



Indian Council for Cultural Relations  
भारतीय सांस्कृतिक सम्बंध परिषद्



GHULAM RASOOL  
SANTOSH THE KASHMIRI  
SHAIVITE  
( 1929-1997 ) | PAINTINGS



# GHULAM RASOOL SANTOSH THE KASHMIRI SHAIVITE

( 1929-1997 ) | PAINTINGS

CURATOR : **UMA NAIR**

**ICCR Presents**  
**VISITING INDIAN MASTERS**

*Kashmir Landscape series 1952, Gouache & water color on board,  
16.5x12.5 inches Collection Shabir Santosh*

*Cover: Untitled 1994 ,watercolour on paper, Collection NGMA Delhi*



‘We turn to our motherland to find the earth’

*Untitled, 1987, Acrylic on canvas , 70 x 50 inches Collection Gita Singh*



## THE KASHMIRI SHAIVITE

My canvas represents a projection of *Shunya*, the Void which is incalculable in time and dimension, Anadi and Ananta {without beginning to end}. The surrounding dark oceans in terms of which you describe the borders of my canvas are the ever unfathomable, unreachable of the fundamental unfathomable, infinite aspects of the fundamental creative force which lies beyond the pale of wisdom, thought and imagination.

The canvas itself therefore is symbolic as it portrays the omnipresence of infinite in the finite. But space cannot be defined without a minimum of three directions or three lines which formulate a triangle which is *Mula Trikona*. The initial nature of all pervading creative force is *Shabda Brahma*, primordial sound which is ever and ceaselessly vibrant.”

GHULAM RASOOL SANTOSH

*Untitled, 1954, Kashmir Landscape, 16.5 x 41 inches, Gouache on Paper Collection Sanchit Joshan*



Life's complex journey has the potential to bind as well as to liberate. In order to navigate this dual nature of experience, the ancient school of Indian philosophy called Samkhya ("that which sums up") divides reality into two categories: the knower (purusha) and the known (prakriti). One great practitioner of this was Ghulam Rasool Santosh.

Santosh was born in the Kashmir valley in 1929. He was forced to give up painting after his father's death and as a result took up several odd jobs of silk weaving, sign board painting, and white washing walls. Slowly he returned to painting and joined the **Progressive Arts Association in Kashmir started by Sayed Haider Raza, mobilizing Kashmiri painters.**

In his early years, Santosh was greatly influenced by geometric shapes and the mysticism of the Kashmir valley. The landscape of Kashmir gave him a finely tuned sense of visual perception and he exemplified semi-abstract treatment. His meditative practices brought him to the language of Cubism and switched over to creating Cubist landscapes, a theme for which he is very popular now. Says Shabir, his son, who is also an artist, "Even though he was influenced by Cubism, one could feel the emotional attachment my father had for his native place, which allowed him to give a refreshing treatment to his work."

Santosh was deeply influenced by the works of Cezanne and the cubists particularly Pablo Picasso. His earliest work in this suite belongs to 1954-it is a landscape of Kashmir with the house boats in the lake the details of a house with wooden stairs as well as a tree. The painting is coloured by a combination of cubism and abstraction, focusing attention on the formal aspects of

*Early landscape work of G R Santosh from 1954. Oil on box board  
Collection Geeta Singh, Art pilgrim*



his work. Santosh's reduction of the visible world into the basic, underlying forms of the house boats, and faceted brushstrokes, seem to reconstruct nature through purely painterly forms. In the fracture and flattening of space—all these can be seen as the beginnings of modern art in 1954 when he went to study for two years at M.S. University Baroda. Like Cézanne whom Santosh loved, he stressed that he painted from nature and according to his sensations, seeking to realise a "harmony parallel to nature."

The next work done in the 1950's belongs to 1955-56 and here there is a formulation of calligraphic script nuanced with strokes and colours that seem to echo a painted prayer. In this oil we see that his pigments were dark and heavy, applied with emphatic brushstrokes and brusque, but deeply personal. Between broken brushwork and brighter colours, we see that he had his own understanding of colour relationships. It is the treatment of composition that reveals his inner leanings towards a contemplative idiom. Santosh was gradually working towards colour harmonies that would become more sonorous, deeply autumnal, and veer towards a more meditative and melancholy state of being.

*Untitled ( Calligraphy Series )  
1955-56, Oil and wax on Canvas  
Collection Sanchit Joshan*



## Kashmiri Shaivism

In 1960, Santosh took a visit to the Amarnath caves in the hope of finding inspiration to write an inter faith romance, however he came back with an experience of a philosophical tradition that would become the fulcrum of his thought process and embrace his inner sanctum.

The 8th century tantric philosophy of Kashmiri Shaivism became his leitmotif. This asserts the oneness of all things and upholds the emanation of energies from Shiva's Shakti or power, the feminine aspect of the cosmos. Santosh's abstracted iconographies thus emerged as an evolution of an odyssey dipped in the rudiments and experiential mystics of Kashmiri Shaivism.

He started studying Tantric Art -imagery and philosophy and created his own cosmic corollaries incorporating the cosmic egg form, the vertical symmetry, the ovoid shape as well as the phallic. This why he said: "My paintings are based on the male and female concept of Shiva and Shakti and therefore construed as tantra."

His two Untitled works from 1968 reflect the genesis of his seeds of thought and his understanding of the mystical union of the male female principles of Shiva Shakti. It shows us that he internalised the meta truths of Shaivite philosophy and added elements of tantra to create works that echoed a mystical aura of transcendence. In India Santosh came under the umbrella of Neo-Tantric artists along with Biren De.

Of tantric traditions historian Emily Wasserman notes:

'Indian tantric art was produced by an esoteric cult of Tantra Yoga followers whose origins may predate the 10th century, A.D. It combines yogic instruction, religion, meditation, science, and a spontaneous folk art expression into a great variety of forms which vary considerably in quality and complexity according to the sophistication of teacher, artist, and student, as well as to the level of thinking and belief signified by the particular art forms.'

*Untitled, 1968, Oil on canvas, 50in x 36 in, Collection Sanchit Joshan*



Created in a crucible of archetypal geometrical patterns, bright primary colours, delicate chromatic combinations of abstract and naturalistic forms, and systematically code-like aspects of Tantric painting; its narrative sequences of yogic postures and the cosmos, created its own aesthetic canon.

They contain a charismatic, pictorial and imaginative affinity in abstract colour painting as they explore infinite luminosity in graphic design, in the contemporary context.

Inspired by the Tantra philosophy, and his understanding of Shaivism Santosh combined the male and female form and finally worked round to paint a pure image of the human form, leaving out the face, hands, and feet. For a while, therefore, his subjects came to be dominated by the Shiv-Shakti/Purusha Prakriti principle.

