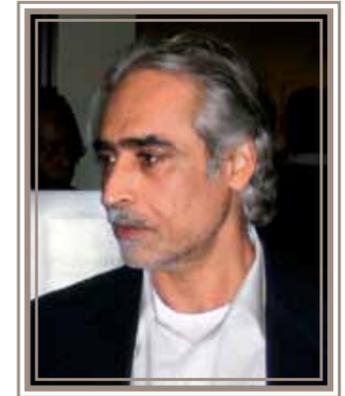
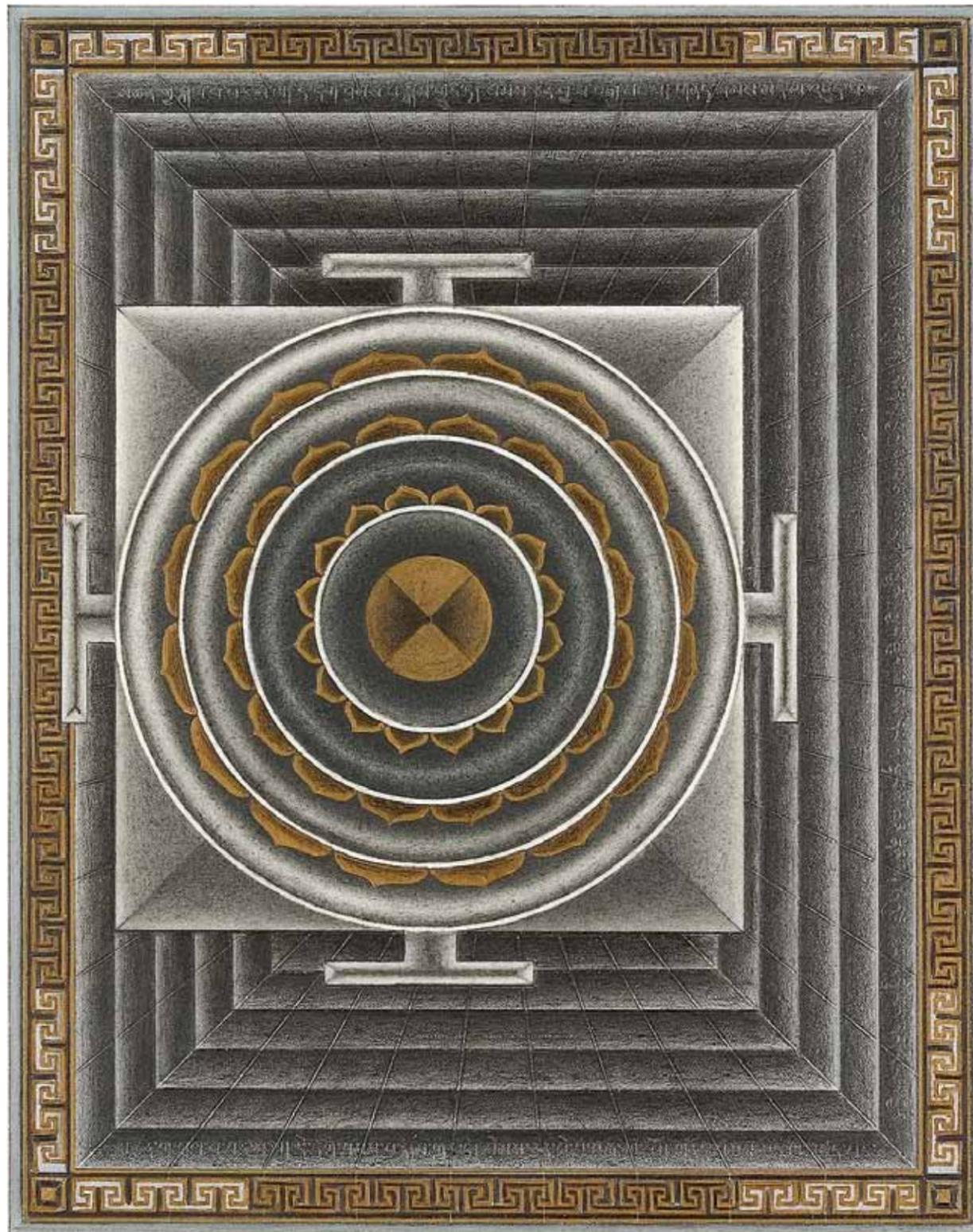


