

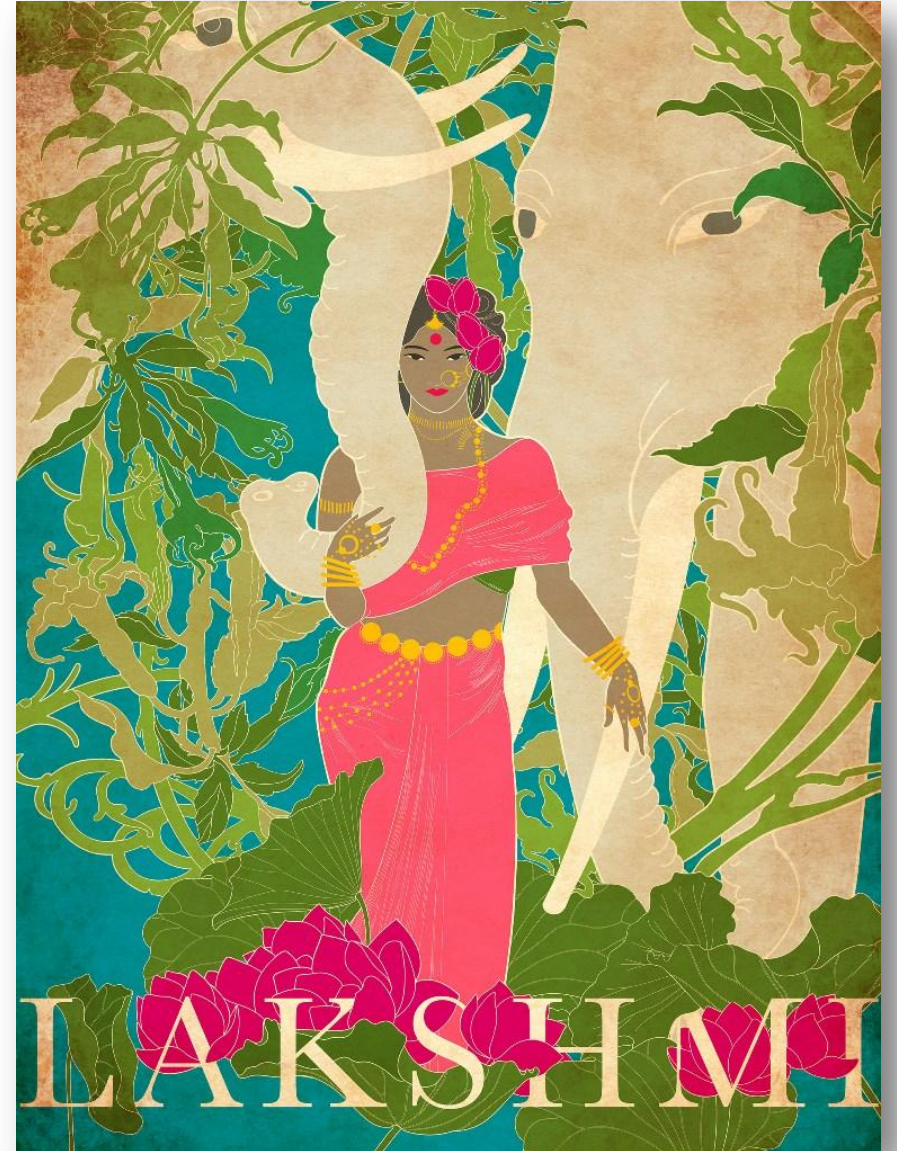
On the occasion of the 20th anniversary
Shrishti Art Gallery presents

Devi is in the Detail

A solo exhibition of artworks by Smruthi Gargi Eswar

This is the exhilarating and unfathomably complex universe of the Goddesses appearing as they do, in various avatars in Hindu mythology. An exploration not just of duality but of multiplicity. A probe - compelling, uncompromising, and fearless – like women themselves.

The Devi in us is the Woman in all goddesses.



SMRUTHI GARGI ESWAR



The difference is a subtle one, but it changes everything - it lies in the way we are seen. Shakti does not reserve a special consideration just for us. We are seen as part of all creation. And she in turn is not affected by our gaze. Her allies lie in nature.

Durga, also a goddess from the forest, has one foot past our door – in our homes. Invoked by warriors and worshiped for an alliance, she shows a tenderness, that leads to battling for us. A warrior mother, who indulges our notions of good and bad, and of bravery and virtues.

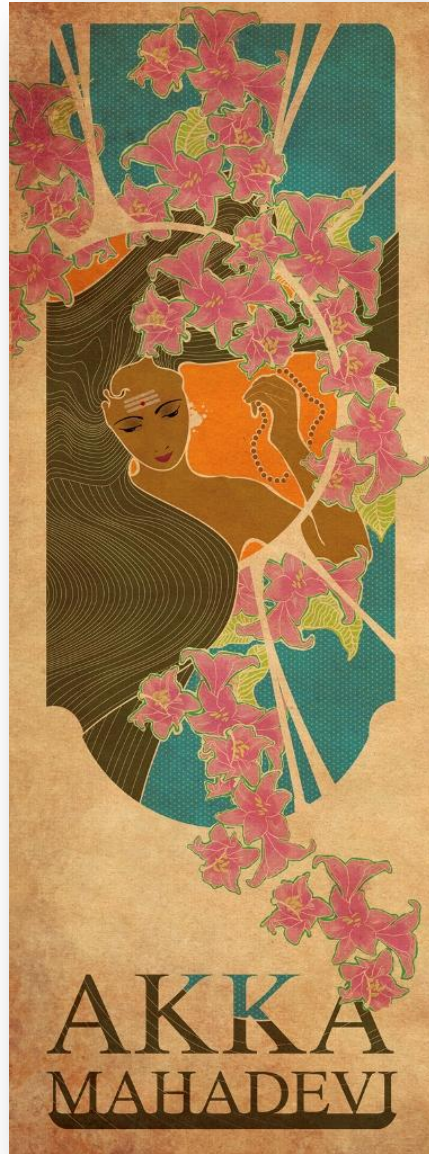
Shakti can surprise us, with her disregard of our perceptions. Her justice is that of the wild. She has the power to confirm our ignorance and fear. Destroying our illusions of conquering nature – not regarding us either positively or negatively. They seem to run on parallel lines, converging now and again, as part of a larger pattern we can't see or understand, seeming as one and then as two , again and again and again.

Durga and Shakti, K3 pigment print on archival paper, 36" x 60", 2022, Edition – 1/10, INR 45,000



Fortune and Knowledge don't always go together, for they are wanted so differently. Lakshmi the goddess of fortune, comes and goes as she likes. Changing lives on a whim, she is more desired than enjoyed. Nervous gods and humans wait for her to favor them and she completely aware of her agency, has a light hearted spirit only the opulent can have. Saraswati on the other hand, like knowledge is very hard to get. But when she arrives she stays. She can't be spent but can only be earned, Deep and evasive, and solid as a rock. In unison they give the world so much texture and color, filling our universe with everything we so desire.