In the Indian contemporary art scene his Tantric art spearheaded the movement in the art world in a series of seventeen paintings he did in the 1970s. One critic describes the artist's style and imagination to be "of the landscape of the heart rather than of any geographical region."

It wouldn't be incorrect to say that he followed the credo of the monastic Shaivite tradition which states: **'we turn to our motherland to find the earth.'**

*Untitled, 1968, Oil on canvas, 51.1in x 27.1in, Collection Sanchit Joshan*



### Shiva Shakti-Purusha Prakriti

In Vedic terms Shiva Shakti and Purusha Prakriti symbolise the same philosophy of principles in consciousness.

Shiva symbolises consciousness, the masculine principle. Shakti symbolises the feminine principle, the activating power and energy. In his notes Santosh says he was in search of an image that smacks of its soil, its tradition. In his research of Shaivism and Tantra he realised his was not a tradition of visuals but of a philosophy. Kashmir Shaivism influenced him in terms of colours-it spoke of *Prakash vimarsha* as it considered colour a form of light. So Santosh started treating colour as light. The orange colour in his paintings referenced a connection to tantra in the form of sindoor.

Santosh had meditative practices, so deep was his understanding that his paintings reflected those powers of energy. Indeed if Purusha is consciousness and Prakriti is nature then the confluence of the two creates the universe. We glimpse the yoga of supreme identity-from his works emanated a ripple of vibrations as if emerging from a doctrine of rituals and transcendental experiences.

Santosh then created a number of paintings with the human spirit at the centre. The human form in lithe and linear contours was an eternal being who was surrounded by the formless divine principle of energies. Clouds and air and even the radiations of the sun all came together to form the Aatma, manifested by the presence of nature. The illuminated energy became the focal point in the painting. Shakti (or Prakriti) symbolised energy, power, movement, change, as well as nature. As the maternal principle – it is the provider, of abundance. In the human as well as in the animal kingdom the mother offers nourishment, warmth and security.

*Untitled, 1987, Acrylic on canvas, 70in x 50in, Collection Sanchit Joshan*



Santosh worked on his paintings to create a cosmos of this pure consciousness –in which Shiva/Purusha is the unchanging, unlimited and an unswayable observer. Purusha has no desires whatsoever; these are inherent only in Prakriti. Purusha is the empty, clear domain onto which Prakriti projects her colourful presence. We see that in his works. Lovelier still is the story of his adding the name of his wife Santosh to his to personify the man woman union. Geometry and symbolism wove its own tableau in a variety of configurations. In an Untitled work of 1987 we espie the yogic posture the balance of harmonies, the prismatic indices of colour creating an aura that defines the human body as a divine energy. It is the crystalline oval ovoid in an ochre tone intensity that glows with an incandescent insignia. This work personifies the Shiva Shakti embodiment and ethos and we sense the communion in a work that echoes the beauty and power of the human figure translated into the idiom of the cosmos. Divinity then is a quality that radiates within the very fibre of existence. Purusha Prakriti then is a philosophy that is based on the fulcrum of oneness.

*Untitled , 1979, Acrylic on canvas board, Collection Shabir Santosh*



Historian and author Devdutt Patnaik says in ‘Samkhya, the school of analytical metaphysics, the world is divided into two parts: the spiritual (Purusha) and the material (Prakriti). Purusha is today translated to mean man; that makes Prakriti woman. Prakriti is today translated to mean nature; that makes Purusha culture, or more specifically male culture. But this attribution of gender to elements of Samkhya is more convenient and simplistic rather than correct.’

In one work of the 1970s we see a union of the phallic symbol and the feminine spirit. The darkness of the juxtaposed imagery has an archetypal aura as it creates an amorphous rendering. In this stirring image Santosh brings alive the reflection of the

Upanishadic sages who maintained that life will always be a mixture of stillness and movement, silence and noise, soul and flesh, spirit and substance. The unchanging divinity within and the ever-transforming divinity around becomes the inner secret of this spirit of existence.

*Untitled, 1970, Oil on Canvas, 49.4in x 34 in, Collection Sanchit Joshan*



Santosh soaked his sensibility with the Purusha Prakriti principle. Purusha means that which is not contained in space and time. Prakriti means that which is contained in space and time. Purusha is thus the spirit while Prakriti is matter. Purusha is the soul while Prakriti is that which wraps around the soul — the mind, the body and the world. We see that mingling in his work of the 1987- the ovoid ebony is surrounded by a crystalline set of triangular luminous facets which yoke into a lotus with fleshy fragments denoting the feminine presence. The formal geometric diagram is both male and female. In this communion gender is an attribute of Prakriti. Purusha is beyond gender. That makes man, a soul wrapped in male flesh and woman a soul wrapped in female flesh.

*Untitled-1987, Acrylic on canvas 70in x 50in  
Collection Sanchit Joshan*



In Hindu philosophy Patnaik says that Prakriti is the container of wealth and knowledge and power. It stimulates and provokes, Purusha into action. Purusha is that which can act — it can if it so wills create or sustain or destroy anything: wealth, knowledge or power. Thus Purusha is the divine within us that can create or sustain or destroy. Prakriti is the divine around us manifesting as wealth, knowledge and power. Purusha creates outside itself but within Prakriti just as man creates life outside the male body within a woman's body. This is why Purusha is best represented by the male form while Prakriti is best represented by the female form. Within is God. Without is Goddess. Without either there is neither. Santosh's works in the late 1980s and 90s became more pronounced in terms of the tantra philosophies and their foundational aesthetics. The luminosity of the representation became the manifestation of energies, the vertical dynamics of design had its own Vedic principles born of the foundational patterns of the pathways of colour and contour.

*Untitled, 1988, Acrylic on Canvas, 54in x 40in  
Collection Sanchit Joshan*



In Santosh's image the face of the sun is an ovoid, it is the harbinger of all energy and life and light. The Yogic stance in the painting speaks to us about the Purusha prakriti Principle. This image points to the vitality of the human mind. Yoking the mind in the impulse of the divine brings us closer to the realm of light.

This painting calls to our mind great sages and seers who controlled their minds and intelligence. Wisdom and its ways come from invocation. The affirmative being of the Divine transforming Sun is a destination then at the end of one's odyssey.

The aniconic and notational drawings of the Tantric Yantra, ritual designs took on a meditative tone, in his hand. The triangle turned into a pyramid, the circle a glowing solid sphere, and the square a radiant cube given his adept constructivist elaborations. Paintings emanating light, the gemlike creations transformed tantric symbols of the cosmogony into charismatic corollaries of deep meditation. An avid colourist and a vanguard of Neo-Tantric artist, he endowed his works with a rare ingenuity that translated the dynamics of three-dimensional volumes on a flat surface.

