

MA Y A N A K A N O D I A



Distinguished Company

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Pictorial Dialogues by Nayanaa Kanodia

Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai & Art Alive Gallery, New Delhi

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Text by Ranjit Hoskote

Art
GALLERY

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Nayanaa collects the impressions and experiences of art-works she finds attractive and compelling; she makes these art-works her own, through a process of referencing, parody and affectionate assimilation that results in a series of quirky tableaux such as 'Distinguished Company'.

Nayanaa Kanodia approaches the history of art in a spirit of playful homage. Her chosen instruments are an attentive irreverence that is never destructive, a gift for understated comedy, and a conviction that art and life can interweave in the most remarkable ways. Nayanaa does not regard art as a universe separate and remote from the concerns of ordinary life. Nor does she view artists, even the masters of the grand concourse of 19th- and 20th-century art history, as demigods whose feet never touch the earth. On the contrary, she treats them as immediate presences that enter into the textures of normal life: their motifs migrate to household objects, to linen and furniture; their mannerisms light up a living room or bedroom; their hallmark images infiltrate the routines and solid familiarities of the everyday.

In Nayanaa's paintings, waking life and the life of dream flow together. Circumstance and fantasy coexist in these frames, allowing the recording self a degree of latitude in the matter of representing its interests. As others might collect objects, Nayanaa collects the impressions and experiences of art-works she finds attractive and compelling; she makes these art-works her own, through a process of referencing, parody and affectionate assimilation that results in a series of quirky tableaux such as 'Distinguished Company'.

In these recent paintings, the artist engages with iconic images from the oeuvres of Picasso, Matisse, K G Subramanyan, Modigliani, F N Souza, Jehangir Sabavala, Frida Kahlo, M F Husain, Jogen Chowdhury, and others: her pictorial dialogues with these masters are calibrated in various registers, being by turns high-spirited, wry, votive and witty.

Nayanaa's paintings originate in an unalloyed pleasure, a viewerly enjoyment of visual surface, narrative depth, and the games that artists play with their audiences.

A window opens to reveal a seascape by Sabavala; a woman who might easily belong to the Company Period offers us Ara flowers; a troika of bodybuilders flex their muscles against a Rothko backdrop. A woman shows off her toned body against a Subramanyan painting, with its resonances of the bohemian life of Weimar Berlin; a couple has wrapped themselves in Raza images; a group of proud owners sit around a table with stiff formality, acutely aware of their good taste and market sense, utterly possessed by the paintings they own.

Unusually for a contemporary artist, Nayanaa's paintings originate in an unalloyed pleasure, a viewerly enjoyment of visual surface, narrative depth, and the games that artists play with their audiences. 'Distinguished Company' marks a long-distance apprenticeship, retracing the impulses that have excited her over the years: van Gogh's brushy, blazing yellows and greens; Dali's unsettling dreamscapes; Raja Ravi Varma's comforting deities, palpably alive and emanating grace in a pastoral landscape; and Bhupen Khakhar's public theatre of secrecies. Khakhar and 'Le Douanier' Rousseau have been among Nayanaa's major sources of inspiration through the years, for their inventive figuration as much as for their bold, fresh and seemingly untutored use of forms and resources conventionally thought to be beneath the notice of the fine arts.

In the same vein, I would draw attention to the manner in which Nayanaa revisits the artistic possibilities first explored by once famous but now virtually forgotten painters like Vajubhai Bhagat, who fell into the gap between British-style academicism and the Progressive revolt in mid-20th-century Bombay. These painters attempted to retrieve

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miniature and popular idioms as vehicles for contemporary metropolitan experience; and while it is all too easy to dismiss their results as kitsch, they deserve a more sensitive reading, as efforts towards reconciling inherited forms of representation with explosively novel subjects and the experience of a rapidly changing world.

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Indeed, despite appearances to the contrary, Nayanaa's art is sustained by a certain seriousness of purpose. If humour forms one pole of her project, research forms the other: while the paintings that comprise 'Distinguished Company' embody the visible outcome of her engagement, there is also an invisible body of work in the form of the bibliographical and annotative reading, and the rehearsals that she has put herself through as preparation for the paintings.

From this preparation, there also emerge tender, beautiful portraits that move a step beyond the relay of parody, homage and apprenticeship, and point in a new direction for Nayanaa Kanodia: I refer to works such as 'The Virgin of the Zoo' and 'Queen of the Forest', both inspired by contact with some of Frida Kahlo's paintings, themselves enriched by the radical Mexican artist's encounter with the ex voto images of colonial folk Catholicism. Sumptuous in their evocation of the female figure who is partly mortal and partly celestial, situated in an abundance of plant and animal life, these are portraits of the powers of fecundity and vitality that help us survive the horrors that history, private or public, may visit upon us. ■

Ranjit Hoskote is a poet, art critic, cultural theorist and curator. He is the author of thirteen books: these include five collections of poetry, five studies of art and artists, an anthology of contemporary verse, a translation, and a cultural history. Of these, the most recent are *Vanishing Acts: New & Selected Poems 1985-2005* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2006), *The Dancer on the Horse: Reflections on the Art of Iranna G R* (London: Ashgate, 2007), and *Kampfabsage* (Munich: Random House/ Blessing Verlag, 2007; co-authored with Ilija Trojanow).

Hoskote has curated fourteen exhibitions of contemporary art, including a mid-career retrospective of Atul Dodiya (Tokyo: Japan Foundation, 2001), a lifetime retrospective of Jehangir Sabavala (Bombay & New Delhi: National Gallery of Modern Art, 2005-2006), and a monographic exhibition, 'Aparanta: The Confluence of Contemporary Art in Goa' (Panjim: GTDC/ Escola Medica, 2007). He was also co-curator for the trans-Asian collaborative project, 'Under Construction' (Tokyo and other regional venues: Japan Foundation, 2002-2003).

