



# Twists and turns of a restless obsessive

A new exhibition, book and lecture explore the work of innovative Indian artist Lancelot Ribeiro who lived in NW3 for 60 years

**T**he Indian artist Lancelot Ribeiro was an obsessive painter who never tired of innovation. "If he was ever away from his paints, he would become extremely restless," says his daughter Marsha. "He would paint through the night, often sleeping at eight or nine in the morning."

A diary scribbling that she found after his death in 2010 encapsulated it for her: "I twist and turn, curve and straighten without aim or result," he wrote. "Just an escape, an escapist thing into painting impulsively, compulsively, endlessly, tired, tirelessly with or without joy."

This approach gave rise to the title of an acclaimed retrospective of his work, *Restless Ribeiro*, at Asia House in 2013. Initially drawing on his Goan-Indian heritage and Roman Catholic background, he painted abstracts, landscapes, portraits and still lifes. His fertile imagination prompted canvases filled with spiky townscapes, gorgeously coloured surreal scenes, disturbing heads, flying landscapes and playful wood sculptures.

A new exhibition of his paintings Lancelot Ribeiro: An Artist in India and Europe, is at



■ **Untitled 1983 by Lancelot Ribeiro**

the Grosvenor Gallery in Mayfair. It coincides with two launches for an eponymous monograph (Francis Boutle Publishers £20) by the journalist and arts writer David Buckman. This is an

illuminating account of Ribeiro's achievements and reversals, his singular personality and often exhilarating work.

Buckman will give an illustrated lecture at the second launch,

at Burgh House in Hampstead, on Wednesday. Images include watercolours of the Heath, as pictured, some of which will be in a new Ribeiro exhibition at Burgh House next summer. This will include archival material from the 1950s onwards about his life in Hampstead, local galleries and schemes beneficial to artists offered by Camden which have long since disappeared.

Ribeiro first lived in the area in 1950 when he stayed with his half-brother, the painter FN Souza, in Chalk Farm while studying accountancy. He was to drop this eventually in favour of life-drawing classes at St Martins School of Art, followed by a brief stint in the RAF before returning home to Bombay. There Ribeiro became a professional painter in 1958.

After successes with shows in India and an international touring exhibition, in 1962 he settled in London with his wife, living first in Belsize Park then for 30 years on Haverstock Hill. He participated in Camden's Picture Loan Scheme, was an eloquent advocate for Indian artists and exhibited widely. A large retrospective at the Swiss Cottage Library in 1987 was opened by Labour MP Tony Banks.

In an obituary for the Independent, Buckman noted that during the early years after Ribeiro's return to London, his paintings were similar to FN Souza's. "Francis, preoccupied with a hectic social life, would sometimes leave works unfinished, allowing Lance to complete them," he says. "Then Francis would add his spiky signature."

Ribeiro's painting changed direction because of his desire to work at speed. He tried fast-drying Polyvinyl Acetates (PVAs) then being used for commercial paints and recorded his findings. Buckman says that these largely unrecognised pigment experiments led to works of peculiar brilliance and transparency. He believes that if Ribeiro had applied for a patent, he would have been a rich man.

The launch for David Buckman's book *Lancelot Ribeiro: An artist in India and Europe* and his lecture is at Burgh House, New End Square NW3 on April 29 and begins at 7pm. Free.

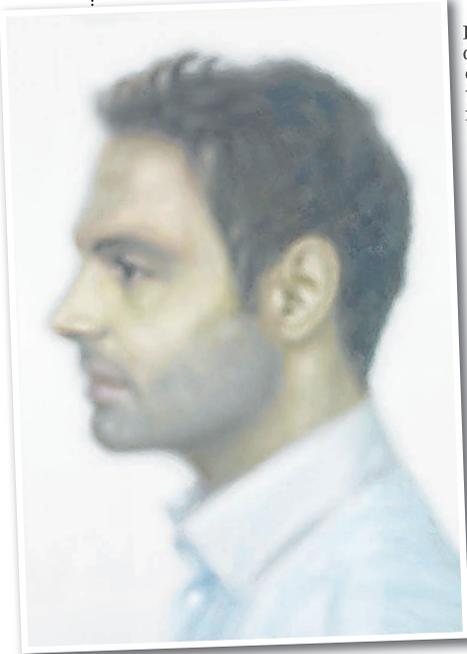
■ **The exhibition runs until May 8 at 21 Ryder Street, SW1. Monday to Friday 9.30am to 5.30pm and on Saturday noon to 4pm by appointment only; phone 020 7484 7979 or email [art@grosvenorgallery.com](mailto:art@grosvenorgallery.com).**

