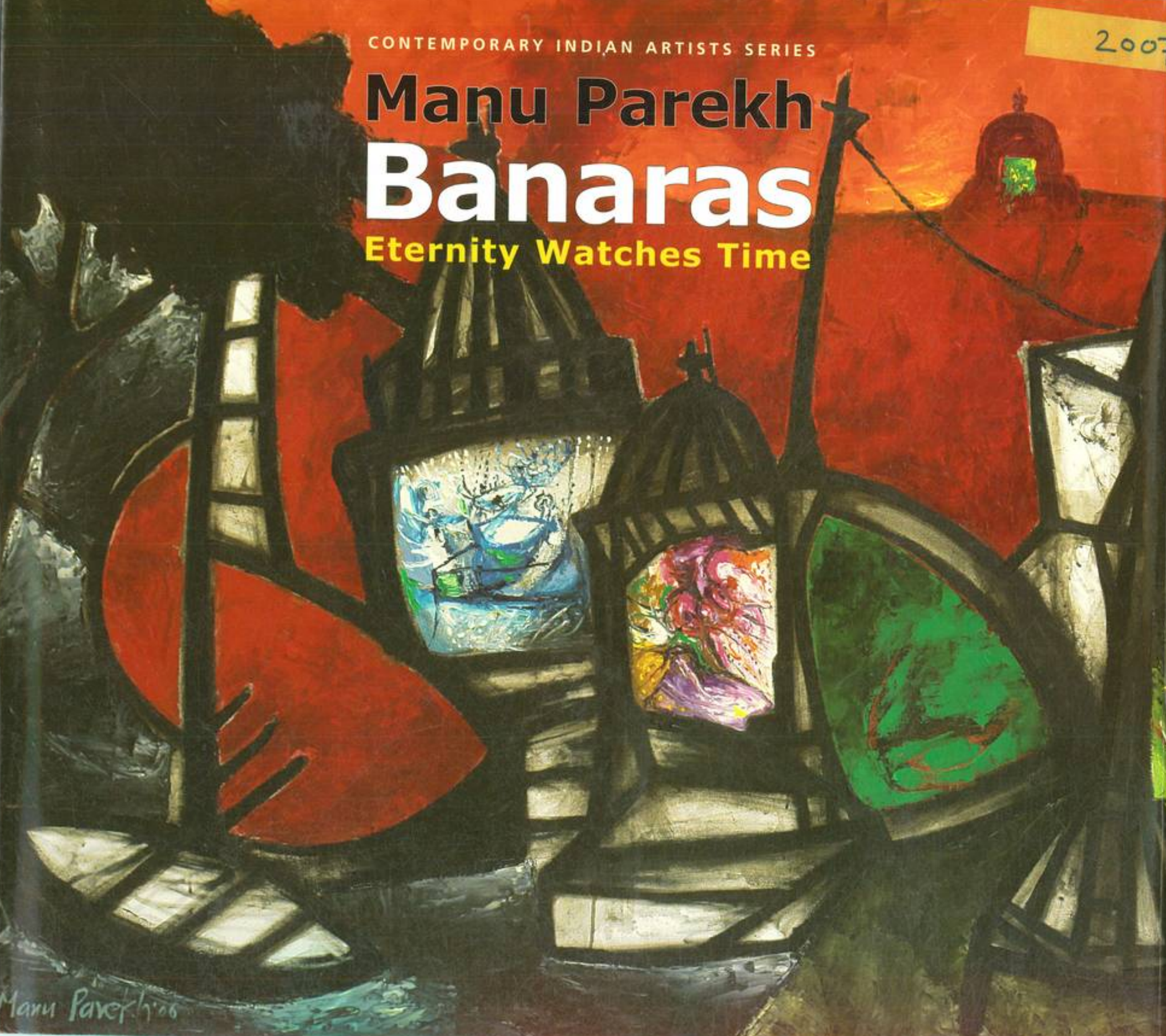
2007

CONTEMPORARY INDIAN ARTISTS SERIES

Manu Parekh

Banaras

Eternity Watches Time





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Manu Parekh
BANARAS
Eternity Watches Time

Essays by Aditi De, Meera Menezes, Peter Osborne, Marilyn Rushton, Jeet Thayil, Ashok Vajpeyi and Tanuj Berry

Banaras is the religious capital of India. Situated on the Ganges, it is a pilgrimage site for the Hindu faithful to bathe in the sacred river. Banaras contains more than 1,500 temples and mosques. Almost all of the city's five kilometres of river banks have been converted into ghats. Banaras has over a hundred bathing and burning ghats, of which Manikarnika ghat is the most sacred. This is the main burning ghat and one of the most auspicious places. Day and night, the fires burn at Manikarnika ghat and the remains of the dead are scattered upon the river. To die in Banaras is to die blessed; many move here to live out their final days.

Manu Parekh has executed a series of paintings inspired by the city. In turn, this book is a collection of the essays by seven writers who have been inspired by his work in this series. Tanuj Berry considers the use of red in the Banaras paintings while Aditi De looks at the theme of holiness and pilgrimage. We hear the voice of Manu Parekh in the inclusion of an interview with the artist in which he explains what attracted him to Banaras and how the city ignited his creativity. Thematic issues are treated by several of the essayists including a comparison with icon painting. These essays offer a thorough assessment of the themes and motivations in the series.

Manu Parekh made a conscious decision to concentrate on landscape in the series to give himself the opportunity to play out the dynamic of faith and fear that he identifies as uniquely Indian. The Banaras series is a symbolic rendering of this relationship. Painted in the Indian Expressionist style these works have a significant role in the development of modern Indian painting.

With 139 colour illustrations and 14 foldouts

Jacket:
Front—*Banaras Sunset*, detail, see page 8
Back—*Banaras at Dawn*, detail, see page 142

Aditi De is a writer, columnist and editor. She is the author of *Articulations: Voices from Contemporary Indian Visual Art (2004)*.

Meera Menezes is a producer at the South Asia ARD First German Television. She has been involved in the contemporary Indian art scene since the late eighties.

Peter Osborne worked at Christie's Contemporary Art and was a chairman of the Harlech Fine Art group. He co-founded the Osborne Samuel Gallery in 2004.

Marilyn Rushton is a lawyer and an academic with a strong interest in contemporary Indian art.

Jeet Thayil is a poet and has received awards from the New York Foundation for the Arts and the Rockefeller Foundation.

Ashok Vajpeyi is an eminent poet-critic who composes on the visual arts. He is currently working on a book about SH Raza.

Tanuj Berry is a friend and collector of Manu Parekh's art. He has been involved with a number of significant publications on Indian artists.

Other titles of interest:

Krishen Khanna
Images in My Time

The Dancer on the Horse
Reflections on the Art of Iranna GR
Ranjit Hoskote

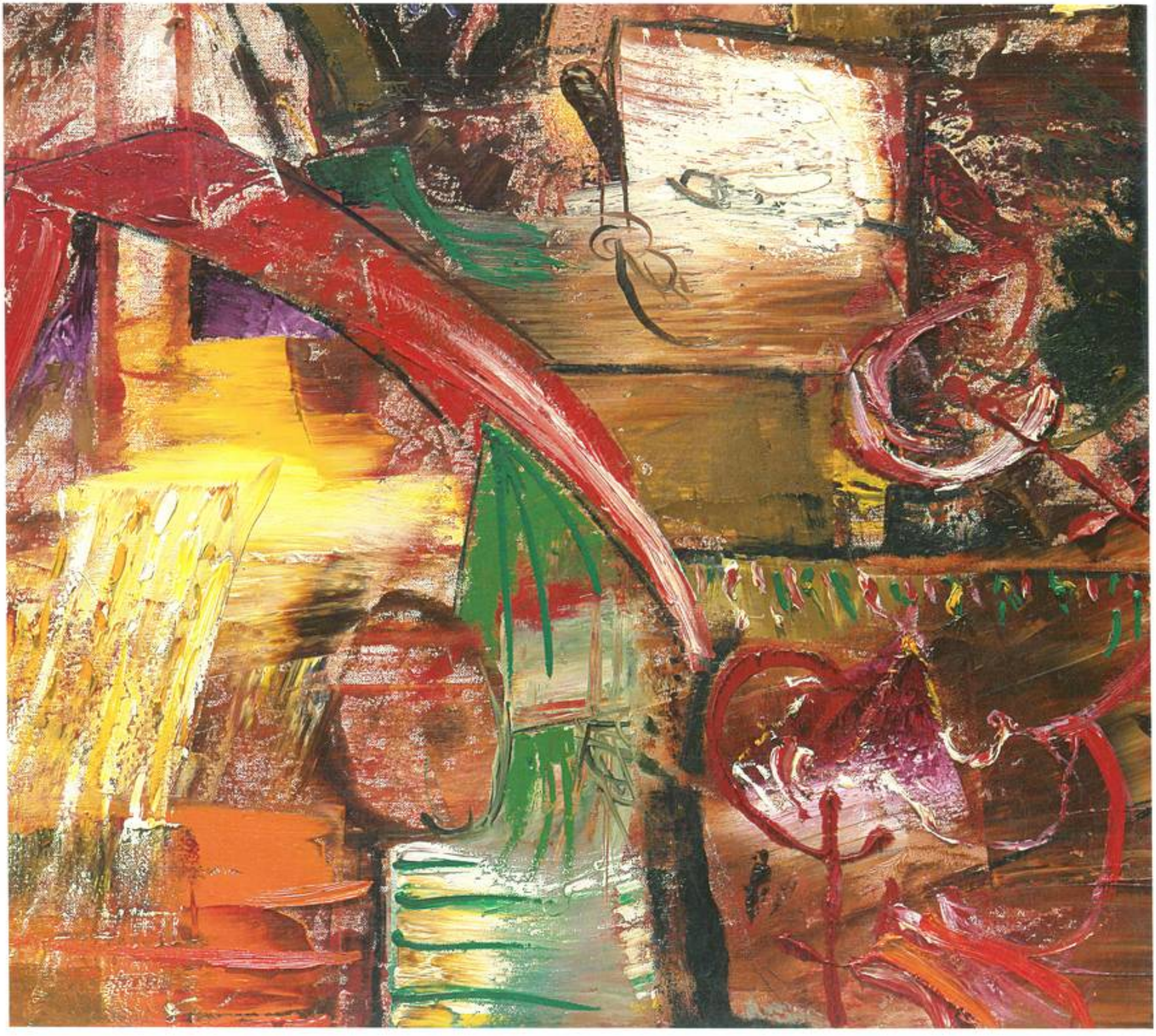
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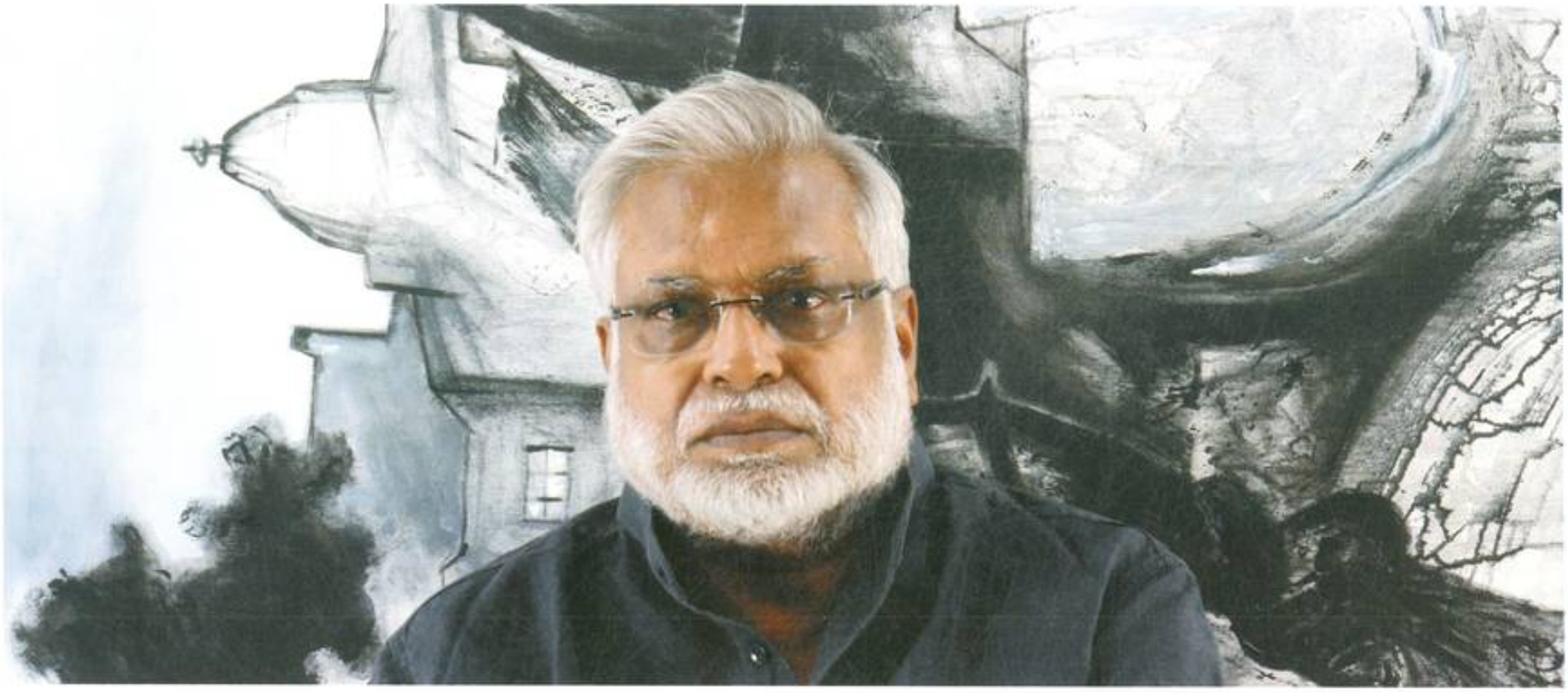
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To
my father
&
Madhvi's father

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Foreword

Manu Parekh's first book on Banaras landscapes, *Banaras: Painting the Sacred City* was published in 2005 and launched alongside a magnificent exhibition of select works from the book at the National Gallery of Modern Art in Delhi. It was followed by an exhibition in London at the Berkeley Square Gallery. The success of these was exhilarating and built up an air of expectation about the works that were to follow.

After one of his recurrent expeditions across the globe, Manu returned to Delhi with an oversized edition of Claude Monet's *Water Lilies*. At the Museum of Modern Art in New York he had viewed Monet alongside Jackson Pollock and was convinced that he wanted to combine their styles – Monet's sparkling brushwork and Pollock's use of materials – to create a massive scale on which to explore the landscapes of Banaras. It was something that he had not attempted before.

He rented a new studio which could accommodate works of this format as his existing studio had size limitations and he embarked on the works represented in this book – the fourteen colossal Banaras landscapes.

Having witnessed the evolution of the entire project, and seen the effort and commitment that went into each painting, it is at times difficult to fathom that all of this could have been completed by Manu in less than two years. We are privileged to have some of these important works as part of our personal art collection.

Fortunate are those who have been to Banaras but privileged are those who will visit it for the first time after having seen these paintings. They will have seen Manu Parekh's mythical Banaras with its swirling colours and hidden life before they see the physical entity made of mortar and bricks and teeming humanity.

Tanuj Berry & Saman Malik
December 2006
New Delhi



Banaras Sunset, triptych, acrylic on canvas, 204 x 45", 2006

A Sanctum of the Human Spirit

Aditi De

Silence sears the scenic edges with light. The incandescence of souls soaring, dipping, fleeting towards a sanctuary. The unspoken cadences of a quest for questions. The footfalls of faith doing a *parikrama* (ritual circular walk around a shrine or a temple) of an ancient sanctum sanctorum. One couched as a city. A city named Banaras.

Amidst the ebb and flow of light and shadow is a surge of abstraction: of a clash between the spiritual and the material being–a meeting, a parting, then an unequivocal bonding; of rites by wafted waves of incense and *homa* (fire worship) rites; of ancient chants and contemporary negotiations, but above all, most dominantly, of total faith; of the interstices of birth, death and marriage on the ghats by the Ganga, an eternal flow since time immemorial; of flickering flames and blooms that echo through shrines, past temples and dwellings of celebrants and mourners alike, a context beyond the mere migratory gaze, the fleeting passer-through.

Shadows crisscross the still, silent reaches. Not through the dramatic jostle and surge of humanity to evoke ancestry, or float lamps on hallowed waters. Not even as a painted chant derived from time-honoured scriptures.

Instead, the arc of the sky on fire blesses the dusk-dusted waters. A bright hibiscus blossom floats out of a smoke-lit shrine, evoking an invisible human presence–a priest, a mendicant, a seeker. Black plastered on black offers transient glimpses of worship, a quiet interlude between passionate engagements with life, with ritual, with religion. A blanking out of colour, yet a setting free of hues unnamed, untrammelled, so far uncreated.

The passion exults in a tumult of acrylic and oils, singeing the canvas. Domed temples loom against skeletal branches, almost like shadow warriors, perhaps defenders of the faith. *Rangoli* (decorative patterning made with coloured powders to signify auspiciousness) riddles fuse the past and present into a melded, yet fluid, future. Celebration jousts with mourning in its winding streets, its open courtyards, its eternal river, through mindspaces that parallel the journey of life.

On the canvas lie mere hints. Of journeys without route maps. Or puzzles sans solutions. Or even landscapes untraceable by a normal intelligence.

What is this mythic landscape? Peopled by Shaivite shades, by the eternal union of Varuna and Assi, a fusion beyond mere tributaries or a divine conclave. Or even a vision beyond the 108 avatars. Reincarnated, rising from the ashes of each creation, infinitely potent, indestructible beyond imagining. And deeply imbued with the power to wash away all earthly sins.



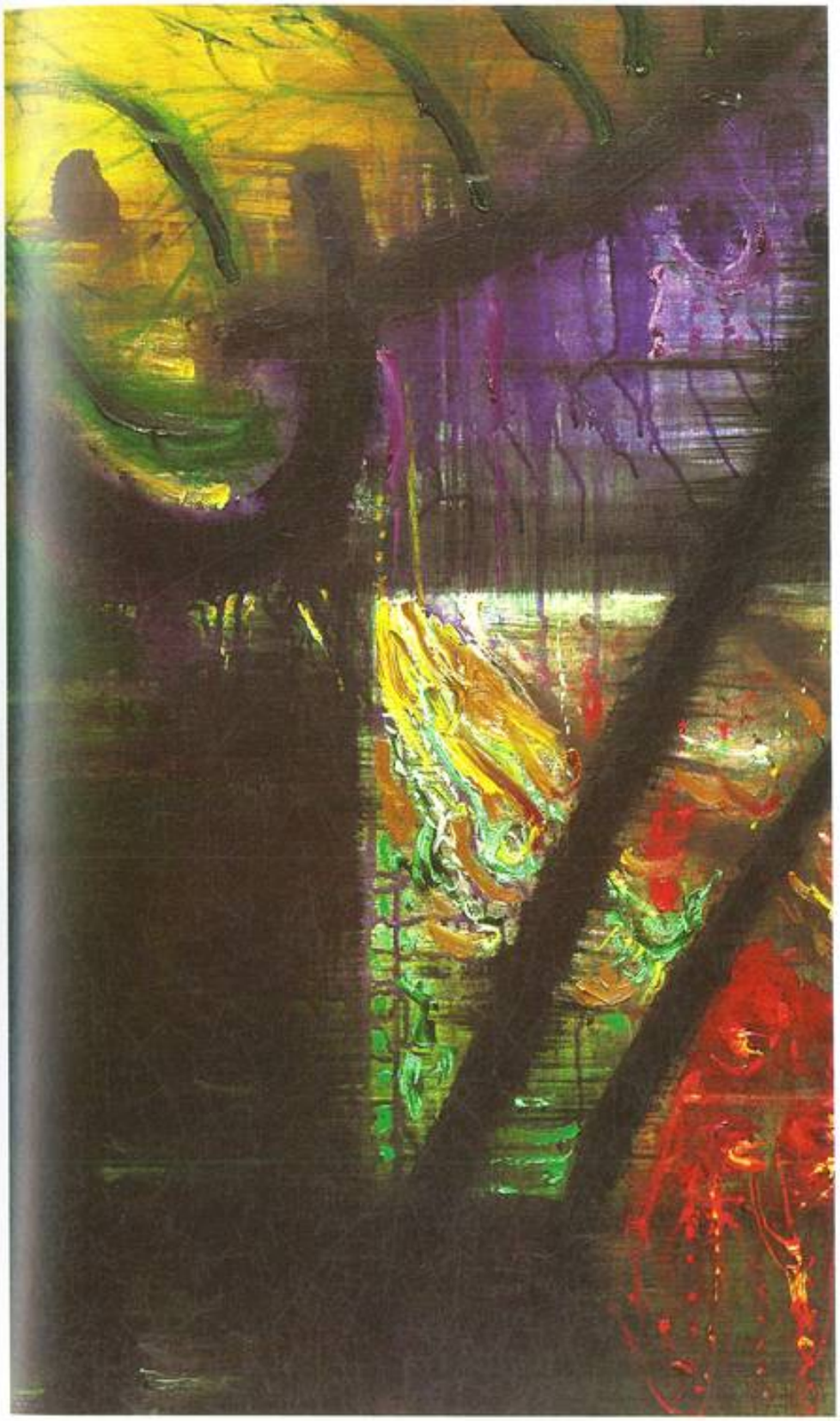
Awash in brush strokes propelled by emotion, orgasmic colour frets, fumes, fusses and pauses for no man. It synthesizes dawn and dusk in a timeless city. It harnesses the mutual ecstasy of darkness and light. It mutes, suggests, then shrouds over, the potency of a higher power.

Can a city ever embody all the thoughts of its denizens since the moment it rose from the dust? Why should religion be stifled by a name, a face, a local habitation? What dreams, what prayers, what progressive thoughts direct its longevity, its teeming paean to a world beyond the merely mortal?

Is Banaras, then, a search for a resting space for ancestral spirits? A destination between the now and the thereafter? An elusive eternal search without an anchor, or even a horizon?

Images, ideas, idylls breeze down the sacred river, perhaps to the tune of Vyasa's hymns or Kabir's *dohas* (couplets in verse) that evoke bliss amidst the tumult of life. Or the haunting notes of Ustad Bismillah Khan's *shehnai* (wind instrument) or N Rajam's violin. Pausing to glance at the *jamdani* (fine muslin) saris, lustrous silks threaded through with intricate gold. Stopping by at each shrine that throbs with wishes, prayers, even gratitude for an ancestral soul set free. Or stepping over the threshold of the Kasi Viswanath Temple, with a prayer on the lips, faith pulsing through every cell.

Faceless, without figures, the city teems with spirit, with time-stilled voices. With pleas that defy age. With an overvaulting prayer. With *diyas* (lamps) that bob, skip and ride the riverine eddies to their ultimate end,



uncharted yet. With ashes and newborn cries, marriage rites and *sraddh* (memorial) ceremonies, celebrating the incessant cycle of birth and death. En route to *moksha* (liberation) from the ever after. Sin-free after a holy dip.

Banaras is where whatever is sacrificed, chanted, donated as charity or suffered in penance makes its mark, whether as *rangolis* on the streets or as a contemporary canvas. Legends and lore surge over the waters. Carrying along the memory of 3000 years of human habitation. Of the *jnana vapi* (the well of wisdom) said to have been dug by Lord Shiva–its waters tinted by liquid *jhana* (the light of wisdom).

Can anyone evoke the 3300 million shrines that dot the cityscape? Or the half a million images of deities? Can this giant cremation ground, this *mahashamshana*, free

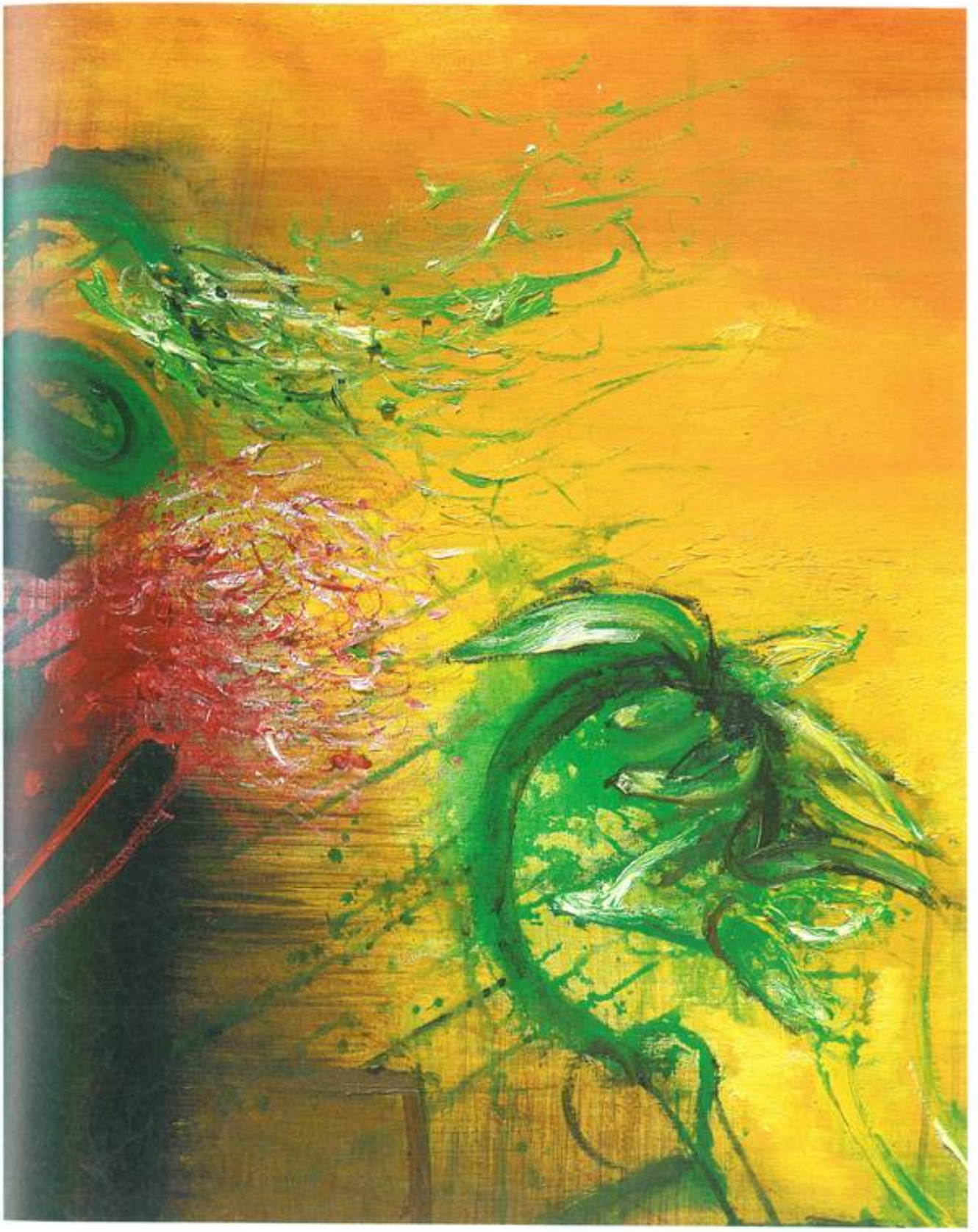
souls from the rigorous cycle of life and death? Can this eternal city encompass death known and faced, transformed and transcended?

Amidst its once rolling hills, lush forests and natural springs, enlightened souls stopped by to meditate over the unfathomable. Among them were Buddha and Mahavira, Kabir and Tulsidas, Sankaracharya, Patanjali and Ramanuja.

This triptych by Manu Parekh pays obeisance to the inspiration that coursed through his blood as he created a canvas that addressed a Banaras beyond the city his imagination has captured over the past 25 years. Like *The Water Lilies* by Claude Monet or the lyrical landscapes of Rabindranath Tagore and FN Souza. Each glance backward refers to the alchemist's vat his brush dips into.

This is not the Banaras of philosophers or mendicants. It shies away from hidebound rituals. It affords mental spaces for retorts, for doubts, for divergences that could prove tumultuous.

At the very heart of this virile landscape lies tranquillity. Silence. Stillness. Even a faceless godhead. For Banaras wafts off the canvas not as a mere state of mind, but as the sanctum of the human spirit.







15 Banaras Sunset















Night Landscape of Banaras, diptych, oil on canvas, 144 x 48", 2004

Night Landscape of Banaras

Peter Osborne

Night, when words fade and things come alive. When the destructive analysis of day is done, and all that is truly important becomes whole and sound again. When man reassembles his fragmentary self and grows with the calm of a tree.[1]

These words from the French writer Antoine de St Exupery capture the essence of Banaras at night. Manu Parekh's great diptych *Night Landscape of Banaras* dramatically articulates the nocturnal spirit of the city. Bathed by moonlight, the cloak of darkness veils but does not still its beating heart. Banaras is evidently not a tranquil place. One senses that behind this veil much is going on, the shades of night creating a thin screen that is cast like a curtain before a stage. The sacred river is the stage itself, around which everything turns and the vast theatrical panoply of the city is the omnipresent backdrop.

In *Comus*, the poet John Milton asks, 'What hath night to do with sleep.'[2]

Of course, the city never sleeps and Manu Parekh captures the beating heart of this extraordinary place. His brush sweeps across the familiar structures; one senses the eternal cycle of time, ebbing and flowing, with the dawn and dusk reaffirming the fundamental rhythm of our lives.

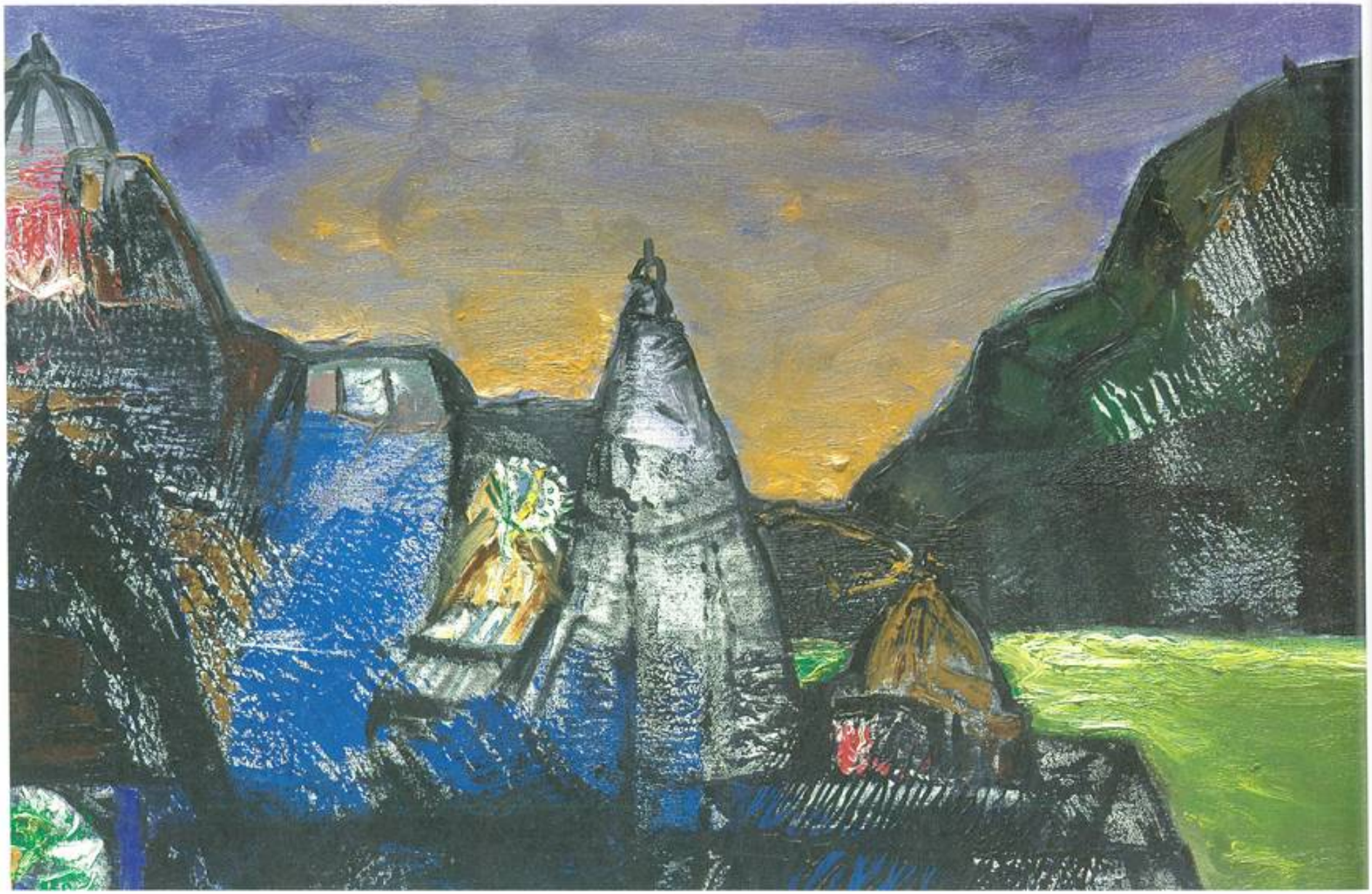
I asked a friend who had recently visited Banaras to recall for me the essence of that experience. He straightaway described the emotional impact of walking through the deserted streets in the hour before dawn, recognizing the first stirrings of the new day. This is the place that Parekh knows intimately and depicts so often and so dramatically.

The city is still, quiescent, draped in the subdued colours of the night. And yet the artist has brilliant yellow and vivid orange on his palette, picking out the outlines of shrines and habitations, the brightly lit interiors signalling that the spiritual heart of the city remains constant.

Rabindranath Tagore writes in *Fireflies*:

The darkness of night, like pain, is dumb
The darkness of dawn, like peace is silent.[3]

Manu Parekh constructs this vast landscape on several planes, using alternating tonalities to define and contrast the perspectival layers. The glow of the night sky creates a celestial backdrop for the deep blue and black silhouettes of the cityscape. In the foreground, the silvery tones return as the artist with bold expressionistic brush strokes allows the moonlight to catch the jagged contours of the riparian facades. And before this the



sacred river reflects the night sky, underlining the composition, recalling to the viewer that whilst the city sleeps, the river flows on.

And what of the actors in this drama? Parekh's Banaras landscapes are usually devoid of visible humanity, and yet there can be no doubt that everywhere where there is light there is life. The pulse of Banaras beats unabated throughout the night, cloaked by the artist in the cobalt and midnight blues of his nocturnal palette. The relentless diurnal rhythm and routine slows, a pregnant pause before the inevitable dawn brings new life and hope and the eternal life-cycle continues. Shakespeare emphasises the mystery and magic of this time to develop dramatic tension. The Chorus in *Henry V*, in a favourite passage, describes the scene:

> *Now entertain conjecture of a time*
> *When creeping murmur, and the poring dark*
> *Fills the wide vessel of the universe.*[4]

King Harry walks unnoticed amongst the campfires and tents of his army in the hours before dawn. There is a theatrical analogy here. In visual terms, the campfires are Parekh's burning ghats, the soldiers' tents are the shrines. One senses the life forces hidden by the veil of night.



Parekh's expression of the sacred city is an abstracted essence, a highly personal response to the particular iconography. This is not literal landscape painting–far from it. The artist responds to the sense of place, and the fundamental forces that move it; the cycle of life and death, the brilliant colours that decorate and define the city, the almost primeval forces that drive the vast numbers of pilgrims through this revered place and the mighty river that defines and literally underlines the city. A great painter such as Parekh, transported emotionally by the sights and sounds of this place, will absorb the visual alphabet; it will soak into his very subconscious and then later re-emerge onto a blank canvas.

