BANARAS

PAINTING THE SACRED CITY

2005



manu parekh

B A N A R A S







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PENGUIN
VIKING

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River with Flowers
20" x 16" Acrylic on Canvas Board 2003 {page 1}

Flying Flowers
30" x 40" Oil on Canvas Board 2004 {page 2}

To
Mukund Shroff,
my drawing teacher
at Ahmedabad,
and
Prof. S.B. Palsikar
at Sir J.J. School of
Art, Mumbai



Foreword

Manu Parekh is an artist you cannot ignore.

You may have walked past many a painting without feeling the urge to pause. Yet, in the case of Manu's work, I would be profoundly astonished if any individual were able to pass one of his paintings without being touched. I first realized this fact during a power cut; I could feel the strength of my favourite Banaras work on my office wall in the dark.

Manu Parekh is a true artist in the real sense of the word: true to his vocation, his belief, and to himself. His clarity of thought is a remarkable asset; coupled with discipline, it heightens his creativity. Unlike many others, Manu has resisted the temptation of commercial forces. He has always done what the artist within him desired. This is the reason why he has been able to do a rich variety of work in his career. I respect him for this spirit as much as I do for his work.

The very first time I came across a Banaras Landscape, I needed little encouragement to realize that I had come across some great art and just had to acquire it. I, along with my brother Saman Malik, am very privileged to have in our private collection a variety of works that have been included in this book. I have always been convinced that Manu has done right by the title of being an 'Indian' artist as the subject matter of his paintings is exceedingly Indian. These landscapes of everyday Banaras are for me a distinctive portrayal of this fact.

Manu always likes to see his landscapes in different lights as it changes the mood of the painting, which I find very fascinating. He may not have the eloquence of a poet but his work displays his thoughts better than any poet ever could. The passion and energy of Manu's paintings repeatedly draw me to his work, and each time a Manu Parekh painting influences me in different ways. I trust that the images contained in this publication will reveal this to some extent.

Tanuj Berry
January 2005

introduction

On a late summer afternoon, a man and a woman climb down the stone steps to the Ganga. They take a dip in the river and believe that their minds, as much as their bodies, have been purified. They go to their chosen temple, among the hundreds along the ghats, after this to light diyas and offer prayers and flowers. Then they go back home, to their family and work, where nothing substantial may have changed in years, but they will return to the Ganga the next day to recharge their faith. On other ghats along the river, dead bodies are consigned to blazing flames.

The drama of life, both mundane and sublime, is played out daily on the teeming ghats and the narrow lanes of the world's oldest living city: pilgrims and priests by the flowing mud-coloured waters, painted boats, flowers, cows, dead birds and animals, human corpses burning to ash in the pyres, diyas bobbing on the river, clay pots piled along busy lanes, textiles, refuse... It is an organic theatre, throbbing with untiring energy, colour and every kind of human experience.

The Banaras landscape at twilight reflects the city's special magic most effectively. As the sky changes from blue to a flaming sunset-orange, turning brighter by the minute, the trees, houses, boats and the domes of the temples—man's world sheltered by the sky—become darker. Then the lights come on in the temples and the shrines glow from within, as the bells begin to clang and prayers rise on the breeze. The ghats resound to an orchestral symphony unlike any other, a symphony orchestrated by individual, unconnected human beings to thank their gods. As the lamps and diyas are brought out, the river flashes with light; nature and humanity come together in worship. It is a spectacle that makes you feel lighter, calmer and more generous than you were just a moment ago. You are outside time. The city of light, the eternal city, is reflected within you.

As an artist, this is the reflection I attempt to put on my canvas when I paint the sacred city.

~

My early visits to Banaras began in 1980, shortly after my father died in Gujarat. They were brief, secret visits, when I came alone, unsure about what exactly I was looking for. I am not particularly religious, and was even less so at the time. But the days I spent in Banaras then ensured a silent dialogue with the many facets of the city, some saturated with mystery, others throbbing with dynamism. Looking back, I think I must have been in search of certain landscapes that would mimic and explain the uncertainties—the light and shadows; the wavering between faith and fear—in my own mind.

My image of Banaras has been conditioned by what I remember best about the first boat ride I took, close to dusk, from Asi Ghat to Manikarnika Ghat: a strange, ethereal glow over the Ganga from the flames and fires of the ghats and the lights of the temples reflected in it. It was a fabulous visual drama, and I wanted immediately to paint everything that I saw, all that was out there: the glow on the river, the silhouetted ghats and temples, the constantly flowing water, the people. As I watched, flowers, too, acquired a special significance for me. I saw a newly married couple with thick garlands of flowers come down to the Ganga to be blessed. Moments later, a dead body covered in similar flowers was carried to the river. In life as in death, the same colours, the same odours.

This shadow-play between decay and spirituality, this nexus between faith and fear, obtains nowhere else for me. I have returned to Banaras over the years to seek new directions in both my life and my art. In its many-layered, thickly textured reality, all contradictions are resolved. The city of light is a vast, crowded landscape where I don't feel small. I become part of the universe; I become vast, yet humble. The days run on, but I become still. I stand alone and I can feel my breath as the breath of all things that exist. My mind comes back home to me; my restlessness turns to peace. My body comes back to my soul and my soul to my body. All life, all nature, all divinity becomes one, flows through me, and the solace this brings gives me the faith to go further.

~

During my early, secret visits to Banaras, I found myself only too vulnerable, alone on the range, and it was a good time to seek visual meanings for greater variability in my art. A walk through the narrow passages, or a boat ride on the Ganga, or some time spent on the ghats in the faith-sustained crowd—all this calmed me, and enabled me to disentangle, from the bustle of a pilgrim town, images rich in human emotion and formidable in structural beauty.

I started going to Banaras regularly after that. For ten years I did only Banaras landscapes, immersed in structural elements as I attempted to depict everything that I saw. But gradually I learnt to capture the true essence of this city, which to me lies in the contrast between its everyday life and spiritual beliefs. I explored the metaphor of Banaras in many ways. I did a series of faces, one of flowers and another of shrines, simultaneously depicting objects and transforming them into fantasy. And through them all was the play of light and shadow, the ceaseless energy of the city, and the frothing, foaming water.

I painted the faces almost as landscapes—human faces in different situations, reflecting the struggle between reality and faith. They were the faces of people caught up in the routine of earning their livelihood but transformed during their morning prayers or the dip in the holy river. The flowers, that are everywhere in Banaras, I painted as portraits. They are both luminous and brooding flowers, in lilac, purple and vivid blues, imbued with the spirit of a place where decay and regeneration coexist.

The images that recur most often in my Banaras paintings are of little temples. The shrine, lit from within, is to me the defining motif of Banaras. The light emanating from the interior, traditionally the place of the idol, is the light I saw on the water on that first boat ride from one ghat to another. It is a suggestion of constant human presence, of survival and the permanence of faith.

I had always wanted to create a truly Indian landscape, and in Banaras I found the inspiration and the symbols to create one. A darker landscape, but with patches of

brightness; fearful, crowded with uncertainties but full of faith. A landscape with both bright colours and solemnity; teeming with human energy yet with an underlying quietude. I was painting, perhaps, the riddle of faith, by simultaneously depicting incompatible experiences.

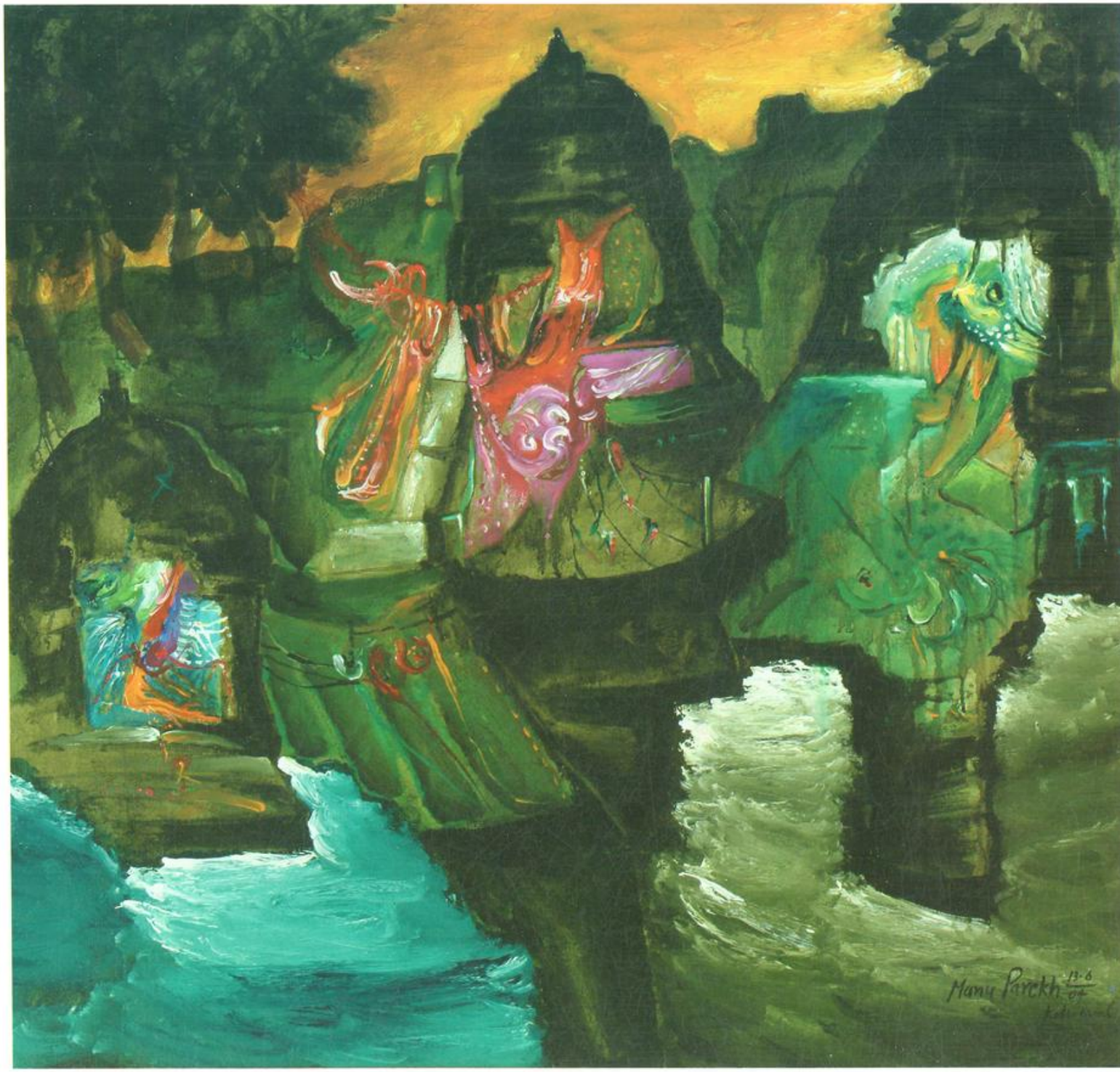
Now, even after twenty-five years and many, many visits, I feel like painting Banaras all over again, something I have not done for over a decade. I still remember that first evening with the bright sunset sky, the silhouetted ghats, windows of soft light in the temples, the glow on the Ganga... Even now, it is as if my search has only just begun. The city of light, with its energy and its contradictions, is within me, to be explored.

'The drama of life,
both mundane and sublime,
is played out daily on the
teeming ghats and the
narrow lanes of the world's
oldest living city… In its
many-layered, thickly
textured reality, all
contradictions are resolved.
The city of light is a vast,
crowded landscape where I
don't feel small. I become
part of the universe;
I become vast, yet humble.
The days run on, but I
become still.'

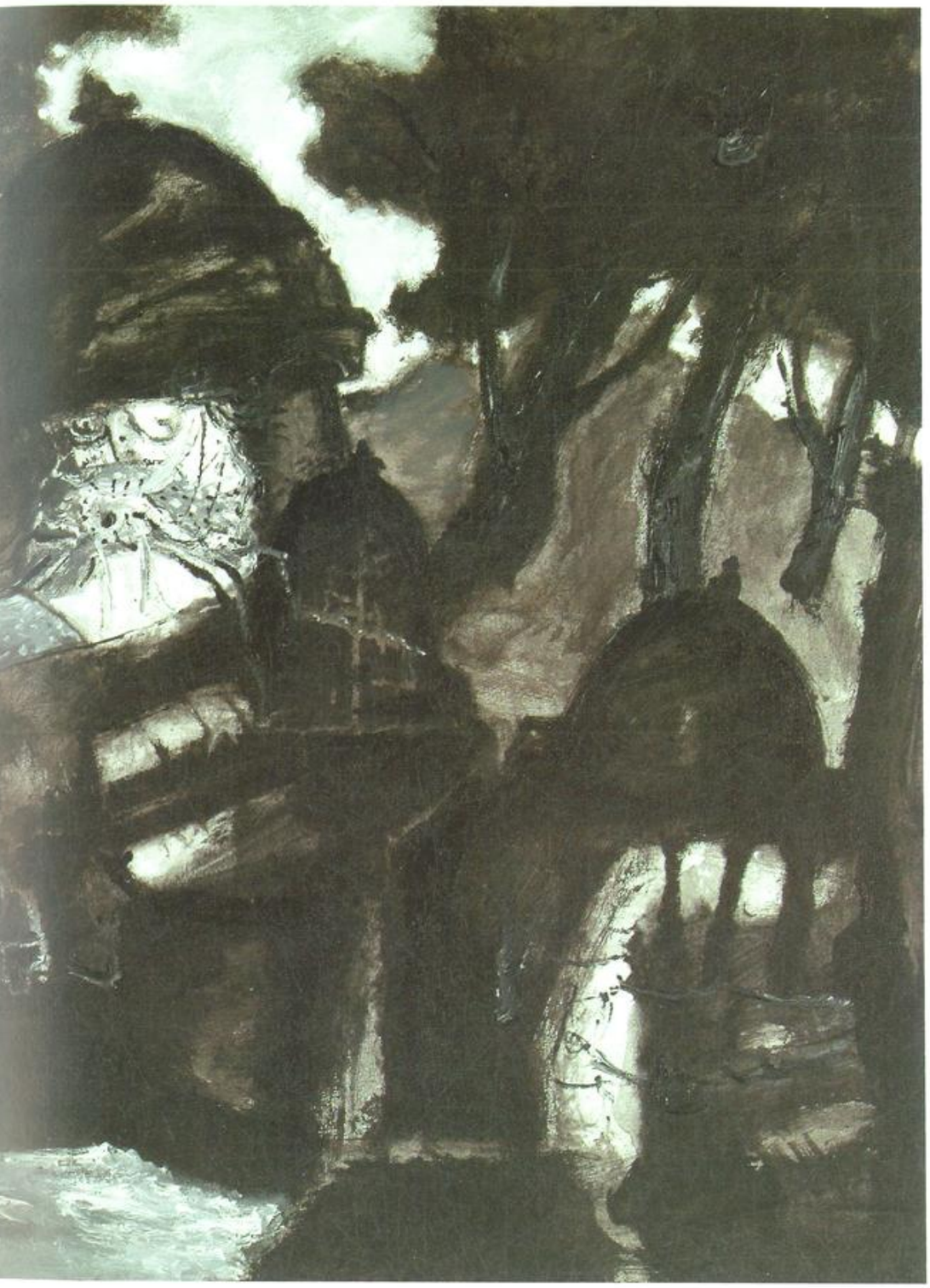
Celebration
40" x 30" Acrylic and Oil on Canvas 1997



