Sculpted

FROM PAINT TO PATINA

THOTA VAIKUNTAM KRISHEN KHANNA JOGEN CHOWDHURY

MADHVI PAREKH MANU PAREKH



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TEXT BY UMA NAIR

ICIA
INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY INDIAN ART

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Foreword

'Picasso seems to be actually more inventive in sculpture than in painting.'—American sculptor Richard Serra after visiting an exhibition of Picasso sculptures at MOMA in New York in 2016.

Five of India's modern art masters—Thota Vaikuntam, Krishen Khanna, Jogen Chowdhury, Madhvi Parekh, and Manu Parekh—have participated in the sculptural explorations born of their own visual associations with viewers over many decades through the images that they have created in their own distinctive style. This very recognizable style and figuration has been the inspiration and foundation of this exhibition. This project is the first phase of bronzes that were created and exhibited in 2019. The delight and enhanced involvement of this group of artists in exploring varied forms of sculpture has continued since. They have managed to bridge the gap between painting and sculpture and translate two-dimensional paintings into bronze sculptures that celebrate both form and fervour.

Proponents of the human figure as seen in daily life and narratives that go back to Indian mythology. These artists are masters of the realms of their own fantasy. While all are painters, their relentless creativity has explored the potential of seeing their artworks in a new dimension. A two-dimensional figure on a canvas has many hidden aspects that are left to the imagination. These three-dimensional bronzes not only bring the paintings to life and extend to a more physical form but also act as an impetus to the artist to create the remainder of the image; a fresh imagination in continuum, exploring multiple views of perception. To create the bronzes the artists had to collaborate with skilled artisans to recreate the figures from every angle; not just the already painted front but also the 'invisible' sides and back of the figure. This provided the artists an exciting opportunity to look at their paintings afresh and constantly visit aspects they had not attended to previously.

This project was completed in collaboration with Bronze Age London, a leading sculpture casting foundry in the UK, resulting in the production of these exceptional bronzes. *Sculpted* turned into a symbiotic association between the artists, skilled craftsmen, and Bronze Age London that resulted in this quality of bronze sculptures and relief works.

Once the final model was created, and passed the rigorous vetting of the artist, the model was signed by the respective artist and sent to London to be cast in bronze. The lost wax process was used to create the highest quality bronze casting. The smaller bronze relief sculptures have been pressure cast to achieve the desired result at the South London Foundry.

The final task was ensuring that the patination of these bronzes was in line with the artists' overall colour palette. Since patina is not like paint, it has its limitations with regard to the extent and tones of colours that can be used. The interaction of different combinations of chemicals at a high temperature on the finished bronze causes it to react and change colour to achieve the desired finish. This is a rare skill and the variation of colour that was required for these pieces meant that special technicians had to be hired by the foundry to complete this crucial and challenging step. Some of the artists specially painted the desired patina output options with varied colour patterns, which was used as reference to ensure that the final pieces were as much in line with the artist's vision as it was technically possible. Each piece was then accompanied by a certificate signed jointly by the artist and the foundry, completing this momentous collaboration.

This book is an ode to the sculptural identities of India's modern art masters. It manifests the potential for spatial exploration. Indeed, the universe was meant for the creation of what we once couldn't imagine.

TANUJ BERRY & SAMAN MALIK
New Delhi

Krishen Khanna

Krishen Khanna's Lust for Life

Ninety-nine-year-old Krishen Khanna's love for an abstracted figurative terrain saw him through events and images that transcend time. Into his subjects he wove a universality and aesthetic that was rooted in Indian idioms and one that embraced deeper human values. When we look at the translation of this imagery into the human form's sculptonic identity, we are seeing how the artist creates a breathing space for shapes to float in and out. Facilitated by the freedom this structure offers, Khanna investigates multiple views of perception.

Sculptural Stories

His love for culture as well as music saw him introduce formal elements of colour and line. Thus began his series—the Bandwallahs, Rumi series, Biblical stories, Christ series—with deep passion in each narrative.

Khanna has described his technique as a process of welcoming the unpredictable as he created work built around the urban experience. He dwelt on sacred mythologies, both local and foreign. At the age of six, Khanna's father came back from Milan with a copy of *The Last Supper* by Leonardo da Vinci, thus initiating a lifelong fascination with Christian imagery. Khanna's *Pieta* sculpture is born of the summation of a series of paintings that are amongst his most striking.

