

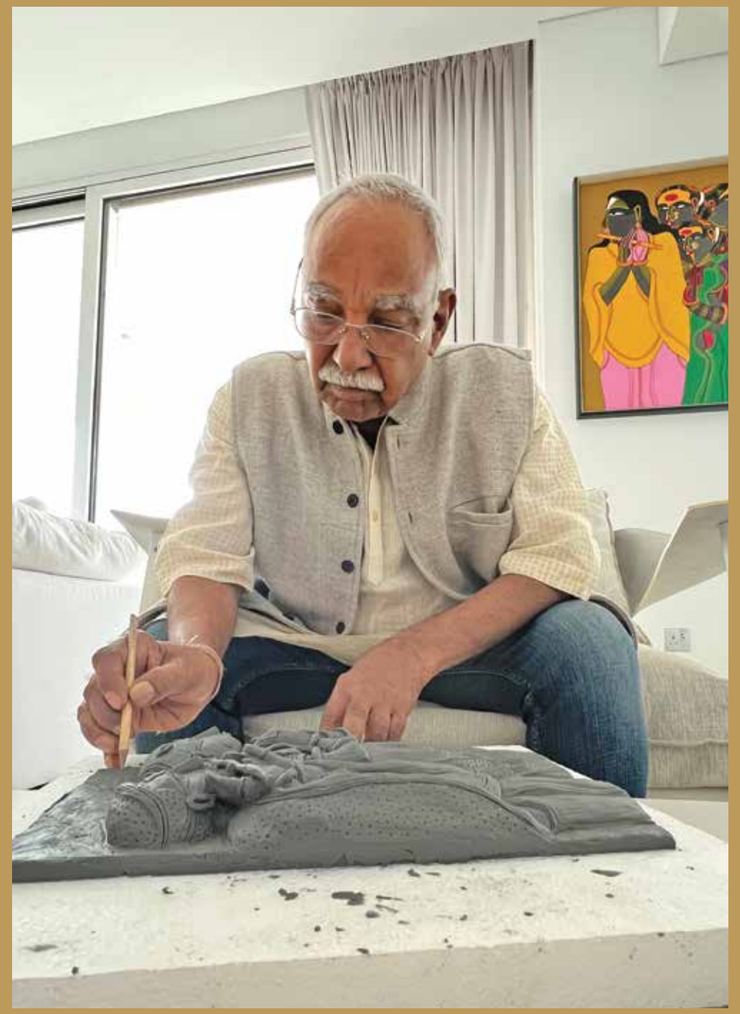
# THOTA VAIKUNTAM

## THE SACRED GAZE

*Women are the backbone of our Culture,*
*that's why Telengana Woman is a*
*Goddess for me.*

THOTA VAIKUNTAM



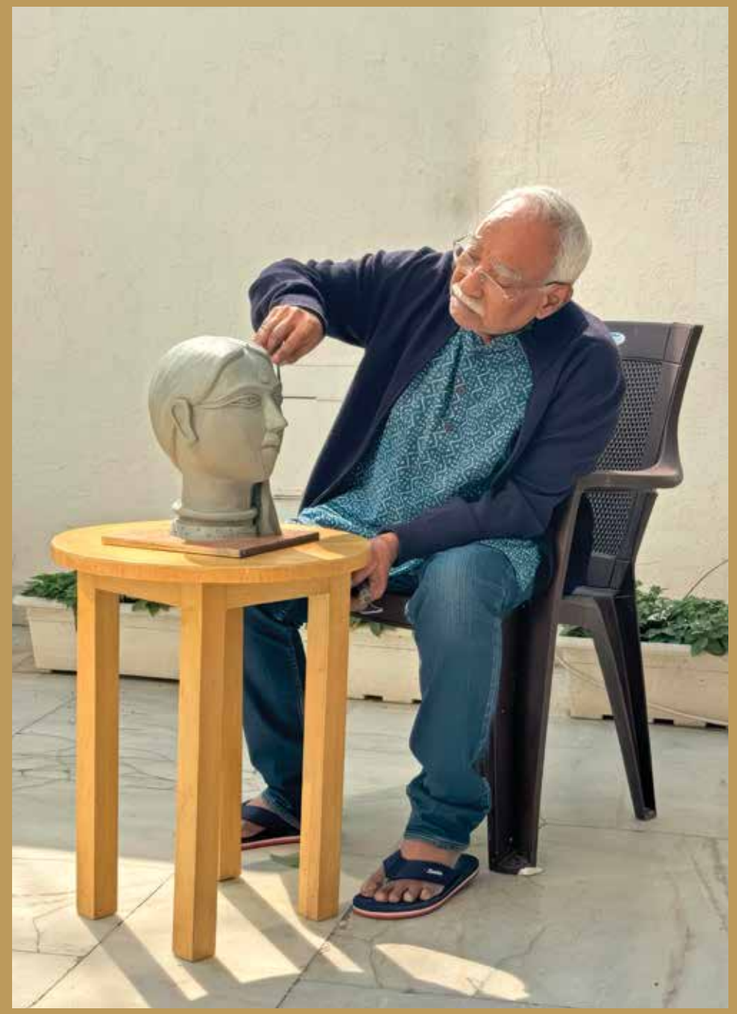


# THOTA VAIKUNTAM

## THE SACRED GAZE

Text: Uma Nair

*In association with Namtech Fine Art*





# A Celebration of Form and Identity

## *Public Art by Thota Vaikuntam*

This public art initiative brings to life the striking **Telangana Lady Head** sculptures of **Thota Vaikuntam,** a recurring subject that has become central to the artist's rich and enduring practice. Bold, dignified, and deeply rooted in cultural memory, these imposing forms seek to offer the public not just a visual experience, but a moment of connection—open, accessible, and resonant.

Despite India's deep artistic heritage, public art remains surprisingly scarce. Vaikuntam, whose work has long celebrated the spirit of rural Telangana, understands the vital importance of inclusivity in art. He believes that art belongs not just in galleries or private collections, but in shared spaces—where it can be encountered by all, regardless of background or education.

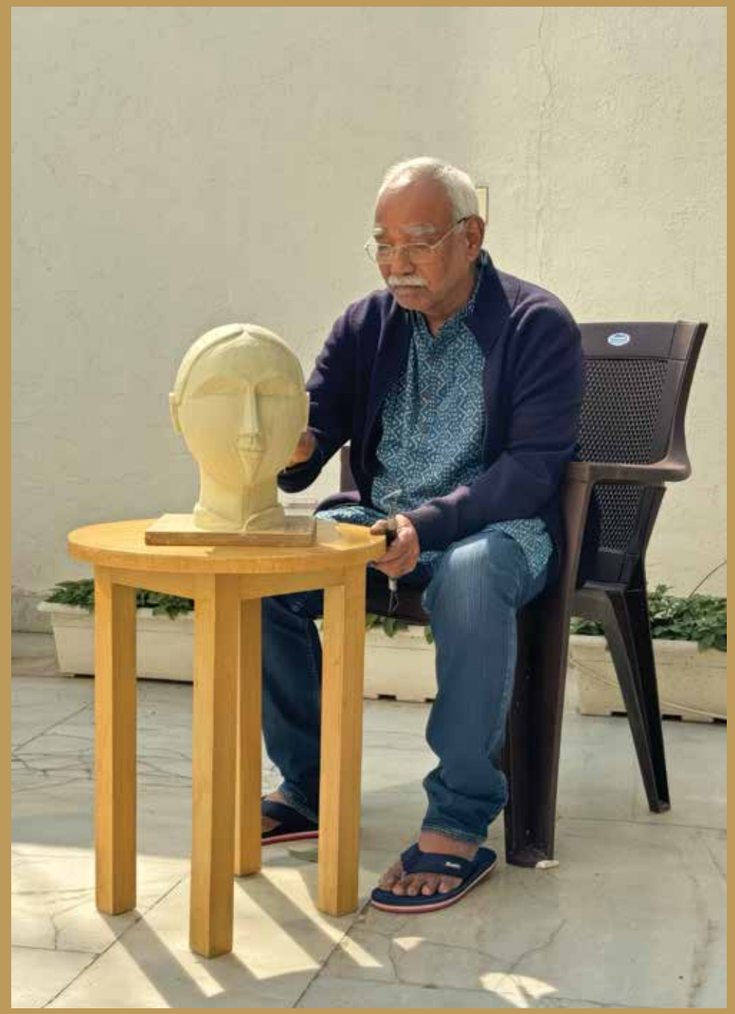
Art speaks a universal language. It stirs something innate within us—a sensitivity we are all born with, a recognition of shared stories and values. It bridges divides, offers new ways of seeing, and evokes a sense of belonging that transcends boundaries.

