

BELA GUPTA
REFLECTIONS OF REALITY



WAYS OF SEEING
Oil on canvas
65 x 85 in.
2019

PREFACE

Bela Gupta's expansive oil canvases represent a nuanced inquiry into the evolution of space within a historical narrative framework. Her works are ambitious in their scope, aiming to contextualise political discourse surrounding themes of empire and global cultural interactions. Through the strategic placement of various visual components and segments inspired by historical records, Gupta explores the ramifications of cultural and imperial encounters.

Her large-scale paintings serve as highly charged sites through which the flux of collective memory and cultural references are visualised, suggesting a landscape where historically disparate occurrences converge, sometimes evoking a humorous resonance that cleverly critiques political norms. This dual-layered representation facilitates a form of dialogue that is both comically engaging and critically sharp, enriching the viewer's interpretive experience.

Furthermore, Gupta posits the existence of an overarching, almost metaphysical realm that parallels and intersects with empirical reality. This is depicted through imagery of figures that float free from conventional physical constraints, symbolising a liberation from societal expectations. Her artistic narrative suggests a transcendence of traditional sensory experiences, challenging our perceptual and cognitive boundaries.

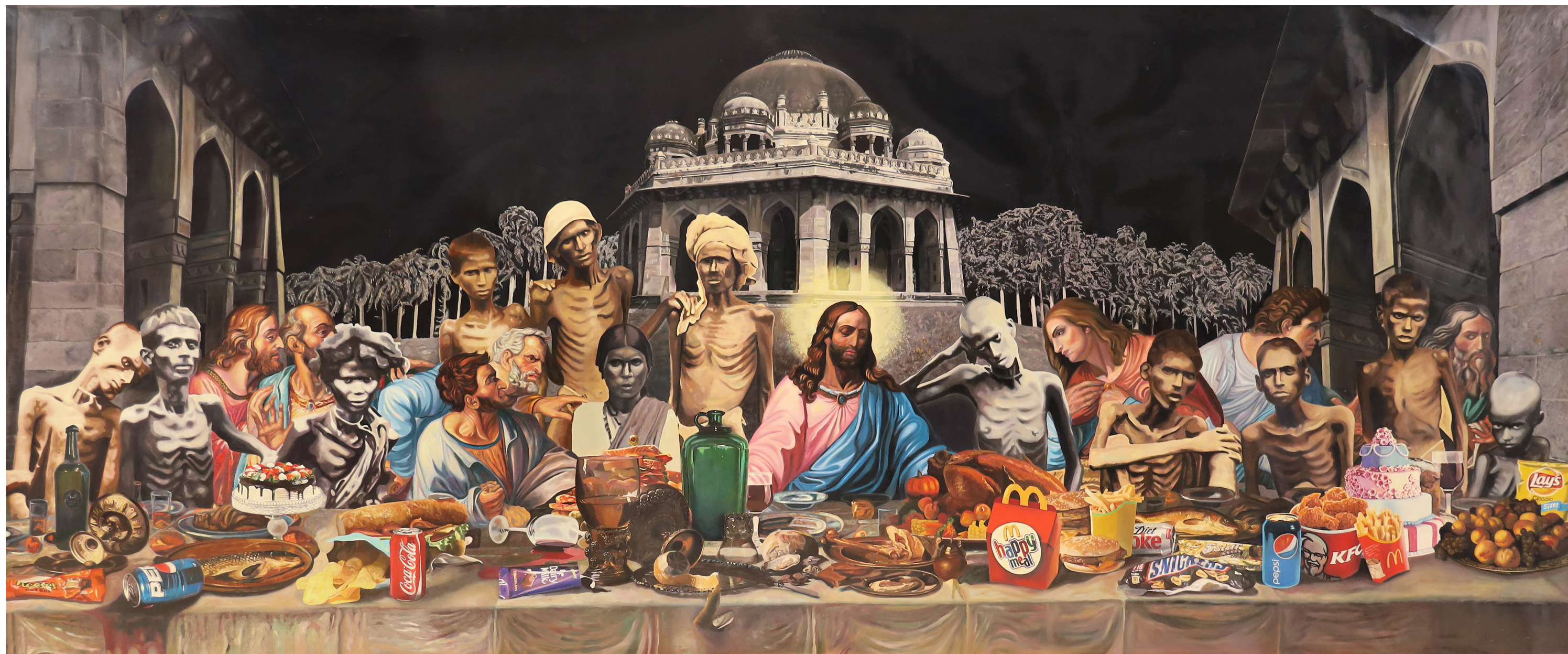
In no insignificant terms, Bela Gupta's art delves into the complex interstices of visual perception influenced by historical and cultural shifts, advocating for a reconsideration of the conventional limits of utility and perception. Through her oeuvre, she invites an introspective reflection on the interconnectedness of history, culture and identity, framed within the visual dynamics of her grand opuses. Gupta encapsulates all the nuances and interfaces of what it means to use one's art to serve history's subjects and its victims, as well the art aficionados of today.



