

Christiane Durand

men and gods



Many thanks to everyone who participated
in the elaboration of this exhibition,
to the institutions that host it, and to my friends.

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A Midsummer Night's Dream

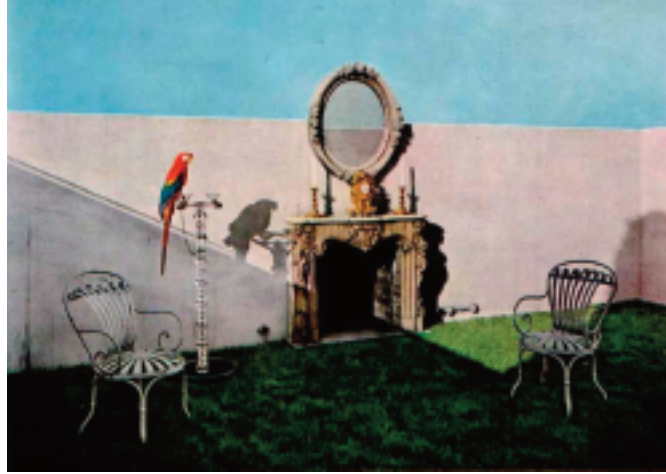
A passage to India

That beginning of January, my scholarly friend, the Master Viswanadhan had invited me and a few other intimate friends to visit the immense park surrounding his beautiful Castle of Cholamandal. That night, came a dream – my questions and Christiane Durand's answers: The gods encountered during our stay on a temple detour, the avatars of the Indies route, those of Christiane Durand, and of the Paris peasant that I am, all intervened! In my dream, the images of the shared gods and of her models, their production, the intertwined narratives, and the emergence of her paintings linked to different times and different places, jostled against my own avatars: The Scottish town planner Patrick Geddes and his 1915 *Report on the Towns in the Madras Presidency*, and his friend Rabindranath Tagore, who dedicated one of his Lipika poems to him. Was it a dream? Between the book and the lamp, ignorant and uneducated about India, my fantastic architect's library merrily collided with the painter's colorful mythology. Carried away by her words, I was becoming, in spite of myself, Tagore's parrot under the protection of the king: Viswanadhan, our host! A gentle alarm clock: *the dry pages of books made a rumbling and rustling noise.*

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1

There was once a bird that was stupid. It sang songs but did not know how to read the sacred books. It jumped, it flew about, but it knew no rules or etiquette.



The king said, "Such a bird is of no use; on the other hand as it feeds on wild fruit it serves no purpose for the royal fruit-market."

He called his ministers and said "The bird should be educated".

The painter and her models: Madhu Basu, Christiane and Eléonore Brandon, Miguel Egaña, François Jeune, Anna-Belle, Gilles et Titine Lécuyer, Dominique Mercy, Annelise Morawski, Arnold Pasquier, Catherine Roseau, Roland Ropars, Nadine Tarbouriech, Viswanadhan.

2

The pundits sat around to express their opinions. The question was, what was the reason of such ignorance on the part of the above mentioned bird?

The solution arrived at was that the nest which the bird built for itself with bits of dried straw was not the place for acquiring much knowledge. So that the first thing that was needed was a cage that should be suitably built.

The selection of gods: 10 avatars of Vishnu, *papier-mâché* statuettes purchased at the Khadi Gramodyog Bhavan in Madras: The fish Matsya, the turtle Kuma, the boar Varaha, the lion-man Nrisimha, the dwarf Vamana, the fighter-prince Parashi-Rama, the hero Rama-Chandra, the ruthless warrior Krishna, the closest being to the Bouddha gods, the "end of the world" – Kalki, certain Egyptian gods, others without representation, and the "lord of the divinity troops", Ganesh.

3

The goldsmith started to build a golden cage. It was such an extraordinary cage that people came crowding from all places for learning. Other said, "Even if the bird does not learn anything it has at least the cage. How lucky the bird is!" A pundit came to teach the bird. Sniffing his snuff he remarked, "This is not the work of merely a few books!"