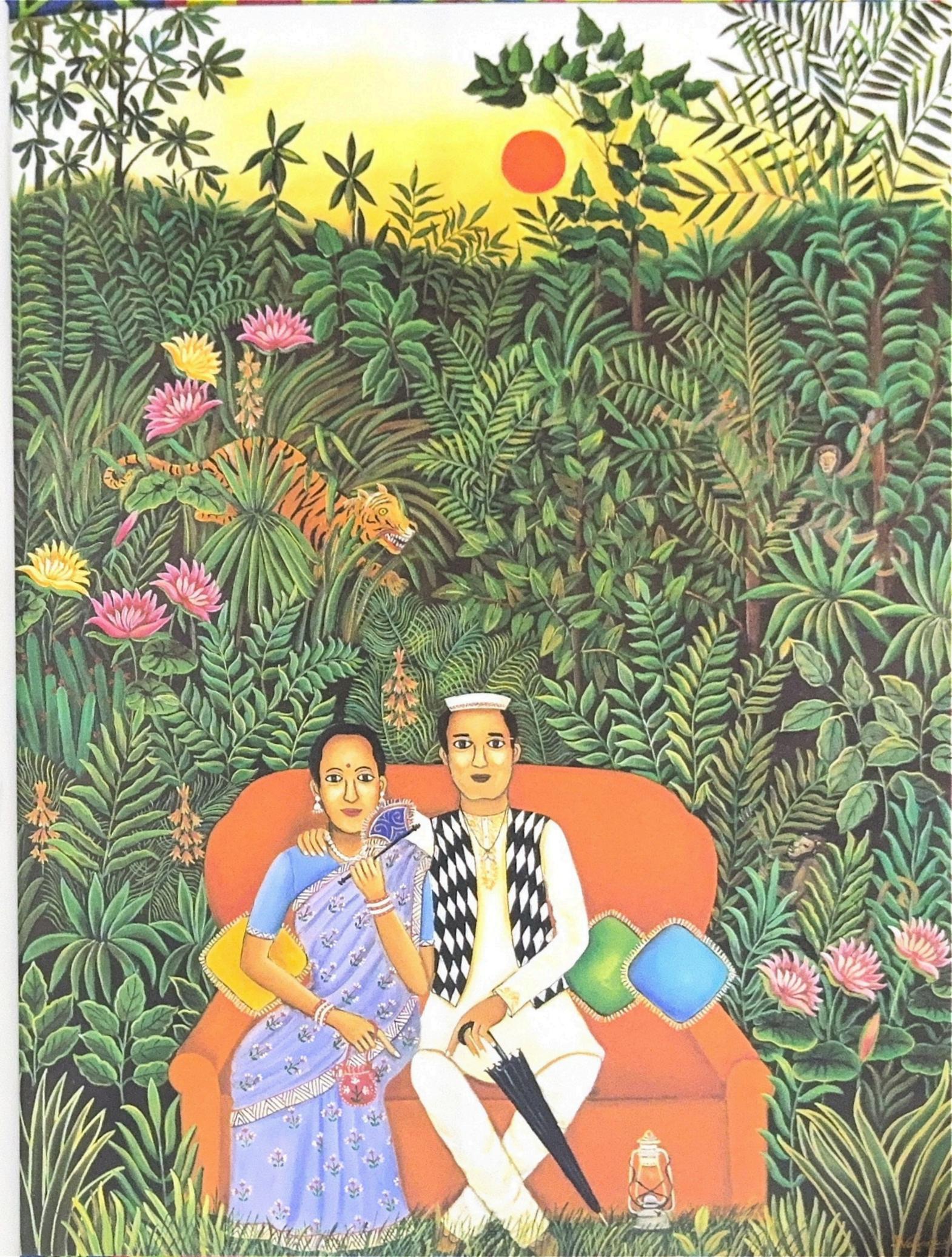
Hoskote has been a Fellow and Visiting Writer at the International Writing Program, University of Iowa (1995) and writer in residence at Villa Waldberta, Munich (2003). He has received the Sanskriti Award for Literature and the Sahitya Akademi Golden Jubilee Award for Literature.

“ My work is based on the timeless themes and experiences of the masters. Delving into the psychological experiences and socio-economic conditions that prompted them to paint what they did, I have taken valuable inputs from their paintings and incorporated them into my signature style. ”

The Waiting Room Oil on Canvas 48" x 36"

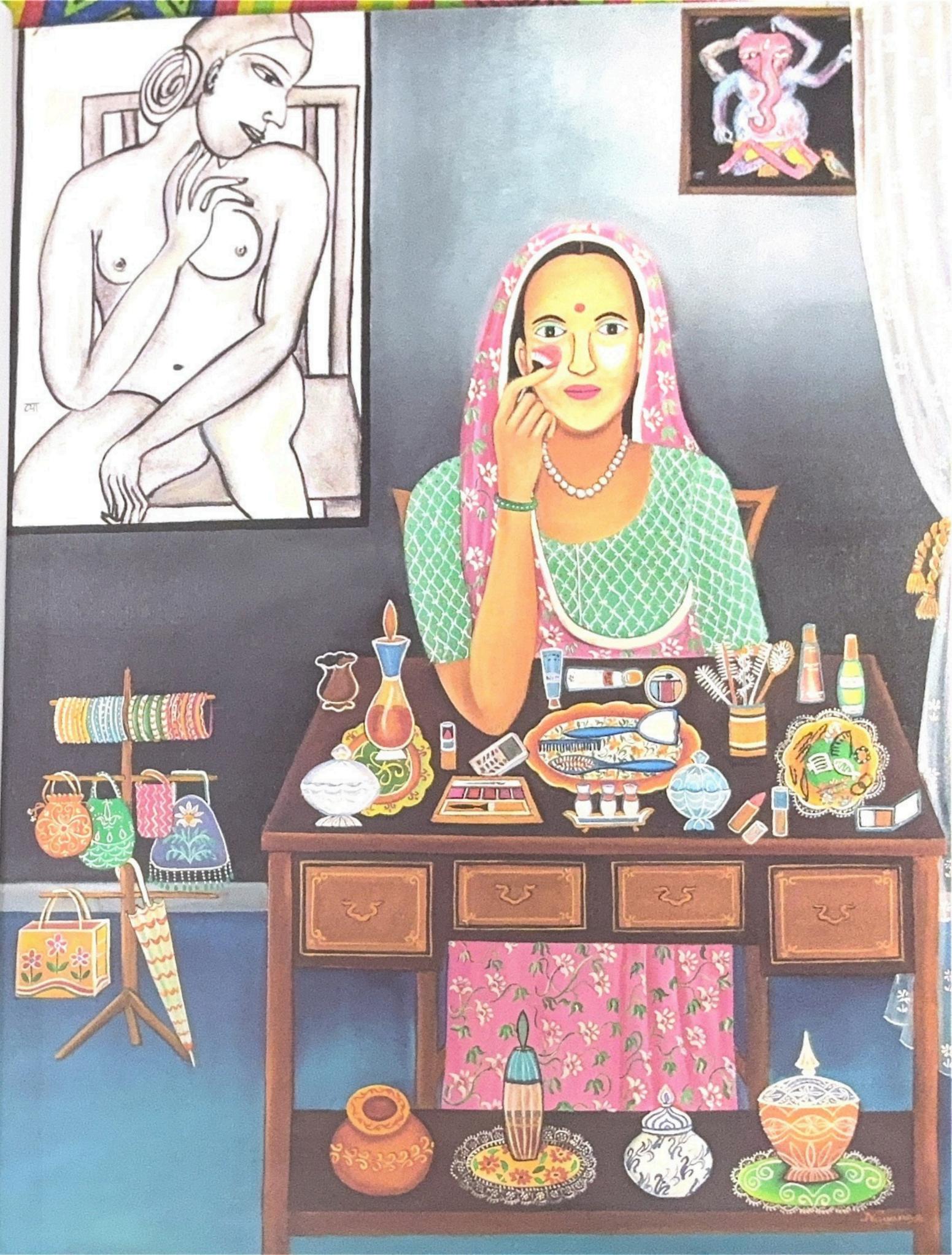


Suppertime for the Tiger Oil on Canvas 48" x 36"





The Perfect
Daughter-in-law
Oil on Canvas
36" x 48"

