



"FOR TWO LOVERS"

KRISTIN HJELLEGJERDE
ARTECO GALLERY

RADHIKA AGARWALA

Radhika Agarwala's works, in painting and sculpture, take form and direction from her upbringing in India and her cultural experiences in Western cities and capitals in the years since. The works invest in the spiritual dimensions at the core of vastly different ethics and visual languages between Asian and Western cultures, and make playful gesture towards a complex history and developing interconnection between the two. In her work hybridisation is actual and represented, actual through the conjunction of divergent cultural vantages that exhume the sacred with the secular, the profound with the mundane, and the figurative with the geometric. Receiving her MFA in Fine Art from Goldsmiths, London in 2011, Agarwala received her BFA in Painting from Rabindra Bharati University in Calcutta (2007), followed by her Post-Baccalaureate Certificate in Painting from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago (2008) and her MFA in Painting from the University of Florida, College of Fine Art (2010). Recent exhibitions include 'Every Breath I Take is One of Yours' at Casa Dell'Arte, Turkey, 'Snapshots of Utopia' at Chitrakoot Art Gallery, Kolkata (2013) and participation in the Saatchi Gallery's Auction by Tanya Baxter Gallery (2012). Agarwala was shortlisted for the 2013 Threadneedle Prize for Painting and Sculpture as well as 100 Painters of Tomorrow (2013) and in 2009 won the Annual Fellowship from the University of Florida School of Art + Art History and Merit Scholarship from School of The Art Institute of Chicago in 2007. For more information, visit www.radhikaagarwala.com.

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Against a shimmering background, a veritable Garden of Eden in monochrome bursts to life. Beasts, birds and cherubs bloom amongst sprawling, verdant vegetation. Closer inspection, however, reveals a carrion eater in the form of a looming vulture, a prickly dragonfly and a gaping snakelike creature. The branches and vines take on the form of squirming serpents, the flower petals claw-like and foreboding. Elsewhere, a male figure rides upon the back of a giant owl, his impressive physique and limbs reminiscent of da Vinci's Vitruvian Man. Yet, his face has been replaced with an architectural structure, a geometric tangle of intersecting lines and angles that radiates from him like a sunburst as he flies upon the great bird's back through a sky of gleaming gold.

Kristin Hjellegjerde/ARTECO Gallery is proud to present a solo show of new works by young artist Radhika Agarwala, marking her second exhibition and her first solo exhibition with the gallery. Running from 15 November – 20 December, “The Two Lovers” evokes fantastic vistas that cross the divide between landscape and dream-scape.

For this series, Agarwala has been inspired by an amalgamation of old historical botanical illustrations from the 17th and 18th centuries, Tarot cards and literature on spirituality, including the Age of Aquarius, as well as her travels, personal experiences and childhood memories. Together, these feed into Agarwala's practice, imbuing her works with a unique visual language, bringing together and hybridizing various images and influences; this is most often evident in her beasts and birds, which in themselves create a new zoology. Colour, too (or the lack of it) plays an important role, her black and white palette selected to imbue the works with a sense of memory and of a harking back to a 'golden age.' “I love looking at old photographs, and classic cinema and all those moments that I've enjoyed are always from black and white movies,” says Agarwala. “I wanted to juxtapose snippets from my subconscious or present state of mind with a rich, theatrical feeling, and I felt I could best do so with a monochromatic palette.” The warm tones of the 24-karat gold gilding give each work a sense of drama and presence, contrasting with the vintage tones of each scene.

This is immediately evident in *The Comrade and the Beast*, in which strange phantasmagorical animals jump out as if from an old botanical manuscript, yet are encased in gold, like a rich Byzantine mosaic or medieval illuminated manuscript. The artist is also inspired by objects and memories she has collected during her travels, as evident in *The Midnight Void II*, in which a giant luminous sea shell floats in a universe of black; this was inspired by a seashell Agarwala owned as a child. "I have spent the last few years collecting objects, influences and memories to build an archive of imagery for myself," she explains. "I appropriate images from everywhere. I grew up in India but studied and lived in the USA and UK, exposing me to very different cultures in terms of aesthetics, so I've been building up my own visual vocabulary as a mesh of all the cultures that I have been exposed to. From illuminated manuscripts to the courtly paintings of India, the masculine and feminine, Christianity and Hinduism, Freud's Pleasure Principle – my work is an honest by-product of everything that I have seen, read and experienced." Figures such as the lotus, the eagle and the swan are borne out of East-West mythologies to form their own neo-reality in Agarwala's works, a Utopian representation of reality. "The swan, for me, symbolizes purity and honesty," says the artist, "while the eagles can be quite cruel, masculine and powerful – it is this idea of two emotions, the greed, femininity and a fragile sensitivity that exist in my mind as a dream or an illusion, waiting to be painted or sculpted." The image of the swan, in particular, is worth noting as the sole sculptural piece on display in "For Two Lovers" – its neck curved, it hovers on the line of majestic and tortured, a fusion of various birds – all at once recognizable, yet created into something new.

