



PAUSE & PLAY

Puja Kshatriya

artspeaks presents
india

PAUSE & PLAY

recent works by
Puja Kshatriya

November 2012

Shridharani Gallery
Triveni Kala Sangam, 205, Tansen Marg, New Delhi



When a picture becomes a painting a painting becomes a picture &

Puja Kshatriya represents the idea of a new cosmopolitan. Born in New Delhi, India, schooled at Modern School and Delhi College of Art, Puja has been travelling across the seven seas. With a spouse in the corporate world of multinationals, Puja entered the arena of the global world.

Particularly in the last two decades, India too, became an important player in the increasing net of globalisation. The development of new markets exalts the emergence of China and India as key sites of world economy. At another level, art and culture of both these diverse lands, naturally found their place in the sun. While the thrust areas were being developed by these nation states and linkages being made between the developed economies, namely the white Western World and the emerging Asian markets, or in other terms the Indian Tiger and the Chinese Dragon, the soft power of 'art' too started gaining momentum. Collectors like Francois Pinault of LHMV, Saatchi and Saatchi, museums like the Metropolitan of New York, the Georges Pompidou Centre at Paris, the Tate Modern U.K., and Asia House in New York, all turned their lens towards India. Large corporate and important curators of biennales and museums across the world, even the 'DOCUMENTA', the art event which takes place in Germany every five years, started drawing India into the hitherto euro centric world. Indian art and Indian artists too joined the process of globalisation with a vibrancy and fervency which was both challenge and fodder for their creative juices. It was in this climate of great economic and social change that Puja was travelling among the busy urban business centres of Hong Kong, Dubai, Sharjah and Singapore.

In a way, either consciously or unconsciously, Puja became part of what cultural sociologist George Ritzer in his book *The McDonaldization of Society* (1993) has termed 'mcdonaldization', where the rationale comes to play. What was interesting for me was that in such a fast changing consumer driven and commerce heavy environment, Puja literally with blinkers on her head maintained her strong links to the cultural roots and devotes herself to the Indian sensibility. The process of 'mcdonaldization' and corporate lure offer a tempting site to easily succumb to. The uniqueness of her works lies in the fact that she keeps herself at bay in this glowing 'mcdonaldization'. The notions



Dr Alka Pande is currently Consultant Arts Advisor and Curator of the Visual Arts Gallery at the India Habitat Centre, New Delhi. Dr. Pande has been passionately involved with the world of art for nearly three decades. She is a prolific writer on Indology and Art History and is the author of several books, which are well acclaimed. Recipient of the Charles Wallace Award (1999-2000), Dr. Alka Pande completed her post-doctoral studies in critical art theory from Goldsmith College, University of London. She was awarded "Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres" in December 2006.

of deconstruction and difference espoused by Jacques Derrida provide ample space to work on the multiplicity of meanings. The relationship shared between the author and text is based on the difference of meaning. The reader, hailing from specific cultural reference point, always comes with his/her own understanding of the text. Similarly, the world of 'mcdonaldization' acts as the author and Puja as the reader takes the best of the world to follow her individual style of understanding.

Puja returns back to the city of her birth in 2012 after twelve years, to show her works in an exhibition titled "Pause and Play". What was particularly refreshing for me was to see an artist so confident of her own trajectory despite the many sights, sounds, smells and influences of a more consumerist dominated global system, where the artists are often tempted to either accede to the market or the trends of western aesthetics which sometimes become a la mode. Puja has remained rooted in the rasa of Indian aesthetics.

"Pause and Play" is reflective of Puja's own preoccupation with the human body. The body of eleven works in the exhibition in a way shows her signature. She works in a singular square format. The eleven canvases, in the dimension 50"x 50", are in continuation of her unique signature style- primarily oils with blade scraping. For several years, the monochromatic and oil have been her patent practices. But of late, she started using acrylics for background while adding several layers to the final product. With colours creeping in, the human figures followed their natural evolution. The human figures can be read as the reflection on the artist's journey.

The epitome of the idealized Roman sculptures, the human figuration does not go unnoticed in human psychology. In the world of imperfection, the classical style of Roman sculptures soaked in perfection makes us ponder. However, the materiality of the world comes with the human flaws and the struggle to survive is rooted in the innate insecurities.

The exhibition "Pause and Play" is an exploration of the power of mind. "Strength and power are often wrongly perceived; those who appear frail may in fact be resolutely strong. ' Wars', as it has been said, 'are not always won or lost on the battlefield', but often in the mind," says Puja. While describing her works Puja says, "The youthful face of my earlier paintings is now accompanied by the face of old age. These severely contoured faces may appear vulnerable, but once the skin is 'peeled' away, they expose great resolve and strength of character. They display how our lives may

be altered by external forces, but they cannot strip away our core values. These are universal images as they deal with the frailties and the experience of being human. As a painter, I find this extremely challenging. I want to explore the human form with all its frailties, strengths and weaknesses. "

Puja, in spite of her many travels, finds a primary engagement with Indian and Asian art. Western art, to some extent, does not have the emotive sensibility to suit her personal proclivities. The process to understand and imbibe the holistic view of the world has led Puja to have her art centred in and around Indian thought and philosophy. Deliberately placing her artistic centre within Indian context, the works are deeply embedded in Indian arts and aesthetics.

*I dive into the sea of forms (rupa), hoping that I may come upon the gem
of the formless arupa- the absolute Brahman*

- Rabindranath Tagore

The *rūpa-loka*, free from sensuous desire is conditioned by devotional religious form and inhabited by gods. In *arūpa-loka* the highest abstract, existence depends on the stage of concentration attained and there are four levels: the infinity of space, the infinity of thought, the infinity of non-being and the infinity of neither consciousness nor non consciousness.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that Puja's early childhood at her home taught her the finer philosophy posed by Tagore. With her father and mother as the guiding force, Puja learned the strength of inner life. Growing up in an unconventional household with a meticulous de rigeur, it was her mother Jamuna Rohatgi who nurtured the artist while transferring the practical intricacies of thinking out of the box, a value which has helped Puja to constantly evolve both personally and professionally. Her father Srikrishna Rohatgi, a news editor at the Times of India, taught Puja the finer aspects of spirituality. The understanding of the thin line separating religion/spirituality/ritualism is deftly handled by Puja. Being brought up in a family that blended both traditions and modernity, the artist received the space to work on the 'Indian' sensibility, which would not just embellish the artistic experience but would accentuate the inner strength to survive in the present world.

Relationships play a key role in Puja's thought process. The work is reflective of her inner spaces. Puja is a deeply spiritual person and this is reflected in her works. And yet she is quick to point that religion and spiritual are two very different trajectories for her. She says, "It is almost like; when does a painting become a picture and a picture a painting. And this is where my parents helped me to make that critical understanding. It is because of my nurture and nature that a fire towards excellence which drives me. And that is why no matter where I am, I must paint everyday."

