

CITIES
IDEAS &
ICONS

Paintings

Works on Paper

Mixed Media

Veena Bhargava

The Village Gallery
presents

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ICONS**

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by
Veena Bhargava

*'What I want to show in my work
is the idea which hides itself behind
the so called reality.
I am seeking for the bridge which leads
from the visible to the invisible'*

Michael Angelo

I find the art scene in India today is livelier than ever before. New concepts, ideas, imageries, style and technique are noticeable in the works of artists who entered the field in the sixties and seventies of the past century. This trend continues with unprecedented fervour and Veena is very much a part of it. Over the past three decades she has made her mark by her singular devotion, application, hard work and an irrepressible desire to reach new heights. She is one of the rare breeds of painters for whom there is no easy route to success. Like all true artists, she has kept her eyes wide open and ears close to the ground. Her keen observation of life around her, especially in a complex city like Kolkata has over the years given rise to a series of imageries which were born out of introspection and research. The imageries contain motifs taken from different sources which combine to make an integrated whole. The selection of motifs demand the viewers serious attention as they have to be inter-related in order to grasp what the artist is trying to convey. Veena is a deeply reflective artist and therefore, each of her works goes through a prolonged period of gestation. Depending on the intention, motifs are selected and integrated into a cohesive pictorial design with sound structural qualities. She then goes into a frenzied frontal attack on the canvas with paint and brush. From this point she embarks on an unknown journey, tackling challenges met along the way. Even accidents are welcome, which she turns to great advantage. I have seen this happening more than once and I was duly impressed.

In the present collection of works there are three distinct categories. There are the large and medium canvases, paintings in gouache and mixed media and finally a large number of black and white ink drawings on paper. Most of the canvases are done in acrylic and mixed media - silk screen transfers combined with painting in acrylic, oil bar and sometimes even encaustic. The extraordinarily vigorous brush strokes are made with such force, as though the paint is emanating from a water jet.

The smooth surfaces in contrast are given a finish almost as smooth as silk. In the process textures are created both accidentally and consciously, together creating a rich pictorial surface that is bound to draw the viewers attention.

The images that appear on Veena's canvases are mainly with few exceptions, born out of her urban experience. Kolkata, a city where she has spent most of her life, is an odd mixture of modernity and primitiveness, of wealth and dire poverty, of human warmth and indifference, of hypocrisy and genuine belief, of positivism and nihilism and of angst and joy.

There are those who can isolate themselves in a world of their own. Being sensitive, such a thought would appear as remote to her as the earth is from the sun. From the time she has matured as a painter she has worked on ideas and themes, which have developed into a series. Her first, entitled, The Pavement Series, which were a collection of large canvases and drawings was based on the pavement dwellers of the much maligned city of Calcutta. The series which were shown here, Bombay and Delhi drew immediate critical acclaim and established her as a front rank artist of the country. Since then, the human condition has remained her primary concern but she has been equally conscious of the fact that the human condition does not necessarily exclude song and laughter. The deterioration of the quality of life, the mindless onslaught on environment, the erosion of behavioural norms, hatred between man and man has given rise to the vital question, 'Where am I in relation to this reality?' Such questioning is an integral part of her artistic personality and this has helped her to formulate a singular vision of her own, which is easier said than done; because it involves the difficult process of a fusion of one's experience, the subconscious and the vast world of imagination with its endless array of meaningful motifs and symbols, culminating in a language of art, full of profound aesthetic ramifications.

Veena developed her themes through metaphors and allegories representing ordinary everyday happenings. Her powerful imageries were matched with an equally powerful expression in terms of sweeping brush strokes, an intense involvement with the paint, a variegated textured surface, a strongly structured design and a highly sophisticated palette. I would need to hastily add that these paintings were equally moving at the emotional level.

Over the past few years Veena's repertoire of imageries have combined elements other than the human figure only. Vestiges of landscapes, the tangled roots of a tree, architectural motifs, often using photographs taken by her - fragments of a railing, an arch, a window, a doorway, an entrance to a shrine, a scaffolding of bamboos, pages from an almanac and calendar, tools used in everyday urban life, images of pop culture, hooves of advancing bulls and several other motifs. These images are painted in acrylic along with screen print transfers on the canvas and are at times combined with human or biomorphic forms to suggest the multi-layered ideas born of the myriad impressions that we are ceaselessly bombarded with through the print and electronic media and conjoined with our personal visual experiences. Here, the artist necessarily goes through a process of careful selection, firstly to suit her ideas and secondly, to make it visually interesting. After all, what matters finally, is the visual impact that the totality of the expression makes on the viewer.

The present collection of canvases are all worked out with great care and without exception all of them operate successfully at all the three levels - the intellectual, technical and the emotional.

Besides the canvases, there is a group of works on paper, some inspired by a visit to the neighbouring country of the pagodas. These are done in acrylic and mixed media - gouache, dry pigments and gold leaf. They are executed in a playful mood but with great panache and

restraint. The vibrantly luminous colours and their harmonization and contrasting juxtaposition show a clear understanding of the mediums used. Evidently, she has enormously enjoyed doing them. Though they may appear complementary to the canvases they stand out on their own strength. The third section of the present collection consists of a number of drawings done mostly with black ink on white paper. A series of heads form the bulk of the group. There are also a few figures in motion, a few busts and vignettes of nature. Some of the heads are split in the middle, some are mask-like and a few portraits too. Heads have an irresistible attraction for figurative artists because of their endless variety of shapes and characters. They can be subtly expressive of human emotion and mood. Some can look saintly, others demonic, some comic, others full of pathos, some strange and fragile, and others heroic. One can go on describing them ceaselessly.

Veena is one of those artists who looks at drawing as a ritual - a regular practice like that of the devout Brahmin who never forgets to recite his Diksha Mantras in the morning. These pen and ink drawings drawn with great vigour and in the form of diagonal lines are suggestive not only of their dramatic power but equally of her tremendous skill and consummate draftsmanship. I have no doubt that these works will demand no less attention of the viewer than her canvases and gouache on paper. Altogether a very impressive collection that will, without doubt, enhance her reputation as an important player in the field of present day Indian art.

Kolkata, September 2006



Paritosh Sen

It was in January 2006 that Veena Bhargava, Ganesh Pyne and his wife Meera and I spent a most enriching day together at Veena di's studio in Kolkata.

She was generous with her time as she treated us to a viewing of her paintings and drawings. Her well appointed studio reflects her personality. A private person she likes to work undisturbed while juggling her life between the demands of urban existence and creative pursuit.

As she talks about her work, the inspiration, the stimuli, her mentor Paritosh Sen, her days as an impressionable art student in New York, what comes through is her passion and sincerity. The thought process behind her work, mulling over her perceptions, the impressions and responses to her urban existence are revealed in her art. Her paintings, mixed media and drawings are a dialogue between the figurative and the abstract, a trend characteristic of Indian contemporary art. They show her supreme command over her medium as in the use of color, compositional balance, and the integration of diverse media. She works industriously and researches thoroughly. She discovered for herself the

encaustic medium in *The Artist's Handbook*. With experimentation she perfected the difficult technique to incorporate it into her canvasses. Her drawings show her mastery over the line and draughtsmanship.

It has been a joy and privilege to work with her on this exhibition, we worked as a team giving each other a patient hearing over daily phone calls, exchanging ideas, accepting and eliminating them as we moved forward towards this exhibition.

Her works are not to be viewed in a hurry and need more than a cursory glance to appreciate, as she is a deeply reflective artist.

I hope you will enjoy this exhibition as I in putting it together.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Dolly Narang'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with large, sweeping loops.

Dolly Narang
The Village Gallery, New Delhi



Paintings



(3) Acrylic & photoscreen on canvas 143 x 178 cm.





(11) Acrylic, oil, encaustic & photoscreen on canvas 142 x 152 cm.

[2019]		[2019]		[2019]	
1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18
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25	26	27	28	29	30
31	32	33	34	35	36
37	38	39	40	41	42
43	44	45	46	47	48
49	50	51	52	53	54
55	56	57	58	59	60





(1) Acrylic & collage on board 122 x 211 cm.





(19) Acrylic & mixed media on paper 32 x 24 cm.



