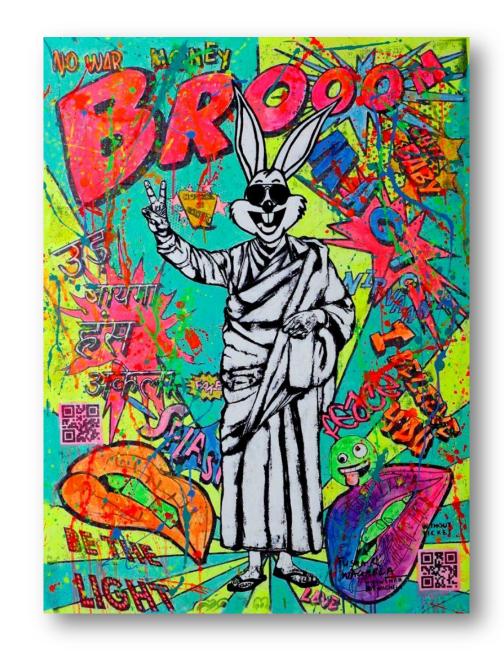
On the occasion of the 19<sup>th</sup> anniversary Shrishti Art Gallery presents

# **LICENCE TO LAUGH**

## An exhibition of artworks by

Chitra Ganesh | Farhad Hussain | Gurjeet Singh Princess Pea | Smruthi Gargi Eswar | Thukral and Tagra | Tushar Waghela





#### **Curator's Note**

Lina Vincent

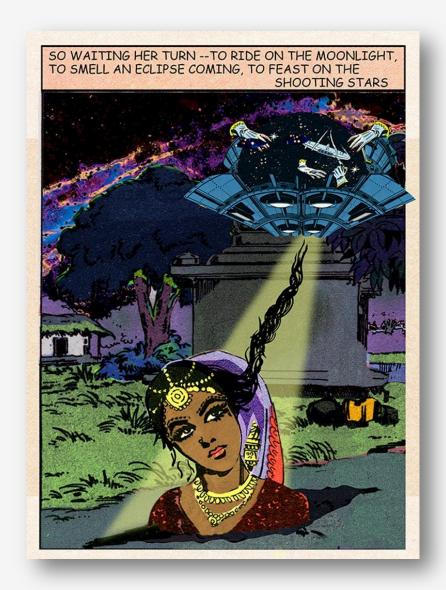
"Sometimes laughter hurts, but humour and mockery are our only weapons". -Cabu (pen name of Jean Cabut), cartoonist and co-founder of Charlie Hebdo (13 Jan 1938-2015)

The complexity of the contemporary world we live in, significantly more so after a long period of disorientation, calls for varied means and devices to navigate it. The intention of this curatorial plan was to penetrate the malaise that blanketed everything, by seeking out artists whose work employed a lens of humour and satire to contextualise life/reality. *License to Laugh* brings together artworks that engender altered perceptions, and awaken nuances of playfulness and new meaning. Art has the power to heal, to envision lightness and transformation in the midst of grim truth; more than anything it can create escapes into multidimensional spaces of the artists imagination.

The artists' styles reference popular culture and outsider art, including visual vocabularies of comics, cartoons, animation, graffiti and posters, as well as legacies of domestic aesthetics, bazaar art and games. The exhibition explores the scope of these graphic languages and compositional frameworks that lend themselves to the expression of multi-layered narratives. The 7 artists utilize differing points of departure in addressing the theme, covering aspects of the personal and the political, and subverting conventional archetypes to open-up plural interpretations. From satirical views of adulthood and growing up, to the employment of game-play as a means of understanding contemporary (individual and social) crises; from witty commentaries on gender roles and the re-visioning of woman-hood, to unravelling memories and wild fantasies through acts of 'making', the artworks subtly as well as visibly build on the broad premise of humour.

Humour and irony exist is a spectrum of shades – from light to dark and in between, associated with varying degrees of human conditioning and acceptance. What may appeal to some audiences, may leave others untouched, even angered; and in our current social ecosystem, acts of personal and artistic liberty have increasingly come under threat of censorship.

