



The Lyrical Line
All Embracing and Flowing

❧ SALMA ARASTU ❧

WORKS FROM 1998 - 2008

Celebration through Line: Paintings of Salma Arastu

Indian born, Salma Arastu extols celebration. Each painting is a celebration of human relationships – mother to child, husband to wife, individual to community – in their most vulnerable and private moments. Each painting, with its faceless people and interchangeable figures, speaks to all races, genders and faiths and is a personal quest on the part of the artist to seek inner peace.

In paintings like *Tribal Joy* (page 20), *When She Became a Widow* (page 58) and *One Continent - One Humanity* (page 43), Salma is at her best. The organic, elastic quality of a continuous line moves across the picture plane, molding and reshaping space. This singular preoccupation with the drawn line that locks fragments of colored surfaces together into tight, cohesive compositions, speaks to Salma's vision of a world of "togetherness." There is a cerebral game of hide-and-seek, where figures and space bond to show volume and deny it all at the same time. In these paintings, the ambiguity of pictorial space is a given. It is the line that performs, both as a mark – a continuous impulse – and as contour, that charges space.

However, it is in the *Blue God* (page 78) series that Salma as "a woman, a Hindu, a Muslim and a multi-cultural artist" shows us her ability to tie cultural narrative into a gestalt. The blue central figure reminiscent of the Hindu god Krishna is centralized and consumed in the rapture of undulating space. She also uses the mandala and alpona symbols from Hindu art to express unity of corporeal matter as seen in *I Found You All*

Around Me (page 82) and *The New Earth* (page 15). Although figure and space remain in a single universal field, they each retain their identity. The signature red that one sees repeated in most of Salma's paintings is to remind us of love and hope, a central theme in her work.

In paintings such as *Hope - the Moon* (page 51), *Hope - the Sun* (page 50), *Three Angels* (page 79) and *Nine Midnight Muses* (page 18), there is total abandonment of the narrative and a sheer delight in enlivening the surface through color, line and texture. Smudges of color, defined by the line, float independently into shapes and are held together by the repetitious forms of layered, textured surfaces. Her faint and fragile figures, usually devoid of gender, spread out horizontally at the bottom of the canvas or paper, and are locked together by the tenacious line quality into an amassed, glowing form, representing humanity. Humanity and nature are in total synchrony. Salma's belief in the ultimate victory of human dignity and in the continuity of human cycles sings out melodiously. The impenetrable forms that blaze from the amassing of the figures speak to this end and act as a beacon renewing the desire of humans for wholeness and harmony.

Halide Salam, Ph.D

Professor of Art / Curator of Non-Western Art,
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PEACEMAKERS
2008 · ACRYLICS AND MIXED MEDIA ON CANVAS · 48" x 48"



MUSIKFEST
2004 · ACRYLICS AND MIXED MEDIA ON BOARD · 48" x 72"

RUPA MODY, ALLENTOWN, PA

∞ This mural was created during Musikfest, an annual event in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, in August 2004. Salma Arastu was the invited mural artist.



LET FAITH ARISE
2002 • ACRYLICS ON CANVAS • 54" x 72"

*LET FAITH ARISE
AND SHINE
UP AND ABOVE
AND WITHIN
SPIRITUALITY IS THE ONLY SOLACE,
THE SOLE STRENGTH
THAT JOINS TOGETHER
MY OWN DISTORTED LIMBS
AND UNITES ME
THE HUMANITY, AGAIN*

THE KNOWLEDGE
2005 • ACRYLICS ON BOARD • 38" x 48"

CHIP & SAM MORROW, CENTER VALLEY, PA



ONE CONTINENT - ONE HUMANITY
2008 · ACRYLICS AND MIXED MEDIA
ON CANVAS · 38" X 48"

*YOU ARE NOT ALONE IN THE WORLD
YOU ARE WOVEN LIKE TAPESTRY
WITH DIFFERENT THREADS COMBINED
WHAT IS YOUR EXISTENCE WITHOUT THEM?
AND WHAT IS YOUR EXISTENCE WITH THEM?
IF YOU BREAK, YOU ARE A SOCIAL TYRANT
IF YOU MOVE ALONG, YOU DO NOT REMAIN YOURSELF.*

Women Groups



CHANTING TOGETHER
2005 · ACRYLICS ON CANVAS ·
60" x 90"

FROM MY CHILDHOOD, IN AJMER (RAJASTHAN), I HAVE MEMORIES OF GROUPS OF WOMEN: TAKING WATER FROM THE PUBLIC WATER — TAP OR WELL; WORKING TOGETHER ON HOUSEHOLD CHORES; GOSSIPING TOGETHER; IN BEREAVEMENT, COMING TOGETHER TO CONSOLE; AT WEDDINGS, DRESSING THE BRIDE TOGETHER; PRAYING TOGETHER; CHANTING TOGETHER; SINGING AND DANCING TOGETHER. AN AMAZING KIND OF LYRICAL ENERGY FLOWS FROM THESE GROUPS OF WOMEN. THIS ENERGY IN A LYRICAL FORM HAS BEEN

