



DAG

Soliloquies of SOLITUDE

SEVEN INDIAN ABSTRACTIONISTS IN THE WEST

THE
ARMORY
SHOW

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Soliloquies of SOLITUDE

SEVEN INDIAN ABSTRACTIONISTS IN THE WEST

Ambadas
Rajendra Dhawan
Natvar Bhavsar
V. Viswanadhan
Sohan Qadri
Anil Revri
Krishna Reddy



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CONTENTS

05	Soliloquies of Solitude: Seven Indian Abstractionists In The West
06	Ambadas
14	Rajendra Dhawan
22	Natvar Bhavsar
30	V. Viswanadhan
38	Sohan Qadri
50	Anil Revri
58	Krishna Reddy
72	About DAG



Soliloquies of SOLITUDE


SEVEN INDIAN ABSTRACTIONISTS IN THE WEST

In search of originality and authentic sensibility, Indian artists began, from the early decades of the twentieth century, to unlearn the academic discourse taught in colonial-era art institutions. After the nation gained Independence in 1947, there was a departure from figurative art, as self-expression took precedence for artists, and many delved into abstraction. At this juncture in history, artists not only experimented with formal structures but contemplated the philosophical question of art's final goal.

Cross-cultural exchanges played an important role in sustaining the abstract in Indian art. Artists were offered government scholarships and privately funded fellowships to travel

overseas to Europe, USA and other countries. Some chose to stay on abroad: for example, Natvar Bhavsar, Krishna Reddy and Anil Revri made New York their home, Rajendra Dhawan and V.Viswanadhan lived in Paris, Ambadas Khobragade emigrated to Oslo in Norway, whereas Sohan Qadri chose Copenhagen in Denmark. Abstraction was crucial to these artists' practice and, in key aspects, each artist stood in a league of their own.

These Indian modernists overseas, produced art distinct in style and idiom, experimenting with a variety of media. Their uniqueness is illustrated by the cultural and political stance taken by each artist, the subjects they sought inspiration in and in their processes of creating art.



Ambadas
1922–2012

‘These pictures are beyond any definition. It is better to feel these pictures rather than look at them. Like we feel coolness in the wind and warmth in the sun.’

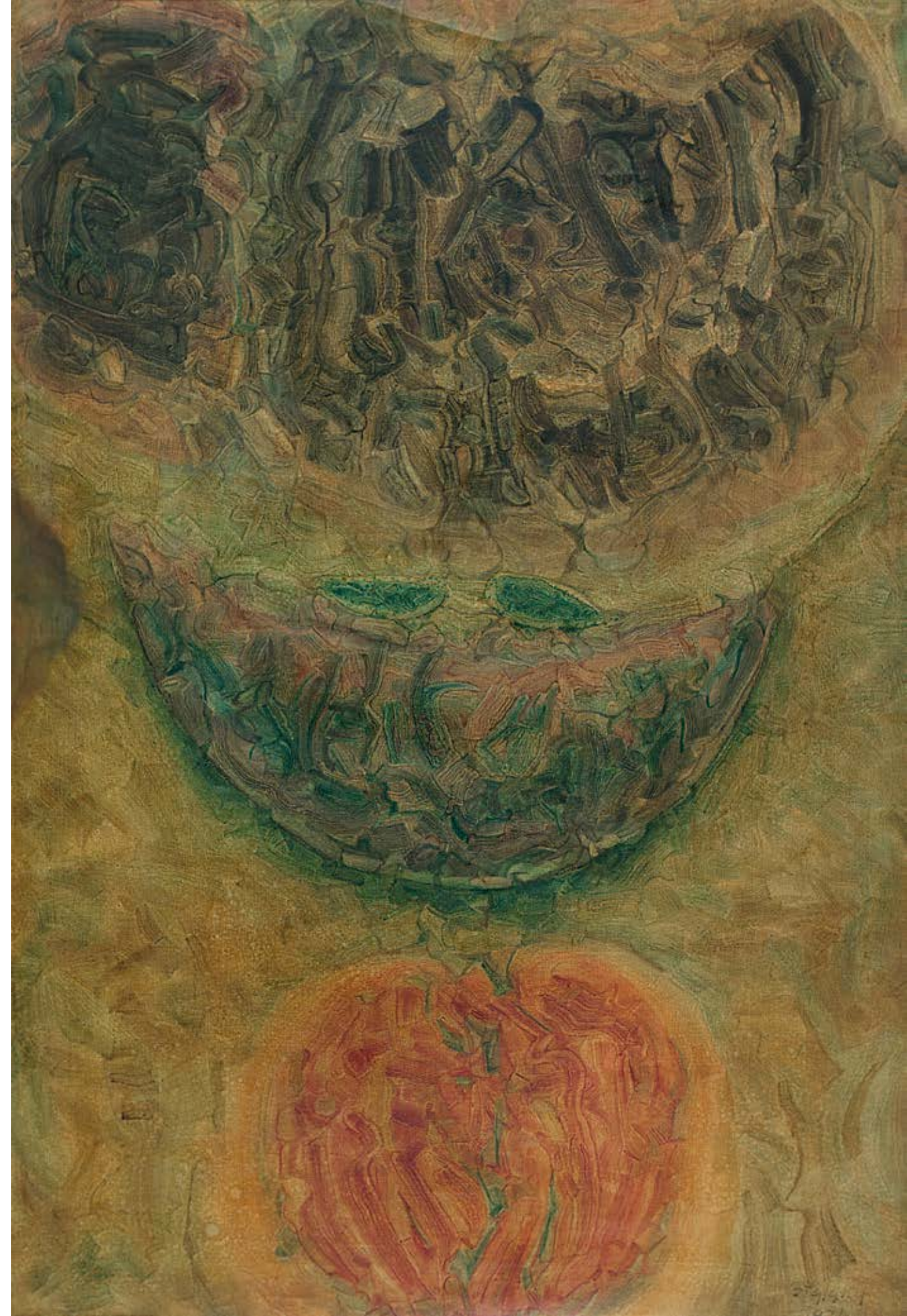
ASHOK VAJPEYI

Born in Akola, Maharashtra, Ambadas was a committed abstractionist. Hailing from a family whose fortunes depended on nature’s bounty, his works too evoke a feeling of natural processes. One notices in his canvases frequently large swathes of paint with details that appear as aerial views of the earth or are reminiscent of organic forms and geological acts such as burrowed soil or bubbling lava. His chosen palette was earthy: browns, ochres, pastel greens and occasional blues that mimic colours of the four elements—earth, fire, air and water. During the 1960s–70s, the predominantly ochre and red impasto hues became even more volcanic with an explosive energy.

His earthy and dark oils, imitating ruptures and shifts in the earth, gave way to lighter and delicate strokes during the 1990s. Some resemble distinct shapes left against a neutral background, appearing as floating patterns in space. The fluorescent pinks and reds, or the faint rugged textured lines, occasionally seem calligraphic too. Art critic Richard Bartholomew called his works an invocation of subterranean life, organic forms of the earth and underwater life.

Informed by Indian philosophical thought and the idea of the *shunya* or the feeling of detachment, Ambadas’s art invokes spirituality and oneness with the earth. His works, at times not dated, denote an absence of chronology or a void where time is suspended. An artist of solitude who remained immersed in the creative process, Ambadas moved to Norway in 1972, but retained connections with the artists of Group 1890, of which he was a founding member.

Untitled
Oil on canvas, 1971
60.0 x 40.0 in. / 152.4 x 101.6 cm.
Signed in Hindi and dated (lower right) 'Ambadas / 71'
Verso: Inscription in English 'Rs: 3500/-'





Untitled
Oil on canvas, 1968
48.0 x 23.7 in. / 121.9 x 60.2 cm.
Signed in Hindi and dated (upper left)
'Ambadas / 68'



Rajendra Dhawan
1936–2012

‘Many artists paint what they see, he [Rajendra Dhawan] painted what he sensed. Space, air and other occult things were his enduring themes.’

PRABHAKAR KOLTE

Rajendra Dhawan devoted his career to non-representation and, in the process, he created art that necessitates quiet introspection. His earthy paintings that are dominated by ochre yellows, sienna browns, and muted crimson reds, occasionally meet deep Prussian blues and bluish greys. From the mid-1970s to the last years of Dhawan’s practice, the hues of his palette changed steadfastly, as did the way he applied oil glazes. He observed in 2011,

‘My works have evolved as I have with time. I paint today as I did years ago, but when I sometimes look back, I see that change. It was a subtle, slow change.’

The Delhi-born artist studied first at Delhi Polytechnic and then at Paris’s École des Beaux Arts during 1953-58, and later at the Belgrade Institute of Art in the early 1960s. Dhawan co-founded an artists’ collective named The Unknown in 1960, which remained active until 1964. Permanently settled in Paris from 1970, he infrequently returned to India for exhibitions. Rajendra Dhawan was known among friends and members of the art community as a man with a quiet demeanour, which in turn reflected in his work. While Indian in heritage, he belonged to a much larger global movement of twentieth-century artists who decidedly transitioned away from figuration.

Untitled
Oil on canvas
35.2 x 45.5 in. / 89.4 x 115.6 cm.





Untitled
Oil on linen
51.2 x 76.5 in. / 130.0 x 194.3 cm.
Verso: Signed indistinctly in English
'DHAWAN'

Natvar Bhavsar
(b. 1934)

‘Art in some ways is documenting something and in some ways very emotive. There is always an undercurrent that takes you to another place besides yourself, and that is where you have the poetic centre of your being.’

NATVAR BHAVSAR

Born in an educator’s family on 7 April 1934 in a small town in Gujarat, Natvar Bhavsar studied to be a drawing teacher and began his career in Chanasma. He then joined the C. N. School in Ahmedabad for its five-year diploma course in art offered by Sir J. J. School of Art; simultaneously, he continued to study for his master’s in teaching art.