Lakshmi and Saraswati, K3 pigment print on archival paper, 26" x 43", 2022, Edition – 1/10, INR 35,000



The serene visual tone of this composition is in keeping with one who thought herself to be without corporeal form. As natural as the flowers and animals of the forest with only her hair to cover her. She is the devotee of Shiva, the beautiful 12th century mystic, Akka Mahadevi. She seems to be a part of the blossoms that frame her. The personality emerging from her poetry - passionate, candid, strong minded and fearless has a strong feminist appeal as does her contribution to the Lingayat tradition where, remarkably, daughters have the same rights as sons. But Mahadevi's power goes beyond the earthly. Her transcendence and union with the divine is so direct and pure it is described in simple and evocative words: "white as a jasmine". She is worshiped and respected for her devotion and the path she made for women to access the divine as men do.

Akka Mahadevi, K3 pigment print on archival paper, 35" x 13", 2018, Edition – 6/10, INR 25,000



The oldest hymns were composed on her banks, a glorious beauty with her lilies and swans flowing through Punjab, Sindh and Rajasthan. A river of language, imagination and music she is Shatarupa – the goddess of infinite forms. All addressing the conception of creation – the one question – Who am I? In taking that step, from being wakeful to understanding, her unblinking eyes gather as her mind absorbs. For she, is the goddess, of all that is known and understood. She is knowledge. Immersed in music and texts, she remains aloof, claiming the sovereignty of the mind over every other reality. Watching syllable by syllable appear she witnesses the construction of knowledge. Interested in wisdom alone, calm and content in isolation, her journey was a solitary one. As a river – she shatters the separation between Purusha and Prakriti, mind and matter, body and soul, and the strange belief that nothing in nature leads to the mind.

Saraswati, K3 pigment print on archival paper, 36" x 27", 2020, Edition – Artist Print, INR 1,05,000



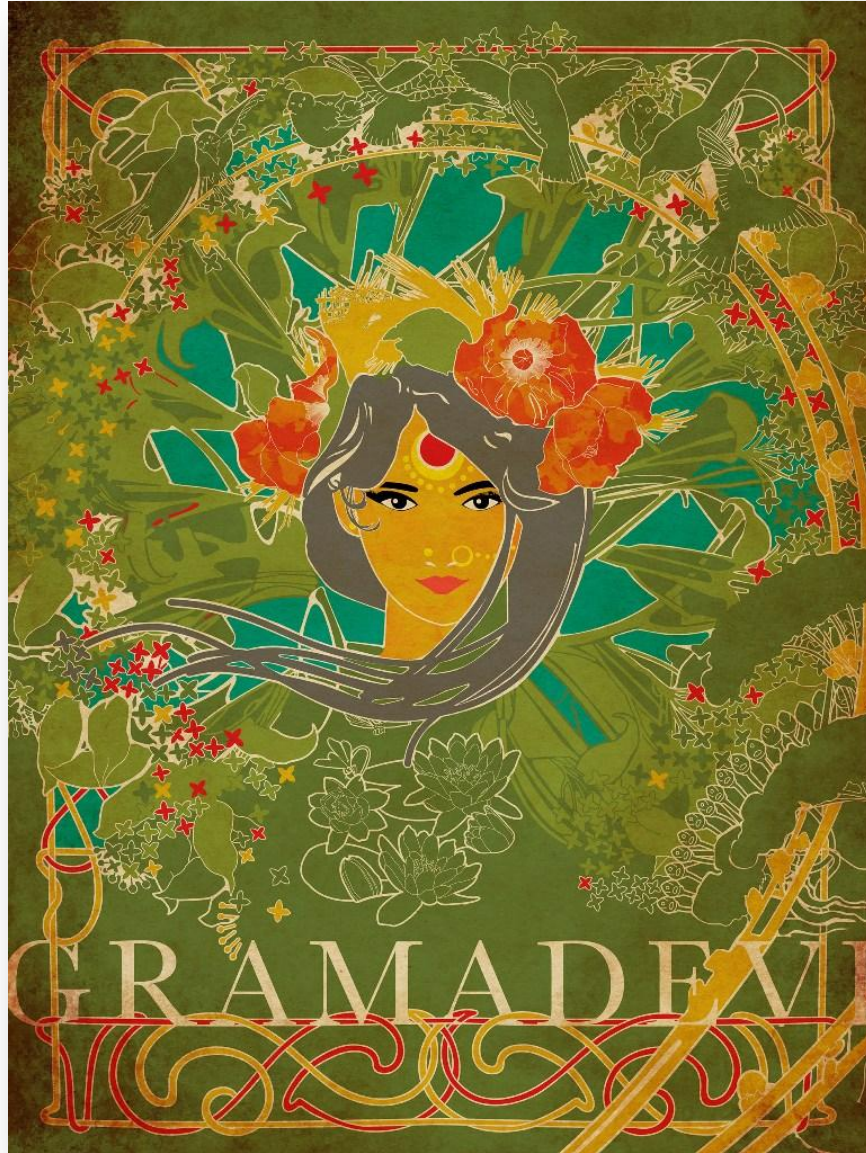
We leap into life, hoping to find the world, as she holds our hands, and helps us find ourselves. She is the Northern Star – a goddess for travellers, a leader for caravans in the literal. In the metaphorical, she navigates us through an ocean of existence. She warms our heart through the friends we make and fuels our courage to take unknown paths. A traveller between faiths, from Hinduism to Buddhism or the other way around, she crosses borders of every kind. We watch her light, travelling through diverse lands and various lives, as we hold on to a river of voices, with numerous stories of her origin. In one, she is born out of Kali's third eye, a goddess for justice, in another she comes from a Bodhisatva's teardrop – so filled with pain, it created a goddess of empathy and compassion. In the white snows of Tibet, she is reborn as a princess from the vastness of China, and still another from the mountains of Nepal. She appears and reappears, always with the perfected wisdom to guide, and to eventually, be the mother of all Buddhas.

