

Matthew Krishanu
The Bough Breaks
26 April/23 June 2024



Matthew Krishanu, *Banyan (Boy)*, 2023, oil and acrylic on canvas, 100 x 80cm. Photo: Peter Mallet. Image courtesy of the artist.

Camden Art Centre is pleased to announce *The Bough Breaks*, the most significant exhibition of Matthew Krishanu's work to date. This major exhibition presents a body of new work, including paintings and works on paper that form the expansive world of his artistic practice.

Matthew Krishanu (b.1980, Bradford, UK) paints atmospheric, pared-back compositions including scenes from the artist's life, particularly his childhood years in Bangladesh growing up with his brother, and their parents—a British Christian missionary and an Indian theologian. In the paintings, seemingly familiar narratives are alluded to but destabilised. The viewer's own projections are called upon to fulfil the interpretive loop, raising questions about childhood, religion, race, power, and the legacies of empire.

These personal stories are told through layers of memory, imagination, and conversations with the history of painting. Drawing on multiple influences including El Greco, Gwen John, Noah Davis, and the Ajanta cave paintings, Krishanu's work often explores how representations in the canon of Western art have shaped our collective unconscious around questions of race and gender. Working in ongoing series that include *Another Country*, *Mission*, and *Holy Family*, one painting segues into the next as a natural telling of the artist's own journey through the joys and sorrows of life, with deeply personal subject matter that speaks to the human condition in all its complexity.

The exhibition's title, *The Bough Breaks*, proceeds from the artist's recent exhibition *On a Limb* (Jhaveri Contemporary, Mumbai, India, 2023). Both exhibitions relate to images from Krishanu's *Two Boys* series, in which the artist and his brother are depicted perched on, and to some extent dwarfed by, the majestic branches, or 'limbs', of the banyan tree—an iconic symbol in Indian culture. The potential failure of this security—if the bough was to break—alludes to the dark undertones of the nursery rhyme *Rock-a-bye Baby*, as well as to the evident failure of the structures that should protect, provide for, and perpetuate society: a poignant metaphor for contemporary life.

The Bough Breaks opens with two important ongoing series: *Another Country* and *Other Places*. Works in Gallery One explore the artist's childhood spent in India and Bangladesh as well as Yorkshire, England where he was born. The compositions depict Krishanu with his brother, the two boys contextualised in the landscapes of these significant places.

In Gallery Two Krishanu's *Holy Family* series is presented alongside his thematically related *Mission* paintings. Portraits of Bengali Christian bishops, nuns and priests serve as a counterpoint or corrective to European depictions of White Christian figures perpetuated in Western art. Elsewhere in the gallery, two partner paintings, depicting the artist's mother (an Indian academic and teacher of Liberation Theology) and father (a British, White Christian priest who worked for the Church of Bangladesh), sit alongside one another. Krishanu's practice is at once an exploration of subject and medium, whereby the deeply personal subject matter is a means of approaching his primary, painterly concerns. The compositions provide multiple entry points—at times holding the viewer at bay and, at others, inviting them in. Meaning is implied rather than dictated, barring the path to reductive biographical readings.

Just as the paintings offer an immersion in surfaces, this major showcase of primarily new work by the artist also foregrounds Krishanu's drawings and works on paper—what he describes as the generative heartbeat of the exhibition.

A new essay by British broadcaster, journalist, critic and presenter Bidisha Mamata is published in the latest edition of Camden Art Centre's long-running File Note series: produced for every exhibition, it represents an important strand of the organisation's programme, enabling the commission of a new piece of long-form writing accompanied by a reading/listening/watching list compiled by the artist. They are an accessible resource, available in the galleries for a small charge and online for free.

Notes to Editors

For further information, interviews and images please contact:
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Camden Art Centre

Camden Art Centre is a place for world-class contemporary art exhibitions and education. Situated in Hampstead, North London (charity number 1065829) Camden Art Centre is a place for art and artists; a place for the curious, the novice and the expert alike. It's a place to see, to make, to learn and to talk about contemporary art, whether in our building, attending off-site projects or via our digital forums. Founded by artists in 1965, the Centre continues to be a space for the most vital and diverse mix of practices and ideas and is dedicated to supporting artists at every stage of their careers.

Matthew Krishanu

Matthew Krishanu (b.1980) was born in Bradford and is based in London. He completed an MA in Fine Art at Central Saint Martins in 2009. Recent solo exhibitions include *On a Limb*, Jhaveri Contemporary, Mumbai (2023); *Playground*, Niru Ratnam, London (2022); *Undercurrents*, LGDR, New York (2022); *Arrow and Pulpit*, Tanya Leighton, Berlin (2021); *House of Crows*, Matt's Gallery, London (2019); *A Murder of Crows*, Ikon Gallery, Birmingham (2019); *The Sun Never Sets*, Midlands Arts Centre, Birmingham (2019) and Huddersfield Art Gallery (2018). Recent group exhibitions include *Beyond the Page*, Milton Keynes Gallery (2023) and The Box, Plymouth (2024); *Life is More Important than Art*, Whitechapel Gallery, London (2023); *Dhaka Art Summit*, Dhaka (2023); *The Kingfisher's Wing*, GRIMM, New York (2022); *Prophecy*, Mead Gallery, Warwick Arts Centre (2022); *Mixing It Up: Painting Today*, Hayward Gallery, London (2021); *Coventry Biennial*, Leamington Spa Art Gallery & Museum and Herbert Art Gallery & Museum (2021); *Everyday Heroes*, Hayward Gallery/Southbank Centre (2020); *A Rich Tapestry*, Ikon, Lahore Biennale (2020); and *Childhood Now*, Compton Verney (2019).