



LEFT: Connected by a common goal — construction labourers on site

RIGHT: The memory of Flora really belongs to the two figures in the foreground, levitant and seeking the clouds



I pause before an unusual painting. Against a backdrop of trees, three armless figures recline. And yet their attitude betrays the tension of waiting. Behind them looms a statue canopied, with horses rearing. The clearing shows a black sky between bland trees. This is not a statue, Ratnadeep says, it's a rorschach. What does it mean? He does not say — but I perceive tranquility.

As I leave, I catch sight of a small canvas full of grey. Yesterday grey was cement, concrete, asphalt. Earth with many teeth powdered and pulverized.

But today I know differently. Grey may be all that, but grey can also be the color of air.

Ratnadeep Advrekar's exhibition, *Memories of an Urban Real City and Finding Through Journeys* was held at the Chavan Art Gallery, Bombay recently.

## City of hope

Ratnadeep Advrekar's oil canvases capture the changing face of the city.

Ratnadeep's interest in form began in rebellion to his climate of nurture: abstract art. "So many things happen. Despite them all, one keeps walking.... That is what this city is about. You look at a building site. Yesterday there was a tree there. Today it is gone. Tomorrow somebody has a home. It's interesting."

### KALPISH RATNA

SOMETIMES, very rarely, the city spells hope. There are chicken-soup stories for a mouthful of warmth. There's survival.

But threat looms. Threat of the city engulfing its boundaries. Leaning back and flattening the hills. Bending forward to drink up the sea. Roads coil up into car parks. They change name, direction, purpose. Roads became roofs for railways, and are themselves roofed by cars. The city fudges identity. The city digests you.

And then, when you least expect it, all this is turned inside out. The city is not destructive, it's constructive. A building is not an ulcer in the earth's cheek; it's a home. The city does not divorce you

from your neighbour, it links you.

This is Ratnadeep Advrekar's version of the city. At the first exhibition of this young artist's work, his canvases surprise you.

Here is Flora in the sun's pro-optic stare. The paint on the statue is incandescent, but the sky is cool. You notice then that you've been looking out through a pane, past the letters of an acoustic. The road outside is rain clean. The backs of the two young men look optimistic. They are ogling either Flora or the fragile girl in jeans. After the first impact, you realize this is recall. This is memory — because there is something more immediate to tell you so. Two figures in the foreground, levitant, seeking the clouds. The vision of Flora is theirs.

Move on to the next canvas.

All browns and reds, shapes of a wall, with buildings beyond. Two stooped men carry between them a white grid. "It's a bridge, not a grid," the artist corrects me. "It's a construction site. The work, or maybe just being there, in the city, is the bridge between them." In all the paintings, the observer appears in the foreground, or mirroring the figures.

"Is that you?" I ask.

"Maybe." If so, then the artist is, by turn bemused, resigned, contemplative. "Just looking," Ratnadeep insists, his colours lending a new dimension to the verb 'look.' "The city is constantly changing. Everything is moving. I am changing with it. I have tried to paint that."



A painting of three armless reclining figures. With the rorschach, Advrekar (inset) leaves the interpretation to you

