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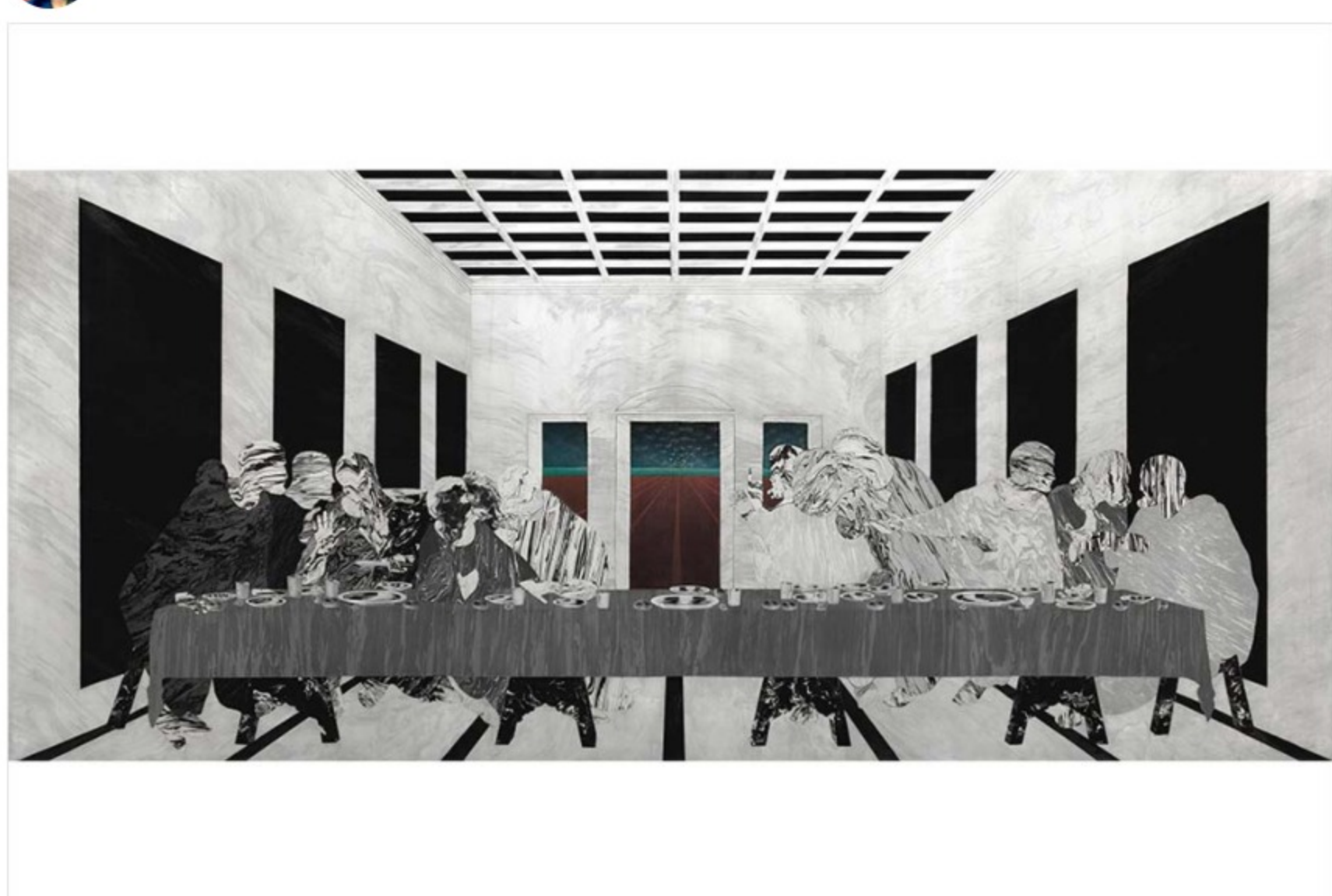
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A Renascent Mind

Who would dare to embark on a project such as Fossilised Passions of Da Vinci? Well, you've probably never heard of Bharat Dalal, the unsung artist now getting his due in NY.



By **Lachmi Deb Roy**
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Bharat Dalal's The Last Supper

Only a person deeply engaged with art history, science, architecture as well as imbued with an innate balance between artistic perfection and metaphysical leanings can dare to reinterpret the work of Leonardo da Vinci. The hugely talented and largely unsung Bharat Dalal (February 17, 1955-November 15, 2018) was certainly one such person. In his chef d'oeuvre, Fossilized Passions of Da Vinci, Dalal selected a few of the Renaissance master's paintings (The Last Supper and Ginevra de Benci being two) and infused layers of expressionism, often adding abstract elements. Through the evolution of his artistic credo, Dalal felt a strong connection with da Vinci, the "universal genius". Fossilized Passions, a series of six canvases, took him over five years (1982-87) to complete. Finally, Dalal's artwork is getting its due at a retrospective in New York.

Dalal had once said that Fossilized Passions was about those emotions, expressions and experiences of Leonardo that were trapped in transition, as the genius doggedly pursued the perfection of the 'universal equation'. "The paintings are based on the life of Leonardo Da Vinci, not as a homage," said Dalal, "but due to visions so persistently haunting, that their full comprehension completely transformed the way I perceived the implausibilities and negativities that lay within my soul."



Bharat Dalal's Cavallo (The Horse); and Ginevra de Benci.

Dalal's apprentice in the US Suniti Joshi says, "All his works, whether art or music, was an exploration of the self. He was an amazingly skilled sitar player, but wasn't interested in performing for an audience. He said his thoughts became clearer as he played music. Music grounded him. As a deeply philosophical person, the common theme in all his paintings was exploration of his soul." The technique used by Dalal in creating his art was no less unique than Van Gogh in his time, or even Jackson Pollock and Robert Rauschenberg in the modern era. He used to hang the blank canvases from the ceiling with the help of pulleys, letting the force of gravity define the flow of the paint, the colours naturally finding its own pattern. For his version of The Last Supper in the Fossilized Passions he used longer lasting exterior paints instead of acrylics or oil, thus giving it its tell-tale, marbelised visual texture.

Bernadette Escalona-Cooper, curator of the retrospective, says, "Bharat Dalal was an artist who traversed beyond boundaries. He was an international artist of Indian origin, did his magnanimous paintings in the US, and examined the works of...Leonardo da Vinci. He was phenomenal because of his ingenuity and introspective mind." Cooper points out how Dalal subjected himself to intense preparation to acquire a thorough insight of each painting by da Vinci. He came upon his perceptions through observations, distinctions, identifications, notations, comparisons and reflections. Dalal connected the elements of art that he linked with emotions to give life to the paintings with his sensitive, emotional poetry.

"The exhibition of Bharat Dalal consisting of the six large, magnificent works... shall prove to be a visual delight for spectators. Though inspired by Leonardo Da Vinci's works, they possess a unique non-replicable technique and a philosophical quest for the universal equivalence," says Vikash Nand Kumar, co-curator of the exhibition, Bharat Dalal's family has taken the initiative for the exhibition in New York.

BEYOND BORDERS: A Retrospective of Bharat Dalal

August 25-27, 2021, at the Consulate General of India, New York

Organised by Arth Art International (India)