

An abstract painting by Raza, characterized by his signature geometric style. The composition is dominated by sharp, angular forms and a complex network of lines. A large, vibrant orange shape occupies the lower-left quadrant, contrasting sharply with the surrounding dark, textured areas of black and grey. The overall effect is one of dynamic tension and intricate detail, typical of Raza's work in the 'geometric abstraction' movement.

RAZA

the other modern



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With his Indian vision and French *sens de la plastique* coalescing to create a unique modernism, S. H. Raza has been a master of colours, concepts and creativity. From his early expressionist works to the mesmerizing abstraction of his later years, Raza's artistic evolution is a testimony to his relentless pursuit of truth through colour and form.

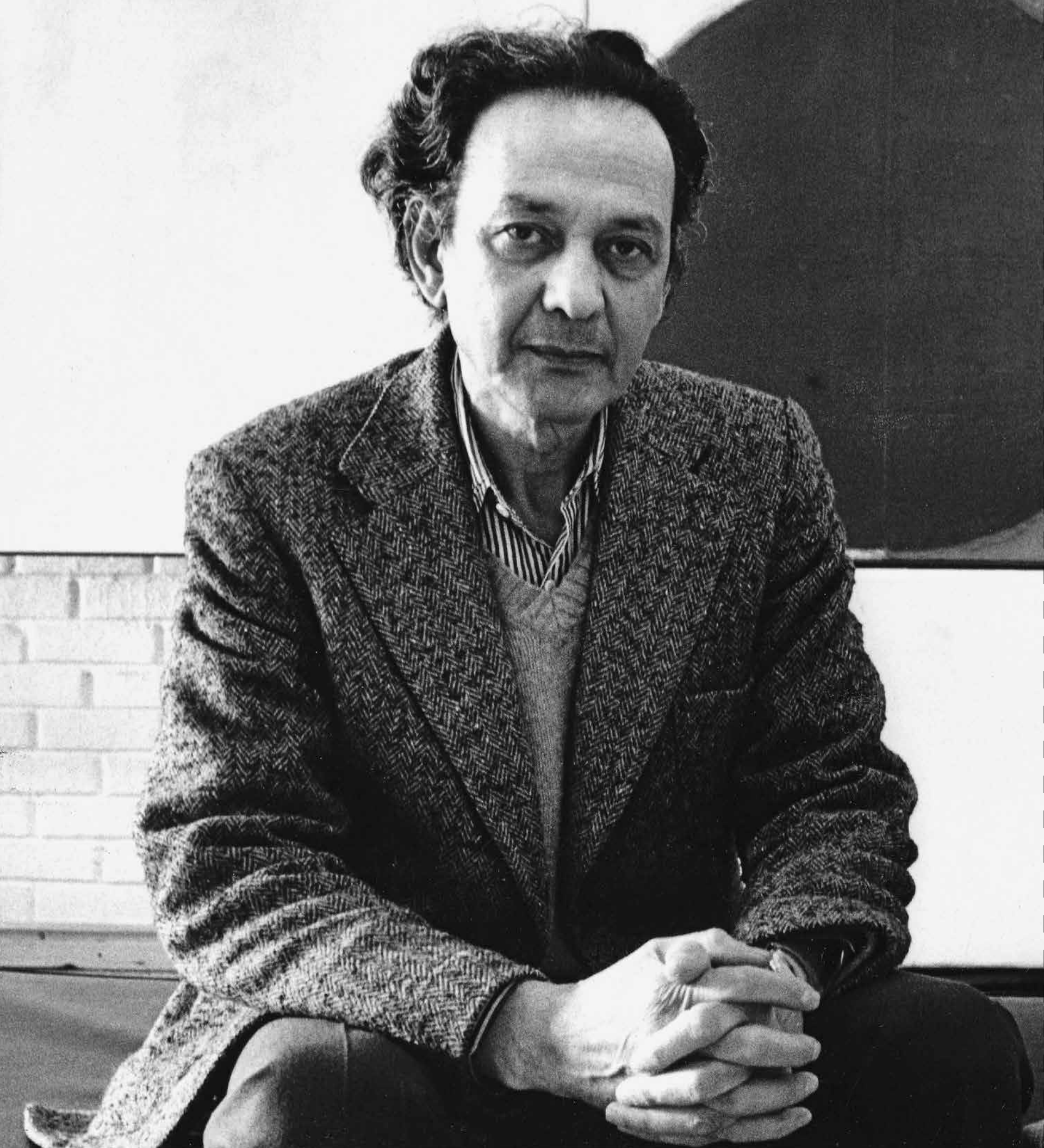
As an artist, Raza moved through many dualities, namely home and exile, colour and concept, imagination and thought, modernity and memory, creativity and invention, locale and universality, passion and meditation, anxiety and silence, time and eternity; and also, in a way, between River Narmada of his childhood and the Parisian river Seine from his adulthood. His journey is a testament to the power of artistic vision and cultural amalgamation.

Raza: The Other Modern celebrates the artist's outstanding body of work and invites the viewer to explore the depth of his artistic genius. One of the most significant exhibitions of Raza's work to be held in Dubai, it is a quest through the evolving phases of Raza's life and artistic endeavours.

With 103 illustrations and 5 photographs

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Foreword by
Ashok Vajpeyi

Geeti Sen
Gayatri Sinha
Yashodhara Dalmia

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Front cover:
Village, 1956 (See p. 25)

Back cover:
Srinagar, 1948 (See p. 21)

Page 2:
Raza during his Paris days
Courtesy: The Raza Foundation, New Delhi

Pages 6-7:
Vue de Partinello, 1957
Oil on canvas, 80 × 184 cm (31.5 × 72.5 in.)
Courtesy: Musée d'ethnographie de Genève,
Johnathan Watts

Contents

Director's Note	8
<i>Harsh Vardhan Singh</i>	
Foreword	12
Something That Will Live Longer	
<i>Ashok Vajpeyi</i>	
Raza's Search for Infinity	14
<i>Geeti Sen</i>	
In the Shadow of the Black Sun	58
<i>Gayatri Sinha</i>	
The Radiating Circle	90
<i>Yashodhara Dalmia</i>	
The Last Days	120
<i>Ashok Vajpeyi</i>	
Solo Exhibitions	126
Acknowledgements	128





Director's Note

It is with immense pleasure and profound reverence that I welcome you to *Raza: The Other Modern*, a retrospective honouring the extraordinary life and work of the eminent artist S. H. Raza on the occasion of his 100th birth anniversary. This landmark exhibition, presented in collaboration with The Raza Foundation, is a testament to the enduring legacy of one of India's most celebrated modern artists.

Sayed Haider Raza, or simply Raza, is a name that resonates with art aficionados not only in India but around the world. His journey—from the vibrant landscapes of his birthplace, Babaria in Madhya Pradesh, to the bustling art scene of Paris, and back to India—is a remarkable testament to the power of artistic vision and cultural amalgamation. Raza's art is characterized by a profound connection with nature and a deep spiritual consciousness, which found expression through his iconic Bindu series, the vibrant and rhythmic compositions inspired by Indian cosmology.

This retrospective is not just an art exhibition; it is a journey through the evolving phases of Raza's life and artistic endeavours. From his early expressionist works, influenced by the post-impressionist and cubist movements in Europe, to the mesmerizing abstraction of his later years, Raza's artistic evolution is a testimony to his relentless pursuit of truth through colour and form.

We are deeply indebted to The Raza Foundation, an institution that embodies Raza's ideals and artistic philosophy, for joining hands with us to make this retrospective possible. It is their unwavering commitment to nurturing and preserving the artistic heritage of India that has made this exhibition a reality. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to them for their unwavering support and collaboration.

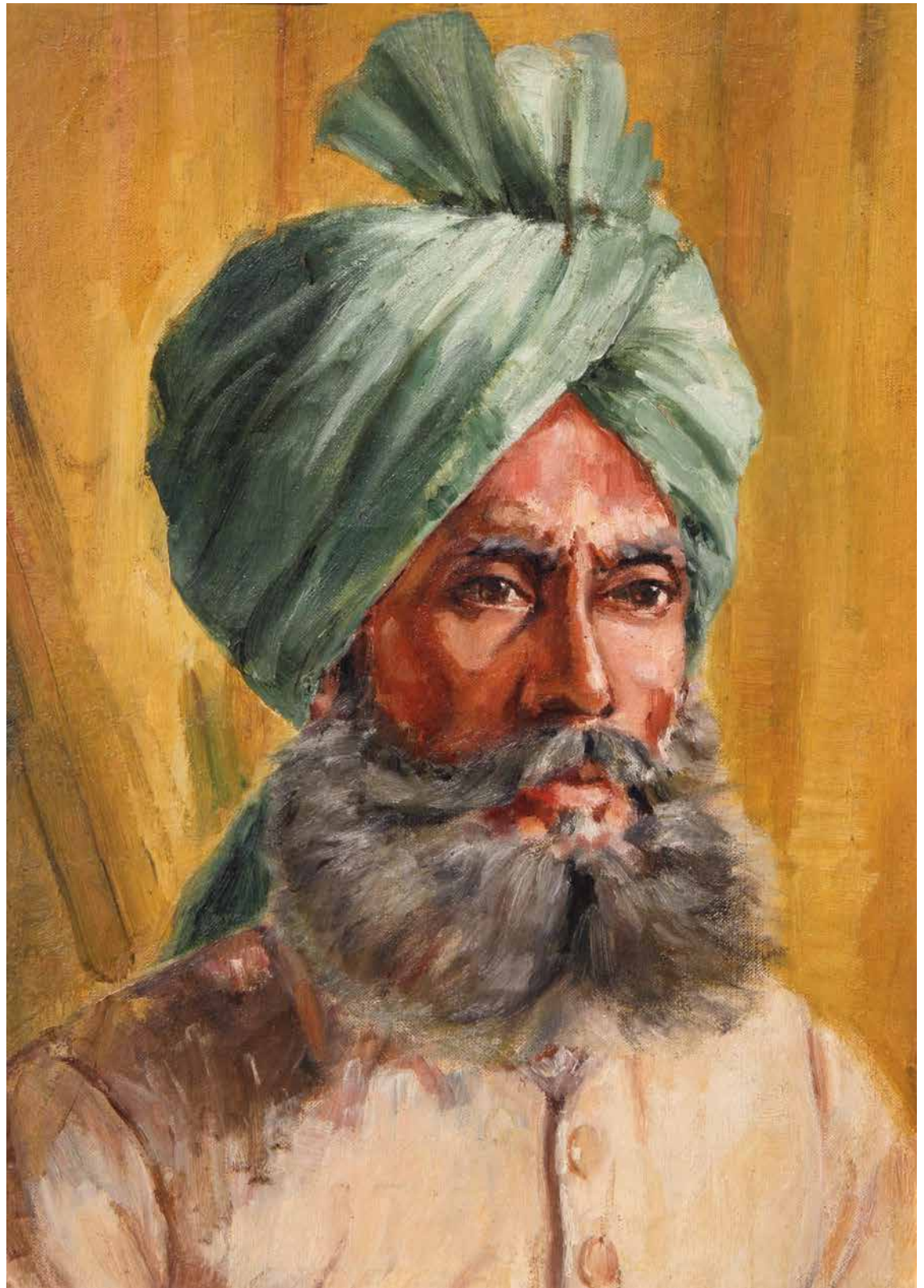
Raza: The Other Modern not only celebrates the artist's remarkable body of work but also invites you to explore the depth of his artistic genius. As you walk through this retrospective, I encourage you to reflect on the spiritual and cultural resonance in Raza's creations—his art that reflected his personal journey, inviting us all to embark on a visual and spiritual odyssey.

In the vibrant, cosmopolitan city of Dubai, a place where cultures converge, we find it apt to showcase an artist like Raza, who symbolizes the synthesis of East and West, tradition and modernity. Dubai is a fitting backdrop for this exhibition, serving as a bridge between cultures and a centre for artistic exchange.

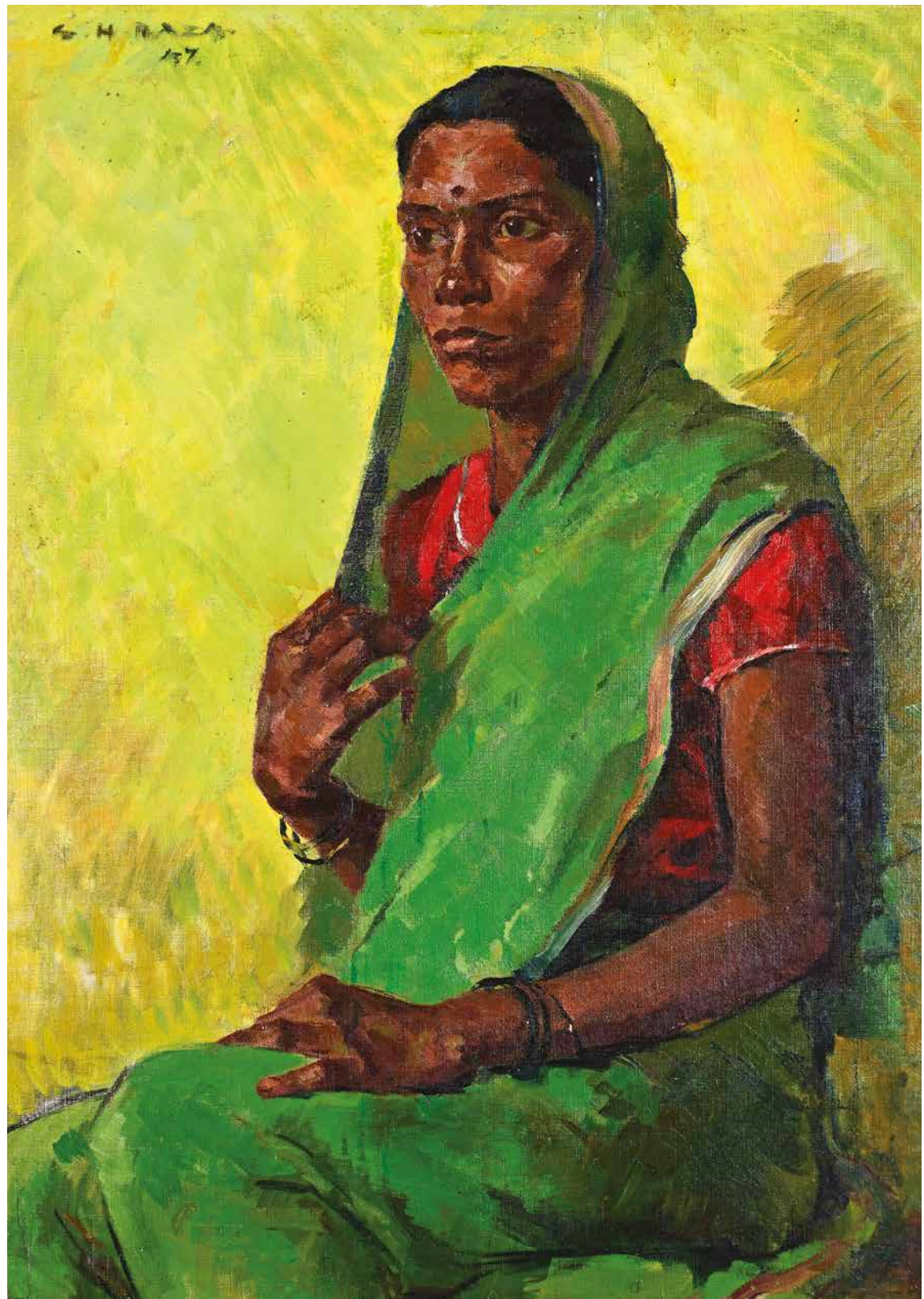
This retrospective would not be complete without the support of the art community and the people who appreciate and understand the significance of Raza's contributions to the world of art. We sincerely hope that *Raza: The Other Modern* will spark new conversations, inspire creativity, and bring us all closer to the spiritual essence that Raza sought to capture in his works.

Once again, I extend my warmest welcome to all of you. This retrospective not only honours the memory of S. H. Raza but also fosters a deeper appreciation for the art that continues to inspire us.

Harsh Vardhan Singh



Portrait, 1941
Gouache on paper
48 × 36 cm (18.9 × 14.2 in.)
Signed and dated on verso
Stamped 'NAGPUR SCHOOL OF ART
SOCIETY, NAGPUR' on reverse; signed
'RAZA, PORTRAIT, '41' upper right and
stamped 'NAGPUR SCHOOL OF ART
SOCIETY, NAGPUR' on reverse
Private collection



Life study, 1947
Oil colour on paper, 66.5 × 43 cm (26 × 17 in.)
Courtesy: Collection—Sir J. J. School of Art, Mumbai

Foreword

Something That Will Live Longer

*“On the outside a warmth is helping,
for high, above,
your own suns are growing immense,
and they glow as they wheel around,
Yet something has already started to live
than the suns.”*

—From *Buddha Inside the Light* by Rainer Maria Rilke

The three-month-long historic show of Sayed Haider Raza that attracted an unusually large number of viewers at the Centre Pompidou in Paris in 2023 has reaffirmed Raza’s stature as an artist with a global reach. With his Indian vision and French *sens de la plastique* coalescing to create a unique modernism, he has been a master of colours, concepts and creativity. While exploring dissonance, disquiet and the tension of life and existence, Raza sought to reach out to the lost equilibrium, consonance and tranquillity of nature. As an artist, he moved through many dualities, namely home and exile, colour and concept, imagination and thought, modernity and memory, creativity and invention, locale and universality, passion and meditation, anxiety and silence, time and eternity; and also, in a way, between River Narmada of his childhood and the Parisian river Seine from his adulthood. As a thinking artist, Raza struggled hard and constantly to override these dualities. He also continued to practise, as it were, two triangles of faith and language: Islam-Hinduism-Christianity and Hindi-English-French.

As a major artist, Raza could be placed in multiple contexts. Firstly, as someone who spent 60 years in France, in the context of the *École de Paris*, the School of Paris, and its aftermath. Secondly, as one of the founders of the Bombay-based Progressive Artists’ Group, in the context of the emergence of a new vibrant plural modernism in India post-Independence. Thirdly, as an abstractionist, in the context of the modern Western tradition of abstraction. Fourthly, as a master colourist, he could be placed in the

tradition of those modernists who took their sense of colour and space division from the Indian miniature tradition, especially of the Rajput-Pahari-Malwa schools. Fifthly, Raza could be located in a rare tradition of those modernists who took deep inspiration from poetry. Sixthly, Raza's art could be seen in the context of the modern attempts to bridge the dichotomy of the spiritual and the sensuous. All these contexts would tell us something significant about the range, depth, and complexity about Raza's art. Yet, none of them singly and all of them collectively would completely exhaust his meanings and intimations. Major art is an inexhaustible source of delight and discovery. Raza's art is major in this respect as well.

Art, in any case Raza's art, evokes a dual sense of mystery and wonder. Your conventional modes of apprehending and articulating meaning almost wither away. Unknown unprecedented layers of meaning assert their presence and overwhelm you: You are face-to-face with a new reality, a created reality, a reality which reveals to you your own world in a new and different light.

A number of shows have been held across the world, including in Paris, New York, New Delhi, and Mumbai, to celebrate Raza's birth centenary. The present show in Dubai is the latest in the series. Many of these have brought public attention to works that were either not accessible to or not seen before by the public. Almost all of them reaffirm that Raza merged his life and art seamlessly; that he made colours speak and sing; that he created art celebrating life and being; that he explored the possibility of the sacred through the sensuous; that he discovered a unique idiom for himself. It is undoubtedly art that inspires and ennobles, which takes you back to existential silence and reflection.

With three essays specially written by eminent art critics Dr. Geeti Sen, Yashodhara Dalmia and Gayatri Sinha analysing Raza from three distinct viewpoints evoking new insights, this book is being published to coincide with a major exhibition of Raza being organised by the Progressive Art Gallery in Dubai.

Ashok Vajpeyi



Sayed Haider Raza in one of his Paris studios
Courtesy: The Raza Foundation, New Delhi

Raza's Search for Infinity

Geeti Sen

“Man is intrinsically related to the environment around him. In Gorbio, the mountains, the woods, the olive trees, the plants, the flowers, the stones become an intrinsic part of my space and my environment. You see, as a writer you have your books. As a painter, I have extremely simple forms around me: in my home in Paris, in my studio and in my garden in Gorbio. These living forms stimulate me and contribute to my vocabulary which grows continuously.”¹

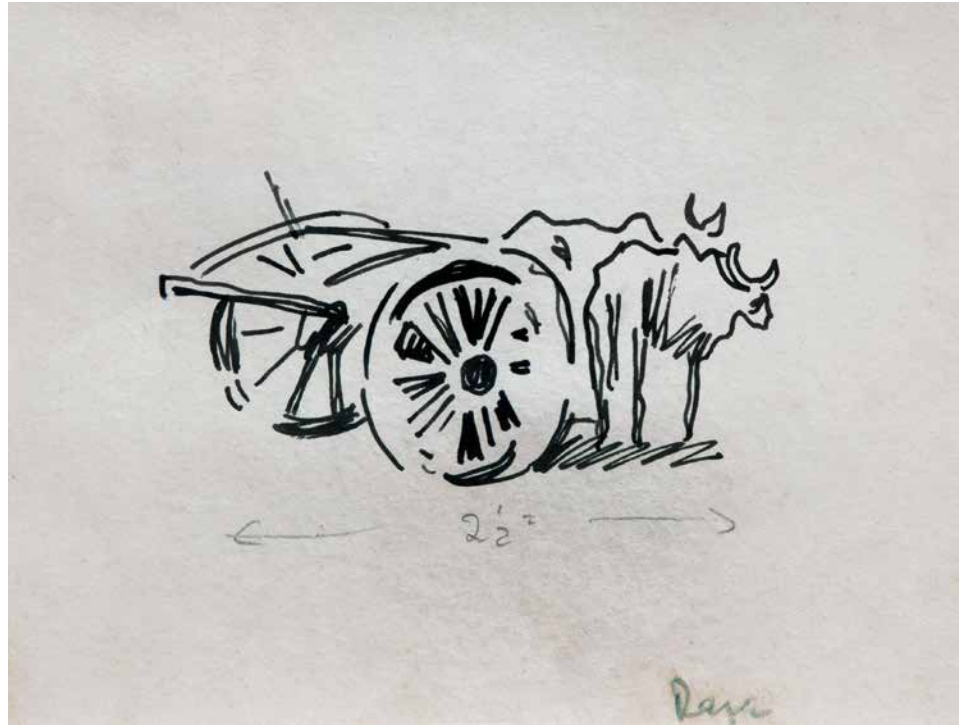
Raza was a phenomenal artist. Meticulous and yet impassioned, he painted. He waited, sitting before the empty canvas for inspiration to direct him—before the first stroke of colour appeared. I was fortunate in having met him, and to have had the opportunity to visit him in France over three years in the late 1980s, at the very time when he was conceiving the most profound paintings which he ever did. It was a time of intense exploration and experimentation.

The studio built by Raza and Janine was about a 10-minute walk away from the French village of Gorbio, where they lived in the summer months. On a fine day, you could look out to the azure blue of the Mediterranean Sea, overlooking the ancient streets of Gorbio with its 12th-century church and roofs of orange tile.

Every corner in the garden in Gorbio had been planted with care, filling me with delight and a sense of wonder. An avocado tree grew in one corner, a lemon tree in another, deep pink and red begonias skirted the trunks of olive trees; a purple flower, and white and yellow crocuses added to the vibrant colours. The herbs included mimosa and mint and myrrh and basil. At night, the air was sparked with these perfumes. There was a pot containing a mango plant, and another with bougainvillea. Mementos brought from India were kept alive and cherished, as indeed memories are kept alive, vividly green.

Stones were also placed in this garden; stones of natural formations that shared an affinity with Raza's paintings. A circular stone for instance, like a *bija*, corresponded to Raza's circle within the square. Most remarkable among these was a “figure of eight” formed by two stones joined together, about which he had exclaimed, “These are two polarities which complement each other, of life and death, pleasure and pain, man and woman, black and white!” These details were not insignificant: they composed the environment where Raza lived, to which he was susceptible.

In one of our discussions, Raza reflected on a concept which had taken root with him and evolved gradually over five decades:



Untitled, 1930s
 Pen and pencil on paper
 16.5 × 20.3 cm (6.5 × 8 in.)
 Private collection

Untitled, 1930s
 Pen and pencil on paper
 16.5 × 20.3 cm (6.5 × 8 in.)
 Private collection





Untitled, 1930s
 Pen and pencil on paper
 17.8 × 15.25 cm (7 × 6 in.)
 Private collection



Untitled, 1930s
 Pen and pencil on paper
 16.5 × 20.3 cm (6.5 × 8 in.)
 Private collection



Untitled (Gol Deval Temple, Bombay), c. late 1940s
Watercolour on paper laid on card,
29.5 × 42 cm (11.6 × 16.5 in.)
Courtesy: Piramal Museum of Art,
Mumbai



Untitled (View of VT Station),
c. 1940s
Watercolour on paper,
29.2 × 46.2 cm (11.5 × 18 in.)
Courtesy: Kiran Nadar Museum
of Art, New Delhi

Gol Gumbaz, 1943
Watercolour on paper
38 × 54 cm (15 × 21.3 in.)
Private collection



Benares, 1944
Watercolour on paper,
41.9 × 29.2 cm (16.5 × 11.5 in.)
Courtesy: Piramal Museum of Art,
Mumbai



The Artist (Somnath Bhat), 1948
Gouache on paper
46 × 34 cm (18.1 × 13.4 in.)
Signed and dated on verso
Private collection

“It’s strange that I needed forty years to understand my passion and love for nature, and to transpose this on to canvas. I’m glad that I took all this time, because it was not a gift to me by someone...it was the conclusion of a lifelong experience.

“Painting is something alive as human beings in its different manifestations.... It is a vital process of becoming. Just imagine how fascinating it is that the seed contains the inherent forces of a plant, of animal life, and so on.... And that could be the same process in form too!”

The collection of Raza’s paintings in the Progressive Art Gallery is rare and incomparable in its comprehensive range of works from the late 1930s to 2010, the year in which he returned to India. These decades document his entire oeuvre. They follow his evolution from the initial small drawings with pen or pencil on paper to his portraits at the Nagpur School of Art from 1939 to his landscapes in the 1940s—including from his visit to Kashmir in 1948.

