

# THE ART

*A perception of art and artists*

**DR VED PRAKASH BHARDWAJ**

**VOLUME 1**

**Abani Sen, Ambadas, Amitava Das, Amr ut Patel,  
Anjoli Ela Menon, Arpita Singh, Anupam Sud, Anwar,  
Ganesh Haloi, Gogi Saroj Pal, Gulam Mohammad  
Shekh, Haku Shah, Himmat Shah, Jeram Patel, Jogen  
Chowdhury, Krishen Khanna, Lalitha Lajami, Madhavi  
Parekh, Meera Mukharjee, Mohan Samant, Nasreen  
Mohamdi, Prabhakar Kolte, Prem Singh**



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The Art  
(articles)

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# Preface

Over the course of my forty years in the field of art, I have written thousands of articles on art and reviewed numerous exhibitions. During this long journey, meeting artists, visiting their studios, seeing their work closely, and writing about their creative practices have been an integral part of my engagement with art. For me, conversations with artists have never been merely a means of gathering information; they have been an important part of the process of understanding their art.

Throughout this journey, I have had the opportunity to encounter and write about the work of many significant artists of modern and contemporary Indian art. M. F. Husain, S. H. Raza, Akbar Padamsee, Prabhakar Kolte, Rameshwar Broota, Abani Sen, Arpita Singh, A. Ramachandran, Ram Kumar, Amitava Das, Jai Zharotia, Ambadas, Jehangir Sabavala, Sudhir Patwardhan, Dilip Ranade, Manu Parekh, Shobha Broota, Anjolie Ela Menon, Arpana Caur, Sanat Kar, Jogen Chowdhury, Veer Munshi, Latika Katt, Himmat Shah, Hemraj, Jagannath Panda, G. R. Iranna, R. M. Palaniappan, Madhavi Parekh, Devyani Krishna, Akhilesh, Manish Pushkale, Sanjay Bhattacharya, Neeraj Goswami, Vijendra Sharma, Saba Hasan, Vivan Sundaram, Gulam Mohammed Sheikh, Nitasha Jain, Devi Lal Patidar, Anwar Khan, Asit Kuamr Patnaik, Narendra Pal Singh, Pratul Dash, Tapan Dash, Nawal Kishor, Vijayraj Bodhankar, Dilip Sharma, Bipin Kumar, Sanju Das, Ragini Sinha, and many others have been part of this journey. Alongside these established artists, I have also continued to meet and write about numerous young and emerging artists. They all artists are not in this book. Some of them will be coming in my next parts of this book.

The art of these artists, and the conversations I have had with them, have continually influenced and enriched my own understanding of art. While writing about an artist, I have never been interested merely in evaluating the work. I have tried to understand how the artist sees, what questions he or she engages

with, and how personal experiences and sensitivities are transformed into a visual language. In this sense, art writing, for me, has always been a living dialogue between the artist, the artwork, and the writer.

This book includes writings on some of the artists I have encountered during this long journey. These essays were written at different points in time and therefore also reflect something of my own experiences and of the artistic landscape of the periods in which they were written. The next volume will carry this journey forward, bringing together writings on other artists and their work. Together, the two volumes will offer a broad view of my nearly forty-year-long engagement and dialogue with modern and contemporary Indian art.

Yet this book does not claim to offer a final conclusion or a comprehensive history of Indian art. It is, rather, a journey through artists and their work as I have encountered and perceived them—a journey shaped by memories, meetings, conversations, disagreements, attractions, and a continually evolving attempt to understand art.

Ultimately, these writings are a record of a personal engagement with art. They reflect not only the artists and their creations, but also the changing nature of my own response to them over the years. Time has altered the art world, the artists, and inevitably, the way I look at art. What remains constant is the desire to look closely, to question, and to understand.

These writings are offered not as the final word on the artists discussed here, but as my perceptions of their work and their creative journeys. They are fragments of a long conversation with Indian art—a conversation that has continued for nearly forty years and, I hope, will continue beyond the pages of this book.

Dr Ved Prakash Bhardwaj

“Art is a lie that makes us realize truth.”

Pablo Picasso

# Abani Sen (1905–1972)



I had earlier had the opportunity to see a few works by Abani Sen, but this was the first time I was able to experience his art on such a comprehensive scale. Meeting the artist himself was, of course, impossible, but on 11 July 2026, when I visited the residence of his son, Prabir Sen, to see the family collection, it felt as though I had, in a way, encountered Abani Sen himself. Plans for the visit had been made and postponed several times, but they finally materialized on that day.

Prabir Sen has created a gallery within his home to preserve his father's works. Many paintings were displayed on the walls, while others had been placed on the floor because parts of the gallery were undergoing renovation. He also regularly undertakes the restoration of his father's older works. The paintings, ranging from

the 1940s to later decades, reveal the remarkable breadth and originality of the artist's vision.

A table in the gallery displayed books, journals, and exhibition catalogues related to Abani Sen. Among them was Professor Ranveer Saxena's *Art, Beauty and Life*, published in 1967. There were also several books and periodicals in Bengali. Going through these materials was an enriching experience in itself. Throughout my visit, Prabir Sen spoke about his father's life, artistic philosophy, and relationships with fellow artists, and I found myself listening with complete fascination.

Abani Sen was born in 1905 in Dhaka, now in Bangladesh. He occupies an important place among the artists who helped shape the course of modern Indian art. At a time when the Bengal School was largely imbued with romanticism, Sen



turned his attention to the realities of everyday life. Instead of relying on mythological narratives and literary themes, he chose subjects drawn from the world around him—subjects that were immediate, authentic, and deeply human. He worked in a wide variety of media, including oil, watercolour, ink, crayon, and pencil.

One of the most distinctive features of Abani Sen's work is his portrayal of animals and birds. Throughout his life, he created hundreds of paintings and drawings of horses, monkeys, dogs, and numerous other animals and birds, yet each work offers a unique perspective. In these depictions, he sought to capture not only their physical postures but also their expressions, temperaments, and inner vitality. His command of different media enabled him to reinterpret the same subject

in remarkably varied ways. He possessed an intense desire to observe, draw, and paint the vibrant world around him. Equally important, he encouraged his students to engage imaginatively with the life and objects in their immediate surroundings and to explore them through diverse artistic approaches.



Although his oeuvre is especially celebrated for its depictions of animals and birds, it also includes a substantial body of work devoted to human life in its many dimensions. A look at the global artistic climate of the 1960s reveals a growing interest, in India as elsewhere, in the depiction of the nude figure and sexual relationships. This tendency found expression in both literature and the visual arts. While this theme appears in some of Abani Sen's works, the majority of his paintings





focus on the everyday lives of ordinary people—from scenes of individuals playing cards or chess to intimate moments of family life.

He possessed an extraordinary understanding of anatomy, body language, and unspoken emotional states. His works emphasize not only physical form but also movement, rhythm, and expressive vitality. Remaining faithful to anatomical structure, he rendered his subjects through bold, energetic, and dynamic lines. As a result, the animals and birds in his paintings appear strikingly alive, animated, and full of character.

The same rhythmic quality and vitality of line characterize his representations of human life. His explorations of the relationships between men and women, as well as his depictions of motherhood, are particularly noteworthy. Although he painted portraits, much of his artistic output is devoted to expressing the many dimensions of human existence and experience.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that, as a thoughtful and experimental artist, Abani Sen was among the early Indian painters to introduce abstract tendencies into figurative

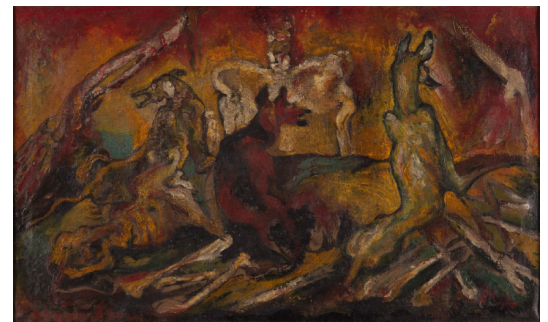
art. Abstraction constitutes one of the defining features of his artistic language. In both his human and animal subjects, he transformed recognizable forms into increasingly abstract visual structures while preserving their expressive power. These explorations were undertaken at a time when abstraction had not yet become a major force in modern Indian art.



Abani Sen graduated from the Government School of Art, Calcutta, where he studied under Percy Brown. Later, as a teacher at the Sharada Ukil School of Art in New Delhi, he mentored many young artists. Among them was R. N. Pasricha, who refined his artistic skills under Sen's guidance and went on to become a distinguished painter of mountain landscapes. Sen also taught drawing and painting at Raisina Bengali Boys' School in New Delhi for nearly two decades, where many of his students later pursued successful careers as professional artists.

For many years, Abani Sen's home remained a vibrant meeting place for artists associated with literature, music, dance, and theatre. He taught art to anyone who wished to learn, without discrimination. His students





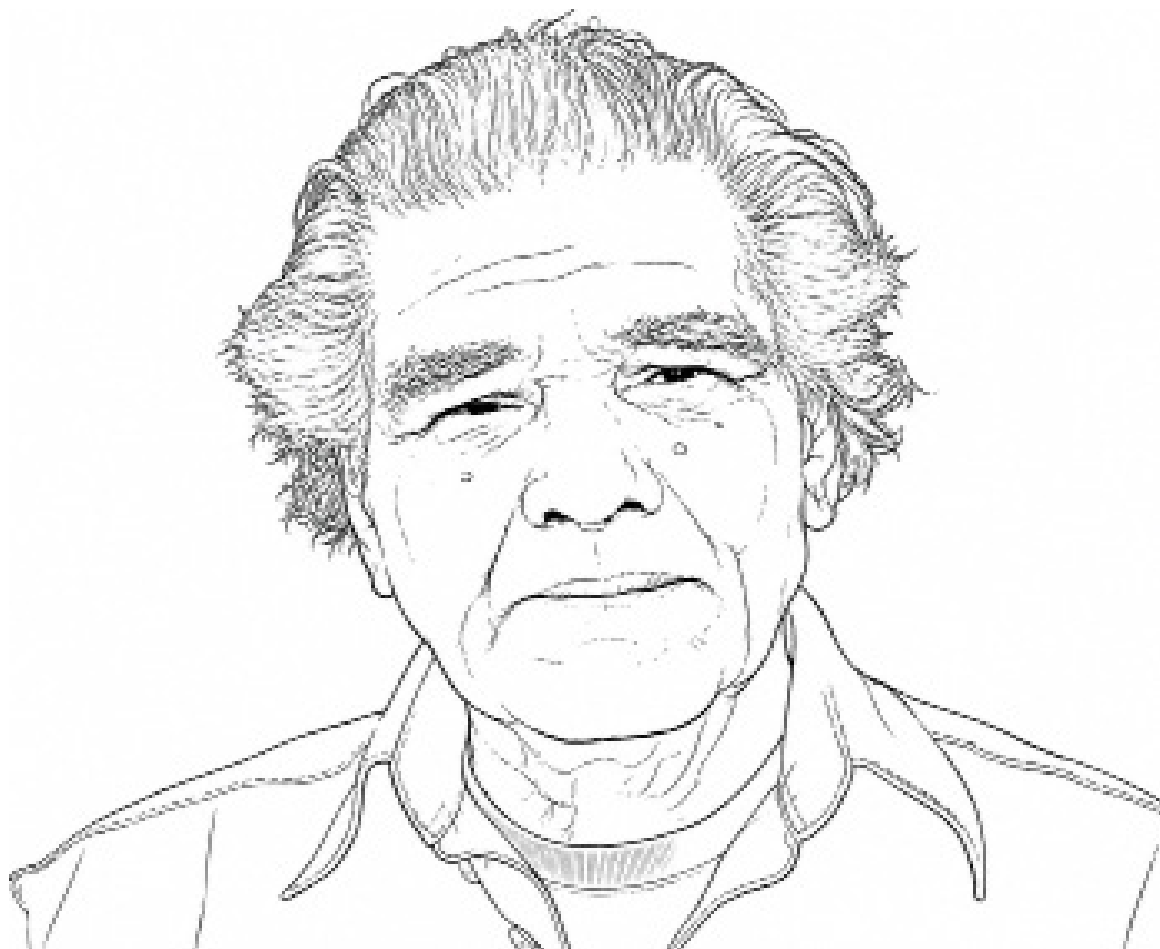
included not only distinguished artists such as Manjit Bawa but also doctors, engineers, postmen, and domestic workers. Recalling his childhood, Prabir Sen remembers that, besides drawing, he and his friends would stage plays on the terrace of their home. In this way, the Sen household became a lively centre for artistic exchange across disciplines—a reflection of Abani Sen's broad, inclusive, and deeply humanistic vision of art.

Visiting this remarkable collection offered far more than an opportunity to study the work of an important modern Indian painter. It provided a rare glimpse into the intellectual and artistic world that Abani Sen created around himself—a world sustained by curiosity, experimentation,

generosity, and an unwavering commitment to observing life in all its richness. The experience deepened my appreciation of his contribution to modern Indian art and reaffirmed the enduring vitality of an artistic legacy that deserves much wider recognition.



# Ambadas



*Ambadas Khobargade (1922-2012) was one of the foremost artists who gave abstract art a distinct identity in modern Indian art. The year marks the birth centenary of this remarkable artist, who was born in 1922 in Akola, Maharashtra. This brief essay reflects on his artistic journey and vision.*

*“Art to me is a happening and performance, an instant plunging, flirting and merging, with life, with it’s being and becoming it. All that is there on the canvas is but a charge in celebration.”*

**I**t has always been difficult for me to speak or write about the art of Ambadas Khobargade, known only as Ambadas. He belonged to that rare category of artists whose creations resist verbal explanation. Young artists often asked him about his technique, and many tried to imitate it, but few succeeded. In doing so, they overlooked an important truth: every artist develops a technique from their own emotional and psychological capacities, but technique alone does not create art. One may say that Ambadas perfected his technique in the same way that a saint perfects the repetition of a sacred mantra.

Ambadas Khorbogade is remembered for his distinctive methods and visual effects. Born in Akola in 1922, he studied at the Sir J. J. School of Art and later became one of the founding members of Groupe 1890. His artistic practice resembled a dive into deep waters in search of something unknown and unexplored. Over time, however, this process became so familiar to him that he could almost anticipate its outcome. Although this occasionally created a sense of repetition in his work, it was comparable to the repetitive discipline of meditation, where a mantra gains depth through continuous recitation.





Ambadas would pour or spread paint on canvas or paper and then respond to the unexpected forms that emerged. His art was therefore both an act of creation and an act of discovery. Bringing together accidental forms became an artistic practice, a kind of play through which he perceived life in new and nearly complete ways. For him, nothing was empty. He often said that everything is full, and it was this sense of fullness that made art a source of ecstasy. Creating representational or descriptive paintings was rarely his objective.

His early works reveal a richer use of colour and a stronger emphasis on the formation of abstract structures. From the beginning, he worked primarily in oil. Later, after developing an allergy to linseed and turpentine oil, he began using kerosene. As a result, the density of colour in his paintings decreased, and the abstract forms began to appear lighter, almost weightless.

Even in his early paintings, the picture surface is often divided into two or three sections. This division creates the impression that the forms occupying the upper areas are floating. As his work evolved, these abstract forms became increasingly free and fluid. Ambadas was also associated with the group of non-representational artists formed in 1951. Art remained

for him a continuous source of discovery and wonder. This search was a daily practice. There was hardly a day in his life when he did not draw something. His pen moved rhythmically across the surface, sometimes pressing heavily, sometimes lightly, creating forms that at first glance appear organic. Looking at his drawings and oil paintings, one often feels that fragmented human figures are drifting weightlessly through an infinite space, detached from gravity and direction.

In both his drawings and paintings, linear movement within undefined yet subtly perceptible forms is transformed into creative energy. The dynamism and weightlessness of these forms suggest a joyous experience of liberation. It is as if a group of people are dancing together within the boundaries of the canvas or paper. Each figure is distinct, yet all are united within a shared emotional universe.

Chance plays a vital role in his work, filling it with the colour and vitality of life. There is no doubt that he avoided descriptive narration in his compositions. Yet he never rejected the presence of rudimentary human forms. He often remarked that art cannot be separated from life; it is an integral part of life in all its manifestations. For him, art was a means of creating ecstasy and revealing the essence of the living world rather than its literal appearance.



In his works, lines and brushstrokes run parallel, intersect, intensify, overlap, and occasionally seem to embrace one another. Formal compositional discipline held little importance for him. One could even say that formality itself had little place in his life.

During the last years of his life, whenever he visited Delhi, I often met him in art galleries. He greeted strangers with the warmth of old friends. We frequently engaged in informal conversations about art, from his own work to contemporary artistic developments. His eagerness to view and appreciate the work of younger artists was one of the qualities that allowed him to connect effortlessly with artists across generations.

The weightless forms, swirling movements, and subtle tonal variations in his paintings and drawings occasionally evoke the spirit of kinetic art. While he may have encountered and studied kinetic art during his time abroad, his work remained deeply connected to Indian cave paintings and tribal art traditions. His abstract forms often resemble images created by anonymous cave painters or the spontaneous imagination of tribal artists. This connection feels natural because Ambadas himself described art as a search for wonder—a search that rarely ends.

I remember him saying in a casual conversation that art was, for him, a continuous journey in which he sought to discover something new every day.

Subject matter and object hood were never central concerns in his artistic life. Objects and forms served merely as points of departure, enabling movement from one state to another. To understand his art, we must pay attention not only to these points of departure but also to what unfolds between them.

His paintings may be seen as eruptions of concentrated energy. He was deeply committed to the final image. While many abstract painters remain uncertain of the eventual outcome of a work, Ambadas seemed remarkably sure of where his paintings were heading. Looking at his canvases, one senses that he painted with an intuitive knowledge of the result.

Entering his artistic world, one encounters a figure that, like a saint, devoted himself to the endless repetition of a single mantra. There is also a pronounced sense of texture in his paintings. The lines appear woven together, as though crafted by a weaver. This quality may have been influenced by his close association with weavers, among whom he worked for a period of time.

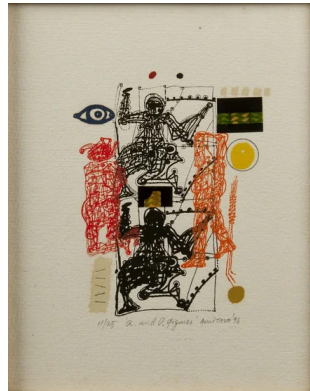


# Amitava Das



Amitava Das is a significant figure in contemporary intellectual art. For nearly five decades, he has pursued an unwavering artistic journey marked by constant inquiry and experimentation. Whether exploring new materials, subjects, or methods of expression, his creative practice reflects a restless curiosity. Poetry occupies a special place in his artistic sensibility, and echoes of the works of Bengali poets Jibanananda Das and Shakti Chattopadhyay often resonate in his paintings. His thinking has also been shaped by existential philosophers Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. Consequently, the conceptual essence of a scene assumes greater importance in his art than its visual representation alone.

To understand Amitava's work, one must experience it rather than attempt to decipher it through logic. Over the years, he has developed a unique visual language by moving beyond the conventional academic principles of art-making. His paintings leave ample space for viewers to enter the work and complete its meaning. In this sense, he invites an active dialogue between the artwork and its audience.



Amitava Das is widely recognized for his innovative exploration of materials within abstraction. His practice spans diverse media, from paper collages to canvas paintings, constantly expanding the boundaries of artistic expression. Through a language of minimal abstraction, he challenges conventional artistic practices and encourages viewers to reconsider their perceptions of form, space, and materiality.

His artistic philosophy can be summarized in the belief that art should be experienced rather than argued with. In the series *If We Knew the Point*, he employs painting, drawing, and collage to create poetic relationships between materiality and meaning. These works invite sensory and emotional engagement rather than purely intellectual interpretation.

A defining characteristic of Amitava's art is his fascination with the expressive possibilities of materials. He frequently incorporates

unconventional elements into his compositions, transforming ordinary objects into carriers of meaning. His paper collages, for instance, combine texture, colour, and found materials in ways that elevate everyday fragments into extraordinary visual experiences.

Through his canvas paintings, Amitava explores the essence of minimalist abstraction. By eliminating unnecessary details, he emphasizes the purity of form and colour, encouraging contemplative engagement. The viewer is prompted to look beyond surface appearances and discover meaning in simplicity. In doing so, he opens a dialogue between artwork and audience while simultaneously expanding the possibilities of contemporary abstract art.

Amitava once remarked that the core concept of his work is life itself. As an urban dweller throughout his life, he has responded to the political, cultural, and social realities around



him. "My paintings are my thoughts, and I think through them. Painting has become a kind of language for me," he observed. To extend this language, he employs a wide variety of surfaces and materials, from canvas and paper to travel tickets, buttons, and other found objects. Together they form a symbolic vocabulary through which he articulates his ideas.

At times, this vocabulary creates compositions as dense and layered as a narrative; at others, it resembles the brevity and suggestiveness of poetry. This tendency was already visible in his early works of the 1970s, where a solitary figure would appear alongside a few symbolic forms, while much of the canvas remained empty. The resulting space intensified the sense of isolation and existential tension. Rendered in an abstract style, the figure seemed to communicate its story through posture and presence alone. These early works are also notable for their restrained colour palettes and profound atmosphere of silence.

The works spanning approximately fifty years, from the 1970s to the present. Across these decades, one can observe significant transformations and experiments. Alongside oil and watercolour, Amitava incorporates materials collected during his travels, including boarding passes, bus tickets, newspaper pages,

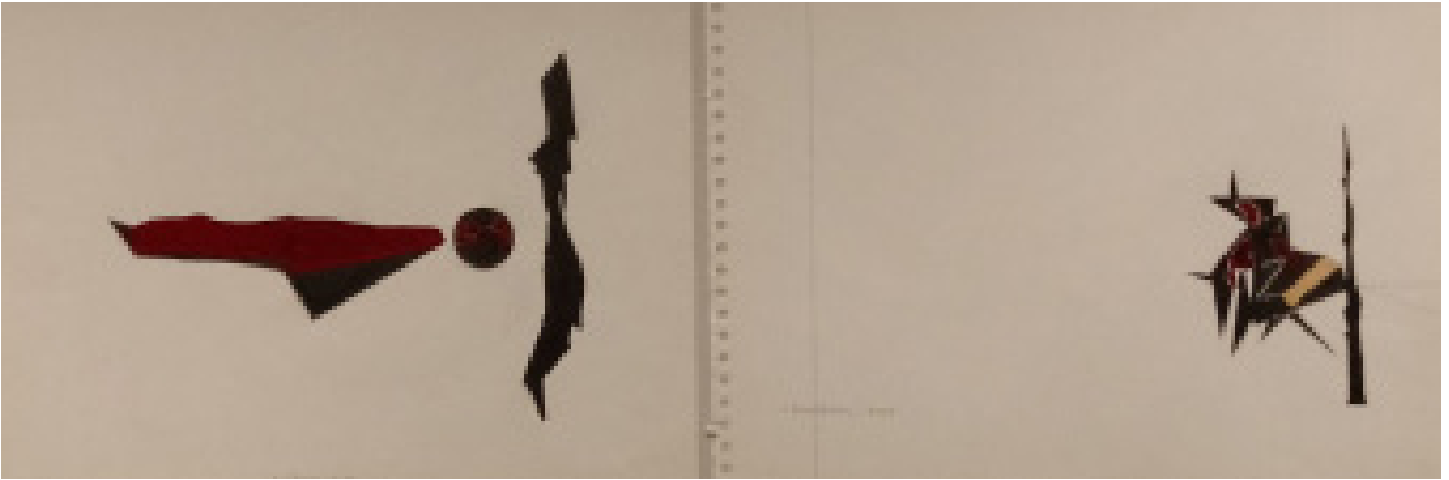
and magazine fragments. Minimalist strategies become a means of expressing the physical and psychological realities of his time.

Collage occupies a prominent place in the exhibition. In many works, minimalist means convey complex ideas with remarkable effectiveness. As in his earlier paintings, large areas are deliberately left open. These spaces become territories for the viewer's imagination, where personal memories and experiences unfold between disparate visual elements. There is a theatrical quality to these compositions, as though one character stands at one edge of a stage while another occupies the opposite side. One speaks, the other remains silent, yet within the empty space between them unfolds not only what has already happened but also what may happen in the future.

