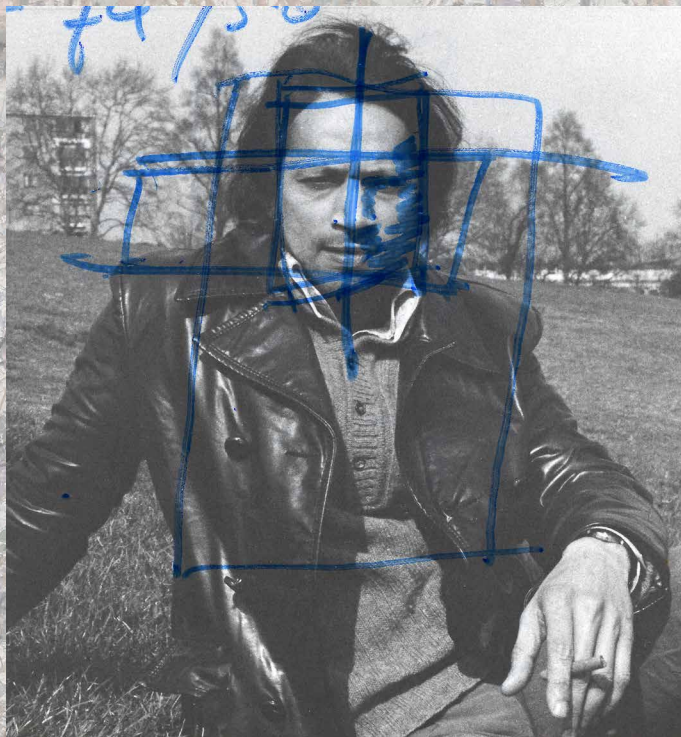


Retracing

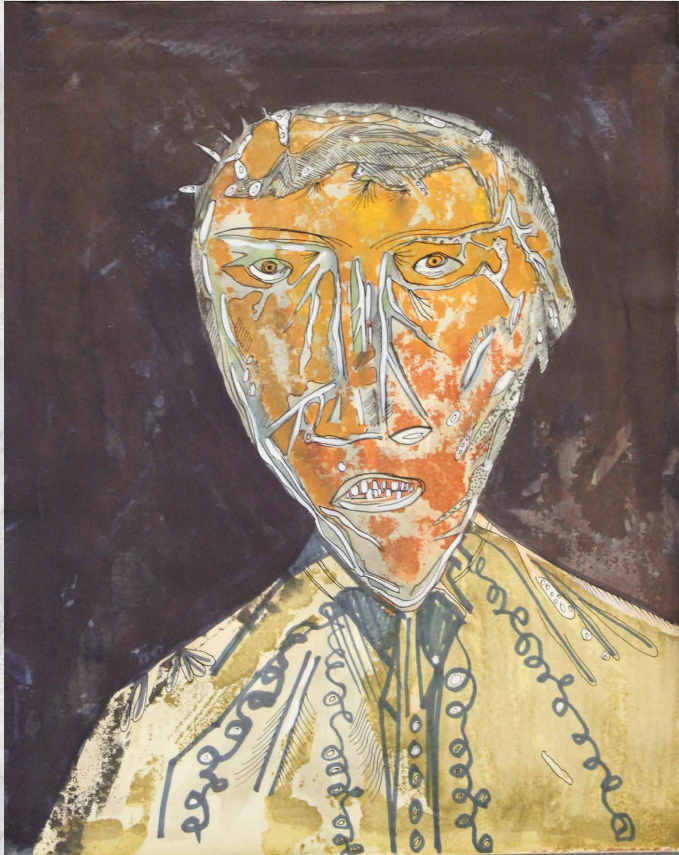
Albino

1933 - 2010



The Artist's Torment

"There is an inner 'noise' when I begin to paint. I would like to stop. To pause a moment but this seems impossible. The noise does not stop. I feel I am being driven by it..."



