WHERE WORDS END . . .

STORY-PAINTINGS BY

TOM VATTAKUZHY

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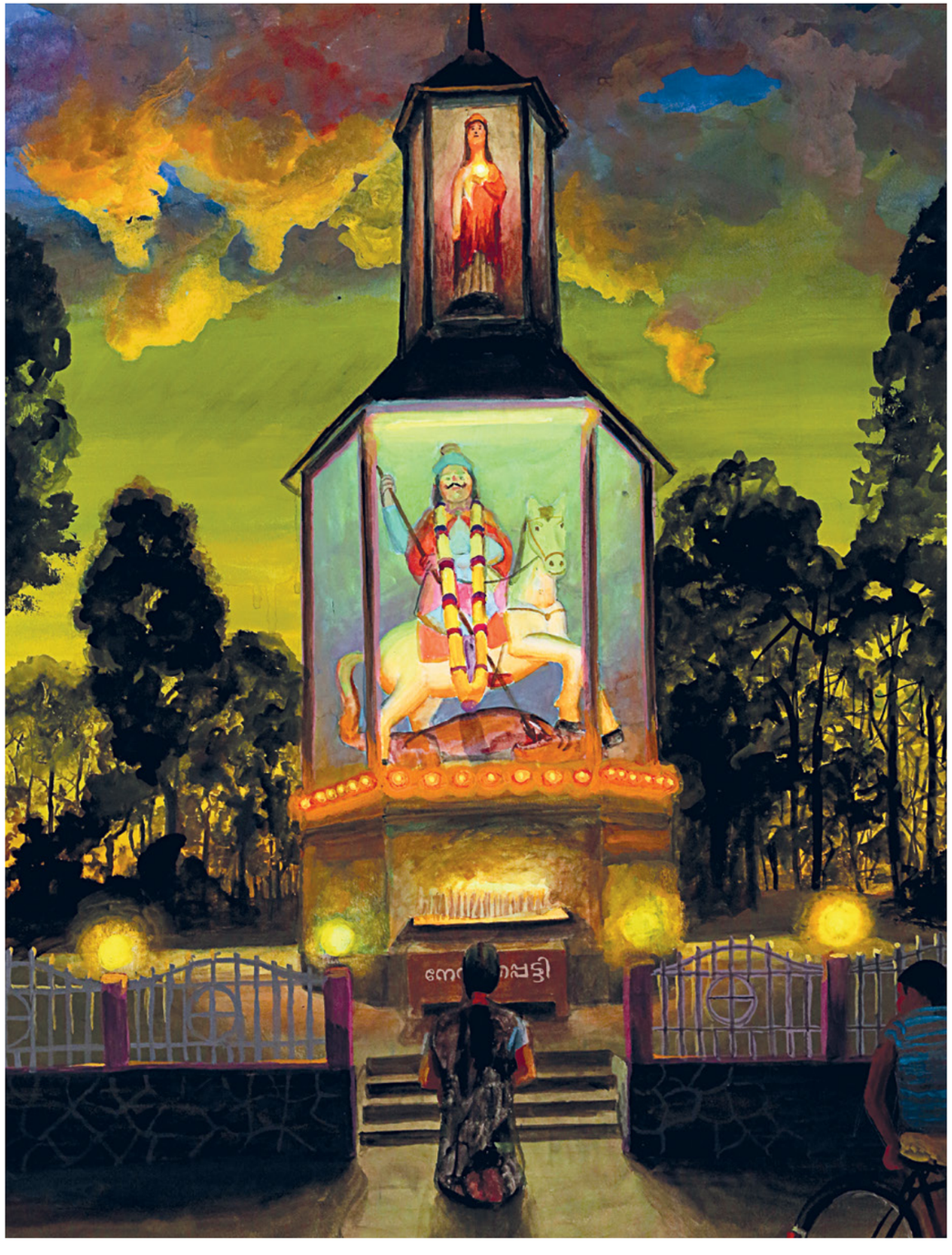
MAY 2026

ICIA GALLERY, MUMBAI



FOREWORD

Tom Vattakuzhy began his career as an illustrator, working for Kerala's most prestigious cultural magazine. Here, he had the opportunity to illustrate for some of the finest writers in Malayalam. In turn, those writers encouraged, even taught him, how to look closely at local life and draw creative strength from it. These illustrations were competent, but he was following, more or less, in the footsteps of established predecessors in them.

Tom then gave up illustration and focused on his own creative work. Having established himself as a serious artist, he returned to illustration around 2014 after a nearly fifteen-year break. But having found his place as an artist, his approach to illustration was now different. In the 1980s, he and the writers were not equals. He was a young professional who embellished their work, and the writers were the mentors who taught him to view life with empathy. Now that he had developed his own worldview, he was their equal, which changed the relationship between his image and their text.

To mark this shift, he calls the new work 'story paintings.' But what does this coinage mean? It means these are 'paintings,' in their own right. If they embellish a text or the pages of a magazine, that is incidental. More importantly, they are not merely paintings occasioned by stories or texts; they are paintings that tell stories. Thus, the word 'story' in 'story paintings' has a double meaning. On the one hand, they are motivated by a story or text and on the other, they have a story to tell. If this were not the case, they could have been called narrative paintings.

In the early illustrations, Tom's work was circumscribed by the writer's text. The text set the perimeters of his thought and imagination. At its best, his effort was to locate the world that underpins the text or to visually restate what the text said. And when he succeeded, the readers admired his skill at giving visual embodiment to the story's characters.

In the 'story paintings', the text – and it could be a short story, an essay or a poem – is a starting point, or, if you prefer, a launching pad. The text helps him to propel his thoughts and imagination towards the world. The text is like a pebble thrown into the still surface of his mind. It sinks deep and creates waves that expand outwards, taking in more and more of the world into its ambit. And that changes the image-text relation and our response to them.

In each case, Tom's responses and the outcomes vary. Take, for instance, the image that accompanies the essay *Padippinum Arivinum Oru Masika,* celebrating the historical role a literary society played in reforming Kerala. The painting alludes to an event in which its upper-class members rewarded children from the lowest castes who did well in a literary competition at a time when untouchability ruled. Tom's painting, while vividly visualising the historical event of a hundred years ago, also brings to the fore that an act of compassionate benevolence also tells an older story of inhuman suppression.

Tom's response to *Purappettupoyavarude Nadu*, an essay on Kerala's migrants to the Gulf countries and their representation in Malayalam cinema, is different. While the essay makes the migrants its object of study, Tom brings into focus, through a surreal image, the heavy cloud of melancholy the migrants carry in their hearts. Tom often appends affective images evoking intense subjective experiences, such as failure or guilt, to texts and stories that address social facts (as in *Edappally Ezhuthiya Ramanan* and *Purappurathekkuchayunna Marangal*). While doing so, he draws on art history, cutting across cultures and time frames alien to the texts, and transcends the texts that set him thinking.

The paintings in this exhibition are born of texts, but they do not belong to them. They invite us to embark on a journey of reflection, just as the texts were for the artist.

R. Siva Kumar
Art Historian, Art Critic & Curator

“I prefer to call these works ‘story paintings’ rather than illustrations. I do not think of it as a visual translation of a particular scene or character in the story. I tend to go to the essence of it – the spirit of it, ponder over it – ponder over the impression it has left on me and I start off from there. And in the process, when it comes through me certain elements of ‘me’ will also get mixed with it.”

Tom Vattakuzhy

WHERE WORDS END . . .

Illustration has long lived in the shadow of literature.

It is expected to illuminate the writer’s world—to serve the plot, clarify the idea, and make the story more vivid. The illustrator stands beside the text, but tethered to its movement. The image moves at the speed of reading and disappears once its task is done.

Painting is different. Painting lets the image claim duration. It refuses subordination. It allows the visual narrator to become the one who thinks, feels, and reveals.

Tom Vattakuzhy’s story-paintings arise at the point where these two conditions—speed and duration, service and sovereignty—can no longer remain separate.

Tom completed his BFA in Printmaking at Kala Bhavana, Visva-Bharati, in 1996. Even during his Santiniketan years, and increasingly thereafter, he was illustrating for Malayalam literary magazines. The chronology matters. Santiniketan and Baroda shaped him in different ways, and the tension between those worlds would eventually surface in his work.

At Santiniketan, the drawn image was never considered minor. Nandalal Bose’s black-and-white woodcuts for Rabindranath’s *Sahaj Path* showed that even ‘illustrations’ made for children could retain austerity and pictorial authority. Benode Behari Mukherjee extended narrative into mural space, where time unfolded across walls rather than pages. Satyajit Ray wrote and illustrated without reducing graphic intelligence. Subsequently, K. G. Subramanyan dissolved hierarchies between painting, toy, mural, and book. A. Ramachandran moved between monumental canvases and illustrated children’s stories without altering the seriousness of his visual language.

In this lineage, illustration was not a subordinate craft. It was a way of thinking through images. Tom’s training in printmaking intensified that discipline. Printmaking demands incision rather than flourish, structure rather than atmosphere. The image

Illustration by M.V. Devan, published in Mathrubhumi Weekly, 1956

Illustration by Namboodiri, published in Mathrubhumi Weekly, 1976

Illustration by A.S. Nair, published in Mathrubhumi Weekly, 1978

must survive reduction; it must hold when stripped to contour and contrast. That economy marked his early illustrations: spare or absent backgrounds, figures emerging from white space, weight carried almost entirely by line.

When he began illustrating regularly for Malayalam weeklies in the late 1980s and through the 1990s, he entered a visual field already shaped by A. S. Nair, M. V. Devan, and Namboodiri. In Nair, there was a sense of dramatic compression—the distillation of narrative into a single heightened frame where shadow and gesture carried more weight than description. In Devan, a stylistic elasticity: the confidence to shift registers—linear, tonal, expressive—according to the demands of the text, without anxiety about consistency. In Namboodiri, the authority of contour and the disciplined centrality of the figure—an image constructed through clarity of line and compositional steadiness.

