

Manu Parekh

RECENT PAINTINGS



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FOREWORD

When in the company of Manu Parekh, it seems unimportant to try to slot art as Modern or Contemporary. Manu at eighty is still teeming with enthusiasm about painting. He so adores his profession that he is unaware of the self-imposed restrictions of many painters who insist on what is, at best, trivial. Indian in every sense of the word, Manu moves effortlessly from one space to the other without noticing the polished signs that attempt to divide what is simply creativity.

He enjoys to the fullest what he likes best—painting.

We continue to enjoy the freedom and excitement of his art.

Tanuj Berry & Saman Malik

September 2019
New Delhi



Manu Parekh is a proponent of using the works of other artists as inspiration. He believes that there is never a truly original or unique artist or work of art. Every artist is inspired by the work that artists before him have created. A good artist draws inspiration from everything around him and creates something that is his own. For Parekh, studying other people's art inspires him in his own work and reaffirms his belief that everything and everyone is connected.

~

Introduction

JEET THAYIL



I asked Manu about ‘late style’. Did he feel he had less to prove to himself and to the world?

‘There is vanity to prove, and freedom from history.’

Vanity can save your life. It gives you the kicks you need to keep making even when there’s nothing left to prove, and no one left to prove it to, when the artists with whom you’ve been having conversations in your head, and in real time, like Souza, are dead. These new paintings were made after his 2018 career retrospective at the National Gallery of Modern Art. Say again: immediately following a retrospective of sixty years of work, Manu Parekh makes forty-two paintings in a single year, many of them a distillation of everything he has done in his working life. This is late style.

Some artists repeat the success of their mature years ad infinitum into old age. I’m thinking of Raza, say, or Rothko, who worked in one medium on one project that developed over the years but never changed its premise. Then there are those who deepen and mix up the work, charging it anew, experimenting until the very last brushstroke or until the moment they are unable to hold a paintbrush and must use scissors, like Matisse at the end, producing massive cut-outs energized by the vitality and joy of movement that were denied to the artist by his own advanced and advancing limitations.

Manu is among the select latter group—a risk-taking crew for whom no achievement is set in stone, and there’s no success like failure. In his new work, he catechizes his own inventions, seemingly unimpressed by past toil, and by the labours of the artist as a younger man. If late style is a fusion of the raw and the cooked, it is also the result of man-hours and discipline; and if there is spontaneity and improvisation—of which these works are full—they are by-products rather than the guiding force.

What I see in Manu's latest late style is rawness at the service of technique, and I see the kind of arrogance that comes from having nothing to prove to anyone except the voices in your head, the kind of confidence that cannot be bought or faked. The speed comes from working every day, and obeying the spasms of body memory, and being unable to wind down when the deadline has passed. He goes on to the next one, and the next. He makes a painting faster than before, having acquired the enigmatic velocity that can only be distilled from a lifetime of experience, which, too, is a prerogative of late work.



Look at the monumental heads. What do they say, those stunned, disbelieving, unready faces out of the Old Testament, suffering torments so holy their bodies are transformed into timelessness, pointing back at the essence of things? Suffering transcends time and place. It makes sense to all ages. It is the one thing ancient man and future man have in common.

'You can't buy pain,' he told me, 'or pleasure. These things you can't fake.'

Look again at the Christ heads—some gaunt Indian Jesus looming powerlessly against a net of crude geometric scrawls, some Jesus in the guise of an Indian holy man, homeless or hallucinating, beset by images of a former life in which he was clothed and loved and served at tables set with bounty, the kind of face you see a hundred times a day in Calcutta or Banaras or Bombay. Look again, and what you find is freedom from the pinpricks of local history. You find the naïve native genius of the Indian village filtered through its wall drawings, but also you find the fearful calamities of the Bible, the apocalyptic and the magical on one page.

'When I paint a head, I'm not painting a head. I approach it from an actor's point of view. I don't paint the face, I paint the expression.'

Everything feeds off everything. Manu's work in theatre and in Indian textiles feeds into the lighting and texture of his pictures. Once he was an actor. He had to think about what the actor must do with his face, how much work must be done by the eyes, by the mouth, by just the eyebrows, just the teeth. As a painter, the experience is channelled directly into what

he does with contrast, with colour and light, and, sometimes, with the absence of colour or light. In the heads he makes, the face is more than portraiture. It is 'a situation' waiting to be decoded, where bands of light illuminate a forehead or someone's eyes, like stark lighting in a small and intimate theatre, the dramatic shorthand that shows and doesn't tell, where the spotlights and strip lights are half the story.

These paintings encapsulate a history of Indian art. I remember meeting Manu in 2005 or 2006, when he lived in a middle-class New Delhi housing colony, the only artist in a community of civil servants and small businessmen. I remember a grid of identical houses, a kind of maze that was easy to get lost in, laid out in the haphazard way of Delhi's residential colonies, the houses numbered with a pretzel logic I was unable to decipher. It was the middle of the day, and the sun beat on my head like a gong. In a few minutes of wandering I was already made insensible by the heat and stillness, the breathless hush bordering on torpor. And then I came to a house with a polka-dot red-and-green snake painted directly on the whitewashed wall. There was a gate and a path leading to the front door. I knew from the happy dots on the absolutely modern, dapper Indian snake that it was Manu's house.

We talked that day about Basquiat (on the wall was an epic triptych, *Colours of Banaras*, in which I saw the similarities between the destructive New York graffitist and Manu, the slash and burn ferocity, the tenderness and aggression mixed so fine you couldn't tell which was which); and Rimbaud, the colour alphabet in relation to the alphabet of vowels; the existential question of breathing Delhi's air; the dread human stew of Calcutta; his first meeting with Souza; the urban vernacular in his wife Madhvi's new work; and we talked of course about water lilies and those landscapes so drenched with emotion they enter your unconscious; and I asked him what it was about Banaras that attracted him so profoundly and made him return to the city time and again. He answered with a word I hear in my head sometimes at the oddest of hours, particularly in times of tranquillity and ease.

'Commotion.'

What I liked about the paintings then, at first sight on a day in June, is what I like about them



today, more than a decade later. I like the blasted improvisatory shock of their newness, the rawness of the colours, the disregard for classical ideas of beauty and finish, but also the residual regard for classical ideas of beauty and finish. And looking now at the trajectory of his career, I see the inevitability of the arc from the local to the universal, from the abstract to the representational, from being a slave and product of history to being free of it forever.

So when I see the late Banaras pictures and the heads, the hairy sex flowers and tumbledown temples and Jesus's eyes, I know I am also seeing, through a blur of memory and desire, every flower and temple and head Manu has ever painted; and I am seeing, through a midsummer haze, a palimpsest of lost races, a codex to be deciphered and devoured by the seeing eye. There is an amalgamation and loosening: the technique may be taken for granted, but the emotion is hard-won still.

You can't buy pain, and you can't fake it.



September 2019

Bangalore



FLOWER SUTRA

This was the Banaras Manu Parekh wanted to capture in colour—a place where celebration and sorrow co-existed, where faith and spirituality were so strong that all who came seeking, whether they were celebrating or mourning, could find answers.



FLOWER SUTRA AT ASSI GHAT

5'X8' ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 2019



FLOWER SUTRA AT TULSI GHAT
4'X8' ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 2019




मनु पारेख '१९


1.


2.


3.


4.

1. *The Water Lilies*, Claude Monet
2, 3, 4. Offerings at Banaras ghats, Manu Parekh





