THE LAST SUPPER



PHANEENDRA NATH CHATURVEDI

PAPER 44x89" 2018

THE LAST SUPPER

35 PIECES OF ART



In association with *Namtech Fine Art*



ALEPH BOOK COMPANY
An independent publishing firm
promoted by *Rupa Publications India*

First published in India in 2019
by Aleph Book Company
7/16 Ansari Road, Daryaganj
New Delhi 110002

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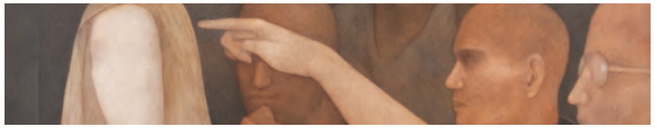
ISBN: 978-93-88292-29-0

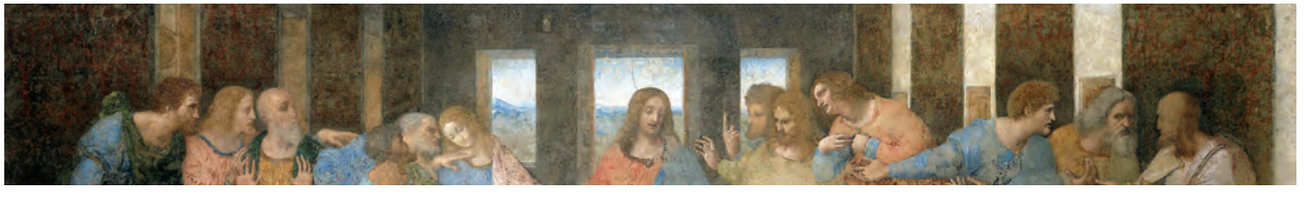
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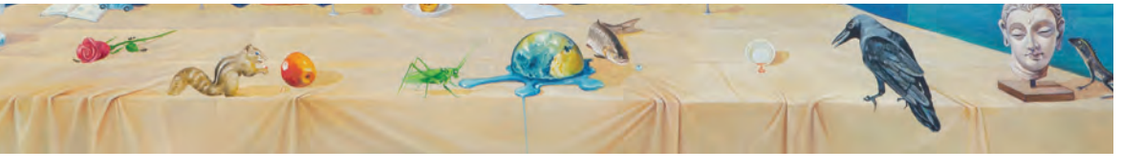
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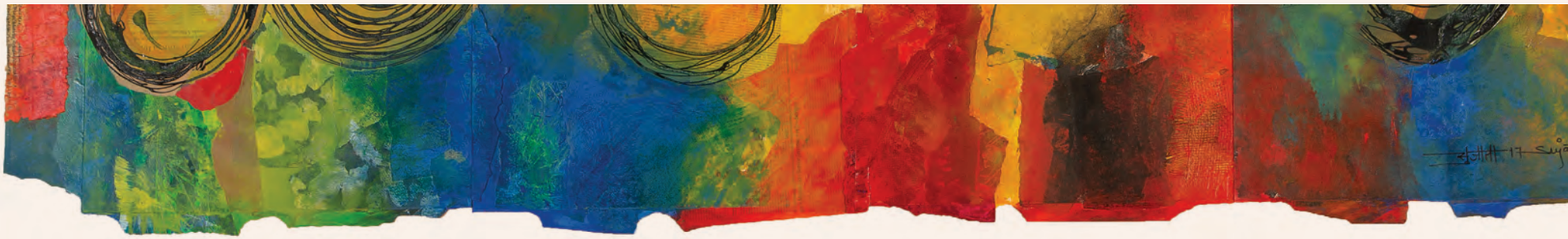














FOREWORD

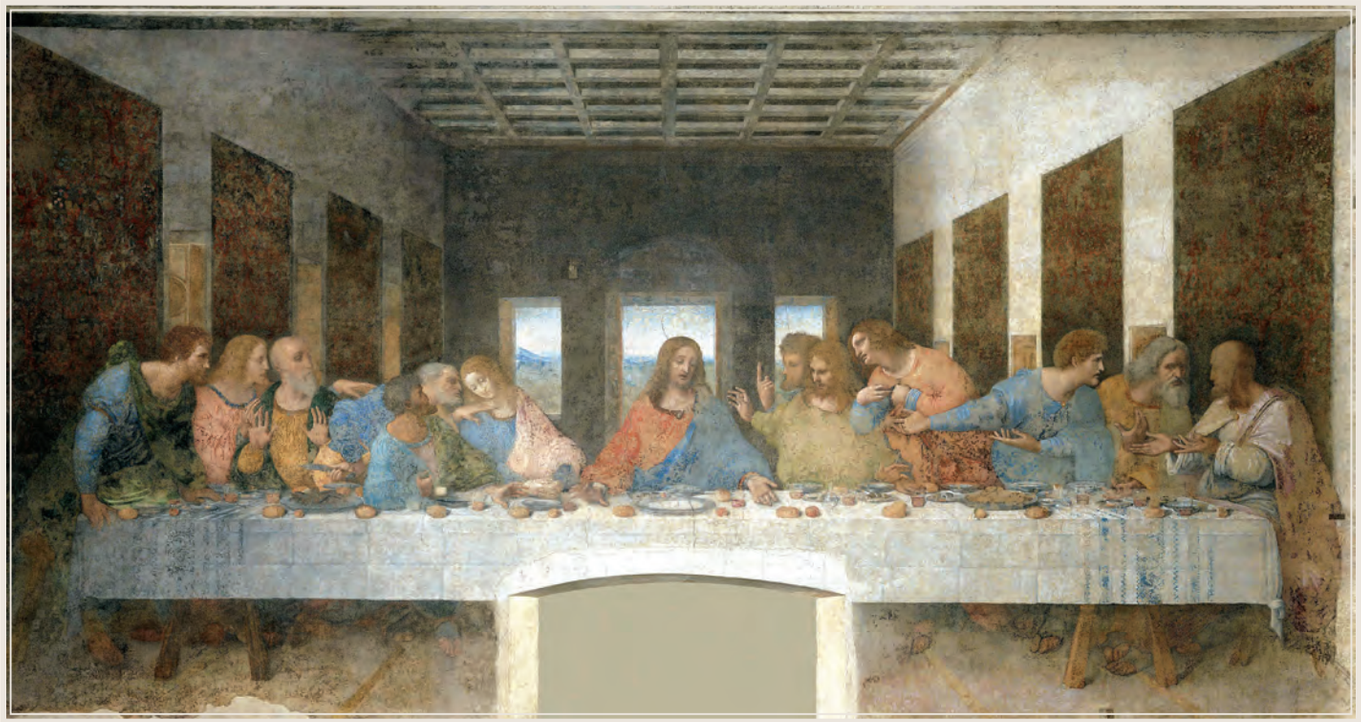
'Last' is so much more than what it portrays. Last is not an end but simply another chance for a new beginning. This exhibition is just an excuse for one artist to play with the creation of another artist, with his or her own set of rules.

The Last Supper is a collection of artworks by thirty-five eminent and emerging Indian Modern and Contemporary artists who have reinterpreted Leonardo da Vinci's iconic representation of the well known Biblical myth.

It is our hope that within these pages you will find, as these thirty-five artists have, a new vision of da Vinci's renowned painting.