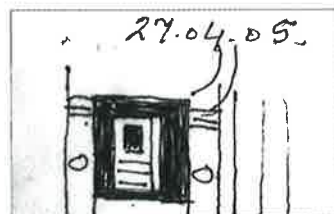


(10) Acrylic, photoscreen & thread on canvas 173 x 143 cm.





(4) Acrylic, encaustic & oil stick on board 46 x 122 cm.





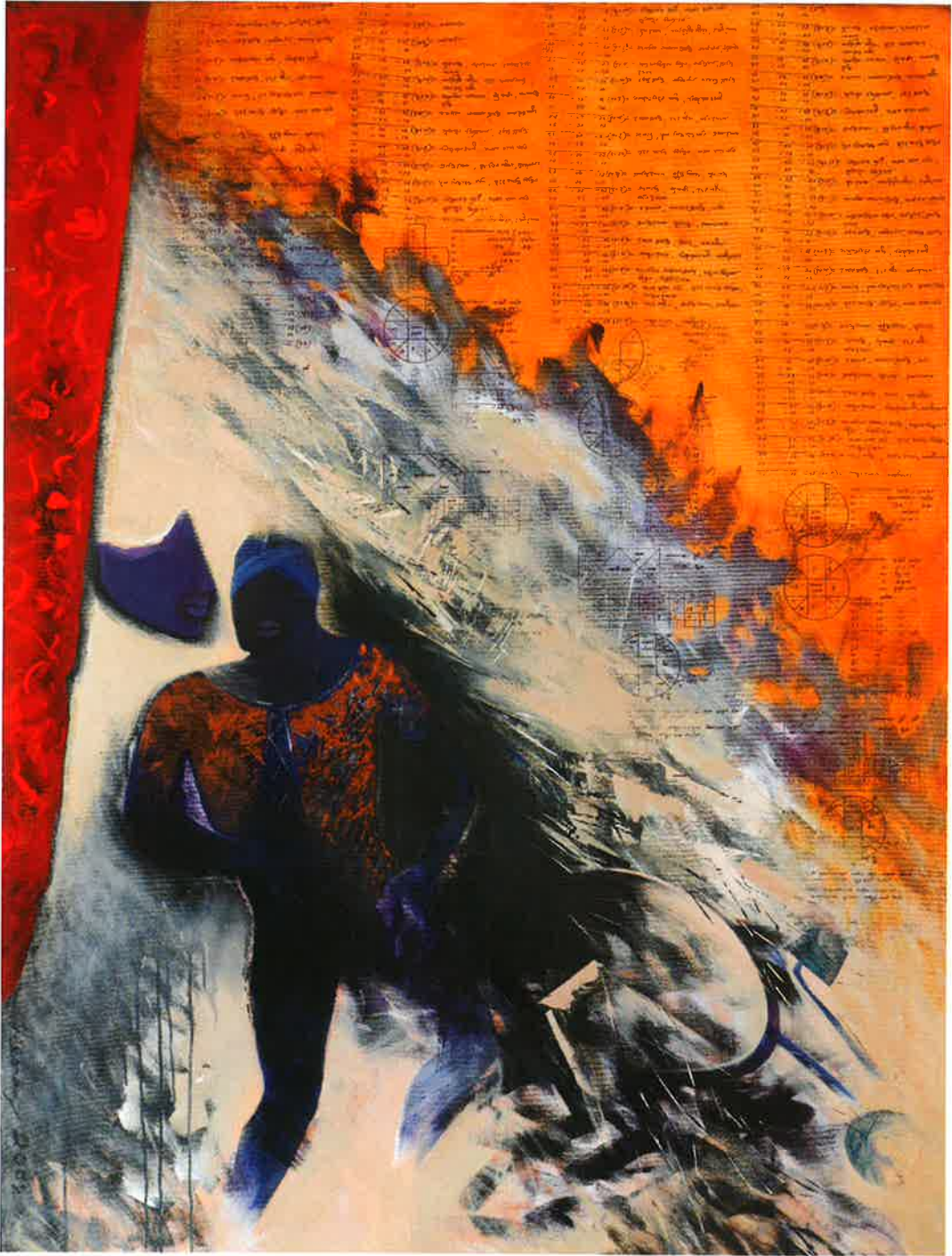
(12) Acrylic & photoscreen on canvas 152 x 122 cm.



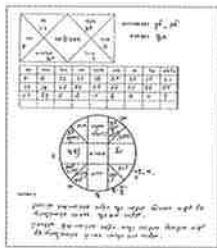


(15) Acrylic on canvas 183 x 137 cm.





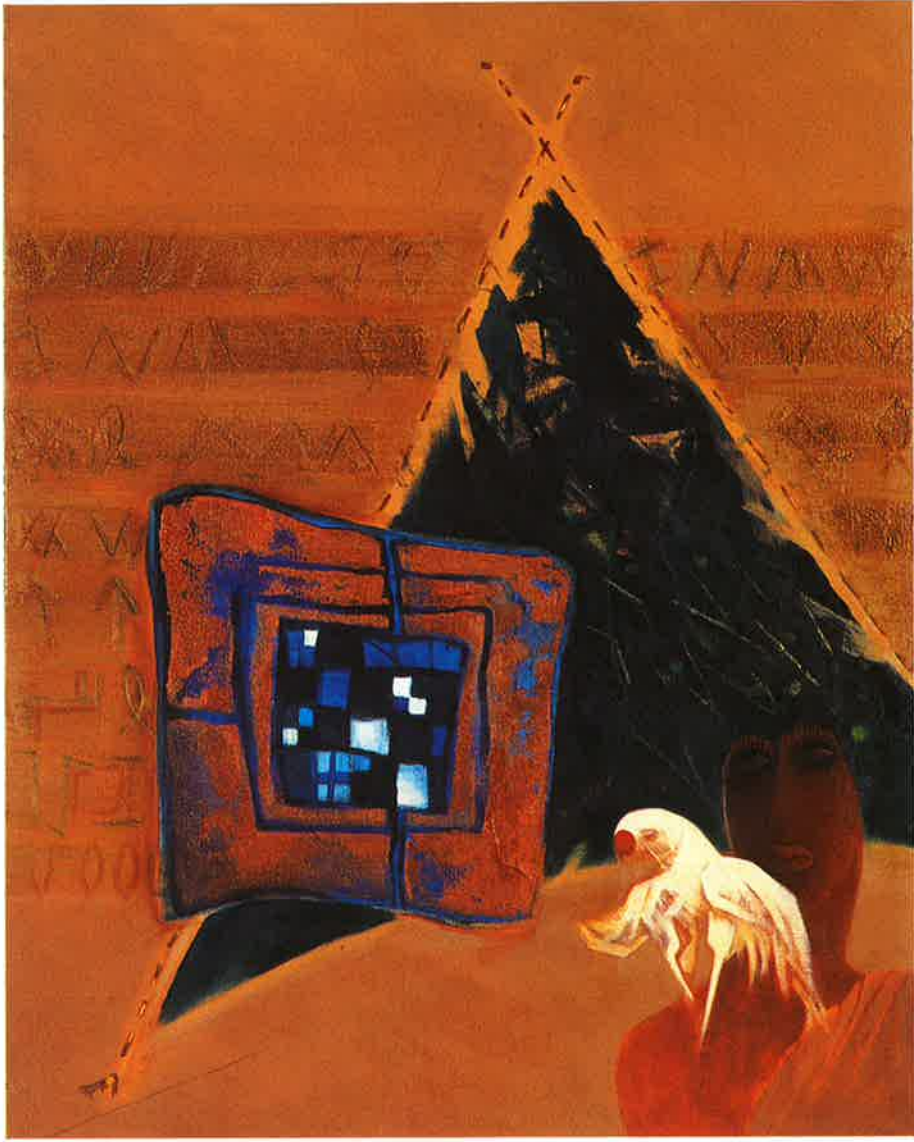
(14) Acrylic & photoscreen on canvas 183 x 137 cm.



