

G O P I K R I S H N A

CARNIVAL
of
RISING
EMOTIONS 

8 September - 23 October 2010

ART MUSINGS

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Title of the show will come here

Gopikrishna works out of Trivandrum. Some might find this reason enough to place the artist at a convenient address called magic realism and leave it at that. For it is out of this same rich address that very many contemporary Malayali artists operate. In their work we often find a critique of the specious Wordsworthian idyll, propagated and flogged without remission by the State government in its long running God's Own Country campaign. Although Gopikrishna does in fact collude with magic realism, his immediate preoccupation is with the always-on-sim standoff between the individual and the civilisation. This anxiety in turns allows greater measures of the symbolic and the surreal to creep into his work as well.

The preceding paragraph would have made it clear to the reader that that *Carnival of Rising Emotions* draws heavily on Freudian thought, with the psychoanalyst's *Civilization* and *Its Discontents* (1929) exercising a particular influence over Gopikrishna's various pictorial narratives.

In his far-reaching *Civilization* and *Its Discontents*, Freud writes, "Life, as we find it, is too hard for us; it brings us too many pains, disappointments and impossible tasks. In order to bear it we cannot dispense with palliative measures. We cannot do without auxillary constructions, as Theodor Fontane tells us. There are perhaps three such measures: powerful deflections, which cause us to make light of our misery; substitutive satisfactions, which diminish it; and intoxicating substances, which make us insensitive to it." 1

On cue and almost in response to this thought by Freud, in an email interaction the artist stated, "I find our present constricting and through my work I try to channel my anxieties about our repressive present and my yearnings for a more uninhibited past.

My mind is a war field where *satvic*, *rajasic* and *tamasic* forces are caught up in an unending war. Nobody wins; nobody quits. In my works these opposing forces and their innumerable manifestations can be pointed out. The contemporary and the archaic are two such forces."

This perspective is played out in each of the three suites – *Great Teachings* (watercolours and oil), *Sankara Bhavanom* (oils

and pencil drawings) and *Untitled* (oils and drawings) – that comprise the show. But it is best amplified by, *Miracle of the Giving Water*, 2009 (from Great Teachings).

Gopikrishna's disenchantment with the parochial present goes back a long way. It has been his constant companion; they have spent yawns together. Consequently the paintings that emerged over the years have been dialogical. Although the artist has never overtly referred to Freud in the first, the second or the third person, making a case for his allegiance to the primary instincts so variously and urgently discussed by the grand daddy of psychoanalysis will hardly qualify as wild conjecture.

But if **Freud** turned to ancient mythology while he was formulating his theories, then as if in an attempt to distance himself from the psychoanalyst, Gopikrishna turned to mythopoeia. In doing so he appears to be suggesting that even mythology has been exhausted and has lost its sheen.

In the artist's case mythopoeia is always attached to a covert mythology and he put it out there succinctly when he titled a recent show *Personal Mythology* (2009). These myths are created to combat a growing disillusionment with the world and its preferred mythologies. Needless to say Gopikrishna's mythologies rely heavily on **intuition**.

According to the artist, "To my mind our link with intuition has worn thin. My paintings are like the breeze; a viewer must try and enjoy them and avoid reading them literally."

The fact that the artist does not crave to be immediately and forcefully contemporary in either his thought or in his work reminds one of Giorgio Agamben's *What Is the Contemporary?* 2, an essay written by. In his essay Giorgio writes, I quote, "Contemporariness inscribes itself in the present by marking it above all as archaic. Only he who perceives the indices and signatures of the archaic in the most modern and recent can be contemporary. "Archaic" means close to the *arkhe*, that is to say, the origin. But the origin is not only situated in a chronological past: it is contemporary with historical becoming and does not cease to operate within it, just as the embryo continues to be active in the tissues of the mature organism, and the child in the psychic life of the adult."

Needless to say, there is something hushed, coded and alchemical in the paintings.

In the *Sankara Bhavanom* series for instance, the title itself contributes to the intrigue. Sankara Bhavanom could be the name of any number of houses in Kerala. Not only is it the title of the series, it also becomes a recurring motif across the five paintings belonging to that same suite. Like a chant it can be found variously on pennants & banners, eye patches, prison walls. Significantly, the drawings to these paintings have been backdated to the year 1943. It comes across as though the name Sankara Bhavanom had meant something 1943 but in its travel across decades, just as it finally snuggled up to the oils of 2010 it decided on being inscrutable.

While discussing this series the Gopikrishna commented, “In this series of five oils I unleashed my mind to follow its own 'heat.'”