Growing up in New Delhi in the sixties, Puja's initial tryst with art began with her teacher Devyani Krishan and Kanwal Krishan at Modern School. With parents and art teachers Devyani and Kanwal, Puja had the traditional relationship of a '*guru*' and '*shishya*'. It was not just the application of paint or the formal training of line form and composition which were taught, but the essence of life and yogic consciousness which was transferred through practice. Puja says, "I was truly privileged to have a teacher like Devayani Krishan who initiated me into the spiritual experience of artistic practice and not simply the device of drawing and applying paint." The five year stint at the Delhi College of Art taught her the basics of fine arts but what really took Puja to another level was her meeting with Rameshwar Broota in 1972, when he joined the Delhi College of Art, as a visiting lecturer. It was Broota who became her guide and mentor and took her into the subtle nuances of the private and solitary world of painting.

The *guru-shishya* tradition broadened her humanistic view leading to hitherto unexplored world of possibilities. Yoga too was an important ingredient in her practice. In fact even today Puja does not commence her day without doing her set of 'pranayams'. A practitioner of *dhyana* and *yoga*, Puja is constantly engaged with the principle of *purusharthas*, the four main goals of life. In 2001, Puja had a solo show in Singapore titled "Between Heaven & Earth" where she explored the philosophy of Vanaprastha.

The artist, through a process of strict mental discipline, is taught to discriminate the essentials in forms and appearances. To a large extent, Puja too follows the same path. At this point I would like to take a pause and reflect on the Rasa theory which is a part of the Natyashastra, a text of dramaturgy. The seeds of Indian Aesthetics and appreciation of both the visual and the performing arts can be traced back to this theory. Acknowledged by many as the Fifth Veda, the Natyashastra

occupies an unparalleled place in the workings of art. Natyashastra is an inter-disciplinary text where the canons of Natya include: dance, music, theatre, and *sahitya*.

Natya, *Nritta* and *Nritya* define the inter-disciplinary aspect of Natyashastra.

Rasa theory: The theory of rasa contained in the Natyashastra is based on the premise that all human emotions can be divided into delight, laughter, sorrow, anger, fear, disgust, heroism, and astonishment.

The Nava Rasas are:

- *vibhasta* (disgust),
- *saundarya* (beauty, eroticism),
- *hasya* (comic),
- *karuna* (pathos),
- *raudra* (fury, anger),
- *bhayanaka* (terrible, odious),
- *vira* (heroic),
- *adbhuta* (marvelous, awe-inspiring), and
- *shanta* (silent, peaceful)

Situating Puja in the Indian context, I find that in her representation of the human body, Puja closely follows the dictates of 'Shad-anga' or the six limbs of the art of painting. The text lays prominence on the basic structure or the language of a work of art, written in consonance with the liturgical texts. The principles underlying a work of art intend to propel the spectator towards the celebration of life through the rasa or emotional experience.

Rupabhedāh pramānāni bhāva lāvanya yojanam
Sādrisya varnikābhanga iti citra shad-angakam

Rupabheda: The knowledge of appearances or form.

Pramanam: Correct perception, measure and structure.

Bhava: Action of feelings on forms.

Lavanya Yojanam: Infusion of grace, artistic representation.

Sadrisyam: Similitude.

Varnikabhanga: Artistic manner of using the brush and colours.

The goal of the *shilpa shastras* was not to communicate how a realistic human form could be achieved but how the idealized and divine body are prized in Indian art. The soul and heart of the artist epitomize the principles of *bhava* and *lavanya yojanam*, feeling and beauty. The devotional love on the part of the artist finds its expression in terms of *bhava* and *lavanya yojanam*. Sadrisya is not imitation as it is popularly believed but marks the reference in the phenomenal world of senses.

Puja's visual representations take me back to the ideas expressed in the aforementioned canonical texts like the *Natyashastra*, *Shilpashastras* and the *Shad-anga* philosophy. "Pause and Play" has resonances with the above said ideas. In fact her visual language takes me back to the aesthetic traditions of pre-modern India of which there is an unbroken tradition with creative transformations into the present.

To quote Henry Ward Beecher, "Every artist dips his own brush in his soul and paints his own nature into his picture." In a similar manner, Puja with her personal artistic evolution endeavors to evolve her own language. She says, "The essence of life lies in simplification which can only be achieved by destroying our erstwhile held ideas and thoughts. This deconstruction will liberate us and empower us to reconstruct and rewrite our lives."

The globe trotter realized that at the end of the day, human and human sensibility remains the same. Despite geographical distances, human nature is always seeking. Unlike her formative years where Puja confined her skill to simply achieving expertise in her craft, in the later years, she saw people as the 'final internal idiom'. The universal harmony, which the individual experiences comes with a realization to achieve this recognition.

For Puja, God is the one "who do not move the mountain from my path, but give me the strength to climb it....I strongly feel that when we believe in ourselves we are in sync with our inner self. We can alter and change our lives. To me, this is spirituality, the ability to transform. I would, therefore,

like to believe that the entity we call God is perhaps the unrecognized strength that resides in all of us. When we call out to God for help, we are in fact calling out to the reservoir of strength within us to give us the power to face, overcome and achieve..."

In the Indian mind *Moksha* or *Nirvana* i.e. liberation is the highest goal of existence. The state of liberation is equated with the state of *ananda* (joy or bliss). Upon the journey from *rupa* (form) to *arupa* (formless) *chit*, *chetna* or consciousness blossoms in freedom, silence and celebration. This is akin to pure *ananda*. Art and aesthetics have been understood as a means to traverse this distance and so the goals, *saundarya* (beauty) and *ananda*, are closely associated.

Darshan, the Indian term for philosophy means vision or the instrument of vision. Diametrically opposed to the Western use of the same term which means 'love of learning' or 'search for knowledge', *darshan* connotes a direct, immediate and intuitive vision of Reality and the Search for Self. While Western philosophy has remained restricted to the search of knowledge, Indian philosophy has been intensely spiritual. It believes in the soul and seeks to realize it in true form and be seen. The same inquisitiveness inspires all schools of Indian philosophy right from the Upanishdas to Samkhya, Yoga, Nyaya, Vaisheshika and Vedanta. In almost all schools of Indian philosophy, the realization of supreme happiness is the ultimate aim.

To borrow from Puja, I quote "In order to review our lives and our work, we need to step aside and distance ourselves from our own selves and de-clutter our thoughts. This process will enable us to realize our core strength and help us in our spiritual growth. We often forget that we have the power to transform our lives only if we alter our perceptions. The fundamental shift in our behaviour will allow us to rediscover, regenerate and recreate ourselves. With time, I have realized the importance of restraint and austerity, both in life and in art." The unsettling ground between the inner self and outer world renders the sensitive artist to the process of introspection. The detachment, which makes us pause and give in to the world of introspection, also makes us connect to the world with a different eye. This tussle which Puja investigates reinforces the interconnectivity between: *vasana*, *chinta* and *karma*.

