



CELEBRATION

T. Venkanna

Show Information:

Curator: Abhay Maskara

Preview: Jan 15, 2015, 6:00pm to 9:00pm (Mumbai Gallery Weekend)

Show Dates: Jan 16 – Mar 7, 2015

Location: Gallery Maskara, 6/7, 3rd Pasta Lane, Colaba, Mumbai – 400 005

Gallery Timings: 11am to 7pm, Tuesday – Saturday

We are delighted to announce the opening of “CELEBRATION” by artist T. Venkanna during Mumbai Gallery Weekend. It is after a span of 4-years we will show seven large format paintings and fourteen watercolors by the artist. The scale and scope of this show is even more ambitious than his feted project “Panchamahabhuta” at the Kochi-Muziris Biennale in 2012-13.

Artist T. Venkanna holds a Masters in Fine Arts (M.F.A.) in printmaking from the Faculty of Fine Arts, M.S. University of Baroda and Bachelors in Fine Arts (B.F.A.) in painting from J.N.T.U, Hyderabad where he was awarded a Gold medal. Born in 1980, the Venkanna is regarded as a torchbearer of his generation, and has received critical acclaim both internationally and within India. The artist was one of 20 artists shortlisted for the SKODA prize in 2010 and 2012. His works are in major collections including the [Charles Saatchi collection](#) (UK), the [Burger Collection](#) (Switzerland), Swagemakers collection (Netherlands) and many more in America, Japan, Russia, Europe and India.

The predominant subject in T. Venkanna’s works is sexual imagination which questions and confronts the stereotypical ways in which sexuality is understood and defined.

“The sexual behavior of human beings is habituated by societal norms and conditions. I believe it is due to this, that sexual fantasy gains importance in a human being’s life and an individual achieves extreme pleasure out of this simple act of day-dreaming, wherein s/he escapes from the harsh realities of this world via an undisturbed and uninterrupted flight of imagination.”

“In this endeavor of mine, I also have been (re)presenting certain imageries/motifs taken from artists of yester years [like Hockney, Rousseau, Mondrian, etc.] as well as from specific forms of traditional art. The political and social contexts underlying these works are quite different when they were made. I re-present these imageries according to my idea, in the process critically evaluating the norms and terms that exist within contemporary society.”

His continuous persistence with this subject has stimulated his interest to explore image-making in all kinds of media, including drawing, painting, sculpture, installation and performance. Venkanna’s most important linguistic device is the integration of the personal and the social using material as per the subject’s requirement with complete freedom and ease.

