

An abstract painting featuring dark, textured shapes in shades of deep red and black, set against a bright yellow background. The shapes are layered and appear to be dripping or bleeding into the yellow, creating a sense of movement and depth. The overall composition is dynamic and expressive.

EMERGING KRISHNA

BY SANJAY BHATTACHARYYA

CURATOR: UMA NAIR



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RADHA'S GAZE

Still amidst the jasmine shower
Seeking solace for a pensive prayer,
Radha's rituals still the chants
Lyrical hums of a flute's haunts.

Bolts and crevices gloom,
Daliesque dense colours croon,
While yet within the woods
Widows lie in wait, in broods.

The Raaga drips and dips as it drags,
The notes of moody crags,
Thy mystic notes fan out
Into a feminine feline's pout.

And when the celestial melody plays
Hearts and hands throb with Radha's gaze.

UMA NAIR



Untitled, oil on canvas, 36" x 44", 2012



Untitled, oil on canvas, 36 x 44", 2012

THE ARTIST IN HIS STUDIO

My show has nothing to do with Lord Krishna's religion. It has everything to do with the idea of form and what light can do to a single setting. A small sculpture of the flute playing Krishna became my subject for this show and I worked around the image and created many counterpoints - different moods at times of day and seasonal drifts.

For me, subject, composition and backdrop, become the idea of an artist's landscape, so what I see is a juxtaposition of many elements from the past and the present to create a new way of seeing. This Krishna show is about that, however, through the element of abstraction, I have left many layers open to interpretation for the viewer to decipher, and also respond to.

While I have used the traditional figure of the flautist Krishna, I have also tried to locate him within the ambience of what my paintings have been all these years. After all, a wall, a door, a bolt, a sunset or a sunrise, they can never go out of our mind's eye. For as Paul Klee says, "One eye sees, the other feels."

Sanjay Bhattacharya



Image courtesy : Mala Parthasarathy



Untitled, oil on canvas, 60" x 96", 2012

EMERGING KRISHNA

Breaking away from myths

Krishna and his proverbial flute - there is indeed a resonant reverence in some of these works – but also Sanjay Bhattacharyya's 17th century Spanish obsession with the mirror image of reality. In a complex and mixed society, we can look at this show in two ways, first, at the canvases and then the photographs or vice versa. But, wherever you begin, the charisma of a darshan to an urban audience, the touch of the past, a thoughtful setting against the bolts and rusted embers of time, give us Krishna, as an avatar of deliverance, the silhouette framed in the pantheon of remembrance, and not ensconced among the gods of a household shrine.

There is a candid, curious quality to Sanjay Bhattacharyya's symbolism of Krishna, wherein the myth of Krishna is no history at all, where the remnants of a ritual crumble away in majestic backdrops built at the height of an artist's epiphany. Perhaps some works, are virtually created in the legion of his own islands of insight, some, less literal, more stylized and evocative, recast in moods of reverie that will never leave the mind. But whatever the intent, whatever the impulse, everything has been fast forwarded to a generation that thrives and throbs in an age of remix – it is like the music that is born of the classical but gets embroiled in the marvellous rhythms of jazz and the quirkiness of a crank shaft in the rhythms of resonance and timbre.

Bhattacharyya's initial renown drew the attention of connoisseurs for their transparent realism of the Bengal School. But he has over the years gone beyond banal realism. Krishna, as a subject, has more allure than the classical street scene and the gaunt facet of the religiosity. Krishna is an abstracted idiom that revels in the light of modern and urban beats of the human consciousness. Forget religion, think of an image as a symbol – “something that gives us joy, and opportunities to think, and create and give joy to others,” says Bhattacharyya in his boyish wisdom.

Years ago, when he did his Dali show at the ITC Maurya in Delhi, it seemed as if he was ushering in a novel age of antiquity, wrapped in a modernist time frame - it was the return of darkly-lit interiors and vibrant still lifes - here too he brings back that era. Bricks and the jagged edges of a sunrise or sunset, achieve a painterliness beyond simple photo-realism. The sculpted silhouette of Krishna's flute is brought to life in the familiar visage of our yesteryears.

What is most striking is that it pulls away the ideas of religious myth, breaking any temptations and indeed with himself too. All these nuances, add to the interpreter of the sublime, heartrending voice, as flute and form weave into the colour of connotations.