Each sculpture by Khanna reflects compositional flavour and clarity of the translation to the third dimension. *Old Man with a Young Hawk* is as irresistible as the *Untitled Emmaus*. These sculptures have a patina unseen in India, and the knowledge that they are cast in London makes one see the finesse and the finish which add up to a perfection of both expressionist as well as elegant idioms.

Old Man with a Young Hawk has a fund of physical detail as it aspires towards a quality of timelessness and universality. Khanna is a narrator, a formalist, and a genre artist who symbolizes the everyday idiom. This is a quiet, sanguine portrait that

speaks of the beauty of man and nature.

At once expressive and deeply emotive in terms of dimensional dynamics, Khanna's *Jatayu* is a masterpiece in both melancholy and mythological intensity. The alchemy of the moment is what ignites all kinds of responses within us as we glimpse its grace and gravitas.

Created in shades of ebony with its wings neatly aligned, this sculpture of *Jatayu* revisits the epics and creates a mirror image of mythos in its allegorical translation. Khanna's love for literature is something that all art lovers are aware of, he has written reams on his reflections of the epics and created series of drawings and paintings according to the many characters and the suggested choreography.

Bandwallahs over Six Decades

The bronze plates by Khanna are of the bandwallahs that he has painted for more than sixty years. These bronze plaques, specially designed in Delhi and cast in London, are a robust rendition of the famed bandwallahs that walk in procession for weddings in North India. The group in the horizontal array create their own insignia of both inspiration and the pathos of their singular occupation of playing for weddings which take place according to astrological calculations. These plates have about them a sense of human association as well as accumulated sensitivities, because Khanna has often wondered what they do when it's off season as well as during the recent pandemic when there were hardly any weddings. Khanna's continuum of works with contrasts between the mundane and the sublime, the ordinary and the epic all swing into vision in these plates. Constantly oscillating between the banal and the sublime, his narrative is distinct and defined.

Intimate Memory

The sculptures create an entirely new sensation. The old man is a dramatic character with a lustrous moustache. For Khanna 'Drawing is a medium reserved for intimate memory, for reworking broad themes that underpin the structure of his work.' These sculptures echo this.

The sculptures thread together narratives that have been handed down through the generations, connected by the readings of time and place. We witness a nuanced imagination that revels in storytelling. We imagine small and big heroisms. Small and big ironies and the beauty of human kindness between man and bird. Recounted and retold, the sculptural version of man and bird is a testimony to a tale as old as time.

Art Is Ananda

One must go back to Khanna's interview published on Saffronart.

'Art for me, is the ultimate Ananda (bliss). Art can provide you with the metaphysical answers you have been looking for even whilst you are involved in its creation. They call it drawing. I really have no name for it. It's a compulsion, an itch. The more I scratch, the more I want to continue. It is enjoyable but it can also hurt when nothing emerges but an incomprehensible mess. Was I taught to draw? Silly question really. How can one manipulate a compulsive itch?

'Try and stop it and see what happens. Bad temper, depression, and a sickness of spirit. Emptiness. It follows that my subject matter is of importance to me and is not fortuitous. Dependent on this choice are the means that will reveal it. Nor is it ever certain that every venture will be successful. What is certain, and this gives me some comfort, is that a moment of my life was spent in such absorption that bypassed time. If at the end of it, what I make finds acceptance with someone, it confirms to me that I'm not alone. The drawing becomes a ground for sharing an experience.'

Beginning in the 1980s, the bandwallahs became a recurrent theme in Khanna's oeuvre. Khanna's ability to translate the daily life and pathos of the common man is what kept his works alive and animated with a human spirit of eking out a life.

