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AGE CANNOT  
WITHER HIM

**An exhibition of KG**

Subramanyan's 'New Works'  
reveals that the 90-year-old  
artist is as inventive as ever



WEEKEND





■ Speaking Tree (reverse painting on acrylic sheet), above; Icon on Horseback (reverse painting on acrylic sheet), left; Girl Against Streets (gouache on board), far left; Icons Big and Small (reverse painting on acrylic sheet), below left; KG Subramanian, below

DEFIX

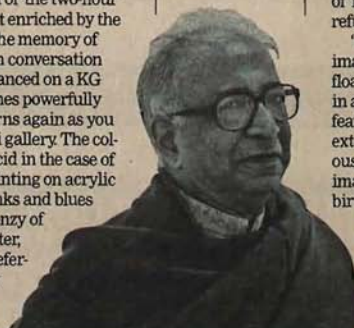


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he colours are exuberant, the strokes fluid, the ideas playful-serious, and the images inventive. It's almost difficult to believe that this exhibition of KG Subramanian's 'New Works' at the Art Heritage Gallery (Basement), Triveni Kala Sangam, is in celebration of his 90th birthday.

The only time you met the artist at his home in Baroda in 2005 - he was one of the 9 artists with roots in Kerala whose work was part of The Double Enders exhibition curated by Bose Krishnamachari that year, and you were to interview all of them for a book, a mammoth task that, regrettably, was stillborn - he spoke about art, literature,

culture and life, throwing in polysyllabic words that would have seemed absurd if anyone else had used them in speech, and generally holding you in thrall with his conversation. Towards the end of the two-hour chat, you had wilted but felt enriched by the ideas he had introduced. The memory of that late summer afternoon conversation returned whenever you chanced on a KG Subramanian work, the lines powerfully individualistic, and it returns again as you wander around the Triveni gallery. The colours are brighter, almost acid in the case of Dancing Icon, a reverse painting on acrylic sheet that features deep pinks and blues and a central figure in a frenzy of movement. Man with Rooster, gouache on board, which references tribal art is similarly startling in its choice of colour.



## FIND YOUR WAY HERE

**WHAT:** 'New Works' an Exhibition of artworks by KG Subramanian

**WHERE:** Art Heritage Gallery (Basement), Triveni Kala Sangam, 205, Tansen Marg, Mandi House

**WHEN:** 11am to 7pm (closed on Sundays), Till April 20

Icon 1, another reverse painting on acrylic has a wide-eyed goddess led by twin smiling tigers, her six hands holding various implements. The four other figures, including a young woman, in modern clothing, in the work seem to be divorced from the world of the goddess and yet to play some part in it.

Not all the paintings on display are saturated in colour like Arhats and 2 with its four bright standing figures, or like Hanuman 1 and 2 which juxtaposes playful langurs in the first panel with the figure of Hanuman holding aloft the Dronagiri mountain with its life-saving herb. The little frame of the cockerel at the entrance - executed in black water colour - that seems ready to jump right off the white paper too affords much viewing pleasure. Unsurprisingly given KG Subramanian's quick wit, undiminished by the passing years, there is humour too, and Speaking Tree with its opposing heads that say 'Baa' and 'Boo' elicits a laugh even as it makes you wonder at its symmetry.

As with all the artist's work, these paintings make the viewer think of myth and actuality, of the fantastic in the everyday and vice versa, and of symbolism, the multiplicity of meaning, and of KG Subramanian's depth of knowledge of both folk forms and of international currents in art, and his refusal to give in to the merely trendy.

"I am by nature a fabulist. I transform images, change their character, make them float, fly, perform, tell a visual story," he says in an excellent interview with R Siva Kumar featured in the exhibition catalogue. "To that extent my pictures are playful and spontaneous... It will be unproductive to explain each image as it will destroy the mystery of its birth."

He is wise to avoid explanations. Each viewer will interpret these paintings for herself and that is what makes them as rich as any others in KG Subramanian's wonderful and varied body of work.



■ Dancing Icon (reverse painting on acrylic sheet), above; Devi, 2 (gouache on board), left