The Artist's Torment, c. 1964

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Father and daughter, 1970

Foreword

Marsha Ribeiro

The way I saw my father - the painter Lancelot Ribeiro - care for his brushes, pens and studio materials always struck me. Whenever he drew a line, his hand was poised, steady and assured. Never was there a wayward smudge or ink blot and his focus was remarkably absolute. His art materials in his studio were meticulously kept and had their particular ordered place on his shelves. He would patiently instruct me, too, in how to care for my own brushes, although my own stock would

inevitably reveal signs of wear relatively quickly. His materials had been kept in the same condition as when first bought and the only clue that would give away their age, was the browning of labels and crumbling packaging.

In stark contrast, his writings were kept in a state of complete chaos. Strewn haphazardly across our old family dining room table, everyday correspondence and junk mail intermingled with his frenzied thoughts written in pencil, poured onto the nearest available scrap of paper – regardless of whether it was blank or not. His words would occasionally appear in-between sentences of printed text, as his mind flitted rapidly from one thought to the next, often crossed out furiously or amended in a way that would later prove illegible. This desperation to put down thoughts, before they were lost forever, were undoubtedly due to his ever-present fear that time - as he would say - “is running out”. His papers had invaded much of the dinner table and beyond, leaving only a small area for us to sit and eat at.

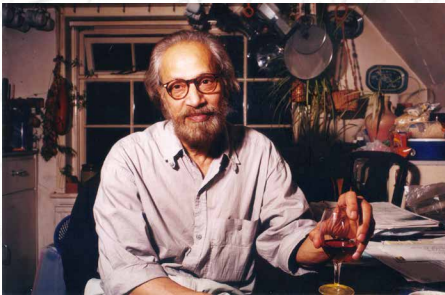


Ribeiro's Belsize Park studio, c.1966

In relaxed mode, he was an entirely different person. At peace, calm and often philosophical, our conversations would meander from topic to topic. Sometimes it was on the depressing state of world politics or on business, at other times the arts. But it was always fascinating. Music would play off his vintage Sony clock radio and sometimes interject into our discussions, influencing the direction

of our conversation. He would tell me what he had been working on.

Over our leisurely drawn-out teas, unable to read his own writing, he would occasionally look up from his pieces and say, "Aghh, what does this say? I can't make this out, can you read it to me?"



Ribeiro in Haverstock Hill, c.1990s

And I would dread having to squint over undecipherable words, written in fading pencil in tightly knit converging sentences. When it became infuriatingly difficult, in exasperation I would give up. I knew it was pointless scolding him. He knew it and took it with good humour. And we would laugh.

It was only after his death that I came across the assortment of diary notes and his writings which shed light on both how he viewed the process of painting and the inner torment he felt with being unable to write with the same ease with which he painted. Unsurprisingly, he noted these thoughts from the late eighties onwards which were also troubled times for him on a personal level.

He had not always written in such a haphazard way and I believe it was the demands of being a professional artist, a racist assault and worrying health concerns mixed in with the depressing everyday reality of housing problems, which threw his domestic world into a state of disorder.

Following a move to a small attic flat at 214 Haverstock Hill in 1986, he wrote in a personal letter to his long-standing friend and patron, Professor Patrick Boylan, how his watercolour phase briefly brought him moments of calm:

"I did not attach any seriousness to them [watercolours] until recently when they appeared to have become my only mode of functioning – physical limitations of space and the general upheaval from '80 onwards was something I've had to live down. They gave me a lot of joy, were extremely relaxing and perhaps levitational. I've never enjoyed doing any of my other work which has always been compulsive."

In the same letter, he confides that they had "kept him from going off the rails".

Water leaks from the roof, burst pipes and persistent damp - the worst possible nightmare for any artist - threw his world askew. Suddenly, large canvas rolls of oil paintings that had been so carefully maintained over 20 years were damaged as "tanks burst during the night". Stacks of oil paintings on paper clumped together and it became a losing battle for him

- and for me - to regain any sense of order. Damp had eaten into his work and watermarked his notes and stacks of writing. Rain would fall - drop by drop - off crumbling plasterwork steadily into buckets strategically placed around his studio.



