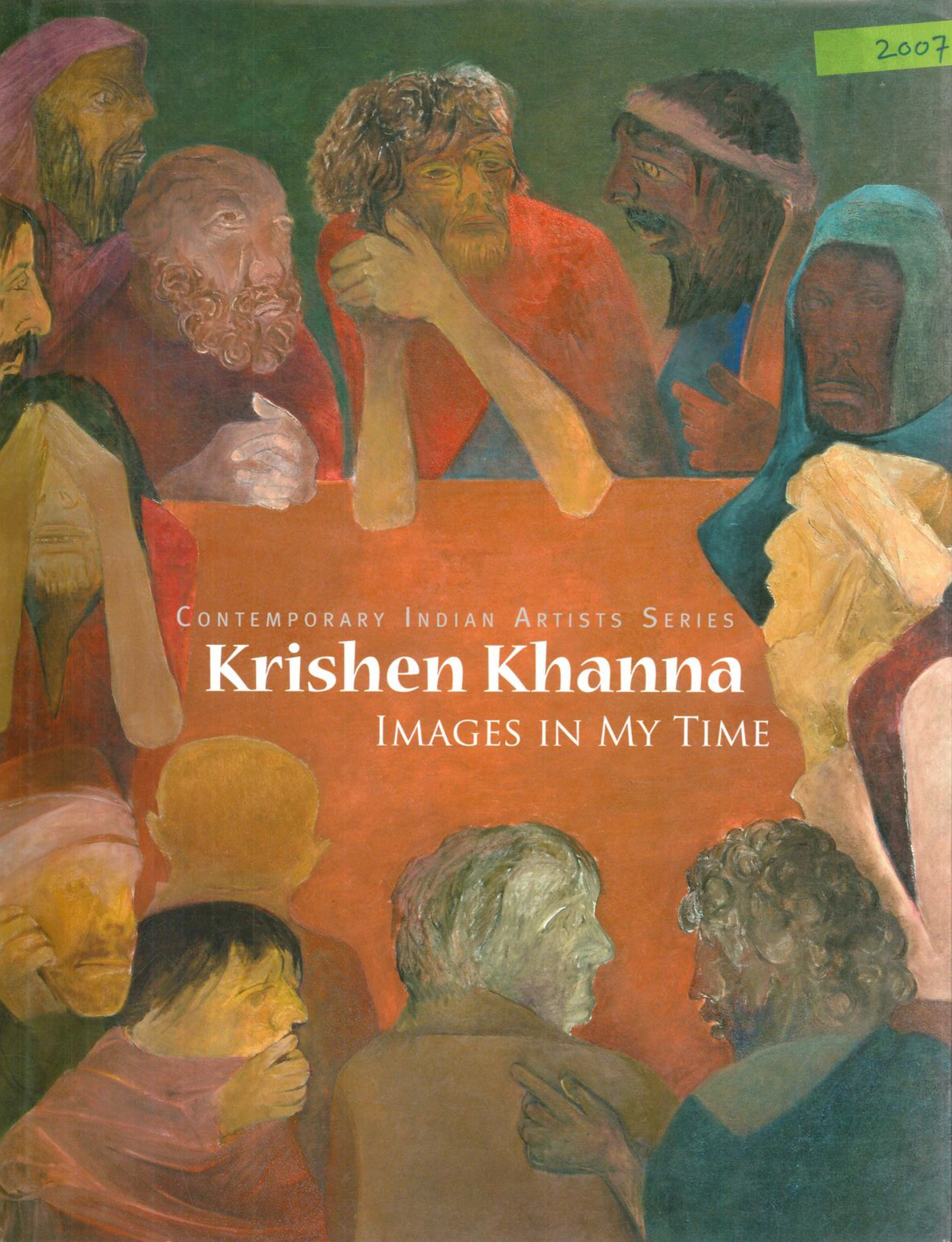
2007



CONTEMPORARY INDIAN ARTISTS SERIES

Krishen Khanna

IMAGES IN MY TIME

Krishen Khanna

Images in My Time

Essays by Krishen Khanna, Norbert Lynton, Gayatri Sinha, Ranjit Hoskote, Marilyn Rushton, and Tanuj Berry | Photography by Karan Khanna

Born in Lahore in 1925, Khanna learnt the tools of his trade at the evening classes conducted at the Mayo School of Art, Lahore. In the wake of India's partition he moved to Simla and thereafter to Delhi where he currently lives and works. So far, he has had over forty one-man shows held at galleries in India and abroad. He has participated in the Tokyo Biennale, in 1957 and 1961, the Sao Paulo Biennale (1960) and in the Venice Biennale (1962). He won the National Award of the Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi in 1965, the Gold Medal at the First Triennale of Contemporary World Art, New Delhi in 1968. He was a recipient of Padma Shree, awarded by the President of India, in 1990.

Khanna's style is discussed by Norbert Lynton – the artist dabbled in abstraction but returned to representational art as a member of the Progressive Artists' Group. This was a brief movement practised by artists striving towards modernity and challenged India's caste-driven structure.

The artist's work is placed in its biographical, historical and social context through the examination of several of his paintings among which are *Flagellation* and a series of *bandwallahs* (musicians) in the 1970s. The depiction of musicians has motivated two writers – Gayatri Sinha and Marilyn Rushton – to look at Khanna's work in relation to the theme of music.

This book is the first to combine an Indian artist's monograph with the discussion of the socio-political context which motivated a generation of Indian artists.

With 116 colour illustrations

Front: *Last Supper*, oil on canvas, 48x72", 2006
Back: Study for *Bandwallahs*, oil on canvas, 14x18", 2005



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Norbert Lynton, professor emeritus at the University of Sussex and former director of exhibitions for the Arts Council of Great Britain, has written widely on twentieth-century art. He is the author of *The Story of Modern Art* and co-author of *The Yale Dictionary of Art and Artists*.

Gayatri Sinha is an independent curator and art critic based in New Delhi. She is the author of *Krishen Khanna: A Critical Biography, The Art of Adimoolam* and *Krishen Khanna: The Embrace of Love*.

Ranjit Hoskote is a cultural theorist, independent curator and poet. He is the author of ten books. These include four studies of art and artists, of which the most recent is *Baiju Parthan: A User's Manual* (2006).

Marilyn Rushton is a barrister-at-law and an academic with a strong interest in contemporary Indian art.

Tanuj Berry is a friend of Krishen Khanna's and a collector of modern and contemporary Indian art. He has been involved with a number of significant projects and publications on many important Indian artists.

Other titles of interest:

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Reflections on the Art of Iranna G R
Ranjit Hoskote

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Images in My Time

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Contemporary Indian Artists Series

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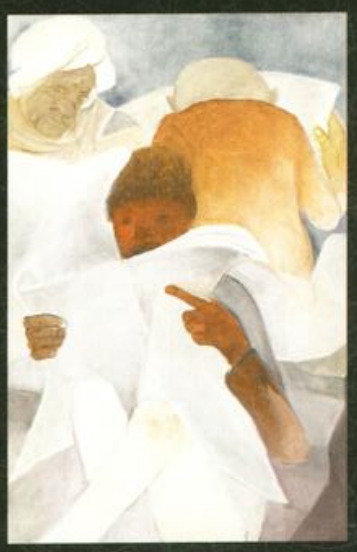
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To the memory of my parents

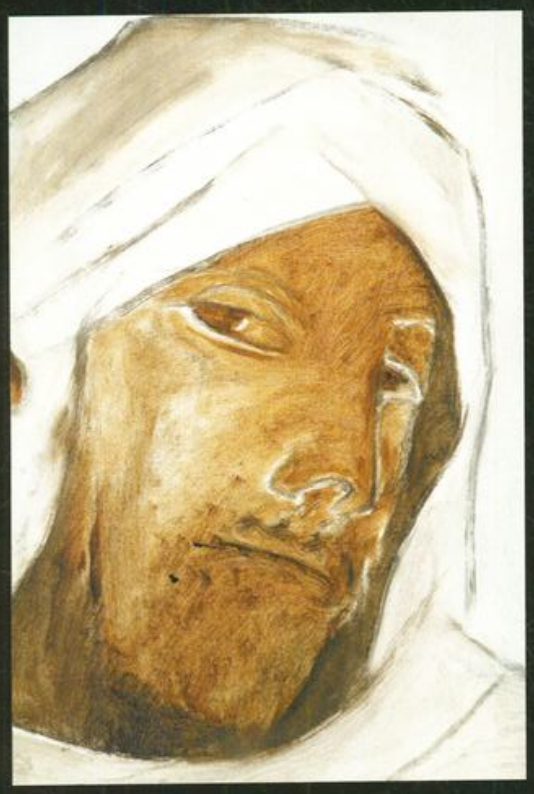
Krishen Khanna

F O R E W O R D

We have had a fairly long association with Krishen and have been involved with four publications on his work. We hold this particular one close to our hearts. It has taken us two years to put it together, with eminent art critics from India and England contributing to the project. The twelve large works selected here are the ones which illustrate important subjects that Krishen has revisited many times in the span of his long career. The biblical theme, which is a prominent section of the book, is represented by *The Betrayal*, *Flagellation*, *The Raising of Lazarus*, *Last Supper*, *Pietà* and *Emmaus*. Some of these have been illustrated jointly, even though they are independent works, as Krishen felt that it placed greater emphasis on the continuity of the theme. The portrayal of musicians, exemplified in *Serenade for Lajwanti* and *Remembering Mali*, is a subject that Krishen has enjoyed visiting repeatedly. In *A Stranger at Gyaniji's Dhaba* and *O.K. Tata* – the former subtle, almost austere and the latter intensely dramatic – he paints everyday life and everyday people, and, perhaps, not-so-ordinary emotions. Krishen's paintings themselves are carefully distanced from emotion, but they ask it of the viewer, demand it almost. *The Blind King and Blindfolded Queen* resonate with layers of meaning and the self-absorbed, enigmatic newspaper readers in *Evening News*, which reverberates with the death of Mahatma Gandhi, silently stand testimony to the infinite uncertainities of life and, indeed, the inevitability of death.This book is published in conjunction with an exhibition of Krishen Khanna's paintings to be held at The Royal Academy of London in March, 2007. Retrospectively, in a career that has spanned nearly six decades, Krishen Khanna's paintings stand eloquent witness to the passage of time in modern India. We hope this selection does justice to his multifaceted narratives, flawless technique and the theatre of human relationships they present.

Tanuj Berry & Saman Malik
November 2006
New Delhi







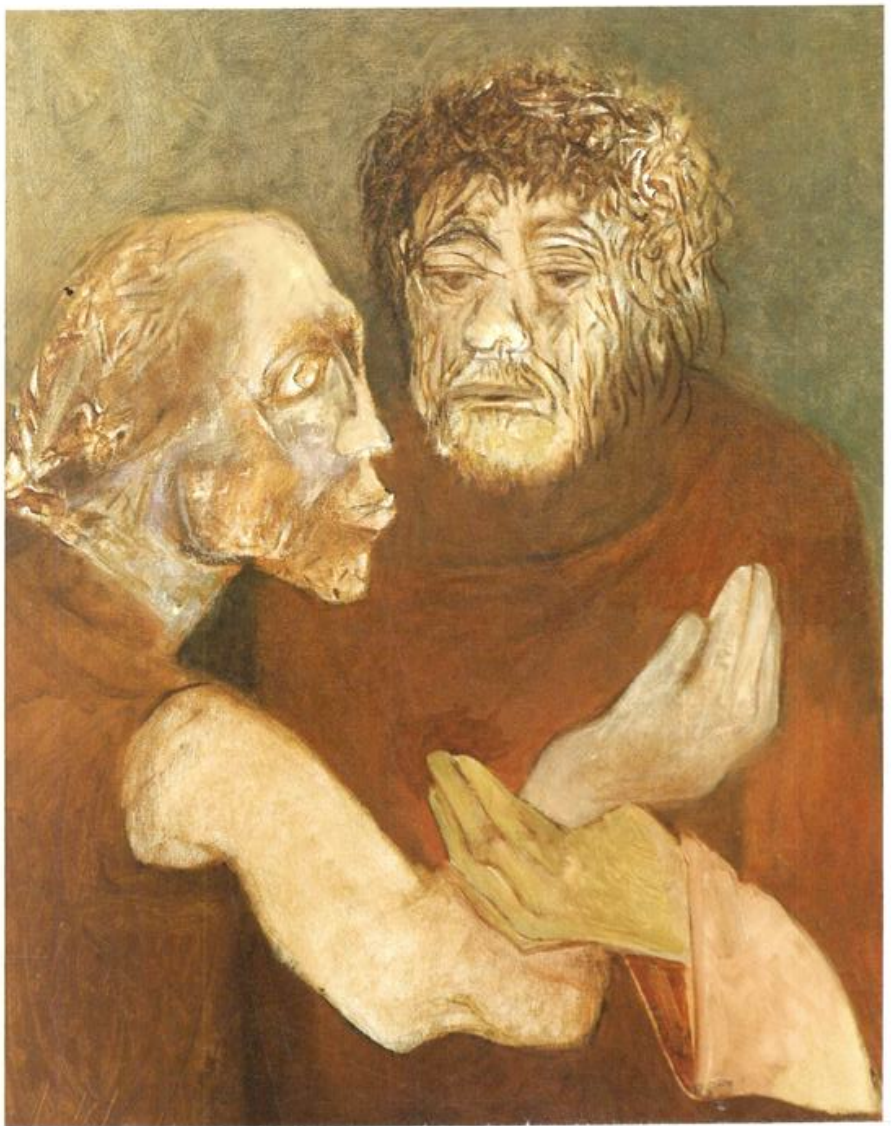
The Betrayal and Flagellation

• Norbert Lynton •



They say love laughs at locksmiths. However true that is, art certainly ignores fences and frontiers, eager to find other modes of expression and other references to adopt and adapt. Kandinsky steeped himself in Russian folk traditions and in news of recent developments in Paris, and chose Munich, halfway between the two, as the place where he might initiate his art, at once radically new and redolent of traditions. Almost all notable modern artists have gone or looked abroad. This applies to the great art of the past as well. The Renaissance itself began with Florence's eager embrace of the culture of antique Rome, which derived from that of ancient Greece. India's multifarious artistic history shows many instances

of debts incurred from, and gifts made to, adjacent and more distant cultures, east and west. Art has always tended to be global, even when regionalism and nationalism aimed to rein it in. **W**hen he was seven, Krishen Khanna tried to make a copy of Da Vinci's *Last Supper* from a reproduction brought home by his father; his first venture into art, we are told. Later he would develop his own versions of the subject, by which time he knew also of other representations of it. His education, first in Lahore and then at the Imperial Services College in Windsor, was basically Christian and English. In India, before and after his years in England, he also studied Urdu and Persian, building up a deep knowledge of, and love for, the



The Betrayal, oil on canvas, 22x28", 2006



The Betrayal, oil on canvas, 48x60", 2006



Flagellation, oil on canvas, 48x60", 2006



literatures of all three languages as well as the Indian languages he had acquired from childhood in the Punjab and, because of the relocations that India's Partition and his work imposed, to Mumbai, Madras and – after he opted for full-time painting – New Delhi. In England, during school holidays, he enjoyed the friendship and guidance of Brother Joseph Gardener at Frensham, as one visitor among several other displaced and family-less youngsters. Here his understanding of Christianity took on additional depth, with closer knowledge of the New Testament and of the character of Christian saints such as St Francis, still a favourite. His college took him on repeated visits to the National Gallery in London, where he soon found himself fascinated by Piero della Francesca's resonantly understated *Baptism of Christ*, as well as the strong, calm art of Giotto and Uccello, religious and secular, and delivering their messages through strong design and unchallengeable staging. He was back in India in 1942, but spent six months of 1954 in London and Paris and in Central Italy, notably in Rome, Arezzo and Assisi, confirming

and enlarging his grasp on western, often religious, art. He speaks with awe of Piero della Francesca's frescoes. **M**y emphasis on his Christian education as man and artist must not overshadow his growing grasp on, and involvement in, Indian and Oriental art, culture and mythology. In Bombay, aged only 24 and a part-time painter, he became part of the Progressive Artists Group and thus made lifelong friendships with a number of artists striving to achieve their individual voices as image-makers for a country and a culture riven by Partition and open enmities and, in varying degrees, eager to find in western modernism – itself a rich, contradictory and rapidly developing field – idioms and methods that might leaven their inheritance. In 1964–65 he produced a number of beautiful *Sumi-e* paintings, abstract and done in black ink on off-white rice paper. The name is Japanese. The paintings celebrate instinctive, as opposed to considered, creation in the spirit of Zen. When he was awarded a US fellowship, he chose to travel via the East. **F**or some time Khanna stayed





Pencil on paper, 16.5x12", 2005

close to abstraction, partly under European and American influence (he knew and admired Rothko and De Kooning), but his instincts and his need to speak about the world more directly led him back to representational art on a very wide front. When he was asked to make a large mural for the Chola Sheraton Hotel at Chennai, in 1975, he chose as his theme the legendary maritime life of the Chola Empire, trading across the Bay of Bengal and along the Coromandel Coast in the 13th and 14th centuries. His mural is a pencil drawing made on many sheets of paper – black and white and with an infinity of tones – to represent ancient ships and their crews amid mighty seas, and their arrival at tropical shores. The ships he had to invent; the people are people, strong but generalized and not intended to refer to a specific place or epoch. In 1980–84 he worked on a mural to fit the complex vault of the main reception area of the Maurya Sheraton Hotel in New Delhi, a multi-lobed surface divided vertically by many timber beams which leave narrow spaces between them, part wall, part ceiling, for which he planned scenes all of which curved in at least one direction. Letting some scenes seem to continue behind the beams, others to be contained by them, and sometimes providing architectural or natural backgrounds for the

activities he was picturing, Khanna's multitudinous scenes here deal with contemporary life, much of it generalized from observation of the world around him, some of it quite personal – as when he represents colleagues and friends, or himself in a wayside teahouse, averted from other figures as they argue and from the Sikh who owns the place and is seen making more tea. The whole work is entitled *The Great Procession*. Khanna wanted it to echo Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* with their inclusive presentation of humanity, its aspirations and failings. If a gentle, humorous kind of realism dominates this mural, it also includes scenes that must be satirical, as when an agile figure is shown juggling with three almost-living heads. Khanna was capturing, directly and symbolically, the ordinary life of Delhi together with its epic moments and the grave social disparities on which the rapidly growing city depends. **K**hanna's overtly Christian paintings may appear to be the opposite of all this, historical and mythical as against the contemporary and real. After his childhood venture, his Christian paintings began in 1966 with a *Pietà*. He has never, I think, painted Christendom's favoured emblem, Christ crucified. The nearest he comes to picturing the death of Christ is in scenes of his *Deposition*, of which the *Pietà*



Pencil on paper, 14x20", 2005

is a particularly concentrated and poignant variation. So not the dying god-man but the dead body on the lap of his tormented and protesting mother, and not the victorious Christ of the Resurrection, but the less dramatic scenes from his last days on earth, when he reveals himself to two disciples at Emmaus, and when Thomas asks to touch Christ's wound to still his doubt. No scenes of Christ falling under the cross as he struggles to carry it to Gethsemane, but repeated versions of the Last Supper and of the Betrayals that brought Christ to that extremity. The closest Khanna comes to showing us the suffering Christ is in *Flagellation*, a five by four foot canvas, wholly occupied by the two figures involved, with even the scourge played down lest it detract from the essential drama of those two, the executioner and his victim. They are presented starkly, in an almost monochrome composition, the assailant clad in white and standing over a brown-skinned Christ, blindfolded, crouching and bound tightly with white bands so that the brown of his body and the zig-zagging bands are the painting's main visual



motif, together with that central hand pulling so viciously at Christ's hair. Khanna has witnessed or known of, over the decades, many fellow humans suffering at the hands of officials acting on the orders of superior powers. *Flagellation* stands for all such acts of violence, often for political reasons but supposedly in the name of law and order. **B**etrayals are often part of such stories, and in another canvas of the same years, also five by four feet, we see Judas betraying Christ with a kiss. This is another very succinct image, with the two protagonists supported by only two indistinct figures indicated on the left and the snout of a dog on the right. Judas's hands gesture and reach out to Christ as his lips press forward; with his left hand (we do not see his right) Christ gently, almost apologetically wards off Judas's lying approach, while his left foot stands forward to strengthen that patient gesture. **E**ach of these powerful paintings delivers an emblem, succinctly scored and choreographed. The main figures, large on the canvas, feel



barely contained by the rectangular supports. Once seen, they are not easily forgotten: they burn their way into our store of significant images. The lack of ameliorating colours and expressive brushwork, the lack of all sweetening or distraction from the key performance, gives this art an incisive and enduring character that goes far beyond the photo-based representations that are often promoted as contemporary art with a social purpose. **T**echnically, these are narrative scenes, qualifying, in view of the importance and the familiarity of their subjects, for the art historical term 'history painting'. Through centuries from the Renaissance on, history painting attracted ambitious artists and held the attention of their informed public, while portraits and genre scenes, of daily life as lived by anonymous contemporaries, were accorded much less attention and an inferior status. At different times and in different places history paintings could be overloaded with narrative or sensuously attractive detail, or honed down to essentials in order to produce a noble – not an entertaining – image. In concentrating his narrative so firmly, Khanna also de-particularizes it. Consider, for contrast, Giotto's crowded and dramatic fresco of the *Kiss of Judas in Padua* or Piero's panel of the *Flagellation in*

Urbino, where the eponymous action is set silently into the middle distance, while mysterious figures stand in the foreground of that brilliantly worked architectural space. Shunning all supporting action and staging, Khanna turns these narrative events into timeless, location-less emblems that reflect on our own time and condemn all inhumanity.



