Post-Independence

Contemporary Indian Art

Selections from the Sunanda and Umesh Gaur Collection

Post-Independence Contemporary Indian Art:
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Paul Robeson Gallery
Rutgers-Newark, The State University of New Jersey

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RUTGERS
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Designed by Ram Rahman

Cover:
Tyeb Mehta, Diagonal Series
Nalini Malani, Love
Ram Kumar, Untitled

Back cover:
Biren De, April '73
Gulam Rasool Santosh, Untitled

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Paul Robeson Gallery

Rutgers-Newark, The State University of New Jersey

350 Martin Luther King Boulevard, Newark, New Jersey 07102, Tel. 973/353-1610

December 2, 2002 through March 14, 2003

Gallery Hours: Tuesday through Saturday 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Foreword

Since its independence in 1947, India has been the site of a remarkable blossoming of contemporary art, which has become evident to the general international art community only relatively recently. As artists in India have adapted traditional imagery and ideas to modern artistic practice, the nation has begun to contribute to the multiplicity of variations on modernism reflective of non-western cultures. This momentum has also resulted in a growing popularity of contemporary Indian art in American private collections.

A couple of years ago, Rutgers University's Zimmerli Art Museum on its New Brunswick campus was contacted by Sunanda and Umesh Gaur, who have brought together one of the leading collections of contemporary Indian art in the United States. The Gaurs reside in North Brunswick, and they wondered if the Zimmerli – essentially their neighborhood museum – might be interested in displaying works from their collection. The collection was significant and the idea was very appealing to Rutgers.

The Zimmerli Art Museum, as part of its role as a cultural component of a major university, has a history of presenting exhibitions that offer educational experiences reflecting many of the societal changes taking place in our culture, regionally, nationally and internationally. On the basis of the 2000 census, New Jersey has the largest percentage of residents of Indian origin in the United States. Indeed, ten percent of all Americans of Indian origin live in New Jersey. With these demographics, it behooves Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey to engage with the Indian-American community in educational and cultural programming. Consequently, a concept was developed to go beyond the Gaur collection and organize a diversified exhibition drawn from several prominent private collections. The Gaurs were enthusiastic about the idea and understood the need for objectivity and museum-based professionalism in the development of the exhibition. Mr. Gaur had an extensive knowledge of modern Indian art and contacts with many scholars and collectors. The synergy between the Gaurs and Rutgers University's Zimmerli Art Museum resulted in a comprehensive exhibition on the subject: *INDIA: Contemporary Art from Northeastern Private Collections*. This exhibition developed into the largest and the most diverse on its theme – post-independence Indian art – organized in the United States. The exhibition was on display from April 7 to July 31, 2002 and highlighted a national culture that is progressively more significant on the world stage. The exhibition and its accompanying catalog enjoyed widespread acclaim. Press coverage and feedback from visitors concerning the exhibition and related cultural programming were very positive. Many visitors who were exposed to contemporary Indian art for the first time were simply amazed to see such cutting edge art by Indian artists. Many visitors also expressed that it would be nice if other venues would offer similar exhibitions on this subject.

This may have come to the attention of Ganesh – the beloved deity of the Hindu pantheon who is the remover of obstacles. Although most museums and galleries have a full schedule of exhibitions for several years, a spot became available at the Paul Robeson Gallery at the Rutgers University Newark campus. I recommended that a smaller version of the Zimmerli exhibition be displayed at the Robeson Gallery. Due to space limitations, logistics, timing and budgetary constraints, Robeson Gallery director Corliss Cavalieri decided to limit the exhibit to works in the Gaur collection only.

Post-Independence Contemporary Indian Art: Selections from the Sunanda and Umesh Gaur Collection consists of 21 paintings and drawings and is meant to be an educational, representative introduction of its theme. These exhibitions at the two campuses of Rutgers University should promote awareness and appreciation of contemporary Indian art and encourage the collecting of contemporary Indian art in the state of New Jersey.

Jeffrey Wechsler
Senior Curator, Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers-New Brunswick
Member, Advisory Board, Paul Robeson Gallery, Rutgers-Newark

Introduction and Acknowledgements

It is a pleasure for the Paul Robeson Gallery to present the exhibition *Post-Independence Contemporary Indian Art: Selections from the Sunanda and Umesh Gaur Collection*. In the context of this exhibition, it seems worthwhile presenting the Paul Robeson Gallery's mission. The Paul Robeson Gallery is an artistic and cultural center dedicated to presenting art and cultural artifacts, as well as programming in the spirit of the diverse metropolitan context of Rutgers University campus at Newark, the greater Newark community, and the northeast region. Our exhibitions and related cultural programs strive to enrich the University's academic programs and facilitate the connection between the Rutgers-Newark campus and the larger community, while enhancing the quality of life for the campus and greater Newark community. Our programs endorse Paul Robeson's legacy in the encouragement of cross-cultural artistic freedom and cultural democracy. Our exhibits tend to be contemporary in nature and have covered diverse themes such as New Jersey Turnpike imagery and the Russian avant-garde movement.

Rutgers-Newark is the most diverse nationally ranked university in the country and many of our students and faculty members are of Asian Indian Heritage. In line with the mission of the Paul Robeson Gallery, this exhibition provides an opportunity for the campus Indian community to share the art of contemporary India with the rest of us while engaging with the growing community of Asian Indian heritage in the New York/New Jersey area.