*Tara, K3 pigment print on archival paper,
36" x 27", 2020, Edition – 7/10, INR 45,000*



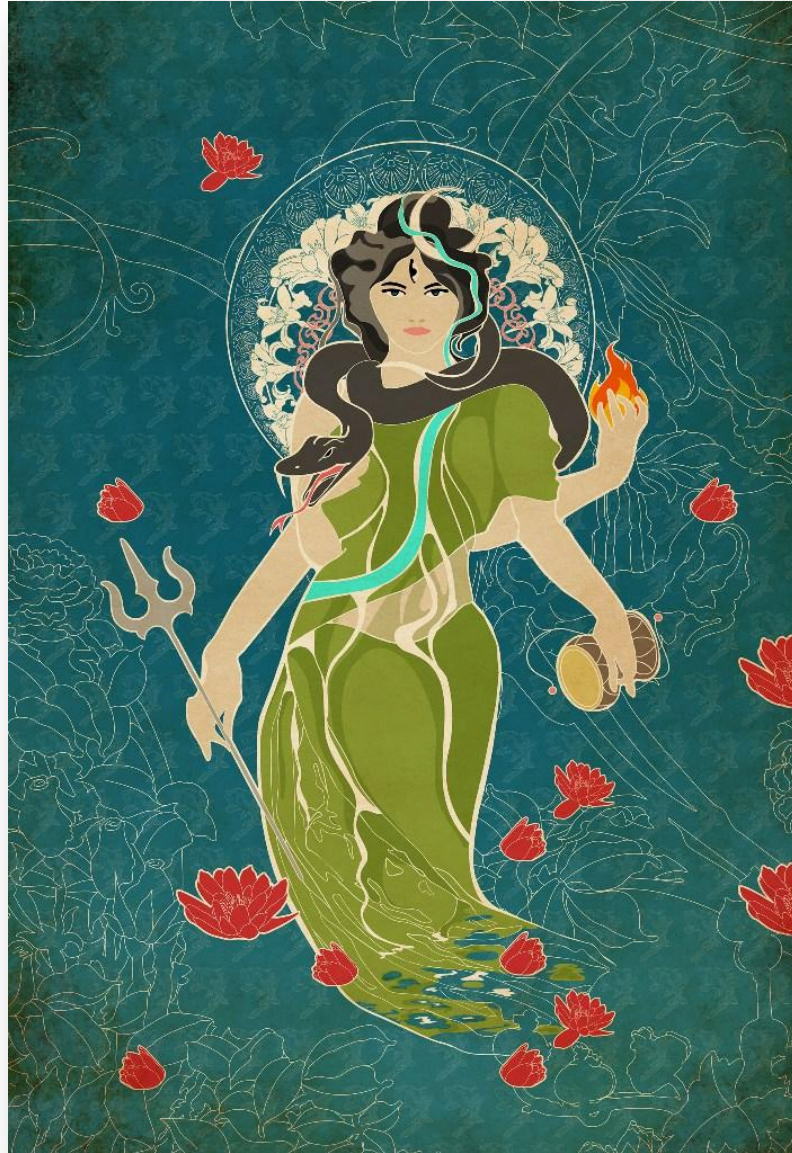
Without desire all of creation loses its fragrance and the god of desire himself was enchanting. In Kama's hands the sugarcane bow and flowered arrows are merely mischievous. And he paid with his life for playing with these wonderful weapons of desire. When he took aim, their effects were limited to passion, a trap that one falls into. In Kamakshi's hands, desire is expansive. A landscape to walk in, eyes wide open, a choice that feels like destiny. A desire for the world and the pleasure of being part of it. In sunshine and starlight, laughter and pain it grows, changing how we feel, what we see and the taste of everything we touch. Red is no longer alarming and blood changes meaning. In Draupadi's hands it is revenge, in Kali's it is destruction, and in Kamakshi's, it is life. We are not hunted but adored by the flowered archer. For some she is a fertile womb, a cleft in a rock that bleeds, marking the coming of monsoon. A season for desire, wisdom and experience - only a life well lived can know.

Kamakshi, K3 pigment print on archival paper, 36" x 27", 2020, Edition - 4/10, INR 35,000



A head sitting upright on the ground, under a tree, outside, at the edge of a village. Her eyes appear through a coat of vermillion. Her body, (underground we assume), is the village - with its houses, fields and pastures, and her fertility, keeping them abundant. With no temple or priest, the goddess is only tended to by the women. A sisterhood that celebrates their mother every day. She is not universal, but local, she is specific and personal. She is yours and she is mine and she lives outside our village. But once a year she comes undone, for her forests have been burnt, to sow again, her weeds uprooted and body fenced up and owned. Wild and hungry she demands blood, and the village rushes to ease, quenching her thirst she is made whole again. Feasts are cooked and sacrifices made to replenish her wildness. Gestures repeated year after year to make her strong and blossom. An apology for killing her forest, and gratitude, for the gift she has given. A process by which we rewild our mother year after year after year.

Gramadevi, K3 pigment print on archival paper, 36" x 27", 2021, Edition – 3/10, INR 25,000



Gentle and limpid, like a rivers' flow, this languid female form is none other than the most masculine of gods: Siva, appearing here as Gopika or divine milk maid, ready to take part in Krishnas' famed raas lila. The sublime strains of Krishnas' flute stir Siva into joining the raas lila or dance that Krishna, the god of love, enjoys with his bevy of Gopis in Vrindavan. As no male can enter Vrindavan, Siva dips himself into the waters of the Yamuna and emerges a beautiful maiden and the two gods dance. Radha points out a subtle otherness in the atmosphere and is told by Krishna who the new dancer is – "He is Lord Siva, says Krishna", my teacher. You wouldn't want me to ask him to leave, would you?" A wonderful world of variation and abundance - for that is what Vrindavan means – a fluid, flowing where gods slip in and out of different sexual forms, dance, love, celebrate pleasure, enjoy beauty. Here Siva the Nataraj, the supreme dancer who dances the cosmos into existence, plays with the god of love, and the cosmos is animated into being.

Gopeshwar(Shiva), K3 pigment print on archival paper, 36" x 27", 2020, Edition – 8/10, INR 50,000



How clean the goddess of pollution looks. The origins of this goddess and what she stands for, was at a time, recognized for traveling far beyond the shackles of the cast system and was not reduced to the pollution identity. Everything about this rendition speaks of purity – the simplicity of the stance, the youthful innocence, the honest, open gaze, even the light ornamentation of the crescent moon. Through penance to the goddess Ambaal, an avatar of Lakshmi, the “low caste” sage, Matang, seeks elevation to Brahma Rishi. When the boon cannot be granted he asks instead that he be recognized as Ambaal’s father. Ambaal is reborn to Matang as a primal form of Saraswati: the goddess Matangi. She who kindles knowledge born of contemplation, also refers to our ability to listen, the origin of true understanding. Matangi is accessible to all as no vows or ceremonies are needed to ask for her blessing. She welcomes offerings of leftovers by unwashed hands. Caste thus becomes irrelevant to the seeker of enlightenment. Life cannot thrive in a sterile environment. And Matangi ushers us out, Offering us instead the throb of life; an open landscape of darkness and radiance.

