



The Shape Of Things

The Art of A. Bala

MAP DISCOVER

Abstract art is art that does not attempt to represent an accurate depiction of the world or a visual reality. Instead, it uses **shapes**, **colours**, **forms** and **marks** to achieve its effect.

What do you think the story behind this work might be?



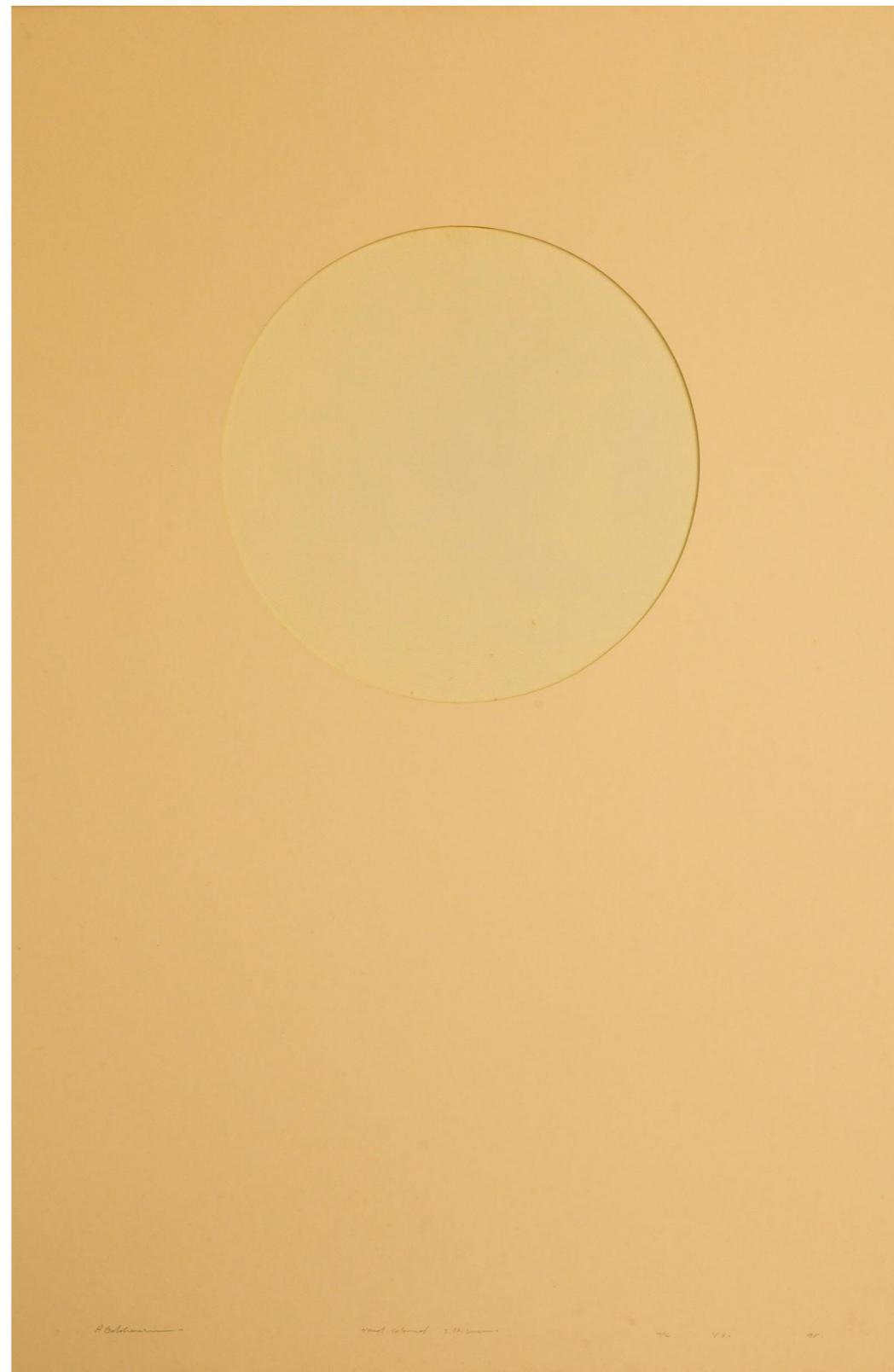
VOCABULARY ALERT!

The word **abstract** means to separate or withdraw. It is commonly used to describe things removed from the physical or concrete world, such as **ideas** or **concepts**.

For example, wisdom is an abstract quality that we can't see or touch.

How do you think the circle in this work was made?

Was it drawn, painted, cut-out, pasted on or something else?



Technically, abstraction has always been employed in art around the world and across time.