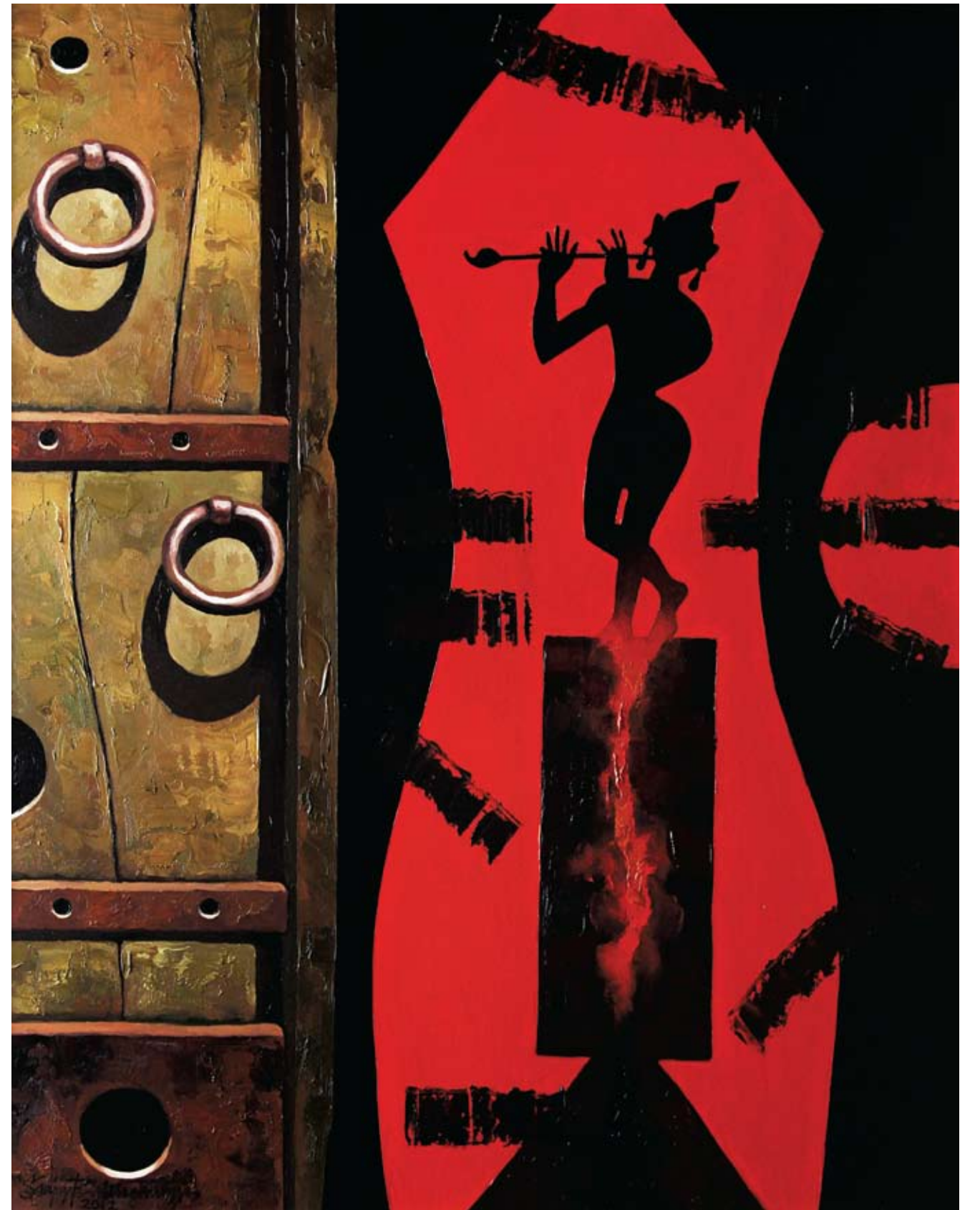
Untitled, oil on canvas, 36" x 44", 2012



Untitled, oil on canvas, 60" x 96", 2012



Untitled, oil on canvas, 60" x 48", 2012



Untitled, oil on canvas, 60" x 48", 2012

The Dark God

When you walk into this gallery at Religare - light filled, lithely laid, and airy - the first thing you see are the large and small canvasses that play with the signature of texture and tenor in the shadow of a small flute player who stands more as a dark God.



Untitled, oil on canvas, 60" x 96", 2012

The line of postures is divided into groups of four. In the first group, you peer over the sunken patches of broken spaces, almost looking at a landlocked port of an ancient hamlet, or perhaps toward a dark fan of sheltering, tropical, translucent terrain in some and, in others, over the same smooth-sanded ridges of roofless walls, snaking toward and away from and parallel to a disappearing and apparently treeless middle distance. Krishna is the dark God, he is the symbol that salutes time and fills eternity, and life just flows around his form.