Matangi, K3 pigment print on archival paper, 36” x 27”, 2018, Edition – Final Artist Print, INR 75,000



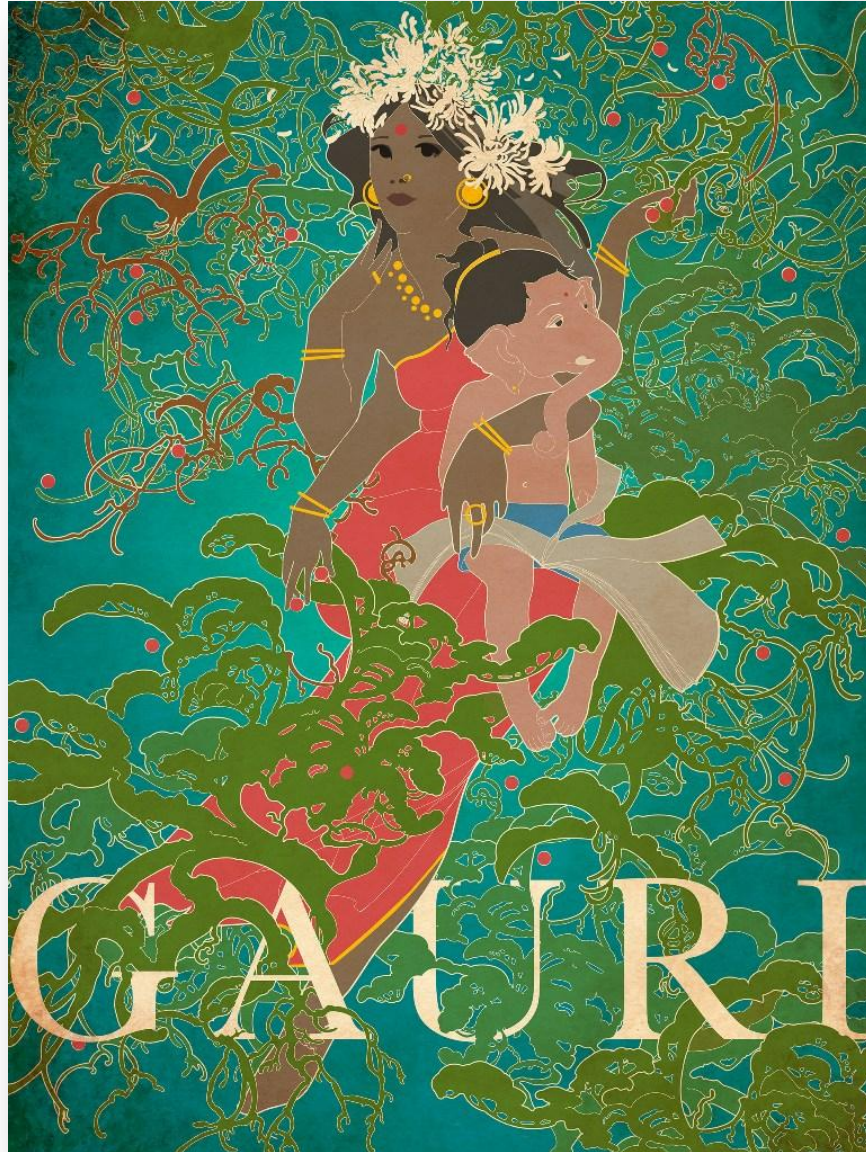
With muted tones, controlled shading and the blotting out of any light the artist wants us to appreciate the implicit: the power of love. We are to engage with the goddess with comprehension, and joy. And the concept of the Whole is put before us at all times. So here is Radha, childhood friend and lover of Krishna, in a fuller form as Earth Mother – slightly paunchy, full breasted, a milky cow by her side. It is a voluptuous image, inherently and powerfully erotic. The faint outline of a peacock feather is the only sign of Krishna. But the focus is Radha. Radha is woman in her entirety – lover, friend, sister, daughter, mother. She is also a wife but not Krishna's. The power and purity of her love is such that it transcends both social requirements and human frailties such as marriage or jealousy. Radha is complete unto herself. And the love that radiates from her is equally complete. It is, in fact, a celebration – in this case, of Krishna, asking nothing from him, not marriage nor fidelity. It is love that is spiritually and physically full: unconditional, eternal and liberating.

Radha, K3 pigment print on archival paper, 42.4" x 36", 2018, Edition – 5/10, INR 50,000



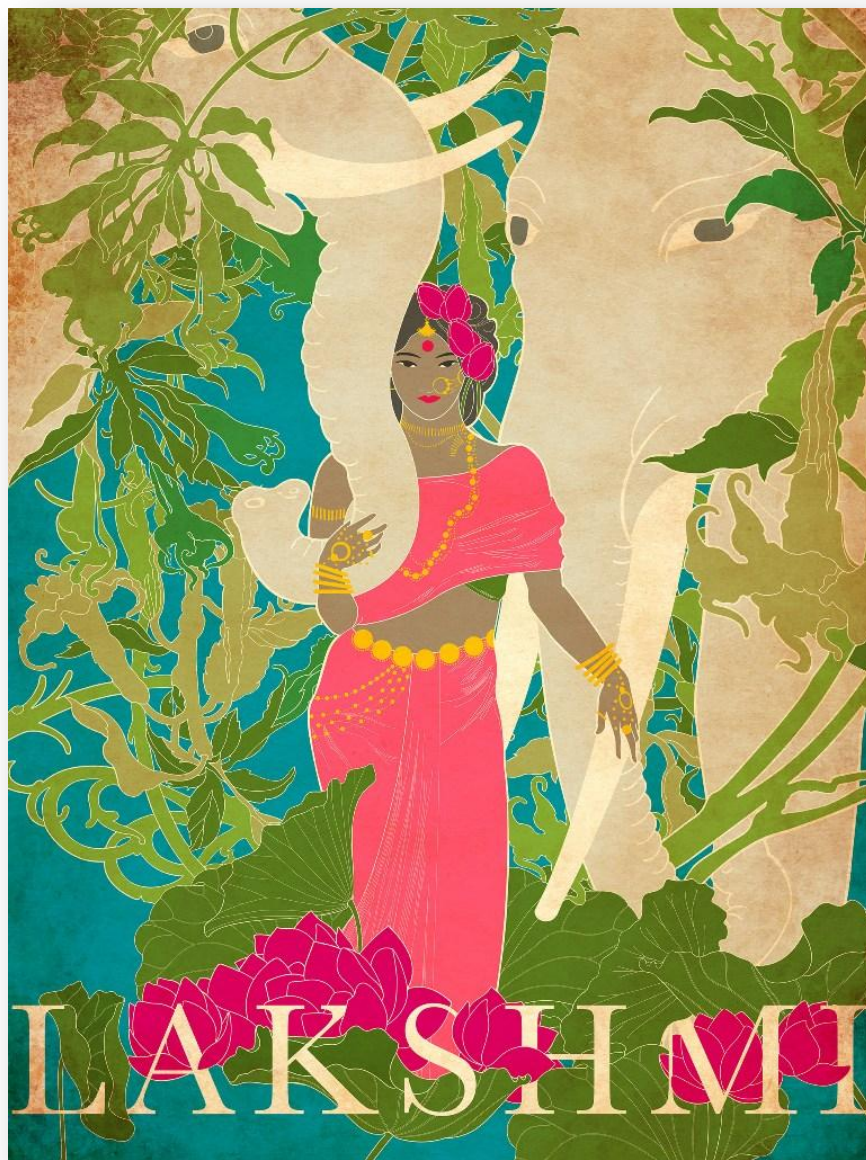
We begin to comprehend Sita at the end. Throughout the Ramayana Sita is the epitome of the devoted wife - Rama's faithful, unquestioning consort. Without reference to Rama who Sita is in her own right is not immediately apparent. She is, of course, the daughter of King Janaka. But then we also learn she is adopted. Even her endless virtues refer to her relationship with Rama – her devotion to and patience with him. But in a thrilling denouement who and what she is becomes terrifyingly clear to all, especially to Rama, when after he demands a second trial by fire to prove her chastity, the obedient, silently suffering wife vanishes. Sita, the goddess, takes her place, was always there, but never comprehended. She is the daughter of the pagan earth goddess, Bhumi. She is the daughter of this land. And here she is depicted in her moment of truth, calling upon her mother to open her arms and swallow her, taking her back into her womb to return to her essence. What becomes clearer still is that Sita's devotion, faith, loyalty, undying patience, strength of will were not mere abstractions, practiced by a woman exemplifying the dictates of tradition, but the gifts she gave.

