



INTERNATIONAL PAPER

DRAWINGS BY EMERGING ARTISTS

UCLA **HAMMER** MUSEUM



SANDEEP MUKHERJEE

BORN 1964 PUNE, INDIA; LIVES IN LOS ANGELES

Nude male bodies, stars, flowers, lotus blossoms, swirling leaves amid rippling bands of light—images like these may bring to mind the Pop-Hindu iconography of 1960s kitsch psychedelia, but in Sandeep Mukherjee's works they convey something genuine about the contemporary search for enlightenment and the self. Through their delicacy, gentle humor, and welcoming sense of intimacy, Mukherjee's drawings entice viewers with momentary glimpses of a dreamlike alternative dimension. Here the artist's own body is made to drift, spin, and tumble through an ethereal realm. Applying pinpricks and faint graphite markings to the surface of a sheet of vellum, he creates astonishingly detailed self-portraits. His smooth nude figure and shaved head recalling the body of a newborn baby, Mukherjee's fluid navigations through an indeterminate space suggest primal memories of the womb, along with a range of out-of-body experiences achieved through astral projection, meditation, and spiritual or sexual ecstasy. In several of his recent works, the physical body has disappeared altogether in favor of abstract compositions that resemble rippling bodies of water or rustling leaves.

Using an airbrush, Mukherjee paints the back or front of translucent sheets of Duralene with solid swaths of silver, pink, gold, mint green, and other vibrant colors. Using either a needle or an etching tool, he scores the surface of the paper with various shapes and patterns, which gives his drawings unexpected dimensional effects while creating subtle differences in tonal values. The cumulative visual impact of Mukherjee's drawings depends as much on their engagement with light, space, and perceptual illusion as it does on the artist's precise, labor-intensive handiwork. From a distance his vellum sheets look like glowing clouds of colored light. Viewed from up close, his minutely rendered imagery appears to rise from somewhere beneath the surface of the paper like consciousness breaking free of a dream.

C. I.