Serenading Lajwanti

• Gayatri Sinha •



Oil on canvas, 32x32", 2005



Serenade for Lajwanti, oil on canvas, 52x72", 2005

'Ours is the modernity of the once colonized. The same historical process that has taught us the value of modernity has also made us the victims of modernity. Our attitude to modernity therefore cannot but be deeply ambiguous.'[1]

As with the other genre paintings in Krishen Khanna's oeuvre, the genesis of the Bandwallah paintings is rooted in personal experience. While driving out of the Garhi Studios one day, in the early 1970s his car was held up by a passing band. Against the background of the 18th-century Garhi fort with its large, capacious artist studios, the raucous band crammed into the small mean street of Garhi village. The syncopated tunes intended for the jollification of a *baraat* (wedding party), the quotient of assertive maleness and vigour of the accompanying groom's party, the residual image of the British colonial march past, and sanguine military energy collapsed into a singular image on that warm Delhi afternoon. Positioning himself as sympathetic spectator and a somewhat humorous narrator, Krishen Khanna has steadily painted the *bandwallah*; the heroics of the street have been rendered with a deep humanist sympathy. **K**rishen Khanna's engagement with music and musicians as a subject has been a steady preoccupation. In the 1950s, his home in Madras was



a site for Carnatic musical performances with masters like Palghat Mani Iyer, *mridangam* player, and the flautist Mahalingam. During these concerts he often painted, petrifying the taut rhythms of the music within abstract forms. In contrast to the sedate classicism of the Carnatic maestros, the *bandwallahs* present the restless energy of the Delhi street, its aspirations and class hierarchies. In their hired uniforms, they resemble the men in trucks; because of their ceaseless movement they become emblematic of the volatility of the city.

The figures on the margin

Krishen Khanna's early paintings of the *bandwallahs* date to early 1970s, a period when he had been particularly preoccupied with war and victimization. India in the late 1960s was recovering from wars with China and Pakistan, near famine conditions, and the devaluation of the rupee. In the aftermath of the Bangladesh war (1971) he had painted *The Game I* and *II* where he portrays military men at a table, discussing the stratagems of war. In *Game II*, skeletal and bodily remains of human corpses lie forgotten under

the table, as the discussions continue. This macabre subject would have been inspired at least in part by the Bangladesh atrocities and the widely disseminated images in Indian newspapers of generals brokering peace across the table. **T**hese paintings bear reference as the soldiers elide into the *bandwallah*s, and the military style uniforms are now rendered faux or even comic. 'The comparison of the *bandwallah*s with warlords is in fact ironic and overt; both these sets of gentlemen wear uniforms and peaked caps, but while one set ordains the destiny of nations and sets armies marching to war, the other marches to tawdry tunes on India's roads in cheap imitation of the army band.'[2] The shift in context from the malevolence of war to the small tunes of the roadside band touches on different registers of social comment. **W**ithin the political matrix of the 1970s, the issues of class authority were foregrounded with the setting up of the Jaiprakash Narayan–led Janata, or people's party. As an artist, Krishen's own response to the marginal figure was already manifest in his paintings of refugees in the 1950s. His paintings of





*bandwallah*s build up a broad narrative around these figures, one that draws from mixed social references. Scenes of the jollification, such as in *Marriage Procession* (1993) underscore the temporary passing pleasure of a hired performance. The pulsations of the street, the rhythm of the marching band are envisioned on the body of the *bandwallah*. On the streets of Delhi, like an off-register palimpsest in his ill fitting uniform, the *bandwallah* recalls the British colonial band. Instead of the military march past, the national anthem or the funerary dirge, his heavy brass instruments now used to belt out slightly off key Bollywood tunes. The band – impaled in the light of the street – usually accompanies the groom's party that dances en route to the site of the wedding. The sights of heaving bodies, arclights and shuffling bands have become common at middle-class North Indian weddings. The cultural pastiche of a colonial residue, popular Bollywood and the Hindu ceremonial procession have come together as part of a popular, if ungainly, even comical ceremony, enacted in full view of the gaze of the casual onlooker.

The street

By the early 1970s Khanna had emerged as a significant painter of Indian street figures, treating the subjects within the genre as

Mixed media on paper, 6x9", 2005

a distinct sub-culture. There appears to be a direct engagement here with acts of labour and the implicit corollary of the difficulty of everyday survival. Other artists to pursue this engagement were Sudhir Patwardhan and Bhupen Khakhar, both of whom paint acts of labour and petty trades, but with distinctly different nuances. By way of contrast, Khanna oscillates in his street paintings between genre and allegory. His engagement varies from subjective identities of people he has known, to generic figures in which they are read in terms of their occupation. In the present work, the *bandwallahs* rambunctiously serenade a dark squat elderly woman, who responds with glee to this passing flirtation. Plucked from the recesses of the artist's memory, she is Gyanoo, or Lajwanti, the doughty sweeper who cleaned the Khanna family home on Mathura Road. As she sits on the steps, the *bandwallahs* appear to weave in and out, belting out a popular tune. **A**s a Dalit subject, Gyanoo/Lajwanti becomes emblematic of Krishen's deliberate blurring of class and communitarian difference. Working and sketching in Bhogal, in the shadow of tomb of the 13th century Sufi saint Nizamuddin Aulia, Khanna would be surrounded by Muslim fakirs, craftsmen with their tool bags, devotees and petty traders. Bhogal represents





the confluence of Hindu and Muslim labour and cultural practices familiar from the artist's early years in Lahore. Speaking of his early childhood home in Lahore as 'my peaceable kingdom', the artist has idealized a time of the easy confluence of peoples and communities. This concern reaches an apogee in his Christ cycle of paintings, and his massive influential painted mural at the Maurya Sheraton Hotel. In the mural, Krishen lends his weight to issues of class, to the dignity and humour apparent in a Chaucerian view of everyday acts of survival. In the Christ paintings, the carpenter from Galilee is recast as a common labourer from the Nizamuddin area, the subject of state persecution. Krishen said, 'The Christ series were set here in Delhi, Nizamuddin in fact, and appear as current happenings. He is wandering amongst us or sleeping with us followers on the road islands. They are not religious pictures as such ... I painted Jesus, not in the image given by European painters, but as one of the fakirs one sees around Nizamuddin.'[3] In his single unstitched garment, he is one among the men in trucks or among the figures that sleep exhausted in the murky pool of the Delhi street lights. In such a continuous line, men in trucks, fakirs and messiahs, *dhabawallas* and jugglers with mangy animals, card



sharps and *beedi* smokers constitute his world of palpable, human engagement. **T**his gratuitous spectacle of the marching *bandwallah*, which is greeted with participatory pleasure or indifference, is also the location of cultural practice disowned by the existing hierarchies of folk art, or high art. In other words, the *bandwallah*s occupy a grey zone – they represent cultural practice but not cultural property, they demonstrate performative spectacle, but are not claimed by a body of accepted performative coda. As figures on the margins, they are defined by a double isolation – first through the act of mimicry that their performance represents, and then by being outside the jollification that they help induce. With their simulated heroism, caught in a time warp of the past and the present, the *bandwallah*s mediate the shadows of the structures of the city. By occupying the intermediate space between the public and the private, the popular and the 'low', they become people with an indeterminate part and an unmapped future. **K**rishen's paintings of unknown and unnamed men have for almost three decades now documented these rites of passage. Most frequently, the *bandwallah*s are painted singly or in groups, playing on their trombones and trumpets. In their performative aspect, the *bandwallah*s embody multiple histories.

Through the combination of the vestige of empire and its visual pomp, folkloric and popular music, they represent a kind of reverse Orientalism. Arguably, the *bandwallah*s stand at the intersection of numerous strains of Indian public spectacle. Their performance, such as it is, exists in the ephemera of immediate gratification and a claim of public space, if only in passing. At the same time, they are released from the bondage of memory and tradition, to become emblematic of a new popular culture, one that draws from the past as it looks into the future. Equally, it is one that compels a transition from the grand historical objective of triumph embodied in the band, to the petty personalized pleasures of the street. Their abbreviated careers then represent the spurious state of hired pleasure. As is characteristic with many of Krishen Khanna's genre paintings, the *bandwallah*s who vigorously serenade Lajwanti represent perennially the *act of doing*. It is the tireless march, the constancy of the gesture – no matter how misplaced the tune – that lends his figures an unmistakable heroism. Seen incrementally as a body of work they may represent crisis, a state of anomie powerful because they always stand for the induced spectacle, a spurious jollification. But in every individual frame, they also appear in



their excruciating commitment to the gesture. **W**orking serially with the same idea over an extended period, Khanna manifests his relationship with these figures as an observer-interlocutor – one who maintains an objective engagement. The nature of this conversation is determined by his chosen language. Over a period of three decades, the *bandwallah*s have been painted in heavy impasto, weaving their away through the dense colours, as well as drawings in *conté* and crayon. The *bandwallah* serenading an indifferent beloved, the *bandwallah* being chased by an irate dog, or the exhausted *bandwallah*, sleeping beside his abandoned instrument, are some of his chosen subjects. In this painting he employs a broadly post-cubist structure in representing the forms in well-defined colour masses. The figures are foreshortened to represent a compression of bodies and instruments, emphasized by the curves and arcs achieved by each form. In the play of flat colours, a geometric rhythm emerges that mimics the syncopated sounds of the band. The single figure in the foreground appears to balance the compressed activity in the rest of the frame. **A**s a body of paintings, these musicians of the street represent a bluff optimism often missing from Khanna's larger body of

work. Their unmistakable energy and sanguine cast, lends them a vigorous propulsion across his canvas. What Krishen Khanna seems to indicate here is the status of recognition afforded by casual encounters. In the dialogic space that he creates between the sweeper, the rootless *bandwallah* and the spectator, he confers recognition to the forgotten fragments of India's social fabric. In breaking with the conventional tropes of representing people of the street, he makes possible a different level of engagement, one that is sustained by a continuous arc of sympathy.



1 Quoted from Partha Chatterjee, *A Possible India: The Partha Chatterjee Omnibus* (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1999), p 281.
2 Gayatri Sinha, *Krishen Khanna: A Critical Biography* (New Delhi: Vadehra Art Gallery) pp 112 and 113.
3 Chanda Singh, *Krishen Khanna in Looking Beyond His Canvas*, India Magazine, September 1984.

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Study for *Bandwallahs*, oil on canvas, 14x18", 2005



The Secular Miracle: On Krishen Khanna's The Raising of Lazarus

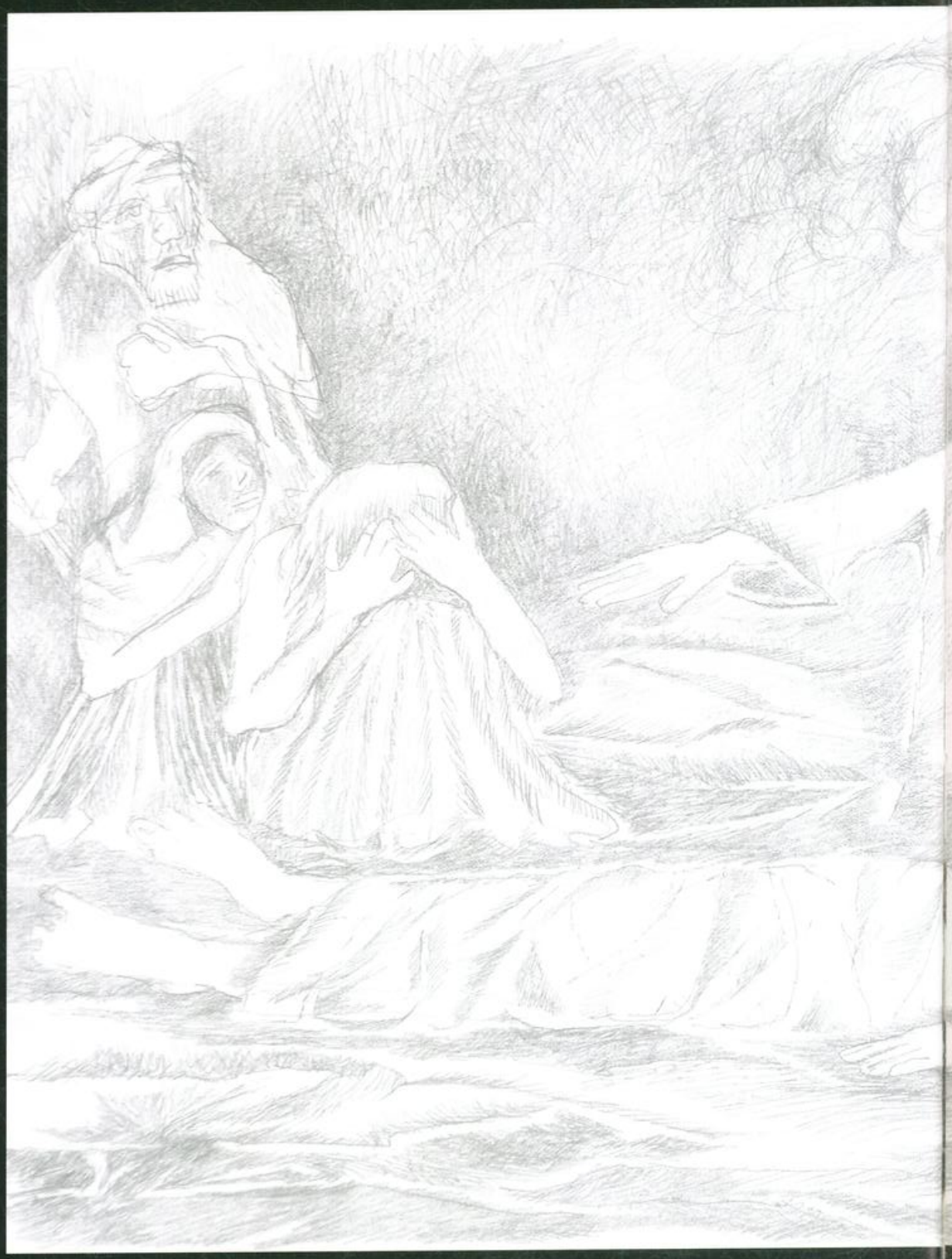
• Ranjit Hoskote •



The Raising of Lazarus, oil on canvas, 48x72", 2005

Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come forth!'
And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Loose him, and let him go.'
— John 11: 43, 44

Krishen Khanna has returned repeatedly, over the last several decades, to the man of flesh and blood that Jesus was before the hierarchs and liturgists transfigured him into the magnificent icon of the Christ. Khanna evokes this human-scale Jesus as a man who acted in society and engaged with its crises, speaking and working with other men and women, with artisans, peasants, lepers, soldiers and merchants. He has portrayed Jesus and the apostles at the Last Supper or at Gethsemane; this preoccupation has extended to saints like Francis of Assisi, memorializing episodes from his life in delicate yet austere drawings and robustly executed paintings. In these pictorial meditations on the mystic and the prophet, Khanna articulates a fascination with the interplay between labour and grace, between the political exigencies of being-in-the-world and



The Raising of Lazarus, pencil on paper, 16x11", 2005



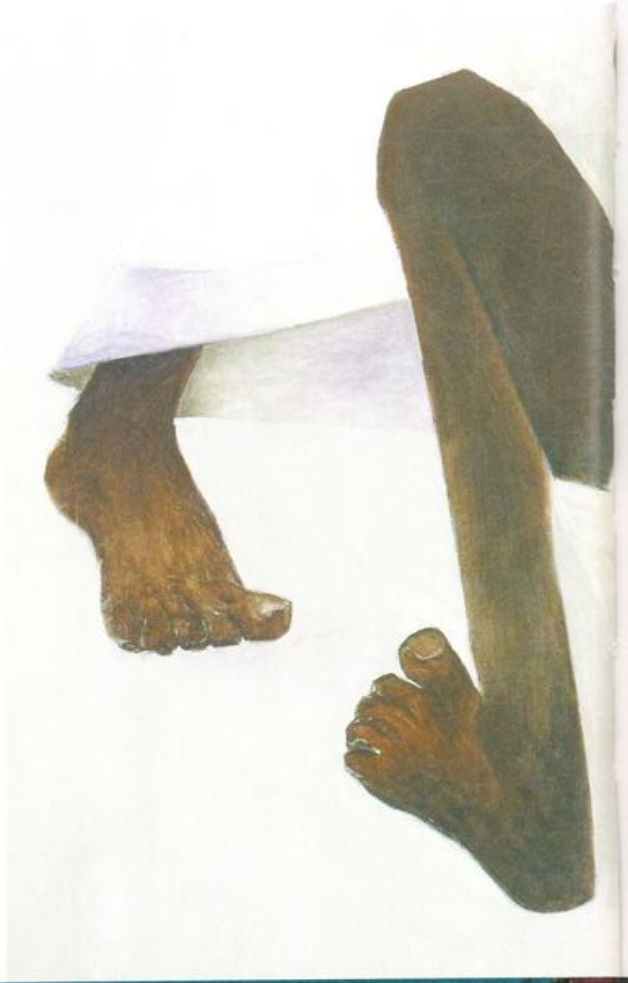


the radiant otherness and 'elsewhereness' of sacred vision. **K**hanna's periodic re-visiting of the episode in which Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, in particular, invites us into a space of enigma. Although familiarity with the scripture gives us an exact knowledge of the identity of the figures and the specificity of the occasion, Khanna enacts key gestural changes, rendering the event less of a miracle but re-investing it with mystery. In the New Testament passage on which this painting is based (John 11: 43, 44, cited at the head of this essay), Jesus arrives at the tomb of Lazarus, who has been dead for some days, accompanied by the dead man's sisters and by a group of townspeople who are

sceptical of Jesus' powers, yet eager to witness whatever might happen. **B**efore their eyes, an uncanny prefiguring of Jesus' own Resurrection – the central mystery of the Christian faith – now unfolds. Jesus commands that the stone closing the mouth of the tomb be rolled aside, communes with the Divine, and summons the dead man in the simplest of words: 'Lazarus, come forth!' In a vision that may seem macabre to those not conditioned by religious tradition to view it as miraculous, Lazarus duly emerges from the tomb, swaddled in sere clothes. As the townspeople, no doubt overcoming their terror and the taboo surrounding the dead, pick up the courage to unwrap him, Lazarus steps from darkness into light, from extinction into the quicksilver stream of life. **K**hanna keys up the drama of the situation by paring away the peripheral details, dispensing with the props and the supporting



cast: there are no onlookers in his version, neither tomb nor stone, and no landscape of any description. The painter focuses the fierce emotional energy of the encounter in the expressiveness of the two principal actors. One man towers over the other, who is on the ground, sitting up as though after having been knocked out, or as though recovering from a long daze. The standing man points firmly forward; the sitting figure, still constrained by his funerary bindings, is trying to rise on the strength of one hand and reach out to his interlocutor with the other. The painting is built around the strong diagonal axis that joins the gazes of the two men, while separating their hands with the gap where their hand-grasp has been aborted. As in the allegories of the Old Masters, gesture accounts for a considerable measure of significance in Khanna's paintings: it conveys the nuances that animate the occasion portrayed. The delicate and shifting balance of power in the relationship between Jesus and Lazarus is coded into the play of hands: the seeping away of tolerant empathy and the onset of exasperated rage



are expressed in a tersely admonitory finger; the appeal for understanding and the willingness to surrender to a stronger will are conveyed by an outstretched palm. **W**e are drawn into a series of questions as we decode these gestures. Are Jesus and Lazarus playing to the script laid down by the Gospels; or are they somewhat at cross-purposes? Is Christ raising Lazarus from the dead; or is he about to expel him from a condition of belonging? Is he about to cast him out from repose into uncertainty? Is his gesture a brisk order for the straggler to march? This daunting figure has more in common with the Jesus who cast the money-changers out of the temple than with the compassionate healer. And what of Lazarus: can we regard him as an embodiment of the grateful dead, mouthing thanks to his redeemer? Or is he pleading, remonstrating, lamenting the misfortune of having to come back to an earthly life that had been providentially sloughed off? Khanna's account takes an apparently precise, executive gesture and clothes it in shadow, clouds it subtly with the penumbras of doubt, ambiguity, and multiplicity of reading. **K**hanna's painterly process reflects this occlusion of clarity by indeterminacy. This painting began life as a



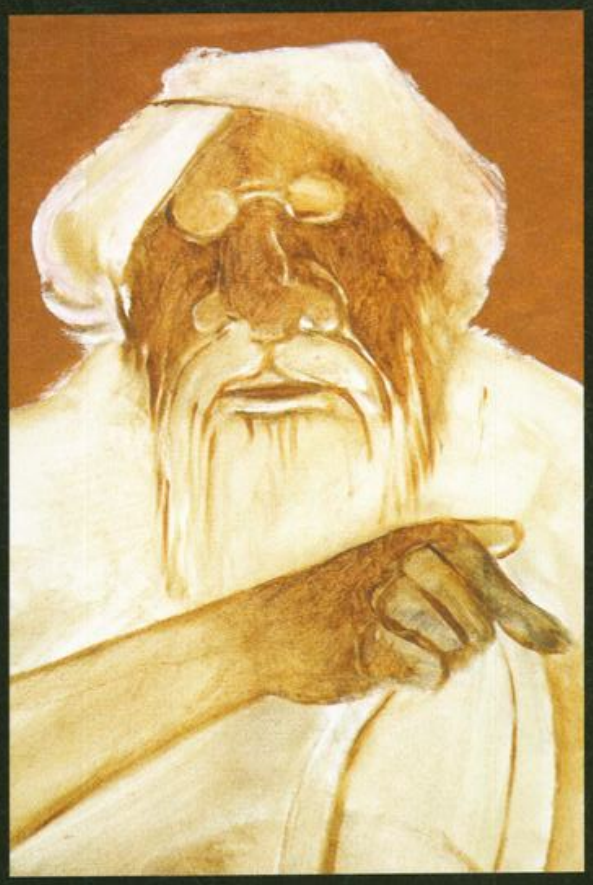
large drawing, imbued with graphic immediacy and presence by the artist, who enjoys a versatile command over line. The figures were then painted in the colours of the desert and rocky wasteland that the artist chose to edit away from the scene: umber and fawn, white and burnt sienna. In translating drawing into painting, Khanna has tuned up the push-pull of the linear forces that shape the composition, accentuating the drama of encounter between two human beings, one more powerful than the other. Indeed, one of the deep underlying themes of Khanna's art is the *asymmetry of power*: in its positive aspect, this manifests itself as the relationship between a guide and his perplexed followers; in its negative aspect, it appears as the relationship yoking an oppressor together with those he oppresses. The tenor of this particular painting is profoundly redemptive. As a parable, it rejects the moral of

dependency on the miracle-worker. Khanna's Saviour may terrify us as he rejects our reliance on him and directs us towards independence, but the rejection is a blessing rather than a curse. Such an attitude may not assort well with a religious tradition that has constructed an elaborate edifice of grace, intervention and soteriological redemption, but it is consistent with J Krishnamurti's insistence that the teacher must liberate the disciple from fossil values, ideals and rites, and not enslave him or her with dogma and doctrine. And therefore, we find ourselves asking: What is the nature of miracle? To transmute the adverse into benign by outside intervention; or to call forth a potential that is latent within the individual self? The miracle, in this painting, is the secular miracle of emancipation. **T**his, in turn, leads us to reflect on the nature of the miracle-maker in wisdom stories: the visionary, the charismatic healer, the guide. Such a reflection touches upon the crucial questions around which Khanna's *oeuvre* has pivoted: What does it mean to be a master? What does power mean? Is it gained by seizing control over others, or by renouncing such control in favour of freedom from the bondage of acting within a power structure? Two

orders of power appear in Khanna's world view, each incarnated by a particular kind of figure. On the one hand, there are those who wield material power. Under this rubric, Khanna has turned his critical pencil and brush to the portraiture of depraved tyrants and rapacious generals, rendering them as monsters bursting from the costume of human impersonation, discussing strategy or dividing the spoils of conflict while their emaciated victims lie dead at their jackbooted feet. Khanna's earliest treatments of these subjects date back to the early 1970s, arguably the grim Golden Age of military dictatorship, when rule by a junta or a strongman seemed to have become the norm in many countries across the planet, including various Latin American, African, South Asian and Mediterranean states. **O**n the other hand, there are those whose kingdom, in Jesus' phrase, is not of this earth. Under this rubric, the artist addresses himself to individuals whose power resides in the enjoyment of a world of their own conception: musicians, scribes and mystics. Through his tableaux of entranced apostles and dancing Sufis, Khanna explores states of absorption, rapture and ecstasy that lie beyond the horizons of ordinary

experience. The present painting may be viewed as an expression of this ongoing meditation on power and freedom; on the intimate relationship between marginality and the truly magisterial. Jesus adopts a marginal position away from courts and temples: paradoxically, he derives his authority by renouncing political power, which is based on constant insecurity and can offer no redemption, and embracing the freedom and serenity of an inner-directed life. This is the promise of freedom towards which Khanna's Jesus directs his baffled Lazarus, a promise implicit in the apparently mystifying and unrealistic prognostication of Mathew 5: 5: 'Blessed are the meek, / For they shall inherit the earth.'





