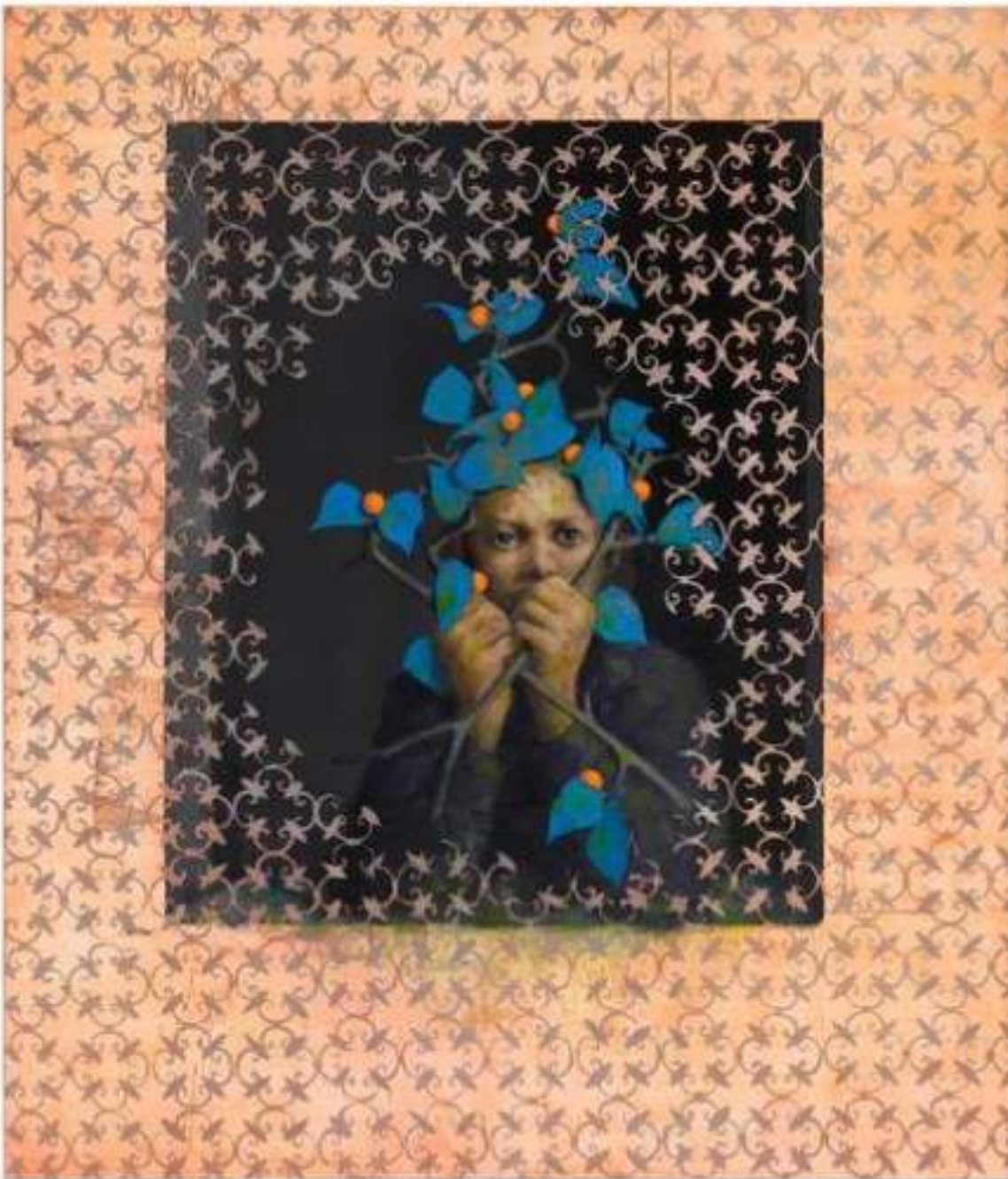


# Beyond the painted veil

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## In his latest exhibition, Jonas Burgert explores the human psyche through a juxtaposition of contrasts

Bandaged human bodies piled atop a horse; a woman clutching onto bright blue flowers while looking through a window longingly; a girl, clad in a white robe with fluorescent bandaged arms, leaning against a wall that is adorned with a melange of vibrant hues as a shrivelled wreath dangles from a shoot. At first instance, German artist Jonas Burgert's oil on canvas paintings seem unsettling. But as you look at them closely you are bound to be captivated by the works which revolve around death, dystopia and macabre and prompt you to think about your own temporal struggles.

Burgert's work is on display in Mumbai for the first time in an exhibition titled *Schlier*, which translates to a fog or veil. The name alludes to the fact that the viewer needs to discover the hidden meaning behind each of the art works.

The artist, who is one of the most important German figurative artists of contemporary times, says the paintings allow him to meditate on the myriad complexities and conflicts of the human psyche. They present a world in which time is suspended and human beings are depicted as unique, contorted creatures, both familiar and fantastical. Each appears to be engaged in some form of quest, the purpose of which is not immediately apparent to the viewer. They appear as dream-like figures, frozen in a moment of time. He says, "It seems to me that we, human beings, recognise ourselves without actually understanding ourselves. This leads to a grotesque situation: man's battle with his own mirror image, struggling to define himself. The title *Schlier* is about psychological portraits, the imprint that an individual leaves behind."

Known for his distinct style, Burgert's works are hugely inspired by Dutch painter Rembrandt. Since 1998, his work has been on view in numerous shows around the world including Italy, Germany and the US.

### Energy of colours

This time, he has juxtaposed fluorescent colours like acid yellows, electric blues, shocking pinks and bright reds with muted greys and blacks; morbid human figures with flowers, puppie and teddies; and the fantastical with the grotesque. "I was looking for a solution to represent the phenomenon of contrast, which is strong and important, in an abstract mood," he elaborates. "Therefore, on one hand, I have used quiet, defensive colours in variations of grey, while on the other hand I wanted to explore the very edge of what the energy of colours can do." Accordingly, he's used strong hues. "I took away the harmonic connecting shades in between because we are living in a time of cynical human behaviour," he says. I have painted a platform on which the result of a psychological and spiritual battle can become visual."

He admits that working on these paintings have been challenging as well as cathartic. "The biggest challenge was to connect the calmness of the figures with the aggression of the colours. I also had to paint and invent individual characters. The idea was to depict the psychology of a human being which can be recognised by everybody. It is only strong as an art piece if you can see yourself in it."

***Schlier* is on display at Galerie Isa, Fort, till April 11.**