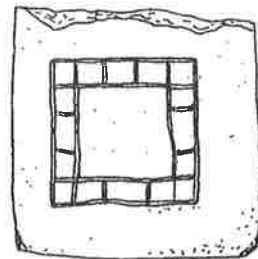
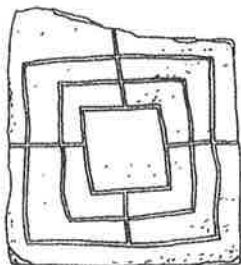


(17) Acrylic on canvas 127 x 102 cm.





(13) Acrylic, oil, thread & encaustic on canvas 102.5 x 81.5 cm.





(5) Acrylic & oilstick on canvas 127 x 122 cm.





(9) Acrylic & photoscreen on canvas 127 x 127 cm.





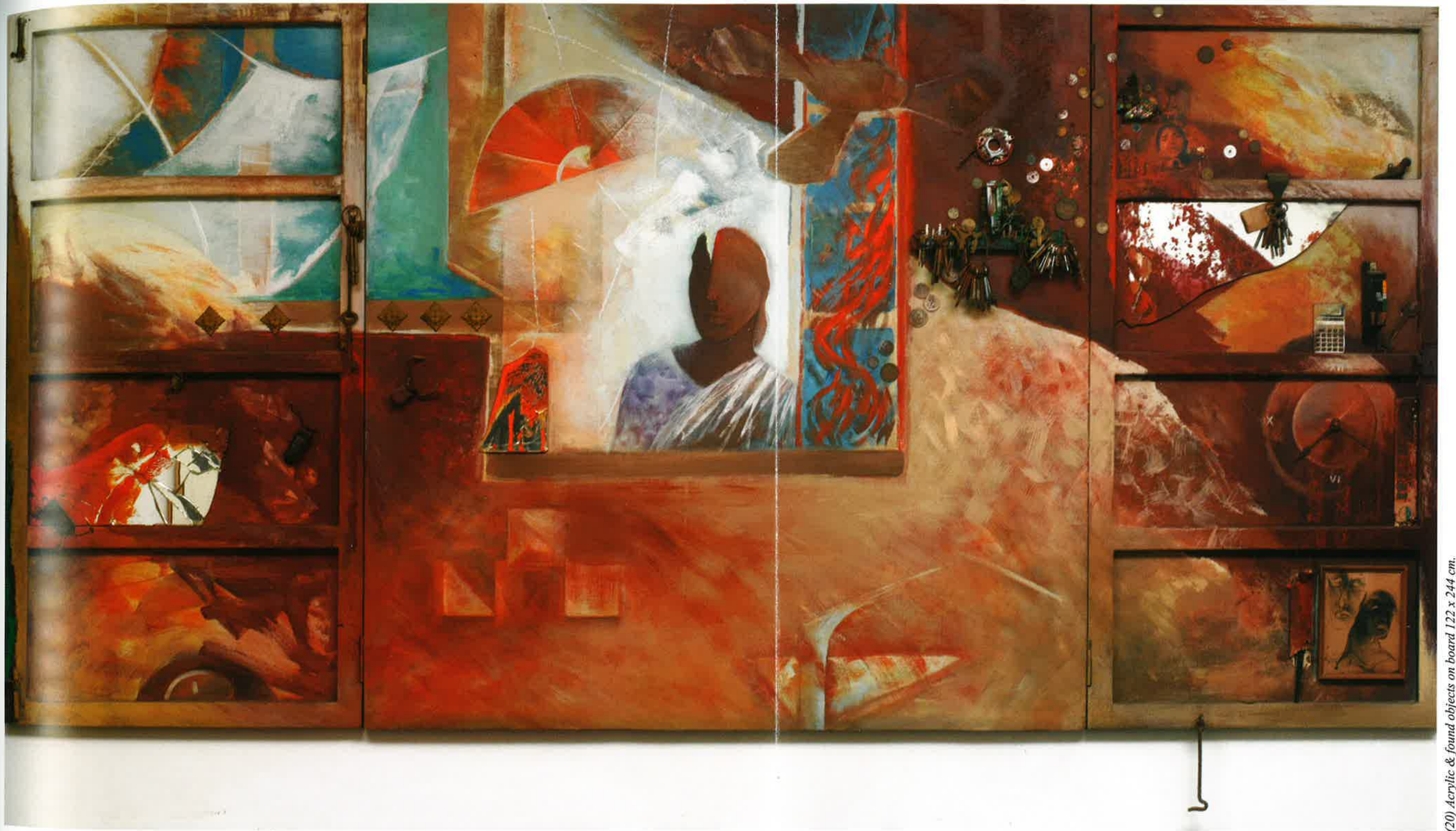
(6) Acrylic & photoscreen on canvas 127 x 102 cm.





(7) Acrylic on canvas 101 x 76 cm.





(20) Acrylic & found objects on board 122 x 244 cm.



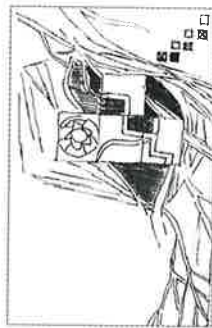


(18) Acrylic on canvas 122 x 127 cm.





(2) Acrylic and oilstick on canvas 152 x 122 cm.





Works on Paper



(6) Performer series I - Pen & ink 109 x 71 cm.



(5) Woman with flower - Pen & ink 70 x 54 cm.



(19) The Statesman - Pen & ink on print 35 x 27 cm.



(8) Ogre - Pen & ink 16 x 12 cm.

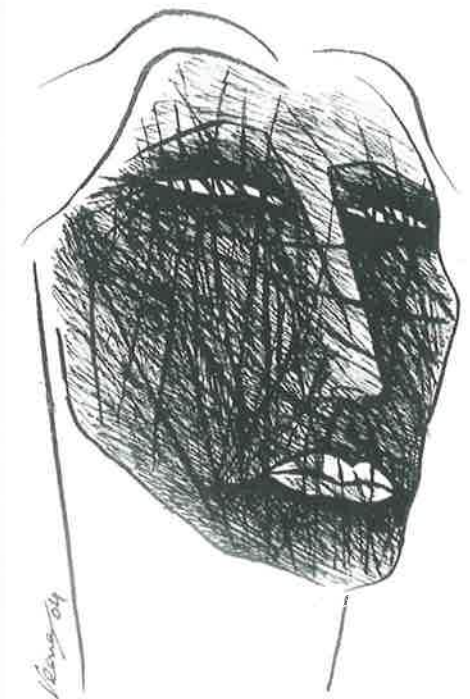


(11) Heads with horns I - Pen & ink 36 x 27 cm.



Keene 04/05

(29) Head - Pen & ink & gouache 18 x 13 cm.



Keene 04

(28) Head - Pen & ink 18 x 13 cm.



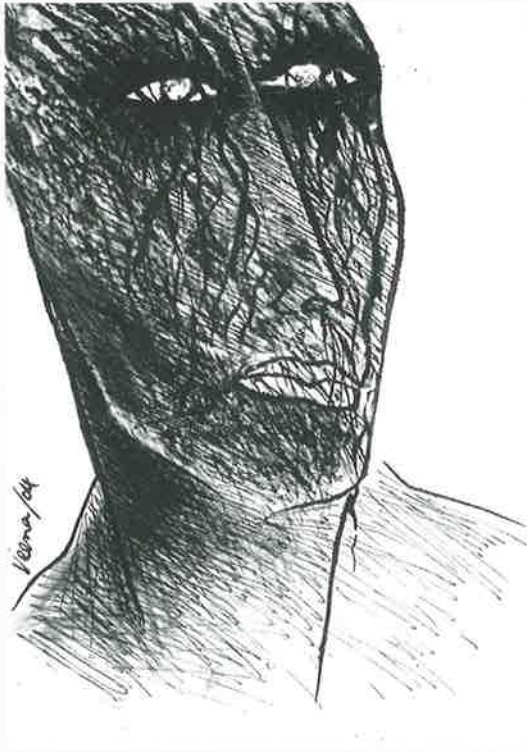
(31) Head - Pen & ink 18 x 13 cm.



