

BOOK READERS

Love on the Gutenberg Galaxy



Mumbiram & Party

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Distant Drummer
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Foreword

The world has always looked to India when a grave moral, spiritual or aesthetic crisis threatened to inundate human civilization. The world of art is presently experiencing such a crisis. Then again, art verily reflects the consciousness of a civilization.

We hear of auctions that bring staggering prices for art objects that have little or no meaning to, or impact on, our sensibilities. There exists no philosophy of aesthetics worth its name that can make sense out of the utter confusion that prevails. So auction houses, that have so far mainly dealt in antiques and curiosities from far away places and times, remain the only arbitrators of the relative worth of contemporary art objects, and by extension, contemporary art movements.

All this is creating waves of cynicism in the minds of art lovers (and would be art lovers) that threaten to dissipate all pleasure as well as enlightenment that we once expected out of Great Art.

Artist Mumbiram of India has brought Rasa Renaissance into the world of art. The Rasa Theory of Aesthetic Appreciation is a well-explored theory that has been prevalent in appreciation of classical Sanskrit Literature. The quality of emotional fulfilment that an artistic creation brings about is Rasa.

Mumbiram is the prime mover of the Personalist Movement in philosophy and art. Rasa is where human beings are. Rasa is all about nuances of human emotions.

Beyond any doubt Mumbiram is the most literary of our contemporary painters. Mumbiram's paintings abound in references to great classics. What is more - Books appear importantly even in the sensuous erotic works of Mumbiram. They play the same intimate role in arousal of amorous feelings in young hearts as say the Sandalwood Scented Wind from the Malaya Mountain or the Cacophony of Cuckoos in the Spring Season, or Hordes of Bumblebees Lusting After Honey.

The "Book Readers, Love on the Gutenberg Galaxy" captures the noble and global ideals that inspire this artist. Love is the constitutional rasa in Mumbiram's poems as well as paintings. Here we see book reading as a very intimate sentimental experience, a blissful amorous happening that is ecstatic to all, crossing all cultural, ethnic or age barriers.

Here books are rivers of rasa. Even demigods shower carnations on those who conjure such literary incarnations. Hibiscuses, peacock feathers, drums, paintbrushes, flutes, the mountains, the stars, the steeple of a church, a pair of oil-lamps. Such is the variety of paraphernalia Mumbiram's book-readers are seen with.

The elegant simple lines of the artist conjure a variety of emotional and romantic situations that we all are familiar with. Far from being redundant, the titles along with the paintings lead one to noble heights of realization that summon ecstatic memories and déjà-vus. Here Books and Book Readers have a distinct angelic aura.

This catalogue includes various other artworks by Mumbiram. All together they reveal the literary artist, that he is. It includes also a selection of Mumbiram's 'In his own words', giving deep insights into the creative process of a Rasa Artist and the aesthetic perceptions of society.

Books are certainly the most peculiar facet of the human civilization of our planet. Indeed not all galaxies may have such civilizations inhabiting them. Yet Love as we know is truly universal. This ensemble of 22 charcoal renderings from Mumbiram's prolific repertoire is about Books, Love, Love of Books and Books of Love.

The series is very aptly called Love on the Gutenberg Galaxy.

**Welcome all Book-Lovers !
Welcome all Art Lovers !
Welcome all True Lovers !
Welcome to Our Galaxy.**

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संसारेऽस्मिन्नसारे परिणतितरले द्वे गती पण्डितानाम्
तत्त्वज्ञानामृताम्भःप्लवललितधियाम् यातु कालः कदाचित् ॥
नोचेत् मुग्धाङ्गनानाम् स्तनजघनभराभोगसम्भोगिनीनाम्
स्थूलोपस्थस्थलीषु स्थगितकरतलस्पर्शलीलोद्यतानाम् ॥

*“In this material world that is so very devoid of
Rasa, there are only two worthwhile interests
for the enlightened Pundit: Either passing time
sporting on the waves of the ocean of philosoph-
ical and spiritual quest, or leisurely caressing the
well-endowed anatomy of young and innocent
damsels with beautiful breasts and thighs that
are anxious and eager for amorous union.”*

(Bhartrihari)

Titles, Captions and Deja-vu's

A good book is always replete with deja-vu experiences for the reader. According to great sages and prophets, the Vrindaavan paradigm of love and dalliance of cowherd boys and girls in a rustic setting is the primal reservoir of all deja-vu experiences.