Vaikuntam's vision is rooted in generosity. With this initiative, he extends his work to the wider world, driven by a simple yet profound desire: to make art a part of everyday life. These sculptures stand not only as powerful aesthetic statements, but as beacons of cultural identity.

*"You are your own creator. You can't base yoruself on others. It has to come from within you."*

THOTA VAIKUNTAM





Thota Vaikuntam, both an artist and a sculptor, is part of a larger Indian avant-garde movement. In creating his Telangana women, characterized by their intrinsic upward or direct gaze, he employs postmodernist techniques of appropriation and observation while drawing from contemporary lifestyles to shape his artistic identity.

The “Sacred Gaze” emerges from the rituals and celebrations of Telangana’s state festival, Bathukamma, which coincides with Navratri celebrations. These sculptures pay homage to modern women, likened to the goddess of life Bathukamma. Over nine days of celebration, women build shrines made from flowers and turmeric, dedicated to the goddess.

These vibrantly painted sculptures remind us of the harvest season, a celebration of cultural festivities across the Indian subcontinent, wherein one offers gratitude to the gods and celebrate the gift of life.

As an artist who has consistently depicted human experiences on canvas, Vaikuntam translates these faces into painted resin sculptures, making them a legitimate subject of his work. His art is both innovative and provocative, serving as a Dravidian cultural commentary within the broader narrative of Indian and South Asian art history.

The impactful, imposing size and saturated colours manifest a certain love for feminine fervour as he imbues his sculptures with a sense of serenity.

Resinated Fibreglass with Automotive Paint
88” x 58” x 81”, Pedestal: 18” x 56” x 48”, Overall Height: 106”













Over the decades, Vaikuntam has addressed issues of femininity and beauty. He recreates a signature style where women remain perfectly adorned through makeup, attire and hair styling in traditional South Indian accents in maintenance of an adherence to everyday tradition.

Through his gargantuan transformations, Vaikuntam celebrates the nose ring, an embodiment of elegance and a reappropriation of ancient Indian temple structures, which emphasized decorative adornments as devotional essentials. These jewelled embellishments are a statement of ancient temple jewellery, bedecked with rubies and emeralds, creating a dialogue between green and ruby-red hues.

For years, Vaikuntam has silently yet profoundly commented on how South Indian religious and cultural traditions remain entrenched in their own practices despite relentless Westernization brought on by the internet and global mass media.

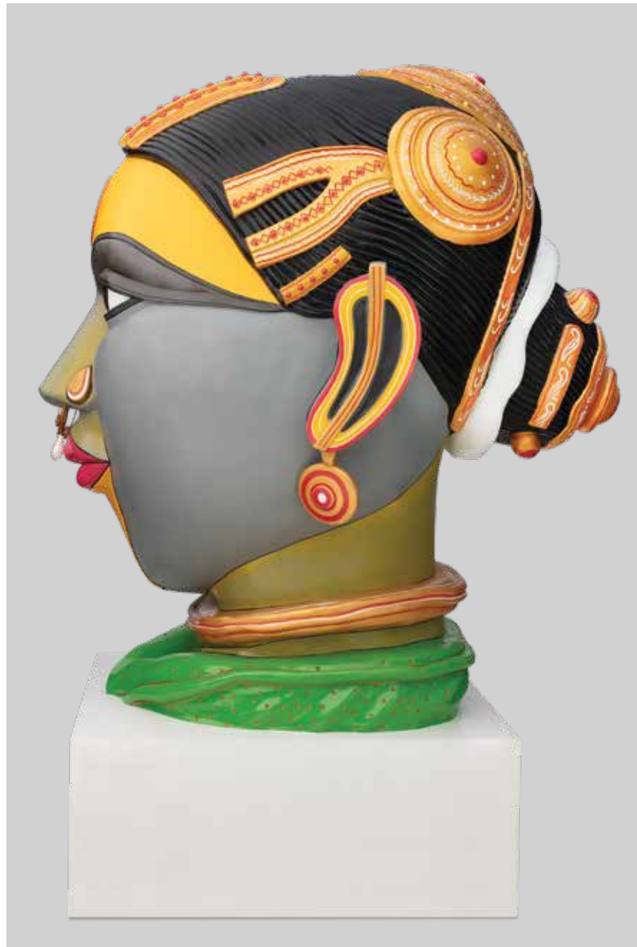


Resinated Fibreglass with Automotive Paint / Pedestal: Painted Stainless Steel
88" x 58" x 81", Pedestal: 24" x 56" x 48", Overall Height: 112"



