



PRESS RELEASE

**Jawahar Kala Kendra
and Kiran Nadar Museum of Art**

present

the euphoria of being

HIMMAT SHAH

A CONTINUING JOURNEY
SPANNING SIX DECADES

Curated by Roobina Karode

Preview: 29 October 2017, Sunday, 6.00 pm

The Museum Galleries

Jawahar Kala Kendra

JLN Marg, Jaipur, Rajasthan

Open to Public: 31 October – 15 December 2017

11 am - 7 pm except Monday

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Jawahar Kala Kendra (JKK) is pleased to bring to Jaipur (Rajasthan) the first ever comprehensive showing of eminent artist Himmat Shah in collaboration with Kiran Nadar Museum of Art (KNMA). This exhibition is a celebration of Himmat Shah's solitary pursuit and inspiring nomadic life lived under an open sky that transformed into a recurrent poetic metaphor of the vastness and infinity of space in his work. It celebrates his prolific and rich oeuvre that has never been seen together in its entirety. A key highlight of the exhibition includes his drawings and sculptures inspired by the landscapes of Rajasthan. Having lived in Bhavnagar, Ahmedabad, Baroda, Delhi, he now lives in Jaipur since 2000. Unlike the retrospective of Himmat's works at KNMA in 2016, this exhibition focuses on his exploration of space through sculpture and architecture, particularly in relation to Charles Correa's architectural feat at JKK.

Tracing and underlining Himmat Shah's contribution to the discourse of modern Indian art, the exhibition presents around 200 works from the KNMA collection along with loans from various public and private institutions and collections. Along with his famous terracotta sculptures, bronzes, and drawings, it brings to light his lesser-known mediums and extraordinary body of works—high-relief murals, burnt paper collages and silver paintings. 'the euphoria of being' highlights key ideas in Himmat Shah's works: fragility and transience of existence, the heightened relationship between ephemeral layers and stasis, his intense connect and understanding of the materials and material world, and echoes of lost civilizations and cultures.

The selection spans over almost six decades; starting from his early burnt paper collages that he exhibited in the famous Group 1890 exhibition at Lalit Kala Akademi in 1964 to the few surviving silver paintings that will be exhibited for the first time after 1973. Though trained in painting Himmat Shah turned to exploring new mediums right after completing his formal education. The exhibition showcases a number of seminal terracotta sculptures from his acclaimed 'Head' series to small found objects, vessels and containers that demonstrate the artist's continuous inquiries. The exhibition includes around 100 drawings, made from 1957 when he was a student at the Fine Arts Faculty in Vadodara to his most recent works in 2015. These drawings are an invaluable record of the journey and observations, indicating the directions pursued by him. These drawings are referenced as anchor-points of the entire exhibition. Also presented is a gallery of portraits, bronze heads, projected as maquettes of possible future buildings, and his monumental bronze sculptures. When Himmat Shah was innovating techniques, experimenting and comprehending the plastic values of art, his contribution somehow got underwritten in the dominant narratives of figuration and narration in modernism in Indian art.

Himmat's practice combines modern abstraction with the local vernacular anecdotes, observations and materials, most times transforming everyday objects into meditative icons with variety of actions performed on and with them. Many of Himmat's early drawings, sculptures and reliefs incorporate a dense clustering of simple geometric forms and mythic and archaic symbols within their surfaces. His art presents a coming together of cultures, artistic traditions and contemporary life. Rather than presenting a chronological sequence, the exhibition display takes a nonhierarchical approach to all the works from

different stages of Himmat Shah's career, following the continuities and creative flows dictated by his inquiries.

On this occasion Pooja Sood, Director General, Jawahar Kala Kendra states, "It is a real privilege to showcase Himmat Shah's entire body of work to the audience in Jaipur..."

Talking about Himmat Shah's persona, the curator, Roobina Karode elaborates, "If there is an Indian artist who possesses the free-spiritedness of the bohemian and has embraced the emancipatory disposition of art, it has to be Himmat Shah. After more than six decades of engagement with art, he is still possessed by a meandering spirit tuned to the spurt of a creative moment that often occurs in states of mindlessness or rapture. All by himself, Himmat wandered and lived—amidst the ruins of the pre-historic sites of Lothal where he was born, on farmlands in arid desert environments, in the wilderness of the dense Dang jungles and the Gir, processing emotions of fear, uncertainty and danger, gathering transformative experiences early on, not knowing then what he was seeking in life, or in art. He extensively explored the landscapes of Gujarat and Rajasthan, aimlessly wandering through the desert, climbing hills, living in deserted caves, walking the tilled fields or sleeping under the vastness of the sky."

