

KALICHARAN GUPTA



presents

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INDIA ART FAIR

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URBANITY-BOON OR BANE?
Kalicharan Gupta's colossal vision for metropolis

Apurva Sinha

When we talk about roots, what comes to one's mind? Depth, strength, belongingness, nostalgia - aswarming pool of personal emotions. Here we are, living in a deeply rooted society that breathes and bleeds in terms of indelible and unreadable emotions. One strongly feels the need to vent when he is detached from his native place, or when he gradually gets accustomed to the hustle-bustle, whims and fancies of a hyper-real life, or when he is forced to confront an unwelcome change. When the artist finds himself in such a predicament, he employs his artistic oeuvre to break free from the illusions and myths of metropolises. Our mind is an aggregation of different beliefs, constantly on the quest to unveil the hidden truth. The artworks of Kalicharan Gupta enunciate the story of the making of an artist, one who is well rooted to his motherland and has developed his sense of ideation with the environment that has affected his mindset. He is an artist who has advanced towards a fast-moving city life in search of an identity, to nurture his dreams, and to embrace new surroundings. Why do people migrate to cities? What are the repercussions? Are urban spaces generating claustrophobia? Is spatial crunch rapidly on the rise? Considering the concurrent scenario, one may think in terms of globalization - is it a boon or bane? Is this sudden change in habitation expansion causing havoc by reducing the city's greenery? Is the city life suffocating? The answers lie in the artworks of Kalicharan Gupta as the artist expresses and explores through lines, giving colours to his emotions.

It is impossible to live in the world without attachments, or indeed to eradicate them. The journey from a village to an urban town has been 'a deep, altruistic quest, a childhood impression, and altogether an imaginative story' for the artist. His artworks profusely justify the millions of experiences from rural-urban transfiguration and veracious occurrences of urbanity. It is the artist's critical observation of the physical environs in which the inhabitants of the gigantic complexes dwell, and the metropolitan spaces that are made up of highways, high-rises and miles on miles of matchbox-shaped dwellings which is evident in his artworks. He says, "As per my imagination, paradise cannot possibly exist in an increasingly crowded Earth. Today, existence without this extravagance is not possible. And yet, we strive in this golden-age, that palatial component that acts as the elixir of life. I want to bleed out the colours of my palette into the manifestations of the life of a metropolis."

Evidently, man, or mankind, is the artist's key metaphor, either that or the cycle of man's life and his immediate environment. His early works shed light over crunching humanity, tumbling over people, festivals teeming with celebrants, all of which leave an



Untitled
Acrylic on Canvas
36 x 33 inches
2016



Detail of South Wall of Pungnaptoseung Fortress

The Architectural Technology of Pungnaptoseung Fortress to Match that of Pyramid

When compared to the Pyramid of Egypt, more advanced architectural technology was employed to build Pungnaptoseung Fortress. The rammed earth Fortress was built by using various techniques such as 'Panchuk' and 'buyeop' which involve mixing silted soil, leaves and clay in a wooden frame to make the structure earthquake resistant.

South Wall of Pungnaptoseung Fortress

Acrylic on Canvas

68x144 inches

2016

unfading mark on any receptive child. His works are resultant of a deep moulding influence which he experienced while growing up. Each of the anthropomorphic gestures has a lore to share. Figures and postures delineate the neuronal human sense. Figuration retains a strong reference to the real world. His quest to unravel the 'real sense of human hood' is depicted in the early works.

Human environments, habitat, and the changes in demographic, sociological, economic aspects have shaped his inter-personal skills and abilities. Human bonding is the most intricate feature of any sort of relationship. He has tried to bring forth the very idea of human-society interaction and relation in his works.

His colourful figures and black and white impressions announce a sudden feeling of adaptation to a new environment, habitat, and societal structure- a caressed bondage. Where is the law of higher humanity? Human-hood is nothing but a process of continual renewal with the passing generations, and unsatisfying harmony and emotions. Is this situation a mere oblivion? His work brings out realism by representing the agony, anguish, and displeased lives of the downtrodden.

"Naturally, I react to the change both positively and negatively. The shrunken world, alarming depersonalization, such is the module of globalisation and people are slowly getting trapped in the chains of society. It is a distressing fact that human behaviour with the surrounding is no more a sociable thought as it has undergone a series of unfamiliar processual changes. Counterstroke to bewilderment in the shackled global intervening spaces is my artistic mind pronounced when I developed a dialogue with the space around me. The idea struck me that human-environment relationship has nestled since the birth of civilisation, and it is with technological advancement that we see a 'progression with each generation', and here we are languishing away to 'no breathing zones,'" says Kalicharan Gupta. Each of his paintings portrays an element of vibrancy which is infused with subtlety, depicting an energetic precision and expressing a wonderment of rhymes and rhythms existing within him.