Tom's early drawings acknowledge this inheritance, especially in their reliance on contour and figure-centered composition. But where Namboodiri's line stabilises form, Tom's begins to unsettle it. In the drawing of the man descending a staircase, the body appears in overlapping phases of motion—legs repeating in quick strokes, steps reduced to angled suggestions. The figure seems to outrun the structure meant to contain him; movement precedes construction.

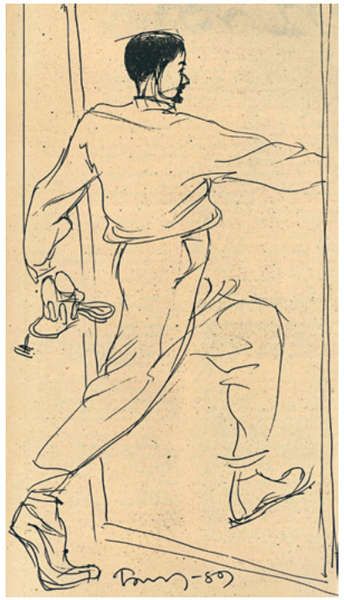
In another, a man turning within a doorway, glass in hand, the architecture is reduced to two framing lines. One leg crosses forward, the torso pivots, and the free arm extends as if still negotiating space. Or take, for example, the scene of a woman seated before a computer monitor, where the space remains skeletal—desk indicated, window merely framed. She occupies the page as presence more than placement, suspended within the sheet rather than grounded in an interior.

Limbs stretch. Lines double back. Gestures hesitate. The frame is not fixed; it is negotiated. Even within the narrow architecture of the magazine page, the figures seem caught mid-transition—as if narrative time has not yet resolved into a single pose.

Many of these works were produced quickly, under deadline pressure. Speed was not an aesthetic flourish; it was a necessity. And it preserved something essential. The rapid line prevented ornament and held on to the first sensation. Rather than illustrating events literally, the drawings extracted conditions—fatigue, longing, shame, waiting. Kerala entered not as scenery but as atmosphere: farmers, migrants, fractured households, moral tremors, small silences that carried large weight. The local was already becoming universal.

In 1998, Tom completed his MFA at the Faculty of Fine Arts, MS University of Baroda. Baroda in the late 1990s was a different climate. Painting was under interrogation. Conceptual gestures challenged medium-specific authority. The brush seemed almost anachronistic amid theoretical urgency.

Tom did not abandon painting. Nor did he retreat into nostalgia. Instead, he absorbed the tension. In *The Death of Art* (2010), Duchamp's urinal enters a painterly confrontation with



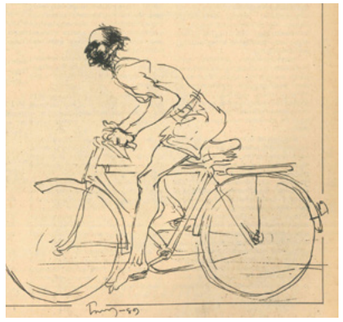


Illustration by Tom Vattakuzhy, published in Mathrabhumi, 1989-1990

Illustration by Tom Vattakuzhy, published in Bhashaposhini, 2001

Niraksharam (Illiterate) and Damayanthikadhakal (Stories of Damayanthi) published in Bhashaposhini, 2014. Courtesy of Bhashaposhini, Malayala Manorama.

Death of Art, Tom Vattakuzhy, Oil on canvas, 2010

mortality. The chess match borrowed from Bergman becomes a debate staged within painting itself. Doubt is not denied; it is confronted. The work does not reject conceptual rupture; it acknowledges it and continues.

Yet Death does not remain confined to theory. In an earlier charcoal story-painting *Aparichithan Ezhuthukariyodu Paranjathu (What the Stranger Said to the Writer)*, Death stands beside a young woman beneath a tree. There is no theatrical skeleton, no dramatic gesture. A vertical trunk divides and binds the composition. The woman does not flee; she steadies herself. Mortality is not spectacle but presence. If *The Death of Art* stages painting's public confrontation with rupture, this work turns inward. Death becomes a companion rather than an adversary. Narrative pauses. Time holds.

From here, the story-painting finds its full form. A story-painting is not a picture of a story. It is the story's parallel life.

In these later works, scale expands. The image no longer occupies the margin of a page but the surface of a wall. Gouache and charcoal replace swift ink. The atmosphere thickens. Architecture becomes a psychological container. Narrative climax dissolves into suspension.

Art-historical memory enters quietly but decisively. When engaging with a story about technology and eroding human values, Tom turns toward the compositional grammar of Holbein's *The Ambassadors*. Renaissance instruments of knowledge reappear as contemporary devices. What once signified mastery now carries distortion. Knowledge stands unsettled.

In the painting inspired by the story of Mata Hari, the structure of Leonardo's Last Supper is unmistakable. Yet the transformation is subtle and charged. The central figure is not a redeemer but a condemned performer. The surrounding figures are not apostles but nuns. Communion becomes scrutiny. The moment before execution becomes a ritualised spectacle. The reference does not sanctify; it asks how societies stage judgement, how a body becomes the centre of moral theatre.

Similarly, in *Trees Slanting Towards the Roof*, the compositional memory of Fra Angelico's *The Mocking of Christ* re-emerges. The blindfolded figure—humiliated yet silent—becomes an archetype of exposed endurance. Here, Christian visual memory operates not as doctrine but as ethical orientation. The sacred is not reproduced; it is relocated. Figures marked by disenfranchisement are framed within a grammar once reserved for theological suffering. Dignity persists without halo.

Elsewhere, the reclining figure and lion recall Rousseau's *Sleeping Gypsy*, yet the dreamlike stillness is relocated to Kerala. The lion becomes a psychological presence rather than exotic spectacle. In works that echo Klimt's embrace, ornament yields to ambivalence; intimacy carries hesitation.

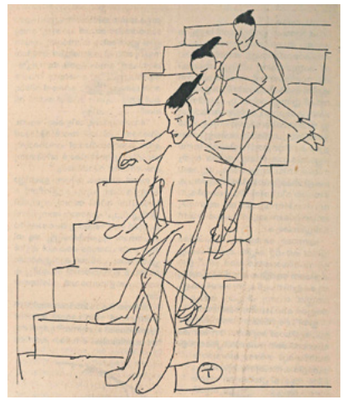
These references are not quotations. They are coordinates—structures of feeling borrowed from art history and re-rooted in Malayalam narrative. Literature provides the spark. Kerala provides lived density. Art history provides tested forms of seeing. Beneath it all lies a quieter inheritance shaped by Christian upbringing—not as declaration, but as disposition. Suffering is not dramatised; it is dignified. The Christ-figure is not painted; it is dispersed across the vulnerable.

Story-painting neither decorates the text nor competes with it. It opens another direction. The reader becomes the viewer. Narrative time slows into simultaneity. The page yields to duration.

If illustration taught proximity and speed, painting grants autonomy and endurance. The line that once served the story now inhabits space. Movement becomes weight.

What remains is an image that does not conclude. It lingers beside the story, not beneath it. The reader, a viewer now, can no longer pass through the narrative; s/he must remain within it. The painting holds them there.

Siddharth Sivakumar
Director, Curation & Artist Relations



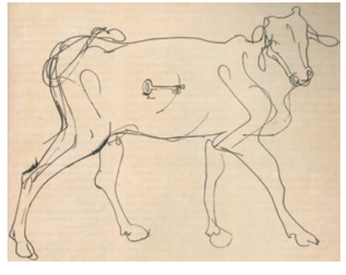


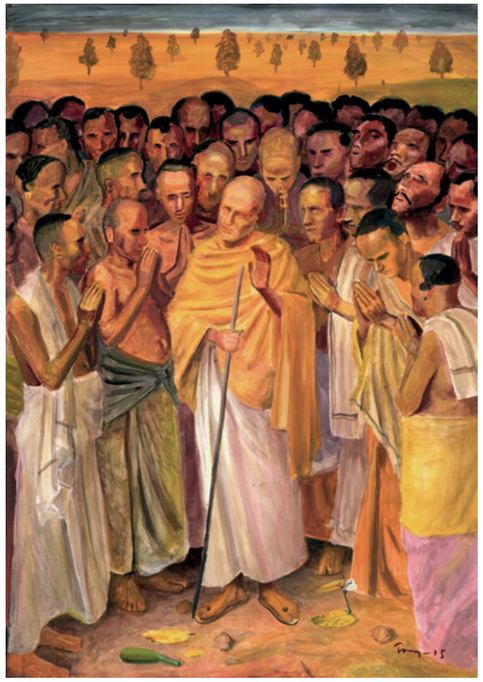
Illustration by Tom Vattakuzhy, published in Mathrubhumi, 2001-2002

PADIPPINUM ARIVINUM ORU MASIKA
(A MONTHLY FOR LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE)

Essay by K.M. Venugopal
Published in Bhashaposhini
39.4 x 55 in (100 x 139.7 cm)
Gouache on paper
2016

Kandathil Varghese Mappillai (1857–1904) was instrumental in founding both the Bhashaposhini Sabha and its magazine, guiding the Sabha with a vision rooted in humanity and equality.