A Stranger at Gyaniji's Dhaba

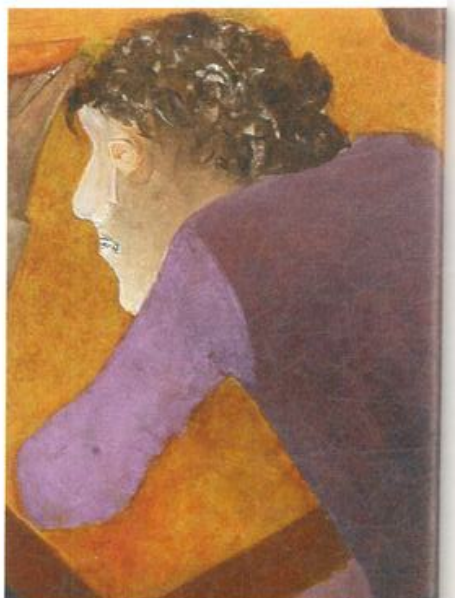
• Norbert Lynton •

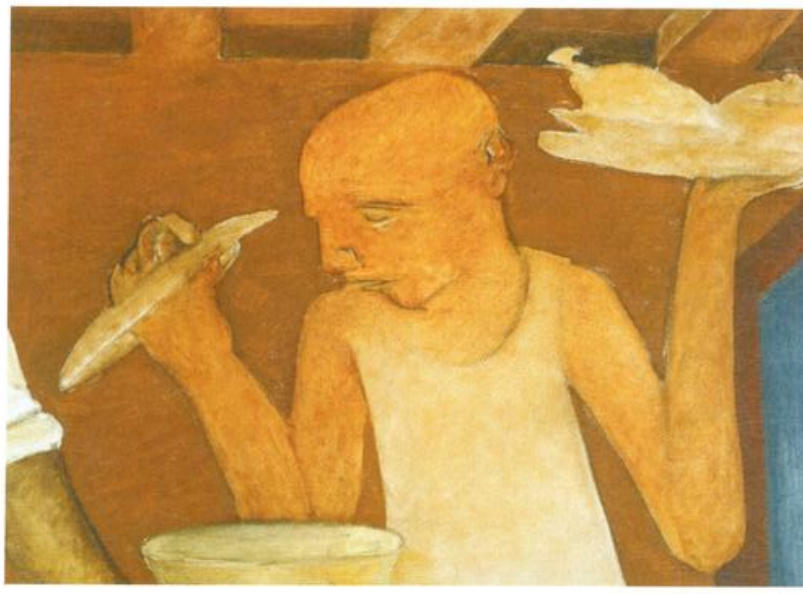


A Stranger at Gyaniji's Dhaba, oil on canvas, 48x72", 2006

The director Anthony Minghella was quoted recently, in the March 25, 2006 edition of the *Guardian*, on his enthusiasm for Samuel Beckett. 'I love Beckett,' he was reported as saying, 'and the enormous resistance to emotion that is in Beckett, the downright hostility to emotion which I think is informed by great emotion.' Such words – 'hostility to emotion' – are too extreme to fit Khanna's art, which is rarely without an emotional charge of some power. They fit the art, say, of Mondrian, where the emotion is channelled into the pictorial construction and into the long process by which each finished work is achieved through endless experiment and adjustment, followed by meticulous execution. Yet it is rare for Khanna's paintings to offer emotional display, and that is as true of paintings he did with a loaded brush and an impression of brusqueness as of those where finely worked areas of more or less flat, smooth colour are set against each other, as we have seen. Minghella's insight, that great emotion may be conveyed by refusing to display it, illuminates whole areas of art. In *A Stranger at Gyaniji's Dhaba*, three men sit around a prominent table, two of them drinking their tea, one apparently waiting to be served. I emphasize the presence of the table because it is the most

insistent element in the composition. One of its corners comes towards us, seeming almost to advance beyond the picture surface. The corner which should be to the left of the prominent one is obscured by a large object, a pot or an urn. The rest of the table's rectangular top is painted in perspective and recedes quite rapidly to the right and into the picture. Its far corner is hidden too, and so is most of its far end though we know it ends there because of the third figure seated by it. All three lean on the table, using it to support their spirits, one feels, as well as their limbs. A fourth man, a waiter, is bringing food with one hand and checking the contents of a saucepan with the other, so that his face is turned to the right and looks down. Indeed, all the four men mentioned so far are shown more or less in profile, with their torsos seen in three-quarters profile. They are neither associating with us nor confronting us; we are observing them from outside the group. But confronting us, in the left part of the background which he shares with the waiter, behind a counter close to the far side of the table, is the turbaned owner of the *dhaba* (teashop) the Sikh, Gyaniji. He is seen frontally, an almost symmetrical figure as he presides over his little establishment and makes more



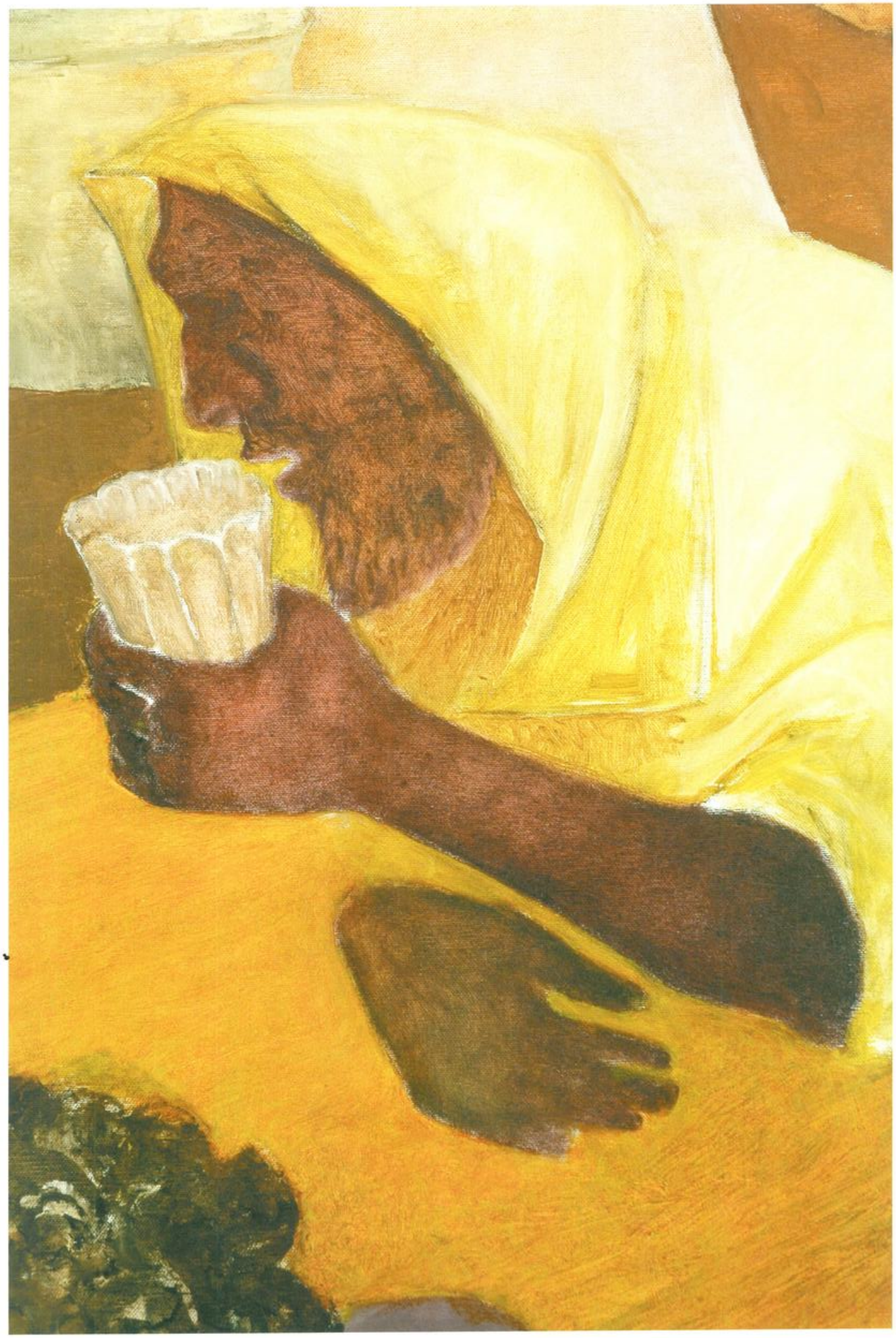


tea. Behind him is a plain wall, and at the top of that we see the beginnings of ceiling beams, also shown in perspective. So at the top and in the lower part of the picture controlled by the table top, pictorial space is demonstrated by means of receding geometrical forms. The figures themselves are relatively without mass and do not occupy much of this space, except for the teashop's imposing host who, with a minimum of outlining and shading (compare him with the almost transparent forms of the waiter), becomes weighty and dominant even though he is not doing anything dramatic. **G**yaniji, the waiter and the man seated at the far end of the table are clad in white and white tinted with yellow. Gyaniji's face is sufficiently spelled out to give him life and character, but otherwise these three figures belong to what seems to be a relatively visionary sphere of the painting, glowing with mysterious light. The two men closest to us, seated to the right and the left of that emphatic corner and facing each other, belong more to our world – we could enter the picture and join them – even though they are treated in Khanna's flat style, their

forms silhouetted against the table top by colour contrast, and also against their seats and the rest of the lower area of the canvas. **A** scene which is part of Khanna's *The Great Procession* mural in the Maurya Sheraton Hotel presents three visitors, a waiter and a Sikh host in a similar *dhaba*. It is instructive to compare the two stagings



of what is, all in all, the same basic plot. The table, again placed diagonally, is less emphatic though it is a clear geometrical form in spite of the painter's way of not showing us much of it, only two of its corners and almost nothing of two of its sides. Having established the table in our minds, Khanna can sharply reduce its description and thus also some of its space-conveying effect. But there are other space-making factors, not least the blue floor which we can see receding to the far corner where it meets two white walls, just to the right of the vertical beam which is part of the physical structure of the large room's vault. Khanna's scene continues behind this beam and seems to take no account of it, until we notice that the space of the *dhaba* is all to its right and that what we are shown to its left is almost spaceless and seems to press forward towards us, though the perspective elements just to its right are so clear. The





Tea Drinker at Nizamuddin, oil on canvas, 30x40", 2006

waiter and the two seated men are in the section on the right, but one of them looks across to the third seated man, to the left of the beam: 'picking a bone' with him, Sinha explains, and indeed he is holding a chicken bone that points at the other man. All the visitors are gently caricatured, and that applies equally to the one who sits with his back to others, and looks gloomily out of the picture as he leans on the back of his chair. He is a self-portrait, Krishen Khanna at odds with the world and perhaps, at that moment, with himself. The bars of his chair hint at a prison. Their host is the strongest and most fully described figure in the composition, standing behind his counter and making tea, an earthly presence – as against Gyaniji's figure in the upper part of Khanna's canvas – that seems to grow in character and size as we look at him. The cardinal difference between the two versions is the hushed, meditative quality of the recent canvas as against the livelier, more narrative and more amusing character of Khanna's brilliant mural. 'Here is God's plenty,' Dryden said of Chaucer. That is what Khanna gives us in that generous compilation, and the scene in the *dhaba* is part of the entertainment. *A Stranger at Gyaniji's Dhaba* is a more solemn event and thus sooner or later reminds us of Khanna's inheritance of the Last

Supper theme. Here no one speaks. The two men in the foreground, their backs draped in maroon, pink and purple, face each other but do not connect; one profile dark but silhouetted against the lighter orange of the table top, the other profile lit but still. This is not likely to be anyone's portrait, and though he visually partners the figure to his left, he seems to be the visitor least at home in the scene and perhaps the one who has arrived last. His diagonally directed form points up the canvas and across the table at Gyaniji whose is the only firmly vertical, as well as frontal, element in the picture. He is iconic; the others corroborate his dominance, like marginal scenes surrounding a saint's image in an Orthodox icon.



My referring, again, to religious imagery is supported by the colours Khanna used in this painting. We noted the brown/white chord struck by *The Betrayal* and by *Flagellation*. The *dhaba* canvas does not share their dominant pallor. In spite of contributions from blue and yellow, that chord remains a very austere one. The painting *Gyaniji's Dhaba* has a warmer colour-key, with hints of red sensed among the pictured persons and objects

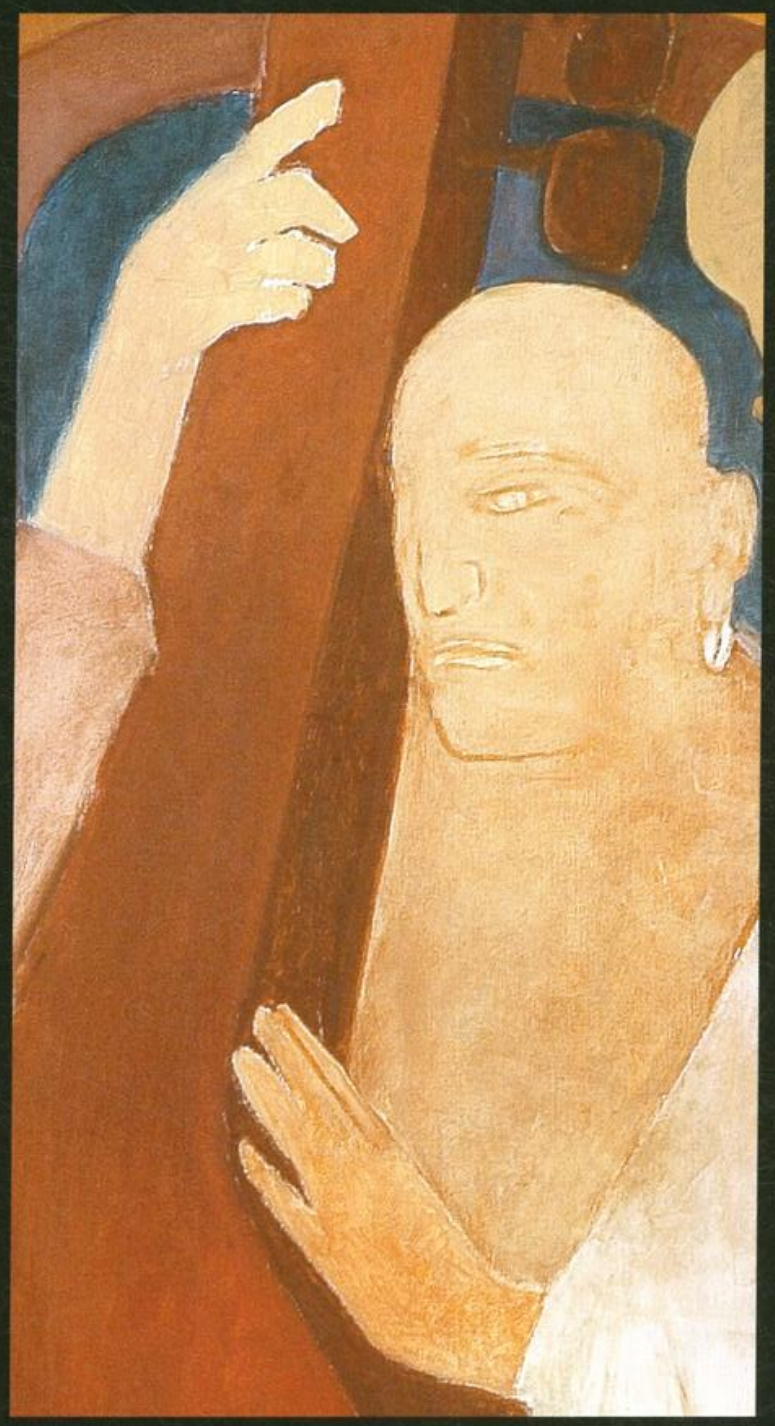
and the orange-brown setting. But we are given, here too, a two-note chord: the reds or browns tinted with the blue of the two foreground figures and the orange-brown that dominates rest. Even the nearly white robes of the background figures partake of that warmth, but they are luminous while the foreground colours are relatively mute. We do not find here any of the vigorous brushwork that dramatizes *Evening News*. Instead, Khanna's care has gone into building and peopling his stage. The drama here is generated by the entire composition, and derives from that its remarkable dignity.

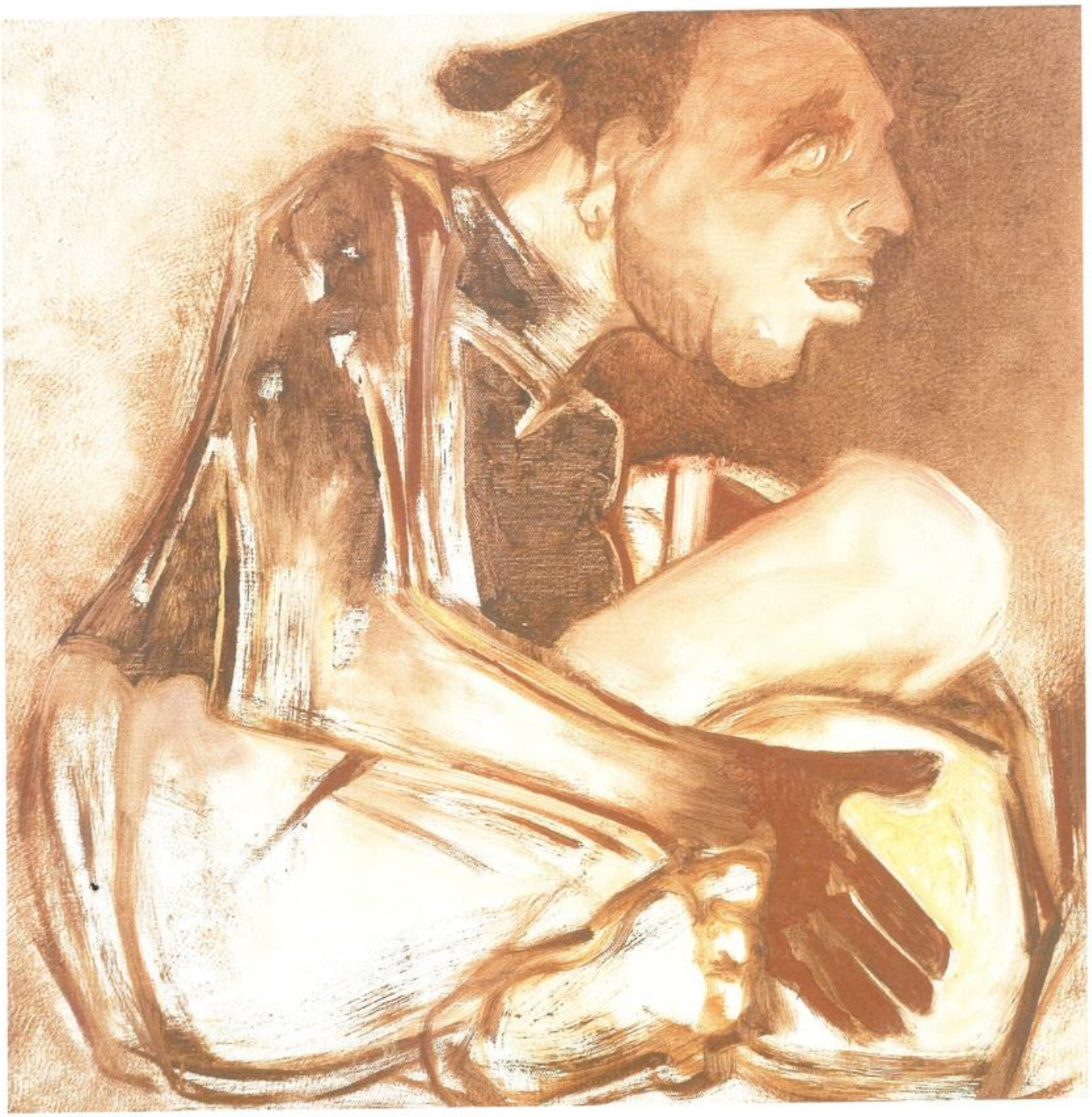


The painting we saw recently in London, at the Berkeley Square Gallery, entitled *An Incident at a Dhaba*, effectively fuses elements of the Emmaus theme and of the Last Supper with an Indian setting. As the catalogue states, 'By stripping his images of specific location, Krishen in fact problematizes the idea of cultural identity and resistance, the great epic.' It is striking that here Khanna employs some of his 'expressionist' brushwork together with areas of flat painting. The mottled table top stretches across the canvas and is quite clearly described, but makes no spatial demands.

