

THE **B**OWL

An Exhibition of Recent Paintings

M S Murthy



25th November 2018 - 12th January 2019

THE BOWL IS THE SHAPE OF OUR MIND

- M S Murthy



When Philosophy Meets Canvas

Our first meeting was when M S Murthy graciously accepted our invitation to be the chief guest and spoke at the Opening Night of our second exhibition in 2017.

It was clear, that here was a gentleman who had a deep understanding of not only his Art which spans decades; but with it an understanding of the human spirit. In his quiet words were threads of wisdom and clarity of mind.

In his work, Art and Philosophy meet canvas, transporting the viewer to a quiet almost silent, contemplative state even as the eye is drawn to the delightful balance of colors, its many layers and lines. The effortless brushstrokes reflect simplicity and economy of motion; at the same time being a gentle, exploration of space within and without, reminiscent of greats such as Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, in the rendering of his "color fields".

He surrounds himself in a workspace that reflects his own pensive spirit, as a haven of green, drawing from each other the peace that never fails to engulf everyone that happens to visit.

It was indeed an honor when M S Murthy accepted our invitation to exhibit his works at Gallery Manora.

With "The Bowl" he transcends space from its physicality to the sublime, brushstroke after brushstroke, in an exclusive body of work that is sure to delight the parched spirits of a turbulent world.

Gallery Manora is proud to present The Bowl by M S Murthy.



Gomathi Suresh

Owner, Director, Gallery Manora, Bengaluru, India



The Cosmic Dimension

M.S. Murthy's art and life have reached a stage when he is compelled to look back at his past as well as to consider the future, that future flowing from, embracing and summarising his previous experience, continuing it while growing further with a partly new perspective. One may remember his beginning with realistic portraits of well-known personalities and ordinary characters. Sharp, light and direct, these predominantly linear drawings rely on the qualities of the classical foundation bypassing the pull of a formally striking interpretation. Similarly, his other kind of drawings which stemmed from the early modernistic stylisation that alluded to ethnicity and traditional art, were calmly individual within their understated link to the idiom. Later, by now already for about two decades, Murthy's watercolours and oil paintings delved into his Buddhist inspiration while increasingly using high abstraction to capture spiritual and philosophical insights. Always keen on retaining the authenticity and modesty of his conviction or, more precisely, premonition, he avoids literal narratives, instead focussing on simple yet intense sensations that in an indirect manner evoke broader and more defined viewpoints. His spiritual orientation shuns statements and ritualistic references opting for a philosophical inclusiveness which is merely invites the viewer to attune to it on his or her own. Those familiar with Murthy as a private person can connect this attitude to the soft atmosphere of tradition around him that admired the tender, accommodating qualities of Christ before it centred on the Enlightened.

At the start of this non or hardly representational phase with its idealistic concerns, the stylised linear head of Buddha turned increasingly abstracted until its faint, incomplete contours absorbed gentle watercolour wash. Within it, the previously all-important line was subdued but to only retain its fundamental properties and significance. The series "Buddha The Light" (2001) required some knowledge of the artist's intentions to let the onlooker discover a nocturnal vision of the city with its architecture, angles, spaces and shadows as permeated by the cool serenity of the moon's illumination. Even in the solitude it evoked, there could be intuited an empathic cordiality of the divine for the human plane which reciprocated by absorbing the same. The next exhibition, "Silence" (2008) developed the seed of space from those works translating it into larger formats whose throbbing expanses of almost monochromatic, muted hues demanded the use of oils on canvas. The silence so suggested over a nearly static time was emphasised by the presence of the residual line, merely indicated by dots or little, amorphous accents. The withdrawal and emptiness of these paintings reverberated of fine sound and spiritual consciousness, focussing on the essential oneness of things precious during which loneliness could metamorphose into a compassionate contemplation, emotions becoming sublimated towards an accepting equanimity.

