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Sotheby's Modern and Contemporary South Asian Art Sale on 10 September 2012 to Feature Four Private American Collections



Ram Kumar, **Untitled (Benares)**, est. \$150/200,000

Sotheby's sale of Modern and Contemporary South Asian Art in New York on 10 September 2012 features high quality works from the 1950s to 1980s that are largely drawn from four private American collections. These include the Abe and Jan Weisblat Collection - the most important collection of Indian Art to appear at auction since the sale of the Herwitz Collection in 2000. A strong selection of paintings from the high period of Modernism in South Asia are included in this 95 lot sale that is estimated to fetch \$3.1/4.5 million; the auction will be on exhibition at Sotheby's from Friday, 7 September. Spearheading the sale is an early work from Ram Kumar, **Untitled (Benares)**, (est. \$150/200,000, above), a 1966 oil on canvas, from the Weisblat Collection. Kumar visited Benares for the first time with MF Husain in the early 1960s in order to sketch on the spot and feel the city's depth and intensity.

Commenting on the sale, Priyanka Mathew, Head of Sale, Modern and Contemporary & South Asian Art at Sotheby's, commented: "We are extremely pleased to present our forthcoming Modern and Contemporary South Asian Art sale, which includes a number of works that are entirely fresh to the market such as the exceptional and important Weisblat Collection. Highlights of the sale include paintings by many of the leaders of Indian Modernism such as MF Husain, Ram Kumar and SH Raza."

The Abe and Jan Weisblat Collection

A seminal MF Husain work to be offered is the bold, large-scale canvas, **Untitled (The Three Muses, Maya Series)** (est. \$500/700,000), which was acquired directly from the artist in the 1960s, and has taken pride of place as the centerpiece of this historic collection. The piece presents a rare and complex composition in which the artist himself appears as the central figure. The dreamlike painting is from the diverse series entitled *Maya*, a theme that is central to both Buddhist and Hindu philosophy. Husain uses his signature bold outlines and standard motif – the faceless woman.



After his first son Shafat was born, MF Husain began working at Fantasy Furniture Shop as a toy designer. He soon became popular for his imaginative and beautiful concepts, and even after he quit his work there, he continued to create wooden toys for children. Among those, offered in this sale are **Tonga** (est. \$15/20,000, below left) and **Bullock Cart** (est. \$10/15,000, below right).



The collection also includes Krishen Khanna's **A Graph of Pleasure and Pain** (est. \$80/120,000), **Untitled (Blue Abstract)** by Ram Kumar (est. \$100/150,000) and **Untitled (Mother and Child)** by MF Husain (est. \$120/180,000, right).

Abe Weisblat moved to India with his wife Jan Hallett after he received a Ford Foundation fellowship to study in Bombay in 1953. Abe's insightful reports from Bombay led the Ford Foundation to hire him to administer its fellowship program, then in 1958 he moved on to the Council on Economic and Cultural Affairs, a small organization funded by John D. Rockefeller III, whose mission was to promote agricultural development in Asia. In its early years the Council provided travel fellowships to Asian artists, whom Abe sought out. Abe and Jan soon became close friends with some of the most influential Indian artists of the time: MF Husain, Krishen Khanna and his wife Renu, and SH Raza and his wife Janine Mongillat. Inevitably, Abe began to amass a collection of contemporary Indian art.



The Collection of the Late June and John Lewis



After the late June and John Lewis moved to Delhi in 1959, they had the good fortune of befriending the collectors Tom and Martha Keehn, as well as Lakshmi Jain, the co-founder of the Indian Cooperative Union; all of whom played a significant role in the development of Indian art. During the 1970s, the Lewis' became deeply invested in acquiring paintings by Indian Modernists, purchasing from galleries as well as from the artists themselves.

A highlight of the Late June and John Lewis Collection is MF Husain's **Untitled (Dancers Under the Full Moon)** (est. \$90/150,000, left), an example of the unique amalgam of post-Independence/post-Impressionist painting: powerfully evocative of classical Indian plastic traditions and distinctly Modern at the same time. The triple axial posture of the five figures draws upon the *tribhanga* postures of classical sculpture, and the tight overlapping forms of the central figures are reminiscent of the frieze panels of North Indian temples.

Created during a key point in Indian history, **Untitled** (est. \$50/70,000) from Gulam Rasool Santosh uses earthy colors and tells a story from life in Kashmir. It was acquired directly from the artist's family.

The Collection of Manuela and Cleveland Fuller

A diplomatic family in the U.S. Foreign Service, Manuela and Cleveland Fuller spent more than twenty years posted in various locations throughout South Asia. While living in Bombay in the early 1960s, the Fullers met and built lifelong friendships with Jehangir Sabavala, MF Husain and Laxman Shreshtha, among others.

A highly important 1970 work, **The Unruffled Calm** (est. \$150/200,000, right) from Jehangir Sabavala is the focal point of this collection. This serene composition was purchased at the opening of Sabavala's exhibition in the early 1970s and has remained in the Fuller's private collection since then. This visionary, ethereal landscape reflects his reorientation toward luminous, multi-tonal dimensionality – a shift from his semi-Cubist abstractions of the mid-1960s.



Also featured in this collection is **Untitled (Bombay Night)** by Laxman Shreshtha (est. \$15/20,000), originally acquired directly from the artist in Kathmandu in 1963.

The Guyer Family Collection

Of the works from the Guyer Family Collection offered in the sale are two paintings by senior artist Krishna Shamrao Kulkarni, **Untitled (Basket Maker)** (est. \$8/12,000, below left) and **Untitled (Farmer Plowing)** (est. \$10/15,000, below right). Early works by the artist such as these are rarely seen on the market. Both were originally acquired by Mrs. Guyer's parents, Mr. and Mrs. J.C. Penney – the well-known philanthropists and founders of the eponymous department store – during one of their visits to India in the mid-1950s.



Other Highlights

Other highlights in the sale include a large early work on paper by artist Gulam Rasool Santosh featuring a village scene. **Untitled** (est. \$50/70,000), created during a key point in Indian history, uses bold lines and earthy colors to present a narrative of idyllic life in Kashmir culled from the artist's childhood memories. The painting was acquired directly from the artist's family.

Other notable works include **Noél** by SH Raza (est. \$80/120,000), **Mirza Sahib** by Manjit Bawa (est. \$120/180,000), Gulam Rasool Santosh's neo-Tantric **Untitled** (est. \$60/80,000), and Manjit Bawa's **Untitled (Mystic Tiger)** (est. \$80/120,000, below).



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