Evening Landscape with Water
36" x 36" Acrylic on Canvas 2004

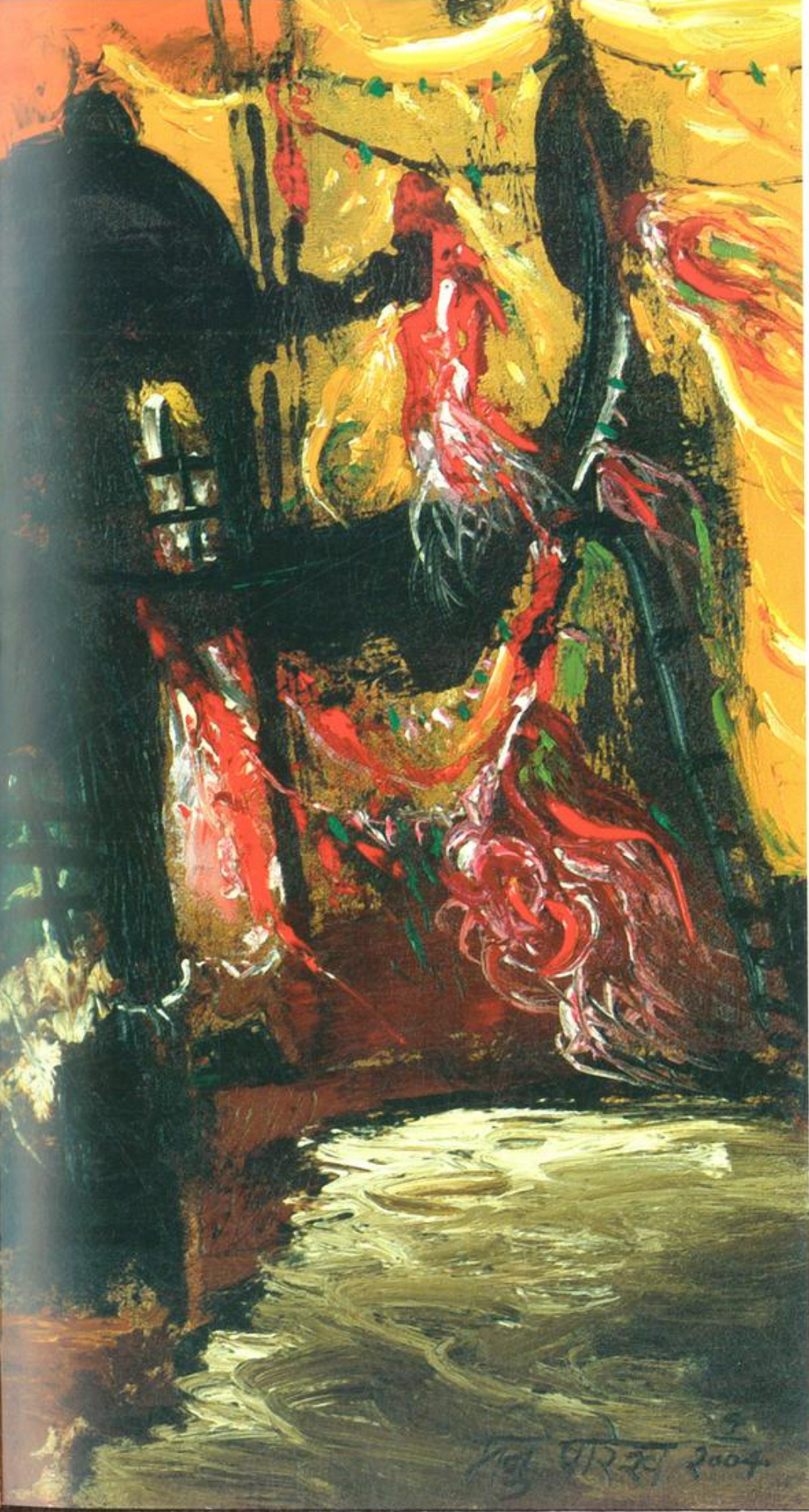

Manu Parekh 13.6.04





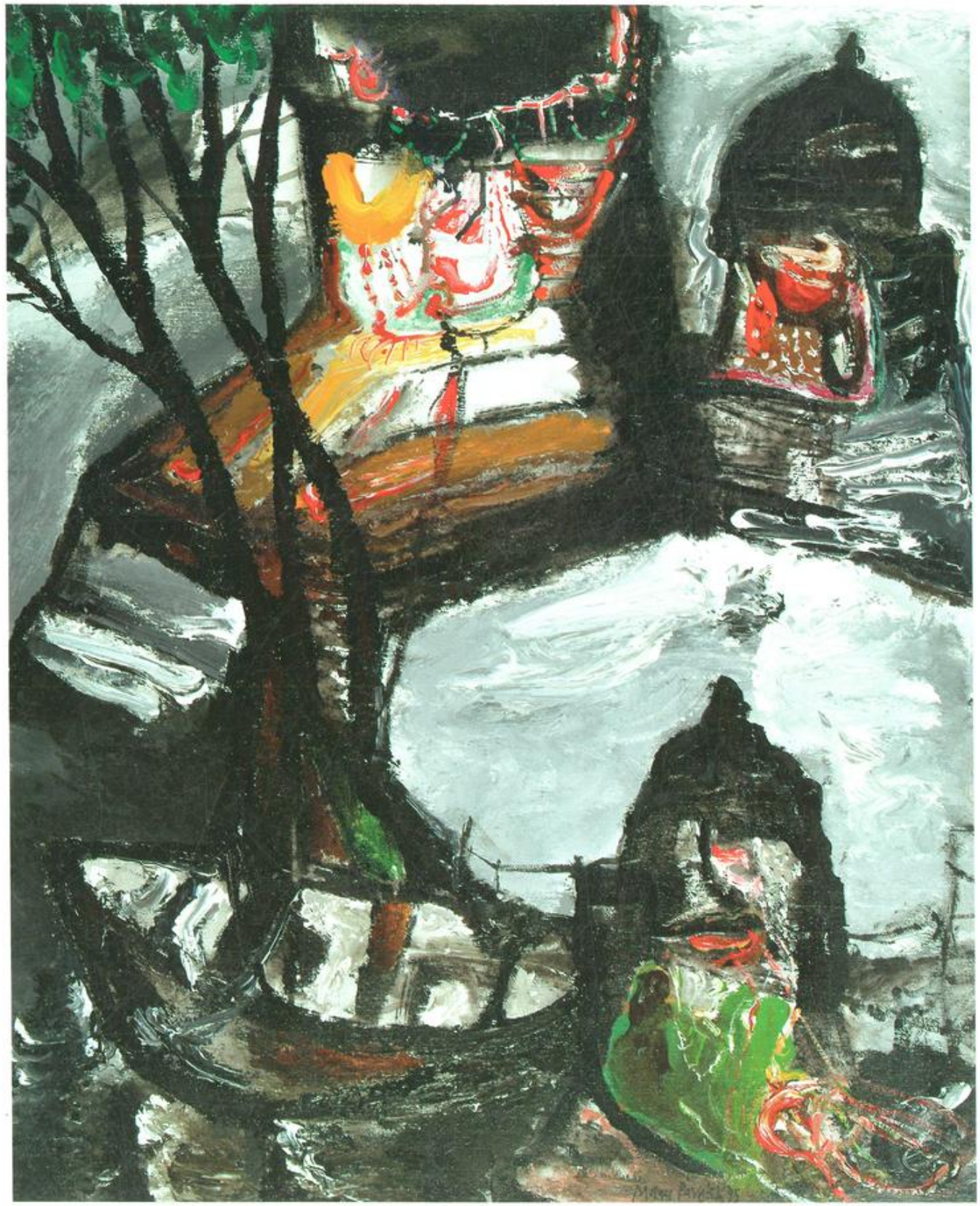
Landscape with Trees and Temple I
30" x 48" Acrylic on Canvas July 1993