The present works, completed after a longer yet period of ten years, grow from, maintain and transcend both earlier cycles. The attention to the reassuring, tranquil silence attained amidst the noisy chaos of reality has resulted in the now vast formats of Murthy's acrylics on canvas. Their structure and colour scheme enhance the impact of expansive spaces as well as the contrast of light and dark areas while leading it towards a nuanced connectedness and interdependence. The aim is, on the one hand, to observe, or more correctly, feel the core of Buddhist philosophy at the maximal scale possible and, on the other, to position within it a new conceptual angle and metaphor, again in terms of a hint to be sensed rather than read. The compositions, presently 8 by 8 feet, still rely on the complementary juxtapositions of luminous regions and threatening darkness, as one recognises the desire for peaceful composure to overcome its nemesis. They are, however, much more sombre in their restrained, whitened grey-blues and black-dominated areas, while as such both appear to be locating a balance. The huge radiant, dim squares or rectangles may be contrasted one to one, like in the diptych, or they remain co-dependent with the geometrically defined ground. The feel of an all-pervasive pulse seems to inhabit the fine textures and the interacting tonalities which invade one another. The role of space and silence there involves one of almost suspended time.

This cosmic dimension becomes accentuated by the often dynamic linear image of "The Bowl". Coming in multiple forms, it connects the different spaces in the paintings and sets them in motion. Once more, the spectator may initially need clarification from the artist. Direct symbolism and narrative are deliberately avoided, since Murthy wishes to evoke in a purely visual manner the overall impression of his, or rather, the Buddha's message and appeal to emotions, not reasoning. He hopes that the onlookers will meditate on the image and grasp its significance by themselves while retaining a bond to ordinary life and choices. The metaphor belongs to the begging bowl, a rarely noticed symbol despite its always being demonstrated by the Enlightened. Open in the morning to receive food, it was closed in the evening. The artist interprets the emblem as epitomising contemporary society's quickness to accept things or ideas and to reject them without any responsibility. His bowl as a container has no volume, transparent in a linear profile, bird's eye view and varied angles which unite everything around. It may be empty or accommodate sporadic, otherwise dense elements of content in the shape of small glittering patches of tempting gold and whitish ones of the substantial five elements. Above all, it stands for the human mind. Murthy is glad to share with others his admiration for Buddhist consciousness, its simplicity, truthfulness, honesty, for its denial of expectations, for a philosophy with a spiritual bend instead of religiosity, genuineness instead of superficial allure and its disciplined application in actuality. He himself is certain to stay happy with what he has and work sincerely without lapsing into formal attractiveness. Hence the importance of understated finesse in the compositions and colours which so acquire an unobtrusive solemnity.

Murthy paints without excessive analysis, trusting an instinctual, if practiced, cooperation of his mind and hand. It would be unnecessary to look for traces of direct idiomatic influence.

His respect for the spiritual base of abstraction in Mark Rothko and Vasudev Gaitonde does not ever translate into quotations.

He handles his abstract or at least maximally abstracted idiom as classic in a general way, adopting and internalising its certain constant, universal qualities without sacrificing a somewhat distanced vista. From the cosmic references of the canvases with their spaces and the normally small object, he comes down into an utterly personal engagement with both, its intimacy embedded in the small size of the paper and the watercolour medium.

