

Of Gods and Goddesses, with a touch of Samba

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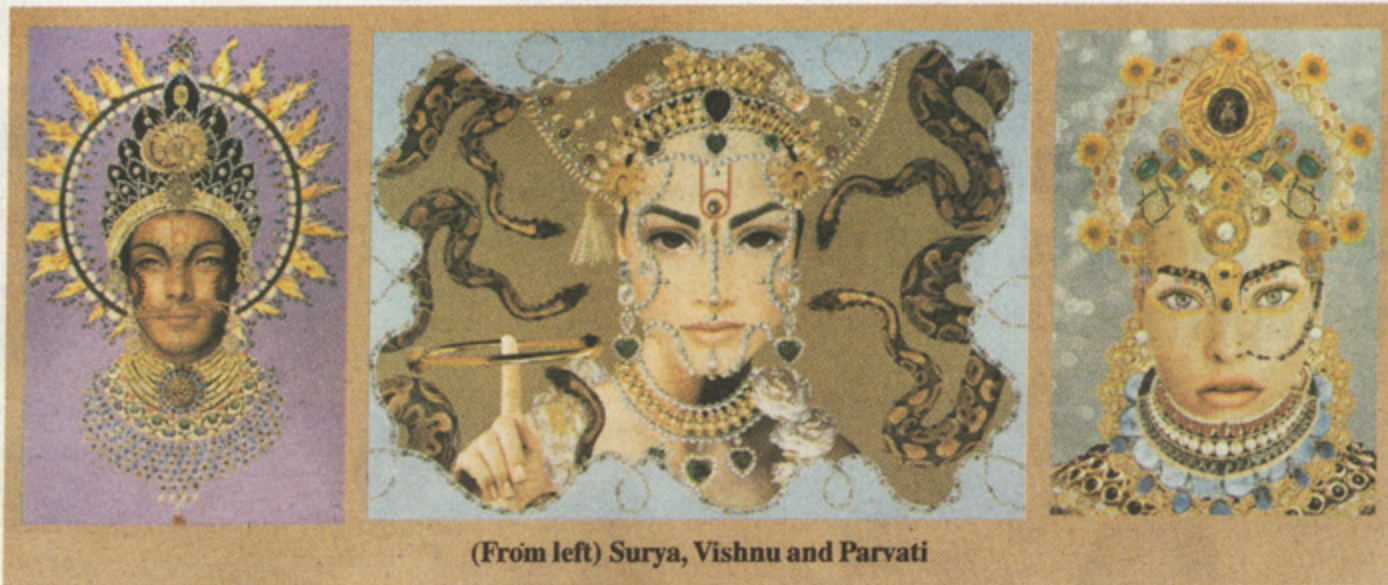
New York

HOW tough could it be for a Brazilian artist to recreate pictures of Indian Gods without ever visiting India? Looking at Roberto Custodio's works, on display at the Peter Louis Art Gallery in New York this week, it seems to be no big deal. But that is only for him!

A collage artist from Sao Paulo, Brazil, Custodio created a series on Hindu deities over a period of four months this year. On display were his versions of 14 Hindu gods, including Surya, Brahma, Shiva, Vishnu, Ganesha, Parvati, Saraswati, Lakshmi, Radha, Krishna, Durga, and Hanuman.

Every piece on display is unique in itself. His Brahma holds the earth, while Parvati has no symbol that may identify her as the goddess, yet she is Parvati. Saraswati and Lakshmi are conventional goddesses, while Radha is sitting in the serene surroundings of a forest. What is most striking about these exquisite art pieces is that they have been created by overlapping small bits of pictures and cuttings over one another to create the picture of the god and the ambience around him. These pieces have been mostly cut out from high-end fashion magazines. The pictures have also been touched up with paint to create the right effect.

"Custodio's work just amazes me.



(From left) Surya, Vishnu and Parvati

He can imagine the painting in its entirety and then find every part of that imagination from the magazines. I fail to understand how he can do it," says gallery owner Peter Louis. It was Louis's idea to commission the work in Brazil and bring the exhibition to New York.

One look at these pieces of art and you'd surely mistake them to for being paintings. "Every part is put in precision. Every little piece is cut so accurately that you don't even see white spaces that may have been around it. I fail to wonder how he could have done it," adds Louis. The cutting is definitely a mystery with Custodio's pieces.

What catches one immediately is the startling power of invention,

along with an emotional strength that envelopes each work. One feels drawn into these collages as if you were in a mystical land. At first one may not find them unique, but an extended view of these pieces could transport you into the serenity, peacefulness and the powerfulness of divinity.

Custodio's defining motivation to find 'beauty' is apparent in each of these works, blending and pushing the boundaries of male/female beauty but always remaining respectful of the subject. Many pieces do carry female faces for male gods. But the treatment and ornamentation of every picture simply hides this fact and makes one accept the painting for its intention.

The Brazilian artist says he was always "inspired" by Hindu deities. In fact, he firmly believes that he must have lived a previous life in India. He studies, reads and researches the pantheon of gods and goddesses, and is always conceiving them in different moods and aspects. "The topic of Hindu deities is very close to Custodio's heart. No wonder he has been able to do such a marvelous job," says Louis. Unlike conventional collages, Custodio also maintains the correct proportion of the figure and figure/landscape/setting, and then with India ink and watercolor pencil, adds the final touch to give uniformity to the piece. The collages, at times, even give a South American feel, with Brazilian motifs

and other arts adorning the art pieces.

A self-taught artist from Sao Paulo, Custodio was interested in creating art, drawing and painting throughout his childhood. He was naturally drawn to artists such as the Dutch master Jan Van Eyck and the Italian genius, Botticelli, for whom sensual beauty was of utmost importance. In 1989, he started to work as an art director for a model agency in Sao Paulo. At that time he started to incorporate his art style into photographs, adding new dimensions to the images through collage, watercolor pencil and India ink.

As demand increased for his art, he began a new direction as an illustrator for magazines like *Brazilian Vogue*. In imagining this pantheon of Hindu deities, Custodio has brought a unique sense of respect for traditional iconography, along with a feel for modern beauty, inspired in part by his South American heritage, which once again places these beautiful Gods and Goddesses on a pedestal to be adored and loved...

The New York exhibition has been a sold-out show, and to meet the demands, the gallery is now offering limited-edition digital prints of the artworks. For more information log onto <http://www.peterlouisarts.com> or contact: Peter Louis at 39 West 19 Street Suite 612, New York NY 10011; Tel: 212 645 6402; info@peterlouisarts.com



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