

SYMPHONY OF FLAMES

AKKITHAM NARAYANAN

Curator Jyotirmoy Bhattacharya



14 - 17 November, 2024







Akkithathu Manayil
Vasudevan Namboothiri

Thiruthi Manakkal
Arya Antharjanam

Curator's Note

Symphony of Flames— These words are not just the mere title of this exhibition but a reflection of the profound artistry and thought that permeates the artworks of Akkitham Narayanan. At first glance, his paintings seem enigmatic, their meanings elusive amidst the bold strokes and vibrant hues. Witnessing his creative process, where each movement is a delicate dance, one recognizes the hidden beauty within its illustration. In the interplay of colours and geometric forms in his artworks, a flame emerges, with its subtle yet powerful aura. The flame sometimes appears as a solitary deeya (oil lamp) lighting a small temple in the middle of a dark forest, sometimes as the soft glow accompanying a scholar immersed in his manuscripts, or as a distant light illuminating the vast night sky of a warm desert. The flame, a symbol of radiance and enlightenment, flickers within the structured shapes of his compositions, born from the deepest reaches of his creativity. He also captures the forms and lines which personify the ancient rituals of tantra.

Born in an orthodox Brahmin family, his childhood was spent in the village of Kumaranellur in the Palakkad district, of Kerala. He grew up in a disciplined household, where art was given an essential seat in developing oneself. Apart from drawing inspiration from his life in Kerala, Akkitham's artistic expression was also drawn from the teachings of eminent figures such as sculptor and painter D. P. Roy Choudhury and renowned artist K. C. S. Paniker. As a student, he was schooled according to the techniques used by the masters of the Bengal School of Art. His initial art training helped him be a professional artist, however, to evolve into the artist he wanted to be, he had to relinquish these learned forms in pursuit of a style uniquely his own.

In his artworks, there is a gradual transition from thick impasto to fine use of colours as he builds his layers on the canvas. These layers, meticulously built, create the illusion of a magical kaleidoscope, which reveals new and mesmerizing patterns with each turn. In his exploration as an artist, he reached Paris, the mecca of the art world. He originally came to Paris to study at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts on a government scholarship. There, he explored his depths as an artist by delving into the modern art of Europe. In



the City of Lights, he found his artistic identity and a place to call his second home. He has been living in Paris for the past fifty-seven years, and despite the distance from his birthplace, his philosophy and artistic vision remain deeply connected to his roots, harmonizing the wisdom of his heritage with the boldness of contemporary abstraction.

This time spent with Akkitham has created a special place in my heart for art, most notably when he was humming lines from Jayadeva's Geet Govinda while painting—

*Rati sukha sare gatam abhisare Madana manohara vesham
Na kuru nitambini gamana...*

A place that is blissful, connubial, and quintessentially, Gone, in a preset place
Arousable, lovely, heart-stealing, with mien
Don't delay in going, follow him, the lord of your heart

These lines from Jayadev beautifully capture the passionate love between Radha and Krishna, weaving a tale that, on the surface, mirrors the emotional depth and sentimentality of a human love story. Nevertheless, the true essence of his poetry lies in its profound symbolism—the union of the human soul with the divine. Writing in the 12th Century, Jayadeva was ahead of his time, portraying Radha and Krishna's love as a transcendent experience of divine ecstasy. His words evoke a deep, almost mystical pleasure, reminiscent of the soul's own yearning for communion with the Almighty. This very bliss finds a kindred expression in the art of Akkitham. Through his art, we witness an invocation of spiritual rapture that bridges the earthly and the divine, making the human experience of love a path to the eternal.

