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TALK

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(Clockwise from above) Artist Edouard Baribeaud's works; Baribeaud

The View from the Other Side

In his first solo in India, Franco-German artist Edouard Baribeaud creates a dialogue between Indian miniature tradition, western art history and contemporary life

POOJA PILLAI

IT STARTED with *Within you, without you* from The Beatles' seminal 1967 album, Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band. Edouard Baribeaud, whose father enjoyed listening to the Fab Four's music, says, "I was only a boy when I first heard the song. I could hear an instrument on it, which I had never heard before and asked my father what it is. He told me that's Pt Ravi Shankar's sitar." And thus began the artist's lifelong fascination with India, which has recently culminated in "The Nocturnal Vault", Baribeaud's first solo show in India. In this show,

which is currently on at Mumbai's Galerie Isa, the artist draws inspiration from the Indian miniature art tradition. "I particularly love the Mughal court paintings and the Kangra style," says 32-year-old, half-French and half-German Baribeaud, who's always been interested in how one can draw connections between different cultures. "I enjoy creating works which draw on many different styles, themes and concerns. I like to think of these works as creating a dialogue between Western motifs and myths and Indian art, but in a contemporary way," he says. Baribeaud's intention of bridging different art cultures

and history is explicit in works such as *Hold On To Me* and *Eve*. In the former, the pose of the nude figure in the foreground can be seen as an homage to the reclining nude in European art tradition, most notably Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres' *La Grande Odalisque*. But that's where the resemblance ends, since this figure is a distinctly contemporary one, with socks on her feet and a knitted scarf wrapped around her throat. The floral pattern in the image is reminiscent of the highly stylised depiction of foliage that one encounters in Indian miniature painting. *Eve*, too, displays a similar hybridity, a refusal to belong to a single

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time or place — the figure's resemblance to her Biblical namesake lies in the fact of her nudity and the densely forested landscape that she occupies. Yet, she's also distinctly Indian, with her long-plaited hair, flowers and jewellery, and the landscape she occupies, as we can tell from the vegetation, is trop-

ical and, in all likelihood, Indian. There's also a distinct theatrical element in each of the works, a sense that what the painting presents to us is merely a facade behind which there are other truths, waiting to be revealed. In *Hold On To Me*, for instance, the nude is posed so that she seems to be watching as a

curtain rises to reveal figures that are, for the moment, obscured. Many times, the artist leaves explicit indications that everything is staged, such as in *A Deep Conversation*, where the female figure at the centre of the work is familiar from Indian miniatures. But as we absorb the larger composition, we notice that she is actually painted onto the wall of a club, at the end of which is a door and through this door is peeking another female figure. This one, dressed in jeans and carrying a guitar, seems more likely to be the protagonist of this painting as she waits to occupy the spotlight on the empty stage. The stage — or set — appears again, along with the-

atrical paraphernalia like lights and ladders, in other works such as *The Hunt* and *The Waiting*. The inclusion of these theatre and film elements is, once again, an attempt at bridging gaps — in this case, between visual arts and performing arts. The Berlin-based artist, who was trained at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, has also trained in filmmaking, and it was on a research trip for a documentary on the *kathputhli* tradition, that he first encountered Indian miniature art. At the museums in Jaipur and Jodhpur, as well as the National Museum of Art, Baribeaud found himself drawn towards the displays of

"The Nocturnal Vault" is on at Galerie Isa, Fort, till November 22