In the second group, you are surrounded by the slender slanting posture of a single silhouette of the flautist, seeking to search for the upper reaches of time, giving us an impression of the artist's gaze from below/above, the ambience ending in textures, made crisply vague, by their own shadows in high cool sunlight, with the ideation of the rising or the setting sun. This third group, picked up the divisions of space in the first two groups with divided time: behind one of the more dulcet areas of the ruins of time that verges on the signature of what is vintage, while in front of the almost untouched image, the leaves of its cornered thoughts simmer as if still subtle yet sometimes sharply edged, in a power relay of some kind, possibly coeval with the aura of time past becoming time present.



Untitled, oil on canvas, 84" x 24", 2012



Untitled, oil on canvas, 72" x 96", 2012

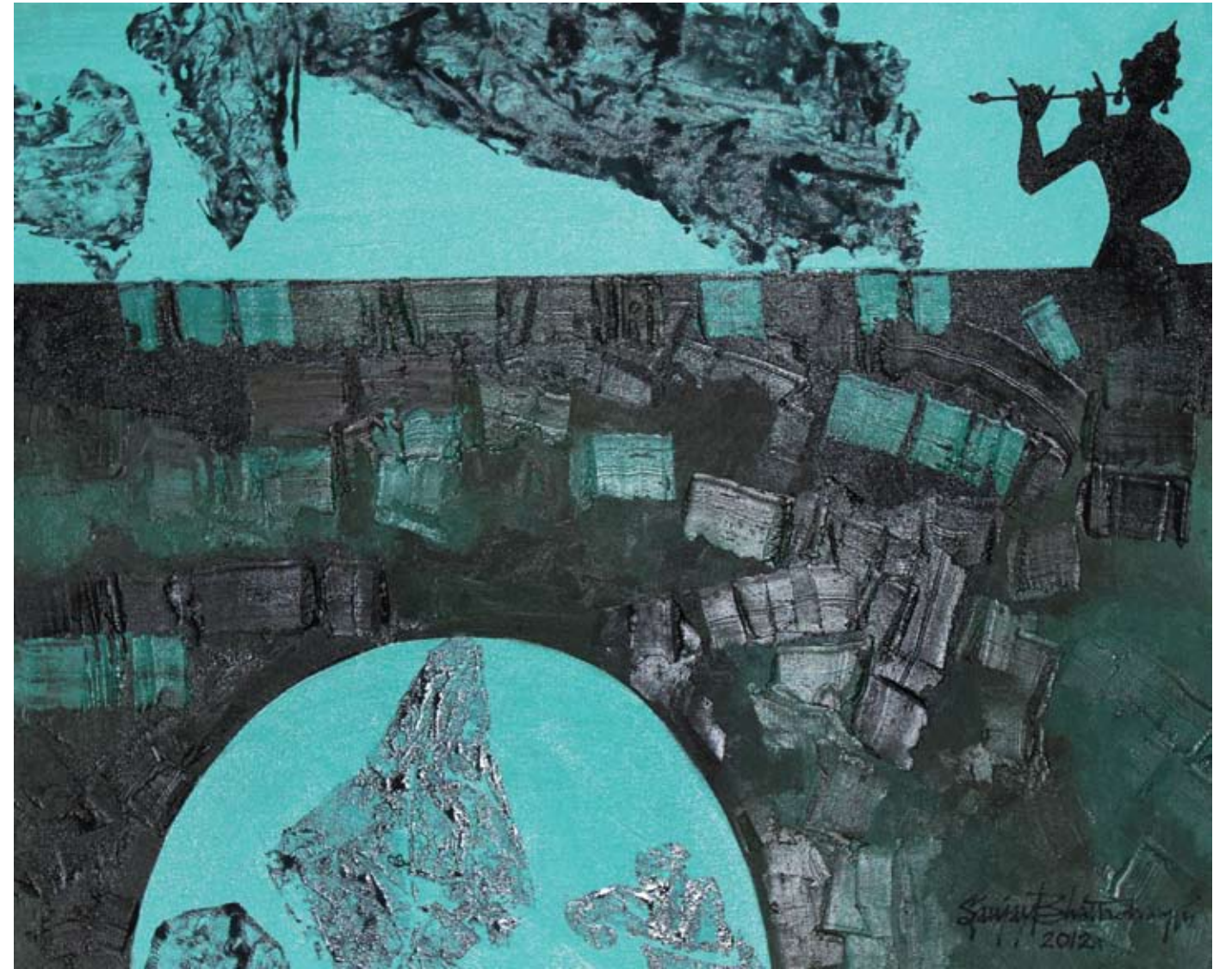
Each work on canvas, is more like an accent on the subject of the crucible of creation, but entirely different from, the nuances of myriad moods that stroke the hour of the ritual. While the silhouette could have been there when the temple was a house of worship and place of business, the shiny fragile metal framework, seemed, like an island that arose from an aging and already threadbare future.