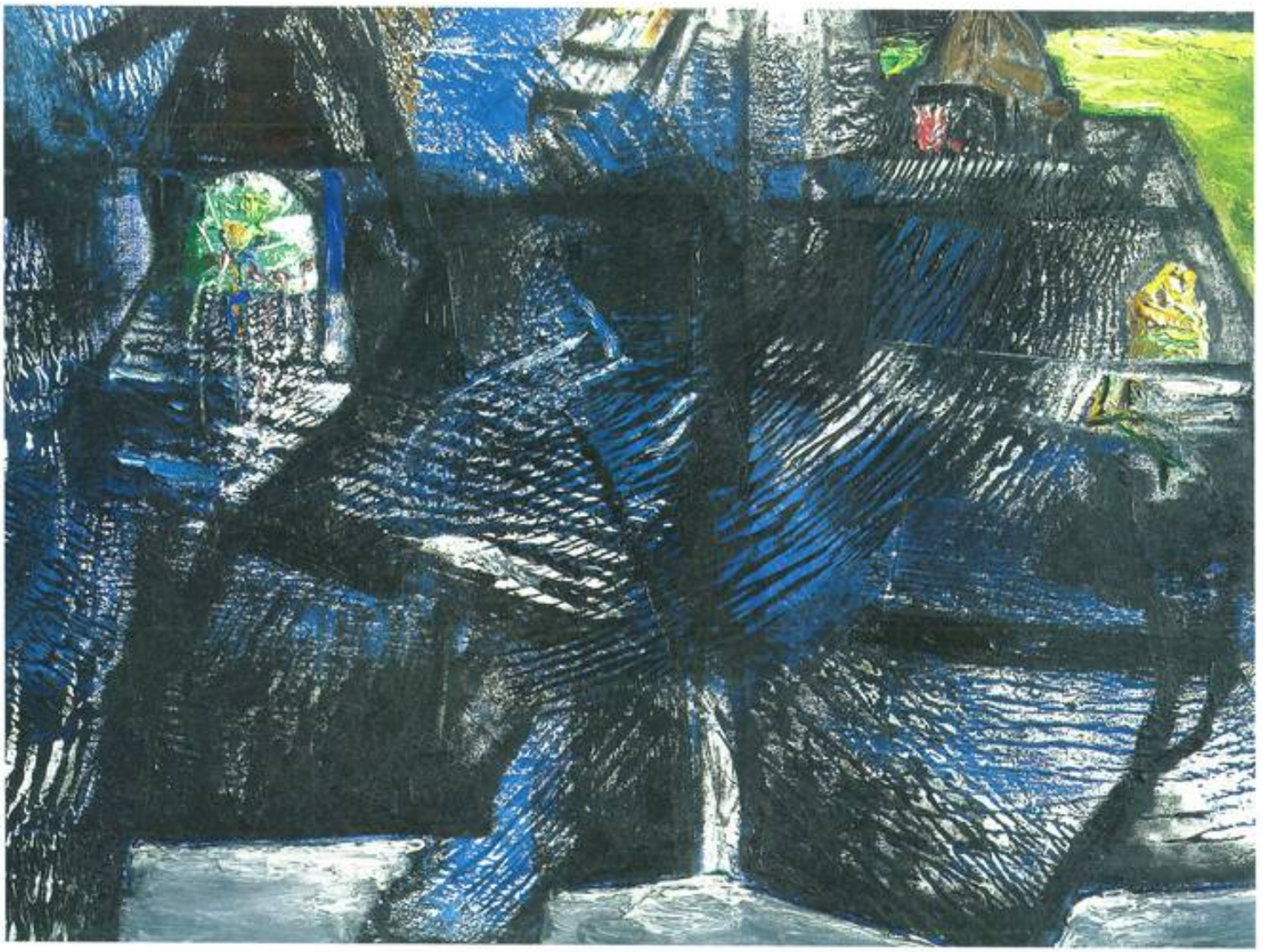
This is a visual language–an auto-suggestive pictorial exploration. These immense works are mural in their compositional structure, but not narrative in their framework. The marks are bold, gestural, dramatic, theatrical. This place, described as the oldest city in the world to be continuously inhabited, celebrates the Alpha and Omega of our time on this earth, a rapturous adventure that is absolute, as finite as the flare of the funeral pyre when the last vestiges of our earthly existence are borne away on the sacred river.

1 Antoine de St Exupery, *Flight to Arras* (London: Penguin, 2000).

2 John Milton, *Comus* (London: H Robinson, 1637).

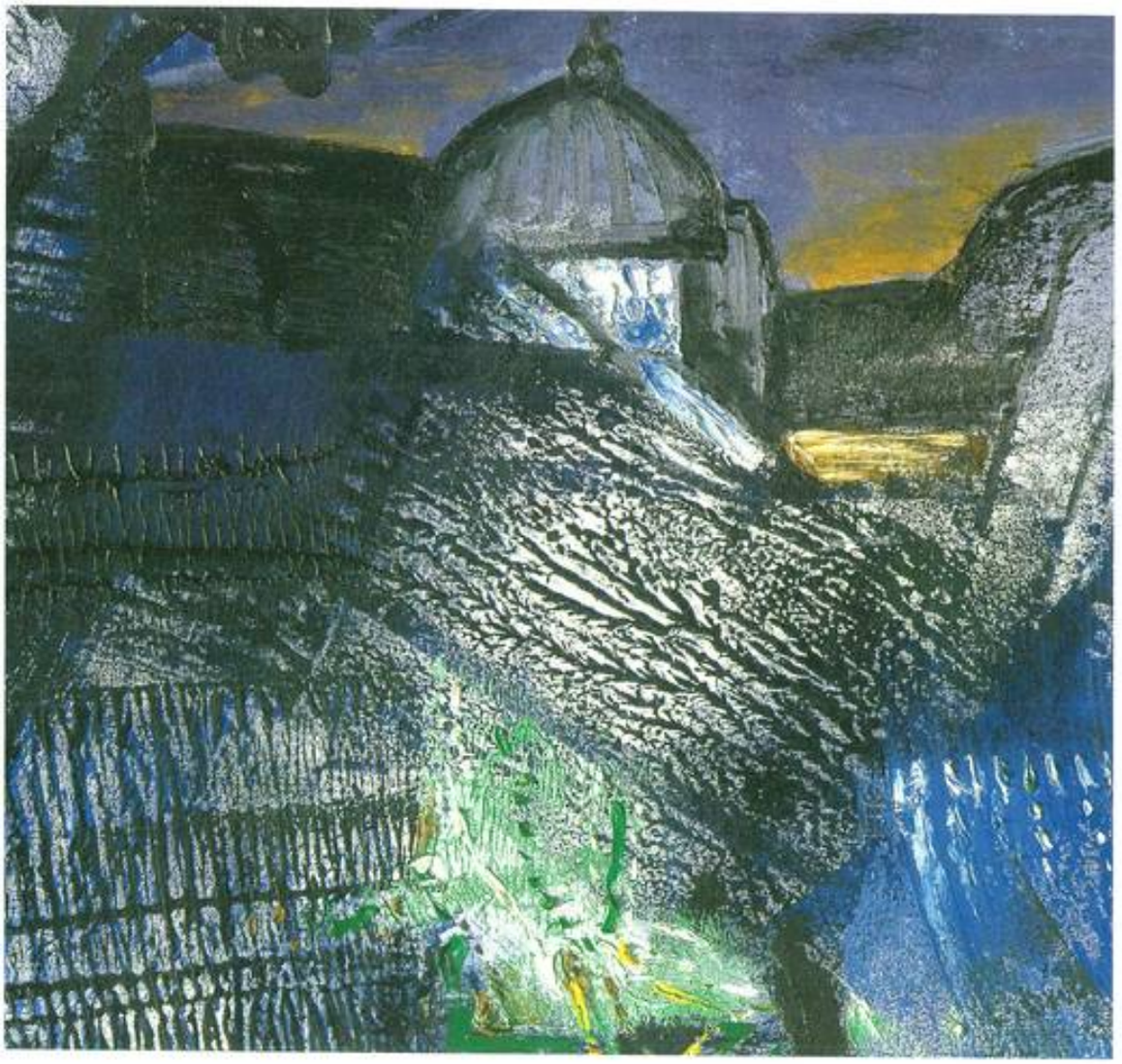
3 Rabindranath Tagore, *Fireflies* (New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2002).

4 William Shakespeare, *Henry V*, Act IV, Prologue (London: Oxford University Press, 2005).



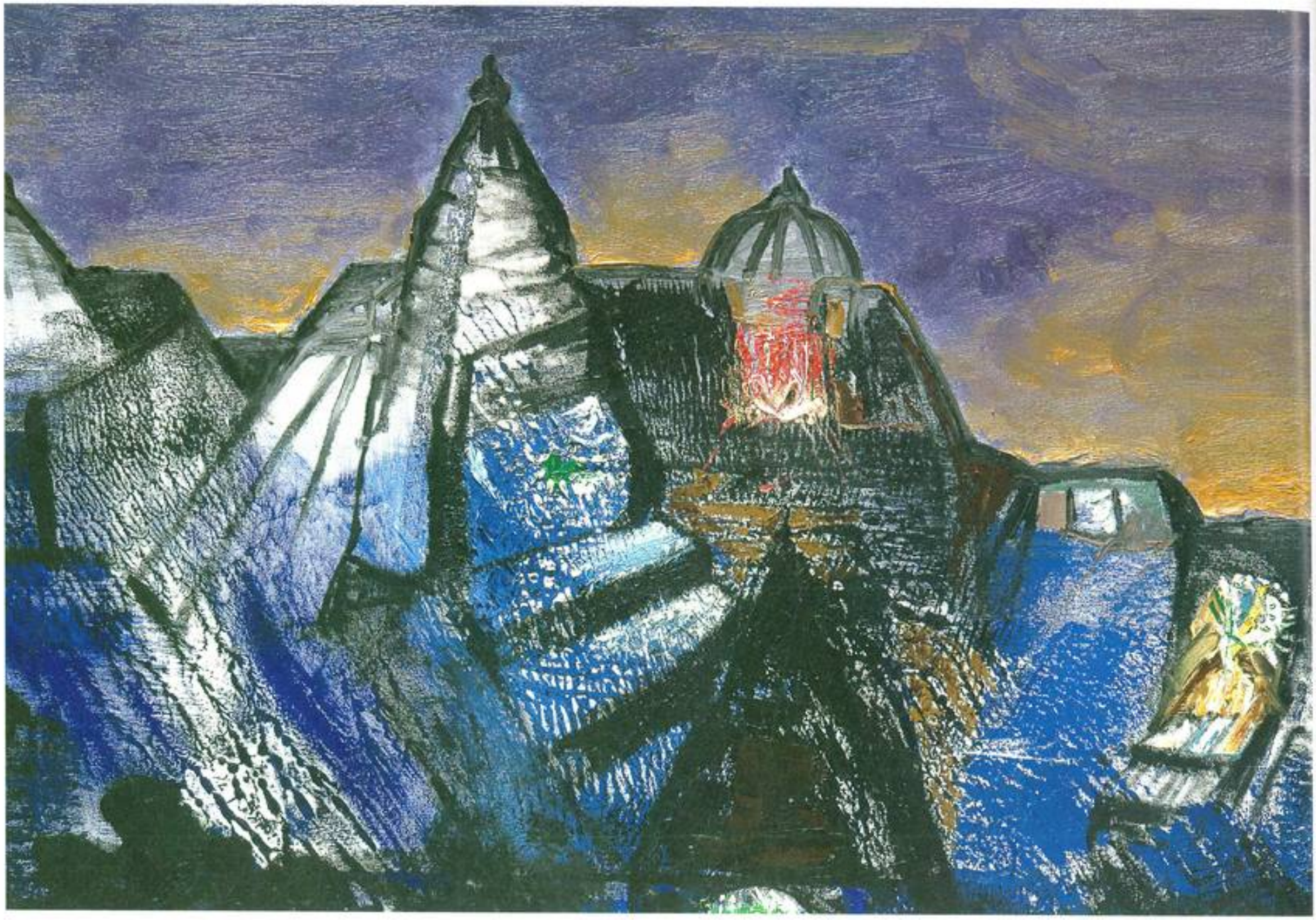

Manu Parekh 10/04


Manu Parekh 10 of 1













Holy Water at Banaras, triptych, oil on canvas, 180 x 40", 2005

Eternity Watches Time

Ashok Vajpeyi

The three-part blue-and-green painting *Holy Water at Banaras* seems to suggest, in the first instance, that the Indian landscape is deeply rooted; the trees, the temples, the stairs, the arches, the pathways, the reflecting water, the lights, the colourful flags are all a natural and spontaneous growth. They appear in an organic connectivity. They are in an intensely rejuvenating relationship: each gives and takes life to and from the other. They are notes in a meaningfully orchestrated composition; an alphabet of objects put together imaginatively to reveal the reality of a timeless continuum of Banaras. At one level, you discern some kind of playfulness creating a kind of architectural fantasy. You can see that the temples are being discovered compositionally–they answer to the needs of composition. The abode of God is ultimately an element humans compose in the fabric of life and habitation. God may be 'Swayambhu' (self-born), but temples are created by humans.

In keeping with the general pattern of the series, Manu Parekh encloses the three-part painting through the mechanical device of a roller, which creates tense line-patterns in rhythmic flow. And there is water, flowing, reflecting, and somewhere still. Water encloses Banaras; Banaras flows from and into water. As the great Russian poet Joseph Brodsky said, 'water equals time and provides beauty with its double.' Here, in this work of art, water is time.

In a somewhat monochromatic composition, there is another dominant element: light. The dark, the luminous, the shaded. The interplay between God-made light, natural light and the manmade light–temple lights. Again, in Banaras, there is a constant rhythm of the two kinds of light, the divine and the human, the spiritual and the sensuous. It is the duality of these lights that reveal and conceal the drama, the cosmic theatre, the *lila* (divine play) of being and becoming in Banaras.

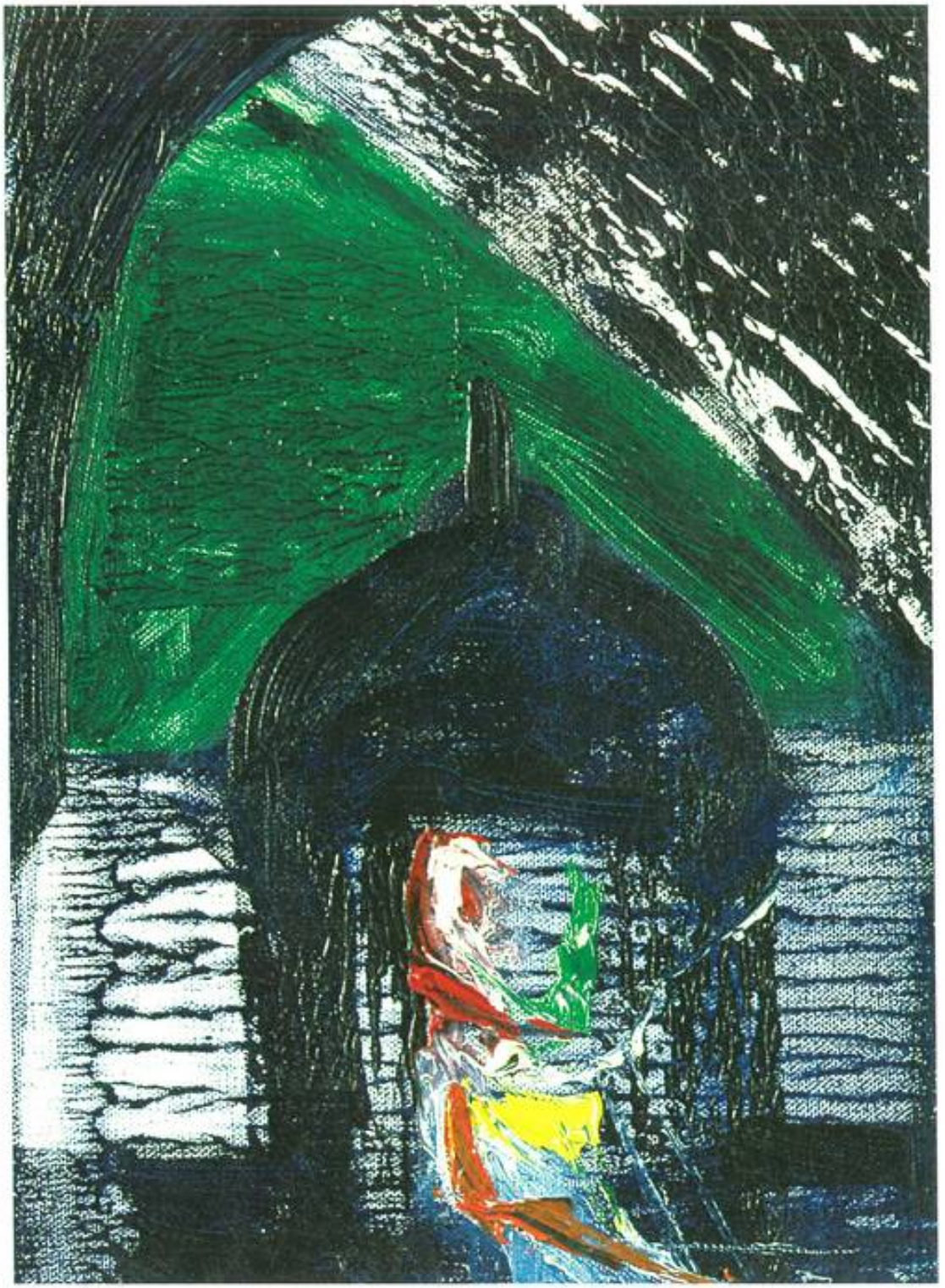
The green, whether of water, trees or of the sky is an enveloping green; in fact, many greens surround and flow around like the very sap of life. They make the still life or lives of the Banaras elements, temples, ghats, corridors, pathways breathe and pulsate with life; they quicken them into vibrant presences, all interwoven with each other, although located apart. It would appear as if the painting is a symphony of green wherein the accumulated images are notes placed carefully to resonate, echo, to sing in silence somewhere between the utterly human and the possibly divine. Just as each note conceals behind, if not embodies in itself an unanticipated location, an unsuspected intimation, each component of the triptych appears like a small text behind which lurks the larger text, the unread Banaras; a Banaras which the sum of all images still fails to enact in full measure but which makes itself felt, even if ultimately unreachable.



At yet another level, the painting could be viewed as a tapestry in which the absence of human figures is cleverly woven into all that is largely made, inhabited and surrounded by humans. The reds and yellows of the little flags and leaves, on the one hand, provide a light relief from the overwhelming green and the well-settled dark. On the other hand, they appear to be the slender threads which bind the scape together, ever so delicately. They perhaps indicate the fragility of the bond as well. Pictorially, the heavy and crowded coloured space is lyrically punctuated by them. The desolation of an otherwise crowded space is being watched by patches of what appears to be a twilight sky: the painting accommodates the sky on its periphery, allowing it to provide a perspective. All spaces are ultimately contiguous. Some trees look sagacious, quiet and undisturbed; others are in fury, bent in agitation.

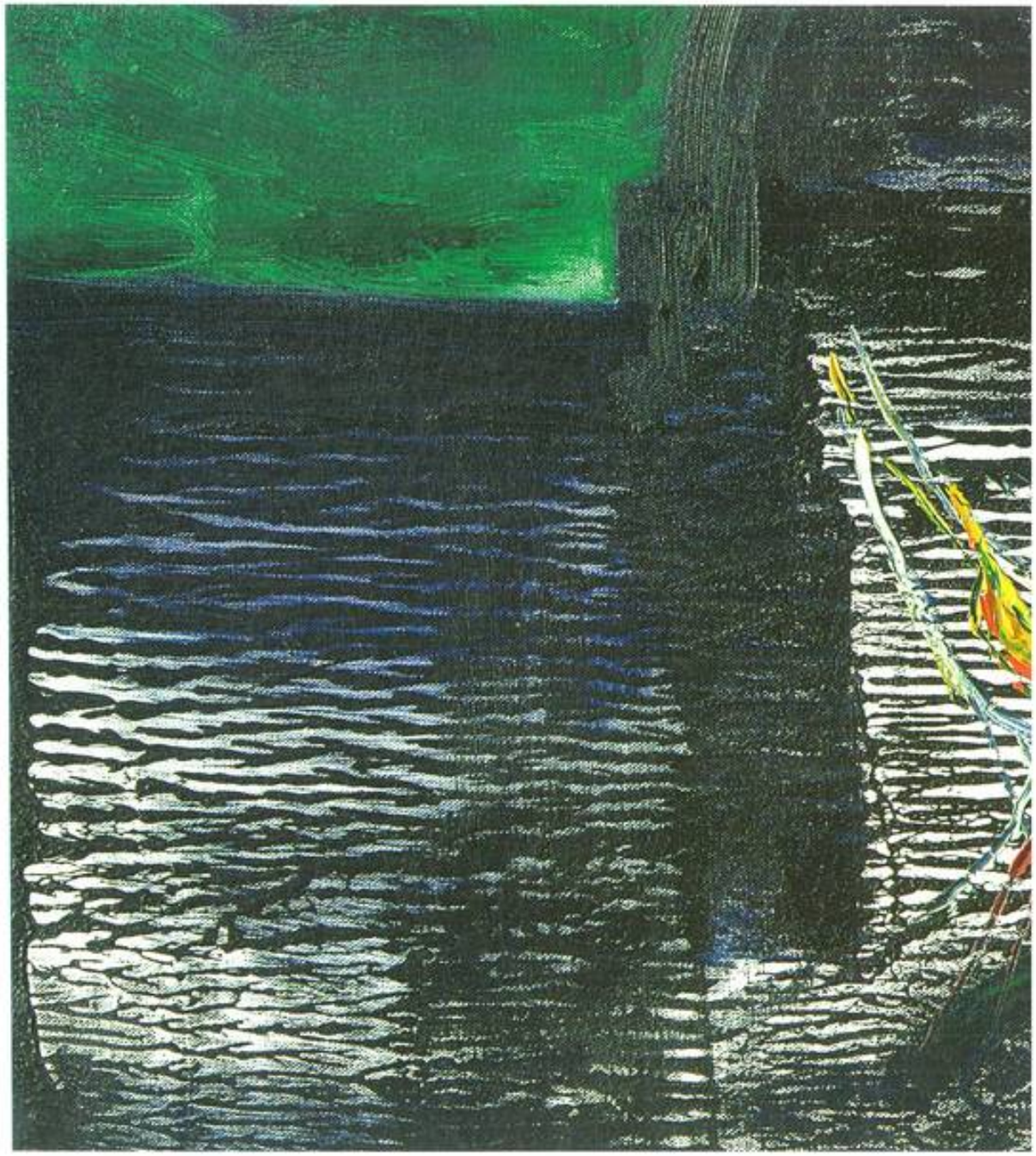
Manu Parekh's paintings are windows: through them, you discover the holy city. It is as if eternity watches time through these windows. *Holy Water at Banaras* makes you to traverse it bit by bit, observing the various subtle details, piecing them together and putting them aside again as you move on. It gives you the impression of being parts forming a whole in themselves, and yet also remaining parts of an endless 'Banarascape', which is simultaneously landscape of the holy city and inscape of its mythical, historical and modern existence. We should be grateful to the art which is so enabling.

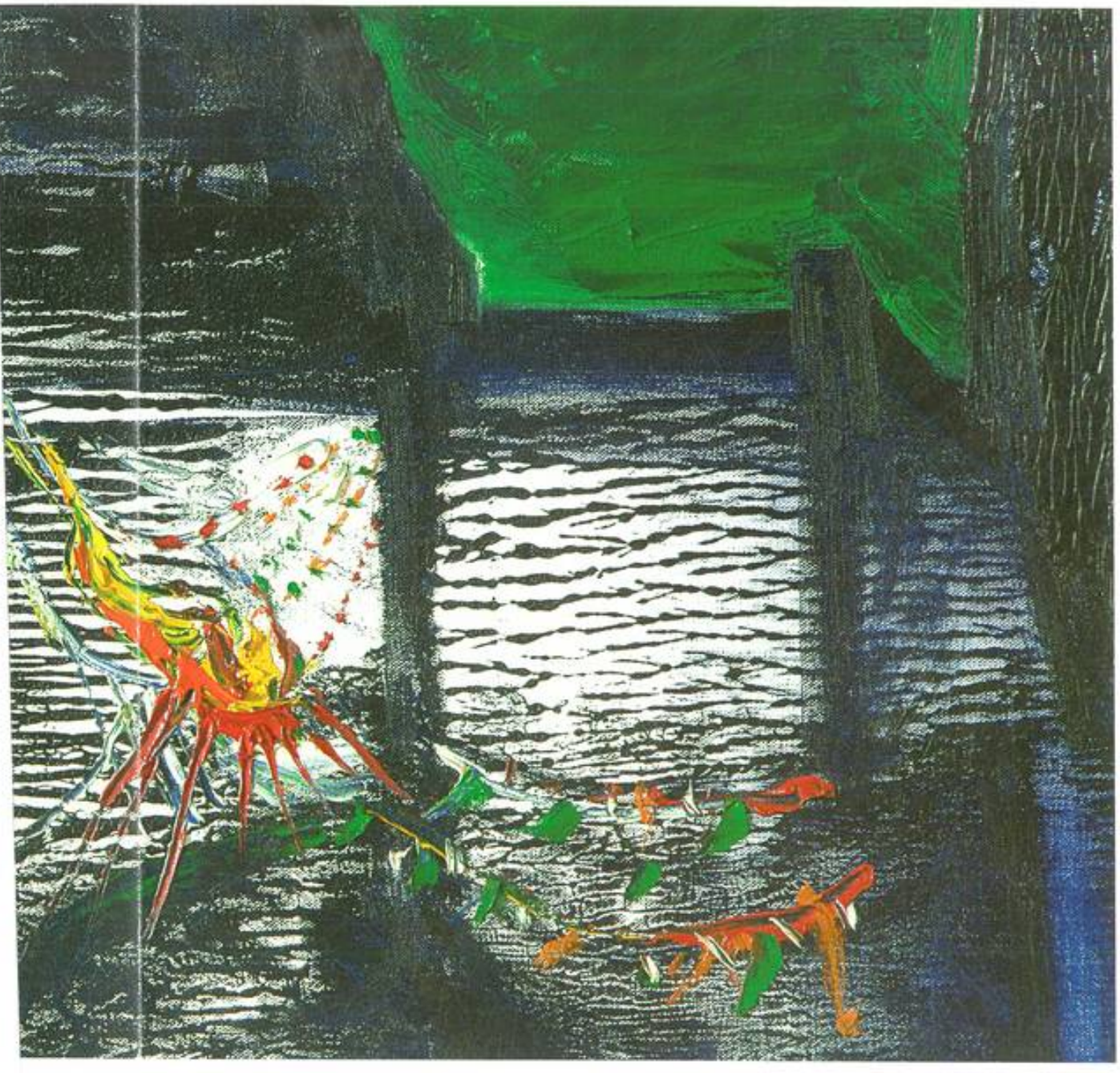
Banaras is eternal, endless, ever-flowing, ever-going: the scapes try to capture the flow, the rhythm, the interminable being of Banaras. They remain still but you move on with a bit of Banaras resonating within you quietly.









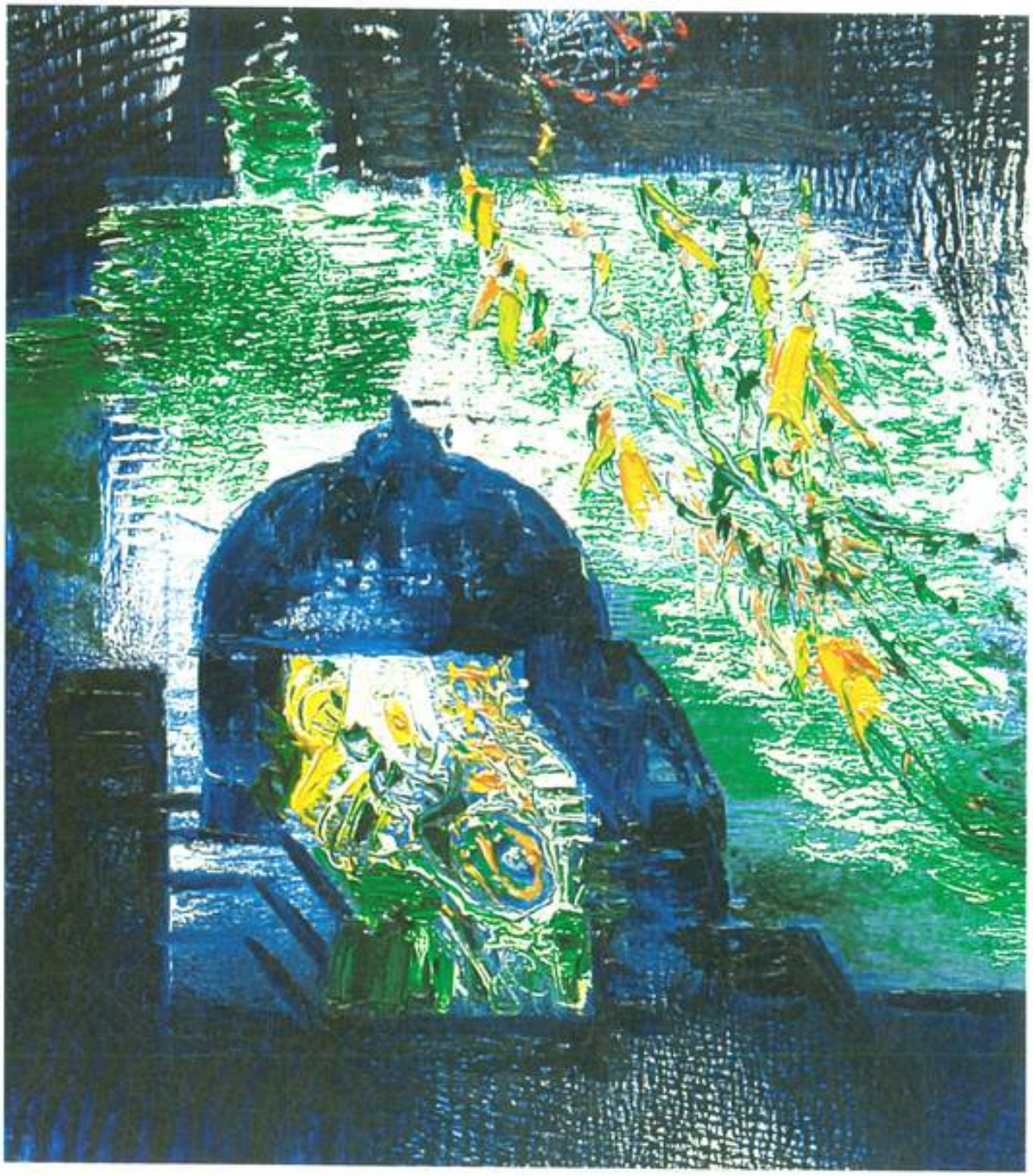


44 Holy Water at Banaras

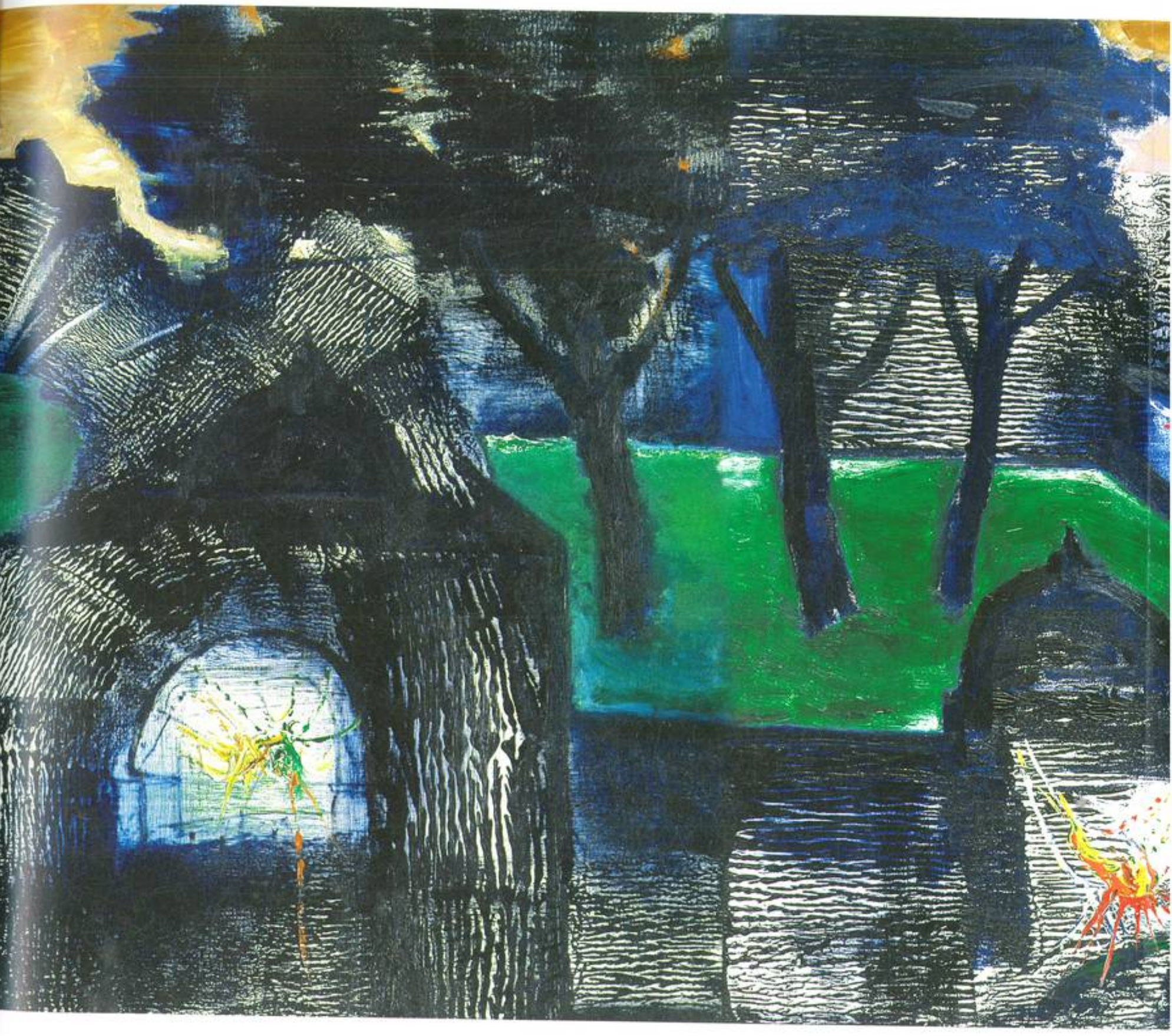


45 Holy Water at Banaras











Banaras, diptych, oil on canvas, 144 x 48", 2005

Landscape as Mindscape

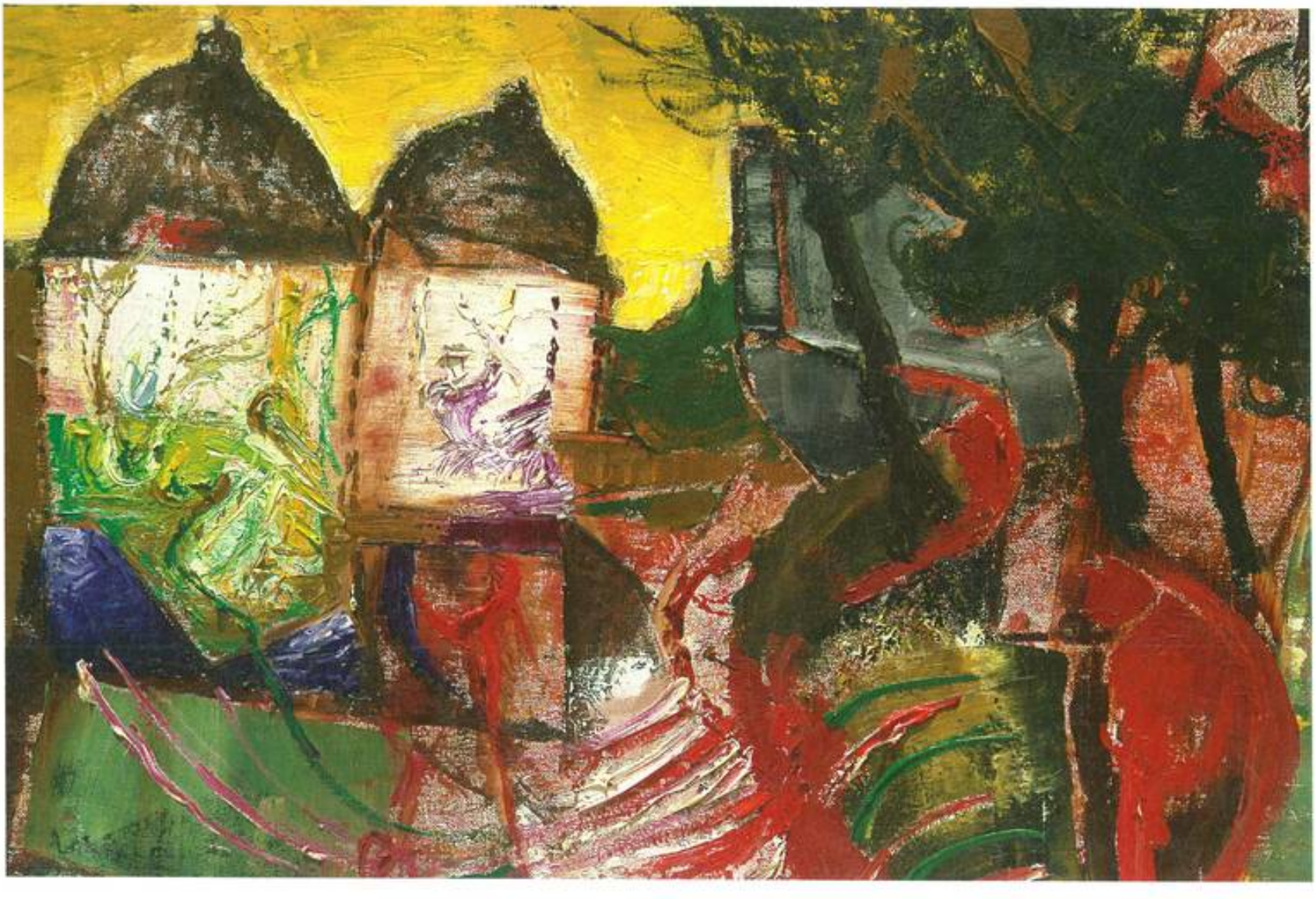
Meera Menezes

Manu Parekh's *Banaras* overwhelms the viewer with its ferocious energy, sheer exuberance, its exacerbation of colour and sense of immediacy. It is a celebration of the holy city of Kashi, with its melange of spirituality and squalor, where the sublime and the quotidian exist seamlessly. Parekh distills the spirit of the city and infuses his diptych with this throbbing organic energy. Like his guru, Ramakrishna Paramhansa, he has discovered pure spirit in all that he sees and having seen it, feels driven to pay tribute to it. His treatment of the temples, the ghats, the festive buntings and the river Ganga speaks of this veneration, this discovery of the divine force within.

