

Thota Vaikuntam

A CELEBRATION





THOTAVAIKUNTAM

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‘The paintings of Vaikuntam are, to my mind, an original synthesis of traditional Indian concepts and demands of a formal logic of the international modern art. The inspiration emerges from everyday Indian life, transformed, and reveals the richness of line, colour, and form. The leaner expression and decantation of figures, faces, eyes, and human bodies or clothes, reveal pure formal order and richness of imagination. In fact, after Jamini Roy, his work is a new significant contribution to contemporary Indian art, without compromise and with fullness of imagination and ecstasy.’

—S.H. RAZA, Paris, 27 December 2007

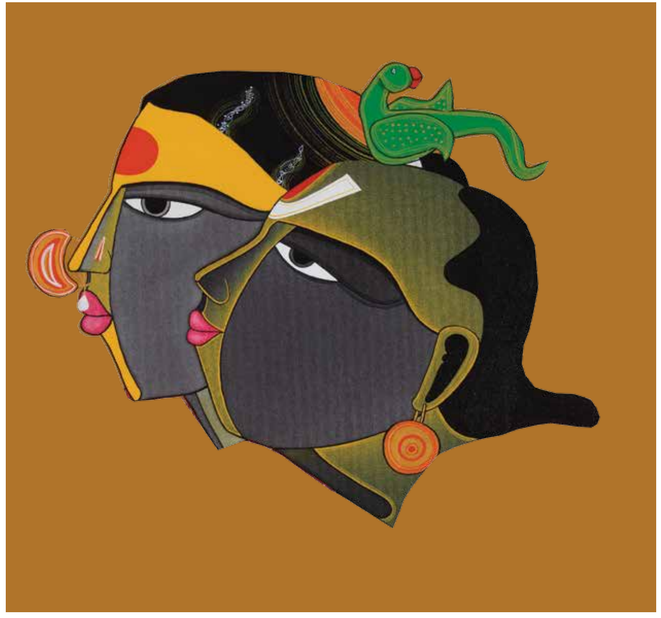


Foreword

Thota Vaikuntam’s paintings are a reminder of the daily celebration and vibrancy of life. The lives of the common folk are always festive and they do not need any special reason for celebration. Women dress up each day in their vibrant Sircilla sarees and adorn themselves with bangles and bottus of vermillion on their foreheads. The men wearing dhoti and challa on their shoulders complement the richness of the women with their simplicity. The flute and parrot show the presence of music in our daily lives. Even the parrots in the paintings have feathers that are dotted just like the sarees of the women, indicating that they are also a part of our everyday lives. The inclusion of gods standing among people signifies the simple day-to-day relationship of people with religion—the regular ritual at a temple is another ordinary celebration of the day. The men and women are dressed with the same vibrancy as the gods. All can appreciate the brightness of colour and enjoy the beauty of inclusivity. Thota Vaikuntam’s paintings allow us to participate in this simple respectful commonality. They are a reminder of the joy of daily life, and allow us to appreciate what is already present and available to all.

This exhibition of important paintings of Thota Vaikuntam is a collection of diverse subject matters the artist has painted over time and yet the common element remains unchanged. A reminder that in spite of the diversity of cultures, what is common to us all is daily celebrations; even though for many it is unnoticed, a simple glance at Vaikuntam’s paintings reminds us of the beauty of what is ordinary. This is the importance of art and it is the essence of Thota Vaikuntam’s work.

Tanuj Berry & Saman Malik
New Delhi • August 2022



With his village as his muse, Thota Vaikuntam is what one would call a 'son of the soil.' Deeply rooted in the soil of his native Telangana, his art celebrates the spirit of rural India and its people with a genuineness that's uniquely his own.

Thota's art is marked by a sense of strength - a power that emanates from the paint or charcoal that he applies to the surface, from his controlled lines, and from the fine strokes that he executes using bold colours. His iconic depictions of rural women, with their large red bindis and vibrant saris, radiate with dignity and honesty even as they carry out the most mundane of daily chores. Each work in this exhibition and book is rich with the artist's reverence for his native land.

This book, like Thota's art, is an ode to the spirit of India. It is a true privilege to see it come to life, and to be a part of it.

Minal & Dinesh Vazirani
Saffronart
Mumbai • August 2022

Thota Vaikuntam AN ENDURING REVERENCE



Thota Vaikuntam's humble upbringing and relatively modest start to his artistic career now sees a magnificent upward trajectory that sits not at a destination, but at a sacrosanct peak. His journey started in 1942 in Burugupalli, Andhra Pradesh, and his formative years in Telangana are of significance to his present success. Vaikuntam's early works were charcoal and conte on paper. A medium chosen due to a lack of resources and access to expensive paint was the beginning of his love affair with the people of Telangana. Later, the subjects were transferred on to canvases and painted in bright acrylics, commencing the second and most momentous part of his pilgrimage back to his roots.

His rich palette of primary colours is stark and radiating with strength. Deep hues of red and ochre adorn his figures. The same colours that represent royalty and symbolize grandeur bring a sense of the regal to Vaikuntam's common man. The unique subject of his works, the traditional Telangana woman, has remained a constant muse for the artist. The female figures carry a sense of earthy voluptuousness with their bodies adorned in butta dotted saris, and gold jewellery, and their thick, dark manes held up with gajras. Turmeric inked foreheads and prominent soul-gazing eyes exude a sense of innate godly essence.

The artist has reiterated many a time that the depth of his inspiration stems from his own mother and the women from the village he grew up around. Vaikuntam's figures are unequivocally a celebration of womanhood in all its glory. Just like Bathukamma, the festival of life that celebrates the patron goddess of womanhood in Telangana, Vaikuntam dresses his women to mirror goddesses, to honour his deep appreciation for his mother and the village women he remembers so distinctly from his youth. The women that Vaikuntam is repeatedly enthralled by are regular housewives, the ones who have created a community for themselves. This community thrives on the preservation of cardinal cultural virtues. Their grace is often overlooked in society until they splash across Vaikuntam's canvas with splendour and allure.

Although Vaikuntam predominantly paints women, the male figure makes an appearance periodically. Many a time, the male figure takes the form of Krishna surrounded by his gopis—the ultimate protector, friend, teacher, and lover, placed as though to watch over Vaikuntam's beloved women. His figures are always seen gathered together in his larger works, almost merging into one another and amalgamating the man and woman, with their gesticulations being highlighted. A sense of togetherness is harnessed in these works as if they are born out of one another. Despite the chaotic groupism a sense of calm exudes from his paintings. The stark backgrounds place the figures centre stage, with each detail pulling our gaze towards them. The repeated elements of parrots and cows fill the works with a sense of harmonization of people and animals, the way that God intended. Rural cultures still abide by that thinking—that every living thing is a creature of God.

Vaikuntam's paintings celebrate indigenism by portraying the clear-heartedness of the common village people, a people removed from worldly influences and its nocuous effects. It is in the mundanities that the artist celebrates life as he honours simple virtues with deep integrity on every canvas. As he ruminates on tales such as the love story of Radha and Krishna, with each work emoting love and affection in the form of gestures, facets, and expressions, it is clear that Vaikuntam is strongly attached to the roots of his past.

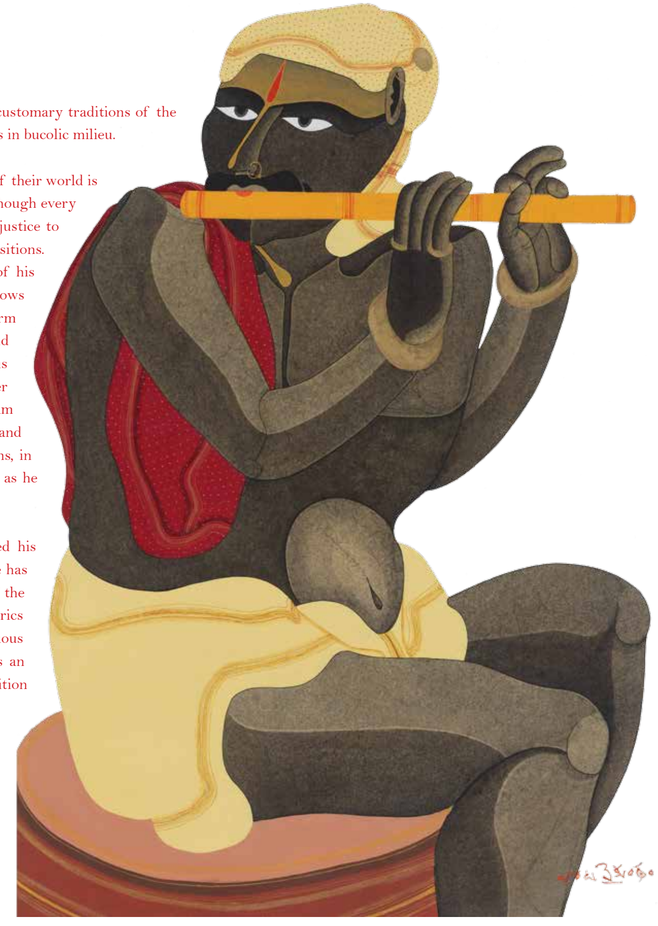
Unyielding to westernization, his canvases strive to preserve the distinctive customary traditions of the rural cycles of life. Vaikuntam might live in an urbanized world, but he dreams in bucolic milieu.

Vaikuntam renders his figures as gods, as if their world resides in temples, as if their world is a temple. He strives for perfection in the depiction of his subjects, almost as though every painting is an attempt at the perfectly defined line and colour palette to do justice to their apotheosis. A profound affection for these people emerges from his compositions. The female-centric universe he creates in canvas after canvas is a testament of his love and respect for the people of Burugupalli. The jubilance in every work shows the contentment of simple life, reiterating that richness need not be in the form of monetary possessions, rather that richness is inherently embedded in and bound to community, to ritual, and to values. Vaikuntam's paintings remind us of the importance of looking inward rather than to the West. Whilst other contemporaries absorb influences of the Picassos and the Cézannes, Vaikuntam found his niche within his home town, within his own family, his people, and his culture. There is nothing mundane about Vaikuntam's ordinary depictions, in fact, they are extraordinary. His simplicity stands as his distinctive anomaly as he continues to meditate on his colourful past in the present.

Sculpture has been Vaikuntam's most recent medium, one that has allowed his signature women and men to climb out of the canvas in new avatars. Bronze has proved to be the perfect choice, with the dark-skinned beauties climbing out of the canvas guilelessly. Primary coloured patinas adorn the rich jewellery and fabrics draped on the figures. The next organic step to broaden Vaikuntam's vivacious world and offer a new expression for us to feast our eyes on. There exists an idiosyncratic quality in Vaikuntam's subjects. He has mastered the art of repetition so brilliantly that we keep wanting more.

Whether it is his early charcoal or conte on paper works, his large-format acrylic canvases, or his bronze with patina sculptures, Vaikuntam has triumphed in every format he has pursued. This collection honours his most significant works of art till date, and whilst we glance through these pages in awe, we are aware that there is still much of the artist's scintillating world left to be shared with us, and that Thota Vaikuntam's legacy is still underway.