ABOVE: DETAILS FROM PAGE 15 & 17

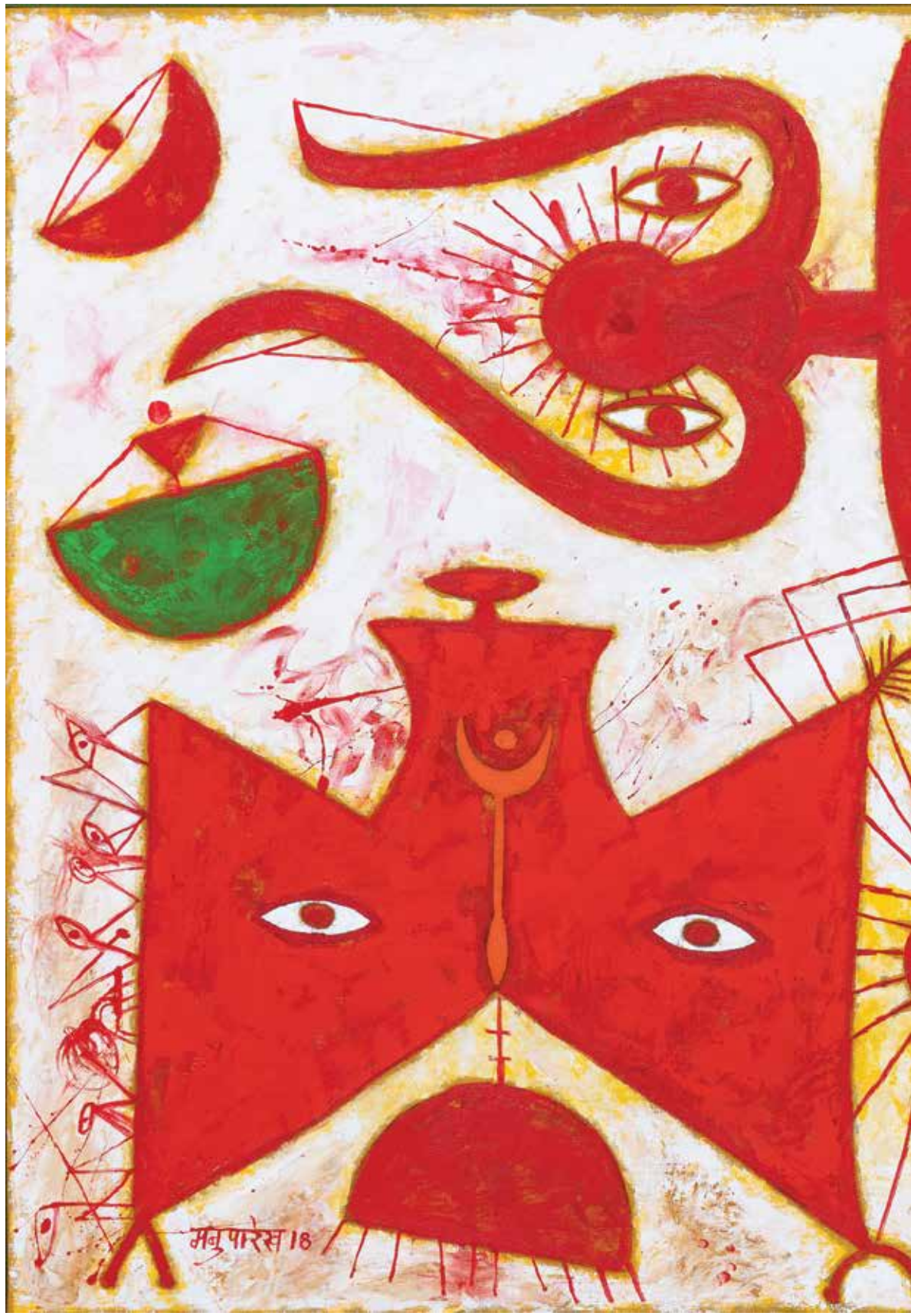


FLOWER SUTRA I (DETAIL, ABOVE)
2'X4' ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 2019



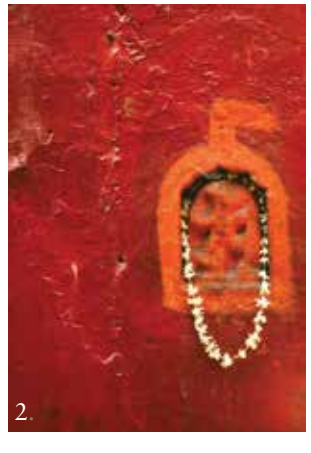
GRAFFITI OF TEMPLE WALL I

40”X80” ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 2018









1. *Rausch* (Intoxication), Paul Klee lithograph
2,3,4. Banaras streets and walls, Dinesh Khanna
5. Walls, Manu Parekh







As a boy, Manu Parekh was more interested in the surroundings of a temple than what was inside. The temple ceremonies, colourful decorations and lights, as well as the temple premises captured his imagination. His faith grew as he became older and, in Banaras, his faith and art became one.



LANDSCAPE

Manu Parekh visited Banaras for the first time in 1980, shortly after the death of his father. He had grown up in a devout Hindu, middle-class family and Banaras fascinated him from the very beginning. He calls his first visit ‘magical’, as it not only deepened his faith in God and offered him relief from his suffering, but was also a turning point in his journey as an artist. Since then, he has visited Banaras nearly once every year, and the magic, peace and inspiration that the place offers him has never diminished.

‘I’ve always felt that we don’t have paintings of Indian landscapes. The little that I found was in Rabindranath Tagore’s landscapes. When I first went to Banaras, there were two things in my mind: Tagore’s landscapes and Souza’s view on landscapes. Souza has said that when he paints landscapes, he takes a church from England, trees from Paris, boats from Amsterdam. I will always remember his powerful landscapes, but I decided that I will go against his way of thinking and create a particularization of place.
And that will be Banaras.’



Light is a crucial element in landscape paintings, and the countless times Parekh witnessed the sun rise and set in Banaras helped him bring in an atmospheric element to his landscapes. He had always been inspired by Paul Klee's use of geometry. In Banaras, he was able to make these techniques his own.

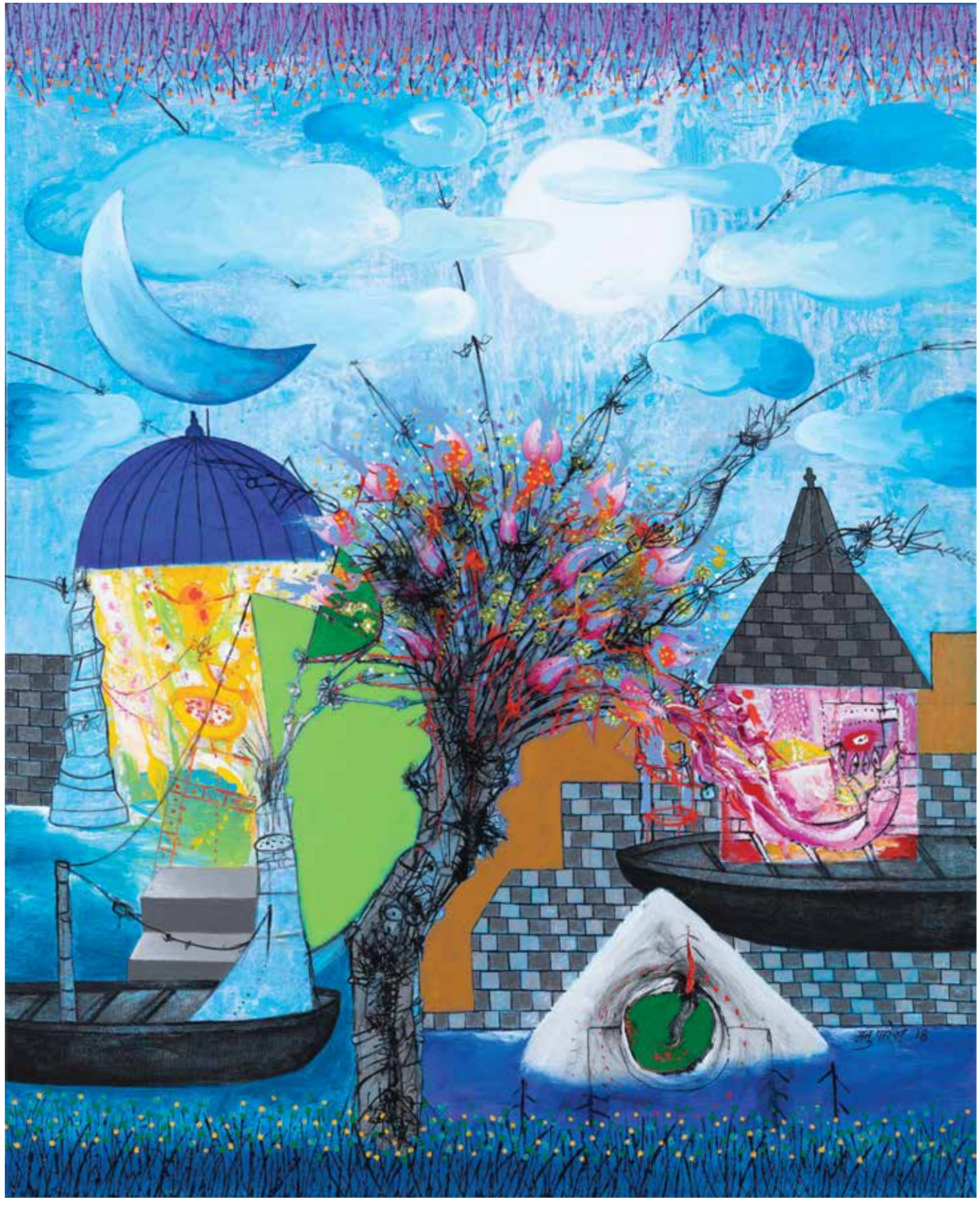
The Tree of Houses, Paul Klee

MOON MOVING AROUND TEMPLE
5'X6' ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 2018



FLOWERS BETWEEN TWO MOONS

4’X5’ ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 2018





‘I’ve always loved the beautiful decoration,
innovative forms and the use of colour in
Pichhwai paintings (above).’