While thousands have flocked to the eternal city seeking spiritual salvation, it was a very different search that brought Parekh to Banaras. It was the search for a landscape which would provide him with the symbols and stimulants necessary to create a visual vocabulary which reflected the Indian reality–anchored in pain, struggle and pathos. In Banaras his search for a truly Indian landscape bore fruit, for he has found both form and spirit here. He recognizes that the Banaras landscape possesses the ingredients which encapsulate the experiences of his travels around India, especially the decade he spent in Calcutta. The artist has been impressed by the human stamina for struggle and survival despite bitter odds, which he saw in the Bengali metropolis, and which he found reflected in Banaras as well. In that sense, *Banaras* can also be regarded as homage to the indomitable spirit of man.

His experiences have also shown the artist that Indian society is one based on fear and faith. It is the dynamics of this relationship between faith and fear that he sees being played out symbolically in Banaras. Devout pilgrims thronging the temples in their religious fervour and the burning pyres of the Manikarnika Ghat serve to make Banaras an organic, pulsating theatre of life and death. For him, these scenes brought the relationship between fear and faith into sharp focus. These are reflected in the painting, with its juxtaposition of dark and bright spaces, metaphors for this very play.

The decision to anchor his oeuvre in the genre of landscape painting has been a conscious one. Parekh has long felt that there has been a dearth of puissant landscapes which related specifically to the Indian context. The two Indian artists who have inspired him with their handling of the genre have been Rabindranath Tagore and Francis Newton Souza. In particular Tagore, whose reflections can be seen in Parekh's work. Tagore, though influenced by Klee and the Blue Rider Group,



couched the Indian character of his work in an expressionistic language. Parekh has also sought to do the same in his oeuvre. Although an admirer of Souza's powerful landscapes, Parekh has consciously taken a position at variance with the former's. If Souza's landscapes had a universal quality about them and were anchored in no particular locale, Parekh was sure that he wanted to locate his works in a specific landscape and space. Banaras turned out to be the perfect choice for him.

The attitude with which the artist approaches *Banaras* is expressionistic and spontaneous. His free-flowing, urgent strokes are a testimony to the dialectics that have marked the Expressionist Movement–juggling the desire for form with the basic desire for utterance or expression. The artist has long marvelled at the German Expressionists and their ability to address their reality through their landscapes. In a gesture mimicking action painting, he squeezes the tubes of paint directly on the canvas, attacking it with ferocity, unleashing pent-up energies. These calligraphic drawings pulsate below the surface creating a frenetic, buzzing ground akin to a charged electrical field. Using a roller, he ushers order into this teeming mass, creating forms both intentional and unintentional in the process. For Parekh, who has a great sympathy for Dadaism, these accidental forms represent the 'readymade'–found objects which he, in turn, harnesses to create his compositions. His pictorial space is a juxtaposition of these accidental forms which mirror the organic/natural and geometrical elements which recall the manmade or real.



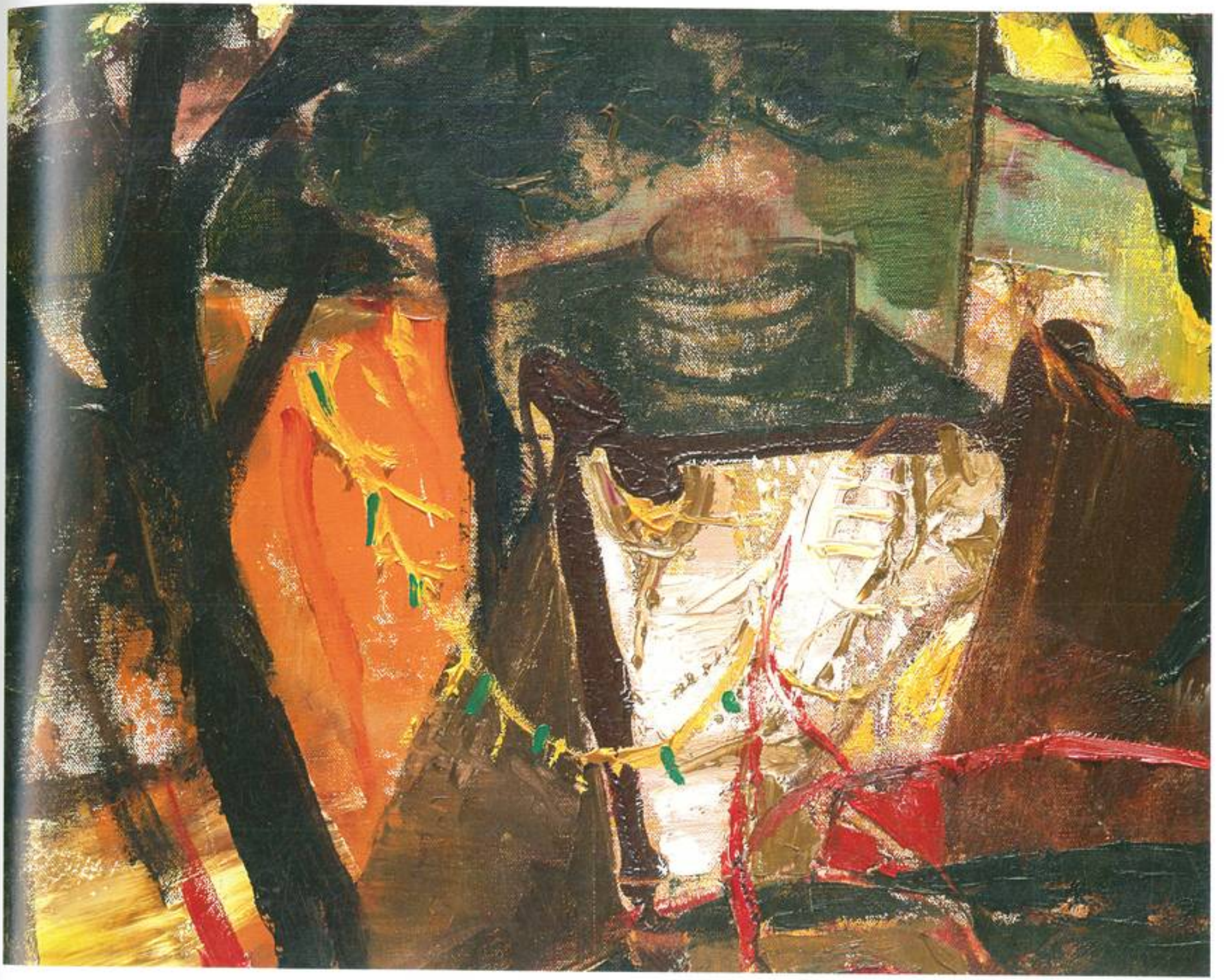
The choice of palette in *Banaras* reflects the artist's view that all existence is vital, dramatic and colourful. What struck him during his visits to Banaras was that both in life and in death, in sorrow and in joy–in the marriage garlands and the flowers adorning a dead body–the colours used were the same. Parekh harnesses the evocative power of colour to create dramatic moments in the painting. Scarlet and vermillion are balanced with the green waters; lemon and cadmium yellow lend their luminescence to the sky. For the artist there is an area of spirituality that can best be expressed through colour. Light and colour fill the interiors of shrines and then burst out, like an outpouring of the fervour witnessed within. With his dexterous handling, Banaras lives up to its name as the 'City of Light'.

However, to read *Banaras* as a mere depiction of the apparent and visible reality would be doing it a disservice. As Paul Klee once remarked, 'Art does not reproduce the visible, it makes visible.' The Banaras landscape is really an outer manifestation of the interior universe. For, in his interpretation of the outer world, the artist offers clues and an insight into the working of his mind. The contradictions he depicts in the Banaras landscape–areas of shadow and light–closely mirror the contradictions and uncertainties that exist within his inner world. Unresolved, they pulsate below the surface, stoking the fires of artistic creativity and imparting an edgy energy to both the artist and his paintings. Landscape is transformed into 'mindscape' as Manu Parekh explores these contradictions in his work.










Manu Parekh '05









Evening at Banaras, diptych, acrylic on board, 144 x 48", 2006

Talking da Vinci and Tagore

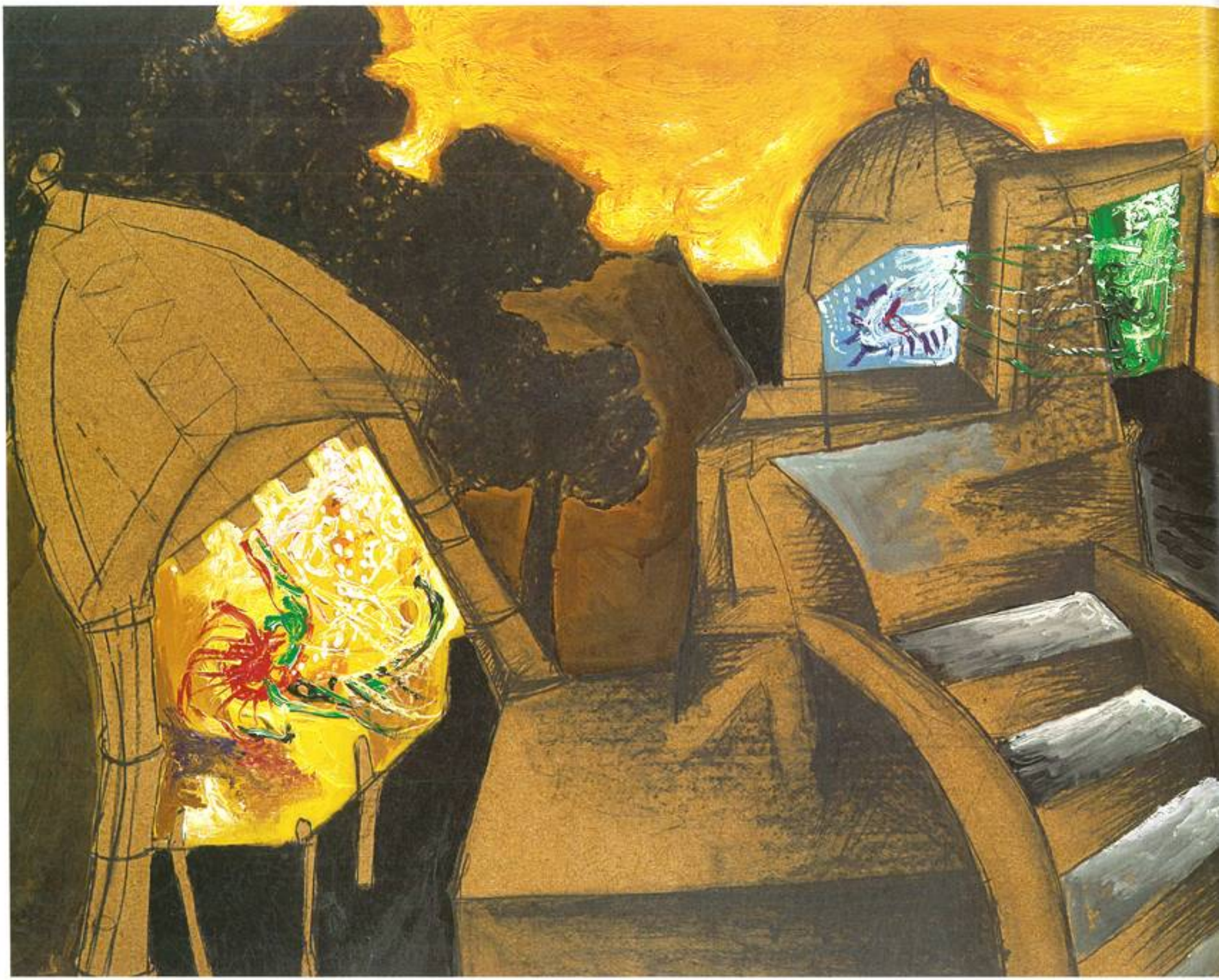
Meera Menezes

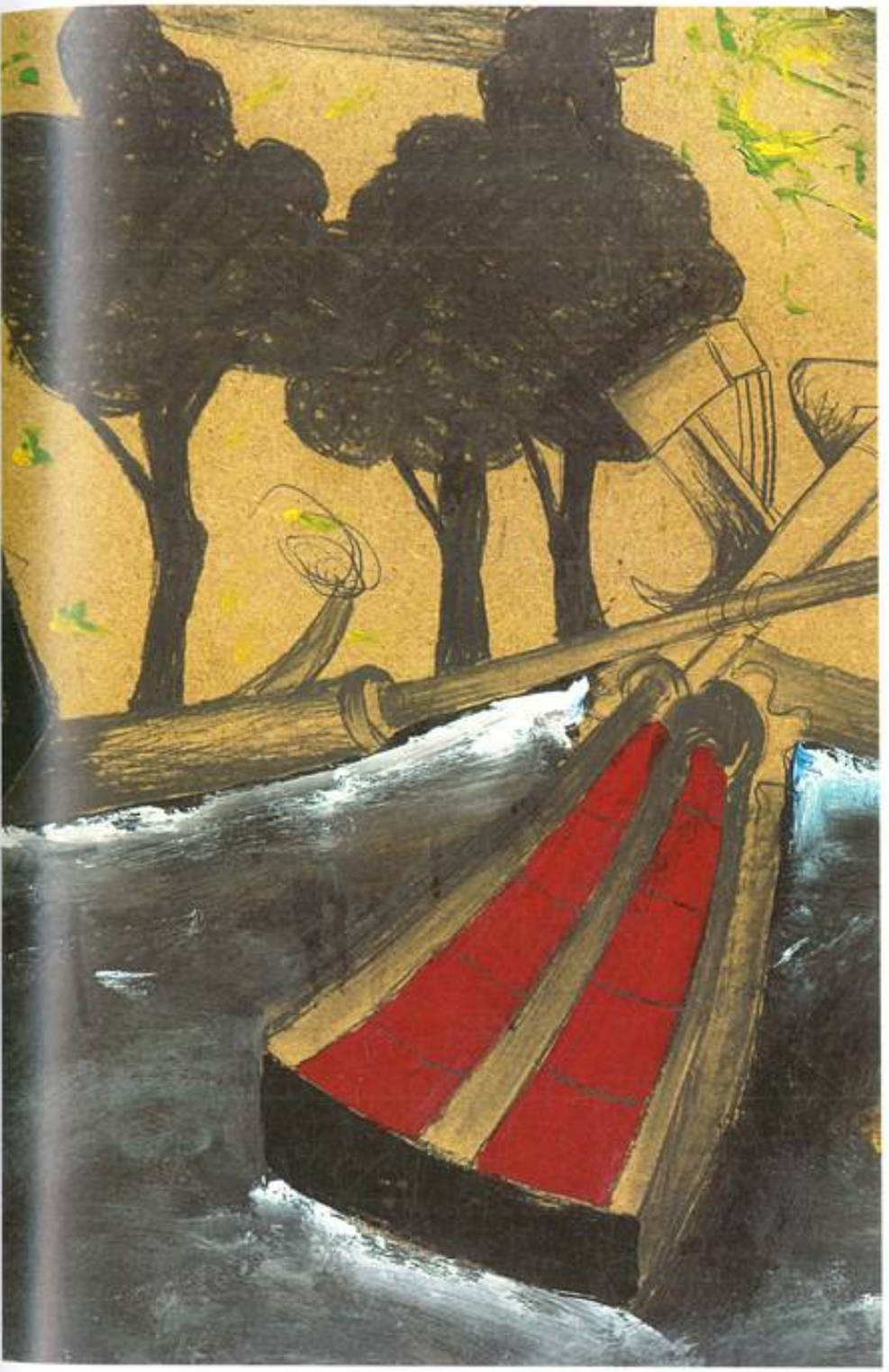
Manu Parekh, in his actor avatar, comes to the fore in *Evening at Banaras*. He has shrugged off his expressionistic cloak to don a mantle of measure and restraint. He has traded the loaded brush bristling with energy and vitality for the lyrical quality of line that only charcoal can afford. Gone is his hectic attitude marked by a destruction of form, replaced instead with an emphasis on linearity. The consummate actor that he is, he changes colour like a chameleon, switches roles with ease. For this versatility he has his former teacher at the JJ School of Art, Professor SB Palsikar to thank, in no small measure. For Palsikar, who wielded mastery over both the brush and charcoal, showed Parekh how to toggle between the two. It is this training and attitude that resonate through Parekh's work even today.

If Manu Parekh is the actor, it is natural to assume that his landscapes are his stage. He brings his love and experience of theatre to bear in *Evening at Banaras*, juggling mood and tone, setting highlights and areas of emphasis, balancing the dramatic with the muted. He could not have asked for a better muse, for Banaras itself is an organic theatre of life and death, where celebration and grief meet and share common space.

What are the strategies the artist employs to achieve his ends? He harnesses light, line, colour and his affinity for set design as he builds up the stage. He then proceeds to divest his landscape of every moving creature, leaving an unmanned space–much like the empty sets of a play where the characters are about to enter or have exited the arena. For Parekh, a 'landscape is the biggest drama and stage show without actors.' But unspoken presences of both Mammon and God abound and linger in *Evening at Banaras*. The temples, the boats with their billowing sails, the ghats, the buntings–all echo these absent presences. Banaras is an excuse to pay tribute to the spirit and stamina of man who, driven by faith, struggles against all odds.

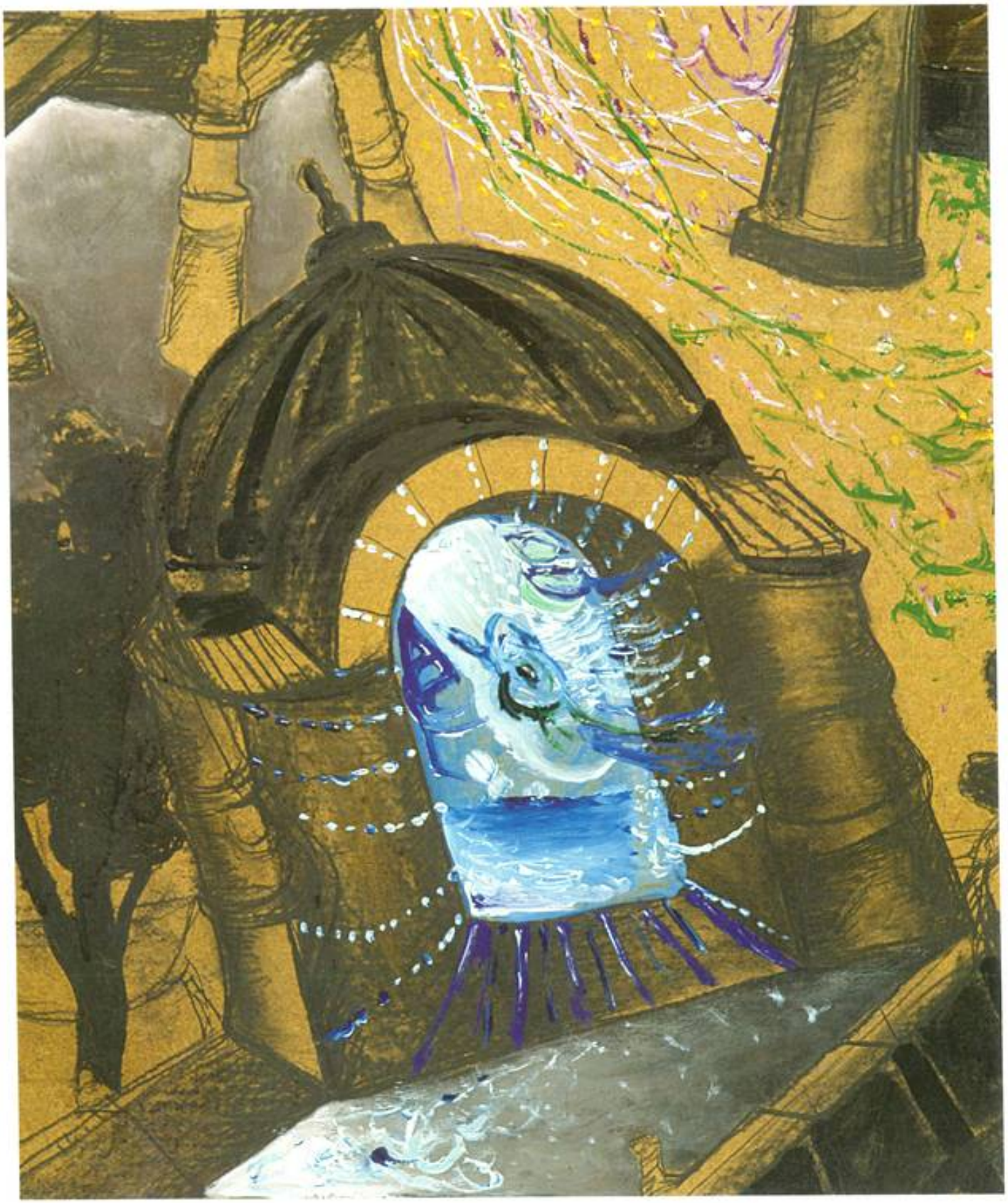
Artificial and natural sources of light are also woven together by the artist to create his dramatic moments. Notice the flaming orange blush spreading across the sky, brightening as it rests on the temple silhouettes like a tremulous halo. The eye is drawn to the luminous shrines dotting the landscape as they glow with an inner iridescence. The light from these shrines is carried on a swell of devotion, bursting its narrow confines and spilling down the stairs to meet the river. The waters of the Ganges lapping the shores rise to receive it, eager to bask in this reflected glow, mingling it with the light from the heavens.

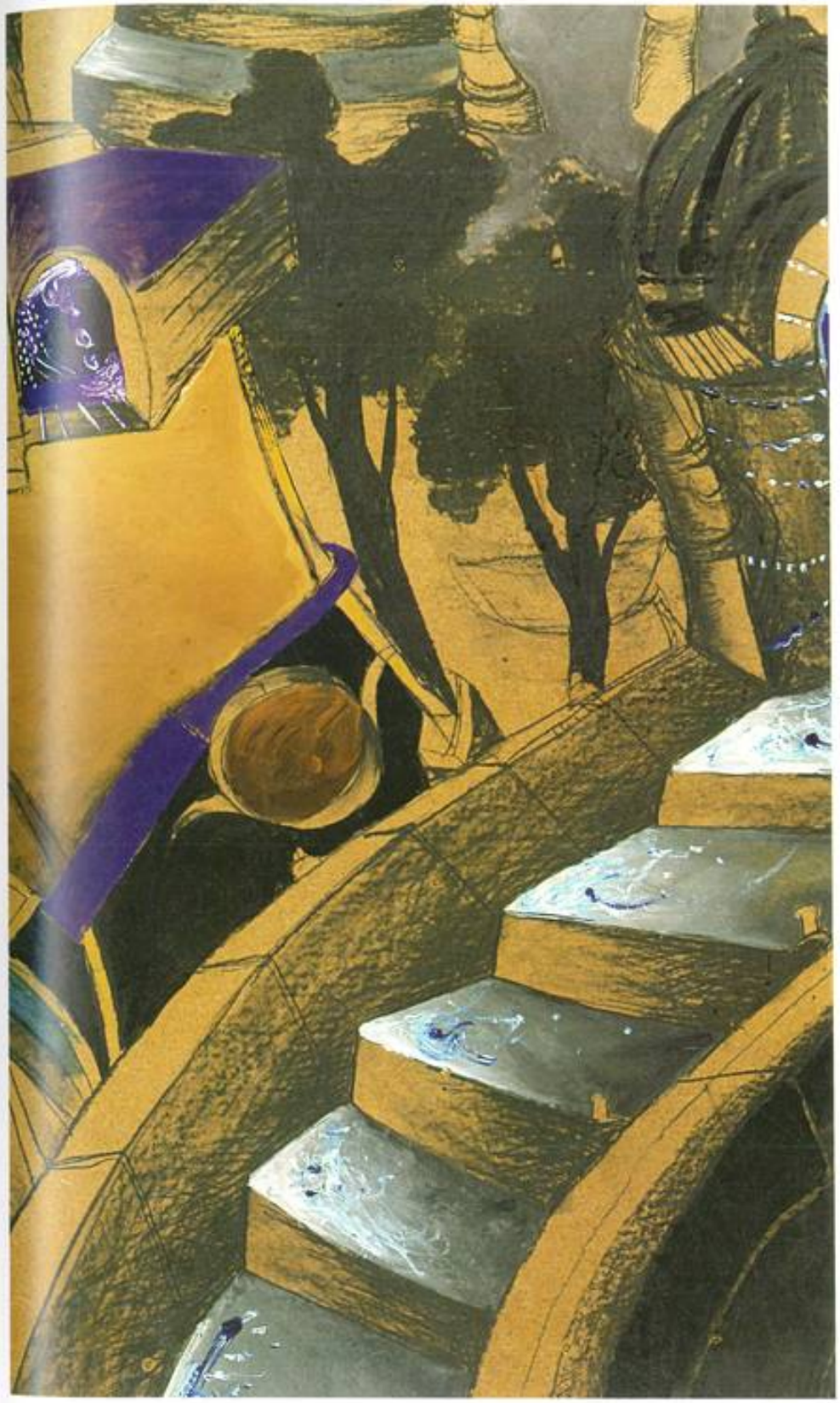




The stage is further built up using multiple perspectives, to create a haphazard, crowded landscape. Parekh often creates organic areas in the work where he arranges elements like shrines, vegetation and the sky, like he would the elements of a still life. The lopsided temples, the incongruity of a boat placed next to a tree, the winding stairs nudging and jostling each other for space, all seem to reflect the life-force energy and vitality that the artist perceives in the holy city. The phallus-like minarets, interspersed with domes mimicking full-bodied breasts, accentuate the sense of fecundity and sensuality in this organic space.

Unlike his other works, in this diptych the emphasis is on large, simplified forms, on the line as bearer of expression. He chooses charcoal and board to highlight the drawing element of the work. Colour recedes from spaces, allowing bare board to show through. For Parekh charcoal is a complete medium in itself and he revels in the wonderful tones that he can get by rubbing the drawing-based linear charcoal lines. What excites him is the whole process of making and unmaking, completion and erasure that working with charcoal entails.



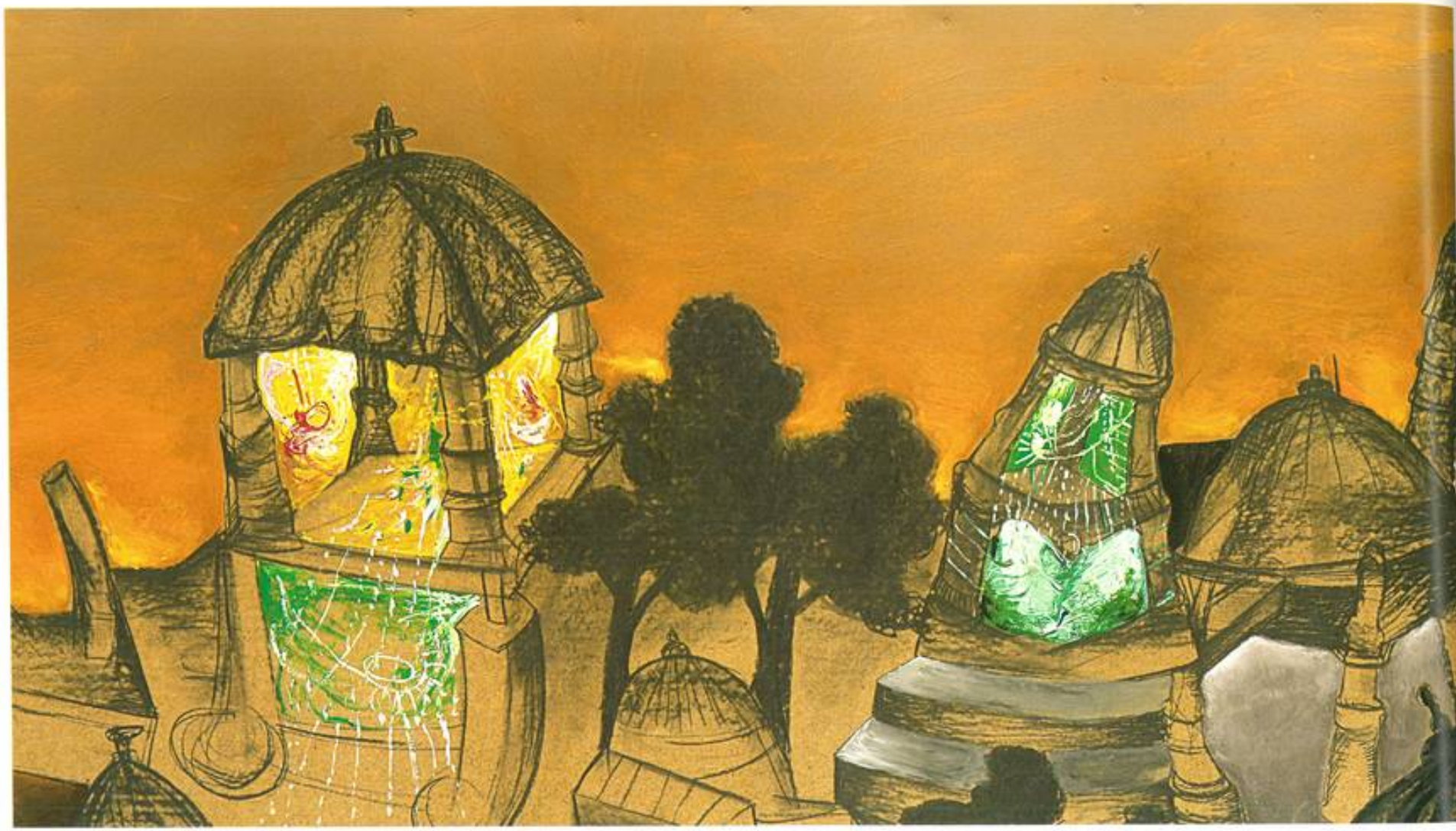


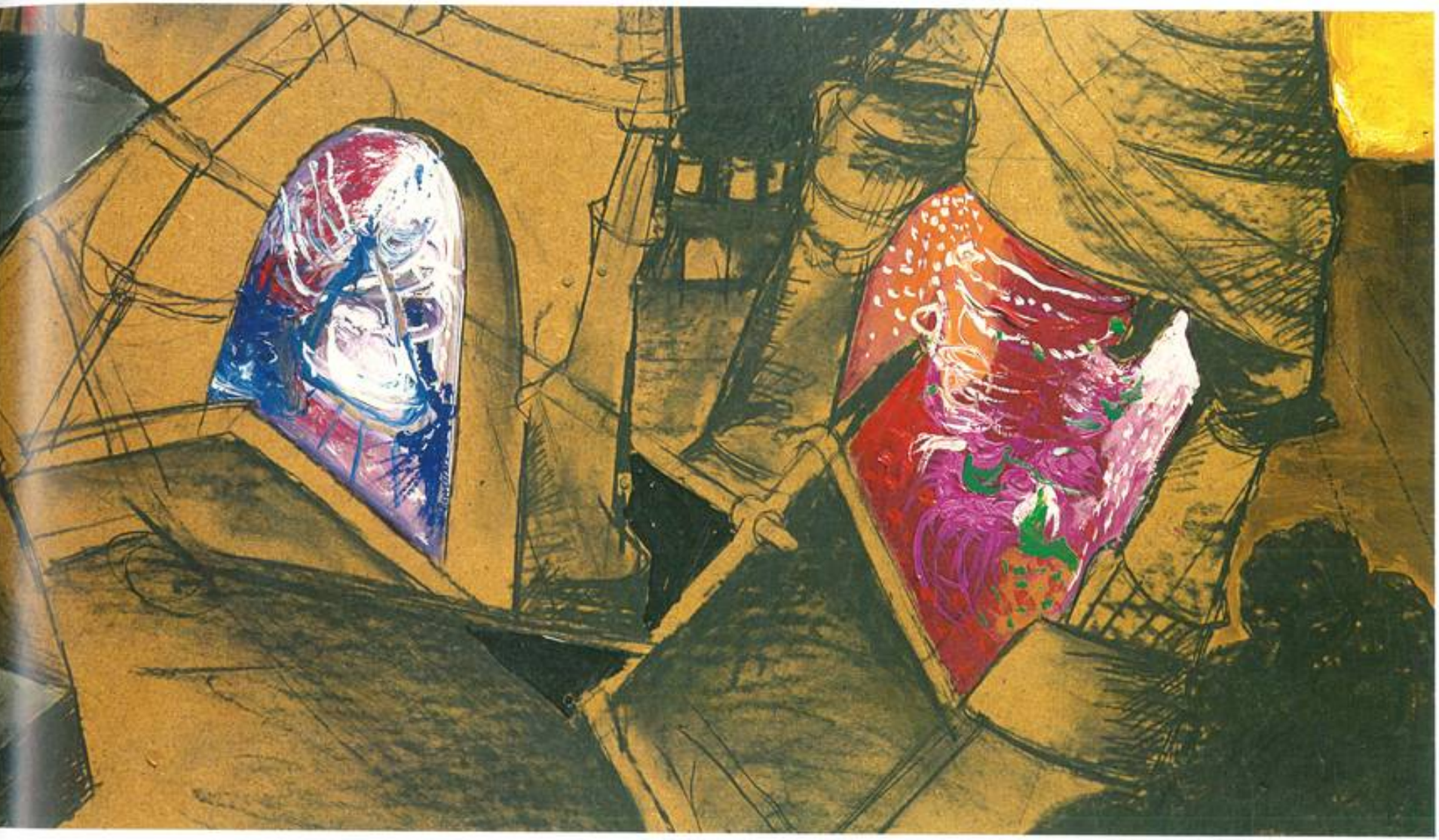
Evening at Banaras is also a reworking of an older painting by the artist; executed in 1987, it is now in the collection of the National Gallery of Modern Art. Parekh revisits this work but does some unexpected things with it. For one, he incorporates a number of drawings done by the Renaissance painter Leonardo da Vinci into his diptych. He copies the Italian's sketches of various structures and cunningly adapts them, adding elements from the Banaras landscape. Only a close reading enables the viewer to tease them out, so completely integrated and at home are they in their surroundings. Parekh, who admires Da Vinci for his sensibility and his evocative lines, has no compunctions about referencing him. He cites the example of the German artist Joseph Beuys who based some of his notebooks on da Vinci's *Codices Madrid*. But even when Parekh quotes from a different artistic vocabulary, he makes it uniquely his own, situating it in an Indian context which reflects the Indian reality.