THE LAST SUPPER — AT THE LODHI
Oil on canvas
78 x 132 in.
2015

'This painting helped me resolve some of the rigid visual bottlenecks and coincide Christ's last meal with that of the photographs of famine figures taken 150 years ago, who faced the camera hours before their imminent death. The only way to overcome challenges on a piece this size was to be comfortable to pivot during creation. I redrew the visual story again and again, changed colours to make everything work in unison.'

Bela Gupta



THE LAST SUPPER AT LODHI'S TOMB

Oil on canvas

57 x 137 in.

2014





THE CAROUSEL II
Oil on canvas
57 x 83 in.
2023

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THE EMPRESS OF INDIA - FORT ST. GEORGE

Oil on canvas

75 x 100 in.

2017



THE ROYAL VISIT

Oil on canvas

58 x 89 in.

2017



'The viewer must seek meaning in the context of the images for Bela's art as more of an inspired activity, and thus to get at the true stuff is to go back to the gut response which the images create.'

K. B. Goel

K. B. Goel, 'The Human Condition', in *K B GOEL: CRITICAL WRITINGS ON ART 1957-1998* (ed. by Shruti Parthasarathy), pp.164-165.

TIME TRANSFIXED

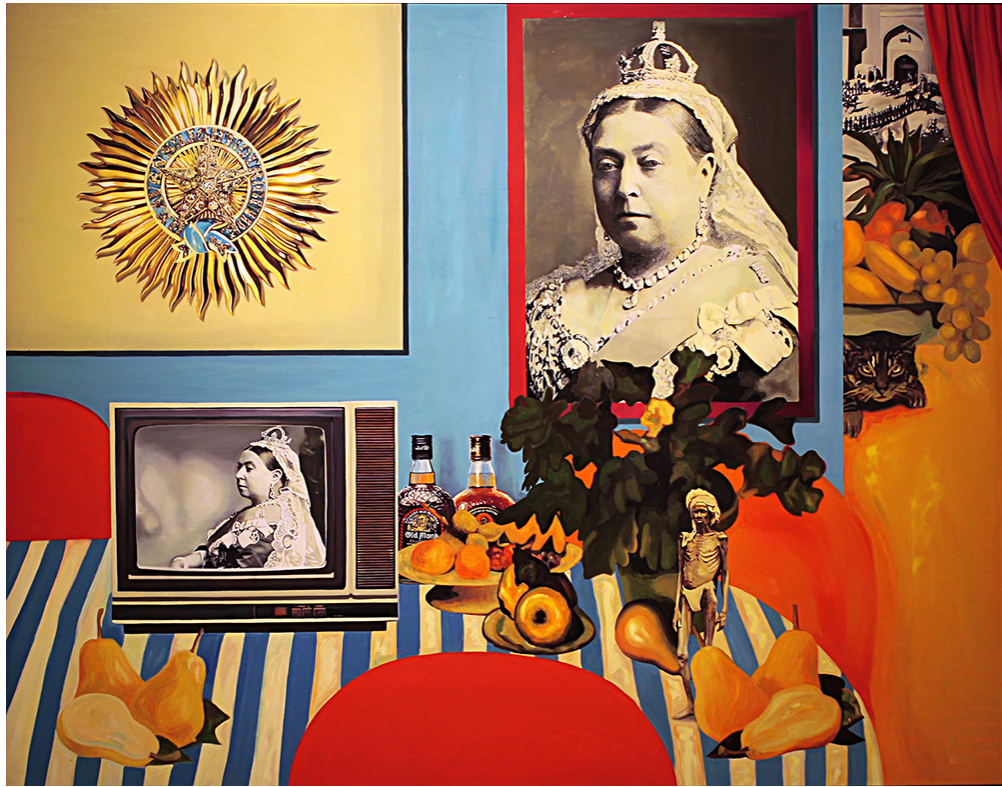
Oil on canvas
56 x 85 in.
2016



“The absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world”

