

Sculpted

FROM PAINT TO PATINA

THOTA VAIKUNTAM KRISHEN KHANNA JOGEN CHOWDHURY
MADHVI PAREKH MANU PAREKH



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Thota
Vaikuntam
Krishnen
Khanna
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Chowdhury
Madhvi
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TEXT BY UMA NAIR



In association with *Namtech Fine Art*

Thota Vaikuntam Krisn'en Khamna Jog'en Chowdhury Machvi Parekh Vann Parekh



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Foreword

‘Picasso seems to be actually more inventive in sculpture than in painting.’—American sculptor Richard Serra after visiting an exhibition of Picasso sculptures at MOMA in New York in 2016.

Five of India’s modern art masters—Thota Vaikuntam, Krishen Khanna, Jogen Chowdhury, Madhvi Parekh, and Manu Parekh—have participated in the sculptural explorations born of their own visual associations with viewers over many decades through the images that they have created in their own distinctive style. This very recognizable style and figuration has been the inspiration and foundation of this exhibition. This project is the first phase of bronzes that were created and exhibited in 2019. The delight and enhanced involvement of this group of artists in exploring varied forms of sculpture has continued since. They have managed to bridge the gap between painting and sculpture and translate two-dimensional paintings into bronze sculptures that celebrate both form and fervour.

Proponents of the human figure as seen in daily life and narratives that go back to Indian mythology. These artists are masters of the realms of their own fantasy. While all are painters, their relentless creativity has explored the potential of seeing their artworks in a new dimension. A two-dimensional figure on a canvas has many hidden aspects that are left to the imagination. These three-dimensional bronzes not only bring the paintings to life and extend to a more physical form but also act as an impetus to the artist to create the remainder of the image; a fresh imagination in continuum, exploring multiple views of perception. To create the bronzes the artists had to collaborate with skilled artisans to recreate the figures from every angle; not just the already painted front but also the ‘invisible’ sides and back of the figure. This provided the artists an exciting opportunity to look at their paintings afresh and constantly visit aspects they had not attended to previously.

This project was completed in collaboration with Bronze Age London, a leading sculpture casting foundry in the UK, resulting in the production of these exceptional bronzes. *Sculpted* turned into a symbiotic association between the artists, skilled craftsmen, and Bronze Age London that resulted in this quality of bronze sculptures and relief works.

Once the final model was created, and passed the rigorous vetting of the artist, the model was signed by the respective artist and sent to London to be cast in bronze. The lost wax process was used to create the highest quality bronze casting. The smaller bronze relief sculptures have been pressure cast to achieve the desired result at the South London Foundry.

The final task was ensuring that the patination of these bronzes was in line with the artists’ overall colour palette. Since patina is not like paint, it has its limitations with regard to the extent and tones of colours that can be used. The interaction of different combinations of chemicals at a high temperature on the finished bronze causes it to react and change colour to achieve the desired finish. This is a rare skill and the variation of colour that was required for these pieces meant that special technicians had to be hired by the foundry to complete this crucial and challenging step. Some of the artists specially painted the desired patina output options with varied colour patterns, which was used as reference to ensure that the final pieces were as much in line with the artist’s vision as it was technically possible. Each piece was then accompanied by a certificate signed jointly by the artist and the foundry, completing this momentous collaboration.

This book is an ode to the sculptural identities of India’s modern art masters. It manifests the potential for spatial exploration. Indeed, the universe was meant for the creation of what we once couldn’t imagine.

TANUJ BERRY & SAMAN MALIK
New Delhi

Thota Vaikuntam

Thota Vaikuntam's Personas

Carving out an artistic language firmly rooted in the collective and cultural histories of bronze-bodied Telangana men and women, India's most famous South Indian artist Thota Vaikuntam's patinated sculptures and bronze plates embody the artist's vision of preserving Indian cultural heritage and committing to its endurance through artistic insights and invention. Vaikuntam's men and women are visually portrayed through a complex interplay of moods and moments.

An ambassador of Indian heritage and Dravidian personas, Vaikuntam's Telangana women give art lovers all over the world so much to savour in terms of the cultural fabric of Indianness as well as a flashback to Indian antiquity. It is enough to look at his solo women and women and child images to know that he is an astute observer of the naive and the humble, the silent, and the sublime.