His journey to the land of Sauras (a tribe of Orissa) taught him the importance of the 'authentic self', indigenous culture and their naïve relationships. "Years ago I had gone to Orissa and visited the Behrampur district where I saw the tribals and was deeply moved by their lifestyle. They stored grains in one place and practiced the principle of sharing. Each family picked what they needed. I was amazed at their idea of selflessness. Over the next few days, I realized that their lives were moulded according to their needs and they did everything according to what little they had. Everything they did was for daily sustenance."

"About sixty million people of India belong to what are variously known as tribes - schedule tribes, aborigines and adivasis. Tribal people are profusely known for preserving their ethnicity. Tribal



Contiguity

Acrylic on Canvas
72 x 120 inches
2016

forms annotate ethnic traditions and elegant graphic charm. This form of art is earthy and brings one close to one's natural surroundings. My inclination towards tribal form of art portray my ability to naturally adapt to my surroundings and create symbiotic relationships. These artworks are immensely influenced by the folk and tribal art." What struck the artist most was the daily chores performed by the tribals which compositely formed a potpourri of visual delight. "My splashes on tribal forms are mostly inspired by my close network with Saura tribes of Orissa, my visits to their local haats, and intimate observations of their day-to-day life."

"Over the years my works were born out of my observations of people that I saw in places I had visited. I have always had an interest in studying populations wherever I went. Owing to that interest, my observations always went deeper into their lifestyles and the simplicity of their everyday being", adds the artist.

When he came to Delhi, a few years ago, he realized that there was an upheaval in the name of development which changed his perspective towards life. His works became a testimony to the upheaval he saw and experienced everywhere he looked. He saw a change in the skyline so he created his rendition of the concrete jungle as if he was peeping into the buildings, sneaking a glimpse of the scene behind the curtains of existence. All over the world open spaces are

vanishing, and we are becoming victims to global warming due to the greed of man.

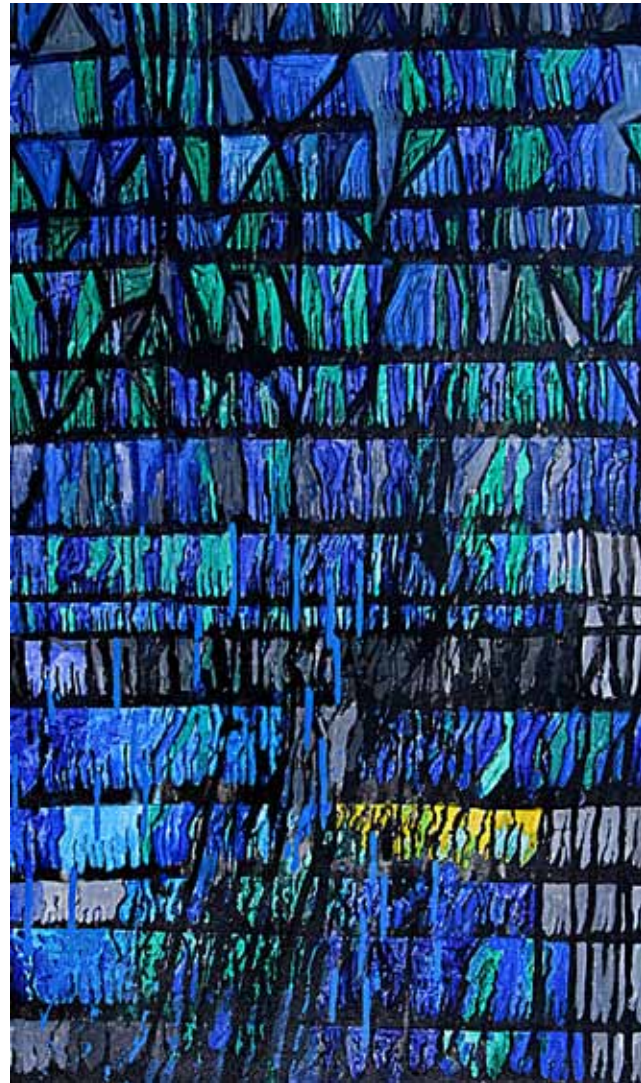
The purpose of life is to truly taste experiences and so his artistic conceptions went through a plausible search for metropolitan identity. In the 'Metropolitan Series' he brings out his inclination to create a centre for human control, to express the openness of the spirit of the city, and to reimagine the reality of metropolises. Fine lines, colour zones, and contrasting tonalities, sometimes disturbingly rendered, lead the way for one's thoughts towards man's current situation in the world that we are living in.