- Jyotirmoy Bhattacharya



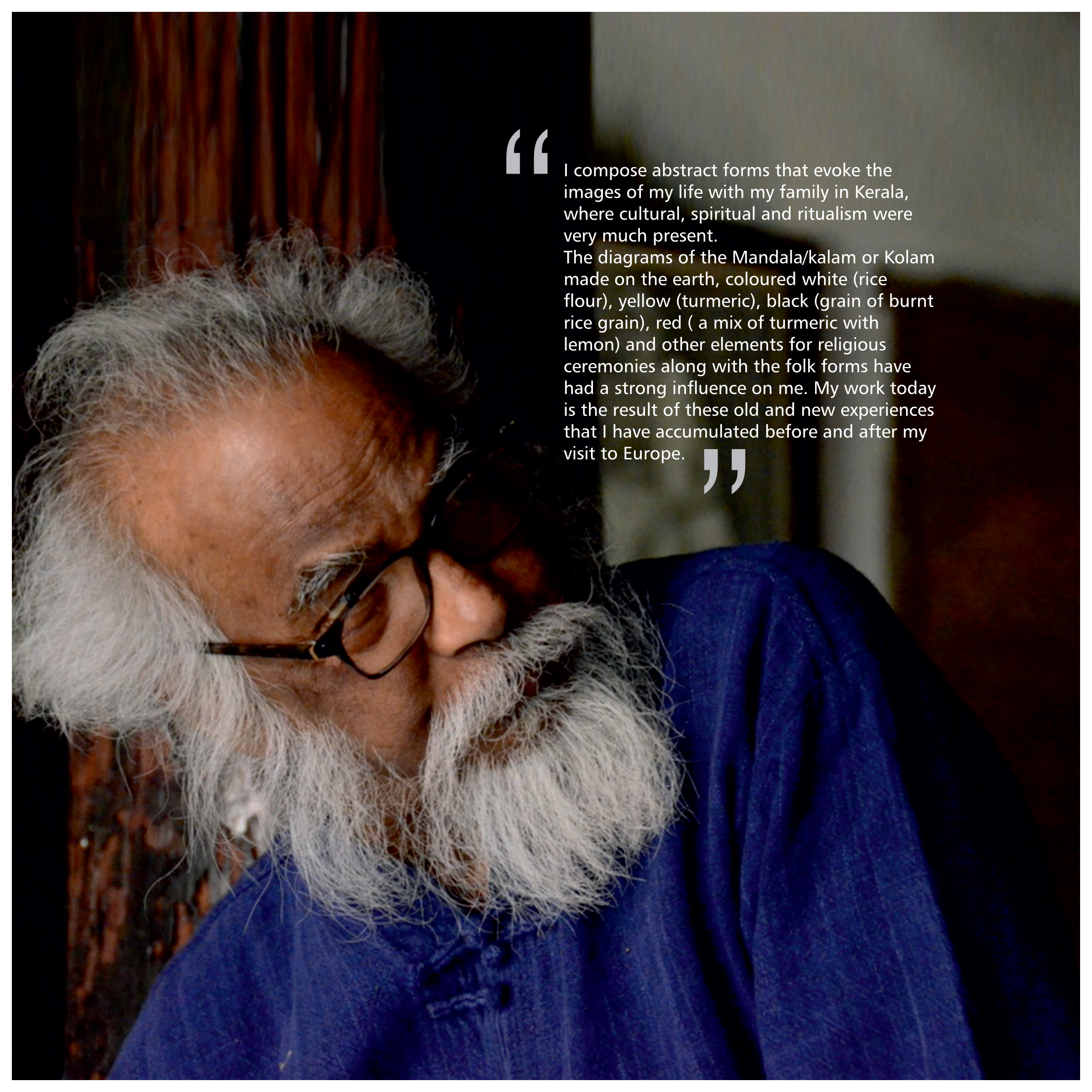
Oil on Canvas, 39" x 39", 1993

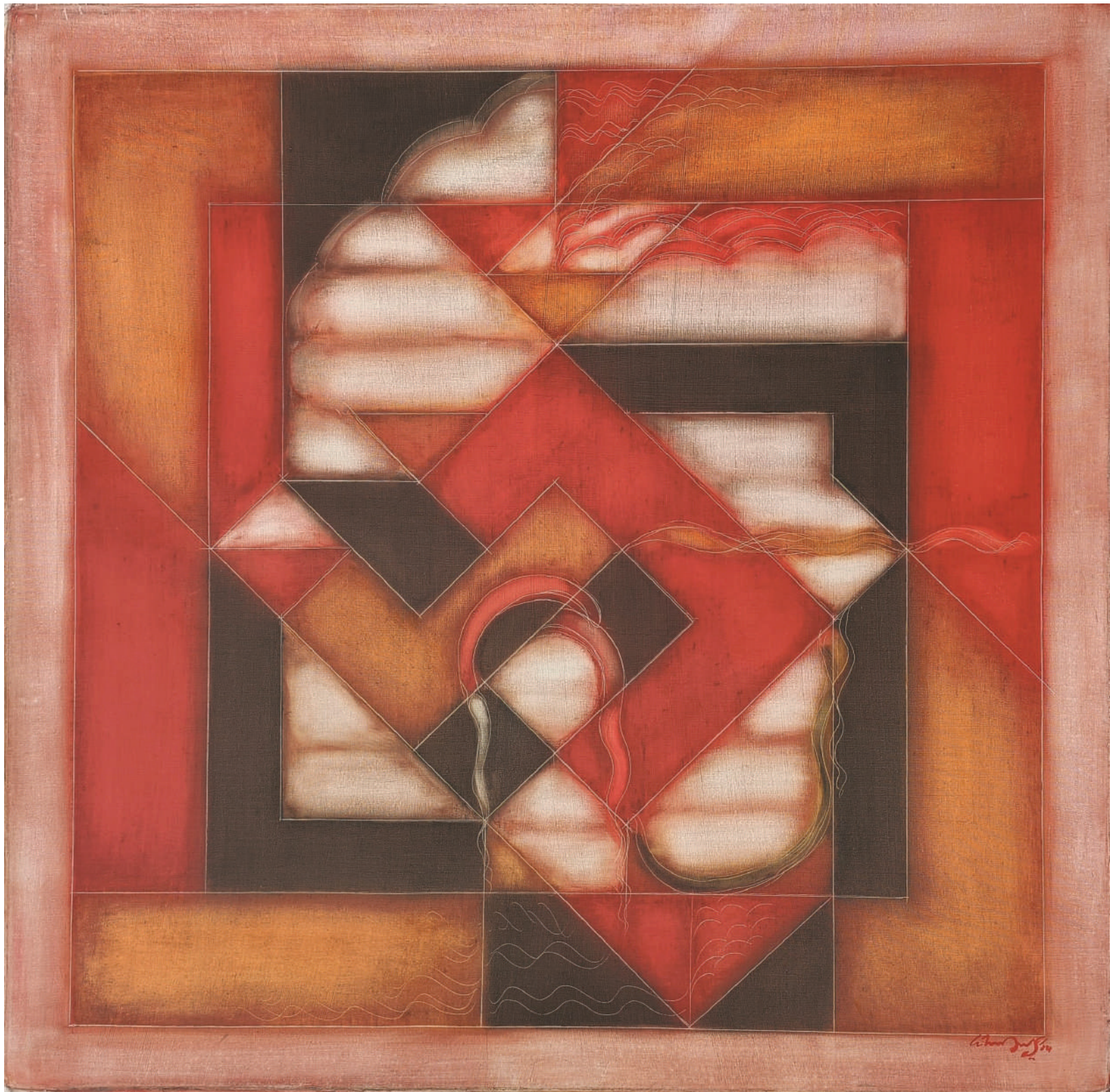
“

I compose abstract forms that evoke the images of my life with my family in Kerala, where cultural, spiritual and ritualism were very much present.


The diagrams of the Mandala/kalam or Kolam made on the earth, coloured white (rice flour), yellow (turmeric), black (grain of burnt rice grain), red (a mix of turmeric with lemon) and other elements for religious ceremonies along with the folk forms have had a strong influence on me. My work today is the result of these old and new experiences that I have accumulated before and after my visit to Europe.

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Oil on Canvas, 39.2 x 39.2 inches, 2014



Akkitham Narayanan was born in 1939 at Amettikkara, near Kumaranallur in the Palakkad district of the South Indian state of Kerala, to father Akkithathu Manayil Vasudevan Namboothiri and mother Thiruthi Manakkal Arya Antharjanam.



Oil on Canvas, 51" x 38", 2024

In 1956, he enrolled at the Government College of Fine Arts in Chennai and graduated with a diploma in 1961. After completing his studies, he was awarded a scholarship by the Government of India and pursued advanced studies until 1964.





Oil on Canvas, 39" x 39", 1975



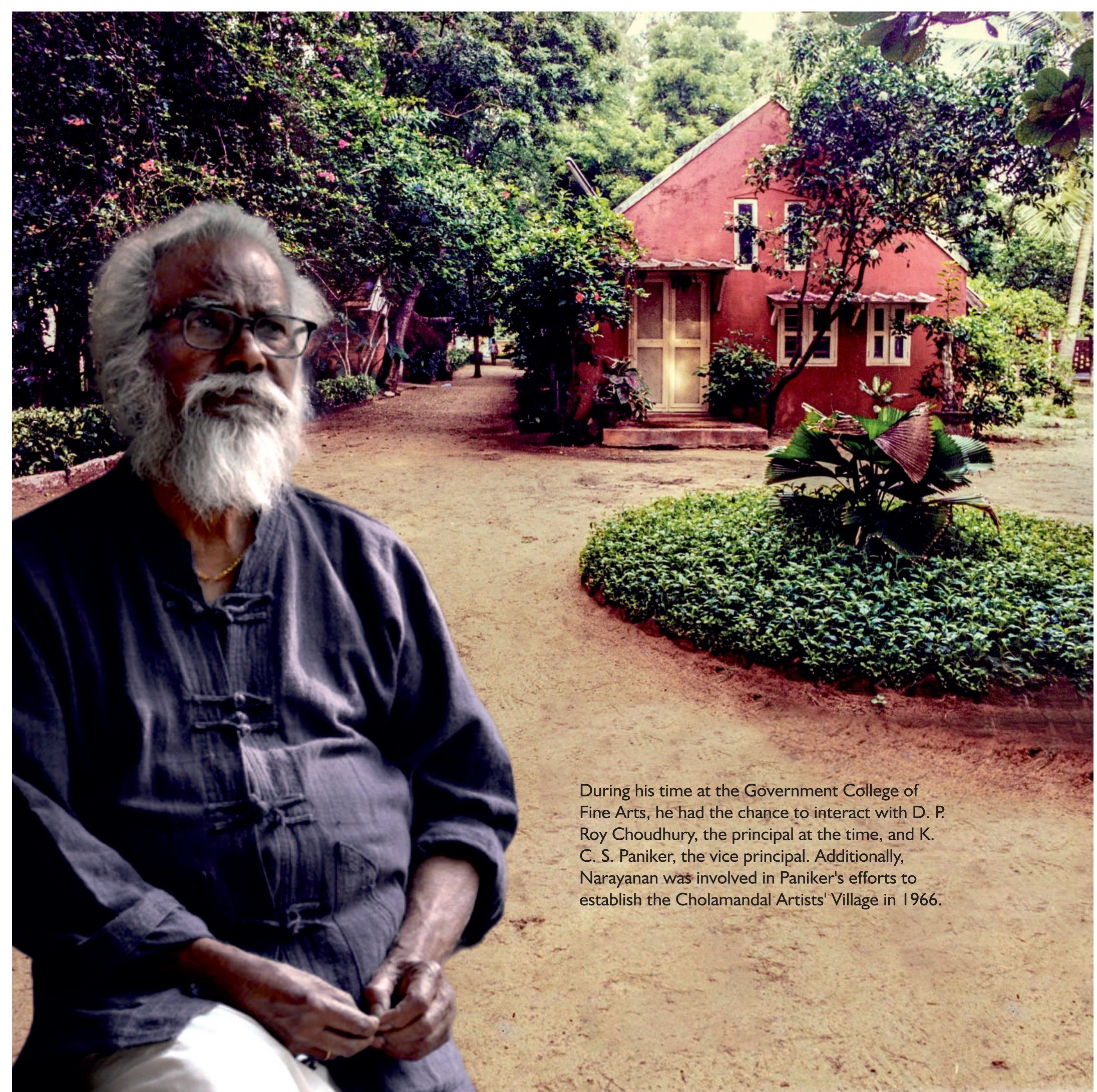


Oil on Canvas, 39" x 39", 2020





Oil on Canvas, 51" x 38", 1996



During his time at the Government College of Fine Arts, he had the chance to interact with D. P. Roy Choudhury, the principal at the time, and K. C. S. Paniker, the vice principal. Additionally, Narayanan was involved in Paniker's efforts to establish the Cholamandal Artists' Village in 1966.



Oil on Canvas, 36" x 31.5", 2020



Akkitham worked at Ethiraj College for Women for a short time as a teacher of the Batik style of painting.





