

ART

5 South Asian artists who are taking over the global art platforms

From Art Basel to the Venice Biennale, *AD* spotlights five noteworthy artists at the centre of the scene.

By Maanav Jalan

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Courtesy of Debashish Paul and Emami Art

Arpita Akhanda





Haruka Oka

Winner of the 2025 Sovereign Asian Art Prize, Akhanda has been showing intricately conceived paper weaves and performance works at venues around the world, including Kyoto Art Centre in Japan and Museum/K20 in Germany. Even in her largest works, an image or idea is never pure or whole. Rather, in the hands of an artist engaging with personal and collective histories of partition and migration, every warp is interrupted by a weft, every idea is intruded upon by another. In her performance works, the audience is invited to write upon, stamp and mark her body. Yet, her practice is one of construction, of interrelating discordant strips together to create the fragmented fabric of her reality.

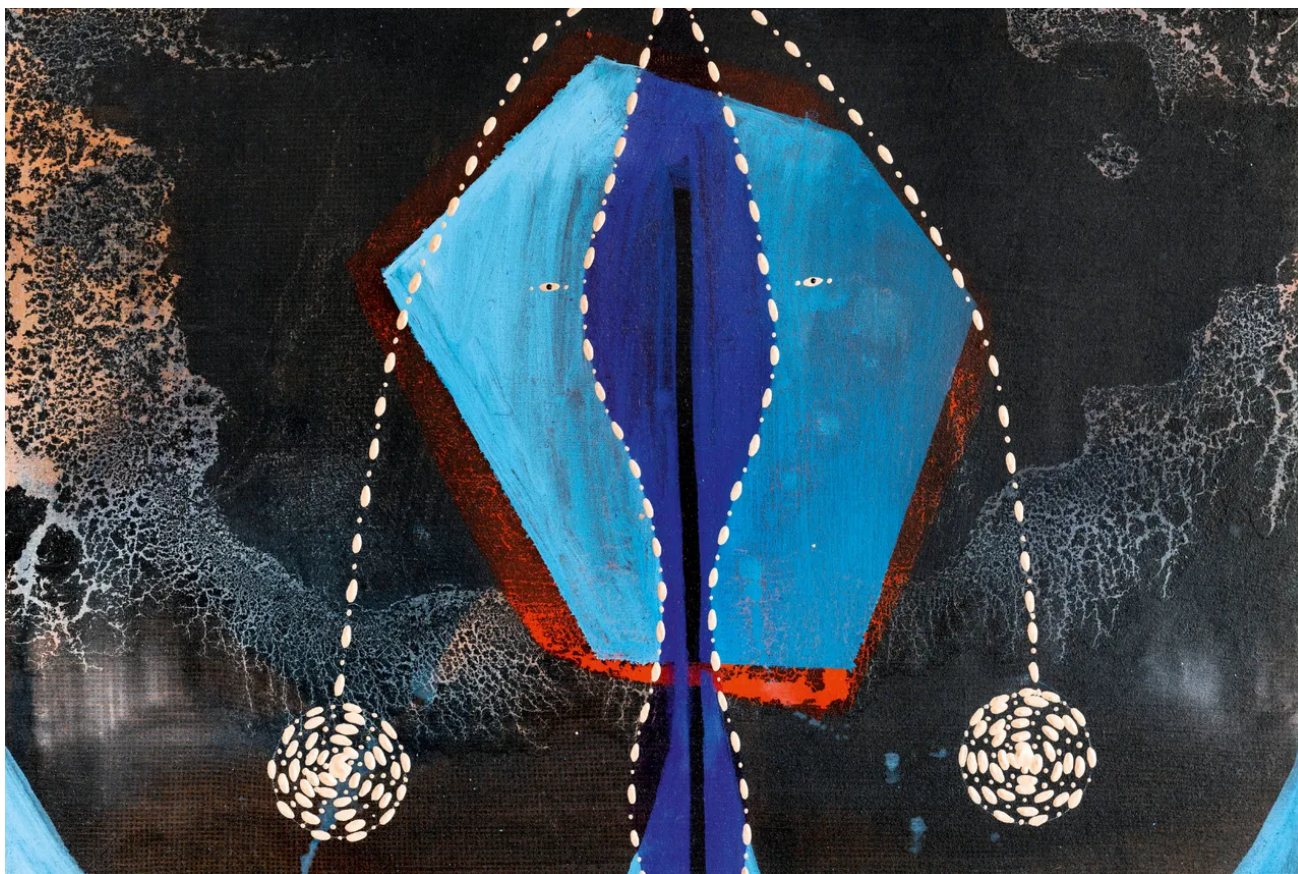
Debashish Paul



Paul's bold performances borrow from Varanasi's ritual and spiritual lexicon. Courtesy of Debashish Paul and Emami Art

Paul is in search of his internal body—a body without limits. On view at the Coventry Biennial 2025 till 25 January, his multidisciplinary practice—made of performance, drawing, sculpture, photography and video—orbits this elusive yet felt entity. “There is fear and anxiety in my physical body,” he says. “So, as an artist, I engage with another body, an expression of the soul, which is endless in its transformations and pleasures.” The Varanasi-based artist sets the stage for his search, borrowing from the city’s ritual and spiritual lexicon. Both shyness and ego disappear when Paul is mid-performance in an elaborate costume, the skin of his internal body. The artist will spend the next two years at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam, finding new modes of concealment and revelation.