By combining classical techniques with this vast visual vocabulary, Agarwala creates "a language of distorted reality," and like painters such as Brueghel or Bosch, a garden of earthly delights that are the subconscious mind brought to life. "We, as humans, have such a barrage of information in our heads at any given time that I thought it would be interesting to throw it into my work and try to make sense of it and see what it could produce both for myself and for the viewer." Here, in the works of this talented, multicultural artist, blossoms a whole new visual language. "For Two Lovers" is a peek into an alternate universe that is at once as awe-inspiring as it is welcoming, as elusive as it is tantalizing, always at our fingertips, yet always just out of reach.





Series from the Midnight Void I 2013
Oil and charcoal on canvas, 125 x 105 cm



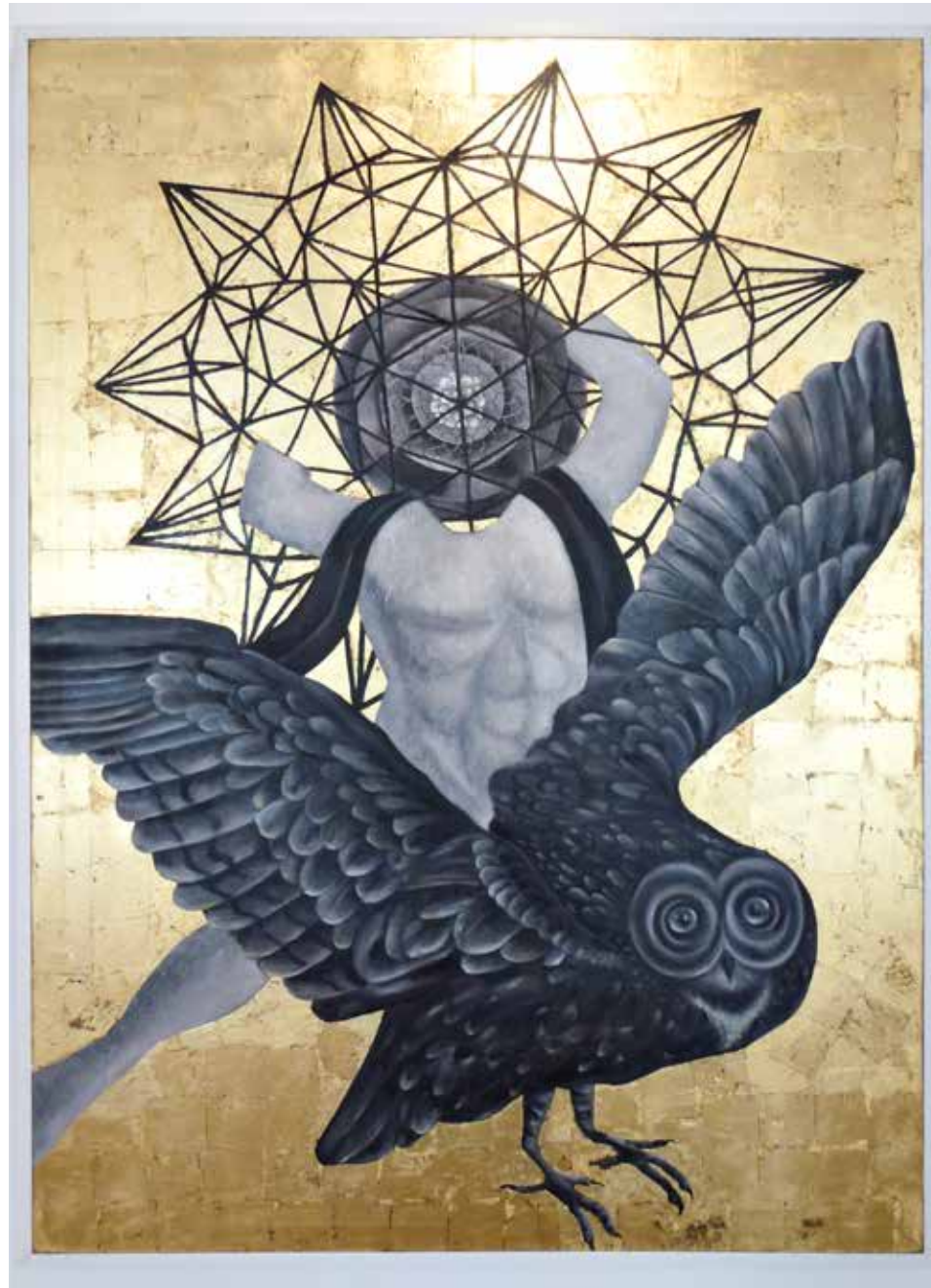
Series from the Midnight Void II 2013
Oil and charcoal on canvas, 125 x 105 cm