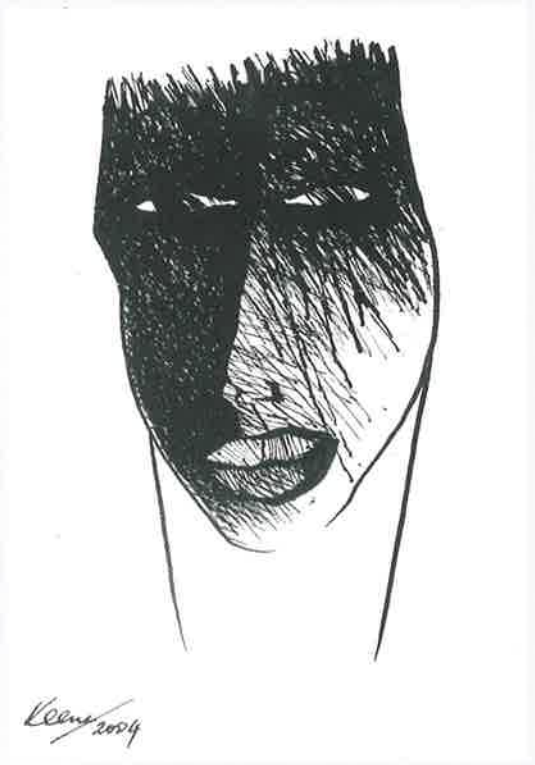
(30) Head - Pen & ink 18 x 13 cm.



(26) Head - Pen & ink 18 x 13 cm.



(34) Head - Pen & ink & gouache 18 x 13 cm.



(36) Head - Pen & ink 18 x 13 cm.



(24) Head - Pen & ink 18 x 13 cm.



V. K. S. / 04

(25) Head - Pen & ink 18 x 13 cm.



V. K. S. / 04

(33) Head - Pen & ink 18 x 13 cm.



(7) Winged figure - Pen & ink 19 x 13 cm.



(39) Nat Spirit - Pen & ink 25 x 19 cm.

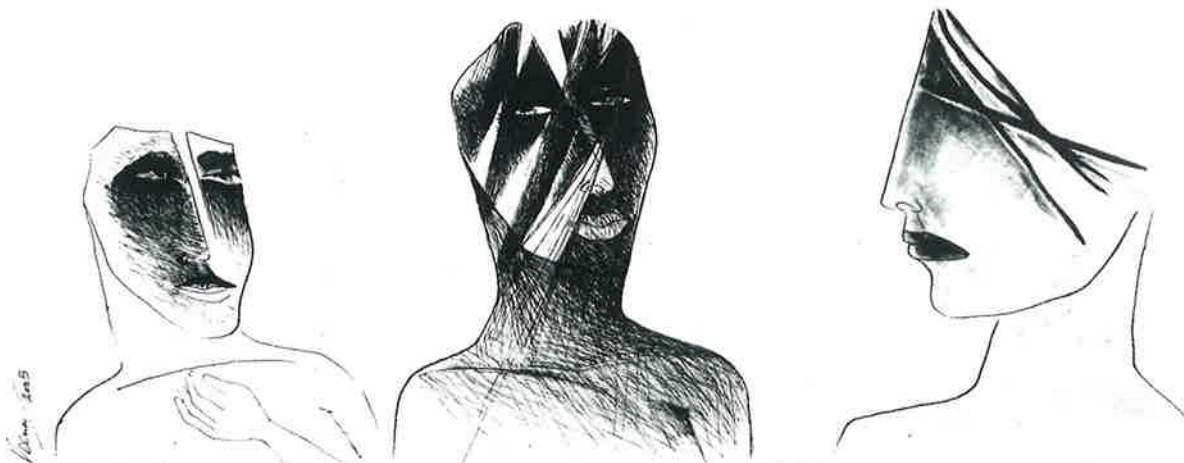


(43) Abu Graïb - Pen & ink & gouache 106 x 73 cm.



Arna Bhattacharya

(44) Standing figure - Pen & ink 76 x 56 cm.



Line in 5

(46) Heads - Pen & ink 21 x 52 cm.



(50) Untitled - Pen & ink & gouache 23 x 20 cm.

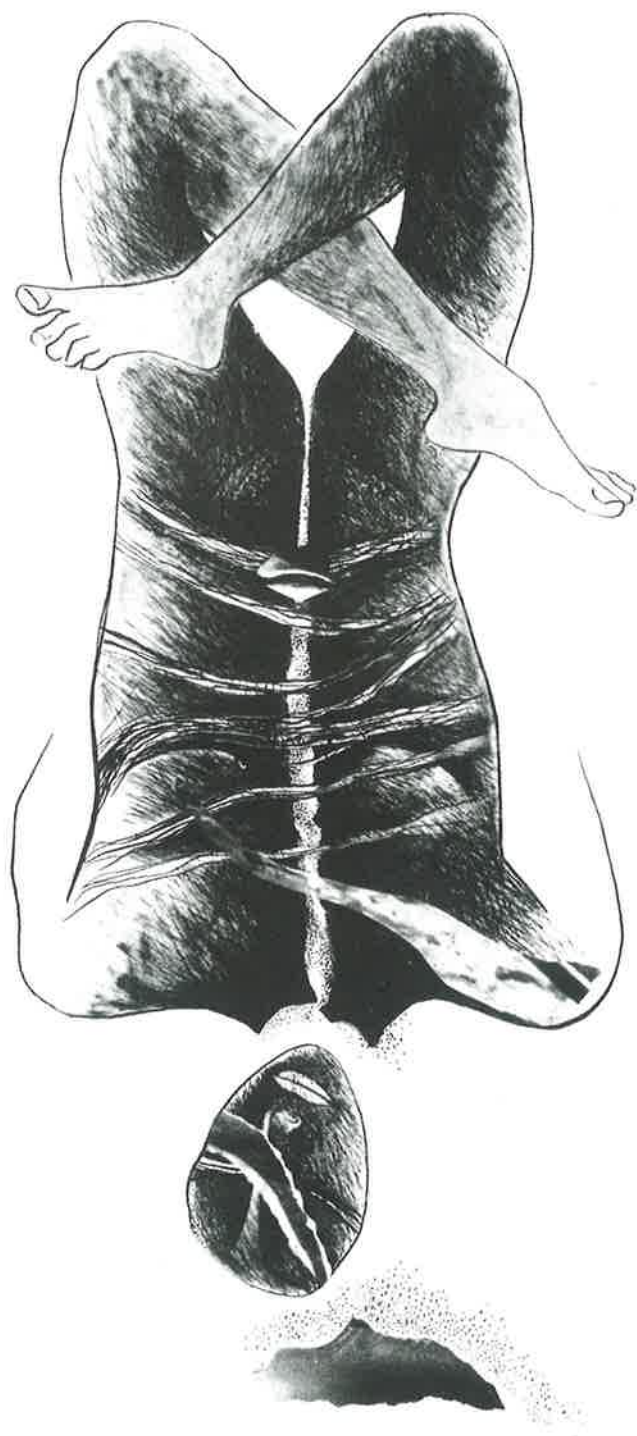


(52) Untitled - Pen & ink 72 x 56 cm.



1965

(45) Woman - Pen & ink & collage 76 x 56 cm.



Lucy Chanjin 2005

(56) Pen & ink & collage 76 x 56 cm.



Mixed Media

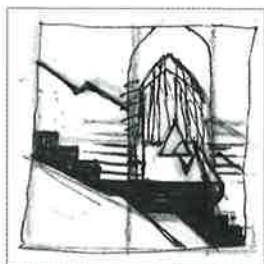


(24) Acrylic & mixed media on paper 43 x 36 cm.