Have you seen very old pots in museums that are decorated simply with shapes and patterns?



Collection: The Metropolitan Museum

In this resource pack, we will look at the works of **Alwar Balasubramaniam**. He's more popularly known as **A. Bala**.

He lives in **Tirunelveli**, a city in **Tamil Nadu** and studied at the **Government College of Art, Chennai**.

He likes to try his hand at a variety of mediums but **printmaking** and **sculpting** are his favourite.

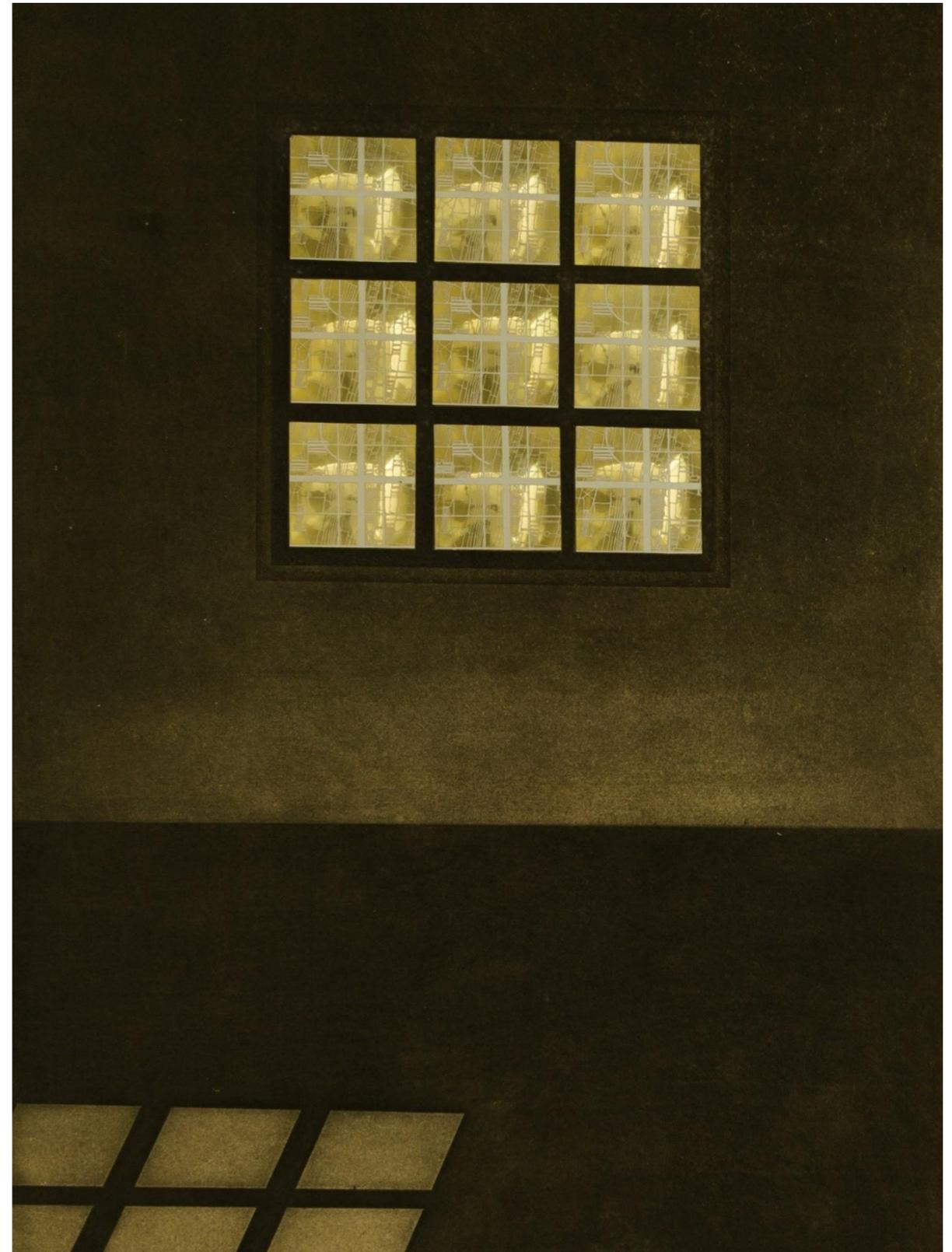


A. Bala wonders a lot about the elements of nature – gravity, light, shadow and air – and explores these in his works.

LOOK CLOSELY.

This is one of his early works.

- Do you think any of these elements are being explored here? Which one(s)?
- Do you see any repetitive shapes and patterns?
- What material do you think was used to create this work?