License to Laugh is about questioning our present times, of giving ourselves the chance to be light-hearted and irreverent without fear— it is about reviewing our collective contemporary and embracing humour in all its forms, as a weapon, even in the darkest of times.







Chitra Ganesh, Prophecy, Mixed media on paper, 40" x 60", 2020



Chitra Ganesh, Dakini Eclipse, Mixed media on paper, 60" x 40", 2019



#### **CHITRA GANESH**

"My work is rooted in painting and drawing, and over the past 20 years has evolved to include comics, photography, animation, video and installation. My practice also took shape through my studies in semiotics, literature and social theory. My visual vocabulary interpolates Hindu and Buddhist iconography, surrealism, Kalighat painting & Islamic architecture, with forms of everyday, popular, mass mediated visual culture.

Core concerns in my work are animated by an understanding of the brown femme body and its attendant histories of representation as a potent site for transformation and subversion. I am interested in both the body's materiality, and its place within a larger set of social and cultural significations. I create culturally layered narratives borne of liminal spaces where myth and history comingle. Drawing on the comic form as a complex system of signification in its own right, narrative devices of epic myth, & visual vocabulary of psychedelic and protest posters, I probe familiar, collectively held stories for moments of rupture, dissonance, and new narrative possibilities.

Collage and automatic writing have been a central part of this process, as a means to form non-linear and surrealist narratives, populated by unreliable narrators, new female subjectivities, and unexpected desires. For some time, I have been exploring science fiction as a contemporary paradigm of myth with its shared emphasis on cyclical time and preoccupation with justice and humanity; as a means to meditate on present day conflicts such as environmental devastation, forced occupations, and hierarchies of gender and power."

Chitra Ganesh graduated magna cum laude from Brown University in with a BA in Comparative Literature and Art-Semiotics, and received her MFA from Columbia University in 2002.



Gurjeet Singh, I wish i could tell him, Fabric, embroidery, GI wire, 16" x 15" x 6" each, 2021



Gurjeet Singh, I wish i could tell him II, Fabric, polyfill, readymade object, embroidery, GI wire, 22" x 20" x 8", 2021





#### **GURJEET SINGH**

These works are part of a series that explores and shares hidden fantasies, happening behind closed doors. This narrative relates to a boy named 'Kirat' who recalls a crush of his past days and thinks,

"When you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it", but in my case, it didn't happen. I wish I could tell him how much I love him. I wish I could hold his hand for life. I wish our eyes would have met and time froze. My eyes would search for him on the bus. I was entering adulthood and my feet were drowning in love. I was in love with the colours of his choice, whether his vermillion turban or olive-green kurta. He had a face like the rising sun, an unearthly smell that no perfume in the world could match, his moustache was thick and dark as a moonless night. I remember how my heart ran vigorously when you raised your hand to take money for tickets, our hands touched, our eyes met...I felt goose bumps. I wish I could hold those hands for longer, I wish we could break the silence of those sewed lips. I realised you are a conductor; I smiled in my heart and felt a great urge to travel for the rest of my life on that bus. When I got mail for transfer to another city, I didn't let my eyes shed tears, I kept them in my heart forever."

Gurjeet Singh was born in Algon Kothi, Punjab in 1994, and achieved his Master's degree in Fine Arts from the College of Arts (Gold Medalist), Chandigarh. His interest in art was developed at home with his family. They have always been engrossed in creative activities and encouraged him to pursue innovative ways of expressing himself. From the women in his home he learnt a variety of skills, such as stitching, embroidery or decorating the house. From his father who repairs scooters and deals in their spare parts he understood how machines work.

Gurjeet primarily creates sculptures, painting, drawings and installations. Through his practice he addresses the several issues that plague the LGBTQ community. He aims to highlight the stories and truths that are often hidden or swept away for being inconvenient.





