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On the cover  
'What is Here, is Elsewhere'  
Acrylic (1997) private collection. U.K.

FREEDOM FROM THE KNOWN

ASHOK PATEL

My heartfelt thanks to  
Smita & Ashwin Barot, David Cevet, Robin Smart,  
Sandhya & Dolar Popat, Fernand wynants, Sanjay Patel,  
Shakuntala& Jagdish Chapaneri, Richard Atkinson  
Alka & vikram Shah  
In India  
Krishna Chhatpar and Rajendragiri Mahant

Text By

DAVID CEVET



***"The Flowering Meditation"*** - Color Pencil - 1995

Dedicated to Shraddha

What is Hear, is Elsewere  
what is not Hear, is Nowhere  
Vishvasara Tantra





***“The Inner Space”*** - Pencil Drawing - 1996 Private Collection - Belgium

Art is a sacred, subtle space  
An open door to the unknown  
with unlimited possibilities.

It is a personal ritual  
A process of experiencing

It begins...

When becoming is dissolved  
Into being as experience itself

Where the self activated organic receptivity  
Performs far beyond ideas and philosophies

Art is an endless journey...

From austerity to sensibility

Desire to meditation

Ritual to enlightenment

Centering to expanding

Subjective to objective and

A lump of clay to sculpture

Remaining silent

Choice less

Letting it transform

Whatever.... however

A path

One has to walk on one's own

And in such walking

One remains only that

Nothing else

Ashok patel

Feb 96

## **The Sculptor Becomes the Sculpture**

[a South Indian Saying]

### **The Room**

The ground floor room in which he had been working for over a year faced onto a cul-de-sac. Furnished simply, it was also the room in which he slept. There was a notice board with notes tacked on, phone numbers, correspondence, small drawings. On the walls he had hung one or two larger, framed drawings while others were propped against cupboard doors. Acrylic paints lay on the work table, tops unscrewed. There were coloured pencils in a box with pastels, Brushes and some pens in cylindrical container.

If anything, music meant as much to him as much to him as drawing and the sound system occupied a whole cupboard top with carefully arranged tapes and discs while on a round table, in almost complementary disorder, were papers, photographs, and small unfinished terracotta or bronze sculptures.

Only the green corduroy jacket slung over a chairback suggested anything about the person who lived there.

Outside, the air was crystal blue with a hint of coming cold.



***"The Unmasking"*** - Terracotta - Private Collection-Germany

## Manuscript and Books.

He had arranged books on an alcove shelf. A few novels, poetry, philosophy. Among his most treasured possessions is a translation of Duino Elegies, Rilke was one of the poets discovered first in adolescence and twenty years later, he had not exhausted his pleasure in reading. The discovery was fortunate, almost predestined, for the inspiration for much of Rilke's practice came from his interaction with sculpture.

Had he published his own poetry? He smiled. No, that was something personal. His poems were the record of his meditations, his record of asking questions, of the imaginative act of identification with living things, his dialogue with flowers, the growth within, decay, death. I thought of Jibanananda Das, a poet whose secular and unbelieving view of natural world allowed no other sense than pain. Even the grass, in his poems feels pain as the deer rip it up with their teeth and morning walks, just before dawn, are through a grey world, littered with snake skins, eggshells and leaves. Jibanananda Das, a poet whose secular and unbelieving view of the natural world allowed no other sense than pain. Even the grass, in his poems, feels pain as the deer rip it up with their teeth and morning wals, just befor dawn, are through a grey world, littered with snake skins, eggshells and leaves. Jibanananda Das's first took was Dhusar Pandulipi, Grey Manuscript; the coloru in these terracotta bowls was earth brown. Set against a totally back backcloth. One sculpture of roots folding onto the bass of the earth, like hanks or some prasilical kapok tree, reminds me of familiar Khmar ruins but the texture of the pot which stood by the cupboard resembled more the dryness of wrinkled skin.

Opening a loose leaf folder, he showed page after page of drawings an texts. Delicate ink drawings, giving the impression of constant searching and digging Images, words bursting like seeds or pustules over the pages. Lines of poetry, plumes of ink, purple, red, gold and black, Figures, diagrams, flowers, vulva shapes, snakes. One book, a bound sketchbook covered in what could be seaman's tarpaulin, looked like the log of a voyages stained with salt and rain.