Sanya Malik





Acrylic on Canvas 60 x 240”



‘You are your own creator.
You can’t base yourself on others.
It has to come from
within you.’

Acrylic on Canvas 60 x 48” 2016

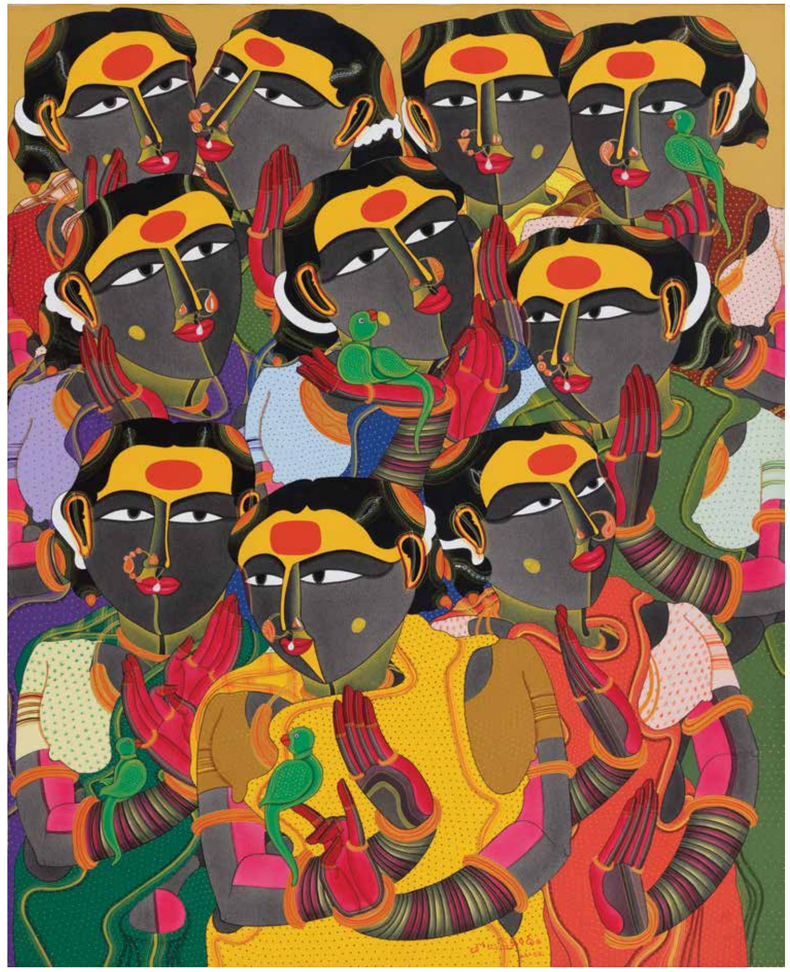


Acrylic on Canvas 72 x 96”



‘My women are really
like goddesses to me. Like
Bhatukamma, the goddess of life.
Or my mother, who gave me
what I wanted. Everything
emerges from that.’

Acrylic on Canvas 60 x 48”





Acrylic on Canvas
60 x 144” 2015

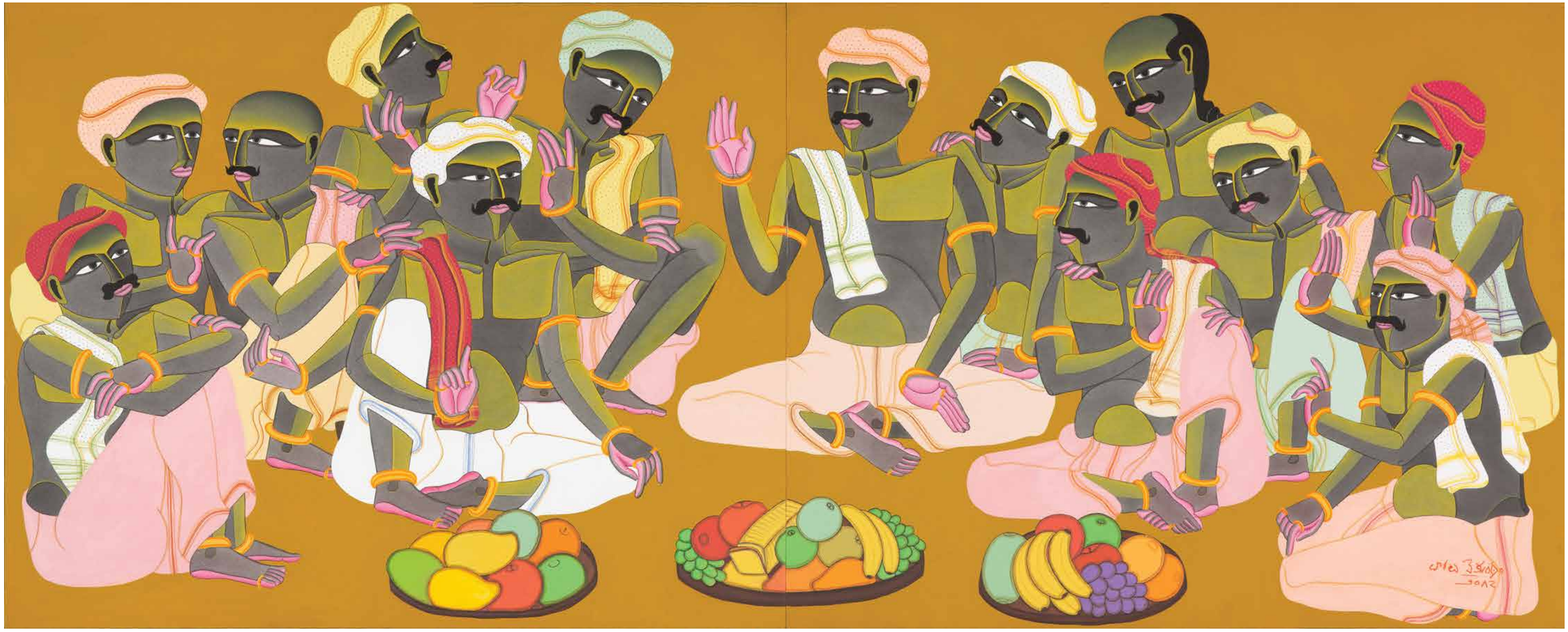


Acrylic on Canvas
72x 180” 2012





Acrylic on Canvas
60 x 144”