As a twenty-seven-year-old, Bhavsar learnt about the possibilities of further education from a class fellow’s father and enrolled at the Philadelphia Museum College of Art to study industrial design, but once there, changed course to study painting at the Tyler School of Art, Temple University. Here, he met Janet Brosious, an artist and art educator; they would later marry in 1978. In 1970, he had his first show at Max Hutchinson Gallery, New York.

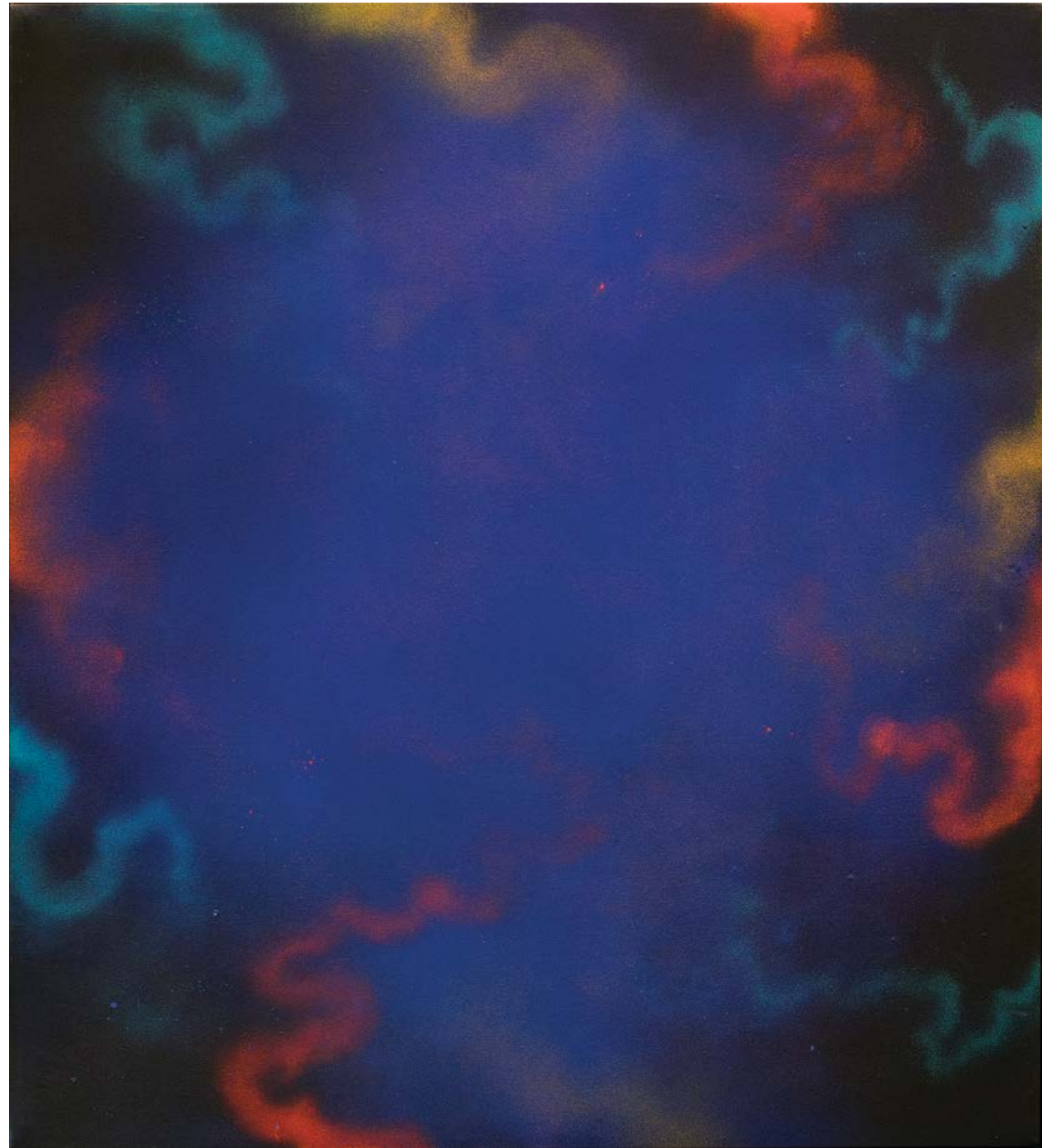
Bhavsar is an abstractionist known for his colour-field paintings, made on large canvases with natural and organic pigments. His paintings invariably have an Indian title, linking his works closely to the land of his birth and youth, and they often address subjects or myths familiar to those from India—whether in a literal or abstract sense. ‘Bhavsar is at once a thoroughly American painter and product of Indian culture,’ Carter Ratcliff, art writer, said of him. Well established and widely appreciated, Bhavsar lives and works in New York.

TRIVENEE

Dry pigments with oil and acrylic mediums
on canvas, 1999

60.0 x 54.0 in. / 152.4 x 137.2 cm.

Verso: Signed, inscribed, dated and titled
in English 'NATVAR BHAVSAR / 60" x 54" /
1999 / "TRIVENEE"; on stretcher: Stamp of
ACP Viviane Ehrli Galerie





KETU II

Dry pigments with oil and acrylic mediums on
canvas, 1977

83.5 x 78.5 in. / 212.1 x 199.4 cm.

Verso: Signed, dated and titled in English
'NATVAR BHAVSAR / MARCH 77 / KETU
II'; on stretcher: Label with artist's name,
inscription and title in English and label of
Max Hutchinson Gallery with artist's name,
title, inscription and date in English and
sticker of Freeport Minerals Company



V. Viswanadhan
(b. 1940)

A mong artists, Velu Viswanadhan is often referred to as ‘Paris’ Viswanadhan because he made the French capital his home. Born in 1940 in Kollam, Kerala, Viswanadhan joined Government College of Fine Arts, Madras, in 1960, where he studied under K. C. S. Paniker, and along with him became a founder-member of the Cholamandal Artists’ Village.

In 1967, Viswanadhan participated in Biennale de Paris, and settled in the city the following year. By then, he had already formulated his concept of space, tantric *mandalas*, and geometric forms, but in time arrived at a new synthesis, narrowing the existing polarities between the East and the West. Though his use of colour remained bold and warm as before, he re-examined his interpretation of space after coming in contact with contemporary Western art—freeing space from the esoteric notions of geometrical figurations, he began to interpret space as time.

Viswanadhan’s engagement with various mediums is blended with his understanding of light and colour, one he has explored in his films as well. Saturated with reds and greens, mauves and crimsons, his works evoke memories inextricably linked with a life lived in different geographical spaces.

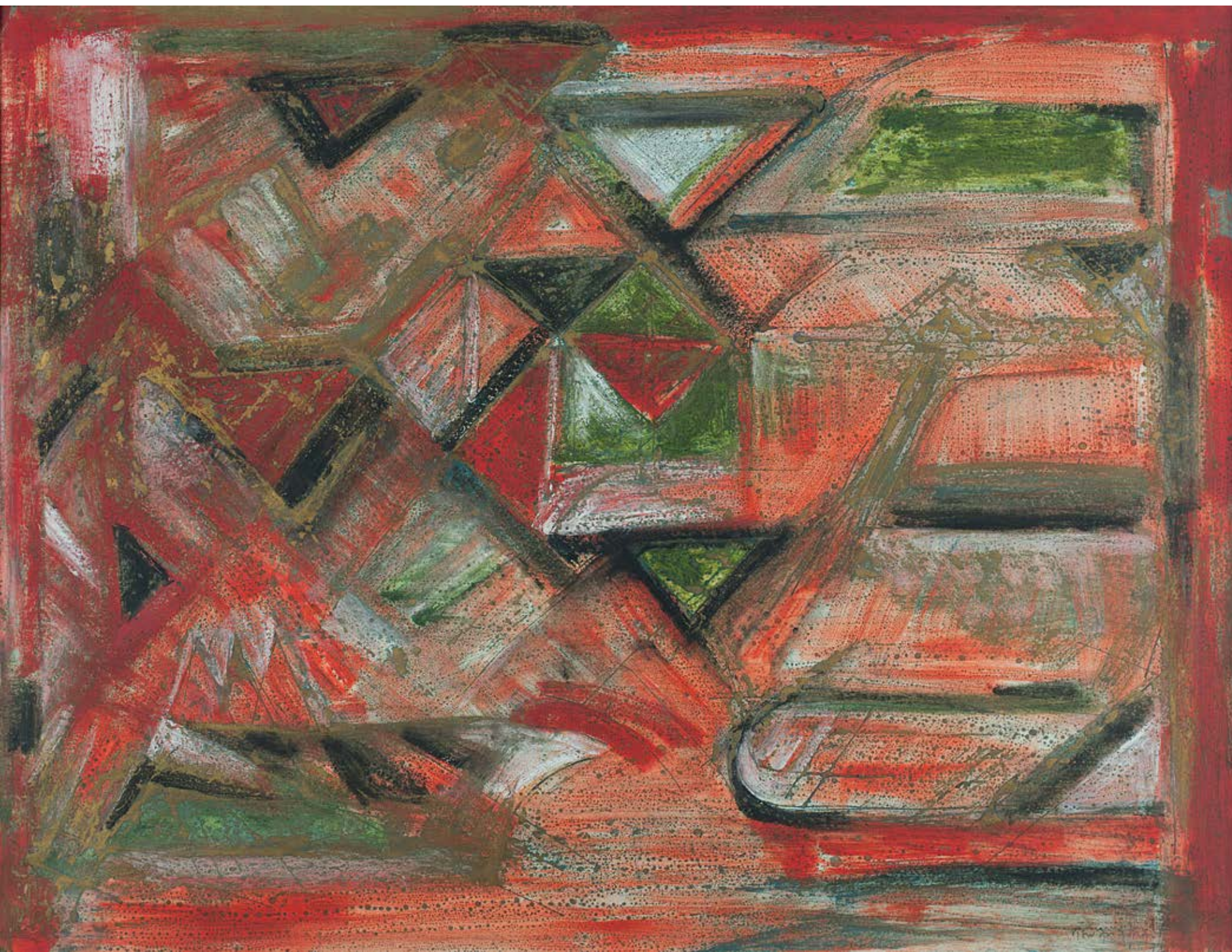
Widely exhibited and collected across Europe, Viswanadhan lives and works in Paris and maintains his studio in Cholamandal.

