

Paradox and Play

LIVING TRADITIONS IN CONTEMPORARY ART

7 March – 4 April 2018
1 AQ Gallery, Delhi

OJAS
ART



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Living Traditions in Contemporary Art

CURATION essays are often so academic that they overwhelm more than they inform. This document is intended as a guide to this show; it is an invitation to be curious about these works. Each section here is designed to be as readable as a social media post.

PARADOXES invite us to ask questions. The aesthetic landscape of the subcontinent is peppered with such invitations. For example, what does it mean for a “tradition” to be “living”? What can be changed and what must stay the same? What defines an “Indian” artist? Subject matter? Traditional techniques? Where it is made? Does it matter if the artist is Indian?

TRADITION, as a stylistic idiom in art, is free to play with the boundaries of cultural heritage and the mainstreams of contemporary art. Ideally traditions have both room to transform, and the capacity to preserve.

LIVING TRADITION refers to a range of forms in cultural heritage: dance, music, craft, architecture, and visual arts. This same term often implies a need for preservation. Where are the limits of innovation? Can any one community or type of artist claim the rights to a tradition, or does diversity only nurture sustainability?

CONTEMPORARY ART is a term that, in over-use, loses meaning. What distinguishes “contemporary art” other than time? In art history, Modernism emerged in the late 19th

century and challenged the conventions of representation and the limitations of traditions. The term “contemporary art” emerged later, in the early 20th century, and challenged the notion of art itself. Do living traditions in contemporary art challenge the notion of tradition itself?

BLACK walls are rarely expected in a museums and galleries. Here, they are meant to disrupt such convention. They set the stage for a fresh encounter with otherwise familiar aesthetics from South Asian architectural, miniature, and folk traditions.

TEXT on these walls is intended to connect the viewer to the work. The words here are meant as signposts, and to give deeper insight into the artists and their process.

TAGS identifying individual works and their creators are, however, intentionally absent. This encourages a direct interaction with the works themselves. By creating aesthetic breathing room for the art, response space is expanded for the viewer. The hope is that you will read the painting more without any option to read a tag.

OLIVIA Fraser divides her time between Delhi and London. For this show, Olivia has graciously permitted the display of work from various periods of her career “painting India” since the 1990s. Olivia began with architectural works, and embraced the aesthetic legacy of her 19th-

century kinsmen who commissioned the Fraser Album, a masterpiece of paintings depicting a range of people in Indian society on stark white backgrounds. Shifting techniques in 2005, she began a remarkable commitment to train with masters of traditional Indian miniatures. All of her work reflects hybrid techniques that seamlessly fuse sensibilities of East and West; these centuries-old aesthetic forms seem to naturally blossom in contemporary designs.

SANTOSH Kumar Das is from the Madhubani district of Bihar. In boyhood, Santosh learned Mithila painting techniques from the great Mahadsundari Devi. A BFA from MSU Baroda distinguishes him from his peers in the Madhubani/Mithila tradition. There are no pencil sketches or studies in his work. This produces a vibrant quality in his lines that can only come from such unrefined spontaneity. When Santosh puts pen to paper, he does so without expectations; figures arrive for play. In rapid successions of reinvention, his process is a performance. He embraces his aesthetic heritage with a twist of modern art.

TARSHITO is an Italian designer and artist based in Bari, Italy. In 1979, the former Nicola Stippoli came to India for the first time and was renamed "Tarshito," by Osho, meaning "thirst for inner knowledge." For the past three decades, he has worked in India largely with folk and tribal artists. In large scale collaborations, he sees his

work as the border of tradition and the contemporary, and as a means for bringing "eternal wisdom" into the present through art. His aesthetics are informed by a deep personal spiritual attachment to India, and his work tries to form something new and unified, always drawing on tradition and a sense of timelessness.

OJAS is more than a commercial gallery space. It is an incubator for a range of creative activity in its mission to take an innovative approach to Indian art. One example is Satrangi, the annual award for Indian folk and tribal artists, which fosters a platform for tradition's place in the contemporary mainstreams of Indian art. This show is designed as a play off of those same themes, and an extension of my own research on folk art and the larger eco-system of Indian art.

THANKS to Fulbright, USIEF, Olivia Fraser for loaning pieces from her personal collections, and to Tarshito and Santosh Kumar Das for their generosity.