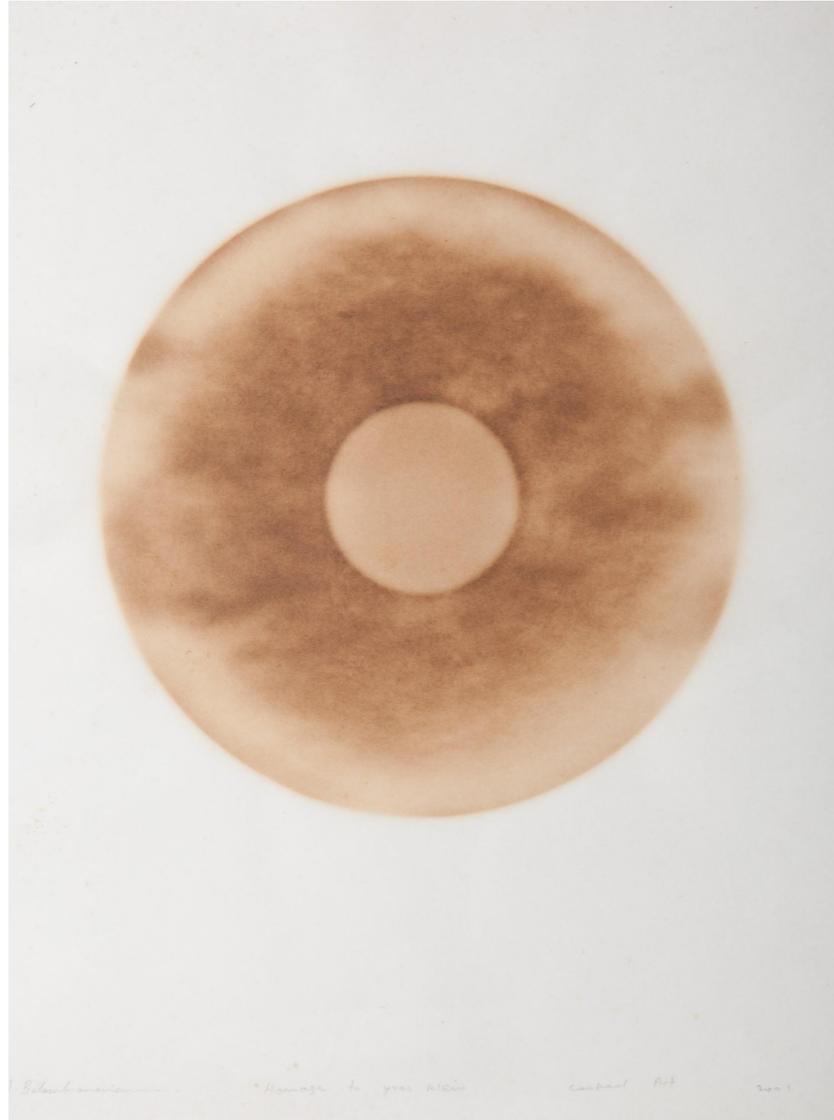




Bala's works might look a little confusing at first. You might not immediately understand what's going on, but that makes it more fun.