Himmat Shah comments on the making of this exhibition: "I'm grateful to Kiran Nadar, Pooja Sood and Roobina Karode, for making this exhibition possible. It is an extremely satisfying experience to present this coming together of my entire life through my work in Jaipur, where I live. My ideas and concepts are based on looking within the form. I've worked all my life. While working I immerse myself in another world altogether. It's a mystery."

Kiran Nadar, Founder & Chairperson, KNMA, adds, "Himmat Shah's contribution to the Indian modern art in 1960s is individualistic and unique. It is important that such deserving artist with undeterred commitment and radical vision gets his due by the world. His works need to be brought into the public domain. KNMA is performing that role, in providing this important historical vantage point."

The first-hand experience of witnessing Archaeological Survey of India's (ASI) excavations done in Lothal between 1955 and 1960, its archaic clay pottery, frequent play-visits to the nearby potters' colony as a child, appears most strongly in his terracotta sculptures that he started working during the late 1970s and 1980s. Technique, craft and chance best describes this corpus of fragile terracotta works, made from clay aged and tediously prepared for five or more years, all by himself. Broadly categorized as Garhi years, the studio in Garhi artists' village created by Lalit Kala Akademi in 1976 was his most engaged and productive period. Garhi studio became his cave for almost twenty five years.

Flags atop an unknown temple, fort or building or hilltop are scattered throughout the exhibition space, invoking a landscape painstakingly constructed. The flag-topped temples scattered in the desert of Rajasthan give solace to the nomads. The exhibition also showcases an array of small sculptures made from casts of found-objects - funnels, bottles, vessels, tyre tubes, cylindrical forms, molten cylinders,

rope – at times hiding and revealing forms within forms. These resuscitated small sculpture-objects command presence and dominate a vast expanse of space.

Drawing for Himmat became central to his conception of the visual form. His drawings on paper stand apart as independent works, as significant and integral to his holistic vision as his sculptures in terracotta and bronze. His advancing and receding lines weave multiple dimensions and visions of vast space. They range from his early drawings in 1957-64 of heads, peering face with agonized expression and architectural motifs that reappears in sculptural forms later, to dark erotic drawings, to constructive strokes and journey of a single unbroken line to gestural calligraphic scripts. One of the iconic linocuts 'Yellow Stone' which was used for the cover of *Contra*66. His life and artistic practice are not separate entities. Each of his bronze head becomes a geography, a three-dimensional architecture whose surface is marked with different lines intersecting and diverging, fissures wearing down, grooves penetrating so deep and cutting through. The architectonic quality distinguishes one from the other. Made with inventive and extraordinary techniques, unique patina and textures, a majority of these bronzes were casted in London between 2005 and 2007.

Himmat Shah's Brief Biography

Acknowledged as one of the most remarkable artists working today in India, Himmat Shah was born in 1933 in Lothal, Gujarat, one of the prominent cities of Indus valley civilization, and currently lives and works in Jaipur, Rajasthan.

After initial training at Dakshinamurti in Bhavnagar, he studied painting at the Faculty of Fine Arts of M.S. University, Baroda, from 1955 to 1961. He received National Cultural Scholarship in 1956, and received a French Government scholarship to study in Paris from 1966-67. Shah was a founder member of Group 1890, a short-lived artists' group, formed in 1962 along with J. Swaminathan, Gulammohammed Sheikh, Jeram Patel, Ambadas etc. The group dispersed soon after their seminal exhibition at the Lalit Kala Akademi in 1963, and each of its members, including Shah continued their artistic practices with their own agendas.

While still a student Himmat Shah had received Lalit Kala National Award for Painting twice, in 1959 and 1962. He was also awarded the Gold Medal by the Jammu & Kashmir Academy of Art in 1960. He came to be known and appreciated within the artistic circles for his erotic drawings exhibition in 1964 in Delhi, and created quite a stir. His early exhibitions were well-received and earned him a unique position. In 2003, the artist was honored with the *Kalidasa Samman* by the Government of Madhya Pradesh. Shah has also received the All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society (AIFACS) Award, New Delhi, in 1996, and the Sahitya Kala Parishad Award, New Delhi, in 1988. He has held numerous group and solo exhibitions in India and abroad and has represented the country in 'Festival of Indian Art' in Moscow in 1996, the 'Biennale de Paris' in 1967 and 1970 and 'biennale 13' in Antwerp.