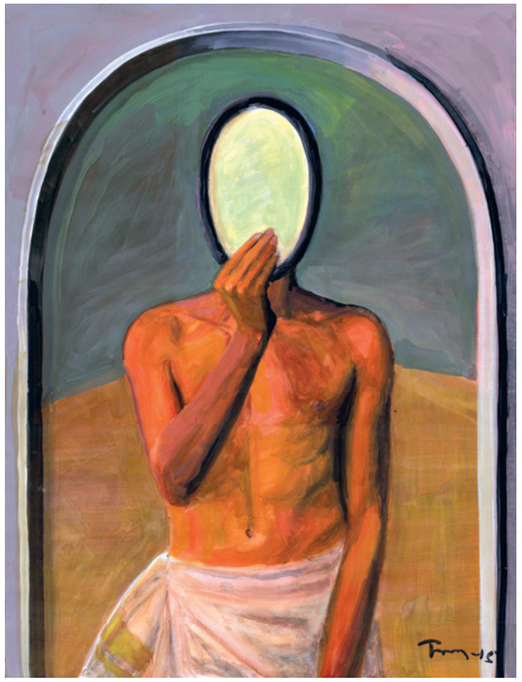
Painted on Sabha's 125th anniversary, the work commemorates its fifth year, a significant moment when members of the nobility publicly honoured and awarded children from oppressed castes who had excelled in literary competitions. The scene captures a rare and historic assertion of social reform.



GURUPAADANGALIL
(IN THE PRESENCE OF GURU'S FEET) - I

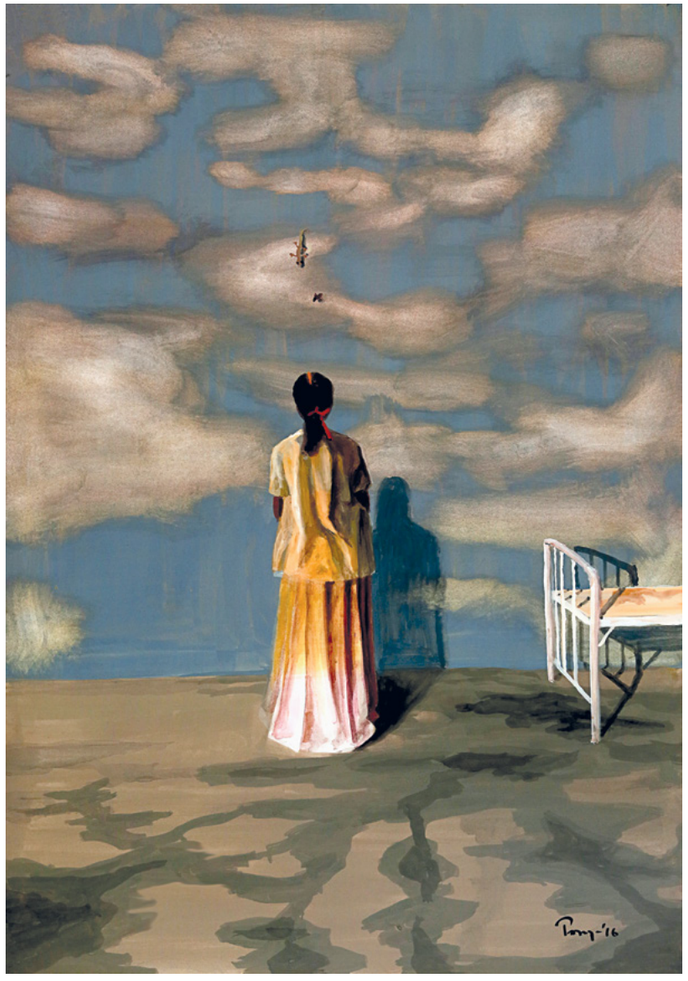
Essay by Maravoor Bhaskaranandaji
Published in Bhashaposhini
39.4 x 27.6 in (100 x 70 cm)
Gouache on paper
2015

The work *Gurupaadangalil,* written in the 1940s, captures the meeting between Sree Narayana Guru and the author. Guru's teachings have profoundly shaped, and continue to shape, Kerala's social and cultural landscape. Challenging the rigid, caste-ridden, and untouchability prone society of the late nineteenth century, he helped transform the region toward a more egalitarian and progressive society. The second work by Tom reflects the philosophical core of Sree Narayana Guru's *Atmavidya—Atmadarsanam* (self-realization). Through inward reflection, it suggests that the divine is not found in external idols, but revealed as a living presence within oneself.



GURUPAADANGALIL
(IN THE PRESENCE OF GURU'S FEET) - II

Essay by Maravoor Bhaskaranandaji
Published in Bhashaposhini
28 x 20.8 in (71 x 52.8 cm)
Gouache on paper
2015



SAKALATHINUM PORUL
(THE MEANING OF EVERYTHING - II)

Short story by Sangeeta Srinivasan
Published in Bhashaposhini
39.4 x 27.6 in (100 x 70 cm)
Gouache on paper
2016

Set within a mental asylum, the story reveals a system where care collapses into containment and neglect replaces protection. This leads to questions of confinement and freedom, neglect and compassion, regulation and justice.

Tom explores them across two images. One that captures the violence and dehumanization of the ill inmates, another exploring the inner human need for freedom and companionship.

SAKALATHINUM PORUL
(THE MEANING OF EVERYTHING - I)

Short story by Sangeeta Srinivasan
Published in Bhashaposhini
58.7 x 41.3 in (149 x 105 cm)
Gouache on paper
2016

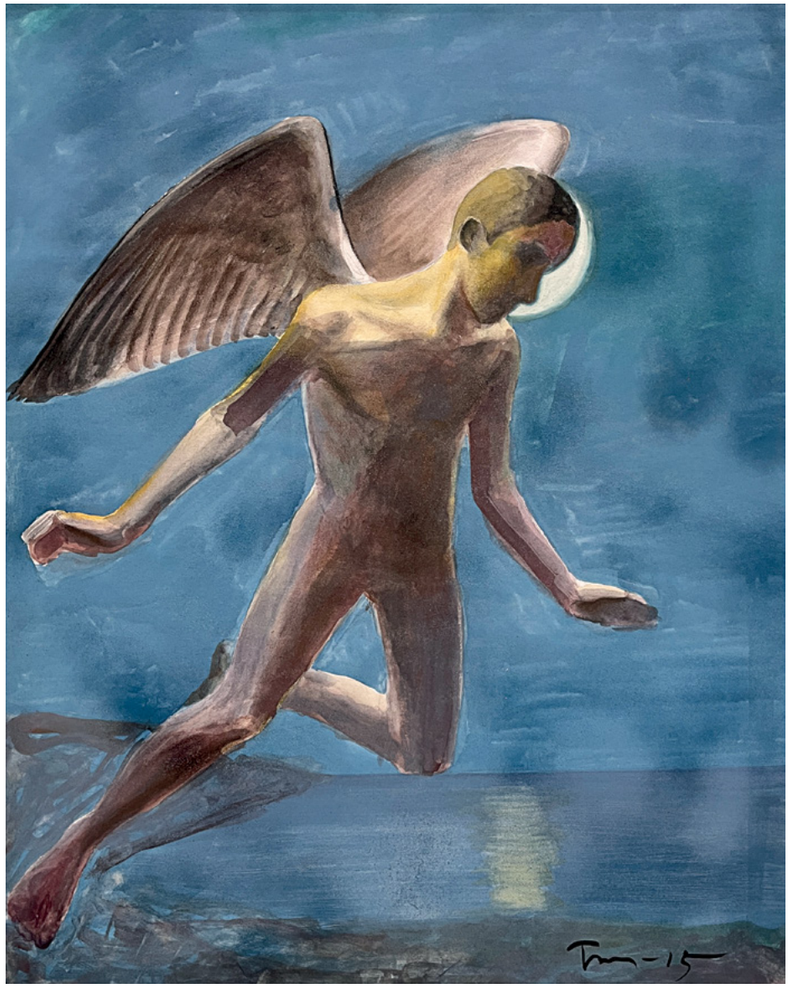
In the larger painting, the space crowds with bodies. Figures appear as patients, victims, and witnesses at once. Gandhi, the cross, and the calendar—markers of freedom, morality, and time—remain present but ineffective. The owl watches, but does not intervene. Authority is haloed yet compromised, its language reduced to faint, barely legible moral instruction. Visibility offers no relief. Small displacements such as a playing card, a crawling insect, a fish out of place introduce chance and neglect, as the absurd is quietly absorbed into the scene. Wings and a dove suggest transcendence, yet remain inert. The work recalls Goya's *Yard with Lunatics* and echoes Michel Foucault's insight that institutions organise rather than resolve. And one figure turns to confront us directly, collapsing the distance between viewer and subject and fixing a measure of responsibility.

PURAPPETTUPOYAVARUDE NADU
(THE LAND OF THOSE WHO DEPARTED)

Published in Bhashaposhini
39.4 x 27.6 in (100 x 70 cm)
Gouache on paper
2016

Set against Kerala's migration to the Middle East, the image lingers on absence and what it leaves behind. A clock without hands, a spent candle, and a cloud adrift within the room hold time in suspension. These recurring elements in Tom's paintings mark not time's passage, but its disturbance. The ektara, a single-string instrument associated with Bengal's Baul tradition, rests to one side, carrying a quiet note of solitude. Nothing happens, yet the space feels altered, held between presence and absence.

Courtesy of *Bhashaposhini, Malayala Manorama*.