The other artist that Parekh actively references is Rabindranath Tagore, whom he considers India's first great modern artist. He is impressed by the way Tagore, despite being drawn to the German Expressionist Movement, imparted an Indian character to his work. The silhouettes, the play of light on the water and Tagore's fascination with black are some of the elements that Parekh draws upon. His silhouetted trees are reminiscent of the Bengali Nobel Laureate's. Scattered in the landscape, he uses his dark trees as a relief to block space juxtaposing the natural with the manmade. Particularly interesting is the right-hand corner of his diptych, where a da Vinci–like form 'encounters' a Tagore-like tree. It is the relationship between the two, especially the visual conversation that ensues, that enriches *Evening at Banaras*.





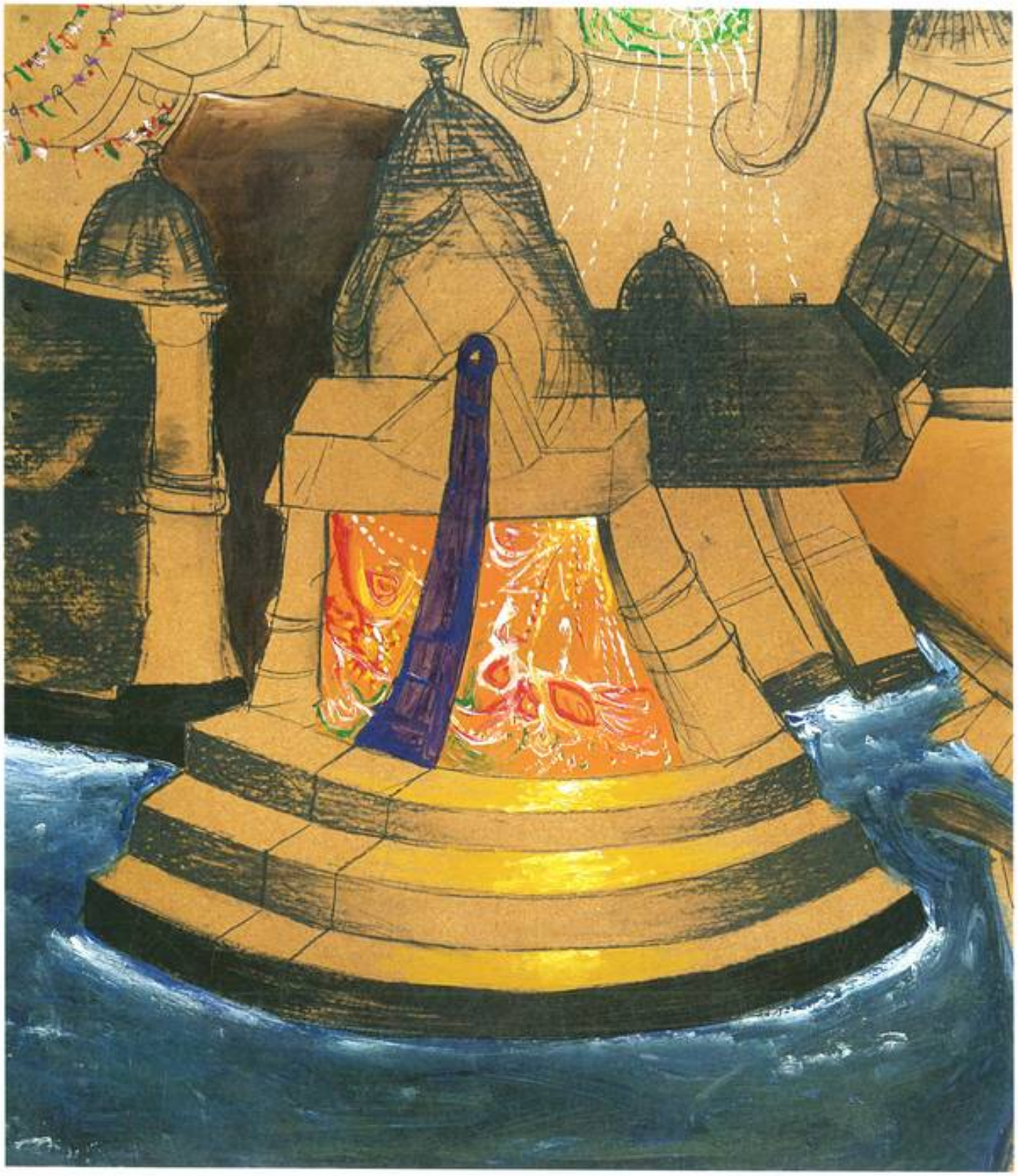





Mary Parekh













Banaras Sunshine, triptych, acrylic and oil on canvas, 180 x 40", 2006

The Sensual Engine

How to Find *Majaa* in Manu Parekh's Banaras

Jeet Thayil

Nature's first green is gold,
Her hardest hue to hold.
Her early leaf's a flower;
But only so an hour.
Then leaf subsides to leaf.
So Eden sank to grief,
So dawn goes down to day.
Nothing gold can stay.

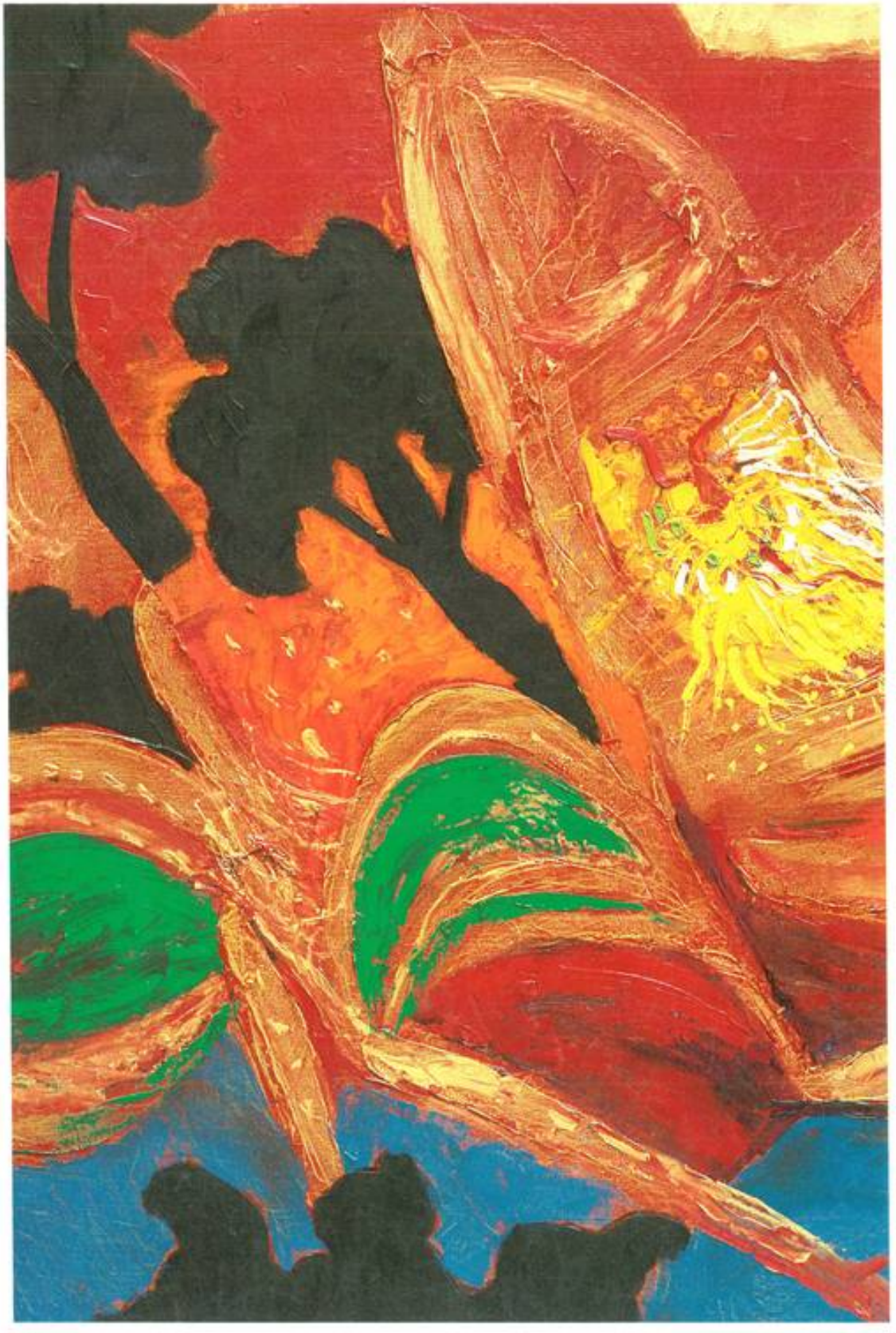
Robert Frost, 'Nothing Gold Can Stay'

Manu Parekh is a painter whose teeming canvases, drenched in colour, in brightness, in sex and mystic energy, fulfil none of the usual expectations about contemporary Indian art. I say this not because there is nothing Indian about his work. Rather because, in an art world increasingly alienated from its surroundings, Parekh represents an older kind of practice. His work is wedded so closely to the personality of its creator that it becomes difficult to separate the various strands that go into the making of a painting.

And what is that personality? In Parekh's case, it has much to do with the *joie de vivre* that Gujaratis call *majaa*, a word that is a kind of colloquial shorthand for pleasurable activity: a meal, a conversation, songs, a shared joke. Parekh brings this idea of joy–an idea from the Indian countryside, as understood and practised by its villagers; and an idea that is located in a list of synonyms from the classic literature–to the work he makes and sets in India's cities. It is the sensual engine that gives his art its peculiar energy and combustive power. It informs each stroke and swipe. And it is found in a combination of seemingly disparate elements, of spontaneity and forethought, of rural and urban, and, intriguingly, of Indian and Western art histories.

Parekh lives in a middle-class New Delhi housing colony, the only painter in a community of civil servants and small businessmen. In a grid of identical-looking apartments, you will find his by a polka dot red and green snake painted directly on the whitewashed wall. At 67, he is a quiet man, though he cannot be described as soft spoken. When excited by a conversation, the words tumble out of him at a high volume and velocity. But the excitement does not often reach his eyes. His gaze is detached: it's the look of a man immersed in something other than the immediate occasion.

He likes to say of himself that he is 'raw', he is 'not intellectual', he is 'someone who follows the hand, not the head,' but this self-description is a pose, one





adopted by artists the world over. It is like Jackson Pollock playing the drunken saint, the unknowing innovator who stumbled on the notion of taking a canvas off its easel and placing it on the floor, of leaning on the horizontal rather than the vertical. Pollock liked to pretend that his innovations happened entirely by chance, or by the happenstance of whisky and smoke colliding in his synapses and flooding his neurons with unforeseeable information. In fact, his best work was the result of careful thought. There was nothing accidental about it.

Similarly, Parekh's late style, a fusion of the raw and the cooked, is the result of man-hours and discipline; it makes use of spontaneity and inspiration, but as byproducts rather than as the guiding ideal of the work. Randall Jarrell said that a good poet managed 'in a life-time of standing out in thunderstorms to be hit by lightning five or six times.' What does it take for the modern artist to be hit by lightning? It involves the





priming of inner weather only he is privy to, but it also requires certain unavoidable external factors. He must sit at his desk or stand at his easel every day, getting on with the work at hand, creating a space within which the lightning rod of inspiration may or may not strike.

In this new suite of paintings, the subject of Parekh's gaze remains the same: Banaras, the city as symbol rather than geographical destination. And though Banaras has been painted before, by a number of artists, it has never been painted like this. The city is not recognizable here as a physical entity of mortar and brick. It is a mythical construct, so that its particularities–flowers, or a special quality of sunlight–do not matter as much as the emotion, which, in each case, is overwhelming and overwhelmingly Indian.

You may note in these pictures the ghostly presence of Pollock or Picasso, but they have been refracted into a medium that is full of the pure products–to refashion one of William Carlos Williams's phrases–of India. It is an art that uses the art of other cultures as fodder for its own process, and the work that results is, against all expectation, indigenous. It takes confidence to do this, and it is a confidence artists from other cultures assume as their right. For an Indian artist, it is a fraught stepping away from received notions of influence.

The triptych *Banaras Sunshine* is a departure even for Parekh, who chooses restraint and profusion in equal measure in its large panels. He is interested here in describing the spiritual life only in terms of hue and





symbol. The flat colour–the gold of the sky and the blue of the water–is crucial. The water has no depth. The sky is the dull gold of Byzantine icons; and it is a telling choice for this picture. Icon painters prefer not to paint natural light for a reason. They wish to focus on divine light. The gold in an icon painting is indicative of a brightness that will last longer than the merely human or the merely natural. It is supposed to tell us that, though we are subject to wear and tear, and the inevitable breakdown of the human envelope, we can always avail of the life everlasting. To subvert the language of the poem that begins this essay, icons tell us, 'Only gold–and God–can stay.' The anonymous icon painter's job is to make manifest this Christian idea and its consolations–as comforting a notion as the Hindu one of reincarnation. The painter will repeat the same storyline, its basic elements unchanged, over several panels. He will draw attention not to naturalistic detail but to the larger meaning of the religious image.

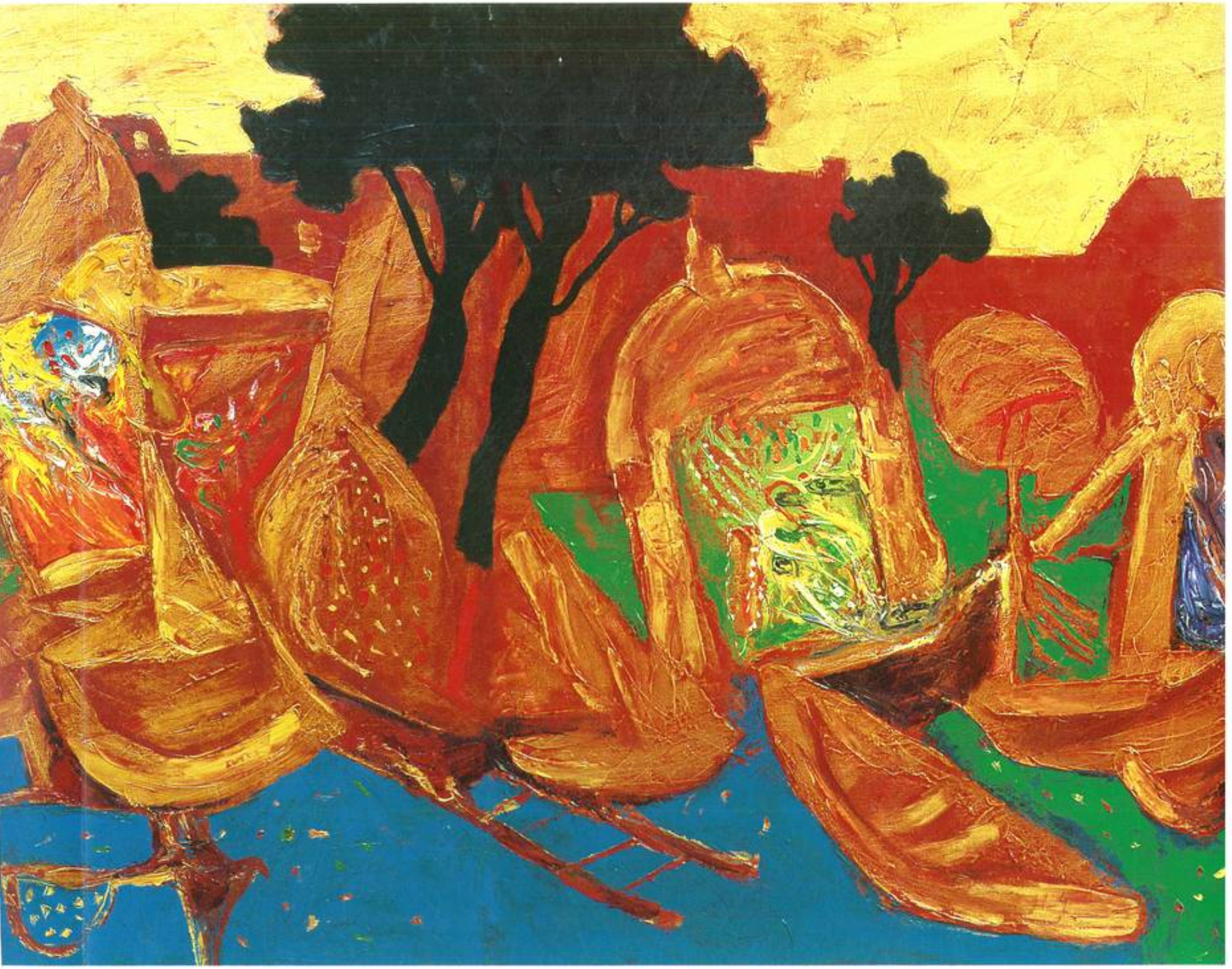
Over the three panels of *Banaras Sunshine*, Parekh does something similar, but he does it in a manner transfigured by vitality. It's the opposite of the quiet-mannered lines of an icon. He uses the techniques of icon painting–the repetition of elements, the flatness, the annihilation of light–to build a sure, jazz-inflected rhythm. The trees are important; they give the painting its sense of order. They are painted differently from the other elements. They occur like black accents, an off-tempo bebop signature that frames and counterpoints the temples, the boats, the water and the landing steps, and the undifferentiated buildings of the background. These latter elements remain unchanged over the painting's three panels, as indeed they remain unchanged in many of the paintings of the suite; but each panel, drawing on an extremity of intent and supple tonal variation, develops in the manner of Indian music, where extemporaneous phrases occur within a strict pattern. And in the way that a *raga* or a poem will use

anaphoric repetition to create an effect that is mesmerizing, the three build a cumulative effect on the senses.

The panels are not designed to work separately. The first sets the painting's elements in motion, like the mechanism of a clock. We see the tumbledown waterfront structures huddled into themselves; the small temples reflected in the water; the beaten gold of the sky, a gold that seems to bleed into the brick of the buildings; the absence of the human figure; the trees, not green but black, like cutouts of trees, each an absence in itself of colour and detail. The blue of the water and the gold of the sky balance each other, and frame the tumult that occurs in the space between them. There is nothing expansive about this sky and this water. The viewer is given only a glimpse of each, as if the chaos of Banaras–its particular Indian profusion–has edged everything else out of the frame. And here, it is apparent that the absence of the human element is a deftness, a strategy. Everything in the panel hints at hidden life, as if the viewer was looking at a stage just before the actors enter, or just after they have left.

The second and third panels extend the premonition of profusion and absence. As the eye travels from left to right, there is less water and sky, and though the various formal elements are still present, they have been skewed and enhanced. The end effect is one of exhilaration or dread; it is sometimes difficult to differentiate between the two.

To come back to the subject of extemporaneous emotion, which is Manu Parekh's constituency: how does he reconcile a spiritual enterprise–which these Banaras paintings undoubtedly are–with the sensuality, spontaneity, and bop phraseology that is his invention? These pictures exist on a plane that takes in everything at once. They seek to encompass, to exclude nothing, like Pound's *Cantos* or a novel by Don DeLillo. In Parekh's idiom this means the bringing together of seeming opposites such as sex and the religious instinct. I say 'seeming' opposites because the combination of these apparent dissimilarities is, in this context, a most natural occurrence. What else is Indian life but a celebration of all the things it means to be human?

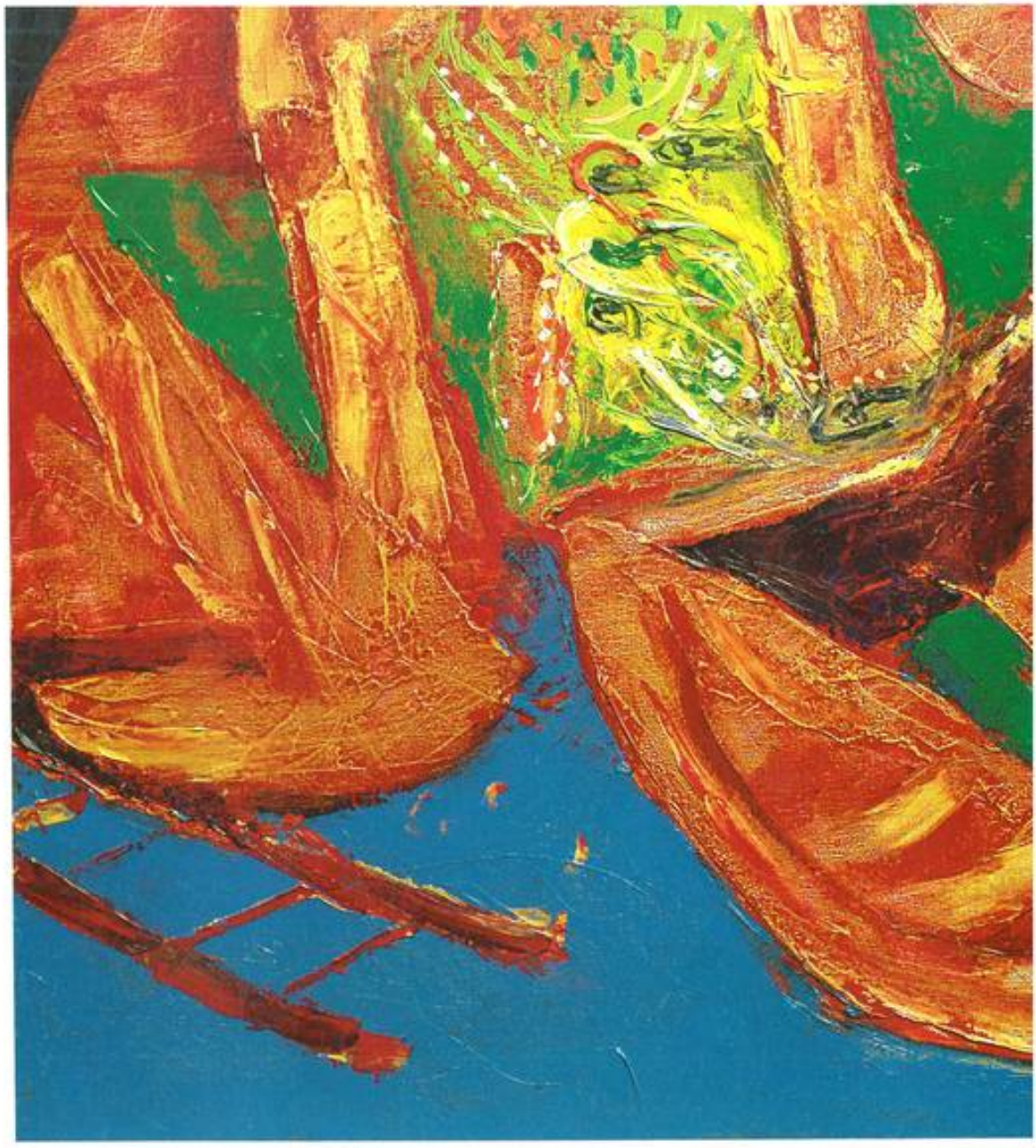


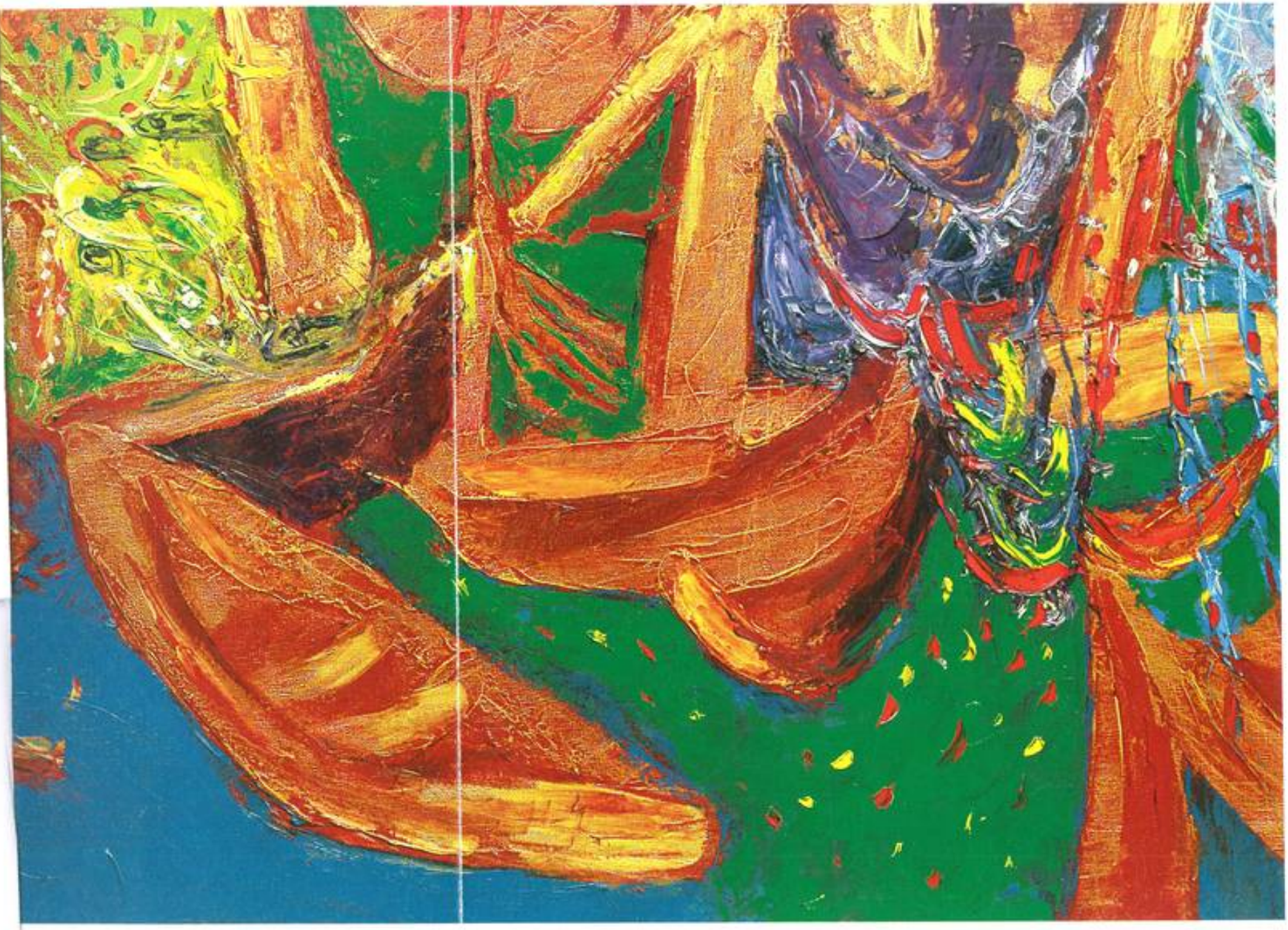


Banaras Sunshine













Banaras in Black and White, diptych, acrylic on canvas, 180 x 48", 2005

No One is Alone in Banaras

Ashok Vajpeyi

Banaras exists partly in myth, partly in history. Partly in time, partly in eternity. It is an ancient holy city, it is a heap of trash and stinking rubbish. It has gods and their temples aplenty–it is not possible to roam through the narrow, crowded lanes of Banaras without coming across them. Sometimes it seems as if there are more gods and cattle than men and women. It is not possible to be alone in Banaras: if the living are asleep, the dead rise and are forever moving or being taken towards the Ganga to be reduced to ashes on the ghats. Life is constantly dying and yet mysteriously asserting itself. It persists in the noises and chores of daily living. The Ganga takes away all the dirt of life and living; it soils itself every moment and yet is holy. The divine cohabitates with the profane, immortal gods with the utterly mortal. Barely clad humans walk up to shrines with gods standing clothed in silks and gold. Banaras is forever changing, yet there is something immutable in it which supercedes change and remains stubbornly timeless, sometimes frozen, sometimes flowing. Modern chaos and confusion, medieval rhythms and paces intermingle to forge a humanscape which is simultaneously pre-modern and post-modern. Banaras is one of the last ramparts, a citadel which resists a final take-over. And yet, the crass commercialism of religion and spirituality is too all evident. Gods in Banaras are indulgent–they do not particularly mind being misused for unholy purposes. Banaras leaves none alone: one has to crave for and create amongst all the noise and din, dirt and crowdedness, a space for being alone, a time for loneliness.

Manu Parekh's new large-size Banarscapes offer a very sharp and telling contrast to its reality: there are no human beings, not even human figures visible or suspected to be lurking in the vicinity. Nature, man-created temples, other shapes, trees, pathways, flags, illuminations are abundant; even the divine presence is evoked and hinted at; but there are no human beings. However, the spaces do not seem ghostly: the human is, as it were, inhering in the constructed structures, in the evoked or suggested divine. The act of painting itself is another incontrovertibly human act. The human presence is evoked not through crowded and huddled human figures but through human creativity: it is the human which brings the divine into being. A Banarascape is not deserted or abandoned by human beings. It merely conceals human presence to allow you to see a 'connectiveness'–a kind of neighbourhood without them. The human unusually refuses to dominate what has been created, sustained, polluted by it.

All the works in this series are large. The largeness is perhaps intended to suggest the enormity of

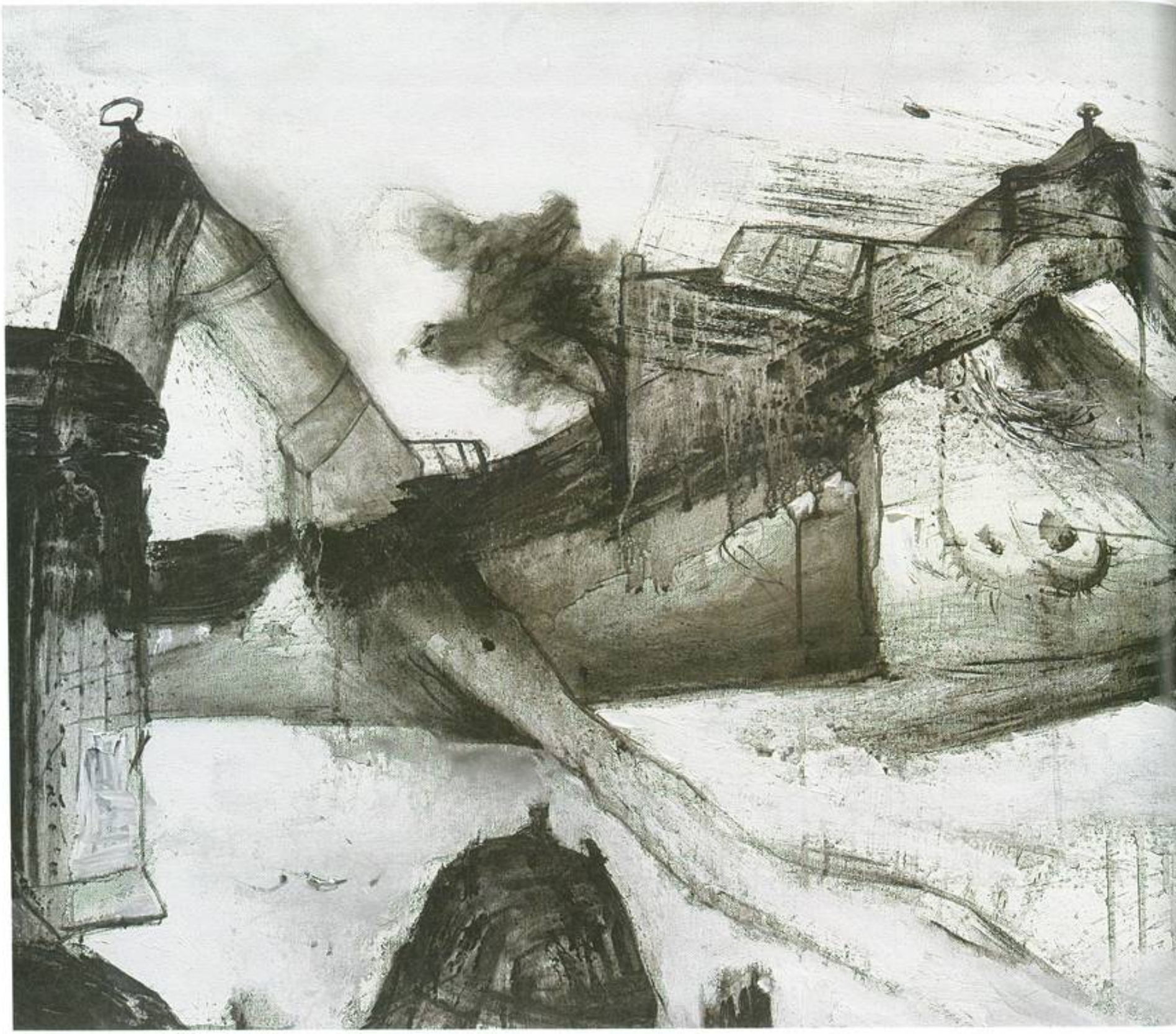


time and spaces in the holy city: its historical mythical existence; its holy and human geography; the crowded vastness; the overwhelming sense of happening.

The black-and-white painting in fact uses grey, white and black. It is a drawing-based painting. Spaces with temples, ghats, boats, water, leaves, flags come together in tangible fundamentality. They have not been placed or implanted; instead, they seem to have grown there almost naturally. Just as the holy city is full of contradictions, the painting plays out its drama through a series of contradictions: a lot is happening visually yet nothing is happening; there is the nothing of vacuity yet there is nothing but vacuity; everything is intentional in the painted space and yet the accidental has also been given its due place. The intentional and the accidental are coexistent. Then again, nothing is allowed to stand in isolation, in divine grandeur or visual divorce; there is tremendous interconnectivity: nothing is isolated in divine design or in human creativity. There is a visible, uninterrupted rhythm of connection: the painting has spaces within it which provide those pauses, sudden but comforting spaces within tremendous crowdedness. There is movement; there is stillness: the dynamics of one does not impinge on the stability of the other.

This painting also seems to be about the collapse of limits–in each segment something or the other seems to be bursting forth, demolishing the obvious and visible limits which encase it in some way. Everything is reaching out to everything else, forging a neighbourhood, a vicinity of close existence. Things are bound together: they do not want to get out of bond, only out of bondage. They do not assert their transgressions; they enact them quietly, in desolate tranquility. On the other hand, a certain imminence also foreshadows the scape: as if something is about to happen–although there are no presences in it, they seem as if they are about to emerge, walk around. As if the scape is an unfolding before they make their entry into the theatre.

The black both concentrates and thins itself out in threads and strings, as it were. Barring the remote sky which stands as a backdrop, the other objects in the painting are visibly involved with each other: they are so close as to lose all sense of identity and yet they remain themselves while being so near the other. The details have been very meticulously worked out: there is no general statement. You cannot simplify them into one clear visual utterance. They seem to assert that they are so many, so close to each other and yet distinct: our plural testament should not be undermined by reducing it to any single reality. We are delicately poised between dream and reality. Not simply the visible and

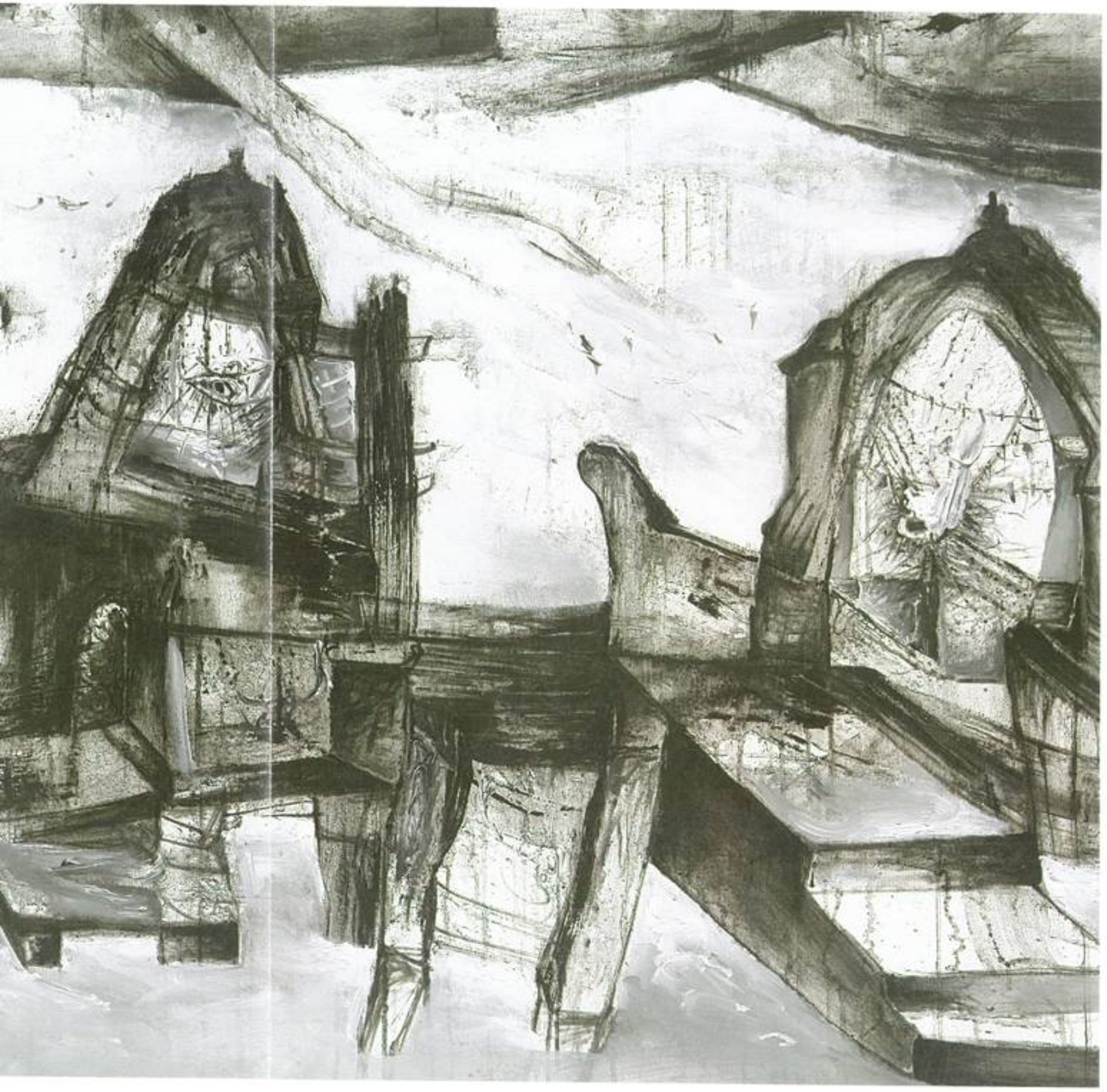


metaphysical existence of Banaras but of the eternal and indestructible city we constitute.