Puja interconnects the outer with inner strengths. In the wake of post modernism and economic globalization, Indian art seems to be throbbing at the intersection of tradition and hypermodernity.

The present contexts of cosmopolitan are of immense interest to the discussion of artists and their artistic proclivities. The declining national borders, de-centring self and merging ethnocentric worldviews, all these not only crop up questions in our minds but asks us to raise a dialogue within ourselves. The onslaught of cosmopolitan notions in the ever mushrooming worlds of globalization raise an anxiety but the answers are within us. The choice to 'merge' or state individuality is an artist's call. The knowledge of difference and the task of transcending the difference and differentiability promise the ideas of cultural multiplicity. The debates between the cultural heritage, cultural specifics and universal humanity lead to a discerning self. The task of the artists in the present shrinking times is to maintain individuality in the 'universal impulse'. Reading Puja under these lines makes the viewer take a close glance at the canvas. It is not a simple painting with chiselled human figuration; it is a microscopic peek to the macro world of socio-cultural tensions and apprehensions.

Puja makes a choice and comes home to voice these anxieties and finds herself at ease in the fight between the inner and outer selves while reclining herself to the inner strengths. To go back to the discussions on 'mcdonaldization' and difference, and see it in relation to the vector of cultural consumerism, it would not be wrong to suppose that the art of collecting art is not an easy task.

In this rapidly changing global world where definitions of art too are changing, naturally the definitions of painting too are changing. A painting is now also known as a picture. In the contemporary approach to art history we have to now acknowledge its plurality- 'art histories' - rather than a singular approach as defined by Ernst Gombrich in 1950 in his iconic book *The Story of Art*. There is no single Gombrichian approach to art history, there are multiple art histories and there are multiple interpretations of art works. Against this backdrop of a departure from the early formalism, modernism and modernity, in the world of the contemporary avant garde, Puja has been adhering to the formalist's definition of the act of painting, preserving the sanctity of her medium while keeping in tune with modernity and contemporary society through the thematics of her work.

Dr. Alka Pande

Art Historian, Author
Autumn, 2012

Artist Statement

Strength and power are often wrongly perceived; those who appear frail may in fact be resolutely strong. "Wars," as it is has been said, "are not always won or lost on the battlefield, but often in the mind".

This series called 'Pause and Play' explores the power of mind and how we can we achieve inner strength by detaching ourselves.

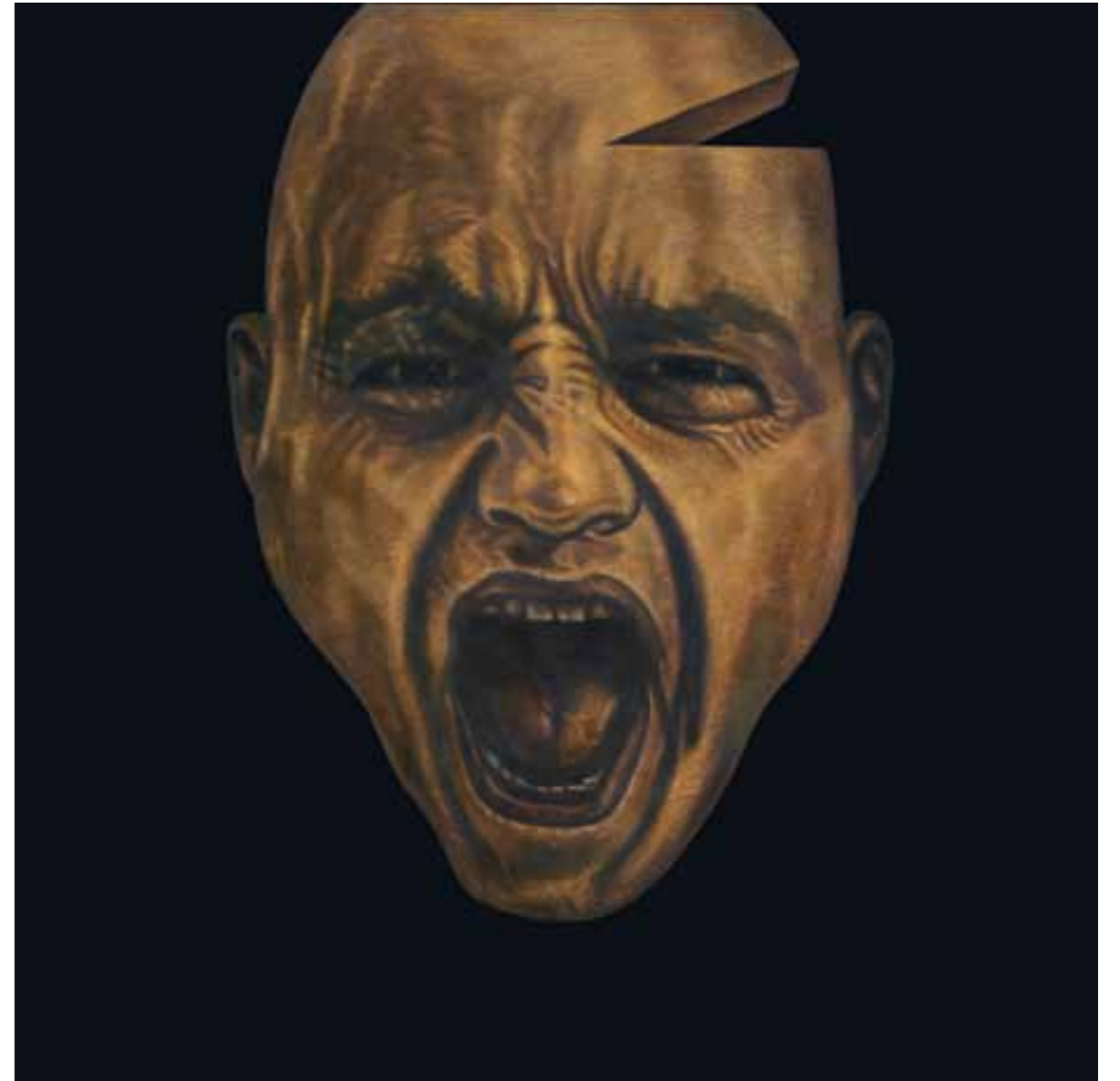
Puja Kshatriya

2012

Pause & Play | Oil on canvas & blade scraping | 50" x 50" | 2010

"These are universal images as they deal with the frailties and the experience of being human. As a painter, I find this extremely challenging. I want to explore the human form with all its frailties, strengths and weaknesses."