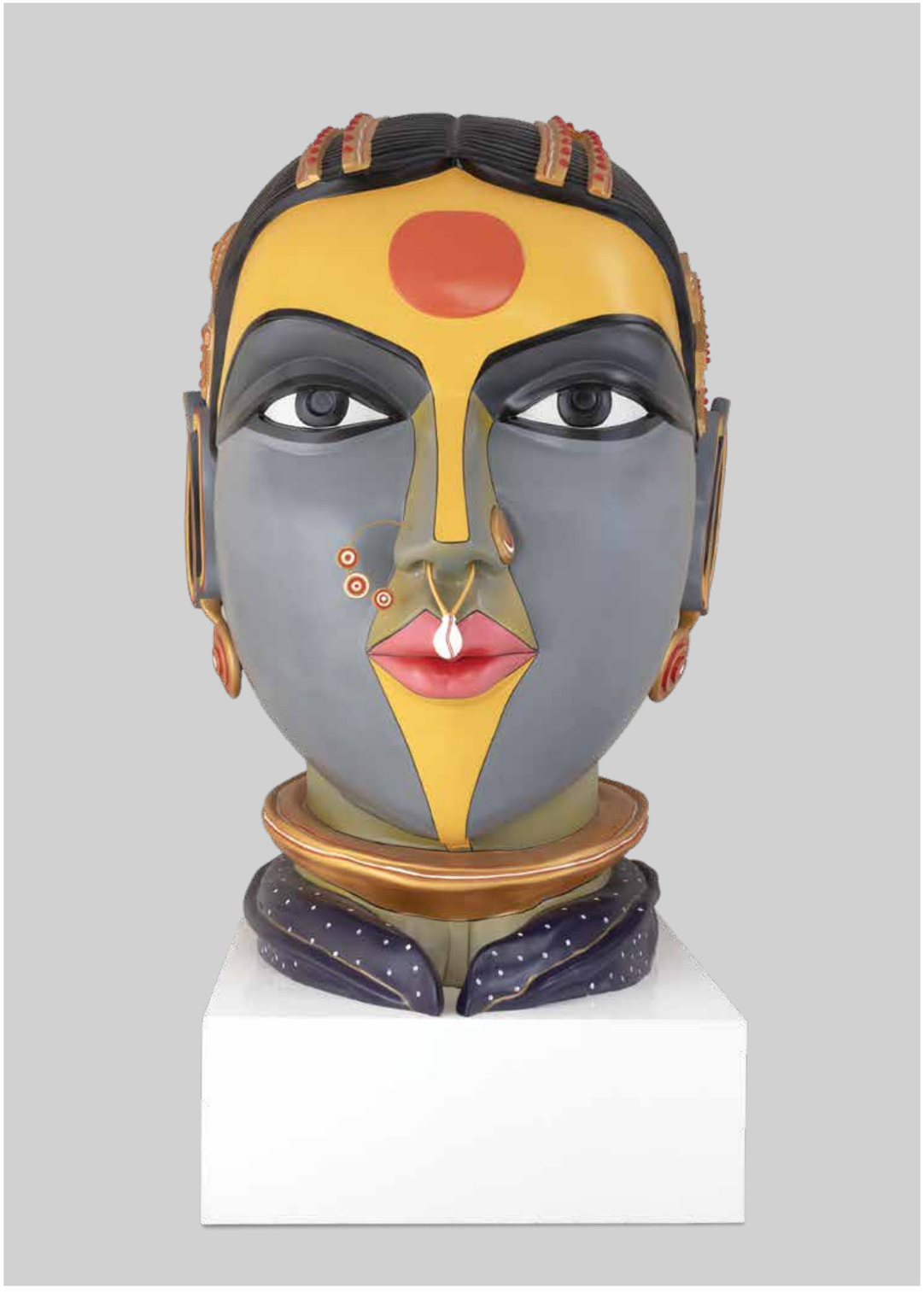






Vaikuntam reaffirms his fascination with feminine identity, which is both universally understood and deeply rooted in tradition. His paintings, marked by cubist influences, parallel his sculptural studies of women, where the everyday defines the chosen medium. For Vaikuntam, the feminine visage determines his material choices, with resinated fibre encapsulating the essence of the sacred gaze.

Resinated Fibreglass with Automotive Paint
88" x 58" x 81", Pedestal: 18" x 56" x 48", Overall Height: 106"











The gilded and frontal gaze of his sculptures, in palettes of gold, green, scarlet, and yellow, offers a sensory and sensual experience. The large round bindi signifies ritualistic symbolism, while the South Indian colour palette enhances the feminine essence. Yellow, reminiscent of turmeric, connects daily life to religious and festive traditions, particularly the worship of Bathukamma. Though rooted in spirituality, his use of colour introduces a sense of gaiety and fervour.

Resinated Fibreglass with Automotive Paint / Pedestal: Painted Stainless Steel
88" x 58" x 81", Pedestal: 24" x 56" x 48", Overall Height: 112"











Resinated Fibreglass with Automotive Paint / Pedestal: Painted Stainless Steel
88” x 58” x 81”, Pedestal: 24” x 56” x 48”, Overall Height: 112”







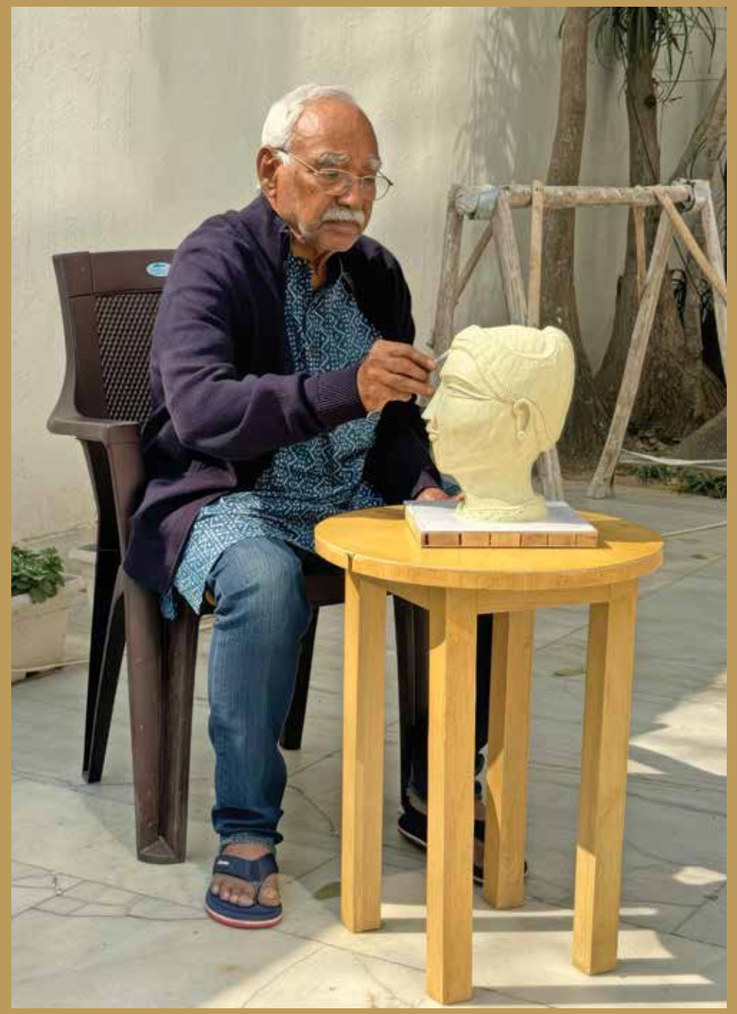




*"All my works are festive. My people are not rich, but they are a very happy people. They enjoy the small, beautiful things in life. I am a part of what I paint."*

THOTA VAIKUNTAM





Resinated Fibreglass with Automotive Paint
93” x 70” x 57”, Pedestal: 12” x 56” x 48”, Overall Height: 105”







