

h e r h e r e n o r t h e r e

BARI IN  
KUMAR TRANSIT



BARI  
KUMAR

IN  
TRANSIT





# BARI KUMAR

# INTER VIEW

**Q: Can you start by explaining the title of the exhibition "In Transit"?**

**A:** In an objective sense, it refers to something in between, a stop over. This exhibition being in London is in-between where I was born, India, and America where I live. But on a personal level, it's a certain state of being in limbo, of being neither here nor there, like a pause in life's course; a psychological situation rather than a geographical displacement.

**Q: Is this state of being "In Transit" a positive one for you?**

**A:** After graduating from my studies in Los Angeles I came to a very conscious cross road. I had to decide whether to accept and take in those visual and cultural references now around me or to refer back only to my roots and go from there. My feeling was to open myself up to whatever appealed to me regardless of its country of origin; what was important was its connection with me. It's a very personal process; I'm often drawn to things another would pass by. My appropriation of both Indian and non-Indian cultural references means it's not easily pigeon holed, and I like it that way. In many ways I see myself as an outsider. I conform to neither what people think of as an Indian or an American artist. Likewise I don't really involve myself within any particular art scene. For me what's important is not the extremes but finding your voice in the balance that lies in between.

**Q: Where do you look for inspiration?**

**A:** When I was growing up in India I wasn't really that exposed to art, and what I had seen in museums didn't inspire me much. Rather than the classical or modernist art of India, it was the

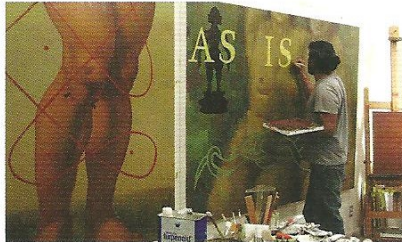
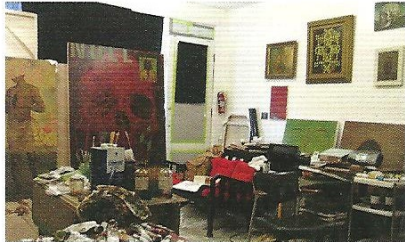
lively activity on the street that drew me in. In particular, the multi-layered dialogue between the people and the visuals around them. For instance, the film posters on the walls next to religious temples which would change constantly from week to week, whether graffitied with political slogans, torn away, defaced, pasted over, spat or even pissed on. I was fascinated by the manner in which they become loaded images, blurring the lines between what's sacred, profane and pop culture.

I built upon that interest through my graphic design studies in LA specializing in advertising, logos, and typography. I also used my time to explore the Renaissance painters and sculptors. I didn't have the opportunity to do life drawing in India and many of my subjects were fully clothed. My study of western art meant the human form entered my work very strongly.

But I found that many symbols and iconography, once removed from their cultural context, can take on a very different meaning. What means something to one person does not necessarily mean the same to another. It was this idea of perception and misperception that began to shape my work. For instance, when you paint an iconic figure, you are dealing with a visual heavily laden with references. By altering its form, colour and its environment, the figures are re-contextualized into a contemporary discourse. For me, I want to bring the Gods down to an earth level as well as to represent humanity through the symbols and icons that we mostly idealise.

**Q: Your work "Future Revisited" has a very ethereal quality to it; can you tell me about this painting?**

**A:** That's a very personal piece, being a portrait of my wife. It's of her in the morning, her braids loosened by a night's sleep.



I chose to paint her from behind, the less identifiable side, the more vulnerable side. It's an image I originally painted ten years ago and therefore in one sense the title refers to a revisiting of the theme. However it is also about being now in what was at one time our future, and a consideration as to where we are in our lives now and what lies ahead.

Also by reversing the text above the figure, it brings into question the relationship between the observer and the observed; a certain nod to the surrealist painter, Rene Magritte.

**Q:** At the moment you are in Hyderabad working on textile fabric pieces; please tell me a little more about these works?

**A:** As a child I used to go with my relatives to the cloth shops where the local women bought their saris. I found them to be fascinating, beautiful places. There are reams of coloured fabric and each one is meant for a different garment. For example, one is for blouses, a finer weave, and one is a cheaper material for the under skirt, the petticoats. Despite all the customers being female the whole operation is run by men.

