

Flight of Fancy

At least one stream of Indian artists has continually thrust towards an art that draws from a recognisably indigenous aesthetic. However, S. Nandagopal, with his roots deep in what Josef James describes as the Madras Metaphor, has also consistently worked towards a modernist approach to classic iconography and sculpture principles. *Garuda*, Nandagopal's newest work, standing 15 feet high in dazzling stainless steel, commissioned by the Transport Corporation of India, Gurgaon, marks a new peak of maturation. The image of Vishnu's *vahana*, familiar from innumerable south Indian sculptures as both temple and household deity, is presented with a strongly contemporary dimension. Nandagopal's *Garuda* embodies much of the dynamic, aggressive aspect of Vishnu's *vahana* even as the qualities of service and repose are emphasised. Instead of his hands folded in *pranam*, he stands hands on hips, wings outstretched for imminent flight. The nose has a broad, tribal cast. The striations on the chest and the wings, the negative space between the legs and torso, give the work an emphatically aerial quality. Importantly, Nandagopal has greatly simplified the image and its attributes. "In one of the hands there should be held an umbrella and in another the pot of *amrita*; the two remaining hands are to be in the *anjali* pose. Garuda should be fashioned with a flabby belly" (T.A. Gopinatha Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography*). Nandagopal has jettisoned many of these elements, including the snakes that are an essential aspect of the Garuda icon.



S. Nandagopal stands beside Garuda installed at the TCI headquarters in Gurgaon. Photo by G. Venketram.

Given its weight of 700 kg, transporting the sculpture from Chennai to Gurgaon and installing it in the TCI headquarters was an engineering challenge. Standing on a massive bell-shaped base surrounded by a pool of water, the Garuda is emblematic of the town of Gurgaon with its aggressive positioning as an industrial city. In Nandagopal's oeuvre, which teems with a buoyant natural world of trees, animals, men and gods, *Garuda* stamps an emphatic presence.

- Gayatri Sinha

Second Time Lucky

The Sotheby's Prize for Contemporary Indian Art, 1999, was awarded to Atul Dodiya at a presentation ceremony held at the Oberoi Towers in Bombay in early November. Dodiya had been one of the five nominees last year as well. A jury consisting of Akbar Padamsee, Geetha Mehra and Ranjit Hoskote recognised his remarkable expansion of the possibilities of painting in a period when many experimental artists have moved to newer media. The award carries a cash prize of Rs.3 lakhs.

The jury for next year's Sotheby's Prize will include Gieve Patel and Harsh Goenka. Ranjit Hoskote has been retained as a member of next year's jury.



Atul Dodiya.

Going Dutch

Bombay-based artist Monali Meher is among 29 participants accepted at the Rijksakademie Van Beeldende Kunsten, a residential centre for research and advanced studies in the visual arts, in Amsterdam. A graduate of the Sir J.J. School of Arts, Meher received a grant from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and begins her first work period in January 2000. The participants were selected from among nearly 700 applicants from all over the world.



Monali Meher.