

## Iconic Processions Sacred Stones to Modern Masterpieces

Featuring M. F. Husain, Ram Kumar, Anjolie Ela Menon, S. H. Raza, Jehangir Sabavala and F. N. Souza

In Partnership with Nayef Homsy

September 11 – October 20, 2012

Press Preview & Reception: Tuesday, September 11, 6:00pm – 8:00pm

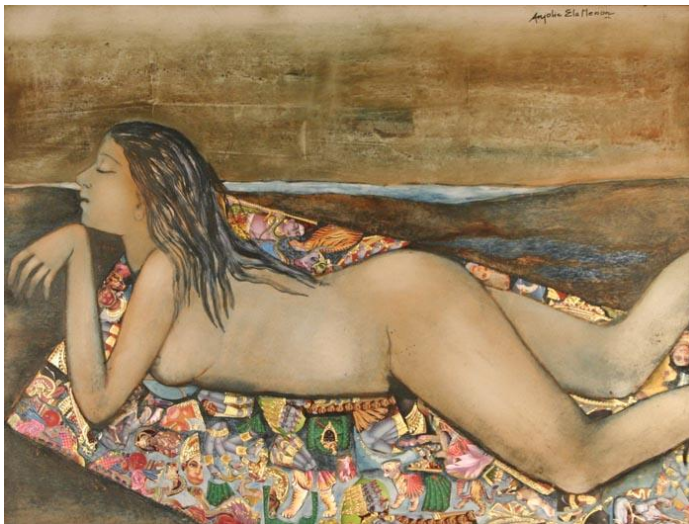
35 Great Jones St., New York NY 10012

AICON GALLERY is proud to present *Iconic Procession: Sacred Stones to Modern Masterpieces*, an exhibition of works by India's Modern Masters, alongside a selection of South Asian sculptural masterpieces and miniature paintings dating back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, curated by **Nayef Homsy**. The accompanying sculptural selection is drawn from the Ancient Region of Gandhara, Central India and Pala regions, spanning from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Together, these works showcase the primacy and endurance of mythological and tribal imagery in Indian art, while bridging nearly two thousand years of artistic tradition and cultural heritage, from antiquity to Modernism.



Jehangir Sabavala, 2004, *The Bridge*, Oil on canvas, 48 x 48 in.

Founded by **M. F. Husain, Ram Kumar, S. H. Raza, F. N Souza** and other artists in the years after India's independence, the Bombay Progressive Artists Group (PAG) grew to be the most influential group of modern artists in India. The artists at the forefront sought new forms of expression, to capture and convey India's complex past and its emerging post-colonial culture. The fusion of Indian subject matter with post-Impressionist colors, Cubist forms and Expressionist gestures forged a synthesis between early European modernist techniques and the ever-shifting cultural and historical identities of India. The PAG further sought to break with the revivalist notions established by the Bengal School of Art, opting instead to paint with absolute freedom over content and technique, as their internationalist desires combined with the need to represent and belong to their homeland. Among the immediate inheritors of the PAG's artistic mission, masters **Anjolie Ela Menon** and **Jehangir Sabavala** carried these traditions forward over the decades with their own distinctively Indian approach to modern art.



Anjolie Ela Menon, *Nude Eden Revisited*, Oil on masonite, 36 x 47 in.