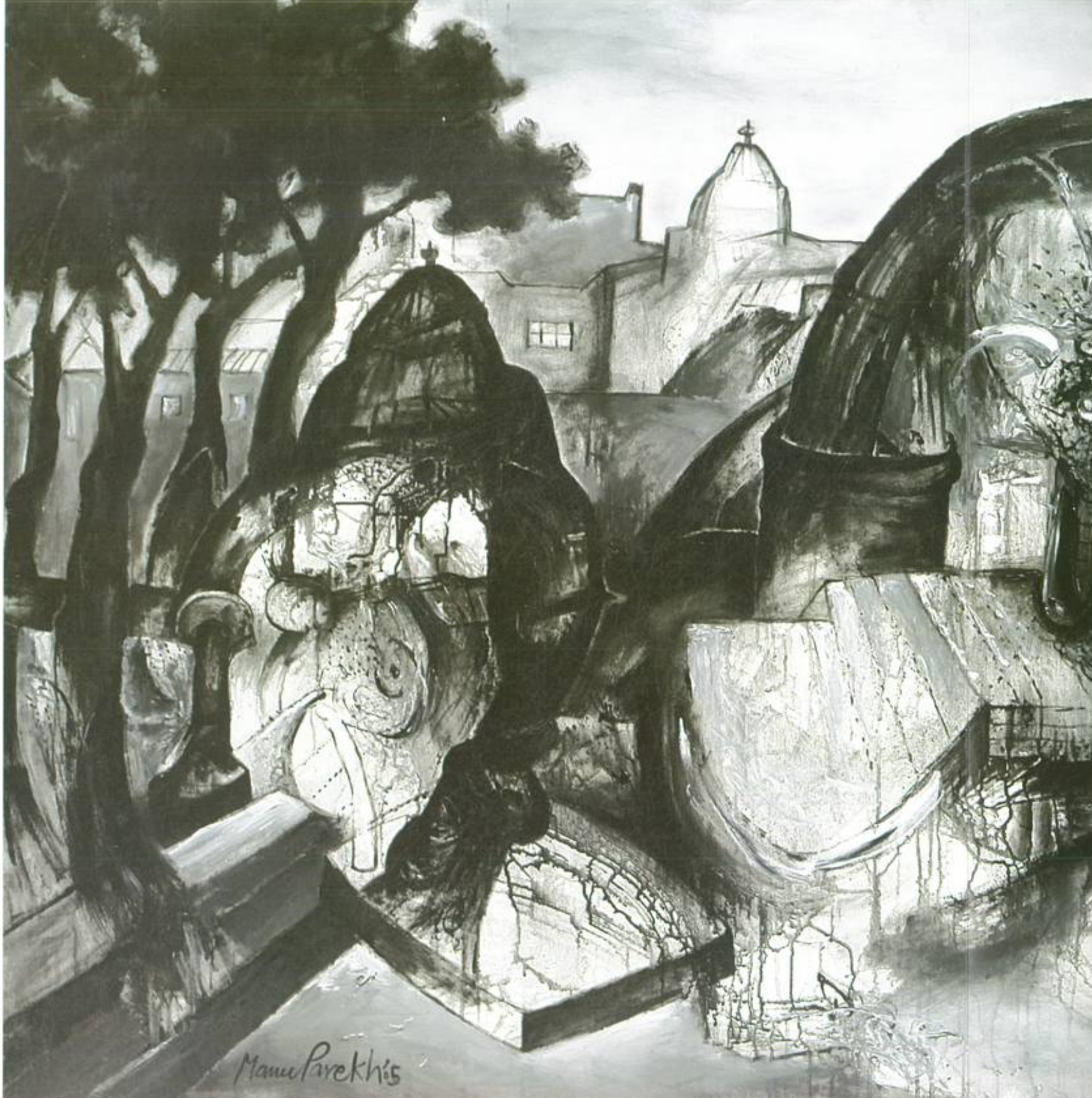
The visibility is constituted by two other elements. Firstly, you notice a veneer of imprints of water, as if the rainwater has quietly leaked on the canvas. As if the vast enclosure of the painting is quietly speaking to, maybe whispering to, the other invisible enclosure of the uncreated, the unformed, the eternal which needs to manifest itself in the temporal or the spatial. Secondly, you notice that the painting enacts, not reproduces or represents, the many layers of time and space that constitute the culture of Banaras. You are, in a way, watching the theatre of Banaras: before the actors enter; after the actors have left; you see the theatrical props. In Banaras everything appears to be either a preparation or a conclusion. *Banaras in Black and White* seems to intimate that beginning and end are simultaneous–it is a composition finding and discovering its own direction.



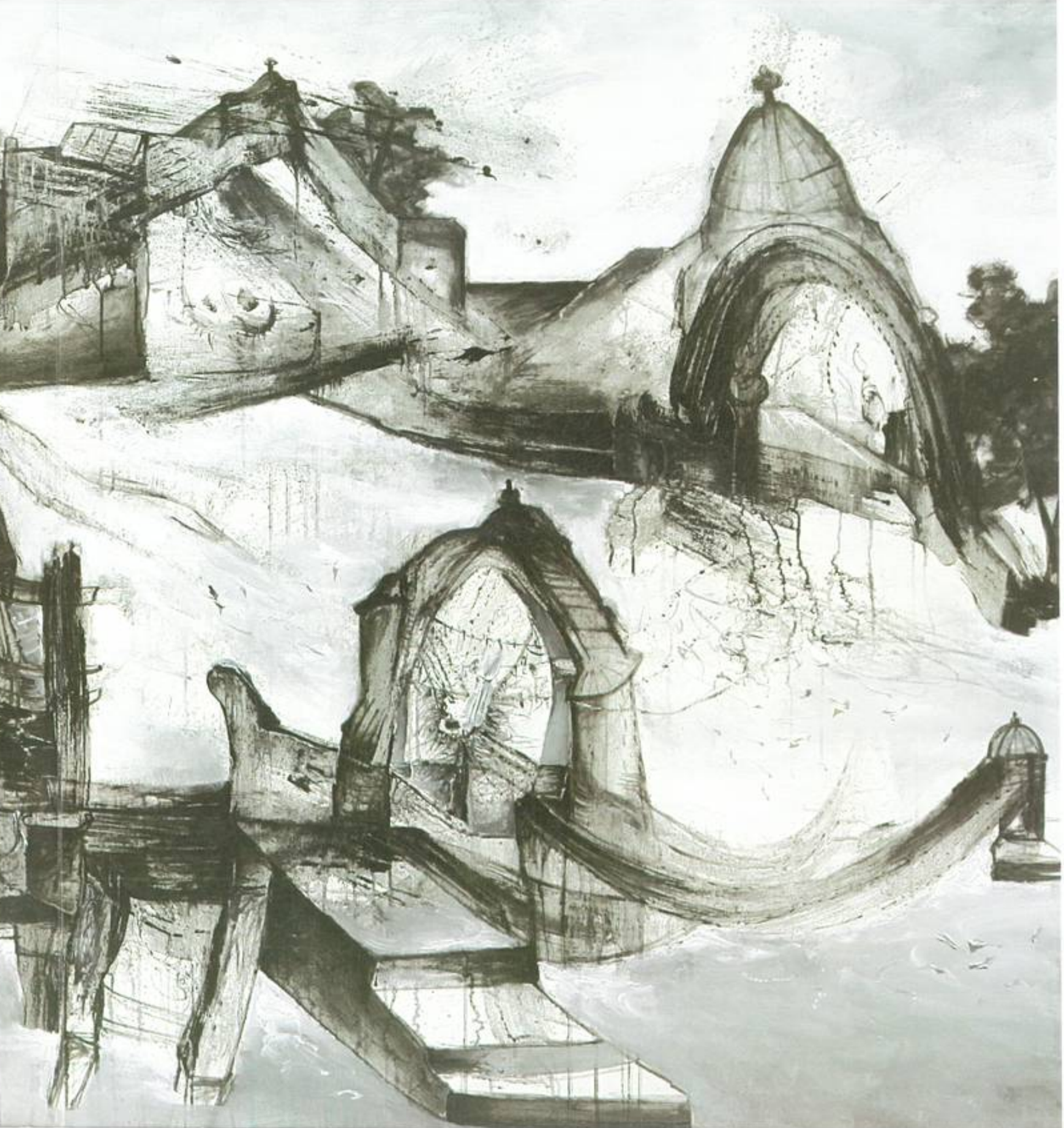


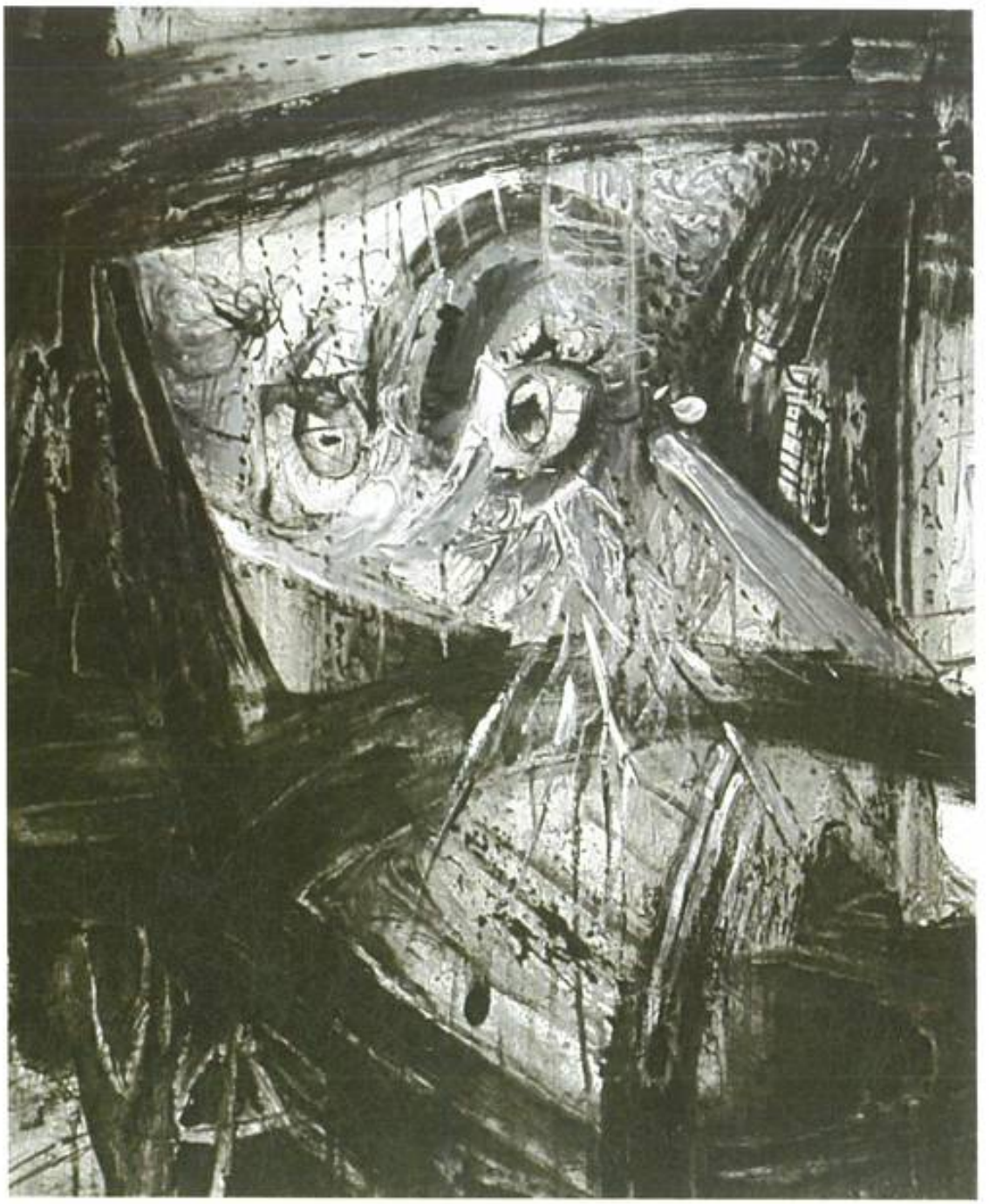




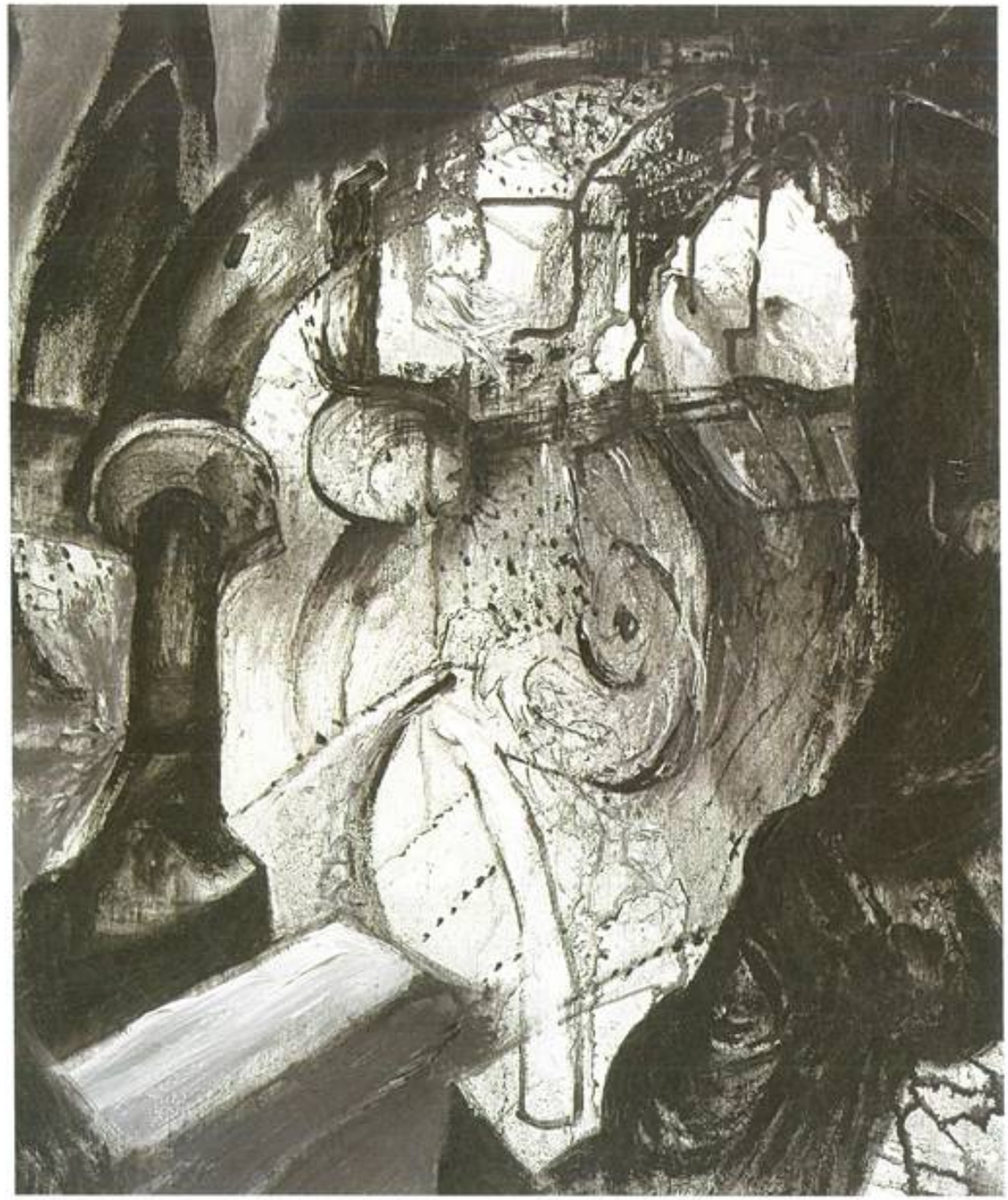

Manu Parekh '15













Banaras in Monsoon, diptych, acrylic and oil on canvas, 180 x 48", 2006

Banaras in Monsoon

Marilyn Rushton

Happy is he who makes a pilgrimage to Benaras but thrice happy is he whose soul ebbs away at the sacred stream, and whose body becomes a prey to the flames at the sacred gat.[1]

For over two thousand years Banaras has been the religious capital of India and one of the most sacred sites in the world. Shiva considered it his earthly home; it is this intimate association with one of the major deities of Hinduism that makes it such an auspicious place of pilgrimage, a seat of enlightenment. Shiva is time, the sun, fire, the destroyer and the generator. It is at Banaras that he is worshipped as the generator.

Manu Parekh makes us feel privileged to make a pilgrimage to the sacred city of Banaras in his company. He visualizes the allure of Banaras, the ghats which hum with ritual prayer and are a hive of activity. He evokes our perception, imagination and visualization of the important *mantras* and rituals for the dying and the dead. We see the powerful integral relationship of life and death, together with the final immersion into the waters of the Ganges.

In Manu Parekh's *Banaras in Monsoon* we see a powerful evocation of all the elements of the monsoon and the abruptness of change. The atmospheric forces interact and herald the onset of the monsoon season. It gradually spreads over the whole of the Indian subcontinent, bringing with it thunderstorms and torrential rains, producing a more intensive effect than anywhere else in the world. We feel this intensity of the monsoon's arrival in his vision of Banaras.

> *...heavy clouds mount up tier upon tier, wind-driven over the darken sky; and when rain falls, first in heavy drops, and then in rushing torrents...*[2]

He captures the menace, fear, death and destruction that the sudden rains bring. In this panoramic vision, we see before us the winds dropping, the sky beginning to darken; it builds up the expectation of thunder and lightning and we fear the oncoming deluge. He depicts a time for rejoicing and renewal–the arrival of the monsoon is a time of celebration for the life it brings, playing a vital role in the lives of all Indians. He evokes the annual cycle, indicative of the continuity of life and the fickle nature of the monsoon. Manu Parekh mirrors the views JJ Aubertin expressed in 1892, when talking about viewing the left bank or north side of Banaras–that the best vantage point is achieved from across the Ganges.



114 Banaras in Monsoon

His execution of the compositional elements from this view produces a compelling, probing dissection of the subject matter–visions within visions. Temples with high spires shape the skyline alongside the bank of the blue waters of the Ganges. For Manu Parekh, no two ghats are ever the same. They are '...piled up, one above the other, in the most elaborate but imposing confusion...'[3] Manu Parekh portrays '...its numerous broken ghats or high landing-steps, in an almost magical manner.'[4]

We see the wondrous sight of the sacred city from the river, an infinite variety of views that unfold in front our eyes in every section of the picture. He depicts the Ganges as a powerful symbol, the water of life, symbolic of a new creation, and of death, the final immersion, and the crossing over from one state in the space of transformation into the womb of the Ganges– '... the water, which has the power to wash off sin even after death.'[5]

Through his paintings, we sense the sacred river's long journey and the force of the advancing monsoon storm.

> *...Siva the Destroyer is symbolized as Siva the Creator or Renovator, because in the 'unending change' the dispersion of one contributes to the formation of the other. But you may remark for ever, and yet not paint Benares.*[6]

Manu Parekh has dared to paint Banaras in his distinctive genre of artistic expression and vision, which he has developed over many years, via a long journey of self-realization achieved through his ongoing fascination with the sacred city.

1 GW Forrest, Cities of India, Past & Present (Mumbai: 1999), p 260.

2 EF Burton, An Indian Olio (London: Spencer Blackett, 1888), p 5.

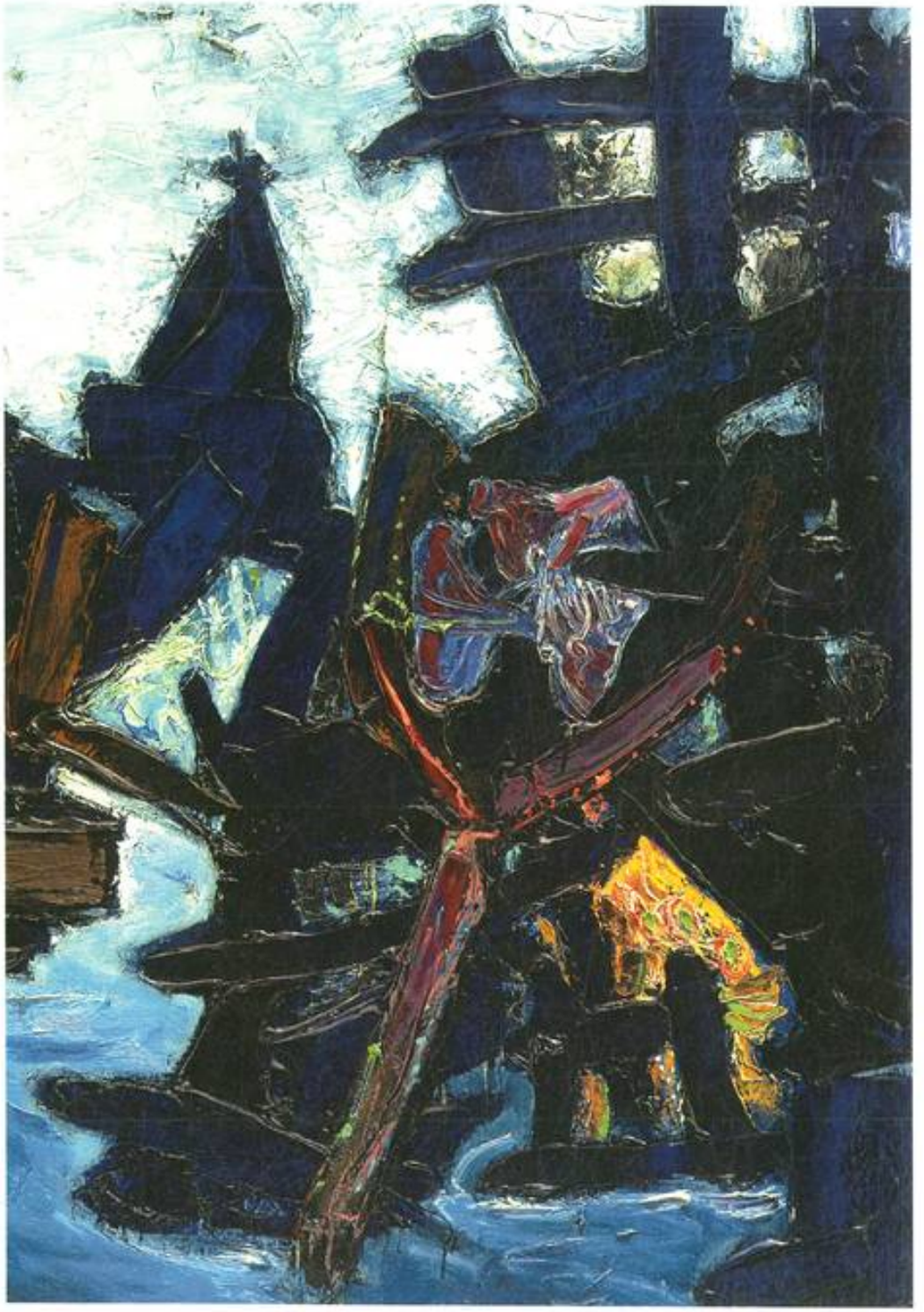
3 Thomas Bacon, First Impressions in Hindustan, Vol II (London: WH Allen & Co., 1837), p 313.

4 JJ Aubertin, *Wandering & Wondering* (London: JJ Aubertin, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1892), p 50.

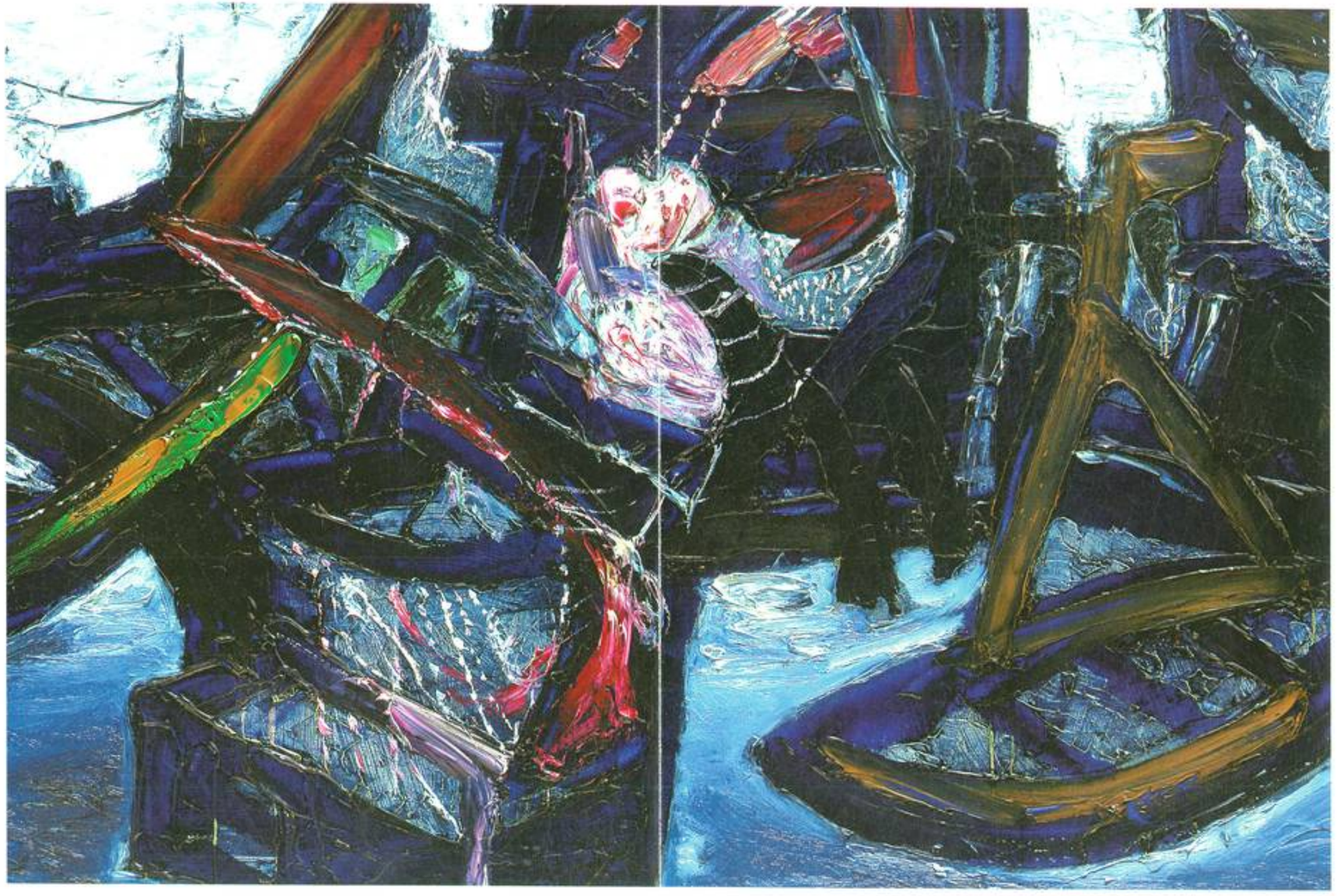
5 GF Abbott, Through India with the Prince (London: Edward Arnold Publishers, 1906), p 286.

6 JJ Aubertin, *Wandering & Wondering* (London: JJ Aubertin, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1892).

























Landscape of Banaras, diptych, acrylic and oil on canvas, 144 x 48", 2006

Landscape of Banaras

Peter Osborne

Manu Parekh's monumental diptych, *Landscape of Banaras*, is an exhilarating, flamboyant visual statement depicting the artist's unique interpretation of the organic iconography of the great city. Organic, this much misused and misunderstood term, defines that which is elemental and natural, something Parekh's paintings clearly evidence with reference to the five natural values of earth, water, fire, air and space.

'The artist is the lover of nature, therefore he is her slave and her master.' This is an acute observation by Rabrindranath Tagore, who was a significant influence on Parekh, and in this painting the artist reaches deep inside himself to discover and reveal the essence of place. It is a journey into the soul without conclusion. His ceaseless and restless re-interpretation of the structures of Banaras typifies an artist's unfulfilled urge for liberation. This ambition is a constant unrequited desire, recalling Seneca's definition of an artist, who takes greater pleasure in the act of painting than in the completed picture. No artists are completely satisfied, all are striving restlessly to discover the essence of themselves through their subject.

Parekh's own description of the life cycle of Banaras as organic theatre is most apt. Theatricality in Parekh's work is self evident. This can perhaps be traced back to his early interest in Gujarati theatre, but also to an instinctive visual extravagance that lends itself to theatrical allusion. Parekh paints expansively and with an inner confidence, never more so than in these monumental landscapes. There is drama here in every brush stroke, every splash of colour. This is not narrative painting, but rather a heartfelt identification with the fundamental life forces that are central to Banaras the place.

There is an expressive virtuosity in the linear configuration of *Landscape of Banaras*, yet the cursive nature of the central formal elements of the painting are delineated by an essentially calligraphic visual language. The organic structure of the painting is multi-layered, demarcated by the artist's diverse palette of brilliant colours. They eye is drawn first to the vivid emerald greens and crimsons of the structures that edge the river, underlined by the deep cobalt blue of the water. Cadmium yellow and orange pick out the brightly lit shrines, the flowers and the flames. Finally the dark mass of the city is silhouetted against a vibrant sky in cerulean blue and turquoise.

In Parekh's painting, the autonomy of colour and of form do not go hand in hand. The form of an object, its contours and surface composition such as a boat or a



building remain true to natural reality, although often extravagantly distorted. There is a structured, often monochromatic framework onto which he juxtaposes complementary contrasts of strong colour. Van Gogh often wrote in his letters about his fear of moving too far away from reality. 'I don't in fact invent the whole painting, on the contrary I discover the thing, but it must come out of nature.'[1]

Banaras is his stage set, an immense panoply of colour, as vivid and vivacious as the life forces that define the city. The sacred river is his stage, the flowing water reflecting the brilliant flashes of colour, the bright yellow of the lighted shrines, the vivid orange of flower and flame–shared symbols of life and death.

A glance at European painting of the last century will reveal stylistic and structural parallels with Parekh's work. Of course there is Van Gogh in Parekh, in the boldness of colour, in the exaggerated gestural marks that signify the essence of structure. Perhaps the spontaneous wildness of the Fauves, the sensational impact of the Blue Rider Group and in particular Kandinsky during the Murnau period, when in 1908 he visited that small Austrian town and redefined the use of colour and form. The German Expressionists took this new approach forward and here we are perhaps closest to Parekh. Rilke, in a rather violent analogy, thus describes the artistic temperament. 'The expressionist, that inner man become explosive, who pours the lava of his boiling mood over all things.'[2] This is the essential centre to Parekh.

Characteristically, Parekh evokes an essence of place, its soul and spirit, in a few spontaneously expressionistic brush strokes. In his studio recently I watched him take a blank sheet and in a few marks he had sketched, in his own unique visual language, the sense of structure of the temples and ghats and the river, rapidly composing an expressive word picture. There is a constant fragile balance between form and expression in his work. He is in no way an abstract painter, and stays faithful to an underlying concrete reality as a foundation. The overlaying of colour and the distortion of form reveal the artist's expression and unique interpretation. This personal revelation, in contrast with the concrete appearance of structure, exposes the vehemence of his expressive will. This second reality is pure and subjective, it is natural.

1 Vincent van Gogh, *Collected Letters*, edited and introduced by Mark Roskill (London: Collins, 1972).

2 Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Complete French Poems of Rainer Maria Rilke*, translated by A. Poulin Jr. (Saint Paul, Minn: Greywolf, 2002).







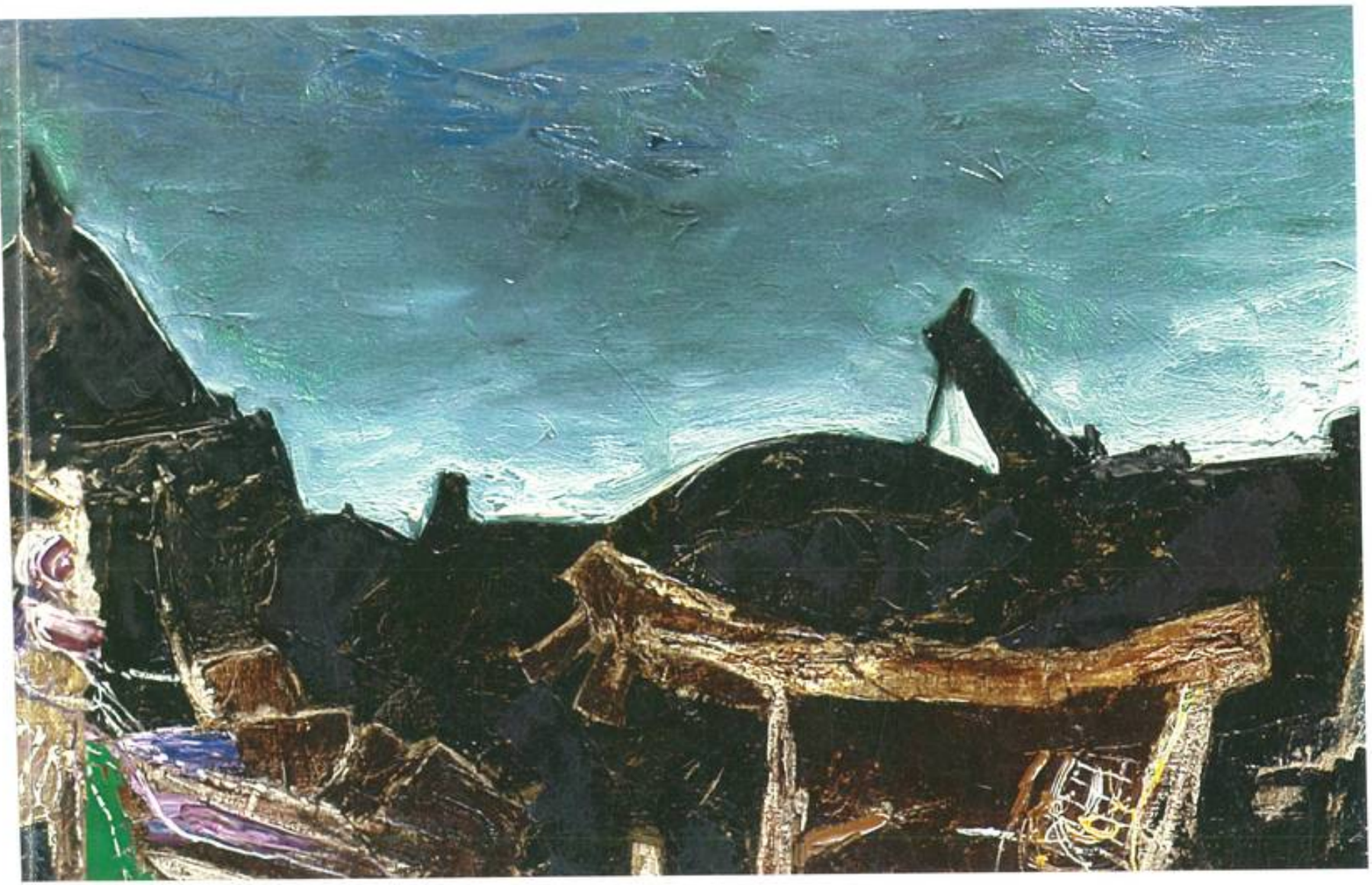
















Banaras at Dawn, triptych, acrylic and oil on board, 180 x 36", 2005

Dawn Light Deities

Marilyn Rushton

In Manu Parekh's *Banaras at Dawn* we see dawn light gods burst forth like Aztec gold, in all their splendour. In so doing they create a sensual, energetic force, a sacred constellation. His magical world harnesses the sky energies to illustrate the empowerment process of dawn light. Through this, he generates the experience of seeing the world in a new light and makes us reconsider everything we have previously believed or known. This creates an energetic rapport with these gods of the forces of dawn light; a magical world of energies in the solar system matrix encompasses the viewer. The ascent of the sun leads the viewer onto a path of higher awareness of the whole new world of mystical energies.

