

# Abby Grey and Indian Modernism

SELECTIONS FROM THE  
NYU ART COLLECTION





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Introduction by Lynn Gumpert

Essays by Susan Hapgood and Ranjit Hoskote

GREY ART GALLERY NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

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# Contents

- 7 Introduction  
**LYNN GUMPERT**
- 13 Abby Weed Grey, Indian Modernism,  
and the Vicissitudes of Cultural Exchange  
**SUSAN HAPGOOD**
- 41 The Disordered Origins of Things:  
The Art Collection as Pre-canonical Space  
**RANJIT HOSKOTE**
- 53 Catalogue  
**RASHMI VISWANATHAN**
- 101 Acknowledgments
- 103 Contributors





## Introduction

The time, it seems, is right. At long last, many non-Western artists active in the 1960s and 1970s are being taken seriously here. Their works are being exhibited not only in their countries of origin but also in the United States and internationally. The Grey Art Gallery, New York University's fine arts museum, is privileged to stand at the forefront of these endeavors, thanks in large part to Abby Weed Grey's pioneering efforts beginning in 1960 to collect modern artworks from Asia and the Middle East. The Grey Art Gallery, which she founded in 1974, is the beneficiary of some seven hundred works she acquired in Iran, Turkey, India, Japan, Pakistan, and Egypt.<sup>1</sup>

Building on Mrs. Grey's donation of artworks—and in keeping with NYU's role as a global university—the Grey Art Gallery has consistently presented shows that focus on Asia and the Middle East. The Grey's inaugural exhibition, in 1975, showcased works from the Abby Weed Grey Collection. More in-depth research into the collection initially focused on modern Iranian art when, in 1976, Robert R. Littman, director at the Grey, oversaw a major solo exhibition of Parviz Tanavoli's bronze sculptures.<sup>2</sup> In 2002 we organized *Between Word and Image: Modern Iranian Visual Culture*, a landmark show that featured works by ten of the Iranian artists represented in the Grey's collection, supplemented by important loans from New York's Museum of Modern Art.<sup>3</sup> In 2013, in conjunction with the Asia Society's exhibition, *Iran Modern*—to which we lent key works—we concurrently displayed some twenty-five pieces from our holdings, the largest public collection of modern Iranian art outside that country.

The Grey has also presented many exhibitions of modern and contemporary Asian art. In 1990, Thomas W. Sokolowski, then the Grey's director, co-curated *Against Nature: Japanese Art in the 1980s*, one of the first major group shows of contemporary Japanese art to tour the United States. Organized with the MIT List Visual Arts Center and the Japan Foundation, the exhibition

featured works by ten cutting-edge artists.<sup>4</sup> Additional shows of twentieth-century Japanese art followed, from solo exhibitions of photographer Yasuzo Nojima (1991–92), designer Shiro Kuramata (1998), and Atsuko Tanaka (2004), a key member of the Gutai group, to the three “First Steps” exhibitions (1997–2001), which featured emerging artists.<sup>5</sup> The year 1996 saw *Traditions/Tensions: Contemporary Art from Asia*, organized by the Asia Society, which took place at the Grey, the Queens Museum of Art, and the Society’s own galleries on Park Avenue. Featuring contemporary art from India, Indonesia, the Philippines, South Korea, and Thailand, the show, as its title suggests, addressed tensions between local artistic traditions and rapid modernization.

Earlier efforts at the Grey to promote twentieth-century Indian art in particular include *Contemporary Indian Art from the Chester and Davida Herwitz Family Collection*, held during the nationwide Festival of India in 1985–86.<sup>6</sup> At the time, modern and contemporary Indian art had largely been overlooked in favor of ancient Indian sculpture, folk art, and nineteenth-century colonial art of the Raj. As art historian Rebecca M. Brown notes in her essay in the September 2014 issue of *The Art Bulletin*, which discusses the Festival of India, only three of the seventy-seven major exhibitions organized under the festival’s umbrella focused on contemporary Indian art, including the exhibition at the Grey.<sup>7</sup> The other two were *Indian Art Today* at the Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C., and *Neo-Tantra* at the Frederick S. Wight Art Gallery, UCLA.<sup>8</sup> As at the Grey, the Phillips exhibition was drawn exclusively from the Herwitz Family Collection, which, as Brown observes in her illuminating and comprehensive article, has long served as the principal source for exhibitions of modern Indian art in North America.<sup>9</sup>

The Grey Art Gallery is pleased to contribute to that tradition of scholarship and advocacy with *Abby Grey and Indian Modernism: Selections from the NYU Art Collection*, the first substantial exhibition of the modern Indian art acquired by Mrs. Grey. Although modern South Asian art has been shown in the United States more often than Iranian art, widespread knowledge of it is still lacking and, as noted by Susan Hapgood and Ranjit Hoskote, curators of *Abby Grey and Indian Modernism*, more in-depth analysis is needed. Happily, in addition to their essays in this publication, other studies and projects are already underway, including the exhibition *After Midnight: Indian Modernism to Contemporary India 1947/1997*, opening at the Queens Museum of Art in March 2015, which will provide yet another perspective on this rich and complex topic.<sup>10</sup>

In her essay, Susan Hapgood outlines some of the challenges encountered in mounting exhibitions of Indian modernism in the United States and also comments on the need to build on the pioneering scholarship begun in the 1970s by both Western and Indian art historians. Her collaboration with Indian poet and critic Ranjit Hoskote in selecting works for the present exhibition, she observes, provides a “more nuanced and multifaceted curatorial approach, one that allows for differing viewpoints, distinct bodies of knowledge, and two independent sets of eyes looking at the same works of art.” Delving deeply into Mrs. Grey’s extensive papers, which are housed in the NYU Archives, Hapgood teases out not only Grey’s relationships with individual artists but also the larger networks in which these encounters took place, bringing the Indian modernist art she acquired into much sharper focus than ever before. She also examines Abby’s sources of inspiration as she went about collecting non-Western modernisms, illuminating how her desire to “do good” and her goal of “one world through art” corresponded with Cold War politics and the international cultural diplomacy undertaken by the United States Information Agency. Whatever Mrs. Grey’s motivations, Hapgood concludes, her extensive travels to India, from 1960 to 1968, resulted in an important collection of Indian modernist works, and her extensive archives provide a wealth of information on artists, galleries, critics, and exhibitions of the time, including the first and second Indian Triennales, both of which Mrs. Grey helped fund.

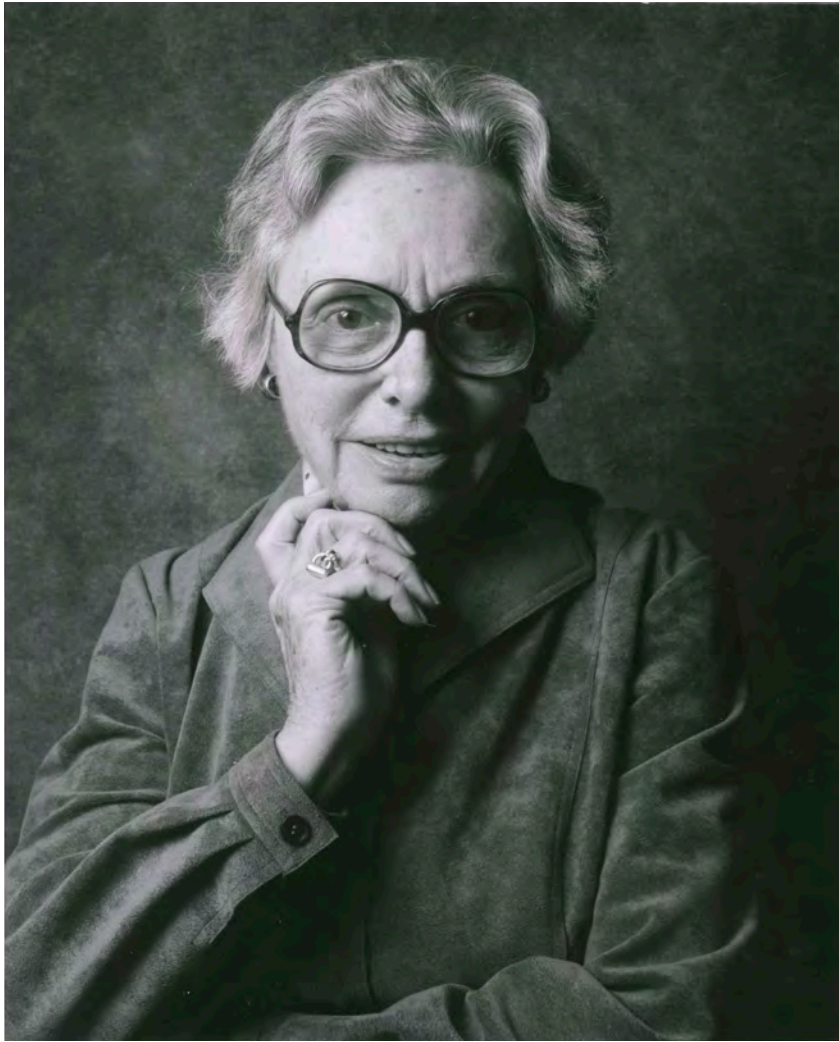
Ranjit Hoskote sheds light on how current views of Indian modern art have crystallized in the years since Mrs. Grey assembled her collection. Characterizing Abby as a “transcultural figure ahead of her time, with eclectic tastes and an ecumenical vision of humankind,” Hoskote discusses in particular those artists marginalized by a dominant narrative of Indian modernism that emerged in the 1980s. He observes how Mrs. Grey’s collection offers us a glimpse of a kaleidoscopic experimental scene in the 1960s and early 1970s that is now often overlooked or ignored. Prabhakar Barwe, for example, who incorporated Tantric practices in his painting, is almost unknown in the United States. Similarly, Mohan Samant, an iconoclastic New York émigré who made avant-garde forays into assemblage, has received little consideration in India. “As a pre-canonical space,” writes Hoskote, “the Grey collection . . . invites us to recall the lost, eclipsed, or disregarded modernisms of those who have fallen below the line of canonical visibility.”

In organizing *Abby Grey and Indian Modernism*, we deliberately aimed to bypass some of the pitfalls that can arise when American museums present modern Indian art. Guardian of what is, to the best of our knowledge, the second-largest institutional collection of modernist Indian artworks in the United States, we began by researching key artists.<sup>11</sup> We then undertook an ambitious campaign of cleaning, restoration, and reframing, all slow and costly procedures.<sup>12</sup> Rashmi Viswanathan, the Grey's former graduate curatorial assistant and a PhD candidate at NYU's Institute of Fine Arts, wrote the in-depth catalogue entries in this volume as well as the extended labels for the exhibition. Taken together, Hapgood's and Hoskote's essays, along with Viswanathan's entries, provide rich contextual frameworks and thought-provoking critical viewpoints that greatly enhance our understanding of and appreciation for these intriguing works. *Abby Grey and Indian Modernism*, we trust, constitutes another important step forward as we continue to study and benefit from the extraordinary collection and archive that Abby Weed Grey so generously bestowed upon New York University.

#### Notes

1. The Abby Weed Grey Collection of Modern Asian and Middle Eastern Art includes approximately 200 works from Iran, 100 from Turkey, 80 from India, 70 from Japan, 4 from Pakistan, and 3 from Egypt. Other countries represented include Greece, Israel, Lebanon, Thailand, and the former Soviet Union (as well as more than 100 works by American artists).
2. *Parviz Tanavoli: Fifteen Years of Bronze Sculpture (1976–77)* was organized by the Grey with guest curator David Galloway. Mrs. Grey wrote the foreword to the catalogue, which included an interview of the artist by Ellen Johnson, US Commissioner for the first India Triennale of Contemporary Art in New Delhi, 1968.
3. Organized by the Grey Art Gallery and the Hagop Kevorkian Center for Near Eastern Studies, New York University, the exhibition was curated by Fereshteh Daftari and me in consultation with Shiva Balaghi, Peter Chelkowski, and Haggai Ram. It included black-and-white photographs by Abbas, an Iranian photojournalist living in Paris who recorded social changes in his native country during the 1970s. Photographs he shot there during the outbreak of the Revolution chronicle how a popular uprising evolved into an Islamic movement. Another highlight of the exhibition was a group of revolutionary posters produced between 1978 and 1988.
4. *Against Nature* was co-curated by Sokolowski, Kathy Halbreich, Shinji Kohmoto, and Fumio Nanjo. In addition to appearing at the organizing venues, the exhibition traveled (1989–91) to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Akron Art Museum, the Seattle Art Museum, the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, and the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston.
5. The artists in the "First Steps" exhibitions (1997–2001) were selected by international juries from a Japanese art competition sponsored by Philip Morris K.K.

6. The thirteen artists included in that exhibition were Manjit Bawa (1941–2008), Bikash Bhattacharjee (1940–2006), Bal Chhabda (1923–2013), Jogen Chowdhury (b. 1939), Vinod Dave (b. 1948), Somnath Hore (1921–2006), M. F. Husain (1915– 2011), Ranbir Singh Kaleka (b. 1953), Tyeb Mehta (1925–2009), Gieve Patel (b. 1940), Sudhir Patwardhan (b. 1949), S. H. Raza (b. 1922), and Rekha Rodwittiya (b. 1958).
7. Rebecca M. Brown, “A Distant Contemporary: Indian Twentieth-Century Art in the Festival of India,” *Art Bulletin* 96, no. 3 (September 2014), p. 338. Brown writes that “despite a stated desire to include ‘today’s India,’” the festival largely presented the country’s art as traditional and craft-driven, and that “only a handful of the seventy-seven major art exhibitions staged during the series of events featured mid- to late twentieth-century, gallery-driven, urban-centered Indian art.” Thus, “to include contemporary Indian art, curators needed to perform a difficult balancing act: staging the art’s distance from the contemporary even as they presented the works as integral to that very same temporal and value-laden category.”
8. Edith Tonelli, then director of the Wight Gallery, was curator of *Neo-Tantra* along with Lee Mullican, professor of art at UCLA. Brown (p. 338) believes the exhibition avoided the eclecticism of the exhibitions at the Grey and the Phillips but ultimately promoted a stereotyped spirituality as a definitive characteristic of modern Indian art.
9. See Brown, p. 352n9. The Herwitzes began their travels in India in the early 1960s, just after Abby Grey’s first trip there. At its peak, their collection included more than 3,000 works.
10. *After Midnight*, which is curated by Arshiya Lokhandwala, will focus on core members of the “Progressives,” including M. F. Husain, S. H. Raza, and F. N. Souza, and their extended circle of friends, among them Ram Kumar, Krishen Khanna, V. S. Gaitonde, Tyeb Mehta, and Akbar Padamsee.
11. The largest institutional collection of Indian modernist works in the United States is at the Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts, to which Mrs. Herwitz donated a substantial portion of her family’s twentieth-century Indian collection along with a library and an archive of related papers.
12. These works, sometimes made with inexpensive materials and unusual techniques, were especially challenging to treat. We would like to extend special thanks to Harriet Irgang Alden of ArtCareNYC and Peggy Ellis of NYU’s Institute of Fine Arts.



## Abby Weed Grey, Indian Modernism, and the Vicissitudes of Cultural Exchange

As the history of Indian modernist art is written and rewritten, it is slowly being woven into a broader narrative of global art history. New York University's potent concentration of paintings, prints, and sculptures acquired in New Delhi and Mumbai (Bombay) by Abby Weed Grey some fifty years ago enriches this ongoing process, spurred along by Mrs. Grey's extensive archives and diaries, which greatly illuminate her travels, patronage, and collecting activities. These Indian artworks and documents have mostly remained in storage ever since, during a period when European and American art occupied center stage in most accounts of modernism, with little if any discussion of what transpired elsewhere. Just as Western avant-garde artists were inspired by non-Western art, artists throughout Asia were influenced by Western techniques as well as their own nationalist agendas—especially so in India.<sup>1</sup> The best-known Indian modernists belonged to the Progressive Artists Group (PAG), which was formed in 1947, just after independence, by six artists, including Maqbool Fida Husain, Francis Newton Souza, and Ram Kumar. Consciously adopting an internationalism in their attitude and style, this group rebelled against the prevalence of realism taught in the schools at the time.<sup>2</sup> Abby Weed Grey was drawn to works by these artists but also many others—including individuals associated with the Baroda Group, the Delhi Silpi Chakra, Neo-Tantric art, and the artists active at the Santiniketan school—who remain little known in the United States.

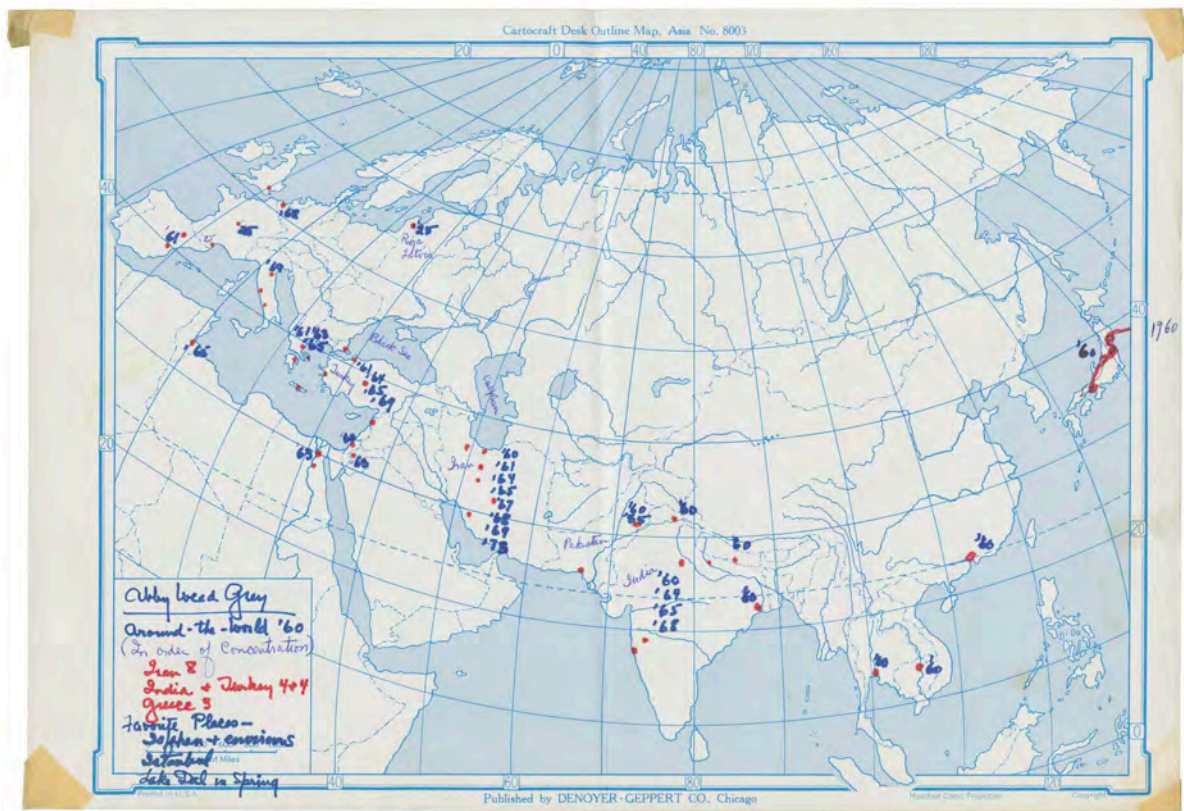
Abby Weed Grey, 1983. Photo: William Coupon. All illustrations in this essay courtesy Abby Weed Grey Papers, University Archives, New York University.

Despite a great deal of existing scholarship on these artists, it is this basic unfamiliarity that challenges us as to how they should be presented and raises important questions, such as how to contextualize this work for audiences in New York, one of the world's self-defined centers of modernist art? How to preempt cursory judgments of their seemingly recognizable styles? Since at least the 1970s, new generations of South Asian and Western art historians have been steadily building upon the great foundational texts of Indian modernist art history, more recently bringing postcolonialist studies and theories of globalization's impact to bear on the subject as well. And while there is widespread awareness that the old story of modernism needs a complete overhaul, it is still treacherous territory, bounded by two potential pitfalls: on the one hand, the uncomfortable delegitimization of the Western standards by which modernism has traditionally been defined and, on the other hand, the forced and inappropriate assimilation of non-Western modernisms to Western models.<sup>3</sup>

As an art historian trained in America and with several years' exposure to Indian modernist art, I have struggled to integrate my impressions of the Indian works in the collection of the Grey Art Gallery with my preexisting knowledge of European and American modernism. The process challenged my assumptions and forced me to recognize the limitations of my knowledge. For this project, it thus seemed best to devise a hybrid methodology that would present this work without a blanket of Western interpretation thrown clumsily over it. Deciding that two heads were better than one, I invited the esteemed poet and art historian Ranjit Hoskote to collaborate. Either of us working alone might skew the presentation, but together—by jointly selecting the art to be displayed and by relying on different methodologies—we aimed to provide a more nuanced and multifaceted curatorial approach, one that allows for differing viewpoints, distinct bodies of knowledge, and two independent sets of eyes looking at the same works of art and unearthing new data for future historians.

In this essay I focus primarily on the documents associated with the Grey collection and the information that emerges from them in relation to trans-cultural exchange, Indian modernism, and the art in the exhibition. At the same time, I want to foreground the paths that brought these works to New York University and to tease out the influential role of patrons and collectors. The former often have various reasons for buying works and donating them to institutions. In the case of Abby Grey, she first wrote of wanting to “do





Map inscribed by Abby Grey, showing her international travels, 1960–73

good” and then followed through on that vision, gradually evolving a philosophical viewpoint that posits art as a form of transcultural communication, a universal language that facilitates mutual understanding.<sup>4</sup> With admirable honesty, she also admitted privately that the stature that comes with being a patron of the arts was another motivating factor.<sup>5</sup> Yet our ability to organize this exhibition depends on a chain of events set in motion long before Abby Grey envisioned a gallery at NYU named after her. It depends, in fact, on her remarkable travels as a single woman in India, which she began in 1960 and continued well into the decade, keeping records all along the way. The internal dialogues she poured out in her travel diaries are interspersed throughout this essay, as are her other notes, recollections, and additional illuminating details she recorded about individual artists and the Indian art scene in the 1960s and 1970s. Lest we forget, the eyes that first picked these works were Abby Grey’s.

