

# N. S. HARSHA: CHARMING JOURNEY

FEBRUARY 4 [SAT] – JUNE 11 [SUN], 2017 MORI ART MUSEUM [53F, ROPPONGI HILLS MORI TOWER]

## TO THE COSMIC VIA SOUTHERN INDIA

The Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, is proud to stage “N. S. Harsha: Charming Journey,” the first major solo exhibition by this Indian artist, from Saturday, February 4 to Sunday, June 11, 2017.

N. S. Harsha was born in 1969 in the ancient capital of Mysore in southern India, and continues to be based there. While international interest in the Indian contemporary art world has burgeoned alongside the country’s recent economic growth, N. S. Harsha has taken part in numerous international shows. Yet at the same time, he has persisted in engaging earnestly with the many aspects of “life” that surround him: the traditional culture and natural environment of southern India, the relationships between humans and the region’s flora and fauna, in the process carving out a unique position for himself. The artist deploys an array of expressive techniques, dominated by painting and including drawing, sculpture, installations and workshops. Underlying all his work however is a worldview in which the microcosmos, as symbolized by the human body; and macrocosmos, embracing all things, exist simultaneously, combined with a keen eye for life’s absurdities.

“N. S. Harsha: Charming Journey” will survey two decades of N. S. Harsha’s practice, by presenting around 75 major works (including new works) produced by the artist from 1995 onward. The “journey” of the title hints not only at the life journey of the artist, but various other journeys too, including India’s economic development, the journey back and forth between the traditional and the contemporary, and an expansion from our everyday endeavors to a cosmic point of view. With an eye on Mysore as a starting point, N. S. Harsha depicts situations and aspects of the world in a critical and humorous fashion, presenting its delights – ironies, love and paradoxes included – as a “charming journey.”

His is a viewpoint that, though locally-rooted, encourages us to reconsider the ways in which modern and contemporary art have traditionally been interpreted through a Western canon. N. S. Harsha proposes an art that transcends time and space, freeing it to become something more universal.



[left] *Come Give Us a Speech* [bottom right] same as left (detail)  
2008 Acrylic on canvas 182.9 x 182.9 cm (x 6)



### PRESS RELEASE

Press Contact Details: Ms. Machino, Ms. Taki  
Public Relations, Mori Art Museum Tel: +81-(0)3-6406-6111 Fax: +81-(0)3-6406-9351  
E-mail: [pr@mori.art.museum](mailto:pr@mori.art.museum) Web: [www.mori.art.museum](http://www.mori.art.museum)

## ◆ MAIN POINTS OF THE EXHIBITION

### Major Solo Show by N. S. Harsha, Internationally-Acclaimed Contemporary Artist Working with the Legacy of the Rich Culture of Southern India

To date, the Mori Art Museum has staged both region-specific exhibitions showcasing the current state of contemporary art in rapidly developing parts of the globe such as China, Africa, India and the Middle East, as well as major solo exhibitions by prominent Asian artists. While N. S. Harsha was one of the artists in region-specific exhibition “Chalo! India: A New Era of Indian Art” held in 2008, he has made a unique place for himself on the Indian contemporary art scene through his mastery of various techniques and his diversity of context, informed in part by the traditional culture of southern India. As well as demonstrating the Mori Art Museum’s policy of taking notable artists from region-specific group shows and presenting them once again in greater depth in major solo exhibitions, “Charming Journey” represents N. S. Harsha’s first mid-career retrospective.

### ■ The Structure of the World Viewed from Polar Opposite Viewpoints: Micro vs. Macro

A fresh look at the way the world is structured, via the practice of N. S. Harsha, in which he engages with “life” from the opposing, as well as holistic viewpoints of “micro” and “macro” – from the lifestyles of people depicted repeatedly in his works, and their connection to plants and animals, to the grander workings of the universe.

### ■ The State of the World as Seen from a Local Perspective

Through the changes in Mysore since the Indian economy opened up in the early 1990s, observable in the works of N. S. Harsha, we may also contemplate the realities of globalization in other parts of the world.



