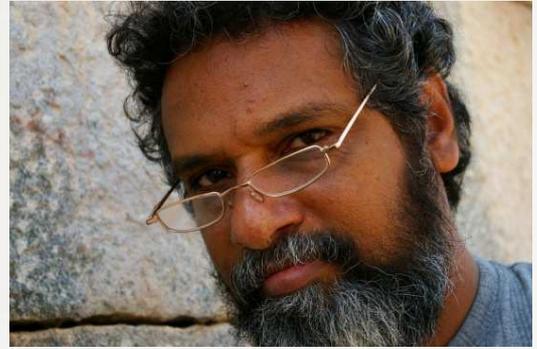


## Art and theatre

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**Theatre** is a collaborative form of art that uses live performers to present the experience of a real or imagined event before a live audience in a specific place. The performers may communicate this to the audience through combinations of gesture, speech, song, music or dance. Elements of design and stagecraft are used to enhance the physicality, presence and immediacy of the experience. Even from the days of Greek theatre different masks and other machinery were used as embellishments to add to the ‘spectacle’ (one of the six components of theatre as Aristotle defined it). Masks also used to suggest the nature of the character, and the nature of the play, whether it is a tragedy or comedy.

Slowly theatre included more of ‘art’ and art included theatre also. Art and theatre are two forms which influenced and mutually complimented. The renaissance period artists painted frozen moments of dramatic action in their works (Paintings of Michelangelo, Ruben, Titian, Benozzo Gozzoli, Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael etc, the painting is a frozen moment of action, as if framed in a proscenium theatre). This trend continued till the early days of modernism. Heightened and enlarged expressions and emotions were represented by early expressionistic paintings.

Theatre at the same time used paintings as backdrops, to establish the scenery or locale. With modernism emerged in paintings (cubism, surrealism to Dadaism), it also influenced theatre narrativeto develop its performance language by accentuating by the use of images. Images became an important presence in deciding the visual of the play and also to express the concern of the playwright or the director. Purpose of the play is shifted from narrating a story to the exposition of an expression or idea, through images. Instead of a vivid reality, theatre become more about images, representation of ideas, fragments of reality and experiences woven one on the other.

### Art and modern Indian theatre

Art is not just the two dimensional paintings or graphics. It includes sculptures, architectural pieces, and in the modern context installations. In modern theatre ‘design’ evolved as a key aspect of the performance. The audience is no more watching the incidents on a black box, or through the fourth wall.

Raja Ravi varma modelled his art on the western modes of capturing a frozen moment of a dramatic action during the colonial era. But the traditional Indian art including the miniature paintings and different murals used to narrate whole story or a sequence of events in a single painting. This multiplicity of narration was accepted by the Indian theatre to reframe itself and liberate it from the western habits of expression.

Post independent Indian theatre liberated itself from the modes of western theatre in its narrative, design, aesthetics and format. It experimented with new spaces and actor-audience relationships as if in traditional rituals. (Indian rituals are closely linked with art; *kalams* and floral paintings are used in many ritual performances. The performance forms like *Theyyam*, *padayani*, and *kadhakal* has elaborate use of body painting, and sculpting and art. This presentation will look into these aspects.

### My theatre and art

I have incorporated visual art and depended on it in many of my productions to device the design, spatial and emotional representation and also to help the narrative. As examples my productions of *Tempest* (tantric art, spatial representation in tantric art, and also the works of KCS Panikkar) adaptation of *Medea*, (paintings by KGSubrahmaniam) and my latest production of *Draupadi* (use of paintings by ShobhaMenon, almost as an exhibition of paintings exclusively done for this production) will be discussed to elaborate this.