



International Conference South Asian Art - Present Scenario: Future Visions

Organised by
HABIART FOUNDATION

Supported by
INDIAN COUNCIL FOR CULTURAL RELATIONS

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India International Centre
40 Maxmuller Marg
New Delhi-110003



INDIAN COUNCIL FOR CULTURAL RELATIONS

The Indian Council for Cultural Relations was set up in 1950 with the primary objective of establishing, reviving and strengthening cultural relations and mutual understanding between India and other countries. Its aims, as enunciated in the Memorandum of Association, are:

- To participate in the formulation and implementation of policies and programmes relating to India's cultural relations with other countries;
- To foster and strengthen cultural relations and mutual understanding between India and other countries;
- To establish and develop relations with national and international organizations in the field of culture.

The major activities of the Council include:

Administration of scholarship schemes for overseas students;

- Exchange of Exhibitions;
- Organization of and participation in International Seminars and Symposia;
- Participation in major cultural festivals abroad;
- Organization of "Festivals of India" abroad;
- Exchange of groups of performing artists;
- The Distinguished Visitors Programme, under which eminent personalities from abroad are invited to India and experts from home are sent abroad to deliver lectures on issues of mutual interest;
- Establish and maintain chairs for Indian studies abroad;
- Presentation of books, Audio-Visual material, Art objects and Musical instruments at Institutions abroad;
- Provide the Secretariat for the Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding : Organization of the Annual Maulana Azad Memorial Lecture and the Maulana Azad Essay Competition

Message

The countries of South Asia have a long and rich artistic tradition going back many centuries, whether it is painting or dance, architecture or music, we have a shared heritage of which we can all be proud. It was architects and artisans from India who travelled all the way to Cambodia to build Angkor Vat, the world's largest place of worship along with indigenous craftsmen. Due to colonial domination adequate attention has not been paid to this tradition of South Asian Art. I am glad that the Habiart Foundation is organizing a seminar on "South Asian Art - Present Scenario: Future Vision" on 26th February 2009. I send the organizers as well as the participants my warm greetings for the success of the Seminar, and hope that this will lead to increasing appreciation of our shared cultural heritage.

Dr Karan Singh
President ICCR

Dr Karan Singh, is a philosopher, environmentalist, statesman, orator, author and politician. He is associated with many cultural and academic institutions and has received several honorary degrees and other awards, including doctorates from the Banaras Hindu University, Aligarh Muslim University and Soka University, Tokyo; took the M.A. degree of Delhi University in Political Science with a first class first in 1957, creating a University record which is still unbroken. He is the chairman of Temple of Understanding, an international inter-faith organization, president of the International Center for Science, Culture and Consciousness, chairman of the Auroville Foundation and member of the UNESCO Project on Universal Ethics. He converted his Amar Mahal Palace located in Jammu into a Museum and Library which contains a priceless collection of Pahari miniatures and modern Indian art as well as his personal library of over twenty thousand volumes; He has extensively lectured on Indian culture and philosophy and has set up 'India Forum', a think-tank on contemporary issues. Dr. Singh has also authored several widely acclaimed books, including Essays on Hinduism, In Defense of Religion and One Man's World.

International Delegates

Bryan Mulvihill has been visiting India for over 35 yrs, to study the iconography and ritual practices of trans-Himalayan Buddhist traditions, directly from living Himalayan masters. He has endeavored to incorporate this knowledge base into a contemporary art practice. He will speak of the rich trans-Himalayan Buddhist culture, past and present, and how the Himalayan treasure could be used by India to present a post colonial democratic spiritual leadership in an increasingly divided materialistic global community.

Khempo Phuntsho Tashi is the director of National Museum of Bhutan. He did his masters in Buddhist Philosophy from the Deemed University, Sarnath. Between 1978-1980 he enrolled in the Monastic Schools at Sakya College in Musoorie. He has authored several books such as The Thirteen Arts and Crafts of Bhutan, The Eyes of the Poetry, published by the National Library, to name a few.

Mamduh Waheed is the Art Coordinator, of the National Art Gallery, Maldives. He did his BA (Hons) Installation Art and Events, from the University of Huddersfield, UK. He has several curatorial projects to his credit such as Image and Identity – 100 years of Stamps in the Maldives (National Art Gallery, Maldives), 'Maldives Contemporary 2005' - The inaugural exhibition of the National Art Gallery (NAG), Maldives.

Rahraw Omarzad (b 1964 Kabul) is a Tajik writer, artist, lecturer and an expert on Persian modern art from Afghanistan. He is the founding director of the Centre for Contemporary Art Afghanistan (CCAA), a lecturer at Kabul University and editor in chief of Gahnama-e-Hunar Art Magazine. Financed by Rahraw Omarzad, the first edition of the magazine, focused uniquely on painting, sculpture, and calligraphy. Then Omarzad - who returned to Kabul at the end of 2002 - responded to the frequent requests from his readers by expanding the spectrum of the magazine to film, theatre, music and other fields. Three further issues have followed, now supported by various international institutions and organizations. He has organized exhibitions of video performance, video installation and photography in various countries.

Sangeeta Thapa and internationally recognized artist, Shashikala Tiwari, established Siddhartha Art Gallery on September the 27th, 1987 as a contemporary art space and meeting point for artists from Nepal and abroad. In 1997, the Gallery relocated to the magnificent Baber Mahal Revisited complex. The Siddhartha Art Gallery has been active in the promotion of contemporary Nepalese art and has strived to introduce international perspectives in art, to the Kathmandu community. Over the years artists from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Palestine, Japan, China along with the Autonomous Region of Tibet, Korea, Australia, France, Belgium, Austria, Holland, Curacao, Germany, the United Kingdom, Finland and the United States have held their exhibitions at the Gallery.