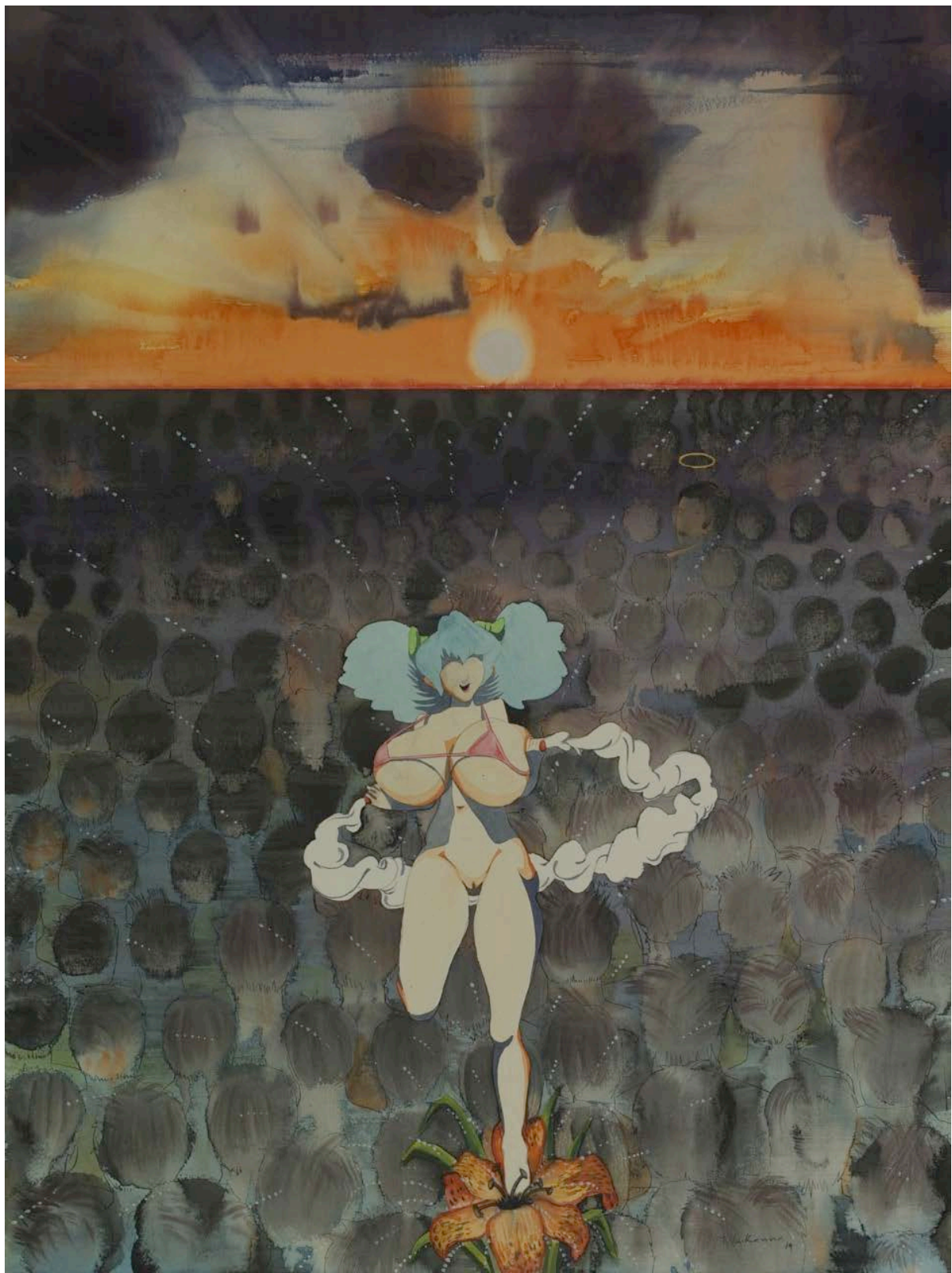
<< Selected works from the show overleaf >>



Love Life II, 2014
Watercolor on paper
40 x 26 inch (101 x 66 cm)



Love Life I, 2014
Watercolor on paper
40 x 26 inch (101 x 66 cm)



Untitled, 2014
Watercolor on paper
30 x 22 inch (76 x 56 cm)



Birth, 2013
Watercolor on paper
30 x 22 inch (76 x 56 cm)

<< Text on the show by anthropologist and writer Sonia Nazareth >>



Constantly immediate and with raw openness, T. Venkanna creates new art for a new world. His storytelling takes various forms through constellations of images, collage, pastiche, the recourse to allegory, metaphor - all ways of thinking-in-pictures, from which understanding emerges without having to be expounded.

Although he uses both erotic and sexual imagery in his work, he is not deliberately trying to provoke the viewer. In fact he transcends what might be perceived as profane

reality, by using sexuality as a trope to examine his most pressing concerns. These include the alienation and commodity fetishism that characterize modern consumer society.

In the oil on canvas - *Celebration*, the figures around a central bed engage in an orgiastic, bestial frenzy. They appear estranged from their own bodies and universal essence. The bed - a metaphor for a sacred, spiritual space - lies empty, typifying the void and questions what we truly are celebrating. *Living Sculpture* takes the notion of spiritual homelessness further, where the idea of home is a robotic experience, and the protagonist is in bed with his leg around a blow-up doll. The image examines contemporary challenges to social cohesion, inviting reflection on states of psychological isolation and emotional poverty.

As antidote to alienation and a pre-requisite for the emergence of a truly human society, is the artist's persistent hope for love. In *Love Life I* and *II*, same-sex couples celebrate their connection in a playful manifestation of non-reproductive sexuality. Here the will to freedom is given pleasurable rein, and sexual experiments unfurl - celebrating aspects of life that a 'rational' society might like to conceal.

