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SMS VIEWS
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When The Horse Becomes Motion

M. F. Husain's Horse Motif: Form, Colour, Memory and Kinetic Energy

Puja Sarkar

Maqbool Fida Husain occupies a foundational position in the history of Indian modernism.

A founding member of the Progressive Artists' Group established in 1947, Husain helped articulate a modern Indian visual language that moved beyond academic realism and the revivalist traditions of the Bengal School. His practice brought together Indian mythology, folk memory, popular culture, history and international modernist vocabularies through an unmistakably individual language of line, colour and fragmented form. Among the recurring images that came to define Hussain's artistic vocabulary, the horse remains perhaps the most recognizable.



Image Courtesy of Icon International

The motif entered his work in the early 1950s and continued throughout his long career. Its significance was not merely anatomical or pictorial. Husain encountered horses in childhood, through the tonga horses of Indore and the Muharram processions associated with the decorated figure of Duldul. His visual vocabulary was subsequently enriched by encounters with Chinese painting, particularly Xu Beihong, as well as European artists such as Marino Marini.. The present Horses - (Acrylic on Board, 16 x 10 Inches) demonstrates why this motif became so central to Husain.

The painting does not describe horses in a conventional naturalistic sense; instead, the animal becomes an instrument for translating movement into paint. Several equine forms appear to overlap, intersect and surge through the confined pictorial field. Their bodies are fractured into angular planes, while heavy black contours act almost like calligraphic strokes, simultaneously defining and disrupting anatomy. The absence of conventional modeling allows the viewer to experience the horses less as individual animals than as a concentrated field of kinetic energy. The composition is particularly striking because of its tension between compression and movement. The vertical format offers relatively little physical space, yet the horses seem to resist containment. Against the deep crimson ground, the dominant oranges and ochres of animals acquire an almost incandescent presence, while the flashes of yellow, blue and white punctuate the surface like visual impulses. The small circular ochre form at the right and the blue linear element along the edge introduce an architectural rhythm, preventing the composition from becoming merely chaotic. Husain's horses have frequently been interpreted as embodiments of power, freedom, vitality and grace. Yet this particular work invites a more nuanced reading. Here, power is not represented through monumental scale but through the velocity of the brushstroke.

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The horses appear simultaneously vigorous and vulnerable, advancing and colliding within an unstable pictorial space. Their fragmented bodies suggest that movement itself - not anatomical completeness - is the true subject. There is also a distinctly Indian dimension to this modernist vocabulary.

Husain's horse could carry multiple cultural memories: the battlefield, royal processions, mythology, Muharram, the Ashwamedha tradition and the broader symbolic association of the horse with energy and transcendence. His own description of horses crossing from Karbala to Bankura terracotta and from Chinese traditions to the Ashwamedha underscores the deliberately plural cultural universe behind the motif. What makes Horses compelling, therefore, is not simply the presence of a celebrated Husain motif. It is the conversion of the horse from subject into visual language. Line becomes movement; colour becomes force; fragmentation becomes rhythm. In this compact work, Husain demonstrates the essential principle of his modernism: the recognizable world need not be abandoned in order to become abstract. It can instead be accelerated, fractured and transformed until its deeper energy becomes visible. For Husain, the horse was never merely an animal. It was a vehicle of motion, memory and imagination and, in works such as this, a means of making movement itself visible.

The Embroidery Art of Renuka Sen

Anjan Sen

My grandmother, Renuka Sen, was, in fact, a gifted artist. She was born in 1900 and passed away in 1960.

She was born into a wealthy and conservative family. Her father, Vaidya Nagendranath Sen, was the founder of N. N. Sen & Co., a company renowned for its Kesharanjan hair oil. In those days, women rarely ventured outside their homes. They pursued their interests in reading, writing, music, literature, and the arts within the confines of their households.



Renuka Sen

My grandmother began practicing embroidery on fabric. With nothing but a needle and thread, she could create extraordinary works of art.

