

ENDURING PATTERNS

FRANCES FERDINANDS



5th - 11th March 2020



ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO

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The Noble Sage 



'Octopus Eyes' (2018)
Acrylic on canvas
30 x 30 inches

INTRODUCTION

A warm welcome to *Enduring Patterns*, our first exhibition spotlighting the work of Frances Ferdinands, a Sri Lankan Canadian artist, a new recruit to the gallery's wide collection. Ferdinands' work fits the collection well. To me it responds to my audience's need to see South Asian contemporary art in a particular manner. It is an answer to our niggling (almost subconscious) need for colour, decoration and adornment in art from the East. This so-called decorative aspect of art in the East (coined by the Western eye) has so often in history been a way of diminishing any intellectuality or contextual meaning, reducing it to the aesthetically pleasurable. Think of the way we use the word 'decoration' or 'decorative'. If we use those terms toward fine art, broadly speaking, we are taking away from its artistic quality. We are superficialising the art in the artwork. And yet it is those words that abound in our minds when South Asian art is described.

The subject is even more complex when we step back from decoration, ornament and pattern and consider the nature of fabric – crucial to Ferdinands' work. The story that comes to my mind is that of Sir Winston Churchill (as the public often have described him, the 'Greatest Briton of all time'), describing Mahatma Gandhi as: "*a seditious Middle Temple lawyer, now posing as a fakir of a type well known in the East, striding half-naked up the steps of the Vice regal Palace*". Pivotal to Churchill's comment was Gandhi's lack of clothing. His small covering he equates with an abandonment of decent values, his treasonous attitude and his 'not knowing his place'. It is a potent threat. It is unlikely that Churchill, a great advocate for the arts, felt the same way about the half-naked marble statues in the National Gallery. Those that he wanted to protect by any means necessary during the war. The mythological figures being

European, the art being to British tastes, the depiction deemed high art, this partial nudity he would have considered very positively. The point is lucid. Fabric is political and contextually-loaded: it is wrapped to the identity of the wearer and the audience that digest it; wedded to the time and place in which it exists.

Churchill also undermined South Asian spiritual thinking and leadership in his use of the word 'fakir' and implied a two-facedness by referring disparagingly to his lawyer days of the past. For Churchill, South Asians couldn't and shouldn't be complex or chameleon-like in their ways of dealing with the world around them, particularly the British. They had to be unmarked, unassuming and convenient vessels, easy to hand, for the pour of instruction. Churchill and Gandhi had met once before in 1906. Then, Gandhi wore a suit and tie, as befitting a lawyer. I would suggest that dealing with a man in a suit in home territory put Churchill at ease. Gandhi's suit then denoted a man working within the British establishment via British rules and values. His suit was an ideological shackle. This Gandhi realised much later when during his freedom struggle in India he dressed simply in uncoloured, un-patterned cotton cloth and implored the Indian people to manufacture and wear the same, returning to the simplicity of Indian heritage and the strength found in self-sufficiency. The fabric and its spinning wheel manufacture became key to the politics of Independence, a symbol of escape from colonial power and a return to core values.

Years later in 1958, a Sri Lankan family are migrating to the economically greener pastures of Canada. The mother (a teacher) and father (an accountant) bring a six-year-old girl with them. This was hardly an

invasion. This was simply a family wanting safe entry to a believed welcoming new land in which to start afresh. Yet at the border, they met resistance. However they dressed, however they presented themselves, their skin colour was the crucial fabric to gain entry. Nearly three decades after Churchill's comment and after Sri Lankan independence from Churchill's beloved Empire, this family wanting to move to Canada was seen as them wanting to be something they innately weren't. The idiom 'mutton dressed as lamb' comes to mind here as does Churchill not being able to balance Gandhi as a British-trained lawyer. It was the Sri Lankan family's first conception of 'the immigrant label' and with it swiftly came distrust and confrontation. The authorities (bizarrely) forced the family to provide proof of lineage dating back to the early 17th century and the beginnings of Dutch habitation of Sri Lanka. European heritage (having been colonized by a 'recognized civilized country') was seen as necessary for them to enter Canada. Then they would be 'cut from the right cloth' so to speak.