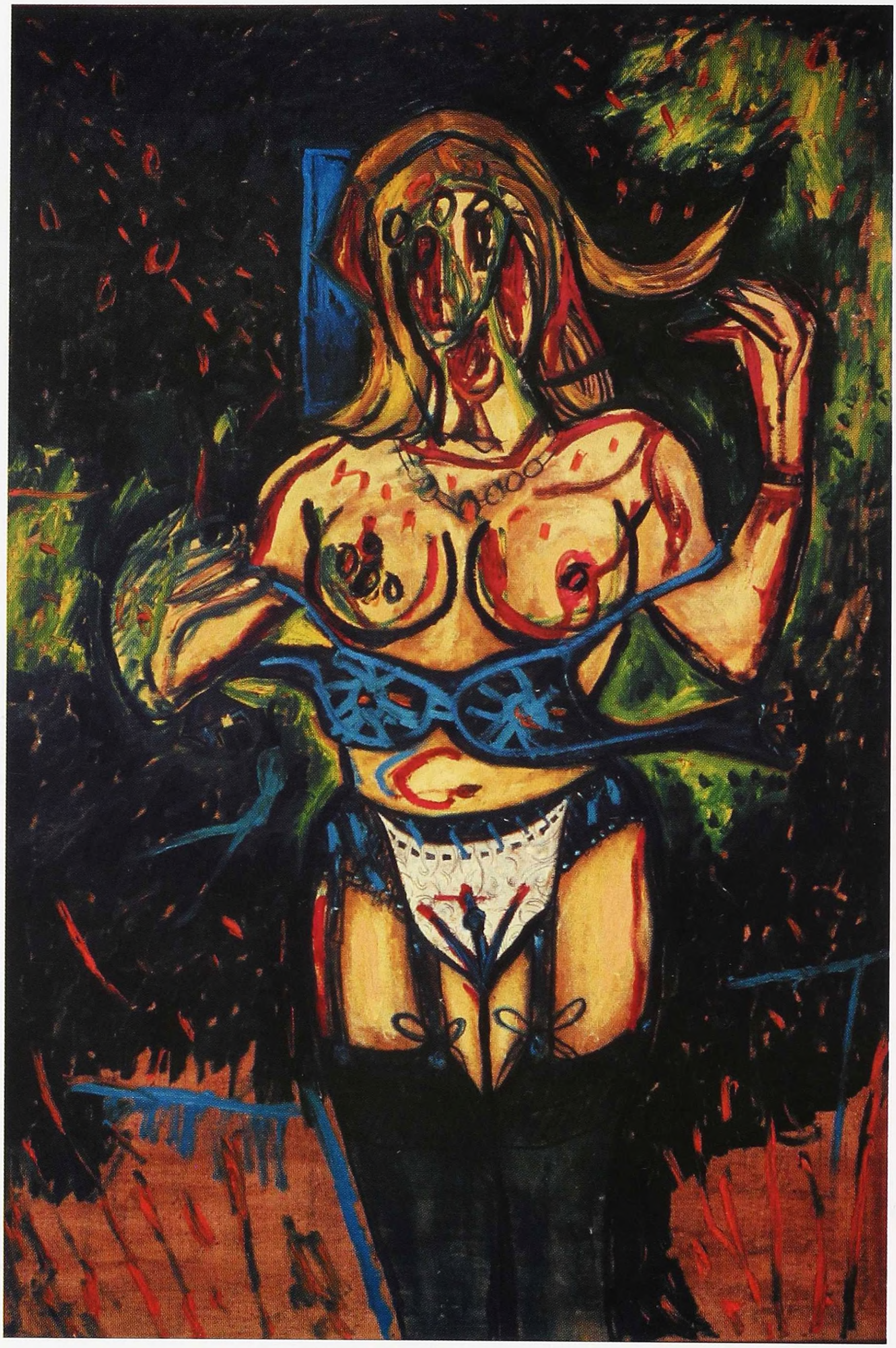
Post-Independence Contemporary Indian Art: Selections from the Sunanda and Umesh Gaur Collection is drawn from one of the finest groupings of post-independence Indian art in the United States and presents a delicate look into the soul of a private collection. The display consists of 21 paintings and drawings from the couple's collection. The works include watercolors, oils and pen-and-ink pieces, in narrative, figurative and abstract styles. A broad range of Indian artists of this period are displayed from the members of the Progressive Artists' Group (F. N. Souza, M. F. Husain, K. H. Ara, and S. H. Raza), to other first and second generation Indian modernists (Ram Kumar, Laxma Goud, et. al), to women artists who have emerged in the last two decades (Arpana Caur and Nalini Malani). The exhibited material breaks from the Rajasthani miniatures and archaeological remnants that exemplify a more common reference point of Indian Art. These paintings and drawings are powerful images from an individual artist's vision and yet resonate within a universal context that reflects familiar human activity. The paintings and drawings are placed across from one another in a manner that creates a conversation about a wide range of approaches in technique and creating forms that demonstrate a great artistic tradition, depth of insight into the human condition and philosophical richness.

We would like to thank Sunanda and Umesh Gaur for their most generous loan for this exhibition and bringing in many contacts from the Indian art community in organizing this exhibition and its related publications. We are very grateful to Jeffrey Wechsler, senior curator of the Zimmerli Art Museum for proposing and assisting us in this exhibition. Special thanks are extended to Marcella Sirhandi, Oklahoma State University; Mary-Ann Milford-Lutzker, Mills College; Gayatri Sinha, art critic, New Delhi and Yashodhara Dalmia, art historian, New Delhi for authoring the didactic labels and catalogue entries for the works in the exhibition.

We gratefully acknowledge the endorsement and support of Professors Ian Watson, Paul Sternberger and Annette Juilano; the Cultural Programming Committee; the Dean's Office and the Provost in making this exhibition possible. Assistance of Marc DeFlorio, Joanne Lee, Benjamin Feld, Agnes Wszolkowska, Latrell Arrington, Diego Giordano and Kyung Sun Cho in various aspects of the project is also appreciated. Finally, thanks are warmly extended to Wynsor Gervais, our gallery manager and to Dawn Vislocky, administrative assistant to Mr. Gaur, for their invaluable assistance and cooperation in organizing many details of this exhibition and its related publications.

