

Kiran Nadar Museum of Art supports Bhupen Khakhar show at Tate Modern

Kiran Nadar continues to champion Indian artists worldwide

May 2016: In June 2016, Tate Modern will present the first international retrospective of Indian artist Bhupen Khakhar (1934–2003) since his death. *Bhupen Khakhar: You Can't Please All* (1 June – 6 November 2016) brings together the artist's work from across five decades and collections around the world, including major works on canvas, luminous watercolour paintings and experimental ceramics.

The exhibition is sponsored by Deutsche Bank and has been made possible by the support of Kiran Nadar Museum of Art (KNMA) as part of their ongoing drive to promote the work of important Indian artists across the globe.

Established in 2010 at the initiative of the avid art collector Kiran Nadar, the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art (KNMA), New Delhi, is the first private museum of art exhibiting and championing Modern and Contemporary art from India and the sub-continent. Amongst the highlights of the museum's core collection are several works by Bhupen Khakhar, a number of which will be included in the Tate exhibition.



Bhupen Khakhar, *American Survey Officer*, 1969. Credit: Kiran Nadar Museum of Art

Kiran Nadar, Chairperson of the KNMA, said *"We are extremely pleased to be part of this iconic Bhupen Khakhar show. His work is immensely significant in the pantheon of Indian art and we are delighted to be lending important works from the KNMA collection to the Tate show. KNMA is committed to showcasing the best Indian art around the world and also facilitate exhibitions of Indian artists to expose them to wider and more diverse audiences."*

Renowned for his vibrant palette, unique style and bold examination of class and sexuality, Khakhar played a central role in modern Indian art but was also a key international figure in 20th century painting. Active from the 1960s, Khakhar was part of a lively new wave of narrative painting and figuration by artists in India that became known as the Baroda School. His practice evolved from the careful study of art from South Asian and European sources, even while he continued to work as an accountant part-time. After early experiments with Pop Art, Khakhar developed a style of painting that combined both high and low, popular and painterly aesthetics, cleverly subverting popular iconography. He confronted complex and provocative themes with candour: class difference; desire and homosexuality; and his personal battle with cancer. Also a writer, his critical observations and literary sensibilities were evident in his sharp, often ironic depictions of difficult subjects.

In his lifetime Khakhar exhibited frequently in India and abroad, including Documenta IX in Kassel in 1992. While he has been included in group exhibitions at Tate in the past, this retrospective will shed new light on his practice by presenting well known works on canvas and paper alongside rarely seen experimental works including textile, glass and ceramics.

Notes to Editors

Tate and Kiran Nadar Museum of Art

Bhupen Khakhar: You Can't Please All is supported by the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi, who have also loaned three works to the exhibition.

About the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art

Established in 2010 at the initiative of the avid art collector Kiran Nadar, the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art (KNMA), New Delhi, is the first private museum of art exhibiting Modern and Contemporary art from India and the sub-continent. KNMA is a noncommercial, not-for-profit organisation, which seeks to exemplify the dynamic relationship between art and culture through its exhibitions, publications, public and educational programmes.

Underlining Kiran Nadar's commitment to showcasing important South Asian artists on the global platform, this is the second international exhibition of an Indian artist that KNMA has facilitated in 2016. Earlier this year KNMA collaborated with the Museo de Reina Sofia and The Metropolitan Museum of Art on *Nasreen Mohamedi* at The Met Breuer, New York (18 March - 5 June 2016).

About the artist

Born in 1934 in Bombay, Khakhar lived in Baroda (Vadodara), where he completed an MA in Art Criticism at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Maharaja Sayajirao University, one of the most important centre for the Arts in India. Khakhar continued working part-time as an accountant but consistently leaned towards an artistic career and pursued it with great passion. After experiments with collage, Khakhar's early paintings depicted the ordinary lives of workers and tradesmen, such as *The De-Lux Tailors* 1972 and *Barber's Shop* 1973. His portraits captured the modern male subject with extraordinary pathos, echoed in the hollowed eyes and piercing gaze of *Hathayogi* 1978 or *Man with a Bouquet of Plastic Flowers* 1975. As he gained confidence as a painter, Khakhar went on to combine popular and painterly aesthetics, absorbing diverse art-historical influences with ease, from Indian miniature and devotional iconography to 14thC Sieneese painting and contemporary pop art. He evolved an engaging figurative style, part of a new wave of narrative painting and figuration that moved away from the modernist canon in vogue in Bombay and Delhi.

Khakhar was part of a lively community of artists and writers in Baroda where his home became a meeting place to exchange ideas, even for visiting artists such as Howard Hodgkin and Dexter Dalwood. Khakhar spent six months as artist-in-residence at the Bath Academy of Art which cemented his links with contemporary British artists. Following his time in Europe, he painted the seminal work *You Can't Please All* 1981, depicting a life-size naked figure on a balcony watching characters from an ancient Aesop fable. This confessional painting signalled Khakhar's self-awareness as a gay man and suggests the personal difficulties he faced at the time.

Khakhar was influenced by Gandhi and was committed to relating the truth as a guiding principle. He confronted provocative themes, particularly his homosexuality, with honesty, sensitivity and wit throughout his career. *Yayati* 1987 show mythical figures in frank and fantastical portrayals of same-sex love. The large-scale diptych *Yagnya - Marriage* 2000 depicts a traditional celebration and feast in a small town with two men receiving a blessing, while smaller watercolours such as *Flower Vase* 1999 and *Grey Blanket* 1998 are more intimate visions of same-sex desire.

A writer and playwright, Khakhar was dedicated to storytelling and the illustration of the world in detail. He worked with Salman Rushdie on a special edition of two stories for which the artist produced a series of woodcuts. Towards the end of his life, Khakhar also made works that expressed his very personal battle with cancer. Works such as *Bullet Shot in the Stomach* 2001 and *At the End of the Day the Iron Ingots Came Out* 1999 show the realities of living with his illness in characteristically unflinching detail. The final work in the exhibition, the small gold hued painting *Idiot* 2003, expressively combines beauty, rage and irony as one character laughs at another's grimace of pain.

Exhibition Details

1 June – 6 November 2016 (Press view: 31 May 2016)

Tate Modern, Level 4

Sponsored by Deutsche Bank

Supported by Kiran Nadar Museum of Art

Additional support from the Bhupen Khakhar Exhibition Supporters Circle

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