The six-year-old grew to be artist Frances Ferdinands and this early episode in her life came to be formative for her art. That migrant robe is one she has worn since and one she has grown to love (even with all the prejudice she and her family has suffered as one of the first South Asian families in Canada). The transient homeless nature of this robe allowed her and her work to slip inconveniently into the matters that should not concern her, the complex and sometimes disappointing dichotomies of the world around her and the two countries neither of which she fully inhabits. Her work pleurably highlights the clumsiness of our contemporary world. An awkwardness exemplified, say, in the idolization of a wartime Prime Minister as the greatest representation of British heroism of all time and yet believing the UK could not possibly have an Empire-based racist prejudice that continues today. It is in these uncooperative crevices that Ferdinands gets to work.

At its heart this exhibition is about fabric. Fabric as a politically-charged material, as a metaphorical reference to time and place, but also fabric as the stuff that makes up art such as the canvas and the things we place upon it as its decoration. Indeed from a different perspective, the things we put/paint on the canvas (whether it be a bowl of fruit, cows in a field or *Samson and Delilah*) all can be read as the decoration of a material, a pattern coded to a time and place upon the fabric. Just as national flags tell of different contexts and meanings (in addition to their aesthetic value), paintings also do the same. Seeing pattern and decoration in this wider sense is useful and freeing. It lets one stand back and see the canvas in the same symbolic and material sense as the shapes and forms placed upon it. The patterns and iconography Ferdinands faux-collages on (as if they are distinct pieces of fabric) we might view as individual thoughts, sensations, memories, references and symbols from the artist. Unlike in the past where a series of works were approached thematically, here by contrast Ferdinands says that she was led intuitively by the process of each painting, by the process of decorating that visual space. Her paintings therefore are rather like magic carpets, whisking us off on a joyful, thought-provoking errant adventure, letting us invisibly consider the complex nature of the world around us in a new textured light.



Jana Manuelpillai
Director
The Noble Sage Art Collection

'3 Commas of the Serendip' (2019)
Acrylic on canvas
24 x 24 inches



FRANCES FERDINANDS

Biodata

Born in Colombo, Sri Lanka in 1952; Lives and works in Toronto, Canada

Education & Awards

B. ED. In Visual Art & Drama, University of Toronto, Canada (1977); HON. B.F.A. in Visual Art from York University, Toronto, Canada (1974); A.R.C.T. (Piano) from Royal Conservatory of Music, Toronto, Canada (1972)

Ontario Arts Council Project Award (1975); Artist Residency at Rocky Neck Art Colony, Gloucester, Massachusetts, USA (1997); Canada Council Project Grant (1985) & Travel Grant (1999); Ontario Arts Council Artist -In-The-School Residency Grant (1994, 1992, 1991, 1978); Ontario Arts Council Exhibition Grant (1986-7, 1989, 1995, 1999-2000, 2003-2008, 2013-15, 2017, 2019); Ontario Arts Council, Access and Career Development Grant - Sri Lanka (2014 & 2016), Mid Career Grant (2016); Winner of 2017 Diwali Coin Design Competition, Royal Canadian Mint; Artist panelist for Resistance Through Art Academic Conference, Munk School of Global Affairs, University of Toronto (2018); Commissioned for MultiCultural Commemorative Gold Coin Design by Royal Canadian Mint (2019); Ontario Arts Council Chalmers Grant, London, England (2019)

