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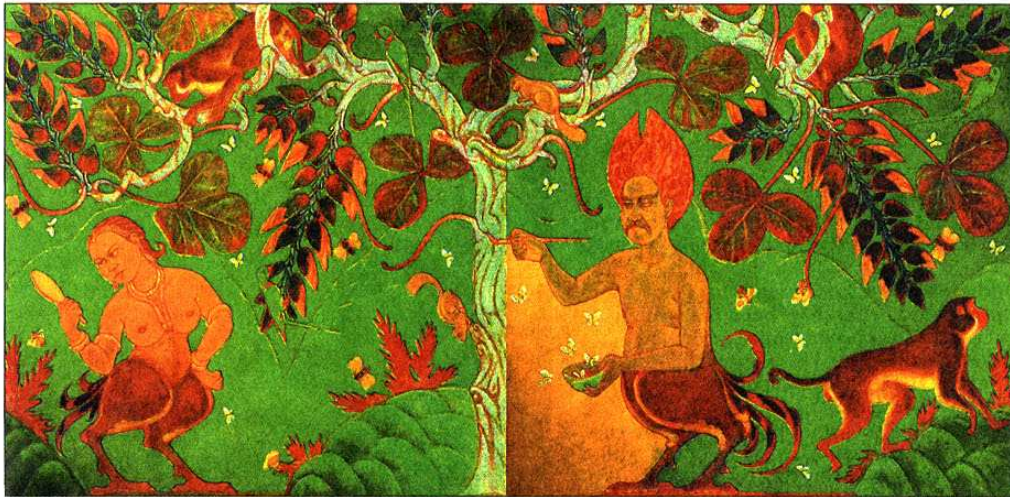


PHOTO: SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM

CAN YOU FIND HIM?: In *Birth Of Palash Tree* (above) by Achutan Ramachandran, the artist has painted himself into the piece as the fiery-haired half-man, half-bird.

Spot the painter

Renowned Indian painter Achutan Ramachandran puts himself in his paintings as an onlooker or narrator

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ARTS REPORTER

INDIAN painter Achutan Ramachandran likes to paint himself into his artworks.

The artist's face, framed by wavy hair parted down the centre, appears in one painting on a half-man, half-bird figure. In another, his face is transplanted onto the body of a fish.

These fantastical paintings are part of an ongoing exhibition of modern Indian art at the Singapore Art Museum (SAM).

Called *From The Everyday To The Imagined*, it showcases more than 40 paintings and sculptures by the stalwarts of modern Indian art, broadly defined as art from 1947 – the year India gained independence – to the present day.

The subjects of these artworks range from everyday social realities of the sub-continent to the rich tapestry of Indian mythology.

The artistic passage to India includes satirical sculptures by Chintala Jagdish, the portraits by artist-printmaker Lalu Prasad Shaw, and large, poetic triptyches of lotus ponds painted at dawn, noon and dusk by Ramachandran.

The works are on loan from collectors abroad or drawn from SAM's permanent collection.

Ramachandran, 72, a renowned veteran Indian painter, is one of the anchor artists in this show, exhibiting the lotus paintings and four other watercolours.

On the phone with Life! from New Dehli where

he is based, he says that he paints himself into his works as "an onlooker and the narrator of a story".

Indeed, in *Birth Of Palash Tree*, he is a kinnara (a mythical half-human, half-bird) with flaming orange hair, holding a paintbrush and working on an unfinished section of his canvas. This is an allegory about being the creator of his luxuriant, stylised natural world, populated by another kinnara, monkeys, a green parrot and beetles amid the tree's blooms and leaves.

He is also present as a silent observer, in the form of a bird, snail and bat in other landscapes inspired by ordinary folk from Indian villages.

Despite being collected and exhibited worldwide, he insists on being an Indian artist first and foremost.

He says: "Art to me is like food. You can't change your food taste. You can be in the United States and eat hamburgers all the time, but you yearn for Indian food."

"My only concern is to be recognised by my own people rather than in the international context."

Born in Kerala in 1935, he was a lecturer and professor of the arts before becoming an artist.

He now lives in New Dehli with his painter wife, Chameli Ramachandran, 58. His son, 38, and daughter, 39, work in Alabama in the US and Toronto, Canada, respectively.

He says of his work: "To some people, modernity in art comes from abroad. But if you're authentic and honest about your cultural situation, then that's modernity."

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> *From The Everyday To The Imagined* is on at the Singapore Art Museum until Jan 16 next year. Museum hours are 10am to 7pm daily, and until 9pm on Fridays. Admission is \$8 for adults and \$4 for students and senior citizens.