Amongst all the abstractionists in the country we must consider Santosh as a beacon of wisdom and transcendental energies. This pioneer of the Neo tantric style born of deep meditative practices immersed in an odyssey of a higher consciousness brought to the contemporary art world the essence and ethos of Kashmiri Shaivism. His paintings stir our inner recesses and awaken within deeper dictums of consciousness nudging us towards unknown journeys of the self crystallised in the crucible of Hindu Shaivite philosophy.

Santosh had over 30 solo shows in India, U.S.A., Canada, Japan, Hong Kong and Singapore- besides exhibiting his paintings in national international group shows, including at the Sao Paulo Biennale, Triennale-India, and the Neo-Tantra Art', U.C.L.A., Los Angeles. Honoured with Padma Shri by the President of India, he was also awarded the National Award twice and the Artist of the Year Award in New Delhi in 1984. His works belong to Museums all over the world. The British Museum's latest Tantra show held in London had two of his works in a stellar exhibition.

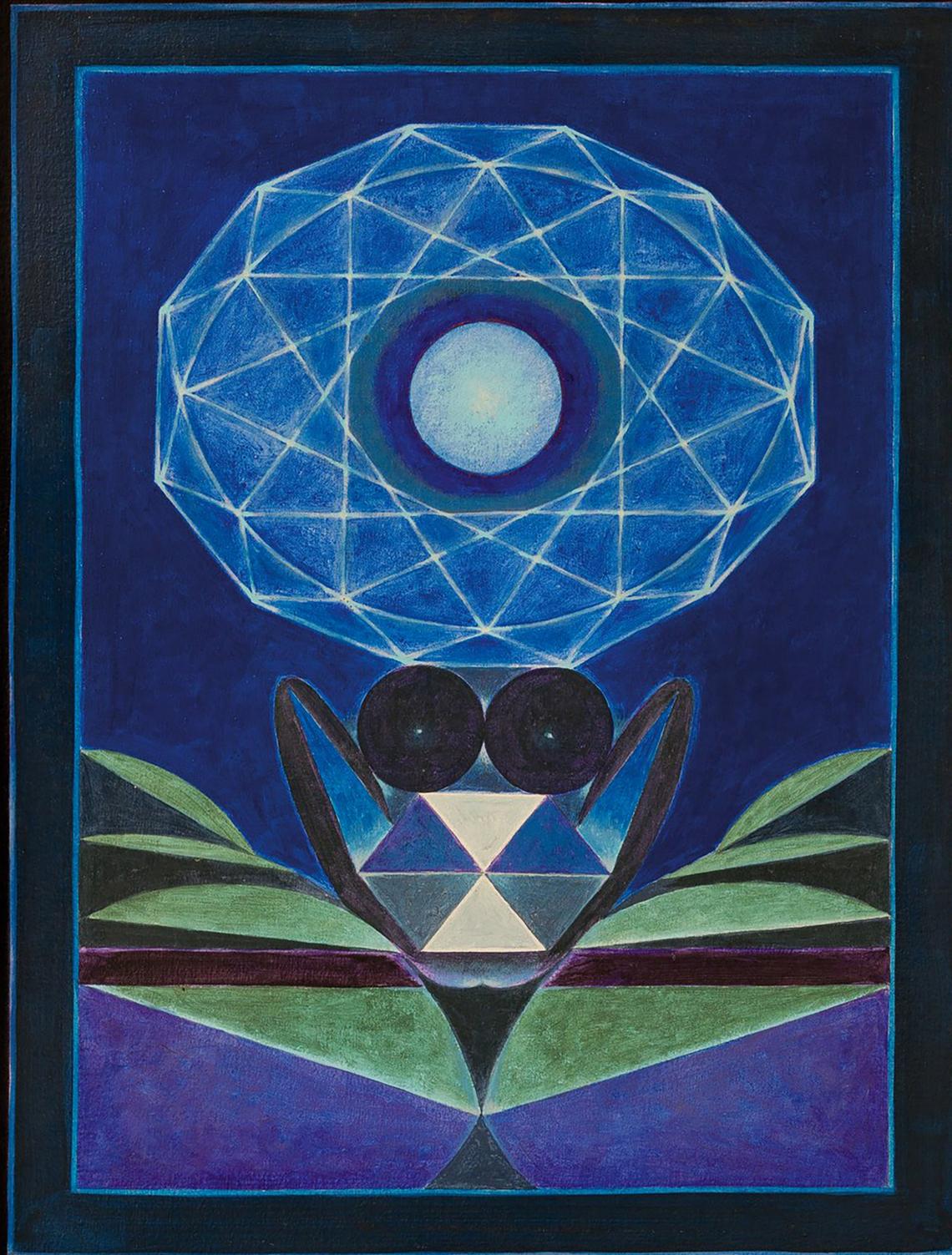
*Untitled, 1994, Water color on Arches paper, 12in x16in, Collection Shabir Santosh*



As a writer in particular a poet, I wrote an important poem in 1963 *Do Rukh* ( twin faced ) which employed the metaphor of one's eyes being transplanted behind the skull. The poem was symbolic of liberating one's thought process from the constraints of time, space or dimension on the one hand, and implying on the other than one may have left one's destination behind.

*G R Santosh*

*Untitled, 1989, Acrylic on canvas, Collection Gita Singh*



Indian consciousness and scholarship has had an unbroken continuity for thousands of years. Tantra however was not an intellectual exercise for me, but an internal urge ,a call to understand the truth that is the source and underlying principle of everything.; the truth that fashions the contours of our creative expression. Tantra helped me in visually actualising our ancient thought process.

