

# ANJOLIE ELA MENON



ART MUSINGS

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26 November - 31 December 2015

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## SABARIMALA YATRA

*Oil on masonite board, 48 x 24 inches, 2015*

Here Menon features a young pilgrim getting ready to embark on the long, relentless, journey to Sabarimala. The protagonist is seen wearing the prescribed black clothes with a belt. The innocent young boy, eager to realize the mysteries that lie ahead of him has come to seek the blessings of his guru. The God, Ayyappan, who was the result of a divine union between Vishnu and Shiva having killed the powerful demoness, Mahishi was worshiped in the hill temple of Sabarimala. It has become a pilgrimage center that attracts thousands of men of all ages but is banned for fecund women!





## LANDSCAPE

Oil on masonite board, 48 x 36 inches, 2015

This is reminiscent of her Khattia series. The bench sits in the middle of verdant rice fields. Someone has just departed leaving the crows to investigate. There is much more happening beyond the confines of the frame as the crow tells of tales that took place here a while ago. The kite flying above the horizon entices the viewer to let his spirit soar like a bird on flight, while the hills that lie far away, beckon, full of delightful promise! Menon's natural affinity with colour is evident in this painting as she finds herself drawn to the endless canvas, the vast panorama of rural India lying still beneath an unrelenting sun.



NIZAMMUDIN BASTI

*Oil on masonite board, 48 x 24 inches, 2014*

The sheer vibrancy of this image draws from the atmosphere of the Nizamuddin Basti where the artist's studio is located. She has been inspired by the lives of the people around her. They have a great reverence for her and have often shared their problems and sought her motherly advice. This painting is a tribute to them. The mother with her son and the goats are contained in their own world. The artist brilliantly depicts the comfort and warmth of the simple people living their lives in this humble place. This painting of the village within the metropolis is both intriguing and thought provoking.



## BEHIND THE ARRAS

*Oil on masonite board, 36 x 24 inches, 2014*

In this poetic explosion, Menon displays her wonderful ingenuity in creating new metaphors. Enigmatic, behind the slow parting of two curtains, she epitomizes the latent sexuality of the seemingly innocent protagonist. The sense of 'waiting' is all pervasive, redolent of hidden passions and the promise of fecundity. Half hidden from the world, a sense of mystery prevails.





