

Suman

beyond rasikpriya



Suhas  
beyond rasikpriya

Suhas Roy's Journey in Art

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## contents



## My friend, father and guru in life

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Suhas Roy's brother, Subhash Roy lives next door to my parents. That's where I first met Suhas Roy. So, until I got married to Suman, Baba was like any other 'Kaku' or 'Jethu', an avuncular acquaintance, not a celebrated contemporary master. What impressed me the most about him was his transparent laughter. True to his name, 'Suhas', he can actually laugh openly, whole-heartedly.

After my marriage I got to know both, Suhas Roy the man and the artist. Clad in a simple lungi and banyan he looks a deceptively ordinary human being. Intensely focused on the canvas, he is unconscious of even his bare chest. Shy, and reticent with outsiders, there's no mistaking one plain fact about him: he is a genuine, forthright person, with not a shred of pretence. And that means one helluva lot. Without ambiguity I can say, I came to respect him more than even my own father.

His lack of airs is probably what sets Baba apart from other contemporary masters, many of whom are his buddies. He is quite comfortable sitting in a roadside tea stall, sharing cha and conversation with equal ease. He is a man of strong opinions, but he is also receptive to criticism. I am a severe critic of his work, but he takes it in the right spirit. He is never dismissive, nor impatient. Without losing his cool he will explain things, give his side of the picture. And he speaks so well! The depth of his understanding and knowledge is remarkable – and its expanse is amazing. Politics or religion, culture or sociology, he cannot only speak on the subject, he will have a fiercely independent perspective on it. And he is so liberal that I have no reservation in modelling for him.

The first time I saw a Suhas Roy painting was after I came into the family as his daughter-in-law. He's not the kind of person who will talk about his work. When I asked him, "Why did you become an artist?" his simply replied: "Because I wasn't good at anything else, maths, science or history." What really happened was that once, when he was ill and confined to bed, his eyes were riveted by a portrait of Tagore adorning the wall. "To idle away the hours I started drawing. Those who saw the drawing, liked it, and that marked the beginning of my journey," he says without much ado.

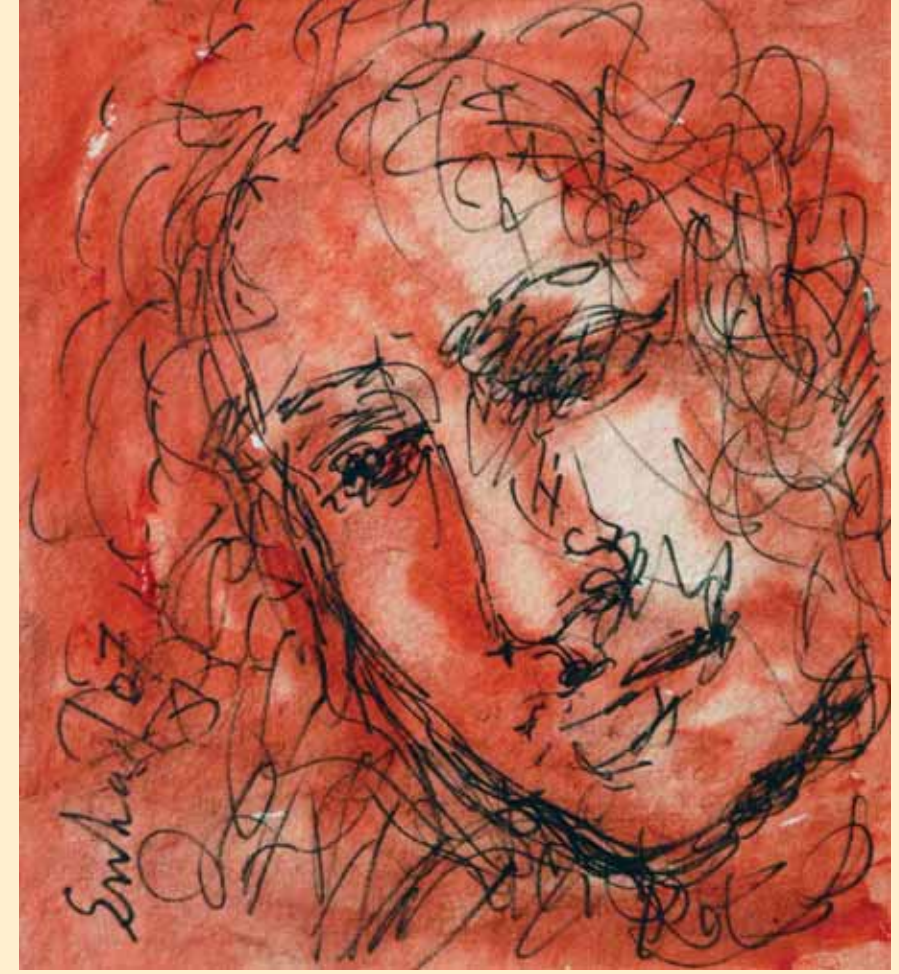
This simplicity of the man and his manners pervades his art, too. As an ordinary viewer, I find his paintings very pleasing. Neither flashy nor complicated, although of a highly resolved standard, they cause visual delight every time I look at them, without having to ponder over why I like them. It is perhaps no surprise that, amongst all his considerable body of work, my favourite is a Mother and Child.

No subject on earth has a greater appeal for a woman, particularly after she has herself become a mother. But what makes this work so special is the affection in the mother's face, her eyes, her look, her entire mien. I have no words to praise its beauty enough. I must add, I'm also inordinately fond of a particular Radha that I have decided to bequeath to my daughter-in-law, when the day comes.

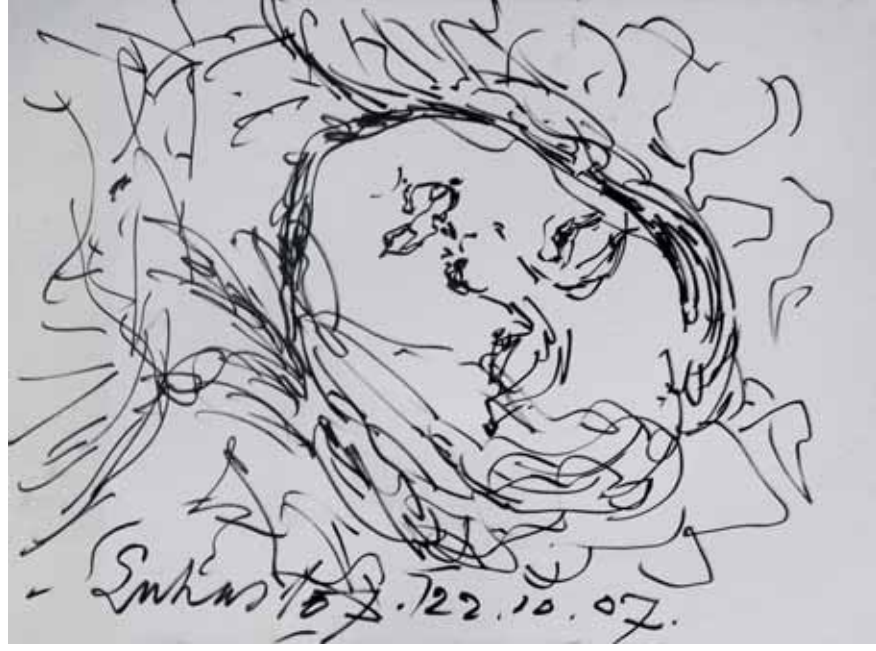
I therefore consider myself lucky that, at the start of my journey in art, I have the privilege of holding the fingers of a stalwart like Suhas Roy. I am secure in the knowledge that, if ever I stumble, there is a stout personality who can inspire me to carry on rather than buckle under. "When you embark on a battle, even if you face defeat, never leave the battle field," Baba has taught me. He has given me my life's mantra by saying: "When you look down upon the earth from the high altitude of an aeroplane in flight, everything from roads and rivers to man and mountain looks dwarfed. Likewise in life, when something unpleasant confronts you, transcend above it all, and they will lose their sting,"

This retrospective exhibition is my tribute to Suhas Roy, a friend, father and guru in my life. And I am fortunate to be inspired in this journey by his son, my husband Suman Roy.

Swati Roy







## Speaking of war by showing peace

Many of the works mounted in the exhibition to be held in Mumbai's Jehangir Art Gallery this December are Not For Sale. Evidently, the purpose of the show is not profit but to hold up the totality of the artist named Suhas Roy – his transformation, his diversity, his skilfulness. Sketches in Western Academic style, graphics, landscapes; Crow, Jesus, Radha; aluminium paint on glass, acrylic on paper, egg tempera on canvas – where do we start? Where did he? There's a story at every turn in the journey, so let's start at the very beginning.

A little boy in Tejgaon, now in Bangladesh, lost his father when he was only a year and half old. One Kaji Saheb, who taught geography in the village school and doubled as the art teacher, took him under his wings. If the boy learnt to outline India on the blackboard, he could also draw papayas and brinjals. And everything he drew scored 10 on 10. "It seems you'll grow up to be an artist!" the teacher would say.

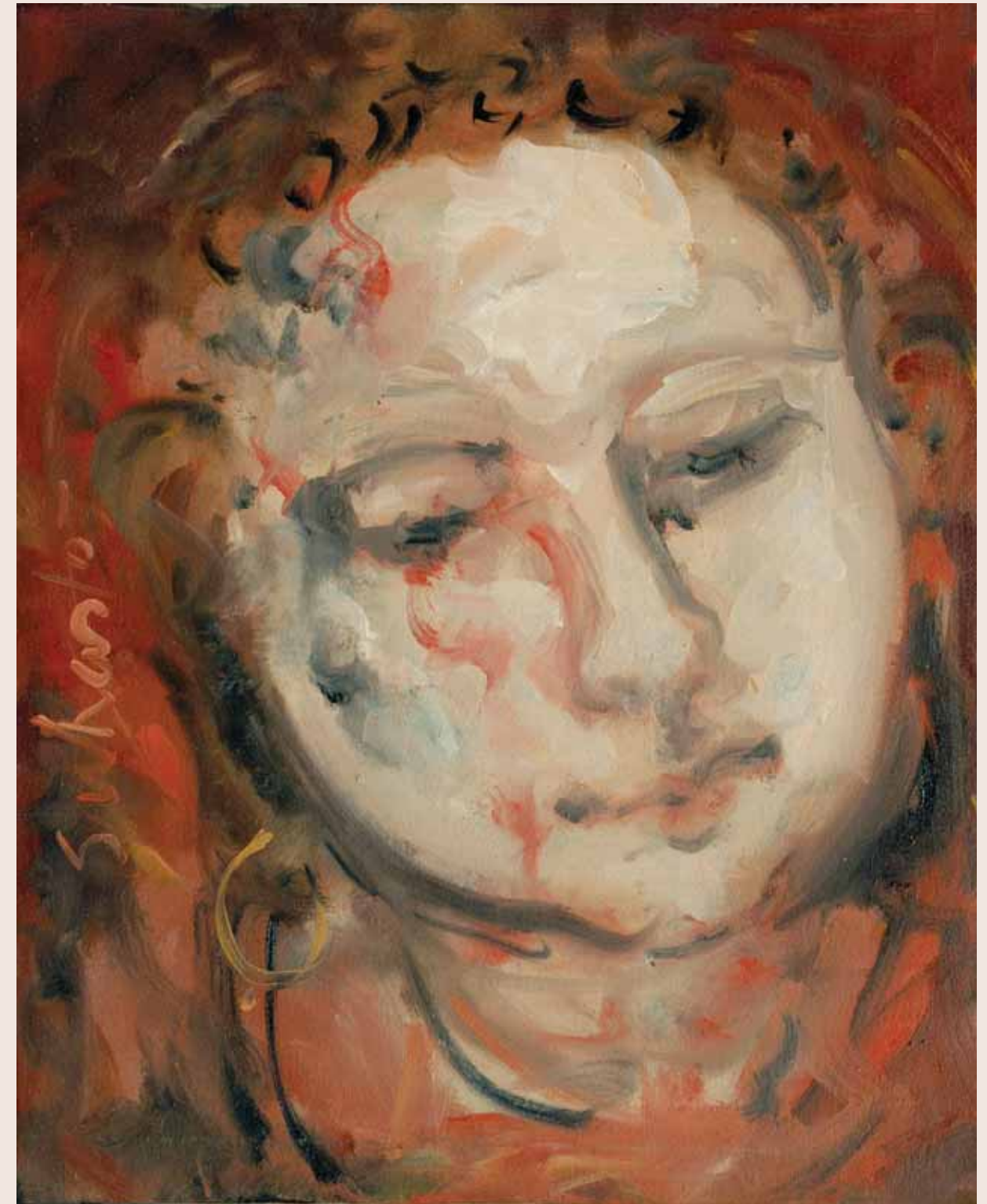
The boy loved to spend all his hours drawing and fishing. "How will these pleasures serve you in life?" the elders in the family would admonish him. The youth smiled in reply and went on to join the Indian Art College, studied new methods of printmaking under Somenath Hore and S W Hayter, visited Paris and Florence to study Michelangelo's David and Pieta, became a Painting teacher and joined Santiniketan... The lush green environs, the ponds and rivulets, the chirping birds and rustic villagers took him back to the childhood haven snatched away by the politics of religion. Suhas Roy, raised in the British Academic mood, riding the high tide of Modernism, debating whether to go Abstract or Semi-Abstract, started painting landscapes.

Yes, landscapes. Trees, birds, mountains, Suhas Roy painted them all, in flat dimensions. He painted elements identified with the genre but rather than borrow from Constable's Countryside or Monet's Lilies he looked at the overgrowth of shaluk and paancowrie in Bengal's backwaters, its ducks, storks and crows.

"Santiniketan gave back the opportunity to go fishing as I did in East Bengal, and I rediscovered the beauty and calming effect of Nature. It came as a relief to me, burdened as I was with the constant thought of 'What to paint?' Nature constantly changes. Besides, I found that appreciation of beauty is not confined to a class or profession – a doctor and a poet alike loves flowers. So I decided to go back to landscape, taking no note of whether it was in fashion or out, whether people will take it or not."

The Crow series became his signature in the '70s. The scavenger was an attraction because of its black feathers. Japanese watercolourist Taikan had come to 20th century Bengal with Okakura and helped Abanindranath Tagore master the medium. He'd done a black-and-white series on Mount Fuji. Chancing upon it in the Santiniketan library, Suhas Roy was so impressed as to reach for the austere palette. The crow readily lent itself to the scheme. In a departure from the practice in the medium, Suhas Roy would spray the canvas with acrylic paint before constructing the image in watercolour. Then he'd use a Japanese colour stick to create tones and dimensions. The Far Eastern concept of an object in a wide, open space came to be highly appreciated and widely collected, including by Karan Singh.

For 10 years Suhas Roy kept doing landscapes. When he tired of that, his imagination sought out tribal girls. It was a natural progression, for women – especially tribal – have





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a symbolic if not symbiotic link with trees. Often he'd counterpoise a tree with a woman. Taru, he titled one of these done in a workshop Suruchi Chand organised for Hudco. From woman in a landscape to Radha was just one step. When Gallery 88 held an exhibition on Krishna, Suhas Roy played with the concept of the Blue God being the Ultimate Being, melding Purush and Prakriti. His canvas thus sported a nude woman against a dark blue background. The title? 'Radha.' It not only sold for an enviable sum, it set in motion an astonishing demand for the image that shows no signs of abating.

Suhas Roy has been criticised for continuing to feed the appetite for Radha – but the master is far from apologetic. It is the very definition of icons, he points out: images of personalities deified by popular imagination – be they mythical, historical or social - are repeated again and again, generation after generation, in different styles and contexts. If one age worshipped them as bronze figurines and gold paintings, another flaunted them in oleographs and calendars. It has been so with Radha-Krishna, Ram-Sita, Buddha Jesus, even Gandhi Tagore and Teresa.

Jesus, however, entered Suhas Roy's world long before Radha. Sometime in 1969 he visited Florence to see David. He found the sculpture epitomising masculine beauty "too proportionate," and wandered into the church next door preserving Dante's Divine Comedy in parchment. There, in one corner, he saw the last work of Michelangelo - an unfinished Pieta. Such infinite pathos! The artist couldn't brush it off his memory even after he returned to Calcutta and one day its picture postcard inspired him to paint a Jesus. When he stopped, the canvas was sporting a contemporary pieta – Jesus without the head, his body descending from the heavens.