TEMPLE UNDER DARK MOUNTAINS
25”X19” WATERCOLOUR ON PAPER 2018



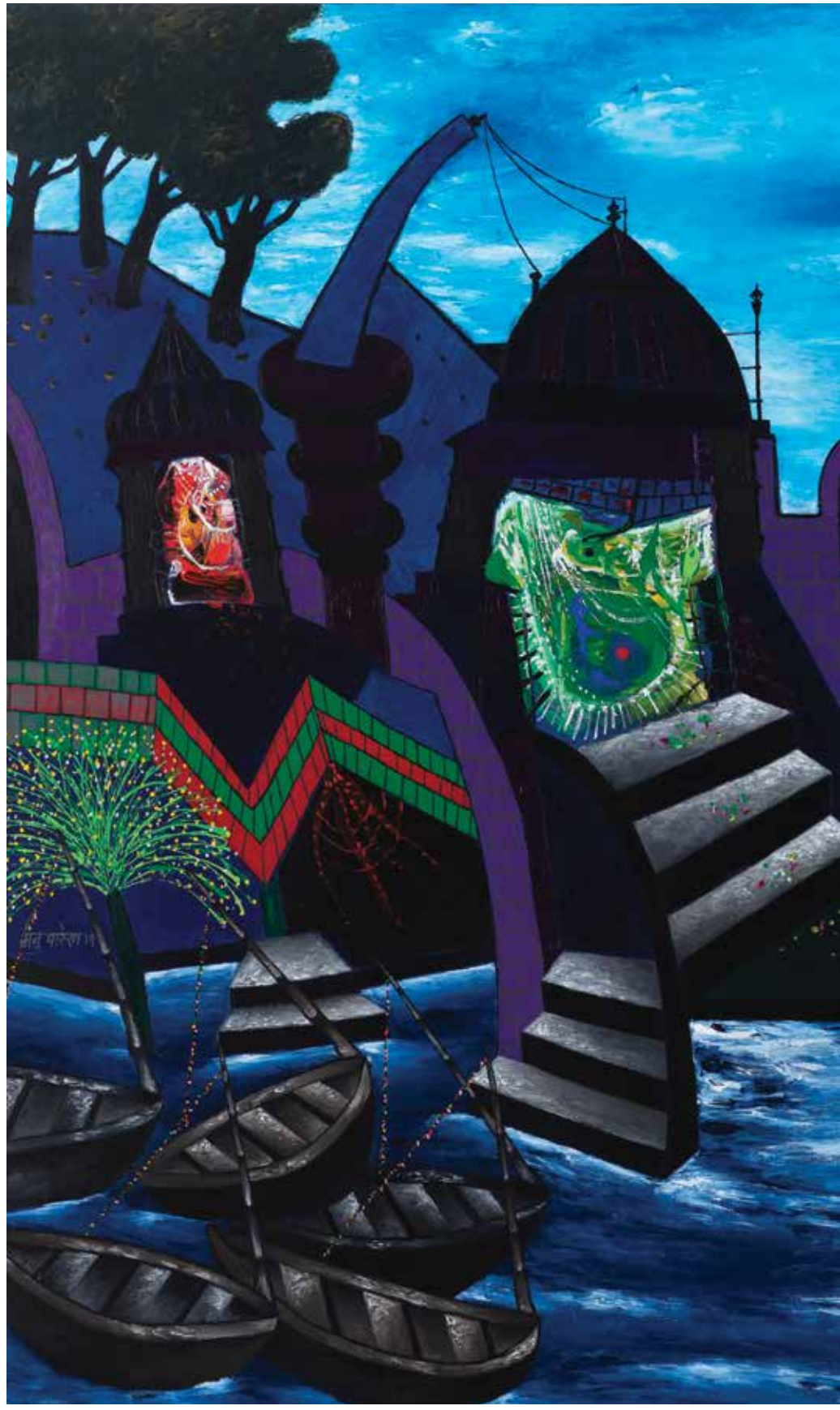
TEMPLE UNDER WHITE FOREST

25”X16” WATERCOLOUR ON PAPER 2018



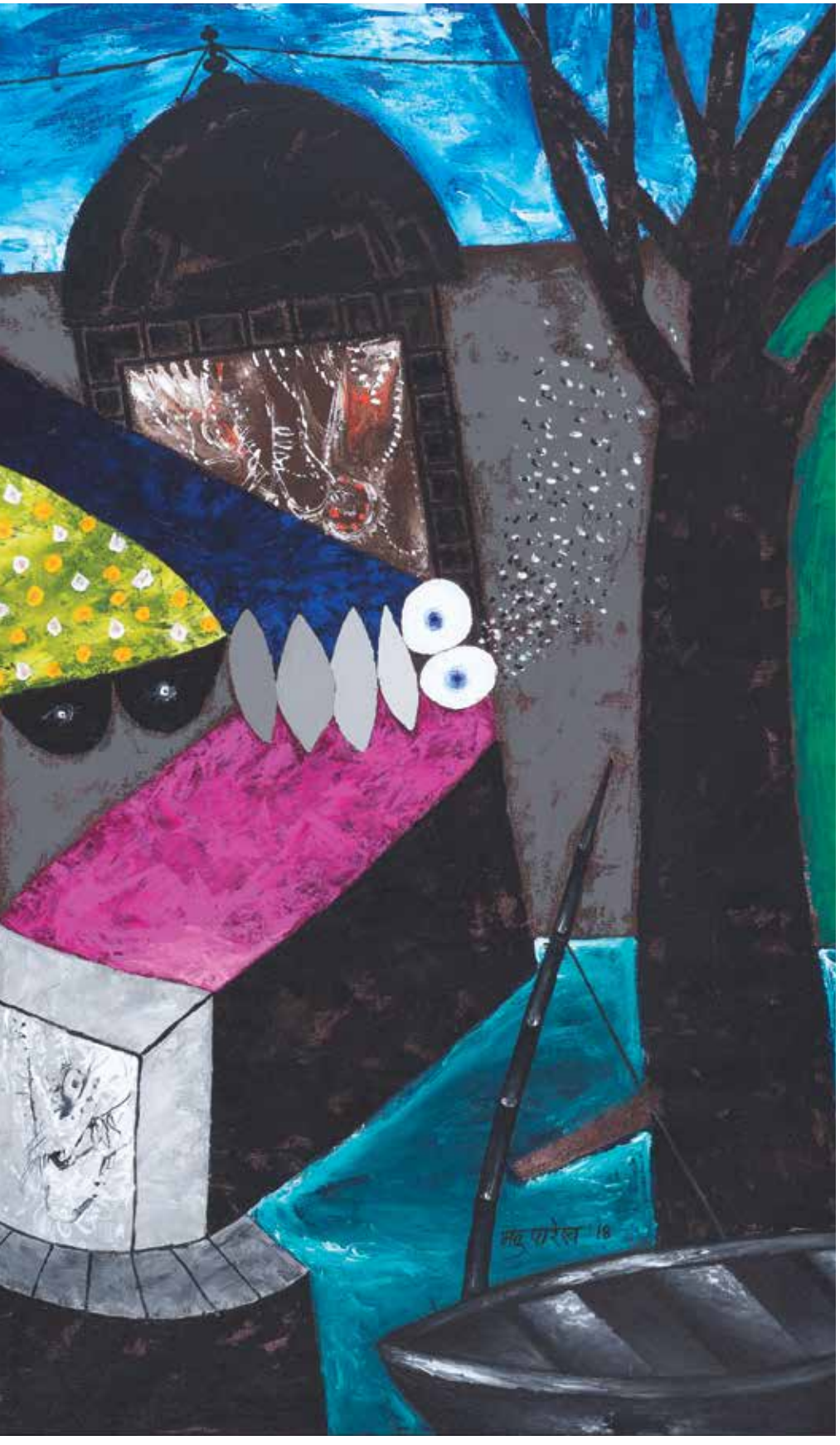
MOONLIT NIGHT AT BANARAS II

5'X10' ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 2019







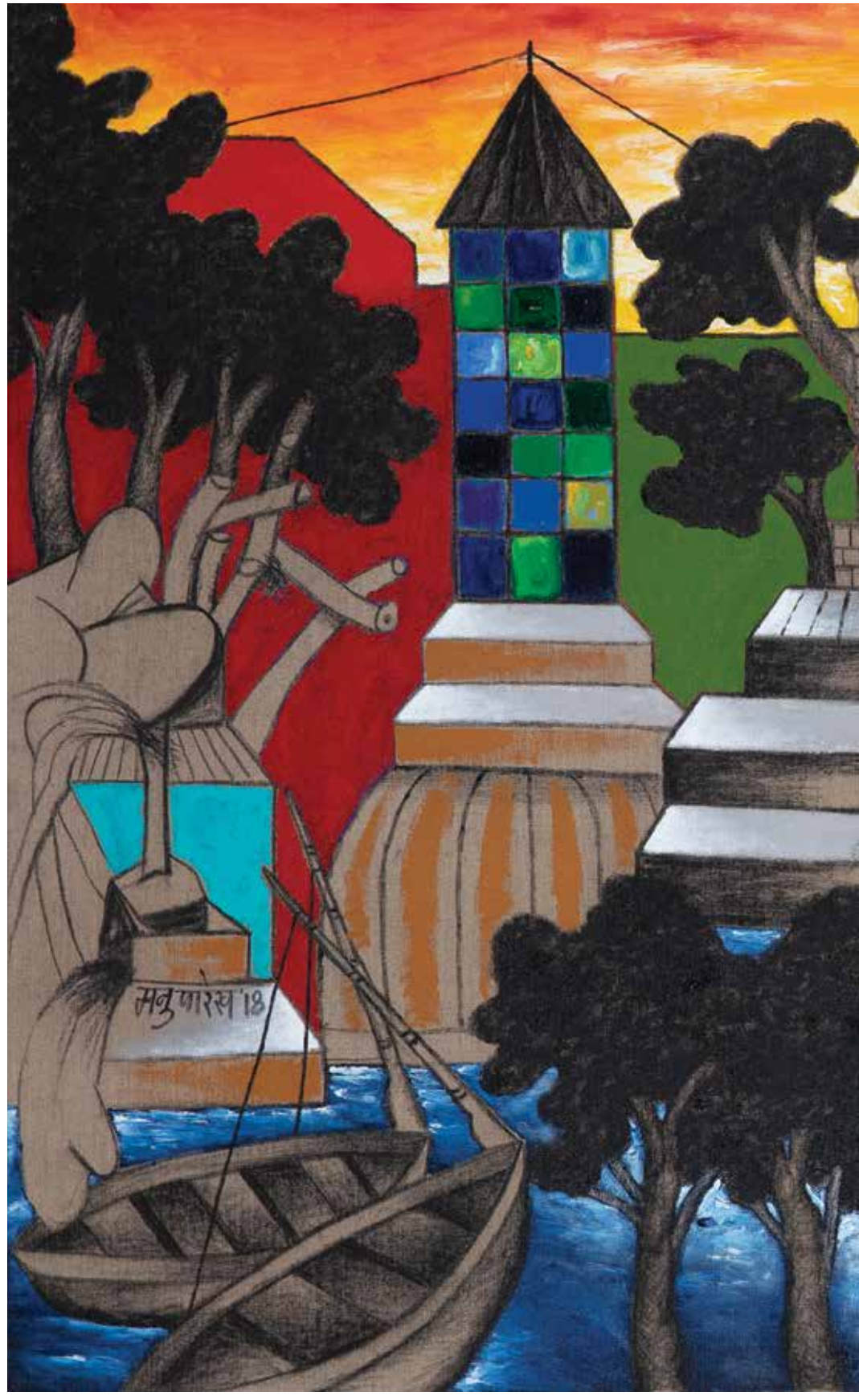


TEMPLE FESTIVAL IN MOONLIGHT

40”X80” ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 2018

ARCHITECTURAL MOSAIC OF TEMPLES

40”X80” ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 2018





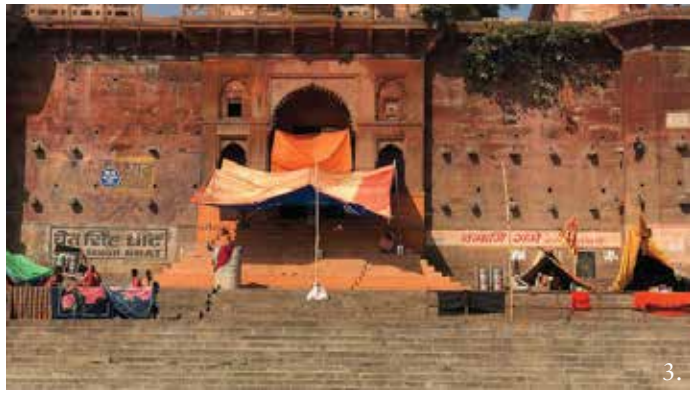




SUNSET AT BANARAS, ASSI GHAT
4'X8' ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 2019









1. Banaras, Vivek Desai
2. Manu Parekh painting on a boat in Banaras
3,4. Banaras Ghats, Manu Parekh



SUNSET AT BANARAS, ASSI GHAT (DETAIL ABOVE)
4'X8' ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 2019


मनु पारेख '18





‘Vincent van Gogh’s *Starry Night* (above) is the most influential painting in the development of art.’



(PREVIOUS PAGE) MOONLIT NIGHT AT BANARAS I, (DETAIL ABOVE)
3'X8' ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 2019





