

art & soul

Memory Roll
Lalitha Lajmi



Memory Roll

Opens 16th October

16 October - 15 November

Solo Show

- Recent Drawings in Grisaille on Japanese Rice Paper Roll.

14 inches (1.2 feet) by 21 feet (252 inches or 6.4 metres), Watercolour and Pencil, Crayon Drawing on Japanese Paper Scroll.

March - October 2020

15,00,000 INR + GST. (21,000 Dollars USD)

Curated by Dr. Tarana Khubchandani.

October 2020

We have lived in times where the present has been fleeting. Preoccupied in our lives that were eternal, our lives promised unending scapes of happening and possibility. During the Covid pandemic Lalitha Lajmi sketched portraits of women, birds with human heads and Christ-like busts on a long Japanese paper scroll that lay in her studio for decades. A relative who was a flight captain had brought the paper from Japan, she never got to using the scroll, rather the pandemic forced her to scout for material in her studio. The pandemic also changed the nuance of time, it was ever present even though it raced away into loneliness. Loneliness is a malaise we live in Bombay at pandemic scale. It stains our memory, nostalgia for familiar loved faces often returns to question our existence.

I have known Lalitha Lajmi since my time at school and those lessons at drawing got me through dentistry school. She often encouraged me to draw like a child asking me to illustrate my life, how I saw my family and what constituted the elements of life. Many members of my family studied under her at the Fort Convent and the Champion School situated both in Colaba district where she then lived and where I grew up. As a gallerist who was born to post-partition refugees from Sindh, 'Art' was introduced to me by Lalitha. My mother still has drawings of mine with her corrections and signature. Her Japanese paper scroll reminds me of our days in school, for her the images are from memory not referenced, drawn in a time of unending loneliness. This is why I call the exhibition Memory Roll.

First Section of Scroll



The drawings presented in this exhibition have been drawn between March 2020 and September 2020 and are part of a scroll. They represent six months of artistic activity in solitude and act as an example of conceptual prowess at being able to draw from memory complex perspectives and anatomy. She uses the water stain that has been on the paper for years to act as a base to sketch the continuity of her drawings in grisaille and sepia tones. Like most of her work these drawings are autobiographical as they are imaginary. For her show 'Performers' at Gallery Art & Soul speaking to the Hindustan Times she said, ' My work is positive now.'



Lalitha has battled loneliness all her life and the emotion has authored her prints. She is the senior most printmaker living in Bombay and one of the few women printmakers of generation that is defined by Zarina Hashmi, Anupam Sud and her , all three women who have lent their personal lives as the subject for their etchings.

She comes from a family of story tellers , her works have been autobiographical stories and with the Memory Roll she attempts something that is not less than cinematic , lengthy and animated. She is the younger sister of the legendary filmmaker Guru Dutt, with whom she shared a very close relationship, much of her work that deals with psychoanalysis deals with his loss. Her brother Devi Dutt was a producer and Atma Ram was also a director, she is the mother of Kalpana Lajmi who is the pioneer of parallel cinema in India as well as the cousin of Shyam Benegal the screenwriter and directors of films now called Alternate or New Cinema. She was extremely close to her brother and her daughter was the only one who understood Lajmi's conversations through her drawings. Their deaths were a loss that has been an unmeasured void in her life, but she celebrates their lives through these drawings in her memory roll. We all pine and suffer the parting of our loved ones. But in the time of a pandemic, where contemporary culture convinces us of our immortality through consumption, invincibility through fantasies of material success and an urban architecture purposed for individuality, loneliness has never been so overwhelming.



Second Section of Scroll



The pandemic discontinued a journey of exhibitions at Gallery Art & Soul since 2003 the year of our founding. Since then we have hosted many solo exhibitions of artists who today are celebrated in the scene and I began thinking which kind of exhibition should mark the coming out of months of uncertainty. Lalitha has been drawing since the pandemic on this scroll and sharing images with me. She marks the beginning of my relationship with art and my memories are vivid as images in a camera roll that I share with her. In 2012 for the India Art Festival I supported a solo retrospective of her prints curated by the Clark House Initiative called 'The Mind's Cupboards'. where we displayed the entire catalogue raisonne of her prints. Along with the Sir JJ School of Art Printmaking Studio they published her plates that had been lying in her studio unprinted. She held workshops with the students of her time at printmaking workshops organised by Krishna Reddy and her interactions with printmakers such as Paul Koli.