One vertical work has Krishna in a blue skirted "lehenga" - the merging of the feminine within. This work offers acute interpretations, in crisp, lucid prose, of such subjects as the nature of the moment that is revered. This work mirrors the power of gesture - and the passion of poise - the ability to express a subtle and often profound gesture in a disarmingly direct, unpretentious way has always been Sanjay Bhattacharyya's characteristic skill and it makes him brilliantly suited to canvasses. In this work, the creation of the image along the edge allows him to illuminate his dark narrative with flashes of dazzling perception. It is an achievement worthy of its subject.

Over the years, Bhattacharyya has treated his canvasses with a certain devotion, and his extraordinary critical but epicurean eye allows him to assimilate the contributions of colour in a composition without losing its originality, but also creating little islands of abstracted thoughts. His palette, too, plays between what is dark and dense, but sometimes lightens his lines, which lures intensity, into a matte finish accuracy.



Untitled, oil on canvas, 36" x 44", 2012



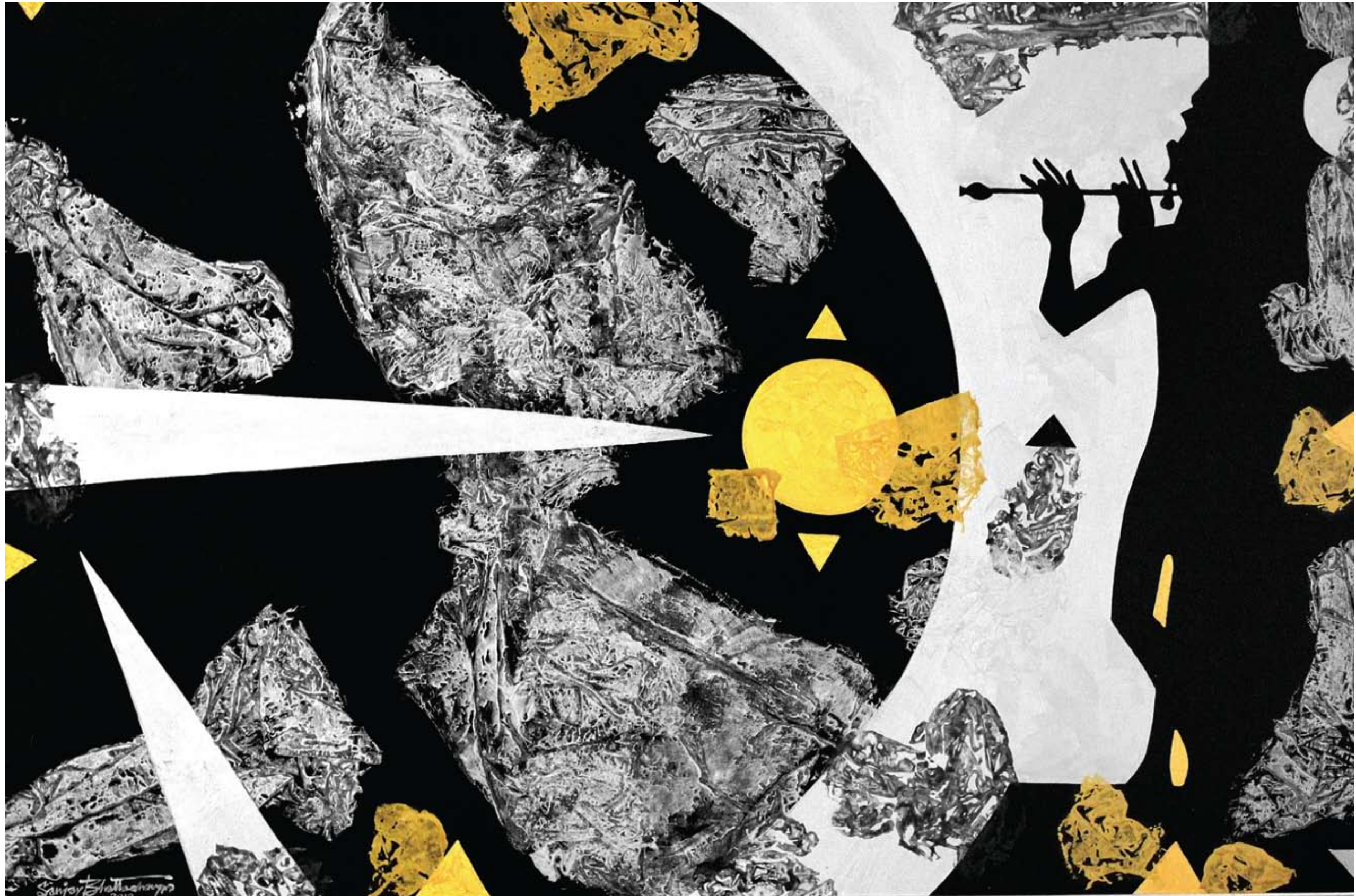
Untitled, oil on canvas, 36" x 44", 2012



