

## STRETCHED TERRAINS

### A string of seven exhibitions

**Yatra: The Rooted Nomad** M.F.Husain

**The Black Sun:** S.H.Raza

**Man Grinding his Teeth:** F.N.Souza

**Delhi: Building the modern** - photographs and architectural models by Madan Mahatta, Raj Rewal, Mahendra Raj, Kuldip Singh, Habib Rahman and A.P.Kanvide. In collaboration with Ram Rahman.

**Events in a Cloud Chamber:** Films and documents from Vision Exchange Workshop - Akbar Padamsee, Ashim Ahluwalia, Nalini Malani and Nasreen Mohamedi

**Interpositions: Replaying the inventory** - Navjot Altaf, Pushpamala N, Mithu Sen and Atul Dodiya

**Sadak.Sarai.Sheher.Basti - The Recurring Figure:** photographs by Parthiv Shah

*Curated by Roobina Karode*

*At Kiran Nadar Museum of Art - 145, DLF South Court Mall, Saket, New Delhi*

**PREVIEW:** 2 February 2017, 7:00 - 10:30pm

**EXHIBITION DATES:** 3 February - 31 July 2017

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The Kiran Nadar Museum of Art is pleased to announce a set of seven independent and yet interconnected exhibitions under the rubric of *Stretched Terrains*. Imagining the multitude of landforms, their physical features and fundamental natures that may stand as parables for an art scene that is as diverse as the geo-societal features of the country, *Stretched Terrains* desires to rewind, excavate and re-examine a set of enquiries around 'modernity' that came up in the past decades.

In its entirety this manifold exhibition brings out the multiform, tenors and textures of modernism in Indian art through three profound exhibitions of M.F.Husain, F.N.Souza and S.H.Raza, and an exhibition highlighting the works of five architects and seminal architectural buildings in Delhi. On another axis it strings together works of contemporary artists Atul Dodiya, Mithu Sen, Pushpamala N. and Navjot Altaf who critique as well as play with the modernist vocabulary at various junctures. Providing an exciting interstitiality between these two approaches are Parthiv Shah's photographs of Husain and the films and documents from the Vision Exchange Workshop held in Bombay between 1969-1972.

The exhibition refers to the post-independence moment of 'nation-consciousness', the inquisitive yet anxious rigour for a self-ruled future of a newly independent nation and the euphoria of setting up new institutional structures. It aspires to introspect ideas around 'progression', 'developing the urban', 'strengthening the rural' and 'making the nation-state'. The exhibition invites the viewer to re-enter this terrain as a stranger, and respond to the mutuality and the stakes a new nation holds in 'internationalism'. Along with this it probes through the binary of the 'symbolic' and the 'archival'.

This exhibition is a consortium of different ingenious pursuits, proposals and vocabularies. They are evident in architecture, visual arts, films and writings. They collectively highlight the interpretative role

of art; the processes of hybridization, assimilation and cross-implantation of cultural practices within a new nation. Exhibiting and bringing together many seminal works from the 1940s and 1950s in the public domain, the display captures the negotiation between collective ethos of the creative souls and their anxieties around developing the post-independence artistic entity.

Furthermore, the seven exhibitions open a sequence of meditations such as on the spaces of public gathering, be it through Husain's rendition of the village fairs or Raj Rewal's architectural conceptualization of the 'Hall of Nations'; a place for trade fairs and expos; or through Navjot Altaf's watercolours of glass and steel constructions and architectural grid structures. Another trait of the exhibition is an impulse towards seeking a disrupted continuity as seen in the reconstruction of Akbar Padamsee's lost film 'Events in a Cloud Chamber' by filmmaker Ashim Ahluwalia, or in the playful insertions by Pushpamala in her series of photo-performances 'Native Women of South India'.

