

For Immediate Release

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CHRISTIE'S

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BE CAPTIVATED: The Founders and The Cutting Edge of South Asian Modern + Contemporary Art at Christie's in June



South Asian Modern + Contemporary Art

Wednesday, 10 June 2009 at 2.00pm

London – Christie's sale of *South Asian Modern and Contemporary Art* on Wednesday 10 June 2009 showcases a wide range of captivating works by the leading artists of 20th and 21st century South Asia, primarily India and Pakistan. From celebrated masters of the Progressive Artists Group through to the biggest names in contemporary art, attractive estimates cross the spectrum of artists, styles and media with estimates ranging from £1,000 to £600,000. The sale has is expected to realise in excess of £2million.

Highlights range from *Ragamala Series*, 1960 by **Maqbool Fida Husain** (b.1915) (estimate: £400,000-600,000) *illustrated top left* and *Untitled*, circa 1966-67 by **Tyeb Mehta** (b.1925) (estimate: £80,000-120,000), to *Red Carpet – 4*, 2007-08 by **Rashid Rana** (b.1968) (estimate: £135,000-200,000) and *Leap of Faith*, 2005-2006 by **Subodh Gupta** (b.1964) (estimate: £70,000-100,000) *illustrated top right*. Many works are from private collections and come fresh to the market.

Yamini Mehta, Christie's Senior Specialist, South Asian Modern + Contemporary Art, London:

The auction comes at a precipitous time as increasingly, international institutions are showcasing Indian and Pakistani art with several key exhibitions on the horizon throughout Europe. June 2009 coincides with Venice Biennale, which features both Indian and Pakistani artists while forthcoming exhibitions are in development at the Whitechapel Gallery and the Saatchi Gallery in London."

MODERNISM: The top lot of the sale is a large panoramic scene depicting Indian musicians, *Ragamala Series*, 1960, by **Maqbool Fida Husain** (b.1915) (estimate: £400,000-600,000) *illustrated top left*. Spanning both the Modern and Contemporary periods, M.F. Husain, often referred to as the 'Picasso of India', was a founding member of the revolutionary **Progressive Artists Group (PAG)**. Husain developed a style that uniquely fused the cultural heritage of India and the 'foreign' influences of European Modernism, paying homage to Indian traditions in their classical forms. From the 1950s to the late 1960s he produced one of his most energetic series entitled *Ragamala*, from which this work originates. The series captures

the artist's fascination with *rasa* (aesthetic rapture) and the rich palette reflects the influence of Indian miniatures. The impact of classical Indian sculpture is also apparent in Husain's exploration of three-dimensional figures on a two-dimensional plane. This celebratory canvas combines music, sculpture and dance to create a tangible visual rhythm.

Christie's set a world record price at auction for **Francis Newton Souza** in June 2008 and a record price for any Modern Indian artist when *Birth*, 1955, sold for £1,273,250. Souza, a one-time enfant terrible, became the only Indian artist to have a room dedicated to his works at Tate Britain in 2005. Four important works by the Souza, the intellectual backbone of the **Progressive Artists Group**, are featured in the sale. The figurative works include a charming *Portrait of an Elder*, 1961 (estimate: £30,000-60,000) *illustrated right*, which is offered from a private UK collection and *Untitled*, a 1957 figure in landscape from a private New York collection (estimate: £40,000-60,000). Souza's position in London's cultural scene was secured in 1955 through his first solo exhibition at Victor Musgrave's Gallery One. Two classic Souza landscapes from 1950s London comprise *Untitled (The Church)*, 1954 (estimate: £40,000-60,000), which is offered at auction for the first time in 30 years from the collection of a European Baroness, and *Untitled*, a 1958 architectural landscape (estimate: £40,000-60,000).

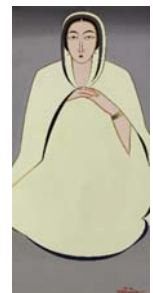


Syed Haider Raza's (b.1922) *La Terre*, 1981 (estimate: £60,000-80,000) *illustrated right*, was acquired directly from the artist, in Gorbio, by a Norwegian collector. The artist spent summers in Norway from the 1950s to 1970s and works acquired by European collectors are increasingly appearing on the market. The rich earth-toned hues reminiscent of Madhya Pradesh plains and prefiguring his later signature tantric geometric style make this an important and very desirable work from Raza's *oeuvre*.