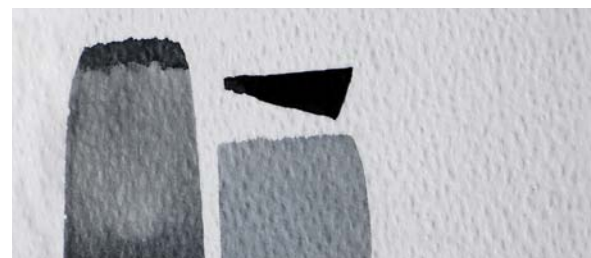
The premonition of expanse there becomes transferred into utter proximity. It is revealed when the painter is gathering together, separating, overlaying and confronting the slightly different pictures of the bowl, their angles and responses to the background and everything else including the empty, uncovered white. Watching it one may guess that he is then, indeed, introspecting himself with regard to Buddhism. The watercolour technique which enables the expression of intimacy comes as the traditional wash recalling Murthy's practice in the 1990s. The formal outcome, though, alters, while the artist multiplying his bowl traces, overlaying their shadows makes them scatter away and lean to one another or bleed a little. Some appear to be bare, tremulous almost drawing-like lines, as some others have a translucent painterly quality and some superimpose and infiltrate their companion shapes, while some turn almost solid. The sense of space and time is preserved along with that of light responding to darkness and silence. The gentle gravity of the tone, nonetheless, allows for a degree of amicable playfulness. This can be also noticed in how the compact space is confronted with the small bowl as a container accommodating its content from shiny golden motifs to ink-like splashes of black. The delicate juxtapositions and balance of subdued yet varied and often radiant tonalities do seem to reflect the artist's world-view.

The abstractness, maybe greater presently and minimalist with its hardly finished shapes than in the acrylics and perhaps a little more design-inclined, does not metamorphose into a fixation for itself, instead containing a premonition of the human presence, its sensations, thought and emotions, also that of nature, even landscape and air. Thus one can believe the artist when he says that before arriving at his non-representative language he did plenty of realistic drawings only to leave them behind as a medium, not the aim. So, the abstracting process becomes a path to achieve the profound simplicity typical of the core of things, its brevity comparable to haiku. The painter wonders sometimes if he will eventually end up with an empty canvas. In the meantime, appreciating the capacity of Buddhism to direct us to a silent mood of enjoyment and serenity, he desires to share his experience visually with others. His making of art assumes then the function of a mirror that can reflect him as well as every one else. Depending on the interplay between time and diverse kinds of vast and small spaces when considering the relationship between the container and content, he plans to raise it to a tangible, living experience for his audience when the gallery displaying his works will become a container.

Marta Jakimowicz

Renowned Art Critic, Bengaluru, India

November 2018





The Empty Bowl is Full of Completeness

- M S Murthy

Buddha, for me is not just a saint or a religious leader, he is one whose form has melted down into the innocent smile of every human being as a motherly touch. In a long journey of three decades, I have done series of works on Buddha's consciousness.

Now, I have focused on the 'Bowl' as a metaphor which was unnoticed unlike his words. The Bowl is full of completeness and extols the virtues of acceptance, rejection and satisfaction. To me the Bowl is the metaphor of Emptiness.

In my new series of works the two forms of the Bowl is significantly used, *the Closed* and *the Open Bowl*. These images have helped me introspect with a new dimension.

M S Murthy

Bengaluru, India

November 2018



THE BOWL
Acrylic On Canvas
96 inch X 96 inch
MSMB-06



THE BOWL

Acrylic On Canvas

96 inch X 96 inch (Diptych)