Radhika Khimji



Using paint and embroidery, Khimji is an architect of abstractions uniquely attentive to the idiosyncrasies of the body. Courtesy of Radhika Khimji and Experimenter

Based between Muscat and London, Khimji reconfigures the two-dimensional space of board, wood and paper into landscapes with broken horizons. Repetitive marks in paint and embroidery thread form bodily structures within the works, such that orifices become crevices. Since representing Oman at the Venice Biennale in 2022, Khimji has presented two solo shows with Experimenter's galleries in Mumbai and Kolkata, and participated in several of its international presentations. Throughout, she has been the architect of an abstraction uniquely attentive to the idiosyncrasies of the body and its uncertain hold on rectilinear space and linear time. "I took a shape out of control," Khimji captions a recent work.

Saju Kunhan



Kunhan manipulates photographs using paint to create ghostly, surreal pieces of art. Courtesy of Saju Kunhan and Tarq

A set of recovered family photographs was the subject of Mumbai-based Saju Kunhan's solo booth by Tarq gallery at the discoveries section of Art Basel Hong Kong 2025, and at Rajiv Menon Contemporary in Los Angeles. The terrain of the past is always navigated by him through material processes—he paints over black-and-white family photographs, rendering its trees and textiles in colour, and transferring the revitalised image onto recycled teak panels. "Painting can reach where photography doesn't. There are moments when I'm not happy with the picture that was taken," says the artist. At the end of a series of manipulations, we are left with a vibrant yet ghostly imprint, a memory. The past belongs not to itself, Kunhan suggests, but to the fragile ways in which we reconstitute it.

Ramesh Mario Nithiyendran

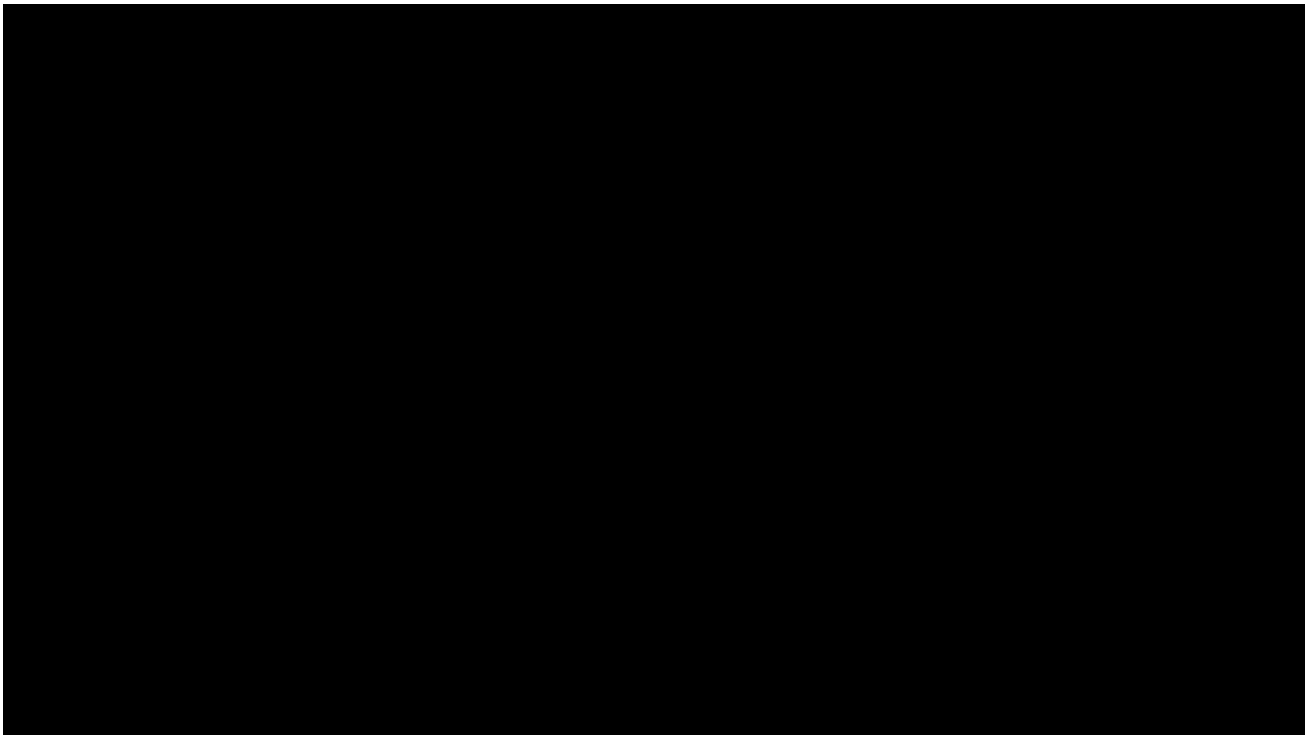


Inspired by Buddhist sculpture and Hindu imagery, Nithiyendran creates grotesque, provocative deities. Bowen Arico



Ramesh Mario Nithiyendran, *Self Portrait with Vessels and Shards*, 2025, bronze, patina and paint, H59 x W34 x D13cm *Mark Pokorny*

There is nothing too precious about Nithiyendran's idols. The Sri Lankan-Australian artist, known for his brash ceramic and bronze works, draws from an array of historical sources, including Gandharan Buddhist sculpture and Hindu religious imagery, to create a "buzzing mythological playground" of irreverent contemporary deities with open torsos, incised faces and multiplied limbs, making him one of the boldest and exciting South Asian artists today. The sculptures activate the potent qualities of their materials—the mouldability of mud, the weight of bronze, the eccentricity of glaze and the ornamental lustre of gold. Many of these pieces were on display at a major solo exhibition, his biggest in India so far, titled *Of Dreaming and Remembering* at Jhaveri Contemporary in late 2025. "At the end of the day, I am moving materials around," the artist says, "I am collapsing things together, I'm putting things under 1000s of degrees of heat."



Topics artist painting south asia