Princess Pea, Dadi, Pen and ink on archival paper, hand-signed at the back, 12" x 8", 2021





#### **PRINCESS PEA**

#### Dadi

The text is inspired by women in protest, as grandmother takes centre stage in the world's biggest protest. The work is a sculpture piece that is made with faith and hope, by turning the wood and shaping it into a figure which wakes us up for our rights and long present suppression of women,

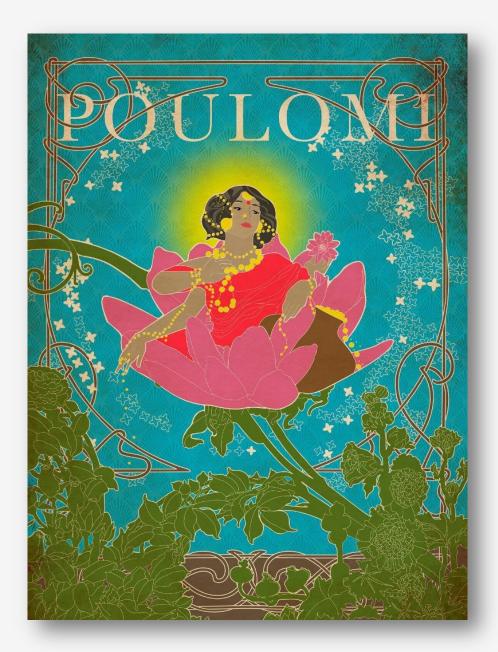
It may be ironical but a commentary of how the much-needed domestic issues are pushed away and the gender roles shifts in the site at Delhi borders, where men are cooking and the females leading the stage.

Princess Pea was born in Ferozpur, India in 1980, and achieved her Master's degree in Fine Arts from the College of Arts, New Delhi. Through her contemporary art practices, Princess Pea brings to the forefront of international issues of tradition, identity and celebrity with an underlying satire on global societal concerns. Through her carefully constructed alter ego, the anonymous female artist seeks to challenge our conception of what constitutes femininity and womanhood. Princess Pea is based in Gurgaon, India.

This world of Princess Pea treads a fine line between the world of fairy tale and the mundane. The broad scope of art challenges perceptions about our conceived notions of the self. As Princess Pea, the artist presents to the world her alter ego in the form of a 'living toy' an anime-style figure that can neither talk, smell nor hear, it a fictional world and she is far away from this world. The practice revolves around the ideas of identity, notions of perfection, self-worth, and further inquires the conflicts between traditional and contemporary roles of women in Indian society.

Gender-based discrimination against female children is pervasive across the world; it is seen in all strata of society and manifests in various forms. It is argued that, on account of this inferior treatment, females often fail to understand their rights. This is more predominant in India and a pressing issue that the artist seeks to address.

SMRUTHI GARGI ESWAR

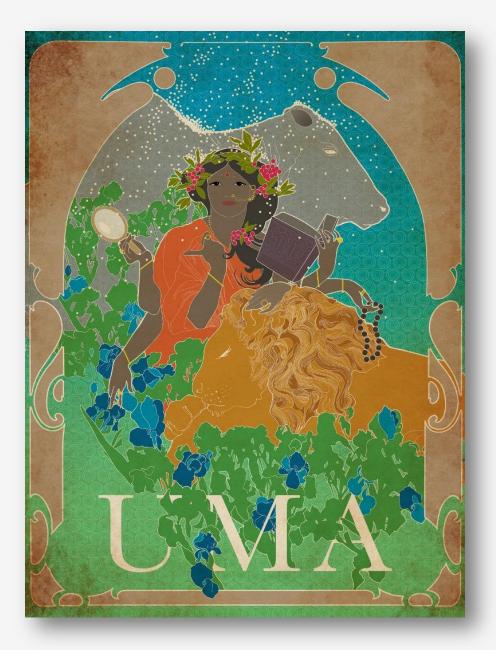


In a cosmos of affluent Asuras and entitled Devas, Poulomi moves. Paying little attention to their eternal combat, she chooses. She is Lakshmi the goddess of wealth. Her attention moves as she gazes over our small lives, only too aware of how little would survive us. From the ground, she had once risen, but only noticed in the skies, when her dazzle was in full bloom.