*G R Santosh*

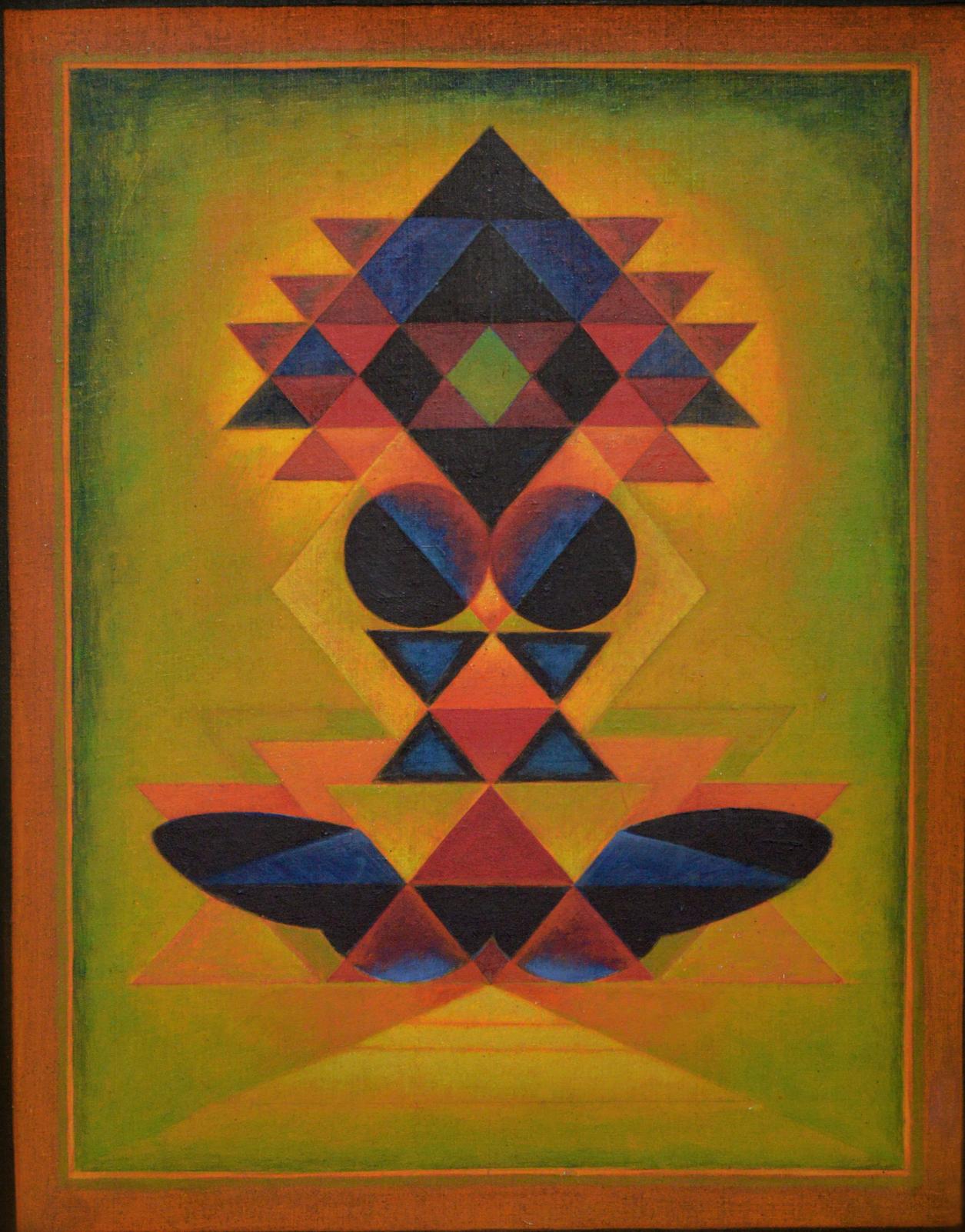
*Sharika, 1989, Acrylic on Canvas, 24x36 inches, Collection Hanut Singh*



*Early figurative 1957, Gouache on box board, Collection Shabir Santosh*

Poetry is universal. Prose on the other hand is straitjacketed in the notion of time and space. Art cannot transcend time and space simultaneously. Even the wall paintings of Ajanta depict different time space frames sequentially in the mural narrative of the Jataka tales.

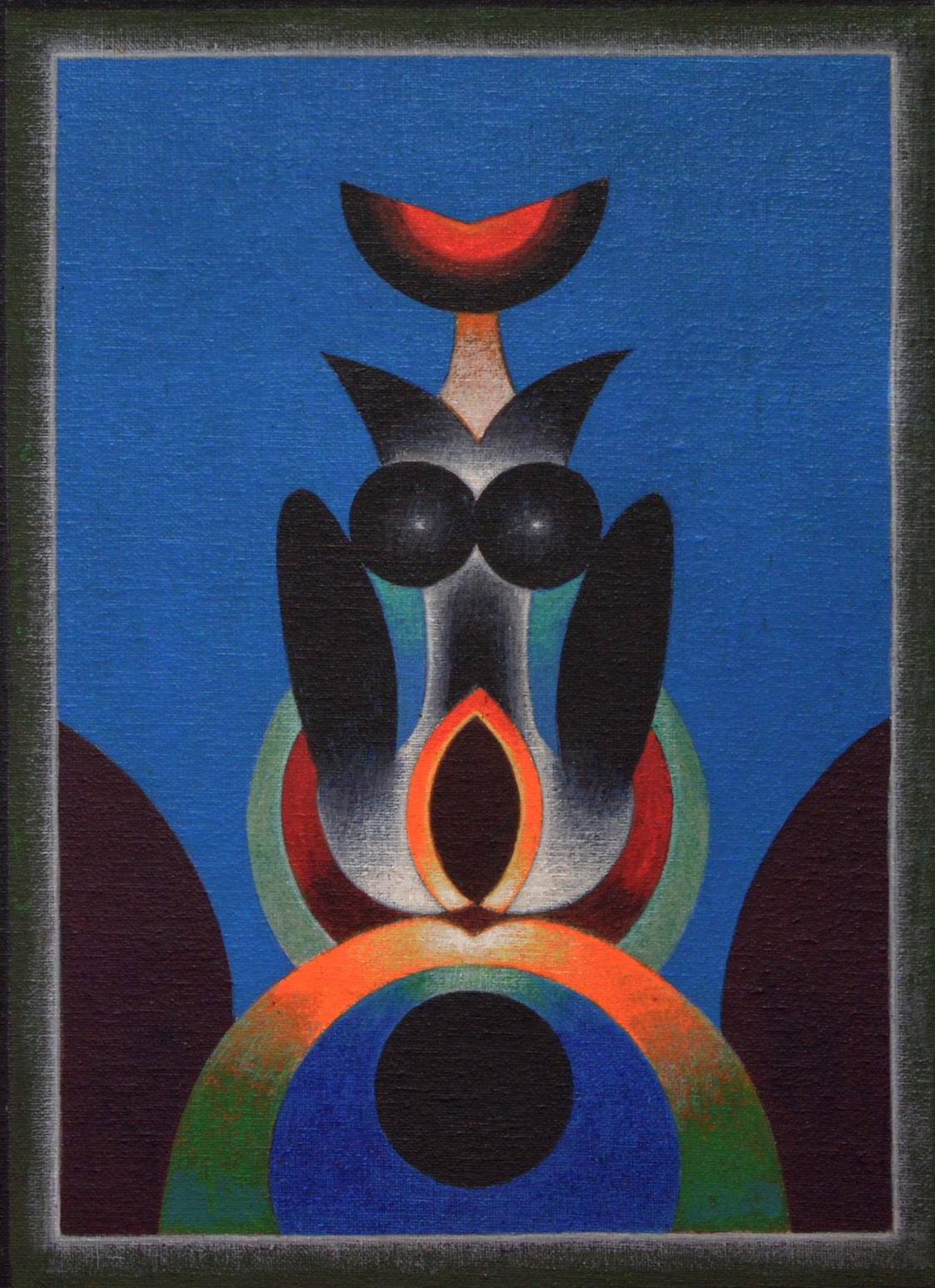
*GR Santosh*



I don't sketch,I divide the canvas down the central axis and star. Since I try to create colour as light, the painting is built slowly, gradually.