MUSICIANS

• Marilyn Rushton •

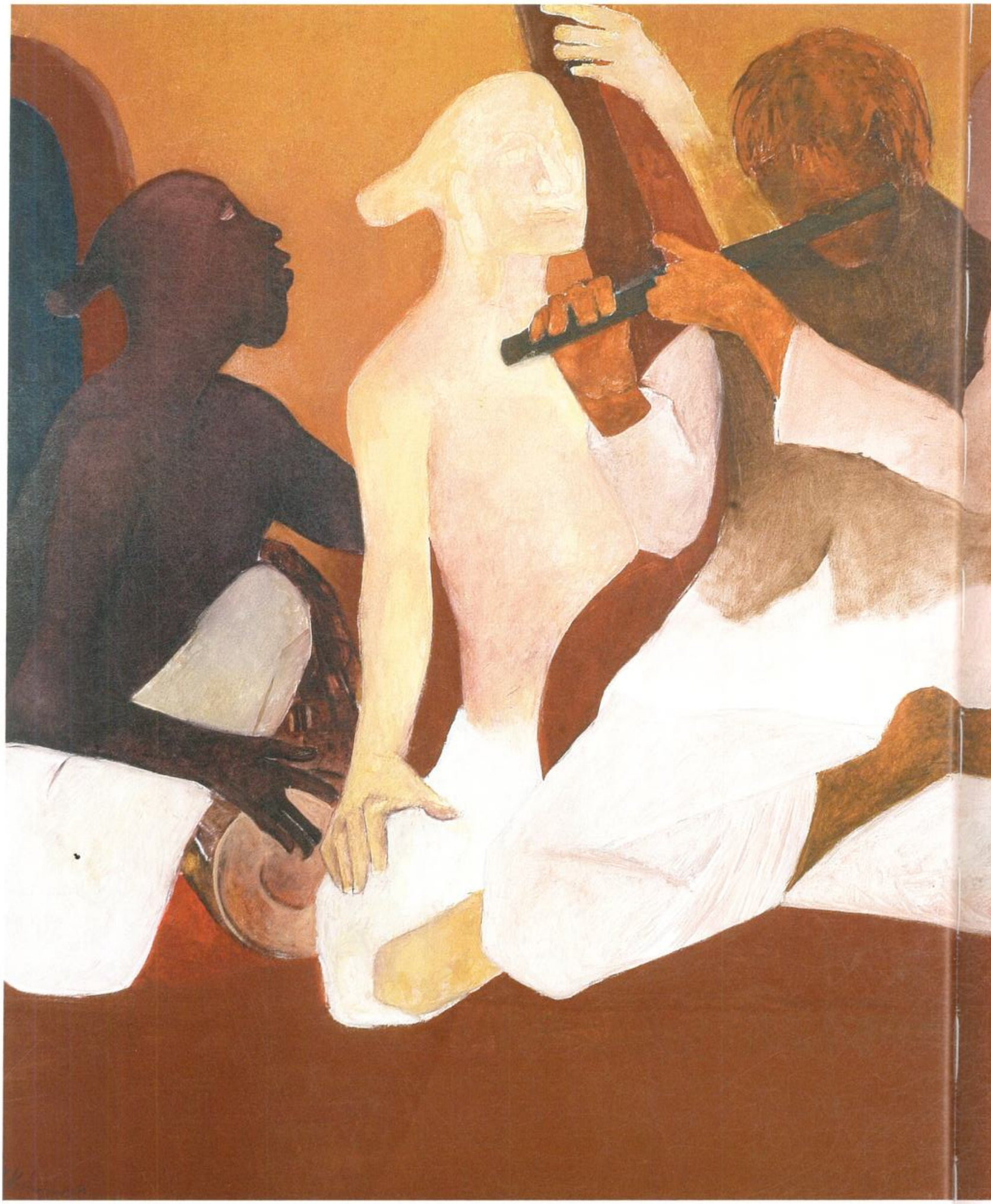




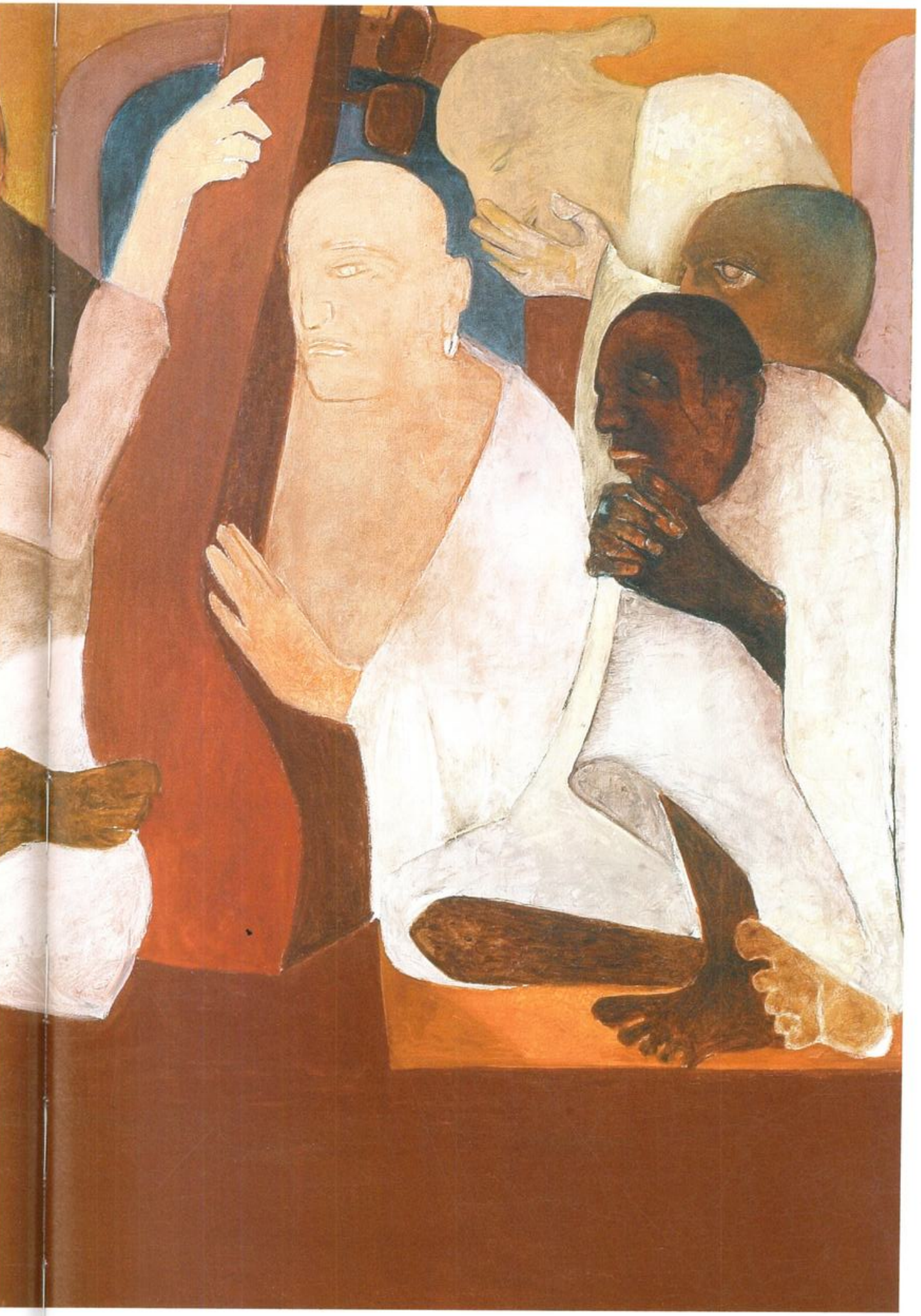
Mridangam Player, oil on canvas, 20x20", 2005

'Painting and music have during many periods of human history played duets happily and harmoniously together.'[1]

In the history of art, we can find many pictorial records of '... the moment we see the musician caught, as it were, in the course of making music.'[2] There have been paintings of distinguished musicians, groups, musical parties, orchestras, musical representations, in addition to numerous sketches and caricatures of music and musicians. **C**an both painting and music be referred to in terms of composition, tones and harmonies? Did Krishen Khanna ponder these parallels? As composer of the piece, the painter himself conducts, producing the structural elements of the composition. The rhythms of colour, the tones of light and shading,



Remembering Mali, oil on canvas, 72x48", 2005

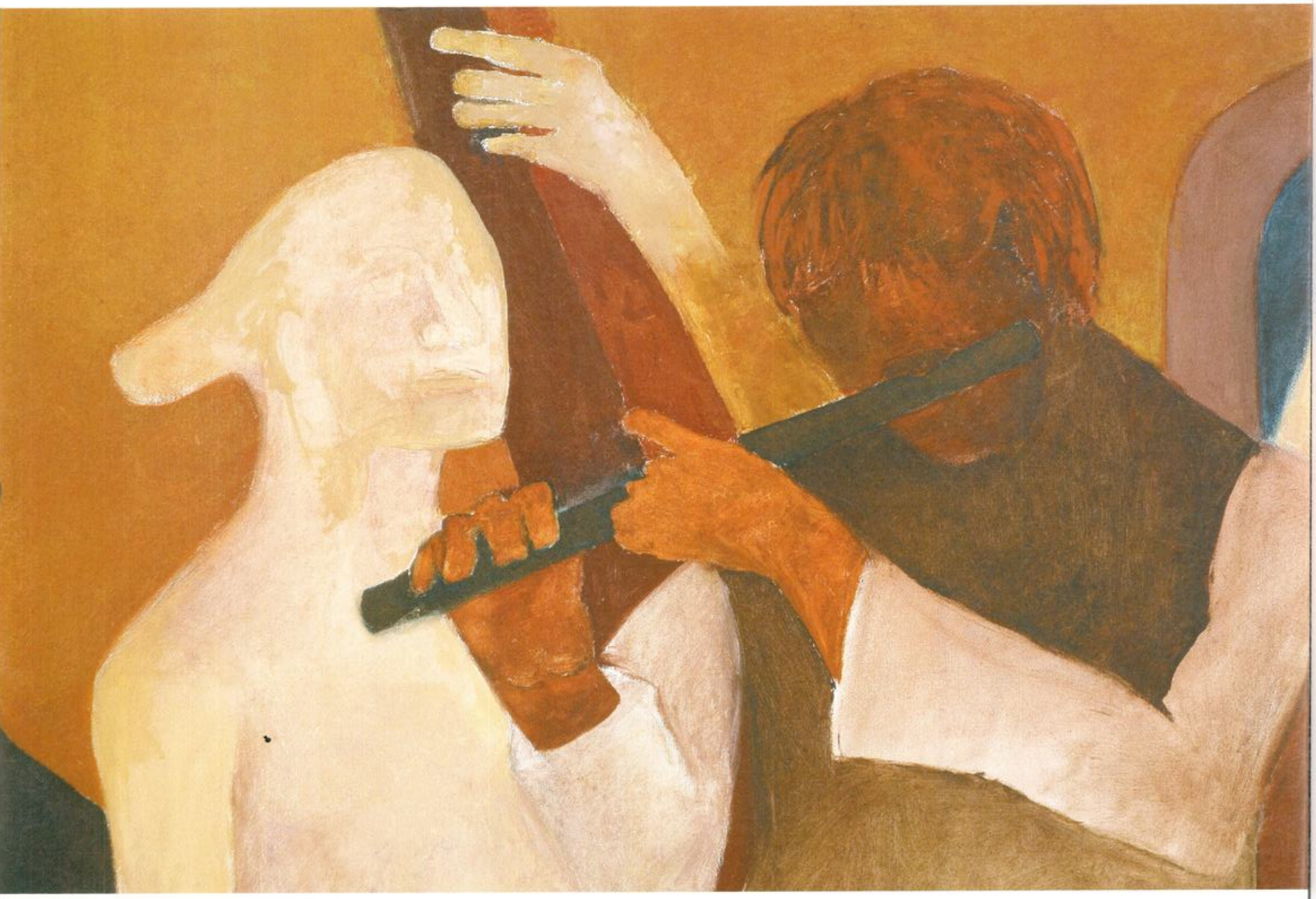




the colour arrangements, the sequences, all produce a harmonious combination in the compositional elements. We see, initially, both art and music harmoniously performing together. But do we? Although not a self-portrait, Krishen is there in spirit, chuckling and sharing his little wry joke with us as only he can. We see harmony in his painting of the musicians, but might the musicians be playing cacophonously? Is this his little joke? Harmony and disharmony at the same time! **T**oday, Krishen fondly remembers his time as an Imperial Service College scholar in Windsor, just prior to and during the initial years of the Second World War. Being a Hindu, he was exempt from early morning chapel and hymn singing. Krishen's school friends would physically drag him to the end-of-term concert,

to assist in singing the school song. The aim of each schoolboy in a particular house was to drown out the opposing houses in singing the school song. Krishen, by his own admission, says that he had no tonal control but considerable volume when singing. **O**ver 70 years later, and still as sharp as ever, Krishen Khanna still remembers the words of his old school song. Not just the 'official version', but most of the 'unofficial version' that every mischievous public school boy knows as well. He looks back very fondly, on his time in the Imperial Service College pipe and drum band, where he played the flute and perhaps this is why Krishen, as in this picture, often returns to the subject of flute players. **T**here has, throughout Krishen's life, always been a close association with music. As with



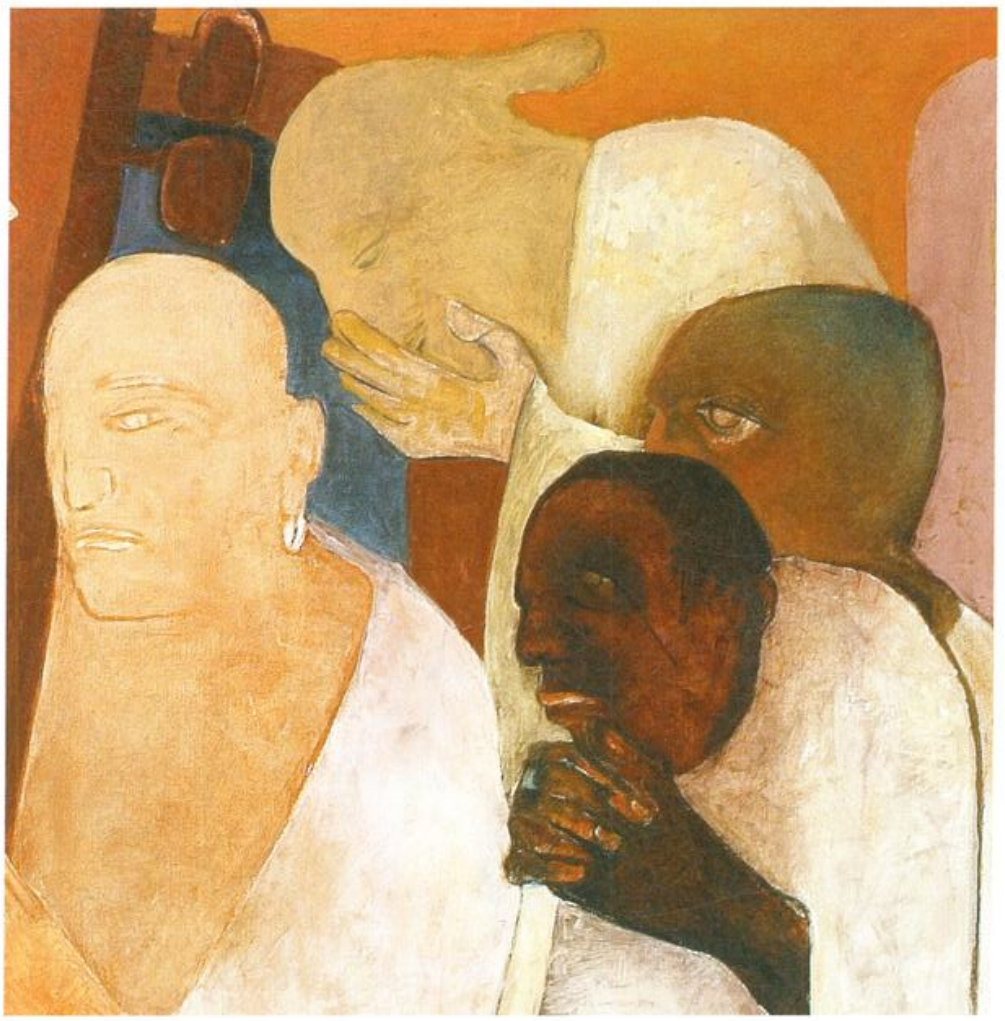




many painters: 'Pictures, in so far as their subject-matter represent what painters have seen, or imagined, might be expected to reflect this close association of the music with daily life ...'[3] Some artists deal with musical subjects only once or twice in the course of their careers but Krishen has returned to this subject matter many times in the course of his. He shows us that 'music offers a story line to link all kinds of groupings, bonding individuals by shared activity.'[4] In Madras in the 1950s, while he was a bank manager at Grindlays, Krishen held many musical soirées at his home, and a frequent guest was the legendary flautist Mahalingam, represented in this painting. Also represented is the *mridangam* (a percussion instrument) player Palghat Raghu, another frequent guest at the

soirées. In this painting Krishen Khanna represents the major instruments in the Carnatic tradition – the *mridangam* and the flute. The other players provide the rhythm or drone accompaniment to the two legendary artists. **K**rishen uses the medium of art to look back at what was for him a very happy period of time in his life, in partial confirmation of '... all the arts with which man is bought into habitual contact, none so persistently accompanies him through his daily life as the art of music.'[5] For Krishen, both the arts of painting and music have played an important role. In this painting, we see Krishen tackle both the muses of music and painting, giving as ever, a virtuoso performance.

1 Lawrence Haward, *Music in Painting* (London: The Faber Gallery, 1945), p 24.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., p 2.
4 Tom Phillips, *Music in Art: Through the Ages* (Munich and New York: Prestel, 1997), p 11.
5 Lawrence Haward, *Music in Painting* (London: The Faber Gallery, 1945), p 2.





O.K. TATA

• Gayatri Sinha •

'Part of the purpose of the state must be to protect not merely the physical and material security of its members, but also their identities.'[1]

The visible image is one of urgent instability. A truck hurtles across the frame, its heavy form careening off the road in vertiginous imbalance. Almost audibly, its heavy load of logs seems to wobble and veer to the left, entrapping the single labouring figure within its heavy grip. **O**.K. Tata – the nonchalant signage that marks most Indian trucks is barely visible through the layers of incremental dust. In this combination of essential elements, of man, machine and materials, the artist communicates a palpable vision, in which the banal everyday image appears poised at the edge of imminent chaos. The figure trapped between the logs herein becomes emblematic of a series of life-long concerns on migration and India's conflicted engagement with urbanism.

A brief background

Krishen Khanna's paintings reveal a persistence of vision. Despite a certain levity, they persist with a reading of the dispossessed who do not share in the country's – and specifically in the city of Delhi's – new buoyant self image. For over five decades, Krishen's subject has been the marginal figure, one who is isolated from the benefits of the modernizing state. One may expand the argument

to his own location as a modernist painter, interrogating the effects of modernity among people who flee village societies under the duress of lack and natural calamity. But even more than an incident, a fragment of narrative or a subject, Krishen Khanna is a painter of the human *condition*. Khanna began painting the truck in the mid-1970s. Three decades later, this heavy subcontinental mode of transport is something of an anachronism, a reminder of the lumbering Socialist era in the age of nanotechnology communications. As a genre painting, the truck came very close in time to other series of works that collectively frame Khanna's response to states of dispossession. A refugee with his family from Pakistan in 1947, Khanna is in close empathy with the migrant homeless, who are driven into the cold embrace of the city in search of work. In a sense, the paintings of this period are decisively shaped by the character of the city, and Khanna's own location within it. In 1961 Krishen Khanna made a critical shift in his decision to quit his job as a banker and become a full time painter. Nearly 15 years earlier, during his first posting at Mumbai, he had become an associate of the latterly celebrated Progressive Artists Group, his own particular concern being with 'significant form' as a sine qua non of modernity in painting. Since the late 1940s the Progressives, their associates, and the broad penumbra of Indian modernists had started to negotiate the vexed



O.K. Tata, oil on canvas, 72x50", 2005

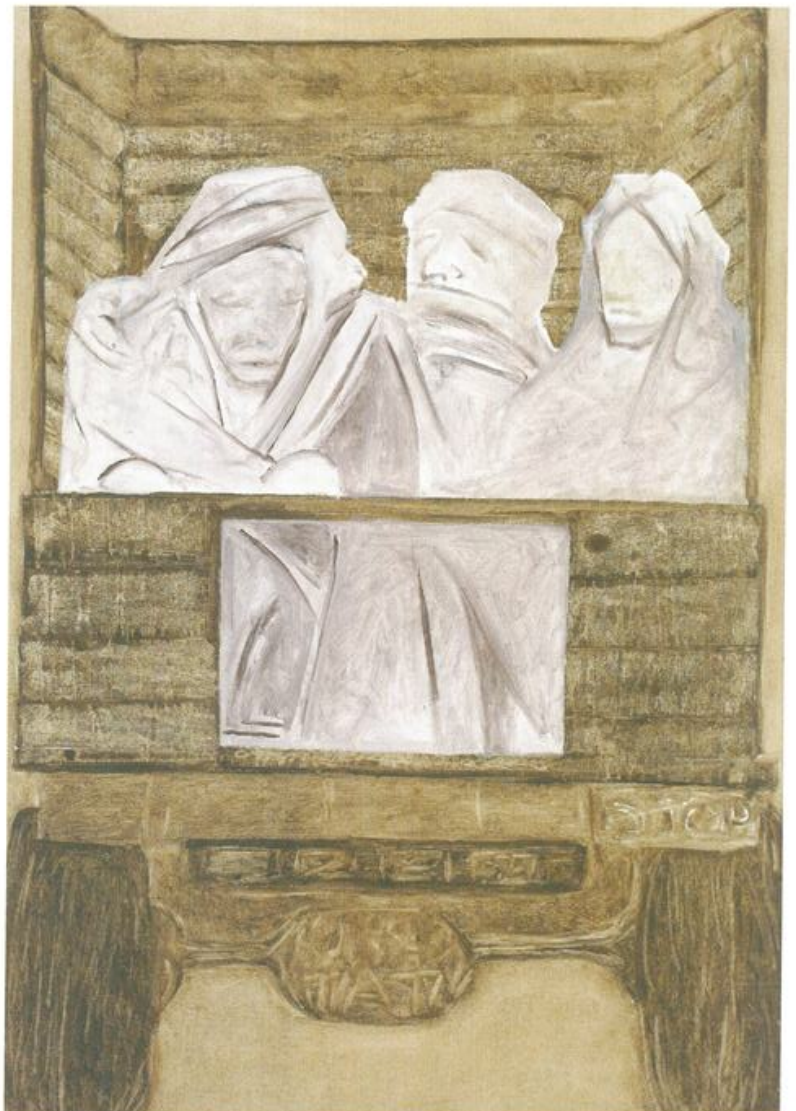


categories of indigenism – then a valued legacy of the nationalist struggle – and western modernism. Khanna's closest associates in Mumbai were the Progressive Artists, a group that came together for a brief and sporadic journey in their quest for a modern art practice. In its composition of two Muslims (Raza and Husain), a Dalit (Ara), and a Christian (Souza) the group reflected the artists' will towards a pluralistic modernity, one that directly challenged India's caste-driven structure and instead foregrounded the primacy of the creative process. At the time of Khanna's introduction to Husain, and later to Souza and Raza in Bombay, in early 1948, his interest appears to have been driven by the assertion that purely formal qualities as the most important elements in a work of art as articulated in Clive Bell's *Art* (1914). His abstract works of Mumbai, or the more lyrical paintings of Madras (1953–58), of musicians or women at their toilet, respond to the sharp southern light in strongly articulated forms. **B**ut from the period of the late 1960s, Khanna's paintings veer in the dimension of social narrative. The reasons for this lie as much in the artist's own circumstances as in India's changing social polity. The optimism of the paintings of Husain or Ara notwithstanding, popular cinema of the mid-1950s had begun to reflect a deep discontent with the decade-long Indian state. Filmmakers Raj Kapoor, Guru Dutt, Satyajit Ray and Bimal Roy,

