



Galerie Romain Rolland
72, KK Birla Ln, Lodhi Gardens, Lodhi Estate, New Delhi, Delhi 110003

8 – 18 March 2025
Opening on Friday, March 7th at 6pm

WOMEN OF URBAN INDIA

ART INSTALLATION

by Olympe Ramakrishna



Installation View



FOREWORD : *PATRICIA LOISON*

DIRECTOR OF ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE DELHI



FRENCH

Quand on rencontre Olympe pour la première fois, sa pétillance et sa beauté frappent. Une beauté à 100 à l'heure, un classicisme des traits auxquels il ne faut pas se fier. C'est un sourire, un regard qui assène ses convictions. Et qui, derrière ses beautés suspendues, presque exagérées en taille et en densité, nous interroge sur ce qu'être une femme ici en Inde et ailleurs, implique.

Je suis moi-même née ici. Je pourrais être une femme de l'exposition. Que liriez-vous derrière les courbes de mon visage, ou la lourdeur de mes cheveux ? Devineriez-vous les méandres de vie derrière le joli sourire ? En tant que journaliste-présentatrice jusqu'à l'été dernier, j'ai toute ma carrière intégré ce paradoxe : n'être pas que jolie. Gagner sa crédibilité derrière le maquillage. Ou l'inverse, gagner le respect de ses pairs en assumant sa féminité.

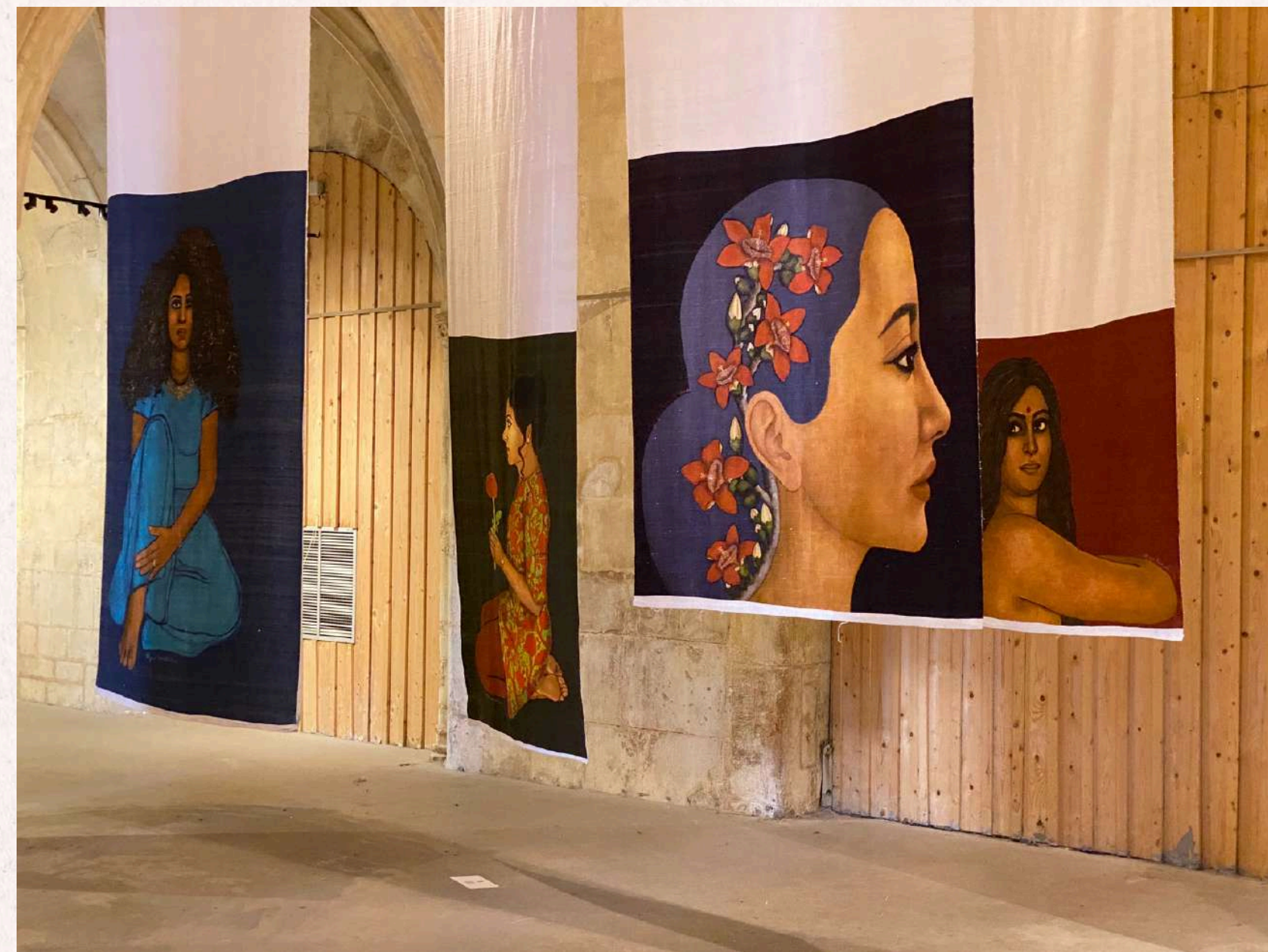
Ici, à Delhi, les Indiennes urbaines nous éblouissent au quotidien, parées, dans la moindre ruelle, de turquoises éclatant ou de jaunes soleil. Le sari comme une parure. Le sari comme une armure. Le sari comme un murmure à nos oreilles. Olympe Ramakrishna, avec son choix de présenter les portraits sur des panneaux de soie évoquant le sari, fait de ce vêtement traditionnel la toile de son questionnement. Un sari souvent étincelant mais dont les plis et replis, les attaches, le drapé millimétré racontent aussi une longue histoire, complexe...

