

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART

INDIAN MODERNIST ART FOCUS OF NEW EXHIBITION SERIES AT RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART

*Installations of Figurative Painting, Abstraction, and Landscape
Create Vivid Picture of Transformative Era*

September 21, 2011 – New York – This fall, a new, three-part exhibition series providing a detailed look at the colorful history of modernist art in post-colonial and post-Independence India will premiere at the Rubin Museum of Art. On view from November 18, 2011 – April 9, 2012, the first installment of the series, *The Body Unbound*, will trace the trajectory of figuration in modernist Indian art from the 1940s to the 1980s and show how the country's shift from colonial subject to sovereign nation impacted artistic trends. The works on display, gathered from local private and institutional collections, will explore the relationship between traditionally Indian, realistic depictions of the human form and the growing influence of abstraction.

After the country gained independence in 1947, growing secularism and modernity emerged in the 1950s, as artistic collectives like the Progressive Artists' Group in Bombay and the Delhi Silpi Chakra in Delhi worked to establish and convey artistic and cultural identities for a new India. The groups integrated international modernist styles including Expressionism with imagery and ideas that resonated locally, and they sought to establish a place for professional artists as they grew the urban art worlds in Bombay and Delhi.

The museum will present the works of a number of India's most influential painters of this era:

- M.F. Husain, a founding member of The Progressive Artists' Group, for whom the female figure – including goddesses and regular women – was an enduring subject and his way of representing an intrinsic quality of “Indianness.” Because he was Muslim, Husain was later widely known and criticized for his provocative paintings of nude Hindu goddesses.
- Tyeb Mehta, His canonical work *Falling Figure with Bird* represents a single, central human figure in a state of contemplation while falling. The painting reflects Mehta's intellectual engagement with modernist existentialism and international notions of “universal Man.” The guiding force of Mehta's artistic practice was the trauma he experienced at Partition in 1947, when he saw a man literally ripped apart just because he was Muslim.
- Bhupen Khakhar, who sought to introduce India's true middle class into his paintings an Indian Pop style that expresses cosmopolitan themes. *First Day in New York* is a humorous take on an Indian's disorienting arrival in the West.
- B. Prabha. Her work *Fisherwoman* is unusual for its time in how it represents a fisherwoman as beautiful and sexual.
- Akbar Padamsee, another artist who blended ancient Indian Sanskritic ideas with Western modernist trends. His main artistic preoccupations were the female body and abstracted landscapes.
- Richard Bartholomew, a photographer whose portraits from the 1960s and 1970s capture images of the art world during those decades, and who photographed the leading artists in India (who were his friends), many of whose works are represented in the *Modernist Art in India* series.

“*Body Unbound* brings to life the vibrant visual culture of India and illustrates how India's transformation into a new nation paved the way for startling new artistic styles,” says Beth Citron, Curator at the Rubin Museum.

The exhibition will begin with traditionalist representations of Indian villagers and townspeople by artists including Nandalal Bose, Jamini Roy, and K.K. Hebbar, and will include select examples of Progressive Artists Group-era works by M.F. Husain, F.N. Souza, and others. It will

then turn to the representation of metaphysical *Man* by Tyeb Mehta and Akbar Padamsee, and the beginnings of narrative figuration through the work of Sudhir Patwardhan, Nalini Malani, Gieve Patel, and Bhupen Khakhar. *The Body Unbound* will also illustrate how figuration was a means to explore fantasy and the imagined body, through the blending of whimsical modernist abstraction and the depiction of human figures.

Modernist Art in India: The Body Unbound will provide an immersive, comprehensive exploration of a socially and politically turbulent era for the Indian nation. This exhibition expands the Rubin's commitment to celebrating all aspects of Himalayan culture, including the art of India. By tracing the development of Indian modernism, *The Body Unbound* celebrates the artistically productive dialogue between tradition and innovation

A catalogue encompassing all three exhibitions will be available. The following two parts of the series will be *Approaching Abstraction* (May 4-October 15, 2012) and *Radical Terrain* (November 9, 2012- TBD 2013), focusing on abstract art and the modern Indian landscape, respectively. *Approaching Abstraction* will concentrate on important explorations of abstraction by India's leading modernist artists, including Tyeb Mehta, MF Husain, Akbar Padamsee, Nasreen Mohamedi, Zarina Hashmi, VS Gaitonde and SH Raza.

This exhibition was supported, in part, by the Vadehra Art Gallery.

ABOUT THE RUBIN MUSEUM:

The Rubin Museum of Art holds one of the world's most important collections of Himalayan art. Paintings, pictorial textiles, and sculpture are drawn from cultures that touch upon the arc of mountains that extends from Afghanistan in the northwest to Myanmar (Burma) in the southeast and includes Tibet, Nepal, Mongolia, and Bhutan. The larger Himalayan cultural sphere, determined by significant cultural exchange over millennia, includes Iran, India, China, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia. The museum explores these rich cultural legacies—largely unfamiliar to Western viewers—from a variety of perspectives, offering multiple entry-points for understanding and enjoying the art of the Himalayas.

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