

The Power of Clouds – Govinda Sah Azad.



Salvation (detail) – 2011 – oil and acrylic on canvas 148 x 148 cm, Photo: Jonathan Greet – October Gallery

The Power of Clouds:

Artist evokes the spiritual power of clouds and the perils of global warming

Govinda Sah Azad Q&A
By Will Gethin

Govinda Sah Azad, 39, is a remarkable Nepalese artist who is currently taking the London art world by storm with his zeitgeist paintings of clouds, portrayed as iconic symbols of spiritual power that also warn of the dangers of climate change.

Renowned 'Earth Pilgrim' [Satish Kumar](#), who recently introduced Govinda's recent 'The Universe Within' exhibition at London's [October Gallery](#), celebrated Govinda's powerful imagination, enabling him to transform the artist's ordinary tools of canvas, brush and colours into an extraordinary work of art. "Every artist is an alchemist, and this is the true work of alchemy," Satish declared.

Growing up in Nepal in the 1970s, Govinda's life was burdened with the kind of struggle that can fuel an artist's quest: his artistic impulses were ferociously suppressed by his parents, leading him to flee the family home at 16 to follow his passion for painting in India. In 2000, he embarked on an epic cycling tour of Nepal during the Maoist insurrection with the aim to "Spread Awareness of Peace through Art for the 21st Century"; the tour was to dramatically change his art and life direction with his awakening to the awesome power of clouds. He moved to London in 2007 where he completed an MA in Fine Art at Wimbledon Art College in 2008. His numerous exhibitions worldwide since then have included shows in the USA, Switzerland, Estonia, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Dubai and Australia.

Govinda's early paintings focused on Hindu deities, temples, sacred landscapes and mountains, before his fascination with clouds took over and he zealously started depicting them as primal symbols of fertility, creativity and heaven. Acclaimed author [Anthony Blake](#) has said of Govinda's work: "His very tangible, textured, exquisite and astonishing canvases are windows into primordial worlds and the mystery of how nothing becomes something".

I gather you were first struck by the awesome power of clouds while painting Nepal's Annapurna Mountain range at sunset one day in 1997, soon leading you to change the subject of your art indelibly. So what happened that day?

Watching the sun rise over the mountains from [Pokhara](#), the mountains glowed silver and then this gold spark emanated at the top of the mountains. When the sun climbs a mountain, the temperature goes up, and as I watched this mushroom-like cloud coming up that day, the bubble got bigger and bigger and within an hour it had covered the whole mountain. And I wondered how I could convince someone how beautiful the mountain was that lay behind the cloud? I was amazed that the clouds could totally obscure the mountain because it was so big. The shape of the clouds remained imprinted in my memory, they made a major impression on me and that inspiration was to be further awakened when soon after I went on a cycling trip around Nepal.

Later I came to see how I always stepped up in my work – graduating from landscapes to painting mountains and then clouds. The paintings were becoming like this holy sky. Today I have progressed to painting the whole universe, with its stars and planets. I was always looking beyond. The paper I was drawing on always became so small next to nature, always I was moving to something else and the space on the canvas became smaller.

Can you elaborate on how clouds further piqued your artistic curiosity during that ensuing cycle tour of Nepal?

I travelled around Nepal for three months on a bike and by the end it was May and it was incredibly hot so I went up to the mountains to cool down. I started to paint near to Everest Base Camp where I could see mountains all around – to the south, the north, and to the east and west. And as I sat painting the morning landscape, the clouds would hide the mountains and I would play this game with the clouds – if I was painting the clouds to the north and the clouds covered them then I would paint the mountains to the south, and so on and wherever there was no clouds I would paint the mountains. It was like this battle between me and the clouds. I did almost 25 paintings in three weeks.

I returned to Kathmandu to do an MA and wondering what to paint, it was clouds that came through, I quickly produced 300 sketches. And I started to wonder, what is the role of clouds? Why do they rise upwards? And I realised that clouds are spiritual, non material, they don't hold matter. Spiritual things must become light. A cloud defies gravity and goes against nature. Clouds are so powerful, they make the invisible visible. Light, sunlight, contains certain colours and the clouds bring those colours out. A cloud is nothing and yet it can change a day into the dark. Sometimes clouds are joyful and seem to lighten things up. Sometimes they become so powerful and scary that everyone tries to hide from them. Storms can come like hurricanes. Jetstreams come through the clouds and can chop a tree or bring a tsunami. Clouds unite with the jetstream and start to hold energy and can become a hurricane. They can do a lot of damage.



