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BODHI ART
Contemporary Indian Art

drishti

VISION



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VISION

akbar padamsee

anjolie ela menon

francis newton souza

ganesh haloi

ganesh pyne

jogen chowdhury

k. g. subramanyan

m. f. husain

nilima sheikh

paramjit singh

prabhakar kolte

ram kumar

shyamal dutta ray

Indian art and Southeast Asia

Drishhti: Vision is a first for Valentine Willie Fine Art. With our focus on modern and contemporary Southeast Asian art, this will be our debut exhibition of Indian art, in collaboration with leading Indian specialists Bodhi Art, based in Singapore and Delhi. This is a rare and exciting opportunity for us to bring some of India's very finest artists to Kuala Lumpur.

India, that slumbering giant to our west, looms large in the Southeast Asian imagination. She has long been a source of ideas, philosophies, art and design for us. Indeed, India has had a deep influence on Southeast Asia. No explanation or examination of our region's art or design can be made without acknowledging the importance of Indian models, whether in textiles or sculpture or jewellery. For Malaysians, India also represents a culture within our culture.

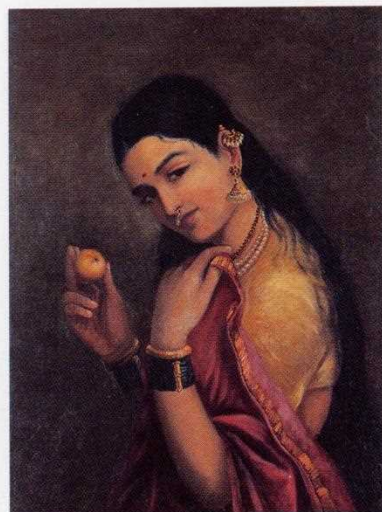
Contemporary Indian culture, its arts and letters, have made an impact well beyond Asia, and as India's economy has boomed, its contemporary art scene has experienced a dramatic spurt of growth. The expansion of wealth and a dynamic diaspora have created a large and diverse market matched by scholarly interest and the realization that art is a vital way of looking at and exploring the forces shaping the world around us.

We are very fortunate indeed in meeting and now working with Bodhi Art. On a recent whirlwind visit to Delhi in order to be present at Bodhi Art's inaugural exhibition in India, we were given a delightful taste of the country's burgeoning art scene. Amidst art by Tyeb Mehta, FN Souza, M F Husain, S H Raza, K G Subramanyan, Bhupen Khakhar, Paramjit Singh, Arpita Singh and Atul Dodiya I was privileged enough to spend time talking and listening to many of the same artists. With this exhibition we know that we are opening up Kuala Lumpur to the best of India. Please enjoy.

VALENTINE WILLIE
Ubud, Bali
March 2005

recasting
the form

Raja Ravi Varma **Lady with a Fruit**
Collection-NGMA, New Delhi



IMAGINE A BACKDROP OF HISTORY THAT unravels like a long nurtured dream; couple it with the continued living presence of present day realities of a contemporary idiom. You end up with a unique sense of a living tradition encapsulated between the modern and the yesteryear. Indian artistic practice goes back many centuries, to folk and Mughal traditions, to the defined framework of the idealized woman as nayika or devi as found amidst the 'selective confines of a high-born patriarchy.' The early masters of Mughal miniatures initiated the practice of visually chronicling the presence of the 'individual' in history. In terms of creating it was the art of portraiture that first flourished.

However, mid 19th century was witness to the intervention of colonial rule in redefining concepts of art. The consequent emergence of a new taste for realism and illusionist effects through oils manifested itself in the production of scenes. The artisans started responding to Western academic naturalism and there was demand for convincing life like images adhering to the convention of Western illusionist paintings. Within the traditionalist market bloomed Bazaar Art from the early Bengal School. Compositions dwelt on religious and mythological incidents, to present iconic renditions. The convention of realism became the integral component; iconographic attributes presented reconciliation between naturalistic presentation, distinctly folk like treatment and a stylistic transition.

Two artists in early practice set the tone for studies in the Indian milieu. Raja Ravi Varma the stalwart of academic realism, created portraits of Indian women as 'cultural and mythic symbols' this was just before the turn of the 20th century. Ravi Varma, it is said created a new trend when he painted women who did not belong to the goddesses signature-the temple imagery that had been fixed by

Raja Ravi Varma **Portrait of a Lady** 1893
Collection-NGMA, New Delhi



the shilpishastras was done away with, he used models to sit for him and his portraits became a comment on cultural practices and tastes. While Ravi Varma is classified as a modern artist, critics do not agree because it is felt that he did not really break with established western notions of seeing; instead his art is seen as the 'affirmation of a halcyon Hindu ideal'. Ravi Varma's portraits of richly bejeweled women 'Portrait of a Lady' (1893), and nude studies as in, 'After The Bath' (1896) set the tone for studies of the Indian woman within her cultural milieu.

From a powerful emotional/moral rhetoric that at the turn of the century practice with the national/cultural stereotype of Raja Ravi Varma and his classical nayikas, the representation of a woman obviously posed critical challenges in the projection of the feminine form. From mediating images that were 'western' in conception and 'life-like' in appearance, Ravi Varma presented the Indianesque beauty as an idealized form.

Post 20th century brought forth Amrita Shergill – for her Indian woman was the inspiration of Ajanta wall paintings and Pahari miniatures, but her images were decidedly eclectic veering away from the classicism that Ravi Varma had captured in his studies of both Maharastrian as well as Nair women. Shergill considered herself an individualist, evolving a new technique, though not Indian in the traditional sense was fundamentally Indian in spirit. Shergill's early studies used families of domestic servants as models, it helped to incise a memory of facial and figural types which we now recognize as the India that 'haunted Shergill'. So Shergill's works were essentially studies that

reflected the Indian poor on the plane that transcends the plane of mere sentimental interest. Shergill had a natural ebullience that made her invest her forms with the fascination of creating a persona who also shared the space with the artist. Her 'Ancient Story Teller' (1940) reflected a dramatic use of white, as well as her ability to attenuate her forms with a sensuous humanism as well as rich and mellow colour play.

Amrita Shergill **Ancient Story Teller** 1940
Collection-NGMA, New Delhi



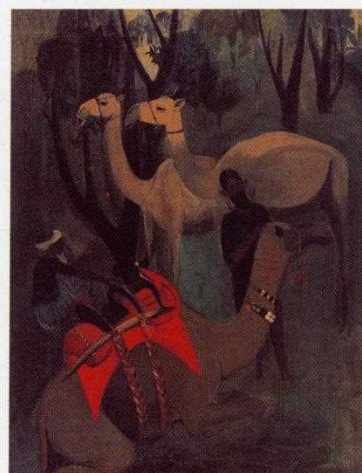
The celebrated exchange between periods of history became the very dictums of discovery, and the lines between learning and discovering on one hand and appropriating and transfiguring on the other became that abacus on which the crucibles of creativity emerge. This is the genesis of the modern day artist in contemporary Indian art. In 1947 in Mumbai, The Progressive Artists Group, pioneered by the likes of M.F.Husain, Francis Newton Souza, and Syed Haider Raza and a few others, brought about the assertion of a new idiom, the birth of the singular differential tenor, that liberated Indian art from its 'revivalist' as well as 'archetypal romantic ideologies' to create the lingua franca of the individual. While Souza brought on the vital introduction of the social critique his works became the vivid and volatile voice of the artist as the explorer of creative

possibilities. Both Husain and Souza brought on the power of the contour as delineation to create figures that were both powerful and poignant while the contour was rendered with minimalist strokes. They believed that a canvas or a sheet of paper had to be attacked and what emerged was dexterity and acumen, the integration of symbols, styles, to present a comment on the unified living Indian culture.

Indian art has not been a single journey down a straight road, it has been a traversing of ingenuous awakenings, of discoveries and explorations that have sustained with both reason and passion and strung together into a unique tapestry. Indian art today weaves in pictorial terms a new range of techniques, and their expressive potential through the signature of the artist's inner experience. The human form has been recast, in terms of the lingua franca of translation it has been revolutionized in a land that goes back many centuries. In the new century artistic practice has become a response, between sensibilities that are passionate or poetic, private or poignant each pathway has its own signature, a lingering memory that has become the personification of what we would call a samhara, a gathering born out of the rites of time. This is Drishti-the vision of the artistic quest, the manifestation of the individualistic tenor. The warmth of the human presence can be felt but not seen. Each vision finds its own pathway, etched in the beauty of its own quest, enigmatic or elusive, it thrives in its own being. ☺

Uma Nair

Amrita Shergill **Camels** 1940
Collection-NGMA, New Delhi



FAST FORWARD THE CONTEMPORARY ART PRACTICE TO THE NEXT CENTURY. The mid 80's brought forth a renaissance for the genre, thrusting Indian art on the global parameters of auction houses in the West. In that scenario the nascent market throbbed with activity. Artists moved from humble beginnings to celebrity status. Art became a commodity, an investment, and the symbol of aristocracy. A sojourn that boasted of artistic practice that embraced upto five or six decades of arduous labour.