Indeed, collectors often play a stronger role in the way art histories are written than we generally care to acknowledge. Artists, art historians, curators, and critics tend to consider themselves more important than collectors, but a large percentage of museum holdings around the world begin with the tastes of individual donors. When works of art move from living rooms to permanent collections, they are thereby deemed worthy of long-term study and preservation; their value is no longer predicated solely on monetary worth.<sup>6</sup> Exhibitions are built from collections, and art histories are spurred by exhibitions. What Abby Grey's collection and archives allow, fifty years later, is for us to piece together a very particular history that includes works by some of India's key modernists: to learn the circumstances of their acquisition, including the contributing role of Cold War politics, and to weave this together with other retrieved strands of information into a broader view of the events that transpired.

Abby Weed Grey has been described as a humble, straightforward, crisp, no-nonsense woman—a little eccentric, but at the same time open, warm, marvelous, extraordinary.<sup>7</sup> Born in St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1902, Abby was the oldest of four children and a granddaughter of Alpheus Beede Stickney, founder of the Chicago Great Western Railway. She left home in the early 1920s to attend Vassar College, where she took a single art-appreciation course (which did not particularly interest her) and majored in English. The Weed family's embrace of Christianity is evident throughout the archives. We know, for instance, that Abby's mother read psalms to her; that Abby herself was involved in two religious conferences at Vassar; and that her brother Paul became vicar of St. Luke's Episcopal Church and later chaplain at the House of the Redeemer, New York.<sup>8</sup> Upon graduating, Abby traveled in Europe for two years with a college friend, visiting Latvia and France before returning to the United States, where she went on to teach fifth grade in a Kansas City private school for girls. By 1928 she was engaged to Benjamin Grey, a lieutenant colonel in the US Army who had been educated at West Point, and they were married the following year. Abby Grey lived as a "military wife," as she put it, for nearly thirty years, traveling frequently with her husband and entertaining guests from their home base in Salt Lake City.<sup>9</sup> When Benjamin eventually retired, in 1947, they bought a summer cabin in northern Minnesota, where they enjoyed a rural lifestyle and trouble-free daily habits. "I liked that kind of life," she wrote. "He'd cut down trees and go fishing. . . . and I would spend time reading art books." Unbeknownst to her, all the while their assets were

steadily growing under Benjamin's careful management of their investments, concentrated in Western railroad stocks and bonds.

In 1956, when Benjamin died of cancer, Abby was middle-aged. Her diary entries reflect a woman truly bereft, one deeply mourning the loss of her husband but simultaneously struggling to come to terms with her newfound wealth. Step by step, turning to religion for support, she tentatively explored how to move forward.<sup>10</sup> Upon learning of the extent of her wealth, she first asked, "Here is [the] means for playing what life-role? How [to] court the True Poetical?" Several months later, still grieving: "The first thing I must do is get rid of this sense of panic that presses me all the time (all the time!). I flee from everything, the start of day, the look from the window, the toll of mealtime, the search into the strongbox where old love letters come to light. Now what is good and permanent for me? Any leads? I am going to spend endless evenings alone. . . . How to get through? . . . As a person, free and untrammelled, I can do anything I want. This is a new thought."<sup>11</sup>

Abby—or Mrs. Grey, as she is traditionally known at the Grey Art Gallery—decided to move back to St. Paul, where she bought a modest house by the Mississippi River, keeping the Deer Lake cabin as a kind of spiritual refuge.<sup>12</sup> She then joined a group of thirteen women on her first trip around the world, in 1960, traveling for two and a half months to Japan, Hong Kong, Thailand, Cambodia, India, Kashmir, Nepal, Pakistan, Iran, and Israel.<sup>13</sup> As she prepared for her departure, a note in her diary shows the future arts patron consciously thinking about the journey ahead, seeing herself primarily as a writer and poet yet anticipating the need to craft a new identity: "On my forthcoming trip, can I envision contacts that will be important to me? Is there a way to quicken the understanding of what I may encounter? Could I collect? What? Can vivid impressions be stored for future reference? How can this trip enlarge me as Poet?"<sup>14</sup>

Mrs. Grey did indeed collect art on that trip, mostly Japanese woodblock prints,<sup>15</sup> and in 1961 she formed the Ben and Abby Grey Foundation, dedicated to encouraging cultural exchange through the building of international collections of art. During her frequent subsequent travels, Abby steadily acquired work by contemporary artists from Egypt, Greece, Iran, India, Turkey, and Pakistan. She would eventually make eight more trips to Asia, the last when she was seventy-one, assembling a collection of more than a thousand works at a time when few other American collectors were attuned to contemporary art from Asia.<sup>16</sup>

It is difficult to measure the historic impact of the numerous exhibitions the Grey Foundation sponsored both inside the United States and abroad.<sup>17</sup> During the 1960s cultural exchange between India and America proliferated for various reasons. Although for Abby Grey the goals of such interaction were altruistic to the highest degree, her projects intersected with Cold War politics of democracy versus communism. India was among the founding nations of the Non-Aligned Movement, a coalition of countries that refused to side with either America or the Soviet Union. During the 1950s and 1960s, the United States established international channels for cultural programming, including the People-to-People Program—founded in 1956 under the extended purview of the United States Information Agency (USIA)—which sought individuals outside government to help with long-range propaganda activities. One of the program’s aims was to “exploit current developments in such a manner as to gain maximum favorable impact for the United States and maximum unfavorable impact for the Communist countries.”<sup>18</sup> In the words of President Dwight D. Eisenhower, who had overseen formation of the USIA, the goal was “to submit evidence to the peoples of the other lands that the objectives and policies of the United States are in harmony with and will advance their legitimate aspirations for freedom, peace, and progress.”<sup>19</sup>

In 1961, a year after her initial around-the-world trip, Mrs. Grey fixed on the idea of sending American art to foreign countries in the form of traveling exhibitions. She approached the director of the American Federation of Arts (AFA), Harris Prior, who was sympathetic to her project,<sup>20</sup> and together they contacted the US government. Given a list of cultural affairs officers in the Middle East, North Africa, and India, the pair canvassed them to gauge interest; their inquiries were met repeatedly with an enthusiastic *yes*.

For her first international project, in 1961, Mrs. Grey, with the coordination and assistance of the People-to-People Program, helped organize an exhibition of prints by Minnesota artists. Titled the “Minnesota Art Portfolio (MAP),” the show—for which she helped select the works and even acted as courier, making deliveries by hand to exhibition venues—traveled to numerous countries in the Mediterranean and Middle East, including Greece, Turkey, and Iran. In her diaries, Mrs. Grey discusses the procedures they undertook to select works but makes no mention of political considerations; in fact, it seems likely that she had no ulterior political agenda and was truly uninterested in using art as an instrument of propaganda. Parviz Tanavoli,

a prominent Iranian artist who knew Mrs. Grey well, recalled that she was patriotic and was well received by US embassy representatives, but he emphasized that she probably either did not know or did not care about the propagandistic aspects of the cultural-program initiatives. “Even if she did know,” Tanavoli commented recently, “she didn’t want to be the government’s tool or puppet. She cared about the art.”<sup>21</sup>

Mrs. Grey believed firmly in the power of art to stimulate communication between people of different cultures, a vision she began to articulate in 1960.<sup>22</sup> In a voice recording from 1964, she admires how presenting art to viewers without an intermediary—without a critic’s voice—allows artists to speak for themselves.<sup>23</sup> Her vision of a world united through art, of art’s role as a catalyst for communication, steadily developed from the 1960s into the early 1970s, often as a part of the USIA’s foreign cultural-exchange program. Mrs. Grey’s support for and stimulus of cultural exchange between India and the United States had also begun by 1961, when she contacted a US cultural affairs officer in Bombay and was encouraged to pursue a project to send American art to India.<sup>24</sup> She also sponsored an exhibition of contemporary Indian and Iranian art—organized by the Grey Foundation and circulated by the Smithsonian Institution—which traveled to seventeen American venues from 1967 to 1971. In doing so, she collaborated for the first time with Margaret “Peg” Cogswell, a former staff member of the AFA who by this time was working for the USIA’s International Art Program from an office at the Smithsonian Institution.<sup>25</sup>

One key proposal of Mrs. Grey’s project for India, to send American art as part of a traveling arts festival throughout the country, was put on hold after it was preempted by a collaboration between the USIA and the Museum of Modern Art, whose 1967 exhibition “Two Decades of American Painting” traveled to New Delhi, Tokyo, Melbourne, and Sydney. The exhibition included more than a hundred works—including major paintings by Jackson Pollock, Jasper Johns, Josef Albers, Robert Rauschenberg, Cy Twombly, and Andy Warhol—but it was also infamously accompanied by art critic Clement Greenberg, who roundly offended the New Delhi art community when he lambasted spiritual interpretations of Indian modern art and declared that “traditional Indian pictorial art died 100 years ago.”<sup>26</sup> Judging from photographs of the installation, the exhibition was impressive, but it did not resonate locally. Some reviewers considered the work cold and pointless, evidence of artists’ intuition giving way to mere inventiveness, and painted in styles that

were opposed to traditional Indian art.<sup>27</sup> In light of this lackluster response, one of the Grey Foundation's trustees urged Mrs. Grey to reconsider her next major undertaking in India, involvement in the forthcoming Triennale, but she was undeterred.

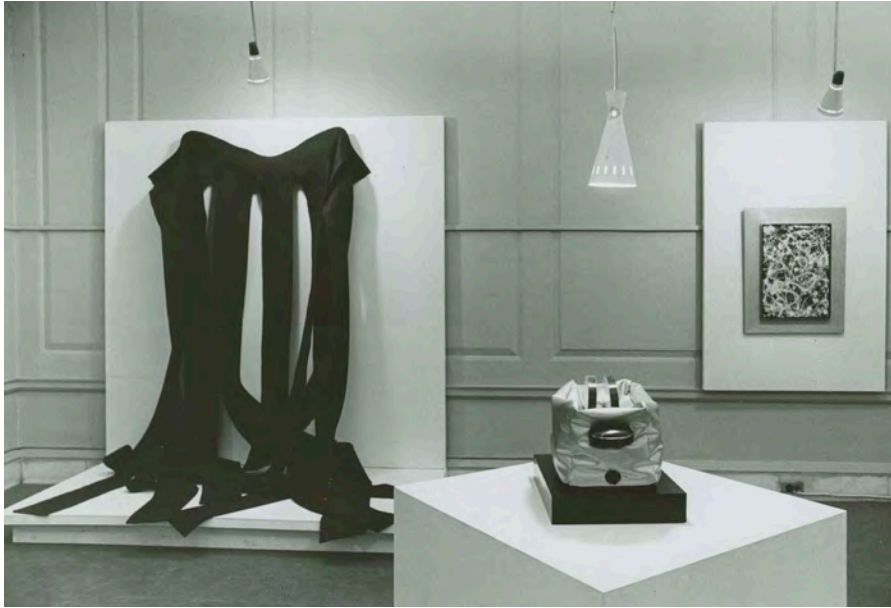
Sponsorship of the American contributions to the first and second India Triennales, in 1968 and 1971, were Mrs. Grey's grandest Indian initiatives. The first brought together art from thirty-one countries and comprised more than six hundred works shown in two New Delhi venues. The American section, selected by US Commissioner Ellen Johnson, showcased major works by a range of artists, including Georgia O'Keeffe, Stuart Davis,



*First Triennale India, 1968. Exhibition catalogue, New Delhi: Lalit Kala Akademi. This show brought together art from 31 countries, comprising over 600 works in two venues.*

Joseph Cornell, Jackson Pollock, Claes Oldenburg, Robert Morris, and Donald Judd, with loans from diverse sources, among them the Leo Castelli Gallery, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Phillips Collection, the Cleveland Museum of Art, and the Allen Art Museum of Oberlin College, where Johnson was curator. Following the initial exhibition at the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, where by all accounts the works were handsomely installed, the show traveled to the Jehangir Art Gallery, Bombay, before returning to the United States.<sup>28</sup> In a voice recording Mrs. Grey notes that the American section attracted positive responses from artists and students and was a worthwhile undertaking.<sup>29</sup> Two of the American artists even ended up winning prizes: Joseph Cornell took first prize for sculpture, and Donald Judd was awarded an honorable mention.

Ellen Johnson met Mrs. Grey for the first time at the airport. Their flight stopped in Tehran, where they picked up Parviz Tanavoli, curator of the Triennale's Iranian section, and all three flew on to India, traveling together for several weeks. In her memoirs, Johnson wrote that she found Mrs. Grey to be "open, warm and alive to everything, especially people, and most espe-



Installation view, *First Triennale India of Contemporary World Art*, The American Collection, New Delhi, 1968, with works by Robert Morris, Claes Oldenburg, and Jackson Pollock. Photo: R. N. Khanna

cially artists.”<sup>30</sup> But as she prepared to travel to the Triennale’s inauguration, Abby engaged in a searching internal dialogue, asking herself bluntly: “What shall I be doing in India?” She proposed many answers, eventually settled on visiting artists in their studios, purchasing works for subsequent exhibitions, and arranging future involvement in the arts. Although she writes in the diary about wanting “to get back her buoyancy, to do something for free and uncalled for, to . . . make a poetical extension,” a few pages later she admits to herself that what she also wants from the Triennale is “stature.”<sup>31</sup>

Mrs. Grey’s connection with the USIA, which continued for several years, led to an exhibition of prints, “10 Young American Artists,” that circulated in India in 1970. The following year she sponsored the American section in the second Triennale India, organized by Waldo Rasmussen, director of the Museum of Modern Art’s International Council, and featuring works by Carl Andre, Sam Gilliam, Eva Hesse, Robert Rasmussen, Robert Ryman, Alan Saret, Richard Serra, and Keith Sonnier. At the same time that Abby was heavily supporting presentations of American art in India, she was also privately acquiring Indian works for herself: the beginning of the collection that would later end up at New York University. Although the Iranian and Turkish

holdings in the Grey collection are considered its greatest strengths, the group also includes a core of works by Indian modernists from the Progressive Artists Group, the Baroda Group, and the Neo-Tantric painters, among others. In every country she visited, Mrs. Grey sought artists who, in her words, were “breaking with the past to cope with the present” and whose works “best marked the advance from tradition to a contemporary view.”<sup>32</sup> Wherever she went, Abby was introduced to emerging and eminent artists through intermediaries, dealers, and acquaintances, but in deciding what to buy she always followed her instincts: “For those who may challenge my choices, aside from a belief that no collection is better than the integrity of taste of the collector, I have had two other criteria in mind: 1) I collected with intent to show in art centers in America, 2) I occasionally took into consideration the dedication and serious intent of artists whose work I was uncertain of from a critical point of view.”<sup>33</sup> Gaining confidence in her own discretion, in 1977 she reflected that “I did not need confirmation that I was a good Picker. I knew I was.”<sup>34</sup>

In making our selections for this exhibition, Ranjit Hoskote and I sought works that we believe still resonate with the viewer fifty years after Abby Grey acquired them. Nearly every one is mentioned somewhere in Mrs. Grey’s archives, accompanied by her commentary on the circumstances of their acquisition, such as her memories of discussions she had with the artists. Tracing her steps and combining her viewpoints with the works themselves adds another perspective to what we hope is a rich and layered transcultural project.

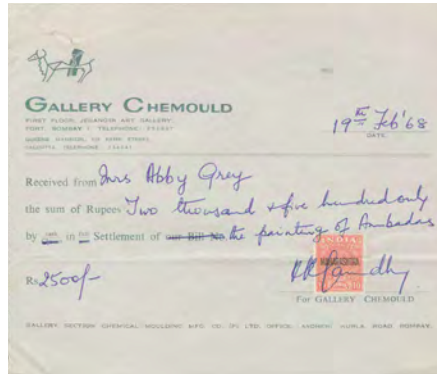
Mrs. Grey traveled to India four times—in 1960, 1964, 1965, and 1968—and collected mostly in New Delhi and Bombay. On her first trip, on a visit to the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, she encountered the work of two major artists from pre-independence India: Rabindranath Tagore, whose paintings were on view, and Amrita Sher-Gil, whose works were being kept in storage (she was escorted by Sukanta Basu, assistant director of the gallery and an artist himself).<sup>35</sup> Among the art dealers she met along the way, and who introduced her to many of the more modernist artists she would eventually collect, were Ravi and Pradeep Kumar, who maintained a branch of their gallery in the Ashoka Hotel, where Mrs. Grey stayed in New Delhi; Mahender and Ravi Jain of Dhoomimal Gallery, New Delhi; the staff of the art gallery at the Taj Hotel, Bombay; and, eventually, Khorshed and Kekoo



Gandhy, who founded Gallery Chemould, Bombay, in 1963. Mrs. Grey's strongest attachments in India, however, seem to have been to three artists she met in New Delhi on her first trip: Kanwal Krishna and his wife, Devayani, and Anjolie Dev (now Anjolie Ela Menon).

While in New Delhi, Mrs. Grey was taken to the Modern School, a prestigious private academy that sometimes served as a meeting point for artists in the city.<sup>36</sup> There she was introduced to the Krishnas, who taught art to students aged roughly eight to fifteen years old. Kanwal and Devayani, both printmakers, were part of the Delhi Silpi Chakra (Delhi Sculptors' Circle), formed in 1949 by a small group of artists who had emigrated from Lahore, Pakistan. Mrs. Grey was immediately impressed by the joie de vivre evident in their large studio and by the dedication of these two artists who had given themselves to teaching art.<sup>37</sup>

Mrs. Grey met Anjolie Dev after she was asked to deliver a letter to the painter, then only nineteen years old.<sup>38</sup> Perhaps putting off having to approach a stranger (and such a precocious one at that), she telephoned Dev on her last afternoon in India. The artist, driving "an old Chevy," picked up Mrs. Grey at her hotel and took her first to artists' studios and, later, to dinner. She describes Dev as "a young and lovely creature" who drove "racing and careening" through the city, leading her to see Sukanta Basu, whom she had met earlier, and to visit the painter Satish Gujral. She bought one work by each artist, choosing canvases small enough to fit in her suitcase. Gujral, who was completely deaf but spoke fluent English, lamented that there was no market for the kind of creative and experimental, but perhaps depressing, art that he was making. (Gujral had lost his entire family during the partition of Pakistan and India, in 1947.) Abby saw the anguish in his compositions, which she thought were filled with hopeless waiting and sorrow but also truly beautiful and charged with meaning. In her diary she describes the painting she bought by him, *Christ in the Desert* (1960), as the work of someone "lonely, deeply religious, hurt as only the world can hurt one who would like to save the world."<sup>39</sup> Gujral was also part of the Delhi Silpi Chakra and had traveled to Mexico in



Receipt from Gallery Chemould, Bombay, February 19, 1968. Signed by Kekoo Gandhi

the early 1950s to apprentice with Social Realist mural painter David Alfaro Siqueiros, whose influence is perhaps manifest in the painting's dark palette, sweeping lines, and austere abstract composition.

As evening fell, Anjolie took Mrs. Grey to the beautiful Dev family residence, where many paintings “full of strong artistic promise” were hung throughout the house. It would be five years before Mrs. Grey purchased a work by her—*Old Delhi* (1965), a layered oil painting of the seventeenth-century Jama Masjid, the country's most prominent mosque—but the introduction had been made, and the experience was galvanizing, including a delicious family dinner served outside in the garden, where two hyenas were briefly sighted skittering into the shadows. Abby's final day on that first visit to India culminated with a “burst of love,” in her words. “I must come back! I have only savored a little of the sweetness and mystery, power and vibrant life of this great India.”<sup>40</sup>

In January 1964 Mrs. Grey returned to New Delhi on her second trip to India, this time accompanied by Peg Cogswell.<sup>41</sup> They went back to the Modern School, where Abby was delighted to find Devayani and Kanwal Krishna in their studio, “a huge room filled with the children's work” and, in one area, the start of their own permanent gallery. It was on this trip that she bought works by both of them: Kanwal's abstract print *Shivering Sun* (1960), an etching by Devayani called *Veiled Mask* (n.d.), and even an etching by their daughter, Chitrangada, titled *Composition* (n.d.). In Mrs. Grey's archives is a voice recording of her reading a letter from Kanwal Krishna that seemingly relates to *Shivering Sun*, with its yellow center surrounded by vibrating lines on a snowy white ground. He recalls his life in the Himalayas, his love of nature, what he calls the “religion of the mountains.” “Mystery,” he writes, “is the greatest educator. . . . I have been thinking of the sun . . . and the magic of light.” Abby, reflecting on the more than fifteen years he spent traveling in Tibet and the Himalayas by yak, camel, and on foot, clearly respected the breadth of Kanwal's experiences and shared not only his reverence for nature but also his (and Devayani's) commitment to making change in the world through their own actions and determination. She wrote even more about Devayani's *Veiled Mask*, an image of a face in three-quarter profile overlaid with a textured fabric pattern. Both Cogswell and another colleague found the image macabre, and admitted so to the artist to prompt a reaction. “No, it is not sad,” Devayani replied. “This is a veiled mask. It is so hard to get to know people; this is just a human being behind two masks.” Kanwal added

that the print was made during a period when they were staying in a Tibetan monastery and Devayani had worked on nothing but mask imagery for a year.<sup>42</sup> Their daughter Chitrangada's print was made with a similar technique. She placed a textile on the etching plate, in this case an abstract composition, and colored in a few small areas with watercolor. It is unclear whether Mrs. Grey knew of the Krishnas' central role in the artistic gatherings at the Modern School, but she certainly admired their art and initiative. A few years later, she would return to see them one last time.