Puja Kshatriya

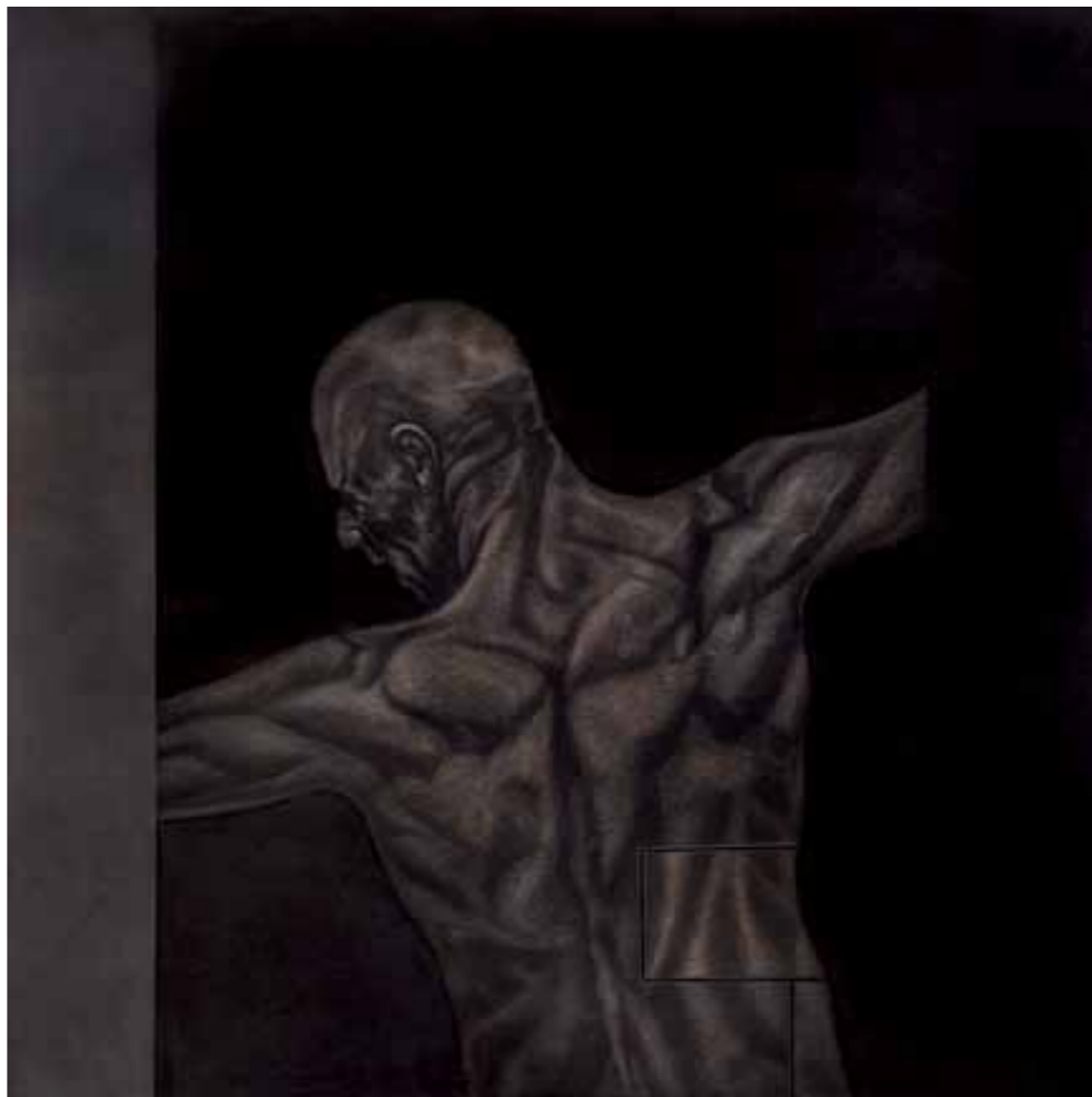
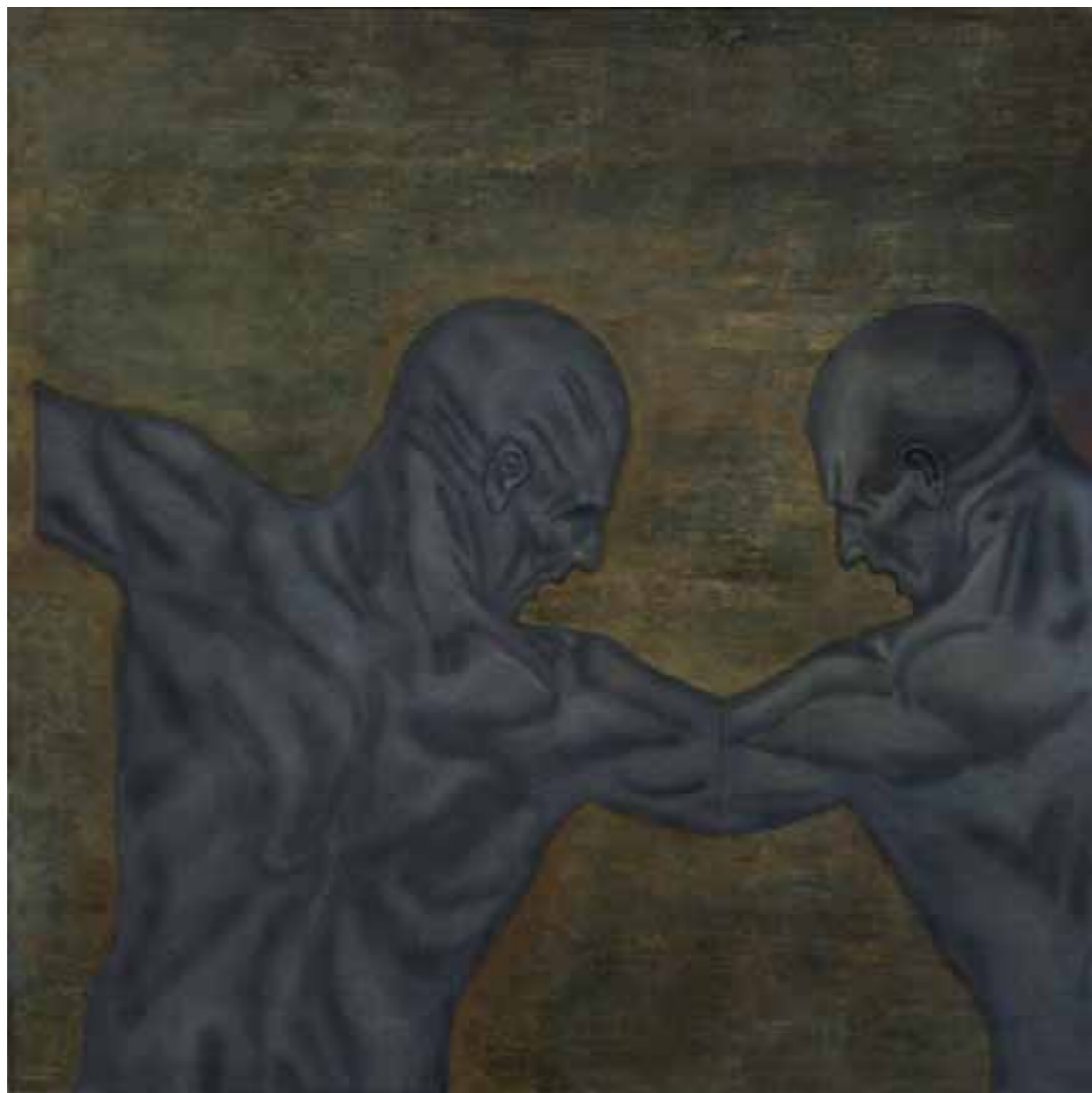