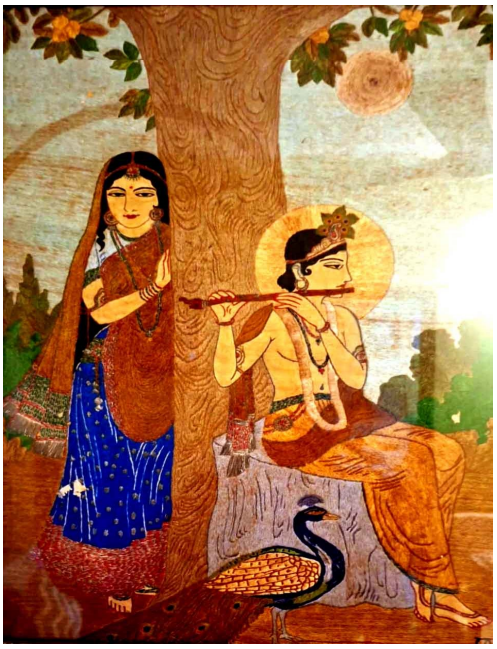
At present, five of her works have been preserved by our family. Viewed from a distance, they resemble Indian miniature paintings. The needle served as her brush, and the thread as her paint. She was capable of producing work of remarkable delicacy and precision, comparable to the finest miniature paintings. Two of her depictions of Radha and Krishna seem to evoke the devotional spirit of Vaishnava Padavali poetry. Her paternal family was deeply influenced by Vaishnavism, and she grew up listening to kirtan performances held in the family home. Drawing inspiration from this devotional atmosphere, she created her embroidered pictures. She may also have seen miniature paintings or printed reproductions of them.

During her childhood, oil paintings belonging to the Early Bengal or Dutch Bengal schools were quite popular in the homes of wealthy Bengali families. There may have been such oil paintings in the homes of members of her paternal family, including works by Raja Ravi Varma. She may have had the opportunity to see these paintings as well.





By the latter half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, several books on Indian art had already been published in English, containing reproductions of numerous miniature paintings. She may have encountered these publications too. In her parental home, she might also have seen paintings depicting stories of Krishna, episodes from the *Mahabharata*, and scenes from the *Ramayana*, particularly in works associated with the Early Bengal and Dutch Bengal schools. One of her depictions of Goddess Saraswati is also outstanding.





Another striking composition features a deity riding a swan against a blue sky dotted with white clouds. The deity is shown within a red circular form adorned with small white dots, with one hand raised in the *abhaya mudra*, the gesture of reassurance and fearlessness, and a *kamandalu*, or water pot, in the other. Her depiction of Krishna and Arjuna in a chariot is equally impressive. These few surviving works alone bear testimony to her artistic excellence. On one occasion, her artwork received an award in a competition held abroad. I remember seeing the certificate when I was a child. It is remarkable to reflect on how women of that era continued to pursue art and culture despite the constraints of conservative social conventions and the lack of personal freedom. My grandmother's work stands as a testament to their talent, creativity, and perseverance.

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Clay Dolls of Krishnagar

Samba Prasad Biswas

Krishnagar, a historic town in Nadia district of West Bengal, India, is renowned for its exquisite clay dolls, a traditional craft celebrated for its remarkable realism, delicate modelling, and artistic detail.



The craft is closely associated with **Ghurni**, an area of Krishnagar that became a major centre of clay-doll making. The tradition is believed to have developed during the eighteenth century under the patronage of **Raja Krishnachandra of Nadia**. Artisans, traditionally known as *Kumors* or potters, developed a distinctive style of modelling that differed from ordinary terracotta work. Instead of producing only religious figures, they began creating highly realistic representations of people from different walks of life.

Krishnagar clay dolls depict a wide range of subjects, including farmers, fishermen, artisans, musicians, religious figures, village women, traders, and characters from everyday Bengali society. Animals, birds, and scenes from rural life are also popular. The figures are particularly admired for their natural poses, expressive faces, detailed clothing, hairstyles, ornaments, and accessories. The making of a clay doll requires considerable skill and patience. Fine clay is carefully prepared and shaped, often over a basic framework. Different parts of the figure may be modelled separately and then assembled. After drying, the surface is refined and the figure is painted in natural-looking colours. Fine details such as facial features, clothing patterns, jwellery, and other accessories are added at the final stages.



What makes Krishnagar dolls especially significant is their **realistic characterisation**. Rather than producing idealised figures, artisans often capture ordinary people and their occupations with remarkable observation. This gives the dolls considerable value as visual records of Bengali social and cultural life.