Dr. Syed Manzoorul Islam is Professor of English at the University of Dhaka, and an award winning fiction writer. He is also an art critic and has curated Bangladesh art exhibitions in UK, India and Iran. He has been a Fulbright Scholar and spent a semester teaching at the University of Southern Mississippi at Hattiesburg, USA in 1989.

Prof. Jagath Weerasinghe teaches at the Postgraduate Institute of Archaeology (PGIAR). He did his MFA (Painting) from American University, Washington DC, US. He is Chairperson of Theertha International Artists Collective and Vibhavi Academy of Fine Arts. He participated in several national and international exhibitions such as the - Singapore Biennale [2006], Ten Artists from Sri Lanka, Milles Garden, Stockholm, Sweden [2005], - Asia-Pacific Triennial, Queensland Gallery, Australia, A preface to Anxiety, VAFA Gallery, Ethulkotte [2003], 4th Asian Art Show, Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Fukuoka, Japan [1994]. In 2000 he participated in KHOJ International Artist Workshop and Symposium, Modinagar, New Delhi, India. He received the UNESCO-Hirayama Silk Road Fellowship [1994] and was the Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Archaeology, University of London.

Presiding Chairs

Dr. B.N. GOSWAMY is a distinguished art historian, and was till recently Professor of Art History at the Panjab University, Chandigarh. A leading authority on Indian art, his work especially in the area of Pahari painting, is widely regarded as having influenced much thinking. He has written extensively. Among his publications are: *Pahari Painting: The Family as the Basis of Style* (Marg, Bombay, 1968); *Painters at the Sikh Court* (Wiesbaden, 1975); *Essence of Indian Art* (San Francisco, 1986); *Wonders of a Golden Age* (Zurich, 1987); *Pahari Masters: Court Painters of Northern India* (Zurich, 1992); *Indian Costumes in the Collection of the Calico Museum of Textiles* (Ahmedabad, 1993); *Nainsukh of Guler: A Great Indian Painter from a Small Hill State* (Zurich, 1997); and *Painted Visions: The Goenka Collection of Indian Painting* (New Delhi, 1999).

Prof. LOKESH CHANDRA (b 1927) is a renowned scholar of Tibetan, Mongolian and Sino-Japanese Buddhism. He has to his credit over 400 works and text editions. Among them are classics like his *Tibetan-Sanskrit Dictionary*, *Materials for History of Tibetan Literature*, *Buddhist Iconography of Tibet*, and the *Dictionary of Buddhist Iconography* in about 20 Volumes. He has been a Vice-President of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, and Chairman of the Indian Council of Historical Research, and is presently Director, International Academy of Indian Culture.

Dr. Neeru Misra, art historian and heritologist, did her masters and doctorate from Allahabad University. She has been pursuing interdisciplinary studies in art and culture. She has been the National Coordinator for United Nations Development Program (UNDP) for over 10 years, where she also coordinated on heritage and culture issues with the UNESCO. She has been associated with the National Museum Institute for many years, teaching postgraduate students and guiding research, and has been the Head of the Department of Museology. She has been associated with the programs of the Smithsonian Museums in Washington D.C. and with Chazen Museum and Milwaukee Museum, University of Wisconsin at Madison and London School of Economics. Currently, she is Senior Program Director at the Indian Council of Cultural Relations, Ministry of External Affairs.

Dr. Pavan K. Varma Writer-diplomat is a graduate in History from St. Stephen's College, New Delhi. He joined the Indian Foreign Service in 1976. He has been Press Secretary to the President of India, the Spokesman of the Ministry of External Affairs, Joint Secretary for Africa, High Commissioner for India in Cyprus and Director of the Nehru Centre in London. He has written over a dozen books including the highly successful *Krishna: The Playful Divine* on India's most popular deity, the critically applauded biography of the Urdu poet Mirza Ghalib, *Ghalib: The Man*, *The Times*, and the *Havelis of Old Delhi*. His first book on a contemporary subject was the path breaking *The Great Indian Middle Class* (this is currently being translated into French), followed by the astoundingly successful *Being Indian: The Truth About Why the 21st Century Will Be India's* (Viking/Penguin 2004), described by *The Economist* as "one of the most subtle recent attempts to analyse the continent-sized mosaic of India and simplify it for the general reader." It was soon published by William Heinemann, in the United Kingdom, as *Being Indian: Inside the Real India* in March 2005. Another recent work is a witty adaptation of Vatsyayana's *Kama Sutra*.

This volume, *Kama Sutra: The Art of Making Love to a Woman*, was published early in 2007 by Roli Books and has been translated into French and German. His latest work is a translated collection of the poems of Gulzar, one of India's best-known poets. This was released in April 2008. He was conferred an honorary doctoral degree for his contribution to the fields of diplomacy, literature, culture and aesthetics by the University of Indianapolis in 2005. Pavan K. Varma is currently the Director General of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, New Delhi.

Professor Rajeev Lochan, presently a Director of the National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA) New Delhi, he is an artist and art education specialist. After teaching at various institutions for more than 20 years, Professor Lochan assumed office as director in March 2001. Ever since, the NGMA has increasingly drawn attention not only in the art society in India but also in various countries around the world.