As a persona Suhas Roy has deep regards for Jesus. That is why such immense love, even when tinged with sorrow, pain or sadness, flows out of his veins. This prompted even Vatican to acquire his Jesus in 2006.

At some point in 1980s the artist found joy in glass painting. K G Subramanian had returned from Baroda to Santiniketan. For one Kala Mela he urged everybody to revive the ancient Indian tradition. Having earlier done some commercial work in the medium, Suhas decided to try enamel colours on glass. It lent a beautiful texture, and the tantalising outcome was acquired in bulk by Mahendra Jain of Delhi's Dhoomimal Gallery.

Rigidity, clearly, is a word unknown to Suhas. The changes have come spontaneously, and a good result has goaded him on. He has dwelt on a theme only until he'd besieged by another creative urge that could come in Khajuraho, or Turkey. Never shy of experimenting, his foremost concern has been meticulous quality. His temperas have, then, egg yolk with oil and Japanese porcelain; gelatine with resin and tamarind seed. If it imparts a finer texture to details, he will use a watercolour brush for oil paintings. For, he believes, "Good art will never lose its demand just as diamond will never lose its market."

Does this imply that Suhas Roy exists in an ivory tower away from social realities? No, the septuagenarian has "never run away from it." Witness the Disaster series that followed a flash flood in Ilam Bazar. On one of his fishing ventures Suhas witnessed dead bodies being fished out of water! Haunted by the image, he painted the series showing landscape with shrouded bodies.

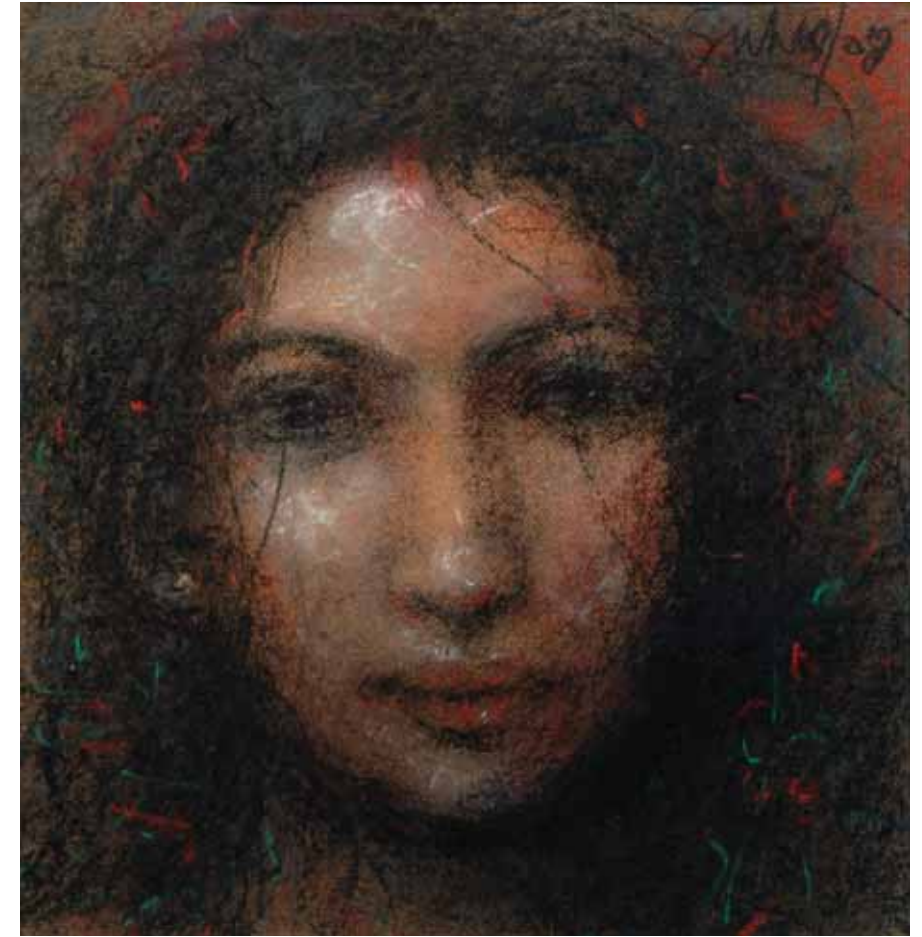
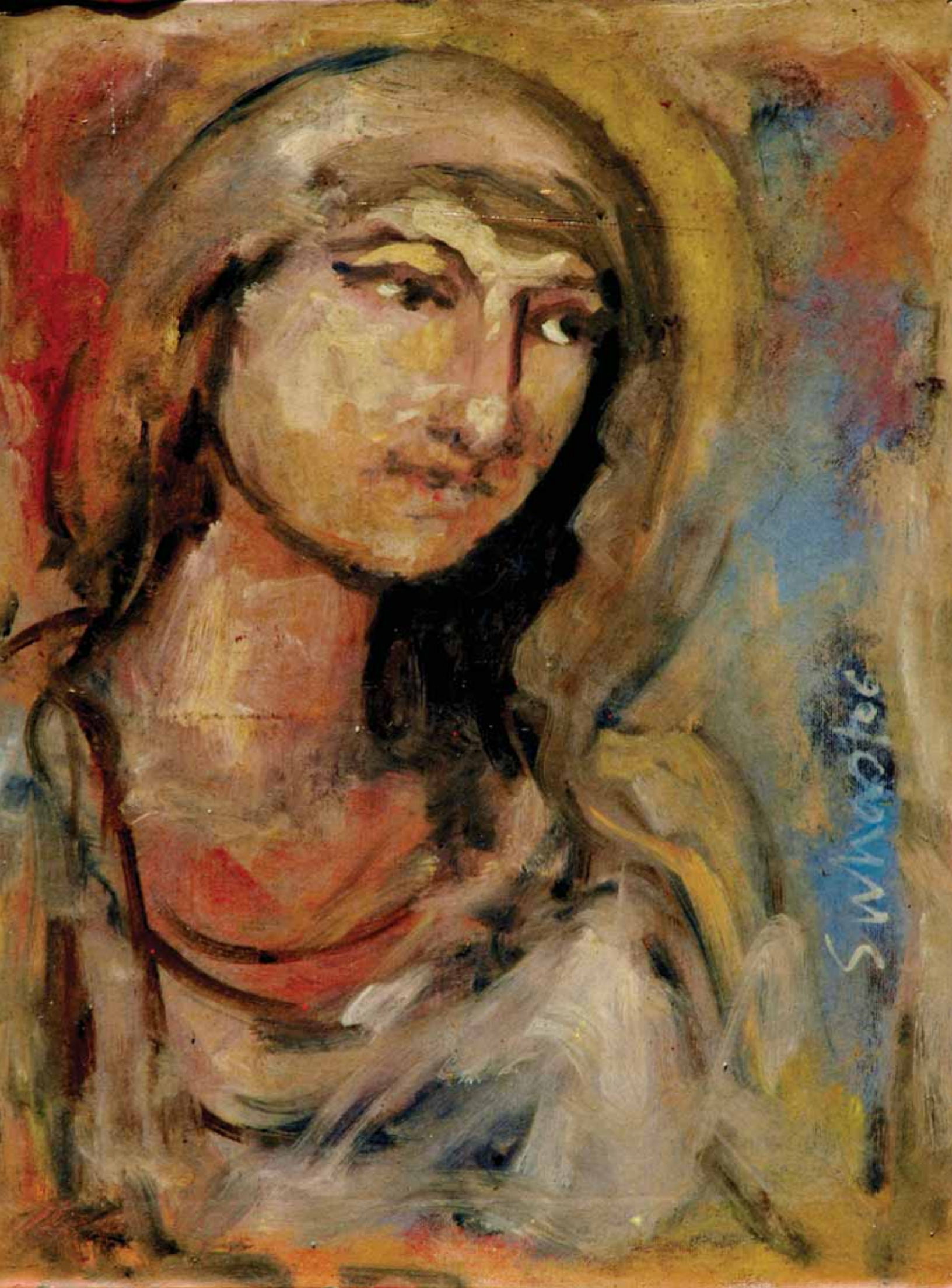
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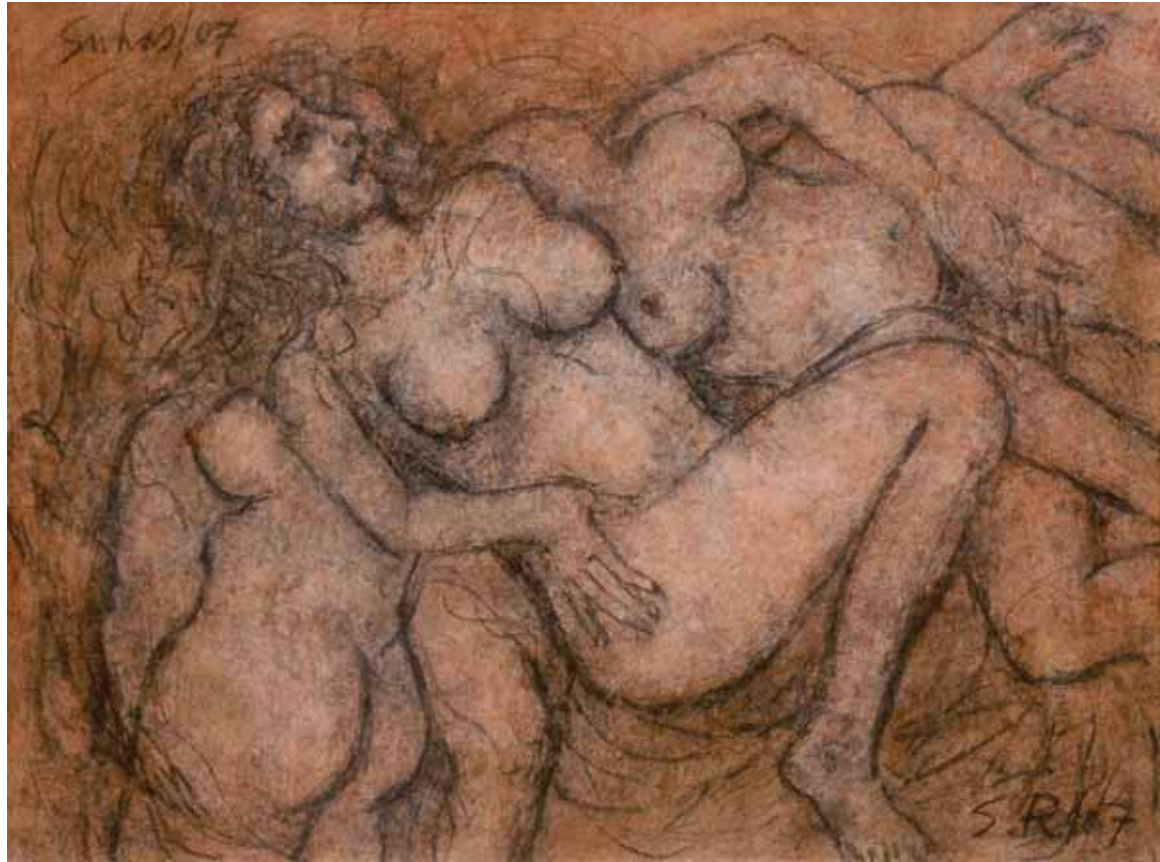
Indeed, ever since the Naxalite period gave rise to despondency, the artist has been "constantly haunted" by social reality. "But I realise, every turmoil, social or political – including Singur - will be shortlived. Documentation, including in contemporary art, will then be shortlived. Only when it transcends here-and-now can art have lasting value. I therefore focus on what has lasting appeal. Flowers blossom in the same fields that are crushed by battling soldiers. I will speak of the war through the Buddha who transcended war."

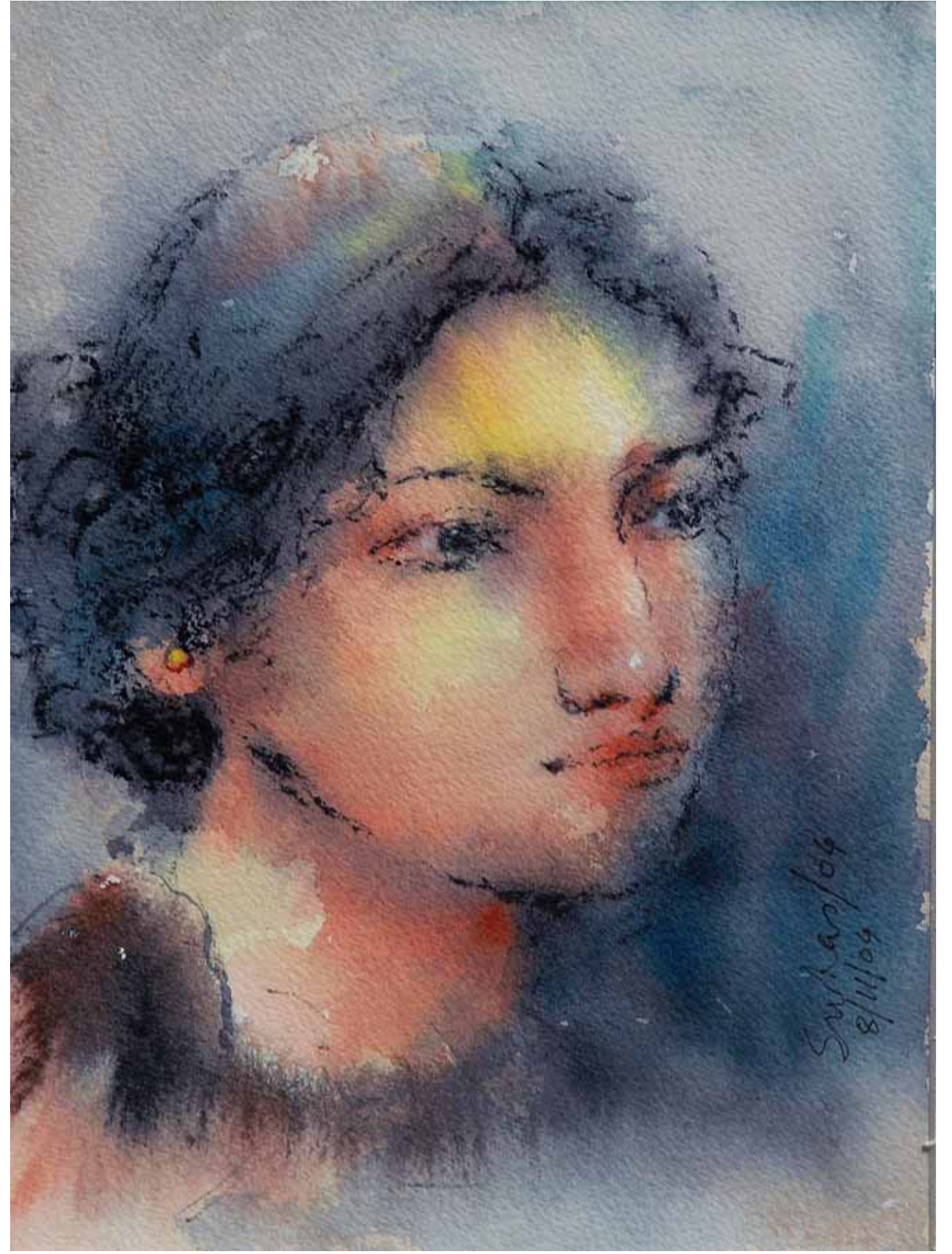
Small wonder, a collector tells Suhas Roy: "When I'm tossed and tired of problems, I look at your paintings. They act like balms."

