

The Kiran Nadar Museum of Art presents  
TWO EXHIBITIONS

## **COMMON COURSE**

Poetic, satirical and political commentaries of  
Gaganendranath Tagore, Chittoprasad, KG Subramanyan and RK Laxman

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## **over the edge, crossing the line five artists from Bengal**

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ganesh pyne . meera mukherjee. somnath hore  
ganesh haloi . jogen chowdhury

PREVIEW: August 11, 2019, Sunday  
145, South Court Mall, Saket

KNMA opens the season with two exhibitions from the museum collection, with an extensive showcasing of five hundred artworks, and few loans from artists and artists' estates.

'Common Course' is a zestful and humorous ride through the caricatures, satirical, poetic and political commentaries of four artists of modern India. The exhibition brings forth the stereotypes, contradictory/ critical impressions, resistance, bold alerting signals to civic and political consciousness and moral crises of colonial India as marked in the political posters of Chittaprosad and commentaries of Gaganendranath Tagore on the topical and social history of Bengal. These along with KG Subramanyan's incisive and stinging poetics on the political drama that unfolded during the 1970s Emergency period and the recurring character of the common man in RK Laxman's cartoons, interprets and voices opinions on political events and the politics of everyday in post-independent democratic India.

The exhibition includes original lithographs and collaged pages of two seminal books. First one is Gaganendranath Tagore's album of caricatures '*Adbhuta Loka* (Realm of the Absurd) made in 1917, which captures the strange deformities, social negotiations and transformations happening in colonial city of Calcutta. The urban, drawing on stereotypes of the dubious priest, aristocrats, the semi-urban or anglicized *bhadralok* that he called as 'hybrid Bengalis' are represented in his works as young men half-clad in Indian dhoti and half in European dress. In the introduction to his another album '*Virupa Vajra/ The Wry Bolt: The play of opposites*' he wrote, "When deformities grow unchecked but are cherished by blind habit, it becomes the duty of the artist to show that they are ugly and vulgar and therefore abnormal." The second book is 'The Tale of Talking Face' by KG Subramanyan. The original collages not only give an insight into the workings and artistry of the master-storyteller and pedagogue Subramanyan, but also the satiric verses that leads us onto the threat of totalitarianism looming through the autocratic ruler/protagonist of his tale. Published in 1989 by Seagull, KG Subramanyan started work on the series in around 1975 when India was under the emergency rule. An array of 43 paper collages constitute the template, building and holding the tension through the black and white spatial registers of events layered with multiple focal points of the narrative.

Treading across varying nomenclatures and understanding of the role of an illustrator, graphic novelist, cartoonist and agitated political resistance, the exhibition reflects on the rich visual syntax and narratives rooted in the conflicts and contradictions of the respective times. It highlights the practice of chronicling social, political and cultural changes in the society through the myriad ways of telling a tale. 'Common Course' cuts across genres of popular prints and book illustrations, subverting, parodying, lampooning with characteristics of pictorial journalism, exaggerated physiognomies of protagonists, readings of the political ties and social tensions, common set of criteria or the rising collective effort of the oppressed. 'Common course' is a play on the assertion and rights of the commons.

RK Laxman as an artist, could be hailed as the *vidushak* or jester of modern Indian Politics. The protagonist of his cartoons 'the Common Man' is a curiously omnipresent bespectacled middle-aged balding man in his modest dhoti and checkered coat, who silently witnesses the humdrum from the tiny corner of the front page of the daily newspaper. This quintessential 'Common Man' bears familiarity with anyone acquainted with the daily affairs of Indian nation. From the prolific oeuvre of RK Laxman, KNMA showcases a rare feat of cartoons where listening, observing, sharp analysis and political commentaries is performed on the most crucial events of the nation. When showcased as a tableau, the immediacy of his swift brush strokes and stinging nature of his humour while unrobing the follies of his peers is palpable. They take you on a tumultuous journey of a newly independent country, its various domestic and international vagaries, and hypocrisy of its leaders and the scandals from 1950s to 1970s. He caricatured almost all significant political leaders and popular public figures of his time, few of the iconic ones are part of the exhibition.

The intense pen and ink drawings and political posters of Chittoprasad from the 1940s and 1950s document and comment on both the world and national political scenarios. There is no meddling or double-speak with the ideologically charged political art of Chittoprasad, it cuts straight and hard just like a hammer and a sickle. He critiques the imperialist domination, British India's

repressive policies, the unity of peasant and workers' union in the face of the trinity of *sarkar, sahuakar and zamindar*, the Royal Navy mutiny, the communal politics of partition, to the challenges, tyranny and social evils of post-independent India. Chittaprasad demystifies the 'politician-capitalist nexus' manifesting as neo-liberal free trade propaganda to its bare bones of exploitation and growing rich-poor divide. Yet we see that somewhere there is a dream of a utopic future, comprised of peaceful and self-sustained villages with plenty food and work, unfurling under a hoisted communist flag. The regimes have changed, the role of Communist Party is debatable in times today, and the monsters of neo-liberal economy have grown beyond comprehension. Yet Chittaprosad's artworks adhere to a recounting of the buried truths of a troubled history of India's development, albeit drenched in ink and strokes of compelling figuration of the common citizen from the margins, upon whose aspirations it has pillared its growth on.

The exhibition **over the edge, crossing the line: five artists from Bengal** continues its showcasing at Saket, after opening early January at the Noida branch of the museum.

Continuing the extensive explorations of different art movements, regions and artistic ideologies within South Asia, it presents in-depth oeuvres and artistic inclinations of five modern masters from Bengal: Ganesh Pyne (1937 -2013), Meera Mukherjee (1928 – 1998), Somnath Hore (1921 -2006), Ganesh Haloi (b.1936) and Jogen Chowdhury (b. 1939). Coming from various parts of Bengal, their visual vocabularies reach maturity during 1970s and 1980s, with the city of Calcutta emerging as an intersection point. The social and political changes, witnessing and observing major occurrences like the Bengal famine, the Tebhaga movement, the Bangladesh Language Movement, the Vietnam War, and avant-garde mobilization in the creative disciplines of literature, cinema and theatre, has shaped their individual artistic styles and preoccupations. The chronological radius of the exhibition spans more five decades from 1960s to early 2000s, showcasing more than two hundred artworks from KNMA collection and loans from other private collections.