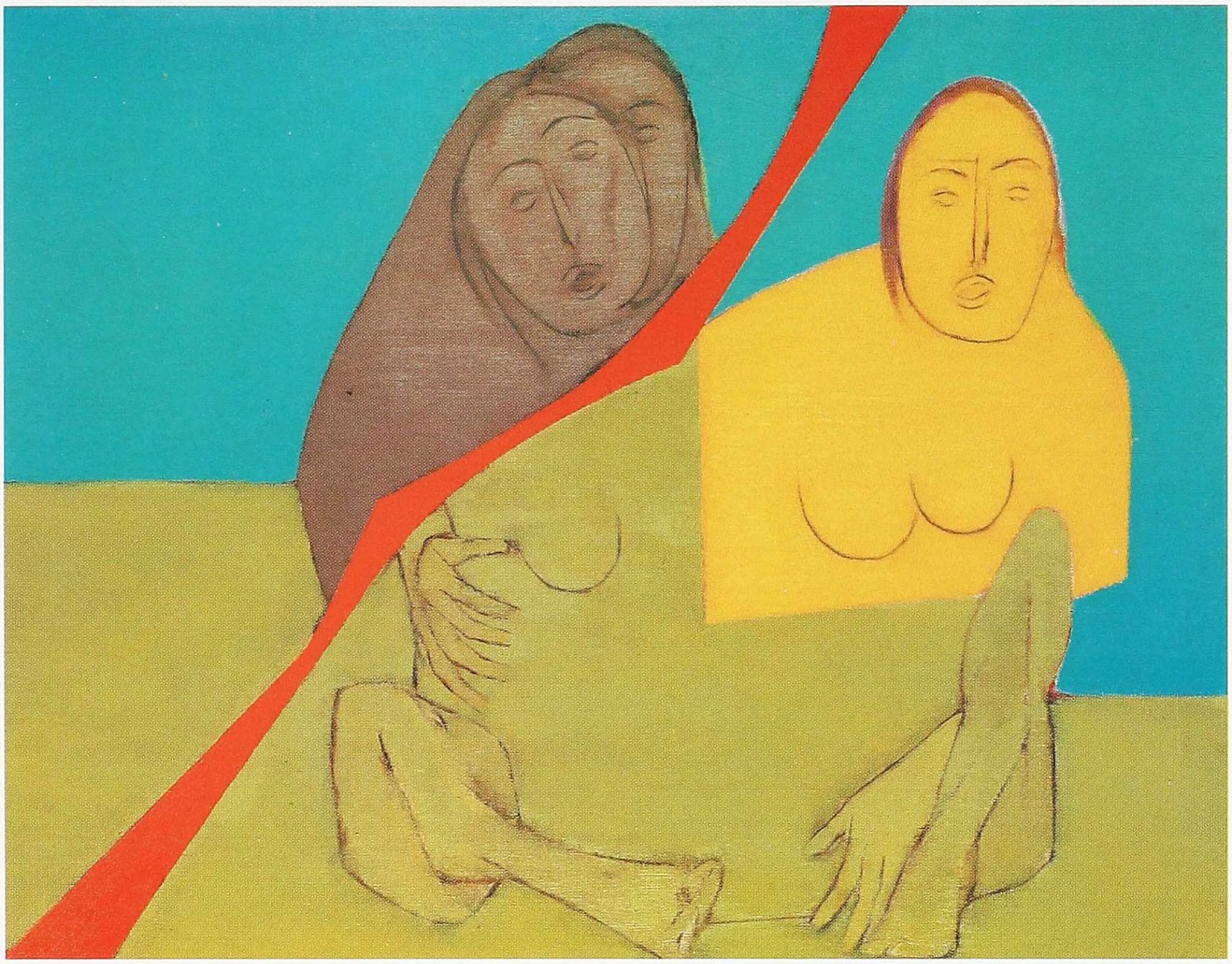
Corliss Cavalieri

Director, Paul Robeson Gallery, Rutgers-Newark



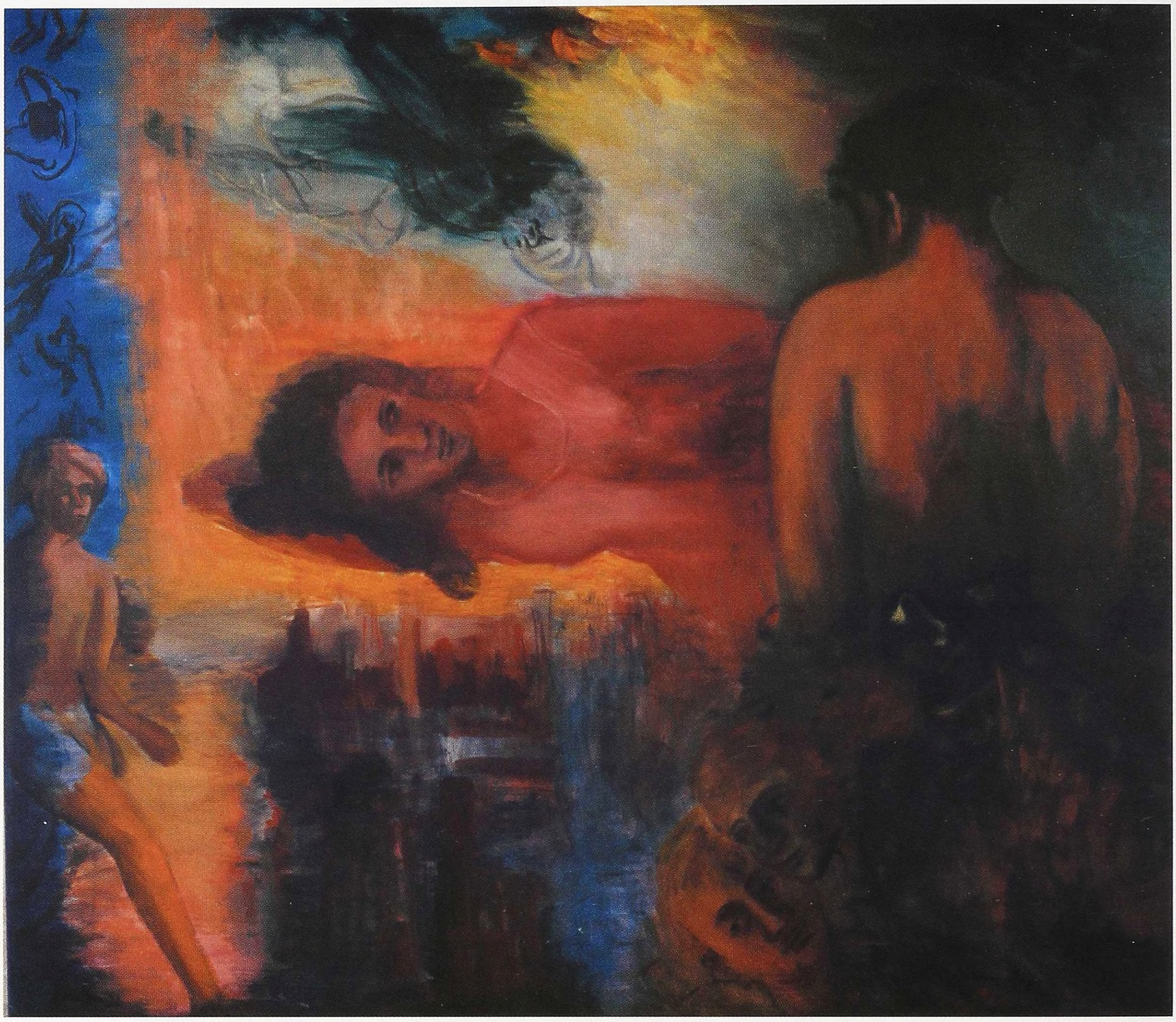
Francis Newton Souza (1924-2002) – ***Woman Undressing***
1964, Oil on canvas, 64" x 44"

One of the earliest modernist artists in India to make the frontal nude, Souza often rebelled against hypocritical social mores by confronting us with voluptuous sexuality. Thus the woman in the act of baring herself, also unclothed the debris of existence. Here the figure is like an ogress who has revealed her violent self entirely, but nonetheless her monumental stature could be of an archaic mother-goddess. The dual existence of evil and perfection, which personified Souza's view of women, are prevalent in this work. YD