*GR Santosh*

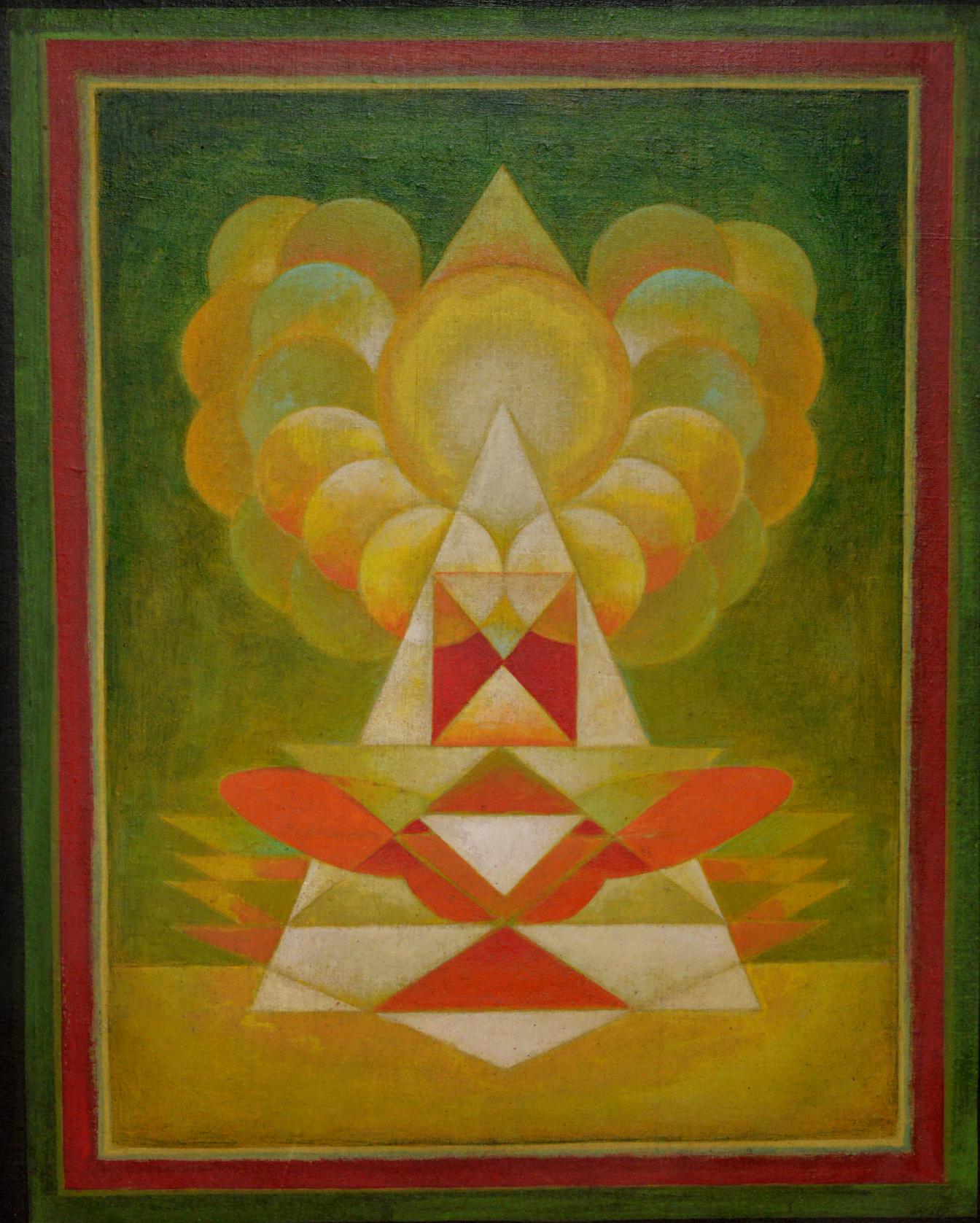
*Untitled, 1982, Acrylic on canvas board, Collection Shabir Santosh*



I gave *maithuna* an image. This image consists of two bodies *prakriti* and *purush* in union. To stylise the purush-prakriti union in its true form, I pared off the head and limbs of the image. My images attained a sort of symmetry ultimately. I had to hold back the natural progression to bilateral symmetry till the time an inner desire would well up.

*G R Santosh*

*Untitled, 1981, Acrylic on Canvas board, Collection Shabir Santosh*



During the course of my studies I understood Kashmir Shaiva (siddhanta) Shaiva principles and the concept of prakash (light) and vimarsha (self contemplation of prakash) and the nature of light in the being of Prakash, in other words light and luminosity. I understood colour as light. And that a pigment is the illusion of its colour. Thus illusion gives the pigment surface its transparency. This means that the light-illusion defines and marks out space illusion.

*G R Santosh*

*Untitled, 1982, Acrylic on canvas board Collection Shabir Santosh*



There is the case of the framing margin in my work. This defines the canvas within cosmic space. I made this visual definition of an exposure through colours.

