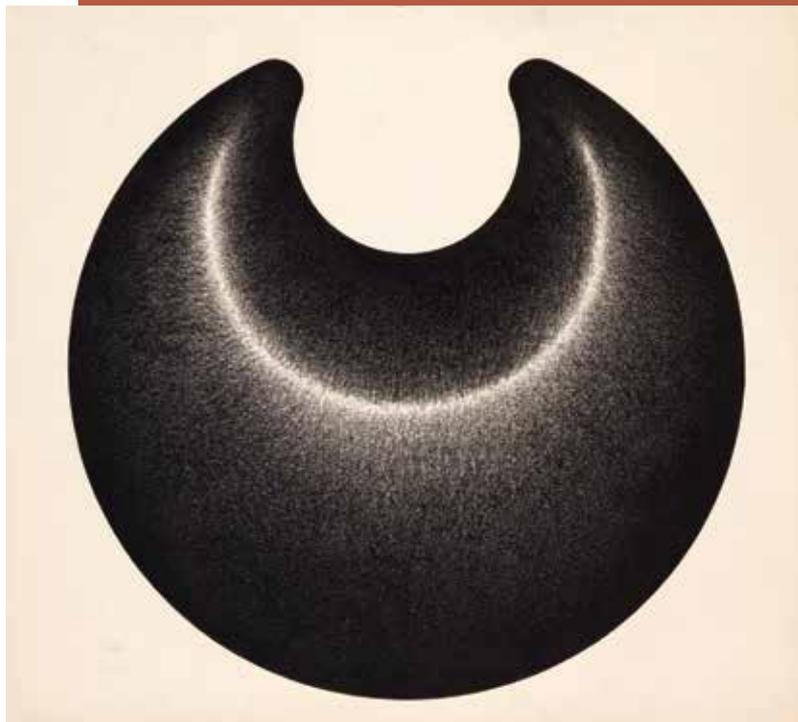




YOUNGO VERMA  
**KUNDALINI**  
UNION OF THE DIVINE

JULY 14 – SEPTEMBER 11, 2016

**AGM**  
ART GALLERY OF MISSISSAUGA



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## DIRECTOR'S NOTE

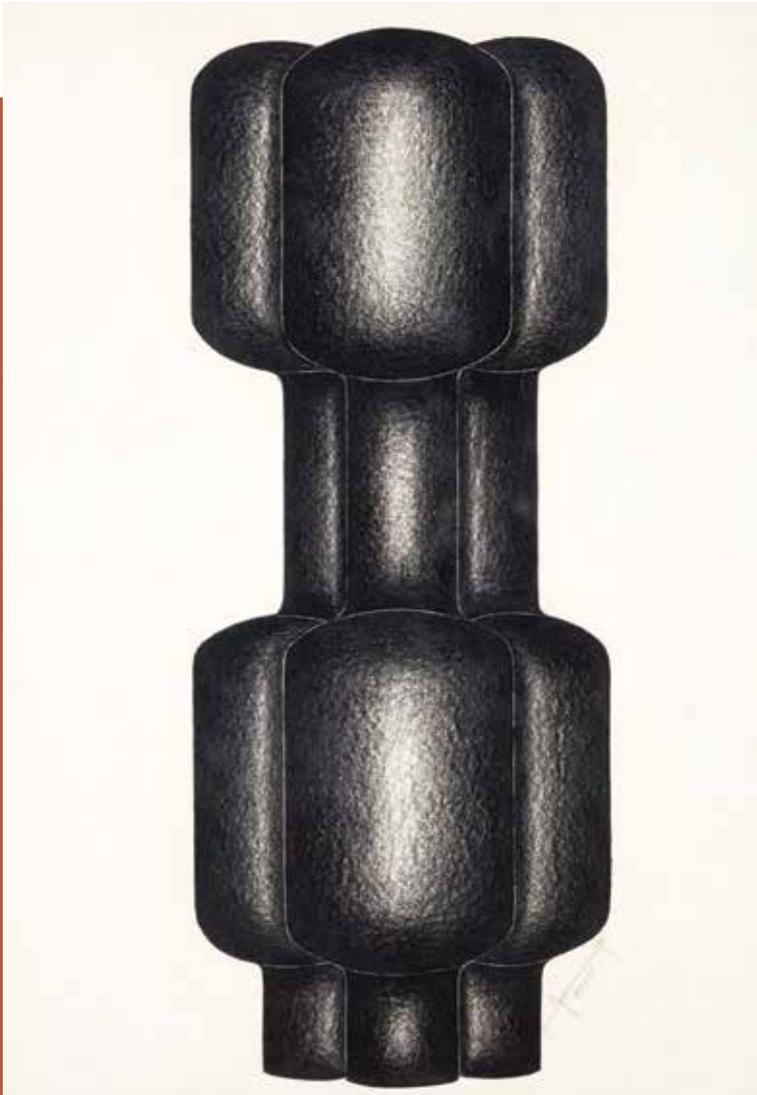
The AGM is proud to present Youngo Verma's *Kundalini: Union of the Divine* in the Robert Freeman Gallery. Alongside the AGM's concurrent exhibition, *Pattern Migration*, this exhibition continues the AGM's tradition of featuring strong contemporary installations in the spring and summer season. Verma was deeply rooted in his spiritual heritage, where meditation played a crucial role and was the inspiration for his lifelong commitment to artistic practise. These works, all rendered by hand on found pieces of paper and used primarily for meditation, depict deities as geometric, vividly realized shapes. It's an egoless practice that connects the audience to ancient Tantra treatises that have been copied over many generations, and eventually have evolved into a complex symbolic cosmology of signs, patterns and codes.