- Katie Lazarowicz

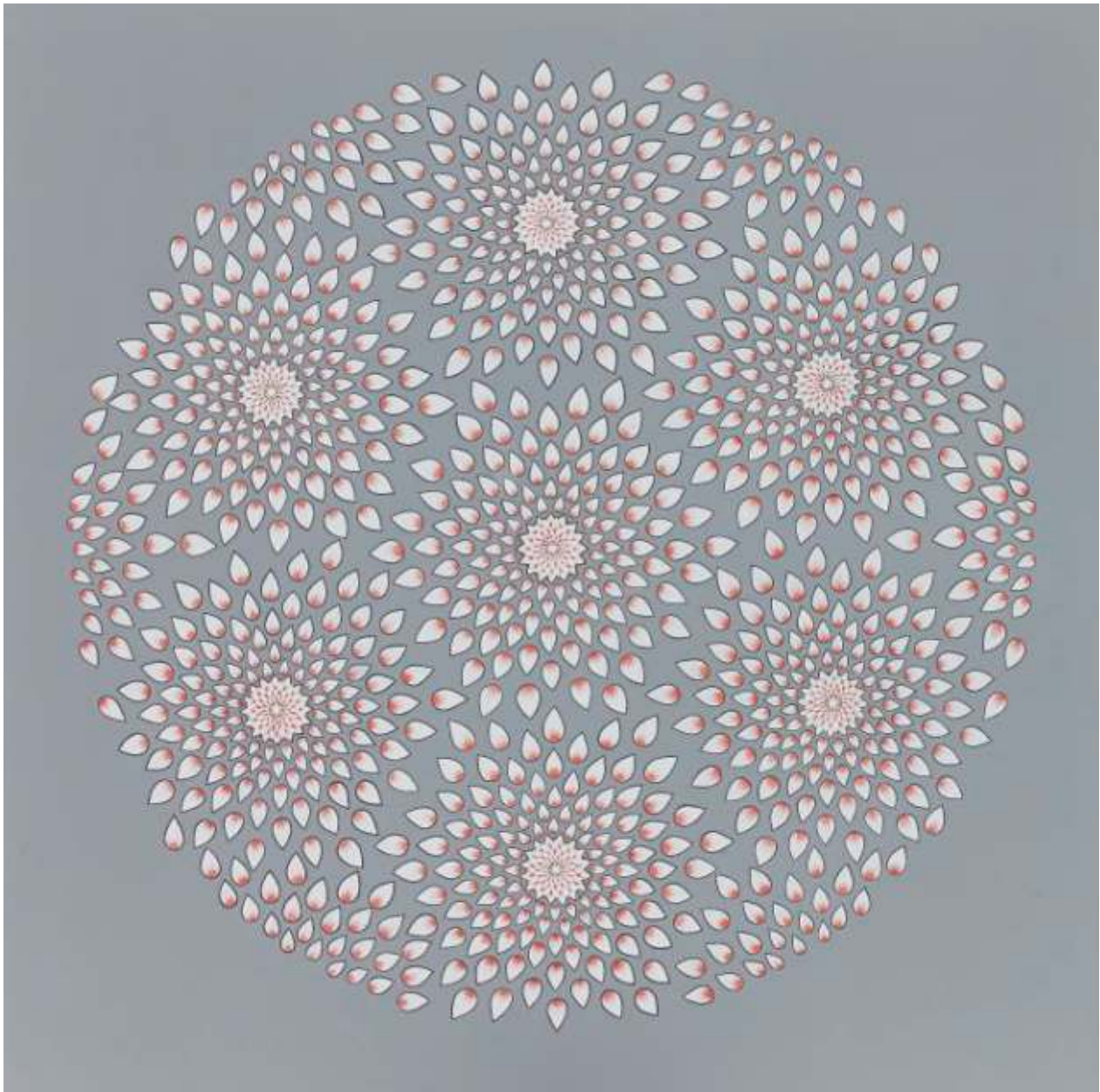
**OLIVIA FRASER
SANTOSH KUMAR DAS
TARSHITO**

Curated by KATIE LAZAROWICZ

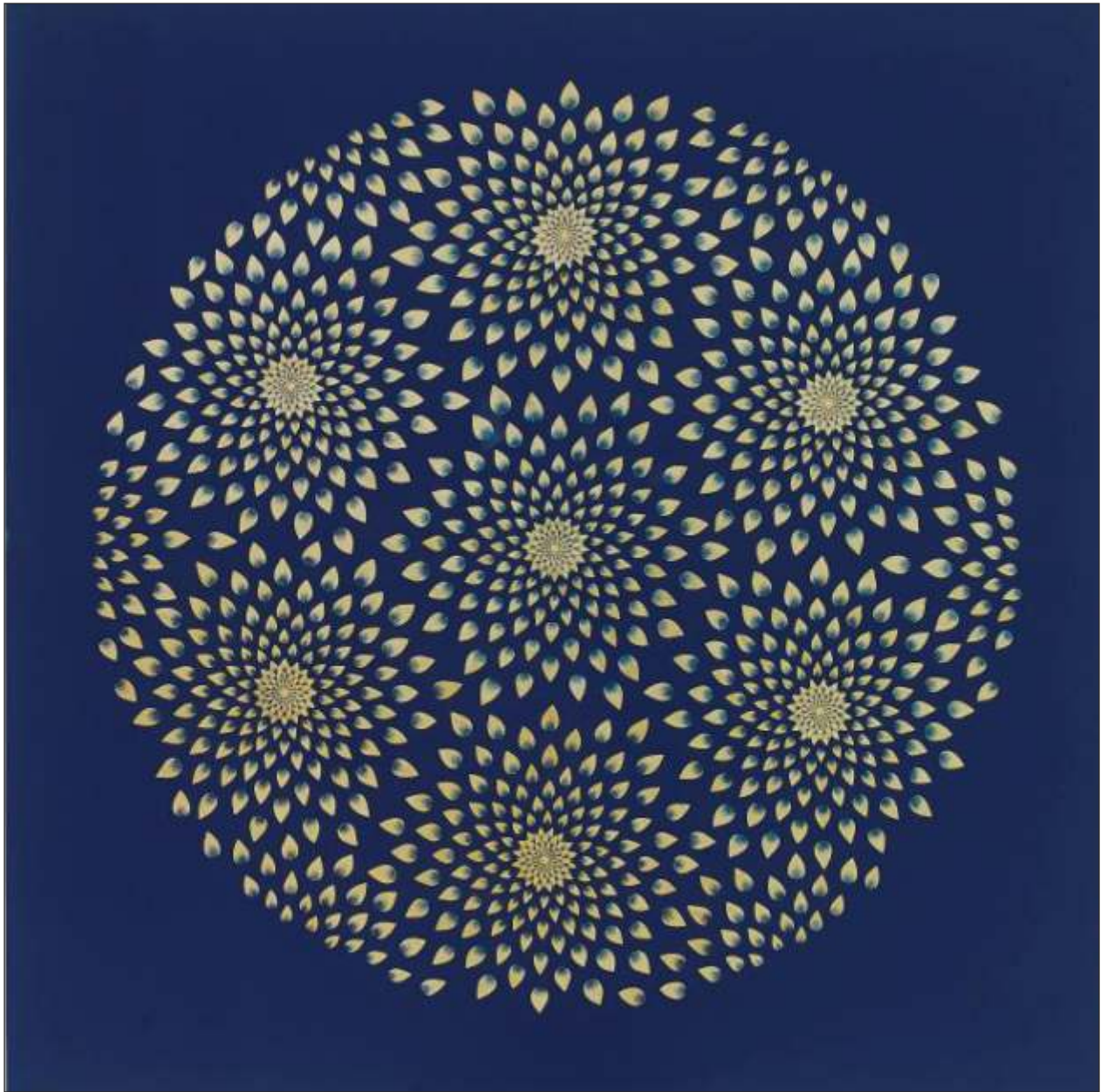
Olivia Fraser

“When you get into the realm of the sacred, text and image are almost one...”

A kinsman, James Baillie Fraser painted India, its monuments and landscape in the early 1800's, painting the architecture of Delhi and its people. James Baillie Fraser commissioned local artists to paint what has become the “Fraser Album” – the greatest masterpiece of Company School Painting: a hybrid form of painting, where Indian artists created something that mixed techniques and ideas from the East and West. Different types of people are portrayed their jobs and crafts -against stark white backgrounds.



Moon, 2013
Giclée prints on 308gsm Hahnemuhle Photo Rag
Edition of 50. Published by Grosvenor Gallery Fine Arts Ltd.
Image: 21½ x 21½ in. Sheet: 24 x 23½ in.



Sun, 2013
Giclée prints on 308 gsm Hahnemuhle Photo Rag
Edition of 50. Published by Grosvenor Gallery Fine Arts Ltd.
Image: 21½ x 21½ in. Sheet: 24 x 23½ in.



Banyan Tree, 2010
Lithograph. Edition of 100
Published by
Grosvenor Gallery Fine Arts Ltd.
27 x 18 in.



