

PRESS RELEASE

In Search Of the Vernacular

Work featured by Post-Independence South Asian Masters

12 November – 12 December

Private View: Thursday November 12, 6pm – 8pm

Since the beginning of the 20th century Indian artists have attempted to articulate a vernacular visual language. This has often entailed taking the forms of Western art as something which had to be either rejected outright, or significantly changed in order to address an Indian vernacular. For example, Abanindranath Tagore deliberately sought an indigenous style through firstly referencing the Mughal manner and subsequently through the development of a pan-Asian style. This attempt to create an 'oriental art' was very deliberately positioned in aesthetic opposition to 'occidental art' yet often still referenced back to the evolving stylistic discourse of Western Modernism. Another example is Jamini Roy, who initially produced works in a hybridized post-impressionist style that echoed Seurat and Van Gogh, before turning away from that towards the paintings made outside Kalighat temples. Roy's turn away from Western Modernism is a very pronounced one, yet it also sets the stage for us to read his subsequent development in parallel to Modernism's increasing move towards a flattened picture plane. So somewhat paradoxically, in turning away from Western Modernism in order to articulate a new vernacular tradition, Roy in fact aligned himself with Modernism's stripping back of ornament in favor of line and color planes.

Utilizing elements of Western Modernism but remaining thematically yoked to Indian subject matter was a strategy that was used by a number of artists who followed Jamini Roy, including F.N. Souza and M.F. Husain. They and other artists associated with the Progressive Artists' Group absorbed the aesthetics of Western Modernism but attempted to create a visual language more specific and true to India, often foregrounding rural inhabitants of India as a way to picture the life of the nation. However the complexity of this practice was simultaneously being paralleled by many Modernist artists working in the West, such as Picasso and Matisse. They deliberately drew on non-Western sources for inspiration - a phenomenon that has become known as 'Primitivism' and has been much debated.

It is perhaps accurate to start to trace a complex pattern of rejection, influence and echoing between artists working in India and Western Modernism in the various ways those artists attempted to articulate a vernacular visual language. This survey exhibition attempts to tease out some of those complexities.

Featured in the exhibition are the works of M. F. Husain, Jamini Roy, Anjolie Ela Menon, Bikash Bhattacharjee, Abanindranath Tagore, Nandlal Bose, Sadequain, F. N. Souza, Jagdish Swaminathan, S. H. Raza and Laxma Goud.