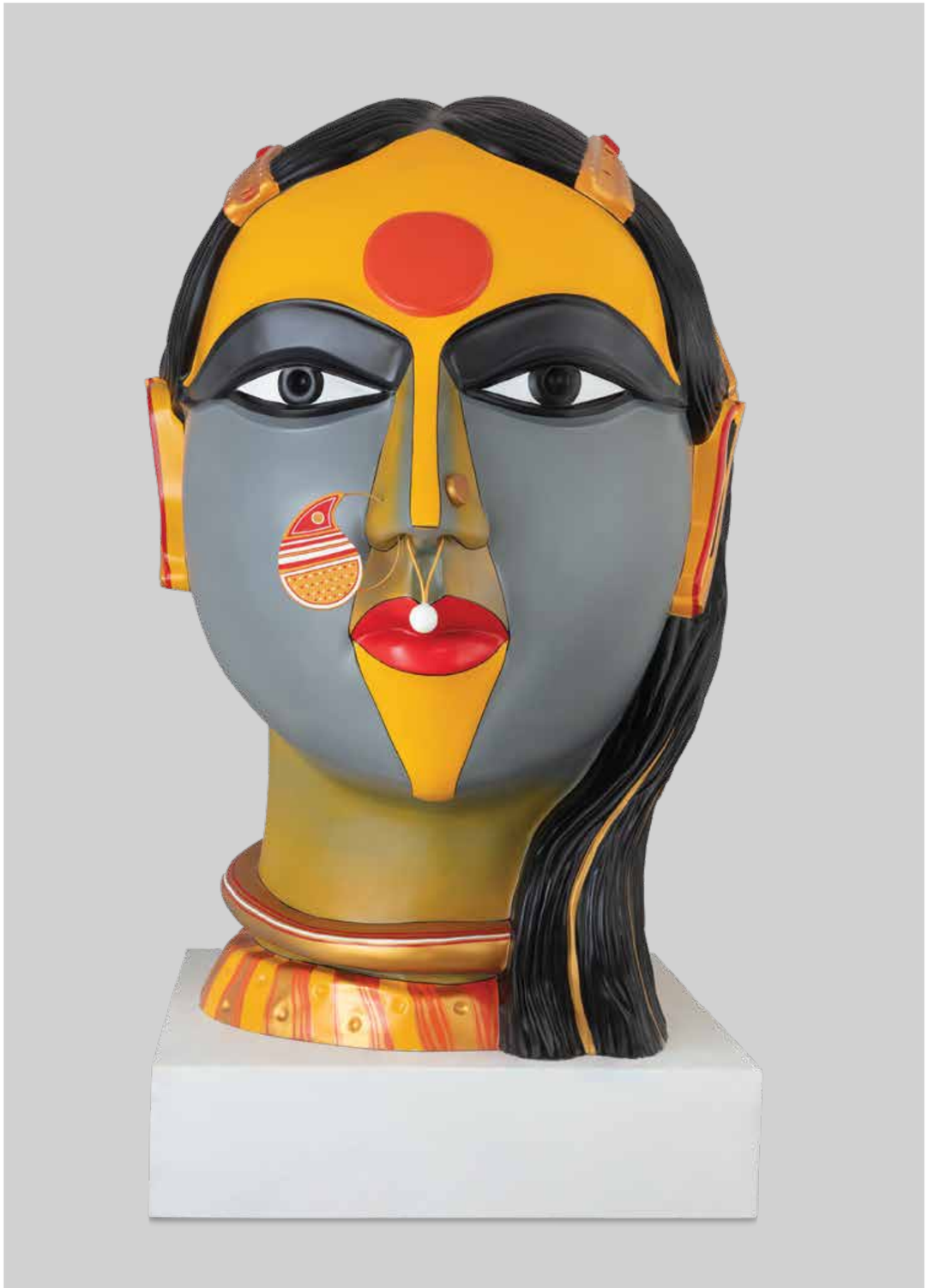




Vaikuntam's leitmotif remains the perception of the feminine form, and his full-blown faces elevate the mundane to the magnificent. His sculptures' kohl-shaped eyes forge deeper connections, referencing an ancient ritual practiced across South Asia. In Indian traditions, kohl-filled eyes are believed to bring the goddess to life.

When referencing Bathukamma, he recalls the history of Indian names—the goddess of life derives her name from the Telugu words "Bathuku" (life) and "Amma" (mother).

Resinated Fibreglass with Automotive Paint
93" x 70" x 57", Pedestal: 12" x 56" x 48", Overall Height: 105"







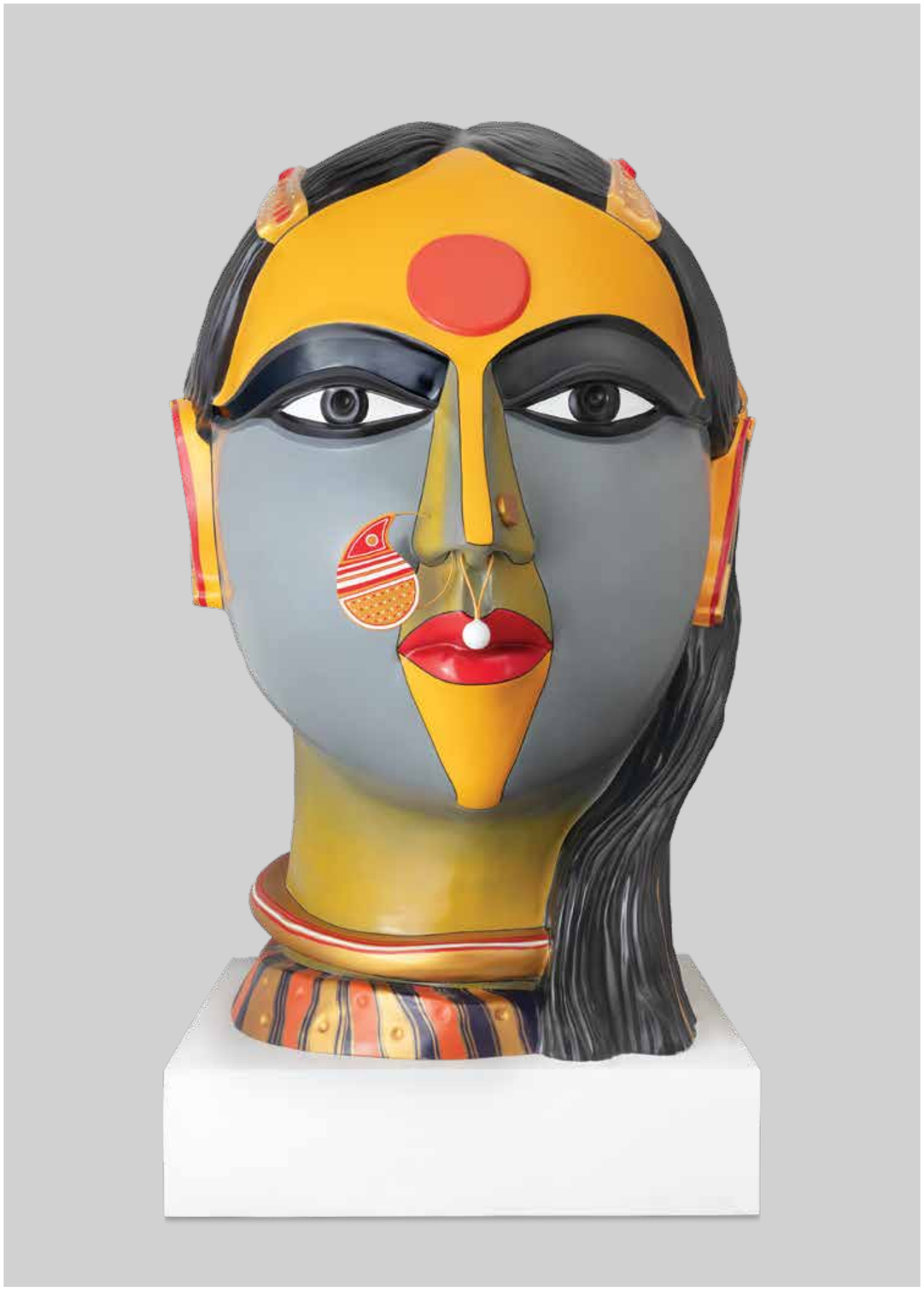




In a minimalist yet lyrical approach, Vaikuntam enhances the expressive depth of his sculptures through small details like three-stoned nose rings. His use of vivid colours echoes South Indian temple imagery, evoking a tactile sensuality. However, his compositions remain serene, inviting contemplation rather than desire.

Resinated Fibreglass with Automotive Paint
93" x 70" x 57", Pedestal: 12" x 56" x 48", Overall Height: 105"













Resinated Fibreglass with Automotive Paint
92” x 66” x 76”, Pedestal: 12” x 56” x 48”, Overall Height: 104”









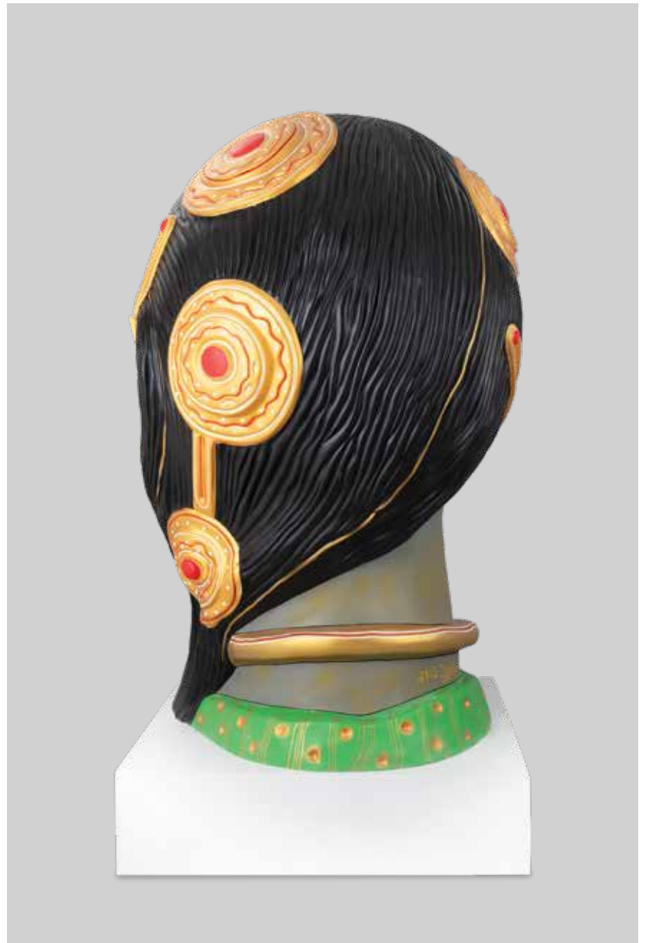


Resinated Fibreglass with Automotive Paint
92” x 66” x 76”, Pedestal: 12” x 56” x 48”, Overall Height: 104”