## YASHODA

Oil on masonite board, 48 x 24 inches, 2015

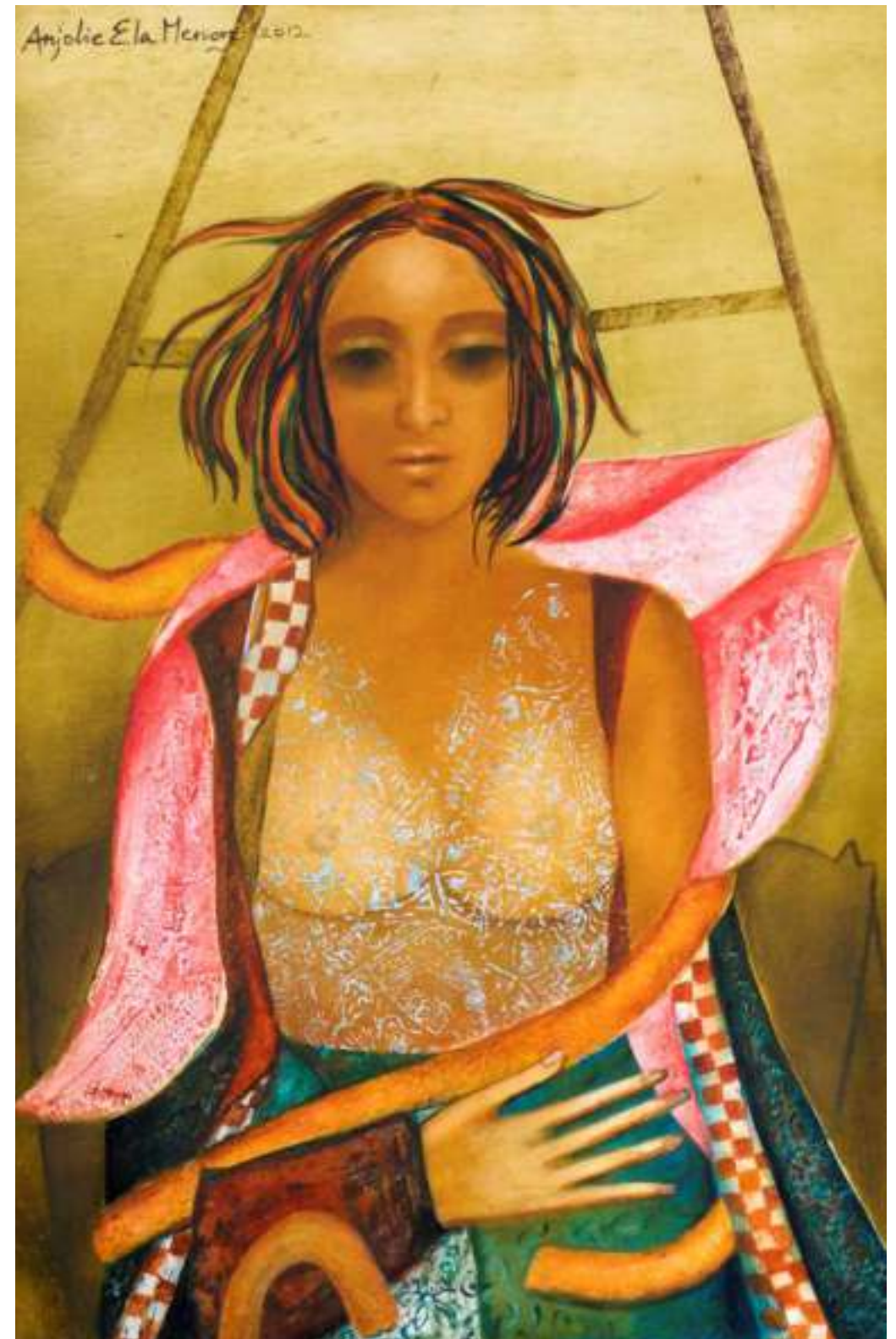
In this painting of Yashoda and child Krishna the prankster, the baby Ladoo Gopal holds on to his ball of butter while Yashoda looks on adoringly. It is apparent here that the artist thinks in color, using warm ochre in the background which stands in contrast to Krishna's blue body adorned with jewels and a peacock feather. Menon's unique interpretation of this narrative shows the loving bond between Yashoda and the very celebrated but naughty child. In a flash the artist takes the viewer to Vrindavan where the child Krishna was nurtured by his loving foster mother Yashoda. Menon achieves a wonderful tenderness, lying at the heart of the whole Krishna cult which is so celebrated throughout India.



## TARA

Oil on masonite board, 36 x 24 inches, 2013

The artist reveals a brilliance of technique in her version of Tara who uses her Shakti to save Shiva. The legend goes that in order to salvage the world from destruction Shiva drank the poison, created by the churning of the ocean between Devas and Asuras. Durga, took the form of the divine mother Tara to rescue Lord Shiva. He became the baby in her lap. She suckled him and the milk from her breast acted as an antidote. Menon's divine Tara with generous breasts is hypnotic with hints of sublimity. One hand on her belly suggests new birth, new beginnings. There is a clear mix of the magical and surreal, an old, legend re-imagined in a contemporary context.





## NAMBOODRI

Oil on masonite board, 36 x 24 inches, 2015

The priests from the artist's family temple in Guruvayoor have inspired many of Menon's paintings. Parallels with Amrita Shergil's work on similar subjects have been referred to by critics, together with the fact that it was Menon's first foray into Indian subject matter after her earlier European phase. Menon portrays a particular innocence on the face of the young acolyte, unspoilt and untouched by the world. The magnificent hues the artist uses in this painting bring alive the character of the young Brahmin chela who has a long journey ahead of him, yet to grasp and learn the Vedic scriptures.