The vision of this remained with me, and in the last couple of years it has subtly materialised itself in the figurative element of my paintings. My images have become ever more deconstructed into bold, mosaic patterns of colour. I wanted to fully explore this and bring the idea of the fabric to the forefront.

However, it took me several years to work out how to reference them. I decided to use thousands of meters of fabrics in hundreds of variant colours as the strokes and colours of my paintings, each petticoat behaving like a pixel within a digital image. Each fabric is cut and folded over cardboard to a size in proportion to what is in the cloth shops and inserted on to a frame like books on a shelf.

The petticoat, the normally "unseen" garment, becomes at last a very visible element and the maker of the image. The idea of the underdog, the hidden, has always fascinated me. One can relate it to American society; it is the immigrant workforce which helps support the system of everyday life, but it is an invisible force which is not recognized. They almost don't exist.

**Q:** What are your thoughts on the current Indian art scene and Indian art market? Do you see the developments as bringing about good opportunities for younger contemporary artists like yourself?

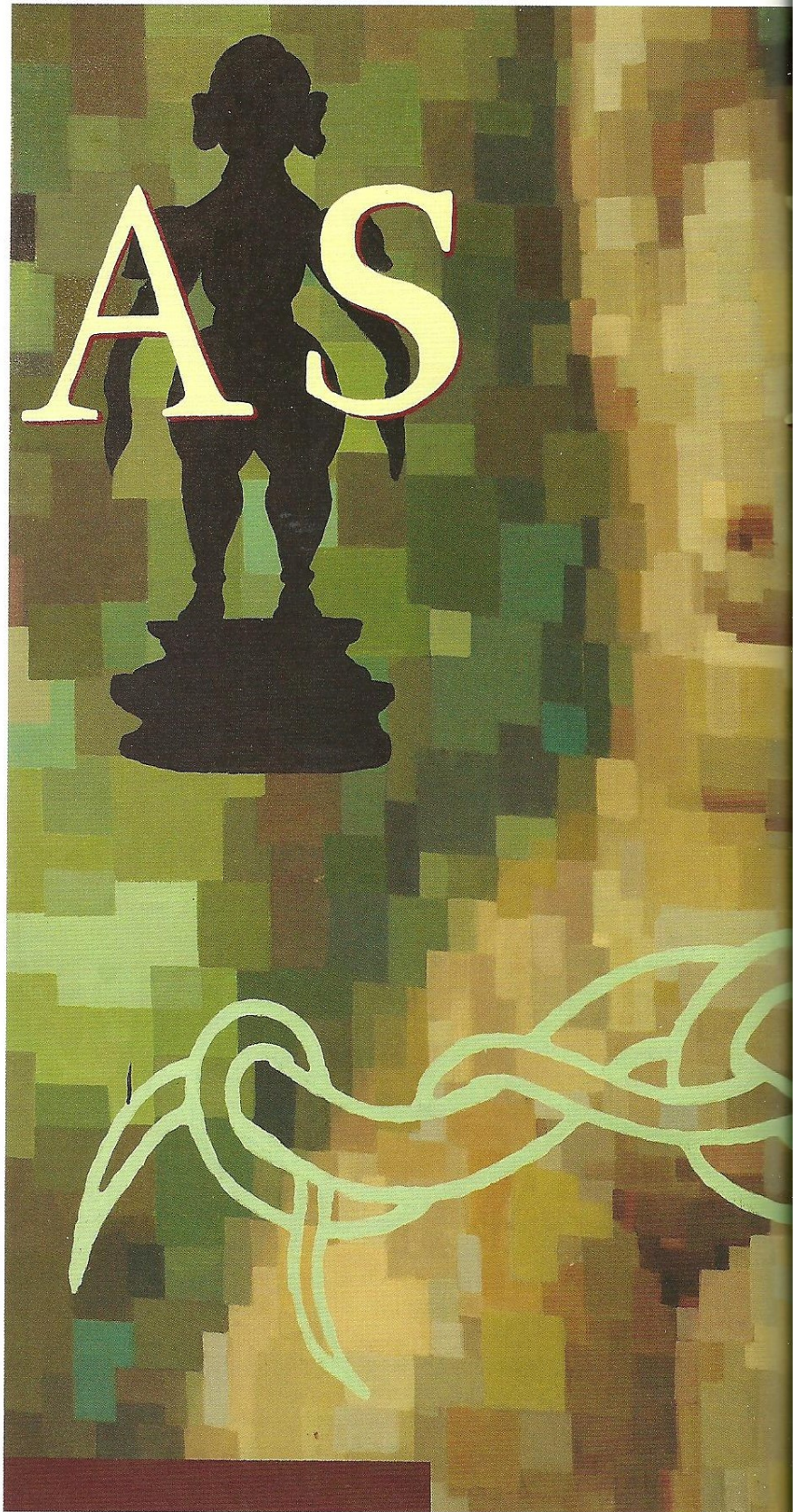
**A:** For many years, I felt that the art scene was very indigenous in nature. With the advent of computers, the access to an international pantheon of artists was made possible. This opens up the dialogue of an artist's work beyond their geographical surroundings. As the focus is on the contemporary Indian art, it provides many artists the opportunity to show their creativity to a larger global audience.

