

MEKHAM
ALEXANDER DEVASIA

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speaking clouds

Recent paintings by

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How much can our eyes see, and how much is our mind aware of? What, exactly, is reality?

Science has explained to us the structure of an atom; it consists of 0.1% material substance and 99.9% of the immaterial. Yet, in this 99.9% of an atom's metaphorical and literal emptiness, scientists are able to measure vibrations.

So, we may ask, what does this scientific discovery of the atom's immateriality mean to our practical modern lives? If everything on Earth consists of atoms, then everything that we see and consider to be reality must have the same proportion.

Although humankind has known about the structure of an atom for decades, we still believe only what our eyes see, and think that is all. Why do we forget what science has taught us? We can only see the tiny 0.1% of what actually exists. This illusion creates a certain kind of misunderstanding for us humans, especially in today's times when materialists rule the world with their unwavering assertions about a complete reality, the reality of 100%.

The series of paintings called the "Mekham – speaking clouds" is – as the artist Alexander Devasia understands his own works – an experiment. Each painting is a part of his working process, like a clip of a film. How does one express with colours on canvas that which cannot be seen – an idea or an imagination, which is hardly felt and not even a perception? Unknown threads are connecting one another in a complicated world, and thereby celebrating a transparent encounter in an unseen dimension, which is the space for spirits.

Text by Sylvie Bantle, Germany 2007

Edited by Gale Berninghausen, Mumbai 2008

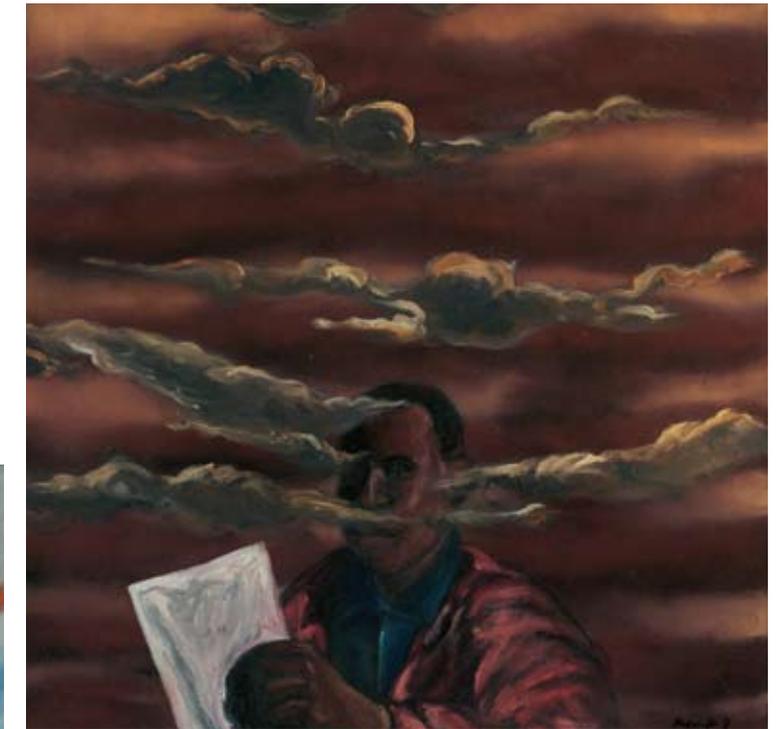
POLITICAL REFUGEE
COMMERCIAL REFUGEE

Living in Germany, the Indian artist is daily faced with European problems. As the media create stories, neither newspapers nor magazines can transport reality between far-flung continents. From all over the world, political refugees find asylum in Europe. They receive proper papers and support in order to start a new life. For commercial refugees, it turns out to be much more difficult than what many expected before arriving. There are many reports of sunken boats and drowned Africans who tried to escape the poor conditions in their countries with all that they had – namely, their lives! The other refugees who survived the journey are kept in isolated camps, where they all are issued the same clothing: orange-coloured sweatshirts, which identifies the commercial refugee in this painting.

Meanwhile, some women in Africa have started campaigns against the men to prevent them from leaving their society. There is no woman who doesn't miss her husband, brother, father or son. With all their energy, these women try to find new ways to make their male family members stay at home and find a livelihood in their homeland. But the young men are consistent in their desire to leave. As many times as they fail and are sent back to Africa, just as many times they try again. Their dreams will never end until they have reached "the other bank of the river".