THE FALLING GIRL

Oil on masonite board, 48 x 36 inches, 2015



Dream and reality converge in this surreal painting where multiple figures fly, freefall, dive and float unfettered, detached from earthly bonds or binding chords.



## MAYA

Oil on masonite board, 36 x 24 inches, 2015

Menon employs myth and reality in her painting of Maya and the baby Gautama, rendered in an unusual style inspired by Buddhist Thangka. Haunting and emotive, the painting evokes the magical legend of Maya who conceived Gautama in very unusual circumstances. Maya dreamt that she got impregnated when a white elephant, entered her womb through her right side. Although she died a week after child birth, she reappeared in the Buddha's life, guiding him through his trials and tribulations. These legends, supported by complex imagery are gleaned from Menon's highly unique imagination. The sheer vibrancy of the beautiful embellishment in this painting makes it a visually challenging piece of art with the contemporary use of ancient iconography cleverly transmuted.





## MARIAM

Oil on masonite board, 36 x 24 inches, 2015

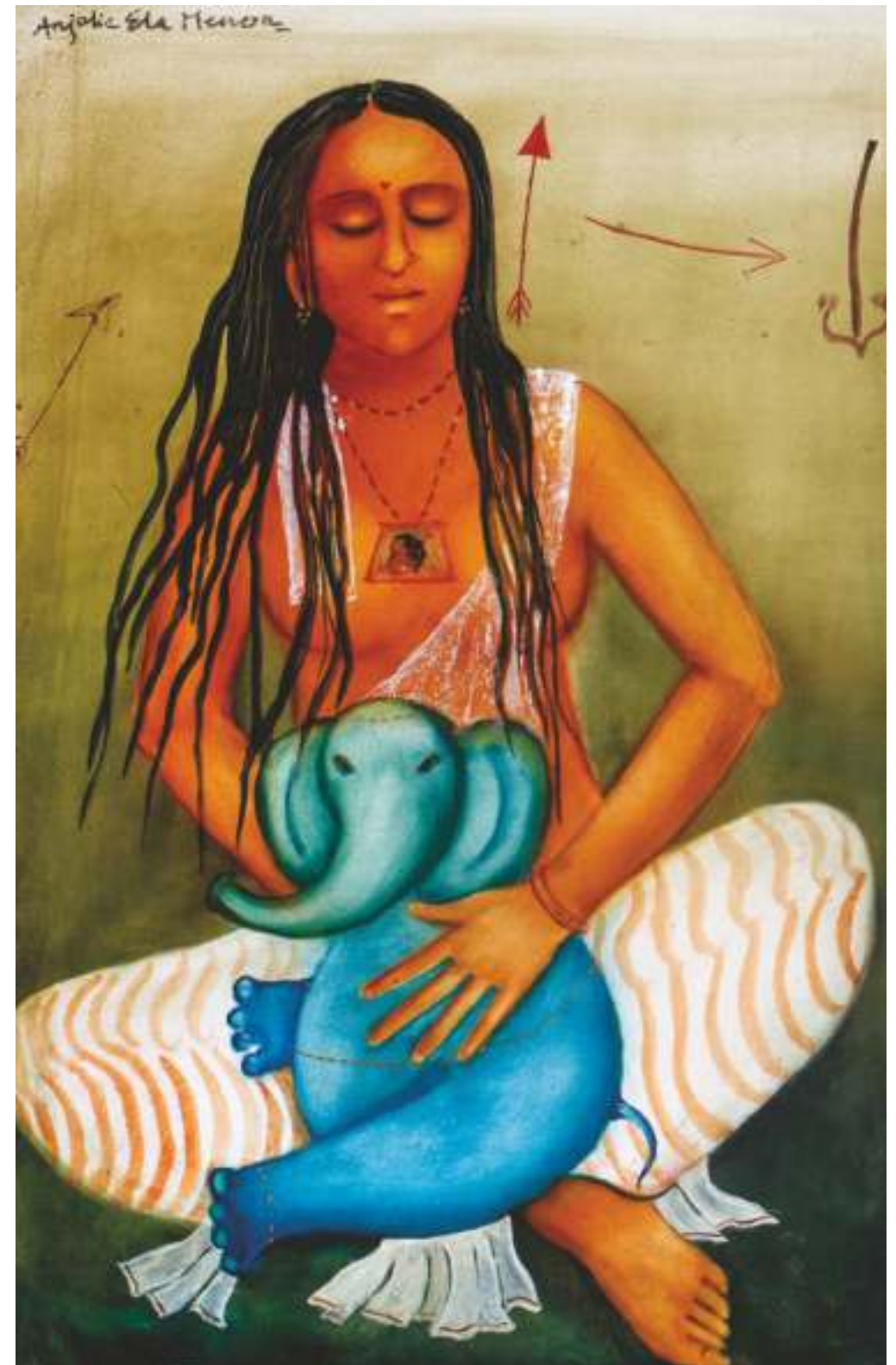
Menon's Mariam and Christ are reminiscent of the religious icons that adorn Orthodox Christian churches. Whether drawn from early Christian art or from an essentially modern visual matrix the artist instills her paintings with a glowing aura. Mariam's gently shut eyelids reflect the compassion and love she feels for her son the baby Jesus. Menon's child Christ exudes an intense internal energy while retaining his innocence. The halos behind their heads emphasise the divine spirit of both mother and child. This haunting figurative painting is one that lingers in the mind's eye, evoking the divinity of Mother Mary as much as that of the holy child.