L'artiste remporte cette gageure de nous combler de la beauté de ses portraits et d'en faire un questionnement. Ces femmes nous regardent. Et nous demandent qui elles sont, dans nos yeux. Celles-là ne doutent pas de leurs droits, de leur légitimité, de la possibilité, d'étudier, de travailler, de créer, d'aimer, de fonder ou pas une famille.

Quel message plus féministe porté depuis la capitale indienne en ce mois de mars où l'on célèbre la journée internationale des droits des femmes ? Quel discours plus essentiel alors que dans ce pays et ailleurs - comme un recroquevillement des combats menés depuis les années 60 -, de Washington à Kaboul, une femme n'est pas tout à fait un homme comme les autres. Parfois, on ne veut plus voir leurs visages. Leurs cheveux. Plus les voir du tout.

Cette beauté qui nous interpelle en face est magnifique, et politique. Et dans les détails -un petit oiseau sur un jacquier, une couronne de fleurs carmin- nous invite en douceur avec l'artiste à tracer notre propre portrait de la féminité. Sans jamais lâcher ces yeux noirs du regard.

Installation View



ENGLISH

When you meet Olympe for the first time, her radiance and beauty are striking. A beauty at full speed, a classical grace that should not be taken at face value. It is a smile, a gaze that asserts her convictions. And behind these suspended, almost exaggerated beauties—both in scale and density—she challenges us to reflect on what it means to be a woman, here in India and elsewhere.

I was born here myself. I could be one of the women in this exhibition.

What would you read in the curves of my face or the weight of my hair? Would you perceive the twists and turns of my life behind a pleasant smile? As a journalist and news anchor until last summer, I have spent my entire career navigating this paradox: to be seen as more than just beautiful. To earn credibility beyond makeup. Or, conversely, to gain the respect of my peers by embracing my femininity.

Here in Delhi, urban Indian women dazzle us daily—adorned, even in the narrowest alleyways, with bursts of turquoise or sunlit yellows. The sari as an ornament. The sari as armor. The sari as a whisper in our ears. With her choice to present these portraits on silk panels reminiscent of the sari, Olympe Ramakrishna turns this traditional garment into the canvas of her inquiry. A sari, often radiant, yet whose folds and pleats, ties and meticulous drapery, also tell a long and intricate story.

The artist rises to the challenge of captivating us with the beauty of her portraits while turning them into a profound reflection. These women look at us. And through our gaze, they ask us who they are.

These women do not question their rights, their legitimacy, or their ability to study, work, create, love, build a family—or not.

What stronger feminist message could emerge from the Indian capital this March, as we celebrate International Women's Day?

What more essential discourse at a time when, here and elsewhere—amid a backlash against the battles fought since the 1960s, from Washington to Kabul—a woman is still not quite considered an equal. Sometimes, people no longer want to see their faces. Their hair. They no longer want to see them at all. This beauty that confronts us is both magnificent and political. And in the details—a small bird on a jackfruit tree, a crown of crimson flowers—we are gently invited by the artist to sketch our own portrait of femininity. Without ever looking away from those dark, unwavering eyes.

Installation View



CURATORIAL NOTE : SEARCHING FOR OLYMPE'S OLYMPIA.

