

# STUDIO VOLTAIRE

T. Venkanna

17 May–23 August 2026

Opening Preview: Saturday 16 May 2026, 3–6 pm



T. Venkanna, *On His Back*, 2024. Image courtesy of the artist and Gallery Maskara.

Through painting, T. Venkanna (b. 1980, Gajwel, India) persistently questions sexual imagination and its entanglements with societal norms, freedom and repression. For his new commission at Studio Voltaire, Venkanna is creating an expansive series of paintings on board using egg tempera and natural pigments. Inspired by the artist's recent travels in Europe, the use of this traditional medium references Venkanna's encounters with Early Renaissance devotional panel paintings. These new works represent a significant evolution in both scale and form for the artist, with individual paintings reaching across multiple panels and gold leaf used for the first time.

Informed by the shifting socio-political contexts of India, the artist's symbolic landscapes, populated by humans, animals and mythical figures, blur the boundaries between private desire and public crisis. Repeating motifs that have appeared in Venkanna's work over several years, such as the image of Adam and Eve, these new works expand the artist's reflections on power, desire, obedience and transgression, as well as connect with recent works that specifically address the politicisation and weaponisation of sex as a tool of power and coercion.

Emerging from a daily practice of painting and drawing in his studio in Hyderabad, the fantastical and at times unsettling aesthetic of Venkanna's paintings detail abominable landscapes, with visions that blend the sacred with the scatological, and combine hidden moments of intimacy with disconcerting public spectacles. Amongst palm trees and freshly trimmed topiary, the boundaries between public and private, real and imaginary, object and subject dissolve and reform.

Central to the exhibition will be a new large-scale painting, titled *Sculpture Garden*. Spanning nearly five metres up towards the vaulted ceiling of Studio Voltaire's former chapel gallery and unfolding across five panels, the work shows a towering, verdant landscape populated by a collection of recognisable sculptures, such as Michelangelo's *David*, entwined or reclining alongside human figures, stone fountains and hybrid creatures. Appearing at once as a paradise, a public park and a theatre, the painting depicts the garden as a space where desire, control and isolation coexist.

Each composition in the exhibition draws together histories of image-making across Western and South Asian visual traditions. Renaissance imagery, such as Correggio's *Leda and the Swan* or Dürer's *Adam and Eve* features alongside references to the gilded manuscripts of the Mughal Empire, Indian miniature paintings and the compositions of temple reliefs. By underscoring enduring cycles of desire, destruction and domination, the artist complicates our understanding of a contemporary moment shaped by nationalism, hyperconsumerism, and environmental decay.

This exhibition follows Venkanna's inclusion in *Artist-to-Artist*, selected by Bharti Kher at Frieze London, presented by Gallery Maskara, Mumbai.

ENDS

## Notes to editors

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## Supporters and Funders

Lead Programme Supporter: Blanca & Sunil Hirani Charitable Trust. Programme Supporter: The Burger Collection with additional support from the T. Venkanna Exhibition Circle, The Studio Voltaire Council and Art Fund's John Ruffer Curatorial Grant.

## About T. Venkanna

T. Venkanna b.1980, Gajwel, India; lives and works in Hyderabad, India. Selected solo and group exhibitions include: *The Human Theatre*, Gallery Maskara, Mumbai (2025); *Politically Charged*, Aicon, New York (2024); *Asia Now*, Modesti Perdriolle Gallery, Brussels (2023); *The Art of India*, Clarinda Carnegie Art Museum, Iowa (2021); *Looking for Peace*, Sakshi Gallery, Mumbai (2017); and *Trajectories: 19th – 21st Century Printmaking from India and Pakistan*, Sharjah Art Museum (2014).

## About Studio Voltaire

Studio Voltaire is one of the UK's leading not-for-profit arts and education organisations. Championing emerging and under-represented artists, we commission and produce exhibitions, artist development programmes, civic and learning projects,

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