Ribeiro's flat in Haverstock Hill, c. 2006

In 2004, his piece 'Calendar' makes his frustrations with being unable to write clear:

"... I feel I should have spent the day and the night writing. But instead, began painting. When that happens there is little else I can do. There is an inner 'noise' when I begin to paint. I would like to stop. To pause for a moment but this seems impossible. The noise does not stop. I feel I'm being driven by it ..."

When I think of the backdrop to 'Calendar', I am reminded that this was a period we were having to contend with a lengthy court battle with his local council for the ongoing state of disrepair to his home and studio. A temporary move out of his attic flat and back, when the case was finally resolved, meant he never regained the order he had once had – except, again, for his paintings and art materials.

One afternoon, while sorting out some of his papers I stumbled across what was for me a deeply poetic and poignant note, revealing a compulsive artistic drive:

"...I twist and turn, curve and straighten often without aim or result. Just an escape, an escapist thing into painting impulsively, compulsively, endlessly, tired, tirelessly with or without joy".

For me, these scattered writings give a resonance to his haunting painting 'The Artist's Torment' which was completed nearly four decades earlier. They show a side to his – as his mother put it – "most sensitive soul" that I find both heartbreaking and uplifting. Ultimately I believe it is a testament to his spirit that despite multiple setbacks life threw his way, his artistic output remained unstoppable, and in his writings he left behind a passion and fire to inspire generations to come.

Calendar Ribeiro, 2004

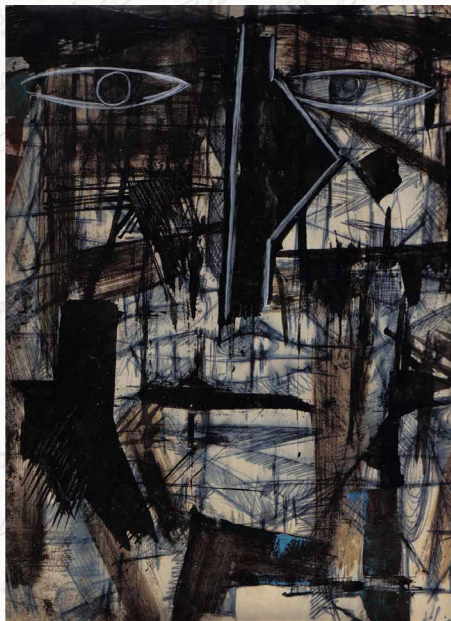
There are screams in these empty days. I have so much difficulty holding on to these ideas. They drift away, and I feel this sense of uselessness. They seem to me – the ideas - to have so much content and still they slip away.

I let a whole week go. Not kept to a single plan. I promise myself each time to sit and work the moment I'm caught up by an idea. I say I'll remember it, it's too good to lose. A day goes by and it's gone. Yet I seem to retain trivia with such ease.

I was very struck by Gogol's stories. Had a few ideas myself on reading them. But...nothing came of them. I should have tried to develop them straight away.

How these days slip by and I with them.

There are these moments when I feel a great strength. The Archangel squarely on my shoulders. I feel I should have spent the day and the night writing. But instead, began painting. When that happens there is little else I can do. There is an inner 'noise' when I begin to paint. I would like to stop. To pause a moment but this seems impossible. The noise does not stop, even pause a moment. It seems impossible. The noise does