1. *San Giorgio Maggiore at Dusk*, Claude Monet
2. Shrine, Banaras, Manu Parekh

MIDNIGHT LANDSCAPE
18"X24" ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 2019





Shrine, Banaras, Manu Parekh

MOON AT ASSI GHAT
2'X3' ACRYLIC ON BOARD 2018





Landscape with Figures-Céret,
Chaïm Soutine

‘The most important feature in Chaïm Soutine’s paintings is his depiction of atmospheric landscape. He used this technique even in his brushstrokes, which fascinates me. He was a contemporary of Van Gogh and, in both of their works, their brushstroke technique goes together with the reality of what they are painting.’

HOLI AT BANARAS
24”X30” OIL ON CANVAS 2019







1. *Paysage avec personnages*, Chaïm Soutine

2. *Landscape*, Chaïm Soutine

MOON AND BOAT IN LANDSCAPE

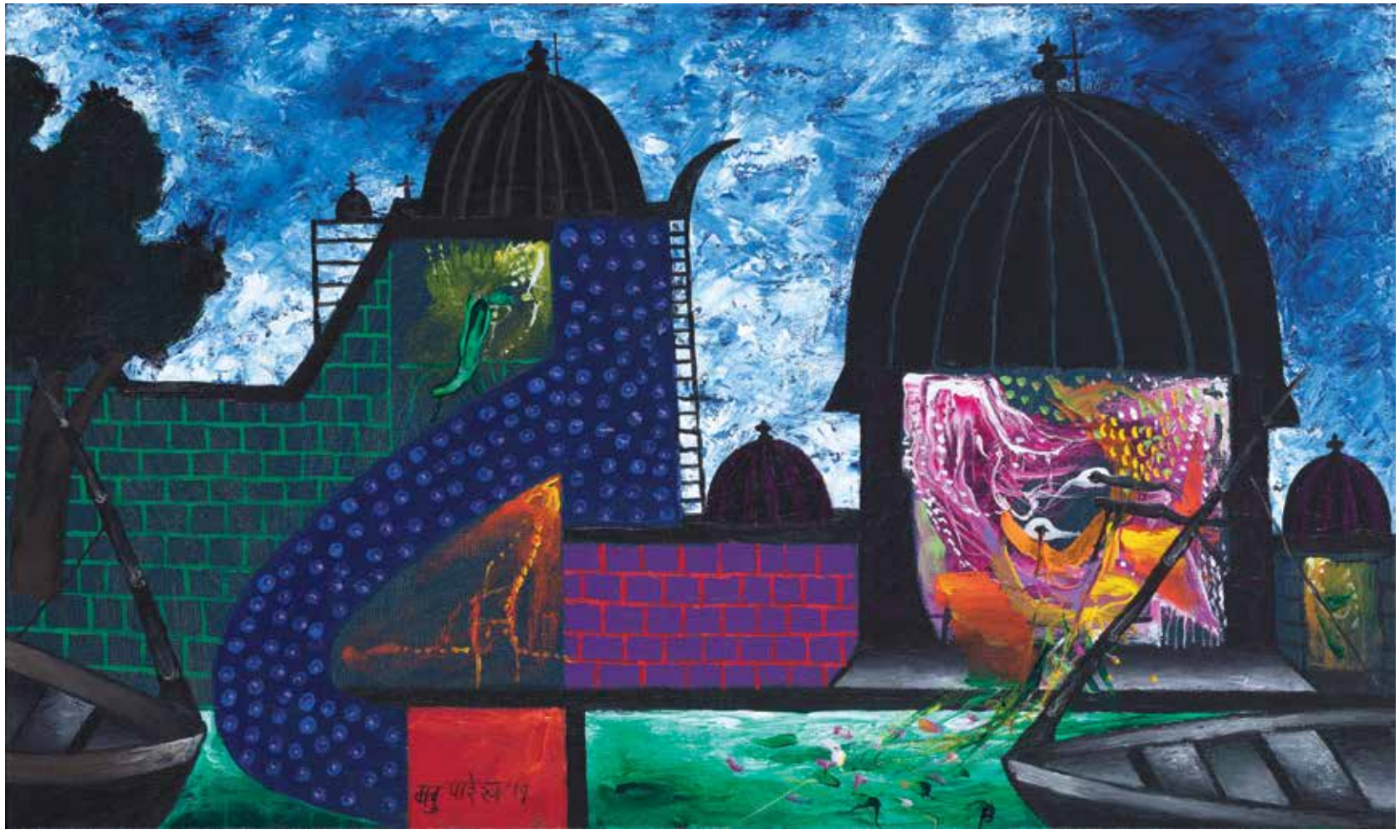
4'X5' OIL ON CANVAS 2019



MONSOON AT ASSI GHAT

4’X5’ OIL ON CANVAS 2019





MOONLIGHT AT BANARAS

18"X30" ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 2019



TEMPLE IN MOONLIGHT

18"X30" ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 2019



TEMPLES, TREES AND BOATS IN LANDSCAPE
18"X30" ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 2019