Tanuj Berry & Saman Malik

December 2018
New Delhi



The Perennial Mystique of *The Last Supper*

RANJIT HOSKOTE

1. Betrayal, Sacrifice, and Redemption

As a child growing up in Margao, in the heart of Catholic South Goa, in the 1970s, I always found myself somewhat unsettled by *The Last Supper*, which would be positioned prominently above the dining table in the homes of my Catholic friends. Whether rendered in oil on canvas or board, or as prints, or as reproductions on tiles, these were always versions of Leonardo da Vinci's legendary painting, *The Last Supper*, painted in situ at the refectory of the Dominican monastery of Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan, in the closing years of the fifteenth century. I did know, then, that the original painting had been reduced to near-ruin by a combination of factors. The materials that Leonardo had used had clashed with the materials used to build the church, resulting in the flaking and degradation of the artist's once-luminous pigment. The depredations of anti-clerical French troops in 1796, as well as an Allied bombing raid during World War II, too had exacted a toll. Various ill-informed and misguided, or well-meaning and ill-starred attempts at restoration had visited further havoc on the painting. However, my concerns as a child were not chiefly art-historical. My disquiet was far more immediate and emotional in nature.

What perturbed me was the location of the painting at the intimate heart of the home. The event that it represented was associated, in my mind, with a profound tragedy. After all, as I had been taught, this was the moment when Jesus announced to his twelve Apostles that one of them would soon betray him, and that another would soon deny him. Leonardo's painting is sharply focused on the drama of this disclosure, and the responses of each of the Apostles to their teacher's announcement. No two reactions are alike. Every individual registers shock, bafflement, and anger in varying degrees—and, in the case of the traitor Judas, guilty surprise and fear. This was also the moment when Jesus bade farewell to these twelve men, his closest associates, preparing them for a time when they would have to engage with the world without his presence to guide them past challenges and through perplexities.

Looking up at *The Last Supper*, its protagonists seated as though on a stage, facing us, I would be seized by the ominous eternity of that Thursday evening meal. Within a few hours, Jesus would wrestle with his doubts and fears about his own impending fate. He would be arrested by the Roman authorities, tormented, vigorously condemned by the Sanhedrin council, reluctantly sentenced by Pilate, and begin the arduous journey to Golgotha, to be crucified on Friday afternoon. Why, I would tremble and think, would people wish

to have their meals in the shadow of this historic, even mythic, meal, so strongly veined with associations of impending treachery, persecution, torture, and eventually, the Crucifixion?

Only later in my childhood did I learn that the Last Supper also held within it the kernel of the entire Christian faith. At this meal, Jesus first announced the guarantee to all who believed in his teachings, of membership in a community that would transcend all differences of birth, occupation, status and location. Regardless of who they were as individuals, all who believed in him would be brought together and made whole through his self-sacrifice, redeemed through the remembrance of his life and acts. For the Last Supper is also the First Eucharist, the first celebration of the holy sacrament of the Communion: the deeply moving moment when the Saviour declares that the bread that is eaten at this table is his flesh, and the wine that is drunk there is his blood, offered up to atone for the sins of humankind.

The three Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—memorialize this sacred mystery that forms the foundation of the Christian faith. In the King James Version, Matthew 26:26–28 reads: 'And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it; and he gave to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."'

The spirit of the Last Supper was that of a 'love feast', a coming together of friends in a celebration of what the ancient Greeks called *agape*, fellowship, the unconditional love of those united by their shared humanity. As Jesus says to the Apostles in John 15:15 (in the King James Version): 'Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.'

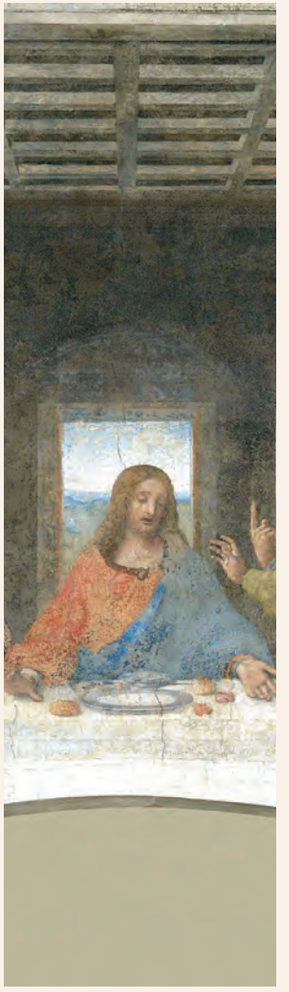
And so, these Biblical accounts of the Last Supper bring into paradoxical synchrony the key themes of betrayal, sacrifice, friendship, and community. They dwell on human weakness yet also emphasise the human ability to hope, to wrestle against the straitjacket of circumstance. The power of the sacred narrative carries its participants along inexorably. Judas will betray Jesus to the Roman authorities. Peter will deny his teacher when identified as one of his disciples, then break down in grief. Jesus will meet his death with a remarkable composure that is, nonetheless, interrupted by moments of agony. The Apostles will scatter and retreat after the Crucifixion, unable to believe that Jesus will rise again. And yet, after the Resurrection, they will re-convene, learn to trust one another fully, find tenacity and strength again, and gain renewed purpose from their common commitment to the healing radiance of 'the Way, the Truth, the Life' that their teacher embodied.

As an adult, I have often eaten at tables set under a representation of this long-ago yet perennial meal. Theology may have cured me of

my childhood anxieties, but it has not—fortunately—robbed me of my appreciation of friendship as a work in progress, my sense that faith in one's fellow human beings is a continuing adventure.

2. Leonardo's *The Last Supper*

The enduring power of a great work of art lies in its ability to find a home in our imagination, where it will always retain a measure of freshness and mystery, even as its physical self—whether in a museum, a private collection, on a temple façade or inside a chapel—fights a losing battle against time and decay. Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper* epitomises this paradox. It incarnates the peculiar mortality that afflicts all things made, once the elements of their materiality begin to come apart. Commissioned by Ludovico Sforza, Duke of Milan, in 1495, and completed three years later, it is widely regarded as one of Leonardo's masterpieces. This mural work is theology made flesh. Despite our distance from them in time and place, we view its thirteen dramatis personae as our contemporaries, as though they were about to perform a piece of theatre, seated at a table that is placed as if within a proscenium. The artist spent days walking around Milan, seeking out people on whose features to base the Apostles. The story is told that he took so long to locate a sitter for Judas that the prior of the monastery complained to Sforza about the artist's 'laziness'. When asked for an explanation, Leonardo replied that he had indeed been looking for a suitable candidate in Milan's criminal district, but could speed up the process if necessary by using the prior as a model.



In previous representations of the Last Supper, artists had either shown the group seated in a circle, or with Judas isolated at one side of the table. Leonardo placed all thirteen men on the same side, but imprisoned Judas in a dark solitude, moving him away from Jesus. The entire composition breathes the presence of the Holy Trinity, worked out in a series of interrelated triangles. The Saviour, at the centre, with his arms stretched down and out, forms a triangular figure. There are six Apostles on either side of him, further subdivided into four groups of three figures each.

Imagine the extraordinary experience that the monks of Santa Maria delle Grazie would have had, as they sat down to their meals in this room during the sixteenth century, coming into it to be embraced by the sheer frontality and magnificence of the painting. As they said grace, they were joined by Jesus and the Apostles—each figure larger than life by half—in a moment at once sealed in time and timeless in its relevance to the life of belief and devotion.

Tragically, *The Last Supper* lost its glory far too soon. As early as 1556, barely six decades after it was completed, it had become no more

than a ‘muddle of blots’, according to the testimony of the artist and pioneering art historian Giorgio Vasari, a votary of Leonardo and his peers in what would later come to be called the Renaissance. A century later, visitors would record that it was barely possible to distinguish the subject of the painting, never mind its details. Flaking, moisture and the exudations of lime from the walls had conspired to destroy *The Last Supper*.