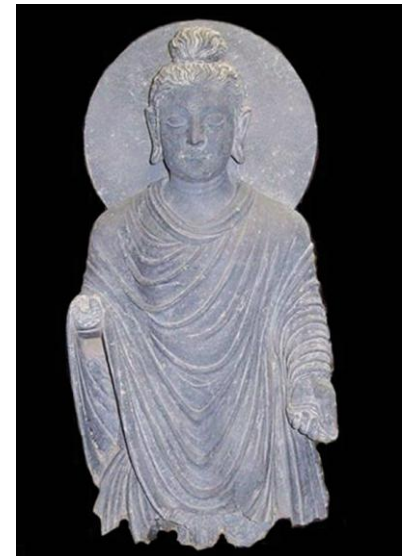
With a career spanning six decades, **Jehangir Sabavala's** body of work was consistent and enveloping, evolving from his early cubist and figurative works to the more subtle and introspective masterworks of the 1960s, evoking the very nature of human experience. Sabavala created heavily atmospheric canvases that were at once dreamlike and acutely perceivable, drawing the viewer into a world of his own making. Favoring sublime landscapes and ethereal figures, his paintings are born of a distinctly cubist influence. Planes of color fit together in a subdued palette, opting for veiled light and mid-tones, contrary to the bolder tonalities and louder imagery of his contemporaries. Sabavala worked mostly in oils, creating landscapes, seascapes, cityscapes and figures. Well-versed in modernist style and theory, yet with a strong classical influence, Sabavala composed shifting geometric wedges with masterful light, color and texture, joined together in vast, tranquil scenes imbued with a sense of nature's spiritual magnanimity and mystery.

Regarded as the “Picasso of India,” **M. F. Husain**, is arguably the most recognizable figure of modern and contemporary Indian art. His narrative works, executed in a modified Cubist style, can be caustic and funny as well as serious and somber. His themes, usually treated in series, include hallmarks of Indian culture and history, such as the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the British Empire, and motifs of Indian urban and rural life. His use of folk, tribal, religious and mythological icons, such as Mother Teresa, Gandhi, Krishna and Saraswati, are characteristic to his work, revealing his penchant for blending diverse cultural influences.

**F. N. Souza’s** unrestrained and graphic style creates thought-provoking and powerful images. His repertoire of subjects includes still life, landscape, nudes and icons of Christianity, boldly rendered in a frenetic distortion of form. His paintings express defiance and impatience with the convention and banality of life. A recurrent theme in his works is the conflict of a man-woman relationship, placing emphasis on sexual tension and friction. An articulate genius, he augmented his powerful and sometimes disturbing canvases with his sharp, stylish and provocative prowess.

**Ram Kumar**, like many of his peers among the first wave of post-colonial Indian artists, combined an internationalist desire with the need to belong to their homeland. His quest for an indigenous tenor did not mean a superficial inventory of ‘native’ motifs; Kumar instead demonstrated that a painter could enact the innermost dramas of a culture while maintaining individuality, even idiosyncrasy, of his art. Ram Kumar’s style, which has proceeded through an alternation of joyous expressivity and brooding reticence, plays out a crucial polarity of emphasis in the context of Indic culture, journeying from city to landscape, via the reminiscing quality of art.

Early in her career, **Anjolie Ela Menon** incorporated influences of Van Gogh, Expressionism, Modigliani, Amrita Sher-Gil and M. F. Husain. Primarily a portraitist, her canvases were dominated by flat planes of brightly colored impasto, her outlines bold and sharp with youthful vigor. Menon embellished her refined texture by burnishing the surface with a soft, dry brush, evoking a glow similar to medieval icons of early Christian art. Frontal perspectives, averted heads and a slight elongation of the body are repeated subjects, particularly of the female nude. The brashness of her early years gradually transformed into nostalgia for the past, revealing a more reserved execution. Fusing the erotic and the melancholy, Menon developed a distinct iconography of distance and loss in later years, with subjects of black crows, empty chairs and beds, windows and hidden figures. The breadth and content of Menon’s body of work makes it difficult to compartmentalize, lending it an artistic self-expression uniquely hers.



**Standing Buddha**, Ancient region of Gandhara, Grey schist, Height: 13 in., 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> century



**Ganesha**, Kangra, 11x14 inches, Late 19th century

Accompanying the Modern component of the exhibition is an iconic collection of South Asian antique sculpture and miniature painting from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, curated in partnership with **Nayef Homsy**. Now a private dealer and specialist based in New York, Nayef honed his expertise in ancient Indian, Himalayan and Southeast Asian art, having worked with the late renowned collector Doris Weiner for six years. The collection on view features a pristine **Standing Buddha** from the ancient region of **Gandhara**, a large **Pala Surya** from the 11<sup>th</sup> Century and a festive **Kangra Ganesha** miniature, among many others.

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