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Thursday, September 25, 2008

Aicon Gallery's Inaugural Exhibition at New Lower East Side Location

New York: Aicon Gallery New York is presenting **The Ghost of Souza** (September 18 through October 19, 2008), as the inaugural exhibition in their new space in New York's Lower East Side arts district. Celebrating the career of Francis Newton Souza (1924-2002), one of the first Indian artists to receive widespread international exposure, the show consists of mid-century works by Souza from Aicon's collection alongside new works created by contemporary artists in response to the Indian master's paintings. The show has been organized by Delhi-based curator **Alexander Keefe**, and will include artworks by the contemporary Indian and Pakistani artists Debnath Basu, Adip Dutta, Neeraj Goswami, Mayyur Kailash Gupta, G. R. Iranna, Riyas Komu, Bose Krishnamachari, Baiju Parthan, Justin Ponmany, Ashim Purkayastha, Chintan Upadhyay, and Muhammad Zeeshan.



Souza straddles many traditions but serves none.
- John Berger on the art of F.N. Souza

In the mid-twentieth century, Francis Newton Souza, along with a loose cohort of Bombay-based contemporaries known as the Progressive Artists Group, broke from the antiquated notions of the then popular Bengal school of painting. Dispensing with the clichéd, neo-Orientalist imagery, recycled from India's manuscript-painting traditions, the Progressive Artists Group called into question the cultural nationalism that the artists and theorists of the Bengal school had ardently espoused. The dreams of a pan-Asian political resurgence that inspired the generation of artists living in post-Independence India had wilted with the rise and defeat of the Japanese in the Second World War. At the same time, the mythologizing imagination of the Independence movement's avant-garde had grown stale and, following the traumatic events of India's partition, was just as likely to evoke cynicism as patriotic fervor. In response to this mounting discontent, Souza and his contemporaries crafted a radically new visual language, at once resolutely international in its influences, yet deeply, if not problematically, engaged with traditional Indian art. Their artistic sources were heterogeneous and elusive, and not always immediately identifiable in their work. In the process, Souza and the Progressive Artists Group established a range of possibilities for artists in India, the legacy of which is still being felt today.

It is ironic that Souza, who always saw himself as an outsider, has come to occupy a position of monumental centrality in modern Indian art. But there is more to it than irony. The Ghost of Souza seeks to emphasize the complex and confrontational relationship that contemporary Indian artists have with the modern masters of their country, just as the mid-century painters, such as Souza, had with their own predecessors. The juxtaposition of Souza's paintings with the work of this new generation of visual artists demonstrates the necessity of this tenuous and ever-fluctuating relationship in contemporary Indian art. Souza's work is intensely powerful, multi-faceted, and at times incredibly dark. It both challenges and provokes a new generation of Indian artists; and while there exist unavoidable continuities in the work of contemporary Indian artists – Souza's internationalism, his refusal to shy away from the grotesque – there are just as inevitably discontinuities, disagreements, and breakdowns in communication. This exhibition creates a map of these relationships, drawing on a wide range of artists and artistic practices from contemporary India, bringing them into conversation with a selection of some of Souza's most reactionary canvases.

An exhibition catalogue will be available.