SHANKAR TRIPATHI, 2025

In the middle of Olympe Ramakrishna's exhibition of portraits rests an unshakably hypnotic gaze that pierces our presence with foreboding seduction. This is Sneha's portrait, fashioned after the French painter Bernard Boutet de Monvel's uniquely famous painting of Yashwant Rao Holkar, the Maharaja of Indore. Sneha's figure arrests our attention, disarming us with disquieting ease. Garbed in a traditional Maratha attire, replete with a garnet-hued turban on her head and exquisite jewelry adorning her chest, Olympe's brush sheaths Sneha in a stately aura of strength and discipline; an evocation that requests—nay, *requires*—our immediate attention. Awash with the regal colour burgundy, Olympe's hand emphasises on Sneha's person with an otherworldly solemnity, a seriousness that parallels the sitter's life as a lawyer, while simultaneously impressing upon the viewer a decidedly human touch—of care, of concern, of love. This is where Olympe's art truly comes into its own, flirting between the realms of the real and the ethereal; it is the making of a symphony of colours that luxuriously seats us on the white throne of the Holkars, while keeping a razor-sharp sabre at the ready.

For the Franco-Indian artist based out of Bangalore, this in-betweenness has been increasingly autobiographical. “Whenever I’m travelling to France these days, visiting my home, displaying my works,” Olympe shares candidly, “a part of India always remains with me.” Today, Olympe's art finds itself at a unique precipice. Born a Norman, the artist spent close to a decade perfecting the human form, studying drawing and painting at the Beaux-Arts, the Académie de la Grande Chaumière, the Atelier Artmedium, and the Battersea Art Center in London—an education that kept Olympe rooted in the weighty academic expression of European artists like Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, Henri Rousseau, and Paul Gauguin. The muted surreality of Rousseau's landscapes or Ingres' neoclassical paintings, however, was soon to be married with the flashy zest of Francis Newton Souza's daring figures, Maqbool Fida Husain's passionate horses, and Amrita Sher-Gil's tender portraits.

An earthy and sedate palette of deep hues became combined with brighter shades of reds, browns, and yellows; a combination that is explicitly visible in the portraits on display. Far from being liminal and ambiguous, Olympe's craft, much like that of Sher-Gil's (an artist who Olympe is dearly fond of), has realised a unique cultural richness that brings the East and West together, an assertive myth-making that has become an underlying pursuit for the artist.

This conscientiousness to remain deliberately cosmopolitan is observed closely in Olympe's self-portrait; mirroring the unassuming depictions of court painters like Bishandas, Bichtir, and Daulat from the Persian and Mughal manuscript painting tradition, Olympe presents herself with a formal and assertive side profile, working on Charisma's portrait. As a diligent court painter from the ateliers of Akbar and Jahangir, draped in white-and-ochre stripes and adorning an earring depicting Leonardo da Vinci's painting *Mona Lisa* (a innocent play on Olympe's son, Leonard), the artist's hand rests assured, detailing the sitter's features. Olympe introduces us to a portrait-in-a-portrait-in-a-portrait; or a portrait of a time—we are made aware of the European painterly tradition (seen in Charisma's in-progress portrait), the medieval painting tradition that defined the larger part of the Indian subcontinent (Olympe's self-portrait), and a little easter-egg for the artist's son (the Renaissance-period *Mona Lisa*).

Olympe's series of portraits form a *Muraqqa*, an album of paintings stitched together to convey a singular truth: the divinity of the feminine perspective. By highlighting eleven of the artist's acquaintances and confidants from the ascending middle-class in Urban India, Olympe's art—filled with signs and symbolisms—provokes a deeper, in-depth understanding of the diverse experiences that inform femininity and its universality across geographies of time and space. Chandu's portrait does this with great regard: draped in a bohemian grey dress, Olympe poses Chandu as Raja Ravi Verma's goddess Lakshmi, with two of her hands extended in the *abhaya mudra*, providing protection and dispelling fear, and the *varada mudra*, granting boons and remaining generous.

Chandu's metaphor extends itself to the entire series, visualising a noticeably changing society that, yet still, remains committed to honouring its traditions, its histories, its roots. Moreover, Chandu's *mudras* are not superficial, but intercede into our lives with great nuance, advocating for a more liberated and powerful understanding and representation of femininity.

Olympe's muses are a far-cry from the passive, objectified 'grande odalisque' of Ingres or Goya; instead, their characters are powerfully staged, built upon, and exalted—this is Olympe, imbibing the spirit of Édouard Manet's Olympia, a spirit that (re)claims control, and gazes back at us.