Untitled (Head), 1962

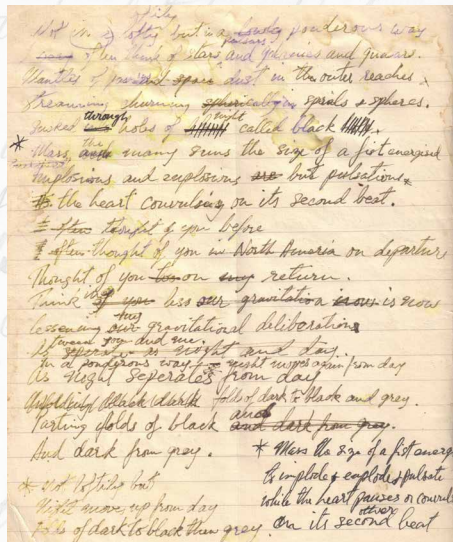
not stop. I feel I'm being driven by it. I feel such a need to try and express this noise in trying to write but can't seem to put down the simplest of things when trapped with painting. I feel such a need to stop painting and only write; at least for a time, but cannot control the urge to paint.



Ribeiro in Belsize Park, c. 1966

Is it that I am running away from something I can't really do yet? I feel this consuming and powerful pull to put things down. Words on paper instead of paint. (It could be a presumption because when faced with the reality of trying to write, I cannot.)

I worked today. Writing a lot at great speed, chasing all the thoughts and ideas. It was a strange feeling. I felt as if drunk with the flow. Like a raging river in full flood. Seems



Extract from Ribeiro's notebook, Undated

beyond control. Must stop. It feels good rushing from line to line. The exhilaration is too much. Must stop, but feeling all the time if I did, it would end there.

Let three days go by. Could not summon up the nerve to look at the lines. Feeling of excitement and

apprehension. Always seems to happen with all my attempts when I write. I go to paint without the slightest worry, never a sense of doubt. Why do I feel so inadequate when it comes to anything I put to paper and yet feel such a need to do it. Why always left incomplete. It's 3 days now, I could at least look at it ...

So many days gone by and yet I feel this apprehension to look at what I wrote with such energy. Like the drunk who reels of strings of words. Thinks them all pearls and ... There's nothing only the slouch of swine about.

Is it the painting is the dog and the wagging tail? Still have not had the

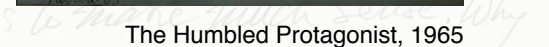


Structures Don't Hold in the Face of It II, 1995

[illegible]

Draft notes, Undated

Read it so many times, seems to make much sense. Why do I feel so diffident?



Have read it again and again. Still

Have read it again and again. Still seems loaded and with essential repetition. By now, there's been numerous changes. All very minor going into rewriting on each occasion. Such hell.