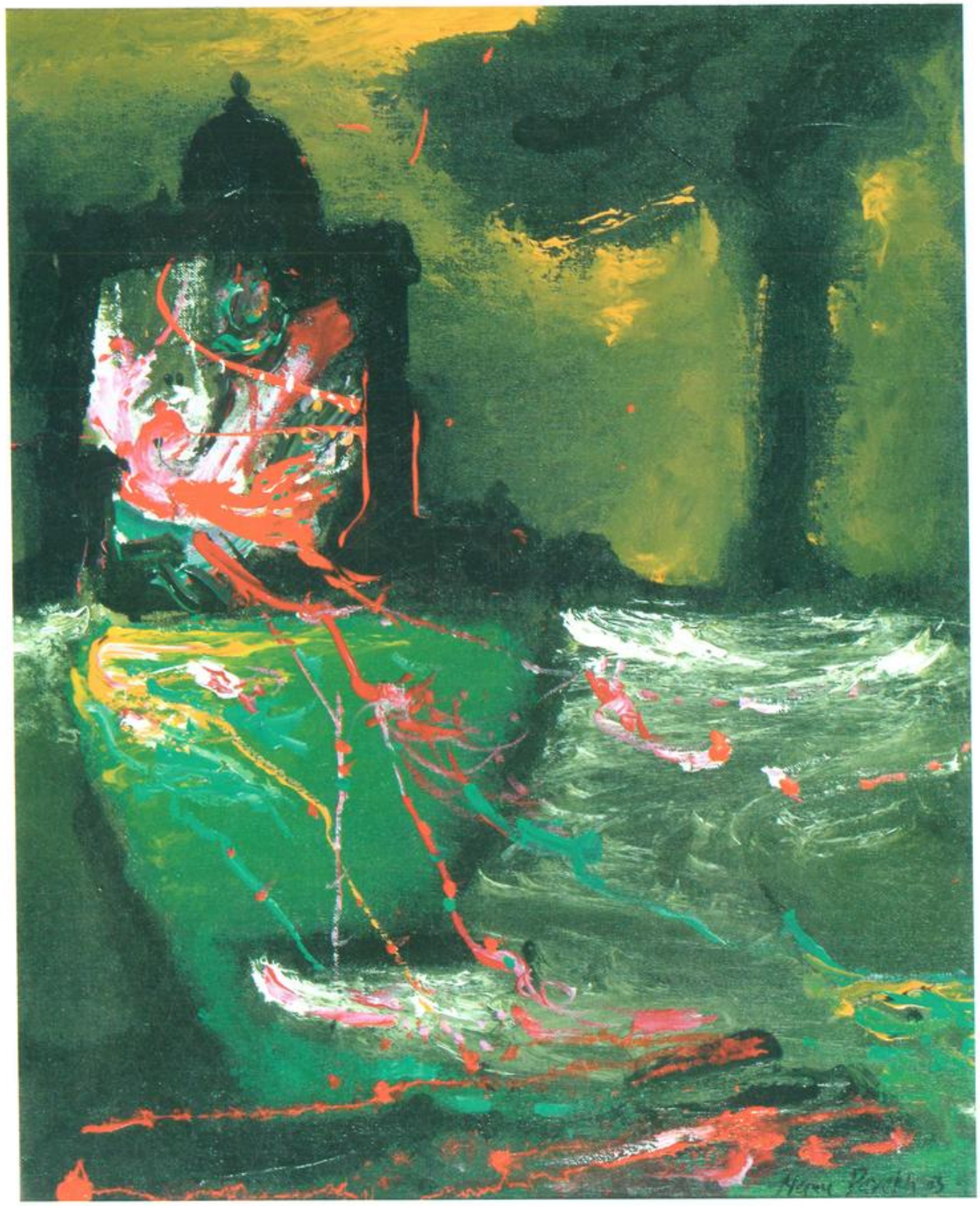




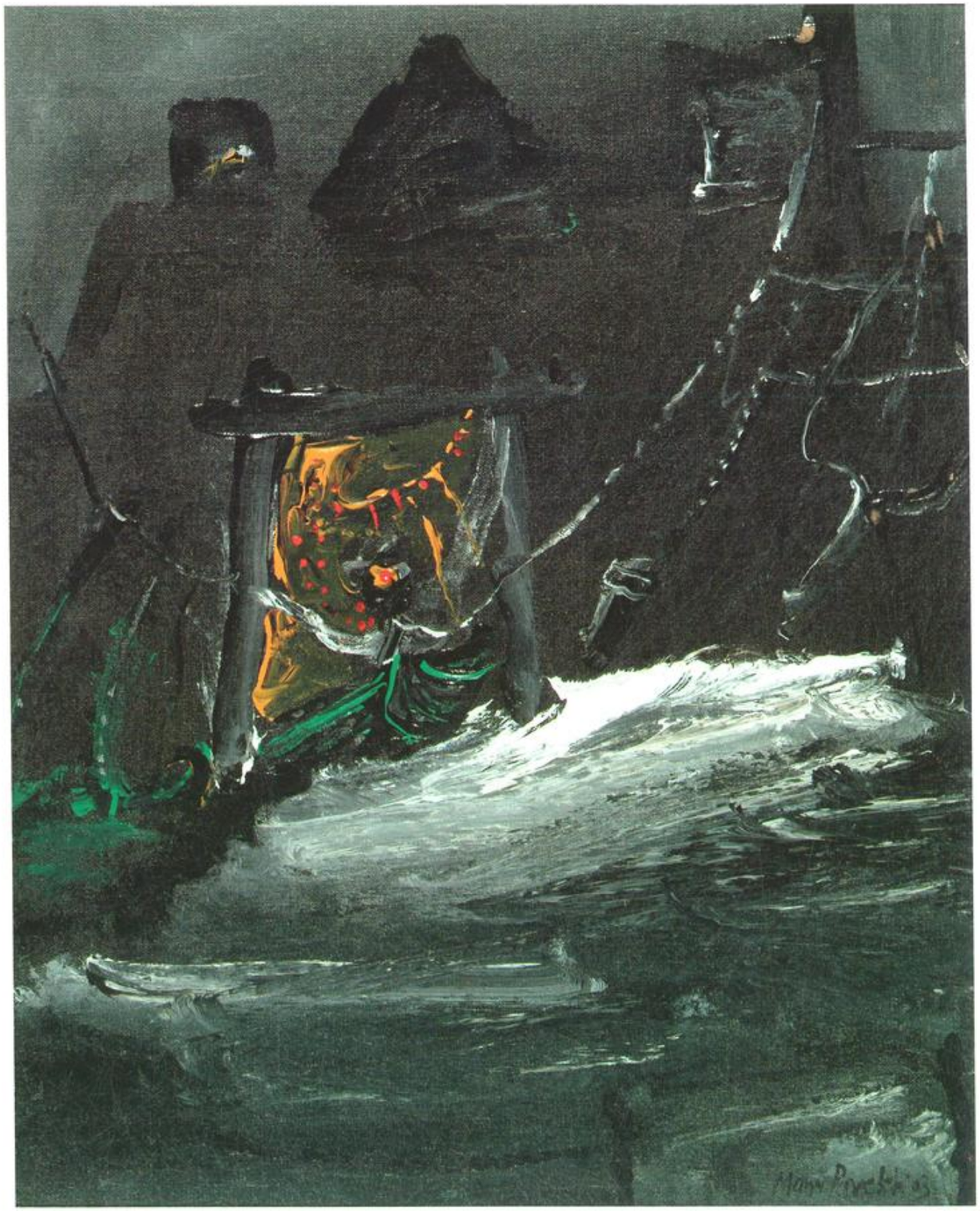
Festival at an Old Temple
30" x 48" Oil on Canvas May 2004

Moonlight, Boat and Temple
30" x 24" Acrylic on Canvas 1995





River with Flowers
20" x 16"
Acrylic on Canvas Board
2003



Dark Night III
20" x 16"
Acrylic on Canvas Board
2003

Landscape with Red Temple
24" x 30" Acrylic on Canvas 1985



Landscape with Boat
36" x 36" Acrylic on Canvas 2003



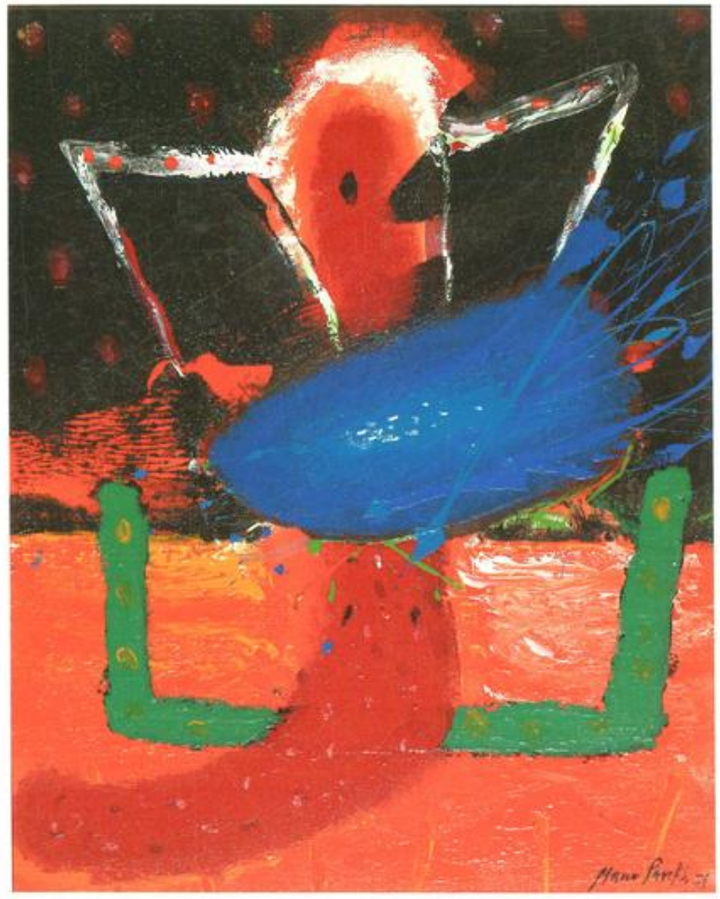
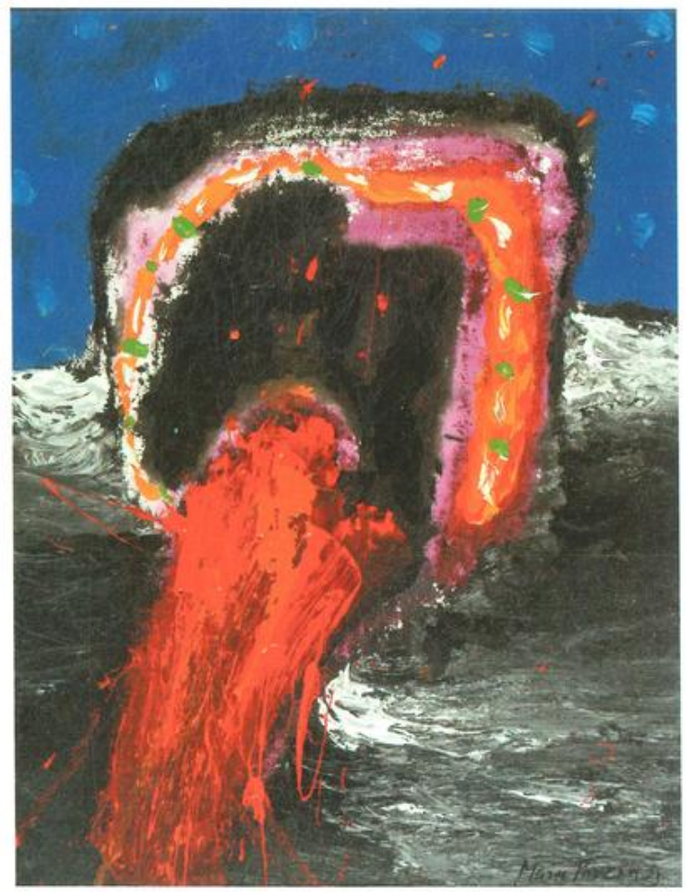


Image of Goddess I
20" x 16"
Acrylic on Canvas Board
2003 {this page}

Temple, Tree and River I
30" x 24"
Oil on Canvas Board
2004 {facing page, left}

Image of Kali Temple
20" x 16"
Acrylic on Canvas Board
2003 {facing page, right}





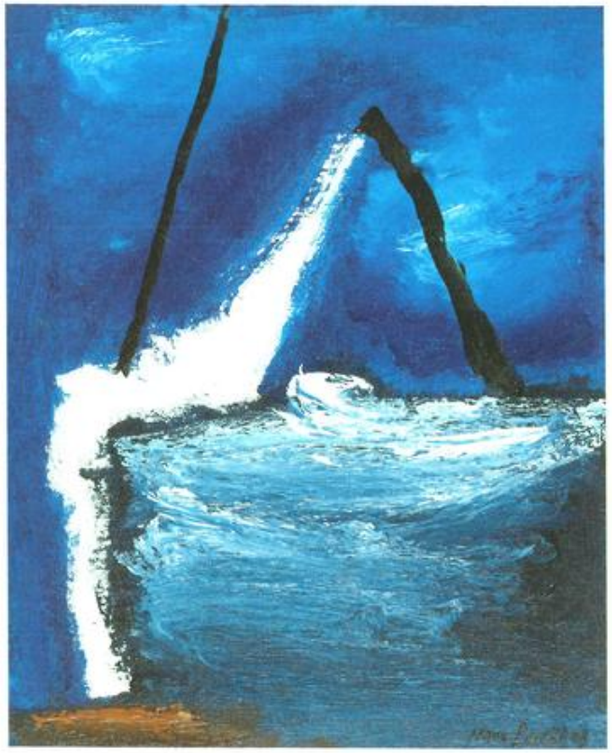
'A walk through the narrow passages, or a boat ride on the Ganga, or some time spent on the ghats in the faith-sustained crowd—all this calmed me, and enabled me to disentangle from the bustle of a pilgrim town images rich in human emotion and formidable in structural beauty.'

Banaras: The City of Lights
48" x 60" Acrylic on Canvas February 2001



Blue Landscape with a Tree
20" x 16" Acrylic on Canvas Board 2003





Boat in a Blue Landscape
20" x 16" Acrylic on Canvas Board 2003



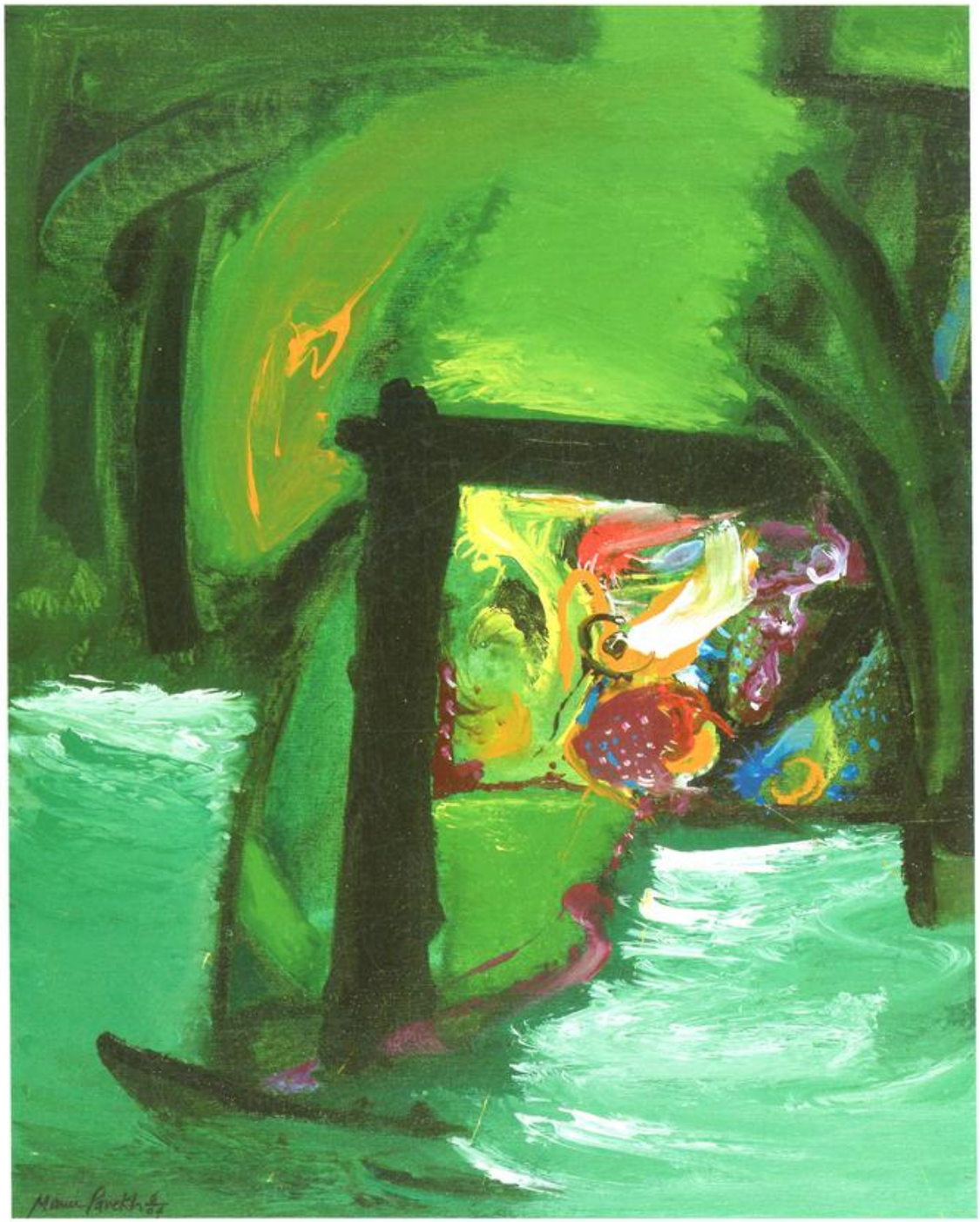
Moon behind Trees
36" x 36" Acrylic on Canvas June 2004