Commercial refugee
Oil on canvas (31 x 31 inch) 80.5 x 80 cm 2006



Political Refugee
Oil on canvas (31 x 31 inch) 80.5 x 80.5 cm 2006

THE PORTRAIT OF THE POET ON HIS LAST DAY

Once upon a time, Sukumaran the poet was a young student who lived in the house of his master. He believed himself to be a good student, but his master only criticised his works and never responded positively as he wished. With time Sukumaran became more and more upset and finally decided to kill his master. When he was approaching the master's room, he overheard his master and the master's wife talking. The wife said: "Why do you always criticise Sukumaran?" The master answered: "Sukumaran is my best student; I want to provoke him into getting better and better."

When Sukumaran heard this, he felt very ashamed. He covered himself up to the neck with piles of rice husk, set it on fire and while burning, he recited his last poem ...

The strange yet simultaneously touching earnestness of Sukumaran might have impressed the artist to start with this painting "The portrait of the poet on his last day" as the first in his new series: "Mekham – Speaking Clouds." This mythological figure of a poet is honest, with a strong dedication to art and all its consequences. For the poet, Sukumaran, there is no idea of escape and the dramaturgy of his own life becomes art! In modern times, mythological stories are often considered to be only myths. Today people often have many ideas about escaping whenever things get too difficult, too complicated, too painful, or too shameful. If full-hearted dedication means "to sacrifice yourself," then does "yourself" mean the ego? The artist is so deeply attracted to these thoughts that he began a new series with this idea.



The portrait of a poet on his last day
Oil on canvas (53 x 47 inch) 134 x 120 cm
2006

A TRIBUTE TO MY MOTHER

While moving between the East and the West for 30 years as a Western traveler - which became more intense with my friendship and marriage to Alexander Devasia, an Indian artist – I experienced the Mother figure of two different cultures. Germany is termed a fatherland and India a motherland. The devotion to Indian motherhood stirs me. Alexander and I have spent many hours in discussions and reflections on the concept of Mother; not only have we compared this symbolic figure of different cultures in the West and East, but we have also contemplated the Mother of other ages.

In his painting »Mother«, the artist brings two periods of his life together; namely the past and present. From the daily experiences of his childhood, sun-dried ricecorn meant food and life to him. As a little boy, he dreamt of the flow of a small canal leading up to the sky. The artist's mother with her cat, Lakshmi, is shown in the present time, old but still active. Throughout her life, she struggled and worried. Her memories range from the most painful to the happiest of days. She has given birth to eight children. Today, she has four great-grandchildren and still exists as the centre of the artist's large family. The skinny Indian cow in the clouds bridges the past and the present, which are two different and separate worlds. For the artist, imagination is very fragile and continues changing shape.



Tribute to my mother
Oil on canvas (55 x 78 inch) 140 x 200 cm 2006

FATHER

Like »Mother«, the painting titled »Father« also has reddish colours – the colours of dusk. There are three generations – the father, his nephews and an invisible figure representing the artist and his imagination. The Father, unlike his wife, is not standing on the ground; he is sitting on a chair, which is suspended in the air. He seems to be resting, silently gazing into the distance. Unseen by the Father, a small boy standing beside him disturbs a young man who is sleeping. The floor is covered with paper.

Alexander's zodiac sign is Pisces. Many years ago, the moment he heard the song from the movie "Arizona Dream", he recognized his favourite line: "fish don't think, fish know everything!" Like a fish, set in his ways and thoughts, the unmovable father does not seek change in his life. Even a strong gust of wind could not move him. He is constantly looking straight ahead. He is not interested in the written word, news or letters, believing that he knows everything.

The artist sees the Father living in a cocoon of solitude. While growing older, the Father has detached from his sense of physical space and does not long for it; instead he is seeking spiritual fulfillment. Everyday he walks barefoot to prayers. Could it be that this ever-changing life has exhausted him from following (his own path)? For him, modern life seems non-sensical. Now, during this time of globalisation, there is no space for him. Once he was a freedom fighter, imprisoned and tortured, but now he is a 90-year old stranger in a world where his time had come and gone too long ago.



Tribute to my father oil on canvas
Oil on canvas (47 x 67 inch) 120 x 170 cm 2006

ALCHEMY

A hastily constructed tower of shabby old books stands unstably... will it fall? The books piled high seem almost to reach the sky.