## PARVATI

Oil on masonite board, 36 x 24 inches, 2015

Menon's Parvati combines the anguish of her terrible loss and the joy of beholding the baby Ganesha. Her wet tresses transport the viewer to the dreadful moment when Parvati stepped out of her bath to find her baby's head severed by her husband Shiva. The arrows and the sword in the painting signify violence. Although she clings to Ganesha her new child, the memory of her dead infant lingers on. This is ingeniously evoked by the artist through the locket worn by Parvati containing an image of a child pierced with arrows. Menon takes the viewer beyond the physical presence of Parvati, entering her being and conveying her anguish. This work is filled with power and quiet reflection, where grief and joy co-exist in a visual matrix which is compelling.



## VRINDAVAN - I

Oil on masonite board, 72 x 24 inches, 2015

Recently on a visit to Vrindavan Menon found much grist for a new series of paintings. In this work an austere mendicant with the traditional "naamam" on his forehead is seen on the ghats of the river. In his hands he holds a lota and long bamboo staff all set to make his sacred journey. The folds of his white shawl have been impeccably painted, offset by the ubiquitous saffron cloth bearing the words Radhe Radhe over and over again, like a litany. The spirituality that emanates from his face is obtained when all worldly desires have been abandoned and utter peace prevails!





VRINDAVAN - II

Oil on masonite board, 72 x 24 inches, 2015

This work from the new Vrindavan series depicts a young woman on the verge of becoming a Sadhvi, drawn to the holy river with thousands like her. The spiritual path chosen by this young maiden raises many questions. Where did she come from and where is she bound? Alone and fragile, what made her give up the world to follow this divine path? Her body, wrapped in thread-bare robes, ceases to be of any consequence to the protagonist. The beginnings of a serenity appear on her face as she embarks on a rigorous path of sacrifice and the eternal quest for divinity.