Perception | Oil on canvas & blade scraping | 50" x 50" | 2009



Etchings | Oil on canvas & blade scraping | 50" x 50" | 2011



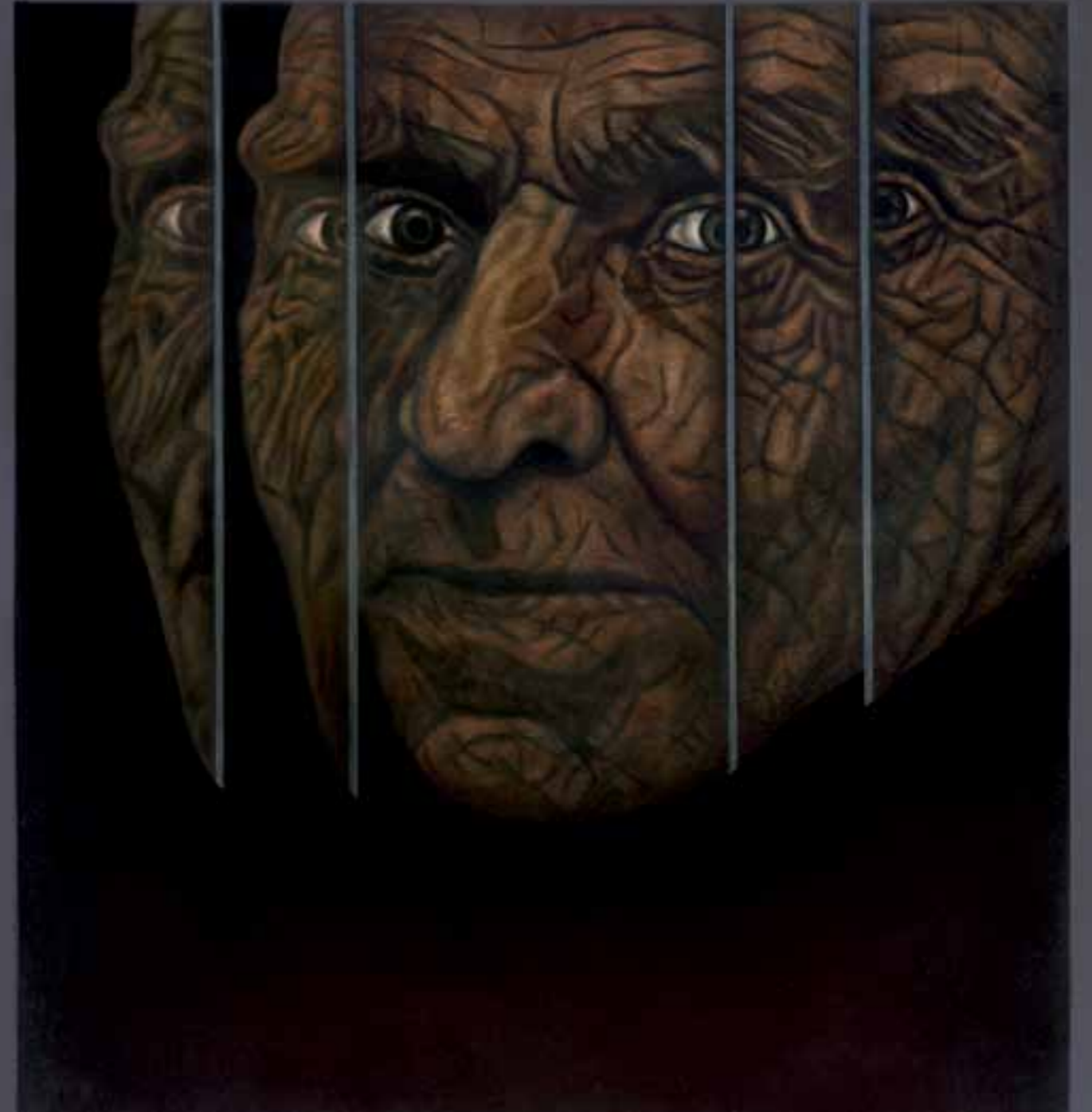


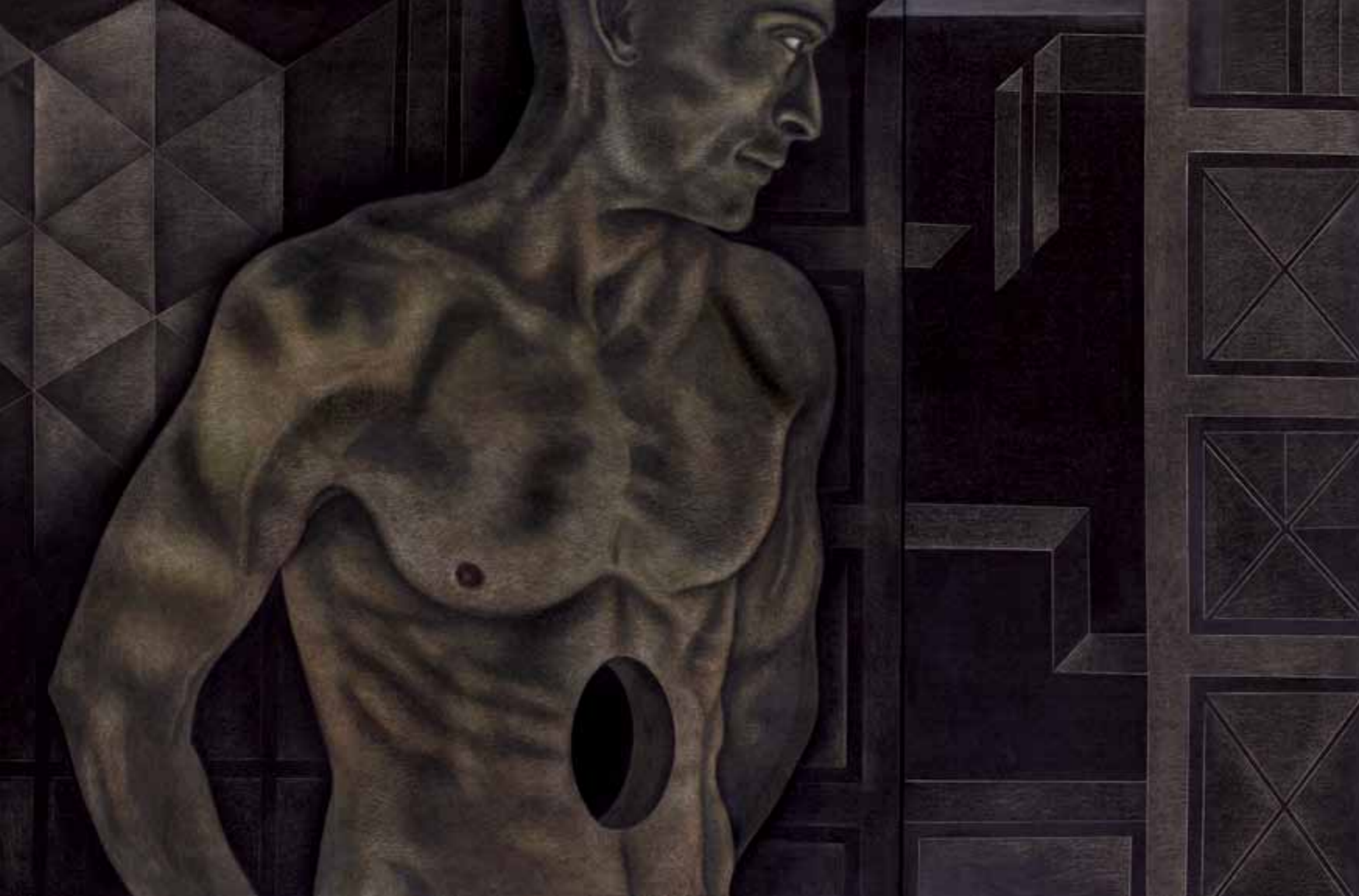
Relay Race | Oil on canvas & blade scraping | 100" x 50" | 2011

