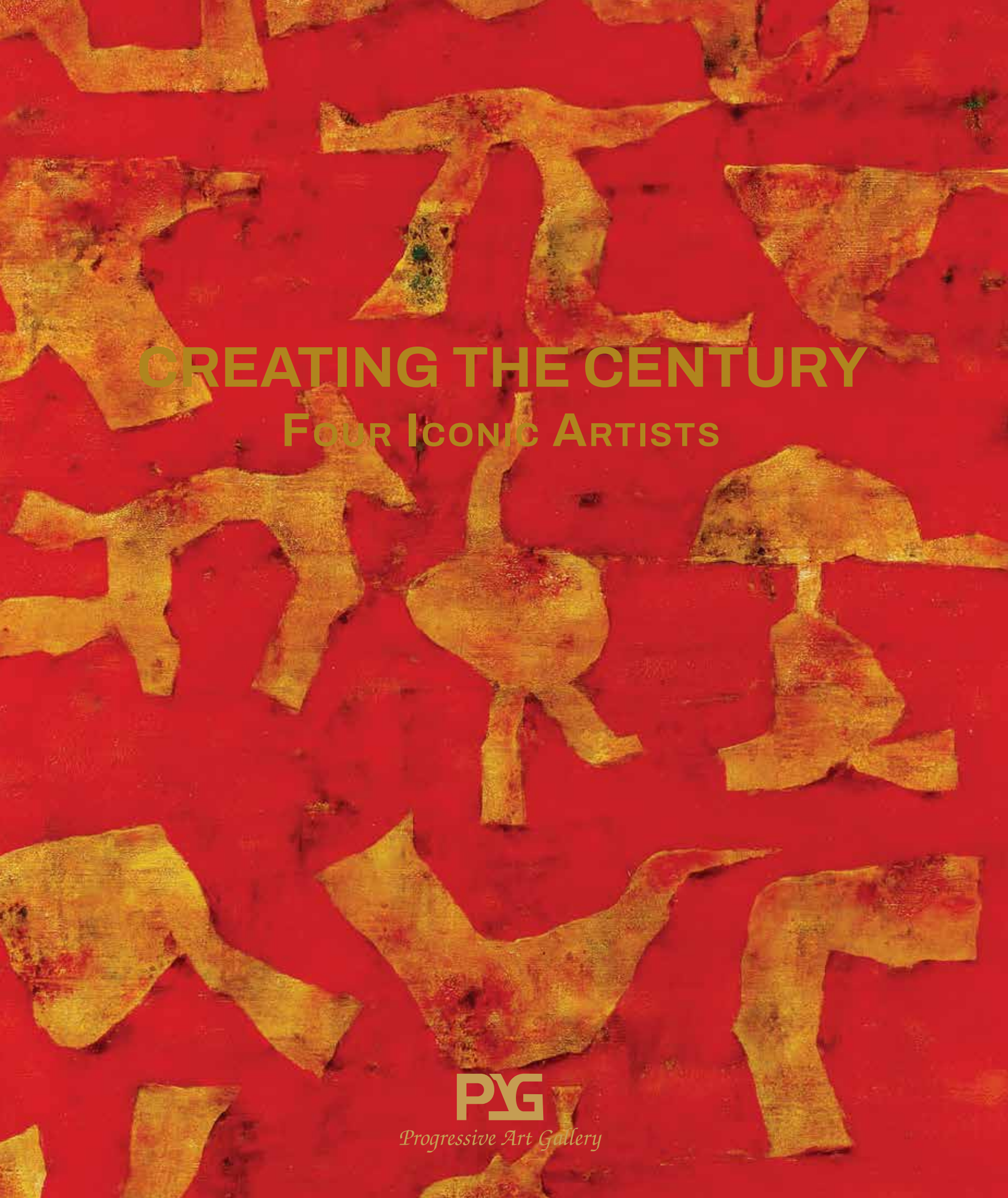

CREATING THE CENTURY

Four Iconic Artists

PYG

Progressive Art Gallery

PARTICIPATING ARTISTS

F. N. SOUZA

K. G. SUBRAMANYAN

RAM KUMAR

V. S. GAITONDE

CREATING THE CENTURY

Four Iconic Artists

Curated by

YASHODHARA DALMIA

29th October to 10th November 2024

at

Shridharani Art Gallery
Triveni Kala Sangam, New Delhi

PG
Progressive Art Gallery

रज़ा फाउण्डेशन | The Raza Foundation

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Front cover image detail: Vasudeo S. Gaitonde | UNTITLED | Oil on canvas | 60 x 40 inches | 1991

Back cover image: F.N. Souza | HAMPSTEAD TERRACES | Oil on canvas | 24 x 30 inches | 1964

FOREWORD NOTE:

It is a happy coincidence that many masters of modern Indian art were born in 1924 and we are celebrating their birth centenary. It was the time when both the national movement for freedom and a wide ranging and complex struggle for modern art were entering a critical phase. The four artists namely Francis Newton Souza, K.G. Subramanyan, Ram Kumar and V.S. Gaitonde were born in almost four corners of the country. When India was still under colonial rule, these artists started, each in his own distinct way in art, to grapple with a non-revivalist modernity, the irrepressible reality of Indian plurality, both of life and expression, traditions and ideas. They made themselves open and vulnerable to the wide world; their roots could draw nourishment from everywhere and yet audaciously remain firm and planted in their own soil. In a way, these artists through their religious, intellectual, familial, and regional backgrounds reflected the overall plural reality of India. Their art, in its specifics, complexity and individuality, is plural, Indian, and modern. It has emanated from a rich and complex life and enacted it in an equal measure in art of richness and complexity. A plural art of a plural country and inheritance, a plural ethos, and a life-affirming plurality.

The exhibition is a modest tribute to four masters who shaped and gave meaning and relevance to Indian modernity. The Raza Foundation is grateful that on our request the Progressive Art Gallery agreed to loan works from its collection for the show and the eminent art critic Yashodhara Dalmia has curated the show and written an illuminating catalogue essay.

Ashok Vajpeyi
Managing Trustee
The Raza Foundation

PAG
PROGRESSIVE ART GALLERY
h the years
1962-63
1964-68
1973
1974
1975
1977
1982
1993
1999
2002
2007

DIRECTOR'S NOTE:

In a year that marks a centennial celebration of four luminaries of Indian modern art—F.N. Souza, Ram Kumar, K.G. Subramanyan, and V.S. Gaitonde—the exhibition Creating the Century: The Four Iconic Artists is a landmark event in the art world. In association with The Raza Foundation, this exhibition, curated by the distinguished author and curator Yashodhara Dalmia Ji, offers an unprecedented exploration into the lives and works of these master artists who redefined modern Indian art. Their unique visions, innovative techniques, and contributions not only shaped the narrative of Indian modernism but also cemented their place in the global art community.

This exhibition serves as a tribute and a reflection, celebrating their centennial birth anniversaries and providing an in-depth look into their artistic journeys. As artists who were pivotal in India's post-colonial cultural resurgence, Souza, Ram Kumar, Subramanyan, and Gaitonde, each in their own way, broke the traditional moulds of Indian art to chart new territories in form, abstraction, and thematic exploration. By juxtaposing their works, the exhibition provides a comprehensive understanding of their artistic philosophies, shedding light on how these creative minds interacted with the world around them and how their distinct styles continue to influence contemporary art today.