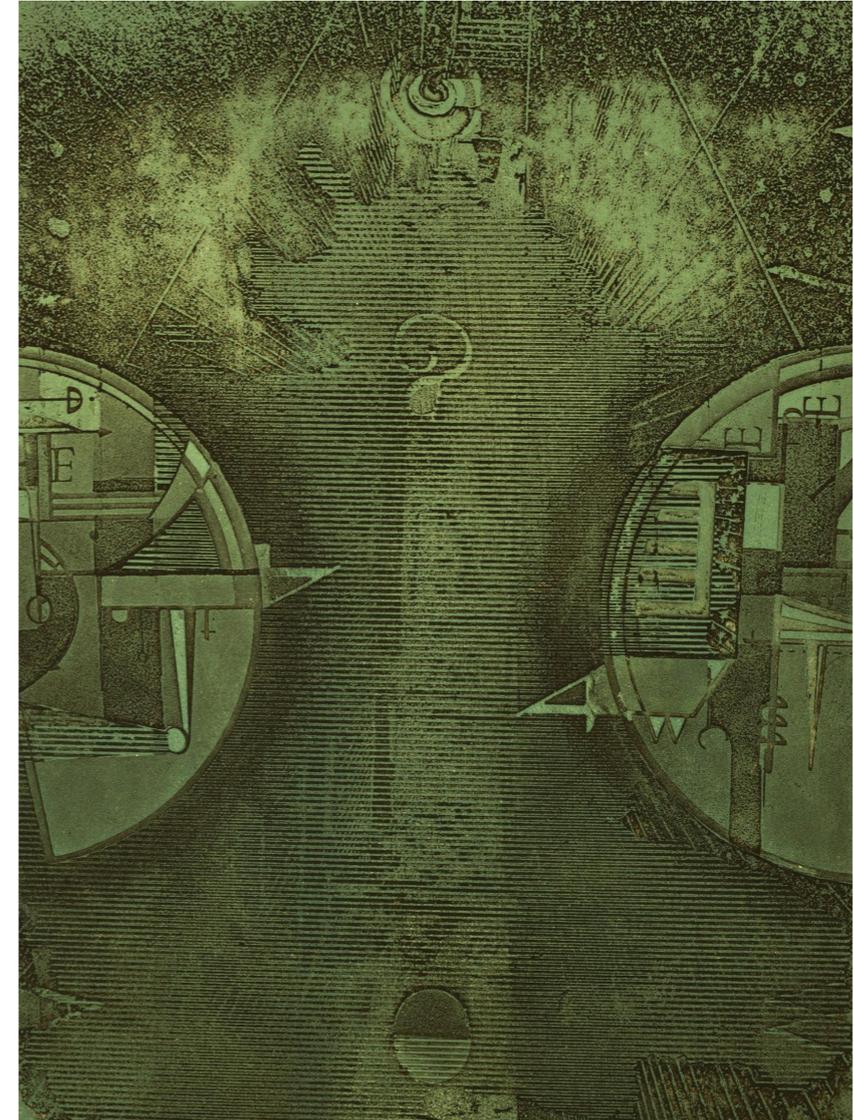
The more you look, the more you discover. And the more guesses you can make about what they might be! Let's look at some of his works and try a guessing game.

What are the components of the little form at the bottom? What do you think it means?



What do you think this is?

- A doughnut gone bad?
- The view through a microscope?
- An eyeball?



What do you think this is?

- The inside of a clock?
- An entry portal to another dimension of the universe?
- A satellite view of a green city?