Shards of a Prism | Oil on canvas & blade scraping | 50" x 50" | 2009

“In the world of imperfection, the classical style of Roman sculptures soaked in perfection makes us ponder. However, the materiality of the world comes with the human flaws and the struggle to survive is rooted in the innate insecurities.”

Dr. Alka Pande





In Search of a Dream
Oil on canvas & blade scraping
60" x 40"
2011

Lunch Break | Oil on canvas & blade scraping | 60" x 50" | 2009

"I dive into the sea of forms (*rupa*), hoping that I may come upon the gem of the formless *arupa*- the absolute *Brahman*"

Rabindranath Tagore



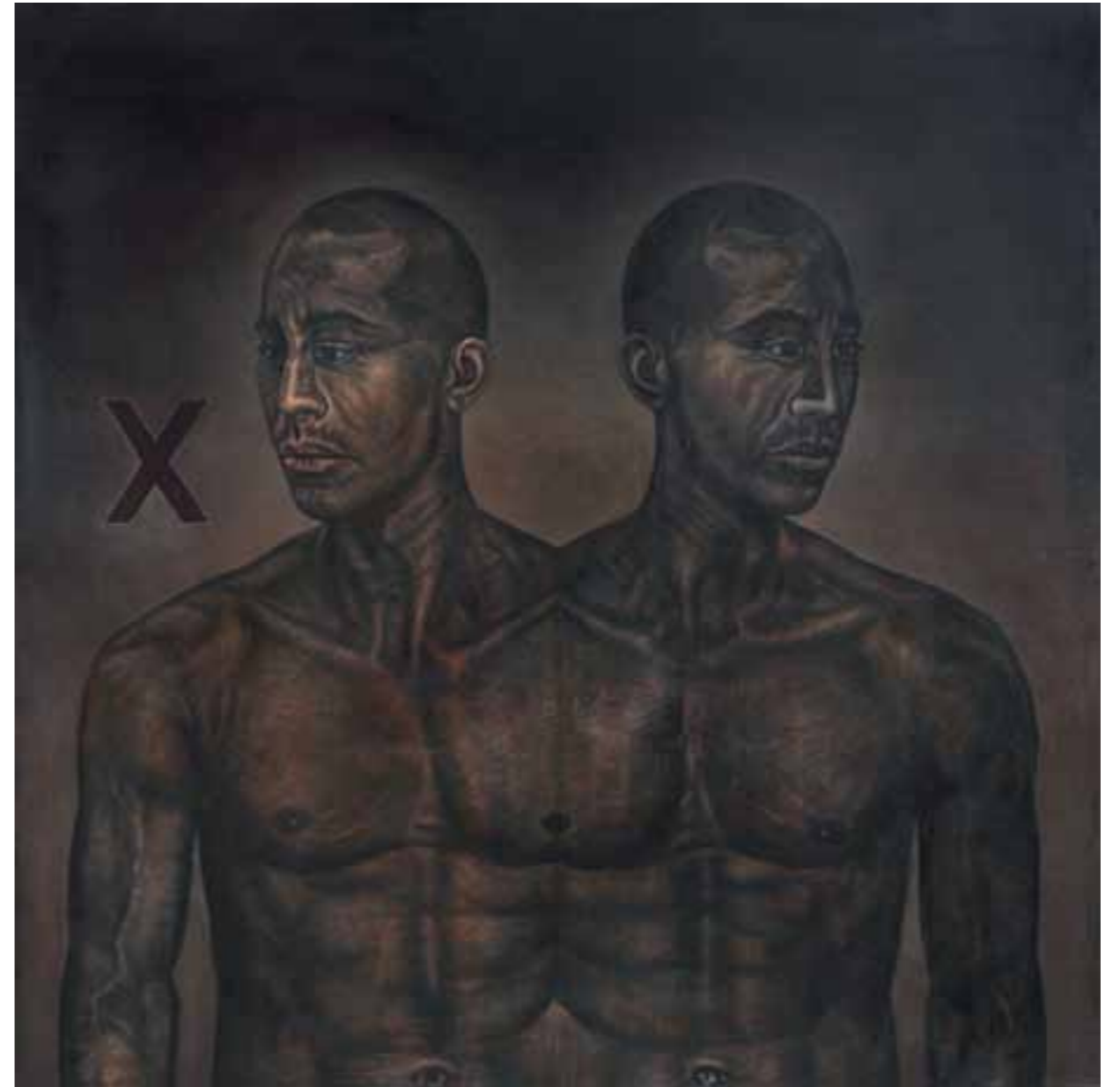


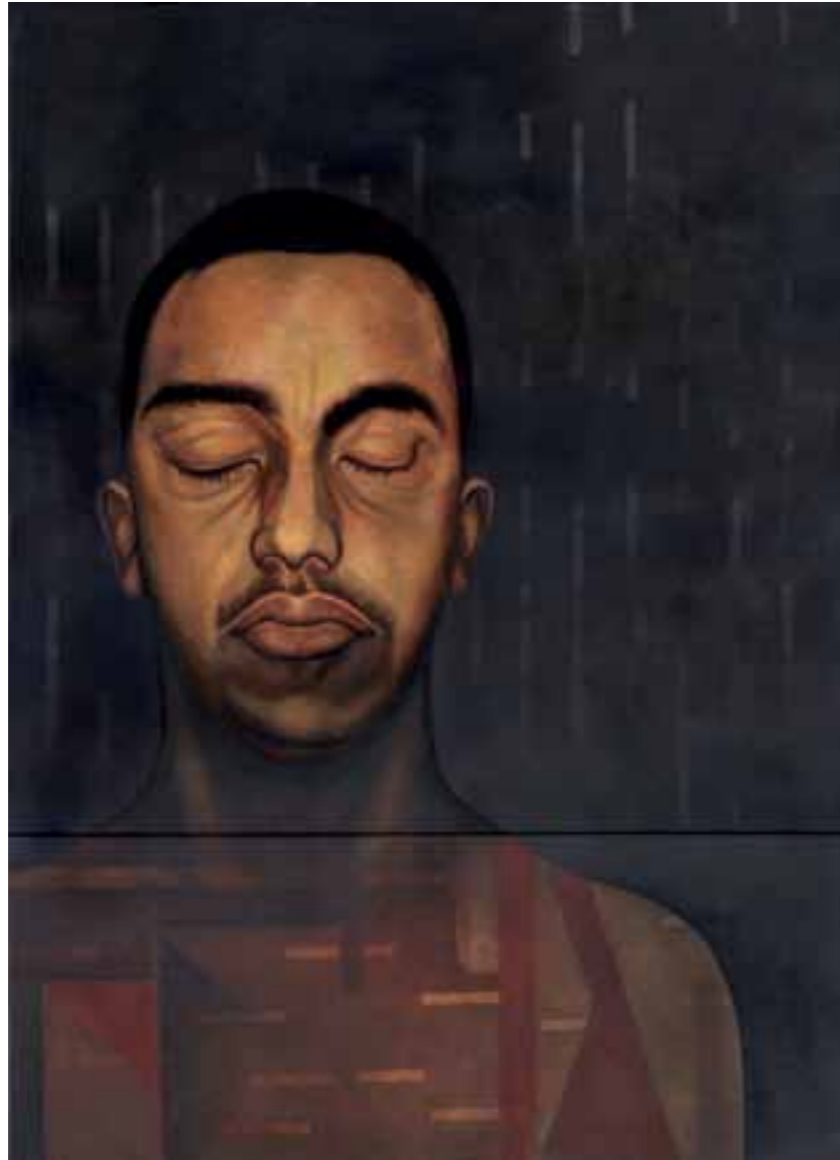
Made to Order | Oil on canvas & blade scraping | 100" x 50" | 2010

Twin Perspectives | Oil on canvas & blade scraping | 50" x 50" | 2009

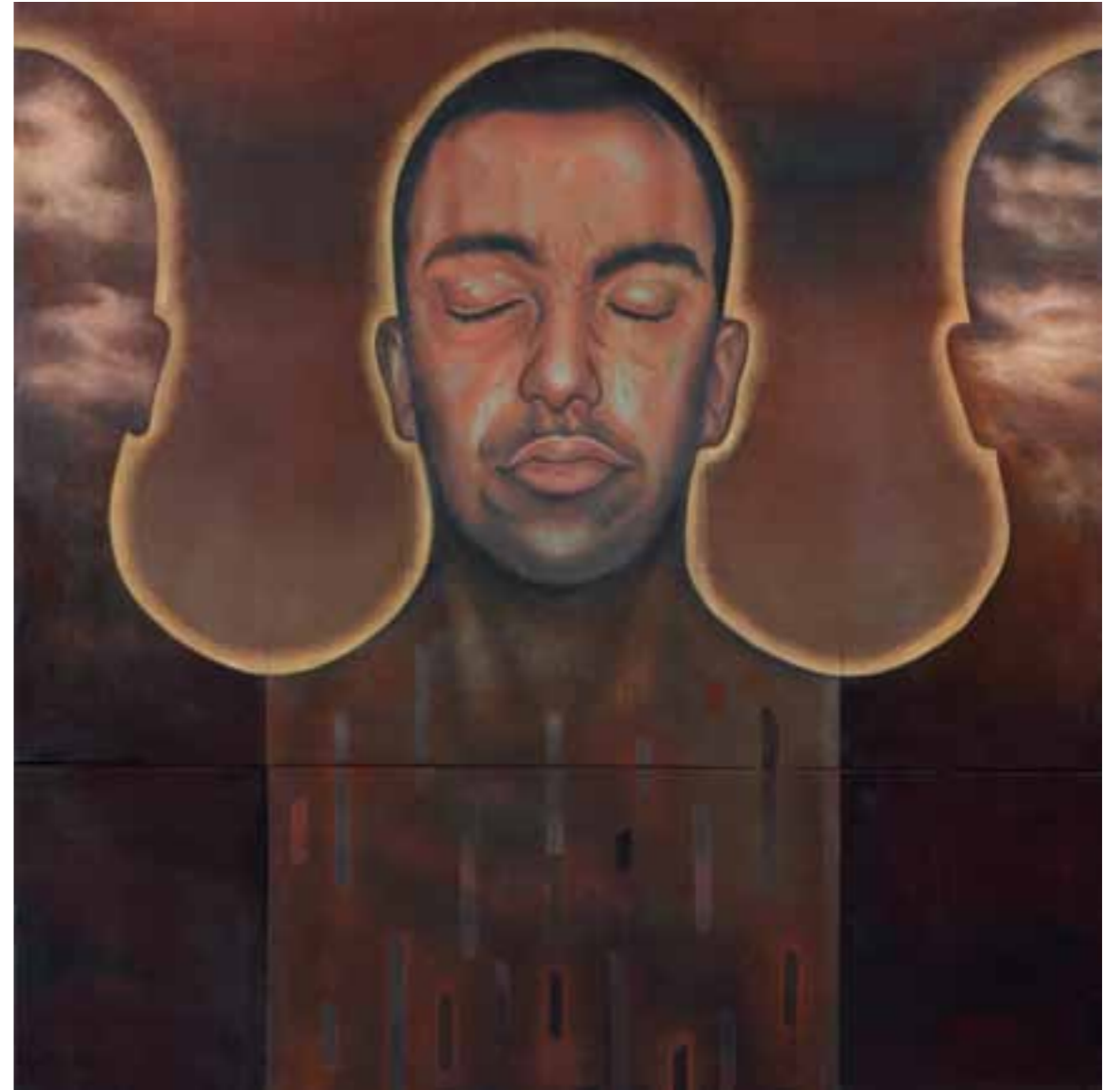
“Pause and Play has resonances of the aforementioned canons. In fact her visual language takes me back to the aesthetic traditions of pre modern India of which there is an unbroken tradition with creative transformations into the present. Puja with her personal artistic evolution endeavors to evolve her own language.”

