi Gallery, Bombay
	<i>a la nuit tombee</i> , curated by Philippe Mouillon for Berge 2000, Grenoble, France
	<i>Early works</i> , The Fine Art Company, Bombay
	<i>Timeless Visions: Contemporary Art of India</i> , From the Herwitz Collection, Peabody Essex Museum, Massachusetts, USA
	<i>Celebration of the Human Image</i> , curated by Yvette Kumar for Gallery 42, Delhi

1999	<i>The Tale of Six Cities</i> , Lakeeren Art Gallery, Bombay <i>Pacaambu</i> , curated by Phippe Mouillon for the Laboratoire, Sao Paulo, Brazil Participated in the "Benefit Event for the Elephant Project" organized by Tasneem Mehta for INTACH, Bombay
	<i>Imagined Spaces</i> , a one year touring exhibition with Surendran Nair at major art centers in Australia. This exhibition was toured by the Noosa Regional Art Gallery under the directorship of Kevin Wilson.
1998-99	<i>Lines of Desire</i> , curated by Jagjit Chuchun, Alnoor Mitha & Kim Merrington. A Liverpool Art School & Oldham Art Gallery & Museum touring exhibition.
1998 1997-98	<i>Indian Spring</i> , Apparao Galleries & Gallerie Martini, USA <i>The Edge of Awareness</i> , curated by Adelina Von Furstenberg (Art for the World) for the 50 th anniversary of the World Health Organization (WHO). Did an assemblage of three water colors on Maheswari Odhanis titled <i>Stories from the Womb</i> , Geneva—Sao Paulo—New York—Delhi
1997	<i>Nirguna/Saguna</i> , curated by Peter Nagy, Nature Morte, Delhi
	<i>Women Artists of India - A Celebration of Independence</i> - Curated by Mary-Ann Milford-Lutzker, Mills College Art Gallery, California, USA
	<i>Epic Reality- Contemporary Narrative Painting from India</i> , from the Herwitz collection
	Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, USA
1996	<i>Of Women -icons/stars/feasts</i> , Eicher Gallery, Delhi
	<i>12 Contemporary Painters - from 1984 to 1996</i> , The Fine Art Resource, Bombay
	<i>Acro da Lapa</i> - curated by Philippe Mouillon for the Laboratoire, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
1995-96:	<i>Inside Out: Women Artists of India</i> - a touring exhibition in England, curated by Alison Lloyd for the Middlesborough Art Gallery, UK
1995	<i>Art for Cry</i> , Bombay, Delhi Portrait Exhibition, Sakshi Gallery, Bombay <i>Dialogues of Peace</i> , Curated by Adelina Von Furstenberg for the 50 th anniversary of the United Nations, Geneva, Switzerland. Constructed a painted room titled <i>Songs from the Blood of the Weary</i> , which is part of the Jehangir Nicholson collection
	<i>Bombay</i> , An RPG Exhibition, Bombay
	<i>Contemporary Art- Deutsche Bank Bombay</i> , compiled by The Fine Art Resource, Bombay
	<i>Indian Winter</i> , Kapil Jariwala Gallery, London, UK
1994	An exhibition of Womens Art - Society for promotion of art - Hyderabad
1993	<i>Images</i> , Sakshi Gallery, Chennai
	<i>Still Lives</i> , Sakshi Gallery, Bombay
	<i>Husain ki Sarai</i> , Vadhara Art Gallery, Delhi
	<i>Images & Words</i> , A travelling exhibition for communal harmony organized by Sahmat - India
	<i>In small format-Works on paper</i> , Sakshi Gallery, Bombay
1992	<i>Journeys within Landscapes</i> , Sakshi Gallery, Bombay
	<i>A Nest For Sparrow</i> , curated by C.S Laxmi, Bombay
1989 1988	<i>Artists Alert</i> , In Memory of Safdar Hashmi, Delhi <i>Cry Exhibition</i> , Bombay
	Exhibition to Celebrate the Declaration of Human Rights UN, Geneva, Switzerland
1987	Second Biennial of Havana, Cuba
	<i>Alekhya Darsan</i> - Six Young Contemporaries, Geneva, Switzerland
	Print exhibition, Centre for Engraving, Geneva, Switzerland
	Print exhibition, Bristol, UK
1986	Sixth International Triennale, Delhi
1985	Exhibition of Contemporary Indian Art from the Herwitz Collection, New York, Pennsylvania, Woraster & Vermont, USA
1984 1983	<i>Young Contemporaries</i> , Sheffield, UK John Nevil Gallery, Canterbury, UK
	Rebecca Smith Gallery, London, UK
1982 1981	British Council Gallery, Bombay <i>Young Students Exhibition</i> , Planetarium, Baroda <i>All India Graphic Exhibition</i> , Ahmedabad