Riverscape and the Ganga
40" x 60" Acrylic on Canvas April 2004

Night Landscape
24" x 30" Oil on Canvas 1990





Green Reflection
32" x 22"
Acrylic on Canvas Board
June 2004



Temple in Night Landscape
60" x 40"
Acrylic on Canvas
2004

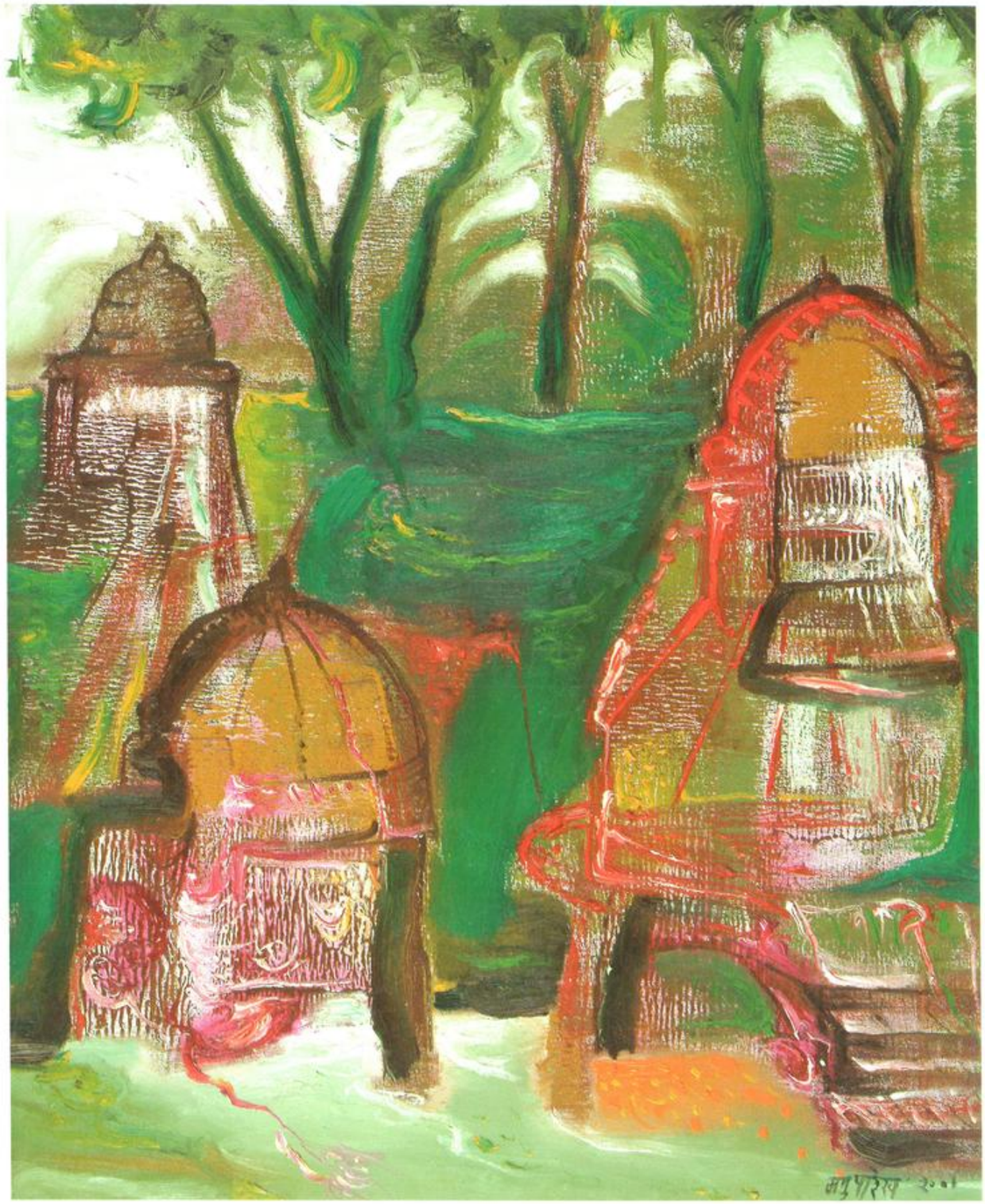


Blue Temple
20" x 32" Oil and Acrylic on Canvas June 2004



River between Two Temples
20" x 32" Oil and Acrylic on Canvas June 2004

Temple, Trees and River II
30" x 24" Oil on Canvas 2001

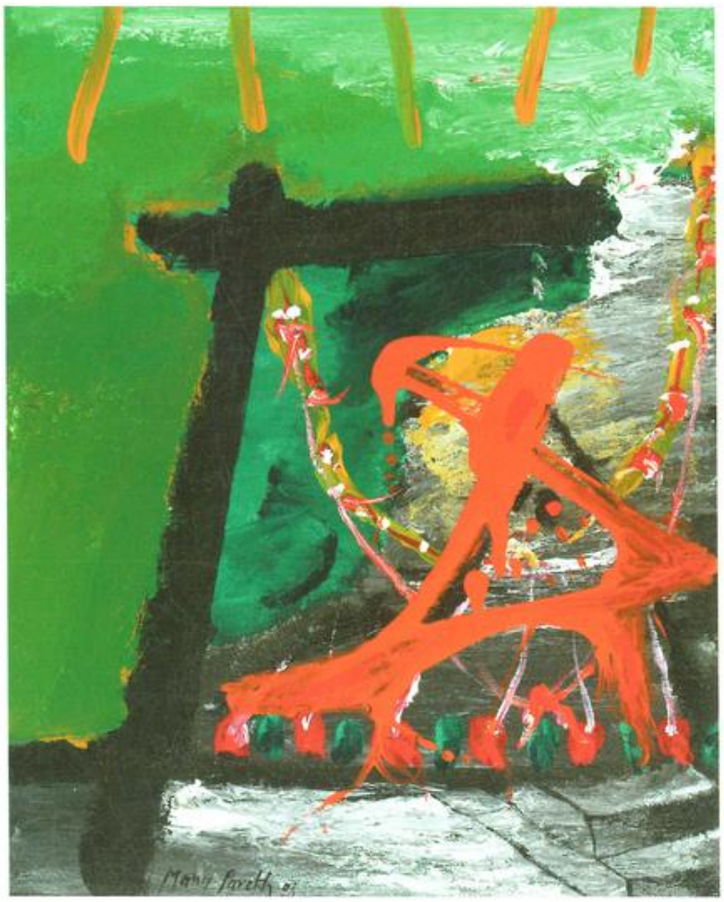


Colours in Landscape
24" x 30" Acrylic and Oil on Canvas Board 2002



Image near River II
20" x 16" Acrylic on Canvas Board
2003 {facing page, left}

Image near River I
20" x 16" Acrylic on Canvas Board
2003 {facing page, right}



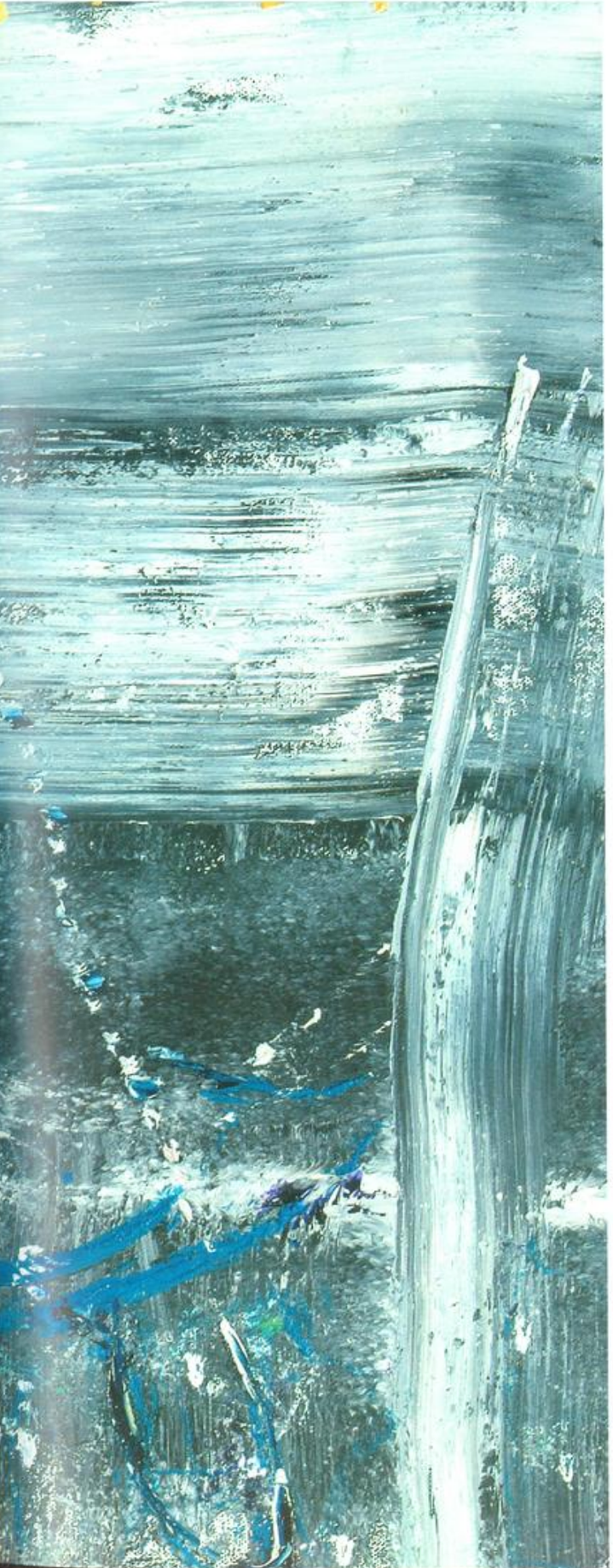


'[Banaras] is an organic theatre, throbbing with untiring energy, colour and every kind of human experience… [The] shadow-play between decay and spirituality, this nexus between faith and fear, obtains nowhere else for me.'