In terms of the Indian art market, it's had a very rapid growth; I feel like it's on steroids. It certainly has its share of positive and negative drawbacks. I hope it brings on a level of appreciation at a grass root level beyond it being reduced to a mere commodity. The chance of an extended dialogue with other artists from different countries is what really excites me. I appreciate the opportunities to exhibit my work around the world, as I always have tried to do without compromising on my inner voice.

Conversation with Bari Kumar and Conor Macklin, 10 April 2008

1

*As Is*  
2008  
Oil on canvas  
152.4cm x 213.4cm  
60in x 84in



IS

+



b é n é f i c e   d u   d o u t e



2

*Dahlia*

2008

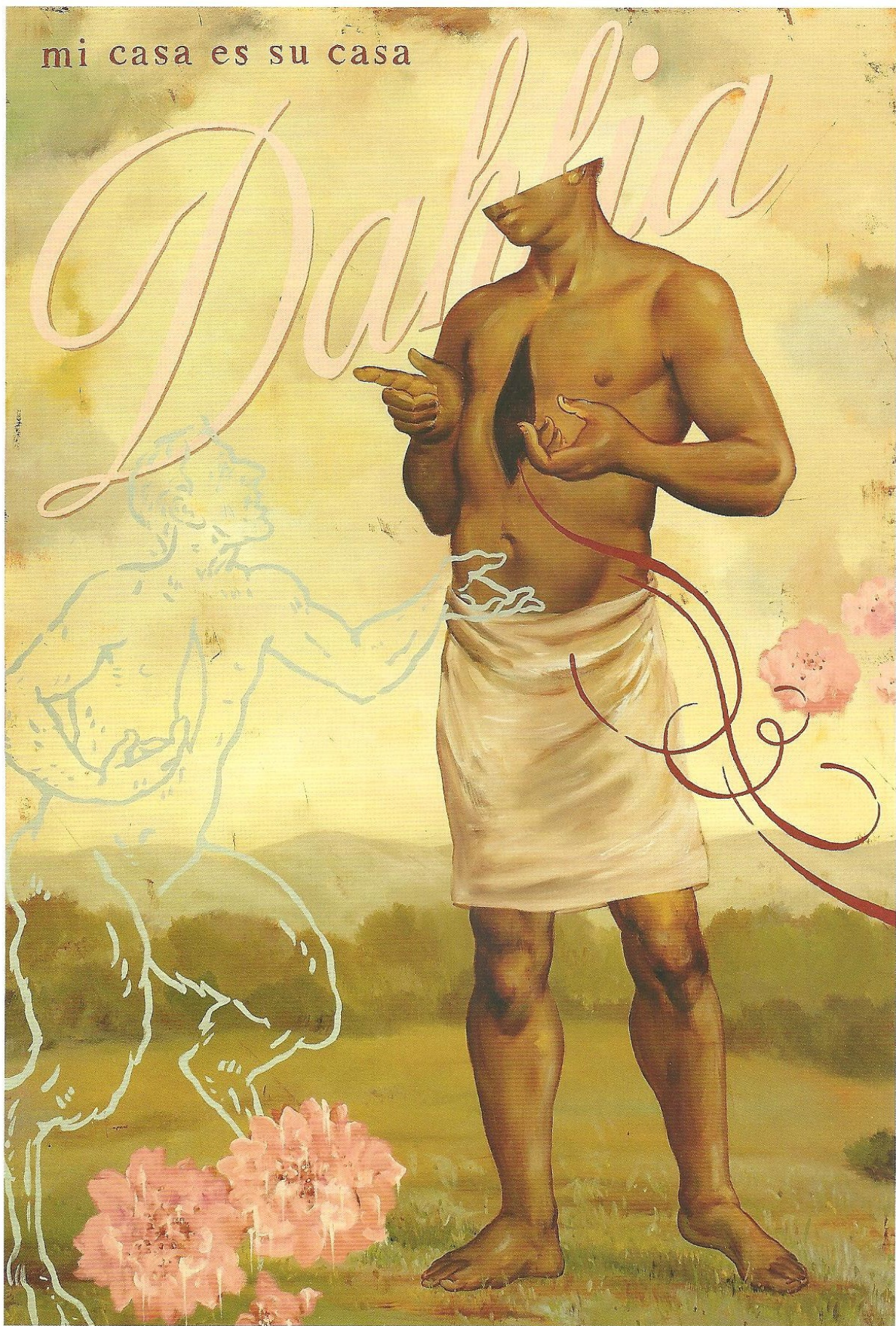
Oil on canvas

182.9cm x 121.9cm

72in x 48in



mi casa es su casa



**3**

***Deliverance***

**2008**

**Oil on canvas**

**121.9cm x 91.4cm**

**48in x 36in**



15

4

*Future Revisited*

2008

Oil on canvas

121.9cm x 91.4cm

48in x 36in

Bani Khamar

2008

FUTURE



**5**

*In Transit*

2008

Oil on canvas

152.4cm x 182.9cm

60in x 72in



neither here nor there

I  
N  
T  
R  
A  
N  
S  
I  
T



6

*Just Is*

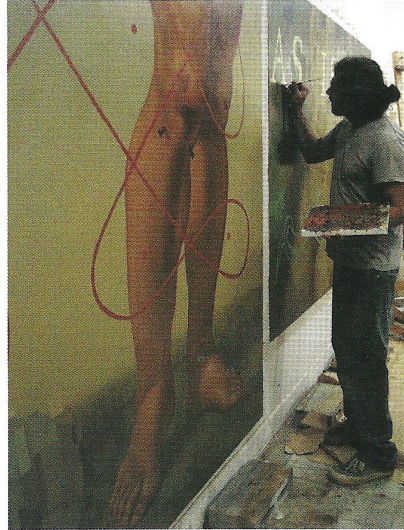
2008  
Oil on canvas  
243.8cm x 182.9cm  
96in x 72in

