

Sakti Burman's artwork invites us to identify this numinous presence, and to celebrate Sand and cultivate it. He pays special attention to it and even pays tribute to it, recognising the importance of a 'secret' inner world. Indeed, his work aims to enliven this presence in daily life - making the private world public - as another poet, Allen Ginsberg (1926-1997), said of poetry itself. Burman's lifelong dedication to painting is like the continuous musings of poets, intent on unveiling, little by little, from one thought and anecdote to another, the Sanskrit notion of maya (indescribable divinity) and its ultimate influence behind every creative endeavour. His own 'lonely poet' takes on many guises. And as the artist explains, 'my hopeful figures roll out onto the stage, one after the other', despite the cultural miserablism that seems to pervade our media-based consciousness, where the power of the negative story, with little redemption or escape, is encouraged to wallow in its own bleakness. Burman still dares to surrender himself to his imaginings of an idyllic world.

This artist's outlook, his efforts as a migrant, successfully spanning two very different cultures and geographical realities, is testimony to his irrepressible creative verve and the very spirit of his Bengal, where the role of tradition, art, and ritual in contemporary life are not to be underestimated. Instead of portraying the torturous struggles of the human condition, Burman chooses to live in a private, 'half-full' kingdom, which he explores daily. And he has even developed the kind of painting that audiences both domestic and international find recognisable, yet personal, and something to which they can surprisingly relate. Burman's imagination, free as a naked child, is portrayed notionally to the outside world but, more importantly, to himself. One could ask: are these just 'tales' - brimming with characters in spellbound gazes, luxuriant settings, and explosive delights - he likes to tell and retell himself? Perhaps his greatest export, from Asia to Europe and back, is the diversity of his own 'fiction', with the myriad of colourful alternatives between its contrasts and all his heroes and heroines. Here is an artist who happily looks on the past with the eyes of the present, which for him is a recurrent continuum, like the greatest of all narratives - one's own life story.

Burman's work, in true Romantic tradition, aspires to the infinite expressed by all means available. Nature, human and otherwise, is like a sacred temple the 'artist-poet' approaches through a forest of symbols, chanting Baudelaire's mantra as he enters: 'Even in the centuries which appear to us to be the most monstrous and foolish, the immortal appetite for beauty has always found satisfaction'. And closer to his original home, the sentiments of Rabindranath Tagore: 'I have become my own version of an optimist. If I can't make it through one door, I'll go through another door - or I'll make a door. Something terrific will come no matter how dark the present'. Tagore was quick to determine that 'in Art, man reveals himself and not his objects', so the artist's challenge is the difficulty of being in the world but not of the world; essentially constructing a private universe. Even Burman's juxtapositions of good and evil have an optimistic outlook, like the serenity of his Artist Painting Adam and Eve (2006) and his quiet recognition of the fact that humans simultaneously make life and take life, illustrated in his Love and Violence (2007) painting.