





Untitled | 48" x 36" | Oil on canvas

Front cover : Untitled | 50" x 40" | Acrylic on canvas

Back cover : Untitled | 50" x 40" | Acrylic on canvas

SPIRIT OF GUJARAT

BY

VRINDAVAN SOLANKI

People Watching

An art assignment in the classroom led to a lifetime’s preoccupation for Vrindavan Solanki. It started with observing architecture of old houses in the by-lanes of Vadodara and Ahmedabad. And soon he was also sketching people. An anthropological interest in people watching has been central to the 67-year-old artist’s art career. And in that he has been anchored to the depiction of members of the nomadic tribe Rabari for several years.

The lifestyle of Rabari men, women and children is an intriguing one. They move around in Kutch, Rajasthan, Saurashtra and Gujarat. Professionally the wandering tribe rear camel, goats and cows and sell milk products. The women are known for their extensive embroidery skills used as much for their everyday garments, special occasions as well as for home décor. While the men wear only white clothes, in contrast the women’s clothes are in the brightest shades and embellished with mirror work. The women wear flowing skirts, embroidered blouses and cover their heads with dupattas, and men wear white dhotis and a short waist coat and coloured turban. The women are adorned in silver jewellery that has intricate motifs typical of the tribe. Their arms and necks are tattooed with traditional symbols that would seem mysterious to outsiders.

So it is only understandable that Solanki sat among them and sometimes across, to observe and understand the unique tribe through his art. His extensive work on the nomads captures their elegant movements and stances. He tries to capture and imagine for his audience what the relationship might be between the people gathered in his composition. The negative spaces between individuals evoke an environment of conversation. The hand gestures gracefully convey emotions. Contours suggest the fall and flow of the beautiful clothes worn by men and women. While not mimicking the intricate embroidered patterns Solanki evokes the complexities of the fabric they wear through shading and suggestive mark making.

Even as one wonders how Solanki restrains himself from using multiple colours to depict this colourfully and culturally rich tribe, one’s attention is drawn to their strong yet supple physique. Also, though he leaves out their remarkable facial features one is intrigued to know the nature of interaction between the individuals in his drawings. Who are they, what might they be doing or saying? Solanki’s anthropological interest in these people becomes the audience’s curiosity. He uses monotone colour gradation to depict their world. We see how he gently composes relationships between a mother and child, a group of women, and, between a man and woman. He captures them as they are walking, sitting, standing, talking and even while they silently gaze into the horizon. The proportion of the figures to the canvas surface makes one believe one is observing them up close, and not from a distance. The artist narrows the gaps between the viewer and his subject.

While drawing and the preoccupying subject have been constant, Solanki has been changing his rendering techniques through the years. He uses oil colour bars or acrylic colours in tones of sepia or black over the white of the canvas skillfully. From creating etching or crosshatch-like textures, to managing intensity of colour to depict lightness or heaviness, roundness or straight contours, we see a range of techniques at work.

Etchings made from 1979 to 2014 are significant part of this collection. These are being exhibited extensively for the first time. Here we see his first preoccupation with architecture of the old city areas in Ahmedabad apart from studies in nature. Yet another small, but recent collection within this suite concentrates on the Bombay theme. While depicting known landmarks of the city such as Haji Ali or Gateway of India he renders a nostalgic temperament by creating imaginary scenes in an imaginary light.

Solanki’s art depicts an India that rouses curiosity, not just in the mere attire or superficial physical aspects. For him his artistic practice is a journey to understand the lifestyle choices, and an understanding of the ways of life of the Rabari clan. Perhaps it is his way of connecting to Junagadh in Saurashtra, his birthplace. In the increasingly modern ways our life is shaped, he pulls us back into a world that co-exists.

Jasmine Shah Varma

Born in 1942 to a middle class family of coppersmiths in Junagadh, Gujarat, Solanki was making sketches and drawings when he was 10 and by the age of 14 had decided that he wanted to be an artist. Solanki has always been fascinated by the pragmatism, realism, fortitude and natural grace of the people of rural Gujarat he grew up observing, who whilst dealing with their daily challenges found time to engage in dance, craft, design and colour. His career which commenced in 1968 when he completed his study at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Baroda has till date been dedicated to capturing on canvas this indomitable spirit of the people of Gujarat and of the various historic structures which he has observed over the decades.