*Kundalini: Union of the Divine* forms an interesting connection with the work in *Pattern Migration* as both exhibitions explore the notions of transference and transformation - that pattern and shape can hold meaning beyond the literal and resonate across borders, time and space.

Thank you to Paul Verma and our generous sponsors for assisting us in realizing this important exhibition and to co-curator Ali Adil Kahn and Assistant Curator Laura Carusi for curating this exhibition with me. All of the AGM's powerful exhibitions are the result of the collaborative support of AGM staff members Kendra Ainsworth, Sadaf Zuberi, Weijia Feng, Sharada K. Eswer and our incredible roster of preparators and volunteers.

## ARTIST BIO

Youngo Verma was born in India in 1938. After graduating from the Delhi College of Fine Art in India in 1964, he joined the studios of Indian masters B.C. Sanyal and K.S. Kulkarni, and taught at the Jammia Millia College in Delhi. In 1971, influenced by the Bauhaus school, he moved to Germany to study sculpture under Michael Croissant at the Städtelschule. In 1981, he moved to Canada, and lived in Mississauga until his death in 2014. His works are in private and public collections around the world, including at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, the Brooklyn Museum of Art in New York, the Royal Palace of Nepal in Katmandu and the City of Frankfurt.





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## **KUNDALINI: THE UNION OF THE DIVINE**

Ali Adil Khan  
Guest Curator

Kundalini is a Sanskrit word (kund, "to burn"; kunda, "to coil or to spiral") defining a concentrated field of intelligent, cosmic invisible energy absolutely vital to life. The ultimate outcome of Kundalini is the union of Will (sakti-kundalini), Knowledge (prana-kundalini) and Action (para-kundalini) leading to the Union of the Divine.

Youngo Verma (1938-2014) lived and worked in solitude for the last 40 years of his life, creating a large body of work that examined and explored the notion of Tantra and its connection to Cosmic Energy. Tantric meditation and ritual practices seek to channel the divine energy of the macrocosm into the human microcosm to achieve Moksha - freedom, self-realization and self-knowledge. Verma's Tantra-inspired drawings, paintings and sculptures evoke profound feelings at the physical and spiritual levels. His paintings reflect on Tantric Hinduism, beginning in the fifth or sixth century, while his later drawings explore Tantric Buddhism.

*Kundalini: The Union of the Divine* presents three distinct and important periods and genres of Verma's art. His early figurative drawings completed in Germany in the 1970s that remained with him until his death and have never been shown before. These remarkably innovative drawings explore the notion of duality, as it depicts alien human figures, grounded yet having wings, with vibrant forms of energy emanating from them.

Verma's highly sensual and spiritual Tantric paintings and drawings that have a meditative and palliative quality were produced in the 1980s in Canada. These are a clear departure from his earlier figurative work. Minimalist and abstract paintings explore spiritual connection with the Divine – Shivlingam and Om. These paintings reference early abstract paintings from India, used primarily for meditation, depicting deities as geometric, vividly hued shapes. The early tantric paintings date back to the handwritten Tantra treatises from the sixth century B.C.E that have been copied over many generations, at least until the seventeenth century, as they evolved into a complex symbolic cosmology of signs.

Verma's Tantric paintings resonate uncannily with twentieth-century art from the Bauhaus and Constructivism to Minimalism. While in Frankfurt, he worked under Michael Croissant, whose style is determined by a geometrical-abstract language. He also admitted to being greatly influenced by the work of Brancusi. In Verma's work, the ancient and the modern come together seamlessly.