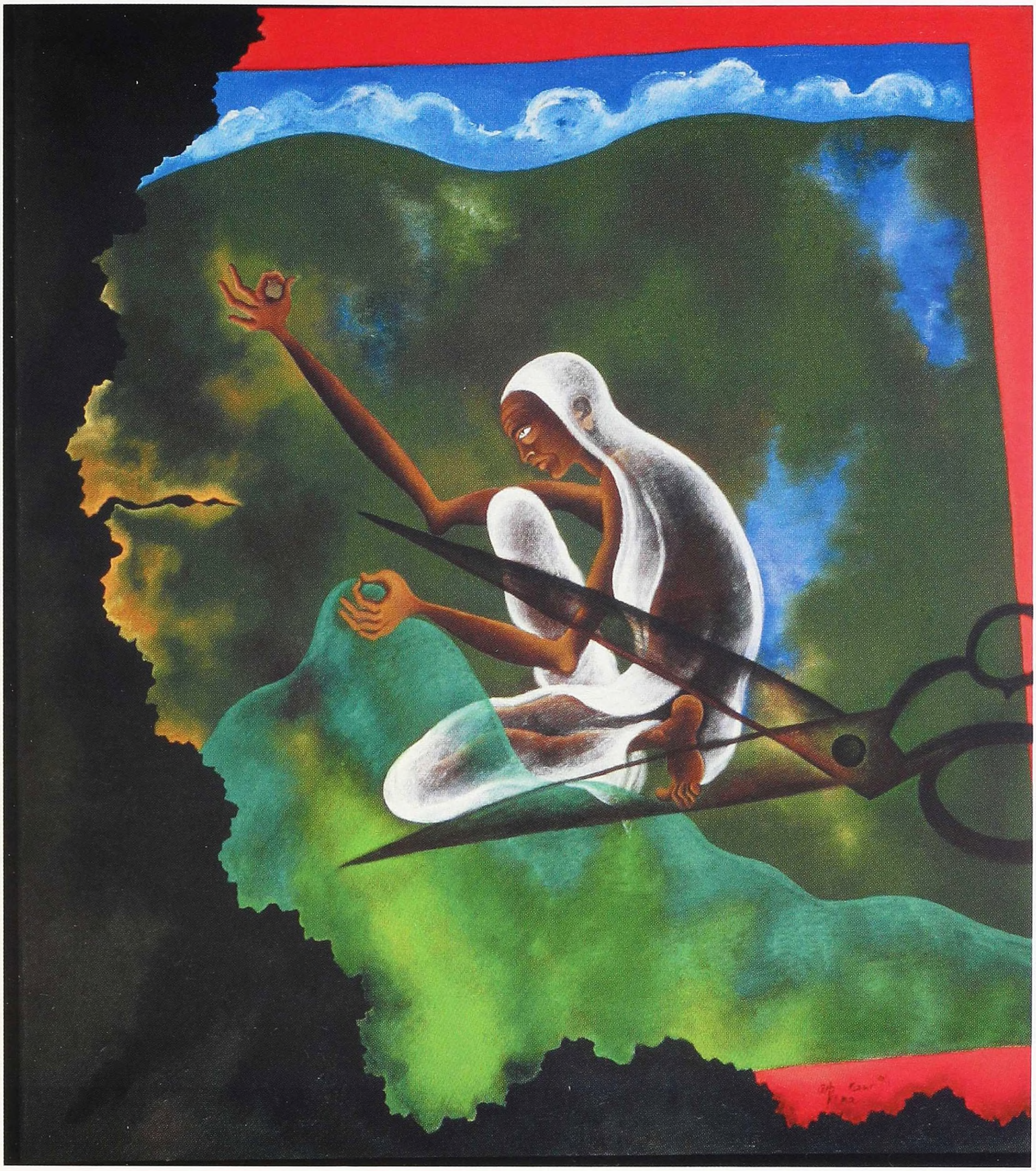
Tyeb Mehta (b 1925) – ***Diagonal Series***
1972, Oil on canvas, 35 1/2" x 45 1/4"

Tyeb Mehta visited the United States in the early 1960s as a Rockefeller fellow. On his return to India, he introduced a notably different style into his art – large flat color masses and figures, rendered with a remarkable economy of line. The distinctive feature of these paintings is the introduction of the diagonal that fractures and splits the images and the canvas into two parts. Arguably, the diagonal of Tyeb Mehta severs and mutilates his figures. Typically heavy torsos and attenuated limbs of the female figure are split and then encased in the pervading field of color. Mehta uses the dynamic interplay of form and color, the hard-edged color masses and the broken, seemingly tentative line of the figure to create a pervasive sense of conflict and irresolution. To the extent that the artist uses color masses to create disjunction within his figures, the diagonal serves to reinforce a sense of the existential isolation of his human forms. GS



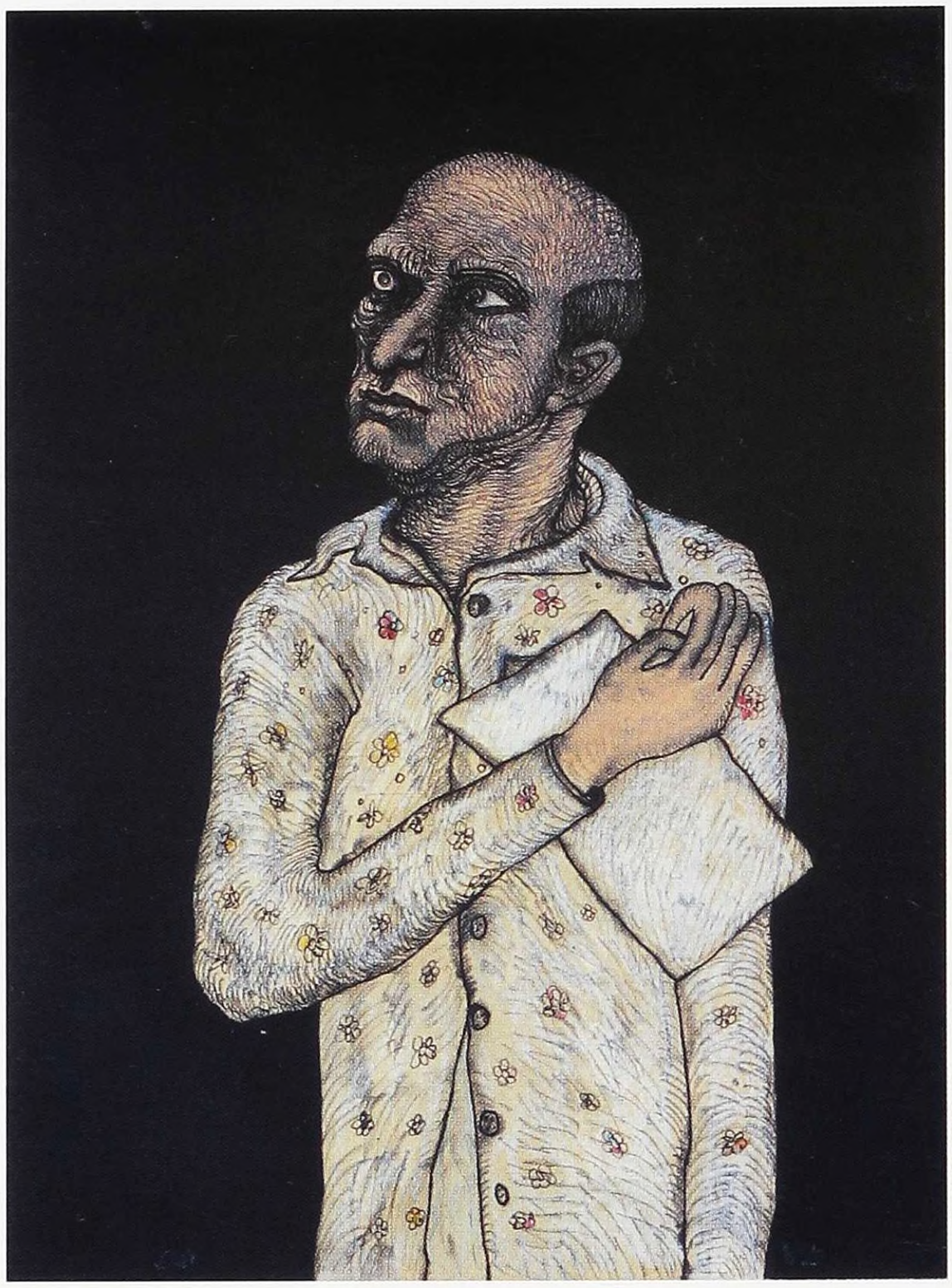
Nalini Malani (b 1946) – ***Love***
1991, Acrylic on canvas, 48" x 56"