Amitava's work is fundamentally concerned with the human condition, in which human beings appear simultaneously as creators and destroyers. The tensions between nature and artificiality, helplessness and violence, cultural displacement, and physical and psychological conflict are all active within his visual universe. Whether depicting nature or humanity, he emphasizes existence itself as the prerequisite for meaning. Sartre's notion that existence precedes essence appears to have deeply influenced his







artistic vision.

As a result, his paintings continually register both the physical presence of human beings and the metaphysical dimensions of their existence. Images of men and women, animals, trees, birds, clouds, the sky, the earth, the sun, and even the invisible presence of air recur throughout his work. By recording these presences, he affirms their dignity while acknowledging their struggles. Rather than offering narratives of victory or defeat, Amitava presents existence as an ongoing reality shaped by changing circumstances. The vibrant interplay of colours often suggests the vitality and joy of life, while dense networks of lines, dots, and dynamic structures reveal the anxiety, instability, and fragmentation of contemporary existence.

In a conversation with this author, Amitava once remarked that he was using the language of computers. This language manifests itself through structural formations reminiscent of electronic circuits and digital matrices. Beginning with dots and expanding into complex abstract configurations, these structures transform recognizable forms into dynamic fields of visual energy. Through such methods, abstraction acquires greater expressive power.

Working with graphite, ink, ballpoint pen, watercolour, collage, and even burn marks on paper, Amitava transforms harsh and ordinary realities into poetic experiences. Yet this poetry never lapses into romanticism. If romance exists in his work, it lies in the essence and expansion of human existence itself. Imagination enables forms to generate new abstract images, but

reality remains the central force underlying his artistic vision.

This quality constitutes one of the greatest strengths of the exhibition. Amitava's artistic universe is far from one-dimensional. The titles he gives his works are often drawn from lines of poetry, and like poetry itself, the paintings generate multiple meanings and resonances. Consequently, viewers frequently arrive at different interpretations and emotional responses.

It is therefore unsurprising that Amitava's paintings evoke seemingly contradictory emotions simultaneously: beauty and deformity, compassion and anguish, helplessness and courage. Within these tensions lies the enduring power of his art—a power that continues to challenge, engage, and inspire viewers across generations.



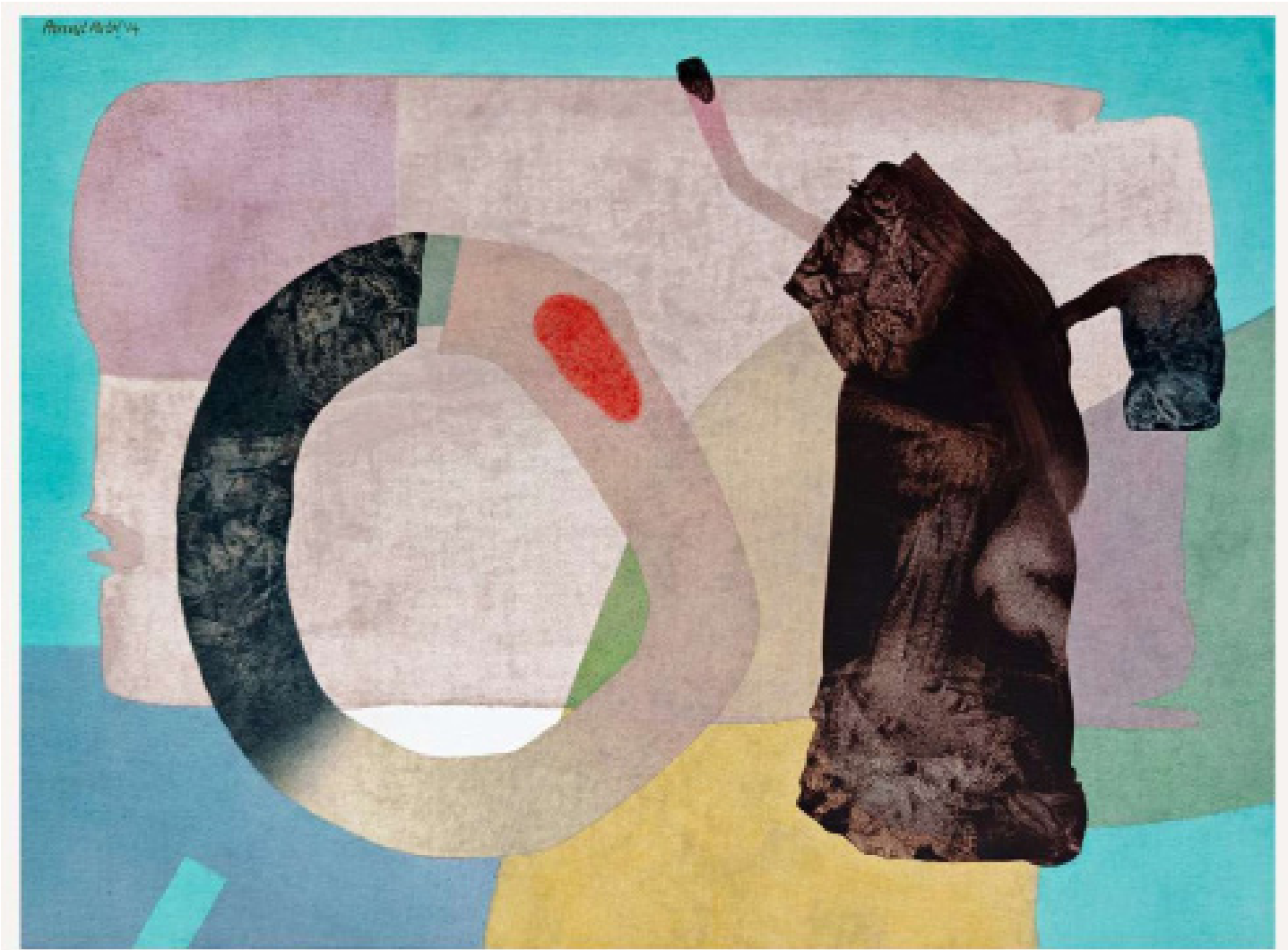


# Amrut Patel



**K**nown for his unique visual language and spirit of innovation, Amrut Patel's artistic journey has spanned almost six decades. Over such a long period, his art has taken many turns. Alongside his wide-ranging engagement with abstract painting, he has created an entire series of works influenced by tribal masks. Working with abstract structures on canvas, subtle light and dark shades, and musical rhythms, he creates a world in which memory and the present exist on the same plane. He constantly challenges the notion that abstract art means creating without purpose. Colours and forms have their own inherent power, but it is the artist who must determine their direction and condition. If an artist cannot exercise that control, he suggests, then he should not enter the field of abstraction.

Amrut Patel was born in 1947 in a village near Ahmedabad. His artistic journey began in 1968 with a diploma in painting. He also received training in fresco and mural painting. At a time when virtual space has become a widely discussed concept, Patel had already explored the idea of virtual space through his art many years ago. The symbolic or suggestive presence of reality within the virtual makes his work particularly significant. When he began his artistic



journey in the 1970s, the influence of neo-tantra was visible in his work, but he soon moved beyond it and developed an independent visual language. His free-flowing forms can be understood as an expression of the human aspiration for freedom.

To understand Amrut Patel's art, we must first understand the forms that emerge on his canvases. Although these forms may not be immediately familiar, they often evoke shapes that are, or have been, present somewhere in our lived experience. At times, they suggest the ruins of ancient civilizations; at others, they evoke the complexity of human life. His paintings often appear remarkably simple in terms of structure. He frequently works with light and dark shades of a single colour to build the composition. He may then introduce another colour either over the existing surface or alongside it.

Working in acrylic, Patel creates a sense of transparency and fluidity reminiscent of watercolour. As a result, his colours possess the character of a

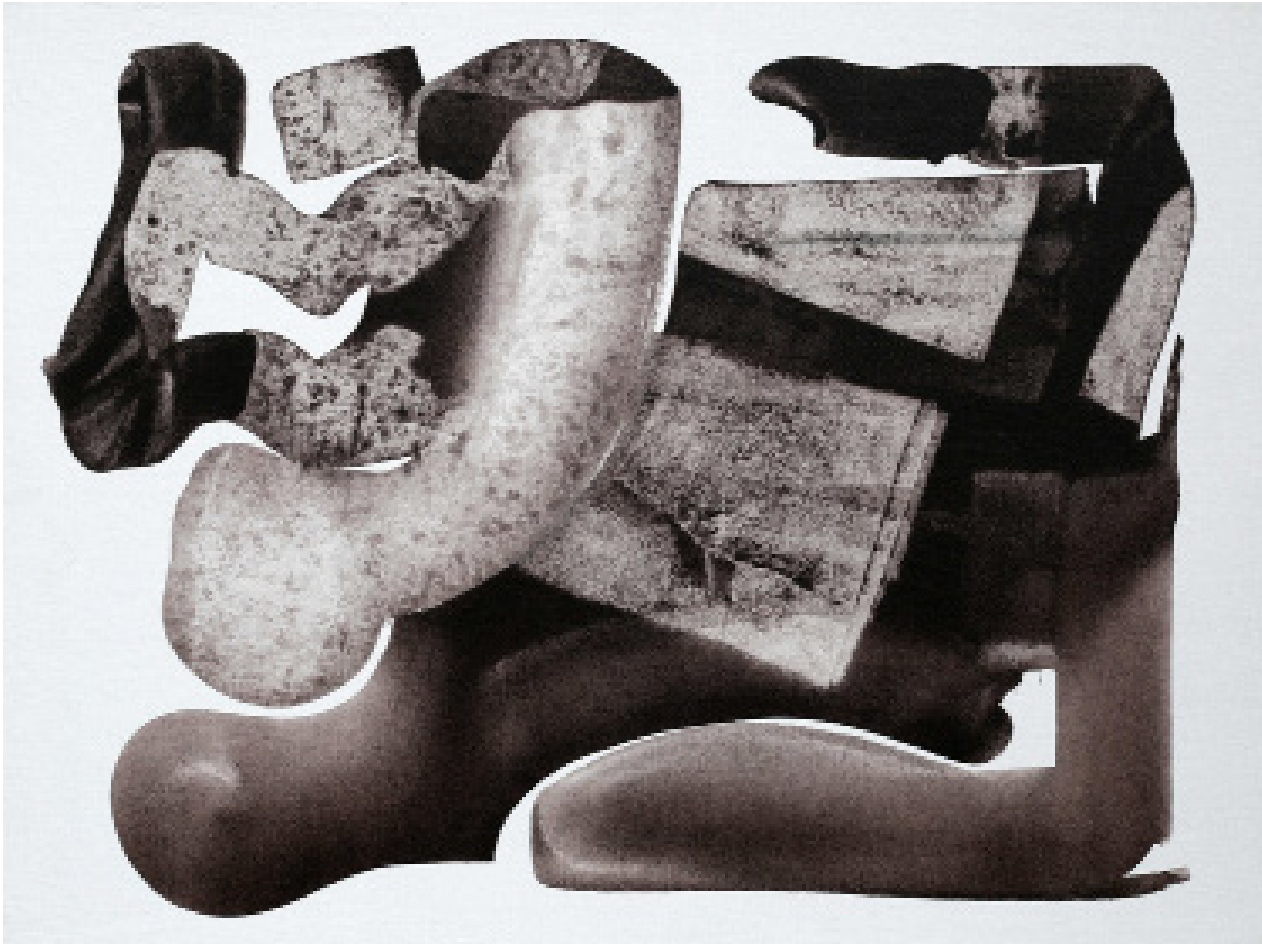






\*Dhirendra Nayak\*—calm, dignified and serious. His paintings create a feeling as though a \*sadhak\* is quietly chanting mantras in a low voice. There is therefore no sense of noise on his canvases, either in the colours or in the forms. Among these forms, however, one sometimes encounters shapes that suggest a human presence. This sensation not only makes his art mysterious but also opens it to multiple interpretations. This is the dynamic element of his work. The forms on the canvas possess stability—paintings are, after all, static objects—but if we try to understand the relationships among those forms, we can easily sense the movement within them.





In many of his recent works, geometric shapes have assumed greater prominence, while some paintings also contain architectural forms. There are incomplete structures that seem to suggest the simultaneous presence of past and present civilizations. References to civilization have often appeared in his earlier works, including symbolic representations of archaeological forms. Some of these references can be found in his recent paintings as well. Several works also contain patterns reminiscent of ceramic vessels and traditional crafts. As we look at these paintings, even the absence of human figures begins to transform into a sense of human presence.

My first encounter with Amrut Patel's art was in 2004. Since then, I have had the opportunity to see his paintings many times, both in his studios and in exhibitions. Each time, I have found something new taking place on his canvases. He has not fundamentally altered his method of depiction, yet at the level of composition he appears to take his painting forward each time

by introducing something new.

When a human being expresses experiences and feelings through a distinctive language, that individual identity becomes central to the expression. Such expression is personal and person-centric. But when an artist communicates with an audience through colours and forms, the expression has the potential to become universal—not meant for one person, but accessible to everyone. This transformation is rare, and Amrut Patel's art raises an important question: when does such a moment occur?

According to Patel, it occurs when an artist expresses himself honestly and with complete dedication, without any inhibition or obstruction. That is why, while looking at his work, we repeatedly encounter a moment when the creator's expression becomes the viewer's own expression. This is what makes Amrut Patel's art more than a personal statement. It becomes a social expression. If we engage deeply with his art, it begins to speak about many of the things that continually unfold around us.



## Anjolie Ela Menon

The significant role of women artists in contemporary Indian art cannot be denied. There was a time when fields like painting and sculpture were considered to be meant only for men. In the last century, Amrita Sher-Gil was the first woman artist who not only established her identity in this field within the country but also gained recognition at the international level. Moreover, Amrita Sher-Gil influenced many of her contemporaries and later painters. Her influence can also be seen in the work of Anjolie Ela Menon. Anjolie Ela Menon, Devyani Krishna, Arpita Singh, Arpana Caur, Gogi Saroj Pal, Rekha Rodwittiya,

Bulbul Sharma, Kanchan Chander, and many other women artists not only challenged the long-standing male dominance in the field of art but also established themselves firmly. Among them, if Anjolie Ela Menon is considered a leading figure, it is because, over her more than six-decade-long artistic career, she has consistently proven herself in terms of subject matter, technique, and experimentation. She still regards her first painting, Head, created at around the age of seventeen, as a foundational example for herself. Born in 1940, Anjolie Ela Menon received her first formal training in art at the age of sixteen at Sir





J.J. School of Art in Mumbai. The structure of education there was entirely British, but through exhibitions she saw outside the school, she became acquainted with authentic Indian art. It was there that she first saw the works of M.F. Husain and Mohan Samant, both of whom, she openly admits, greatly influenced her. According to her, at one point, Husain's bold black lines and flat surfaces influenced her so much that she began to follow them—though her themes remained different. She had to leave Sir J.J. School after just six months.

At the age of eighteen, the paintings she created had a strong sense of romanticism, partly due to the influence of Amrita Sher-Gil, which she herself acknowledges. In her first exhibition, she displayed 53 paintings in various styles. However, when she went to Paris to study art, the direction of her art changed completely. A vast new world of ideas and perspectives opened before her. It is often said that her work is heavily influenced by Western art. This is true to some extent, as her real artistic journey began after her studies in Paris.

However, it is important to note that although her technique may reflect Western influence, the soul of her work remains Indian.

This is why, when she seeks to connect her art with Indian identity, she incorporates not only Indian themes but also elements of calendar art, which she considers entirely Indian and contemporary. She expresses concern that whenever we talk about indigenous art, we tend to look only to the past—Ajanta or miniature painting—while ignoring the art around us, such as calendar art or the paintings on rickshaws, buses, and trucks. She paid attention to these forms and incorporated their elements into her work, giving them new and contemporary meanings.

At the age of twenty, Menon went to Paris for further study, where she was influenced by European Impressionism as well as church art based on Christianity. There, she established a dialogue with Western art. After returning, her artistic identity reflected Western techniques combined with Indian themes. Much later, she again turned toward the West, going to Murano,



where she worked on glass art for two to three years. Even then, she remained rooted in Indian themes, painting subjects like the Shiva lingam and Krishna.

Anjolie Ela Menon never separates her art from her personal world. In her early paintings, windows and crows frequently appear, reflecting memories of her life in Mumbai. According to her, crows were a common sight in Mumbai but not in Delhi. The subjects in her later works also remained closely connected to her personal experiences. Therefore, it would not be wrong to describe her art as a pictorial autobiography. Menon should be regarded as a bold painter because she depicted the nude form at a time when such representation was not expected, especially

from a woman artist. Perhaps this is because she does not accept any form of gender discrimination in art. She does not like to be labeled a “woman artist.” She argues that if male painters are not called “male artists,” then why should women be labeled differently? Similarly, she rejects any notion of competition in art. According to her, art is not a hundred-meter race where someone comes first and someone second.

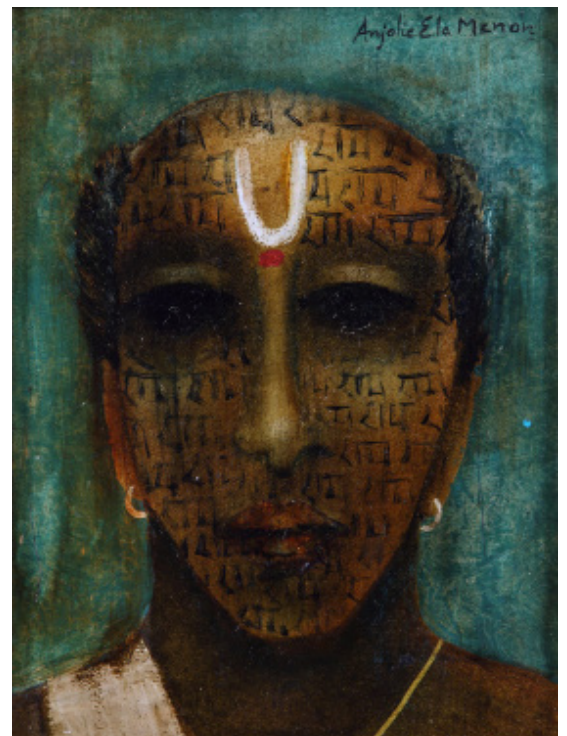
In fact, Anjolie Ela Menon wishes to be recognized simply as an artist. This reflects the aspiration of a true artist—one whose work has established a distinct identity not only in India but also abroad. She is among the most expensive women artists in the country, with her paintings valued in lakhs and crores. International auction houses like Christie’s and





Sotheby's, as well as India's Saffronart, regularly include her works in their auctions. Her exhibitions are also held internationally. Having conducted around thirty solo and numerous group exhibitions, her artistic journey shows no sign of rest. Believing that dissatisfaction is the basis of growth, she continues to strive for new creations. A few years ago, the news of counterfeit versions of her paintings being sold once again demonstrated her immense popularity.

In her art, Anjolie Ela Menon consistently addresses the social position of women. In her paintings, she portrays women's status in contrast to male dominance in various ways. She also explores themes of loneliness and the lives of elderly women within families. Most of the women depicted in her works belong to the working and middle classes. She has no shortage of subjects—ranging from various narratives to depictions of deities, as well as works centered on Christ. She has also created unique social imagery through subjects like old windows and doors.







## Arpita Singh



Among the women artists of contemporary India who have not only established a distinct identity for themselves but have also given a new direction to Indian art, Arpita Singh occupies a leading position. Amrita Sher-Gil was the first modern woman artist of India who created paintings rooted in Indian sensibility while employing the idiom of Western art. Her contribution cannot be denied. However, from the point of view of artistic achievement, Arpita Singh deserves credit for experimenting with her art and addressing subjects that, for a long time, generally remained outside the sphere of women artists. Although Arpita Singh does not accept any division between male and female artists, there is no doubt that, precisely because she was a woman, her early works reflected a critical perspective on the condition of women and girls in society. This critical perspective is what made her a major artist of her time, and as a result, artists of the generation that followed her increasingly developed



a new way of looking at their time and society. We can see the development of this critical vision in her later works as well. Arpita Singh, who initially created abstract landscapes, used this same critical perspective to create human landscapes that bring out various aspects of contemporary life. After Arpita Singh, one can compile a long list of women painters who may be described as alert, conscious, and intellectually engaged artists. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Arpita Singh broke the boundaries of decorative and hobby-oriented art for women artists and opened up a new path for them.

Born in 1937 into a Bengali family in West Bengal, Arpita moved to Delhi for family reasons. It was here that she studied art at the School of Art, Delhi Polytechnic. Here she met Paramjit Singh, and after a long friendship, their relationship developed into a lifelong partnership, and she became Arpita Singh. After completing her art education in 1959, she joined the Government of India, working in the Cottage Industries Restoration Programme. There she came into contact with traditional artists and weavers, and it is said that this experience also influenced her work. During that period, however, her paintings were largely monochromatic and abstract. In the 1980s, she began creating works influenced by the folk art of Bengal, with women as their central subject. In these paintings, she depicted women engaged in private and everyday

activities. Initially, she worked mostly with watercolours on paper.

In the 1990s, she began working with oil paints on canvas, which brought about a major transformation in her work. From this point onward, not only did the scale of her canvases expand, but the range of subjects in her art also widened. During this period, she created some paintings in which women were depicted nude. However, she emphasised their softness and sensitivity, and there was no sense of nudity or eroticism in them. Thereafter, nude female figures continued to appear in many of her paintings, but the meaning of the naked body gradually expanded into a critical commentary on the condition of women in her time as well as the increasing violence in human affairs. It would therefore not be wrong to say that her artistic world moved from the private sphere into public life.

Once, she created a cover illustration for the Puja issue of a Bengali magazine in which she depicted a pistol and other weapons in the hands of Goddess Durga. This caused considerable controversy. Through that image, Arpita Singh had symbolically expressed the violence prevalent in her time. In fact, when we examine her later works, we consistently find a critical commentary on the increasing violence in society. At the same time, she has also targeted the contradictions of metropolitan life and political and administrative





anomalies. Even while doing all this, she has never compromised the artistic qualities of her paintings.

In her paintings, Arpita Singh uses colour on the surface in such a way that the tension of our times becomes clearly visible. She often creates thick layers or patches of colour on the canvas, producing a sense of conflict and tension. Pink and blue are among the colours she uses most frequently, although she also often employs black and white, which were the dominant colours of her early works. She uses a similar technique in her watercolours as well, although the colours there are often muted. Arpita Singh had a deep interest in landscapes from the time of her art education, which is why she was also one of the favourite students of Sailoz Mookherjea. Her early abstract paintings were structured around landscapes, and this continued into her later figurative works. For this reason, she composes each painting as a kind of human landscape.



In her paintings, she often uses household objects as symbols according to the subject of the work. However, it would be ironic to say that most art critics have continued to interpret her work primarily through the lens of women. This is why it is often said that her work expresses the position of women in society and the family. There

is no doubt that women were at the centre of her early works, which was natural as well. This was directly connected with personal experience. In a male-dominated society, a woman has to pass through many contradictory situations, which a woman may understand more deeply. The same can be said of Arpita Singh. However, it would not be justified to overlook the men who appear in her artistic world simply because she is a woman painter. This point becomes especially important because she herself does not accept the division between male and female artists.

There is no doubt that while a man may tend to perceive things more through the mind, a woman may often



This becomes evident in her later works, where, alongside household objects, we prominently encounter weapons, cars, aeroplanes, soldiers, and often assassins hiding behind bushes, aiming at people who are sitting or passing by. Here, she simultaneously combines the toys of childhood memories—such as weapons, cars, aeroplanes and bouquets—with her mature imagination to create a broad engagement with contemporary concerns. An extension of this can be seen in the paintings in which she offers an artistic commentary on the structural contradictions of metropolitan cities and the social injustice embedded within them. In one such painting, she takes Delhi as her focus and brings together administrative, political and social contradictions. The contradictions of Delhi's development that she expresses in this

Changing contexts over time are also an important aspect of her work. On the one hand, she expresses the growing pressure of the market on human life in works such as “Buy Two, Get Two Free,” while on the other, in a mural such as “Wish Dream,” she gives form simultaneously to the material and cultural aspirations of our time. Similarly, she gives space in her artistic world to ordinary subjects such as “Prayer,” “Classified File,” “Classified Advertisement,” and “Breakfast.” Alongside these, various words—sometimes complete and sometimes fragmented—and numbers also appear in her works. However, they do not remain merely symbols; rather, they become the foundation of the landscape in which the artist constructs a story. As an artist, she views life in its entirety. Therefore, her works rarely present isolated images. Even when a single figure appears alone in a painting, she creates such an environment around it that the figure ceases to remain isolated and instead appears to represent a much larger community.



