M. F. Husain: Early Masterpieces, 1950s–70s

M. F. Husain: Early Masterpieces is mounted in conjunction with the Year of India at Brown University. Presented as an exploration of India and its dramatic rise on the world stage, the Year of India includes lectures, readings, conferences, and performances that advance the understanding of India’s people, culture, economy, and politics.

It is entirely suitable that the work of M.F. Husain be chosen for this celebration. One of the most recognized figures in Indian art, Husain’s career spans the rise of modernism in India and the introduction of contemporary Indian art onto the international art stage. While Husain exhibited in international venues, specifically the Bienal de São Paulo, as early as 1971, it is only over the past decade that contemporary Indian art has been widely embraced in the West. Galleries specializing in contemporary Indian art have sprung up in Mumbai and New Delhi as well as in London and New York. And major international art venues, such as the Tate Modern, Documenta, and the Venice Biennale, to name just a few, have focused viewers attention on living Indian artists.

The current exhibition brings this conversation to Providence. We are most grateful to Brown alumna Amrita Jhaveri, who has generously shared her collection with us. Focusing on Husain’s early works, the collection provides a view into the artist’s first manifestations of favorite subjects: life on the streets, women and horses (together and apart), and mythological and religious personages.

Jo-Ann Conklin
Director, David Winton Bell Gallery

The exhibition is drawn from the collection of Amrita Jhaveri ’91 and funded by Jindal Steel Works.

It is presented by the Year of India, the Cogut Center for the Humanities and the David Winton Bell Gallery at Pembroke Hall, Brown University, February 5 – March 26, 2010

Mallica Kumbera Landrus and Jo-Ann Conklin, co-curators

Amusement in the Street, 1957
Oil on canvas, 14 ¼ x 20 ½
As I begin to paint hold the sky in your hands

Early Masterpieces, 1950s–70s

Oil on canvas, 37 ½ x 22 ¾

Untitled

works—particularly paintings that depict Hindu traditions—and demonstrate his diverse influences, be it in the form of a mythological story or a Mother known for her immense charitable work.

Husain was immersed in Hinduism and its many traditions. Pandharpur, the city of his birth and early childhood, is a temple city. Dedicated to the goddess Draupadi—an early supporter of Husain's passion for painting—married again and moved the family to Indore. Here, as the oldest of seven children, Husain received his first lessons from his mother, Zainab, who taught him to paint on such contemporary lives and faces, even when the faces of strangers, which revealed the marks of their struggle for survival. His early works focus on such contemporary lives and faces, even when

His 1961 painting entitled Chariot of the Sun God, ca. 1953

Oil and Chinese lacquer on canvas, 42 ½ x 114 ¼

as a fierce, beautiful, and compassionate force, Durga is normally depicted in painting and sculpture as a female; the one on the right (usually associated with a coiled sleeping snake.) is Kundalini, an instinctive libidinal force called the

In the early 1940s designed furniture and toys. While On his way home Husain acquainted himself with people, social, religious, and cultural traditions. Whereas three men (including Husain) were from minority backgrounds, a fourth belonged to the dalit (low caste or untouchable) community. His 1961 painting entitled Chariot of the Sun God, ca. 1953

and often represented mammal, second only to the tiger rather than the rider. The goddess is revered as the founder of modernism. His 1961 painting entitled Chariot of the Sun God, ca. 1953

In the field of Indian contemporary art, Maqbool Fida—an early supporter of Husain's passion for painting—married again and moved the family to Indore. Here, as the oldest of seven children, Husain received his first lessons from his mother, Zainab, who taught him to paint...
These Indian subjects are in a form and style one can clearly associate with mainstream modernism. Although the landscapes (Red Landscape and Black Hill) are Indian, Husain’s style creates with them an abstract universality. This merger of the Indian and universal modernism continues in Husain’s later works. If not for certain symbols in his paintings, including the name of a character written on the surface, most subjects remain anonymous, as expressive color and form. However the word “anonymous” certainly does not apply to the artist M.F. Husain, whose name is the most recognized in contemporary Indian art.

Mallica Kumbara Landrus
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