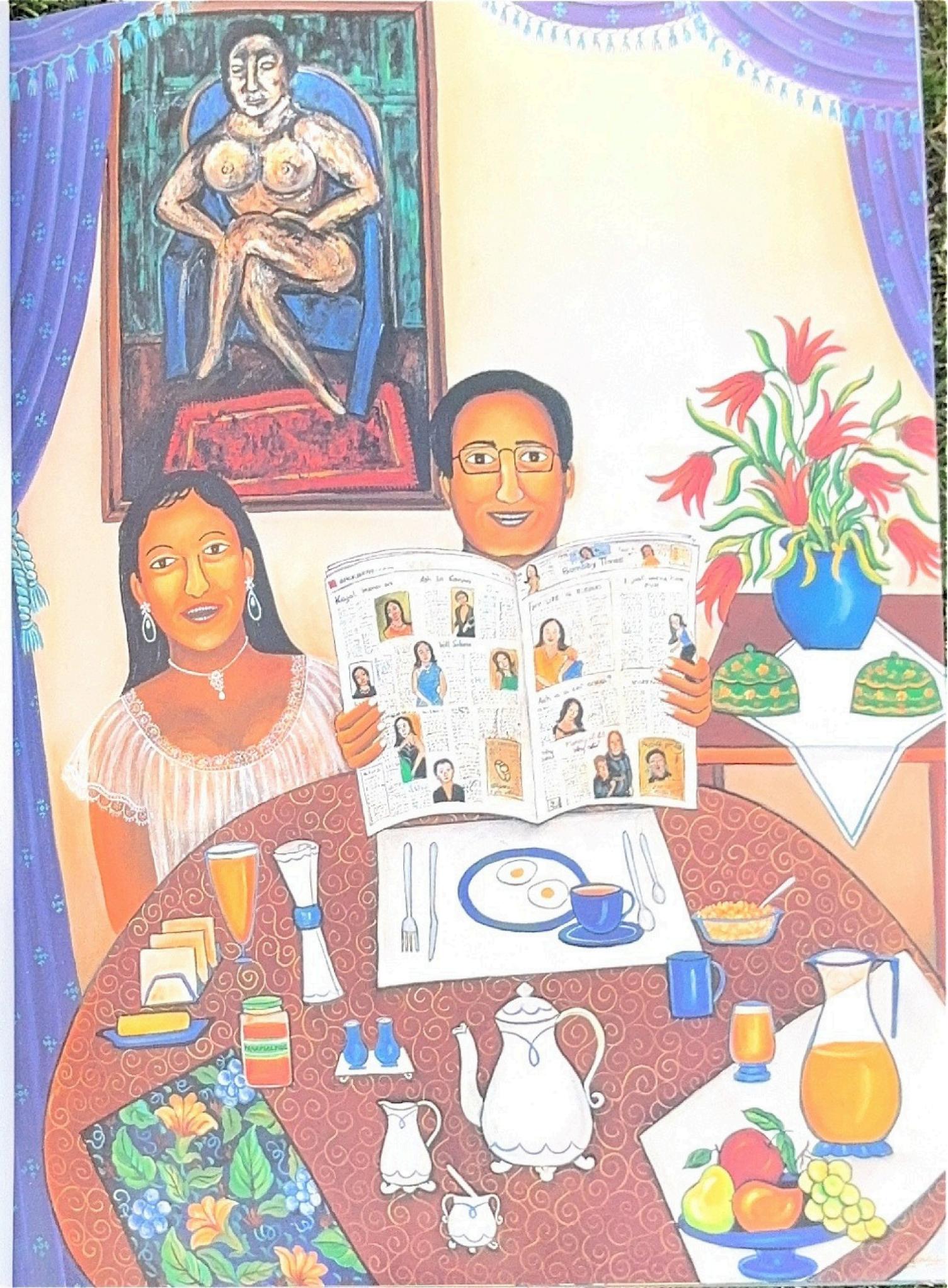


The Miracle of Age Oil on Canvas 48" x 36"



Reverie
Oil on Canvas
36" x 48"

Today's News Oil on Canvas 48" x 36"



Toned Bodies Oil on Canvas 48" x 36"





Zebras
Oil on Canvas
36" x 48"

J. Nagaraj

Superwoman Oil on Canvas 48" x 36"



Artists at Work Oil on Canvas 48" x 36"

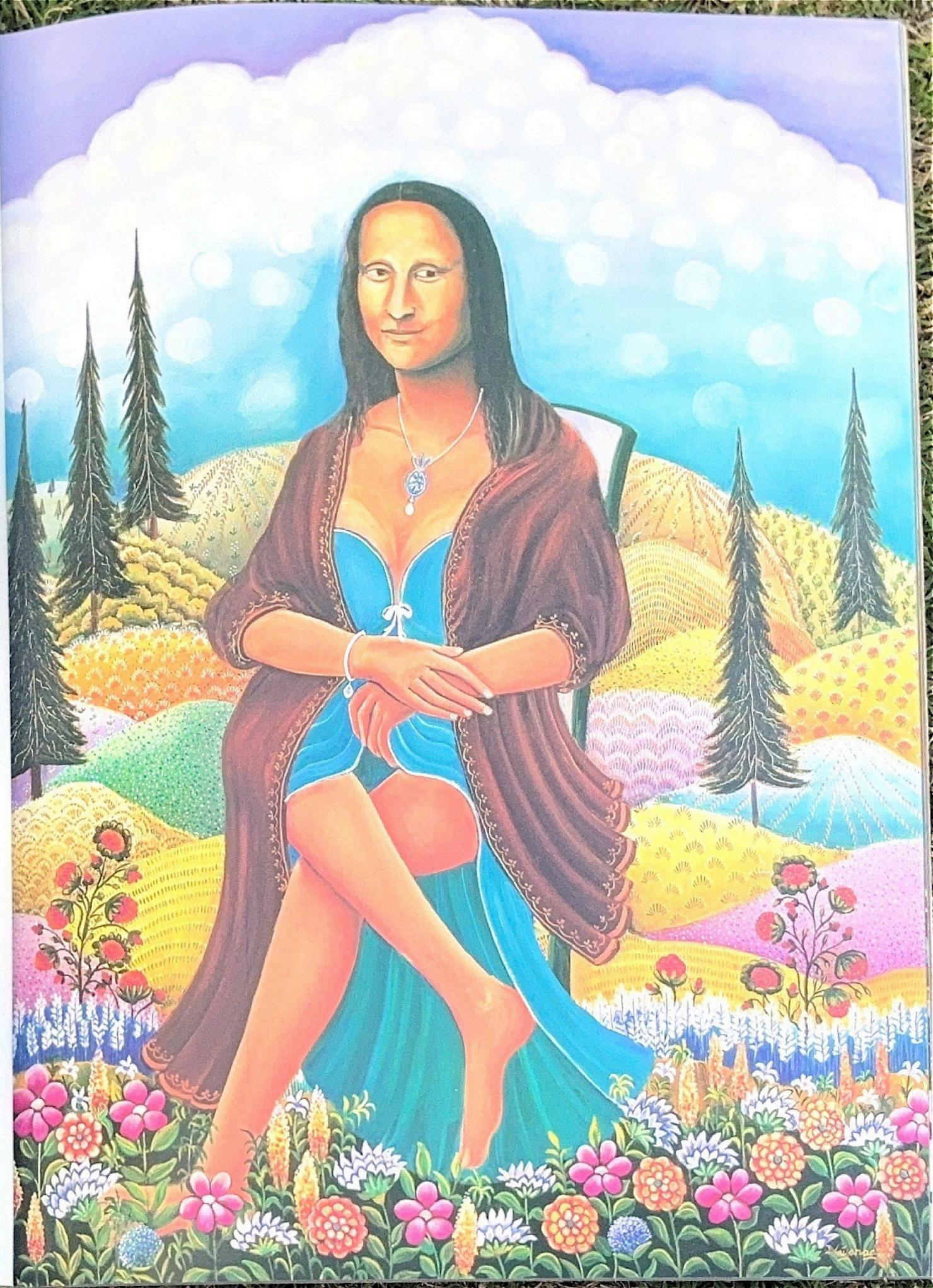


Entwined Oil on Canvas 48" x 36"



“By innovatively mirroring images that once mirrored life,
I have achieved a connection between the eminent artist,
his works and our contemporary world.”