Lance Ribeiro, o.T., 1992
PVA/Acryl auf Papier

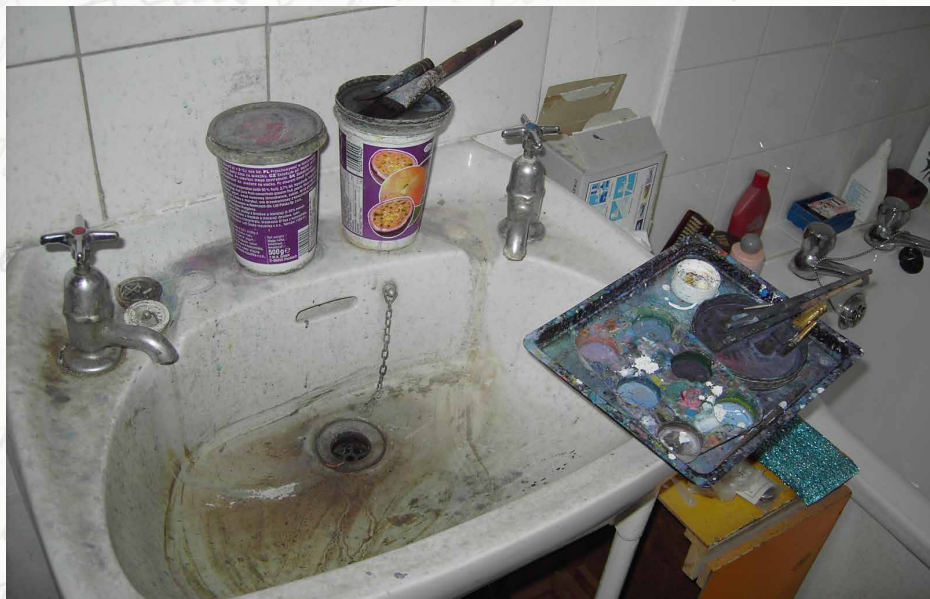
11-11-95

Hello Jörg - It was nice
to talk to you on the phone.
I tried you a couple of times
before without success. I hope
I wasn't the cause for the
teapot break. Perhaps I ought
to get you one from here?
There's been quite a break
with my work - the painting
and writing have both come
to a grinding halt. Maybe for
the best. We've been overdoing
it in the last couple of months,

so it could be for the best to slow down
a bit. In some ways I'm happy about
it. The only problems that arise are
that I feel a kind of limbo. It's OK
when the weather is great, there's
something else to do - like going
out and perhaps looking at beautiful
girls or whatever. London I think
becomes one of the duller places
with dull weather.
Have you retained the same phone
number for your new place? As I
recall, you had plans to move
when I last spoke to you.
Nance.

Galerie Signum Winfried Heid, Boxbergstr. 9-13 D-69126 Heidelberg

Facsimile of a Postcard to Jörg from Ribeiro, 11th October 1995



Ribeiro's sink, 2010

Reflections on Art

Ribeiro, Undated

1 The images I worked with focus on the anthropocentrism confronting us. There is an innate sense of doom in this that appears inescapable. This does not seem to trouble Humankind too much, when really it ought to. We are led from catastrophe to catastrophe. Cataclysms with all the awe inspiring power of natural forces and as if this were not enough we deal out cataclysmic excesses of our own - the evil securely entrenched in our psyche - causing pain and deprivation that out-do natural ones. The



Beastly and Beautiful, 1964



Destination, 1966

dispossessions we inflict on ourselves are of the worst kind. There is no vindictiveness in the changes and upheavals of Nature. Seemingly the vindictiveness has been encoded in us to do our own hustling, as adjuncts to Nature. There seems to be no way out of this vice, which is as sure as death itself. There is no respite, the terror is always there, and the means to confront it are meager. To suggest that there is a symbiotic cohabiting of vice and virtue is false. It is

invention to believe there are these opposites 'Good' and 'Evil' resident in each of us, and that good is almost always triumphant. It is only the degree of evil that manifests itself at any given time. The least evil is usually thought of as good, but not so, as all good has its own desire and not done for its own sake. It is not being cynical, but as an observer, and being part of the evolutionary process in which evil has been the motivating factor in all ages it seems a hypocrisy to accept anything else. The terror that confronts us may seem microcosmic within larger systems, but is no less vital as perhaps the continental shifts or the imploding and exploding atom or cosmic structures.

2 Lets stop pretending Art is not for the masses – as charlatans and hypocrites would have us believe – and to say it is, is a lie; causing confusion for those masses its meant for. It is this elitist pretention that engenders guilt in those who do not understand that which they should. The lie is extended further as those charlatans do not understand it either, but gloat at the non-comprehension by the crowd. This sadly enhances the gulf and furthers the intent to elitism.

You may ask what has all this to



In the Aftermath, 1996

do with Art? Well nothing really. Art has nothing to do with any of this. The moment you relate it to something it ceases to be Art. It loses its mystery the indefinable aspect.

It is within this framework I think, that my images form. However the work itself is neither polemic nor programmatic.

ANY RESEMBLANCE IS PURELY INTENTIONAL



Artist Lancelot Ribeiro pointing to a self-portrait. Can you see any resemblance?

Everyman Foyer Gallery review,
Hampstead News, 14th May 1965

LOOKING curiously at a painting of a man with a long, lopsided face, a distorted mouth and a strange-coloured complexion, I asked the artist what it was. "A self-portrait," he answered! The artist was Lancelot Ribeiro, whose paintings are currently hanging in the foyer of the Everyman Cinema, and, in my opinion (although he called the painting "flattering") the portrait did him no justice.

