

AD

From the home to the world: Meet 5 South Asian artists thriving in London

AD visits young trailblazing artists from South Asia and its diaspora in their London Studios to discover their practices and unique interpretations of a shared history.

Matthew Krishanu

"In painting, you can portray many time periods at once," says Matthew Krishanu, who uses the medium to revisit scenes from his childhood in Bangladesh and India, and life in London. Soon after his major solo exhibition at Camden Art Centre, we visit Krishanu at his studio in Blackhorse Lane and ask him what keeps him coming back to paint.



Examples from his many years-long series stand next to each other here. Krishanu works on these series simultaneously, traversing years and kilometres with each switch. In *Another Country* (2012-ongoing), two boys, stand-ins for himself and his brother, explore an unnamed landscape in South Asia. They climb trees, sit at the edges of boats and teeter on playground monkey-bars. The theme reappears in a 2024 painting, this time with his daughter on the tree, in Epping Forest, London, and guarded at the base by the painter's late wife, the writer Uschi Gatward.

While rooted in personal memory, the ambition of Krishanu's paintings goes beyond autobiography. His figures are stand-ins not just for himself, his brother, his wife and daughter, but gesture at the criss-crossing social histories of, as the artist says, "the majority of people in the world," that is, those "with brown skin and black hair." Likewise, Krishanu's Mission series is less the story of his missionary father in Bangladesh and more a way to call attention to the larger history of Christian missionaries in South Asia. Within these paintings, we see rooms in which iconic pictures from the canon of Western art history hang, such as Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper*. These "quotations" as Krishanu calls them, re-contextualised in the South Asian setting, make a clever flip — it is now the canon that does not quite belong in the room.

References to art histories are everywhere in Krishanu's work, and each work often draws from several sources. His *House of God* series, with large sections of the foreground made of a single colour, clearly cite the American Colour Field movement. Four works from the series were also included in the 2023-24 travelling exhibition of South Asian miniature painting from 1600 to now, *Beyond the Page*, for their use of the Indian miniature strategy of placing motifs in a flat narrative space.

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Tanya Leighton

Despite their many relationships with ideas, places and people of the past, Krishanu's paintings respond to his here and now. *Crow*, a series of close portraits of mainly London crows, depicts the ubiquitous contemporary London figure, "strutting, mythical characters," as Krishanu describes them. "In various cultures, they are the carriers of souls into the afterlife," he says, "and in some way the invisible thread between my past and present." If Krishanu's figures are like tricksters shuttling through time, his canvases are membranes, tensely holding together his many worlds, "many lineages".