It is a peculiar thing to have said. In that the sexual connotations of the noun *heat* are palpable. Although we observed pockets of sexual energy in Gopikrishna's earlier narratives with men frolicking and cavorting, in the *Carnival of Rising Emotions* perhaps only *Hungry Soldiers*, 2010 (from *Untitled*) has sexual undertones.

In response to a question about the predominance of the male figure, with virtually no mention of the feminine the artist said, “I was brought up in the male world of my father and brother. Maleness is only thing I know; it is closest to my heart. Since I know it better than the female psyche, it makes sense to work with something I understand.”

But in lieu of the erotic we have violence, sensual violence to be more precise. Over the centuries, in vocabularies proposed by artists, musicians, theorists, etc etc the erotic and the violent, have long since been understood as analogous. The aggression, much like the sex before it is symbolic of a life of uninhibited and unmediated joy and pain. In a painting such as *Man Reading a Horoscope* (2008) the ruptured fruit-egg is not symbolic of either one or the other, but of both.

Living in the capital of Kerala with his wife and children Gopikrishna is aware that his yearning for complete sovereignty will always remain unrealised; his choices have already been made for him. Be that as it may, through his new exhibition the artist charts a vicarious pattern. So it is not without irony that he emails his intentions vis-à-vis the show, “I allowed myself to be totally free and *Carnival of Rising Emotions* is the result of a travel through freedom.” And as such total freedom is a paradox, because the illusion of this said freedom would also have to be negotiated through certain compulsions.

History of art is teeming with artists exploring the unconscious, which has been dumbed down in perpetuity by the persuasive currents of civilisation. Goya, the symbolists, the surrealists and even the Chapman Brothers owe plenty to Freud. And although Freud continues to be a majestic presence among artists, writers, filmmaker and their ilk, he seems to have fallen off of his pedestal among the hardboiled science heads who appear to find greater solace in the meticulously a posteriori cognitive neuroscience and other such.

In Gopikrishna's highly anthropomorphic paintings where tails are being chased relentlessly or even being pulled into a needle's eye, it is difficult for us to miss the point the painter is driving to. But the questions that beg asking still remain and nag. Is there a way out? Is a more strategic abandonment possible? Is a relay of syntheses even conceivable? Some might say that the answer lies in the unlikely tangled virtual labyrinths of gaming. This seems like a departure from what has been discussed above but this writer proposes it for that very same reason.

Gaming and its corollaries such as role playing, has come under a lot of flak from highflying cultural theorists and psychoanalysts who have probably never so much as touched a gaming console. But without going to a pro-gaming overdrive, it needs to be said that there are things to be observed and gained from gaming.

In gaming lingo there be a something or someone called procedural author. Such an author writes only the skeleton narrative/ rules of an immersive game and allows the programming and the gamer to figure the rest out on the fly.

An aside, this encounter with gaming is not entirely tangential to the context of our artist and the exhibition at hand. Indulge me as I propose Gopikrishna as a kind of procedural author, who provides us with the symbolic nut bolts and allows us carry things further via our imaginations.

Of course there are some who forget that they are acting in a virtual realm and get psychotically and crippling engaged with it. But for the most parts, hopefully, gamers enjoy the immersive virtuality knowing that they are dealing with fiction. But from these games we understand that freedom from strictures is only possible by way of symbolic gestures such as those found in gaming and in *Carnival of Rising Emotions*.

Truth be told, thus far there has been no entirely feasible way out of some our most deep-seated conditioning.

But it isn't all bleak. If you run your bare knuckles over a stuccoed wall, you will graze them for sure. But, you won't graze your hand if you run it over one of the paintings.

All said and done, in conclusion it must be acknowledged that Gopikrishna is darkly humorous; *Sunday Killer*, 2009 (from *Untitled*) pithily portrays the same. He is aware that the road ahead is potholed with impasses.

CARNIVAL OF RISING EMOTIONS

After the completion of my solo show in Delhi in 2009, I thought about taking a little turn from that path. I allowed this profusion or carnival to happen within me and enjoyed it to the total. Though one or two lines of thought may be discerned in these works, they are individual appearances each. The Sunday Killer, the Stagman, or the Soldiers are separate entities speaking separate stories. The aloofness of my presence contributed to the unbridled joy of creation in oblivion. While doing these paintings, I felt that death has answered back. Each stroke given, each face painted, was done to give life to moments otherwise lost in the darkness of time. So these paintings are records of various emotions, weather conditions, anxieties. I mostly prefer earthy colours as my subject always has a link between life and nature; nature as god made it, not a nature man re-made. My characters co-exist, the flesh, the tree and the sky together.