For an artist who has had no training, Indian-born Mr. Ribeiro shows a certain amount of ingenuity and good technique, although his subject matter does not seem to differ greatly. He calls his style "Modern expressionism" and most of his paintings are dark and heavily outlined, although in the past year he has turned to finer and more simple outlines, using brighter colours.

His titles are ordinary and convey no particular message and the word "landscape" appears in several of his 22 paintings being exhibited. "I would prefer to leave them untitled, but laymen have to give tags to everything they see," he said.

Mr. Ribeiro, who lives with

his wife in Belsize Park Gardens, began painting professionally in 1958. He had been painting from the age of six, but did not think of taking it up as a career until seven years ago, having just spent five years training to be a chartered accountant.

"I paint every day but my best work is done in the winter," he said. "Even when I don't feel like it, I sit down in front of my easel or drawing board so that I can keep in trim. I'm really at my happiest when painting portraits, although most of my pictures are landscapes."

Unlike most artists, Lancelot Ribeiro is not bothered by noise and is rarely disturbed. "I can work anywhere, because my pictures are thought out quite precisely in my mind before I begin to paint, so all I have to do is to transfer it on to canvas," he told me.

"Very often I get up in the middle of the night if I feel like it and I go into my studio. My wife who is fortunately not an artist, but the stabiliser in our relationship, is quite used to it by now and takes no notice."

Diary Notes

Ribeiro, Undated

1 It all begins with the sibilants heard and found within the oracular structure of the word, the words, the herds, in an endless mist, of dust, of snorting and hiss and in losing it all or oneself over and over again.

Was it pure accident, to be so pure with the finding it, with the word 'sibilant' that then leads and becomes a series of oracles... And so it goes constantly wherever or whenever I'm alone, it creates or causes my own muddles of never being at the turning point of where I want to, wish to, be, and so I twist and turn, curve and straighten often without aim or result. Just an escape, an escapist thing into painting impulsively, compulsively, endlessly, tired, tirelessly with or without joy. More pain than I usually remember during the hiss and miss and the routine.

Sonnie, Souza, went through possibly similar situations but this is not about his paintings.

2 Life's a hooray and an array – my friend. Come and check the incredible display – my friend. It's out of the realm of words and still makes no sense to me. I will never make a master of it. But colour and form helps to work out the distortions so I can distort and work with them... Never could figure it out. The answers



The Search, 1967

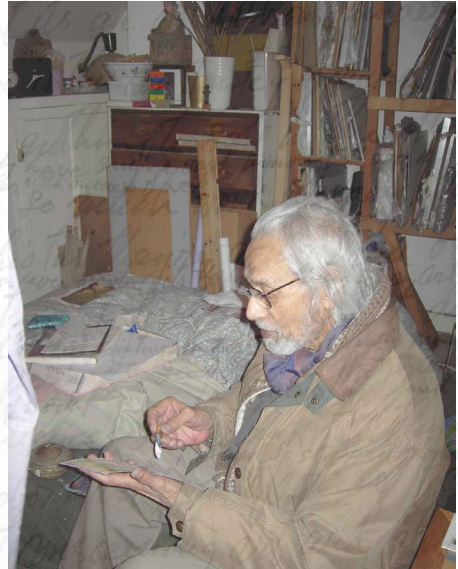
from others confused me even more but at 4, could have been 3, I told myself I will work it like ABC - which I hadn't mastered either. I often jumbled the alphabet fumbling to make it work. It never did. I know because I was always told so, yet it seemed right... Day dreaming at school was what I liked best, being told off at school was routine.

3 What's this about – it's difficult to make much sense at this stage. To put order into general thinking seems so far fetched that the rare moments of clarity always – yes always – fall by the wayside and yet while I paint it's an act without hindrance. I just work and work and work and every so often there is this constancy of mind 'why can't I just stop all this. Why do I have to paint when I have nothing to say in the often clichéd kind of way trying to find a meaning. Why do I produce so much while I have so much work already stacking the wall in space growing smaller with an excess of work.