Hindu Tantrism combines devotional elements with ones that may seem more mystical, such as mantras and mudras. Vibrations can be felt from Verma's painting *Om Shanti Om* (1988), which is a mantra traditionally chanted at the beginning and end of meditation sessions. Coming from Hinduism and Yoga, the mantra is considered to have strong spiritual and creative power but despite this, it is a mantra that can be recited by anyone for meditation and relaxation.

And finally, a small number of drawings completed in the last 15 years represent an in-depth exploration of cosmic energy in graphite on paper. Drawing meticulously for hours, days and weeks, sitting cross-legged on the ground with soft classical music playing in the background, Verma would say: "every day after breakfast, I sit in *Tapasya* (a yoga position) and paint what comes to me. I am thinking of the skies, cosmic energies up high above, and my hand moves automatically. This is a process during which I don't think of Earth and Earthly things. At that point I only know that my hand is moving. I am thinking of, meditating about and concentrating on cosmic energy. I am a *Fakhir* (a Sage). This is the great advantage of me being in solitude. I can get absorbed in this without being disturbed."

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Verma's highly evocative paintings and drawings created through this process help us visualize cosmic energy and explore some key questions. Are cosmic energy and creativity related? Does exposure to cosmic energy heighten one's consciousness, self-realization and personal creativity? Made towards the end of his life, Verma's series of cosmic energy drawings seem to grow darker and darker, almost morbid, and devoid of light. Perhaps, we can speculate, he achieved *Moksha* and became aware that he had reached the beginning of his next journey.

**Ali Adil Khan is an art writer, curator and collector based in Toronto. He is the founder of South Asian Gallery of Art (SAGA) and Visual and Interactive Arts of South Asia (VIRSA). He actively promotes South Asian art, music and culture in Canada.**

