

VARUNIKA SARAF

Varunika Saraf's paintings follow the Indian miniature traditions of Mughal and Kangra courts while also exploding them into new scales, literally and metaphorically. Trained in traditional Wasli painting, the artist creates both small compositions that can be held in two hands and large works that fill entire walls. She uses traditional subjects from mythology and nature that evoke specific associations and stir emotion, but only as players in an imagined, otherworldly cosmos. Throughout Saraf's compositions of supernatural hybrids and impossible landscapes, she references well-known works of art from all over the world that become a point of entry for viewers, giving them a lifeline amid the cosmic journey into the artist's imagination. In *Cloudburst*, 2010, a large-scale painting with a traditional Indian approach to pictorial space, we see the iconic Indian image, *Dying Inayat Khan*, painted in 1618 to record the Mughal court official's death. Saraf shows us Inayat Khan flying through her swirling cosmos, presumably to heaven. Hokusai's familiar waves from eighteenth-century woodblock



prints surround *Island*, 2010, while other compositions recall works of Frida Kahlo, Hieronymus Bosch, and Marc Chagall—all of which conjure a sense of mythological surrealism. As clouds of peering eyes encircling a forest in *Untitled*, 2010, suggest, Saraf's paintings gaze back upon us, becoming a "third eye" to transport us into an inner realm of higher consciousness.

A.H.

Ankbon Hi Ankbon Mein, 2010. Watercolor on rice paper overlaid on found textile. H. 7 × w. 7 in.

FACING
Island, 2010. Watercolor on rice paper and cotton cloth. H. 73¼ × w. 62½ in.