A Break from the Museum Oil on Canvas 48" x 36"



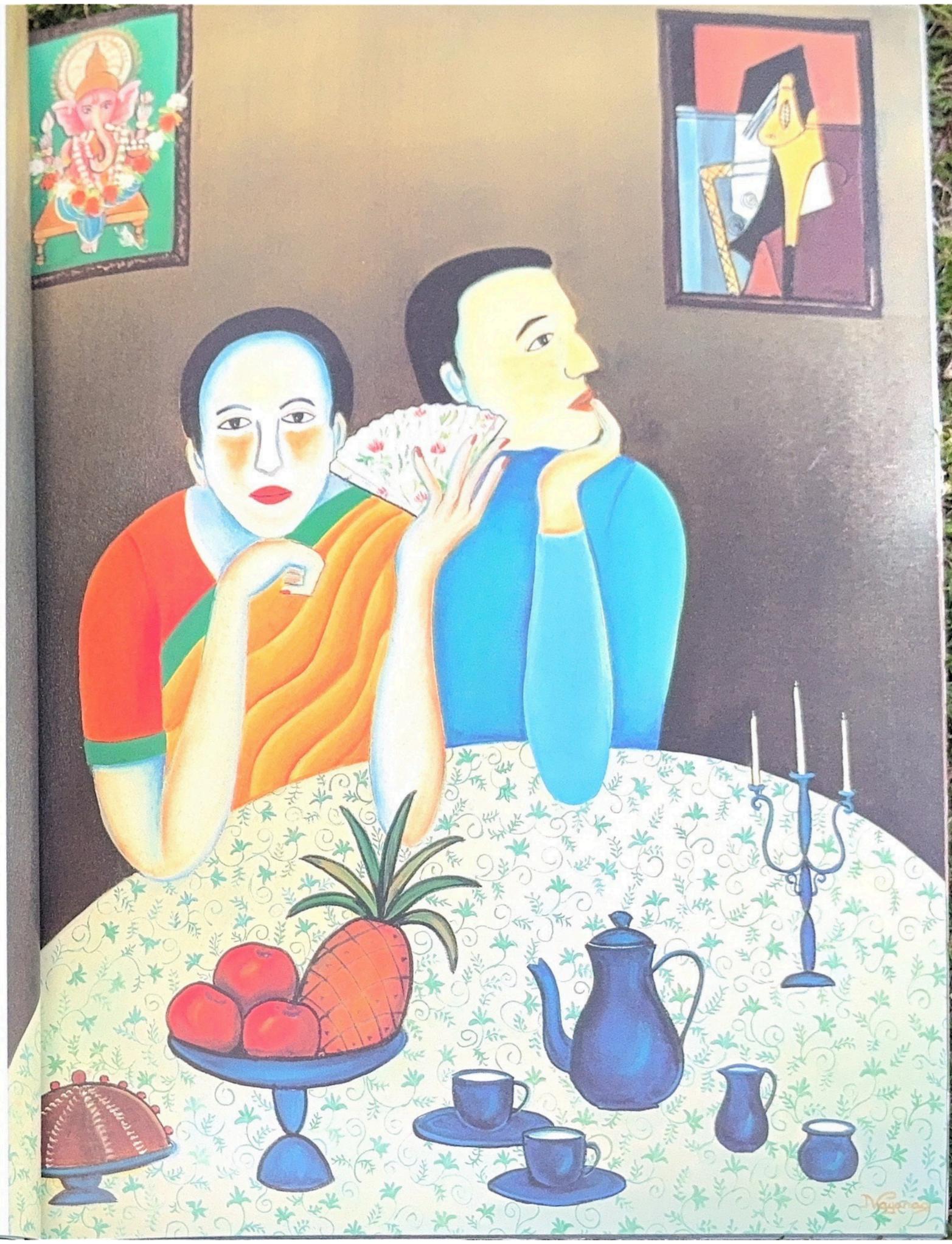
Between Lingerie and Landscape Oil on Canvas 48" x 36"



Possessed, Possessing Oil on Canvas 48" x 36"



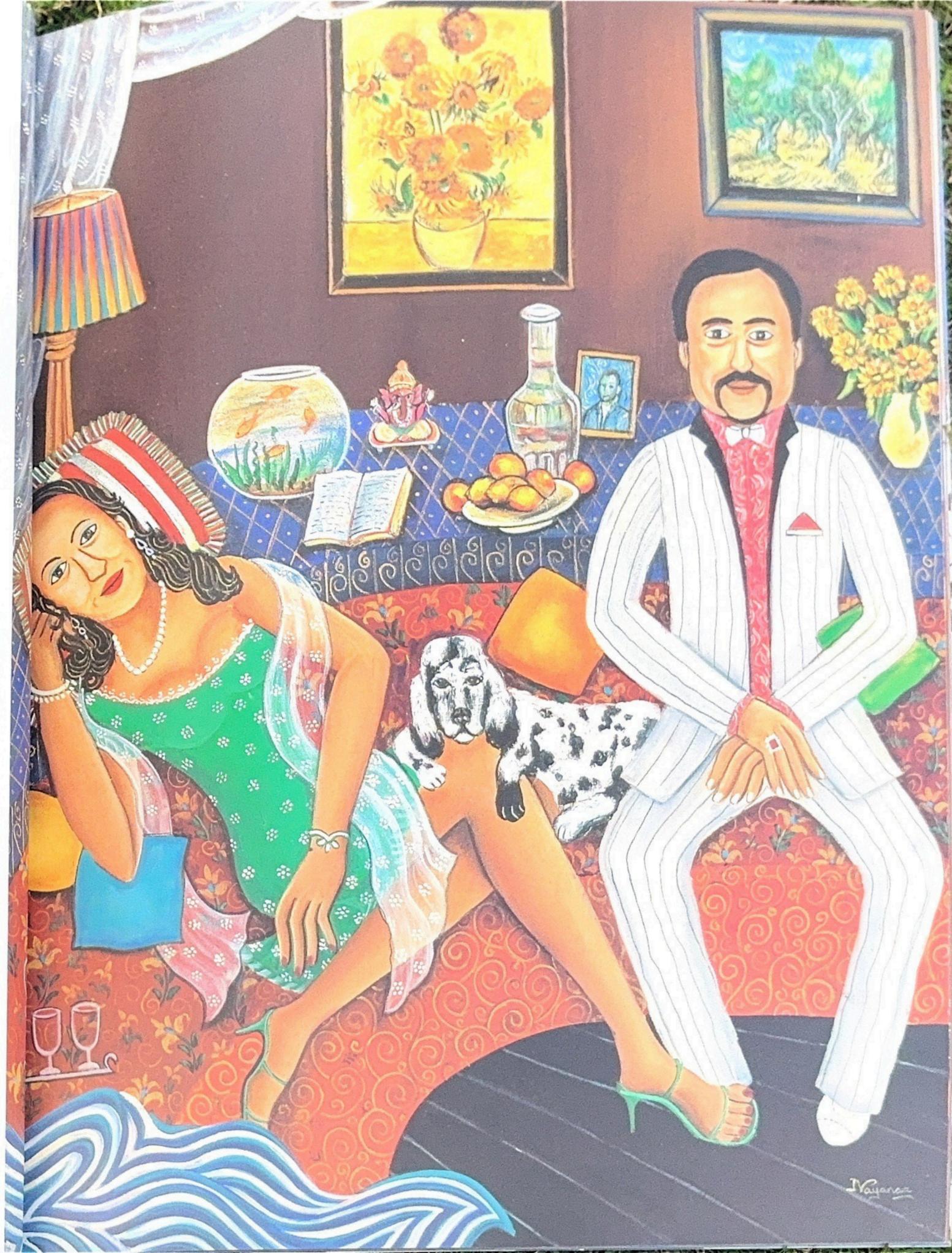
Blue Period Oil on Canvas 36" x 30"



