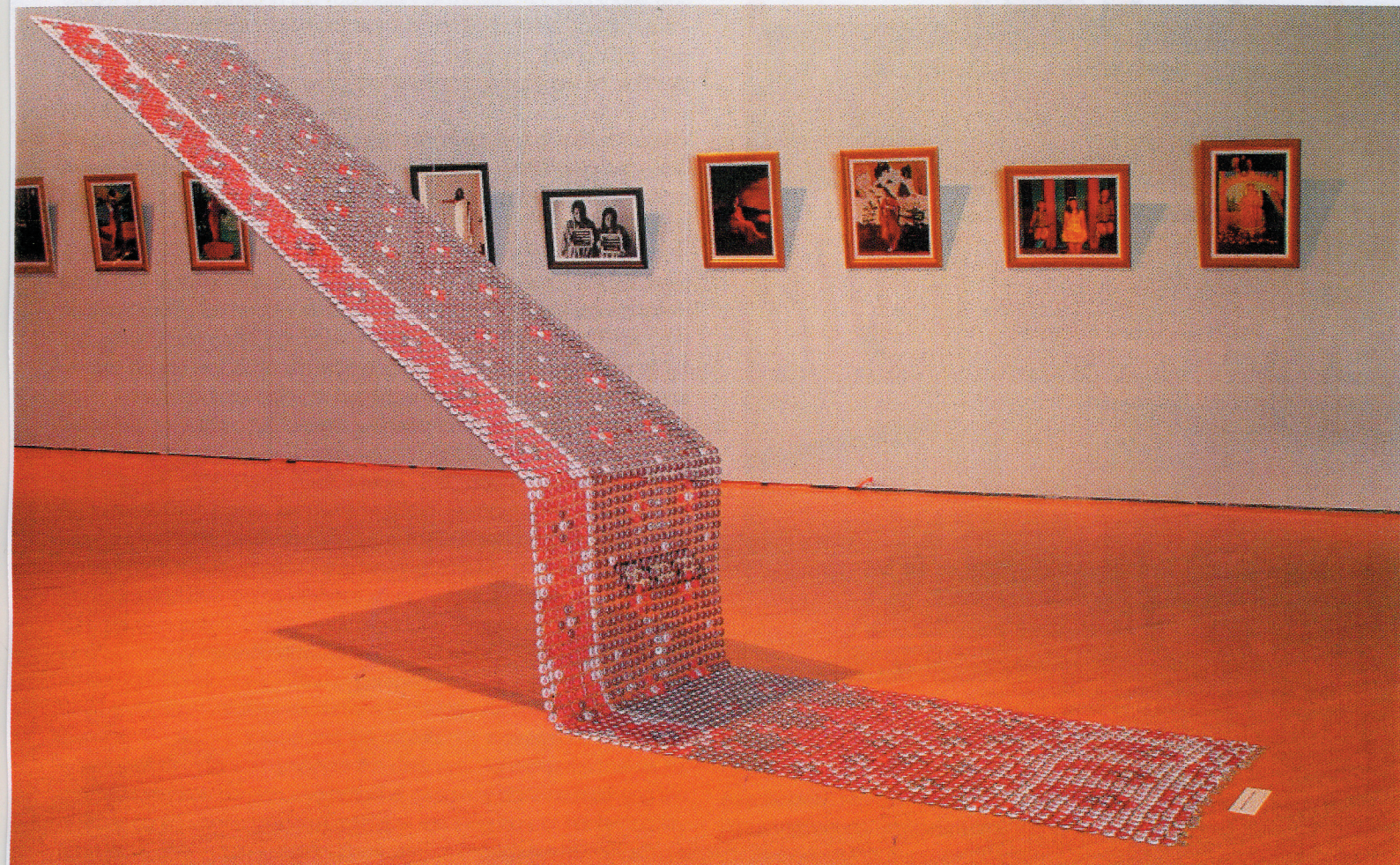


3 GROUP SHOWS TRENDS NARRATIVES



Sharmila Samant, A Handmade Saree, 1998 - 1999
Coco-Cola bottle caps, metal shackles and computer prints with wooden frames

Edge of Desire: Recent art in India Fatal Love: South Asian American Art Now AshtaNayaks: The Early Pioneers of Indian Art

by KIRAN CHANDRA

An expansive two-part art exhibition organized by The Asia Society and the Queens Museum as well as a rare showing of members of the Progressive Arts Group at Gallery Arts India, are not only highlighting the rich depth and range of contemporary art practices in India but those amongst the South-Asian diaspora as well.

