



Formed Resonance  
Sculpture and Drawings

SHAKTI MAIRA

Art Gallery, Kamaladevi Complex, India International Centre, New Delhi

• March 4th to 12th, 2017 • Sculpture and Drawings by **Shakti Maira**

There are two directions artists can take in their work. Most establish a distinctive, easily recognizable style, and then remain in that groove. Others, like me, don't. My work done over a period of time, when brought together, may look more like a group show. The freedom to strike out in new directions is a truer expression of my creativity, which could be described as 'formed resonance'. I make whatever forms resonate with my changing concerns and evolving passions. My materials and styles move with, and respond to, my life journey.

This exhibition is a celebration of art made in an intimate engagement between the artist's mind and hands. This allows the sensibility, experience and skill of the artist to create and manifest directly. These days, handmade art is being pushed back by conceptualism, installations and the use of computers and 3-D printers. Am I alone in feeling that this is resulting in the loss of precious qualities, like the integration of our sensory, emotional and intellectual capacities, and the simple (or even profound) experiences of beauty that can come through the arts?

## WOOD CARVINGS AND THEIR COUSINS IN METAL



Two years ago, on a walk in Dalhousie, a half-burnt log caught my eye. It was black, mysterious and oddly powerful. In the fading evening light, it evoked the goddess Kali. I dragged it back and thus began a new body of work: wood carvings.

It was a time in my life when I needed to do slow, hard, rhythmic work. Without the help of power tools, I set about carving pieces of wood using a saw, a mallet, chisels, rasps, files, sandpaper, and ultimately, fire. I tried to let the form come from the wood.

One of the delights of making art with a beginner's mind is the emergence of something fresh and powerful. It all started with that burnt piece of chir (Indian pine) and moved on to other Himalayan woods like deodar ('god's wood'), and juniper, a wiry conifer that is the last tree before the snow-line. I also explored other woods – teak, American ash, shisham, chaap and keekar. Each came with its own character and inclination to be worked upon. To an extent the type of wood created the

sculpture. It was a most enjoyable journey into density, grains, textures and knots, and one that enabled me to feel many monsoons of tree growth in my humbled hands.

The sculpture that emerged included several versions of the Kali presence, some half-man/half-woman forms, heads that have a primal African-Indian tribal energy. And a few others – some abstracts, and my signature sadhus.





WOOD CARVINGS





For many years I have been casting in bronze, and as I carved wood, I wondered whether this tree-ness could be captured in metal. This led me to cast some of the wood sculpture in bronze, which is an unusual route for a sculptor to take. It has been a joy to find that the spirit of wood can be successfully transferred into metal. And, it is obvious that these metal forms could only have been made by first carving them in wood.



## DRAWINGS

I found a kinship between carving wood and drawing. Both entail making marks on surfaces. In one case, the drawing is additive, while in the other it is subtractive. Both ask the artist to be minimal, in the sense that drawing is at its best when it is simple, pure, free, and wood wants to be altered only within its nature, circumscribed by its hardness, grains and knots. Different woods, like different kinds of paper and drawing materials, have their own personalities and behaviours. So I bring together in this exhibition these three-dimensional and two-dimensional works that are created through marks and strokes to make palpable the importance of drawing in art making.

For me, drawing is essential to making art. I encourage students to draw a lot because it is such a good way to learn how to 'see'. It sharpens observation and understanding of form – line, light, colour and relationships.

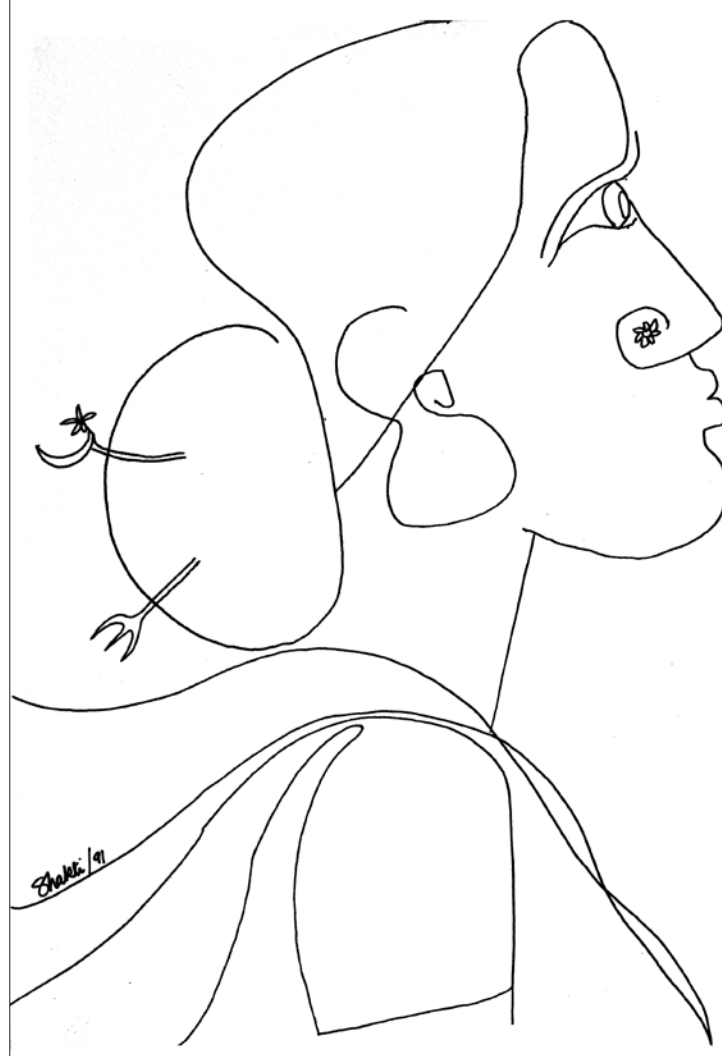






### Figure Drawings

I made the figure drawings in this exhibition largely in New Hampshire, USA. For many years I would go on Sundays to the New Hampshire Artists Association and a group of us would sharpen our skills through figure drawing. Most of this time was spent in doing one-minute, two-minute or five-minute studies of models. The idea was to visually grasp the essentials and render them with a flowing fluency. They are done mainly in graphite, charcoal and ink. There are several painterly sepia ink drawings in this group that employ an unusual ink-on-ink technique.