*Development*

2004

Bronze, wood, acrylic on canvas

24 x 60 x 4 cm (top)

25 x 60 x 3.5 cm (bottom)

Collection: Usha Mirchandani, Mumbai

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## ■ Expanding the Concept of “Painting”

From large canvases, floor paintings and murals to installations such as *Nations* and *Leftovers*, N. S. Harsha has created a vast oeuvre that takes conventional notions of “painting” and expands them. In this exhibition, he turns his hand to a further exploration of the new possibilities of painting, starting in the form of classical techniques of expression such as the miniatures and religious paintings of southern India.

## ■ Community Programs and Workshops Directed by the Artist

Community programs and workshops directed by N. S. Harsha himself, interacting with local people and children in Taiwan, India and elsewhere, have been well received. He is intensely curious when it comes to the accumulation of experience and knowledge, and the process by which ideas develop, and in Tokyo too will run a series of workshops aimed mainly at children, giving them (the artist included) the opportunity to exchange knowledge.

## ■ A “Resource Room” Displaying a Wide Variety of Material

The exhibition will incorporate a “Resource Room” displaying items such as N. S. Harsha’s Indian comic collection, Japanese fine art books, sketches of ideas, and other material related to his works. These will be accompanied by photos and video footage showing the everyday lives of people in Mysore, and the landscapes, giving visitors a sense of the atmosphere of southern India. This space will explore the cultural and philosophical context of southern India that forms the background to N. S. Harsha’s practice, and resonances with the development of modern and contemporary art in the West and Japan.



*Leftovers* 2008

Installation view: “Leftovers,” Ginza Maison Hermès Le Forum, Tokyo, 2008

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Courtesy: Fondation d'entreprise Hermès



*Nations* 2007

Installation view: Sharjah Biennial 9, UAE, 2007



*Ambition and Dreams*: Project designed for TVS Academy, Tumkur, Karnataka, India 2005

Courtesy: TVS Academy, Tumkur, India

## N. S. HARSHA

Born 1969 in Mysore, Karnataka in Southern India, N. S. Harsha continues to live and work in Mysore. Received a Masters Degree in Painting in 1995 from the Maharaja Sayajirao (MS) University of Baroda [Vadodara], internationally renowned for its progressive education. The artist also is a recipient of prestigious awards including the DAAD Scholarship (2012) and Artes Mundi Prize (2008). He has participated in a number of international exhibitions such as the Kochi-Muziris Biennale (India, 2014); Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art (2013); Dojima River Biennale (Osaka, 2013); Adelaide International Biennial (Australia, 2012); the Yokohama Triennale (2011) and the Bienal de São Paulo (Brazil, 2010). He also held solo exhibitions at Institute of International Visual Arts (INIVA), London in 2009, and Ginza Maison Hermès Le Forum, Tokyo in 2008. He was also a participant in the major international touring exhibition “Indian Highway” at the Serpentine Gallery, London in 2008 (followed by five major museums all over the world through 2012), and “Chalo! India: A New Era of Indian Art” at the Mori Art Museum in 2008 (touring to Seoul and Vienna in 2009).

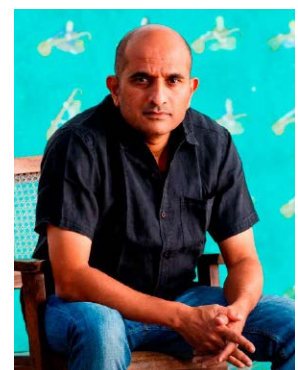


Photo: Mallikurjun Katakol

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## GENERAL INFORMATION

**Exhibition Title:** “N. S. Harsha: Charming Journey”

**Organizer:** Mori Art Museum

**Curated by:** Kataoka Mami (Chief Curator, Mori Art Museum)

**Exhibition Period:** February 4 [Sat] – June 11 [Sun], 2017

**Venue:** Mori Art Museum, 53F, Roppongi Hills Mori Tower, 6-10-1, Roppongi, Minato-ku, Tokyo

**Open Hours:** 10:00-22:00 | Tue: 10:00-17:00 | \* Admission 30 minutes before closing. | \* Open everyday.

**Admission:** Adult: ¥1,800 / University/highschool student: ¥1,200 / Child (age 4 up to junior highschool student): ¥600 / Senior (ages 65 and over): ¥1,500 | \* All prices include tax. | \* Ticket also valid for Tokyo City View observation deck (excludes Sky Deck). | \* Additional entrance fee to the Sky Deck is required.