Oil on canvas, 20x30", 2005

between 1954 and 1957, dealt with many of the challenges to the nation state – of rural poverty and urban migration, of joblessness and the despair of urban existence. Popular cinema was effectively withdrawing from the romantic idealization of India, to a critique of Nehru's problematic model of socialism. Sarvepalli Gopal records Nehru's own disconnection with the running of the state when he quotes the prime minister: '...I work more as an automaton in a routine way, rather than as an active and living person ... Functioning in such a way ceases to have much meaning. Many of our policies, economic and other, leave a sense of grave uneasiness in me.'[2]

In the vanguard of the artist's concern with a failing state are Khanna's narrative works of the 1960s and 70s. His intervention



that intersects political and personal concerns is remarkable for its unique responsiveness to India. By 1961, Khanna had left his job to assume the life of a painter. With his wife and three children, he moved into a small flat on Delhi's Mathura Road, one of the main arterial roads that connected the city with its developing, diffuse suburbs. Mathura Road also contained the cramped colony of Bhogal, which like Karol Bagh and Lajpat Nagar held a large refugee population of Partition migrant Punjabis, who sought to establish themselves in businesses that supported the growing city, such as timber and trucking. It was also the locus for a large population who sought work as casual labour. Here Khanna was among his own – another migrant seeking a life in a large city. His own experience with a shifting, diasporic identity would trace back to his early teens as a student at Imperial College, London, where, as the only Indian



he had to return home during the outbreak of World War II. His refugee status was compounded by the Partition when his family, like thousands of others, fled from the Punjab, in quest of a new livelihood. **T**hough the 1960s and 70s, in the era of Indira Gandhi, India witnessed an increasingly proactive state; the nationalization of private banks, the withdrawal of privy purses to Indian royals ran close in time to India's evident aspirations as a nuclear power. Indian intervention in the liberation of Bangladesh revealed an aggressive state just a few years later that turned upon itself with the imposition of emergency. At the same time, the margins of the homeless and the disfranchised continued to swell. Krishen's observations of Delhi at this time were dictated by his view of the street, as an index of the aspiring city. In the 1970s Delhi augmented its growth through the mapping and building of colonies, ubiquitous government flats and shopping centres, institutions and office blocks. At the lowest end of the scale in this historical transaction were the labourers who loaded and off-loaded materials. They are Krishen's men in trucks, the shifting, dislocated populace obscured by the dust of the vast North Indian plain, their faces covered against the cement haze that rises from aspiring concrete. From his location in the Bhogal teashop, the view was a fragment of historical cleavage, of the act of erasure contained within the act of building. This was

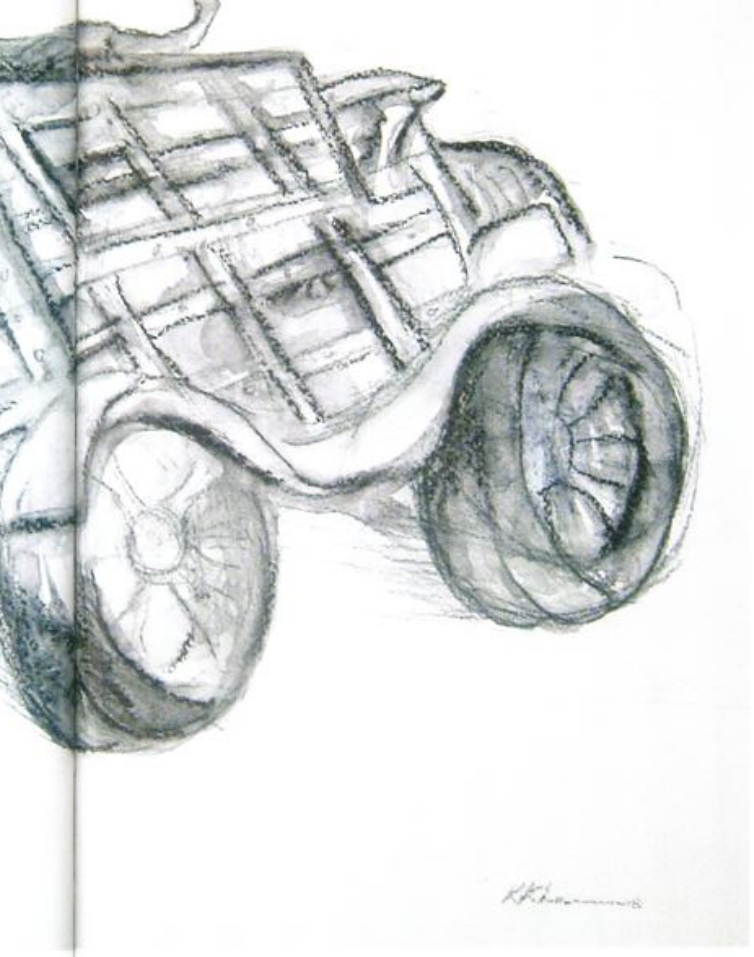


in a sense New Delhi, the city-state that was expanding and erasing the site of the capital of the Empire; a city that over the millennia had declined and been rebuilt. As Benedict Anderson discusses, the new city emerges as the twin of the old (New Delhi/ Old Delhi), mimicking some of its customs and traditions, but also intersecting.[3] It is in this period of the late 1960s that Krishen emerges as a genre painter of the subaltern classes. The view from the teashop is epitomized in the figure of Ramu, the *dhaba* boy, a vision of the street entrepreneur. In 1968, for the Indian triennale, Krishen Khanna was awarded for his work *Rider* (1967, oil on canvas). The turgid movement of the figure of the motorcyclist streaking across the canvas indicates Krishen's engagement with the movement of the street, one that becomes a full-blown preoccupation with the men in trucks.

Rear View

During the 1970s, the expanding capital city attracted the farmer or village artisan who, displaced by a disintegrating village economy, would seek employment as construction labour. Khanna said of these series of paintings: 'I got involved with painting the rear of trucks

Mixed media on paper, 18x12", 2005



with the huddled up and dehumanized cargoes, labourers, a common enough sight in the country. Since the men at the back acquired the character and colour of the cargo they were carrying, it was only appropriate that they and the tortuous machines be painted in monochrome. A series of grey and dusty paintings were painted.'[4] The figures in the trucks appear along side cattle, ropes and implements, packed in like their bovine cargo in an interminable rite of passage. The idea of construction in the city is realized by images of such homeless workers who contribute to the material processes of development but live outside its benefits. In a double edge, the growing prosperity of the city is affirmed in their abject presence. Further, the sense of entrapment is repeatedly suggested by the frame of the truck, a mobile panopticon that makes these men visible to public gaze. Krishen says of this particular work, 'The wheels and tyres of this monster are brushed violently as is the ground on which they rotate creating an uneasy sense of instability or rush. Clearly this is not a happy painting which flatters the viewer's eye. It would have been a travesty to convert a labourer bludgeoned by bouncing logs in a ghoulish machine into

a delicious pattern of coloured harmonies.'[5] It is this aspect of the city, its harsh social conditions that serve as the artist's document of contemporary India. Trapped between the logs of hood, in a hurtling truck, the figure in the painting belongs to the large number of subaltern figures, daily wage earners, street-side characters, street performers and men in loud argument who represent the panoply of displaced figures of the Bhogal–Nizamuddin area. The small teashop where he sketched and worked served him as a laboratory of observation. This image of homeless labouring men was played out in several works, broadly grouped under the title *Rear View* and *Nocturne*. *Rear View* usually captures the image of men in the dense, smoke-filled light of a Delhi evening, as the truck hurtles to its destination. 'Their apparition-like forms are caught presumably in the glare of the headlights of the vehicle following the truck, not unlike animals petrified in a cage. Their state of rootlessness and overcrowding on the rough city streets is emphasized in their animal-like forward backward placement in the truck.'[6] These works of labourers huddled like cargo in trucks, integrate with the narrative and the conceptual frame of the series of genre paintings that he attempted at the time, notably the paintings titled *Nocturne*. Painted in the colours of cement dust, these works embody the labourers at night fall. In the shade of the truck or under it, their

emaciated bodies appear prone and exhausted, the contours lit perhaps by the single street light. A street dog huddles close to the oblivious figures for warmth. The *Nocturne* paintings in the shades of burnt umber grey and white appear bled of all vitality or promise of renewal. In a broad sense, these men of the street also embody Khanna's images of labour and survival. The Bhogal *dhaba*, where labourers briefly pause for sustenance, relate to his Christ paintings, and issues of faith, doubt and humanity. In his Christ images, the single cloth that covers the rough hewn bodies of the apostles, the stoicism that characterizes the figures, and the overarching concern with issues of spiritual sustenance are very close to his paintings of street labourers absorbed in grinding acts of survival. Krishen Khanna reaffirms his position as a painter of men, but in the very act of observation, he confers both dignity and a sentient presence.

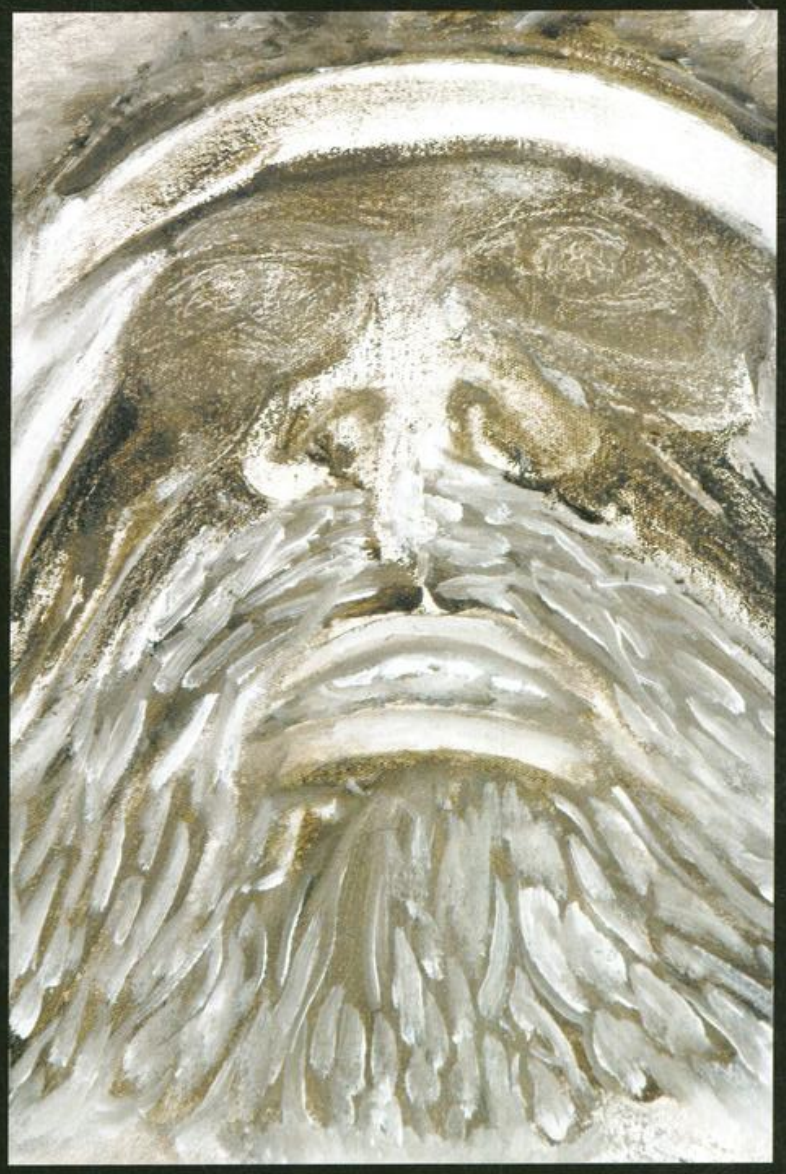
1 Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1997), p 205.
2 Sarvepalli Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography*, Vol 2 (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1979).
3 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983).
4 Note to the writer, March 2006.
5 Interview with Chanda Singh, *India Magazine*, September 1984.
6 Gayatri Sinha, *Krishen Khanna: A Critical Biography* (New Delhi: Vadehra Art Gallery, 2001), p 116.



Pencil on paper, 20x14", 2005

The Blind King and Blindfolded Queen

• Tanuj Berry •

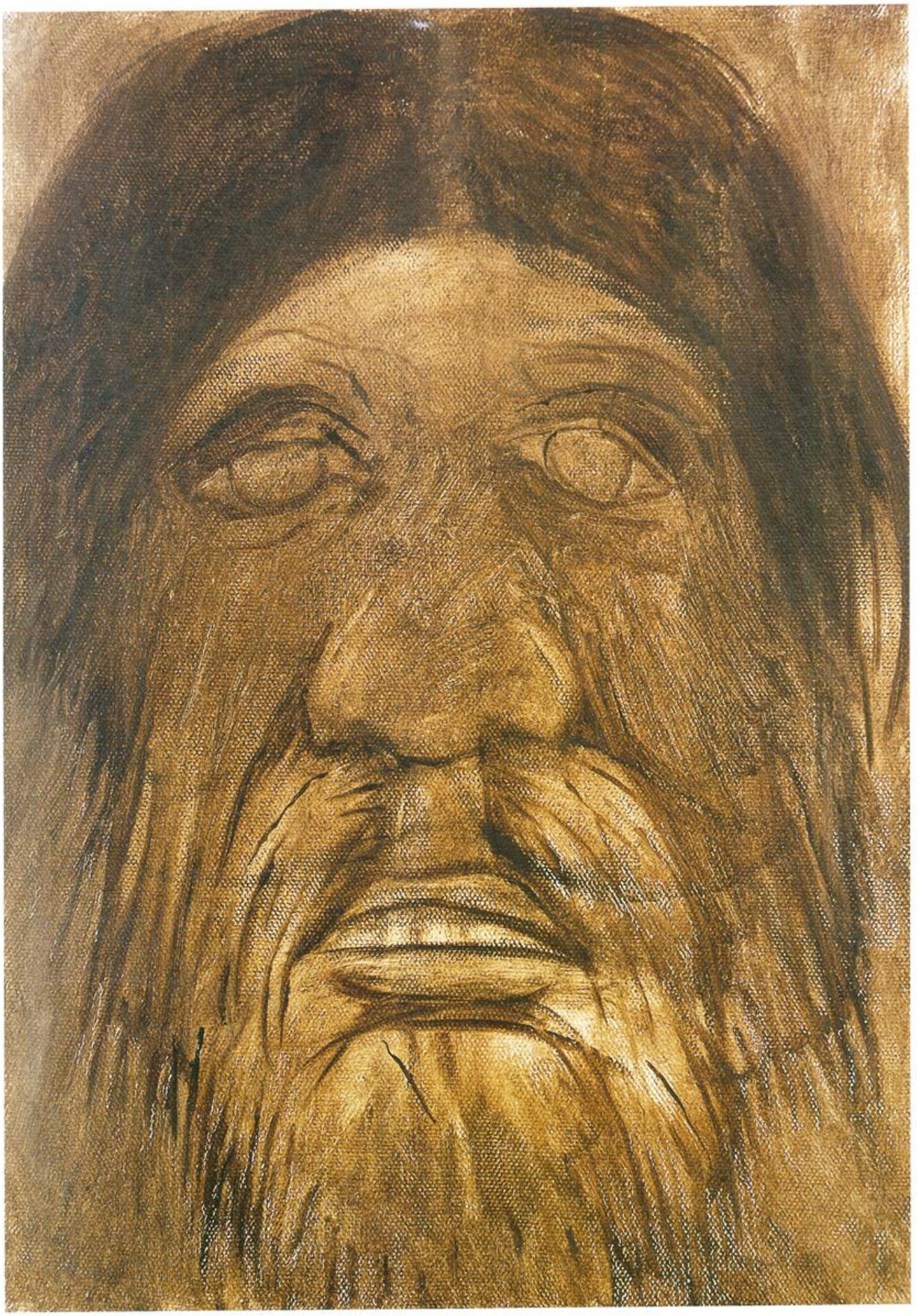


Krishen Khanna has revisited characters from the *Mahabharata* in his paintings over the years. The blind king and queen are Dhritarashtra and Gandhari from the Hindu epic.

The *Mahabharata* says that Dhritarashtra was born to Ambika, the first wife of Vichitravirya, the king of Hastinapura. After Vichitravirya's death his mother Satyavati sent for her firstborn, Vyasa. In accordance with his mother's wishes, Vyasa visited both the wives of Vichitravirya to grant them sons. When Vyasa visited Ambika, she saw his horrible and threatening appearance; she closed her eyes and dared not open them. Hence, her son Dhritarashtra, the eldest prince of the Kuru kingdom, was born blind. **B**ecause of his blindness, Dhritarasthra's brother Pandu ruled the kingdom in his stead. Pandu was cursed by a deer that he had killed while it was copulating. He was struck with shame and resolved to spend the



The Blind King and Blindfolded Queen, oil on canvas, 42x70", 2006



The Blind King, oil on canvas, 10x14", 2005

remainder of his life in exile in the same forest. He relinquished all worldly pleasures and sent the royal jewels back to his palace. Dhritarashtra was in tears when he received Pandu's jewels. Bhishma, counsellor to the kings of Hastinapura, advised him to assume the throne and rule judiciously.

"A blind man as the king," said Dhritarashtra bitterly.
"Yes, integrity and wisdom are your eyes," replied Bhishma, and arranged for the new king to wed Gandhari, daughter of Subala who was the king of Gandhar (Kandahar).

Gandhari, on finding that Dhritarashtra was born blind, decided that she would deny herself the joy of sight that her husband could never take pleasure in. In a supreme gesture of self-sacrifice, she blindfolded herself for life in order to become one with her blind

king. **D**hritarashtra and Gandhari ruled their kingdom wisely. As the *Mahabharata* story goes, Gandhari wanted a hundred sons, and the great sage Vyasa granted her a boon that would make her wish come true. She became pregnant, but did not give birth for two years. She beat her womb in frustration, envious and resentful of Kunti, the queen of Pandu who had given birth to a boy, Yudhisthira. A hardened lump of grey-coloured flesh emerged from her womb. Gandhari was devastated and called upon Vyasa to remind him of his words. Vyasa cut this flesh into a hundred and one pieces. They were preserved with butter in bronze jars and grew into a hundred sons, who were known as the Kauravas, and a daughter, Dushala. **A** dispute over the succession to the throne of the kingdom followed. Duryodhana, Dhritarashtra's eldest son, was born late despite his father's early marriage. This legitimized the claim of his cousin Yudhisthira – the eldest of the Pandavas, the five sons of Pandu – to the throne, as



Gandhari, bronze, 28x14x14", 2006

the eldest of his generation. A struggle for the throne of Hastinapura ensued. **W**hen the princes came of age, Yudhisthira was given half the kingdom of Kuru and made king of Indraprastha to avoid a conflict with the Kaurava princes. Duryodhana became the prince regent of Hastinapura and, owing to Dhritarashtra's age and blindness, he became powerful and influential, managing the state affairs with a circle of advisors that included his scheming uncle Shakuni. Indraprastha's prosperity and fame exceeded that of Hastinapura's and it roused Duryodhana's jealousy. When Yudhisthira performed the Rajasuya sacrifice that made him emperor of the world, it made Duryodhana incapable of restraining his fury. **S**hakuni knew that the Kauravas could not rival the Pandavas in martial power. He devised a scheme for Yudhisthira's ruin by defeating him in a game of dice – at which Shakuni excelled and Yudhisthira was a complete novice. Yudhisthira could not resist the challenge; he gambled








away his entire kingdom, his wealth, his four brothers and even his wife, in a series of manoeuvres to repossess one by staking another. Dhritarashtra made Duryodhana re-establish Yudhisthira but he played again – and lost again. Shakuni set the condition that the Pandavas must spend thirteen years in exile in the forest before they were given their kingdom back. **A**t the end of term of the exile, Duryodhana refused to return Yudhisthira's kingdom. Although Dhritarashtra criticized his son, he implicitly desired that Duryodhana, not Yudhisthira, remain emperor. These events ultimately led to the battle of Kurukshetra where the Pandavas were victorious and the Kauravas were annihilated. **A**lthough the Kauravas were portrayed as villains, the *Mahabharata* presents Gandhari as just and moral. Time after time she cautioned her sons to follow the path of *dharma*, righteousness, and make peace with the Pandavas. Gandhari was a devoted worshipper of Lord Shiva.

Blind King, bronze, 33x18x21", 2006






Her sacrifice of sight and her austere life granted her divine power. It is said that when her gaze fell on Yudhisthira's toe through a small gap in the blindfold, it was charred black by her rage and power. Gandhari's grief at the loss of her sons resulted in her cursing Krishna, the king of the Yadavas, who had guided the Pandavas in battle – the curse led to destruction of the Yadavas. **G**andhari spent the end of her days with Dhritarashtra and her sister-in-law Kunti in the Himalayas, where they are said to have died in a forest fire.