M. Ramachandran had been part of art and literary movements in Kerala in the early eighties, and published a number of poems in Malayalam. His association with Kerala Kala Peetom, an institute that teaches and promotes art in Kerala, lured him to the world of art. He held a solo exhibition of his paintings at the Gallery of Society of Contemporary Artists, Kolkata in the year 2002. His works are in many private collections. He holds an MFA in Art Criticism from the Faculty of Fine Arts of the M. S. University of Baroda and a postgraduate degree in the English Language and Literature from the University of Kerala. Later, he joined the Centre for Linguistics and English of Jawaharlal Nehru University for his Ph.D. (Semiotics) and he has been working on the subject 'The Aesthetic Dimensions of Cultural Polity in Contemporary Indian Painting'. He is also associated with Swaralaya, an organisation devoted to Music, and organised many of its programmes. He has been contributing articles on art and allied subjects to various journals and newspapers published in Malayalam and English. As a Visiting Lecturer, he has lectured in many art institutions including College of Art, New Delhi, National Institute of Fashion Technology, New Delhi. He was Lecturer in Art History and Aesthetics at College of Fine Arts, Thiruvananthapuram, and Art Critic for *The Statesman*, New Delhi. He curated a number of exhibitions for the National Academy of Art and organise its programmes in his capacity as its Deputy Secretary.

Dr. Shovana Narayan is D.G. Commonwealth Games & Culture. She is best known as one of the best Kathak danseuses in the world. She performs in India and around the world, and has been awarded the Padma Shri. Her guru is Birju Maharaj. Ms. Narayan studied at Miranda House in Delhi, India (graduating with a Masters degree in Physics) and is also a career officer of the Indian Audits & Accounts Service. She has edited several books.

Indian Delegates

Alka Raghuvanshi is a trained art curator, having trained at the Goldsmiths College, London and the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford. She has curated and designed major exhibitions many of which travelled to other parts of the country and the world as well.

Anoop Kamath started his career as a graphic designer and journalist in 1993. He has worked with Business Standard, Business World, Outlook magazine, Hindustan Times newspaper. As an editorial designer he has designed over 20 magazines and 7 newspapers. He is also a painter and photographer. He started exhibiting his paintings in 1997. He has had 2 solo exhibitions and has been exhibiting with galleries in New Delhi, Bangalore, Honkong and Dubai. He started www.mattersofart.net, India's first online magazine on Indian contemporary art in 2005. He is the publisher and Editor-in-Chief of the magazine. The magazine is updated monthly and covers a wide spectrum of articles including essays, interviews, reviews and listings. He is currently working as an Art Director with Indian Express Group of Newspapers.

GEETI SEN is a cultural historian, writer, and visiting lecturer at several institutes in India and abroad. She took her master's and doctoral degrees at the Universities of Chicago and Calcutta, began her career in India as the assistant editor of Marg, Mumbai, and was appointed art critic for the Times of India, Mumbai and India Today, Delhi. In 1982 she joined the India International Centre as the Editor, resuming this appointment in 1990. Sen's books include *Paintings from the Akbar Nama*, *Image and Imagination*, *Five Contemporary Artists in India*, *Bindu: Space and Time in Raza's Vision*, *Ganesh Pyne: Revelations and Feminine Fables: Imaging the Indian Woman in Painting, Photography and Cinema*. Honors and awards include among them the Homi Bhaba Fellowship and the Jawaharlal Nehru Fellowship.

Kavita Singh is an art historian and teaches at JNU, School of Art & Aesthetics. Her research interests include the history and politics of museum collections, the social history of Indian painting, and the application of narrative theory to art. Her publications include *New Insights into Sikh Art* (Marg, 2002) and essays in several international and national journals and edited volumes. She has been Research Editor, Marg Publications and Guest Curator, San Diego Museum of Art and Museum Intern at the Asia Society in New York. She was co-curator of *Power and Desire: Indian Paintings from the Binney collection*, an exhibition of Indian miniature paintings that travelled through the US, Europe and Asia. In 2005 she received a major grant from the Getty Foundation for a collaborative project to study the place of museums in the social landscape of India today.

Manasij Majumder (B. 1938) : majored in English Literature both in college and university. Taught Eng. Lit. at a degree college under Calcutta University till 1998. He had been a regular art critic for The Telegraph, The Business Standard, and the Bengali weekly Desh between 1986 and 1999. Published articles on art and literature in both Bengali and English in the leading journals and newspapers of Calcutta, He authored - 2000 *Bishay Niradchandra Chaudhuri* (a collection of articles in Bengali on Nirad C. Choudhuri), 2002 *Dreamer on the Arc* A study of the art of Sakti Burman, 2005 *Art Moves : Works by Sunil Das*, 2006 *Close to the Event: Art of Bikash Bhattacharjee*, 2008 *Imprints of a Sensitive Soul, Art of Amitabha Banerjee*, 2009 *Harano Prapti Sangbad*, (A collection of essays in Bengali on literature, art and culture).

Dr. Nuzhat Kazmi is the Head of the Department of Art History & Art Appreciation, Faculty of Fine Arts, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. She did her M.Phil. from Delhi University and PhD from Jamia Millia Islamia. She was a Commonwealth Scholar in Oriental and African Studies, London University, London from 1993.

Prima Kurien did her post graduation in English literature from the Delhi University [1988]. In 1995 she launched Art Inc to showcase contemporary Indian art and new media. Currently she works as an independent curator, art appraiser and exhibition designer. Her curatorial projects include Combine, National Gallery of Modern Art, Wayside deity with video artist Shilpa Gupta and Anita Dube and Living on the Edge a series of three shows tracing the synergies of artists Himat Shah, Amitava Das & Valsan Kolleri.

Pooja Sood is an independent Curator and Art Management Consultant based in New Delhi. Sood is the Director of KHOJ International Artists' Association, an autonomous, artists' led registered society aimed at promoting intercultural understanding through experimentation and exchange. Part of the global Triangle Arts Trust, Sood researched and facilitated the development of artist led organizations in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal thereby developing a south Asian network for the arts. She is the Regional Coordinator of this network. She has been the Curator of the Apeejay Media Gallery, the first and only dedicated new media gallery in India since 2002. and since October 2007, she has assumed the directorship of the Artists Pension Trust, Mumbai which is part of the global Artists Pension Trust head quartered in New York. She lives and works in Delhi.