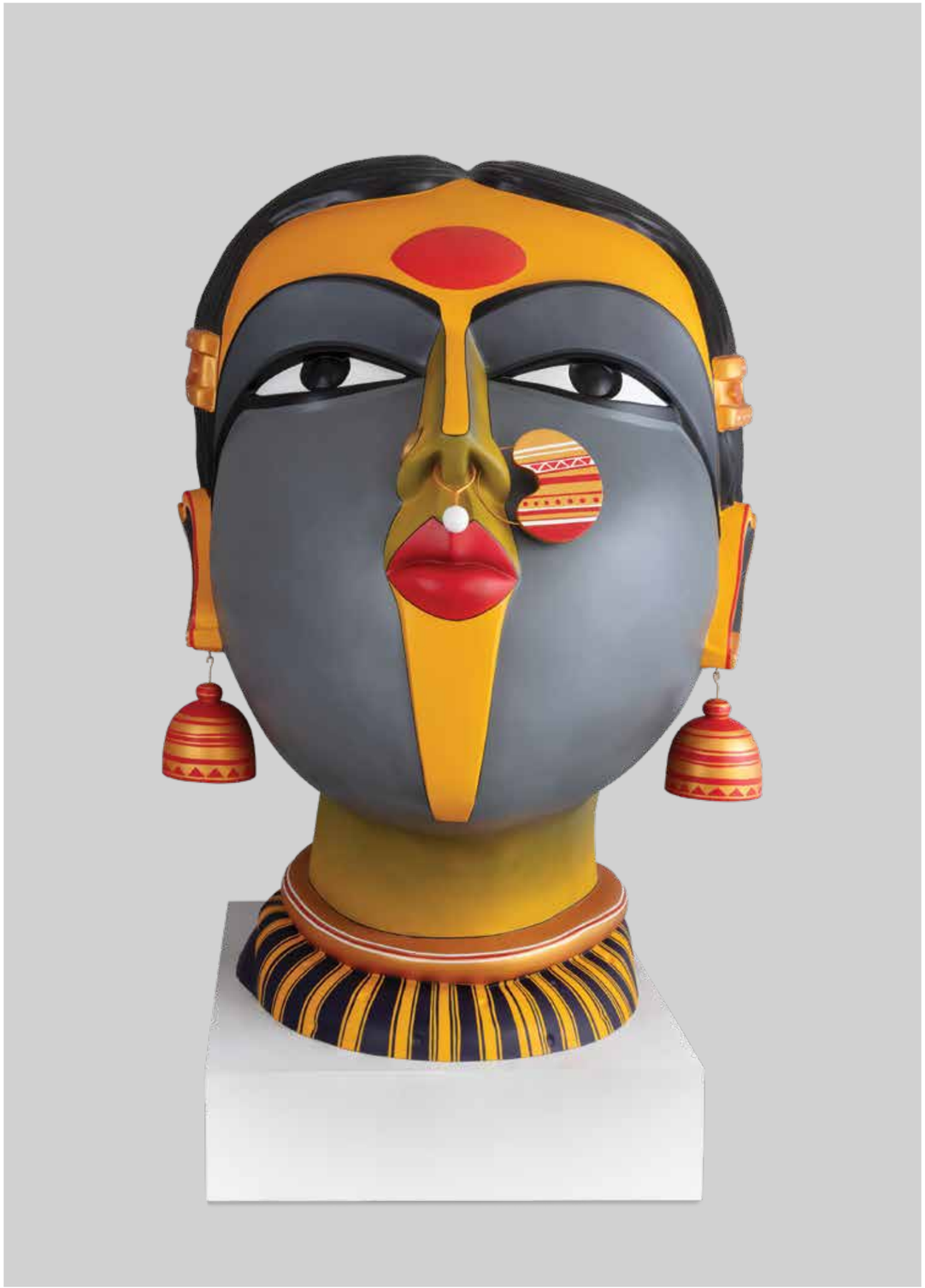
*"Maybe my childhood memory clings to my roots. I've taken from my people in Telengana. I draw them. I take my colours from them. I've taken details from their everyday lives, stylised them, and made them look grand. That's my intention."*

THOTA VAIKUNTAM



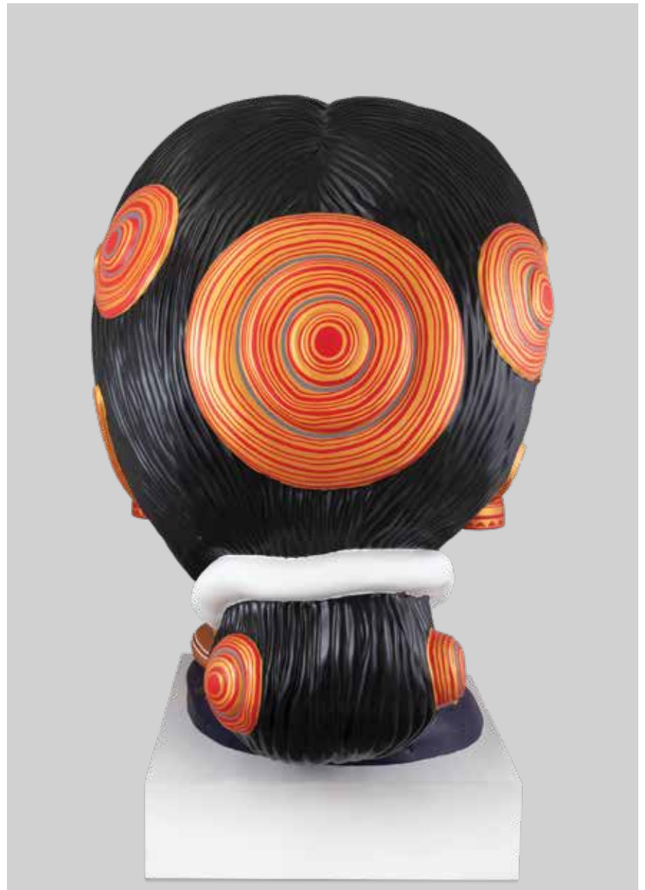


Resinated Fibreglass with Automotive Paint
92” x 71” x 80”, Pedestal: 12” x 54” x 48”, Overall Height: 102”



