

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART

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**INDIAN MODERNIST ART EXHIBITION SERIES CONTINUES WITH
APPROACHING ABSTRACTION, MAY 4 – OCTOBER 15, 2012
AT THE RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART**

*Exhibition Unites Rare Experimental Films with Abstract Paintings;
Explores Distinct Trajectory of Abstraction in Modernist Indian Art*

New York, NY – This May the Rubin Museum of Art presents *Approaching Abstraction*, the second installment of a series devoted to the history of modernist art in post-colonial India. Picking up where *The Body Unbound* left off in the transitional period following India's 1947 independence, *Approaching Abstraction* explores the ways in which prominent Indian artists experimented with principles of abstraction. Uniting painting and rare experimental films from over a dozen of India's leading artists, the exhibition highlights how the intention, execution, and trajectory of abstraction in India remained distinct from that of Euro-American modernism. On view from May 4 through October 5, 2012, at the Rubin Museum, *Approaching Abstraction* reflects on the characteristics and progress of abstraction in modernist Indian art and includes works from local private and institutional collections.

While figuration remained the dominant tradition in Indian art, by the mid-1950s leading artists, including M.F. Husain and S.H. Raza, began incorporating non-representational forms into their work. Husain and Raza's artist group, the Progressive Artists' Group in Bombay, led the way in developing a modern arts movement and original visual language for India, which engaged a broad range of international modernist stylistic trends and ideas while creating new Indian cultural identities for their new nation. This delicate balance is visible in Raza's painting *Aaj*

(1970), which captures the Indian landscape in rich yellows and reds with abstracted Devanagari script of the Hindi word “aaj,” which means “today,” inscribed above the horizon line.

To many artists for whom figuration remained the primary link to social, political, and community concerns, film presented an opportunity to explore the more personalized principles of abstraction. *Approaching Abstraction* will showcase rare experimental films by Husain and Tyeb Mahta and Akbar Padamsee, artists whose paintings remained focused on figural compositions but whose films explored abstract ideas and decontextualized images. Husain’s *Through the Eyes of a Painter* (1967) won a Golden Bear Award at the Berlin Film Festival in 1968 and Mahta’s *Koodal* won the Film Fare Award for the best documentary film of 1970. Husain, Mahta, and Padamsee’s films will be presented alongside the respective artists’ paintings for the first time, connecting their experimentation with abstraction to their broader body of work.

Approaching Abstraction will include works by a number of other influential artists of the era:

- V.S. Gaitonde, whose self-described “non-objective” paintings worked toward a formal purity of line and color, aided conceptually by his engagement with Zen Buddhism.
- Krishna Reddy, a pioneer of intaglio simultaneous color printmaking, a technique that enables multiple colors of different viscosities to be printed on the surface of the work from a single plate.
- Nasreen Mohamedi, a Minimalist artist who trained at St. Martin’s School of Art in London before returning to Bombay. A protégé of V.S. Gaitonde, Mohamedi used the grid as a template for her linear drawings and watercolors.
- G.R. Santosh and Biren De, leading artists of the 1970s Neo-tantra movement, which integrated modernist principles of abstraction with Tantra, a set of esoteric practices associated with Hinduism and Buddhism that are often represented symbolically by the union of male and female energies.

“Though abstraction has been seen as a side note to India’s long history of figuration, the variety and depth of the work presented in *Approaching Abstraction* shows how abstraction was critical

and integral to modernist Indian art, and it will also explore the ways in which experimentations with abstraction in India functioned apart from abstraction in Euro-American modernism,” says Beth Citron, Curator at the Rubin Museum, who completed research for her doctoral studies while living in Bombay for two years.

Approaching Abstraction is the second installment of the museum’s *Modernist Art in India* exhibition series, revealing both the influences and trajectory of modernist art in the socially and politically turbulent era after India gained independence. This exhibition series expands the Rubin’s commitment to highlight the culture and art of Himalayan Asia and India. By tracing the development of Indian modernism, *Approaching Abstraction* celebrates the artistically productive dialogue between tradition and innovation.

Approaching Abstraction was supported, in part, by the Dedalus Foundation.

The final part of the series, *Radical Terrain*, open from November 9, 2012 through April 22, 2013, will highlight the diverse explorations of landscape in Indian art after independence, showing how landscape was a means for artists to come to terms with the vastness and diversity of India as a new nation. The exhibition will also feature new work by international contemporary artists of diverse backgrounds currently working in landscape, to be introduced at intervals during the course of the exhibition.

ABOUT THE RUBIN MUSEUM:

The Rubin Museum of Art provides an immersive environment for the exploration of Himalayan art and culture and its connections to contemporary life and ideas through innovative exhibitions, dynamic programs, and diverse educational opportunities. The only stand-alone institution in the U.S. dedicated to the art of Himalayan Asia, the museum holds one of the world’s most important collections of the paintings and sculptures of Tibet, Nepal, Mongolia, and Bhutan, and provides a bridge between the cultures of the region and other cultures worldwide. In addition to exhibitions, the Rubin’s programming encompasses dialogues, films, performances, and more, offering multiple entry-points for understanding and enjoying the art of the Himalayas. The shop and café at the Rubin are also inspired by the varied cultures of the region, completing the

visitors' experience. For more information, including hours and location, visit www.rmanyc.org.

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