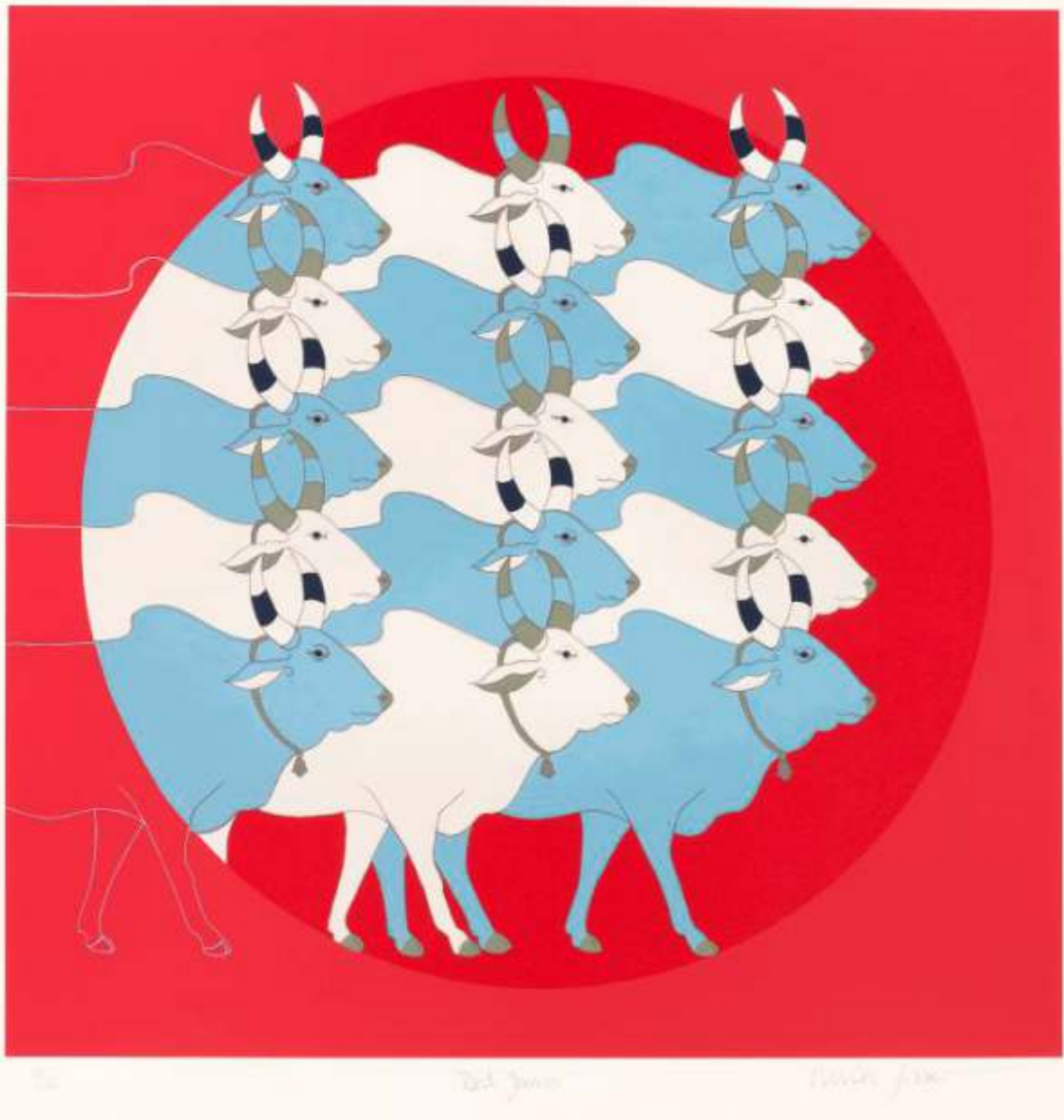
Krishna III
Lithograph. Edition of 100.
Published by
Grosvenor Gallery Fine Arts Ltd.
27 x 18 in.



Krishna II
Lithograph. Edition of 100.
Published by
Grosvenor Gallery Fine Arts Ltd.
27 x 18 in.



Krishna I
Lithograph. Edition of 100.
Published by
Grosvenor Gallery Fine Arts Ltd.
27 x 18 in.



Red Dawn, 2012
Screenprint on 410gsm Somerset tub size paper
Edition of 100. Published by Grosvenor Gallery Fine Arts Ltd.
30 ½ x 29 6/8 in



Blue Dawn, 2012

Screenprint on 410gsm Somerset tub size paper

Edition of 100. Published by Grosvenor Gallery Fine Arts Ltd.

30 ½ x 29 6/8 in



City of Gods, 2005
Edition of 25.
26 x 6 in



Patriotic autos, 2006
Edition of 25.
11 x 17 in

Santosh Kumar Das

“It’s all about romance. This is where it begins...

From the motif of romance, *latpatiya suga*, two parrots are intertwined with love. If there could be two parrots, why not, I thought, there could be two human beings!

I molded them in the same form. It was a revelation to me, this work.

This led to that.”



