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The Waking World

by Arnab Chakladar

Ranbir Kaleka is an important and innovative contemporary Indian artist who, like many contemporary Indian artists, is too little known outside the world of the collector, the curator and the art aficionado. With this exhibition we hope to bring not just Ranbir but also the heterogeneous world of contemporary Indian art to a larger audience that does not necessarily move in those circles. Locating Ranbir's work in the larger context of contemporary Indian art is beyond the scope of this introduction; instead a few words on the pieces exhibited here and the title of this exhibition:

Viewing many of these pieces one has the impression of being summoned into a world within the frame of the work which seems to be on the verge of moving from a dream state to waking. The point is not that Ranbir's figuration and juxtaposition often have a dream-logic but more importantly that the aesthetic and psychological landscape of his work is not closed--one where the viewer must try to decode the artist's meaning--but open--inviting the viewer into the making of meaning. To put this another way, it is not merely the artist's ideas being presented to us via dream imagery but the work itself seems to be dreaming, and inviting us to dream with it. Thus in pieces such as *Man*, *Cock-A-Doodle-Do* (in gallery 1), *The Convert* and *Dreaming Hunter* (in gallery 3) the principal bodies seem to also literally beckon to the viewer. In *Women with Lizard* (in gallery 2) the women's faces and bodies curve so that the viewer becomes the third in the circle. (This effect is more directly pronounced in the video installations in gallery 4: the gaze of the viewer is an intrinsic part of the pieces.) It is important to note that the world of these pieces (which includes the viewer) does not remain within the state of dreaming; viewing these pieces we feel that they (and we) are both about to wake up, and that the waking world will be made anew; the waking world is (be) coming and we with it. That is to say the effect of these pieces is not simply instinctive or unconscious, it is simultaneously intellectual.

Finally a word on Ranbir's range: the pieces presented here cover the gamut of media from oils on canvas, watercolours, painting and mixed media on shaped wood and board, digital photographs, to complex video installations. The latter new media work represent the latest phase of the evolution of Ranbir's interests (though mutation may be a better word than evolution in this context)--while it is not possible to convey the impact of these pieces through static images on the web we hope that the images and Ranbir's accompanying descriptions give a good sense of their impact. All the pieces together give us a glimpse not only into Ranbir's oeuvre but also into the dynamic world of contemporary Indian art.

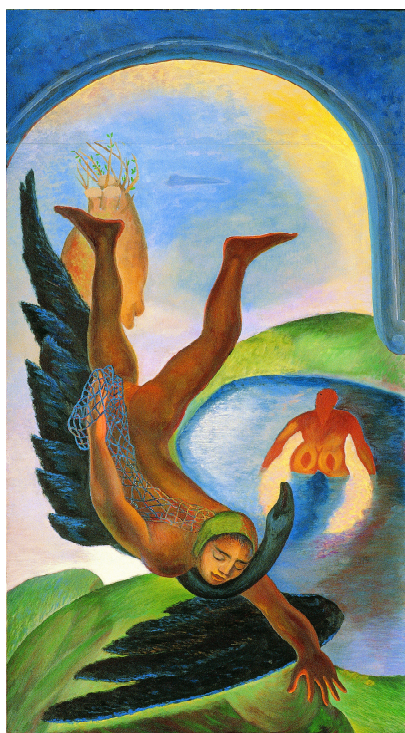
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Man 2001
12.7 x 14 cm
60 x 66 inches
acrylic on plastic



Cock-A-Doodle-Do 1991
91.5 x 122 cm
36 x 48 inches
oil on canvas



Dreaming Hunter 1991
94 x 51 cm
37 X 20 inches
oil on paper