Oil on Canvas, 38" x 51", 2014



He is a recipient of the Tamil Nadu State Lalit Kala Akademi Award thrice, the Raja Ravi Varma Award of the Kerala Lalithakala Akademi and the Cagnes-sur-Mer International Festival of Painting Award, and many other honours. He has conducted exhibitions in France, Japan, Poland and Germany, and his paintings have been displayed in many elite galleries across the globe.

Oil on Canvas
51 x 41 inches
1999



He received another scholarship, this time from the Government of France, which assisted him in moving to Paris to study at École des Beaux-Arts. He studied at the institution until 1970, specialising in monumental art under Jean Bertholle and engraving under Lucien Couteau.



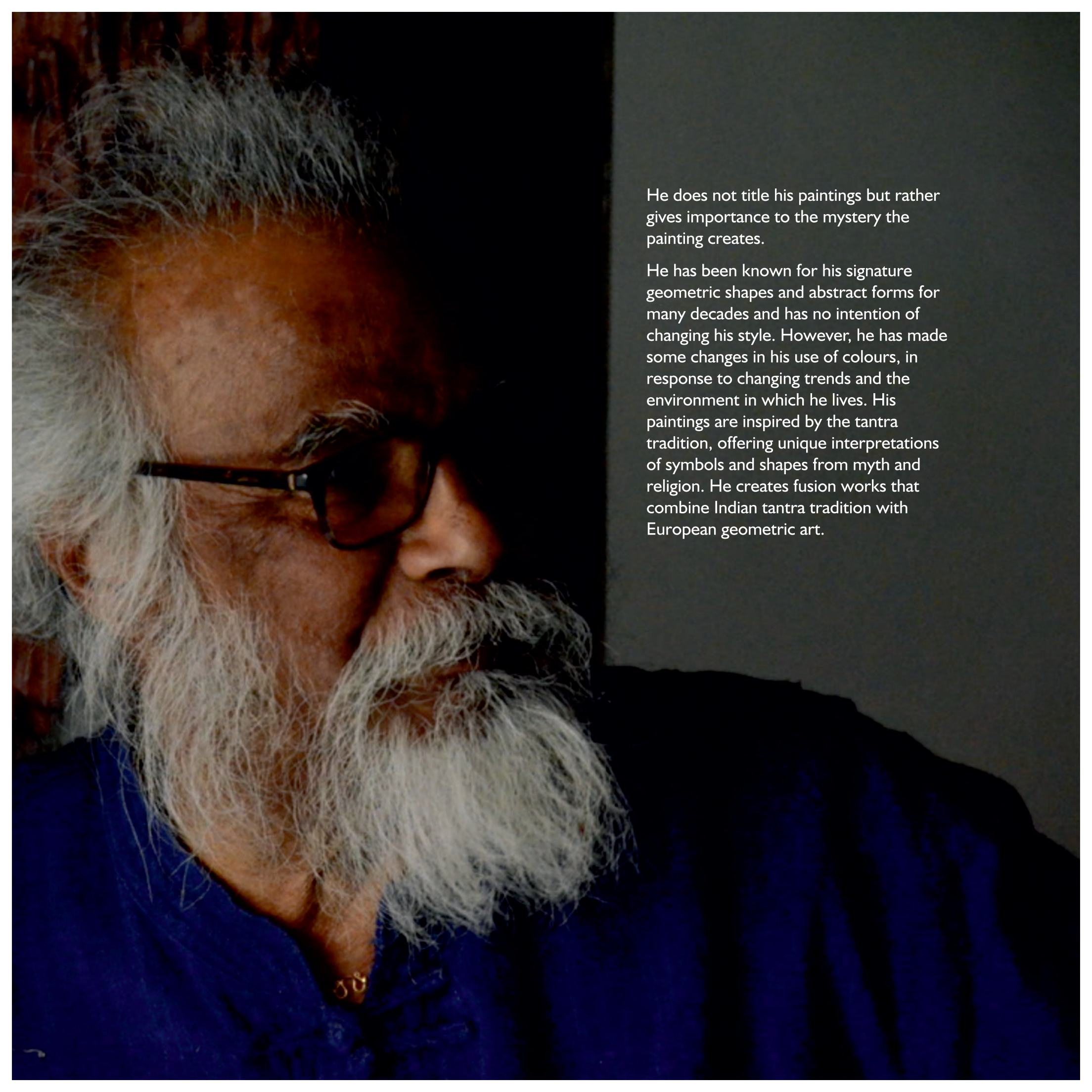


Oil on Canvas, 39" x 31.5", 1968



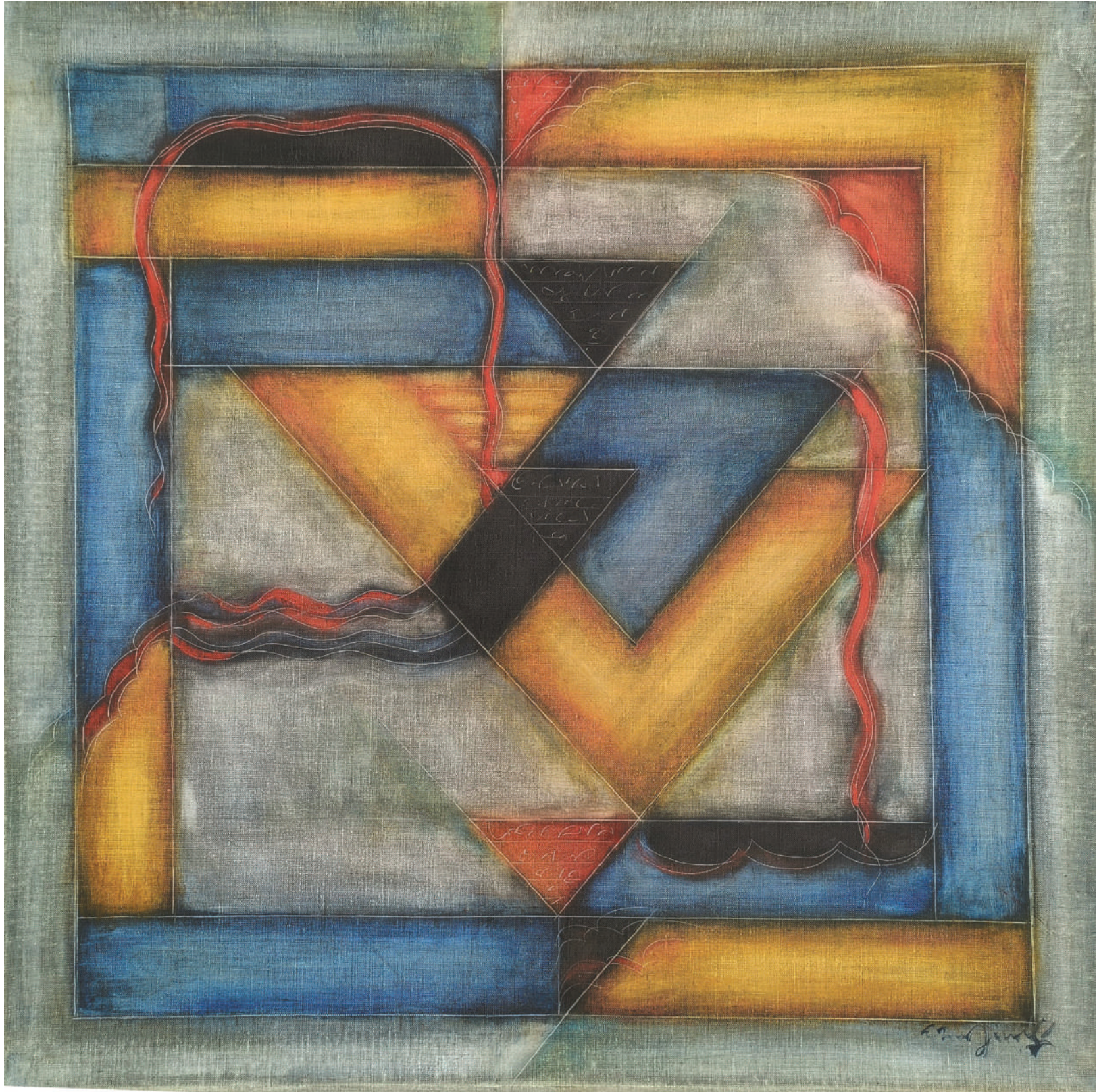


Oil on Canvas, 31.5" x 25", 1969



He does not title his paintings but rather gives importance to the mystery the painting creates.