The deliberate avoidance of any background in the paintings foregrounds Olympe's formal, compositional, and symbolic enquiries. By placing the highly-detailed depictions of the artist's muses against flat, bold, and strong colours, Olympe suspends each of the eleven women—Lux, Roopashree, Romi, Shuchika, Charisma, Kavitha, Chandu, Arpitha, Sneha, Hitha, Deepti—and herself, on a surface that elevates their position, their presence, their feelings.

By invoking the universality of colours, the artist registers the universality of the cosmos; her art becomes symbolic of *pranamu*, or the life-force that channelises through every being of the natural and the preternatural world. In the midst of this primordial and phantasmic energy, Olympe's muses stand apart as mother goddesses. Arpitha's portrait, a glaring passion of the colour red, is adorned with a crown of pomegranates, a fruit that has symbolised sanctity, fertility, and abundance since the beginning of time. Arpitha's brooding gaze approaches us with a mystical tension; an unease that makes itself alarmingly felt with Olympe's bold colour palette. It is a colour palette that immediately centers our attention onto the pomegranate held in Arpitha's right hand. Is she holding an unassuming fruit, or something more? With Olympe, symbols reign supreme, and it is not difficult to imagine Arpitha as Leonardo da Vinci's *Salvator Mundi*, or Jesus Christ—the Saviour of the World, holding the celestial heaven in his hand; the pomegranate becoming the very womb of the world. If so, is Arpitha wearing a crown of thorns? While Olympe's enigmatic mysticism leaves the ardent viewer scurrying for clues, some of her portraits are consciously biographical, and playfully direct.

Charisma's portrait features a little bird perched on the branch of a jackfruit tree, placed against the sitter's braided coiffure. The seemingly eccentric choice, however, is avowedly personal for the artist: it is for Olympe's love for nature, for the symbolisms that characterise botanical (and largely, the Company School of painting) art, that the artist chose to incorporate Sheikh Zain al-Din's ink-and-colour work *Black-hooded Oriole and Insect on Jackfruit Stump* in Charisma's portrait.

Lux's portrait, in a similar vein, features a vine of Seemal, or a cotton tree flower (it is interesting to note Olympe's concern regarding the symbolic flora, a flower that the artist chooses to place against a solid grey of Lux's hair, deliberately deciding to forgo any texture so as to accentuate the ornament). "I like visiting the Lalbagh Botanical Garden; not necessarily to paint, although I do paint en plein air on my terrace, but to seek inspiration in the flora and fauna that surrounds us," remarks Olympe.

The exhibition curates Olympe's series of powerful portraits as digital prints that are suspended farom the top, fluttering on large-scale dupion silk panels; panels that reminisce upon one of the most ubiquitous garments of Indian society, the sari.

Olympe's visuality and display design allows these women to float around in the gallery; a soaring presence that imbues our viewing experience with a sense of atmosphere and delight. The visitor is thrust onto a maze of sensuality and tradition—of femininity par excellence—navigating a familiar sight of saris on display, of women on the streets, mobile, and with purpose.

It is against this very bright and simple background that the keenly wrought details of Olympe's art—as well as her philosophy—become absolute. "My work has a precision that is easily observed. It is rigid, not in movement, but in the straight lines that accentuate structure and discipline in the figures I paint." For the curious onlooker, Olympe's art presents one final question: why are her figures so solemn in their facial expressions? In the end, her undulating colours stand for the ambivalent and complex atmosphere of a rising superpower—of India, and its people—as much as they celebrate the joy of femininity.

Encountering Olympe's muses, and the artist herself, allows us to reflect on our own presence, on our own resilience to make sense of a rapidly advancing society that is hurtling itself from one generation to another in a matter of centuries, decades, years, and soon, in days and seconds. And, in the end, the women of Urban India reflect the tireless simplicity of Olympe Ramakrishna's artistic pursuit; a pursuit that is keen for its love of the feminine, and for the continuous desire to make art.