With his bold, raw, and often controversial imagery, F.N. Souza remains a symbol of rebellion and defiance in the art world. His works challenged established norms, primarily through his explorations of sexuality, religion, and power. Ram Kumar's haunting, abstract landscapes reflect his inner meditations on life and death, his works being a fusion of the personal and the philosophical. K.G. Subramanyan's art, rooted in Indian folk traditions and mythology, explored a playful yet profound integration of narrative, satire, and craft. V.S. Gaitonde, on the other hand, journeyed into the realm of pure abstraction with his serene, meditative canvases, where the spiritual and the sensory beautifully merged.

This exhibition, curated by Yashodhara Dalmia Ji, a scholar deeply familiar with Indian modernism, opens new dialogues between the works of these four iconic artists. Dalmia's sensitive and insightful approach ensures that the viewer is not just a spectator but becomes part of a deeper conversation that traverses time and space, connecting the personal histories of these artists with larger narratives of art and society.

A special mention and heartfelt thanks go to Shri Ashok Vajpeyi Ji, Life and Managing Trustee of The Raza Foundation, whose tireless efforts have brought this exhibition to life. The Raza Foundation has long patronised modern and contemporary Indian art, fostering creative dialogue and supporting the legacies of artists who have shaped the country's cultural heritage. Creating the Century would not have been possible without his vision and dedication. Vajpeyi Ji's commitment to preserving and promoting the works of Indian modernists is commendable, and this exhibition stands as a testament to his deep engagement with the arts.

Our sincere gratitude extends to Yashodhara Dalmia Ji, whose expertise and profound understanding of these four artists have guided this exhibition to new heights. Her scholarly perspective and curatorial acumen ensure that each artwork is contextualised within the broader framework of the artist's life, times, and creative output.

Creating the Century is more than just an exhibition; it celebrates a legacy, reflects on history, and engages with the timeless power of art. The works of Souza, Ram Kumar, Subramanyan, and Gaitonde continue to inspire, challenge, and provoke, making this centennial a momentous occasion for art lovers and scholars alike.

Harsh Vardhan Singh

CREATING THE CENTURY

Four Iconic Artists

As notions of feudalism began to dissipate, and an awareness of historical identity and the concept of a nation became part of the new quest for freedom in India, it became evident that modernism in art would manifest itself as a major vehicle for self-expression. Instead of the largely mimetic and picturesque works that had been popular and had immobilised art, the emerging forms began to be transformed into a vital and imaginative genre.

It was this encrusted modernity with its multiple levels of aesthetic codes, reflecting the diversity of the country, which became established and a forceful consciousness arose of a growing individualism and a powerful need for self-expression. In Bombay as well as in other cities, as groups of artists congregated to articulate their innovative beliefs, a strong and multiple form of modernism began to take place. In a rising nation it was the underbelly of existence that inevitably became the prime focus for the artists as the burgeoning life of the streets spilled out and created a vivid entourage of memory and metaphor.

While Euro-American modernity placed countries like India as the 'other 'and the 'marginal' they were at the same time dependent on the colonised, a result of interpenetration with the material and aesthetic notions of these countries. Displacing the notion of this modernity as pivotal then, we have to see that there was a fusion and the creation of a 'Third Space' where as the scholar Homi Bhabha emphasized the 'difference is neither the One nor the Other, but something else besides, in-between'.1 Hence the multi-

dimensional cultural forms which created the paradigms for non-eurocentric modernities and also emerged in India privileged this norm as significant and gained widespread popularity.

In Bombay, a group of artists gathered in 1947 to form the Progressive Artists' Group in the very year that India gained Independence, and in their compelling endeavour for rooting modernism in their country presaged the very core of art in the nation. The group was initiated by the artist Francis Newton Souza [1924—2002] who with his audacious distortions of the human form and frank exposures of the body not only aroused a strong reaction but also created the tenor for modern art. The other artists in the Group consisted of M.F. Husain, S.H. Raza, K.H. Ara, S.K. Bakre and H.A. Gade and their primary objective was to propel a modernism which critiqued the outmoded practices of schools of art and rejected outright the revivalistic approach of the Bengal School.

With a new nation coming into being and with the onset of modern Indian art, it was Francis Newton Souza who could be said to be the generative source of this creative transformation. The Goan artist had not only founded the Progressive Artists Group in 1947 but created the syntax for Indian art with his devilish heads, nude and voluptuous women and apocalyptic landscapes which began to expose the seamier side of existence. These were images which were deftly made with few bold strokes and etched out the human physiognomy in all its disingenuity such as the work in this collection (oil on board,1957). In engaging with these, the artist was to make eminently modern forms which depicted contemporary life.

Souza's strict Catholic upbringing in Portugese Goa had far from making him a devout Christian, instead provoked him into being ferociously anarchic against the rigidities and the corrupt practises of the Church. His view of

Christ was not that of a compassionate figure but of the vengeful God of Romanesque Churches in Spain.

Coming Into His Own

Souza left for London in 1949 where he experienced the country's post war angst and witnessed ravaged buildings and food shortages which cast their gloomy shadows. He found it difficult to exhibit his works and lived in a situation of penury. A few years of deprivation followed but after that the artist's inherent talent began to be recognized. In 1954 he participated in the group show held at the Institute of Contemporary Arts where he exhibited along with artists like Graham Sutherland and Francis Bacon with whom his work can be said to have a correspondence. In infusing the dark mood of the post- war era Francis Bacon(1909-1992) for instance had exposed the human form with the hideous and the brutal underside of his personality. A meeting with the poet, critic and editor of *Encounter*, Stephen Spender also brought about his participation in an exhibition and would also lead to the publication of his autobiographical essay 'Nirvana of a Maggot'in *Encounter* the following year which won him further acclaim. This coincided with his solo exhibition in 1955 at Gallery One. Writing on this exhibition the famed critic John Berger wrote,' How much his pictures derive from Western art and how much from the hieratic temple traditions of his country, l cannot say. Analysis breaks down and intuition takes over. It is obvious that he is a superb designer and an excellent draughtsman. I find it quite impossible to assess his work comparatively. Because he straddles several traditions but serves none' 2

Souza's manifestation of hypocricy acquired depth and dimension, however, when he impasted on his papal exposition an adult revulsion of power and corruption. His manifestations of the grotesque resulted in heads which

were to bare the canker within the soul as it were. The cold, soulless eyes for forehead, gnashing teeth for mouth and the face bounded by ferocious lines in a ridged, rocky terrain petrified by its own violence became his means of exposing the inner malevolence of the soul. In a work such as in this collection (oil on board, 1961) , the denouement of the upper classes with their vestments of polite behaviour and their underlying corruption impacts the viewer. In time to come the foetus heads, as Souza would have them, became tubular, then dotted with wriggles and squibbles and finally composed of octagonal shapes connected with funnels. Many examples of these can be seen as part of this exhibition. Even as the heads became increasingly inventive in their devilish visage, they also began to loose some of the earlier energy and passion and veer towards design, though ingeniously composed. Yet in their heyday they were to arouse the sheer horror of man's inhumanity to man.

If Souza's heads were his most distinctive feature they were characteristically rebellious and at the same time revelatory. In his dexterous handling of strokes he not only exposed the detritus of existence but also created a metier for modernism in India. The planar surface with a vigorous delineation of the line and colour, subjected to anarchic and vivid motions would inscribe the liturgy of modernism. The picturesque, the perfect and the sublime became subjected to a world which had known urbanity and the debris of existence. If Souza had delved into his own traditions he had also archived the etiology of modernism to root it in his country.