The nephews then sent for the script-writers. They came and copied books and then copied the already copied books until the accumulated books were mountain high. Whoever saw them said "Most admirable! Knowledge has no limits!"

The script-writers accepted remunerations which were piled up on a bullock's back. They wasted no time to hurry back home. Their days of hardship were over.

The nephews kept a constant watch over this expensive cage. There was always some repairing to be done and moreover when people noticed the elaborate method of dusting it, wiping it and polishing it, they remarked, "This, no doubt, progress!"

Avatar, Sanscrit *avatara*. In the Indian religion, descent of a god to earth, and in particular, the incarnations of Vishnu. Metamorphosis, transformation.

4

The work may be lacking in many other things, but critics who abound, are many. They said, "The cage is improving, but nobody seems to know what's happening to the bird!"

This reached to king's ears. He called one of his nephews and asked, "Dear nephew, what is this I hear?"

The nephew replied, "Your Majesty, if you want to know the truth, send for the goldsmith, the pundits, the script-writers and also the people who do the repair-work and the supervisors. The fault-finders are starving, that is why they must criticise!"

The avatars of the Indies route, the meeting of the gods, the temples: Injambakkam, Mahabalipuram, Tirukkalikundram, Kanchipuram, Chidambaram, Kum-bakonam, Darasuram, Tanjore and Gangaikondachita.

5

The king expressed his wish that he would himself like to see this method of teaching which was so vigorously in practice. One day accompanied by his ministers, friends, and advisers, he came to visit the pupil.

The pundits at the top of their voice, shaking the tufts of hair on their otherwise shaved heads, started chanting the auspicious slokas.

The king was pleased, and as he stepped out the entrance to get up on the elephant.

He went back and saw the pundit and said, "How do you teach the bird, I must see the method!"

He saw it. He was extremely pleased. The method was so much greater than the bird itself that the bird

was barely noticeable. It seemed there was no urgency that the bird should be seen. The king was convinced that there was no lack of preparations anywhere. There was no gram, no water in the cage, but page after page was being torn from stacks of piled-up books and with the pointed end of a pen they were shoved down the bird's throat. Its song was utterly smothered and there was not even the tiniest gap through which the bird's cry, if there was any, could be audible. It was an astonishing affair!

"Converstation pieces"? The modern light of the unusual.

6

Day by day the bird appeared more and more lifeless conforming to all rules of civilised respectability. And yet due to an innate habit, the bird would look up to the morning light, and would unreasonably try to flutter its wings. Sometimes it was even seen that its thin beak would try to bite off the bars of the cage.

The police said, "This is the height of misbehaviour!" Thereupon at the place where learning was in progress the blacksmith appeared with his furnace and hammers. There went on a drastic hammering. An iron chain was made, the bird's wing were also clipped.

All the far and near relatives of the king with solemn looks, shook their heads as they passed their opinion, "In this kingdom the birds have not only no sense, they are also grateful."

Then the pundits, with a pen in one hand and a piecing rod in the other issued forth such rules that could only be justified in the name of education!

Rediscover childhood dimensions. At a certain moment before falling asleep, the imagination some-

times succeeds. Suddenly, everything is there once more: "A child sees everything with novelty; he is always exhilarated. Nothing more resembles what we call inspiration than the joy with which a child absorbs color and form... A genius has solid nerves; those of a child are weak. In one, reason has a major role; in the other, sensitivity occupies almost the entire being. But genius is nothing more than unlimited rediscovered childhood: It is presently a gifted childhood in order to express oneself, one of virile organs and of an analytic mind that enables one to organize the sum of involuntarily accumulated matter" – Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life*.

7

The bird died. Exactly when nobody was able to say. The king called his nephew and asked, "Dear nephew, what is this I hear?"

The nephew replied, "Your Majesty, the bird received a complete education."

