

ARTnews

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'Ghost of Souza'

Aicon

The larger-than-life Goan artist Francis Newton Souza (1924–2002) is less celebrated in the West than he deserves to be, at least according to the organizers of this exhibition. He was, apparently, "the Picasso of India," and although this claim may overstate the case, Souza was clearly influenced by the older artist. Based on the evidence of the work shown here, Souza was affected equally by Rouault, Kirchner, and the primitivism that inspired them.

The focus of this inaugural exhibition, at Aicon's New York venue (other branches are in Palo Alto and London), organized by Delhi-based curator Alexander Keefe, was evidence of Souza's influence on a younger generation of artists from the Indian subcontinent, an inspiration as widespread as it is diverse. In the specially commissioned works included here, there was everything from the respectful portrait-homages of Baiju Parthan, to reworkings of Souza's imagery by Ashim Purkayastha, to Neeraj Goswami's cubistic paintings. There were also some remarkable pieces by artists who, under the sway of Souza, were simply able to find their own direction.

pointed stars, Komu ventures into new territory. Even further from Souza's visual or technical example is G. R. Iranna's sculpture *The Boat on Hunger Strike* (2008): a fishing boat lies on its side, its cargo of marble architectural decorations smashed on the floor, its elegant curved prow wrapped in a cotton bandage. Poetic suggestions of travel, learning, frustrated hopes, and contact between different cultures abound. I can think of no more eloquent way for an esteemed artist's ghost to be invoked.

—Robert Ayers

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Francis Newton Souza, *Degenerates*, 1957, oil on board, 48" x 60".
Aicon.

In fact, the best works were, ironically, those that departed furthest from Souza's esthetic. Riyas Komu's *Old New Belief & Unclaimed Dead Bodies* (2008) may well take its starting point in Souza's morbid Christianity, but in transmuting the subject into exquisitely carved wood reliefs of flayed skulls studded with five-

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