

The Blue
Lotus

papia
intertwined
ghoshal

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PRESENTS

Papia Ghoshal is a Fine artist, poet, baul singer and an actor from Kolkata. She is a versatile personality who has built up a prominent brand name in the international art and poetry scenario. She is known for her uniquely alternative style, boldness and imagination as well as for her distinguished raw voice while singing traditional Baul and other rare forms of Bengali folk songs.

Her way of life, she believes has much in common with the ancient philosophy and practices of the Bauls of Bengal. Papia, being a bohemian, chose to be based in Bohemia, Prague, surrounded by nature, where the Závist, holy Celtic Oppidum, river Vltava and the forest mingle in ecstasy. She also loves to spend quiet moments at her ashram, a musical & meditative space in the outskirts of Kolkata in the winter.

Education

Papia Ghoshal is a graduate from the University of Calcutta in political science, sociology, Indian classical music, Rabindra sangeet and folk music, followed by master's degree in Indian music. Later she did her further studies in fine arts from Merton College in London and dedicated herself to Indian art. Papia was an apprentice of the Indian legendary painter Prakash Karmakar for over 15 years.

She is the international editor of 'The London Miscellany', a British heritage magazine, dedicated to art & literature, first founded in 1825.

Artist career

Her artistic career began at an early age, when she managed to establish and build one of the most successful companies in Calcutta focused on furniture, interiors, exteriors, landscape design and execution called 'Intrique'. Later she started dedicating her time fully to fine arts, music and poetry. She started traveling extensively, exploring art and culture of other countries, particularly Barcelona, Paris and London.

At this time, at the turn of her vital life interests, she met film director Bappaditya Bandopadhyay, who found the inspiration and motivation in her creativity for his film works. Their collaboration resulted in the feature film Shilpantar, screened at Sofia International Film Festival in Bulgaria and many other international festivals, and Kantatar (Barbed Wire), screened at Raindance International Film Festival in London and many others in Europe and India.

Papia was invited to introduce the feature film Shilpantar (Colours of Hunger) as the co-producer and presenter at the Art Film Fest in Slovakia in 2003. This was just

a step away from Czech Republic, when she was invited by Gender Studies, Prague to exhibit her painting in 2004.

This was followed by different series of exhibitions in Prague including 'Triennale', National Gallery in Prague, Gallery Lapidarium, Gallery Miro, National Museum in Prague, Art Prague and many others.

In 2007, the European Union of Fine Arts Award was bestowed upon Papia for her contribution to art and culture in Europe.

Papia exhibited her paintings in 2008 at the AIFACS Gallery, organized by the Ministry of Culture of India in cooperation with the Embassy of the Czech Republic in India.

In the same year in 2008, Papia received the prestigious Medal of Franz Kafka Award at the House of Kafka (Kafkuv Dům) in Prague.

Fine art

Papia's work is a fascinating mixture of traditional Indian philosophy and the European surrealist movement. She often challenges norms and overcomes boundaries between reality & fantasy. On the contrary, she merges those together, from which her own unconventional style is created. The strange, almost magical transformations of the human form goes beyond anthropology, to enter the realm of poetic metamorphosis.

Using her intuitive knowledge, Papia challenges the interpretation of visible and invisible worlds. The intensity of her insight is powerfully pronounced in the characters she develops. The vibrant use of colours on the canvas is as full of energy as, according to tantrism, the cosmos is full of energy. Out of those colours emerge powerful messages, where subjects are stripped of their social conventions, hypocrisies and taboos.

Poetry

Papia Ghoshal, hailing from Bengal, is blessed with the soil where poetry exists as a way of life. Bengal has given birth to brilliant poets like Rabindranath Tagore and many others. Poetry forms a natural and very strong part of Papia's work and her existence. It also forms one of the very important inspirational sources for her painting. "As a truly Renaissance figure Papia Ghoshal transience her creativity into

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the handsel in films, as film maker and script writer” (quoted by Dr Shibnarayan Ray).

Through poetry, Papia celebrates and worships a woman and freely explore all aspects of womanhood. As a matter of fact, freedom forms the main feature of her poetry, as much as serenity. All is then directed to Love as the purest manifestation of being. Thus she unconsciously addresses all phenomena, which were most worshiped by surrealists in the boom of their movement and which have not yet been fully grasped.

