



T. Venkanna's striking collection of large, hand-embroidered paintings, currently on display at his solo exhibition **Love Me As I Am at Gallery Maskara**, curated by Abhay Maskara stage fantastical landscapes in which bodies topple out of other bodies, become depersonalised and malleable, and genitalia efface, frequently surrounded by nature.

While I had spent countless hours, through months of admiring the artworks and immersing myself in the gallery's atmosphere, the familiarity I had developed with the space allowed me to approach this interview with a deeper understanding of the artist's work and a genuine curiosity to delve into their creative process. When I spoke to him about the liberating nature of his works and the purpose of his creations, Venkanna expressed that his works aim to challenge conventional norms and provoke thought by exploring themes of identity, gender, and social inequality. He believes that through art, individuals can find the courage to question established systems and strive for a more inclusive and equitable society.

Pencil and hand embroidery on linen

78 x 86 inches (198 x 218 cm)

Venkanna's instinctive creations are not for the puritans. He depicts people as their unadulterated, primal selves who defy killjoy conservatism. The characters in his fantastical universe are liberated beings, free from restraints, moral judgment, and censorship. By making these Romantic and Surrealist tropes seem contemporary, the paintings challenge the viewer to consider if they might find erotica offensive and to question their own social conditioning.

Although the ferociously beautiful works of T. Venkanna may appear jarring and macabre to those who are not familiar with his work. The intersection of excess and profanity, where the worlds of the material and the spiritual merge, is another place where his work exists

Still Life, 2022

Oil on canvas

72 x 144 inches (183 x 366 cm) triptych

His artistic expression is multifaceted, spanning painting, printmaking, ink and watercolour drawings, sculpture, embroidery, and even performance art, he has been practising his craft for more than 15 years. Post-impressionism, Mughal miniatures, early Renaissance paintings, and Indian mythology are all sources of inspiration for the artist, who weaves them together with his own imagination. His paintings, which are frequently charged with a wild and feverish energy, veer into the surreal.

His works are in major collections in India, Japan, Russia, Netherlands, France, USA, UK, including the Burger Collection, Switzerland, the Swagemakers collection, Netherlands, the Karen and Robert Duncan Collection, USA , The Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, India, amongst several others.

Circus, 2022

Oil on canvas

96 x 192 in (244 x 488 cm), quadriptych

Same but Not the Same, 2022

Pencil and hand embroidery on linen

89.5 x 126.75 inches (227 x 322 cm)

Churning, 2022

Pencil and hand embroidery on linen

95 x 103 inches (241 x 262 cm)

The main theme of T. Venkanna's works is sexual imagination, which questions conventional ideas and definitions of sexuality. To which he confirms "Social norms and environmental factors influence how humans behave sexually. This is possibly the reason why daydreaming, which allows one to escape the harsh realities of this world through an undisturbed and uninterrupted flight of imagination, can be very enjoyable."

Hiding, 2022

Oil on canvas

36 x 120 inches (91.5 x 305 cm) pentptych

Strong Desire, 2022

Pencil and hand embroidery on linen

53 x 182 inches (135 x 462 cm)

T.Venkanna's compositions remind me of William Blake's or Georges Bataille's tragic visions, in which beauty exists in a constant state of tension between grace and destruction. In his works, the delicate balance between serenity and chaos is evident, drawing parallels to the enigmatic artistry of Salvador Dali or the haunting poems by Sylvia Plath. Each brushstroke seems to encapsulate a profound sense of duality, captivating the viewer with a mesmerising blend of light and darkness. This delicate balance between grace and destruction is what gives beauty its power to captivate and inspire. It is through this tension that beauty becomes both alluring and unpredictable, drawing us in with its elegance while reminding us of its fleeting nature. Perhaps that is true for his works as well, as they evoke a sense of transience and impermanence. Venkanna's ability to convey such complex emotions through his brushstrokes is a testament to his exceptional talent and artistic vision.

Words by Keshvi Kamdar

Photographs courtesy of Maskara Gallery



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