Ratnā Lahiri studied for her Ph.D on Human Values in Modern Indian Literature (1982), and went on to teach at the University Of Delhi until the early nineties. Her deep interest in Ancient Indian Cultural values is reflected in her contributions to the Encyclopedias of Indian Literature (Sahitya Akademi), Encyclopedia of Hinduism (under publication) and in the translated summaries of Jaina source materials in the Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophy (MLBD). Dr. Lahiri subsequently taught Indian Studies at the Asian Center of the University of Philippines in Manila, followed by projects of the University of South Carolina in the department of Religious Studies and the Department of Philosophy at the University of Washington in Seattle, both in the USA. Her forthcoming works include a critical translation and analysis of the two existing Filipino versions of the Rama story from the folk literature of the Maranao people, which she wrote for a Fellowship at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study in Shimla, and the recently published translated and edited book *The Hindu Way: A search for the Eternal*, from Shubhi Indian publications.

REKHA MODY is the founder of Garutman Pvt. Ltd, Habiart Foundation, Divya Chaya Trust, Stree Shakti-The Parallel Force. Garutman Pvt Ltd was founded in 1985 to promote quality Indian literature translated from Indian regional languages to English and promote them Internationally. Divya Chaya Trust, founded in 1984 provides social, economic and educational support to 1000 children in need and has established income generative programmes for women from lower income groups in both urban and rural areas. Habiart Foundation started in 1989 is a non-profit organization to promote contemporary and traditional art. In 1999 she edited *-A Quest For Roots-* This book contextualizes the experience of women in India from the earliest recorded times to the mid-20th century.

Sangeeta Gupta is a poet and an artist. Her first solo exhibition was at Birla Academy of Art & Culture, Kolkata in 1995. Her solo shows have been held all over India i.e. Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Lucknow and Chandigarh and abroad at London, Berlin, Munich and Lahore. She has participated in national exhibitions of Lalit Kala Academy, AIFACS and Sahitya Kala Parishad and in several art camps. She received the 69th annual award for drawing in 1998 and 77th annual award for painting in 2005 by AIFACS, New Delhi and was also conferred Hindprabha award for Indian Women Achievers by Uttar Pradesh Mahila Manch in 1999. There is a collection of short stories and four anthologies of poems in Hindi to her credit. Her collection of poems *Pratinaad* has also been translated in Bangla, English and German. Her latest book '*Lekhka ka Samay*' has been published in 2006 which is a compilation of interviews of eminent women writers in Hindi.

Shukla Sawant is a visual artist and studied at JNU, School of Art & Aesthetics . Her research interests include Contemporary Art and Art in Colonial India. She has been a Commonwealth Scholar at the University of London and studied at the Ecole Des Beaux Arts Paris. She recently contributed articles on Sultan Ali, Sanat Kar, Chittoprasad, among others, to the Delhi Art Gallery catalogue "Manifestations" 2004. She has participated in artist residencies at Braziers College, Oxford U.K (Triangle Arts Trust) Khoj Workshop, Modinagar, Began Grond Residency, Utrecht and has had solo exhibitions in London (Harriet Green Gallery), Amsterdam (FIA), Mumbai (Lakereen) and Delhi (Art Inc).

Suneet Chopra was born in Lahore 1941. He won The Tagore Gold Medal for writing at St Xaviers College Calcutta, 1957. Studied at the School of Oriental and African Studies and JJNU. Published his first 100 line poem ' Amrita ' in the Bengal journal, Manjari in 1959. His book of short stories titled ' Transactions and other stories' [1985] has been translated into many Indian languages and French and Arabic. Suneet Chopra has travelled widely and is proficient in several languages including Latin And Hausa. He is an art consultant , critic , curator and social activist.

Sunil Mehra is an independent cultural commentator, journalist, curator, writer who has worked as staff writer/editor for major Indian dailies and newsmagazines among them Times of India, Indian Express, Financial Express, India Today and Outlook. He researched, wrote, directed, produced and anchored Center stage, a weekly show on culture for DD News and DD Metro channels in the course of which he interviewed writers, artists, film and theatre actors, singers, dancers, activists across India and abroad. It was rated as one of the three best programme on DD channels in 2000. He has since written, produced and directed a prizewinning documentary on radical Muslim Odissi dancer, Ramli Ibrahim for Astro channel in Malaysia; music from the film has been adopted as the signature tune for the channel's premier cultural programme. Most recently he has produced and directed films on Indian dancers for the Australian Dance Council in Melbourne. His last film "Fana'a: Ranjha Revisited" on Sikh Bharatnatyam dancer Navtej Johar was screened to critical acclaim in the latter half of 2008 at the World Sikh Forum in Los Angeles, at the Indian Arts Festival, Toronto and at the Bhubneshwar Film Festival in Orissa.

South Asia –Present Scenario Future Visions: An overview

India has historically been a symbiotic partner in the world view of South Asia, and this has been well documented by scholars and art historians alike. In more recent times all nations of this region have shared a similar exposure to colonial, post colonial and post modernist winds which have swept over them, threatening to strike at the very core of their distinct cultural, social and political identity. If accepted, this regional uniqueness would have remained at best a curiosity and a temporary indulgence.