Tyeb Mehta, one of India's greatest Modernist masters, (b.1925) is featured in a dynamic expressionist painting *Untitled*, circa 1966-67 (estimate: £80,000-120,000) *illustrated left*, which is a rare early work from a private American collection and in immaculate condition. Reflecting the influence of Francis Bacon, the palette and brushstrokes have great depth and vibrancy, while the human lovers appear to explode and then melt into the canvas - acting as forms that create space and tension.

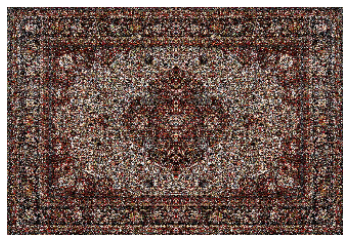
A major early work from 1963 by **Ram Kumar** (b.1924) depicts Benares, the holy city which had a profound and lasting impression on Kumar's artistic sensibility and which led to him to all but abandon his previous figural style (estimate: £40,000-60,000). Other highlights include two *Untitled* figurative works by **Avinash Chandra** (1901-1993) from 1976 (estimate: £4,000-6,000) and 1977 (estimate: £6,000-8,000), which were both acquired directly from the artist by the present European collector. Elsewhere, *Untitled* (estimate: £12,000-18,000) is by one of the stalwart founders of Indian modernism, **Jamini Roy** (1887-1972), *illustrated right*.



Sri Lankan Modernism is represented by **George Keyt** (1901-1993) who was a pioneer in the region, and a contemporary of the Progressive Artists Group. Keyt's *Six Dancers*, 1947 is a wonderful group of works on paper gifted by the artist. Elsewhere, three abstract paper works by **Nasreen Mohamedi** (1937-1990) represent a rare appearance by the artist at auction. Forming one lot, which is offered with no reserve (estimate: £8,000 - 12,000), they reflect both Mohamedi's training at London's Central St. Martins and her interaction with British artist Peter De Francia. An artist whose work straddles the preceding and following generations, Mohamedi was prominently exhibited in Documenta XII, Kassel, Germany 2007.

CONTEMPORARY WORKS: The strong group of contemporary art provides an opportunity to acquire key works by some of the best known South Asian practitioners today. **Subodh Gupta** is one of India's best known contemporary artists. His vocabulary is firmly rooted in the vernacular of everyday India. The monumental oversized stainless steel buckets (98 x 38 x 43 in.) *Leap of Faith*, 2005-2006, *illustrated top right page 1* (estimate: £70,000-100,000) epitomize Gupta's ability to capture tension and irony in the mundane durable items which are familiar to all echelons of Indian society. Gupta has most recently been exhibited prominently at 2009 Tate Triennale, Altermodern with a 10m high mushroom cloud comprised of vessels and also at the Serpentine. The artist will have a major solo exhibition in London later this year.

Photography is increasingly appearing in India as an artistic medium in its own right, as opposed to being a purely documentary tool for journalistic purposes. Recently integrated by Christie's in the South Asian category, photographs are an excellent entry point for works by major names in the Indian art scene, at more accessible prices. In the upcoming June 10 London auction, photographs by numerous artists will be featured, led by *Red Carpet – 4*, 2007-08 **Rashid Rana** (b.1968) (estimate: £135,000-200,000), *illustrated below* and also includes *MCD Taps*, 2007 by **Atul Bhalla** (b. 1964) (estimate: £4,000-6,000); **City Uprise**, 2006 by **Gigi Scaria** (b.1973) (estimate: £2,000-3,000) and *The Ethnographic Series*, 2000-2004 by **Pushpamala N.** (b.1956) (estimate: £15,000-20,000), as well as works by **Anita Dube**, and **Vivek Vilasini**.



Rashid Rana is one of the best known multi-media Pakistani contemporary artists; his work is both politically engaged and conceptually engaging. *Red Carpet – 4*, 2007-08 (estimate: £135,000-200,000) *illustrated left*, is an extraordinary and important work by Rana, which represents the violence and beauty to be found in daily life of the region which run alongside each other in stark contrast; this work is an ironic celebration. It was inspired on

the day that Benazir Bhutto returned from exile: in the morning Rana shared the sense of great optimism for a bright future; during the day he endured his first visit to a slaughterhouse and the process of desensitization towards what he saw; by the evening the joyous celebrations from the morning had been replaced by carnage – not of animals at slaughter, but by the human victims of a suicide bomb attack on Bhutto's life. This day resulted in *Red Carpet*, which is created from hundreds of composite images of goats being slaughtered, arranged to form a stunning impression of the traditional tapestries of the region. This marks the first time that a photographic work is featured on the catalogue front cover for Christie's South Asian Modern + Contemporary Art.