Yagna
30" x 40" Oil and Acrylic on Canvas Board February 2000




Manoj Parekh



Riverscape I
22" x 32" Oil on Canvas 2004



Windy Landscape
20" x 16" Acrylic on Canvas Board 2003 {this page}

Evening Prayer
36" x 36" Oil on Canvas 2004 {facing page}



Landscape with Tree and Temple II
24" x 30" Oil on Canvas 2003

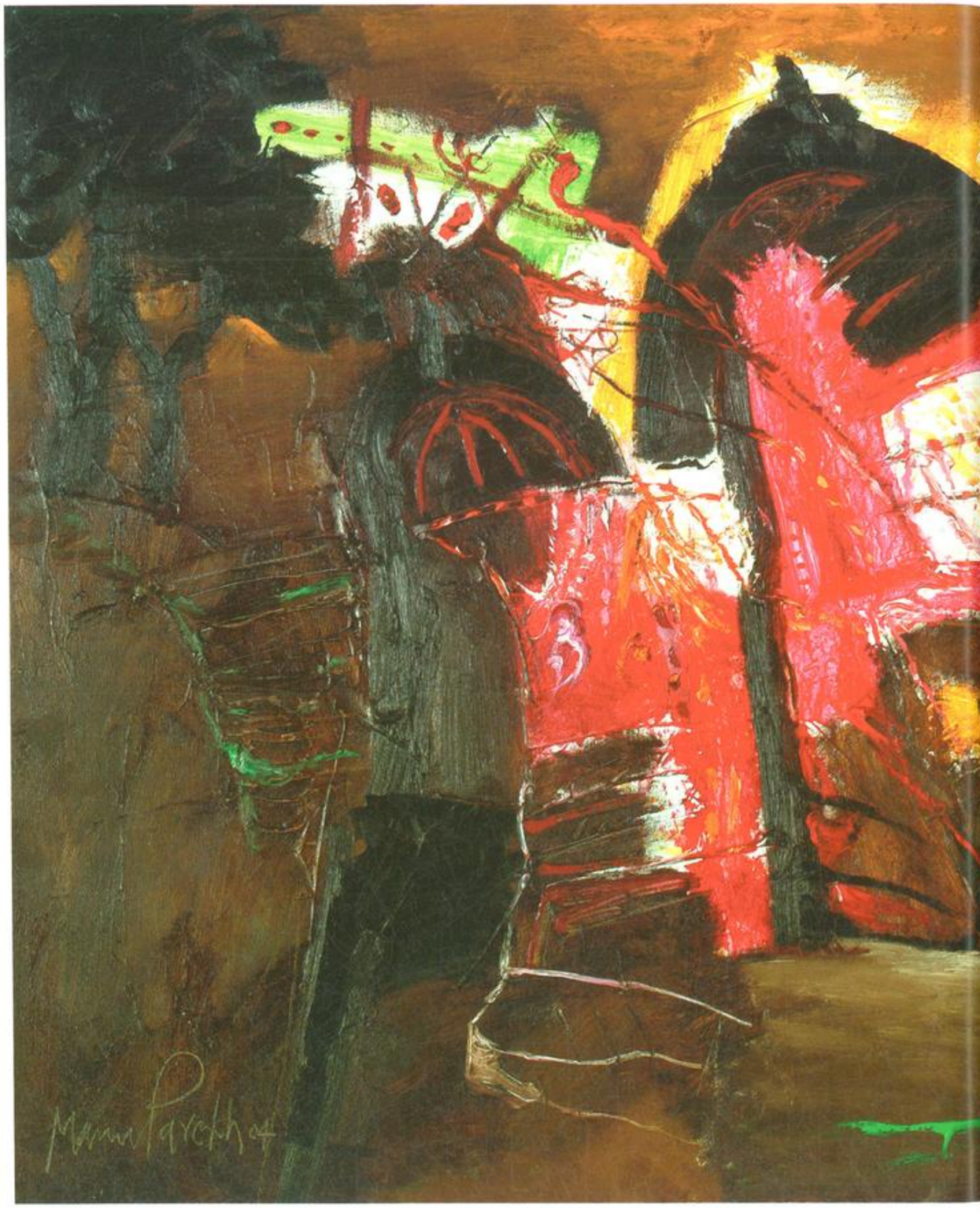




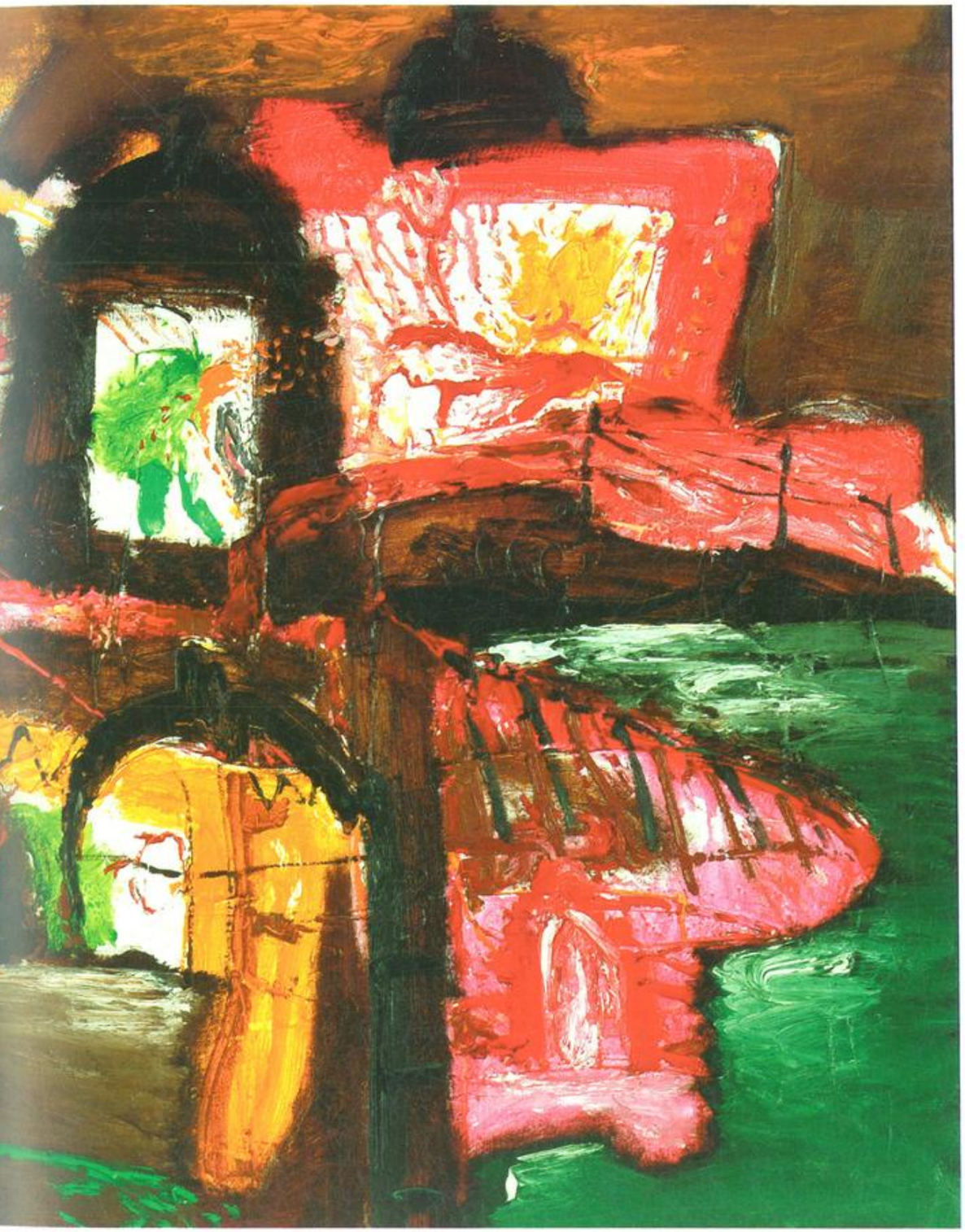
Entrance of Temple II
30" x 24" Acrylic on Canvas Board 2004 {this page}

Temple Light at Dark
23" x 30" Acrylic on Canvas June 1993 {facing page}





Landscape in Pink and Brown
30" x 48"
Acrylic on Canvas 2004



Temple at Night I
60" x 40" Acrylic on Canvas 1993



Sandhya Aarti
30" x 40" Oil and Acrylic on Canvas Board January 2000



'The shrine, lit from within, is to me the defining motif of Banaras. The light emanating from the interior, traditionally the place of the idol, is the light I saw on the water on [my] first boat ride from one ghat to another. It is a suggestion of constant human presence, of survival and the permanence of faith.'