However, the intellectuals and public of this region have been present to the dangers of succumbing to this form of hegemony and have questioned the mindless conformity, which bears no relevance to the regional concerns or aspirations. While opening our windows to change, we as a region have remained grounded in the cultural social and political ethos of our own unique identities. Even as we pride ourselves in our uniqueness, we revel at the same time in our diversity, cognizant of each others views and ideologies.

In today's era of globalised cultures, we have prided ourselves in our innate ability to question established norms and foster a spirit of inquiry, at the same time respecting and perceiving, varying viewpoints.

This ability has been the primary catalyst in allowing our Art, Literature and Craft to retain their regional identity, while adapting and evolving with the political and social history of our times.

However, some of our pressing concerns in the field of ART are as follows:

Do we still have this ability in the field of visual art ?

In the face of new challenges and conflicts, each region of South Asia has responded in its own unique manner as evidenced in the freshly emerging dialogue, experiments, use of new media and content, especially in the post colonial art of South Asia. In the face of a sweeping wave of western ideology, we strive fiercely to retain our own identity in the context of one's own cultural, social and political ethos.

However, globalization has brought new parameters to our very identity.

Are we still able to make an unique contribution?

- For Art and literature to be relevant, it must mirror and interpret this changing face, while retaining and not compromising the cultural, social and political values and traditions of the region within the context of which it is practiced and from where it has emerged. Is our visual art able to interpret, reinterpret and able to take on the challenges of rapidly changing equations both globally and within our own nations? Are we able to express, depict, voice our concerns and views, boldly and distinctly without being intimidated by running the risk of offending our political and economic benefactors?
- Is there a strong and unified voice and identity that is emerging from the South Asian continent irrespective of our distinct identities and because of our common concerns and compulsions? What are the points of convergence and divergence in our individual political, social and economic approach and outlook to a changing world order?
- A very relevant concern for this sub-continent is the glaring absence of governmental, institutional support and patronage vis a vis research grants, scholarships, studio facilities, up gradation of museums, lack of documentation, and recognition and promotion of our vast pools of talent. As a result of which we are constantly looking to foreign agencies and developed countries for funding and support. Can we mobilize and motivate ourselves and our own resources to become more self sufficient and to be able to document, evaluate and interpret our history and our culture for and by ourselves?
- Do we need an international Art Code with enforceable laws which can regularize trade practice, if so, how can we ensure that it does not get undermined by the blatant lack of transparency and accountability in it?

It will be fruitful to reflect on these queries which could reveal a portrait of the emerging art persona of the nations concerned, help each other understand how their various historical political and social compulsions have crystallized and developed within the larger regional identity of South Asia. It will also be a forum for us to find possible solutions to the challenges that confront us at present and for the ones that are likely to emerge in the future.

Habiart Foundation, in collaboration with the India Council for Cultural Relations proposes to highlight these concerns by facilitating an interaction through this international conference, in which eminent scholars and art historians will present their viewpoints and participate in open discussions regarding these issues, and more which are bound to arise in the course of this forum.

Rekha Mody
 Founder Trustee
 Habiart Foundation

Dr Ratna Lahiri
 Hony. Director
 Habiart Foundation

Prima Kurien
 Programme Director

Contemporary Indian Art

India's contemporary art dates from around the end of the 70s. But any such date referring to the recent past is to problematize our approach to the very concept of contemporaneity of art. Like modern, contemporary has a temporal connotation as well as value specificities which do not describe the contemporary art of another era. The term contemporary began to qualify art after 1950 in the West, probably because western artworks of the post war decades, especially those showcased in the five yearly Documenta in Kassel, Germany, displayed such bewildering diversity in terms of style and genre that marking them contemporary was the most appropriate way out of the state of resultant confusion. A contemporary artwork sports a certain uncertainty about how it is to be allotted a definitional slot or a stylistic category. It is nevertheless located in the space broadly defined by modernism on the verge of its logical or adventitious extension.

Indian art witnessed the early beginnings of modernism in the works of such masters as the poet Tagore, Gaganendranath Tagore, Jamini Roy, Amrita Sher Gill, Ramkinkar, and Binode Behari Mukherjee and made a giant stride absorbing and assimilating all the updates of modernism in the 40s and 50s. Formal and stylistic signifiers of western modernism betokening the identity of the artist, rather than that of his nation, featured abundantly in our art in these two decades. But a parallel effort was also on to lend western modernism a native look..

The generation of young artists of the sixties and seventies displayed a remarkable post-colonial zest for getting rid of all the colonial hangovers of aggressively courting or rejecting western modernism. They considered world art as their heritage and sharpened their susceptibility to resources both native and foreign. They knew there was no turning away from the western lead in continuous redefining of art's modernist values and their gradual slide into the contemporary. Artists all over India especially in the major centres of art activities such as Kolkata and Santiniketan, Delhi, Chennai, Baroda and Mumbai were as much sensitive to what was happening in the West as they were of their strong roots in native reality in which both past and present co-existed defining and shaping each other. The artists in the 60s and 70s consolidated the templates of modernism and brought to bear upon them in their practice a breath-taking range of diversity and vitality. As a result Indian art, although anchored in global modernism, forged a distinctive identity of its own.

It acquired a fresh vitality and vigorous divergent manifestations in the works of the artists in the 70s and 80s. Figurative art with Cubist, Expressionist and Surrealist re-orientations featured in a wide range of works of the senior most artists of the earlier generations and those of the later decades, exuding the artist's personal vision and bearing his or her individual style. No less has been the vogue of non-figurative art whether of charged formal properties of pure values or of diversely structured geometric abstractions often rooted in Tantric or religious art traditions.

