

Return of the Seeker



Brussels, Belgium, circa 1966. The challenge had come without warning. On one side of the board sat a handsome, somewhat mysterious man, a self-proclaimed chess champion from the birthplace of the game itself. On the other sat René Magritte, the famous Belgian Surrealist artist. Perched on an easel in the background was Magritte's seminal image of a pipe, *Ceci n'est pas une Pipe*. According to a recounting of the event, the match did not last long, as Magritte proceeded to quickly checkmate his young visitor.

At the time, the art world, and the world at large for that matter, was already familiar with Magritte, whose intriguing paintings would eventually be worth millions. But who was the man from India for whom serendipity had arranged this contest?

He, as it turned out, was also an artist, part of a small group of Indian modernists in a still fledgling movement. Unknown to him then, he too was about to make his mark in the art world. He would remain friends with Magritte until the Surrealist's death some months later.

Sohan Qadri, by all accounts, has had a fascinating journey. An acclaimed artist, published poet and tantric Buddhist yogi, Qadri is known for his stunningly beautiful dye-infused works inspired by his spirituality.

Qadri was born in the Sikh homeland of Punjab in Northern India. His own religious indoctrination however, took a different path, as the young Sohan would be inducted into the practice of Tantric-Vajrayan Buddhism at age seven. The boy also drew spiritual guidance from a Sufi, a man who lived on his family's farm.

Qadri's formal education began at the College of Art in the British enclave of Simla. Here he was trained in the classic techniques of oil painting by a faculty that included Satish Gujral, who had spent time in Mexico with Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo. But Qadri was uninspired by convention. Instead, it was the burgeoning modernist movement fueling artistic expression in cities like Paris that excited him most. Ultimately, it was Qadri's lifelong spiritual beliefs that would lend unique character to his pieces and define his art. "Art can have the same effect as meditation," he said, "but only if we drop our constantly interpreting mind and learn to simply see."

In the 1970s, the itinerant seeker finally settled in Copenhagen. Stylistically, his work transitioned from paint on canvas to ink and dye on rag paper, a move that revolutionized his aesthetic and, on a more practical level, allowed him to meditate without inhaling paint fumes. It was also during this period Qadri met one of his most important patrons, the Nobel Prize winning writer, Heinrich Boll, who subsequently included the artist in his writings.

On the deepest level, Qadri's work could be described as a yogic diagram of the cosmos, a sacred roadmap for the practice of tantra. But Qadri puts aside such interpretations in favor of a pure, life-affirming aesthetic. As the renowned Buddhist scholar Dr. Robert Thurman commented, "Qadri swims in a world of beauty. His works unfold the world he wills for us to discover, explore, enjoy."

Now in the twilight of his life, Qadri sees his creative technique of color absorption as a metaphor for something he has been preparing for since age seven: his own absorption into the infinite absolute.

—Joseph Lawrence

Rasa: Contemporary Asian Art featuring the [art of Sohan Qadri](#), 9606 Santa Monica Blvd., Beverly Hills (through 6/12). For more info contact Joseph Lawrence at 310.278.4520.