GIANTS FOR SALE
oil on canvas - 60" x 78" - 2010

SUNDAY KILLER
oil on canvas - 58" x 46" - 2009





HUNGRY SOLDIERS
oil on canvas - 60" x 78" - 2010

SHRI GOPINATHJI, FUEL EXPERT
oil on canvas - 59" x 46" - 2009





STAGMAN AND TURTLES
oil on canvas, 42" x 60" - 2009

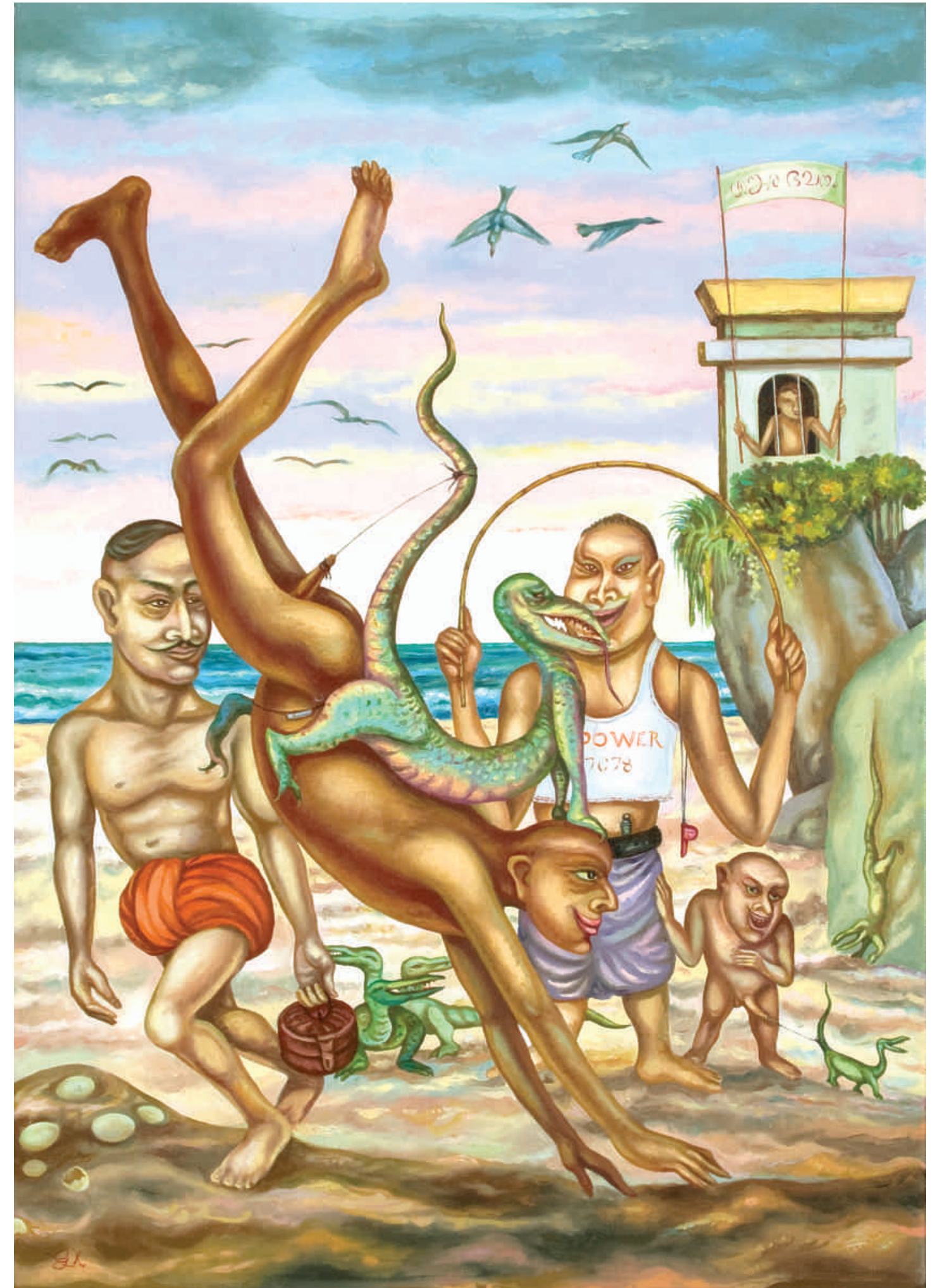
ABDUCTION, MAN ABDUCTING SAVAGE
oil on canvas - 48" x 34" - 2010