***"Now, I Am Nowhera"*** - Color Pencil - 1984

## Drawing

Sculpture was slow. Drawing, projects for sculpture or, more usually, for its own sake, was constant. Drawing was what he described as searching for his source of the spirit, liberation, poetic emotion. The only comparison that comes to mind is in some of the drawings the Rabindranath Tagore produced towards the end of his life where lines, moved by their own internal rhythm, finally form mysterious, personal images, though Tagore's conning disavowal of any kind of preparation belied his vast experience of images of all kind.

Some of the drawings, resemble images of ritual first of all and yet, when examined closely, reveal a beauty which comes from a pure delight in line following line. Looking at the work dating from his earliest student years and comparing that with the work exhibited in the previous years, the increasing freedom and assurance are reflected in the abandonment of careful outline and the marked reference to already existing images. Drawings now start with a few marks of coloured pencil or ink and then, out of these first marks, emerge others which gradually drift, floating into images which gradually solidify but then shimmer dance and threaten to move again as one looks, like an animated film.



***“Center To Expanding”*** - Color Pencil - 1997

## Learning

He could hardly not have been aware of the difference between his interests and those of his contemporaries although it was coupled with enormous love, communicated in his voice and his gestures, for those teachers who had encouraged his interest in literature, philosophy, art and music and as an individual, despite the fact that those very teachers who encouraged him and valued his gifts were exasperated by his metaphysical concerns, offering the criticism that such esoteric obscurities prevented the onlooker from gaining access to the work. Rejecting advice to draw in the bazaar and from the naked figure in the life room, he nonetheless saw the experience of the body, and his own body in particular, as central to his concerns although the acts of drawing and sculpture were never about the profession of art but the medium through which he continuously affirmed his search, as he explained, for non-identity.



***“Freedom From The Known”*** - lithograph - 1997





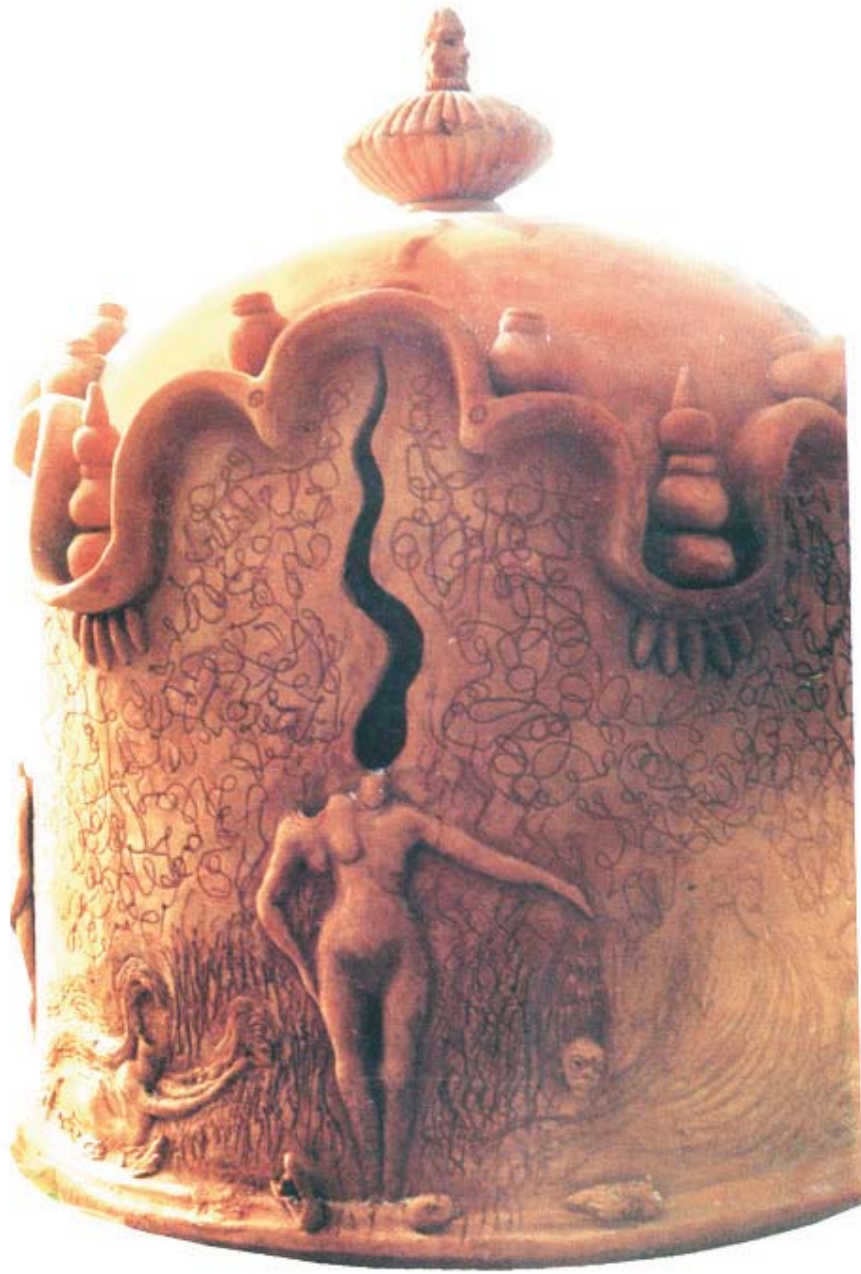
**“Shakti”** - Bronze - 1985 Private Collection-Bombay