7

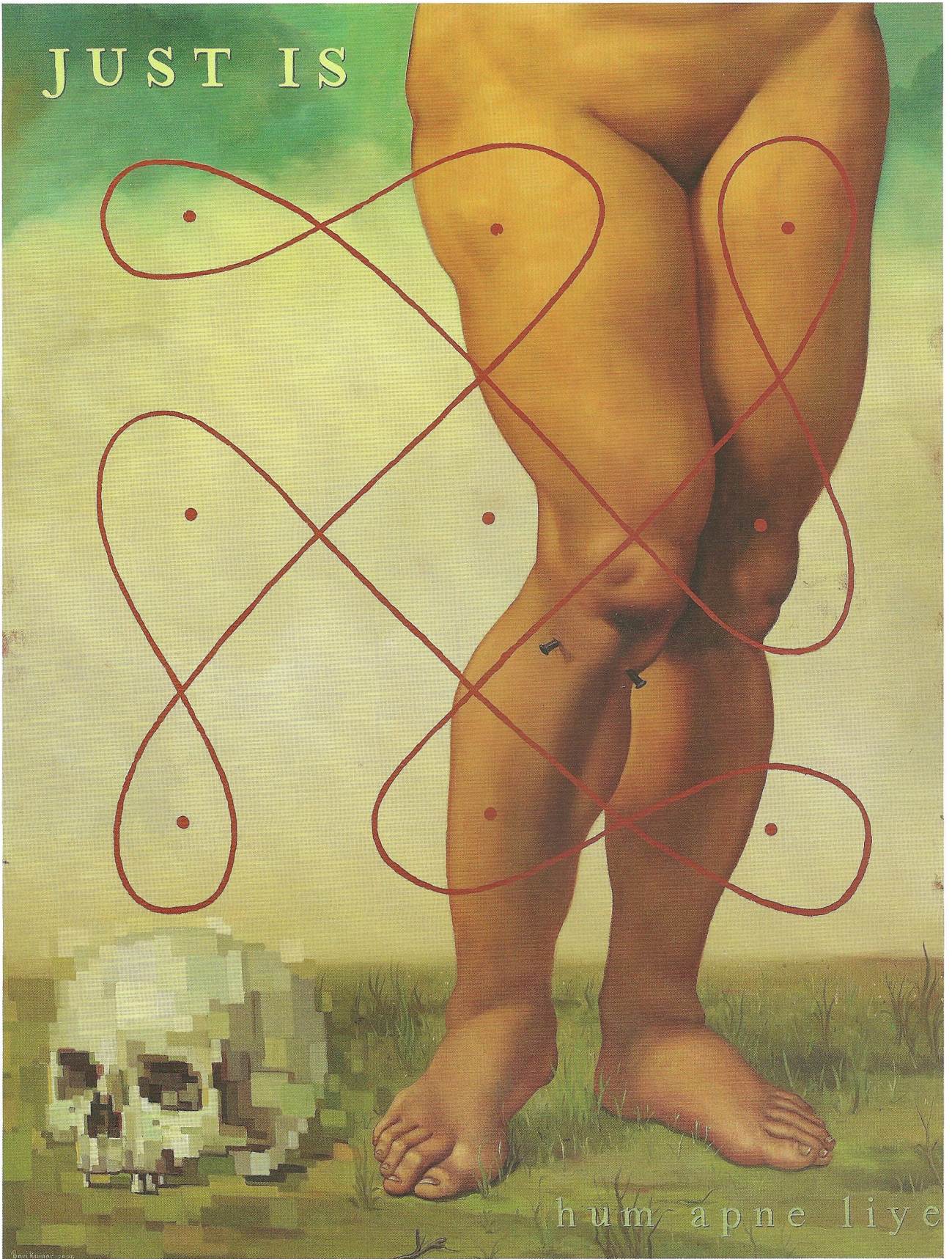
*Nothing (else) Matters*

2008  
Oil on canvas  
121.9cm x 182.9cm  
48in x 72in

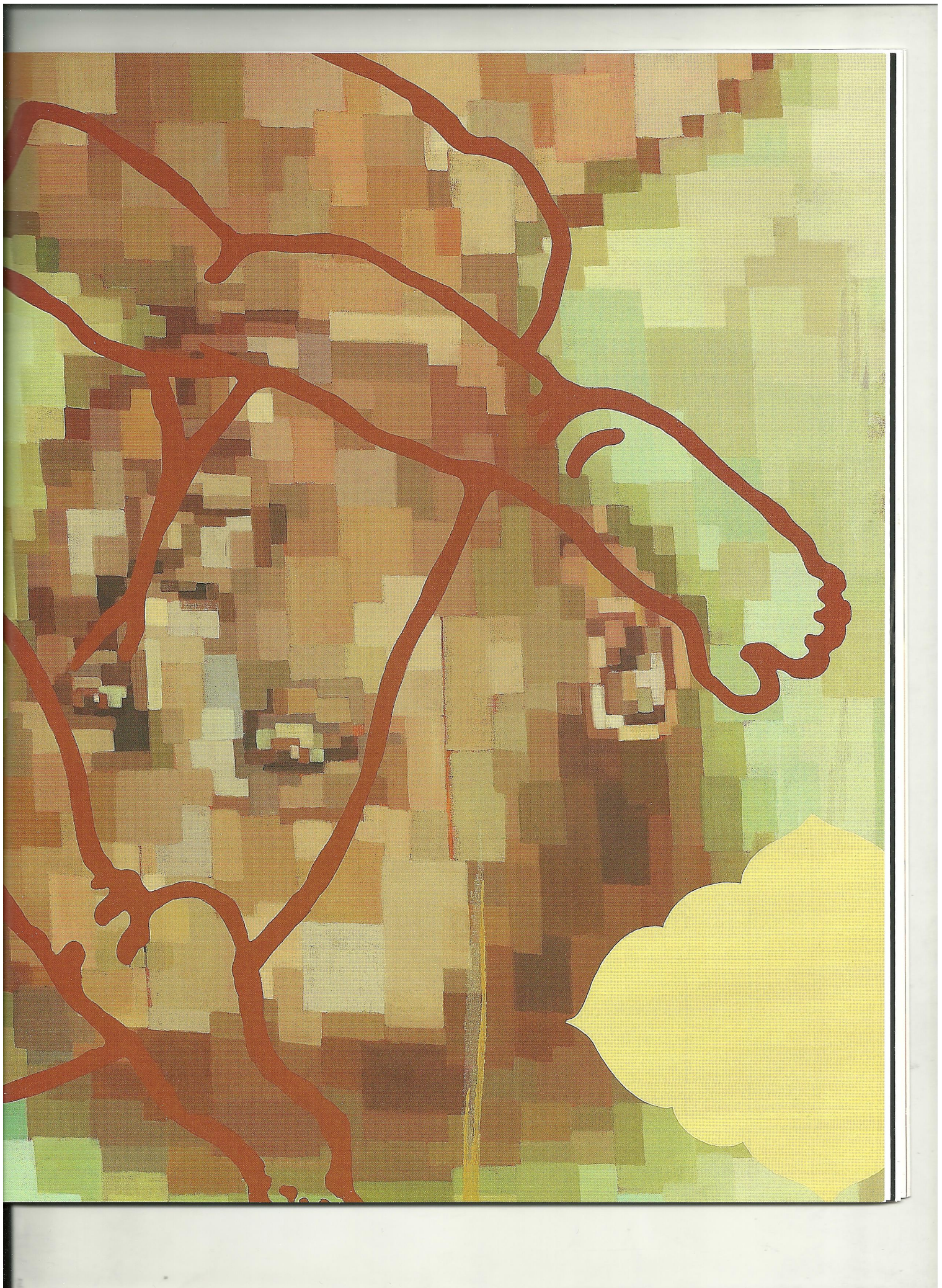
*next page*

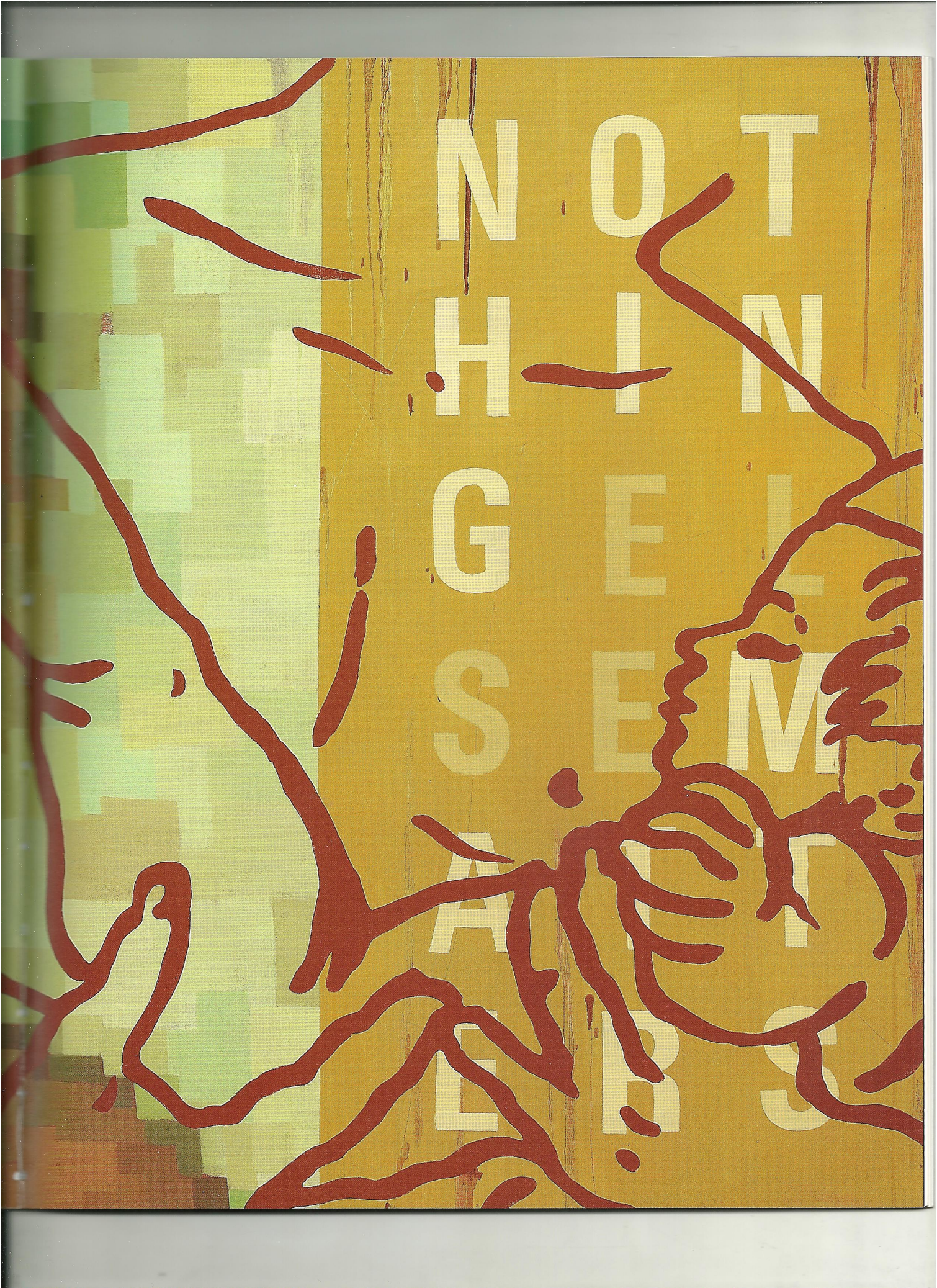


JUST IS



hum apne liye





N O T

H I N

G E L

S E M

A T

L B S

8

*Null + Void*

2008

Oil on canvas

213.4cm x 152.4cm

84in x 60in

NULL



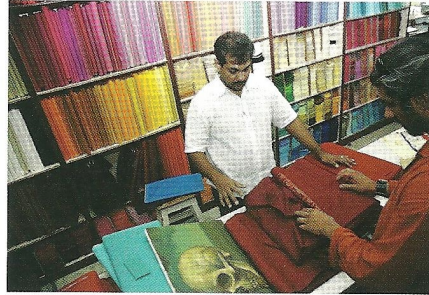