It is conventional to blame Leonardo’s choice of medium for this catastrophe. As the painter and art historian James Elkins writes: ‘Tentative or explosive motions of one liquid through another are irresistibly metaphors for mental states. … The same kind of dynamic, swirling, unstable mixture of fluids can also be seen in paintings, whenever an artist has tried to mingle substances that do not go together easily. Leonardo’s *The Last Supper* is a crumbling ruin, the effect of media that could not harmonize with one another.’[1]

Let us look upon Leonardo’s project with a more sympathetic eye. To begin with, *The Last Supper* is not a fresco, although it is often erroneously described as such. A true fresco is painted on wet plaster and must be executed swiftly, before the plaster dries. There is no room for alteration or revisiting. Knowing this, and doubtless knowing his own predilection for taking a long time over his projects—usually leaving deadlines far behind, to the exasperation of patrons—Leonardo sealed the stone wall of the refectory with a layer of two resinous substances mixed with each other, pitch and mastic, and a second layer of gesso, a mixture of lime and gypsum. Over this, he applied an undercoat of white lead—lead carbonate, which enhances the luminosity of any pigment laid over it. As the medium for his actual painting, he chose egg tempera. These arrangements allowed him to work slowly, building up the painting through the shading which was his preferred treatment, clothing the scene in a suffusion of chiaroscuro, an interplay of light and shadow, startling surface and implied depth.

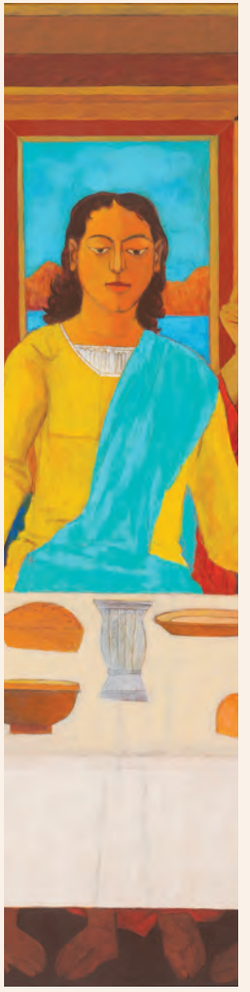
Leonardo selected his materials and techniques from a repertoire developed in relation to painting on panels. His mixture of pitch and mastic was an experiment, expressing that side of his complex personality which was dedicated to scientific enquiry. Unluckily, he had not accounted for the shoddy construction of the monastery and its location on low-lying ground. Santa Maria delle Grazie had been built in haste from the rubble of lime and old bricks—a recipe for disaster, made worse by its location. The refectory was flooded during heavy showers; over time, the moisture, rising through the walls, proved fatal to the mural. Eventually, having survived vandalism and bombardment as well, *The Last Supper* was stabilized during a two-decade-long restoration project that presented its results in 1999.

The refectory was secured through climate control, and the restorers used archival references to recreate a sense of the original through limited repainting. This approach has been controversial, and not all observers have been delighted by the manner in which some semblance of Leonardo’s splendid figures has been resurrected. Perhaps we can console ourselves with the master’s own astute insight,

phrased as a rhetorical question in his *Notebooks*: 'Why does the eye see a thing more clearly in dreams than with the imagination being awake?'[2]

3. *The Last Supper* in Indian Art

Many Indian artists, at least since Jamini Roy (1887–1972), have come under the spell of *The Last Supper*. They have articulated its perennial mystique through their individual vocabularies, often re-staging the painting in historical and cultural armatures closer to their own context. This book celebrates the persistence of *The Last Supper* as an inspiration in postcolonial Indian art, through thirty-five paintings that reprise it in diverse ways.



This would be the proper occasion to recall that Christianity has been present in India since at least 52 CE, and has been continuously practised in the subcontinent for two millennia. It is unfortunate that some motivated commentators associate it solely with the colonial encounter. This would be the occasion, also, to remind ourselves that Christian themes had fascinated Indian artists long before the advent of modernism, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Painters active in the imperial Mughal ateliers patronized by Akbar and Jehangir—such as Basawan, Manohar, Keshav Das, and Abu'l Hasan—had adapted Biblical figures and episodes, assimilating or improvising around paintings and engravings by Dutch and Danube School artists that arrived in Agra and Lahore by way of the Antwerp-Surat international trade route.

The thirty-five artists who have contributed to this book span several generations, have evolved distinctive styles, inhabit varied geographical locations, and are committed to a variety of painterly media. While space does not permit me to address every contribution individually, I will dwell here on a few of them. A number of these works emphasise the aspects of friendship and community over the hint of betrayal, so that the group portrait assumes a benign, collegial character. Krishen Khanna has had a lifelong engagement with Biblical themes; his version of Leonardo's masterwork substitutes the Apostles with his fellow Indian artists, including, among others, M. F. Husain, Tyeb Mehta, Akbar Padamsee and Bhupen Khakhar. Likewise, Veer Munshi's interpretation of the theme also features Indian artists as the disciples gathered around Christ; we find, among those present, K. G. Subramanyan, Satish Gujral, M. F. Husain, S. H. Raza, Tyeb Mehta, Ram Kumar, J. Swaminathan, Akbar Padamsee, Krishen Khanna, and Jehangir Sabavala. In Manu Parekh's take on *The Last Supper*, too, we find public figures standing in for the Apostles, among them artists, actors, and politicians. In Madhvi Parekh's handling, her iconography making elegant reference to child art and folk art, the group gathered around the table straddles a spectrum of ethnic, religious, occupational, and regional groups, who seem to form a coalition premised on the quest for harmony.

Milburn Cherian encases her interpretation of *The Last Supper* within the framework of an altar, so that it is divided into a central panel dominated by the figure of Christ, with two wings occupied by groups of Apostles. It is as much a sculptural work as it is a painting. Sachin Karne addresses the afterlife of Leonardo's painting in popular culture: the table is abandoned by its figures, and the painting is dominated by a textual account that implicitly refers to the kinds of readings associated with Dan Brown-style fiction.



Baiju Parthan's approach to *The Last Supper* is mediated through the domain of digital imaging, with various historical interpretations of the theme being invoked in images that slide between positive and negative interfaces, the figuration annotated with mysterious symbols. Ranbir Kaleka engages wittily with an artistic sleight-of-hand, using Sultanate architecture, tropical avifauna, and figures from Mughal and Rajput painting to frame Paolo Veronese's sumptuous, high-spirited *The Feast in the House of Levi*, a large-scale 1573 painting that now hangs in the Accademia, Venice. Originally presented as a Last Supper, this work provoked the anger of the Inquisition, which asked the artist why such a holy theme had been treated in a profane spirit, with buffoons, dwarves, animals and drunkards sharing the frame with Christ and the Apostles. Veronese responded by changing the name of the painting, referring to a less exalted Biblical episode.

Strikingly, Binoy Varghese replaces the male participants in the Last Supper with female protagonists: all the Apostles at his table are South Asian women, while, curiously, the Christ figure is replaced by a Caucasian woman, leaving one to decode the implied

political asymmetry of empowerment between the global North and the global South. K. Laxma Goud and Thota Vaikuntam also essay translations of the milieu and ethnic character of the protagonists of the Biblical tableau. Goud transforms them into men of South or West Asian origin, in robes characteristic of those regions; he also isolates Judas in a pre-Leonardo manner, on the other side of the table from his peers. Vaikuntam, long associated with a stylised figuration evoking rural Telangana, turns Jesus and his circle into a group of Telangana villagers, seated on the floor, with platters of fruit before them.