**According to Mrs. Kiran Nadar, "This large exhibition presents much new juxtaposition, experiments and projects for the first time, and also emphasizes the strengths of the KNMA collection with seminal artworks. We are very glad to make art historical investigations of this scale and tenor possible."**

Last year with the passing of artist S.H.Raza we lost three prominent figures of the Progressive Artists Group (M.F.Husain, F.N.Souza and S.H.Raza). With independent and extensive shows dedicated to all three, KNMA presents a rare opportunity for researchers and the general public to relook at the contribution of this generation. Presenting modernist experiments in architecture alongside new explorations by artists through mediums such as film and photography and documents of such artistic exchanges and workshops displayed in the exhibition indicate trajectories that might be re-explored.

Highlights of the exhibition include seminal works such as M.F.Husain's *Between the Spider and the Lamp* (1956), *Yatra* (1955), F.N.Souza's *Family* (1947) and *Birth* (1955), S.H. Raza's *Saurashtra* (1983) and *Haut de Cagnes* (1951). The majority of the early works of Husain and Souza reflect influences of their visit to the exhibition 'Masterpieces of Indian Art' at the Government House (now Rashtrapati Bhavan) in 1948. Both found inspiration and incorporated elements in their own ways from the Gupta sculptures, the bold colours of Pahari miniatures, Khajuraho sculptures and Chola bronzes. Husain's *Untitled* (1956) work from the KNMA collection suggests these influences in his registers and assemblage of different scenes in one painting, inspired by the sculptural friezes from Indian temple architecture, and their role in creating new mythologies apt for the new and progressing nation.

A major section of the exhibition *Yatra: The Rooted Nomad* brings together the early works of Husain from late 1940s and 1950s that project the scale of India's vast rural and agrarian society, and the fabrics of civilization in a modernist language. Village life and fairs are the central theme. With rural masses that constitute the newly formed nation, the envisioning of a new land with its people, these paintings have dark and earthy colours, bringing contrary forces together; modernity and tradition, enveloped in Husain's personal symbolism - one sees hand gestures, uniquely implemented postures, referencing and dwelling on popular stories and myths. From his years spent as a cinema billboard painter and children's furniture designer are toys and a doll's house. The colours, sights and sounds of public gathering, the fairs, the toys are but artistic representation of his boyhood memories and sometimes even realities, thus making M.F. Husain one of those artists whose artistic practice mirror life in a ruthlessly true manner. Amidst this kind of dexterity Husain took distinct interest in certain subject matters like the image of the woman as mother, and as a mysterious figure and presence evolving in oral stories of Maya, Ganga, and the graces.

A prolific artist and writer F.N. Souza wrote in his diary in 1956, "Eyes in the brow, better to see with the brain / Stars in the face are the scars of smallpox / Arrows in neck like flies mean affliction / The grinding of teeth is not in the Day of Resurrection but today". Any investigation into Souza's work perhaps begins with the man himself; hedonist, contrarian, sometimes malevolent, sometimes agonizingly insightful and always at odds with the rest of the world. Souza's general belligerence towards authority is most satisfying in his relentless tirade against organized religion and the Roman Catholic Church in particular. The exhibition *Man Grinding his Teeth* presents his forays, from early paintings as a member of the communist party to his masterly use of line in distorted portraits and heads of the city man whose tormented expressions emit corruption, confusion, irreverence and brutal confrontation to savagely brutal depiction of the female body.

The exhibition dedicated to S.H.Raza entitled *The Black Sun* reveals facets of his early practice that is relatively less viewed is his array of landscapes, cityscapes and those works etched out of his memories of Malabar, Rajasthan or even imaging of an Italian village. All diverse yet with intimate connections with his evolution as a painter since his student days at J.J. School and the advent of the Progressive Artists Groups in 1947. This exhibition brings forth the sights and sounds of the 'verdant green forests' of Madhya Pradesh as reflected in Raza's paintings, memories and delights of the landscapes that kept haunting him even after he moved to France.