EVENING LIGHTS

18"X30" ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 2019

AFTERNOON PRAYER

18”X30” ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 2019



PORTRAIT OF TEMPLE

12”X15” WATERCOLOUR ON PAPER 2018



LANDSCAPE WITH TEMPLE DOME

27” X15” WATERCOLOUR ON PAPER 2018



TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE

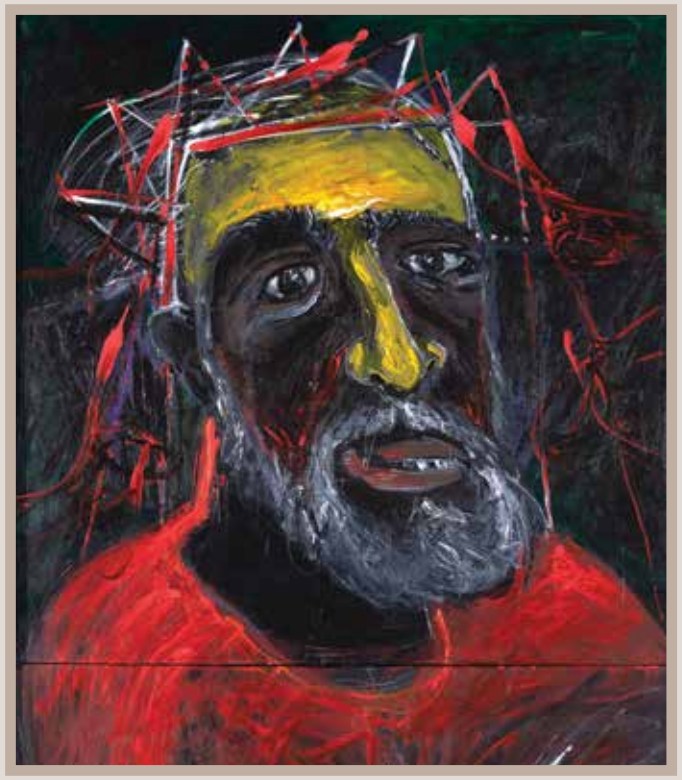
15"X21" WATERCOLOUR ON PAPER 2018





INTERIOR OF TEMPLE

23'X15" WATERCOLOUR ON PAPER 2018



HEADS

‘When I paint a head, I don’t paint a head but expression.
When I paint expression, I don’t paint expression but I create the
situation on his face, what is happening in front of him.’

‘For me, India is the most interesting country, with so many
different faiths, different kinds of behaviour, and situations full
of contrast and contradictions. In one day, we cross so many faces,
we cross so many situations, we cross so many experiences.
In this crowd, so many things happen that
one can create a very interesting face.’

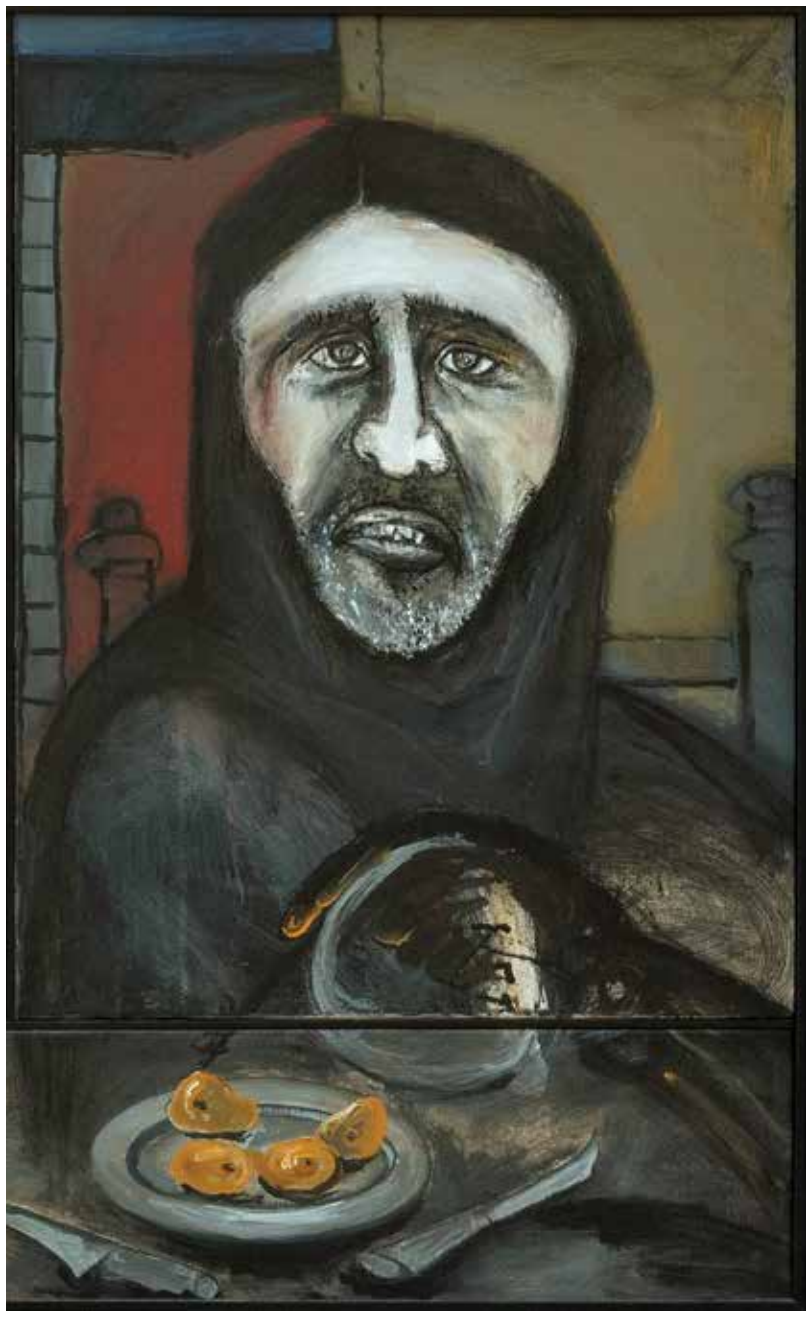






Manu Parekh was moved by Van Gogh's depiction of poverty in *The Potato Eaters* (above). Potatoes symbolized poverty in Europe, and are one of the cheapest food staples available in India. Parekh connects Van Gogh's painting with his through the potato. The faces in the painting are inspired by ordinary people—those who are secondary characters in their own lives.

POTATO EATERS FROM KALAHANDI
APPROX 4'X10' ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 2019







1.



2.



3.

1. *A Weaver's Cottage,* Vincent van Gogh
2. Detail, Manu Parekh
3. Willem Dafoe, the actor playing Van Gogh in the film *At Eternity's Gate*

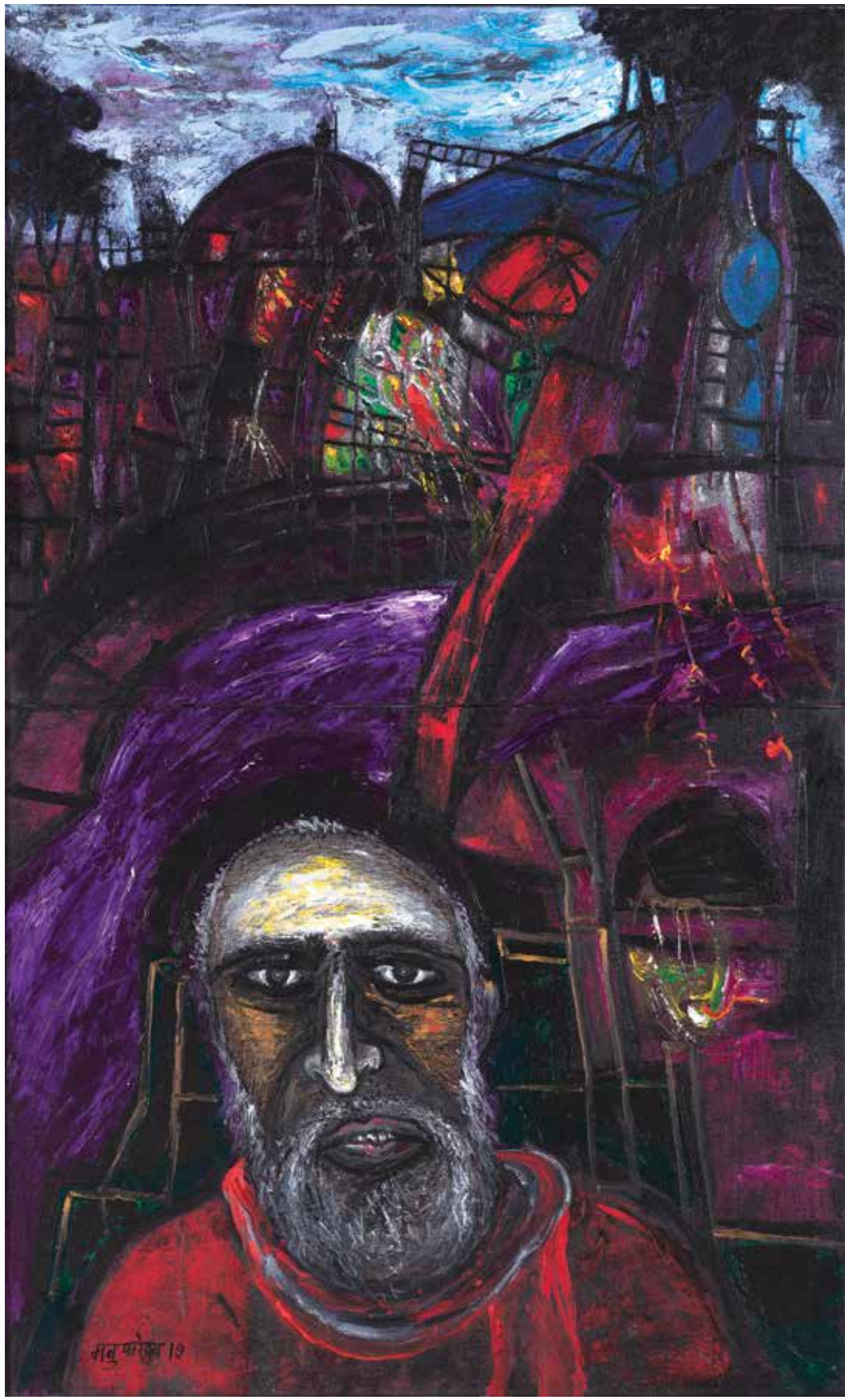
In *Weaver from Kalahandi*, Manu Parekh melds together Van Gogh's *A Weaver's Cottage* and the expressions of the actor playing Van Gogh in *At Eternity's Gate*, Willem Dafoe. For the painting, he took inspiration not from Dafoe's portrayal of Van Gogh, but from the actor's expressions in real life.