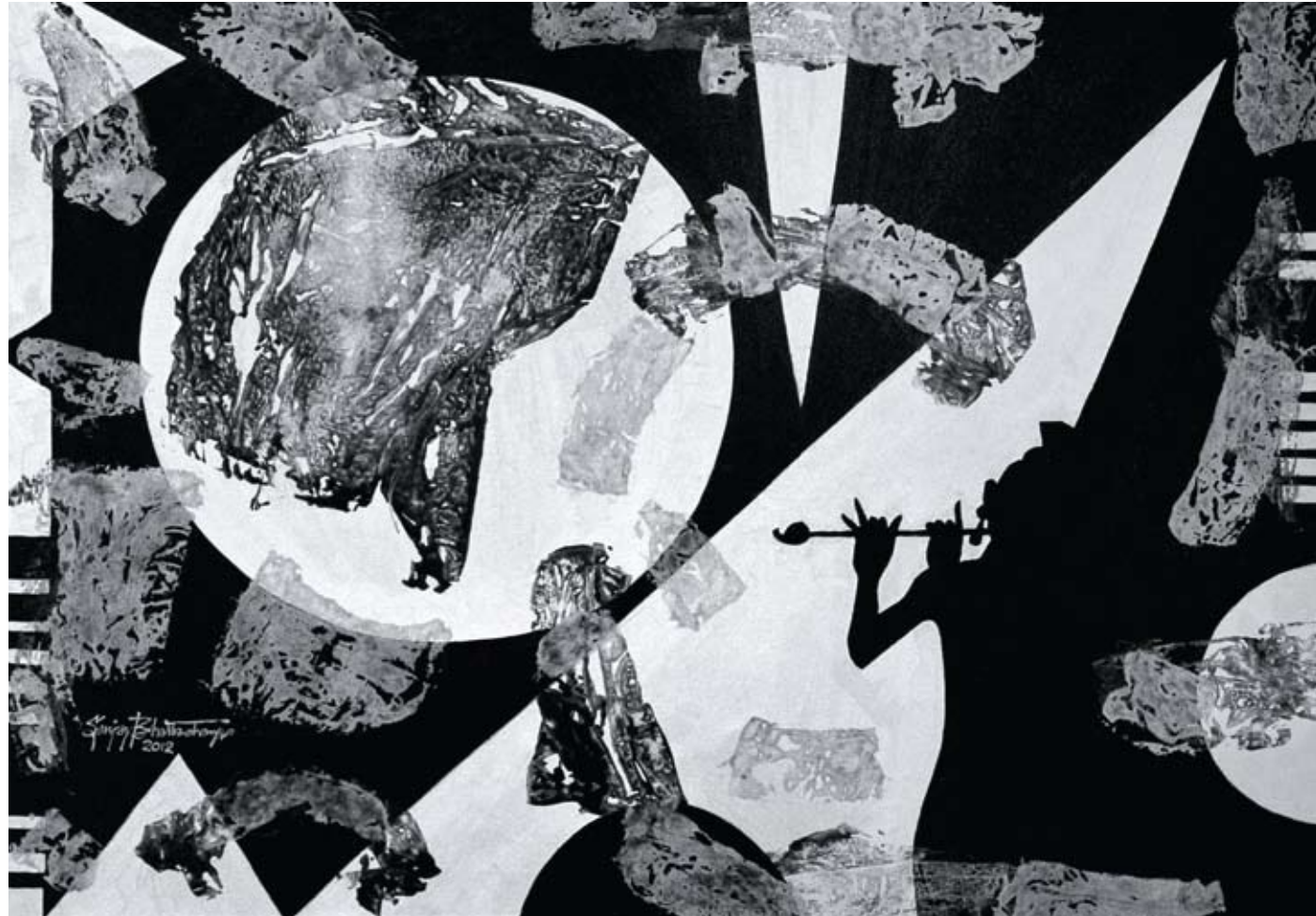
Untitled, oil on canvas, 36" x 44", 2012



Untitled, oil on canvas, 60" x 84", 2012



Untitled, oil on canvas, 48" x 72", 2012



Untitled, oil on canvas, 42" x 60", 2012



Untitled, oil on canvas, 42" x 60", 2012

■ BETWEEN THE SHADOW & THE FORM

"The camera - like the wheel, plough, or printing press - is a tool that has fundamentally reshaped the human condition. It is that important. Before the nineteenth century, images appeared to the eye as singular and precious; even prints seemed, at bottom, handmade. The earliest photographs were also regarded as rare -- miraculous relics of the actual world. Very soon, however, the camera began to churn out images in relentless profusion; today, it's hard to imagine Western culture when it did not constantly chase after its own shadow. No feature of life seemed to change more through the influence of photography than fame."