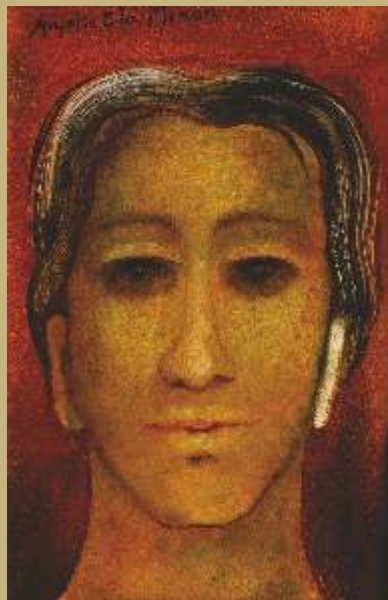


UPANAYANAM

Oil on masonite (triptych), 96 x 96 inches, 2014



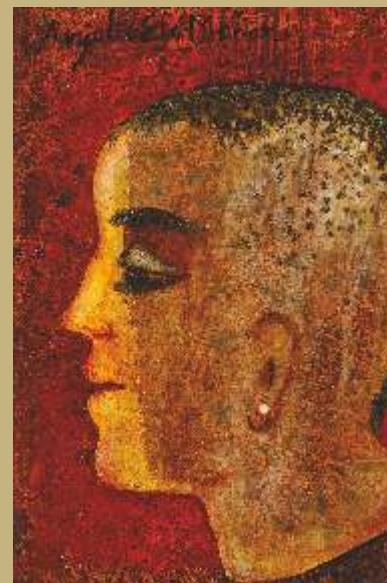




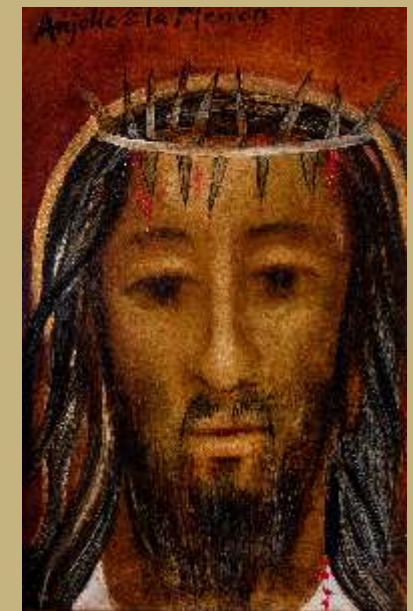
VIR  
Oil on masonite board, 12 x 8 inches, 2014



SASRIKA  
Oil on masonite board, 12 x 8 inches, 2015



PRITHVI  
Oil on masonite board, 10 x 7 inches, 2015



CHRIST  
Oil on masonite board, 12 x 8 inches, 2015





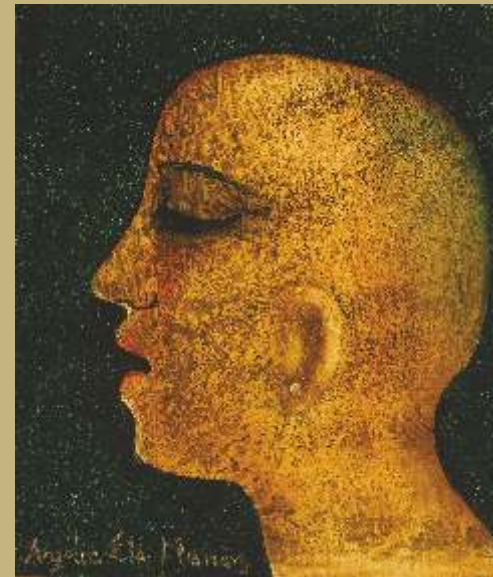
AVANTI  
Oil on masonite board, 11.5 x 7.5 inches, 2011



MADHAVI  
Oil on masonite board, 12 x 9 inches, 2013



INDEERA  
Oil on masonite board, 8 x 8 inches, 2014



ACOLYTE  
Oil on masonite board, 12 x 10 inches, 2015



Anjolie Ela Menon (1940, West Bengal) is among India's leading contemporary artists, and has created a name for herself in India and internationally. Educated in Lovedale and with an Honours degree in English Literature from Delhi University, Menon went on to study art at the JJ School of Art, followed by Post graduate studies in Fresco at the Ecole Des Beaux Arts in Paris.

In Europe it was the Christian, Romanesque, church imagery and the brilliance of a Byzantine palette that caught her imagination and continues to impact her work. Few contemporary Indian artists have created a body of work of such beauty and depth as Anjolie Ela Menon. Her paintings reveal an extraordinary sensibility. Sensuality and beauty are still important for Menon in an art milieu that tends to have abandoned aesthetics. Besides weaving legendary narratives she is in her element when she combines myth with reality.