MSMB-01



THE BOWL
Acrylic On Canvas
96 inch X 96 inch (Dptych)
MSMB-02



THE BOWL

Acrylic On Canvas
96 inch X 96 inch
MSMB-05



THE BOWL

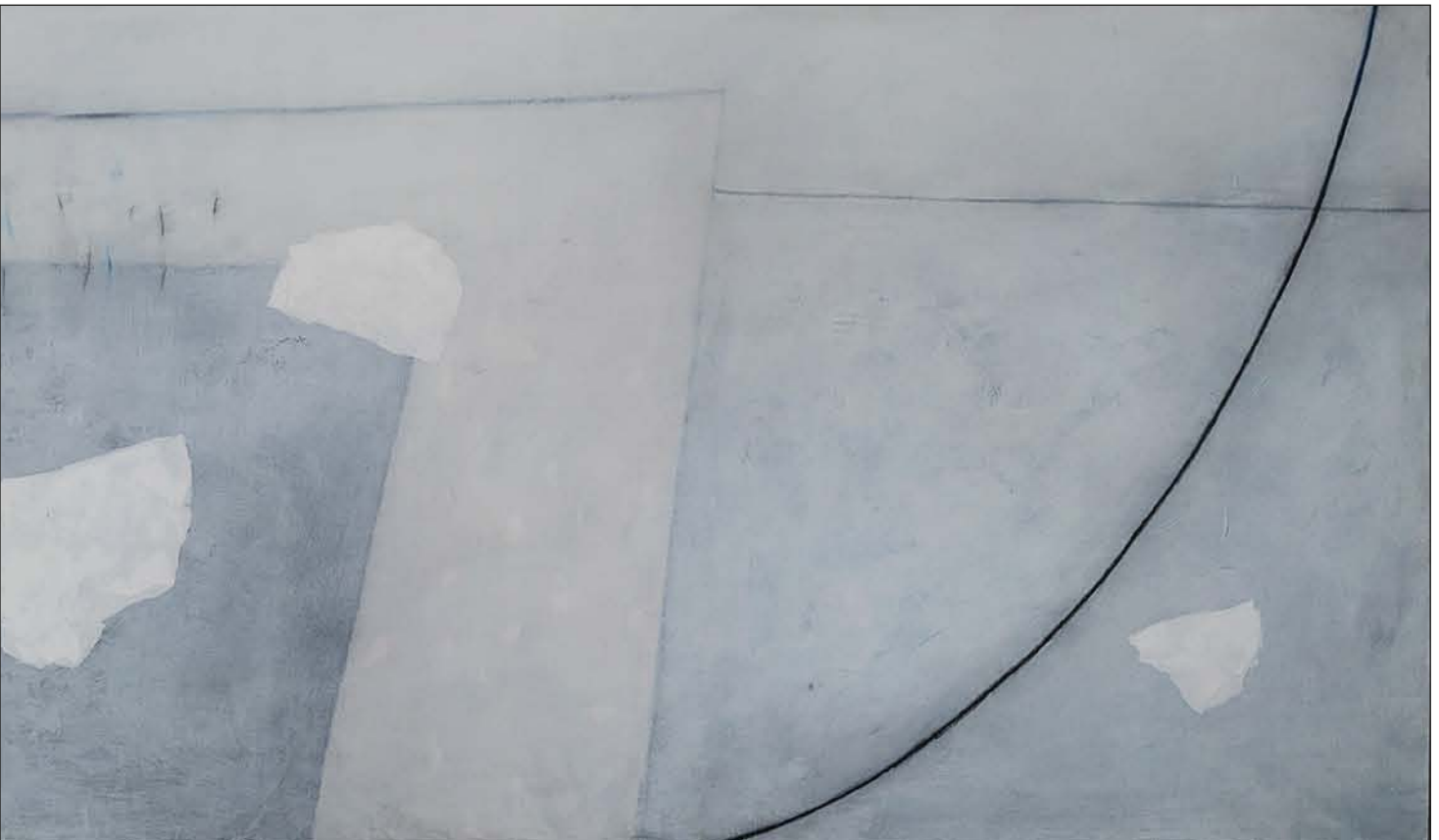
Acrylic On Canvas
96 inch X 96 inch

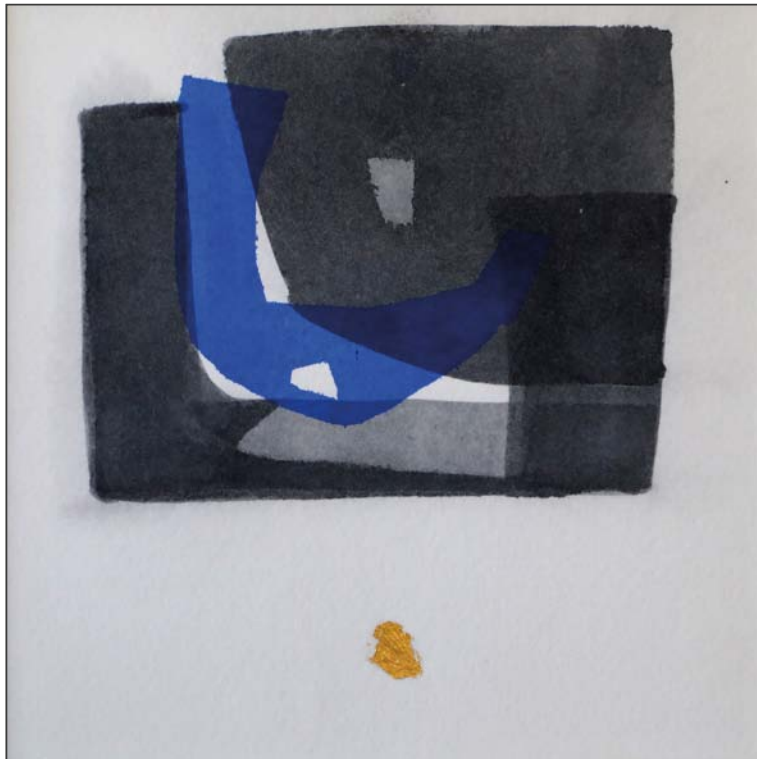