Solo Exhibitions

'Open Sesame', Kitchener, Ontario, Canada (2018); 'Exotic Landscapes', Station Gallery, Whitby, Ontario, Canada (2017); 'Connective Threads', Visual Arts Clarington, Ontario, Canada (2017); 'Between Latitudes', Gallery Stratford, Ontario, Canada (2017); 'Lassanai (Beautiful)', Articsok Gallery, Toronto, Ontario (2015); 'Convergence', Propeller Centre, Toronto, Canada (2015); 'Frances Ferdinands @ Lola's', Sarnia, Ontario, Canada (2009); 'Food for Thought', ARTSPlace, Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia, Canada (2008) & Propeller Centre, Toronto, Ontario, Canada (2007); 'Embodied Ideals', Buffalo Arts Studio, Buffalo, New York, U.S.A. (2004) & Gladstone Hotel, Toronto, Ontario, Canada (2003); 'Adrift', Kelowna Art Gallery, Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada (2003) & MacDonnell Gallery, Toronto, Ontario, Canada (2001); Judith & Norman Alix Gallery, Sarnia, Ontario, Canada (2000); 'Palm Breeze', Ka' Ikena Gallery, Kapi'olani College, Honolulu, Hawaii (2000); Gallery 13, Rocky Neck Art Colony, Gloucester, Mass., USA (1997); Kenneith Gallery, Sarnia, Ontario, Canada (1991); 'Frances Ferdinands 1983-1989', Judith&Norman Alix Gallery, Sarnia, Ontario, Canada (1990); 'Urban / Nature', Albert White Gallery, Toronto, Ontario, Canada (1988); 'Mysterious Travellers', Galerie Arpege, Collingwood, Ontario, Canada (1987) & Albert White Gallery, Toronto, Ontario, Canada (1986); 'War', La Centrale, Montreal, Quebec, Canada (1986) & Kozak Gallery, Toronto, Ontario, Canada (1985); 'Solitary Women', Merton Gallery, Toronto, Ontario, Canada (1981)

Selected Group Shows

'Ubuntu', Articsok Gallery, Toronto, Canada, (2014); 'Mining Beauty', Art Gallery of Northumberland, Cobourg, Canada (2014); '21st Century Surrealism', Articsok Gallery, Toronto, Ontario, Canada (2013); 'Colloquium', Guelph Humber University Gallery, Toronto, Canada (2013); 'Ripe', Rouge Concept Gallery, Toronto, Canada (2010); 'Transdiasporic Art Practices', WomanMade Gallery, Chicago, USA (2009); 'Echoes of Surrealism', Diamond-Newman Fine Arts, Boston, U.S.A. (2008); 'Anthropomorphism', WomanMade Gallery, Chicago, U.S.A. (2006); 'By Appearances', University of Waterloo Art Gallery, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada (2006); 'Nord – Sud' Galeria Carrion Vivar, Bogota, Colombia (2005); 'Fabrications', WomanMade Gallery, Chicago, USA (2004); Passions Gallery, Provincetown, Mass., U.S.A. (1993); 'Beyond Time and Circumstance', Lynnwood Arts Centre, Simcoe, Canada (1992); 'Art Contemporain du Canada', Galerie AderTajan, Paris, France (1992); 'Contemporary Realism', Art Gallery of Northumberland, Cobourg, Canada (1990); 'Figurative Impact', Lynnwood Arts Centre, Simcoe, Ontario, Canada (1987); 'MP's Choice', Byward Market Gallery, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada (1986); 'Old Wars by Young Artists', Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, Canada (1985)

Selected Public and Corporate Collections

Advanced Photographics, Danvers, Massachusetts, USA; Archives of Ontario, Toronto, Canada; Archon Construction, Toronto, Canada; Canada Life Assurance, Toronto, Canada; Cadillac-Fairview Corp., Toronto, Canada; CHSLD Providence Notre-Dame de Lourdes, Montreal, Canada; City of Markham, Ontario, Canada; Dresdner Bank Canada, Toronto, Canada; Franco-Nevada Mining, Toronto, Canada; Judith & Norman Alix Gallery, Sarnia, Canada; Gerling Global Life Insurance, Toronto, Canada; K.P.M.G., Toronto, Canada; KPM Kente Management Co., Belleville, Canada; Linda Leibel Art Source, Toronto, Canada; Mount Sinai Hospital, Toronto, Canada; Remmus Textiles, Montreal, Canada; Robert Mc Laughlin Gallery, Oshawa, Canada; Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Canada; Satov Consultants, Toronto, Canada; Seamark Corporation, Gloucester, Massachusetts, USA; Standard Broadcasting Corporation, Toronto, Canada; Tom Thomson Art Gallery, Owen Sound, Canada, Northumberland Hills Hospital, Cobourg, Canada; Dr. Anna Tuska Dentistry, Port Hope, Canada; OJCR Construction, Toronto, Canada; Seneca College, Toronto, Canada.