This show must begin its sojourn with three distinct paradigms of composition. The early masters who belonged to The Progressives, the practitioners of the figurative genre and the abstract creators who played both with the landscape as well as the purity of the abstract idiom. This section of the Progressives of course brings to its forefront F. N. Souza the master of the macabre. Landscapes by Souza are a rare phenomenon, done in the quasi-impressionist mode his landscapes were actually soothing statements of his life in Manhattan, or in London. While the lines took on a jagged nature his landscapes had a sweeping tenor of the spirit. It must be known that Souza was a writer of rare wit and sarcasm; he could be terribly engagingly comic, profoundly original and appallingly honest. Souza's genius in his art came through his strokes and in his colours, whatever he wanted to say he was able to get a hypnotic grip on the eye of the viewer. The Nude study presents Souza in his typical art of rejection mode-it was one that 'straddled many traditions but served none.' He believed sexual emotions tore men and women apart.

The patriarch of the palette M. F. Husain's Meenaxi comes close on the heels of the release of the film he produced. Just like the film, Meenaxi for Husain is marvellously European in its candidness and utterly rooted in the Indian soil in its surging spirit. Open to interpretations Husain can never weave the straight narrative; he uses the abstract formulae of cubism to unravel a host of suggested innuendos. 'I have tried delving into the limitless world of creative endeavour and the vicissitudes in the way of such endeavours' said Husain about Meenaxi-the film. The series of paintings that sprang from the aftermath of the film, approached myriad aspects, the relationship between art, the real and the imagined being, and it also looks at culture.

Ram Kumar is an agent of intellectual prowess, he has within him the uncanny silence that unravels the meditations of a city called Varanasi. Over the years, his works have spoken of travels, places for him have been captured in the wake of a dust storm that rises like a sheet of muslin. No matter what the mood or the moment, Ram Kumar's oeuvre personifies not a profusion of colour but a sheathing of the animate and inanimate cresses that come in the wake of a breezy entendre. Colour for Ram Kumar, who is also a short story writer, is a tranquil orchestration of elegance that ingests moods, moments and memories. For him abstraction is the language of restraint, the understated mood of momentousness that speaks within its own silence. However his works now seem to mirror the disturbance that has become the symbol of development, a comment on civilization itself.

Akbar Padamsee also belonged to the Progressives, though a wee bit later. The invention of modernism in the Indian context was his sensibility, whether in his figurative works or in his abstract 'Metascapes', they could be described as being both cerebral as well as sensual. While on the one hand Akbar deeply probes the existential aspects of the "modern personality" with all its elements of stress, alienation and solitude - on the other hand, in his treatment of the human form, and in his handling of paint, one notices elements of great sensuality. It is these conflicting elements of both pain and tenderness, which makes his paintings visually arresting and intellectually provocative. ☺

Akbar Padamsee Head Water colour on Paper 14.2 x 14.2 in 2000



Nude Water Colour on Paper 22 x 15 in 1996



FN Souza Untitled Acrylic on Paper 22 x 14 in 1955



Untitled Gouache on Paper 22 x 15 in 1951



MF Husain Meenaxi Acrylic on Canvas 22 x 29 in 2004



Meenaxi Acrylic on Canvas 29 x 22 in 2004



Ram Kumar Untitled Acrylic on Paper 18 x 22 in 2004



Untitled Acrylic on Canvas 32.5 x 36.5 in 2004




IT IS PERHAPS THE CHALLENGE OF COLOUR, the vitality of composition that makes Indian art decidedly painterly. Then the ease with which the pliant brush plays out its lyricism to capture the figurative mode is what comes on as the most comfortable sensibility. From the feminine visions of Anjolie Ela Menon who creates her Raphaelite Romanesque creatures to the distinct inspirations that come from folklore and mythologies in the works of Ganesh Pyne the use of the figurative presents many an ambience of both opacity and translucency.

Jogen Chowdhury plays with the vitality of the contour – it becomes the celebration of distortion to portray traditional imagery with the zeitgeist of contemporary painting, in a skillful blend of an urbane self-awareness and a highly qualified Bengali influence. The close up view of figuration is his most vital consideration. He commented that, in his early works, “the space projected a simple iconic presence. A spatial sequence was worked out but the space was not complex. The background seemed to vanish.” What ensues is the human form in a more iconic and more dramatized personification. However this work ‘Man Crawling’ is perhaps “now more personalized and subtle”. It speaks in an equivocal tone through the gaze as well as the art of gesture.

‘To the open eyed the world is a bright but broken up panorama, to the blind a single blanket of darkness he feels close to his skin. If the little things I see around me excite me and link up to stories of a kind that is good enough’, said Manida or K.G. Subramanyan the doyen of art teachers in the nation. Subramanyan’s works read like encoded myths. A myth that flirts with facts and begets fable. So what do you get? A kaleidoscope that has more than one reference – a mixed up iconography and an intentional ambivalence. Colours throb with the resonance of Indianesque splendour, there is the deliberate image, leap and image, slur that overlaps identities and sets up umpteen image encounters. This is a bush of fantasy that entices, it is like a dense woodland of echoes, themes get repeated and you partake of a dense tropicana which resonates with a thousand sighs.

Ganesh Pyne is the surreal creator of the Indian art scene, however he has twisted the surreal idiom to suit his Bengali intellectualism. His temperas are steeped in the tale of the portrait that is equivocal. Pyne plays with the power of the human visage, accents of Hals, Rembrandt and Paul Klee come and go. Interestingly it is his exposure to Walt Disney’s cartoons and his own experience as a young animator, in Kolkata, that finally liberated him and helped him develop two important stylistic features – distortion and exaggeration that led to surrealism. He uses these to explore the deep recesses of his fantastical imagination to create uncanny images of disquieting creatures. Pyne blends romanticism, fantasy and free form and an inventive play of light and shade to create a world of ‘poetic surrealism’.

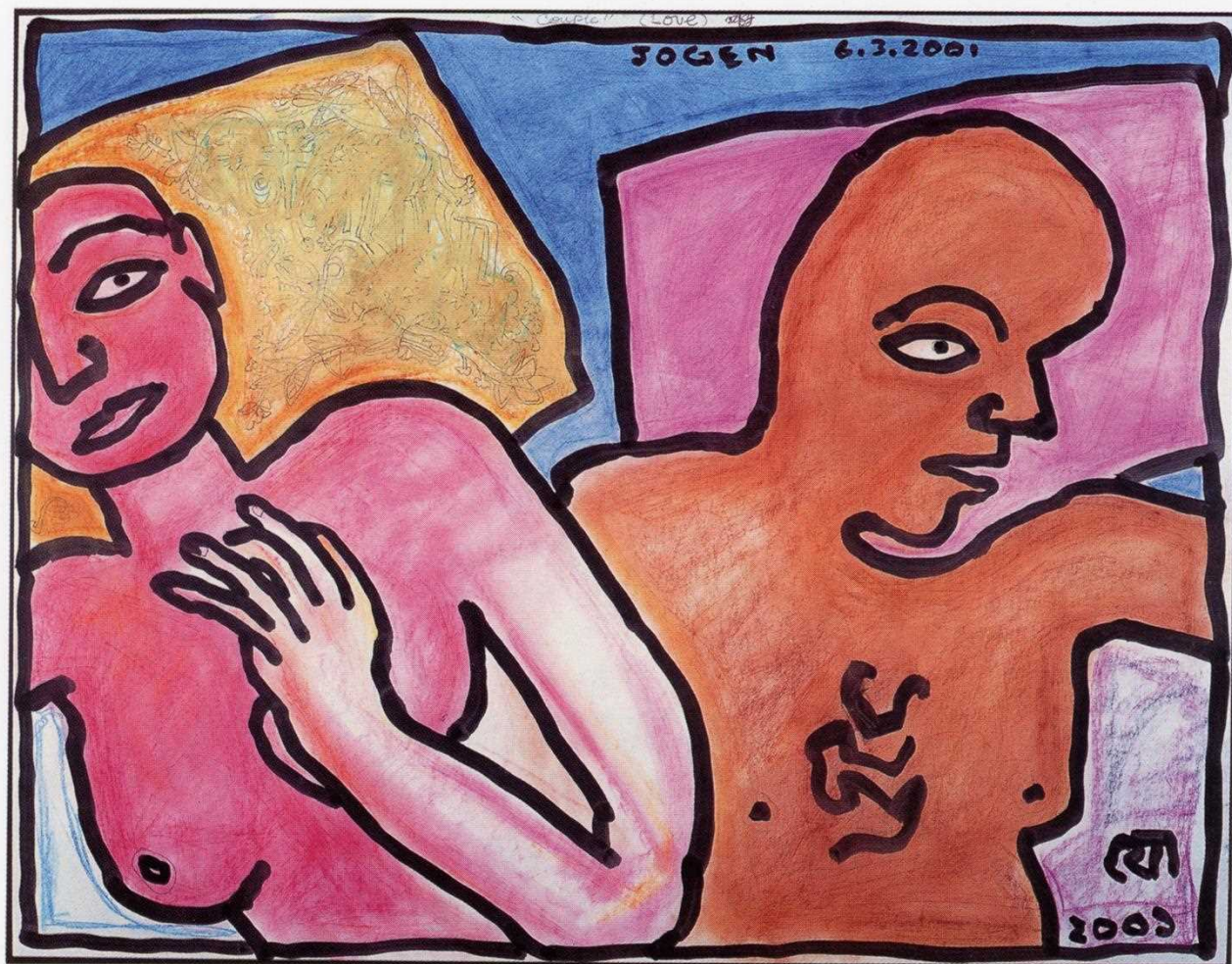
From Bengal too is Shyamal Dutta Ray who lends a flaxen toned tenor to his somewhat subtly surreal subjects. Ray is credited with adding depth and intensity to the medium of watercolours, at a time when the Bengal school of Art traditionally used light and watery colours, he used darkened tonalities, fleshed it out to give it an intrinsic quality of naïveté. A melancholia and pensiveness reflect the contradictions of life around him. Regarded as a master watercolourist, most of Ray’s work reflects life in Kolkata, a blend of the contradictions of opposites, of joy and sorrow, struggle and strife, poverty and hope. The sense of irony, the hint of surrealism and the awareness of a disintegrating society all speak about the passages of the experiential. 