"Tomorrow I will start the art school's work I paint at home and the fruit of my hard work is a very beautiful still-life"
Amrita Sher-Gil, in a letter to Victor Egan, February 1931

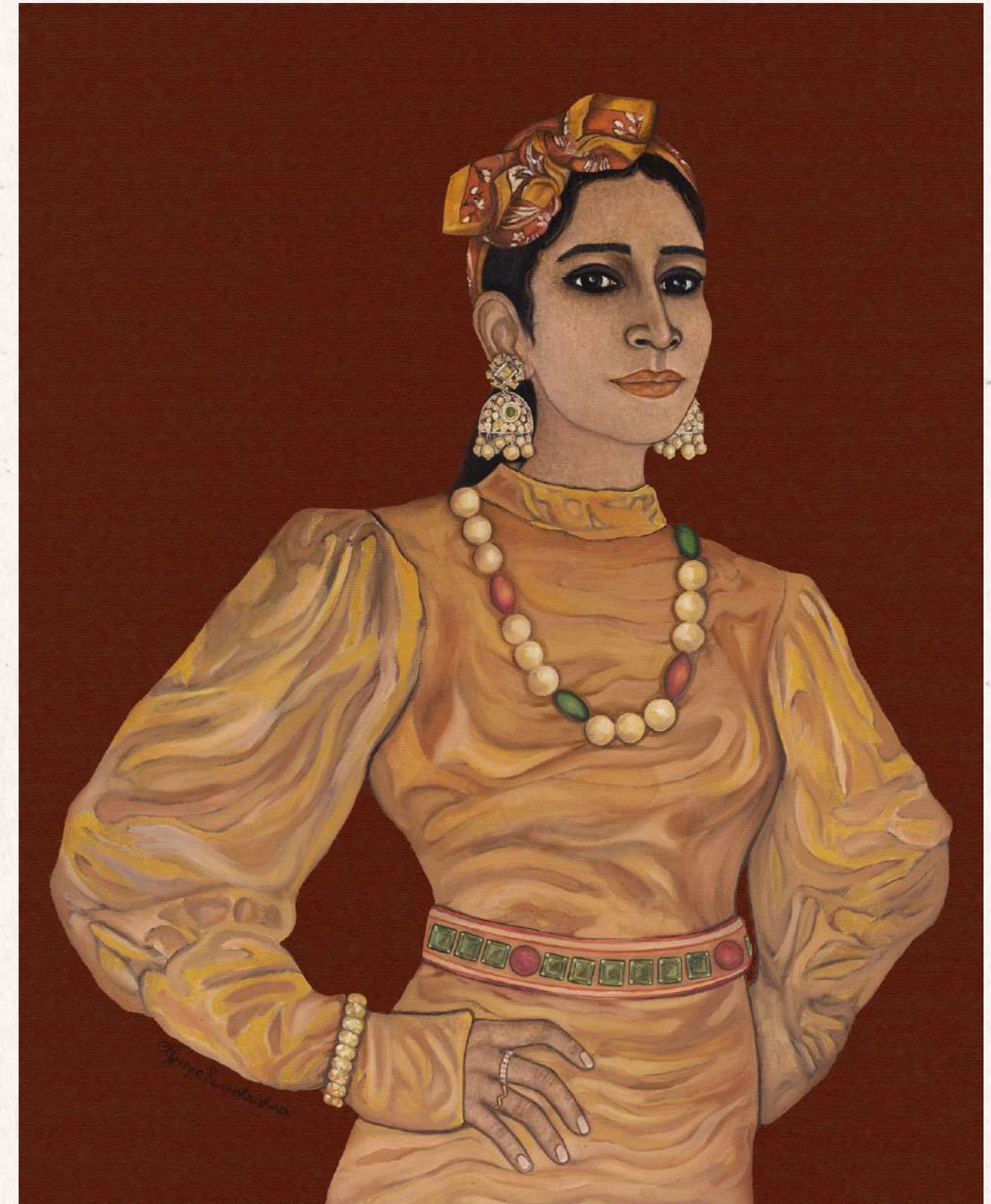
WOMEN OF URBAN INDIA