The 'Celebration' series is a recording of human existence and experiences since the creation of cave paintings. Embellished through rituals and passed on through generations, myths and tales have formed beliefs and offered escape from the mundane. The vehicle of story enhances empathy and creates catharsis while giving the viewer the opportunity to suspend disbelief through the medium of visual narrative. In 'Sea Change', there is a self-analytical correlation of a realistically painted portrayal of different strips, so much like the quotidian necessities of emotional camouflage, and yet it offers insight into the artists' inspirations and intentions.

The artist's work is linked to a larger commentary on urban living. Through the little granular strokes, he tries to examine the root cause and repercussions of themes such as urban expansion, migration, climate change, and popular icons in minutiae. With man's progressive commoditization, art has to sacrifice some of its loftier ideals. The grainy texture is the overview of life in a metropolis that is truly uncanny given the stillness and inanimate quality of his subjects even as he unravels moorings in an urban jungle.

Recently, the artist displayed an array of artworks along with Jai Zharotia at the 13th Gongju International Art Festival 2016. It was the 35th group show of the artist. He took an enthusiastic initiative by conducting the Korea-India contemporary art exchange exhibition in 2016 titled 'where are you?' to strengthen the cultural ties of the two countries. The first exchange program between India-Korea began in 2002, and till date hundreds of artists have benefitted from this noble venture. In 2016, twenty-two Indian artists got an opportunity to display their artistic endeavours which triggered cultural relations, exchange of ideas and contemporary art practices in pan-Asia.

Kalicharan Gupta's splendid art style and rich play with colours is interwoven with emotions and experiences. Here's an artful conversation with the artist whose creativity is laden with thoughtful imageries of the mythos of urbanity.



Untitled
Acrylic on Canvas
23.4 x 15.5 inches
2016



Untitled
Acrylic on Canvas
22.5 x 16.5 inches
2016

Apurva Sinha: Kalicharanji, you come from a rural place, and I am impressed with your adaptation. What inspired you the most when you began your artistic journey?