Auction Results Oil on Canvas 48" x 36"



A Fashion Statement Oil on Canvas 36" x 30"



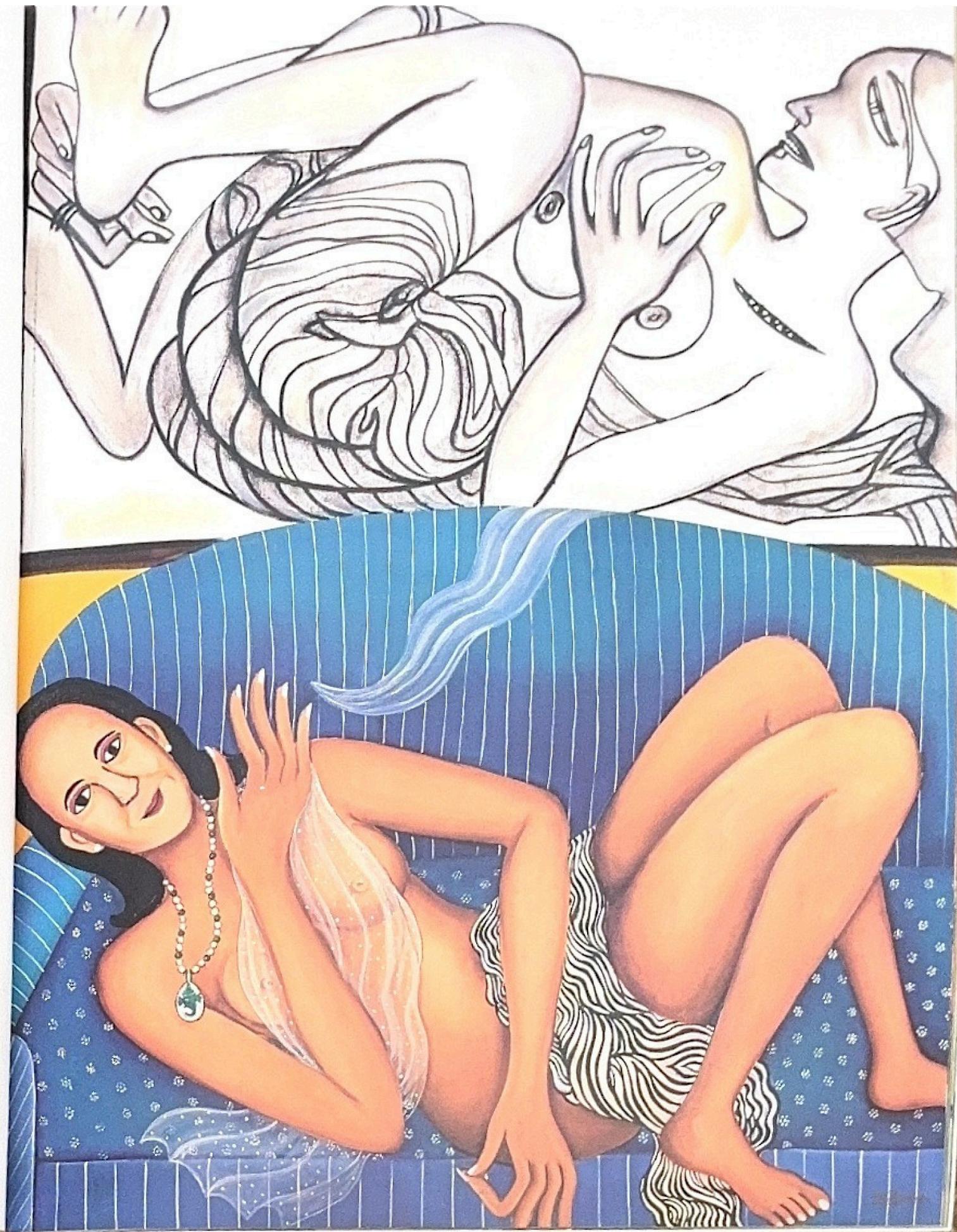


Mumtaz Mahal
Oil on Canvas
36" x 48"

Krishna's Games Oil on Canvas 48" x 36"