She places windows often within domestic spaces, windows that look into landscapes of the mind. These she depicts as artist self-portraits. Lajmi was born to a poet father and a poly-linguist writer mother in 1932. Through a vocabulary of an unequal distribution of images and perspectives within the same plane she narrates a layered history of the modern Indian woman in the decades that followed independence. She returned to her career as an artist after her marriage and the birth of her children in an exhibition of the Progressive Artists Group in 1960 at the Artist's Centre Bombay. A year later her mentor KH Ara, who had included her in the exhibition, gave opportunity to do her first solo show. Being one of the few women artists of that period, Lalitha managed her career along with the responsibilities of a family and that of an art teacher within a school.

Third Section of Scroll



She returned to her home late in the evenings. This and the lack of sunlight curtailed her painting. Having studied the art of intaglio and etching through a government funded program for evening classes at the Sir JJ School of Art, from 1973 to 1976, Lalitha set up a press within her kitchen. Working at night using electrical light, through an interesting use of grisaille and sepia tones, she began making prints that later were to travel to an exhibition that took place simultaneously in West and East Germany in 1983, supported by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations. Images in her works are metaphors with multiple references to relationships, dream sequences and multiple identities. The performer- often the clown - represents our own domestic performance of roles we are expected to play, the mask - our concealed identities through which we put up our multiple appearances, and the skull a vanitas to our short life. Drawn from her personal history she creates a visual biography that is left to interpretation by her viewers. Presenting dichotomies that are both humorous and tragic, akin to the stories of her brother, the legendary director Guru Dutt often narrated through his films.

Each year, on his journey to Shantiniketan Dr. Heinz Mode an archaeologist would stop into Bombay to meet Lalitha Lajmi, replicating the barter trade that existed between his country the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) and India. He was one of her first collectors. The two hailed from socialist economies where the paucity of liquid funds was acute. Thus, they devised a barter where Lalitha would receive art books in lieu of the art work Mode would pick up. From this friendship over a few decades arose an extensive library.