Albert Camus

ON THE VIA DEL CORSO
Oil on canvas
99 x 72 in.
2020



WESSEL AND THE EMPIRE
Oil on canvas
56 x 74 in.
2017



LOOTER'S PRIDE
Swarovski on canvas
59 x 97 in.
2021



ROCKETS
Oil on canvas
58 x 80 in.
2016



COKE SHACK
Oil on canvas
59 x 90 in.
2014

BIOGRAPHY

Bela Gupta is a distinguished artist based in New Delhi, renowned for her dynamic and insightful engagement with socioeconomic themes through her art. Specialising in oil-on-canvas, Gupta also has extensive experience in creating multi-medium art installations. Her oeuvre is a compelling mix of aesthetic simplicity and complex narrative depth, reflecting her versatile engagement with different artistic mediums and styles.

Gupta's journey began at the College of Art, New Delhi, where she honed her skills in traditional painting techniques and explored various mediums. Over the years, she has developed a distinctive style that marries the vibrancy of pop art with the gravitas of sociopolitical commentary. This unique approach has not only defined her body of work but has also positioned her as a critical voice in the contemporary art scene.

Gupta's paintings are celebrated for their vivid expressiveness. Her canvases are often large, immersive experiences that draw the viewer (with their seeming simplicity) into a profoundly complex visual dialogue about the disparate realities of her native India and the broader world. Whether depicting the bustling energy of urban life or the serene decay of forgotten landscapes, her work consistently seeks to provoke thought and evoke emotion and visceral responses.

In addition to her paintings, Gupta's art installations offer a multi-sensory experience that further explores her themes of choice. Utilising a combination of found objects, multimedia components and traditional art materials, these installations create interactive spaces where viewers can physically engage with the topical issues she depicts.



EMPRESS OF INDIA
Oil on canvas
58 x 89 inches
2016

Gupta's embrace of pop art elements allows her to infuse her work with a sense of immediacy and accessibility. Bright colours and bold forms are a nod to the pop art tradition, yet her subjects remain deeply rooted in their diegetic milieu. This juxtaposition makes her work both familiar and new, allowing audiences of all backgrounds to connect with her artistic narratives.

Bela Gupta's work has been exhibited widely across India and internationally in galleries and art fairs. Each exhibition has been a stepping stone in her career, broadening her reach and impact within the global art community. Her works are part of several private and public collections, attesting to their relevance and resonance.

Through her paintings and installations, Bela Gupta continues to challenge and illuminate the fabric of our shared and lived realities. As she continues to evolve and expand her artistic boundaries, Gupta's vivid art stands as a site of multilayered and deep thoughtful engagement, marking her vital presence in the world of contemporary art.

To view Bela Gupta's latest works and exhibitions, visit her website at www.bela-gupta.com, which offers a comprehensive look at her portfolio, along with details on upcoming projects and exhibitions.



ALICE IN WONDERLAND

Oil on canvas

56 x 98 in.

2016

'My work highlights the absurdity of the world we live in. Some people are driving electric cars while some are getting their carts pulled by livestock. Inclusive growth is the most significant farce of our era and India epitomises that notion. My work also has repeated criticism of unfettered capitalism and consumerism where it furthers this global disparity – some people have access to things they don't need and some don't have access to anything.'

Bela Gupta



McFARM
Oil on canvas
64 x 56 in.
2014

'I generally like identifying and juxtaposing varied images to create a polarity. Once I identify these inputs, I start executing and bringing them all together in my interpretation on an oil-on-canvas or a pencil drawing.'

Bela Gupta



ROOMSCAPE — I
Oil on canvas
57 x 57 in.
2024



ABSINTHE
Oil on canvas
53 x 57 in.
2016

THE INTERPLAYS OF HISTORY, CULTURE AND PERCEPTION IN BELA GUPTA'S ARTISTIC NARRATIVE

Bela Gupta's oeuvre emerges as a profound artistic inquiry into the interplay between historical narratives and spatial dynamics. Her works ambitiously tackle the themes of imperialism and cultural expansion, using a complex layering of visual elements to underscore the political underpinnings of these phenomena. Each piece is a pastiche of elements drawn from archival materials, which are ingeniously juxtaposed to foster a dialogue between past imperial actions and contemporary cultural dialogues.