Grace and Gravitas

Take any of his mesmerizing, gorgeous women. Grace and gravitas both come together in the women who are created as matriarchs of all they survey. Their jewellery, their hairdo with tightly pulled back buns, and their dark coloured saris, all have about them a rustic rhythm.

Vaikuntam says it was his Professor Manida, the famed K. G. Subramanyan, who told him he must find his odyssey in the stories of everyday Indian lifestyles. The women's hands have a supple grace, his treatment of lacing the hands with lithe scarlet lines tells us that he is a lover of tradition. His felicity for creating reflections not just of conversation, but the perfection of hairstyle tied in a triangular knot as well as the scarlet and ochre toned festooned forehead all create a choreography that is both fascinating as well as born of a unique fiction.

Richness of Experience

‘My work is born of the richness of experience, of loving my people in my village as well as observing the beauty of rituals and lifestyle,’ he says . ‘When I started painting more than fifty years ago I was looking at works that dealt with the human figure but my lines and strokes didn’t have a richness. This richness came over time. My brushstrokes too were born of another reflection, and when I started creating the full form of the human figure I wanted to create a certain charm and elegant mood. This is why I played with strokes of colour even in the hands and feet.’ The sculptures reflect these strokes in supple smoothness.

The Ganeshas and the Musicians

Vaikuntam’s Ganeshas have their own sense of spiritual echoes in terms of the beauty of form. His Ganeshas are bejewelled wonders who sit in a certain satiety and seduction. The musicians with their instruments are at once a tableau of rituals that enact the rhythms of South Indian ragas. The simplicity of the subject, the ability to create them on the bronze plates as a group of comely, huddled humans all become a choreography of a pilgrimage of sorts as we sense the camaraderie and a unison in their predicament.

In the mother and child bronze patinated plates, we at once know of the deep bond between the woman and child. The mood is one of deep maternal affection, and the beauty of the works lie in the silent conversations that Vaikuntam presents us with. The images are adorned with bold, strong blocks of colour and blouses in shades which stimulate reflected light, as if the image is refracted on another surface. The pilgrims with festooned foreheads all have their own identity.

‘Pilgrimage as a subject is close to my heart,’ says Vaikuntam. ‘I was very close to my mother and family and have beautiful childhood memories. When I create my images my subjects are a culmination of my love for the performing arts, music, as well as ancient Indian sculptures. So I bring everything together, that is why you will see the women always decorated with bangles and earrings and necklaces and anklets, always in saris.’

Reflective Conversations

In the women series, Vaikuntam appropriates imagery from his past works, particularly from his own imaginative sources, returning to the subject matter he has addressed in the 1980s and 1990s. Vaikuntam’s approach in these reflective single sculptures can therefore be read as a socio-cultural comment on the techniques of reusing imagery found in popular culture, and perhaps an acknowledgement that his own work has entered into popular visual culture.

The idea of reflection in conversation in these works also has a precedent in earlier works by Vaikuntam. For Vaikuntam, the human figure is his elixir.

In-depth Portraits

Vaikuntam’s portraits of men and women epitomize him as a pivotal pioneer of making indigenous Dravidian characteristics and features with the large festooned bindi fashionable. Vaikuntam’s men and women are painterly, robust, and full of the rhythms of

their own sublimity. These women have a sense of strength, a power that emanates from the paint or charcoal that he applies to the surface, from his controlled lines, and from the fine strokes that he executes. His use of primary colours render the sculptures resplendent despite the size of the bronze plates.

As he explained, ‘I like using rich primary colours, which give a sense of character and depth to my paintings. Like reds and saffron and even orange, because these are essentially Indian colours. I don’t like using colours that are a mix of two, because they are not natural, they don’t exist in surroundings around us, in our everyday life.’

Nataraja, Lord of the Dance

Vaikuntam’s Nataraja is the pièce de résistance of this collection. Created in different patinas, here is a robust, resonant Lord of the Dance who is encircled by the endless cycle of flames that emanate from his being. The Nataraja expresses the graphic beauty of the mandala of birth, death, and rebirth. The flames seen as ribboned patinated entrails pertain to the timeless wheel of the world.