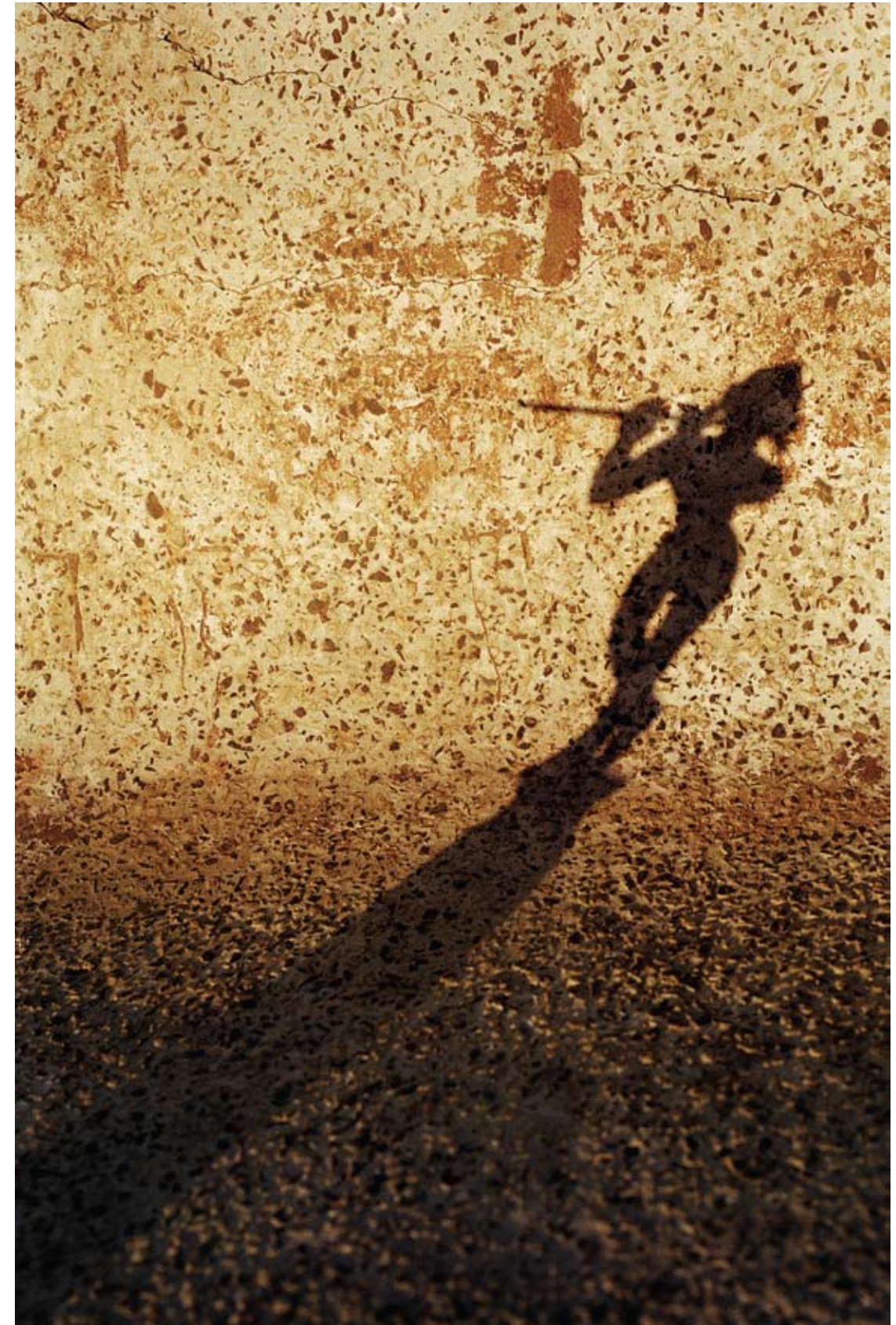
Mark Stevens, *New York Mag*

[<http://nymag.com/nymetro/arts/art/reviews/121/>]

In the shadow of time

When an artist spends more than three decades in the realist mould and translates realism on canvas he belongs distinctly to a certain genre. But when he undergoes a catharsis, that reinvents a convincing mood, it becomes the genesis of a new series. Moving out of his home, to the myriad moorings of his own studio – Sanjay Bhattacharyya left his brushes in the corner and became the pilgrim with a camera. Exploring abstraction amidst the shadows that fell on the wall, finding materiality in the very textured tenor of the light that fell, Sanjay Bhattacharyya's ten works, reflect in many ways, a significant sense of what Kandinsky called "inner necessity." There is a noticeable strand of solitariness here, of a city-dwelling artist, combing the city in pursuit of what might be thought of as anti-experience, in an attempt to quiet the mind.