Anjolie Ela Menon Ganga Oil Painting on Board 47.5 x 30 in 1990

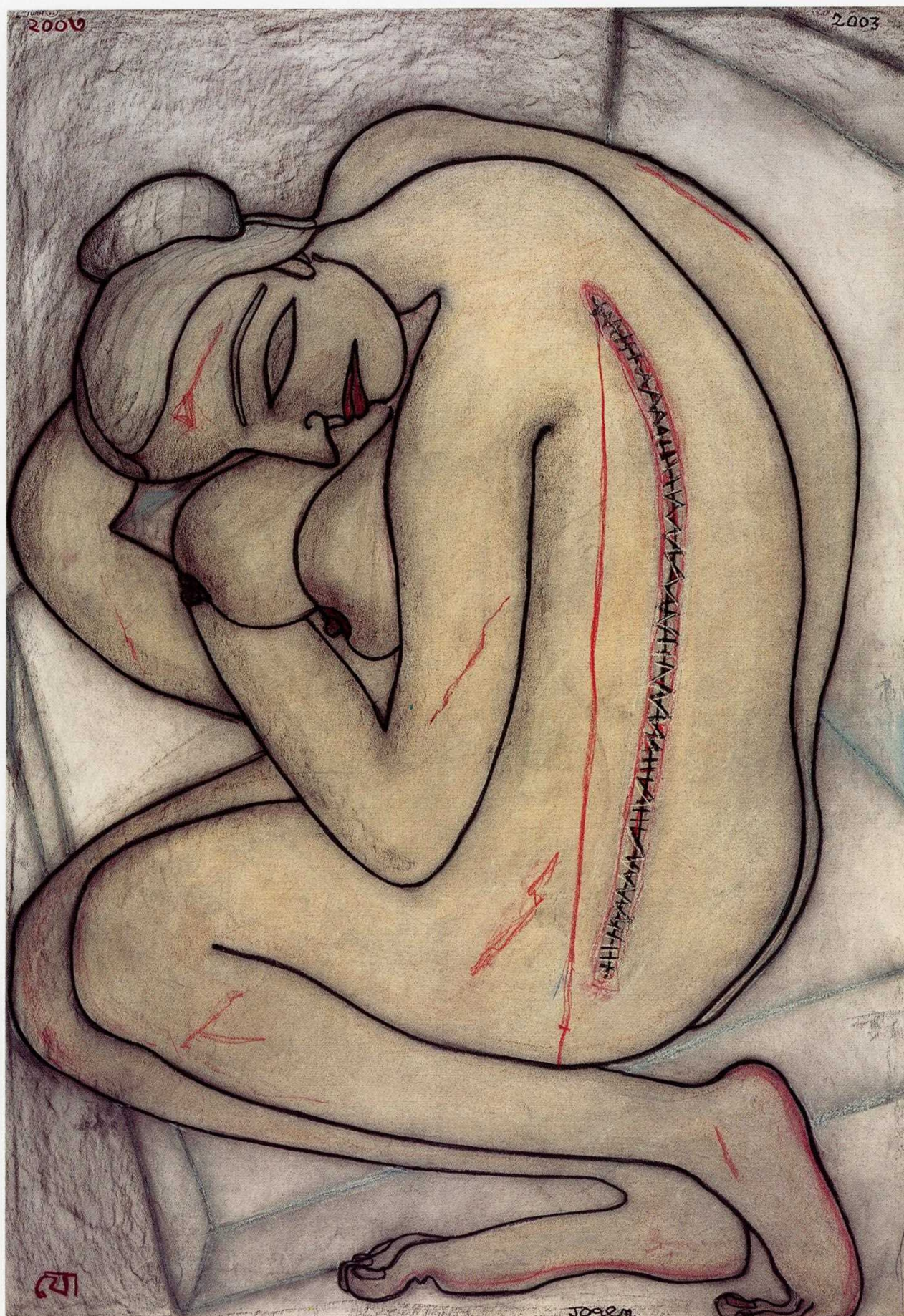


Jogen Chowdhury

'Couple' Love Water Colour on Paper 22 x 28 in 2001

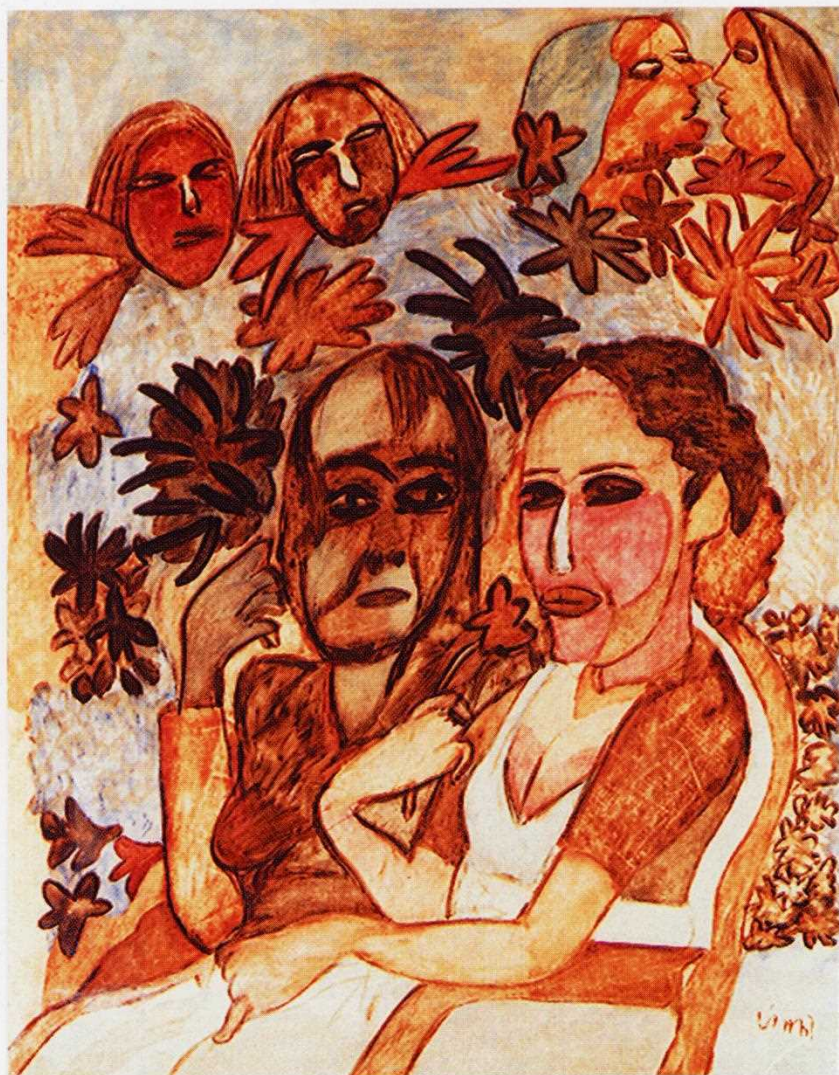




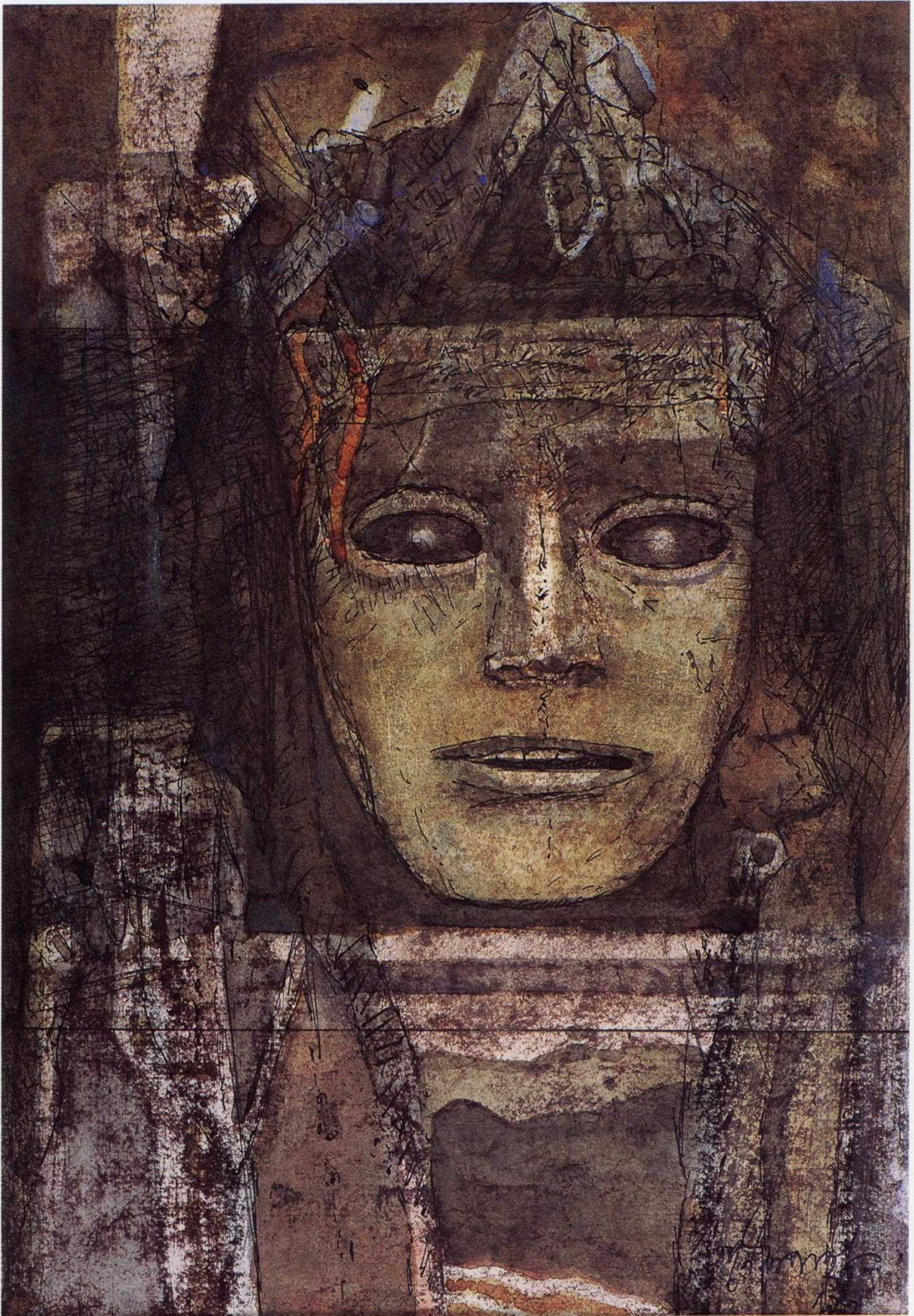


K G Subramanyan Family Group with Pet Gouache on Paper 28 X 22 in 1992

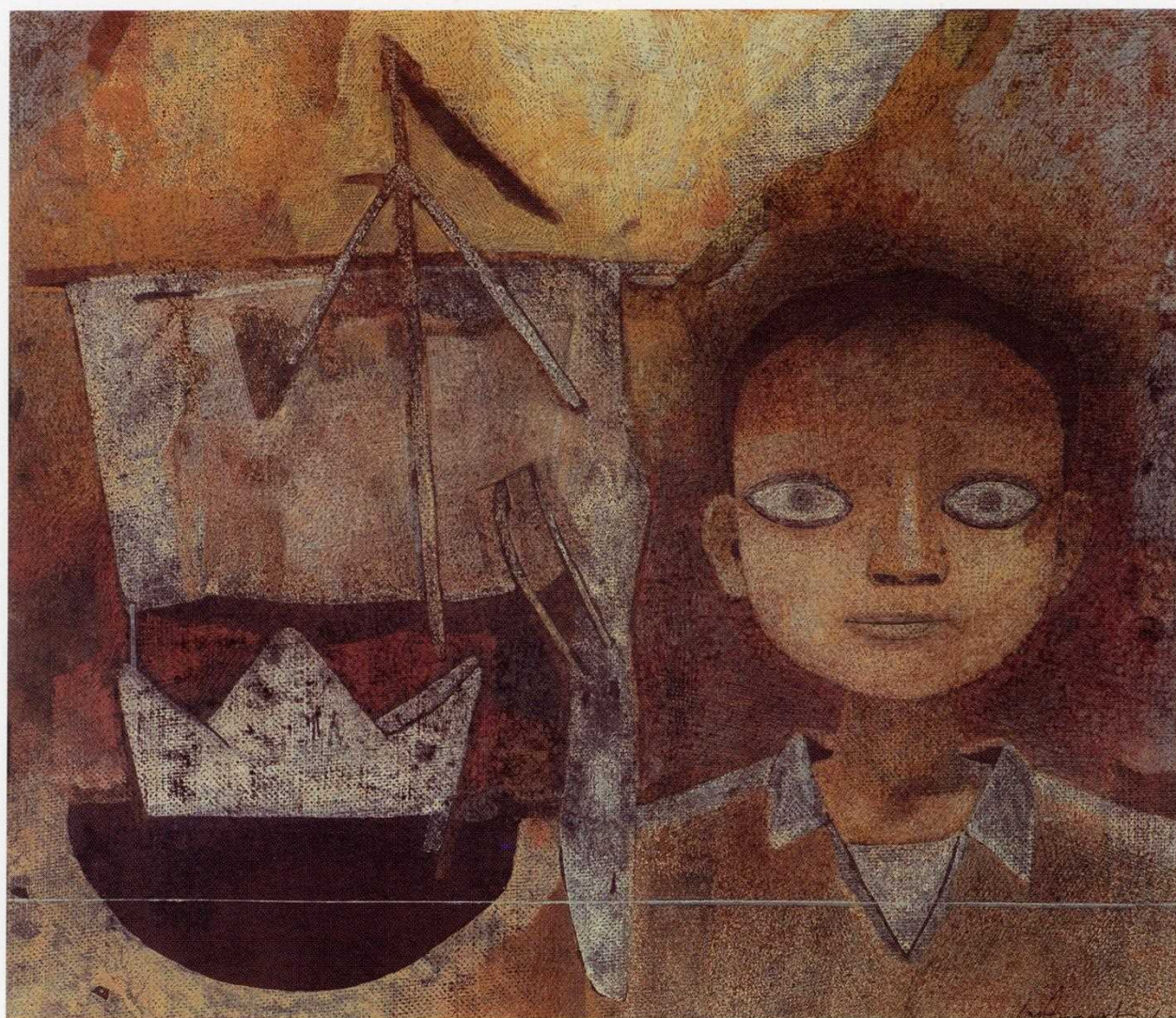




Ganesh Pyne Head Mixed Media on Paper 6.7 x 4.7 in 1995

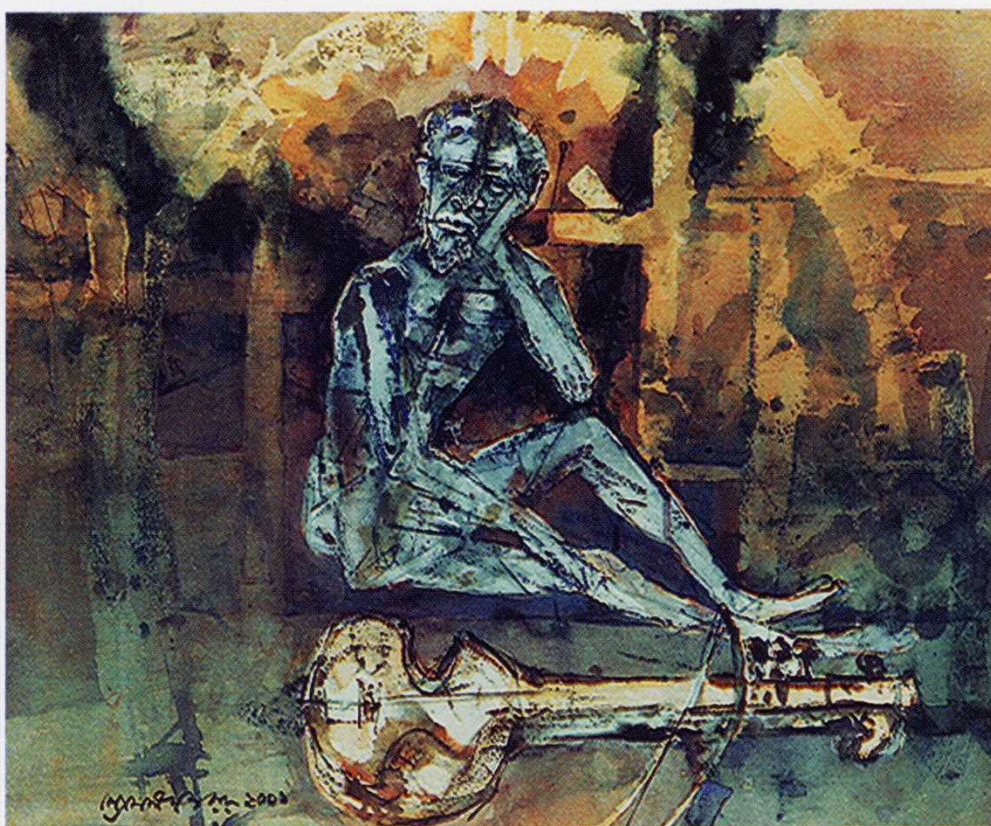


The Paper Boat Tempera on Canvas 9.4 x 11 in 1995



Shyamal Dutta Ray

Man with a Stringed Instrument Water Colour 17.5 x 21 in 2001



Boy with Kite Water Colour 19.5 x 19 in 1980



THE ABSTRACT TENOR SPEAKS WITHIN THE TRANQUIL RENDITIONS of the orchestrations of colour that swim and swathe over colour fields. It is perhaps the ritual and the realistic both often used as metaphor that diminishes into the vast creation of the evolution of time and space.

