

INDIAARTFAIR
2020 30.01 - 02.02

NSIC Exhibition Grounds, Okhla Industrial Estate, New Delhi

FOCUS BOOTH F02

For the 2020 edition of the India Art Fair, Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke is delighted to present a solo booth with six oil-on-canvas paintings by Ratheesh T.

What is unique about Ratheesh's paintings is that they place the local at centerstage, and demonstrate an intense attentiveness towards the specificities of costume, expression, gesture and attitude. These meticulously crafted works foreground situations and moments that are intensely personal and moving.

Let us look closely at 'I Am (Cleaning Pond)' (2015), a dramatic self-portrait in which the artist-persona faces his viewers naked, divested of all his clothes. This painting establishes a visual equivalence between the cleaning of a pond (this green pond, by whose side his house stands in Trivandrum, has played an important role in Ratheesh's paintings and the purification of a self burdened with aspirations, attachments, and anxieties. Even as excavators drag the pond for water hyacinths and garbage in the background of the painting, the wall of the house is demolished. The barrier between architecture and landscape, privacy and public space has been breached. The artist-persona occupies the foreground: a profane ascetic who has rejected the claims and demands of the social world. He stands "clothed only in the sky", *digambara*, in the Sanskrit phrase; he has renounced his clothes, books, and other impedimenta, which lie in splendid disarray around the pictured room. But look at his hands: he holds a hammer in one and a chisel in the other, and blood drips down both, and onto the tools. In attacking the wall, he has attacked himself; the house is an extension of its inhabitant's body. The psychic processes of integration and individuation – enshrined in the exclamatory 'I Am' – have entailed the sacrificial death of previous self-definitions.

'I See You' (2018) portrays a liminal occasion, a threshold event that takes place in a strongly oneiric atmosphere. Ratheesh articulates a sexual tension. The title, 'I See You', acquires multiple contexts: is it spoken by the man, immobilised; or by the woman, held back; or by both of them? Or by us, the viewers, with reference to the half-glimpsed meanings of a mysterious image that conceals them in plain sight? The answers escape into the darkness, where, as our eyes grow accustomed to the truancy of light, we discern a tapestry of trees, flowering shrubs, the filigree patterns of aerial roots against the shadows.

Overleaf

In 'Contestant Waiting at Legend's Corridor' and 'Dancing Girl' (both 2020), the disquieting cultural and political legacy of South Asia's leaders and freedom fighters is articulated with such precision and humour, that, as artist Gieve Patel phrases it, "Actual real-life presences acquire strangeness through a poetic fabulation in the artist's method."

Born in 1980 in Kilimanoor, a small southern village situated in a dense forest, Ratheesh moved to the city of Trivandrum to study art, and now maintains studios in both places. His work has been shown at the 1st edition of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, Kochi, India (2012) and the 5th Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale, Fukuoka, Japan (2014). Ratheesh is a recipient of the Royal Overseas League Scholarship, Scotland, 2004. His work is in numerous private and public collections in India, Europe and the USA.

(Partly excerpted from the essay "Between The Riddle and The Exclamation — Recent Paintings by Ratheesh T." by Ranjit Hoskote, 2018)