



**Art | Basel
Hong Kong
May | 15-18 | 2014**

DAG
DELHI ART GALLERY



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A BRIEF HISTORY OF INDIAN MODERN ART



EARLY BENGAL
(ANONYMOUS)



RABINDRANATH
TAGORE

India's vibrant art ateliers up till the 18th century had absorbed foreign influences but had developed indigenously, largely in the form of miniature paintings on paper, and as localised folk styles that were mostly illustrative and intended as souvenirs for pilgrims. The arrival of European landscape artists changed all that, since the colonial elite and, later, the rich Indians, began to patronise them for their realistic works that used elements such as depth, perspective and chiaroscuro on large canvases painted with oil.

Indian artists began to teach themselves to paint in this foreign medium from the 19th century onwards, led by Raja Ravi Varma, and it wasn't long before the British set up art schools to train Indian artists to paint in the academic or realistic style based on Western percepts. The mastering of this form led to fewer European artists coming to India, and Indian artists began to enjoy the patronage of art lovers.

But artists could hardly stay outside the ambit of a society that was questioning colonial imperialism in all its aspects, whether political or cultural, and by the end of the 19th and start of the early 20th centuries, the imperial capital, Calcutta, became the fountainhead for a nationalist struggle that saw artists reclaiming their Indian heritage. This led to the first art movement in the country, resulting in the birth of revivalism under the Bengal School. This is characterised by a wash technique of painting on paper with exaggerated features of often mythological retellings creating the first identifiable body of modern Indian art under such stalwarts as Abanindranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose and Kshitindranath Majumdar.

Critics have been divided whether revivalism is a stand-in for modernism, though its breakout under the Santiniketan School of expressionism and, particularly, the works of Ramkinkar Baij, or Benode Behari Mukherjee, the folk style of Jamini Roy, or indeed, the bold, mordant art of Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore,



S. G. THAKAR SINGH



BIKASH BHATTACHARJEE



H. A. GADE



M. F. HUSAIN



KRISHEN KHANNA



S. H. RAZA



RAM KUMAR

suggest a case for modernism that was organically born. Earlier, the Paris-educated, half-Hungarian Amrita Sher-Gil had made a case for Indian modernism when she renounced her salon style, replacing it with a striking palette and a stylistic rendering that had its roots in the miniature tradition.

Elsewhere, in Bombay, the Progressive Artists' Group with its strident Western approach and absence of political ideology marked a significant departure from existing art styles in India, in 1947. This would become a marker for artists in, especially the 1950s and '60s, with F. N. Souza, S. H. Raza and M. F. Husain the most vociferous, while others such as Tyeb Mehta, Akbar Padamsee, Ram Kumar, Krishen Khanna and V. S. Gaitonde played a significant role in the creation of a bolder vocabulary for Indian art.

If the 20th century was marked by the establishment of the artists' commune of Cholamandal outside Madras led by Sultan Ali on the one hand, on the other, New Delhi emerged as a hub for a more eclectic group of artists such as J. Swaminathan, or G. R. Santosh, while Baroda, in Gujarat, came to be known for an eponymous style that engaged more closely with society and social issues around it. Indian artists living and working overseas made their mark, while those in India exhibited frequently, creating a vibrant environment in which art flourished even though it lacked a market.

By the end of the century, however, the scene was changing, and infrastructure – following the economic reforms in 1991 – began to improve, creating an interest in collecting art. 20th century Indian modern art has since been at the forefront of collecting and investing in Indian art, and Delhi Art Gallery, which has the largest private collection of art, and artists, from this period, is at the forefront of organising scholarship and exhibitions that are seminal for their significance and documentation.



The gallery space at Hauz Khas Village, New Delhi

DELHI ART GALLERY

Established in 1993, Delhi Art Gallery has grown to become a premier institution of art, boasting of a distinctive and extensive collection of early-modern as well as modern and contemporary art, ranging from names such as Rabindranath Tagore and Nandalal Bose to F. N. Souza, M. F. Husain and S. H. Raza, from Avinash Chandra and G. R. Santosh to Sohan Qadri and Chittaprosad, among the over 400 artists in its inventory.

Delhi Art Gallery employs a large number of professionals to manage its affairs: its Research and Documentation division creates superior publications and provides support for its exhibitions. A Sales and Marketing team takes art to homes and offices through an interface programme and manages and maintains art resources for companies and collectors whom it also advises on art purchases.

In the two decades since it was established and as one of the largest repositories of Indian modern art anywhere in the world, the gallery has become distinguished for its focus on 20th century Indian art.



The gallery space at Kala Ghoda, Mumbai

Its collections provide a critical link for everyone from art-lovers, collectors and investors to academicians, scholars and researchers. Documentation processes across various genres have resulted in some iconic exhibitions, known for their breadth of scale and depth of research. Extensive exhibition catalogues and books – part of its ongoing efforts on shedding new light on the well-established artists and their genres, but also on the lesser-known but equally talented painters and sculptors – is a measure of the seriousness of the gallery's effort of concentrating not just on the names of Indian artists familiar to all art-lovers, but also the lesser-known but equally significant talents.

Delhi Art Gallery has a flagship gallery in the heart of picturesque Hauz Khas Village in New Delhi, as well as a second gallery in the exclusive DLF Emporio. In 2013, it marked its debut in Mumbai in a standalone, historic building in the art precinct of Kala Ghoda in the Fort area. It opened with a seminal exhibition, *Mumbai Modern* on the principal and associate artist-members of the erstwhile Progressive Artists' Group in Bombay.

FEATURED ARTISTS

J. Sultan Ali

K. H. Ara

S. K. Bakre

Bikash Bhattacharjee

Avinash Chandra

Sankho Chaudhuri

Jogen Chowdhury

Prodosh Das Gupta

Sunil Das

Biren De

S. Dhanapal

H. A. Gade

K. Laxma Goud

K. K. Hebbar

M. F. Husain

Ram Kumar

Anjolie Ela Menon

Akbar Padamsee

Gogi Saroj Pal

B. Prabha

Ganesh Pyne

Sohan Qadri

A. A. Raiba

S. H. Raza

P. T. Reddy

D. P. Roy Chowdhury

Prosanto Roy

G. R. Santosh

Himmat Shah

F. N. Souza

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Front cover: K. H. Ara, *Untitled*, Oil on canvas

Back cover: S. H. Raza, *Zameen*, Oil on canvas, 1960





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