The artist decried the existing notion that his creations were deploying a borrowed language not just of Romanesque art but of the School of Paris painters like Picasso. Yet as he pointed out the modernist forms which arose out of industrialization and urbanization in the West drew from the

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Souza 59

'primitive' which they were introduced to in ethnographic museums in their own as well as colonized countries. As Souza explained, 'If modern art is hybrid, what is the School of Paris? Matisse is "Persian", Van Gogh is "Japanese", Picasso is "African", Gaugin is "Polynesian". Indian artists who borrow from the School of Paris are home from home'3

As demonstrated by his bold delineation of forms Souza's frankly sexual women bared themselves in their full nudity. The artist pointed out that women had an inherently sexual appetite which had been suppressed because of the Victorian morality and had been unknown to the country before colonial times. Thus the sexual voluptuary displayed by his frontal nude figures was at the same time countered by the unhindered manifestation of desire.

Apocalyptic Landscapes

The landscapes made by Souza are diametrically different from the picturesque and calm vistas of conventional modes. The ingenuous rectilinear shapes which were made in splashes of vivid colour created an exploding vision of the holocaust and nuclear outbursts where instability became the defining mode. The houses seem to be bursting by seismic undercurrents which would tear things asunder erupting from within. In one of the works here (oil on canvas ,1964) the brilliant red structures are on the verge of falling into an abyss of nothingness as the firm outlines of houses slide downwards shaking the very foundation of polite society.

Souza's Still Lifes such as *Untitled*, (oil on canvas, 1959) seem to move towards angles and positions which would draw from his experience of wider world and would frame his objects. These are far removed from the intimate comforts of home and glazed with the reflections of his diverse experiences.

In his diverse experiments with gouache, pen and ink, mixed media, oil on canvas and board and chemical paintings Souza's brilliant draughtmanship creates a world of burning embers and sizzling disasters which have a profound effect of disarming conventions.

The violence as well as tenderness which infuse his most rebellious works create elegiac renderings of the magnificent. It could be said that these forms not only questioned oppressive methods but also in their wiry lines and astringent compositions turned conventional notions of art upside down.

Subramanyan's Subversions

Across the continent on the eastern side, at Santiniketan, the multiple oeuvre of the artist, K.G. Subramanyan (1924—2016) consisted of polymorphic works made in diverse media ranging from paintings, water colours and reverse painting on glass to murals, sculpting and even set designing. Of these we can take note of a splendid suite of glass paintings which took place in the eighties reusing the technique of the practice from colonial times, but subverting its content to sardonic, witty and humorous narratives of the present. Quite ingeniously the artist imbued these works with an erotic flavour, reflecting the Kalighat traditions and relaying it for the present.

The artist's intense involvement with the language of art created with each new medium the enhancement of expressive possibility. As he stated 'These are all things that come unplanned but it is true that every significant event has more than one layer of meaning, metaphoric in the case of poetry. In all visual images people who are taken up with realism overlook that there is nothing so realistic if it doesn't have a reference to something else. So this kind of overlayering of visual images and then through that a kind of flattening of its meaning that is part of all kinds of works of art that mean

anything to us. Influenced by the Santiniketan teachings in his early works, the artist combined in his paintings of women and children, Far Eastern calligraphic forms with folk and miniature traditions. In his multifaceted works these diverse narrative elements were extended to the perspex surface, which while being reflective would also be durable.

Subramanyan's imbibing of the Santiniketan methods where he trained and taught was ingrained in his teaching at the MS University, Vadodara influencing whole generations of students. Following this he moved back to Santiniketan where he lived and worked till his retirement when he settled down in Vadodara.

Indeed his notion of modernism lay embedded in his writings on Rabindranath Tagore. As he wrote, 'He [Tagore] valued tradition but resented the inflexibilities of the traditionalists and their resistance to change. He was a partisan for progress but the unthinking excesses of the iconoclasts offended his sensibilities. He was a proud nationalists but was dismayed when nationalism tended to become a blind cult that divided people from people and made them distrust each other. He was a modern but was wary of those moderns who in their leap forward repudiated their antecedents. For him the right plan had to by-pass these confrontations and go to the fundamentals of growth. This he had to try himself in whatever small way. Viewed against this background his Santiniketan experiments were not just a poet's dreams, they had a solid rationale.' 4

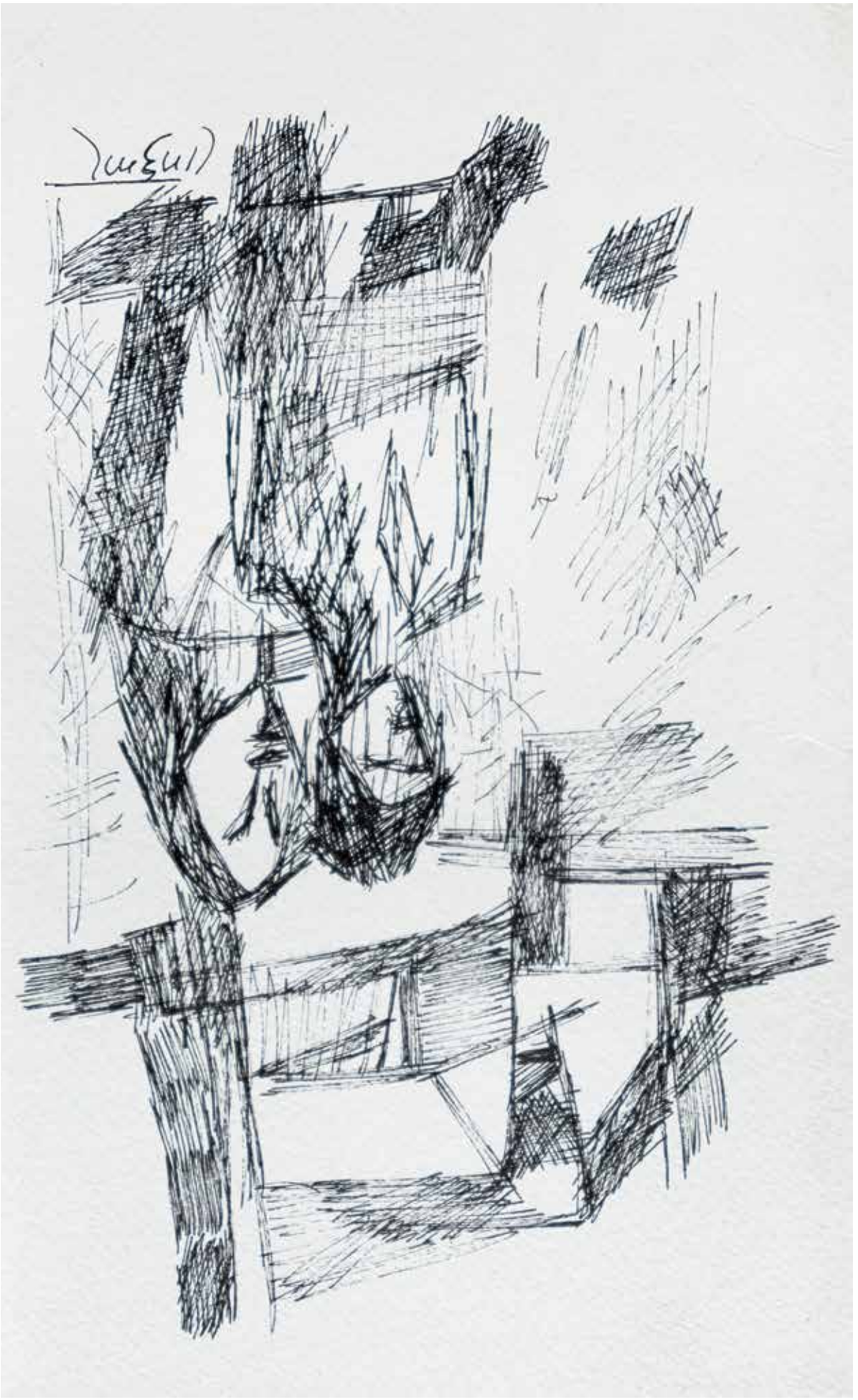
Polymorphic Portraits

The extension of boundaries in form and method lay at the core of Subramanyan's works. In the artist's polymorphic works the animated movement of the portraits creates the notion of time within the moment.