While my Indian husband, the artist, worked on his paintings »Ancestors eyes« and »Mekham – Speaking Clouds«, I got deeply involved in the past of my German culture, and a particularly dark chapter in its history. As a writer, I was searching for forgotten colleagues of the past. They were forgotten because their works were once forbidden, banned or burnt. To get to know these great thinkers hiding behind their unknown names was like lifting a curtain. Questions previously not thought of appeared and opened completely new perspectives to history. All these influenced and strengthened my own thinking and seeing, which I discussed with Alexander repeatedly. An exciting process inspired each of our visions – of painting and literary projects. For a moment, our work seemed as if one!

Forbidden, banned and burnt books are not only a part of German history. Such methods to destroy knowledge, wisdom, passion, love, and freedom were carried out by certain people in cultures. The reason was to attain power over others by suppressing diversity. No doubt there must be energy in the books, fed by elements of eternal quality, lasting longer than a human life. Even though some books were once forbidden, banned, or burnt, and their secret readers punished, some books still remain. There are thousands of pages filled with words, expressions of ideas, stories, feelings, visions. When these are found and read, new life is given to these words from times passed, thereby opening a wider view of existence.



Alchemy
Oil on canvas (60 x 48 inch) 152 x 121 cm 2007

BOY SLEEPING ON DRIED RICE CORN

Is the boy sleeping or is he dreaming? Both dimensions of the unconscious exist in this painting and have come together. It seems that the whole sky embraces the boy. Something of this sleeping boy, which cannot be seen with physical eyes, communicates with the sky. It is transparent and shapeless, and can move around without the body. Is it also able to be everywhere?

The sky is a kind of visible eternity. Long before humans existed, the sky was there, and it will remain even after humans cease to exist.



Boy sleeping on dried rice corn
Oil on canvas (31.5 x 35 inch) 80 x 90 cm 2007

ELEPHANT – DOES AN ELEPHANT IN THE DREAM MAKES ONE HAPPY?

“This elephant is from a dream,” says the artist. Then he adds, historically, that the elephant is a main motif and an important figure in Indian art.

In Kerala, it is considered auspicious to dream of an elephant. One popular saying refers to three things that we never tire of watching – one of them is an elephant!

The elephant is special in the animal kingdom. Elephants are said to never forget and their lifetime memories remain intact. Wisely the eldest of a herd's females lead the others to food and water. Elephants also cultivate strong bonds with each other and their community provides them security.

Once, during a troubled time of severe illness, I dreamt of an elephant sleeping beside our bed – not on my side, but on my Indian husband's side! It was a very consoling and happy moment.



Elephant
Oil on canvas (55 x 78 inch) 139 x 199 cm 2007

BOY SITTING ON DRIED RICE CORN

An old image has accompanied the artist throughout many paintings from different creative periods. A boy ponders, sitting in front of a small pond.

When I first saw Alexander's paintings about 10 years ago, I was immediately touched by one of these images. It was of a boy sitting and pondering in front of a small pond with islands in it. Close by his head passed a flying crow.

This old image recurs time and again in the artist's works – memories of a child coming into the focus of his own reflections. The child seems to be alone, isolated from other humans, but not from nature and animals. Sitting there silently, he can see whatever he wishes to see in this small pond, traveling to islands in the far sea or sailing in ships. The surface of this small pond becomes a mirror of his imaginations.

Here, in this painting, however, the boy is no longer motionless. Now he touches the water and appears as if something is about to happen!



Boy sitting on the dried rice corn
Oil on canvas (35 x 39 inch) 90 x 100 cm 2007

Alexander Devasia (b.1963, Punnapra, Paravoor, Kerala)

EDUCATION:

1979-1985: Bachelor of Fine Arts - Painting, College of Fine Arts, Trivandrum, Kerala, India

1986-1988: Post Graduation, Faculty of Fine Arts, M. S. University, Baroda, India

SOLO SHOWS: (*SELECTION*)

1983: College of Fine Arts, Trivandrum, Kerala, India

1991: Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai, India

1993: Chitram Art Gallery, Cochin, India

1993: Paravoor Public Library, Punnapra, Kerala, India

1994: Gallery 7, Mumbai, India

1995: United Arab Emirates

1995: 'Work on Paper', Pundole Art Gallery, Mumbai, India

1996: Paravoor Public Library, Punnapra, Kerala, India

1997 and 1998: 'Ten Suspended Images' Times of India Gallery, Cochin, India and Pundole Art Gallery, Mumbai, India