Delhi's bandwallahs in bronze plates hold a historical and bold portrayal—their bright colourful uniforms, gold epaulettes, and brass buttons, right down to their tired expressions as they belt out the same tunes at one wedding procession after another. His latest Bandwallahs series comes from a place of deep despair, from wondering about what they were doing during the pandemic with such few festivities and weddings. Looked at in unison they exemplify an occupation of contrasts. The medley of melodies and their limited wage lifestyle. And Khanna's words of the past come back:

'What would happen were I to begin with no drawing or compositional props, where figures are not in space but are space themselves, and colours ringing loud and clear in merry juxtaposition without tonal continuities or intermediary grays, and the application of colour pigment were assertive and not tentative? I found a new exuberance in the act of painting. Using the image of the bandwallah, I let it go, not attempting to rub out or physically eradicate, and gave vent to all the possibilities stimulated by that odd instinct.'[1]

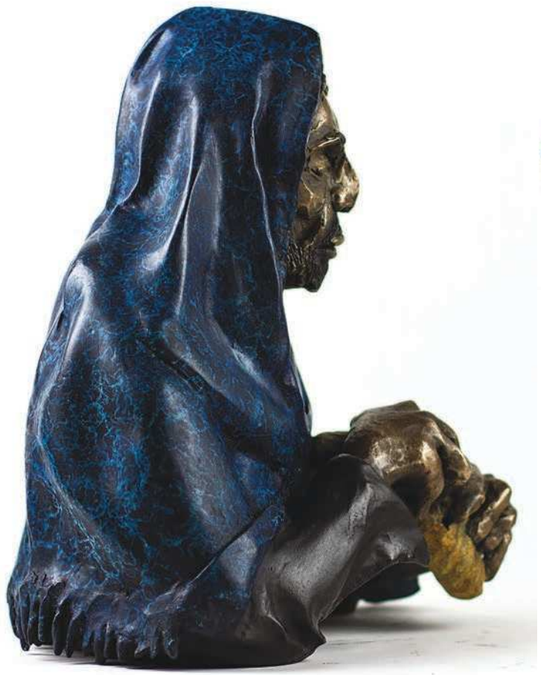
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1. Krishen Khanna, 'Beyond the Bandwallah's Cacophony: a non- committal statement by the artist'.