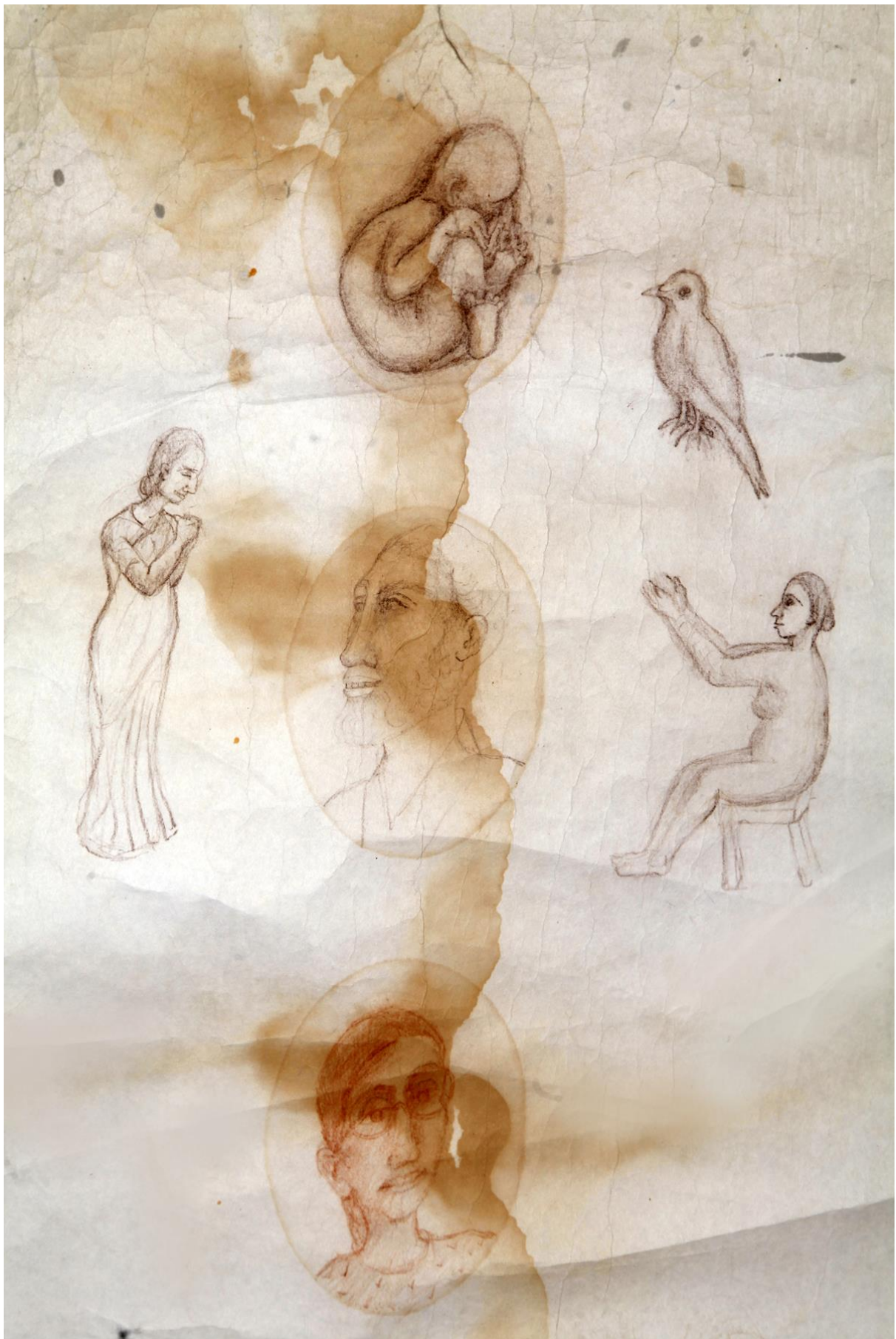
Fourth Section of Scroll



Lalita Logan
Sep 2020

In 1983 Lalitha travelled with her daughter to Germany on the invitation of Dr. Mode. A pastor and his wife arranged for an exhibition of Lalitha's works in West Berlin. Lalitha thinks back to her journey by train to the other side of the wall to an exhibition of her etchings arranged by Dr. Mode. The stark contrasts of the two worlds, and her two simultaneous exhibitions across the iron curtain, were coincidences that resembled the dichotomies within individuals, represented in her works. Often described as stark and biographical, etchings that are difficult to view, they were personal metaphors, easily misunderstood as literal, until read as a visual vocabulary for concise, psycho-analytic insight in a confessional mode.

Scroll Painting has a long tradition in India, the Patachitras of Bengal tell tales , long unending stories and tales of valour, love, courage and folk memory. Manasa Mangalkavya is a tale of the Goddess Manasa is one such folktale that invokes the Goddess Manasa who cures the village folk of epidemics such as smallpox and other illnesses among children. Manasa convinces a Muslim King to allow her worship which has now developed into a syncretic shamanistic worship where Bauls enact and sing from these scrolls. Pabujika Phad is another scroll that the shaman who is a bard-priest and called a Bhopa uses to sing a tale of benediction and protection, a scroll that is popular amongst the indigenous castes of Rajasthan. In Lalitha Lajmi's native Konkan coast of Western India, similar renditions of long murals are found in temples that celebrate the life of the Bhutas, benevolent spirits who hail from before the advent of Hinduism and act as village deities against the curses of disease and death. Lalitha Lajmi somewhere uses the multiple scales of animation that do not follow a linear timeline but rather a surreal imaginary against the scourge of loneliness that we face during the Covid 2019 pandemic's induced lockdown.



