

# WHEN NOTHING GOES RIGHT, GO LEFT

Curator: Uma Nair

A solo exhibition of the works of

**BALAJI  
PONNA**

14th Oct - 4th Nov, 2020

A painting by Balaji Ponna depicting a person riding a white horse in a dark, textured landscape under a starry night sky. The scene is set in a vast, open field with a dark, textured ground. The sky is dark and filled with numerous stars of varying colors and sizes. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.



## Curatorial note

*This series of works follows my continuing engagement with what may be called as ‘human-scapes’. It is also the outcome of my concerns and comments about existing society. It is in many ways the mirror of our dystopian times. When hatred and treachery becomes a norm, the hope for a better life fades into the oblivion.”*

- Balaji Ponna

The temporary and the transient both come into context in the allusions created in veteran artist Balaji Ponna’s latest set of watercolours and canvasses. Beyond the technique and treatment of abstracted subtleties, we glimpse a gesture of a sub text and prelude to the dichotomy and diabolism of human lifestyles that sift and sieve through time.

Whether canvasses or paper work his is a language that cuts across boundaries to create corollaries of a global scenario, where diverse languages of visual dynamics coexist in a same plane, amidst a constant shift of imageries. The landscape of life and the human mind both coalesce in these works. Ponna’s vision is one that quests for humanity’s essence amidst trials tribulations and hopes.

“The harbingers of change are dark and the visions blurred in searching humanity,” he adds. “What is last left are the traces and adages of truths which can only be retold. If we can really listen to these simple truths probably there still is the chance for the skies getting clearer.”

### Subtle lacing irony and humour

These human scapes leap beyond origins and become an engrossing narrative. Ponna’s titles stem from his thoughts his observations and perceptions.

“The titles of my works are significant acts, in themselves for through them, I cajole people to look and observe my work in a specific manner, sometimes, like almost filling in a blank,” says Ponna. “Though the humour in my work might seem overt, it operates in a more subtle and ironic manner often laced with serious sub context, I usually engage with concepts, which are part of popular usage, making them more accessible, for example: In my work, ‘When you can’t turn right, go left,’ I’m talking about the present crisis we are living through. We often tend to follow a similar tested path which however has proved a failure and is fatal; sometimes owing to fear or pressure and we don’t think of alternatives. The work urges us to think beyond the given and figure out possibilities of other lives.”

Titles for Ponna go beyond generating multiple possibilities and meanings. The fusion of verbal and visual intentions becomes a valid means of achieving communicative corollaries. In the past he has said his works respond to the socio-political and cultural realities of time. Then we see a rhetoric in which meanings and expressions are implied with a sharp consciousness that is critical of established cultural and social imagination in society.

Ponna elucidates: “It’s a matter of playing with certain notions that the society and people carry. my present series of work is about that, but executed in a humorous mode. The ‘titles’ with the visuals emerging out is been symbolically woven, which is meant to signify the blindness of the beliefs that the people carry with their notions. I try to build compatibility between my language and the ideas that circulate around it. Here the title becomes one of the primary, constitutional and conceptual elements of any of my works. The visual and its verbal supplement are simultaneously conceived, this makes the process more interesting and challenging.”

### Literal and metaphoric translations in colour

While Ponna refers to his works as human scapes it is the larger leitmotif of the landscape and pluralistic global scenario that engages; we see a constant shift of imagery that is built around critical



commentary and gesture. The nimbus clouds in his landscape are lithe and linear, but according to him they run deeper. His works are reflective of inner intensities and in-depth reading. His rumination stems from two classical German philosophers Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. The far reaches of their writing that embrace truth, morality, language, aesthetics, cultural theory, history, nihilism, power, consciousness, and the meaning of existence become milestones in the evolution of Ponna's own intellectual history.

Philosophy then becomes the bedrock on which his works evolve; knowing that his quietude is fashioned by India's great thinkers J. Krishnamurti, and Ramana Maharshi, Srirangam Srinivas (Sri Sri) and Chalam from Telugu writers.

Stylistic and material possibilities abound when you look at the texture, the layers and the understanding of terrain. In the artist's work, it is the greyness and darkness of intensity that reoccurs and evolves, newly invested with a familiar yet undeniably reflexive, altered narrative; symbolic objects from a common man's life are utilized with new interpretation and potential as in his works, *Blood is thicker than Water* and *Suitable Pole to Tie*. Time and memory serve an integral role in the works as the potential of remembering the existence of life in its entirety. Time is used as a medium, just like the watercolour, soot and pastels Ponna uses for creating an enlivened backdrop.