### Ratnottama Sengupta









## Art of Suhas Roy: A Dialogue with the Self

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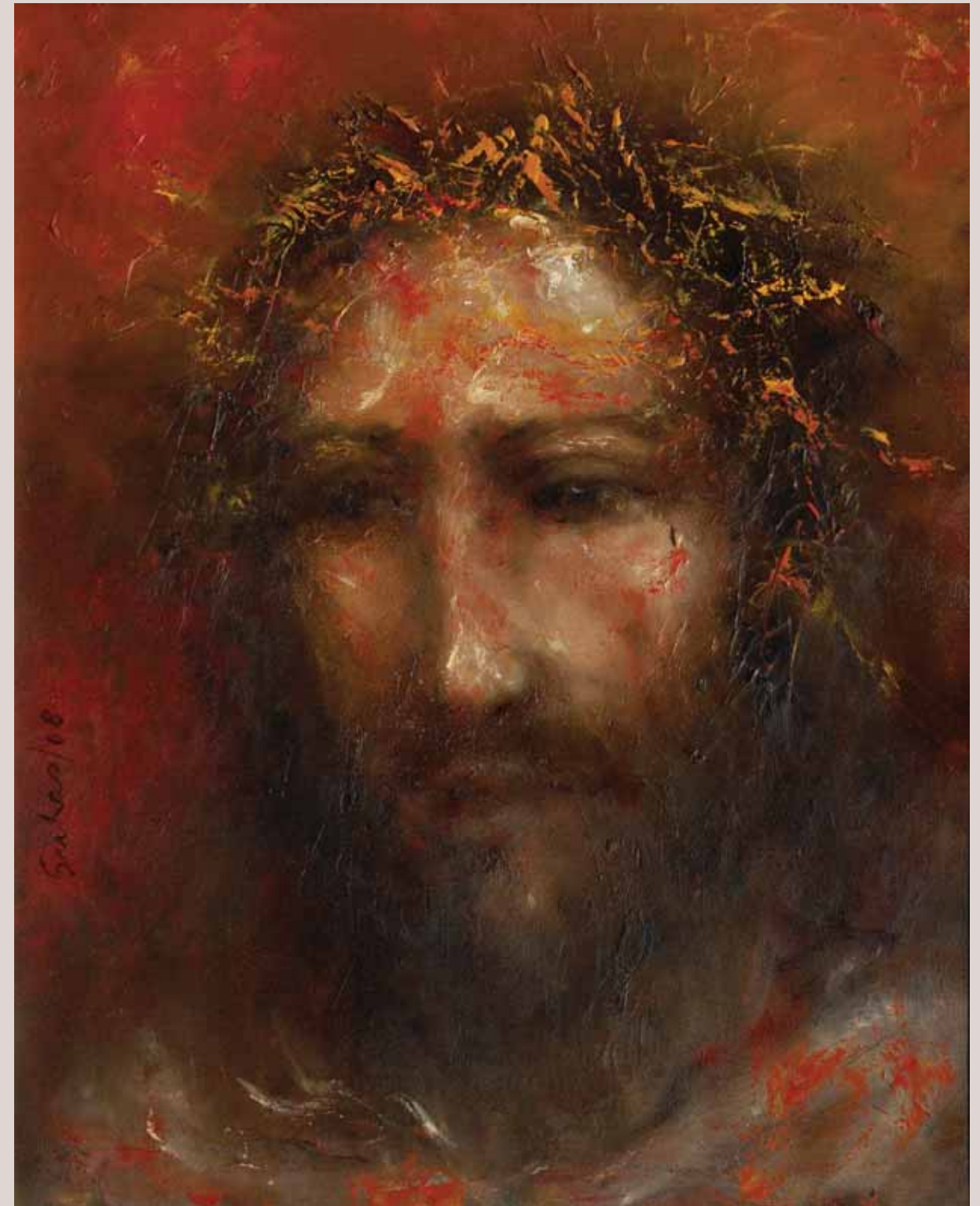
Suhas Roy belongs to the generation of 1960s. This generation, reared in the post-colonial geo-political situation, knew it for certain that they needed an identity of their own that would neither recall the past nor be modeled after the Euro-centric modernism, but would prudently be different, new, refreshing and individualistic. Though the generation included artists of different categories, and some of them initially dabbled in abstractionism, by and large they remained figurative. What made them more significant was that they encoded their Indian identity by using typically Indian images to signify their cultural base. While congruity with European modernism was more pronounced in the works of the preceding generation of 1940s, the post-colonial context and the local moorings remained the continuing strength of the artists of 1960s.

Suhas Roy had sailed for Europe immediately after his schooling at Calcutta. He interfaced contemporary European art as a student at the Atelier 17 and at L'Ecole de Beaux Arts in Paris between mid 50s and mid 60s. He also participated in exhibitions in Europe but his encounter with European modernism was disillusioning, And for him returning home meant returning to his own cultural base that ensured hope against the tragic collapse of the ideological systems that sustained so much of the European mind frame.

A viewer of Suhas Roy can discern that three specific themes recur in his paintings. These are the images of Radha of the Indian mythology, the Christ, and an Arcadian landscape that is virgin and serene. Each of these three signifies an artist's psyche that betrays an individual's ways of seeing. Abanindranath Tagore's Suklabhisar of 1895 that showed Radha's yearning for Krishna in a moonless night allegorized his quest for Indian identity. The avant-gardes of the 40s abstained from exploring mythology as they considered such attempts as indications of backwardness. Suhas Roy had no such inhibitions. In the art school, the pedagogy carries forth the colonial legacy and the first year students copy Roman and Greek antique figures as ideal types of human pose and posture. The sophomores study live models or female nude models in fixed postures under an artificial light source. Suhas Roy too studied Venus figures and live models in Calcutta and Paris, but his Venus transposed to Radha in the Indian cultural context.

His initial Radha images, bedecked in jewellery in an Arcadian setting, referred to the schools of Rajput painting. Occasionally he also drew on the Surasundari image embellishing temple sculptures. Radha's emergence from water suggested by the lotuses around also recalls the Venus myth. Gradually the Radha image was shorn of references and she emerged as a coy, beautiful girl in the prime of her youth. Over the years she has not aged: her youth and beauty stay put. The dissolution of a mythical female of eternal charm into a next-door girl can be cited as an example of the Jungian 'anima' or the feminine self residing in the psyche of a male, that operates as an ever-strengthening spirit. Jung identified this 'anima' within the male-self as the image of personal love, feeling for nature and his relation to the unconscious. Suhas Roy's Radha represents his 'anima'; more particularly, the second stage of 'anima' as we see in Faust's Helen who personifies a romantic and aesthetic self and is also characterized by sexual elements. The male spirit residing within the female is named 'animus'. This anima-animus concept approximates the Ardhanariswara image of Indian mythology.

Suhas Roy's Christ is a far cry from the European prototype. His Christ looks Indian. Calm



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and composed, he is an image of forbearance. The serene visage of Jesus with the crown of thorns that he paints time and again obliquely refers to the artist's tryst with the time that had not been kind to him during his initial years, as he was a victim of the country's partition in 1947. Suhas Roy was born in Dhaka in British India. After the partition the Roy family migrated to India leaving the property on which the family thrived. Suhas Roy's Christ is neither a symbol of painless detachment as we see in Renaissance art nor an anguished martyr as we see in Grunewald and in Sutherland. Suhas Roy presents him as a redeemer who bears all the sufferings and pains as a mortal. As in Durer, Suhas Roy's Christ visage too resembles his self-portrait: they dissolve in each other. His Christ is young, charming and transcends the world's agony and angst, and exists on the metaphysical plane.

Incidentally Suhas Roy is one of those few contemporary artists who never gave up landscape painting. Unlike Rousseau's exotic Arcadia, in Suhas Roy's landscape each and every tree is identifiable in their characteristic features. His landscape, complete with a kingfisher or a crane and mostly showing a sunny ambience laden with moisture, is a genre in itself. Constable's idyllic countrysides are true to the topography. Suhas Roy does not paint any particular spot as is expected of a landscape artist. His landscapes substitute the particular for the universal. They do not show the traditional vanishing point or the sky-land distribution of space. Instead, they offer a glimpse into the lush and the perennial verdant ambience of Bangladesh that the artist carried with him when he left his birthplace for good. Like Chagall's diasporic Vitebsk, Suhas Roy's landscapes register his yearnings for his place of birth. When he moved over to Santiniketan from Calcutta and built his house there, the local palm trees or palmyra started appearing in his landscapes encoding the spatial reality. The recurrence of the palmyra at certain unexpected locations turned his landscapes into an autobiographical statement.

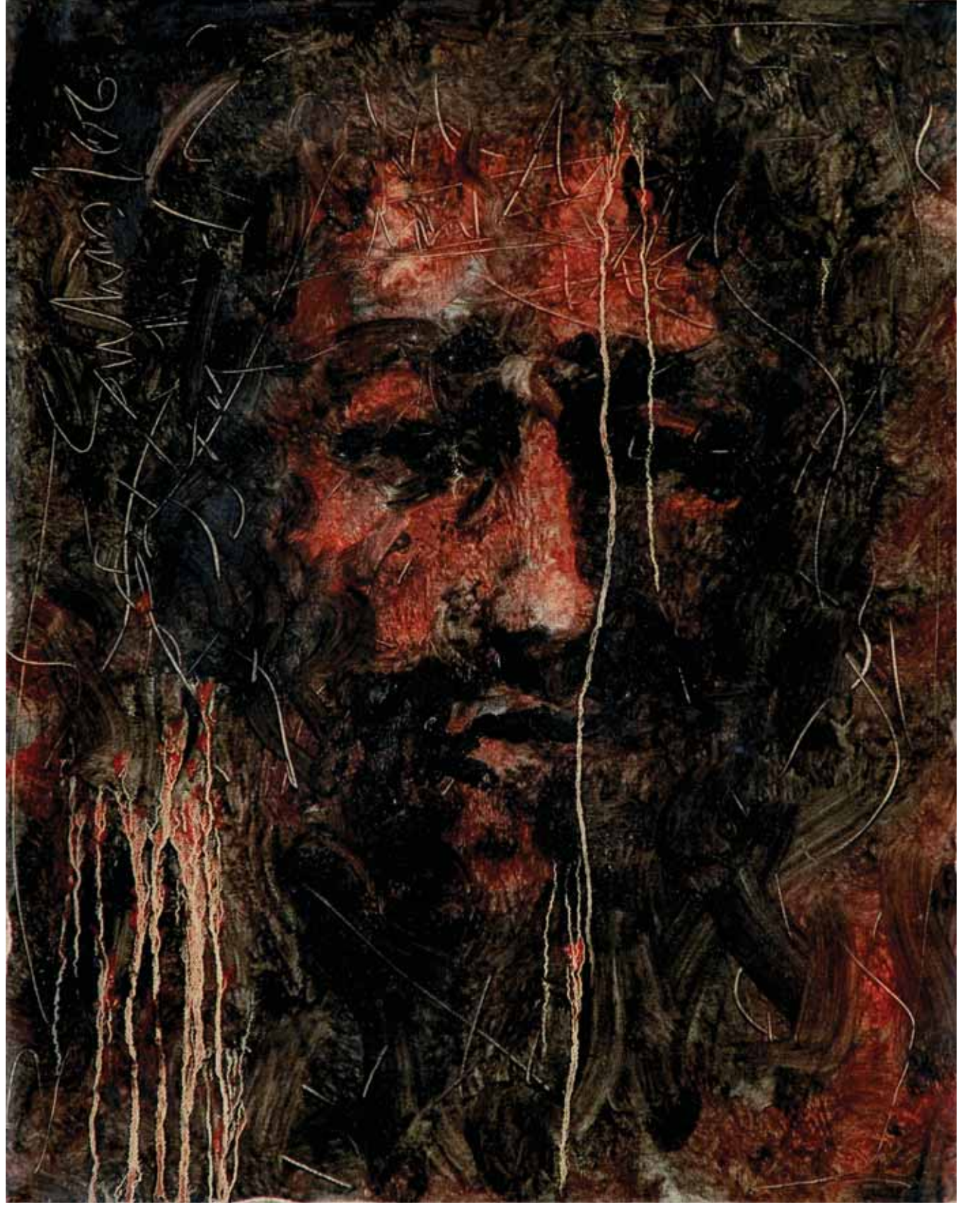
All arts are stimulated by human cognition and are volitional. Nature is indifferent to human emotions. In arts the human soul speaks out. In that sense, all arts are autobiographic. Suhas Roy's painting is no exception. The issues he puts in relation to themes are personal as well as universal.



Sovon Som  
Kolkata, October 2008









## He gave us in a hundred ways

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Suhasda came to Santiniketan when we were in our 1st year. My first impression was – ‘He’s such an easy person!’ He would answer everything with a smile. And so encouraging! “Hobey, hobey!” was his unfailing response whenever we approached him with our work. For a young artist seeking reassurance at the outset of her journey in art, it was like Destiny speaking.

“Keep painting,” he would urge. I would finish ten at a stretch and show up before him. “Suhasda please take a look, are they getting anywhere?” I’d say. “Of course! You’re doing fine!” he would reply, the conviction in his voice filling us with the will to do 20 more.

Learning from Suhasda has thus been a part of me from the beginning of my art life. “Play with it!” he would urge, whether we were painting or drawing. That instilled in us the freedom to play at will with our palette. Unconcerned with the final outcome we would ply colour on colour, stroke on stroke, line on line... When we were satiated, we would roll them up and take them to Suhasda. “Yes, you’re head on!” – we waited to hear him say.

We got Suhasda in his prime years. Sometimes, when young artists flocked to him, Suhasda would pick up the work and show how to do it right. What a perfect stroke it would be! I could never bring myself to paint on what he’d touched. Sometimes he would explain a point by drawing something in our sketchbook. We cherished these works like prasada. Those were different times we lived in, it never crossed our minds that, though casual, these were imprints of a master that could – in days to come – fetch a hefty price.

At all other times Suhasda would work in the studio so that we could see what, and how, he was painting. I remember he was then doing the Crow series. I was deeply impressed by his tremendous patience. “To build something you must have patience,” we learnt from the practising artist.

Another thing about Suhasda that I admire most: He never differentiated between one student and another, on any ground. Rich or famous, sought after, well connected – they all got the same attention as one from an ordinary home. He was the spark that could set off fireworks, if the student had it in him or her. I wasn’t a prized student, but I had a dogged perseverance that bordered on the adamant. Suhasda was indulgent about my stubbornness. He had the capacity to convince me with his logic but rather than launch into an argument, he gave me the freedom to discover things for myself.

The process of learning under Suhasda was quite different from the others. We never started with the thought, “What will be get at the end of the work?” The process itself was what mattered most. The journey itself was an achievement, he inculcated in us. It firmed up our foundation and inspired us to battle on with the brush. How much that strengthened our grasp over our medium, we discovered much later.

While in France, Suhasda had mastered printmaking in Hayter’s Studio. One day he showed us some of the work he had done there. Amazing! The colours glowed even after the passage of considerable time. “It’s all about layering,” he said, smiling characteristically even as he enriched us with the knowledge of which order would yield the best result.

After his Crow series Suhasda moved onto the Disaster series. He has always worked in terms of series. Then he came to portraits, black and white or monochromatic. It was



followed by the Radha series, which he has continued to do over an inordinately long time. Of course, he has chequered it with the Mistress of the Moon series on Khajuraho, and Jesus too.

I cannot sit in judgment or critique Suhasda's paintings. I've never looked upon them as an objective viewer – from the very beginning he was a major contemporary artist who we were lucky to have as our teacher. His skilfulness is unmatched: when he's drawing, the lines never get loud; when he's painting, the palette is never overpowering. If any student can grasp just the secret of this, Suhasda has succeeded in his role as a guru.

Suhasda was fond of fishing. It was not a sport for him, nor his favourite pastime, it was a passion. Perhaps it brought back memories of his childhood years in East Bengal. And Santiniketan offered him enough opportunities to go fishing. On a good day, he'd tell me, speaking in our native Bangal dialect, "Stay seated, you're not leaving until you've had some fish."