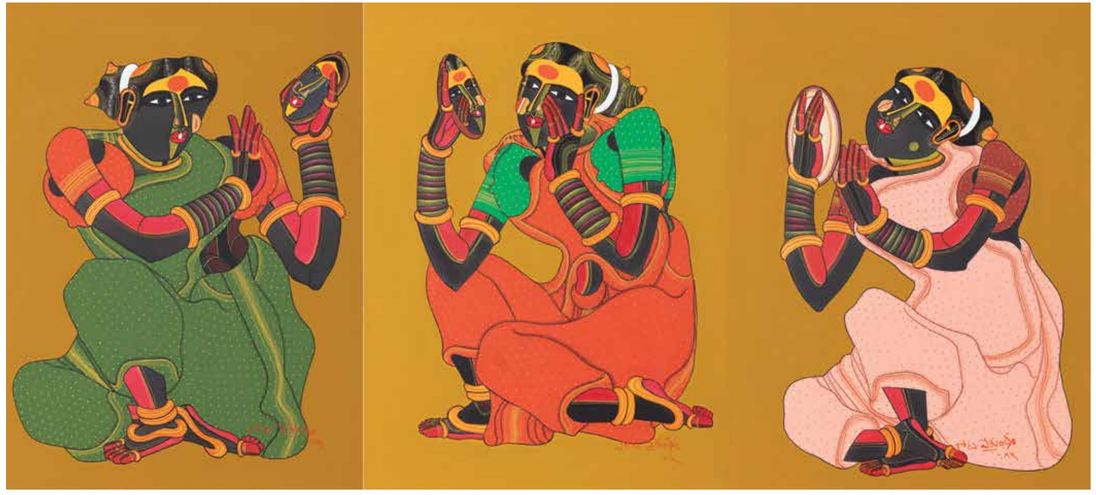
Acrylic on Canvas 48 x 120" 2017

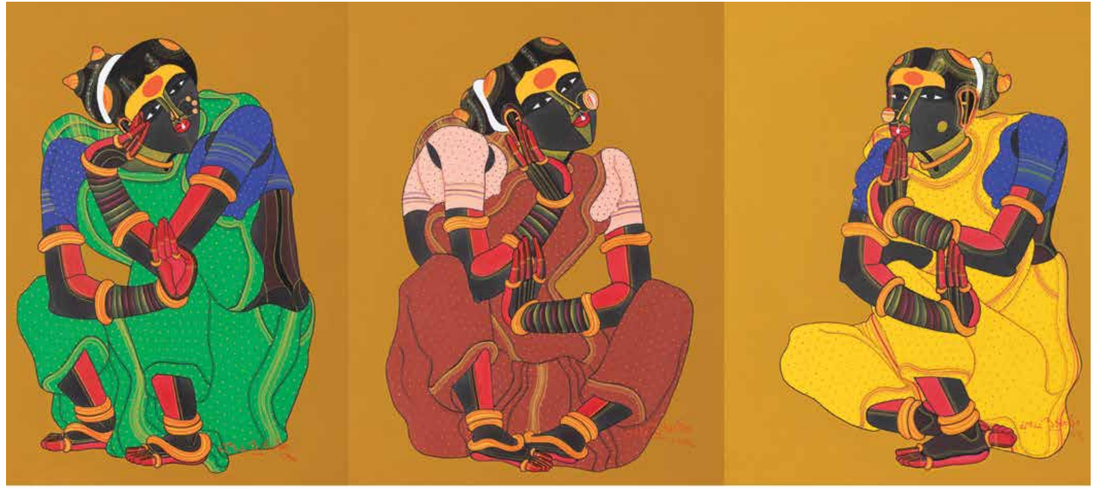


Acrylic on Canvas set of nine, each 32 x 24” 2015



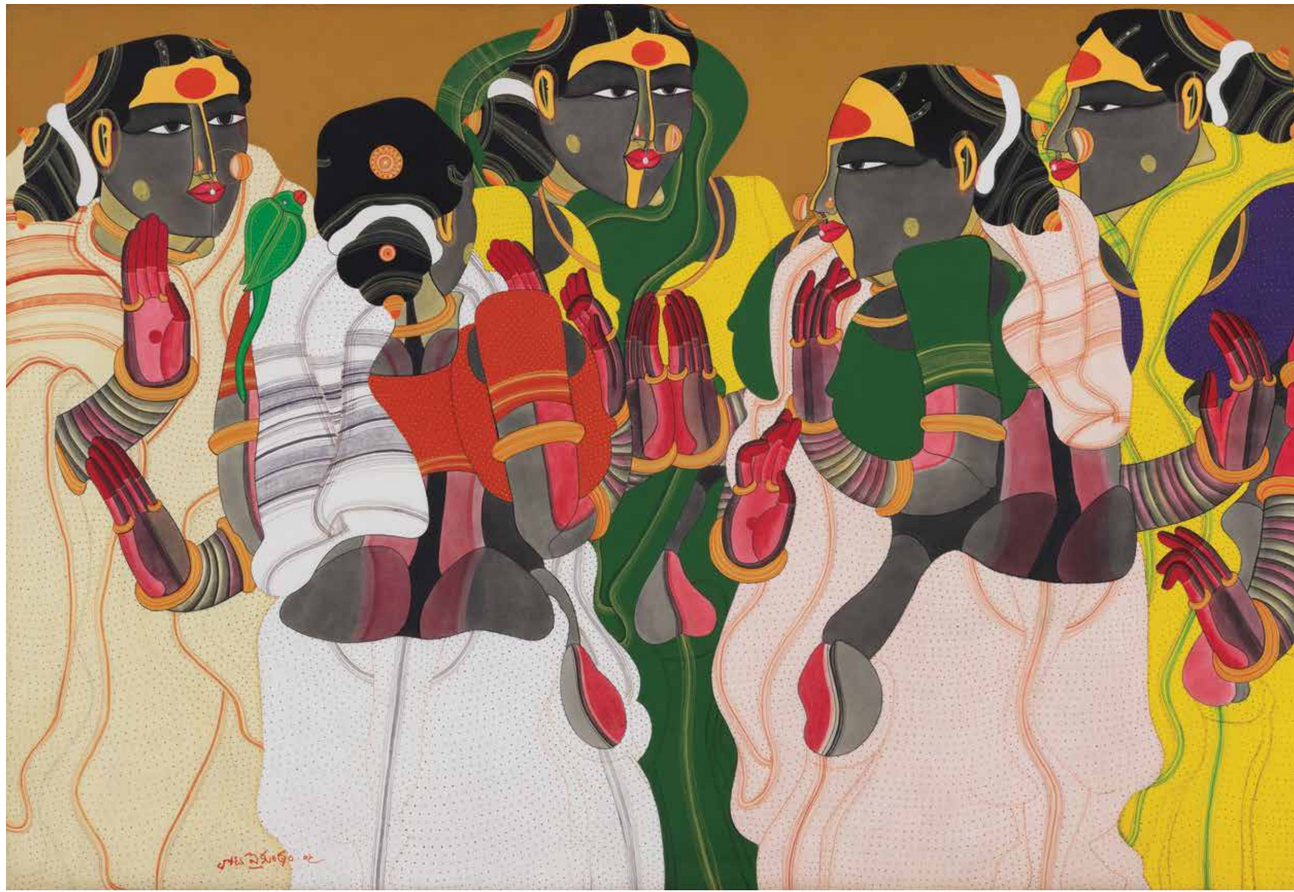
(Detail) Acrylic on Canvas set of nine, each 32 x 24” 2015





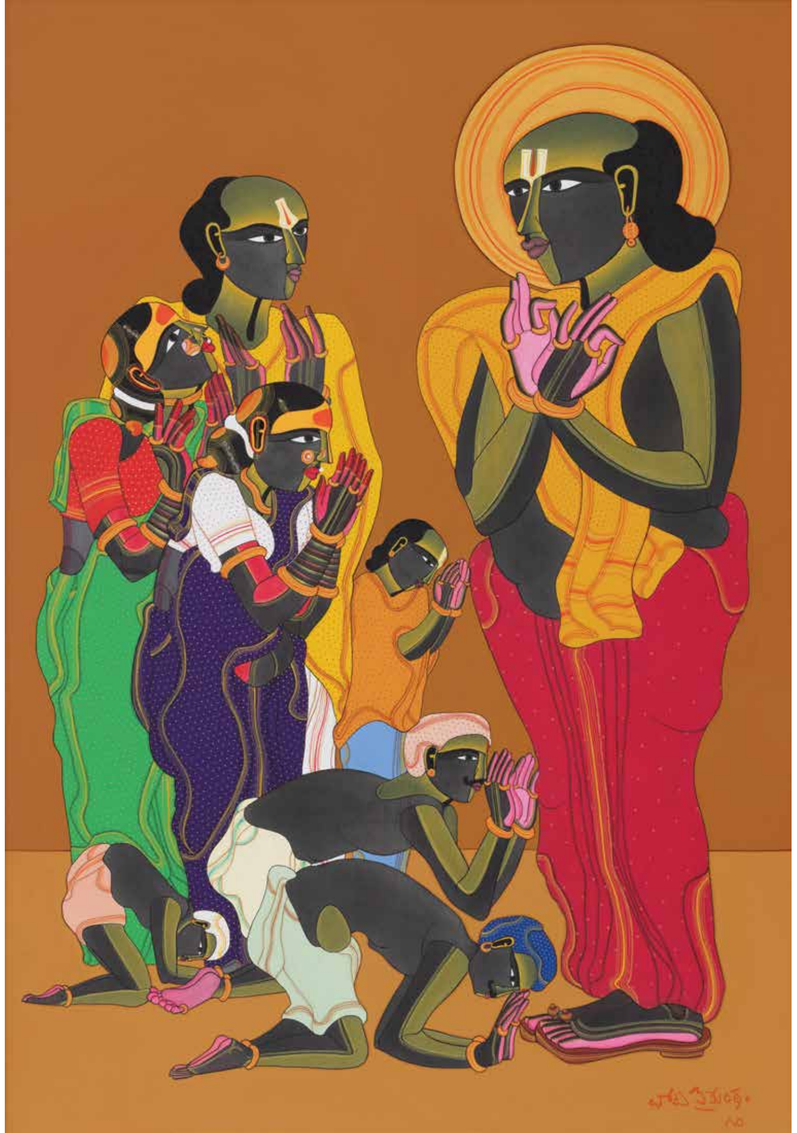
‘I’m a villager, not a city man.
Maybe because my childhood
memory clings to my roots.
I’ve taken from my people in
Telangana. I draw them.
I take my colours from them.
I’ve taken details from their
everyday lives, stylized them,
and made them look grand.
That’s my intention.’

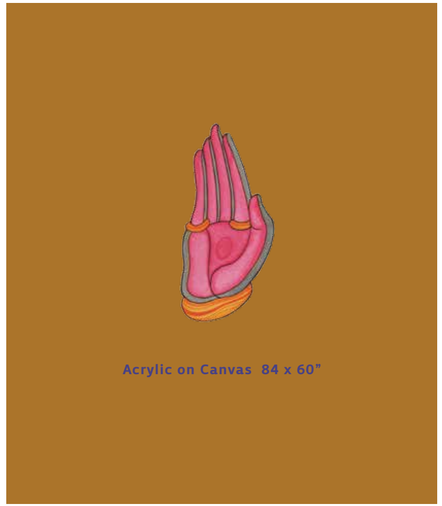
Acrylic on Canvas 48 x 72” 2006



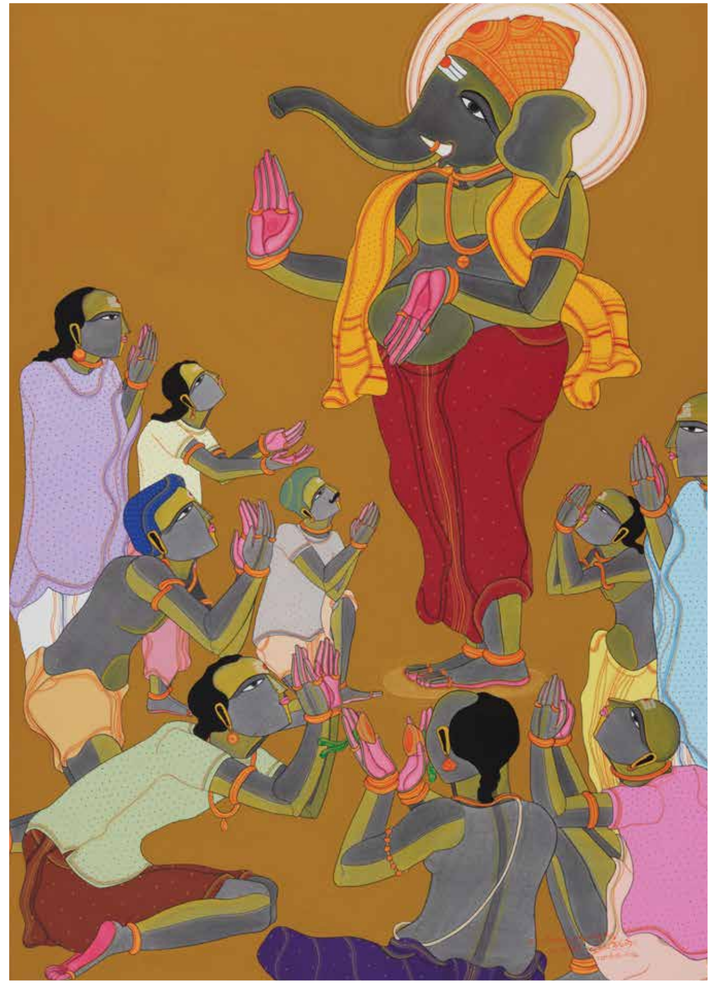


Acrylic on Canvas 72 x 48” 2014





Acrylic on Canvas 84 x 60"



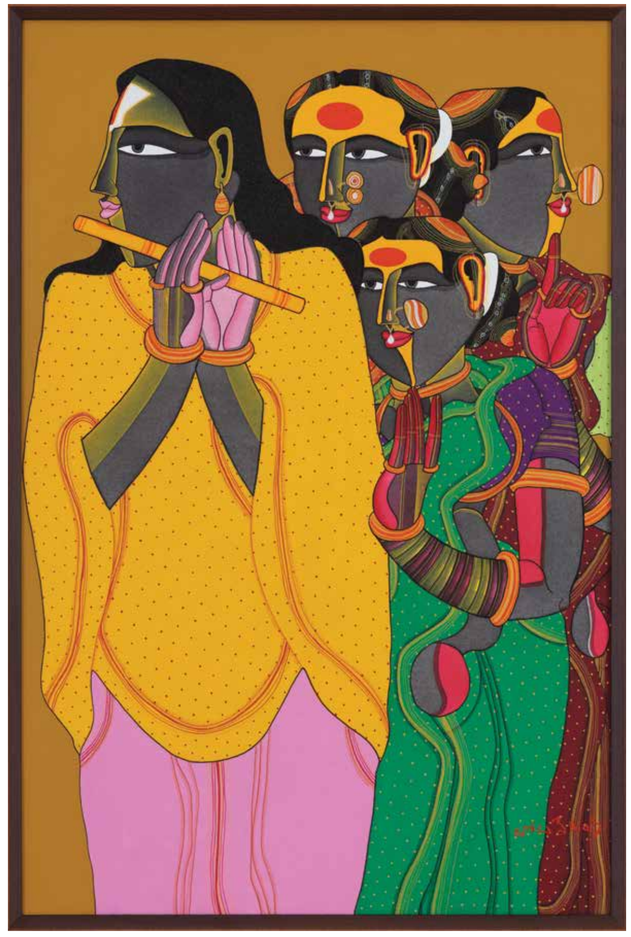


Acrylic on Canvas 60 x 48" 2007



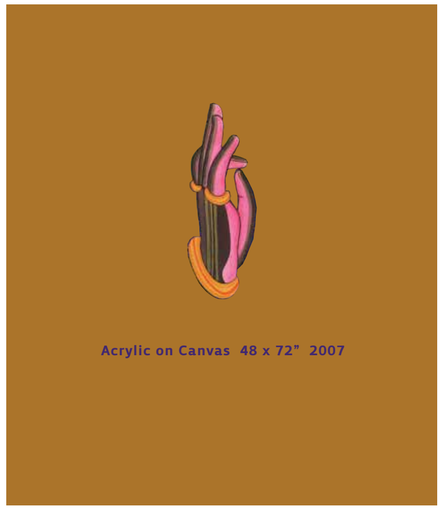
‘Right from the beginning,
I realized that with iconography,
you have to reach a certain level,
then let it be. When I was forty-
two, I began to do these works.
Before that, my work was entirely
different. I realized as I grew
older that I had to concentrate
more on the humans than
anything else.’