Blooming face of a lion
28 x 20 in
Pen & ink and acrylic on paper



Watering the fields
28 x 20 in
Pen & ink and acrylic on paper



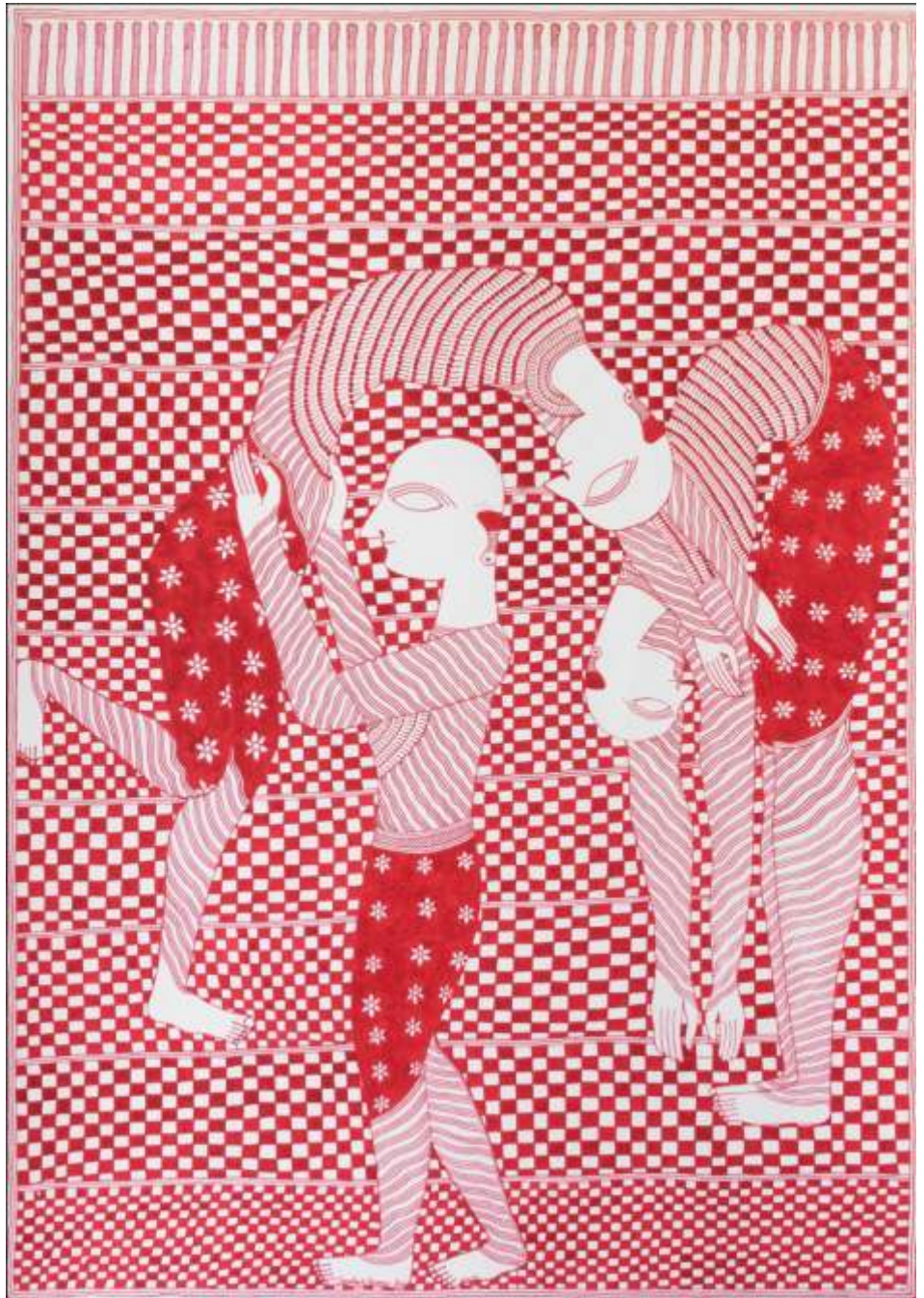
Fish Caught – Fish Free
28 x 20 in
Pen & ink and acrylic on paper