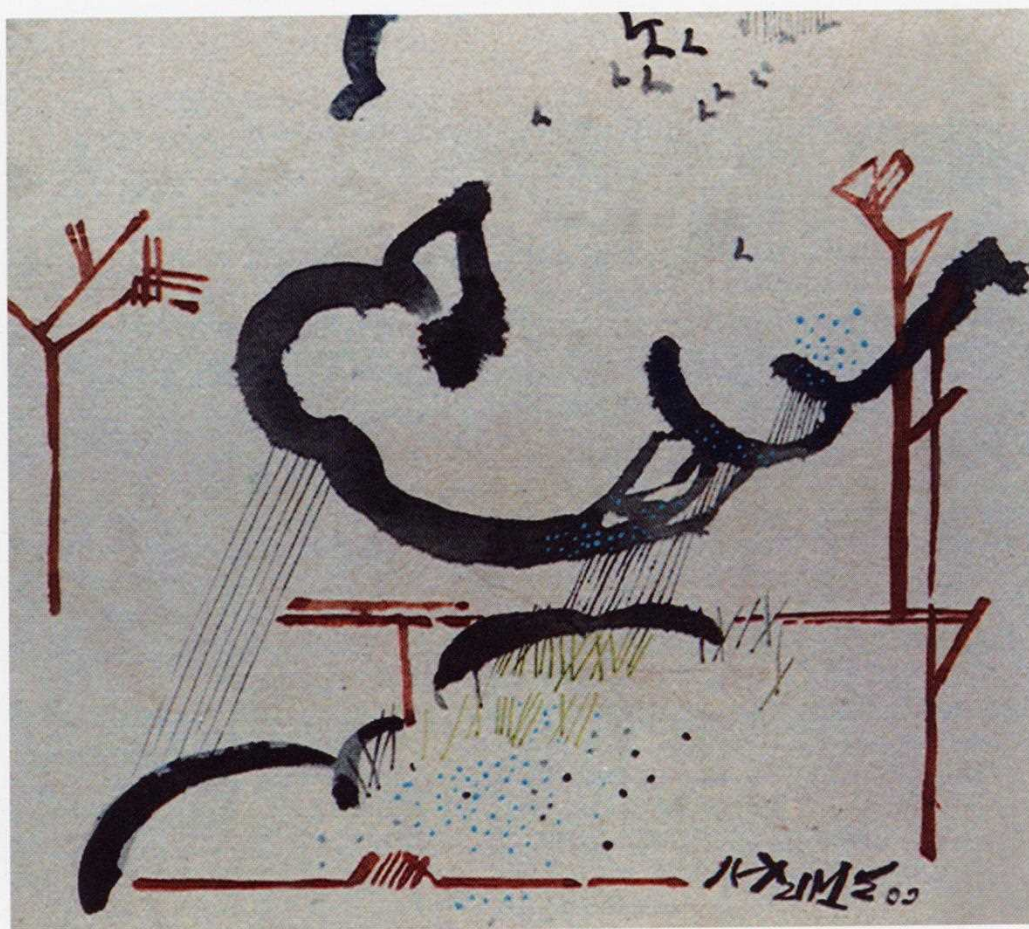
Dexterity spells the strain of subtle gradations in Nilima Sheikh's watercolour on paper. For her the creation straddles traditions, to embrace varied kinds of painting. Grounding innovation to blend in ingenuity, her work reflects a cohesive blend of sensuality and soft lyricism. While the soft and subtle gradations speak of the layered technique it is her cache of memory, the infinite number of tales that become the very narrative that she translates into dulcet tones of quietude.

A tempera and a gouache-personifying the artistic ruminations of one of India's finest artists of the older generation. Ganesh Haloi has over the years played with the minimalist meter of the landscape. For him the architectonics of a place is captured by paring down the glimpses to achieve a unity that is no longer the sum of parts but an amalgam of a state that lies between being and nothingness. The momentum of Ganesha's moods is always one that is in quest of an isolatory quietude—one that is incandescent in content in sensing the fragility of the wind that wafts across the shores. In his last show in Delhi when I quizzed him about his affair with empty space and the questions that it provokes, he had said: 'Art is transformation. It is neither momentary nor stable. It is the process of continuous happenings. It is neither the image nor the reflection. It is the cultivation of one's own world. It is the pain of departure and separation. Art ultimately leads to reunion with wholeness and delight.'

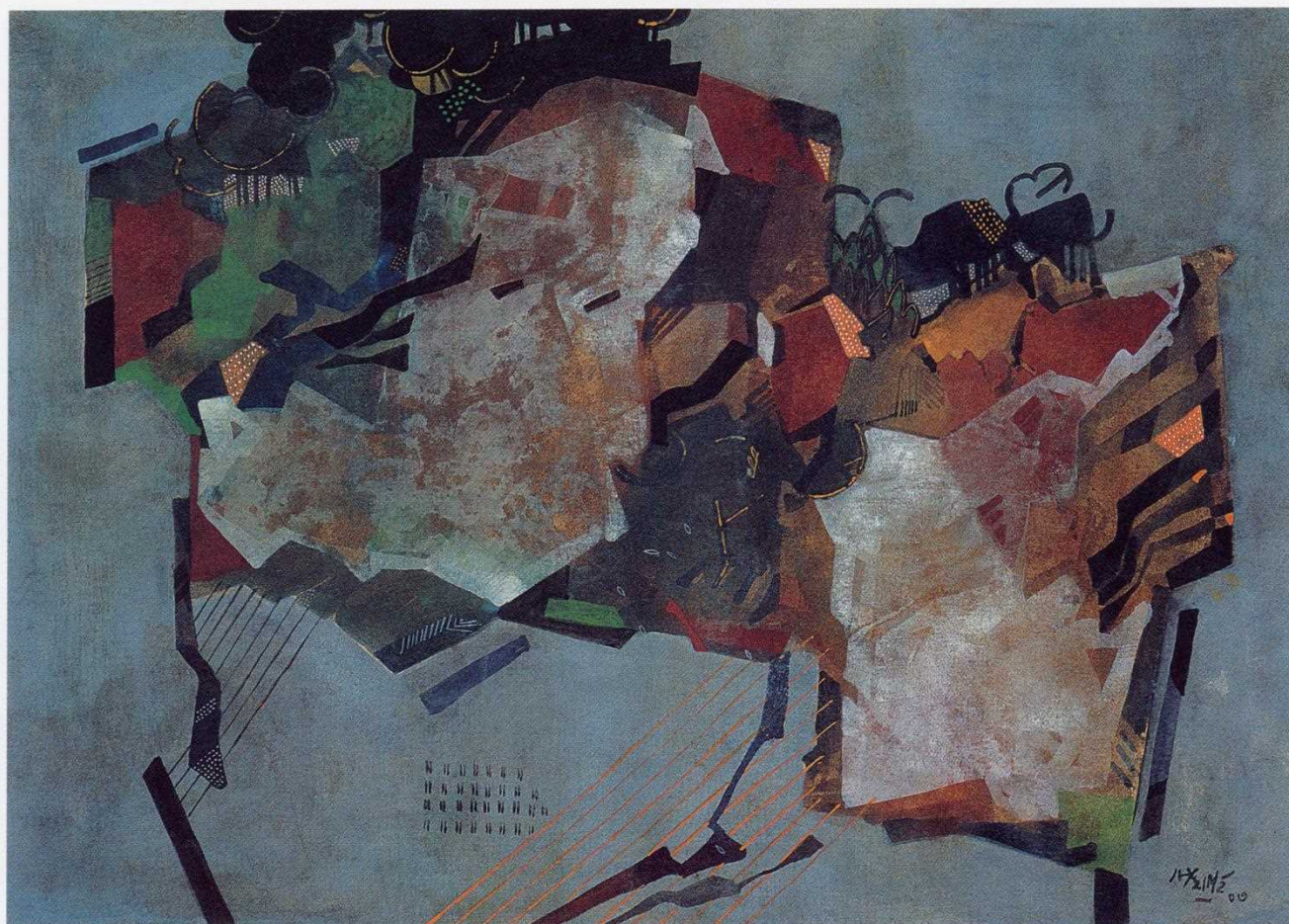
The early work of Prabhakar Kolte shows the strong influence of Paul Klee, the Swiss artist and teacher whose childlike figures belie the sophistication of his richly textured surfaces. Kolte's debt to Klee can be seen in his technique of weathering his stronger colours, adding flecks of white to age the effect of the abstraction of solid, strong hues. His canvases are characterized by a single, dominant colour in the background, on which lighter and more complex forms, both geometric and organic, are placed. Kolte works with the primacy of geometric configurations to play his abstractions. This is the enigmatic vision of the world of striation in colour. Hidden within, is man's inner consciousness.