At first glance, the mood of these photographs seems unfamiliar, but one quickly realizes that it is their geometry that is familiar, by way of Rothko and Scully, by way of Sanjay Bhattacharyya himself, in his paintings done over 30 years of arduous labour. Concentric forms and textured nuances in the patina of rust add up to an integrated whole, as hermetically compact as the forms are self-contained. The colour in these works is usually a sort of irradiated, fleshy, earth tint, although sometimes it looks bleached out, and dark edges enhance its intensity. There are varied degrees of opacity and the scattering shadow of debris. You recall the great German artist Gerhard Richter. Richter painted what his website describes as "images without glory"; images that rendered the ridiculous, ordinary; the tragic, ordinary; the beautiful, ordinary. "Many amateur photographs," he once said, "are more beautiful than a Cézanne." And that is what this show is about.



Untitled, digital print on archival paper, 60" x 40", 2012

In the photographs I played with the notion of a single ray of light and the different perspectives that it can add. My studio is the backdrop of my thoughts. And it is the place where all my compositions and creativity comes to light.

Sanjay Bhatnagar



Untitled, digital print on archival paper, 60" x 40", 2012

The hint of a rainbow actually makes you think of the word that remains in memory long after the event faded into history. It looks real and at the same time unreal, like a scene wrenched out of the natural world and turned into formal geometry, as iconic as an abstract painting. A critic in the past had said, once the photographers stopped worrying about art, it would seem, the art world decided to let them use the front door. Sanjay Bhattacharya has used that front door.

He is an artist in his own right, the marvellous creator of the realist world, has never tied himself down to the literal image. Although he made his reputation in the early nineties for landscapes, portraits, and a series of charged still lifes that seem to be only loosely anchored in the material world, this study becomes a corollary of sorts. This sojourn sees him experimenting with pure abstraction, and massive nonrepresentational photos are at the core of his quest, amidst the symbolism of Krishna.

Once in a conversation at his studio he said: "Desires are eternal, but life in a city is temporal. I played with this idea of the 'emerging Krishna'. I know the subject of yesterday can never come back." The iconic metaphor sneaks up on us in pictures, and we are startled to see what it looks like. In the penumbra the corrosive elements of development actually enter the proscenium space of orchestrated character. Every little degradation looks like a brushstroke and surprising colour breathes lyrical urgency. The formlessness blazes with a rare cumulative energy.

We see certain staccato nuances and sometimes, as Henry James asked us to, we "do it" - explore and conquer it - but what we see, when we see it, is so far unlike what we experience when we're doing it that the difference itself can become a subject for art. "The Dome of Thought," wrote Lord Byron, as he contemplated the ruins of a Greek temple, "is the Palace of the Soul." Abstraction when contemplated upon can become a palace in our minds and food for the soul.



Untitled, digital print on archival paper, 40" x 60", 2012



Untitled, digital print on archival paper, 60" x 40", 2012



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Untitled, digital print on archival paper, 40" x 60", 2012

Solitude and Surrealism Unbound

The desire to sit inside my studio and shoot is an attraction to solitude, open space, subtle expressions of light and time ... Sometimes it's about understanding light. Sometimes it's about darkness. Here I found both. I'm attracted to the darkness of an image, the way it rots and rusts because of atmosphere – and to anything that is contrasting it, informs me of the incessant call to visual attention, it opens interior spaces that offer untold possibilities of discovery. This darkness is another form of light.

Sanjay Banerjee



Untitled, digital print on archival paper, 60" x 40", 2012



Untitled, digital print on archival paper, 60"x 40", 2012

Once it was said, for Surrealists, "desire was seen as the authentic voice of the inner self. It was an expression of the sexual instinct, and, in sublimated form, the impulse behind love. It was also a path to self-knowledge."

It seems as if light and chemical have been applied directly to photographic paper - in reality, it is the scene that unfolds. What we get are a series of monochromes, small, oxidised colour fields, and smoothed-up swaths of texture that recall psychedelic light-show effects, but they're more mysterious. Juxtaposing these almost empty spaces with the formless surge invites us to see all these things as potential abstractions - buoyant, atomized, and melting into air.

It has about it a genuine touch of Zen, which values abstraction as something that can help the mind transcend the limitations of ordinary discourse and rational thought. The sound of the crackling of iron rusting - and the mystery it evokes - is certainly more interesting than what's usually spewed into photographs.