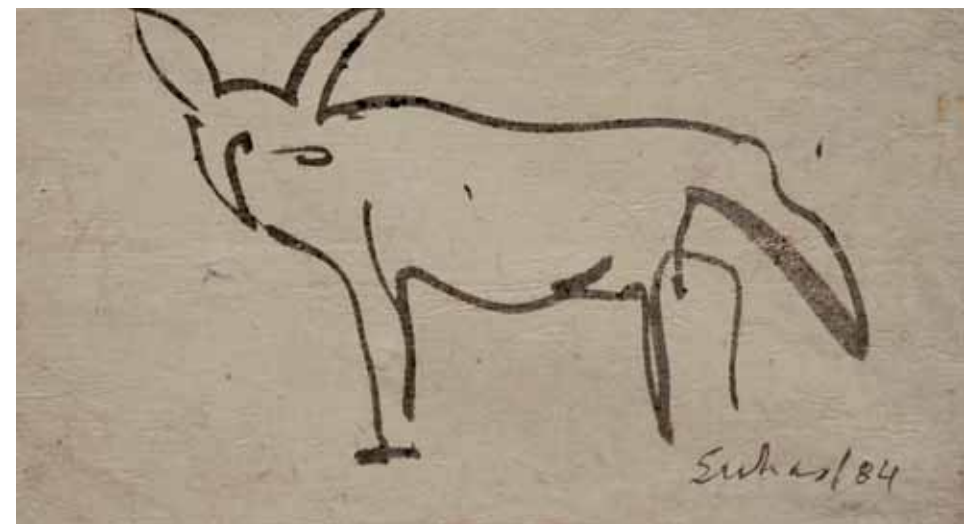
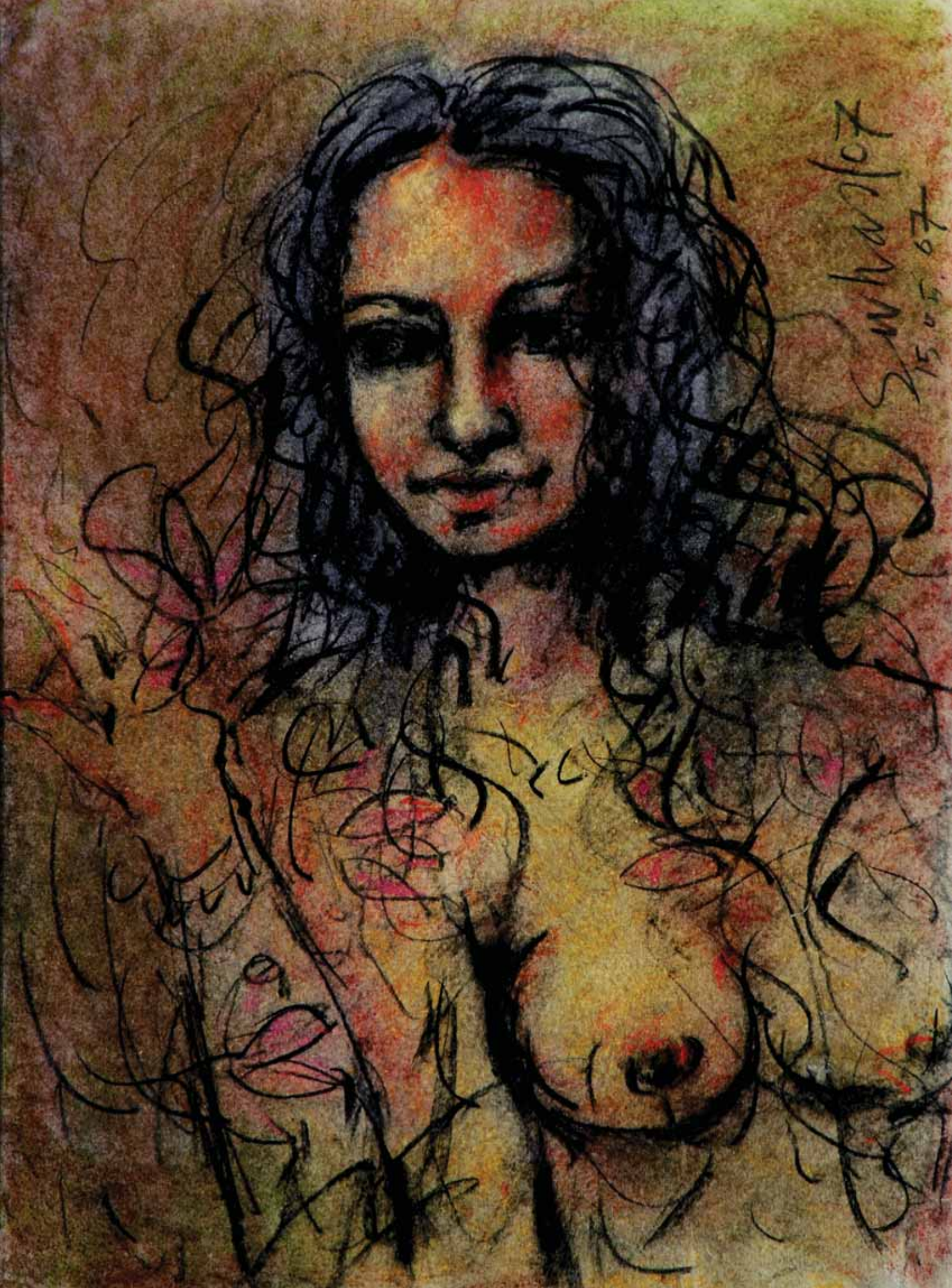
After school hours he was like a friend. A father figure who prepared us innocent souls, to face the rough and tumble of an artist's life, with unadulterated affection.

To sum up, I can only say – he gave us like a shatadhara, in a hundred different ways.

Jayashree Chakraborty







## Nature as the Eternal Feminine

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Visual art has lost much of the old lustre, that illuminated surface with multiple layers of appeal that addressed people ranging from a lay audience to elitist viewers or connoisseurs. This was true for not only the old masters but many moderns too, until art acquired absolute autonomy, demanding viewers proficient in art semiotics. Crowds who visit museums preserving great art of the past are seldom aware of art history and anything else that is required for appropriate appreciation of the masters. But the viewer enjoys, each according to his ability and need, the excitement of watching an artwork even if for the sheer grandeur of its content and the pure wonder of the artist's mastery over his craft.

Suhas Roy's early training at Indian Art College in Calcutta ingrained in him a passion for mastering art's basic craft and skill. Later he acquired an undying admiration for the values and visions of the old masters, particularly the Italian Renaissance and the 18th century French Classicists whom he studied with care when he visited France and Italy in 1965. He would have completely agreed with the famed American art critic Robert Hughes when he said: "Late-modern art teaching ... has increasingly succumbed to the fiction that the values of so-called academy – meaning, in essence, the transmission of disciplined skill based on live model and natural motif – were hostile to creativity."

Nevertheless Suhas knew his art couldn't afford to get out of joint with the times. Modernism demands not merely transcendence of talent into genius, of craft into creativity or virtuosity overtaken by vision; it also demands a certain perception of contemporary values that shapes the self, and its fleshing out in expressive forms. Such forms may have an excuse of representation but it aims at tracing the nuances of the artist's inner journey. His early pen and ink drawings and graphics, sporting his command over modernist formal values, often register him as an artist of the 60s who had lived through the decades of refugee influx, political turmoil and Naxalite violence. But these works also display the brio of his craft, for which the images engage the viewer more, as their expressive content.

Roy hails from the other Bengal, now Bangladesh, which left an indelible imprint on his impressionable mind with its luxuriant rural green. His brisk sensitive studies of foliage, figures, animals, birds, or scraps of landscapes in dashed charcoal, or dense pen-and-ink hatching amply bear this out. These are all part of his exercise in quest of forms that can speak of his self deeply charged with nature since his early life. We cannot forget that he shot into fame when, as a Kala Bhavan teacher in Santiniketan, he did naturescapes in tempera and oil, more often in the reverse technique of glass painting. These are treescapes or close forest views, groves or shrubberies with masses of foliage, studded sometimes with flowers or birds, filling the entire picturespace except for an occasional glimpse of woodland space or the sky. Ranging from meticulous realistic detailing to texture-specific atmospheric evocation, his landscapes are remarkable in their density as exclusive views of nature – not as a backdrop to human reality – and as such they are suggestive of a mystic tie that the artist unconsciously developed with nature in the rural ambience of his early life.

As in the glass paintings or in his graphics, charcoals and pen-and-inks and brushy wash drawings are the first thing one has to take into consideration in an unforced impression of his total ease with his craft. It is present even in the most sketchy or washy evocation



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or crows and cranes, dogs and doves, figures and faces, each unmistakably shaping out of smudges, dashes, strokes and stains. Yet the forms spontaneously exceed their semantic briefs and achieve in each frame an abstraction of expressive statement that refers to the artist himself in his instantaneous creative abandon.

In all this Roy has seldom displayed any zest for direct delineation of a social space in his art. His early graphics or drawings of the 60s bear evidence, very obliquely though, of his awareness of the events around. In figures, forms and textural and tonal treatment of his imagery of the 60s and 70s there is often a sombre strain sustaining the aesthetic anchor of his creative practice. This happened especially in his Santiniketan days, when he was least bothered about any subject for his painting. "You can find a subject even under your feet," he would say. What he cared a great deal for was looking into his charged self, pure and authentic, in quest of the aesthetic and the spiritual. Suhas has, however, stopped short of going all the way to where modernist aesthetic had landed modernist art before being upstaged by the post-everything movements of the 70s. Not an abstractionist but a virtuoso in the figurative idiom and his art committed to imaging his experience – in the best tradition of India's past art as well as 150 years of modern art in Bengal – he rediscovered in nature an inexhaustible source of the sustenance for his perception of self and self-expression.

But soon he shifted his quest from nature to human figures, especially in the form of female nudes and portraits. The figurative in his pictorial idiom took on a rhetorical turn. Now he would represent nature by making a figure for her. His canvas ceased to sport nature as close view of dense forest or woodland. Now she is imaged or metaphorized as a fair lady – nature as the eternal feminine, as is traditionally done in Indian philosophy and literature. She often appears as Banalakshmi, the woodland deity, the embodied spirit of the greens, her face and figure framed with a flurry of charcoal strokes, pliant as creepers or bedecked with a flourish of foliage. She may be a tribal girl or a village belle, a transparent beauty glowing on her placid visage, sometimes recalling the nayika of our miniature paintings. He has till date done innumerable such portraits generally titled Radha, including erotic nudes titled Mistress of the Moon, and occasionally the portraits and the Passion of the Christ.

Done in diverse mediums, Roy's work celebrates traditional aesthetic. He lends it a fresh dimension of wonderful imaginative and expressive power, and the splendid intensity of his virtuosity pushes his art beyond the limits of mere representation.

Manasij Majumder







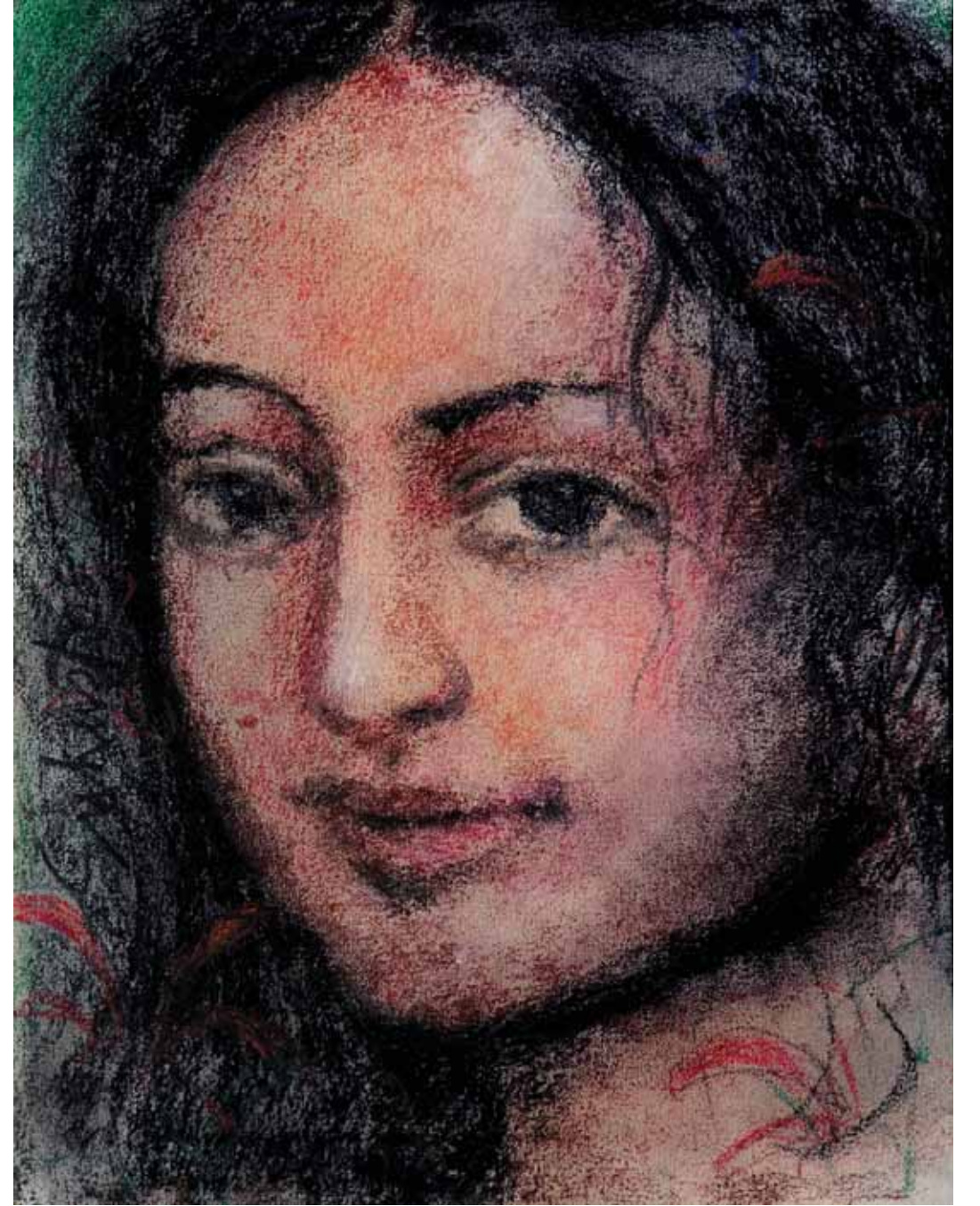
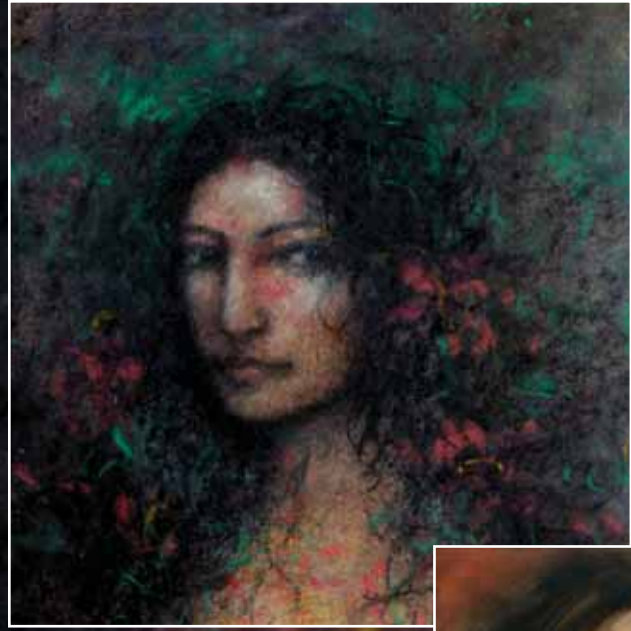


