

VISWANADHAN

15 January – 14 March 2026



Sans titre, 2014, Caséine sur papier kraft fin marouflé sur toile

The Nathalie Obadia Gallery is delighted to present a solo exhibition in Brussels by Indian artist Viswanadhan, following a highly acclaimed debut in Paris in 2024, thus celebrating the start of his representation by the gallery. A major figure in contemporary abstract painting, the artist has gained international recognition, which grew even further in 2025. The Sharjah Biennial dedicated a monographic pavilion to him, bringing together more than forty works spanning six decades, through which he explores the tantric geometries of his childhood in a subtle movement that leads them towards modernity.

The exhibition presents a selection of works on paper (2014–2016) offering an immersion into the heart of Viswanadhan's artistic research: a journey through spaces where colour, light and gesture intertwine, flirting with the sacred. In this voluptuous array of tones, red gradually asserts itself as the dominant colour. It embodies the progressive refinement of a palette that, since the late 1990s, has narrowed to focus on the traditional colours of *kalamezhuthu*¹ – green, yellow, red, black and white. Sovereign red, red as vital energy, red deeply rooted in the artist's native region.

Born in 1940 in a village in Kerala, southern India, into the *Vishvakarmas* community—artists, artisans, sculptors and architects associated with temples—Viswanadhan grew up in an environment where spirituality permeated every gesture. Introduced to idol carving and mandalas from childhood, he developed an intimate relationship with forms, rhythms and symbols at an early age, which would continue to resonate throughout his work.

His training at the Government College of Arts and Crafts in Madras (now Chennai) introduced him to the fundamentals of Western art. While the Bombay school embraced the international avant-garde directly, those in Madras and Calcutta favoured a more syncretic approach, combining Western knowledge acquired through British colonisation with the uncoded 'innate knowledge' of traditional Indian cultures.

This approach was further reinforced in 1968, when he left India to travel to Europe. His decisive encounter with Myriam Prévot in Paris, then director of the Galerie de France, played a decisive role: she offered him his first solo exhibition in

¹ A ritual practice in Kerala that involves drawing sacred figures on the ground using vegetable or mineral-based coloured powders (black, red, yellow, green, white), traditionally performed during ceremonies dedicated to the deities.

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1970, encouraging him to settle permanently in the capital, while maintaining a deep connection with his native country. Co-founder in 1966, with K.C.S. Paniker, of the Cholamandal Artists' Village, he returned there regularly to work in his original studio. As Bernard Blistène points out, this constant movement between two worlds gives his approach 'a duality that is both singular and complex, in which our contemporaries recognise a plural modernity'².

Viswanadhan makes tantric geometry the central language of his work. The *Shri Yantra*, a sacred motif in Hinduism, appears transfigured in an almost calligraphic style, becoming a set of lines and intervals that replay the balance of opposites and the circulation between the cosmos and interiority. From the 1990s onwards, his work became increasingly refined: tighter forms, a palette reduced to symbolic tones, vibrant light rendered by casein on canvas or handmade paper, which he particularly favours.

Viswanadhan captures movement in every stroke and nuance, transforming them into journeys rather than surfaces. He favours a horizontal structure where the image glides, approaches and recedes. This choice is consistent with his cinematographic practice. He is the author of a series of films on the five elements, *Sable/Sand*, *Eau/Ganga*, *Agni/Feu*, *Air/Vayu* and *Ether/Aakash*, which poetically explore Indian landscapes, mythological places and the symbolic gestures of vernacular India. Later, his film *Les Terres de France* (2015) paid tribute to his European masters in an installation of 21 panels of earth. This work, along with that from his film *Sable*, is now part of the Centre Pompidou's collection of modern and contemporary art.

Within these singularities, the Western eye sometimes clumsily attempts to fit Viswanadhan's images into a familiar aesthetic framework, at the risk of altering their essence. These superficial interpretations fail to perceive the depth of his work. Jean-Jacques Lévêque³ aptly described him as a 'surveyor of infinity', someone who, through his actions, opens up and cultivates space.

Suspended like open windows, Viswanadhan's works invite us to cross the threshold into a vibrant unknown, where 'the great unconscious' comes to the surface. 'The paintings arise from the wonder-filled void that settles in. They are mirrors of absence, of a vaster space beyond,' writes Michael Peppiatt⁴. Thus unfolds Viswanadhan's art: a crossing, a call, a space offered — where painting does not describe the world, but reveals within us that which remains boundless.