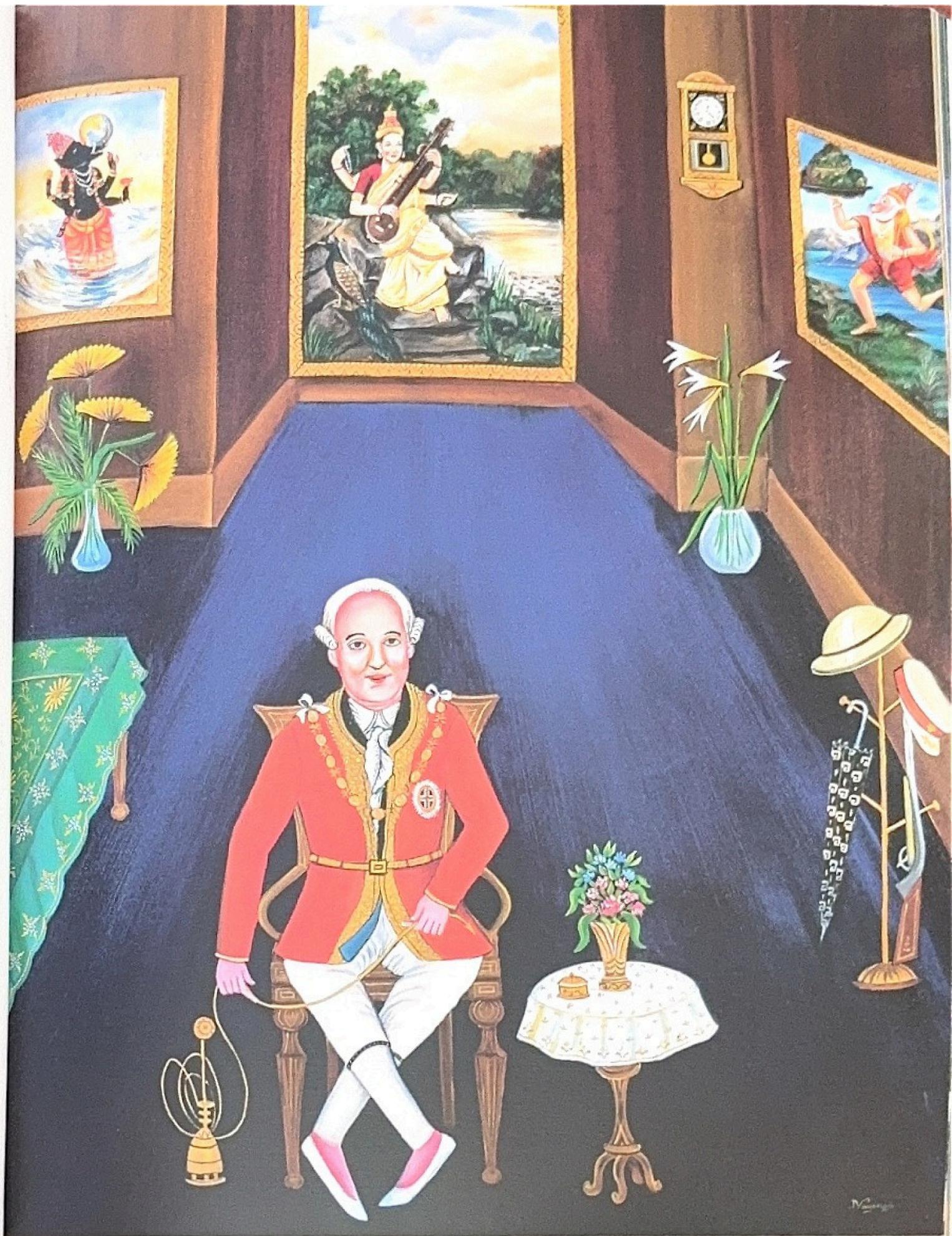


Beyond the Wound Oil on Canvas 48" x 36"

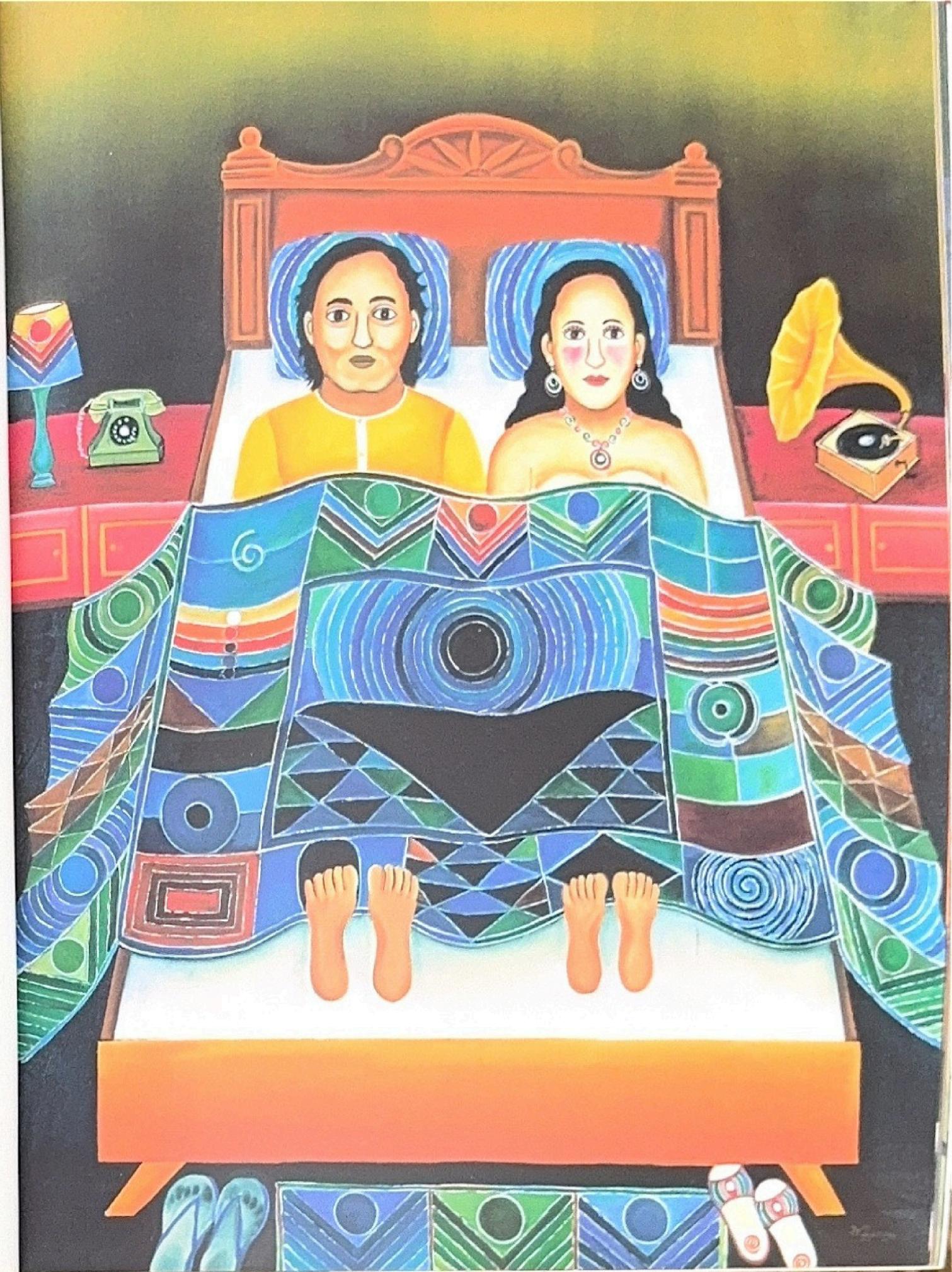


“ These paintings are moments of pleasure held for ever.
They are about time – and time, in paintings,
is movement stilled. ”

Company Period Oil on Canvas 48" x 36"



An Obsession Oil on Canvas 48" x 36"



The Arrangement Oil on Canvas 48" x 36"



Ara's Flowers Oil on Canvas 48" x 36"