"I am more concerned with the way I deal with colour, form, image and lines," he explains. "I am also interested in how others have similarly responded to situations through their work. These dark clouds are of course the resultant of our human inflicted calamities literally and metaphorically. This gloom which surrounds our humanity would erase the horizon of hope if we don't go back to the fundamentals of equality. If we are to do anything it's to look back into history and see why these structures, edifices and state institutions which talk about social justice and democracy were created for. When personal greed and inhumanity becomes the culture of society, we are on the brink of yet another collapse. History has proved that this collapse actually is costly for the millions of the most oppressed and the dispossessed."

## Blending realism and surrealism

What is clearly visible in Ponna's work is a strong narrative approach along a quasi-surreal plane with imagery formulating a language that seeks to create a satirical yet sensitive commentary on the lifestyles and dogmas and discourses we are faced with in everyday living. Tranquility and tension both combine in the canvas *Branches for Birds... Sculptures for streets*. The sculptures in the painting are a symbolic representation of objects with a strong narrative; the mention of the birds is a lamentation as well as a satirical comment on urban history.

"What I put across and suggest for all us is to pick up those simple commonsensical markers which can lead us somewhere better," he explains. "Like the shadow that follows even an optically impaired person however oblivious he is of that fact, the effects of our inhuman and unconcerned deeds would follow us everywhere to remind us of our impending doom."

Political subtexts and main stream politics converge in his works; he is skilled in the art of charming accommodation. Ponna's works comprise a crucial relation between the painted text-phrases and the images. In fact this text, composed in two phrases, frames the meanings and the subtext of the visual images. The brevity and simplicity of the imagery are key in this regard.

Composed of a moderate number of 12 lush, richly compressed landscapes sometimes dotted with objects/humans it is the elements, the individual vignettes that are a pleasure to behold and parse, handing off one by one as viewers work their way down the lines of thought and intensity. In addition to insightfully unpacking the means and ends of the artist's own psychology, such amenity allows the reverberating resonance to seep into the emotional fabric of one's own subjectivity. Secular self-invention and ingenuity both become Ponna's insignia.





## When Nothing Goes Right, Go Left

water colour, soot and dry pastles on acid free paper  
28.5 x 38.5 inches  
2018