His visit to France began in 1950; it extended to nearly 60 years of living in that country. He imbibed the French training in formalism, by using elements of the circle, the square, the triangle, and of horizontal and vertical and diagonal lines, which came to signify for him the elements of nature. But to the end of his years, and to the last painting of

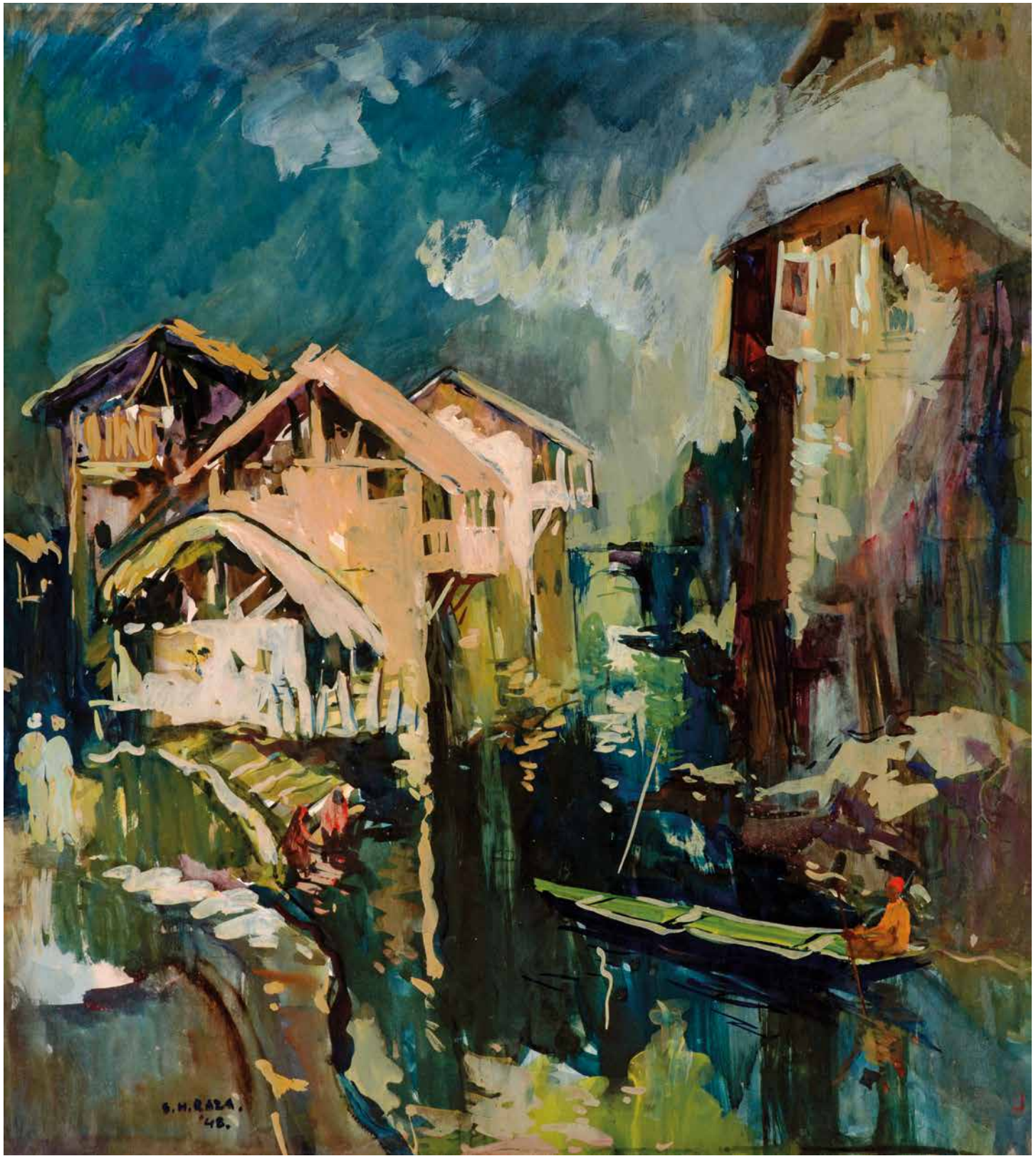
the *bindu* which was never completed, he remained Indian in his sensibilities.

By turning to abstraction from the 1980s, Raza turned away from exploring the external and towards the internal instead. Implicit in his pictures thereafter is a sense of timelessness which is all-pervasive, bringing a different meaning to his paintings. He ‘abstracts’ from nature its essence, its deeper implications for mankind. He creates a paradigm that is both relevant to the world today and in harmony with traditional Indian concepts. Searching for his roots in India while living in Europe, his images coalesce into metaphor. In the best tradition of symbiosis, Raza began to create images to possess universal meaning—to relate each one of us to the universe ‘out there’.

...

Raza is considered to be a landscape artist. The painter Vasudeo S. Gaitonde, who was almost his contemporary and who created images of profound abstraction, once said to me, “Raza painted only landscapes.” On the contrary, the early drawings in this collection tell us that he began his explorations with studies of the human figure. These are small sketches with pen or pencil on paper: of women including a dancer, a man smoking a hookah, a bullock cart, figures from his immediate environment done in the 1930s when he was still in his teens.

Srinagar, 1948
Gouache on board
54 × 49 cm (21.3 × 19.3 in.)
Private collection





In 1939, when he joined the Nagpur School of Art, he was trained in the academic style of realistic portraiture. In 1941, he worked both on a drawing and a painting in gouache of a musician. Created seven years later, *The Artist* is much freer and more exuberant, evolving into bold expressionism. The study of the artist Somnath Bhat is informal, both in pose and in treatment; with his head cocked at an angle, his hair and face are flecked with green and white patches. Do we see suggestions of the influence of van Gogh?

The son of a forest warden, in his early years Raza was attuned to living the 'rhythm' of the natural forest reserves in today's Madhya Pradesh. A painting titled *In a Forest* creates this environment, where humans are dwarfed by the vegetation. The swaying trunks of trees, the blurring of branches and the use of non-naturalistic colours such as mauve are expressionistic. What is depicted is the impression of a forest, not its details.

Raza's studies *Gol Gummad*, from 1943 and 1947, suggest a dramatic change in treatment. The first watercolour is a mature landscape influenced by European colours, depicting monumental architecture. Painted in pale creams and blue-greens, it introduces Islamic domes and turrets with a European cast over the sky. Four years later, the architectural details are hardly visible except for three domes and trees on the left corner. The remaining landscape is submerged in water,

reinforced by the reflection of trees and the buildings in the water. Compared to the first, this second painting is like a mirage in its gestural and emotive feeling. Instead of depicting a realistic landscape, it evokes an emotional response from the viewer.

In 1948, Raza was invited to visit Kashmir by Sheikh Abdullah, along with writers such as Khwaja Ahmad Abbas and actors such as Balraj Sahni. The visit left an indelible impression upon him. He painted with passion and vigour, sketching the bazaars and bridges of Srinagar, the tranquillity of the landscape, the trees in their autumnal glory. But he also painted the charred ruins of Baramulla. Dramatic in their realism of the typical houses in Kashmir, there seems to be tragic implications in the darkness of the waters, the sharp division between dark and light. These landscapes are very different from the tranquil atmosphere of the earlier *Gol Gummad* (1943), a landscape painted just five years earlier.

Raza arrived in the thriving metropolis of Bombay in 1943. Arriving from Nagpur, this brought about a vast change in lifestyle. With his limited means, he enrolled privately as a student at the J. J. School of Art. For his livelihood, he worked at the Express Block Studio. Within a year of his arrival, he found a discerning teacher in Walter Langhammer, art director at the *The Times of India* in Bombay, who introduced him to the work of European artists. Emmanuel Shlesinger began to acquire

Untitled, 1955
Mix media on paper
39.5 × 46 cm (15.5 × 18.1 in.)

Untitled, 1955
Mix media on paper
38 × 42 cm (15 × 16.5 in.)

his paintings, and the art critic Rudy von Leyden wrote about his work. There were discerning Indians as well, such as Kekoo and Khorshed Gandy and the eminent scientist Dr Homi Bhabha. The general effervescence of the time was optimistic as India became a free country in 1947. In 1948, the six founding members of the Progressive Artists' Group, which included Raza, held their first exhibition.

•••

In 1950, Raza left for Paris—the centre of the art world. He visited galleries and museums to understand the structure of Cezanne, the colours of van Gogh, and the mystery of “*le douanier*” (Henri) Rousseau. He strove to build his pictures with the impact of Cezanne’s pure structure and the use of van Gogh’s emotive, raw colours.

These influences are seen in his early studies of the French countryside, titled *Village* in 1955 and 1956. A radical change in treatment appears from what he had been doing in India. The silhouette of houses aligned one against another are painted with facades glowing in hot orange. The lower half of *Village* (1955) is plunged into darkness. This is neither day nor night nor evening. It is an imaginary time in the vision of the artist, as though the village was burning. Similar constructions of the French landscape follow in 1956, a chaotic ensemble of white and blue and glimmering yellow patches. The savage expressionism is accentuated with the

sky above in hot orange. Never does one see a sky that orange! Once again, the village appears against a muddy yellow background. This is landscape at its most poignant, with no sense of distance or perspective. No breath of air stirs, no sound breaks through the silence. The overall impression is violent and threatening.

This was the year Raza won the coveted award of the *Prix de la Critique*, making him the first non-French artist to achieve this distinction. But the writers and critics in Paris were perplexed by his works. Be it village or town or church, the world according to Raza was aflame. It was being forged anew, baptized by fire. This sensation of being ‘forged’ comes alive in his canvases in the mid-1960s, titled *La Provence Noire*, *Leurs*, and others which remained untitled. Rudy von Leyden had written, a few years earlier: “They did not fit into any ready-made pigeonholes of classified styles, and yet fascinated because of the peculiar mood of their own.”

Jacques Lassaigne, who later became the Director of the Museum of Modern Art of Paris, described in a catalogue Raza’s early paintings in Paris as “...strange unaccountable works, unamenable to any traditional art”²

Day Raga, signed and dated to 1962, is a milestone in Raza’s evolution. In the Progressive Art Gallery’s collection, this small but exquisite work is the earliest known representation of Raza’s abiding interest in Indian classical music. He leaves behind any

Village, 1956
Oil on canvas
45 × 58 cm (17.8 × 22.9 in.)
Private collection





suggestion of landscape by creating a canvas with red and black and touches of yellow, introducing no sense of depth or perspective. The colours return us to the vibrancy of Indian miniature painting and are different from anything he had ever done! Many years later, he wrote that he was returning to the sources that had nourished him, which deepened in intensity and meaning as the years passed:

“I feel that as you go to different countries, you assimilate new ideas. All this is returned to the sources that have been important to you from your childhood. Other elements, views, ideas, colour perceptions, for instance, which are very strong in India, come back to you with a new vitality. You are conscious of them.”

Memory plays a fascinating role in that it feeds on images of the past and intensifies the experiences—all the more so if we are separated by time and place. From 1959, Raza had been returning to rediscover India with his wife Janine. He began a search for the essential truth of his own specific tradition.

The melody of a *raga* can transform into a visual image. Derived from the Sanskrit word *ranja*, meaning to colour, *raga* means “to colour” or to arouse the senses. It implies ways to influence the mind with an emotive response, to inflame it with a certain passion. How appropriate then, to introduce these moods into a painting: to embody the music, to

enact the verse inscribed above the picture. Not only the painter but the viewer participates in this experience!

The colour black becomes an obsessive force in Raza’s paintings in the 1960s. It dominates all else, to bring new depth and mystery into his work. These images may carry titles, such as *La Provence Noire* (1965) or *Leurs* (1967), or remain untitled, but they no longer have any resemblance to landscapes. The most powerful among these works is titled *The Invisible Cross* (1970), where the black strokes are heightened by the interstices in chrome yellow. Does the cross refer to a state of mind, is it a metaphor for a mood, a state of being?

In 1962, Raza was invited to visit California and teach at the University at Berkeley over the summer. There, he encountered the Expressionists of the New York school, and he mentions that he was affected by the work of Hans Hofmann and Mark Rothko. Hofmann wrote in the 1960s, emphasizing “painterliness”, and the new gestural approach by the American school was supported by the writings of Clement Greenberg. In Raza’s work also, the cognizant forms have now disappeared. It is the mood that prevails, or, to put it in his own terms, “a certain climate of experience”. The brush stroke assumes importance to create this mood. It is no longer nature as seen or constructed by the artist, but nature as experienced. From this point of view, his paintings *La Source* (Spring, 1972) and

Eglise et Calvaire Breton, 1956
Oil on canvas,
60 × 73 cm (23.6 × 28.7 in.)
Courtesy: Piramal Museum of Art,
Mumbai



Rouge Sur Rouge, 1961
Oil on panel, 50 × 50 cm (19.7 × 19.7 in.)
Courtesy: T. H. Collection

Lumières, 1961
Oil on board,
112.5 × 112.5 cm (44.3 × 44.3 in.)
Photo Hélène Mauri/Courtesy:
Fonds municipal d'art
contemporain de la Ville de Paris



L'Orage (The Storm, 1973), *La Terre* (The Earth, 1979) and *The Earth* (1982)—all four in the Progressive Art Gallery—assume significance.

In an important untitled work of 1976, Raza breaks away from the intense domination of black. This image may remain untitled, but it sings the same melody as *Day Raga* (1962). It is created in bold strokes of predominant red, with green and white and just glimmerings of black. This entire composition is 'framed' by a border on all four sides of the same red, identical to the manner in which paintings were 'framed' by borders in miniature traditions. In this untitled 1976 work, Raza's vision awakens to find inspiration from miniature painting.

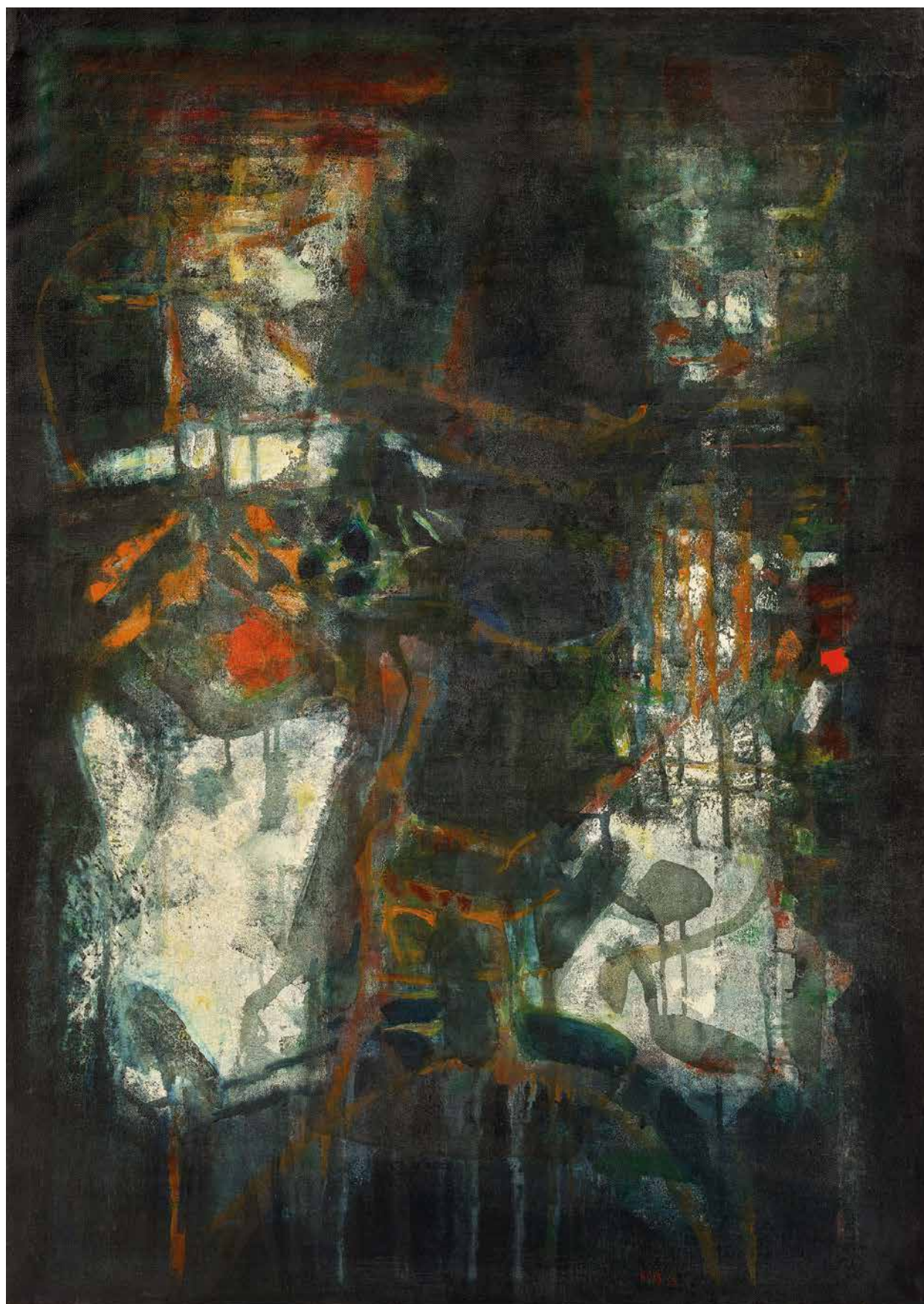
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In the last 30 years that he painted, Raza's images were transformed into abstractions; they signify more than is stated. Abstraction is a state of mind. With meditation, the cognition of the outer world penetrates to another level of consciousness. In these diagrams is realized the infinite potential of the artist's interior vision. Symbolic images exist, which may be visual referents for his vocabulary. Raza's paintings explore, through a few chosen signs of the circle, the square and the triangle, a sense of the infinite. Raza would not describe his works as spiritual. Instead, he refers to them as 'significant form'.

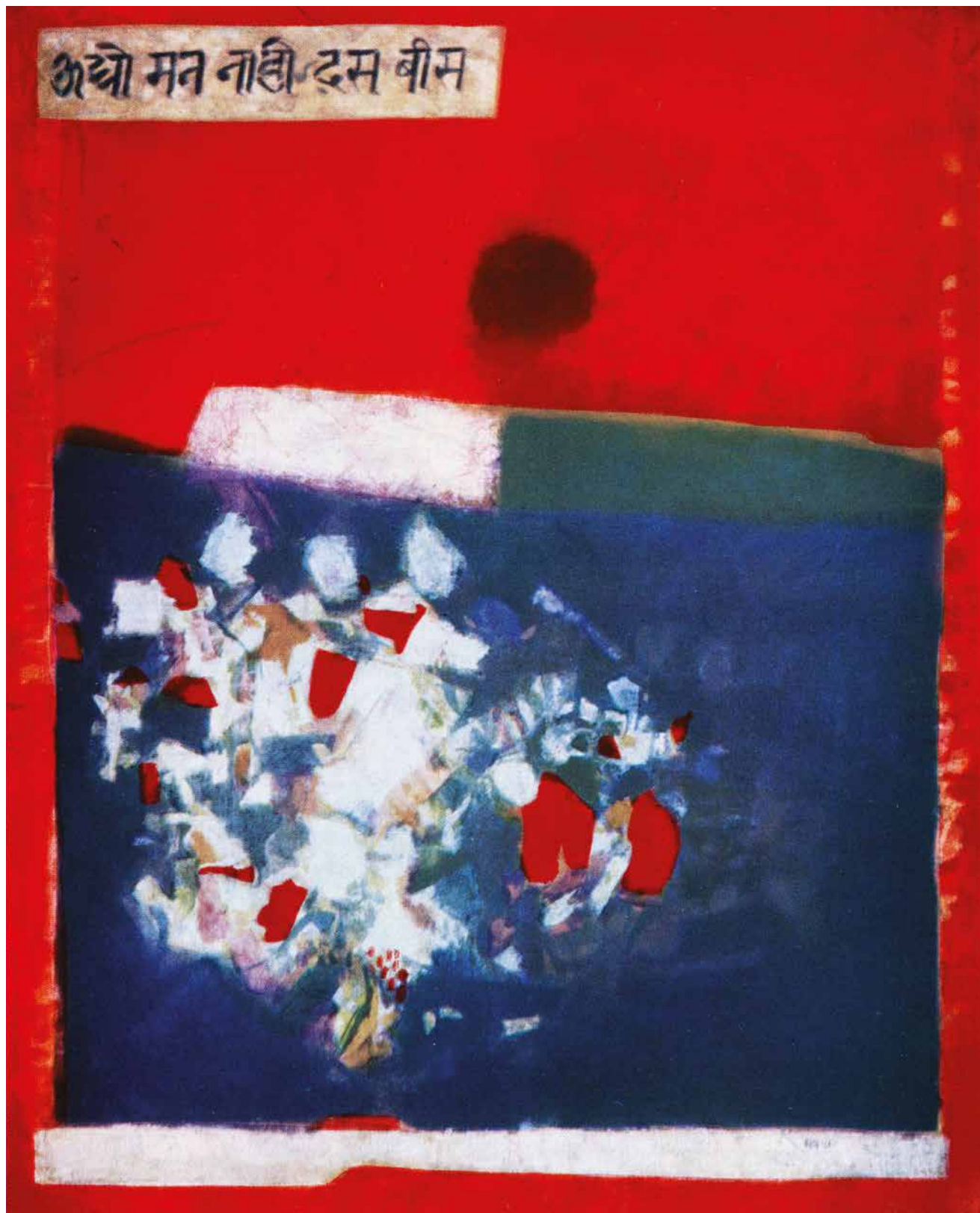
In a work from 1979, which is part of the Progressive Art Gallery's collection, the black *bindu* surfaces and is placed at the centre of the painting. It surfaces with absolute clarity of vision, as though it had always been there. Of course, the *bindu* had appeared much earlier in his work, in the form of *The Black Sun* (1953) and *Haut de Cagnes* (1951). But now the *bindu* becomes a magnetic force compelling our attention, and it remains the leitmotif in his work for the next three decades. When Raza describes his return to his homeland, he returns again and again to the anecdote of the black *bindu* inscribed for him on the walls of the primary school in his village. This story has acquired the status of a legend.

From the 1980s, in large paintings titled *Earth* (1982), *La Terre* (1984) and *Green Earth* (1984), Raza explores the infinite potential of the earth's resources. In *Bhoomi* (1987), the *bindu* appears like a lodestar, placed in the centre of the canvas as a dense black circle poised between strong diagonal and horizontal forces. Memory, the power of recall, sifts out the *bindu* from the superfluous and enshrines it as an icon.

Raza's *Bindu* (1980) was shown in Delhi at the Indian Triennale in 1981, where he was invited to exhibit his work. He took this invitation as an honour and decided to exhibit his newest and most significant images, as his gift to his mother country. *Bindu* was painted in acrylic on canvas, within a square frame.



Untitled, 1964
Oil on canvas
91 × 64 cm (35.8 × 25.2 in.)
Private collection



This was exhibited along with a larger canvas in horizontal format, titled *Ma* (1981), in which the central focus was again the large, black and opaque *bindu*.

In my discussions with him in France in 1989 and 1990, which have been published in my book, Raza charts out his experiments with the *bindu*:

“For me, at that initial stage, bindu not only represented the primordial symbol or the seed but also a point which could be enlarged to a circle—one of the most significant geometrical forms.... Immense energy and potential were released by a simple yet essential form. It opened up a whole new vocabulary which corresponded, in a sense, to my training in Paris in formalism.

The first painting realized was a dark black bindu with grey and white radiation around, within a square frame. In the centre of the circle was vertical and a horizontal line. This was the genesis. Slowly, colours started appearing—at first dull, and later, more and more bright.

My earlier bindus were not vibrating; they were dense and solid, as pure form. Later, the

bindu appeared as concentric circles of energy, expanding. Still later, they began moving through space—as the sun moves across the sky.... With the bindu, I discovered that a whole series of different climates of thought can be created. Bindu Panchatattva demonstrates the five elements of earth, water, fire, air and ether. I have interpreted the universe in terms of five primary colours: black, white, red, blue and yellow.³

Raza offers us no apologies for the repetition of the *bindu*, which explores, as it expands, the infinite possibilities of the universe. It could be titled as it is in the works exhibited here as *Bhoomi* (1987) or *Ankuran* (1987) or *Naga* (1989) or *Param Bindu* (1991) or *Bindu Nad* (1994). Nature and its elements are rendered through geometry and pure colours, to create the principles which govern the universe. Raza’s use of form and colour, following what he terms as “the dictates of an inner logic”, return him to the vision of abstraction in India and elsewhere—not only in contemporary modern art but over centuries of belief and practice.