KADAL NEENDIVANNA VAAKKUKAL
(WORDS THAT SWAM ACROSS THE SEA)

Short story by Shihabuddin Poythumkadavu
Published in Bhashaposhini Annual Issue
28 x 22 in (71 x 56 cm)
Gouache on paper
2015

ARABIYUDE INDIAN PRAVASAM, INDIAKKARANTE ARABIAN PRAVASAM
(THE ARAB'S INDIAN EXILE, THE INDIAN'S ARABIAN EXILE)

Essay by K.U. Iqbal
Published in Bhashaposhini Annual Issue
22× 32 in (56 x 81.3 cm)
Gouache on paper
2015

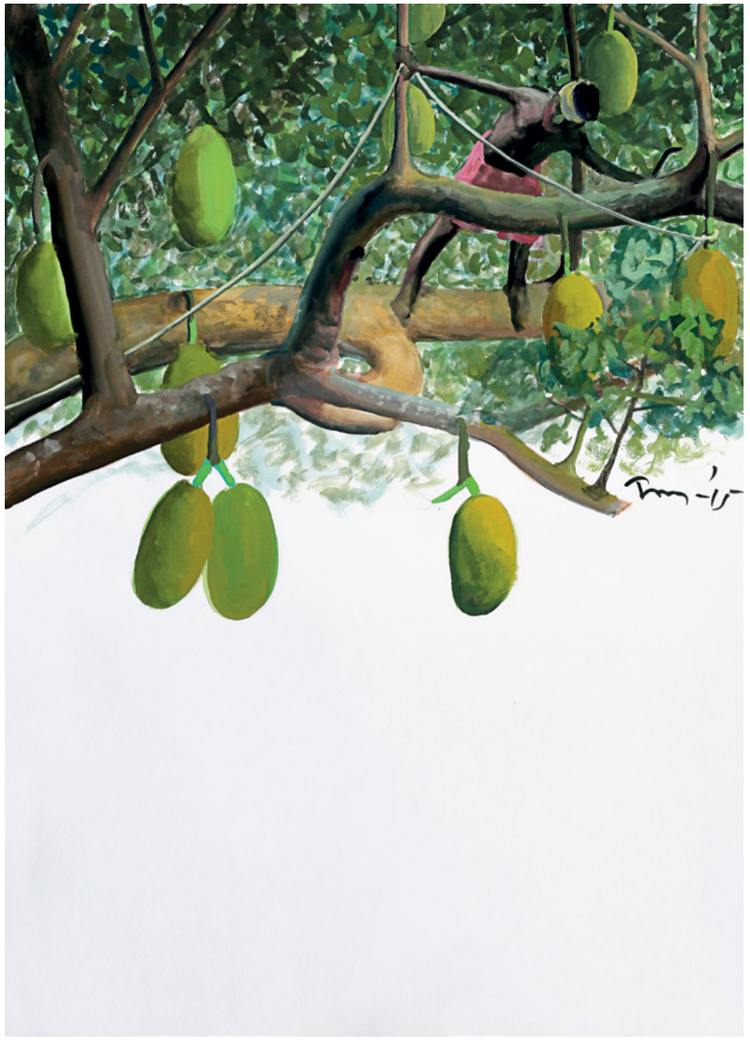
GARDABHAVIKREEDITHAM
(THE DONKEY'S PLAY) - I

Short story by S.V. Venugopan Nair
Published in Malayala Manorama Annual issue
28 x 19.7 in (71 x 50 cm)
Gouache on paper
2015

GARDABHAVIKREEDITHAM
(THE DONKEY'S PLAY) - II

Short story by S.V. Venugopan Nair
Published in Malayala Manorama Annual issue
28 x 18 in (71 x 45.7 cm)
Gouache on paper
2015

The Donkey's Play is a sharp political satire set in rural Tamil Nadu. Mantra, a former panchayat president, keeps a herd of donkeys, disciplined, hardworking, obedient, and inexpensive to maintain, much like his own family. With calculated affection, he extracts tireless labor from both the animals and his three wives, all while projecting himself as a benevolent leader. Mantra now steps into electoral politics, contesting for MLA. Through his rise, the story slyly exposes the mechanics of populism and the theatrics of modern-day elections.



KUNNUKARAYILE MARANGAL KARAYUMBOL
(WHEN THE TREES ON THE HILLSIDE WEEP)

Short story by Sethu
Published in Malayala Manorama Annual Issue
21.3 x 20 in (54 x 50.8 cm)
Gouache on paper
2015

The story is an elegy for a vanishing moral ecology. Kunjappan, a traditional woodcutter, takes pride in his ancestral craft, while his son Ramankutty hears a silent cry in every fall of the axe. As Kunnukara's hills yield to commerce, their conflict deepens beyond a generational divide into a haunting question of life and livelihood, whether survival justifies the severing of what sustains us. The dilemma is held in a dangerous balance, its precarity made visible.

LENINUM KARSHAKANUM
(THE LENIN AND THE FARMER) - I

Short story by Abraham Mathew
Published in Bhashaposhini
18 x 30 in (45.7 x 76.2 cm)
Gouache on paper
2016

Tom illuminates a story about the false hope awakened in a farmer by his naive faith in ideology and his disillusionment with three images. The blinding sunrise that evokes the illusory force of ideological faith, a woman feeding hen evoking the natural rhythm of a farmer's life and the darkness into which the disillusioned walks.

LENINUM KARSHAKANUM
(THE LENIN AND THE FARMER) - II

Short story by Abraham Mathew
Published in Bhashaposhini
23 x 22 in (58.4 x 56 cm)
Gouache on paper
2016

LENINUM KARSHAKANUM
(THE LENIN AND THE FARMER) - III

Short story by Abraham Mathew
Published in Bhashaposhini
25.6 x 11 in (65 x 28 cm)
Gouache on paper
2016

TECHNOLOGYYUM MOOLYANGALUM
(THE TECHNOLOGY AND THE VALUES)

Essay by Sanal V
Published in Bhashaposhini
27.6 x 22.4 in (70 x 57 cm)
Gouache on paper
2015

The work questions a crucial dilemma: do we need technology shaped to serve the nation, or must the nation reshape itself to embrace technology? What once addressed basic human needs now manufactures new desires. Technology today is erasing the distinction between humans and machines. At the same time, it has fostered constant surveillance, which inevitably becomes a tool of control. The work reflects on this deep entanglement between humanity and technology, probing the ethical awareness that must emerge if we are to shape our shared future. Drawing inspiration from *The Ambassadors* (1533) by Hans Holbein the Younger, it invokes the painting's anamorphic skull, visible only from a particular angle, as a metaphor for technology's hidden consequences: ever-present, yet revealed only when we learn how to look.

PURAPPURATHEKKUCHAYUNNA MARANGAL
(TREES SLANTING TOWARDS THE ROOF)

Short story by Sreekrishnapuram Krishnankutty
Published in Bhashaposhini
28 x 20.5 in (71 x 52 cm)
Gouache on paper
2015

This painting was prompted by a story about a political murder that takes place following a gesture of reconciliation by an old friend and political rival. To punish the man reaching out to an ideological opponent he is falsely accused of betraying his old friend. This leads him to be haunted by an inner guilt. Tom captures the innocence and inner suffering of the man through a retake on Fra Angelico's *The Mocking of Christ.*

KATTOORKKADAVILE KALPPANIKKAR
(THE MASON OF KATTOOR) - I

Short story by Asokan Charuvil
Published in Malayala Manorama Annual Issue
28 x 16.5 in (71 x 45 cm)
Gouache on Paper
2014

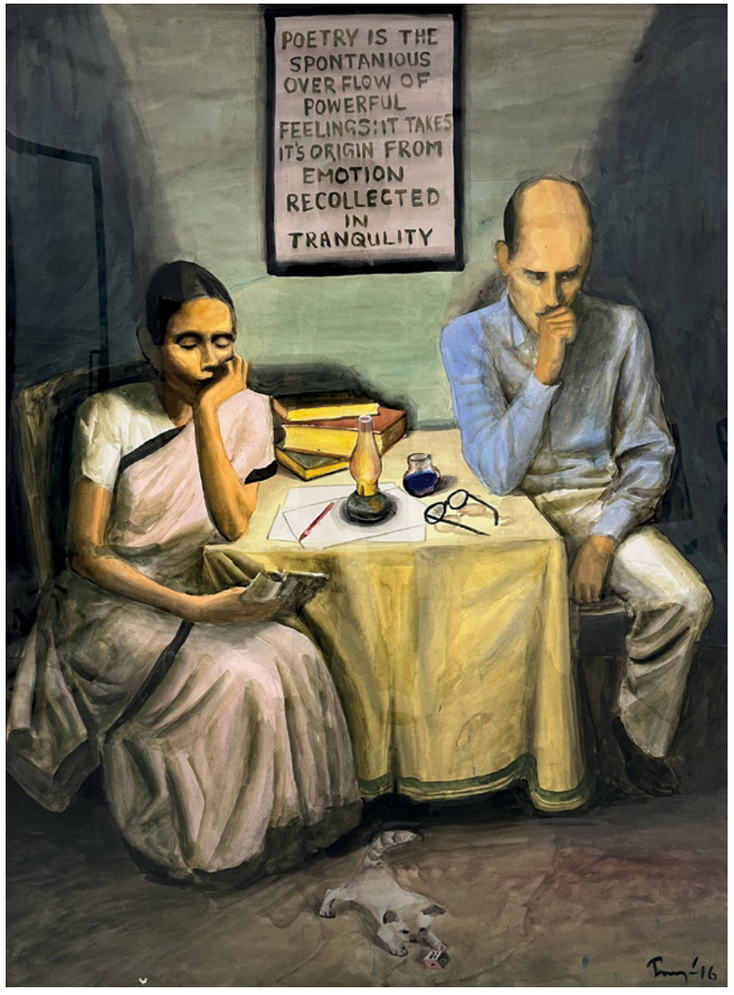
KATTOORKKADAVILE KALPPANIKKAR
(THE MASON OF KATTOOR) - II

Short story by Asokan Charuvil
Published in Malayala Manorama Annual Issue
28 x 22 in (71 x 56 cm)
Gouache on Paper
2014

In *The Mason of Kattoor*, the bond between Ramankutty, a mason and a left wing activist, and Sister Jennifer shaped by poverty, speaks of Kerala's long entanglement of ideology, religion, and survival. Despite their differing callings, both find a quiet comradeship shaped by hardship and moral conviction. The second painting draws from Sister Jennifer words to Ramankutty: "God dwells as wisdom in his heart."