## Finishing Touch

water colour, soot and dry pastles on acid free paper  
19 x 29 inches  
2018







## Most Suitable Pole to Tie

water colour and dry pastles on acid free paper  
19 x 25 inches  
2018







## Blood is Thicker than Water

water colour, soot and dry pastles on acid free paper

19 x 28.5 inches

2018







## God's Path is Socialism

water colour, soot and dry pastles on acid free paper

28.5 x 38 inches

2018





## My Emotion Dried up my Words

water colour and dry pastles on acid free paper  
25 x 39 inches  
2018







We were What You are, and What We are, You will be

mixed media on acid free handmade paper  
19 x 25.5 inches  
2019







## Never Come back Again

water colour on acid free paper  
19 x 27 inches  
2018







## Iodine Factory

water colour on acid free paper  
20.5 x 29 inches  
2018





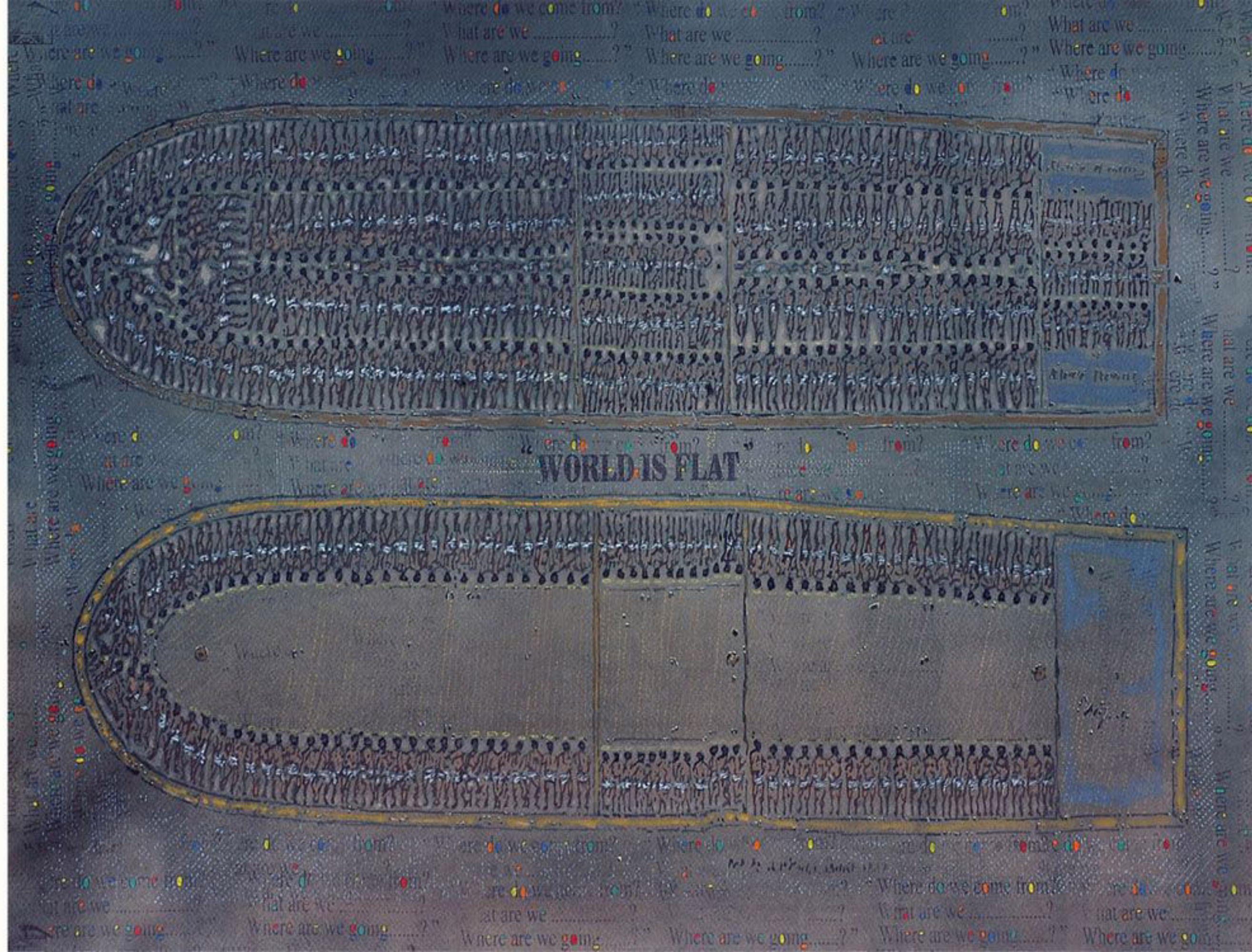


## For me, The World is Flat

water colour on acid free paper

20.5 x 29 inches

2014







## Branches for Birds...Sculptures for Streets

oil on canvas  
72 x 93 inches  
2012



"Branches for birds...sculptures for streets..."







## Friends and Foes

mixed media on acid free handmade paper  
28 x 18 inches  
2019







Born in 1980, Balaji has completed his MFA in printmaking from Viswa Bharti University, Shantiniketan, 2003 and BFA in printmaking from Andhra University, Visakhapatnam in 2001.

The visual strategies Ponna employs are the usage of grids, smoke soot, and similar devices that can metaphorically represent and give way to multiple readings in his work. Through a new body of work based on time, transience, global/geographical vs personal identity he aims to take his work to a more complex arena of engagement and interpretation and to make one think about the visuals and the ideas in circulation in the contemporary world. Balaji lives and works in Vadodara, Gujarat.

#### Solo Shows :

- "Blues Browns and Greens" at Gallery Art District XIII, New Delhi 2017;
- "The Mirror has no heart" at Art District xiii, collaboration with The Guild Art Gallery, in New Delhi 2015;
- "Looking is not seeing" solo show in The Guild art gallery, Mumbai 2011;
- "Monuments" a solo project at India Art Summit by the Guild Art Gallery Mumbai at New Delhi 2011;
- "The Things I say, a solo show at Studio la Citta, Verona, Italy 2010; 'Black Smoke', at Bose Pacia & The Guild, Mumbai at Bose Pacia Kolkata 2009.

