

The arts with
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Front Row

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Manish Om Prakash offers viewers a chance to return to an age of Innocence

Turning back time with art

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No matter where you come from, most anyone can think back fondly to those years of innocence, captured in Manish Om Prakash's current exhibition.

Innocence is exhibiting at the Winchester Galleries on Fort Street until Nov. 10, Om Prakash's third show at the gallery. Om Prakash looks upon *Innocence* as a breakthrough in his work, from his previous shows. He is now experimenting with different themes, techniques and styles.

Each of the works, whether a painting of a mythological figure such as Narcissus sitting by a pool, or a character sketch of a young boy running through the grass, portray an inner peace for the figure, something everyone including Om Prakash is longing for.

"Everybody loves to remember those things. We never find the time. You grow up and forget all those things you cherish. I had a happy childhood," Prakash says, at the gallery, adding, with all the trouble in the world, it is good to have an escape route to happier times.

"It's those feelings I put out. I'm amazed a lot of people got essentially what I feel. When I'm working on a piece the whole rest of the world fades out. There is a moment of peace, and quietness."

The theme for the exhibition is derived from the painting also titled *Innocence*, of a child cradled in his father's arms. When Om Prakash went to see his friend's baby, he began to recollect about his own innocence.

The painting *Towards...* is Om Prakash's

own past. The elephant, a prevalent aspect of his heritage, represents the feelings of serenity he felt when his mother read him fairy tales.

The Oak Bay painter was born in India's Punjab province. He came to Canada in 1988 to pursue graduate studies at the University of Victoria, a masters degree in neurobiology. Om Prakash considers himself a figurative painter, influenced primarily by his studies of the Renaissance period.

"When you study Renaissance art it's all so based on mythology. I spent my entire teenage years reading mythology," Om Prakash says of the influence which still dominates his work, with his own style and interpretation given to the myth and the figure.

Om Prakash's works are rich in colour and emotion. Each detail of the human figures are part of a larger story.

His focus is more on the meaning behind the myths.

"There is a story, but there is a truth to it, whether it be a decision about life, contemplation, temptation," he says specifically about the painting *The Judgment of Paris*.

Om Prakash recently began working with models. His studies of the models is incorporated into the paintings.

Also, Om Prakash has incorporated his overall theme into his sketches.

"This was a good learning experience. It was good to work with two or three different people. Their whole personality shows through the body.

"I like story-telling. Maybe it's part of my culture. This is a good way for me to bring back a moment in time."