² Bernard Blistène, *Le Maître et l'Univers* [catalogue], Galerie Nathalie Obadia, 2025. Bernard Blistène is a French art historian and curator, former director of the Musée national d'Art moderne – Centre Pompidou (2013–2021).

³ Jean Jacques Lévêque is a French historian and art critic.

⁴ Michael Peppiatt is a British art historian and critic. He has curated numerous exhibitions devoted to 20th-century artists such as Alberto Giacometti, Christian Schad and Antoni Tàpies, and is recognised as a leading authority in the field of art criticism.

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Born in 1940 in Kadavoor (Kerala, India), Viswanadhan has been living and working in Paris since 1968.

Viswanadhan grew up in the southern Indian coastal state of Kerala. Born into the Vishwakarma caste—a group of traditional architects, painters and sculptors—he was introduced to idol carving by his father at an early age, assisting him in the creation of floor diagrams, made of natural color pigments, mandalas and other representations of Hindu or Tantric rituals.

In 1965, he graduated from the Government College of Arts and Crafts in Madras (Chennai). After an artistic education geared towards Western art, Viswanadhan took a much more personal direction, choosing to reclaim his Indian origins by returning to the simple gestures and geometric motifs he had observed as a child, in contact with Tantric rituals and texts. Alongside the director of the Madras Fine Art School, K.C.S. Paniker and a few other graduates, he founded the “Cholamandal Artist’s Village”, before embarking on a trip to Europe in 1968. Upon arriving in Paris, he had a decisive encounter with Myriam Prévot, then director of the Galerie de France, who proposed a collaboration. This would lead, two years later, to his first solo exhibition in France. At the time, the gallery was among the most influential Parisian galleries, supporting the work of contemporary painters living in Paris, such as Pierre Alechinsky, Hans Hartung, Pierre Soulages, Alfred Manessier and Zao Wou-Ki. Viswanadhan then collaborated with gallery owner Darthea Speyer, who first presented the iconic work *Sable* (1976), now in the collections of the Centre Pompidou.

Viswanadhan’s work has been the subject of major solo exhibitions and has been featured in numerous group shows, including in 2023 at the Lalit Kala Akademi (Chennai, India); in 2018 at the Centre Pompidou (Paris, France) and at KANAL Pompidou (Brussels, Belgium); in 2017 at the National Gallery of Modern Art (Bangalore, India); in 2016 at the Nature Morte Gallery (New Delhi, India); in 2008 at Marlborough Gallery (New York, USA); in 1998 with a traveling retrospective at the National Galleries of Modern Art in Delhi and Mumbai, the Lalit Kala Academy in Chennai and the Victoria Memorial Hall in Kolkata (India); in 2005, at Jehangir Art Gallery (Mumbai, India); in 2006, 2004, 2002, 2000, 1996, 1993, 1989 and 1982 at Galerie Darthea Speyer (Paris, France); in 1987 at La Malmaison (Cannes, France); in 1985 at the Musée national d’art moderne – Centre Pompidou (Paris, France); in 1981, at the Centro de Bellas Artes (Maracaibo, Venezuela); in 1972, at the Art Institute (Kochi, India); in 1970 at Galerie de France (Paris, France). In 1971, he was awarded the Palette d’or Prize at the Festival International de la peinture (Cagnes-sur-Mer, France) and the following year, that of the 9th Biennale Internationale de Menton (France).

His oeuvre, which spans almost sixty years, offers a profound reflection on the relationship between form, space, light and color. His work is held in important collections such as, in France, the Musée National d’art moderne de la Ville de Paris, the Centre Pompidou (Paris), the Centre National des Arts Plastiques (Paris), the Mobilier National (Paris), the Musée d’art moderne et contemporain de Saint-Étienne; in India, the Birla Academy of Art and Culture (Kolkata), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (New Delhi), the National Lalit Kala Akademi (New Delhi), the National Gallery of Modern Art (New Delhi).

Viswanadhan has been represented by the Galerie Nathalie Obadia Paris/Brussels, since 2024.

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Brussels Charles Decoster

Paris Cloître Saint-Merri

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Viswanadhan

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Andres Serrano

A Personal Mythology: Immersions and Bodily Fluids
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Mickalene Thomas

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Shirley Jaffe

26 March - 23 May 2026

Paris Cloître Saint-Merri - Espace II

Sophie Kuijken

12 February - 28 March 2026

Patrick Faigenbaum

Paris, Saint-Louis, Santulussurgiu 2019 - 2024

10 November 2025 - 24 January 2026