We were made to understand that this is how she always was - but as Poulomi, she reminds us of an earlier time, when she was a child, growing into a woman in her home, underneath the earth, hidden in the early hymns of the Vedas. A long age of both innocence and awareness, when Asura meant a divine being, still uncoloured by a later moral turn their stories took. Fathered, not just by one, but three Asuras.

Varuna – the ocean, Puloman – the earth and Bhrigu – the teacher. Sharing her heritage, with glorious asuras – Balli, Virochana, Prahalad. An age of innocence that changed as did she, only coming into herself as she moved away from home, arriving in the world of gods and astonishing the heavens with her glamour. Her journey continued, till she finally and ultimately met Vishnu, making him and her the king and queen of heaven.

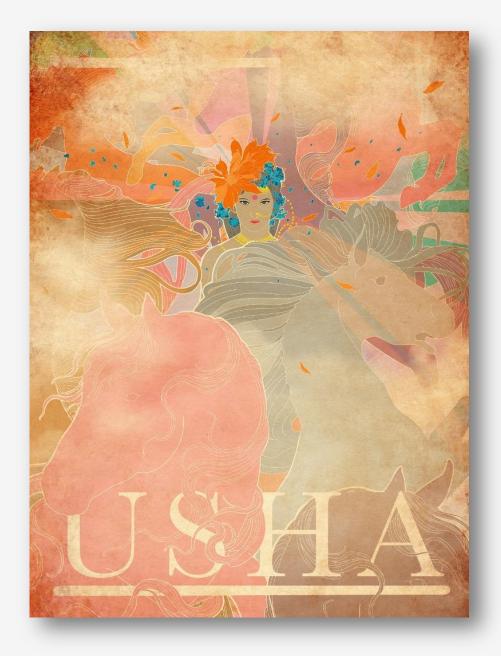
Smruthi Gargi Eswar, *Poulomi*, K3 Pigment print on archival paper, 36" x 27", Edition – 2/10, 2020



A goddess with many names and many lives — Parvati, Gauri, Shakti, but it's Uma who holds the mirror, changing how we view ourselves and the universe we live in. She is the creator of a new world order, where culture is born out of empathy. A distinctly feminine vision, in which our spirit is found in her matter, our soul in her substance. Even as we observe we realize that she is the observation. While awkwardly, we tussle with values, constantly making and breaking them, she is natural phenomenon

Uma brings an air of expectancy, a preparation for a family as she arrives at her husband's icy cave in the mountains. The hermit god Shiva, has known nothing else. — they make love for a thousand years, thinking of nothing but pleasure as she thaws the walls of his glacier and releases Shiva's tapas into the world — rivers into the plains and life into the dry soil. Their home on the impossible peaks of Kalilash, her presence warming its core for she is also a daughter of the mountains. Their children will be either hers or his, and not the fruit of their union, but that, is another story. A love beyond the narrow understanding of procreation and family. As Kali she had danced on Shiva's chest, but as Uma she sits beside him and on him when they make love. Ice and fire giving way to life and a unique shared vision of all creation.

Smruthi Gargi Eswar, Uma, K3 pigment print on archival paper, 36" x 27", Edition – 6/10, 2020



Her name appears three hundred times, there are twenty hymns in her praise - the most written for any god or goddess in the Rig Veda, and apparently the most beautiful. She is not worshiped or celebrated, but sung for. Like the other early gods of her time, she is made of words, and the ones that created her are said to be the oldest. Finding form in poetry, Usha the new dawn floods our minds, as she looks into every opening eye, every morning. She is consciousness. And immediately dazzled, we blink – the first sign of a mortal. For Usha and her fellow immortals don't. We are enticed out of slumber and into another day, as she passes an invisible line of time through us, counting our numbered mornings.