Krishnagar clay dolls have received recognition both in India and abroad and have been displayed in museums and exhibitions. They represent an important part of Bengal's folk-art heritage and demonstrate the craftsmanship, creativity, and cultural knowledge passed down through generations.



Today, however, traditional artisans face challenges such as changing consumer preferences, rising production costs, and competition from mass-produced decorative objects. Supporting local craftsmen, museums, cultural institutions, and traditional markets can help preserve this distinctive art form.

Krishnagar's clay dolls are therefore more than decorative objects. They are miniature expressions of Bengal's people, occupations, customs, and everyday life, preserving a valuable cultural heritage through the hands of skilled artisans.

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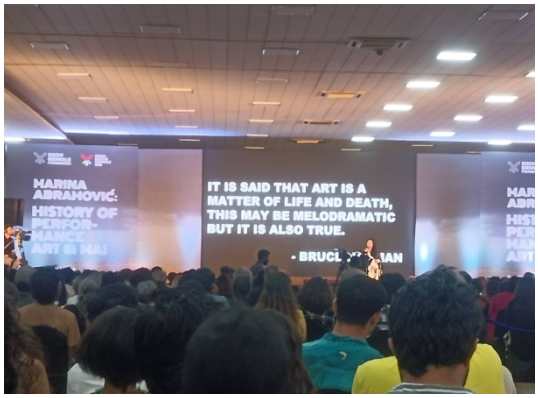
The Prophet of Performance

Bhaskar Hazarika

She walked onto the stage like a Western prophet parachuting into India, carrying enlightenment in one hand and a PowerPoint clicker in the other.



Her opening declaration was suitably divine: "After seeing my presentation, you will learn everything about performance" or said something very close to this statement. Salvation, apparently, now comes in slide format and performance art gradually gets its 'form'. A good old modernist desire. What followed was a greatest-hits playlist of modern art: a few famous Western artists, some recycled movements, decorative quotations, and generous portions of blah blah. Somewhere between explaining what "good art/true art" is and dropping names, she appointed herself the official bridge between "this" and "that" categories, or past and present categories, a self-certified inheritor of Great World Art, as if history had been waiting patiently for her arrival. Unfortunately, this bridge was constructed from arrogance and ignorance. She showed little awareness of performance or performing arts practices in India, no understanding of local movements, experiments, or contextual frameworks. Her talk floated comfortably above history, politics, and lived realities. Conceptual depth was replaced with motivational speaking. Theory, too, was clearly optional. Lacan? Victor Turner? Richard Schechner? Judith Butler? Peter Burke? Badal Sarkar? Or any one from cinema, theatre? Not even Shahrukh Khan. None made it into her universe. Critical engagement with performance, body, identity, or representation seemed unnecessary when one already possesses prophetic confidence. The word "real" was used generously, though without any sense that it has been argued over for decades.



Either nobody told her, or she chose not to hear that, contemporary India is not a Western imagination project. Present-day Indian artists are argumentative Indians: they already carry more information about world art than her slideshow assumes.



And at KMB, most of them are not preparing to appear for a postgraduate entrance examination in the history of performance art, they are practitioners, thinkers, and critical agents navigating complex realities, not passive recipients of imported enlightenment.

And present-day India, just to be clear, has no open positions for new prophets, guru-mas, or imported goddesses. The spiritual-artistic marketplace is already overcrowded. Perhaps she hasn't heard of Baba Ramdev. She arrived as a saviour of performance and left as a spectacular case study in cultural blindness, mistaking complexity for emptiness, and assuming that India was simply waiting for her solo lecture-performance to finally understand art.

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Understanding For Appreciation Part- II

Silajit Ghosh

Details about the whole process of my painting, specifying the various aspects and stages of it:

As such, in my case, the process of painting as a whole, can be broken down into various components or stages as follows:



Pic 1. Ustad Ali Akbar Khan

A. Building up and enrichment of a sense of the ultimate truth of all pervasive universality or the feel or knowledge of it and reflecting and contemplating about the same through every moment of my life. The essence of it, being an utmost endeavor to be and perpetually remain and exist, in a state of effortlessness through the act of letting go and complete surrender of the ego. This is achieved through allowing the flow of time and life, to take over the entire happening process.