## **NEO-TANTRISM IN THE DIASPORA: YOUNGO VERMA (1938-2014)**

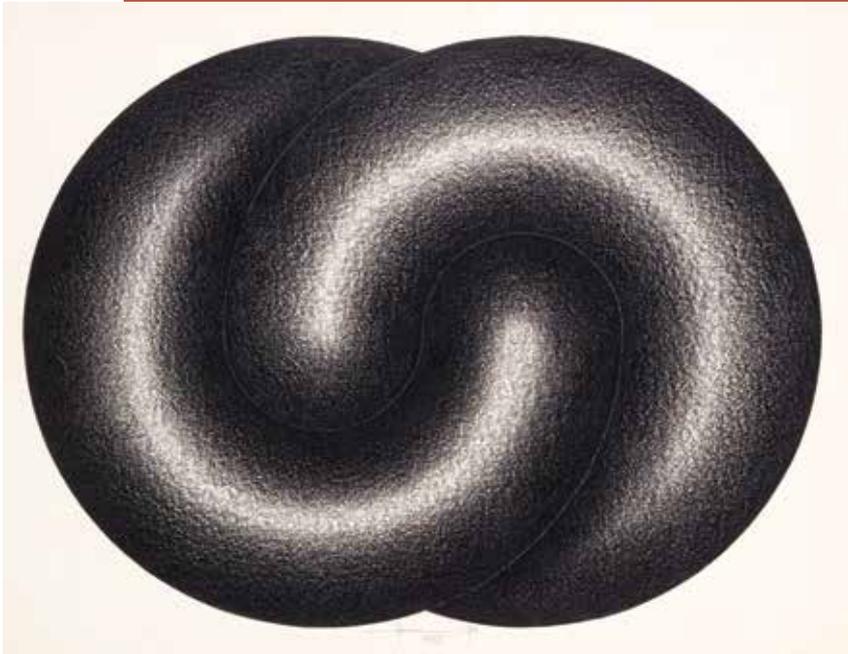
Deepali Dewan

Yungo Verma was born in 1938 in the small village of Kherikalan in Haryana, a state in the middle of Northern India. He grew up during a turbulent time, just before India gained independence from British colonial rule in 1947. By the 1960s, Verma was studying at the Delhi College of Art under revered modernist painters BC Sanyal (1901-2003) and KS Kulkarni (1918-1994). As a student he participated in projects with his teachers, many of which still occupy public spaces across north India today. He initially trained as a sculptor mostly for financial reasons. Unlike other arts that required the purchase of expensive paints and brushes, the school provided clay for free and stones could be found on the ground anywhere. Sculpture also connected with his childhood experiences of making toys with clay he'd find by the river. Its malleability was appealing. "Whatever came into my mind," he said, "I made it then destroyed it and then made it again." After graduating from the Delhi College of Art in 1964, he taught art and sculpture at Delhi's Jammia Millia College until 1971. In that year, at the age of 33, he travelled to Europe to study art, as many of his fellow artists had done before him, such as S. H. Raza (b. 1922) to Paris and Sadanand Bakre (1939-2007) to London. Verma went to Frankfurt, Germany to study sculpture at the Städelschule under Michael Croissant (1928-2002). It was the work of Constantin Brancusi (1876-1957) that had inspired him to go to Germany in the first place. Called the father of modern sculpture, Brancusi was known for geometric lines and organic forms that had representational connections and yet operated on a symbolic and metaphoric level as well; his work pulled from folk traditions from his native Romania, as well as the modernist ideals of abstraction. In Frankfurt, Verma sketched from life and honed his sculpting and casting skills. He witnessed up close the exploration of an avant-garde figural abstraction. After 10 years in Germany, Verma moved to Canada where he settled for the remainder of his life. He took up painting and travelled almost yearly to India during the winter months, to make work in a large studio space and to exhibit with galleries in the capital city of New Delhi. Never veering from his engagement with the abstract form imbued with spiritual significance, he created a substantial body of work that is only now coming to light.

Verma's paintings and drawings are dominated by geometric and organic shapes that skirt the boundary between representational and non-representational form. They evoke a range of imagery from Hinduism, Buddhism and Tantric practice that use abstract shapes to refer to philosophical concepts. The circle is often associated with the female creative energy, combined with the square it becomes a cosmic map (mandala), and overlapping triangles refer to the Union of male and female (duality) within the divine. In Verma's paintings,

these shapes appear float in a sea of color that evokes a sense of universal time. These kinds of aesthetic explorations were not Verma's alone and reflected a wider interest among artists such as Biren De (1926-2011), G. R. Santosh (1929-1997), and P. T. Reddy (1915-1996), who have been associated with Neo-Tantrism. Tantric practice, up until the 1930s, was considered a hidden system, combining elements of Hinduism and Buddhism. It was only with the systematic study of this religious practice that it became more widely known. Within artistic circles, it came to be seen as another manifestation of a visual expression rooted in India's pre-colonial past. Privileging the circle, triangle, and square as visual forms imbued with spiritual significance, Neo-Tantricism allowed Indian artists to engage with European modernism while still maintaining a connection with their indigenous heritage. Through the act of grappling with duality on a visual level—light/dark, material/immateral—Verma was able to translate the material into the conceptual realm.

**Deepali Dewan is an art historian with a special interest in South Asia and the South Asian diaspora. She is a Senior Curator in the Department of World Cultures at the Royal Ontario Museum and an Associate Professor in the Department of Art at the University of Toronto. She is the author of *Raja Deen Dayal: Artist-Photographer in 19th-Century India* (2013, co-authored with Deborah Hutton), *Embellished Reality: Indian Painted Photographs* (2012), and the editor of *Bollywood Cinema Showcards: Indian Film Art from the 1950s to the 1980s* (2011).**



## IMAGE CREDIT

### Cover

Youngo Verma, *Union #2*, 1973, graphite on paper, collection of Ali Adil Khan

### Inside

1 Youngo Verma, *Tantra 101*, 1978, graphite on paper, collection of Ali Adil Khan

2 Youngo Verma, *Abstract Form #2*, 1975, graphite on paper, courtesy of Youngo Verma Estate

3 Youngo Verma, *Tantra #23*, graphite on paper, collection of Ali Adil Khan

4 Youngo Verma, *Tantra #35*, 1982, graphite on paper, courtesy of Youngo Verma Estate

5 Youngo Verma, *Cosmic Energy #3*, 1982, graphite on paper, courtesy of Youngo Verma Estate

6 Youngo Verma, *Tantra #25*, 1982, graphite on paper, collection of Ali Adil Khan

This exhibition is generously supported by Baylis Medical, Canadian Community Arts Initiative, Flex Recruiting Solutions, Canada Pakistan Business Council, the family of Paul Verma and the South Asian Gallery of Art



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Engage. Think. Inspire. This phrase opens the dialogue at the AGM. The Gallery connects with the people of Mississauga through the collection and presentation of relevant works from a range of periods and movements in Canadian art. Expressing multiple ideas and concepts, this visual art translates into meaningful cultural and social experiences for all audiences. The AGM employs innovative education, artist projects and other forms of dialogue to advance critical enquiry and community connection to the visual arts.

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ISBN: 978-1-927595-25-1