Nalini Malani was born in Karachi. Today she is one of India's foremost artists who lives and works in Mumbai. She has responded in her paintings, video and conceptual art to the tensions present in urban life, particularly for the downtrodden laborers and street workers, and to the sense of loss for the displaced. In her brilliant production of Heiner Mueller's *Medea*, in 1994, she addressed the incestuous and tragic aspects of love. In this painting, which was surely done as a precedent to *Medea*, she explores the minefield of sexual love. The painting may be viewed vertically or horizontally, a situation that is common to many contemporary works. The ambivalent axes further underscores the tensions building on the canvas, which in turn puts the onus of interpretation upon the viewer. Whichever way it is seen, the woman is central to the desires of the shadowy males that surround her. As both a seductive siren and source of *shakti*, the female principle of the universe, her body is enhanced by a golden glow that ignites the emotions of love, passion and betrayal. MAML



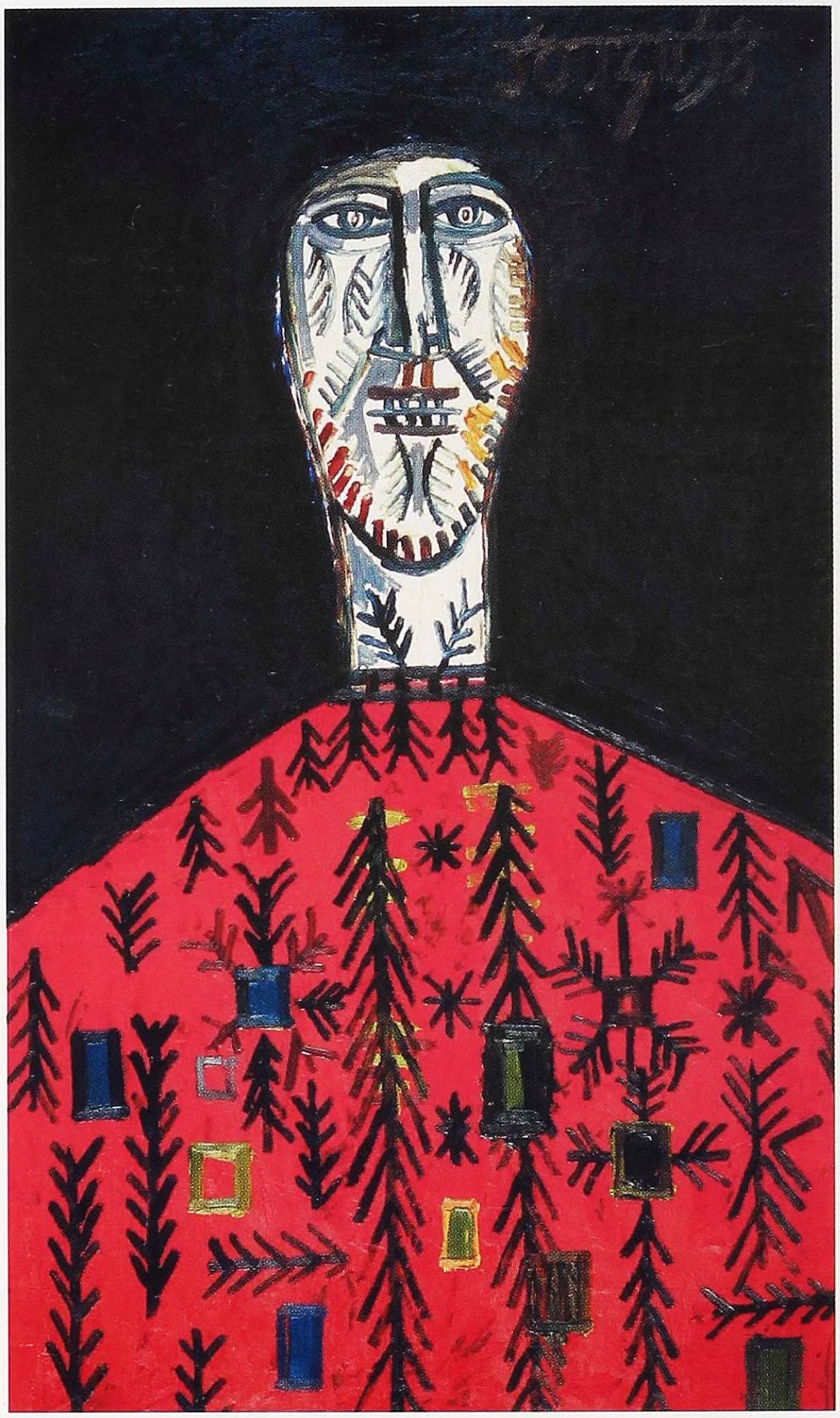
Arpana Caur (b 1954) – ***Time***
1994, Oil on canvas, 67" x 53"

Arpana Caur was born in New Delhi, where she works and lives today. Dualities and the tensions inherent in the principle of complementary opposition are themes that prevail in her paintings. Gender, caste, class, religious and communal issues, are all ingredients in her fearless critiques of the human condition. In this work she paints the inexorable progression of *Time*. The futility of man's efforts to create time is relentlessly destroyed by the inescapable fact of measured time passing. Time is not biased. It is not cyclical, linear or episodic – it is infinite. It is life that is not permanent. In the center of the painting, against a brownish background of dark clouds that are breaking up to reveal the blue sky, is seated a figure shrouded in white, sewing a green swathe of evanescent, billowing vapor that dissolves along its edges into the black abyss of eternity to the left of the painting. As steadily as the figure sews the ephemeral clouds, so what it creates, disintegrates and disappears. Ominous black shears that appear to hold the figure in the angle of it's blades, cut through and advance this sisyphusian task, acting as a constant reminder of the inescapability of *Time*. Even the off-balance red border is being eaten away by encroaching *Time*, as it simultaneously reminds us of classical *Rajput* miniature paintings of the long forgotten *Malwa* and *Mewar* courts.
MAML