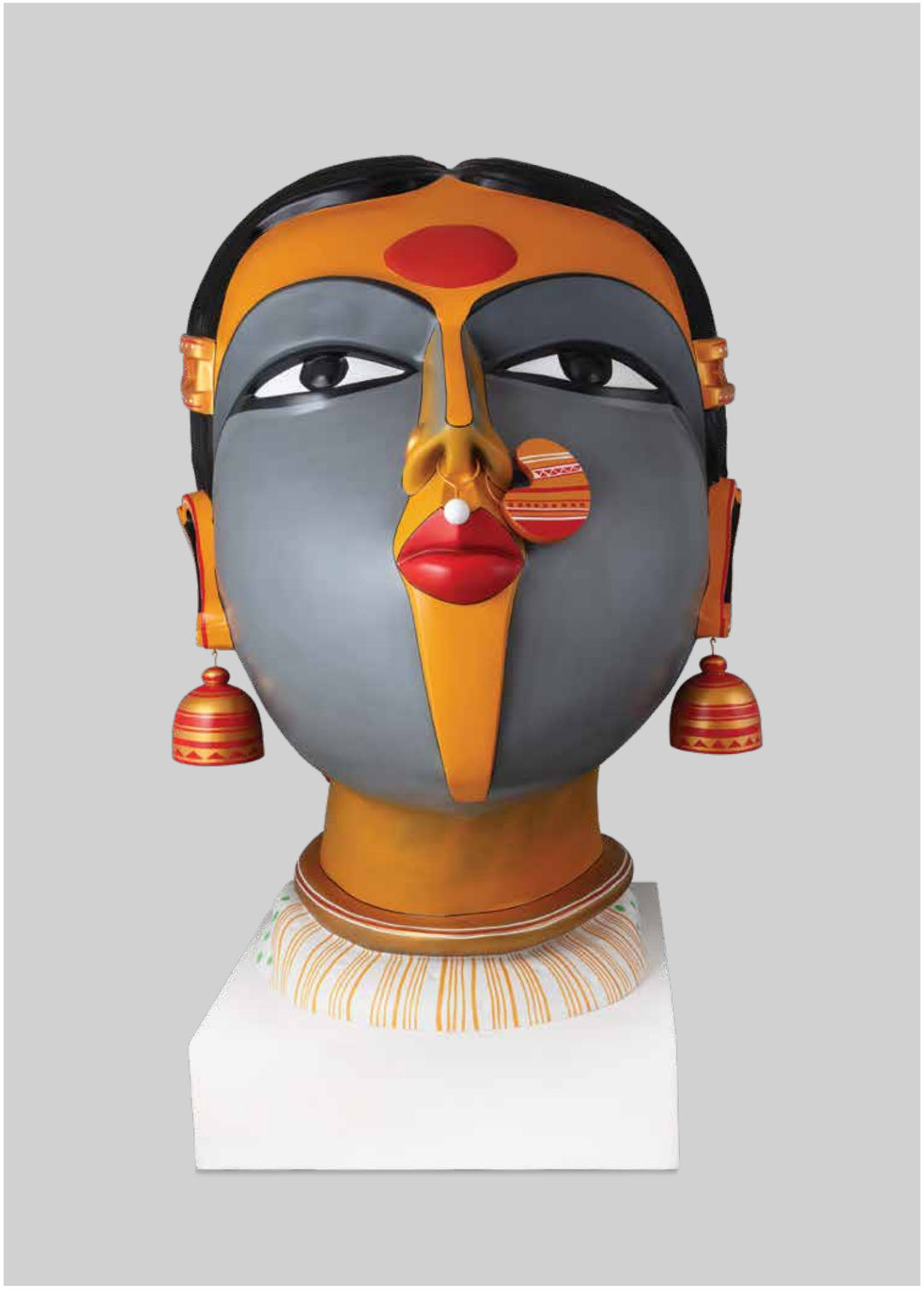






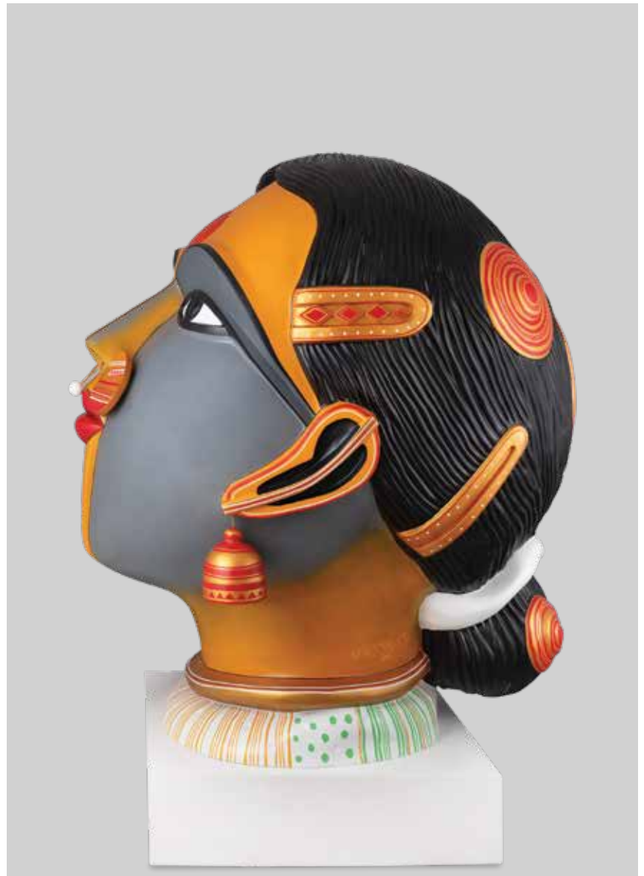


Incorporating elements like hairpins and coiled buns, Vaikuntam merges classical and modern influences with a playful surrealism while maintaining simplicity and beauty. His sculptures defy the pre-fabricated aesthetic of mass media, imparting a dream-like ethereality. His careful sequencing of these works forms sculptural history within the vocabulary of his own artistic vision.



Resinated Fibreglass with Automotive Paint
92" x 71" x 80", Pedestal: 12" x 54" x 48", Overall Height: 102"