She is illumination, releasing us from time. Moksha, vimoksha, vimikti, mukti — she is enlightenment. Brushing past and passing quickly, young and audacious, she takes many lovers. An adored bright beacon drawn by a thousand horses, in every shade of twilight, she remains the most desired. To know her, is to know abandonment, for she always rides past us, towards her sisters — Sandya and Ratri — evening and night. A bond between sisters, made of time, so special it holds all of reality within it, and still, it holds them apart.

Smruthi Gargi Eswar, *Usha*, K3 pigment print on archival paper, 36" x 27.25", Edition – 5/10, 2020



The most complex of goddesses. The familiar image is that of a blue-black creature on the rampage, eyes blazing, tongue grotesquely protruded, even more ferocious than the demons she slays.

Here she is young, beautiful, playful, full of mischief, emerging out of sumptuous foliage. And the sensation is one of overwhelming, all encompassing serenity - despite her garland of skulls.

For Kali is also Bhavatarini or Redeemer of the Universe. And she is Night – the moment before the creation of light. Beyond time. With no beginning or end. The essence of all being. She is Being itself.

What is delightful about this piece is that it embodies the concept of Kali. A new artist - a woman, a new perspective, a dynamic medium and our fresh engagement with ancient knowledge. For Kali is ultimately the goddess of change and thence of continuity.

Smruthi Gargi Eswar, *Kali*, K3 pigment print on hahnemuhle etching on archival paper, 36" x 27", Edition – 7/10, 2019

#### Sister Misfortune Series

Alakshmi gives this series its name - she is the dark side of the ever-welcome Lakshmi, Goddess of Fortune, who needs no introduction. Alakshmi is Sister Misfortune. And she does need an introduction. For the simple reason that she is so minimally engaged with. For our natural, human response is to shy away from the unpleasant. But how dark is dark? Is it as disturbing as we have been led to believe or is it merely the rest of the story? And thus begins an exploration both disturbing and ultimately triumphantly life affirming. An exploration not just of duality but of multiplicity. This is the exhilarating and complex universe of Woman appearing as she does in her various and beguiling avatars in the pantheon of goddesses of Hindu mythology. Sister Misfortune is also a probe compelling, uncompromising and fearless – like the goddesses themselves – into our attitudes - women towards themselves, men towards women. How does the idea of a goddess coexist with Everywoman?

As we view each goddess, the question of who or what a woman is broadens, becomes greater. It becomes once more the only question that ever matters, the question mankind has asked over and over again in an attempt to unravel that eternal conundrum: who are we?

Text by Malini Aikat S







#### **SMRUTHI GARGI ESWAR**

### Learning to Breathe

(SEEING) - We view the past with a sense of romance, and mystery that we deprive our own times. I am drawn to imagery that acts as a record of an age's interior life, building a joint memory of the people of that time - a uniqueness that is tied up with the uniqueness of the time they represent. (MAKING) - To then dislodge this vision, and use as a lens to view ourselves, our time and our world, to build a personal memory, has become my way to address all things present and absent. A way to talk about, the passing of time, its innate sense of multiplicity, that space between reason and romance and our need to re-wild in spirit and with nature.

The series wanders, unrestricted and unaccountable, telling its own story, in its own world.

Smruthi Gargi Eswar is a graphic artist based out of Bangalore. She studied at the Baroda Faculty of Fine Arts and at Chitrakala Parishad briefly. Her art studies though, had started earlier, while she was still a student at The Valley School KFI. She runs her own studio (Studio Smu), with shows travelling to Budapest, New York, Cochin, Delhi and Mumbai from her studio in Bangalore. She is also a board member of Art in Social Structures, an international NGO run and funded by artists that believes that art is the building block of all social structures. Her photography work has been published in India and the Philippines. She was also a part of the KYTA art residency and was a Fellow with Jaaga's Be Fantastic Fellowship in 2020.