In the present series this imbues the visage with a sense of mobility while remaining still. In doing so the ordinary person extends his boundaries beyond the finite to the notion of being extraordinary. Thus in the work *Ragini Vibhas* (Reverse painting on glass, 2003) in the present series the forms are juxtaposed both horizontally and vertically laying the surface open to further narratives. The man and woman in *Leela* (Acrylic on canvas, 2011) seem to incite dialogues between themselves as well as create a gestalt of the back and front as plants, animals and birds foreground the planar dimensions of the painting.

As the artist Nilima Sheikh pointed out, 'Subramanyan brings to service the notion of modular divisions, additive in nature. The attenuation of form is conditioned directly by format, by the exigencies of space in this modular construct. Contour has a forming function which parallels rather than completes the function of colour formulation. This dual forming is extended through a calligraphic flourish that activates negative spaces. And the structural grid of the modular divisions repeats itself in patterns, enlivening the surface. Conversely, localized surface patterning may extend itself to form the overall design. Subramanyan employed these devices not only to reduce the art-craft polarities he found detrimental to an understanding of either, but also to engage in the practice of art as a craftsman might.' 5

It was at the Fine Art Fair held in Vadodara in 1972 that Subramanyan first designed toys which became a further extension of his language. Made of bamboo, leather and beads these puppet- like animal forms served to bridge the gap between art and craft as well as create new compositions. As Sheikh pointed out, 'For Subramanyan the fair was the best occasion to vindicate his several obsessions: the mobility between art and craft practice, between



studio exercise and working *in situ*, between painting and the physically more projective arts, between varying scales and different materials and finally, between art as serious business ---and as fun.'6

According to the artist 'I have always used a fluid kind of space but this is not necessarily true only of the miniatures. It is characteristic of a lot of oriental paintings. But I will not quarrel with miniature because after all what is a miniature? It is a painting to be read. Generally speaking what you call an easel painting is an extension of the miniature. Later people got into a conflict about whether a painting was to be read or whether it was there for decorative purposes. An abstract image takes away the readability or keeps it subservient. In any case when I paint I try to keep these two things together—the human drama and the generality of the image. I like to use various devices like the polyptch where various incidents, complete in themselves are grouped together. 7

Ram Kumar's Sombre Forms

Ram Kumar's (2024—2018) lonely, alienated individuals located within tattered houses and shabby streets created the awareness of the plight of the ordinary person in a newly emerged, developing but also traumatised nation. These forlorn figures with their gaunt faces and melancholy eyes such as the girl sitting with a pensive expression and her hands clenched in this collection, loomed large over the cityscape and provoked a deep empathy.

He was an accidental artist and yet reached great heights in his works. Ram Kumar's early days were as a banker and later as a journalist with the newspaper Hindustan Times. In the meantime he had joined Sarada Ukil's

evening art classes. He also wrote stories in Hindi about lower middle class individuals and the sordidness of their lives which was faced by them with great fortitude. This provided him with a means of existence but his increasing involvement with art took him to Paris where he studied under Andre Lhote and Fernand Leger.

Ram Kumar's stay in Paris was not an easy one but as he struggled to survive he also learnt to sharpen his tools. 'I told my father I wanted to go to Paris and study art there. He bought a ship ticket which was Rs.700 and then I reached Paris without any money.

I told the editor that I would send him articles from there with the title,'In Search of Art' and I started writing in the ship itself and sent the first article from Cairo. So I was writing articles for the Hindustan Times, the Hindi version and they were sending the money to Paris. At that time the foreign exchange problem was not there and that money was the basis for my existence there. I would send about four articles in a month for atleast Rs. 200 per piece so it added upto Rs. 800 to Rs. 1000 which was more than enough to survive.'8

The Paris years were known for the camaraderie Ram Kumar shared with artists like S.H. Raza and Akbar Padamsee. His training in Paris along with his association with the Mumbai based Progressive Artists Group and with the Delhi Shilpi Chakra, provided the necessary professional alignments which enabled him to sharpen his artistic tools.

Ram Kumar's paintings of Varanasi are well known for their lucid interpretation of the pilgrimage centre. It was in 1960 that he visited Varanasi with the painter M.F.Husain to study the sacred city at close quarters and this would prove to be a watershed in his painterly oeuvre. The

stay there resulted in a series of paintings where, while the bustle and energy of the city and its sharp contrast with life and death were predominant in Husain's works, Ram Kumar's tight cubes of human dwellings were packed together precariously as shown in this collection and seemed as if they might crumble even as death dissolves life . Although there is no human presence, Kumar's Varanasi works are haunting evocations of human suffering as well as fortitude in their continued endurance against great odds. As he stated, 'The place, the light in the place plays an important role.The gullies,after gullies, the widows, the old men waiting to die. Manikarnika ghat and the dead bodies. There is hardly any difference between the dead and the alive there. They are waiting to be cremated. '9

The dwellings in bright colours dissolve into paler, more abstract hues as their ephemeral quality becomes universalized. By 1969 his work had become increasingly abstract, where sweeping strokes of grey, black and white and the windswept landscape seemed to be moving almost of its own volition towards a larger vortex of seething gyration. As his work turned towards greater, even lyrical abstraction, there was always an undercurrent of pain with the situation of the individual whose sordid plight rarely changed. The fusion of private and public spaces which characterise his language also make it distinctive, and provide us rare glimpses into the lives of ordinary people which he once suggested so vividly in his lonely city dwellers.

According to the artist, 'I think personally when you come to analyse yourself then you think when you are making formative paintings. I think psychologically you are undergoing certain phases of your own problems and they conveyed something in your paintings, in your colours and forms and gradually when the changes take place within yourself too then I think the colours and forms become different. In earlier times they were very muted,