Notes

Ūdho Man Nahī Das Bīs, 1964
Oil on canvas,
127 × 114.3 cm (50 × 45 in.)
Photo Walter Silver / Courtesy:
Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, MA

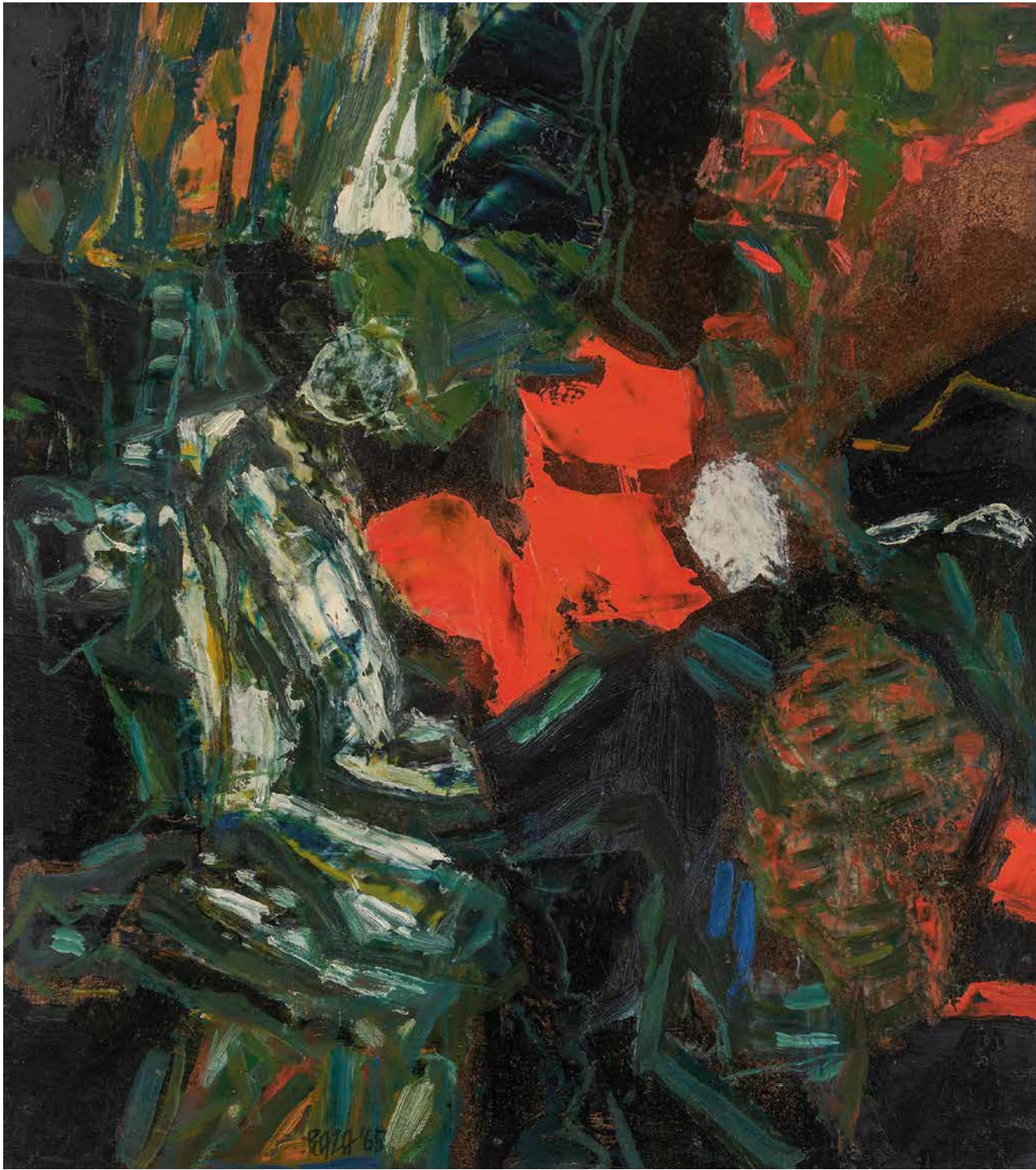
1. Geeti Sen, *Bindu: Space and Time in Raza's Vision*, Media Transasia Ltd, Bangkok, Hongkong, New Delhi, 1997, Republished by the Raza Foundation and Mapin Publishing, 2021, p. 24.

2. Jacques Lassaigue, writing from a retrospective view in the *Raza Catalogue*, Gallery Chemould, Bombay, 1976.

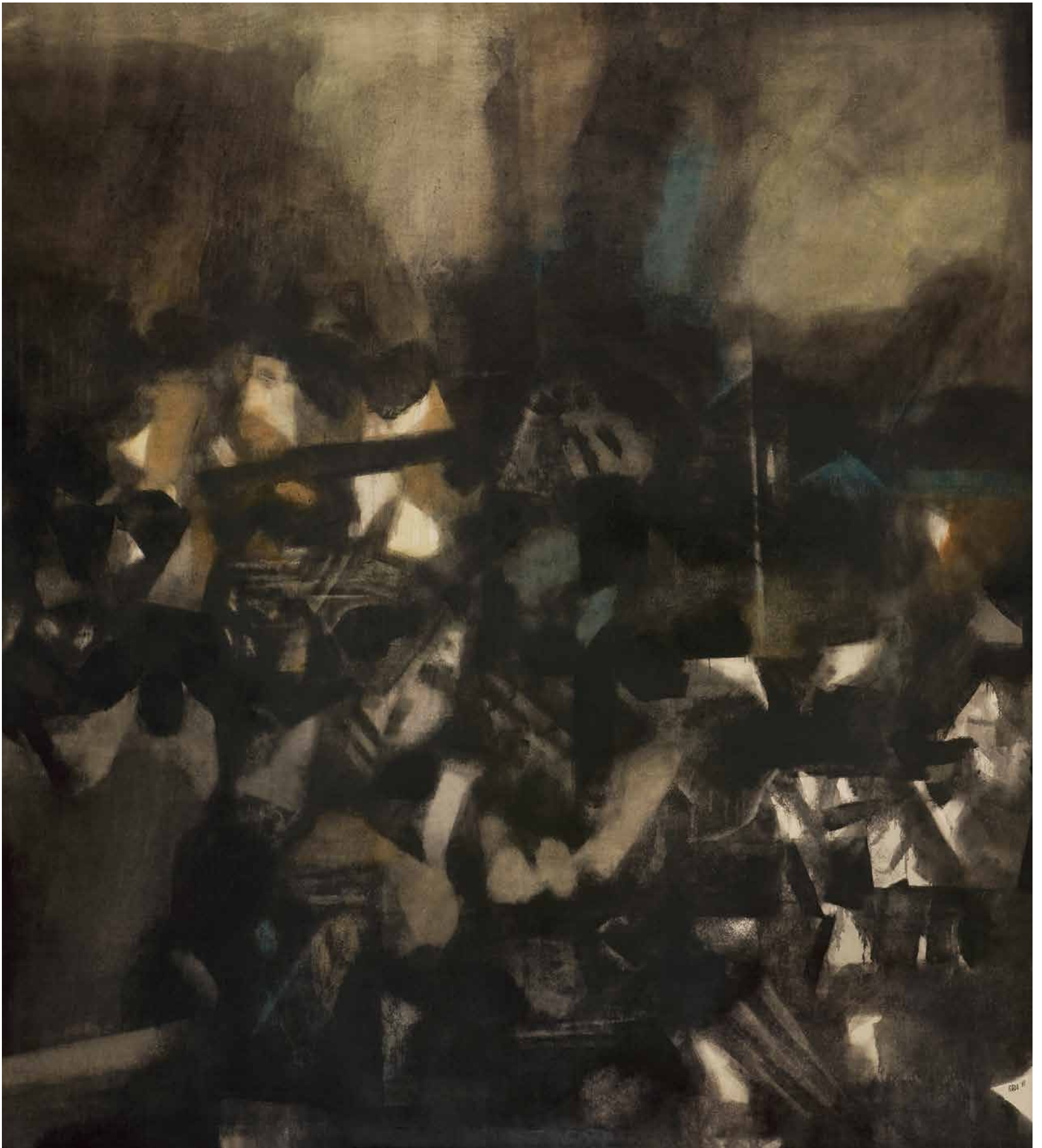
3. Excerpted from Geeti Sen, *Bindu: Space and Time in Raza's Vision*, Media Transasia Ltd, Bangkok, Hong Kong, New Delhi, 1997, Republished by the Raza Foundation and Mapin Publishing, 2021.

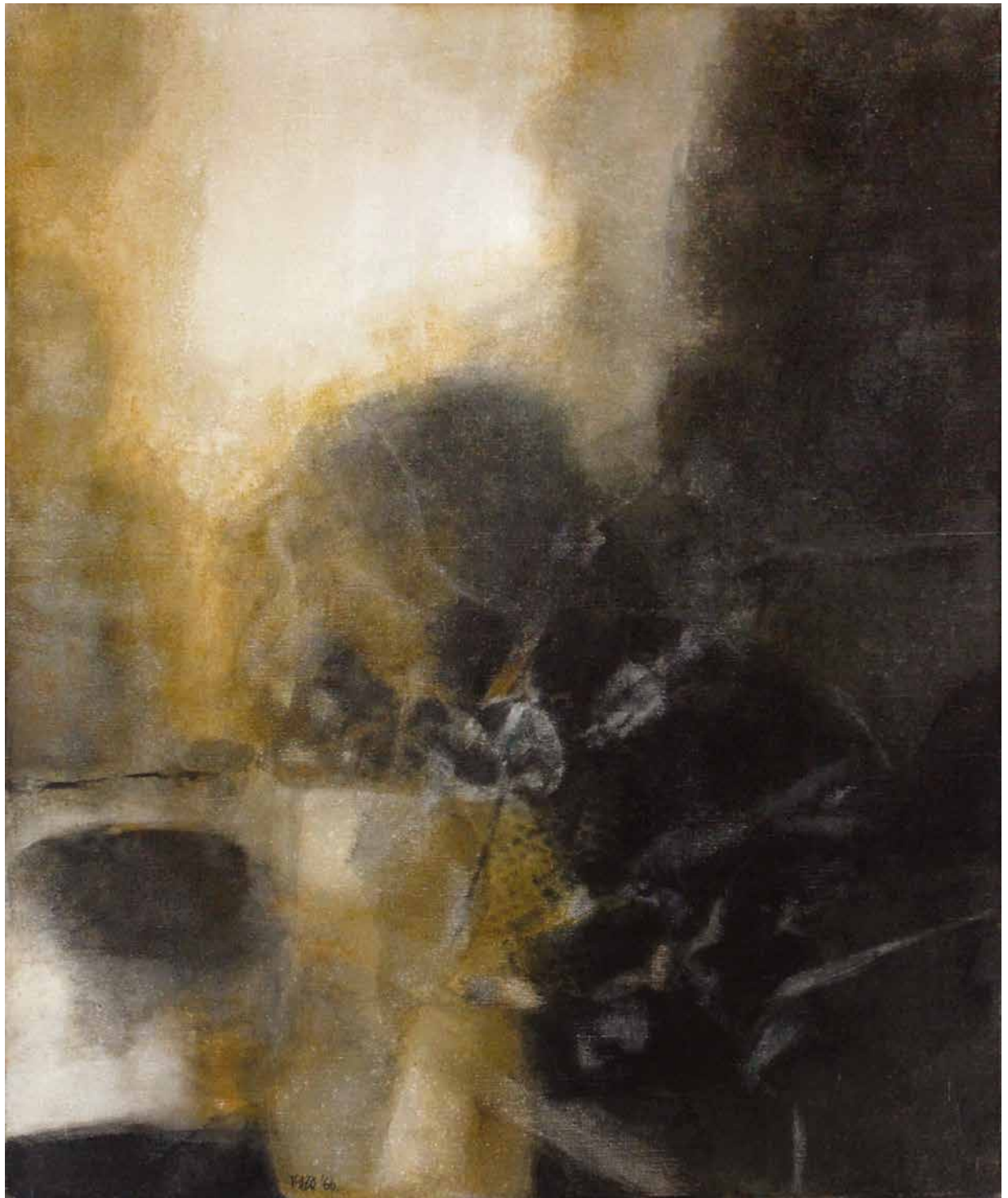


Untitled, 1964
Oil on board
29 × 23 cm (11.4 × 9 in.)



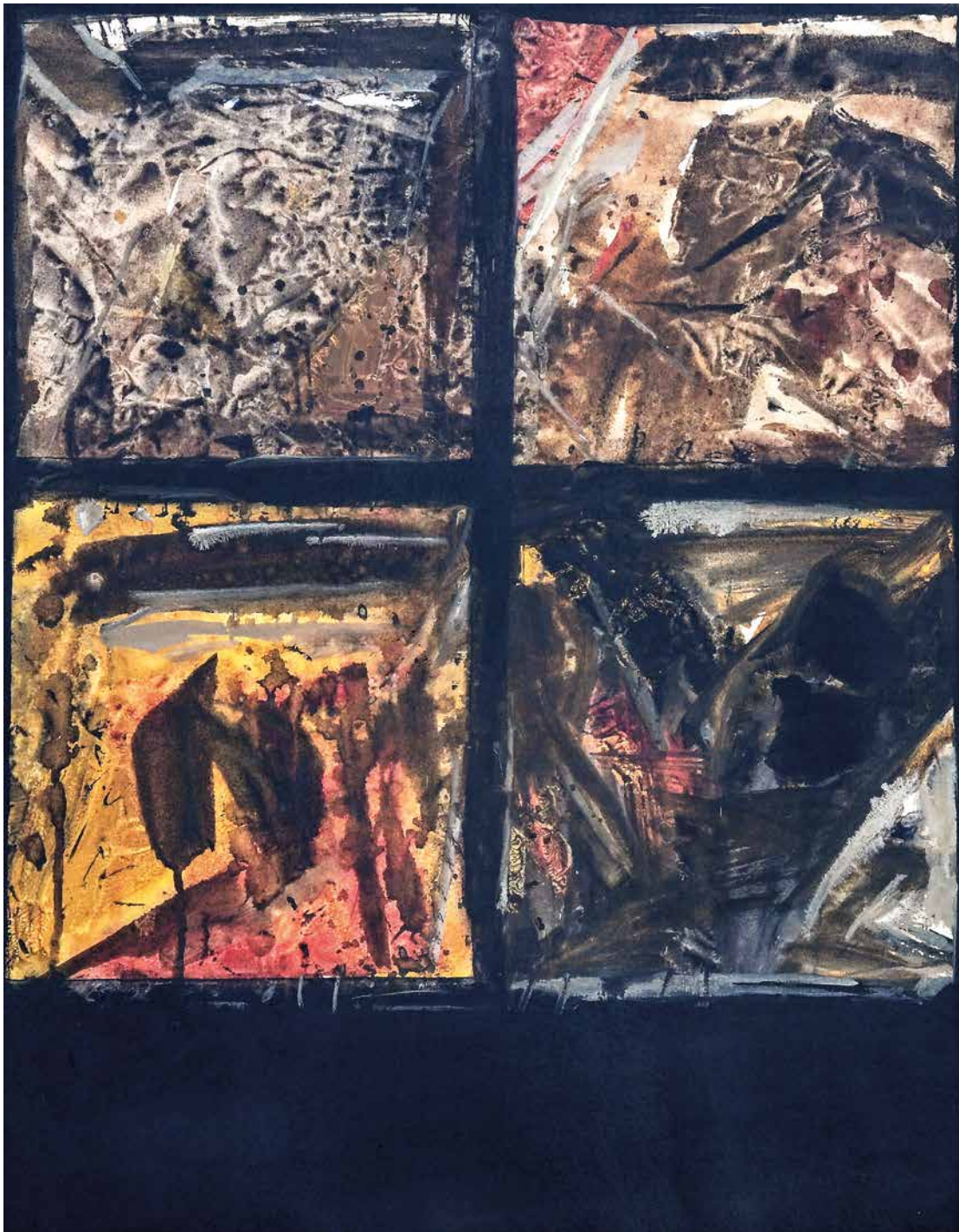
Basoli Landscape, 1965
Oil on plywood
42 × 37.5 cm (16.5 × 14.8 in.)





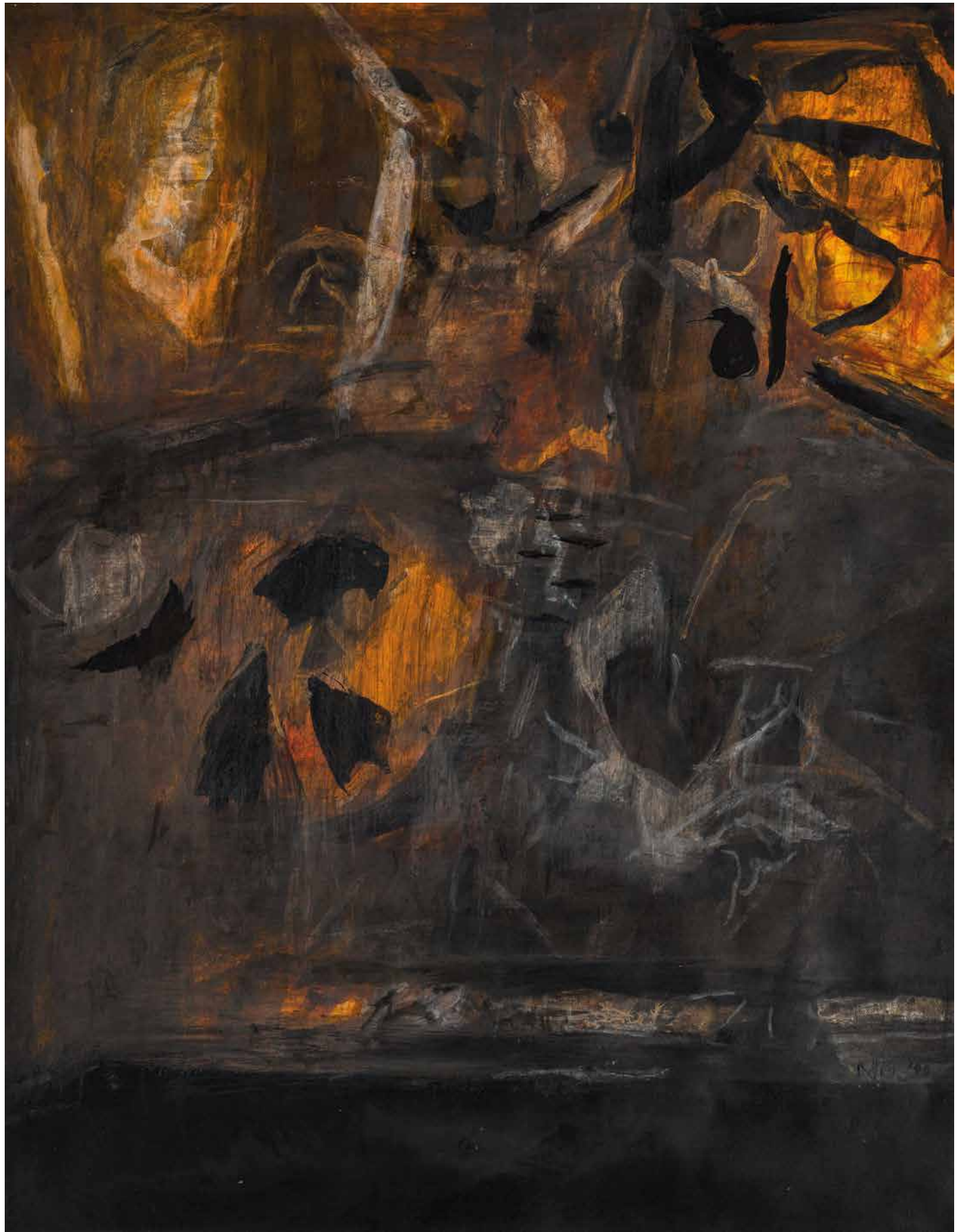
Rivage, 1966
Oil on canvas, 73 × 60 cm (28.7 × 23.6 in.)
Courtesy: Galerie Mirchandani
+ Steinruecke, Mumbai

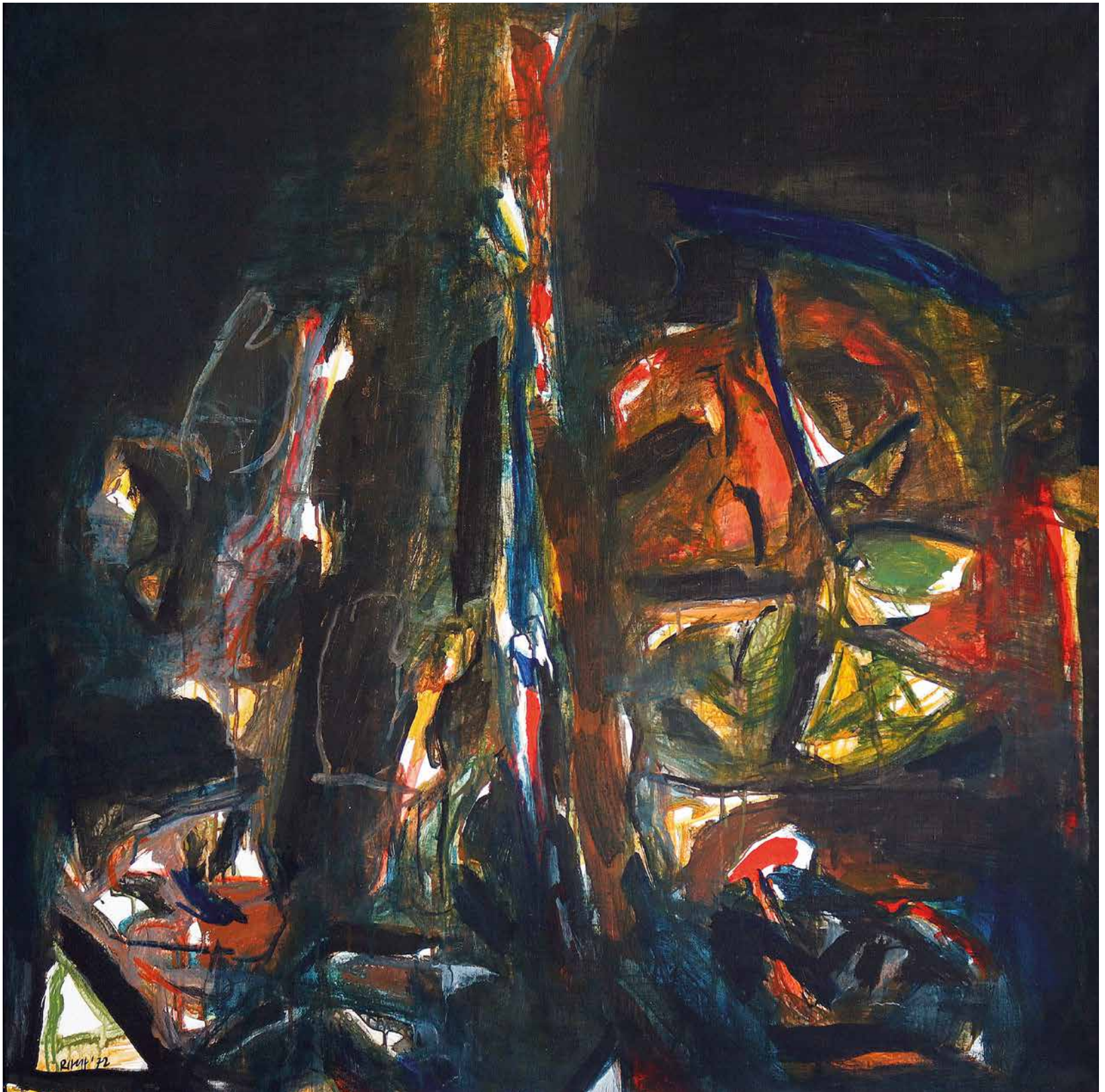
La Provence Noire, 1965
Acrylic on canvas, 203 × 183 cm (80 × 72 in.)
Private collection



Untitled, 1970
Watercolour on paper
63 × 49 cm (24.8 × 19.3 in.)

Untitled, 1980
Acrylic on paper
65.5 × 50 cm (25.8 × 19.7 in.)