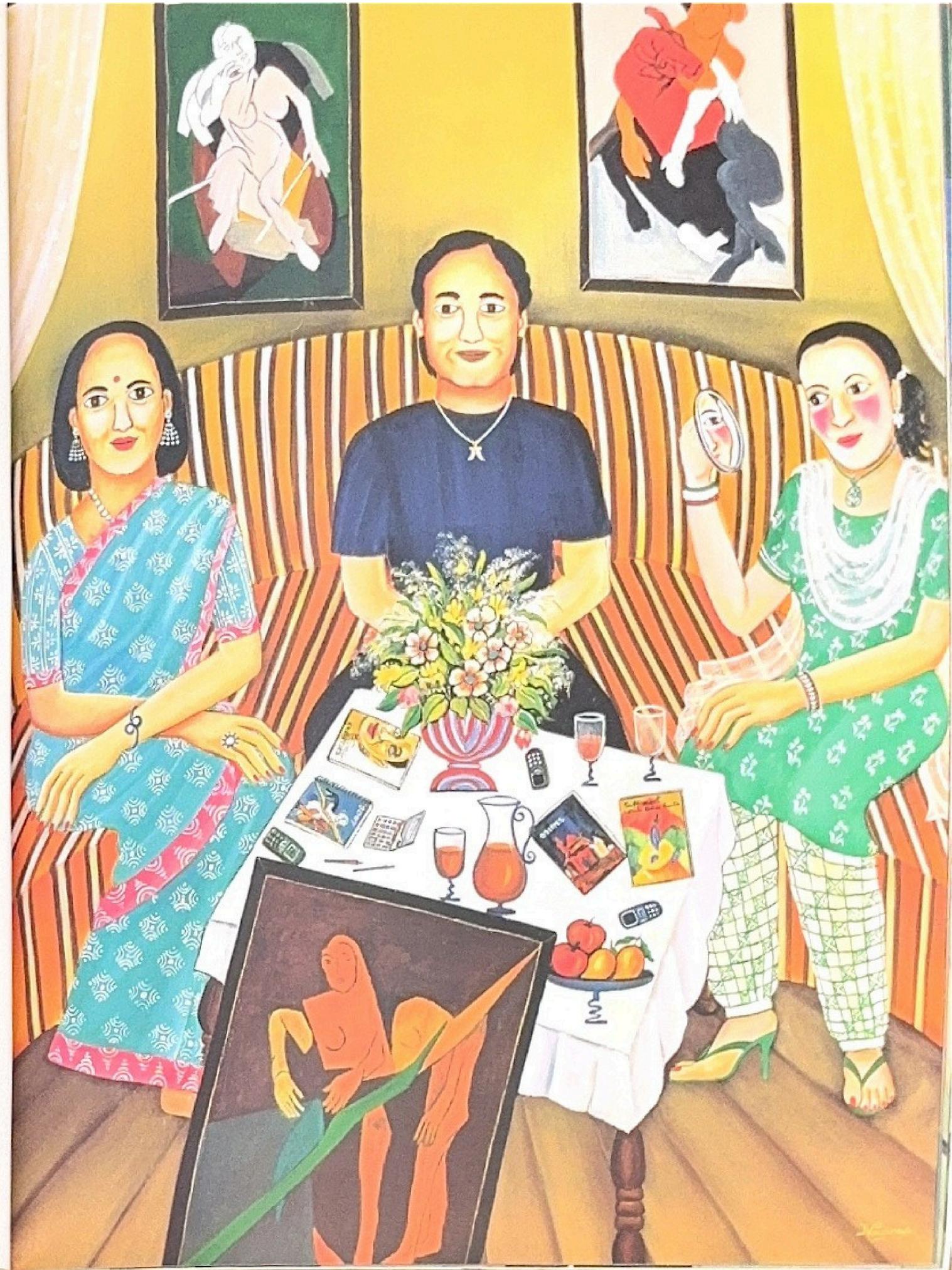


Me with
my Boyfriend
Oil on Canvas
36" x 48"

The Chor Oil on Canvas 48" x 36"



Proud Owners Oil on Canvas 48" x 36"



The Virgin of the Zoo Oil on Canvas 48" x 36"



Group Show
Oil on Canvas
36" x 48"



The Wrestlers Oil on Canvas 48" x 36"



Interior Oil on Canvas 38" x 38"

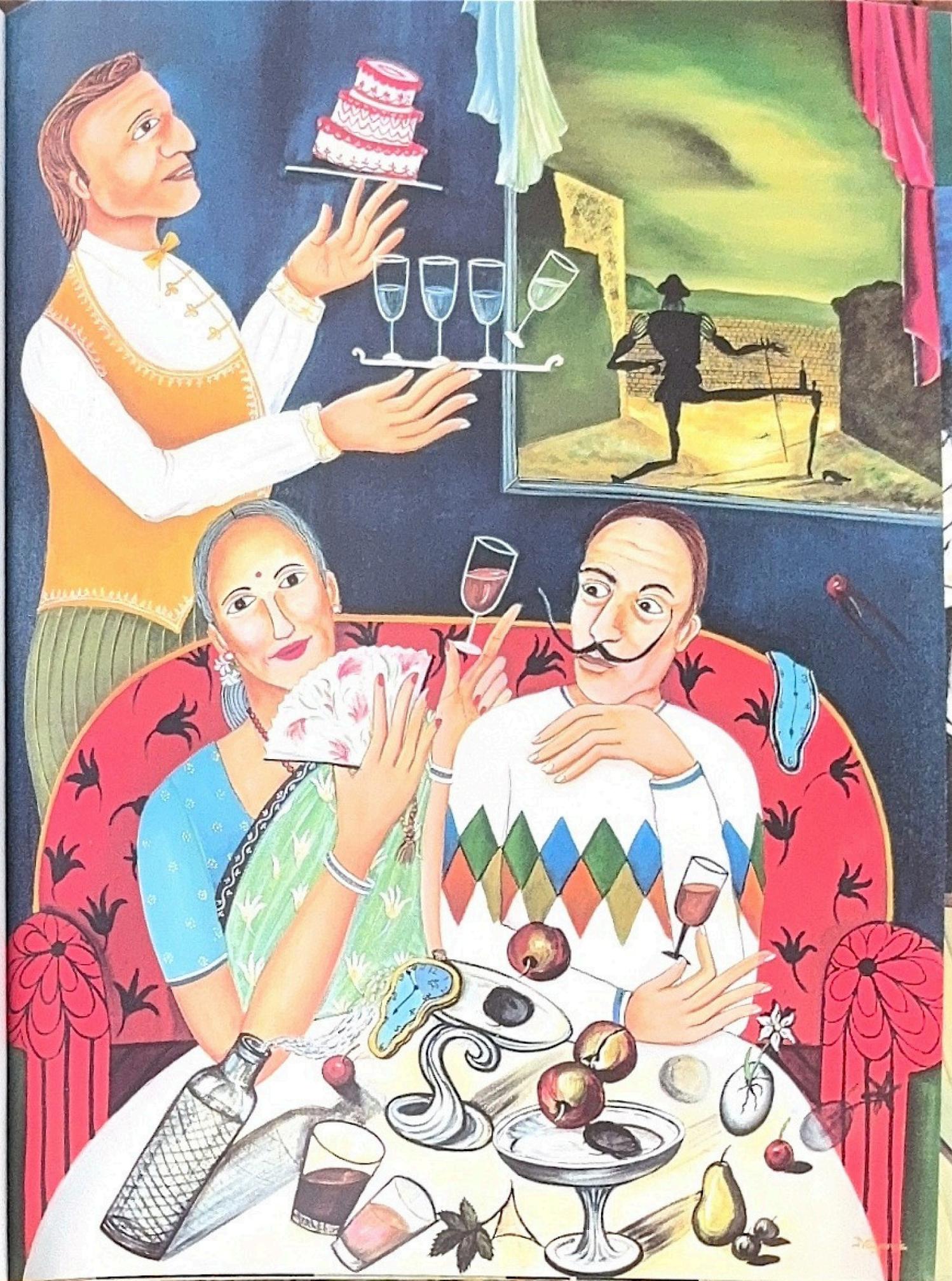




A Green Thought Oil on Canvas 48" x 36"

“ On the one hand, we have people clinging tenaciously to their roots, fearing the extinction of their cultural identities. On the other hand, we have the birth of a new generation dependent upon progressive conveniences.”