#### Group Shows :

- Balaji has participated in several group shows such as "India Art Fair with Art Centrix Space" in New Delhi, 2020;
- "Con Tempus | With Time" a group show at Art Centrix Space, New Delhi, 2019
- "Road to Prospect" group show in The Stainless Gallery, New Delhi ,2019;
- Group show in Art District XIII. New Delhi 2019;
- "Indian Art Fair with Art District XIII" New Delhi 2019;
- Vis-a-Vis Foundation's group show at Kochi 2019;
- "ALWAYSROOMFORLOVE" a group show at Art Centrix Space, curated by Monica Jain, New Delhi 2018;
- "Mapping Frontiers" curated by Lina Vincent Sunish at Kalakriti Art Gallery, Hyderabad, 2018;
- "Forking paths" a curated show at Fine Arts Gallery, Baroda 2017;
- "A New Space" a group show at Nazar Art Gallery, Vadodara 2016;
- The Fondazione Benetton of Treviso-by Luciano Benetton, Ponzano, Italy 2013;



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- India Art Summit 2013, by the Guild Art Gallery, New Delhi;
- "Art Chennai" Latitude28 Gallery, New Delhi, 2012;
- "Giant Elephant-Indian Contemporary Art at Gong Art Space, South Korea 2011;
- "Glocal- des Parades" a group show, at Sarjan Art Gallery, Baroda and Derbyshire U.K 2011.

#### International Shows:

- "10x10" show at Gallery Threshold, New Delhi 2010; "Art Celebrates 2010 New Delhi Commonwealth Games 2010, New Delhi 2010;
- "Therefore Graphiti" An group show in The Guild, and Saffron Art, at Mumbai & New York, 2010;
- Art Basel, with Studio la Citta, Italy 2010; Arte fiera Bologna, 2010;
- "Des Parades: the challenge of Glocal, Derbyshire, UK 2010;
- "June show" at 1x1 Art Gallery, Dubai, 2010;
- "A group exhibition of paintings, by Navsar, Devi Art Foundation, New Delhi 2009;
- "New Vanguard" a group conducted by Saffron Art@ The Guild New York 2009; India Art Summit 2009, by The Guild Art Gallery, at New Delhi, 2009;
- India Art Summit, by Nature Morte, New Delhi 2009;
- Residency Show at the Guild, Mumbai 2009;
- Group Show at Nature Morte, New Delhi 2009; "Contemporary Exoticism" curated by Marco Meneguzzo, at Studio La Citta, Verona,
- ITALY 2009; Basel Art fair, 2009 with studio la Citta, Italy;
- Hong Kong Art fair 2009 with The Guild, Mumbai 2009;
- Work has been selected for France Print Biennale, France 2009; "July Show",
- The Guild Gallery Mumbai 2008;

- "In the Midst", group show organised by Zamaana Arts, at Tehresharan Gallery New York, 2007;
- "American Curry" A print show at Abs Lanxess Gallery Baroda by Tennessee University, U.S.A 2006;
- "Distilled Embers" prints show organized by Alternatives & Threshold Art Gallery, New Delhi, 2005;
- "Are We like This Only", curated by Vidya Shivdas, Vadehra Art gallery, New Delhi. 2005;
- An exchange exhibition of prints, at Saga College of Art, Japan, 2002;
- "Sojourn" artist camp and show, at Vizag, by Threshold Art Gallery, New Delhi 2001. imagery formulating a language that seeks to create a satirical yet sensitive commentary on the lifestyles and dogmas and discourses we are faced with in everyday living.
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Established in 2014, Art Centrix Space is a unique 3,500 square feet space in a stunningly landscaped 2.5 acres environment in the heart of South Delhi's Vasant Kunj. The indoor space has a formal gallery that is approached by an unusual sculpture garden. It is a natural setting for unique installations and sculptures and is a hub for cultural conversations and events. Through thought provoking curated exhibitions both upcoming and mid career contemporary artists have been represented at our shows and at booths at the Art Fairs in the past few years.

Apart from paintings, works of paper, bronze and stone sculptures, Art Centrix Space has a vast collection of Contemporary Pichwais of the quality hitherto unseen in India including those in pure gold, whites and monochromes. The gallery also collaborates with Indian artists to create exceptional modern kinetic sculptures.

Monica Jain, the Curator-Director of Art Centrix Space holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts from College of Art, New Delhi and a Master of Arts in Art History from the National Museum Institute, New Delhi. As an artist, she has trained under renowned sculptor KS Radhakrishnan to work in wax and bronze and loves the spontaneity of watercolours. She styles spaces with art, bespoke sculptures and installations.



Art Centrix Space





## ART CENTRIX SPACE

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