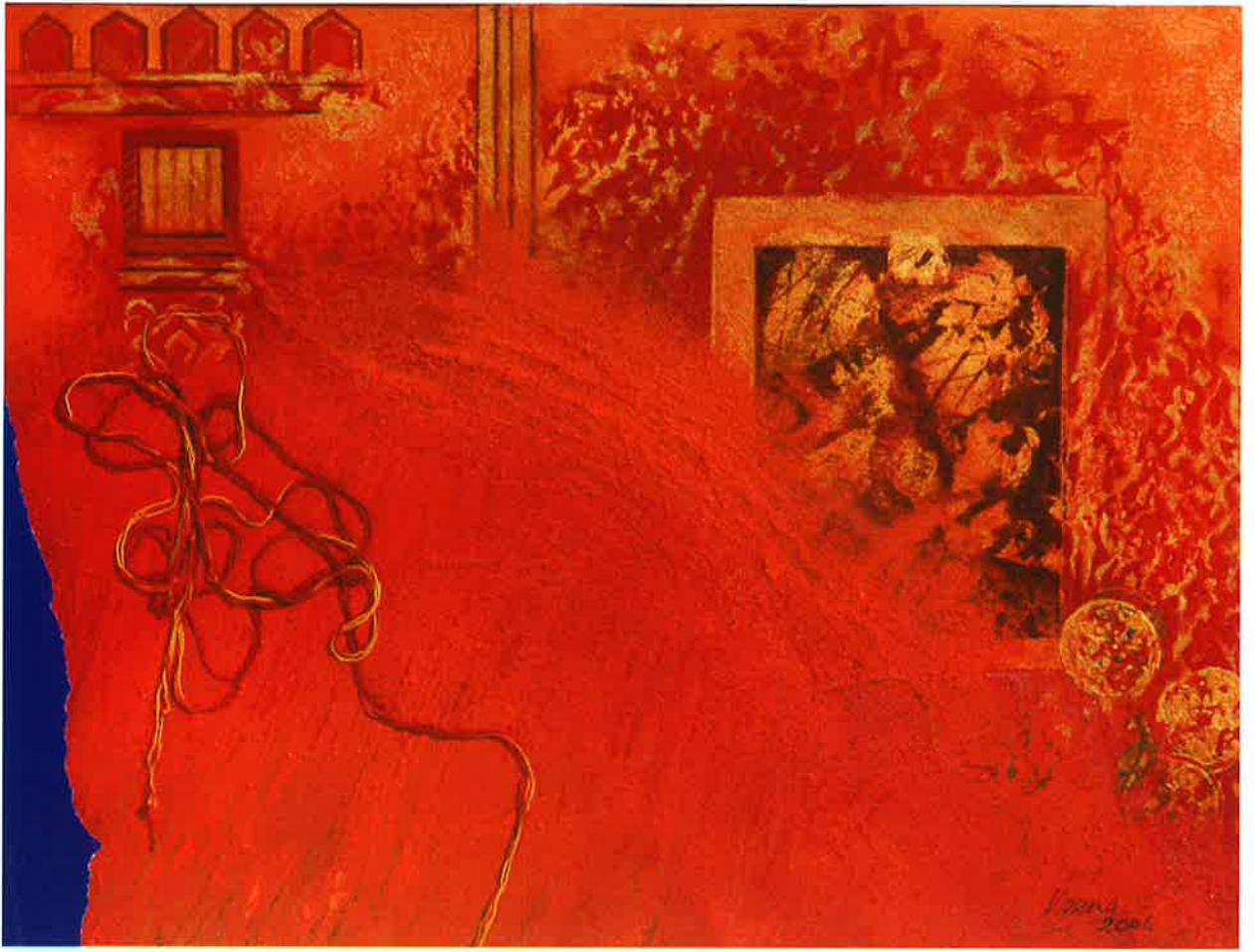


(27) Acrylic & mixed media on paper 28 x 27 cm.

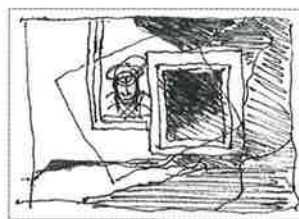
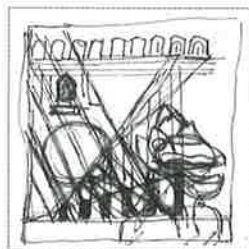




(23) Acrylic & mixed media on paper-43 x 36 cm.

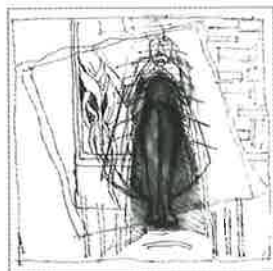


(28) Acrylic & mixed media on paper 31 x 40 cm.





(22) Acrylic & mixed media on paper 43 x 36 cm.





(26) Acrylic & mixed media on paper 43 x 32 cm.



(25) Acrylic & mixed media on paper 28 x 22 cm.



(25) Acrylic & mixed media on paper 28 x 22 cm.



(21) Acrylic & mixed media on paper 43 x 36 cm.



I was born in Simla, the summer capital of the Raj, the second and middle child in a family of three daughters. My father evidently turned away disappointed when he was informed of my arrival. Greater disappointment was to follow when my younger sister was born two years later. My mother, poor soul, had to bear the brunt of the patriarch's disdain, as if she alone was responsible for the debacle.

My father, a stern disciplinarian, somewhat Victorian in his attitudes had joined the Indian Railways on his return from England and was to marry my mother, sixteen years younger a few years later, permitting her to bring with her only the clothes she wore at the marriage ceremony. A man of probity, with firm values, we were brought up in an atmosphere where work and achievement were held in high esteem. We were questioned about our results and rewarded with a smile, or rebuked with a stony silence. Throughout our adolescent years, we carried the burden of 'performing' to try and keep up with parental expectations. Though my parents were from Sind, we were brought up in Delhi, Simla, Karachi and Lahore until my father was transferred to the Eastern Railway, Calcutta in 1946. He retired as General Manager in 1951, to stay on in Calcutta till his recent death at the age of 93.

As a child, I was extremely shy and took refuge under the bed when visitors came. I am told, I had a taste for ants and on one occasion settled down to a meal of the crawling creatures, only to be bitten into a resultant wail - possibly the cause of my occasional acid tongue!

School was at La Martiniere for Girls, and Art was a compulsory subject that I enjoyed, but took lightly. I vividly remember an incident, which occurred in Class VII after a holiday break. Our art teacher, who wore brightly coloured spectacles, and often

came to class forgetting to wear her false eyebrows, asked us to draw a holiday scene. I handed in my drawing of the Massacre of Amboyna, dated 1623 - she was furious. Apart from the usual subjects, I also took piano lessons and was coerced by my parents into taking singing and dancing lessons in one of the myriad 'cultural' schools down the Elgin Road para, where we lived. Both were short-lived attempts, fortunately for the teachers and for me.

Tennis at the BLTA under Dilip Bose and carpentry were my other activities. At home, I often sat by myself and drew and painted portraits and landscapes and also amused myself with soap carving. There were no 'arty' members in my family and creative pursuits were undertaken at my own initiative, and for my personal satisfaction. My primary interest lay in Biology and Physiology, taught by Mrs. Lorna Bobb, an excellent teacher with wonderful human qualities. I had great respect and affection for her and she in turn treated me as a young friend. I wanted to be a doctor and was encouraged in this vocation, both by Mrs. Bobb and my parents. During the last two years at school, a few of us opted for Art as a subject and we were sent to Mr. Sudhir Munshi, the art teacher at La Martiniere for Boys. My introduction to Mr. Munshi, the first professional artist I had ever met, was perhaps the beginning of a deeper interest in art.

I finished school with a first division and a credit in art and joined the ISC at Loreto College for my pre-medical studies. The two years at Loreto were happy years that opened up my sheltered life. I studied hard but also enjoyed the extracurricular activities of debating, dramatics and sports. Some of my closest friendships were made during these formative years. We were idealistic and enthusiastic, with high standards of achievement and responsibility, but fortunately with a capacity to laugh

at ourselves. Ironically, three of my dearest friends were to commit suicide a few years later. I formed a close bond of friendship and understanding with Mother Christina, who taught Botany, and it was also during this period that I met Father Antoine, the Sanskrit Scholar who had come to deliver a lecture to us. So overawed was I, that my mind charged into a gush of compelling questions. A friend and I mustered up enough courage to seek an appointment with him, to resolve for us, the enigma of existence. With his typical smile he agreed, provided we cleaned up his dusty bookshelves at Shanti Bhavan, where he lived. This was the beginning of another enduring friendship and in fact, Father Antoine became so much a part of our family, that we were later to request him to name our children at their namkaran ceremonies.