Solanki does not paint faces and yet captures the spirit and persona of his subjects by painting their body language. In his early works of ink on paper he sketched rural landscapes and structures, and then excelled in his black and white renderings on canvas which conveyed the inner light of his subjects by leaving some portions blank. Solanki has thereafter successfully experimented with earth colours which are yellow, red and orange. His recent coloured works are infused with a special glow of spiritual light and Solanki succeeds in capturing a wide range of emotions through his unique style which gives emphasis to the body language of his subjects and leaves the face blank.

Mumbai has played an important role in Solanki’s life and career, as he studied at the JJ school of fine arts from 1963 to 1964, held his first solo exhibition in 1969 at the Jehangir Art Gallery, and now after a hiatus of 8 years returns to Mumbai with his 44th solo exhibition.

- The Viewing Room



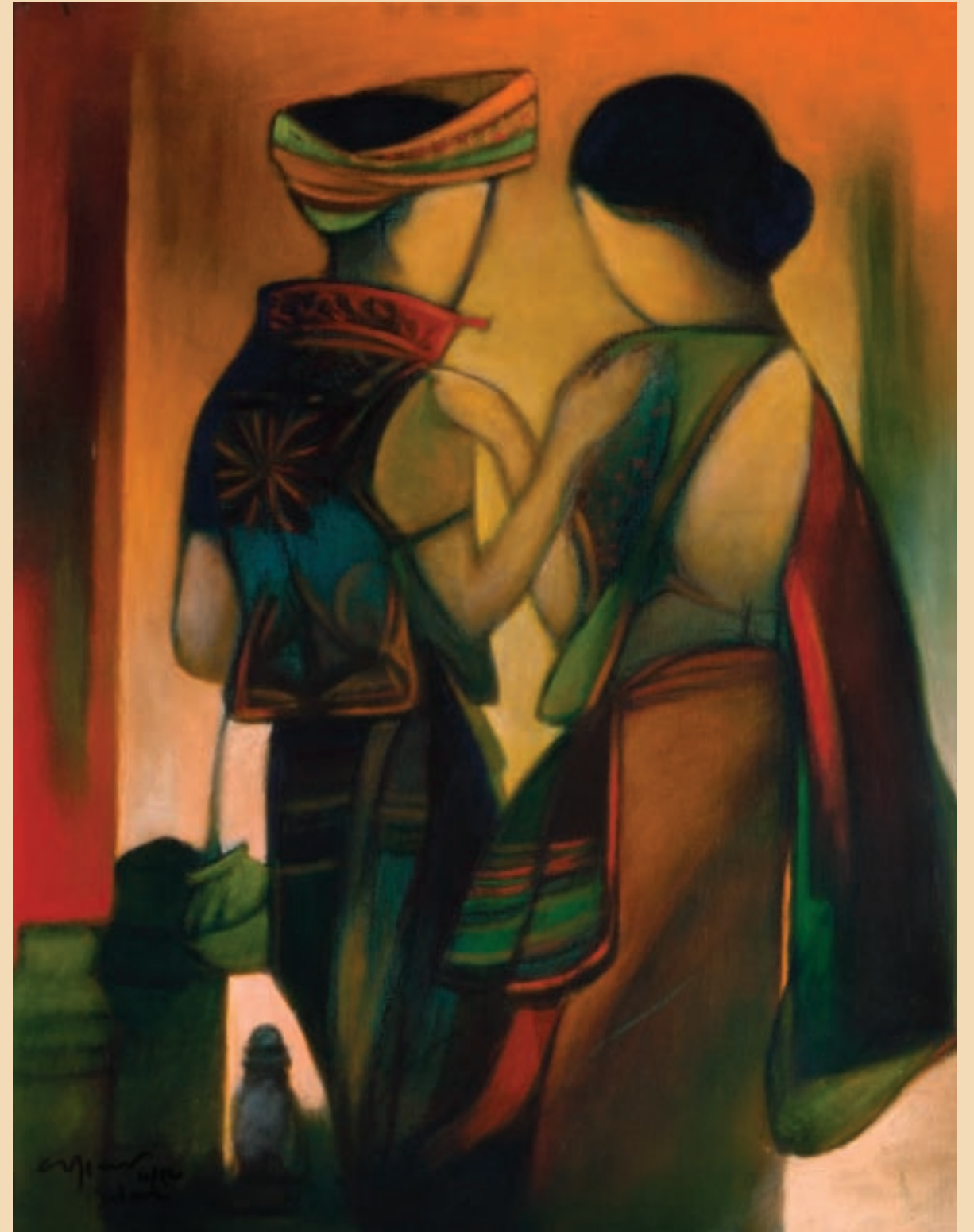
Untitled | 48" x 36" | Oil on canvas



Untitled | 26" x 20" | Acrylic on canvas



Untitled | 26" x 20" | Acrylic on canvas



Untitled | 26" x 20" | Acrylic on canvas



Untitled | 48" x 72" | Oil on canvas



Untitled | 40"x 42"
Acrylic on canvas



Untitled | 24"x 24"
Oil on canvas



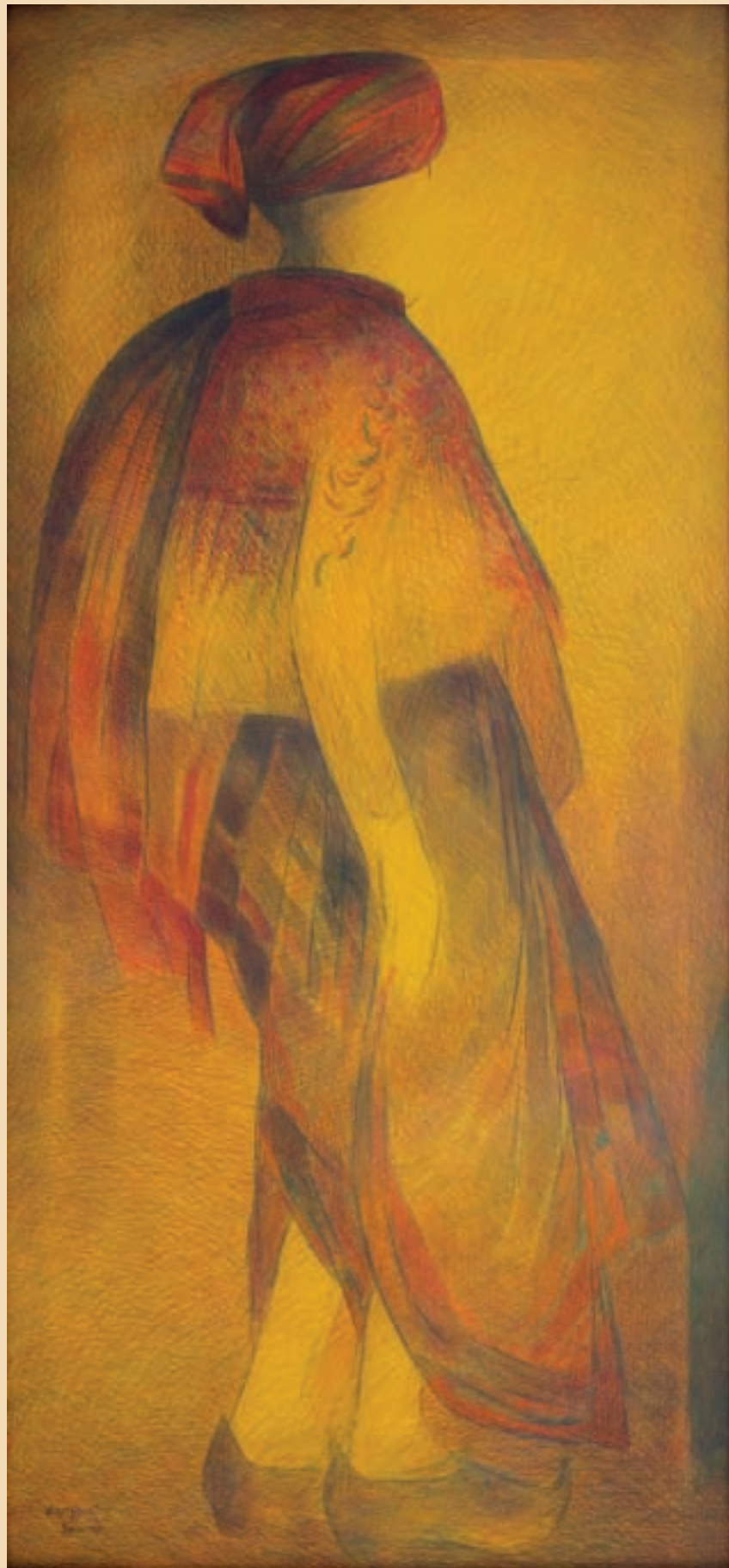
Untitled | 40"x 42"
Acrylic on canvas



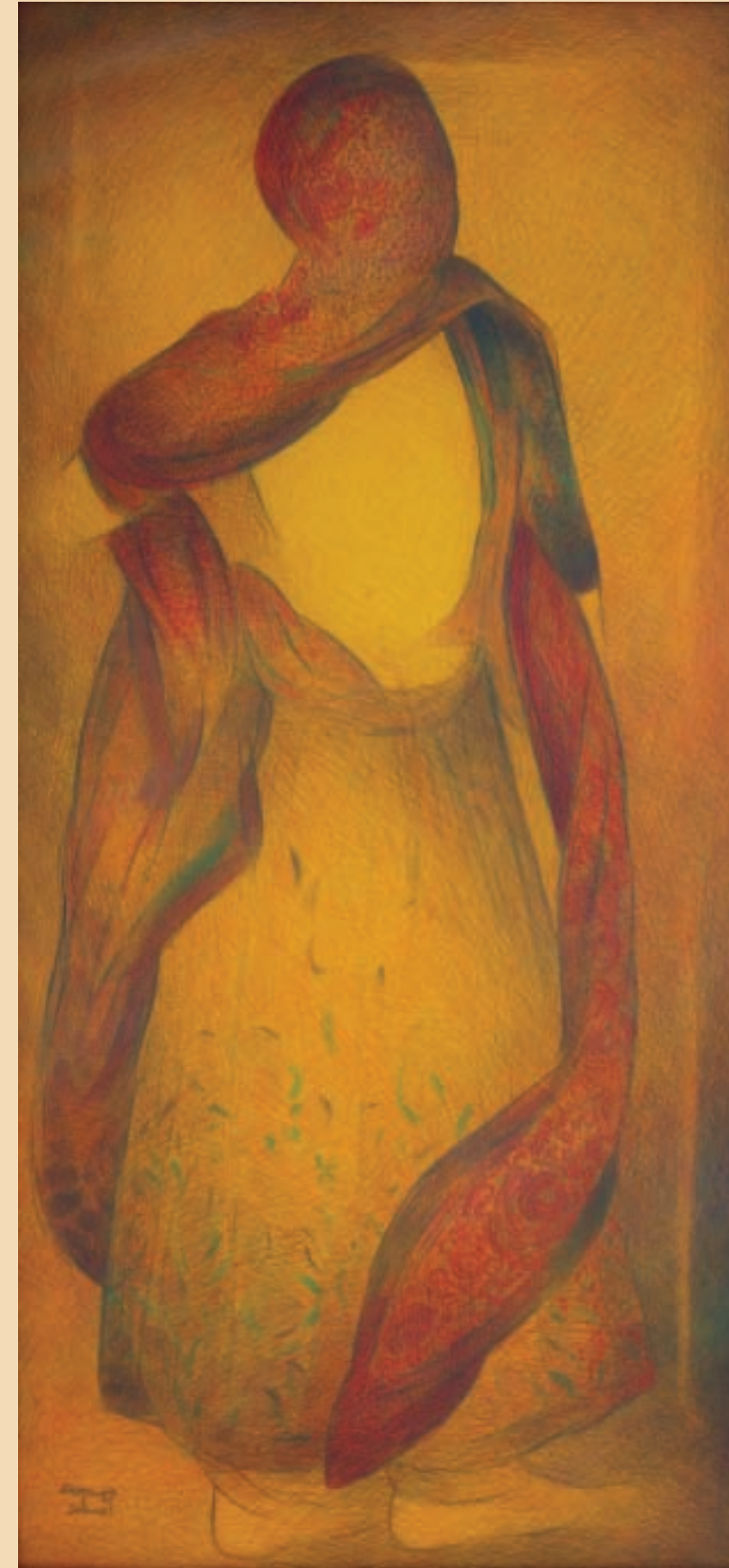
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Oil on canvas