The string continues with *Delhi: Building the Modern* that addresses the architecture of modern India. Echoing the vision of hope that was embodied in Nehru's midnight address to the country, followed by the entire Nehruvian era thereafter. The exhibition includes models, structural and engineering drawings, photographs of five seminal architects Raj Rewal, Mahendra Raj, Kuldip Singh, Habib Rahman and Kanvinde, covering a period of two decades between 1960s and 80s. The architectural photography of Madan Mahatta charts the scale, innovation and the contexts of modernization in architecture, such as the artful and controlled use of reinforced steel. Mahatta's photographs also bring into discussion buildings and works of other important architects like J.K. Chowdhury and Joseph Stein. These iconic buildings such as the Hall of Nations by Raj Rewal at Pragati Maidan and Rabindra Bhawan in New Delhi by Habib Rahman are extraordinary experimentations, uniquely indigenous and remarkably global in nature. The processes behind these projects are compelling due to their manual renderings and more importantly, have a base in ingenious engineering intuition and judgments. Structural elements like transfer girders, procedures like post-tensioning and staging, and details in every joint and node, in every taper and twist that shaped different elements, allude to unique structural logic. These new constructions and buildings also made the superstructures of a new independent nation, with a commanding presence and setting. This section also refers to large murals on institutional buildings made by artists like M.F.Husain and Satish Gujral, commissioned by the Public Works Department. It is for the first time that architecture and visual arts are being presented together. This section is organized in collaboration with artist, photographer and curator Ram Rahman.

This string also consists of a project-exhibition *Events in a Cloud-Chamber* which reconstructs the Vision Exchange Workshop (VIEW). It was, a revolutionary space for interdisciplinary experimentation and collaboration that artist Akbar Padamsee established in April 1969 and continued till 1972, using the funds that he had received through a Jawaharlal Nehru Fellowship. Padamsee, a member of the Bombay Progressives, was interested in experimenting with the mediums of photography and film. The multidisciplinary workshop was hosted in Padamsee's Nepean Sea Road apartment, and included painters, printmakers, a cinematographer, an animator, a psychoanalyst, sculptors, photographers and students from the J.J. School of Art. Participants included people like Mani Kaul, Nalini Malani, Gieve Patel, and Krishen Khanna. It resulted in several film projects most of which are lost such as Gieve Patel's short film *Chairs*. Kumar Shahani made a 16mm film *Obsession* with a script by the psychoanalyst Udayan Patel. The highlight of the exhibition includes Padamsee's two films that were made in the context of the workshop, *Syzygy* (1969) and a remake of *Events in a Cloud Chamber* (1974/2016). The latter was lost and is reconstructed by filmmaker Ashim Ahluwalia in collaboration and conversation with Padamsee. This small exhibition also brings together Nalini Malani's photographs, Nasreen Mohamedi's photographs, burnt drawings of Padamsee's film *Syzygy*, and archival material including correspondences and exchanges between artists associated with VIEW.

A playful and exciting aspect of Husain is presented through the photographs of Parthiv Shah in the exhibition *Sadak.Sarai.Sheher.Basti: the recurring figure*. Mostly taken during 1992-1993, these photographs tease out the theatre of everyday life of artist M.F.Husain that consists of many conversations, travels, accidental plans, and impromptu gestures. Parthiv captures Husain amidst different actions, from reading a newspaper in a busy market and roaming the streets of Nizamuddin basti, knocking doors, listening to the poetry of mechanic-poet who lives near the *dargah* to drinking tea and walking barefoot. Posing and giving company to the historical figures, actors and political leaders such as Bogart, Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Marx, Hitler etc. painted in his magnum opus works as displayed in his major retrospective at the National Gallery of Modern Art in 1993 *Let History Cut across Me Without Me*, he re-enters as a stranger. Husain is revealed to us as he merges with the crowd or improvises and becomes an extension of his paintings. He is also sighted among friends in relaxed and passionate

conversations like with Ram Kumar at Humayun's tomb on one long afternoon. These photographs shift our attention to the peripheral and different levels of playfulness of Husain, the gypsy on the move.

