

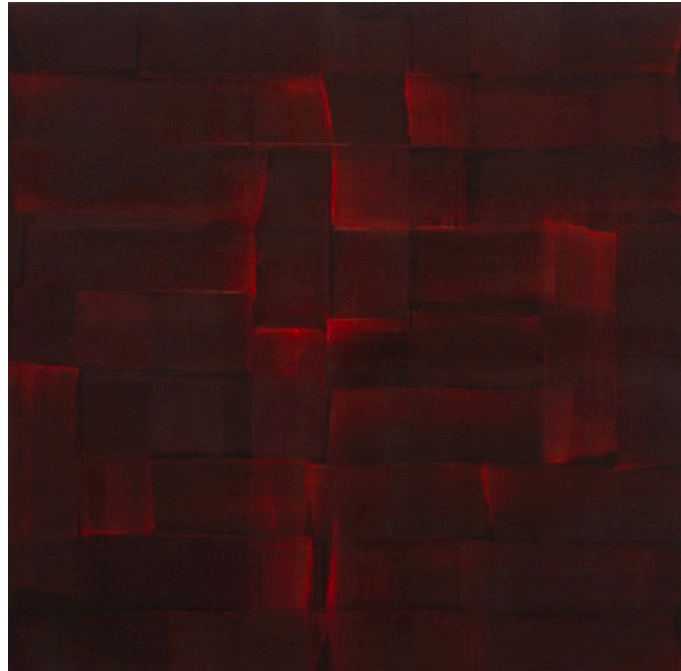
# GALERIE NATHALIE OBADIA

PARIS - BRUXELLES

## Viswanadhan

January 17 - March 8, 2025

91, rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré, Paris 8<sup>e</sup>



Sans titre, 2006  
Casein on canvas, 210 x 210 cm (82<sup>5/8</sup> x 82<sup>5/8</sup> in.)

Galerie Nathalie Obadia is delighted to present Indian artist Viswanadhan's first solo exhibition at its Paris gallery, 91 rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré, 75008. On view, there will be fifteen works produced by the artist between 2000 and 2010, showing his various evolutions. This selection reveals paintings with changing chromatic palettes, where red gradually asserts itself as the dominant color. Known as one of the leading figures of the contemporary art scene, Viswanadhan is able to blend tradition and modernity, in an approach that is at once intimate and universal.

Born in 1940 in Kadavoor, in Kerala, Viswanadhan grew up in an environment steeped in culture and spirituality, influenced by the traditions of the *Vishwakarma* caste of craftsmen, architects, painters and sculptors. It is in this context that, as a child, he was introduced to the sculpting of idols and to mandalas, the sacred geometric figures used in Hindu and Tantric rituals. These early explorations of color, form and symbols would leave a lasting mark on his oeuvre, manifesting themselves throughout his career as echoes of his Indian roots.

Trained at the Government College of Arts and Crafts in Madras (now Chennai), Viswanadhan discovered the fundamental principles of Western art. Unlike the Bombay school, which drew directly on these influences, the schools of Madras and Calcutta adopted a more syncretic approach, seeking to marry Eastern and Western aesthetic traditions without denying their own heritage. This is how Viswanadhan came into contact very early on with the international scene, notably through the exhibition *Two Decades of American Painting*, organized by Clement Greenberg in New Delhi, in 1967. On this occasion, he was first exposed to works by Mark Rothko, Jackson Pollock and Sam Francis, who left their mark on him. However, far from limiting himself to a mere appropriation of Western trends, Viswanadhan chose to transcend them by reconnecting with the primal gesture of his childhood and establishing a genuine dialogue with his origins.

Paradoxically, this process intensified in 1968, when the artist left India to visit Paris. It is in this context that he made the decisive acquaintance of Myriam Prévot, then director of the Galerie de France. Their collaboration marked a turning point in his career: he decided to settle in the French capital, which would lead him to affirm his personal approach, furthering his research into materials and light. In fact, although Viswanadhan has been living and working in France for over fifty years, he has maintained close ties with India. His works carry within them this "double movement that makes his process at once singular and complex, and in which our contemporaries will recognize a 'plural modernity,'"<sup>1</sup> as Bernard Blistène writes. The deep connection is also evident in his frequent trips to India, in particular to the Cholamandal Artist's Village, that he co-founded in 1966 with his former professor, K.C.S. Paniker. There, he returns to his original studio and spends several months each year, further bolstering the link between Indian heritage and contemporary art.

In these various singularities, the Western eye seeks, sometimes clumsily, to integrate Viswanadhan's images into an aesthetic grid that could alter their essence. These attempts at interpretations distort what is above all a subtle mastery of the painter's gesture. Far from being the artisan of a mere representation, he orchestrates the space, shaping and cultivating it, like a

<sup>1</sup>Bernard Blistène, *The Master and the Universe*, Galerie Nathalie Obadia, 2025 (translated from the French by Vanessa Wildenstein).

gardener planting roses at the very heart of an endangered natural world<sup>2</sup>. Viswanadhan affirms this idea by declaring, “Why does the bird sing? Isn’t that the answer we should give to those who ask the painter why he paints? Isn’t birdsong the harbinger of time in a given space? It sings of time; it tells of space!”

