

melancholic mantras

recent works by **anurendra jegadeva**

24th April – 10th May 2003



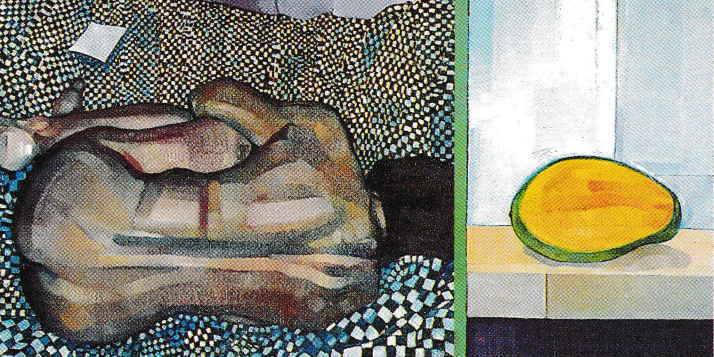


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Anurendra Jegadeva is a Malaysian figurative painter whose vision has been shaped by Malaysian circumstances. His serial portraits, still-lives, armed monks, his visual satires of Indian clichés, his encounter with diasporic Australian cities and suburbs, all speak of a world intensely experienced at a local level, from the cuisine to the sporadic bedlam of the street. His world is fraught with tensions that people elsewhere might not understand; but with deliberate brush and inventive formats and imagery, he lets us in, sharing the daily sentiments, from a contemplation of domestic life to incipient violence, injustice and political strife.

Anurendra, however, is not a reporter of a local existence unique to the languages and ethnicities and balance of power in Malaysia. His aim is not to record the events or even the general feelings of pride or alienation, aggression or grim authority. Rather, his artistic agenda is to speak through these circumstances to embody something more universal. In identifying and acknowledging the realities of parish and caste, he rises above their expressive limitations. His work has something archetypal about it, conferring upon the locally-inspired a degree of transferability of meaning, a degree of quality and currency that makes the work emotionally communicative and visually exciting to viewers of diverse background.





In its elevation of the everyday to the grand and poignant, Anurendra's painting discovers connection between people of disparate values, background and vision, for the themes of alienation, marginalization and even the negation of difference are embedded in the work, drawing it above its origins to connect with a cosmopolitan audience. Explicit themes like race, religion, poverty, violence, migration and the search for a better life transcend Anurendra's Malaysian experience. Recent events in the world provide tangible indications of threats on a global level. The world increasingly looks eruptive, chaotic and duplicitous.

Events that have followed the catastrophe of the World Trade Center—the war in Afghanistan, the imminent war in Iraq and the oppressive classification of terrorism accorded to any acts of dissent within certain nation states—reflect insecurities in the face of difference.

But Anurendra's work does not moralize or stand in judgement. The work explores points of view about our humanity based on personal experience and consciously presents points of reference that a broader audience can relate to. Within this context the work is cross-cultural without being trammled by the parameters of Social Realism in modern art.

Neither propagandist nor illustrative, Anurendra's paintings recover and make use of the nostalgia and romanticism of history painting evident in the very traditional symbols of dress and accessories and larger histories specific to their Asian identity. At the same time they would revel in a neo-expressionist emotionality and internalism that sets them aside as modernist. These elements are displayed in the play of color, gesture and rendering that remain reverential to the memory of the light and shadow of various tonal masters, as well as the pure formalism of an obsessive figurative painter like Euan Uglow.

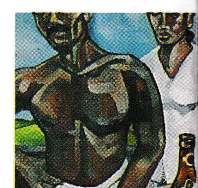
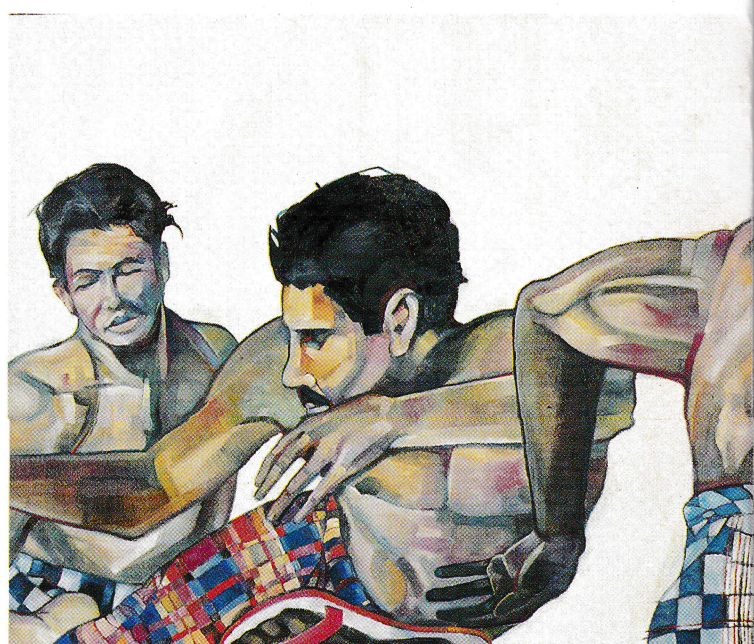
Through their content and technique, these paintings not only seek a fusion of cultures but the fusion of traditional values and modern epochs in contemporary art. Their artistic and philosophical concerns range from traditional devices like the narrative, the autobiographical and the concept of an aesthetic standard to more contemporary preoccupations

with aesthetic precepts like alternative ways of constructing the picture plane. These various and diverse conscious concerns have helped achieve a contemporary aesthetic that also allows the work transcend its specific scenarios and ideologies.