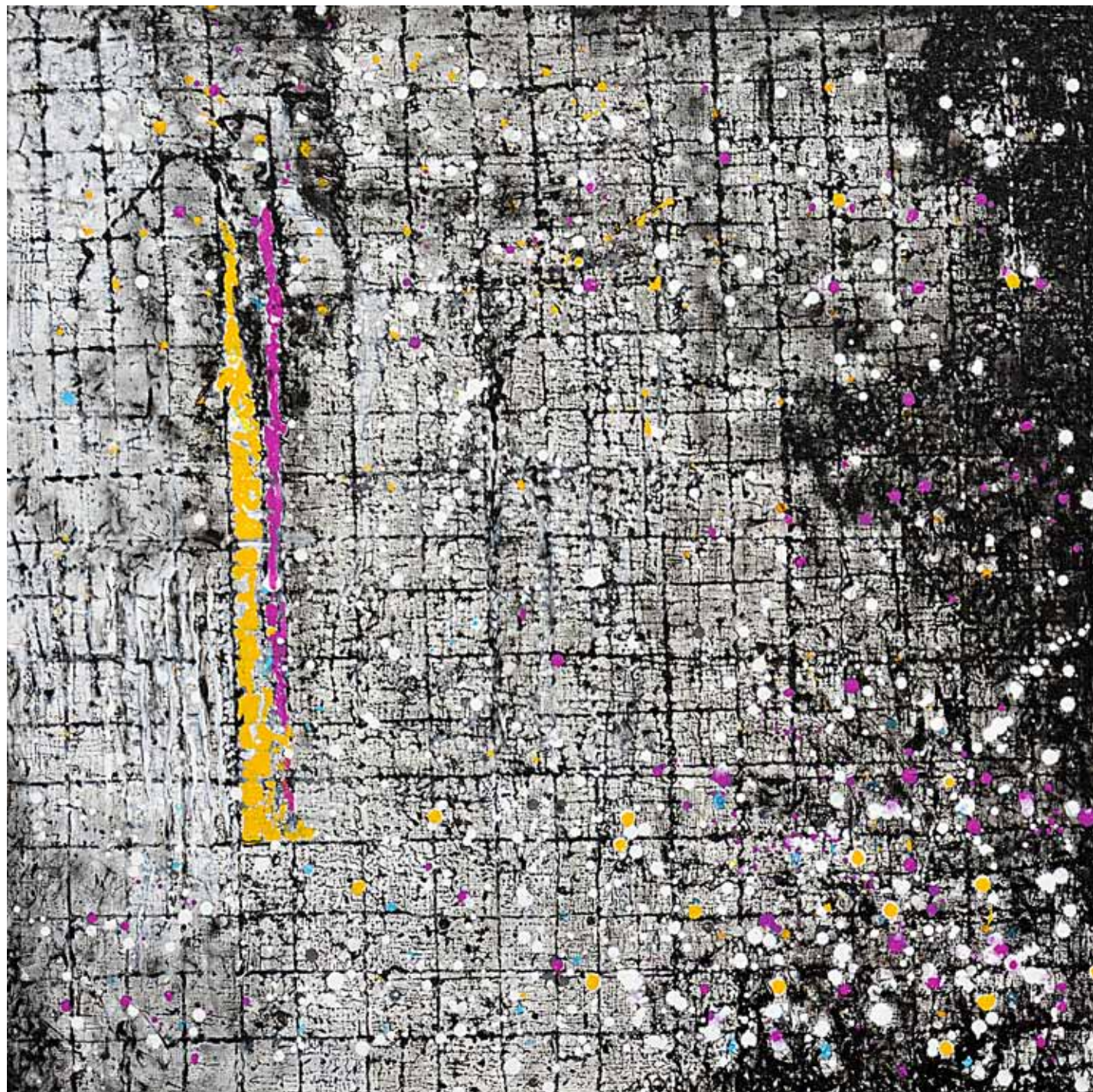
Kalicharan Gupta: I did not know much about art except what the drawing master taught me, but yes, my mother and sister painted the walls with animals, gods, and goddesses during the festivals using brushes made out of cotton. The landscape of my native village, the Yamuna, the agricultural land and its simple people, I think all these left an imprint on me when I left for Delhi. After leaving a beautiful, clean and green cultural land, I came to Delhi and settled in one small room when my college education ended. There was no place to move, work or sit with friends to chat. Sometimes I thought that there was no place to breathe, and a thought crossed my mind- how can I start my work in a small room where four members were living? But, in spite of that, I started with pen-ink drawings on paper and continued for 14 years struggling in the art field. Struggle was the next theme that I adopted and portrayed as while growing up I had seen my parents struggling to look after 10-12 members of the family, and then my personal struggles when I moved to the city. All this shaped my personal and artistic journey.

A S: With the summation of influences how have you managed to retain a very individual form of expression?

KG: Before Myths of Metropolis, I had worked on two big projects- 'Downtrodden' and 'Tribal Series'. The metropolitan series came later and Myths of Metropolis is a part of this series in which many pros and cons of the urban living are reflected as I openly declare that I belong to a small village in Haryana. In the metropolitan cities, I used to see big concrete structures of buildings and the consequent spatial crunch. Being an Indian and having Indian sensibilities has shaped the person I am. My fixation for colours is dictated by my environment, and the festivities I have seen and participated in have defined my understanding of art. I am always curious about my future style of work, colouring, composition, way of working etc. Some of the artists who have left an impression on me are Jackson Pollock, Pablo Picasso, Paul Cezanne, Francis Bacon, Monnet, Henry Moore, and Mark Rothko. Once someone asked Jackson Pollock about the relationship of his work to nature, Pollock reportedly commented, "I am nature".

I did a number of projects that focused on issues related to pollution, destruction of natural habitats and thus disseminated my agony for the natural environment and surroundings.

A S: What a spirited use of colours exists in your artworks, please tell us something about the role of colour and the



Suprematism
Acrylic on Canvas
36 x 36 inches
2016

narrative that you project to the society as each of your artworks depicts a melodramatic face of urbanism?

K G: The history of colour and colourists fascinates me, specially the miniatures and Bengal School. Absorbing the colourful life of metropolitan cities, the shiny streets and extravagant culture has attracted many people from the nearby towns. A huge number of people from the villages and towns intrude the cities on a daily basis, many people come to the city to earn a livelihood, while for some it is a mesmerising journey to a fanciful place. I express myself by means of nature, but if you carefully observe the sequence of my work, you will see that it overshadows the naturalistic appearance of things indicative of the expanding cities and gradually emphasize the plastic expression of relationships.