Temple at Night II
24" x 30" Acrylic on Canvas Board April 2004

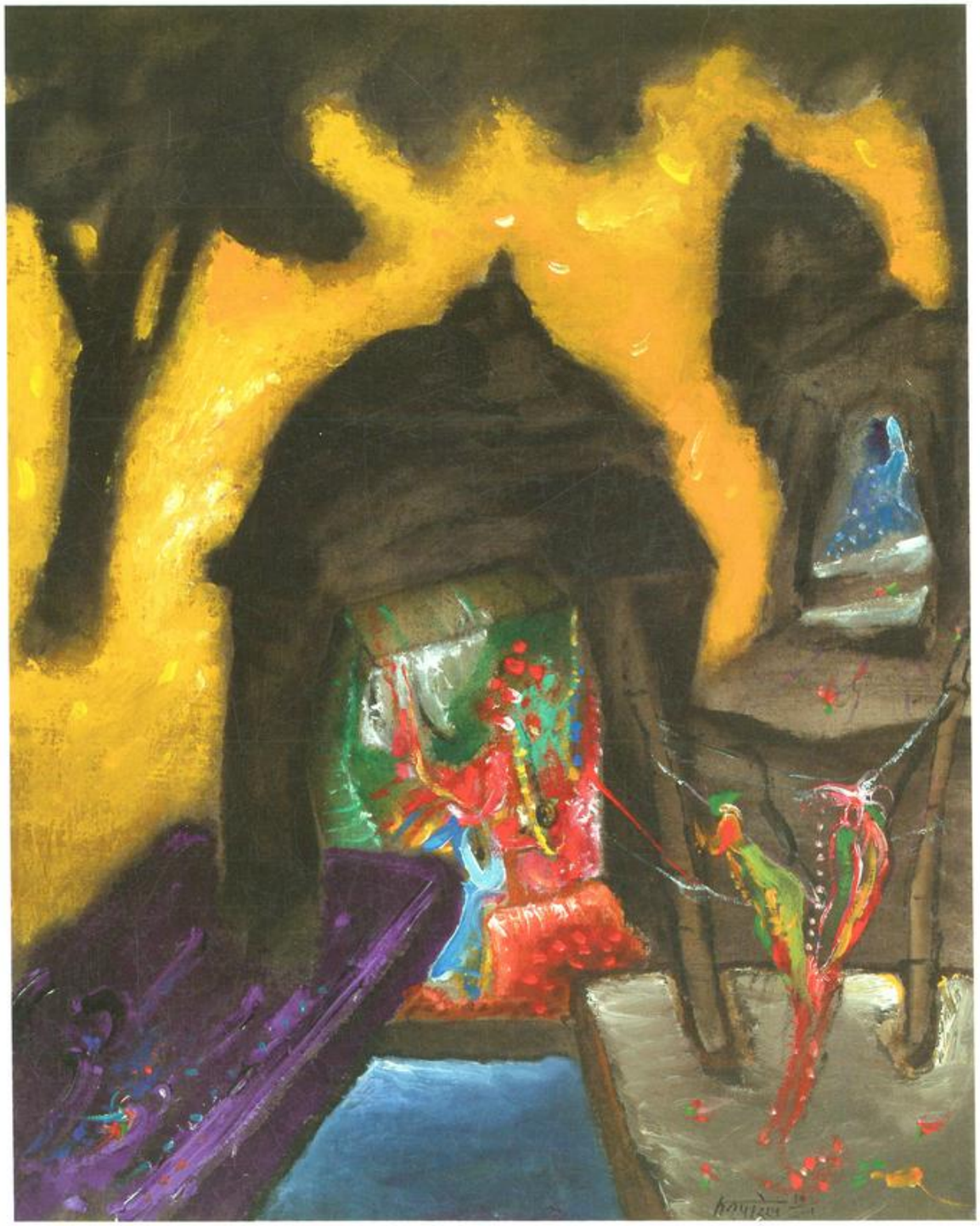


River Ganga
24" x 30" Acrylic on Canvas Board June 2004

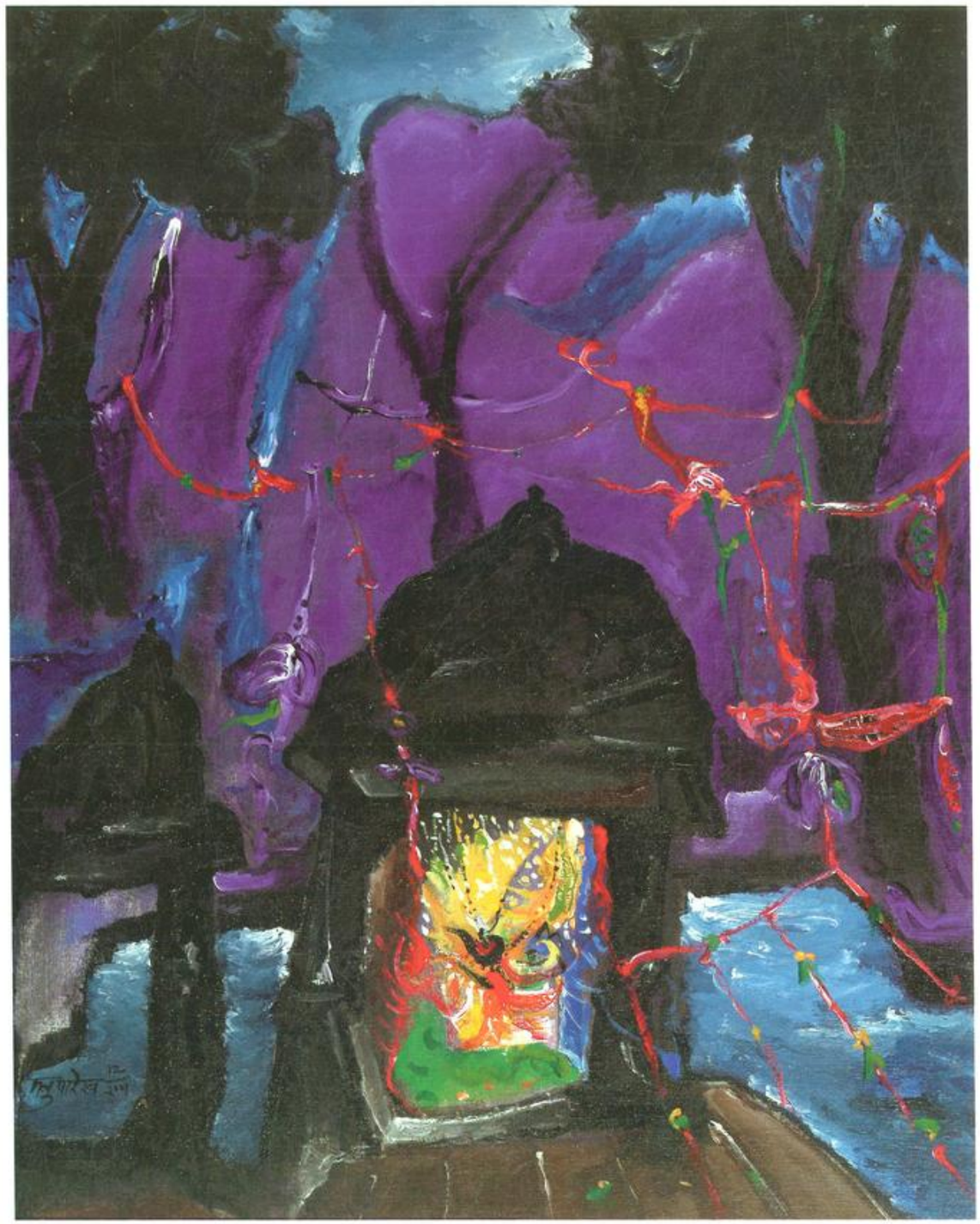


Women II
36" x 42" Oil and Acrylic on Canvas 1993





Evening
30" x 24"
Acrylic on Canvas
October 2001



Festival at Temple II
30" x 24"
Acrylic on Canvas
December 2001



Dark Night I
20" x 16" Acrylic on Canvas Board 2003 {this page}

Dark Night II
20" x 16" Acrylic on Canvas Board 2003 {facing page}



Dark Night, Bright Temple
30" x 40" Acrylic on Canvas July 1993



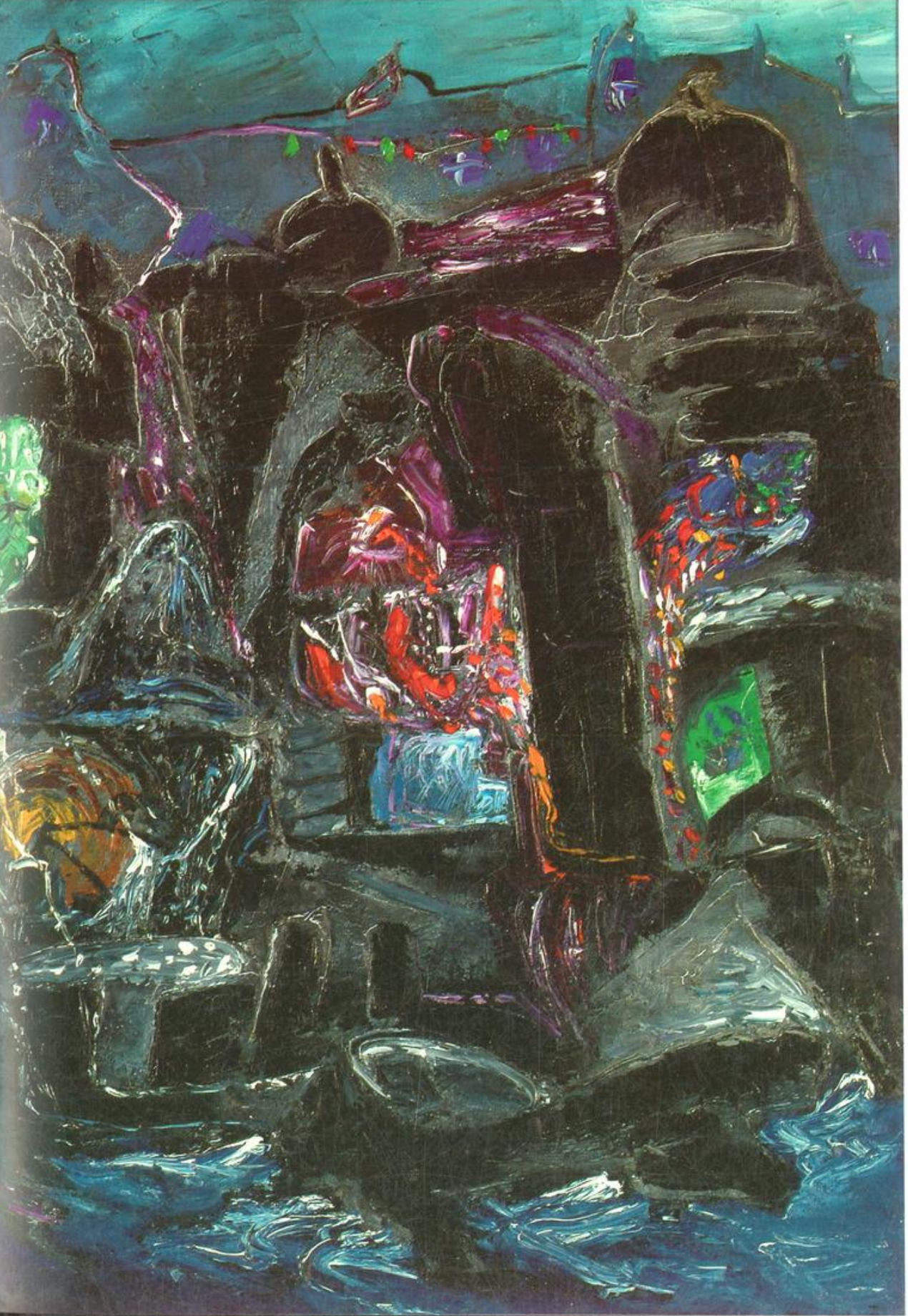

Manu Parekh



Night Landscape of Banaras
48" x 144" (Diptych) Oil on Canvas 2004

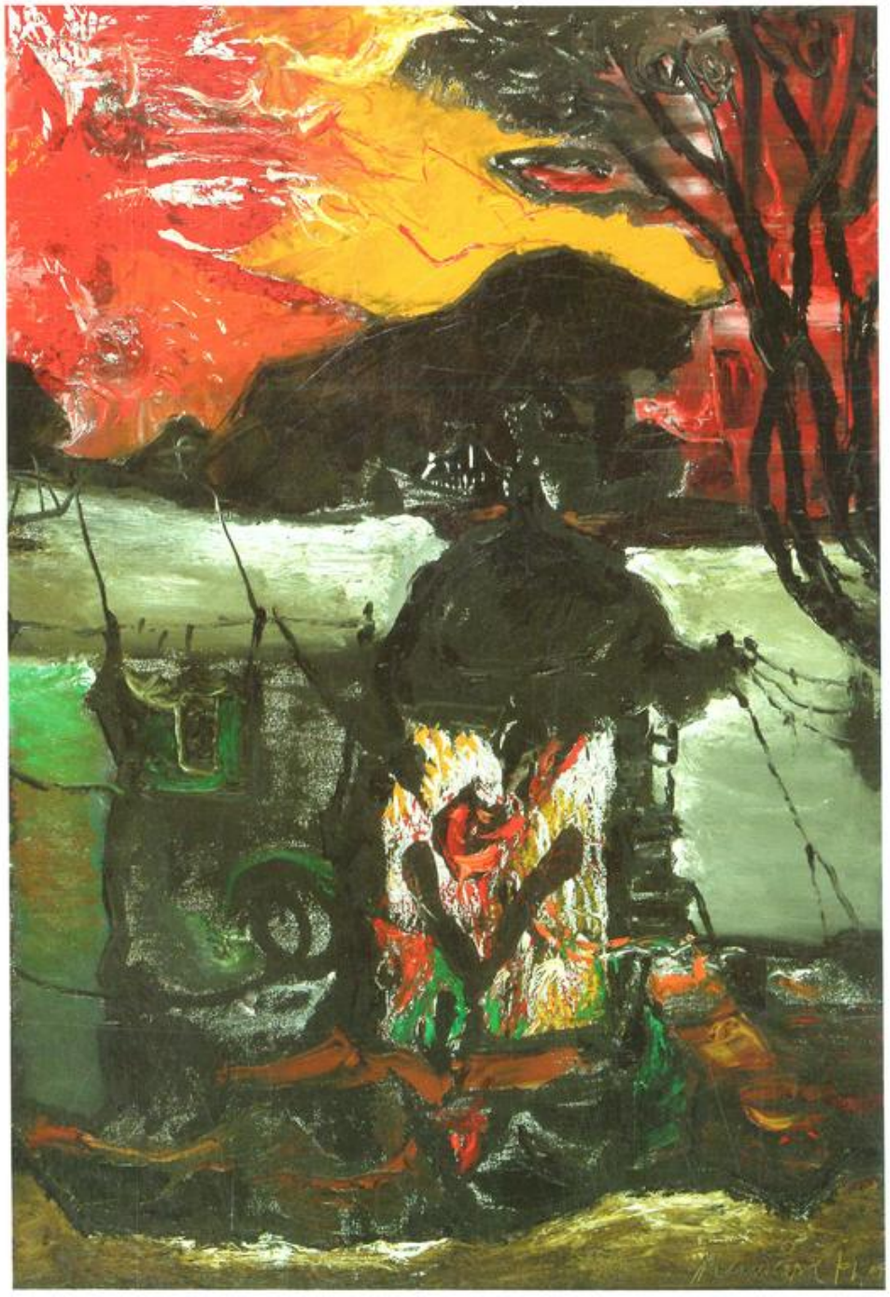


Temple Festival
30" x 40"
Oil on Canvas March 1993



Evening at Banaras
36" x 36" Acrylic and Charcoal on Board 1987



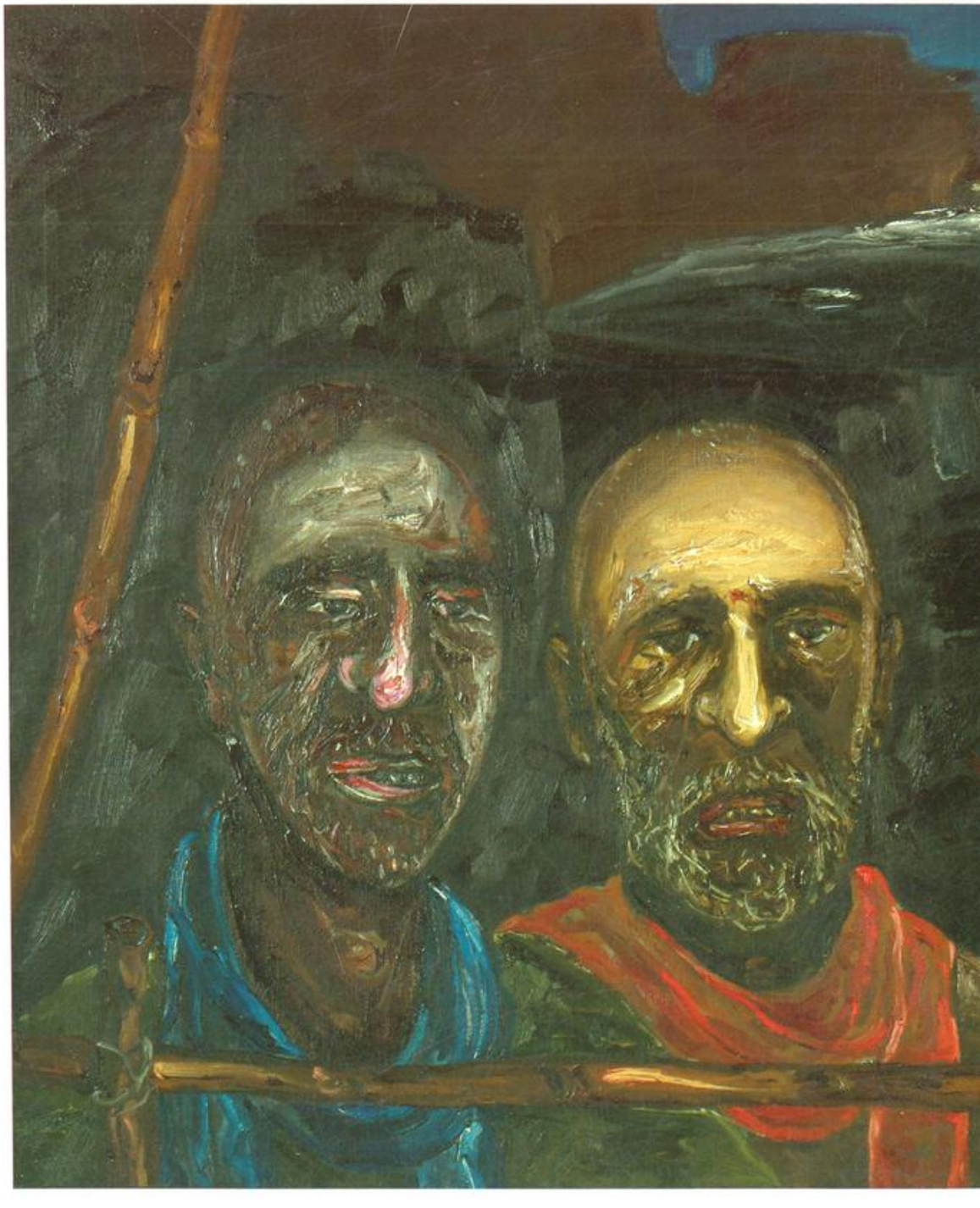


Evening Light
32" x 22"
Oil on Canvas
2004 {this page}

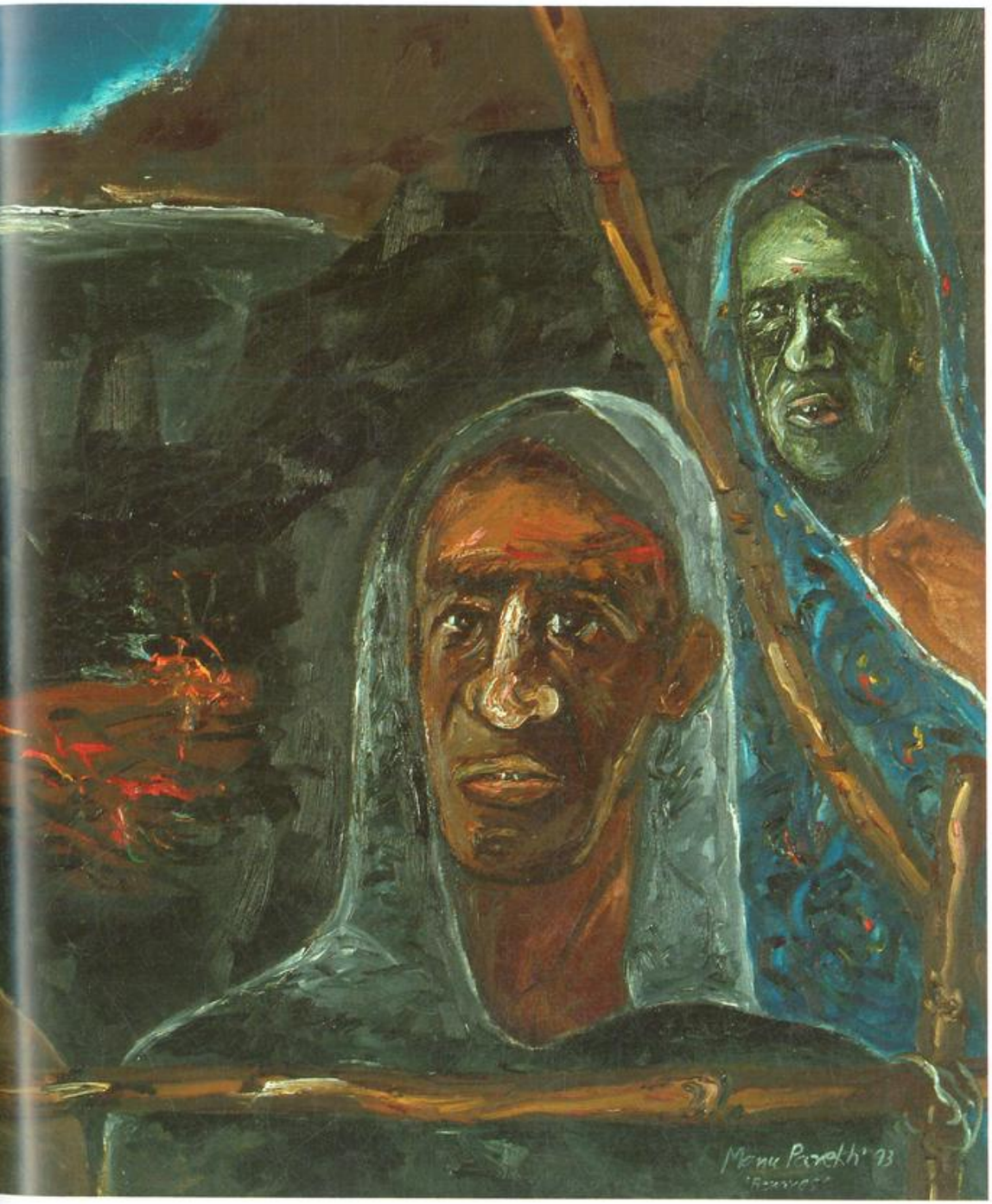
Kali Temple
24" x 30"
Oil on Canvas
April 2004 {facing page}



'I explored the metaphor of Banaras in many ways. I did a series of faces, one of flowers and another of shrines, simultaneously depicting objects and transforming them into fantasy. And through them all was the play of light and shadow, the ceaseless energy of the city, and the frothing, foaming water.'