WEAVER FROM KALAHANDI
4’X5’ ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 2019

MAN IN LANDSCAPE

60”X36” OIL ON CANVAS 2018





Peter O' Toole as Becket in the film *Becket*

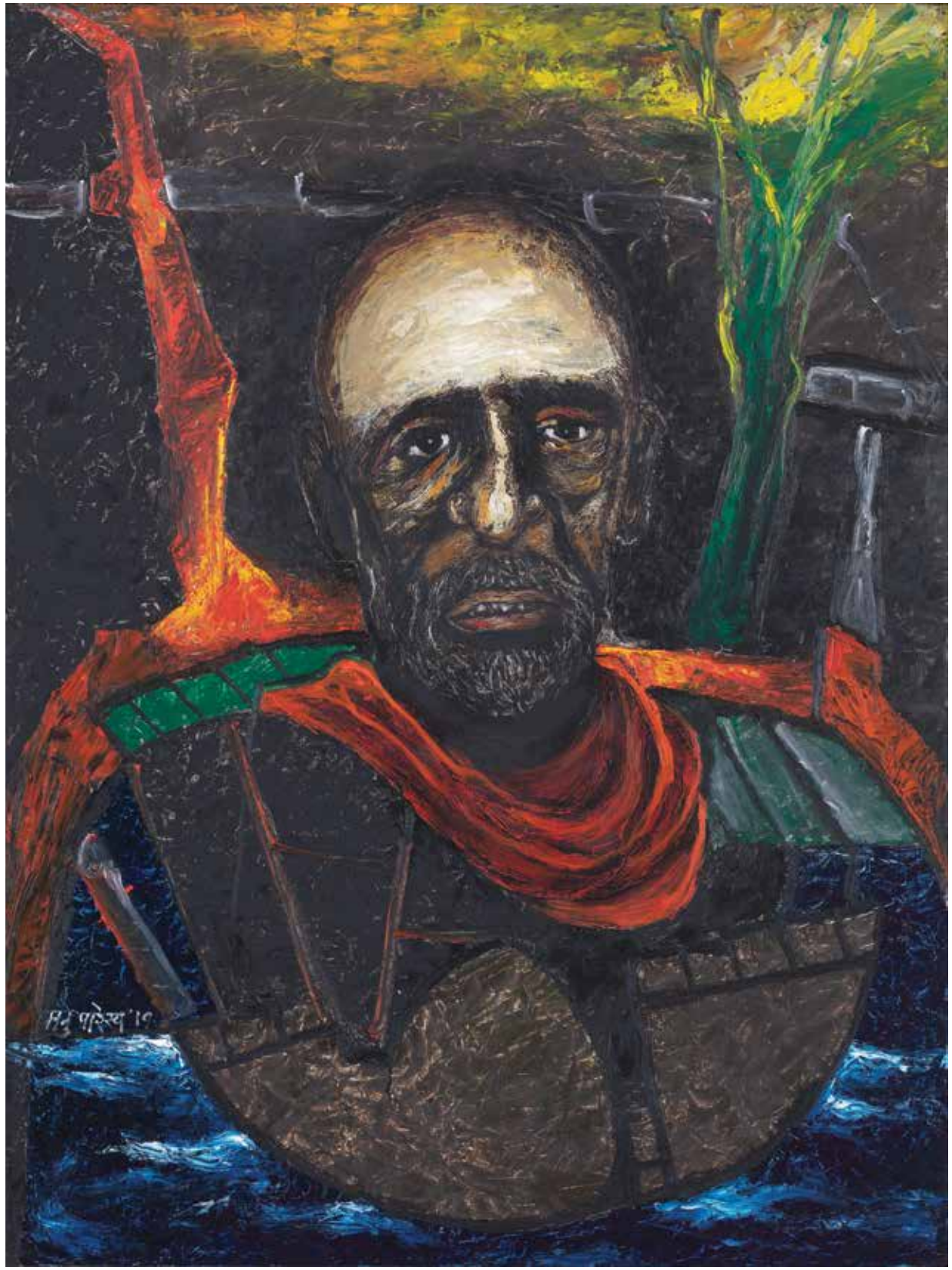
KING WITH BIRD

2'X4' ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 2018



HOLY DIP

30”X40” OIL ON BOARD 2019



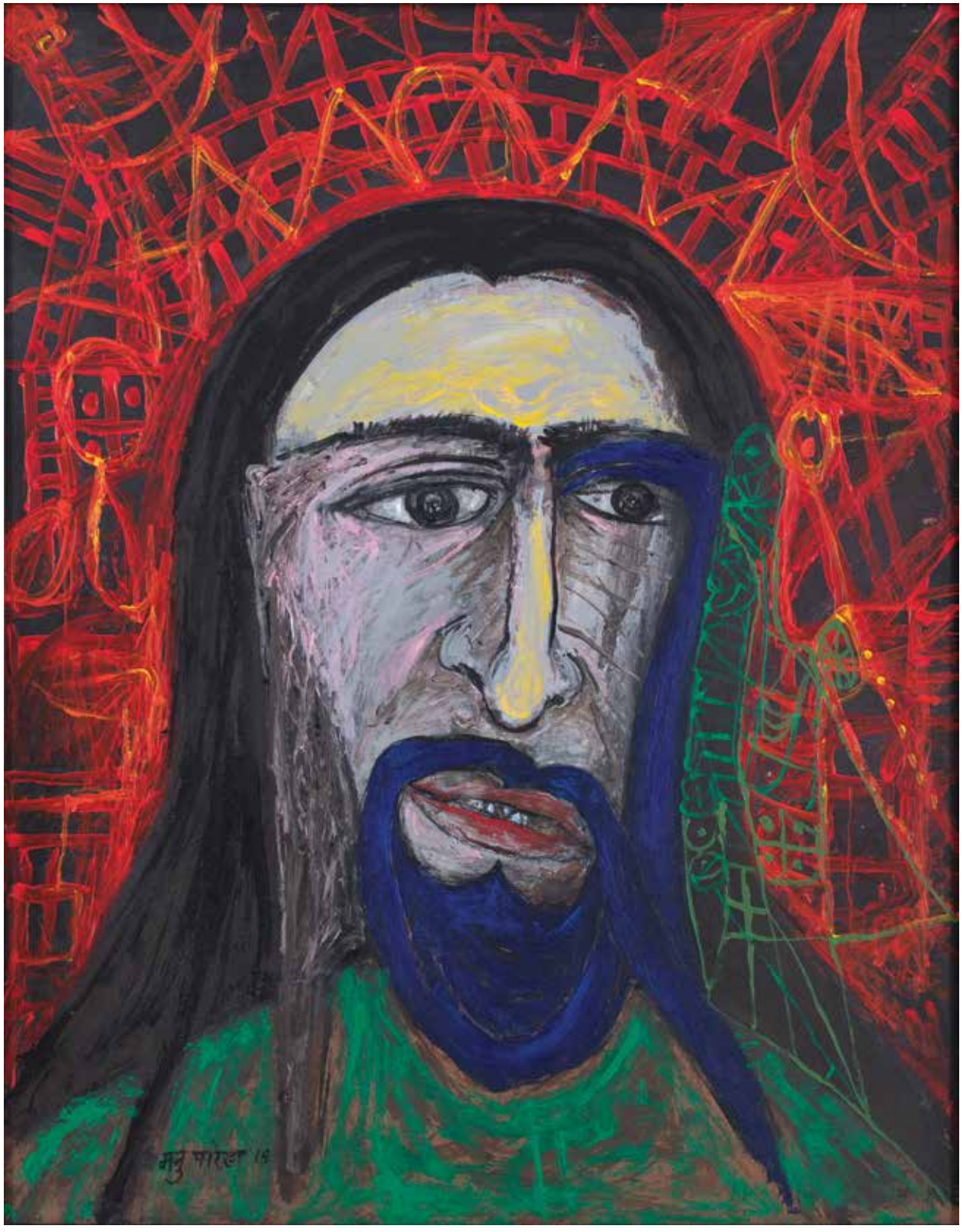
HOLY DIP IN MANHOLE AT BADA BAZAAR

36”X56” OIL ON BOARD 2019



JESUS CHRIST

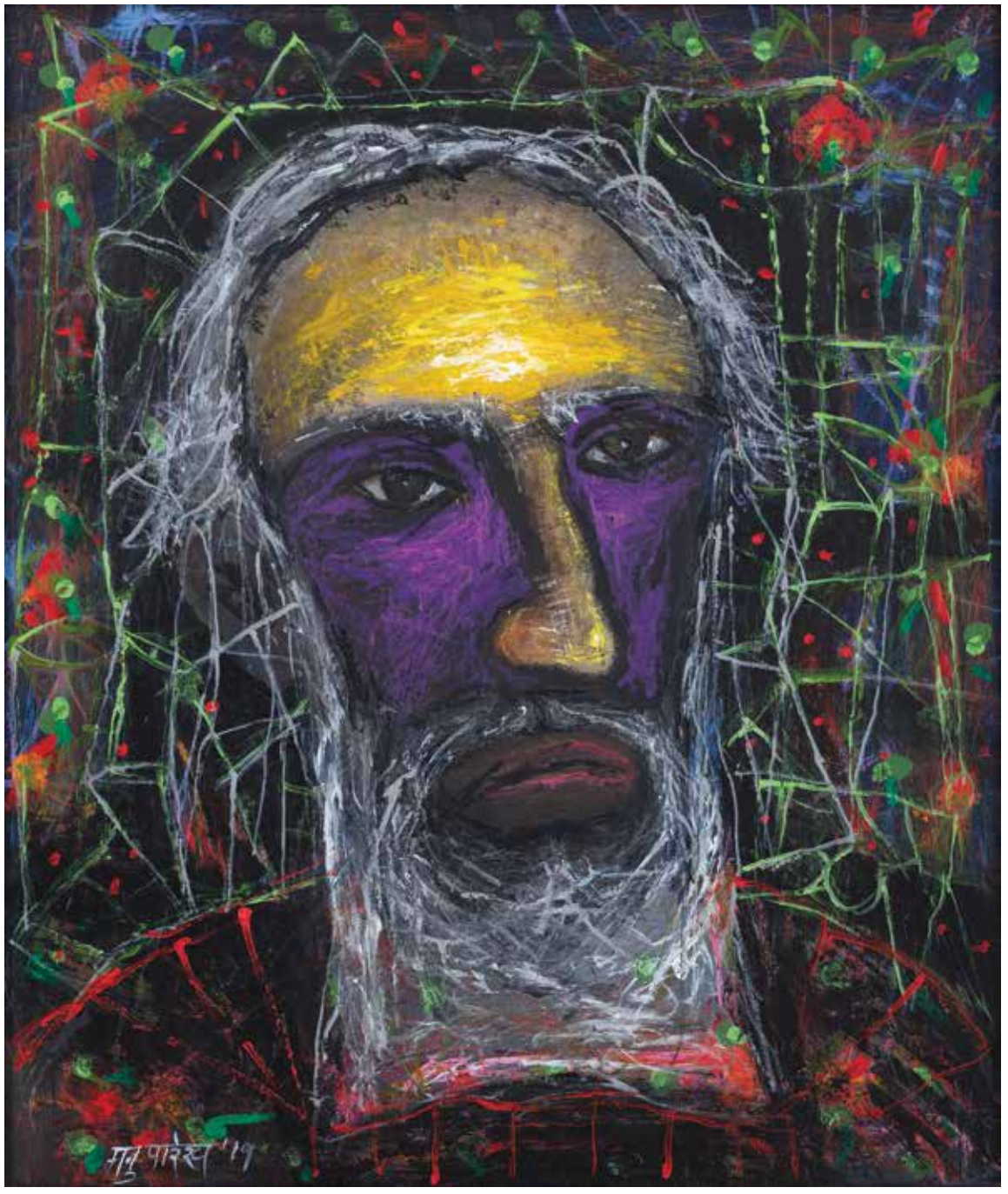
24”X30” ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 2019