A S: *You are known to be an artist who has explored different realms of people i.e. rural, tribal, and urban. What medium do you use to connect people and spaces?*

K G: I must tell you that, as a painter, everyday anew observation is made by me when it comes to nature, but the sensation of this realisation is painful as all I see is massive destruction to nature and diminishing spaces where one can breathe openly. For example, the same subject can be studied from different angles when it is seen near a river or in a densely populated city.

I always try to connect the people with my work whether figuratively or in an abstract manner to open their eyes to the future of modernisation. For instance, if we modernize the tribals or their inhabited areas, they will not benefit from the change as they are closely connected to nature and it would be brutal to relocate them from their ecological habitat which they are used to. Thus my work closely defines the reciprocating relationship between people and spaces.

A S: *What has been a pivotal experience for you that has given you an important learning?*

K G: Learning is a continuous and never-ending process. I feel that one can learn from every nook and corner of one's surroundings. I have gained immense exposure and experience by regularly visiting good exhibitions, museums, seminars, open discussions, by participating in group exhibitions, workshops, national and international art fairs, biennales etc. Last September, I participated in Korea-India exchange programme in Seoul and visited the Gonju biennale. In October, I painted two works for the 13th GIAF (Gonju International Art Fair-2016) and gifted both the works to the museum. Such activities have a major impact on the artists and is a great learning process.

A S: *Tell us how you go about the visualization of an artwork.*

K G: The agony and rage that I have experienced from the changes in society and environment has inspired my sense of ideation. One of my major subjects of portrayal is the decomposition of nature. All this has created a series of imageries that has evolved in my artworks. My mantra is to imbibe distinctive properties from the surroundings and then form an individual sense of creation.

A S: *Tell us something about your ongoing projects and the theme that you have employed.*

K G: I am currently continuing my last main theme i.e. metropolitan series, and I am working on large canvasses, particularly for the India Art Fair. These works, which are in four pieces, are a little different from my previous works as I tried to penetrate the hue by throwing on the canvas one by one. It is called the 'South Wall of Pungnaptoseong Fortress'. The idea struck me when I saw and excavated an ancient wall in HanseongBaekje Museum in Seoul. So my ongoing works accentuate a sense of belonging, as a legacy is carried forward through the ages.

A S: *Your non-profit organisation, Academy of Visual Media (AOVM), is a platform where young artists are given a chance for an international exhibit in Korea. What role does an artist have in the society?*

K G: This AOVM for the promotion of art and photography was registered in 1999 in Delhi. Since its inception, we have had many programmes such as the honouring of the best photographers from the South-Asian countries. The trust organizes exchange programmes between Korea and India (alternate years) to promote young talented artists. We include 5-6 young artists to participate in workshops, exhibitions, and seminars etc. Artists have to exhibit one artwork and present his/her slideshow in the exchange programmes. Sometimes they are also given a chance to deliver a lecture/ slide show in the Universities so that students get a chance to see the artist working live and learn from their style too.

A S: *Do you think art has changed over the years?*

K G: Yes, certainly, not only the arts but also science, IT, photography and visual arts has changed worldwide. There's no doubt as art is one of the best mediums to express yourself. Nowadays, there are many platforms such as biennales and art fairs that are coming up all over the world in metropolitan cities. Even in small cities, there are biennales happening and the number is increasing every year. This year four biennales were



Epicycle
 Acrylic on Canvas
 48 x 48 inches
 2016

introduced in Srinagar, Gaya (Bihar), Bengaluru and Pune. You can judge yourself by the way art and art-related activities are flourishing day by day. Installations are trending these days like those of Subodh Gupta. Collaborations and exchange programmes open windows for new ideas and styles. More galleries are coming up to promote the artists, and private museums such as Kiran Nadar Museum provide a great boost for the artists. You see people from all walks of life are participating in the



