



Ratheesh T, Allotted Land, 2018, oil on canvas, 182 x 306 cm / 72 x 120 in



Ratheesh T, Amma, 2016, oil on canvas, 183 x 122 cm / 72 x 48 in



Ratheesh T, The Wall Between Us, 2020, oil on canvas, 183 x 214.3 cm / 72 x 84.4 in



Ratheesh T, I Am Cleaning Pond, 2015, oil on canvas, 198 x 244 cm / 78 x 96 in



Ratheesh T, On the Middle Step, 2014, oil on canvas, 244 x 198 cm / 96 x 77.9 in



Ratheesh T, Silent Dialogue, 2021, oil on canvas, 183 x 123 cm / 72 x 48.4 in



Ratheesh T, Saami, 2018, oil on canvas, 183 x 152 cm / 72 x 59.8 in



Ratheesh T, You Made Me an Artist, 2021, oil on canvas, 183 x 183 cm / 72 x 72 in

Attributed to “magical realism”, **Ratheesh T**’s earlier paintings are surreal—often hypnotising—images of the mythological universe that informs the local culture he hails from. Interspersed with his personal iconography, his large-scale paintings are bold statements on social injustice and the marginalisation of the native inhabitants, who, as daily-wage earners, battle for survival and self-sustenance. ‘Allotted Land’ (2018) represents the intricate social fabric of village life in southern Kerala, ridden by poverty, manual labour, alcoholism as well as the betrayal by a political ideology which pledged social equality for all. Teeming with details, groups of figures and animals form various intersecting focal points, cohesively woven together into a singular picture plane. This “genre painting” of epic dimension suggests a deep sympathy with the “orphans of modernisation”, acutely observed by the artist “as if I was one of them”.

From 2014 onwards, Ratheesh T’s subject matter has deliberately changed with a focus on self-portraits depicting the artist in his immediate surroundings. ‘On the Middle Step’ (2014) marks the turning point, where his interest in the collective over the individual is reversed. We see the artist, a solitary figure, standing on the staircase of his middle-class home, looking down on a group of dark-skinned villagers. While the chrome-railed staircase signifies upward mobility, the fruits the villagers offer him with sardonic smiles recall the frugality of life that is evocative of the artist’s own dispossessed childhood. Although the sharing of food indicates a gesture of inclusion, Ratheesh T now seems to belong to a sophisticated, urbanised world—visible through the grilled windows—hinting at the new place he occupies in the social stratification.

Without making any preparatory sketches, Ratheesh T’s paintings are direct renditions of his observations, experiences and visions. His brush stroke is controlled, not impulsive, applying the volume of paint and its layers in a restrained way. Following a linear rather than painterly style allows him to sharply define the outlines of his objects. While he finds the “figurative-narrative pattern the most radical and expressive method” for his practice, he imbues his canvases with saturated colours and sharp contrasts of light and dark hues, conveying a sense of spatial depth in a tropical setting.

In ‘I Am Cleaning Pond’ (2015), the artist poses himself as nude figure. Despite being deprived of all clothes and furniture that might serve as signifiers of his upbringing and place in society, the body doesn’t seem defenseless. The crumbling of the wall behind him reveals a scene in which weeds are extracted from a pond. This can be read as an analogy to the process of self-renewal that Ratheesh T has imposed on himself. Peeling off the layers of identity—consisting of values, beliefs and role-specific expectations that society has assigned to him—the painting reveals a state of striking interiority. In a radical gesture of liberation, entailing a new form of artistic freedom that from now on informs his painterly vocabulary, the body is stripped back to its core, manifesting its essential humanness.

Ratheesh T received his BFA in Painting from the College of Fine Arts Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram. His work has been exhibited in numerous solo and group exhibitions, most recently: Zuzeum Art Centre, Riga, Latvia (2021); ‘Lokame Tharavadu’ (2021), curated by Bose Krishnamachari, Alleppey, Kerala; Galerie Mirchandani & Steinruecke, Mumbai (2020/2018); Jeonbuk Museum of Art, Wanju-gun, South Korea (2015); the 5th Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale, Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Fukuoka (2014); and the 1st Kochi-Muziris Biennale, Kochi (2012) among others. His work is also held in various public collections, including: Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Fukuoka; Nasher Museum of Art, Durham, North Carolina; Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi; and Zuzeum Art Centre, Riga, Latvia.