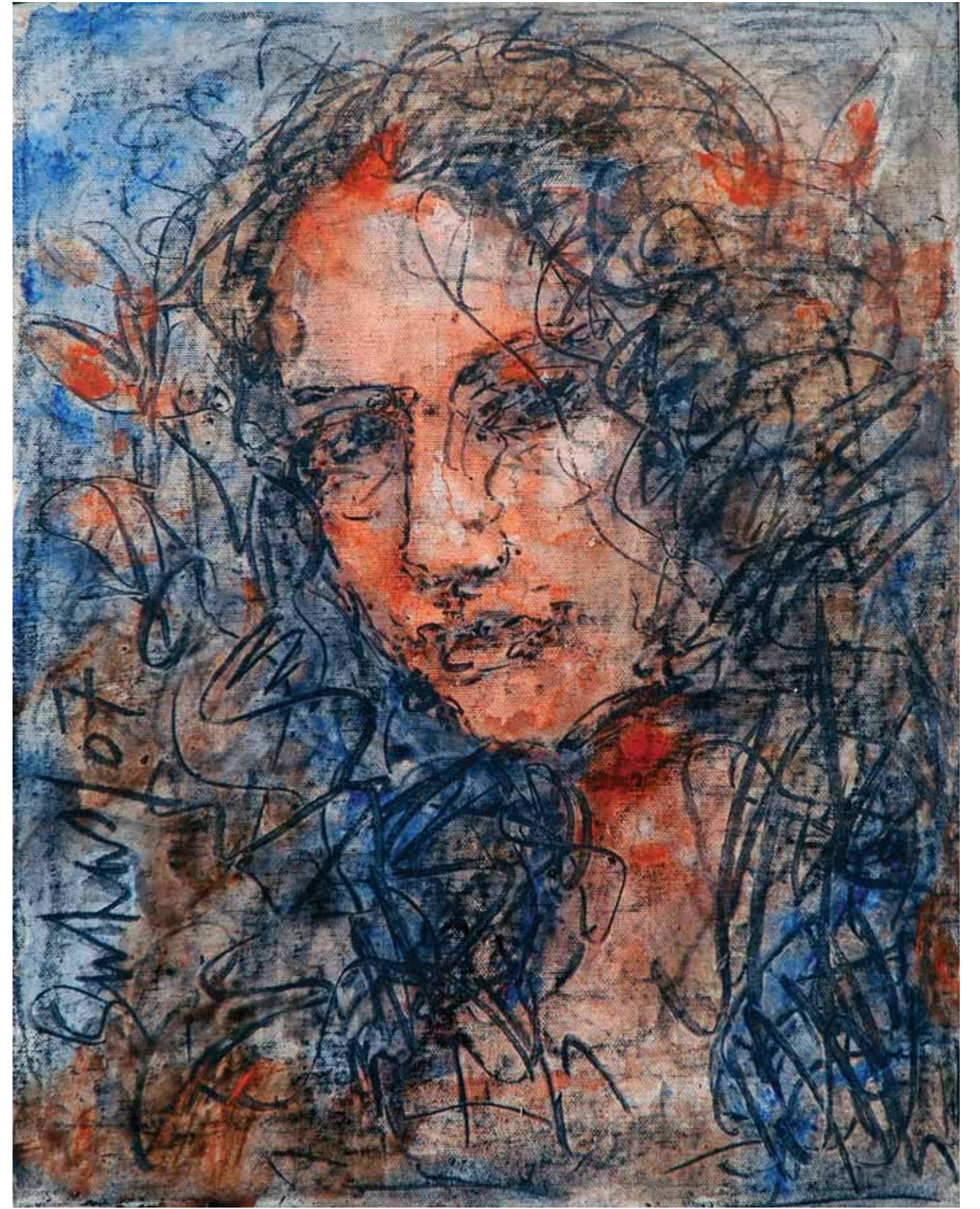
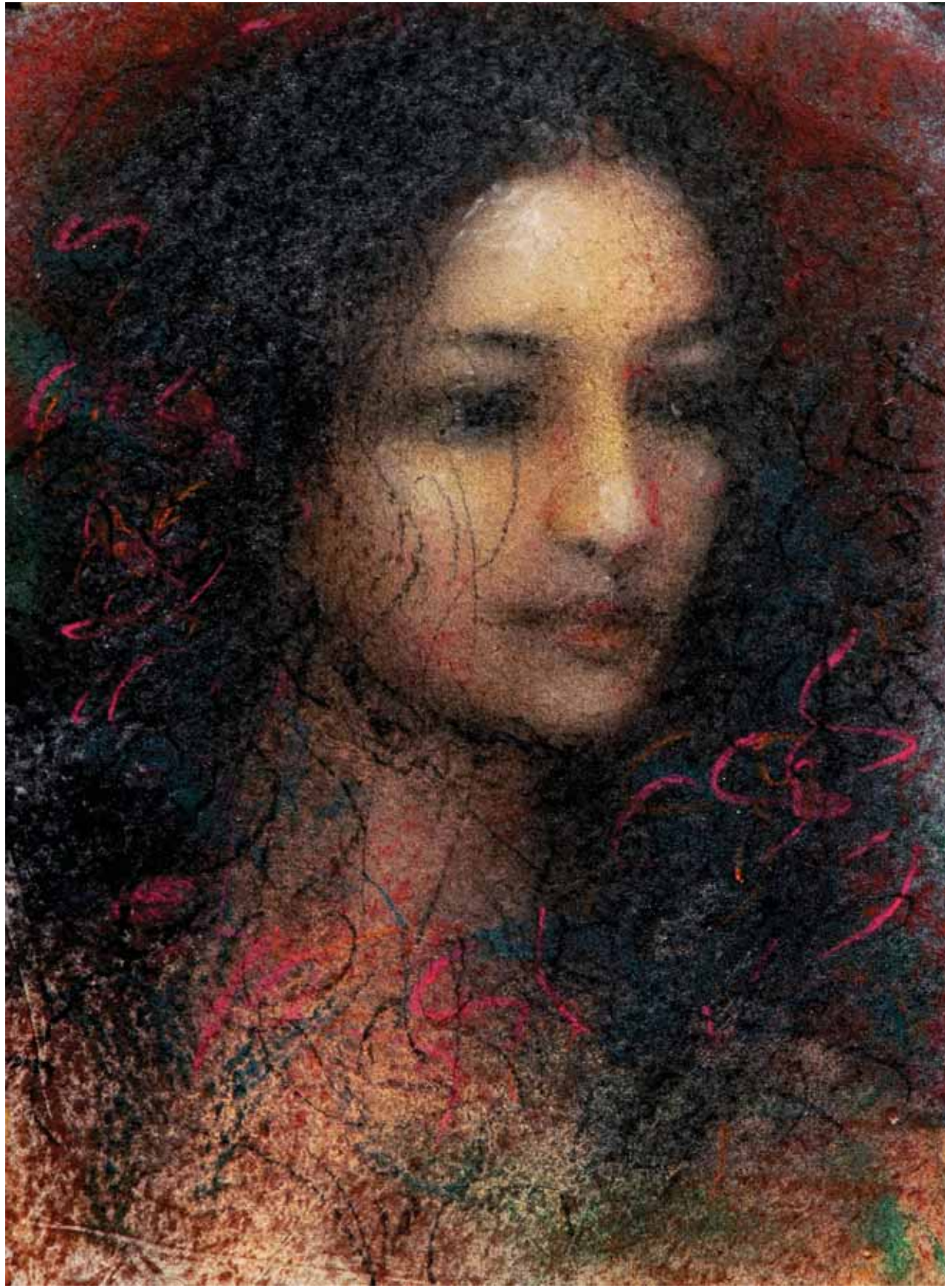
## On Suhas Roy

Suhas Roy is a hugely skilled artist and his works are extremely graceful and romantic. Through use of materials like crayons, charcoal and brush, he has created a sense of mysticism around characters that one can seem to identify and yet can remain unknown. A great deal is done by him to portray the refined imagery in his paintings rich in elegance and beauty. His works have a feeling of a soft core and a sense of weightlessness permeates the images.









## The art and artistry of Suhas Roy

Suhas Roy's paintings, like many of his contemporaries, span parts of two centuries. Born in 1936 in the then East Bengal, he grew up amidst tillers of land and toilers of the river. Soon World War II and the famine of 1943 ruptured their peace. Then came the communal riots of 1946 that culminated in the partition of India. Insecurity forced his large joint family to flee the newborn East Pakistan. Little did they know that, before long, it would secede to become Bangladesh.

Suhas is a globetrotter since his student days. He was teaching in Indian Art College when he travelled on a French Government scholarship to study printmaking at Atelier 17. Subsequently he has toured the Americas, Europe, Egypt, East and South East Asia, sometimes as a sightseer, sometimes to participate in international art camps or festivals. He has been invited to Bangladesh, and exhibited in Dhaka by ICCR. While there he slips away to his ancestral home, still inhabited by the sons of his paternal uncles. "Nostalgia for the early days draws me like a magnet," he says. "A visit to Dhaka is a sort of homecoming."

Suhas is a low profiled, amicable, cheerful person who never thrusts his opinions on others. He is always smiling, accommodating, helpful. This laughter-filled, peaceable nature is an integral part of him. Sufferings and shocks have agonised and shaken him but never overwhelmed him. He quickly regains his calm. This inner tranquillity manifests itself in his work.

### Drawings

Suhas is always jotting, scribbling, making instant linear notation of what catches his eyes or stirs him, on proper drawing sheets or bits of paper. Pencil, pen and ink, conte, pastel, charcoal, brush, their combination – he uses them all. Sketches, or drawings, some are signed and dated, some not.

The earliest drawings date from the 1960s. The folk doll form of those days was a wistful attempt to reach his roots. One work dated 1967 plays with the symbol of a snake. Then came portraits of men, in swift strokes or finished works with dark to light progression showing definite intent. His fascination with women's face and curves of the body is also evident. As he observes their natural posture, women with mysterious faces emerge to convey inner strength.

Sometimes he studies women, sometimes trees, foliage, leaves and flowers, crow, other birds. Cattle and dogs are not left out. What begins as pure and simple outdoor sketches later transformed into visual renderings glorifying nature. The key to understanding the transformation lies in his lifestory.

After finishing his art education in Kolkata's Indian Art College he joined in as a lecturer. When his mentor Somenath Hore left for Delhi, he found himself heading the Graphic Arts department. As a member of the Society of Contemporary Artist he had worked on their graphic press along with Somenath Hore, Arun Bose and other members. During this period painting took a backseat and printmaking became his passion. It was reinforced by the French scholarship that took him to Atelier 17.

Before Suhas, Kaiko Moti, Krishna Reddy and Arun Bose had trained under William



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Hayter. After him, Tapan Ghosh and some others. While Hore had initiated him into the art of printmaking, Hayter taught how to make multicolour prints from a single matrix.

Both Kolkata and Paris influenced the artist in his formative years. After his return he became the Principal of the Indian College of Art. Administrative problems took up much of his time. Life took a turn when he was appointed a lecturer in Santiniketan's Kala Bhavan. The total atmosphere of the surrounding villages, the Santhal men and women started to change him. Holidays found him out fishing. Waiting for the fish to bite he would watch the date palms with pots tied round their neck, village boys grazing cows in the field, farmers ploughing the fields, groups of Santhals going to work, birds in flight... Everything in nature fascinated him. It broke down the wall between indoor and outdoor that marked his earlier drawings and paintings. He became a nature mystic in the Wordsworthian sense.

Santiniketan also gave him an economic stability that encouraged him to paint in right earnest. He traded the metal plates and woodblocks, which are somewhat restrictive, for paper, canvas, board and cloth. On these he painted in oil, watercolour, tempera, mixed media... They gave expression to an enchanted soul at tune with the world around him.

#### Printmaking

From 1964 to 1974 Suhas Roy was a printmaker. His first solo exposition in 1963, at the Arts and Prints Gallery, had established him as an artist whose figurative work is always enriched and enhanced with textured statements. The image and the spatial interludes, on or inside the surface, impart a magic quality to his etchings, aquatints and intaglio. Evidently he was never keen on absolute formal abstraction. The land of Pharaohs is pictured with a pyramid. The scorching midday sun bores a hole on a pyramid's exterior stony wall. Another print depicts a mask-like elongated granulated face that mirrors total acceptance and a frightening apathy. Yet another print profiles a bearded person and fossil-like imprints. While his method has affinities with Hayter's technique, his content admixes Indian and international elements. From his printmaking he carries over to his paintings the linear movements, cross-hatchings, tonal variation and textured hues.

#### Paintings

The tradition and modernity debate that raged among artists during the colonial period came to an end after Independence. The search for relevant form and a personal style became important. The artists who went to Paris at the end of WWII and returned to India insisted on working out the tenets of modernity and its subjective relation to individual talent.

By the time Suhas went to Europe, the post war reconstruction was over. Like his study at the Ecole, his tours of Western Europe and Egypt and visits to galleries and museums created a deep impression in him. Since his teaching days at Santiniketan he has frequently changed his style and content - from landscapes with flowers and foliage to disasters. His strength however lies in his iconography.

His recent works have diligently worked out Hindu, Buddhist and Christian themes. What do these have in common with the religious art that have gone before? It is the sustained need to communicate visually through myths and history. Rembrandt's religious art had no

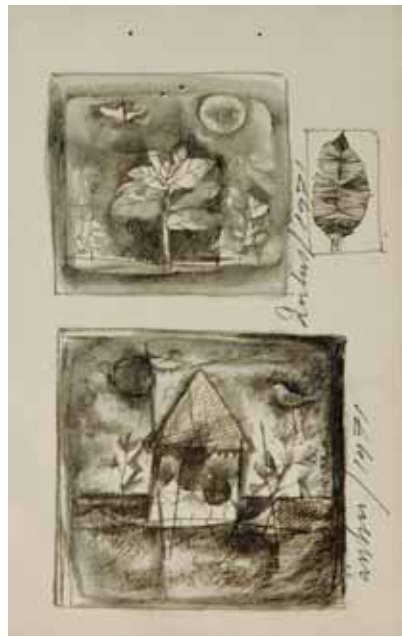
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takers in Catholic Europe of his times. Rouault does not draw Christians of Europe today – they speak to larger circles. Similarly Marc Chagall, a Jew, and Hindu artists Jamini Roy, Nikhil Biswas and Suhas Roy have depicted Christ. They have broken new grounds by inculcating deep, and many more illuminating ideas, in their paintings. Suhas has also taken the life of Buddha to communicate a depth of understanding and contemporary relevance. Strangely Rembrandt, Rouault, Jamini or Suhas were not commissioned by any church or sangha. Moreover Suhas invested his own iconic and aesthetic content in the Radha series.

In any work of art, the aesthetic has to surpass the religious. The best works of Suhas depicting Buddha, Christ or Radha go beyond the boundaries of religion and the spiritual, to expand the realm of art. His work shows an intense search for a personal style. He never sticks to any medium and takes liberties with its conventional use. It would seem Suhas wants to preserve what he can from the past. Yet, at heart, he knows contemporaneity is a rejection and replacement of the past. Imagery from the Renaissance to post Impressionism, Ajanta murals to medieval Indian paintings – everything has been transformed in his work. The nudes, Buddha with wounded swan, Christ being taken down from the Cross – they take us through the labyrinth of art history as also the ill-lit areas of our mind.

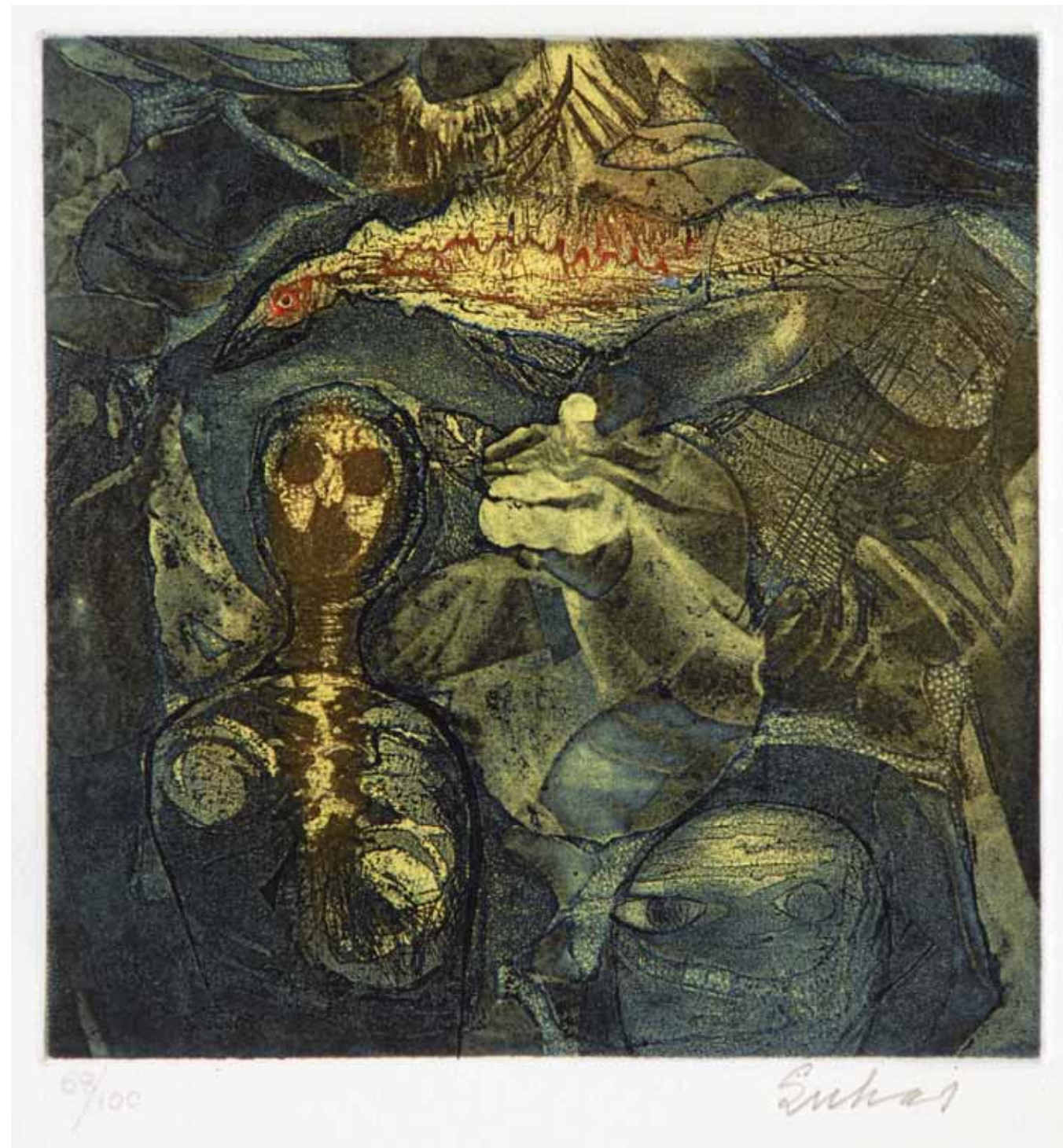
Undeterred by a bypass surgery, Suhas Roy paints on. As colours burst forth with linear modulation, the fractured and fragmented world gains new life on the painted surface.