As we were three daughters, strictly brought up, meeting the opposite sex was restricted to relations and the sons of our parents' friends. It was at college that I was partially let out of my cage and met young men at social gatherings. At sixteen, I had a starry-eyed infatuation which burst like an evanescent bubble when the young man left to study abroad. In retrospect, a blessing. On a trip to Darjeeling, a youth from Calcutta was so struck by me, that as a farewell gift he presented me with a jewelled dagger, which I declined to accept. So hurt was he that, he along with two male companions had the temerity to arrive at our fortress on Elgin Road, only to be met by my mother who curtly told them that no strangers were permitted to set foot in our closely guarded domain! The three youths froze and beat a hasty retreat, never to return. I bought an illustrated book entitled, 'Gods & Goddesses in Art & Legend'- great myths as pictured by the masters Titian, Rubens and others. Mother took one look

at the nudes and complained horror-struck to my father, who fortunately recognized the stature of the work and overlooked the nudity.

My parents, conservative in their attitude, expected me to follow the patterns of behaviour laid down by society and the family. This often led to argument and conflict, as I disagreed with their views, and had to stand up for what I believed.

By temperament, I am a sensitive person, excited by creativity, affected by misery, poverty and the plight of the underdog. I have always felt the need for privacy, the need to recoil into a quiet corner where I could draw and paint, read and listen to music. Along with my busy schedule, I took up art lessons under Dev Kumar Roy Choudhuri, an artist introduced to me by Sudhir Babu. Dev Kumar Babu straightaway encouraged me to draw and paint from life, still life and nature, I painted portraits, views from the window, real and imaginary landscapes, street scenes - till zero hour neared for the final ISC examination, in which I secured a first class.

Then came the tense phase of entrance examinations to Medical Colleges. In 1956, I was selected for an interview at the Vellore Medical College. The five days of interview were gruelling and covered every aspect of one's abilities. For example, in an auditorium full of staff and students, I was asked at three minutes notice to speak on 'Romance or Duty, which would you choose'. Tongue-tied, and shaking, like a good convent bred girl, I spoke on duty, oblivious to the fact that I was to do just the opposite a year later. Though selected, I felt alien and perhaps homesick and heaven knows how I had the gumption or stupidity to refuse admission and return to Calcutta, much to my father's disappointment. By the time I returned, admission to the Calcutta medical colleges had closed and I joined the Biology Honours Department at Presidency College.

A few months later as some students had dropped out, I was called for an interview and admitted to the Calcutta Medical College. The work pressure was grinding and the professors forbidding. I enjoyed anatomy and dissection despite the ugly yellow deposits of fat in the cadaver. It was a shock to see once living beings lying still in rows in refrigerated compartments at the morgue, unclaimed, abandoned, alone and impersonal in death, these victims were to be dragged by their limbs across the hard floor of the dissection room for our investigations into the human body. During this phase, I became very intense and the awareness of my fellowmen came into sharp focus. Friends complained that I had become grim and humourless. Leila, one of my dearest friends, went to the extent of saying that taking up medicine had a morbid and adverse affect on my personality. Looking back, it was a period of awakening, of questioning and of confusion.

It was not all grim, I bought a skeleton for thirty rupees (life was cheap then), which I kept in a basket under my bed and often used the femur, as a weapon to frighten my younger sister Sunita into compliance! Though there was little time for socialising, I kept in touch with friends and met Kamesh Bhargava, a recently qualified Bilet Phiret accountant working with Price Waterhouse. This friendship matured, but it was out of question to invite him to the house, as my mother still kept a strict vigil. We had to work out careful strategies to meet after work.

Within me I felt restless, and began to feel a misfit. I cannot give a concrete explanation for my agitation but it is during this period that I questioned myself on whether I had made the right choice of career. Long discussions followed with my close friends and teachers. Mrs. Bobb, who had given a glowing letter of recommendation for

the Medical College, understood my predicament and need to be myself. I had the strange urge to become an artist.

Mrs. Bobb, bless her, now wrote another letter to enable me to apply for admission to art college. My elder sister Ratna's husband, also supported my decision, though my parents were still in the dark. I had completed my final first year examination, got a promotion to the next year and bade goodbye to medicine.

I was overcome by guilt, unprepared to face the humiliation and bitter disappointment that was to follow. Besides, I was no artist, a mere novice cursed with a yen for perversity. My father ignored me for months and my mother, taking full advantage, set me to sewing bedsheets and *jharans* and suggested that I take up nursing, or get married. I listened with a deaf ear and continued my own pursuits, which led to my joining the Government College of Art, in Calcutta. My teachers and classmates were helpful and friendly and I adjusted easily to the new relaxed discipline.

My friendship with Kamesh grew and the inevitable proposal came. My parents convinced of his upright character and impressed by his academic brilliance, a gold medallist at that, approved, and we were married while I was in my second year at Art College. We lived in Short Street where I carved out a small studio in our one bedroom flat. Kamesh always took an active interest in my work and I was to remain a student for almost four years after marriage. Though difficult, I did manage to strike a balance between home and work. In my third year when I opted to specialise in fine arts, Kamesh was asked to work for the New York office as an exchange visitor. I approached Mr. Chintamani Kar, our principal and requested him to grant me leave for a year and allow me to rejoin in the fourth year, as I planned to continue my art studies in New York. He was extremely

supportive and agreed, provided I could substantiate my claim with examples of work done while I was away.

We took the long way round to New York, through the east to Japan, San Francisco, Mexico, then upto New York. An eye-opening trip for a callow twenty one year old exposed for the first time to different lands and cultures. In New York, while Kamesh was asked to invest in a grey flannel hat, in keeping with his professional image, I stalked the streets in search of an art school. Naomi & Carl Rothschild, whom we had met in Bangkok, had undertaken to guide us through the 'perils' of an alien metropolis. Naomi accompanied me to the Art Students league, a unique organisation with over thirty studios, run by a panel of renowned artists. I immediately felt at home at the League. I was introduced to the work of the teachers and students in the different studios, and asked to choose who I would like to work with. There was no formal examination system. I joined the life drawing, portraiture, painting and composition classes for five mornings a week, under the dapper and distinguished artist Edward Laning. During the afternoons, I joined anatomy for artists and the elements of drawing under Thomas Fogarty. I was propelled into intensive work activity. We worked from the model, emphasising contour, mass and action, composition, pictorial design and painting techniques. In the drawing class, my hand loosened with rapid time sketches, the pose of the model ranging from one minute to one hour. Using conte and charcoal I filled several full sized newsprint sketchpads. Class-work was supplemented by discussions on form and techniques in great works of the past and present, by visits to the Metropolitan Museum, the Frick Collection, the Cloisters, Guggenheim, Whitney and the Museum of Modern Art. Never before had I been exposed to such a range of original works.

It was a fantastic experience and I was charged with excitement. So enthused was I, that for a month in addition to the morning and afternoon class I signed up for night classes which carried on upto 10 pm. Difficult, if not impossible, challenges were thrown at us - draw from the model in slow motion, portray the image as if it were sitting at an angle of ninety degrees from the model - impossible, but we tried. I felt a great sense of exhilaration and fulfillment and was one with myself for the first time ever. My work was commended by both my instructors and one of my paintings was selected, as an illustration of student work for reproduction in the annual League catalogue.

Apart from work, Kamesh and I visited operas, ballets, concerts and the theatre, both on and off Broadway - Brecht's 'Threepenny Opera' had just opened in Greenwich Village. We travelled the land and met the polyglot mixture that is America. We were fortunate in being able to mix in diverse social circles, the warmth of my Bohemian crowd being matched by the hospitality of Kamesh's professional colleagues and friends. New York was a city of magic and we were young. I was offered a scholarship but had to refuse as Kamesh was due back in India. The farewell party organized by Mr. Laning and all my classmates was a complete surprise and I was in tears. I owe a great debt to Edward Laning and to my days at the Arts Students League - till today, a high point in my life.

For our return, Mr. Laning had drawn a map, highlighting an art and architectural tour of Europe. From the cathedrals, galleries and architectural landmarks of England, through France and the Low Countries, north to Germany and south through Florence and Milan, Venice and Rome to Giotto's frescoes in Padua and finally back to Calcutta.