During the 1964 trip Mrs. Grey and Peg Cogswell also visited the Kumar Gallery in Sunder Nagar Market, Delhi, where she was first shown the work of Gulam Rasool Santosh, a student of N. S. Bendre's. Dean of the extremely influential Maharaja Sayajirao University, Baroda (now Vadodara), Bendre had visited Abby at home in Minnesota a few weeks earlier. She returned to the gallery a second time during the trip, at which point a few artists were waiting to meet her, including Santosh. She describes the artistic development of Santosh's work as moving from an "Impressionist canvas of a Kashmiri boat and mountain scene, through a rather Léger period, Cubist, and finally abstractions with heavy paint which were inspired by his feelings for the Himalayans." The latter presumably were his Neo-Tantric paintings, the style for which he became best known. This movement, promoted by Santosh's dealer, Virendra Kumar, was based on Tantric philosophy, which combines mind and body toward spiritual ends, sometimes focusing on sexual energy and mysticism. Whether or not these motivations were discussed during the visit, Mrs. Grey was drawn more intensely to an Abstract Expressionist-style painting of the artist as a Christ figure, asking him why he chose this particular symbolism. "Christ is part of our Muslim religion," he replied. "I do not know why I did it, perhaps there is a part of me that feels as if it were being sacrificed." Mrs. Grey noted in her diary that Santosh had "made a love-match with a Hindu and Pradeep [Kumar] told me for some years he had a struggle but was happy in his marriage now." She then continues with an account of how the artist arrived at this imagery: "I put the nail hole in the hand, and look at my own! Now I cannot paint!" (His hands were bandaged, he explained, owing to an allergic reaction to turpentine.) "Some say the body is dead and only the head and hand is alive." Asked why he lightened the painting with yellow, the artist replied, "I do not know. But the hand upraised like that in that particular gesture says—I see it just now—Peace! Peace!"<sup>43</sup>

During the same gallery visit Mrs. Grey purchased a painting by Ram Kumar (no relation to the gallerist), a more established artist who had studied under André Lhote and Fernand Léger in Paris in the early 1950s and shown at the Graham Gallery, New York, in 1958. By the time Abby made his acquaintance in 1960, Kumar—who apparently was not present during the 1964 gallery visit—had exhibited widely and won several prestigious awards.<sup>44</sup> The small painting she bought by him, *Kashmir* (1963), depicts a seemingly cut off and isolated area surmounted by a full moon with a flag above it, perhaps referencing the increasing tensions among Pakistan, India, and China over the spectacularly beautiful region of Kashmir, which continue to this day. Mrs. Grey mentions this painting in passing as a “peaceful and cool semi-abstractation of Kashmir, that beautiful place where [Gulam Rasool] Santosh for six months in the summer is taking the family (he loves the cold) and which is part of the dream of the plains Indian in summer perhaps—and my spring blossom remembrances.” She quickly moves on, however, to the mundane details of the rest of her day: “I had to waste time in the beauty parlor where I nearly roasted under the hair dryer. We were invited by the Ambassador of the U.S. of America and Mrs. Bowles to a piano duet concert. . . . It was a dull evening.”<sup>45</sup>

As she prepared to leave New Delhi, Mrs. Grey likely had the canvases she had purchased taken off their stretchers and rolled, and the works on paper packed flat. Otherwise, the works she bought on the 1964 trip would never have fit into one suitcase, her standard but rather unorthodox transport method. Among these new pieces was the work on paper *Yantra III* (1964) by Prabhakar Barwe, a young artist from Bombay. Western viewers may see the influence of Paul Klee, whom the artist was in fact interested in, but they are less apt to recognize a relationship with Neo-Tantric painting. Barwe later explained to Abby that the title refers to the pictorial part of Tantric practices, to “a symbolic diagram or picture with supernatural symmetries and calligraphic expressions dealing with occult forces and superhuman powers. . . . These are his own symbols, inspired by Tantra but the forms and colors are his own.”<sup>46</sup> *Yantra III* is inscribed in Indian Devanagari script with mantra-like repetitions (“Pr Pr Pr Pr,” “yuh yuh yuh yuh,” “ya ya ya”) as well as the word *samudra* (Sanskrit for “ocean”), perhaps relating to the circular forms that are traditional symbols for water. Barwe collaged silver leaf to the surface, which must initially have provided shimmering reflections, and used a brilliant red watercolor background to give the impression of an otherworldly figure with many faces

and eyes, pendulous breasts, claws, and wings: a feminine symbol. In a revealing diary entry Mrs. Grey recalls how the artist explained the imagery to her:

[Barwe] sat with me on a bench before his four paintings and explained as best he could their intricate import. They are Tantra, which is a process of design which includes Yantra or the diagram of a symbol, and Mantra or calligraphy, and is expressive of a mood, an outburst of emotion. God can be expressed through evil, for either extreme—good or evil—takes one nearer God. The sense must be controlled through various exercises such as . . . the drawing of geometrical patterns + calligraphy. According to Barwe this is an old Indian science. It is Yakshini [a voluptuous mythical being of the Hindu and Jain religions who is also sometimes a demoness] having to do with spirits in the evil sense, those elements which, conventionally, we call evil from a social point of view. Wealth, love, peace, and the like have their evil side, in excess; they are not a total good.<sup>47</sup>

Such assiduous notes are extraordinarily helpful to scholars, allowing us not only to build art histories of this crucial period but also to decipher why Mrs. Grey may have been drawn to a particular work or artist.

Surprisingly, to date no mentions by Mrs. Grey of either M. F. Husain or the Bombay-based Progressive Artists Group (PAG), of which he was a member, have been found despite the fact that Husain is perhaps the most prominent Indian modernist and the Progressives are the best-known exemplars of the significant cultural changes that took place in Indian art beginning in the late 1940s. Founded in Bombay shortly after independence, the Progressive Artists Group was active for nearly ten years before dissolving in 1956. Mrs. Grey would eventually acquire works by several of the original members (including Husain and F. N. Souza, but not K. H. Ara, S. K. Bakre, H. A. Gade, or S. H. Raza) as well as other artists later associated with them (Ram Kumar, Mohan Samant, and Krishen Khanna). Indian art had moved in numerous directions during the period of transition from the colonial era to postcolonial modernity. The Progressives, for their part, made a clean break from the pictorial traditions of the Bengal School—the nationalist art movement that had flourished during British rule—consciously adopting an internationalism in their attitude and artistic style.<sup>48</sup> They looked outward to other cultures and integrated inspiration from abroad into their own artistic practices, just as the Western modernists of the early twentieth century

had introduced radical changes by adopting formal features of “primitive” or “aboriginal” cultures. As eminent art historian Geeta Kapur has recently noted, “This is what has now been recognized to be the elliptical looping of vocabularies and affects that have generated multiple modernisms. . . . [Indian modernism] exercised its own creativity in the period of transition to modernity, devising formal transfers, visual articulations and cultural hybrids that were eclectic and integral to its own civilizational genius and to its own historical needs.”<sup>49</sup> Husain, who was self-taught, was inspired by German Expressionism and initially made a living painting movie billboards before going on to achieve international renown as an artist. Mrs. Grey bought one of his works, *Virgin Night* (1964), which depicts a woman seated, perhaps smoking a cigarette, with a hookah pipe and a spider to her left and a ghostly hand pointing down from above. Husain included a spider in many of his works, a motif that some commentators have interpreted as a sign of protection derived from an Islamic story about the Prophet the artist had heard as a child.

We have no idea how Mrs. Grey discovered Husain’s work or where she bought it, but we know that she met Mohan Samant, another artist associated with the Progressives, later that year when he was working and living in New York. (She learned about him, as she put it, through “the usual feelers I had out” and visited him in his studio.) Samant’s work may have come to her attention through a pair of well-received exhibitions at World House Galleries in 1961 and 1964; in 1963, moreover, Samant had been listed in *Time* magazine as one of the top one hundred artists in the world.<sup>50</sup> In any case, in November 1964 Mrs. Grey bought a thickly impastoed composition by Samant made with paint and sand on canvasboard, *Door of the Heart* (1964). Of the striking blue that appears at the top of the canvas, Samant told Mrs. Grey that he had been looking for a color he had never seen before. According to the artist, the Persians had used this blue, the Indians took it, and the Persians had taken it back. The door forms seem to double as pages of a book, and the various scripts look like Hebrew, Sanskrit, and, perhaps, Devanagari. At the time Mrs. Grey met Samant, he was preparing to leave New York because his visa had expired. “We need to offer cultural exchange,” she replied, exhorting him to return.<sup>51</sup> Not only did Samant return, he made New York his home for more than thirty years during the latter part of his life.

It seems that Mrs. Grey bought another work in New York by one of the Bombay Progressives: an ink wash painting by the major artist Krishen

Khanna. With its delicate surface texture, the painting, titled *Vijay* (Victory; 1965), reflects Khanna's interest in Japanese ink-painting techniques, which he encountered during a trip to Japan sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation. "Over a long period I have been interested in trying to reduce the cumbersome of matter," the artist explained. "Oil paint tends often to be a slow and ponderous medium, tired out by five centuries of hard use. . . . With ink and rice paper, matter is held down to a minimum and the subtlest inflections of consciousness are registered with immediacy. There is no going back, no erasing, or editing or rethinking."<sup>52</sup> Atypical for Khanna, who is known primarily for figurative compositions, *Vijay* reflects a period in the artist's career when he lived in Washington, D.C., and New York (1964–65) and experimented with unfamiliar methods and pure abstraction.<sup>53</sup> Mrs. Grey did not write extensively of her introduction to Khanna or his work, but we know she met him in person because they later recorded an interview together about the first Indian Triennale for the radio program *Voice of America*, in which she describes him as being "'up' on American contemporary art."<sup>54</sup>

On her third trip to India, in 1965, Mrs. Grey purchased the etchings in the exhibition by Somnath Hore and Vivan Sundaram. Hore, whom she met in New Delhi, is described in the diary as "a young man, tall, thin. . . . We talked of his work and lithography in India. So gently voiced, so quiet and humbly spoken, but with that breaking to the surface of his spirit when he smiled."<sup>55</sup> Much of Hore's work is figural, including *Shepherd* (1965), which reflects on the tragic Calcutta famine of 1943 yet has a similar attention to layered colors and textures as the more lighthearted and floral *Birth of a White Rose* (1961). Traveling on to Bombay, Mrs. Grey met Sundaram at his first exhibition—a show at the Taj Art Gallery the artist remembers as tough-looking and provocative—and became one of his first patrons. Today one of India's most respected contemporary artists, at the time Sundaram had just graduated from Maharaja Sayajirao University, Baroda, which he told Mrs. Grey had been so strictly administered that it snuffed out the creative spark in many of its students. Sundaram remembered being encouraged, however, by the school's dean, N. S. Bendre, whom Mrs. Grey had met in Minnesota several years earlier.<sup>56</sup> In the diary she admires Sundaram's lively sense of humor, and as the artist recently recalled she was evidently bowled over by his show, too, from which she bought several works.<sup>57</sup> The smallest, a collage with ink wash and photographic prints that demonstrates a strong Pop sensibility, incorporates documentary images of two female sculptures that the

artist appropriated from a government-produced book on the famous tenth- to eleventh-century temples in Khajuraho. The two figures—one heavy, the other slender—are juxtaposed with text reading “Stay Slim with Limical,”<sup>58</sup> a reference to (or perhaps the slogan of) a dieting product whose name was derived from “limited-calorie.”<sup>59</sup> In her travel diary Mrs. Grey characterizes the work as “a photographic collage of an erotic ruined sculpture of a female contrasted with a smaller statuesque figure clothed in flowing white sari, with a harassed look upon her brow.”<sup>60</sup> She also bought *Camel* (1965), a theatrical, phallic composition in ink wash that depicts the hindquarters of a camel with its neck stretching away from the viewer through a window. According to the travel diary, the work was from a series inspired by the atmosphere of Jaisalmer, the twelfth-century Rajput walled city in Rajasthan. She describes both the city and the series:

The paintings are inspired by the solitary atmosphere of the city of Jaisalmer. An ancient fortress in yellow that throbs in the desert. . . . [They are] part of a series where a camel, a man, a woman, and a goddess encounter each other. Through narrow doors, lanes and against decorated windows the movement takes place. The climax is reached on a red balcony when the camel reaches before the man. . . . The paintings are built up architecturally, through which form emerges. . . . A greater emphasis is laid on color and decorative detail, to create a sensuous vibrating atmosphere. Eroticism merges with a poetic humor as contrasting symbols come together.<sup>61</sup>

Both Sundaram and Santosh were associated with the Baroda Group, a circle of artists who resisted formalist decrees that painting should be either entirely abstract or realist and instead freely integrated “Western” and “Indian” forms, motifs, and narrative subjects. This rejection of strict dichotomies is all the more compelling in light of Geeta Kapur’s remarks in her introduction to the 1981 exhibition of Baroda Group art, “Place for People” (which included works by Sundaram but not Santosh), where she discusses the widespread admiration among the Indian modernists for Paul Klee’s art. “Indian artists,” she wrote, “not only [prefer] Klee to all other artists but also prefer in their own tradition precisely those features which might have appealed to Klee—for example, a latent primitivism, a lyrical and mystical strain, and more obviously, of course, an exquisite sense of colour and design . . . via Klee,

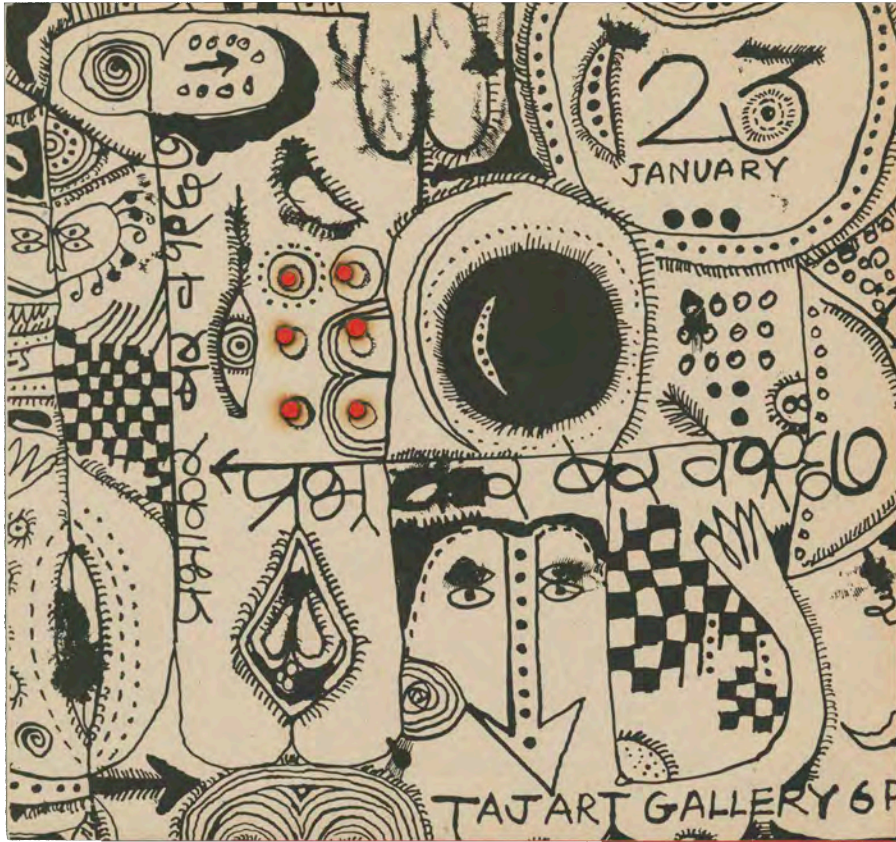


an Indian artist will also claim an identity apart and beyond, for while his Western counterpart is seen to be struggling away from the post-Renaissance conventions of a literary realism, the Indian artist can treat himself like the privileged heir of an intrinsically more advanced art and to practice, in all innocence, an age-old Modernism.”<sup>62</sup>

On the same visit to Bombay Mrs. Grey made the acquaintance of Jehangir P. Vazifdar, whom she described as “by far the most astonishing artist” she met on that trip. She bought one work from him: a canvas painted in a completely self-invented style based on a personal theory of color. Vazifdar made his living as an architect, contractor, and builder but found his greatest pleasure in painting. When Mrs. Grey visited his business complex, the Vazifdar College of Building Industries, she discovered three of the ground-floor rooms installed with his work. Later, as she and Vazifdar were waiting in the air-freight offices to ship his painting to the United States, the artist told Mrs. Grey that he spent half of his time painting and refused commissions. “Why should I go on making millions [in the construction business]?” he lamented. “I am continuously frustrated in my work, I cannot get the building materials I want, and so on. But in my painting I am a free man.”<sup>63</sup>

During Mrs. Grey’s last visit to India—to celebrate the first Indian Triennale—she acquired the works in the exhibition by Jaya Appasamy, Prabhakar Barwe, and Ambadas (Ambadas Uttamrao Khobragade) as well as others, perhaps, judging from the 1968 dates of many of the Indian works in her collection. Ellen Johnson introduced her to Appasamy, who had studied at Oberlin College for her master’s degree and become a close friend. Appasamy was a member of the Delhi Silpi Chakra and later was active as an art critic and historian. After lunch on the rooftop terrace of Appasamy’s apartment in New Delhi, they viewed her paintings and Mrs. Grey purchased two canvases, including *Ethnic Figures* (1967). Interestingly, the collector’s and the curator’s recollections focus on different concerns. Mrs. Grey writes about Appasamy’s portrayals of the human condition, interpreting the brooding presence in her paintings as an extension of the artist’s life. Johnson, in contrast, describes the works as “graceful, mostly figurative . . . delicately brushed in large, simplified areas of nearly uniform tones calling to mind (mine, certainly not Jaya’s) Milton Avery’s handling of surface, shape and space.”<sup>64</sup>

After visiting the Taj Mahal and Khajuraho, the pair eventually made their way to Bombay, where Mrs. Grey purchased the works by Barwe and Ambadas. Barwe’s *King and Queen of Spades* (1967) is made with playing cards



Exhibition announcement, *Prabhakar Barwe*, Taj Art Gallery, Bombay, 1967

affixed to a bright composition that recalls Mughal miniature paintings as well as Klee's idiosyncratic symbolism. Abby calls it "a very exciting picture" without further elaboration. In a Taj Art Gallery brochure, the artist muses about color, sexual allure, and the excitement of fantasy, evidently referring directly to this work: "Red light area—imagination at loose—How many O's in loose?—Taxi yellow fascinates, invites spreads—yellow always invites—who said that?—Little nymph with a large bosom balances her masses on one leg—Flame red glows in the enveloping night—far away the red signal says stop . . . STOP . . . stop thinking? stop feeling? absurd!!"<sup>65</sup> The "flaming red light" of Barwe's work also flashes brightly in a painting by Ambadas, a prominent painter based in Bombay who had graduated from the Sir J. J. School of Art in 1952 and was associated with the short-lived Group 1890, which formed in 1962 but dispersed soon after. Mrs. Grey bought several of his oil

paintings, including *Faceless Divinity* (1967), which looks to this viewer like an abstracted vulva. Mrs. Grey does not mention this particular composition in her diaries but does note that she was introduced to Ambadas by Khorshed Gandhi at Gallery Chemould and that she later visited the artist's Bombay home on the Worli waterfront, next to the Arabian Sea.<sup>66</sup> In the brochure for the exhibition, Édouard Roditi, a poet and essayist previously associated with the Surrealist movement, discusses Ambadas's multivalent associations and gently proposes a new kind of Indian modernism: "A number of foreign art-lovers who happened to be visiting India have all expressed . . . an interest in the work of Ambadas as their choice of the most promising younger Indian painter. Is this because his work . . . appears to conform more readily to their own Western criteria of artistic excellence? Or is it, on the contrary, because they can detect . . . a refreshingly novel quality of 'Indianness' if I may now coin a word similar to the 'negritude' that the poet Aimé Césaire has proposed as a characteristic of the art and literature of Africa?" Abby kept in touch with Ambadas, and the artist sent her a Christmas card with a small painting done in Madhubani style, *Krishna Dancing on a Snake* (1968), which she had framed for her collection.<sup>67</sup> Still later, in 1970, Ambadas traveled to the United States and was a guest of Mrs. Grey's in St. Paul, where she hosted an evening gathering of local artists to meet him.

Six additional works dating from 1968 or later—by Dhanraj Bhagat, Mumtaz Sultan Ali, Ram Kumar, F. N. Souza, and Krishna Reddy—have been selected for the current exhibition, but exactly how or where Mrs. Grey acquired some of them is unclear. It is possible that the earliest, Bhagat's *Symbols*, from 1968, was purchased in India and that the remainder were acquired during her frequent visits to New York, where her brother Paul lived.

A rough-hewn, totemic wood monolith, *Symbols* represents a rare foray for this collector into the realm of Indian sculpture. Like Abby's friend Kanwal Krishna, Dhanraj Bhagat was born in Kamilia (in modern-day Pakistan) and had emigrated to India, where he was a founding member of the Delhi Silpi Chakra.<sup>68</sup> He also hung out at the Modern School, where Mrs. Grey most likely met him given her frequent visits there during her final trip to India, in 1968. Perhaps she had this work consolidated with others for shipment back to the United States.

Little is known about Mumtaz Sultan Ali. Born in Bombay, she eventually moved to New Delhi and exhibited at Gallery Chemould in the late 1960s. *Her Dream* (1969), a small, lyrical print, is populated with female figures of

varying sizes and features Shaivite symbolism (referring to the Hindu sect that worships Shiva), including a small lingam, or phallic generative form, on the right.<sup>69</sup>

Mrs. Grey acquired the untitled painting by Ram Kumar from 1970, her second work, a year after her last visit to India. The atypically abstract painting, made with charcoal and ink on paper, brings to mind compositions by the Abstract Expressionists Franz Kline and Robert Motherwell.

F. N. Souza and Krishna Reddy were both established artists (albeit with starkly different styles) by the time Mrs. Grey collected their works, and she would surely have known of them by reputation. Souza, best known for his highly sexualized nudes, had been the primary founder of the Progressive Artists Group in 1947. He left India for London two years later and eventually moved to New York, where he was living when he made the painting Mrs. Grey acquired: *Trimurti*, a depiction of the Hindu trinity—Brahma, god of creation, at left; Vishnu, god of preservation, in the middle; and Shiva, god of destruction, at right—all painted in viscous oil with an impulsive fervor. The work was purchased from an exhibition organized by Shashi Gadgil, a private dealer in the Washington Square Village apartment complex.<sup>70</sup> There is no commentary in the archives as to why Mrs. Grey bought this particular painting, but it did fill a significant gap in her collection in terms of the artists associated with the Progressives, even if it was made long after the group's dissolution.

Reddy, associated with no specific movement, was director of the Department of Graphics and Printmaking at New York University from 1976 and was named professor emeritus in 2002, successfully expanding the department while also continuing to make art. He first became interested in printmaking while studying art at Santiniketan, outside Calcutta. After seeing Reddy's natural talent (evident in the two sketchbooks borrowed for this exhibition), Abanindranath Tagore recommended that he go to London to develop his career. Reddy went on to study at the Slade School of Fine Art in 1949 and the following year traveled to Paris, where he met with many prominent artists—including Constantin Brancusi and Alberto Giacometti—telling them not only about the influential philosophical ideas of Rabindranath Tagore and Jiddu Krishnamurti but also about the work of his teachers Nandalal Bose and Ramkinker Baij, among others. "The general atmosphere, the general assumption in Europe was that India had no culture!" he recalls now. "I didn't go there to make a name. I went to under-

stand, what is art about? But not as a nationalist, not as a representative of my country.”<sup>71</sup>

In Paris Reddy worked at Atelier 17, Stanley William Hayter’s pioneering print workshop, where he developed a special process for printing multiple colors simultaneously with just a single pass through the press. Two additional etchings from Reddy’s Paris years are included here: *Bulging Tuatara* (c. 1953) and *Seed Pushing* (1961). Both are organic abstractions evincing a symbolic vital process, or a stage of growth, in accordance with Hayter’s statement that Reddy’s images offer “an escape from the nonsense of the idiot round of daily existence into a timeless calm which is the real sense of life.”<sup>72</sup> The final work of his in Mrs. Grey’s collection, *Many and the One* (1971), has a built-up, sculptural, and relief-like surface that depicts a row of abstracted female figures separated from a solitary individual, as if the latter has somehow been chosen from among the others.