‘A painting is neither an object nor a resemblance. It is a non-object, an image that beholds the power, the presence. It does not represent, it does not reproduce. It exists. Nothing is less immaterial than a painting’

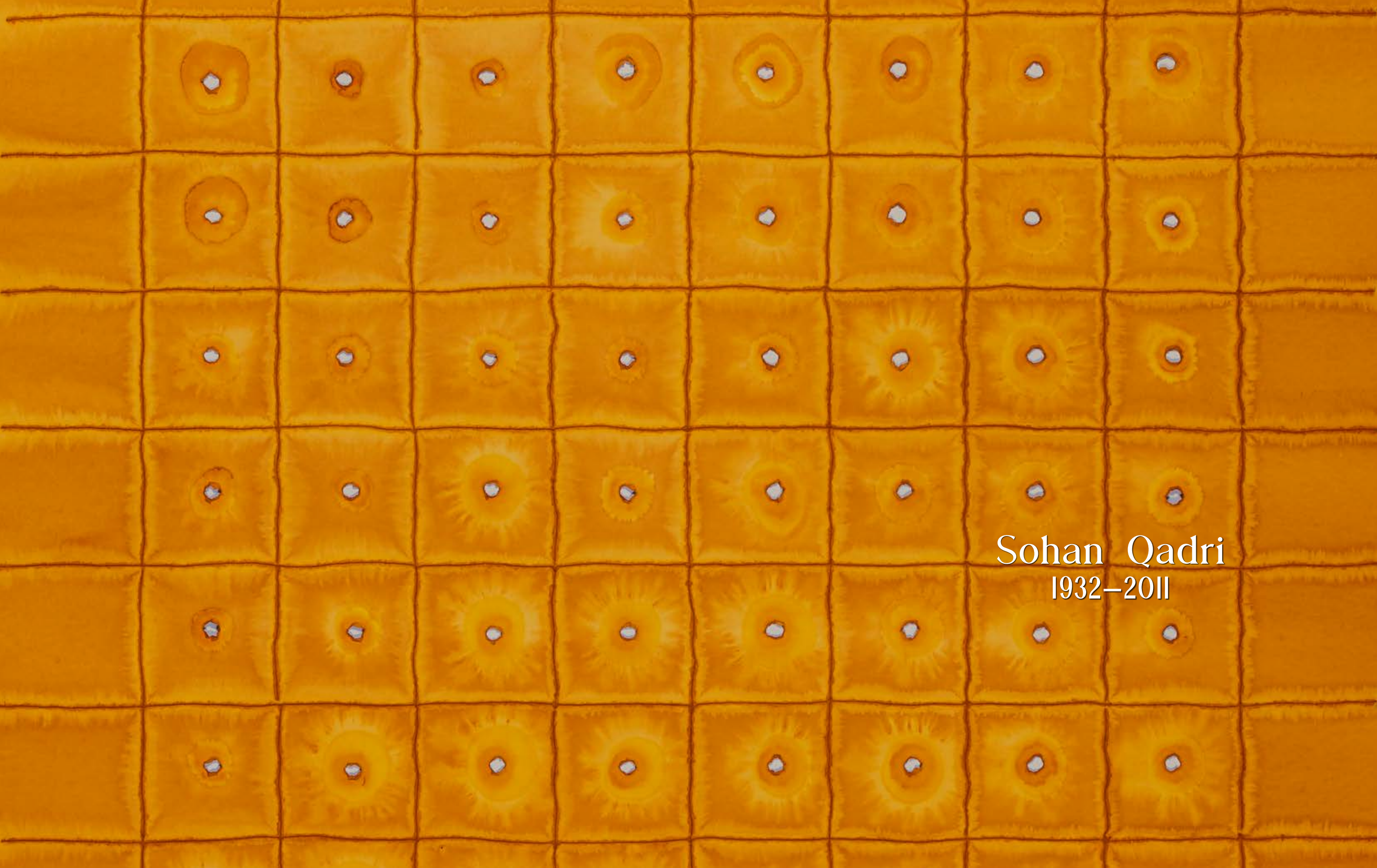
V. VISWANADHAN

Untitled
Gouache and gold pigment on paper, 1971
19.2 x 25.0 in. / 48.8 x 63.5 cm.
Signed in English and dated (lower right)
'Viswanadhan V / 71'





Untitled
Mixed media on paper, 1972
20.0 x 25.7 in. / 50.8 x 65.3 cm.
Signed in English and dated (lower right)
'Viswanadhan / 72'



Sohan Qadri
1932–2011

Sohan Qadri was born to an affluent agricultural family in Kapurthala, Punjab. He was influenced at a young age by two spiritual men—Bikham Giri and Ahmad Ali Shah Qadri, a *yogi* and a Sufi, respectively—which deeply impacted him and paved the way for his explorations of philosophical and existential questions as he grew older. This search manifested in travels to the Himalayas and to monasteries in Tibet.

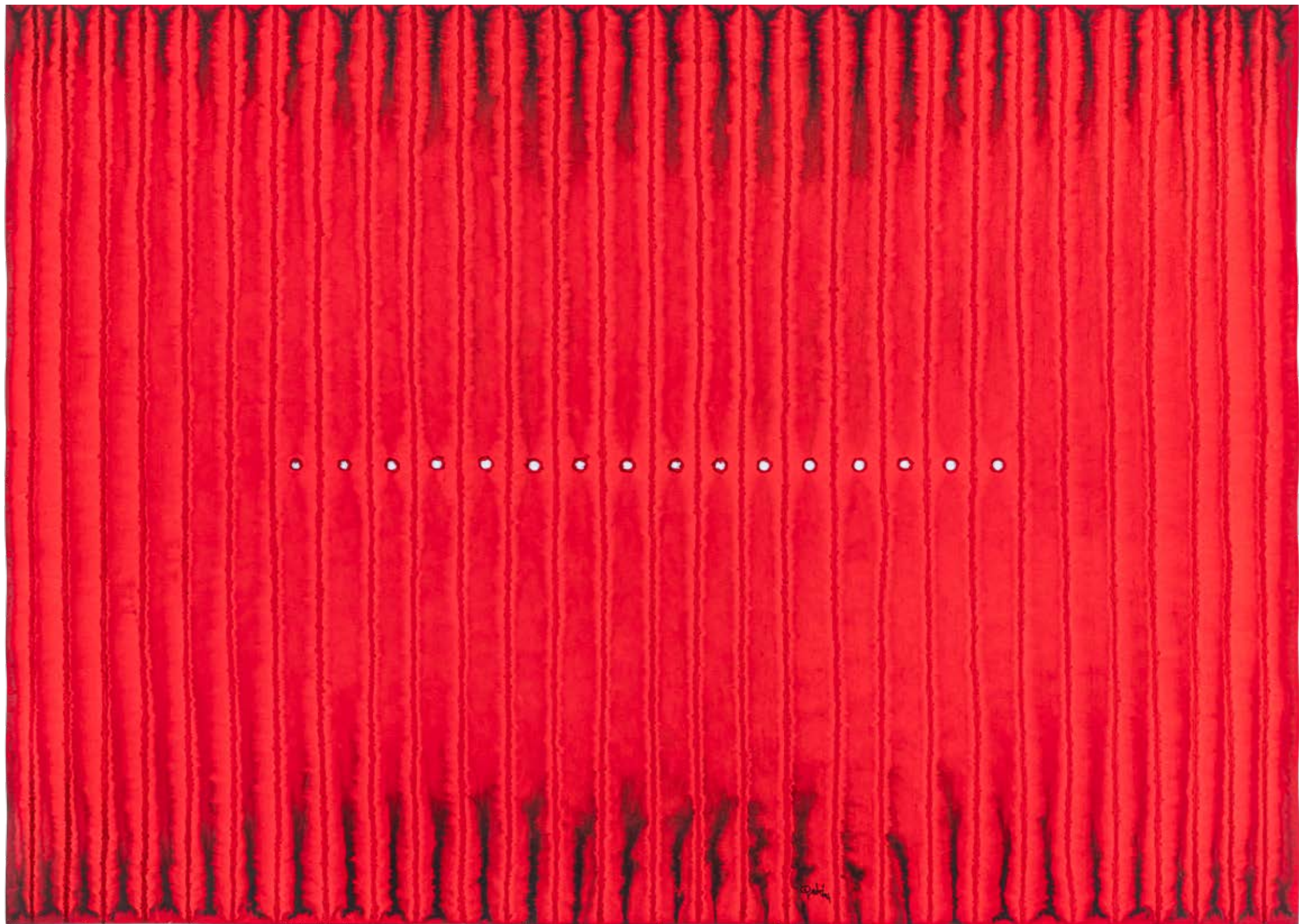
He started his career as a photographer at a film studio in Bombay, where he discovered art made by members of the famed Progressive Artists’ Group—leading him to pursue an MFA programme from Simla’s Government College of Arts in 1955. In the 1960s, Qadri travelled across Africa, North America and Europe, visiting Paris and Zurich, before settling down in Copenhagen in the 1970s.