1998: Draavidian Art Gallery, Cochin, India

1999 and 2000: Autoren Galerie I, Munich, Germany

2000: Galerie WebKunsthhaus, Weßling, Germany

2001: Galerie Goethe 53, (Kultur-Referat) Munich, Germany

2003 and 2004: Hotel Apollo, Regensburg, Germany

2004: Jazz-Club-Galerie in City Museum, Regensburg, Germany

2005: 'Singing In The Rain', Galerie Mueller & Plate, Munich, Germany and Pundole Art Gallery, Mumbai, India

2006 'Song Of The Crowd', Pundole Art Gallery, Mumbai, India

GROUP SHOWS: (*SELECTION*)

1985: Workshop with 4 artists in the fishing village in Vettukadu, Kerala, India the works were exhibited in Trivandrum, India and

Amsterdam, Netherlands

1988: 'Question And Dialogues', Indian Radical Painters and Sculptors Association Faculty of Fine Arts, M. S. University, Baroda, India

1989: Indian Radical Painters and Sculptors Association, Kozhikode, India

1993, 1995 and 1996: drawings during traveling to Kadmat, Kavarathi and Minicoy-Island (Lakkadives), India

1993: 'Poster Campaign Against Religious Fundamentalists' - organised by Cochin Corporation, Cochin, Kerala, India

1994: 'Relief Fund for Latur Earthquake', Faculty of Fine Arts, M.S. University, Baroda, India

1998: 'Group Show', The Guild Gallery, Mumbai, India

1998: 'Miniature Format Exhibition', Sans Tache Gallery, Mumbai, India

2000 and 2001: 'Artists of the Gallery' (paintings), Autoren Galerie I, Munich, Germany

2001: 'Foreign Artists living and working in Munich', Trafo Neuhausen, Munich, Germany

2001: 'Contemporary Art from India', State Museum for Ethnology, Munich, Germany

2002: 'Group Show', King's Foot Gallery, Madison, U.S.A.

2003: 'Group Show', King's Foot Gallery, Madison, U.S.A.

2003: 'East-West', Galerie Mueller & Plate, Munich, Germany

2005: 'Double-Enders' a travelling exhibition Mumbai, Delhi, Cochin and Bangalore, India

2007: 'Representation – II', Triva Contemporary Art, Trivandrum, India

DOCUMENTARY FILMS: (WITH SYLVIE BANTLE)

1999: Mortuary - Joseph

It was awarded Bronze Award at the 22.Tokio-Video Festival, Japan.

The film was also screened at:

15.Documentary Filmfestival Munich, Germany;

18.Festival Video Estavar-Llivia, France;

Short Film Festival Cochin, India;

'Rights for 2000' Planete TV-Chanel, Paris, France

2000: 'Santhi Bhavan' - House of Peace

2001: 'Chakara'

The film was screened at:

17.Documentary Filmfestival Munich, Germany

2002: All the above 3 documentary films were screened at Hermann Hesse Festival, Calw, Germany

2007: 'Searching for the Dancing God...' Kerala's last Shaman

103 min., (Voice Over in English language or in German: original title 'Die Suche nach dem tanzenden Gott...')

All documentary films were screened at several cinemas in Germany and Austria

SHORT FILMS (FICTION): (WITH SYLVIE BANTLE)

2003: 'Morning Paper and Tea', 19 min. (Voice Over in English language or in German: original title 'Zeitung zum Tee')

The film was screened at:

44. International Film Festival For Children and Youth, Zlin, Czech Republic;

21. Video/film tage, Thüringen&Rheinland-Pfalz, Gera, Germany

2005: 'Rain', 6 min. (no language, Music only)

The film was screened at Alexander Devasia the exhibition preview titled 'Singing In The Rain', Pundole Art Gallery,

Mumbai, India

2006:at the Short-film-Special, Stegen, Germany

VIDEO INSTALLATION: (WITH SYLVIE BANTLE)

2007: '23 faces – 23 biographies', 37 min. (silent)

shown at the I.BrandlochFest2007, Munich, Nuernberg, Herrsching and Fuerstenfeldbruck, Germany

Alexander lives and works between India and Germany



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