## Anupam Sud

Understanding and observing life cannot be achieved merely by sitting inside a room, a grand building, or a studio. To truly understand life, one has to move closer to it—to step into streets, alleys, and the lived realities of human existence. In the field of art, this process becomes possible not only through the choice of subject matter but also through the mode of presentation. Many artists of our time have stepped beyond the boundaries of the studio in order to engage directly with life and its realities. Here, moving outside the studio does not simply imply a physical act; rather, it signifies stepping beyond the protected realm of imagination to confront and comprehend reality itself. The art of Anupam Sud exemplifies this perspective.

Anupam Sud is regarded as one of the significant figures in contemporary Indian art. Through her

sustained engagement with printmaking, painting, collage, and photography, she has generated important conceptual discussions within the Indian art world. Her creative practice has never remained confined to a single medium or style; rather, through continuous experimentation she has expanded the possibilities of artistic expression.

Anupam Sud first established her identity primarily as a printmaker. She introduced numerous technical experiments in printmaking and developed a distinctive visual language by combining different methods and media. However, more than her technical achievements, it was her choice of themes that drew widespread attention in the art world. After Anjolie Ela Menon, she was perhaps among the first Indian women artists to make the nude body a central theme in her artistic practice. Yet in her work, the female body does





not function merely as an object of physical beauty or visual attraction; rather, it emerges as an intellectual, emotional, and conceptual expression.

Born in 1944 in Hoshiarpur, Punjab, Anupam Sud studied at the College of Art in New Delhi, graduating in 1967. During 1971–72, she received a British Council scholarship to study printmaking at the Slade School in London. She worked primarily with intaglio prints, while also integrating her knowledge of etching, lithography, and screen-printing to develop an independent visual vocabulary.

One of the most distinctive aspects of her art is that it functions less as a visual representation and more as the manifestation of an emotional and intellectual process. Through her works, she has explored the complexities of human existence, social contradictions, and the multidimensional nature of relationships between men and women. Themes of coexistence, attraction, distance, tension, and conflict between genders repeatedly appear in her work. She does not approach relationships through an idealistic lens; instead, she addresses the psychological and social tensions embedded within them.

Her work also demonstrates a clear resistance to gender prejudice while simultaneously reflecting a

strong contemporary social consciousness. Another significant characteristic of her art is its narrative quality. Almost every work seems to unfold a story, an experience, or a psychological condition. Within these visual narratives one finds not only human anxiety and emotional struggle but also a challenge to conventional middle-class social restrictions and taboos.

In many of her works, Sud presents male and female figures in opposing or inverted compositions, creating a visual tension that reveals the dualities and complexities within human relationships. In one work, she combines motifs such as helicopters and butterflies, creating meaningful contrasts between power and delicacy, mechanization and nature. She has also addressed the emotional isolation and despair experienced during the pandemic period.

A noteworthy aspect of her artistic practice is her engagement with traditional Indian visual cultures, particularly miniature painting traditions, which she incorporates into contemporary contexts. Her works establish an on-going dialogue between tradition and modernity. Works such as *Cosmic Dance* and *Black Conch* emerge with fresh layers of meaning through this process.

The incorporation of abstraction within





figurative representation also remains a defining feature of her art. In her printmaking, abstraction often appears through textures, while in many works abstract structures in the background create additional visual depth and complexity. At times she also incorporates elements of nature, thereby expanding the interpretive possibilities of her compositions.

Anupam Sud's art ultimately demonstrates that artistic practice is not merely a reconstruction of the visible world; it is also a sensitive interpretation of human experiences and social realities. Through continuous experimentation over a long creative journey, she has shown that the true role of an artist is to identify the deeper meanings embedded in life and express them through new forms. This is precisely why her work occupies a distinctive and influential place in contemporary Indian art.





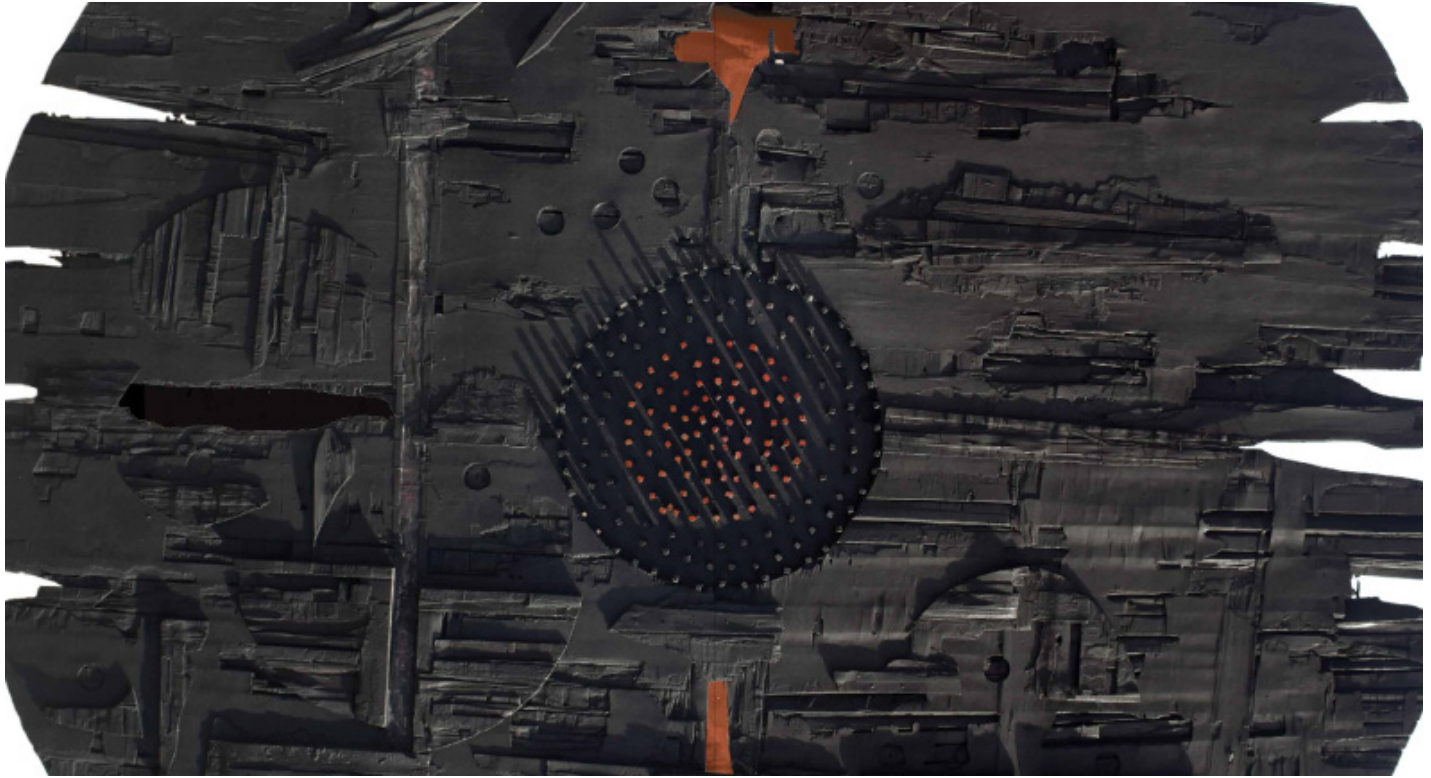
## Anwar

*Anwar Khan (b. 1964, Ambha, Madhya Pradesh), widely known simply as Anwar, is a distinguished figure in Indian abstraction. Unlike many of his peers trained in major art schools, he pursued his passion more humbly, studying in Gwalior and completing a National Diploma in Fine Arts in 1985. After moving to Bhopal, drawn by its thriving artistic community, he found a lifelong base and the mentorship of J. Swaminathan, who introduced him to Sufism and its philosophy of love and light.*

Anwar occupies a rare and compelling position among contemporary abstract artists. In a field often divided between mathematical precision and the unpredictability of chance, Anwar has created a middle path—conscious and deliberate, yet open to intuitive resonance. The unplanned and accidental have very little role in his abstraction. Instead, his work exists in a world of quiet control, where form and material engage with one another with philosophical intent.

Working in oil on canvas, he achieves a remarkable softness that places his work in a distinctive emotional space. He divides the picture plane into a few broad sections and brings together numbers in some areas and other motifs in others. What emerges across the expansive surface is not a narrative composition but





something more mysterious—an experience of quiet delight that lies beyond words.

When he works in pastel on paper, the medium changes, but his artistic language and mode of expression remain the same. Despite working in a consistent style for many years, he has managed to avoid repetition. Anwar considers J. Swaminathan his guru, and for him, creating a painting is not merely an exercise or routine practice. This is why there are times when he does not create anything for several days, and then, suddenly, on a particular day, a painting seems to begin taking shape on its own.

Anwar has a deep affection for different media. Whatever the medium, he embraces it with great warmth and makes it his own. During his years in Bhopal, he worked with ceramics, which became a close and cherished companion. After moving to Delhi, that companion was left behind. But he eventually had the opportunity to reconnect

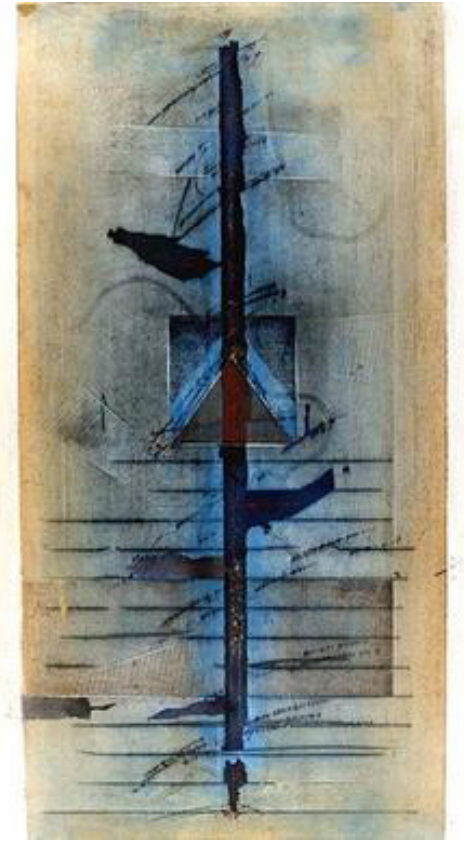
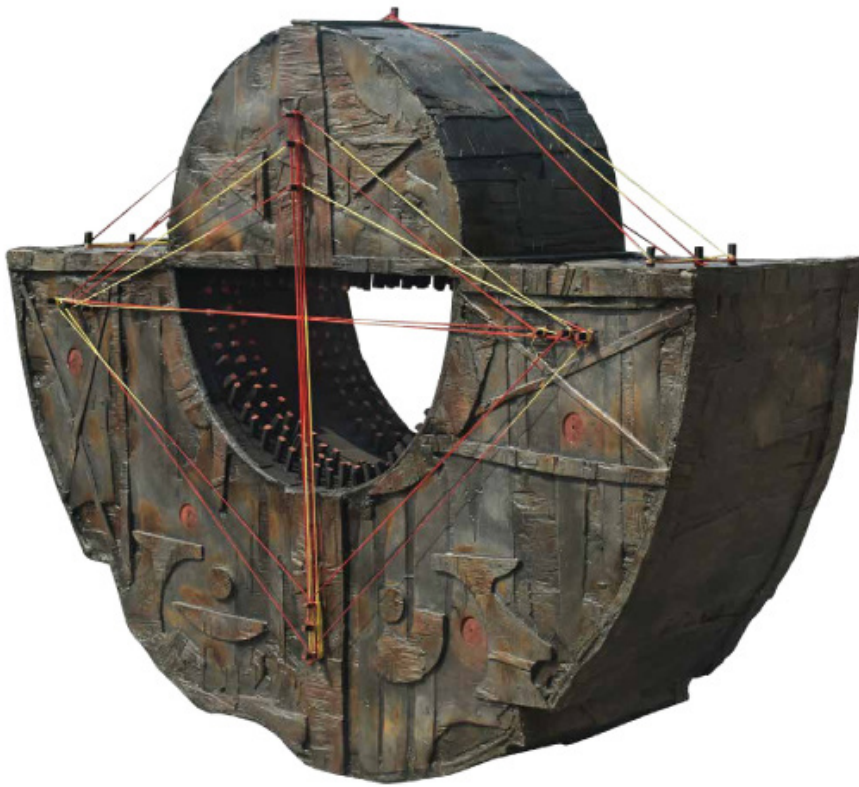
with it, and he travelled to Khurja, where he created several ceramic works. Today, he continues to explore possibilities in entirely new and unconventional artistic media.



What distinguishes Anwar is his fearless engagement with new materials and formats. For years, we have encountered his distinctive works on canvas and paper, but his recent move into wood—particularly plywood—marks both a symbolic and material shift in his long search for artistic truth. When his wooden works were recently shown in a group exhibition, they surprised and captivated viewers, signalling a new chapter in his evolving practice.

Whatever the medium—canvas, paper, ceramics, sculpture or installation—Anwar possesses a unique ability to make every surface his own. His solo exhibition at Tao Art Gallery in Mumbai was a testimony to this evolution. It revealed an Anwar who is not merely adopting new media but also deepening the philosophical language of his art.





His sculptures, ceramics, installations and wood-based works represent a layered expansion of his creative vocabulary, while his fundamental identity remains intact. Even in these new forms, we recognize Anwar.

The familiar presence of geometric symbols—circles, triangles and squares—as well as recurring numbers continues to appear. These motifs are far more than elements of design; they serve as bridges between the past and the present, between ancient systems of knowledge and contemporary experience. They create a sense of continuity in his work, suggesting that while the surfaces may change, the spirit remains constant.

Anwar's practice is not merely aesthetic—it is spiritual. He regards art as a form of sadhana, a discipline of self-discovery and a ritual of cultural offering. There is a clear intention in his work to give back to the world something of all that he has inherited from history,

memory and tradition. The complexities we encounter in his works often reflect the complexities of our own time, expressed through a visual language that is deeply personal yet universally resonant.

For Anwar, art is a discipline of self-examination and an on-going process of renewal. Whether it is a new surface, an unfamiliar material or an unexplored form,

he accepts every challenge with the devotion of a seeker. This openness defines his relationship with materials: they are not obstacles but companions. He does not merely adapt to new media; he transforms them, reshaping them through his inner vision. Ultimately, Anwar's work is not only about abstraction—it is about presence. His art speaks through symbols and silence, texture and tone, ritual and risk. It invites us not merely to witness the transformation of materials, but also to experience, through them, the

possibility of our own transformation.







## Ganesh Haloi



**G**anesh Haloi expresses the beauty of nature and its mysterious structures through a distinct and newly nuanced artistic language. His solo exhibition at Akar Prakar Gallery, New Delhi, brings to light various dimensions of his art, in which the imaginative

quality of his image-making and the autonomy of his design emerge as prominent elements. The paintings, mostly executed on paper, present a remarkable synthesis of the concrete and the abstract in their structural composition. At times, he employs familiar geometric shapes, while at other moments he introduces forms that evoke both geometric and architectural sensibilities. Yet, as cohesive structural entities, the paintings remain fundamentally abstract.

It is significant that Ganesh Haloi is widely credited with establishing abstract art within the Bengal School. While many of his contemporaries were preoccupied with exploring expression through the physical form of human life and bodily shapes, Haloi chose instead to distill the essence of life through his own unique artistic vocabulary. The current trajectory of abstract art within the Bengal School bears the clear imprint of his influence.



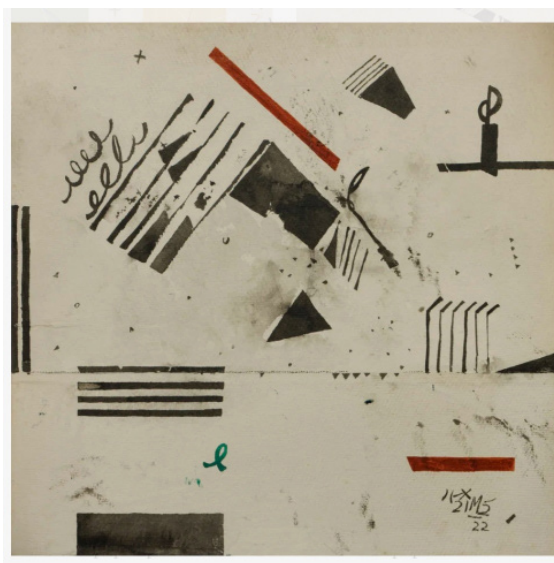
In engaging with his works, one encounters expansive color fields, calligraphic lines, delicate dots, architectural contours, and geometric shapes that collectively invite viewers to perceive and contemplate both the physical and metaphysical dimensions of existence. His art appears less concerned with conveying a singular, definitive message and more invested in expanding the viewer's capacity for observation, reflection, and introspection. Through this process, the viewer is drawn into a realm of experience that, though intimately connected to life, often remains unseen or unarticulated.

Ganesh Haloi's creations are marked by a profound sense of serenity in their elegance and communication, particularly in works dominated by expansive and subtly modulated color fields. These chromatic compositions

often evoke abstracted landscapes. However, these landscape-like formations function less as representations of the physical world and more as expressions of inner emotional states. They demand engagement beyond surface perception, resonating instead with the emotional and psychological terrain of human experience. The concrete, when fully resolved, leaves little room for mystery or curiosity; it becomes complete and, in a sense, empty. Haloi's works gesture toward this emptiness, yet they embody incompleteness rather than finality. Through the introduction of geometric shapes, lines, and points, he disrupts this emptiness, anchoring his compositions within worldly contexts where emotion and feeling take precedence.

To evoke these emotions, Haloi incorporates both recognizable and enigmatic motifs. It





is crucial to note that emotions are inherently fluid and never static or complete; their shifting nature is what aligns them with abstraction. For this reason, human emotions themselves can be described as abstract. Haloi seeks to perceive and represent this emotional realm in an alternative manner, and thus, even as abstraction permeates his work, it remains intentionally incomplete—just as no emotion can ever reach absolute closure. The transparent and semi-transparent layers of color in his paintings deepen this abstraction, adding complexity and depth to the emotional landscape he constructs.

A prevailing sense of peace and silence characterizes much of Ganesh Haloi's imagery. Yet within this stillness, he creates possibilities for dialogue on multiple levels: among the juxtaposed formal elements within the paintings, between the artwork and the viewer, and between nature and human consciousness. His work is fundamentally non-narrative; nonetheless, in engaging with his compositions, one senses the presence of fragmented memories and dispersed imaginations. The melancholic resonance of a lost or vanishing landscape, conveyed through translucent layers of color, often feels poetic—like a soft, distant voice echoing through a deserted valley. At times, it is as though the rustling wind brushing against standing crops permeates the atmosphere with an almost musical cadence.

Moments of melancholy surface in his landscapes, yet they are neither fixed nor overwhelming; the artist does not allow them

to settle permanently. While Wassily Kandinsky consciously propelled his artistic language toward abstraction and sought to translate music into visual form, Ganesh Haloi situates abstraction primarily within the realm of emotion. At the same time, on a formal level, he continuously fragments and challenges this abstraction. Ambiguity—and even more so, incomprehensibility—represents the ultimate stage of abstraction, a stage rarely reached in Haloi's work. Instead, clarity and ambiguity coexist as two compelling dimensions of his art, captivating viewers through their subtle interplay.

The transcendental quality often attributed to Ganesh Haloi's works arises from the conceptual logic and pictorial structure underpinning his compositions. This structure is also deeply aligned with principles of minimalism: his paintings favor minimal forms, openness over density, and an expansion of the invisible. Within this openness, certain visual elements symbolically allude to human existence and consciousness.

At the core of abstract art lies the pursuit of the true self—an inherently human essence shaped by the dynamics of nature. Clement Greenberg's critical perspective is relevant here, as he emphasized the exploration and interrelation of form, space, and surface in abstract art. The presence and interaction of these elements in Haloi's work can be understood as a reflection of human life itself, since all forms, even those derived from nature, ultimately convey facets of the broader human experience.

# Gogi Saroj Pal



Regarded as one of the early and significant women artists associated with feminist concerns in modern Indian art, Gogi Saroj Pal consistently made the condition and inner life of women central to her practice. Women's lives, their desires and constraints, their vulnerabilities and aspirations, and the complex and often magical worlds of their inner experiences remained recurring subjects in her work. She did not present women merely as visual figures or objects of beauty; instead, she created images of women who assert their own presence, agency, and identity. Her art thus challenges the conventional representation of women through the male gaze and opens up a space in which the female figure becomes a subject in her own right.

One of the distinctive features of Pal's practice is her sustained engagement with Indian mythology, legends, folklore, and traditional art forms. She drew upon these sources not as fixed remnants of the past, but as living visual and imaginative resources through which contemporary questions could be explored. By reinterpreting familiar symbols and narratives, she gave them new meanings and brought together mythological imagination, female experience, and modern social consciousness. Her varied representations of the independent woman emerged from this creative engagement with tradition.





Works such as Kamadhenu, with its fusion of woman and cow; Kinnari, which brings together woman and bird; and Dancing Horse, in which the figure is conceived as half woman and half mare, reveal the imaginative breadth of her symbolic language. In these works, animals, birds, and mythological forms are not merely decorative devices. They become metaphors for female strength, freedom, desire, transformation, and the relationship between woman and nature. By combining elements of Indian miniature painting with folk traditions and mythology, Pal developed new visual concepts in which familiar cultural symbols acquire contemporary significance.

The miniature tradition was a particularly important source of inspiration for Pal. Its influence can be seen in the structure and composition of her paintings, in the treatment of figures, the use of relatively flat colour areas, and the organisation of pictorial space. She was especially influenced by the Pahari miniature tradition. Yet she did not accept this inheritance passively or reproduce it literally. From the beginning, her artistic temperament was independent

and rebellious. She resisted the unquestioned imitation of Western artistic norms and styles, while also engaging critically with Indian traditions. Her relationship with miniature painting was therefore not simply one of influence, but also one of dialogue, reinterpretation, and resistance.

Unlike the idealised and ornamental heroines of traditional miniature painting, Pal created female figures who, even when nude or semi-nude, cannot easily be understood as decorative objects created for the pleasure of the male gaze. Their bodies become statements in themselves. Their presence suggests an assertion of female authority rather than an attempt to complete or serve masculine power. In this way, Pal moved the female body beyond the conventional realm of beauty and transformed it into a language of agency, resistance, self-determination, and existence. Her treatment of ornamentation is equally significant. Whereas traditional miniatures often give considerable importance to elaborate clothing, jewellery, and richly decorated settings, Pal frequently chose simpler clothing, restrained environments, and a deliberate



reduction of decorative detail. This allowed the female body and its presence to occupy the centre of the composition. Her approach challenges the mentality that treats women primarily as decorative objects. For Pal, the body is not simply something to be looked at; it is a site of experience, desire, memory, identity, and power.

Personal conversations with Gogi Saroj Pal also offer an intimate insight into her understanding of art and artistic practice. She was often encountered at Garhi, and because the studios were close to one another, discussions about art naturally became part of everyday interaction. One of her recurring pieces of advice was: “Work a lot, but know what you are doing and why you are doing it.” The statement reflects an important aspect of her artistic philosophy. For her, sustained artistic labour needed to be accompanied by clarity of purpose and a conscious understanding of the subject. She also believed that an artist needs sufficient “space” for art—a space in which experimentation, independent thought, and the development of an individual visual language can take place without fear or inhibition.

Although she was a senior artist, Pal



maintained a particularly lively engagement with younger artists. She enjoyed seeing other people’s work and remained interested in the creative possibilities emerging among the younger generation. Her advice to young women artists was especially direct: do not make yourself weak; recognise your strength and make it visible, because an artist’s real strength lies in her art. Her encouragement—“Do something new, and believe in what you do”—can be read not merely as advice to younger artists but as an expression of the conviction that sustained her own artistic journey.