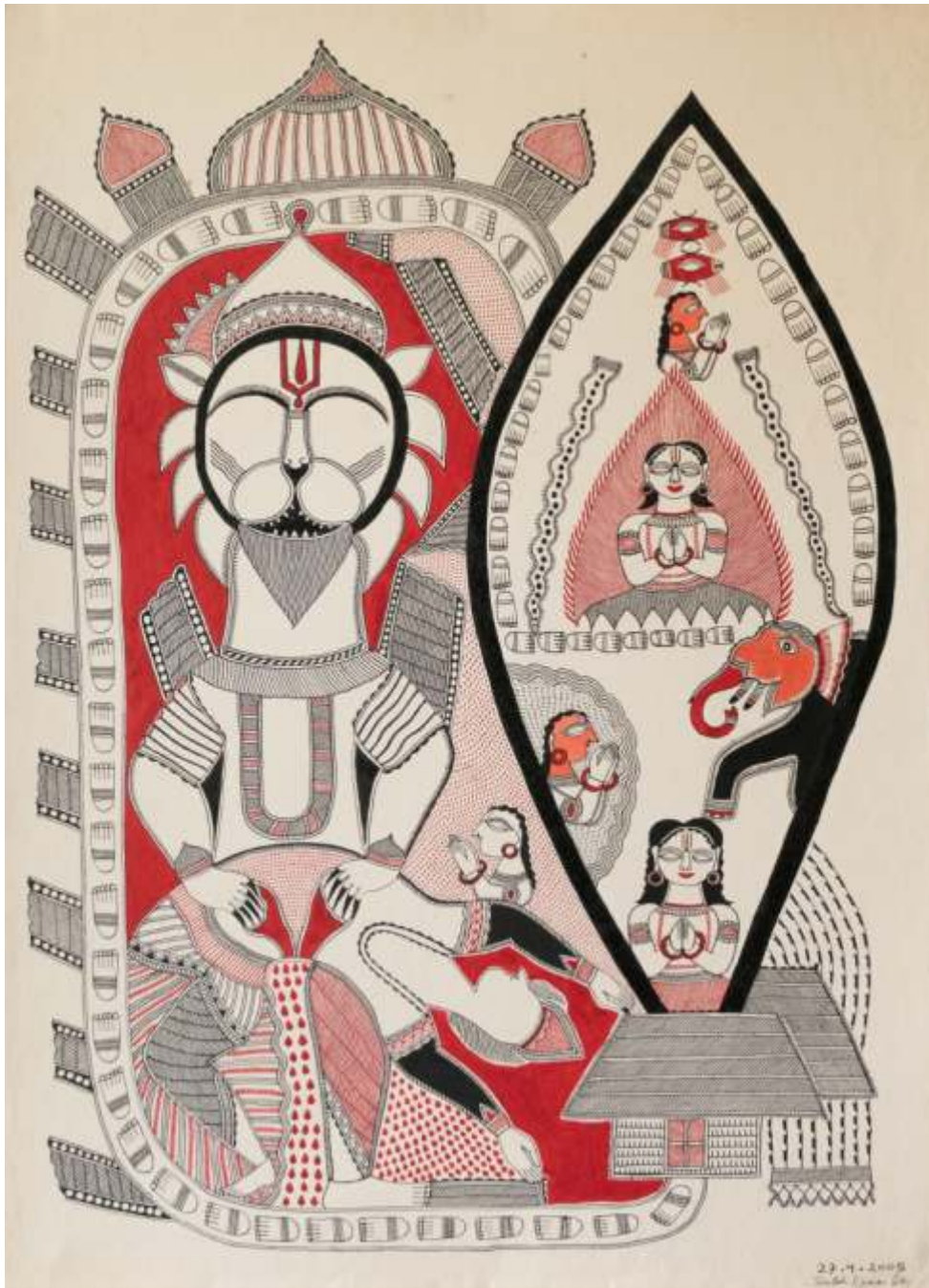
Reflection
28 x 20 in
Pen & ink and acrylic on paper



Casting the Net
28 x 20 in
Pen & ink and acrylic on paper



Yoga Performers
28 x 20 in
Pen & ink and acrylic on paper



Nar Singh A Prahlad
22 x 30 in
Pen & ink and acrylic on paper



Intertwined in Love
(inspired by Latpatiya Suga)
22 x 30 in
Pen & ink and acrylic on paper



Encounter
22 x 30 in
Pen & ink and acrylic on paper



Flying in Love
22 x 30 in
Pen & ink and acrylic on paper

Tarshito

DELHI

My smell,
my nakedness
entices
hordes of human flesh
from faraway lands.
Traders,
emperors,
marauders.

I
pose
nude
up on a hill.
Below,
a feast of eagles --
possessed,
intoxicated.