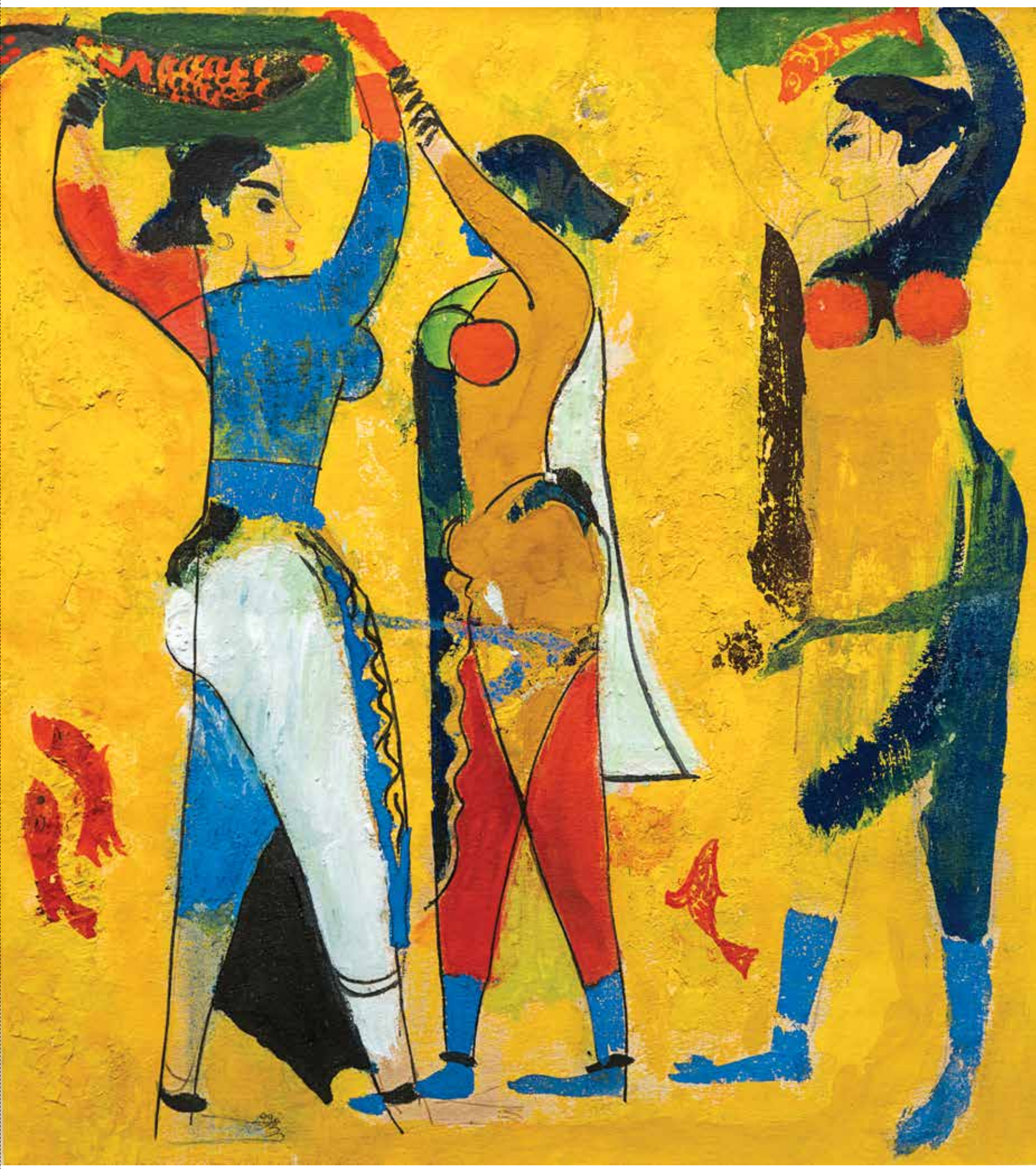
black and white and greys but now they are lighter so now perhaps one is more free. One wants to have more freedom so one applies many colours and see how what sort of feeling they create. One is not committed by any colour.10

Never far removed from concern with the human situation, however, the sensuousness of Ram Kumar's strokes would always evoke the precariousness of man's existence. His paintings would be drowned in a bed of white depicted in the work (acrylic on canvas 1990s) as he moved towards minimal representation where an occasional sign would relieve the great pale expanse. The glistening glaciers, flowing rivers and the forests of the Himalayan foothills are evoked in sweeping movements that seem to radiate light and yet are always counterpoised by darker, more sombre shades.

In his later years Ram Kumar's brooding works see the emergence of wedges of reds and greens as he attains an even greater freedom with his colours. A twig, a bit of broken roof tile, would give a glimmer of the storm underlying the radiating surface. The sense of pain beneath the most sensuous of his strokes creates an ever present concern with human existence.

Gaitonde's Luminous Depths

While being exposed to the works of Western modernists along with that of the Indian miniature tradition V.S. Gaitonde (1924—2001) developed a penetrating insights into form and colour which provided him with new painterly modes. These varied influences combined to develop his non-representational vocabulary in the late 50s when he abandoned his figurative style. The earliest work however such as in this collection (Oil on paper,



1950s) were figurative, similar to Ram Kumar, albeit a lyrical description of the countryside and idyllic renderings of village belles.

These heterogenous influences later combined to develop his non-representational vocabulary in the late 50s when he abandoned his figurative style which were derived from both Indian and western styles such as that of the artist Paul Klee, which he had imbibed at the J.J. School of Art in Mumbai.

The metier and substance of his works later was the painterly surface itself where the application of paint created a highly textured area with thick and thin paint balancing themselves to reflect light in a nuanced manner. In New York on a Rockefeller scholarship in 1964 his work further transformed when coming into contact with the Abstract Expressionist form of painting with its focus on all- over paint which was dripped or slashed on the canvas. The school itself had become a marker for High Modernism and set about a ripple of possibilities in the painterly world. Indeed he along with the artist Krishen Khanna had visited Mark Rothko's studio and this proved to be a catalyst for his own emergence of tints over large expanses.

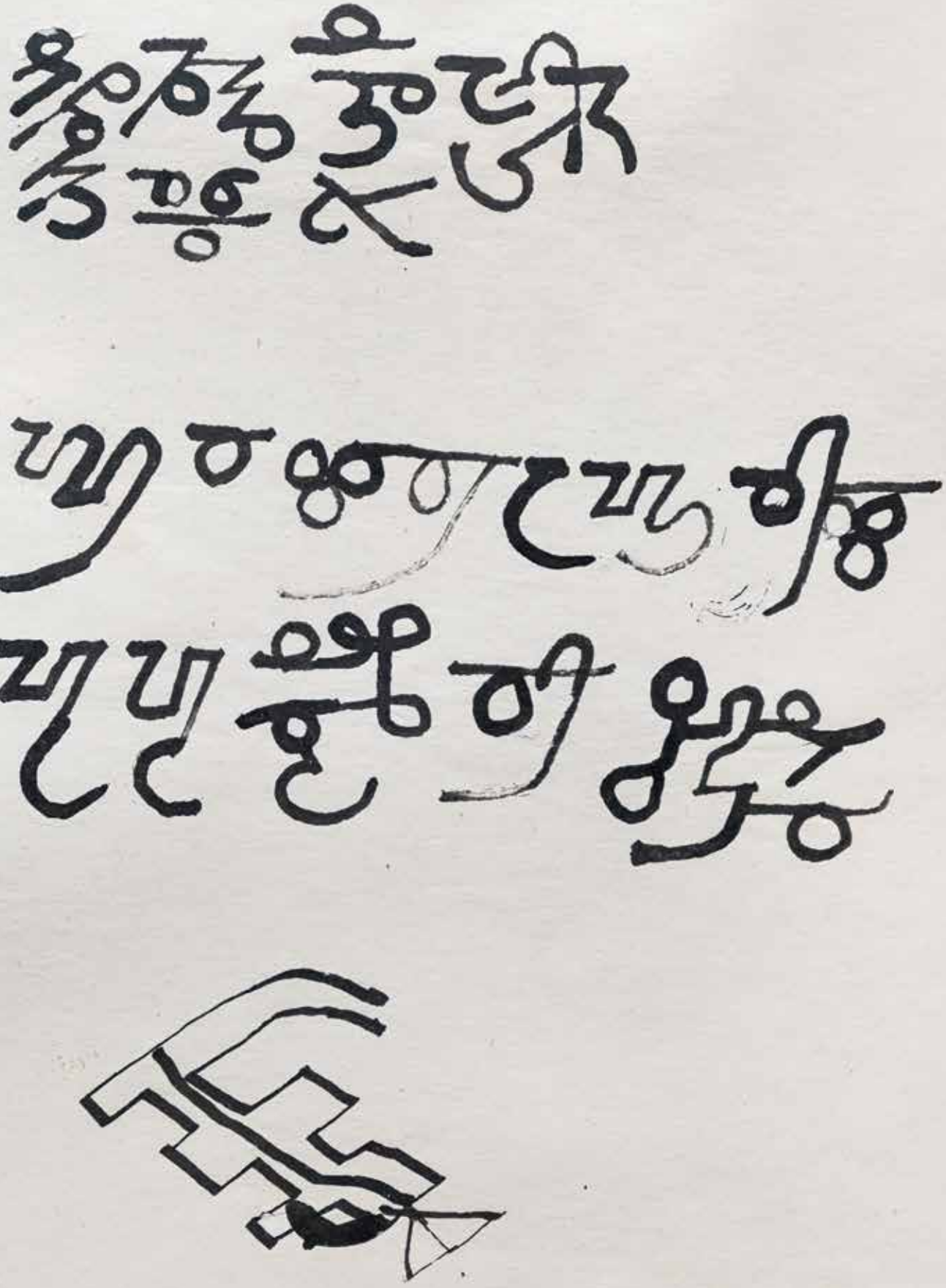
Gaitonde's luminous colours would assume no shape and form and would evoke nothing other than themselves. It was the very surface which was the sensuous pre-occupation of the artist, and he modulated paint on it as if it were his object of passion. The artist's colour surfaces are translucent, creating almost an underwater ambience with beams of light penetrating the depths. His radiant reds with flashes of light such as the one in this collection (Oil on canvas 1991) would create a conglomeration of colour and strokes which seemed to rise from unknown depths. His swabs of paint would regurgitate from the very bottom like the limitless ocean which he had sat across and ruminated for hours from his studio at Bhulabhai Desai