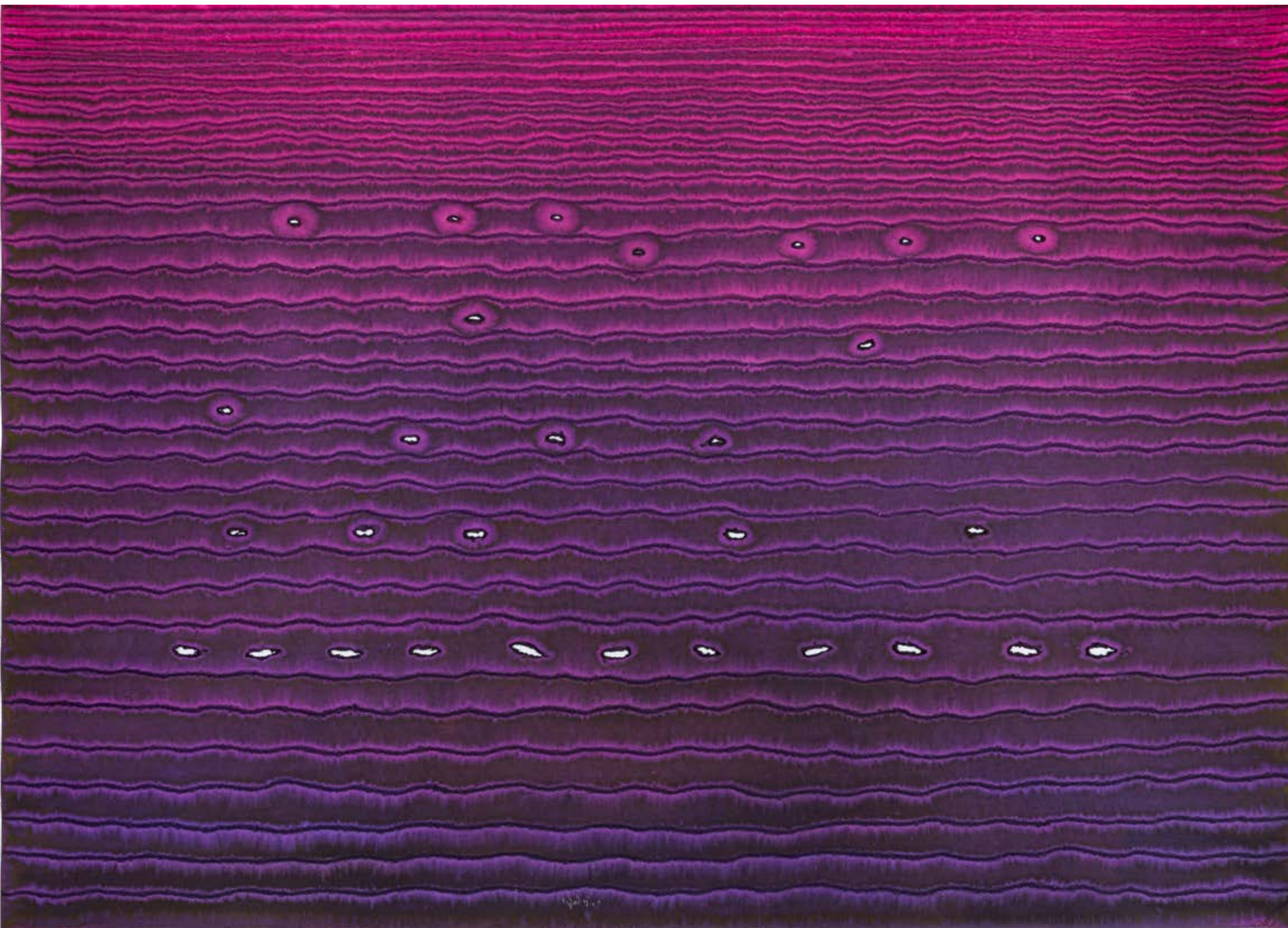
Representation disappeared from Qadri’s visual language early on. In search of transcendence, he created works imbued with tantric symbolism and philosophy, giving rise to his own abstract, modernist vocabulary. His art was minimalist, rendered in vibrant colours, almost an allusion to the northern lights of Scandinavia. Qadri began his career painting with oils on canvas but from the 1970s onwards, he started working on paper—soaking it, carving it and covering it in dyes, turning the two-dimensional surface into a three-dimensional medium. Devoted to metaphysical pursuits, he taught *kundalini yoga* in Copenhagen, and in 2004, he established Gyan Stumbh-Stupa, a centre for spiritual learning and practice in Punjab.

‘I am a dot in the silence of the void.’

SOHAN QADRI

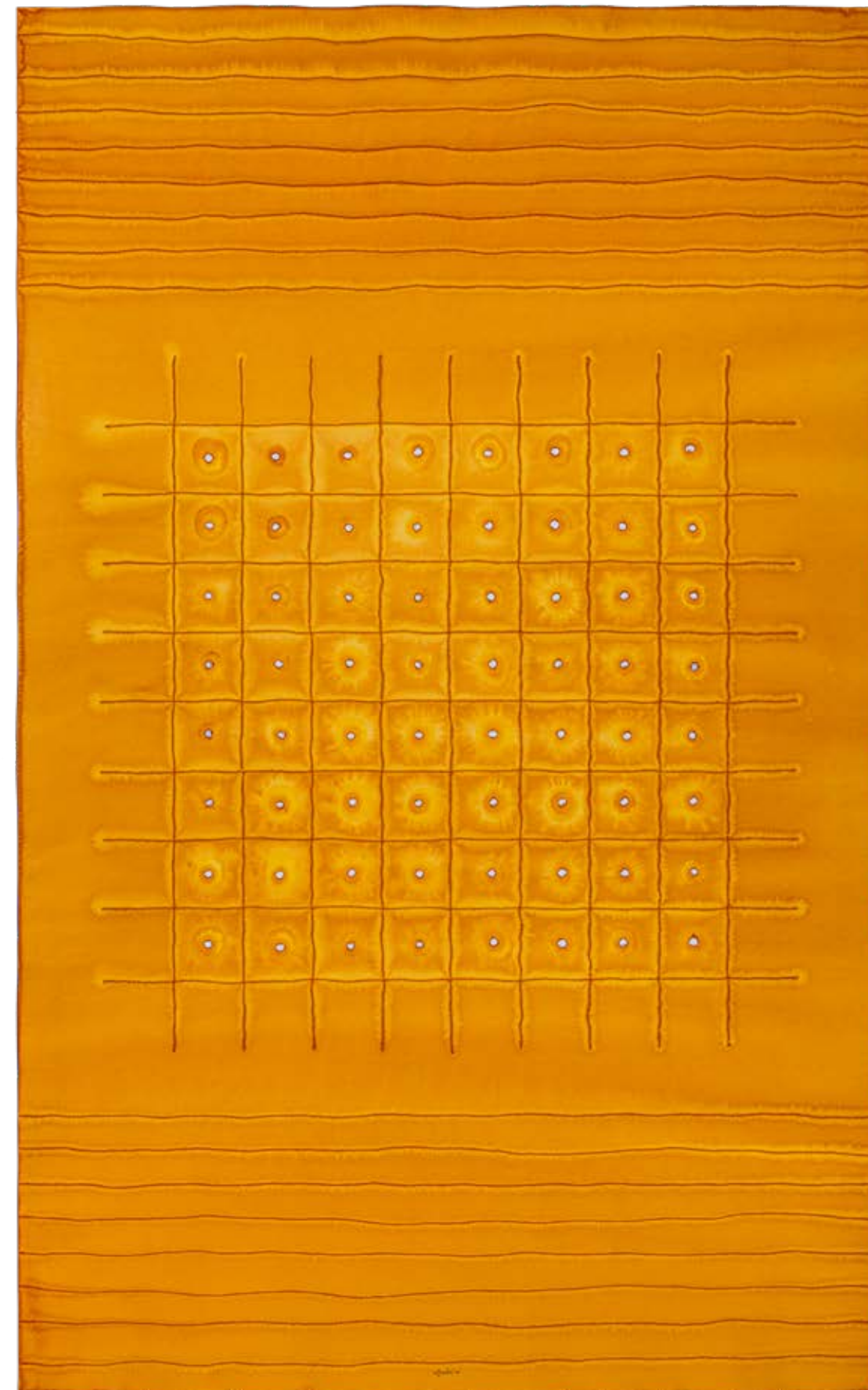
Untitled
 Ink and dye on paper, 2004
 39.2 x 55.0 in. / 99.6 x 139.7 cm.
 Signed in English and dated (lower right)
 'Qadri / 04'





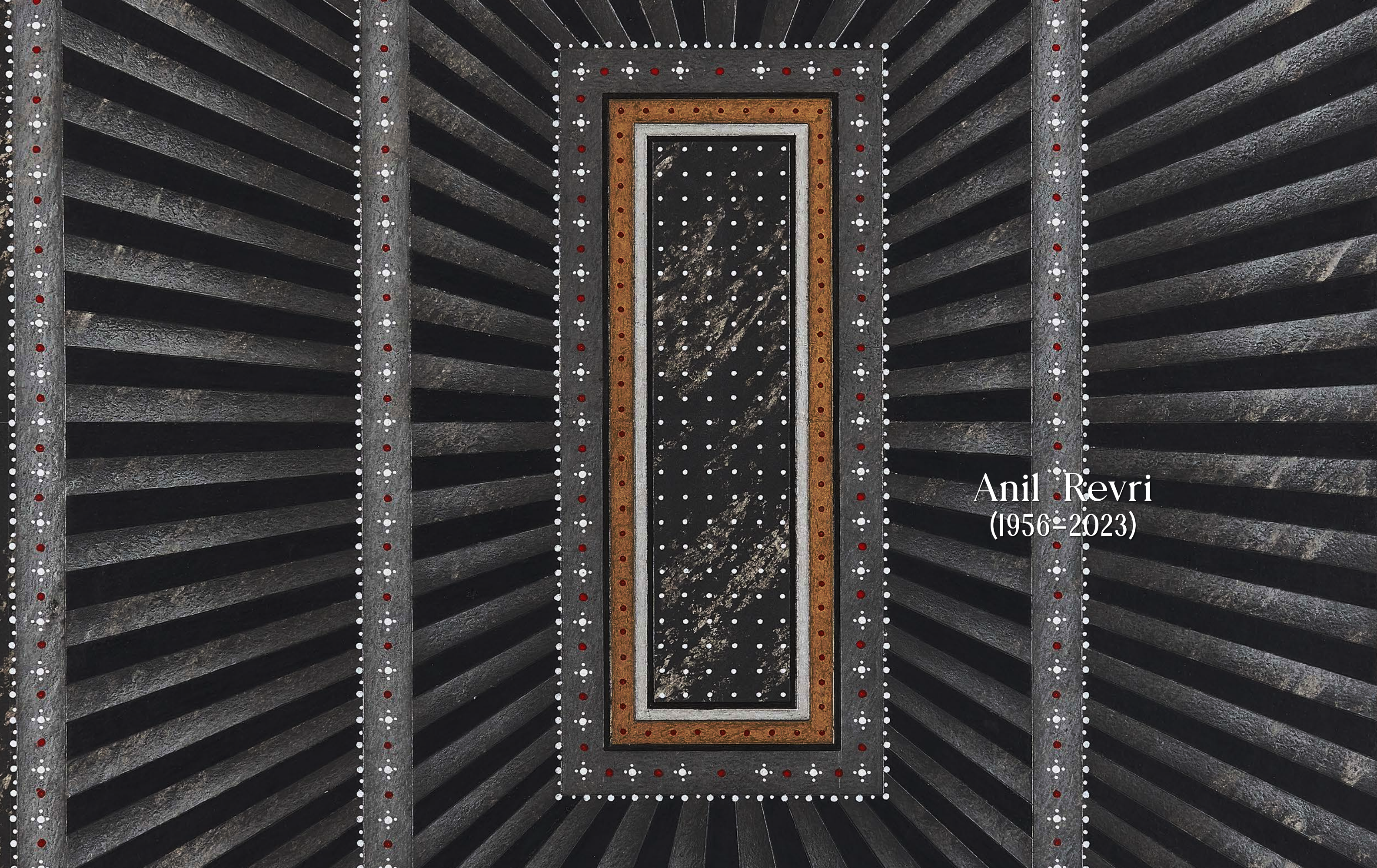
Untitled
Ink and dye on paper, 2003
39.2 x 55.0 in. / 99.6 x 139.7 cm.
Signed in English and dated (lower centre)
'Qadri / 03'