Edge of Desire: Recent Art in India and Fatal Love: South Asian American Art Now are two visual art shows that complement and contrast each other - reflecting the direction that art from India and art from the South Asian diaspora are taking. Both of these shows are bringing the current voices of painters, sculptors, photographers and multimedia users to the attention of the Western art world and engaging them in artistic dialogues at an international level.

Edge of Desire, curated by Chaitanya Sambrani of the Australian National University, Canberra, presents the works of thirty-eight artists and collectives. The exhibition is significant in that, through art, it depicts India's cultural evolution since 1990 - from the advent of India's entrée into the global economic market to its struggles with political and religious fundamentalism. With artists ranging from those who are self-taught to those trained in the vocabulary of modern art, and those who show in a folk medium to others represented by galleries, this is a seminal exhibit - aiming to do what the Asia Society's "Inside Out: New Chinese Art" did in 1988 to bring the thriving contemporary art of China, into the American consciousness.

Meanwhile, young diaspora artists express their ideas on cultural assimilation - addressing 'the desire for place and the relationship with locations real and imagined' - and comment on contemporary events through the use of various mediums in Fatal Love. Curated by Jaishri Abhichandani and Prerna Reddy, this exhibition encourages the questioning of cultural practices that migration and modernization have spurred and to look intimately at the emerging community around them. The political and social commentaries in Edge of Desire and Fatal Love as well as the use of multimedia and other current expressions of art mark a sharp contrast to the all painting exhibition on view at Gallery Arts India. The exhibition, Ashtanayaks, showcases early and current works of some of the key figures in early Modernist trends in painting in India - M.F. Husain, S.H. Raza, Tyeb Mehta, F.N. Souza, Gaitonde, Akbar Padamsee, Ram Kumar, and Swaminathan. Except for M.F. Husain, who has explored other media including film, these artists have remained loyal to painting, either in abstract fields evoking landscapes or abstractions of the figure. In 1947, some of these young artists, including M.F. Husain, S.H. Raza, and F.N. Souza, established the 'Progressive Artists Group' whereby they collectively created works that were influenced by western modernism but uniquely Indian in perspective.

What is striking to all three exhibitions is the importance of the respective works to the history of India and the evolution in expressions of creativity both within India and amongst the diaspora. Ashtanayaks makes for an interesting comparison and historical reference point by reflecting the creative contributions made by artists at the inception of contemporary art in India, after Indian Independence, and its importance henceforth, as post-colonial art when juxtaposed to the artists from Edge of Desire who are coming out of this aesthetic lineage, but through their current practices, show how quickly they have realized the goals of these early modernists by rejecting, embracing or continually re-assessing ideas of what is modern in a country like India - where economic growth and social development may not go hand-in-hand. It is also interesting to note that the choice of medium is not limited to canvas painting (what is considered a largely European medium), but has evolved to experiments freely in media - from crude vegetable paints, found objects, recyclables to film, plastic as well as the conventional tools of painting, printmaking and drawing but on new surfaces and with different intentions.

There is no doubt that the strong messages, the mediums selected and the various expressions of art in these three exhibitions will lay the foundation for what will hopefully lead to an ongoing interest in the artistic and creative voices coming out of India and South Asia.



Shahzia Sikander SpiNN, 2003
Digital animation Courtesy of Brent Sikkema Gallery, New York



Mareena Waheeda Daredia, Afternoon Prayers 1, 2004
Color photograph 30 x 40 inches

Edge of Desire: Recent Art in India
Queens Museum of Art: February 27 - June 5, 2005
Asia Society: March 1 - June 5, 2005
<http://www.queensmuseum.org>

Asia Society and Museum
725 Park Avenue (at 70th Street)
New York, NY 10021
<http://www.asiasociety.org>

Fatal Love: South Asian American Art Now
On view at the Queens Museum of Art
February 27, 2005 - June 5, 2005

Ashta Nayak: Eight Pioneers Of Indian Art
March 31, 2005 - April 29, 2005
Gallery ArtsIndia
206 Fifth Avenue
NY NY 10010
www.artsindia.com