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W*hy this elimination of Sight?* **D**hritarashtra had a most powerful body but was born blind. His wife Gandhari was beautiful...and bound by duty. She blindfolded herself to suffer the same deprivation as her husband. Well, that's what the epic says. I chose the blind king and his blindfolded wife because many that rule and are in power can see but are blind to the more important issues of life.



***S**o you are using these images as metaphors?* **Y**es, that is so. I was also interested in the somewhat bizzare image of the blind head of state advised by someone who has voluntarily accepted blindness – the whole scene is in the dark, so to say.

***T**he blind leading the blind – does that ring a bell?* **Y**ou are referring to Pieter Bruegel's painting which bears that title. In a way, it is a good comparison but Bruegel's intent was quite different. A sense of humour underlies his painting. We see a whole row of people holding onto each other following a blind leader who is about to fall into a ditch! But there is nothing funny about the blind king or his blindfolded queen. Anxiety is the major emotion at play as they are presiding over a session of gambling that will decide not only the fate of the kingdom but also the entire race. There is a prevailing sense of doom.



Y*ou have used no colour in the painting and have left it as a black and white composition?* **I**t might have meant a dilution of the primary emotion. I'm speaking for myself, and I am not laying down any kind of primary principle. I could argue that Picasso's *Guernica*, which has doom and destruction as its principal emotions, is executed in black and white which sustains it. Colour might well have been a distraction.

B*ut there are a number of great paintings which have employed colour to enhance terror, which is the major emotion. Goya's* The Third of May 1808: The Execution of the Defenders of Madrid, *for instance?* **A**s I said, I was speaking of my own view concerning the working of this particular painting. I have also painted pictures of harrowing subjects using bright reds, oranges and yellows.



***A**nd what were these subjects?* **A** cremation, and then there is the painting of Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, of jackbooted generals with corpses under foot....

B**efore we become completely cheerless....I** won't inflict you with any more.

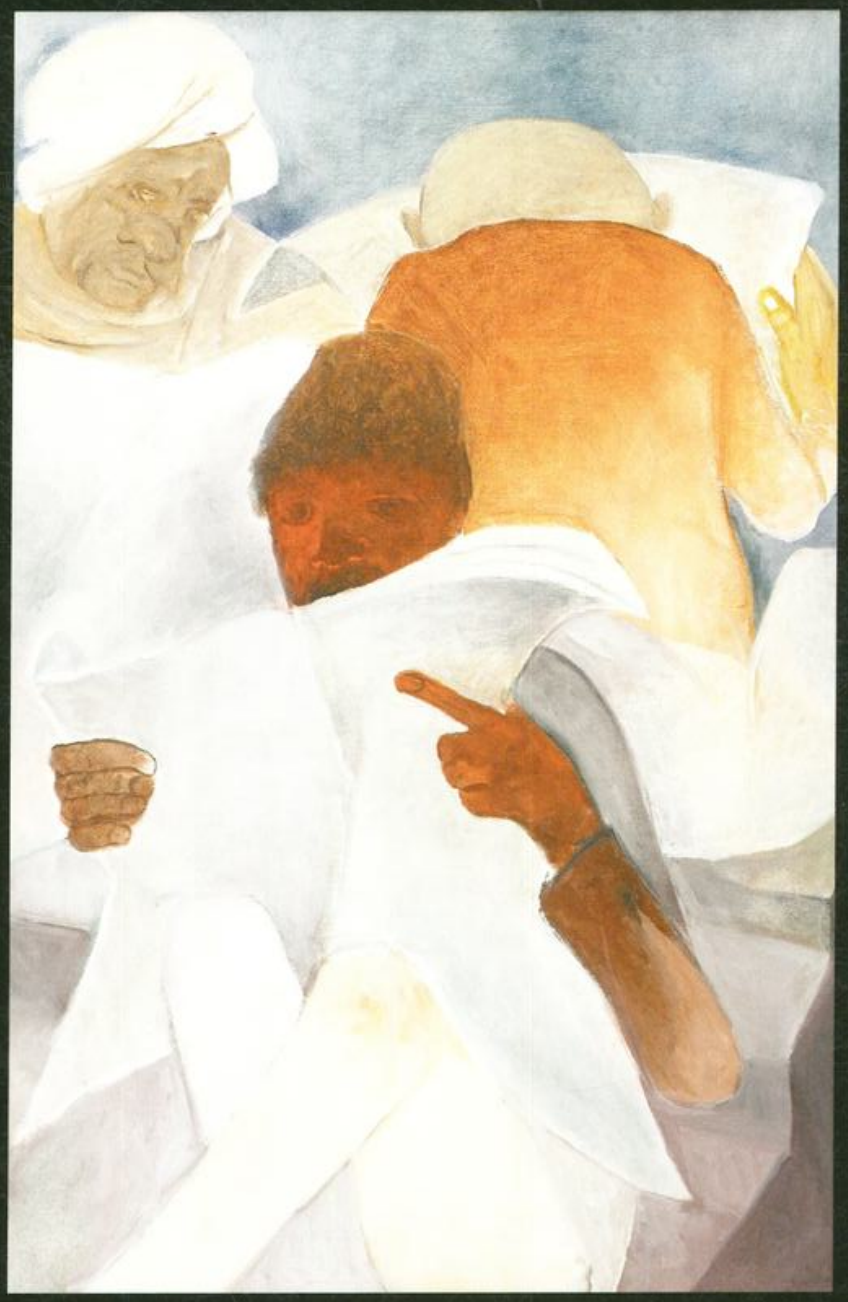
Though Krishen has explored sculptural works in the past, he has mainly worked with terracota and this is the first time he has cast his works in bronze. His fondness for the subject of the blind king and blindfolded queen is apparent in the fact that he decided Gandhari and Dhritarashtra would be two of the first few works to be cast in bronze. For Krishen, working with sculpture is not only about being able to give his work a third dimension, but also the fact that he could explore greater options to express his subject's emotions via this medium. **T**he response evoked by his work has

not been purely aesthetic, containing as it does a strong moral undertone which is more humanist than didactic. Art is not seen as a separate or secluded aspect of human activity, not better than or worse than but encompassing it as a whole. The primary oppositions and inherent contradictions that the blind king and blindfolded queen represent – the one blind by birth, the other by choice; the king in a position of power and yet helpless; being watched and being, literally and metaphorically, in the dark – seem like bizarre unsolvable riddles. He confers upon these figures an unusual affinity that locates them within the story of the *Mahabharata* but also turns them into ordinary people. **K**rishen's paintings cater to the eyes of a cross-section of viewers and invoke a feeling of exhilaration. It seems that, as an artist, he has been distinctive in accepting in his work multiple factors rather than focusing on the purely formal aspects of painting. This has made for an immense richness of metaphors and a variety of underlying emotions.



Evening News

• Norbert Lynton •



Evening News, oil on canvas, 24x36", 2005



We see part of a crowd, each man and woman isolated mentally, intent on the joint activity of reading a newspaper. We are not shown where they are, and assume an open-air setting, a public square perhaps; their closeness suggests an urban space. The edges of the picture contain what we see and imply that there is more of it, especially to the right and left where the trimming is felt most strongly. The paint is thick; the colours and colour contrasts are strong. The painter's brushes leave emphatic marks in all parts of the canvas. This is part of a continuing scene involving many people and many newspapers and possibly not limited to one location. The title Khanna gave this large painting, six by four feet, does not specify the event it refers to. Neither do the faces he shows us in the islands left by all that opened newsprint. On the whole, they are serious and aware of nothing; but each individual finds the news absorbing. One man, at the left edge, is covering his mouth with a gesture that speaks of dismay. A woman's

head, left of centre, just could be smiling; at any rate her lips are parted to show her white teeth. We then notice that mouths are in fact rare in this picture, as many of them are covered by the newspaper each figure is holding, so that we tend to see only the upper parts of their faces where expression is often ambiguous. The crowd is silent, though it is united by the event. **G**ayatri Sinha, in her 2001 book on Krishen Khanna's life and work, illustrates part of a six-foot square canvas of 1971, to which the artist gave the same title, *Evening News*. At the front of the book she illustrates the whole of a six-by-six-foot painting. This one is dated 1990 and its title is *News of Gandhiji's Death*, followed by the subtitle *Newspaper Readers*. Sinha also refers to a painting, another *News of Gandhiji's Death*, done in the year of the assassination, 1948, and shown in Mumbai the same



year: an 'expressionistic painting', she writes. The composition is more or less the same in them all. Part of a crowd of people is shown, intently reading their newspapers, most of them facing us and seen by us from slightly above. The brushwork in these two earlier versions is slightly rougher and less concerned with delivering the subject's appearance, more with catching the dramatic spirit – as opposed to action – of the occasion. Partly because of this, and partly, I suspect, because of the square format used here, the crowd feels less compacted in the 1948 version than in the vertical canvas of the recent painting. **W**e frequently meet with photographs of people reading newspapers, not least in newspapers. Also crowds gathered in public spaces in celebration of a leader or a major event or, of course, in order to protest against what is being done in their name. Here, though, the spirit of the representation is different, most of all because of the silence. This crowd is stunned by what it is reading. But perhaps Khanna's most telling precursor here, or perhaps antitype, is James Ensor's enormous horizontal



Evening News, oil on canvas, 48x72", 2005

painting of *The Entry of Christ into Brussels in 1889*, painted in 1888. It is the way we are confronted by a crowd of people that links the two pictures, but in the Ensor it is an ambiguously carnivalesque crowd of gaiety that presses towards us. Behind it come soldiers and a somewhat remote Christ seated on an ass. The device of heralding the coming of Christ to the Belgian capital gives this picture a particular tone, as does its total denial of the normally convivial carnival spirit, thanks to its harsh colours and above all its coarse brushwork and strident colours, and its monstrous, mask-like faces. Everything here is horrible. Celebration feels like oppression, even the expressed enthusiasm for the socialist state. Carnival is here death's partner. Christ's entry into Jerusalem was followed by his betrayal, trial, torture and crucifixion. Ensor's painting remained for long with the artist, then entered a private collection and was exhibited occasionally; it is now in the Getty Museum in Los Angeles. Khanna is likely to have known of it from reproductions. **B**ut in many respects, Khanna's painting is the



Study for *Newsreaders*, oil on canvas, 18x24", 2005

opposite of Ensor's. Khanna shows us part of a crowd and though the mass might have been awesome, there is nothing monstrous about it. There is no sound; Ensor's painting is loud in its performance as well as in its strident manner. We are to be appalled by it, and wonder how and why everything in what seemed to be offered as a festivity is turned into hell-on-earth. When we know the occasion



pictured in the *Evening News* paintings we become fully aware of Khanna's undemonstrative approach. The drama is implied below the surface, and because of this we sympathise with everyone's response to the assassination and even participate in it. Gandhi's death lives on, a vivid global event even it happened long ago. We experienced it as a disaster in our own lives. **Y**et Khanna's most recent *Evening News* is a strong painting. Its gravity becomes more imposing as we study it. He could have made a direct representation of Mahatma Gandhi's death, in January 1948, amidst the pains and perplexities of

Partition; but he did not, just as he has not represented the many distressing scenes created by the partition process, not even where his own family was involved. As with his treatments of scenes from the life of Christ, he portrays not the climactic, but moments preceding or succeeding it, and reactions to it. This painting of people silently reading the news reflects on 1948, but also on mass society everywhere, its dependence on information and on how this information is filtered to it through this or that commercial and politically-inflected agency. Khanna makes us attend to the generality, by withholding the more specifying title, before we discover the particular reference that is the painting's factual base. Not that he shies away from painful motifs. Some of Khanna's most distressing pictures are called *Nocturne* and show huddles of reclining figures that could well be corpses, or *Rear View*, picturing weary figures in the backs of vans and lorries, sometimes on top of the metal bars





Old Man Reading Paper, oil on canvas, 24x24", 2005

and other such hardware, the transporting of which is the lorry's business. Other paintings, such as those called *The Game*, come close to being variations on the theme of the Last Supper, with figures seated around a prominent table, talking or, more usually, being hectored by a military-looking man. Sometimes we see, reluctantly, that those scraps on the floor, beneath and by the table, are parts of bodies. One painting, *The End*, done in 1972, is of a man tied to a chair and probably dead after interrogation. No obvious echo here of Leonardo or religious art – though this man is tied up with strips of cloth rather like the Christ in *Flagellation* – but such echoes pervade Khanna's art below the surface, as when he reminds us of the dead Christ when he portrays the very opposite of a *Pietà* in *The Dead – Preparation for the Photograph* (1970). He pictures there the corpse of the modern, militant revolutionary. His head is being propped up for the photographer by a woman under supervision by military louts. Though the contrast is so strong, we cannot but think back to the peaceable revolutionary of two



thousand years ago. Gayatri Sinha and others have found expressionism in Khanna's more heavily worked paintings. I want to question the implication that his work of this sort is to some degree allied to the German Expressionism of early Modernism or to American and European Abstract Expressionism. Of course, he and his colleagues in the Progressive Artists Group were aware of both and had personal contacts with practitioners of the post-1945 movements. The justification for true expressionism is the undeniable urge to represent the world through personal, passionately experienced feelings. These are indicated by distortion and exaggeration in every aspect of the work of art. The subjects or motifs may be of the real world, but it is emotion that becomes the dominant subject. In Abstract Expressionism, motifs from the real world may be invoked (as in De Kooning), but usually it is the form and technique used by each individual artist that becomes the conveyer of the emotion. Since these identities need to be established and restated again and again, such paintings tend to take on the

character of signatures. **K**hanna is quoted, in Sinha's book, as saying 'I agree with De Kooning who said it is never a question of what style you adopt, style does not create the work.' Eager to associate every admired artist with an individual style – in effect, a brand-image – and suspicious of artists liable to work in a variety of idioms at a time or likely to change them successively, we may find it difficult to take this seriously. Surely, the soul of the artist is revealed in his mode of address, his tone of voice? But most artists know that before them lies a plethora of styles to be adopted or adapted, and many select their idioms consciously and quite freely, on grounds of interest and principle rather than in response to 'inner necessity' (Kandinsky's standard phrase, picked up from Tolstoy). In this sense, we can be closer to the truth when we see the artist as a stage director, deciding on the character of each production. Khanna, at any rate, reserves the right to use different styles for different occasions, to become, in a sense, a different painter according to his subject and to the way he wishes to place it before us. **B**ut even



this is too limiting a statement. The 'expressionistic' mode he has used in the paintings referring to Gandhi's death is the mode also of his paintings of the 'peaceable kingdom' of his childhood in Maclagen Road, Lahore, so well described by Sinha, of some of his pictures of street musicians, *bandwallah*s, cheerful, bouncy scenes, and even of what might be thought the most firmly 'expressionistic' of them all – his 1959 painting of *Children Eating Watermelons*, an entirely charming treatment of its smiling theme in which geometry may be observed playing a major constructive role behind the lively, eye-catching brushwork. In fact, we see him using a much flatter, apparently more controlled, manner of painting in what are self-evidently his most serious paintings, as well as in some of his most light-hearted. We have seen two examples, *The Betrayal* and *Flagellation*, and there are even flatter ones, with colour forms almost laid into the surface like marquetry, as in the powerful *Emmaus* picture of 1979, and the technique is pre-echoed in works of the 1960s. This mode empowers his two most passionate

indictments of political oppression, *The Game I* and *II*, 1971–77 and 1972, but it is also the idiom of some of his recent *Bandwallah* paintings done in 2000 and 2002. **S**o subject alone does not dictate Khanna's pictorial method. The more roughly worked surfaces, as in his series of *Evening News* paintings, make for a more integrated surface, with forms merging into each other and allowing for diverse colours to contribute to describing the same form. It is striking that here, in the most recent of the *Evening News*, he has added dark lines here and there to outline forms that might otherwise have been too imprecise. We have to assume that he uses his neat, flat, almost neoclassical style on a variety of occasions, grave or cheerful, when he wants to deploy clear colour forms with unambiguous outlines and surprising colour juxtapositions.



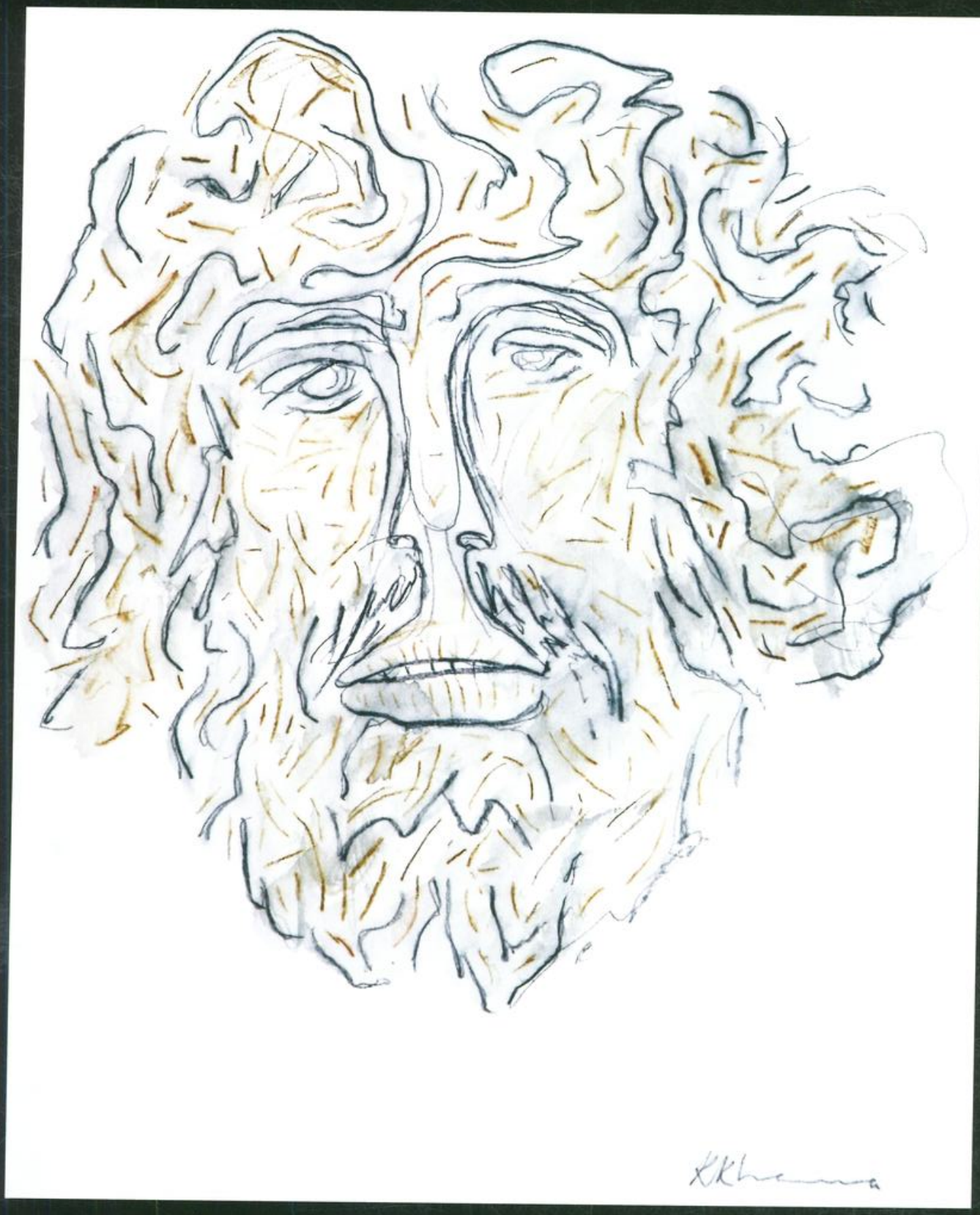


Study for *Last Supper*, oil on canvas, 18x24", 2006

In Retrospect.

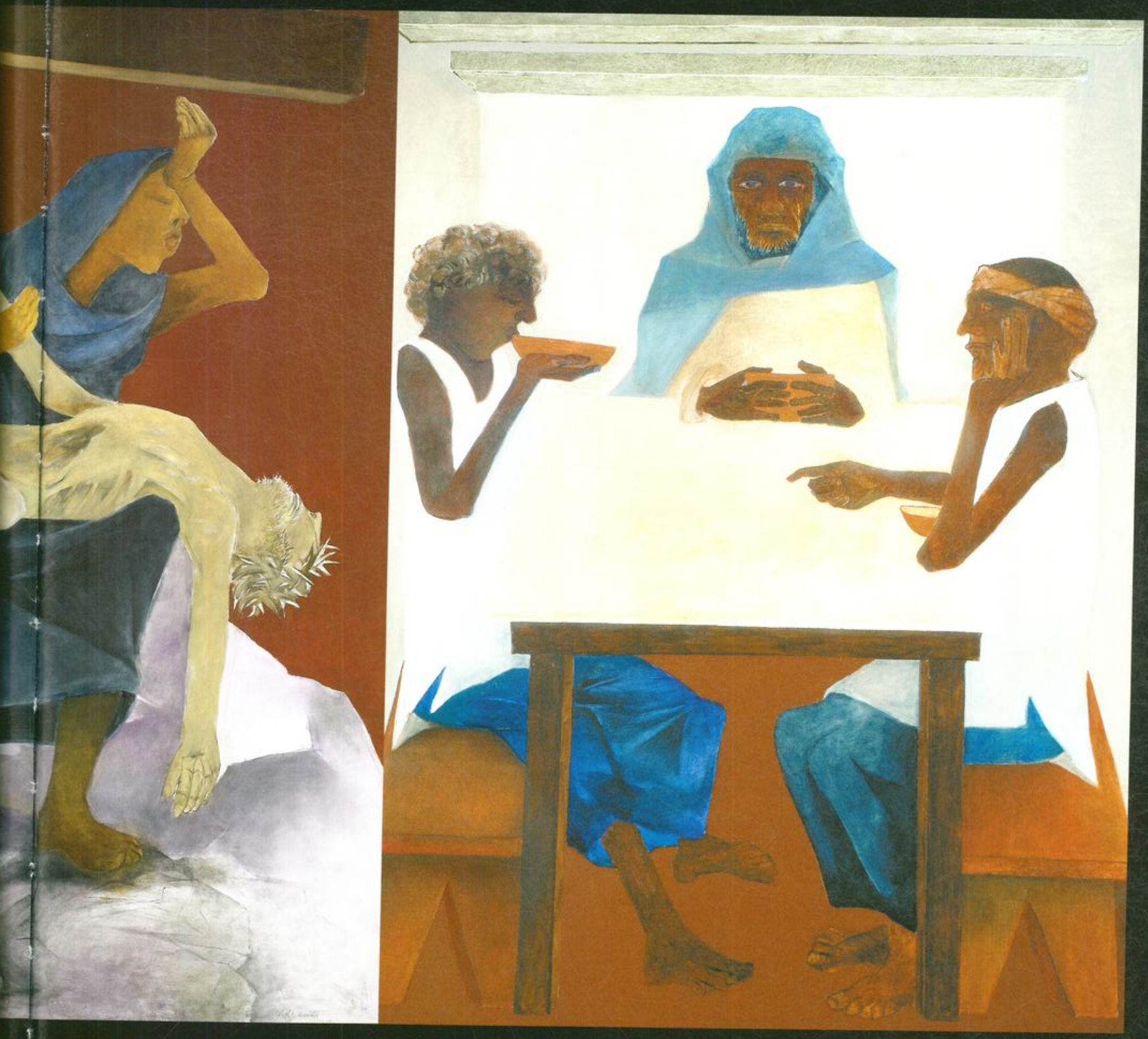
• Krishen Khanna •

I was barely seven years old when I was shown a print of Leonardo's "Last Supper." I recall the mess I made in trying to copy it in pencil on paper. I remember too how infuriated I became at my inability. I have never seen the original in Milan but have carried the image in my mind of the small print which still hangs on the wall of my studio in Shimla. More than the visual impact of the print are sequence of events leading up to and going beyond the Last Supper. Quite often people ask me if I am a Christian. Understandably they are intrigued and find it difficult to reconcile my interest in so called Christian subjects with my obvious Hindu name. An English friend even went as far as to suggest that my name Krishen was a misspelling for Christian! Most people resort to creating catagories to file away issues which they find difficult to resolve. I manage to live with an endless number of open ended thoughts.