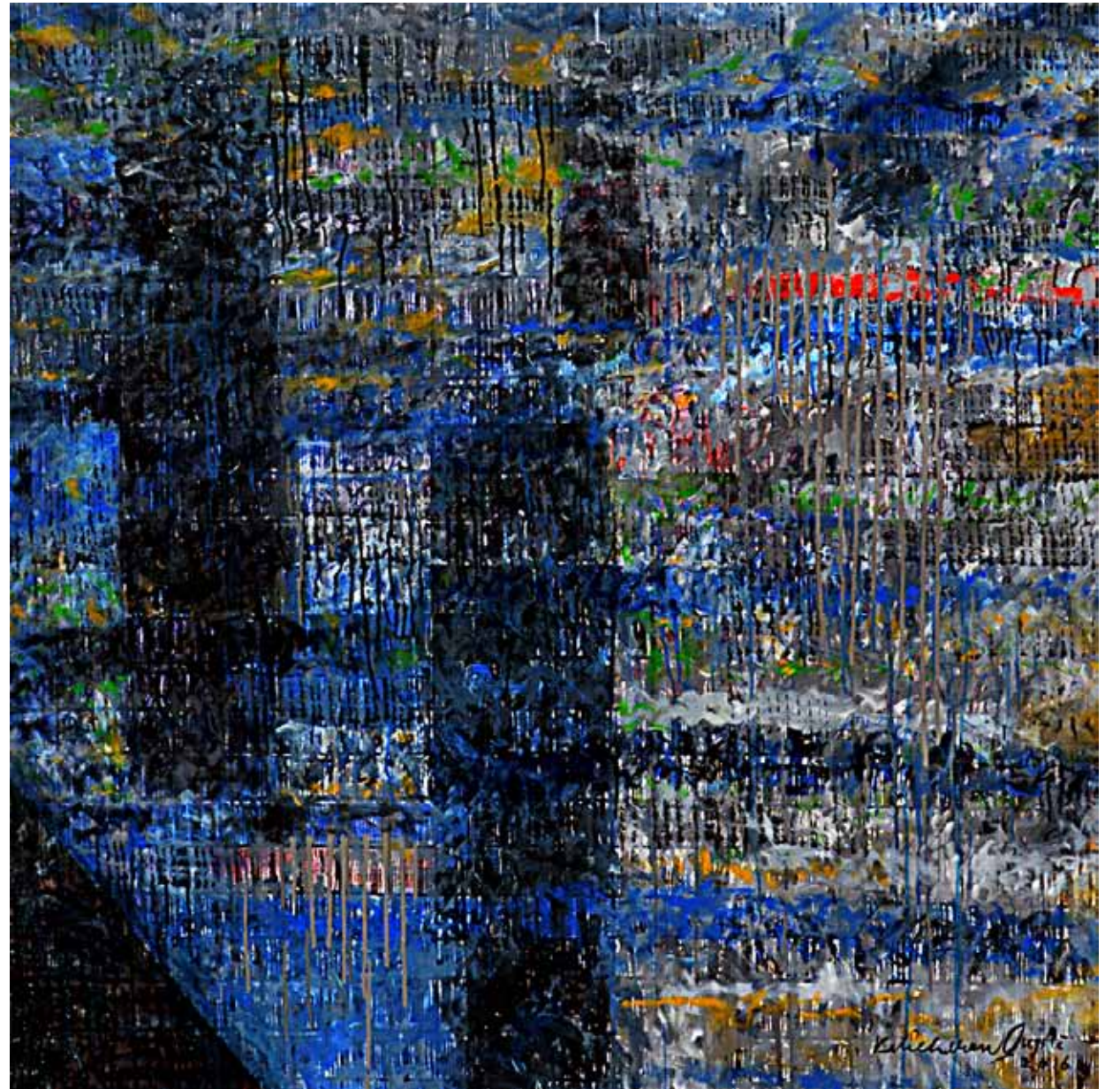
Contrapuntal
 Acrylic on Canvas
 48 x 48 inches
 2016

art field. In the near future, you will see more trends and practises in the field of art.

So is urbanism a boon or bane? I would like to sum it up with a thought - There are infinite possibilities in life, but what matters is the inner self. The rejection or acceptance of cultural and societal stigmas is completely your own choice. The artist surely shares a magnanimous vision that would benefit the future generations.