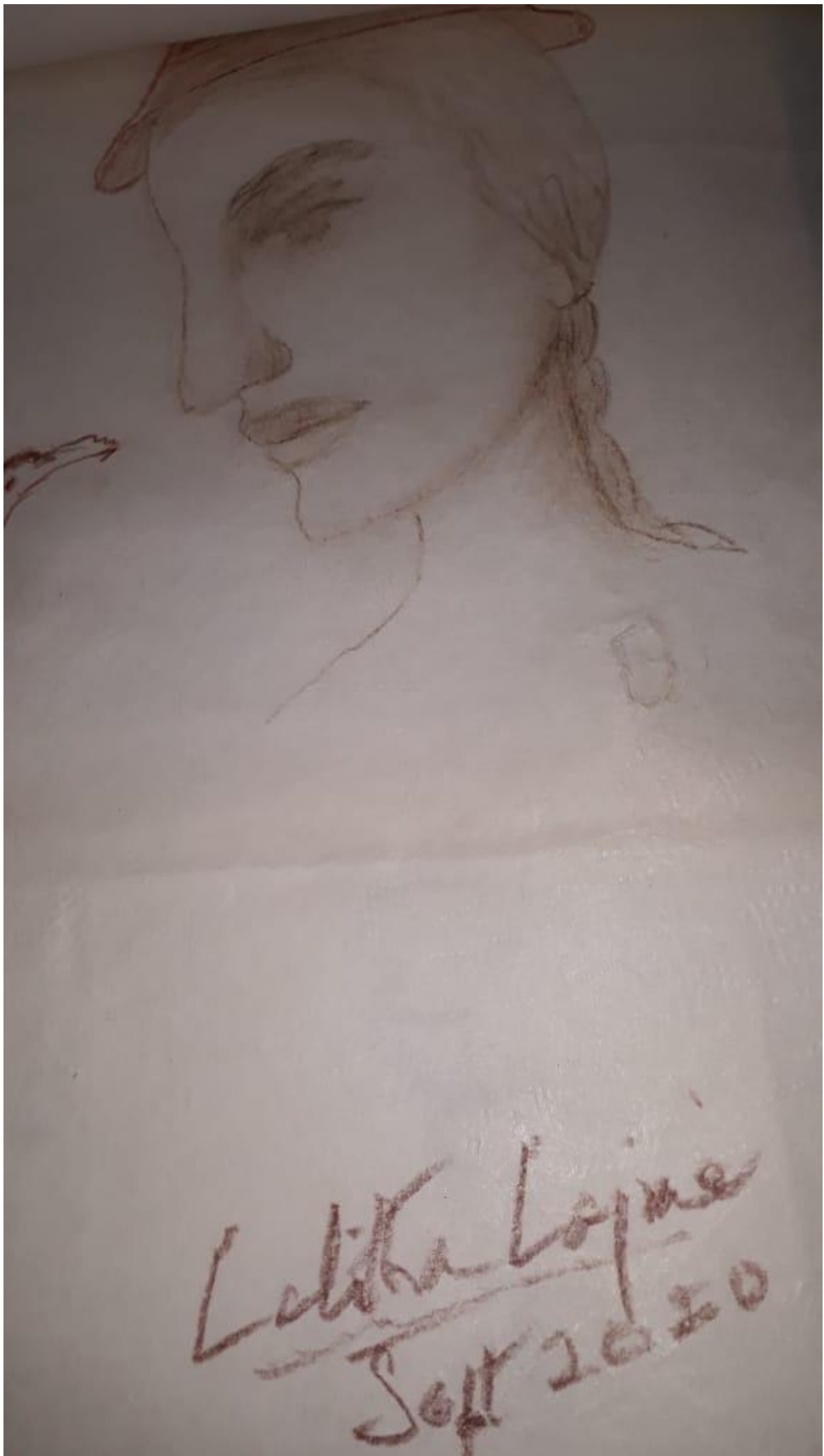
The major themes that re-occur in her work: dichotomies of the self-hidden behind masks; the trope of social performers, like the clown; intense portrayals of the abject; metaphorical windows and psychological interiority; erotic works of intimacy between the sexes; and arresting portraits. Her present works are presentations of her imaginations, during the pandemic we engulfed by material that has been animated on screen. The act of drawing is an act of radical conceptualism in a time where we are inundated with multimedia. Drawing is least consuming of resources and demonstrates human ability over the techniques and possibility of machines and artificial intelligence. Our memory rolls even if found on computer hard-disks, mobile phones and digital clouds represent human life, we often privilege our memories stored in our brains because it is the narrative we prefer to remember as those stories champion our life. Likewise 'Memory Roll' champions the life of Lalitha Lajmi, who tells stories of performers and masques that mimic our lives.

Dr Tarana Khubchandani.

