



Ninety works of India's greatest modern and contemporary masters come together in a blue-chip suite of rare works, in remembrance of Kumar Gallery's founder Virendra Kumar at the Kumar Gallery online exhibition. Virendra was close to the Progressives and a special friend of F N Souza. Kumar Gallery had historic exhibitions of Souza at Sunder Nagar Gallery as well as Sainik Farms. Virendra passed away last year.

Amongst the 17 works of Souza five works are ultimate masterpieces in composition. Begin with *Untitled girl with a mirror*, a 1962 tempera on canvas, of a romantic nuanced nude created in graceful curves and appreciation of the feminine form unlike Souza's later nudes that were more puerile in facets.

Souza was known for the heads he created as a subject of themes ranging from kings to priests to individuals with monstrous faces and surreal dynamics of design. This head of a king 1964, has about it a robust rendering of domination, damnation and an expression of evil acts of suppression and obsession with power.

The next head is a 1950 masterpiece of a girl's profile created with deft details and cross-hatched magnificence. *Violet Head* has a strong Picassoic flavour though the nose stud and large earrings give it the village belle insignia.

The fourth is a radiant *Red Moon* (1966) that is reminiscent of his Spanish series. Here, Souza captures a simultaneously bright and austere scene, using strong warm colours to

STELLAR SOUZAS

India's greatest modern and contemporary masters come together in a blue-chip suite of rare works, in remembrance of Kumar Gallery's founder Virendra Kumar, says **UMA NAIR**



depict what is most likely the view from his studio on a dreamy sunset evening. With a combination of meticulous lines and crosshatches, Souza foregrounds the few trees in this scene, and a few bare branches just visible and sprinkled.

Behind them, a majestic moon illuminates the stylised sky recalling the Catholic architecture that informed so many of Souza's landscapes in the 1950s.

A gorgeous drawing of a landscape is *Churches and Houses* (1958). It is a landscape

done with Christian symbolism and a veritable personification of London. Writing about Souza's urban landscapes, fellow artist Jagdish Swaminathan noted, "Souza's cityscapes are the congealed visions of a mysterious world. Whether standing

solidly in enamelled petrification or delineated in thin colour with calligraphic intonations, the cityscapes of Souza are purely plastic entities with no reference to memories or mirrors." (J. Swaminathan, 'Souza's Exhibition', *Lalit Kala Contemporary* 40, New Delhi, March 1995, p. 31)

Showing online for the next five months, this exhibition is a treat for tired eyes. It reaffirms Virendra Kumar's place as an astute and philatelic collector with an eye for rarity. In tribute to Virendra Kumar on his 89th birth anniversary, director Sunit Kumar says, "There was a time when the evolution of style was the result of a hard-won struggle against the prevailing commercial trends. It was precisely at those crossroads in the history of India that Virendra acted as the principal tastemaker and visionary patron for serious, avant-garde artistic expression." The early years between the 1950s and 70s tell a tale of vintage vitality.

(Picture courtesy: Kumar Gallery, Delhi)