**General Inquiries:** +81-(0)3-5777-8600 (Hello Dial)

### ◆ CURATOR'S MESSAGE Kataoka Mami (“N. S. Harsha: Charming Journey” Curator / Chief Curator, Mori Art Museum)

N. S. Harsha was born 1969 in the ancient capital of Mysore in southern India. In the 1990s he studied at the MS University of Baroda, internationally renowned for its progressive education, and is currently based in Mysore. N. S. Harsha has, for the past two decades, taken part in numerous shows around the world, including exhibitions devoted specifically to Indian contemporary art. Meanwhile, he has continued to engage earnestly with “life” around him in its many forms: the traditional culture and natural environment of southern India, and the relationships between humans and the flora and fauna of the region, in the process carving out a unique position in contemporary art.

Woven into the artistic practice of N. S. Harsha is a complex cultural mix: from the figurative tradition of his homeland – for example, in the intricate sculptures at Hindu temples of the Hoysala Dynasty (11-14th century) such as those at Halebid and Belur, and Mysore-style miniature paintings – to the culture of myths and stories handed down via a tradition of picture scrolls, and media such as modern-day comics; and the “rangoli” sand drawings that are created every morning by the women of the household. The artist makes skilled use of multiple media, focusing mainly on painting, and also including drawing, sculpture and site-specific installations and workshops, all with the common undercurrent of a worldview in which the microcosmos, as symbolized by the human body; and macrocosmos, embracing all things, exist simultaneously, plus a keen eye for day-to-day absurdities and moments of duality.

This exhibition titled “N. S. Harsha: Charming Journey” is a mid-career retrospective bringing together for the first time the artist’s most important works to date. It focuses on the development of his practice while encompassing his major works from 1995 through 2016. The word “journey” of the exhibition title hints not only at the life of the artist himself, but also at various other “journeys” including the political and economic development of India, the parallel changes in different communities, as well as changes observable in the daily lives of people, the journey back and forth between the traditional and the contemporary, and the journey from a biological scientific worldview to an astronomical or cosmic scale. From the figures that sometimes number in the thousands in a single painting, it is possible to unravel the lives of individuals. Sometimes within these works, we human beings are depicted as mere specks in the vast universe, alongside other organisms such as flora and fauna. At the same time we are able to observe N. S. Harsha’s curiosity about the profound mysteries of the



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universe, and our unpredictable future. The processes by which these “journeys” are undertaken are not always “charming” yet N. S. Harsha channels his critical, humorous gaze toward the absurdities of our world, and its duality of values, presenting them to us as a “charming journey.”

To date, the Mori Art Museum has staged both regional exhibitions showcasing the current state of contemporary art in up-and-coming parts of the globe such as China, Africa, India and the Middle East, as well as major solo exhibitions by prominent Asian mid-career artists. “N. S. Harsha: Charming Journey” will be positioned as one of this solo exhibition series. India is composed of multiple states, languages, culinary cultures and religions, each of which has developed over thousands of years, making for a history of extraordinary complexity. Mysore, where the artist is based, has existed as a kingdom with a rich cultural and artistic history since the 14th century. In recent years there has been a growing body of research on the idea of “multiple modernities,” and we hope that in this exhibition, by unraveling “art” through the viewpoint of one artist – N. S. Harsha – and the multifaceted culture of Mysore that continues to inspire him, dominant Western notions of modern and contemporary art will be liberated to become something more universal, transcending time and space.



*Punarapi Jananam Punarapi Maranam (again birth - again death)*  
2013  
Installation view: The Fifth Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art, 2013



*Punarapi Jananam Punarapi Maranam (again birth - again death) (detail)*  
2013  
Acrylic on canvas, tarpaulin  
365.8 x 2,407.9 cm

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