



Memories of a Home

Kerala-based artist PR Satheesh focusses on his bond with nature through 'abstract landscapes'

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GROWING UP on a plantation in Munnar, located at the edge of a forest, PR Satheesh forged a strong bond with nature in his early years. He would spend hours amid trees or playing with animals. Spotting a wild creature that had strayed into their property or around it, wasn't uncommon either. But when he left for Government College of Fine Arts in Trivandrum, his first real exposure to city life, it overwhelmed him. "It was a stark contrast to the life I had led growing up, and this is what my art is about," explains Satheesh, looking at his multi-panel untitled artwork that hangs at Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke in Colaba, Mumbai.

Defined by infinite loops in bold colours such as acid yellows and greens, the large-scale paintings do not feature defined figures or clean lines. However, there is a strong sense of nature — trees, animals, even people. The 49-year-old calls it "my style of landscape art", adding that he is aware it is unlike the usual landscapes one sees. Perhaps this is also what fascinated curator Anita Dube, who invited Satheesh to participate in Kochi-Muziris Biennale 2018-19.

Satheesh's Mumbai debut, titled "Frenetic" — also his first solo showing — is an extension of the works on display at the Biennale. Walking around the gallery, looking at his works, Satheesh feels it took a long while for his work to find its voice. The initial inspiration to pursue art came from his father, who would carve on wood. But it took him several attempts before he could get into the arts college. "I lacked the communication skills to make the cut until my brother set me up to live with some art students for some time. Not only did it give me exposure to art, but also to life," he says. Sure enough, this time when he applied, Satheesh enrolled in the art institution.

After college, his art practice continued through scholarships and he spent the next three years living in cities outside of Kerala. But



PR Satheesh; (top) one of his untitled works from 2018 on display in Mumbai

eventually, his roots beckoned him and he returned to Munnar. The following 15 years, he chose to live his life as a farmer. While he remained prolific with art, he confined it to small showings at exhibitions and galleries. However, his college friends continued to encourage him and one of them set up a studio space in Kochi for Satheesh. He has since been living between the city and his plantation, spending two to three days a week in Kochi.

Looking at his works in pen and ink on paper, Satheesh says that drawings are at the core of his art. Some of these are akin to doodles. But the artist stresses that this is only one kind of drawing he does. Pulling up a photograph on his phone, he shows an artwork with endless human heads that can be seen through wire mesh, as if indicating a sense of being trapped. "I do not hate the city but the two distinct environments are always at loggerheads in my mind, and perhaps also in my art... Whatever we do, we commit to nature and I would say my work is like abstract landscape. But landscapes also have a lot going on, mythical creatures or climate change, for instance. Somewhere my art hopes to reflect all that."

The exhibition is on till December 31