Sister Misfortune is now part of the art project — The Mother in you is the Mother in me, in Berlin. From a fine arts education, she moved on to graphic design and photography almost immediately. Over the last few years, she moved back into the space of Fine Art finding an avenue to explore address and express at a more personal level. The journey from graphic design to art, established the medium in which her works are created. Her solo shows for the series Sister Misfortune, was held in Cochin (at the Open Eyed Dreams gallery), and also the series was shown at the False Ceiling and at the Art Loft for the Art Hop event in Mumbai. In Bangalore a few from the series were shown at the group show 4 Walls, held at The Taj West End by Art Chutney. 4 new pieces "Seasoned" were commissioned and created from the Sister Misfortune series for the Label Ritu Kumar for a line of clothing and were launched together in New Delhi. Walking the line between design and art Smruthi is keen on exploring the world around her as she blurs the lines between the two.





'Hate, negligence, ignorance, envy, isolation, dominance' is positioned as those sentiments that have occupied our collective minds in the present moment. Responding to the volatile climate of atrocities across the country against students, friends colleagues, and respected elders. This project space is not a site of protest, but a safe space to expand our understanding through vocabularies, aesthetics, and value systems of gameplay.

Verbal Kabbadi marks this tough time in support of free voice and against undemocratic actions that seem to undermine the very fabric of our nation. It is time to stand, learn, organize, and educate each other.

### Verbal Kabaddi IV

Precarious times in a single breath!

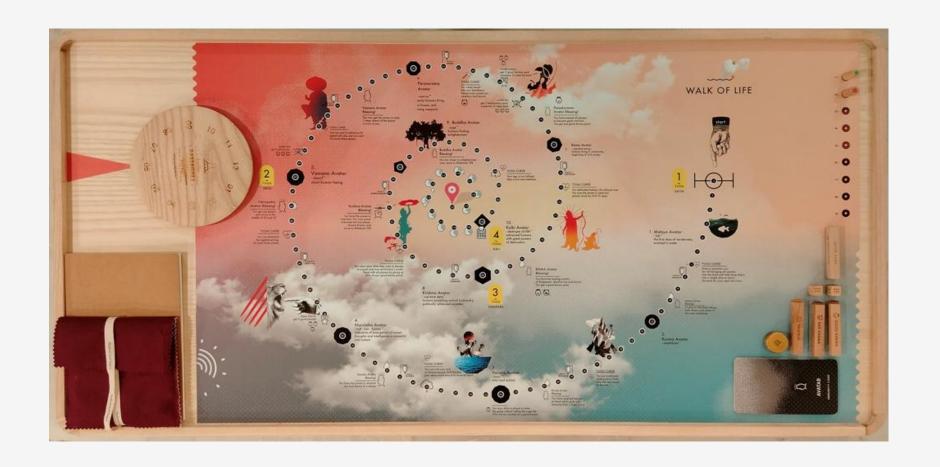
How to play:

- 1. Player A, Start the game by reciting #1 in a single breath.
- 2. Player B, Repeat the same text.
- 3. Stamp a point only if recited correctly.
- 4. Continue to read all.
- 5. Mark your points at each step and count them in the end.
- 6. Breathe.

Aim: To perform this self-motivated activity by reciting the tongue-twisting texts to address the precarious times we all live in.

Reward: The winner gets a stamp of sincerity for reciting and acknowledging distress situation in a single breadth.