'Interlopers' (2019)
Acrylic on canvas
24 x 24 inches



'No Fixed Address' (2019)
Acrylic on canvas
24 x 24 inches

FRANCES FERDINANDS – ENDURING PATTERNS

“True beauty results from that repose which the mind feels when the eye, the intellect, and the affections, are satisfied from the absence of any want.” - Owen Jones, Grammar of Ornament

This exhibition of recent works by Frances Ferdinands marks a somewhat new departure in a forty-year artistic career and the artist’s first solo exhibition in Europe. It is a worthwhile moment to appreciate the journey the artist has taken and draw together some of the artistic concerns and approaches that have led her to this outstanding series of paintings in the gallery. No more elucidating starting point exists for understanding Ferdinands’ art than her early exploration of the *Pattern and Decoration Movement* of the 1970s and 80s.

Emerging out of the Feminist Art Movement of the late 1960s, and standing against the prevailing Minimalism dominating art, Pattern and Decoration (P&D) declared itself vehemently aside from figuration and abstraction. By contrast, it was within the much-derided arena of ‘the decorative’ that the group felt the greatest freedom. The largely female group saw the instinct towards making something decorative as a move in the offence; an action that shunned Western patriarchal dominance in art. Decoration, an essential aspect of every human culture since the beginning of civilization, allowed a new alternate art and art history to be manifested that was inclusive and refreshing. Patriarchal Western civilization had adopted the stance that art that was decorative should be subjugated as less important and less serious than other so-called Fine Arts. Yet those other Fine Arts inevitably were driven and defined only by white men. Decoration by contrast associated itself with artistry, femininity, craft, humanity, multiculturalism, the past as much as the present, and most of all the essence of beauty that bound all artists in their quest – the need to produce visual pleasure

for the onlooker. It could do this without needing to disassociate itself from abstraction or figuration (seen as male visual structures) necessarily or at all. Whereas patterning had been equated with triviality and a lack of intellectual depth, they chose to think unequivocally in terms of the amusement and potential for freer intellectuality to be found in the repeated arrangement or form. In this sense, the Western pursuit of so-called uniqueness for every inch of an artwork’s being was turned on its head.

Furthermore the prevailing negative view of decoration was one not generally shared by non-Western cultures. P&D was influenced by sources outside of what was considered to be fine art. Blurring the line between art and design, many P&D works mimic patterns like those on wallpapers, printed fabrics, and quilts as well as inspiration outside of the United States. The influence of Islamic tile work from Spain and North Africa are visible in the geometric, floral patterns. They looked at Mexican, Roman, and Byzantine mosaics, Turkish embroidery, Japanese woodblocks, and Iranian and Indian carpets and miniatures. Although the artists in doing this could be perceived as unscrupulously mining world cultures (and appropriating patterns and textile designs in an artistic manner not dissimilar to the questionable Primitivist artists before them) there is still a sense of the international artistic language of pattern and decoration being infinitely more even-handed. As such, even now, there is great power in this movement’s aims for a more equitable and open-minded contemporary art.