It achieves this transcendence, paradoxically, through the personal. The key element of Anurendra's philosophy is for



the work to be steeped in personal experience; only once it has told its stories true to the author's experience might it express ideas of political relevance, especially regarding race, nationality and migration.



In turn, the combination of private feeling and institutional implications has caused Anurendra to revise his conception of how an image might function in a gallery. Against seeing paintings as autonomous units with an integrity confined to the four edges of the canvas, Jegadeva seeks a more dialectical approach to image making, in which one image may have an effect on another and may induce meanings that would not fit in a single tableau. So too with the artist book. Anurendra conceives of painting as non-absolute, and feels that this is the best way to express the great underlying relativism in human values that would make for a more tolerant and harmonious world.

In spite of respecting formalist or modernist technical preoccupations—and even indeed gaining their visual clout—Anurendra has moved away from the conventions of the isolated hallowed quadrangle in which the artist innovates to produce a self-sufficient, self-referential heroically insular object, supposedly outside social or political discourse. Anurendra would rather engage the way pictures can be conditioned by their context, and assembled in dynamic formations that argue in the context of relevant political and personal themes.

Anurendra achieves metaphoric pregnancy in the works. His paintings and artist books are an ongoing and inexhaustible project, for the personal is as profound as the social is urgent. As viewers, we may never circumscribe or adequately analyse the profundity, just as the urgency may

remain sublimely un-managed; but their artistic synthesis is inspirational in our less than perfect world. The important artist, while grappling with issues of self and community, gives us time to reflect on the integrity of being an individual.

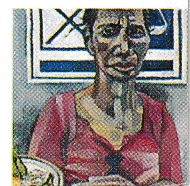
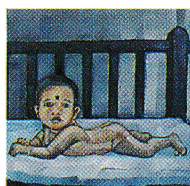
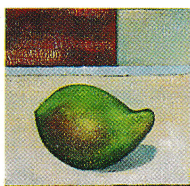
Robert Nelson in conversations with Anurendra Jegadeva

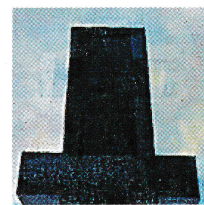
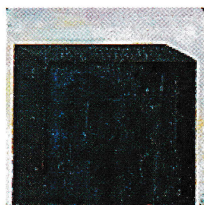
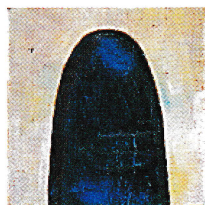
Dr Robert Nelson is the Associate Dean, Research and Graduate Studies, Faculty of Art & Design, Monash University. As a writer, artist and academic he is both prolific and respected. He has been the art critic for The Age Newspaper since 1994. He is a regular contributor to local and international art journals. A practising artist with a particular interest in the 'rehabilitation of painting', he has been exhibiting regularly since 1990.



Works featured in catalogue:

- Cover and wrap-around: **Large Militant Monk (detail)**, 2001
Diptych, Oil on Canvas, 91cm x 120cm & 91cm x 23cm
- Fold-in: **New Gods, Old Gods**, 2002
Assemblage, Oil on Canvas, 48cm x 48cm & 17cm x 17cm (6)
- Opposite & this page
Top left: **Food & Flesh 1**, 2001
Diptych, Oil on Canvas, 28cm x 25cm and 28cm x 20cm
- In-text: Page 6 from **Fair and Lovely Portrait Album**, 2003
- Right: Page 8 from **Family Album Thesaurus**, 2002
- Bottom: **Running Indian I, II**, 2001
Oil on Canvas, 73cm x 91cm (2)
- accompanied by
- The History of the Malaysian Indians in 10 Common Cliches**
Oil on Canvas, 17cm x 17cm (10)





artist profile

Anurendra Jegadeva

Born 1965

Johor, Malaysia

education

1986 Foundation in Art & Design, Oxford Polytechnic

1993 LLB Honours (London)

2002 Master of Fine Art, Monash University

Anurendra is currently pursuing Doctorate studies in Art History at the Faculty of Art & Design, Monash University

solo exhibitions

1992 Solo, Kuala Lumpur

1993 A First Work, Kuala Lumpur

1998 Monk Couture, Kuala Lumpur

1999 Women & Elections, London

2001 Migrant Adventures – People, Places and
Other Assorted Things, Kuala Lumpur

2003 Melancholic Mantras, Kuala Lumpur

selected group exhibitions

1996 Men on Women, Kuala Lumpur

1998 Art and Nationalism – 40 Years of Malaysian Art, Kuala Lumpur

A Decade of Malaysian Art, London

APA, Kuala Lumpur

Around the Body, Kuala Lumpur

1999 Experiences, Adelaide

2000 Nationalism & Peace, Kuala Lumpur

2002 Australian High Commission Retrospective –

A Gathering of Artists 1982–2002, Kuala Lumpur

the artist would like to acknowledge:

Beverly, Rachel and Lizzie

Rahel Joseph

Dr. Jolly Koh

Wairah Marzuki

Dr. Robert Nelson

Datuk N Parameswaran

His Excellency Mr. James Wise

Anna Slocombe

Inpa & Rupa!

Family

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