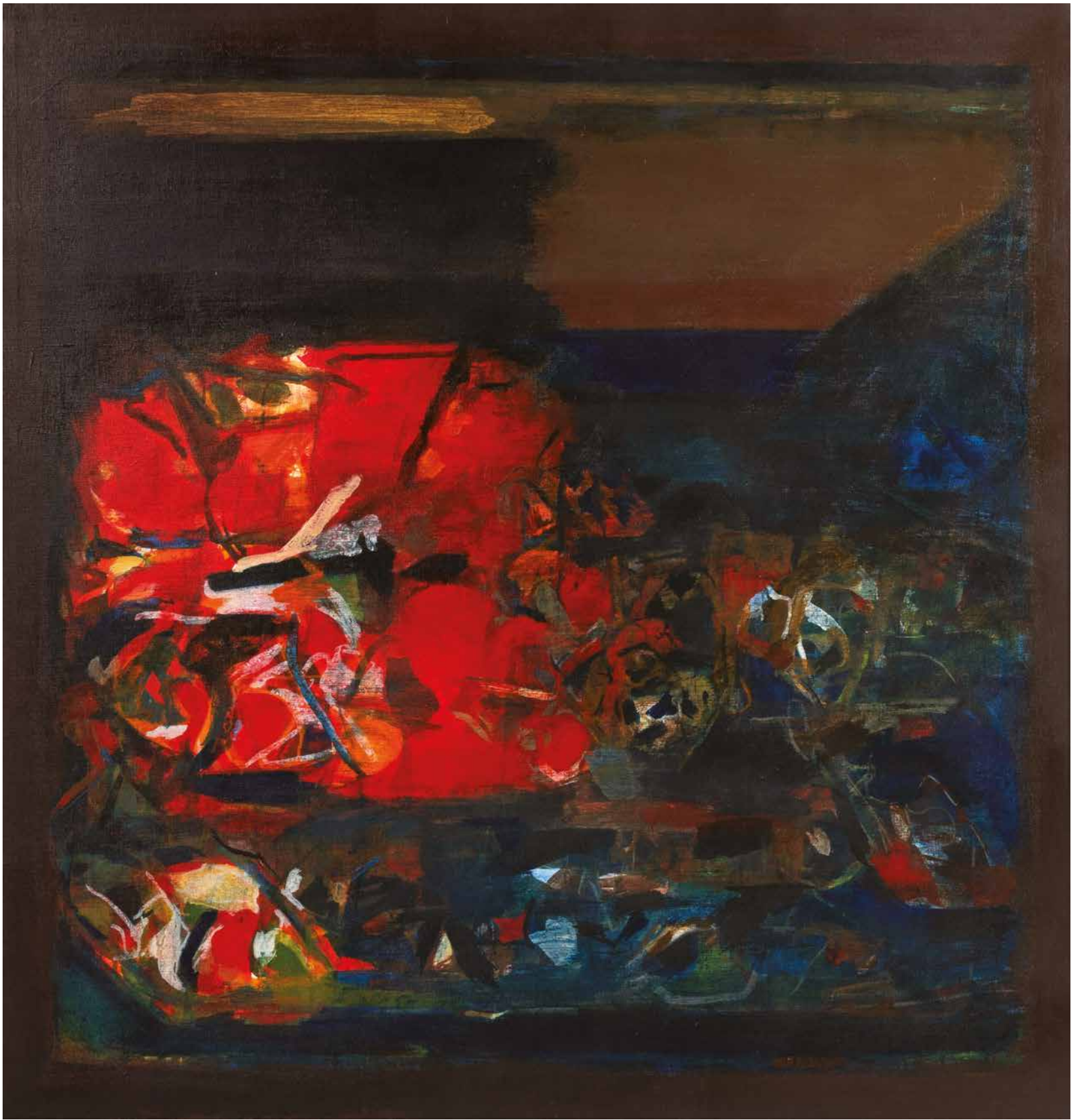




La Source, 1972
Acrylic on canvas
100 × 100 cm (39.4 × 39.4 in.)
Private collection



L'Orage, 1973
Acrylic on canvas,
100 × 100 cm (39.4 × 39.4 in.)
Courtesy: Private collection, Mumbai





La Nuit, 1972
Oil on canvas, 100 × 100 cm (39.4 × 39.4 in.)
Courtesy: Private collection, London

Untitled, 1976
Acrylic on canvas, 116.84 × 111.76 cm (46 × 44 in.)
Courtesy: Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi



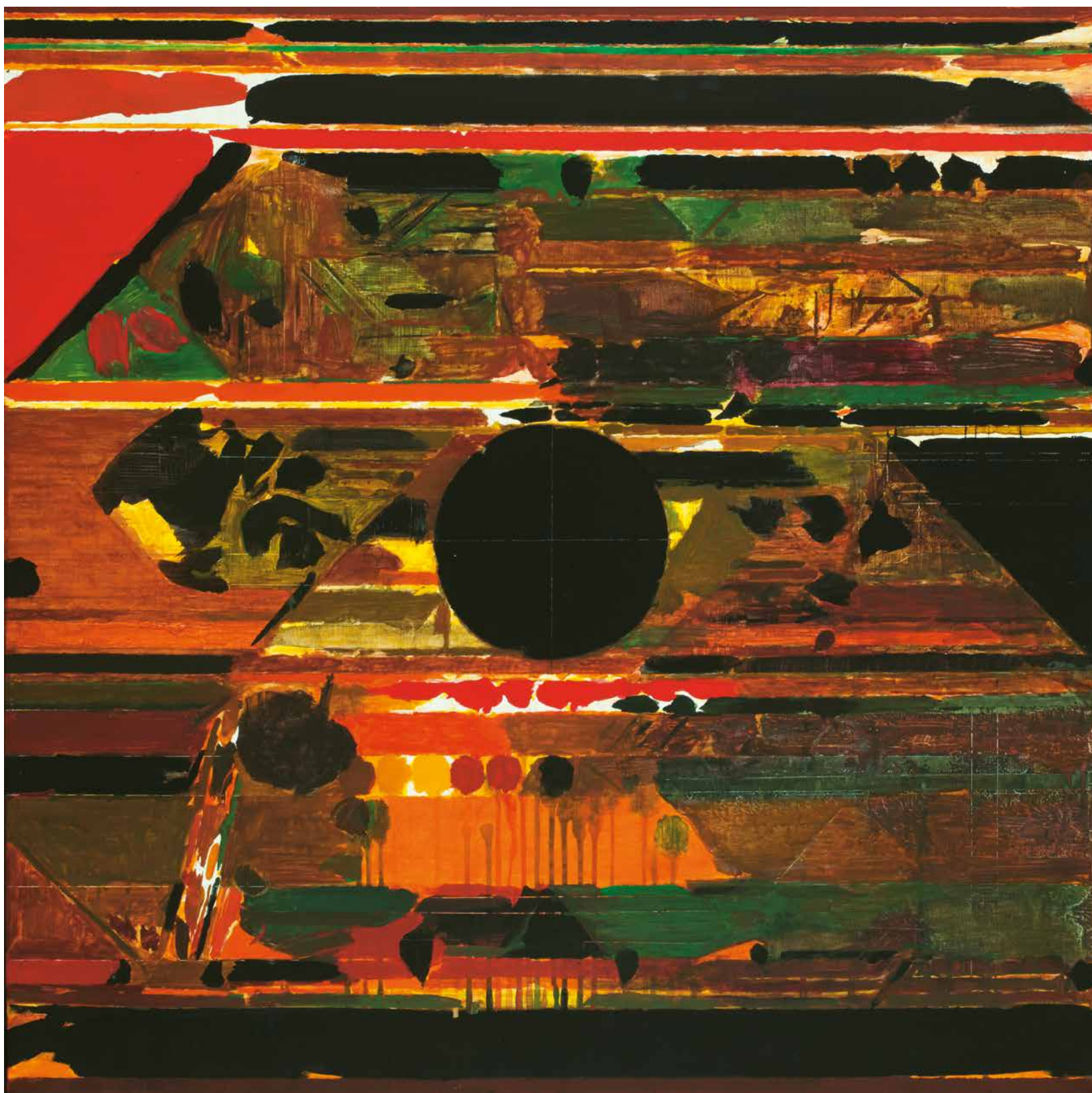
La Terre, 1979
Acrylic on canvas
130 × 195 cm (51.2 × 76.8 in.)



La Terre, 1979
Oil on canvas, 114 × 195 cm (44.9 × 76.8 in.)
Courtesy: Piramal Museum of Art, Mumbai



BenglaDesh, 1971
Acrylic on board, 50 × 50 cm (19.7 × 19.7 in.)
Courtesy: Collection of Ashish and Resham Jain



Untitled, 1982
Acrylic on canvas
80 × 80 cm (31.5 × 31.5 in.)
Private collection



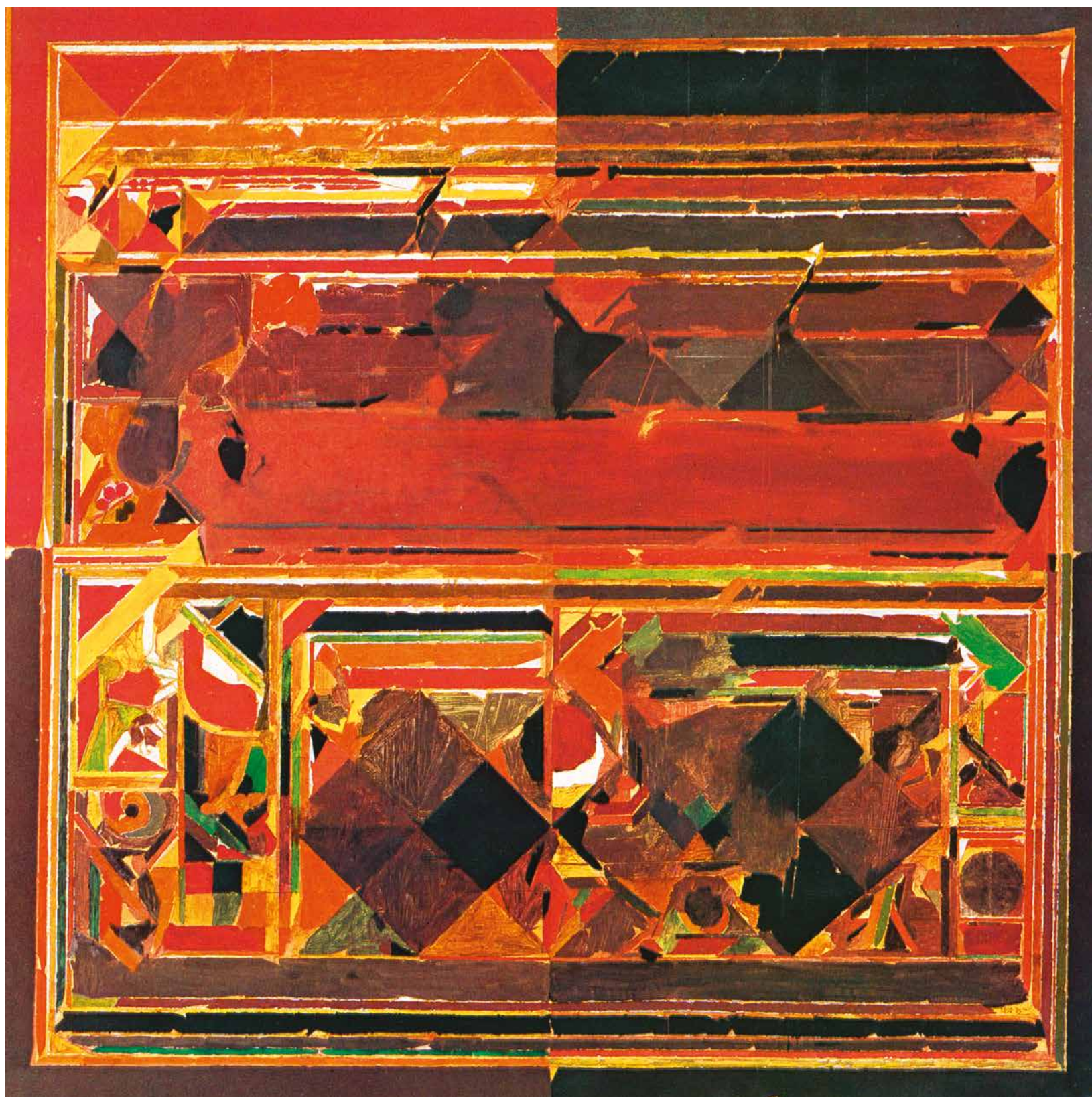
Maa, 1981
Acrylic on canvas,
175 × 260 cm (68.9 × 102.4 in.)
Courtesy: Private collection, London





La Terre, 1981
Acrylic on canvas
100 × 100 cm (39.4 × 39.4 in.)
Private collection

Saurashtra, 1983
Acrylic on canvas,
200 × 200 cm (78.75 × 78.75 in.)
Courtesy: Kiran Nadar Museum of
Art, New Delhi





Rajasthan, 1983
Acrylic on canvas,
80 × 80 cm (31.5 × 31.5 in.)
Courtesy: Kiran Nadar Museum of Art

Garmiyan, 2001
Acrylic on board, 30 × 20 cm (11.8 × 7.9 in.)

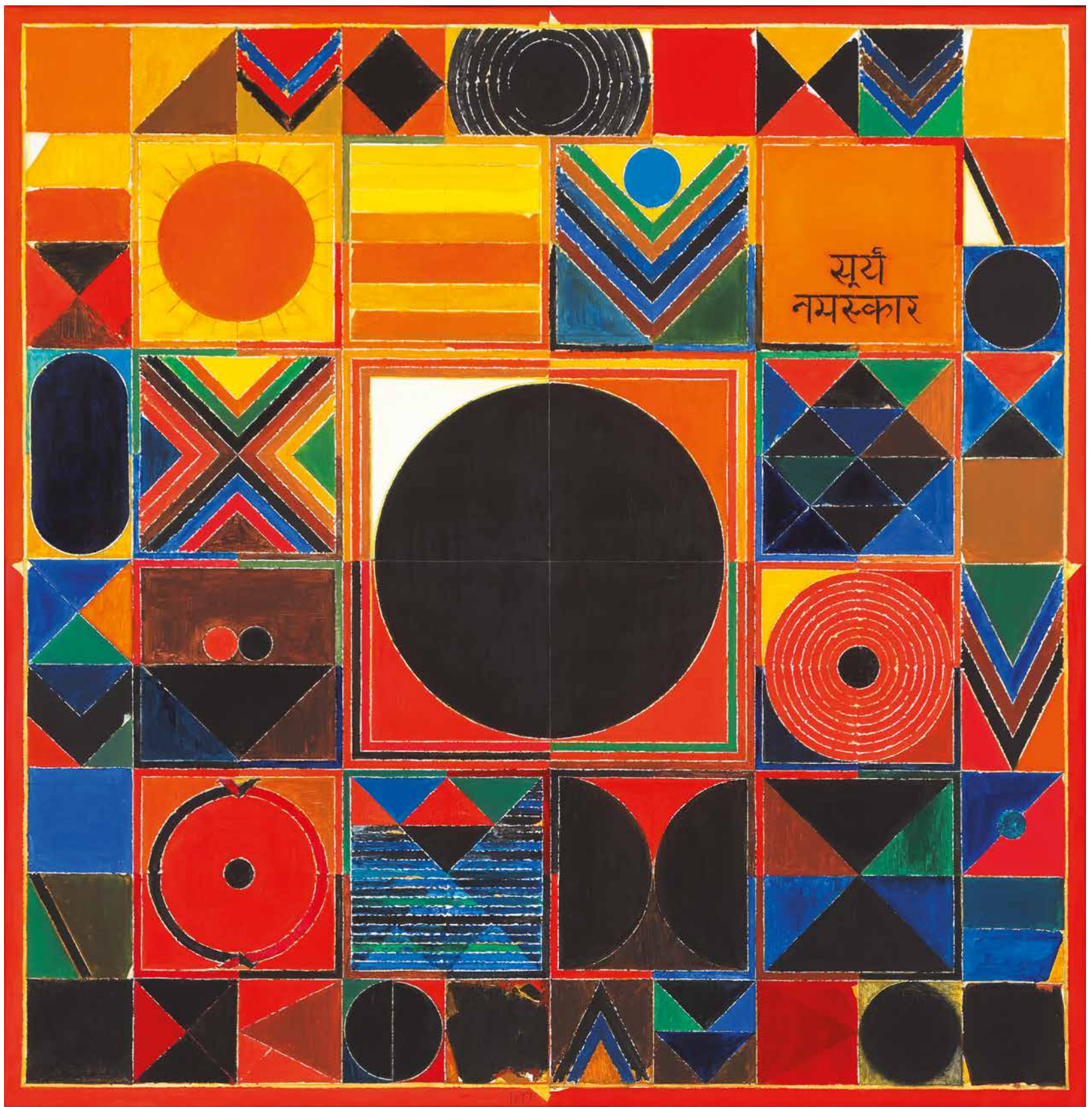




Genese, 1988
Acrylic on canvas
80 × 80 cm (31.5 × 31.5 in.)
Private collection



Bhoomi, 1994
Acrylic on canvas, 150 × 150 cm (59 × 59 in.)
Collection: Kiran Nadar Museum of Art,
New Delhi





Sansar II (Univers, 4 Grand Bindu), 1994

Acrylic on canvas

150 × 150 cm (59 × 59 in.)

Signed, dated and inscribed 'RAZA/ "SANSARII" /
(Univers, 4 grand Bindu / 1994)' on the reverse

Surya - Namaskar, 1993

Acrylic on canvas, 150 × 150 cm (59 × 59 in.)

Courtesy: Piramal Museum of Art, Mumbai



Raza during his Paris days
Courtesy: The Raza Foundation, New Delhi

In the Shadow of the Black Sun

Gayatri Sinha

That Sayed Haider Raza's artistic career unfolded with a progressive linearity of intent is well demonstrated by this exhibition. Beginning with his sketches and watercolours of the early 1940s, there is an organic growth through his explorations of turbulent movement and a voluptuous embrace of colour in a distinctly expressionistic style, building up to his final acquiescence into the formal geometric symbolism of the last decades of his life.

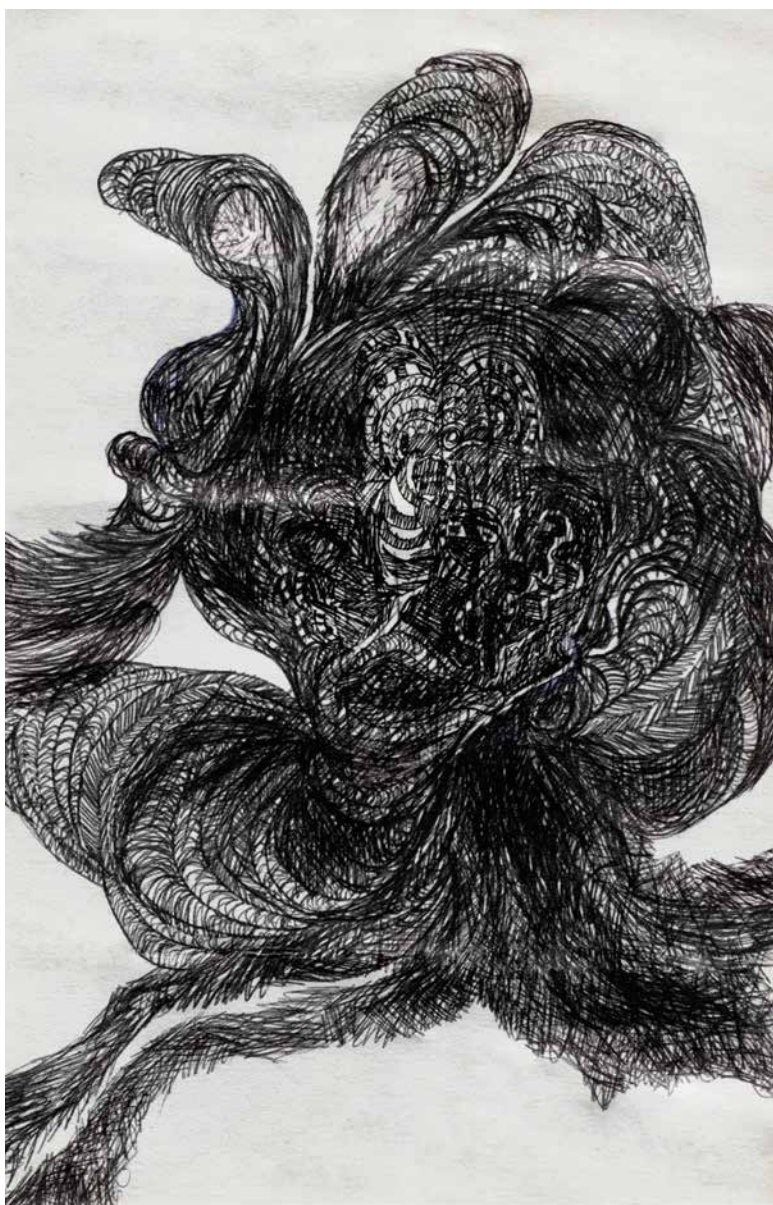
That Raza titled his works in Hindi, French and English creates a cartographic trace of his travels between cultures and continents, as does the poetry that he held dear, a proximate presence that was to colour and define his art. Perhaps, we can also understand how poetry in at least three languages—free of all material trappings, snatched out of the air—was to define his desire to live in different cultural strains but also beyond them.

Bombay/Kashmir

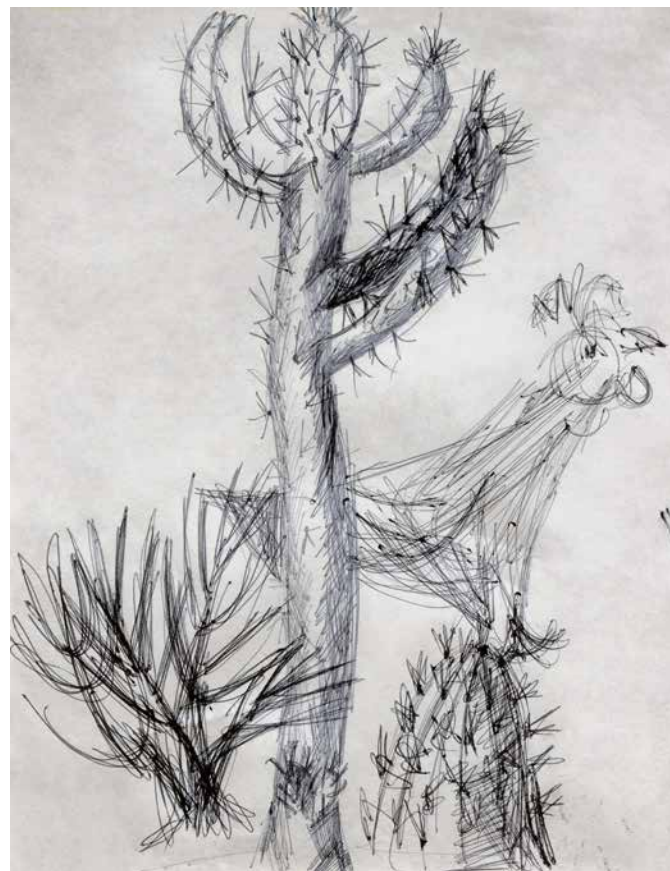
Dating to the turbulent pre- and post-independence years of the 1940s, Raza's early works done in Bombay and Kashmir bear a rare serenity. He graduated from the J. J. School of Art in 1943, the year that the Bengal famine racked the resources of the nation, even as the Tebhaga movement marked a

watershed peasant rebellion. Living and working in metropolitan Bombay, Raza rapidly entered cosmopolitan circles. The sketches from the Schlesinger collection on view bear testimony to his proximity to the expatriate artist trio of Rudi von Leyden, Walter Langhammer and Emmanuel Schlesinger, who would exercise considerable influence on Raza and his cohorts in the Progressive Artists' Group. Raza's watercolours from this time, consisting of portraits and views of towns and cities, reveal an engaging use of colour and light, which he would soon develop into what von Leyden described positively as "the non-illustrative, non-representational quality of colour in painting".

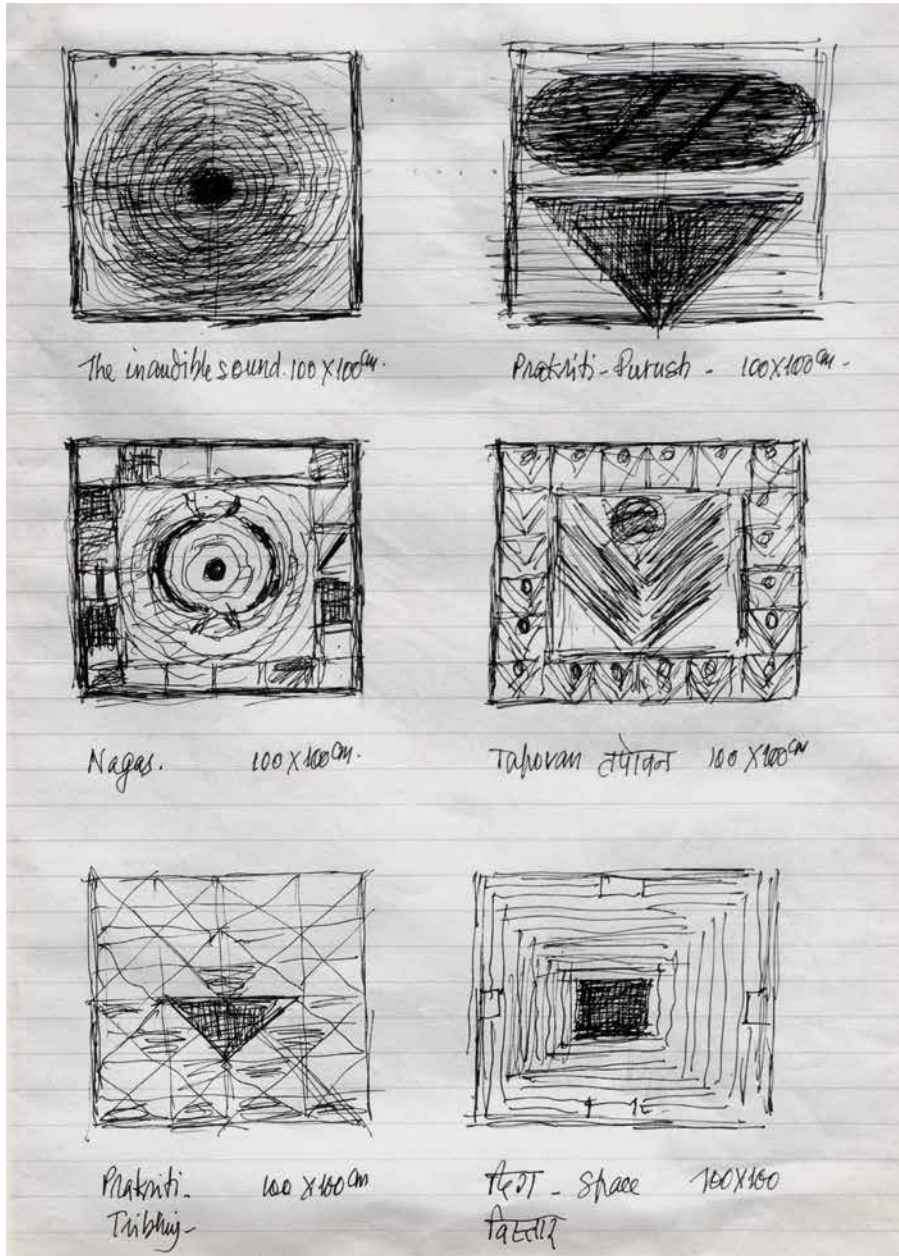
What becomes apparent in this phase is Raza's use of what Susan Sontag termed the "recessionist view". Herein, the gaze of the artist seems to pull back into a comprehension of the landscape as impressionistic, and the figures appear small and unindividuated. Although Raza made portraits even later in his career, the human figure seems to hold little enchantment or curiosity. Nor does he seek the intimacy of the close-up of the human form and its painterly delineation. His main preoccupation in these works of the 1940s, such as *Gol Gummad* (1943 and 1947), is with



Drawing on paper
25 × 16 cm (9.9 × 6.3 in.)



Drawing on paper
26 × 20 cm (10.2 × 7.9 in.)



Drawing on paper
22 x 30 cm (8.7 x 11.8 in.)



Drawing on paper
26 x 36 cm (10.2 x 14.2 in.)



Portrait, 1941
Pencil on paper
48 × 36 cm (18.9 × 14.2 in.)
Signed and dated on verso
Stamped 'NAGPUR SCHOOL OF ART
SOCIETY, NAGPUR' on reverse; signed
'S. H. RAZA', upper right and stamped
'NAGPUR SCHOOL OF ART SOCIETY,
NAGPUR' on reverse
Private collection



Untitled (Princess Street, Bombay), 1945
 Watercolour on paper laid on cardboard
 31 × 35.6 cm (12.2 × 14 in.)
 Courtesy: Piramal Museum of Art, Mumbai

Untitled (Bombay Street Scene), 1945
 Watercolour on paper laid on cardboard
 30.9 × 39.4 cm (12 × 15.5 in.)
 Courtesy: Piramal Museum of Art, Mumbai



Untitled (View of Bombay), 1945
 Watercolour and gouache on paper laid on card
 43.9 × 56.9 cm (17.3 × 22.4 in.)
 Courtesy: Piramal Museum of Art, Mumbai

Untitled (Cityscape), 1946
 Watercolour on paper,
 17.7 × 25.4 cm (7 × 10 in.)
 Courtesy: Piramal Museum of Art, Mumbai

how light transforms the landscape, illuminating the paintings from within. This is most apparent in his views of Bombay and Srinagar, with clusters of houses and boats breaking the landscape into asymmetrical planes and surfaces, an element that anticipates some of his post-cubist works of Paris from the early 1950s.