Untitled
Ink and dye on paper, 2010
78.7 x 49.2 in. / 199.9 x 125.0 cm.
Signed in English and dated (lower centre)
'Qadri / 10'





Untitled
Ink and dye on paper, 2010
78.7 x 49.2 in. / 199.9 x 125.0 cm.
Signed in English and dated (lower centre)
'Qadri / 10'



Anil Revri
(1956–2023)

‘Mood and atmosphere are achieved by the way the optic nerve perceives light and color on different frequencies. Each variation in line — oblique, broken, dotted or curved — creates a specific frequency and evokes a particular response.’

ANIL REVRI

Anil Revri (1956–2023) was an Indian-American artist whose practice combined Eastern philosophical inquiry with Western abstraction. Born in India, he studied interior design at the Sir J.J. School of Art in Mumbai before moving to the United States, where he earned a BFA in graphic design from the the Corcoran College of Art + Design in Washington, DC. This cross-cultural education shaped a distinctive visual language—at once rooted in spiritual reflection and grounded in rigorous formal structure.

Revri’s work drew on the traditions of the Washington Color School, incorporating serialised stripes, dots and circles, while also reflecting the meditative aesthetics of Islamic, Hindu and Buddhist art. Though abstract in appearance, his compositions were deeply contemplative, often described by critics as visual gateways into altered states of perception and inner stillness. His paintings, inspired by sacred geometry and metaphysical thought, were created as acts of meditation and invited viewers to engage in a similar journey.

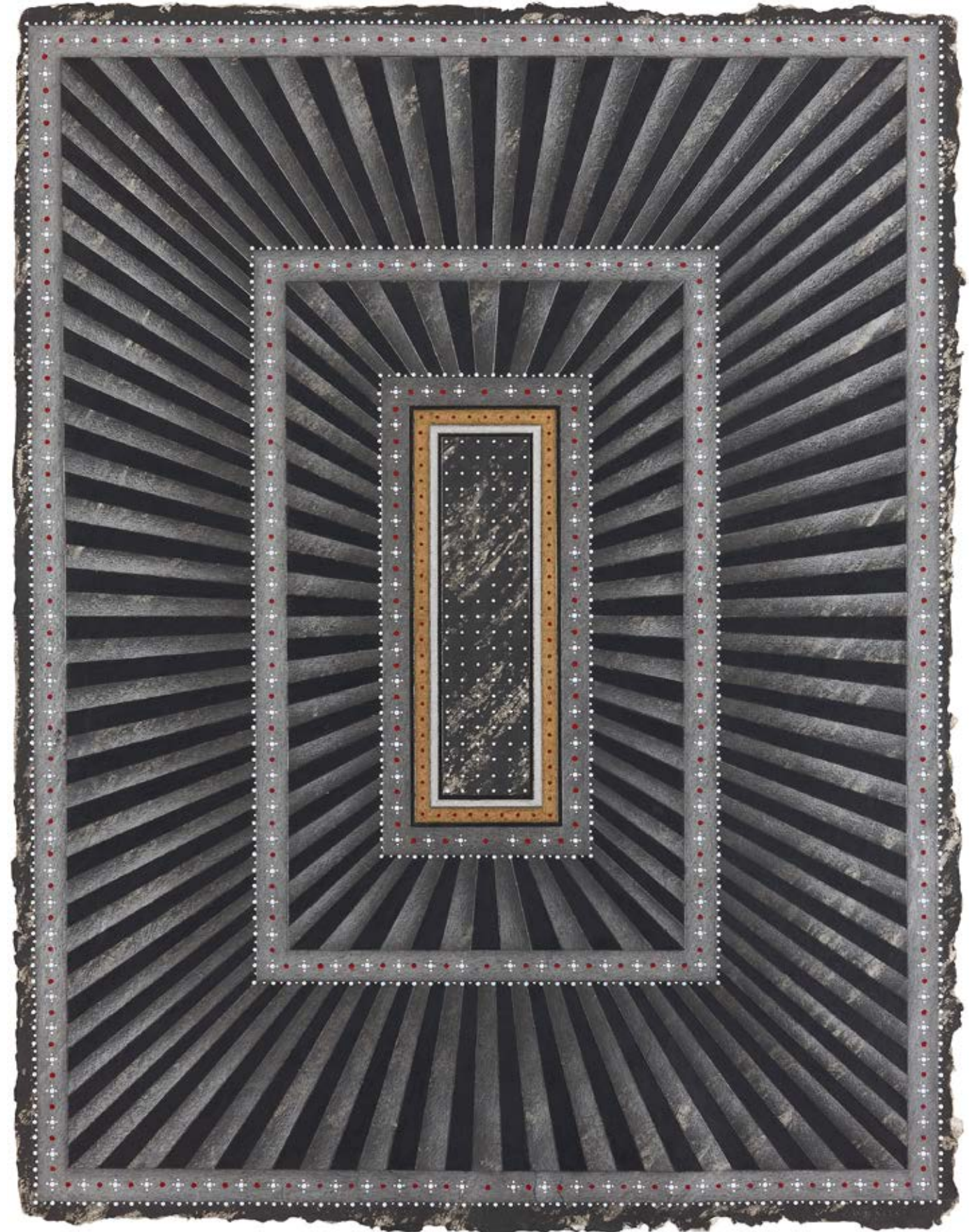
Over the course of his career, Revri held thirty-eight solo exhibitions in India, Europe and the United States. He was the first Indian-American artist to be given a solo exhibition at a major American museum, the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. His *Cultural Crossings* series was supported by the White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and was exhibited at the United Nations’ Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders in 2000. Among his notable public works was *Wall for Peace*, a sculpture first exhibited at the American University Museum and later displayed at Dulles International Airport.

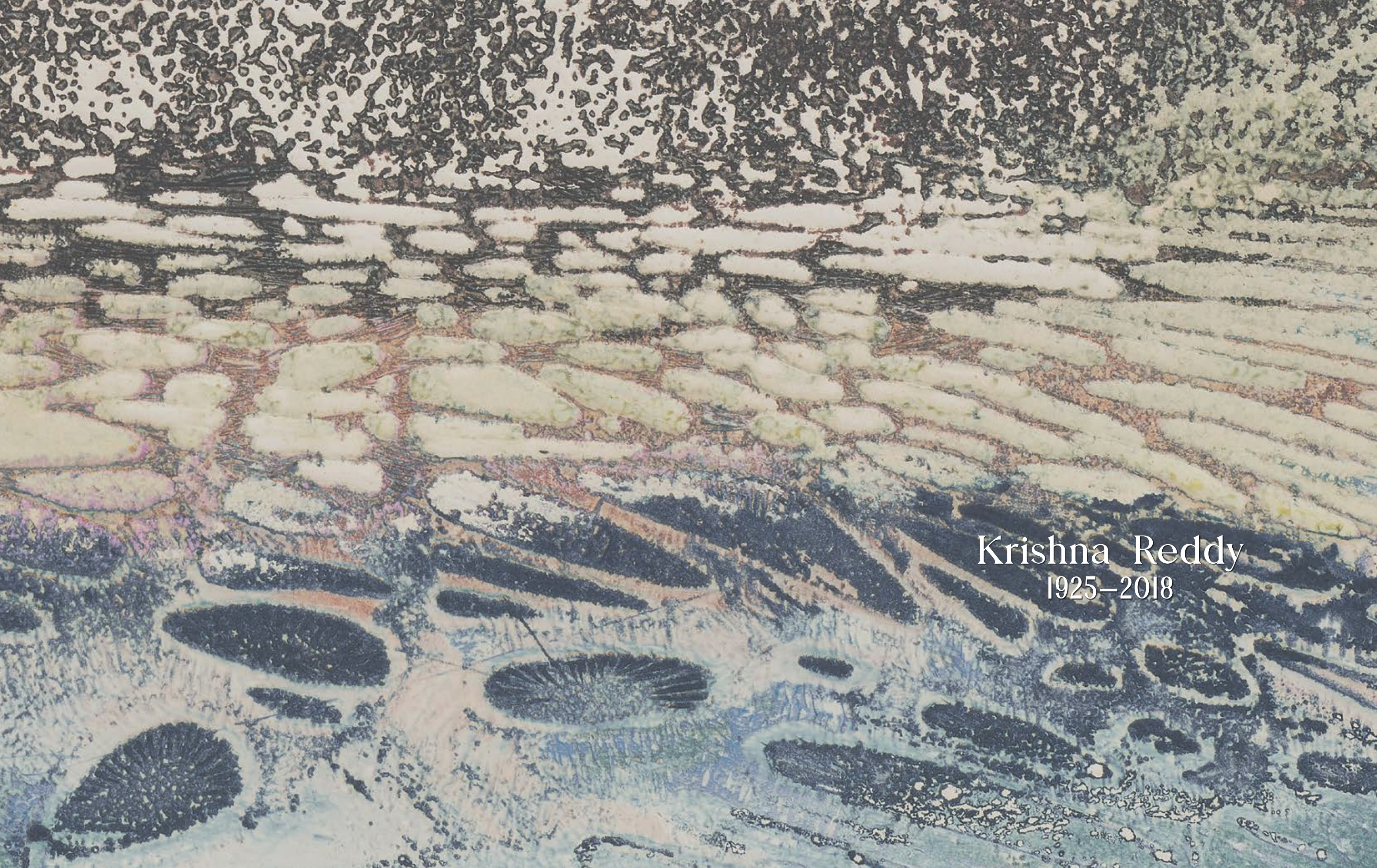
Anil Revri lived and worked in Washington, DC, until his passing in 2023. His work continues to resonate for its spiritual depth, visual precision and capacity to connect diverse cultural traditions through abstraction.