Atul Bhalla (b. 1964), whose physical practice engages with environmental and social concerns, is represented by the work *Wash / Water / Blood*, 2007 (estimate: £8,000-12,000) *illustrated left*, from his seminal performance piece in 2005. Similarly

Vivek Vilasini's (b. 1964) large scale work *Last Supper – Gaza*, 2008 (estimate: £15,000-20,000) *illustrated right*, is an arresting re-enactment of Leonardo da Vinci's composition into a poignant present day context, by burqa-clad women.



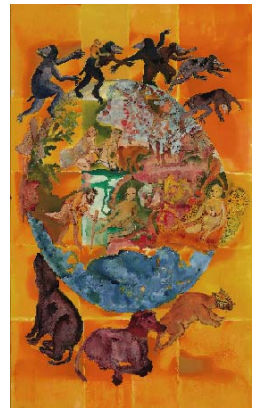
Amongst an exciting group of Modern and Contemporary Pakistani artists featured are *Untitled*, a 1991 canvas by **Zahoor Ul Akhlaq** (1941-1999), who is one of the founding figures of the Pakistani contemporary art movement (estimate: £12,000-18,000) and *Untitled (Woman with Pigeons)* by **Jamil Naqsh** (b.1939), which was a gift from the artist to the present owner, *illustrated below right*. Naqsh left Pakistan

and has been working in London for the past 20 years; thematically he often examines and celebrates the female form and beauty. Three works by contemporary Pakistani miniaturists include *Untitled (Burqa Series)*, 2006 by **Waseem Ahmed** (b.1976); *Traversing Territories – I*, 2008 by **Talha Rathore** (b.1969) (estimate: £3,000-5,000); *Untitled* by **Mudassar Manzoor** (b.1979) (estimate: £4,000-6,000) and *Maligned Monster II* by **Shahzia Sikander** (b. 1969) (estimate: £1,500-2,000).



The Bollywood style and scale of *Lost Kingdom of Navin*, 2008 is by **Navin Rawanchaikul** (b.1971), who recently featured in the Tate Triennial exhibition, *Altermodern*, and is being offered at auction for the first time. This is a multi-faceted snapshot of life today which 'casts' art world luminaries within India as one would normally see film heroes and villains (estimate: £30,000-40,000),

illustrated above. Other highlights include *Sita/Medea 1*, 2004 by **Nalini Malani** (b.1946) (estimate: £30,000-50,000) *illustrated right*, who featured in the last Venice Biennale and numerous institution shows, including the first Indian retrospective at the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA) in 2007 and the Serpentine exhibition of Indian art in 2008. Elsewhere, *Love Terrace – II*, 2007 by **Jagannath Panda** (b.1970) (estimate: £30,000-40,000) skilfully combines textiles and references to traditional miniatures, displaying a modern sensibility which examines the contemporary environment and increasing urban sprawl of New Delhi. This eclectic mix of works offers museum quality pieces at levels for any collector.



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Images available on request

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Notes to Editors:

Global interest in Indian Art has established the category as a mainstay of the contemporary scene in London, New York and Hong Kong. Since launching Modern and Contemporary Indian Art sales in New York in 2000, worldwide sales in this category at Christie's have grown from \$656,000 to over \$45 million in 2008.

Sale dates:

South Asian Modern + Contemporary Art on Wednesday, 10 June 2009 at 2.00pm: Christie's South Kensington, Old Brompton Road, London, SW3 3LD

Public Viewing dates

Christie's South Kensington, Old Brompton Road, London, SW3 3LD between 4 June and 9 June 2009

About Christie's

Christie's, the world's leading art business had global auction and private sales in 2008 that totaled £2.8 billion/\$5.1 billion. Christie's is a name and place that speaks of extraordinary art, unparalleled service and expertise, as well as international glamour. Founded in 1766 by James Christie, Christie's conducted the greatest auctions of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, and today remains a popular showcase for the unique and the beautiful. Christie's offers over 600 sales annually in over 80 categories, including all areas of fine and decorative arts, jewellery, photographs, collectibles, wine, and more. Prices range from \$200 to over \$80 million. Christie's has 57 offices in 32 countries and 10 salerooms around the world including in London, New York, Paris, Geneva, Milan, Amsterdam, Dubai and Hong Kong. More recently, Christie's has led the market with expanded initiatives in emerging and new markets such as Russia, China, India and the United Arab Emirates, with successful sales and exhibitions in Beijing, Mumbai and Dubai.