Jagannath Panda transposes the Last Supper on to the rim of an illusionistic Mantegna-style ceiling designed to look like the sky's dome: Jesus and the Apostles seem to gaze down at us while curlicued Chinese-style clouds swirl above them. G. R. Iranna also invokes a degree of illusionism, with a row of thirteen Theravada Buddhist monks in their yellow robes eating from bowls of rice; behind them, another row of thirteen anchorites look away, their backs facing us. Clearly, the spiritual impulse that animated Leonardo's painting has travelled long distances in space and time: it assumes, and will continue to assume, unpredictable avatars.

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1. James Elkins, *What Painting Is: How to Think about Oil Painting, Using the Language of Alchemy*, New York & London: Routledge, 1999, p. 37.

2. Leonardo da Vinci, *The da Vinci Notebooks*, Emma Dickens (ed.), London: Profile Books, 2006, p. 170.

35 PIECES OF ART









HIMMAT SHAH, *CHRIST*

88x42x38”











MANU PAREKH, *THE LAST SUPPER*
ACRYLIC AND OIL ON BOARD 54x396" 2017





MANU PAREKH (DETAIL)





THOTA VAIKUNTAM
OIL ON CANVAS 48x120" 2017





THOTA VAIKUNTAM (DETAIL)



KRISHEN KHANNA, *THE LAST BITE*
OIL ON CANVAS 40x60”