Hope – 2009 – Oil, acrylic and newspaper on canvas 135 x 120 cm

Can you elaborate further on why for you the cloud is a symbol of spiritual power and peace?

Clouds are free. They maintain nature. Clouds feed the green world with its plants and trees with rain and maintain the temperature of the air. And they bring a vision of the invisible energy holding the space. They show the space between the earth and the moon and gravity becomes easier to understand, the magnetic field becomes more obvious and visible. And clouds show the high tide on the sea.

In every religion, the cloud is depicted as a symbol of divine power. In Hinduism, the god Indra – king of the gods – is shown with a thunderbolt in his hand. His role is to maintain nature's energy. The thunderbolt is linked to clouds and Indra decides when it rains. So the cloud is a key instrument of God. A thunderbolt in Hinduism is a way to enlightenment.

Similarly in Christianity, clouds show the way to heaven and angels sit on clouds and disappear through them. Clouds also take the soul to heaven. In Islam, Mohammed travels from Israel to Mecca on a cloud. So just as all religions talk about the soul, the cloud is also exalted in all religions.

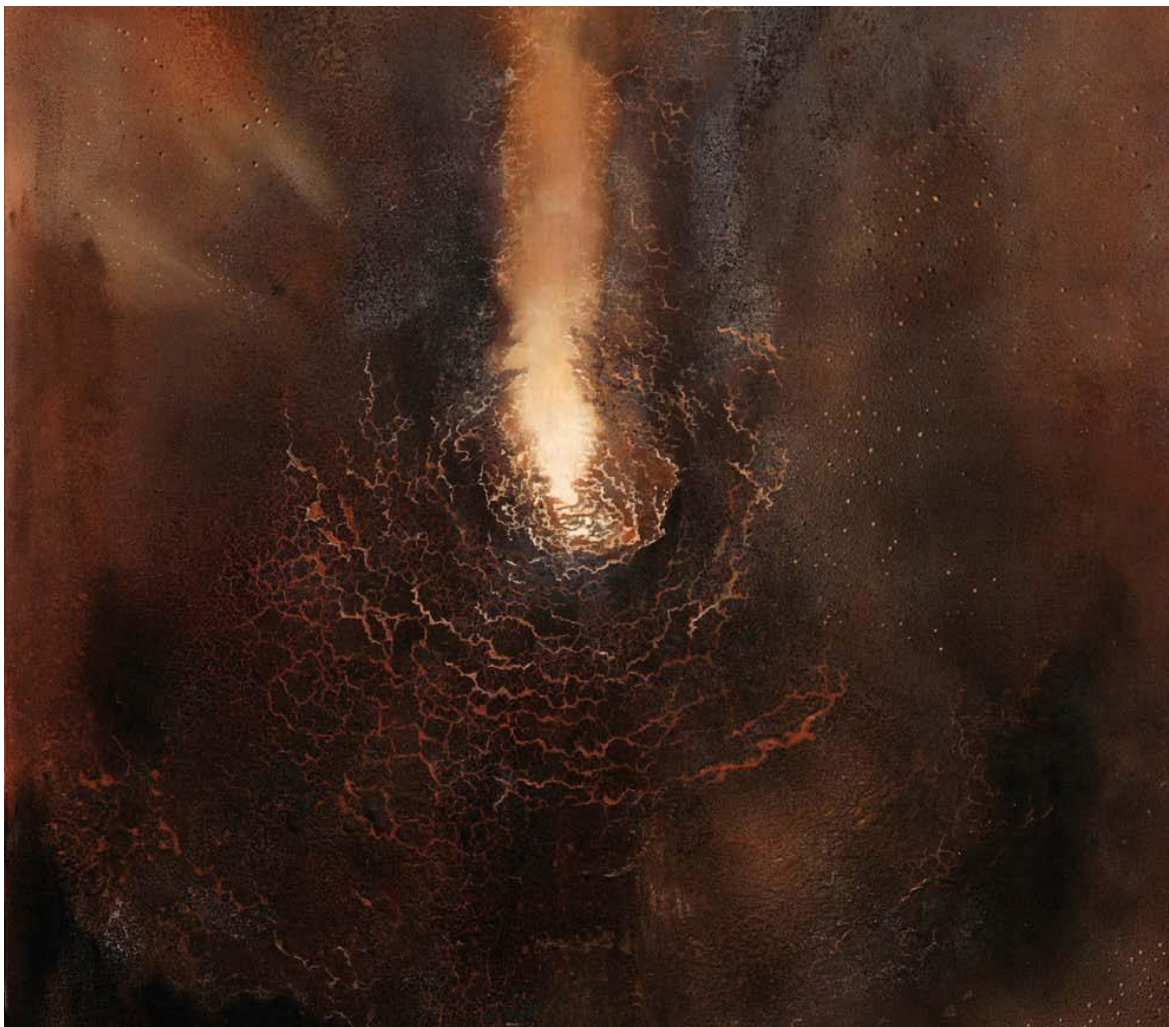
Clouds are spiritual energy, free from the laws of nature. They guide nature. They feed nature by rain, or destroy it with a storm. They are an example of spiritual energy in the visible world.