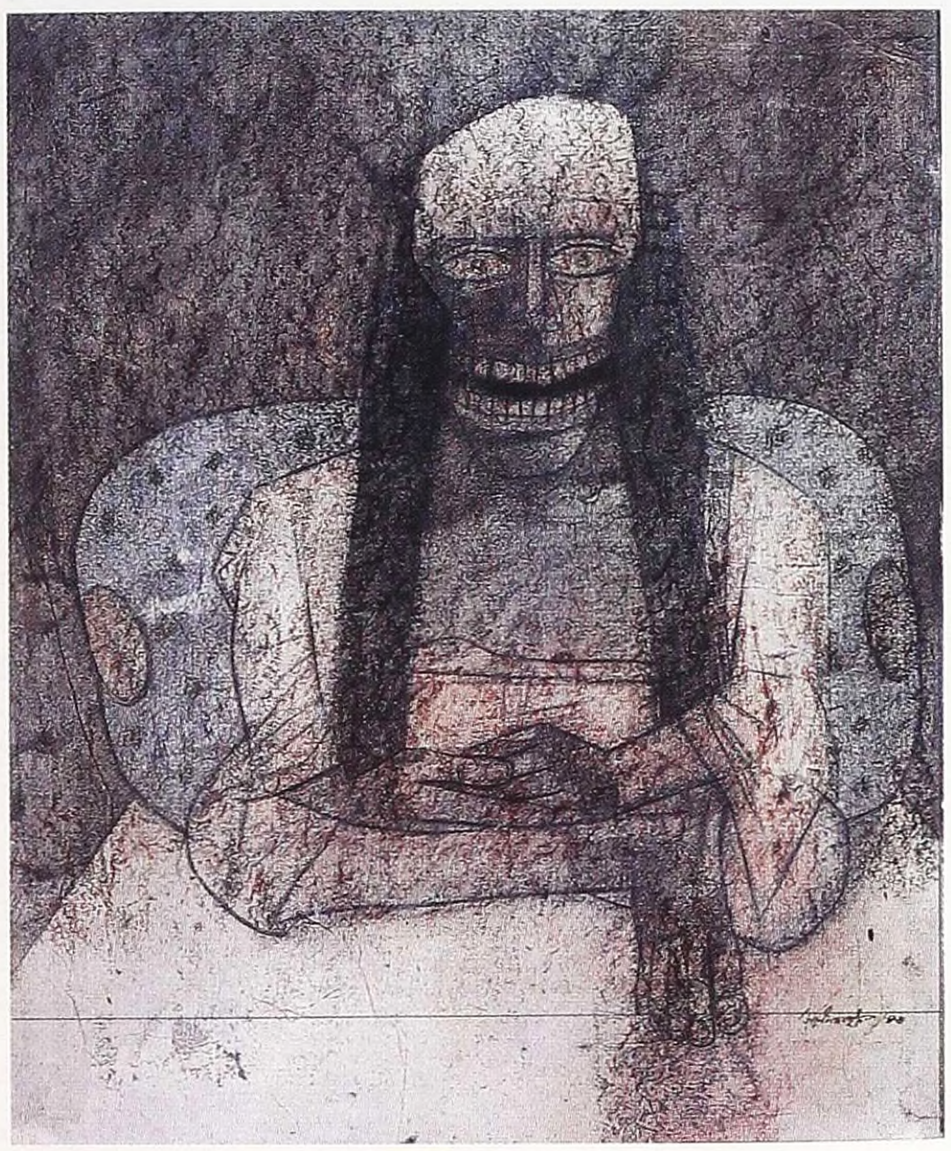
Jogen Chowdhury (b 1939) – ***Man With Piece of Paper***
1986, Pastel and ink on paper, 15" x 11"

Jogen is renowned for his unique style of bent fingers, lumpy wrinkled bodies, and textured skin. No less significant are his emotionally charged motifs such as nude elderly couples interacting, anthropomorphic Ganesh, a sunflower surrounded by floating fish and oversized flowers growing in tiny pots. While most of his work is assigned social or political meaning, some are personal statements and artist's memories, like this man with a paper, that are perplexing and open to interpretation. MCS



Francis Newton Souza (1924-2002) – ***Red Jumper***
1958, Oil on board, 40" x 24"

Francis Newton Souza's main achievement lay in reconstructing the human face to reveal the undercurrents of both corruption and decay in society. Often his heads were of depraved religious heads or of the affluent class, who manipulated power according to their own unscrupulous needs. He devised the head with icy cold eyes, which replaced the forehead, gnashing fang-like teeth and a flickering, mobile visage. Often hatchings replaced facial characteristics and conveyed the death of the soul. The red colored jumper interlocks with the deep purple of the painting to highlight the immobilized whiteness of the head. YD



Ganesh Pyne (b 1937) – ***Untitled (Skull head)***
1983, Tempera on paper, 17" x 13 3/4"

In much of his work, Pyne creates a mythology around figures of death. Here the grinning skull on a somewhat distorted figure may have multiple associations. This work seems to refer to the famous Mughal miniature of the Jehangir era, *The Dying Inayat Khan*, in which the courtier lies wasting away on a bolster. (The large bolster is typical of many Bengali households.) It is this juxtaposition of the grinning skull and the bolster, otherwise devoid of any other context, which creates a sense of heightened mystery and tension. GS



Sudhir Patwardhan (b 1949) –***Mother and Child***
1989, Oil on canvas, 39 3/4" x 24"

Patwardhan is an anomaly. Trained as a physician, he volunteers his medical skills for the working class and fulfills his creative temperament by painting every-day scenes of common people residing near his Mumbai clinic. Intimately familiar with the vision of a mother balancing her child on one hip while dangling the X-ray in her free hand, Patwardhan transposes the somber mood into a striking painting. We sense the tension of the mother, her red face linked to the red background, yet the artist pulls us from despair by swirling strong colors around her – the deep blue sari which forms a figure eight with the sharp green shirt. MCS



Maqbool Fida Husain (b 1915) – ***Untitled (Siddhartha)***
1982, Oil on canvas, 41" x 68"