VOID

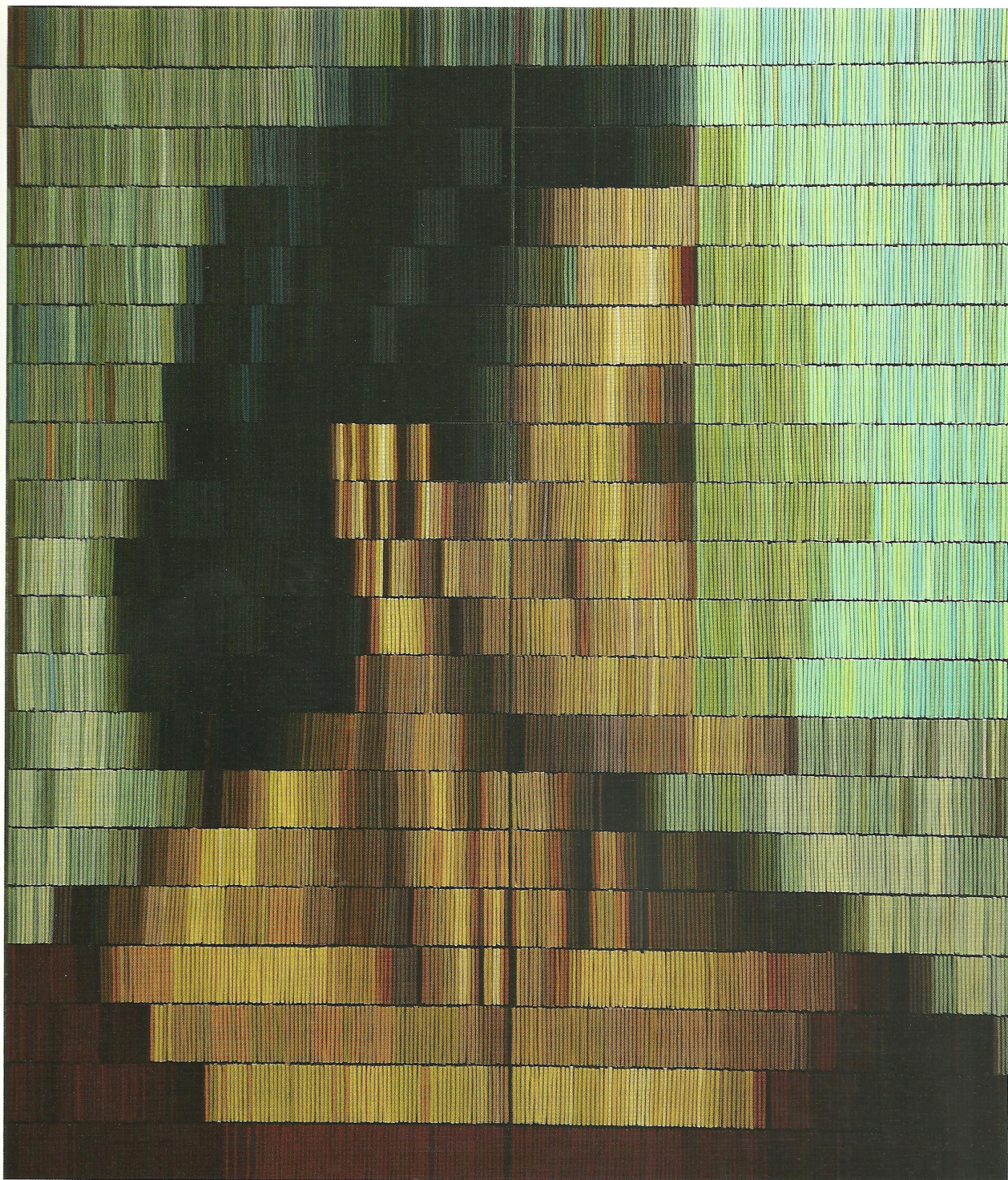
9

*Unseen*

2008

Cloth, cardboard  
and acrylic frame  
208.3cm x 182.9cm  
82in x 72in







*Your Birth is my Fate*

2008  
Cloth, cardboard  
and acrylic frame  
209.6cm x 304.8cm  
82½in x 120in

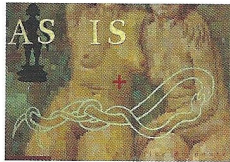


# LIST OF

# WORKS

1

*As Is*  
2008  
Oil on canvas  
152.4cm x 213.4cm  
60in x 84in



6

*Just Is*  
2008  
Oil on canvas  