MY FAVORITE SUBJECT. BY PAINTING WOMEN AGAIN AND AGAIN, I PAY TRIBUTE TO MY MOTHER, ALAM'S MOTHER AND MY TEACHERS AT THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, ALL OF WHOM HAVE NURTURED ME, CHANGED ME AND GIVEN ME STRENGTH AND AN UNSHAKABLE FAITH IN ALL THAT IS GOOD.



WOMEN — YOU ARE LOVE
WOMEN — YOU ARE ENERGY
WOMEN — YOU ARE MERCY
WOMEN — YOU ARE STRENGTH
ALONE YOU CAN BRING OUT THE BEST IN YOUR FAMILIES
TOGETHER YOU CAN NURTURE NATIONS
AND MAKE A BETTER WORLD!



THE BRIDE - I
1999 · ACRYLICS AND MIXED MEDIA ON CANVAS · 52" x 38"



THE BRIDE - II
2001 · ACRYLICS AND MIXED MEDIA ON BOARD · 20" x 30"

SHIRIN & PAWAN KAPUR



SHARING LIGHT
2008 • ACRYLICS AND MIXED MEDIA ON CANVAS • 38" x 48"

It is interesting, however, that the most recent work, structured to explore the contemporary artistic idiom, clearly displays elements encoded in the style of Indian miniatures. And indeed the works which recall this tradition are among the artist's strongest pieces.

The blending of traditional and contemporary imagery shows the artist striving for a unique personal expression. Visual elements from numerous cultures, traditional and modern, Eastern and Western, are her tools.

— Excerpt from a short essay, “Salma Arastu, Traditional and Contemporary Imagery,” by Charlotta Kotik, Curator of Contemporary Art, Brooklyn Museum of Art. This essay introduced the paintings by Ms. Arastu, in a solo exhibition at the Art Heritage Gallery, in New Delhi, India in March 1998.

Ms. Arastu believes in the ultimate victory of human dignity and in the continuity of human cycles. The impenetrable forms that arise from the amassing of the figures speak to this end and act as a beacon renewing the desire of humans for independence and determination.

— Excerpt from an introductory note by Halide Salam, Curator of Non-Western Art, Radford University Art Museum, Radford, VA. This 2005 Salma Arastu exhibition was sponsored by the McGlothlin Family Endowment in support of the South Asian Cultures Festival in 2005.

The geometrics are a highly popular form in Islamic art, whereas a cube relates to the “Kaaba,” the sacred place for Muslims all over the world. Brilliantly she archives the childhood memories of story telling, music lessons, family meals, leisure times within a square; unconsciously she has saved these happy memories. The “Cube” relates to the spirit and there are several nuances relating to the “Cube.”

— Excerpt from an essay, “Art Scene, Illumination: Salma Arastu” by Fatima S. Khan, art curator, in *Pakistan Link*, first Pakistani newspaper on the internet since 1994, Wednesday, May 30th, 2007.

With her suggestive and suggested miniatures, so modern and respectfully

reinterpreted, we feel the emotion of a present immersed in the past and yet projected into the future. Evocative and refined, Salma's miniatures are totally fresh and enjoyable.

— Excerpt from an essay, “Admirable Fusion of Grace and Energy,” by curator of “A Gallery” in New York City, in *The Asia Observer*, January 29, 1998. This was a solo exhibition by Salma Arastu.

Whether figuratively narrative or purely abstract, Arastu expresses, especially through paint handling and color, a spiritual joy not commonly found in most contemporary art.

— Excerpt from an art review by Isadore La Duca in *The Irregular, The Easton & Two River Area*, June 1998. This was Salma's solo show of paintings at De Arte Magick Galleria in Easton, PA.

Arastu's new work is a unique spin on folk art and miniatures, blended with western techniques.

— Excerpt from an art review, “A Bite of the Big Apple,” by art critic Lavina Melwani in *India Today*, February 23rd, 1998. This review was for Salma's solo show at the “A Gallery,” New York City.

Salma's paintings are an admirable fusion of grace and energy. They are delicate and yet so powerful. Her abstract works are a charming explosion of light and shapes.

— Excerpt from an art review, “Kamlesh Arastu's Exhibition at 'A Gallery,’” New York City, in *News India-Times*, page 28, February 6, 1998.

This series of paintings is a procession and progression of our life. Salma connected us to the circular spiral. She gave us another look into life with paintings done in groups, family and friends, holding and touching and gathering.