Road in Mumbai. The white stroke on white for instance could create the textured tonality which provoked the profound essence of creation. At the centre of his paintings lay the belief in bringing this to the fore with its boundless possibilities.

The artist himself contradicted the fact that he was an abstract painter and always referred to his own paintings as being 'non-objective'. In his later works and after a serious accident in the mid-80s his work developed a painterly hieroglyphic and calligraphic system of signs and symbols which intuitively recalled the hallowed grace of the universe. An artist prone to meditative silence he tended to dwell on both Zen philosophy and ancient beliefs including calligraphy.

A note on Gaitonde's definitive solo exhibition which took place at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York in 2014 and curated by Sandhini Poddar and Amara Antilla, states, 'When looking at Gaitonde's oeuvre within the wider related context of international postwar art, one can draw parallels to artists working within the contemporary School of Paris, and movements such as Art Informel, Tachisme, and Abstract Expressionism, and yet continue to define his output within the particular ethos of living and working in India, as he did throughout his lifetime. '11

The artists who came to the fore and continued with their creations were to influence ensuing generations over the century. Their styles, and also importantly their beliefs, formed the path that was later taken and evolved by modern and contemporary art in India. From Souza's diabolical humans which questioned corruption, to Subramanyan's expressive delineation of street life, Ram Kumar's tightly- wedged houses which muffled the surface in despair and Gaitonde's emblazoned paintings rising from the depths we have the emergence of a monumental art for the country. The language thus



गायतोंड '87.

Mr. Ashok Vajpeyi, Life and Managing Trustee, The Raza Foundation with Eminent Author & Curator Yashodhara Dalmia.

Photograph courtesy: The Raza Foundation, New Delhi

created became varied and distinctive in shapes and colours as an underlying unity of beliefs knitted it together for the people as a whole. In the struggle to carve a meaningful path which reflected contemporary life, the artists' heroic attempts became symbolic of the nation's own impassioned means of existence.

Yashodhara Dalmia
Curator

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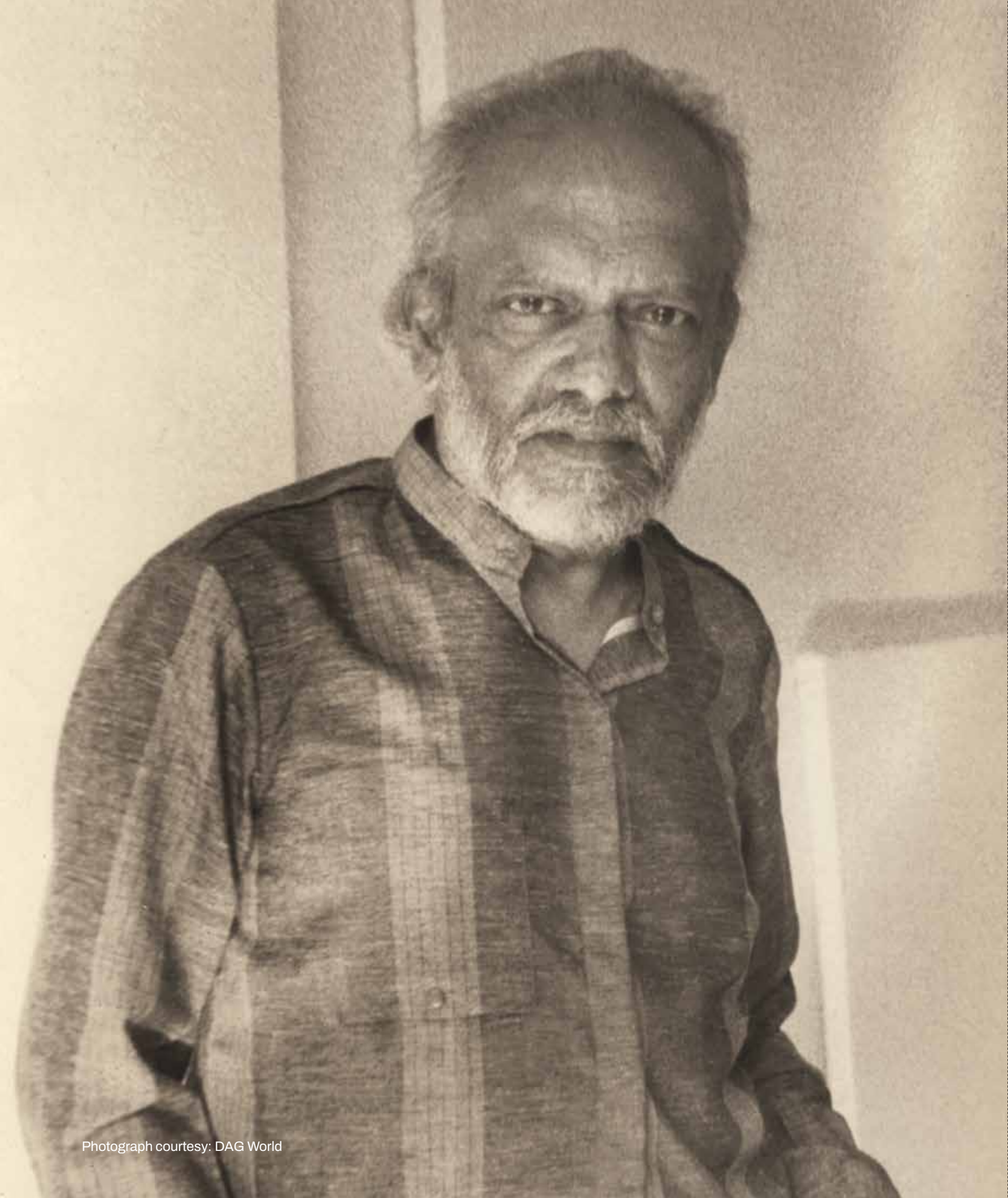
4. K.G.Subramanyan, *Santiniketan, the Making of a Contextual Modernism* catalogue of the show at NGMA curated by R.Siva Kumar, NGMA, New Delhi, 1997
5. Nilima Sheikh *A Post-Independence Initiative in Art, Contemporary Art in Baroda*, edited by Gulammohammed Sheikh, Tulika, New Delhi 1997 p. 121
6. Nilima Sheikh, Ibid, p.102
7. Interview with the author, Mumbai, March 1990
8. Interview with the author, Delhi, December 2007
9. Interview with the author, Delhi, December 2007
10. Interview with the author, Delhi, December 2007
11. 'Painting as Process, Painting as Life 'Solomon R Guggenheim Museum, New York, from October 24, 2014, to February 11, 2015