### Mother India and Her Sons

The small suite of ink drawings and paintings called 'Mother India and Her Sons' was done one cold winter in my loft studio in New Hampshire, when communal tensions were roiling in India before the Babri Masjid was brought down. I was saddened by what the sons of India were doing to a pluralistic Mother India. I share these here for the first time, as it seems relevant. I feel strongly about India remaining a pluralistic, wisdom-based civilization.



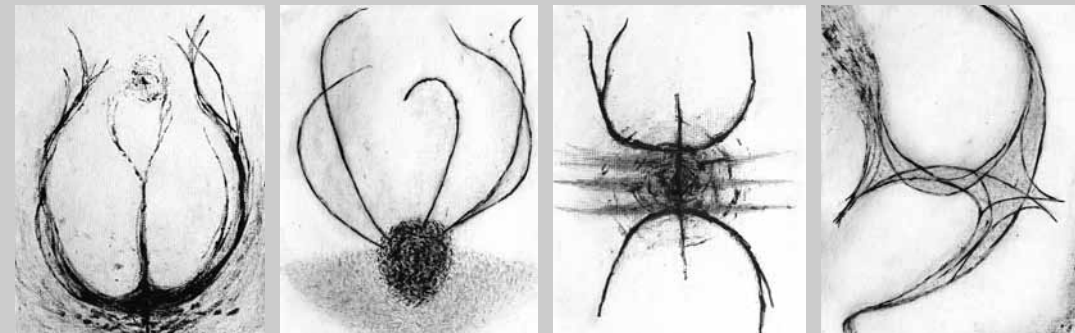


## The Singers

Coming back to India after many years abroad, I landed in the lap of Delhi's rich classical music scene - full of wonderful performances, many here at the India International Centre. I went to as many as possible. Inspired, I even tried to learn how to sing. After listening to these concerts, I would come back filled with music. Sometimes the next morning, I would do these charcoal drawings of singers absorbed in their art. I wonder if I was able to better evoke the singer's absorption because I too was singing in those days.

## The Origin of Form

'The Origin of Form' are recent, minimalistic, India ink drawings done with a twig and a porcupine quill. They were made, one each morning, when I would start my work day in the studio. I would sit and try and empty my mind of all thoughts, ideas and images. Then, with this blank mind, I would allow my hand to manifest whatever it wanted. I was curious to see how form starts, and where it goes. I would end each drawing the moment I felt my mind beginning to engage with the form. Imagine these drawings, then, as an empty mind playfully manifesting on paper. It is not surprising that these emergent forms are mostly abstract, but in a few, a human face does peek out – evidence of the mind's anthropomorphic inclination. Something I encountered again when I would sit with a piece of wood, wondering where it wanted to go, and but for a few small abstract wood sketches, human-like forms would want to emerge.





## SEEKERS AND SUFIS



I round off this collection with a set of heads from 'The Sangha' that was exhibited here in 2012, and four groupings of 'The Sufis', which play on the idea of our inherent multiplicity and oneness. I wanted to reconnect with my last exhibition by revisiting 'The Sangha' – a group of bronze sculpture that was exhibited here in 2012, and was very well received. So we have a group of bronze heads that depict the resolve and mind-states of seekers on the spiritual journey. I also include new castings of four groupings called 'The Sufis.' I am drawn to the textures of these bronze robes, reminiscent of the 'suf' of the Sufi's. In these groupings, I play with the idea of oneness, similarity and otherness in human life. In one grouping, the song of the Sufi is imagined through a triage of singers, all singing in one voice.







## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Shakti Maira is an artist, sculptor and printmaker. He has had 29 one-person shows, the first of which was in 1973 in Mumbai. Since then, his work has been exhibited in solo and group shows in Boston, Paris, New York, Washington, D.C., Manchester, Concord, Henniker, Hollis, Acton, Portland, Newport, Portsmouth, Santa Fe, Cambridge, Rotterdam, Colombo, Bengaluru, Chennai, Mumbai and New Delhi. His work is in the National Gallery of Modern Art in India, and in private collections around the world.

Shakti has been engaged in children's education and development through art, and has conducted numerous workshops in schools in the US and India. In 2005 he helped organize the 'Learning through the Arts in Asia' symposium in New Delhi, and was invited by UNESCO to formulate the Asian Vision of Arts in Education: Learning through the Arts.

He has written extensively on art, aesthetics, education and culture. In 2006, his book *Towards Ananda: Rethinking Indian Art and Aesthetics* was published by Penguin/Viking, which has developed a following around the world for pulling art out of its modern confusions and reconnecting it with everyday life and living. His new book, *The Promise of Beauty and Why it Matters* (HarperCollins, 2017) pivots around a series of conversations with eighteen eminent thinkers on the difficult, enthralling notion of beauty.

Shakti is a public speaker on contemporary issues in aesthetics, beauty, art and culture in India and abroad. He was invited to speak on art and aesthetics at the Edinburgh International Festival in 2011. He was co-organizer of an international conference, 'The End of Art and The Promise of Beauty' in New Delhi, in February 2012.

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