### Shakti

Unmasking - or breaking and remaking? Beneath every finished sculpture there are others, buried or hidden or living as ghosts. Or destroyed out of dissatisfaction ? He worked slowly, directly with clay, this time without preparatory drawing, constantly rejecting the solutions which emerged. Struggling with the problem of the naked female figure, he wanted neither the styles available in previous Indian sculpture nor the abstraction represented by Brancusi.

Feeling deeply for the sense of power and creativity within the woman, he began making the Shakti, he remembered, at midnight, in complete darkness. Later, the small clay sketch was enlarged to almost life size, broken and refashioned many times over several years before finally being cast in bronze, "I wanted, " he said, " to just get the uprising spirit, not the physical female body.

Yet the image is unlike any erotic sculpture. It is not a seductive woman but a woman who has been, literally, used. The polished bronze has the sheen of oiled skin. The woman's breasts are dugs, sucked on by many children, rather than objects of desire, pulled on or bitten rather than caressed. She lifts her hands, stretching her body in offering. Luxuriant hair on her head flows like a river. Her eyes, half open, in state of susupti, waking sleep.



**“Satori”** - Terracotta - 1990 Private Collection - Japan

### Changing

Still dissatisfied with the naked figure, which could, in any event be interpreted as part of a metropolitan tradition with all the pressures of changing fashion, he returned to the village and an intense study of terracotta sculpture which was often left at village shrines, in forests, using the materials of the very earliest surviving sculpture, changing, through his deeply personal need, into intensely surreal objects.

The sky in the photograph was so pale that it was difficult to see where the clouds began. Trees. Dark blue and then one solitary low tree with vermilion leaves burning. Beside that, another patch of green and yellow.

Just before twilight, another photograph taken, another bell-like construction, this time crowned with the head of bearded man, the luxuriant black of the shadow and the foliage making a rich dark, contrasting with the yellowish orange light. Deep shadows accentuated the low relief of the reddish ochre walls on which he had shaped a dancing woman whose arms turned into tendrils. Where the face should be there is a slit, flameshaped, through which the viewer could look at the sculpture inside, although it is impossible to see the whole sculpture from one viewing point and each time the face is pressed against one of the four viewing slits, the observer must look through the woman's face, becoming part of her body



***“Form To The Formless”*** - Glass Fiber - 1992

#### Form to the Formless

He had made the original drawing ten years before, a large drawing of a nest of black snakes twisting and intertwining across a vast landscape which suggested not only the size of the serpents but also the height of the mountain that they formed. In the distance, towering above the plain, was the lingam, resembling the phallus more anatomically, with the glans and the frenum more clearly indicated, but his solutions to the problems of translating this drawing into a sculpture have led to a change in the proportion of the parts. For no attempt has been made to imitate the vast scale of the drawing but, rather, the object, though still almost two metres high, is compressed, tightened, so that the coils of the snakes could easily be seen as the roots of plants or twisted plaits of green hair surrounding the black lingam.