The modernist discourse of contemporary Indian art however has regional variations keeping in view whether or not modernism, though a global process, takes on the epithet Indian to qualify it. There are several ways modernism is claimed to have been indigenized by mating Indian sensibility to western formal values or by seeking sources of modernist elements in seminal form in our past art, or by recycling native resources to relate the modernist perception of contemporary political and social reality. Native resources appropriated to revitalise or indigenize Indian art of these decades often came from both Margi and Desi art of diverse regional traditions.

A new discourse of modernism rooted in tradition re-interpreted and freshly recycled, especially in the light of post-colonial and postmodern situation marked the practice of a generation of artists, young and old, based in Baroda, Bombay Delhi and Calcutta. They reacted against the art of exclusive formal purity or the style-without-content art of high modernism. Figurative idiom and narrative imagery staged a spectacular comeback in the works of K. G. Subramanyan, Gulam Sheikh, Bhupen Khakkar among the senior artists active in later decades and Gieve Patel, Sudhir Patawardhan, Nalini Malani, Bikash Bhattacharjee, Jogen Chowdhury Rama Chandran, Laxma Goud, Vivan Sundaram to name only a few among their juniors. Modernism reached its dead end in the West by the end of 60s. But its impact began to be felt from the 70s onward, though not in a major way until the 90s. Updates of art beyond modernism, often challenging the definitional basics of traditional art concepts and art forms, began to arrive in the mid 80s. With the advent of globalization, spectacular rise in consumerism and high-tech culture and the steady decline, especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union, of the societal outlook in India's social and political objective so far pursued, contemporary Indian art scene in the 90s and after registered a remarkable change in the practice of artists such as Bhupen Khakkar, Atul Dodiya, Vivan Sundaram, Gogi Saroj Pal, Arpana Kaur, Subodh Gupta, Ratnabali Kant, Chhatrapati Dutta, Jitish Kalat, Chintan Upadhyaa and many others. Contemporary art scene in the 90s and at the turn of the century is again marked by vitality, vision and fresh vocabulary, poised again, however, between what is globally western and what is locally global in art today.

Manasji Majumdar

INDIAN ART AND FUTURE VISION

Art in India, like other parts of the globe, has seen major transformations in every aspect in the last twenty five years. Technological innovations and globalization have added new dimensions to both, the artistic expressions and the critics' perceptions of these expressions. Artists are also guided by the choices made available to them by the critics, and therefore to some extent, the changing perceptions of art criticism play an important role in shaping the future of art.

One of the important roles that art critics play in visualizing the art is that they set the "context for the art under consideration." The epistemological framework evolved by the parameters of art criticism should provide a "meaningful engagement with art" to the public. Over the years, the framework and the domains of public engagement have undergone significant transformations: from narrative to interpretive, the approaches have raised issues as wide as ethics, plagiarism and morality.

The crisis in art criticism mainly relates to the dilemmas of dichotomy – the same object can be interpreted in several complementary and conflicting ways. To what extent such a conflict is essential to keep the dynamics of creativity afloat is a major question faced today.

This paper attempts to analyze the direction of art criticism in recent past and its probable impact on the future of Indian art.

Dr. Neeru Misra

Art Historian and Heritologist

AFGHANISTAN ABSTRACT (N.A.)

Rahraw Omarzaad

Art as spectacle: Commodification and crisis in Bangladeshi art

Taking my cue from Guy Debord's view of the spectacle (elaborated in his book *The Society of the Spectacle*) that spectacle is a natural logic of commodity culture that promotes consumption as an end in itself, I would like to look at the contemporary Bangladeshi art scene and locate areas that show a strong tendency towards commodification, and by extension, towards the spectacle. As market for art expands, preferences for certain styles also become apparent, and many artists adopt such styles to move up in terms of market valuation. In the process some are compelled to make a compromise with their preferred styles, some even abandon them in search of more 'market friendly' styles. In a few cases artists use the same or similar motifs and visual repertoire again and again, emptying them of meaning. The market shifts gear once a particular choice gets exhausted, and a new preference emerges. The market even decides on the size of the canvas and the use of materials that too, appears to restrict the creative space for artists. The other aspect of spectacle, its valorization of images and appearances, also deserves consideration. The prominence that installation art, in particular, video installation, has attained in Bangladesh has to do with the lure of the spectacle. Installation art doesn't usually sell; therefore it is not art as commodity (except for the sponsored work), but it is an assemblage that depends on the spectacle for shaping its aesthetic appeal. The appeal of the spectacle and the operations of a hyper-market are creating problems in representation as well as in cultural aesthetics. In such a backdrop, the following questions become urgent:

- i) What should be the role of the market—the galleries, buyers, and corporate sponsors— in deciding art trends at a particular time?
- ii) How should artists address these issue: should they fall in line or resist? What shape should that resistance take?
- iii) Can artists work in isolation from the market?
- iv) What role is the media playing in creating consumerist notions of art as well as their practice?
- v) As change is a necessity in art, are the market-led changes anything extra-ordinary?

There are other issues to, such as the role of art exhibitions in promoting art, and art as a profession that is also witnessing changes over the years that need to be addressed. The paper will attempt to search for answers to all these questions for an understanding of contemporary as well as future trends in relation to the appeal of the spectacle and the operations of the market.

Syed Manzoorul Islam

Cultural Identity of Bhutan: Evolving Traditional and Modern Arts

The Bhutanese people possess a greater satisfaction and contentment in life due to strong religious influences and the overall Buddhist perspective that permeates daily life. Similarly, art in the context of Bhutan is saturated with many religious symbols and representations and these forms of art were introduced into the country by Buddhist missionaries, saints and philosophers from the 7th Century onwards. These Buddhist emissaries used multiple means to teach Buddhism to the general population and this included use of visual forms such as artifacts and ritual objects, specific designs within architectural structures, dance and music. These artistic forms continue to be utilized and endure even in these modern times and continue to play a very important role within Bhutanese society and life. In particular, the Thirteen Traditional Arts and Crafts of Bhutan (or Zorig Chusum) have contributed significantly to efforts associated with promoting and achieving Gross National Happiness which is the guiding principle of Bhutan's national development. Preservation of culture and its promotion for the well-being of people is one of the key platforms of Gross National Happiness.

