

The Art House unveils brand new portraits created by artist Charan Singh in his first-ever solo exhibition.



Charan Singh, The Promise of Beauty, Reader, 2023

Charan Singh: The Promise of Beauty

15 June–17 August 2024, The Art House

The Art House in Wakefield is delighted to present the first major solo show by **Charan Singh: The Promise of Beauty**.

Born in India, and now living in London, Singh's research and practice are at large, informed by his involvement with HIV/AIDS work and community activism. His work bridges the connections between artist and its subject by investigating the themes of memory, storytelling, masculinity, and representation.

In this thought-provoking new body of work, the artist explores the act of performing for the camera, whilst questioning the genre of self-portraiture, in a series of brand-new photographs. He focuses on reclaiming the identities of marginalised queer communities and sub-cultures in India. Examining how communities have been portrayed as victims, Singh challenges how colonial and neo-colonial narratives have influenced history and knowledge. For **The Promise of Beauty** the artist uses photography, video, and sculpture to explore his 'pre-English language' life, creating artistic resistance through storytelling and fictional fragments to express multi-layered gender

experiences and the ephemeral nature of queer desire. This exhibition brings together a series of six monumental photographic self-portraits that re-examine and re-create minor figures from the Company Paintings – a hybrid style developed during the colonial period in British India, painted by both Indian and European artists, many of whom worked for European patrons.

Displayed across the main gallery walls, the 1.5-metre-high photographs aim to disrupt Euro-American versions of queerness, which remain predominantly white and upper-class. With Singh as the subject, director, and voyeur, he subverts the genre by disorienting the viewer's gaze, who may be familiar with this style of artwork. We encounter the artist appearing and reappearing, holding the gaze of the viewer, as he performs the role of the minor figures each wearing a range of traditional garments or with parts of the body modestly exposed, to challenge the visual language which sits central to this dialogue.



Charan Singh, *The Promise of Beauty, Bather*, 2023

By centring his own body within a world of rich visual language, colourful staging and powerful storytelling, Singh celebrates identity. The works interrupt the 'standard' of queerness often seen in dominant English-language culture that can overshadow indigenous expressions of gender and sexuality, and reveals a beautiful collection that intersect themes of intimacy, vulnerability, and desire.

Singh first began working as an activist and supporting HIV/AIDS community work during the 1990s in Delhi, attempting to democratise access to information and health services through projects. A range of material from the artist's studio, from that time, can be seen alongside his photographic works. Singh has a growing international reputation, gaining widespread critical recognition for his works. His photographs have been exhibited in New Delhi, London, Houston and New York. Although he is often the one behind the camera, for **The Promise of Beauty**, Singh has returned to self-portraiture following a ten-year break, since first featuring himself in his 2014 series *Not at Home*.

Curator Emily Ryalls said: *"We are delighted to be exhibiting these powerful new portraits, which will have a profound impact on confronting notions of masculinity and gender identity for many people. It has been an honour to work with such an inspirational artist, as The Art House is not only committed to supporting the practices of artists who have not yet exhibited a solo show in the UK, but also committed to promoting meaningful and pioneering work"*.

Don't miss your chance to catch the latest body of work from this exciting and emerging artist, and immerse yourself in a vibrant display of culture and identity.

ENDS

Images and interviews by arrangement.

Notes to Editors

Press Contact: Damon Jackson-Waldock / damon@the-arthouse.org.uk / 01924 312002

The Art House

Drury Lane, Wakefield, WF1 2TE
01924 312 000

Social

Twitter: @TheArtHouseUK

Facebook: /theartouse.wakefield

Opening Times

Monday: Closed (appointment only)

Tuesday: 09:30 – 16:00

Wednesday: 09:30 – 16:00

Thursday: 09:30 - 16:00

Friday: 09:30 - 16:00

Saturday: 09:30 - 16:00

About The Art House

The Art House provides time, space and support for artists, makers and creative businesses to develop their practice. It is a place where artists and audiences of all kinds are welcome to experience contemporary visual art and learn about the practice of being an artist through a year-round programme of exhibitions and events.

Established in 1994 by a group of disabled and non-disabled artists, The Art House is both a visual arts development agency and registered charity. Alongside a programme of training, mentoring, residencies and commissions, The Art House develops a range of projects designed to engage audiences in the artistic process and contribute to an essential discourse around diversity in contemporary visual arts practice. The Art House's three Maker Spaces (Print Studio, Darkroom, and Ceramics Studio) host a year-round programme of workshops and courses, supporting both the public and members in their artistic development. As well, the Maker Spaces are utilised to support a Learning programme that is targeted at both pupils and teachers to develop their skills, as well as team development for organisations.

The Art House is the recipient of The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation's second annual Award for Civic Arts Organisations 2022. It is the UK's first Studio of Sanctuary, a role which sees them engage Wakefield's Asylum Seeker, Refugee, and Settled communities in creative projects, and was awarded Gallery of Sanctuary in 2023.

TAH offers free private view appointments, designed to be covid-safe and offer maximum access accommodations to visitors who otherwise find themselves excluded from visual arts spaces. For more information and to book a private view visit The Art House website: <https://theartouse.org.uk/about/access/>.