Far From the City
Acrylic on Canvas
55 x 60 inches
2016



Kannatal
Acrylic on Canvas
48 x 48 inches
2016



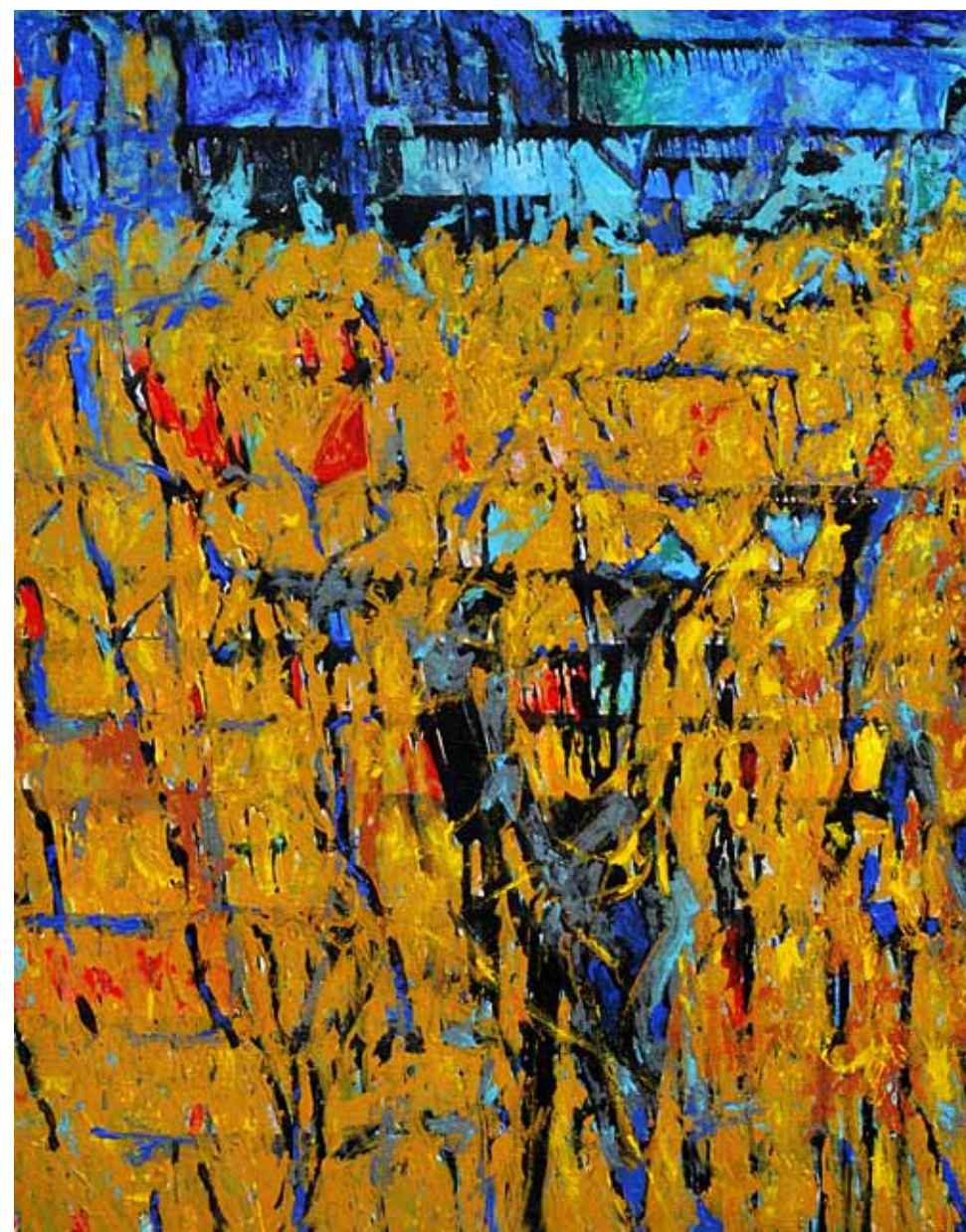
Celebration- I
Acrylic on Canvas
60 x 55 inches
2017