Papia, who’s leading her life following the path of the Bauls, also creates her own lyrics which talk about her knowledge about the Baul philosophy and practices. She composes songs originating from her rhythms of poetry.

Her poems takes her readers to the visual imageries of her paintings and vice-versa. Papia Ghoshal, being a passionate artist who loves to experiment with many different ideas, sometimes can be seen driving the broad gauge locomotive steam train with passengers, in the west Somerset, England! She loves the colour of the fire while driving.

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A viewing of works from Papia Ghoshal's video *Forbidden Dreams - The world beyond eroticism*'

by Martin Bradley

"Love's Question"

*And is this all true,
My ever-loving friend?
That the lightning-flash of the light in my eyes
Makes the clouds in your heart explode and blaze.
Is this true?
That my sweet lips are red as a blushing new bride,
My ever-loving friend,
Is this true?*

Extract from 'Love's Question', Rabindranath Tagore. "Selected Poems" trans. Willian Radice
Penguin Books, 2005

'Forbidden Dreams - The world beyond eroticism by Papia Ghoshal in Woburn Gallery, London' is the title of a video taken in the now closed Woburn Gallery formerly of 14 Woburn Walk, in salubrious Georgian Bloomsbury, London. Incidentally, Woburn Walk was once a residency of Irish poet W.B. Yeats.

The aforementioned video is our YouTube encounter with the exhibition *'Papia Ghoshal, an exhibition of paintings'* held between the 2nd and 15th of July, in 2006. This was one year after the artist's highly successful exhibition *'Forbidden Dreams'*, at the Chitrakoot Art Gallery, Gariahat Road Kolkata (2005), as mentioned in the Indian Telegraph newspaper. Earlier (2003) Ghoshal had exhibited at the prestigious Academy of Fine Arts in Kolkata, revealing some sixty paintings on a similar theme, with notions of 'taboo' and 'maleness' remaining in the artist's mind and oeuvre. More recently (2012), the Times of India had reported on Ghoshal's exhibition *'Tantra, Shunya'*, which was held at the Azad Bhavan Art Gallery, Kolkata, and was supported by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations.

There are, obviously, many questions which arise from the West Bengal artist's potentially provocative works and, more specifically from the video and former showing's title - *Forbidden Dreams*, and the works therein. Within the first few frames of the video *'Forbidden Dreams...'* we (the viewing audience) are led