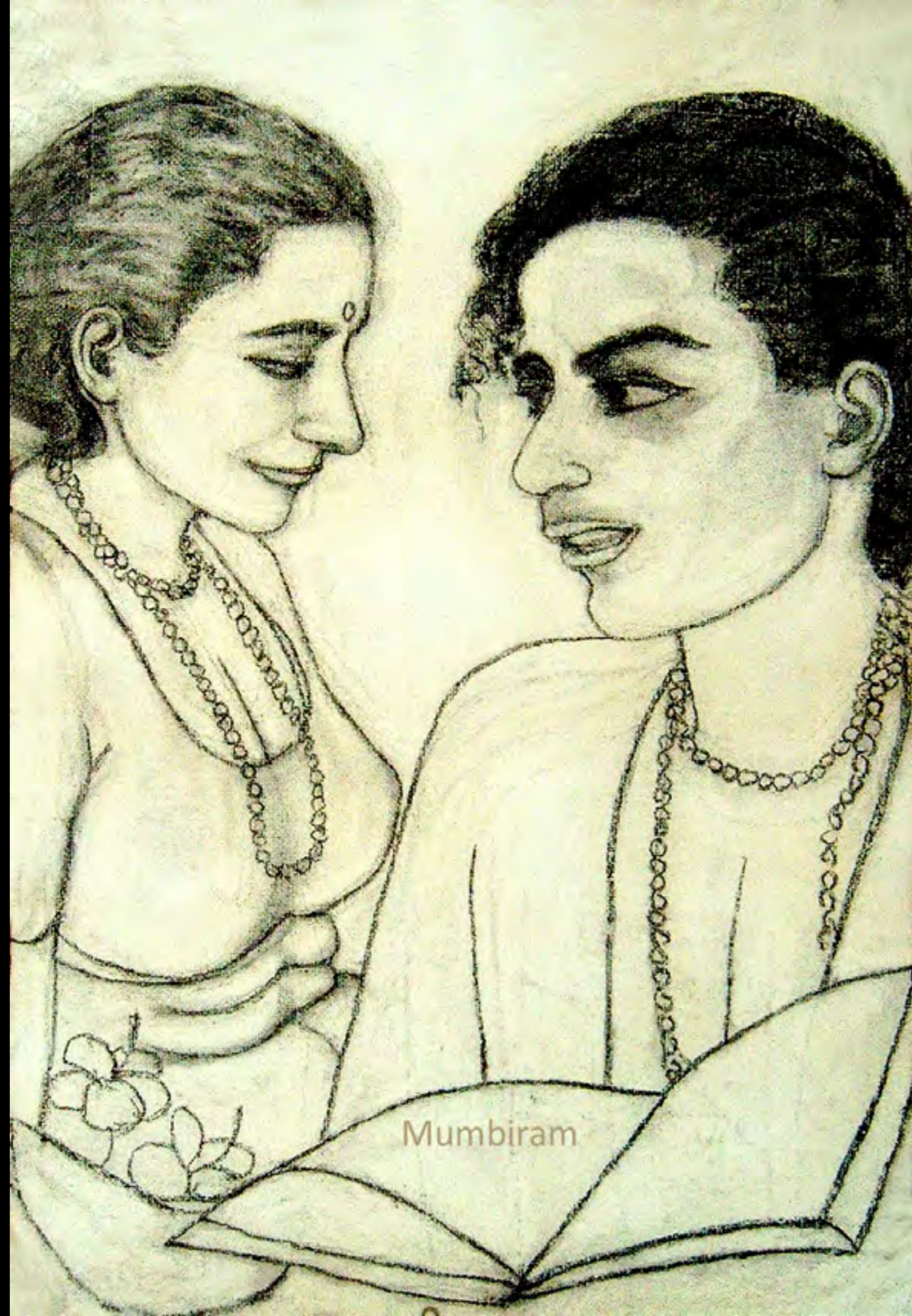
Mumbiram's art also has this same haunting quality. Imagine, the extended captions that appear opposite the pictures of the book-readers in this ensemble are excerpts from the books that they are reading. Then we have a deja-vu in a deja-vu experience.