*G R Santosh*

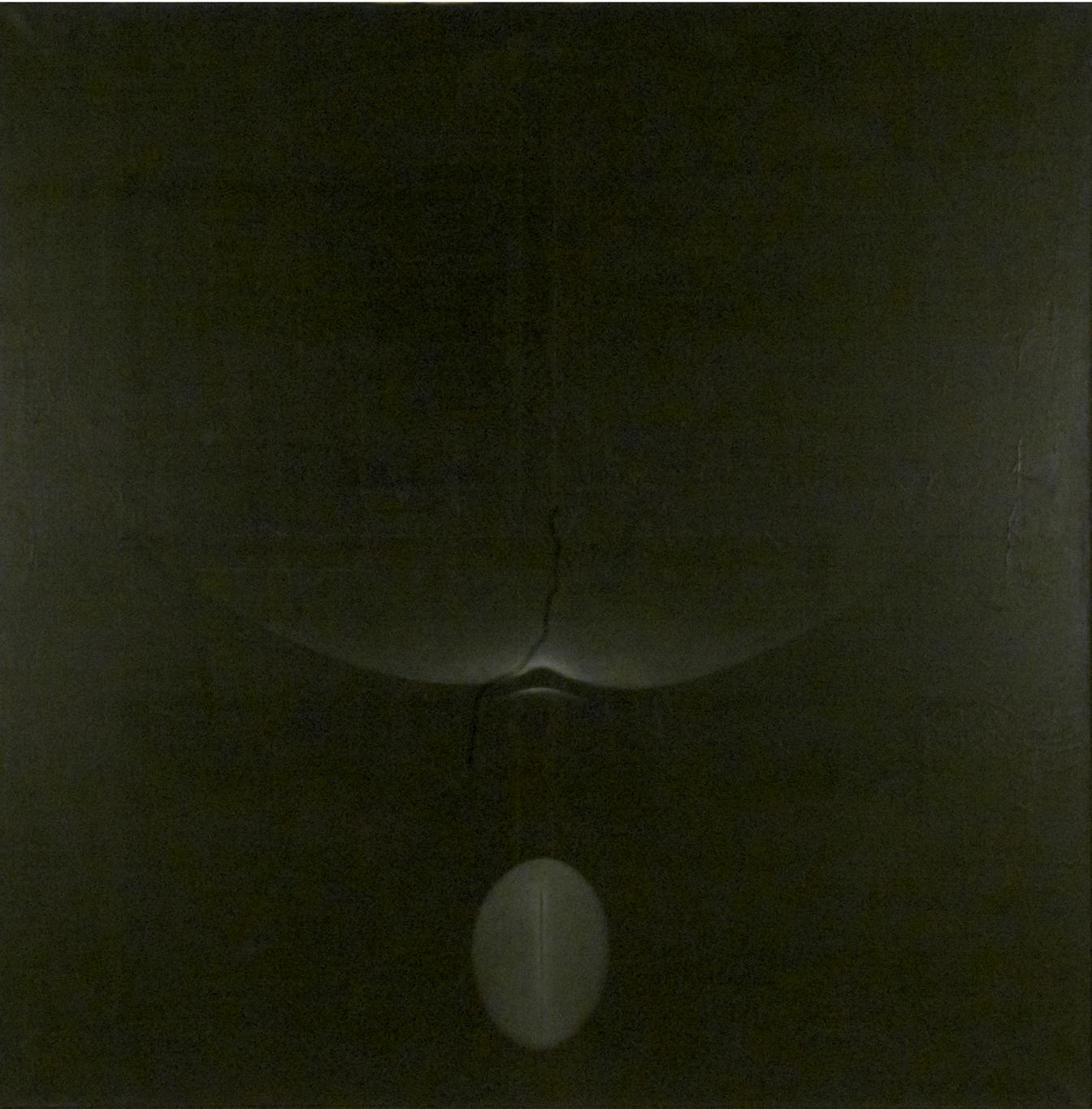
*Acknowledgements:*

Poems and quotes of GR Santosh : Shabir Santosh  
(GR Santosh Archives )

Collections: NGMA New Delhi

Collectors: Shabir Santosh, Sanchit Joshan,  
Gita Singh, Hanut Singh

*Self and the elements, Acrylic on Canvas, Collection NGMA Delhi*



## NIGHT

It is said  
When there was nothing  
That, indeed, was everything.  
Around there was that eye as well  
Where dreams of beginning  
And the end, lay asleep  
Lost within manifold dreams.  
That world of half sleep  
Terrain of doubt between yes and no.  
Vision that, tired, returns

The eye, as wide awake yet somnolent looking,  
Does not cry, nor smile  
There was no rival in love  
No love rite either  
Neither heart nor beloved.  
The illusion of Brahma broke  
And the eye blinked  
That which was not  
Started happening all at once  
The footfalls of silence became 'alaap'

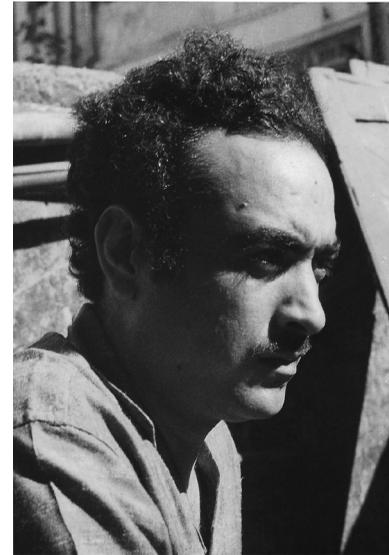
From the rhythm of breath  
Issued the incantation of 'Shakti'  
The even 'answer' of ambrosial 'ni'  
Kameshwari, Kalavati 'ragini' awoke  
The golden warp-and-weft of 'vani' was illuminated

*Untitled, Oil on Canvas, Collection NGMA Delhi*

The chain of time tightened moment to moment  
That, which was nothing, became visible  
The eye sees the light of day  
Night is a dark fire, burning  
The fire went out and a voice hailed --  
Silence is that feeling of the unheard  
Unseen truth :  
Call it dream  
And you are the emperor of dreams  
Call it mirror  
You the fair visage  
Call it a musical scale  
You are the voice  
Call it time  
You are the moment  
Call it the beginning  
Then you are the end  
You, the 'you' connected with the 'I'.

I go :  
You will also return there someday  
Where there is nothing  
The nothing that is  
Everything.

*G R Santosh*



### **G.R Santosh**

Born in 1929 in Srinagar, Kashmir, Gulam Rasool Santosh, popularly known as 'Santosh' was initially trained in painting, weaving and papier mache. He subsequently won a Government of India scholarship to study Fine Arts at the MS University, Baroda, under the guidance of late Professor N.S Bendre.

Early in his career, G.R. Santosh was influenced by Cezanne and his cubist treatment of the pictorial space. He held his 1st solo show in 1953 in Srinagar. From the late 50's onwards, get began to get inspired by the Tantric mystico religious traditions prevalent in Kashmir. The notational drawings of tantric yantra underwent a metamorphosis in his works as he reinterpreted and reinvented the symbols to give expression to his unique subjectivity.

Perhaps not known to many, he was also an acclaimed mystic poet in Kashmiri and wrote widely in Urdu. In 1979, he received the Sahitya Akademi award for his collection of poems in Kashmiri, titled 'BesukhRuh'. G.R. Santosh has exhibited his works at several solo exhibition in India and abroad including those at New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Bombay and New Delhi. He has been represented in several private and public collection in India and abroad and has also been honoured with the Padma Shri. G.R Santosh passed away in 1997.

## Education

- 1954-56 Faculty of Fine Arts, Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda.(Student of N. S. Bendre)  
1947-53 Self-Taught Craftsman, Painter, Weaver.

