

# The Pond

By Pushpamala N

*The Pond* is one of the images from my new series of works called *Abduction (Apaharana)* in which a *Rakshasa* abducts a Princess. Taking from the fabulous — from myth, folktale and dream, the drama is staged in a far away time. A magical pond reflects the pensive heroine and the abductor, in shimmering ripples of water between the floating leaves of lotus plants.

The reflection in a pond or mirror is a powerful archetypal image, which goes beyond the frame of the narrative and evokes many layered associations and meanings. Ranbir Kaleka for instance, told me the tale of an enchanted pond lined with copper in a Punjab village where it was said the fairies came to bathe. I was also told of the mother goddess who is worshipped in the form of a mirror and is believed to manifest herself in the reflection. While the lady in reverie at the side of a lotus pond is an old familiar romantic figure, the Tamil *Ramayana* by Kamban has an incident where Ravana, hiding with Maricha behind the bushes near a lake in the forest, has his first glimpse of Sita when she comes to draw water.

*The Pond* looks curiously fluid and enigmatic with life-size faces of the protagonists floating up from the depths of the water. It was shot at night with film studio lights at the small pond in the garden of my studio in Bangalore. Clay Kelton, my photographer, has a film background and is familiar with using studio lights, which are now only used in old portrait studios. I refer to various genres of photography in my work, and this series is based on old theatre stills that are usually very frontal and tableau-like. *The Pond* however is more cinematic, as it is shot on a real location and in close-up. The characters are dressed in the style of early twentieth century Kannada Company Theatre. I based the look of the *Rakshasa* on the famous *Kalla* (thief) role played by the legendary Company actor/ director Gubbi Veeranna in the play *Sadarame*. My friend, the art historian Suresh Jayaram who has a wonderful *Yakshagana*-type face, plays the *Rakshasa*.

People ask me why I perform in my work. I obviously enjoy it, but my presence in the work as the artist and author brings a different meaning to the picture. By embodying the character I bring my own subjectivity and persona into the story. The way I work is in a sense cinematic, as I produce, direct and work out the mise-en-scènes, which I commission photographers to shoot. We also improvise on the basic scenes during the actual shoot. I worked a lot on the printing of this image, choosing a matt yellowish paper for the first time to get a softer image. \_

An explanation by artist Pushpamala N of the method and thought behind her performance photography piece entitled *The Pond*.





*The Pond*, hahnemuhle bamboo paper, 32"x48", 2009. Author/Producer/Director - Pushpamala N, Camera - Clay Keltor, Princess - Pushpamala N, Rakshasa - Suresh Jayaram.