243.8cm x 182.9cm  
96in x 72in



2

*Dahlia*  
2008  
Oil on canvas  
182.9cm x 121.9cm  
72in x 48in



7

*Nothing (else) Matters*  
2008  
Oil on canvas  
121.9cm x 182.9cm  
48in x 72in



3

*Deliverance*  
2008  
Oil on canvas  
121.9cm x 91.4cm  
48in x 36in



8

*Null + Void*  
2008  
Oil on canvas  
213.4cm x 152.4cm  
84in x 60in



4

*Future Revisited*  
2008  
Oil on canvas  
121.9cm x 91.4cm  
48in x 36in



9

*Unseen*  
2008  
Cloth, cardboard  
and acrylic frame  
208.3cm x 182.9cm  
82in x 72in



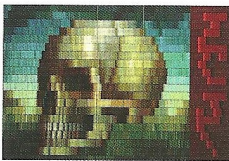
5

*In Transit*  
2008  
Oil on canvas  
152.4cm x 182.9cm  
60in x 72in



10

*Your Birth is my Fate*  
2008  
Cloth, cardboard  
and acrylic frame  
209.6cm x 304.8cm  
82 1/2in x 120in



# CREDITS

**Design**

CHK Design

**Printing**

Creative Group

**Photography**

Matt Pia

D. Ravinder Reddy

**Images**

© Copyright c/o Grosvenor Vadehra  
and Bari Kumar 2008

**Other contributions**

Emily Austin

Anne Macklin

# CONTACT DETAILS

**Grosvenor Vadehra**

21 Ryder Street  
London SW1Y 6PX

T +44 (0)20 7484 7979

F +44 (0)20 7484 7980

E [art@grosvenorgallery.com](mailto:art@grosvenorgallery.com)

[www.grosvenorvadehra.com](http://www.grosvenorvadehra.com)