Acrylic on Canvas 36 x 24”



Acrylic on Canvas 60 x 144” 2014





Acrylic on Canvas 48 x 72" 2007



Acrylic on Canvas 48 x 48” 2015



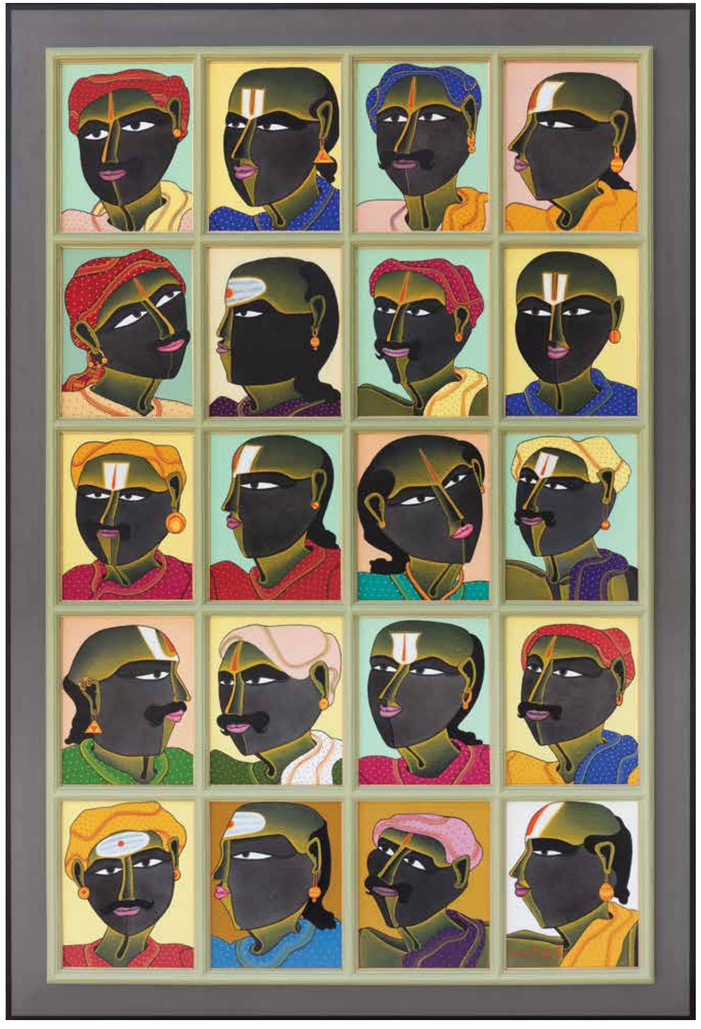


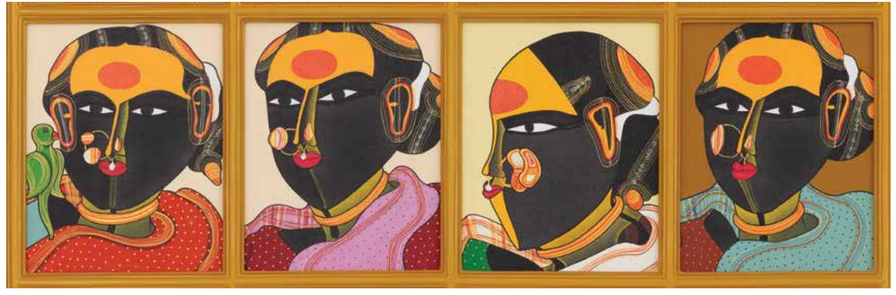
Acrylic on Canvas 16 x 20”



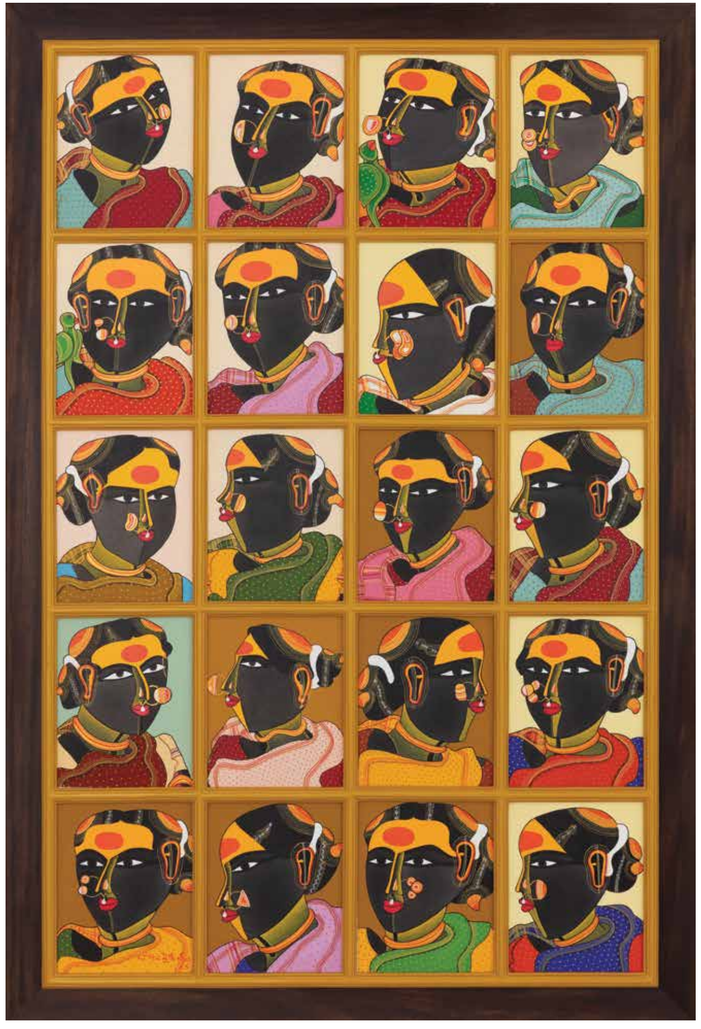


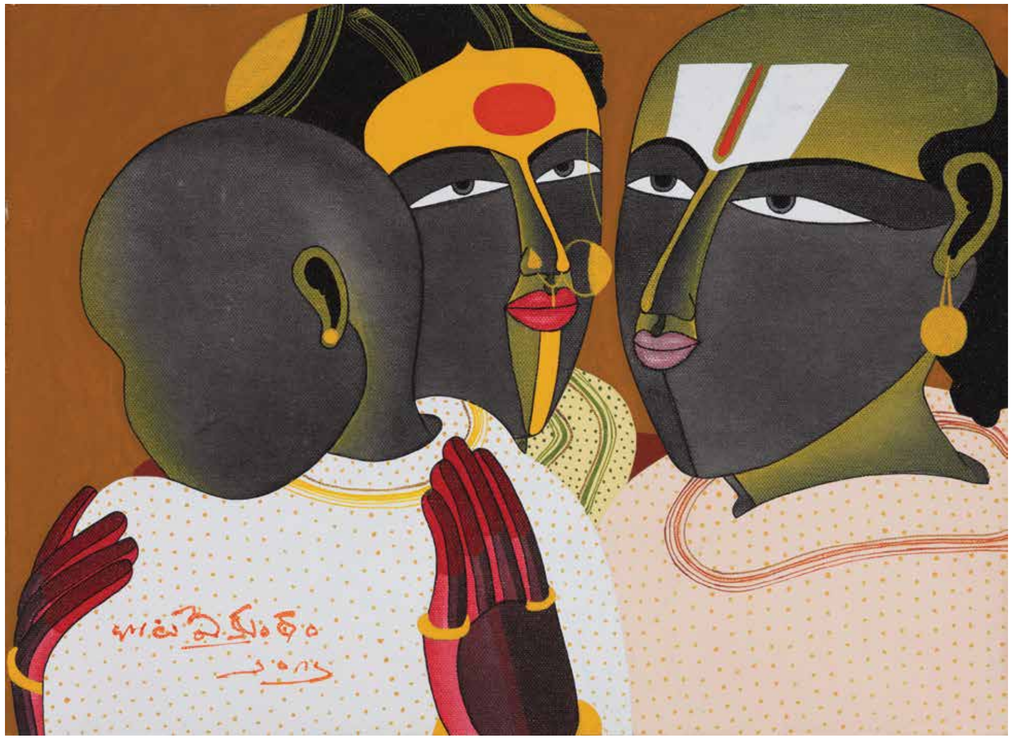
Acrylic on Canvas 52 x 34"



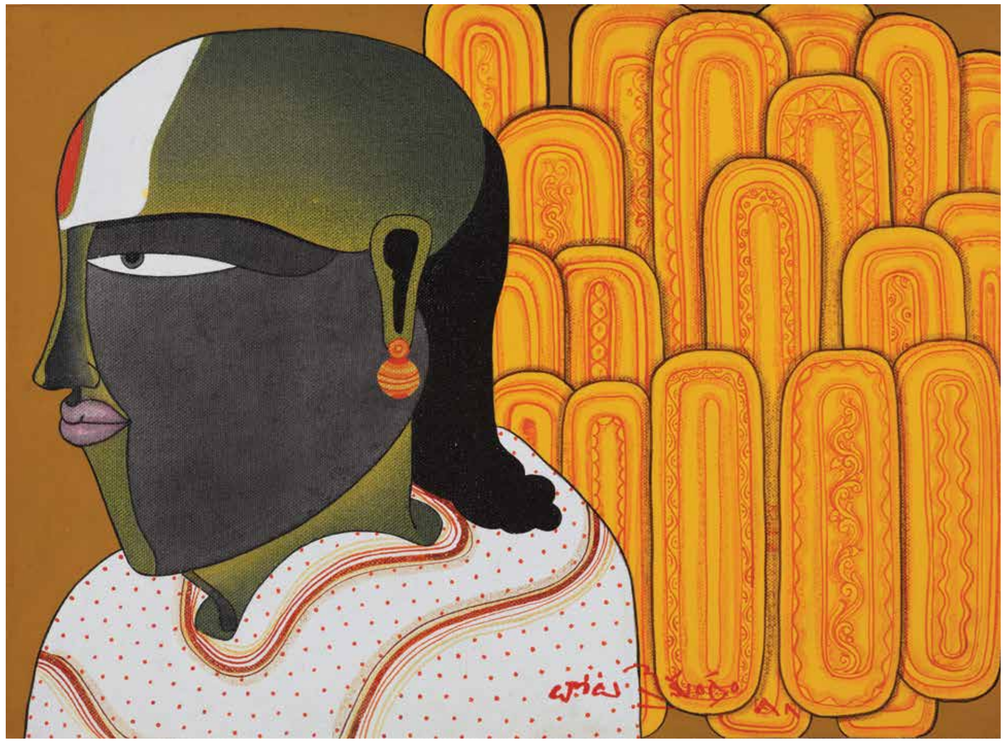


Acrylic on Canvas 52 x 34"