If that is a visual tenor of minimalism, Paramjit Singh's landscape reflects the Wordsworthian entendre. It speaks of woods and the shade of trees, of the power of nostalgia that rivets within the captured dictums of colour. Textural terrain and the synchronized medley of vitalized tones become his refrain. The thick pigment on the brush it seems, flirts with its own pliancy before it has filled the whole space, before it has created a tactile presence that shivers, for all the harmonic hues. The smooth areas of the sky and water too have the sensation of mirroring the atmospherics. Tensile etchings silently spill onto the resonances that balance the strokes of verbal and visual symphony. ☺

Ganesh Haloi Dreams Tempera 13 x 13 in 1984



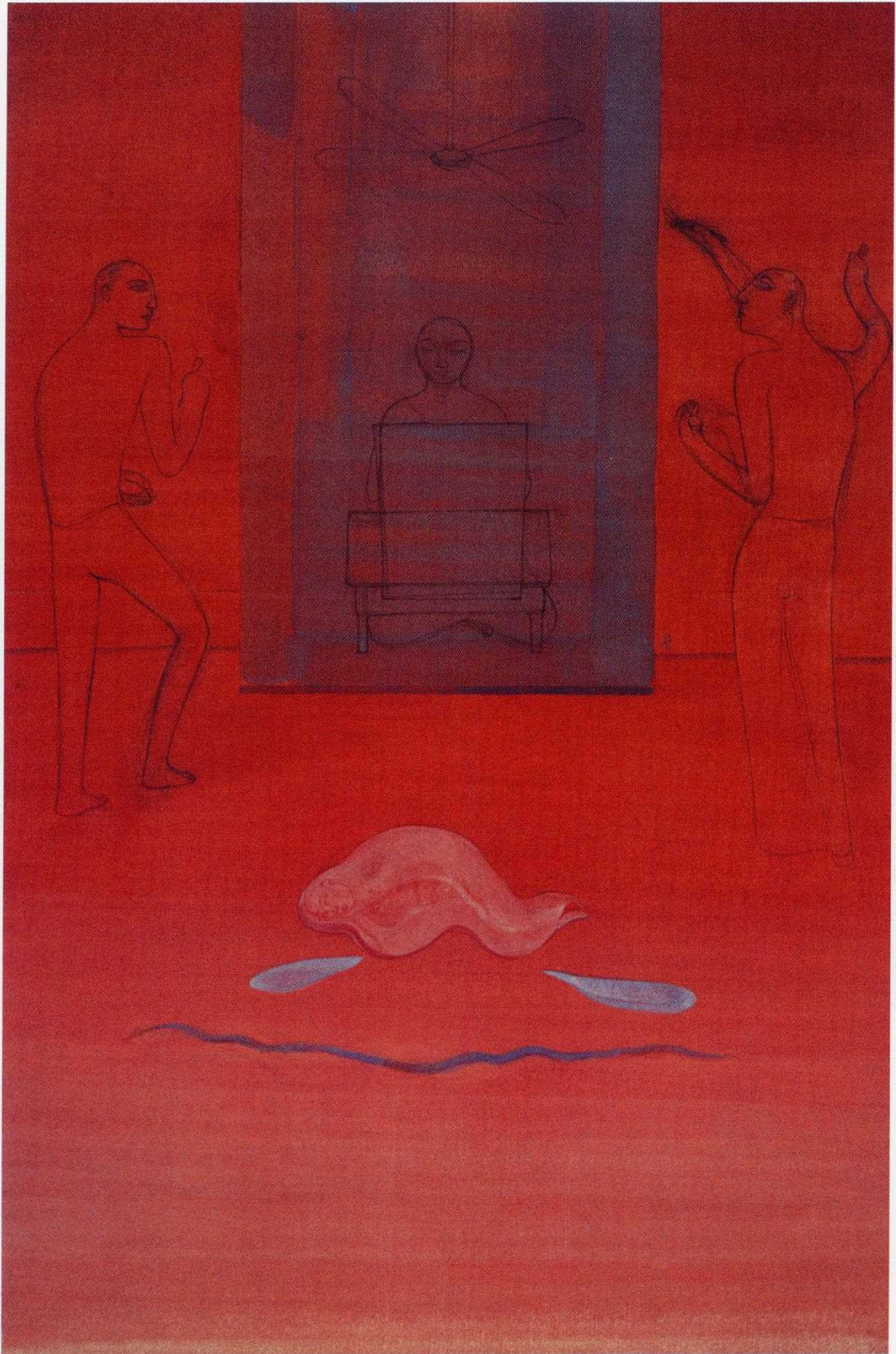
Untitled Gouache on Paper Board 20 x 29 in 1984