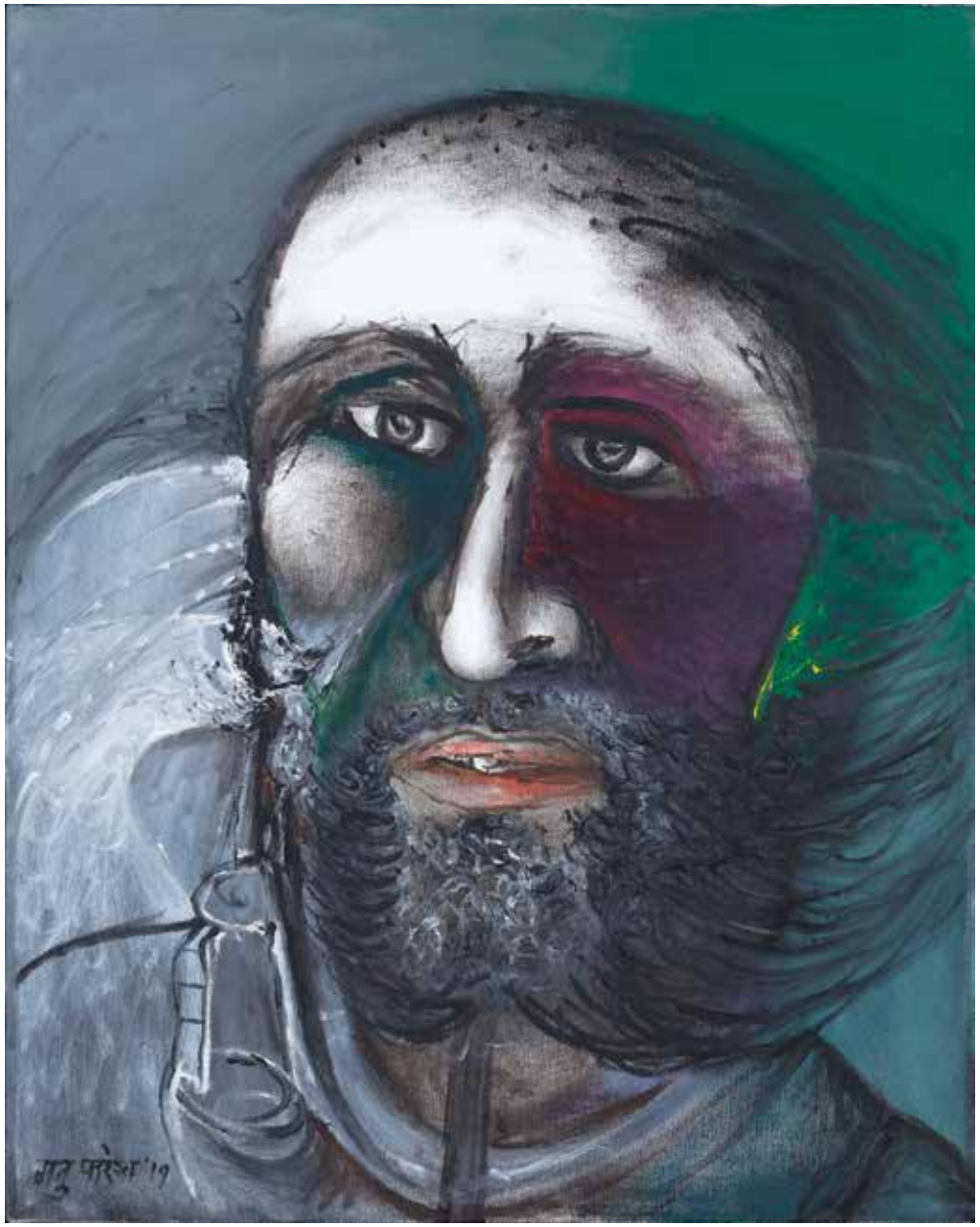
THE POET VI

24”X36” ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 2019



THE POET III

24"X30" ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 2019



THE POET IV

24”X30” OIL ON CANVAS 2019

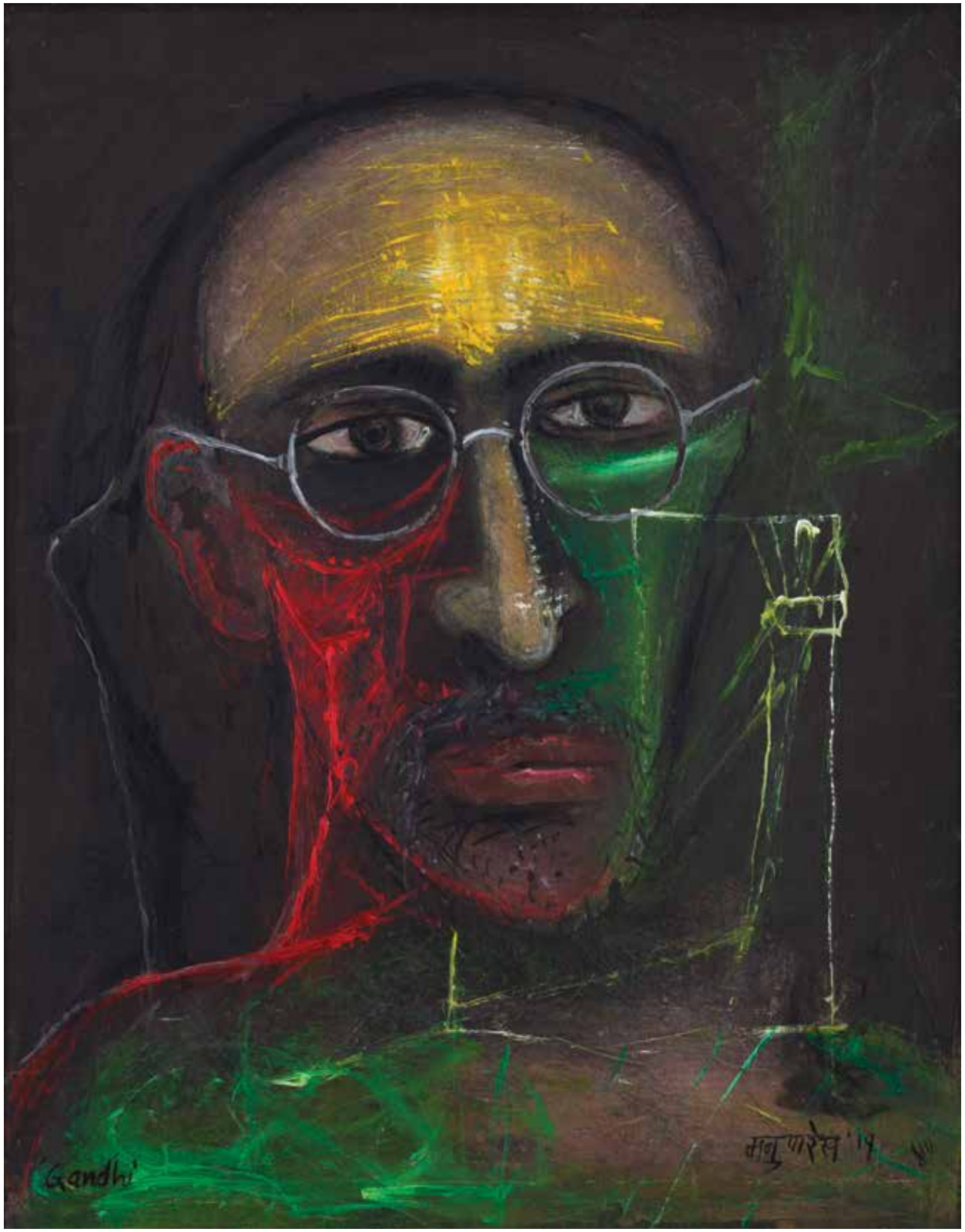


THE POET VII

24”X30” ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 2019

GANDHI

24”X30” ACRYLIC ON BOARD 2019


Gandhi



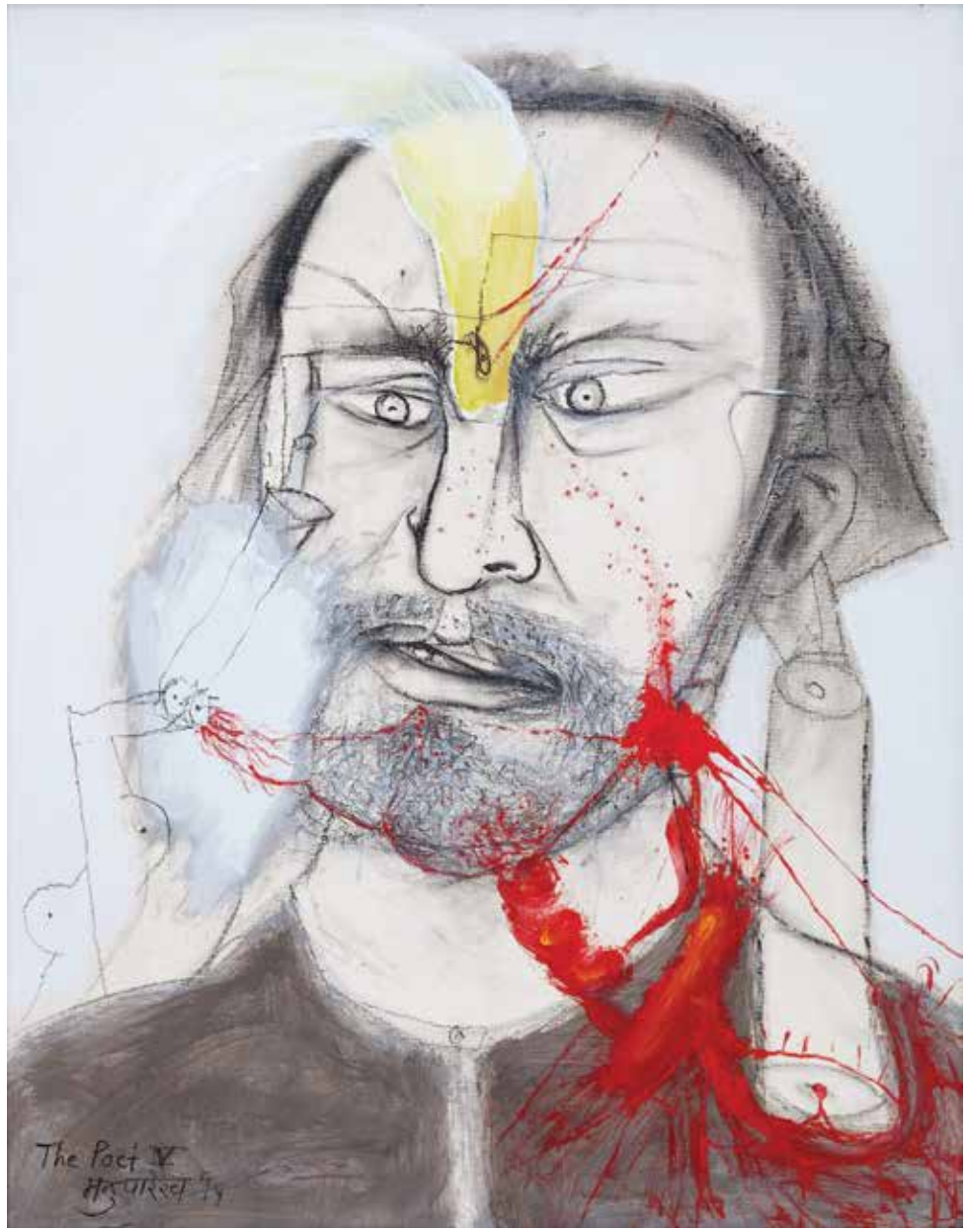
THE ACTOR (BRANDO)
2'X2' ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 2018





THE POET I

24”X30” ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 2019



THE POET V

30"X24" ACRYLIC ON BOARD 2019

THE POET II

24”X30” ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 2019


मनु पारेख '19

ABOUT SAFFRONART

Founded in 2000 by Minal and Dinesh Vazirani, Saffronart is a leading international auction house, and India's most reputed, with over two hundred auctions to its credit. Its flagship gallery is in Mumbai, with offices in New Delhi, London and New York. At the forefront of selling Indian art, Saffronart has, over the past eighteen years, held online and live auctions, exhibitions, and Dialogues in Art, working with collectors, gallerists and artists to develop a strong market for art and aesthetics. Its focus is to bring transparency to the auction process, and provide easy access and information to collectors around the world. Saffronart's services go beyond auctions to include private sales, appraisals and valuations for clients. Saffronart has set several global benchmarks for online auctions, and was the subject of a case study at Harvard Business School in 2005.

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SAFFRONART