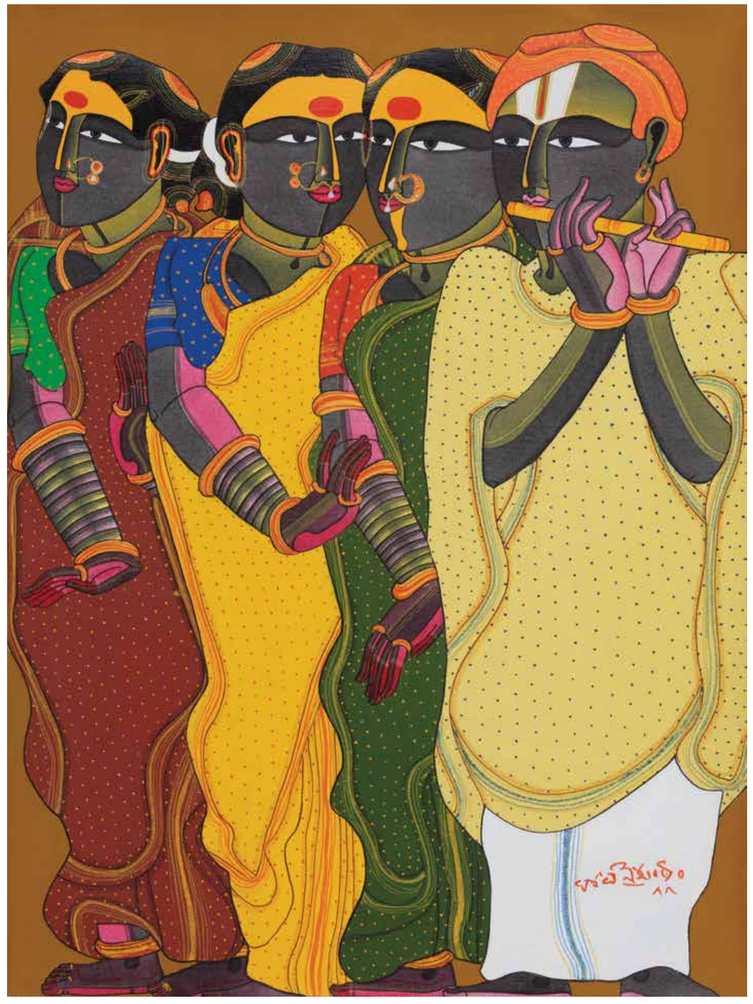
Acrylic on Canvas 12 x 16" 2012



Acrylic on Canvas 12 x 16" 2011

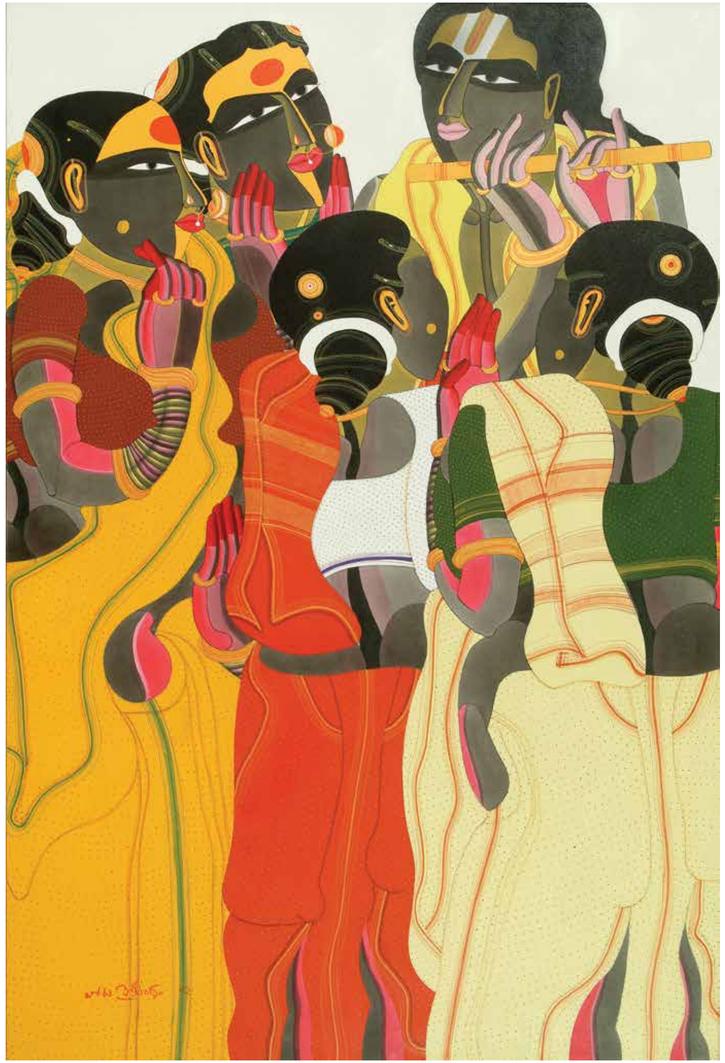
‘All my paintings are festive.
I seldom show solitary figures.
Even when I do, they seem to be
gearing up for festivities amidst a riot
of colour. My people are not rich, but
they are a very happy people. They
enjoy the small, beautiful things in life.
Even money can’t buy happiness.
My paintings are an expression of
these rural joys, of a connection with
the soil and other human beings.
I am part of what I paint.’

Acrylic on Canvas 24 x 18” 2011





Acrylic on Canvas 36 x 60" 2009



Acrylic on Canvas 72 x 48" 2007



Acrylic on Canvas
48” diameter



Acrylic on Canvas
72 x 41” 2006



Acrylic on Canvas
72 x 36” 2007



Acrylic on Canvas 60 x 40” 2016



Acrylic on Canvas 60 x 48” 2016



‘I talk to my half-finished paintings at night, and return to them in the morning to complete my work.’

Acrylic on Canvas 48 x 36” 2015





Works on Paper

Acrylic on Paper 30 x 22" 1994



Acrylic on Paper 30 x 22" 1994

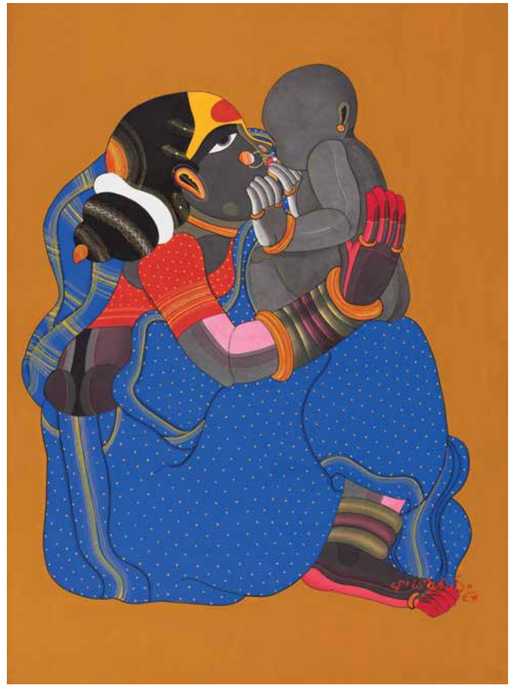


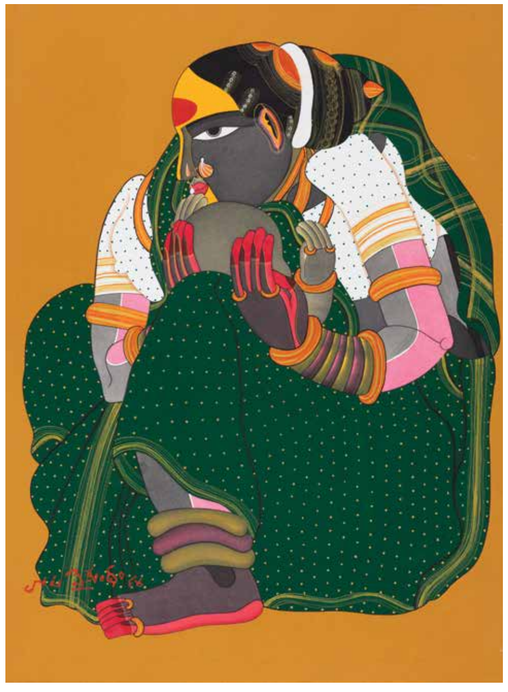
Acrylic on Paper 30 x 22" 1994



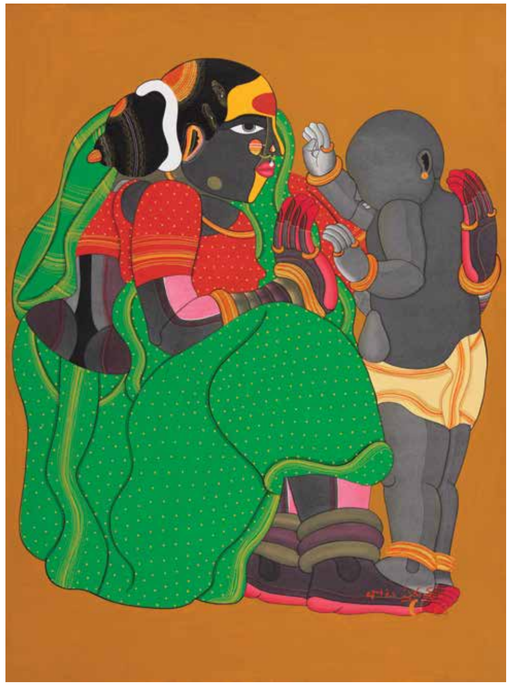
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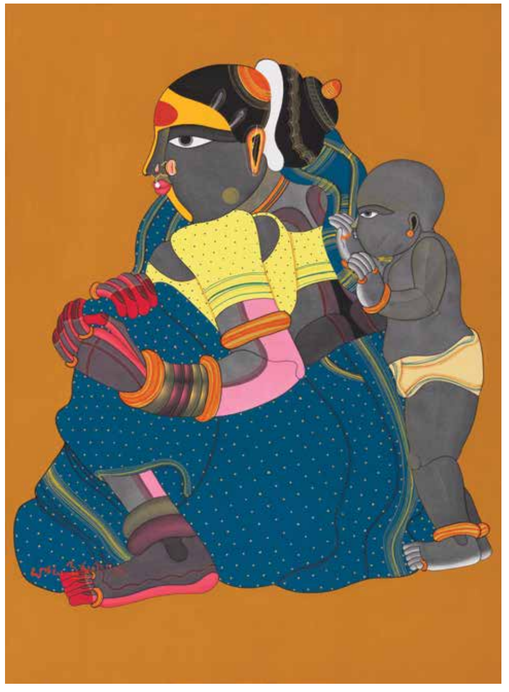