Photograph courtesy: DAG World

FRANCIS NEWTON SOUZA

(April 1924 – March 2002)

F.N. Souza (1924-2002) was a pioneering Indian artist and a central figure in the post-Independence Indian art movement. Born in Goa, Souza emerged as a prominent voice in the Indian avant-garde, known for his bold, provocative works that explored themes of sexuality, religion, and identity. His artistic journey was marked by a desire to break free from traditional conventions, and his vivid expression often challenged societal norms.

Souza's formative years in Goa were infused with the rich cultural influences of Portuguese colonialism and Indian traditions. He later moved to Mumbai, where he became a founding member of the Progressive Artists' Group in 1947, which aimed to redefine Indian art in a contemporary context. Souza's early works were characterised by figurative representation, often featuring distorted forms and stark lines that conveyed emotional intensity. His distinctive style evolved into a more expressive and abstract approach, using vibrant colors and bold brush strokes.

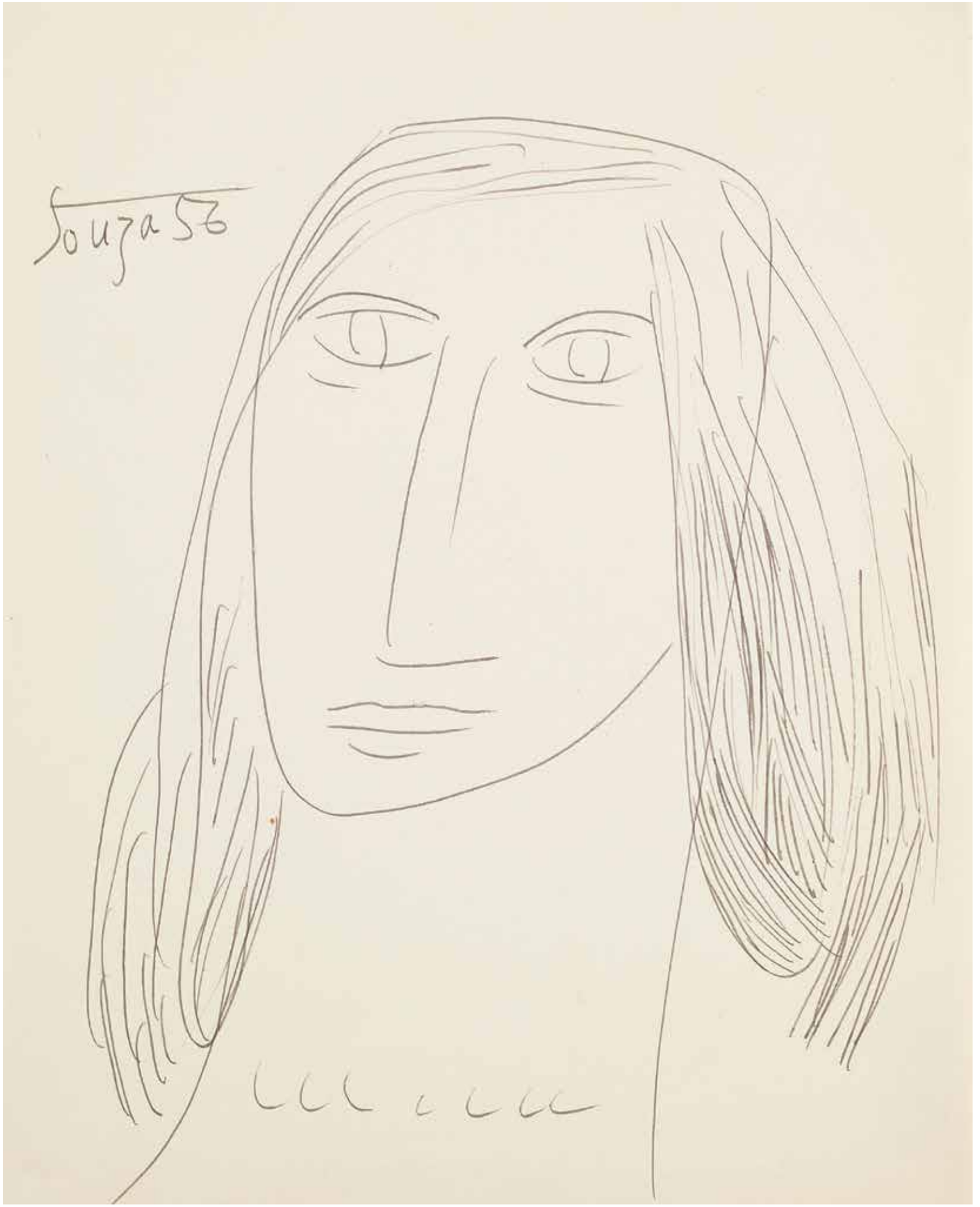
One of the recurring themes in Souza's work is the exploration of human figures, often depicted in a raw and unfiltered manner. He was unafraid to confront taboo subjects, particularly sexuality, which he portrayed with a mixture of sensuality and violence. His paintings often evoke a sense of existential angst, reflecting the complexity of human experience. This willingness to address controversial topics set Souza apart from many of his contemporaries and garnered acclaim and criticism.

Souza spent much of his life in London, where he gained recognition in the international art scene. His works were exhibited in prestigious galleries, and he became known for his unique fusion of Western modernism and Indian sensibilities. Throughout his career, he received numerous accolades, including the Padma Bhushan in 1980, although he later returned the honor in protest against governmental policies.