Manu Parekh honours the meeting of the gods of dawn light, creating an event worthy of the trinity of the gods on high. He creates an energetic affiliation with these gods. We see their ability to move, change and act on both living and non-living things. The activating force of these spiritual deities represents the sacred constellation of the forces in which we live. Like hallucinogenic drugs, they bring forth diverse levels of perception.

In *Banaras at Dawn*, Manu Parekh acts as the integrator of the four elements–fire, water, earth and air–harmonizing the earth's most ancient energies and creating a land which represents both decomposition and regeneration. There is a great variation of detail in the rounded temples, and in the evidence of rituals and sacrifice. We see the empowerment process of the golden volcanic energy that emanates from the breaking dawn light. We see a sky that holds a promise of developing energies–*manas*–all of which enter the world and galvanize life. He also introduces various energies—dark filaments, karmic challenges, profound influences, primeval forces, vibrations of light–a constellation of cosmic forces which enable us to develop the areas of our awareness. The dawn light represents the duality of life and death. Within the composition, we see an integration of positive and negative space, air, earth, fire and water alongside corresponding points of the spiritual practices of the faithful. He harmonizes these elements, directions and assertions of belief in an indisputable manner.

Within the temples of enlightenment, we see the vibrations of the rituals, a synchronization of the energies of life and death, a state of awareness and an inexplicable pure wonder of the new constellation that we are witnessing, represented in the classical religious ritual of integration. At the top of stairways to enlightenment, we see entrances to temples, the colours

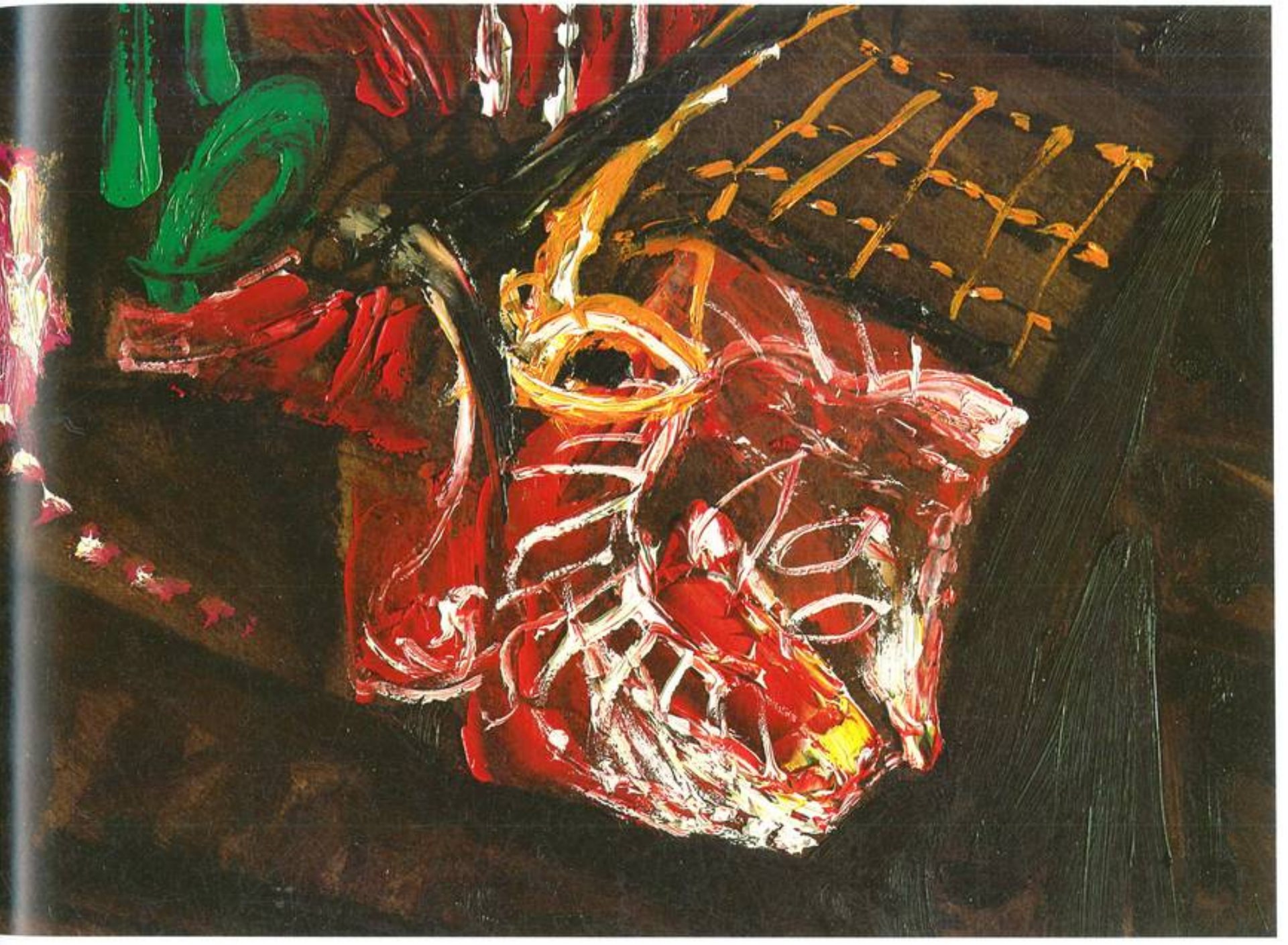


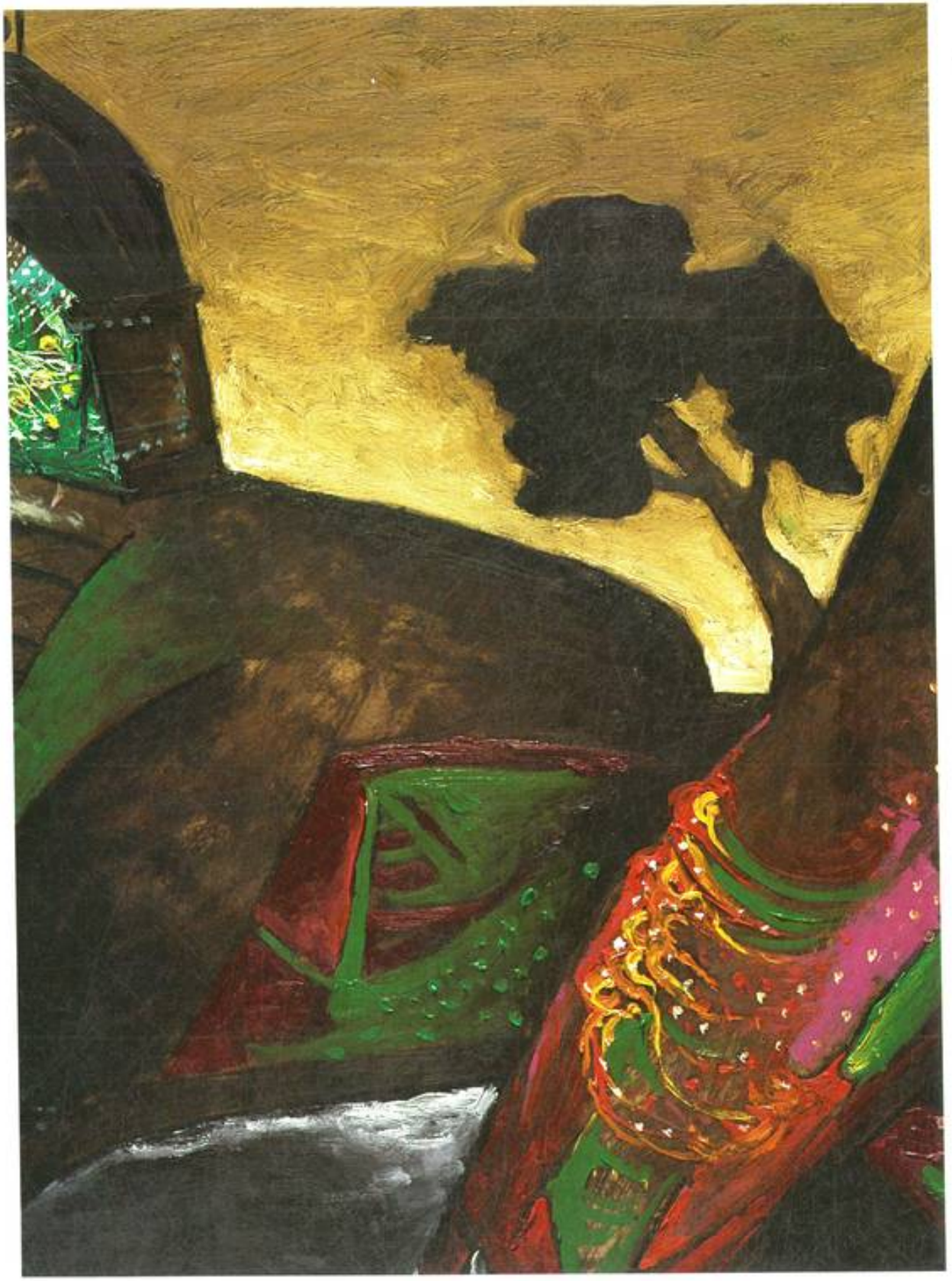


of which pull us in, holding us witness to spiritual traditions. We see different paradigms, both the accepted and the unaccepted ones, reflecting a combination of our perceptions, thoughts and fragile emotional states. It is through his identification of our emotional states that Manu Parekh traps us within his composition. In his vision, the terrain mediates between water and sky. We see the development of the awareness of another journey–vessels bobbing on the sacred river, indicative of man's journey through life.

On closer examination, underneath Manu Parekh's chronicling of the dawn light and the probing dissection of the panoramic view lies a dialectic juxtaposition of a sensual quality. There is a surprising harmony in the combination of symbolic shapes with the distinctive appearance of the three elements–sky, earth and water. The schematic outlines of the trees and buildings given a simplified treatment, the changing plays, the irregular positioning and an irregular distribution of light in the sky express the atmospheric quality of the composition. His appreciation of the sensual can only be perceived by a true aesthete of the dawn light.













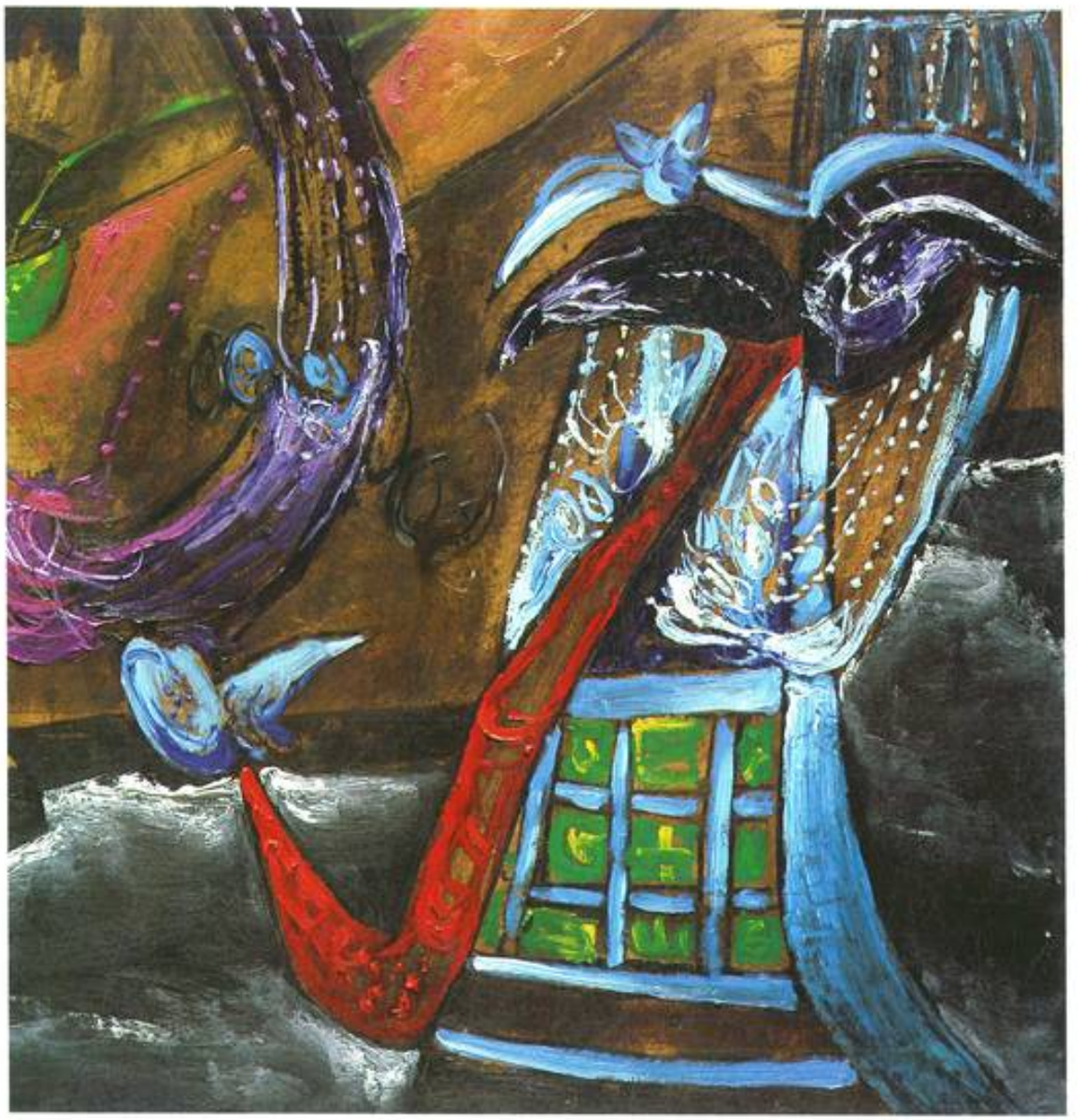


151 Banaras at Dawn











Moonlight Banaras, diptych, acrylic and oil on canvas, 144 x 48", 2006

Moonlight Banaras

Marilyn Rushton

The moon lighting up the night sky has always been an object of wonder. In Manu Parekh's *Moonlight Banaras* we see no moon, only moonlight–light that we perceive as coming from the moon, but which is, in fact, reflected sunlight–another example of the heavens declaring God's glory.

Parekh avoids placing too much sky in the composition, as the night sky has nearly no reflectivity. It is the images in the forefront of the composition that are subject to a variety of albedos. We see moonlight shining through partial clouds in the sky, creating an interesting effect of colours and tonal diversity. Moonlight shadows are more blue-tinted than those of daylight–in different parts of the canvas we see subtle variations of the reflected light, resulting from his utilization of the unseen moon as a primary light source within the picture.

Manu Parekh captures the beauty present in the natural world and the processes active within it to produce an interesting optical effect of a pale illuminating curtain of light veiling the shrines. We see how various aspects of the light interact with the contours and patterns of the scene. He captures the rapid changes and the moonlight's motion. From the mirrored surfaces, pale shafts of moonlight are reflected towards the viewer's eyes. The sacred ghats are silhouetted against the sky, as the unseen moon moves towards its climactic phase.

The composition demonstrates Parekh's compelling mastery of the counterparts of positive and negative space–the positive moonlit sky, the negative silhouetted landscape, the positive moonlit temples and the reflections in the sacred river. He strikes a balance between the positive and the negative elements, differentiating them so as to give definition to the composition. However, he then purposely upsets the balance between the positive and negative spaces by having the moonlit temples in the foreground intersect the negative silhouette through to the positive space of the moonlit sky. Negative space, in the form of the silhouette, helps to define and differentiate the subject matter above and below it. In the relationship between texture, colour and form, we see that the negative space is not just an absence of light. It is this skilled use of the interacting positive and negative spaces that has such a memorable effect on the viewer's eye. Finally, we see the counterbalance of the positive and negative elements, symbolically distinguishing good from evil.

We see gateways and roads, entrances into and exits out of the canvas, subtle adjustments that reveal

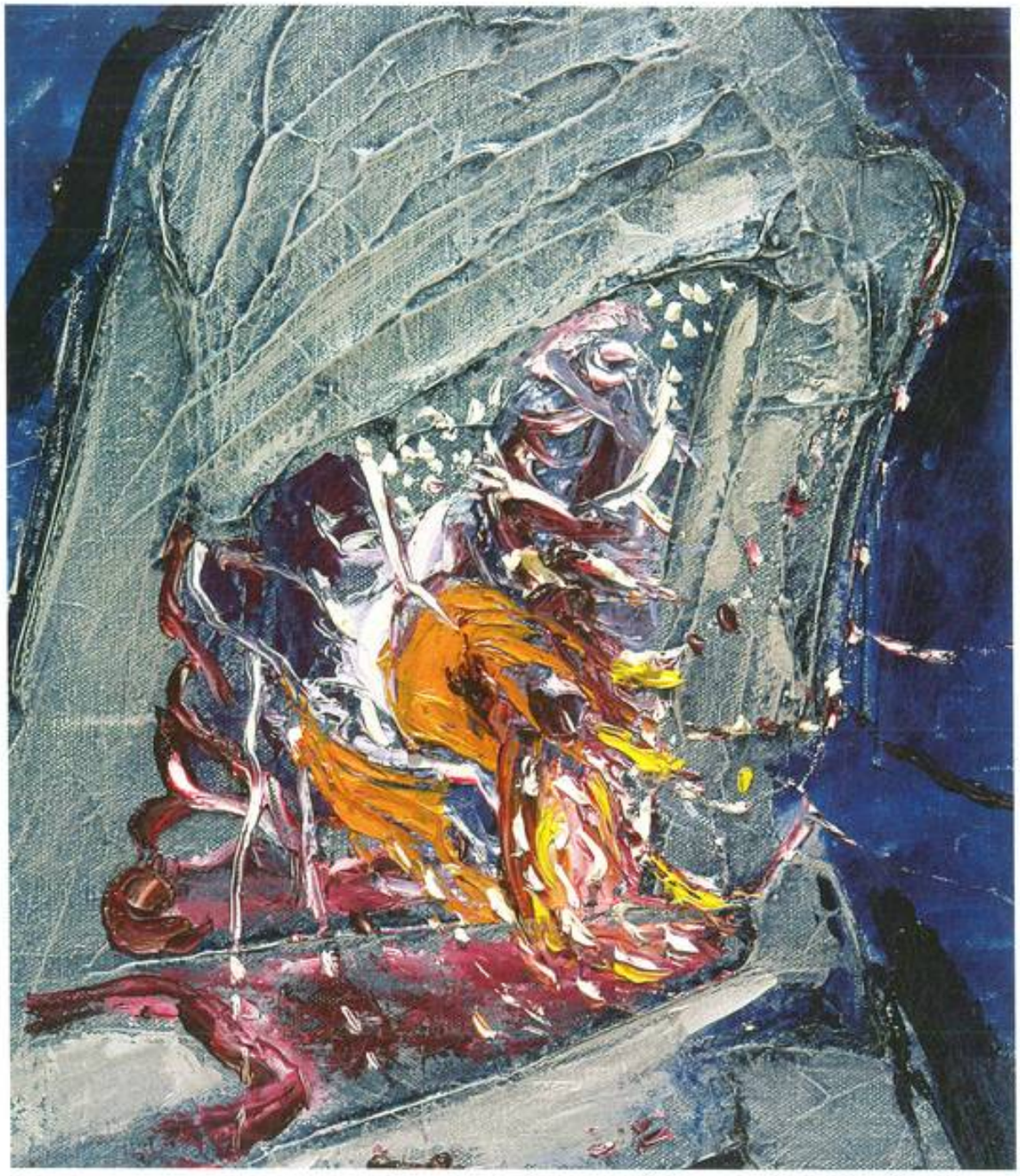


160 Moonlight Banaras

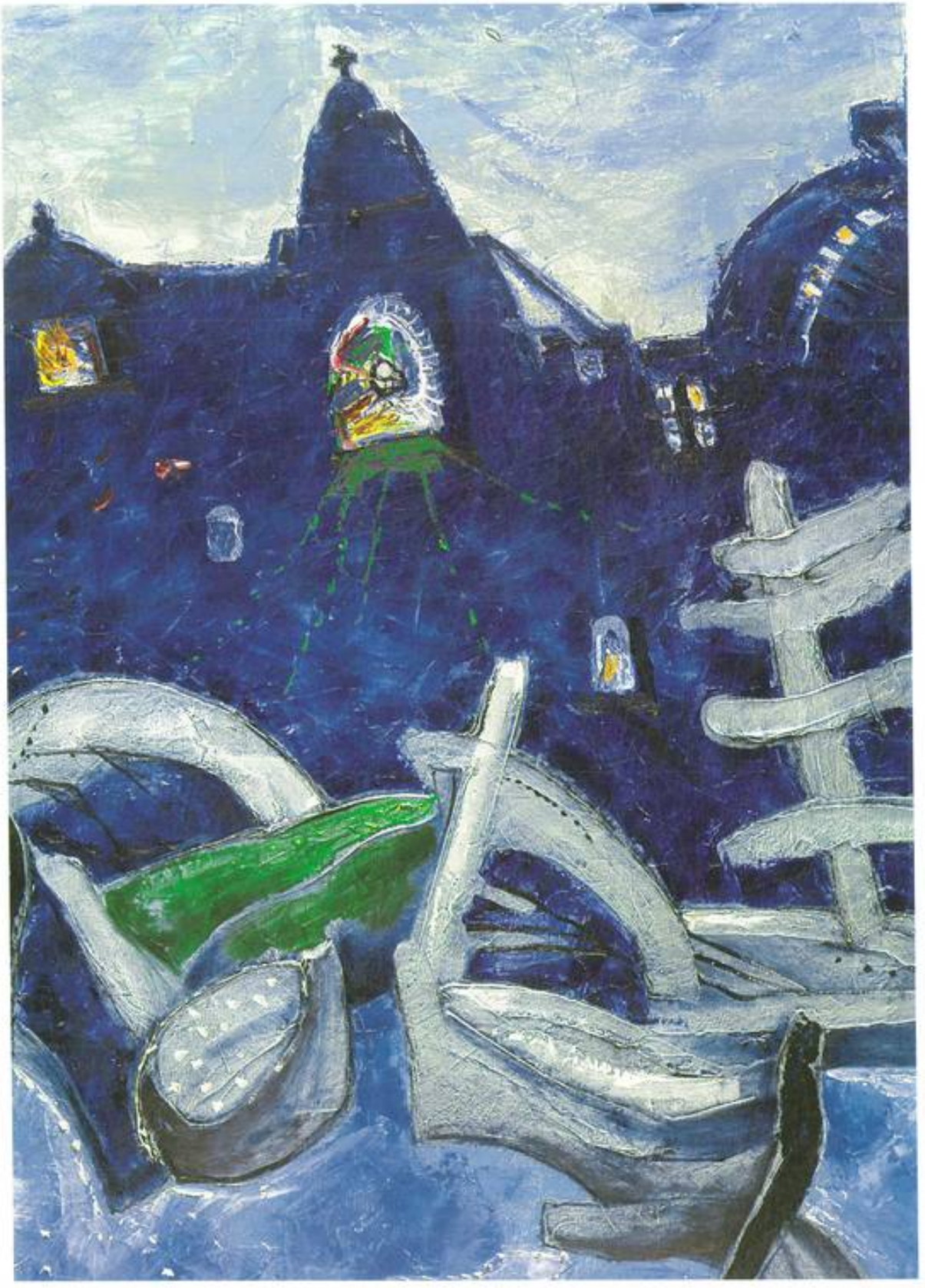
more of the subject matter than before. What distinguishes Manu Parekh from other artists is that he draws us in, capturing us visually and emotionally, so that we are involved with the elements of the composition. To watch him paint is like watching a ritual dance–he paints standing up, walks around, side-to-side, backward and forward, he will even turn the painting upside down to check the balance of the constituent elements. The energy of his painting travels across the canvas and intersects with the primal positive and negative forces, with good and evil.

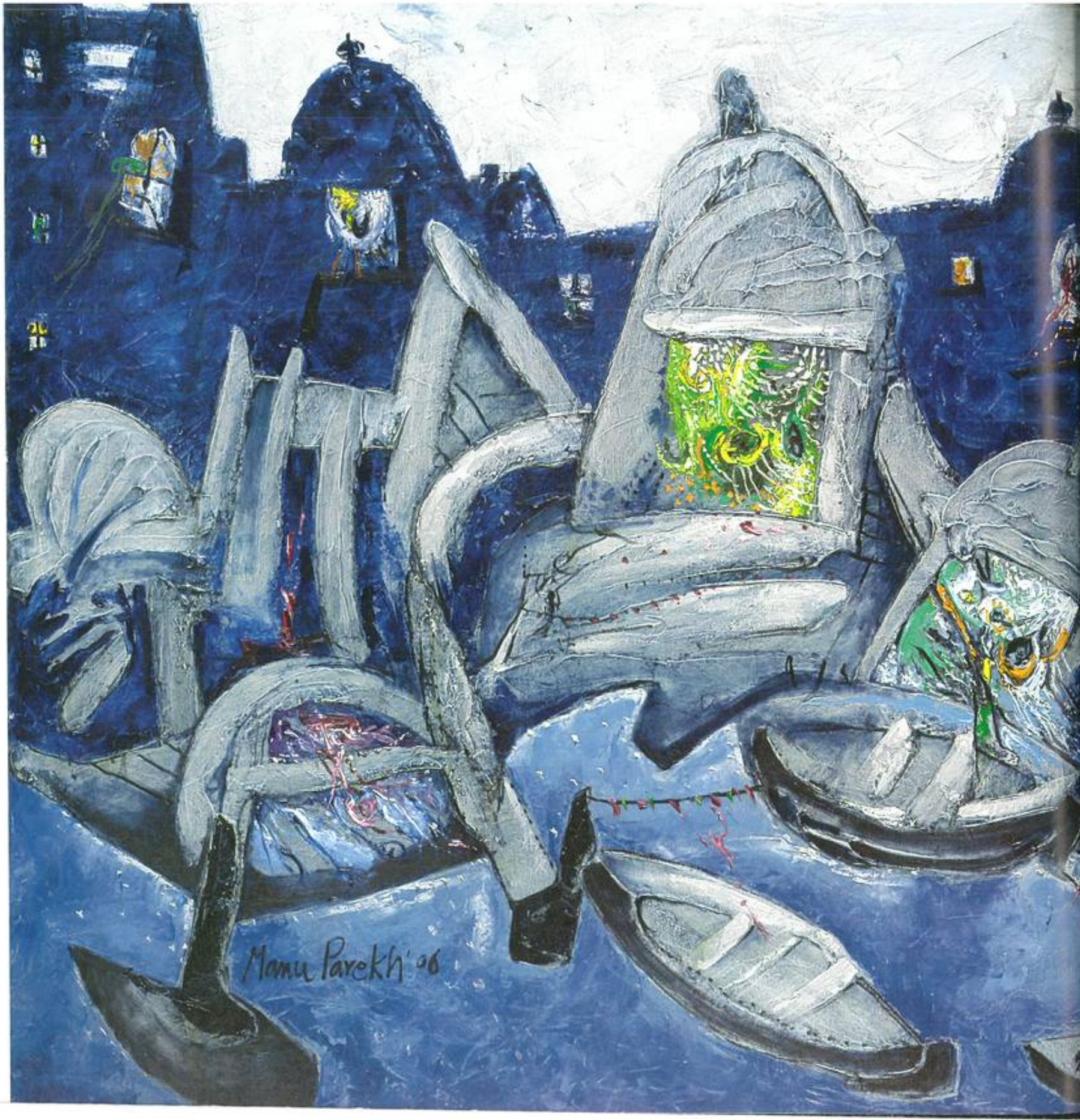
Manu Parekh has found the key to producing a dynamic tantalizing vision by dancing with the moonlight goddess.







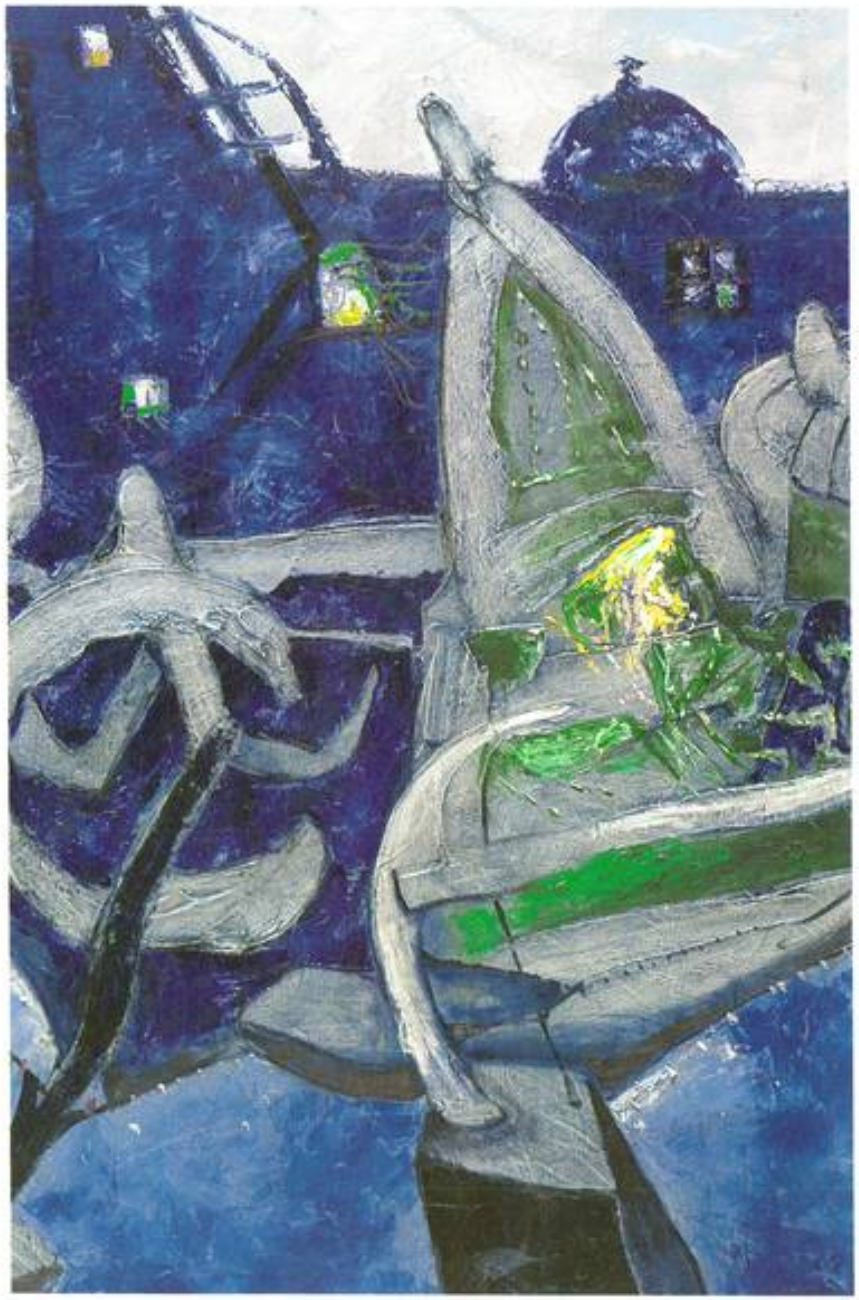



Manu Parekh '06













Colours of Banaras, triptych, oil on canvas, 180 x 40", 2006

The Thrice-Named City: A Colour Alphabet

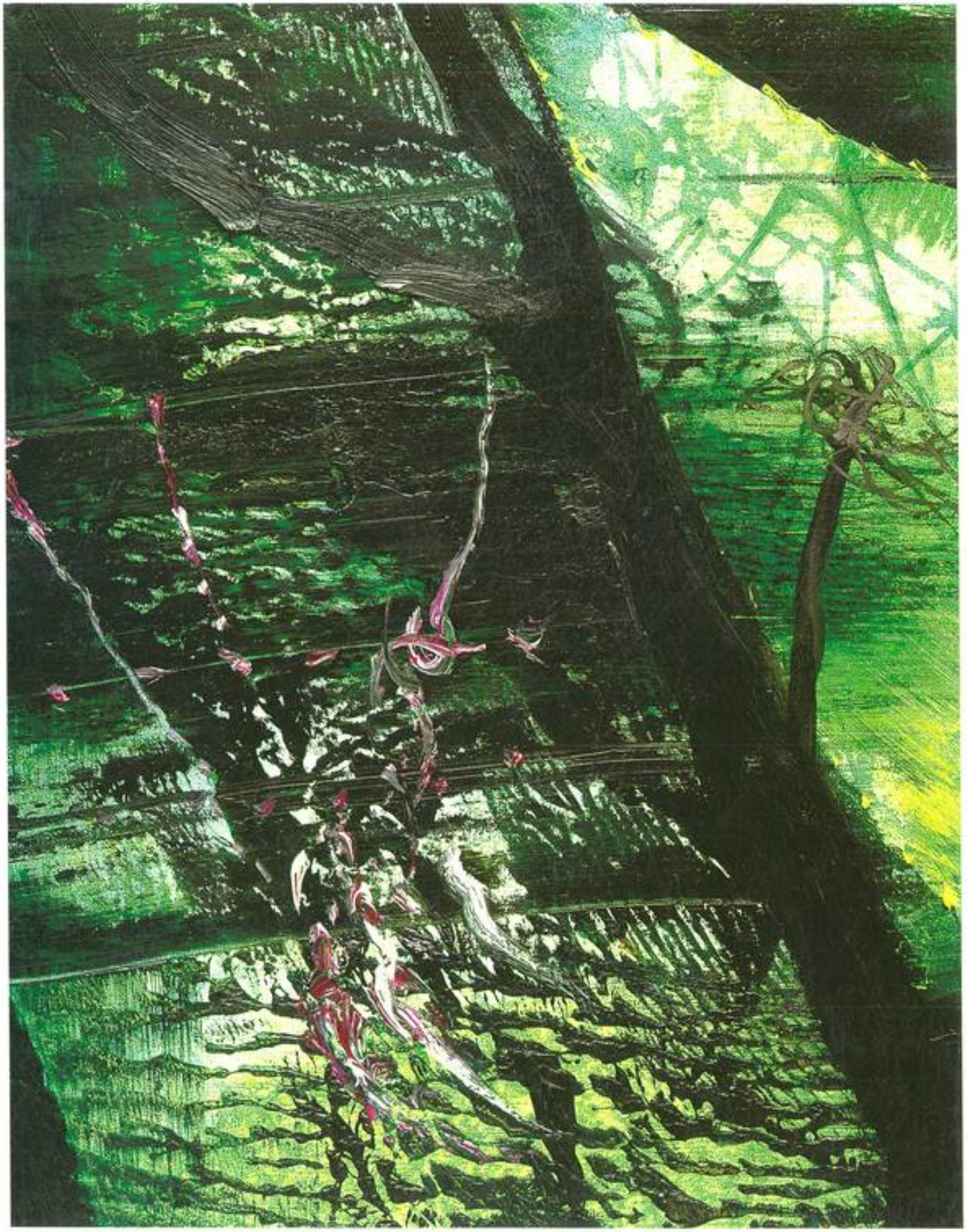
Jeet Thayil

Banaras revels in contradiction. It is full of life, but its business is death. Death stains the air around the Manikarnika and Harishchandra ghats, and mixes ash into the green of the river. The city accepts and engenders everything, like a conundrum out of mythology; it welcomes death in life and the opposite, life in death. There's nothing you can do here that has not been done. You cannot change anything, least of all the broken civic systems. If you are a tourist you will seek to visit as much of it as you can, and you will collect proof of these excursions in a photograph or in a souvenir. As a pilgrim you may attempt to penetrate the city's outer crust of benign neglect to the unchanging, unchanged life within. If you are an artist you will lay claim to the city's most potent force, its unhidden life of symbol and archetype. In each case, you may be successful or you may not. The city does not care. It is what it is. It has been this way since forever.