It would, however, be limiting to define Gogi Saroj Pal’s art solely as “feminist art.” Her practice brings together questions of gender with mythology, folk





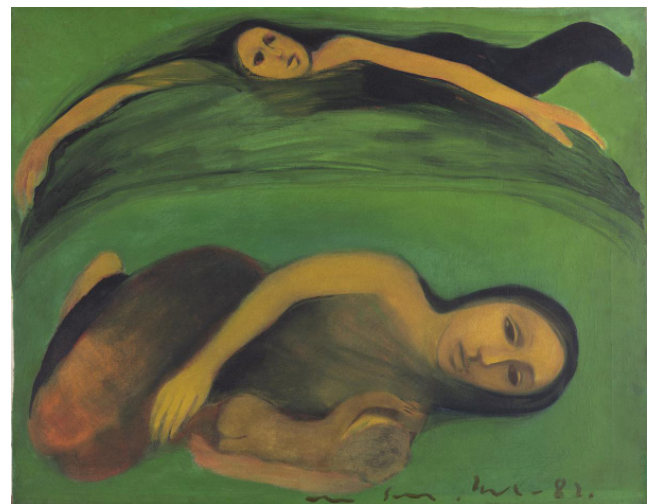


traditions, nature, the body, desire, imagination, and cultural memory. By rereading symbols embedded in Indian traditions, she transformed them into a contemporary language in which the woman becomes the author of her own narrative. This is among the most significant achievements of her work. She did not merely make women the subject of her paintings; she also made the right to see, experience, desire, and define oneself an essential part of artistic expression.

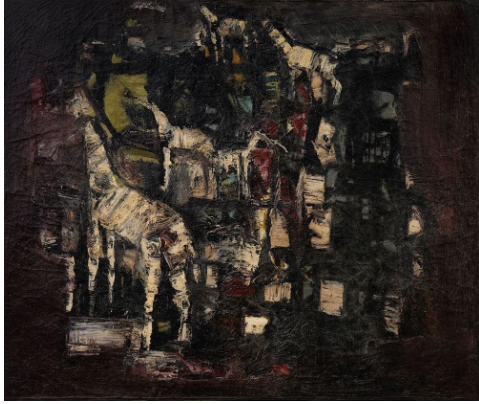
In this sense, Pal's art offers an alternative path through Indian modernity. It is neither a direct imitation of Western modernism nor a passive repetition of tradition. Her practice enters into tradition, questions its inherited meanings, and reactivates mythology within the language of the present. Her recurring figures of women, animals, birds, and mythological beings suggest that identity is not fixed but continually transformed. The energy of this transformation is visible throughout her work.

Gogi Saroj Pal's art is a powerful visual articulation of female agency, imagination, and inner life. Through a sustained dialogue with Indian miniature painting, folk art, and mythology, she

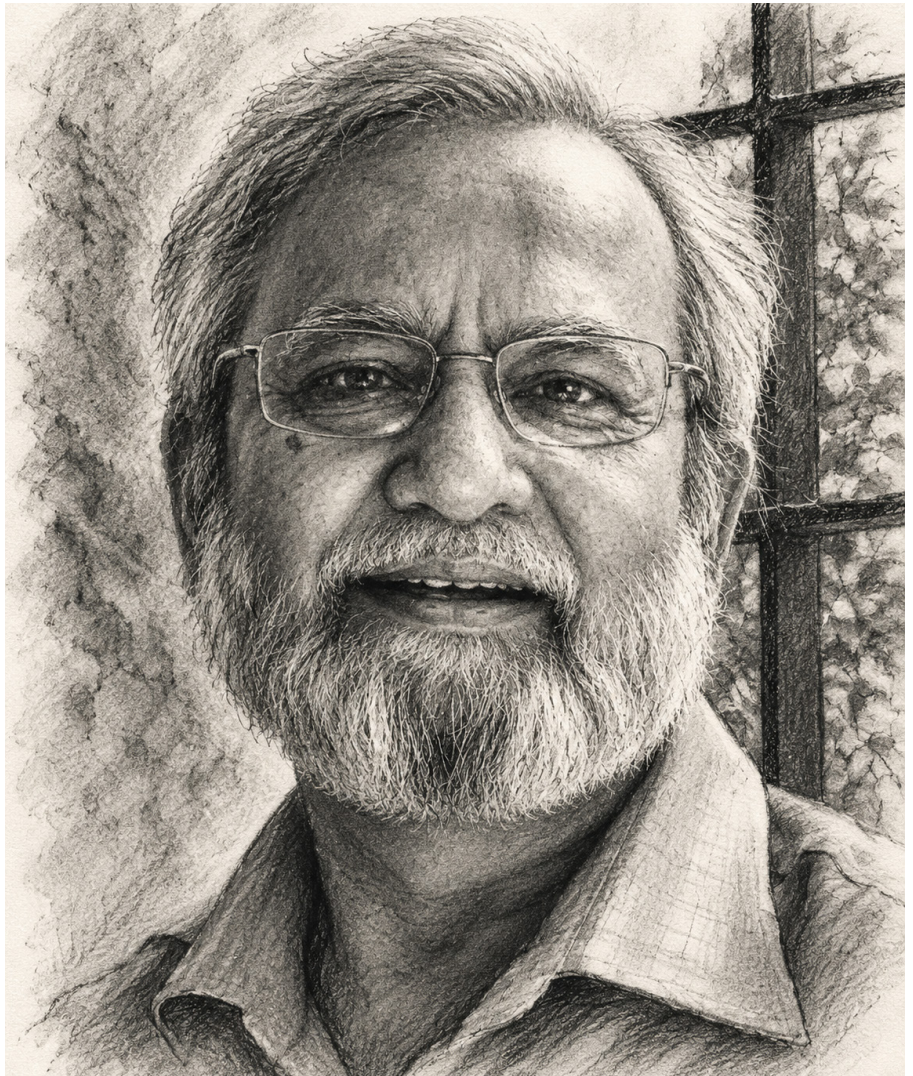
developed a distinctive language within modern Indian art in which beauty and resistance, tradition and modernity, the body and self-consciousness, myth and contemporary life coexist. Her work reminds us that keeping a tradition alive does not mean simply reproducing it; it means returning to its hidden possibilities and discovering them anew through the questions and experiences of the present.







# Ghulam Mohammad Sheikh



**G**hulam Mohammad Sheikh's six-decade-long artistic journey offers a compelling account of the changing landscape of contemporary Indian art. His practice reflects the transition from traditional artistic languages to modern and contemporary modes of expression, while also demonstrating how the visual vocabulary of Indian miniature painting can be reinterpreted within a contemporary framework. Artist, poet, writer, and educator, Sheikh has consistently explored the possibilities of different media and methods, allowing the requirements of an idea or subject to determine the form of his expression. His practice encompasses painting, drawing, printmaking, collage, digital art, books, ceramics, and installation, revealing an artist for whom no single medium or style is an end in itself.

At the heart of Sheikh's work is a dynamic relationship between subjectivity and objectivity.

His art emerges from personal memory and experience, yet it continually opens itself to larger social, cultural, political, and historical realities. His works do not merely pursue visual beauty; rather, ideas, questions, and human experience remain central to his artistic concerns. Beauty is present, but it is rarely the final destination. Instead, Sheikh uses visual language to communicate with his times, often questioning established assumptions and drawing attention to the contradictions and complexities of contemporary life. His work therefore possesses a critical dimension, reflecting the intellectual and social currents of the periods through which he has lived and worked.

Although his practice is fundamentally figurative, Sheikh's paintings and drawings frequently incorporate elements of abstraction. The human figure, however, remains central





to his understanding of the world. Human life—with its visible realities as well as its memories, dreams, anxieties, conflicts, and aspirations—is one of the most persistent subjects of his art. Through layered imagery and complex spatial structures, he brings together the seen and unseen dimensions of experience. His figures often inhabit spaces that appear simultaneously historical and contemporary, familiar and imagined.

Sheikh's artistic development has never followed a linear trajectory. Rather, his practice can be understood as an evolving discourse on social experience, personal memory, cultural heritage, political circumstances, and global influences. His engagement with Indian traditions is neither nostalgic nor imitative.

Instead, he revisits them critically and creatively, transforming inherited visual and narrative forms into vehicles for contemporary thought. In this context, the Indian miniature tradition has been particularly significant. Sheikh has drawn upon its compositional structures, narrative possibilities, spatial treatment, and attention to detail, while adapting these characteristics to address modern experiences and concerns.

His engagement with poetry, particularly the poetry of Kabir, is another important dimension of his practice. Kabir's questioning of religious divisions, his emphasis on spiritual experience, and his rejection of rigid boundaries between communities resonate deeply with Sheikh's artistic vision. The Kahat Kabir series







demonstrates how poetry can become a visual and intellectual resource. By placing Kabir at the centre of his artistic inquiry, Sheikh reflects on non-violence, communal harmony, pluralism, and the syncretic traditions of the Indian subcontinent. His work suggests that cultural memory can provide not only a connection with the past but also a means of responding to urgent contemporary questions.

A wide variety of media has enabled Sheikh to investigate both material and subject matter. His practice includes watercolour, gouache, oil painting, drawing, printmaking, paper collage, digital collage, artist's books, ceramics, and large-scale installations. This diversity is not simply a matter of experimentation with materials; it is closely connected to his search for the most appropriate form through which an idea can be communicated. Consequently, he has produced both intensely coloured works and powerful black-and-white compositions. The choice of medium, colour, or technique is secondary to the clarity, force, and resonance of the expression.

Several major works demonstrate the breadth of these concerns. *Speechless City* (1975) and *City for Sale* (1981–84) engage

critically with the changing urban environment and the social and political realities embedded within the modern city. These works transform the city from a mere physical setting into a complex metaphor for power, alienation, memory, commerce, and human relationships. Decades later, *Ahmedabad—The City Gandhi Left Behind* (2015–16) extends this engagement with the city, bringing together history, memory, political reflection, and the continuing relevance of Gandhi's legacy. The work demonstrates Sheikh's ability to connect a specific geographical place with broader questions concerning history, identity, violence, and social change.

Storytelling occupies an equally important position in Sheikh's practice. His *Kaavad* and accordion books demonstrate his sustained interest in traditional Indian narrative forms and their potential for contemporary reinterpretation. The *Kaavad*, with its multiple panels, compartments, and unfolding narrative structure, becomes in Sheikh's hands a complex visual and spatial device. Similarly, the accordion book allows images and stories to unfold sequentially while simultaneously creating relationships between different moments, places, and memories. These





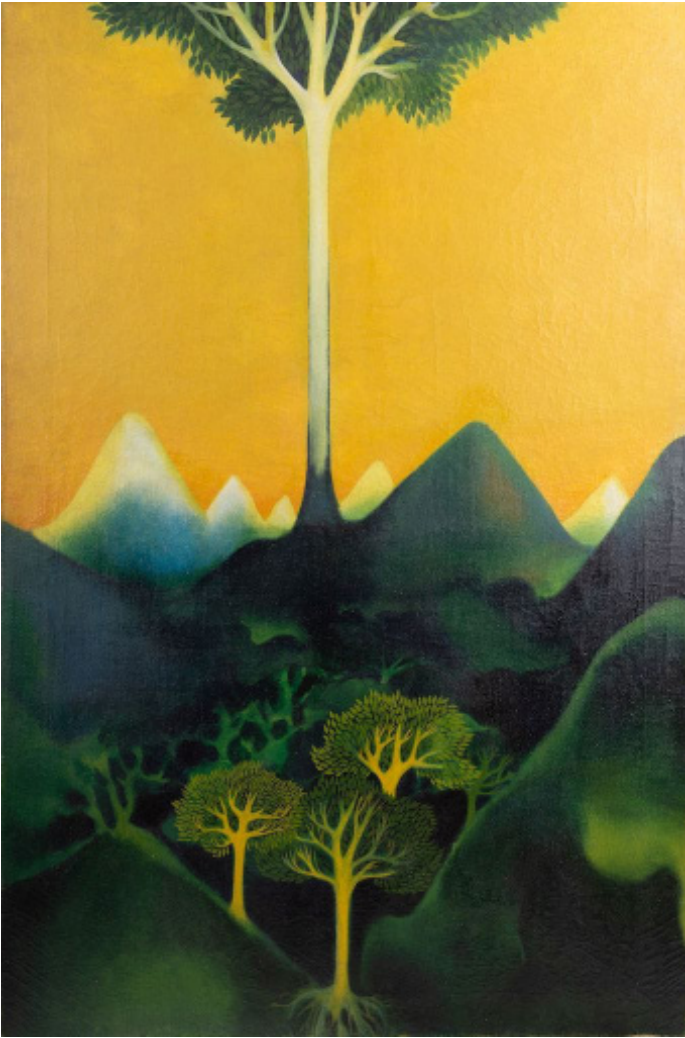
works reveal his fascination with the act of narration itself and with the ways in which stories are constructed, remembered, fragmented, and reimagined.

Sheikh's experiments with digital media further demonstrate his willingness to move beyond conventional boundaries of painting. Works such as *Talisman: Amulet* (2001) and the *Mappamundi* series (2001) explore the possibilities of digital collage and contemporary image-making. In the *Mappamundi* works, the map becomes more than a representation of geographical space. It becomes a site where histories, cultures, journeys, migrations, encounters, and conflicts intersect. By bringing together diverse visual references, Sheikh challenges the idea of geography as something fixed and objective. The map becomes instead a repository of historical memory and a field of dialogue between different civilizations and perspectives.

His recent works, including *Caravan*

(2019–23) and *Dus Darwaza* (2019–24), continue this engagement with travel, memory, time, and contemporary experience. The idea of the journey—physical, cultural, intellectual, and imaginative—runs through much of Sheikh's work. Images appear to travel across time and space, while fragments of personal and collective memory coexist within the same visual field. His recent practice therefore does not represent the past as something separate from the present; rather, it demonstrates how histories continue to inhabit contemporary life.

One of the most distinctive features of Sheikh's art is its ability to bring together seemingly different worlds. Tradition and modernity, poetry and painting, history and contemporary politics, personal memory and collective experience, local narratives and global influences are not treated as opposing categories. Instead, they are woven together into a complex visual language. His work demonstrates that tradition can remain relevant when it is approached critically and imaginatively,



and that contemporary art can engage deeply with cultural heritage without becoming merely retrospective.

Sheikh's artistic language is therefore best understood as plural, open-ended, and constantly evolving. His use of miniature traditions does not prevent him from engaging with abstraction, digital technology, installation, or contemporary forms of visual storytelling. Likewise, his engagement with contemporary politics does not disconnect him from poetry, history, or cultural memory. He moves between these territories freely, allowing each medium and visual form to contribute to a larger inquiry into human existence.

Ultimately, Ghulam Mohammad Sheikh's art is an extended meditation on how we remember, how we inhabit cities, how histories shape the present, and how individuals negotiate an increasingly complex world. His six decades of practice reveal an artist deeply committed to dialogue—between past and present, tradition

and innovation, image and text, individual memory and collective history. Whether working in miniature-inspired painting, black-and-white drawing, printmaking, digital collage, artist's books, ceramics, or large-scale installation, Sheikh remains guided by the same fundamental concern: the search for a meaningful and compelling form of expression.

His art does not offer simple answers. Instead, it invites the viewer to look, remember, question, and interpret. In doing so, it transforms inherited visual traditions into living contemporary languages and establishes a sustained conversation between art and the realities of our time. Sheikh's practice ultimately demonstrates that the significance of contemporary Indian art lies not only in the adoption of new styles and technologies, but also in the ability to rethink history, tradition, memory, and human experience through an evolving visual imagination.



# Haku Shah



**I**t is not possible for any artist to remain silent about his art or the art of his time. Art is his primary language, and he or she can express themselves through art. However, some artists are able to express their feelings and thoughts in words as well. Haku Shah was one of them. He was a true Gandhian who believed in living according to his principles. Mahatma Gandhi had a profound influence on his life. The simplicity of his art, as well as his deep concern for folk, tribal, and even children's art, was solid proof of this influence.

We can say that the art of Haku Shah has been a journey from folk art to modernity. While he made folk art his base at the level of design and colour schemes, he used modern concepts as the basis for the subjects and presentation of his paintings. His subjects were generally tribal people, women, children, animals, etc. Along with the subjects of his paintings, his style of portrayal was also influenced by folk art.

If you look at the figures in his pictures, they do not appear to show any kind of miracle; rather, they depict the surrounding reality of everyday life. We see animals being grazed by shepherds, children and women playing with birds, and scenes



of folk life, such as lovers playing flutes in front of their beloved. His images do not show any kind of charged reality. Instead, this quality can be seen in the movements of human figures and in the colour schemes of his paintings.

He also worked extensively on Gandhiji and his ideas. From this point of view, his art and life were closely connected. A few years ago, I had the opportunity to meet and talk with him during his solo exhibition in Delhi. It seemed that I was talking to a senior artist of my time, yet at the same time, it felt as if I were having a conversation with a friend of my own age. There was no formality, no cover of fame, and no distance between us.

He lived Gandhism and his respect for folk and tribal arts through his art, while also keeping these perspectives alive in his life. He not only organised many exhibitions and museums dedicated to tribal and folk arts but also documented them. Along with this, from time to time, he continuously wrote about various concerns related to art.

On one occasion, he wrote about the idea of globalisation and Indian art. Despite continuous efforts, traditional arts and crafts of India were still not receiving the importance they deserved. According to him, the reason for this was that the gaze of the West had not moved beyond curiosity towards Indian art, especially folk and tribal art. He wrote that the winds of globalisation had not yet touched traditional artisans and artists. He did not agree with the idea that globalisation would necessarily spoil them.

He wrote, "Art has been a source of spiritual energy for our rural/tribal population for many generations. It has been an integral part of their lives. If the world knows about them and admires them, it certainly will not harm them. It can work in another way because we can also learn about the traditional arts and crafts of other countries. But, as I said earlier, only those who are sensitive towards them should interact with them. Mass production of art to meet market demands will make it hollow and lifeless. Our





ancestors possessed the skill, precision, and honesty of art. We should not lose them."

Gandhiji had a profound influence on his vision of art education and creativity. He was not in favour of giving children an art education that would take away their individuality. He said that if a child can create a human figure in their own way, it may be inspired by their parents or someone else. However, our art teachers often pressure them to make something else, such as flowers or other conventional forms. For this, he considered the entire education system responsible. He also stressed that teachers should teach children while learning from them as well.

His view of the art education curriculum was that our courses should be designed in such a way that they provide children with opportunities to unleash their creative energy. They should be given knowledge of our rich cultural heritage. Visual elements such as clay sculptures, floral designs, and pottery should be included in the school curriculum. This would help boost their creativity.







Vedprakash Bhardwaj in  
Conversation with Himmat Shah  
Anant Art Gallery, New Delhi,  
30 November 2005

## Himmat Shah

**Y**ou have worked across multiple genres, from painting to sculpture, and have explored both figurative and abstract forms. Today's young artists, whether painters or sculptors, are experimenting and evolving rapidly. How do you view their work?

Himmat Shah: It is difficult to pass judgment on another artist's work, and perhaps I do not possess the authority to do so. However, I can say with certainty that the artists working in India today are exceptional. Young artists, in particular, are constantly exploring new ideas and pushing the boundaries of their practice. Art is vast, and what has been achieved so far represents only a fraction of its possibilities. It is like an endless ocean, and each artist draws from it according to their ability and vision. In a way, art is undergoing its own kind of samudra manthan—a churning of the ocean. With advances in technology, Indian artists are producing remarkable work on a global scale.

Many young artists today create large-scale sculptures, often prioritizing spectacle over sensitivity to materials. Having worked with







**everything from terracotta to metal, which material do you connect with the most?**

Himmat Shah: Clay is my favourite. It offers immense flexibility and an expansive scope for artistic expression. While many artists work across different mediums, I have chosen to focus primarily on clay in recent years. That said, whenever I felt that a clay work would translate well into bronze or wood, I experimented with those materials as well.

Unfortunately, my health no longer allows me to work as extensively as I once did. That is why this exhibition features works that I have saved over the past twenty to twenty-five years. In fact, I had no plans to exhibit them, but Mamta ji from Anant Art Gallery insisted, and that is how this exhibition came about.

**After moving from Delhi to Jaipur, your approach to exhibitions changed. Was this due to circumstances or a personal choice?**

Himmat Shah: At seventy-three, I no longer have the energy to hold exhibitions frequently. Instead, I prefer to concentrate on my work. Even earlier, my exhibitions were not frequent; they took place every

five to ten years. So this is not really a new shift, but rather a continuation of the way I have always worked.

**You started with painting, but at a time when the market for paintings in India was growing, you transitioned completely into sculpture—even though there was no real market for it. What led to this shift?**

Himmat Shah: While I was painting, I realized that relief work was becoming an increasingly important element in my art. This led me to explore sculpture, and I found it to be a more effective medium for my expression. Around that time, I created a mural in Ahmedabad, and as I continued to work with sculpture, I became completely immersed in it.

However, now that I am in Rajasthan, I have decided to return to painting as well. My style will remain unchanged; I do not intend to experiment much. The historical monuments and intricate craftsmanship of Rajasthan inspire me, and I see immense possibilities in engaging with this artistic heritage.

**Your sculptures have a strong abstract quality, often suggesting both known and unknown**



**forms. What drew you to abstraction?**

Himmat Shah: I primarily work with clay, and I allow the material to guide the form. If I discover a shape emerging from the clay that fascinates me, I develop it further. Abstraction was never a deliberate choice; it was simply a natural progression.

My focus has always been on the visual experience: does the form evoke a sense of joy? Clay is flexible and constantly offers new possibilities, and I prefer to embrace the beauty that emerges rather than impose rigid forms upon it.

**Today, your work is being widely collected, and galleries are showing considerable interest. However, there was a time when your work remained unsold. How do you perceive this shift?**

Himmat Shah: It feels good. The art scene has evolved alongside economic growth. People now have the means to appreciate and collect art. Earlier, artists were barely recognized. Doctors, lawyers, and engineers were valued, while artists were often dismissed. Families discouraged their children from pursuing art because they feared it offered an uncertain future.

Today, that perception has changed. Art has

gained respect, and parents increasingly see artistic careers as viable, just like medicine or engineering. The international recognition of Indian art has also contributed to this transformation.

Art has always been essential to human life, and even when everything else fades, art remains. Creativity is intrinsic to us. Even small children instinctively shape birds and peacocks from leaves and grass. The world is full of beauty, and as artists, we are here to celebrate and express it. With new materials and technologies, artists today are doing incredible work, and the possibilities in art have never been greater.

**Your terracotta sculptures have a unique sensitivity, musicality, and poetic quality—something rarely seen in contemporary works using modern materials. Why is that?**

Himmat Shah: The essence of it lies in the nature of clay itself. Clay is a deeply personal and direct medium; it responds to the artist's touch and emotions. It is soft, pliable, and allows for endless possibilities. When I work with clay, there comes a moment when it feels as though the clay has its own heartbeat. I never work from pre-made drawings or moulds. I shape my forms directly, responding to the sensitivity of



the material. That is why I do not enjoy working with graphics; they lack that organic connection.

**You have also been involved with literature and writing, and your work carries a musical quality. How do you see the relationship between different art forms?**

Himmat Shah: I have always been deeply engaged with literature, especially poetry. Hindi poetry is rich, and through translations we now have access to extraordinary works from different languages. The new generation of writers is experimenting in exciting ways.

Music and theatre also influence me profoundly. At times, my work is shaped by poetry; at other times, by music. My drawings, in particular, have a strong musicality. Everything I read, hear, or see finds its way into my work in some form.

I believe that an artist creates a work of art in much the same way that a mother gives birth to a child. There is a similar organic process of creation.

**Public art in India often seems limited to statues of political figures and decorative fountains. What are your thoughts on this?**

Himmat Shah: True public art is still missing in India. We have yet to develop a proper understanding of environmental art—of how art can be placed within a space in a way that enhances its surroundings. There is very little awareness of what constitutes beauty in a public setting and how that environment can be enriched through art.

In contrast, countries such as the United States and those in Europe have invested in meaningful public art, with renowned artists creating exceptional works. Even in these countries, statues of political leaders exist, but they are often executed with artistic integrity.

In India, most political statues are poorly crafted. However, there have been some noteworthy efforts. Vadodara, for example, saw some good work because its Maharaja invited talented artists from abroad, helping to establish a tradition of fine craftsmanship.