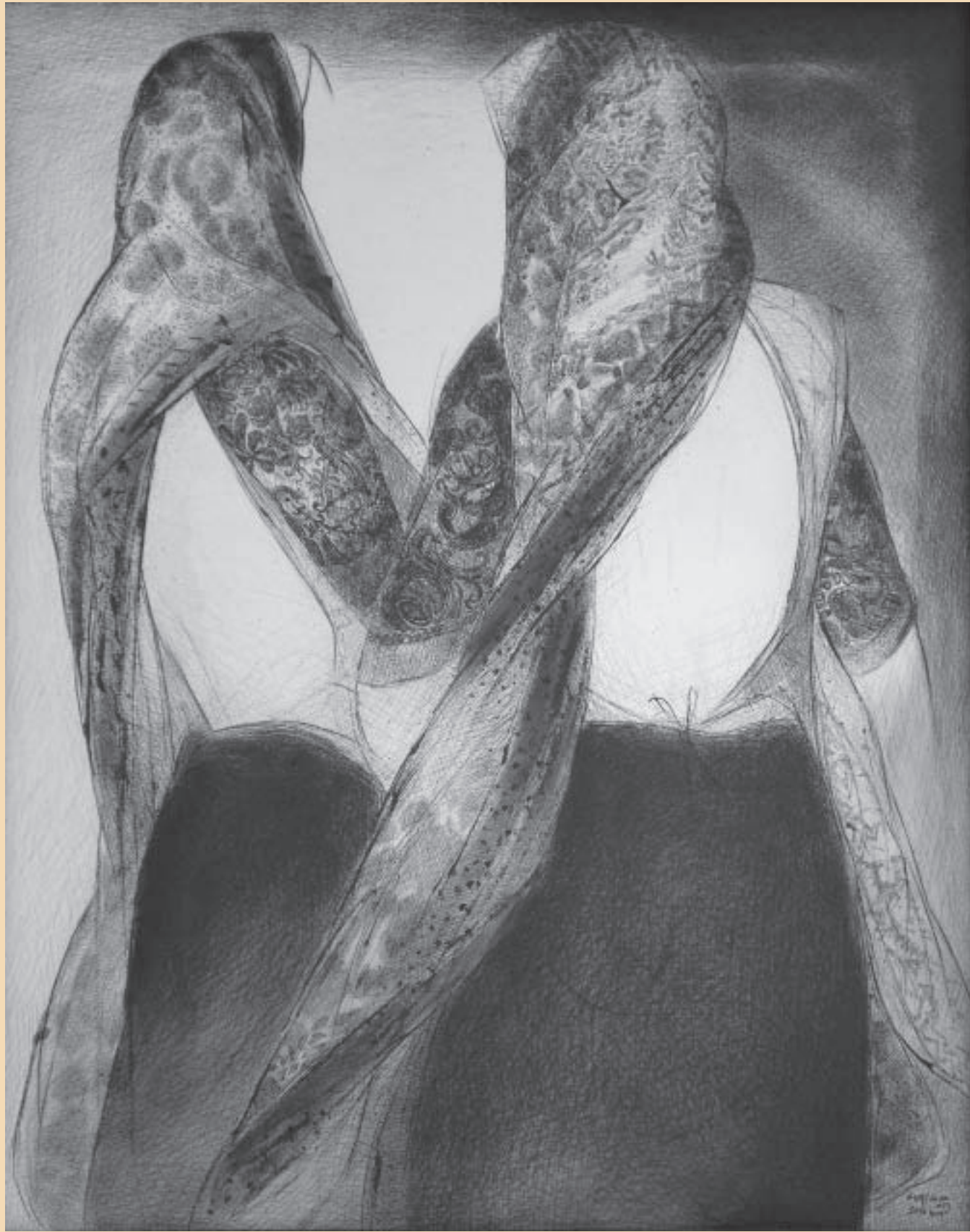
Untitled | 36"x 48"
Acrylic on canvas



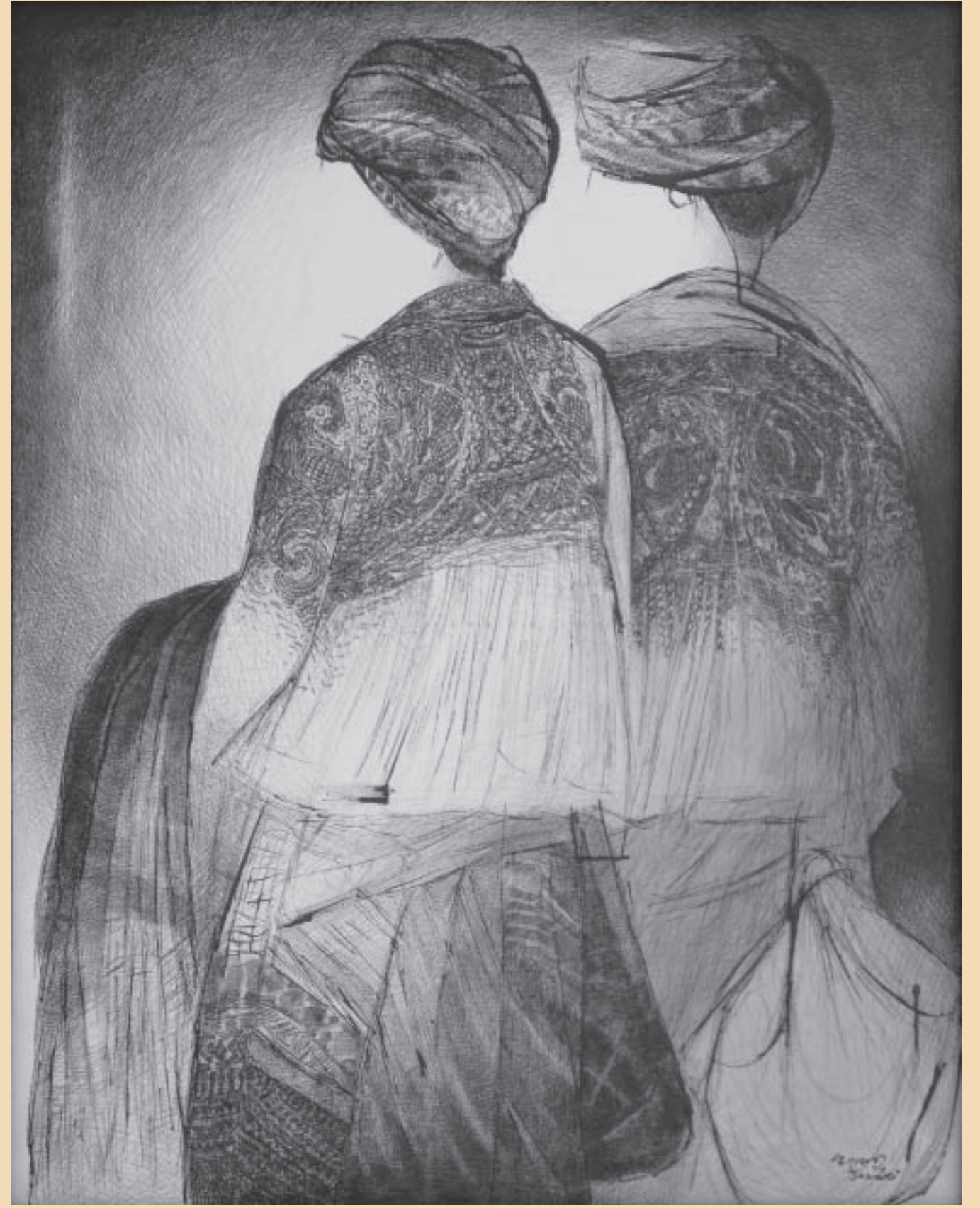
Untitled | 60"x 28"
Acrylic on canvas



Untitled | 60"x 28"
Acrylic on canvas



Untitled | 40"x 32" | Acrylic on canvas



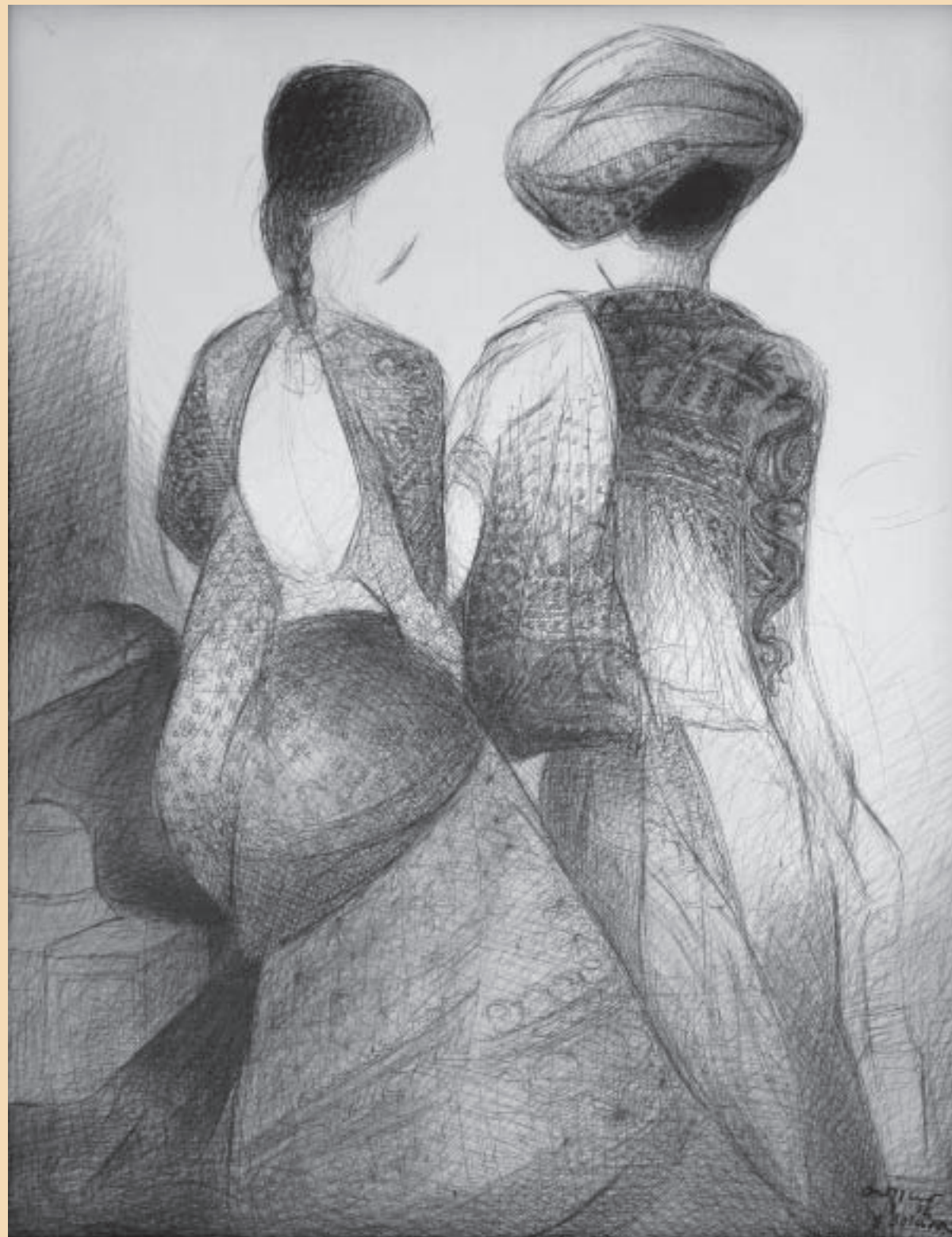
Untitled | 40"x 32" | Acrylic on canvas

Untitled | 32"x 40"
Oil on canvas





Untitled | 26" x 20"
Acrylic on canvas



Untitled | 26" x 20"
Acrylic on canvas



Untitled | 40" x 50"
Acrylic on canvas



Untitled | 50" x 39" | Acrylic on canvas



Untitled | 28" x 26" | Oil on canvas



Untitled | 60" x 24"
Acrylic on canvas



Untitled | 60" x 32"
Oil on canvas



Untitled | 48" x 72" | Oil on canvas



Untitled | 60" x 32"
Acrylic on canvas



Untitled | 13.78" x 11.9" | Etching



Untitled | 9.65" x 13"
Etching



A Selection of Etchings



Vrindavan Solanki

1942 Born - Junagadh, Gujarat, India
1980 Diploma in Painting, MS University, Vadodara