The captions to the book-readers are selected excerpts of "Vrindavan Diaries", Mumbiram's translation of a little known manuscript in Vraja dialect that is spoken around Vrindavan where Krishna sported 5000 years ago.

For titles of the book-readers in Mumbiram's Galaxy see the last page of this catalog.

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In the middle of the night Gopeshwar Mahadeo appeared before Rupa Goswami in a dream and said, "Tell us some Leelas of Love and the Beloved." So Rupa Goswami said with folded hands, "Maharaj, this Leela is very Confidential. Very few are qualified to taste that Nectar." Upon which Gopeshwarji insisted saying, "When the Mango tree blossoms the Koel goes into ecstasy. The miserable camel cannot relish it and perishes. So have no qualms, sing the Leelas of Love and the Beloved without any hesitation."



Mumbiram

“Nandimukhi you have indeed attained Perfection! You are attached to loving devotional service. So now you go to Barsana in Raja Vrishabhanu’s retinue and meet Radha’s sakhi Vishakha who is my life and soul. Tell Vishakha I am telling so. She should make a picture of Krsna and show it to Radha to arouse her love. Why? Because Krsna’s looks are so adorable that Radha will be enchanted. Tell this to dear Vishakha in Barsana, then you go to the forest where Krsna is sporting the Leela of Tending Cows. You go there and say Radha’s name in Krsna’s ears. Why? Because that will immediately make Krsna feel affectionate towards Radha. Why? Because when Krsna hears Radha’s name he will forget all his games and his playing and everything else.”



Purnamasiji retired to her thatched hut after having Krsna hear Radharani's name and having kindled immense feelings of Love in Separation. Krsna put his arm on the shoulder of his friend Shridama and said, "Ever since I heard Radha-ji's name, a moment without her is appearing like a millenium to me. I am feeling intoxicated with feelings of love, therefore, I am asking you this. Tell me when was the last time you saw Radha with your eyes?" So Shridama spoke to him laughingly. You see Radha is Shridama's sister so he is the closest that Krsna has to his beloved Radha. Whenever Krsna cannot be with Radha he speaks with Shridama and somehow passes time. Then Thakurji went and sat at a lonely spot in the bowers. There he meditated upon Radha. Immersed in her Love he became greatly agitated. Then he put his lips on his Murali and began to resound the bowers with Radha's name.



As soon as Vishakha heard this, she made a very beautiful picture of Krsna. Then she approached Radhaji with a big smile on her face. So Radhaji asked her, "Well, well. What have you got with you today that you are smiling so much!" So Vishakha says to her, "Come with me somewhere alone. I want to show you something extraordinary." Radhaji got up from the retinue of her Sakhis and went into the house with Vishakha alone. Vishakha showed her the picture of Krsna. No sooner did Radha set her eyes on that picture of Krsna than she took the picture to her bosom and collapsed on the ground saying, "Ha, Ha, Krsna." She began to breathe heavily. A continuous stream of tears began to flow from her eyes. She was perspiring profusely all over her body.

Mumbiram in his Own Words

(Some Collected Quotations)

“Aesthetic Attraction or repulsion is a primal force. It cannot be explained in terms of anything more basic. Disregard of beauty is a sure sign of moral degradation.”

“We all negotiate Aesthetic Gravitation together. There are no extra expectations out of the Artist.”

*“What does art do for poor people?
Same as a does for the rich. Doesn't bread do it.”*

*“Art mitigates dizziness caused by fields of Aesthacy.
It is a compact renewable source.
The Aesthetic Gravity Machine.”*

“The offerings here are series of deja-vu's - the mysterious feeling of having passed thorough an identical situation before. Drama of the human situation is what fascinates me the most. Anybody is free to construct their own stories around these pictures. If you can relate to even just one of these, I have scored.”

“Abstraction is deletion of detail that is a hindrance to expression and communion. This is natural abstraction. Then there is synthetic abstraction where you build up meaning by Juxtaposition of Symbols. I have produced a series of these when I lived in a Warli Adivasi Village near Dahanu.”