SANKARA BHAVANOM

The name Sankara Bhavanom is one of the old ordinary names of Kerala houses. Sankara Bhavanom is a mystery and is a connecting link of the individual scenes of this series. I painted the five small oils with a primitive vigour and enjoyed the experience very much. It was as if I was in my true world. Images which may be viewed as representations of violence creep into my paintings as symbols that are sometimes ungraspable by human knowledge. It is like a natural phenomena, an earthquake, storm or flood which will carry images of torn flesh, mutilated bodies etc. but it also asks the question, - what does this mean?. If this question is asked and meditated upon, there is a chance that one can enter a world beyond the shallow sphere of human knowledge cultivated by schools. The images you see as violent are the same as outpouring of great energy nature outlets. It is only humans who identify and commit violence. Animals do not have that theory. I like to see myself as part of the animal kingdom who fears nothing but the human eye only.

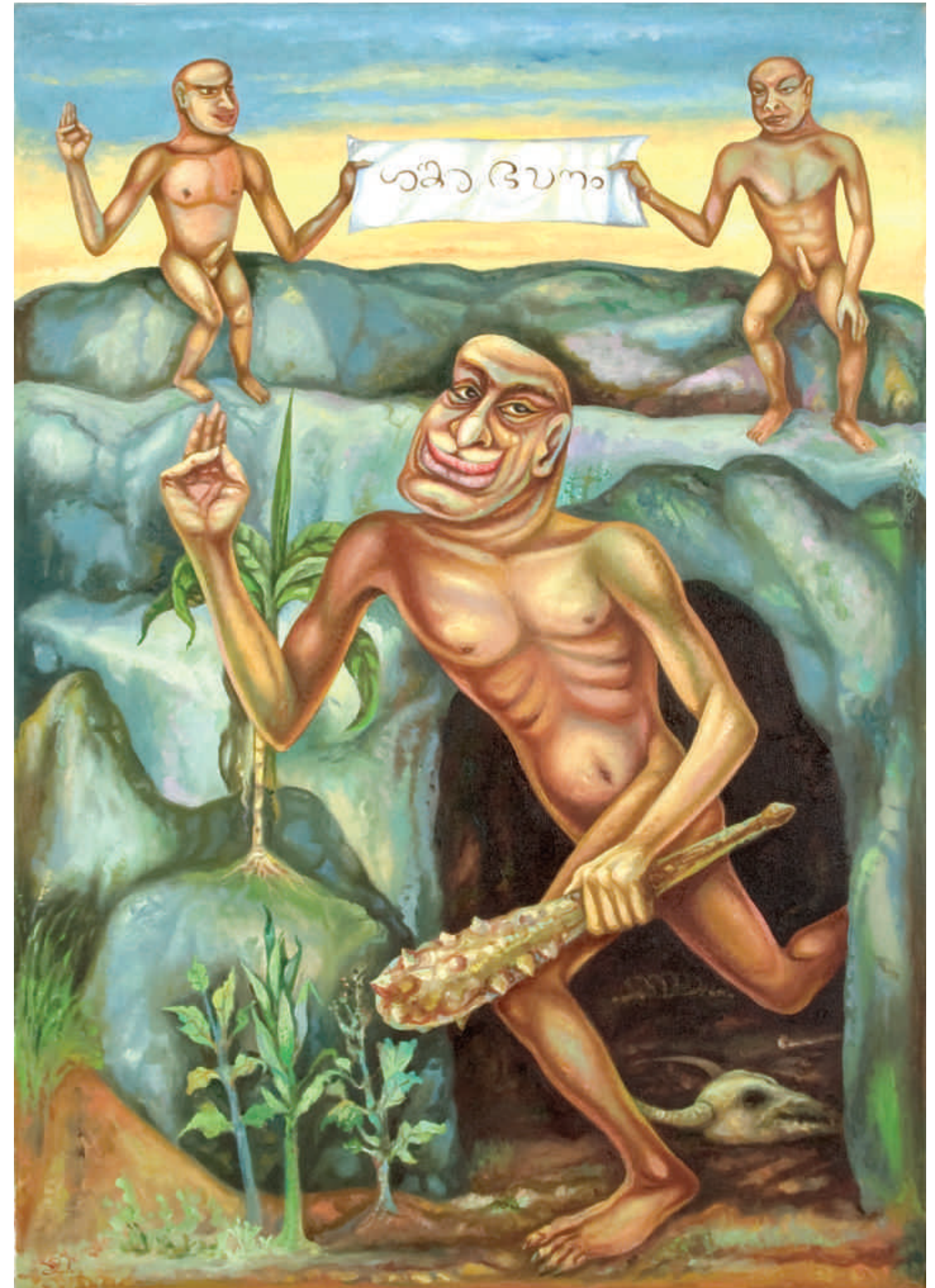
FRIENDLY LIZARDS
oil on canvas - 32" x 23" - 2009