The significance of the Paris paintings lies at least in part in the complete occlusion of human bodies, and in their broad alignment with the prevailing School of Paris's engagement with lyrical abstraction, and its response to personal expressivity. These works may have also been borne of Raza's inner experience of an overarching sense of conflict that he felt from the mid-1940s, first in India with the trauma of Partition and his family's migration to Pakistan, and thereafter with the difficulties of being a young émigré artist in post-war Europe. As a struggling artist in Paris, Raza did book design to support himself; at the same time, he continued to be in close touch with his Indian *confrères*, writing letters copiously and occasionally exhibiting with them. In artistic terms, the impressionist landscapes of his Bombay years were soon overlain with influences from the powerful School of Paris. Post-war Europe was a society experimenting with the philosophies of personalism, which placed the human being as the starting point of philosophical reflection. At the same time,

existentialism and its popular discourse addressed the crises of absurdity, anxiety and the purpose of human existence that emerged in the aftermath of the World Wars. One may speculate here that Raza's gradual embrace of a gestural abstraction in the late 1950s served as a mode that was generous enough to accommodate these different cultural and intellectual strains, artistic ideas and transcontinental influences.

India/Paris

It is generally presumed that an artist's oeuvre is a mark of his temperament and his circumstances. While Raza's early works draw on landscapes and historic locations he would have visited or painted from photographs, his progressive inclination marks states of enigma, with the canvas demonstrating a transformative exuberance as much as a sombre, even dark, state that recalls the depths of the black paintings of Pierre Soulages. It may be surmised that Raza was entirely interested in using light as a fractal that could break through the painted surface and create peaks and troughs to absorb or reject illumination. The process speaks of intuition and a universal approach to the human condition. In his conversation and correspondence with Indian friends and artists, Raza would have been keenly aware of the social turbulence that the nation was undergoing in the 1960s, with the Indo-China and Indo-Pakistan wars, the



Untitled, 1940s
Watercolour,
42 × 56 cm (16.5 × 22 in.)

Bombay from Malabar Hill, 1948
Gouache on paper,
59.5 × 89.4 cm (23.4 × 35 in.)
Courtesy: Kiran Nadar Museum of
Art, New Delhi





Kashmir Landscape, 1948
Gouache on paper
61 × 45 cm (24 × 17.8 in.)
Private collection

deaths of successive prime ministers Jawaharlal Nehru and Lal Bahadur Shastri, and a worsening economic situation. It is, perhaps, at this point that his journey diverges quite sharply and becomes more deeply Indian, even as it seeks a more cosmopolitan character. Sunil Khilnani, in his book *The Idea of India*, has suggested that India as a civilization passed through three phases of change. The first was when the country saw feudal powers give way to a single sovereign state; the second was the implementation of the grand vision of democracy, where the right of the vote brought every Indian onto an equal footing; and the third was the confrontation of an ancient civilization with modernity. It is in keeping with this third phase that Raza seems to have achieved his most distinct success, through the evolution of a highly synthetic, abstract language.

In Raza's long career, we may trace at least three phases of abstraction, each seeking a different form of expressivity. While he was still in India, he was exposed to European artists such as Oskar Kokoshka, Otto Dix, Max Beckmann and George Grosz, as well as the Vienna School and Freud. Before his departure to Paris, we already see a flattening of perspective and the first burst of abstraction that rips through his impressionistic, peaceable landscapes by the mid-1940s. Paris in the 1950s, with its different currents and styles, the lingering influences of Fauvism

and cubism, presented other aesthetic possibilities. Like other artists of his time, Raza in the 1950s responded with heightened engagement to the painterly preoccupation of the time with gesture and speed, identified with lyrical abstraction.

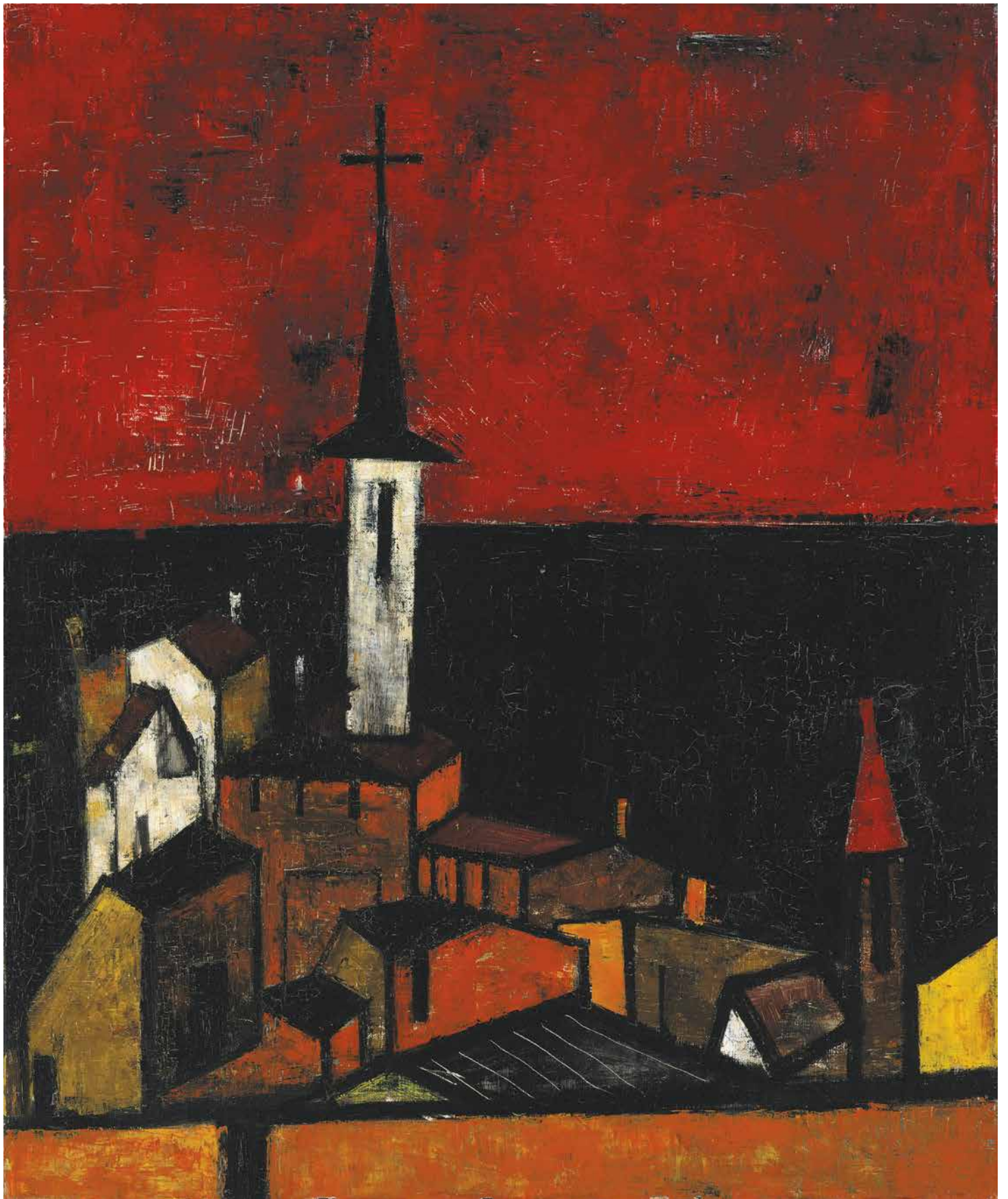
Raza's picturesque landscapes open out into non-representational painting as early as the mid-1950s; in a work like *Untitled* (1956) from the present collection, the ground seems to appear with great force in the foreground, virtually rising above and submerging the standing houses in the rear. It is as if a massive tremor has set upon the landscape, like a great cataclysm. Through many mediations in colour and form, the ground becomes the artist's primary subject, assuming a propensity to heave and shift, and rupture and part, to reveal extraordinary depth. By the time we approach *Day Raga* (1966), the mood is vibrant, even ecstatic. Against a deep, sanguine background, the surface seems to break into jagged peaks and troughs against a turbulent sea of red. Clearly, there are periods of experimentation along the way, the aqueous drip effect of *Untitled* (1964) recalling, for instance, the large expressionist works of Joan Mitchell, which she painted while living in Giverny around the same time that Raza was working in Paris. Three or four works in the present show speak of a darker phase, in which a luminous depth emerges out of the energies of black paint. Raza was painting these works

in the mid-1960s, contemporaneous to Soulages, who spoke of white as a redemptive presence in his “black and night” paintings. Raza has been identified with the colours of Rajasthani paintings, the fiery molten sunsets of the desert, the eclipse-like black sun, and the vibrancy of the Indian landscape. Simultaneously, the influence of European abstract expressionism, Biblical readings of light and darkness, and the symbolic cultural value that is attributed to colour may be read in his works. In *The Invisible Cross* (1970), the ecclesiastical conflict between darkness and light, between good and evil, is signified as the light that redeems and leads away from an uncomprehending darkness.¹ Raza’s own preoccupation with these two elements, of the sun as the illuminating Bhanu Mandala or else as the black orb/star of Islamic belief, introduces a phenomenological strain, even as its presence marks the artist’s movement away from gestural to geometric abstraction.

In what may be seen as the third and conclusive investigation of abstraction, Raza gradually allows the elemental forms of the *bindu* and the square (also interpreted as the Vastupurushmandala) to gradually subdue the turbulent, even reckless energies of the expressionistic landscape. Order is imposed through a highly calibrated geometric symbolism, one that seems to draw from the wave of geometric abstraction that swept the West, as much as from the ancient Indian

geometric symbolism of the *yantra*. This allows us to understand how Raza reinvests the ground with endless possibilities. While his landscapes have been interpreted to represent space as a site, Raza himself refutes this association. He wrote: “Some paintings like *Satpura*, *Bhumi* and *Saurashtra* carry very little actual visual elements.”² In reworking the ground with a fresh canvas as it were, Raza found enormous potential in the *yantra*, which by definition is a “a tool and a form, used to control, curb, bind or influence”. The Sri Yantra, the form haloed by Shankaracharya in his eighth-century text *Saundaryalahiri*, which celebrates the union of Shiva and Shakti, appears as both the sculptural form of Meru and as a two-dimensional object of veneration. Raza draws generously from its geometric elements, its ascending and descending triangles. However, he also dismantles and reimagines its possibility to reinterpret the ground. He draws on symmetry but reconstitutes the different geometric elements. He adds linear effects that vibrate and pulsate across the surface of the painting, rendering the work rhythmic and aural. The square, which is suggestive of the Vastupurushmandala and holds the *yantra*, is deliberately broken in parts to appear like an unfinished painted frame, while the luminous black orb seems to draw all the colours of his paintings into its dark depths.

Untitled (Church in Landscape),
c. 1950s
Oil on canvas,
71.1 × 59.7 cm (28 × 23.5 in.)
Courtesy: T. H. Collection





Paysage Provençal - I (Cagnes), 1951
Gouache and ink on cardboard,
52.7 × 57.8 cm (20.75 × 22.75 in.)
Courtesy: Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi



Haut de Cagnes, 1951
Gouache on paper, 68.6 × 72.4 cm (27 × 28.5 in.)
Courtesy: Darashaw Collection, Mumbai



Village, 1956
Gouache on paper
54 × 63 cm (21.3 × 24.8 in.)
Private collection

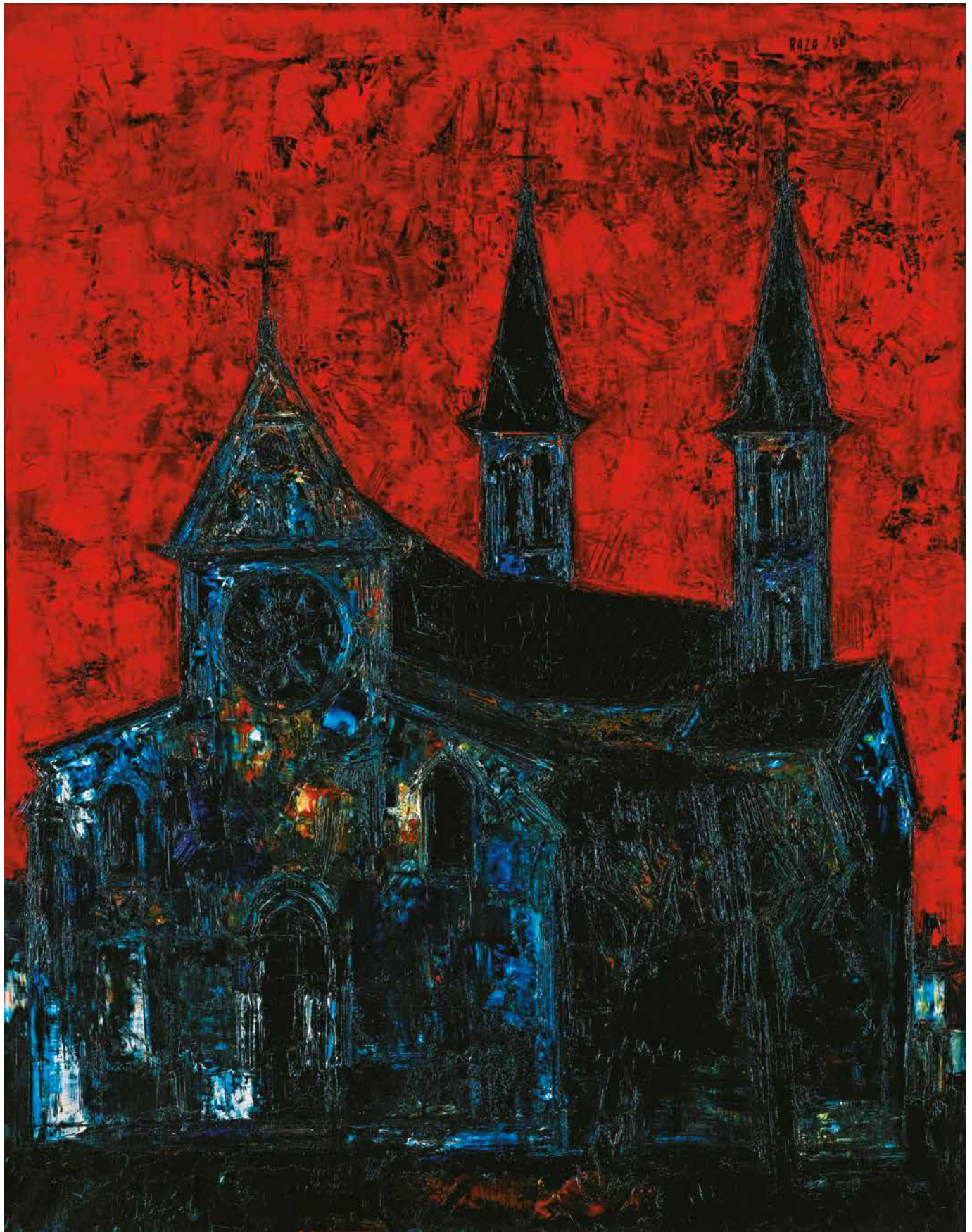


Eglise Jaune, 1956
Acrylic on paper
48 × 63 cm (18.9 × 24.8 in.)
Courtesy: The Raza Foundation

(following pages)
Village Corse, 1957
Oil on canvas, 80 × 160 cm (31.5 × 63 in.)
Courtesy: Musée d'ethnographie de Genève,
Johnathan Watts







Dominating each work with its enigmatic presence, Raza's black sun is a magnetic object of contemplation and lends itself to different readings. Raza's own explanation was fairly cryptic: "...'black suns' in my paintings were mostly the earth or the sun or the moon. I believe that this subject can be painted for centuries to come. In any case, it has been the essential preoccupation of my work—this earth from which we emerge, into which we go back."³

Other readings may place the black sun in the domain of psychic phenomenology. A follower of Tibetan Buddhism, the psychoanalyst Carl Jung had visited Darjeeling to study the religion. He thereafter wrote of the Mandala and its centre, defining it as "a central point to which everything is related, or by a concentric arrangement of the

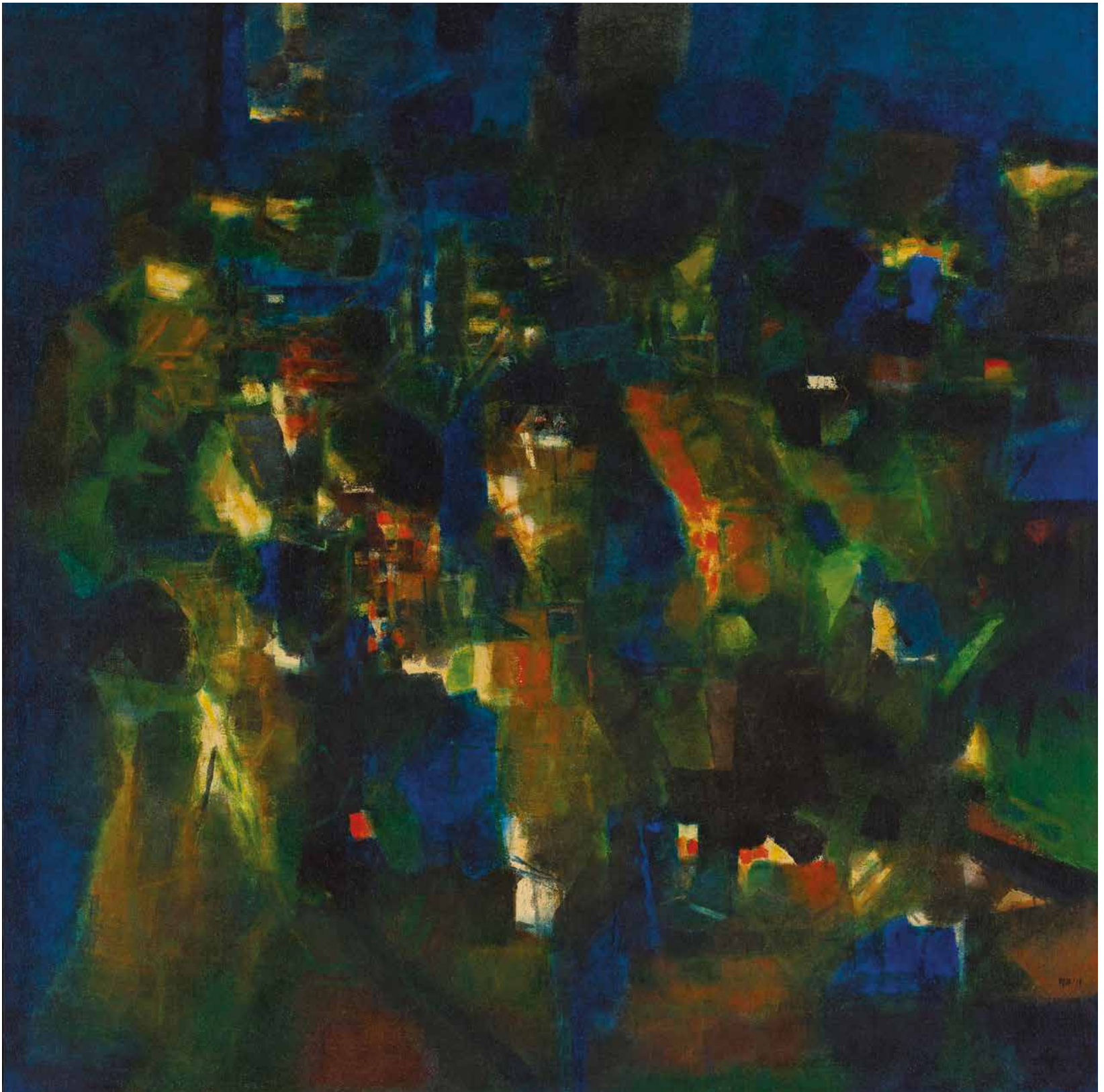
disordered multiplicity and of contradictory and irreconcilable elements. This is evidently man's self-healing on the part of Nature which does not spring from conscious reflection but by an instinctive impulse."⁴

The black sun dominating the centre of Raza's paintings can signify an eclipse and its concomitant belief in a radical change of energies. Equally, it may be Khatim, the black planet which heralds the Prophet in Islam as the last *rasool* or messenger, a symbol that marks the end of a spiritual quest. In the exuberance of his later works and his use of colour as life-affirming, the sombre black sun places Raza within the unsettled verities of his time and our own. Distant and enigmatic, it allows for a pause and a return to the primordial state of stillness.

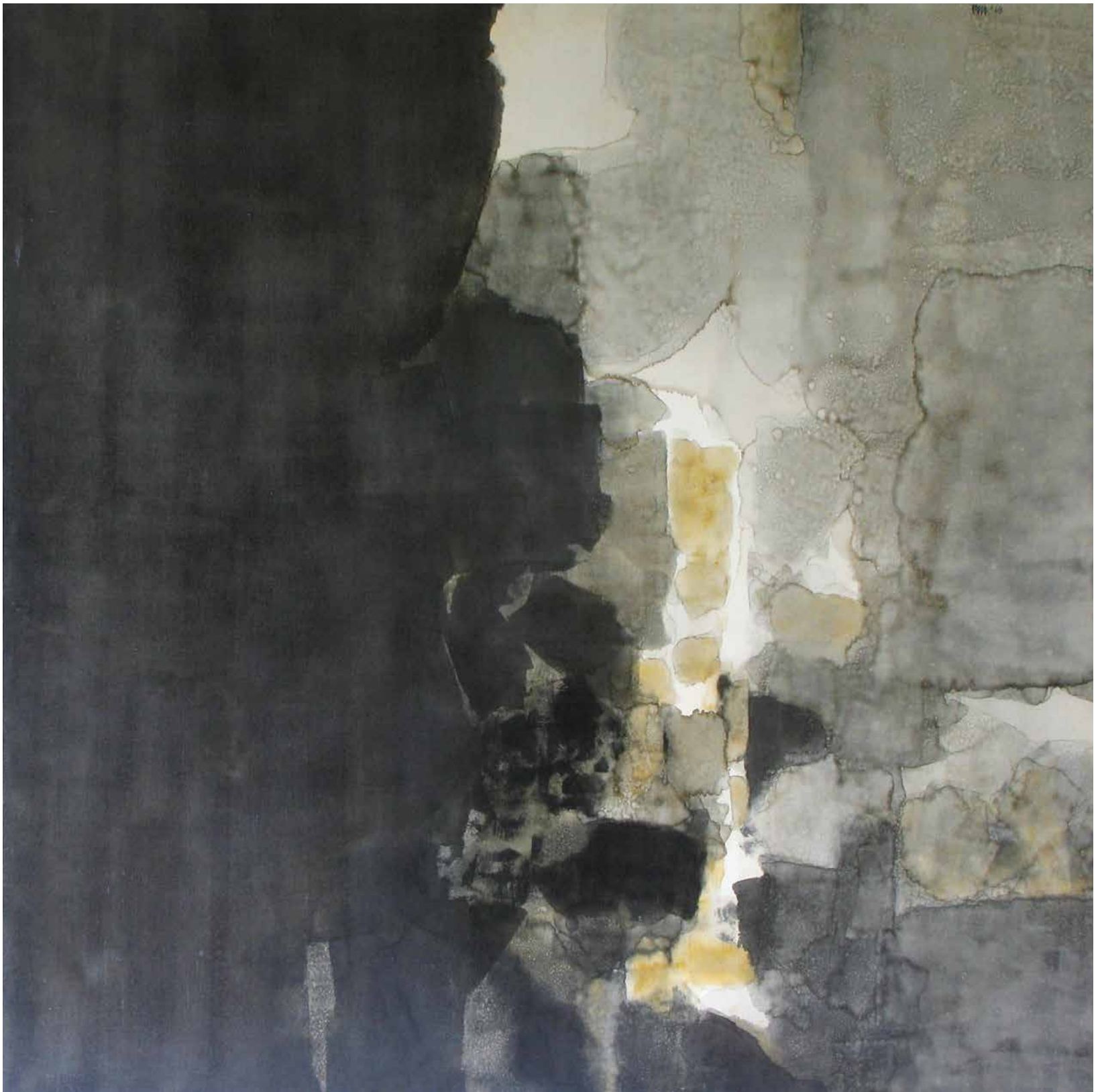
Church at Meulan, 1956
Oil on board,
91.4 × 72.4 cm (36 × 28.5 in.)
Courtesy: Darashaw Collection,
Mumbai

Notes

1. "The light shines in darkness and the darkness comprehended it not" (John 1:5, NIV Bible); "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned" (Isaiah 9:2, NIV Bible).
2. From "Evolution and Continuity: An Inner Temperament," reproduced in *Sayed Haider Raza* (New Delhi: Mapin Publishing and The Raza Foundation, 2023), 96.
3. Raza, S. H. and Sen, Geeti. "Genesis of the Image," *India International Centre Quarterly* 13, no. 1 (March 1986), 5-26.
4. Jung, C. G. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, translated by R. F. C. Hull (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980).



