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# ART *India*

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I have no body either. I am an array of vertices strung across x-y-  
and-z' axis woven together into a 3D mesh. \_



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STOP



Net Culture



# Changing the Profile of Indian Art in the US

**Peter Nagy** converses with US-based Umesh Gaur about his passion for contemporary Indian art and the up-coming exhibition at the Zimmerli Museum, which will contain some of the best works from his and other major collections from Northeastern US.



Umesh and Sunanda Gaur with Tyeb Mehta's painting in the background.

**Peter Nagy:** You are a money manager and your wife is a doctor, so how did you first become interested in art?

Umesh Gaur: Our interest in art started when we were students. We used to frequently visit art museums in New York City. When we started working, we started to collect decorative arts. We quickly gravitated towards Indian arts, not simply because of our Indian origin, but because we were able to understand it and enjoy it at a much higher plane. As time went by we started collecting contemporary fine arts.

**PN:** Do you have conscious parameters for your collection?

UG: Yes. We concentrate on collecting major artists of post-independence

modern Indian art. We first do a lot of research to identify which artists we like and want to add to our collection, and then we try to add a few representative fine works by the artist. We started our collection with works by the members of Progressive Artists Group. After acquiring a few works by Husain, Souza, Raza and Ara, we started adding works by other masters of this period such as Ram Kumar, Tyeb Mehta, Ganesh Pyne and Bikash Bhattacharjee.

In 1997 we saw an exhibition of women artists of India at Mills College in Oakland, California. We were very impressed by the works of the women artists and soon thereafter, we started acquiring paintings by Vasundhara Tewari, Madhvi Parekh, and Nalini Malini. In some ways we find that gender issues raised by these women artists go far beyond their male counterparts.

To round out the collection we have just now started to explore newly emerging artists that have come on the scene in the last ten years. In general we are attracted to abstract works, mythological abstractions and stunning portraits. The final selection is however made by intuitive passionate gut feeling for the work. We

usually fall in love with the piece before we get it.

**PN:** Where have you sourced most of the works in your collection from?

UG: We have acquired most of our works through auctions at Sotheby's, Christie's and Bonham's in New York and London. As a money manager, I feel that an art auction is an efficient marketplace, and unless you get carried away, you can get a pretty good selection of fine artworks at fair market prices. We have also bought several works from art galleries in New York and New Delhi. We find that gallery managers can be very helpful in identifying and sourcing fine works.

**PN:** Do you follow the contemporary art scene in general or are your interests solely in Indian art?

UG: We can relate to Indian art a little bit better since we are of Indian origin. In addition to appreciating the work itself, we can also appreciate the cultural aspects of the work. Collecting Indian art also provides an interesting avenue to stay in touch with our cultural heritage and the processes of modernisation affecting India. We also hope that our family collection will strengthen the bond between our kids and their Indian ethnicity.

We do follow twentieth-century Western art and we have been dragging our kids to New York City art museums for many years. We must have done something right, because our kids now want to go to modern art museums on their own. Our family is a big fan of all French impressionists, abstract expressionists such as Jackson Pollock and American pop artists like Andy Warhol and Jasper Johns. However, as collectors, we find that Indian art is still reasonably priced; it is possible to get outstanding works by the greatest Indian artists for less than \$20,000. A comparable work by an American or European artist



M. F. Husain. Untitled. Oil on canvas. 41 x 68 in. 1982.



would run into millions. Clearly, Indian art today is more fun to collect and represents a better value.

Over the years we have also put together a library of Indian and Western art books and catalogues. Not only does this help us in researching and educating ourselves about modern Indian art, it also serves as a resource to study the juxtaposition of Indian and Western modern arts.

**PN: Can you explain how the upcoming exhibition at the Zimmerli Museum came about?**

UG: We approached the museum originally to offer our collection for a special exhibition at the Zimmerli. The museum researched the contemporary Indian art scene and identified two converging recent phenomena. The first is the remarkable blossoming of contemporary art in India in the last few decades, which has not been displayed adequately in American museums. The second is the tremendous increase in the Asian American population of central New Jersey, with individuals of Asian-Indian heritage forming a very significant segment of this growth in the region surrounding Rutgers University's New Brunswick campus. Zimmerli museum seized the opportunity and asked us to help them in organising a major survey of contemporary Indian art that would include not only works from our collection, but also the best works from all the major collections in the Northeastern US. We were more than happy to oblige.

The exhibition is scheduled from April 7 to July 31, 2002. Jeffrey Wechsler, senior curator at the Zimmerli is curating the show.