TAILOR
oil on canvas - 32" x 23" - 2009



HUNTER
oil on canvas - 32" x 23" - 2009

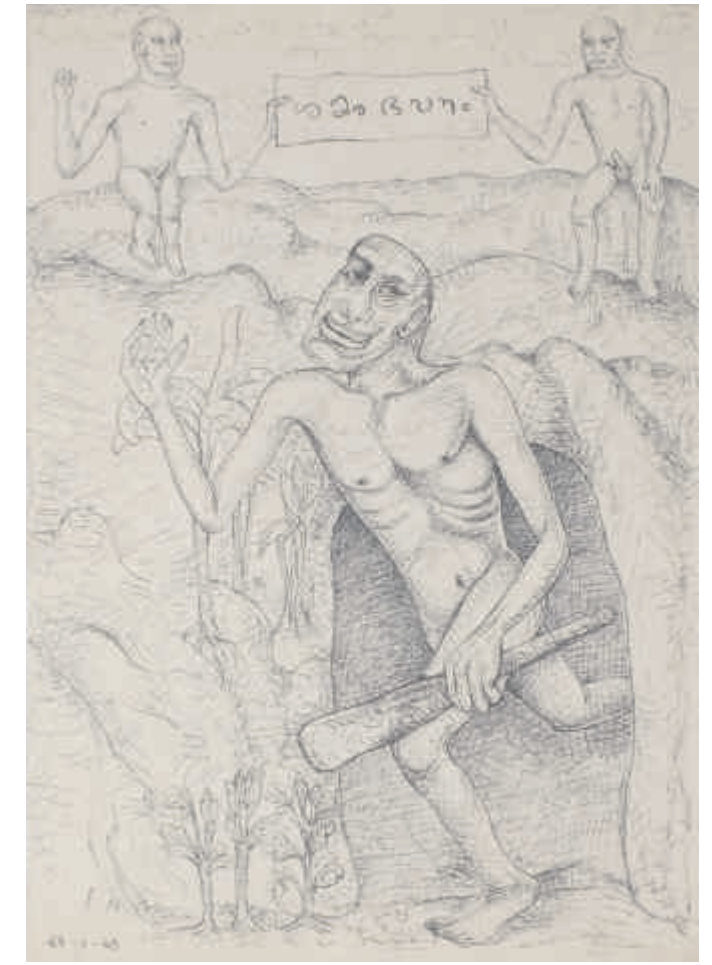
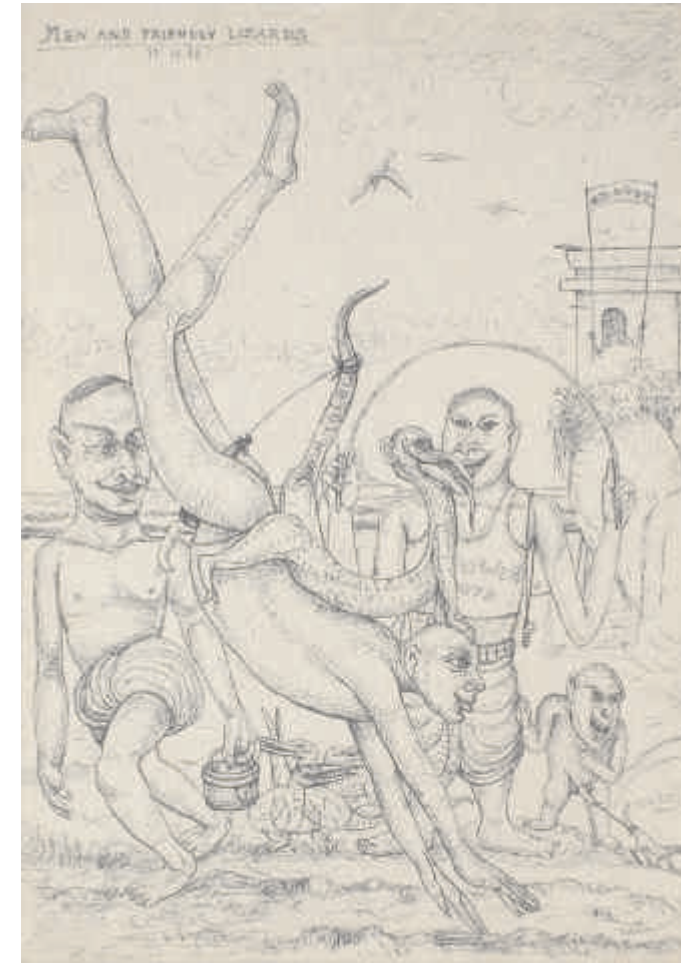
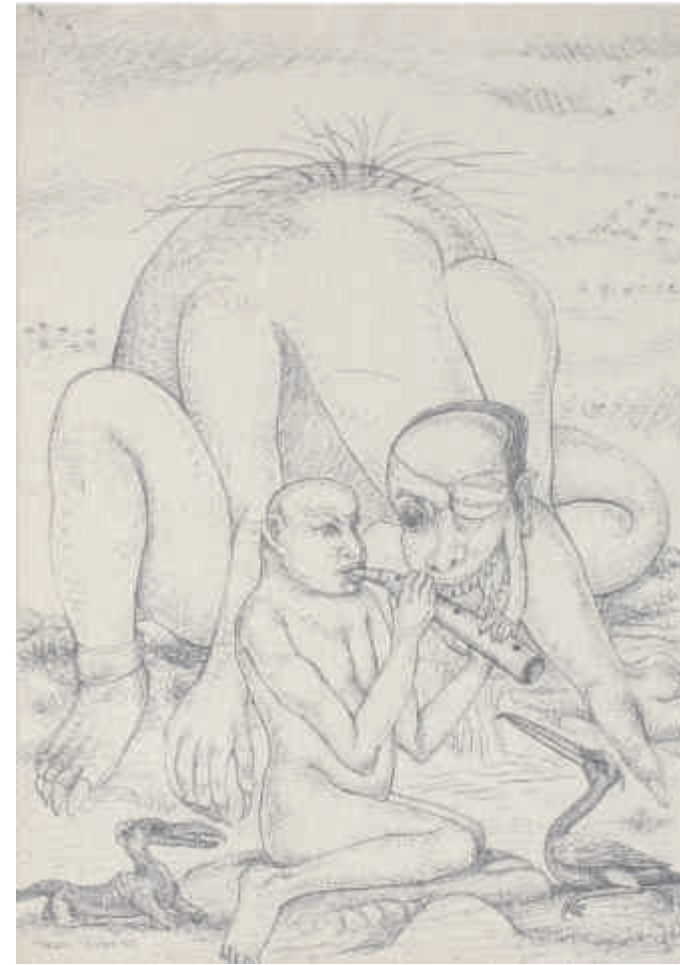