Gupta's approach is both heavily analytical and visually engaging, employing a rich tapestry of imagery that oscillates between direct historical references and abstract compositions. This melding of styles is designed to provoke reflection on how historical events are not isolated but rather interconnected in a visually dynamic space that unfolds on her canvases. Her technique suggests that memory and culture are not static but are constantly being reshaped—a notion that is central to understanding the flux in cultural identities.

Her paintings are not just visually striking; they are intellectually layered, offering a satirical yet poignant critique of the sociopolitical landscapes that shape global cultural exchanges. Through the lens of humour and irony, Gupta targets the absurdities and contradictions of political power structures, a satirical approach which enables her to weave a subtle yet sharp commentary on the ongoing impacts of colonial legacies and cultural hegemony.



CRUCIFIED
Oil on canvas
45 x 45 in.
2022

Gupta's work suggests a transcendental dimension where the metaphysical and the empirical coalesce. In her portrayal of figures that defy gravitational constraints, she invites the viewer to question the limits imposed by societal norms and physical laws. This motif of floating figures can be seen as a metaphor for the potential to overcome the restrictive labels that society often imposes on individuals based on race, gender or history.

In her visionary art, Gupta proposes a continuous dialogue between what is seen and what is known, questioning the very foundation of how we perceive reality and its various layers. She challenges the audience to reconsider the 'sensory givens' of our existence, pushing the boundaries of how art interprets and influences our understanding of history and personal identity.

Through the strategic use of space, memory and cultural imagery, Gupta's paintings articulate a sophisticated narrative that is both a visual feast and a cerebral journey. The semantic layers in her works are reflective of the complexities of modern life, where history and memory play pivotal roles in shaping cultural consciousness. Her art not only captures the essence of these dynamics but also acts as a catalyst for viewers to explore deeper questions about identity, history and the nature—or positionality—of perception itself.

By challenging viewers to rethink the intersections of history, culture and identity through a critical-visual format, Bela Gupta solidifies her position as a significant contemporary artist. Her ability to encapsulate complex ideologies within the bounds of her canvases, while maintaining an aesthetic appeal that is both universal and poignant, marks her as a crucial voice in the discourse on contemporary art and its role in societal critique and cultural introspection. Her exhibitions continue to inspire and provoke, ensuring her place in the dialogues that will shape the future directions of global art movements.



HEIDI'S BOW
(VICTORIA'S SECRET)
Oil on canvas
57 x 80 in.
2013

RAPE — I
Oil on canvas
75 x 97 in.
2011



DRAWING 6
Pencil on paper
2024

TIME TRANSFIXED — THE RED ENGINE
Oil on canvas
56 x 83 in.
2019



STILL LIFE WITH BIRDS
Oil on canvas
74 x 45 in.
2022

STILL LIFE WITH HERSHEY'S
Oil on canvas
31 x 30 in.
2023





FIZZBALL (DIPTYCH)
 Oil on canvas
 58 x 108 in.
 2014



SPANISH TANGO
 Oil on canvas
 56 x 75 in.
 2015



THIRST — I
Oil on canvas
74 x 49 in.
2011

NEXT PAGE:
WESSEL AND NEEM
Oil on canvas
55 x 80 in.
2013





DRAWING 5
Pencil on paper
2024

THE HISTORIC PALIMPSEST OF BELA GUPTA

In the select works of Bela Gupta, there is a recurring motif of historical engagement that transcends mere representation. Gupta navigates the complex terrain of cultural memory and colonial narratives through her interweaving of iconography, setting and character, evident across her paintings and installations. Each work serves not only as a piece of visual art but also as a dialogic space where past and present collide and converse in a layered exposition, often interrogating the ironies and absurdities of human existence.

In some of her works, there is a conspicuous dialogue between the regality of the British Empire and the Indian cultural landscape, both architecturally and symbolically. The juxtaposition of imperial figures against the backdrop of Indian monuments is jarring, evoking a sense of historical dissonance that is both critical and reflective. This deliberate anachronism seems to critique the sanitised narratives often associated with colonial history, revealing a more complex interplay of domination and resistance.

