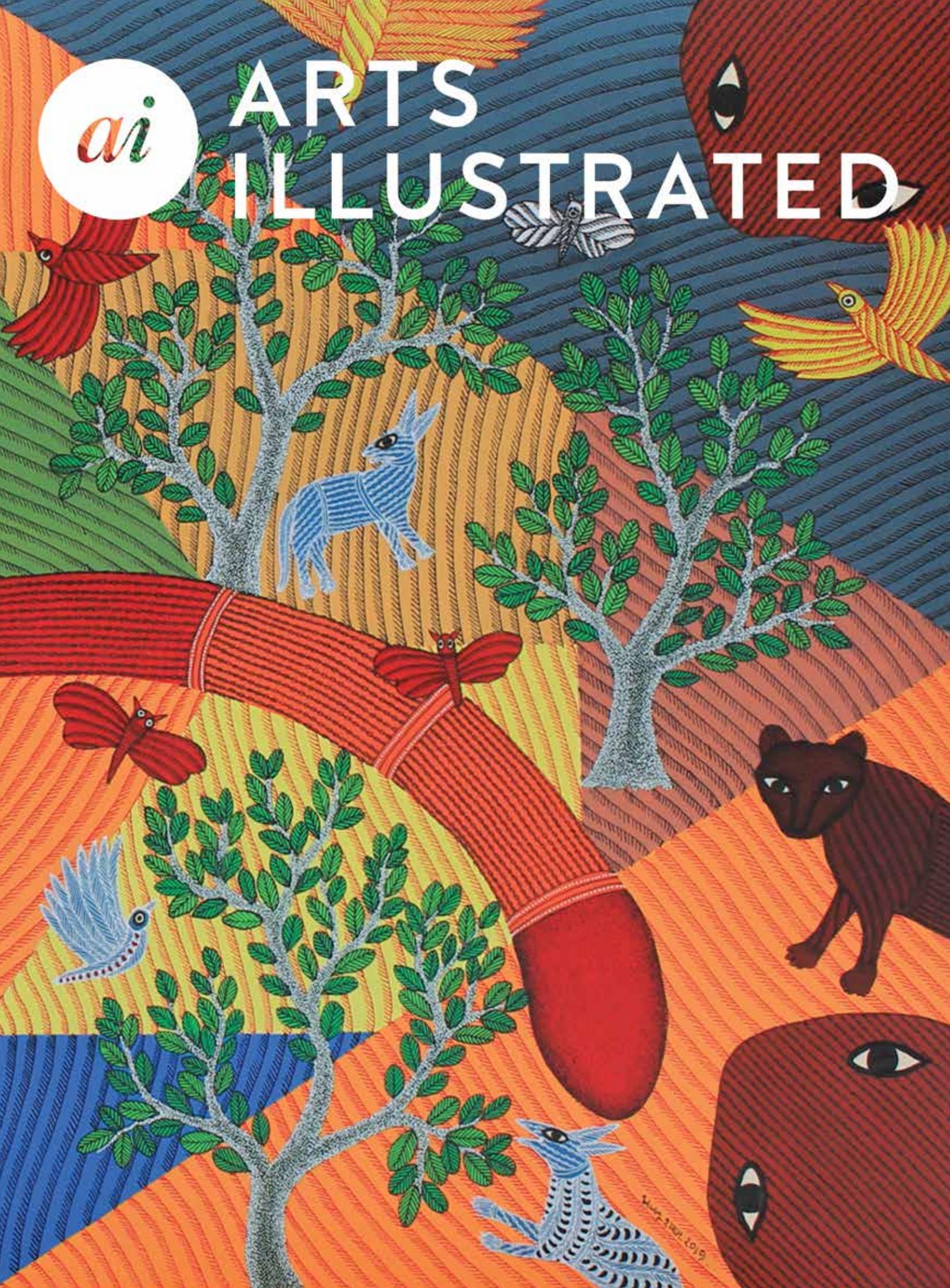




ARTS ILLUSTRATED



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Team

Sales Offices

Chennai

127 T.T.K. Road, Alwarpet,
Chennai 600018
phone +91 82203 08777
phone +91 44 4216 5100
sales@artsillustrated.in

Coimbatore

Jenney's Residency
Opp CIT Avinashi Road,
Coimbatore Aerodrome Post,
Coimbatore 641014
phone +91 82203 08777
sales@artsillustrated.in

Abu Dhabi

Flat No. 701, 7th Floor,
H.E.Shaikh Tahnoon Bin Moh'd
Al Nahyan Building, (Arab Bank
Building), Al Nasr Street,
Abu Dhabi, U.A.E.
phone +97 15631 89405
sales@artsillustrated.in

Singapore

No. 1, Kim Seng Promenade,
12-01 Great World City (East
Tower), Singapore 237994
sales@artsillustrated.in