We returned home after almost a year, bankrupt, as we had borrowed heavily to finance the trip, but saturated with rich memories, euphoric and nostalgic. I must confess, the return to Art College was traumatic. Mr. Kar had left and the powers that be, turned a deaf year to the commitment given to me by him. The crateful of drawings and paintings were not enough to satisfy my peers and I was asked to undergo an examination in isolation, to enable me to join the fourth year. After the charged intensive atmosphere at the League, I felt impatient at the lethargic pace. The models, poor souls, were frozen into wax-like images from Madame Tussaud's due to the long dreary poses imposed upon them. Leila and I turned our garage into a studio for rapid life drawing and painted outdoors together after college hours. While in the fourth year, our daughter Brinda was born, but I continued classes and qualified with a diploma in 1962.

We moved to a larger flat in Elgin Road. In 1963, Vir our son was born and a period of motherhood and domesticity followed. We were a close knit family and my father often referred to my mother and his three daughters as the 'Four Furies!'. The children were young and needed attention and my creative activity lay dormant. By the end of 1967, I began to feel uneasy and resumed painting with cityscapes and landscapes inspired by a visit to the Andamans. Though, I had a diploma to my credit, I felt most inadequate - the real quest as an artist hadn't even begun. I felt depressed and painted a desperate gloomy self-portrait. During these intervening years, I had virtually cut myself off from the art scene, but now I had to begin again somewhere. I chanced upon Anju Chaudhari at her show and she referred to the respected artist, Paritoshda in glowing terms. I made enquiries through a friend, to find out whether Mr. Sen would consider giving us

art lessons. Having granted us an interview, nervously we visited his home which bearing the stamp of its occupants, was full of paintings, books, records and potted plants. Mr. Sen, in his fifties, gaunt, serious and arty-looking with green fingers, was frank and almost blunt with us. He said that he had little time to spare, but since we had approached him, he agreed to a three months trial to decide whether it was worth his while to continue, and we in turn had our options open. He agreed to a weekly session at my studio for a couple of hours. He discussed the concepts of contemporary art, and left us to develop our own themes, only to give his critical opinion and suggestions as the work progressed. Enthusiastic and elated, I became eager to discover and express myself through line, tone, form and colour. From the onset, Mr. Sen and I established a rapport and his guidance and encouragement helped to steer me through a stormy phase of uncertainty. Kamesh and the children, now seven and five, warmed to him immediately. At the end of 1969, he left for Paris. Those hesitant beginnings have resulted in a long and enduring friendship with him and his wife Jayashree, and now they are a part of our family and friends. Here was a senior professional, like Mr. Laning who cast aside age barriers and treated me as a friend and co-professional.

I worked in my studio with the children barging in and out, bawling and quarrelling, disturbed by visitors, telephone calls, and daily routine chores as well as the inevitable crises. Working at home has always been a problem as, in the early years you were considered to be a dilettante. Realising that regular work discipline was the only solution, I had a night latch fitted to the door! Fortunately Kamesh understood my needs and eccentricities, and stood by me like a rock.

From 1970 onwards, I worked on both figurative and non-figurative imagery but never completely abstract. Giving special emphasis to structure and colour, I painted a series of cityscapes, contrasting colonial and present day architecture, and also organic rock and root forms, inspired by a visit to Musoorie. I explored silent and anonymous, monolithic, seated and reclining figures and animal forms imaginary and real, simplifying and reinterpreting the natural image. The late sixties and early seventies were troubled times leading to violence in the country and neighbouring Bangladesh. These ominous times were expressed in some large oils and Victim drawings. I worked spontaneously with sweeping strokes and loaded brushes in opaque and transparent hues, with painterly textures surfaces. Alongside, I continued drawing constantly in pen and ink, a practice that I follow till today. I find the direct finality of pen and ink most challenging and the flow of black ink on white paper exciting. All this work resulted in my first solo exhibition in Bombay in 1972.

Formulating my thoughts, I realized that ideas alone were insufficient and that a fusion of the emotional, intellectual and aesthetic, combined with technical skill were necessary for harnessing the creative process. As Robert Motherwell succinctly puts it 'An artists art is just his consciousness developed slowly and painstakingly with many mistakes en route'.

The concrete realisation of vision or idea, the search for an image and its transference into paint is a constant challenge. I attempted through the restricted locale of the pavement, to express symbolically the wider context of man in an urban environment gradually losing his humanity. The fight for survival in an increasingly pressured society forces an indifference, that leads to the alienation and anonymity of the individual. Through images in repose and

tension, I tried to express the underlying estrangement of urban man and his strangely ambivalent responses of hope, despair, tolerance, indifference, frustration, apathy and at times a contentment that ignores the reality around him. A large body of paintings and drawings culminated in the Pavement Series.

The human condition continues to be my preoccupation. The quality of life has deteriorated into ruthless and meaningless man eat man madness. Human values and behavioural norms are being eroded, resulting in rising aggression, violence, disorder and lumpen rule, while unchanging stereotyped, ritualistic practices continue. Even nature has not been spared in its environment abuse. Where am I in relation to this reality?

In contrast to the suffering and despair, there is the song and laughter and joy of life, the integral order and harmony between man and nature. An artist cannot exist on one plane alone and 'to the feelings of anxiety and despair is always added a kind of delight, a kind of bliss, also a not caring and a caring in an obsessive way, also a sadness and sense of futility'.

Though expressionism remains the springboard of my imagery, I am ever conscious of evolving a personal vision and imagery, that is contemporary and born out of the fusion of my experience and subconscious to enter the world of imagination - to recreate and symbolize nature through the language of art. I am still striving for that essential form, devoid of any visual enticement.

I have developed my themes through allegoric and metaphoric commonplace everyday happenings and observations, often using deliberate ironical contrasts. A group of onlookers; commuters pushing their way through and precariously perched on the footboard of a bus, contrasted by

a dummy with a necktie in a shop window; a man on a beach juxtaposed with an unreal landscape. To convey aggression, violence and muscle-power, I selected the massive animal form of the bull. Being unfamiliar with the bull form, I persuaded Vir to accompany me to a *para khatal* and after preliminary sketches, I worked on a series of bull drawings. Ideas followed for Mahadada, a two headed swaggering bull taking a pot-shot at colourful balloons that served as a soft target. Chowringhee Crossing, anthropomorphic in concept, portrayed a herd of blue-black bulls, advancing menacingly across a white zebra crossing into the metro chasm. People crowding around at street corners, jostling to have a glimpse of what does not concern them creates a feeling of curiosity and claustrophobia, in contrast to the peddler of toys who unconcerned goes his own way. Conventional and established norms are still practised, oblivious to change. Marriages continue to be celebrated with pomp, glitter and vulgarity. In the midst of cacophonous brassbands, frightened horses and gyrating *baraties*, the *bandwalla* stoically plays his brass instrument. The orgy, reminiscent of Bollywood movies resulted in the tawdry *barat* procession, 'VB Productions' and the Bandwalla series. Moving away from oil and acrylic on canvas, and gouache, watercolour and mixed-media on paper, I have experimented with scrap timber, charred with a blow torch, metal sheets, rivets and chains to create assemblages, reminiscent of derelict gates. In 1981, the late Pillo Pochkhanawalla the sculptor, and I derived great pleasure in a junk assemblage project together. My interest in photography enabled me to explore the mystery of a darkroom at Chitrabani for a year, leading to the happy assignment of photographing Ganesh Pyne at work in his studio. Women, by and large are discriminated against, repressed and relegated to a

domestic existence and often treated as sex objects - the trapped and lonely victims of circumstance. Even the liberated professional woman faces a conflict between the needs of her profession and the demands made on her by a male dominated society. A Man & Woman Series and a Woman Series with its psychological undertones, and a humourous tongue in cheek, Wanted Series based on newspaper marriage advertisements emerged as a result. The tragicomic Hairdresser Series' was sparked off by my observations in a Chinese beauty parlour. I have seen women and men too, these days, of all ages, shapes and sizes trying to transform themselves into ludicrous caricatures. And so the circus carries on, with us fools and mortals playing the clown...