In the alleys of the old city you will see processions of men, women, and children following corpse on its way to the pyre. The body is treated cavalierly, without solemnity or grace. Or that is the way it will appear to you, a visitor, whose notions of propriety have no place here. In this city, where so many come to die, death is not a matter of mystery, not even of overt grief. Once the animating spark is gone, a body is nothing more than a decayed crust ready to be discarded. And so it will come to pass, the cremation, which occurs without emotion. A priest will inter the ashes into the river. No wails will ascend the air. There is only workaday calm, because, after all, death is our expected destination. How can one be surprised? This is the city's old question.

Its three names speak of different ways to enter its history. There is Kashi, the ancient Puranic location. There is colonial Banaras with its telltale architecture, grandiose and seedy at the same time. And there is modern day Varanasi, choked with pollution, with traffic and commuters, with the quality Manu Parekh terms 'commotion'. The city's three names may speak of different ways to enter its history, but there is no way to enter it except imaginatively. For the artist, this means immersion in all the things the camera-wielding visitor cannot see; it means keeping his antennae tuned to unheard frequencies.

Parekh does not paint on his visits to Banaras. He makes no notes, no sketches, no aides-memoire. He does something riskier and inevitably more profound: he soaks up details and stores them in his mind for use back home in New Delhi. Then, when it comes time to work, he reverses Rimbaud's alchemic formula that gave each



vowel an equal colour. Parekh uses colours like alphabets, as if each engendered its own set of sounds. He puts them together and creates paragraphs of meaning. He likes to use his hands and to vary his materials. He likes the physical labour of working with paint. He works fast, but such is the scale of these paintings that *fast* becomes a relative notion.

He lets the tempo and the texture that develops as he is painting carry him through the length of the work. This gives the canvas a sense of 'spontaneous play', like the element of light-heartedness sometimes found in Indian erotic narratives. You can see the scrape of the palette knife, the quick squeegee swipe, the Gerhard Richter–style areas of pure colour. Each tool changes things a little in terms of rhythm; a slow blues or *ghazal* gives way to the double time of jazz. There is no drawing before the paint is applied. Parekh works directly on the canvas, and the percussive speed of his wrist, which is a kind of narrative in itself, is evident in the movement of his line.

*

On a weekday in early June, there is a book of Jean Michel Basquiat prints on his work desk. What possible connection could Parekh feel with the nihilistic American graffiti artist? You have to look past Basquiat's violence, to his exuberance and to the boldness of his make-it-new agenda. Parekh and Basquiat share a slash-and-burn ferocity, a quality I can see in the painting that is hanging on the studio wall, *Colours of Banaras*. The picture portrays a Varanasi/Banaras/Kashi of the mind, a place that is sinister and hopeful at the same time. It takes everything that is commonly understood about Banaras and melts it into an imaginative topography, an invented version of the city, more seductive than its reality.

*

'This one isn't as aggressive, it's more lyrical.'
'What's lyrical for you may be tough for someone else.'
'India is tough.'
'And lyrical.'
'It's what attracts me about Banaras.'
'Toughness and lyricism. What else?'
'Commotion.'
'A lot of noise and activity signifying nothing. What's attractive about that?'
'It is an Indian invention. You can't defeat it. You have to use it in some way. There's nothing else that can be done with it.'

*

It is possible that *Colours of Banaras* is the key painting of the series. It's not only the monumental size of it–three panels, 4 by 17 feet each–and the way it fills the eye and the brain, or the virtuoso use of materials, or the gorgeous sheen it brings into a room. It is the fact that the painting, especially its first panel, with its use of rollers and calligraphy, was crucial to the evolution of the series. It led to a dozen other pictures. This is the way Parekh likes to move. He lets the work tell him which way to go, how to finish it, how to trust it. It's the way a novelist works, or a poet whose only controlling mechanism over his material is in choosing a rhyme scheme.



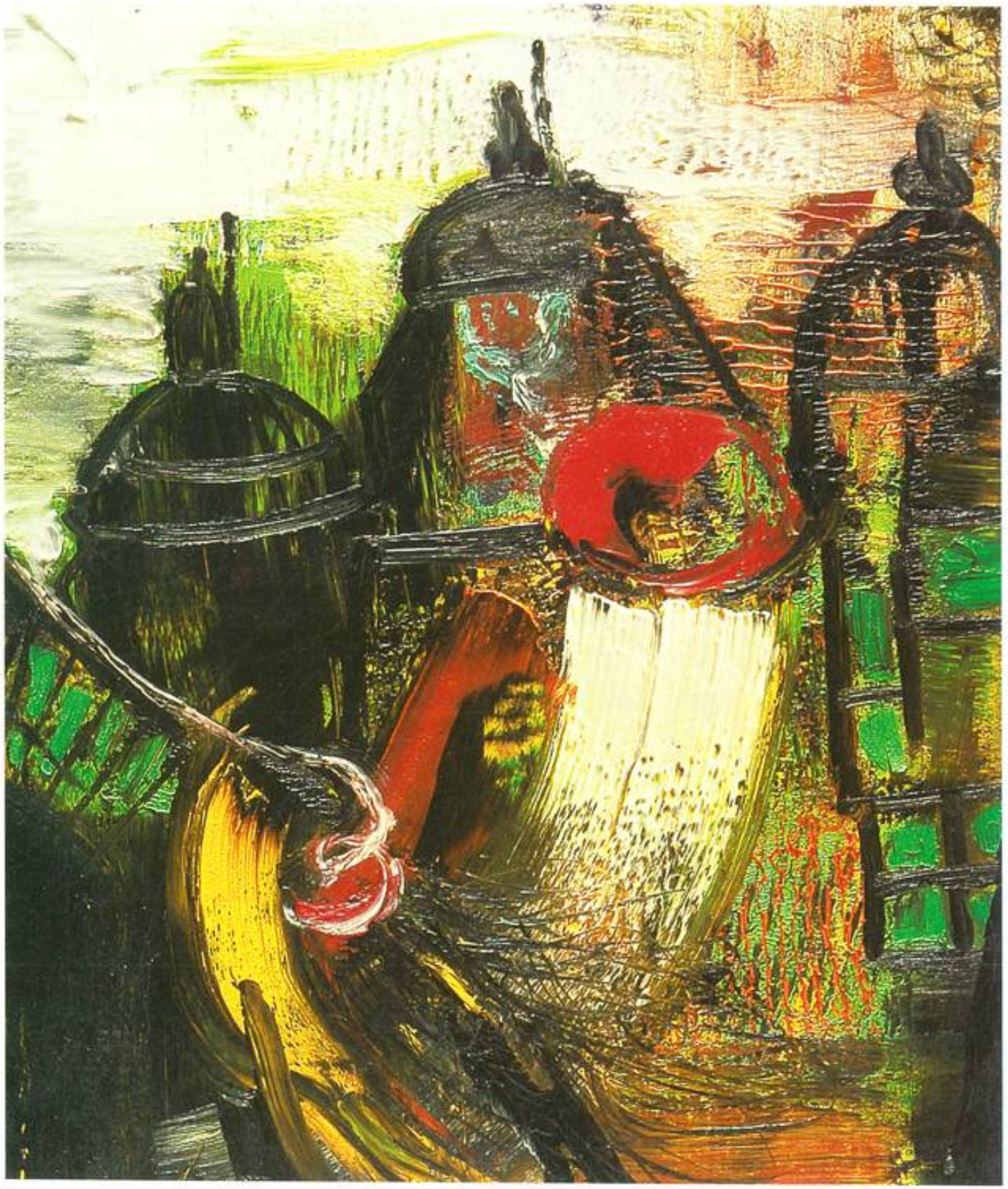
This surrender to the painting's own imperative makes the progression from the first to the last panel both natural and dramatic. In the first panel, the viewer finds a procession, a coven of trees, their stark lines sharp with black paint, webbed with brush calligraphy and the use of rollers. The trees obscure the rounded shapes of barely discernible temples, and there are shreds of red, flowers torn by wind and rain and, beyond, a green and blue blur, like a landscape viewed through a rain-swept windshield. The middle panel brings a whiff of the subconscious, of long-buried archetypes: a serpent figure, disembodied breasts, a penis. The blur is gone, as if you have emerged from a rain-swept forest into the sunlight. The last panel's three-dimensional squeegee swipes, the careful detailing of the trees, the temple roofs piled on top of each other like domed rain clouds, all these take the painting past tumult–into serenity. It is also, thanks to the incorporation of metallic studwork and powerful sweeps of distressed colour, a journey beyond the expected gestures of twentieth century Indian modernism, into a possible future.

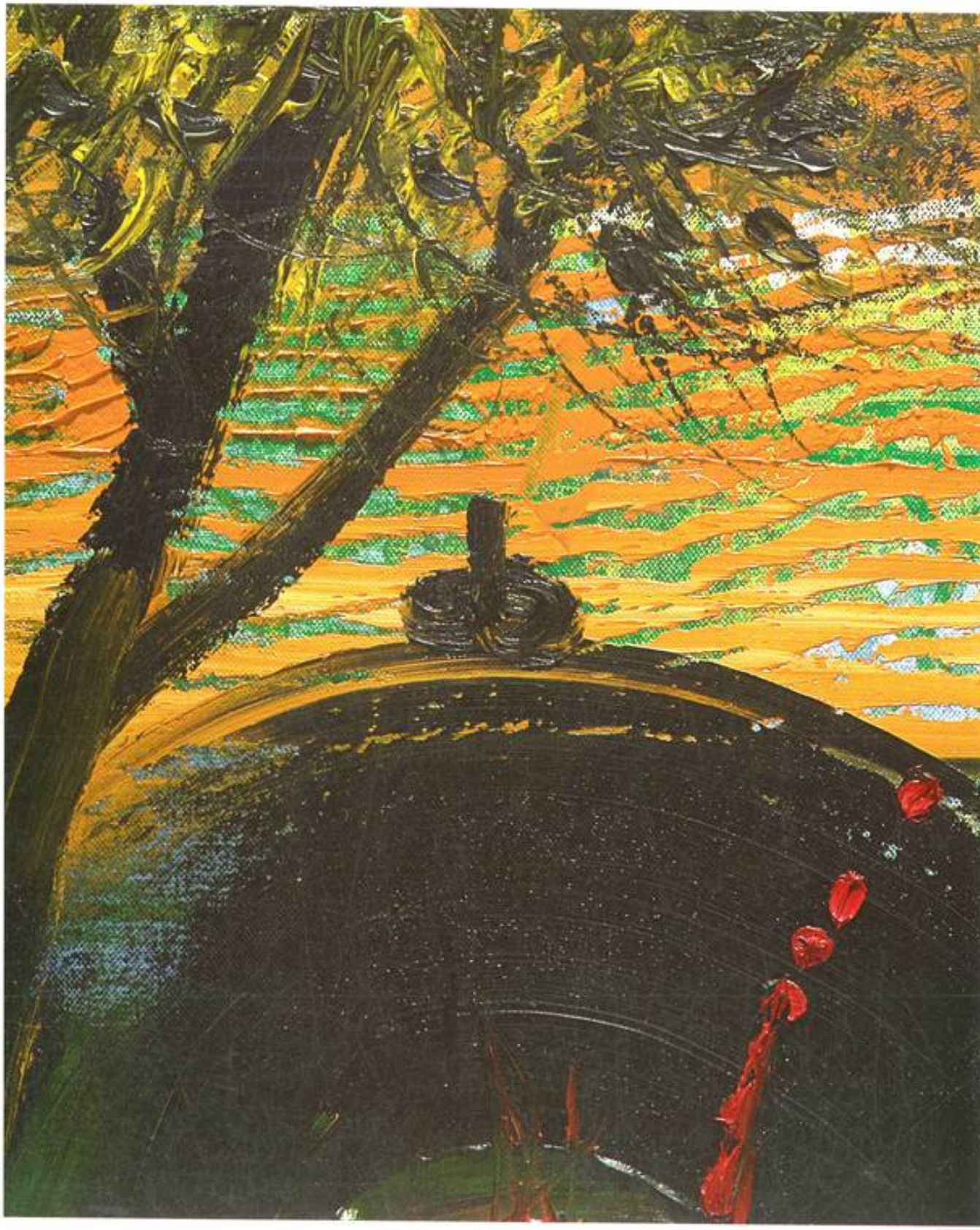
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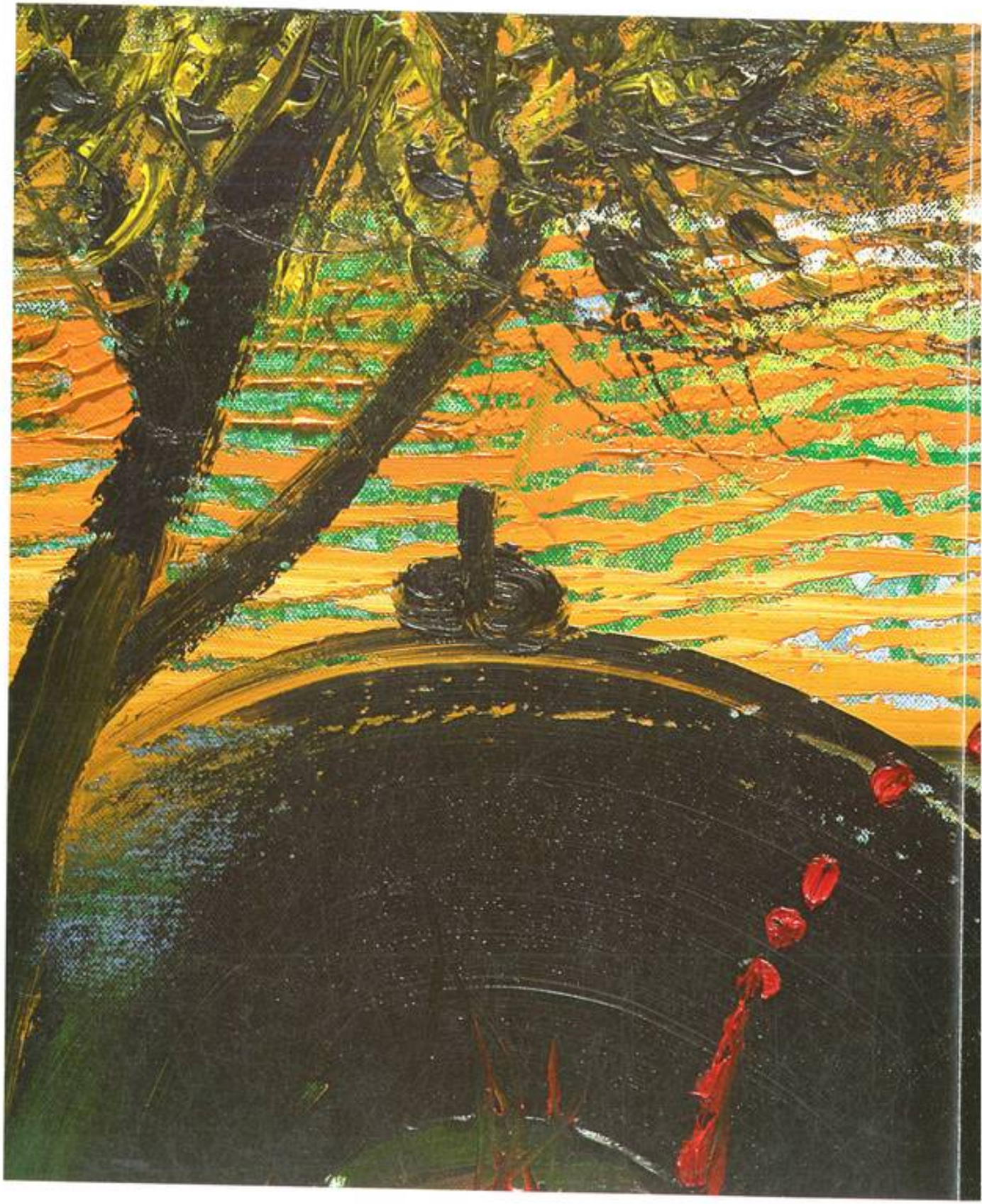
'I went to MOMA in 2002. I went to see the water lilies of Monet. From my bench I realized I could see both Monet and Pollock. It was like a bolt of wisdom to me, a sense of immense possibility that arrived all of a sudden. That connection took many years to come to fruition in my mind, and it finally came together for me in these paintings. I immediately did a series on Banaras, worked for two years on it. Pollock, the water lilies, Banaras in the rain: I want to acknowledge the paternity of these paintings. I want the viewer to feel the emotion I felt on first seeing this landscape.'

*

Emotion is a key, but the ultimate point of *Colours of Banaras* is more subtle and far-reaching than a study of the emotions. The use of a large brush, of acrylics, the layers of green on the canvas–all of this gives the painting the sense of a landscape made and unmade by water. Monet's lilies are always present, somewhere under the paint, or below the surface of the river, but these ghostly flowers have been refashioned into more familiar local flora. As with the other paintings in the series, there are formal notions being worked out. The comparative studies of manmade light versus natural light; the speed; the disconcerting visual impact of colour and texture; the exuberance of the execution; the repetition of elements, though each painting in the series is very different in mood from each of the others. Each element matters, but they are mere *technicalities*, a word that evokes, intentionally in this context, the word *technique*. What is really coming into play here is more important–and unsettling–than the spectacle of a painter working at the height of his considerable powers. It is nothing less than a portrait of an ungraspable city. It is essentially fictional, but a fiction that becomes truer than fact. And the portrait these pictures paint is of a city in which *modern* and *ancient* are merely perspectival variations, nothing more than cerebral play, as superfluous as glosses on the sun. They are finite terms for an entity that deals in the infinite, in the superabundant and the undying. It is a portrait of Kashi, City of Light and City of Night, always there where we cannot see it, just a little beyond our mortal gaze.








Manu Parekh '06

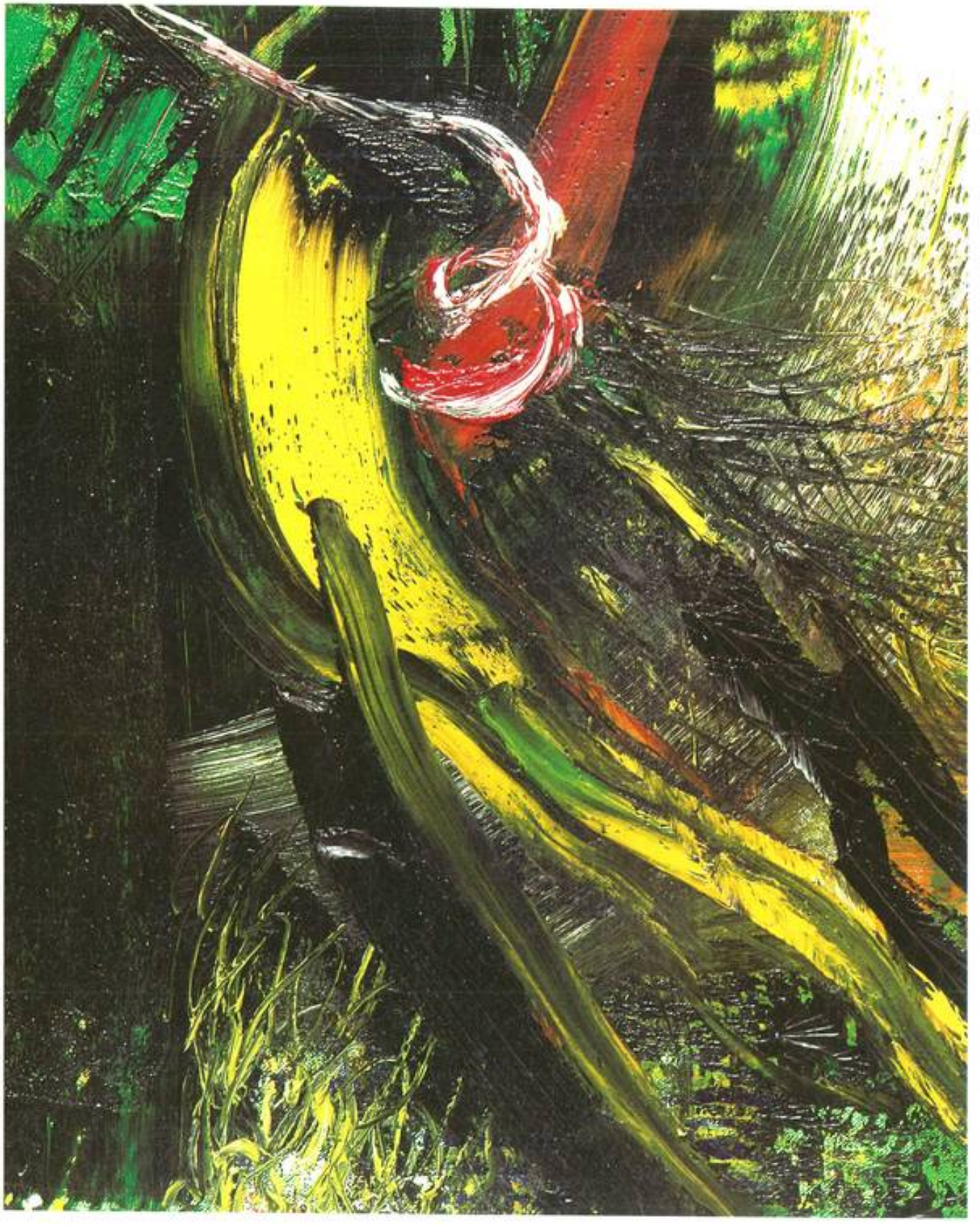


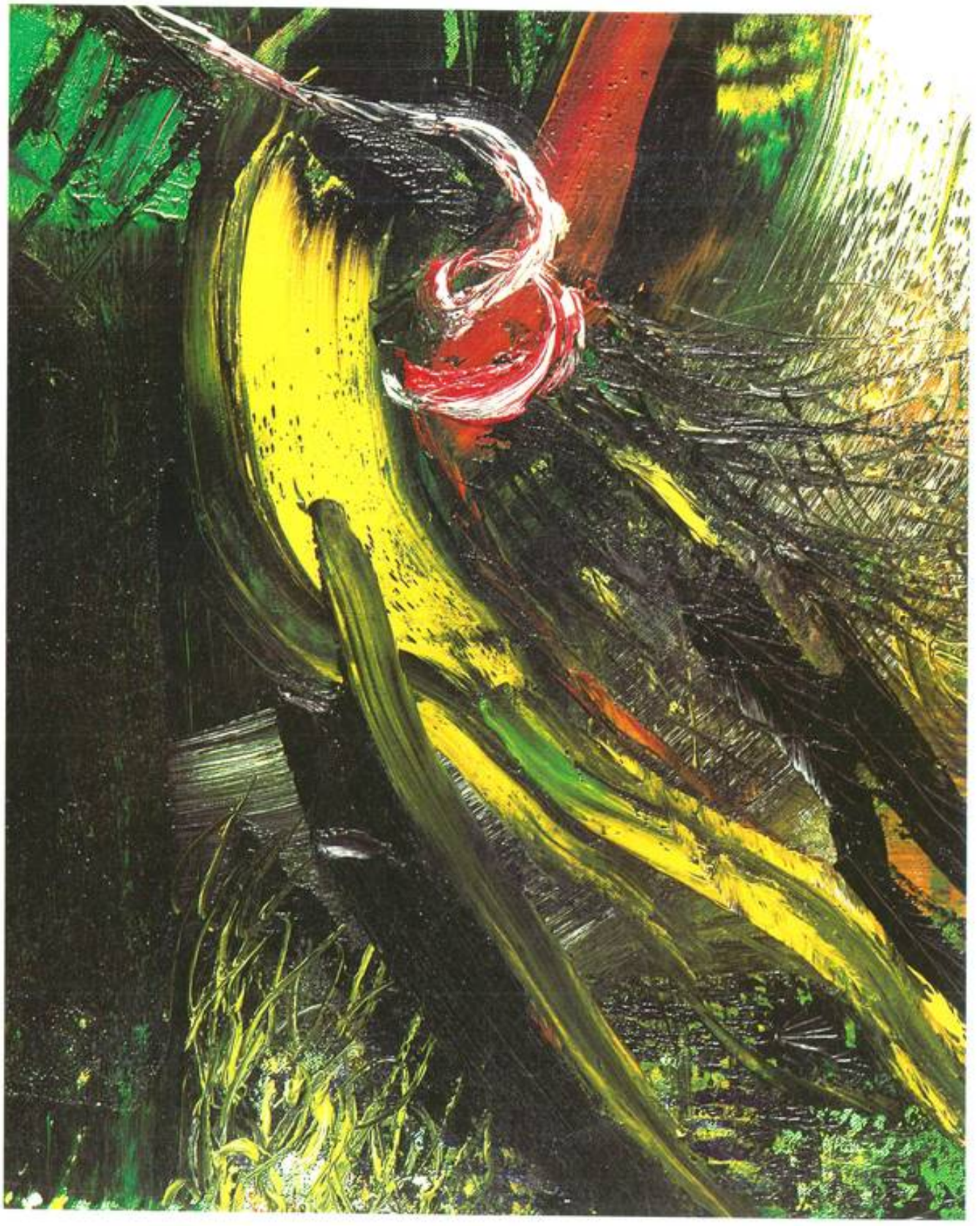














Banaras in Red, diptych, oil on canvas, 150 x 48", 2006

Banaras in Red

Tanuj Berry

This book contains fourteen works and each of them reveals the diversity of Manu's talent and commitment to his work. I chose to write about this particular work as I believe that red is Manu's favourite colour and amongst the array of vibrant colours that he uses on his canvas, it is the one that brings out his best.

Banaras in Red has outdone Manu's spirit many times over. I have yet to come across a work that speaks to me in more ways. The vitality and refinement of this painting indicates the absolute power Manu can exercise in his work.

The orange sky illuminates the backdrop emanating the colour red, as if the light inside the temples has merged with the landscape behind. The black trees on either side seem to be playing the role of divine guards channeling the energy to create this outstanding landscape. The contrast between black and the shades of grey holds the essence of the red and orange within them. It is as if they were the real reason for the colours of Banaras. This painting takes the viewer to a higher level, one that demands complete attention.

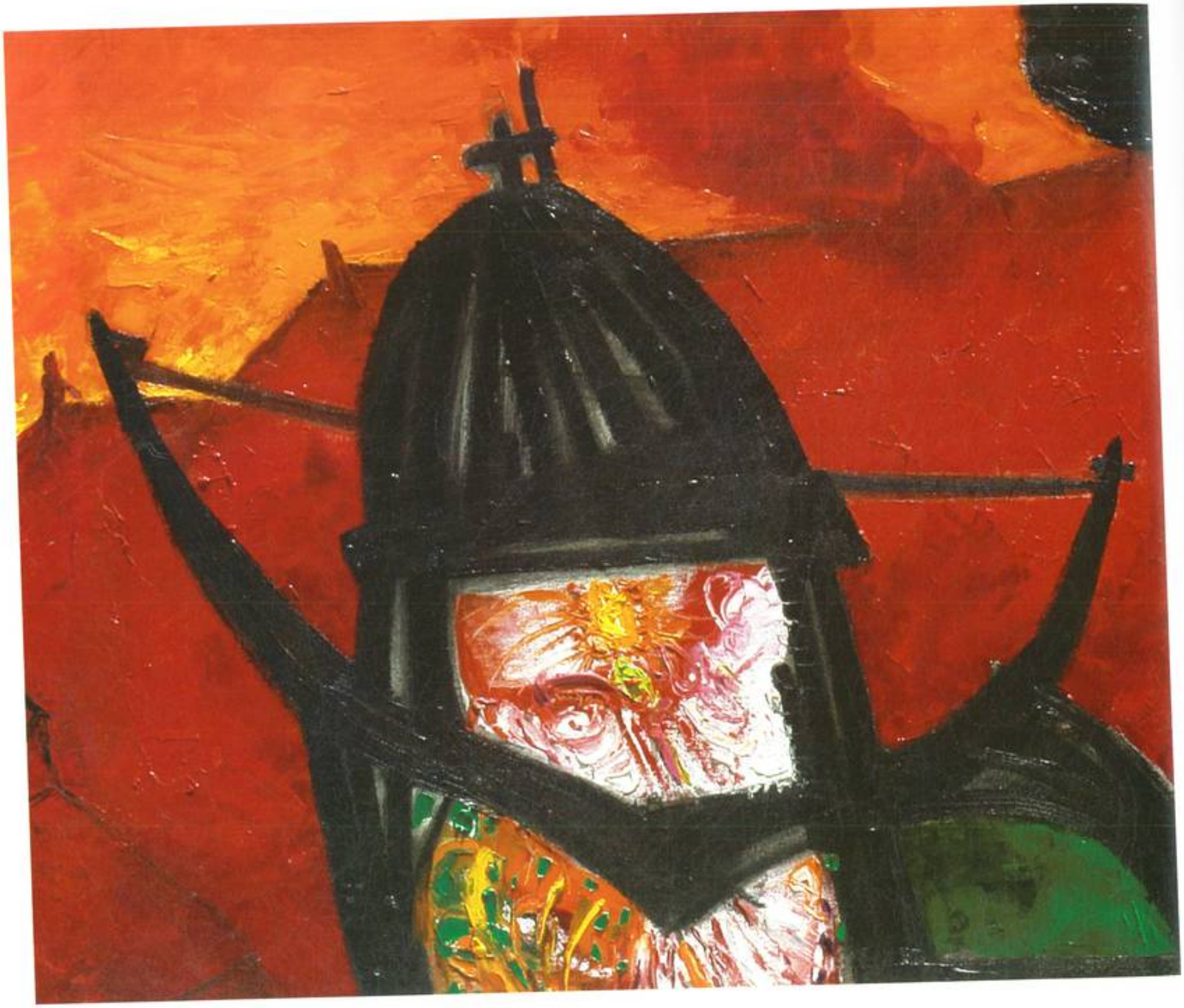
The inverted bow-like construction encircling the key temple structure seems like an aura catapulting the temple's luminosity into the sky as if to announce the arrival of the time of day with its radiance. The painting is also suggestive of the communication between the individual temple structures through their intense brilliance. The red hues bring out the most important facets of the city's enigmatic character.

Although Manu adores being social and has a taste for good things, he is satisfied only by what he believes in with conviction. This painting proves the point that being true to one's own work is more important for an artist than being true to one's desires. In some strange way, that can only be felt and not explained, *Banaras in Red* reveals that Manu has been true to his real self and has sacrificed a great deal for his work.

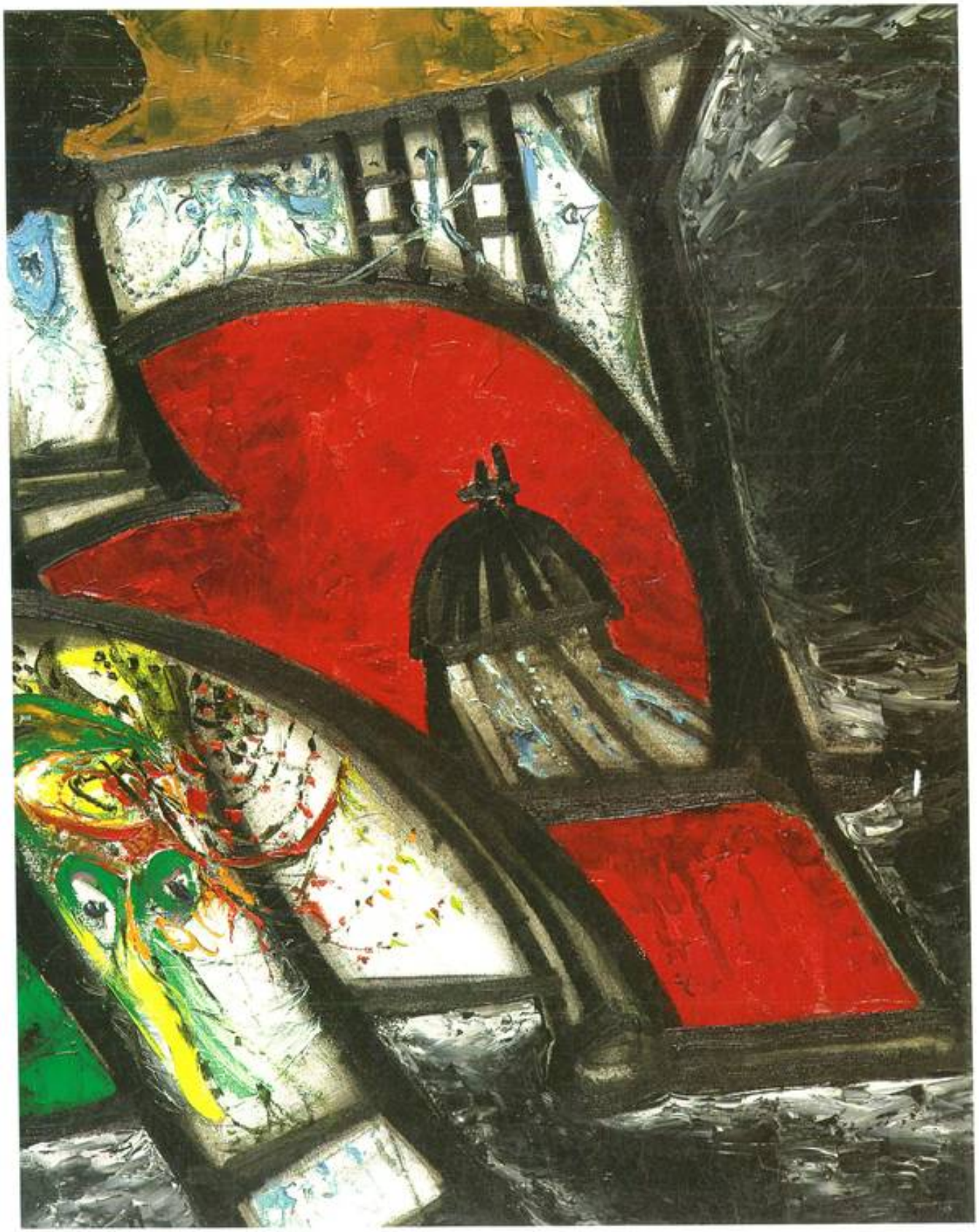
Banaras in Red is the most magnificent painting by Manu Parekh that I have had the opportunity to observe. My three-year-old son Abhivardhan is the present owner of this painting and I hope that when he is older, he feels the same away about this work that I do today.