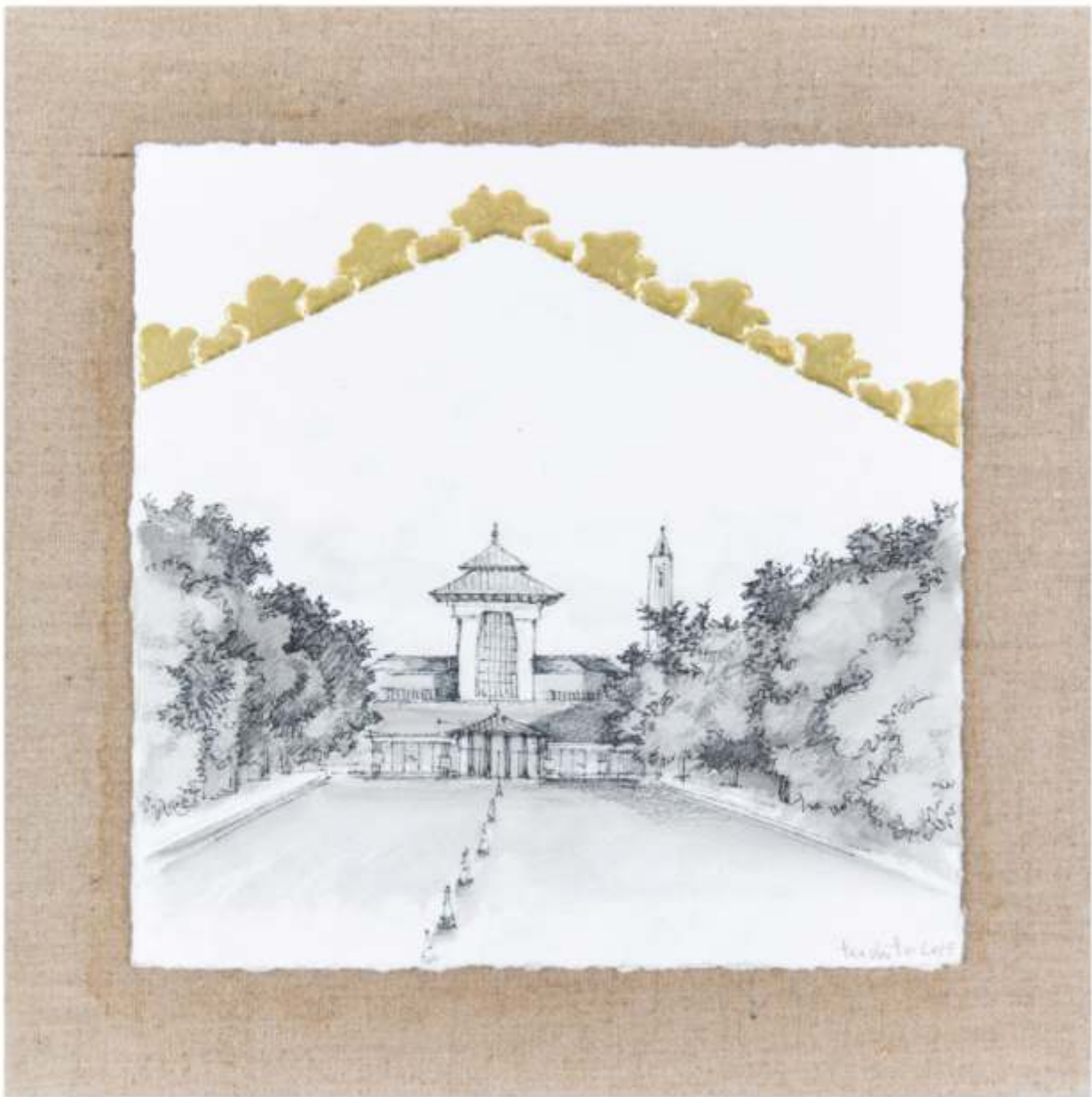
-Abhay K., *Seduction of Delhi*



Alai Minar, 2014

15 x 15 in

Rubber, inks, pencils, sealing wax and gold leaf on hand-made paper mounted on canvas



An immigrant in New Delhi, 2015

15 x 15 in

Rubber, inks, pencils and gold leaf on hand-made paper mounted on canvas



University of Delhi, 2014

15 x 15 in

Rubber, inks, pencils and gold leaf on hand-made paper mounted on canvas



South Block, 2014

15 x 15 in

Rubber, inks, pencils and gold leaf on hand-made paper mounted on canvas



Delhi, 2014

15 x 15 in

Rubber, inks, pencils and gold leaf on hand-made paper mounted on canvas



Humayun's Tomb, 2014

15 x 15 in

Rubber, inks, pencils and gold leaf on hand-made paper mounted on canvas



Lal Qila

15 x 15 in

Rubber, inks, pencils and gold leaf on hand-made paper mounted on canvas



Iron Pillar of Delhi, 2014

15 x 15 in

Rubber, inks, pencils and gold leaf on hand-made paper mounted on canvas



Qila Kuhna, 2014

15 x 15 in

Rubber, inks, pencils and gold leaf on hand-made paper mounted on canvas



Red Fort

15 x 15 in

Rubber, inks, pencils, sealing wax and gold leaf on hand-made paper mounted on canvas



Sheesh Gumbad, 2014

15 x 15 in

Rubber, inks, pencils, sealing wax and gold leaf on hand-made paper mounted on canvas



Tomb of Muhammed Shah, 2014

15 x 15 in

Rubber, inks, pencils and gold leaf on hand-made paper mounted on canvas



Bara Gumbad

15 x 15 in

Rubber, inks, pencils, gauze, sealing wax and gold leaf on hand-made paper mounted on canvas



Connaught Place

15 x 15 in

Rubber, inks, pencils and gold leaf on hand-made paper mounted on canvas



Aryaghat, 2015

15 x 15 in

Rubber, inks, pencils and gold leaf on hand-made paper mounted on canvas



Basantpur, 2015

15 x 15 in

Rubber, inks, pencils, gauze, sealing wax and gold leaf on hand-made paper mounted on canvas