The bird was brought over. With it came the policeman, the footman, the men on horse-back. The king felt the bird with his hand. It made no sound, either hushed or loud. Only the dry pages of books made a rumbling and rustling noise in its stomach.

Then Christiane Durand, announcing that all her work's secrets were now revealed, set off for Chola-mandal, where a merry dinner soon brought all of us together.

Philippe Duboÿ, *Le perroquet de Geddes*

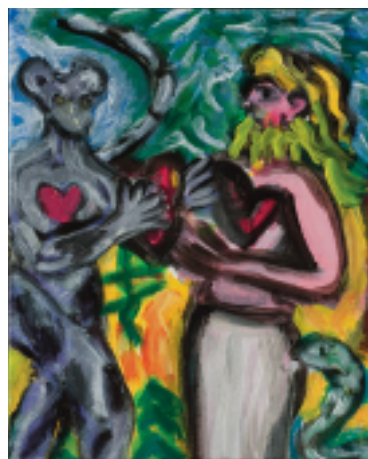
Translation Marta Rosenquist



Agitation about creation
2009-2010
acrylic on canvas
115 x 200 cm



As a family party
2010
acrylic on canvas
89 x 116 cm



Hanuman and Jesus Christ
exchanging hearts
2009
acrylic on canvas
27 x 22 cm



Sherif-Shiva
2010
acrylic on canvas
81 x 106 cm



Sacred snake
2010
acrylic on canvas
22 x 27 cm



Kindergarten
2009-2010
acrylic on canvas
115 x 200 cm



Olympus
2009-2010
acrylic on canvas
115 x 200 cm



Mythological scene
2009
acrylic on canvas
81 x 106 cm

Satyavati and the ascetic
2010
acrylic on canvas
27 x 22 cm



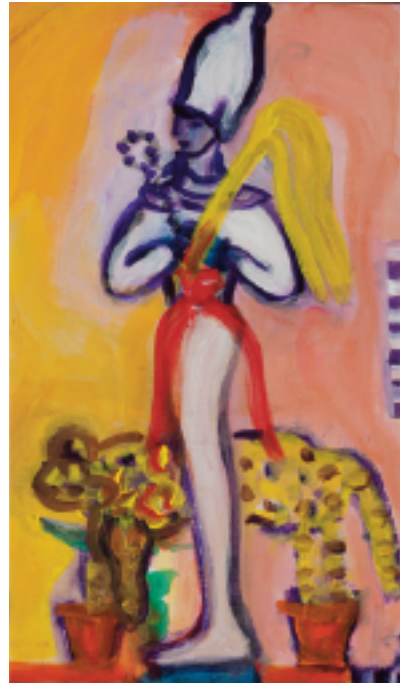
In transit
2010
acrylic on canvas
100 x 86 cm



Alliance with Osiris
2010
acrylic on canvas
100 x 162 cm



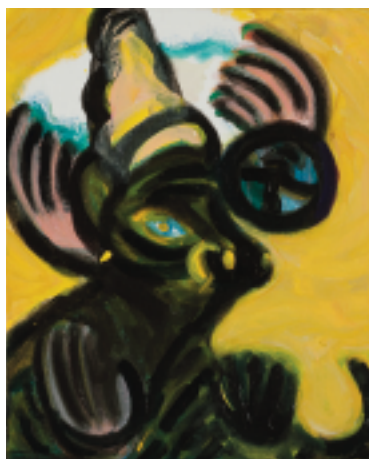
Catherine Roseau
2009
acrylic on canvas
41 x 24 cm



Osiris
2010
acrylic on canvas
41 x 24 cm



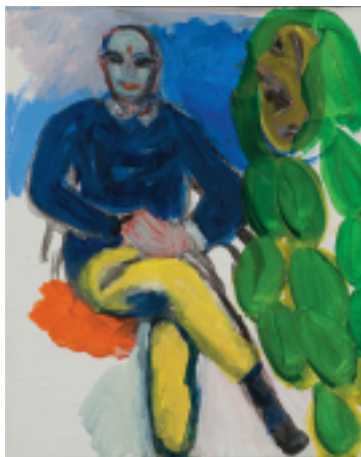
Nirvana
2010
acrylic on canvas
73 x 105 cm