He has been known for his signature geometric shapes and abstract forms for many decades and has no intention of changing his style. However, he has made some changes in his use of colours, in response to changing trends and the environment in which he lives. His paintings are inspired by the tantra tradition, offering unique interpretations of symbols and shapes from myth and religion. He creates fusion works that combine Indian tantra tradition with European geometric art.



Oil on Canvas, 23.5" x 23.5", 2022

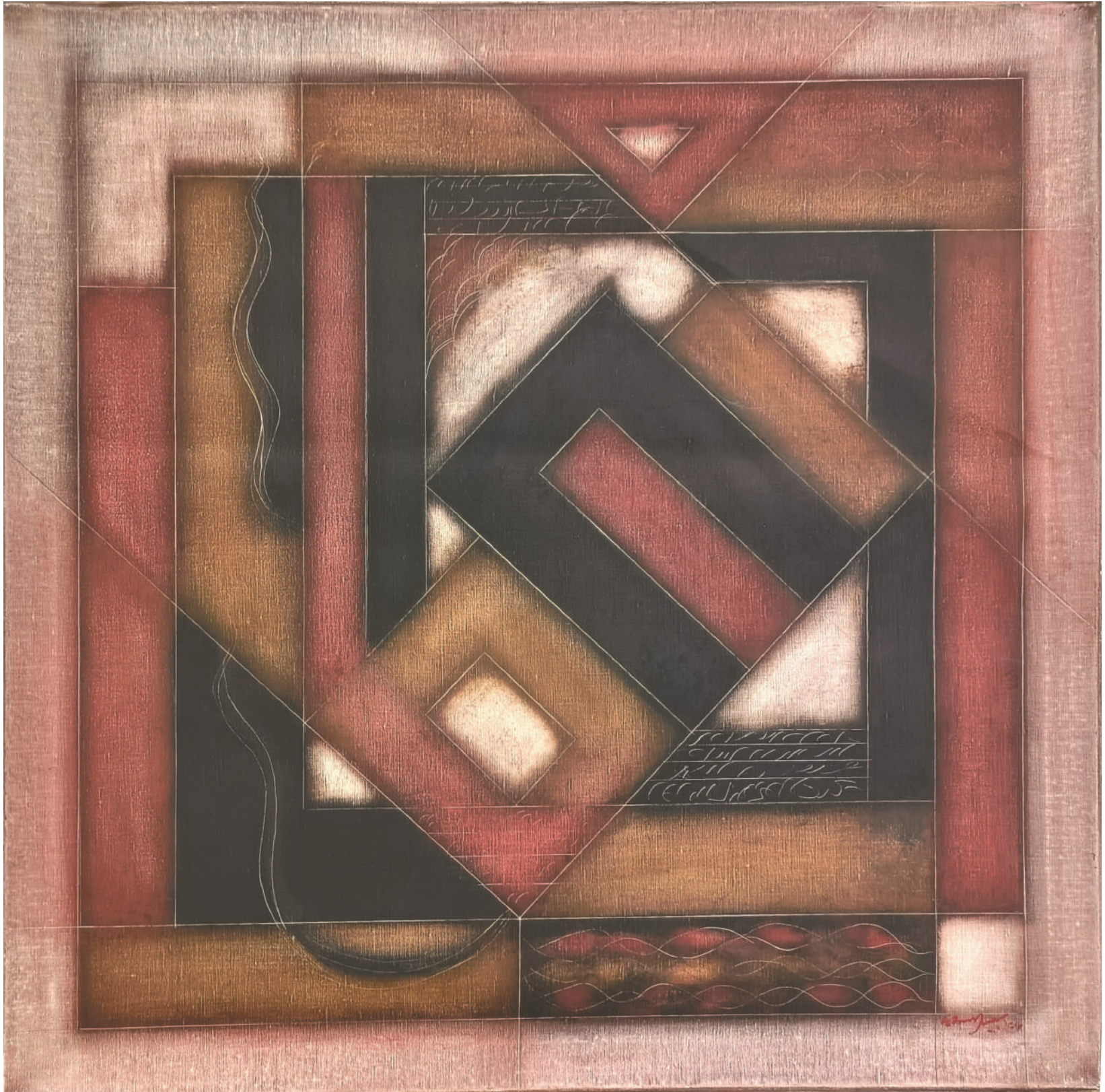