Sacred arts include the three-fold religious arts known as *ku sung thugten*, or literally images, scriptures, and stupas. We consider these as sacred because of their representation of the body, speech and mind of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and thus, these objects are enshrined and worshipped by faithful devotees. These representations are usually composed of three different types of materials including clay, metal, and wood but there are also textile or fabric versions in the form of *thangkas* which feature painting, embroidery and appliqué. Some of these *thangkas* or *thongdrol* are as large as the wall of a building and are suspended for viewing at special events outside of temples and dzongs.

In recent years Bhutan has been gaining a reputation as the land of happiness in the world due to the enlightened concept of Gross National Happiness which was introduced by the visionary Druk Gyalpo Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the 4th King of Bhutan. It is considered one of the most precious gifts ever given to the people of Bhutan in the history of the country.

The promotion of traditional arts are viewed as especially relevant in terms of realizing Gross National Happiness and they are very much tied to economic growth. As mentioned earlier, government policy consistently supports the training and skill development of new artists – including both women and men – through the establishment of the Zorig Chusum Institute located both in the nation's capital of Thimphu and in Eastern Bhutan. Training these young people provides employment opportunities while at the same time propagates the continued appreciation and use of traditional art forms.

Because of this deep and sustained appreciation, tourists from around the world are keen to visit Bhutan to experience this unique and "living culture" for themselves. This past year for 2008 saw the largest numbers of foreign guests visiting the country. Tourism has now become a key foreign income earner for the country and has stimulated economic growth. Because of the interest and demand from the tourists, products of arts and crafts are also great demand. This consumption by foreign guests – along with those purchased by local Bhutanese for their own use – provides economic opportunities for traditional and modern artists.

The traditional and sacred arts of Bhutan have gained international attention and appreciation not only due to the rich variety available which showcases the living culture and heritage of Bhutan. Art and culture in integrated form weave together the social fabric of the nation and result in a distinct image which is reflective of various social roles of the people.

In the past, art was mainly produced for a specific use or based on a patron's wish. These days the motivation remains the same but also art is now produced for decoration or for selling to tourists as a travel souvenir. Because much of art today is produced mainly for commercial purposes, there are challenges associated with authenticity issues and maintaining original designs and forms as prescribed by traditional practices and passed along by the artists of the past. This dilemma is one of great concern for the Bhutanese because while economic gains are desired, the preservation of genuine Bhutanese fine arts and crafts also needs to be maintained.

In recent years there are many young artists who are also interested in and developing their skills in the creation of more abstract or modern art. This should not be seen as an erosion of traditional art but instead an expansion or an evolution of Bhutanese art. Much of this modern art remains based on Buddhist principles and concepts but it expressed with a freedom outside of the traditional art system which provides a choice for the young artists.

Khenpo Phushok Tashi, Director, National Museum of Bhutan

Maldivian Art at the Beginning of the 21st century

Unlike her South Asian neighbors India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan, the Maldives was never a colony of the British. Attempts to perceive the arts through the context of dominating (modernist) philosophies of the 20th century were never made in the country which consists of over a 1000 islands (of which only close to 200 are inhabited). Traditionally western institutions such as museums, galleries and art schools and colleges were never established in the country. And the main players of a typical art market which today is almost a global phenomenon were never identified as influencing the role of art in society. These include the Art Critic, the Art Dealer and perhaps most importantly, the Collector (private, public, institutional and individual). In the Maldivian context, the word 'art' in the western sense does not have any consequence in that it does not signify anything. In other words, there is no word in the Maldivian language Dhivehi connoting art. Instead there is craft. As for art forms, there are plenty, including different genres of poetry, music and dance. There are also many craft forms and practices that on occasion overlap with art.

Western art practices such as drawing to represent or reproduce a reality or express an idea or emotion, and the use of paint to do the same would have come to the Maldives early in the 20th century if not before. With the onset of the tourism industry in the early 1970s, some of these practices – which utilized the various skills employed in the production of contemporary art forms, including painting and sculpture – made the transition into the production of souvenirs or mementos for visiting tourists.

The introduction of tourism in the early 1970s also marked the beginning of a new phase in the history of art and craft in the country in that a new avenue was opened up for Maldivian artisans working in visual media to cater for, giving them many commercial incentives to be engaged in the production of various crafts including painting, stencil printing and carving. And although this new development intensified technological innovation and productivity, a negative side-effect of this was that artisans increasingly grew dependant on this emerging market which became a flourishing trade by the mid-80s. This reliance on the tourist dollar to sustain the practices of artisans also hampered academic and institutional development with a contextual focus on recognizing the cultural value of these practices and nurturing the same with individual and institutional patronage (both public and private).

The forces created by the lucrative souvenir trade generated a market dynamics that was estranged from academic and critical discourse. And when at the beginning of the 21st century attempts were made to institutionalize the arts through state funding and sponsorship, the lack of a vibrant cultural discourse surrounding the arts was severely felt. Moreover, reaching out to the international community and art markets – through the regular channels of art fairs and in enlisting the interest of international curators have also been troublesome for the same reason. This leaves the Maldivian arts community – including individuals and institutions in a vacuum-like situation where parallel attempts have to be made in multiple streams to create links with market forces rooted in global art trends.

