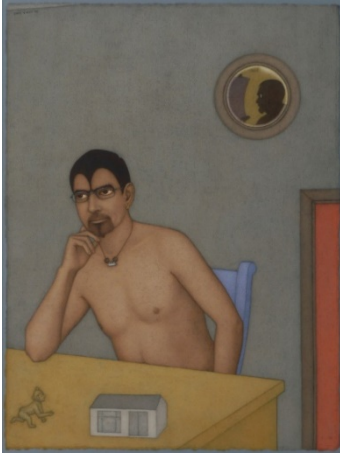


PIANO NOBILE



Shanti Panchal: Ragas of the Dawn

21 October 2016 – 6 January 2017

Piano Nobile Kings Place

The 2015 Ruth Borchard Self-Portrait Prize winner returns this autumn with an exhibition of new and existing work, featuring his trademark contemplative watercolours.

Appropriately, as the days shorten and nights draw in, Panchal's monumental watercolours, featuring his trademark earthy tones, will bring a welcome sense of the vibrancy and sensuality of his Indian homeland to London's Piano Nobile Kings Place.

Born in northern Gujarat in the mid-to-late 1950s (his exact date of birth is unknown) Shanti first came to London in 1978 and is now permanently based here.

During his career, Panchal has been artist-in-residence at the British Museum and at the Harris Museum in Preston and won numerous prizes and awards, including the 1991 BP Portrait Award and first prize in the Singer and Friedlander-supported *Sunday Times* watercolour competition. His work is held in various public collections including the British Museum, Liverpool's Walker Art Gallery and the Imperial War Museum.

Renowned for his large-scale, fresco-like watercolours Shanti Panchal is a master of contrasts. At first archaic, his work then reveals itself to be challengingly contemporary. His abstracted works are partly inspired by Indian miniaturist painting plus Buddhist and Jain frescoes, but also by the visionary figuration of El Greco, Rothko's colour fields and Francis Bacon's backdrops.

Opening on 21 October at Piano Nobile Kings Place *Shanti Panchal: Ragas of the Dawn* includes a mix of existing and new paintings. Each one is a watercolour on paper and details part of a narrative or autobiographical moment in the painter's life. His signature ochres, siennas, umbers, violets and greys recall his youth in Mumbai and evoke sand and mud walls, terracotta red roof tiles and vast skies.

"I'm very inspired by the earth colours of where I grew up but also the old concept of the five elements; earth, fire, air, water and space, or nothingness. Consequently, I have a small palette" Shanti says.

Shanti saturates the hand-made paper with his palette of rich, vibrant colours by infusing the paper with many layers of watercolour and scraping back until the surface and colour become one - an evolutionary and meditative painting process. Each of his large works can take between five to six months to create, as he painstakingly builds up each layer.

"I can only work on one painting at a time," he explains. *"I don't like to be distracted, as my mind, body and spirit are engaged in the creation of each piece. Consequently, I'm not what you'd call a prolific painter. I like to spend time with each work, so rarely, if ever, produce more than seven pieces a year."*

Although his work has been compared to that of Rothko and El Greco, *Ragas of the Dawn* reveals the influence of Canova in *The Three Graces* and the landscapes of Blake, Turner and Constable.

His 2015 *Ruth Borchard Self-Portrait Award* winning work, *Artist and the Lost Studio* was painted in late 2014, when Panchal was faced with the prospect of losing his north London studio. Describing his response to this incident, he said: *"I felt I was being stripped naked of the things I had worked for many years. Circumstances were forcing me to move – the studio was being snatched away from me."* The artist's nakedness symbolises his acute sense of vulnerability. He sits rather tentatively on a simple wooden chair of *"refreshing watery cobalt blue. I'm looking into the distance – into the uncertain future – but really it is a more inward look, accompanied by the hand's thoughtful gesture."*

Another moment of crisis in his life is depicted in Panchal's first identifiable and definitive self-portrait, *The Wreck* (2010).

A collector had invited him to stay in his apartment in Barcelona and it was while out strolling along the beach that the pair spotted the rusting hulk of a ship. *"This first self-portrait was of me sitting on the beach, facing the sea, with the shipwreck behind – inspiring me as a metaphor for myself – as I had recently had a personal crisis. The simple shape of the ship, and the propeller half-buried in the sand, interested me. The weather was very grey – but there is space – and glowing colours around – allowing the figure to breathe."*

Speaking of the wrecked but now becalmed vessel in the desolate sands, Shanti added: *"We live a life of difficulty and conditioning but, at the same time, there is hope. The rusty wreck has already had its journey, its adventures; similarly, I have my own history. These simultaneous histories are presented [and simplified here] in a kind of unified enigmatic narrative."*

Since 2010, he has painted several other self-portraits. *The Artist's Head* (2010) is a small, intensely focussed work – with starkly stylised black hair, eyebrows, goatee and exaggerated eyes resembling those in Jain art. Panchal has given himself what he describes as a *"a very gentle, vulnerable look"* – but there is determined resolve set within his features, indicating his dedication to his own multi-layered, infinitely painstaking art and its taut focus on metaphysical meaning.

Therein lies the subtlety and meaning of this fascinating man and his oeuvre.

Dr Robert Travers, Director of Piano Nobile says *"Shanti Panchal is unique amongst artists working in Britain today. From simple beginnings in Indian village life, he travelled to the UK and soon found himself established. A much admired artist, with a particular voice not heard before, his work is held in great esteem by both museum and private collectors."*

NOTES TO EDITORS

IMAGE – *Artist and the Lost Studio* by Shanti Panchal, 2014 (82 x 102cms, watercolour on paper) © The Ruth Borchard Collection

London-based **Shanti Panchal** was born in the mid-to-late 1950s, in the Indian village of Mesar. He attended the Sir JJ School of Art in Bombay (now Mumbai) and first came to London (on a British Council Scholarship) in 1978. Many of the male figures in his fresco-like watercolours of subtle vibrancy – inspired as much by paintings by El Greco and Francis Bacon as Indian Miniatures and Buddhist and Jain frescoes – reflect diverse aspects of himself. In 2001, Panchal won First Prize in The Sunday Times Watercolour Competition in London, and in 2011 Second Prize. He won the third biennial Ruth Borchard Self-Portrait Prize in 2015. His paintings are in numerous public collections, including those of The Arts Council, The British Museum and The Imperial War Museum.

Piano Nobile specialises in 20th-century works including International, Modern British and Post-War art. The gallery holds an extensive but selected stock, and also represents an exclusive stable of contemporary artists and artists' estates. Established in 1985, we act as agents and principals for private, corporate and museum collections dealing with appraisals, acquisitions and dispersals. With a discerning curatorial vision and a reputation for authoritative exhibitions and publications, the gallery seeks the best quality works of art from established and emerging markets. Piano Nobile Kings Place, based in King's Cross, is the concept space of the gallery, offering a complementary commercial gallery location to expand the exhibition programme of Piano Nobile. Focusing on modern and contemporary British and International art, Piano Nobile Kings Place presents three to four carefully curated exhibitions a year. For more information see www.piano-nobile.com or follow us on Instagram [@pianonobilegallery](https://www.instagram.com/pianonobilegallery)

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