Nuit Sur la Ville, 1964
Oil on canvas, 190 × 190 cm (74.8 × 74.8 in.)
Photo Gwen Le Bras / Courtesy:
Galerie Lara Vincy, Paris



Grey Landscape, 1968
Acrylic on canvas, 150 × 150 cm (59 × 59 in.)
Courtesy: Jehangir Nicholson Art Foundation,
Mumbai



Black Sun, 1968
Oil on canvas, 150 × 150 cm (59 × 59 in.)
Courtesy: Private collection



Terre Rouge, 1968
Acrylic on canvas, 150 × 150 cm (59 × 59 in.)
Courtesy: Jane and Kito de Boer Collection



La Terre, 1970
Acrylic on canvas, 324 × 228 cm (127.5 × 89.7 in.)
Courtesy: Private (international) collection



Composition, 1971
Oil on canvas, 30 × 30 cm (11.8 × 11.8 in.)
Courtesy: Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi





Zamin, 1971
Acrylic on canvas, 189 × 300 cm (74.4 × 118 in.)
Courtesy: Jehangir Nicholson Art Foundation,
Mumbai

La Terre, 1971
Oil on canvas, 189 × 160 cm (74.4 × 63 in.)
Photo Musée de Menton/ Courtesy: CNAP
(FNAC 31317)



Paysage, 1980
Acrylic on canvas, 120 × 120 cm (47.25 × 47.25 in.)
Photo: Yves Chenot / Image courtesy: CNAP
(FNAC 33507)



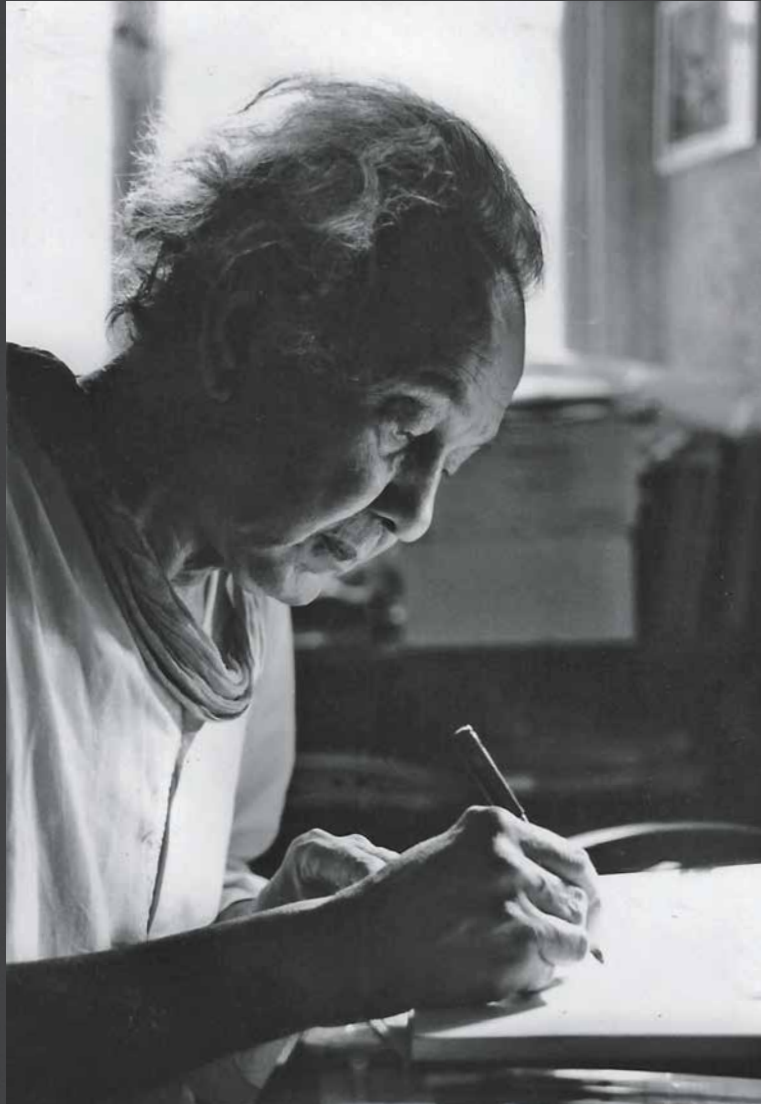
Rajasthan, 1983
Acrylic on canvas, 152.5 × 152.5 cm (60 × 60 in.)
Courtesy: Piramal Museum of Art, London



Bindu, 2000
Oil on canvas, 121 × 121 cm (47.6 × 47.6 in.)
Collection: Kiran Nadar Museum of Art,
New Delhi



Shanti, 2012
Acrylic on canvas, 60 × 60 cm (23.6 × 23.6 in.)
Courtesy: Private collection, New Delhi



Raza at his writing table
Courtesy: The Raza Foundation, New Delhi

The Radiating Circle

Yashodhara Dalmia

One of the foremost pioneers of modern Indian art, Sayed Haider Raza is known for his transformative works which created glowing abstract shapes in light and dark from elementary geometric forms. The artist's quest was informed with colour and composition which pivoted around the black circle and morphed into consistently new symphonic visions.

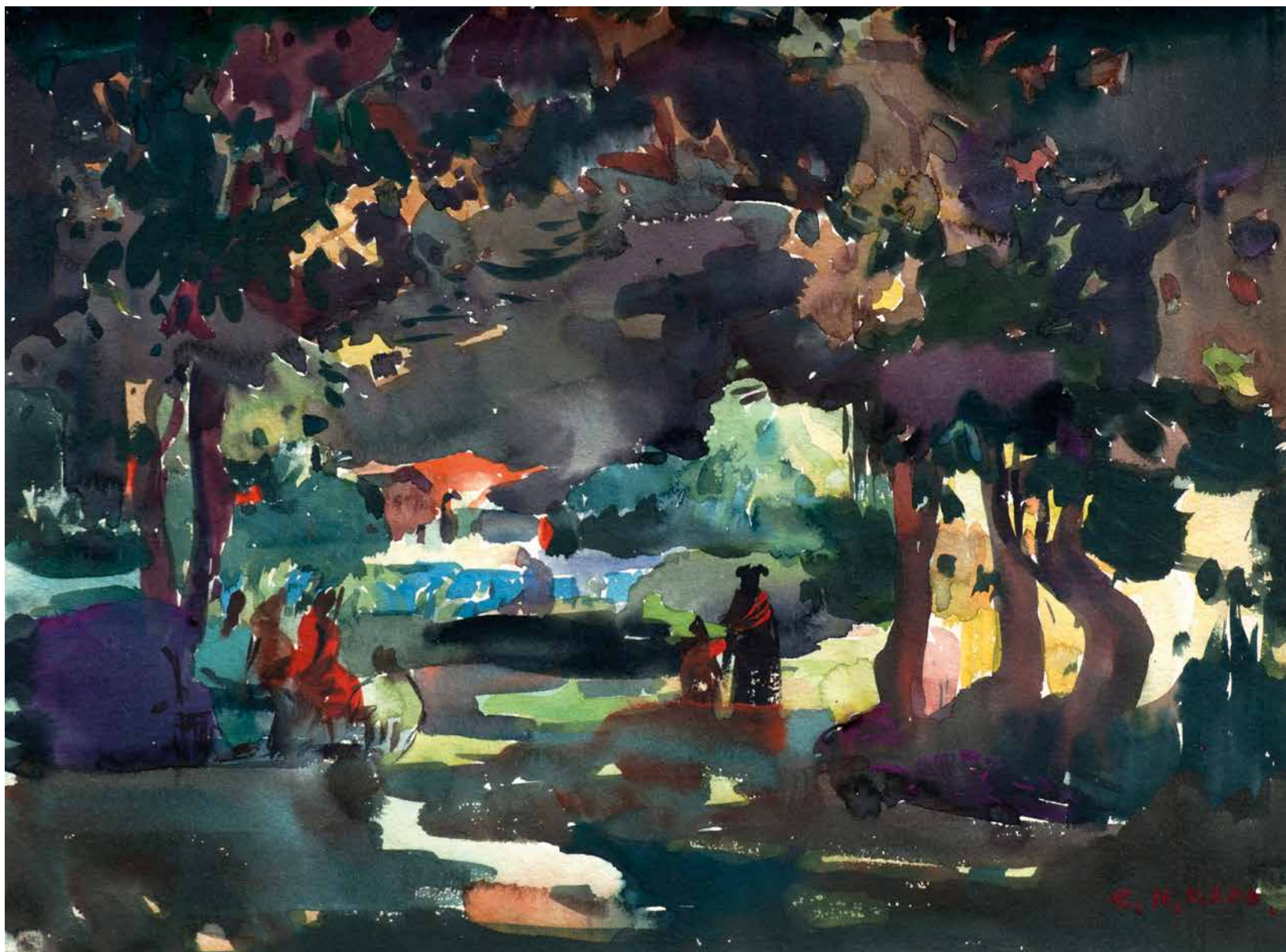
A childhood spent in the lush thickets of the forests of central India had provided him with the means to seek boundless horizons replete with colour and subtle sights and sounds. He was sent to train at the Nagpur School of Art, from where he made his way to Bombay (now Mumbai), the centre of art activity in India in the late 1940s. Raza's earliest paintings of rain-washed seafronts or the dazzling lights of the night that speckled the dark or the drenched streets and people created a magnetic periscopic effect. In a panoramic sweep, the entire city with its myriad tonalities, swelling shapes, and contracting and shining surfaces came bewitchingly alive. In a gouache on board titled *House Boat in Srinagar* (1949), the artist weaves a spell of dazzling white as the asymmetrical shapes of the boats swarm over the limpid green surface reflecting the haunting beauty of the valley.

These early years also reflected the artist's skill in creating evocative forms, such as

Portrait (1941) where the turbaned, dignified representation of a man expresses his empathetic emotions. A deftly sketched pen and ink portrait of a musician of this period reveals the latter's intense devotion to his art.

The newly independent country was to experience sombre times with the ravages of Partition and, in the midst of the ensuing communal frenzy, Raza's entire family left for Pakistan. Yet, the artist chose to remain in Bombay, where he was a founding member of the forceful Progressive Artists' Group formed in 1947, the very year that the country gained independence. The Group rejected effete revivalism and academic naturalism in art and, in the midst of a welter of existing traditions, carved its own path to modernism, linking it to international trends. Raza was to engage with debates and discussions with other members of the Group such as M. F. Husain, F. N. Souza, K. H. Ara, H. A. Gade and S. K. Bakre, continuing late into the night. Their poverty of means was matched by their talent and sincerity, which would later propel them into the mainstream of art in the country.

Raza left for Paris in 1950 on a scholarship to hone his skill and to acquaint himself with the works of masters such as Cezanne, Picasso and Matisse. He was to stay in France for two years but instead spent more than half a



In a Forest, 1940s
Watercolour on paper
25 × 35 cm (9.9 × 13.8 in.)
Private collection



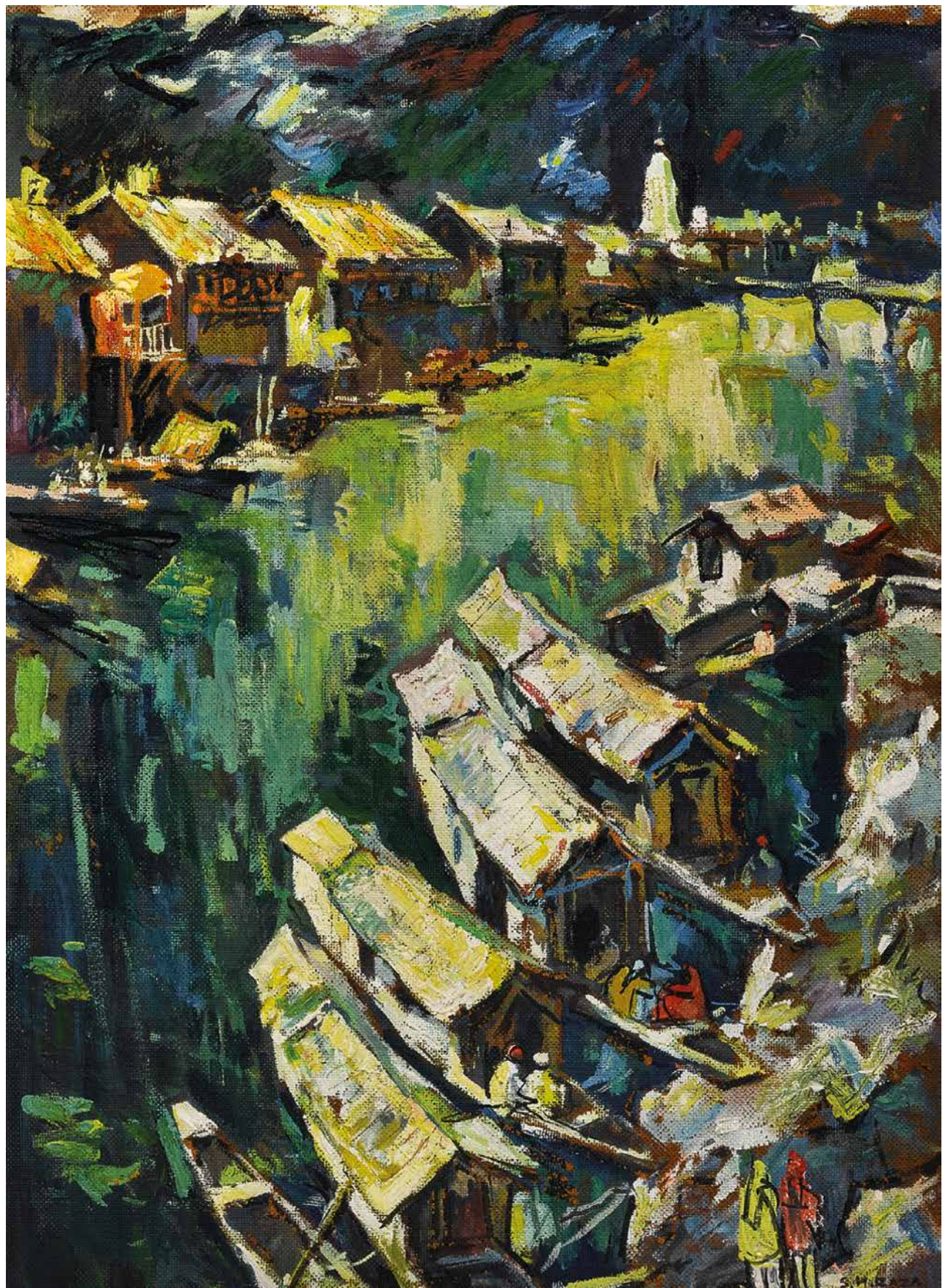
Portrait, 1941
Pencil on paper
48 × 36 cm (18.9 × 14.2 in.)
Signed and dated on verso
Stamped 'NAGPUR SCHOOL OF ART
SOCIETY, NAGPUR' on reverse; signed
'S. H. RAZA', upper right and stamped
'NAGPUR SCHOOL OF ART SOCIETY,
NAGPUR' on reverse
Private collection

century there, coming back to India only towards the latter part of his life. He married fellow artist Janine Mongillat in Paris and settled there, later also acquiring a studio in Gorbio in southern France where they spent the summer months. Post-war Paris of the 1950s suffered from a sense of exhaustion and wore a haunted look. The regular rendezvous of the artists and writers, such as Café de Flore, had a deserted air and the masters were 'present' by their absence. The École de Paris had run its course, leaving behind the last remnants of abstract art with painters such as Pierre Soulages, Nicolas de Staël and Serge Poliakoff. While the scene had shifted to New York, the city par excellence for art, Paris harboured a melancholy nostalgia for the masters. Yet, a whole generation of artists from Asia and other parts of the world were to make their way there to imbibe the paradigms of modernism with which the city still engaged. Apart from the Indo-Hungarian painter Amrita Sher-Gil earlier, a slew of artists from India too were to converge in the city in the 1950s and 1960s. This was partly an act of decolonization where they sought to free themselves from the imperialistic controls in their countries to establish their own personal and national identities.

Raza enrolled at the École des Beaux-Arts and in his paintings was to skilfully meld the careful structuring of compositions inspired by the School of Paris with the glowing tonal

variations of the Rajasthani and Pahari miniatures drawn from Indian aesthetic traditions. Feverish, intense works in the first few years in Paris had strange, uninhabited cities devoid of any location in time or space. The absence of human presence and an eerie silence create their own metaphor of a haunting stillness around the works. In many of the works in these early years, the black sun hangs from a blazing orange sky over a row of cubicle houses, shorn of all life. These dot the landscape interspersed by the spread of flaming sienna where the earth and sky are extensions of each other. Raza traversed the wild terrains of Brittany and the lush valleys of southern France to suddenly come upon a row of stark white houses or a medieval church. In works such as *Village* (1956), the houses could be placed in a timeless space, devoid of human presence, under a burning sun interfacing with a cataclysmic reality. The artist painted with a raw immediacy, embalming his canvases with the primaries, the burning red of the structures set off by glinting ochre and charred black. His serially placed houses would hark to Cezanne's vision in establishing the supremacy of the art object. At this juncture, however, the works could be considered the rooting of the École de Paris style to his own sense of identity and country.

As the burnt, passionate tone of his paintings gave way to more conventional themes, a new lease of life was given to these



Houseboat, 1948
Gouache on board
90 × 60 cm (35.5 × 23.6 in.)
Private collection



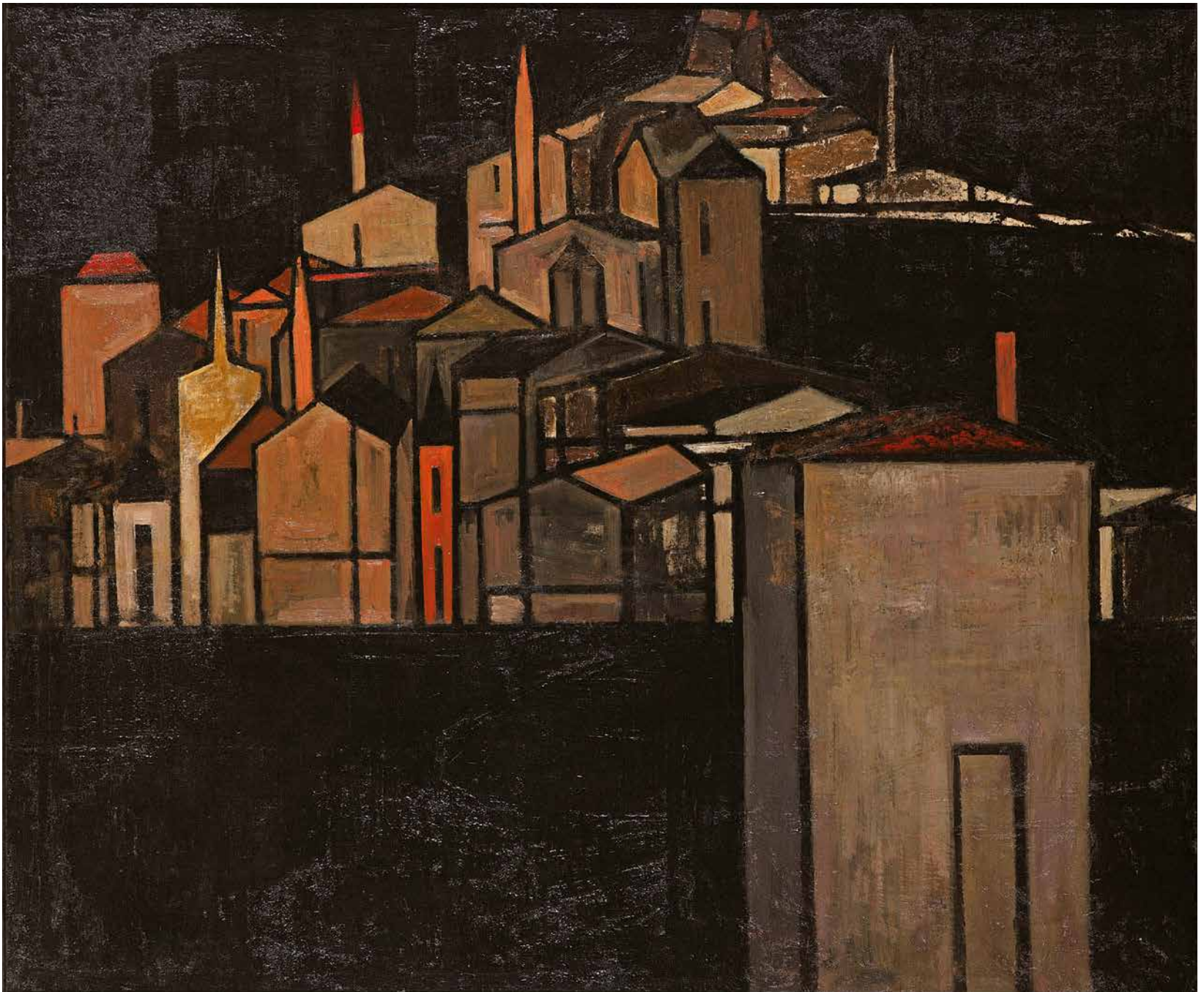
Carcassonne, 1951
Tempera on paper, 47 × 54.9 cm (18.5 × 21.6 in.)
Courtesy: Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi

Untitled, 1952
Gouache on paper,
62.5 × 49.5 cm (24.6 × 19.5 in.)
Courtesy: Piramal Museum of Art, Mumbai





Untitled, 1953
Gouache on paper, 48.5 × 58.5 cm (19 × 23 in.)
Courtesy: Jehangir Nicholson Art Foundation,
Mumbai



Italian Village, 1953

Oil on board, 100 × 120 cm (39.4 × 47.25 in.)

Courtesy: Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi

from across the Atlantic. A stint at the University of California in Berkeley in the summer of 1962 brought Raza into contact with the works of the New York school of painters such as Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko and abstract expressionism. The interactions between his flow of paint and the ideas of abstract expressionism were to lead to a greater lucidity in his approach.

Raza revelled in this new-found freedom and in his engagement with fluid brush strokes. Even as his palette mutated to an expressive use of colours and his medium changed from oil to acrylic, his gestural strokes began to stoke the inner recesses of his imagination, unleashing a minefield of memories. As the artist stated:

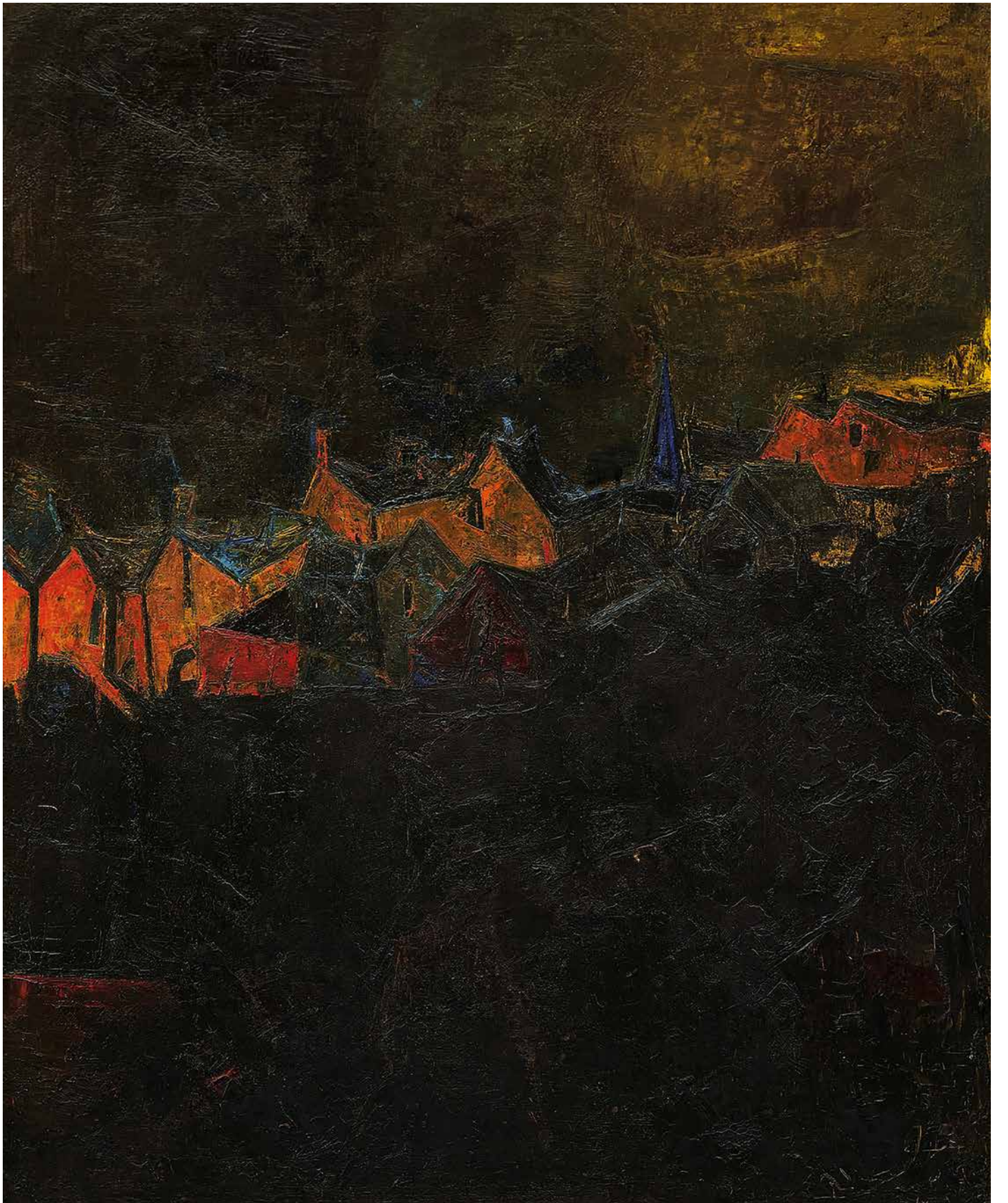
*“Thereafter, visual reality, the aim to construct a ‘tangible’ world, receded. In its place, there was a preoccupation with evoking the essence, the mood of places and of people. Day and night, summer and winter, joy and anguish—these elementary experiences that are felt rather than seen, became my subjects. They were expressed through emotive colours and forms which became increasingly more gestural.”*¹

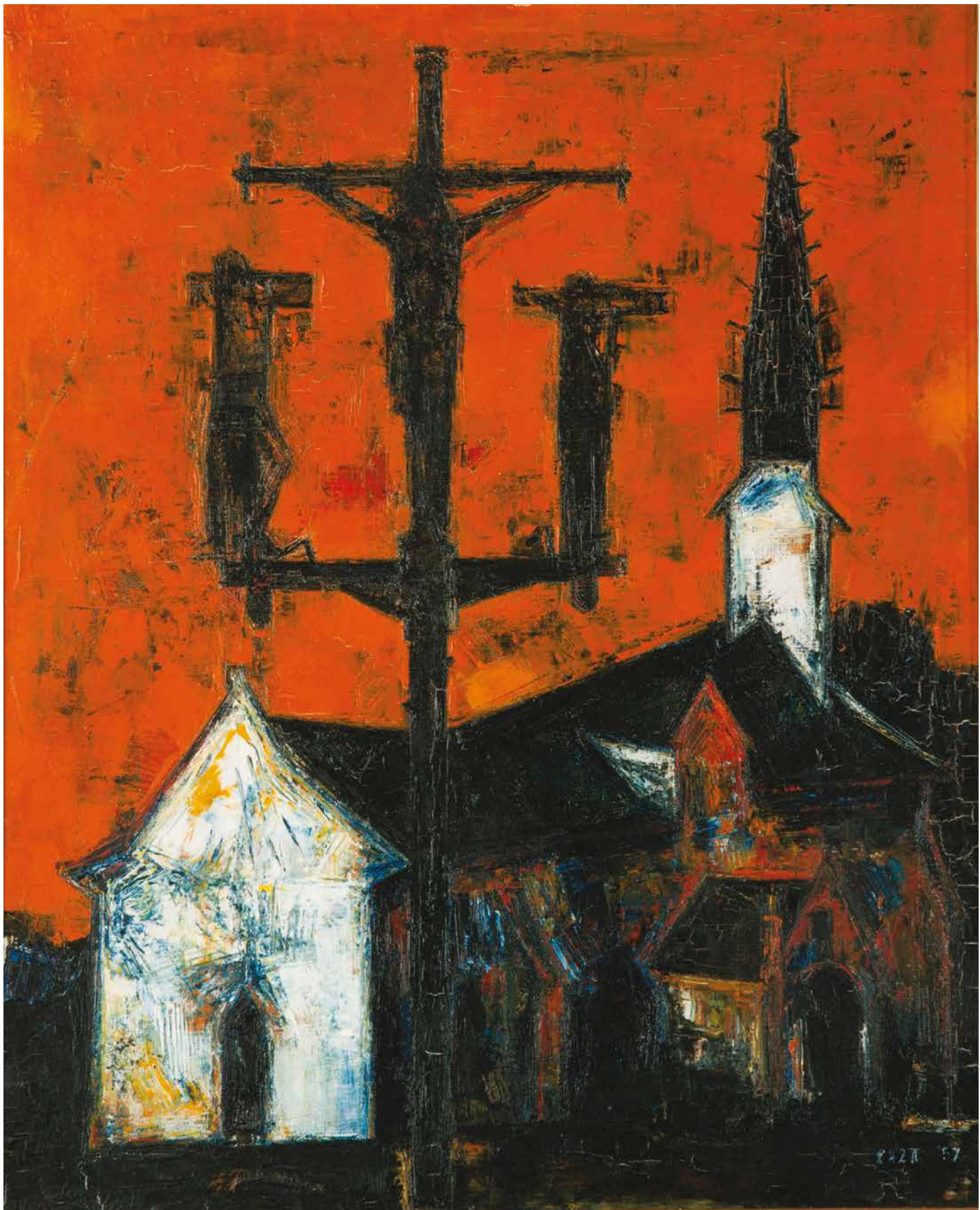
The hot, burning colours and the searing sensations of his land began to flood his canvases as freedom began to be accompanied by memory. Raza’s feverish gestures, lent fluency by the use of acrylic, were like spikes of flame spiralling in all directions. The lashing

reds, yellows and browns of the forests were recreated in works such as *L’Orage* (early 1970s), the surface aflame with colours. There is no recognizable shape, only the fluency of paint and its vibrant movement on the surface. Elsewhere, in a magnificent seven-foot painting evocative of *Saurashtra* made in the early 1980s, the burnished reds, earthy browns, sunset oranges and canary yellows are loosely bounded to create a symphonic movement on the surface.

