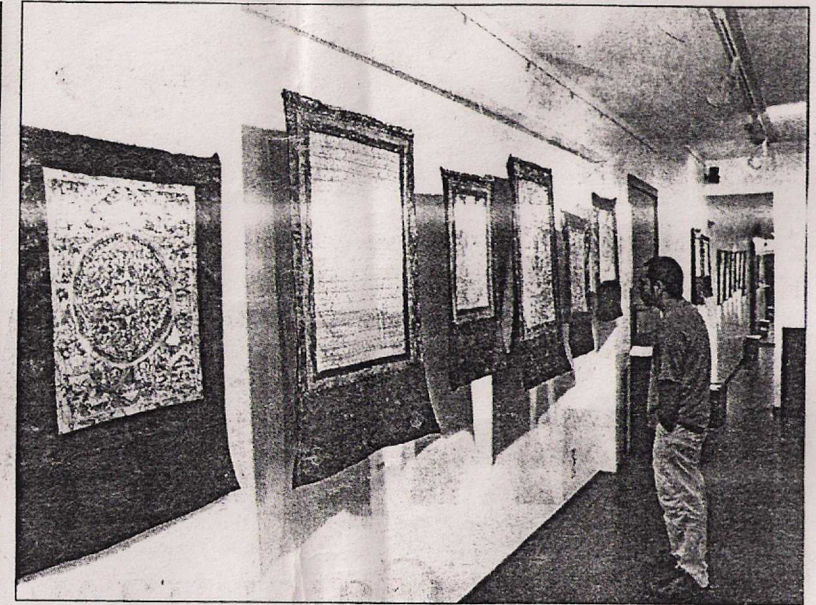
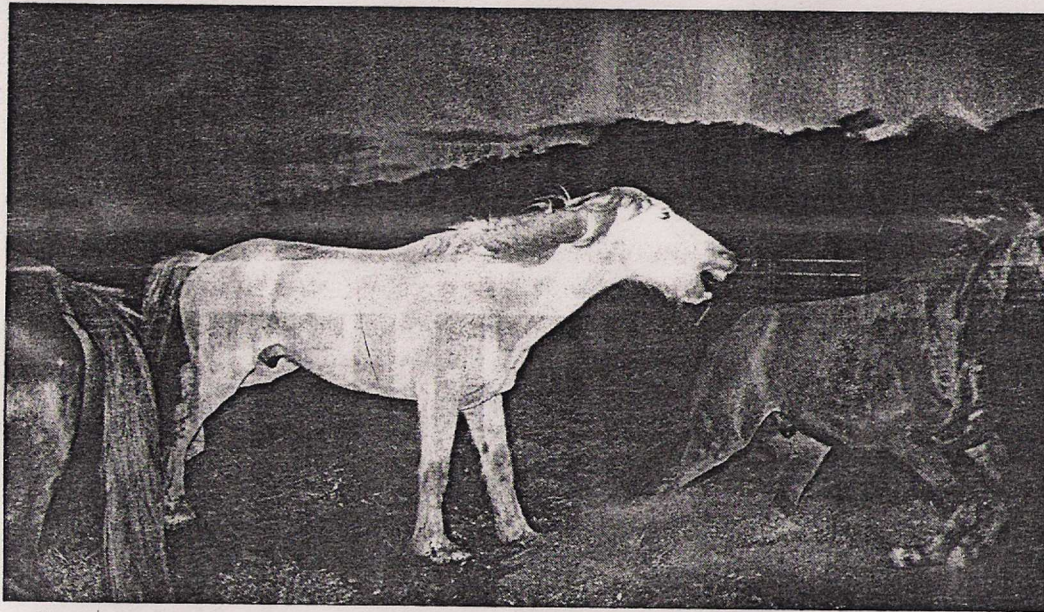


# Turbulent and troubled images

Trent Parke's magical photographs of Australia are being exhibited at Bose Pacia gallery. They reveal a world that is uncannily beautiful but is at times deeply disturbing. Parke, who is in his late 30s, is the only Australian photographer to be represented by Magnum, and in 2003 he drove about 90,000 km through the island and produced this body of work titled *Minutes to Midnight*.

In his Australia night and day seem to merge, there is little to tell the real from the unreal, and a plague of vermin evolves into a series of images that have a phantasmagoric quality. Trent's images of the outback and aboriginal towns are washed by driving rain, scarred by firestorms and drought, and awash with the harsh sunlight that "rattles" (to use Trent's verb) down the

streets. It is a poverty-stricken countryside which this light turns into an apocalyptic vision. Trent's use of the flashlight can turn the most mundane image into pure magic. The horses turn into wild-eyed beasts. (The gallery should have been more careful about framing this photograph. The eye of the horse at the extreme end is masked by the mounting board). Trent uses sunlight in the same fascinating way. The light turns the old man stepping out of the shadow into a fiery creature. Trent himself turns into a spectre



(Left) A photograph by Trent Parke; (right) exhibition of thangkas at Weavers Studio. Picture by Sanjoy Chattopadhyaya


against the black sky. This exhibition is organised by the Australian high commission and Drik.

Sumit Biswas's self-indulgent squiggles are striving hard to turn into human forms. They have arms, legs and attitudes. Akar Prakar had opened with a show of his quite a few years ago, and the artist seems to have evolved little since. The same reds and browns and ochres. The canvases have grown in size and so the paintings look a little more impressive but the over-

all impression of sameness can be bothersome. One hopes that this young artist would try to look beyond squiggles — well anthropomorphic squiggles, in this case.

A documentary on the oldest lama, Chralrinpoche, and a diary of Annada Munshi had spurred Prabhas Kejriwal's curiosity about thangkas. Prabhas, a relative of Chitrakoot Art Gallery owner Prakash Kejriwal, recently curated his first exhibition from his thangka collection.

"Chralrinpoche used to breathe mantras into 50 fishes every day and release them in the river. It was while I was filming the documentary that

 **eyewitness**

I became interested in Tibetan Buddhism and their religious art. Then I chanced upon a diary of Annada Munshi and bought it from College Street for Rs 20 or 30. Munshi was ec-

centric but immensely talented and he was the only one who experimented with Tibetan sacred art... not reproducing thangkas blindly but using it in his own way. I contacted his family and also managed to collect some of his works from dealers," said Prabhas.

Most of the thangkas on display at Weavers Studio between June 3 and 14 were for sale for Rs 3,000-14,000. They were works by the newest generation of thangka painters, monks in Darjeeling and Silig-

uri. Kejriwal had collected over two years.

There were also some small brass icons of the stupa, Yamantaka and Manasa collected from antique shops in the Northeast. A handful of thangkas more than a century old, borrowed from the collection of Late Pratap Chandra Chunder, were also on show.

One wishes, however, that the organisers had arranged for some supporting literature for each thangka as had been available during a similar display at Indian Museum recently.

As with the mandalas, the drawing of thangkas is thought to be a way of meditating. Modern researchers claim that Indian myths that can no longer be read in manuscripts are preserved in thangkas. But to the uninitiated, it is impossible to unlock the symbolic forms and read the stories. That may be one of the reasons why thangkas adorned with delicate forms and designs often touched with gold found few buyers.

Soumitra Das and  
Sebanti Sarkar