KAATHU KIDAKKUNNU
(LONGING)

Short story by Santhosh J. K. V
42 x 30 in (106.7 x 76.2 cm)
Gouache on paper
2016

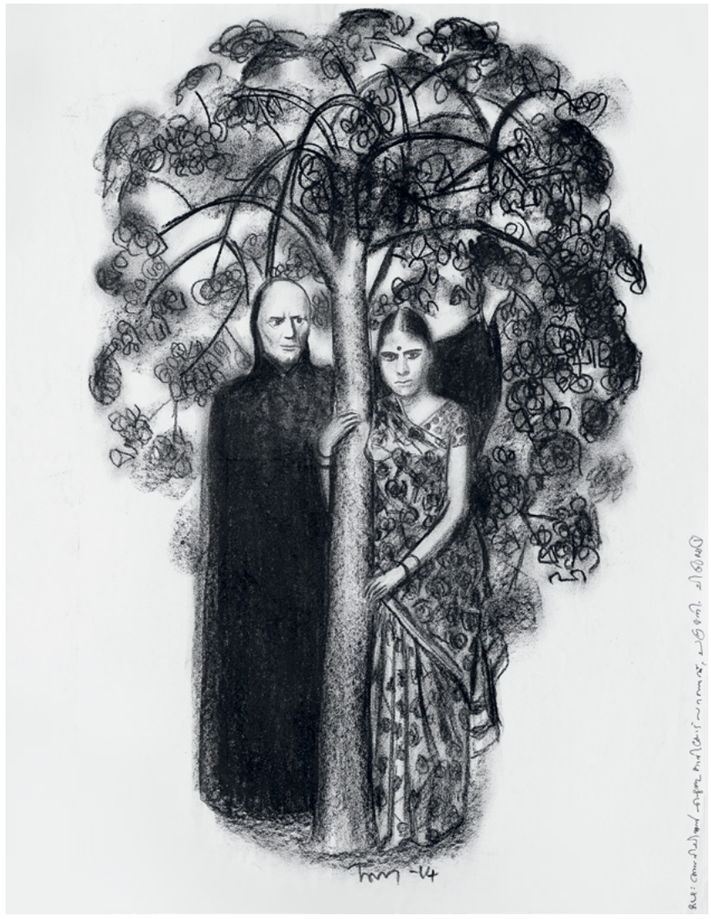


THALACHORILLATHA STHREEKAL
(THE WOMEN WITHOUT BRAINS)

Short story by M. Saraswathi Bai
Published in Bhashaposhini
41.3 x 30.3 in (105 x 77cm)
Gouache on paper
2016

Brainless Women (1911) is the first known published Malayalam short story written by a woman. Govindan Nair, a struggling writer, dismisses his wife Kalyaniamma's intellect, believing women are incapable of creative thought. In quiet defiance, Kalyaniamma writes under a pseudonym, and her success restores the family's fortunes. When Govindan realises that his admired literary rival is his own wife, he is humbled and transformed.

Here, the couple sits across a small table in a sparsely lit room, the man bent inward in doubt, the woman absorbed in her thoughts. What appears as an ordinary domestic scene becomes a site of quiet reversal: as his certainty falters, she inhabits the intellectual authority he once denied her. The framed dictum on poetry hovers above them with quiet irony, and the shared space of books and light turns into a charged field of recognition, disbelief, and a newly unsettled order.



APARICHITHAN EZHUTHUKARIYODU PARANJATHU
(WHAT THE STRANGER SAID TO THE WRITER)

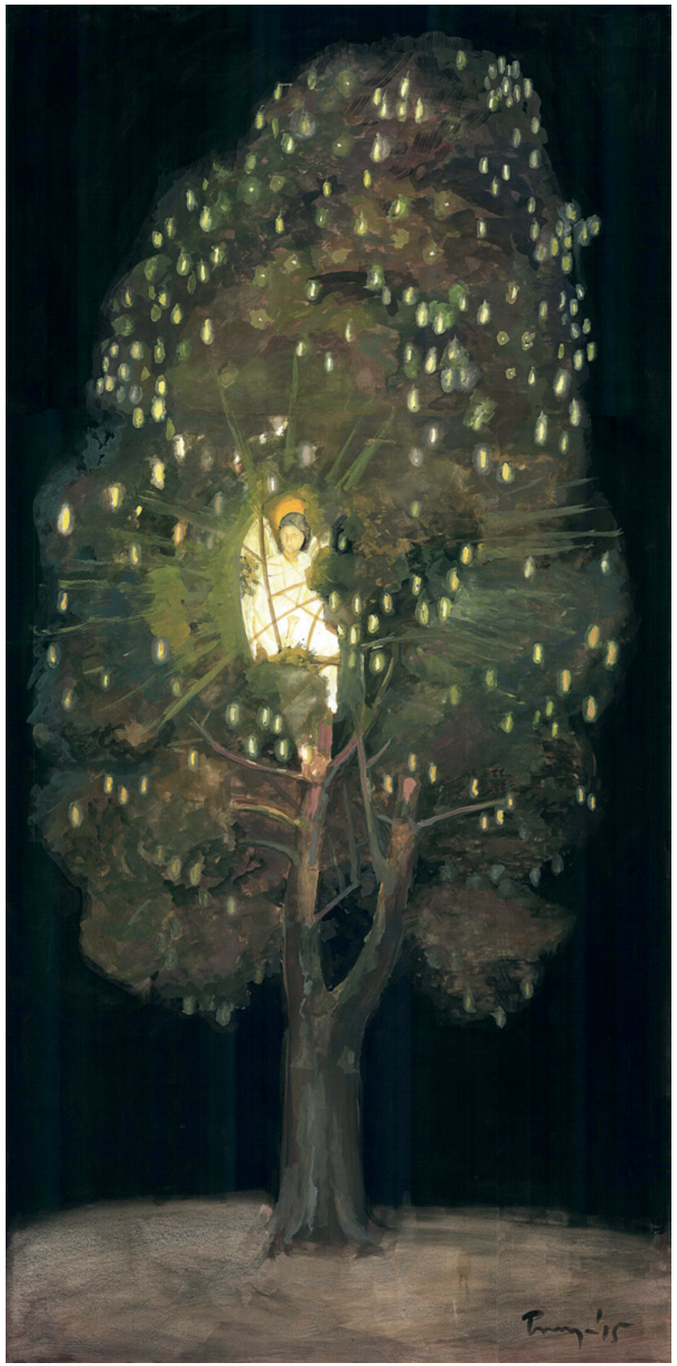
Short story by Chandramathi
Published in Bhashaposhini Annual issue
28 x 22 in (71 x 56 cm)
Charcoal on paper
2014

"On the off chance that I live, I will compose stories. They may irritate others. So I choose to leave." These were the haunting final words by T A Rajalakshmi (1930-1965), the celebrated Malayalam writer who ended her life at the peak of her career. Her fiction centred on resilient women confronting patriarchal constraints, yet her candour was often misunderstood and harshly judged, making it vulnerable to censure.

In Tom's rendering, Death appears as the stark, watchful presence from Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal,* not a sudden terror, but a silent companion who lingers and waits. Rajalakshmi stands upright beside it, composed, as if she has long been in silent dialogue with this inevitable companion. The writer and death stand together before a tree filled with Malayalam letters, much like Adam and Eve. The work reflects on the artist's cruel paradox: to speak boldly is to risk isolation. The very society that celebrates and consumes art can, in its judgment and intolerance, quietly suffocate the ones who create it.

KADANNAPPANI
(WASP NEST) - I

Short story by K.V. Sudhakaran
Published in Bhashaposhini
27.2 x 32.3 in (69 x 82 cm)
Gouache on paper
2016



KADANNAPPANI
(WASP NEST) - II

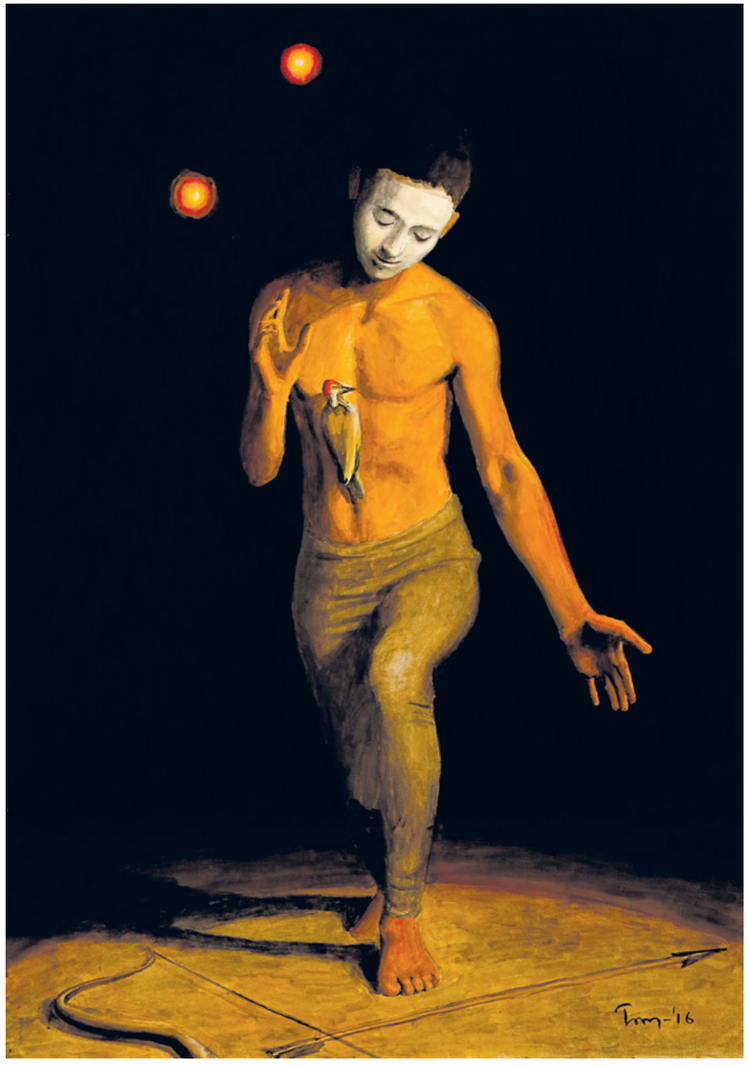
Short story by K.V. Sudhakaran
Published in Bhashaposhini
55 x 26.8 in (139.7 x 68 cm)
Gouache on paper,
2016

“Figures appear in my works as representations of people I grew up seeing from my younger age – the ordinary, the oppressive, the vulnerable and the marginalized who are destined to be in the outskirts of our political discourses. They dwell in the twilight zone between the truth and lie, propriety and impropriety; Good and evil and, real and surreal.”