The indigenous traditions of his country, where colours express mood, as well as the influences of abstract expressionism, inform Raza’s work. In an evocative painting simply titled *Composition* (1974), the deep blue interlocking with blacks and browns creates a dynamic surface that is charged with an imperceptible energy. The dark of the forests, the flickering lights of the fireflies and the hidden sounds of night accompany his unfolding of memories. The flashing white spaces emerging from the sombre, nuanced black are like resonances of the night. In the masterly work *La Terre* (1984), with its coal black, molten grey and earthy brown, a depth of darkness spreads over the surface in swarming wedges. The in-between spaces have red, orange, yellow, green and white that are like flashes in the dark. The expressive quality of black—with its liquid intensity—is highlighted, making the night come alive. He painted *La Terre* again and again, obsessed

Village, 1955
Oil on board
72 × 58 cm (28.4 × 22.9 in.)





with its magnetism and its many-hued tonal variations. In one brooding example painted in the 1980s, flaming colours are enveloped within the impending darkness and flit through its fluid surface to create a restless energy.

The density of the night held a special meaning for Raza and it haunted him as did the morning. A daub of orange here, a flash of green elsewhere, demarcates the area between the dark of the night and glowing colours of daylight. These could be his experience of a once-known space while growing up in the forests of what is now Madhya Pradesh in central India. The stillness of the night with its eerie sounds and shapes would reverberate for the young boy in the darkness. In the daytime, the enthralling spectacle of the village with its diversity and colours would weave a spell. As he stated:

*“The most tenacious memory of my childhood is the fear and fascination of Indian forests... Nights in the forests were hallucinating; sometimes the only humanizing influence was the dancing of the Gond tribes. Daybreak brought back a sentiment of security and well-being. On market-day, under the radiant sun, the village was a fairyland of colours. And then, the night again. Even today, I find that these two aspects of my life dominate me and are an integral part of my paintings.”*²

In many of these paintings, we have the emergence of brilliant colours and shapes from

the enveloping sombre tones where the two are juxtaposed and interconnected, implying a perpetual coexistence of dualities.

When the darkness became enclosed in a circle in the artist’s work, it enclosed vibrant, gestural strokes framed by flaming colours seeming to contain radiating energies. Paintings made in the 1970s signified notions of a centrifugal force of great dynamism which, by its power, could symbolize the flow of the universe. The emergent image of the circle within the square became pivotal to his work. The frame of the canvas itself would have red, black and yellow interlocking and unfolding, at the centre of which—ensconced within a square—would be the throbbing dark circle. The master artist’s constantly expanding oeuvre denoted the shifting movements of colours and spaces in the hemisphere which would be contained by the dark orb in the centre, the *bindu* or the circle. The dark centre within the square would resonate through the elements—earth, water, sky—and infuse the horizon with vibrant energies.

As Raza stumbled on the vast universe of inchoate experiences of childhood, the floodgates of the past were opened and there would be no holding back. He recalled:

“I have never really left the deeply rooted, wonderful world of forest and rambling river, hill and sparkling stream. The time spent as nature’s child. You see, we lived in the country’s core, in Barbaria, Madhya

Crucifixion, 1957
Oil on canvas,
61 × 50 cm (24 × 19.7 in.)
Courtesy: Kiran Nadar Museum of
Art, New Delhi



Crucifixion, 1957

Oil on canvas, 61 × 50 cm (24 × 19.7 in.)

Courtesy: Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi

Peinture, 1959

Oil on board, 45.1 × 192.4 cm (17.75 × 75.75 in.)

Courtesy: Piramal Museum of Art, Mumbai





Paysage, 1960
Oil on canvas, 114 × 146 cm (44.9 × 57.5 in.)
Courtesy: Private (international) collection

*Pradesh, where my father was a forest ranger, and in Mandla afterwards. The lush Kanha thickets were my regular haunts. Highly impressionable at that tender age, I soaked in every single feature of that beautiful landscape. So I let my mind wander. But that was precisely the problem. It wandered excessively, making me, I'm afraid, the worst, most distracted pupil in my class. So that was when it happened—my introduction to a certain idea which was later to become my leitmotif, an integral part of my art, the very backbone supporting my body of work. This was the concept of the bindu. How can I ever thank my beloved schoolteacher Nandlal Jharia? He left an absolutely indelible mark on me. Noticing my restlessness, it was he who made me wait behind suddenly one evening, facing one of the whitewashed walls of the classroom. On this he drew carefully, with firm, strong hands, a large, dark circle. Just that, stark against its clear background. 'Is bindu par dhyaan do (Concentrate on this round spot),' he instructed. I tried that. It was difficult not to be distracted at first, but then I got his point. Gradually, blotting out much else, my mind settled down to focus solely at that centre. It was uncanny. Savouring every one of its essential requisite colours, lines, tones, textures and space. I found myself riveted.'*³

Light and dark in his work would lead masterly painting such as *Maa* (1981), which,

although not part of this collection, in its classical overtones influences and infuses the subsequent works. In this painting, flaming tongues of colours on one side are juxtaposed with the black, still centre on the other, both equipoised as movement to stillness, action to reflection. The emerging and recessive depths of the painting are tautly contained within the frame. The flickering square resonates the opening gateways of realization with the still, dark circle in the centre. Below the painting, in a manner reminiscent of the miniature tradition, is the inscription, "*Maa, lautkar jab aaoonga, kya laoonga?* (Mother, when I return home, what shall I bring?)". The yearning for home, with its blazing colours, overflows and is reconstructed in an evocative flow. Often, the Devanagari script would surface in his paintings, reminiscent of the miniatures, underlining the edges and enhancing the textures of his paintings.

From this period onwards, the dark circles emanating colours began to appear increasingly in his works. While these had a distinct affiliation with Indian spiritual thought, it was primarily their plasticity which made an impact. As he pointed out:

"My present work is the result of two parallel enquiries. Firstly, it aimed at pure plastic order, form-order. Secondly, it concerns the theme of nature. Both have converged into a single point and become inseparable. The point, the bindu, symbolizes the seed bearing the

potential of all life, in a sense. It's also a visible form containing all the essential requisites of line, tone, colour, gesture, and space.”⁴

Yet, he maintained an equal distance from both traditional religious thought and the movements of abstract expressionism, maintaining his own composition and form.

His work is often identified as ‘tantric’ but Raza refuted the nomenclature, claiming that the beliefs were far too complex and he was far from a practising tantric. Yet, in many ways, he did explore the infinite possibilities of symbolic form such as the static female principle and the kinetic male principle uniting to form the entire universe of matter and spirit, drawing mainly from his own tradition. He attempted to consciously create his identity as separate from that of the École de Paris and strove to be distinctive in an Indian manner. In this he imbibed other influences in pluralistic and hybrid ways. Essentially, he remained deeply reverential to an inner core of being which was a source of renewal and strength. As he stated, “*Divya shaktion ke bina chitra nahi banate.* (Roughly, one cannot create images without divine forces.)”⁵

He said:

“The small red canvas is staring at me. But the Gods are absent. You won’t believe it but I cannot work without the presence of divine forces. They are tangible and real. I have to pray before I start working. They are a link

between the unknown and the known, they charge me to a state of ‘unawareness’ and it is only in that samaa—dream-like state—that my best paintings come, without my ever fully knowing how and why. It is a state of grace, inexplicable.”⁶

As the art historian Pierre Gaudibert observed:

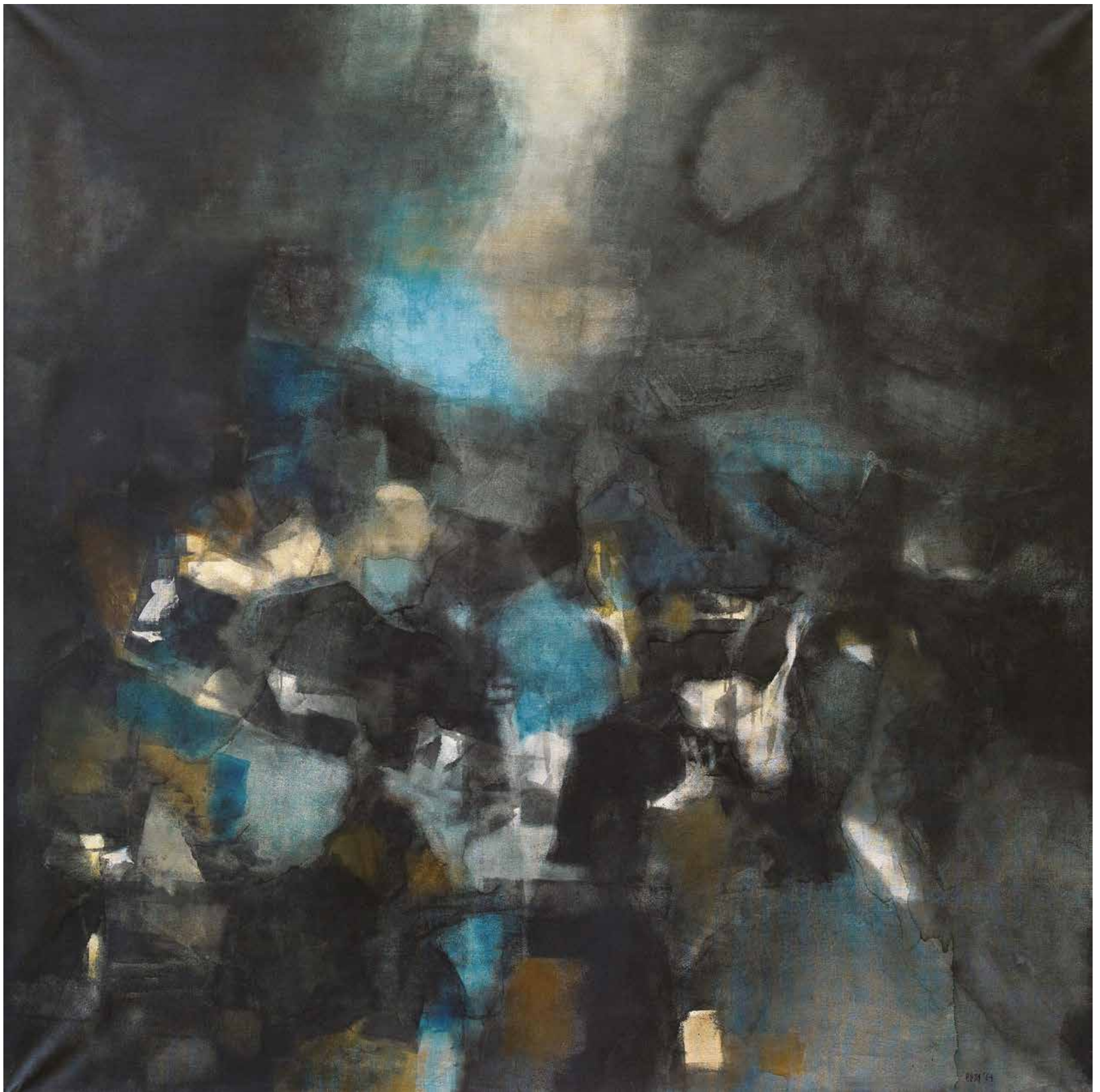
“Thus Raza has grown into a universal creator whose roots lie deep in his own soil but whose antennae are cosmic. He heralds the plastic artists of the twenty-first century in their ability to create every manner of artistic symbiosis and cross-fertilization. This much is obvious in the gradual maturing of the artist—an alchemy arising from his memories of childhood, of forests and people, of signs and symbols reinterpreted from Indian culture and confronting the modern art of Europe and the United States. Through this has emerged an entirely original plastic creation.”⁷

If Raza’s early *bindus* are dense and immobile, they metamorphose into concentric circles of energy and, still later, begin to wade through space, suspended and yet animated. Finally, their potential as germination of life is brought into play providing them with a universal connotation. The concept that the point carries within it the potency for all of creation, just as the seed carries the tree within it, leads to their innumerable radiating

Gods Dwell Where Woman is Adored,
1967
Acrylic on canvas
73 × 54 cm (28.7 × 21.3 in.)

L'inconnu, 1971
Acrylic on canvas
200 × 100 cm (78.8 × 39.4 in.)
Private collection





La Pluie, 1964
Oil on canvas, 150 × 150 cm (59 × 59 in.)
Courtesy: Jane and Kito de Boer Collection



Sikri, 1968
Oil on canvas, 150 × 150 cm (59 × 59 in.)
Courtesy: Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke, Mumbai



La Terre, 1971
Acrylic on canvas, 65 × 50 cm (25.6 × 19.7 in.)
Courtesy: The Raza Foundation

Untitled, 1975
Mix media on paper
59.7 × 44.4 cm (23.5 × 17.5 in.)

permutations and combinations with circles, triangles and squares. In Raza's works such as *Ankuran* (1987), the *bindu* or the seed is like the womb of the earth which contains within it an infinite potential for life. Manifold variations of the deep, dark circle in rich, earthy hues emanate triangles, diagonals and squares as the artist's eye turns towards germinating forms. In the nuanced blues and blacks of the painting *Prakriti Purush* (2012), the essential alchemy of the masculine and feminine conjoined in all of creation is suggested. As Raza turns towards the darker hues of the earth, it is as if he is delving into its very centre to find an even more universal space for the emanation of life.

In his later works, the artist sheds the canvas of lustrousness and turns towards colours which changed from light to dark in subtle nuances conveying a sense of rotating movement and restrained sensuousness which made an even deeper impact. The delicate works made by Raza in the 1990s such as

Param Bindu (1990) had concentric circles painted in ethereal colours ensconced within the depth of primaries of red, yellow and blue. The canvas, which expands into a translucent space, transfers an exquisite delicacy even as its tonal variations create an atmosphere of meditative spirituality.

At their best, the artist's involvement with colour vibrations and a heightened spirit provide a heady mixture of paint and an exuberant sensual experience. At all times, Raza retained a passionate involvement with his experiences and drew from indigenous sources and the hot colours and the natural landscape of his country and its metaphysical and literary thought while catapulting his work to the forefront of modernism. His pluralistic conceptual vision always remained ingrained to the core of his being as also the vast universe of perception which informed his long journey from a small village in central India to the international world of thought and form, which became his domain in his final years.

Notes

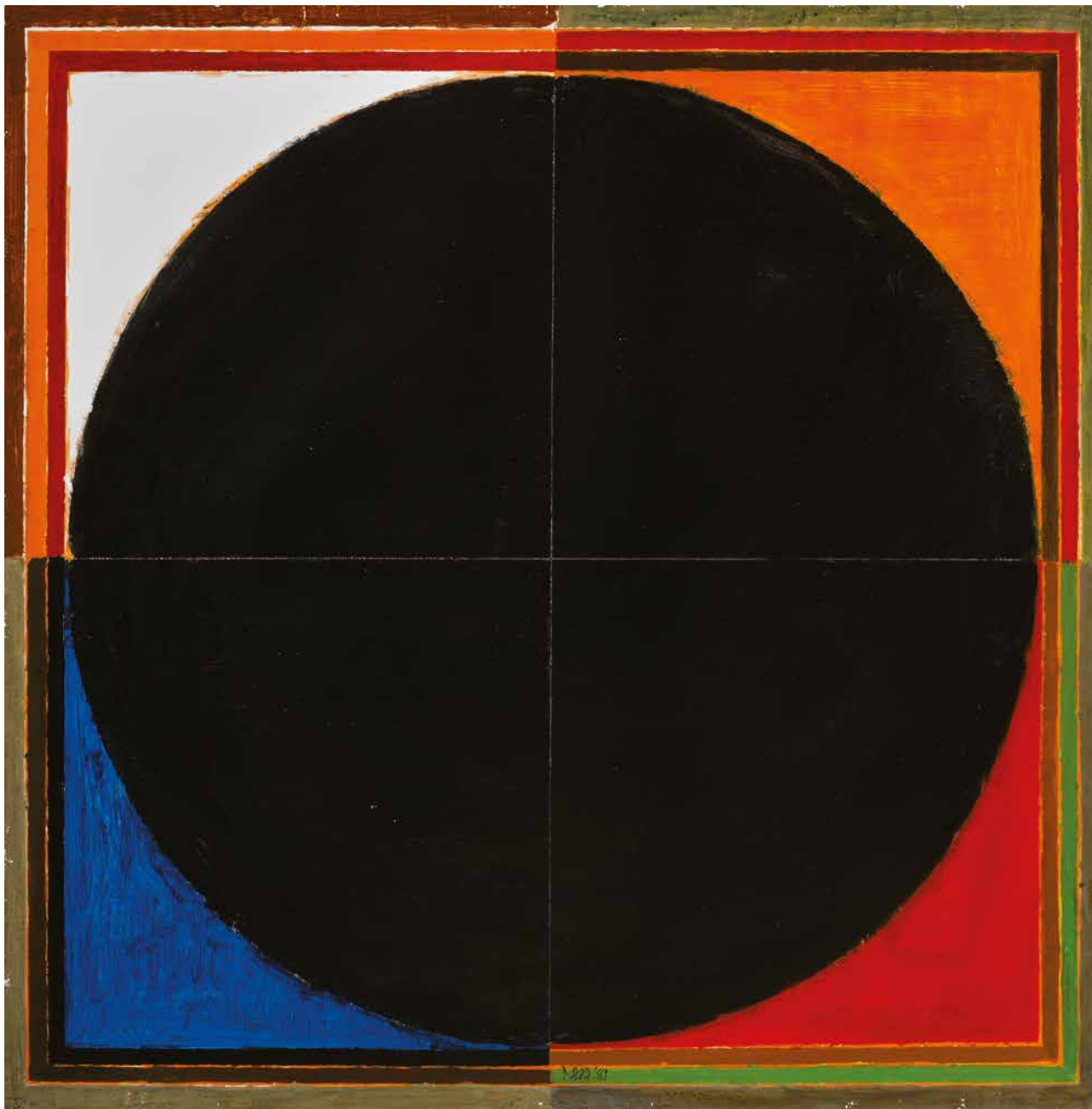
1. Quoted in Sen, Geeti. *Bindu: Space and Time in Raza's Vision*, Media Transasia India Ltd, New Delhi, 1997. p. 59.
2. Quoted in Lassaigne, Jacques, *Raza Anthology 1980-1990*, Bombay, 1991.
3. Raza, S. H. "My Art", *Illustrated Weekly of India*, March 19, 1989.
4. Raza, S. H. "Artist's Today", East West Visual Arts Encounter, *Marg*, Bombay, 1987.
5. Raza, in an interview with the author, Bombay, January 1992.
6. Raza to Krishen Khanna, Gorbio, August 9, 1987.
7. Gaudibert, Pierre. *Raza Anthology 1980-1990*, Bombay 1991.



Tapovan, 1972
Acrylic on canvas,
160 × 189 cm (63 × 74.4 in.)
Photo courtesy: 2018 Christie's Images
Limited

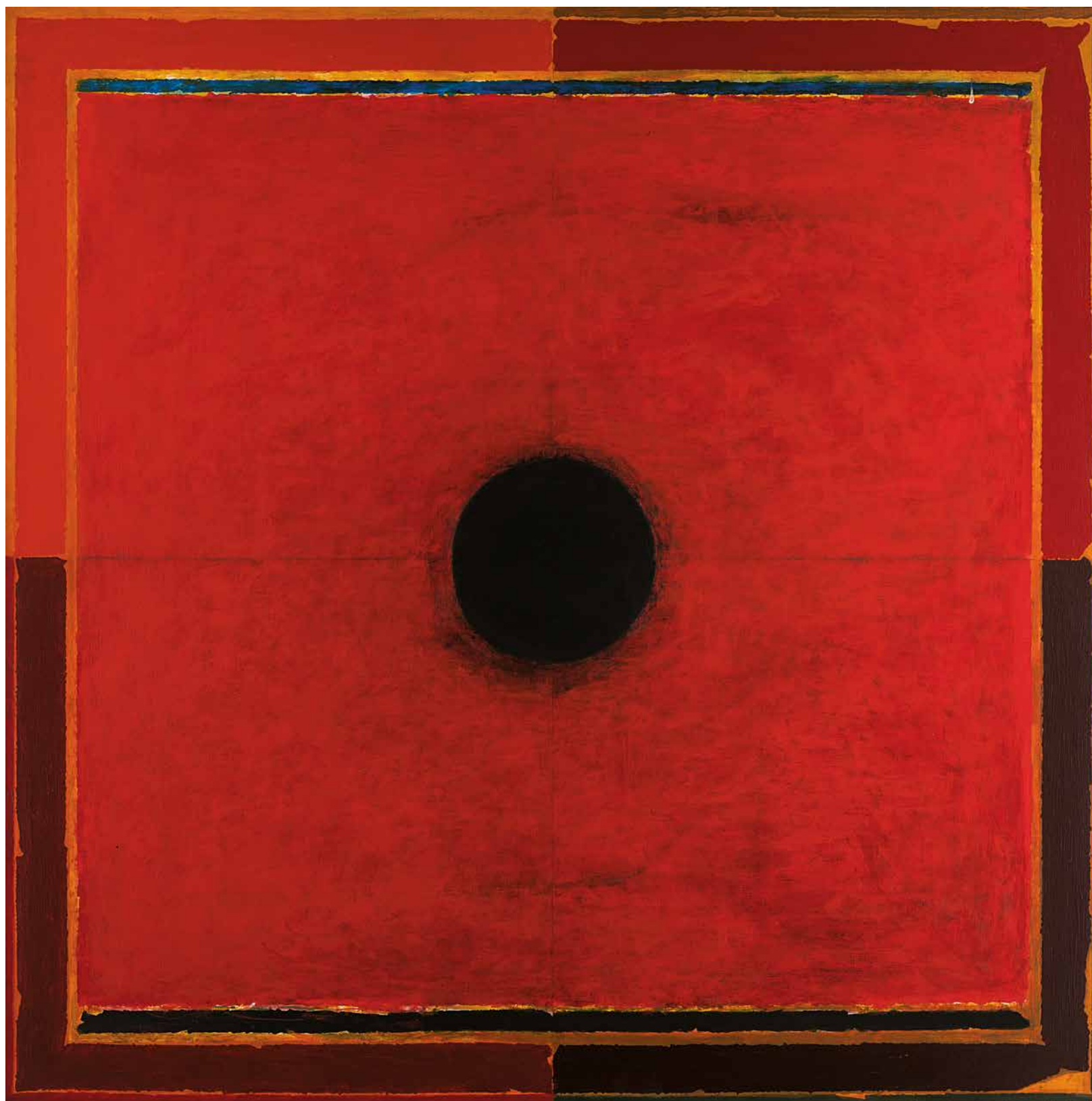


Untitled, 1975
Acrylic on canvas, 100 × 100 cm (39.4 × 39.4 in.)
Courtesy: Piramal Museum of Art, Mumbai