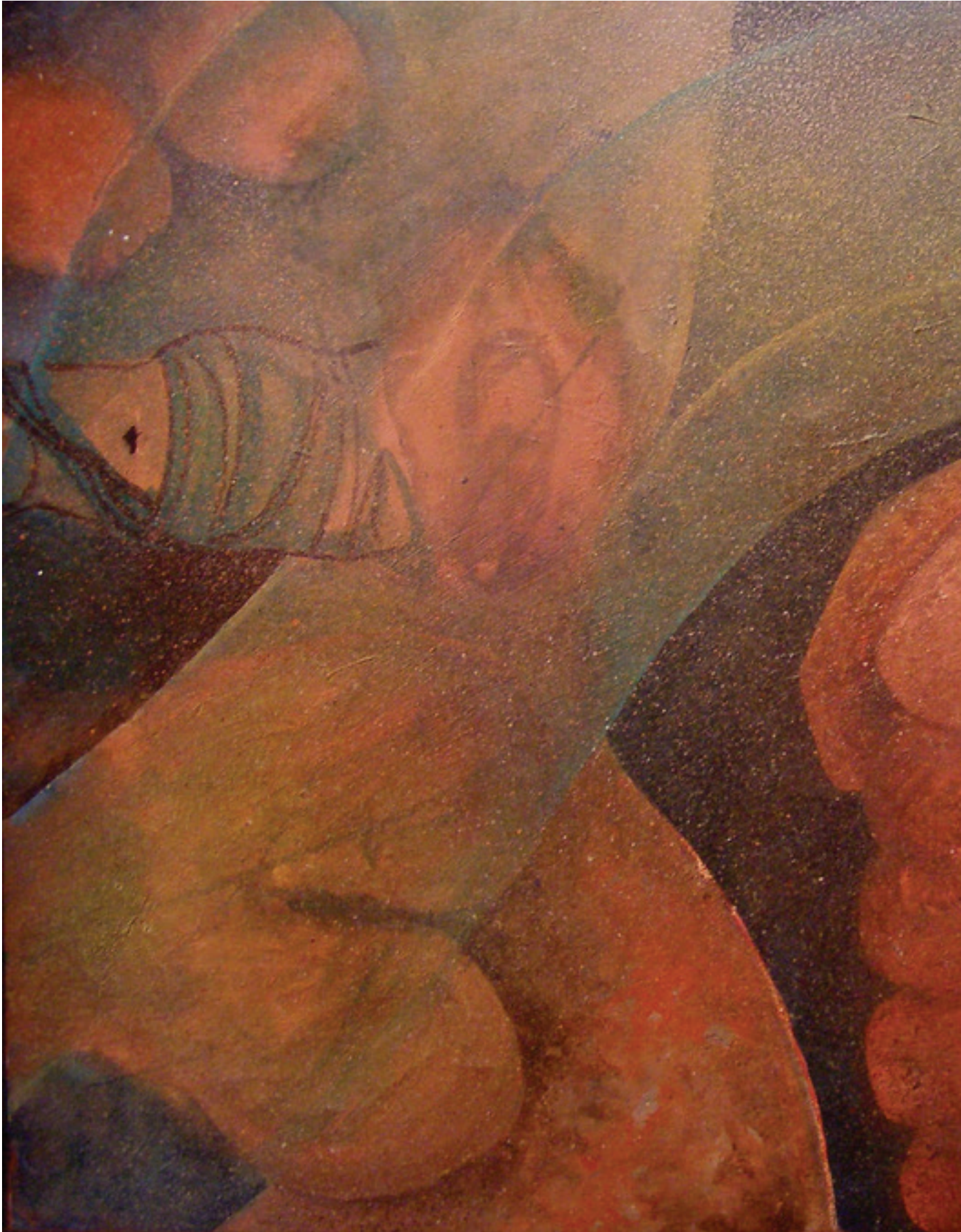
papia ghoshal