**Do you think art is accepted in society? Do art and society influence each other?**

Himmat Shah: Art should be an integral part of life. When people engage with art, they develop a deeper sense of beauty, and this enriches their lives. Today, more people are displaying paintings and drawings in their homes, even if they can afford only prints.

Earlier, art was naturally woven into everyday life. Embroidered textiles, handcrafted objects, and clay figurines were common. In places such as Rajasthan and Kutch, people painted murals on their homes and created relief work. These traditions reflect an inherent artistic sensibility.

**In urban life, paintings often receive more appreciation than crafts. Why do you think this is?**

Himmat Shah: That is changing. Crafts are now gaining recognition, and a strong market is emerging. Many painters have also started exploring crafts because of this shift. Today, art is a viable profession; many artists are earning well and living comfortably.

Financial stability has also improved the quality of artistic work. When artists struggle financially, many of their creative abilities remain suppressed. Economic support allows them to explore and develop their full potential.

**Do you still have a dream project you wish to accomplish?**

Himmat Shah: At this stage, I simply want to rest. Age and health no longer allow me to work as I once did. For the past five or six years, I have not created anything new. In fact, I no longer even consider myself an artist.

**But moving to Jaipur—wasn't that motivated by a specific artistic purpose?**

Himmat Shah: No, there was no specific purpose. I wanted peace, and I did not want to live in Delhi anymore. Rajasthan appeals to me because of its rich artistic heritage. Its monuments, palaces, and craftsmanship inspire me. There is a sense of space and tranquillity, as well as a raw beauty in Rajasthan that is absent in Delhi.

The scarcity of resources in Rajasthan has also shaped its art. Its architecture—the mud and stone houses, the landscape, and the way of life—all feel like poetry. That is what draws me there.

**People often expect clear meaning in art. How much importance do you give to meaning in your work?**

Himmat Shah: I do not believe that art should have a direct or literal meaning. If art is required to explain something clearly, it becomes mere illustration. Art should be experienced and enjoyed. I do not create art to convey a message or bring about change. The purpose of art, for me, is to bring inner joy. No great transformation necessarily comes from art; its true role is to touch the soul and elevate the spirit.



# Jeram Patel

*Jeram Patel was born in 1930 at Sojitra in the Kaira district of Gujarat. He studied drawing and painting at Sir JJ School of Art, Mumbai between 1950 and 55, and typography and publicity design at Central School of Arts and Craft, London for two years till 1959.*

*Jeram Patel was one of the artists who turned around the Indian art scene and formulated a new visual identity and method of abstraction in the late 1950's and 60's. Alongside NS Bendre and Sankho Chowdhuri who set up the Baroda School of Art, Patel, with artists like Jagdish Swaminathan, initiated one of the greatest changes in Indian art as a founder member of the short-lived artists' collective Group 1890. He was till recent working as a professor at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Baroda University.*

*The artist passed away in 2016.*

Jeram Patel was an important figure in contemporary Indian art, particularly known for his abstraction. He was one of the founding members of Group 1890, alongside artists such as J. Swaminathan, Jyoti Bhatt, and Raghav Kaneria. His inclination toward abstraction was evident from the beginning, yet his art can perhaps be better understood as occupying the space between the figurative and the abstract—a meeting ground where the two continually merge into one another. It is true that his works do not contain the clearly recognizable human or natural images found in conventional figurative art. Yet the







forms he created possess an inherent character and structure that constantly evoke a variety of familiar and unfamiliar images.

Jeram Patel challenged the certainty and clarity of external, pictorial experience. He created forms in which a sense of restlessness appears not only at the formal level but also at psychological and emotional levels. In his work, form and formlessness seem to dissolve into one another.

For Jeram Patel, who worked with waterproof ink on paper, the medium was never an end in itself. Rather, he often seemed to rediscover himself by changing the medium. At one point, his burnt-wood works established his reputation, but then, almost suddenly, he seemed to reject the identity associated with them. He began working with enamel paint on wood, and when that too started to become identified with his artistic persona, he turned to ink on paper, taking his work to a new level.

Yet Patel did not accept being judged by a single standard or having one particular style or medium permanently identified with his art. Thus, when art lovers and collectors were deeply attracted to his ink works on paper, he abandoned them and once again

returned to burning wood, this time combining it with glass, in order to discover himself in a new form. By challenging the illusion of the supremacy of the medium, he was also, in a broader sense, questioning the growing importance and apparent necessity of material things in life. A medium is ultimately a material; its significance depends on how, how much, and why an artist chooses to use it. It is therefore worth noting that despite the differences between his various media, there is a fundamental similarity in the underlying forms of his works. This continuity becomes an essential part of his artistic identity.

His art, which maintains a remarkable balance between the economy of material and the abundance of creativity, is more concerned with the inner form of contemporary human beings than with their external appearance. The external form may be anything—beautiful or distorted—but the true form is internal. It is the beauty of the inner self that ultimately makes the individual, and society as a whole, beautiful.

In Patel's works made with waterproof ink on paper, the forms that emerge sometimes appear human and at other times resemble animals. There is a little of the animal in every human being, and a little of

the human in every animal. In this sense, Jeram Patel seems to be searching for a kind of biological truth. His forms often resemble animated images floating in the air. There is no clearly defined surface or ground in his paintings; everything appears to be suspended in an empty space.

Those whom we regard as human beings, and from whom we expect humane behaviour, can suddenly appear before us as man-eaters. This does not merely expose the darker realities of Indian society; it also evokes the disturbing reality of the international political landscape, revealing a face that is often concealed beneath the surface of civilization.

In this way, Jeram Patel's works open up possibilities for numerous discourses. One of the marks of a great artist is precisely this ability to allow viewers to generate multiple interpretations and conversations around the work. Art can transform the viewer from an existing state of consciousness into another psychological and sensory state. Patel's work possesses this quality in a particularly powerful way.

One of the defining characteristics of his art is the dynamism of his forms. Whatever kind of form he creates—whether it evokes the human figure or the shape of an animal or bird—it never appears lifeless. There is always a sense of life and movement within it. Many artists who work primarily in a figurative mode and create highly vivid, almost photographic representations are nevertheless unable to bring into their work the inner movement of life that Jeram Patel achieves through remarkably minimal means.

Patel himself referred to his ink works on paper as “drawings.” Yet it does not seem entirely adequate to call them merely drawings, because they are complete and independent paintings in their own right. In his works—particularly those made with enamel paint on wood—we sometimes encounter forms resembling toy puzzles, while in the drawings, alongside puzzle-like structures, we also find images suggesting fragmentation or dismemberment of the human body. Many forms in Patel's work seem at one moment completely familiar and at another as though they have emerged from an unknown world. His is a world of familiarity and unfamiliarity, where imagination and reality coexist. Reality is not merely what is visible. What remains unseen can sometimes constitute a larger and more profound reality. What appears before our eyes may, in fact, be an illusion of reality rather than reality itself. Jeram Patel's art brings this tension



between the visible and invisible, between reality and its illusion, into focus.

He refused to accept the limitations imposed by medium, fixed style, or easy simplification. His desire to remain independent also liberates the forms that emerge in his work. His figures often seem to float or fly in space. Although they remain connected to one another, they retain their individual freedom.

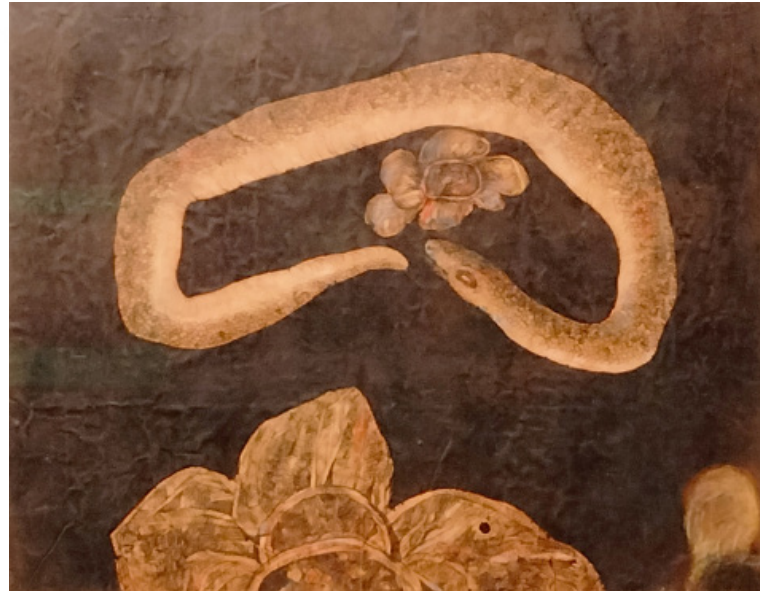
There are also numerous motifs from folk art within his forms, but they do not appear in their original forms. Patel reworked them through his own distinctive visual language, giving them new identities that bring them closer to contemporary contexts.

By bringing form and formlessness together, Patel's works also free the viewer from the constraints of preconceived experience and predetermined meaning. They do not impose a single interpretation. Instead, they awaken the viewer and encourage movement toward new experiences and new meanings. In this sense, Jeram Patel's art is not merely an exploration of form; it is also a process of transforming the way we see and experience reality.

This is perhaps the great strength of his art. With minimal materials and limited visual means, Jeram Patel creates a world in which the boundaries between form and formlessness, familiarity and unfamiliarity, reality and illusion, stillness and movement, and human and animal remain constantly fluid. His art does not end with a conclusion; it leaves the viewer within an experience where meanings continue to emerge and change.

Perhaps, therefore, Jeram Patel's art does not exist simply between form and formlessness. It exists at the point where the two become one.





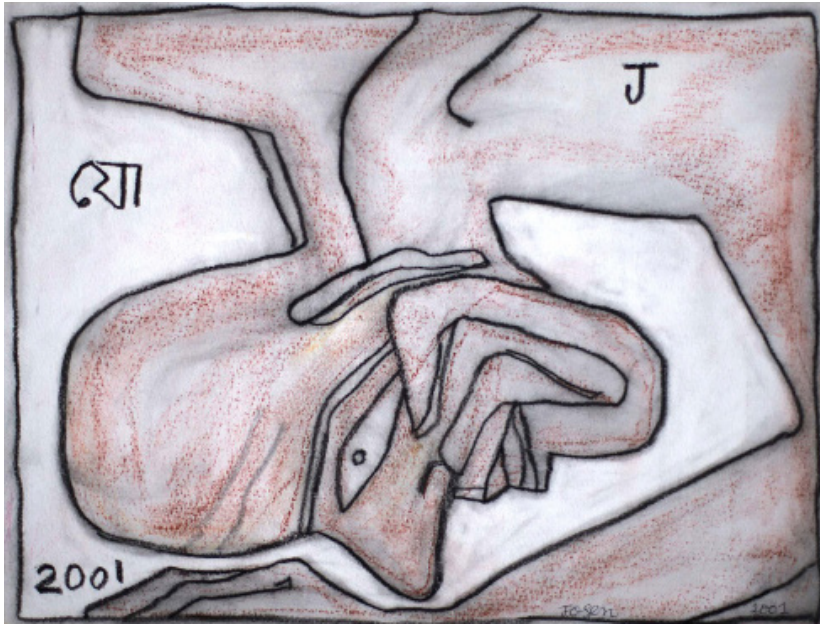
## Jogen Chowdhury

**J**ogen Chowdhury occupies a distinctive position in modern Indian art through his ability to blur the conventional distinction between drawing and painting. In his practice, line, colour, surface, and figuration function together as an expressive visual language through which personal memory, historical trauma, social violence, and psychological experience are explored. His art is deeply rooted in the realities of Bengal and India, particularly the Bengal famine, Partition, communal violence, political instability, and social inequality. However, his works rarely illustrate these events directly. Instead, historical experiences are transformed through distortion, symbolism, irony, and formal experimentation into images with broader human significance.

The human figure is central to

*Born in 1939 in Faridpur, Bengal, Jogen Chowdhury studied at the Government College of Art and Crafts, Kolkata, from 1955-60, followed by a stint at L'Ecole Nationale Superior des Beaux-Arts, Paris, in 1965-57 on a French Government Scholarship. He was appointed as a textile designer on the Handloom Board in Chennai. In 1970, he joined the Calcutta Painters Group. His first collection of poems Hridoy Train Beje Othey was also published in the same year.*

*He quit his job at the Madras Handloom Board in 1972 to join the Art Gallery of Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi as a Curator.*



Chowdhury's artistic vocabulary. Bodies lying on the ground, wounded figures, scenes of violence, and representations of interpersonal aggression recur throughout his work. These images go beyond descriptions of physical suffering and become meditations on vulnerability, mortality, power, and social violence. His early works often used relatively recognizable and realistic forms, but even then there was an interest in the psychological dimensions of human existence. Gradually, the external body became a vehicle for expressing internal anxiety and collective trauma.

One of the most recognizable features of Chowdhury's practice is his use of dramatic, continuous, and meandering lines. His reputation as the "master of unbroken lines" comes from this distinctive technique, especially visible in his ink and pastel works. His lines do not merely outline the body; they define, distort, compress, and psychologically charge it. Figures often appear trapped within a network of marks, creating a tension between containment and instability. The line therefore becomes more than a formal element: it registers the pressures imposed upon individuals by society, history, and time.

Chowdhury's distortion of the human body is equally important. His figures may be elongated, compressed, contorted, or anatomically exaggerated. These distortions are not simply departures from academic realism but part of his critical vocabulary. The deformation of the body becomes a visual equivalent of distorted

social and psychological realities. Through this transformation, ordinary anatomical forms acquire unfamiliar meanings, allowing the artist to express complex experiences of fear, suffering, alienation, and uncertainty.

A significant aspect of Chowdhury's work is his ability to derive unusual meanings from ordinary forms and situations. His imagery frequently draws upon Bengali culture, local social experience, domestic situations, and everyday life. Yet these references are transformed into symbols of universal concerns such as violence, desire, mortality, gender, alienation, and human vulnerability. His art therefore constantly moves between the particular and the universal. Bengal and Indian social experience remain essential to his work, while the meanings of his images extend beyond their immediate cultural context.

An acute awareness of historical time, or "epoch consciousness," is fundamental to his practice. His images emerge from specific historical and social circumstances but are not limited to them. Historical experience is transformed into a broader visual language, enabling an image rooted in a particular moment to acquire universal resonance. This combination of historical specificity and wider human significance is one of the major strengths of his art.

The Bengal School influenced some aspects of Chowdhury's early development, particularly his engagement with Indian cultural



and pictorial traditions. However, his mature work moves beyond revivalist nationalism and develops an individual modernist language. His art remains connected to Bengali cultural identity while also engaging with international modernism and twentieth-century figurative art. The result is neither purely regional nor simply cosmopolitan, but a form of modernism grounded in local history and experience.

Chowdhury's art is strongly responsive to the social conditions of his time, although it does not usually adopt the direct language of political propaganda. His early association with the Communist Party is relevant to his social consciousness, but his artistic practice cannot be reduced to political ideology. His concern with ordinary people and social inequality is expressed primarily through perception and representation. Social reality influences the mood, structure, and conceptual direction of his images rather than becoming a straightforward political message.

This separation between political ideology and artistic practice allowed Chowdhury to

experiment freely with form. His treatment of the human figure gradually moved from descriptive representation toward distortion and psychological condensation. Instead of reproducing the visible world, he created an alternative visual reality in which the tensions of contemporary existence became visible. His work therefore encourages viewers to look beyond the surface of an image and consider the social structures of inequality, violence, injustice, and vulnerability underlying it.

The symbolic complexity of Chowdhury's imagery becomes particularly evident when seemingly simple scenes are examined closely. For example, an image of a man cutting a woman's chest and abdomen with a knife may initially appear to represent gendered violence. The presence of a fetus within the woman's womb, however, expands the image's possible meanings to include female foeticide, patriarchal violence, destruction of future generations, and even humanity's destructive relationship with nature. Such imagery demonstrates how Chowdhury's





works resist a single interpretation.

His paintings and drawings often operate like poetry, relying on suggestion, metaphor, ambiguity, and association. The viewer becomes an active participant in the production of meaning. A recognizable figure provides an immediate point of connection, but distortion, gesture, posture, and surrounding space prevent the image from becoming a simple statement. The viewer moves from recognition to interpretation and is encouraged to look again.

This interaction between visual beauty and conceptual disturbance is fundamental to Chowdhury's work. His drawings may appear simple and elegant, but their apparent simplicity conceals considerable psychological and symbolic complexity. As Shakti Burman has observed, there is a simplicity and beauty in Chowdhury's drawings. Yet the beauty of the line frequently exists alongside disturbing subjects involving violence, death, anxiety, and social contradiction. This tension makes his work particularly compelling.

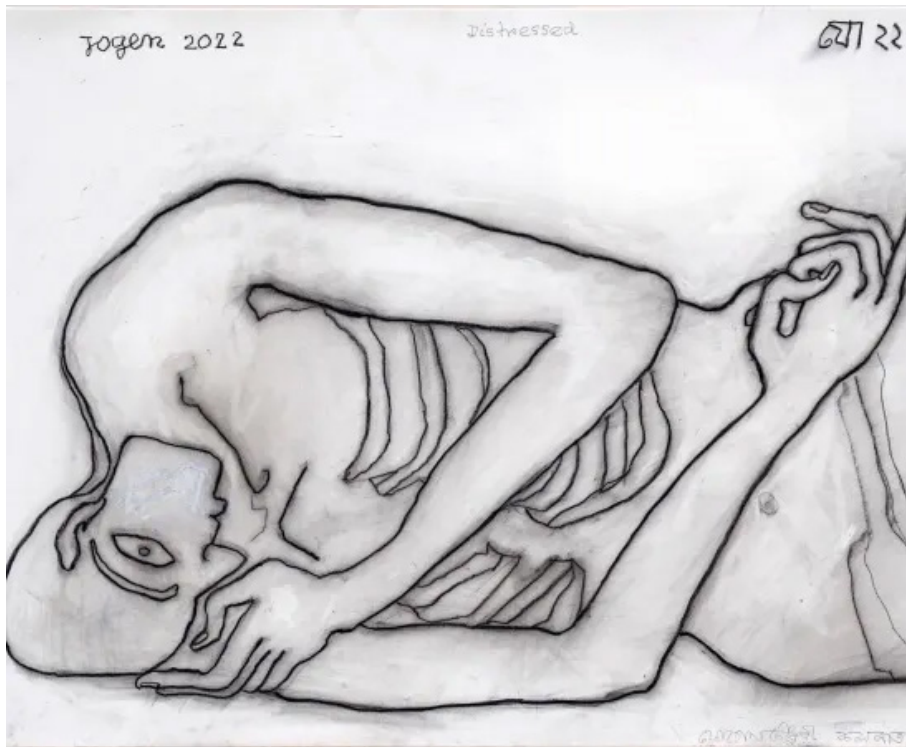
The development of distortion in

Chowdhury's art corresponds with his increasing concern with psychological and social realities. The body gradually ceases to be merely anatomical and becomes psychological, historical, and political. His engagement with poetry, especially the work of Jibanananda Das, also contributed to this transformation. Jibanananda's exploration of landscape, memory, alienation, modernity, and historical consciousness offered Chowdhury a way of perceiving reality beyond literal representation. His paintings consequently share with poetry an openness to ambiguity and multiple meanings.

Cross-hatching is another important feature of his mature practice. The accumulation of marks gives his figures a dense, tactile surface and creates an atmosphere of psychological tension. The body appears to emerge from or become entangled within a web of lines. Cross-hatching therefore contributes not only to texture but also to the emotional and conceptual intensity of the work.

Although Chowdhury has worked in pastel, charcoal, watercolour, oil, ink, and other media, line remains the central organizing principle of





*In his drawings, line carries structure, movement, texture, mood, and meaning.*

his mature visual language. In his drawings, line carries structure, movement, texture, mood, and meaning. As a result, the distinction between drawing and painting becomes increasingly unstable. Drawing is not simply preparation for painting; it becomes an independent form of artistic thought.

His sketchbooks provide important evidence of this process. Preliminary sketches, repeated studies, variations in pose, and compositional experiments demonstrate that the apparent spontaneity of his finished lines is supported by sustained observation and formal investigation. His self-portraits and personal images similarly reveal the connection between individual and collective experience. The individual body often becomes representative of a broader psychological condition in which private emotion and historical memory intersect.

The reclining or collapsed figure is particularly significant. Such bodies can be interpreted as images of exhaustion, social vulnerability, and historical trauma. Rather than depicting an event directly, Chowdhury often captures its psychological aftermath. His representations of women similarly engage with gender, patriarchy, sexuality, reproduction, vulnerability, and violence. These subjects are rarely reduced to one social statement; instead,

the female body becomes a site where several forms of cultural and social anxiety converge.

Chowdhury's response to contemporary politics is likewise indirect. Rather than reproducing recognizable public events, he creates images capable of evoking several historical situations at once. Violence represented in one context can therefore become a metaphor for violence more generally. This approach allows his works to remain historically relevant while acquiring a wider symbolic life.

Although Chowdhury is primarily recognized as a figurative artist, abstraction is also an important dimension of his practice. Gesture, colour, line, and movement can operate independently of recognizable imagery, while abstract structures frequently appear within his figurative works. His figures remain identifiable but can simultaneously function as metaphors for fear, isolation, violence, desire, and historical trauma. Thus, figuration and abstraction are not opposites in his art; recognizable forms become starting points for psychological and conceptual abstraction.

Ultimately, Jogen Chowdhury's significance lies in his ability to transform the ordinary into the unsettling and the local into the universal. His art is deeply rooted in Bengal, the experience of Partition, Indian social realities,



*The enduring power of his work lies in the tension between beauty and disturbance.*

and the political anxieties of his time. Yet these specific experiences are transformed through distortion, line, cross-hatching, symbolism, and ambiguity into a sophisticated visual language.

His “unbroken line” should therefore be understood not merely as a stylistic signature but as a conceptual instrument. It connects the body with its environment, the individual with society, and the present with historical memory. The line records both the visible contours of the body and the invisible pressures acting upon it. Through this continuous movement, Chowdhury turns drawing into a form of social and psychological inquiry.

The enduring power of his work lies in the tension between beauty and disturbance. His paintings and drawings initially attract through their elegant lines, formal economy, and visual inventiveness, but sustained attention reveals a world of damaged bodies, fractured identities, violence, memory, and social contradiction. His art therefore demands active participation rather than passive observation. Its meanings emerge through the interaction between image, history, and the viewer’s own experience.

Chowdhury’s importance extends beyond his reputation as a major Indian figurative artist or the “master of unbroken lines.” His practice demonstrates how drawing can become painting, how figuration can contain abstraction, how local experience can acquire universal meaning, and how aesthetic beauty can coexist with social critique. In his art, the human body is never merely a body; it becomes a record of history, a site of violence, a repository of memory, and a metaphor for the fragile condition of human existence.







## Krishen Khanna

**K**rishen Khanna, a genre painter and a narrator who weaves and spins images out of the fragments of time was born on the year 1925 at Lyallpur, now Faisalabad in Pakistan. His art practice is embedded in the unfoldment of his own life experiences. With his colleagues, he belongs to the generation that experienced painting and independence, painting for independence and painting from a position of independence.

In a paradox, his art springs from the observation of life lived around himself but it is not an intimate act of confession or self examination. In this way, Khanna is central to his own practice as mediator and interpreter but never as a subject. He assumes the position of the 'katha vachak' or narrator, looking outward to the other rather than the self. The central image then is of the artist as commentator, who through painted gesture and

narrative seems to set up threads of connectivity. To all families, like his own which suffered the ravages of the Partition, the accumulation of family and community narratives, of loss and survival became like a bank of stories, shared and adapted over the years. It was partition that drove the first wedge of displacement and deep anxiety into everyday experience of many young Indians growing in the Punjab but for Krishen, the actual sense of displacement came much earlier during his schooling in England at the Imperial Services College. When war broke out, shelling and air raids became a part of the student's experience.