Over the years numerous Artists would often tell me about the hiatus they're going thru or gone through or feel that they are about to go through. Perhaps it [was] taught at Art School or even maybe it's the done thing for any artist to have so as to get back with greater vigour. In fact on it's first mention I didn't even know what it meant. I assumed it was a blanking of the mind while they worked at their paintings and not what it really meant, an inability to paint. I was quite



Ribeiro's flat in Haverstock Hill, c. 2006



Ribeiro at work, in Haverstock Hill, 2010

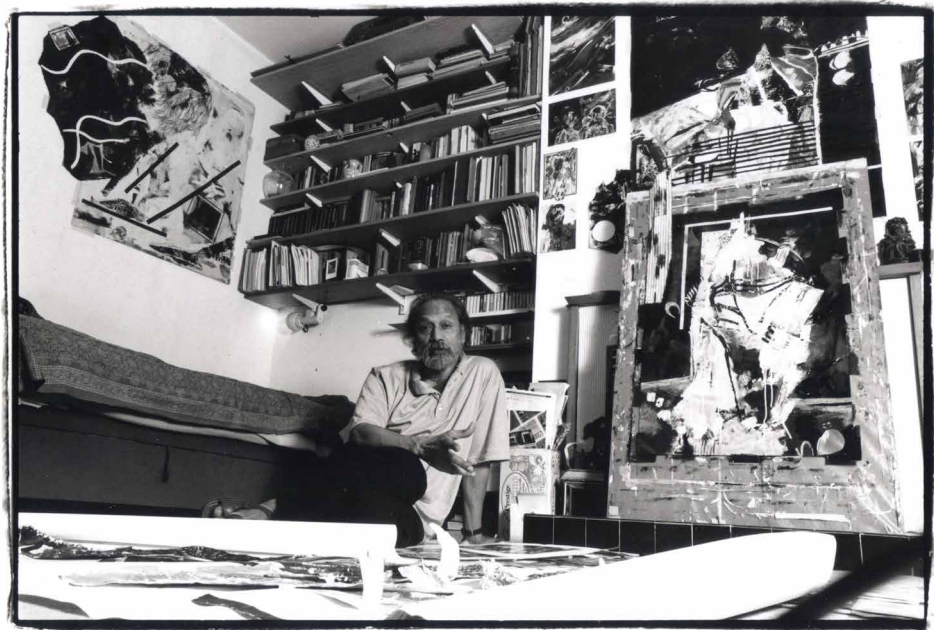
shocked – perhaps more puzzled than shocked. I also wished I too could have similar experiences, which would be the perfect solution to reduce the extent of work so a hiatus now and again would be great. I think the thinking behind this was that I could or would understand something about 'art' had I stopped plodding at it ceaselessly but of about concerning art and almost parallel to this, and just as often would wonder why is it that I want to think about 'art' while there seems to be no need whatsoever to do so, the work just flows – often it glows and who knows where or when it stops. The only analogy I can think of is that of breathing in and breathing out but beside this the clarity of thought is uncanny but I'm never able to define the locus relevant to the work and the immediacy of chaos that follows when I stop. While I stop.

4 I look at the work when I think it's finished and then wonder why I work on such a scale. It's the compulsion that's really upsetting. I listen to much that's said about it and can only nod graciously when I feel I really should.

Some years ago a major collector – who had also begun to collect my work – said “You know Lance, I have never known anyone who works on such a massive scale. I feel that if one took perhaps twenty of the most productive painters on the planet, put them together they wouldn't even have a fifth of your work. I recall asking if that was good or bad, as

I'd never thought about it in such a way. His response was effusive saying “it's not just the numbers, the work is quite unbelievable, almost all of it is truly fantastic and with immense power”.