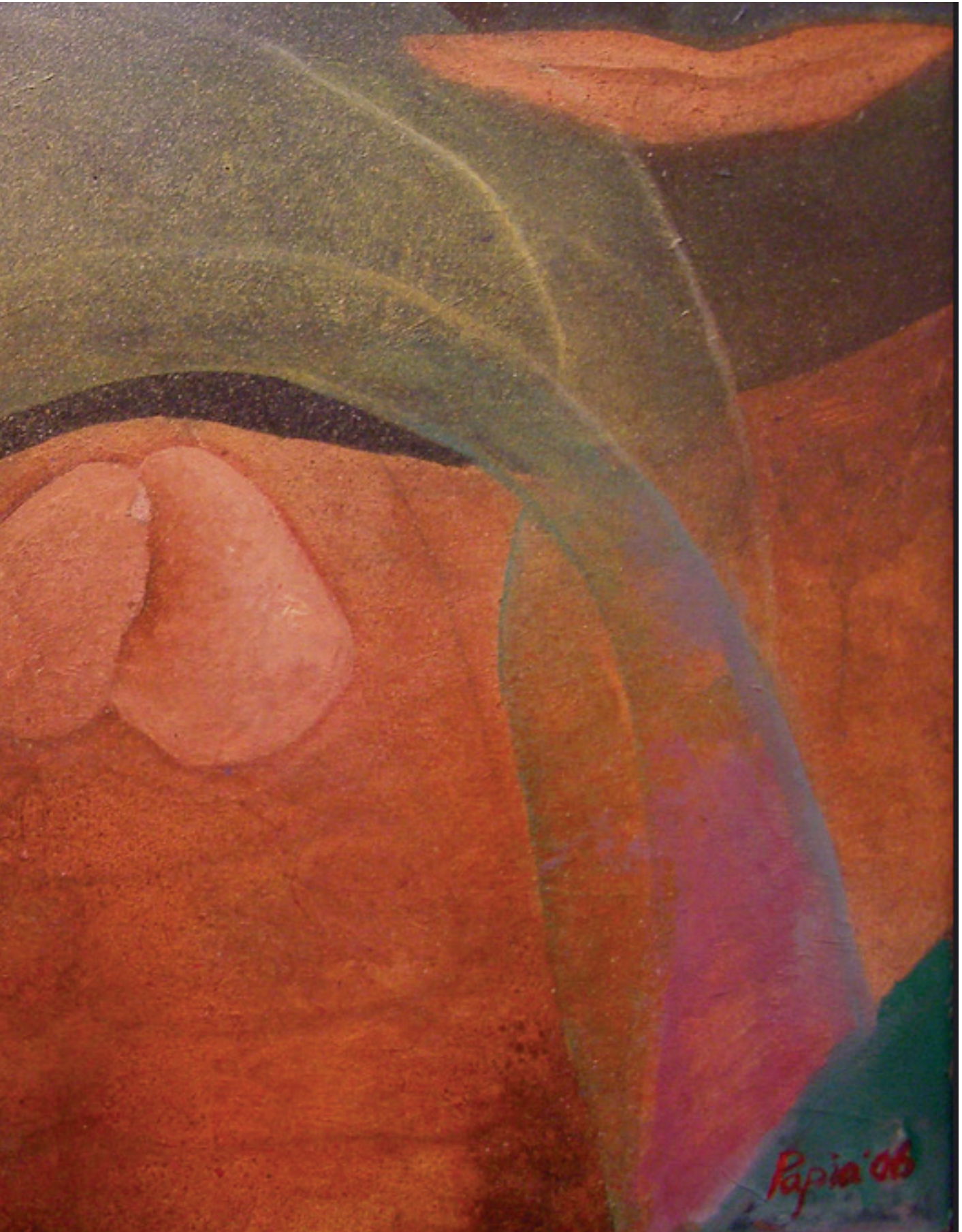
Woburn Gallery, Woburn Walk, Bloomsbury, London