Duration: 5-7 minutes



#### **THUKRAL & TAGRA**

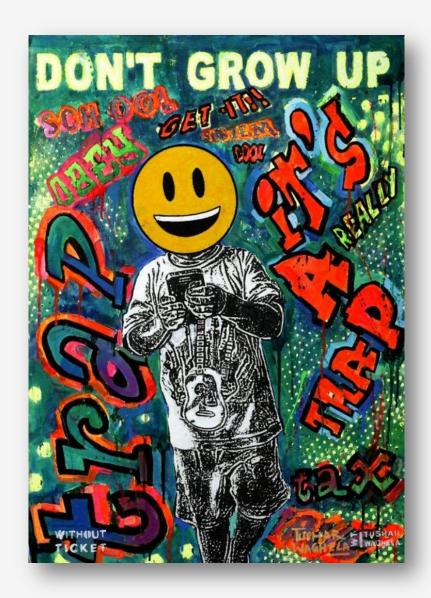
#### The Walk of Life

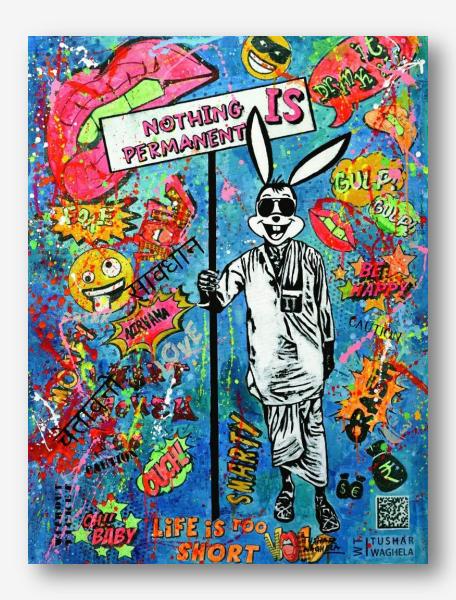
The Walk of Life game is built upon the ancient Indian card game called Ganjifa, originally played with a set of 120 cards. The artist-duo have converted it into a board game that derives its narrative from Dashavatar, the ten earthly incarnations of the Hindu god Vishnu. The avatars can also be considered as the evolution of mankind: from fish to amphibian, to mammal, to human, and to a deity. The play manifests into an introspective exercise that holds the players accountable for their actions and intent. It allows players to equalize their existing debts and deeds of their Bad Karma with Good Karma. The act of playing this reflective game builds into a community that is vulnerable yet comforting.

This family-oriented game has previously been exhibited as an art installation across the globe, collectively witnessing the participation of around one lakh people.

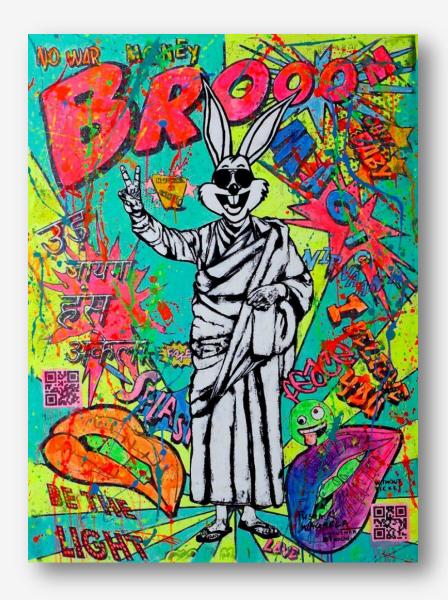
Jiten Thukral and Sumir Tagra work collaboratively with a wide range of media including painting, sculpture, installations, interactive games, video, performance, and design. Thukral & Tagra work on new formats of public engagement and attempt to expand the scope of what art can do, further emphasizing what the practice can do in a virtual context through their archives and publications. They break out of the mediated-disciplinary world, create multi-modal sensory, and storytelling in immersive environments. Their earlier work dealt with tropes of migration, mythological narratives, symbols of Indian identity, and motifs of a globally manifested consumer culture that enliven a largely pedantic and static area of cultural material. From a pop visual character to a predominantly abstract visual approach and compositional philosophy, Thukral & Tagra constantly shift in terms of their grammar and vocabulary. They have offered sociopolitical commentary that is implicit in their aesthetic for the past eighteen years. Recently, they seek to identify the practice as pedagogy through their collaborative Pollinator.io – Interdisciplinary lab, which cultivates an inclusive learning ecosystem that indexes to achieve knowledge sharing through cross-pollination.







Tushar Waghela, Nothing is Permanent, Acrylic, spray, paint on canvas, 45" x 33", 2021



Tushar Waghela, Brooom!! Wrooom!!, Acrylic, spray paint on canvas, 45" x 33", 2021



#### **TUSHAR WAGHELA**

#### Without Ticket

The earth I find myself in, as an uprooted and alienated human, is pervaded by terror and treachery. Its axis has crumbled and it rotates randomly in boundless space. Norms have lost sanctity, violation and violence are the now accepted forms of civilized behaviour. It's a journey towards a universe that defies both morality and immorality. Of deracinated people without a past or a future. People who stare at a seemingly ephemeral but endless present.