*Sita, K3 pigment print on archival paper,
36" x 27", 2018, Edition – 6/10, INR 25,000*



The quintessential mother goddess wanted a child. She famously made love to Shiva her husband for a thousand years - a union that aided all of creation, but it didn't result in a child for them. Gauri, although completely in love, was now aware that she would need to make one on her own. While Shiva was away, she carved a perfect little boy out of turmeric, who she had rubbed from her own body. Breathing life into him she had brought Ganesha from the image behind her eyes to before them. He was entirely Gauri's creation, and like all of nature – made from her soil. Shiva unknowingly decapitated the child's head sending Parvati into a rage changing her into Kali to avenge her son's death by destroying all of creation. Brahma, the god of creation ran in its defence and pleaded with her to reconsider. And so she did - the world would be spared, only if the child was brought back to life. Shiva now, more sympathetic, sent Brahma out with orders to bring back the head of the first creature he crossed, laying facing north. Brahma returned with the head of a glorious elephant. Breathing new life into him, Shiva placed it on Ganesha's body. Unique and irreversible the elephant headed scribe was created.

*Gauri, K3 pigment print on archival paper,
36" x 27", 2022, Edition – 1/10, INR 25,000*



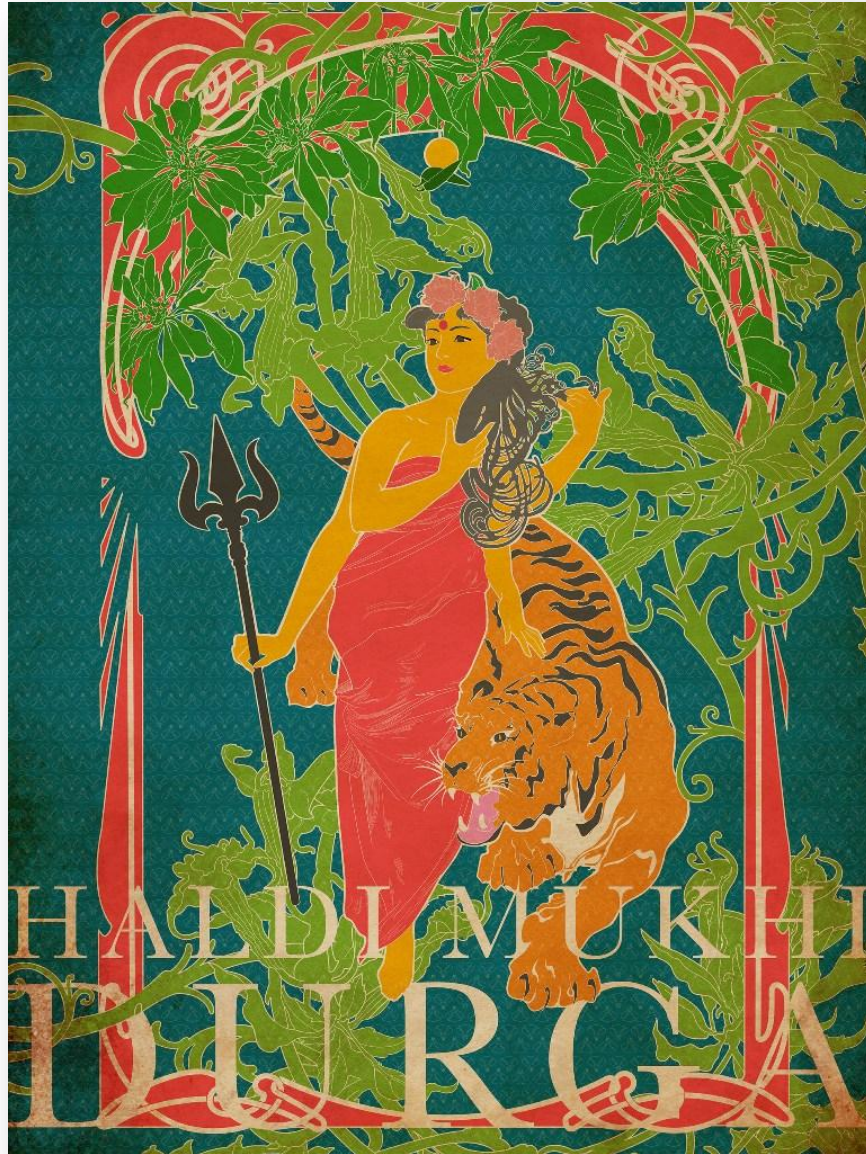
The goddess of fortune, like wealth, is more desired than enjoyed. From the ground, she had once risen, but only noticed in the skies, when her dazzle was in full bloom. We were made to understand that this is how she always was, but she reminds us of an earlier time, when she was a child, growing into 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, spinning them into simplistic caricatures of demons and villains. An age of her childhood, 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. An age of innocence that changed as did she, only coming into herself as she moved away from home. Suddenly, capturing our attention, she arrived in the world of the gods. Astonishing the heavens with her glamour, she chose to sit beside Indra. Still, she remained restless and uncertain. Surly, she thought, the heavens must have someone more worthy of her. Lakshmi changes lives on a whim, leaving a trail of uncertainty, unaware of whom she will favor next. Indra suffered in his insecurity, never able to truly enjoy her, eternally balanced on a shaky throne. She seemed to have appeared with no particular reason and now might leave just as mysteriously. Proving him right, her journey continued, till she finally met Vishnu.