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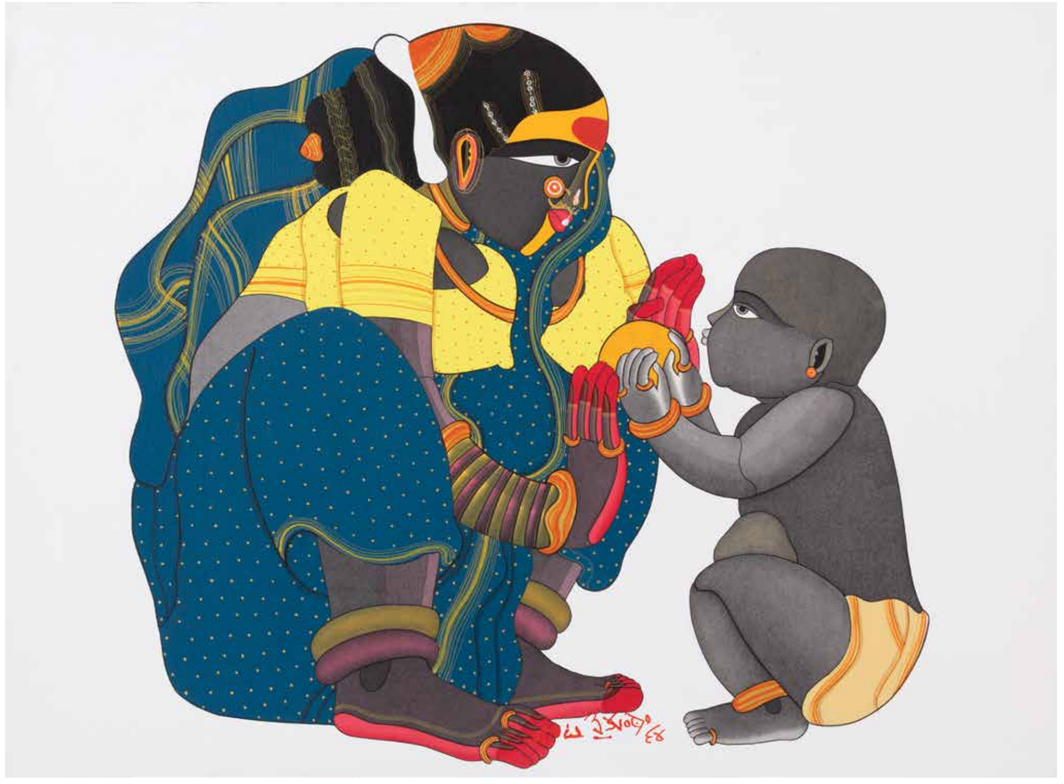








Acrylic on Paper each 30 x 22" 1994



Acrylic on Paper 22 x 30" 1994

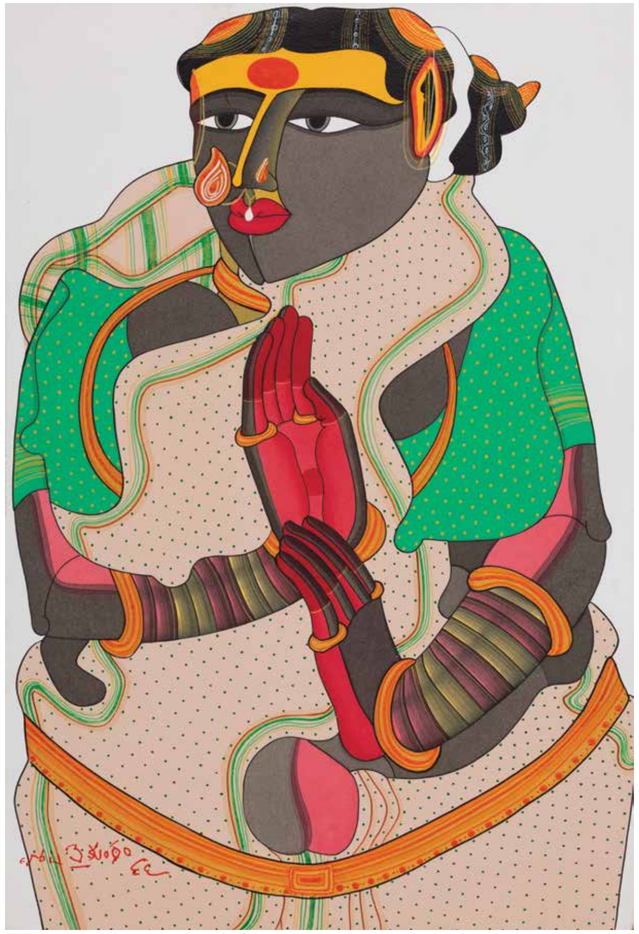


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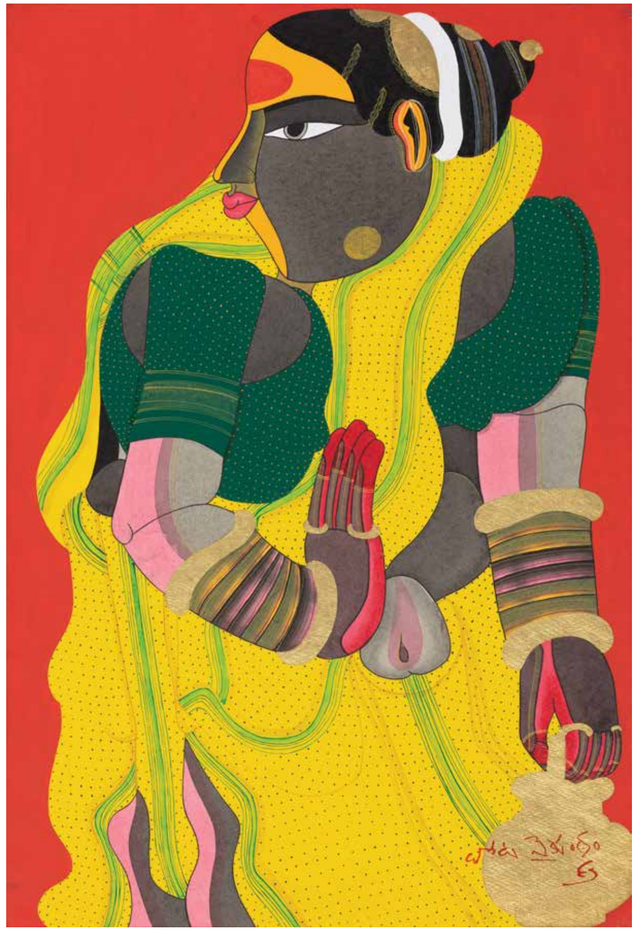


Acrylic on Paper 22 x 30" 1994

Acrylic on Paper 22 x 15" 1996

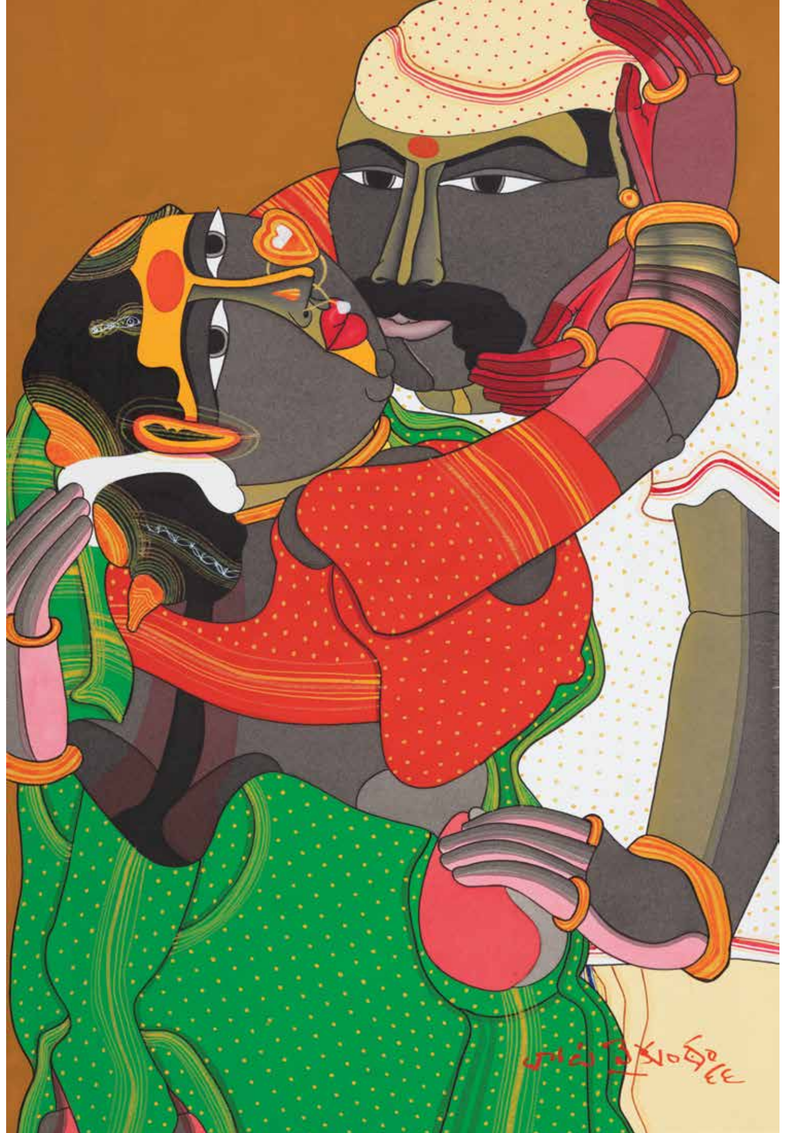


Acrylic on Paper 22 x 15" 1993



‘…he has created prototypes
which extend his work from
the purely personal to
the regional and, finally,
to the universal.’
—Krishen Khanna