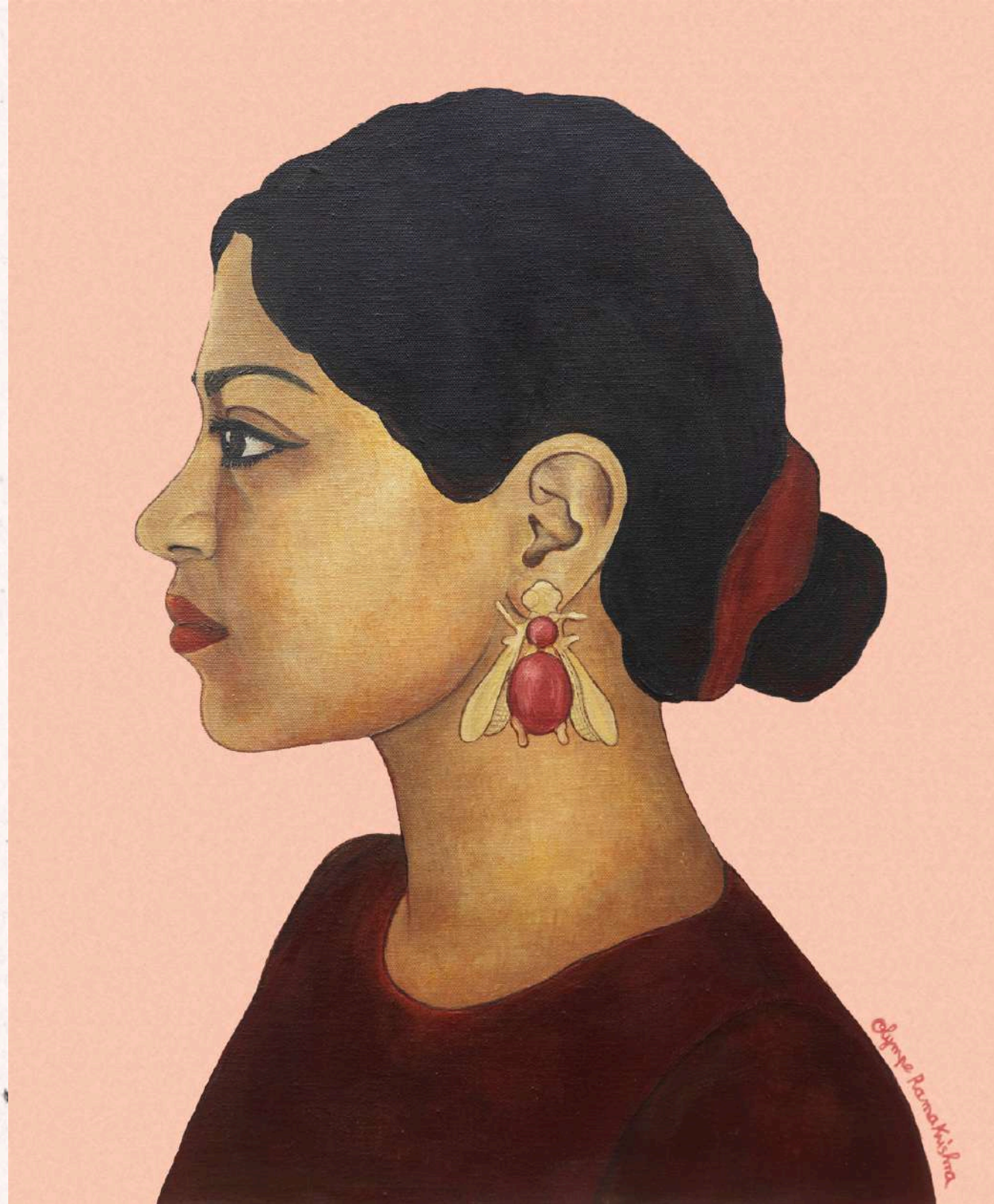
The installation consists of 12 panels of Dupion silk.
Oil paintings on canvas are photographed and digitally printed onto Dupion silk.
Each silk panel measures approximately 16 × 3.9 feet