In others, namely her reinterpretations of *The Last Supper*, she reimagines a canonical scene with inserts of modernity and markers of colonial presence. The inclusion of contemporary and colonial-era figures disrupts the traditional biblical tableau, creating a space where the sacrosanct and the vulgar merge. This blending of temporal layers suggests a subversion of the original narrative, perhaps pointing to the enduring impact of colonial and post-colonial discourse on contemporary society.



STILL LIFE WITH FORT WALL
Oil on canvas
42 x 52 in.
2022

Gupta further explores the elasticity of cultural contexts, by situating the familiar scene of communion within the Indian architectural sphere, she invites a reevaluation of religious iconography through the lens of cultural diversity and historical intersection. The *Alice in Wonderland* edition, with its fantastical elements, encourages viewers to consider the surreal aspects of cultural imposition and the often absurd reality of historical encounters.

The *Betrayal* offers a stark commentary, placing iconic figures in a moment of historical significance, juxtaposed with an emaciated figure adorned with wings, capturing the essence of Gupta's thematic concern with the impact of political actions on the human condition. Similarly, her *Triptych, Empress of India – 2017*, juxtaposes a figure that represents colonial power with scenes of revelry and neglect; a triad which serves as a powerful commentary on the consequences of historical exploitation and the contrasting realities it engenders.

At the heart of Gupta's thematic exploration lies also the stark juxtaposition between the lived realities of privation and the superficial exuberance of consumerist culture. This duality is not presented as a mere observational contrast but as a critical commentary on the dual realities that coexist within the same societal frameworks. Her art serves as a mirror reflecting the grim disparities that are often overshadowed by the glitz of modernity.



THE LAST SUPPER WITH MAHARAJJI AND THE QUEEN

Oil on canvas
60 x 120 in.
2017

By amalgamating surrealistic technique and other elements that appear incongruent, she fosters a visual field where the ordinary is recast into the extraordinary. This method is not about surrealism for its own sake but is a deliberate strategy to enhance the perceptual and emotional engagement of the viewer. The surrealists' emphasis on the unconscious as a reservoir of revelation finds a distinct echo in Gupta's work, where the juxtaposition of disparate elements unveils deeper societal critiques.

Through her astute manipulation of archival imagery and contemporary symbolism, Bela Gupta critiques the sociopolitical landscape and compels the viewer to confront the enduring legacies of history and their participation in it. Her art acts as a palimpsest, demanding an active engagement from its viewers. It asks us to look critically and to challenge ourselves with the moral imperative of bridging our individual experience with the universal themes she presents. Each layer of her work reveals both the overt and the subtle forces that have shaped cultural identities and collective memory. In Gupta's hands, the canvas becomes a site of historical inquiry and a crucible for the interrogation of the past's influence on the present.



DRAWING 3
Pencil on paper
2024

'The artist implies that our collective experience is dynamic and manifests a visual space determined by memory shifts and cultural analogies. In a broad sense she depicts a world where unrelated events can begin to co-exist simultaneously. This often creates a comical effect which allows for an ironic political commentary.'

Peter Hatper
Cultural Shifts in the Paintings of Bela Gupta
Artery (30th October 2019) Spotlight.



