

Modern Masters

Master-works from India's Progressive Artists Group: Part Two

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

September 9 – October 15, 2011

Press Preview & V.I.P. Reception: Friday, September 9, 6:00pm – 7:30pm

Adriana Proser, John H. Foster Curator for Traditional Asian Art at the **Asia Society**, New York, hosts a discussion on art from the Ancient Region of Gandhara with reference to the Asia Society exhibition **The Buddhist Heritage of Pakistan: Art of Gandhara**

35 Great Jones Street, New York, NY 10012



F. N. Souza, *Christ on Palm Sunday*, 1956, Oil on board, 48 x 30 in.

Aicon Gallery is pleased to present **Modern Masters**, Part Two of an exhibition featuring master-works by the leaders of India's Progressive Artists Group. The second installment of this exhibition will focus on an important selection of iconic works on canvas from **Vasudeo Gaitonde, M. F. Husain, Ram Kumar, S. H. Raza, and F. N. Souza**. Part One of the exhibition featured a stunning array of works on paper by these and other Progressive masters. Both exhibitions are dedicated to the memory of **M. F. Husain**, a friend and inspiration to us all.

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

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

of folk, tribal, religious and mythological icons, such as Mother Teresa, Gandhi, Krishna and Saraswati, are characteristic to his work, revealing his penchant for blending diverse cultural influences.

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



Vasudeo Gaitonde, *Painting No. 3*, 1962, Oil on canvas, 40 x 50 in.

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

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

Vasudeo Gaitonde is often regarded as one of the finest and evocative abstract painters of India; however, Gaitonde despised the title of 'abstractionist' bestowed upon him, preferring his work instead to be described as 'non-objective'. Art, throughout Gaitonde's career, was in itself a complete process, boldly exploring both the inner and outer realms of form and shape. Gaitonde, unlike his contemporaries, preferred a slow and meticulous painting process, hence his production of very few finished major works on canvas.

Aicon Gallery is proud to present the current exhibition of master-works on canvas by these five pillars of Indian Modernism, as the second installment of our two-part exhibition from India's Progressive Artists Group. The iconic works selected represent the true pictorial breadth and experimentation embraced by these artists in the uncertain yet liberating years following India's independence.

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

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VASUDEO GAITONDE



Vasudeo Gaitonde, *Painting No. 3*, 1962, Oil on canvas, 40 x 50 in.

F. N. SOUZA



F. N. Souza, *Christ on Palm Sunday*, 1956, Oil on board, 48 x 30 in.

F. N. SOUZA



F. N. Souza, *Green Landscape*, 1960, Oil on board, 30 x 24 in.

M. F. HUSAIN



M. F. Husain, *Mother Theresa*, ND, Oil on canvas, 37.5 x 60 in.

M. F. HUSAIN



M. F. Husain, *Autobiography V*, 1996, Acrylic on canvas, 47 x 23 in.

M. F. HUSAIN



M. F. Husain, *The Mirage* 1960, Oil on board, 48 x 30 in.

S. H. RAZA



S. H. Raza, *Nad Bindu, Fertilité*, 1988, Acrylic on canvas, 31.5 x 31.5 in.

S. H. RAZA



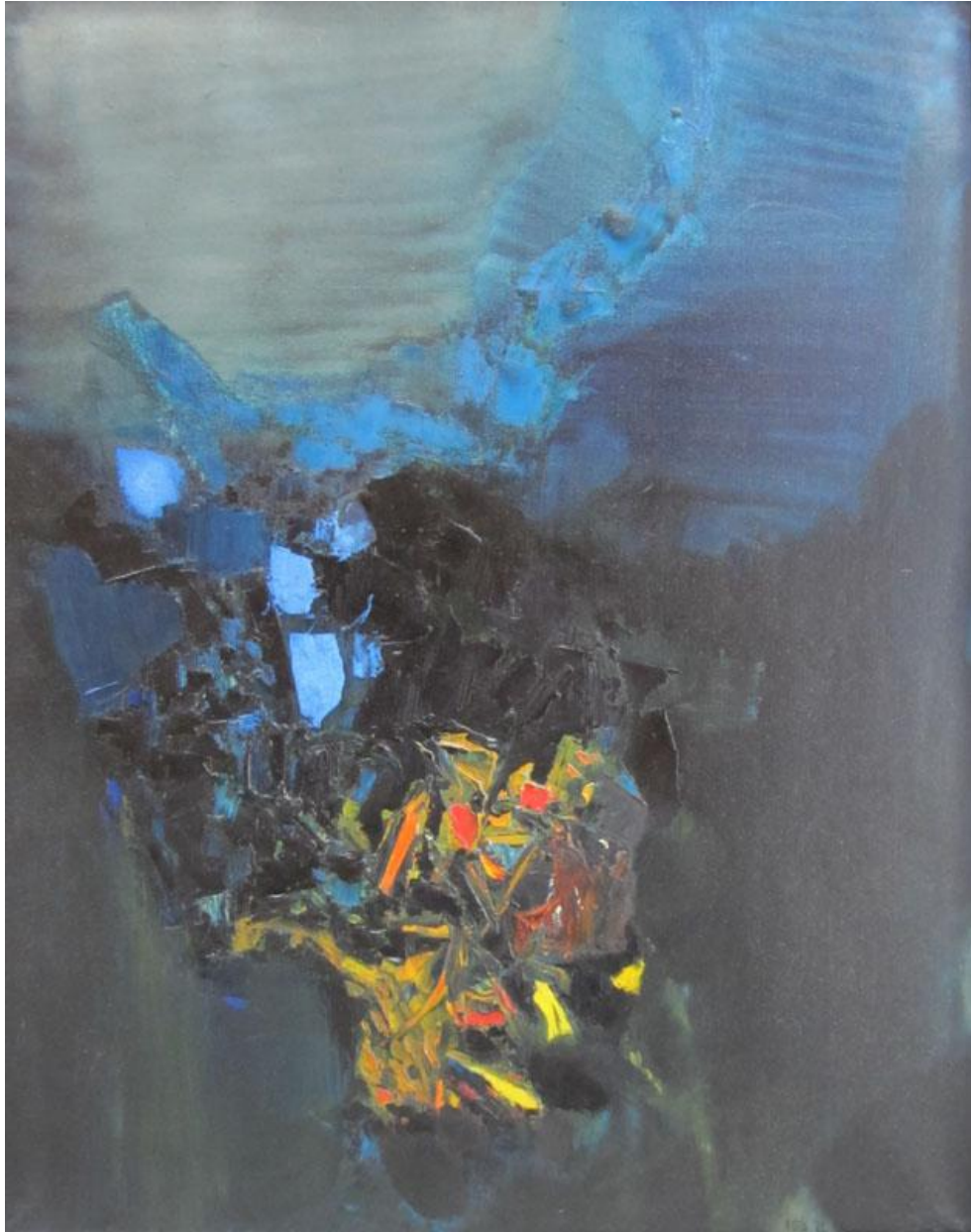
S. H. Raza, *Untitled (Brown Abstraction)*, 1977, Oil on canvas, 16 x 13 in.

S. H. RAZA



S. H. Raza, *Untitled Abstract*, ND, Acrylic on card, 31.5 x 31.5 in.

S. H. RAZA



S. H. Raza, *Valle de Gorbio*, 1962, Oil on canvas, 36.5 x 28 in.

RAM KUMAR



Ram Kumar, *Abstract Landscape 17*, 2002, Oil on canvas, 48 x 72 in.

RAM KUMAR



Ram Kumar, *Untitled Abstract*, 1970, Oil on canvas, 50 x 50 in.