Oil on Canvas, 39" x 35.5", 2011

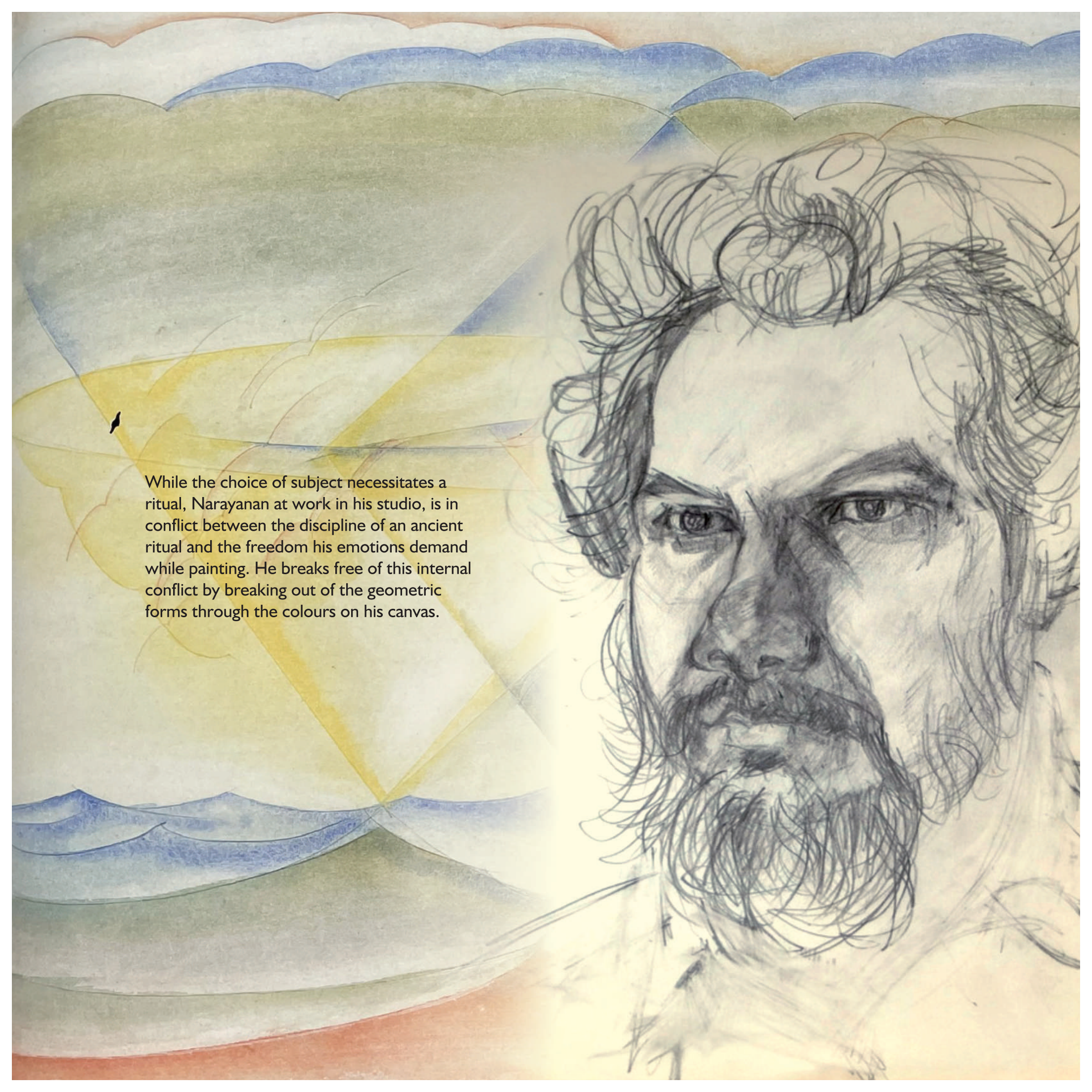




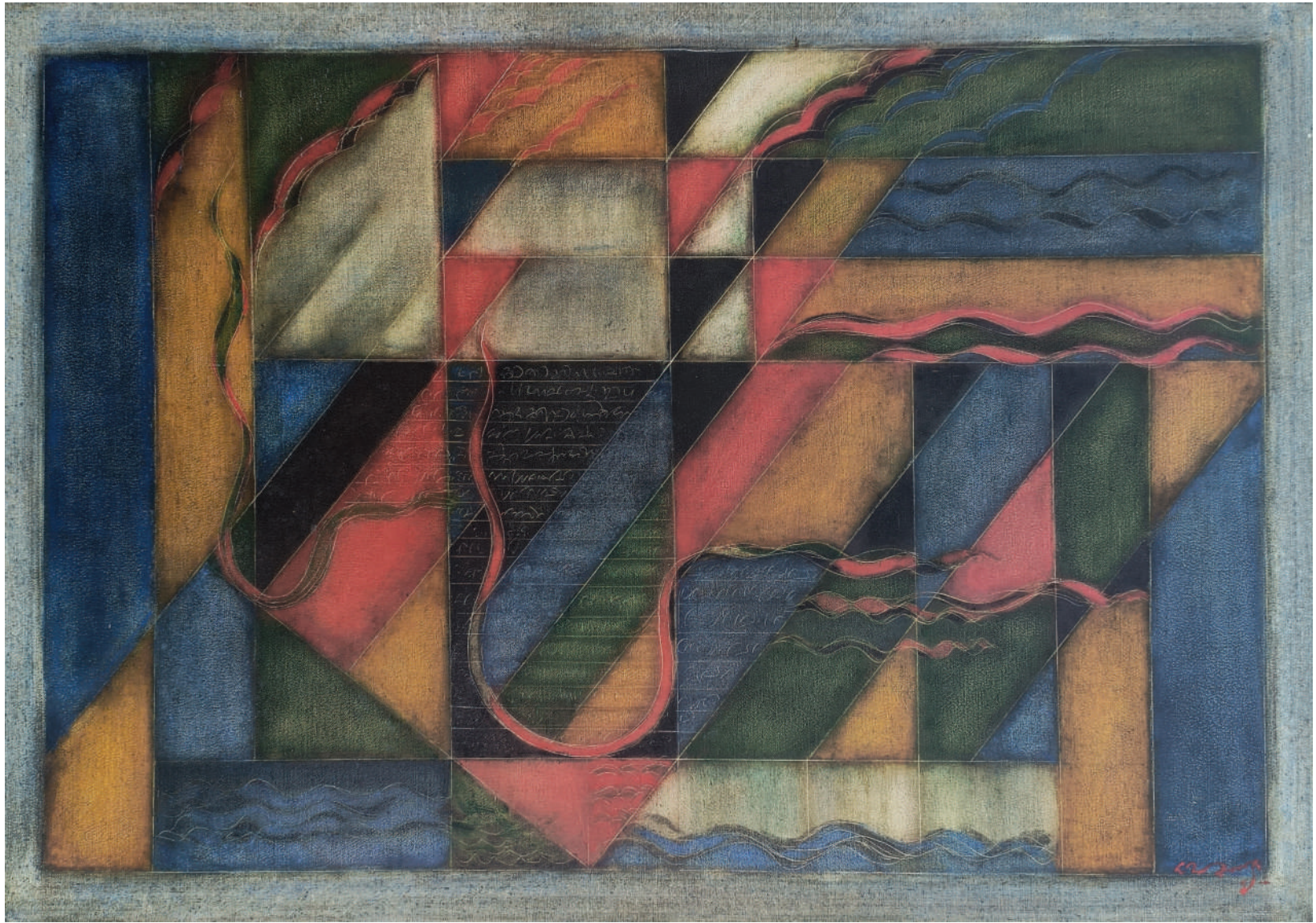
Oil on Canvas, 38" x 51", 2006



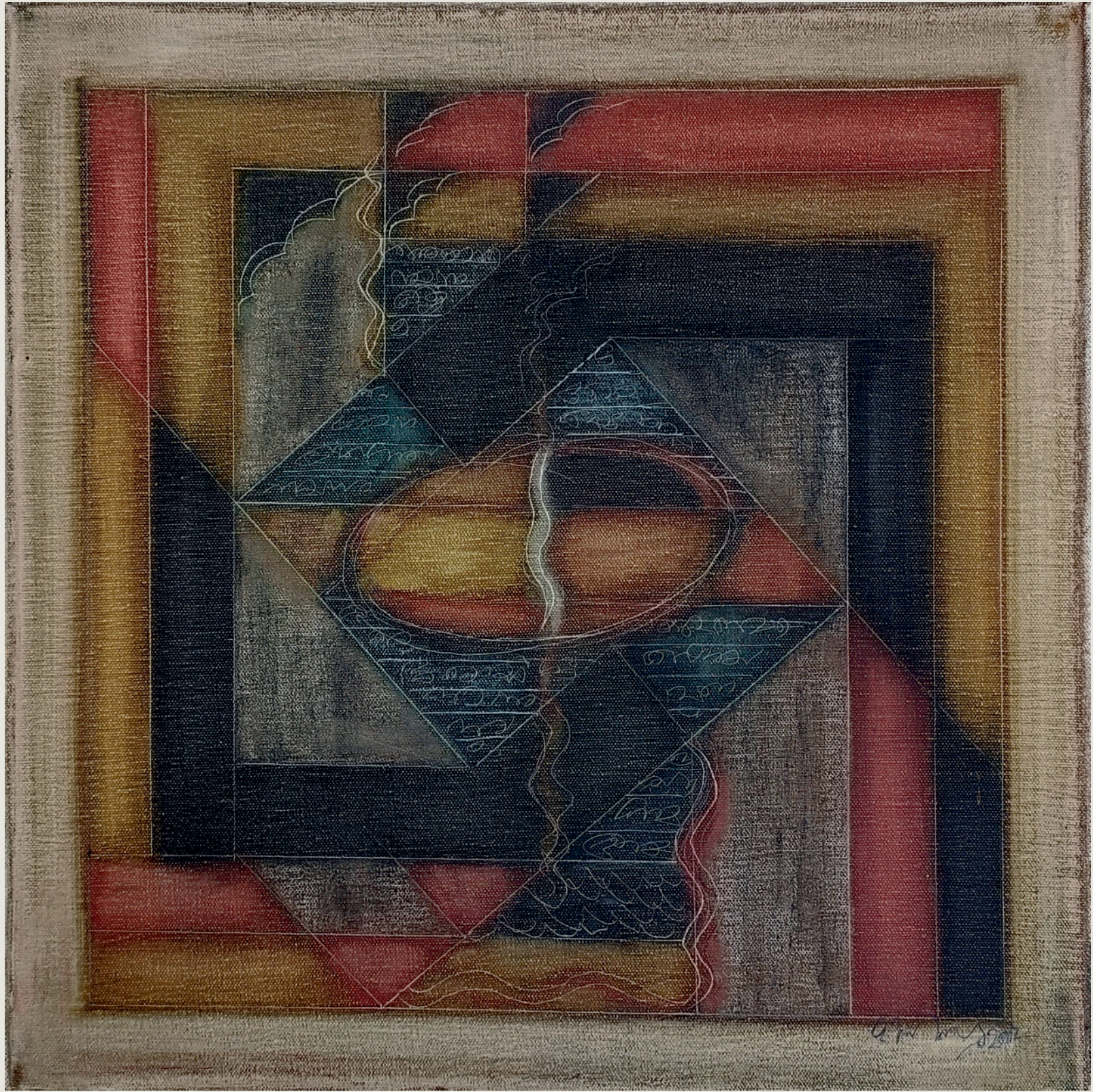
Oil on Canvas, 39" x 39", 2004



While the choice of subject necessitates a ritual, Narayanan at work in his studio, is in conflict between the discipline of an ancient ritual and the freedom his emotions demand while painting. He breaks free of this internal conflict by breaking out of the geometric forms through the colours on his canvas.