He returned to Sultan and then joined the Government College at Lahore where he studied English literature. The violent displacement from their home was compounded with Krishen's need to seek work. He befriended the artists who made





up the core of the Progressive Artists Group - Husain, Souza and Raza with his appointment at the Grindlays Bank. From the late 1940's, he began to exhibit his work at the Bombay Art Society and exhibited with the Progressives at the Jehangir Art Gallery in 1951 following his invitation to their show in 1949. Krishen's banking career that spanned the decade of the 1950s at the Madras and Kapur represents another idyllic period of a family of young children, and his growing fascination for Indian classical music, which he introduced as a subject in his

paintings. He also did several paintings on the subjects of death and displacement and revealed the first indication to paint subjects from myth and history. In a critical decision to become a full-time painter and to abandon his career as a banker, he came to Delhi in the early 1960s with

a family of three small children and his wife Renu and lived for several years with his parents.

Krishen's introduction to allegory and religious symbolism is buried in a childhood memory. When his father returned from his doctoral studies in England in 1932, he brought with him a copy of Da Vinci's *The Last Supper* which he keenly studied. He

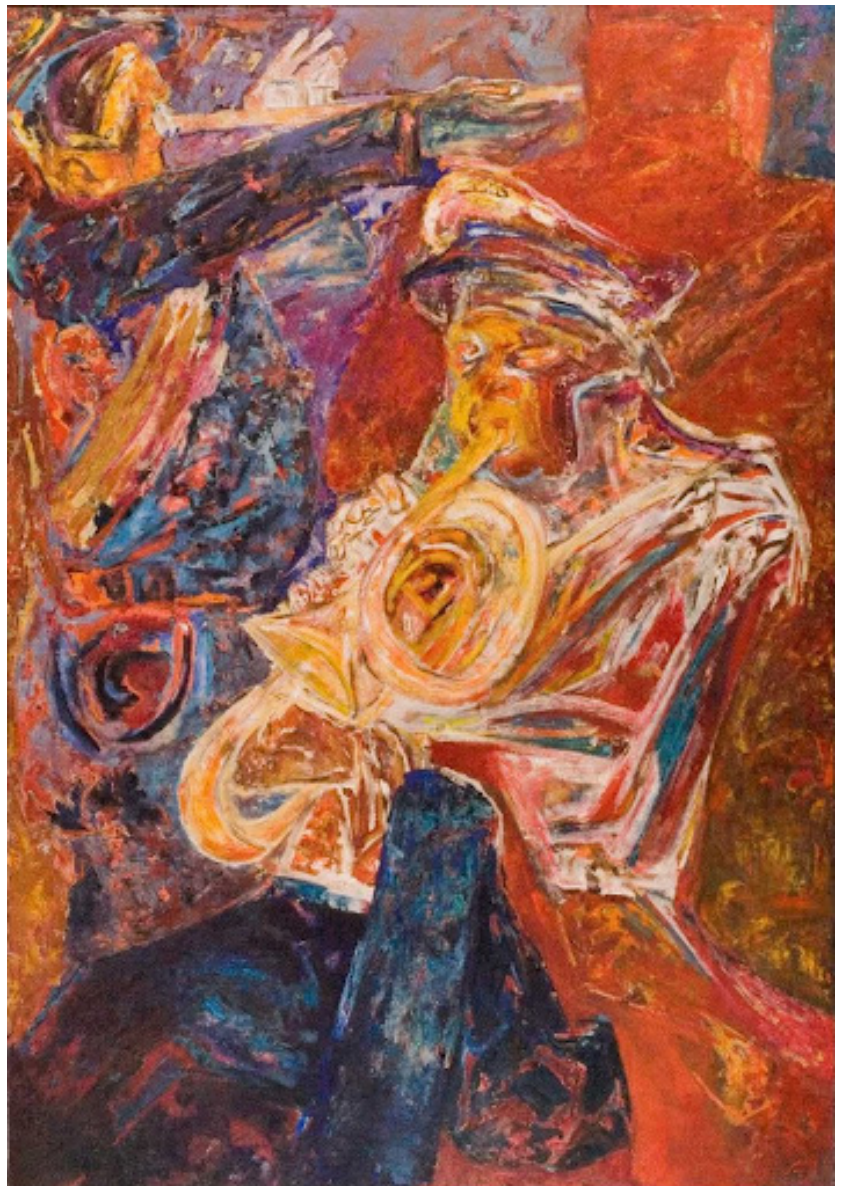




spent summer holidays at the vicarage of the Franciscan Brother, Joseph Gardener who reinforced his readings of the Bible. This gentle figure is what inspired his first painting of St. Francis, a recurring subject in his painting. From the late 1960s, he engaged in a series of paintings on Christ that start with The Last Supper, and Garden at Gethsemane and gradually culminate in Betrayal, Christ's Descent from Cross, Pieta and Emmaus. The series gains significance not only because of its appearance during the emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi but because of the kinship it shares with Krishen's other work of the 1970s.

He became an artist-in-residence at the American University, Washington DC. In 2010, a retrospective of his work at the Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi was exhibited. His other solo exhibitions were held in London, in 2005 and 2007; Mumbai 2004; New Delhi, 1994; and New Delhi, 2001, 1966, 64, 60, 59 and 58. His works were also included in exhibitions in galleries in India and New York in 2001 and 2002.

In 2011, the Government of India awarded him with the Padma Bhushan; in 2004 he received the Lalit Kala Ratna from the President of India; and in 1997 he received the Kala Ratna from the All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society, New Delhi. Khanna lives and works in New Delhi.







## Lalitha Lajmi

Lalitha Lajmi passed away on 13th Feb. 2023 in Mumbai. She was born on 17 October 1932 in Calcutta. In contemporary Indian art, Lalithaji has been such an artist who expressed feminine identity differently in her paintings. Her art was a kind of depiction of dramatic situations in life. In her art, Lalitha ji expressed the tension between man and woman on the one hand, and on the other hand gave expression to the emotionality of the relationship between the mother and her children, especially the daughter. She used to compose the picture like a scene in a play. Despite being the sister of legendary filmmaker Guru Dutt,

she never thought of acting in films. However, she made a guest appearance in Aamir Khan's film *Taare Zameen Par*. Her daughter Kalpana Lajmi is a well-known filmmaker.

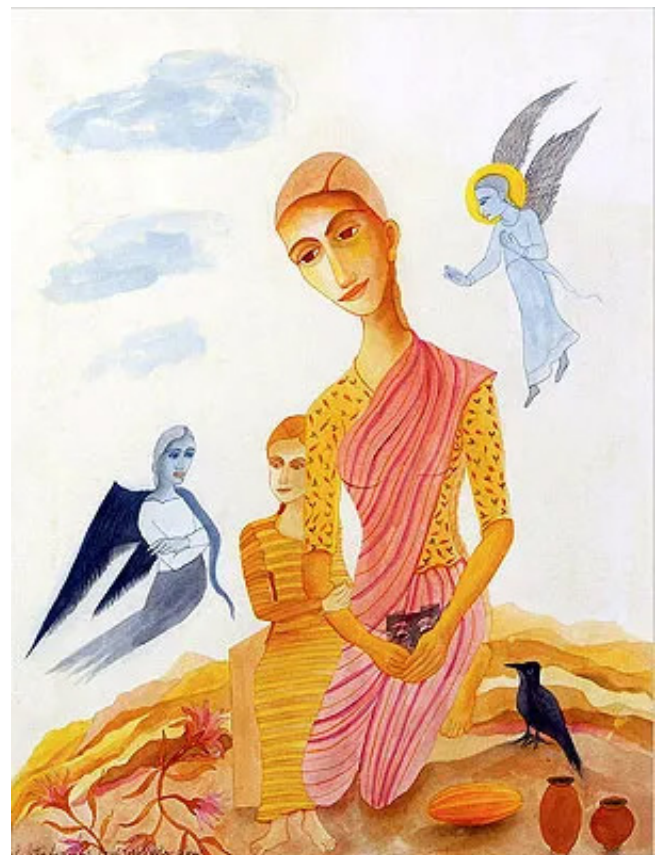
The watercolor paintings of Lalitha ji are famous. In these paintings, she created human relations in both their forms of tension and attachment. The clown has been a subject of her paintings which conveys a dual personality. By showing the man as a clown, she exposed his double character. Masks are seen in many of her paintings, even with women. It is clear from this that she did not forget that there can be duality in the personality of a





woman. The composition of mother and daughter is found in many of her paintings. In some, the mother depicted is seen as protective of her daughter, while in some, she gives her the power to fly in the open space.

Looking at the structure of Lalitha ji's paintings, we can see the inspiration of Picasso and Marc Chagall in many places. A girl riding a bicycle, a man dressed as a clown, and standing men and seated women poses are some of the compositions. This is because dramatic structures are very common in the works of Marc Chagall and Picasso. Picasso used to create a sense of drama even in still-life. Marc Chagall's circus as well as other theatrical performances can be seen here. Due to this, there is a sense of dynamism in his paintings whereas painting is a still moment of life. There is no desire to compare Lalitha ji with Picasso and Chagall here. There is no point in the comparison between artists of different times or between contemporary artists.





All the artists express different aspects of human life in their way of which some are common. Despite living in different cultures and geographical conditions, there is a surprising similarity in some situations in human life. This is the reason why we find similarities with many artists in the world.

It was probably Guru Dutt's influence or it was an instinct somewhere in her that she composed each picture like a frame in a cinema. Many of her paintings, if seen together as a series, would seem like we are watching a still film. This artistic quality was later reflected in the films of his daughter, filmmaker Kalpana Azmi. Dramatic elements abound in the works of both Lalitha ji and Kalpana ji. Dramaticism happens not only in theater or film but also in life, which creates an impression of dynamism in Lalithaji's paintings. Performance can be seen in her paintings at two levels, the level of emotion and the level of body language. Just as an actor or actress presents

a character in a play, similarly Lalitha ji used to create characters in her paintings. Life is also a drama. This world is a big stage on which we are playing our respective roles. Lalithaji kept expressing this thing in pictorial language.

The relatively long figure of a woman in her paintings was considered an expression of feminine aspirations. But this tall figure, which was often taller than the male figure, also represents the Indian family and the role of women in maintaining and managing it. Instead of women's liberation, women's consciousness was their main voice.

Lalitha ji was a very sensitive and kind-hearted artist. Once in 2015, when I was living in Mumbai, I had the opportunity to meet and interact with him at Jehangir Art Gallery. Like her art, she was clear about life and human relations. I still remember her words that an artist should be like his art. You create something and live something else, this duality takes you nowhere.







Madhvi Parekh





Madhvi Parekh's art is deeply rooted in folk life—the folk life woven into memory, childhood experience, stories, rituals and the visual culture of rural Gujarat. One of India's most distinctive artistic voices, Parekh (b. 1942) has, over more than six decades, developed an artistic language that remains remarkably independent of dominant movements, trends and schools. Though she is a self-taught artist, her work reveals a sophisticated engagement with both indigenous traditions and modern art. At its heart, however, her practice remains intensely personal: an imaginative reconstruction of the world she encountered during her childhood in Sanjaya, Gujarat.

Most of us carry memories of folk life, whether consciously or otherwise. Yet these memories often remain dormant, absorbed into the background of everyday experience. For Parekh, they have become the very foundation of artistic expression. The village life she witnessed as a child, the stories she heard, the rituals she encountered and, importantly, the images

painted on village walls became a visual inheritance that continued to resurface throughout her career. Her art can therefore be understood not as a straightforward representation of folk culture, but as a process of remembering, transforming and reinventing it.

This relationship between memory and imagination gives Parekh's work its distinctive character. Her paintings appear to emerge organically rather than from a predetermined intellectual programme. As she has observed, she does not pre-plan her paintings; instead, she paints what comes naturally to her. Her subjects arise from memory, childhood stories and her immediate surroundings. The result is a body of work that feels spontaneous and instinctive, while remaining remarkably controlled in its formal organisation.

Her sketchbooks provide an especially revealing insight into this process. The daily act of drawing is fundamental to her practice—"Even today, I draw every day." These drawings function almost as visual rehearsals in which images, characters and forms gradually discover their relationships. Many later

develop into larger compositions. The sketchbooks thus reveal that the apparent spontaneity of her paintings is supported by a sustained discipline of observation and drawing.

Madhavi Parekh's engagement with folk traditions is equally evident in her recurring imagery. Figures of Kali and Durga, animals, snakes, lions, magicians, circus performers and imaginary beings populate her visual world. These are not merely decorative motifs; they belong to a larger imaginative universe shaped by indigenous memory and popular visual culture. The recurring presence of Durga, in particular, connects her work to the rich traditions of folk and miniature painting across India. Her compositions sometimes recall the structural logic of Kalamkari and Pichwai, in which a principal figure occupies the centre while subsidiary figures, animals or ornamental elements populate the surrounding space. Yet Parekh does not simply imitate these traditions. She absorbs their principles of organisation and narrative and transforms them into a highly individual contemporary language.

Her relationship with modern art adds another important dimension to this practice. Paul Klee has been a significant influence, particularly in the playful treatment of form and the imaginative transformation of the visible world. The work of Joan Miró also provides an interesting point of comparison, especially in Parekh's use of simplified, animated and sometimes seemingly childlike forms. Her encounters with modern art during travels abroad broadened her visual vocabulary, while her exposure to Christian imagery and representations of the life of Jesus introduced further subjects into her repertoire. Nevertheless, these influences remain assimilated rather than imitative. Parekh's achievement lies precisely in her ability to encounter modernism without allowing it to eclipse her indigenous and personal sources.

Her association with her husband, the artist Manu Parekh, was an important early encouragement in her artistic journey. Her experiences in Kolkata also deepened her understanding of folk culture and exposed her to different artistic environments. Yet her development cannot be reduced to the influence of either her husband or the artists she encountered. She gradually established an independent visual language through an ongoing dialogue with folk artists, popular imagery and modern art. Her work is refreshingly free

from intellectual pretension. Its sophistication comes not from theoretical complexity but from the intuitive intelligence with which she brings disparate visual experiences together.

Colour is another defining feature of Parekh's work. Her palette is frequently vibrant and joyful, with strong reds, blues, greens and blacks recalling the brilliance of Indian folk traditions. Yet these colours are not simply stylistic devices. They are intimately connected to memory. Reflecting on her childhood in rural Gujarat, Parekh recalls the extraordinary light of nature—the setting sun transforming the world around her with a golden brilliance. Such experiences, absorbed during childhood, seem to have become an instinctive part of her visual vocabulary. Colour in her paintings therefore functions simultaneously as formal structure, emotional memory and cultural association. The surfaces of her paintings further reinforce this connection to rural experience. At various stages of her practice, Parekh has introduced textured backgrounds inspired by the walls she encountered in village homes. These surfaces evoke the material character of vernacular environments and suggest the physical presence of memory itself. At other times, however, she uses flat, solid fields of colour. The contrast between textured and untextured surfaces demonstrates the flexibility of her approach and prevents her engagement with folk aesthetics from becoming formulaic.

Perhaps the most compelling aspect of Parekh's art is its sense of play. Her figures seem liberated from the rigid logic of ordinary representation. Scale shifts, characters interact unexpectedly, and animals, humans and imaginary beings coexist within the same pictorial space. Rhythm and repetition frequently organise the composition, while central figures are surrounded by secondary forms that create an almost theatrical or narrative environment. Her paintings consequently seem to unfold like stories or fables, with each image containing the possibility of another.

This quality of playfulness is closely connected to Parekh's understanding of life itself. For her, the vibrancy of the things surrounding her is the source of her work. Her paintings represent different aspects of life as she encounters it. This emphasis on lived experience gives the work a remarkable freshness. Rather than imposing a fixed conceptual framework upon her subjects, she allows images to evolve through memory, intuition and association.





There is also a subtle sense of emancipation in many of her works. Her figures appear to exist outside the tyranny of mechanical time—the regulated, repetitive time of modern life. They inhabit an imaginative space where myth, memory, childhood and the present coexist. In this sense, Parekh's art offers not an escape from reality but an alternative way of experiencing it: one in which the ordinary can become strange, magical and newly alive.

Although her inspiration remains firmly connected to rural India, her artistic language is unmistakably contemporary. This tension between the indigenous and the modern is central to her achievement. Parekh neither romanticises folk culture nor treats it as a museum-like repository of motifs. Instead, she allows folk memory to remain fluid and transformative. Her paintings demonstrate how inherited visual traditions can survive not through literal repetition but through continual reinterpretation.

Madhavi Parekh's long exhibition history,









beginning in the early 1970s and extending across numerous solo and group exhibitions in India and abroad, reflects the sustained importance of her practice. Yet the significance of her work lies less in the duration of her career than in the consistency of her artistic inquiry. Across changing periods and contexts, she has continued to return to the same essential sources: memory, folklore, nature, childhood, storytelling and everyday life.

Ultimately, Madhvi Parekh's paintings are best understood as visual fables of memory. They emerge from the intersection of childhood experience, rural Gujarat, indigenous traditions, modern art and the constantly changing world around her. Her achievement lies in transforming these diverse sources into a language that is at once intimate and expansive, naïve in appearance yet formally sophisticated, deeply rooted in folk culture yet unmistakably contemporary. Parekh reminds us that folk life is not simply something inherited from the past. It can remain alive within memory, continually changing as it encounters the present. Her paintings give that memory form—playful, vibrant, mysterious and endlessly inventive. In doing so, she demonstrates that the most personal memories can become a powerful source of contemporary artistic expression.







## Meera Mukherjee



**I**n the history of modern Indian art, few artists have transformed tradition as powerfully and authentically as Meera Mukherjee. At a time when sculpture was considered a masculine domain and modern art was heavily influenced by Western aesthetics, Meera forged an artistic language that was deeply Indian, socially rooted, and technically innovative. Her work not only reshaped modern Indian sculpture but also challenged social conventions surrounding gender, craft, and artistic hierarchy.

The birth centenary celebrations of Meera Mukherjee have renewed interest in an artist whose legacy continues to inspire generations. An exhibition showcasing her bronze sculptures alongside works in terracotta, wood, marble, ceramics, and drawings demonstrates the extraordinary range of her creative practice. Although widely celebrated as a sculptor, Meera was also a painter; writer, researcher, teacher, and activist who believed that art must remain connected to people and lived experience.

Born with a passion for art, Meera joined the Indian Society of Oriental Art at the age of fourteen. However, like many women of her time, her artistic aspirations were interrupted by marriage and domestic responsibilities. Yet the monotony of conventional life could not suppress

*"I belonged to a country which also had a great tradition of its own... though I was at the moment living, learning and growing in the West, I should still find my own way to myself, rooted in the great Indian tradition."*

*— Meera Mukherjee*





her creative spirit. After separating from her marriage, she moved to Delhi and enrolled in Delhi Polytechnic, where she studied painting before discovering her true calling in sculpture. In 1947, she earned a diploma in drawing, graphics, and sculpture, laying the foundation for a remarkable artistic journey.

Choosing sculpture as a profession was itself an act of rebellion. In mid-twentieth-century India, sculpture—especially metal sculpture—was considered physically demanding work suitable only for men. Teachers and fellow students doubted whether a woman could manage the labour-intensive process involving moulding, casting, welding, and collaboration with male assistants. Meera Mukherjee shattered these assumptions with determination and skill. Through her work, she challenged the deeply embedded notion that women belonged only in “softer” artistic practices such as painting.

A turning point in her career came when

she received an Indo-German Fellowship to study at the Academia der Bildenden Künste in Munich. There she encountered European sculptural traditions and learned modern techniques of metal sculpture. Yet instead of imitating Western modernism, Meera began searching for a distinctly Indian artistic identity. Her mentor, Toni Stadler, encouraged her to rediscover the richness of Indian traditions rather than merely follow European trends.

That search eventually led her to Bastar in central India, where she encountered tribal artisans practicing the ancient Dhokra metal-casting technique, also known as the lost-wax process. The meeting transformed her art forever. Meera immersed herself in the lives and working methods of tribal metalworkers, learning not only their techniques but also their collective understanding of creativity and community. She adapted Dhokra casting into modern sculpture, giving traditional craft a new artistic vocabulary

and bringing tribal metalwork into the sphere of contemporary art.

What made Meera Mukherjee exceptional was not simply her use of indigenous craft traditions, but the respect with which she approached them. Unlike many modern artists who borrowed tribal motifs without acknowledging their creators, Meera worked closely with artisans and sought to build meaningful collaborations. She believed tribal artists deserved recognition as creative individuals rather than anonymous craftsmen. Through workshops, research, and activism across states such as Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, and Rajasthan, she worked tirelessly to empower artisan communities and preserve living craft traditions.

Her sculptures reveal a profound empathy for ordinary people. Fishermen hauling nets, women sewing, labourers at work, musicians lost in rhythm, weavers, dancers, and village communities became central subjects in her art. Meera celebrated the dignity of everyday life and the quiet strength of common people. Women, in particular, occupied a significant place in her work—not as decorative figures but as embodiments of resilience, labour, and inner power.

The textured surfaces of her sculptures, shaped through Dhokra casting, gave even modestly sized works a monumental presence. Her figures often appeared interconnected, emphasizing community and collective existence rather than isolated individuality. This reflected the influence of tribal social life, where cooperation and shared labour formed the basis of existence.

Beyond sculpture, Meera Mukherjee explored multiple artistic forms, including painting, graphics, terracotta, ceramics, woodwork, and writing. She maintained diaries that documented

her artistic process, philosophical reflections, and observations about society and education. Her scholarly engagement with craft traditions led to important publications such as *Folk Metal craft in India*, *Metal craft in India*, and *Metal Craftsmen in India*. As a Senior Research Fellow with the Anthropological Survey of India, she conducted extensive studies on metalworking communities across India and Nepal, helping document and preserve traditional knowledge systems.

Recognition gradually followed her extraordinary contributions. She held her first exhibition in 1960 and received the President's Award for Master Craftsmen in Metalwork. In 1992, she was honoured with the Padma Shree, one of India's highest civilian recognitions. Yet

perhaps her greatest achievement lies beyond awards and exhibitions. She fundamentally altered the conversation around Indian modern art by proving that modernity need not reject tradition. Instead, tradition itself could become a source of innovation.

Today, Meera Mukherjee stands as a pioneering figure who redefined sculpture in India. She broke gender barriers, elevated tribal craftsmanship, and created a visual language that was modern without

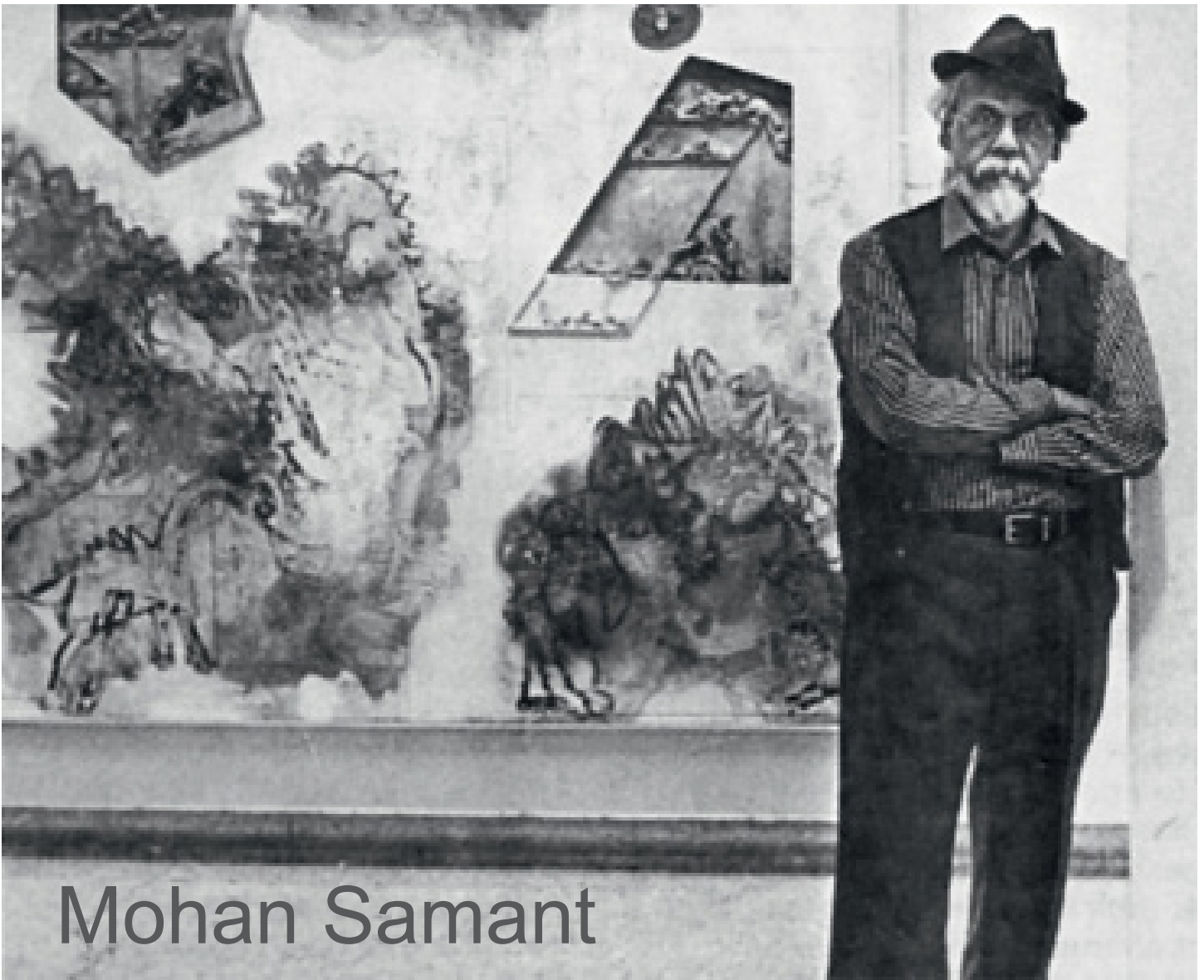
losing its cultural roots. Her art reminds us that true creativity emerges not from imitation, but from a deep engagement with one's own heritage, people, and lived realities.