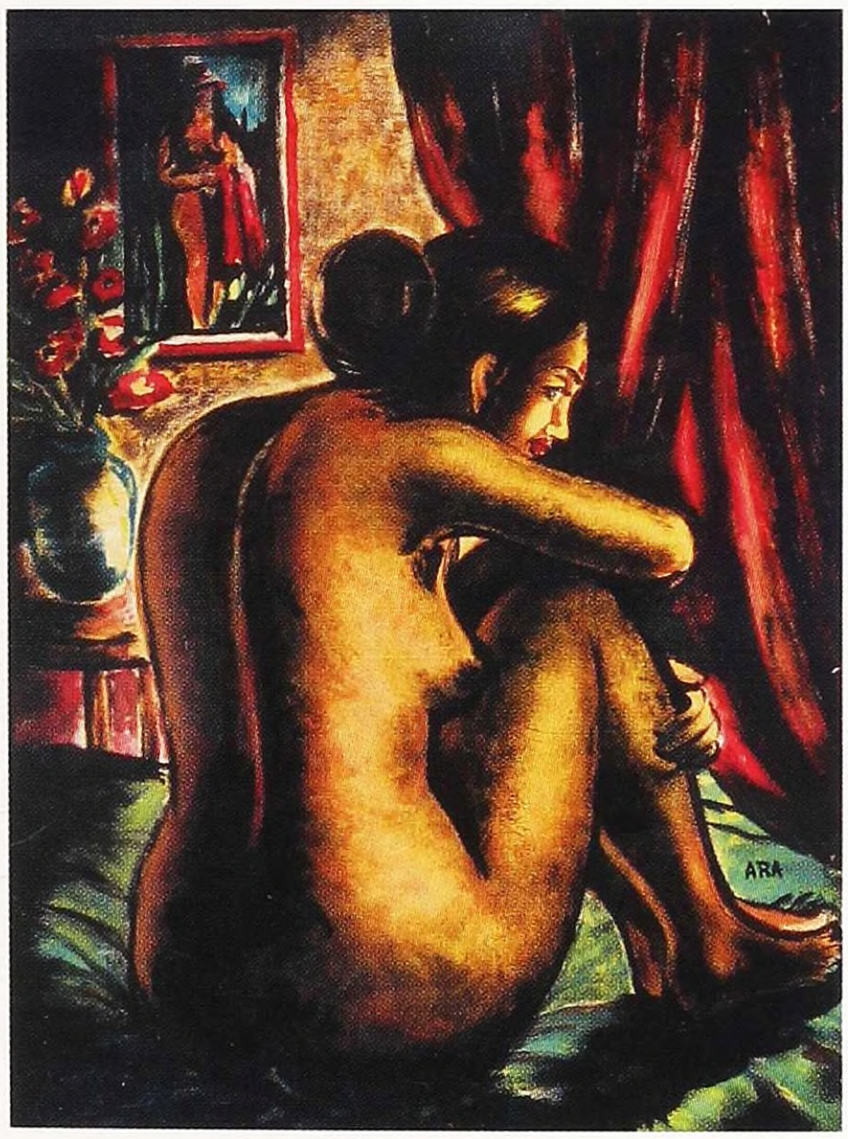
India's best-known, most prolific and controversial artist, Husain illustrates every aspect of Indian culture and history. From mythology to the British Raj to Mother Teresa, Husain puts a twist on every image. Here he depicts the meditating *Siddhartha Sakyamuni*, unimpressed by the three daughters of *Mara* (incarnation of the devil) who try to lure him away from his impending *nirvana* (enlightenment). The tree is not the bodhi tree as legend prescribes and the snake becomes *Siddhartha's* head rather than a protective hood sheltering the soon-to-be Buddha from a violent downpour. Nevertheless, the message is clear – stick to your resolve and you, as *Siddhartha*, will succeed. MCS

Maqbool Fida Husain (b 1915) – ***Mother***
1982, Crayon and pastel on paper, 22" x 15"

Impressed with the impact of Mother Teresa on India and the world, Husain featured her in a series. Sometimes he lauds her self-sacrifice, sometimes his art seems critical of her intent, and most, like this image, depict Mother Teresa as a faceless phantasm defined by a white saree with a blue (or red) border. A brown child – perhaps representing India, reaches out to the hidden lady. An appropriate American expression which Husain would surely appreciate regarding this painting of Mother Teresa – Is she for real? MCS





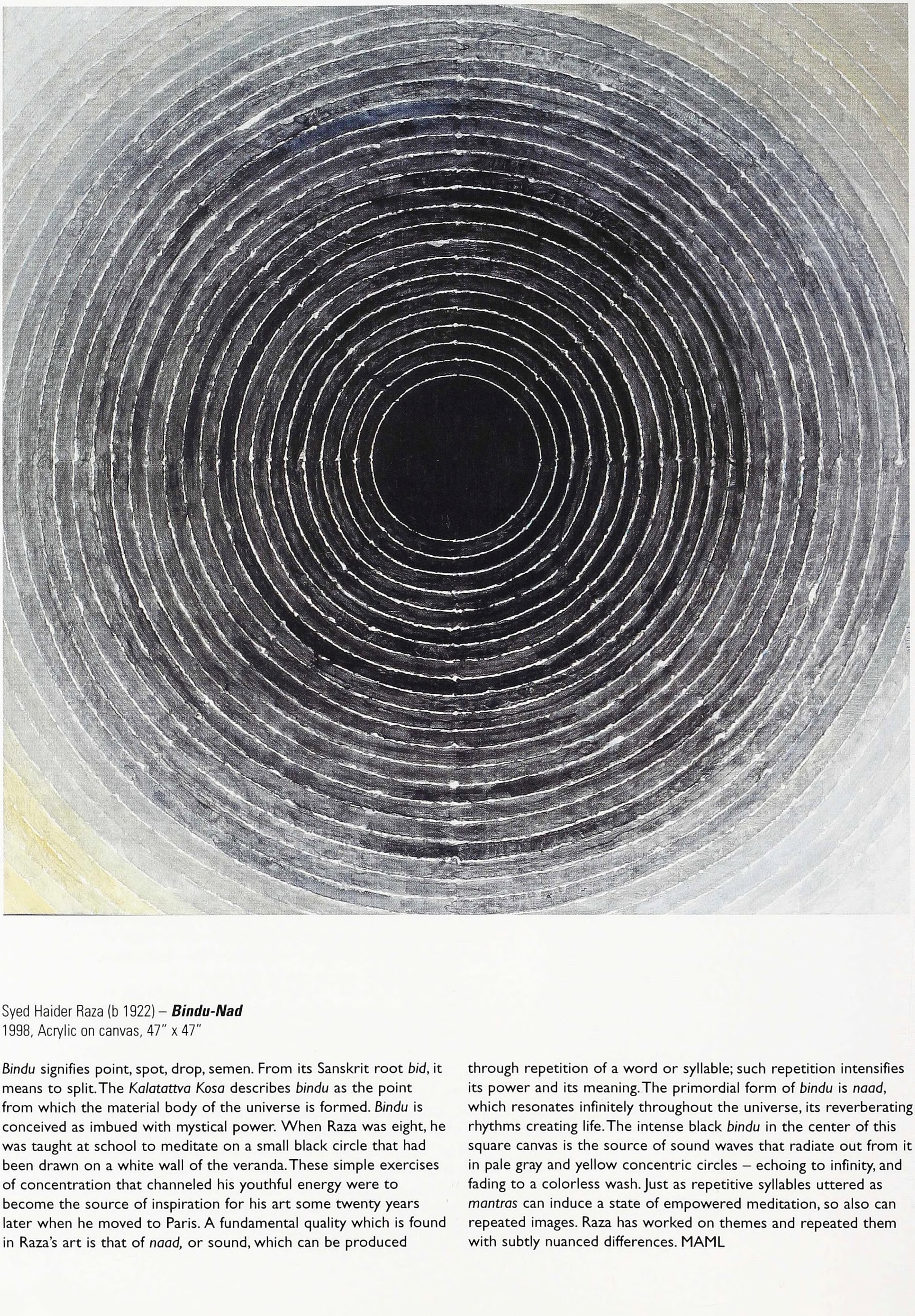


B. Prabha (1933-2001) – ***Four Women Conversing***
1966, Oil on canvas, 35 1/2" x 53"

B. Prabha was born in Bela, a small village near Nagpur. She attended the Sir J. J. School of Art, and had lived in Mumbai since the early 1950s. She studied western artists including Picasso and Van Gough; however, she was drawn to the work of Amrita Sher-Gil, who was undoubtedly the most celebrated modern artist in India in the late 1930s. *Four Women Conversing* is a direct quotation of Sher-Gil's paintings made between 1935 and 1937 of peasant women seen in her travels throughout India. In Prabha's work, four slender dark-skinned women wearing simple white saris stand talking with each other. A young boy stands close to the women on the right, perhaps his mother. The only hint of a setting is the wooden supports used for drying fishing nets. The placement of the women and boy recalls Sher-Gil's *Bride's Toilet*, 1937, where the seated figures interact in a similarly quiet and thoughtful way. MAML