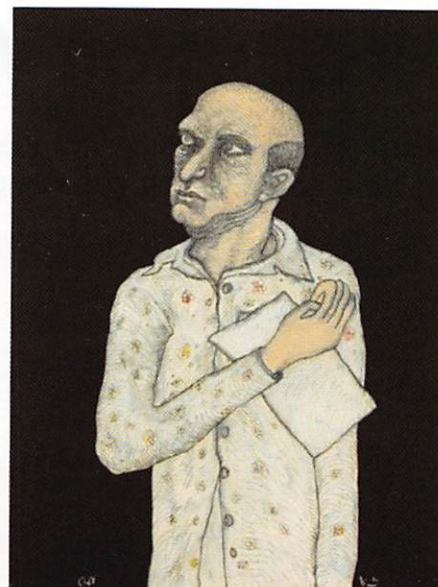
**PN: Who will be the primary audience for this show and how will the exhibition be structured?**

UG: In the beginning we were planning on several dozen works, but as we have encountered more and more phenomenal pieces in private collections, the exhibition has grown substantially, both in quality and quantity. Consequently, the museum has cancelled another exhibition which was scheduled alongside our show, to give our exhibition extra space

and additional resources.

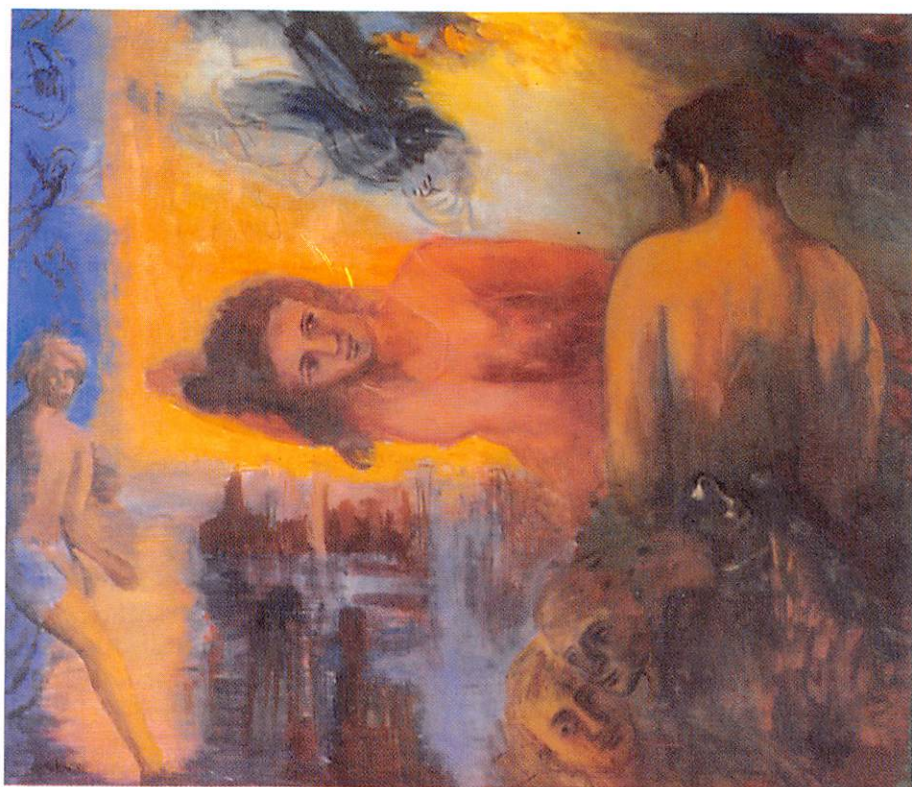
The exhibition will consist of 100 works and will emphasise the production of the post-independence era – that is, 1947 to the present. Most of the prominent Indian artists of this era will be displayed – from the members of the groundbreaking Progressive Artists Group, to other first and second-generation Indian modernists (Manjit Bawa, Arpita Singh, Tyeb Mehta, Rameshwar Broota, Ganesh Pyne, *et al*), to artists who have emerged in recent years (Atul Dodiya, Chittrovanu Mazumdar, Ravinder Reddy, *et al*).

The exhibition will be a must see show for all enthusiasts of contemporary Indian art within several hundred miles of driving distance. It will also draw several thousand Indian and non-Indian members of the Rutgers community, who will be exposed to contemporary Indian art for the first time. It should also substantially enlighten the general public as to its subject, and act as the basis for a spectrum of educational programmes and events offering insight into Indian culture. These activities will include tours and lectures as well as music, film, dance, and other cultural offerings.



Jogen Chowdhury. Man with Piece of Paper. Pastel and ink on paper. 15 x 11 in. 1986.

We are already starting to compare this exhibition to earlier exhibitions of contemporary Indian art and our survey shows that the Zimmerli showing is going to be more comprehensive and broad-based than anything that has ever been done at a Western museum. We think this show is going to be a great treat and are hopeful that it will have a very positive influence on the profile of Indian art in the New York metropolitan region. 17



Nalini Malani. Love. Acrylic on canvas. 48 x 56 in. 1990-91. All photos courtesy Umesh Gaur.