as Alice into Dobson's Wonderland, from a London tree-shadowed pavement, glimpsing the gallery's name as we go, and digitally emerge into the rabbit-hole of a 'Grade 2, listed' building (part of a terrace of 8 shops, originated in 1822 by Thomas Cubitt).

The antique ambience of the Bloomsbury gallery already legitimises Ghoshal's



Papia Ghoshal, Forbidden Dreams, 2006



hangings as, effectively, we become at one with a thronging crowd of art enthusiasts, luminaries and their collective 'knowing' hubbub. Before us, on an easel, is Ghoshal's *'Game of Chess'* - on the canvas is a chess board shaped like a woman's body. Poignant, as the theme of love, forbidden, revolves around 'Games People Play' (Eric Berne), and chess specifically which references both *'Shatranj Ke Khilari'* (in English *'The Chess Players'*, directed by Bengali filmmaker Satyajit Ray who, like Ghoshal, was from Kolkata) and chess which is thought to have originated in India. Beyond that easel-held canvas is, quite literally, a window onto an outside world of greenery.

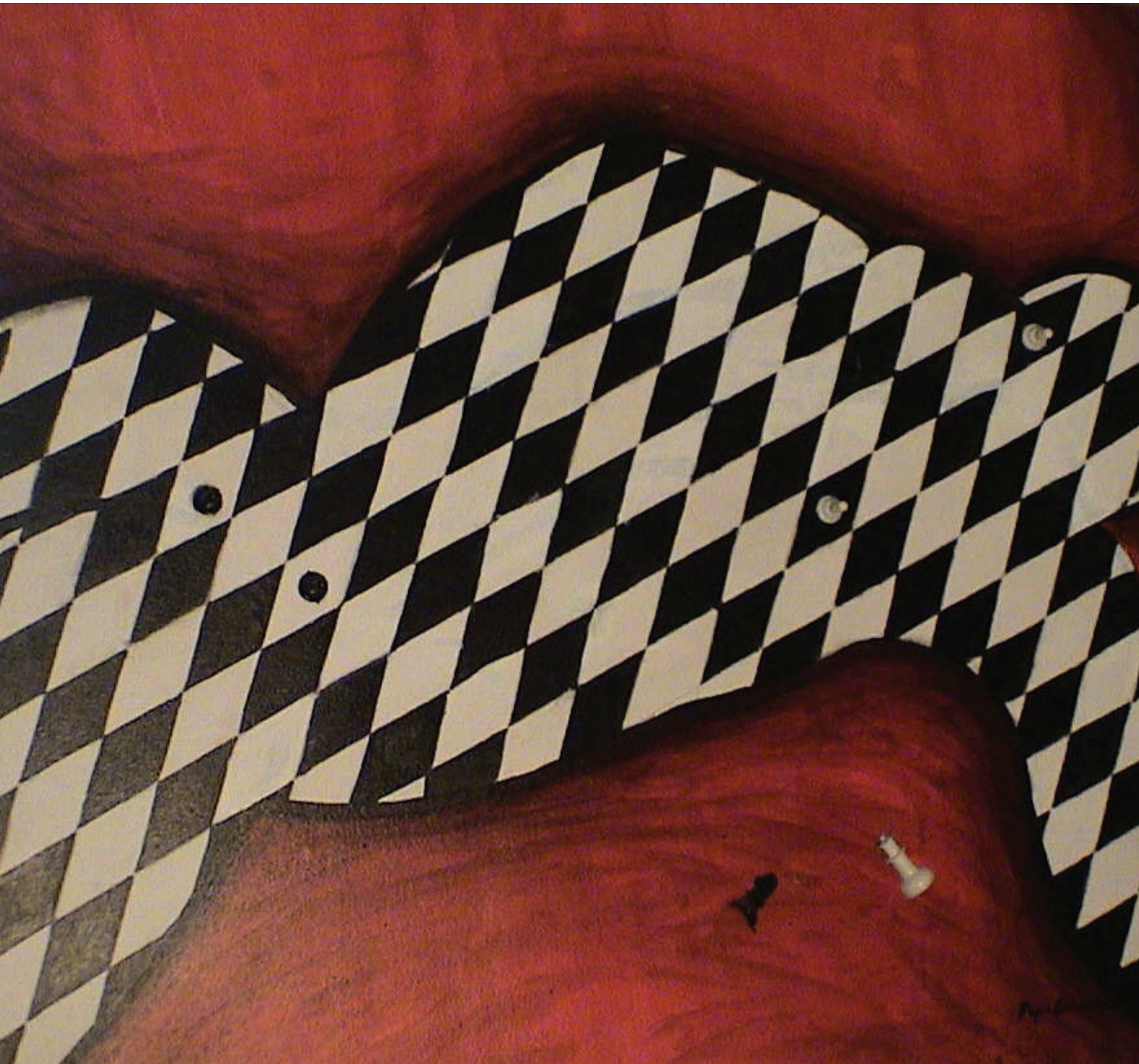


The Chess Players, Satyajit Ray, 1977

Entering, instantly we are introduced to the melodically plucked strings of Sebastian Dreyer's sitar. It is there, after our fall into Wonderland, that our intertwining begins. We become effectively intertwined within those lilting sitar strings as well as the beckoning sights of Ghoshal's meseric sensual imagery. Dreyer's sitar emphasises the exoticness of India and prepares us for encounters with South Asian 'otherness'. From the sight of *'Game of Chess'* we are led to the artist herself, dressed beguilingly in a white sari with green floral sari blouse emphasising her links to the earth and to Shakti/Kali/Durga the quintessential embodiment of female power

Rabindranath Tagore in his poem *'Love's Question'* (above) provokes concerns of the Platonic duality of appearances and reality (Plato's Cave analogy in *The Republic*). We project, Tagore intimates, onto the object before us, imbuing it (or she) with our reasoning and our whims. An appearance of reality ('flesh and blood') is only half of what we encounter, the rest is our conjuring ('fantasy of our mind'). Ghoshal, in snippets of dialogue during the fifteen minute thirty-three second video, intimates that it is the very same with the appearances of equalities within society, more specifically the equalities of sex and gender where females (to all intents and purposes) have the illusion of power, but in reality continue to be subjected to a covert, and age-old, domination by males. As Ghoshal faces a





Papia Ghoshal, Game of Chess



Papia Ghoshal, *The Market*, 2004



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A woman riding on an enormous winged penis, India, 1900

a painting of a balance ('The Market'), female forms in one pan and a large snake-like penis on another, she mentions "This balance beam shows how the man is still dictating terms over many women in today's society." she continues "...today's women even in the first world countries apparently seem to dominate the man but in reality the man still dominates...you really cannot speak out". It is forbidden to do so, there is a taboo on real gender equality not only in Ghoshal's mother India, but globally.

Sigmund Freud, who caught the 20th century imagination in the 1908 reworking of his 1905 'On the Sexual Theories of Children', with his observations of sex, and in particular theories such as, 'Oedipus Complex', 'Castration Complex'; and his now infamous construct 'Penis Envy', which he claimed all females endured. Incidentally Freud had a twenty year (1921 - 1937) correspondence with Girindrashankar Bose, who became the champion of Freudian psychoanalysis in India and was called the 'father of psychoanalysis in India' and founder of the Indian Psychoanalytical Society (at 14, Parsi Bagan Lane, Kolkata).



