

Marlborough

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VISWANADHAN

March 11-April 5, 2008

New York, NY (February 19, 2008) -The Directors of Marlborough Gallery are pleased to announce that an exhibition of paintings by Viswanadhan will open at Marlborough, 40 West 57th Street, on March 11 and continue through April 5, 2008. Born in Kerala, India in 1940, Viswanadhan is a celebrated artist who resides in Paris and Chennai. This will be Viswanadhan's first New York exhibition in fifteen years and will comprise approximately thirty paintings from the late 1960s through 2007.

Within the context of contemporary Indian art, which is often concerned by *mediatic realism* (figurative realism), Viswanadhan stands out as a unique artist. In the West, the Abstract Expressionists sought their inspiration in Eastern philosophy. Viswanadhan, inversely, looks for the mysterious and miraculous affinity between Western abstraction and Tantric art. Viswanadhan's work, developed between Indian and Western concepts, draws from the *Vedas* as much as from pure form inspired by Platonic philosophy. His journey follows a path of simplification, interiorization and sublimation of matter, specifically in his exclusive use of geometry and strong color to create paintings that pulse with energy.

Born into a family of Hindu artists and craftsmen, Viswanadhan joined the Madras School of Arts in 1960 under the painter K.C.S. Paniker. Shortly after finishing his studies in 1966 he founded, along with fellow artists and Paniker, the Cholamandal Artist's village near the city of Madras, now called Chennai. In 1967 Viswanadhan's work was included in the Biennale de Paris. One year later, he arrived in that city and was introduced to the Galerie de France, with whom he held his first solo exhibition in 1970. Since that time, Viswanadhan has had over 50 exhibitions in museums and galleries throughout the world.

In the late 60s Viswa's contact with contemporary art in the West made him reexamine the concept of space and develop his own notion of art as "drawing spirit out of the material". Beyond the esoteric rituals and the geometry of Tantric art he had observed during his childhood in Kerala, Viswanadhan strived to express something higher and more universal than the *Murthi*: the archetypal images of idols in India that are traditionally the subjects of art in that country. With as much reference to Cézanne as to Tantric figures, Viswanadhan chose geometric forms to play this important role in his oeuvre. In Tantric art The Absolute may be represented as a figure at a superficial level or as a geometric form at a higher level: the geometric is divine. For Viswanadhan, this continual search for "matter and meaning" progressively synthesized into geometric harmonies of color and light.

After settling in Paris, Viswanadhan began a new body of work distinct from the vaguely representational paintings of recent years: large canvases with a variety of forms in strong colors seemingly lit from behind. In this exhibition, *Untitled*, 1974, (acrylic on canvas, 78¾ x 78¾ in., 200 x 200 cm), is particularly emblematic of this period, with radiant peaches, reds and yellows that seem to vibrate through the thick and granulous facture. A western observer when looking at work from this time could think of stained glass panels in a modern cathedral.

In the late 70s and early 80s the series of prismic, white and other untitled paintings move away from the materiality of previous painting. They evidently explore light and its effect on our vision: large canvases sometimes using only different shades of yellow trick us into believing that we are directly looking at the sun, with the strong light dissolving the forms into intense and blinding yellow color fields. Other works such as *Untitled*, 1986 (mixed media on canvas, 86¾ x 76¾ in., 220 x 195 cm), are painted in shades of brown, grey and yellow that suggest an almost cubist decomposition of form, though here the artist's concern is still light and its effect on our perception.

From the late 80s to the present Viswanadhan has painted several series of works where orange, red and green are painted in a thin casein (milk protein) medium. The paintings are geometric compositions of superimposed and transparent colors once again seemingly backlit. *Untitled*, 1992 (casein on canvas, 51¾ x 51¾ in., 130 x 130 cm), is a shimmering example of work in this period. His paintings can have many interpretations, their lightness sometimes suggesting textiles or veils floating in the wind.

Viswanadhan's most recent series of works, began in 2000, is bold and magnificent. The works are painted in shades of red on a dark background: the pure black he applies as a first layer on the canvas "creates the light" even on the darkest paintings. A large diptych of 2005, *Untitled*, (casein on canvas, 76¾ x 102¾ in., 195 x 260 cm) will be a highlight of this exhibition.

Viswanadhan is also recognized as a film director. His films on the five elements: *Sand* (1976-1982), *Water* (1985), *Fire* (1988), *Air* (1994) and *Ether* (2002) were presented in a number of international films festivals, including the 1987 Jerusalem Film Festival, Israel; 1988 Festival de Cinéma du Réel, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris and at the Hirschhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington DC in 1992.

In 1998-2000 a traveling retrospective of Viswanadhan's work was presented at the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi; Lalit Kala Akademi, Chennai; the National Gallery of Modern Art, Mumbai and Victoria Memorial Hall, Calcutta. A recipient of numerous awards for painting and film, Viswanadhan received the high honor of Chevalier des Arts et Lettres in 2005 and will receive the K.C. S. Paniker Award, Kerala Lalit Kala Akademi, later this year.

Viswanadhan's work is in the permanent collections of many important institutions, including the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi; National Gallery, Chennai and Mysore State Museum, Bangalore, India; Centre national d'art moderne, Paris; Chateau-Musée de Cagnes-sur-mer; and Musée d'Art Moderne de la ville de Paris, France; as well as Pfalz Galerie, Kaiserslautern, Germany.

An illustrated catalogue featuring an interview with the artist by Louise Nicholson will be available at the time of the exhibition.

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