It brings into focus, surrealism's most useful insight: that the mind possesses a deep formality that may assert itself when conscious control is suspended. In surrealist dream pictures, the discovery process ends before brush touches canvas. The rest is whistle-while-you-work, academic execution. Intriguingly, in this case there is no brush; there is only the eye that searches, and the hand that clicks.

Susan Sontag's words echo through these textural variations. She said: "Photographs instigate, confirm and seal legends. Seen through photographs, people become icons of themselves." In this case, it's the process of rust, the abandoned little image, the wall that disintegrates; the subject becomes the icon, and vanishes like a phantom. Here today, gone tomorrow.

Where does the artist come in? He comes in, when in his studio, he keeps a little flute player and a single shaft of light decides to fall upon its recesses. That moment becomes the point in combustion and the artist captures those moods in the solitude of his studio.

This show was born in that moment.

UMA NAIR
CURATOR & CRITIC
NEW DELHI, OCTOBER, 2012

A MORNING MEDITATION

Lord Krishna and his flute

Bhajans and music taken from folklore, have always dwelt on the subtle beauty and fascinating realms of the flautist. Poets, philosophers and spiritual gurus have all waxed eloquent on the nectarine bliss of the flute of Lord Krishna.

Stories tell us that Lord Krishna was very close to the common man. He was called “Natkhat” since he played pranks during his childhood with his friends – Gwaalas, and also with his God-Mother, Yashoda and later in youth, he played pranks on the beautiful Gopikas. Tales of the past tell us about Krishna Leela.

It is said, that sometimes he talked to his dearest spiritual companion Radha through the songs he played on his Flute – indeed, only Radha understood the nuances and divine glory in Kanha’s recitals that wafted over valleys and plains and hills.

The Flute is the oldest musical instrument known to mankind. This instrument made of bamboo has a haunting soothing quality and as you hear the first notes, it is a journey of deep fascination. Its simplicity brings it close to nature, untouched by technology; it speaks of the depth of limpid pools of swara and laya. Lord Krishna’s flute reflected celestial bliss.

Once, Lord Krishna asked his devotees what they would like to become in his hands. They give him different yet distinctive answers. Some said the lotus, some the “conch”, some the “chakra” and so on, but no one mentioned the flute. Lord Krishna advised them to become his flute.

In his discourse to his devotees, he said that in the human personality structure, as in the flute, there are eight main spots: The five organs of perception, mind, intellect, and ego. If you get rid of your ego and become like a hollow reed flute, then the Lord will come to you, pick you up, put his lips and breathe through you and out of the hollowness of your heart, the captivating melody will emerge for all creations to enjoy. But if you will continue your attitude of dislike, hatred and jealousy, the Lord will distance himself from you, since you will be useless for his purpose.

Two years ago when I saw the set of photographs taken by Sanjay Bhattacharyya of a small Krishna with a flute, it brought back a host of reflections and recollections. These images spoke to me; it stirred the response of bhakti within me. My mother would sing a whole lot of “bhajans” in Malayalam only associated with the flute and lord Krishna. One “bhajan” says:

Odi vaa,
Odi vaa vaa kanha,
Odi kuyal oodhi....

Run to me oh Kaanha with your flute, you bring to me the hills and plains and valleys when you play a few snatches. Let me put a peacock feather on your little head and make you a prince of the realms of divinity.

UMA NAIR

SIX DEGREES OF BLISS

Radha longs for the sonorous nectar,
Flowing from the flute of the naughty dark boy,
While he plays in secret and croons like a nightjar,
For the one mad with intellectual ploys,
Seeking the adamantine lord.

Of the cosmic form of great time,
Krishna the mischievous one, plays the mistress
While he gets chided for his crime,
By the ruler of the three worlds, his wife and the Empress.

ARIJOY BHATTACHARYYA

Sanjay Bhattacharyya

Born in 1958, Sanjay Bhattacharyya is known for his British orthodox technique of using water colours, and his realistic renderings in oils, which are done on a mammoth scale. An exceptional portrait artist, he has painted portraits of our honourable Presidents Dr. Shankar Dayal Sharma and Mr. K.R. Narayanan, both of which are displayed within Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi. His portrait of the late Shri Rajiv Gandhi forms a part of Shrimati Sonia Gandhi's private collection.

In 1994, Bhattacharyya had a solo exhibition titled 'Rajiv Gandhi: Landscape of a Man' at the prestigious National Gallery of Modern Art (N.G.M.A.), New Delhi; making him, perhaps, the only Indian painter to have had a solo at the N.G.M.A at such a young age. In addition, he has held numerous solo exhibitions in New Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, New York and London.

A passionate photographer, Bhattacharyya has had four prominent photography exhibitions in New Delhi, New York and Mumbai.



Image courtesy : Mala Parthasarathy

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