His quest for harmony leads him to place geometric forms at the core of his oeuvre, not as simple ornaments, but as profound symbols. The *Shri Yantra*, sacred emblem of Hinduism, is reinvented in each of his creations, its geometry simplified into almost calligraphic writing. Each line, each space evokes the balance of opposites, revealing the mysteries of the cosmos and of the human soul. From the 1990s onwards, he undertook a radical purification of his forms, exploring color like a spiritual language. By exclusively using green, yellow and red, black and white (colors of the *kalamezhuthus*), the forms carry a deeper meaning. This return to the essence is accompanied by the use of casein, which enables him to play with light and transparency, adding a new dimension to the material

In his canvases, Viswanadhan adopts a predominantly horizontal structure, that seems to evoke the movement of cinematic tracking shots, where the camera follows a subject, moving closer to it, away from it or around it. This formal choice echoes his cinematic practice, an essential dimension of his work. His films, like *Sable* (1976), bear witness to this same quest, that of a poetic exploration of Indian landscapes. Along his journey, he collects sand in mythological places, a gesture at once symbolic and material, which nurtures his paintings as well as his films. Cinema, like painting, becomes a path along which to travel, a visual quest inviting the spectator to move through his works. This approach, reinforced by the way he paints standing up—with the canvas placed on trestles—, underlines the movement and ceaseless research, where each line, each nuance borne by light and matter, participates in an exploration of space and time. The quest becomes a never-ending journey, an invitation to discover the hidden depth of the work through new eyes.

Thus, Viswanadhan does not just reduce forms, he captures their very essence. Color and light become vectors for a broader quest, that of an experience of being that transcends the visible and the palpable, inviting a deep reflection on existence and spirituality. For being a painter does not mean worshipping a fallen world, but “turning back towards the only source of beauty left: itself;”<sup>3</sup> cites Viswanadhan.

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Sharjah Biennial 16, from February 6 to June 15, 2025, will dedicate an entire pavilion to VISWANADHAN, with the presentation of over 40 works: paintings, works on paper, photographs and films.

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<sup>2</sup> Jean-Jacques Lévêque, *VISWANADHAN, l'arpenteur de l'infini*, Paris 1973

<sup>3</sup> Wassily Kandinsky, *Du spirituel dans l'art et dans la peinture en particulier*, Folio Essais, 1989 (For an English version, see *On the Spiritual in Art*, 1946, translated from the German by Hilla Rebay)

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Born in 1940 in Kadavoor (Kerala, India), Viswanadhan has been living and working in Paris since 1968.

Viswanadhan's work has been the subject of major solo exhibitions and has been featured in numerous group shows, including in 2023 at the Lalit Kala Akademi (Chennai, India); in 2018 at the Centre Pompidou (Paris, France) and at KANAL Pompidou (Brussels, Belgium); in 2017 at the National Gallery of Modern Art (Bangalore, India); in 2016 at the Nature Morte Gallery (New Delhi, India); in 2008 at Marlborough Gallery (New York, USA); in 1998 with a traveling retrospective at the National Galleries of Modern Art in Delhi and Mumbai, the Lalit Kala Academy in Chennai and the Victoria Memorial Hall in Kolkata (India); in 2005, at Jehangir Art Gallery (Mumbai, India); in 2006, 2004, 2002, 2000, 1996, 1993, 1989 and 1982 at Galerie Darthea Speyer (Paris, France); in 1987 at La Malmaison (Cannes, France); in 1985 at the Musée national d'art moderne – Centre Pompidou (Paris, France); in 1981, at the Centro de Bellas Artes (Maracaibo, Venezuela); in 1972, at the Art Institute (Kochi, India); in 1970 at Galerie de France (Paris, France). In 1971, he was awarded the Palette d'or Prize at the Festival International de la peinture (Cagnes-sur-Mer, France) and the following year, that of the 9th Biennale Internationale de Menton (France).

His work is held in important collections such as, in France, the Musée National d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris, the Centre Pompidou (Paris), the Centre National des Arts Plastiques (Paris), the Mobilier National (Paris), the Musée d'art moderne et contemporain de Saint-Étienne; in India, the Birla Academy of Art and Culture (Kolkata), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (New Delhi), the National Lalit Kala Akademi (New Delhi), the National Gallery of Modern Art (New Delhi).

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Paris Saint-Honoré

Viswanadhan

January 17 - March 8, 2025

Sarkis

March 22 - May 2025

Paris Cloître Saint-Merri

Roger-Edgar Gillet

*Gillet et compagnie*

February 8 - April 26, 2025

Paris Cloître Saint-Merri - Espace II

Guillaume Lebon

*AH BON!*

January 11 - March 15, 2025

Brussels

Collective photography exhibition

*La représentation et son double*

January 16 - March 1, 2025

Victoria Palacios

March 21 - May 17, 2025

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