“The personal realm is infinitely richer than the impersonal realm. Stripped of our ethnicities we are all beautiful belly-buttons. Psychologists say our mind works in the framework of a repertoire of archetypes. These are archetypes of a transculture ethos.”

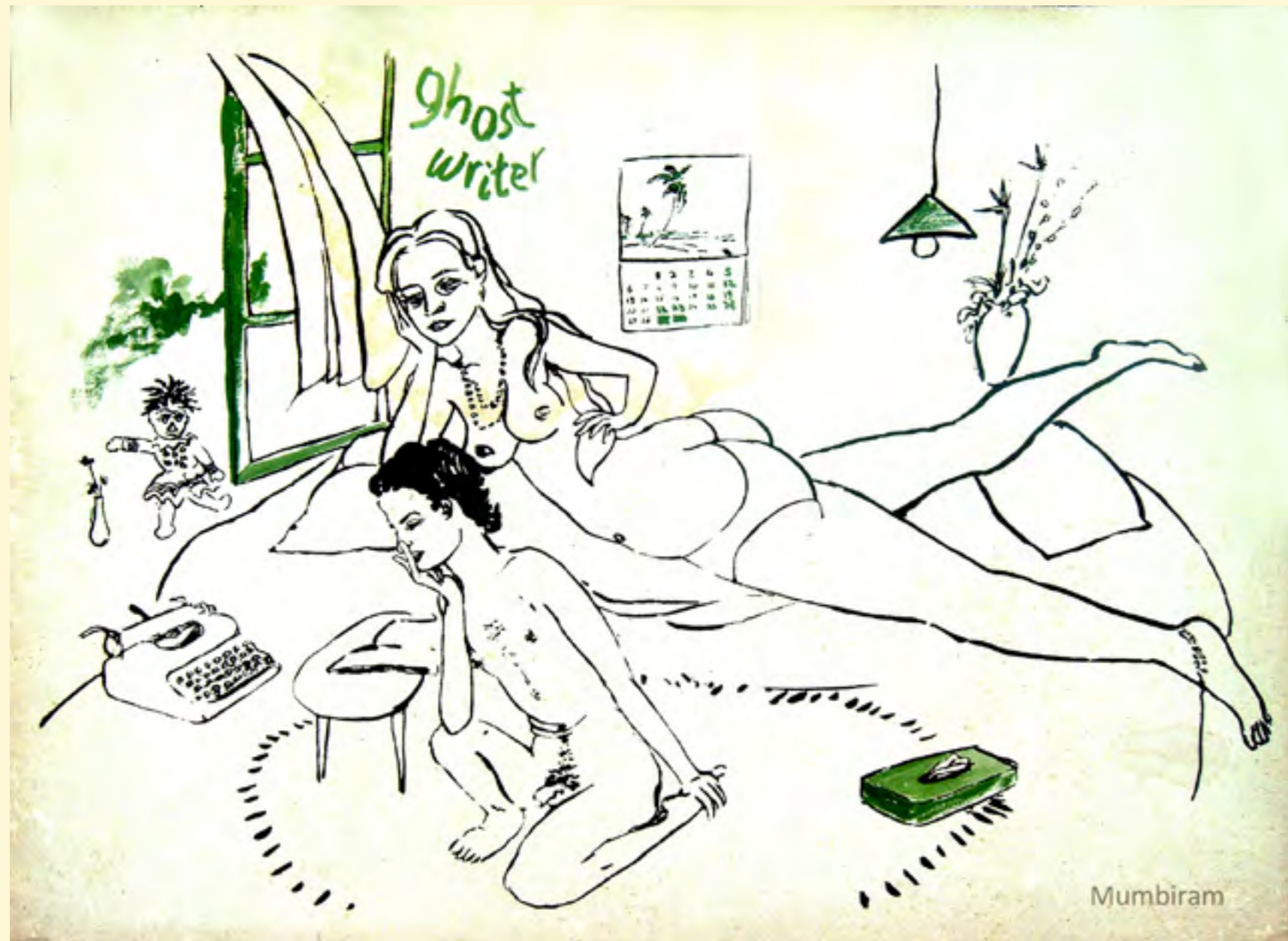
“During my 12 years in America I investigated the three E’s of modern age. Electronics, Economics and Aesthetics. I don’t buy the scarcity myth on which all economic theories are based. Resourcefulness of the spirit is unbounded. Electronic communication has shrunk time and space, yet the cultural divide is getting wider. Everybody is fighting for his own separate corner. Now is the time to tune up our Aesthetic Antennas and relish the inundating diversity of human relationships.”