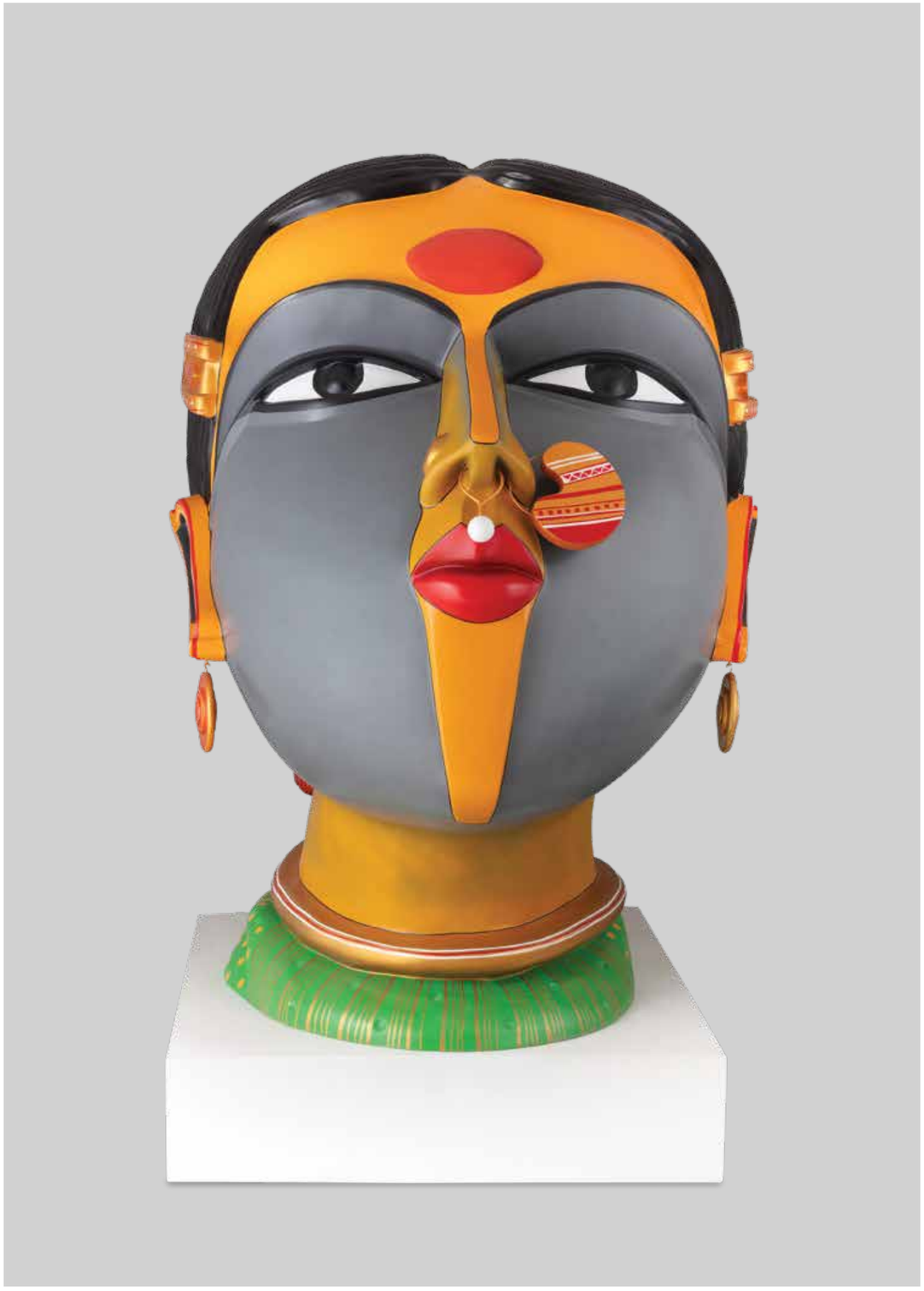




While repetitive feminine imagery could risk monotony, Vaikuntam instead creates an enigmatic, alternative world—a feminine diary filled with cultural narratives.

His work merges public art sensibilities with ancient Indian traditions. In a world where the female body remains a contested space between tradition and modernity, Vaikuntam's sculptures reappropriate femininity as both sacred and sensual. His sculptural heads embody the existence of young Indian women, bridging the past and present.

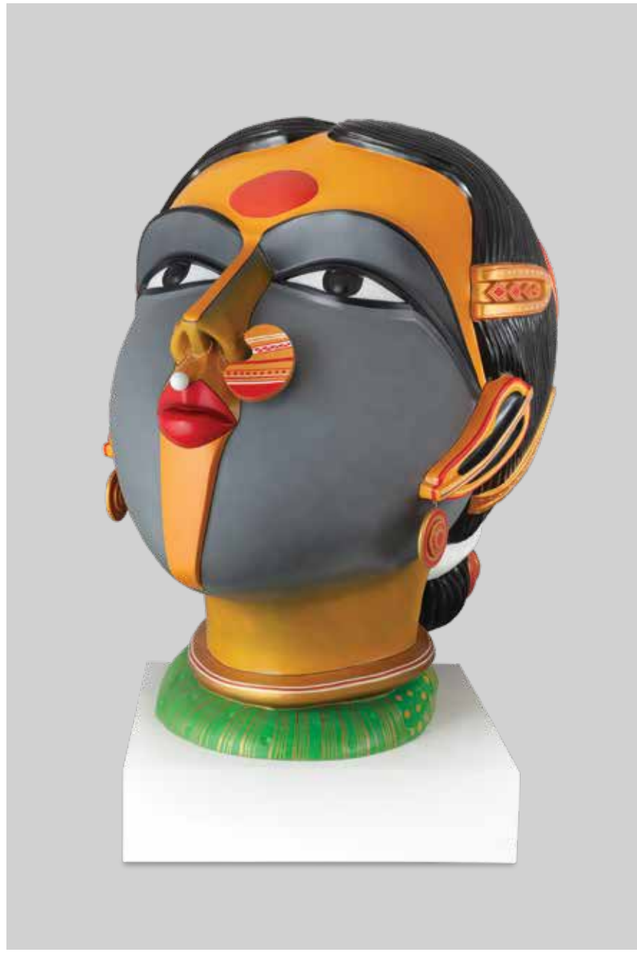
Resinated Fibreglass with Automotive Paint
92" x 71" x 80", Pedestal: 12" x 54" x 48", Overall Height: 102"





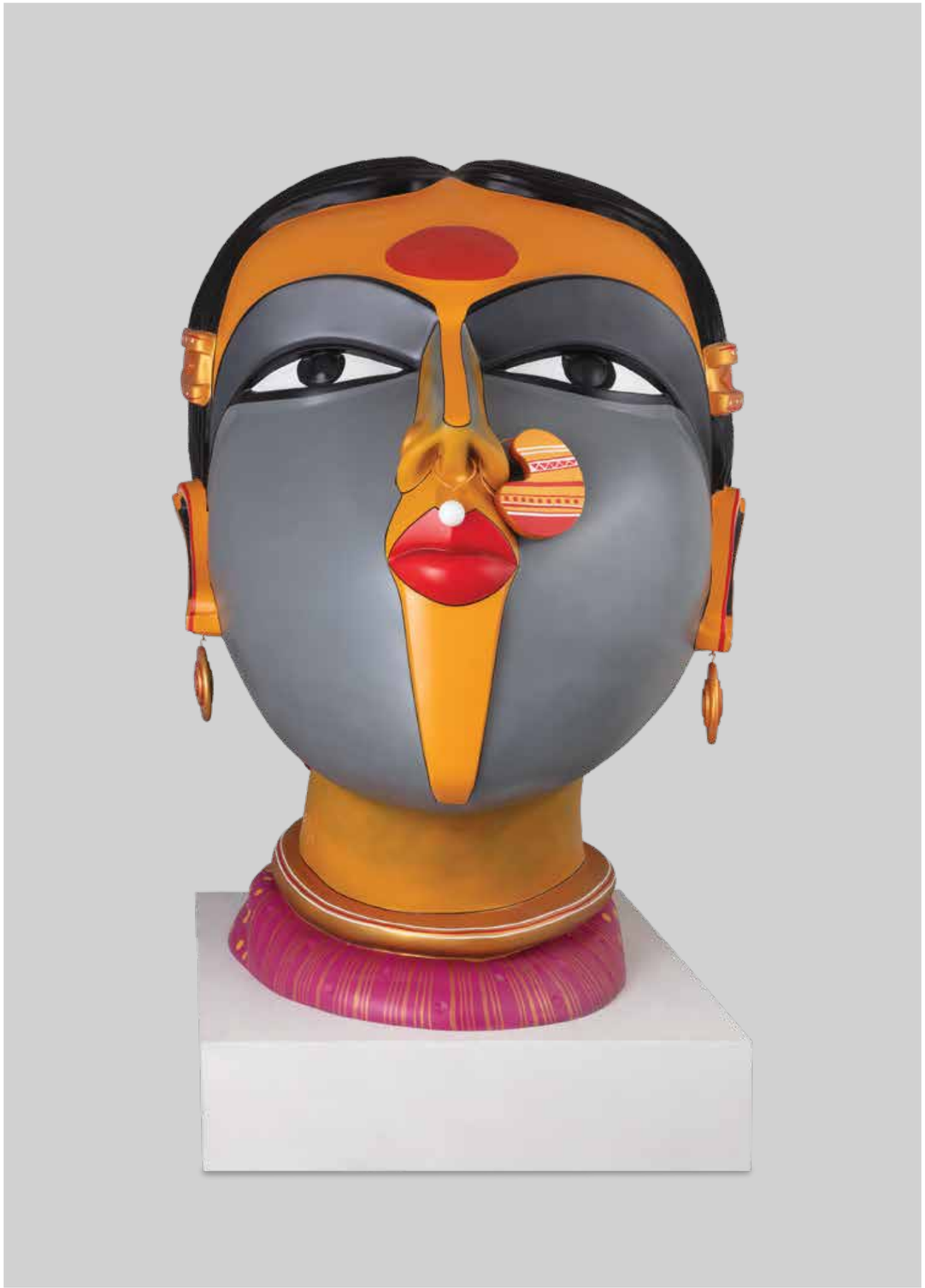






Vaikuntam's fusion of classical and contemporary art lends his sculptures a radiant originality. These heads capture the present moment while echoing the eternal. His work bridges the contemporary with the classical, the fleeting with the infinite, whilst blending the past in archival echoes with modern representation, retaining aesthetic and modelling techniques infused with cubist elements honed over decades.

