

The background of the entire page is a vibrant, abstract composition of colorful paint splatters and brushstrokes. The colors are diverse, including shades of blue, green, yellow, orange, red, pink, and purple, all set against a dark, almost black base. The splatters vary in size and intensity, creating a dynamic and energetic visual field.

# maag

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**JANNIS VARELAS YORGOS STAMKOPOULOS GEORGIA SAGRI**

**GREGOS THEOPSY IRIS TOULIATOU KOSTAS BASSANOS GOSIA BOJKOWSKA**

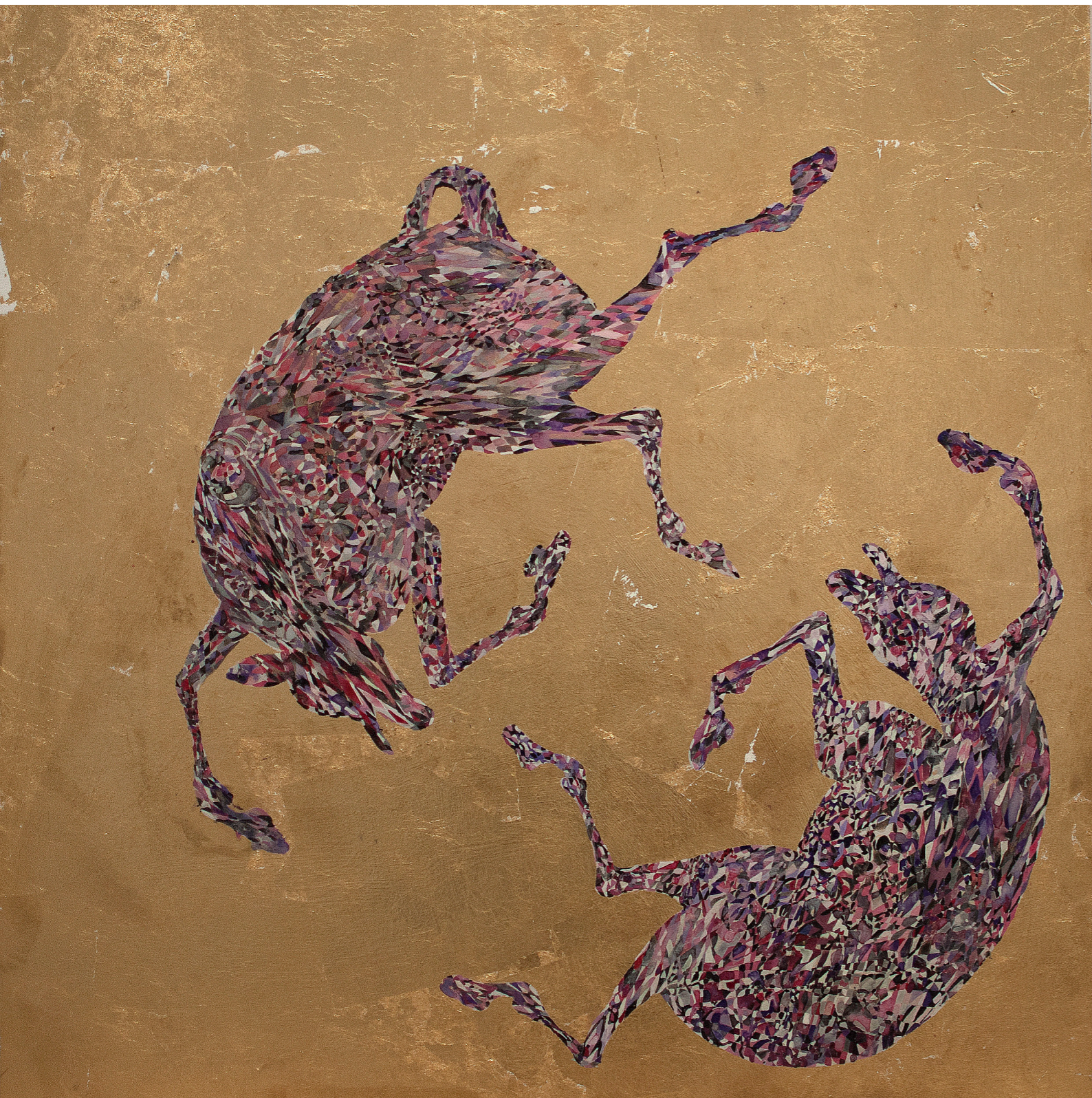
**RADHIKA AGARWALA AMIR CHASSON TIMON BOTEZ**

/FEATURES/Q&A/

# RADHIKA AGARWALA

by Kristin Hjellegjerde





1)  
KH:  
What was the first piece of art that really mattered to you?

