

KUMAR GALLERY



Virendra Kumar's unmatched collection of Indian art is now on view

90 works of India's greatest modern and contemporary masters come together in an elegiac ensemble in remembrance of Kumar Gallery's founder Virendra Kumar



N. S. Bendre's Omkareshwar Temple of Peace (1945) is one of the rare canvases on display at Kumar Gallery

Kumar Gallery of Sunder Nagar, New Delhi, was a rite of passage for some of the biggest Indian masters. From M.F Husain to Newton Souza, Krishen Khanna to V.S Gaitonde—they all had solo shows at the gallery which was established in 1955 by Virendra Kumar Jain, then a 22-year-old art lover. The pioneer passed away in 2020 and on his 89th birth anniversary Kumar Gallery opened a show 'Celebration: Masters of Modern & Contemporary Indian Art'.

"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," says director Tarun Jain about the role his uncle played in championing Indian artists, many of whom became life-long friends.

Amongst the 90 works are a stellar suite of 17 works by Francis Newton Souza who was a close friend of Virendra. In the 1990s one recalls visiting Kumar gallery in Sunder Nagar and viewing 22 landscapes by Souza all priced between



F. N. Souza's Untitled (Girl with Mirror) (1962)



F. N. Souza, Untitled (Churches & Houses) 1958

Rs 20,000 and Rs30,000 each. In this show there are still lifes, landscapes, a charismatic head of a woman along with an erotic Girl With A Mirror. The Red Moon (1960) is an enigmatic landscape in tangerine and red hues, while the head of a woman is a detailed dramatic creation. Souza's Flower with Vase too is a work created in a surreal signature. Other works range between portraits and an evocative drawing of churches and houses, done in neat linear fashion in 1958.



M. F. Husain, Indian Village (1960) Oil on canvas

M.F Husain's early period is represented here in a mesmerising self portrait as well as a spirited study of horses from 1970. Equally evocative are Figures in a Field (1959) and Indian Village (1960). Husain's treatment of form and fervour both become his hallmark of compositional clarity and emotive essence—Figures in a Field is an ensemble of women and a man with a subtle erotic aura while Indian Village is set in Prussian blue against a midnight sky.

Some other rare treasures include Omkareshwar (Temple of Peace) created in 1945 by NS Bendre, a resplendent gouache on paper that revels in a tensile landscape study done in cubist strokes. Abstract artist G R Santosh's early figurative of a set of Kashmiri women is a masterpiece beyond comparison, done in the fashion of the cubist rendition of the female forms. Also brilliant is Ghulam's tantric abstraction of the symbolism of man and nature.

Krishen Khanna, the last of the Progressives, is known for his series based on life and literature and music. His Figure on a Tiger Skin (1999) is a brilliant yet melancholy filled poise of a young boy. Krishen's Thumri is yet another masterpiece of music and melody while his Bandwallah is a quintessential portrait of Delhi's bandwallahs who play for marriages.



S. H. Raza, Basse Provence (1960) Oil on canvas

Amongst women artists a panoramic B Prabha and Meera Mukherjee's Archer are deeply evocative works. Also of great stature the Ram Kumar works as well as a deeply resonant Sayed Haider Raza whose 100th birth anniversary will be celebrated in Paris and India this year.

By UMA NAIR