

## Natvar Bhavsar

### *Sublime Light: On the cusp of the 1980s*

Aicon Art Exhibition: September 26 – October 31, 2020

Press Preview & V.I.P Reception by appointment\*: Saturday, September 26 (4pm – 8pm)

35 Great Jones St, New York NY 10012



Natvar Bhavsar, *OORVSEE II*, 1985

Dry pigments with oil and acrylic mediums on canvas, 84.5 x 68.5 in.

instance, in Bhavsar's *SHAMANA* (1984), the viewer is confronted with a seemingly monochrome canvas which upon further contemplation reveals a pulsating chorus of muted colors peeking through. The feeling is of lightness in contrast with an eerie gravity.

These are appropriately juxtaposed with the *AA-KASH* (meaning 'sky' in Sanskrit) series – an intimate suite of pastels on paper completed between 1981- 89. The small-scale is deceiving to the extent that they suggest monumental-scale paintings. Not only are these abbreviated paintings important for their originality, coherence, and ebullient manner in handling color, but also in their awareness of contemporary painting by an artist who at the time was literally on the cusp of the emerging multicultural art world. In a different essay on the artist, Ratcliff opines,

We are delighted to present *Sublime Light*, Aicon Art's second solo exhibition of the early work of seasoned New York artist **Natvar Bhavsar**.

Claiming 'color' as his medium, Bhavsar has been exploring the sensual, emotional, and intellectual resonance of color since the early 1960s. His paintings evince influences from his childhood in India, surrounded by vivid textiles, practicing rangoli, and witnessing the Holi Festival, and adulthood in New York in the 1970s. The current exhibition considers 13 important works that were conceived in the late 1970s and sustained the artist's practice through the 1980s. Light and its interaction with material color was an obsession for the artist during this period. In an essay on the artist art writer **Carter Ratcliff** has said,

*"This (his) is the tradition of a specifically American Sublime, which uses color and gesture to invoke a sense of unbounded space and light."*

The canvases in the present exhibition represent the important introduction of vertical flashes to the artist's exploration of color field in the 1960s. The energetic effect of these gestures makes the surfaces hum and vibrate, while their verticality indicates an abiding interest in architecture. The artist stresses the importance of the latter especially in works where the image seems to rise from the lower edge as if from the earth upward. For

*“It’s as if Bhavsar wants us to see darkness in a new way, not as the opposite of light but as a variant on it. In his art, all is in flux; everything is both what it is and all that it might become.”*

By the 1980s, Bhavsar had built a strong body of work that grew from more Cubist tones (pre-1960) to structured works that straddled the realm of color-field painting (1968 – 1973). These works were well received and exhibitions of Bhavsar’s works at the reputed Max Hutchison Gallery (1970) and at the Jewish Museum (1970) were lauded by critics. He forms part of a legacy of important artists who exploited the expressive power of color by deploying it in large fields. While matters of form seemed to be all that concerned artists like Barnett Newman, Helen Frankenthaler, Robert Motherwell, Morris Louis, Jules Olitski and others, Bhavsar has managed to go beyond these concerns and express a yearning for transcendence and the infinite. His works continued to mine the tenets of color and his borders became increasingly obfuscated. This lent the works a foreground and background, the profound effect of which was a sense of being enveloped in color. In comparison to the works that preceded them, a striking feature of the artist’s 1980s work was the absence of a lower border in the paintings— drawing the eye upward. In works like *AMBHI II* (1983) and *OORVSEE* (1985) this effect is heightened by the vertical pours of color that hark to landscape painting but also to the notion of divine light, thus referencing the sacred. This relates directly to the spirituality in the work, engendered as much by the physical and emotional exertion the artist puts into it, as the ritual practice that contextualizes it. This decade in Bhavsar’s career thus marks an important period of transition, assimilation and synthesis – both his identity as well as his visual language.



Natvar Bhavsar, *AA-KASH IIX*, 1987  
Pastel on paper, 20.5 x 16.75 in.

The immediacy in Bhavsar’s works is a result of the ‘controlled spontaneity’ of his artistic process. The works are constructed using dry pigment that is often sifted, poured or otherwise dispersed onto eagerly prepared surfaces. The use of dry pigment is a direct physical and spiritual link to the artists connection to India. Each gesture marks a specific distance from the work’s surface, a particular density of color and a measured movement of the body. The resultant surface is grainy and made up of a density of color in varying tones. In the present body of work, this gesture is mediated through the use of an agricultural implement used to plant seeds. This allowed the artist to deposit spores of color strategically in vertical lines. A much-lauded aspect of Bhavsar’s practice is his use of various implements and tools, often of his own invention, in the dispersion of pigment. Referencing this process, art critic **Robert C. Morgan** writes,

*“It is a reverse form of archeology, and is perhaps closer to the process of nature or the entropy of cities that have been eroded, deserted, destroyed, or simply lost in time. Bhavsar restores this sense of lost time through his intimate application of pigments. They are embedded in the surface of his work, reaching both microscopic and galactic proportions, depending upon one’s state of awareness and emotional receptivity to the amorphous shapes that the colors suggest.”*



Born 1934 in Gothaya in Gujarat, India, Natvar Bhavsar studied at the Seth CN College of Fine Arts in Ahmedabad. At the same time he obtained a degree in English Literature from Gujarat University. Then in the early 1960s he decided to move to America and earned a Master of Fine Arts degree from the University of Pennsylvania after receiving a **Rockefeller Grant**. Bhavsar has shown widely in New York where he has been a central figure in the art world and a longtime resident – one of the few remaining original artists from the **SoHo school** – along with a variety of gallery and museum exhibitions internationally. He has been exhibiting his works in solo exhibitions since 1970. The artist is included in numerous public collections and institutions including the **Philadelphia Museum of Art, Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney and the Australian National Gallery**. He also features in notable private collections in the US, Germany, France, India, Australia and the Middle East. Throughout his career, Bhavsar has been associated with a number of acclaimed artists, most prominently, Mark Rothko, Robert Motherwell and Barnett Newman.

Please contact Aicon Art ([newyork@aicongallery.com](mailto:newyork@aicongallery.com)) for more information.

---

At Aicon Art we take the health and well-being of our community, clients, and associates very seriously. Like you, we're closely monitoring the quickly developing effects of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. To help prevent the spread of COVID-19, we will practice social distancing. The gallery is open by appointment at this time.

**\*On Saturday, September 26 from 4pm to 8pm, we will host a press preview / champagne reception by appointment. We encourage RSVPs for the same in order to allow us to effectively socially distance and to disinfect surfaces. A maximum of 2 parties will be admitted to the gallery at any given point. NY state recommended PPE will be available on site. We do not recommend scheduling an appointment if you or anyone you are in regular contact with, has compromised health at this time.**

Please email us with your preferred time at [sales@aicongallery.com](mailto:sales@aicongallery.com) in order to RSVP for the event.

---

We have revitalized our digital presence and we will continue to announce our digital programming – on our Instagram @aiconart and our virtual exhibitions - for the upcoming months. Stay tuned and stay safe.