Geometric Abstraction 5
Mixed media on paper, 2019
40.0 x 30.0 in. / 101.6 x 76.2 cm.
Signed in English and dated
(lower right) 'ANIL REVRI / 2019'

Geometric Abstraction 8
Mixed media on paper, 2019
40.0 x 30.0 in. / 101.6 x 76.2 cm.
Signed in English and dated
(lower right) 'ANIL REVRI / 2019'





Krishna Reddy
1925–2018

Krishna Reddy was arguably the greatest among Indian printmakers, and a key global figure who pioneered simultaneously coloured intaglio prints. Working in Paris, at Stanley W. Hayter’s reputed printmaking studio Atelier 17, Reddy developed, alongside another Indian-origin artist Kaiko Moti (1921–89), the ground-breaking technique of ‘viscosity’ printmaking. In this method, the viscosity or thickness of ink pigments is controlled by combining varying proportions of uncooked linseed oil, which allows multiple colours to be applied to the intaglio plate at once. Using this process and other techniques, Reddy produced vibrant abstract prints, many of which invoke nature.

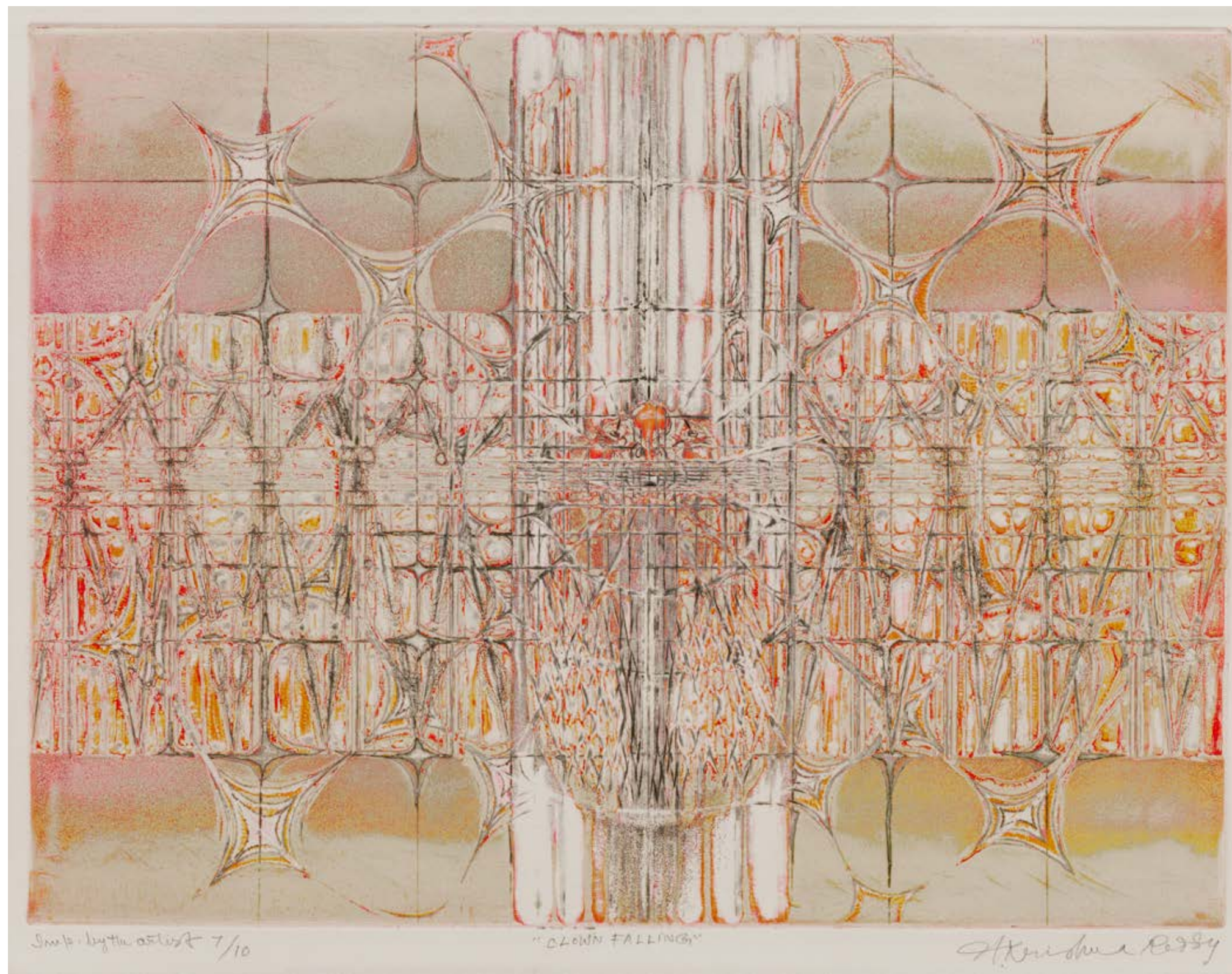
Born in Chittoor, Andhra Pradesh, Reddy completed a diploma in fine arts from Visva Bharati University in 1947. Travelling to Europe in 1949, he spent time at London’s Slade School of Fine Arts (1951–52), Paris’s Académie de la Grande Chaumière (1952–55), and Milan’s L’Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera (1956–57). Ossip Zadkine, a Belarusian-born French artist who was Reddy’s mentor in Paris, had introduced him to Hayter. At Atelier 17, Reddy was duly appointed assistant director (1957–64) and subsequently co-director (1964–76).

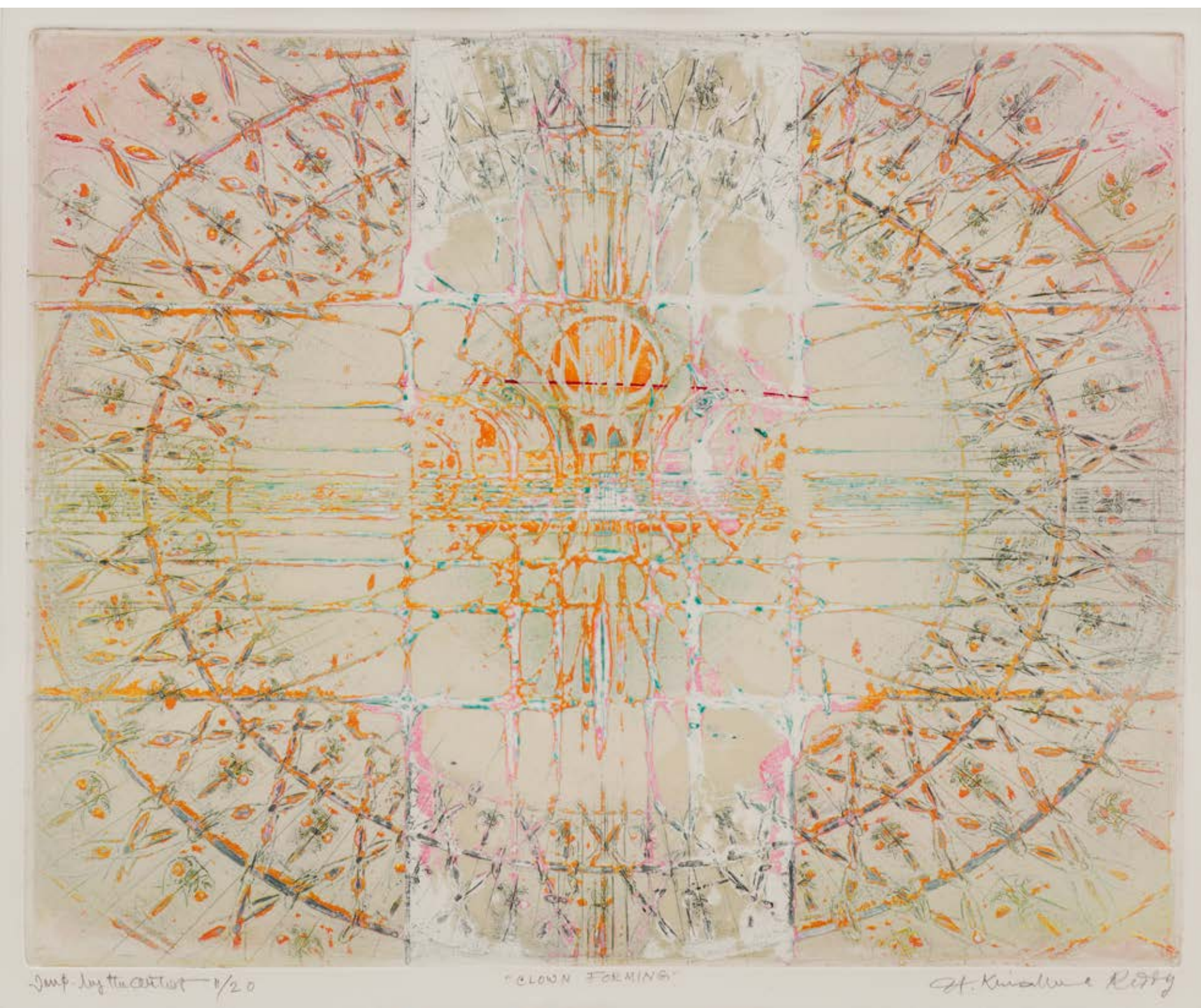
Reddy was equally prolific in teaching. After spending decades in Paris, he moved to New York in 1976 and established Color Print Atelier within New York University’s campus, serving as the director of graphic arts and printmaking at the university’s art department until his retirement in 2002. His prints have been extensively exhibited by stellar institutions, including the 2016 showcase by the Metropolitan Museum of Art that presented him alongside Hayter and Zarina.