INSTALLATION 1
2015



DRAWING 4
Pencil on paper
2024



INSTALLATION 2
2016

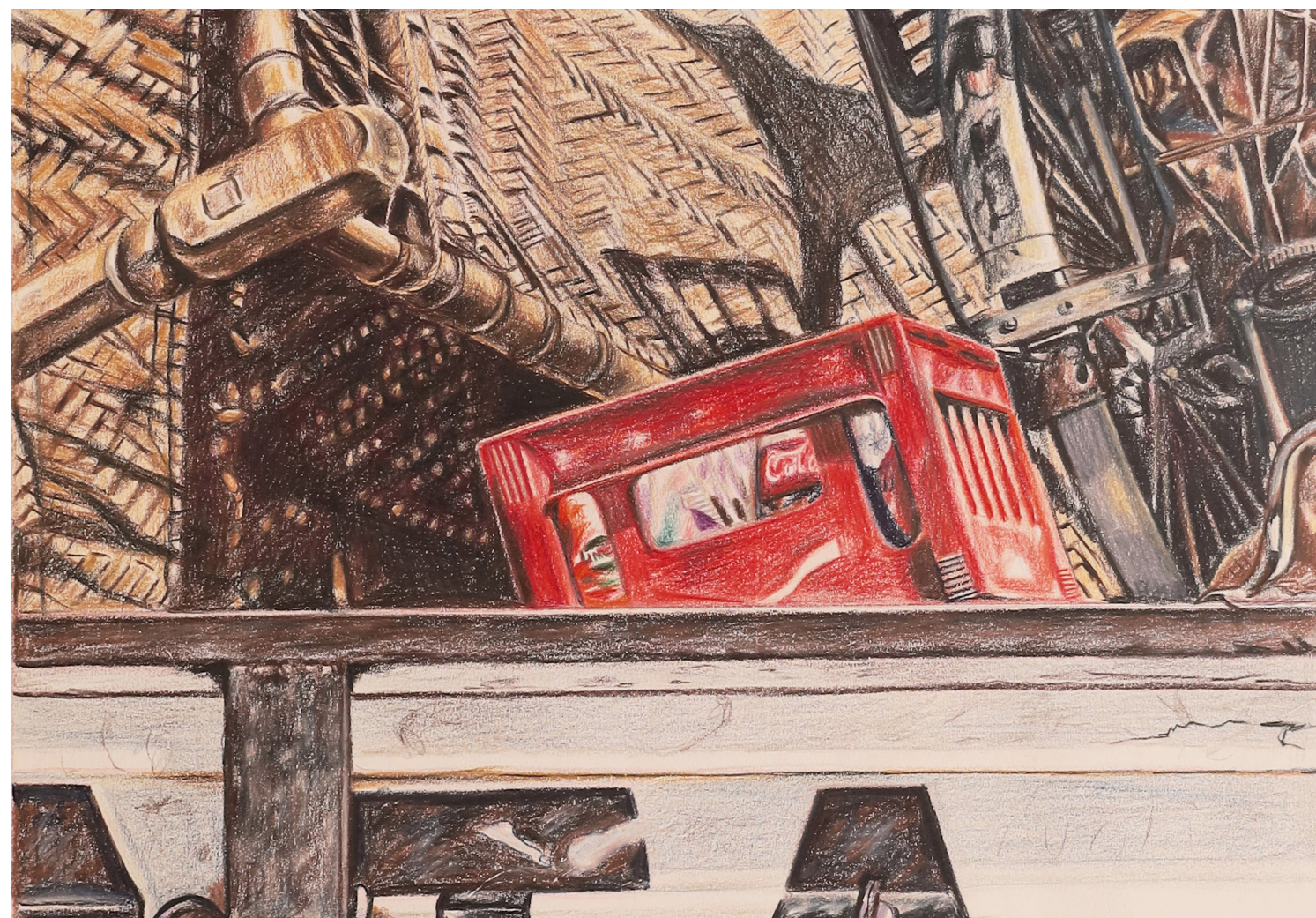


MULTIMEDIA INSTALLATION
2015

OPPOSITE:
DRAWING 16
Pencil on paper
2009

'I always gave a lot of thought to the aesthetics in the construction of a series of paintings that are often dealing with serious socio-economic arguments. Most of the standard visual imagery involving such dialogues is sombre. By merging them with extracts from pop artworks I am not only able to create an element of shock but also play with off-setting the contextuality of the subject matter. The reference to works of modern masters works like a filter through which the most depressing issues acquire a visual appeal and a twist of absurdity.'

Bela Gupta





YALTA AND HIGH FASHION

Oil on canvas

58 x 78 in.

2016



SHOWSTOPPER-IV

Oil on canvas

57 x 84 in.