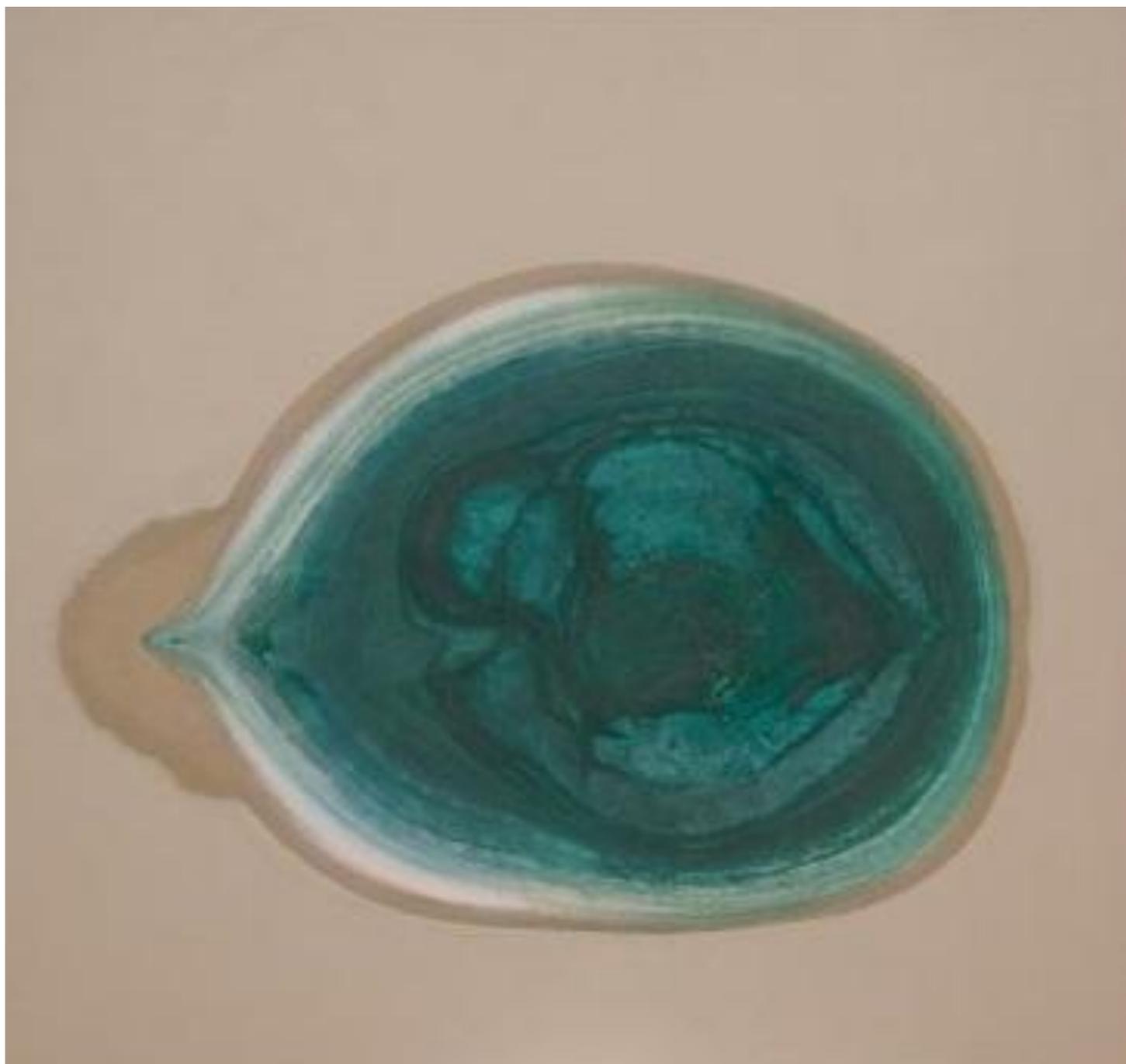


Image: Collection of Talwar Gallery

Bala is also interested in natural processes such as gravity, erosion and wind patterns, and sometimes uses nature as his 'artistic collaborator'.

In this work, for instance, Bala spread paint on the canvas and let gravity do its job.

REFLECT.

This work reminds him of lakes found in Tamil Nadu.

What does this work remind you of and why?

CREATE.

Let's make a fun artwork using nature as your collaborator.



For this you will need:

A sheet of paper (any colour)

Paint (any contrasting colour to the sheet)

A paintbrush

Fold your paper in half down the middle and open it back up. On any one half of the paper, put a few blobs of paint in the middle.

Keep the paint thick – the more paint on the paper, the bigger the blot will be at the end!



Fold the paper and gently press where the paint was dropped. Open up the paper and reveal your new symmetrical blot-based painting!



Bonus:

If you enjoy this activity, don't forget to check out our **Activity Sheet** for another spontaneous painting exercise!

What does the painting you just made look like or remind you of?

Sometimes, Bala also likes to play around with what we see and what really is.

For instance, look at the circle in this artwork and the lines inside.

What does it look like to you?

Can you guess what was used to make it?





Here is the detail of
the same circle.

Would you change
your answers looking
at it close up?

**What do you
think it would
feel like if you
could touch
this detail?**



In this work, Bala was interested in traces* that humans leave behind.

THINK.

What are the other **Big Ideas** that you think this work can connect to?

Head to the **MAP DIY Guide** to make an artwork inspired by YOUR Big Idea!

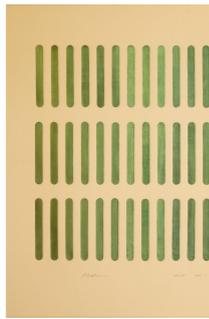
*traces are indications or signs of something that existed or has happened.



**What shapes,
angles and
text forms can
you see here?
Do they tell
you a story?**

Did you have fun exploring abstraction and the art practice of A. Bala?

Learn more about two other abstract artists from India in our packs in the Discover MAP series.



Krishna Leela Pata, c. 1930s
Unknown Maker(s)
Natural pigments on paper
H. 435 cm, W. 20 cm
PTG.0615



Untitled, 1998
Alwar Balasubramaniam
Etching
H. 82.6 cm, W. 55.9 cm
MAC.00100



Window 9B, 1997
Alwar Balasubramaniam
Serigraph
H. 69 cm, W. 49 cm
MAC.00099



G.C.A.C., 1997
Alwar Balasubramaniam
Serigraph
H. 69 cm, W. 49 cm
MAC.00095



Homage to Yves Klein, 2001
Alwar Balasubramaniam
Impression from hot plate on paper
H. 33 cm, W. 27 cm
MAC.00092



Form 4, 1997
Alwar Balasubramaniam
Etching?
H. 29.3 cm, W. 19.3 cm
MAC.00093



Limited from unlimited. R. Undated
Alwar Balasubramaniam
Serigraph
H. 76 cm, W. 55 cm
MAC.00094



16 - 0 (Blue), 1997
Alwar Balasubramaniam
Silkscreen hologram
H. 76 cm, W. 55 cm
MAC.00098



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