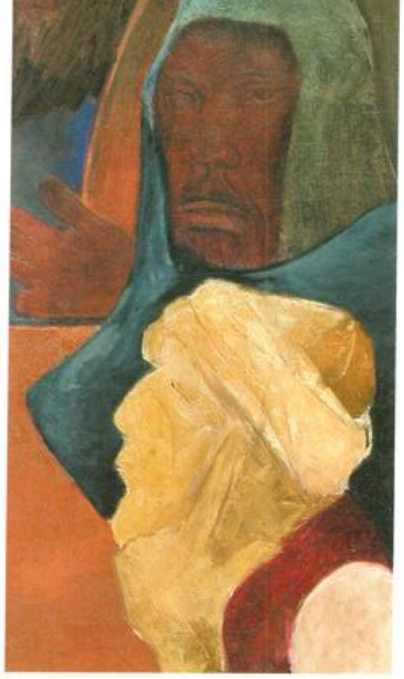
Pencil on paper, 9x11", 2006

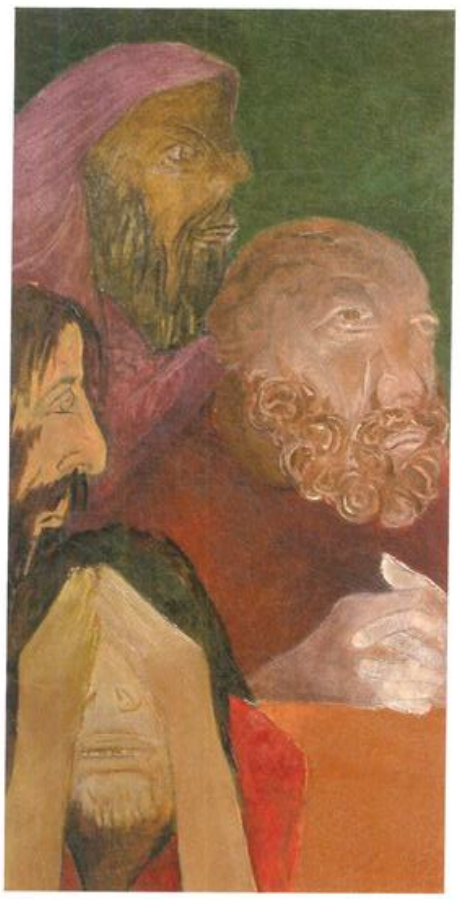




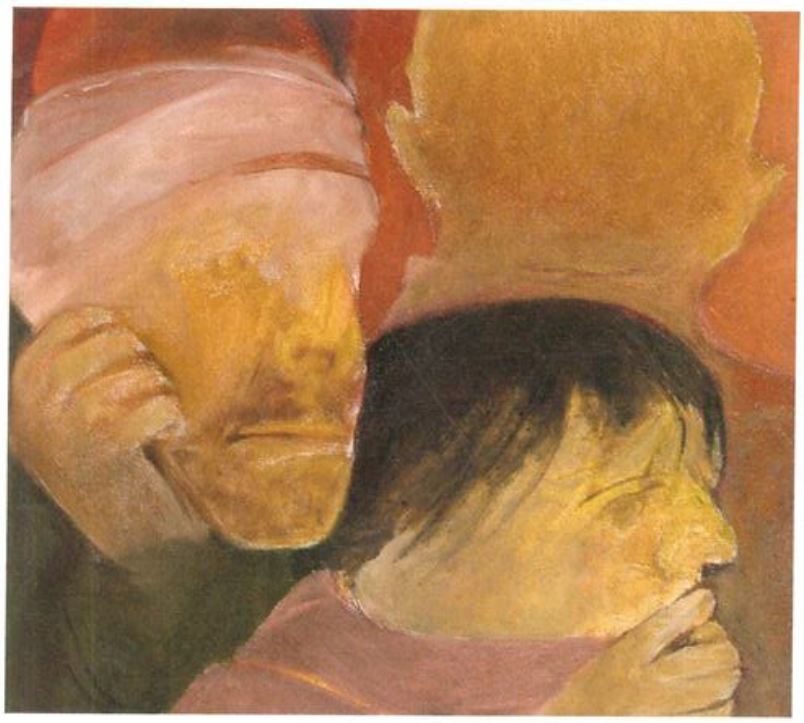


Last Supper, oil on canvas, 48x72", 2006









When I lived in an area known as Nizamuddin in Delhi, I was witness to an entire gamut of Islamic Culture. Pilgrims arriving from different Islamic Countries were a common enough sight. There would be students too coming to Study at the old and reputed Madrassa carrying their beddings and other belongings on their Shoulders. My father, who was a historian and a critical observer of his surroundings, once remarked that Christ would have borne a greater resemblance to these pilgrims rather than the Anglo Saxon version to which we had become accustomed. This observation seems to have had a great effect on me. The events in the Bible became more real and intimate. I also began to see correspondences between Social & political events and what happened at the time of Christ. The fear and consequent actions of right wing orthodoxy against any kind of change in thinking, the silent but corrosive corruption, the betrayal, the ineffectiveness of those in power to protect innocence against howling mobs, the barbarity of those carrying out orders, the pain and suffering of mothers over their dead sons have all happened before and will happen again — A season of repetition and return. I have been painting these subjects intermittently for the last fifty years. This cycle may continue, who knows?



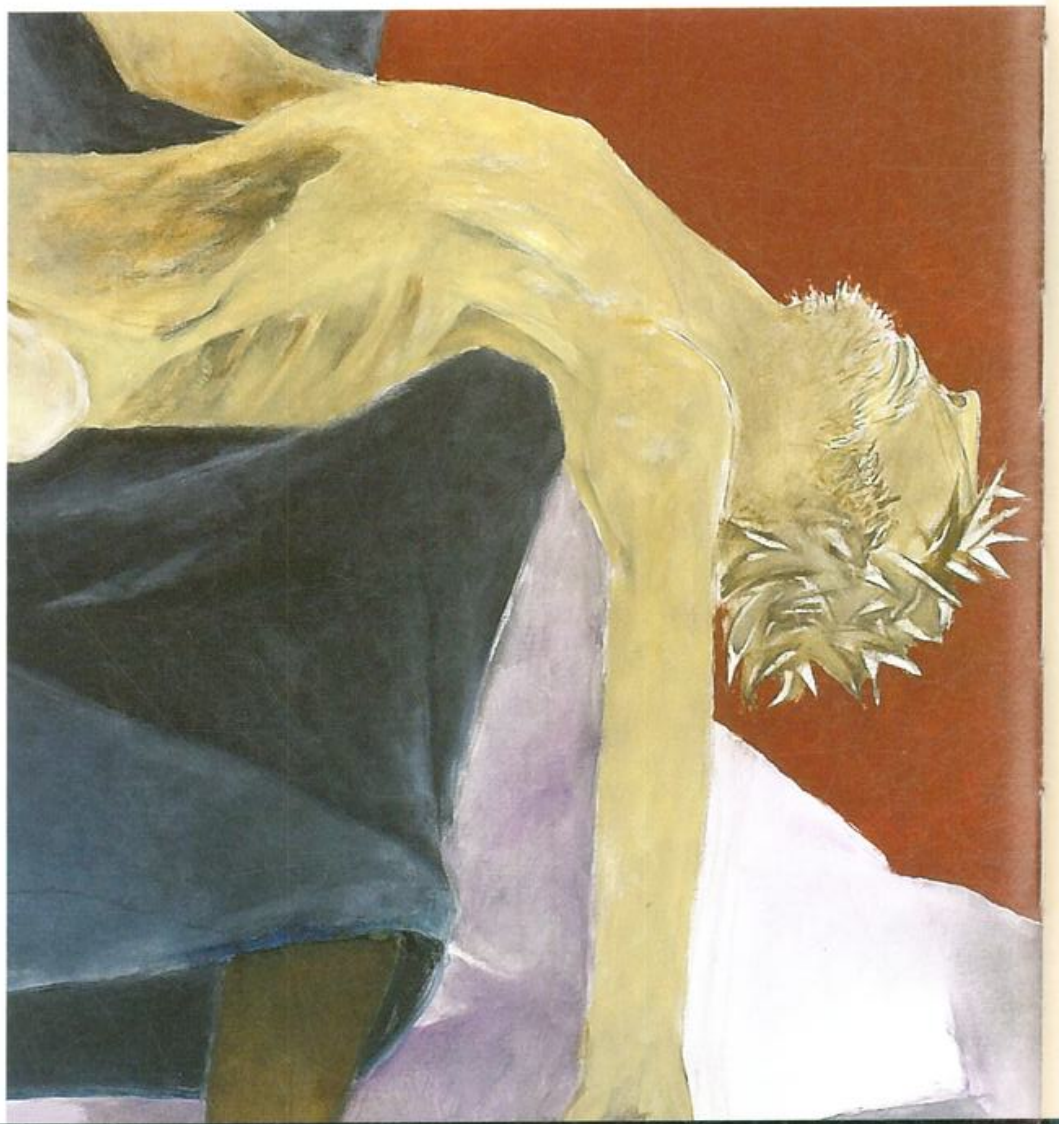
Pietà, oil on canvas, 52x72", 2006



Oil, acrylic and charcoal on canvas, 18x24", 2006



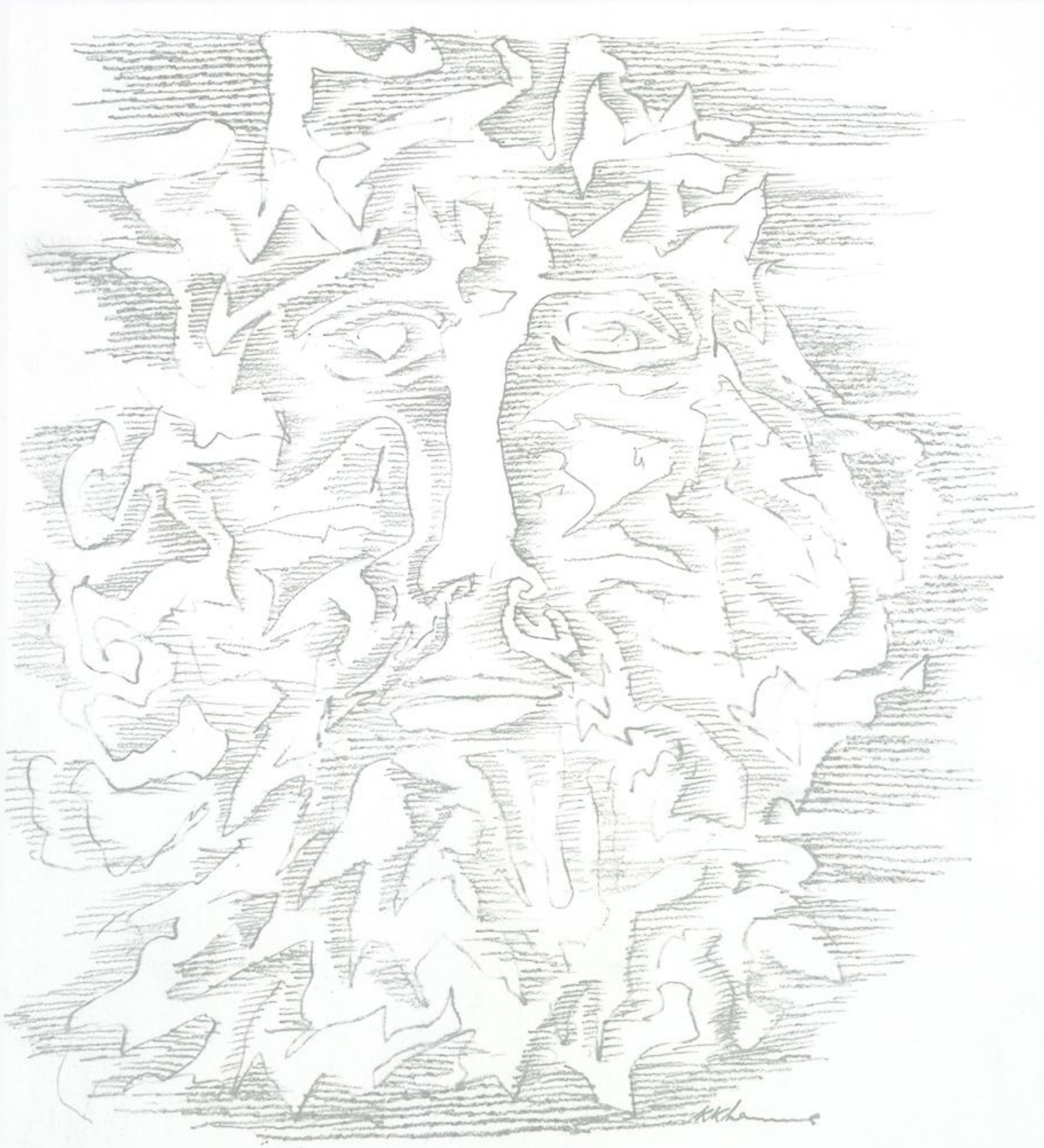




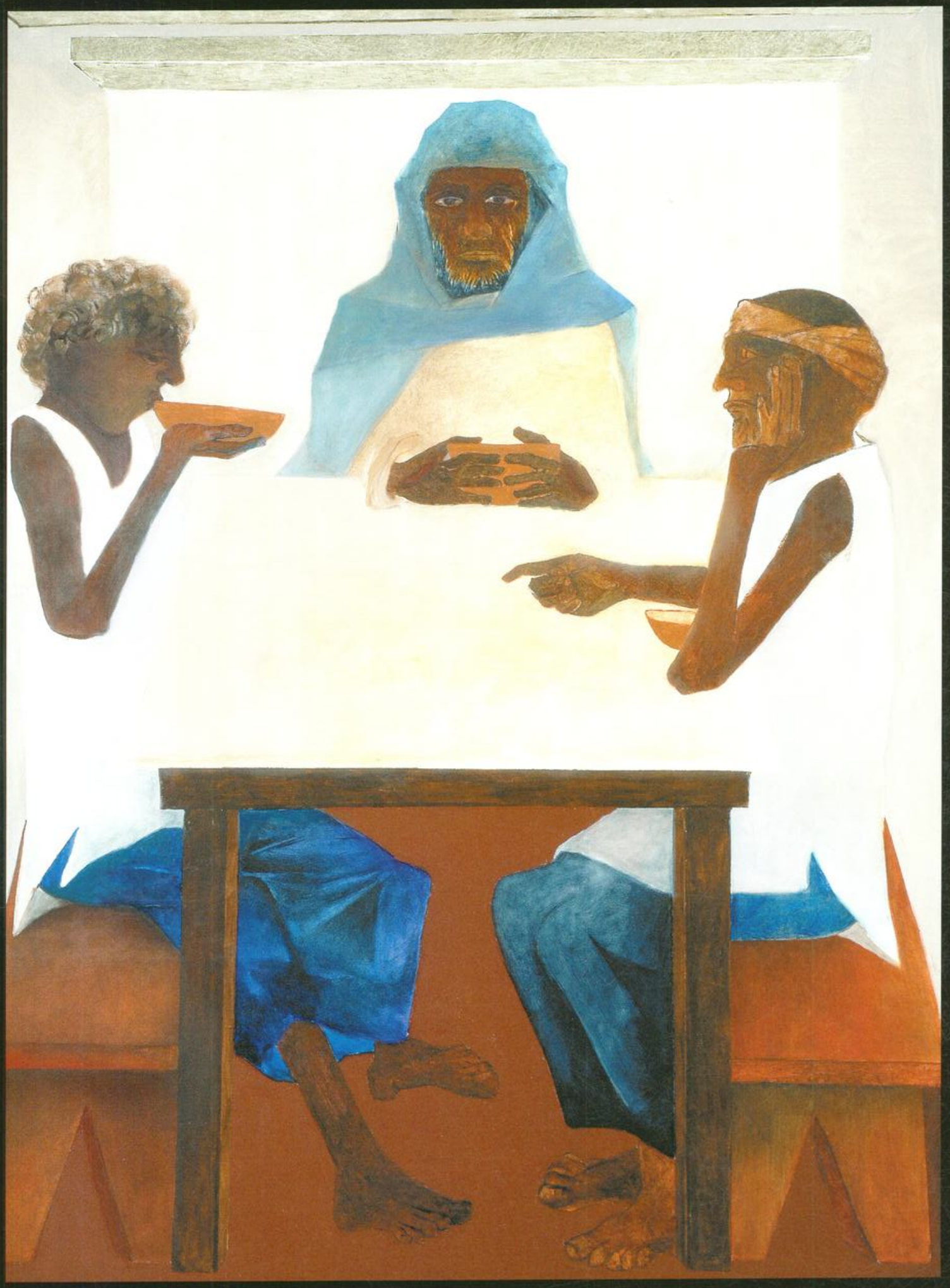
Once a painting is started, a whole process of thinking and feeling opens. Though I have painted these subjects before, they ~~were~~ appeared as if for the first time. I did not want to duplicate my earlier efforts. I decided to paint in subdued middle tones which would be appropriate to the solemn occasion. As the painting progressed I began introducing people I knew. These were not portraits of people but only some features were painted. In an earlier work I had painted my artist friends with Husain being the eldest in the Centre. Everyone who saw this painting wondered who was Judas - I responded by asking why was it thought to be the Last Supper - I had painted a group of painters & not the apostles of the Bible - In the new painting of the Supper, I avoided any possibility of an analogy. There were two other paintings to follow which would be in sequence. I wanted the painting to be imbued with anxiety, doubt & maybe a sense of guilt - I was tempted to add plates, pottery & food on the table but thought the better of it. That might have become a delicious still life quite contrary to what I had intended. The table is bare without any sign of feasting. It acts as a device to hold the anxious congregation together. The rafters on the ceiling are the only hint that this enactment is inside a room.