## Selected Posthumous Exhibitions

- 2017 'Perennial Transcendence', presented by Sanchi Art at India Art Fair, New Delhi  
2017 'Tantra', Art Konsult, New Delhi  
2015 'Abby Grey and Indian Modernism: Selections from the NYU Art Collection', Grey Art Gallery, New York University, New York  
2013 'The Naked and the Nude: The Body in Indian Modern Art', Delhi Art Gallery, New Delhi  
2012 'Awakening: A Retrospective of G R Santosh', Delhi Art Gallery, New Delhi  
2011 'Ethos V: Indian Art Through the Lens of History (1900 to 1980)', Indigo Blue Art, Singapore  
2011 'Manifestations VI', Delhi Art Gallery, New Delhi  
2011 'Manifestations V', Delhi Art Gallery, New Delhi  
2011 'Celebrations 2011', Annual Exhibition, Kumar Art Gallery, New Delhi  
2010 'Above and Beyond', Aicon Gallery, London  
2010 'Manifestations IV', Delhi Art Gallery, New Delhi  
2010 'Celebration 2010', Annual Exhibition, Kumar Art Gallery, New Delhi  
2009 'Bharat Ratna! Jewels of Modern Indian Art', Museum of Fine Arts, Boston  
2009 'The Root of Everything', Gallery Mementos, Bangalore  
2008-09 'Modern India', organized by Institut Valencià d'Art Modern (IVAM) and Casa Asia, in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture at Valencia, Spain  
2008 'Moderns', Royal Cultural Centre, Amman, Jordan organized by Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi in collaboration with Embassy of India, Amman, Jordan  
2008 'Frame Figure Field: 20th Century Modern and Contemporary Indian Art', Delhi Art Gallery, New Delhi  
2007 'From the Vault', Highlights from the Herwitz and Gallery Collection, Aicon Gallery, New York  
2007 Delhi Art Gallery, New Delhi 2005 'Unrealistically', ArtsIndia, New York  
2005 'Contours of Modernity - An Exhibition of Contemporary Indian Art', Founder's Hall of SOKA University of America in Aliso Viejo, CA

- 2005 'Manifestations III : Hundred Artists from the Delhi Art Gallery Collection', Delhi Art Gallery, New Delhi  
2004 'Manifestations II', Delhi Art Gallery, New Delhi and Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai  
2003 'Manifestations I', Delhi Art Gallery, New Delhi and World Trade Centre, Mumbai

## Selected Solo Exhibitions

- 1994 Dhoomimal Art Centre, New Delhi  
1991 Little Theatre Gallery, New Delhi  
1989 Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai  
1985 Dhoomimal Art Centre, New Delhi  
1983 'Santosh', Gallery TAI IN, Seoul  
1982 'Modern Indian Paintings', Hirschhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C.,USA  
1982 'Contemporary Indian Art', Festival of India, Royal Academy of Art, London  
1979-80 'Contemporary Indian Art', organized by National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA) at Japan  
1978 Exhibition at South Korea  
1978 Triveni Kala Sangam, Gallery Chanakya, New Delhi  
1976 South Korea  
1976 'Acrylics', Gallery Chanakya, New Delhi  
1975 'Pencil Drawings', Gallery Chanakya, New Delhi  
1974 Exhibition dedicated to Urdu Writer Thakur Poonchi, Srinagar  
  
1973 Gallery Chanakya, New Delhi  
1970 Gallery Chanakya, New Delhi  
1970 Bistidari, New Delhi  
1969 Pundole Art Gallery, Mumbai  
1968 Dhoomimal Art Centre, New Delhi  
1968 Gallery Chemould, Mumbai 1967 KunikaChemould Art Centre, New Delhi  
1964 Revel Gallery, New York  
1962 Gallery Mayer, New York, Kumar Gallery, Kolkata, Kabul, Tel Aviv, Los Angeles, Devorah Sherman Gallery, Chicago  
1962,71 Kumar Gallery, New Delhi  
1953,57,59,62,64 Mumbai  
1953-56,63 Srinagar

## Selected Group Exhibitions

- 1992 Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai  
1984 'Exhibition of Contemporary Indian Painters', National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA), New Delhi

1984 'Neo-Tantra', National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA), New Delhi and Sahitya Kala Parishad, New Delhi  
 1983 'Tantra', Stuttgart, West Germany and South Korea  
 1980 Paintings in the Miniature format, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi  
 1979-80 'Contemporary Indian Art', National Gallery of Modern Art at Japan  
 1973 'Contemporary Indian Painting', Washington D.C.  
 1972 Cannes, France  
 1972 'Contemporary Indian Painting', GDR (German Democratic Republic)  
 1971 Exhibition at Los Angeles, U.S.A.  
 1971 'Tantra Art', Montreal  
 1971 'Contemporary Art of India', Japan  
 1965 'Ten Contemporary Painters', M.L.T. Cambridge and New Jersey State Museum  
 1963-64 'Ten Contemporary Painters from India', University of South Florida, Tampa  
 1963-64 Museum of Contemporary Art, Jacksonville  
 1963-64 Delgado Museum of Art (New Orleans Museum of Art), New Orleans  
 1963-64 Hunter Gallery of Art, Chattanooga, Colorado Springs  
 1963-64 Long Beach Art Centre, San Francisco, East-West Centre, Honolulu and continued in Hong Kong, Manila and Singapore  
 1963,65 Mainichi, Tokyo  
 1961 National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa  
 1959 'Modern Indian Art', Cairo  
 1959 'Contemporary Indian Painters', Japan  
 1956 Indian Exhibition to Eastern Europe  
 1950 Shows with Progressive Artists Association

#### Joint Exhibitions

1980 With artist Om Prakash, Lalit Kala Akademi Gallery, New Delhi

#### Participations

1988 Second National Biennale, Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal  
 1988 'Festival of India', Takaoka Municipal Museum of Art, Toyama, Japan and Meguro Museum of Art, Tokyo, Japan  
 1985-86 'Neo-Tantra: Contemporary Indian Painting Inspired by Tradition, Festival of India', Frederick S. Wight Art Gallery,

University of California, Los Angeles, U.S.A.  
 1982 'Contemporary Indian Art, Festival of India', Royal Academy of Art, London  
 1982 Vth International Triennale, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi  
 1982 'Modern Indian Paintings', Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C.  
 1980 'Contemporary Indian Art', Lalit Kala Akademi, held at Dubai  
 1980 'Exhibition of Contemporary Indian Painters', Lalit Kala Akademi, held at Japan  
 1977 Bulgaria International Art Exhibition  
 1973 National Exhibition, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi  
 1968,78,82 First, Fourth and Fifth International Triennale, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi  
 1963,69,72 Sao Paulo Biennale, Brazil  
 1965 Mainichi Biennale, Japan  
 1961 Paris Biennale, Paris, France  
 1959 'Contemporary Art from India', Museum Folkwang, Essen StadtischeKunsthalle, Recklinghausen, Museum OstwallimDortmunder Galerie Pel ate, Zurich  
 1957 National Exhibition, New Delhi