2013



ON THE LEDGE 1, 2, 3
 Oil on canvas
 56 x 56 in. (each)
 2014

*"Nothing beside remains. Round the decay Of that colossal wreck,
boundless and bare The lone and level sands stretch far away."*

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822)



EMPRESS OF INDIA 1, 2, 3

Oil on canvas

57 x 89 in. (each)

2017



PREVIOUS PAGE:
FLYING CANS
Oil on canvas
59 x 89 in.
2018



THE LAST SUPPER — AT THE BAZAAR
Oil on canvas
59 x 148 in.
2014



THE LAST SUPPER - X
 Oil on canvas
 130 x 58 in.
 2020

NEXT PAGE:
 DRAWING 7
 Pencil on paper
 2024



THE REVOLUTIONARY
Oil on canvas
85 x 59 in.
2015

TRANSCENDENTAL CONSUMPTION: ICONOGRAPHY AND IRONY IN BELA GUPTA'S THE LAST SUPPER-X

Bela Gupta's *The Last Supper-X* is a provocative reimagining of Leonardo da Vinci's iconic fresco, *The Last Supper*. Gupta's reinterpretation is not merely a pastiche; it is a palimpsest that overlays the weight of contemporary culture onto the foundational fabric of Renaissance art. Gupta's choice of oil on canvas is itself a nod to traditional techniques, yet her execution is far from conventional.

The first element that strikes the observer is the insertion of modern, consumerist symbols in the form of soft drink cans, superimposed with animated characters in a celestial ballet. This juxtaposition serves a dual purpose: firstly, it reflects the omnipresence and, arguably, the idolatry of consumer culture which stands in contrast to the sanctity often associated with the original painting. Secondly, the playful nature of these animations contrasts sharply with the sombre mood of da Vinci's work, introducing an element of irony or satire. The characters appear to be in a state of dynamic motion, racing through space. The cans seem to orbit the central figure, suggesting both a halo effect and the encircling of commercialism around contemporary life's central narratives.

At the heart of the piece is the *tableaux vivant*, a reinterpreted version of da Vinci's gathering. Gupta's figures, although reminiscent of the original apostles, diverge significantly in their appearance, which could be interpreted as Gupta's commentary on the evolution of human forms and ideals. The faces are distorted, elongated, with a haunting quality that resonates with the alienation and existential angst of modern life. Their poses, however, still mimic the conversational groups da Vinci depicted, maintaining the original composition's dynamic.



DRAWING 10
Pencil on paper
2010

The central figure, analogous to Jesus, maintains an aura of calm amidst the chaos. Yet, the traditional halo is replaced with a stark light, possibly representing the harsh glare of public scrutiny in the digital age. There is a spill on the table, a vibrant red that stands out against the monochromatic tones of the figures and the cosmic background. This red spill might signify the spilling over of lifeblood or perhaps the permeation of commercialism into the sacred spaces of human interaction.

The background is a tapestry of cosmic imagery, suggesting the vastness of space and time beyond the immediacy of the human experience. It provides a commentary on the insignificance of man's earthly concerns in the grand scheme of the universe. The use of space as a backdrop also serves to universalize the themes of the painting, suggesting that the interplay of the sacred and the profane, the spiritual and the material, is not confined to any one time or place.

The composition is tied together by the trajectories of the animated cans, which trace a series of arcs and lines across the canvas. These could be read as the unseen forces of market dynamics that influence and guide human affairs, much like the hidden hand of providence was once thought to do. The use of vibrant, almost neon colours for these lines injects a sense of vitality, but also of artificiality, underscoring the constructed nature of consumer desires.

