

## Ghost of Souza to appear in NY



Lost childhood by Chintan Upadhyay The boat on Hunger Strike by GR Iranna

As the inaugural exhibition in their new space in New York's Lower East Side arts district, Aicon gallery is presenting a unique exhibit featuring selected works of legendary artist Francis Newton Souza.

The show will present mid-century works by Souza from Aicon's collection alongside new works created by contemporary Indian and Pakistani artists in response to the master's paintings. The show will include artworks by Debnath Basu, Adip Dutta, Neeraj Goswami, GR Iranna, Sonia Khurana, Riyas Komu, Bose Krishnamachari, Shibu Natesan, Baiju Parthan, Justin Ponmany, Ashim Purkayastha, Tazeen Qayyum, TV Santhosh, Chintan Upadhyay, Vivek Vilasini, and Muhammad Zeeshan.

Souza (1924-2002), was one of the first Indian artists to receive widespread international exposure and recognition in the West. He studied at the Sir JJ School of Art, but was expelled in 1942 because of his support for the Quit India Movement. After this he founded the Bombay Progressive Artists' Group to encourage Indian artists to participate in the international avant-garde.

The group, broke from the antiquated notions of the then popular Bengal school of painting. Dispensing with the clichéd, neo-Orientalist imagery, recycled from India's manuscript-painting traditions, the Progressive Artists Group called into question the cultural nationalism that the Bengal school had ardently espoused. The dreams of a pan-Asian political resurgence that inspired the generation of artists living in post-Independence India had wilted with the rise and defeat of the Japanese in the Second World War.

At the same time, the mythologizing imagination of the Independence movement's avant-garde had grown stale and, India's partition was likely to evoke cynicism as patriotic fervor. In response to this discontent, Souza and his contemporaries crafted a radically new visual

language, at once resolutely international in its influences, yet deeply, if not problematically, engaged with traditional Indian art. Their artistic sources were heterogeneous and elusive, and not always immediately identifiable in their work. In the process, Souza and the Progressive Artists Group established a range of possibilities for artists in India, the legacy of which is still being felt today.

It is ironic that Souza, who always saw himself as an outsider, has come to occupy a position of monumental centrality in modern Indian art. But there is more to it than irony. The Ghost of Souza seeks to emphasize the complex and confrontational relationship that contemporary Indian artists have with the modern masters of their country, just as the mid-century painters, such as Souza, had with their own predecessors.

The juxtaposition of Souza's paintings with the work of this new generation of visual artists demonstrates the necessity of this tenuous and ever-fluctuating relationship in contemporary Indian art. Souza's work is intensely powerful, multi-faceted, and at times incredibly dark. It both challenges and provokes a new generation of Indian artists; and while there exist unavoidable continuities in the work of contemporary Indian artists – Souza's internationalism, his refusal to shy away from the grotesque – there are just as inevitably discontinuities, disagreements, and breakdowns in communication. This exhibition creates a map of these relationships, drawing on a wide range of artists and artistic practices from contemporary India, bringing them into conversation with a selection of some of Souza's most reactionary canvases.

Visit Aicon Gallery:

35 Great Jones Street, New York, NY

<http://www.aicongallery.com>