## Gauzy portraits reflect sitters in meditation

Some things that are better left unsaid can nevertheless be shown, argued the Austrian-British philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. This is offered as an insight into the paintings of Iranian artist YZ Kami by Robert Storr in his perceptive catalogue essay for the latest exhibition at the Gagosian Gallery.

There are three strands to this exhibition, reflecting Kami's preoccupations. In terms of the number of works, his gauzy, sfumato portraits predominate. Storr observes: "A tender wonderment emanates from the soft-focus, fine-grained brushwork of Kami's pictures, as if the artist – and, vicariously, the viewer – were exploring the surface with his fingertips."

Based on his photographs of family, friends and strangers, they depict faces as vessels to convey an atmosphere of reflection, often with eyes closed in meditation. *Daya in Profile*, is the first side view, inspired by his first sight of the sitter



and a profile portrait by Cezanne that he much admires: "The ear is very prominent, but the way he painted it, the ear looks like a flower."

On entering the gallery the draw is *Black Dome I*, one of the quasi-architectural abstractions that Kami created as

companions to his portraits. Of these Storr writes: "Composed of nested concentric rings of brick-like lozenges that evoke the domes and cupolas of churches, mosques, and temples, these panels are dilating and contracting mandalas or the contemplation of unfettered minds."

Kami explains the *Black Dome* paintings in terms of a dark state of being during acts of transformation or journeys towards light. He cites the nigredo phase of alchemy and the dark night of the soul of Catholicism.

The third element of this thought-provoking exhibition is the depiction of hands joined in supplication, a common action spanning faiths and an iconic image of Durer. Storr suggests that the essence of this gesture is the circumstance in which a body closes the sensory loop upon itself so the mind does the same.

■ **YZ Kami: Paintings until May 30 at 6-24 Britannia Street, King's Cross, Tuesday to Saturday 10am to 6pm.**

■ **Daya in Profile 2014 by YZ Kami. © YZ Kami. Courtesy Gagosian Gallery. Photography by Robert McKeever.**

## Darkness beneath dance of life



To commemorate Yom Ha Shoah, also known as Holocaust Remembrance Day, which this year fell on April 15, Ivy House in Golders Green has an exhibition by the talented artist Barbara Jackson. Titled *Dance of Life* (The Story of a German Jewish Family), it has paintings (like *A Day at the Races* pictured) etchings and mixed media works that tell the story of her family's life in Germany before 1935.

Both parents were born there, in places now within Poland. Her father served in the German air force in the First World War and was awarded the Iron Cross. After hearing Goebbels speak in 1934, he became convinced his homeland was not safe for Jews. His mother and sister stayed and perished in the camps but his brother fought in the French underground and

survived. After coming to Britain, her father worked at Marks & Spencer, eventually as manager at the Kilburn branch. In the war he joined the Royal Pioneer Corps and afterwards formed an export/import company and sold textiles to Liberty and Heals. Barbara was born here and studied at St Martins School of Art.

Her aim for *Dance of Life* is to convey the good life, financial security and the feeling that her parents and their generation in Germany felt to be "proud Germans of the Jewish persuasion". Some works contain an uneasy feeling of the darkness to come.

■ **Until May 14 at 94-96 North End Road NW11. For opening times visit [www.jw3.org.uk](http://www.jw3.org.uk) or phone 020 7433 8988.**