Living in this time I want to create the art which gives joys, passions, childlike innocence with all the vibrant colours of life and love.

May the force be with you.

Tushar Waghela, born 1975, is a filmmaker and visual artist, holding a Master's Degree in Indian Philosophy. For the past 25 years, he has been working in the field of contemporary art and experimental cinema. His video arts, installations, short films and experimental cinemas have been shown in many museums, galleries, universities and more than 150 international film festivals such as Cannes Film Festival, London Asian Film Festival, British Film Institute, the Collectif Jeune Cinema Paris, Mumbai Film Festival, and many more. He is currently working on a Pop Art series using street art, spray painting and mixed media techniques.

Tushar lives and works from his studio in Chhattisgarh.



Farhad Hussain, Untitled, Fiber glass, 27.5" x 22", x 11", Edition of 6, 2019



#### **FARHAD HUSSAIN**

Everything in life is of interest to Farhad Hussain, as he absorbs and translates the humdrum of existence as well as the undercurrents of human relationships within his paintings and sculptures. He uses humour and sarcasm as devices in depicting realities of peoples' interactions, their foibles and excesses. Sometimes absurd, the dramatic tableaus he creates capture distinct moments in time, the figures often caught in the midst of mirth, their smiling faces mask-like as though posing for a photograph. The viewer is often led to wonder what would happen next, or outside the framework of the scene.

Known for his trademark vivid colouring and simplified, stylised forms, Hussain has explored the context of middle-class urban lifestyles, and the aspirations and desires that form a background to their posturing, attire and the surrounding material imagery. Broad references to elements from miniature paintings, Kalighat paintings, Japanese prints and pop images from mass media have informed his practice in the past, amalgamated now into a distinct and personal visual vocabulary.

B. 1975 in Jamshedpur, Jharkhand Farhad Hussain completed his BFA in Painting from Kala Bhavan, Visva Bharti University, Santiniketan in 2003 and MFA in Painting from MS University, Baroda in 2005.

Hussain bases his works on the realities of human relations and their subtle complexities. His art works are a mélange of vibrant colors. He has held solo exhibitions, and participated in many group shows nationally and internationally.

Farhad Hussain received the Nasreen Mohamedi Scholarship from MS University, Baroda in 2004. He lives and works in New Delhi.



#### **LINA VINCENT**

Lina Vincent is an independent art historian and curator with two decades of experience in arts management. She is committed to socially engaged practices that reflect in the multi-disciplinary projects she has developed and participated in. The focus areas of her research include arts education, printmaking history and practice, the documentation of living traditions, and environmental consciousness in the arts.

She recently worked on an Archival Museum Fellowship from the India Foundation for the Arts, and runs the Goa Familia archival photography project with the Serendipity Arts Foundation. She initiated and headed the Piramal Residency Artist Incubator Programme 2019-20. Lina has curated numerous exhibitions with galleries across India and contributes to publications on art history and contemporary cultural practices.



Photo credit Nishant Saldanha

### **ABOUT US**

Established in 2002, **Shrishti Art gallery** is one of the leading art galleries in India showcasing Indian contemporary art. The word "Shrishti" denotes creation. The Gallery showcases not only eminent Indian Contemporary artists, but also forms a creative space for upcoming artists. Over the last **nineteen years**, Shrishti has mounted more than **200** art exhibitions in India and abroad including paintings, sculptures, graphics, drawings and new media.

We offer advisory solutions to individuals, architects, interior designers and corporates to discover and collect artworks. We not only help you invest in art and build your collection but also in decorating your homes and offices.

Shrishti Art Gallery is located in Jubilee Hills, Hyderabad - 33.

Visit us at www.shrishtiart.com



# THANK YOU!



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