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Publisher & Chairman

Vincent Adaikalraj

Editor

Praveena Shivram

Consulting Editor

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Subeditor

Vani Sriranganayaki Vanamamalai

Copy Editor

Sethulakshmy S Nayar

Graphic Designers

Chenchudar Chellakannu
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Administrative Officer

Ramakrishnan

Gallery Manager, Art Houz Gallery

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Contributors

Abha Iyengar

Arti Sandhu

Meera Rajagopalan

Poonam Ganglani

Rehana Munir

Romain Maitra

Saritha Rao Rayachoti

Seema Massot

Shantanu Prakash

Siddhartha Das

Suzanne McNeill

Swati Negi

Published by

LA 5 Global Publications

#127, T.T.K. Road, Alwarpet,

Chennai 600018, India

phone +91 44 4216 5100

info@artsillustrated.in

editorial@artsillustrated.in

sales@artsillustrated.in

Special Thanks

Bandana Kumari

Bhajju Shyam

C. P. Satyajit

Dr. Sunil Awachar

C. S. Krishna Setty

Krithika Subrahmanian

Pa. Ranjith

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Publisher's note

After the rains, that unmistakable smell of wet earth – *mann vasanai*, as we say in Tamil – is like an old, weathered hand reaching out from the depths of the earth to meet us. In that gesture of reaching up, it carries with it a deep-rooted sense of knowing. We see that gesture in a young sapling or an ancient tree, and are reminded, time and again, that it is the soil beneath our feet that makes us stand tall.

And, so, our theme this issue is simply that – Soil – with all the images, metaphors and symbolism it carries: the politics of caste, identity and belonging; the artfulness (and earthworm-y quality) of constant restructuring and relevance; the power and influence of privilege and perceived dominance; and even those sensory filaments of memory and nostalgia unconsciously (and consciously) conditioned with dollops of prejudice.

Vincent Adaikalraj



Vincent Adaikalraj

Arpita Singh | Six Decades of Painting

JANUARY 30 TO JUNE 30, 2019, NEW DELHI

Reviewed by RAHUL KUMAR

The Kiran Nadar Museum of Art (KNMA) presented the first-ever retrospective of artist Arpita Singh. Over 240 works on display covered a detailed representation of the artist's career spanning six decades, the earliest work being a 1961 painting. Arpita's practice flourished at a time when there were few women artists from India who were going global. The art scene in the country in the 1960s was male-dominated. Both the practitioners and teachers of art were primarily men and all the major art movements such as the Progressive Art Group and Group 1890 were formed by male artists. The impact of these practices fuelled Arpita's work. Fairly early in her career, she realised her interest in painting the human figure. 'Arpita credits the influence of Sailoz Mookherjea for the style in which she applies paint and Biren De for the sense of anatomical proportions in her works,' explained Roobina Karode, Director and Chief Curator, KNMA. The retrospective titled *Submergence: In the midst of here and there* was made possible with the 61 works that KNMA owns, and borrowed paintings from various private and institutional collections globally, including the Glenbarra Art Museum, Japan.

The show also dedicates a separate section to her abstract works, many of which are minimalistic ink-on-paper. Her interest in strokes and the structure of her canvas is evident from this body of drawings. The figurative works, forming the majority at the retrospective show, are found all along her practice, although the more recent ones are informed through a sense of abstraction. 'Arpita is a "reluctant feminist". While her subjects revolve around the theme of the feminine, she did not attack the patriarchal domination of the time,' says Karode.

The bold use of purple and pink colours, even to depict horrific scenes of war and bloodshed are unique to her practice. The brush work has a certain rustic rawness to it. This balance of expressive strokes with a deliberate palette of pastel colours is an important aspect of her work. The most significant works in the exhibit also bring out her emphasis on space-making, which often utilises flat renditioning that lacks a sense of dimension. Arpita also depends extensively on her visual memory. 'In a significant work titled *My mother*, she began with the portrait of her mother, but divided her canvas diagonally with an image of a road. She then reminisced pictures from television of a riot scene and added dead bodies on the road,' adds Karode. She uses a direct approach to display the idea of feminism, where the female nude is used to express the vulnerability of women in society. For instance, in a large configuration with other bold themes forming the core of a work, one odd nude figure would be introduced with ease. This sort of the naïve approach eventually became sophisticated, making her work unpredictable. And this incoherence itself became her spirit.



Arpita Singh, *Woman Smoking*, Watercolour on paper, 30" x 23", 2005. Collection: Anjolie Ela Menon.

Arpita Singh, *Untitled*, Poster paint on paper, 32.7" x 26.7", 1981. Collection: KNMA.

Arpita Singh, *Untitled*, Ink, pastel and poster paint on paper, 27.7" x 19.7", 1981. Collection: KNMA.

Arpita Singh, *Journey*, Oil on Canvas 42.5" x 42.5", 1971. Collection: KNMA.

All Images Courtesy of the artist and Kiran Nadar Museum of Arts, New Delhi.



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