Several more years would pass before the stars aligned to promote and preserve Abby Grey’s achievements—and her art collection—in perpetuity. On one of her frequent trips to New York, she arranged to meet with Peter Chelkowski, whose lectures on Persian history for the distance-learning television show “Sunrise Semester”—produced by NYU and aired on CBS three times a week at the crack of dawn—she had found inspiring.<sup>73</sup> She contacted Professor Chelkowski to discuss their mutual interests, setting in motion a chain of events. The eminent art historian (and NYU professor) Horst W. Janson was dispatched to meet with Mrs. Grey in St. Paul, and by 1973 plans were underway for the donation of her collection to the university and the formation of the Grey Art Gallery and Study Center.<sup>74</sup> As ever, Abby searches her soul, writing in her journal, “What gives me an incredible sensation is that now New York University and Washington Square have just prepared for me a beautiful invitation to locate my collection, museum and program there. I too, have been proposing what manner of announcement. Is this sacred or profane?”<sup>75</sup>

It is sacred, no matter how we view the sequence of events. Although the story that Mrs. Grey’s collection presents is not comprehensive, it nonetheless constitutes a remarkable gathering of work that allows scholars to study (and the public to view) Indian modernism from the personal perspective of a singular patron of the arts. That Abby was also an indefatigable writer and diarist and saved so much of the ephemera related to her collecting—all of it donated to NYU—is a windfall for historians as well as a catalyst for further study.

Mrs. Grey's vision of bilateral cultural exchange was earnest and heartfelt, not driven by politics or any other agenda. Her collaborations with a US-government agency whose methods were very much in sync with her own certainly may have had an impact on her thoughts, but in the end her motives were quite different. Ironically, if we consider the amount of great art that came back with Mrs. Grey from her Asian travels in collaboration with the USIA, then we are the beneficiaries of Cold War policies today widely viewed as objectionable. Roughly fifty years later, in fact, we are still absorbing the works she collected, still striving to understand the history of Indian modernism. In so doing, we are also learning about "modernism at large," a phrase coined by cultural historian Andreas Huyssen that encompasses the cross-national cultural forms that emerge from the negotiation of the modern with the indigenous, colonial, and postcolonial in the "non-Western" world, as described by art historian Iftikhar Dadi. Canonical studies of modern and contemporary art continue to assume that Western art is central—is the "universal" modern—a fallacy that results in non-Western modern art being perceived as lacking in both a fully realized modernist subjectivity and cultural authenticity.<sup>76</sup> Postcolonial studies have repeatedly exposed the ways in which Western scholars and historians have perceived non-Western artists as failing to measure up because they were seen to be situated in the premodern era, and how their works, moreover, were looked down upon as impoverished, derivative responses to Western modernism. I hope that this project, partial and perspectival as it is, will contribute to new understandings of Indian modernist art and, at the same time, illuminate the crucial role of individual patrons such as Abby Weed Grey in the revised art histories yet to be written.

#### Notes

1. Vishakha N. Desai, "Beyond the 'Authentic-Exotic,'" in Bruce Altshuler, ed., *Collecting the New: Museums and Contemporary Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 106.
2. Geeta Kapur, "Modern India: A Retrospective on the Practice of Art," *India Moderna* (Valencia: IVAM Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, 2008), p. 335.
3. Okwui Enwezor, "Mega Exhibitions and the Antinomies of a Transnational Global Form," *MJ—Manifesta Journal*, no. 2 (Winter 2003/Spring 2004), pp. 6–31.
4. Shiva Balaghi and Lynn Gumpert, eds., *Picturing Iran: Art, Society and Revolution* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2002), p. 17.
5. New York University Archives, Abby Weed Grey Papers, Box 3, Folder 15, diary typescript from 1963, and Box 3, Folder 3, Series III, notebook, 1968, p. 43.
6. Robert Storr, "To Have and to Hold," in Altshuler, *Collecting the New*, pp. 30–31.

7. From Ellen Johnson, "The First India Triennale," in Athena Tacha, ed., *Fragments Recalled at Eighty: The Art Memoirs of Ellen H. Johnson* (North Vancouver: Gallerie, 1993), p. 93, and Robert Littman, interview with the author, June 10, 2014, New York. Unless otherwise noted, additional biographical information is from New York University Archives, Guide to the Papers of Abby Weed Grey 1922–1978, <http://dlib.nyu.edu/findingaids/html/archives/grey/biographist.html> (accessed August 16, 2014).
8. See *The Vassar Miscellany News* 8, nos. 8 and 26 (October 24, 1923 and February 9, 1924), p. 1; Lynn Gumpert, "Reflections on the Abby Grey Collection," in *Picturing Iran*, pp. 17–19; and Rita Delfiner, "Daily Closeup: She Knew What She Liked," *New York Post*, April 16, 1975.
9. Abby Weed Grey, *The Picture Is the Window / The Window Is the Picture* (New York: New York University Press, 1983), p. 12.
10. Abby Weed Grey Papers, Box 2, Folder 36, Series III, January 1956 notebook, pp. 20–21; and Box 20, Folder 5, Daybook 1951–75, 1956, pp. 10.
11. Abby Weed Grey Papers, Box 20, Folder 5, Daybook 1951–75, 1956, p. 27.
12. Rita Delfiner, "Daily Closeup." Robert Littman (interview with the author) described the house as "a very unpretentious house by the Mississippi. It had four or five bedrooms but it was a plain house, not like the place her sister [Emmy Lou] lived." "Her sister lived in a grand house on the main drag of St. Paul, a very beautiful street with beautiful houses." Littman also talked about the Deer Lake house as a spiritual refuge for Abby Grey. Just after her husband's death, Mrs. Grey's diaries contain passages extolling nature.
13. I was unable to find mention of how this trip came to be organized. Payments for it were made to the House of Travel, New York, and Mrs. Grey writes later that some of her fellow travelers were from New York and Washington D.C. Abby Weed Grey Papers, Box 2, Folder 40, notebook transcript from December 1, 1959, and February 5, 1962, mentions meeting up with friends from the "Round-the-World Tour" in New York and Washington. Another document ("Jeff Beddow from Abby's 1960 diary" Box 1, Folder 16) mentions the 1960 trip with "New York ladies," and Lynn Gumpert, director of the Grey Art Gallery, told the author (September 8, 2014) that she thought the 1960 trip may have been connected with Abby Grey's alma mater, Vassar College. It bears mentioning that in December 1958 Vassar College hosted a weekend conference on US propaganda and public policy; speakers included George Allen, director of the USIA, and Carla Williams, who at the time worked for the People-to-People Program. Two issues of the school newspaper, the *Vassar Chronicle* (December 5, 1958, p. 1) and the *Vassar Miscellany News* (December 10, 1958, p. 1), provide extensive commentary and reporting on the conference.
14. Abby Weed Grey Papers, Box 4, Travel files, January 16, 1960.
15. Abby Weed Grey Papers, Box 4, Travel files, interview with self, January 30, 1977, says the collection started with Japanese woodblock prints.
16. Abby Weed Grey Papers, Box 20, Folder 5, Daybook 1951–75. She refers to completing "the catalog of A Thousand and One Works."
17. For a thorough list, see "The Grey Foundation Collection: A Brief History," *One World Thru Art* (St. Paul: Ben & Abby Grey Foundation, 1972), pp. 7–9.
18. Francis Francina, "Institutions, Culture, and America's 'Cold War Years': The Making of Clement Greenberg's 'Modernist Painting,'" *Oxford Art Journal* 26, no. 1 (2003), p. 80.

19. "Information Dept. Reveals Objectives," *Vassar Chronicle*, December 5, 1958, p. 1-A.
20. Abby Weed Grey Papers, Box 2, Folder 41, handwritten text, 1961; Folder 40, AWG notebook, October 1958–August 1962. In Mrs. Grey's writings, the first mention of the People-to-People Program appears on January 22, 1961: "Suppose ACT (Amer. Cultural Ties) turns into MAP (Minn. Art Project). Suppose I use the People-to-People project in Wash D.C. to assist in Realization." Abby Weed Grey Papers, Box 2, Folder 40, entry dated January 22, 1961. At a later point, Margaret Cogswell was made a trustee of the Ben and Abby Grey Foundation.
21. Parviz Tanavoli, telephone conversation with the author, August 26, 2014.
22. Abby Weed Grey Papers, Box 1, Folder 16, transcribed interview with Jeff Beddow. Tape number 2, interview series side 1, August 12, 1975.
23. Abby Weed Grey Papers, MC151\_ref1463, voice recording on reel-to-reel tape.
24. Abby Weed Grey Papers, Box 6, Folder 54, letter from Margaret Cogswell to the wife of the US ambassador to India, Mrs. Chester (Steb) Bowles, in New Delhi, January 4, 1965, shows that she attempted another initiative. Cogswell and Mrs. Grey met with Steb Bowles to discuss their hopes for an "Arts Festival" in New Delhi, which they proposed for late October 1965. They requested an exhibition of American painting and sculpture, works from the current *Communication Through Art* project of the Grey Foundation, and perhaps a one-artist show by a prominent American. "It is our hope that an exhibition of Indian art can be arranged to be shown along with the American works." They also wanted to send a dance group, an instrumental group, and an American poet, and to have Indian groups participate along with the Americans. They suggested funding from the State Department American Specialist Program for some of these costs. This plan never came to fruition; according to the USIA, they were considering several other proposals as well.
25. SIA RU000321, National Museum of American Art (U.S.) Office of Program Support, Records, 1965–1981, with related records from 1954, [http://siarchives.si.edu/collections/siris\\_arc\\_216890](http://siarchives.si.edu/collections/siris_arc_216890) (accessed August 27, 2014). This website provides a summary of the International Art Program's (IAP) purpose and history. Considered an arm of the USIA, it was set up within the Smithsonian. Between 1965 and 1970, most of IAP's exhibition budget was directed to large international shows, notably foreign Biennales. After the threatened boycott of American artists at the Venice Biennale in 1970, the Smithsonian began reconsidering its role in such shows, not wanting to get involved in politics and fearing the consequences in its relations with artists. At the same time, the USIA no longer felt that international shows were the most useful means of reaching audiences abroad.
26. Devika Singh, "A modern formation? Circulating international art in India 1950s–1970s," in Shanay Jhaveri, ed., *Western Artists and India: Creative Inspirations in Art and Design* (London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 2013), p. 52.
27. Grey, *The Picture Is the Window*, p. 187.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 200.
29. Abby Weed Grey Papers, MC151\_ref1453, voice recording, reel-to-reel tape.
30. Johnson, "The First India Triennale," p. 93.
31. Abby Weed Grey Papers, Box 3, Folder 3, Series III, notebook, 1968, pp. 41, 43.
32. Grey, *The Picture Is the Window*, p. 15, and Abby Weed Grey Papers, Box 6, Folder 11, 1975, "Inaugural catalog" manuscript, p. 2.



33. Abby Weed Grey Papers, Box 3, Folder 3, Series III, unpaginated notes.
34. Abby Weed Grey Papers, Box 4, Travel files, interview with self, 1977, n.p.
35. Abby Weed Grey Papers, Box 3, Folder 11, Travel Diary (1st), 1960, Series IV, p. 52.
36. Richard Bartholomew, *The Art Critic* (Noida, India: BART, 2012), p. 359, and Rosalyn d’Mello, “The Art Critic and the Politics of Memory,” *Caravan Style & Living*, November 2012, p. 80. In her text “1960 First Trip around the World,” Mrs. Grey says she was taken to the school by one of the shop owners in the Ashoka Hotel. Abby Weed Grey Papers, Box 1, Folder 1, p. 56.
37. Abby Weed Grey Papers, Box 3, Folder 11, Series IV, p. 54.
38. Abby Weed Grey Papers, Box 3, Folder 11, Travel Diary (1st), 1960, Series IV, pp. 64, 68.
39. Abby Weed Grey Papers, Box 3, Folder 11, Series IV, Travel Diary, (1st), 1960, pp. 67–68.
40. Abby Weed Grey Papers, Box 3, Folder 11, Series IV, Travel Diary, (1st), 1960, pp. 64, 69.
41. Abby Weed Grey Papers, Box 3, Folder 15, Series IV, 1964 diary, pp. 60–61. Another colleague named Ruth went on this trip too. Cogswell, at this time still head of publications at the AFA, would soon be hired by the USIA to work for its International Art Program. In addition to India they stopped in Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan, where Mrs. Grey’s exhibition “Communication Through Art,” organized under the auspices of the USIA, was presented during that period.
42. Abby Weed Grey Papers, Box 3, Folder 15, diary typescript, pp. 60–61, 67–68; Box 3, Folder 16, 1964 travel diary, p. 67; and voice recording MC151-ref1463, 28:00–31:55, 42:55–44:18.
43. Abby Weed Grey Papers, Box 3, Folder 17, January 28, 1964 diary entry; and Box 3, Folder 15, diary typescript, pp. 68–69; and handwritten 1964 diary.
44. Shiv Kapur, *Cultural Profiles* (New Delhi: Inter-National Cultural Center, 1961), p. 95.
45. Abby Weed Grey Papers, Box 3, Folder 15, diary typescript, p. 69.
46. Abby Weed Grey Papers, Box 4, Folder 6, Barwe folder.
47. Abby Weed Grey Papers, Box 3, Separation Box, 1965 diary, p. 98.
48. Kapur, “Modern India,” p. 355.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 354.
50. “The Lively Answer,” *Time*, September 30, 1963, p. 74.
51. Abby Weed Grey Papers, MC151-ref1463, 1964 or later voice recording, 15:50–22:58.
52. Abby Weed Grey Papers, Box 4, Khanna folder, artist’s statement.
53. “Krishen Khanna,” <http://www.saffronart.com/artists/krishen-khanna> (accessed September 11, 2014) and data reported to me by Rashmi Viswanathan.
54. Two *Voice of America* interviews with William Miller, USIA cultural affairs officer, were recorded at the USIS office in New Delhi on February 12 and 13, 1968. The interview was with Abby Grey and Krishen Khanna, whom Abby refers to as “a member of the Triennale subcommittee who had recently had a show in a 57th Street gallery in New York City and so was ‘up’ on American contemporary art.” Grey, *The Picture Is the Window*, p. 188. I have been unable to locate the recordings.
55. Abby Weed Grey Papers, Box 3, Separation Box, 1965 diary, p. 83.
56. Abby Weed Grey Papers, Box 3, Folder 18, Series IV, mid-November 1965, n.p.
57. Discussion with the author at Sundaram’s home in New Delhi, March 7, 2013.
58. Art historian Annapurna Garimella concurred about the possible source of the figure at right being Khajuraho (email to the author, August 9, 2014). She thought perhaps the figure at left came from Konark, in Orissa.

59. Rashmi Viswanathan alerted me to the origins of the term “limical.”
60. Abby Weed Grey Papers, Box 3, Folder 18, Series IV, Travel diary, mid-November 1965, n.p.
61. Abby Weed Grey Papers, Box 9, Folder 3, Travel Diary, p. 101.
62. Geeta Kapur, *Place for People* (Bombay, 1981), n.p. It is worth noting that many Indian artists had been exposed to Klee and Kandinsky’s work through an exhibition of Bauhaus artists in Calcutta in 1922, following Nandalal Bose’s visit there the previous year, and that Stella Kramrisch taught at Santiniketan and the University of Calcutta in the 1920s and lectured on the history of European art from Gothic to Dada. See “Bauhaus in Calcutta—Exhibition,” on Bauhaus Dessau website, <https://www.bauhaus-dessau.de/bauhaus-in-calcutta.html> (accessed September 15, 2014) and *India Moderna*, p. 358.
63. Abby Weed Grey Papers, Separation Box, Folder 3, Travel Diary 1965, p. 101.
64. Grey, *The Picture Is the Window*, p. 188; Johnson, *Fragments Recalled at Eighty*, p. 95.
65. Prabhakar Barwe, *Prabhakar Barwe* (Mumbai: Taj Art Gallery, 1967), n.p.
66. Grey, *The Picture Is the Window*, p. 202. He lived at 27 Sea-Face House and had received the National Award in Painting from the Lalit Kala Akademi in 1965, according to documents in Abby Weed Grey Papers, Box 4, Folder 1.
67. I am indebted to Professor Dipthi Khera for this identification.
68. Bartholomew, *The Art Critic*, p. 359.
69. I am indebted to Rashmi Viswanathan for pointing out these features during a viewing of the work on March 7, 2014.
70. Abby Weed Grey Papers, Box 4, Folder 47, note; telephone conversation (September 15, 2014) with Vidya Gadgil, wife of Shashi Gadgil, both currently living in New York, who explained that Shashi later opened a gallery but in 1971 would have rented space for exhibitions.
71. Discussion with Krishna Reddy during a visit to his Wooster Street apartment and studio, March 20, 2014.
72. Stanley William Hayter in *Krishna Reddy*, exhibition brochure (Mumbai: Gallery Chemould, 1966), n.p.
73. Gumpert, “Reflections on the Abby Grey Collection,” pp. 18–19.
74. Robert Littman, interview with the author. Littman recounted, “They took her seriously! . . . That’s when they sent Horst Janson out to see her. They discussed the fledgling collection.”
75. Abby Weed Grey Papers, Box 20, Folder 5, Daybook 1951–75, 1973, n.p.
76. Iftikhar Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Press, 2010), pp. 1–2, 13. Dadi mentions Rasheed Araeen’s journal *Third Text* as an influential locus of postcolonial studies and of this viewpoint in particular.

# The Disordered Origins of Things: The Art Collection as Pre-canonical Space

It may be latent in human psychology to model the world on a fall from innocence, since we each go through one. I can't know because I speak as an American, and I do know that as a culture we're disastrously addicted to easy fantasies of a halcyon past, one always just fading from view, a land where things were more orderly and simple. (The model is doubly useful, open equally to our patronizing dismissals of the past and to our maudlin comparisons to a corrupted present.) For that reason, so many really smashing cultural investigations open up a window onto the truly disordered and frequently degenerate origins of things we've sentimentalized as pure and whole and pat.

—Jonathan Lethem, "*Supermen!*: An Introduction"<sup>1</sup>

## I. AN EDUCATION IN SURPRISE

Browsing through the Abby Weed Grey collection of twentieth-century Indian art is an education in surprise; the artists whose works are represented include the widely known and the little known, but it is the latter that chiefly seize my attention. The fact that the collection spans such a variety of artistic positions is not, in itself, surprising. Grey, a connoisseur and traveler who built up collections of modern Indian, Iranian, and Turkish art in the 1960s and 1970s, was a transcultural figure ahead of her time, with eclectic tastes and an ecumenical vision of humankind. The personal motto that guided her as she pursued her Eastern itinerary at the height of the Cold War was "One world through art."<sup>2</sup> Her points of cultural reference and sources of access

to art and artists in the India of the 1960s were impeccable. These included the Lalit Kala Akademi, or National Academy of Fine Art, New Delhi, which during the late 1960s was presided over by the polymath Mulk Raj Anand, a Fabian socialist, veteran of the Spanish Civil War, novelist, and editor. She also patronized Gallery Chemould, Bombay, whose moving spirits were Kekoo and Khorshed Gandhi, pioneering gallerists committed to the promotion of individual artists and active in their support of a nascent art scene and the plural articulations of regional modernism to which it gave rise.

The Grey collection thus includes works by magisterial Indian artists such as Maqbool Fida Husain, Krishen Khanna, and Krishna Reddy, whose names are legendary in Indian art circles; some of them have also become increasingly familiar in a North American context. This wider currency may owe, in some cases, to the frequent appearances that their works make in auctions of South Asian modernist art; in other cases, to the monographic exhibitions that major museums have accorded them; and in yet other cases, to their association with a breakthrough technical contribution to their discipline (such as Reddy's development of the viscosity printing process in printmaking), or to a historic fate they may have suffered, such as censorship or exile (as in the case of Husain, whose persecution by ultra-conservative forces in India obliged him to seek refuge first in the United Kingdom and later in Qatar).

Alongside these eminent figures, however, the Grey collection includes works by practitioners who are admired in theory and ignored in practice in India; some have been excluded from, or marginalized within, the canonical narratives of postcolonial Indian art that have been constructed since the 1990s. In consequence, these artists remain quite unknown in North America at the present time. Under this rubric, we may list the ingenious and enigmatic Prabhakar Barwe, whose two works in the Grey collection, *Yantra III* (1964) and *King and Queen of Spades* (1967), are both informed by the years that Barwe spent in Varanasi, Hinduism's holiest city, where he experimented with the heterodox practices of Tantra, working with the sacred diagrams known as *yantras* and reflecting on Tantra's ability to harness spiritual quest and sexual desire into an experiential whole.<sup>3</sup>

Another artist whose work appears in the Grey collection, Mohan Samant, had until recently been edited out of the narrative of postcolonial Indian art. Samant spent much of his life in New York as a solitary figure who disdained groups and circles. Yet, as I have argued elsewhere, this border crosser—who delighted in melding the painterly, the sculptural, and the architectural, and

who revolutionized the pictorial surface into an assemblage with cutouts and insertions—was a “one-man avant-garde” ahead of his contemporaries in India and in step with such radical artists of the 1960s and 1970s as Gordon Matta-Clark and Wolf Vostell.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, and despite having been exhibited throughout the 1960s by Paula Cooper at World House Galleries, New York, Samant left next to no trace in his adopted homeland. His *Door of the Heart* (1964), a bold work executed in acrylic and sand on canvasboard, reminds us of an ebullient spirit awaiting the belated attention and recognition that a retrospective would accord him.

Other pioneering figures from the 1950s and 1960s, consigned to near oblivion in India except in the occasional reminiscences of their few remaining contemporaries, also appear in the Grey collection. The catalogue of works reveals an etching by Devayani Krishna, *Veiled Mask*, from the 1960s, and a 1960 etching and aquatint on paper, *Shivering Sun*, by her husband, Kanwal Krishna. The Krishnas joined the Modern School in New Delhi in 1953 and soon initiated an efflorescence in the graphic arts that would continue well into the late 1960s. Kanwal studied with Stanley William Hayter at Atelier 17, Paris, and both the Krishnas traveled and exhibited extensively in Eastern and Western Europe during the Cold War as well as in Latin America, enriching experiences that they brought to bear on both their practice and pedagogy.