After the Wilton Diptych 2013
Oil and 24-karat gold on canvas, 120 x 100 cm



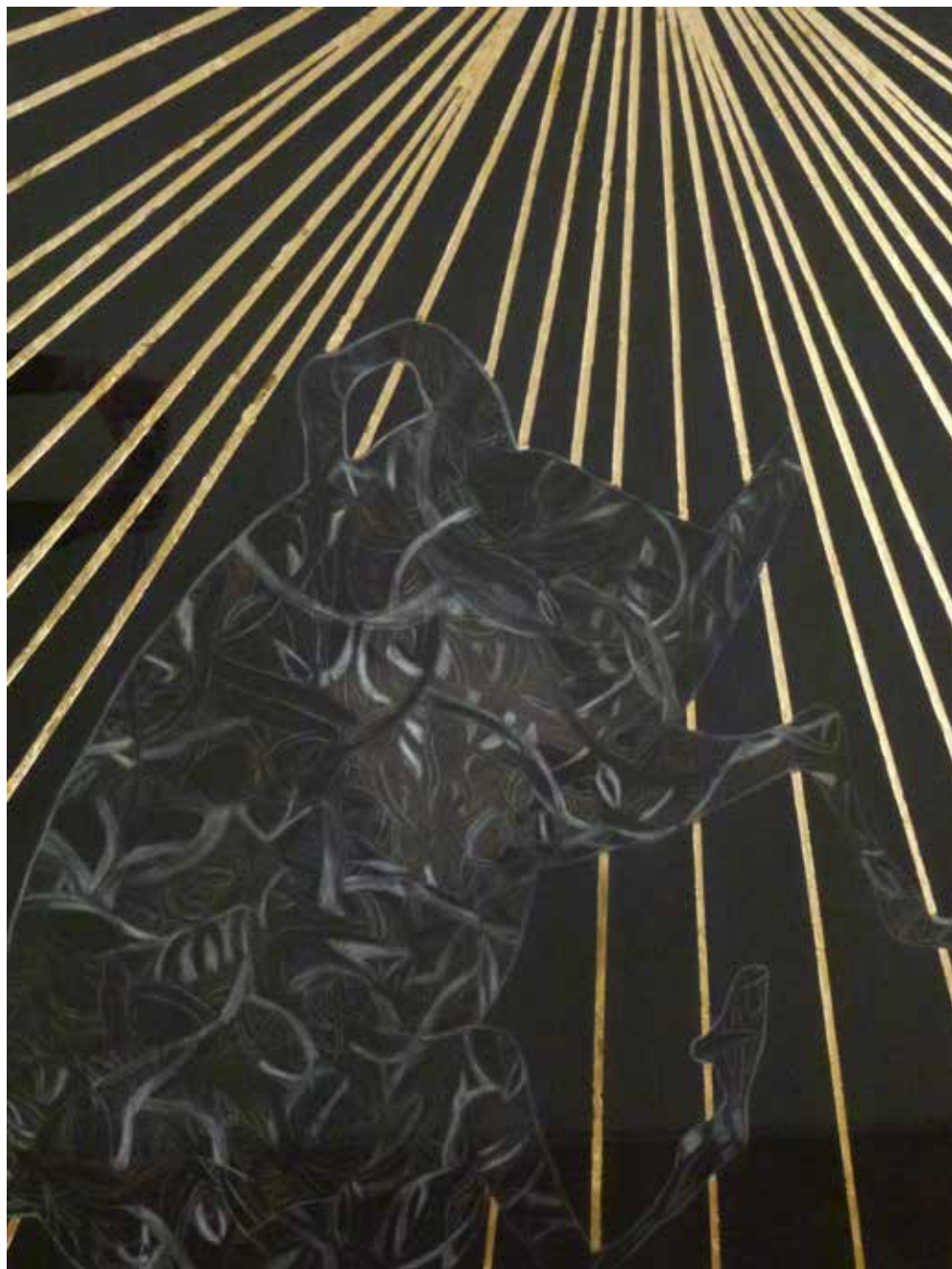
The Golden Queen Resurrection 2013
Bronze, 85 x 65 x 40 cm