1982 Post Diploma in Graphics, MS University, Vadodara
1982-87 Visiting Faculty NID, Ahmedabad
1987-90 Member of Lalit Kala Akadami, Gujarat

Honour

2006 Gaurav padak, Junagadh Mahotsav-2006, Vibrint Gujarat
2006 A Chapter about the artist in a text book ‘Chitrakala’, as a part of curriculum to10th class by Gujarat State Education Board
2008-09 Lalit Kala Gaurav purskar, Gujarat Lalit Kala Akadamy, Ahmedabad

Solo Shows

1969 First Solo Show, Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai
1971 Drawings on Saurastra, Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai
1972 B&W Drawings, Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai
1973 Exhibition of Drawings, Triveni Art Gallery, Delhi
1973 Drawings of Landscapes, Triveni Art Gallery, Delhi
1974 Recent Drawings, Taj Art Gallery, Mumbai
1975 Drawings of Junagadh, Max Muller Bhavan, Mumbai
1978 Drawings, Art Heritage, Delhi
1978 Charcool on Paper, Max Muller Bhavan, Mumbai
1980 Graphics & Drawings, Contemporary Art Gallery, Ahmedabad
1981 Drawings, Taj Art Gallery, Mumbai
1983 Drawings, Taj Art Gallery, Mumbai

1985 Homage to my beloved mother-Drawings
Exibition, Taj Art Gallery, Mumbai
1987 Drawings, Contemporary Art Gallery, Ahmedabad
1987 Drawings, Contemporary Art Gallery, Mumbai
1988 Drawings, Grindlays Art Gallery by Sharan Apparao, Chennai
1989 Drawings, Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai
1990 Drawings, Vithi Art Gallery, Vadodara
1990 Pen & Ink Drawings, Designscape Gallery,Mumbai
1991 Drawings, The Continetal Hotel Curepipe, Mauritius
1991 Drawings, Art Heritage, Delhi
1992 Couple-Series, Lalit Kala Akadami, Ahmedabad
1992 Couple-Series, Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai
1993 Couple-Series, Lalit Kala Akadami, Ahmedabad

1993 Couple-Series, Art Heritage, Delhi
1996 Acrylic on canvas, Ashle House, Chennai
1996 Drawings on canvas & paper, Crimson Art Gallery, Bangalore
1997 My People (Acrylic on canvas), Cymroza Art Gallery, Mumbai
1997 India-My people my land, Wallace Gallery, New-York
1999 My land my people, Cymroza Art Gallery, Mumbai
1999 Black & White, Renaissance Gallery, Bangalore
2001 Acrylic on canvas, Yatra & Reflection, London
2001 Mother & Child, Cymroza Art Gallery, Mumbai
2002 Recent works, Prakrit Art Gallery, Chennai
2002 Recent works, 127 At The Kemps, Mumbai
2003 Faceless Face, Cymroza Art Gallery, Mumbai
2003 Mumbai-The Turning Point, Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai
2004 Recent Paintings, Marvel Art Gallery, Ahmedabad
2005 Silhouettes, The Renaissance Art Gallery, Bangalore
2007 Black & White 2006, Cymroza Art Gallery, Mumbai
2009 Dignity & Grace: Ethnic Echoes, Art Heritage, New Delhi
2010 Silent Conversation, Marvel Art Gallery, Ahmedabad
2011 My People: a traveling show, Prakrit Arts, Chennai, Time & Space Art Gallery, Bangalore, Kalakriti Art Gallery, Hyderabad
2013 The Classic Touch: Gallery Veda, Chennai