K. LAXMA GOUD

ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 60x72" 2016



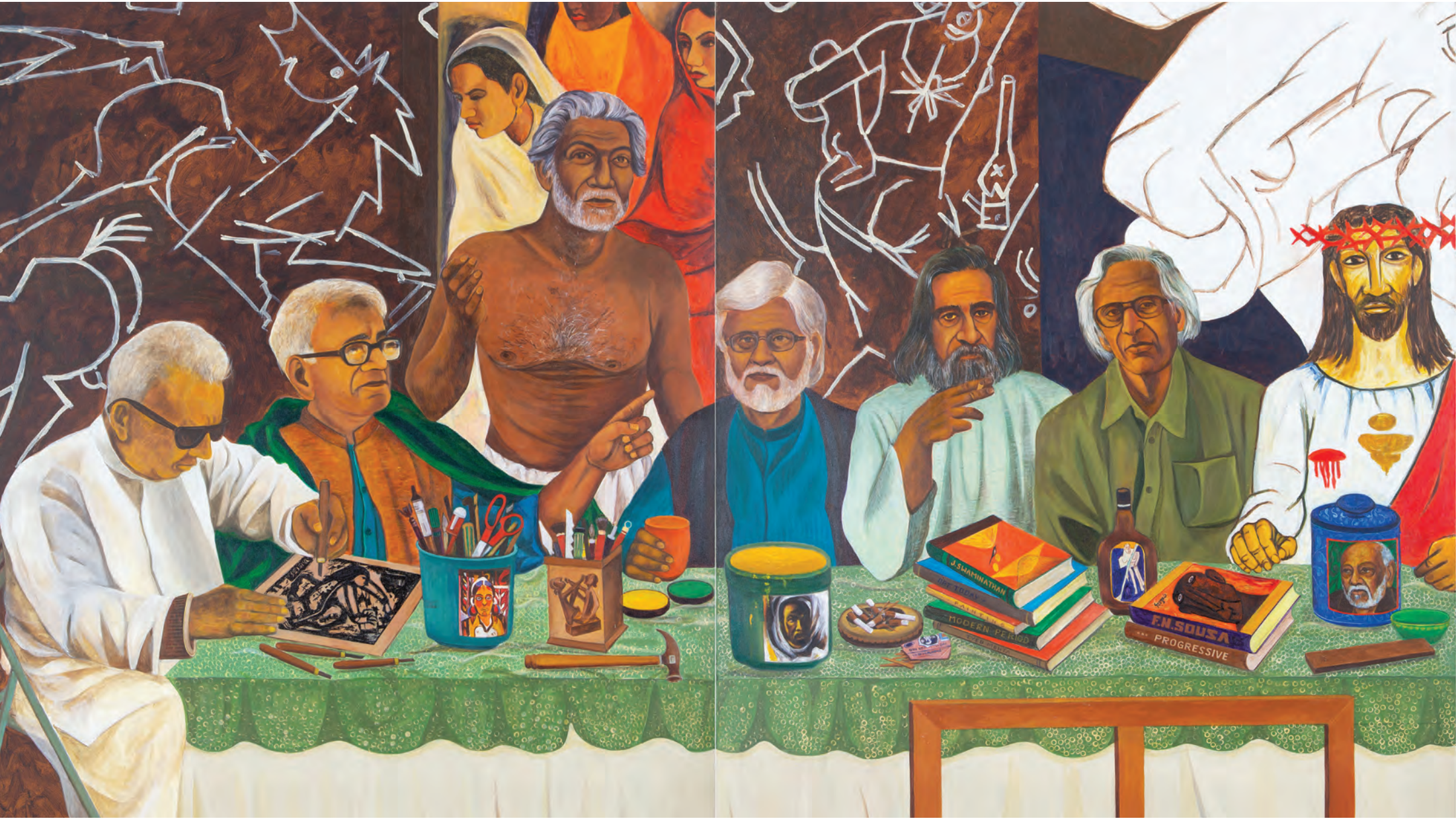
MADHVI PAREKH

REVERSE ACRYLIC ON ACRYLIC SHEET

60x120" 2017




माधवी. 17



VEER MUNSHI

ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 69x240" 2016-17


progressive artist
A.PADMSI
KRISHEN KHANNA



SUJATA BAJAJ
MIXED MEDIA ON PAPER
48x81" 2017



JAGANNATH PANDA
ACRYLIC AND FABRIC ON CANVAS
DIAMETER 48” 2016



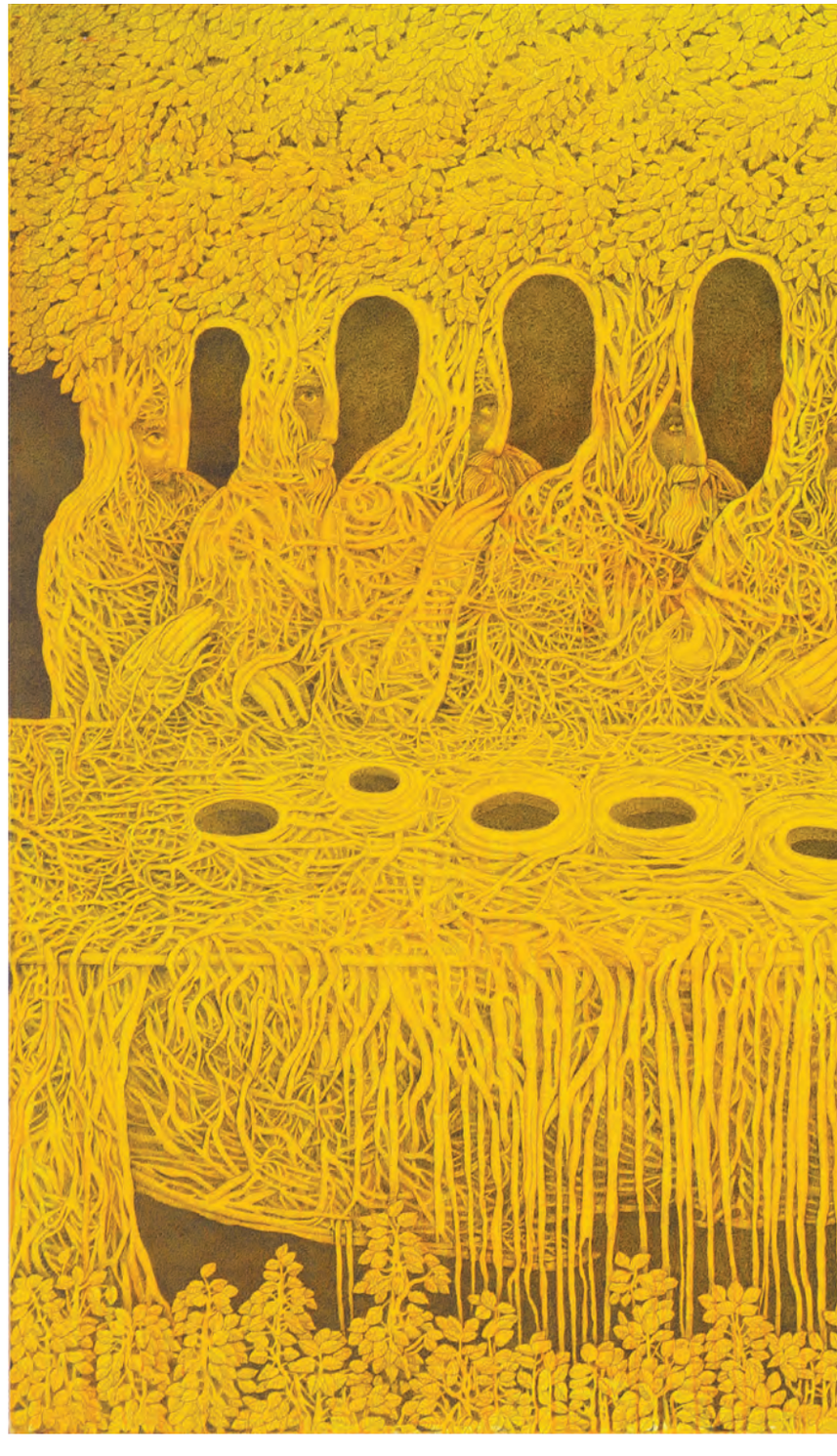
G.R. IRANNA

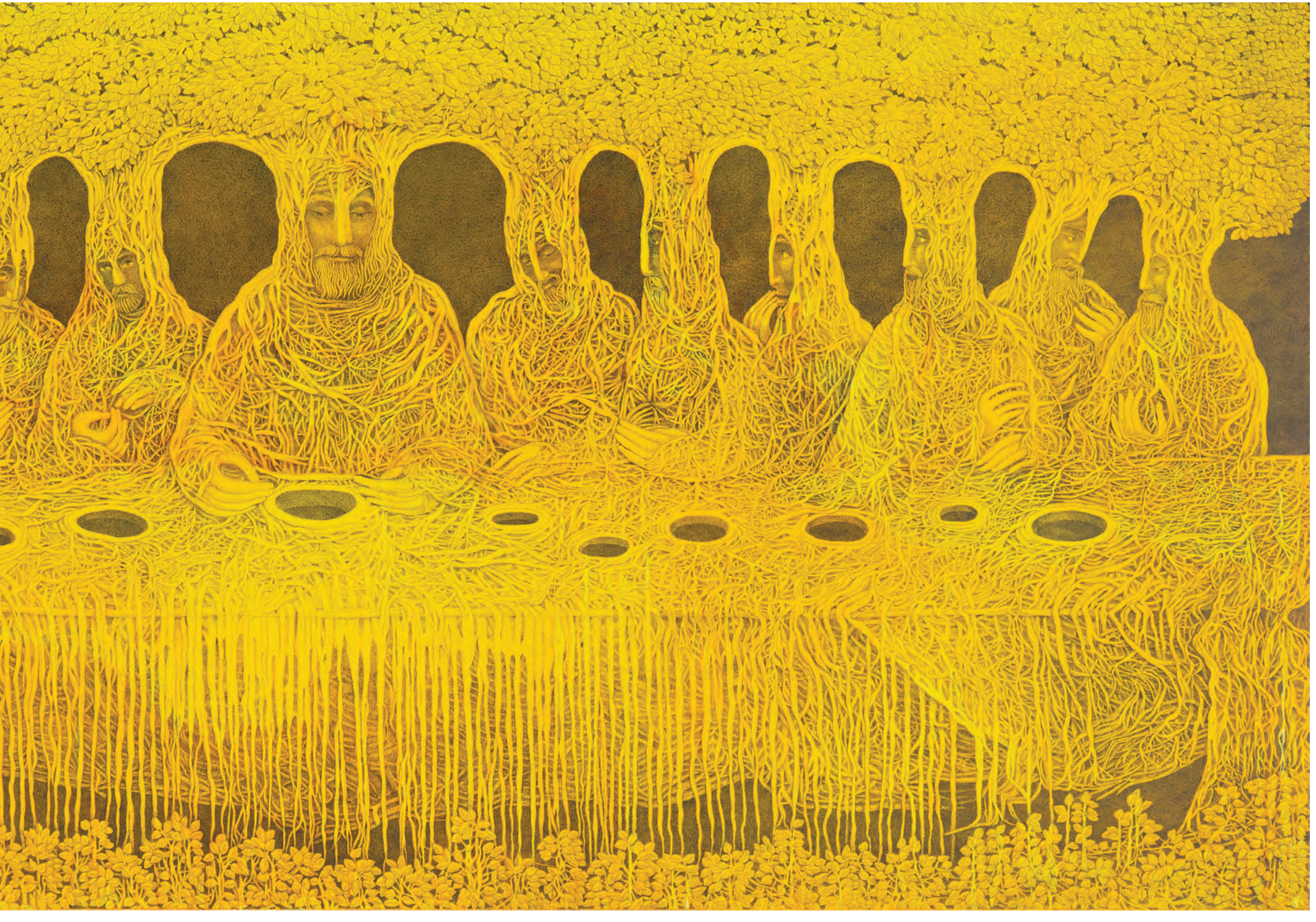
WATERCOLOUR ON PAPER 55x72”

