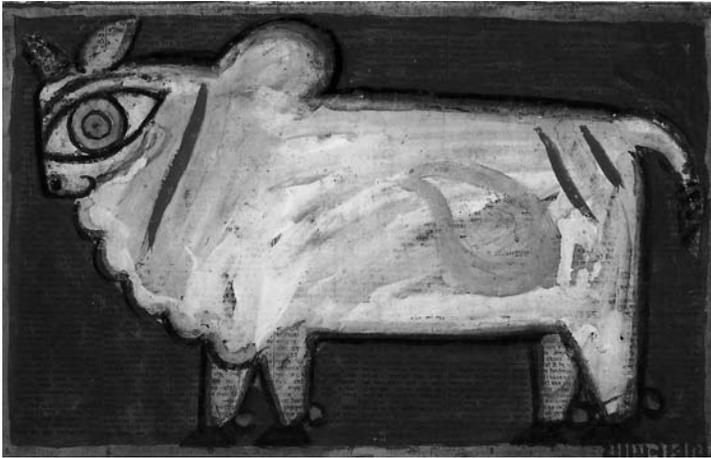


Timeless Visions *Contemporary Art of India*

from the Chester and Davida Herwitz Collection

June 22 - September 17, 2000



Jamini Roy, *Untitled*, undated
Tempera on newspaper, 10^{3/4} x 16^{3/4} in.
In Hinduism, cattle are sacred and revered.

The exhibition *Timeless Visions* celebrates the modern and contemporary work of thirteen artists from India. As a group, these artists have probed such profound themes as the nature of creation and representations of the divine, the essence of being human, the character of the heroic, and such formal concerns as color, form and space.

As a country India, which gained independence from British rule in 1947, ranks second after China in terms of population and is home to the world's largest film industry. While collections of

the traditional arts of India such as Hindu and Buddhist temple sculpture and Indian miniatures are well established in museums throughout the world, the importance of the art of post-colonial India has only recently begun to be recognized. Contemporary Indian art represents a radical break from the past because Indian artists are no longer subordinate to patrons or trained solely as apprentices in established styles. Color, form, texture and line once deployed only for narrative purposes sometimes take precedence—or become—the content. Four of the artists represented in this exhibition (Dave, Goud, Reddy and Rodwittiya) were trained at the newly established fine arts department at Maharaja Sayajirao University in Baroda. This program is not limited to traditional European or Indian approaches to art, but was designed to be international in its scope and training. In 1954 the National Gallery of Modern Art was inaugurated in Delhi, and the Indian government established the Lalit Kala Akademi to support contemporary art.

The artists, Sayed Haider Raza and Maqbool Fida Husain, were particularly instrumental in internationalizing the art of India by creating the Progressive Artists Group. The artists within this group acknowledge a debt to Western Modernism while incorporating aspects of India's artistic heritage into their work. By including references to Hinduism, the epic *Ramayana*, and the many deities worshiped within their society, artists such as K.G. Ramanujam and Bikash Bhattacharjee have drawn from India's rich history. Contemporary Indian artists are thus exploring a wide range of subjects and themes from a uniquely Indian perspective. In describing his work, M. F. Husain has said "...for the last 40 years, I have depicted in my work nothing but India herself."

There is enormous diversity among the artists represented in the Herwitz collection. They range from pioneers of modernism to members of the post-independence generation. A unifying aspect among these artists is their interest in visualization of the timeless and the transcendent nature of art. As stated by Rekha Rodwittiya: "I both consciously and unconsciously choose a vocabulary based on commonly-shared experiences that transcend cultural boundaries, [and] allow a universal form of communication to occur."

The collectors, Davida and the late Chester Herwitz, began acquiring Indian art during the 1960s. The couple was captivated by the country in 1961 while visiting suppliers for their women's fashion accessories business in Worchester, Massachusetts. Their collection, from which this exhibition is drawn, numbers more than three thousand works. As the largest and most comprehensive collection of modern Indian art, the Herwitz Collection traces the development of many of India's established and emerging artists. Works from the collection have been exhibited at the Tate Gallery, the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford, the Centre Pompidou, the Chicago Institute of Art and the Worchester Art Museum.

This exhibition, organized by the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts, is dedicated to the memory of Chester Herwitz who was honored in 1997 with the Indo-American Society award for his contribution to the development of Indian art.

Acknowledgements

Annemarie Sawkins coordinated the exhibition and gallery guide preparation. James Kieselburg acted as registrar. Andrew Nordin, assisted by Tim Dykes, designed the installation. Jerome Fortier designed the gallery guide, and Paul Amitai was responsible for promotion. Lynne Shumow organized educational programming, and Lee Coppernoll, assisted by Joyce Ashley and Nicole Hauser, provided administrative support; and Clayton Montez coordinated security.



Rekha Rodwittiya, *Untitled*, undated
Watercolor and pastel on paper
58^{1/4} x 46^{1/2} in.
Hanuman, the monkey-god, warrior and loyal follower