We also find works by Satish Gujral, Mumtaz Sultan Ali, and Gulam Rasool Santosh. Gujral was the only member of his generation of Indian artists to study in Mexico City, choosing the Palacio Nacional de Bellas Artes in 1952 while his confreres from Bombay, New Delhi, and Calcutta set their sights on academies and galleries in Paris, London, or New York. Returning home after an apprenticeship with the legendary muralists Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros, Gujral soon became a larger-than-life figure on the Indian scene. Despite this, and despite a career that spans more than six decades and a body of work that straddles painting, sculpture, architecture, and design, Gujral remains tangential to the main narrative of Indian art. Similarly, Mumtaz Sultan Ali, who crafted a stylized vocabulary based on the traditions of Indian miniature painting, and Gulam Rasool Santosh, who adapted the Indic sacred diagram, especially the *yantra* and the *mandala*, to propose an aesthetic of transcendence, remain peripheral within the dominant understanding of Indian art. All these artists, I would suggest, were creating experimental vernaculars for themselves through a productive bricolage of ideas, images, and techniques culled from diverse sources.

While the Grey collection initially appears to have been assembled idiosyncratically, reflecting the personal preoccupations of a private collector, in fact this unique group of works embraces the diversity of artistic explorations, cultural alignments, and ideological perspectives that animated the Indian art scene as it unfolded between the 1940s and 1960s. It permits us access, therefore, to a vista that has been constrained by the canonical view of Indian art that came to be established through a series of discursive and exhibitionary moves during the 1990s and early 2000s, which I shall soon examine here. Legislated onto the past by selective acts of retrospection, also both discursive and exhibitionary, this view rapidly won the approval and reinforcement of the market and became absorbed into the framework of critical reception by museums, academia, the media, and viewers at large. Thus, over a period of time, our view of modern Indian art has come to be premised on the visibility, documented continuity, or self-perpetuating narratives of formations such as the Bengal School, the Santiniketan artists, the Progressive Artists Group (PAG), and the Baroda Group, among others. As a corollary, appellations that were once tactical and protean have in retrospect become hard-edged and definitive. As another corollary, groups independent of these vocal and articulate groupings, and individual artists who were unaffiliated with groups or who broke away from coteries, have suffered neglect.

I would therefore argue that the Grey collection's importance lies precisely in the exceptional opportunity it offers viewers to savor the pre-canonical phase of the vibrant regional modernism that developed in India in the early decades after it achieved independence from British colonial rule in 1947. Accordingly, I would regard this collection as a conceptually open and enabling space rather than a sealed and limiting one. As a pre-canonical space, the Grey collection gestures toward the possibility of a salutary corrective in our perception and appreciation of postcolonial Indian art. Inevitably, it also invites us to recall the lost, eclipsed, or disregarded modernisms of those who have fallen below the line of canonical visibility.

## II. THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF CANON FORMATION

This would be the appropriate point to outline a brief historiography of the processes of canon formation in postcolonial Indian art during the last two decades. These processes have their origin in efforts to theorize and historicize the crisis that confronted the early Indian modernists, from the 1920s

to the 1960s, and which forms a legacy to succeeding generations. Such modernists, including M. F. Husain, Jehangir Sabavala, Shiavax Chavda, K. K. Hebbar, Francis Newton Souza, V. S. Gaitonde, Akbar Padamsee, and Tyeb Mehta drew upon a dual tension: while driven by the ideological compulsions of nationalism, engendered by modernity in its particular Indian social and economic form, they were also impelled by the desire to appropriate the high modernist aesthetic as it became available to them from exemplars in Paris, London, New York, and Munich. Even as they mediated the influence of Euro-American modernism, these artists had to negotiate with the more immediate pressures of the late-colonial and postcolonial quest for a national identity.

How were these artists to modulate the compulsions of ideology with the dictates of the imagination and, later, the demands of a nascent nation-state with the institutional logic of the art world? How could they reconcile their ambitions with the various syndromes of hesitancy and sensitivity that their situation as postcolonial subjects inflicted upon them? How could they develop artistic languages that would be recognizable as international yet legible to their local viewership? Indian modernists responded to these challenges in varied ways, shaping divergent strategies, ranging from the critical appropriation of School of Paris strategies and the pursuit of lyrical abstraction to the embrace of heterodox and artisanal materials, and the amalgamation of Indic and Euro-American painterly legacies.<sup>5</sup>

Over a period of time, several standard narratives have come to frame and define these developments. The self-understanding and manifestos of various groups, taken at face value or endowed with authority through influential publications and exhibitions, have played a central role in shaping these narratives, as have genuinely important revisionist studies. The first wave of these narratives emerged during the 1990s, when the Bengal School, long dismissed as a backward-looking movement premised on the retrieval of the miniature traditions of the feudal courts, was restored to its robust reality as a movement of cultural resistance and self-assertion during the late colonial period by two seminal works of art history: Tapati Guha-Thakurta's *The Making of a New 'Indian' Art: Artists, Aesthetics and Nationalism in Bengal, c. 1850–1920* (1992)<sup>6</sup> and Partha Mitter's *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India 1850–1922: Occidental Orientations* (1994).<sup>7</sup>

In 1996, the Progressive Artists Group, popularly regarded in the Bombay art world as the originators of Indian modernism, received their canonical

acceptance when Yashodhara Dalmia organized “The Moderns,” the inaugural exhibition of the Bombay branch of the National Gallery of Modern Art. This exhibition was followed, five years later, by a book based on her research into the work of the Progressives and their allies and associates, *The Making of Modern Indian Art: The Progressives*.<sup>8</sup> The Progressives, among them F. N. Souza, M. F. Husain, Syed Haider Raza, K. H. Ara, H. A. Gade, and S. K. Bakre, had polemically set themselves against the Bengal School, and much of the opprobrium that was heaped on the Bengal School artists—from which Guha-Thakurta’s and Mitter’s studies rescued them—may be traced back to the diatribes of the Progressives, especially Souza.<sup>9</sup> Dalmia’s exhibition and book, taken together, proposed a category, “the Progressives and their associates,” that would in time blur the distinctions among various artistic positions while cementing them into a consolidated bloc in gallery and auction-house contexts. Thus, for instance, Ram Kumar’s early affiliations with the Delhi Silpi Chakra and his apprenticeship to the cubist lineage were downplayed in favor of his friendship and association with the Progressives.

The year 1997 bore witness to two parallel gestures of canon formation. On the one hand, the art historian R. Siva Kumar’s benchmark exhibition and related publication, *A Contextual Modernism*, restored the Santiniketan artists—Rabindranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose, Benodebehari Mukherjee, and Ramkinker Baij—to their proper place as the originators of an indigenously achieved yet transcultural modernism in the 1930s, well before the Progressives composed their manifesto in the late 1940s. Of the Santiniketan artists, Siva Kumar observed that they “reviewed traditional antecedents in relation to the new avenues opened up by cross-cultural contacts. They also saw it as a historical imperative. Cultural insularity, they realized, had to give way to eclecticism and cultural impurity.”<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, the influential Baroda Group, a coalition whose original members included Vivan Sundaram, Gulammohammed Sheikh, Bhupen Khakhar, and Nalini Malani—and which had left its mark on history in the form of the 1981 exhibition “Place for People”—was definitively historicized in 1997 with the publication of *Contemporary Art in Baroda*, an anthology of essays edited by Sheikh.<sup>11</sup>

Ironically, as if to illustrate the workings of the cultural politics of canon formation, 1997 was also the year in which the Madras-based art critic Josef James published *The Madras Metaphor: Contemporary Indian Sculpture*, a magisterial study that nonetheless vanished without trace. Canons cannot be formed unless the process is sustained by the collaboration of influential



arbiters, actors, and institutions in any given cultural scene. Unfortunately, James's protagonists, the artists of Cholamandal—an artists' colony outside Madras founded by the artist and academic K. C. S. Paniker in 1964 on the premise of evolving a regional modernism independent of Western templates—have consistently been ignored in an ethos that is fixated on the centers of New Delhi, Bombay, and Baroda.<sup>12</sup>

Guha-Thakurta's and Mitter's studies were dispassionate and academic; by contrast, Dalmia, Siva Kumar, and Sheikh's projects combined the historian's mandate with the affectionate partisan's desire to memorialize one or another avant-garde tendency within the trajectory of Indian modernism. When auction houses such as Saffronart, Christie's, and Sotheby's became active in the Indian art world during the early 2000s, they based their cartography of the subject on these then-recent publications and exhibitions: the canon was ready to be crystallized. This brief historiography reminds us of the shifting genealogies, revised allegiances, and periodic recalibrations by which, as the novelist and essayist Jonathan Lethem notes in the passage that serves this essay as epigraph, we erase the "truly disordered and frequently degenerate origins of things" and imagine a past that is "pure and whole and pat." Although Lethem suggests that this is an American weakness, it is a universal pattern of human behavior, and certainly informs the manner in which multiple pasts are reformatted and subsumed within a single past in India.

### III. RECONSTRUCTING MULTIPLE PASTS

A collection such as Abby Weed Grey's permits us a forensic engagement with, and the possibility of reconstructing, these multiple pasts. The testimony of the Grey collection tallies closely with the nuanced contemporary accounts of the period under review, which we receive from the critic, poet, and cultural organizer Richard Bartholomew and the critic and curator Geeta Kapur. In Bartholomew's writings of the late 1960s and early 1970s, there is no narrow focus on the "Progressives." Instead, he speaks of a "Bombay school," a rubric under which he includes a number of artists over and above the Progressives. In a 1961 text ("Contemporary Indian Painting," published by the Japanese Cultural Forum in a volume titled *Modern Art of Asia*), Bartholomew characterizes postcolonial Indian art as primarily expressionistic and offers a survey spanning movements, cities, and individual artists. "The nucleus of the New Painting is Bombay. The greater body of efficient and experimental

painters reside there,” he writes. “Bombay is the home of M F Husain, Mohan Samant, R D Raval, Akbar Padamsee, Newton [F N] Souza, Tyeb Mehta, [K K] Hebbar, [Shiavax] Chavda, [H A] Gade and [V S] Gaitonde.”<sup>13</sup>

Likewise, in her introduction to *Contemporary Indian Art*, an exhibition held at the Royal Academy of Arts, London, in 1982, Geeta Kapur writes of the emergent artists of the early 1960s: “While making a place for themselves they were expectedly critical of the preceding generation, who they saw as the Westernizers.” Of one of the most prominent of these, J. Swaminathan—co-founder of Group 1890 along with Ambadas, Gulammohammed Sheikh, Eric Bowen, and others—Kapur notes: “Breaking the professional discipline which the older painters had in their way quite admirably established, he proposed . . . the magical potency of the folk and tribal cultures which are still alive and contemporary, he questioned the technocratic, incipiently authoritarian culture of the West.” Even so, and significantly, “in the matter of creative procedure the alternative principle that was adopted by this group of artists was most nearly surrealist—particularly as it developed under the star of Paul Klee.”<sup>14</sup>

As Bartholomew’s and Kapur’s observations demonstrate, the exchanges and affinities among artists were far more complex than the established canon suggests; often, these points of contact were formed across location, generation, and chosen idiom. Again, through its holdings, the Grey collection demonstrates the pervasive and unifying role that Klee played as a common factor in the work of a number of Indian artists who, between the 1950s and 1970s, came under his spell. Indeed, the nearly decade-long interval between the publication of English translations of Klee’s *Pedagogical Sketchbook* and *The Thinking Eye* accounts for his transgenerational appeal in India.

Klee’s *Pedagogical Sketchbook*, a conspectus of the Swiss master’s notes for his lectures at the revolutionary Bauhaus school of art, design, and architecture during the early 1920s, was originally published as a Bauhaus student manual in 1925. It was translated from the original German in 1953 and has remained in wide circulation globally. Both the *Pedagogical Sketchbook* and Klee’s other masterpiece, *The Thinking Eye* (published posthumously in 1956 and translated into English in 1961), have been repeatedly cited as points of inspiration and reference by artists of otherwise divergent preoccupations, including Shankar Palshiker, V. S. Gaitonde, Akbar Padamsee, Badri Narayan, and Prabhakar Barwe. Klee’s parabolic phrasing and choices of metaphor, such as his favorite image of taking the line for a walk, recur in the reminiscences of many of these artists.<sup>15</sup>

Importantly, these ideas circulated not within the retrospectively imagined boundaries of group and faction, but around inclusive venues such as the legendary Bhulabhai Institute in Bombay during the late 1950s, as well as Gallery Chemould and the Pundole Art Gallery from the early 1960s onward, under the aegis, respectively, of the gallerists Kekoo Gandhi and Kali Pundole. During the late 1960s the state-run Films Division hosted a unique assembly of visual artists and filmmakers that resulted in dialogues and collaborations among the documentary filmmaker and ceramicist Jean Bhowmgar, the musician Vijay Raghav Rao, the artist and animator Abid Surti, and artists such as Badri Narayan and Tyeb Mehta. As the cultural theorist Nancy Adajania has argued and demonstrated, the importance of these collaborations has been lost on the established canon altogether, premised as it is on the gallery system.<sup>16</sup>

In order to account for the diversity of the actual Indian art scene at the time when Abby Grey was collecting, it might be useful to consider the corrective to the canon that the art historians Mortimer Chatterjee and Tara Lal have proposed. They cite a 1965 essay by Badri Narayan, who employed the formulation “the artists of the third epoch” to describe his moment. “The First Epoch in modern Indian art,” Narayan wrote, “belongs to what is now called the Bengal School led by Abanindranath Tagore; the Second to independent and stylistically divergent painters like Jamini Roy and Amrita Sher-Gil; and the Third to those many painters, too numerous to be named individually, too varied in their outlook, those artists who emerged about the 1950s of this century, turning for inspiration not only to their own primitive, prehistoric and the more archaic and early miniature traditions, but also to the makers of the new patrimony—Klee, Mondrian, Mirò, Villon, Brancusi, Moore, Orozco, Marini, Giacometti, and the host of those eclectic masters of the post-impressionist period. . . . The significant [artists] after 1947 are men like Hebbbar, Husain, Bendre, Souza, Padamsee, Gade, Subramanian [*sic*], Ram Kumar, Sankho Chowdhuri [*sic*], Davierwalla, Raman Patel, Chavda, Raza, Gaitonde, Ara, Samant, P T Reddy, K S Kulkarni, Satish Gujral, Chintamani Kar.”<sup>17</sup>

This is the reality that Grey experienced on her visits to India. As Chatterjee and Lal observe, it was a time distinguished by a “dizzying array of experiments, with individual artists often exhibiting an extraordinary catholicity in their choices of influence and style. It was a period not of manifestos and deep-rooted collectives but, rather, of constantly shifting allegiances and strategies. Artists were continually on the move—taking up teaching

positions, moving in and out of burgeoning artist colonies, taking short-term tenancies of the newly formed art studio communities around the country, or even going abroad for good. Soon myriad networks and friendships assumed shape, forcing an ever greater sharing of knowledge amongst the younger artists active at that time.”<sup>18</sup>

From this “dizzying array of experiments” emerged what I have earlier called the experimental vernaculars that so many of the artists in Abby Weed Grey’s Indian collection devised for themselves, evidence that they were moving away from the classicizing programs of a School of Paris or a School of New York orientation, adopting hybrid practices, or disrupting the incipience of a settled style with departures in terms of theme, material, or context of production.

#### Notes

1. Jonathan Lethem, “*Supermen!*: An Introduction,” in Lethem, *The Ecstasy of Influence: Nonfictions Etc.* (New York: Doubleday, 2011), p. 142.
2. See “The Abby Weed Grey Collection of Modern Asian and Middle Eastern Art” webpage at [http://www.nyu.edu/greyart/information/Abby\\_Weed\\_Grey/body\\_abby\\_weed\\_grey.html](http://www.nyu.edu/greyart/information/Abby_Weed_Grey/body_abby_weed_grey.html) (accessed November 1, 2014). This text is adapted by Rory O’Dea, a doctoral candidate at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, and a former graduate assistant at the Grey Art Gallery (2004–5), from Lynn Gumpert, “Reflections on the Abby Grey Collection,” in Gumpert and Shiva Balaghi, *Picturing Iran: Art, Society and Revolution* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2002).
3. For an account of this phase in Barwe’s career, see Ranjit Hoskote, “*The Blank Canvas* Revisited,” introduction to Prabhakar Barwe, *The Blank Canvas*, trans. Shanta Gokhale (Mumbai: Bodhana, 2013), pp. 9–10.
4. See Ranjit Hoskote, “Mohan Samant: A One-Man Avant-Garde and a History That Would Not Claim Him,” in Hoskote, Marcella Sirhandi, and Jeffrey Wechsler, *Mohan Samant: Paintings* (Ahmedabad: Mapin & New York: Grantha, 2013), pp. 15–21.
5. See Ranjit Hoskote, “Art: From Enchantment to Interrogation,” in Hiranmay Karlekar, ed., *Independent India: The First Fifty Years* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 402–16.
6. Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *The Making of a New ‘Indian’ Art: Artists, Aesthetics and Nationalism in Bengal, c. 1850–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
7. Partha Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India 1850–1922: Occidental Orientations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
8. Yashodhara Dalmia, *The Making of Modern Indian Art: The Progressives* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001).
9. On being asked in an interview whether he acknowledged that the Bengal School had played an important role in the cultural ferment of the first half of the twentieth century, an unrepentant Souza replied, “Not as far as I am concerned. I wrote an article . . . where I call[ed] Tagore a Vedantist propped up by Emerson.” See Neville

- Tuli, *The Flamed-Mosaic: Indian Contemporary Painting* (Ahmedabad: Mapin/HEART, 1997), p. 390.
10. R. Siva Kumar, *Santiniketan: The Making of a Contextual Modernism* (New Delhi: National Gallery of Modern Art, 1997), n.p.
  11. Gulammohammed Sheikh, ed., *Contemporary Art in Baroda* (New Delhi: Tulika, 1997).
  12. Josef James, *The Madras Metaphor: Contemporary Indian Sculpture* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997).
  13. Richard Bartholomew, "Contemporary Indian Painting," in Bartholomew, *The Art Critic*, edited by Rati Bartholomew, Carmen Kagal, Pablo Bartholomew, and Rosalyn D'Mello (New Delhi: BART, 2012), p. 66.
  14. Geeta Kapur, introduction to *Contemporary Indian Art: An Exhibition of the Festival of India, 1982* (London: Indian Advisory Committee, Festival of India, United Kingdom, 1982), pp. 6–7. *Contemporary Indian Art* was a two-part exhibition in 1982 held at the Royal Academy of Arts, London, under the aegis of the Festival of India in Britain. It was conceived and organized by Akbar Padamsee, Richard Bartholomew, and Geeta Kapur.
  15. Paul Klee, *Pedagogical Sketchbook*, trans. Sibyl Moholy-Nagy (London: Faber & Faber, 1953), and Jürg Spiller, ed., *The Thinking Eye*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: George Wittenborn, 1964).
  16. See Nancy Adajania, "New Media Overtures Before New Media Practice in India," in Gayatri Sinha, ed., *Art and Visual Culture in India: 1857–2007* (Bombay: Marg, 2009), and "Probing the Khojness of Khoj," in Pooja Sood, ed., *The Khoj Book 1997–2007: Contemporary Art Practice in India* (New Delhi: HarperCollins, 2010).
  17. Badri Narayan, "Artists of the Third Epoch," *Lalit Kala Contemporary* 3 (New Delhi: 1965), p. 22, quoted in Mortimer Chatterjee and Tara Lal, *The TIFR Art Collection* (Bombay: Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, 2010), p. 26.
  18. Chatterjee and Lal, *The TIFR Art Collection*, p. 26.





# Catalogue

Entries by Rashmi Viswanathan

*All works are from the Abby Weed Grey Collection of Modern Asian and Middle Eastern Art, New York University Art Collection.*

## AMBADAS (1922–2012)

Ambadas Uttamrao Khobragade (known as Ambadas) is celebrated in India as a visionary abstract painter. Ambadas worked for the Weaver’s Service Centre as an art designer along with a number of other Indian modernists—including Prabhakar Barwe and Arpita Singh—all of whose work evinces textile-like color rhythms. As Ambadas observed, “I paint, repaint and paint all over, and for hours, in order to be one with, and be that. I paint non-stop. Nothing is empty; every bit of space breathes.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the central mass in *Faceless Divinity* seems to inhale and exhale, as if heaving. The artist offers no narrative in his work and avoids representation, instead directing the viewer’s attention to color, form, and texture by applying layers of paint to achieve an almost sculptural quality. Ambadas co-founded the Bombay-based Group Non-Representational, which promoted abstraction, and the Bhavnagar-based Group 1890 in 1962, formed in opposition to art movements in Bombay and other urban centers. Group 1890 resisted contemporary and earlier efforts to carve out an identity for Indian modernist art through the use of Indic forms with modernist aesthetics. Its manifesto declares:

From its early beginnings in the vulgar naturalism of Raja Ravi Varma and the pastoral idealism of the Bengal School, down through the hybrid mannerisms resulting from the imposition of concepts evolved by successive movements in modern European art on classical, miniature and folk styles to the flight into “abstraction” in the name of cosmopolitanism, tortured alternately by memories of a glorious past born out of a sense of futility in the face of a dynamic present and the urge to catch up with the times so as to merit recognition, modern Indian art by and large has been inhibited by the self-defeating purposiveness of its attempts at establishing an identity.<sup>2</sup>

*Faceless Divinity*, 1967

Oil on canvas

60% × 36 in. (152.7 × 91.4 cm)

G1975.184





Ambadas consistently rebelled against the use of Indic forms, opting instead for pure abstraction. He drew from a range of philosophies, including structural anthropology, in which all phenomena (such as art) derive meaning from their relative position within social structures. In that philosophy, meaning is not intrinsic but, rather, generated by structural forces. Accordingly, *Faceless Divinity's* pulsing forms and red sphere perhaps stand for the elemental, generative powers from which natural energy pours and confers meaning. In 1972 Ambadas moved to Norway, where he lived until his death in 2012.

*Krishna Dancing on a Snake*, 1968

Watercolor on paper

10 x 7½ in. (25.4 x 19.1 cm)

G1983.13



**JAYA APPASAMY** (1918–1984)

Better known as an art critic and historian, Jaya Appasamy worked only briefly as an artist, painting mostly landscapes. As both critic and artist, however, she was uncomfortable with the East/West dichotomization of modernism in contemporary scholarship as well as the tacit equation of *Western* with “universal” and “modern” and *Eastern* with “local,” “peripheral,” and “traditional.” Appasamy saw modernism as the confluence of a range of artistic traditions, not a novel form of expression, and rejected the common academic conception of it as a Western language that irresistibly pushed itself out into the rest of the world.