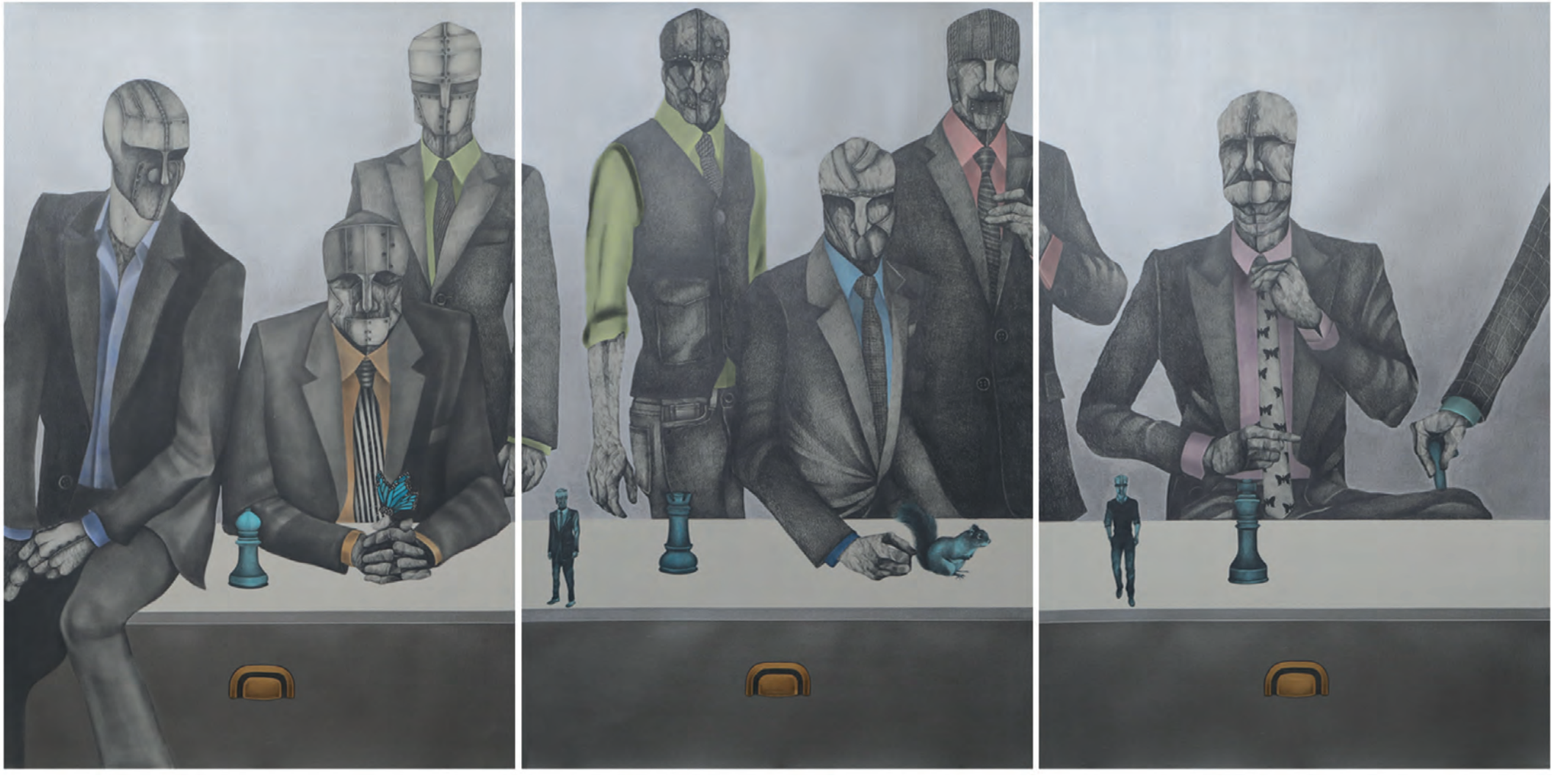


OMPAL SANSANWAL

PEN, INK & ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 54x108" 2017







PHANEENDRA NATH CHATURVEDI, *THE LAST SUPPER*
MIX MEDIA ON ARCHIVAL PAPER 60x240" 2018 (WORK IN 6 UNITS, EACH UNIT SIZE IS 60x40"),



KISHOR SHINDE

POWDER COATED PAINT ON METAL & ALUMINIUM 48x32" 2018



BAIJU PARTHAN

ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 48x96” 2017




VERITAS
JUDEA
JERUSALEM
GALILEE
DECAPOLIS
PANIA

ARINDAM CHATTERJEE

ACRYLIC, DRY PIGMENTS, CHARCOAL & OIL ON CANVAS 72x96” 2018







CHANDRA BHATTACHARJEE

OIL ON CANVAS 66x180" 2018

PARUL CHATURVEDI

OIL ON CANVAS 55x96" 2017





JAGANNATH MOHAPATRA

ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 60x96”



DILEEP SHARMA

MIXED MEDIA ON PAPER 44x81”











MEENA SANSANWAL

ELEVATED EXPRESSIONS - THE LAST SUPPER

ACRYLIC ON PAPERMACHE 60x36x48" APPROX. 2017

SOJWAL SAMANT *BONE OF CONTENTION AT TABLE FOR SIX.*

WOOD & STONEWARE 30x64x16" 2018





PRAMOD MANN

BLACK MARBLE 54x21x38" 2017



MILBURN CHERIAN

OIL ON CANVAS WITH CARVED WOODEN FRAME 34x61”


IHS

RANBIR KALEKA, *RAVI VERMA IN THE HOUSE OF LEVI: VERSION LAST SUPPER*
OIL AND DIGITAL PRINT ON CANVAS 60x55" 2018

FARHAD HUSSAIN

ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 66x96”



BINOY VARGHESE

OIL ON CANVAS 48x96" 2017





ANANDAJIT RAY

ACRYLIC ON PAPER 60x40”



PRATUL DASH, *LAST SUPPER*
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 60x120" 2017





