

Shifting the Paradigm

Masterworks of Indian Painting: Before and After Independence

A selection of works from Nandalal Bose, Vasudeo Gaitonde, M. F. Husain, Ram Kumar, Jamini Roy, Jehangir Sabavala & F. N. Souza

September 12th, 2014– October 14th, 2014

Press Preview & Opening Reception: Thursday, September 12th 5:00pm – 8:00pm

35 Great Jones St., New York NY 10012



Jamini Roy, *Landscape with Pond (With Landscape on Reverse)*, Tempera on card, ND, 12.5 x 16.5 in. (each)

AICON GALLERY is pleased to present *Shifting the Paradigm – Masterworks of Indian Painting: Before and After Independence*, an exhibition of works by India's Modern Masters, accompanied by a selection of works on paper from the estate of Francis Newton Souza.

Abanindranath Tagore was the principal artist and creator of Indian Society of Oriental Art and the first major exponent of swadeshi values in Indian art, thereby founding the influential Bengal school of art, which led to the development of modern Indian painting. He was also a noted writer, particularly for children. Popularly known as 'Aban Thakur', his books *Rajkahini*, *Budo Angla*, *Nalak*, and *Khiner Putul* are landmarks in Bengali language children's literature. Tagore sought to modernise Mughal and Rajput styles to counter the influence of Western models of art, as taught in Art Schools under the British Raj and developed the Indian style of painting, later known as Bengal school of art. Such was the success of Tagore's work that it was eventually accepted and promoted as a national Indian style within British art institutions under the epithet of Indian Society of Oriental Art.

Nandalal Bose was an Indian painter of the Bengal school of art. A pupil of **Abanindranath Tagore**, Bose was known for his Indian style of painting. He became the principal of Kala Bhavan, Santiniketan in 1922. He was influenced by the Tagore family and the murals of Ajanta; his classic works include paintings of scenes from Indian mythologies, women and village life. Today, many critics consider his paintings among India's most important modern paintings. In 1976, the Archaeological Survey of India, Department of Culture, Govt. of India declared his works among the nine artists whose modern paintings were henceforth considered "to be art treasures, having regard to their artistic and aesthetic value".

Founded by **M. F. Husain, Ram Kumar, S. H. Raza, F. N Souza** and other artists in the years after India's independence, the Bombay Progressive Artists Group (PAG) grew to be the most influential group of modern artists in India. The artists at the forefront sought new forms of expression, to capture and convey India's complex past and its emerging post-colonial culture. The fusion of Indian subject matter with post-Impressionist colors, Cubist forms and Expressionist gestures forged a synthesis between early European modernist techniques and the ever-shifting cultural and historical identities of India. The PAG further sought to break with the revivalist notions established by the Bengal School of Art, opting instead to paint with absolute freedom over content and technique, as their internationalist desires combined with the need to represent and belong to their homeland.

Regarded as the "Picasso of India," **M. F. Husain**, is arguably the most recognizable figure of modern and contemporary Indian art. His narrative works, executed in a modified Cubist style, can be caustic and funny as well as serious and somber. His themes, usually treated in series, include hallmarks of Indian culture and history, such as the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the British Empire, and motifs of Indian urban and rural life. His use of folk, tribal, religious and mythological icons, such as

Mother Teresa, Gandhi, Krishna and Saraswati, are characteristic to his work, revealing his penchant for blending diverse cultural influences.

Ram Kumar, like many of his peers among the first wave of post-colonial Indian artists, combined an internationalist desire with the need to belong to their homeland. His quest for an indigenous tenor did not mean a superficial inventory of 'native' motifs; Kumar instead demonstrated that a painter could enact the innermost dramas of a culture while maintaining individuality, even idiosyncrasy, of his art. Ram Kumar's style, which has proceeded through an alternation of joyous expressivity and brooding reticence, plays out a crucial polarity of emphasis in the context of Indic culture, journeying from city to landscape, via the reminiscing quality of art.

Among the immediate inheritors of the PAG's artistic mission included **Jehangir Sabavala**, who carried these traditions forward over the decades with a distinctively Indian approach to modern art. With a career spanning six decades, Sabavala's body of work was consistent and enveloping, evolving from his early cubist and figurative works to the more subtle and introspective masterworks of the 1960s, evoking the very nature of human experience. Sabavala created heavily atmospheric canvases that were at once dreamlike and acutely perceivable, drawing the viewer into a world of his own making. Favoring sublime landscapes and ethereal figures, his paintings are born of a distinctly cubist influence. Planes of color fit together in a subdued palette, opting for veiled light and mid-tones, contrary to the bolder tonalities and louder imagery of his contemporaries. Sabavala worked mostly in oils, creating landscapes, seascapes, cityscapes and figures. Well-versed in modernist style and theory, yet with a strong classical influence, Sabavala composed shifting geometric wedges with masterful light, color and texture, joined together in vast, tranquil scenes imbued with a sense of nature's spiritual magnanimity and mystery.

F. N. Souza's unrestrained and graphic style creates thought-provoking and powerful images. His repertoire of subjects includes still life, landscape, nudes and icons of Christianity, boldly rendered in a frenetic distortion of form. His paintings express defiance and impatience with the convention and banality of life. A recurrent theme in his works is the conflict of a man-woman relationship, placing emphasis on sexual tension and friction. An articulate genius, he augmented his powerful and sometimes disturbing canvases with his sharp, stylish and provocative prowess.

Accompanying the Modern component of the exhibition is collection of works on paper, also by **F. N. Souza**. BLAH BLAH BLAH YOU BUY NOW.

The end.

Standing Buddha, Ancient region of Gandhara, Grey schist, Height: 13 in., 2nd/3rd century

Ganesha, Kangra, 11x14 inches, Late 19th century

Please contact Amy <Amy@Aicongallery.com> for more information.

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