*“Art is to bridge the gap
between the space age and the bow- and - arrow age.
Art is to bridge the gap between east and west.
Art is to bridge the gap between man and woman.”*



“Vyaasa’s despondency”

Vyaasa, the compiler of the Vedas of antiquity was feeling despondent even after composing the Epic Mahabharat. Narada, his preceptor advised him to write the devotional Shrimad Bhagavatam. Mumbiram made this pastel rendering on cheap Manila paper during his stay in the barn on Angela’s farm at Potomac, Maryland (1977).



*“An artist is different only in that he is more of a participating voyeur. He is listening to a distant cuckatoo.
He is popularising sanity.”*

“An Artist identifies the archetypes of the evolving ethos. Give me 10 good artists and I will make dollar equal to a rupee.”

“Indians are dreadfully unaware of the none-such beauty of the Indian man and the Indian woman. Hussein leaves his faces blank. But the winds of change are already here. Even in films the meaty boneless faces are giving way to angular intelligent faces.”

“The Ghost Writer” comes through the window like Peter Pan and writes the school projects of young adolescent college girls that like to lounge and read but cannot write like Pete. Limited Edition screenprint made in 1982 is nostalgic about Mumbiram's days in Berkeley in the sixties.



"Mandai Madonna" is reading while her toddler fusses with her. You see the top of the improbable towering structure that the English built for a vegetable market. This is one of the limited edition screen prints that Mumbiram made in 1982.

"You recognise some of these faces in my paintings. I have used them to introduce several hithertofore unrepresented types. Life is one long deja-vu. We all fail in love at least 10 times a day."

"I have nothing against language. Titles cannot limit a good painting. Word has power but form has magic."

"Personalism is a frontal attack on materialism on the aesthetic front. India is the last and now the first bastion of Personalism. This is a place where even clouds are addressed as persons. Personalism leaves no room for the 'existential void'."

"I am bringing into the purview of Art faces and situations heretofore neglected. I am evolving indigenous archetypes."

“My canvas is a window on life. The persons on the other side are so close you could touch them. As for myself, I am the painting. The pursuit of art is a strange penance. The artist works to quench the thirst of many, in his own life he is running after a mirage.”

“A sovereign artist bends style at will. But there is a method in the madness. That is style.”

“I do not want to produce art that is created for and used as objects of interior decoration for the wealthy and affected.”

“Art should inspire the human mind towards visions of an ideal world that is in the realm of possibilities for the human society.”



“Don't burn the body of the poet, he was burning all his life. Don't shower flowers upon it, he was blossoming all his life.”

Pune poet Manmohan's famous lines inspired this vision of two admirers of the poet. (1982)



“Artist in the Kunja” was made during happy days in a beach-village in Raigad District. The little toy-like figure staring at you is Lord Jagannath. (2004)

“We all experience that there exists a very natural and healthy mutual attraction between opposites. Cultural as well as bodily diversity can lead to most creative and fascinating unions of individuals... Great art celebrates the material diversity yet brings out the transcending universality of human experience ... Without such lofty art illuminating the social fabric there is no possibility of either peace or love.”

“Most of my work has a context from Krishna Katha. Yet the solo portraits also stand very well on their own. It is simply exhilarating to make live portraits of some of the most amazing neglected beauties of folk India. It takes a lot of purity and integrity of the heart to be able to establish a rapport with them and inspire them to participate in this most ennobling endeavour. It is like discovering a star. Sometimes a whole constellation. It was all there all the time but was not noticed nor celebrated like the proverbial peacock dancing in the forest.”

“When you buy a painting from an artist you are doing much more than acquiring an art object for your private pleasure. You are joining an aesthetic movement. Further, you are under-