The mountains are my escape to commune with nature, to experience my longing for silence and calm and so come to terms with myself. But the reality and scars of life remain and now alone, I am perforce pulled back onto the urban tangle, that complex web, where once more, I must perform. But....

'The important thing is to pull yourself up by your own hair to turn yourself inside out and see the whole world with fresh eyes'.

Veena Bhargava

A Bengali version of this article translated by Sandip Sarkar appeared in DESH in 1992.



Veena Bhargava

VEENA BHARGAVA

- 1938 Born in Simla in Himachal Pradesh
- 1959-60 Art Students League of New York
- 1962 DFA, Government College of Art Kolkata
- 1982-83 Photography, Chitrabani, Kolkata
- 1992 British Council - Visit to UK
- INDIVIDUAL EXHIBITIONS**
- 1972 Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai
- 1976 Birla Academy of Art & Culture, Kolkata
- 1977 Black Partridge Art Gallery, New Delhi
Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai
Gallery Chemould, Mumbai
- 1982 Art Heritage, New Delhi
Gallery Chemould, Mumbai
Hutheesing Visual Art Centre & NID, Ahmedabad
- 1988 Birla Academy of Art & Culture, Kolkata
- 1994 Gallerie 88, Kolkata
Art Heritage, New Delhi
- 1995 Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai
- 1996 Lakeeren, Mumbai
- 2001 Gallery Chemould, Mumbai
- 2002 The Artery, Kolkata
- SELECT GROUP EXHIBITIONS**
- 1972-73 25 YEARS OF INDIAN ART, LKA, New Delhi
Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai
- 1973-74 CONTEMPORARY INDIAN
PAINTINGS, ICCR
Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Poland & Belgium
- 1977 INDIAN PAINTING 1977,
Chandigarh Museum
IX INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL
OF PAINTINGS,
Cagnes - Sur - Mer, France
- 1978 INTERNATIONAL TRIENNALE IV, New Delhi
- 1979 INDO GERMAN WORKSHOP,
Max Mueller Bhavan, Kolkata
- 1982 SEVEN CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS
OF W. BENGAL,
Birla Academy of Art & Culture, Kolkata
- 1986 WOMEN ARTISTS OF INDIA, NGMA,
New Delhi
- 1987 CENTRO CULTURAL, Sao Laurengo, Portugal
HELPAGE INDIA AUCTION, Christie's - Taj,
NCPA, Mumbai
- 1988 NELSON MANDELA FREEDOM AT 70,
Seagull Foundation for the Arts, Kolkata
ART FOR CRY, Mumbai, Kolkata, Delhi
& Bangalore
SEVENTEEN INDIAN PAINTERS,
GALLERY CHEMOULD'S
25 YEARS AT THE JEHangir, Mumbai
- 1989 TIMELESS ART EXHIBITION & AUCTION,
Sotheby's, Mumbai
ARTISTS ALERT, Safdar Hashmi Samaroh,
New Delhi
- 1990 AWARD WINNERS 1955-1990,
National Exhibition LKA, New Delhi
KOLKATA THROUGH THE EYES OF
PAINTERS,
Birla Academy of Art & Culture, Kolkata,
Mumbai
SELECTED ARTISTS FROM KOLKATA,
Le Gallery, Madras
BENGAL ART TODAY, GALLERIE 88
at Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai
- 1991 HELP AGE INDIA AUCTION,
Aspreys, Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai
ART FOR SPASTICS, EXHIBITION &
AUCTION, Grindlays Gallery & Le Gallery,
Madras
- 1992 SILVER JUBILEE EXHIBITION OF EASTERN
INDIA, Birla Academy of Art & Culture,
Kolkata
MADHAVAN NAYAR FOUNDATION,
Centre for Visual Arts, Cochin
- 1993 WOUNDS, CIMA, Kolkata & NGMA
New Delhi
- 1994 CHITRANJALI,
Indian Craft Village Trust Auction
Taj Bengal, Kolkata
- 1995 ART FOR CRY ,
Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai
LKA, New Delhi
BOMBAY, AN ARTISTS IMPRESSION
RPG Enterprises,
Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai
- 1996 THE H.K. KEJRIWAL GALLERIES,
Karnataka Chitrakala Parishad, Bangalore
PERSPECTA - Gallerie 88,
The Oberoi, New Delhi
CONTEMPORARY INDIAN
PAINTERS 1996
Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai
- 1997 IMAGE - BEYOND IMAGE
Contemporary Indian Paintings from the
Collection of Glenbarra Art Museum,
Japan, Birla Academy of Art & Culture Kolkata,
Karnataka Chitrakala Parishad, Bangalore,
NGMA, New Delhi
POST INDEPENDENCE INDIAN
CONTEMPORARY ART,
Vadehra Art Gallery, NGMA, New Delhi
COLOURS OF INDEPENDENCE, CIMA,
NGMA, New Delhi
THE LOOKING GLASS SELF,
Lakeeren, Mumbai

1997 contd. THE INTUITIVE LOGIC II - HEART,
Nehru Centre, Mumbai, New Delhi
RECENT & EARLIER PAINTINGS,
The Guild, Mumbai
CONTEMPORARY TRENDS IN BENGAL,
Metropolitan Festival of Art, Victoria Memorial,
Kolkata

1998 GOUACHE & CONTEMPORARY INDIAN
PAINTING, Gallery Art Motif, New Delhi
CONTEMPORARY INDIAN PAINTINGS,
Singapore
ART FOR ASHRAYA, Dubai

1999 WOMEN FOR WISE, Exhibition & Auction,
Christies, NGMA & Taj, Mumbai
RECENT WORKS, Jamaat, Mumbai
ART FOR SPASTICS, Exhibition & Auction,
Bonhams, Taj, Chennai.

1999 ART FOR A CAUSE, KARGIL,
Gallery Katayun, Kolkata
PRABHA II, Bishwa Banga Sammelan,
Millenium Festival,
Contemporary Artists of Bengal,
Town Hall, Kolkata

2000 MILLENIUM 2000
Birla Academy of Art & Culture, Kolkata
BENGAL 2000
Birla Academy of Art & Culture, New Delhi
42nd NATIONAL EXHIBITION OF ART
Invitee Artist, LKA , Jaipur, New Delhi

2001 ART OF BENGAL Past & Present
1850 to 2000, CIMA at NGMA, Mumbai
ART OF BENGAL Past & Present
1850 to 2000, CIMA, Kolkata

2002 JEHANGIR ART GALLERY GOLDEN
JUBILEE EXHIBITION, Mumbai
WHITE CUBE,
Indo-German Art Project,
Max Mueller Bhawan at the Artery, Kolkata
COMMUNALISM COMBAT,
Sahmat, New Delhi

2004 THE MAKING OF INDIA, Sahmat,
Rabindra Bhawan, New Delhi
WOMEN ARTISTS,
Samokal Art Gallery, Kolkata
GOLDEN JUBILEE EXHIBITION OF
NATIONAL & TRIENNALE AWARDEES, LKA,
New Delhi
DHAARA - MASTERS & THEIR STUDENTS,
Academy of Fine Arts, Kolkata and Aryan Art
Gallery, New Delhi
SEVEN DECADES OF EXCELLENCE IN ART,
Gallery Art & Soul, Taj Palace, Mumbai
FACE TO FACE, CIMA Art Gallery,
Kolkata

2005

PAROMA, Gallerie LA MERE, Kolkata
FIFTEENTH ANNIVERSARY SHOW
Gallery Sanskriti, Kolkata
GREY, Gandhara Art Gallery, Kolkata
FEMININE MYSTIQUE, Gallery ART &
SOUL, Mumbai
SYNCHROME, Akar Prakar, Kolkata

AWARDS

1972, 1973 Birla Academy of Art & Culture
Kolkata
1974, 1981
1986 National Award, Lalit Kala Academi,
New Delhi

COLLECTIONS

Birla Academy of Art & Culture, Kolkata
Gallery Chemould, Mumbai
H.K.Kejriwal Collection, Karnataka
Chitrakala Parishath, Bangalore
Madhavan Nayar Centre For Visual Arts,
Kochi
National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi
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Mumbai
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Museum, Hemeji, Japan
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<http://agenda.is.asu.edu/wwol/bhargava.html>

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