



RELEASE

JERAM PATEL (1930 – 2016)

The dark loam : between memory and membrane

Curated by Roobina Karode



Exhibition Dates: August 24 – December 20, 2016

KNMA, 145, South Court Mall Saket, New Delhi

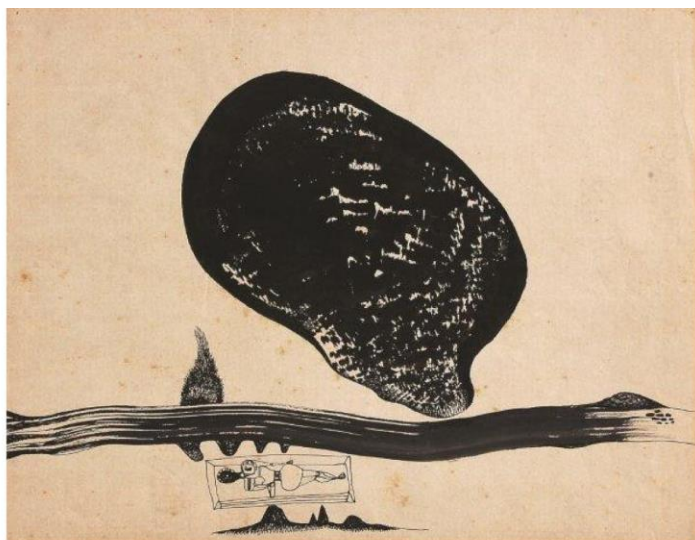
KNMA is pleased to present the first-ever retrospective of the veteran artist Jeram Patel titled 'the dark loam: between matter and membrane'

Sadly, Jeram Patel passed away this year in January when the museum was in the midst of preparation for this very exhibition.

This is the last of the trilogy of retrospectives that examines abstraction in Indian art from the early post-Independence period. We began with Nasreen Mohamedi's 'a view to infinity' (2013), then presented Himmat Shah's 'hammer on the square' (January - July 2016) and now Jeram Patel (August 2016). The trilogy emphasizes different individual trajectories of abstraction, through a large corpus of works, allowing viewers to examine their singular practice and their contribution in the shaping of Modern Indian art in the 1960s-70s.

While Nasreen never affiliated herself with any group and worked in complete solitude in her studio/home, Jeram and Himmat were founder members of Group 1890 along with ideologue J.Swaminathan and other fellow artists- Gulammohammed Sheikh, Ambadas, Jyoti Bhatt, Rajesh Mehra, Eric Bowen, Raghav Kaneria, Redeppa Naidu, S,G.Nikam. The Group did not last beyond their first group exhibition. The manifesto written by Mexican poet Octavio Paz in 1963 emphasized their belief in 'the reality of an image rather than the image of reality'. The final image in Himmat and Jeram is abstracted, excavated or assembled into a composite form.

Though their language of abstraction evolved its own syntax and vocabulary, the series of exhibitions highlight the possible points of crisscrossing and connections that can be drawn between their preoccupations and manifested forms. Their distinct ways of responding to the world does not fit into any preceding style or group. Drawing remained of primary importance to all the three artists, using pen and ink as well as graphite, relying heavily on the mystery of the monochromatic image.



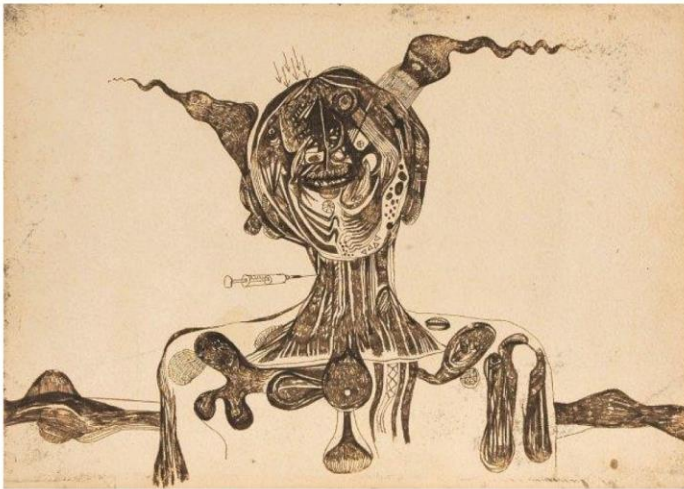
A major section of the exhibition is devoted to the 1960s, when Jeram invented working extensively with a new tool, using a blowtorch on the naked skin of plywood sheets stuck together to burn and arrive at a charred image through the process. Equivalent to a performance, he would through time, draw out a deep archaeology onto the surface of the wood or paper. The nailing of wood and metal fragments and see-through perforations made by Patel, speak of a violent confrontation with the materiality of being and time, the furrows show life underneath, embedded within the material. They also evoke presences of buried landscapes that through time have transformed in substance and feel.

The grittiness of his early works with mixed enamel paint, zinc white, sand and fevicol layer the surface to create 'the dark loam' used as a metaphor here for the mysterious void or the dark bare soil/surface of his works.