Sandip Sarkar









## Suhas Roy's Rasikpriya

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The surface is covered with dense lines, forms and imagery often in a mix of subtle and bright palette. There are scribbles and doodles along-side fine drawings of birds, flowers, foliage and entwined vines in woods and landscapes as well as faces of women and men that evoke emotions of tranquility on the one hand and romance and sensuousness on the other. A seductive appeal in harmony with a Zen feel is what entails much of Suhas Roy's artistic oeuvre that reveals a pre-occupation with the female form. The subject, mostly Radha as Rasikpriya, inundate his current artistic expressions that inhabit a world of grace, innocence, fantasy, romance and sensuality. Myriad moods and modes are evoked by the artist's finely crafted and delineated work adorning a mystical ambience surrounded by decorative motifs.

### Retracing the Genre

Though his fascination with female figure can be traced back to his early drawings of Santhal women, his artistic oeuvre has traversed through genres, forms and mediums before settling on its current preoccupation. In 1960s the artist worked in semi abstract mode and geometric patterns with recurring appearance of flora and fauna, boats and men. These were impressions of his early childhood in East Bengal and subsequent encounters in his daily life in Kolkata, then at Santiniketan or even in Europe. The natural beauty of the places has impacted on the artist's sensibilities as reflected in his black and white drawings and colourful paintings of ghats, crows, people and life.

The born artist's love for the form and rigour of practice gets reflected in his masterly line work and imagery that makes and an impressive repertoire of drawings and paintings. Exposure to legendary artists like Nandalal Bose and Benode Behari Mukherjee, as well Chinese and Japanese masters who came to Santiniketan, was very beneficial for Suhas who diligently searched through the books and journals in the college library for his inspiration. He studied scriptures, classical and folk arts and found the calligraphic style of oriental art especially interesting. A marked influence of these and miniature forms is discernable in his art despite a swing towards nudes and an occasional cross hatching.

The first hand exposure to European Masters in the museums at Paris and around, and the techniques he learnt there, have also impacted on his work, while the small studies often on the same paper for economy helped perfect his renditions in drawings and paintings. Christ, and mother and child in red and yellow, seem to have been his favourite themes and colours at the time. A few semi figurative works often outlined in black mark the early suite while narratives began to appear in 1970s with figures and birds peppering them. Life in the countryside took centre stage as Suhas Roy moved to Santiniketan. A more contemporary look began to adorn it in 1980s as the artist changed his ethos while doggedly retaining his links with the roots.

A clear obsession bordering on infatuation with Radha or 'Radhika' has led Suhas Roy to create a substantial body of remarkable work involving reinterpretation and reincarnation of the legendary figure as a woman in myriad forms. Meditating not just on her external or physical splendor but also her inner beauty, Suhas Roy's art focuses on her sensuousness and innocence. Her nudity, seductively covered in parts with locks of long open tresses bedecked with flowers, presents a picture perfect beauty pregnant with fantasy and erotic



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undertones. Though often rotating around iconic figuration and mythology, his artistic creations make a more universal appeal beyond their ritual or religious confines. The artist is able to evince another interesting twist in his discourse on beauty by adding renderings that appear somewhat bewitching and dark alongside those that evoke grace and composure, as the mystical world of fantasy and romanticism saturates to turn into a realm of surrealist realism.

#### The Artist's Persona

The man, the creator of this amazing ensemble, was born in a small village Sagardi in East Bengal now a part of Bangladesh in the year 1936. A gypsy by nature and typical village lad, he loved to roam around the open fields through the day and toil by midnight's lamp to figure some of it out in his art. Though a good painter who was able to sell his first landscape painting to a British collector while still at college, life for Suhas at that early stage was a struggle as was the case with many of his ilk in those days until he could find himself a job. His assignment was to make pencil sketches for a medical anatomy book directly imitating images from fake skulls, but it helped him earn a meagre living besides honing his skill in drawing.

The rigour also brought a finesse to his art that helped him win a scholarship to Paris where he studied graphics at William Hayter Atelier 17 and then murals at Ecole Supereur des Beaux Arts. He soaked in all he could of the museums and European Masters' works that he saw there. On return, he taught graphics for a while at his alma mater. It was here that he along with his contemporaries founded the Society of Contemporary Artists. Later he moved to Kala Bhavan at Santiniketan, where he finally built himself a home and headed the department of painting there until his retirement. Guiding impressionable young students on how to draw and paint or choose the right colours, shades and tones; some of the features that are strong in his own work- are amongst the cherished memories of Suhas' career as a teacher.

The spectacled silver haired diminutive persona adorns an innocent demeanor in an ever smiling face. Married to his classmate and fellow artist Jharna, he now lives in Kolkata along with his son Suman Roy, also an artist, and his family. Today with a large body of work to his credit, Suhas Roy has many accolades and awards to his credit. His work has been exhibited extensively in numerous exhibitions all over the country and in international shows including the Asian Graphic Prints Traveling Exhibition USA, Tokyo Print Biennale Japan, Contemporary Indian Art Yugoslavia, in Australia and London, and can be seen in numerous personal collections including that of the Nehru-Gandhi family while the artist continues to be in demand.

#### His Master's Choice

A printmaker and painter, at equal ease in drawing, the master artist is adept at using a range of techniques and materials and his choice varies from crayons, charcoal, pastels, acrylic, water colours and oils to tempera, gouache and brush work. While his medium and technique for a particular work is determined by the subject in hand and the imagery in his mind, painting in oil and acrylic remains his preferred medium. Mastery in handling tempera enables him to add a unique touch of sensuousness to the imagery. His consummate



skill in creating the imagery in fine texture, palette and composition give his work its distinct look. The deft rendering of the lines and contours in harmony with his choice of colours endows his Radhikas with an enigmatic and ethereal beauty that appears to play with light and shade. Given his preoccupation with female subjects, there is no place for Krishna or a male figure in the artist's scheme of things except in rare cases such as his painting for help-age India featuring a nawab holding a rose that he did some years ago.

A slow and careful painter, Suhas gives full attention to all aspects of his paintings - the line, colour, space, texture, form or composition. Each image then is filled with a different rasa and aura. Though he likes creating his own emulsion and working in tempera, that requires effort and time for the colours to mature, given his frail health forces him now to work more and more with pastels. The compulsive painter he enjoys that as well as working in charcoal for "they are direct mediums and no problems of moisture either". In soft tones he works on one painting over days to give it its subtle and calm look besides under currents of sexuality. Akin to the miniature painting from which he draws his inspiration, some of his work especially Radhas in face profiles on paper and canvas come in small size though he is equally deft at working in large format including an amazing body of nudes in full frame on canvas that he painted for his recent solo show in London.

Suhas' work wears a distinctly subtle and highly skilled look given its use of varied processes involving mixed media - in several layers and special mix. A finesse and delicacy are some of the strong characters of his line work and drawings while his colours that

easily dissolve into the base, add to the gentle and lyrical appeal of his paintings. The surrounding background melds with figuration becomes integral to the imagery.

The artist's feminine figuration-beautiful and tranquil-is his tribute and celebration of womanhood. "I don't like it in any distorted form or shape" says the artist whose art-scape continues to be inundated with her form in a mix of reality and fantasy. Spontaneity and restraint underline most of his art. His landscapes appear in harmony with nature. His Christ though a mark of suffering and sacrifice, suggests peace. His attempts at featuring political messages through art during the Naxalite movement were non-violent as Suhas is essentially a man in search of peace and harmony.

Capturing their dusky simmering skin and sensually beautiful body in his art, he was ready with his first show fully devoted to Radha with whom his love affair continues to this day and age. The young-at-heart 72-year-old continues to find beautiful women "an endless source of inspiration".

#### His Muse

Radha or Radhika adorning a gentle and somewhat detached look is the artist perennial muse. Perfectly proportioned she is beautiful and sensuous evoking emotions of tranquility and romance bordering on eroticism. With a touch of mystery and seductiveness in her eyes, she is the artist's tribute to womanhood and sexuality. There is an ethereal glow on her rounded face, bright open eyes, luscious red lips, expectant and sensuous bare breasts redolent with a new look, feel and sensuality. With a slight tilt of her head and her face and ears covered with long tresses he endows her with sensuality typical to her depiction in Indian art over the centuries. But the artist also adds an interesting touch of the contemporary in the way he figures her almost universal appearance and appeal. A translucent quality as if seen through a fine muslin or glass, she may appear exquisitely dressed or in the nude, in dewy freshness straight after a bath or in a rain soaked body, bedecked with flowers or simply in psychedelic colours, in a frontal or side profile. The Nayika continues to be central to much of the artist's current work.

In Suhas Roy's scheme of things passion is essential for sexuality and the trigger for his art lies in Puranic myths or concepts with their focus on beautiful female demure belle. The artist's muse represents the young milkmaid in folk lore or the heroine of Gita Govinda or the young woman of today. In any case she is seen self engrossed as if in soul search. Radhika that he continues to draw and paint is his incarnation of the sensuous beauty as a contemporary reality in his inimitable style. The artist's muse is not a mythological or conventional figure but she has a personality and character of her own that "we can all relate to even today". She can stand alone sans Krishna who is seen no where around in the artist's repertoire with its spot light entirely on her and her demure look with a transnational and immortal appearance, enacting a different story in each of his over six thousand paintings, "as I don't like to repeat myself".

Besides historical books and museum collections, Suhas draws his inspiration also from classical sculptures of Khujaraho, Konark and Cholas as well as paintings by European masters and maids of today. With different posturings and expressions on her face or the



flow of the locks or the surrounding foliage or the flowers that bedeck her, occasionally in full profile that could be nude but may be just the face or the torso, he gives his Radhika “my dream girl and ideal woman” a distinct look and persona in each case to make her equally attractive for people “from anywhere in the world”. The sensuousness, sexuality and eroticism that one sees in his work, the artist regards as “the truth and reality, essential for life”. This is the common thread that according to him links Madonna with his Radha and other goddesses that we worship as symbols of prosperity in the cycle of life in works such as ‘Mistress of the Moon’ and subsequently ‘the Midnight’ series. “My Radhika is modern, appeals to one and all though she is not glamorous as depicted in the media” and to make her immortal and universally loved it is her internal and eternal beauty that the artist prefers to focus on.

Suhas Roy’s art world encapsulates the eternal connection of women intertwined with plants, a theme popular in early Indian art of the Kushan period as depicted as Shalabhanjika, a woman beneath a tree on railing pillar. He codes his Radha as Rasikriya- the sprout of love, endowing her with a real, intimate and romantic look from one angle only to withdraw it the next, as she gets transposed onto another enigmatic surrealist domain. Centrally positioned she performs a vital role in his art despite her delicate, elusive and lonesome figurine. In an introspective mode she appears to look the other way guarding her mystery



## Destined to be encrypted in history of art

Art, at different points in time, has been defined in different ways. Though interpretations have locally emerged for their typical geo-physical and socio-cultural background, art enjoys a status that purports eternity – the eventual state of transcendence.

In contemporary times art is held as the ultimate manifestation of the liberated minds that exist not within the suffocating confinement of any conformity. Concepts that get crystallized as forms or textures are the purest uninhibited reflexes of the unbound mind.

Surprisingly my guru Suhas Roy has been assimilating this very essence of art ever since he gained control over his senses. A true champion of his time, he creates obsessively without being driven by mere terrestrial appetite. Every time he initiates consolidating his soul-discerned images, he touches a further elevated level of sublimity.

A man hailing from the land of rivers and greeneries, brought up in a family with values and ethics, he combines humility and modesty with the steely firmness of an ascetic who dares to show readiness in renunciation. These features have moulded his creative psyche.

It is amazing to witness Suhas Roy's method of working – and I have done so over the last three decades. I have used all my analytical rationale to get an idea of his intense, inwardly drawn mind. His capacity to connect with his divine ego has transformed his restless senses into a celestial tranquility that generates a ceaseless flow of zest. Whatever flesh-and-blood form he takes up as his subject metamorphoses into an incorporeal image that emerges from the womb of infinite space and time, be it the crow, corpses, Radha or Jesus.

The extent of monetary appreciation justifies the visibility of his work but he is untouched as ever. He was a champion in the art market when many of the contemporary masters had hardly found any takers. My guru still has the courage and artistic conviction to destroy his work if it does not appeal to his soul. He does not depend on his enormous dexterity as a painter. On the contrary, he rejects his previously acquired refinement if he finds it inappropriate for the communication between his inner and outer selves. He despises manoeuvre and shuns showing skill as many artists do, to establish their identity.

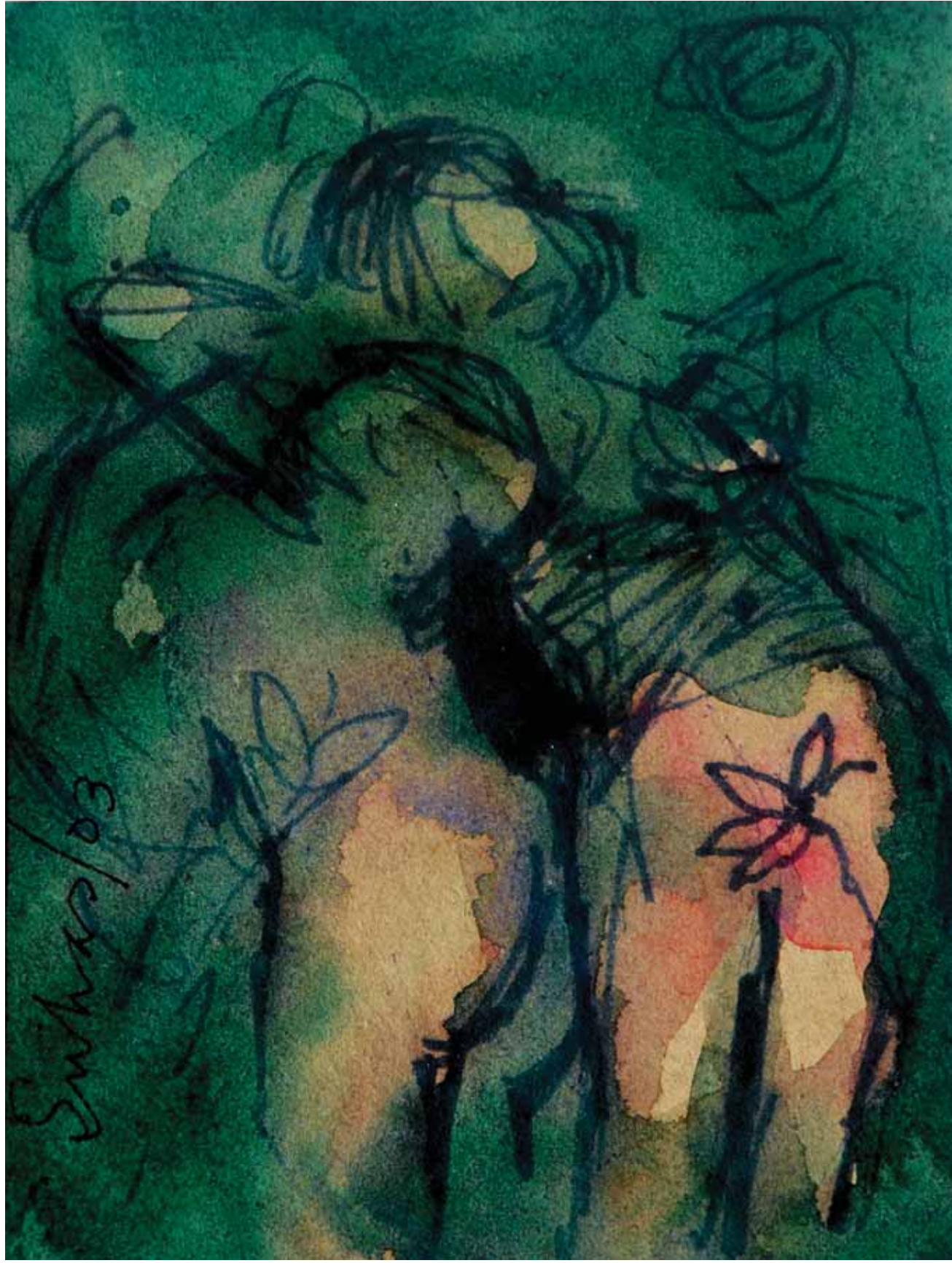
His paintings till the early Radha period had a magnificent stillness in their semblances. This could be because of the strongly delineated contour, but spiritually penetrative attempts may help onlookers to connect with the latent spirit of the depiction and enable them to feel the inherent pulsation of images. The vibrant interactions between the forms and their surroundings may be discerned through the inner eyes.