‘From his beginnings in Atelier 17, he [Krishna Reddy] demonstrated his originality and artistic creativity and rapidly became one of my most sought after artist-collaborators.’

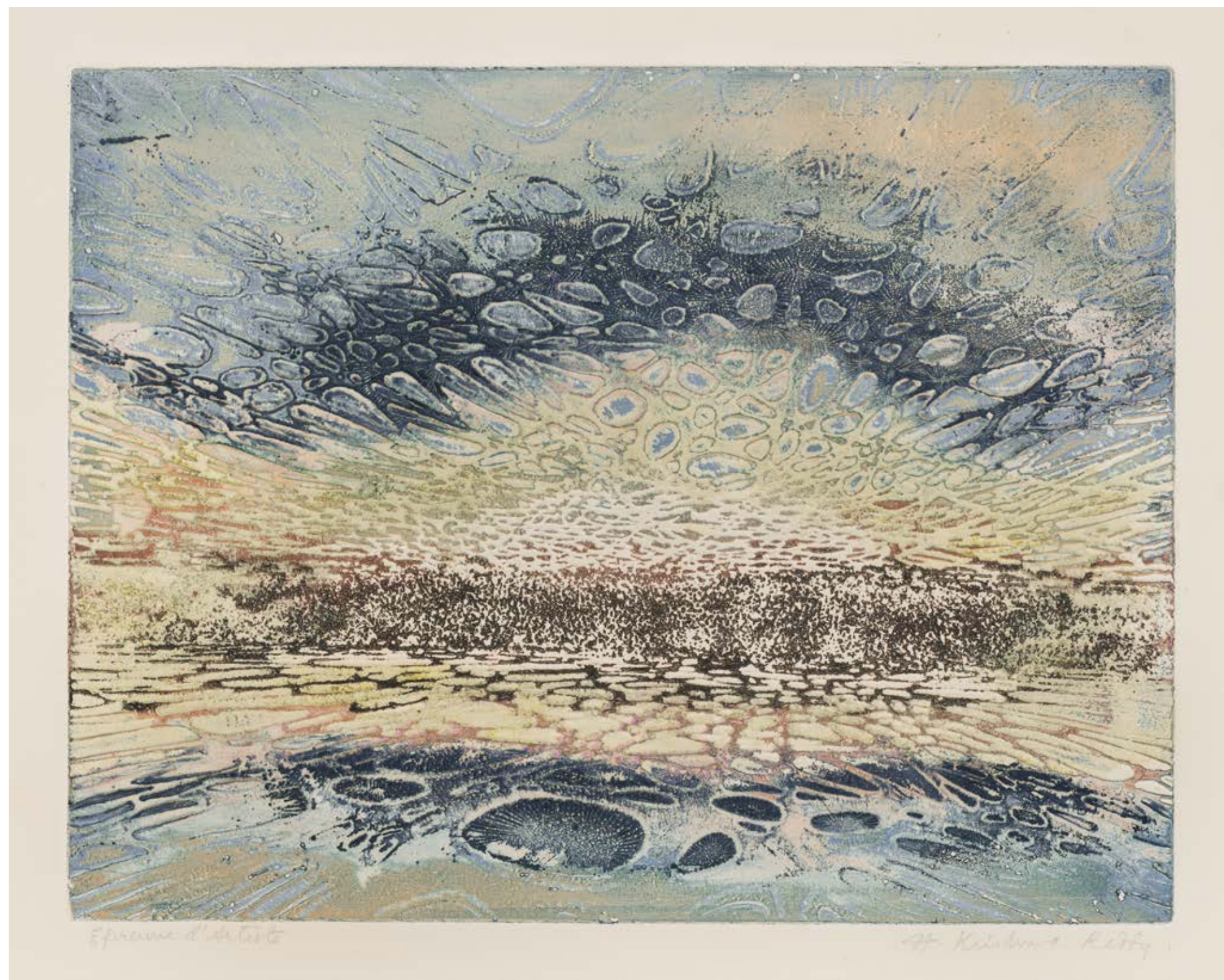
STANLEY WILLIAM HAYTER

Clown Falling
 Viscosity on paper
 14.0 x 18.0 in. / 35.6 x 45.7 cm.
 On print: Inscribed in Latin and English (lower left)
 'Imp. by the artist / 7/10'; titled in English (lower
 centre) "CLOWN FALLING" and signed in English
 (lower right) 'N. Krishna Reddy'
 Edition 7 of 10

