

BEN BROWN FINE ARTS

For Immediate Release

DESMOND LAZARO: Recent Works

Private View: 2 May 2012, 6-8pm

Exhibition: 3 May – 6 June 2012

Ben Brown Fine Arts, London, is pleased to present the gallery's first exhibition of works by Desmond Lazaro, an artist who has lived and worked in India for over 15 years. In India, the artist not only reconnected with his cultural heritage, he fastidiously studied the ancient tradition of miniature painting—specifically that of Pichhvai painting—under one of the only surviving masters of the tradition, Bannu Ved Pal Sharma of Jaipur, Rajasthan. Lazaro apprenticed under Sharma for over a decade, becoming proficient in this painstakingly meticulous and laborious ancient craft that involves all stages of art production, from hand-making paper, cloths, pigments and brushes to eventually painting, burnishing and embellishing these stunning works with precision and ornate detail, typically involving entire studios of artisans. Lazaro has since applied the discipline and skills he acquired working in the Pichhvai tradition to his own body of work—meticulously-rendered paintings of contemporary subjects and concepts, which have earned him critical acclaim and exhibitions around the world. This conflation of tradition and modernity, collective and individual, ancient craft and innovation, religious and secular and East and West, results in a visually exquisite and uniquely expressive body of work.

This exhibition presents a range of small and large scale works primarily from the last two years, some painted with minute detail on sheets of handmade paper, others created with swathes of dazzling pigment on vast, hand-woven canvases. The subject matter includes the seemingly mundane—a canopied bed, tea cups, post boxes, lozenges—yet all of Lazaro's imagery is infused with cultural or historical significance and reflects his experiences from a multi-cultural existence. Also included are vibrant patterned or color-blocked paintings that reach toward abstraction, save for the presence of a lone figure depicted with psychological intensity. Lazaro's technical precision creates texture and three-dimensionality in all of his work, as seen in his depictions of fibrous carpets and coconut palm leaves, while his use of pure mineral pigments and handmade brushes of either squirrel or mongoose hair create a dazzling paint surface reminiscent of Old Master paintings.

Many works in the show stem from Lazaro's Blue House project, a series he recently embarked upon that explores concepts of house and home, as he himself has been searching for a home somewhere between England and India and he is fascinated by visual references that signify home and identity for others. These works are rendered mainly in ultramarine blue—a shack, a garden shed, a palm leaf, a corrugated rooftop—and sometimes gold shellac. In India he repeatedly observed and was struck by the corrugated metal sheets coated in ultramarine blue used as fences or rooftops on shacks. This duality of natural and man-made, beautiful and industrial, Eastern and Western (the blue could reference both Krishna and Yves Klein) fascinated him, as did the idea that a house or concrete block represented social mobility or stability (he observed in a fishing village that had been devastated by the tsunami of 2004 that many shacks were replaced by concrete block homes in an effort to rebuild and stabilize the region, yet people still tended to sleep and eat outdoors and only kept their belongings inside their new "homes"). This is the first time Lazaro's masterful iterations from the Blue House project will be exhibited together, creating a greater context for his elaborate working methods and his dedication to exploring subjects in depth.

While Lazaro's artistic vocabulary and imagery are thoroughly contemporary, his working method is firmly rooted in ancient Indian traditions. Lazaro and his team of craftsmen make all his materials by hand—papers, cloths, pigments and brushes—before he actually begins to paint and draw, this stringent preparation becoming an integral part of the life of his works. Lazaro's unabashed dedication to craft and communal production is rare in the age of the art star who strives to be seen as autonomous and novel, yet somehow his revival of these ancient traditions as a backdrop to his unique body of work puts him into a category all of his own. It is this duality of tradition and modernity that informs all of his work and makes his production so compelling.

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Biographical Information

Desmond Lazaro was born in 1968 in Leeds, England, where his Indian parents had emigrated in 1958. He received an undergraduate degree in painting from the University of Central Lancashire, England, and later received a scholarship to Maharaja Sayajirao University in Baroda, India, where he earned a Master's degree in painting. During this period Lazaro became fascinated by miniature painting and immersed himself in the art of Pichhvai cloth painting, a tradition of the Rajasthan region. Lazaro spent over ten years studying Pichhvai painting, participating in all aspects of their production. He documented his experience in a doctoral dissertation submitted to the Prince's School of Traditional Art in London that was published in 2005 as a book entitled *Materials, Methods & Symbolism in the Pichhvai Painting Tradition of Rajasthan*. In 2004, Lazaro established a company that produces handmade pigments and paint brushes as well as a foundation to promote the revival and continuance of traditional arts in North India, the Fellows of the program tasked with the challenge of "making traditional art within a contemporary context."

The artist will be in attendance at the Private View and is available for interviews. Please direct press requests to Whitney Ferrare at +852 2522 9600 or whitney@benbrownfinearts.com

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