It was good to have him say what he'd just said but it wouldn't have mattered too much as I do think I'm over-productive and also have the feeling that the work is better than most. I certainly don't mean this in a boastful or bombastic way. I'm conscious about it in a kind of half knowing subconscious way. (My) beginning as an image-maker began in the most in auspicious way.



Ribeiro in his attic flat at Haverstock Hill, London, c. 1997

5 ...rejecting with the stupid phrase "I'll take a raincheck". I especially remember Indira Gandhi who was the Information and Broadcasting Minister ringing me to say "Lance I'm having a party for Jackie Kennedy and I want you to meet her, please come". I made an excuse that I was leaving Delhi and couldn't make it "which wasn't really the case". I then decided to leave for Britain despite all the advice not to. I was selling paintings like potatoes and I hated it. So I planned to go back to Britain where I spent most of my adolescent years from 16-21. Looking back I could see how immature and naïve I was. I have in spite of all the foregoing learnt nothing and have systematically destroyed any aspect of success that came my way. What's incredible is the extent of the success that came my way without any effort on my part.



First Lady Jackie Kennedy with Indira Gandhi, 14th March 1962, New Delhi CC BY-ND 2.0, Flickr, U.S. Embassy New Delhi

On the last day of my show in New Delhi in 1962 the chairman of the largest mill 'Bombay Dyeing' came and decided to buy every painting and even transport it all to Bombay. I seemed to have got cold feet and refused. I told him we could decide this in Bombay. He agreed but I did not approach him on my return to Bombay. I can only look at all of these things.

✓ April 62: Delhi Diary

2★ EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS by Lancelot Ribeiro.
Kunika Art Centre. Open till April 12, from 10 a.m to 7 p.m.



The half-brother of Newton Souza, the well-known painter, and a Goan — Lancelot Ribeiro (29) is self-trained. In this his first exhibition in Delhi, he shows landscape, heads, and some still life studies. He is a romantic and his work has the compression and brilliance of stained-glass. Buildings impress him as forms. In his landscape, the particular and personally evocative quality springs from the active relationships between the sky and the crystalline constructions that go for houses. He has had two exhibitions in Bombay in 1961.

LANCE RIBEIRO
214 HAVERSTOCK HILL
HAMPSTEAD LONDON NW3 2AE
30-7-50

Dear Gerald McBurney

I was about to start a picture (painting) when your lecture on
Shostakovich began

I can't recall when I felt so enlightened by a talk. I didn't stop working,
I wanted to, but remembered that I seem to have a better
awareness, listening, while painting

Halfway thru your talk I felt, that what I was doing seemed
conditioned by what was being said and so would like to
offer the picture to you (as a kind of dedication). I would
be delighted if you accept and more so if you like it.

This letter has been long delayed as I tried to find
a contact address for you and gave up.

I'm now addressing it to Radio 3 to forward it on
Lance Ribeiro

P.S. Incidentally are you the Mc Burney who did a
series of readings of Bruno Schulz stories?

Encl Forward to the Delhi Cate. 18-8-50

Acknowledgements

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We hope you find this resource useful to your experience and study of Lancelot Ribeiro.

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Photograph of First Lady Jackie Kennedy with Indira Gandhi, 14th March 1962, New Delhi © U.S. Embassy New Delhi (licensed under creative commons CC BY-NC 2.0) <https://www.flickr.com/photos/usembassynewdelhi/6914428675>

Resources:

- Retracing Ribeiro website: www.retracingribeiro.co.uk
- Educational Resource Pack (available on the Retracing Ribeiro website)
- Retracing Ribeiro The Poet (available on the Retracing Ribeiro website)
- Retracing Ribeiro film (available on the Retracing Ribeiro website)
- *Lancelot Ribeiro, An Artist in India and Europe* written by David Buckman, published by Francis Boutle Publishers
- *Restless Ribeiro, An Indian Artist in Britain* published and distributed by River Books Co. Ltd.



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