

ॐ त्र्यम्बकं यजामहर्षे सुगन्धिं पुष्टिवर्धनम्। उवाचुरुकममव ष्वनानृत्तोमुधक्षीय माऽमृतात्

The mythological narratives that establish the Hindu religious beliefs are largely based on the constructive, the destructive, and the meditative forces.

Artist Vikash Kalra enriches our visual space with the richness of Shiva's philosophy, where his Godly stature is an insight to the metaphysical world. This metaphysical sphere is set around myths and rituals which the artist invokes in his work. He sets the tone by creating various stages and moods of Shiva's meditation as he visualises them.

One may say that his art is a form of meditation practiced in the methods of incantation where his chants are visualised and performed on his canvases. In the process, each time the image of Shiva is imagined, it is a system of engaging with the symbolism associated with Shiva. More so, this act of creating Shiva's facial expressions depict the artist's dialogues with the omnipresent. He does so with the intent of exploring his own metaphysical journey framed on the subject of 'the cosmos'.

The metaphysics here is related to presight, insight and foresight, and, in each case, the artist envisions forms of Shiva's adventurous presentations. Kalra sets out to warrant the beginnings of 'creation' in the mythic portrayals of Shiva, where Shiva is the ultimate artist who is not only a forceful source but also the inspiration of creative industries. Shiva's role as the creator is beyond the boundaries of spiritualism and occupied in the centrality of metaphysics. His creation can not be challenged mostly because of the 'might' that Shiva possesses as the creator.

Kalra initiates a metaphysical dialogue with Shiva's might in creation. The artist is fully empowered in God's metaphysical probings, where Kalra becomes the muse of the creator and, in return, has become the tool of Shiva to demonstrate Shiva's presence and his miracles. For instance, it is believed that Shiva emerged on earth as a result of a lightning that struck the ground: one ray of light was seen rushing towards the sky and another ray of light pierced the ground. Shiva's emergence was considered in this interstitial space that was in between the two directions the lighting had struck.

It is not easy to overlook his avatar's structure based on death, birth, and rebirth. Here, symbolic use of ash, third-eye drawn across his forehead, the power-drum (damru) tied at the neck of his trident, the cow (Nandi) who serves as his medium of transport and messenger, and the tiger-skin that he is often seen wearing as a loincloth (and, sometimes, shown as his seat) are all important gestural supports to the philosophy he is associated with. The rudraksha or stonefruit are markers of this same philosophy and it semiotically refers to the chants of prayers that Shiva is imagined through. The ardh-narishwar or 'the half of a woman' in Shiva too defines this breakaway from dualities that is largely inscribed in religious or social practices.



Shiva is life and death and anything that stimulates the remaining elements in between. Shiva is the ultimate truth, denial, acceptance, form, death, life, birth, performance, and imagination. One may posit that, in practice, Kalra explores the vivacious nature of Shiva in his work. Kalra's love and devotion for this omnipotent form emerges as an interesting visual intersection between philosophy, religion, cultural practice, the Arts, and politics. The acrylic on canvas images of Shiva is an attention to his sole goal of attending the perfect state of meditation and meeting the presence of God in himself. Here, he resurrects the artist in him as the gift of life empowered by Shiva's adventurous might. In the process, the mythological transforms into something real and this 'real' is only visible to those willing to look beyond the surface. Kalra's visual language echoes the stylistic, bold brushstrokes of the European modernists who influenced India's contemporary art practices and he blends it with his own spiritual tranquility. The vibrant colours that evoke the myths surrounding Shiva's grandeur elevates his style to unburden the Indian flavours in belief and in faith.

In doing so, he reveals the mystic, the mythic, the mysterious, and, finally, the monk in himself. All in all, Shiva's tandav performance weighs heavy on human civilization and it has found a creator in Kalra to expose the blurring divides between ideas. Therefore, the artist takes up this baton to visually be in conversation with the richness of Shiva's mantra, tantra, and creation.

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