Lakshmi, K3 pigment print on archival paper, 48" x 36", 2022, Edition – 2/10, INR 50,000



Parvati covering her face with a lotus is the story behind the Lingam and the Yoni. A lipped disk shaped form – the Yoni (the emblem of the Devi) with the phallic Lingam (the presence of the God Shiva). The couple would come to be known and symbolized for their thousand years of lovemaking. In that era of pleasure, the walls of the glacier (their home in the mountains) thawed and Shiva's tapas was released into the world – rivers into the plains and life into the dry soil. Their union would be symbolic and would come to represent fertility. In their cave of copulation though, nothing mattered to them. This disregard for the rest of existence only seemed to be problematic when they received unexpected guests. Rishis arriving, walked right in on the couple making love. Parvati, was shy and giggled as she covered her face with a lotus, because Shiva would not stop making love to her. Appalled, the Rishis cursed the couple that they would from then on, be known and represented by the Lingam and Yoni. A curse that made little difference to anyone and the idea of shame receded into the horizon along with the irate Rishis.

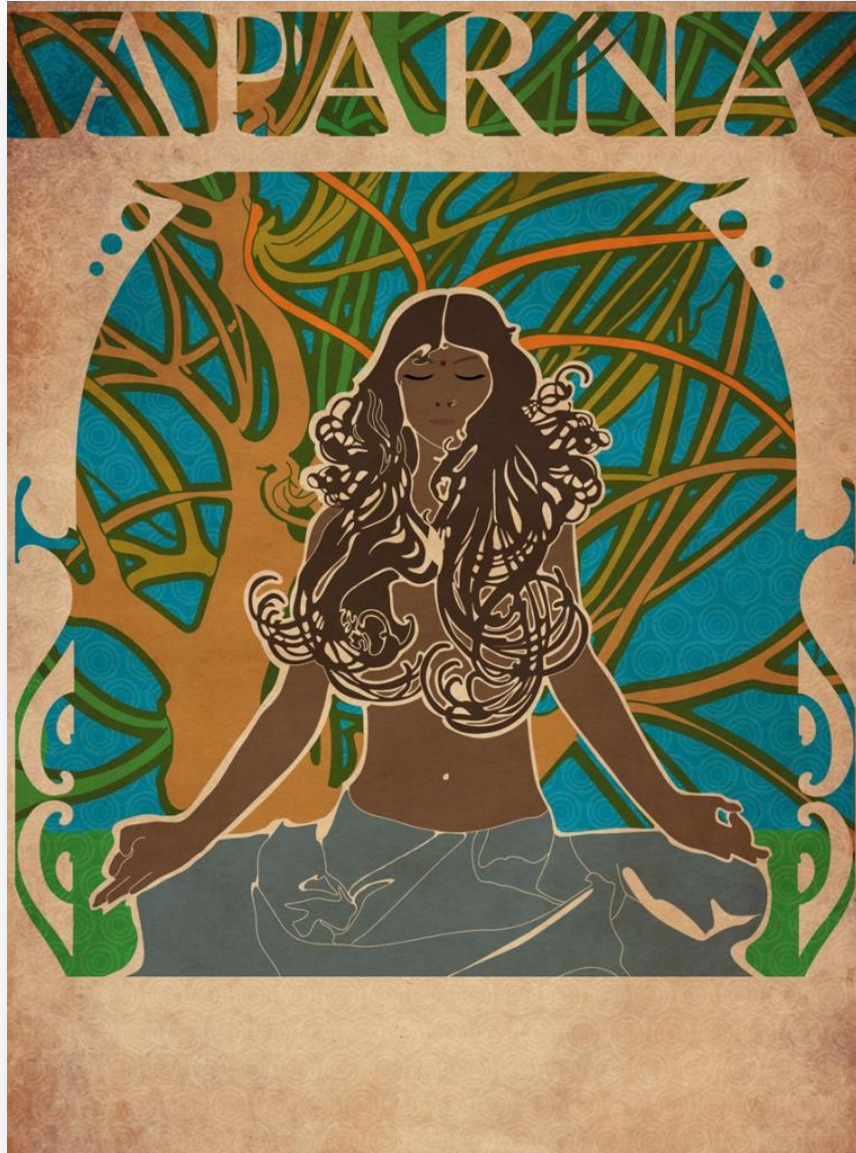
*Parvati, K3 pigment print on archival paper,
48" x 36", 2021, Edition – 4/10, INR 56,000*



As Haldi Mukhi (the yellow faced one), Durga comes to us, exhausted and tired of her relentless life. Here she is Uma and Parvati – the mountain princess, and our abode becomes her paternal home. She visits every autumn, and we pamper her with the fruit of our harvest. As feasts are prepared, her children run outside to play with the other young ones from the village. Watching them leave, she relaxes and we start to apply turmeric all over her body.

Forgetting her innumerable duties, the warrior mother transforms into the daughter. Eating dessert for lunch, she turns back into the spoiled little princess of the Himalayas. She watches us dance and fill the air with the sweetest of scents, singing songs that act as a record of her complaints. A meditating husband, while she has to take care of the world in general, bringing up her own children, creating food in the icy peaks of the Himalayas, warring, nurturing, enabling all of creation... The list seems to go on. Life of a goddess is strenuous and we listen to the adorable young, yellow faced immortal tell us of her life.

Haldi Mukhi Durga, K3 pigment print on archival paper, 36" x 27", 2021, Edition – 3/10, INR 35,000