MSMB-04



THE BOWL

Acrylic On Canvas
204 inch X 60 inch
MSMB-03



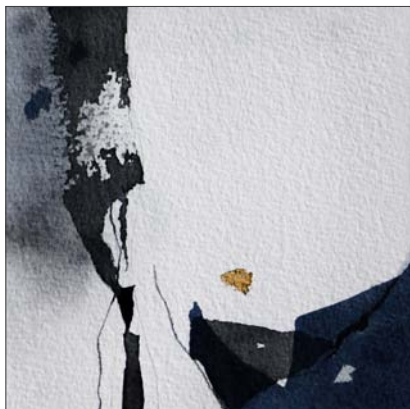


THE BOWL

Watercolour On Paper
Each 14.5cm X 19cm

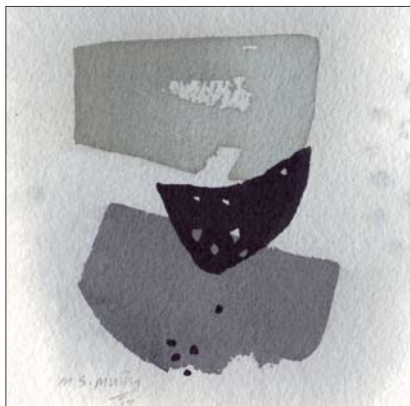
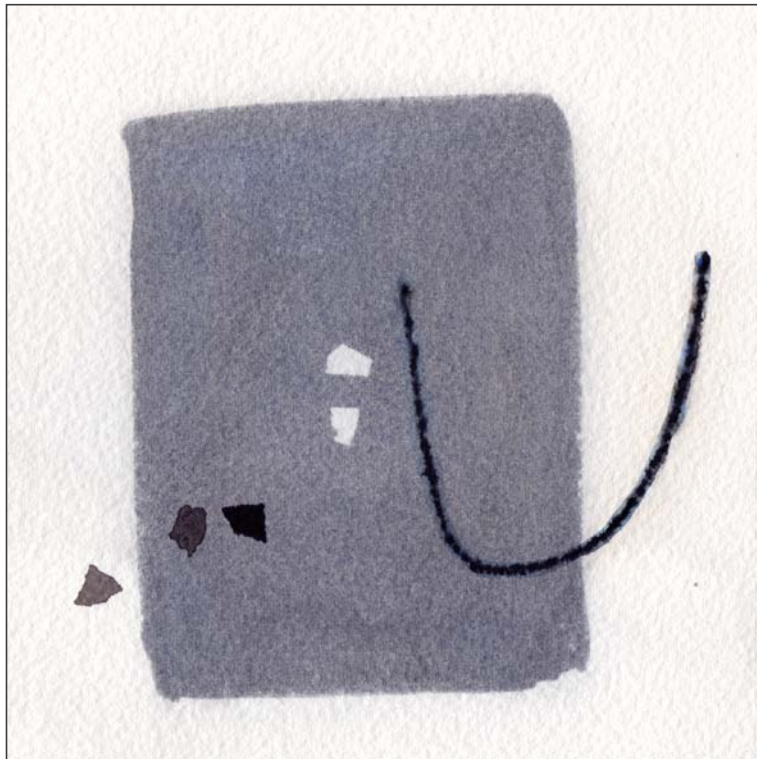