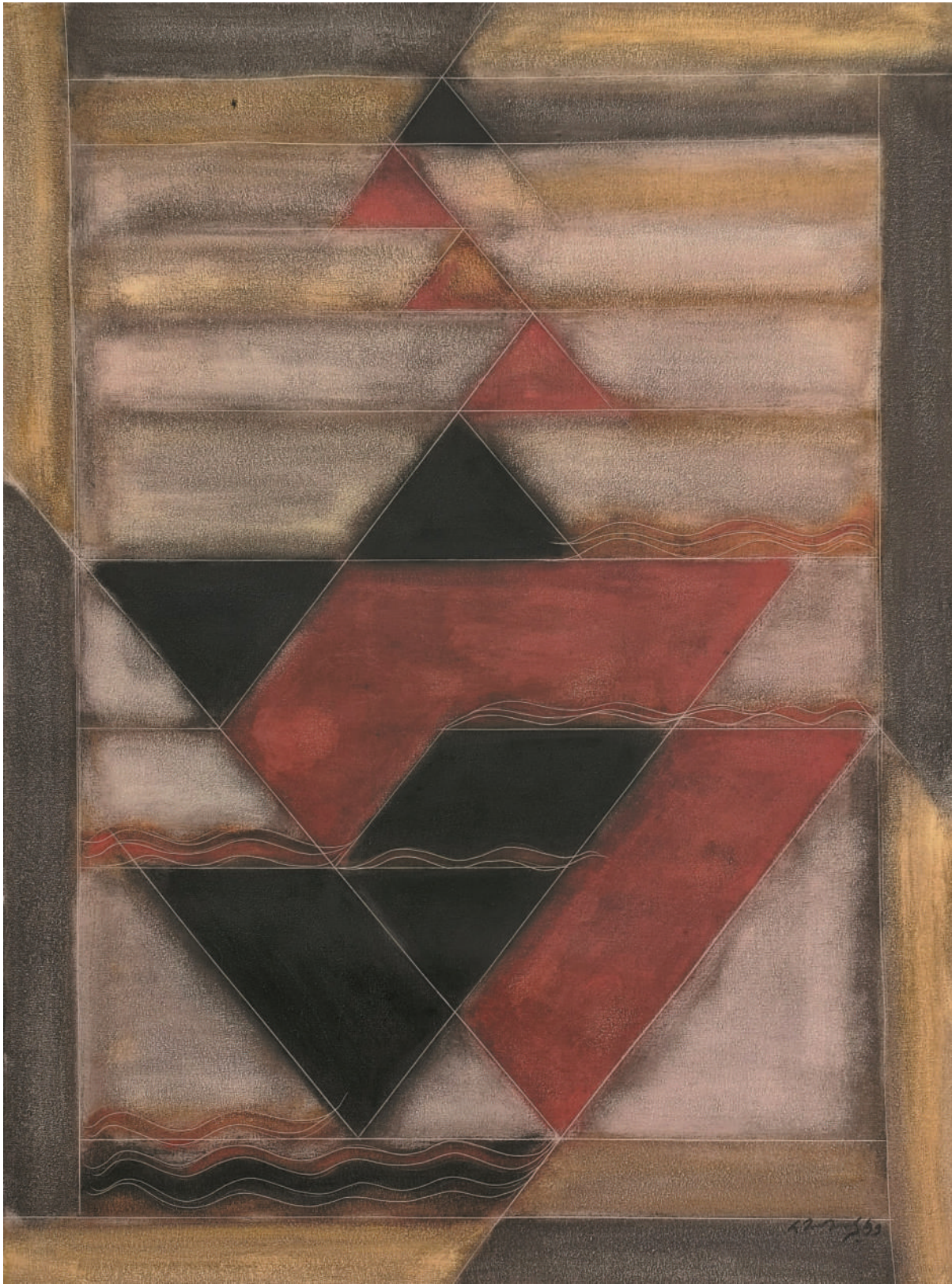
Oil on Canvas, 45.5" x 32"



Oil on Canvas, 17.2" x 17.2", 2012



Oil on Canvas, 47.2 " x 47.2 " , 2018

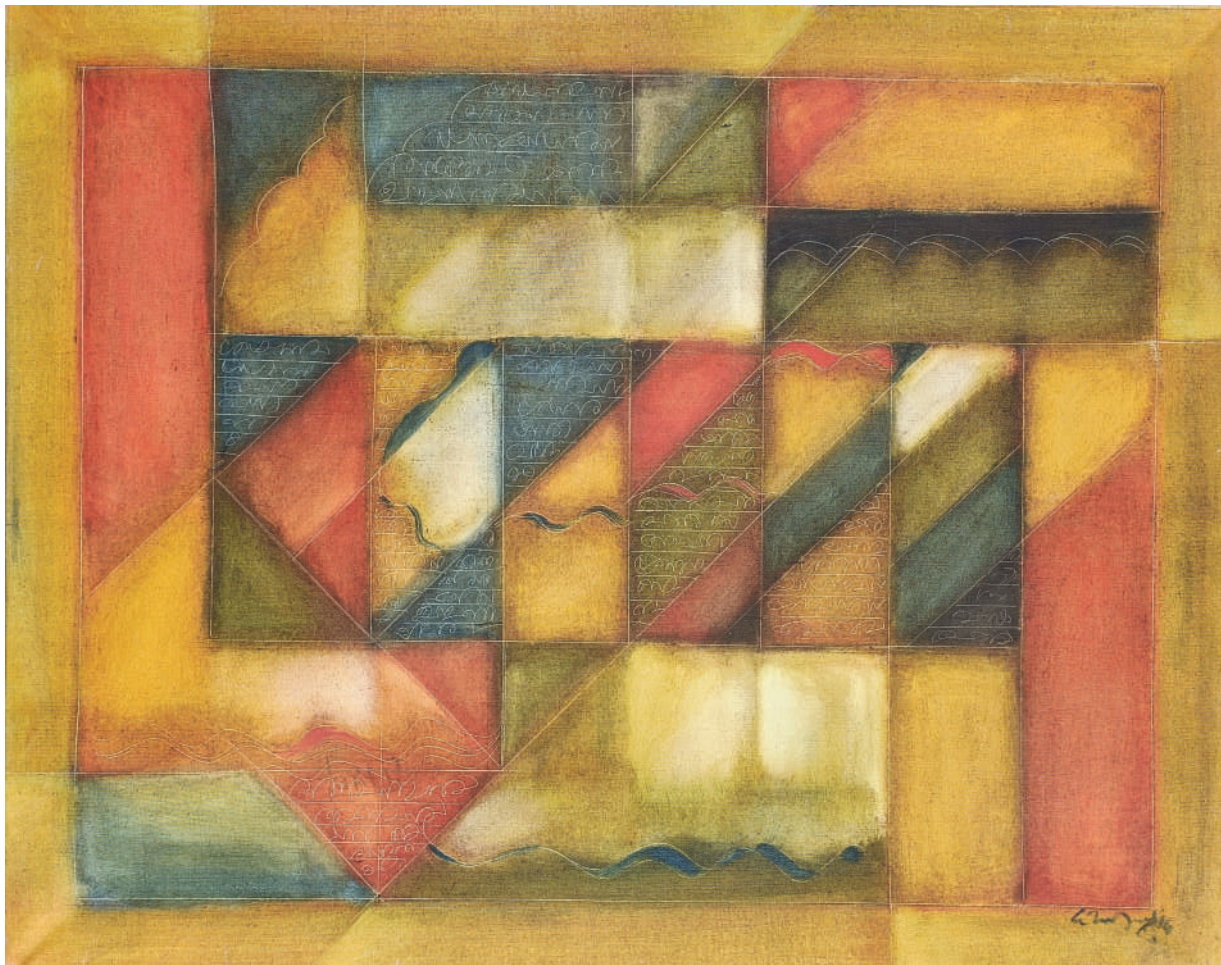


Oil on Canvas
51" x 38"
1999



Oil on Canvas
28.5" x 21"





Oil on Canvas, 25.5" x 32", 2016

Akkitham Narayanan has been living and practising his art in Paris for the past forty years. His most recent solo exhibitions include one in Seoul in 2016 and another in Paris in October 2017.