SUDHANSHU SUTAR

OIL AND ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 66x90" 2017

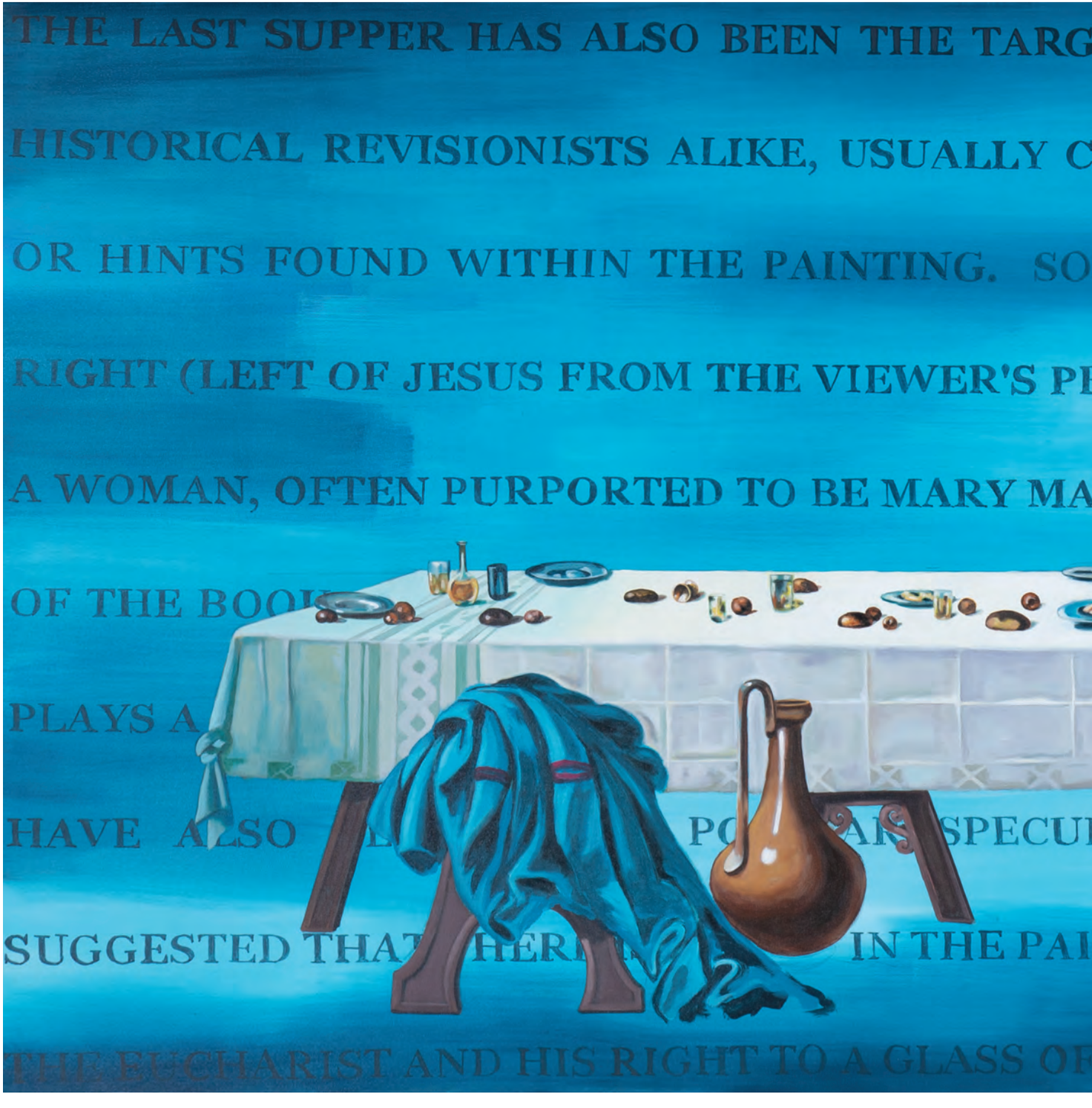


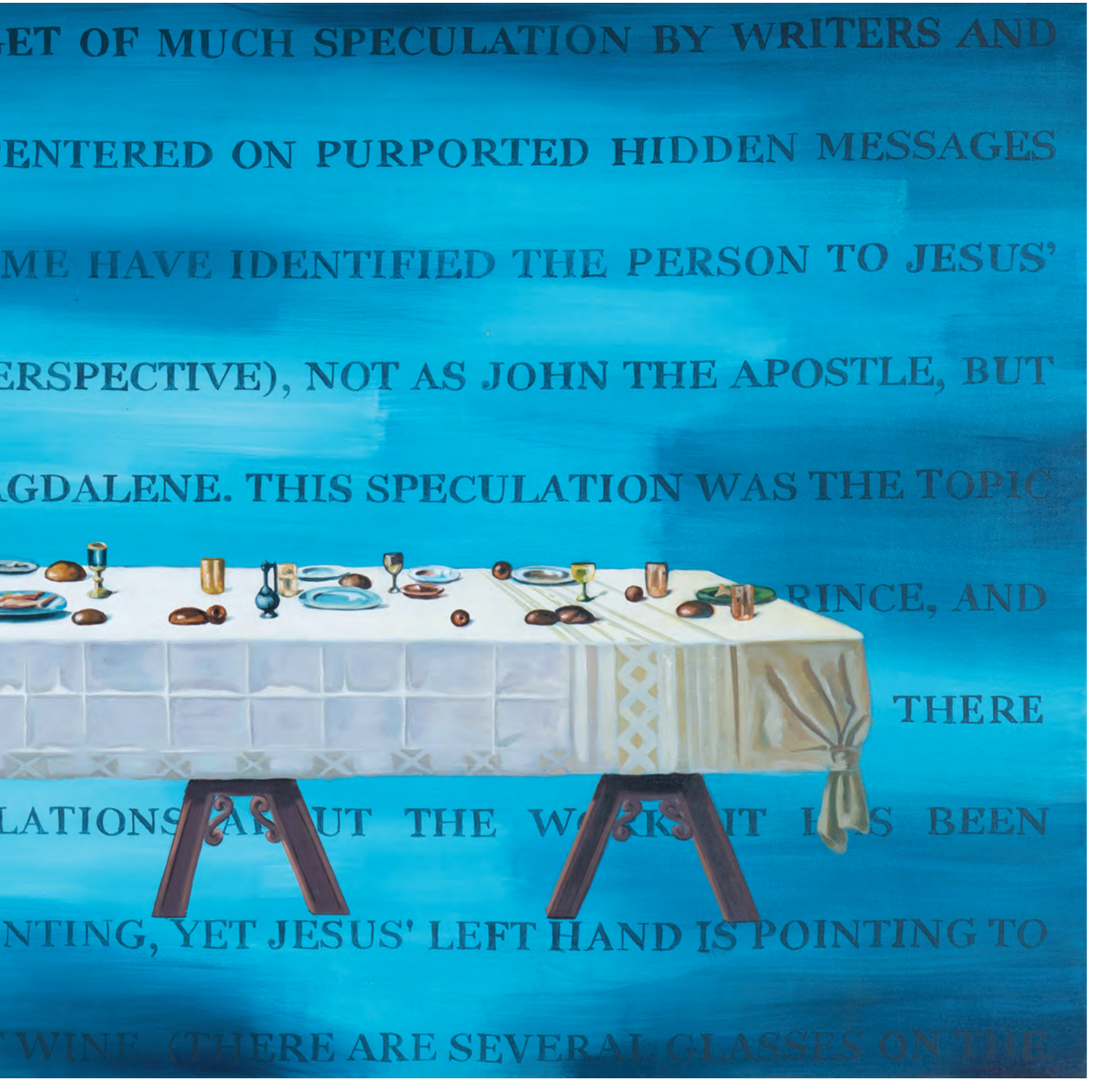
ANUSHREE GUPTA AND ANANT AGARWAL, *THE LAST SINS*
WOOD AND FIBER GLASS WITH VIDEO PROJECTION 48x240”



SACHIN KARNE

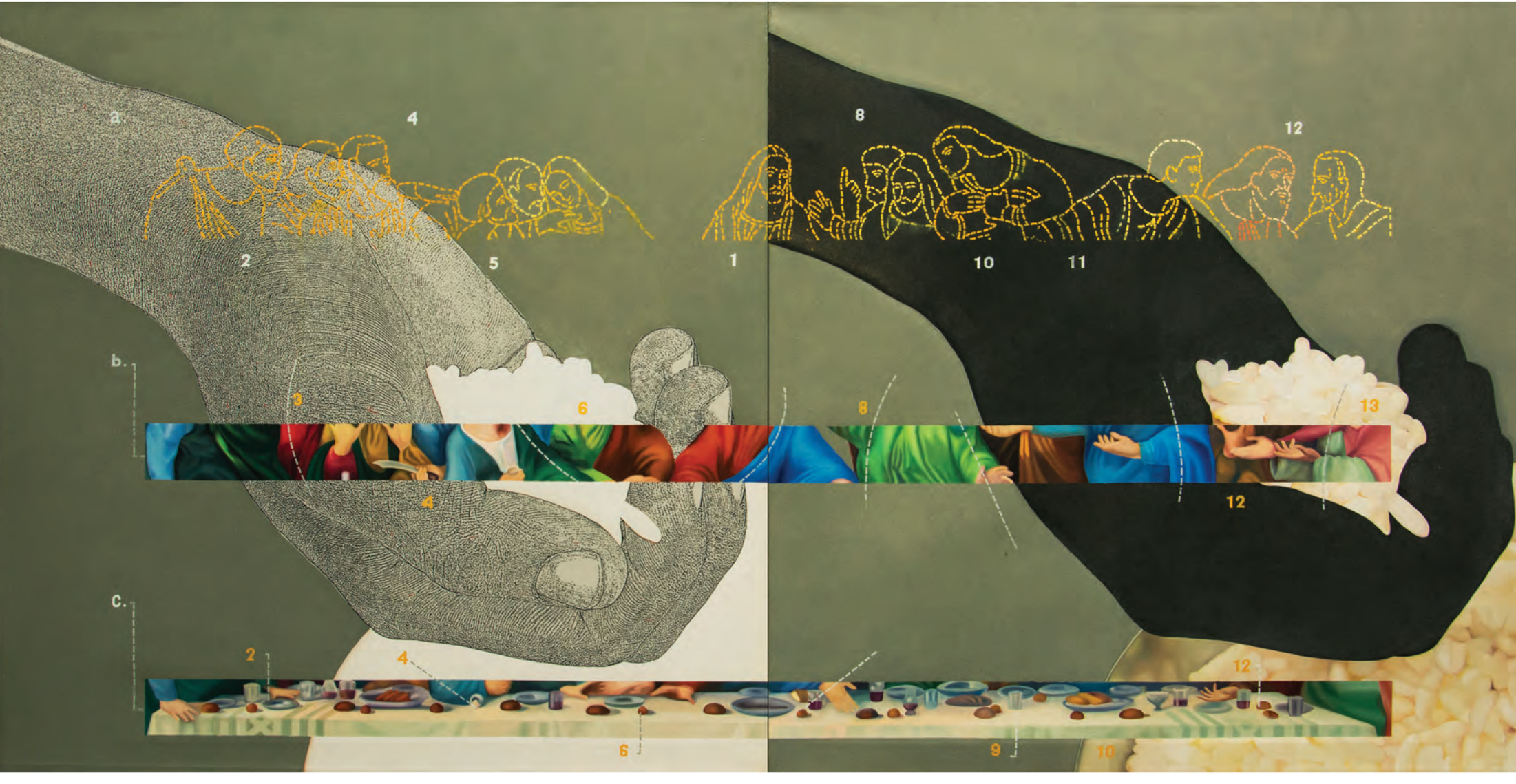
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 60x120" 2016