Resinated Fibreglass with Automotive Paint
92" x 71" x 80", Pedestal: 12" x 54" x 48", Overall Height: 102"







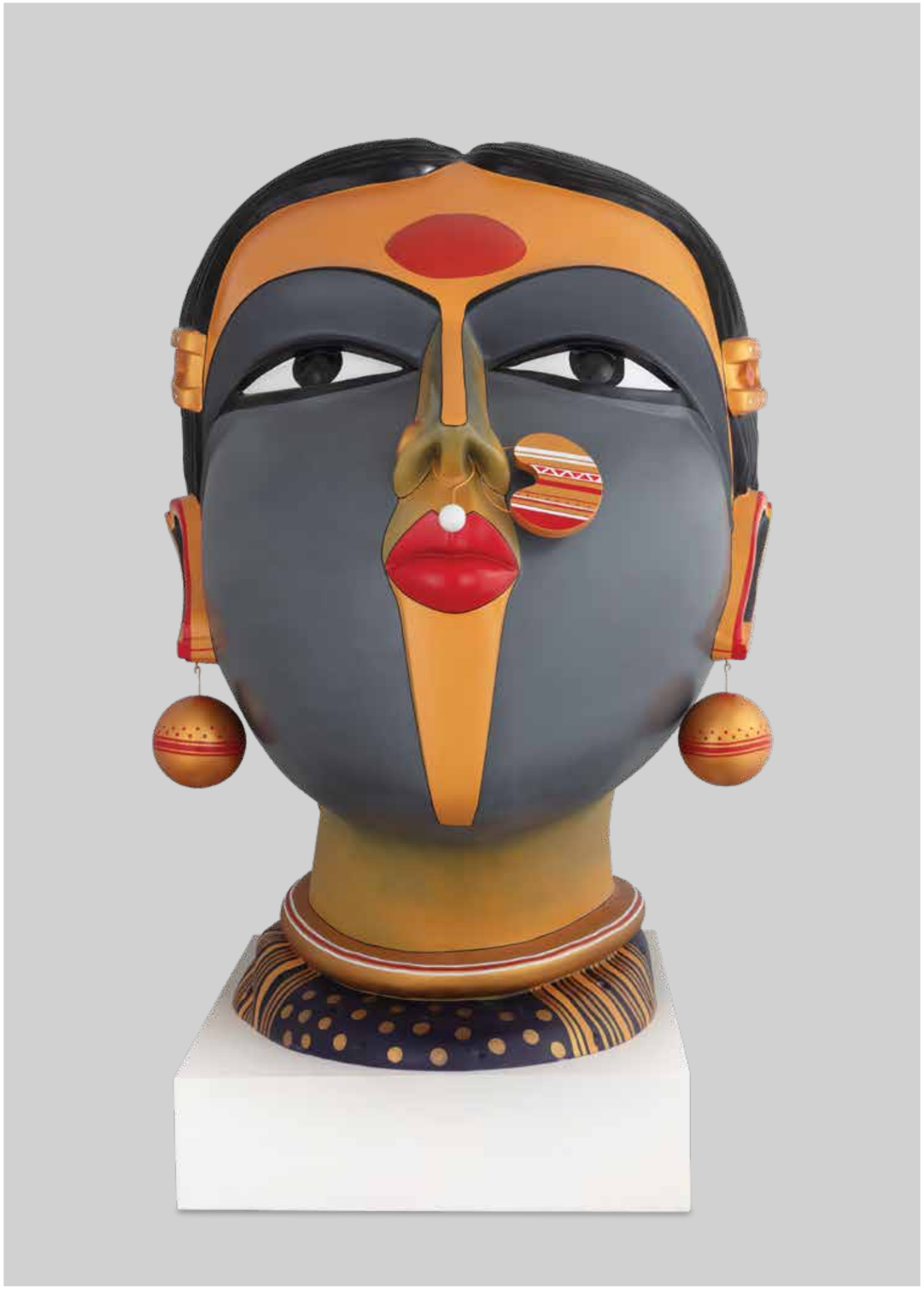




His suite of monumental heads embody a confluence of the contemporary and the traditional, the spiritual and the sacred, while raising seminal questions about human desire and ways of seeing in the practice of worship and everyday living. His exploration of cultural identity involves a dialogue of iconicity, adornment, and artistic commentary. The social commentary that Vaikuntam imparts through his artworks becomes an archival anecdote of a visual ethic, combined with the cultural ethos of his homeland.

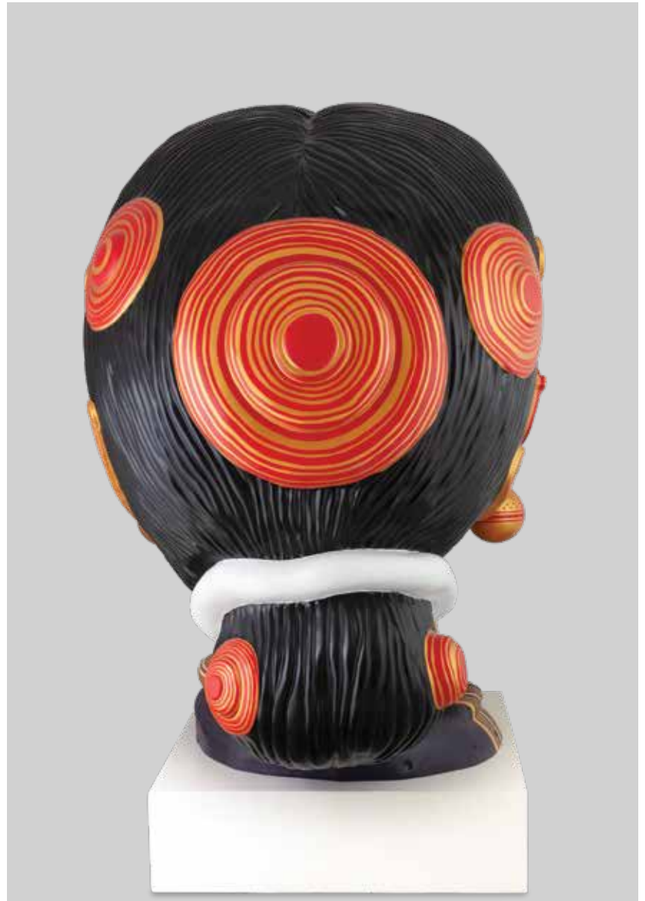
While embracing Western modernity in the execution of large-scale heads, Vaikuntam ensures continuity with ancient Indian traditions. Each sculpture unfolds as a dramatic dialogue between past and present within the lustrous, kohl-filled eyes, as he deftly distills the zeitgeist of the times, portraying the timeless essence of the feminine form.

Resinated Fibreglass with Automotive Paint
92" x 71" x 80", Pedestal: 12" x 54" x 48", Overall Height: 102"











## ABOUT ICIA

Nestled in the heart of Mumbai's art district, Kala Ghoda, the Institute Of Contemporary Indian Art, also known as ICIA Gallery, takes forward the legacy of establishing Indian art in the mindspace of art patrons and enthusiasts. The gallery was set up by Mr Vickram Sethi in the year 2007 with a vision to redefine the orthodox infrastructure not only with regards to the curating and viewing process but also to acquire authentic and prime artworks.

ICIA is one of the largest grassroot galleries in India and has been actively enhancing 'The Exhibition Experience' for the viewer. Over a period of ten years ICIA has exhibited works of revered Modernists and established contemporary artists. The gallery has deftly carved a niche for itself by representing India's art culture with a balanced approach, showcasing the seminal attributes of the masters in tow with the experimental and disruptive vision of contemporary artists from within the country. AstaGuru is a part of ICIA.

ICIA
INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY INDIAN ART

AstaGuru
India's Premium Auction House