For Ferdinands, discovery of this movement was revelatory and impactful to the psychology of her art-making. It allowed her to think of her art as free from the constraints of any country to which she was thought to ‘belong’ - Canada or Sri Lanka, or indeed any of the colonial powers that had dominated the island. Her art was able to, as she puts it, ‘hover’ somewhere between the representational



'Blue Palm' (2018)
Acrylic on canvas
40 x 20 inches



'Coiled' (2017)
Acrylic on canvas
30 x 30 inches

and the abstract, evenly between the informative and the purely pleasurable, at will drawing on historic objects, murals, tiles, textiles, wallpaper as reference without the need to validate. Their manifestation being validation in their own right. The need to foreground or background ideas or imagery in the visual space to potently 'communicate' was made redundant by the ideology of pattern. It freed her from her own gender to approach feminist issues; from her own Sinhala language (or from her accented foreign language in Canada) in order to poetically show the decorative and intellectual aspect of the written word. The ideology made her art that of a happy outcaste (building on her migrant 'otherness'), empowering her to unpredictably mix imagery, styles and approaches to create paintings that make wide-reaching tangential connections across cultures. Ferdinands has said: 'My intention overall is to create enduring bonds by amalgamating both Western and South Asian concepts, belief systems and visual languages. Through this synthesis I try to speak to the "in-between space" of varied social and cultural realities I inhabit. The resulting works are a reflection of my hybridity as a Sri Lankan-born Canadian in articulating issues as I see it from this unique perspective.' Put succinctly, P&D from the start was an armory of beautiful resistance that has helped her thinking (sometimes unconsciously) throughout her career and certainly galvanizes at core the work that is seen today.

Indeed to look at Ferdinands' career, the several series of works that have come before, is to see a *patchwork*. Whereas the idea of patchwork has come to be associated with words such as the second-hand, superficial artisan art, the makeshift, the domestic, shabbiness and incompleteness (in the light of P&D this makes more sense now I am sure as patchwork quilts, say, are considered female activities), here I would re-define patchwork to describe Ferdinands' free and unique movement between several different thematic subjects yet all the time showing the same conjoining 'threads' holding the oeuvre together.

Over her career we have perceived Ferdinands bring together disparate painted objects in her paintings (all notably of varying imagined textures) to address a

spectrum of spiritual, environmental and social concerns. This might be food shortage, the domestic space, haute couture fashion or the exploitation of women. The subjects are varied but the attending is similar. In her art a painted loaf of 'Wonderbread' can straddle a reference to Caravaggio and that sit with a Chinese rice bowl, an image of the Buddha's foot or a rare Sri Lankan fish. In her work, nature is not at odds with consumerism, spirituality happens in the same plane as artificiality, so-called high art is not separate from utility and the West is only the other side of the East. Likewise the painting is simply a painted piece of canvas but it is also a metaphorical mirror, a symbol shelf, a ceramic vase we could pick up as well as a fleeting painted memory we can't quite grasp. In this way the stylistic approaches find harmony in her work in their jarring. Even when Ferdinands is painting 'realistically' nothing is meant as sacrosanct. Like a patchwork quilt has a use and a meaning to us, it is still the product of many other cloths that have meanings and uses outside of the original quilt.

Now in 2020 Ferdinands embarks on a new departure where bombastic figuration, or even the semblance of a more direct communication, is largely put aside. I wonder whether it is this that she describes as a new 'sense of mystery' she wants for every work. Where intellectuality would ordinarily have preceded a work of art's creation, an ordering and conscious arrangement, now Ferdinands wants her paintings to be produced intuitively, within her process. There was never any particular emphasis on continuity within her paintings in style and approach, but now Ferdinands wants the differentiation between her symbols to be even less and the overall works to be even more flatly perceived; the line between realism and stylisation, the three-dimensional and the two-dimensional, even less detectable. The joyful decoration of the pictorial space in this series is paramount to the artist. Each canvas should sing before it speaks. In this sense, this feels an open nod to her earliest influence in the P&D Movement that wanted art to bring pleasure again. Ferdinands has looked in every past exhibition at a specific theme and then approached from all angles and planes. Here however she does not want to think of the show in terms of theme. She simply wants to attend to each canvas and see what occurs. An experimentation

such as like seeing/making beauty of a newspaper double-page: its different articles, writers, visual column-ing, array of images and photographs having a balance and related meaning together by being on the same page, being of the same day's news, and yet keeping its disparate form from an objective point of view arrived at by the page designer's machinations more than anything else.

