

Over the years, Matthew Krishanu has divulged enough of his life to have his experiences inform his paintings. Onto Krishanu's landscapes, for instance, we project the knowledge that he grew up in Bangladesh, where his British father worked as a Christian minister, or that every year he would visit India with his Bengali mother. And although the figures representing the artist and his family are pared down, Krishanu's minimalistic, child-like style complements the period of his life he draws from.

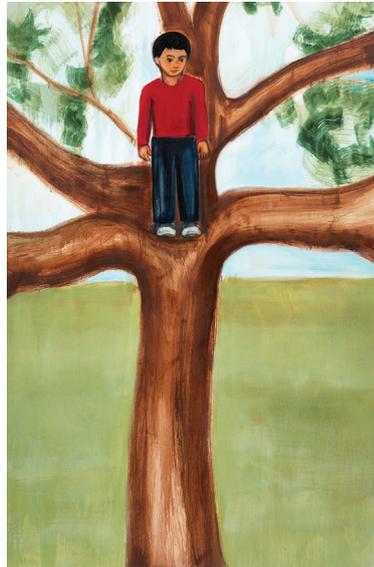
While the autobiographical matters—the paintings are based on Krishanu's memories and photographic records—there is little preoccupation with authenticity. Most scenes he constructs are not exact recreations and anecdotes

Matthew Krishanu *On a Limb*

Jhaveri
Contemporary

are seldom made available to the viewer, turning these assemblies into vessels for our imagination. We enter through the autobiographical and leap into the unknown, as places do not look like they should: certain details are magnified to the point that they acquire an emotional charge, particular to what painting makes possible. We notice application and brushwork as much as setting and subject, causing drips, spills, and smooth, opaque forms of the body to also capture our attention. The painterliness locates the viewer in the present—the artist is not only remembering his past, but also demonstrating his current interest in power and politics.

In "On a Limb," at Jhaveri Contemporary in Mumbai, we



MATTHEW KRISHANU, *Boy in a Tree*, 2023, oil and acrylic on canvas, 225 × 150 cm. Photo by Peter Mallet. Courtesy Jhaveri Contemporary.

often encounter two boys—based on Krishanu and his older brother—perched on tree branches. Here, recollections of childhood take on connotations that seem otherworldly and at times even sinister. The subject of *Boy in a Tree* (2023) stands alone on a solid trunk, looking away while appearing pensive and lonely. The portrait's focus shifts between the tree's sinuous branches and the boy's straight limbs, contrasting each other. The same boy appears in *Banyan (Red and Blue Boy)* (2019), dwarfed by the mighty branches he scales. The tangled aerial roots are formed by dried drips of paint. The "red and blue" boy holds his own, enveloped by a largely ochre and brown composition that threatens to swallow him, conveying his encounter's intensity. In these paintings, red and blue—colors of the Union Jack—become symbolic of colonial presence. The ravages of extraction are not depicted; rather, Krishanu focuses on the vastness of the land and its many unknowns.

Limbs are at the forefront of many paintings. Most of the human limbs Krishanu paints

do not adhere to anatomical accuracy, but hang by the side of the body, lending it weight. An older woman's arm in *Sari and Dungarees* (2023), appears heavy: with one arm she holds a boy's hand, while the other rests on a second boy's shoulder. Through her firmly placed arm, we see a dynamic of power and authority—as between a grandmother and her grandchildren—at work. The sari-clad woman appears strong and unwavering, while the timid, Western-clothed children rely on her vigor.

Other forms in Krishanu's paintings could also be regarded as limbs: a plastic seesaw in *Seesaw* (2023); a structure in *Sculpture Park (Two Boys)* (2023). Even the Agra Fort balconies, restrained to two paintings' edges, appear to be precarious places to linger. In the diptych *Agra (Water View)* (2023), a man looks into a vast expanse of water that merges with the sky. His neck is bent in a way that we could imagine him lost, gazing at the depths of himself. His companion in the other half of the diptych, *Agra (Water)* (2023), stares back at the viewer and could be based on Krishanu's late wife. Each color palette differs, making it appear as if the subjects do not occupy the same place or mood.

To be "out on a limb" is to place oneself in a vulnerable position, to take a chance—perhaps that is what it means to draw from one's life to make art. Depicting people and events that are private and personal and elongating their distance from the self, such that they are delicately poised between the authentic and the staged, the anecdotal and the archetypal, can be nothing short of an act of faith.

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