



Boy Without Reflection 2004
 305 x 152 cm
 120 x 60 inches
 oil on canvas

The Hindu June 6 2004

REVIEW

VISION BY NIGHT (*excerpt*)

After Dark Exhibition

28 April to 31 May 2004

Sakshi Gallery, Mumbai

by Madhu Jain

The most overwhelming and powerful work is Ranbir Kaleka's huge canvas (eight feet) titled *Boy without Reflection*. Amazingly, the painting is peopled almost entirely by baying dogs, unleashed from some netherworld and harbingers of our worst fears. A huge, howling dog — its chalk-like skeleton visible — is the centrifugal force of the work. Everything else in the painting exists in relation to it — whether it is the other mauled dogs, cocks (recurrent in Kaleka's paintings and videos), the sinister looking leash that resembles a snake. Or the sole witness to it: the boy of the title who is a helpless spectator to the devastation.

There is something timeless about the work, a context movable back and forth in time, and across continents: apocalypse now, and then. Kaleka says that the first image that came to his mind before he began this painting was of him "standing at the edge of a precipice" and staring at the horrors below.

Kaleka, like most of the other artists in the show, is not being literal. Yet you can see that cataclysmic events in India — Partition, the anti-Sikh riots in 1984, the demolition of Babri Masjid and the bloody aftermath, and more recently Gujarat — have left their mark on him and on the other artists.

Madhu Jain is a independent art critic and curator