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RIDING THE HIGH WAVES: FROM MEHTA TO GUPTA



Modern and Contemporary Indian Art March 30, 2006

New York – After the spectacular success of Christie's sale in September 2005 of *Modern and Contemporary Indian Art* which set a new world auction record for any modern Indian painting when Tyeb Mehta's *Mahisasura* sold for nearly \$1.6 million, this season the *Modern and Contemporary Indian Art* sale will have its own catalogue. With 166 lots and a total value of \$7 – 9 million, it will be the largest and most diversified selection ever offered in the field by an international auction house. Spanning India's enormously versatile 20th and 21st century artistic history, this auction will bring together several of the most established artists from the Progressive Artists Group such as Maqbool Fida Husain, Tyeb Mehta, F.N. Souza and Syed Haider Raza with today's most avant-garde artists including Subodh Gupta and Jitish Kallat.

The cover lot of the sale and a masterpiece of Indian modern painting is Vasudeo S. Gaitonde's large abstract oil *Untitled*, 1975 (estimate: \$600,000-800,000). Painted in what is generally considered Gaitonde's most intense and supreme phase of artistic creation, *Untitled* not only exemplifies the artist's superb technique and delicate sense of color, it also shows him as the artistic heir to some of the 20th century most influential artists such as Paul Klee and Mark Rothko. From a private Swiss collection, the painting was acquired in 1977.



Another of the Progressive Artists Group's most lauded artists, the 90-year-old Maqbool Fida Husain, is represented with more than a dozen paintings, providing a unique insight in the themes that fascinated Husain throughout his longstanding career. The horse is a recurrent theme for Husain who draws inspiration from Han and Tang pottery horses as well as from the sculptures by Marino Marini. A striking 1960 painting depicting three horses in a dramatic movement, *Untitled* (estimate: \$150,000-200,000), comes from the collection of an Italian diplomat and was formerly in the private collection of Roberto Rossellini, the Italian film director. Husain, who also counts film making among his many talents, was an ardent admirer of Rossellini and the two men were certainly acquainted.

The superb juxtaposition of colors and the intricate patterns typically associated with the stained-glass window technique was a source of inspiration and an artistic challenge for Francis Newton Souza and some of the paintings coming up in this sale are great examples of Newton's endeavors to imitate these effects. *Untitled* from 1958 (estimate: \$100,000-150,000) offers a view on what seems to be the outskirts of a city, dominated by a large white tower. All buildings are boldly painted and outlined with dense black contours with brilliant color fields, perfectly evoking the stained-glass windows. The present painting was showcased in an article published in 'Country Life' in 1966, featuring the architect couple Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew, the then owners of the work. It is now being offered by their descendants. Another important Souza, *Untitled (Blue Cityscape)* (estimate: \$100,000-150,000), is from a Swedish collection and clearly shows the same fascination with the stained-glass-window-pattern.

Among the contemporary art offerings, the sale features Ravinder Reddy's *Woman of Kapulapadu II* (estimate: \$80,000-100,000). This monumental – 65 x 57 x 81 in. - sculpture is executed in polyester, fiberglass and resin and depicts a woman's head in bright reds and blacks. Its sheer size and vibrant presence command attention and fill the space in an extraordinarily energetic way.