Boudhanath, 2015

15 x 15 in

Rubber, inks, pencils and gold leaf on hand-made paper mounted on canvas



Bhaktapur, 2015

15 x 15 in

Rubber, inks, pencils and gold leaf on hand-made paper mounted on canvas



Enlightened Existence, 2015

15 x 15 in

Rubber, inks, pencils and gold leaf on hand-made paper mounted on canvas



Garden of Dreams, 2015

15 x 15 in

Rubber, inks, pencils and gold leaf on hand-made paper mounted on canvas



Janakpur, 2015

15 x 15 in

Rubber, inks, pencils and gold leaf on hand-made paper mounted on canvas



Lumbini, 2015

15 x 15 in

Rubber, inks, pencils and gold leaf on hand-made paper mounted on canvas



Mustang, 2015

15 x 15 in

Rubber, inks, pencils and gold leaf on hand-made paper mounted on canvas



Manokamana Temple Nepal, 2015

15 x 15 in

Rubber, inks, pencils and gold leaf on hand-made paper mounted on canvas



Pashupatinath, 2015

15 x 15 in

Rubber, inks, pencils and gold leaf on hand-made paper mounted on canvas



Patan, 2015

15 x 15 in

Rubber, inks, pencils and gold leaf on hand-made paper mounted on canvas



Path of Gold, 2015

15 x 15 in

Rubber, inks, pencils and gold leaf on hand-made paper mounted on canvas

OLIVIA FRASER

After graduating with a MA in Modern Languages from Oxford, Olivia spent a year at Wimbledon Art College before moving to India in 1989.

In 2005, she decided to study the traditional Indian miniature painting techniques under Jaipuri and Delhi masters, and now uses this in her work with its gem-like stone colours, unique miniature brush work, and its elaborate decorative and burnished surfaces. Having been especially influenced by Nathdwara pichwai painting and early 19th century Jodpuri painting, Olivia has been exploring its visual language, reaching back to an archetypal iconography strongly rooted in India's artistic and cultural heritage that can breach borders and be relevant to her twin life between East and West. Her work has been shown in galleries and art fairs around the world and in 2015 her work was shown at the Venice Biennale. Her paintings are now in collections in India, UK, France, Belgium (Museum of Sacred Art), UAE, Singapore, Australia, China and the USA.

Olivia divides her time between Delhi and London.

SANTOSH KUMAR DAS

Das is a well-known Mithila Artist, born in 1962. He graduated in English from Darbhanga followed by a Bachelor of Fine Art at M.S.U, Baroda in 1990. He has exhibited his works at B.H.U, Devi Art Foundation, Indian Habitat Center, the Retrospective Show in San Francisco, Western Australia and US. His works are in Museums and Institutional Collections of Oberlin Museum USA, Ethnic Art Foundation USA, Mary C Lanius, Denver USA, Asian Heritage Foundation, New Delhi. His best-known work is on Krishna Series and the Gujarat Series which was followed by a series on Buddha and Yoga. He paints remotely in his village of Ranti and teaches the young generation and is a great inspiration to many. He is currently working on his autobiography in Mithila style and practicing art in his studio at his home in Madhubani.

TARSHITO

In Sanskrit, Tarshito means "thirst for inner knowledge". It is the name that Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh gave his student Nicola Strippoli, in 1979, during the latter's first journey to India. Born in Corato (Apulia, Southern Italy) in 1952, he graduated from the University of Architecture in Florence, and though still preoccupied with the ideas of radical Architecture, he was travelling towards the Orient in search of inspiration and full of curiosity.

The works extend traditional Indian art forms into contemporary dialogues. The aim of Tarshito's artistic practice is to fuse the discourses of fine art, applied design and craft with those of philosophical pursuit and spiritual awakening. Tarshito has held numerous exhibitions of his works throughout Europe and a solo exhibition of works made in India was held at the Crafts Museum in New Delhi in 2001. His works have been shown in solo shows and in curated group shows in museums and institutions across Asia and Europe.

KATIE LAZAROWICZ

Ms. Katie Lazarowicz is a PhD candidate in the Department of Asian Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. She has a BA in studio arts from SUNY, Geneseo and two master's degrees: one from John Carroll University with a concentration on renaissance and medieval art history, and the other a Master's of Divinity from Harvard Divinity School with a concentration in Hinduism.

She has spent a significant of time in India, to study Hindi and Urdu. She has presented her research related to Mithila art and material culture at the Annual Conference on South Asia at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, the Southwest Conference of Asian Studies, and the East-West Center in Hawaii. Most recently her academic research has focused on museum anthropology and included an academic appointment at the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C.

A Fulbright scholar, her doctoral dissertation explores how Mithila folk art transmits a narrative of economic development in India today. Her work intersects the fields of anthropology, religion, art, and economic history, and explores what the study of material culture can reveal about changes in social, political, and economic circumstances over time.

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Gallery 1AQ, Near Qutab Minar, Mehrauli, Delhi 110 030
+91 11 2664 4145, 85100 44145 art@ojasart.com



@/#ojasart