

S H R A Z A

Zamin : Homelands

The works of Sayed Haider Raza (1922-2016) are a testament to an internal dialogue with separation and belonging, in relation to the artist's migratory life and the social realities of the time. Raza's journey from rural India to France and eventually back to India, shaped his idea of kinship to place.

Born in a small town in the forest region of Madhya Pradesh, Raza moved to Bombay to pursue a career in art. In his youth, Raza witnessed significant moments in the nation's changing history.

In the city at the cusp of independence, Raza's art was informed with the hope and aspirations of a new nation and the mobility it afforded. However, the optimism of independence was offset by personal and political events - national discord, Gandhi's assassination, the death of his parents and a separation from his siblings through Partition. These losses impacted Raza and perhaps ideas of *desh bhakti* and a longing for the lost land in his later works had their genesis in this moment, which was further distilled through a sense of alienation when Raza resided in France.

'Zamin: Homelands' traces Raza's oeuvre as a landscape artist, a diaspora artist and as an artist in pursuit of an Indian modern sensibility. In Raza's artworks we see these paradigms merge through a recourse to abstraction. The exhibition hinges on the period between the 60s – 70s, when Raza moved from painting street scenes to an abstraction of nature, which originated through a desire to connect with the Indian forest landscape.

From this defining juncture, we look back at some of the early cityscapes of Bombay, the French landscapes and the later 'Bindu' works of the 80s which he became most known for.

Among the first Indian diaspora artists, Raza encapsulated in his work the profound experience of expressing one's identity through the eyes of the other within a global context. The external to inward gaze, meshed ideas of the native and the foreign, the East and the West. The quest for a rootedness in one's origins is observed in many of the artists who moved to the West. For Raza this meant a deep study of Indian aesthetics, spiritual scriptures and revisiting his childhood- to rekindle a sense of wonder and meaning to nature and the environment.

The exhibition showcases Raza's experiments with European and Indian painterly traditions to arrive at a unique form of abstraction. Raza's painting titles, letters exchanges and diary notes written in French,

English and Devanagari, reveal his varied knowledge of art, literature, poetry and philosophy of world cultures.

Raza imbued meaning in form and colour through ancient Indian aesthetics and cosmology. While abstraction was largely regarded as a creation of western modernism, Raza's practice grounded abstraction in Eastern thought, referencing primordial concepts of sacred geometry and power diagrams of yantra and tantric philosophy.

For Raza, the 'Bindu' marked his arrival at making of an icon that was universal in form and rooted in the national. It afforded multiple associations and meaning as the Tama Shunya- dark void, beej-seed, dhyana-meditation, naad-reverberation, the sun, the drop, the world and the cosmos.

The artist's life and work may be read as a deliberation on the human experience of migration and displacement. In an increasingly polarised world, Raza's legacy finds relevance today by an affirmation of plurality and cultural coexistence.

-Puja Vaish

About the collaborators

Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya

Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya, formerly known as the Prince of Wales Museum of Western India, is one of the premier art and history museums in India. CSMVS celebrated its 100 years' glorious journey as one of the premier, public enlightenment centres of the country on 10th January 2022. This was a landmark moment, not only in the history of the Museum but for the cultural movement of the country. In the last decade the Museum has undergone a profound modernization process with the idea to transform the Museum from a national level repository of antiquities to an institute of international standards. In its Centenary year, CSMVS has put together a list of significant projects and initiatives which will be undertaken in and beyond 2022 to mark this landmark year and moment.

Jehangir Nicholson Art Foundation

The Jehangir Nicholson Art Foundation functions as the Modern and Contemporary Art wing of the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya, Mumbai.

One of the earliest private collectors of modern Indian art, Jehangir Nicholson, acquired almost 800 artworks over 5 decades. The artworks in the collection date from the 1940s - early 2000s reflecting the significant trajectories of post-independence Indian art as well as the cultural milieu of the city. The core of the collection is of the Bombay Progressive Artists Group, and further features art oeuvres from around India including Baroda, Delhi, Calcutta, Madras. Having built a significant collection, it was Nicholson's ardent wish to make his collection accessible to the public. As early as 1976, he made an alliance with the National Centre for Performing Arts (NCPA) to open an art centre there called the Jehangir Nicholson Museum of Modern Art where a part of the collection was displayed. It was the first space in the city dedicated to Modern and Contemporary Art. When the National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA) opened in the 90s, Nicholson was on its advisory board and also exhibited works from his collection there. He spent his final years negotiating with the authorities for a space in the city to build a museum of contemporary art. In his will, he expressed a desire that a home be found for his collection where it would be accessible to the public. After Nicholson passed away, the Executors of the Nicholson Estate formed the JNAF and entered into a collaboration with Mumbai's premier museum, the CSMVS where the Jehangir Nicholson gallery opened to the public on 11th April 2011.

Art Musings

Art Musings is one of the earliest galleries to have been established in South Mumbai's vibrant and culturally rich Colaba area. Founded in 1999, well before the emergence of the area's 'gallery district', Art Musings has been a trailblazer both in terms of the artists it represents and the exhibitions it has organised both in its own space and at other off-site venues across the city, including at the esteemed National Gallery of Modern Art in Mumbai.

Over the years, Art Musings has nurtured a spectrum of artistic practices, working across generations and choices of medium and vocabulary. It has presented the work of such legendary Indian modernists as SH Raza, MF Husain, FN Souza, KG Subramanyan, Ram Kumar and Satish Gujral, all members of the first generation of post-colonial Indian artists.

The gallery enjoyed a long-term relationship with Raza, and held several exhibitions with him since 2004.

Among the other artists with whom the gallery works are stellar practitioners of distinctive approaches such as Anjolie Ela Menon, Sakti Burman, Baiju Parthan, Nalini Malani, Paresh Maity, Gopikrishna and Jayasri Burman. Also in their roster are young artists Raghava KK, Shilo Shiv Suleman, Smriti Dixit, Maya Burman, and Nilofer Suleman, their trajectories encompassing many diverse directions on the compass of contemporary art.

The Raza Foundation

The Raza Foundation is a non-profit organization devoted to arts, culture and ideas, established in 2001 by the widely acknowledged master of modern Indian art Late Sayed Haider Raza. The Foundation has been instrumental in creating dialogic spaces for various arts, poetry, ideas etc. through a series of talks, panel discussions, shows and concerts etc. and publications and fellowships to the younger talent for carrying serious research into the works of masters and contemporary issues of culture. The Raza Foundation organizes a large number of activities in as many as 20 cities every year. Keeping alive the legacy of the master, regular exhibitions of the paintings of Raza, his friends and contemporaries are also organized.

Through its vision, the Raza Foundation engages in extensive programs that promote emerging artists and writers. It aims to broaden the audience for art, literature, classical forms of music and dance, enhance opportunities for young artists, and explore and revitalise the connections between arts. The initiative enables the Foundation to respond to what is current in the art world, both nationally and internationally and to embark on interesting projects as they emerge in the cultural field.



ART MUSINGS