The rear galleries of the museum showcase works of contemporary artists Atul Dodiya, Mithu Sen, Navjot Altaf and Pushpamala in the exhibition *Interpositions: Replaying the Inventory*. The practice of all the four artists flourished between the 70s and 90s; a period that displayed phenomenal changes in society, culture, politics and economy in complex layers within the country. Works displayed in the exhibition are almost like registrations of these changes. Their practices pick up cues from the modernist predecessors at times directly and at others tangentially. Pushpamala's *The Native Types* series, reflect her occupations with the reenactment of a set of pre-independence, essentially colonial images. Her sardonic sense of humor and sharp subversive language turns this series into visual critique of the colonial.

Atul Dodiya's visual lexicon with his 'photo real' treatment of images and cultural reference laden narratives is brought forth through the diptych series of juxtapositions of Archival digital prints and oils on canvas. He inquiringly titles the works with both art historical and socio-politically historic references, for instance *With Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan, North - West Frontier* paired with *Nude Descending the Staircase - Marcel Duchamp, 1912*. Atul's artistic practice, much like Pushpamala's is a complex weave of assimilated information from diverse time spans and sources, critical positioning and finely balanced theatrics. On the other hand Navjot Altaf's works are a critique of the celebration, of urbanization's limitless desire to lure the human psyche at the cost of abusing the planet; which in fact is a general trait of the independent 'modernized' nation. Mithu Sen, the youngest of the four artists articulates through a very different visual vocabulary. Her images in mixed media on custom made acid free papers are beautifully violent. Serene on the surface yet rebellious in subject matter is what Mithu consistently offers to her viewers. The modernist patriarchal values and standards are mercilessly brought to test by her minimal yet emotionally charged works like *Beheaded after prostrate surgery* or a series like *The same river twice*.

## Notes to Editors

### About Kiran Nadar Museum of Art (KNMA)

Established at the initiative of the avid collector Kiran Nadar, KNMA (the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art) opened in January 2010, as the first private museum of Art exhibiting Modern and Contemporary works from India and the subcontinent. Located in the heart of Delhi, KNMA, as a not-for-profit organization intends to exemplify the dynamic relationship between art and culture through its exhibitions, publications, educational and public programs. An initiative of the Shiv Nadar Foundation, KNMA aims to instill a deep sense of appreciation for contemporary art by making it accessible to everyone.

[www.knma.in](http://www.knma.in)

### About Shiv Nadar Foundation

The Shiv Nadar Foundation ([www.ShivNadarFoundation.org](http://www.ShivNadarFoundation.org)) has been established by Shiv Nadar, Founder, HCL - a \$6.3 billion leading global technology and IT enterprise, with over 90,000 employees across 31 countries. Founded in 1976, HCL is one of India's original IT garage start-ups and offers diverse business aligned technology solutions spanning the entire hardware and software spectrum, to a focused range of industry verticals.

The Foundation is committed to the creation of a more equitable, merit-based society by empowering individuals to bridge the socio-economic divide. To that purpose the Foundation is focused on the underdeveloped disciplinary areas in India related to transformational education, creativity and art. The Foundation set up the SSN Institutions ([www.SSN.edu.in](http://www.SSN.edu.in)) in 1996, comprising the SSN College of Engineering (already a highly ranked private engineering college in India), in Chennai, Tamil Nadu. The Foundation has also set up VidyaGyan, a residential leadership academy for meritorious rural children, at Bulandshar and Sitapur in Uttar Pradesh. In addition, the Foundation runs the Shiv Nadar University ([www.snu.edu.in](http://www.snu.edu.in)), an international multi-disciplinary university with strong research orientation located in Greater Noida in India's National Capital Region and the Shiv Nadar Schools ([www.shivnadarschool.edu.in](http://www.shivnadarschool.edu.in)), a network of progressive urban schools across India aimed to provide children with education that creates lifelong learners.