In an era increasingly disconnected from handmade traditions and collective cultural memory, Meera Mukherjee's work remains profoundly relevant. She showed that art can be contemporary and rooted, personal and social, individual and collective. Above all, she demonstrated that modern Indian art could speak in its own voice—confidently, courageously, and authentically.









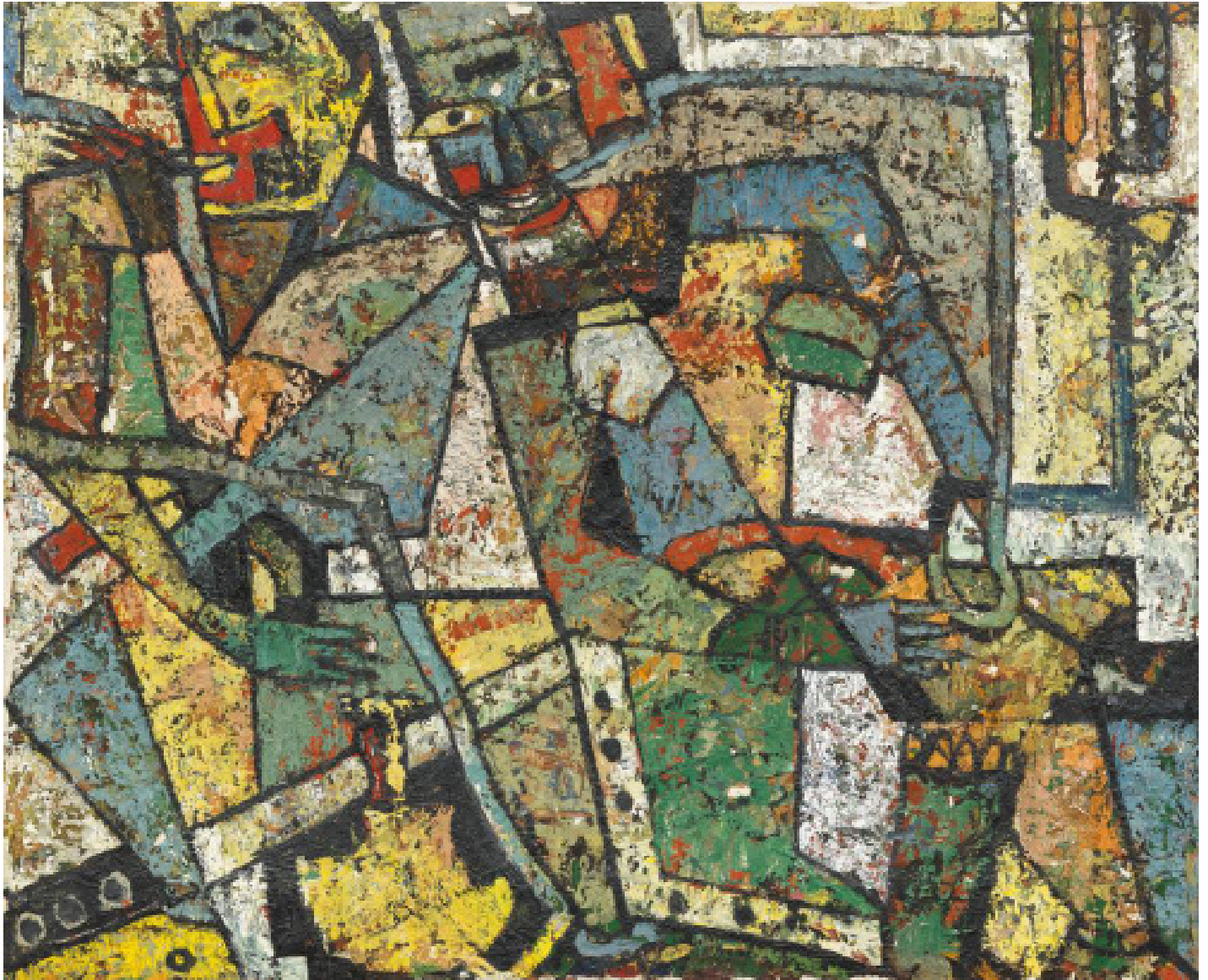
After India's independence, a new form of modern Indian art emerged in Mumbai in the form of the Progressive Artists' Group. While most members of this group were influenced by the art world of Paris, Mohan Samant and M. F. Husain developed their own artistic language inspired by Indian painting traditions.

Mohan Samant was born into a zamindar family in Mumbai. He graduated in 1952 from the Sir J. J. School of Arts. He received two of India's most prestigious art awards—the Gold Medal from the Academy of Fine Arts, Calcutta, and the Gold Medal from the Bombay Art Society. He worked in Italy for two years (1957–58) on a scholarship from the Italian government. Under the guidance of M. Palshikar, he studied the Basohli miniature painting tradition. In January 1959, he moved to New York on a Rockefeller grant. He passed away in New York in 2004.

In 1963, the renowned art historian and critic John Richardson included him among the 100 greatest artists in the world. Influenced by painters like Paul Klee and Picasso, Samant valued developing his own style and form. Although he was influenced by Western artists, he considered Indian artistic traditions more important. Samant once said, “You grow in what you keep creating continuously,” and “There are 25 different ways of painting, and when you stand before the canvas, 15 different forms can emerge. You do not repeat yourself.”

In the early 1950s, Samant joined the Progressive Artists' Group (PAG). While his fellow members drew their primary inspiration from Paris, Samant explored imagery from Egyptian tomb paintings, the murals of Ajanta, and Rajput miniature paintings, establishing a series of primal images in his work. His deep study of Basohli miniature painting helped him





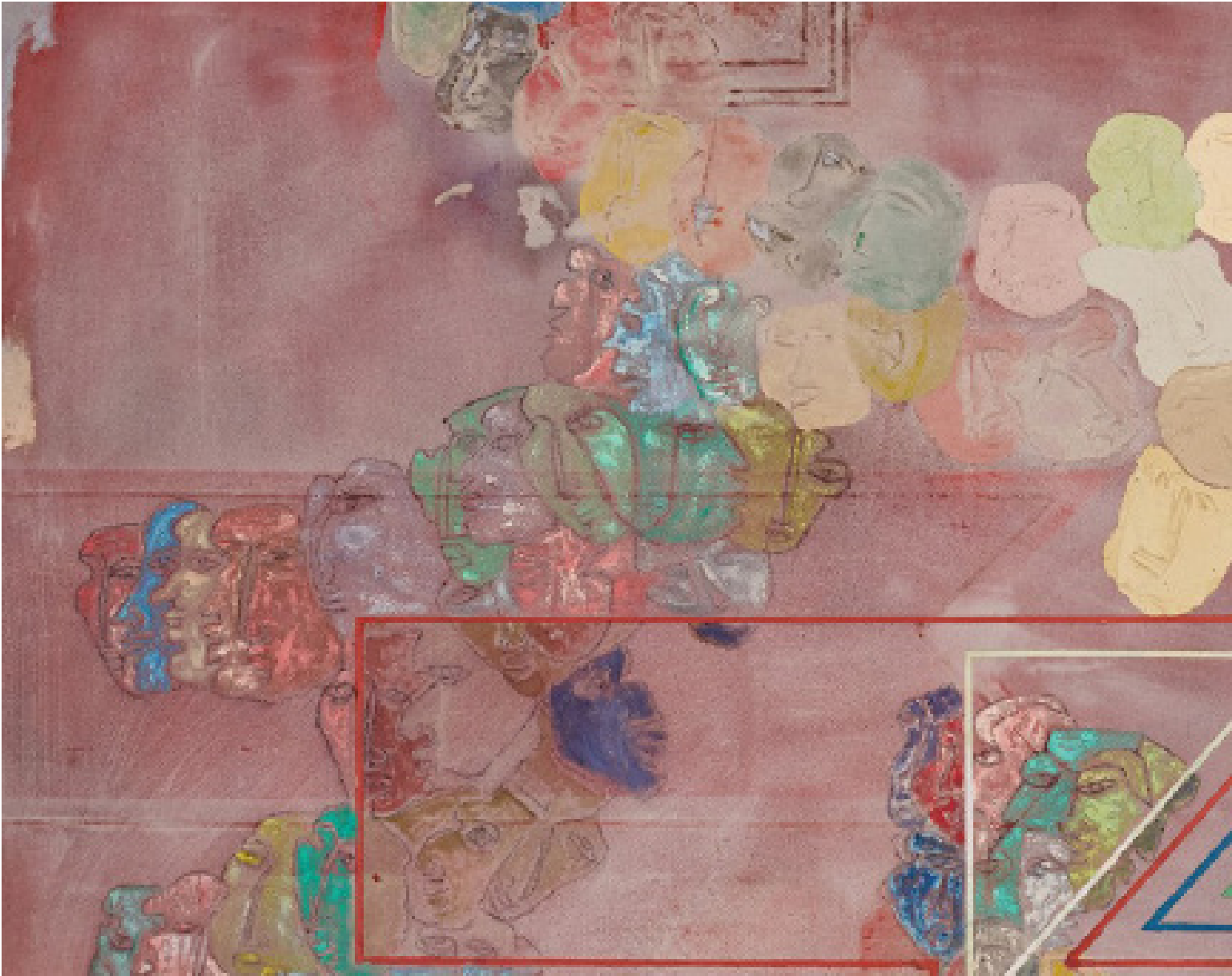
develop a visual language in which Western techniques were visible externally, but the spirit of the paintings remained Indian. The influence of Cubism can be seen in his works, though he used it in a distinct way. His compositions show only a partial use of Cubism. He created Indian themes by applying Cubist structures sometimes to human figures and sometimes to compositional elements.

Samant settled permanently in New York in 1968. In an interview, he mentioned spending hours at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where he continued to find powerful symbols in the collection of cultural heritage from around the world. He described his art as somewhat like “installation art”—“the only difference is that my installation exists within the frame.” This approach shows a strong inspiration from the murals of Ajanta and Ellora, as his works often depict an expanded narrative around a theme. Instead of single

figures, he preferred to create groups of figures.

From the beginning, Samant’s art involved combining multiple mediums. Along with merging decorative and abstract art, in the 1960s he experimented with textures by mixing sand and glue with paint. In the 1970s, he pasted pieces of paper onto canvas. In the 1980s, he began creating forms using wire, attaching them to the canvas to complete the artwork. In this way, he developed a unique mode of expression by integrating various materials. Abstraction appears both in the main forms and in the background of his works, making them multi-dimensional.

Samant was not only a painter but also deeply interested in music. The sarangi was his favorite instrument, which he practiced regularly. In this context, he said, “I do not practice the sarangi. I play it every day as if I am performing in a concert—sometimes very good, sometimes very bad.” Similarly, he did not rehearse

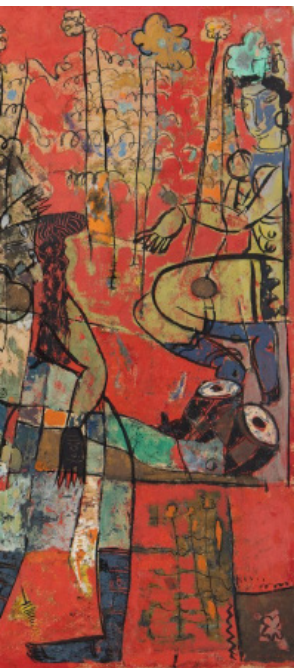


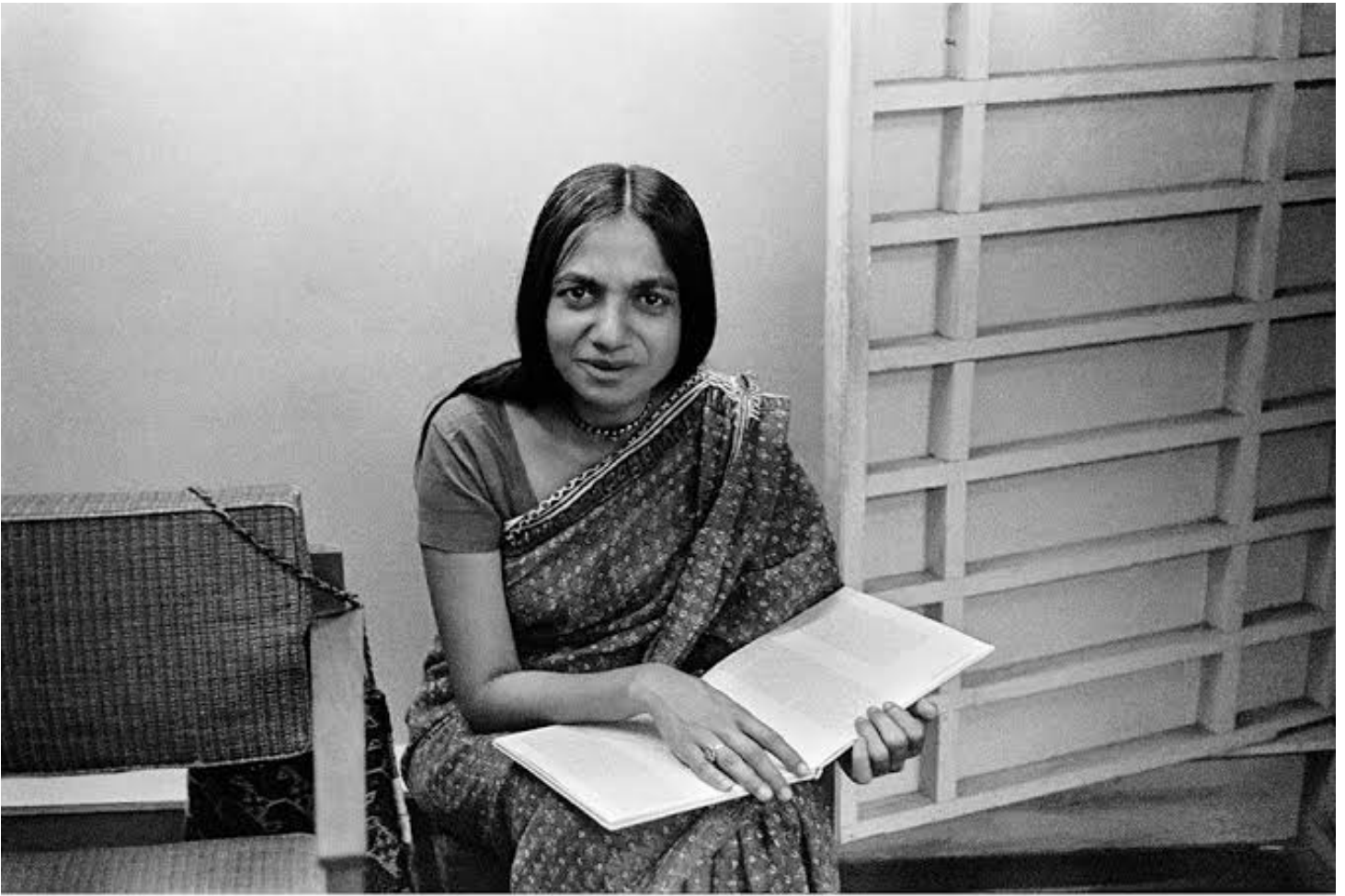




painting through drawing or sketching. He said, “I just paint, and if I don’t like it, I paint over the same canvas two or three times, or many times. I do not use drawing and sketching as preparation for painting; they are completely different works.” On May 18, 2003, he hosted an afternoon of music and art in his Manhattan studio, where he played Indian classical ragas on the sarangi surrounded by his paintings.

His major solo exhibitions include Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai (2000); Birla Academy of Art, Kolkata (1998); Birla Academy of Art and Culture, Mumbai (1997); Gallery B.A.I., New York (1994, 1995); Birthday Book, New York (1973 and 1975); Selected Artists Gallery, New York (1972); Pundole Gallery, Mumbai (1967); Gallery Chemould, Mumbai and Delhi (1966); Taj Art Gallery, Mumbai (1965, 1966); World House Galleries, New York (1961 and 1965); and the Rome Institute of Oriental Studies, Italy (1958).

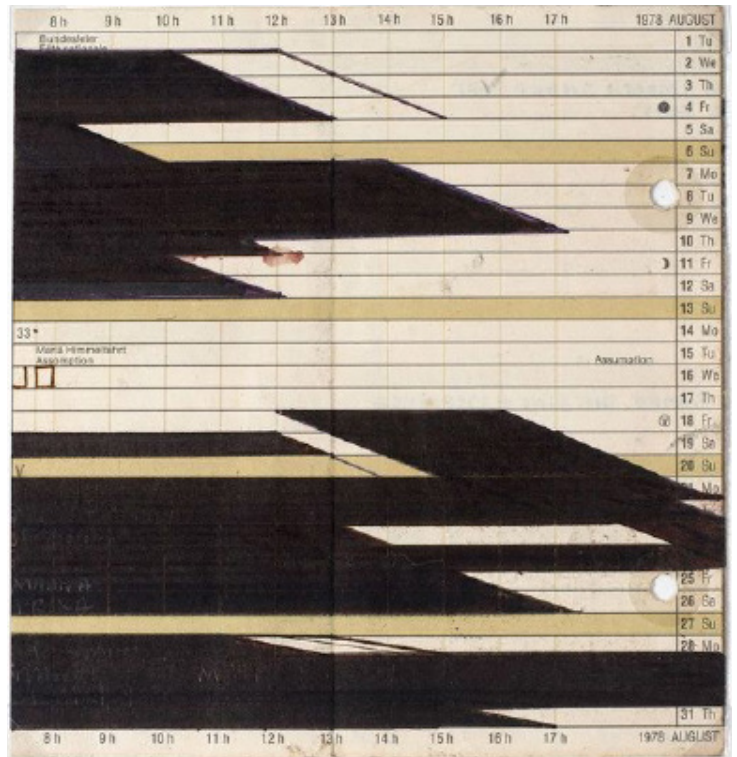




## Nasreen Mohamedi

Art does not merely bind human beings; it also liberates them. Familiar forms and figures in paintings and sculptures often anchor the viewer to a fixed meaning and experience, whereas abstract structures open up a freer realm of imagination and perception. The art of Nasreen Mohamedi embodies this very sense of liberation. Her works seem less concerned with the visible world and more engaged in exploring a subtle and mysterious realm that cannot be fully expressed in words.

Nasreen Mohamedi was born in Karachi in 1937 into a prosperous family. Around 1944, her family moved to Mumbai. Her father owned a photography equipment business in Bahrain, which nurtured her early interest in photography. As a teenager, she studied at Saint Martin's School of Art in London and later went to Paris on a





## The Art



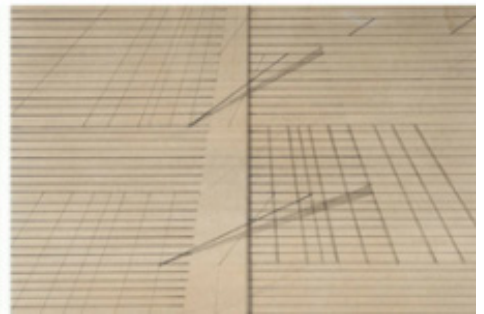
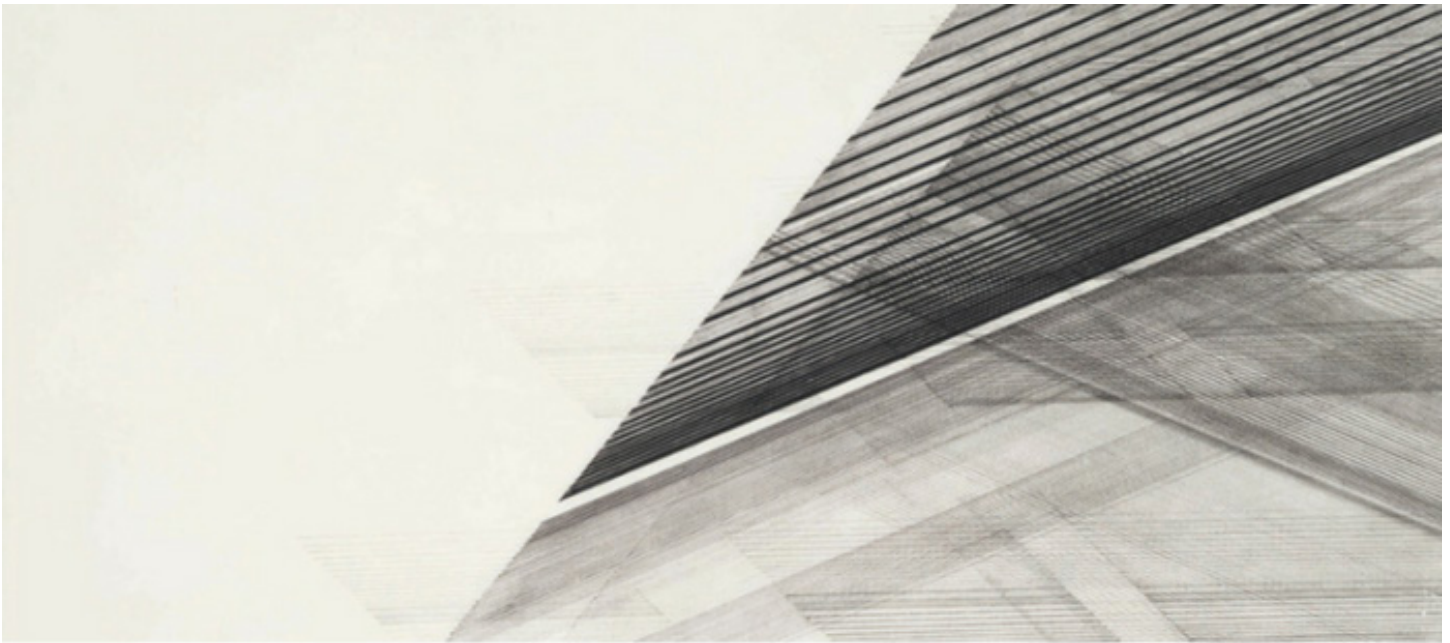
scholarship. Her travels across Europe and the Arab world deeply shaped her artistic sensibility. The desert, the sea, and architectural forms especially influenced her fascination with lines, empty spaces, and light.

After returning to Mumbai, she came into contact with artists such as Vasudeo S. Gaitonde and Jeram Patel. At the time, Indian modern

art was undergoing significant experimentation with abstraction. Gaitonde's art and his Zen-inspired ideas left a profound impact on Nasreen. Although she admired the works of M. F. Husain and Tyeb Mehta, her own artistic inclination from the beginning leaned toward minimalism, Zen philosophy, and Sufi thought.