Papia Ghoshal, Forbidden Dreams II, 2003

"To Freud, women were simply men without penises (Cohler & Galatzer-Levy, 2008), so naturally he introduced a stage of 'penis envy' – where a woman realises she does not possess a penis, and experiences an envy of the male, which accounted for much of female behaviour. Freud claimed that the only way they could overcome this penis envy was to have a child of their own – even going as far as to suggest they wanted a male child, in their efforts to gain a penis."

Riya Yadav, Freud and penis envy – a failure of courage, *The Psychologist*, June 2018, Vol.31 (pp.92-94)





Papia Ghoshal, Forbidden Dreams, I | 2003



Roman Bone Winged Phallus, 43 and 410BC, found in Suffolk, Britain



In the West Freud's 'penis envy' theory only legitimated already existing gender inequalities. Others have disputed Freud's claims, such as Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, and Hélène Cixous who reinterprets the concept of 'penis envy' from a female perspective (as does Ghoshal).

"Though masculine sexuality gravitates around the penis, engendering that centralized body (in political anatomy) under the dictatorship of its parts, woman does not bring about the same regionalization which serves the couple head/genitals and which is inscribed only within boundaries. Her libido is cosmic, just as her unconscious is worldwide."

Hélène Cixous, Keith Cohen, Paula Cohen, *The Laugh of the Medusa*, Signs, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Summer, 1976), pp. 875-893

Cosmological connections with the male and female members occur within Indian cosmology, and specifically in the more usual Śiva and Śakti interwoven religious traditions (Tantra - woven) and Kashmir valley Indian visual depictions. These revolve around the male member and are chiefly limited to Shiva's erect 'lingam' (penis), and to the female genital, the 'yoni' (vagina and vulva), a receptacle usually depicted beneath the male. These images also occur within the Vajrayana Buddhism tradition.

Lingam and yoni are worshiped by Shaivites (followers of the Indian god Shiva, also known as Adiyogi Shiva, regarded as the patron god of yoga, meditation and arts), in their homes and temples. Statues are anointed with many items including oil and flowers. The piercingly erect lingam, made of hard substances such as stone, wood and metal, is in opposition to the often flaccid examples portrayed in the exhibitions of work by Papia Ghoshal. Her soft, erectile dysfunctional and often uncircumcised, penises (such as in *Forbidden dreams 1*) may be observed as a feminist move to debunking notions of a natural male mastery. By portraying images of penile softness, akin to that soft Camembert cheese melting in the sun which inspired Salvador Dali to create his *'The Persistence of Memory'* (1931) Ghoshal renders a source of male power dissipated.

One of Ghoshal's works (*'Forbidden Dreams 6'*, 2003) appears to be a woman mounted on a large penis. It brings to mind a gouache painting by an unknown Indian painter of *'A woman riding on an*

enormous winged penis' (circa 1900, found in the Wellcome Collection), like one other of Ghosal's paintings (*'Peek Through Darkness'*) the main subject appears to have the feet of a cockerel (in English a play on words). Ghosal's *'Forbidden Dreams 11'*, with cockerell feet, and *'Forbidden Butterfly'* are more reminiscent of ancient Roman winged phalluses (such as the *'Roman Bone Winged Phallus'*, 43 and 410BC, found in Suffolk, Britain).

Within Ghosal's oeuvre there is little doubt that the female (Ghosal) is dominant. Phalluses clamour for entry in *'Menstruating Eye'* (2007), come disguised as snakes in *'Snake and Ladder Game'* (more games), and occur very subtly in *'Radha and her Krishnas'* and symbolically in *'Manasa'*. Constantly the viewer observes Ghosal's images of Kali (Linga Purana, 500 to 1000 CE) and Durga (Shiva Purana, possibly 10th Century CE) with their superior female power derived from Shakti, with and without phalluses present.



Gudimallam Sri Parasu Rameswara Swamy Temple Shiva Lingam

It is interesting to note that Ghosal exhibited at the Nehru Wangchuck Cultural Center, Bhutan, in 2011. Since the 15th century, Bhutan has become renowned for the Lama Drukpa Kunley who has been titled the *'Divine Madman'* for his unorthodox introduction of sexuality into his teachings.