When I started to paint The Pieta, I thought of Shakespeare's outburst in Julius Caesar- Through Mark Anthony he says "How many times must Caesar bleed in sport" - Indeed the enactment of murder over and over again should by now have quelled our feelings of sorrow and disgust, made us immune to such happenings. Just as Caesar will continue to be murdered on the stage, Mary, the mother will continue to be painted mourning over her dead son. My Pieta is not the first nor will it be the last. As a child I was taken to funerals by my mother & my grandmother, not because they wanted me to be aware of such happenings but because I couldn't be left alone at home while they were gone. The memory persists of women beating their breasts and their foreheads and wailing all the while. The memory came over me from my distant but vivid past. Sitting on a barren promontory under a sloping cross, Mary holds the dead head of her son whose lifeless body in a pallor of death, lies in her lap. It amazes me how some artists will dwell on a tragic theme with such delicious colours which anaesthetise. Indeed its a travesty to be avoided-

The final painting, the last of the triptych is the breakfast at Emmaus- The story of how Jesus walked with two strangers who were discussing the recent gossip of the dead man who seemed to have walked away from his tomb, makes me think

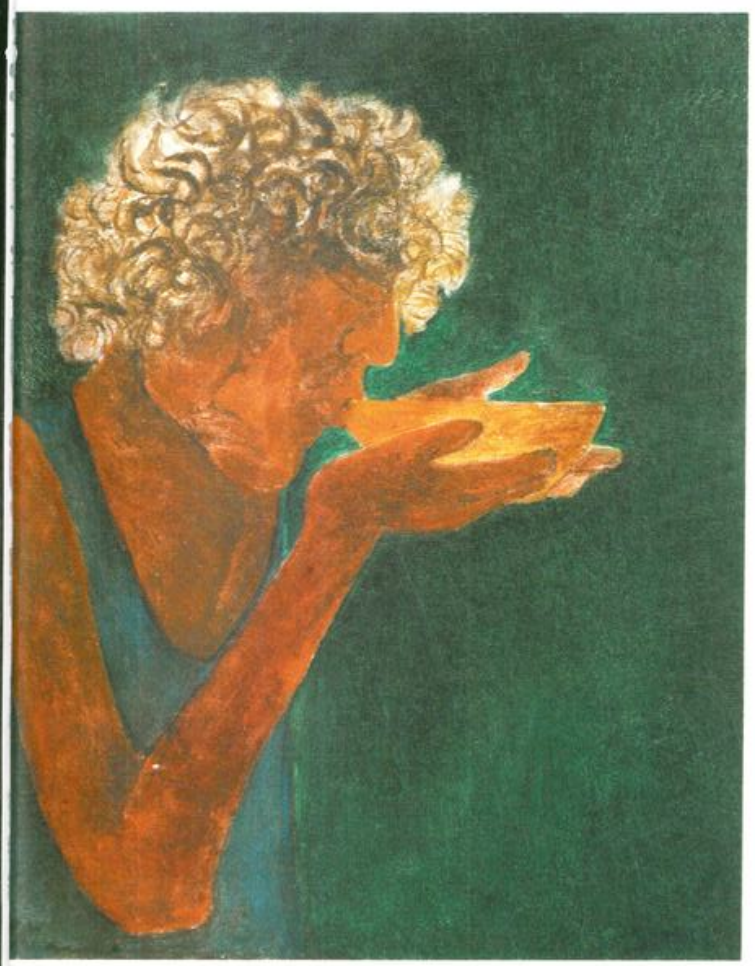


Pencil on paper, 9x11", 2006



Emmaus, oil on canvas, 52x72", 2006

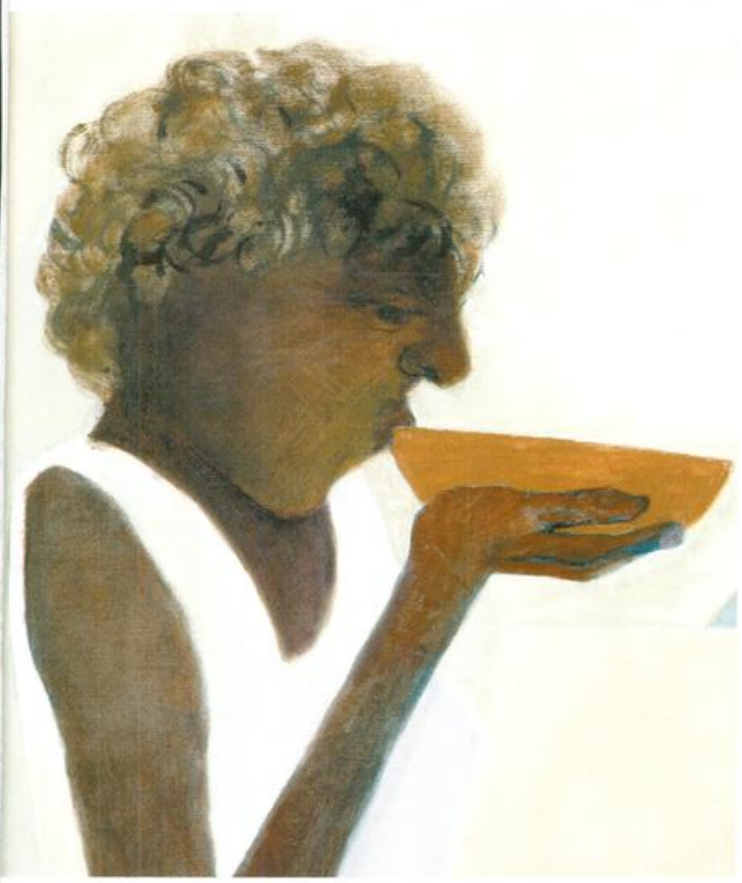
Oil on canvas, 14x18", 2006





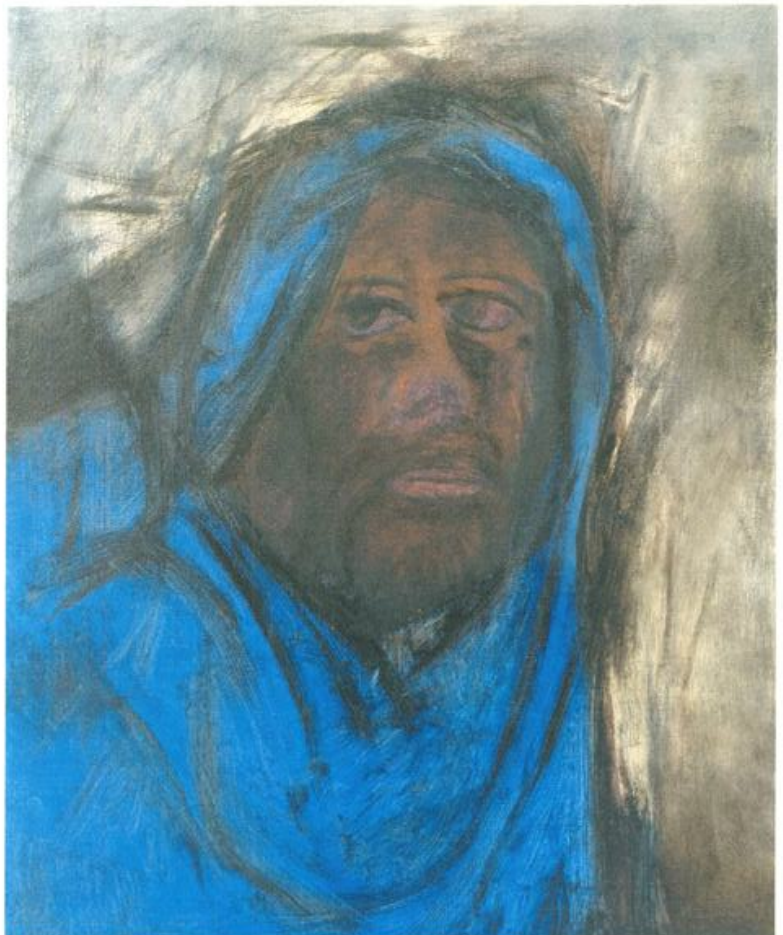






of the very uncertain times through which I passed during the partitioning of Punjab. I would have to walk a great distance through heavily wooded lonely roads to reach home late at night - keeping me company was an old Sikh waiter at a restaurant. During the hour and a half that we trudged, he regaled me with the most weird happenings which he said had happened on the very route that we were walking. All sense of the rational evaporated leaving me feeling helpless. The old man was full of faith & would chant hymns periodically as if to keep the evil spirits at bay. Those lonely & frightening walks in the dark still haunt me and the tussel between the believer and non believer continues. Inspite of the doubter, the painting breathes peace, a much needed quality these days.

Krishen Khanna



Study for *Last Supper*, oil on canvas, 16x20", 2006



CHRONOLOGY

1925
Born Lyalpur, Punjab.

1929–1935
Schooling in Lahore at Sacred Heart and Cathedral School. Passed two examinations of The Royal Drawing Society, London.

1936
Father transferred to Multan. Entered Government High School. Emphasis on Urdu, maths and art. Mr Butt, a very sympathetic art teacher.

1938
Successfully competed for Kipling Scholarship to study in Kipling's old School located in Windsor and renamed Imperial Services College. A typical English public school dedicated to stern discipline, sports, officers training corps, fagging and corporal punishment.

1942
Outbreak of Second World War. Digging trenches against air raids, gas masks, greater emphasis on matters military. Passed Certificate A of the British War Office, courses in signals, tactics and machine guns. Passed Oxford and Cambridge School Certificate with art as a subject.
School trips taken to The National Gallery, London; immediately attracted to Giotto, Piero Della Francesca, Uccello.
Returned to Multan.
Joined Emerson College and passed Intermediate Examination with Persian. Developed a great love for Persian poetry.

1944
Family moved to Lahore.
Joined Government College and completed BA (honours). Developed an abiding love for English poetry.
Met Harkishen Lal and Prem Nath Mago, both artists of great merit.

1946
Entered a large printing press as an apprentice—joined Sheikh Ahmed's Studio One to study drawing.
Exhibited in annual exhibition of Punjab Art Society.
Painting of *Dead Tree* commended.

1948
Partition of India. Wandered over hills in Shimla trying to paint.
Secured a position in Grindlays Bank and was sent to Bombay.
Meeting with Souza, Husain, Gade, Ara, Gaitonde, Raza, Samant, Tyeb Mehta, Palsikar and Bendre.

1949
Invited to join Progressive Artists Group and exhibited with this Group in Chetna Restaurant; Artists Aid Centre—Progressive Artists Group. Bombay Art Society.
CJ Hall met Stephen Spender and WH Auden.

1950
Married Renu Chatterji on her return from Bedford College, London.

1951
Exhibition of Progressive Artists Group at Jehangir Art Gallery.

1952–1953
Daughter Rasika born in Bombay.
Transferred to Grindlays, Madras.
Meetings with KCS Paniker, Santhanaraj and other artists in Madras.
Exhibition of his collection of Progressive Artists at Madras College of Art.

1954
Proceeded on six months leave to Europe with Renu—visited Rome, Arezzo, Assisi, Paris, London. Painted in Paris.
Second daughter, Malati, born in Delhi.
Joint exhibition with MF Husain at AIFACS, New Delhi.
Returned to Grindlays, Madras.
Husain sold a small painting of Khanna's to Dr Homi Bhabha of TIFR.

1955
Solo exhibition at USIS, Madras. Chief Guest: Rajaji.
Friendship with Dr VK Narayana Menon who introduced him to Carnatic music. He got to know the great musicians of South India attending innumerable concerts. Great influence on him as a painter.
Movement from informal, unchartered beginnings to a sense of order.
Visits by Husain, Bal Chhabda and Roberto Rossilini who bought paintings.
Concert organized in his studio for Pandit Ravi Shanker.
Narayana Menon introduced him to Ben Brittain, Peter Pears, Lord George Harewood and the poet Louis MacNeice.

1956
'Eight Painters', at Indian and Eastern Newspaper Society Building, Old Mill Road, New Delhi (Husain, Kulkarni, Gaitonde, Samant, Krishen Khanna, Ram Kumar, Bendre, Satish Gujral).
Sir Kenneth Clark visited exhibition. Offered to help find gallery in London.

1957
Solo exhibition at AIFACS, New Delhi.
Tokyo Biennale, Japan.

1958
Solo exhibition, Kumar Gallery, Connaught Place, New Delhi.

1959
Solo exhibition, Kumar Gallery, New Delhi.
Inaugural exhibition, Gallery 59, Bombay (Husain, Raza, Padamsee, Gaitonde, Ram Kumar, Krishen Khanna).
'Contemporary Art from India', Essen, Dortmund, Zurich.
'Modern Indian Art', Cairo.
'Trends in Contemporary Painting from India', Graham Gallery, New York.
'Artists of Fame and of Promise', Leicester Galleries, London.
Visited Paris, Guest of Jean and Krishna Riboud who introduced him to Tamayo, Matta, Sima and other artists. Small drawing acquired by Tamayo who advised him not to neglect his home territory.

1960
Solo exhibition at Kumar Gallery, New Delhi.
Solo exhibition at Leicester Galleries, London (visited by John Berger, Sir Herbert Read and Sir Kenneth Clark).
Sao Paolo Biennale, Sao Paulo.

1961
Solo exhibition, Ashoka Gallery, Calcutta.
Solo exhibition, Jehangir Art Gallery, Bombay.
Tokyo Biennale, Japan.
Resigned from Grindlays and motored up from Bombay to Delhi with Akbar Padamsee.

1962
Solo exhibition, Kunika Art Centre. Catalogue introduction by Richard Bartholomew.
Solo exhibition, Leicester Galleries, London.
Travel Fellowship by Council for Economic and Cultural Affairs, New York.
Meeting with artists in Dacca, Malayasia, Thailand, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Japan and New York.
National exhibition, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi.
Venice Biennale, Indian participation.
Lecture on contemporary Indian art at Berkley, California.

1963
'Eight Contemporary Artists from India', Lever House, New York. Introduction in catalogue by Dr Laxmi Sihare.
'Contemporary Painters from India', Gallery 63, New York.
Meetings with Berbert Ferber, Mark Rothko, Saul Steinber in New York.

1964
Solo exhibition, Kumar Gallery, New Delhi.
Artist-in-Residence, American University, Washington DC.
Solo exhibition, Watkins Art Gallery, American University, Washington DC.
'Six Artists in Black and White', Shridharani Gallery, New Delhi (Husain, Padamsee, Gaitonde, Ram Kumar, Bal Chhabda, Krishen Khanna).

1965
Solo Exhibition, Egan Gallery, New York.
'Ten Contemporary Artists from India': University of South Florida, Tampa; Jackson Art Museum, Jacksonville; Delgado Art Museum, New Orleans; Hunter Gallery, Chattanooga; Colorado Fine Art Centre, Colarado Springs, Long Beach; Art Institute, San Francisco, East West Centre, Honolulu (introduction in catalogue by Dr Grace Morely).
'Ten Contemporary Painters from India': MIT, Cambridge, USA; New Jersey State Museum, Trenton.
Morris Graves visits studio in Washington and acquires two *Sumi-e* paintings.
Mr Duncan Philips buys a small painting for his collection.
Lalit Kala Akademi, annual exhibition.

1966
Solo exhibition, Kumar Gallery, New Delhi.

1968
Solo exhibition, New Art Centre, London.

1969
Solo exhibition, photographs, Kunika Chemould, New Delhi.
Solo exhibition, experimental photographs, Pundole Gallery, Bombay.
'Contemporary Art, Dialogue between East and West', Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, Japan (sixty invited artists).
'Indian Painters 69', Max Mueller Bhavan and Birla Academy, Calcutta.

1970
'Art Now', Kunika Chemould, New Delhi.
Expo '70, Indian Pavillion, Osaka, Japan, three photographic murals.

1971
Visited Khem Karan, Dograi and other forward military areas with Husain, Ram Kumar, Tyeb Mehta—paintings and drawings executed after visit.
'Contemporary Indian Art' Renwick Gallery. Smithsonian Institute, Washington DC.

1972
'Art Now', Kunika Chemould, New Delhi.
'One World through Art', Ben and Abbey Grey Foundation, St Paul, Minnesota, USA.

1973
Solo exhibition, Pundole Gallery, Bombay.
1974
Solo exhibition, Black Partridge, New Delhi.
1975
Solo exhibition, Dhoomimal Art Gallery, New Delhi.
Third Triennale of Contemporary World Art, New Delhi.
1976
25th Pugwash Conference, Madras.
1977
'Pictorial Space', Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi.
'Indian Painting 1977', Chandigarh, organized by Black Partridge Gallery.
1979
Solo Exhibition, Dhoomimal Art Gallery, (catalogue introduction by J Swaminathan).
'Modern Asian Art', Fukuoka Art Museum, Japan.
1980
Solo exhibition, Rabindra Bhavan, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi.
1981
Inaugural exhibition, Roopankar Museum, Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal.
'Indian Painting Today', Jehangir Art Gallery, Bombay.
1982
'Myth and Reality', Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, UK.
'Contemporary Indian Art', Burlington House, London.
'Modern Indian Painters', Hirshorn Museum, Washington DC.
1983
Solo exhibition of drawings, Garhi Studio, New Delhi.
1984
Inaugural exhibition, Gallery 7.
1985
Ram Kumar and Krishen Khanna at Gallery 7, Bombay.
1986
Solo exhibition of drawings and paintings at Sarla Art Centre, Madras.
Baghdad International Festival of Art.
1988
First International Biennale, Lahore, Pakistan.
Baghdad International Festival of Art (member of international jury).
1989
'Timeless Art', Solo exhibition and auction, Centre for Contemporary Art, New Delhi.
Sothebys, Bombay.
'Artist's Alert', exhibition and auction by Sahmat, New Delhi.
1991
Solo exhibition, Gallery Espace, New Delhi.
Birla Academy of Art, Calcutta, anniversary exhibition.
Fifth Biennale, Havana, Cuba.
'Addressing Gandhi', travelling exhibition by Sahmat.
1992
'Masters of Indian Art', Hotel Oberoi Intercontinental, Bombay.
1994
'Indian Drawing Today', AIFACS, organized by Gallery Espace.
'The Solids', second Indian Drawing Biennale, exhibited as special invitee.
Solo exhibition, Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi.
1995
Solo Exhibition, Sakshi Gallery, Mumbai.
'Bombay', presented by RPG Enterprises.
'River of Art', inaugural exhibition, Art Today.
1996
The Mahabharata, *The Card Player* and *The Scribe*— Kumar Gallery, New Delhi.
'A Tree in my Life', Village Gallery, New Delhi.
'The Moderns', inaugural exhibition, NGMA, Mumbai.
1997
'Tryst with Destiny', Art from Modern India 1947–1997, Singapore Art Museum, organized by CIMA Gallery, Calcutta.
'Six Modern Masters', Kumar Gallery, New Delhi.
1998
'The Probing Eye', an exhibition of photographs, Surendra Paul Art Gallery, New Delhi.
'Drawings', Guild Art Gallery, Mumbai.
1999
'Mahabharat', Gallery 7, Mumbai.
2001
'Living Legends of Indian Contemporary Art', Tao Art Gallery, Mumbai.
'In Conversations', curated by Gayatri Sinha at Gallery Espace, New Delhi.
Indian Art Circle, Habitat Centre, New Delhi.
Solo exhibition, Kumar Gallery, New Delhi.
Saffron Art and Pundole Art Gallery, New York.
2003
'Of Memories, Dreams, Reverses', at Anant, New Delhi.
Transition at UBS in London.
Exhibition of Drawings, Pundole art Gallery, Mumbai.
2004
Solo exhibition, 'An Airing' at Pundole Art Gallery, Mumbai.
2005
Solo exhibition, Berkeley Square Gallery, London.

SPECIAL PROJECTS

Laminated dawing, 7.6 feet x 80 feet mural at ITC WelcomHotel, Chola, Madras. (This has since been moved in blocks to WelcomHotel, Maurya's restaurant in the departure side of IG Airport, Delhi).

Mural: oil on canvas on the dome of WelcomHotel, Maurya Sheraton. Completed after four years in 1987.

Declaration Universelle Des Droits de L'Homme, 1998

Tryptich, oil on canvas, *The Legacy*, British Council in India, 7 feet x 15 feet.

Circular floor mural in mosaic in WWF building at Mahim Nature Park, Mumbai.

Memorial to Salim Ali, WWF Mahim Nature Park—assemblage of stone and grass.

Painting of St Francis with animals donated to WWF auctioned.

Photographic murals for Shipping Corporation of India. MMTC India at Expo 70, Osaka, Japan.

Photographic mural at Zagreb, Trade Fair.

REPRESENTED IN THE FOLLOWING PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi.
Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi.
Roopankar Museum of Art, Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal.
Punjab Museum, Chandigarh.
Birla Academy, Kolkata.
Air India, Mumbai; Steel Authority of India.
Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Mumbai.
Larsen & Toubro Ltd., Mumbai.
Jehangir Nicholson Museum of Art, Mumbai.
Madhaven Nair Museum of Art, Kochi.
Himachal Pradesh Museum of Art, Shimla.
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Yad Vasham, Jerusalem.
Contemporary Art Society, London.
DeMenil Foundation, Houston, Texas, USA.
New York University, Grey Art Gallery & Study Centre, New York, USA.
Glenbarra Museum, Fukuoka, Japan.
RPG Collection, Mumbai.

AWARDS, FELLOWSHIP AND HONOURS

1955
Commendation, Bombay Art Society Award, Bombay Art Society.
Saurashtra Government Award for oil painting.
1963–1964
Artist-in-Residence, American University, Washington DC.
1965
Award, Lalit Kala Akademi Annual Exhibition.
Fellowship of the Council for Economic & Cultural Affairs, New York, USA.
1968
Invited by West German Government to see *Documenta*.
1986
President's Award at Baghdad International Festival of Art.
1989
Gold Medal, First International Biennale of Art, Lahore, Pakistan.
Sahitya Kala Parishad Award, Delhi for distinguished work.
1990
Padma Shree from the President of India.
1997
Kala Ratna from All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society, Delhi.
2004
Lalit Kala Ratna from the President of India.

BOOKS, FILMS AND DOCUMENTARIES

1995
Salman Rushdie & The Lost Portrait, BBC London, directed by Chris Gramlund.
1996
The AR Show, Celeb: Krishen Khanna.
Growing Up, Episode VII, Beginnings & Ends, Krishen Khanna; RAQS, Media Collective.
The Story of Indian Painting, Episode 9–12, Cine Arts India, New Delhi.
1998
Maraqua-e-Nafees, ANZ Grindlays Bank
2005
Krishen Khanna: *The Embrace of Love* by Gayatri Sinha published by Mapin Publishing, Ahmedabad.
Krishen Khanna: A Critical Biography by Gayatri Sinha published by Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi.
2006
Forth coming:
Krishen Khanna: Chola Migrations and *Krishen Khanna: The Great Procession* by Norbert Lynton published by Mapin Publishing, Ahmedabad.

NOTE ON CONTRIBUTORS

Norbert Lynton, professor emeritus at the University of Sussex and former director of exhibitions for the Arts Council of Great Britain, has written widely on twentieth-century art. He is the author of *The Story of Modern Art* and co-author of *The Yale Dictionary of Art and Artists*.

Gayatri Sinha is an independent curator and art critic based in New Delhi. She has edited the seminal volume *Expressions and Evocations: Contemporary Women Artists in India*, *Woman/Goddess* and *Indian Art: An Overview*. She is also the author of *Krishen Khanna: A Critical Biography, The Art of Adimoolam* and *Krishen Khanna: The Embrace of Love*. Her curated exhibitions include 'The Self and the World' (National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, 1997), 'Vilas: The Idea of Pleasure' (Birla Academy, Mumbai, 2000), 'Cinema Still' (New Delhi, 2002), 'Woman/Goddess' (1998–2001, a travelling exhibition) and 'Middle Age Spread' (National Museum, New Delhi, 2004). She has been credited with a Department of Culture and a Ford Foundation award.

Ranjit Hoskote is a cultural theorist, independent curator and poet. He is the author of ten books. These include four studies of art and artists, of which the most recent is *Baiju Parthan: A User's Manual* (2006). He is also the author of four collections of poetry; the most recent of these is *Vanishing Acts: New & Selected Poems, 1985–2005* (2006). Hoskote has curated twelve exhibitions of Indian and Asian art, including a mid-career retrospective of Atul Dodiya (Japan Foundation, Tokyo, 2001) and a lifetime retrospective of Jehangir Sabavala (National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi and Bombay, 2005–06). He was also co-curator for 'Under Construction', a collaborative trans-Asian curatorial project developed for the Japan Foundation (2001–02).

On her first visit to India, **Marilyn Rushton** was told by a clairvoyant that she would return to India many times. Now, nearly ten years later and after many trips, she has an ever-expanding collection of Indian contemporary art. She is a lawyer and an academic and also teaches Management and Maritime Law–related courses at the London Institute of Shipping and Transport and Schiller International University (London).

Tanuj Berry is the Managing Director of Namtech Business School and Bertech Infotech Ltd. He is the author of *Mathematical Methods for Economists* (1994) and *The Indian Stock Market – To Buy or Not to Buy* (1995). He is a friend of Krishen Khanna's and a collector of modern and contemporary Indian art. He has been involved with a number of significant projects and publications on many important Indian artists.

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