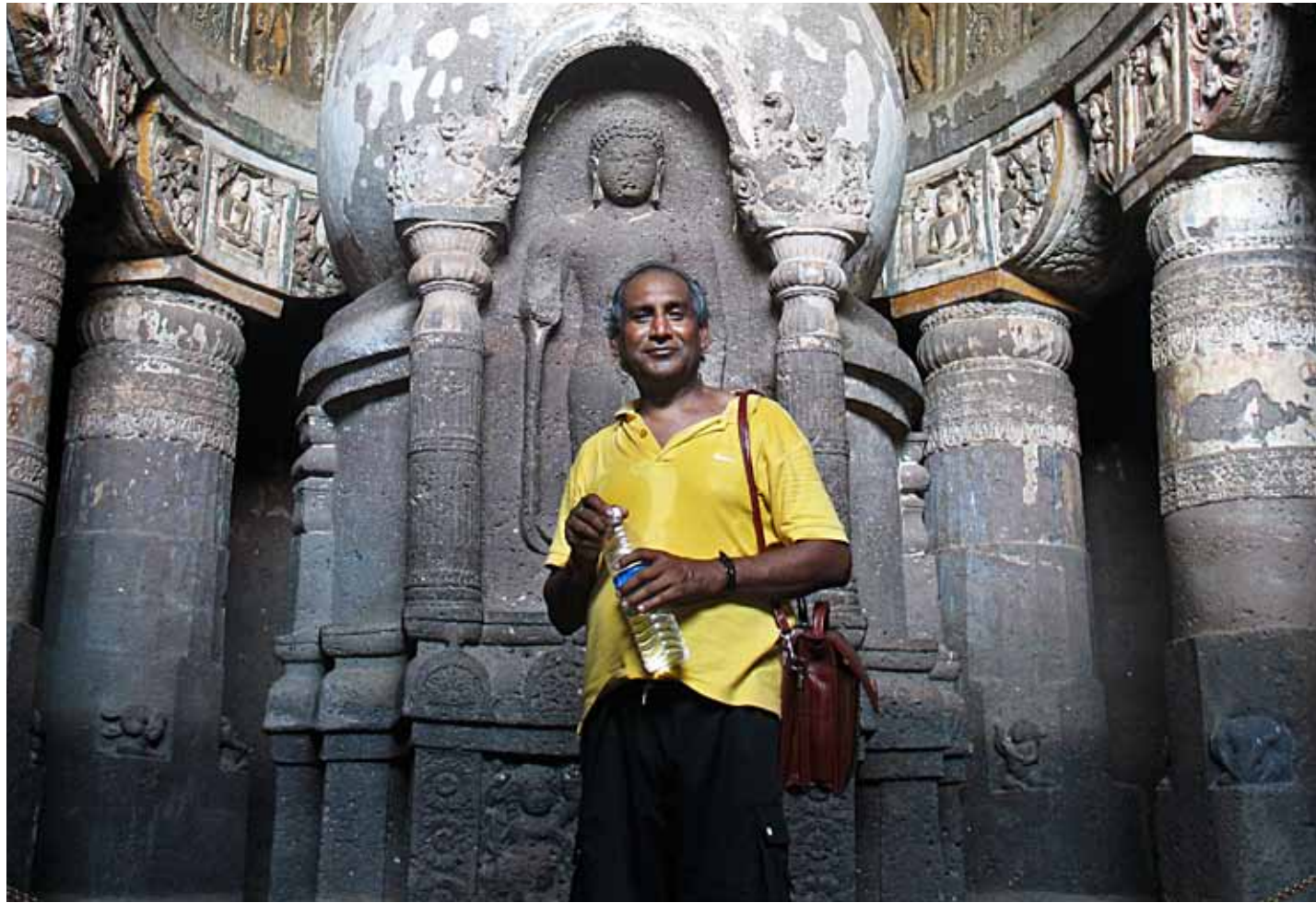
Untitled
Acrylic on Canvas
22.2 x13.5 inches
2016



Untitled
Acrylic on Canvas
24.6 x15 inches
2016



Untitled
Acrylic on Canvas
24 x19 inches
2016



Kalicharan Gupta

Studied at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, College of Art, New Delhi.

Seventeen One-man shows in India, Korea. Participated in fifty group shows. Curated India- Korea and Korea -India 2002,2012, 2013,2015,2016 Exhibitions workshops and seminars New Delhi .Participated Twenty five artist's Camp/ National and International workshops. Nominated as Commissioner of South Asian Countries and worked under National Museum of Contemporary art, Seoul Korea 2006. Slide shows and lectures in Korean Museum and colleges/universities 2006. Participated in 13th GIAF (Gongju International Art Fair) 2016 Korea. Participated in India Art Festival Delhi 2016. Honorary Director, Garhi Studios, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, 1994-97.Commissioner of Biennale of Visual Arts, Seychelles 1992. Nominated on 50th Anniversary of India's Independence-Curated an exhibition of three artists at Vladivostok, Russia through ICCR in 1997. Visited and participated in1995 Kwangju first International Biennale, Korea 1995. Junior and Senior Fellowship from Department of Culture, Govt. of India. National Award from Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi. Published Articles in leading Indian, Korean, Russian newspapers and magazines. Films on me telecast on Delhi Doordarshan four times.Chandigarh Lalit Kala Akademy makes a film on me.Works are in the collection of Lalit Kala Akademi. NGMA New Delhi, Govt.Museum Chandigarh, Chandigarh Lalit kala Akademy, Rajasthan Lalit Kala Akademy Jaipur, Kiran Nadar Museum and private collection in top industries, and abroad, .



Celebration-II . Acrylic on Canvas . 36 x33 inches . 2016



Untitled . Acrylic on Canvas . 27 x18 inches . 2016



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