

Mahesh Baliga *Drawn to remember*

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24 Grafton Street, London



Mahesh Baliga, *Flowering self*, 2022 © Mahesh Baliga.
Courtesy the artist, Project 88, and David Zwirner

“My paintings remind me why I remember something while looking at something else. My works contain the experience of looking. The curiosity of looking at a person, a person in a particular condition. Existences mingle; the animals, the trees, and objects in my paintings may tell human stories.”
—Mahesh Baliga

David Zwirner is pleased to present *Drawn to remember*, an exhibition of new paintings by Indian artist Mahesh Baliga, on view in The Upper Room at the gallery’s London location. This will be Baliga’s first solo exhibition outside of India.

Baliga documents the intricacies of life in western India, instilling quotidian and often overlooked moments with emotional resonance. Fascinated by the relationship between a painting’s formal construction and its psychological effect, the artist slips seamlessly between the real and the imagined, developing surreal visual interventions that convey the poignant and strange nature of memories, personal loss, and the passage of time.

Using casein tempera, Baliga deftly synthesizes Eastern and Western influences, combining the vivid palettes of postimpressionist Pierre Bonnard with a visual abundance that recalls Persian miniature painting. The artist populates his canvases with a recurring reel of characters and settings: the verdant surroundings of his outdoor painting studio, the ink-stained shirt of a poet, the artist’s late mother with her hands pressed together in prayer. These diverse and seemingly unrelated images coalesce into a “private hieroglyphic landscape,” hinting at the existence of a larger chronology that is both tantalizingly

familiar yet obdurately enigmatic.¹ As writer and curator Aveek Sen described, to grasp Baliga's compositions is "like learning to read auto-fiction—neither fully autobiography nor fully fiction—made by a generous but subtle and elusive writer for whom the reinvention of characters and situations, the retelling of dreams and myths, and allusion to other artists and their work were constitutive of the mystery, veracity and labour inherent in the actual making of images."²

A number of "lap-sized" paintings, as the artist calls them, will be on view in *Drawn to remember*. Baliga arrived at the smaller format as a way to continue his practice as a painter while commuting back and forth from Surat, India, where for several years he held a teaching position at Veer Narmad South Gujarat University. In these small compositions, Baliga explains, "There is always a negotiation between the act of making and what I feel. The small scale gives both the artist and the viewer a sense of intimacy, it creates a kind of nearness to the things that are distant."³ Also on view will be a selection of larger paintings, which continue the artist's characteristic and sustained observation of day-to-day life in Vadodara, India.

Born in 1982 in Karnataka, India, Mahesh Baliga received a BFA from C.A.V.A., Mysore University, Karnataka, India (2005), and a postgraduate diploma in painting from the Faculty of Fine Arts, M.S. University, Vadodara, India (2007). He currently lives and works in Vadodara, India.

The artist has been included in various international group exhibitions, such as *Lokame Tharavadu (The World Is One Family)*, Kochi Biennale Foundation, Kerala, India (2021); *e stray*, Baekgong Museum, Gangwon-do, South Korea (2017); and *Len Den*, Mumbai Art Room, Mumbai (2015). Since 2009, Baliga's work has been the subject of several solo exhibitions at Project 88 in Mumbai, including *It's a Normal Day* in 2020 and the online presentation *As I Remember* in 2021. His work is held in the collections of the Karnataka Chitrakala Parishath, Bangalore, India, and the Clarinda Carnegie Art Museum, Clarinda, Iowa.

Baliga has held teaching positions at the Surat School of Fine Arts, Veer Narmad South Gujarat University, Surat, India; Navrachana University, Vadodara, India; and College of Art, New Delhi.

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¹ Aveek Sen, in *Imaginary Happenings*. Exh. cat. (Vadodara, India: Mahesh Baliga, 2021), p. 7.

² *Ibid.*, p. 6.

³ Mahesh Baliga, artist statement, 2022.