Lalitha Lajmi born in 1932 , Kolkata is a painter and printmaker based in Bombay who uses traces of autobiography , imaginative tales and psychoanalysis to paint and publish art works that sit on many panes of genre, technique and concept. Recent solo exhibitions include 'The Minds Cupboards' 2013 at India Art Festival and Clark House Initiative; 'The Masque of Life' 2014 Jehangir Art Gallery and 'Performers' 2015, Gallery Art & Soul, Mumbai.



She has exhibited her work in India, (Germany) and the United States. Lajmi has given lectures in India and the UK as well. She also showcased her work in the Graphic workshop of Prof. Paul Lingerine in Mumbai and two of her etchings were selected for "India Festival ' ' 1985, USA. Her work has been displayed in various famous art galleries including Prithvi Art Gallery, Pundole Art Gallery, Apparao Gallery, Chennai, Pundole Gallery, Mumbai, Hutheesing Centre for Visual Art, Ahmedabad , Art Heritage, New Delhi, Gallery Gay, Germany, Prints Exhibition at Max Muller Bhavan, Kolkata etc. She taught at Campion school and Convent of Jesus and Mary for over 20 years.



Lalika Lajme
Sept 2020

Some of her group exhibitions include A SYCO, The viewing Room, Mumbai, Think Small, Art Alive Gallery, New Delhi, The Feminine Eye, Gallery Sara Arakkal, Bangalore. Her initial work displayed a lot of autobiographical elements and her later work reflected the hidden tension between men and women.

Lajmi has also showcased a natural bonding between mother and daughter in her work. Her works are held in the collection of the National Gallery of Modern Art, British Museum and CSMVS Museum Mumbai.

Gallery Art & Soul

Gallery Art & Soul , established in 2003 is a gallery of Indian modern , contemporary and decorative arts in the heart of Bombay. Founded by Dr. Tarana Kubhchandani as an extension of her activities at the Art & Soul Cancer Foundation , the gallery has pursued a discourse both within India and internationally of aesthetic syncretism producing exhibitions that are varied in genre, materiality and conceptual though across art historical timelines.

From its inception it has produced a steller Breast Cancer charity support salon exhibition and gala and over the last two decades has hosted solo exhibitions and retrospectives of artists such as Syed Haider Raza, Manu Parekh, Satish Gupta, Sujata Bajaj , Subhash Awchat, Laitha Lajmi, Binita Karim, Rithika Merchant , Rabin Mondal, Krishna Reddy, Abdul Aziz Raiba, Yashwant Deshmukh, Revati Sharma Singh, Arzan Khambhatta, Jin Sook Shinde, Vilas Shinde, Seema Kohli and Vasant Wankhede.

Apart from the expansive space in the Worli district of Bombay the gallery has partnered in hosting exhibitions National Gallery of Art New Delhi & Mumbai, India Art Fair, India Habitat Center, CSMVS Museum , Mumbai, Jehangir Art Gallery, Sir JJ School of Art , Mumbai, Clark House Initiative , Kasturbhai Lalbhai Museum , India Art Festival, Chennai Art Summit and Nehru Centre.

The gallery has a yearly scholarship for art students, travel bursaries for artists to the Venice Biennale , in past support to non for profits such as

Kala Ghoda Festival, Kochi Muziris Biennale , Clark House Initiative , CSMVS Museum, NGMA and Sir JJ School of Arts. We have been in the forefront of supporting ceramics as an art form and have yearly curatorial project in support of the medium.

The gallery provides a cross section of artists who work mainly within Modernism and Contemporary Decorative Arts. This focus allows us to support a crucial section of the art eco-system . The gallery provides consultative services for large scale acquisitions by collectors privately and for their corporate needs. We provide investment advice , curatorial expertise, collection management services and secondary sales to collectors. Collection Management is a forte and we service 6 important art collections across India (Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Surat and New Delhi) and the United States (New York) . Our exhibition programming is dynamic and interspersed with senior artist presentations, curated group shows and debutant solo shows for young artists. We are committed to our syncretic vision of art and support for accessible health in the field of cancer research.

We invite you to join us this Friday 16th October, 2020, as part of [#ArtNightFriday](#) with Art Walks Mumbai and Mumbai Midtown Arts Collective as we share some of Lalitha Lajmi's beautiful works.

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