Dr. Alka Pande





Breathe in-Breathe out-1 | Oil on canvas & blade scraping | 36" x 50" | 2012



Breathe in-Breathe out-2 | Oil on canvas & blade scraping | 50" x 50" | 2012



Mapping the Terrain | Oil on canvas & blade scraping | 70" x 50" | 2007



“The persistent human head in Puja’s paintings is her representative anthem for metaphysical probing. Stylistically, these works might lead one to believe that they are phot-realistic, but as soon as you enter a painting, the exploration of each minute cell reveals the inherent, abstract quality of the work and the artist’s philosophy of work”

Anahite Contractor, Mumbai, 2007

Mapping the Terrain | Oil on canvas & blade scraping | 70" x 40" | 2007



“In this interior & landscape, Puja is the seeker, who journeys through the translucent and dark terrains of psyche to encounter her protagonists, who appear to be engrossed in a dialogue with themselves. Strongly physical, yet elusive in their detached, distancing from reality, these enigmatic persona seem to raise many questions about themselves, their identity function and being”

Sumitra Srinivasan , Mumbai , 2005



Reality & Metaphor | Oil on canvas & blade scraping | 80" x 50" | 2005



Puja Kshatriya

Solo Shows

- 2012 'Pause and Play' , Artspeaks India, Triveni Kala Sangam, New Delhi
- 2009 'Construct -Deconstruct', Museum Art Gallery, Mumbai
- 2007 'Mapping The Terrain', Tao Art Gallery, Mumbai
- 2005 'Reality & Metaphor', Museum Art Gallery, Mumbai
- 2003 'Fragments', Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai
- 2002 'Between Heaven & Earth', London Fine Arts, Singapore
- 1999 Triveni Kala Sangam, New Delhi
- 1997 Taj Art Gallery, Mumbai
- 1995 Design Art Gallery, Dubai
- 1982 'Animal Farm' Indian High Commission, London
- 1981 'Animal Farm' Gallery 7, Centaur Hotel, Mumbai
- 1980 Triveni Kala Sangam, New Delhi

Group Shows

- 2011 India Art Fair 2011, Delhi, Cymroza Art Gallery
- 2010 Gallery Art & Soul, Mumbai
- 2006 'Water for life", Charity exhibition by Cymroza Art Gallery, Mumbai
- 2005 'Passages, Exhibition by Indian Painters, by Gallery Art & Soul, Singapore
Concern India Summer Exhibition, Mumbai
Concern India Auction by Christies, Mumbai
Participation at the Kala Ghoda Art Festival, Mumbai
- 2004 'Police Welfare Fund', Auction by The Art Trust, Mumbai
'Journey', Charity exhibition for Breast Cancer by Gallery Art & Soul
Concern India Auction by Christies, Mumbai
The Harmony Show, Mumbai
- 2003 The Harmony Show, Mumbai
- 2002 Shades Art Gallery, Singapore
- 2001 Shades Art Gallery, Singapore
Women Artists, Cymroza Art Gallery, Mumbai
- 1999 The Harmony Show, Mumbai
- 1998 Dubai Art Centre, Dubai
Shades Art Gallery, Singapore
- 1997 'Sharjah Biennale', Sharjah 1997
- 1996 Sharan Apparao Gallery, Chennai
- 1995 'Sharjah Biennale' Sharjah
- 1994 International Festival of Arts, Dubai
- 1993 Dubai Art Centre, Dubai
- 1986 Gallery 7, Mumbai
National Exhibition, Sahitya Kala Parishad, New Delhi
- 1985 National Drawing Exhibition, Chandigarh Art Museum
Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi
- 1984 National Drawing Exhibition ,Chandigarh Art Museum
- 1983 National Drawing Exhibition , Chandigarh Art Museum
- 1977 'Women Painters of India', Sahitya Kala Parishad, New Delhi

- 1976 'Artists - 26', Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi
- 1973 Graphics Exhibition, 'Group 8', New Delhi
Cymroza Art Gallery, Mumbai

Workshops & Camps

- 2012 Silk Screen Printing - STPI, Singapore
- 2010 Lithography - STPI, Singapore
- 2006 Conducted workshop on 'Textures' at NGMA, Mumbai
- 2004 Art Camp, Organised by Harsh Goenka, Madh Island
- 2003 Attended workshop - NGMA, Mumbai

Awards & Scholarships

- 1994 Jury's Award, International Festival of Art, Dubai
- 1986 Cash Award, Sahitya Kala Parishad, New Delhi
- 1985 Certificate of Merit, Chandigarh Art Museum, Chandigarh
- 1983 Award, Chandigarh Art Museum, Chandigarh
- 1977 Certificate of Merit, Sahitya Kala Parishad, New Delhi
- 1974 Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA), Delhi College of Art
- 1973 Merit Scholar, College of Art, Delhi
- 1972 Merit Scholar, College of Art, Delhi

Puja's paintings and sculptures are in the collection of Delhi based institutions like Lalit Kala Akademi, Hudco Art Museum, Sahitya Kala Parishad and College of Art Museum. Additionally, they are also included in several prestigious collections in India and overseas.

She has contributed to mainstream publications on art. Over the last several years she has expressed views in features on artists Rameshwar Broota, Atul Dodiya, Shreyas Karle, Sunil Padwal among others.

Puja Kshatriya lives and works in Gurgaon & Mumbai.

E-mail: pujakshatriya@gmail.com | Delhi : +91 99997 59306 | Mumbai : +91 98206 07001



Ashwini Pai Bahadur

Artspeaks India founded by art collector and entrepreneur Ashwini Pai Bahadur, has been closely involved with the fine arts for more than fifteen years. With an objective of creating interfaces between Indian contemporary art and the rich folk-craft traditions of India, Artspeaks India focuses on promoting visual art forms in India and overseas.

Artspeaks India functions under two separate conceptual identities - Artspeaks India Contemporary and Artspeaks India Heritage. While the former focuses on preservation, exhibition and collection of modern and contemporary art, the later aims at organizing varied traditional crafts activities and creating windows for their exposure.

Ashwini Pai Bahadur has previously freelanced as an arts consultant and an art dealer. She has also worked on diverse art-related projects, curated art shows, directed and produced films. Apart from writing for publications and artists catalogues, she has also been sourcing Indian modern and contemporary art for key collectors in India and overseas. Her career span includes stints with The Times of India, British Council and Lalit Kala Akademi.

5 Kehar Singh Estate, Lane no. 2, Westend Marg
Said-Ul-Ajaib, New Delhi - 110030, India
T +91 11 40569595 F +91 11 41684757 M +91 98185 82234
E info@artspeaksindia.com | artspeaksindia@gmail.com
www.artspeaksindia.com