As chairman of the Delhi Silpi Chakra (Delhi Sculptors’ Circle), an arts organization dedicated to civic progress and popular appeal, Appasamy resisted contemporary efforts to create an Indian national art. In *Ethnic Figures* she thus avoids localizing forms, instead painting a landscape that might be anywhere, from any time. Distilled to thickly outlined cylindrical and ovoid forms, the monumental figures dominate the pastoral landscape of trees, earth, and sky, blurring the traditional figure/ground dichotomy. By leaving both faces and landscape undefined, the artist opened the scene to multiple interpretations.

Born in Madras, Appasamy studied at the famed Santiniketan School, an arts enclave established by the Tagore family at the turn of the twentieth century. In 1952, following a brief visit to China as a Government of India scholar, she enrolled at Oberlin College, Ohio, where she studied the works of Abanindranath Tagore. In 1964 she became editor of *Lalit Kala Contemporary*, one of Delhi’s major art periodicals, and in 1977 she was appointed professor at Santiniketan’s institute of art, Kala Bhavan.

*Ethnic Figures*, 1967

Oil on canvas

35¾ × 48¾ in. (90.8 × 122.6 cm)

G1975.186



## PRABHAKAR BARWE (1936–1995)

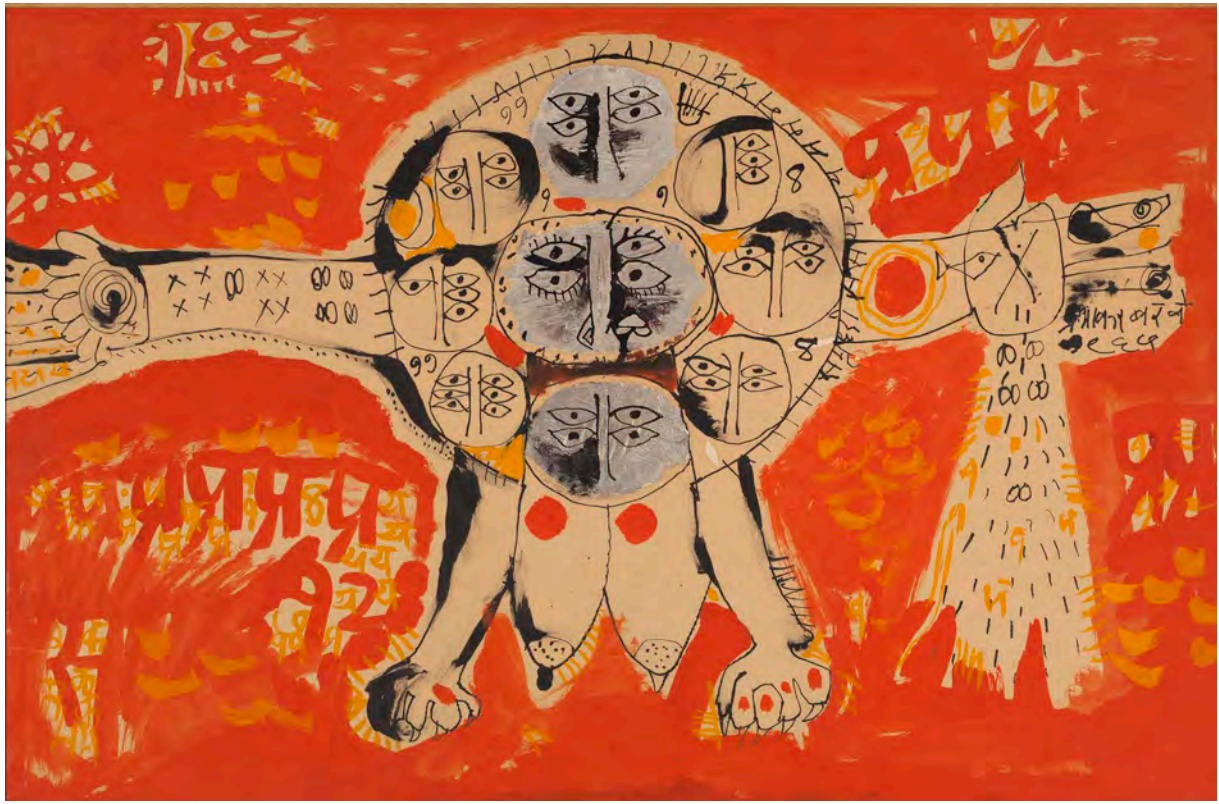
Prabhakar Barwe, born in Maharashtra, was the son of a Bombay film-industry artist and grand-nephew of the celebrated sculptor V. P. Karmarkar. Deeply influenced by Tantra, which he was exposed to while living in the holy city of Varanasi from 1961 to 1965, he is best known today for his abstract symbolist works whose forms draw from the unconscious. In that respect he was influenced early on by Paul Klee, whose art he came to know while a student at the Sir J. J. School of Art, Bombay (graduating in 1959).

*Yantra* is a Sankrit term referring to the geometric cosmograms used in Tantric practice, a branch of mystical Indic philosophy. A *yantra* functions as a focus of worship and meditation as well as a formal, aesthetic expression of divine power. The Devanagiri script that dots the painting functions more as a formal gesture than as letters signifying words. Barwe often used forms with rich associations—from scripts to *yantras* to everyday items such as playing cards—and divested them of their meanings, employing them as formal yet meditative expressions.

In *King and Queen of Spades*, the solid, contrasting pools of color are in a style reminiscent of Basohli painting, a school of Pahari artists who often use deep reds and yellows. The painting also recalls Indian textile design in its alternation of large fields of bright color with more intricate designs, reflecting Barwe's association with the Weaver's Service Centre at the Government of India's Ministry of Textiles in Varanasi. After meeting a number of other artists there, including Ambadas, Barwe went on to mine the patterns and designs of Indian craft art, thereby challenging the hegemony of Western visual idioms in modernist art.

TOP: *Yantra III*, 1964  
Watercolor, ink, and silver paper on paper  
19 $\frac{3}{8}$  × 29 $\frac{1}{8}$  in. (49.2 × 74 cm)  
G1975.152

BOTTOM: *King and Queen of Spades*, 1967  
Paper and oil on canvas  
39 $\frac{3}{16}$  × 54 $\frac{1}{8}$  in. (99.5 × 137.5 cm)  
G1975.188



## DHANRAJ BHAGAT (1917–1988)

Born in Lahore (then in British India and now in Pakistan), Dhanraj Bhagat is one of many accomplished sculptors worldwide who turned to wood, stone, and earthen materials in the 1940s and 1950s. Moving away from the British colonial legacy of academic naturalism, Bhagat was among a number of Indian artists, in particular, who turned to a combination of abstraction and figuration to articulate new ideas. *Symbols* speaks to his larger practice of pitting the artistic language of figuration against the wood's simplicity. He foregrounded its materiality, coating it with minimal paint varnish and leaving its surfaces visible. A vertical stack of cubic and spherical shapes culminates in a yawning, face-like ovoid that hints at figuration, yet its totemic abstraction precludes any narrative reading.

Bhagat participated in India's first three Triennales (1968, 1971, and 1975) as well as the All India Sculpture Exhibition (1947 and 1949) at the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi. He also exhibited with the All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society, New Delhi, one of the first organizations to mount exhibitions of modernist art in India. This state-funded, largely conservative space discouraged experimentation in art, however, alienating some of its members and associates. In the late 1940s several of the group's disenchanted members, along with other artists, formed the deeply influential artists' collective Delhi Silpi Chakra. Bhagat was among the artists to exhibit in the Silpi Chakra's first show, in 1949. In 1977 he received the Padma Shri, one of the Indian government's highest civilian honors.

*Symbols*, 1968

Wood and nails

48 × 7¾ × 4¾ in. (121.9 × 19.7 × 12.1 cm)

G1975.187





**SATISH GUJRAL** (born 1925)

Born in Jhelum, Punjab, Satish Gujral attended the Sir J. J. School of Art in Bombay, where he met members of the Progressive Artists Group in the mid-1940s. Unlike his peers who traveled to Paris and London to pursue art studies, Gujral turned his back on Western European training, opting instead to apprentice in Mexico under the celebrated artist and muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros from 1951 to 1952. Gujral is known for his murals at the New York World's Fair (1964), the Oberoi Towers, Bombay (1971–72), the Palace of the Sultan of Muscat (1975), and the World Trade Center (1980). For his designs for the Belgian embassy in New Delhi, the Belgian government awarded him the Order of the Crown in 1983.

In *Christ in the Desert* Gujral mines dark terrain, moving away from the strong contours, clearly articulated figures, and voluminous forms of his murals. The picture dates from the post-independence period (1947–60), when Gujral was creating moody, atmospheric paintings through the application of thick, course brushstrokes, heavy use of black, and the rhythmic juxtaposition of thick lines of contrasting colors. Here the desert's black horizon extends high up into the picture field, partially obscuring the sky. Crisscrossed with heavy purple lines, the desert seems to stretch on into infinity, far beyond the eye's capacity to see it. Perhaps abstracting the weighty subject of Christ's fasting and temptation in the desert, Gujral pictorializes a profound internal struggle.

*Christ in the Desert*, 1960

Oil on canvas

20¾ × 37¼ in. (52.7 × 94.6 cm)

G1975.156



## SOMNATH HORE (1921–2006)

In the wake of the devastating Calcutta famine of 1943, Somnath Hore, who was born in a small village in the city of Chittagong, in present-day Bangladesh, turned away from the sentimental lyricism of the Bengal School to co-found the Calcutta Group of Art in 1947. By straining, contorting, and abstracting elements of the human form, Hore violently represents what he views as the abjectness of the human condition. In *Shepherd* he employs the pastoral trope of the peasant, but the figure is neither nostalgic nor romanticized. Rather, the skeletal shepherd in the brown, fallow field, which is depicted in spare curvilinear forms, buckles under a burden of hopelessness. One senses the resonance of the political philosophy of the outspoken printmaker Chittaprosad Bhattacharya, who like Hore championed printmaking as an inexpensive, reproducible medium accessible to the masses and an ideal platform for social critique.

As a young man Hore met members of the Communist Party, for which he made posters, and the party's leader helped him gain entrance to the Government College of Arts and Crafts. Early in the artist's career he served in a variety of posts around India. From 1954 to 1958 he was a lecturer at the Indian College of Art and Draughtsmanship, Calcutta, and he headed sections of the Delhi College of Art as well as Santiniketan's art school, Kala Bhavan, until 1967.

In 1962 Hore won the Delhi-based Lalit Kala Akademi's coveted National Award (Graphics) for *Birth of a White Rose*. Guided by India's cognoscenti around the country's gallery circuits and artists' enclaves, Abby Grey cannily snapped up such works well in advance of most other American collectors.

TOP: *Birth of a White Rose*, 1961  
Etching on paper  
19¾ × 17¾ in. (50.2 × 45.1 cm)  
Edition 4/10  
G1975.157

BOTTOM: *Shepherd*, 1965  
Etching on paper  
8 × 9⅞ in. (20.3 × 25.1 cm)  
Artist's proof (3)  
G1975.200



## MAQBOOL FIDA HUSAIN (1915–2011)

M. F. Husain, perhaps India's most celebrated and controversial artist, remains at the center of a debate in India regarding obscenity in art. Born to a Muslim Bohra family in Pandharpur, Maharashtra, he was raised in the city of Indore. At the age of twenty he left for Bombay, intending to pursue a career in the arts. His first years in that bustling cosmopolitan center were difficult. Working as a billboard painter and a children's furniture and toy designer, he struggled to maintain a painting practice during his spare time. Then, in the late 1940s, he was asked by F. N. Souza to join the newly formed, Bombay-based Progressive Artists Group (PAG). Founded following India's emancipation from Britain, the PAG was deeply committed to breaking the grasp of Bengal's nationalist schools and forming an Indian avant-garde. As a member of the group, Husain mined cubist, expressionist, and local modes to create his own vocabulary of darkly expressive forms.

Although Husain traveled far from his humble beginnings, design remained central to his vision; as seen here, he often placed his strongly outlined figures at the center of the composition. Known for recontextualizing religious-cultural iconography, Husain painted numerous abstractions of the Virgin Mary, Hindu goddesses, and even Mother Teresa, often veiling the figures or otherwise hiding their faces. In *Virgin Night* the female form is resolutely contoured yet inaccessible, present yet removed. In her hand she holds a hookah pipe with a spider perched on it, and the light casts a shadow that obscures her face. Perhaps derived from the artist's yearning for his own mother—who died when he was two years old—the mother figure reappears frequently in his art, her face always hidden from the viewer's gaze. Such iconography sparked great controversy. In the 1990s Hindu nationalist groups disturbed by the artist's paintings of nude goddesses started anti-Husain campaigns that still rage on. In 2006, unable to sustain the pressure of legal complaints and threats on his life, Husain left India, living out his last days between Doha and London.

*Virgin Night*, 1964

Oil on canvas

39¼ × 29½ in. (101 × 74.9 cm)

G1975.158



## KRISHEN KHANNA (born 1925)

Born in Lyallpur, in the Punjab (today Faisalabad, Pakistan), Krishen Khanna is a leader of India's modernist movement and an avid promoter of modernism as a universal art form. He is best known for his figural works, which typically feature vibrant street life and celebrate the mundane through jagged angles and vivid colors.

Khanna began his professional life as a clerk with Grindlays Bank, Bombay. There he met M. F. Husain, who introduced him to the Progressive Artists Group, with whom Khanna mingled and exhibited. Largely self-taught, Khanna went on to win numerous accolades, including, in 1962, a fellowship from the Rockefeller Foundation that enabled him to spend time in Japan and to expand his growing repertoire of forms and artistic languages. His works are deeply inflected by such travels and by his wide-ranging experiences.

Khanna's early works are steeped in optimism. Reflecting the colors and light of Bombay and Madras, they depict boisterous musicians or women in domestic settings. During the later 1960s, two decades after independence, Khanna's art entered a darker phase as he addressed social issues connected with India's bloody partition and expressed his flagging faith in the country. After traveling to Japan, he embarked on meditative explorations of color and shape, including the present work, *Vijay*, which draws from the Japanese tradition of *sumi-e*, or black ink on paper. Channeling the ink wash, the artist courts accident to produce dark, atmospheric forms reduced to their essences, a technique that evokes a sense of withdrawal and disenfranchisement. Unlike Khanna's figural paintings, which display a narrative sense of movement and a relative clarity of form, his black-and-white abstractions defy storytelling.

Khanna's interest in *sumi-e* coincided with his growing taste for Abstract Expressionism; the two styles intersected in his one-artist show at New York's Egan Gallery in 1965, which showcased his abstract explorations. Because Khanna's engagement with Abstract Expressionism is less well understood than his figurative work, *Vijay* brings to light the important yet underexamined period in the artist's career when he lived and worked in New York.

*Vijay (Victory)*, 1965

Ink wash on paper, 36½ × 23¾ in. (92.7 × 60.3 cm)

G1975.159





**CHITRANGADA KRISHNA** (active mid-twentieth century)

Daughter of Devayani and Kanwal Krishna, Chitragada was raised in an artistic household committed to local community and national politics. In this etching, the net pattern stretched across the plate hints at three-dimensional space, while at the lower left, a cluster of red and white spots abruptly flattens the picture plane. Chitragada grew up spending time at the Modern School, a haven for avant-garde artists active throughout Delhi in the 1960s and 1970s, where her parents taught a variety of techniques, including batik, and promoted the notion of community in art. According to Abby Grey, the Krishnas used their school as a means not only to train students but also to raise funds for the causes they held dear. With proceeds from the sales of children's works, Chitragada's mother, Devayani, purchased art by her peers, thus bolstering the burgeoning Delhi modernist community. Mrs. Grey mentions that some of the profits were also directed to Indo-Pakistani war efforts. This makes clear that some Delhi artists did not shy away from political involvement.<sup>3</sup>

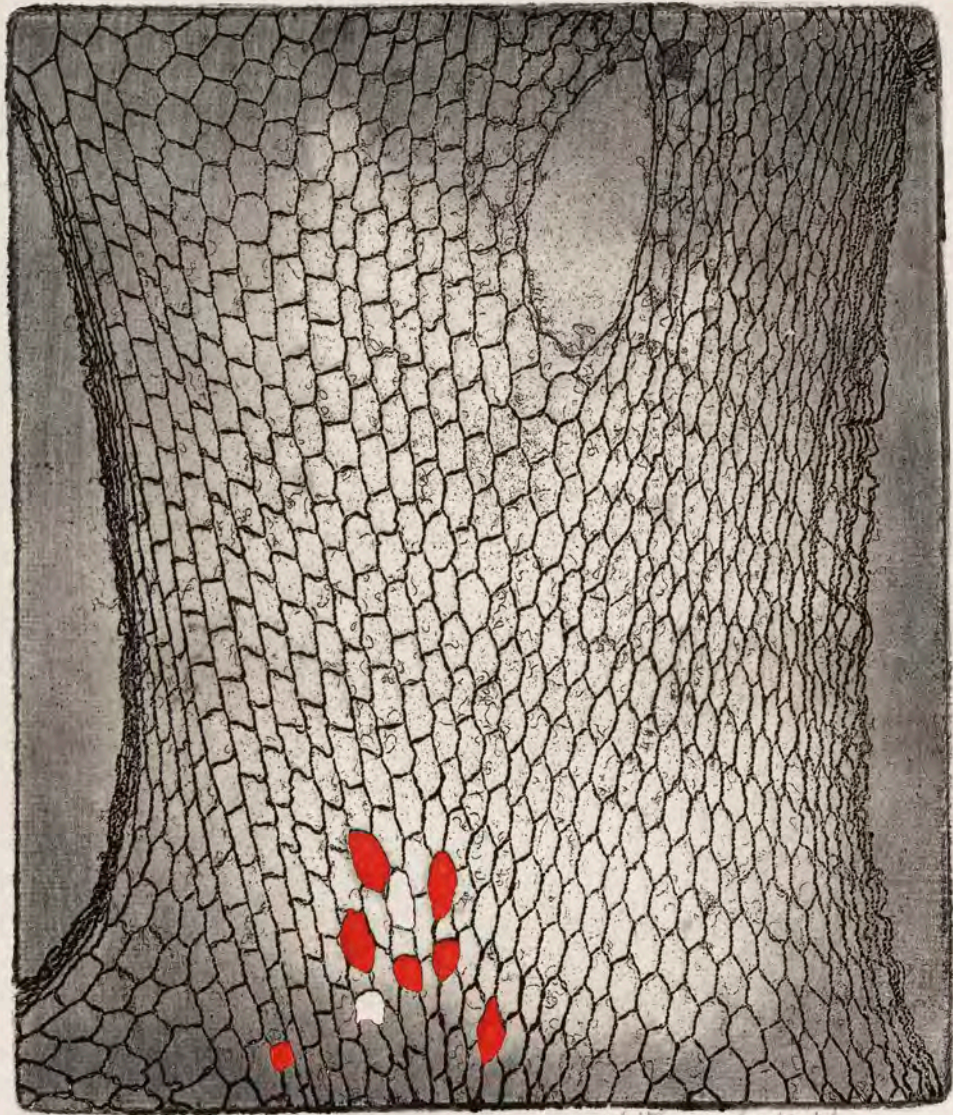
*Composition*, n.d.

Embossed etching and watercolor on paper

10¼ × 8¼ in. (26 × 21 cm)

Edition 7/20

G1975.204



VII/XX

Chitangaadu Krishna

## DEVAYANI KRISHNA (1910–2000)

Abby Grey spent much time with Devayani Krishna in India. In Mrs. Grey's journal, she writes of her admiration for her and her husband, Kanwal's, commitment to the arts. Devayani was one of the older artists Abby met; in her fifties at the time, she had witnessed firsthand the sweeping changes brought by India's independence from British rule. Raised in the city of Indore, Madhya Pradesh, she had also been exposed early on to the International Style, an artistic and philosophical movement that focused on both the formal and social aspects of art and design. Pre-independence Indore was rich with modernist experiments. The Maharaja of Indore, Yashwant Rao Holkar, an avid proponent of the style, commissioned the German architect Eckart Muthesius to design and furnish his famed Manikh Bagh Palace and collected works by Constantin Brancusi, Le Corbusier, and Charlotte Alix.

Like many of her generation, Krishna attended the renowned Sir J. J. School of Art in Bombay, graduating in 1936. Later she left urban India and moved to the Himalayas. Intrigued by the masks used in Tibetan spiritual practices, she began to incorporate them into her work. When Mrs. Grey asked Krishna about *Veiled Mask's* dark aesthetic, the artist replied: "No, it is not sad. This is a veiled mask. It is very hard to get to know people. This is just a human being behind two masks."<sup>4</sup> Through such veiled imagery and esoteric symbolism, both Devayani and her husband reacted to the tragedies unfolding around them. While in the Himalayas they witnessed Tibetan Buddhists' loss of autonomy to the People's Republic of China, which in 1951 would wrest control of Tibet and send Buddhists into exile. Later, during their friendship with Mrs. Grey, they became deeply invested in the politics of the Indo-Pakistani war of 1965, in which thousands lost their lives in the fight over Kashmir. Devayani's sensitive works of this period are steeped in instability and pathos. Returning to India, Devayani joined the faculty at the Modern School, a small art academy in New Delhi.

