



## Light & dark

### VISUAL ARTS

SRIMOYEE BAGCHI

Artistic creation, T.S. Eliot had argued, triumphs when tradition is balanced with individual talent. Bholanath Rudra understands this maxim well. His luminous watercolours are rooted in a tradition of painting with light washes that the likes of Abanindranath Tagore imbibed from the Japanese artists, Yokoyama Taikan and Hisbida Sbumso. Dissatisfied with the faint washes of the Japanese, Tagore transformed this technique by layering the transparent colour washes and dipping the paper in water in between to create a surreal effect where scenes are bathed in a diffused glow. Rudra has not only mastered this technique but has taken it a step further with his talent to create ethereal scenes where watercolours are manipulated to great cinematic effect.

At *Pensive Moons* (his solo show at Emami Art, on view till August 20), Rudra sets the stage for a dramatic exposition of man's deprivations on nature. But the viewer is not confronted by scenes of gore that shock

and, at times, instantly repel. Instead, the soft glow of the forest scenes almost lulls one into believing that this might just be a night of camping. But the night air carries the stench of the cruelties that Jibanananda Das had smelt in his poem, "*Campe*". Although not a single drop of blood is spilt and no humans are visible, injured and captured elephants paint a telling picture of human greed. Both poignant and strikingly beautiful is how Rudra uses concentrated drops of water to wash away the paint and evoke floating specks of light. In *Rustle - II* (picture), for instance, these pinpricks of light descend like fireflies over the figure of a fallen tusker as if paying their last respects to this once majestic animal.

Large elephants and shadowy trees might dominate the canvases, but the true protagonist is the moon. Rudra engineers its shape and colour, just as a light artist would do to set the stage in a theatre, to bathe his scenes in an eerie radiance. The moon waxes and wanes and goes from clear white to blood red and its light filters through the trees to cast a spotlight on the horrors that humans have left strewn on the forest floor.