*"I take refuge in the virile young tiger's Thunderbolt,
rising proudly, indifferent to death;
I take refuge in the maiden's Lotus, filling her with
rolling bliss waves, releasing her from shame and inhibition."*
~Lama Drukpa Kunley (The Divine Madman)~

Phalluses, and phallic imagery, are everywhere in Bhutan, on walls, doorways, carved small and large, brightly coloured made out of stone, bamboo, ivory. Some

of which are directly attributed to Lama Drukpa Kunley. It is thought that once an individual has accepted that they are bound by taboo and ritual, freedom comes by observing those ties, that then allows observation, acceptance, and the release of guilt. This enables refocusing and the creation of positive beliefs and thoughts.

In the *'Forbidden Dreams - The world beyond eroticism'* video it is suggested that the exhibition is a "sequence of meditations on the male body, exploring its sexual grace, its power and its sadness." Sadness, perhaps, because even the Shiva lingam (penis) is powerless without the Durga yoni (vulva and vagina) into which to spill its seed. Ideas from Lama Drukpa Kunley, drawing from Tantra, have been seen by the West as speaking of things 'Forbidden' and/or 'Taboo'.

On the subject of 'Forbidden', while visualisation of sex, particularly in Victorian England, had drawn to it notions of prudery. One book (a sixpenny book on the sex in 1877, purported to be 'The rudest book in Britain') championed birth



Wall Phallus Bhutan

control, and was taken to court for the obscenity trial of Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh. Yet Jan Marsh (at the Victoria and Albert Museum) defends a very different position. She indicates that records show that the 1860s were as sexually active as the 1960s (*'Sex & Sexuality in the 19th Century'*), thus indicating that notions of Victorian 'Forbidden' and 'Taboo' are just as fugitive as there are today.

It is not unheard of that female artists take an interest in male anatomy, as between 1968–99, and finally cast in 2001, Louise Bourgeois' *'Fillette'* is a latex over plastic sculpture of dishevelled penis and scrotum. While in 1974 Lynda Benglis created *'Smile'*, a cast bronze depicting a penis with two 'tips'. One exhibition, held in 2016, titled, *'The Female Gaze Part II: Women Look at Men'*, and curated by Cheim & Read, June 23 – August 31, New York, gathered together a selection of female

artists including Berenice Abbott, Ellen Altfest, Ghada Amer, Diane Arbus, Gina Beavers, Lynda Benglis, Huma Bhabha, Louise Bourgeois, Katherine Bradford, Cecily Brown, Kathe Burkhart, Lois Dodd, Marlene Dumas, Tracey Emin, Katy Grannan, Grace Graupe-Pillard, EJ Hauser, Celia Hempton, Jenny Holzer, Chantal Joffe, Sarah Lucas, Catherine Murphy, Alice Neel, Catherine Opie, Collier Schorr, Dana Schutz, Joan Semmel, Cindy Sherman, Sylvia Sleigh, Betty Tompkins, Nicole Wittenberg and Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, 'talking' about maleness and the male body.

It practically goes without saying that the exuberance and innovation of Ghoshal's canvases, concerning the male body, would not have looked out of place in that New York exhibition.

The video *"Forbidden Dreams - The world beyond eroticism by Papia Ghoshal in Woburn Gallery, London"* closes. The Woburn Gallery has closed. Papia Ghoshal and her works continue. Ghoshal is a creator. She brings to life canvases, sculptures, poetry and performances in which she presents the Durga/Kali 'shakti' (energy, power) of the female, not in opposition to the male, but as well as the male. Ghoshal reveals 'maleness' in all its fragile glory, its strengths and weaknesses. Being male is to be human, one half of humanity, not superior nor inferior but alongside, and intertwined.



Papia Ghoshal, Snakes and Ladders



Louise Bourgeois' 'Fillette' , 1968



Lynda Benglis, 'Smile', 1974



Papia Ghoshal, Forbidden Dreams, 3, 2004



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by Martin Bradley

The World of Forbidden Dreams - series of works
exhibited by Papia Ghoshal at Woburn Gallery in
central London, July 2006.

Poetry reading by Papia Ghoshal, Eddie Linden,
Christopher Arkell, Celia Purcell & others

Music by Sebastian Dreyer on sitar

Presented by The Miscellany Foundation

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