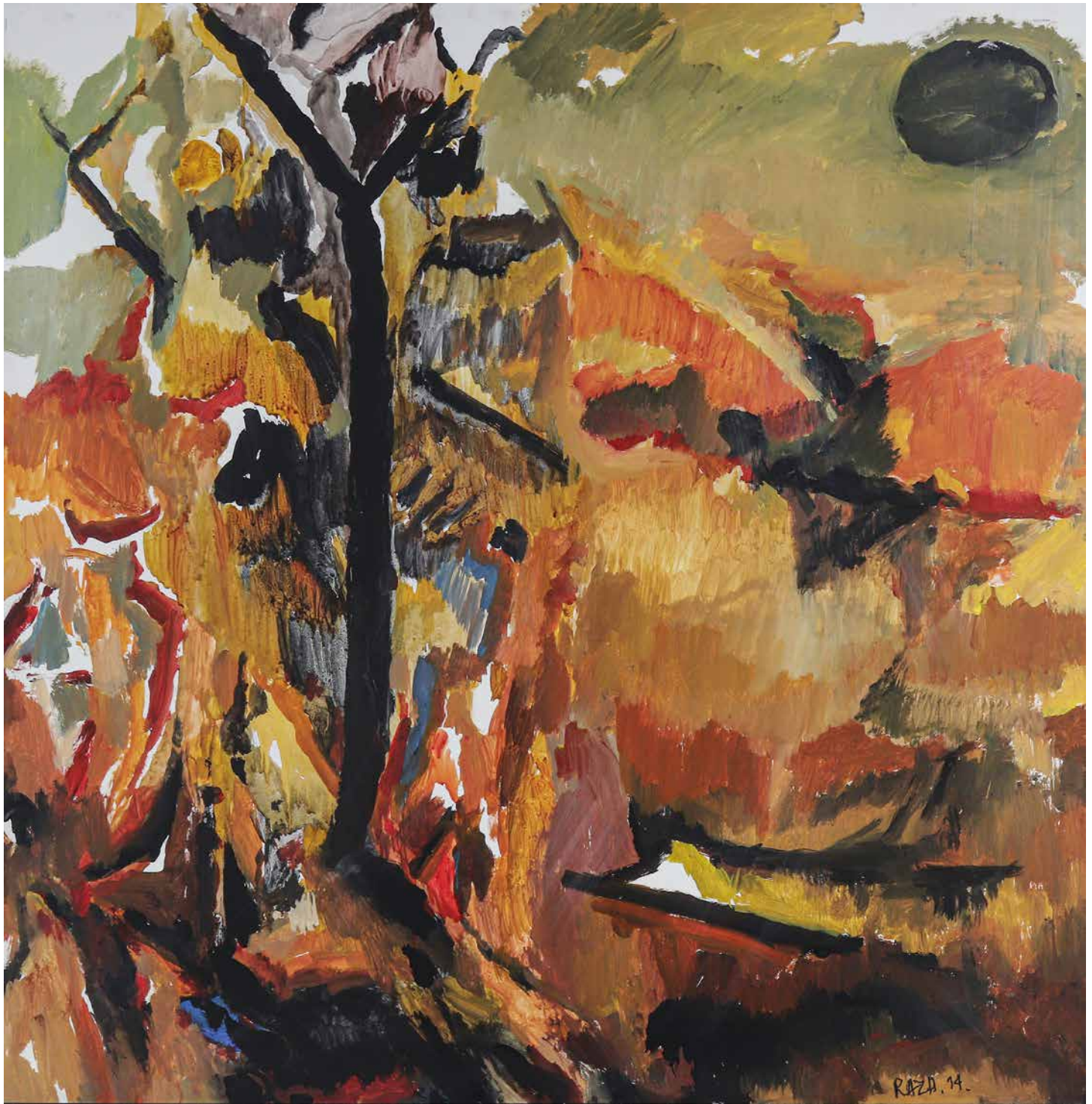


Bindu, 1981
Acrylic and pencil on paper,
80 × 80 cm (31.5 × 31.5 in.)
Photo J.L. Lacroix / Courtesy: Ville de Grenoble /
Musée de Grenoble

Bindu, 1984
Acrylic on canvas,
119 × 120 cm (46.8 × 47.2 in.)
Courtesy: Piramal Museum of Art, Mumbai







Tree, 2014
Acrylic on Canvas
100 × 100 cm (39.4 × 39.4 in.)

Prakriti Purush, 2012
Acrylic on canvas
120 × 60 cm (47.3 × 23.6 in.)
Private collection

The Last Days

Raza returned to India for good a little before his 89th birthday in late December 2010 to live and paint in two rooms at the Raza Foundation. The return after six decades to his homeland filled him with immense vitality, enthusiasm, irrepressible creativity and energy. Though he was infirm and had suffered a thigh bone fracture, he painted almost every day for a few hours, later on going to the studio in the wheelchair. This brief period of a little over five years resulted in as many as 550 canvasses and 80 drawings approximately. He literally lived to paint and painted to live. During this period, Raza visited Jaipur and Mumbai once and Kolkata twice, where his latest works were shown. He also visited the dargah of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti in Ajmer and went to Khairagarh, Chhattisgarh, to receive a D.Litt (honoris causa) from the Indira Kala Sangit Vishwavidyalaya, and his hometown Mandla once. In New Delhi, he attended a large number of talks, concerts, recitals, readings, etc., organized by the Raza Foundation as well as others. It was in 2013 that he did a set of paintings as a tribute to Mahatma Gandhi, whom he had held in great esteem all along, and also a couple of works with Islamic motifs.

Raza had to be hospitalized many a time due to his weak immunity and vulnerability to infections, and, under medical advice, the number of visitors he could meet was restricted. But he met many young artists who came to him to show their works, as also poets,

musicians, dancers, etc. At times, classical music concerts of *khayal* and *dhrupad* music were organized for him in his studio. He also periodically met his old artist-friends Ram Kumar and Krishen Khanna. The zest for life and creativity merged organically and one could not be distinguished from the other.

He ate little and drank barely a glass of wine, talked less and listened more. You could spend hours with him in silence but in deep communication without words. His humility, his unflinching sense of gratitude, his memories of friends and teachers never left him. It was during this period that he was honoured with the Padma Vibhushan by the Government of India and Commandeur de la Légion d'Honneur by the Republic of France. Raza continued to offer financial assistance liberally, as was his wont, to writers and artists in indigent circumstances.

He was all along enthusiastic about the working of the Raza Foundation, which took on dynamism and energy with his presence. He presided over as many as eight meetings of the Raza Foundation Trust during this period.

His frail health continued to deteriorate in spite of 24-hour nursing facilities. However, Raza continued to visit his studio every day and to paint. As soon as he finished a work, he wanted it to be titled and framed almost immediately. He gave up writing letters and other written communications but continued to sign and write on most of his canvasses. But



Sayed Haider Raza at work in his studio after his return to India in 2010, New Delhi
Courtesy: The Raza Foundation, New Delhi

from the middle of 2015, even this writing became rare. He dictated once in a while a letter or two.

On 17 May 2016, Raza suffered a stroke and was rushed to hospital. He was kept in the intensive care unit and remained there for 67 days. Since he had miraculously recovered earlier, his friend Ashok Vajpeyi and Secretary (Raza Foundation) Sanjiv Kumar Choube continued to hope against hope and attended on him throughout this period, without a break. Raza would open his eyes sometimes, but there was no sign of recognition. Raza breathed his last on the morning of 23 July 2016

on the hospital bed, with the two standing outside.

The body was flown the next day morning to Nagpur and after five hours of a rainy journey by road arrived in Mandla. He was buried with full state honours next to his father's grave, close to River Narmada, which he held in great esteem all his life. A new art gallery and a road named after him have come up in Mandla, where now twice every year a Raza Festival takes place, featuring art workshops, tribal and folk dances, poetry readings and classical and traditional music.

Ashok Vajpeyi



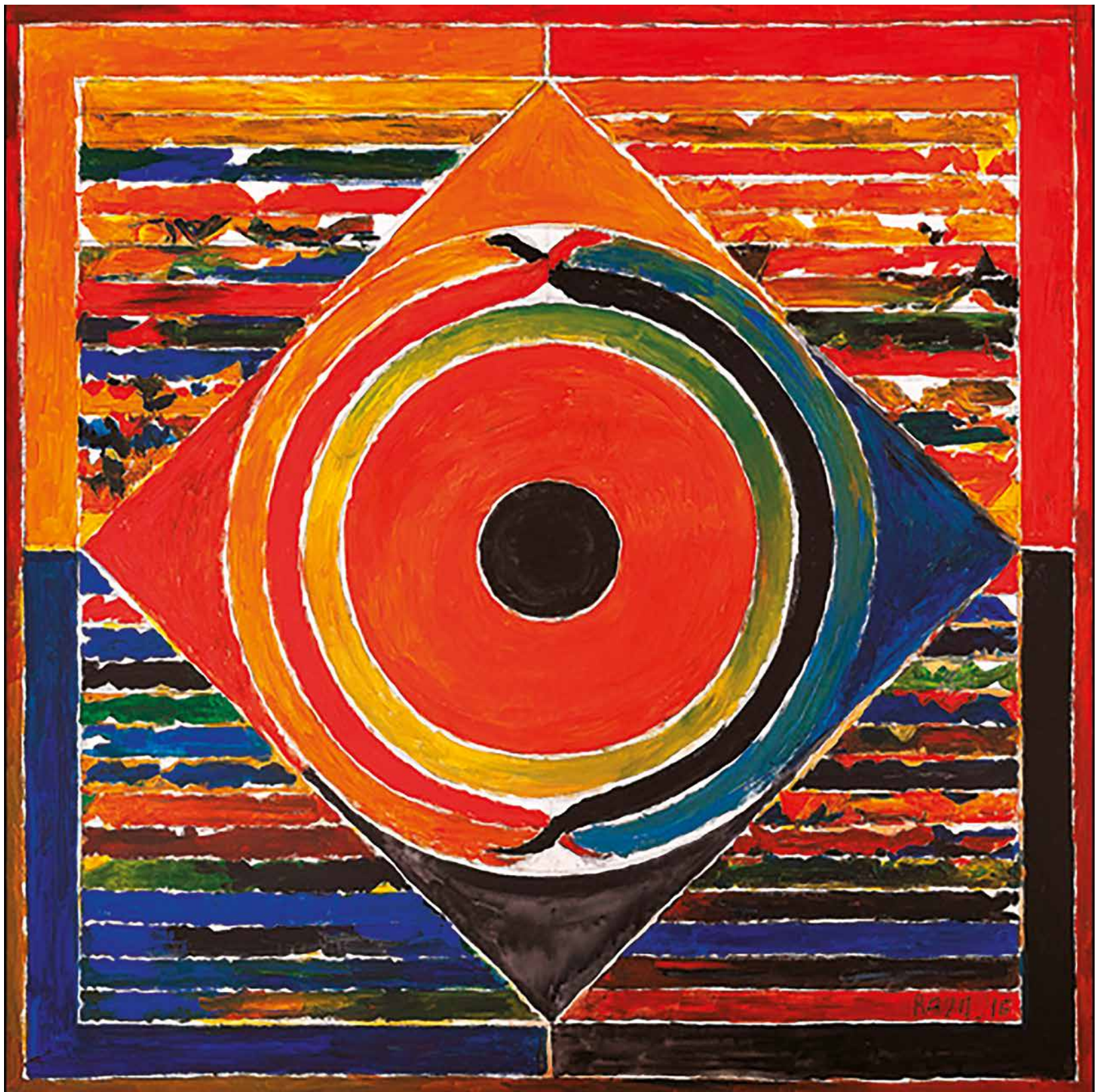
Kriti Prakriti, 2012
Acrylic on canvas, 120 × 120 cm (47.2 × 47.2 in.)
Courtesy: Private collection, New Delhi



Om, 2013
Acrylic on canvas, 120 × 120 cm (47.2 × 47.2 in.)
Courtesy: Private collection, New Delhi



Aarambh, 2014
Acrylic on canvas, 120 × 100 cm (47.2 × 39.4 in.)
Courtesy: Private collection, New Delhi



Swasti, 2016
Acrylic on canvas, 100 × 100 cm (39.4 × 39.4 in.)
Courtesy: The Raza Foundation, New Delhi

Solo Exhibitions

29th November to December 1947: *Landscapes in Watercolour*; Bombay Art Society, B.A.S. Salon, Bombay, India

June-July-August 1948: *Kashmir Series* exhibited in Srinagar, Kashmir. K. A. Abbas states that S. H. Raza's Kashmir Series 1948 paintings were exhibited (probably an informal display) in Srinagar on his Houseboat, Srinagar, India

1st to 6th September 1948: *100 Kashmir Paintings*, Exhibition Hall, Parliament Street, Delhi, India

Opens: Tuesday 19th October 1948: *Kashmir Paintings* Exhibition, Bombay Art Society Salon, Bombay, India

14th to 19th September 1950: S. H. Raza: Farewell Exhibition of Paintings at the Charles Petras Institute of Foreign Languages (IFL), Bombay, India

1952: First Solo Exhibition in France at the Palais Carnoles, Menton, which at the time was under the Presidency of Henri Matisse, and over the next few years would exhibit many of the great modern masters from Picasso to Dali, Dufy to Sutherland, Menton, France

October 1956: Galerie Saint-Placide, Paris, France (in honour of S. H. Raza winning the Prix de la Critique)

18th April to 14th May 1958: *Peintures et Gouaches* at Galerie Lara Vincy, Paris, France

1958: Jehangir Art Gallery, Bombay, India

April 1959: Jehangir Art Gallery, Bombay, India

5th to 19th May 1959: RAZA: *Peintures et Gouaches*. Galerie Dresdner, Montreal, Canada

1959: All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society (AIFACS), Delhi, India

1960: Galerie Dresdner, Montreal, Canada

19th April to 18th May 1961: Galerie Lara Vincy, Paris, France

July to August: Galerie Lara Vincy, Paris, France

1962: Galerie Dresdner, Montreal, Canada

1962: *Modern Indian Art*, Santiago, Mexico

1962: Worth Ryder Art Gallery, Berkeley University, California, USA

June to July 1963: Dom Gallery, Cologne, Germany

1964: Galerie Lara Vincy, Paris, France

18th November 1964 to 10th January 1965: *Raza: Peintures Recentes*. Galerie Lara Vincy, Paris, France

6th October to 10th November 1966: *Raza - Paris: 25 Oil Paintings from 1962-1966* at Tecta Galerie, Dusseldorf, Germany

1967: Galerie Lara Vincy, Paris, France

15th to 27th April 1968: Chemould Gallery, Bombay, India

25th October to 9th November 1968: *RAZA - Recent Oil Paintings*, Galerie Dresdner, Toronto, Canada

26th March to 4th May 1968: *Sayed Haider Raza*. Dom Gallery, Cologne, Germany

1968: Tecta Gallery, Dusseldorf, Germany

27th November 1969 to 5th January 1970: *Raza: Peintures Recentes*. Galerie Lara Vincy, Paris, France

1972: *Abbaye du Pommier*, Annecy, Le Grenier, Roquebrune Village, France

1974: *La Palette*, Trouville, France

4th to 31st October 1975: Galleria Matuzia, San Remo, Italy

26th February to 1st March 1976: Chemould Gallery (Also simultaneously organized at the Jehangir Art Gallery), Bombay.

1976: Stavanger Kunstforening Gallery, Stavanger, Norway

1977: La Tete de l'Art, Grenoble, France

1978: *Utsav*, Madhya Pradesh Kala Parishad, Bhopal, India

1978: Jehangir Nicholson Museum, National Centre for Performing Arts, Bombay, India

1979: Stavanger Kunstforening Gallery, Stavanger, Norway

1980: Galleriet, Oslo, Norway

27th October to 27th November 1982: Galerie Loeb, Berne, Switzerland

1982: Galerie J.Y. Noblet, Grenoble, France

20th February to 7th March 1984: Chemould Gallery, Bombay.

1985: Galerie Pierre Parat, Paris, France

1987: *La Tete de l'Art*, Grenoble, France

29th October to 12th November 1988: *RAZA: Germination, maleri go grafikk* Galleri Koloritten, Stavanger, Norway

1988: Chemould Gallery, Bombay, India

24th January to 10th February 1991: *Raza Anthology 1980-90*. Gallery Chemould, Bombay, India

24th September to 7th October 1991: *RAZA: Retrospective 1952-1991*, Presented by Le conseil municipal, at Palais Carnole, Musee des Beaux-Arts, Menton, France

28th June to 17th August 1991: *Bindu ou la quete de l'essentiel*, Galerie Eterso, Cannes, France

1992: Jehangir Nicholson Museum, National Centre for Performing Arts, Bombay, India

1992: *Parcours des Arts*, La Louvesc, France

1994: L'Artotheque d'Enterprise Group, Michel Ferrier, Echirrolle, Grenoble, France

6th to 16th February 1997; 21st February to 2nd March 1997; 10th March to 10th April 1997: *Raza: Avartan, 1991-1996*. Organized by Vadehra Art Gallery & Chemould Gallery, at Roopankar Museum of Fine Arts, Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal, India (6th to 16th February 1997); Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai, India (21st February to 2nd March 1997) & the National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA), New Delhi, India (10th March to 10th April 1997)

1997: *Le Parcours du Regard*, Oletta, Corsica, France

1997: Galerie Grewal Mohanjeet, Paris, France

2nd to 14th June 1999: *RAZA* Presented by Apparao Galleries at Gallery Art 54, New York, USA

3rd to 21st March 2001: *Mindscapes, Early Works by S. H. Raza 1945-50*, Delhi Art Gallery, New Delhi, India

19th to 26th February 2002: *Prints on Canvas*, Tao Art Gallery, Mumbai, India

22nd to 28th February 2002: *The Sacred Search: a select collection of works from 1951 to 2002*. Presented by Apparao Galleries at Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai, India

2002: Gallery Chemould, Mumbai, India

1st to 2nd February 2003: Apparao Galleries and Satya Paul, Taj Mahal Hotel, Mumbai, India

7th to 24th October 2003: *S. H. Raza: Paintings from 1966 to 2003*. The Fine Art Resource, Berlin, Germany

16th to 31st January 2004: *S. H. Raza: Japa* at Art Musings, Mumbai

2004: Aryan Art Gallery, New Delhi, India

16th to 29th June 2005; 13th to 30th July 2005: *S. H. Raza: Summer 2005*. Organized by Berkeley Square Gallery & Saffronart at London (16th to 29th June); The Saffronart Gallery, New York, USA (13th to 30th July)

- 25th February to 19th March 2005: *Raza: Recent Works*. Aryan Art Gallery, New Delhi, India
- 2005: Tao Art Gallery, Mumbai, India
- 14th to 28th January 2006: *Metamorphosis*. Presented by Aryan Art Gallery, New Delhi, at Soho, Hong Kong
- 17th February to 10th March 2006: *Germinating Tidal Waves*, Exhibition of selected works, Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi, India
- 1st to 12th December 2006: *Metamorphosis*. Presented by Aryan Art Gallery, New Delhi, India
- 8th to 28th February 2006: *Rang Raas*, Tao Art Gallery, Mumbai
- 2006: Selected Works of S. H. Raza, Peter Louis Gallery, Paris
- 13th to 17th March 2007: *Limited Edition Serigraphs*, Marvel Art Gallery, Ahmedabad, India
- 21st September to 31st October 2007: *Raza a Retrospective*, Saffronart Gallery in association with Berkeley Square Gallery, New York, USA
- 22nd February to 18th March 2007: *Swasti*, Organized by Art Alive Gallery in Collaboration with The National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA), New Delhi, India
- 5th to 17th February 2007: Institute of Contemporary Indian Art (ICIA), Mumbai, India
- 2007: *Mini Retrospective*, Institute of Contemporary Indian Art, Mumbai, India
- 2007: *Celebrating 85 Years of Living Legend S. H. Raza*, a Travelling Exhibition at Hong Kong, Singapore, Dubai, Mumbai, New Delhi, Organized by Aryan Art Gallery, New Delhi, India
- 8th to 22nd February 2008: *The Truth*, Tao Art Gallery and S. G. Banking India, Tao Art Gallery, Mumbai, India
- 10th to 16th March 2010: *S. H. Raza*, Presented by Akar Prakar, Kolkata, India
- 15th September to 10th November 2010: RL Fine Arts, New York
- 3rd to 24th March 2010: *Recent Works*, Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi, India
- 2010: *Raza Ceramiques*, Galerie Flora J, Paris, France
- 2010: Gallerie Patrice Trigano, Paris, France
- 2011: Punaragaman, Vadehra Art Gallery and Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, India
- 2012: *Bindu Vistaar*, Grosvenor Vadehra, London, UK
- 2012–13: *Vistaar*, Art Musings and Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai
- 21st February to 2nd March 2013: *Antardhwani*, Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi, India
- 2013: *Shabd-Bindu*, Akar Prakar, Kolkata, India
- 12th to 14th June 2014: *Pyaas*, Grosvenor Vadehra, London, UK
- 21st February to 26th March 2014: *Parikrama-Around Gandhi*, Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi, India
- 2014: *Paysage: Select Works 1950s–70s*, Sovereign FZE, Dubai
- 18th December 2014 to 31st January 2015: *S. H. Raza: A Retrospective*; Aicon Gallery, New York, USA
- 19th October to 29th November 2015: Paintings / Raza, Peintures, Galerie Lara Vincy, Paris, France
- 22nd February to 18th March 2015: *Aarambh @ 93*, Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi, India
- 28th February to 15th April 2015: *Aarambh @ 93*, Art Musings, Mumbai, India
- 7th March to 25th April 2015: *Aarambh @ 93*, Akar Prakar, Kolkata
- 15th January to 24th February 2016: *S. H. Raza - Nirantar*, Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi, India
- 11th March to 9th April 2016: *S. H. Raza - Nirantar*, Akar Prakar, Kolkata, India
- 22nd March to 30th April 2016: *S. H. Raza - Nirantar*, Art Musings, Mumbai, India
- 5th to 8th May 2016: *Spotlight S. H. Raza Solo Show*, Frieze New York 2016, Booth D30, Aicon Gallery, New York, USA
- 13th to 18th March 2017: *Sayed Haider Raza: A Retrospective*, Art Dubai Modern, Grosvenor Gallery, Dubai, UAE
- 1st to 31st March 2017: *Gandhi in Raza*, Akar Prakar Art Advisory, New Delhi, India
- 3rd February to 31st May 2017: *The Black Sun; Stretched Terrains*; A String of Exhibitions, Curated by Roobina Karode KNMA, Saket, New Delhi, India
- 2017: *Hommage à S. H. Raza*. Tour Lascaris, Gorbio, France
- 1st to 10th July, 2018: *Uttar Raag: An Exhibition of Late Works by S. H. Raza*, The Raza Foundation in collaboration with Triveni Kala Sangam, Shridharani Art Gallery, New Delhi, India
- 22nd to 28th February 2018: *S. H. Raza Kshitij: Paintings from 2011 to 2015*, Art Musings, Mumbai, India
- 28th June to 28th October 2018: *S. H. Raza: Traversing Terrains*; Piramal Museum of Art, Mumbai, India
- 13 December 2018 to 16 January 2019: *The Sound of Silence by S. H. Raza*, The Gallery (Apparao Galleries), Chennai, India
- 2nd to 6th October 2019: *Raza/Tantra: Black & White Aesthetics*, Frieze Masters, Grosvenor Gallery, London, UK
- 2019: *Voyage dans l'Inde d'hier et d'aujourd'hui, œuvres de la collection Raza*. Tour Lascaris, Gorbio, France
- 25th September to 9th October 2020: *Raza Rendezvous*, The Arts Trust, Online
- 6th to 22nd February 2021: *Raza Antrung: A selection from Raza Archive*, Curated by Akhilesh, Triveni Kala Sangam, New Delhi, India
- 18th February to 14th March 2021: *Dance of the Elements*, A show of Raza's works curated by Ranjit Hoskote, Akar Prakar Gallery, New Delhi, India
- 22nd February to 13th March 2021: *Geyser*, A show of works by Raza and his friends, Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi, India
- February to March 2021: *A Travelling Exhibition of Raza's Authorized Prints*, Jabalpur, Kanha, Indore, Ujjain, Mandla, Ahmedabad, Bhopal, Vallabh Vidyanagar, Surat, Khandwa, Raipur, Diu, Dhar, Dewas, Porbandar, Jamnagar & Lucknow, India
- February 22nd to 28th 2022: *S H Raza's centenary exhibition* by Piramal Museum, Mumbai.
- April 30th to June 30 2022: *Traversing Space* curated by Roobina Karode, Kiran Nadar Museum of Art in Bikaner House, New Delhi.
- June 2nd to July 31st 2022: *Zamin: Homelands* curated by Puja Vaish Jehangir Nicholson Art Foundation at Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya, Mumbai.
- February 14th to May 15th 2023: *S. H. Raza [1922–2016]*, celebrating S. H. Raza's centenary at the Centre Pompidou, Paris.
- March 1st to May 31st 2024: *Raza: The Other Modern*, Progressive Art Gallery, Dubai

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Ashok Vajpeyi is a New Delhi-based Hindi poet-critic who has written poetry and criticism of literature, music and visual arts in many publications. He is the recipient of many national and international awards, including the “Officier De L’Ordre Des Arts Et Des Lettres,” from the Government of France.

Dr Geeti Sen is a cultural historian, professor, art critic and editor, trained at the Universities of Chicago and Calcutta. A new and revised edition of her seminal work *Bindu: Space and Time in Raza’s Vision* has been recently published by Mapin Publishing and the Raza Foundation.

Yashodhara Dalmia is an independent art historian and curator based in New Delhi. Among her publications are *Amrita Sher-Gil: A Life, The Making of Modern Indian Art* and the recently published *Raza: The Journey of An Iconic Artist* (2021).

Gayatri Sinha is a critic, editor and curator. She has curated many important shows and written extensively about modern and contemporary Indian art. Since 2011, she has directly supported knowledge in the arts through her initiative Critical Collective, which is the first such art archive and news magazine on Indian art.

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