15 x 14 x 18″
Patinated Bronze









14 x 14 x 12″
Patinated Bronze









31 x 35 x 22.5″
Patinated Bronze



17 x 12 x 18″
Patinated Bronze









13 x 15 x 7″
Patinated Bronze



Kaka Singhji Bigle Wala 11.5 x 7 x 1.5″
Patinated Bronze

~

(right) Prakash Chander Haran Wala 11.5 x 7 x 1.5″
Patinated Bronze







Major Sahebji 11.5 x 7 x 2″
Patinated Bronze

~

(left) Chandru Saheb Drum Wala 11.5 x 7 x 1.5″
Patinated Bronze



11.5 x 6.5 x 1.5″
Patinated Bronze



Ramji Lall Ting Ting Wala 11.5 x 7 x 2″
Patinated Bronze

Ravi Rajinder Tae Maddi Di Jugalbandi
11.5 x 13 x 1.5″
Patinated Bronze





Bhura Singh Chota Shimla Wala
11.5 x 7 x 2″
Patinated Bronze



Sharmaji Tututru Wala
11.5 x 7 x 1.5″
Patinated Bronze



Jarnal Singhji France Walay
11.5 x 7 x 1.5″
Patinated Bronze



Masterji Band Walay
11.5 x 7 x 2″
Patinated Bronze



26.5 x 65″
Patinated Bronze

35 x 48″
Patinated Bronze



40 x 58.5 x 4.5″
Patinated Bronze





26 x 67 x 1″
Patinated Bronze

16 x 23 x 3″
Patinated Bronze





13 x 12 x 1.5″
Patinated Bronze



13 x 12 x 1.5″
Patinated Bronze



13 x 6 x 3.5″
Patinated Bronze



13 x 6 x 3.5″
Patinated Bronze



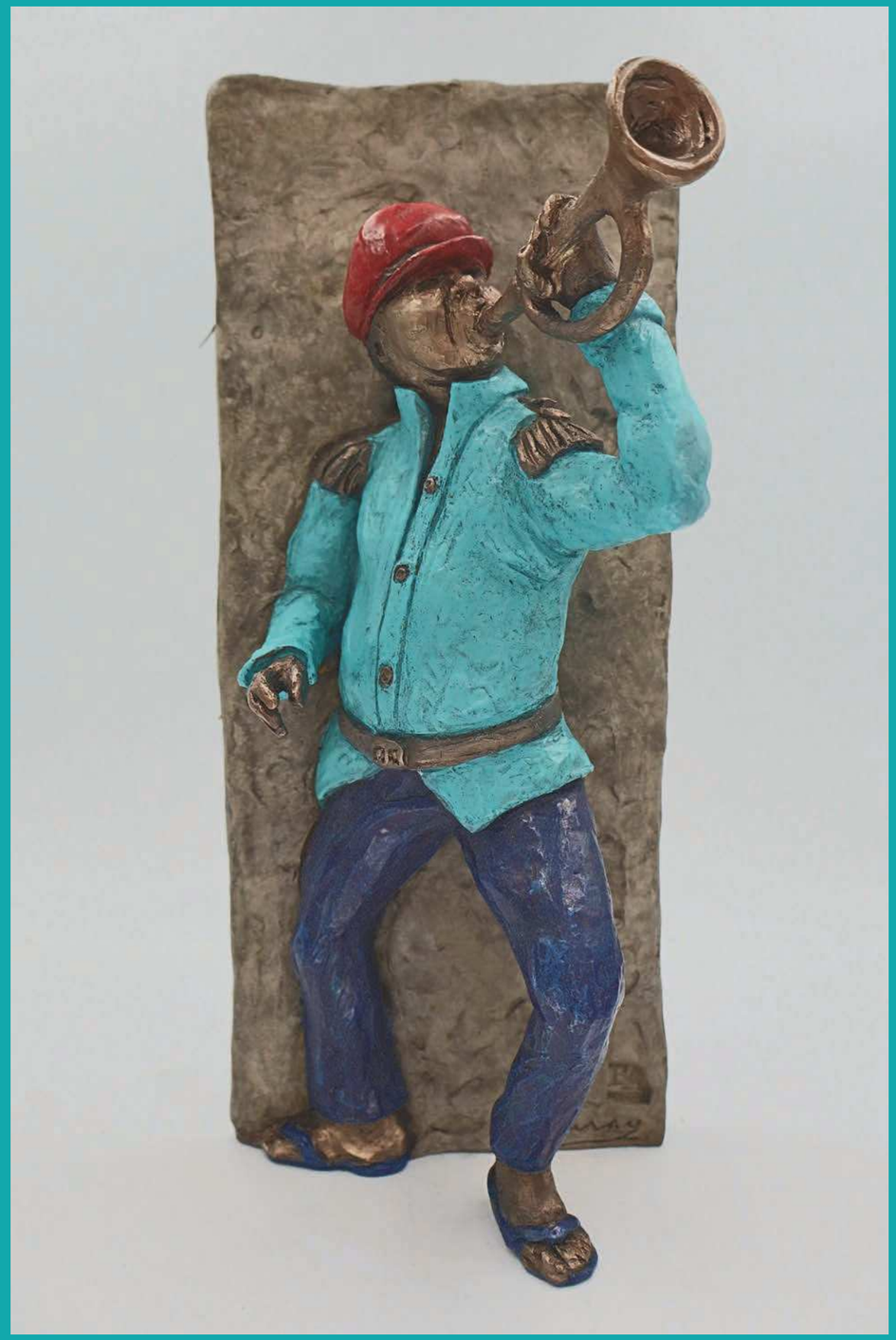
13 x 6.5 x 4.5″
Patinated Bronze





13 x 5.5 x 6″
Patinated Bronze

13 x 5.5 x 1″
Patinated Bronze













Krishen Khanna at work



Photograph: Shazid Chauhan

Uma Nair is a senior art critic and curator. She has penned more than 100 catalogues in thirty-four years of writing on Indian modern and contemporary art. She writes for *Architectural Digest India,* the *Times of India*, and other respected publications.

ABOUT ICIA

Nestled in the heart of Mumbai's art district, Kala Ghoda, the Institute Of Contemporary Indian Art, also known as ICIA Gallery, takes forward the legacy of establishing Indian art in the mindspace of art patrons and enthusiasts. The gallery was set up by Mr Vickram Sethi in the year 2007 with a vision to redefine the orthodox infrastructure not only with regards to the curating and viewing process but also to acquire authentic and prime artworks.

ICIA is one of the largest grassroot galleries in India and has been actively enhancing 'The Exhibition Experience' for the viewer. Over a period of ten years ICIA has exhibited works of revered Modernists and established contemporary artists. The gallery has deftly carved a niche for itself by representing India's art culture with a balanced approach, showcasing the seminal attributes of the masters in tow with the experimental and disruptive vision of contemporary artists from within the country.

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