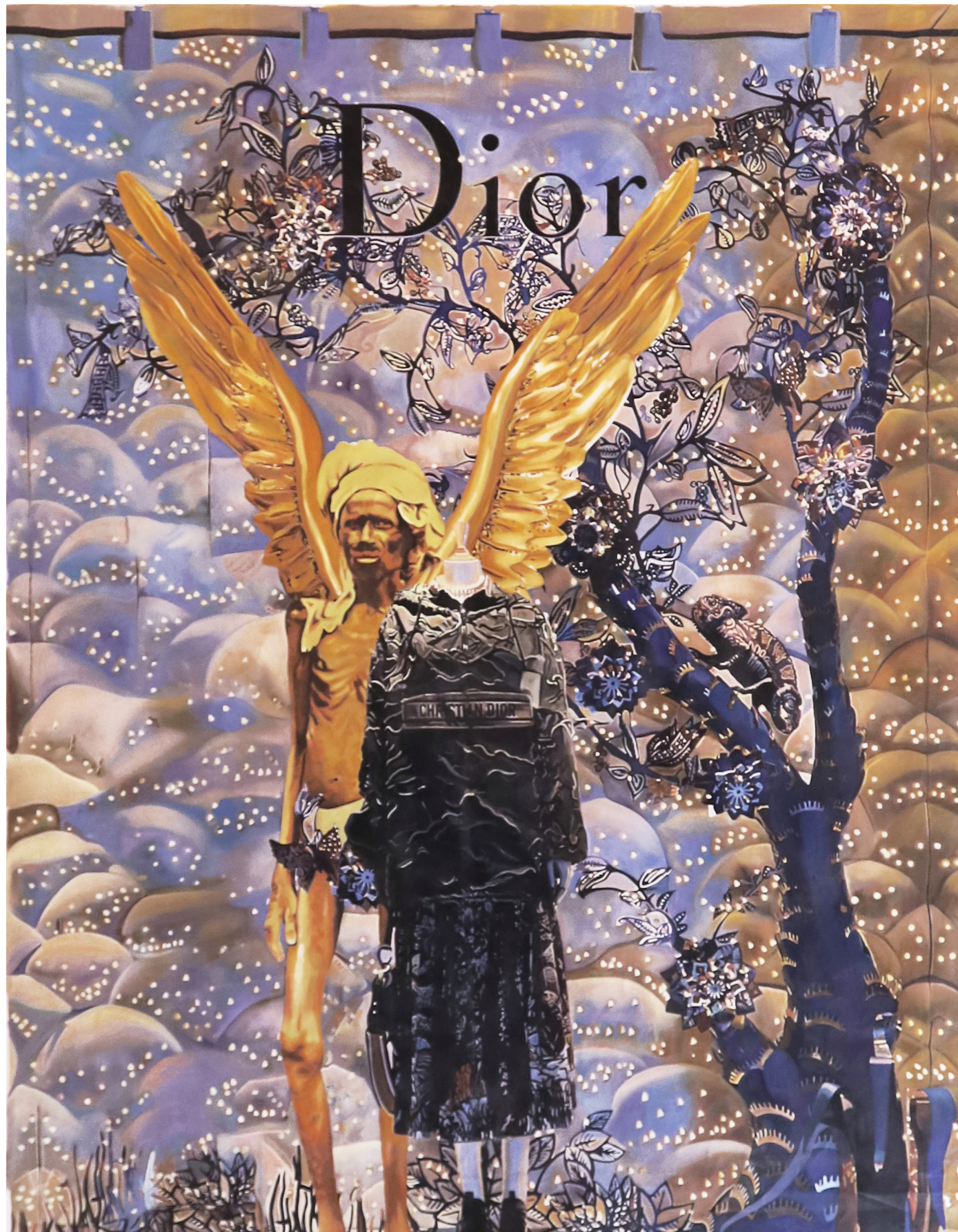
Bela Gupta's *The Last Supper-X* thus becomes a meditation on the tension between enduring human values and the ephemeral fascinations of contemporary culture. It is both a homage and a critique, a historical commentary and a contemporary indictment. The painting encourages the viewer to contemplate the role of tradition in a world where the sacred and the profane intermingle freely, and where commercial icons have attained a stature once reserved for religious ones. In its complexity and layering, the work is both a visual feast and an intellectual puzzle, demanding engagement on multiple levels and offering no easy resolutions.



THE BAZAAR AND BABA
Oil on canvas
130 x 58 in.
2017



COSMOS
Oil on canvas
58 x 100 in.
2018



Dior
Oil on canvas
72 x 98 in.
2019



SALVATION
Oil on canvas
57 x 99 in.
2022



STILL LIFE WITH PLASTIC FLOWERS
Oil on canvas
32 x 34 in.
2024



DRAWING 9
Pencil on paper
2024

‘As an example, one of my themes reflecting the plight of the land tiller in the Indian agrarian economy was influenced by the long conversations I had with my son who was involved in rural development and regeneration work in various parts of India. My work begins much before I enter my studio. I gather information by collecting newspaper cuttings, reading on the net and subsequently started tracing the plight of the farmer/peasant from the time of the British Raj to the present.’

Bela Gupta

STILL LIFE IN A HAVELI
Oil on canvas
33 x 42 in.
2023





DRAWING 2
Pencil on paper
2024



COKE BOTTLE WITH BURRWEFLIES
Mixed Media
2015



COKE BOTTLE WITH BURRWEFLIES
Mixed Media
2015



WESSEL AND THE MAGNETS
Oil on canvas
58 x 79 in.
2017

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