

## INDIA

## New Delhi

Krishen Khanna  
at Dhoomimal Gallery

Throughout the selected works that make up Krishen Khanna's (b. 1925) most recent exhibition we see how brilliantly he breathes life into his images that evoke human situations and conditions. His protagonists are the ordinary people in the street, among them refugees and *bandwallahs*. It is Khanna's empathy for the weak and underprivileged that emerges most powerfully in his compositions. We are made acutely aware in Khanna's art that it is strikingly local in feel. He often noted "all great art has to be local." By this he meant that for him the moments of his art were informed by what was near him. He saw the passion of the moment.

Khanna's *A Season of Watermelons* confirms these sentiments as he captures moments from the lives of the locals who are an integral part of his surroundings. Enjoying the season of the watermelons the artist communicates the simple pleasures found at the roadside among ordinary people. Through his painterly skills Khanna elevates the mundane to a fresh emotional level.

Khanna's visual vocabulary conveys his concern for the state and fate of man. His interpretation in *Bandwallahs* (2000) is unique. Alone or in a group they make personal statements. Often associated with majestic army bands the motley bands, dressed in worn-out uniforms, elevate the gentry's sense of gaiety by accompanying marriage processions in the city. The artist catches them rehearsing or saddled up. A band is survival for *bandwallahs*.

Besides the *bandwallahs*, Khanna was fascinated with the life of Christ, an interest from his childhood when, at the age of seven, he was shown a print of Leonardo's

*The Last Supper*. As a young child he tried to copy it. The image remained in his mind: he has depicted Christ frequently in his work. While *Christ Carrying the Cross* shows the sad plight of Christ, one wonders: who is it really? Could it be the apostles discussing the betrayal of Christ? Khanna is well known for *The Last Bite* (2005) in which he humorously recreated the Last Supper featuring fellow contemporary artists evoking memories of their informal tea sessions enjoyed over the years.

The deeply personal life experience is deftly recalled in works that he made some 60 years after moving from Pakistan, during the 1947 Partition, to India that really impacted him. So imbedded was the brutal exodus in his young mind that he felt compelled to paint *Refugees 1947* (2009). But his empathy was not restricted to Indians and this is evident in *Afghan Refugees* (2004), portraying old men, children, women, and animals all moving steadily toward an unknown future.

Usually Khanna sees the world through color but in his *conté* drawings, including *Woman at the Window*,

we see a subtle artist at work in a single color. Through his mastery of different media Khanna moves the viewer into fresh visual sensibilities. The end results are paintings that remain firmly etched in one's mind.

Uma Prakash

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## SINGAPORE

Sunsook Roh  
at Shophouse 5

Korean-American artist Sunsook Roh's creative impulses are full of extraordinary energy, muscular leaps of the imagination that dazzle the eye, and a demanding emotional power that is primal. In her earlier works in various *Tree of Life* series, which began to take shape more than a decade ago, Roh dealt with the notion of her artworks as being "alive," living things whose presence spoke to the vagaries of the human condition. In such works, Roh also spoke of making art that speaks to "memory" and the "transience" of life, encouraging people to "look beyond the material" to a more spiri-

tual world. At the same time, her works were, in their simplest and most complex forms, connected to her earlier life as a nurse, a career in which she witnessed the helplessness of patients as they neared the end of life. Such a reality marked her spirit: it has come to inform the constant core of her art making through which she embraces the creative obligations of her life.

Roh's most recent exhibition, *Originally and Truthfully (Tree of Life VI)* addresses many of the same considerations as her earlier *Tree of Life* series. There are still questions of memory, the transitory nature of all relationships, the fleeting reality of all life, the tangled interconnectedness of the human condition wherever it is found, and the constant search for elemental freedom.

The major immediate differences between her earlier *Tree of Life* works and her current *Tree of Life VI* (2015) is that the ceaseless energy and sense of anger are gone. Now, there is a calmness within it that stills one's thoughts and calms the spirit.

As if to emphasize the change in her *oeuvre*, Roh performed the beautiful and



**Above left:** Kishen Khanna, *A Season of Watermelons*, undated, oil on canvas, 72 x 48 inches. **Above right:** Kishen Khanna, *Who Is It?*, 2006, oil on canvas, 46 x 30 inches. Images: Courtesy of Dhoomimal, New Delhi.

elegant *Salpuri*, the traditional shamanic dance that has been an integral part of Korean culture for thousands of years. The *Salpuri* dance is intensely appropriate to Roh's art in *The Tree Of Life* as, while it speaks to the sadness and splendor of life and separation, it also speaks to freedom, both spiritually and personally. The dance here, which is as a 'metaphor' for Roh's continuous individual search for "spiritual liberation" as she has said, is also, I suggest, indicative of a renewed purpose in her creative life, a fresh look at the world, inside and outside, of dream and reality, and of the memories that feed humankind's fearful psyches.

When one looks back at Roh's earlier *Tree of Life* works, one sees many clashes of the spirit through her use of materials, objects, and forms. Here with the white gauze-wrapped fiberglass of the tree roots in *Tree of Life VI* Roh addresses life's sturdy organic forces again but in a more fluid, less agitated, manner. This work, which seems to grow out of the gallery floor naturally, has a stillness to it that is reflected across all the strikingly colored works in the exhibition, all of which are of cast resin with LED embedded in the acrylic casing.

Where Roh's *Tree of Life* works are of the earth, her richly colored acrylic works suggest the world of the sea. Works in the triptych *Synaptic Tales* (2012–2013), the eight panels of *Untitled* (2015), and the large, elegant multi-panel work *Grace Project* (2014–2015) glow with the subtle shifts colors of forms that might live within the rhythm of a man-made aquarium or an underwater paradise such as the Barrier Reef. The forms that Roh has made hark back to the spontaneous colorful free-flowing forms made with paint dripped on rotating glass projected onto a screen or a wall, often seen in 1960s' counterculture bars. Here Roh has stilled that movement and, like insects in amber, her molded acrylic forms speak to earth's colorful ecological his-



Sunsook Roh, *Synaptic Tales*, 2012–2013, polyester resin cast triptych, LED embedded, 22 x 22 x 4 cm.



Sunsook Roh, *Grace Project*, 2014–2015, cast resin, LED embedded acrylic casing, 232.5 x 71.5 x 10 cm. Images: Courtesy of the Artist.

tory as well as something of the human spirit in flux. In all her art Roh endeavors to speak to life, to the visible and invisible, and to the majesty of the human spirit. Gone are the shadows of doubt and in their place is the light of eternal hope.

Ian Findlay

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## THE UNITED STATES

### New York City

#### Tiffany Chung at Tyler Rollins Fine Art

For the Vietnamese-American artist Tiffany Chung the return to her native country in the early 2000s enabled her to reconnect with her ancestral homeland and the opportunity to evaluate her position as someone living in "between." In the early period, after relocating from California, her art was an abstract mix of photographic and sculptural installations that drew from global pop cultures, showing life in a developing Asian metropolis.

Based in Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon), Chung gradually returned to themes that centered her earliest exhibition pieces in the U.S. during the mid-to-late 1990s. Those works explored her family history within the context of the refugee community settling in America after the Vietnam War. Back then she also looked to the broader migrant community with an acknowledgement to America's Hispanic community.