Of late his works have partially merged the contours of the images. The lines are more fluid and dynamic, the body has more textural tension. All these reflect the restive mind of the master, through he filters out the carnal from his reflexes. The dynamism that pervades the surface could be expressing his impolite eagerness to unify completely with divine forces that generate in him the zest to create.

Time, that ruthless assessor of our deeds, either places us in the niche that exists beyond time or pulls us down to be lost without a trace. I strongly believe that my master's glorious record will be encrypted in the history of art and culture.

Tapan Karmakar











## Suhasnanak

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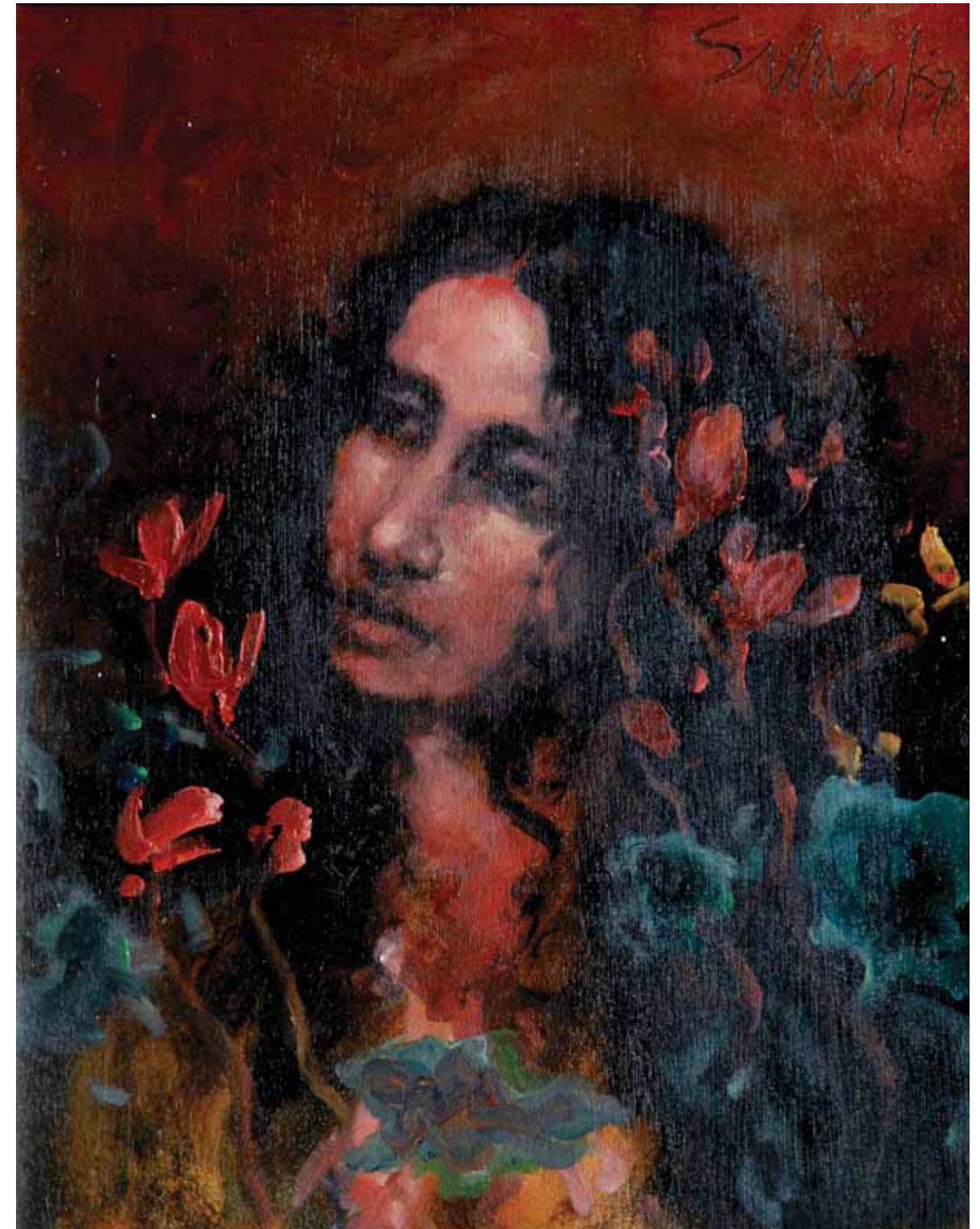
Poignantly tentative in his representations of the late 1950s, from mid-70s to the present, Suhas Roy's paintings and drawings have clearly evolved into a mature, liberated expressionism. His images increasingly possess a lushness of colour, a perfectly studied scale in his early and present drawings and a painterly ease that suggests a rare coordination of discipline and playfulness. There is something inward and natural about the genesis of these works, if one were to use 'natural' to describe such highly developed artifice and elaborately indirect use of direct perception.

It should be stated from the start that despite his training in Indian and European traditions of art in Indian College of Art, Calcutta and L'Ecole Superion des Beaux Arts, Paris, respectively, his work does not involve itself in a polemic of the relationship of the one tradition to the other. Although there is apparent engagement with the contradictions between two traditions, there is also an attempt to utilize aspects of the language and thought of each, in order to develop a language that welds together figures and deep space – a tightly-knit surface web of interlocking shapes. The language, with its subtleties, allows the expression of a 'narrative' that is both simultaneous and unfolds in time. It also juxtaposes elements from more than one narrative.

Suhas's imagery leads to a sensation of meaning and significance, cramped and obscured rather than unfolding through its narrative structure. This is because, for Suhas, the imagery is not much that can be ordered within any framework based on the historical progression or retreat of time. Instead, the flow of mnemonic images creates a different sense of movement and a different hierarchy between objects. This is also linked with a deeper realization that the handling of a body of paint, its articulation and sense of gesture as paint, are largely capable of the movement in time of an intuitive-subjective experience that culminates in romantic apogee in the present exhibition.

His ability to conjure up experience through the shape and weight of lines and rhythms of his earlier drawings are eloquent. They work out pictorial conventions, attitudes and free associations that swivel between dream and reality. The works have an inchoate narrative quality, as figures, both wraiths-like and robust, acquire symbolic weight as they get filtered through liquid swells and flows of translucent strokes. It is a long line of flight that Suhas creates because we are tracing the real and composing a plane of consistency, not simply imaging or dreaming. The lines of flight must not be understood in a chronological sense, or in the sense of an eternal generality. Rather, it points towards the 'untimely' as fact and principle: a time without rhythm, a wind that stirs at midnight, or at noon or dusk. It is vulnerable like an upturned inscription; but also resolute like an image that refuses the journey across the mind's aperture in a stop-go movement – a realist balance that has long creased to be a picture-fable. The danger is that such images will sink into particularity and end up as just another art school image of a model.

Suhas evades such entirely. In his work, the element which was once provided by iconography now springs largely out of his expressive handling. Suhas creates a metaphor for his own activity. It is almost a combat. It is the same thing for suffering: in such suffering there is a whole manoeuvre of the unconscious of the soul, of the body, that makes us come to bear the unbearable. Quiet enigmas of subtle counterpoint, their viewings result not in familiarity but in fresh discoveries. In the end it makes us seek his work out as if we needed it, and



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makes us cherish it, as some source of elixir, long after more documentary or photographic evidence of “our common suffering” has become a sad blur. Something of the same quality is transmitted – an oddness, a disturbing quiet.

At times, Suhas’s mysterious heroine, the eternal Radha is literally garbed as a muse; or lies nude to sniff politely the receding air in a pensive guise; live image of her inner self, but a recognized one that deeply stirs the painter. Suhas returns to it again and again, always humbly and unquestioningly, and the languid sexuality that pervades. As we go from painting to painting, we learn to “read” Suhas. It reinforces our impression of a veiled narrative – the story goes more subjective. In his Mistress of the Moon series, Suhas places the moonlight deeper and deeper within the picture, frequently on the far side of still water. The nature he adopts rarely commands the space, they filter, they intuit.

Suhas recreates for the eye, in two dimensions, something of the pleasurable hindrances of a winding progress through Nature. We are left purer and warmer for the experience. At the last moment a few touches of bright colour are added: earlier they would have threatened the tone of an essential eclectic exercise. In one painting foliage and atmospheric overlays the entire canvas, a coarsely woven veil of branches at once dark and shining. It is a perilous moment. The artist is intoxicated by the degree to which his own powers can enter the serene landscape, alter, withhold, made precious, the clear view beyond.

To the trees, the, we turn, to the water and light, for clues to the meaning of these works. But by now, the tiny rustics and the diaphanous vegetation create a mood that is passive, trustful and melancholy. Those stretches of water, they sustain and extend the sky; their calm shimmer overwhelms a field; slowly as they accumulate in scene after scene, they begin to speak of relinquishment, of escape lacking any exuberant painterly iridescence. If anything can stir us in the Romantic version of classic, Suhas has divined it in his language. His concern always remained to invest his female subjects with the nuance of pristine and agelessness. The increasing subjectivity of his mood can be attributed to the tarnishing of that in the atmosphere he lives in. He was too much of an artist not to breathe it.

There is much fascinating materials in his iconographical and literary aspects of his works that provide means of self education for his viewers. His application of the paint across the surface of the canvas reinforces, or counterpoints, the rhythms set up by the distribution of figures and the grouping dark and light masses. The colour sequence of brown, ochre, black, cobalt blue, red and grey – his regular palette – is reversed or echoed in a different part of the painting setting here an ochre pause and there a red note, a green flourish or a blue glissando. One relates to narrative elements and still enjoys the paintings as brilliant compositions.

He displays consistent exaggeration with extremities once he abandons the graceful fluency of his earlier glass paintings of the 80s. Now the painted surface shifts to theatricality and artifice. The nudes are not only part of a a sequential frieze, but give a representation of turning bodies seen from different viewpoints. This is part of his complex attitude to the relationship between space and time. His concern is with reestablishing a certain rigour, visual as well as intellectual, which he feels has been lost. Doubtless there are some traits, seeming to reintroduce a kind of tactile mould that simply serve to establish the different modalities of colour, a line which is washed downstream by river of ochre colour with

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circular eddies. It prevents the unlimited expansion of colour through a double spatial effect that confines the colour locally and fixes it, in such a way that it is enhanced or accelerated.

In spite of his enormous erudition and sense of form, he puts them together with a calm detachment in which a clear structure combines intimately with eroticism and expressiveness to achieve a paradoxical visual image to create scenes of artifice and makes him one of those rare painters who belong to arts and art historians alike. But these artifices do not by any means resist our emotional identification or intellectual response. Celebrated by his contemporaries for his formal rigour and invention, his language provide historians an cultural theorist with unending possibilities for learned exegesis and decoding of his gestural rhetoric.

The larger size of Suhas’s recent paintings indicates his need to stretch himself, creating works that are grand by Suhas standards. As the size has grown, so has the boldness of his brush strokes. Although underpainting may tell a different story, it is as if in these later works he needs fewer strokes to achieve the same emotional pitch. This is curious, but it is a source of extraordinary vitality, of spectacle and of sensation, and declares that the first must be renounced to reach the second. It is a kind of declaration of faith in life.

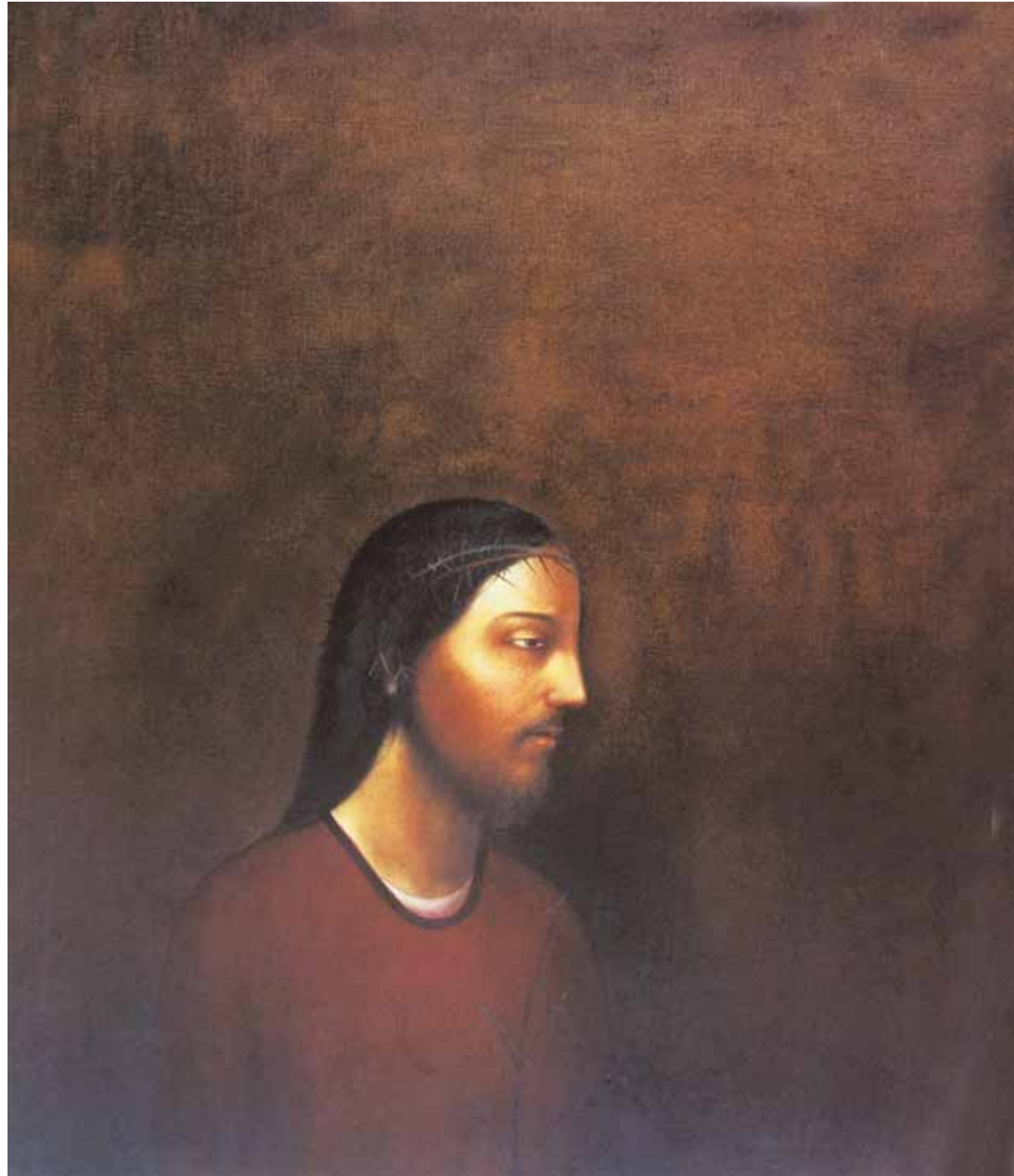
This painterly oeuvre is rhythm, more profound than vision, and appears as if music has been invested visual level. It is logic of the senses that is neither rational nor cerebral.