RA:  
That's a difficult one. There have been many pieces that mattered to me. However, I think it was Egon Schiele's drawings that affected me the most. I had never seen anything so intensely and vulnerably present with gestures of human emotion. I was more used to being surrounded by classical forms of representation. As a teenager, I was also enchanted by Kalighat paintings (which come from 19th century Bengal), loaded as they are with stories and illustrations.

2)  
KH:  
Growing up in India you had an uncle who had a gallery - do you feel that that influenced you in any way to choose a career as an artist?

RA:  
Yes, growing up in Calcutta, which is considered the creative capital of India, has indeed shaped my life in various ways. Some of the greatest philosophers, poets and artists are from the city, so there was always this urge to delve deeper into history and literature. Spending most of my time at my uncle's gallery was probably one of the most enriching experiences as a child. While my friends were playing in the fields, I would be surrounded by this avant-garde community of people, listening to their stories (which made no sense to me at that point). My uncle introduced me to the world of music and cinema. I would come back home every time with a book, or movies by Kieslowski, Wong Kar Wai, Satyajit Ray and others. Some things happen by destiny and chance but I think my uncle definitely affected my decision to become an artist. As time passed by, I hated going to school and the only thing I enjoyed was drawing. I would draw on all my books and sketch my surroundings and myself. I started creating another, more interesting kind of reality for myself.

3)  
KH:  
Do you find that your Indian roots inspire and affect your art?

RA:  
I'm generally quite intrigued by a lot of things

and find inspiration everywhere, but obviously living between cultural worlds that are polar opposites, I have become more conscious of my cultural heritage. This is something that I never imagined would become a topic of discussion for my work, but it has now become a significant point. Having lived in many different cities and cultures, and most importantly being away from my roots, has enabled me to get closer to, and understand, the importance of one's identity and how people around me associate with that. Walking is a good comparison - the longer we walk in an unfamiliar environment, the more we start discovering the history of the place, finding new meanings from it, and ultimately we create our own narratives. In the same way, I'm trying to build my own vocabulary of symbols and stories that come directly from my everyday experiences and the constant floating images from my city.

4)  
KH:  
You've travelled and explored different directions with your art - how did you get to where you are today?

RA:  
Observation is a powerful tool. Landscapes and narratives alter each time we travel from one place to another, and filter through to construct new ideologies. To be honest, I never thought that things would turn out the way they are now today, but all along, my explorations, my eagerness to learn and ambition to achieve something greater, and simply keeping an open mind have helped me a great deal.

5)  
KH:  
What made you travel and settle in America and Europe?

RA:  
I left India after finishing my degree in painting from my home city. I received a scholarship to study at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and still remember the struggle and frustration I went through just to get a paper signed by my professor in India, and various levels of bureaucratic nonsense. It was my first taste of the Western world and contemporary art. I was overwhelmed and suddenly everything was changing too quickly. I decided to go back to India to digest all the visual encounters. I worked non-stop in my

away from general distractions and enter quickly into another world.

7)

KH:

How long does it take for you to create a piece that you are happy with?

RA:

Happiness is a strange emotion, to begin with. I enjoy the tension created within the process and there are certain moments that make me feel accomplished or settled with a piece. Sometimes it can take me only a few hours, at other times, a few months, to create a work. Some are made on impulse, some based on initial drawings, and some are images from external sources.

8)

KH:

You have been working with bronze lately. Can you tell us about your inspirations here?

RA:

I had an urge to try a new sculptural material, and bronze, being the toughest one to tackle, seemed like a rewarding challenge. I went back to India this year, where I saw miniature paintings from India and Persia along with figurines from the Chola period. I wanted some of my two dimensional works to have a certain kind of presence and physicality to them. The sculptures were ultimately a reaction to the images from the streets of my home city and previous drawings. I would like to understand this medium more and experiment further on.