Oil on Canvas, 48" x 35", 2019



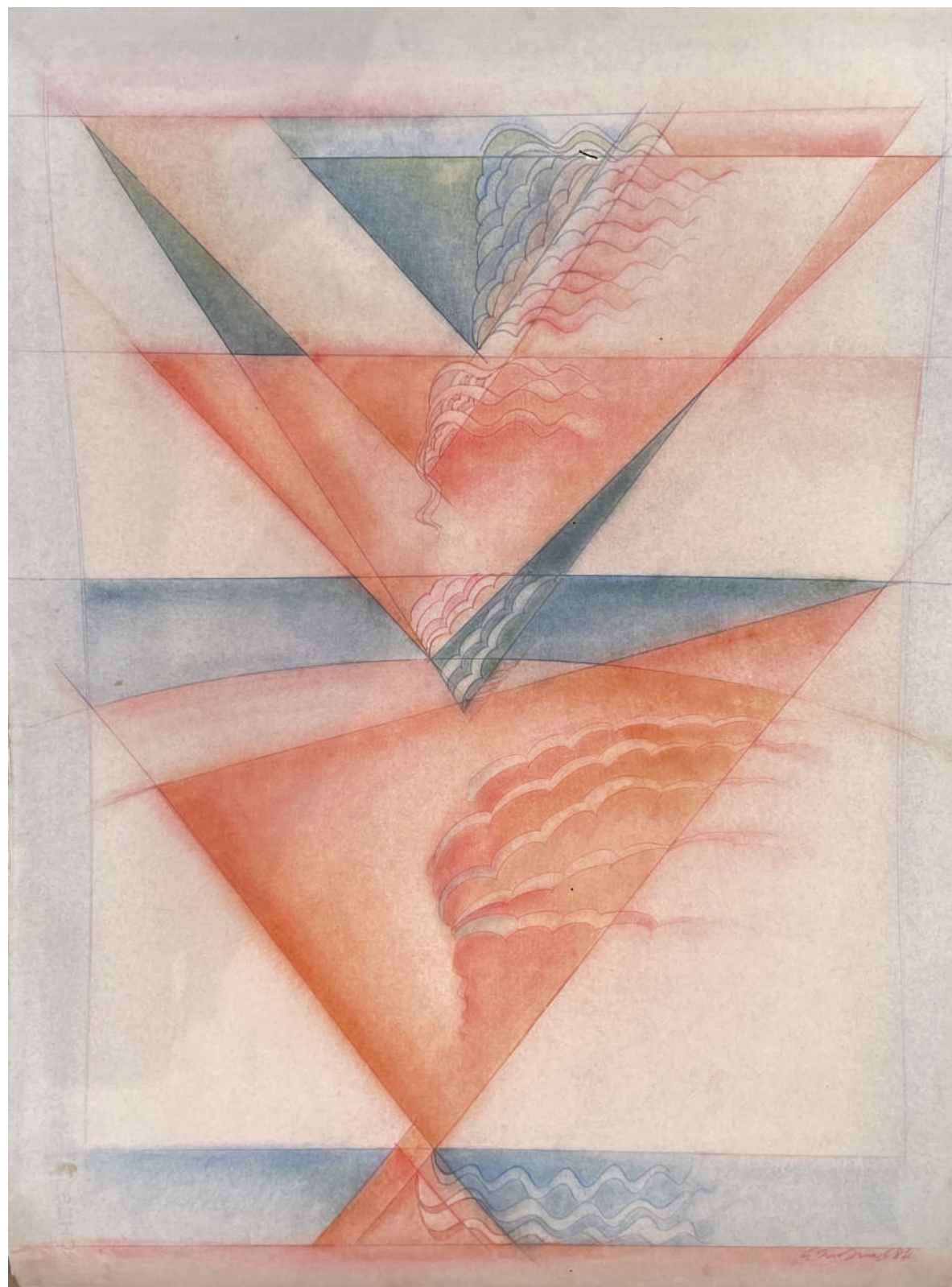
Oil on Canvas, 51" x 37.5", 1994



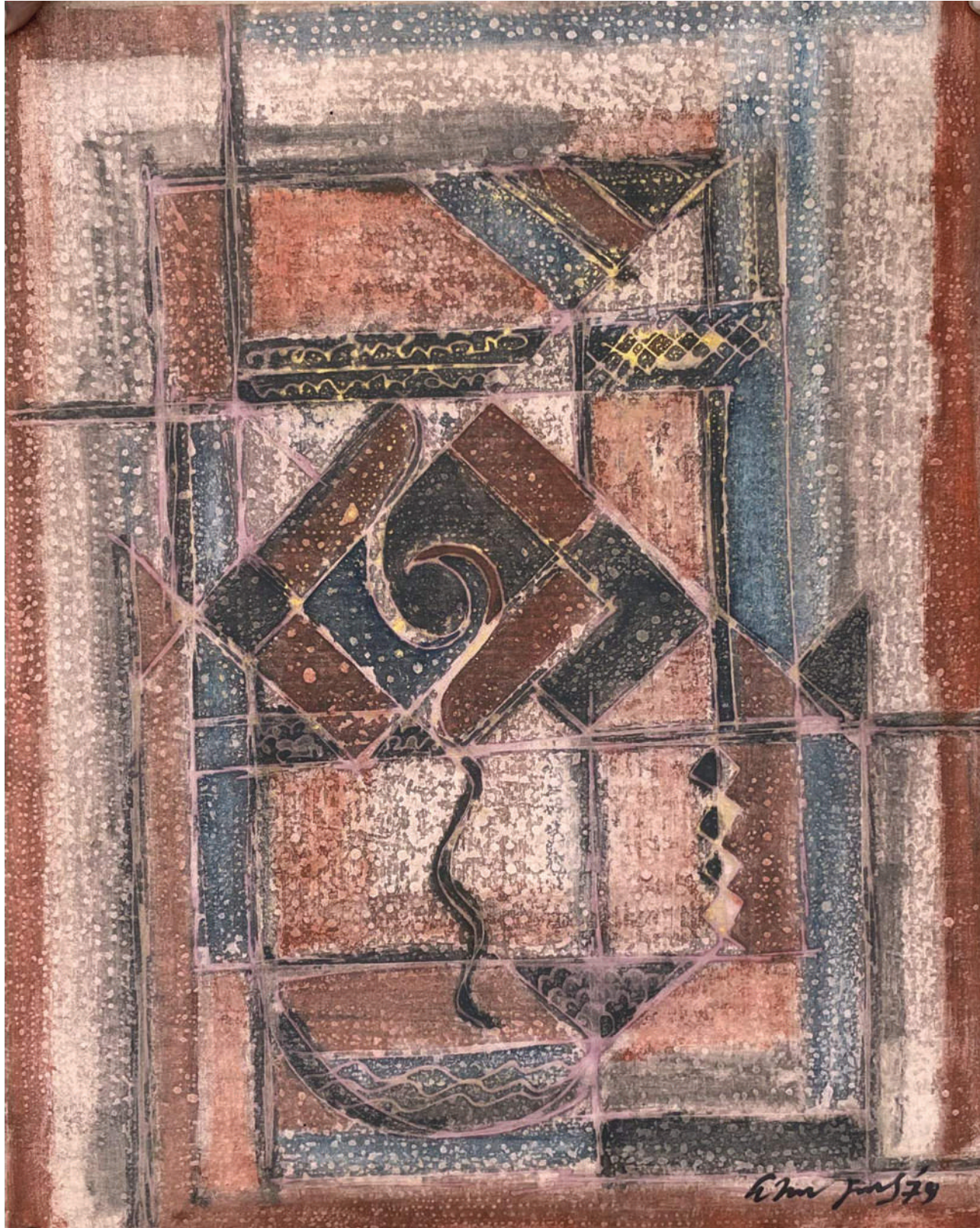
Oil on Canvas, 51" x 52", 1978



Water Colour on Hahnemühle German Paper, 21" x 29", 1984



Water Colour on Hahnemühle German Paper, 30" x 22", 1984



Oil on paper, 20" x 16", 1979



Water Colour on Hahnemühle German Paper, 21" x 31", 1984



Water Colour on Hahnemühle German Paper, 22" x 30", 1984

Solo Exhibitions

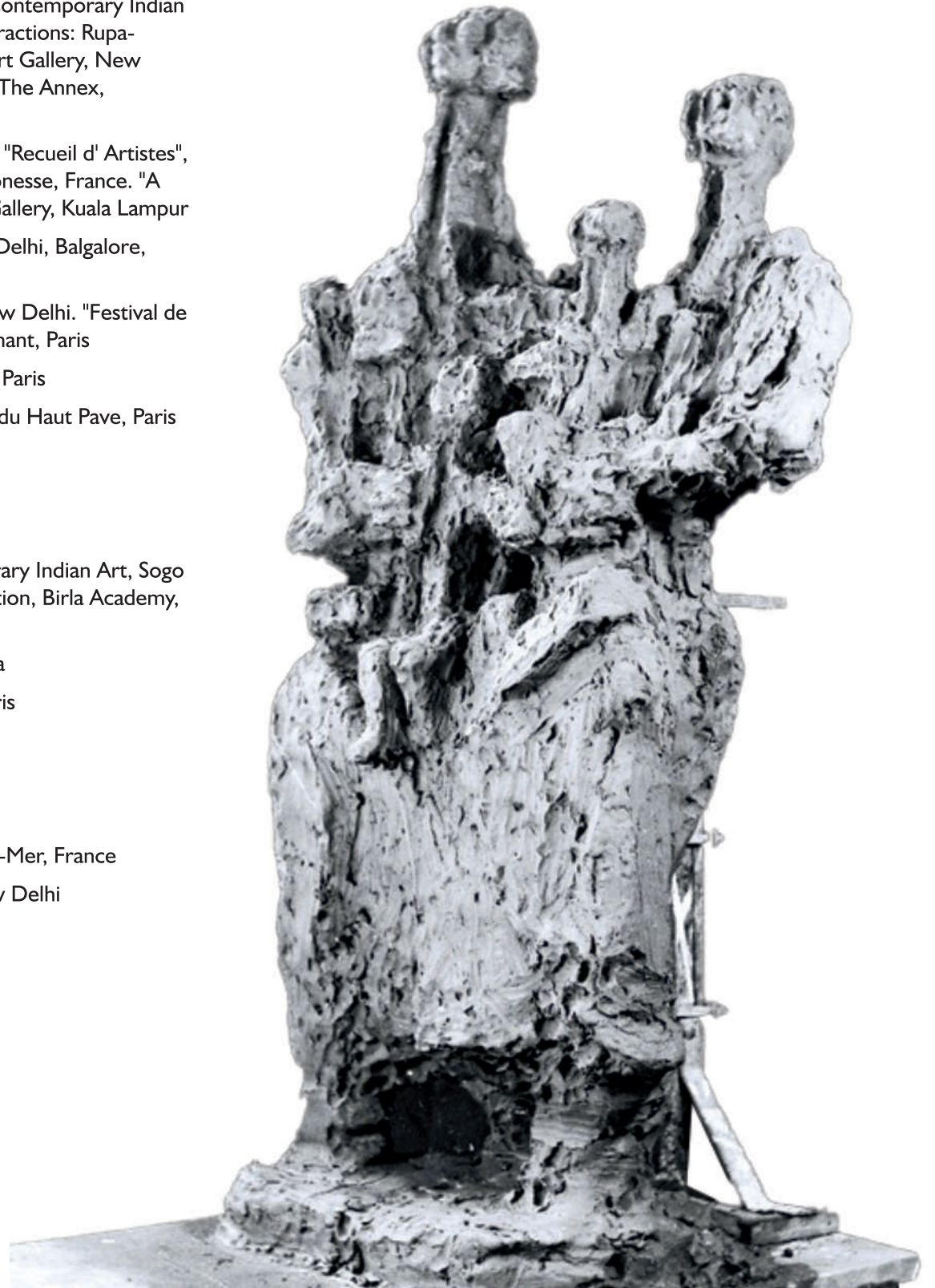
2022 - Cochin Triennale, Cochin
2015 - Gallery Art Works Fabien Paris Seoul Gallery, Korea
2012 - Nanappa Art Galley . Cochin ; Gallery HUS, Paris
2011 - Artalive Gallery. New Delhi
2010 - "Art and Religion in the Indian world", House of Researches, Paris Sorbonne
2009 - Indigo Blue Art Gallery, Singapore
2007 - Galerie Le Normand, Paris
2006 - Art Alive Gallery, New Delhi. KL Gallery, Kuala Lumpur
2005 - Galerie "Mille Lieux du Monde" Servoz, Chamonix, Paris. Pundole Art Gallery, Mumbai
2003 - Municipal Library, St. Pierre des Corps
2002 - Galerie M & R Kolbein, Garbsen, Germany
2001 - Espace Lino Ventura, Garges-les-Gonesse
2000 - 4th Festival of Art & Music, Cornservatoire Andre Navarra, Charenton-le-Pont
1998 - Pundole Art Gallery, Mumbai
1995 - Chateau de Talcy, France
1994 - Pundole Art Gallery, Mumbai
1991 - Galerie Seibu, Tokyo. Pundole Art Gallery, Mumbai.
1990 - La Collegiale, Orleans

1988 - Galerie La Marge, Blois. Pundole Art Gallery, Mumbai. Galerie Steintor Verlag, Hannover. Galerie Seibu, Tokyo.
1986 - Mukai Gallery, Tokyo
1984 - Galerie Seibu, Tokyo
1983 - Galerie Steintor Verlag, Hannover
1982 - Galerie La Marge, Blois
1981 - Galerie Seibu, Tokyo
1980 - Galerie Steintor Verlag, Hannover
1978 - Galerie Seibu, Tokyo. Gallery Miyawaki, Kyoto, Japan
1976 - Galerie du Haut Pave, Paris. Galerie Steintor Verlag, Hannover. Museum, Wilhelmshaven, Germany
1974 - Mukai Gallery, Tokyo. Galerie Steintor Verlag, Hannover
1973 - Galerie Steintor Verlag, Hannover
1972 - La Galerie, Paris
1970 - Galerie Transposition, Paris
1966 - Triveni Art Gallery, New Delhi
1965 - Max Muller Bhavan, Chennai



Group Shows

- 2010 - "Made in India", Galerie Lipao-Huang, Paris. "Besides Paris", Birla Academy of Arts & Culture, Kolkata
- 2009 - "Think Small", Art Alive Gallery, New Delhi
- 2007 - "Art in Itself", Akar Prakar Gallery, Kolkata. "Made in India: 07 Spring", Opera Gallery, London. "Masters of Contemporary Indian Art", Indigo Blue Art Gallery, Singapore. "Abstractions: Rupa-Aurupa", Museum Gallery, Mumbai & Visual Art Gallery, New Delhi. "Abstract Visions Parallel Perceptions", The Annex, Bangalore
- 2006 - "Indian Artists", Gallery White Elephant, Paris. "Recueil d' Artistes", Maison Des Arts Louis Aragon: Garges-les-Gonesse, France. "A Collection of Indian Contemporary Art", KL Gallery, Kuala Lumpur