Let us start by looking at the earliest of the paintings in the series, 'Coiled' (2017). Here we see an imaginary tropical landscape populated by stylized flowers, trees, animals and birds. Weaving through the work is a purple serpentine shape that, Ferdinands says, is reminiscent of a snake. Although perhaps in the past Ferdinands would have made this snake-like form more recognisably serpentine to hammer home an association, here she lets the form take a decorative function, compositionally informing no more than other curves in the work, and providing likewise natural landscape-like curves from which the trees and leaves hang, protrude or root. As with all works in the show, pattern is hugely important. Whereas before we would have read it from a porcelain bowl or a table runner, now pattern predominates the surface, meeting and overlapping like a handshake. Often but not always they have meanings attached. Ferdinands says: 'the pattern on the left side is an old traditional *Liya Vale* Sri Lankan design. There are many of these that depict creepers or leaves that form a continuous curving pattern in different directions - some like this one is very symmetrical on each side of the centre. Lotus and other flowers were also incorporated into this type of design. Originally they were used to decorate clay pots, walking sticks, silver platters, pillars, moonstones in front of ancient temples and such like'. We see that this adornment of the canvas is meant to carry us away not only to a tropical landscape but also through the patterns to the everyday imagined village nearby.

Almost from the same yarn comes 'Snakin' (2018). A like serpentine shape finds its way into the piece and this time it has a head: a Sri Lankan devil mask seems to be taking a bite out of itself. This work feels a direct response to Ferdinands' prolonged stay in Sri Lanka where she undertook a Sri Lankan demon mask-

making course. With the head's resemblance to that of an oriental dragon, one cannot help but wonder if this points to Sri Lanka's growing relationship with China. Particularly as the red shape on the left Ferdinands describes as 'like a shield' and the middle one 'like an open vessel'. Certainly the sense of a more narrative meaning is enabled by the stylised sticks that protrude activating the scene, yet the overriding sense is still of a joyful canvas space. There is hope and optimism everywhere within.

It is worth noting how the vast majority of the works in the show are a square format, in itself like detailed, customised tiles of different sizes. If we take a cursory panoramic vista of the show we note that though colourful, all the works together are of the same imagined volume. They all sit at the same visual tonal level, none pronouncing over the other from the point of view of square footage or palette or subject matter. Again this feels Ferdinands thinking broadly about the exhibition as an installation, the audience being wrapped in the delight of this one painterly fabric. It is also a subversion of the definition of uniqueness in art that links her show to P&D once again.

'Blue Palm' (2018) and 'Octopus Eyes' (2018) both introduce the West into her painterly tropics. The former has in the upper left a circular shape which holds a likeness to 19th Century British Arts & Crafts textile work; the octopus' eyes in the latter an artist's nod to Gustave Klimt (an artist who also was not afraid of the power of the decorative) and lastly the leaf shapes are 'made from an early 19th Century Western textile of the 'jungle''. The inclusion makes us consider Western ideas of the exotic as we simultaneously enjoy the traditional Sri Lankan border pattern crossing the canvas horizontally to the right. 'Interlopers' (2019) was the first painting Ferdinands created after taking an Islamic Art course in London in the same year and as such contains antelopes prancing into the scene like in an ancient miniature. One can see the Muslim impact in many of the patterns chosen but particularly in the tree 'painted in an Islamic pattern found in the Great Mosque of Cordoba of 784 AD'. Just near it however is the green curvy shape that relates to Ferdinands' love of Kandinsky. In this way the paintings



'The Burden in Becoming' (2019)
Acrylic on canvas
30 x 30 inches



It's a Small World' (2019)
Acrylic on canvas
36 x 36 inches

take us from great natural beauty to epic civilisation, from the everydayness of textile decoration to the high art of the museum, all in smooth, easy sweeps.