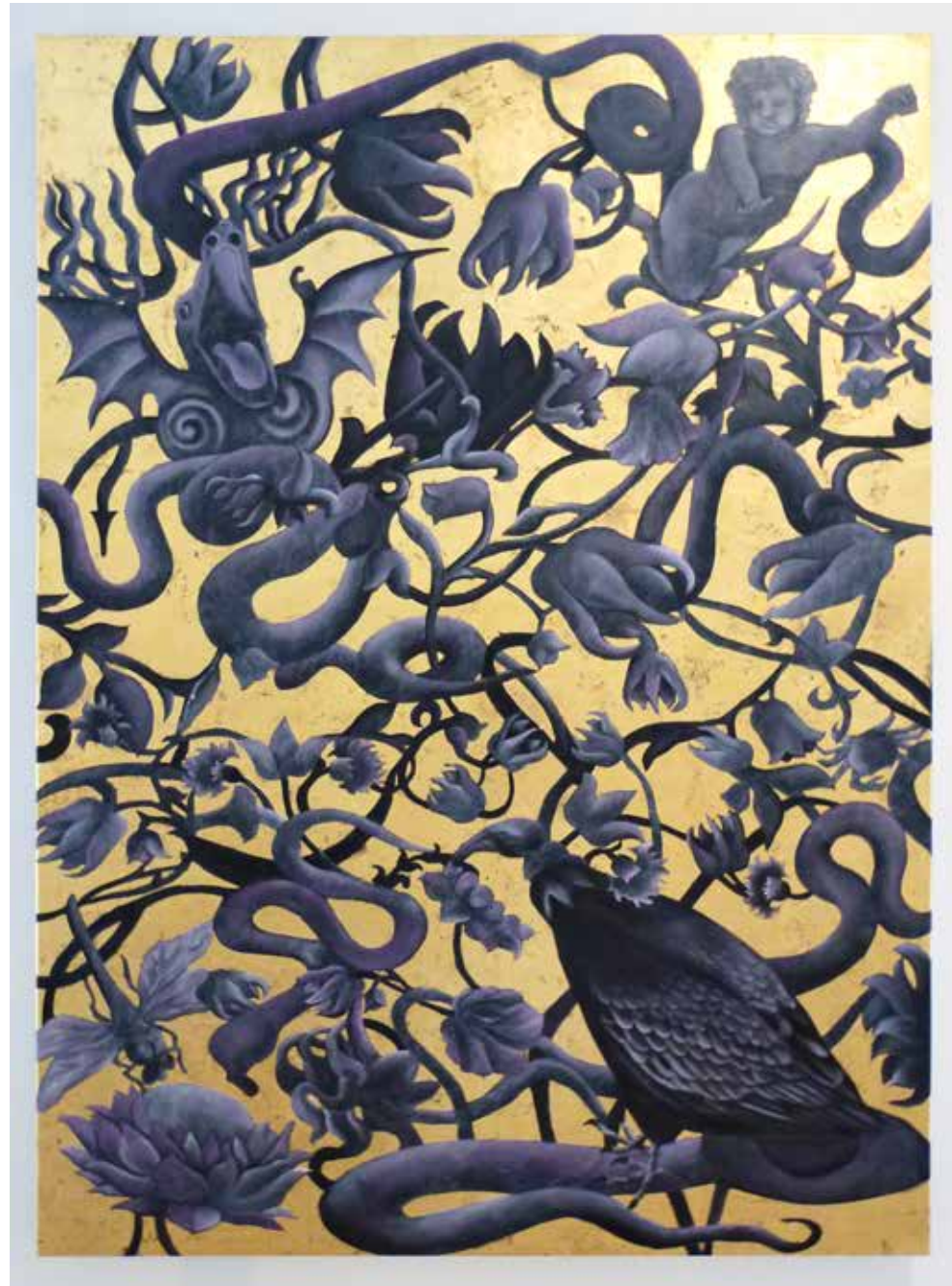
The Seventh Heaven with the Minerva 2013
Oil and 24-karat gold on canvas, 172 x 123 cm