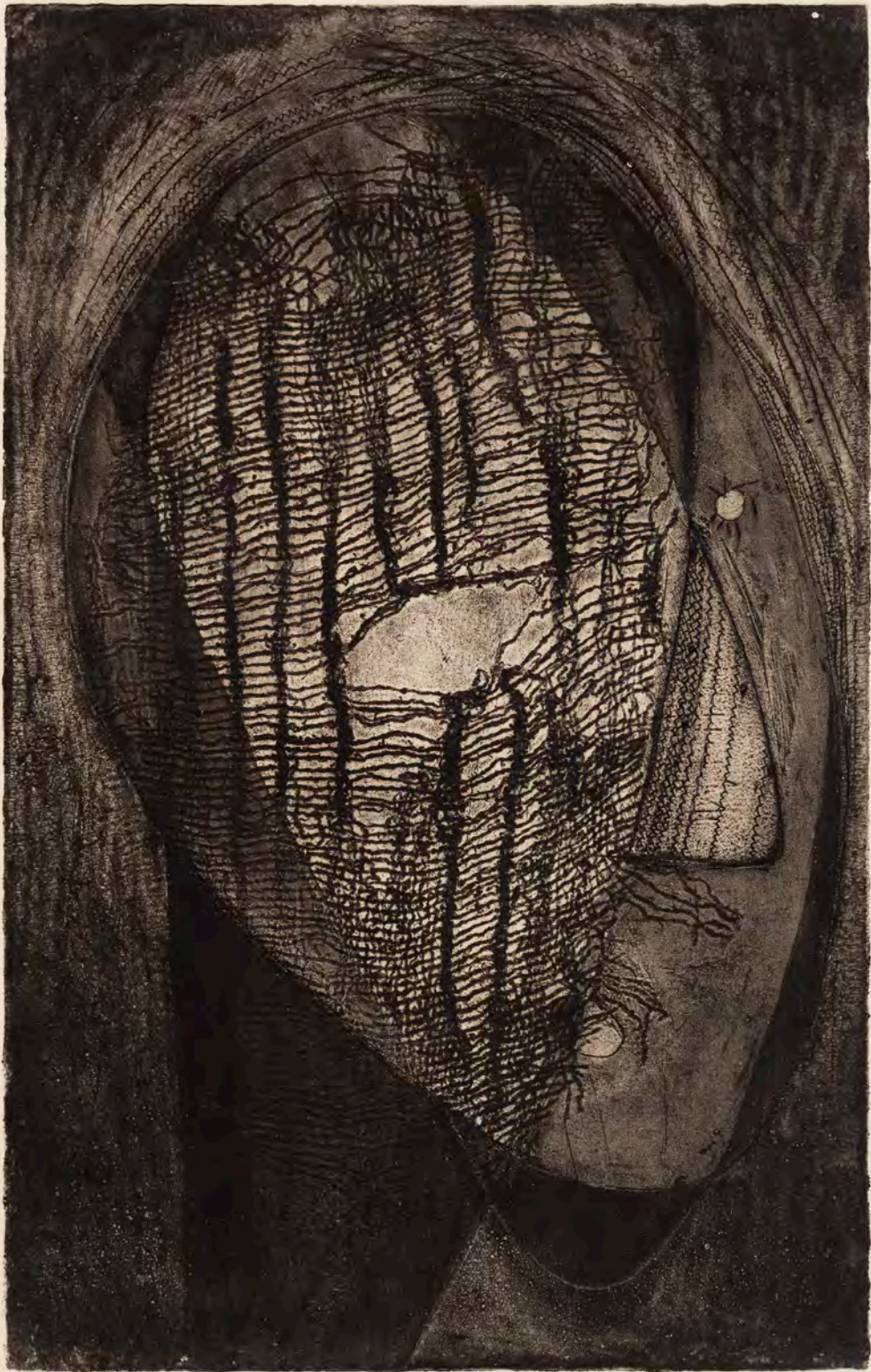
*Veiled Mask*, n.d.

Etching on paper

15¾ × 9⅞ in. (40 × 25.1 cm)

Artist's proof

G1975.207



ARTIST'S PROOF

*Diapane*

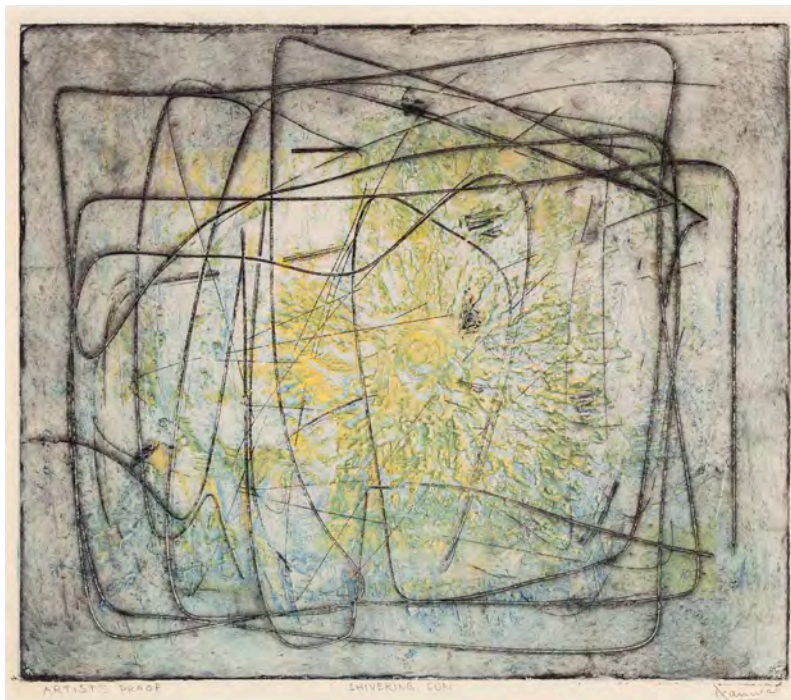
## KANWAL KRISHNA (1910–1993)

Kanwal Krishna was born in Kamilia, in Punjab, and married the renowned artist Devayani Krishna. As a young man he painted and drew pictures for research societies and British political delegations to Tibet and Bhutan, documenting the delegates' journeys. Best known for his painting of the ascension of the new Dalai Lama in 1939, Krishna journeyed time and again to the Himalayas, residing with his wife in the northern Indian and Tibetan regions of the Himalayas in the 1940s.

Devayani and Kanwal were deeply moved by the territorial conflicts surrounding them. In Tibet, the Chinese government was increasingly encroaching upon the rights and freedoms of Buddhist monks, and in Kashmir, Pakistan and India were contesting each other's claim to the state. During the bloody Indo-Pakistani war, Krishna accompanied the Indian army to Kashmir and witnessed firsthand its tragic consequences. Profoundly affected by these experiences, he produced sixty paintings on India's military occupation of Kashmir. These often include fractured landscapes and hill-sides, as in *Shivering Sun*, where a luminescent haze caught inside colliding and intersecting trapezoids creates a geometry that is unstable yet alive and pulsating. Krishna's critiques of Indian and Asian politics are oblique, alluding to the world's instability through abstract forms. In *Gay Scorpions*, for example, he evokes nature's vibrancy through dynamic lines and contrasting colors.

TOP: *Shivering Sun*, 1960  
Etching and aquatint on paper  
15¼ × 17¼ in. (38.7 × 43.8 cm)  
Artist's proof  
G1975.209

BOTTOM: *Gay Scorpions*, 1962  
Etching on paper  
19½ × 15½ in. (49.5 × 39.4 cm)  
Artist's proof, 1 of 5  
G1975.160



ARTIST: SERGE

EMERING SUN

*Serge*



Artist: Serge

Fog Scapes

*Serge*

**RAM KUMAR** (born 1924)

Born in Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, Ram Kumar achieved renown as both a writer and an artist, but today he is primarily known for his visual art. Unlike many of his predecessors, who looked to India's countryside for inspiration, Kumar was drawn to India's bustling urban streetscapes. In *Kashmir*, among Kumar's most celebrated works, he reduces the city to an abstract map in which buildings are huddled together in a vibrant unit. Expressionistic landscapes such as this one echo Cubist paintings by the artist Fernand Léger, with whom Kumar worked in Paris, as well as portraits by Amedeo Modigliani. The painting also marks a shift by Kumar from a figural to a more graphic style following a trip to the pilgrimage city of Varanasi in 1960, when he began to render the contours of the urban environment in thick impasto.

*Untitled* derives from another transitional period in the artist's career. By the late 1960s Kumar had turned to the poetic media of charcoal and ink to create purely abstract drawings and paintings. Recalling Krishen Khanna's painting *Vijay*, Kumar's *Untitled* draws upon the anti-figural idioms of Abstract Expressionism. Kumar was associated with the Progressive Artists Group (PAG) as well as the Delhi Silpi Chakra, which unlike the PAG had a more political slant and sought to bring modernism to a broader public audience. As reflected in Kumar's alliance with both groups, his art engages with social issues as well as art for art's sake, and his depictions of urban life range from portraits of India's emerging and disenfranchised middle class to abstract urban renderings.



LEFT: *Untitled*, 1970

Charcoal and ink on paper  
23 × 29 in. (58.4 × 73.7 cm)  
G1975.211

OPPOSITE: *Kashmir*, 1963

Oil on canvas  
32¼ × 19¾ in. (81.9 × 50.2 cm)  
G1975.161





**ANJOLIE ELA MENON** (born 1940)

Anjolie Ela Menon, born in West Bengal, is a post-independence modernist who began painting as a teenager, in the mid-1950s, and gained critics' attention at an early age. One of her first mentors was M. F. Husain, who organized the first exhibition of her work in Delhi, in 1959. Soon afterward Menon left India to live in New York, where she visited Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater at the invitation of Edgar Kaufmann Jr., the son of the couple who had commissioned the house and director of what was then known as the Industrial Design Department at the Museum of Modern Art. Through Kaufmann, Menon was exposed to Impressionism and American modernism. Later that year, she moved to Paris to attend the École des Beaux-Arts, where she was trained as a fresco painter.

Following graduation from the École, in 1961, Menon traveled around the world for several months. Starting in Greece, she went on to explore areas celebrated for their long-surviving monuments and architectural history: Beirut, Jerusalem, Baghdad, and Tehran. She kept painted records of her travels, and *Old Delhi* might be seen as a continuation of this period of painterly journaling. In this picture, she obscures her subjects under multiple strata of paint, requiring the viewer look through a rough patina in order to excavate the composition and discern the hazy images. Key forms such as domes or turrets conjure a monument, perhaps Delhi's famed mosque, Jama Masjid.

*Old Delhi*, 1965

Oil on canvas

24¾ × 24½ in. (62.9 × 62.2 cm)

G1975.162



**KRISHNA REDDY** (born 1925)

One of India's most prominent print artists, Krishna Reddy taught at New York University as a professor and was head of the Department of Graphics and Printmaking in the School of Education (now the Steinhardt School) from 1976 and was named professor emeritus in 2002. Born near Chittoor, Andhra Pradesh, Reddy early on harnessed his artistic skills in the service of protest. In 1942 he painted posters for the Quit India Movement, in which citizens rallied against England's continuing occupation. As a result of participating in nonviolent protests, he was imprisoned twice.

Reddy began his art career at the age of sixteen in the artists' enclave of Santiniketan. He studied under Nandalal Bose, a pupil of Abanindranath Tagore's and a vocal exponent of Indian styles of art. Reddy's notebooks from the period are filled with sketches of sites such as the caves in Ajanta and Ellora, temple statuary, and other time-honored Indian art. He worked directly from nature and onsite rather than in the studio, celebrating native forms of art practice. Inscriptions from his Santiniketan sketchbooks indicate that at least some of his drawings were traced from books by the Sri Lankan art historian Ananda Coomaraswamy. An ardent nationalist and exponent of South Asian arts well before the rise of South Asian art history as a global academic field, Coomaraswamy and his scholarship also influenced Reddy's approach to local arts.

After completing his studies in Santiniketan at the age of twenty-one, Reddy emigrated to England, where he enrolled at London's Slade School

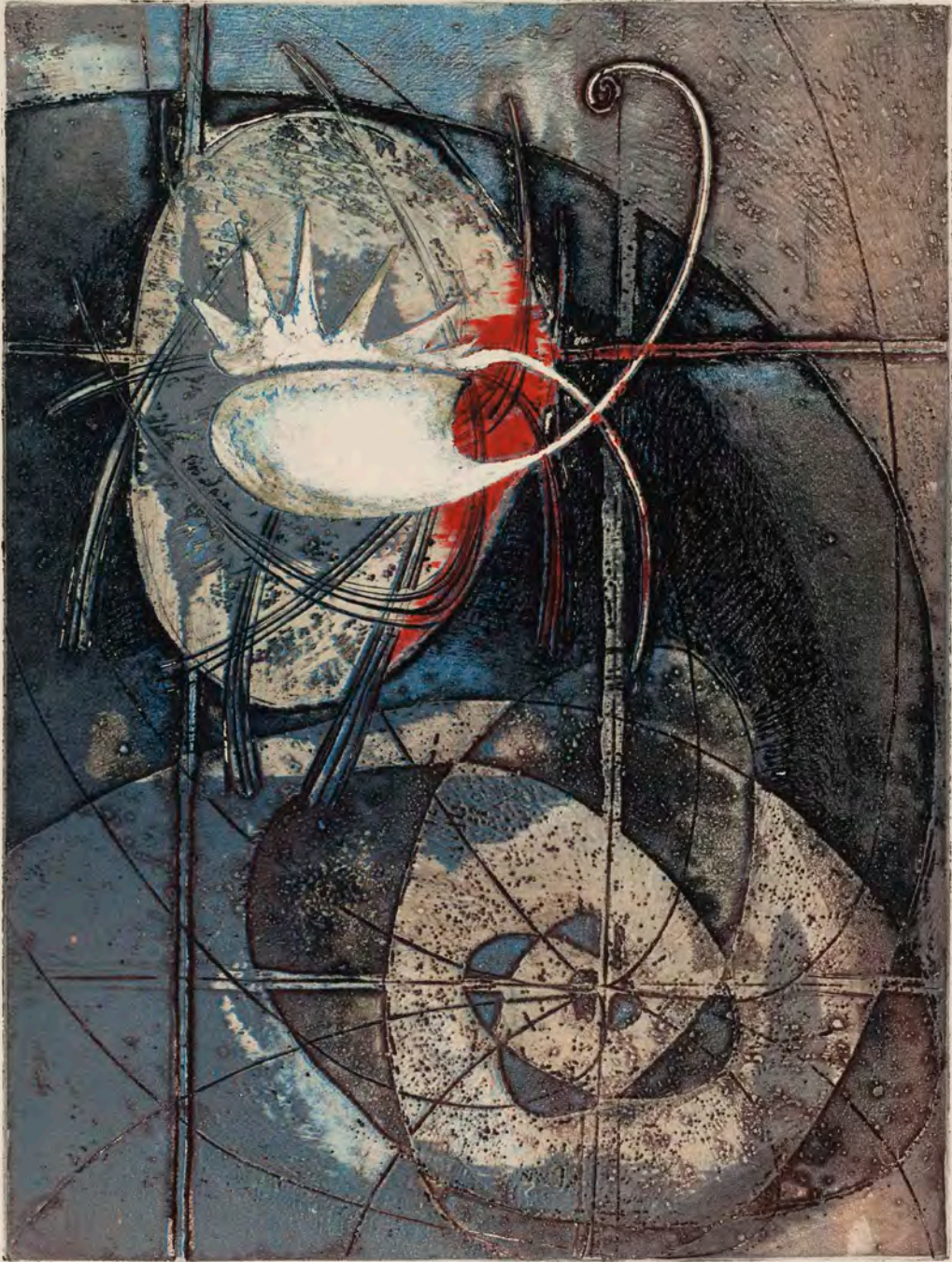
*Bulging Tuatara*, c. 1953

Etching on paper

26 × 19¾ in. (66 × 50.2 cm)

Artist's proof, 1 of 10

Gift of the artist, G2014.4.2



*Epreuve d'artiste 1/10*

*"Bulgu + Tuatara"*

*H. Krishna Reddy*

of Fine Art and studied with the sculptor Henry Moore. In the early 1950s Reddy moved to Paris, where he worked alongside Stanley William Hayter in his print studio, Atelier 17, and in 1957 he earned a Certificate in Fine Arts from the Accademia Di Belle Arti Di Brera, Milan, under the tutelage of the sculptor Marino Marini.

At Atelier 17, Reddy produced both sculptural and painterly works, traits reflected in the rich textures of *Bulging Tuatara*, *Seed Pushing*, and *Many and the One*. The artist often explores themes of nature and spirituality, reducing phenomena to abstract geometric forms that pulse with vitality. Line serves as his primary element, and through its repetition Reddy creates images radiating generative force.

TOP: *Seed Pushing*, 1961

Etching on paper

19¾ × 26 in. (50.2 × 66 cm)

Artist's proof, 2 of 5

Gift of the artist, G2014.4.1

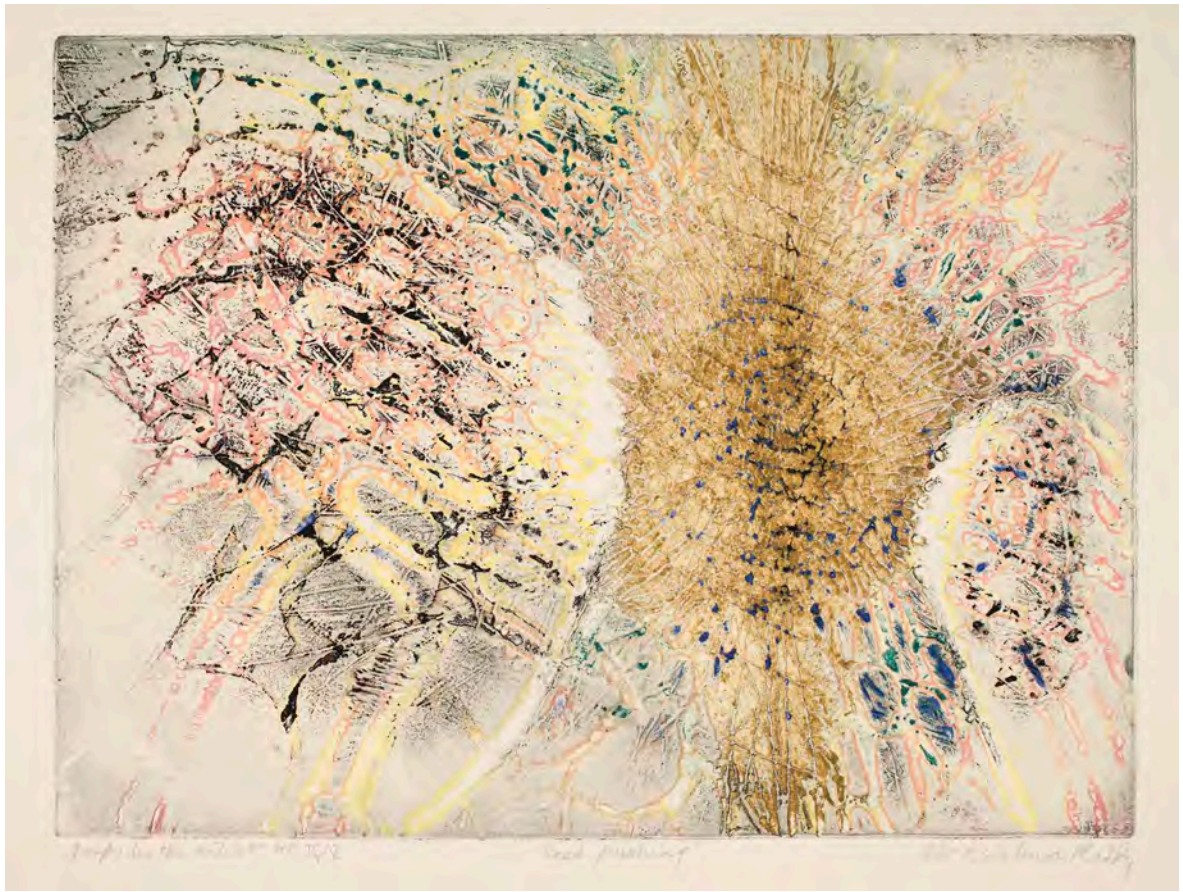
BOTTOM: *Many and the One*, 1971

Etching on paper

16 × 22 in. (40.6 × 55.9 cm)

Artist's proof

G1975.571



Impressions of the artist 1952

Seed Fishing

by Krishna Reddy



Impressions by the artist

"Many of the One"

by Krishna Reddy

**MOHAN SAMANT** (1924–2004)

Born in Bombay, Mohan Samant graduated from the city's prestigious Sir J. J. School of Art in 1952 and joined the Progressive Artists Group that same year. Early on Samant's works garnered praise, including the silver medal at the 1953–54 Annual Exhibition of the Bombay Art Society.

Samant's work draws inspiration from many sources, including Paul Klee and Pablo Picasso as well as Basohli painting, the celebrated Pahari school whose ideas and techniques he studied during his college years. *Door of the Heart* reflects this eclecticism, displaying the bold lines and colors of Basohli painting filtered through the lens of Abstract Expressionism, which dominated the New York art world in the 1950s and early 1960s. Equally experimental in his use of diverse media, Samant applied sand and acrylic to his canvases in the early 1960s, crafting richly textured pieces that are as sculptural as they are painterly.

*Door of the Heart*, 1964  
Acrylic and sand on canvasboard  
38 × 48 in. (96.5 × 121.9 cm)  
G1975.165



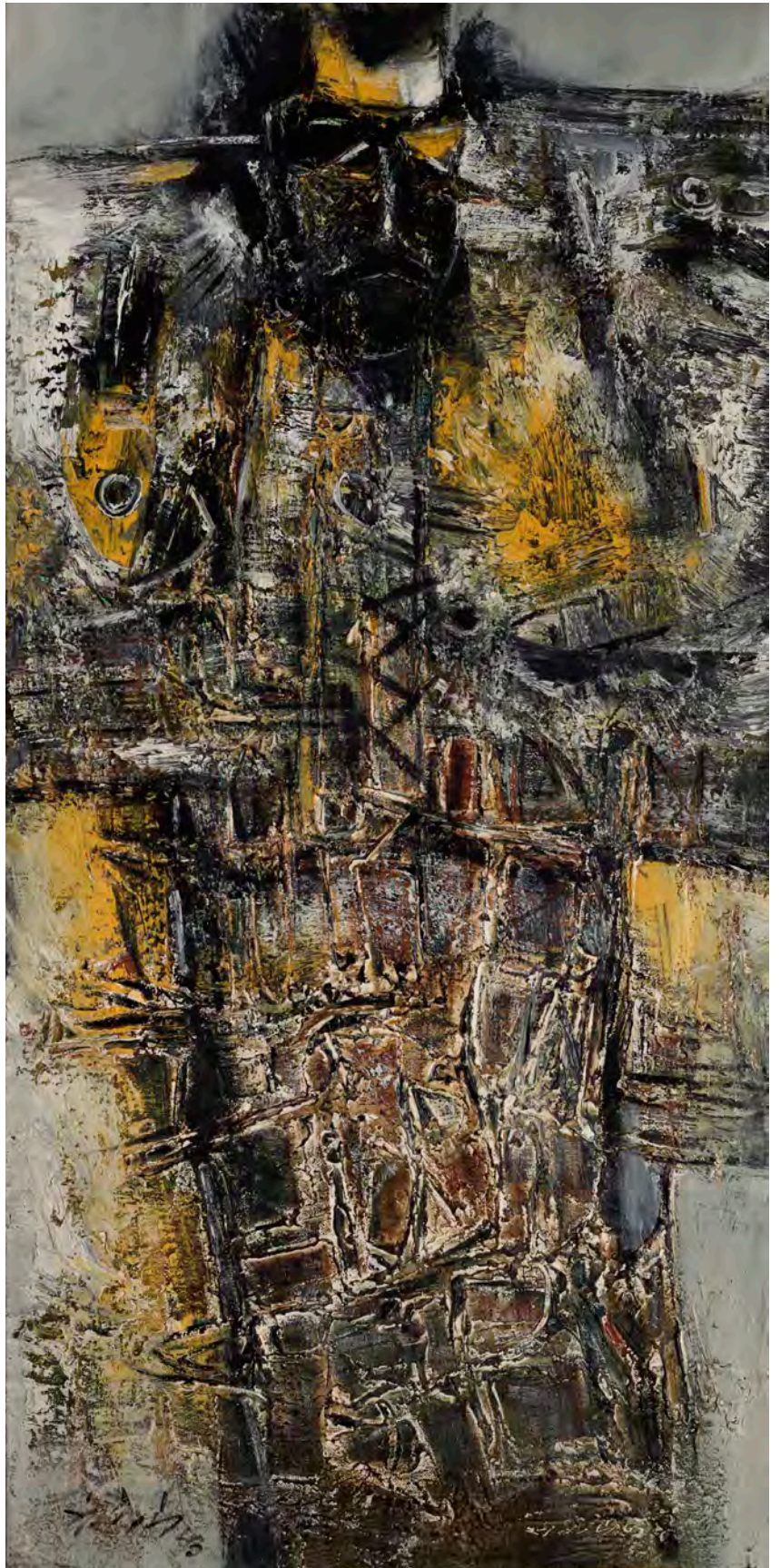


## **GULAM RASOOL SANTOSH** (1929–1997)

Gulam Rasool Santosh (né Gulam Rasool Dar) was born to a lower-middle-class family in the city of Srinagar, Kashmir. He began to make art at an early age, including depictions of the mountainous region where he grew up. Soon after his graduation from high school, in 1945, his father's untimely death forced Santosh to give up his dream of becoming an artist and turn to jobs such as sign painting and whitewashing walls. Yet he soon found his way back to the arts, and in 1952 he joined the Progressive Arts Association in Kashmir, which was founded by Syed Haider Raza, a visionary modernist. In 1954, under the tutelage of the figural expressionist N. S. Bendre of Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Santosh began to achieve recognition as an artistic innovator.