Manu Parekh, one of India most inventive painters, believes that a good artist draws inspiration from everything around him. Parekh's study of other people's art inspires his own work and reaffirms his belief that everything and everyone is connected. This book showcases 42 new works painted over a single year by a master creating at the height of his prowess. The paintings evince the variety of influences that have informed Parekh's oeuvre through the years: nature, worship and ritual, theatre and film, and the work of other seminal artists as well as his own previous works. Parekh returns to beloved places, themes, artists and creations, infusing each of the paintings with new energy and depth.

As Jeet Thayil says in the introduction, 'Some artists repeat the success of their mature years ad infinitum…. Then there are those who deepen and mix up the work, charging it anew…. Manu is among the select latter group.'

~



Manu Parekh is among India's best-known contemporary artists. He received his diploma in Drawing and Painting from Sir J. J. School of Art, Mumbai, in 1962, and has held several solo shows and participated in a number of group exhibitions in India and abroad. He has been Member of the Society of Contemporary Artists, Kolkata; Member of the General Council, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi; and Member of the Advisory Committee, National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi. Parekh received an honorary Doctorate in Literature from Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata, in 2013. He was awarded the President of India's Silver Plaque and the All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society Award, New Delhi, in 1972; the National Award from the Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, in 1982; and the Padma Shri in 1992.

Book design: Bena Sareen

ALEPH ₹

ART

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