Tom Vattakuzhy

EDAPPALLY EZHUTHIYA RAMANAN
(EDAPPALLY’S RAMANAN)

Essay by Suresh Madhav
Published in Bhashaposhini
39.4 x 27.6 in (100 x 70 cm)
Gouache on paper
2016



PAKARNNATTAM
(IMITATION)

Short story by Sreekrishnapuram Krishnankuttty
Published in Bhashaposhini
39.4 x 27.6 in (100 x 70 cm)
Gouache on paper
2016

ILAYUDE PACHA NJARAMBU
(THE GREEN VEIN OF A LEAF)

Short story by P. Surendran
39.4 x 37.8 in (100 x 96 cm)
Gouache on paper
2016

MARCHMASATHILE ORU SAYAHNAM
(A MARCH EVENING)

Short story by Susmesh Chandroth
Published in Bhashaposhini
28 x 17 in (71.1 x 43.2 cm)
Gouache on paper
2015

SANTHRASAM
(ANXIETY) - I

Short story by M. Mukundan
Published in Malayala Manorama Annual Issue
27.6 x 31.5 in (70 x 80 cm)
Gouache on paper
2016

SANTHRASAM
(ANXIETY) - II

Short story by M. Mukundan
Published in Malayala Manorama Annual Issue
27.6 x 19.7 in (70 x 50 cm)
Gouache on paper
2016

HOMES - I

Short story by Valsalan Vathussery
Published in Bhashaposhini
22 x 28 in (56 x 71 cm)
Gouache on paper
2015

HOMES - II

Short story by Valson Vathussery
Published in Bhashaposhini
28 x 22.4 in (71 x 57 cm)
Gouache on paper
2015

CLARA

Short story by John Samuel
Published in Bhashaposhini
28 x 39.4 in (71 x 100 cm)
Gouache on paper
2016

KARPPOORAMANAM
(THE SMELL OF CAMPHOR)

Short story by T. Sreevalsan
Published in Bhashaposhini
38.2 x 38.2 in (97 x 97 cm)
Gouache on paper
2016

The painting turns on the loss of a lifelong friend—one shaped equally by intimacy and competition. Like burnt camphor, the departed leaves no residue, only a lingering presence.

At the centre, the body anchors the scene, yet what it holds is already slipping away. The two women, seen from behind, could be their younger selves, turned toward a past that cannot return. A handless clock, a calendar, and the framed photographs attempt to hold time in place; yet they too begin to loosen, their images fading.

Elsewhere, almost without emphasis, a young girl bends over the petals of a flower, and a bird gathers twigs above. They do not restore what is lost; they continue regardless. In that quiet continuity, life moves forward.

NAGARATHILE KUYIL
(THE CUCKOO IN THE CITY) - I

Short story by Shihabuddin Poythumkadavu
Published in Bhashaposhini
22 x 27.2 in (56 x 69 cm)
Gouache on paper
2015

NAGARATHILE KUYIL
(THE CUCKOO IN THE CITY) - II

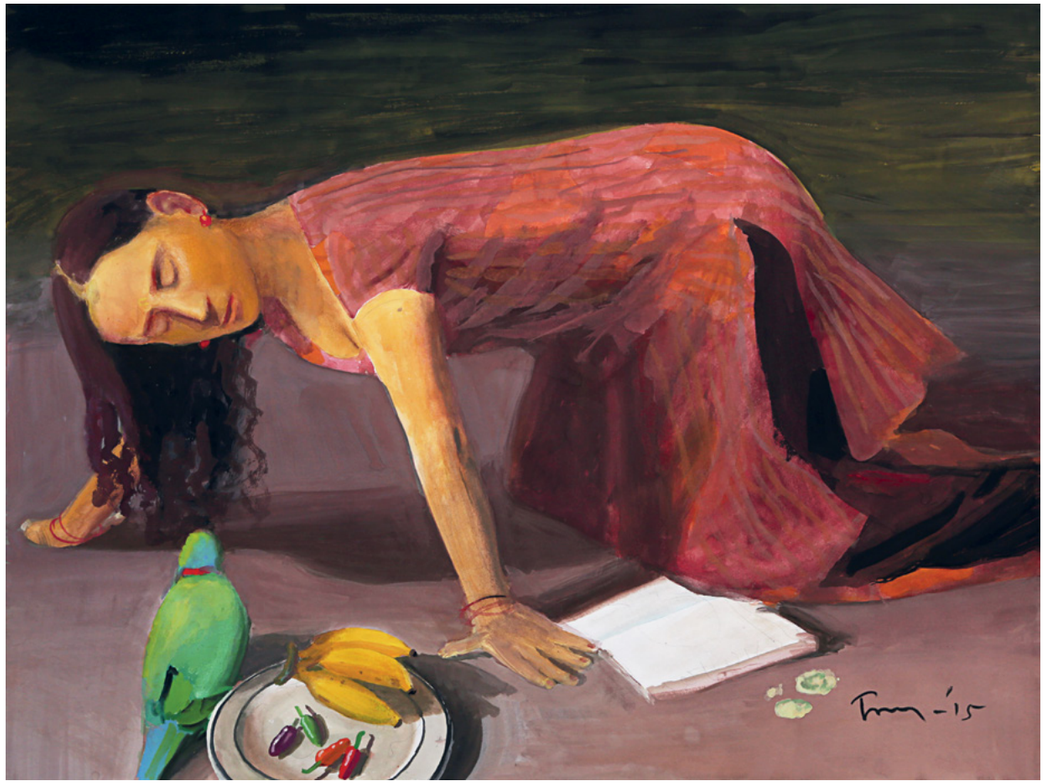
Short story by Shihabuddheen Poythumkadavu
Published in Bhashaposhini
22 x 28 in (56 x 71 cm)
Gouache on paper
2015

POYTH
(THE DUAL)

Short story by C.S. Chandrika
Published in Bhashaposhini
20 x 14.6 in (50.8 x 37 cm)
Gouache on paper
2016

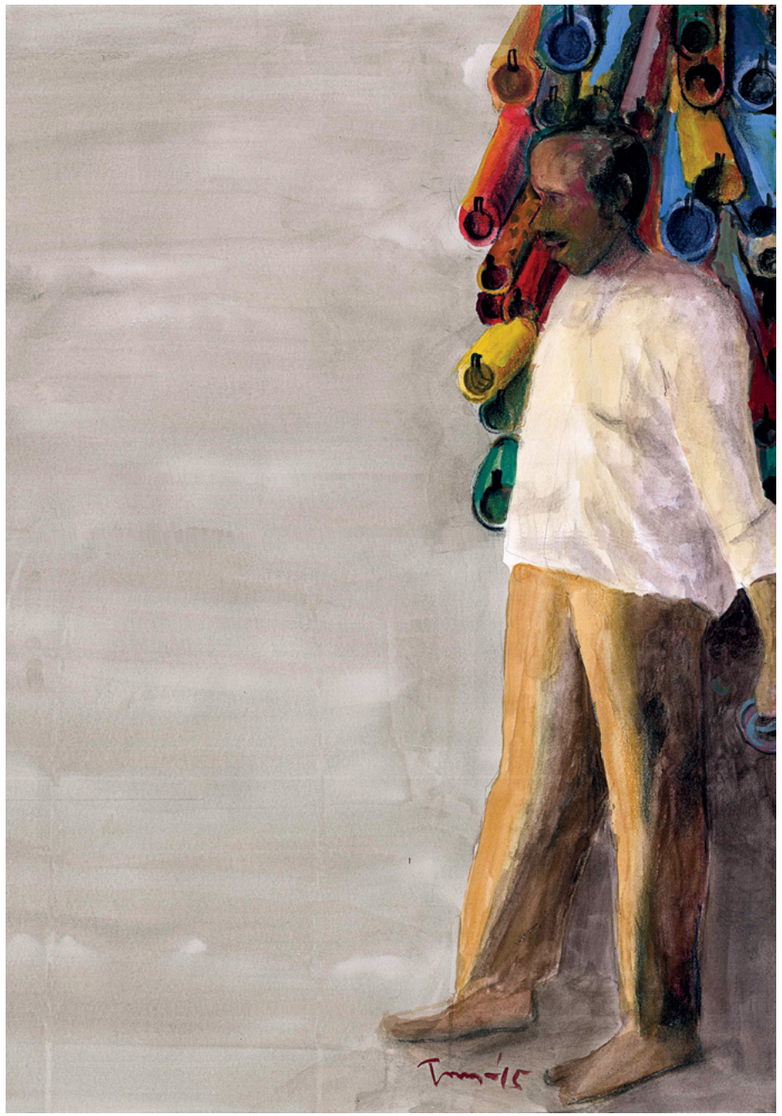
ORU BRUSH CHITRAM VARAKKUNNU
(A BRUSH PAINTING A PICTURE)

Short story by Grecy
Published in Bhashaposhini
28 x 22 in (71 x 56 cm)
Gouache on paper
2014



