

For Immediate Release

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VIBRANT TYEB MEHTA PAINTING HIGHLIGHTS CHRISTIE'S SECTION OF MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY INDIAN ART

Indian and Southeast Asian Art Including Modern and Contemporary Indian Art
September 21, 2005



Tyeb Mehta (b. 1925)
Mabhisura, 1997
Acrylic on canvas
Estimate: \$600,000-800,000



Ram Kumar (b. 1924)
Untitled (Benares), 1981
Oil on canvas
Estimate: \$80,000-120,000

New York – Among the most remarkable changes in the art market over the past few seasons is the steep rise in demand for Indian contemporary art, largely brought about by the burgeoning economic power of Indians and expatriates. The first section of modern and contemporary Indian art organized by Christie's in New York took place in 2000 and totaled \$650,000 – five years later, Christie's sale of *Indian and Southeast Asian Art Including Modern and Contemporary Indian Art* is offering Tyeb Mehta's extremely powerful painting *Mabhisura* with a pre-sale estimate of \$600,000-800,000. With this estimate, Christie's not only challenges all previous world auction records in the field but also reinforces the strong momentum set by this vibrant new collecting category. Besides the 138

lot section of modern and contemporary Indian paintings and sculpture, the sale will offer major pieces of Gandharan, Indian, Tibetan, Mongolian and Southeast Asian art as well (*see separate release*).

Tyeb Mehta (b. 1925), was part of the vanguard Progressive Artists Group that drew stylistic inspiration from European masters – especially Francis Bacon in Mehta’s case - while re-interpreting distinctly Indian themes post-Independence in 1948. He is not a prolific artist due to his highly exacting and meticulous standards. *Mahisasura* refers to the traditional Hindu tale of the Warrior Goddess Durga slaying the Buffalo Demon, Mahisha. However, Mehta’s interpretation recasts Mahisha as a sympathetic figure in a seductive embrace with Durga, symbolizing the spiritual transformation after union with the divine. The striking red/black/white painting, resembling as one art critic called it “an exalted act of yogic origami,” will be offered with an estimate of \$600,000-800,000, a figure that more than doubles the previous world auction record for a work by Mehta and for any Indian contemporary painting at \$317,500, set by Christie’s in New York in September 2002.

A strong and varied selection of works by Francis Newton Souza (1924 - 2002) includes landscapes, nudes and still-lives. One of the many highlights is *Girl with Hairpin and Girdle*, 1957 (estimate: \$80,000-120,000) from the collection of John Sankey. The work, bearing an impressive provenance, was twice published and part of an early Souza exhibition with Gallery One, London, in 1957. Both gentle and yet highly suggestive and melding European conventions with a compelling Indian motif, the present painting is arguably one of Souza’s most sublime depictions of the nude female.

Maqbool Fida Husain (b. 1915), the elegant, soon-to-be nonagenarian who honored Christie’s New York with a guest appearance during the March sale, is represented by an impressive group of 16 works. He is currently India’s best known contemporary artist. As a celebrity in his own right, he still paints with as much vigor as he did half a century ago. The highlight of the group is a large work from a highly sought after period in Husain’s oeuvre. Entitled, *Trial*, 1969 (estimate: \$300,000-500,000), it is a beautiful representation of a Panchayat session depicting rural women, executed with a thick impasto in a subtle palette.

Another key figure in Indian contemporary art is Ram Kumar (b. 1924), who started out as a figurative painter and turned to abstraction in the 1960s after a pivotal journey to the holy city, Benares. The sale offers a fine group of Kumar’s work from two private New York collections, of which the cityscape *Untitled (Benares)*, 1981 (estimate: \$80,000-120,000) and the landscape *Untitled (Laddakh)*, 1983 (estimate: \$50,000-70,000) are the focal points.

Mirror Image by Akbar Padamsee (b. 1928) (estimate: \$140,000-180,000) evokes a mythical landscape. Executed as a diptych in a bold palette and using diametrically opposed colors such as oranges and blues, the painting represents the basic elements of nature; earth and air, water and fire. The

selection further includes an early 1950s work of an untitled Christ figure depicted with strong contours and expression, reflecting Georges Rouault's fauvist influence (estimate: \$50,000-70,000).

Finally, the sale has expanded to also include modern sculpture, a medium that has been overlooked for far too long. This section contains a bronze figure of a bull by Tyeb Mehta (estimate: \$60,000-90,000) as well as two bronze works by Dhruva Mistry (b. 1957), an internationally recognized sculptor who was inducted to Britain's Royal Academy of the Arts; and works by Himmat Shah (b. 1933), Navjot Altaf (b. 1949) and Zarina Hashmi (b. 1937).

Auction: Indian and Southeast Asian Art

September 21 at 10 a.m.

Including Modern and Contemporary Indian Art

and 2 p.m.

Viewing: Christie's Galleries at Rockefeller Center

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Images available on request

Visit Christie's Web site at www.christies.com

More information about Christie's sale of *Indian and Southeast Asian Art Including Modern and Contemporary Indian Art* can be found on www.christies.com. All lots from the sale can be viewed online along with full catalogue descriptions on Lotfinder®, which also allows clients to leave absentee bids. www.christies.com provides information on more than 80 sale categories, buying and selling at auction, complete auction results, and Christie's international auction calendar.