Krishna Hawlaji Ara (1914-1985) – ***Seated Female Nude***
circa 1960s, Gouache on paper, 29" x 22"

Ara, who worked as a domestic servant and a car cleaner, was a self-taught artist whose talent was discovered by the *Times of India* art critic Rudy von Leyden. Ara was a nationalist who participated in the struggle for independence in the 1940s and did some complex paintings on this theme. However, he made his mark as a founding member of the Progressive Artists' Group and as a painter of rich, sensuous still lifes and voluminous female nudes. It is characteristic of Ara that the nude, whose bodily contours are prominently outlined, has her back to the viewer and an impassive quality that draws from the still life. GS



Syed Haider Raza (b 1922) – ***Bindu-Nad***
1998, Acrylic on canvas, 47" x 47"

Bindu signifies point, spot, drop, semen. From its Sanskrit root *bid*, it means to split. The *Kalatattva Kosa* describes *bindu* as the point from which the material body of the universe is formed. *Bindu* is conceived as imbued with mystical power. When Raza was eight, he was taught at school to meditate on a small black circle that had been drawn on a white wall of the veranda. These simple exercises of concentration that channeled his youthful energy were to become the source of inspiration for his art some twenty years later when he moved to Paris. A fundamental quality which is found in Raza's art is that of *naad,* or sound, which can be produced through repetition of a word or syllable; such repetition intensifies its power and its meaning. The primordial form of *bindu* is *naad*, which resonates infinitely throughout the universe, its reverberating rhythms creating life. The intense black *bindu* in the center of this square canvas is the source of sound waves that radiate out from it in pale gray and yellow concentric circles – echoing to infinity, and fading to a colorless wash. Just as repetitive syllables uttered as *mantras* can induce a state of empowered meditation, so also can repeated images. Raza has worked on themes and repeated them with subtly nuanced differences. MAML

OTHER WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

Biren De (b 1926) – ***April '73***
1973, Oil on canvas, 52 1/2" x 40 1/8" (Illustrated on the back cover, bottom)

Laxma Goud (b 1940) - ***Untitled (Couple with Goat)***
circa 1980, Watercolor on paper, 13 3/4" x 10 1/4"

Maqbool Fida Husain (b 1915) - ***Hanuman-Thirteen***
1981, Watercolor and ink on paper, 12 5/8" x 19 5/8"

Ram Kumar (b 1924) - ***Untitled***
1974, Oil on Canvas, 33 1/8" x 60 1/4" (Illustrated on the front cover, bottom)

Ganesh Pyne (b 1937) - ***Untitled***
circa 1970, Pen and black ink on paper, 4" x 6 3/4"

Shyamal Dutta Ray (b 1934) - ***Death of a Dream***
1973, Watercolor on paper, 19" x 25"

Gulam Rasool Santosh (1929-1996) - ***Untitled***
circa 1975, Acrylic on canvas, 55 3/4" x 42" (Illustrated on the back cover, top)

Francis Newton Souza (1924-2002) - ***Woman***
1946, Pencil on paper, 12" x 8"

Catalog Entries:

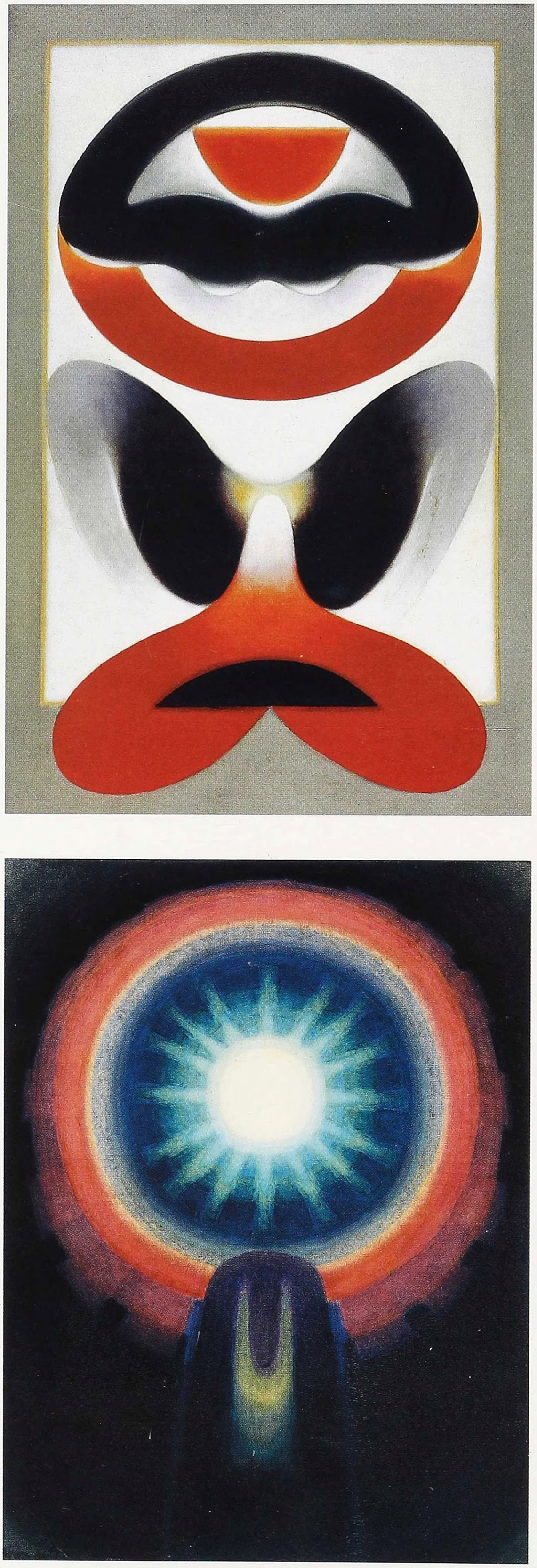
Yashodhara Dalmia is an art historian and independent curator based in New Delhi, India (YD).

Mary-Ann Milford-Lutzker is the Carver Professor of Asian Art History, Mills College, Oakland, California (MAML).

Gayatri Sinha is an art critic and curator based in New Delhi, India (GS).

Marcella Sirhandi is an Associate Professor of Art History, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma (MCS).

Photography: All by Jack Abraham, except Tyeb Mehta and Syed Haider Raza courtesy of Christie's and Nalini Malani courtesy of Sotheby's.



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