The Family I
36" x 60" Oil on Canvas 1993


Manu Parekh '73



Portrait of a Flower
36" x 60" Oil on Canvas 1993



Banaras Landscape
36" x 48" Oil on Canvas 1993





Banaras Graffiti III
36" x 48" Cement, Acrylic, Powder Colour on Canvas Board 1997



Banaras Graffiti I
36" x 48" Cement, Acrylic, Powder Colour on Canvas Board 1997

Banaras Graffiti V
36" x 48" Cement, Acrylic, Powder Colour on Canvas Board 1997



Windy Day II
22" x 32" Acrylic on Canvas Board 2004


Manu Parekh '04

Old Temple near River
22" x 32" Acrylic on Canvas June 2004


Manu Parekh



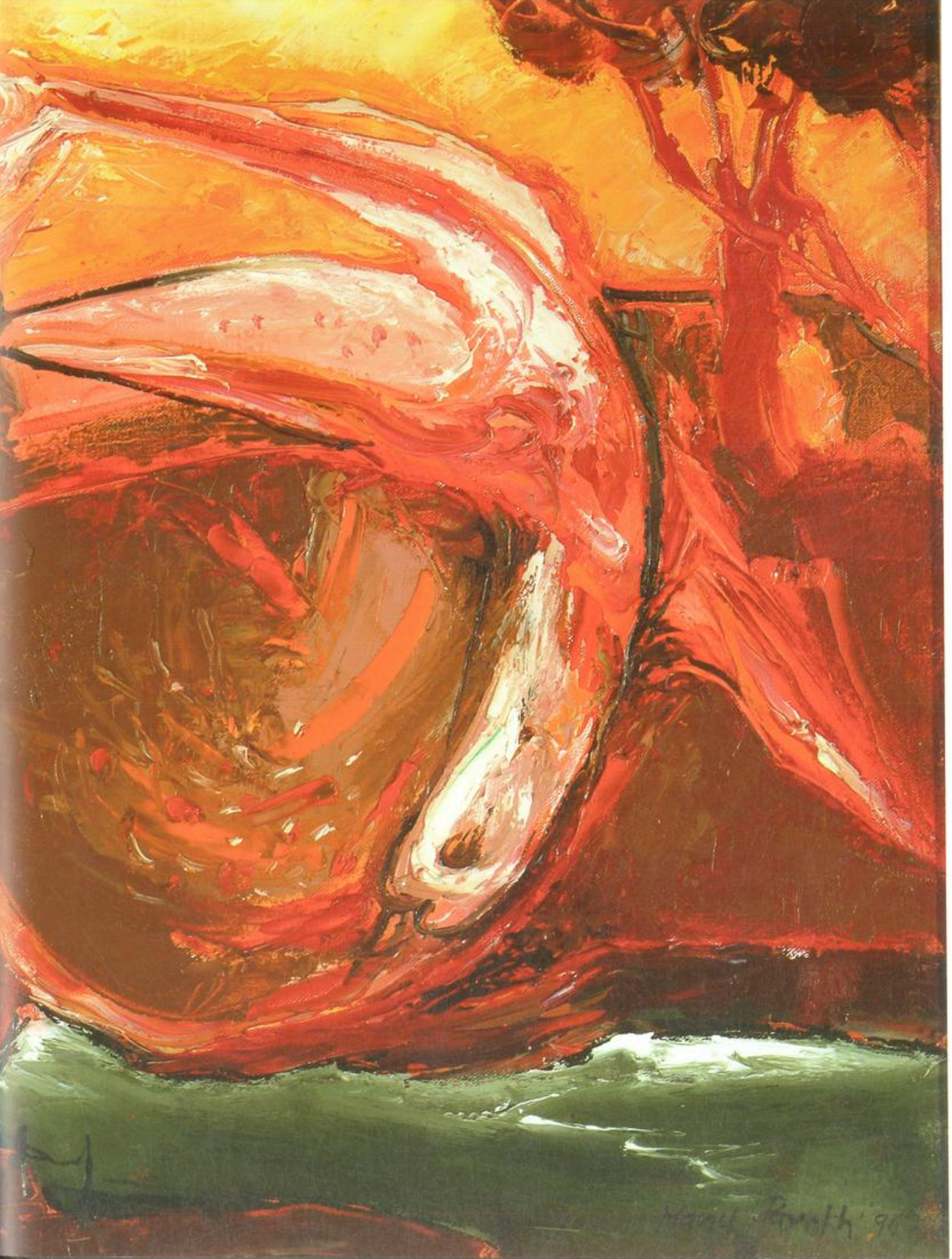
Windy Day I
24" x 30" Acrylic on Canvas Board March 1995

'The Banaras landscape at twilight reflects the city's special magic most effectively. As the sky changes from blue to a flaming sunset-orange, turning brighter by the minute, the trees, houses, boats and the domes of the temples…become darker. Then the lights come on in the temples and the shrines glow from within, as the bells begin to clang and prayers rise on the breeze.'

Landscape with Trees
36" x 48" Acrylic on Canvas June 2004

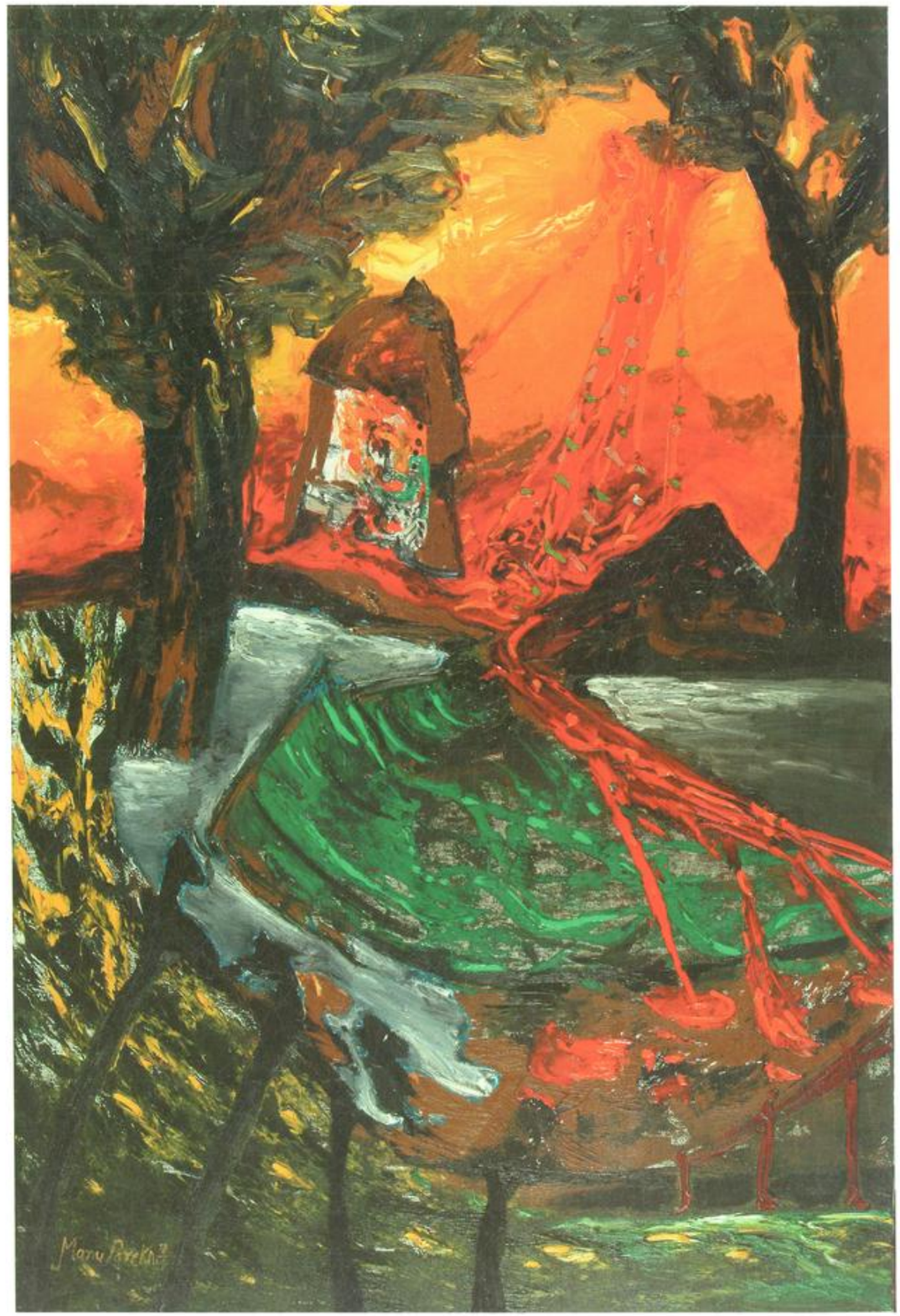






Landscape with a Flying Bird
22" x 32"
Oil on Canvas 1996

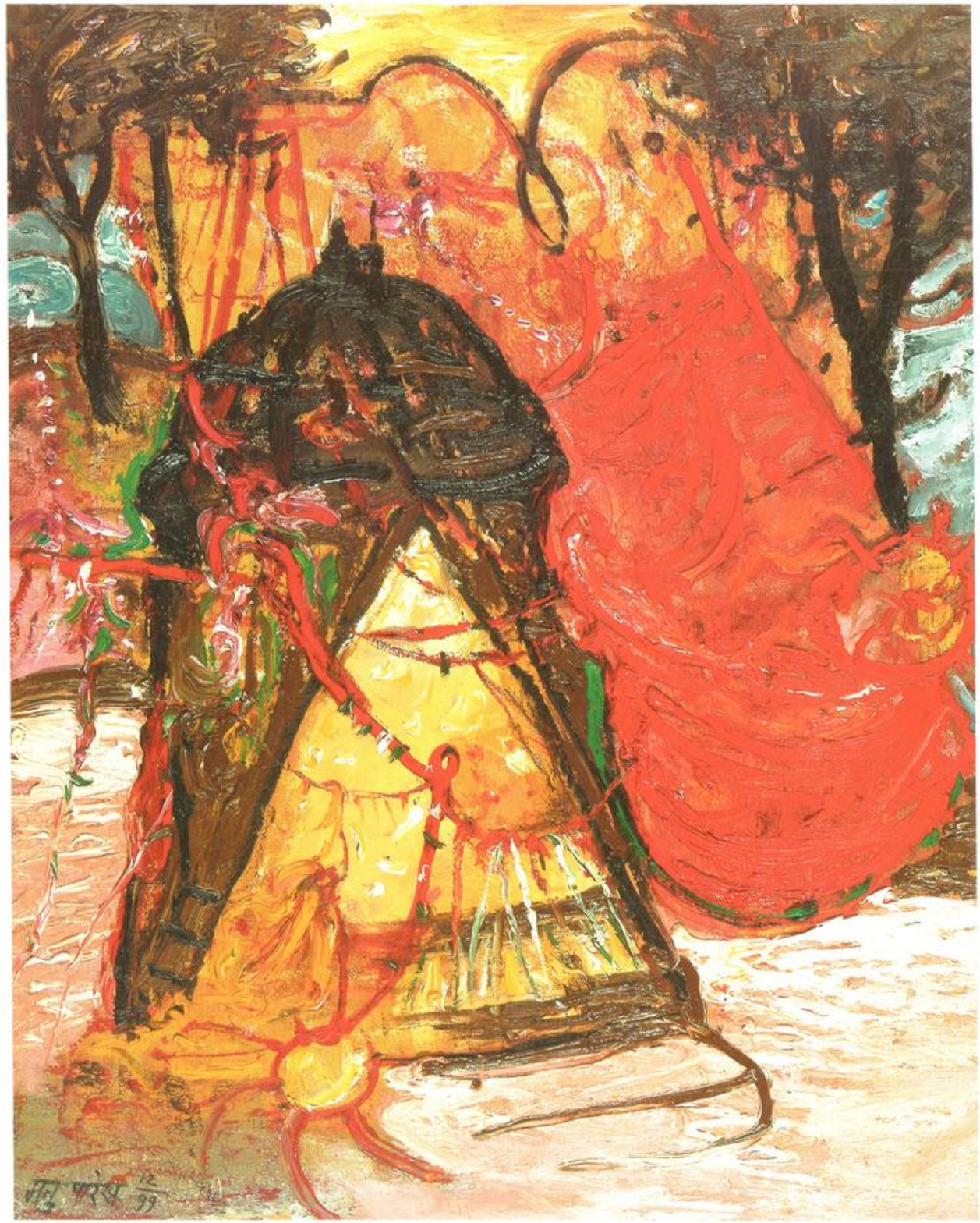
Sunrise at Banaras III
30" x 48" Oil on Canvas 2004



Bright Evening Sky
60" x 72" Acrylic and Oil on Canvas 2004


Manu Parekh

Temple on Festival Day
30" x 24" Oil on Canvas December 1999



Festival near River
36" x 48" Acrylic and Oil on Canvas 2004



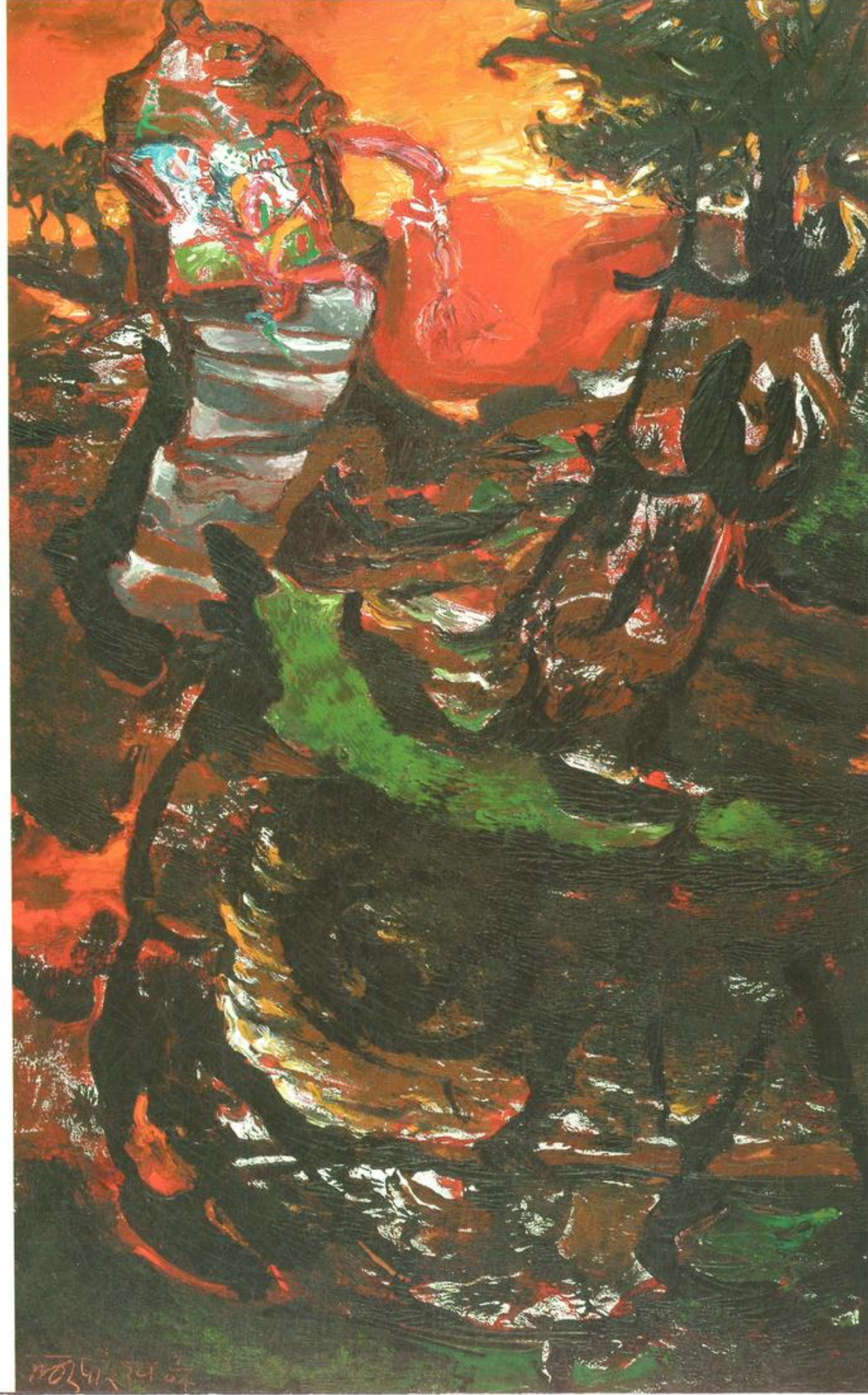
Landscape with Temples
24"x 30" Acrylic on Canvas Board June 2004



