

Through the Ages

South Asian Sculpture and Painting from Antiquity to Modernism

Featuring Vasudeo Gaitonde, M. F. Husain, Ram Kumar, S. H. Raza, Jehangir Sabavala, F. N. Souza and Jagdish Swaminathan

In Partnership with Nayef Homsí

March 16 – May 12, 2012

Press Preview & V.I.P. Reception: Friday, March 16, 6:00pm – 9:00pm

35 Great Jones Street, New York, NY 10012



Vishnu, Central India, 10th Century, Sandstone, 27.5 in.

Aicon Gallery New York is pleased to present *Through the Ages*, an exhibition of master-works on canvas by India's Modern Masters alongside a selection of South Asian sculptural masterpieces and miniature painting dating back to the 2nd century, curated by **Nayef Homsí**. India's Progressive Artist's group is represented with iconic works by **Vasudeo Gaitonde, M. F. Husain, Ram Kumar, S. H. Raza** and **F. N. Souza**, while masters **Jehangir Sabavala** and **Jagdish Swaminathan** round out the collection with their own distinctively Indian takes on modern art. The accompanying selection of South Asian sculpture and miniature painting is drawn from the Ancient Region of Gandhara, Central India, Bangladesh and Pala regions and spans from the 2nd to 19th century. Together, these works showcase the primacy and endurance of mythological and tribal imagery in Indian art, while bridging nearly two thousand years of artistic tradition and cultural heritage, from antiquity to Modernism.

Founded by M. F. Husain, F. N. Souza, S. H. Raza and others in the years immediately following India's independence, the Bombay Progressive Artists Group grew to become the most influential group of modern artists in India. The artists at the core of this group sought new forms of expression to capture and convey India's complex past and its emerging post-colonial reality. By combining Indian subject matter with Post-Impressionist colors, Cubist forms and Expressionistic gestures, these artists forged a synthesis between early European modernist techniques and the ever-shifting cultural and historical identities of India. The Group also sought to break with the revivalist nationalism 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. Although the Progressive Artists Group disbanded in 1956, its leading artists continued to cultivate their individual styles, and to this day remain an influence and inspiration for generations of contemporary South Asian artists.

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, also 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.

An iconoclast known for his powerful imagery and the Group's main ideologue, **F. N. Souza's** unrestrained graphic style and uncompromising vision created much controversy surrounding his life and work. His repertoire of subjects covers still life, landscape, nudes and icons of Christianity, rendered boldly in a frenzied distortion of form. Souza's works express defiance and impatience with convention and the banality of everyday life. A recurrent theme in his work is sexual tensions and conflict within male-female relationships.

The frenetic, abstract works of **Ram Kumar** have served to consistently set his work apart from the more simplistic narratives that have developed around modern Indian art. By insisting on the abstract, Kumar demands something that most of his contemporaries do not: A privately contemplative viewing experience. His works are often less about transcendence, and more about the visual encounter between the viewer and the painting in front of them. Thus, Kumar's evolution from his earlier figurative work to later abstract landscapes can be understood as the embodiment of a break between depicting something (the individual) and articulating the possible response of that something; between looking at a picture and participating in it.



M. F. Husain, *Mustafa II*, 1975, Oil on canvas, 48 x 29 in.

Since his work with the Progressive Artists Group, **S. H. Raza's** subject, style and technique have evolved over distinct stages, drawing influence from his migration to France, his involvement with Abstract Expressionism in the 1950s and 1960s, and ultimately his return to a core Indian aesthetic philosophy in the 1970s. Breaking away from specific locations in time and space, or the confines of a nationalistic focus, his body of work is trans-cultural in its appeal, proving Raza an especially significant Indian artist on a worldwide stage.

Jagdish Swaminathan is an Indian artist with a judicious relationship to Western Modernism. He began his career as a journalist and art critic for Left magazines and was an active member of the Communist Party of India. In 1966 he started the magazine 'Contra' with a cri de coeur to reverse the trend of Indian artists looking for the "back slaps of art snobs, especially those in Paris, London, and New York." Swaminathan instead turned to India's indigenous folk and tribal culture. His paintings are characterized by simplicity, vivid imagery, and bright colors. He used this simple imagery to represent the elevation of man's inner nature over commonplace or grotesque influences. In his late work, Swaminathan's work shifted from geometric to symbolic, again emphasizing his interest in tribal arts.

In **Jehangir Sabavala's** paintings wedges of color come together in a quiet, subdued pallet that stands apart from the bold colors of the Progressive Artist's Group. His imagery set him apart as well; while his work consisted mostly of figures and landscapes, his contemporaries were tending towards increasingly imaginative and striking subject matter. Sabavala committed to and developed of these muted, meditative scenes over the six decades of his artistic career.

Accompanying the Modern component of the exhibition is a stunning collection of South Asian antique sculpture and miniature painting comprised of masterpieces ranging from the 2nd to the 19th century, curated in partnership with **Nayef Homsy**. Nayef honed his expertise in ancient Indian, Himalayan and Southeast Asian art having worked with renowned collector Doris Weiner for the past six years until her recent passing and is now a private dealer and specialist based in New York. The collection on view features an absolutely immaculate **Central Indian statue of Vishnu**, an astounding 12th century granite **Chola Adhanarisvara**, and several stunning **Gandhara Buddhas** among many others.

Please contact Aicon Gallery (Andrew@Aicongallery.com) for more information.