Acrylic on Paper 22 x 14" 1996



Acrylic on Paper 22 x 15" 1994



Acrylic on Paper 25 x 17" 1994



Acrylic on Paper 22 x 15" 1994



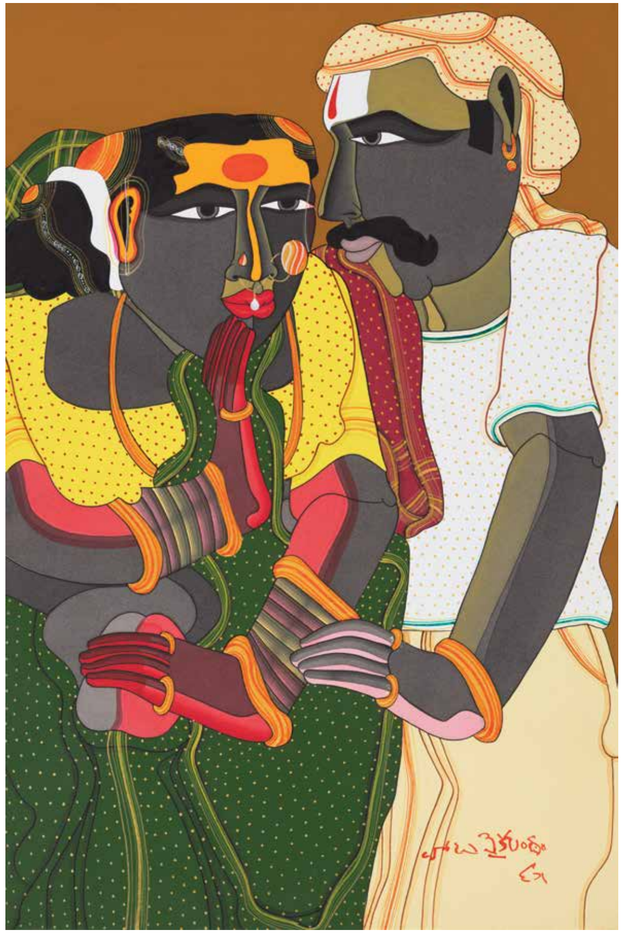
Acrylic on Paper 22 x 15" 1995



Acrylic on Paper 30 x 22" 1995



Acrylic on Paper 22 x 15" 1995



Acrylic on Paper 22 x 17" 1992



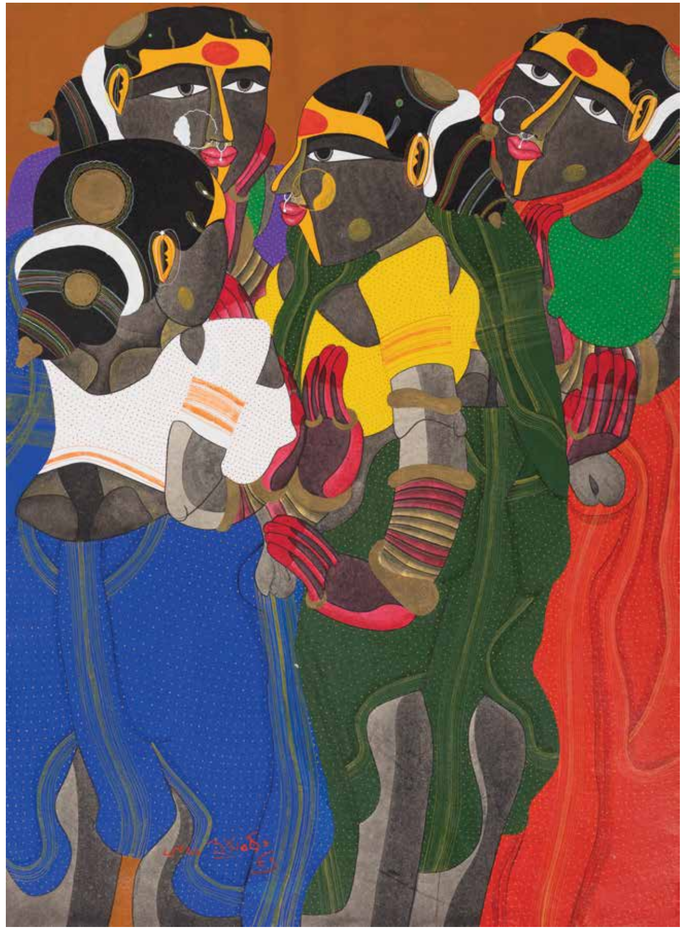
Acrylic on Paper 23 x 18" 1991



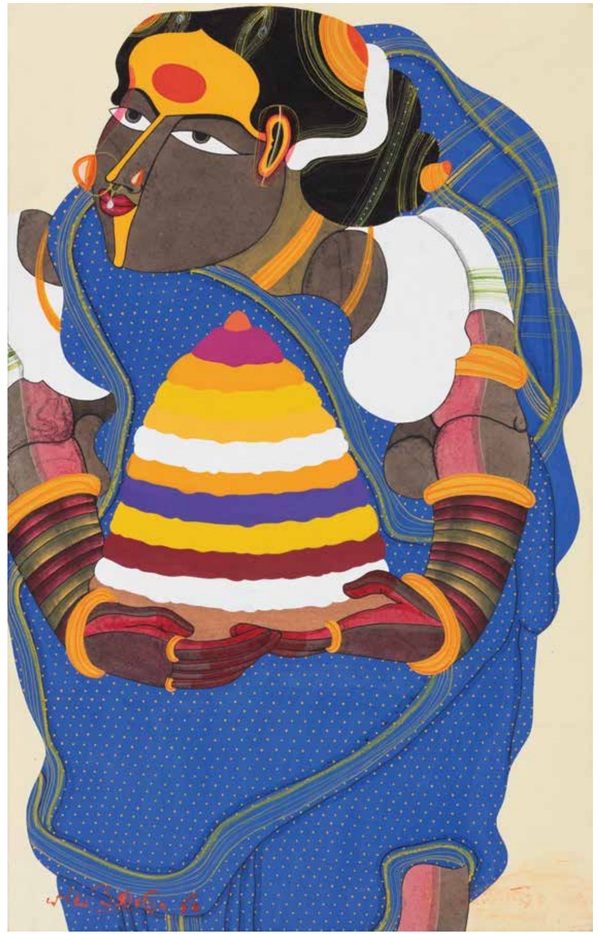
Acrylic on Paper 23 x 18" 1985



Acrylic on Paper 30 x 22” 1992



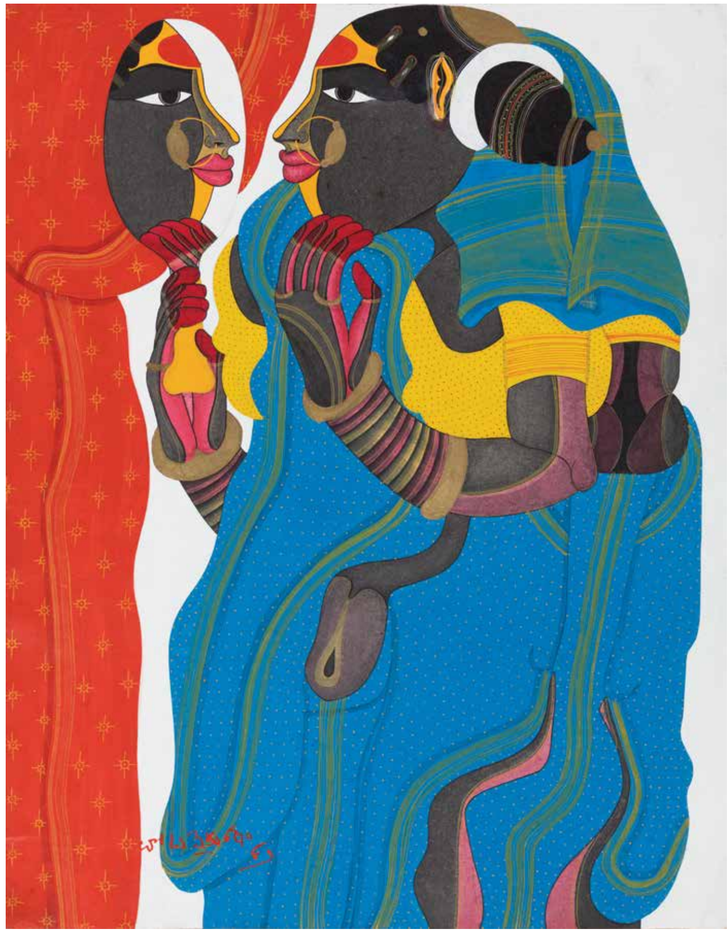
Acrylic on Paper 22 x 14” 1994



Acrylic on Paper 22 x 15" 1996

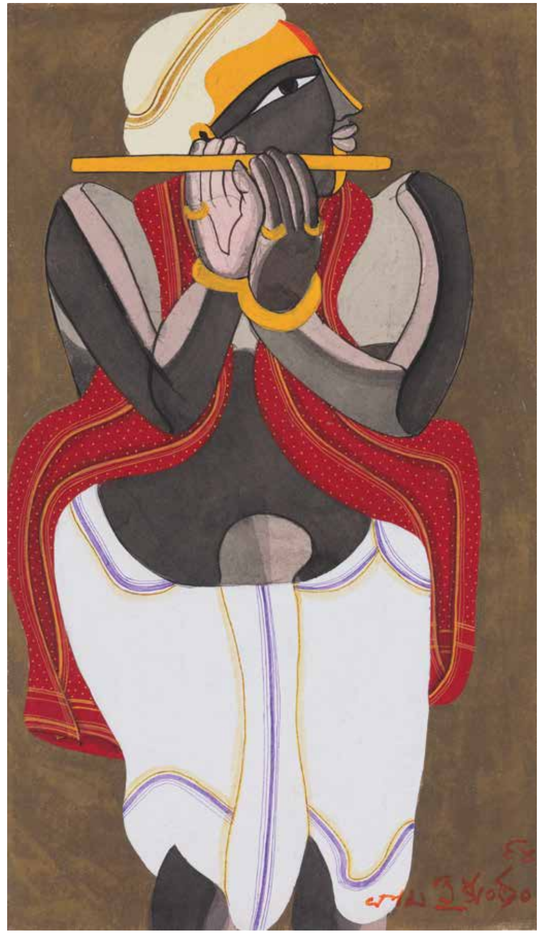


Acrylic on Paper 23 x 18" 1992



Acrylic on Paper 30 x 22" 1994



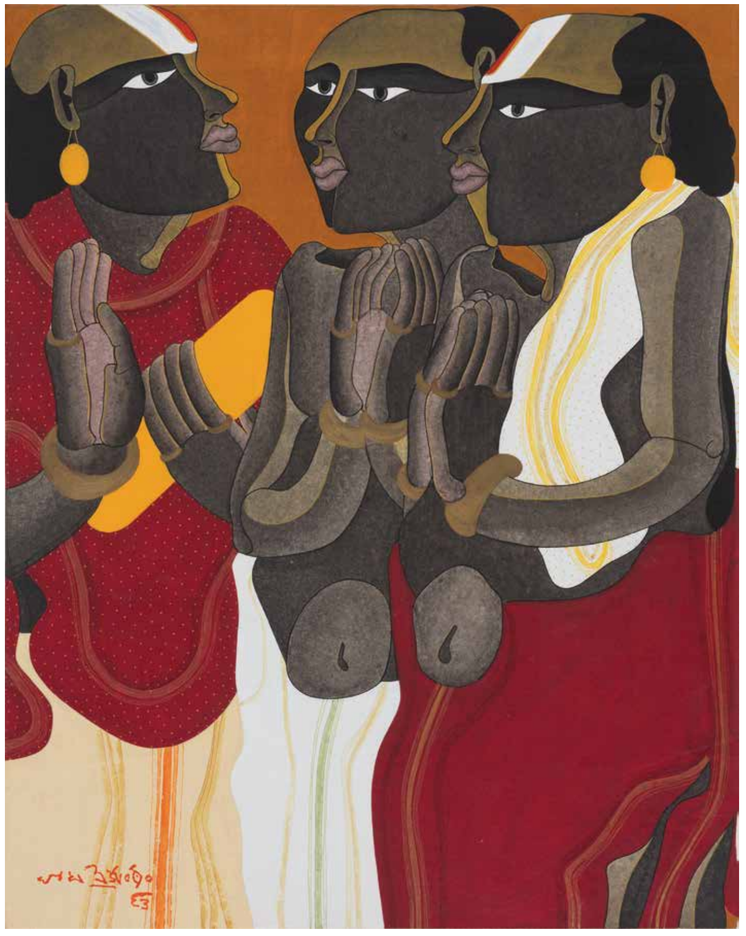


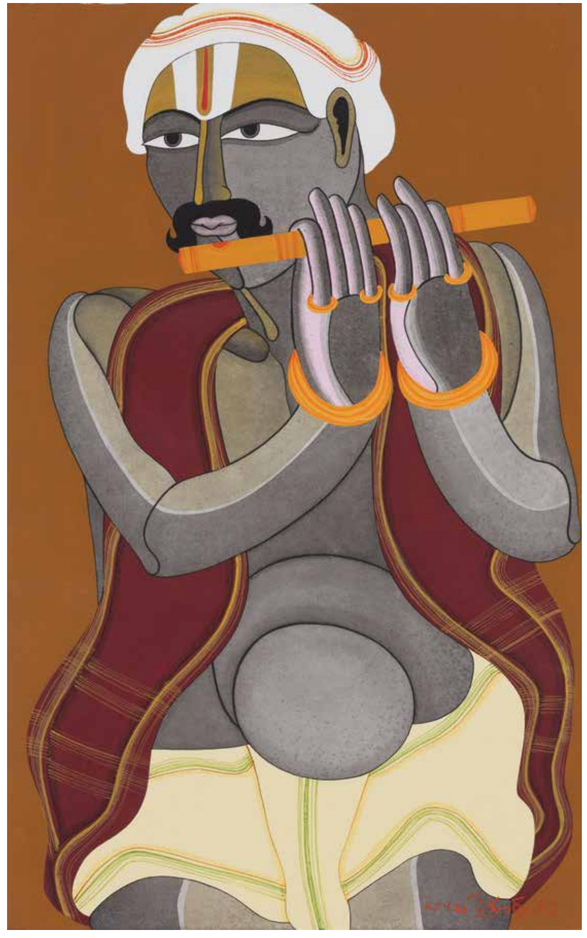
Acrylic on Paper 14 x 8" 1994

Acrylic on Paper 22 x 15" 1994



Acrylic on Paper 23 x 18" 1993





Acrylic on Paper 22 x 14" 1997

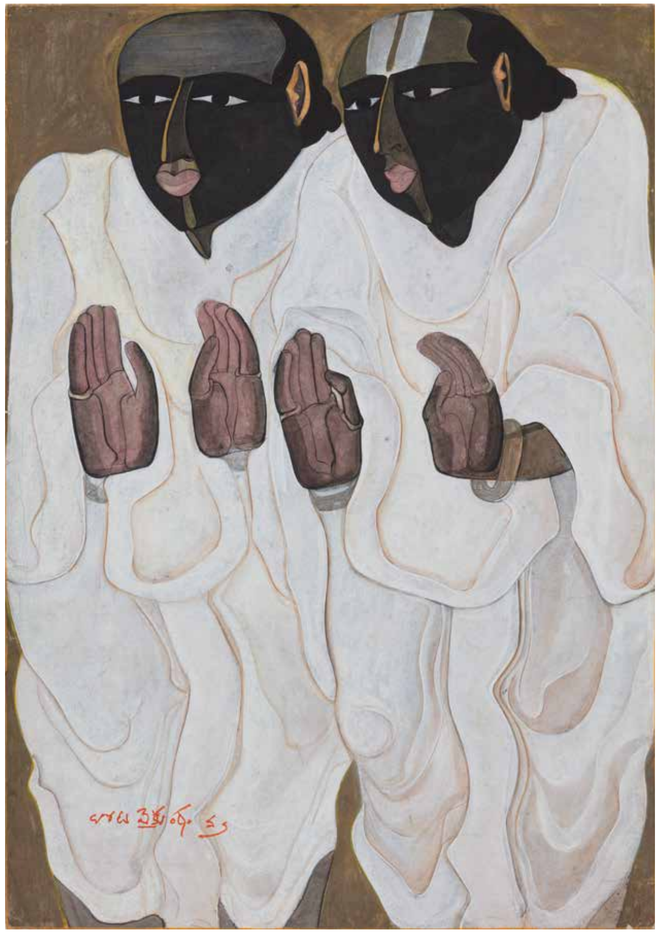
Acrylic on Paper 23 x 18" 1990





Acrylic on Paper 25 x 15" 1991

Acrylic on Paper 24 x 17" 1982



‘Who is Vaikuntam?
Without painting,
I am nothing.’

Acrylic on Paper 22 x 15” 1993





Acrylic on Paper 7 x 5" 1977



Acrylic on Paper each 11 x 8" 1982



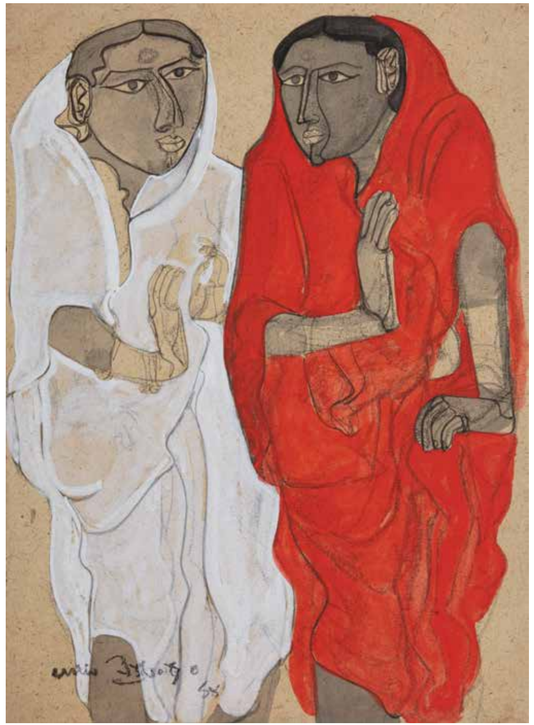
Charcoal on Paper 30 x 20”



Charcoal on Paper 30 x 22”



Charcoal on Paper 15 x 11” 1986



Charcoal on Paper 15 x 11” 1984



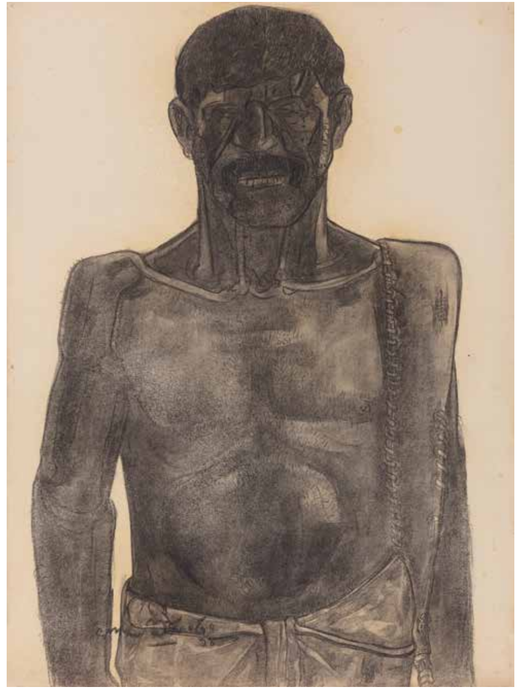
Charcoal on Paper 30 x 22" 1980



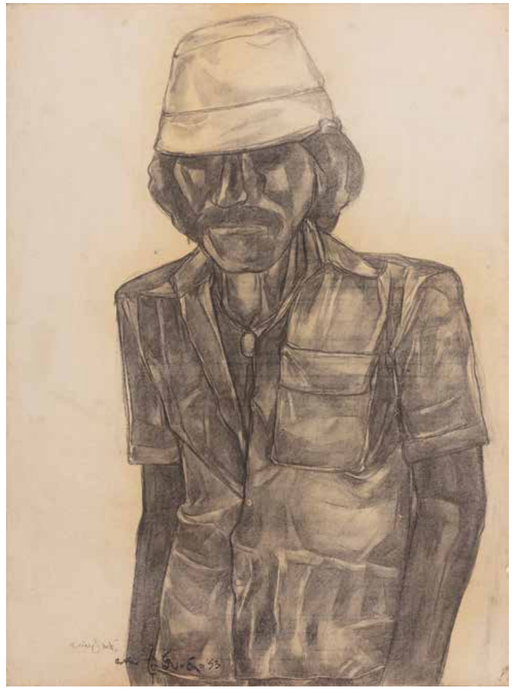