Santosh is best known for his abstract depictions of Indic Tantric iconography, which feature distilled spheres and ovoids within solid fields of contrasting colors. Less well known are works such as this one, which draw from other spiritual traditions. Here, jagged lines suggest the crucified figure of Christ, whose stigmata shine out from the forest of abstraction. When asked by Abby Grey why he looked to Christ for the imagery in this painting, Santosh replied, "Christ is a part of our Muslim religion. . . . Perhaps there is a part of me that feels as if it were being sacrificed. I put the nail hole in the hand, and now look at my own. Now I cannot paint! Some say the body is dead and only the head and hand are alive."<sup>5</sup>

In the 1960s, with the rise of the counterculture in the United States and the West's turn to Indian philosophies as alternative spiritual and intellectual paths, Indian artists looked to their own traditions in search of patently Indian yet increasingly universal artistic languages. A rich conversation emerged; Ravi Shankar's musical collaboration with the Beatles is a prominent example. Santosh and his fellow artists moved seamlessly back and forth between the connected idioms of India and the West.



*Myself Crucified*, 1963

Oil on canvas

47¼ × 23⅙ in. (120 × 58.6 cm)

G1975.166

## FRANCIS NEWTON SOUZA (1924–2002)

Born to a Roman Catholic family in Goa, F. N. Souza lived an artistic life marked by a spirit of rebellion and restlessness. He was expelled first from St. Xavier's College and then, in 1942, from the esteemed Sir J. J. School of Art, Bombay, for his vocal anti-British stance. Galvanized by India's independence in 1947, Souza founded the celebrated Bombay-based Progressive Artists Group. Through this revolutionary association he championed art that transcended regional and national boundaries, a poignant advocacy given that Souza's career in an independent India was short lived. In 1949 the police raided his apartment on charges of obscenity; disgruntled and disenchanted with India, he left for London. At the time he painted *Trimurti* Souza had been residing for four years in New York, the city that became his home for the next thirty years.

Devoted to mixing high and low in his art, Souza used figural images—often grotesque, hypersexualized women—to jar viewers by transforming them into voyeurs. The deconstructed and abstracted human form remained central to Souza's vision throughout his career. Never one to shy away from religious iconography, Souza also used his work to comment on the dynamic influence of religion in his life. *Trimurti*—the word refers to a Hindu cosmological concept in which the gods of creation (Brahma), preservation (Vishnu), and destruction (Shiva) are joined as a single cosmic force—is one of Souza's "head paintings," in which he used strong contrasts and solid outlines to depict faces. Here three heads fan out from the neck, an arrangement often seen in temple sculpture, with each head framed by a different color. The three heads appear to be in motion, an illusion achieved through the boisterous application of splotches of bright contrasting colors. White lines break through these color fields, creating pulsating rhythms.

*Trimurti*, 1971

Oil on canvasboard

30 × 24 in. (76.2 × 61 cm)

G1975.216



**MUMTAZ SULTAN ALI** (born 1947)

Born in Kondapalle, Andhra Pradesh, Mumtaz Sultan Ali studied from 1964 to 1969 at the College of Art in New Delhi, where she embraced the art of printmaking. In the late 1960s, while still in art school, she began exhibiting at New Delhi's Gallery Chemould—and throughout her career she has participated in numerous exhibitions, both in India and internationally. She made this etching, *Her Dream*, during her last year of art school; it was selected for the National Exhibition of Art at Lalit Kala Akademi (National Academy of Fine Art) in Delhi, from which Abby Grey evidently acquired it.

In this work, Mumtaz Sultan Ali follows in the footsteps of her father, J. Sultan Ali, a well-known artist and art teacher associated with a circle of artists in Madras who used Indian iconography in their works. Here she employs a range of motifs associated with Shiva, the Hindu god of destruction. The Shiva lingam, or conical emblem, seen at right, symbolizes cosmic potentiality, and the snakes garlanding the feminine figure recall Shiva's serpent necklace. The pattern of alternating red and white vertical bands echoes the color scheme on the exterior walls of many Hindu temples and also seen around the Tamil countryside. In such indigenist works, Mumtaz Sultan Ali evokes the myths of the Muria people of Chhattisgarh, Central India, through the large almond eyes, rotund breasts, and stylized faces, all characteristic of Muria sculpture.

*Her Dream*, 1969

Etching on paper

7 × 9 in. (17.8 × 22.9 cm)

Artist's proof

G1975.217



Artist's proof

"Her Dream"

Mumtaz Sultan Ali '69

**VIVAN SUNDARAM** (born 1943)

One of the most recognizable names in contemporary Indian art, Vivan Sundaram is associated with the Baroda Group, which also includes the renowned artists K. G. Subramanyan, Gulammohammed Sheikh, and the powerhouse art critic Geeta Kapur. Sundaram studied at the Maharaja Sayajirao University, Baroda (Vadodara), and continued his education in London, earning a post-diploma from the Slade School of Fine Art in 1968. A keen critic and artist, Sundaram fostered exchange between the two disciplines and in 1976 founded the Kasauli Art Centre, where artists and scholars conducted workshops and shared ideas. He also helped establish the Delhi-based *Journal of Arts and Ideas* in 1982.

In his work, Sundaram combines humorous formal experiments with social critique to create playful yet introspective commentaries on the relationships between art, culture, and history making. *Keep Slim* (or, as Abby Grey titled it, *Keep Slim with Limical*) exemplifies Sundaram's capacity for wry allusion: the photcollage juxtaposes a cutout magazine photograph of a statue of a fecund female figure, perhaps a *yakshi* of the kind seen in Hindu temples, with a slender woman clad in a sari. At the right are the words "Stay Slim with Limical," a reference to the drink Limical (derived from "limited calorie"), which was clinically tested by the Glaxo company in India as a cure for childhood obesity and marketed to upper-middle-class families in the 1960s. Following its commercial failure, the company rebranded the same chemical composition as a health supplement for children, called Complan (from "complete plan"), basically inverting the compound's purported purpose. Colliding the historical associations of Indic statuary with the consumerist underpinnings of Glaxo's questionable venture, Sundaram cannily provides a

*Keep Slim*, 1965

Collage of ink and photograph

11 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 9 in. (28.3 × 22.9 cm)

G1975.219





STAY SLIM WITH LIMAL

VWAGYU - 65

television commercial–style “before-after” narrative of the “slimming” effects of unchecked consumerism on the arts and culture in India.

Sundaram’s drawing *Camel* eludes quick interpretation. The elegant black contours of the camel’s foreshortened torso and long slender neck lead the eye toward the decorative window panels. The inky black night sky, seen through the slightly ajar panels, contrasts sharply with the drawing’s white areas. In her diaries, Abby Grey describes this work and notes that it is part of a narrative series inspired by the city of Jaisalmer.<sup>6</sup>

*Camel*, 1965

Ink wash on paper

14<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 10<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in. (36.5 × 26.7 cm)

G1975.218



**JEHANGIR P. VAZIFDAR** (1920–2011)

Jehangir Vazifdar participated in the post-independence art scene and met Abby Grey during her visit to Bombay in 1965. Although remembered primarily as an architect and building contractor, Vazifdar was also an innovator in the arts. In particular, he devised languages of color, correlating hues with various abstract concepts, as recorded in his unpublished “Color Alphabet and Dictionary.”<sup>7</sup>

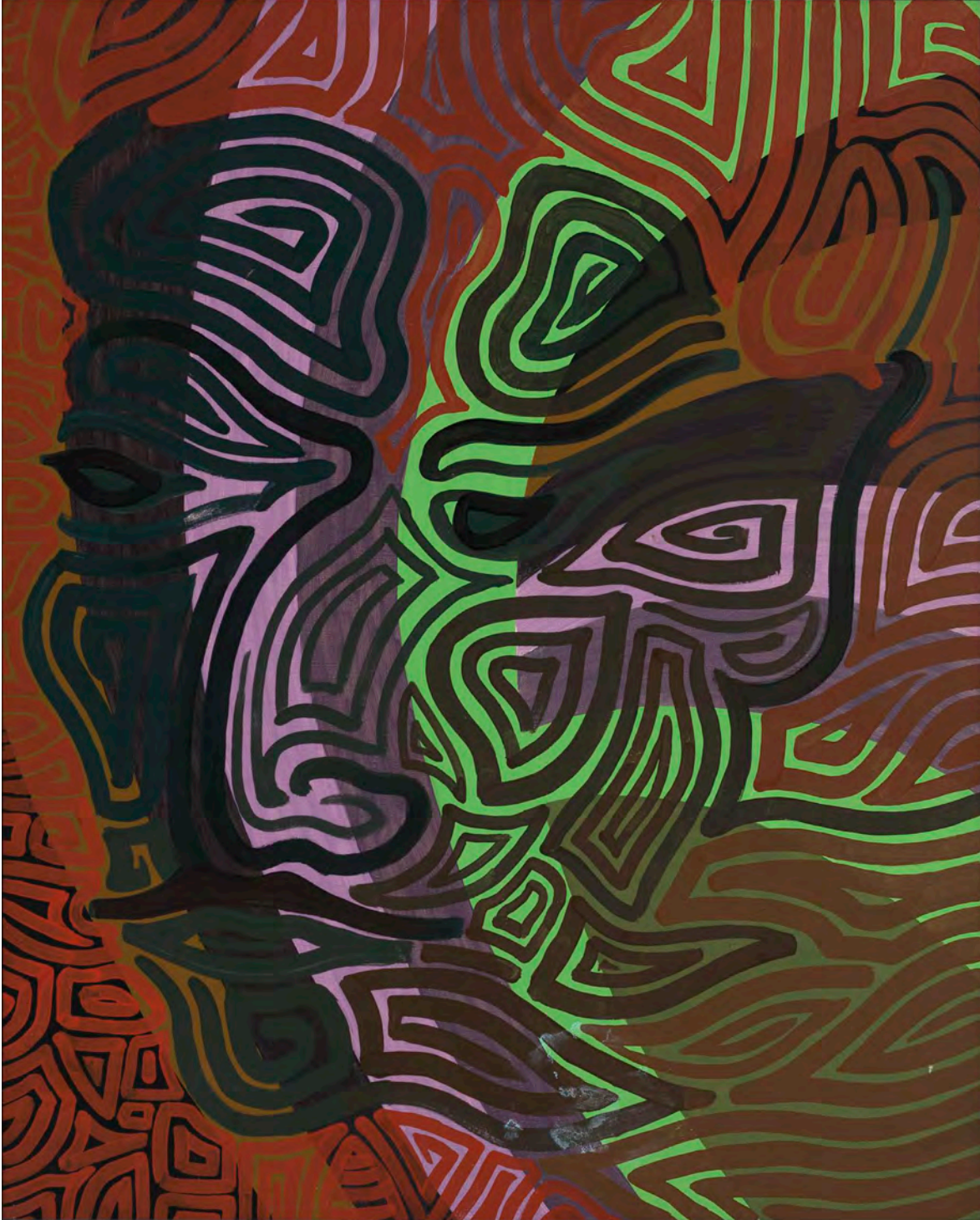
Vazifdar dedicated his artistic career to producing works that could not be copied or otherwise forged.<sup>8</sup> In this self-portrait, he depicted his face through alternating curvilinear bands of color. Lines of green, pink, and black animate the red field, highlighting aspects of the abstracted visage. Although it recalls Western psychedelic posters of the 1960s, Vazifdar’s self-portrait may also demonstrate his interest in creating patently unreproducible art.

*Self-Portrait*, 1965

Oil on canvas

45 × 35¾ in. (114.3 × 90.8 cm)

G1975.167



## Notes

1. Roobina Karode, *Manifestations IV: LXXV Artists* (New Delhi: Delhi Art Gallery, 2010), p. 25.
2. *Group 1890 Manifesto* (New Delhi, 1963), n.p.
3. Abby Weed Grey Papers, 1922–1978, Box 9, Folder 3, Travel Diary, 1965, p. 83.
4. Abby Weed Grey, *The Picture Is the Window: The Window Is the Picture* (New York: New York University Press, 1983), p. 107.
5. Grey, *The Picture Is the Window*, p. 108.
6. Abby Weed Grey Papers, Box 9, Folder 3, Travel Diary, 1965, p. 101.
7. Abby Weed Grey Papers, Box 4, Folder 50, Artist Files.
8. “Fake-proof!” *Times of India*, November 13, 2004.

## Acknowledgments

Delving into the prescient collection amassed by Abby Weed Grey is at once exhilarating, challenging, and intriguing. We at the Grey Art Gallery feel privileged and honored to act as guardians of these works of art, and we are fortunate to do so within the context of a global research university. I would first like to thank Susan Hapgood, who during the three years she lived in Mumbai, kept a close watch for potential collaborative projects that would allow us to shine more light on the modern Indian art Mrs. Grey collected. She and Ranjit Hoskote together selected the works in the exhibition, and both contributed illuminating and thought-provoking essays to this publication. Susan was assisted by Rashmi Viswanathan, who researched the works and contributed the catalogue entries while a graduate curatorial assistant at the Grey.

That the Abby Weed Grey Collection of Modern Asian and Middle Eastern Art came to New York University is in part thanks to the efforts of professors Peter Chelkowski and H. W. Janson. Watching Chelkowski, a Persian specialist, on *Sunrise Semester*, a television series broadcast on CBS in 1970, spurred Mrs. Grey to contact the university while seeking a home for her collection. Janson traveled to St. Paul, Minnesota, to see the works in person, and he heartily recommended that NYU accept Mrs. Grey's collection as well as her generous endowment, which allowed the university to establish the Grey Art Gallery and Study Center, as it was then known. Early on Mrs. Grey envisioned that the facilities for the planned gallery would include a study-storage area equipped with sliding racks as well as a conservation laboratory. In addition to providing an endowment for the gallery, she also helped establish the Grey Fine Arts Library.

At the Grey Art Gallery's founding, in 1974, the existing NYU Art Collection, which had been initiated in 1958 by NYU professor Howard Conant, was brought under the same roof. Robert R. Littman, named director of the gallery in 1976, worked closely with Mrs. Grey to sort through her

diaries and compile her biography, *The Picture Is the Window/The Window Is the Picture: An Autobiographical Journey*, which was published in 1983, soon after her death. We express our heartfelt appreciation to Nancy Cricco and the staff of the NYU Archives, which houses Mrs. Grey's papers along with those of the Grey Art Gallery, and to Dipti Khera, assistant professor in the Department of Art History and the Institute of Fine Arts, for her guidance and advice.

This publication would not have seen the light of day had not it been for Laura Lindgren's heroic efforts under the tightest of deadlines. She has once again provided an elegant design, which is available both as a free download PDF and print on demand. We also thank Dale Tucker along with Lucy Oakley, who lent keen editorial eyes to realizing this publication. Margaret Holben Ellis, Eugene Thaw Professor of Paper Conservation, treated a number of the works on paper in the exhibition with the help of students at the Institute of Fine Arts, including Emily Hista Cohen, Shannon Mulshine, Abigail Teller, and Laura Panadero, as well as art history students Sarah Getto and Sara Garzon Vargas. At ArtCareNYC Inc., Rustin Levenson, Harriet Irgang Alden, Ralph Augsburger, Jean Dommermuth, and Yeonjoo Kim restored key paintings, and we are most grateful to ArtCareNYC for their very generous in-kind support. Frank Poueymirou, the Grey's former deputy director, helped fundraise for the exhibition and designed the graphics.

Students are essential to all projects undertaken by the Grey Art Gallery. Julia Pelta Feldman, this year's graduate curatorial intern, provided critical support for my introduction and assisted on all aspects of the show's preparation, as did graduate intern Yixue Shao. The exhibition was expertly organized and pulled together amid unrelenting deadlines by the Grey's extremely dedicated and talented staff: Laurie Duke, Noah Landfield, Amber Lynn, Ally Mintz, Lucy Oakley, Richard Wager, and Michèle Wong. A special shout out to Michèle for her guidance and oversight of NYU Art Collections; there could be no better or more committed steward.

Finally, we are deeply grateful to the show's funders. We thank the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation; Vazifdar Builders PVT. LTD., who wanted to acknowledge their founder, Jehangir P. Vazifdar, for whom art was a great passion; the Asian Cultural Council for funding Ranjit Hoskote's travel; and Deanna Horton. As always, we thank the Grey's loyal supporters: Director's Circle, Inter/National Council, and Friends, along with the Abby Weed Grey Trust.

—Lynn Gumpert, Director



## Contributors

**LYNN GUMPERT** has served as director of the Grey Art Gallery at New York University since 1997, and from 1999 to 2000 was interim director of NYU's Museum Studies Program. Gumpert is responsible for the development and direction of the Grey Art Gallery's exhibitions and related programs as well as the permanent collection. Among the more than 55 exhibitions she has overseen at the Grey are *Modern Iranian Art: Selections from the Abby Weed Grey Collection at NYU* (2013); *Soto: Paris and Beyond, 1950–1970* (2012); *Icons of the Desert: Early Aboriginal Paintings from Papunya* (2009); *The Poetics of Cloth: African Textiles / Recent Art* (2008); *The Downtown Show: The New York Art Scene, 1974–1984* (2006); *Electrifying Art: Atsuko Tanaka, 1954–1968* (2004), and *Between Word and Image: Modern Iranian Visual Culture* (2002). In 1997, 1999, 2006, 2009, and 2014 the Grey Art Gallery received prestigious AICA (The United States Section of the International Association of Art Critics) awards.

**SUSAN HAPGOOD** is a New York–based art historian and curator who lived in Mumbai from 2010 to 2013. Starting in February 2015, she will be executive director of the International Studio & Curatorial Program in Brooklyn. Hapgood was a visiting professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi (2013), and is founding director of the Mumbai Art Room (from 2011). She holds an MA in Art History from the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, worked at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, and was director of exhibitions at Independent Curators International. She has curated over 50 exhibitions, written some 70 journal articles, and authored or contributed to the following books: *FluxAttitudes* (Ghent: Imschoot Publishers, 1991), *Neo-Dada: Redefining Art, 1958–62* (New York: Universe Books, 1994), *Slightly Unbalanced* (New York: Independent Curators International, 2008), *In Deed: Certificates of Authenticity in Art* (Amsterdam: Roma Publications, 2011), *Union of the Imaginary—VOTI* (Istanbul: Salt Beyoglu, 2013, e-publication), *Mapping*

*Gender: Bodies & Sexualities in Contemporary Art Across the Global South* (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru University, 2014), and the forthcoming publication *Early Bombay Photography* (Ahmedabad: Mapin).

**RANJIT HOSKOTE** is a cultural theorist, curator, and poet. He has written more than 25 books, including *Vanishing Acts: New & Selected Poems 1985–2005* (Penguin, 2006) and *Central Time* (Penguin/Viking, 2014), as well as the monographs *Zinny & Maidagan: Compartment/Das Abteil* (Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt/Walther König, 2010) and *Atul Dodiya* (Prestel, 2014). His translation of poetry by the fourteenth-century Kashmiri mystic was published as *I, Lalla: The Poems of Lal Ded* (Penguin Classics, 2011). He is co-author of *Kampfabsage* (Blessing, 2007; in English as *Confluences: Forgotten Histories from East and West*, Yoda, 2012) and *The Dialogues Series* (Popular, 2011) of conversations with artists, and co-editor of *Future Publics: A Critical Reader in Contemporary Art* (BAK, forthcoming). Since 1993, Hoskote has curated 30 exhibitions of contemporary art, including two monographic surveys of Atul Dodiya: *Bombay: Labyrinth/Laboratory* (Japan Foundation, Tokyo, 2001) and *Experiments with Truth: Atul Dodiya, Works 1981–2013* (National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, 2013); a retrospective of works by Jehangir Sabavala (National Gallery of Modern Art, Bombay and New Delhi, 2005–6); and *No Parsi is an Island* (with Nancy Adajania; National Gallery of Modern Art, Bombay, 2013–14). Hoskote co-curated the 7th Gwangju Biennale with Okwui Enwezor and Hyunjin Kim (2008) and was curator of India's first-ever national pavilion at the Venice Biennale (2011).

**RASHMI VISWANATHAN** is a PhD Candidate in the History of Art at New York University's Institute of Fine Arts and was graduate curatorial assistant at the Grey Art Gallery in 2013–14. Her current research focuses on colonial-era photography in India, examining changing methods of representing crime and criminality under the British Raj. She has also written on queer feminisms in South Asian art. Viswanathan is currently a specialist in modern and contemporary South Asian art at Christie's.