- 2005 - "Artransport", Double Enders, Mumbai, New Delhi, Bangalore, Cochin
- 2003 - "Souvenir d'en France", Alliance Francaise, New Delhi. "Festival de l'Inde", L'Arc, Le Creusot. Galerie White Elephant, Paris
- 2001 - "L'Inde, Carrefour Des Arts", F&H Art Forum, Paris
- 1997 - "L'art a l'ecole", Paris. "Traits d'Union", Galerie du Haut Pavé, Paris
- 1997 - 01 - Salon de Mai, Paris
- 1996 - Harmony Show, Mumbai
- 1993 - Harmony Show, Mumbai
- 1992 - Roopankar Print Biennale, Bhopal. Contemporary Indian Art, Sogo Museum, Yokohama, Japan. Centenary Exhibition, Birla Academy, Kolkata
- 1990 - International Methodology Show, Busan, Korea
- 1985 - Retrospective of the Galerie du Haut Pavé, Paris
- 1983 - Grafik Biennale, Varna, Bulgaria
- 1975 - Triennale of India
- 1974 - Biennale of Menton
- 1970 - 72 - International Painting Festival, Cagnes-Sur-Mer, France
- 1961 - National Exhibition of Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi





ART MAGNUM



Art Magnum's vision and mission is to showcase South Asian art in its austere authenticity and magnificence on a global platform. Since its inception in 1986, it has been nurturing both the emerging and noted artists to further the cause of championing and patronizing South Asian art. Its founder Lt Shri Prakash Chand Singhvi was a visionary whose passion and enthusiasm was the driving force behind the gallery. Presently, Art Magnum's enterprising director, Saurabh Singhvi, is skilfully taking his legacy forward. The gallery has been proudly presenting different mediums of artistic expression ranging from the traditional to the modern, and the contemporary and the experimental. Housed at a contemporary space with ultramodern infrastructure located in the heart of South Delhi, the gallery attempts to give voice to the novel and noteworthy talents through a roster of shows that present the news makers of contemporary genre and also the old masters and marvels of Indian art from the pre and post-independence era.

Art Magnum has innovatively kept striving towards new paradigms reroute to its journey, and has achieved multiple milestones and mammoth goals. The firm has successfully organised elite art events at art capitals across the globe including at New Delhi, Dubai, Singapore, etc and has received critical and popular acclaim for the same. The collection of the gallery includes works of M F Husain, S H Raza, F N Souza, Somnath Hore, Suhas Roy, K G Subramanyan, Paresh Maity, T Vaikuntam amongst the others. Going forward, Art Magnum shall act as a catalyst for the talented young artists striving for creative excellence and shall keep inspiring the art aficionado by showcasing the contemporary and the classic path breakers of South Asian art.

Saurabh Singhvi

Director, Art Magnum