Vaikuntam plays with the natural as well as cultural idioms of the convergence of fire in its closeness and its clarity. He creates the Lord of the Dance as one who invites fidelity and faith. Shiva’s roles as creator, preserver, and destroyer of the universe convey the Indian conception of the never-ending cycle of time. Although it appeared in sculpture as early as the fifth century, its present world-famous form evolved under the Cholas. Vaikuntam’s Nataraja holds his right hand in the gesture of the abhaya mudra (gesture that allays fear), bestowing protection from both evil and ignorance to those who follow the righteous path of dharma. His left palm faces downwards, bestowing spiritual grace and fulfilment through meditation and mastery. Once seen, Vaikuntam’s Nataraja nestles within our inner senses.

The rhythms of his very presence present the polarities of both perception and perspective. It is the colour and contour of the patinated ribboned flames that become the embellishment that traps the human gaze.

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10 x 8 x 7"
Patinated Bronze





14

11 x 10 x 6"
Patinated Bronze



11 x 10 x 6"
Patinated Bronze



19 x 19 x 13"
Patinated Bronze





15 x 5.5 x 4"
Patinated Bronze





10 x 7 x 5.5"
Patinated Bronze



9 x 7 x 4"
Patinated Bronze





17 x 8 x 5"
Patinated Bronze





30 x 25 x 22"
Patinated Bronze



10 x 8 x 6"
Patinated Bronze



9 x 7 x 5"
Patinated Bronze





9 x 7 x 5"
Patinated Bronze





7 x 6 x 5"
Patinated Bronze





7 x 6 x 3"
Patinated Bronze





10 x 7 x 4"
Patinated Bronze



11 x 6 x 2"
Patinated Bronze





11 x 6 x 2"
Patinated Bronze



11 x 6 x 2"
Patinated Bronze



11.5 x 12.2 x 1"
Patinated Bronze

11 x 6 x 2"
Patinated Bronze





7 x 12 x 2"
Patinated Bronze



7 x 12 x 2.5"
Patinated Bronze



6 x 11 x 2"
Patinated Bronze



6 x 11 x 1"
Patinated Bronze



11 x 6 x 2"
Patinated Bronze



6 x 11 x 2"
Patinated Bronze



11 x 6 x 2"
Patinated Bronze



7 x 12 x 2"
Patinated Bronze

~
(Left) 11 x 6 x 2"
Patinated Bronze



11 x 6 x 2"
Patinated Bronze



11 x 6 x 2"
Patinated Bronze



6 x 6 x 2"
Patinated Bronze



6 x 6 x 2"
Patinated Bronze



6 x 6 x 2"
Patinated Bronze



6 x 6 x 2"
Patinated Bronze



6 x 6 x 2"
Patinated Bronze



6 x 6 x 2"
Patinated Bronze



11 x 7 x 2"
Patinated Bronze



11 x 7 x 1.5"
Patinated Bronze



6 x 11 x 2"
Patinated Bronze



11.5 x 7 x 2"
Patinated Bronze





Vaikuntam giving the finishing touches





Uma Nair is a senior art critic and curator. She has penned more than 100 catalogues in thirty-four years of writing on Indian modern and contemporary art. She writes for *Architectural Digest India*, the *Times of India*, and other respected publications.

ABOUT ICIA

Nestled in the heart of Mumbai's art district, Kala Ghoda, the Institute Of Contemporary Indian Art, also known as ICIA Gallery, takes forward the legacy of establishing Indian art in the mindspace of art patrons and enthusiasts. The gallery was set up by Mr Vickram Sethi in the year 2007 with a vision to redefine the orthodox infrastructure not only with regards to the curating and viewing process but also to acquire authentic and prime artworks.

ICIA is one of the largest grassroot galleries in India and has been actively enhancing 'The Exhibition Experience' for the viewer. Over a period of ten years ICIA has exhibited works of revered Modernists and established contemporary artists. The gallery has deftly carved a niche for itself by representing India's art culture with a balanced approach, showcasing the seminal attributes of the masters in tow with the experimental and disruptive vision of contemporary artists from within the country.