How can clouds raise awareness about global warming?

Clouds play a big role in changing climate. Rivers dry up in Nepal from an absence of clouds and rain. There is not enough rain or snow. The earth is so exhausted with so many pollutants and this is not good for nature. Clouds can normally filter the air but they are now so affected by all the pollution in the air that they are altered and can no longer provide the right balance of snow and rain and storm. So extreme weather comes unexpectedly and the clouds get irritated and affect everyone. With global warming rising higher, the clouds also get temperamental and overwhelmed and they become the cause of the problem. So nature is like temper in a hyper state upsetting everyone, and in this state, the clouds can behave in this destructive way.

Do you think the struggles and challenges you have endured in your life have made you a better artist?

Yes, I do. When humans go through major struggle I think they can become more resilient and more creative. My parents tried to stop me drawing but I was so determined to pursue my art and so I went to Delhi. I wasn't interested in education, only art, and particularly art that shares a message of peace. But I don't want people to suffer like I did. Art is important for conveying emotion and history and reflects societies and their circumstances. But I can't say I am suffering any more – the time from 1995 when I left my village in Nepal to my life today in London has been a long journey. And London is such a fantastic place for creativity, most artists want to come to London, the city has galleries representing artists from all across the world. I get inspired by the other artists that are learning here in a way that isn't so possible back in Kathmandu.



Birth of a Star (detail) – 2010 – Oil and acrylic on canvas 180 x 120 cm

What are you planning to do next now that your big exhibition at the October Gallery has finished?

I recently returned to my studio in Brixton to discover what my next phase will be. For a new phase, I explore and see where the painting wants to go, I look for a hint that can take things forward, it's like having a conversation with myself. And it's like my muse, the creative force, guides me to the new phase. The extreme weather right now is interesting for my art, it's been reflecting my subconscious capacity to source creative images from within me and to draw what comes through.

Tell me more about your creative process and how you become a channel for divine creativity?

For me as an artist the idea always comes as an abstract form and then grows into a painting. When I paint, it's not that I have a picture in mind, it's a vague idea, an abstract form and from there the creative force leads me and grabs my mind and ideas. It takes all my energetic and physical existence and forces me to do what it wants me to do. I become an innocent child and the creative force leads me to draw and paint as it wants. I become an absence and the paintings become presence. It's like I am dreaming, my mind becomes absent. When I am painting, it's like my brain is wiped out and I have to stop painting when preparing for exams, like when I was at art college, or I can't remember anything.

What is your message as an artist today and how do you hope your art can help to inspire a better world?

I want to show how nature, clouds and the earth are all connected to spirituality. And how they treat everyone equally. They don't discriminate between differences like fat, rich, poor etcetera. There is no disconnection in the world, we are all one society, one way. If there is a problem in one part of the world then we must all try to take responsibility and find a solution. Clouds show what is going on in the world. I paint clouds to prompt people to ask what they can do to support nature. Art conveys truth. The real artist tries to show what is true and to reflect the nature of things.

MORE INFORMATION

Watch Satish Kumar's introduction to Govinda Sah's recent October Gallery exhibition.

<http://www.lifeartsmedia.com/the-spiritual-power-of-clouds-govinda-sah-azad?show=slide>

For more information about Govinda Sah Azad and his art, visit his website: govindasah.com

[Source: The Power of Clouds – Govinda Sah Azad](#)