MUSICAL LOVERS
oil on canvas - 32" x 23" - 2009



PRISONERS
oil on canvas - 32" x 23" - 2009





SHANKARA BHAVANOM
Drawings - 16" x 12"

GREAT TEACHINGS

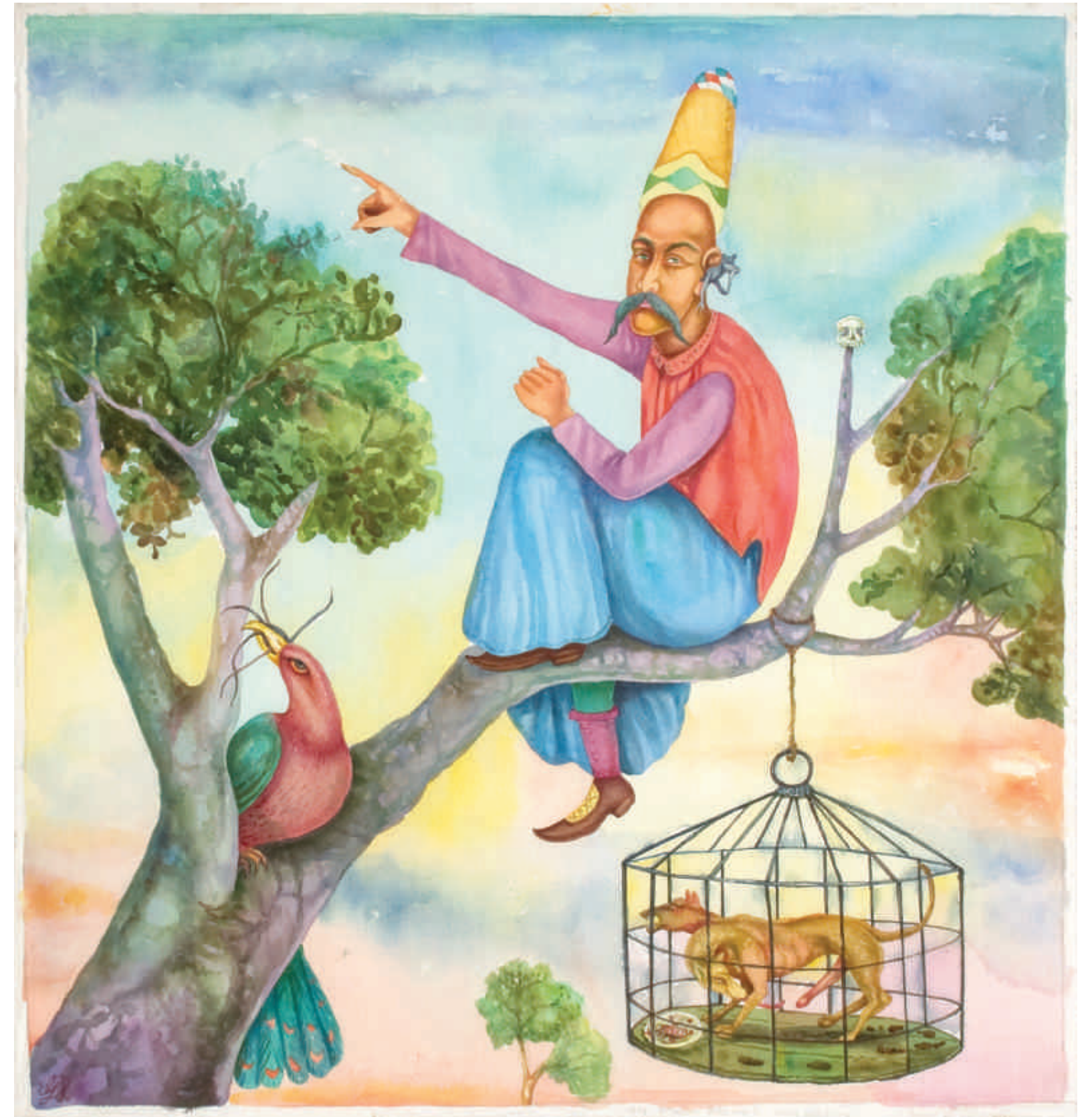
The mystical watercolours represent my true inner journey. In existence, it seems to me that some secrets exist behind the enigma of pain, death and life. These secrets are cyclical, appearing and disappearing again and again. Man's journey is destined to drag through these thorny paths potent with meaning. In my watercolours this travel of the self gets a projection. The oil painting, *The Miracle of the Giving Water*, has an alchemical quality. The two characters represented in confrontation are different in many aspects. In the image of decorated nomad, the incessant fear, eternal defence, and the never-ending beats of the mind are suggested, while the yogi has transcended all these stages, the body already abandoned to nature. The miraculous appearance of a flowering plant growing in separate pots united by the flowing water symbolises the bestowing of truth to the seeker and the ensuing bliss.



RAJA YOGI
watercolor on paper, 23" x 22" - 2009



TYING THE TRAVELLING MAN TO THE TREE OF SOUL
watercolor on paper - 22" x 36" - 2009

