

NS Harsha

Exhibition 11 April–18 May 2019

Private view Wednesday 10 April, 6–8pm

Victoria Miro, 16 Wharf Road, London N1 7RW



NS Harsha, *Warmth*, 2019
Acrylic and gold foil on canvas
137 x 107 cm
54 x 42 1/8 in
© NS Harsha
Courtesy the artist and Victoria Miro, London/Venice

This solo exhibition by the renowned Indian artist NS Harsha features new and recent works, including the major installation *Reclaiming the Inner Space*.

One of the most acclaimed artists of his generation, NS Harsha draws on a broad spectrum of Indian painting traditions and popular arts, as well as the western canon, to create quietly philosophical works that reflect on structures, borders and barriers as a series of ever-shifting concepts.

A focal point of this exhibition is the major work *Reclaiming the Inner Space*, 2017. This three-dimensional, wall-mounted work features a 'herd' of approximately 1400 hand-carved wooden elephants that appear to roam a plain made from recycled cardboard packaging, flattened and attached to acrylic mirror. While the elephants refer to the ornaments that one might find in Indian souvenir shops, they also recall the elephant processions of Dasara festivities in Mysore, the artist's home, and elsewhere, celebrated at the end of Navratri each year.

Collected from various sources, including recycling facilities and the artist's friends and family, the cardboard packaging is attached face-down to the mirror, its printed graphics and logos readable only, up close, in reflection. The unprinted sides of the packaging, meanwhile, have been partially covered with an explosive trail of dark paint which Harsha has embellished with a detailed constellation of stars and

planets. Interweaving local and global points of reference, *Reclaiming the Inner Space* underscores a sense of interconnectedness that characterises much of Harsha's art. Here, the changing consumer habits, cultural customs and labour patterns of his local neighbourhood are aligned with broader socio-political narratives of modernisation, mass-production and our changing relationship to nature.

Further works on view include a new iteration of *Tamasha*, 2013, an installation of larger-than-lifesize monkeys that appear to scale a large scaffolding-like structure. The title of the work refers to the Marathi tradition of satirical theatre, performed widely by travelling groups in India. Taking various contemporary connotations of the word 'Tamasha' – which can refer to political upheaval or even human folly – Harsha casts his monkeys as simultaneously non-temporal and earth bound, pointing upwards to the heavens while their tails, intertwined, tether them inexorably to one another and the structure on which they perch. In this, Harsha also refers to the phenomenon of the rat king and its appearance in northern folkore traditions since the sixteenth century.

While storytelling endures at the heart of Harsha's practice, linear narrative remains elusive in a number of exquisitely rendered new paintings. Instead, through gentle humour and dreamlike grace, he makes quietly philosophical enquiries into the complex social, economic and cultural realities of contemporary life. In *Warmth*, 2019, the artist meditates on public spaces, and the ways in which individuals come together in various formations. Fascinated in particular with open circles, a form that allows people to enter and leave at will, becoming temporary points of focus, speakers or sages, he delineates a series of curving throngs, each focused around a different being or entity – including fire, a golden donkey, an astronaut, and the Hindu god Brahma. One such figure – a skeleton holding a newborn infant attached by an umbilical cord – reappears as the central figure in *You have grip on me, so do I*, 2019, a work that makes explicit cycles of life and death, beginnings and endings.

Central to these paintings is a gentle questioning of our place within the known and unknown worlds, the strength of our grip on the tangible and, conversely, the force with which the intangible exerts a hold over us. In *Smears to weave her everyday*, 2019, Harsha focuses on the mat sellers in his hometown of Mysore – businesses that have existed in the same place for generations. Taking as a starting point the familiarity of the mats and their cheerful colours and patterns, Harsha, who uses them to sleep on during the summer months, aligns the quotidian textiles of the marketplace with the fabric of the universe, in which the mysteries of the cosmos are wrapped.

About the artist

Born in 1969, NS Harsha lives and works in Mysore, India. He was a recipient of the prestigious DAAD Scholarship in 2012, and was awarded the Artes Mundi Prize in 2008. Solo exhibitions and projects have taken place at international venues including Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, Swansea (2018); Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (2017); the Dallas Museum of Art (2015–2016); DAAD, as part of the DAAD Artists-in-Berlin Program (2012–2013); INIVA, London (2009); and at Maison Hermes Tokyo (2008). Harsha's work has featured in group exhibitions including the 21st Biennale of Sydney (2018); the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, India (2014); Moscow Biennial of Contemporary Art (2013); Dojima Biennial, Osaka (2013); Adelaide International Biennial (2012); Asian Art Museum, San Francisco (2012); the Yokohama Triennial (2011) and the Bienal de Sao Paulo (2010). He was also a participant in the major touring exhibition Indian Highway, which was staged at the Serpentine Gallery, London (2008); Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art, Oslo (2009); Herring Art Museum, Denmark (2010); Musée d'Art Contemporain, Lyon (2011); MAXXI, Rome (2011–12).

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