#### Honours and Awards

1997 Doctorate of Literature (LittD), posthumous, by University of Jammu  
 1997 Posthumous citation and special prize for 'extraordinary contribution in the field of Art and Literature', by the Government of Jammu and Kashmir  
 1992 ZehneJadidAitraaf for best interview published in the Urdu magazine ZehneJadid  
 1991 Kala Ratna Award, All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society (AIFACS), New Delhi  
 1985 Kalhana Award, The Kashmir Education and Science Society, New Delhi  
 1984 Artist of the Year, Sahitya Kala Parishad, New Delhi  
 1979 Sahitya Akademi Award for BesukhRuh (his collection of poems)  
 1977 Awarded Padmashri, Government of India  
 1973 National Award, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi  
 1964 National Award, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi  
 1959 First Prize, Kalidasa Jayanti Exhibition  
 1957 National Award, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi  
 1955-56 Governor of Bombay's Prize  
 1954-56 Cultural Scholarship, Government of India

# UMA NAIR



## Curator

Uma Nair has been curating art shows since 2005 in the capital city of Delhi. Her first show Terra Natura, was a show of five seminal ceramic artists that sold out in Delhi.

Her curatorial ventures have spanned painting, photography, ceramics and sculpture.

Moderns, Earth Songs and Gandhi @150 years

History happened when she was invited to curate an archival show at the Lalit Kala Akademi in a show called *Moderns* that was sent to Jordan, Berlin and Vienna in the years 2008-2016.

In researching the archives of the Lalit Kala Akademi in New Delhi her next historic culling was *Earth Songs* a show of 86 works from the Lalit Kala Archives, a study on India's tribal art.

She also curated Gandhi@150 Years an epic show of sculptures paintings and graphic prints and photographs at Lalit Kala Akademi on October 2nd 2019 with 86 artists.

## iSculpt I and II

In terms of public exhibitions her most important curatorial exercises have been *iSculpt I (2016)* and *iSculpt II (2018)* at the India International Centre, Gandhi King Plaza. *iSculpt* was a revolution in the making of public exhibitions and public art that expresses fidelity to the idea of a "sculpture of one's own"—in this case, a series of literal and metaphorical works dedicated to material experimentation

and innovation, and in doing so provides a plethora of works for the history of ingenuity among sculptors to take root. The Gandhi King Plaza morphs into a sculptural court for 10 days creating dynamics of a rare aesthetic order.

## Photography

Coupling photography and paintings happened with a show in 2007 with Gallerie Nvya called *Darpan*. It looked at how artists and photographers dealt with the concept and idea of a mirror in art. 2011 became an important year when a small show of photographs and paintings and sculptures was held at the India Art Fair entitled *Womb to Tomb* with works by Raghu Rai, Pablo Partholomew and Pankaj Mistry.

Two important solo exhibitions in photography were Pankaj Mistry's *Reverie* in 2009 and Prabir Purkayastha's *Borokhun* in 2011.

The greatest exhibition of photographs happened at Kolkata Centre for creativity in 2019 when she curated Kolkata International Photo Festival with the masters Jyoti Bhatt and S Paul other than many other Indian photographers.

## Painting

Nair goes by the discipline that solo shows as curatorial exercises hold greater weight when you curate a show of an artist with great talent specifically for artists who have worked for more than a decade and are still relatively unknown.

Among artists who revel in painting Nair's most

important exhibition was Sanjay Bhattacharyya's *Emerging Krishna* at the Religare Art Gallery in 2012. Iconic oils and a series of photographs became the focus of an exhibition that celebrated form as much as the spiritual aura of the flute player as an incandescent symbol cast against different prisms of light by the master disciple of Bikash Bhattacharjee.

Nair's next curation is Prabhakar Kolte's 50 years of work at Treasure Art Gallery in Delhi.

## Printmaking -intaglios and serigraphs

Nair's group shows like *Vriksha*, (2019) *Gandhi @150 years* (2019) and *Yatra Naryasthu* (Women's show at NGMA-2021) have included leading printmakers like Jyoti Bhatt, Zarina Hashmi and Soghra Khurasani.

Her most historic solo exhibition to date has been 84 intaglio prints by the mentor and leading printmaker Jyoti Bhatt. This solo show was a collection of prints and serigraphs from Collectors all over India and held at the prestigious Bihar Museum, Patna.

## Sculpture/ Installations

In the year 2010 Nair was invited to write about the Lalit Kala Akademi National Exhibition that was held in Kolkata. At the exhibition she discovered the work of the brilliant bronze sculptor Arun Pandit. She came back and connected with Pandit who was working at Garhi Studios and curated his first solo show in 2012. Later in 2016 his epic show of sculptures *Power and Pathos* was well received with the Alkazi Foundation picking him up as their lead sculptor and buying 4 works for the foundation.

In January 2020 Nair curated Prodosh Dasgupta: A journey of 60 years at Akar Prakar Delhi for the India Art Fair. This exhibition became one of the most highly proclaimed exhibitions because it became an educator's paradigm of modernist moorings.

## Ceramics

Nair is both a collector and a great patron of contemporary ceramics. Her first show Terra Natura 2005, became a lesson in history and techniques and the alchemy of textural terrain in ceramics.

The next show she curated was in April 2017 by Architecture Professor Manjari Sharma who had been dabbling in sculptural ceramics more than 10 years. *Sculptour* became an exhibition that spoke of the power and passion for explorations and experiments with clay.

Nair's next solo unveiling was the enigmatic and brilliant ceramic artist G. Reghu's ceramic show at Jehangir Art Gallery Mumbai on January 15, 2018. As a voice in contemporary art criticism it is Nair's in depth analogies and critiques that pitch her amongst the best in the nation.

## International

On the international front it is the Lalit Kala Akademi exhibition *Moderns* that has garnered great recognition and appreciation for Nair's curatorial and historical annotations. *Moderns* has travelled to Jordan and Berlin for epic unveilings and rave reviews.

## Author

**Nair has been writing as an art critic for 31 years.**

Nair's first monograph was published in 2005 -25 years of Paresch Maity.

Nair's monograph on Arpita Singh's *Wishdream* was an essay that was penned as far back as 2005 but published by Saffronart in 2010.

Nair's last book was *Reverie with Raza* for Akar Prakar and Mapin Publications published in 2016. It became the last book to be published on Sayed Haider Raza during his living years just before his passing away.

Nair has also penned more than 100 catalogues in 31 years of work. Her most important ones are ITIHAAS, Dhanraj Bhagat at 100, Dhvani-Shabd our Chinh and Upendra Maharathi for NGMA Delhi.

She currently writes as critic for: *Architectural Digest India*, *The Hindu*, *The Pioneer*, *EXOTICA Magazine*, and writes a blog called **PIUMAGE** on *Times of India*.



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