Two Lovers 2013
Charcoal and 24-karat gold on canvas ,170 x 120 cm



Night Lover 2013
Charcoal and gold leaf on canvas, 170 x 120 cm



Comrade and the Beast I 2013
Oil and 24-karat gold on canvas, 168 x 93 cm



Comrade and the Beast II 2013

Oil and 24-karat gold on canvas, 173 x 120 cm



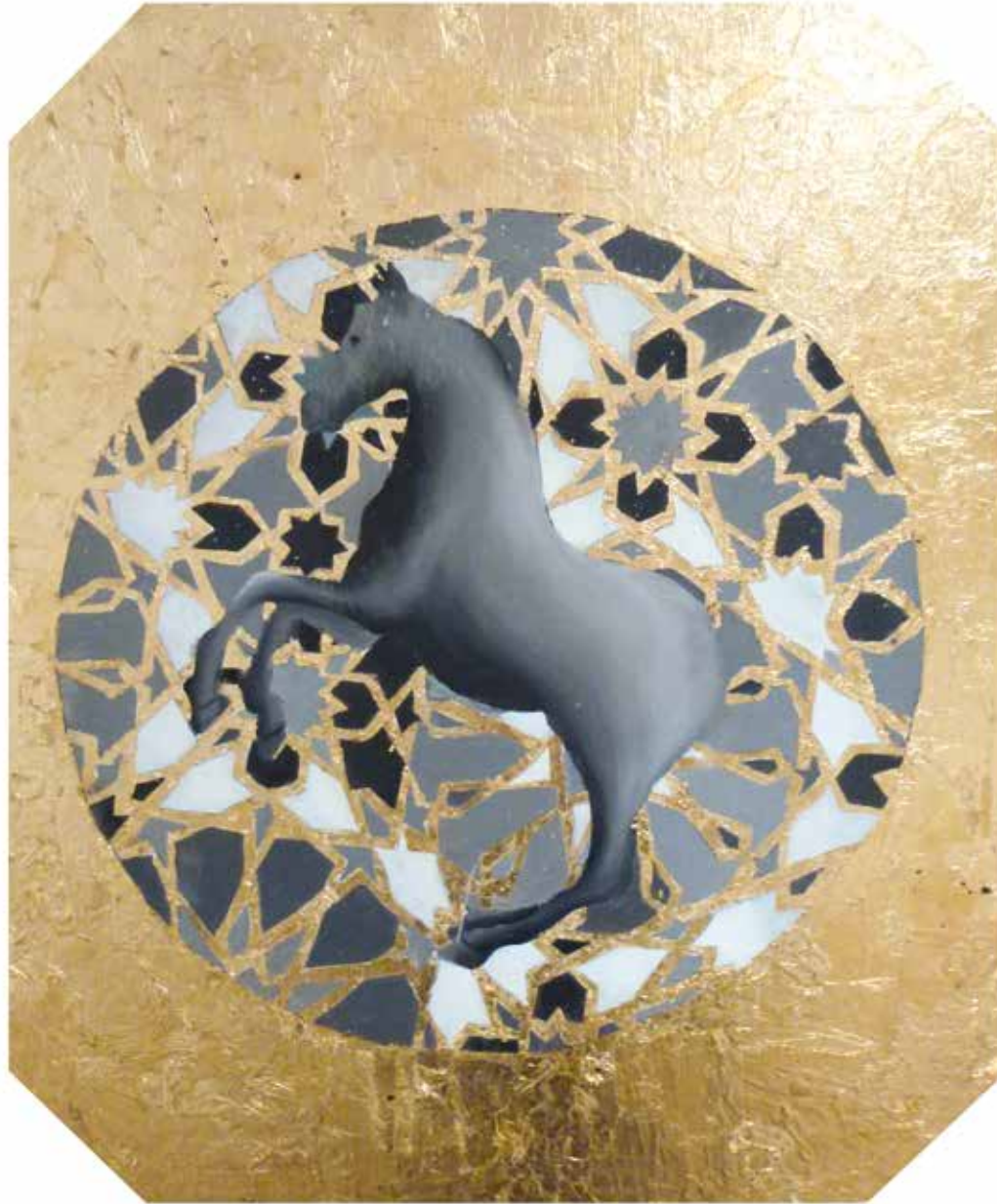
Series from the Abandoned Nights I 2013
Oil and charcoal on canvas, 46 x 56 cm



Series from the Abandoned Nights II 2013
Oil and charcoal on panel, 46 x 56 cm



Series from the Abandoned Nights III 2013
Oil and gold leaf on panel, 46 x 56 cm



Series from the Abandoned Nights IV 2013
Oil and gold leaf on panel, 46 x 56 cm



Series from the Abandoned Nights V 2013
Oil and gold leaf on panel, 46 x 56 cm



Synthesis of a Paradise Lost IV 2013
Bronze



Synthesis of a Paradise Lost III 2013
Bronze



Artist Radhika Agarwala

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