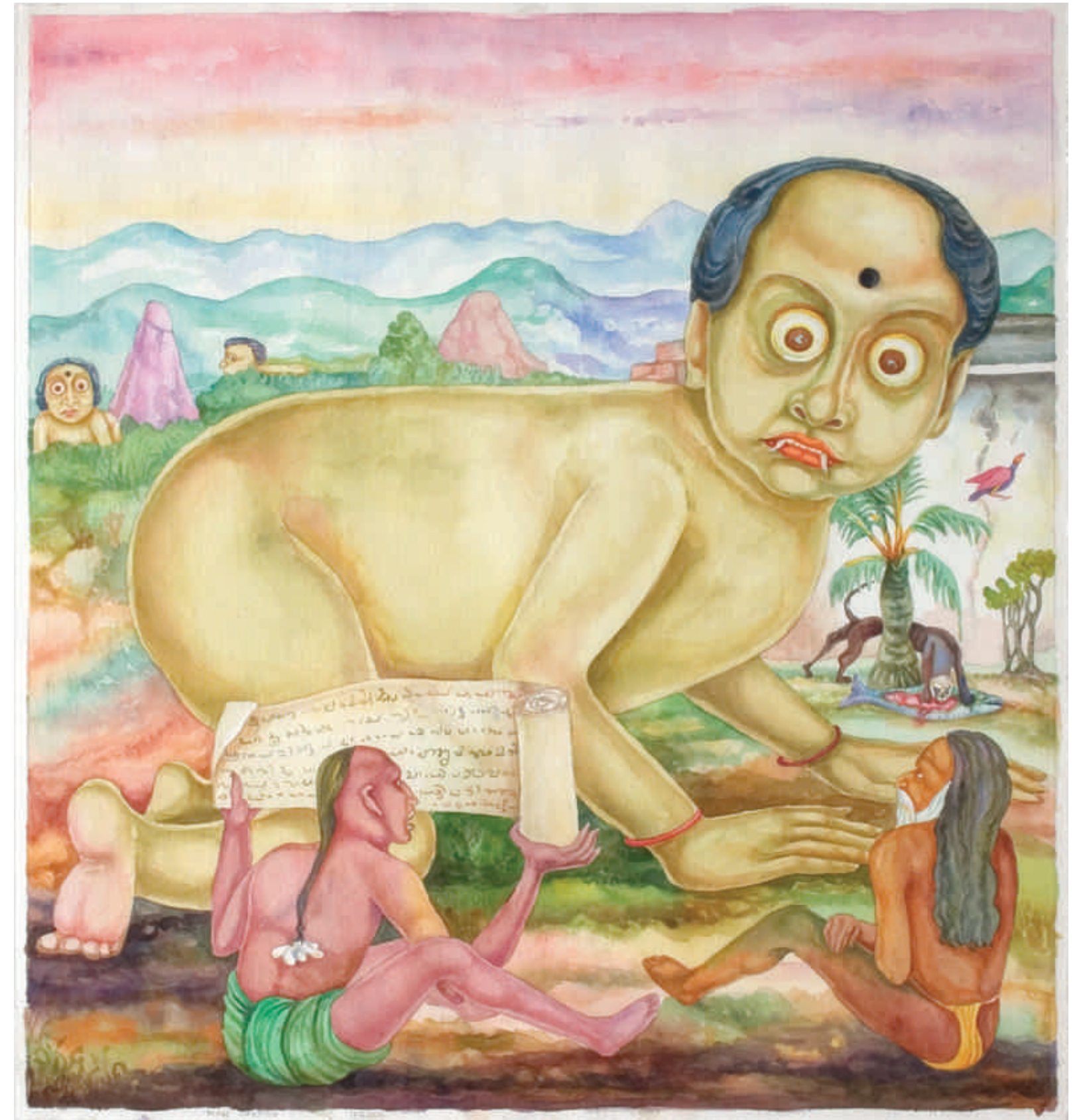


GUIDE

watercolor on paper - 23" x 22" - 2009



HAMSA YOGI
watercolor on paper - 22" x 36" - 2009



MAN READING HOROSCOPE
watercolor on paper - 23" x 22" - 2009



MAN READING HOROSCOPE
watercolor on paper - 22" x 36" - 2009



MIRACLE OF THE GIVING WATER
oil on canvas - 78" x 60" - 2009

GOPIKRISHNA

1965, Trivandrum, India

Art Education

- 1995 M.F.A (painting), College Of Fine Art, Trivandrum, India
1987 B.F.A (painting), College Of Art, New Delhi, India

Solo Exhibitions

- 2009 *Personal Mythology*, Palette Art Gallery, New Delhi, India
2007 *Dream Conservatory*, Art Musings, Mumbai, India
2006 *The Cave In The Metropolis*, Palette Art Gallery, New Delhi, India
2004 *Swan And Other Paintings*, Inaugural Show, Kashi Art Gallery, Mattanchery, Kerala, India
2002 *Turtle Hatchery*, Kashi Art Cafe, Cochin, Kerala, India
2001 *Secret Energy*, Kashi Art Cafe, Cochin, Kerala, India
2000 *Gates To Decivilization*, Durbar Hall, Kerala, India
1996 *Beyond The Known*, Museum Gallery, Trivandrum, India
1989 College Of Fine Arts Gallery, Trivandrum, India

Group Exhibitions

- 2008 Art Singapore, with Art Musings, Singapore
2007 *Ten Light Years*, Kashi Art Gallery, Kerala, India
2005 *Double Enders*, Travelling Exhibition Curated By Bose Krishnamachari, India
2002 Exhibition Of Indian Contemporary Art, Curated By Justin Marx, Gallery Lombadi, Texas, U.S.A
2001 Bose Pacia Modern Prize For Contemporary Art Gallery, New York, U.S.A
2000 *Exile & Longing*, Lakeeren Contemporary Art Gallery, Mumbai, India
1993 School's Gallery, Amsterdam, Netherlands

Awards

- 2002 Award For Drawing, All India Fine Arts Society, New Delhi, India
2001 Runner Up, Bose Pacia Modern Prize For Contemporary Art, New York, U.S.A
2000 State Award For Painting, Kerala Lalit Kala Akademi, India



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