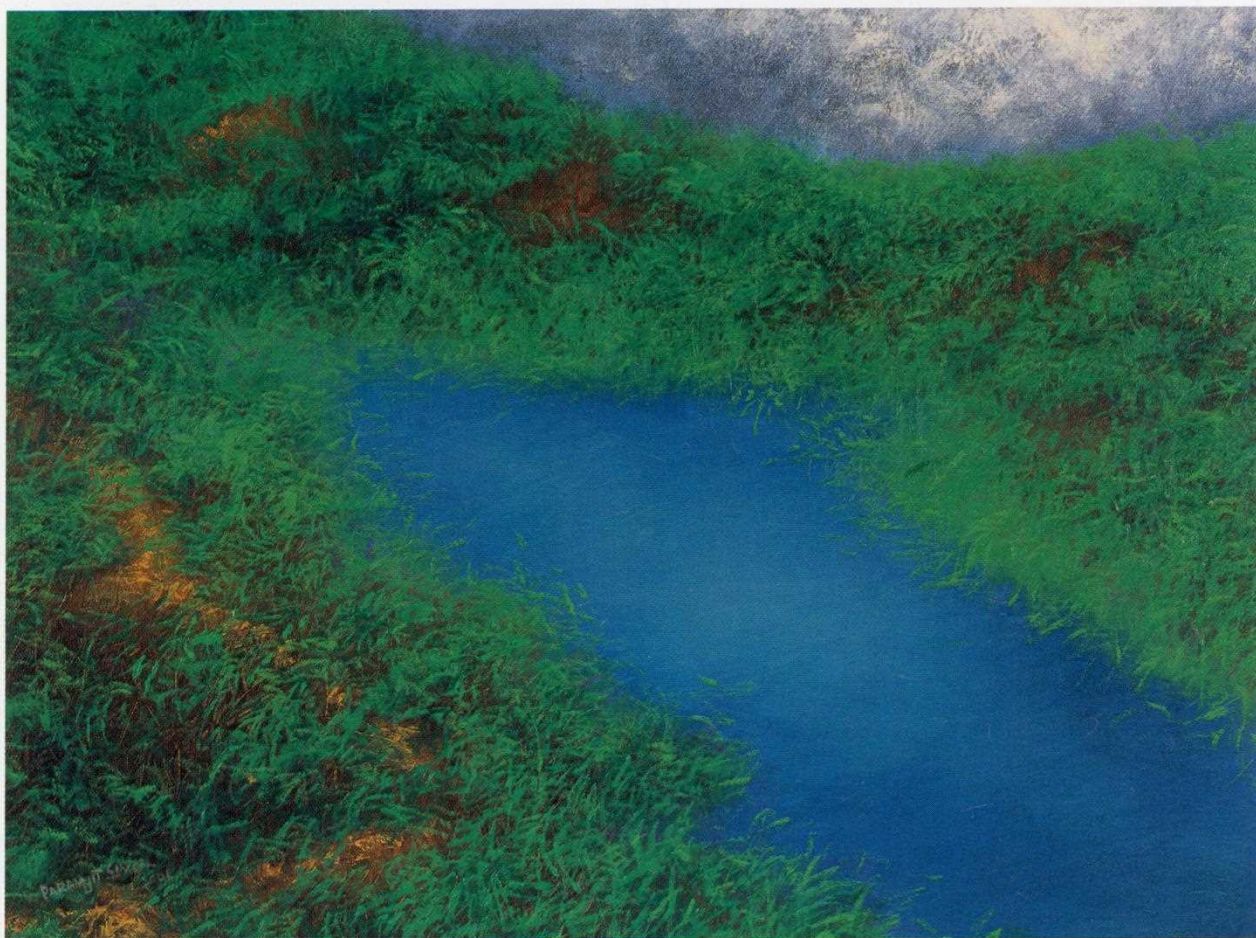
Nilima Sheikh

Chanda Kinare Jhalka Casein Tempera on Sangneri Paper 7 x 18.7 in 2000





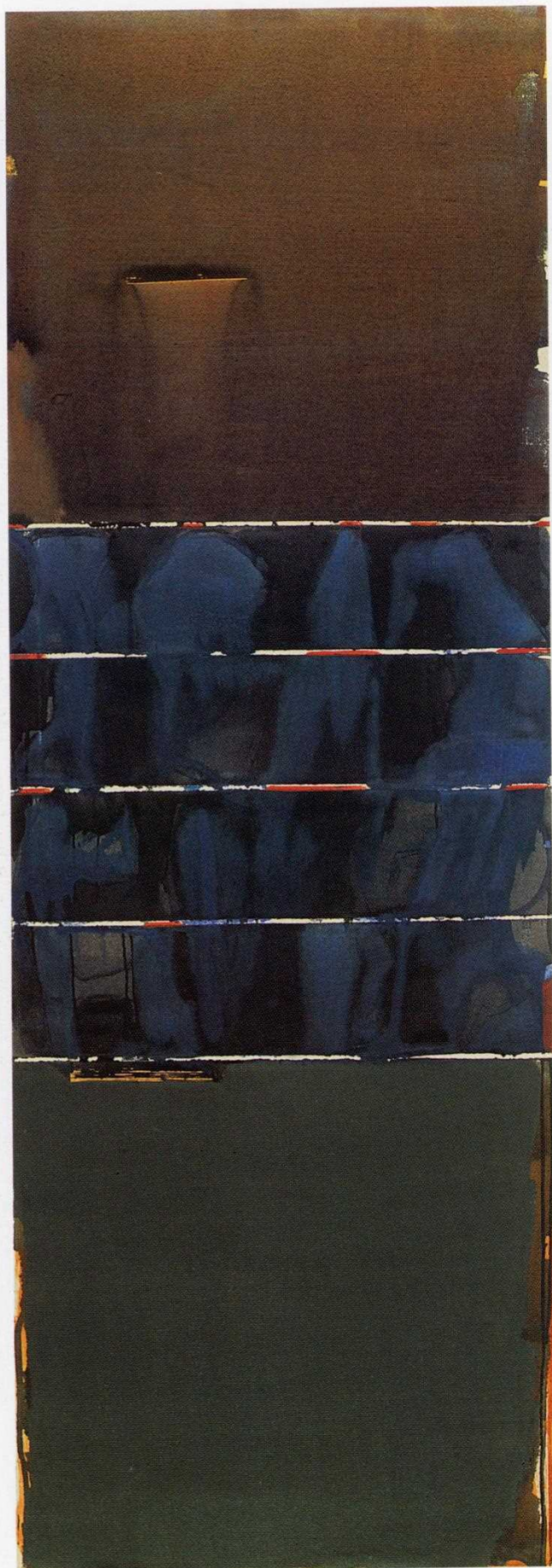
Paramjit Singh Untitled Acrylic on Canvas 30.4 x 60.8 in 2001



Untitled Crayon Drawing 11 x 7.5 in 2001



Prabhakar Kolte Untitled Acrylic on Canvas 85 x 30.5 in 2003



Untitled Water Colour on Paper 19 x 25 in 1999



akbar padamsee (1928)

Akbar Padamsee was one of the early pioneer painters of the 1940's to forge a new modernist style in his Indian art and refine figuration. Born in 1928 he exemplifies shared spaces and the delicacy of solitude in his couples. He passed out of the J.J. School of Art, Bombay. Contemporary of other young radicals, he, along with his other young artist friends like M.F. Husain, F.N. Souza, Tyeb Mehta, V.S. Gaitonde, went on to claim that they "invented modernism" for Indian art. By this they meant rejecting India's past traditions and looking to the Paris School for inspiration. In his search for modernism Akbar left for Paris in 1951 and lived and worked there till 1967. He has dedicated himself over five decades to the sensuous discipline of creating female nudes, the male figure, the couple and the visionary landscape.

anjolie ela menon (1940)

Among the women artists, she is the proverbial thinker. Throughout her career as a painter, Anjolie Ela Menon has regularly re-envisioned her role as an artist and keeps questioning herself. She often states that "dissatisfaction is the source of growth," encouraging an artist to "abandon known (and often acclaimed) ground for new territory". The body of work she has produced bears testament to her disdain for categorization. Menon's early canvases exhibit the varied influences of Van Gogh, the Expressionists, Modigliani, Amrita Shergill, and M. F. Husain. Mainly portraits, these paintings "were dominated by flat areas of thick bright colour, with sharp outlines that were painted 'with the vigour and brashness of extreme youth'." In 1960, at the age of twenty, Menon departed India to study art in Europe. There, she was influenced by her exposure to the Romanesque and Byzantine techniques of the medieval Christian artists. While in Paris, she began to experiment with a muted palette of translucent colours, which she created by the repeated application of oil paint in thin glazes. Menon sold her first work to the President of India Dr. Zakir Husain at the tender age of 15 for Rs.750.

francis newton souza (1924-2002)

An iconoclast known for his powerful imagery Francis Newton Souza was born into an orthodox Roman Catholic family in Goa in 1924. He went to Bombay to study painting at the J. J. School of Art. He was expelled from the art school before he could graduate because of his perceived anti-establishment attitude. It was again this spirit of independence which made him rebel against the existing art scene in India which was dominated by out-moded British academic and the revivalist Bengal School. In his search for a new vocabulary, Souza, like many other rebellious young painters of his generation began to look towards Europe especially to Paris for inspiration.

Souza was the catalyst who along with other radical young painters like M. F. Husain, Akbar Padamsee, S. H. Raza, and V. S. Gaitonde, K. H. Ara and H. A. Gade formed the Progressive Artists Group in Bombay in 1947. They would experiment together and sometimes, even painted similar subjects. Another source of influence was the stained glass windows of the medieval churches of Europe. The effect of these diverse influences came to be reflected in Souza's works as bold linear imagery and flat colours set against a two dimensional picture plane and became dominant stylistic features of Souza's paintings which he used to create powerful and provocative imageries. He died in 2002.

ganesh haloi (1936)

"Everything begins in pain," says Haloi, an artist who moved from landscapes to pure abstracts. Born in Bangladesh in 1936 his memory of the Brahmaputra, the partition and the abject sense of detachment is seen in his works. He maintains high standards of craftsmanship and his construction of trees, houses and the ambience of Kolkata that seems murky with a suppressed strength. Some of his finest works include nature-scapes painted on rice paper.

His astute understanding of the grammar of artistic practices makes him a respected figure in artistic pedagogy. He graduated from Government College of Art & Craft Kolkata in 1956 and joined the Archaeological Survey of India as a Senior Artist. He was deputed to work at Ajanta famous for its frescoes from 1957 to 1963. Then he joined the Art College Kolkata as a lecturer in 1964.

His initial work includes study of miniatures at Banasthali (Rajasthan) and copying Ajanta frescoes for six years. While his earlier work is dominated with landscapes, his later works reflect his introverted and philosophic temperament. Haloi's work shows his preoccupation with the theme of devastation or calamity and resilience.

ganesh pyne (1937)

Ganesh Pyne is known for his small tempera paintings, laced with surrealism, rich in imagery and symbols. He is one of India's foremost artists and his works in a show are indeed a rare phenomenon. Ganesh Pyne is known for his small tempera paintings, rich in imagery and symbols. He acknowledges the influence of great painters like Abanindranath Tagore, Hals, Rembrandt and Paul Klee. But he says that his exposure to Walt Disney's cartoons and his own experience as a young animator, in Calcutta, finally liberated him and helped him develop two important stylistic features - distortion and exaggeration. Pyne was born in Kolkatta and grew up in a decaying mansion. He also grew up on stories told by his grandmother - old stories, mythological stories, and fairy tales. He spent several evenings in smoky Kolkata cafes discussing communism and Picasso with his friends. "My childhood memories revolve around Kolkata. The sounds and smells of this city fill my being. I love Kolkata."

He doesn't remember the first time he started to paint, but does remember the anger that he drew from his family over his decision to become an artist. Pyne, nevertheless, took admission in the Government College of Arts and Crafts, Kolkatta. "My first painting was 'Winter's Morning' which showed me and my brother going to school," he recalls. In 1963, he joined the Society for Contemporary Artists. During that period he made small drawings in pen and ink. "I did not have enough money then to buy colour," Pyne says. This was also the period of experimentation. The anger and despair of the 70's fuelled one of the most fruitful periods in his life as an artist that culminated in works like 'Before the Chariot' and 'The Assassin'. The painter blends romanticism, fantasy and free form and an inventive play of light and shade to create a world of 'poetic surrealism'. In the Indian miniature tradition, Pyne's paintings should be savoured in solitude, slowly and at leisure.

jogen chowdhury (1939)

Jogen Chowdhury is known as artist, philosopher and writer. An active participant of the leftist ideology in his college days, his imagery was drawn from his cultural background more than his intellectual milieu. "My background is relevant," he remarked in an interview, explaining that his life in Kolkatta was "quite disturbed with political movements. This has a definite influence on my work like the Ganesha period. The Bengali business class worshipping the icon, and their corruption, how they degenerate just like the flesh." The famine, the Partition, and the food movement all cast a pall over his formative years, and a quality of darkness may be seen to inherent in Chowdhury's work. Yet as well as an indicator of sadness, this darkness can be understood to evoke an aura of mystery. It is an effect enhanced in Chowdhury's more recent works, which, increasingly, crop the central image. Chowdhury explains that "The purpose is to hide some parts. The moment I show the entire figure, the interest in the details would be lost. Earlier on the figures were observed in their natural bearings which came through expressionistic stylization and the weight of reality was greater. There is an effect of distancing today." Speaking on contemporary art, Chowdhury maintains the necessity of a uniquely Indian approach to art, as opposed to the blind aping of the Western trends of installations et al. "To be global you do not have to do something that is imitative of America, Australia or England. It has to have an authenticity, which is not what blind imitation allows for."