ET OF MUCH SPECULATION BY WRITERS AND
ENTERED ON PURPORTED HIDDEN MESSAGES
ME HAVE IDENTIFIED THE PERSON TO JESUS'
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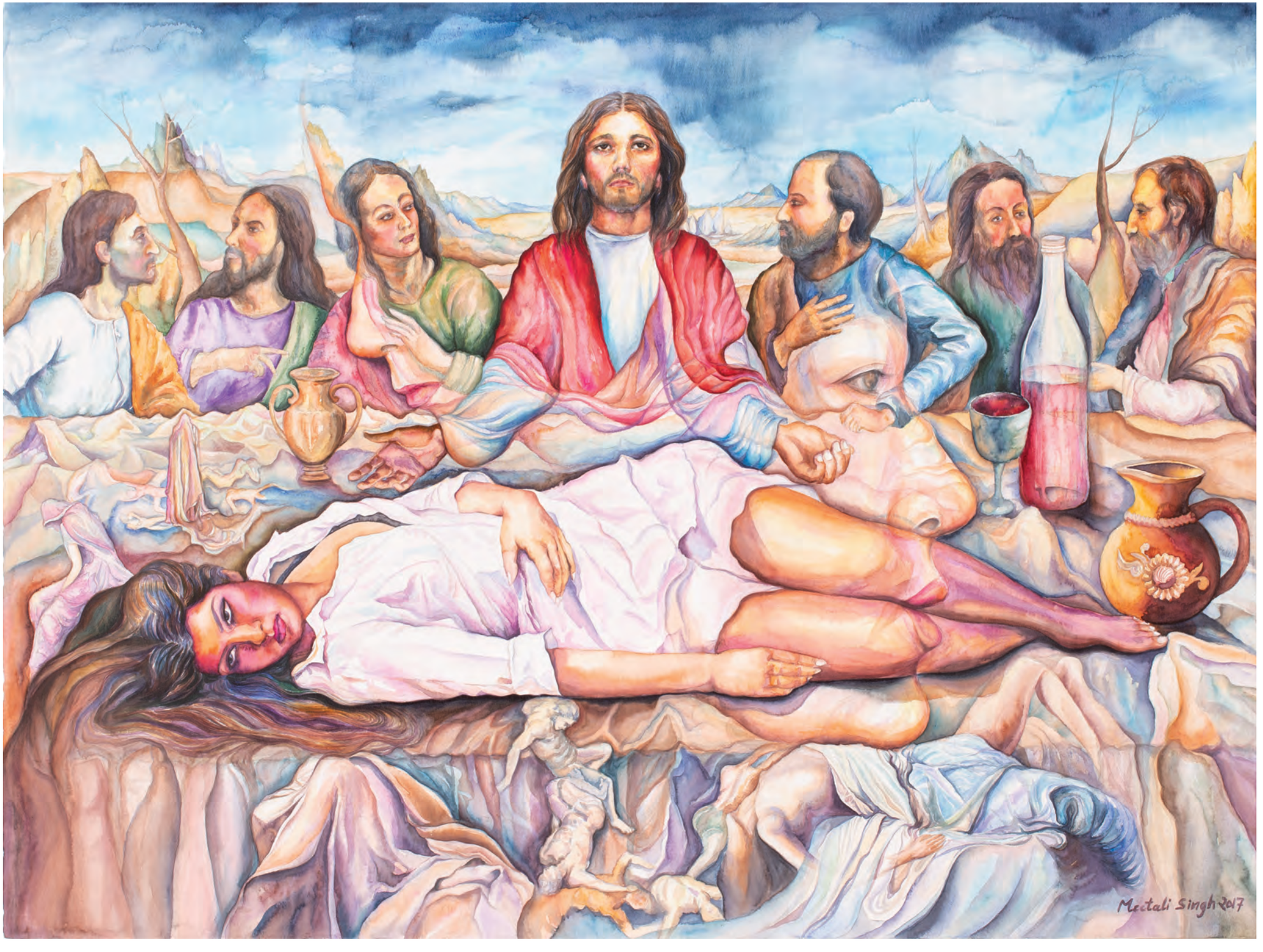
PRASANTA SAHU

ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 48x96" 2018


a.
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MEETALI SINGH

WATERCOLOUR ON PAPER 30x40” 2017

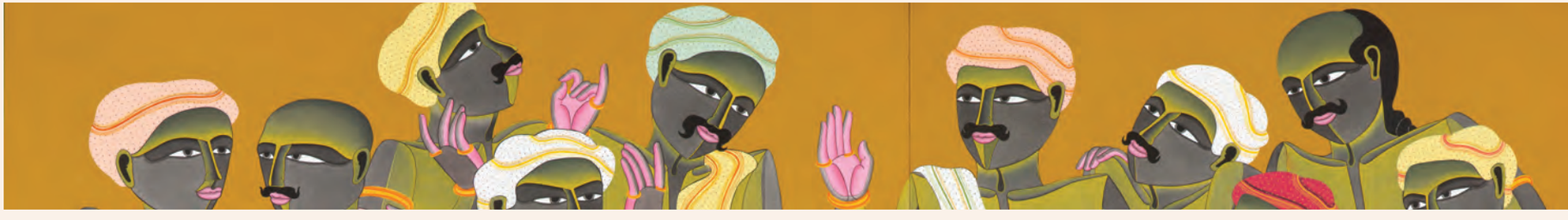

Mrctali Singh 2017

RAM BALI CHAUHAN

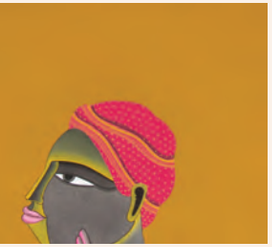
PEN INK & ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 60x96" 2018











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 18 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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