Her early works reveal abstract





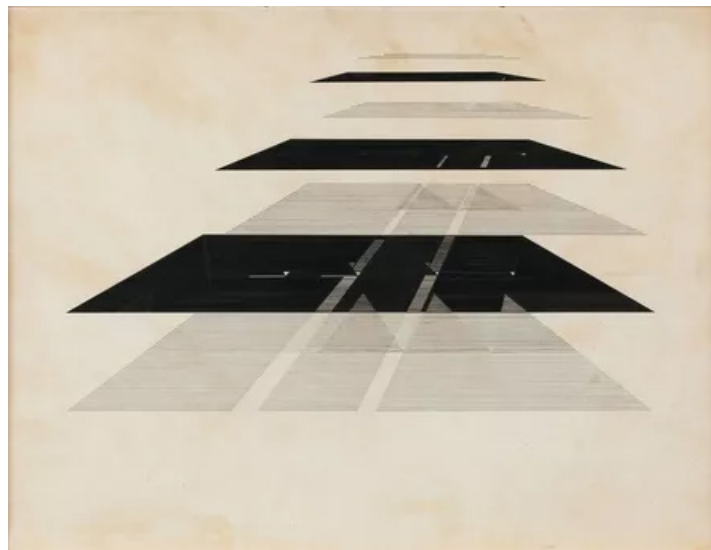
compositions inspired by nature. She was especially drawn to the shifting patterns created by sea waves on sand, the marks left by crabs along the shore, and the linear structures of the desert. For her, nature was not simply a visual experience but a rhythm that carried within it a sense of infinity and emptiness. Sufi philosophy, Mughal decorative motifs, and the geometry of Islamic architecture also informed her artistic language.

Nasreen Mohamedi holds a distinctive place in Indian modern art because she was among the first women artists in India to make abstraction her primary mode of expression. At a

time when most women artists focused on daily life, figurative imagery, and gendered experiences, Arpita Singh was one of the few who initially experimented with abstraction before later moving toward figurative narratives. Nasreen, in contrast, remained deeply committed to abstraction throughout her artistic journey.

A decisive transformation in her work came when she joined the Faculty of Fine Arts at Baroda University. The experimental atmosphere there and the intellectual exchange among artists gave a new direction to her practice. Gradually, she moved away from

color and began creating highly refined linear





compositions using pencil and graphite. Her drawings often suggest architectural structures, urban grids, or geometric expansions extending endlessly into space.

Many of her lines appear so faint and delicate that they seem suspended in emptiness. There is a sense of weightlessness in them. This is where her art resonates deeply with Zen philosophy, which emphasizes inner stillness and the liberated state of the mind. In Nasreen's work, empty space is as significant as the line itself. Rather than constructing objects, she creates mental and spiritual experiences through her compositions.

During her lifetime, Nasreen Mohamedi received admiration from fellow artists and critics, yet she did not achieve widespread recognition in galleries and the commercial art world. She herself showed little interest in establishing a formal theoretical framework around her work. It was only after her death in 1990 that the true significance of her art began to be fully appreciated. Since then, numerous exhibitions of

her work have been organized in India and abroad, and her art has been included in major museums and international exhibitions.

Nasreen was not only a painter but also a serious photographer and a thoughtful writer. Her photography, like her drawings, reflected a minimalist discipline and sensitivity to structure. She maintained detailed diaries filled with reflections on art, philosophy, and poetry. These writings contain references to figures such as Rainer Maria Rilke, Federico García Lorca, Albert Camus, and Friedrich Nietzsche. She was also deeply inspired by abstract artists such as Wassily Kandinsky and Paul Klee.

The most remarkable aspect of Nasreen Mohamedi's art is that it speaks through silence rather than spectacle. Her lines do not merely depict visible forms; they guide the viewer toward inner concentration, emptiness, and freedom. This is what makes her contribution to Indian modern art so unique—she transformed abstraction from a visual style into a profound spiritual experience.





## Prabhakar Kolte

Experimentation and the evolving self are the main protagonists of Prabhakar Kolte's art. For more than six decades, he has continually experimented with the possibilities of painting, moving from form to formlessness, from object to thought, and from sound to silence. His experiments have extended beyond the canvas to unconventional materials, processes, and methods. Today, he is admired as one of the foremost abstractionists of contemporary Indian art. His paintings often employ dripping colour, concealed layers, and partially exposed surfaces to create images that resist immediate recognition and interpretation. Kolte has continued to paint for more than sixty years without allowing prevailing opinions about art or his work to determine his artistic direction.

For a poet, poetry exists not only in words but also in the space between words. In a similar way, for a painter, a painting can exist in the spaces between colours and shapes on







the canvas. For an abstract painter, the painting is never simply the colours and shapes that appear before the viewer. According to Kolte, painting is not merely what one sees on the canvas; it is also what exists in the eyes of the painter. The script of a painting is colour and shape, while the script of a poem is language. Although their modes of expression are different, both painting and poetry are mediums through which thoughts and feelings can be expressed. It is in this sense that a painting is sometimes described as a story or a poem.

Kolte's abstract paintings resemble modern poetry, which is free from fixed rhyme and rhythm and therefore possesses an almost infinite capacity for expanding meaning. His paintings similarly refuse to settle into a single interpretation. Their meanings shift according to the experience, imagination, and sensibility of the viewer.

A painting is, above all, something to be seen. In poetry, the meanings of words provide

the reader with certain points of reference. This is not necessarily the case with Kolte's abstract paintings. His works do not generally present recognizable forms that can be connected to a specific context and followed toward a predetermined meaning. Kolte has also maintained a close association with poetry, and it is therefore not surprising that the texture and atmosphere of his paintings can recall modern poetry.

Looking at his paintings, one is often reminded of the poetry of Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh. The images in Muktibodh's poetry frequently move beyond the literal meanings of words and lead the reader into a mysterious and unfamiliar world. Something similar happens in Kolte's work. What unfolds on the canvas resembles a mystery. To enter that mystery, the viewer must make an effort, because the artist provides no formula for interpretation. Whereas words in poetry may sometimes function as clues or points of reference, Kolte's paintings



deliberately avoid such fixed directions. This is why his visual poetry appears even more mysterious.

Kolte often uses geometric shapes in his paintings, but these forms are frequently incomplete, like a poet leaving a line of verse unfinished. Just as an unfinished poetic line can open up an infinity of meanings, Kolte's incomplete lines and geometric forms leave possibilities open to the viewer. The painting does not end where the artist's brush stops; it continues in the imagination of the person looking at it.

The experiments Kolte conducted during the early stages of his career continue to be remembered and remain important to the history of Indian abstraction. He is regarded as one of the most significant abstract painters working in India, and the intellectual dimension of his art is particularly striking. His early canvases are often characterized by a single dominant colour in the background, over which lighter and more complex forms—both geometric and organic—are placed. In discussing his approach to abstraction, Kolte has emphasized the need to immediately

cover or suppress identifiable images so that his forms can function as pure forms rather than representations of recognizable objects.

Prabhakar Kolte was born in 1946 in Nerurpar, in Ratnagiri district, Maharashtra. He received his Diploma from the Sir J. J. School of Art, Mumbai, in 1968 and taught there from 1972 to 1984. His career as a painter and teacher has made him an important figure in the development of modern and contemporary Indian art.

Kolte's art can be understood as an art of seeing the invisible. His paintings do not contain scenes in the conventional narrative sense. There is no identifiable form that leads the viewer toward a particular story. He has expressed this philosophy in the memorable statement: "I don't see and paint, but I paint and see."

To see and paint is to reproduce what exists before the eyes—to begin with a visible, external experience. Kolte rejects this as the primary purpose of painting. Instead, he follows a more difficult path, one in which the invisible world becomes more compelling than the visible one. What is unknown and unseen attracts us



## The Art

precisely because it remains mysterious. Kolte attempts to reveal something of this mystery through painting, but never reveals it completely. His abstraction deepens rather than resolves the mystery.

If we look closely at his paintings, unfamiliar and unidentified forms seem to appear through thick lines and combinations of colour. His method ensures that the painting never opens itself completely. Just as words in a poem acquire new meanings through their associations with one another, colours in Kolte's paintings generate an expanding field of images and sensations.

He may begin by applying one colour to the canvas and then create non-representational forms with other colours. But the process does not end there. He often applies a deep layer of colour over the earlier surfaces, while deliberately leaving parts of the underlying canvas exposed. He also allows colour to flow across the surface. As one colour emerges through another, different structures appear in the final composition. The effect can resemble someone peeping from behind a curtain, a sheet of mist, or a veil of darkness: something becomes visible while something else remains indistinct and shimmering.

There is often an impression of geometric forms in these paintings, and at times a sense of urban structures seems to occupy a large part of the picture. It is here that Kolte's painting becomes a visual parable of the invisible. The familiar seems almost within reach, yet remains beyond complete recognition.

Kolte is recognized as an abstract artist who moves from the simple toward the complex. He believes that abstraction cannot easily be explained and that its beauty should be experienced rather than reduced to interpretation. At an exhibition in Delhi, when a visitor asked him to explain his paintings, he reportedly responded politely that the paintings should simply be seen and enjoyed. This attitude captures something essential about his artistic philosophy. For Kolte, the encounter with a painting is not an intellectual puzzle that necessarily requires a solution. It is an experience that must be lived through seeing.

The joy of creation is like a festival in Kolte's art. When his paintings are viewed together, they can seem like a singer performing one raga after another. This musical quality is especially evident in his use of colour. The acoustic beauty of music seems to emerge visually through the



juxtaposition of colours. Like an intense or subdued alap, the colours spread across the canvas—somewhere lighter, somewhere darker, sometimes forceful and sometimes almost silent.

As one continues to look at his paintings, the vision of the invisible becomes increasingly illuminated. What initially appears obscure gradually acquires an emotional and visual coherence, though it never becomes completely transparent.

Kolte once told this writer that an artist must have a reason for applying every colour. A colour should not be placed on the canvas without purpose. For him, it is not enough to know how many colours to use or where to apply them; it is equally important to know where to leave colour out. The spaces without colour are as significant as the colours themselves.

At first sight, it may not be obvious why a particular colour has been used in one of Kolte's paintings. But when we look at the painting as a whole and begin to consider the relationships among its colours, those relationships acquire significance. Colours develop a kind of sociality, much like words in poetry. A word gains meaning through its relationship with other words; similarly, a colour gains its expressive force through its relationship with other colours. The painting gradually unfolds like a poem.

Kolte frequently works through several layers on the canvas. He applies successive layers of colour, often beginning with lighter tones. Finally, he covers a large portion of the surface with a darker colour, but does so in a way that allows the earlier colours to peek through from beneath the final layer. This creates a complex picture structure in which the history of the painting remains partially visible.

Sometimes this structure evokes the architecture of a city; at other times, it resembles a dream from the night that one remembers only in







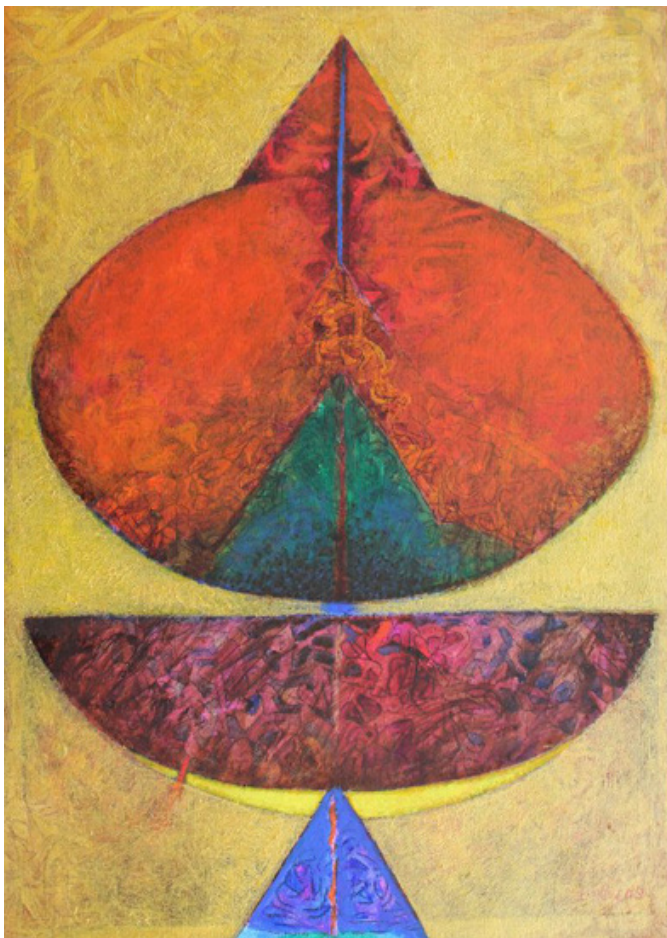
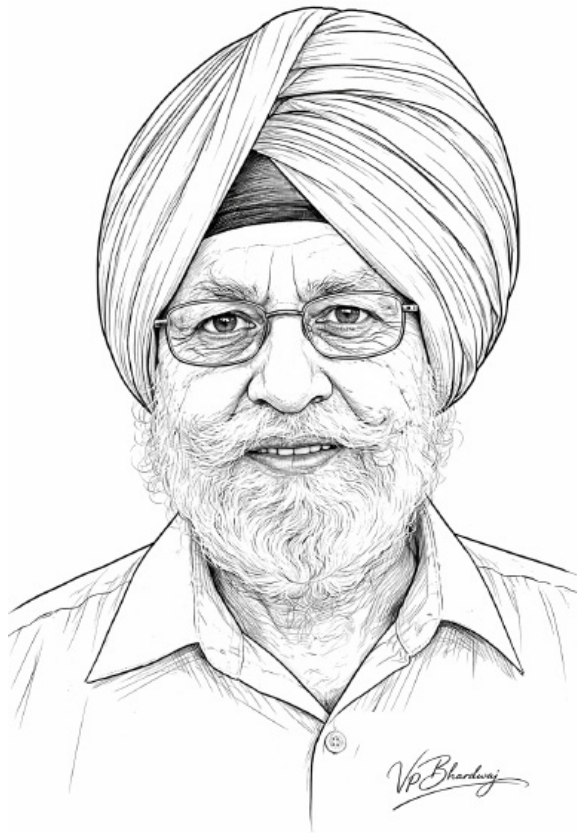
fragments. The dream is never recalled in its entirety. Instead, isolated images, colours, shadows, and forms remain in the memory. Kolte's paintings operate in much the same way. Their composition becomes a kind of theatre in which the visible and invisible continually appear, disappear, and reappear.

This is perhaps the central quality of Prabhakar Kolte's art: he does not paint to make the invisible completely visible. He paints to make us aware of its presence. His colours conceal as much as they reveal; his forms suggest without defining; his layers preserve traces of what has been hidden. Like poetry, his paintings leave something unfinished. Like music, they communicate without relying on literal language. And like memory, they transform what is seen into something that exists beyond seeing.

Kolte's art ultimately asks us not to search for a single meaning but to remain with the experience of looking. His paintings invite the viewer into a space between recognition and uncertainty, form and formlessness, sound and silence. In that space, the act of seeing becomes an act of discovery. The mystery remains, but the mystery itself becomes the painting.



## PREM SINGH



Prem Singh's artistic journey spans more than six decades, encompassing his roles as an artist, art teacher, and writer. Over this long and evolving career, he has continually questioned, expanded, and reinvented his visual vocabulary, moving between figurative, semi-abstract, abstract, and collage practices. Rather than remaining committed to a single stylistic language, Singh has allowed each phase of his practice to emerge from an ongoing engagement with experience, observation, memory, and imagination. At the heart of this sustained exploration lies a profound relationship with nature, which has remained both a recurring subject and a deeper philosophical presence within his work.

Prem Singh's practice can be understood as a continuous search for the relationship between the visible and the invisible. His paintings often begin with recognisable impressions drawn from the world around him, yet these impressions gradually dissolve into colour, light, texture, rhythm, and pattern. In this process, the external world becomes a point of departure for an inward and contemplative journey. The landscape, the human figure, light, and natural forms are not simply reproduced; they are transformed through the artist's imagination into visual experiences that suggest something beyond literal representation. This movement between observation and abstraction gives his work a distinctive character and





allows the viewer to encounter nature simultaneously as image, memory, emotion, and spiritual experience. In the early stages of his career, Singh explored social and cultural realities, often depicting human figures through a semi-abstract idiom. The figure provided him with a means of engaging with the realities of everyday life while also allowing him to investigate gesture, posture, relationships, and the emotional dimensions of human existence. His works from this period offer sensitive reflections on the social and cultural milieu of Punjab, revealing an awareness of its traditions, social structures, and changing realities. Particularly significant is his engagement with the position and lived experiences of women in society. Through the figure, Singh brought attention to questions of identity, dignity, vulnerability, and social circumstance, transforming observations of everyday life into compositions that carry a broader human resonance.

Even as social and cultural concerns occupied an important place in his early work, nature remained an inexhaustible source of inspiration. Over time, his engagement with nature became increasingly expansive, moving beyond the depiction of specific landscapes or natural forms toward a more intuitive and metaphysical understanding of the natural world.

He accords a significant place to its varied forms, perceiving nature not merely as a visual motif but as a divine body of light—an ever-renewing presence capable of refreshing, awakening, and nourishing the human spirit. This understanding enables him to approach nature as something alive and transformative, a force that connects the material world with the inner life of the individual.

Singh's artistic inquiry extends into poetic configurations of forms, patterns, and spaces, where the realms of earth and sky appear to intersect. His compositions often seem to hover between different states of perception: what initially appears to be a landscape may gradually reveal itself as an arrangement of colour and light, while an apparently abstract form can evoke memories of leaves, water, vegetation, clouds, rocks, or the changing atmosphere of the natural environment. Through these layered compositions, he creates an almost magical visual experience in which familiar elements of nature are transformed into new and evocative forms.

This transformation is central to Singh's artistic language. Rather than attempting to describe nature literally, he seeks to capture its underlying energy, rhythm, luminosity, and sense of constant change. Space in his paintings is therefore not always fixed





or clearly defined. It can expand, dissolve, overlap, or recede, producing a sense of movement between foreground and background and between the tangible and the imagined. Forms emerge and disappear within this shifting spatial field, encouraging the viewer to remain attentive to subtle changes in colour, texture, and light.

His work consequently occupies an intriguing space between abstraction and recognition. Although his paintings are abstract in their formal language, they retain suggestive references to the natural world and to lived experience. This ambiguity is an essential part of their appeal. The viewer is not presented with a single, predetermined reading; instead, the paintings allow memories and associations to surface gradually. A particular colour may recall a season, a luminous passage may suggest sunlight reflected on water, and an arrangement of lines or forms may evoke the organic

rhythms of plants or the contours of a landscape. In this way, Singh's paintings establish a dialogue between what is seen and what is remembered.

A distinctive feature of Singh's practice is his exploration of light and its interaction with elusive, often unknown patterns. Light becomes both a formal device and a metaphorical force, animating the surface and creating a sense of movement, depth, and luminosity. It appears to penetrate forms rather than simply illuminate them, creating a subtle tension between transparency and density. At times, light seems to emerge from within the painting itself, giving the surface an atmospheric quality and suggesting an inner radiance that cannot be reduced to a naturalistic representation of illumination.

The shimmering passages of colour and shifting forms invite viewers to look beyond the immediate image and engage with the multiple layers of meaning

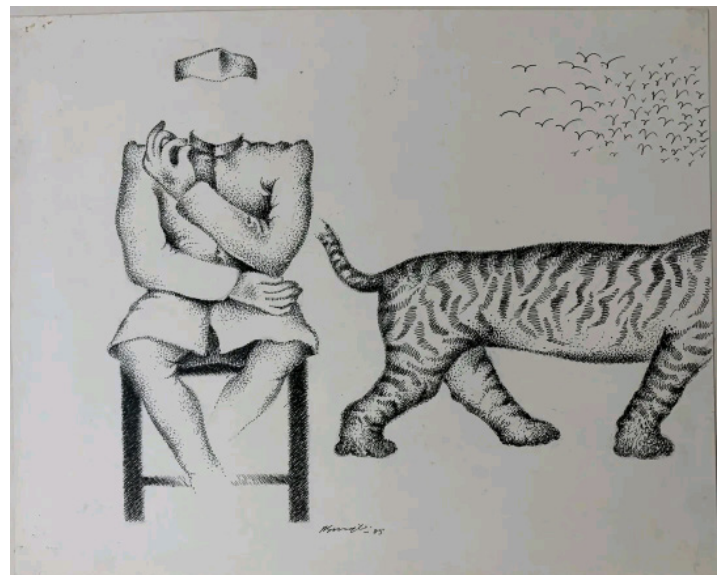




embedded within the work. Colour in Singh's paintings functions not merely as description but as an emotional and spatial element. Contrasting and closely related tones can establish rhythm, while areas of transparency and opacity create a feeling of depth. His surfaces reward sustained looking: details become visible gradually, and relationships between forms change as the eye moves across the composition.

Materiality also plays an important role in this process. Singh primarily works in oil and acrylic, media that allow him to build layers, variations in opacity, and rich surface textures. He also employs charcoal to heighten texture, tonal variation, and spatial depth. The contrast between dense and delicate passages, between sharply articulated marks and softer areas of colour, contributes to the tactile character of his paintings. These material decisions reinforce his larger interest in transformation, allowing the physical substance of paint to become part of the expressive language of the work.

An important milestone in his career came during the 1990s, when Singh produced a significant series of works in watercolour and ink that received widespread acclaim. The shift to these media demonstrated another dimension of his willingness to experiment and adapt, allowing him to explore transparency, fluidity, line, and spontaneous mark-making in ways distinct from the heavier material presence of oil and acrylic. The works in this series earned him the prestigious Lalit Kala Akademi Triennale Award, recognising both his technical accomplishment and his distinctive artistic vision. The





recognition marked an important moment in his career and further established his position within the contemporary Indian art landscape.

The significance of this period lies not only in the award but also in the broader continuity it reveals within Singh's practice. His experimentation with different media has never been an end in itself. Instead, each material becomes a means of pursuing a particular visual and emotional experience. Watercolour and ink offered him immediacy and fluidity; oil and acrylic enabled greater layering and density; charcoal brought a directness of mark and an emphasis on texture. Across these different approaches, however, his fundamental concerns remain remarkably consistent: light, nature, transformation, space, and the relationship between external reality and inner perception.

Singh's enduring commitment to experimentation and his ability to continually renew his artistic vocabulary reflect a deep engagement with the relationship between humanity and nature. His career demonstrates that stylistic change need not represent a departure from an artist's core concerns; rather, it can become a means of looking at those concerns from continually changing perspectives. From the human figure and the social realities of Punjab to the increasingly poetic and abstract language of light, colour, and natural forms, Singh's work reveals a sustained search for connections between the individual and the larger world.

His long experience as an art teacher and writer further complements this artistic journey, suggesting an engagement with art that extends beyond the act of painting itself. Teaching involves

observation, communication, and an openness to different ways of seeing, while writing encourages reflection and articulation. Together, these dimensions contribute to a practice grounded in both intuition and contemplation. They also help place Singh's work within a broader cultural context in which art becomes a means of observing, questioning, and understanding experience.

Across his varied body of work, Singh encourages viewers to contemplate the beauty, mystery, and complexity of the world around them. His paintings ask us to slow down and look closely, allowing images to emerge gradually rather than presenting themselves as immediate statements. The natural world in his art is never simply a backdrop. It is a living presence—dynamic, luminous, and spiritually charged. Through colour, texture, light, and abstraction, Singh transforms his observations of nature into meditations on perception and existence.

Ultimately, Prem Singh's artistic journey is defined by an openness to change and a persistent search for renewal. His work bridges the recognisable and the abstract, the physical and the spiritual, the observed world and the imagined one. By continually returning to nature while reinventing the means through which he approaches it, he invites viewers to experience the environment not simply as an external landscape, but as a vital presence intimately connected to human consciousness. His paintings encourage a deeper appreciation of the natural world and remind us that its beauty can be encountered not only through what we see, but also through what we feel, remember, and imagine.











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More than 1000 articles and interviews with up-coming and eminent artists and art exhibition reviews published in art magazines and newspapers like samkaleen kala, kala Dirgha, Sahara Samay, Rastriya Sahara, K magazine, Art journal, the creative minds and other publications since 1984.

Books on art: Indian contemporary art: Multidimensional Time, Mirror of Images, Dahleez Par Kala-1 and 2, Tunes of life, The Art.

Assistant Editor 'Kalayen Aspasi' published by Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi.

Assistant Editor 'Brihad Adhunik Kala Kosh' by Vinod Bhardwaj, published by Vani Prakashan.

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Articles and other writing published in different books.

Award: 2010, senior fellowship, culture ministry, Gov. of India.