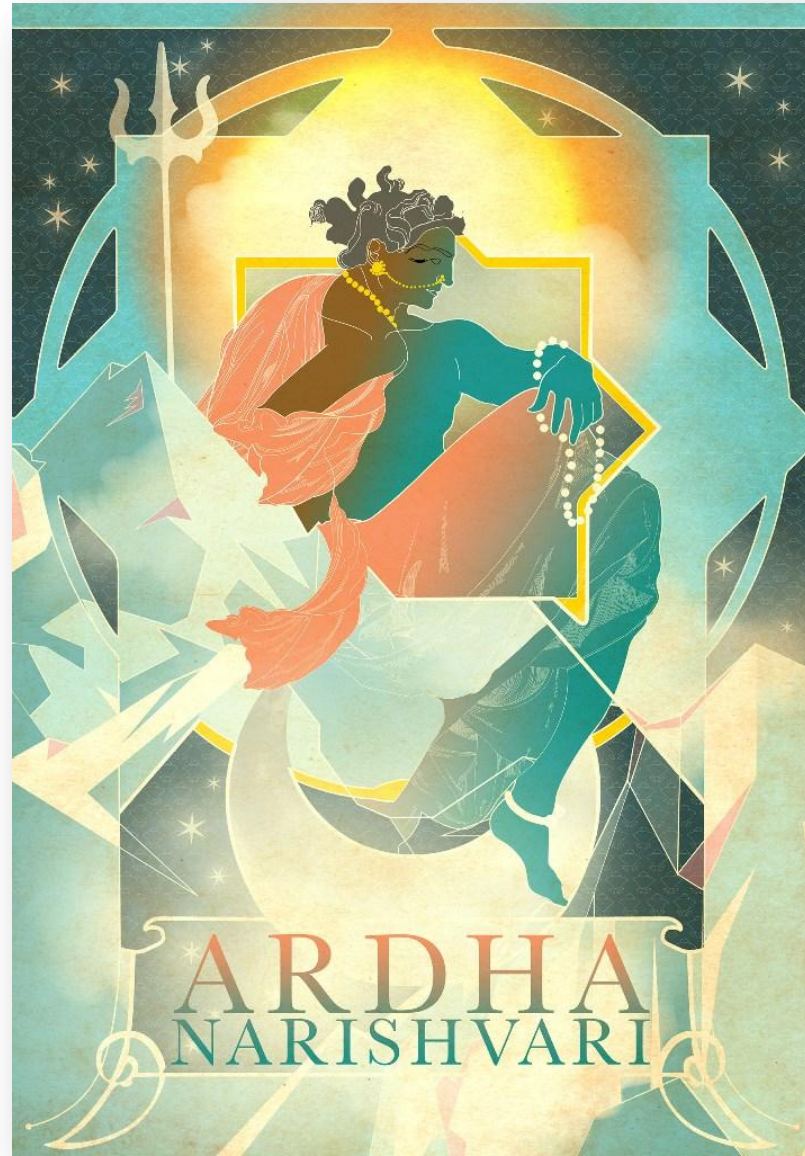
Aparna (still Parvati at the time), through tapas, was to disrupt the world of the gods, because she was in love with one of them - Shiva, the greatest of all ascetics, who had withdrawn himself from the world after having brutally lost his first wife. The adventure was to happen within her mind. A journey that would take her into the unknown, where definitions do not hold, and everything recedes into the irrelevant, except for that single nucleus of heat. It was the other rishis in the forest, who renamed her as Aparna – not even a leaf. For she had lived on nothing. No food, no water, nothing - not even a leaf. Disturbed out of their own tapas, by the growing force of her's, they had to recognise the power of this young girl, soon to be their goddess. And as always the gods paid attention, and so did Shiva. Breaking his tapas and opening his eyes to acknowledge her. Falling in love, he restored the place of nature above the mind. Prakriti over Purusha.

*Aparna, K3 pigment print on archival paper,
36" x 27", 2021, Edition – 7/10, INR 45,000*



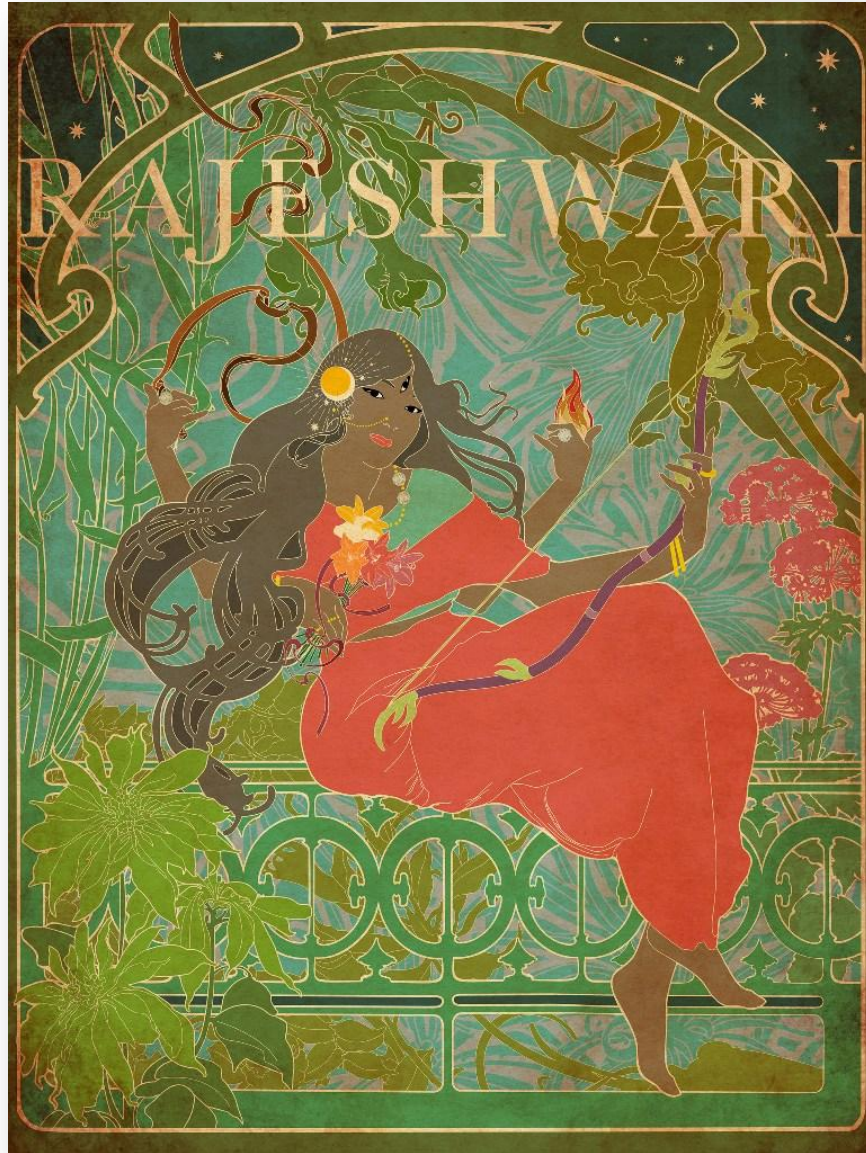
Ganga was a celestial river – The Milkyway – Akashganga - running her course from one end of the sky to the other. And then? Her voyage downwards to us. She was to descend where the land meets the sky – the highest peaks of the Himalayas where Shiva lived. It's not clear if she knew her strength, if she knew that the famine plagued world that desperately needed her, would not have survived the force of her arrival. An unimaginable flood falling from the heavens, as she who runs wild across the skies, would now devastate the only home we knew. The gods were moved into a state of panic and decided to bother Shiva, the ascetic God. Just before she could touch dry land to fulfil her destiny, her fall was broken. Suddenly she was trapped, in a forest of his hair, that Shiva caught her in, and tied up quickly, pinning tightly over his head, with the crescent moon. In his maze of hair, she broke into smaller and smaller tributaries. Realizing very quickly that she might lose herself completely to him. She would have to persevere and push, until finally and suddenly she could smell the fragrance of wet soil. A few drops at first and then a gushing glorious river. Ganga was home.

*Ganga, K3 pigment print on archival paper,
36" x 27", 2018, Edition – 10/10, INR 70,000*



The worlds are split into two. Male – the mind is Purusha. Female – nature is Prakriti. While in reality all of us exist within this spectrum, bridging the gap between the two. In Shiva and Parvati we see their love coming together so we may perceive this world as they do. The name Ardhanarishvari means "the God Who is half woman or the Goddess who is half man". Equally split down the middle, they show us the beauty and strength when the mind comes together with nature, neither claiming superiority.