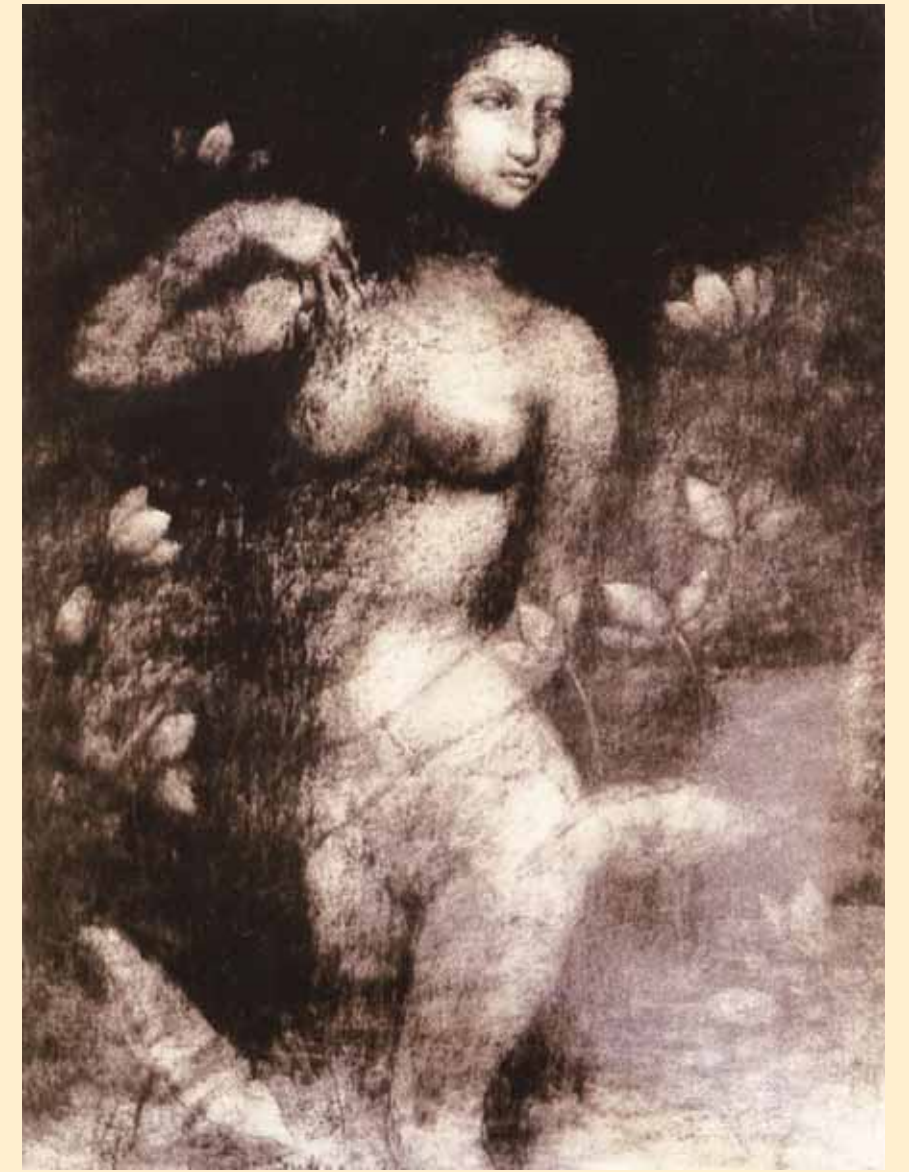
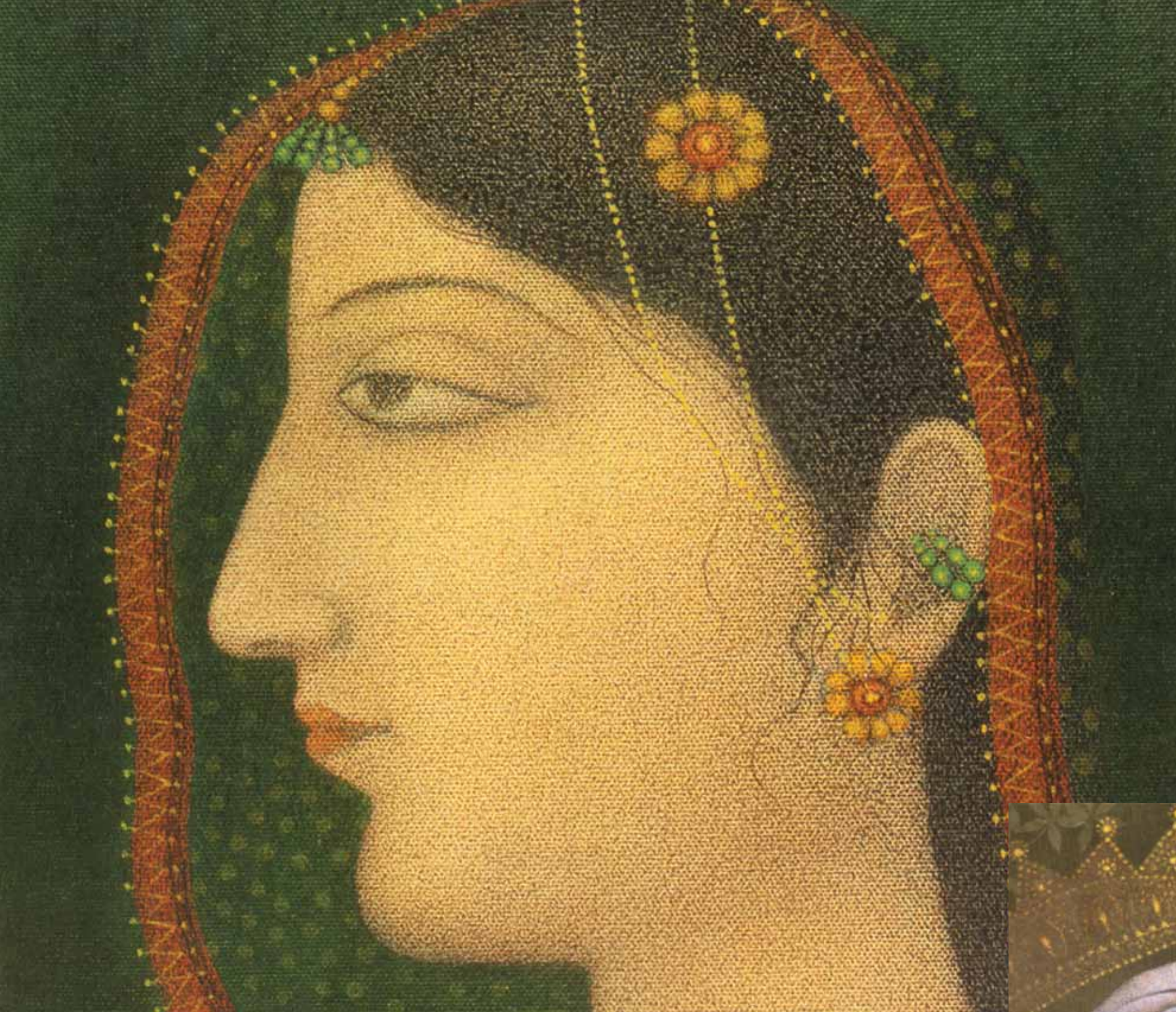
This rhythm in Suhas’s paintings runs through a piece of music. It’s a world that seizes us, closes in around us, opens the self to a tranquil world and opens the world itself. He puts a vital rhythm into the dynamic equilibrium of forms, the virtues of distinct serenity, an unruffled essence of forms, deliberated measured progression that nourishes and dazzles us. His quintessential Radha, or the stark Christ with the crown of thorn, preserve the singularity or specificity of a form and beauty in perpetual variation. We feel the pull of tradition. He never allows the painted ground to become inert or allows the form to become murky or dissolve into a grisaille. Rather, he reinvents the art of painting, painting through colour, by restoring to the background vast monochrome fields that are carried toward infinity, and by inventing new colours of the flesh that seem to have baked in a kiln to rival ceramics.

The beauty and idea of these works hold us in extreme promises to challenge representation as “formidable tool of domination” but to a redefinition of realism because it is high time to realize we will no more be restricted by debased modernism and redefine the definition of realism, abstraction and cultural representation. The poetic and structural sign of another immersion in an essentially fluid domain will take us a step further in the exploration of Suhas Roy’s ingenious future meditations. We do not have much comfortable equivalences around us.

Nanak Ganguly, September 2008

Nanak Ganguly is an independent art critic based in Kolkata.





## He taught me to paint for my inner self

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Turquoise and red and white... the feathers were brilliantly coloured but life was slipping out of the kingfisher when I chanced upon the bird in Santiniketan. Gingerly I picked it up, brought it home, spooned some water through its beak and put it down on the window sill. Then I picked up the brush and started daubing the glass canvas. What came out was pure emotion, in blue and red and green. I couldn't have done better even if I'd done a study.

But why on glass? Why not canvas? Because Baba once excelled in glass painting! Lush green forests, with bright red flowers, and lengthening shadows - what peace they spelt in me! I was then a child studying in class 6. Clearly its appeal stayed on in my subconscious, and once, when Baba was in Manipur, I tried my hand at it. It must have been an immensely enjoyable experience, for once I graduated out of Santiniketan and looked to establish my own identity, I went back to the gloss of fragile glass.

Let me however point out the difference in my handling of the medium. I paint not just the reverse but on both sides of glass, to evoke the beauty of tribals, fears of death and decay, or the peace of even a crucified Jesus. Additionally I've substituted glass with acrylic sheet. If there's any lack of transparency in acrylic, it more than compensates by its durability. And it allows me room to experiment at will. Paint on both sides, weave in bits of paper, stick beads and glass, work the 'canvas' like collage... I am doing Baba's bidding: "Paint what pleases your inner self."

That one liner was Baba's graduation gift to me - and it set me free from the burden of being Suhas Roy's son. Until then I would constantly worry whether I should do like my father, or strike a different note. Suhas Roy had traversed through colleges, galleries and camps, in Paris and Prague, Poland and Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Dubai, Japan and Cambodia... His quest for a worthy subject took his art from lotus ponds and crows to Jesus and Radha. His effort all along has been to create serenity in a world torn asunder by strife, conflict, violence...

The tenor of Baba's art has eternal appeal. This technique is flawless. This treatment is what every student of his should master if they want to make a lasting impression in art. But if I were to follow in my father's footsteps, I would be seen as a pale copy of a highly sought master. That's why I would never watch Baba at work, as some of his students did.

But can you fight your own shadow? Can you change your profile by simply willing it should be different? And what if the search for individual identity went awry? That's always a tough choice for the son of a renowned father. By that one line, urging me to paint what pleases my inner soul, Baba had given me a new birth - this time, as an artist.

Suhas Roy isn't just my father, he has been my biggest friend. I grew up in Santiniketan with him while my mother was in Kolkata for her job. There was a time when he would be painting for hours, days, nights on end. I'd value what he'd said then: "when painting becomes an addiction, you'll have no other need..."

Baba has been an eminent artist for all my years of recollection. Although he has been a teacher almost all his life, I have observed every series he has worked on, as a viewer. I have





found in him a human being who is totally oblivious to rank and status. If he could mingle with any man on the street with me his identity as father or teacher also was secondary. Anytime he'd paint something new, he'd call me to show it to me. So I have always loved him as a viewer. I have marvelled at his control over medium. But while Baba's students gained from his guidance, I have never imbibed his technique. With me, forever, it's been a challenge to jealously craft my own signature. We are, in the final count, players in the same field.

Baba once told me, "If you want to know what is Fire, I will tell you to burn your fingers in a flame: nothing else will give you the idea." Such practical lessons are his gift to me. Baba has vast knowledge, he's a philosopher in his own way, I realised only when I started travelling abroad and seeing the world, in the light of my own experience. That is when his mantra of "Paint what you like" took on a new meaning.

Creating your own signature is a tough job. It is tougher than being a famous father's son. When I set about that job, I again found inspiration in Baba's words: "Paint what you love most, paint what you hate. Fight what hurts and celebrate what pleases - through your painting. Paint in every situation of life. Paint, simply paint..."

Every generation views the givens in a new light. Jesus Christ - a subject I share with Baba - had instilled new confidence in people, preached them, loved them, taught them how to live. These are precisely the things Baba has done for me. My Jesus - indeed, my very art - is a tribute to my father.

Suman Roy





Jesus in Vatican





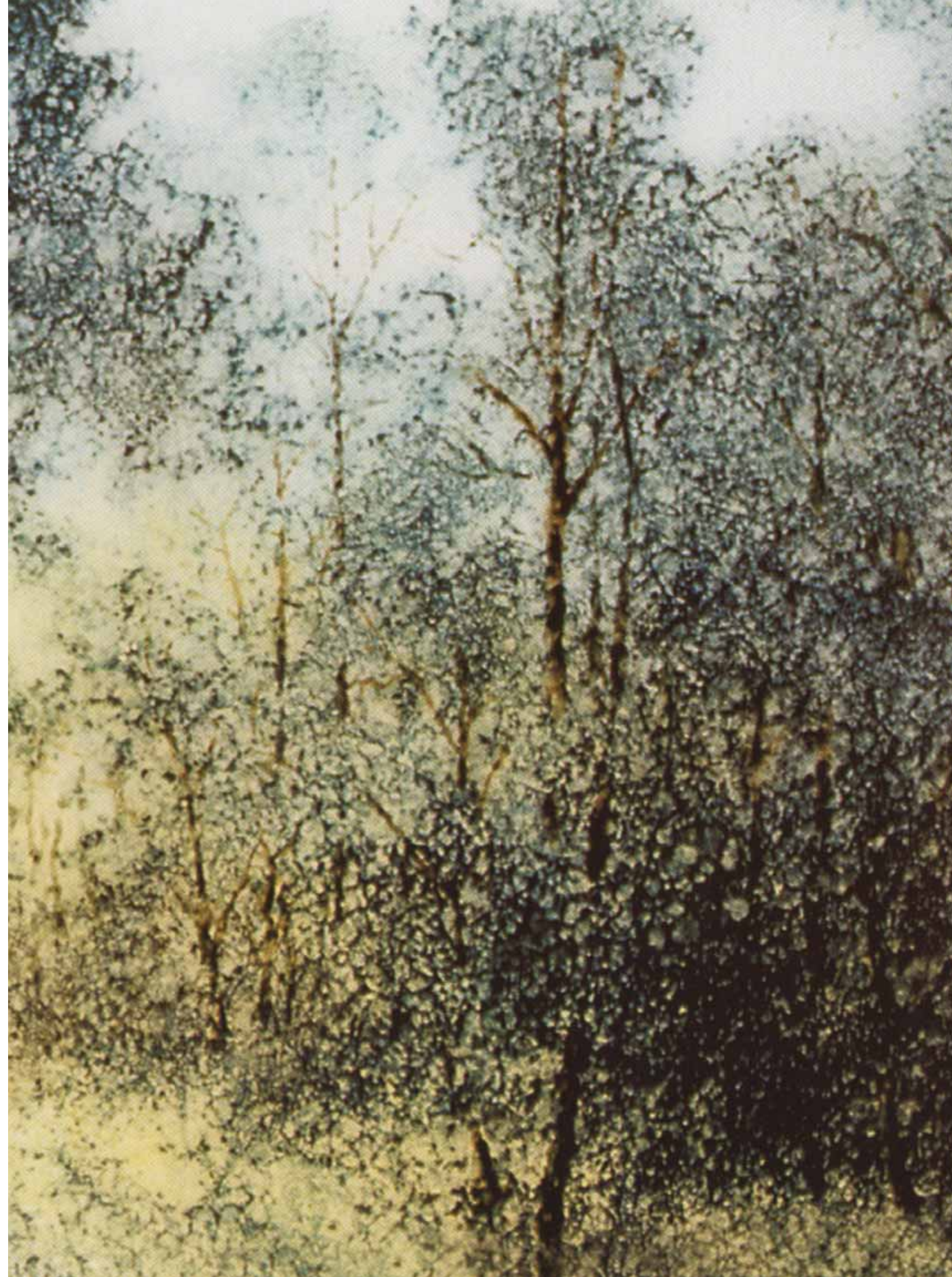


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