9)

KH:

I find you to be incredibly productive and driven, an embodiment of Rilke's statement, *Surely all art is the result of one's having been in danger, of having gone through an experience all the way to the end, where no one can go any further. The further one goes, the more private, the more personal, the more singular an experience becomes, and the thing one is making is, finally, the necessary, irrepressible, and, as nearly as possible, definitive utterance of this singularity.*

Can you relate to this?

RA:

Thinking about this quote brings to mind another quote, from Tagore:

studio for a year, in the suburban part of my city, during this time. Then it was time for me to set off on another journey, and I received a grant to study at the University of Florida. I felt as if I had come into a kind of wilderness, but I soon made friends, and showed my work in Miami. I experienced a different part of America; a place where I felt I did not belong at that point of my life. I then decided to move to New York for a while to work for the American sculptor Patricia Cronin, who later became a great friend and mentor to me. I lived in Brooklyn and spent my evenings in Williamsburg. Strangers on the streets became friends and I saw some of the best art shows, which inspired me a great deal. Spending time in New York changed my world completely. I think that was what finally prepared me to study in London at Goldsmiths. This is where I presently live and work from and I finally feel slightly settled somewhere... or maybe not.

My art has definitely gone through strange and very interesting cycles and movements through my years of academia, and now finally I think I'm beginning to express my voice through my work and mix these experiences into something meaningful.

6)

KH:

When you work do you listen to music, or how do you create a comfortable work environment?

RA:

I'm always listening to music. I live in a dilapidated, yet charming, Victorian house in Camden in North London. I listen to the radio in the kitchen, in the shower, and obviously in my studio. Lately, I have been listening to lot of classical music, and Icelandic musician Olafur Arnalds is one of my favourite artists at the moment. There is no one way to create a comfortable situation in which to make art, especially in a city like London. Having said that, it's discomfort that keeps me constantly making art and gives me the urge to introduce everyday experience into my practice. I usually make a few drawings each morning, which is a ritual I like to follow as it allows me to move



shown in a space that I understand so well. I am currently working on a thematic direction for the show that will encompass my paintings and sculpture. It will combine Western classical paintings, Indian miniatures and manuscripts, and Russian medieval tarot cards, woven into a dense, somewhat absurd, fairy tale.

Yes, I can relate to this. Desire and curiosity are by far the most important emotions for me; the ability to turn both of them into something worthwhile and follow one's instinct is very powerful. This and my desire to explore my art from different views has driven me to overcome the struggles and situations I have found myself in, and along the way become stronger internally.

10)  
KH:

There seems to be a lot of story telling in many of your pieces - can you tell us a bit about where the narratives come from?

RA:

Storytelling and iconographic imagery have always been important in India, so mythologies and folklore are areas that interest me. It is difficult not to play with the duality of such notions. When I moved away from my country, I realized the importance of telling my own story for the first time. I felt an urge to recast history and tradition in a new light and deconstruct these narratives through an imaginative process. I saw a great retrospective show of the Czech filmmaker Jan Švankmajer in Prague earlier this year. He said something very logical and powerful about the concept of imagination that resonated deeply with me: *Imagination is subversive because it puts the possible up against the real. That's why you should always use your wildest imagination. Imagination is the biggest gift humanity has received. Imagination, not work, makes people human.*

I feel very strongly about this. I think historical sources are a mere starting point. Thereafter the images created can often be complex, playful or absurd.

11)  
KH:

In August you will have your first solo show at my gallery ArtEco, which I am very thrilled and excited about. Do you have a direction for the show yet?

RA:

It gives me great pleasure that my work will be

#### IMAGES IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

New Beginning, Gouache  
2012  
Watercolour and gold leaf on panel, 82 x 76 cm  
Image courtesy Radhika Argawala & ArtEco Gallery

As The Gentle Beasts Come into My Paradise, 2012  
Watercolour and gold leaf on panel, 82 x 76 cm  
Image courtesy Radhika Argawala & ArtEco Gallery

Untitled  
(Series from the Indian Summer Delight)  
Gold leaf and watercolour on panel,  
76 x 101 cm  
Image courtesy Radhika Argawala & ArtEco Gallery

Synthesis of a Paradise Lost I  
2012  
Bronze  
Image courtesy Radhika Argawala & ArtEco Gallery

LINK:  
[www.radhikaagarwala.com](http://www.radhikaagarwala.com)  
[www.artecogallery.com](http://www.artecogallery.com)