Sunrise at Banaras I
30" x 40" Oil on Canvas 2004



Sunrise at Banaras II
30" x 48" Oil on Canvas 2004

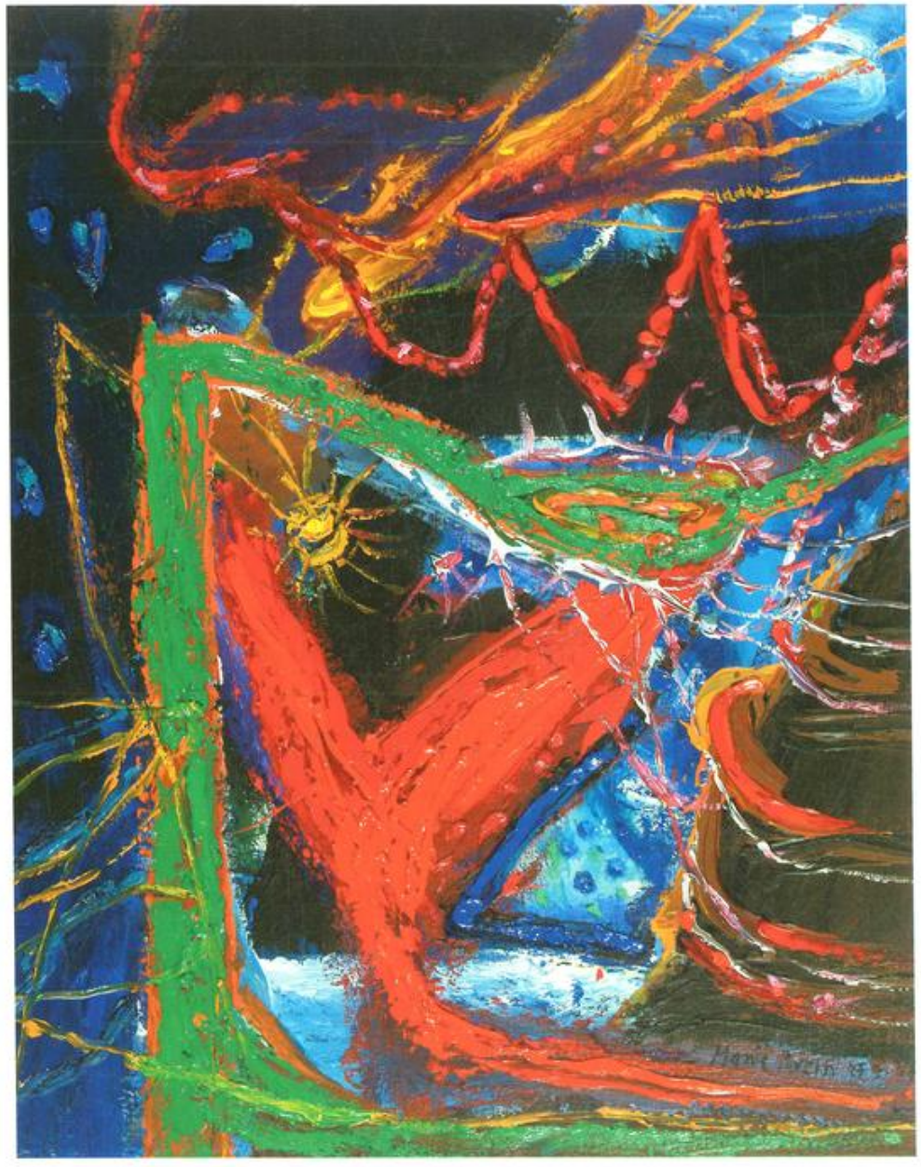


Banaras Landscape with Evening Sky
40" x 60" Acrylic on Canvas March 2001



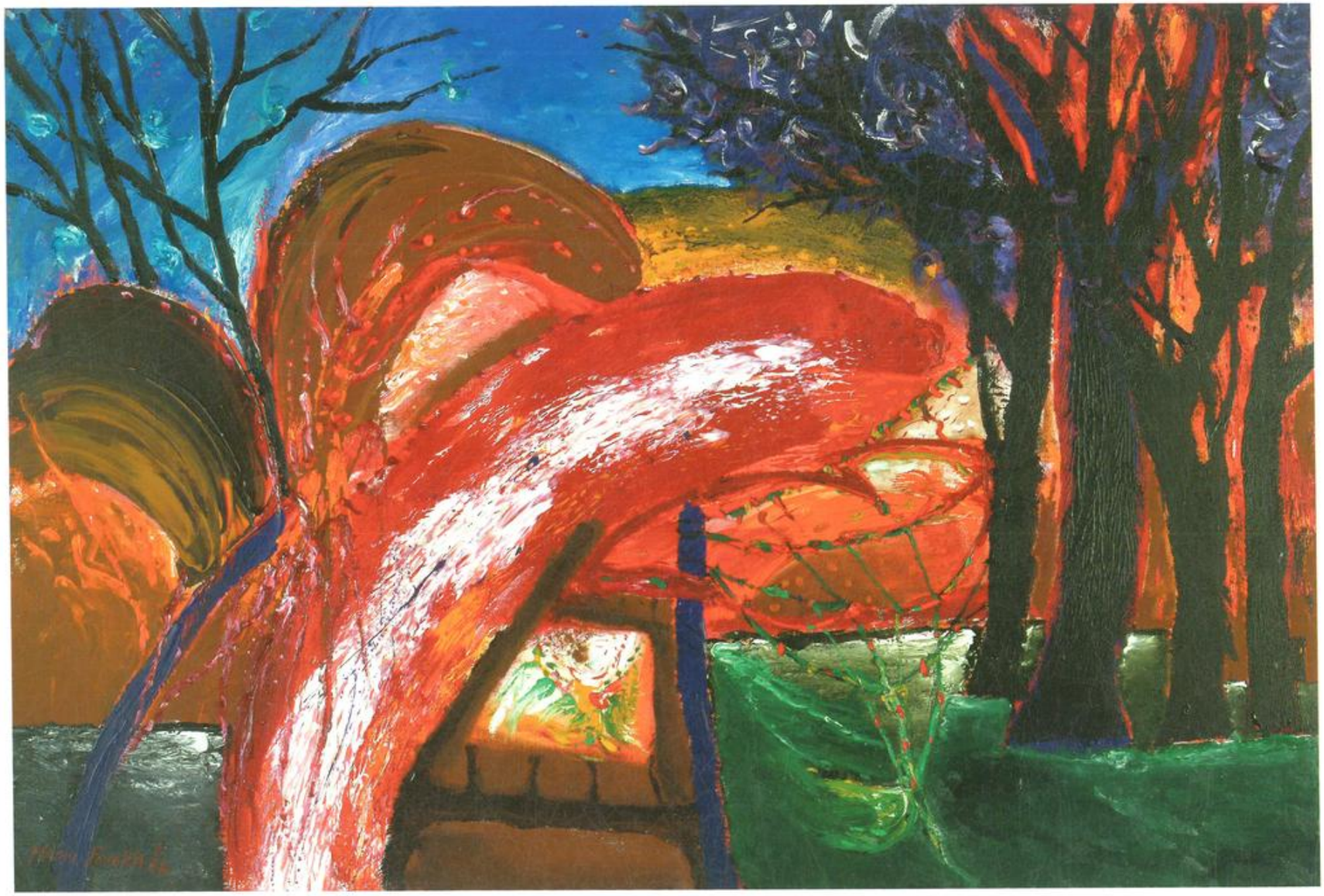
Sun behind Trees
36" x 36" Acrylic on Canvas Board 2001





Flowers and Fire
30" x 24"
Oil on Canvas Board
July 2004 {this page}

Flowers in Landscape II
40" x 60"
Acrylic on Canvas
July 2004 {facing page}



Morning Light
24" x 30" Acrylic on Canvas Board June 2004



Fire
60" x 40" Acrylic and Oil on Canvas June 2004



Solo Exhibitions

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 François, Chandigarh

1999 Ritual Oblations, Sakshi Gallery, Bangalore

1999 Ritual Oblations, Sakshi Gallery and Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai

1998 Homage, CIMA Gallery, Calcutta

1997 ARKS Gallery, London

1996 Bose Pacia Modern, New York

1995-96 Still Lifes, sponsored by Seagull Foundation, Mumbai, New Delhi, Calcutta, Mumbai

1994 Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi

1992 Exhibition of Twenty-Five Years of Work sponsored by Seagull Foundation, New Delhi, Calcutta, 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, Calcutta

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, Calcutta

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

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 at 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 of 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, Calcutta

Represented in several private and public collections in India and abroad

1967 Graphics and Paintings, Everest Gallery, Calcutta

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 Modern, 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, Calcutta

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 Bhawan, New Delhi

1975 3rd International Triennale, Rabindra Bhawan, 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, Calcutta

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

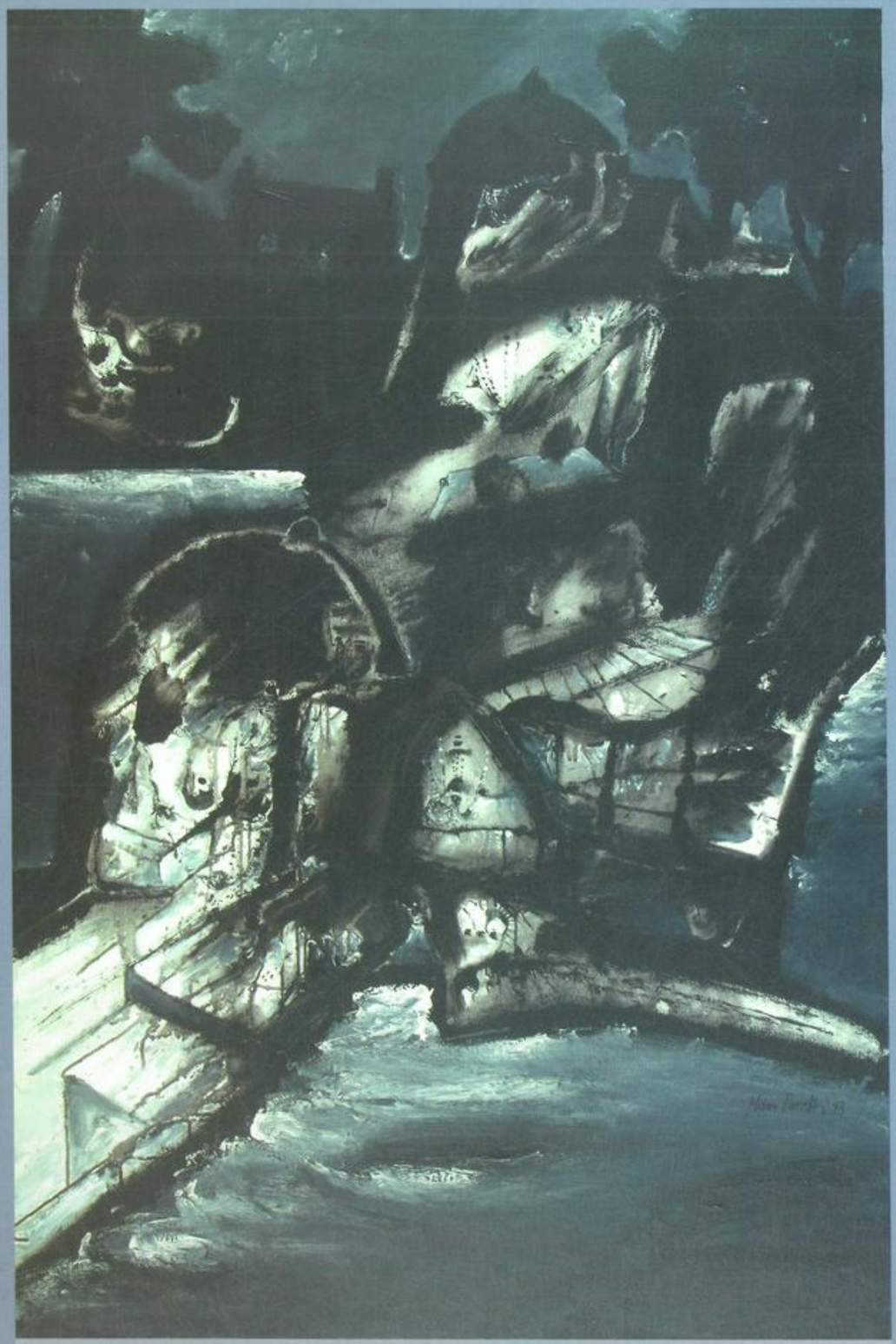
1971 Birla Academy of Art and Culture, Calcutta

Films

Film by Krishnendu Bose in 1991

Documentary film on Manu and Madhvi, by Suraj Purohit, sponsored by Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi in 1992

Portrait of a Painter, by Vikram Singh, sponsored by Doordarshan, New Delhi



Our pleasure in the Banaras series by Manu Parekh is the deepened awareness we gain from the painter's personal, visual experience of that holy city: the searing fires, the lights that emanate at night from the temples, the sunset reflected in the mysterious waters. Painting has value when it conveys emotions that words cannot express. Literalness in painting has its limits, because paintings are built with forms, not bricks. Emotion can only be expressed emphatically. Manu Parekh's slashing brush strokes are a painter's way of saying, I made this. Nature uses thunder and lightning for the same purpose.

Manu Parekh, born in 1939, is the foremost expressionist in contemporary Indian painting. Parekh's paintings break all the rules, sometimes reducing riotous colours to black and white, or making a city on a river plain into a kind of mountain. Whether his sense of space is innate, or due to the differences between Indian pictorial perspective and Western one-point (or 'photographic') perspective, I cannot say, but these compositions have the capacity to astonish. Those who know Banaras say that this is how it is; this is how they remember it. Those who have not been there yet, including myself, feel that we now know something of the journey.

John T. Spike
Director, Florence International Biennial of Contemporary Art
Florence, Italy