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Dr. M S MURTHY

Dr. M S Murthy was born in 1960 at Bangalore. He has a Diploma in Fine Arts & Modelling in 1982. He has held 25 solo exhibitions all over India. Has participated in State, National and International exhibitions. In 2003 he won The International Biennial Award from the Iran Academy of Arts, 2006 he won the Karnataka Sahithya Academy Award for his essay collection '*Desi Nagu*'. In 2010 Government of Karnataka honoured him with '*Rajyotsava Award*' for his achievement in the field of art. He was the Chief of Academic Council at Jain College of Visual Arts, Bangalore.

His works are with National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, Featherlite Pvt. Ltd, Namdhari Seeds, Caterpillar Inc. Bangalore, CICOPA, Bangalore, Alliance Francaise, Bangalore, Karnataka Chitrakala Parishath, Kejriwal Art Gallery, Bangalore, State, National Academies and many private collections in India and abroad.

In 1986 he held his first solo exhibition on *Art and Literature* in Chitrakala Parishath, Bengaluru. His works have been exhibited at Rabindra Kala Kunj Art Gallery (1994), Y.B. Chavan Gallery (1994), Grindlays Bank (1994), Chitrakala Parishath (2000 and 2010), KYNKYN Art Gallery (2011), Venkatappa Art Gallery (1978), Alliance Francaise (1995), Sumukha Gallery (1997), Crimson Art Resources (1994), Time & Space Gallery (1995 and 2008), Lakshana Art Gallery (2004), Jehangir Art Gallery (1997 & 2012), K.C.Das (1995), *Harmony* by Reliance Pvt. Ltd., Mumbai (1994), Iran Academy of Arts-Iran (2003), Tamarind Art, New York (1995). In 2018 he exhibited his latest works titled *The Bowl* at Gallery Manora, Bangalore.

He has presented papers at art seminars, curated art shows, has also been jury member for various State and National Art exhibitions and is currently conducting art workshop - *Kalasanskar* at his studio *Bhoomi - The Centre For Artists*, Bangalore. He has received a *Doctorate, D-Litt Award* from the Hampi University for his research on *Pictures of Child Mind* in 2010. His first play in Kannada *Yashodhare Malagirililla*, based on Buddha's Philosophy - 2007, was adjudged the Best Regional Play by AIR, Bangalore. Recently he published *Drushya - World's First Visual Novel*, which won the Best Book of the Year Award *Pustaka Sogasu* from the Kannada Book Authority, Government of Karnataka. In 2016 he published his sixth book, *Nijada Neralu* a collection of essays. Department of Information and Public Relations, Govt. of Karnataka Published *Mahatma Gandhi* a collection of drawings, in 2016. He was awarded the *Mysuru Kala Gowrava Prashasti* in 2016. Halabhavi National Trust Award, *Halabhavi Rashtriya Prashasti* in 2016. He was the Academic Council Member for University of Folklore, Karnataka.

Dr. M S Murthy has served as the *Chairman of Karnataka Lalithkala Academy*, from 2015-2017. In 2017 Government of Karnataka Awarded the lifetime achievement *Award Varnashilpi Venkatappa Prashasti*.

He lives and works at his studio *Bhoomi - The Centre For Artists*, Bengaluru.



Dr. M S Murthy

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