Speaking about the sculpture, he described the work as a network of interrelationships in life, tangled and now purifying. Human relationships were not seen as traps but as positively helpful towards achieving identification with nature.



***“Lotus Meditation”*** - bronze - 1995

#### Lotus meditation

From a folder he pulled out a large drawing, torn at the edges, in black gouache and ink, of a lotus growing out of mud, first forming into a living organism, part animal, part vegetable, with fine, pollen trapping hairs, ending in a lotus which is now too heavy for the winding tendrils to support. The petals of the flower in the drawing are delicately sharp, directing the flower away from the earth. In the process of change and transformation, several years later, into the small green bronze, the original drawing has become more animal, smoother, more like the limbs of a dancing figure, becoming leaves, curved, sharp, more intense, supporting a closed petal ball.





***“Slipping Away Flowing & Unfolding With The Lotus”***  
Epoxy Putty & Plaster - 1995

#### Slipping away

On the table stood a sculpture that could be picked up and held. The head of a temple pillar in the shape of a lotus starts to grow and breaks through the stone into the architectural structure and cracks it. Having broken through, it starts to flower, coming into ripeness, bursting and then rotting, though inside is not a seed but living entrails. One sculpture is lost inside another sculpture, dead leaves intertwine with figures held captive, until, finally, at the crest, the shape of the snake, its hood expanded, holding itself erect and resembling still a bird's beak. As the piece is turned in the hand, a small human figure is revealed. Orange, gold, green and the purple of ripe aubergine. Almost the smell of the blossom and the stench of its dead remains. As I start to describe these mysterious and magical works, I find myself making moulding movements in the air with my fingers, trying, as I try to recall the appearance of these pillars, to remake them, sharing how they were made, drawn almost, with the clay.

The way that can be followed is not the true way - Laotsu

## Listening

Looking at these small sculpture while listening to the soundtrack of Mrinal Sen's Genesis, i recall another of his films, in witch a photographer confronts the world of an old house, wich is slowly falling into ruin, and in so doing, according to one Calcutta critic, ' confronts the difference between modernity and certain kinds of traditions.' Mrinal Sen's direction resembles, the same critic suggested, a series of still photographs, each one lingering over some quality of material, of the uneven light and exposure to rain, the effect of heat witch bleaches some colours while leaving others brilliant and clear.

I think of the coconut, bursting out, splitting before sending out its new root, and the opening witch reveals the lips of the genitals which pucker and at their sharpest point, can cut before flowering.

Walking to the station, " I am interested, " he said " in the process of working, in the way in which one experience extends in to another, so far it grows on and on through me, though sometimes i wonder about how these things are explored... I don't feel it's me..."

David Cevet  
January 1997.

[ David Cevet is a painter and writer living London. He is the author of several books of poetry and translations, as wellas essays and books on indian poetry. ]

## ASHOK PATEL

Studied sculpture during 1979-1985 at M.S.University Baroda, India.

Studied Kathak dance and Light Music to enhance the understanding of creativity  
M.S. University Baroda, India.

Also studied Ceramic at Brunel University at UK.  
Art work has been shown by several galleries, including the Jahangir Art Gallery in, Bombay India and Commonwealth Institute in London, UK.

He has widely participated and exhibited since 1991.

He has won state art academy awards 1983, 1990.

His work is in public and private collections including Institutions and Galleries

In India, Japan, Germany, USA, Belgium and United Kingdom.  
Since moving to London in 1994, he has held 4 solo and 7 private exhibitions, and participated in 6 group events.

In December 1995, BBC broadcast a documentary surrounding his one-man show held at the Commonwealth Institute.

In July 1997, ZEE TV broadcast his interview in connection with his one-man show at the Meghraj Gallery.

His work was chosen by Sotheby's for chlchester Open Art Exhibition.