Several decades earlier we have seen Ferdinands use words in her paintings to further broaden associations. Today we see literature used differently in '3 Commas of the Serendip' (2019). The title is a play on the story *The Three Princes of the Serendip*, a Persian fairy tale about Sri Lanka and the source of the word serendipity associated closely with the island. Ferdinands was drawn to how the story was one pivoted on 'inference and discovery'. As such she knits cleverly three comma shapes into the painting so we can do our own extrapolating. These are a punctuational link to the written story and, commas being dividing, the sequential nature of the fable's culmination. The division of the comma and the connective tissue with Sri Lanka, makes one also think that this work relates to the island's three main colonisers: the Dutch, the Portuguese and the British. Ferdinands leaves this to our imagination and delight to guide us.

Perhaps most political of the works in the exhibition is 'It's a Small World' (2019). Although the title is 'taken from an old children's Mickey Mouse book', the painting 'relates to the Disney-fication of the world with the cartoon character in the centre and circling around him the shapes of countries in conflict'. Above Mickey is Syria, says the artist, and 'then going around clockwise is Iraq, USA, India and lastly England. I patterned all of them appropriate to the culture'. Ferdinands appears to be pointing to the caricature manner in which politics is played today; cartoonish clowns taking centre stage in crucial geo-political issues that threaten us all.

Two other works are particularly noteworthy: 'The Burden in Becoming' (2019) and 'No Fixed Address' (2019). In the latter, we see Ferdinands return to the pressing theme of transience, flight and migration. Patterns seem to be migrating from one shape to another whilst a butterfly and a bird in flight are pitted against the symbolic permanency of the tied knot of fabric and the stability of the two urn-like shapes to the right and left. The flamingo perched on one foot seems almost representative of the migrant experience: always appearing like its just

landed though at the same time tempted away by other places. The emphasis in 'The Burden in Becoming' is transformation. There are three vessel-like shapes, all three with South Asian or Islamic patterning: two are attractive vases and one an embellished hand grenade. Butterflies and frogs appear also in this painting, creatures of transformation. The duality of evolution is poetically described by the artist: you can change to become a vessel for nourishment like a vase or you can evolve to be a destroyer like a grenade. You can grow to be loved like a butterfly or you can opt for the frog and divide those that look upon you. The moving aspect however is, whatever you decide, you are made from the same cloth and hold the same wondrous decoration. There is empathy here for the migrant experience: we evolve in a manner that is often out of our hands and we (and others) must be kind.

I could spend more time analysing the patterns and iconography of Ferdinands paintings in this exhibition but more important to me was to show how her past concerns in the last four decades over crucial global issues continue today in the exhibition. They emerge from the painting if searched out. Most important to the artist with this show is the need for each and every canvas to bring sensations of happiness and visual joy to the onlooker. Perhaps the inference is that without this foundation of happiness, what use is anything else?

Jana Manuelpillai

INTRODUCING THE NOBLE SAGE



The Noble Sage is the art collection and dealership of Jana Manuelpillai.

Jana has a wealth of experience behind him. His interest in art at a young age led him to a degree in Art History and English Literature, specialising particularly in Baroque 17th Century Art, European Modernism and the art of Rembrandt. This was followed by a First Class Masters degree in Museum Studies with emphasis on education.

His career has been vast, varied and international, spanning from Dulwich Picture Gallery and South London Gallery to The Barber Institute of Fine Arts and the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art.

For the last fifteen years he has been acquiring art from the Asian subcontinent with a special interest in the Madras College of Art - the earliest British art school in India. His celebrated gallery, The Noble Sage, founded in 2006, was the first physical London space for South Asian contemporary art.

The Noble Sage spotlights the best in Indian, Sri Lankan and Pakistani modern and contemporary art for a clientele with an eye for beauty and a mind for intellectual inspiration.

The Noble Sage Art Collection can be viewed by appointment only. Please contact the gallery on info@thenoblesage.com or by telephone on 07901944997.

Back cover: Detail of 'Purple Pineapple' (2018), acrylic on canvas, 30 x 30 inches

'Snakin' (2018)
Acrylic on canvas
30 x 30 inches





The Noble Sage

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