Born in 1939 in Faridpur in Bengal Jogen was educated at the Government College for Arts in the years 1955-60, after which from 1965-67 he was sent on a French Government Scholarship to Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris. Jogen now teaches at Shantiniketan. A book on his works has just been published by the Japanese collector Masanari Fukuoka who is an ardent admirer. Jogen is also an avid writer, and overall a man of great charisma.

k. g. subramanyan (1924)

Could an artist be known for familiarity as well as his facility with diverse media such as iron sheets, watercolour, gouache, oil, acrylic, relief murals on panels, fabrics and terracotta? If an artist could have a prodigious trajectory it is he. Known affectionately to all as Manida the doyen of Shantiniketan who also had a stint at Baroda, Subramanyan is the one man who has bridged the divide between arts and crafts and over six decades worked on a host of mediums - he defies definitions. Born at Kuthuparamba in North Malabar in Kerala, with his education at Madras Presidency, an esteemed institution of high credibility in the British era, Subramanyan went onto the Slade College of Art in London in the years 1955-56. In later years as the Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts, he is said to have set a legacy of nurturing the open minded quest in his students. His deep interest in the study and the sustenance of crafts in India made him the obvious choice to be the Member Delegate, General Assembly World Craft Council, in Mexico in 1976.

His works are stated to belong to the genre of the new Modern. His works are often wise, witty, eloquent, solemn, playful, rhetorical, complex, simple, cerebral, virtuosic - almost anything but self-promotingly heroic. Subramanyan is among the few artists who have explored the possibilities of Modern art from this perspective. As an artist he is extraordinarily versatile, and the exploration of art as language is one of the running themes in his writings. In a catalogue that was recently released by the National Gallery of Modern Art his most evocative writing is Dialogue - a conversation with an imaginary Socrates. He cherishes the facility to work in diverse media, sizes, and techniques over a stylistic conformity to a medium, size, technique, and manner of visualization. Subramanyan lives in Shantiniketan.

m.f.husain (1915)

Self taught to the core, a veritable observer of the culture and social ethics of society at large, Husain began his career by painting billboards for feature films and making furniture designs and toys, to earn a living. When he did take up painting as an art form, however, he returned time and again to his roots, and to themes that blended folk, tribal and mythological art to create vibrantly contemporary, living art forms. He sold his first work for Rs 25. His popularity as a public figure has as much to do with his style and presentation, as it does with his themes. His understanding of both western and Indian art and civilizations keeps him on top of the game. He depicts the icons of Indian culture, through the ages, seeking to capture the quintessence of his subjects, like Mother Teresa, Krishna and the goddess Saraswati. Husain has had many phases in his tenure of more than 6 decades. He believes finally art is also about performing.

Husain was born in 1915 in Pandharpur, Maharashtra. His mother died within days of his birth. He was brought up by his grandfather. The fact that he did not see his mother's face makes him create his female faces without features. A self-taught artist, he came to Mumbai in 1937, determined to become a painter. In 1948, he was invited by F. N. Souza to join the Progressive Artists' Group, a group formed to explore a new idiom for Indian art. Besides painting, he has also made feature films, such as "Through the Eyes of a Painter", in 1967, which was a Golden Bear Award winner at the Berlin Film Festival, and "Gajagamini" in 2000. In 2004 he made Meenaxi. Husain will turn 90 on September 17th 2005. He is an artist who competes with no one but himself.

nilima sheikh (1945)

University mentor and artist Nilima Sheikh describes herself as part of the third generation of artists who have engaged with Indian traditions. To be specific, there was the generation of Abanindranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose and Benode Behari Mukherjee followed by one of their students K. G. Subramanyan from whom she has sought inspiration.

Trained initially in Western-style oil painting, she has spent almost all of her student and professional life in Baroda. Nilima Sheikh was born in 1945 in New Delhi. She studied history at the Delhi University (1962-65) and painting at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Baroda. She has taught art at the Faculty between 1977 and 1981. According to her, Baroda, in the '60s, was certainly identified with modernism. There was an attempt to clear the deadwood that had accrued around the older Santiniketan experiment. At the same time, many of the influential teachers recognized the value of history and of reinventing tradition.

She elaborates to say, "Baroda saw itself as quite distinct from the Progressive painters of Bombay. After all, K.G. Subramanyan was very active in Baroda during my student days, as a teacher, ideologue, and as an artist. He was definitely as interested in exploring Indian craft traditions as in painting in oils. And his concerns were all about bridging these dichotomies. He was a great inspiration to me." Nilima Sheikh claims a lineage born of pre-independence Indian nationalism fostered in the climate of progressive internationalism of the 1940s and 1950s. Sheikh turned her attention to miniature painting mid-career. Her relationship to pre-modern painting has been thus more geared toward its visual forms than its technical aspects. Her research into the varied South Eastern tradition of narratives gives her works a rich imagery laced with the minimalism of the orient.

paramjit singh (1935)

If the landscape could be painted the way Wordsworth wrote poetry it is here in the works of Paramjit Singh. Paramjit could be described as one of India's leading landscape artists, who creates only in the Impressionist mode. Paramjit grew up in Punjab, known for its lush fields of wheat and mustard. The love for nature came to him naturally perhaps in the sunsets and sunrises observed in the wheat fields in the farms. It was a chance discovery of a small landscape painting, by the poet Rabindranath Tagore, in his father's library at the age of 13, that inspired Paramjit to become a landscape painter. However, it was from Sailoz Mookherjee, the seminal artist of Delhi in the Fifties that Paramjit learnt to observe nature intimately. Sailoz taught the young painter to look not merely at the outer reality of nature but understand the pulsating rhythm within. With the help of the Impressionist technique of handling light and the Expressionist mode of handling colours and translating opacity amidst luminosity, Paramjit has, over the years, created his own unique vision and style. With a brush loaded with pigments and with short brisk strokes, Paramjit creates in his paintings what painter Gulammohammed Sheikh had once described as 'visual hypnotism'. In one of his recent interviews, Paramjit stated that like the Impressionist painters 'I, also, am a painter of light. For me the starting point is the physical element of a landscape. From it, I derive the inspiration to handle pigments in a way one handles language to give expression to one's subtlest thoughts and fanciful feelings. My use of pigments gives them, I feel, a tactile quality. The flexibility of the technique I employ allows me to decipher ever-changing meaning in the wave on the water or the wind that rustles the grass.'

prabhakar kolte (1946)

Prabhakar Kolte was called the Klee of his college, his work shows the strong influence of Paul Klee, the Swiss artist and teacher whose childlike figures belie the sophistication of his richly textured surfaces. Indeed, Klee's influence was felt by many of Kolte's classmates studying at the J. J. School of Art in the late 1960's. Kolte's debt to Klee can be seen in his technique of weathering his stronger colours, adding touches of white to age the effect of an otherwise bold hue. His early canvases are characterized by a single, dominant color in the background, on which lighter and more complex forms, both geometric and organic, are placed.

Kolte freely acknowledges his early debt to Klee, stating in an interview that "In those days people used to call me the Indian Paul Klee. He spent twenty-two years teaching at his alma mater, the J. J. School of Art. He retired in 1994, and now devotes his time to painting. Kolte is a cheerful animator who retires from groups only to take up his brush that plays between pliancy and repose.


ram kumar (1924)

Meet Ram Kumar and you can sense the cerebral prowess of a thinker who believes in brevity. Born in Simla in 1924, Ram Kumar did his Masters in Economics from Delhi University. A student at the Sarada Ukil School of Art, Delhi he began to participate in group exhibitions when he was spotted by Raza who became a close friend. Ram Kumar left for Paris by boat and studied under Andre Lhote and Fernand Leger in Paris between 1949-52. It is perhaps his understanding of the tranquility that made him feel a sense of being alien everywhere. Back in India he worked in the minimalist figurative vein first and then went onto pure abstraction. For Ram Kumar it is the brush in repose.

He has held several solo exhibitions like the International Biennales in Tokyo in 1957 and 1970, the Venice Biennale 1958 and in Sao Paulo in 1961, 1965 and 1972. He has also participated in the Festival of Indian shows in the then USSR and Japan in 1987 and 1988. He also writes short stories in Hindi and four collections of his works have been published. He has received the Prem Chand Puraskar from the U. P. Government for Meri Priya Kahaniyan, a collection of short stories. He does not believe in discussing either the dichotomies of colour or the whys and wherefores. The human condition is the main concern of the painter manifested in his early works by the alienated individual within the city. Interestingly in his later works the human condition is presented more by the absence. Later the city, specifically Varanasi with its dilapidated, crammed houses conveys a sense of hopelessness. Increasingly abstract works done in sweeping strokes of paint evoke both the exultation of natural spaces and more recently an incipient violence within human habitation.

shyamal dutta ray (1936)

Imagine watercolours that breathe the association of skeletal angst. Shyamal Dutta Ray's body of work constitutes a major turning point in the history of the Bengal school of art. Ray is credited with adding depth and intensity to the medium of watercolours, at a time when the Bengal School of Art traditionally used light and watery colours. His melancholic and pensive works reflect the contradictions of life around him. Regarded as a master watercolourist, Ray is also a founding member of the Society of Contemporary Artists, an artists' collective, that sought to introduce innovativeness into the art world of the 1960s. Most of Ray's work reflects the city life of Kolkata, with its happiness and sorrow, struggle and strife, poverty and hope.

The works also exhibit a sense of irony, surrealism and awareness of a disintegrating society. Shyamal Dutta Ray studied at the Government College of Arts and Crafts, Calcutta. He has received many honours: the Award of Merit from the Lalit Kala Academy, the Shiromani Kala Puraskar, and the Special Commendation of the Karnataka Chitrakala Parishad. 

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