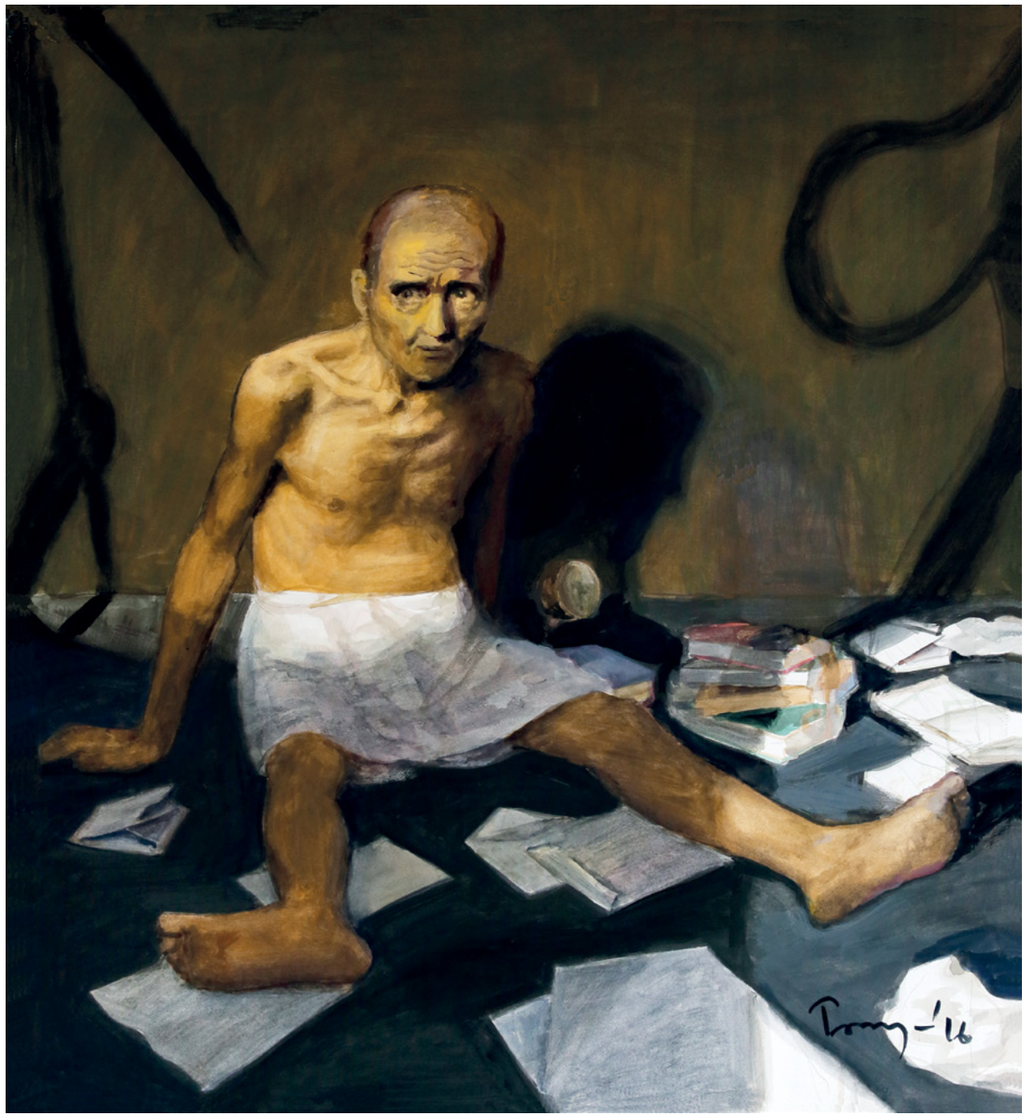
GOPAKUMARAN AMBAZHANGAKKARIYUM SUKASAPTHATHIYILE KADHAKALUM
(GOPAKUMAR AMBAZHANGAKAARI AND THE STORIES FROM THE SEVENTY TALES OF THE PARROT)

Short story by Rekha K
Published in Malayala Manorama Annual Issue
21.7 x 28 in (55 x 71 cm)
Gouache on paper
2015



VALACHETTIKAL
(BANGLE VENDORS)

Poem by O.N.V. Kurup
Published in Bhashaposhini Annual issue
27 x 21.2 in (68.6 x 53.8 cm)
Gouache on paper
2015



NINNEYORKKUNNU NJAN
(I REMEMBER YOU)

Short story by M.V. Gopakumar
Published in Bhashaposhini
27.2 x 24.8 in (69 x 63 cm)
Gouache on paper
2016

ENNALE VANNAVAR
(THOSE WHO CAME YESTERDAY) - II

Short story by M.G. Babu
Published in Bhashaposhini
30 x 22 in (76.2 x 56 cm)
Gouache on paper
2015

ENNALE VANNAVAR
(THOSE WHO CAME YESTERDAY) - I

Short story by M.G. Babu
Published in Bhashaposhini
29 x 20.5 in (74 x 52 cm)
Gouache on paper
2015

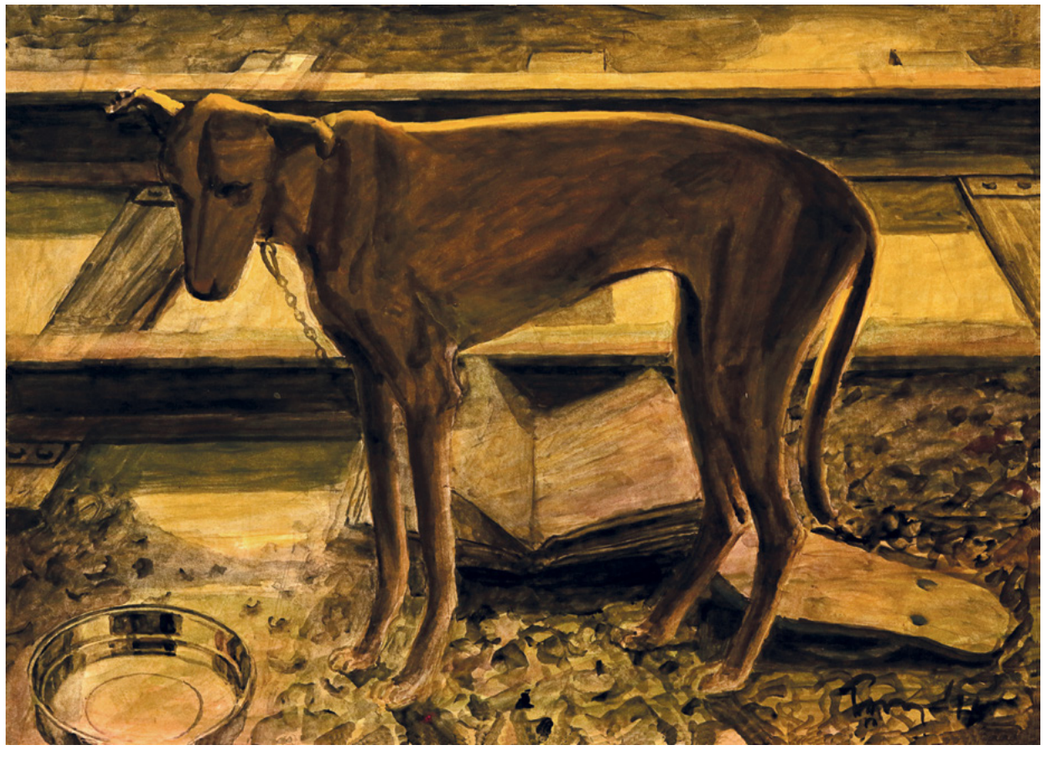
BHASHAYUDE KALAVARAKAL
(THE PANTRY OF LANGUAGE)

Short story by Mundoor Shethumadhavan
Published in Bhashaposhini
27.6 x 19.6 in (70 x 50 cm)
Gouache on paper
2016

MINNALPPANIMUDAKKU
(LIGHTNING STRIKE)

Short story by Ashtamoorthi
Published in Malayala Manorama Annual Issue
28 x 19.7 in (71 x 50 cm)
Gouache on paper
2015

After a sudden disruption, a woman is left alone in a vehicle with a driver as night falls, uncertain of what may follow. Tom doesn't illustrate the story—he translates its condition. The dogs are not characters from the text; they stand in for bare life held in suspense—exposed and vulnerable. The female dog, in particular, carries the weight of the downtrodden, a recurring presence in his work that echoes a dispersed Christ-like figure. The flag appears only as a shadow, suggesting authority as distant and ineffective. Tom shifts the story from event to atmosphere, replacing the literal with images that hold its tension, where what is at stake is not shown, but quietly felt.



LOPAMUDRA

Short story by Santhosh Panayaal
Published in Bhashaposhini
19.6 x 27.6 in (50 x 70 cm)
Gouache on paper
2016

JHELUM

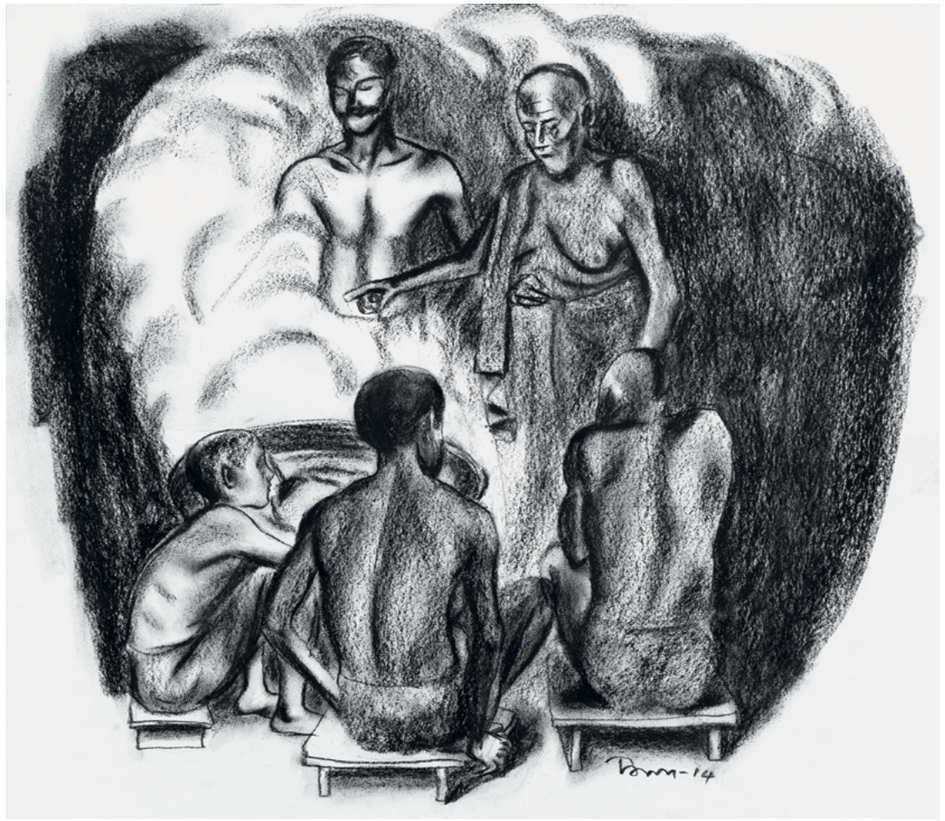
Short story by K. Aravindakshan
Published in Bhashaposhini
27 x 22 in (68.8 x 56 cm)
Crayon & charcoal on paper
2015