Artist Revri's solo show in Washington DC



Anil Revri

*Western critics, collectors, and museum goers have long admired traditional Indian art. But contemporary Indian works, despite the relatively high prices some have fetched at auctions in recent years, remain an acquired taste. First, the prices, even for masters of 20th century Indian art, have never been as high as they can be for contemporaneous Western art. Besides, most of the buyers are Indians rather than Western collectors or museums. Not surprisingly, then, it is rare for an Indian-born artist to win two solo shows in mainstream museums as painter Anil Revri has done. The American University Museum at the Katzen Arts Center in Washington, DC, recently presented his Faith and Liberation through Abstraction, in its enormous, beautifully lit space, says **Vibbuti Patel***



Photographs by Neil Greentree

Cultural Crossings 1.1, 1998–2001.
Mixed media on Arches paper.
12 x 9 in (30.48 x 22.86 cm).
Collection of the Corcoran Gallery of Art

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Revri, 56, has lived in the States for 30 years. He came as a graduate of Bombay's J.J. School of Art after having had a show at the Jehangir Art Gallery as a precocious undergraduate. Later, he trained at DC's Corcoran School of Art and, in 2004, had his first one-man show at the Corcoran Gallery. Now, his new work has received favourable reviews in major news publications and praise from established art critics and scholars who compared his paintings to those of greats like Wassily Kandinsky and Piet Mondrian.

Indian viewers, too, have been surprised by Revri's art on many levels: it is nothing if not deeply Indian, but it is not ethnically representational or colourful. It is steeped in spirituality but not in religion. Intricately crafted as any miniature, but still abstract, modern, monochromatic and intense, it is profoundly personal. It arises from a meditative inward focus as Revri creates with the *Gayatri mantra* playing in the background. (Visual artists' choice of background 'music' can often be telling: M F Husain painted a huge on-site mural, at a press conference in a New York gallery, with Beethoven blasting from a boom box; Sohan Qadri painted in 'total silence, in tranquil Copenhagen', to facilitate meditation while he worked.) For Revri, the holiest of all ancient mantras serves as a metronome: he uses it for its incantatory Vedic Sanskrit, its lack of emotional highs and lows. He was taught the *Gayatri* by his grandmother as a visualization aid to combat childhood fears. "It erases anxiety and negativities", he says. It is an 'autosuggestion' that he found valuable when battling years-long physical pain (the result of two disabling accidents), an immigrant's emotional pain and an artist's tough life.

He struggled to make ends meet by bartending, waiting tables, freelance designing, and lived with disappointments of broken promises—professionally and personally.

But it was not always so. Revri grew up in a cultivated middle class family marked by the unique secularism of post-independence India where all religions were simultaneously equal and private. His economist father worked for Hindustan Steel, his mother was the famed Ram Gopal's lead classical dancer. His childhood was spent watching his mother onstage, whenever he was not travelling by train from one steel town (Jamshedpur) to another (Bhilai), and hearing horror stories of the atrocities of the Partition from his grandmother who had been displaced from Lahore in 1947. Later, when his widowed mother married noted journalist Inder Malhotra, their home was filled with culturally diverse artists and intellectuals. This rich childhood was to profoundly influence the art Revri created in the New World, as he responded to religious violence erupting in the aftermath of the 1992 destruction of the Babri Mosque in India, and the equally traumatic tragedy of 9/11 in the United States.

The Katzen show is a retrospective that includes several series of paintings, with the newest, the 'Ram Darwaza' works, inspired by his mother's death in 2007. As she lay immobilized in bed, a frustrated Rekha Revri Malhotra told her son, "I wish I could enter into one of your geometric compositions and dance my way to the

OPPOSITE *Ram Darwaza 6*, 2010.
Mixed media on canvas.
60 x 50 in (152.4 x 127 cm)