1980	<i>All India Photography Exhibition</i> , Mysore
1979	<i>Shaishav</i> , photography exhibition, Baroda
1978	Opening Exhibition of Urja Art Gallery, Baroda

Residencies/Projects

2016	One month residency supported by Sakshi Gallery & hosted by Linika & Sanjay Kumar, Kodaikanal, Tamilnadu
2010 2004	Invited for a one month residency at Montalvo Art Centre, USA Invited for a three month residency to the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Fukuoka, Japan
2003	Painted on Bombay Suburban train as part of the celebration of the World Social Forum that was conducted in January 2004. This project was organized by Open Circle, Bombay
2000	Transcultural Drawing Residency (CAIR Fellowship) at the Liverpool Art College, John Moores University, UK
1999	Invited by the Noosa Regional Council for an international residency program. Surendran Nair was also part of this program, Noosa, Australia
1995	Worked on site specific location for world art exhibition "Dialogues of Peace" constructing painted room titled "Songs from the blood of the weary" (duration two months), Geneva, Switzerland
1991	International Artist in Residence (duration two months), The Magasin Centre National D'Art Contemporain de Grenoble, France
1990	Asian Cultural Council Rockefeller Foundation "Starr Fellowship" (duration six months), New York, USA
1988-89	Artist in residence at the Konstogskolan Art College—invitation by the Svenska Institute—Stockholm, Sweden

Curatorial Projects

2015	"Subtextual Documentalists" An exhibition of photographs by Jyoti Bhatt & Manisha Gera
	Baswani - "The Collective Studio Baroda" in collaboration with "SITE art space" hosted by Sakshi Gallery, Mumbai.
	"Subtextual Documentalists" An exhibition of photographs by Jyoti Bhatt, Manisha Gera
	Baswani & Noh Suntag from Korea, "The Collective Studio Baroda" in collaboration with "SITE art space" hosted by The Korean Cultural Centre (with assistance from Kim Kyoungae & Kim Changhyun), New Delhi.
	"Residual Remnants" An exhibition of paintings by T.Venkanna, Kim Kyoungae, Abir Karmakar, Poushali Das, Mitali Shah - "The Collective Studio Baroda" in collaboration with "SITE artspace".
	"Subtextual Documentalists" An exhibition of photographs by Jyoti Bhatt & Manisha Gera Baswani
	"The Collective Studio Baroda" in collaboration with "SITE art space."
	"This Side of the Forest" An exhibition by Vasudevan Akkitham, "The Collective Studio Baroda" in collaboration with "SITE art space."
	"Measured Metres"An exhibition of painting & Sculpture by Indrapramit Roy & Mayur Gupta
	"The Collective Studio Baroda" in collaboration with "SITE art space"
	"Generations-Notional worlds" An exhibition of art by K. G. Subramanyan, Nagji Patel,
	Surendran Nair, Manisha Parekh, Sonatina Mendes & N. Divya, "The Collective Studio Baroda" in collaboration with "SITE art space."
	'Quiet Conversations from the Courtyard', Ashvita, Chennai
2012 2011	'Feminine Syntax - Personal Biographies - Lemongrasshopper Art Gallery- Ahmedabad
2008	"Pernoctation & Early Drawings", Curated the section of early drawing of Surendran Nair for Sakshi Gallery, Mumbai
1998	"Cross Currents", Touring Exhibition co-curated with Jennifer Lloyd, Norway
1997	"The Printed Image", Jyoti Bhatt for Cymroza Art Gallery, Bombay
	"The Drawn Image", Cymroza Art Gallery, Bombay
1993 1992	"Four Young Contemporaries", Cymroza Art Gallery, Bombay, Sakshi Gallery, Bangalore



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