Varaha
2009
acrylic on canvas
27 x 22 cm



Hide and seek
2009
acrylic on canvas
89 x 116 cm



Vishnu Ropars
2010
acrylic on canvas
27 x 22 cm



Double meditation
2009-2010
acrylic on canvas
115 x 200 cm



Born in 1948 in Albi, lives in Paris, France

Solo Exhibitions

2010

men and gods, Alliance française, Bengaluru (India)
men and gods, Cholamandal Centre for Contemporary Art, Chennai (India)

2009

Conversations, Fondation COLAS, Paris

2008

Sculptures, Musée d'art et d'histoire, Hôtel Beurnier-Rossel, Monbéliard (France)
Sculptures exquises, Galerie Darthea Speyer, Paris

2005

Conversations, Galerie Darthea Speyer, Paris
Conversations, Centre de Recherche et d'Actions Culturelles, Valence (France)

2003

Les énigmes des rêves, Galerie Darthea Speyer, Paris

2001

Portraits, Institut français, Hamburg (Germany)
A travers les sables, Galerie Darthea Speyer, Paris

1998

Misonorme, Centre Bradford, Aussillon (France)

1997

Les insectes, Galerie Darthea Speyer, Paris

1996

Portraits, Galerie im Kulturamt, Saarbrücken (Germany)

1995

Les insectes, Sala exposicions Sant Joan, Lleida (Spain)

1994

Les nourritures terrestres, Galerie Darthea Speyer, Paris
La passion de l'autre, Galerie Geiselhart, Reutlingen (Germany)

1993

La passion de l'autre, Institut français, Aachen (Germany)
Le jeu de modèle et de son artiste, Centre Bradford, Aussillon (France)
La passion de l'autre, Institut français, Mainz (Germany)

1991

Les travestissements, Galerie Darthea Speyer, Paris

1986

Venus et Olympia, (paintings/photographies),
Les hommes, (pastel drawings/photographies), Centre culturel franco-italien, Torino (Italy)

1985

Venus et Olympia, (paintings/photographies), *Les hommes* (pastel drawings/photographies), Galerie Polaris, Paris

1982

Les Icares, Centre culturel de l'abbaye des Prémontrés, Pont-à-Mousson (France)

1981

Les Zébrés, Galerie Divergence, Metz (France)
Les Etrusques, Kunstverein, Bochum (Germany)
Les Icares, Galerie l'Œil, Forbach (France)

1980

Etrusques et Icares, Galerie Maier-Hahn, Düsseldorf (Germany)

1979

Abstractions, Cité internationale des arts, Paris

1978

Abstractions, Cité internationale des arts, Paris

Selected Group Exhibitions

2009

Adam et Eve, Biennale de sculpture d'Yerres (France)
Art Protects, Galerie Yvon Lambert, Paris

2008

VISIONS, «Le 19», CRAC, Montbéliard (France)
La collection de la galerie Darthea Speyer en trois temps..., Galerie Darthea Speyer, Paris
Mutations, 15 peintures de la série des «Insectes» CRAC, Château du Tremblay, Fontenoy (France)

2007

Art Protects, Galerie Yvon Lambert, Paris

2004-2005

Interprétations de George Sand, Musée de Châteauroux (France)

2004

Tête à Tête, Musée Ingres, Montauban (France)
Et la femme créa l'homme, Espace Belleville, Paris

2003

Galerie Darthea Speyer, Paris

2002

Galerie Darthea Speyer, Paris

2000

Galerie Darthea Speyer, Paris

Cholamandal Centre for Contemporary Art
Chennai (India)
August 21th–29th, 2010

Alliance française
Bengaluru (India)
September 3th–14th, 2010