MOUSOLIYAM
(MAUSOLEUM)

Short story by E. Santhoshkumar
21.3 x 13.4 in (54 x 34 cm)
Charcoal on paper
2014

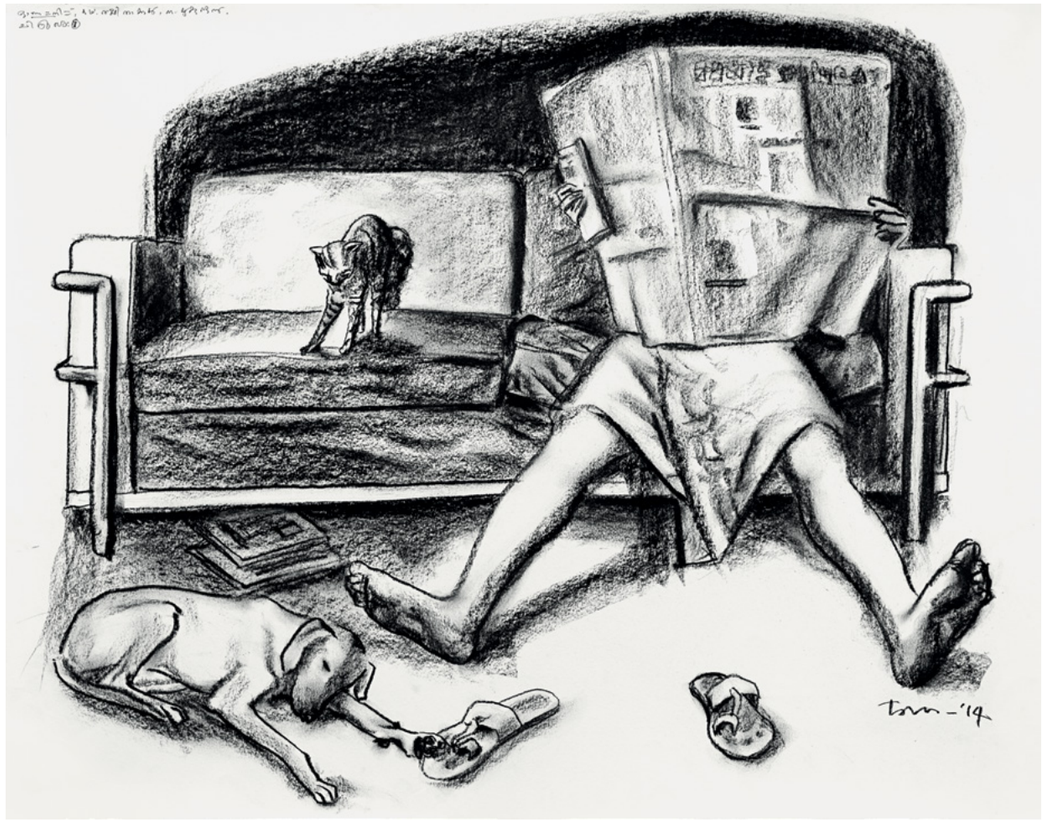
VELLIYAAZCHAKALILE MURIKKU
(THE INDIAN CORAL TREE ON FRIDAYS)

Short story by Ambikasuthan Mangad
Published in Bhashaposhini
28 x 22 in (71 x 56 cm)
Crayon & charcoal on paper
2015



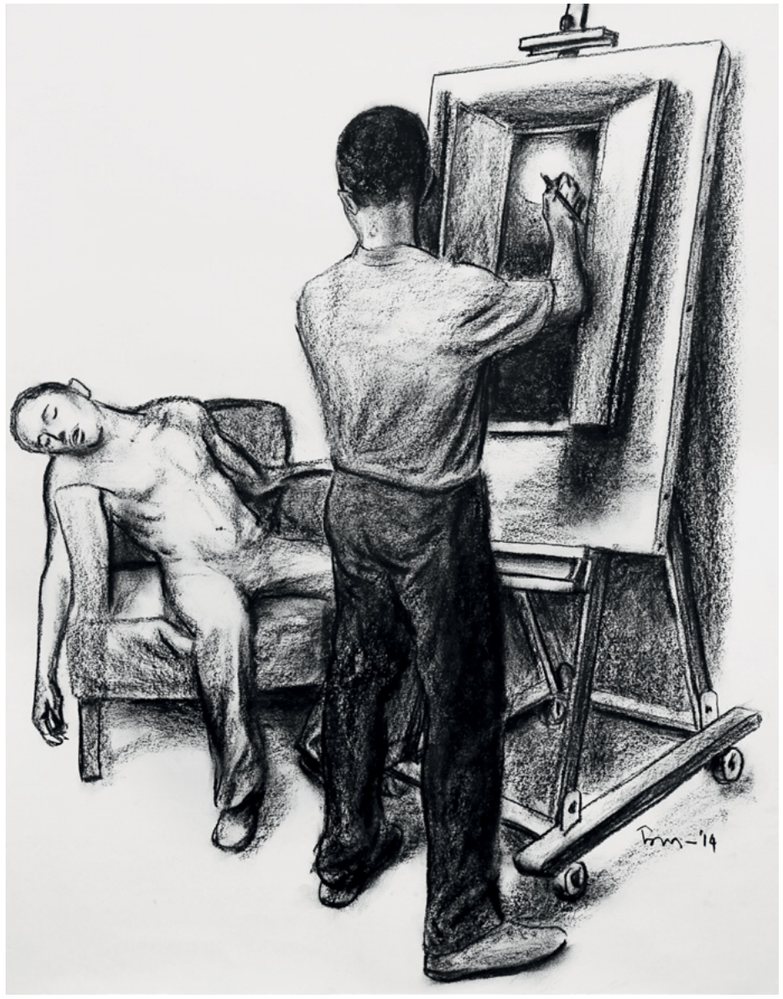
YAA DEVI!

Short story by Jayamohan
Published in
Bhashaposhini Annual Issue
21.7 x 24.4 in (55 x 62 cm)
Charcoal on paper
2014



RAKSHITHAAKKAL
(GUARDIANS)

Short story by M. Mukundan
Published in
Malayala Manorama Annual Issue
22 x 27 in (56 x 71 cm)
Charcoal on paper
2014



AKNJAATHAVASAM
(LIFE IN DISGUISE) - I

Short story by Karunakaran
Published in Malayala Manorama Annual Issue
28 x 22 in (71 x 56 cm)
Charcoal on paper
2014

AKJATHAVASAM
(LIFE IN DISGUISE) - II

Short story by Karunakaran
Published in Malayala Manorama Annual issue
21.6 x 21.6 in (55 x 55 cm)
Charcoal on paper
2014

RAATHRIKAAVAL
(NIGHT WATCH) - I

Short story by S. Harish
Published in Malayala Manorama Annual Issue
27.2 x 20.5 in (69 x 52 cm)
Ink on paper
2014

RAATHRIKAAVAL
(NIGHT WATCH) - II

Short story by S. Harish
Published in Malayala Manorama Annual Issue
23.6 x 20.8 in (60 x 53 cm)
Ink on paper
2014

AKJATHAVASAM

Short story by Karunakaran
Published in Malayala Manorama Annual issue
24 x 18 in (61 x 45.7 cm)
Charcoal on paper
2014

TOM VATTAKUZHY

Born in 1967, Kerala, India

Tom Vattakuzhy completed his BFA in Printmaking from Kala Bhavana, Visva-Bharati, in 1996, and his MFA from the Faculty of Fine Arts, M.S. University of Baroda, in 1998. He is known for his figurative paintings, often described as poetic, intimate, and introspective. His works carry a strong narrative depth, evoking moments that seem suspended between reality and dream. With a restrained palette and carefully structured spaces, his paintings draw viewers into a world of domestic quietude, memory, solitude, and contemplation. A painter, printmaker, and illustrator, Vattakuzhy has received several honours, including the AIFACS Award (New Delhi, 1997 and 1998), the Kerala Lalitha Kala Akademi Award (1997), the National Scholarship from the Ministry of Human Resource Development (1996), and the Haren Das Award from the Academy of Fine Arts, Kolkata (1995).

Following his solo exhibition *Song of the Dusk* at Aicon Contemporary, New York (2022), Vattakuzhy presented his first major institutional solo exhibition in India, *The Shadows of Absence*, at the Birla Academy of Art and Culture, Kolkata (2025). Curated by R. Siva Kumar and presented by the Institute of Contemporary Indian Art (ICIA) with support from AstaGuru, the exhibition later travelled to Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi. His work was also featured in the foundation exhibition *Edam* at the Kochi-Muziris Biennale (December 2025 – March 2026), further extending the international visibility of his practice. Tom Vattakuzhy is a critically acclaimed contemporary artist from India, represented by the Institute of Contemporary Indian Art (ICIA).

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Institute of Contemporary Indian Art