Dessert with Dal Oil on Canvas 48" x 36"



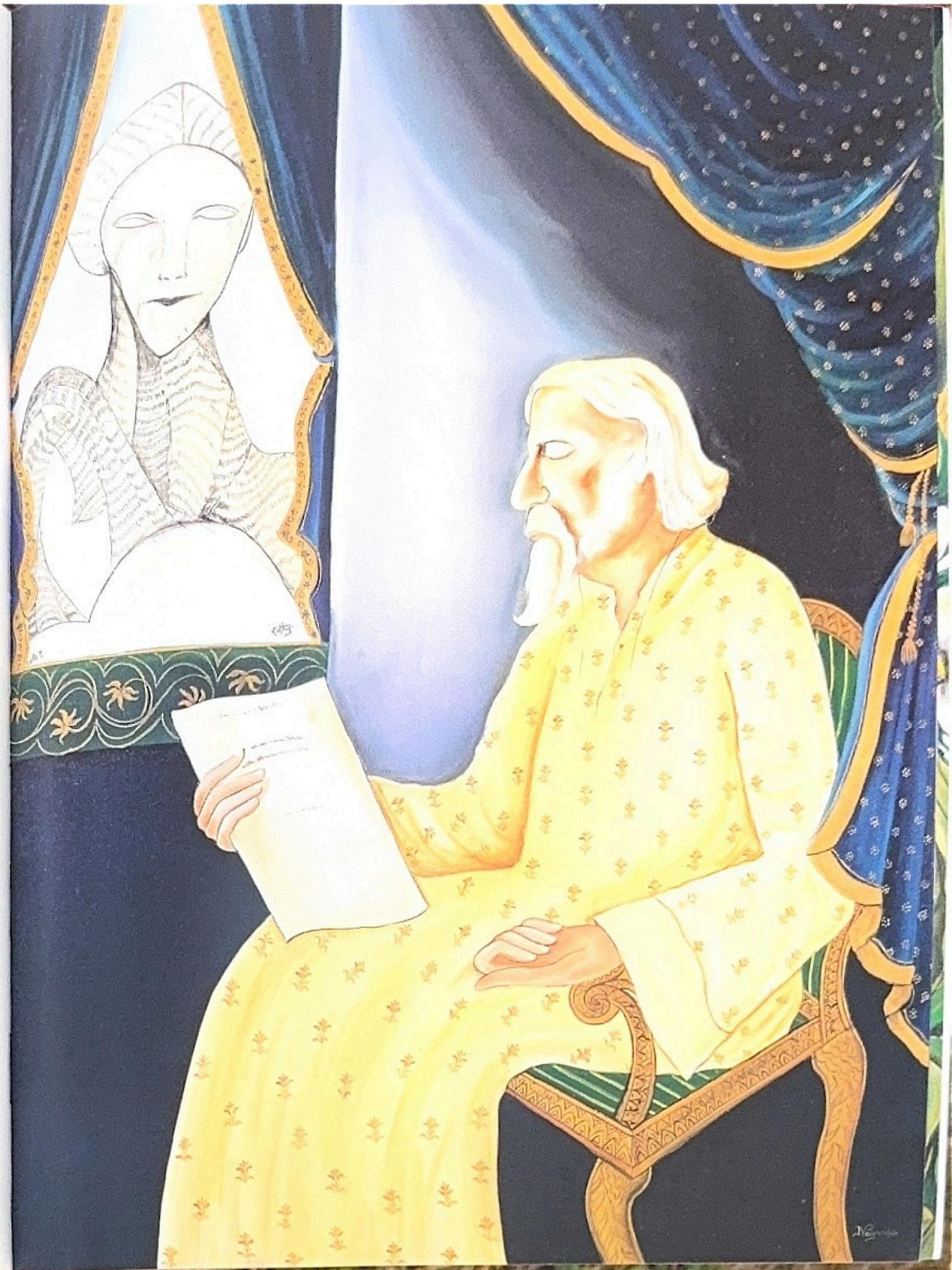
Gallery of Rogues Oil on Canvas 48" x 36"





The Model and her Artist
Oil on Canvas
30" x 30"

A Dream of Tagore Oil on Canvas 48" x 36"





The Repast
Oil on Canvas
36" x 48"

The Queen of the Forest Oil on Canvas 36" x 30"



Artist's Note

My work is based on the timeless themes and experiences of the masters. Delving into the psychological experiences and socio-economic conditions which prompted them to paint what they did I have taken valuable inputs from their paintings and incorporated them into my signature style. I have portrayed the powerful influences that their artwork has left on society today. By innovatively mirroring images that once mirrored life, I have achieved a connection between the eminent artist, his works and our contemporary world.

This is a departure from my earlier work where depiction was charged with innocuous humour personifying the subtle ironies which permeate daily life, which lay in harmony and yet in conflict with the collision of the East and West. The paintings reflected an unkempt maelstrom that has engulfed our transforming society, providing fuel to a raging dichotomy where on the one hand we have people clinging tenaciously to their roots, fearing the extinction of their cultural identities, and on the other hand we have the birth of a new generation dependent upon progressive conveniences.

My continuous journey to and fro, from the past to the present has resulted in this body of work where a picture of the moment is built up in which whole histories and relationships are made visible. These paintings are moments of pleasure held forever. They are about time – and time in paintings, is movement stilled.

Souza's masterpieces of nudes appear in my paintings as buxom women enjoying a lazy afternoon with his still-lives as their objects of desire. Picasso's 'Dora Marr with Cat' becomes a luscious lady lying seductively on a couch with her pet. We have serious art collectors who regale in buying Tyeb Mehtas and celebrate their latest acquisition, ladies lounging a la Jogen style, Raza diehards who have a quilt, rug, lampshade and bedside slippers all designed like his paintings. A flower seller sells Ara's flowers, an artist is seen painting Husain at work painting Mother Teresa. Then there are the Modigliani ardent fans who wear the same clothes as the protagonists in his paintings. Van Gogh's sunflowers spring to life in a luxuriant flower vase being admired lovingly by a lady. Rabindranath Tagore's woman gazes through a window at Rabindranath Tagore reading his book deep in reflection. Protagonists enjoy a viable position along with the backdrops and objects of the masters all merging one with the other. Andy Warhol's 'Marilyn Monroe' is the centerpiece of the choir with her look-alikes.

No major body of work pertaining to the masters can be complete without a reference to Leonardo da Vinci's 'Mona Lisa'. Here, Mona Lisa escapes the public glare and media from the Louvre to verdant surroundings for the peace and solitude she so desperately longs for. Equally important is 'The Last Supper'. For me, the take off point was more Jamini Roy than Leonardo da Vinci.

This exhibition is the result of more than two years of research, experimentation and final execution.

Artist's References

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Glass Paintings, Marg Publications, 2003
The Great Artists – Salvador Dali
Frida Kahlo – The Brush of Anguish by Martha Zamora
Osians Catalogue, July 2007
Saffron Winter Online Auction Catalogue, Dec. 2006
Osians ABC Series July 2003
Botero by Mariana Hanstein



NAYANAA KANODIA

Nayanaa Kanodia was born in 1950 in Pune, Maharashtra. She has had no formal training in art except for a year's apprenticeship with Anjolie Ela Menon. She had her first solo show in Mumbai in 1986 and has held numerous exhibitions since then in India and abroad. In 1998, she was selected by The Commonwealth Institute for a solo show in their newly renovated complex in London. In 2001 she was invited by the Victoria and Albert Museum, London to exhibit her work and to give a demonstration of her technique. She has also participated in many group shows nationally and internationally including the ones in New York in 1988; National Gallery of Modern Art, Mumbai in 1997 & 1998; Dubai in 1998; London in 2001, 2002 & 2006; 'Centre Regional D'Art Contemporain', Sete, France in 2001; Washington in 2001; Paris in 2002; Hong Kong in 2005; Singapore in 2006; 'The Ueno Royal Museum', Tokyo in 2007; South Africa in 2007. Nayanaa is the first Indian of non-British origin whose works are in the collection of the 'Paintings in Hospitals'. Nayanaa's work is held in many public and private collections in India and abroad including the Musée International d'Art Naïf, Paris. She lives and works in Mumbai.



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