Confounding further those who prize the 'logical', Venkanna collapses the boundary between male and female, in the portrayal of his multifaceted, pregnant hermaphrodite in *Evolution*. Through this new creation, he asks if fixed notions of gender are desirable or even tenable; underlining the notion that gender is a man-made category of knowledge, as opposed to an inherent reality. Adam and Eve in the distance, represent the heterosexual, ideological majority. In foregrounding the hermaphrodite, an apparently-stable hierarchy is challenged, establishing that forces that counter the normative, have the ability to be as flexible, plural and hybrid as power itself.

The graffiti and slogans painted liberally on the surface of the canvases, draw attention to the created theatricality and constructed nature of the works. The audience is thus provoked to reflect, rather than respond solely with emotion, to the aesthetic of what they are seeing. Additionally, the text inscribed onto the body of the work, pushes the boundaries between text as visual art and visual art as text, forcing us to rethink the status of both.

The power of Venkanna's art lies in how he transforms the wolves of his spontaneity into the shepherds of knowledge and beauty; revealing the world in ways we have always known, but scarcely have the courage to admit.

- Sonia Nazareth

About the artist

T. Venkanna holds a Masters in Fine Arts (M.F.A.) in printmaking from the Faculty of Fine Arts, M.S. University of Baroda and Bachelors in Fine Arts (B.F.A.) in painting from J.N.T.U, Hyderabad where he was awarded a Gold medal. The artist lives and works in Baroda, India.

Recent shows in 2014 include *Residual Remnants*, Site art space, Baroda, India; *Midnight's Grandchildren* curated by Girish Shahane, Kitab Mahal, Mumbai; *Trajectories: 19th-21st Century Printmaking from India and Pakistan* curated by Dr. Paula Sengupta and Camilla H. Chaudhary, Sharjah Art Museum, UAE. Major shows in 2012-13 include *Air Sri Lanka*, Galerie Krinzinger Projekte, Vienna, Austria, *Lunch with Olympia*, curated by Robert Storr, Yale University School of Art, CT, USA, *Between the Lines: Identity, Place, and Power*, National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA), Mumbai, India, *Pancha Mahabhuta (The Five Great Elements)* at the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, Kochi, India, *Cynical Love: Life in the Everyday* curated by Gayatri Sinha at the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, Noida, India, a solo presentation at Art Brussels 30th Contemporary Art Fair, *ProjectStage* at Art Stage Singapore, the India Art Fair, India, the VIP Art Fair, (online). In 2011, Venkanna presented a controversial solo performance at Art Stage Singapore and was part of *New Trends from South India*, at the Lalit Kala Academy, Chennai, India. Other key projects during the year included; *CROSSROADS: India escalate* (India Pavilion) at the Prague Biennale 5, Czech Republic, a solo presentation at the Art Brussels 29th Contemporary Art Fair, Belgium, *Fabular Bodies*, curated by Gayatri Sinha for the Harmony Art Foundation, Prince of Wales Museum, Mumbai, India, *Printmaking: Open Studio*, at Gallery Maskara, Mumbai, India, *(M)other India* at Galerie du Jour – Agnès B, Paris, France and *Window in the Wall*, Pearl Lam Galleries, Shanghai, China. In 2010 his work was part of *Finding India: Art for the New Century*, Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) Taipei, Taiwan. His solo show, *NERO* opened at Gallery Luce in Torino, Italy and he simultaneously showed at Artissima 17 Torino, Italy. He was also the youngest artist featured in the Saatchi Gallery show *The Empire Strikes Back: Indian Art Today*, London, UK.

To download a PDF of previous press on the artist please click [here](#) (126 MB file)

About Gallery Maskara

Gallery Maskara has a clear and compelling mission to taking a *global* and *multidisciplinary* approach to art that responds to the cultural fabric of our time thus fueling critical dialogue, collaboration, and public engagement. More simply put it is to *EXHIBIT AND PROMOTE ART OF THE PRESENT*.

The gallery is located in the heart of downtown Mumbai between 2nd and 3rd Pasta lane in Colaba, and functions as a hub for the exploration of emerging ideas in the contemporary art. The freestanding 3,250 square foot building served as a cotton godown during India's pre independence era and has been renovated by noted conservation architect Rahul Mehrotra to maintain its historic character. With a nearly 50 feet ceiling height and walls that run 100 feet in length, the cavernous space marks a shift from the typical white cube neutral space and is raw yet flexible, making the building extremely well-suited for contemporary art practices.

For more information, visit: <http://www.gallerymaskara.com>

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