Anjolie returns to Mumbai after a gap of 9 years with this solo exhibition at Art Musings featuring recent works. In this series, through the mastery of her technique, she creates images that come alive but continue to exist in an existential time warp. Menon's paintings capture all the nuances and magic of motherhood in the ongoing series Divine Mothers. She takes the viewer on a visual journey drawing from mythology -Yashoda and Krishna, Mariam and the infant Jesus, Parvati and Ganesh and Maya and the baby Gautama. However the divine women are often modeled after the women near her studio in Nizamuddin Basti, lovingly nurturing their young. What emerges in these paintings is the close bond between mother and child. In this collection Menon's continuing interest in the phenomenon of sacrifice and pilgrimage is once again evident. Menon's protagonists are mythological figures as well as the ordinary people whom she portrays in her unique style, with great sensitivity. Her paintings, through their texture and stunning coloration, convey the wonder of breathtaking transmutations. Menon's work is well known for the translucent textures which she creates by using thin glazes on Masonite. Beneath the overlaying of an unmistakable patina her invisible brushstrokes glimmer with a rare radiance.

Menon has been awarded the Padmashree by the Government of India and the Chevalier des Arts et des lettres by the French Government. The Delhi Government conferred the Lifetime Achievement Award on Anjolie Ela Menon, as one of the foremost Indian artists of her generation. Menon is also a social activist who runs an NGO for the education of needy students. Menon is currently Chairperson Acquisitions at the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi.

Her paintings hang in major museum and private collections globally. She has held over 60 solo exhibitions including retrospectives at the Jehangir Art Gallery, Lalit Kala Akademi and National Gallery of Modern Art, Mumbai 2002, and represented India at the Algiers Biennale, the Sao Paulo Biennale and three Triennales in New Delhi. Recent exhibitions include Indian Contemporary Art, March 2014 in Hong Kong and Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi, March 2015. Following several murals in public spaces, her latest large work now adorns the T3 Airport in Delhi. The Asian Art Museum San Francisco held a solo show and accessioned her seminal work titled Yatra. Three books, a portfolio by Lalit Kala Akademi and several films have been made on her. The artist lives and works in New Delhi.

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## ART MUSINGS

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Founded in 1999, Art Musings was one of the first galleries in South Mumbai's vibrant Colaba district. The gallery has been extremely responsive to the emergent vocabularies shaping Indian art and has played a key role in nurturing a spectrum of artistic practices.

Over the years they have offset exhibitions by Indian modernists such as SH Raza, MF Husain, FN Souza, Sakti Burman, Anjolie Ela Menon, Ram Kumar and KG Subramanyan with shows by contemporary artists like Baiju Parthan, Paresh Maity, Raghava KK, Nalini Malani, Smriti Dixit, Jayasri Burman, Gopikrishna, Maya Burman and Nilofer Suleman.

Solo exhibitions including SH Raza's *Aarambh @ 93*, (2015) & *Vistaar* (2012), Paresh Maity's *Symphony of Silence* (2013) & *Montage: Moments / Memories*, (2009), Jayasri Burman's *Lila* (2014) & *Fables & Folklore*, (2010), Nalini Malani's *Womantime* (2013), Raghava KK's *Ridiculous Copycats*, (2015), *That's All Folks* (2013), *Exquisite Cadaver* (2011) & *Brooklyn Bound R Train* (2010), Smriti Dixit's *Memory of Red*, (2015) & *Feasting & Fasting* (2012), and Baiju Parthan's *Source Code* (2006) have been some of their landmark exhibitions.

To reiterate their commitment to the development of the Indian art scene, their publishing initiative, Afterimage, has published a series of high-quality art-historical monographs including Maite Delteil – *Enchanted* (2013), SH Raza – *Vistaar* (2012) and Baiju Parthan– *A User's Manual* (2006). It is our endeavour to take the works of these artists, and others, to a collector base that is spread across Asia, Europe and North America.