Ardhanarashwari, K3 pigment print on archival paper, 36" x 27", 2020, Edition – 2/5, INR 45,000



A virgin mother and an independent one. A kumari matha. Mythology is filled with attempts made by male devas and assuras who tried to capture her. Dying or suffering consequences, they learnt, that nature will not be ruled by culture and the attempt, would lead to life lessons wrapped up in punishments. The mother goddess of all creation, she who holds the whip and the sugarcane. Punishment and Reward. A goddess before the Gods. She regarded us from a distance, through the eyes of animals, (all wild at the time), as she held in her womb, the three Gods who were to come. Brahma the god of creation, Vishnu the god of protection and Shiva the god of destruction - the son most protective of her. She is present in every temple – the Garbhagriha , the womb chamber, in which - sits the idol. Sometimes, even giving birth to herself. In the forest and the sea, in every seed and flower, the goddess of creation weaves life into a complex fabric.

Rajeshwari, K3 pigment print on archival paper, 36" x 27", 2021, Edition – 2/5, INR 35,000



The animals show us where she is, by simply being who they are – the tame are in the world of men, the wild are with the Goddess. Through their eyes, she regards us from a distance, and instantly we know – she is Prakriti. Nature is feminine and she is the Primal One – unwitnessed and unperceived, a reality we come upon, a part of creation not destined for everyone. In that stillness we feel the loneliness of our species. But in her gaze we are rescued - and seen as part of all creation.

Prakriti, K3 pigment print on archival paper, 36" x 27", 2021, Edition – 1/10, INR 25,000

About the Artist

Smruthi Gargi Eswar
b. 1979 Bangalore, Karnataka

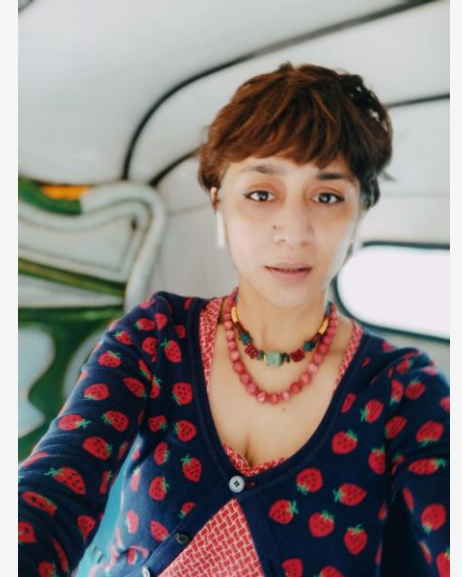
Smruthi Gargi Eswar is a graphic artist based out of Bangalore. She studied at the Baroda Faculty of Fine Arts and Chitrakala Parishad briefly. Her art studies though, had started earlier, while she was still a student at The Valley School KFI. She runs her studio (Studio Smu) in Bangalore, with shows traveling to Budapest, New York, Cochin, Berlin, and Mumbai. She is also a board member of Art in Social Structures, an international NGO run and funded by artists that believe 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. This collaboration led to a performance in Ballhaus Ost with Felizitas Stilleke.

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 were held in Cochin (at the Open-Eyed Dreams gallery) Ballhaus Ost Berlin, also the series was shown as part of group shows at the False Ceiling and 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.

She lives and works in Bangalore.



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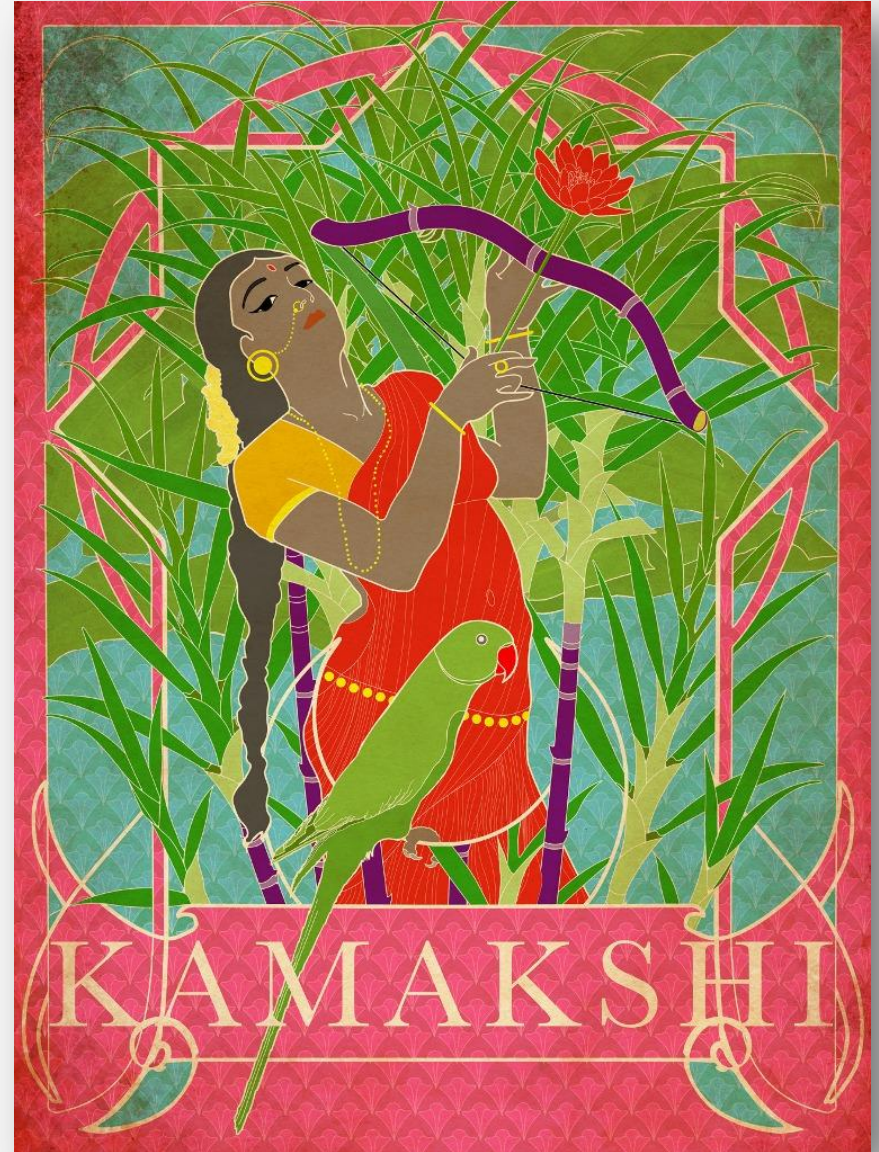
ABOUT US

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.

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