B. Feeling an irrepressible urge to express out all of the above, on to a paper or canvas, as spontaneously as possible, keeping the emotion content pure and raw. This is done by catching hold of it, at the intrinsically root levels, as if operating in a trance of getting possessed by the creative urges. This wipes off the outer reality and get guided by my extremely intuitive inner self and the inner self ONLY, which exist in a perpetually unconditional state, independent of any and everything lying outside of me.

C. Getting intimate with the characteristics and applied behavior of the materials and mediums which are used to execute the physical pieces of paintings.



Pic 2. Painting by Henri Matisse

For example, in case of one of the most important variables needed to create a painting, the element of colour, has a variety of characteristics like basic hue, richness, saturation, luminosity, its comparative orientation in the overall spectrum of the colour-wheel, tonal quality, opacity, malleability, viscosity, texture, brightness, contrast and area-weightage, compositional structuring etc.

D. Relentless practice and striving, to substitute all the personal anxieties of creating a successful piece of art, by getting fully engrossed and interested only with the sole objective of enjoying, appreciating and worshipping the beauty itself on "Here and Now" basis. I try to fulfill the quest of remaining perpetually, in a trance-like detached but expectant state, termed by Sri Aurobindo as "ASPRIHA".

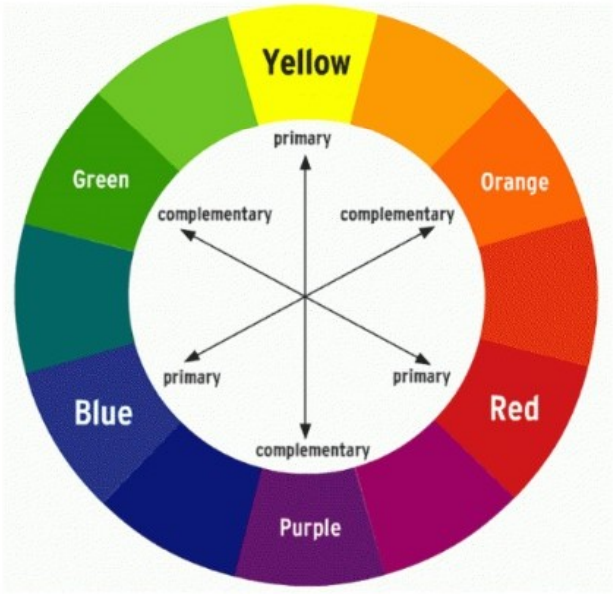
Simultaneously, I keep enjoying and longing for the overwhelming feelings of : (a) Fathomless and Heartfelt joy, (b) Glorious Uncertainty, full of the Fun-factor and (c) Ecstasy of unconditional love through total amalgamation of my individual and the cosmic minds. I strive constantly to become the nonchalant observer of the entire process of my creation, taking the physical form of a painting and that too getting executed almost on its own, utilizing my physical mind and body like a mere brush, loaded with colours.



Pic 3. Music Movement Image

MY INFLUENCERS:

Pondering over the biggest pieces of influencers with respect to my process of painting, the two of the greatest of personalities and their creatives works which have the greatest influence in this regard are:



Pic 4. Colour Wheel

1. Music of Ali Akbar Khan … especially his "Alaap" movements endowed with the longest and deepest of "MEENDS", which means the prolonged sound movements created by a single stroke of the string of the musical instrument sarode, which he plays, entangling and hovering through multiple notes.

The specific attributes of these meend sounds, which impact my psyche as a whole profoundly and strike the innermost psychological chords are their Uniqueness, Purity, Independence and Unconditionality. Every time, I listen to these particular sounds of musical movements, it appears to me that "SOME" thing of greatest of impacts are being heard by me "for the very first time" invariably giving rise to that unmistakable feeling as if, the entire universe along with my consciousness is getting created and born from the scratch … beginning of all the beginnings ... the "ORIGINAL" zero or void from which everything, including space and time were created through the "Big Bang" as corroborated by Science.

2. Fauvist paintings of Henri Matisse … especially his treatment of colours in their purest elements, keeping the vibration quotients of each of them intact and thus create and define the notion of "HARMONY" in spite of using them with utmost audacity in terms of variety and composition, simultaneously representing them as the essence of the free will.

(Continued .. Part III)