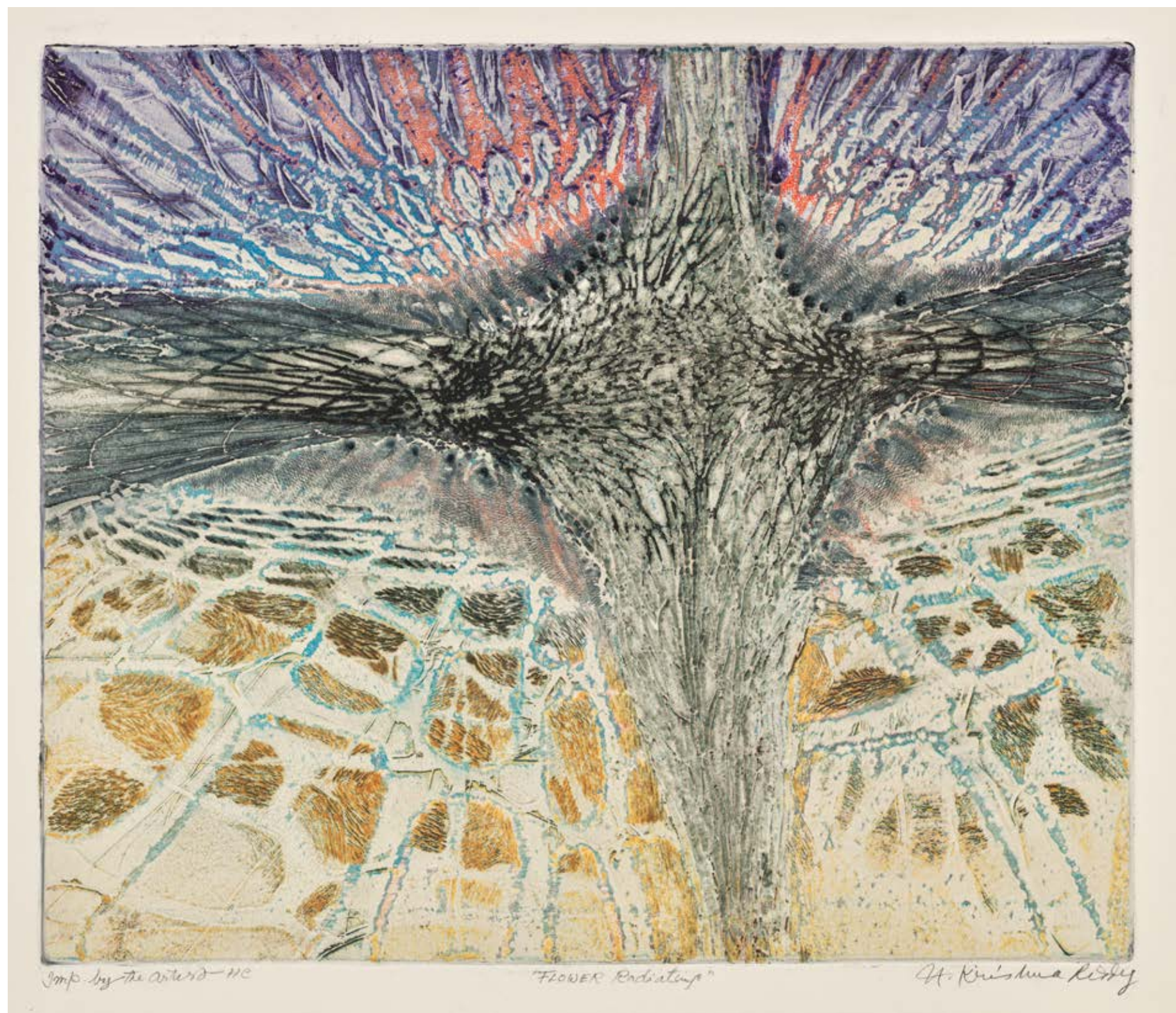




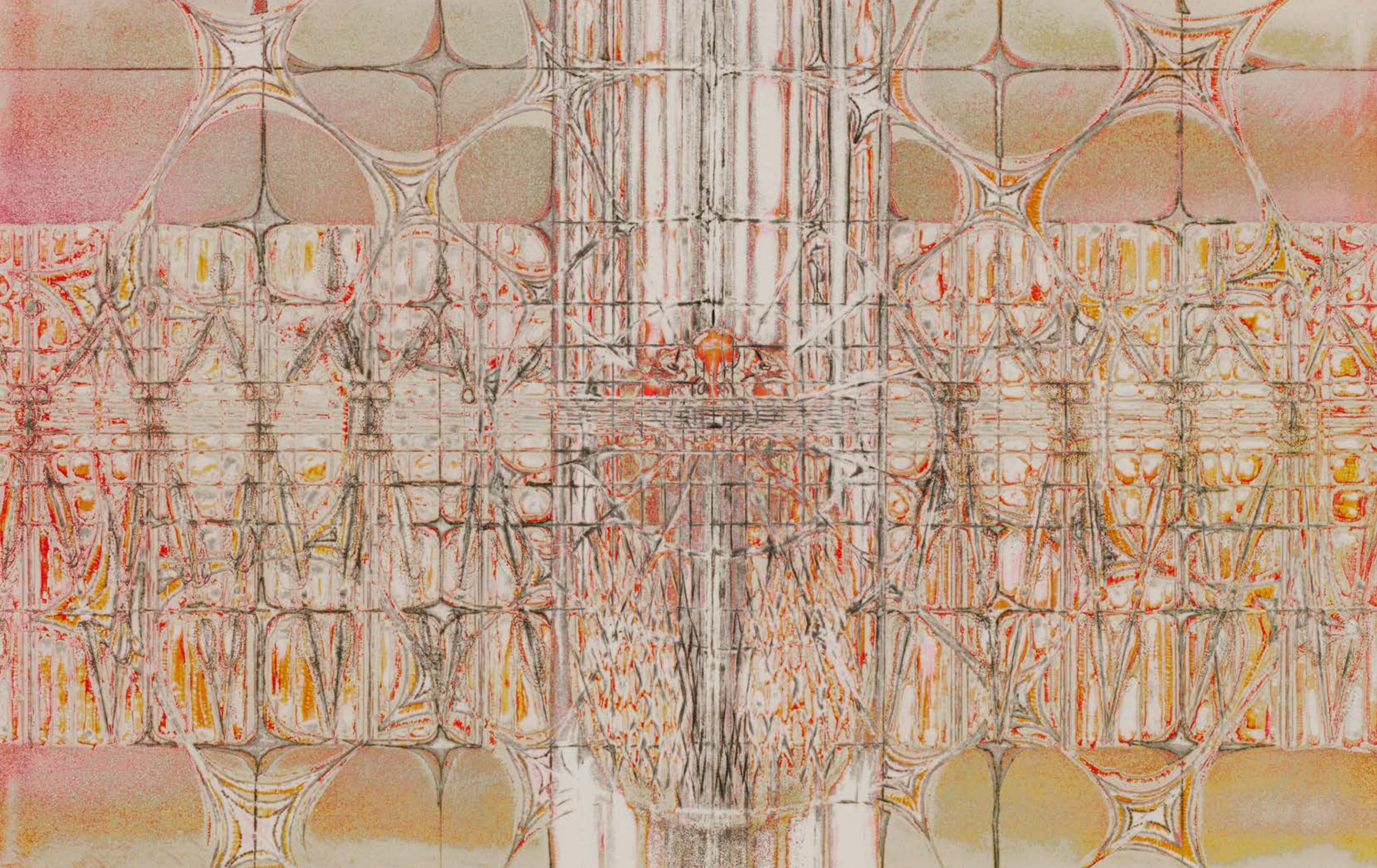
Clown Forming
 Viscosity on paper, c. 1981
 15.5 x 19.3 in. / 39.4 x 49.0 cm.
 On print: Inscribed in Latin and English (lower left)
 'Imp. by the artist / 11/20'; titled in English (lower
 centre) "CLOWN FORMiNG" and signed in English
 (lower right) 'N. Krishna Reddy'
 Edition 11 of 20



Pastorale
 Viscosity on paper, c. 1959
 19.7 x 26.5 in. / 50.0 x 67.3 cm.
 On print: Inscribed in French (lower left)
 'Epreuve d'Artiste' and signed in English
 (lower right) 'N. Krishna Reddy'
 Artist's Proof



Flower Radiating
 Viscosity on paper
 19.7 x 26.0 in. / 50.0 x 66.0 cm.
 On print: Inscribed in Latin, English and French
 (lower left) 'Imp. by the artist - HC'; titled in
 English (lower centre) "FLOWER Radiating" and
 signed in English (lower right) 'N. Krishna Reddy'



About DAG



NEW DELHI

Established in 1993 as an art gallery, DAG has grown exponentially to become India's leading art company with a comprehensive collection starting from the eighteenth century onwards. From acknowledging recognised masters to restoring the legacies of generations of artists marginalised over time, from acquiring the custodianship of artists' studios and estates to bringing back to India works associated with Indian art and heritage from overseas, DAG has revisited the history of three centuries of Indian art practice with a repository of artists that, taken together, tell the story of Indian art.

In the over three decades since DAG's foundation, the Indian art world has

seen far-reaching changes in which the company has played a stellar role. Its iconic exhibitions that are curated to provide historical overviews have brought to the fore important artists neglected through the passage of time while also documenting critical art movements and collectives. New generations of art lovers have been able to reclaim the inheritance of forgotten masters through DAG's pathbreaking curations at its galleries as well as participation in international art fairs, and collaborations with museums and cultural institutions in India and abroad.

At the heart of the company's programming is ongoing curatorial enquiry and exploration



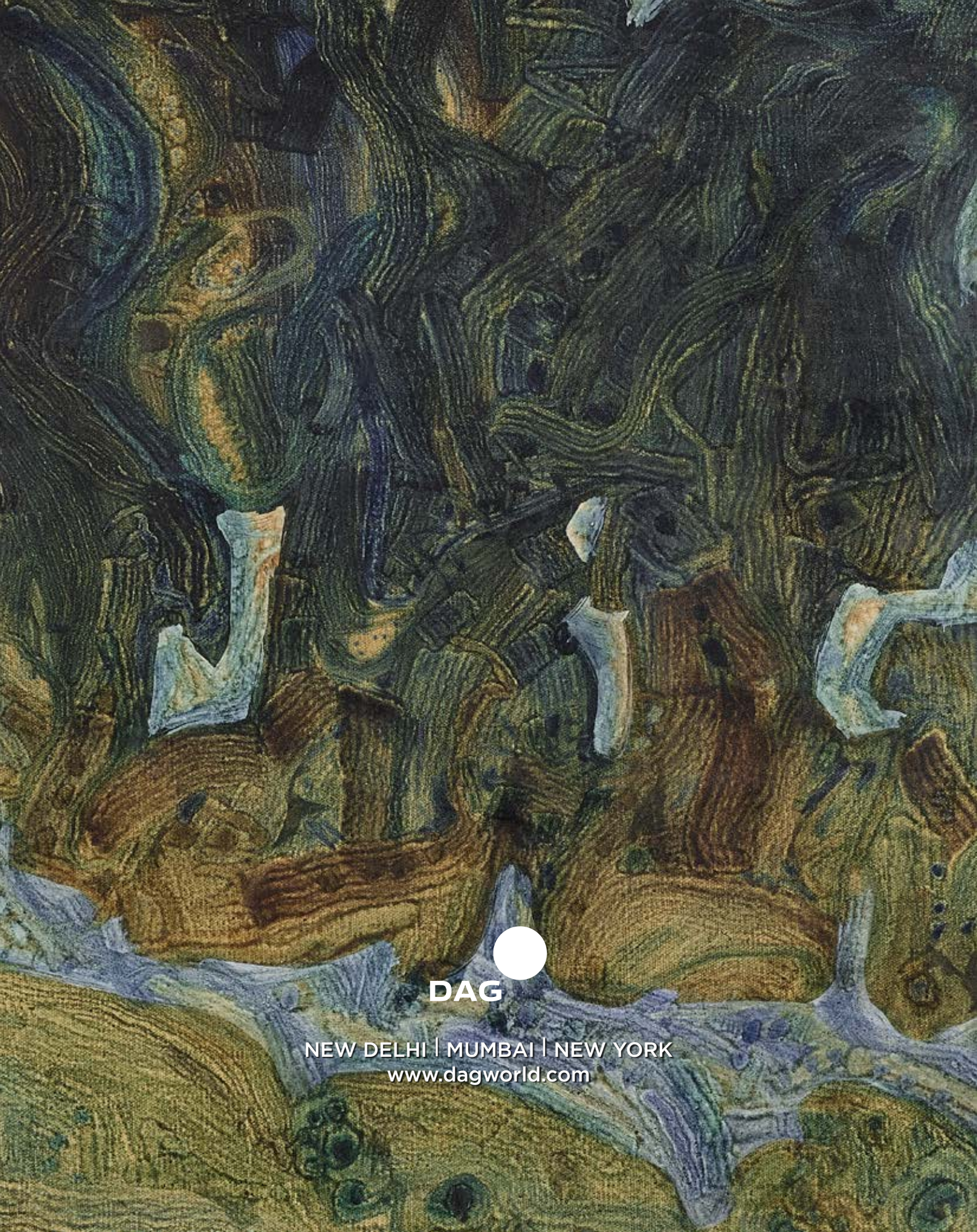
MUMBAI

for its exhibitions; a rigorous publishing calendar with an impressive library of books to document Indian art history; a museums programme focussed at engaging the public to increasingly democratise its outreach; commissioning of videos and films in relation to artists and their work; and engagements with artists, critics and the art community at large. Through these initiatives, DAG remains steadfast in its commitment to foster an appreciation for, and the dissemination and promotion of Indian art.

An important aspect of the company's collaborative efforts has been to work with institutions and museums, whether for hosting DAG-organised exhibitions or for

establishing immersive public-private museum exhibitions such as those undertaken at Delhi's Red Fort (*Drishyakala*) and Kolkata's Old Currency Building (*Ghare Baire*) with the Archaeological Survey of India. Set up as museums, these exhibitions ran for periods of three years and two years, respectively, garnering an amazing response from large numbers of viewers.

DAG recently acquired Jamini Roy's studio-cum-house in Kolkata and is in the process of setting up its first single-artist museum dedicated to the National Treasure artist. It has galleries in Mumbai, New Delhi and New York.



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