OIL PAINTING ON CANVAS
DIGITALLY PRINTED ON DUPION SILK

SHUSHIKA

2023





OIL PAINTING ON CANVAS
DIGITALLY PRINTED ON DUPION SILK

ROOPASHREE

2023

OIL PAINTING ON CANVAS
DIGITALLY PRINTED ON DUPION SILK

CHARISMA

2023





OIL PAINTING ON CANVAS
DIGITALLY PRINTED ON DUPION SILK

LUX

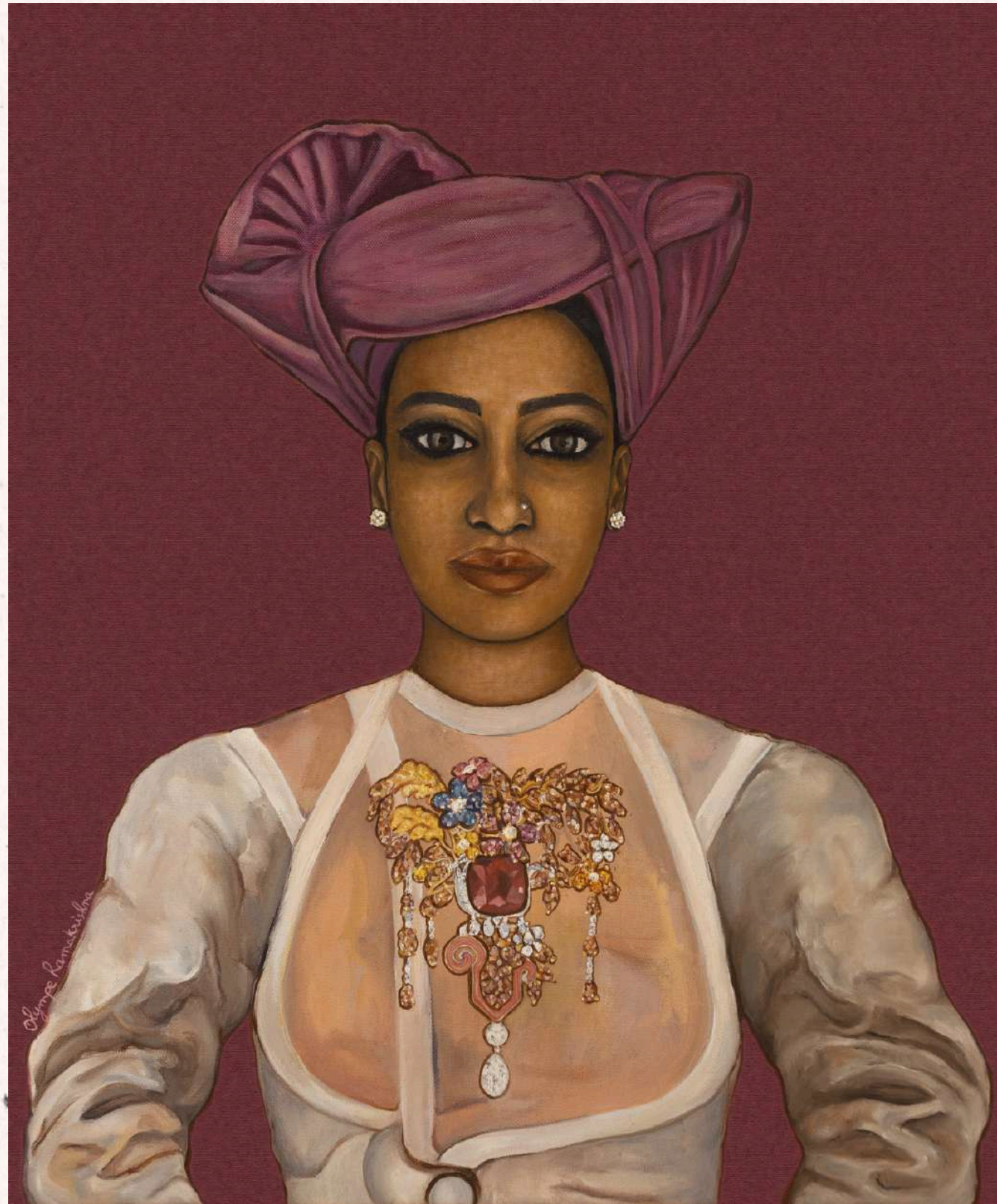
2023

OIL PAINTING ON CANVAS DIGITALLY
PRINTED ON DUPION SILK

ROMI

2023





OIL PAINTING ON CANVAS
DIGITALLY PRINTED ON DUPION SILK

SNEHA

2023

OIL PAINTING ON CANVAS
DIGITALLY PRINTED ON DUPION SILK

DEEPTI

2023





OIL PAINTING ON CANVAS
DIGITALLY PRINTED ON DUPION SILK

CHANDU

2023

OIL PAINTING ON CANVAS
DIGITALLY PRINTED ON DUPION SILK

HITHA

2023





OIL PAINTING ON CANVAS
DIGITALLY PRINTED ON DUPION SILK

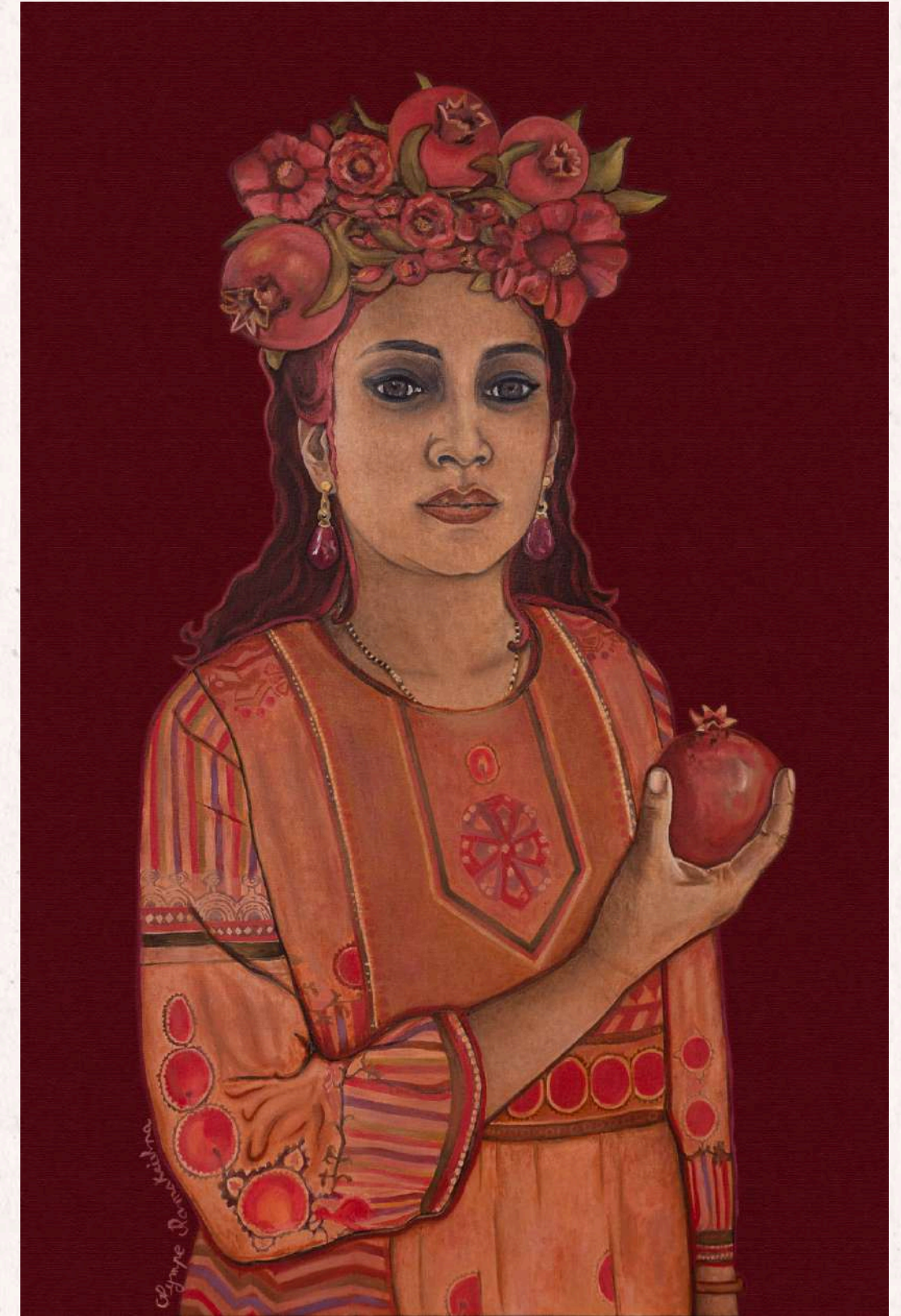
KAVITHA

2023

OIL PAINTING ON CANVAS
DIGITALLY PRINTED ON DUPION SILK

ARPITHA

2023





OIL PAINTING ON CANVAS
DIGITALLY PRINTED ON DUPION SILK

OLYMPE

2023



Olympe Ramakrishna is a Franco-Indian visual artist based in Bangalore, India. Born in a small village in Normandy, northern France, into a family of artists, she grew up immersed in a rich creative environment that shaped her early artistic journey.

In Paris, she studied drawing and painting, honing her skills through live model sessions over seven years at the Beaux-Arts, the Académie de la Grande Chaumière, and the Atelier Artmedium. Her exploration of art also took her to London, where she studied life drawing at the Battersea Art Center.

As a female artist, Olympe Ramakrishna is dedicated to presenting women from a distinctly feminine perspective. Her work, often dreamlike and symbolic, explores the complexities of feminine identity, provoking thought and fostering a deeper understanding of the diverse experiences that shape it.

Olympe Ramakrishna's dual Franco-Indian heritage lends a unique cultural richness to her art. Drawing inspiration from both European and Indian artistic traditions, her influences range from the Flemish Primitives, Ingres, Gauguin, and Le Douanier Rousseau to Mughal miniatures, Company paintings, and the iconic Amrita Sher-Gil.

Her artworks have been featured in both solo and group exhibitions in India and France, and are part of private collections across Europe, the United States, and India.



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