Mamduh Waheed

An Overview of the Transformation of Nepali Art Through History

From ancient times Nepal has practiced a hybrid of Tibetan Buddhist and Hindu mysticism. The importance of both these religions in this country can be seen in the art and architecture, commissioned by the kings from many centuries ago. From the 12th century onwards, the great visionary Newar Kings also known as the Mallas established Kathmandu Valley as a vibrant center of the arts. In 1767, the rule of these visionary Newari Kings came to an end with the invasion of Kathmandu Valley by Prithivi Naryan Shah from Gorkha.

The Shah Kings continued to patronize the religious art of the prevailing in the Valley and also entrusted the Chitrakars with creating portraits for the Royal Court. Successive generations of the Shah dynasty continued to patronize religious art, some of them penned treatise on religious and spiritual practices which reveal show immersed they had become in the religion practiced in the Valley.

It was the Ranas, who were pivotal in introducing contemporary expression in Nepal. They built a number of European style palaces during their 104 years of rule. Though the Ranas borrowed heavily from the west or were inspired by the West - it is interesting to note that they were xenophobic. Fearing the expansion of the British rule into Nepal, Shree Teen Jung Bahadur Rana ruled Nepal as closed country and as a consequence, Nepal became a forbidden country and Kathmandu Valley a Forbidden City. In 1922, two Nepali painters: Tej Bahadur Chitrakar and Chandra Man Maskey were sent by Chandra Shumsher to study fine art at the Government School of Art in Calcutta.

India's independence and the end of the British Raj had a great impact on the intellectuals of Nepal. In the vanguard of this movement were the social activist, teachers, lawyers, and members of various underground political outfits who were also arrested. Writers and poets began to rebel against the Rana rulers. The writings of this time began to mirror a new socio-political realism that challenged the establishment and called for change. In 1952, King Tribhuvan Bir Bikram Shah Dev ended the Rana rule and Nepal finally opened up her borders to the rest of the world. His successor, King Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev, believed that the arts could be used to reflect the optimistic spirit of these times. During this time, artists boldly strove to work beyond the rigid parameters of traditional and religious art. A number of royal portraits and busts were made during this period. It was during this time that Nepali nationalism became defined.

Between the 60's and 70's, the Royal Academy was established to promote art, literature, dance and music, the City Hall was built to stage public performances, the Nepal Association of Fine Arts, and the Arts Council were established to promote contemporary expression and an independent association was also initiated to promote Nepali handicraft. The very first art exhibitions were held during this time and private art galleries made a tremendous beginning. Sadly the preoccupation with the new did not match with the wisdom that was needed to protect and conserve the art from the past, as most Nepalese were clueless about the value of their Nepali heritage. The smuggling of art from temples and monasteries began during this vulnerable time. Many foreign experts came to "preserve" or "make a study of" these art works. Though laws were quickly set up to ban the export and trade of antiques, the theft of ancient art continues. To understand the magnitude of

the of this theft, it is imperative to understand that every piece of ancient Nepali or Himalayan art that is being exhibited in the prestigious museums abroad have been stolen. Though Kathmandu has been referred to as a "museum without walls", sadly only 20 percent of the art from antiquity remains today.

The late King Birendra Bikram Shah Dev, being an artist himself (assassinated in 2001), continued to support contemporary art. Even though at one level of life, art was and is still commonly recognized as having religious, ritualistic and utilitarian values, the burgeoning interest in contemporary art spurred the imagination of the local artists. By the 1960's and 1970's, many more artists received training in prestigious art academies in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Russia and Paris. They returned to Kathmandu, invigorated by their studies and their experiences and were determined to contribute to the emerging art scene in Kathmandu. By the 1980's, the original patrons of the arts, which used to be the temples and the aristocracy, were replaced by private galleries who believed that contemporary expression had a market. The role, played by private art galleries, to uplift and create awareness about the vitality and potential of this field cannot be minimized. Though all the contemporary art activities were confined to Kathmandu, the rising confidence in the arts was vitalized by the role played by private entrepreneurs and the media.

It is important to note that the recent political changes have created very definite political ripples within the art circles in the country. Artists for the very first time have been divided in to different political camps. In 2008, the Maoist cultural and political wing held an exhibition of Maoist propaganda art. The attacks on the opposition, and on the free press by the Maoists, have been a disturbing sign and could be construed as a tactical move towards a totalitarian regime. At this critical juncture of Nepali history, it may be prudent to query if an artist or writer who dares to question a totalitarian regime through their work, will become the next casualty and how this will effect the overall development of contemporary expression.

Interestingly, the success contemporary Nepali art now enjoys, does not match the vitality or stature that contemporary art has been enjoying in the neighbouring countries of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and China. Perhaps this can be explained by the fact that Nepal's history of contemporary expression does not even span a century. The recent economic and political developments now mean that Nepal is a country that lies neatly in the middle of the world's biggest growth region. Keeping this in mind, the new government of Nepal must rise to the challenges of time, and develop the intrinsic cultural potential of the country.

Sangeeta Thapa, Curator, Siddhartha Art Gallery

Modernist Art in the 20th century Sri Lanka

Modernist art found its way into the art world of Sri Lanka in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, during the colonial occupation of the island. It may be suggested that, in one hand modernism in art operated within a discourse of anti colonialism and on the other the same worked within the values and politics of colonialism. Towards the end of the 20th century modernist notions and conceptions on art, having worked out, rephrased, debated and internalized within local social and political anxieties arrived at a critical point in its social-aesthetical trajectory giving rise to, what can be called a 'para-modern' or late-modern juncture. This paper briefly mapsplots this variegated history of modernism in Sri Lanka and attempts at describingdefining its current forms and configurations.

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