In the seminal art journal *Contra*'66 edited by artist J. Swaminathan, Jeram Patel provocatively wrote, "By burning wood I am making an attack on it. I make some contact and by making contact I forget certain things. I don't know nor can you know, what it is that I forget in that attack...I don't want to create anything. Sometimes I don't want to paint either. I never claim that I am creating anything...Nobody can create anything. The only thing that

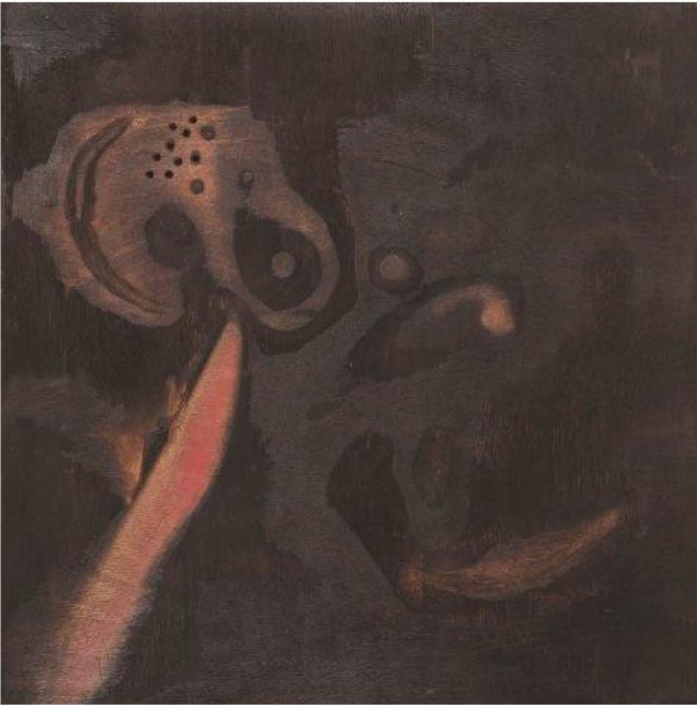
one can do is to destroy things. By way of destroying or destruction, I perhaps want to forget something” (1966).

The exhibition includes his rare early figurative drawings ‘Hospital series’ executed with a crow quill, in which the human body seems to encounter the harsh truth of human mortality. Surrounded by medical and surgical devices that serve as a metaphor for pain as well as healing, the images condense gestures of desire and death. One encounters poignant details such as the injected needle pricking the skin, the bruised body bearing signs of disease and decay and the laceration of the skin. Jeram draws the image almost without a pause, using intimate dense short strokes. He often renders the body ambiguous within a surreal landscape. Jeram presents the duality of the body through its contradictory states of the erect, charged male energy and its passive, impotent form.



His peer artist Gulammohammed Sheikh writes in a moving tribute, “Jeram Patel was a phenomenon, an artist of exceptional vision but also a solitary soul.” Often described as an overpowering figure, aggressive and agitated, he questioned and talked about the purpose of life, aimlessness, the dilemmas around belonging, and dying as a process and death as a physical release. All these inquiries inform the physical tactility and violence

subtly embedded in his early works wherein a tormented attack or fury was unleashed onto the material.



Another section focuses on later works that sometimes appear as dancing shadows, dismembered parts of a body or different bodies composed together in the form of dark silhouettes. The body's potency/life force, and heroic gestures of digging the loam/material gradually moves towards forms that are liberated from the fecundity and earthiness of body to transfigure into shadows or apparitions.



According to curator Roobina Karode, “The amorphous composite animal-like living body form in Jeram’s later dark drawings is the metaphoric dark loam. It shrinks, shrivels, swells, wrinkles, ages, drawing our eye to the opaque sculptural form and translucent details, exposing itself differently at different times. Its changing contours reveal and hide as if the moment of becoming, sometimes scattered or dismembered, but always seen as a dormant mass breathing slowly. With no apparent connection with the outside world, these forms enter the primeval zone, capturing the ghostly apparitions that haunt Jeram’s active imagination, and penetrate his psyche. This exhibition explores the ‘probing of the [artist’s] spade into the dark loam.’”

The Kiran Nadar Museum of Art has the largest holding of Nasreen Mohamedi , Himmat Shah and Jeram Patel’s works in its collection. Mrs. Kiran Nadar expressed, “the discovery of these artists by locating and sourcing their works and bringing a large corpus of their art into public domain has been our way to turn the light and focus on them, on their extraordinary vision and contribution that has somehow remained obscured within the discourse of Modern and contemporary Indian art.”

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Jeram Patel was born in 1930, in Sojitra, Gujarat. He studied art at the J J School of Art of Bombay. For further studies in typography and publicity design, he went on to the Central School of Art and Craft, London. After

teaching at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Vadodara, for several years, he served as the Dean as well.

Jeram received four National Awards from the Lalit Kala Akademi in 1957, 1963, 1973 and 1984.