Charcoal on Paper 30 x 22" 1983



Charcoal on Paper 30 x 22" 1983



Charcoal on Paper 30 x 22" 1984



Charcoal on Paper 30 x 22" 1983



Charcoal on Paper 30 x 22" 1983

Charcoal on Paper 29 x 22" 1981



Charcoal on Paper 22 x 15" 1984





Charcoal on Paper 9 x 6" 1988



Charcoal on Paper 9 x 6" 1988



Charcoal on Paper 11 x 7" 1989



Charcoal on Paper 14 x 11" 1961



Charcoal on Paper 8 x 5" 1987



Charcoal on Paper 11 x 9" 1987



Charcoal on Paper 13 x 15" 1986



Charcoal on Paper 9 x 7" 1988



Charcoal on Paper 8 x 6" 1988



Acrylic on Paper 15 x 9" 1985



Acrylic on Paper 7 x 5" 1982



Acrylic on Paper 6 x 4" 1989



Conte on Paper 28 x 17"



Sculptures









Cast in 18K Gold 5 x 3 x 3”





Bronze 10 x 8 x 7”





Bronze 11 x 10 x 6”





Bronze 11 x 10 x 6”



Bronze 24.5 x 11 x 17”

Bronze 17 x 8 x 5”















Bronze 30 x 25 x 22”





Bronze 7 x 6 x 3”





Bronze 7 x 6 x 3”





Bronze 9 x 7 x 5”





Bronze 9 x 7 x 5”



Painted Boxes



Acrylic on Wood 15 x 22 x 17" 1999







Acrylic on Wood 11 x 21 x 14" 1999





Acrylic on Wood 7 x 15 x 11" 1999

ABOUT SAFFRONART

Founded in 2000 by Minal and Dinesh Vazirani, Saffronart is a leading international auction house, and India's most reputed, with nearly five 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 twenty-one 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



‘You are your own creator.
You can’t base yourself on others.
It has to come from within you.’
—Thota Vaikuntam