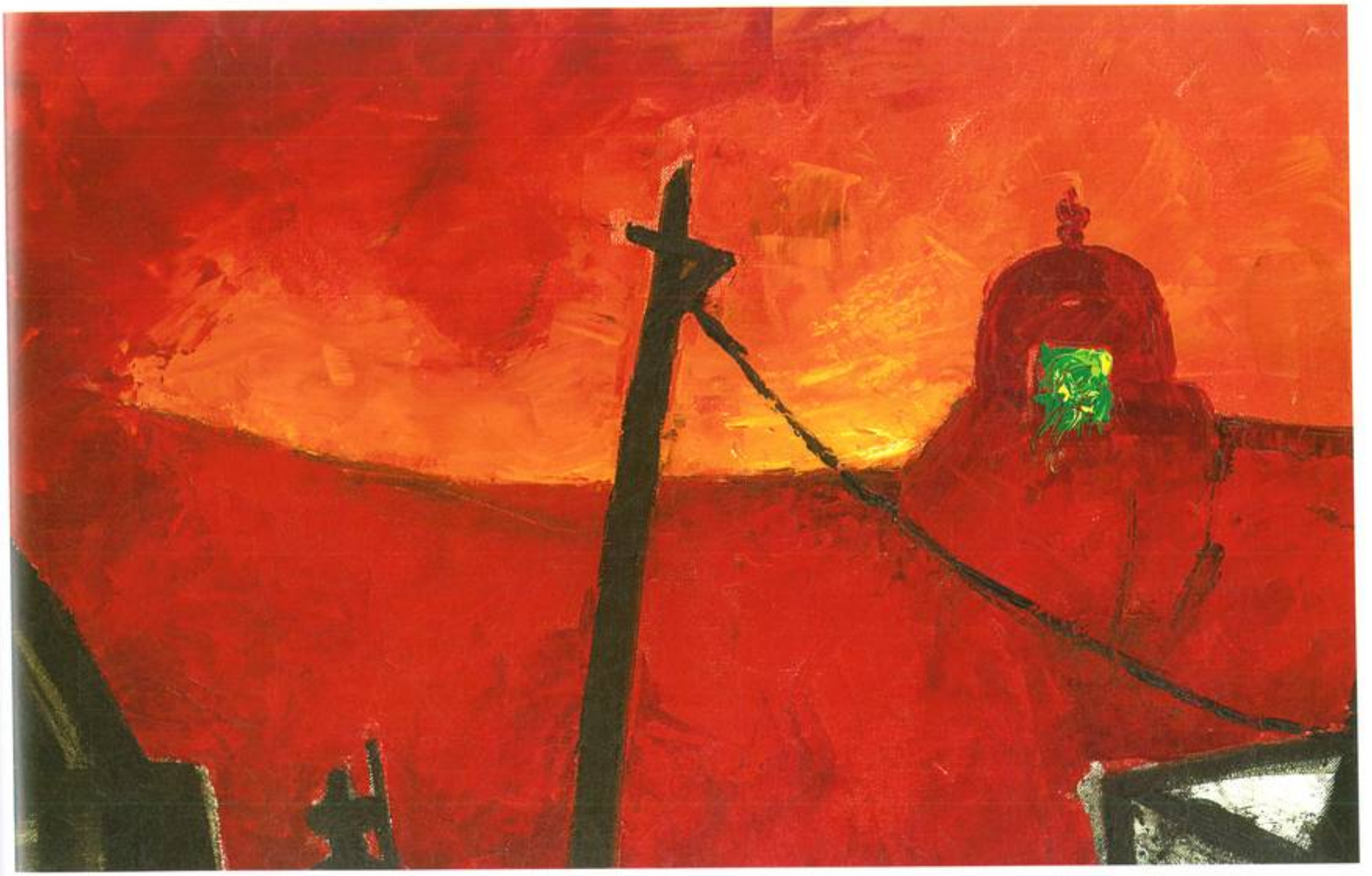














The Blue Surge of Banaras, diptych, acrylic on canvas, 72 x 48", 2006

The Blue Surge of Banaras

Aditi De

What does Banaras mean to the creative mind? Must each artist's interpretation capture the mood, the unheard melodies, the memories of the holy city with alternate strokes? What sets Manu Parekh's interpretation apart from those of, say, Binode Behari Mukherjee, MF Husain or Ram Kumar? Why does he capture his emotion, his ultimate faith, in little shrines that seem to bob between heaven and earth, in a landscape that comes to life in swathes of blue, perhaps a realized palette of Banaras blues? Can there be answers in his voice?

I was very excited by the decade I spent in Calcutta from 1965 onwards. Within a week, I became a typical Calcuttan. I even became a member of the Society of Contemporary Artists. I was then working with the Weavers' Service Centre. Calcutta had almost too much human drama. It was full of contrasts and contradictions. Transferred to Delhi, my work suffered from memories of Calcutta. I wasn't happy. Around 1979, as I struggled, I realized I had to find another place to replace Calcutta. When my father passed away, I went to Banaras, where I found once again great human drama. I imagined how he would have reacted had he been with me. That was a good beginning.

What distinguishes the energy of Banaras from that of other cities? How does a city evolve from a mere locale to a spiritual harbour? Can inspiration spring from jostling crowds by Ganga-side shrines, a shakti pitha (pilgrimage centre), a jyotirlinga (each of the twelve shrines that celebrates Shiva), once named Avimukta? Can great devotion wash away a mortal sin?

I feel my Calcutta period was an inner landscape, while Banaras is an outer one. The latter is distinctive because of its light and shadows, both natural and manmade. In the decoration of a temple, its *garbha dwar* (door to the sanctum sanctorum), the drama enacted within it, I glimpsed the varied human activities I so admired in Calcutta. I found here the Indian quality of light I appreciated in Rabindranath Tagore's paintings.

But the biggest attraction to me was the people and their collective faith. One day, I was waiting at the Dasashwamedh Ghat. It was filled with young married couples in bright clothes, with red and yellow flowers all around. Soon afterwards, at the Manikarnika Ghat, I saw the same flowers around a body lain out for the last rites.

I vividly recall the shaven head of a widow amidst rituals. People may be uneducated, but not unintelligent. They followed the priest through the rituals without question because of their love for their elders. When I roamed about Banaras at night, often I'd come across a small *mandir* (temple) lit from within. I'd discern a sudden movement–a *pujari* (priest) performing rites.

Life and death coexist so organically in Banaras. That attracts me–the everyday evidence of common



people bathing in the Ganga, praying at a shrine, then re-entering life. In this series, I tried to create a human space without using human beings. If I had put a person or a face in, it would have become a calendar!

What influences shaped Manu Parekh's Banaras landscapes? What factors moulded the current trajectory of these mega-canvases? Was it important to alter the traditional perspective, the formed notions on this city, to discover a found city on canvas?

If Ram Kumar's Banaras landscapes weren't so fantastic, mine would have been tough to do. I admire FN Souza's landscapes just as much. They provide me with a frame of reference about Banaras within Indian painting, which is no hindrance at all. There's no question of disagreement. Only by appreciating their work can I create my own individual space. I went to Banaras to create a typical Indian landscape, which doesn't exist so far.

My experience in Gujarati theatre helped me create a space of anticipation, of mystery. To create an invisible presence through an absence. Or perhaps a human presence without a realistic representation.

It was from a lifetime of working with craftsmen that I learnt to respect good workmanship. I once watched a *zardozi* (embroidery in metallic threads) embroiderer in Agra create beautiful patterns with a single thread, for over six hours, with the same level of fineness. The West sees repetition as derogatory, but from an Indian point of view, repetition creates a big tapestry. Even a carpet is an epic work. I'm conscious of this as a painter.

What does the distinctive use of space—such as the triangle of shrines around a shimmer of moon-rippled water—signify in this Banaras canvas? Why the frenzied hurly-burly of elements—a key player, the tossing of leaf, branch and invisible limb? Does this capture an inner human-scape, a questioning of faith, or even a lack of piety? As even the surrounding shrines seem to tilt and joust in simulated turbulence, do their inner colours celebrate the elevated spirit or inner certainty?

I was experimenting with space and creating movement in this painting. The trees, the inner decoration of some shrines and the play of light are active characters, not mere props—as in Chaim Soutine's landscapes. The sky is not especially expressive, but the water is. I wanted to suggest the properties of holy water.

In terms of realistic representation, the colours of Banaras would be brown, yellow and red. But as a



colourist, I wanted to create fictional colours within a similar moonlit landscape, when nights are bluer.

Flowers are an essential character of the city. They are very dramatic, beyond the poetic and romantic. As a life force, they accompany its people from birth to marriage to death. You can see fresh flowers at worship, but also decaying flowers at the ghats.

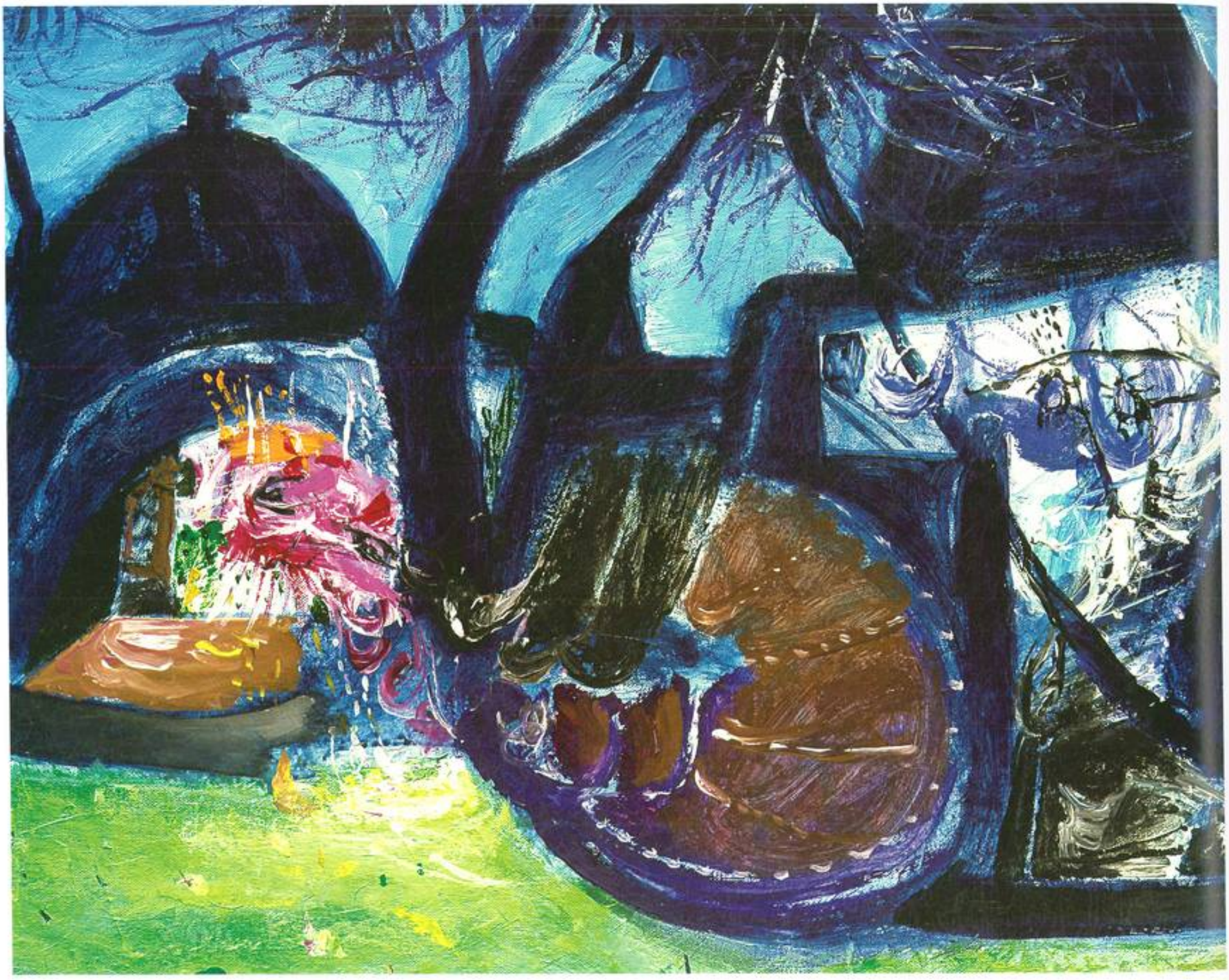
At these shrines, I could trace the interesting choreography of normal and festive life that makes the everyday bearable.

What does Banaras evoke in the spirit that echoes other sites of pilgrimage? What is the secret life of the pious shaped by? Will these canvases form a constant point of reference in Manu Parekh's artistic journey into the future?

In 2005, I visited the Sistine Chapel, the Chisti Dargah in Ajmer, and Jerusalem. I'm not an intellectual. I reacted to each as a common, middle-class man would, with *bhakti* (devotion), with unshakeable faith. It's not about the art, the architecture, the carving or decor, though these create a feeling within the worshipper. Each is imbued with layers of time and thought. It's all about the spirit.

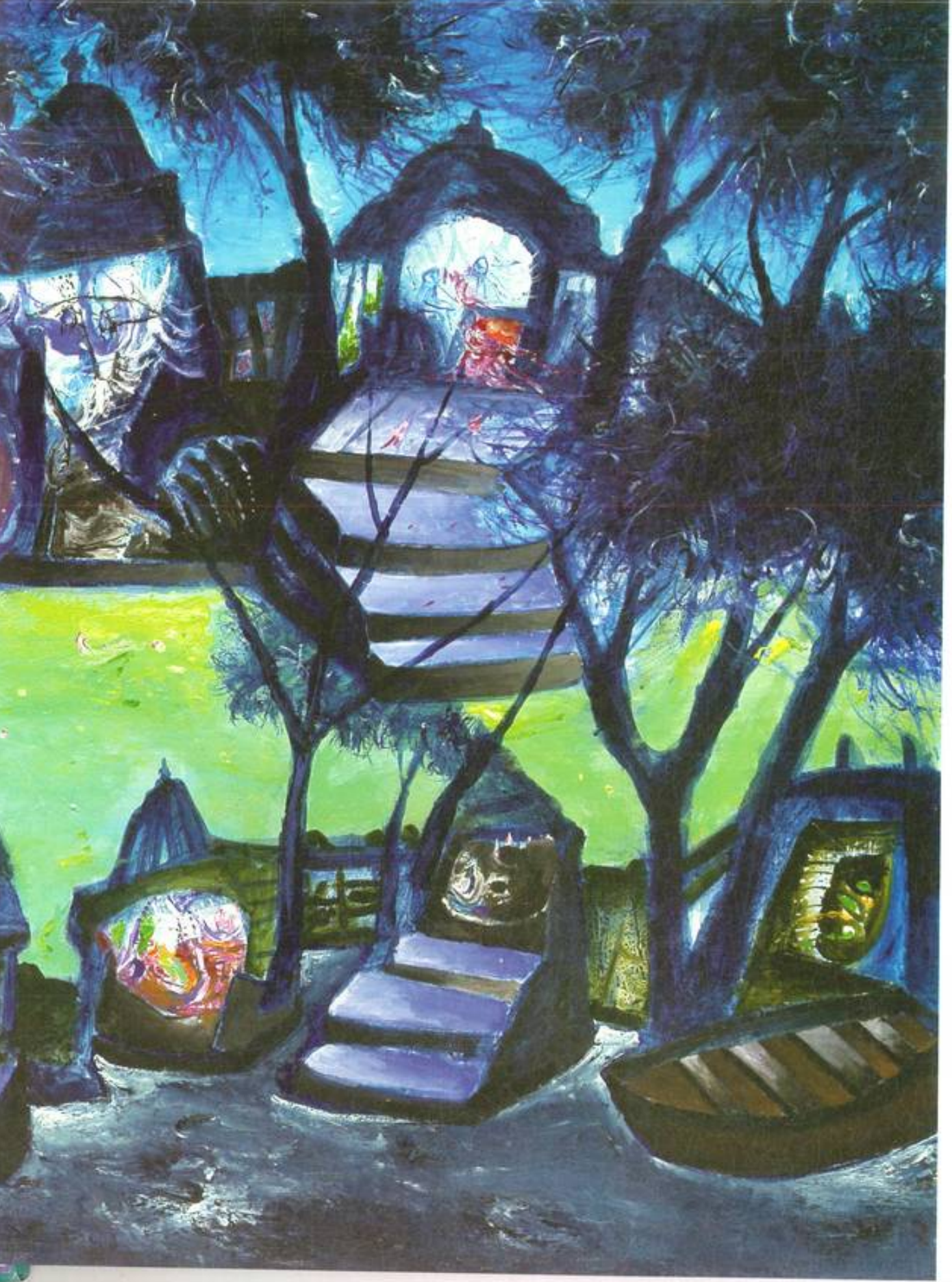
To me, the interior of a shrine–with its colours, gloss, lights, flowers and silk–is the best example of Indian abstract expressionism. One day, I wish to paint only such an interior without any images.

If I stop painting Banaras and find my inspiration only in Indian temples, I can create a great abstract painting, which will make you spiritual. I have a desire to explore that.

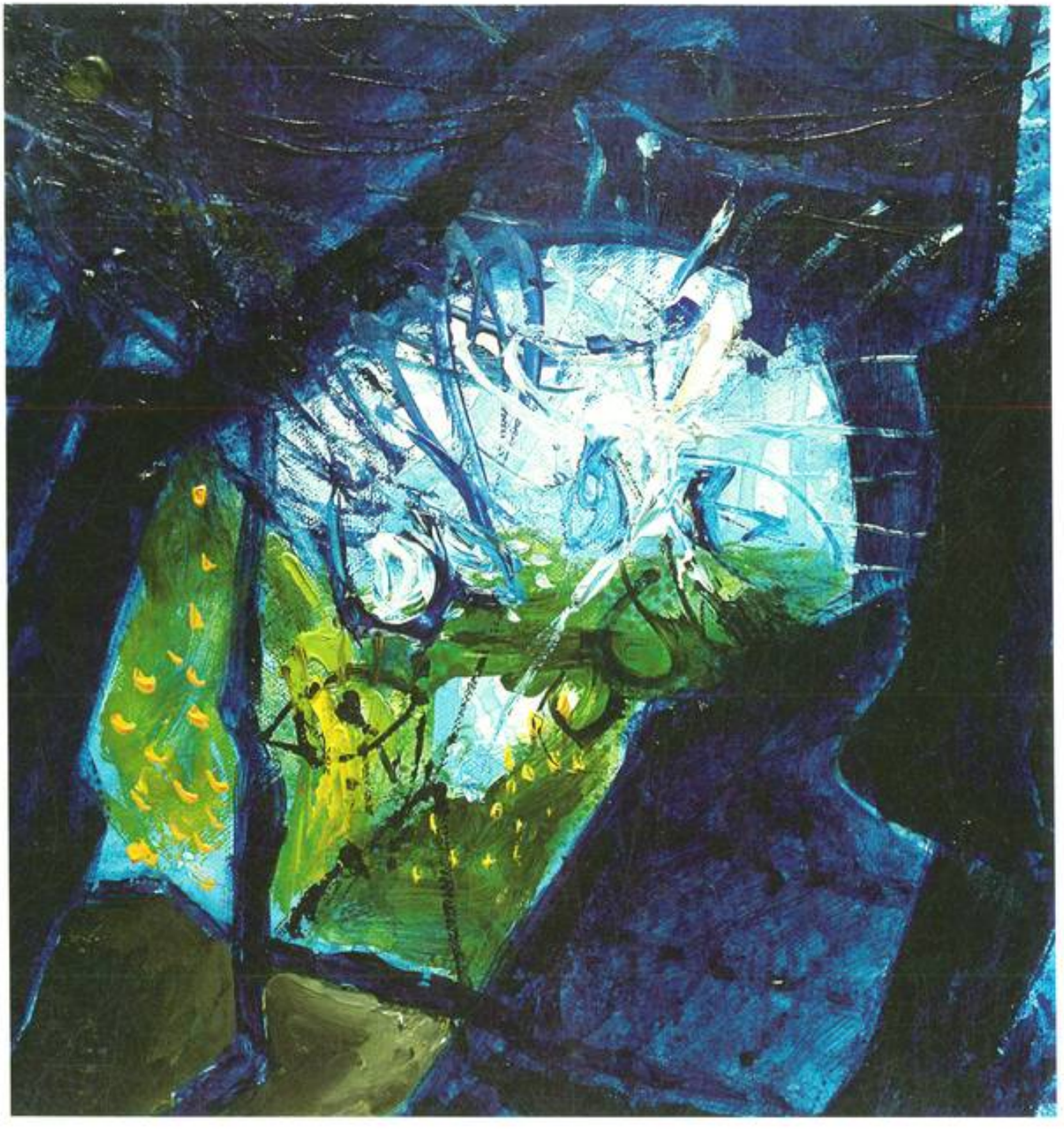


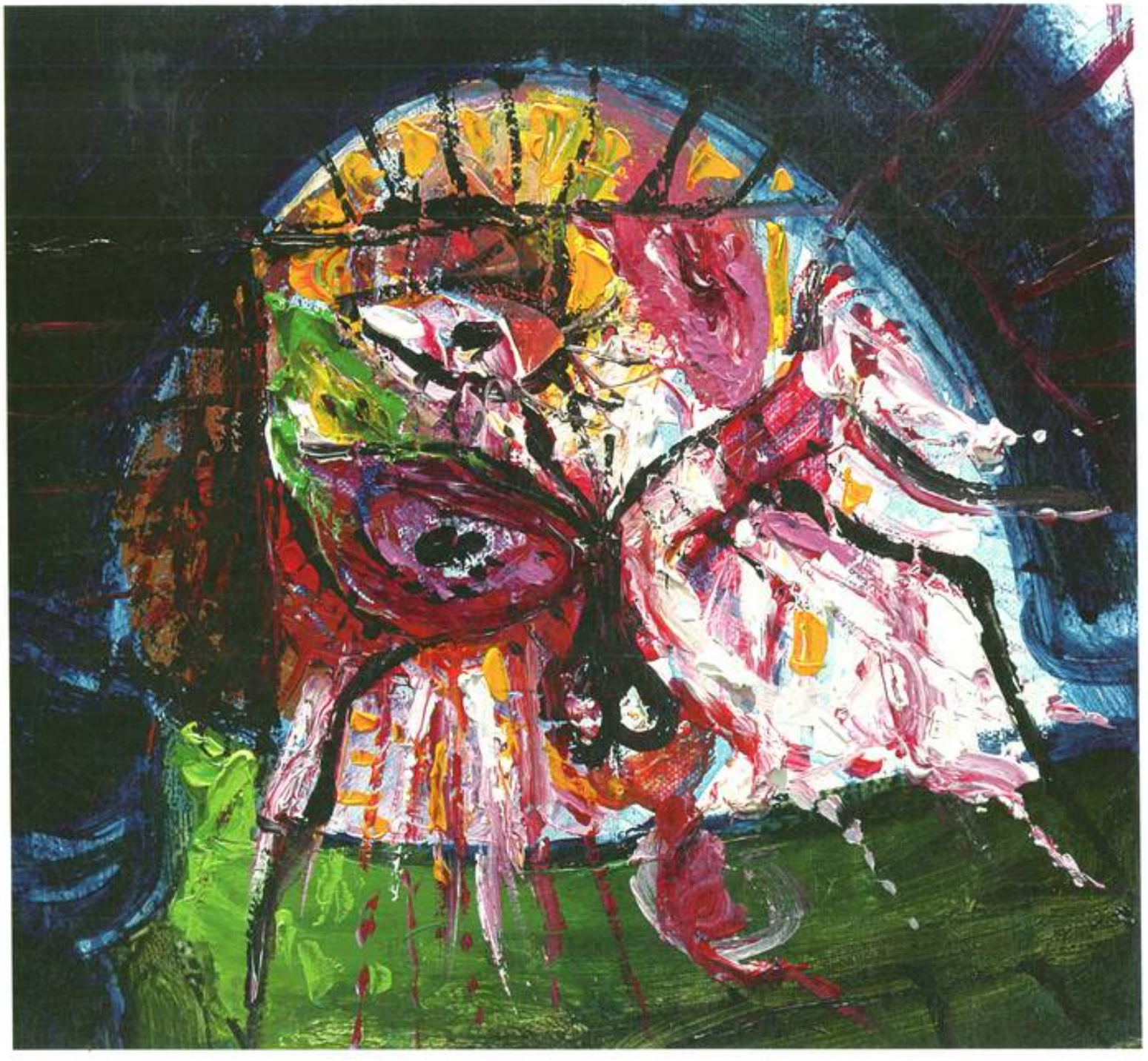


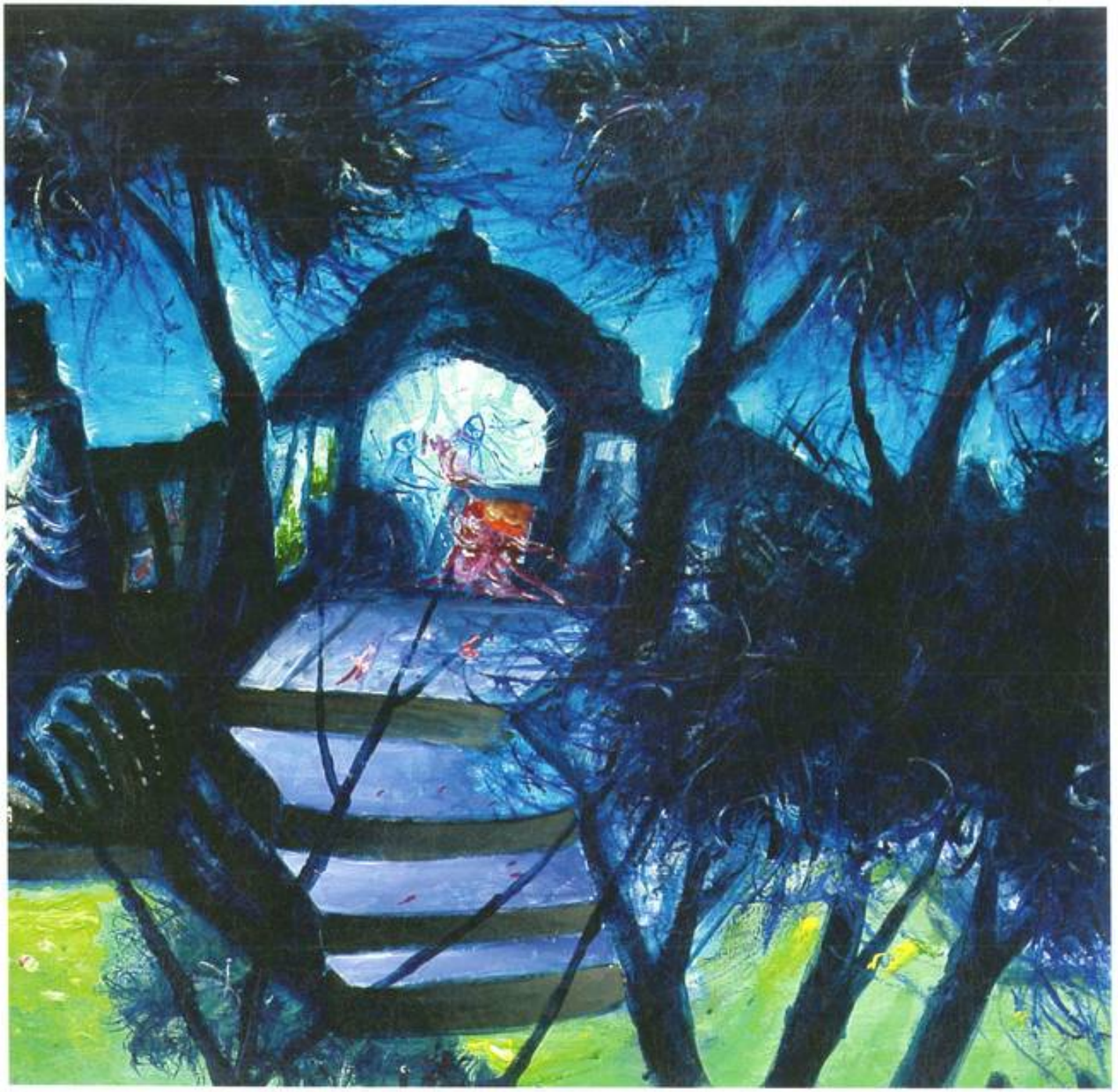





Manu Parekh '06







Chronology

Solo Exhibitions

2006 Berkeley Square Gallery, London
2004 Banaras, Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi
2003 Portraits of Flower and Landscapes of River at Jehangir Art Gallery and Tao Art Gallery, Mumbai
1999 Ritual Oblations, Rabindra Bhawan, New Delhi
1999 People for Animals, Art World, Chennai
1999 People for Animals, Alliance Française, Chandigarh
1999 Ritual Oblations, Sakshi Gallery, Bangalore
1999 Ritual Oblations, Sakshi Gallery and Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai
1998 Homage, CIMA Gallery, Kolkata
1997 ARKS Gallery, London
1996 Bose Pacia Modern, New York
1995–96 Still Lifes, sponsored by Seagull Foundation, New Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai
1994 Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi
1992 Exhibition of Twenty-Five Years of Work, sponsored by Seagull Foundation, New Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai
1991 Small Drawings, Sophia Duchesne Art Gallery, Mumbai
1991 Banaras Landscapes, Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi
1990 Small Drawings, Village Gallery, New Delhi
1990 Man-Made Blindings (Bhagalpur Blindings), Cymroza Gallery, Mumbai
1989 Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai
1988 Paintings, Chitrakoot Art Gallery, Kolkata
1988 Paintings, Dhoomimal Art Gallery, New Delhi
1985 Paintings, Dhoomimal Art Gallery, New Delhi
1984 Ten Years of Work, Birla Academy of Art and Culture, Kolkata
1984 Paintings and Watercolours, Urja Art Gallery, Baroda
1981 Paintings, Dhoomimal Art Gallery, New Delhi
1978 Paintings, Taj Art Gallery, Mumbai
1976 Paintings, Dhoomimal Art Gallery, New Delhi
1975 Paintings, Dhoomimal Art Gallery, New Delhi
1974 Paintings, Dhoomimal Art Gallery, New Delhi
1970 Paintings, Taj Art Gallery, Mumbai
1968 Graphics and Paintings, Ahmedabad
1967 Graphics and Paintings, Everest Gallery, Kolkata

Workshops and Auctions

2002 Auction conducted by 'Concern India', Mumbai
2002 Workshop at Nathdwara by Archer House, Ahmedabad
2002 Workshop at Khajuraho, organized by Seher Group
2001 Workshop and Udaipur Palace, organized by 'Art Trust'
1999 Auction conducted by HEART, New Delhi
1999 Auction conducted by Christies, London
1999 Auction conducted by Bonhams, London, for Art of Spastics at Raj Coromandel, Chennai
1999 Workshop at Mauritius, organized by Seher Group
1999 Workshop at Manesar, organized by Seher Group
1998 Workshop at Puri, organized by Hansraj Hotel
1998 Workshop at Ramganga, organized by Seher Group
1998 Workshop at Almora, organized by Suresh Kilachand
1997 Workshop at Vadodara, organized by Alembic
1997 Auction by HEART, Mumbai
1997 Auction by Christies, London
1997 Workshop at Pahelgaon, organized by J&K Government and Lalit Kala Akademi, Srinagar
1997 Workshop at Vadodara, organized by ABC Ltd
1996 Workshop at Mud Island, Mumbai, organized by Harsh Goenka
1996 Workshop at Kalimpong, organized by Rotary Club, Kalimpong
1996 Workshop at Bangalore, organized by Chitrakala Parishad, Bangalore
1993 Workshop at Leh Ladakh, organized by J&K Government
1990 Auction for Helpage India, conducted by Asprey, London at Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai
1990 Workshop at Dalhousie, organized by Media Transasia
1990 Workshop at Vadodara, organized by IPCL
1989 Timeless Art, organized by *Times of India*, Mumbai and auction by Sotheby's London
1983 All India Artists Workshop, Kasauli, sponsored by Punjab University, Chandigarh
1976 All India Artists Workshop, Kasauli, sponsored by Punjab University, Chandigarh
1975 Workshop at Gandharbal (Kashmir), organized by Lalit Kala Akademi and J&K Government

Important Projects

2005 Member, International Jury for Triennale of India, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi
2000 Part of advisory committee of National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi

1985 Commissioner to Exhibition of Madhubani Painting at Turin, organized by ICCR
1987 Commissioner to 'Six Yong Contemporary Artists', Festival of India, Stockholm

Collections

National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi
Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi
Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Mumbai
Punjab University Museum, Chandigarh
Birla Academy of Art and Culture, Kolkata
Represented in several private and public collections in India and abroad

Group Exhibitions

2004 Group Exhibition at Nature Morte, New Delhi
2004 Rituals at Gallery Sumukha, Bangalore
2003 Celebration of Colours, Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi, and Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai
2002 The Affordable Art Show, People for Animals, Maurya Sheraton, New Delhi
2001 Eight Artists from Bengal, Indian Embassy, Berlin
2001 Works on Paper, Bose Pacia Modem, New York
2000 Faces, Gallery Espace, Dubai
1999 Icons, Lakeeren Gallery, Mumbai
1999 As You Like It, Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi, and Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai
1998 Opening Show, Sakshi Gallery, Mumbai
1997 Colours of Independence, CIMA Gallery at National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi
1997 Fifty Years of Independence, Vadehra Art Gallery, organized by National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi
1997 Through the Looking Glass, Lakeeren Gallery, Mumbai
1997 Gift for India, Sahmat, New Delhi and Mumbai
1997 Major Trends of Indian Art, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi
1997 Intuitive Logic, HEART, New Delhi and Mumbai
1997 Kali, exhibition in Topical Museum, Amsterdam
1996 Contemporary Indian Painters associated with Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai
1995 Heads, Maya Art Gallery, Hong Kong
1995 Postcards for Gandhi, Sahmat
1993 Wounds, CIMA Gallery, National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi
1993 Vadehra Art Gallery at Husain Ki Sarai, New Delhi
1993 Opening Show, CIMA Gallery, Kolkata
1982 Seven Indian Artists, Travelling Exhibition in Worpswede, Hamburg, Hanover, Brauschweig, Bayeuth
1982 Modern Indian Painting, National Gallery of Modern Art, Hirschorn Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC
1981 5th International Triennale, Rabindra Bhawan, New Delhi
1978 4th International Triennale, Rabindra Bhavan, New Delhi
1975 3rd International Triennale, Rabindra Bhavan, New Delhi
1964–85 Thirty group shows in India and abroad

Awards

1992 Padma Shree by the Government of India
1991 Birla Academy of Art and Culture, Kolkata
1982 National Award, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi
1974 All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society Award, New Delhi
1972 President of India's Silver Plaque, All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society Award, New Delhi
1971 Birla Academy of Art and Culture, Kolkata

Books and Films

Banaras: Painting the Sacred City published by Penguin Books India in 2005
Documentary film on Manu and Madhvi, by Suraj Purohit, sponsored by the Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi in 1992
Film by Krishnendu Bose in 1991
Portrait of a Painter, by Vikram Singh, sponsored by Doordarshan, New Delhi

Note on Contributors

Aditi De is a Bangalore-based writer, columnist and editor. Her journalistic writings since 1976, mainly on the arts, have been published across major Indian print media. She is the author of *Articulations: Voices from Contemporary Indian Visual Art* (2004) and *A Twist in the Tale: More Indian Folktales* (2005).

Meera Menezes completed her Masters in German Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi and is currently working as a producer at the South Asia Bureau of ARD First German Television. She has worked on several stories and documentaries on political, cultural and social issues. She has been involved with the Indian contemporary arts scene since the late eighties and was the liaison in India for the Amsterdam-based Foundation for Indian Artists (FIA). She has helped coordinate cross-cultural ventures like the Indo-Dutch project 'The Other Self' exhibited at Delhi's National Gallery of Modern Art and was also the Delhi coordinator of the Indo-Australian venture 'Fire and Life'. She is the Delhi correspondent of *Art India* and has written for several catalogues and journals.

Peter Osborne was a marketing director at Christie's Contemporary Art, the director and subsequently chairman of the Harlech Fine Art Group. He is the founder director of Berkeley Square Gallery which he acquired from the Harlech Fine Art Group in 1994. He co-founded the Osbourne Samuel Gallery in 2004 and developed Berkeley Square Gallery for specialized Indian art exhibitions in 2005.

On her first visit to India **Marilyn Rushton** was told by a clairvoyant that she would return to Indian 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 & Transport and Schiller International University (London).

Jeet Thayil was born in Kerala, and educated in Bombay, Hong Kong and New York City. His poetry collections include *English* and *Apocalypso*, and he edited the anthology *Give the Sea Change and It Shall Change: Fifty-Six Indian Poets (1951–2005)*. He is the recipient of awards from the New York Foundation for the Arts and the Rockefeller Foundation, among others. He lives in New Delhi where he works as a writer and editor.

Ashok Vajpeyi (born 1941) is an eminent Hindi poet-critic, art-lover and institution-maker. He writes on visual arts and music and is currently working a book on SH Raza. He has been a recipient of the Sahitya Akademi award, Dayavati Modi Kavi Shekhar Samman, Kabir Samman and has been honoured by the governments of France and Poland. He founded and directed the Department of Culture of the Government of Madhya Pradesh, the multi-arts complex Bharat Bhavan, Mahatma Gandhi International Hindi University. He lives in New Delhi.

Tanuj Berry is the Managing Director of Namtech Business School & Bertech Infotech Ltd. He is a friend of Manu Parekh and has acquired over time a selection of Parekh's finest paintings. He is the author of *Mathematical Methods for Economists* (1994) and *The Indian Stock Market—To Buy or Not to Buy* (1995) and has been involved with a number of significant projects and publications on many important Indian artists.