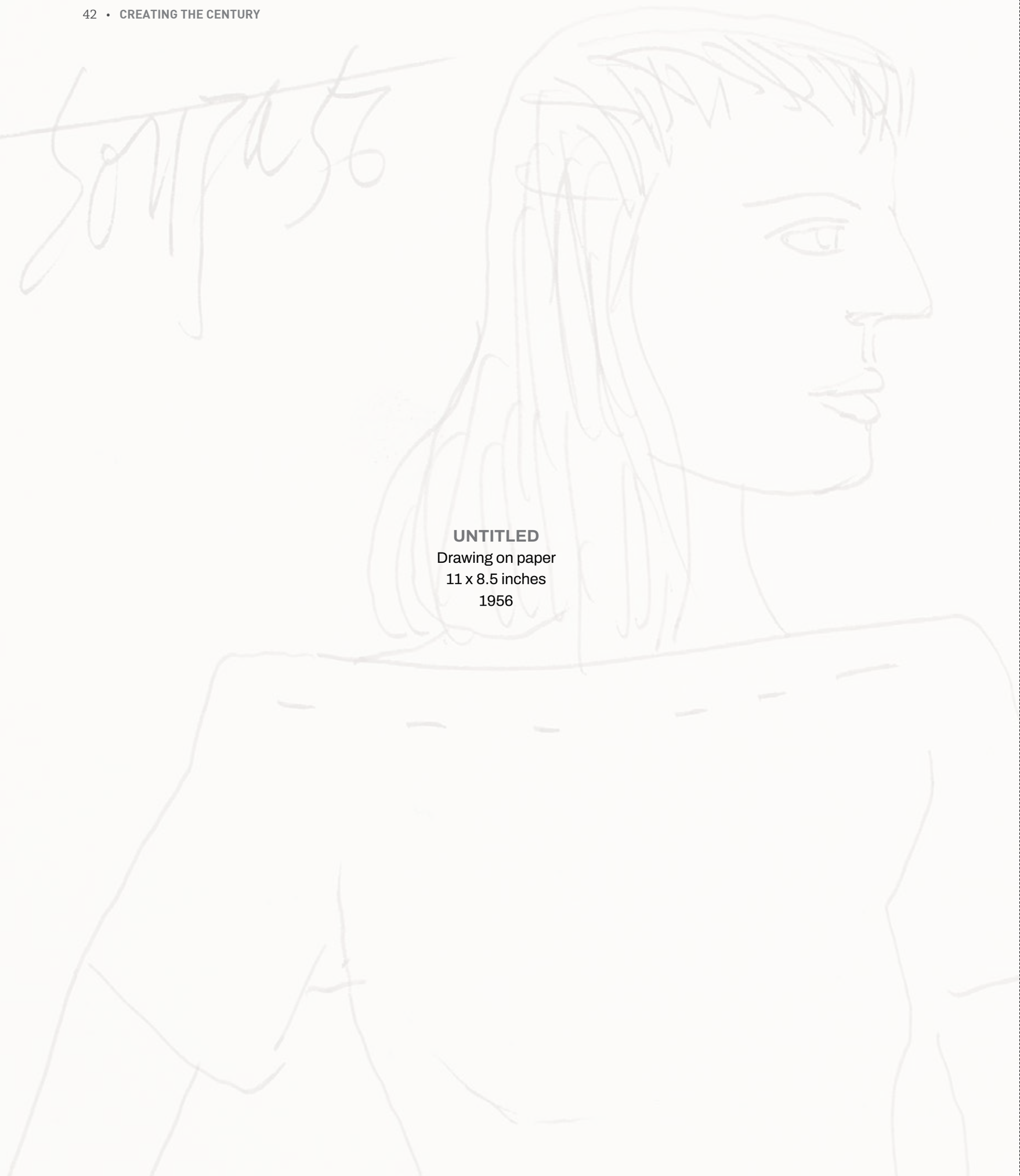
In addition to his painting, Souza was also a talented writer and illustrator. He produced essays and critiques that delved into the philosophy of art and the role of the artist in society. His contributions to the discourse on modern art in India were significant, as he articulated the challenges and responsibilities of the artist in a rapidly changing cultural landscape.

F.N. Souza's legacy endures as a testament to the power of art to challenge, provoke, and inspire. His fearless exploration of complex themes and innovative techniques have left an indelible mark on Indian art, influencing generations of artists and continuing to resonate within contemporary discourse.

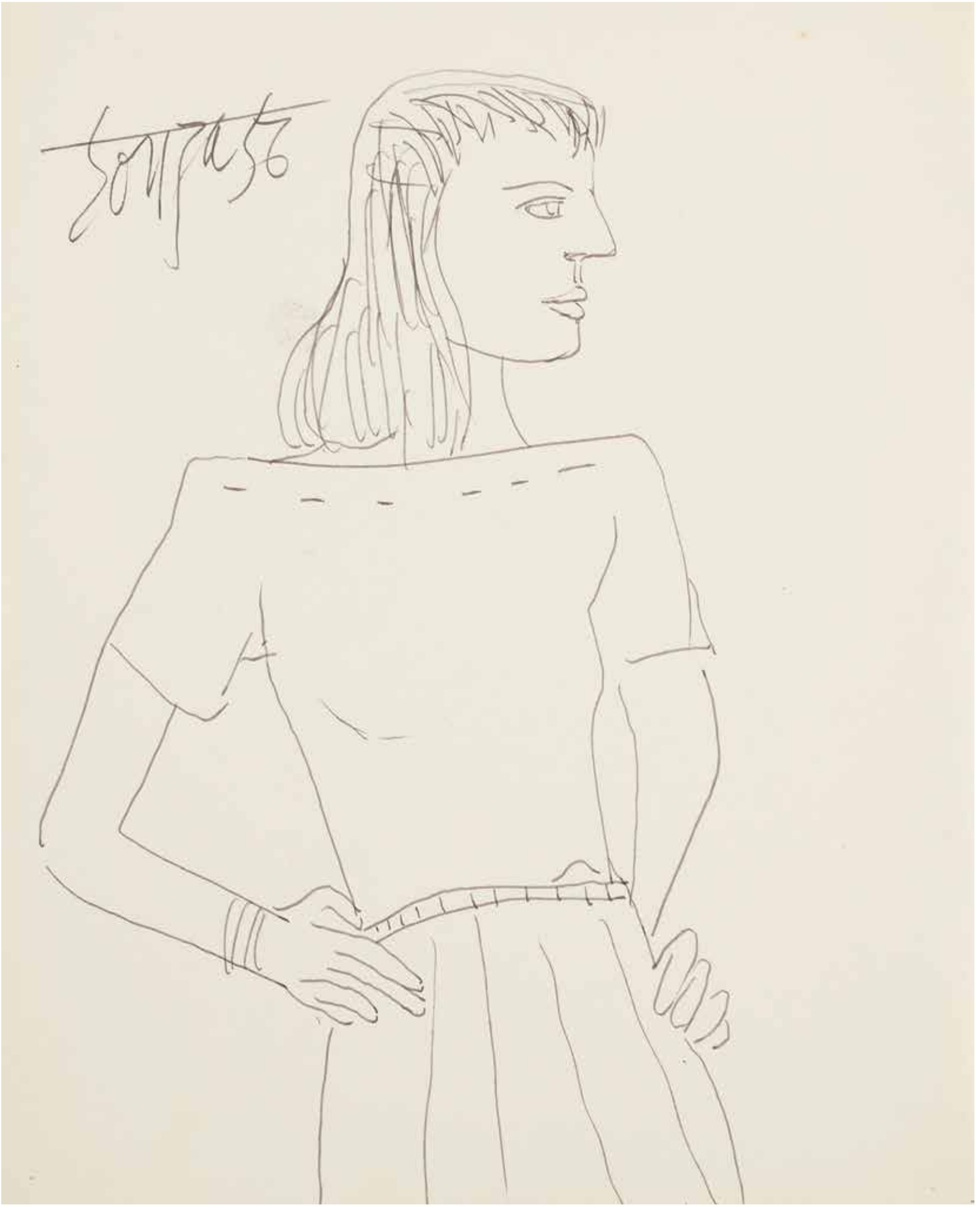
UNTITLED
Marker on paper
7 x 8 inches
1950's

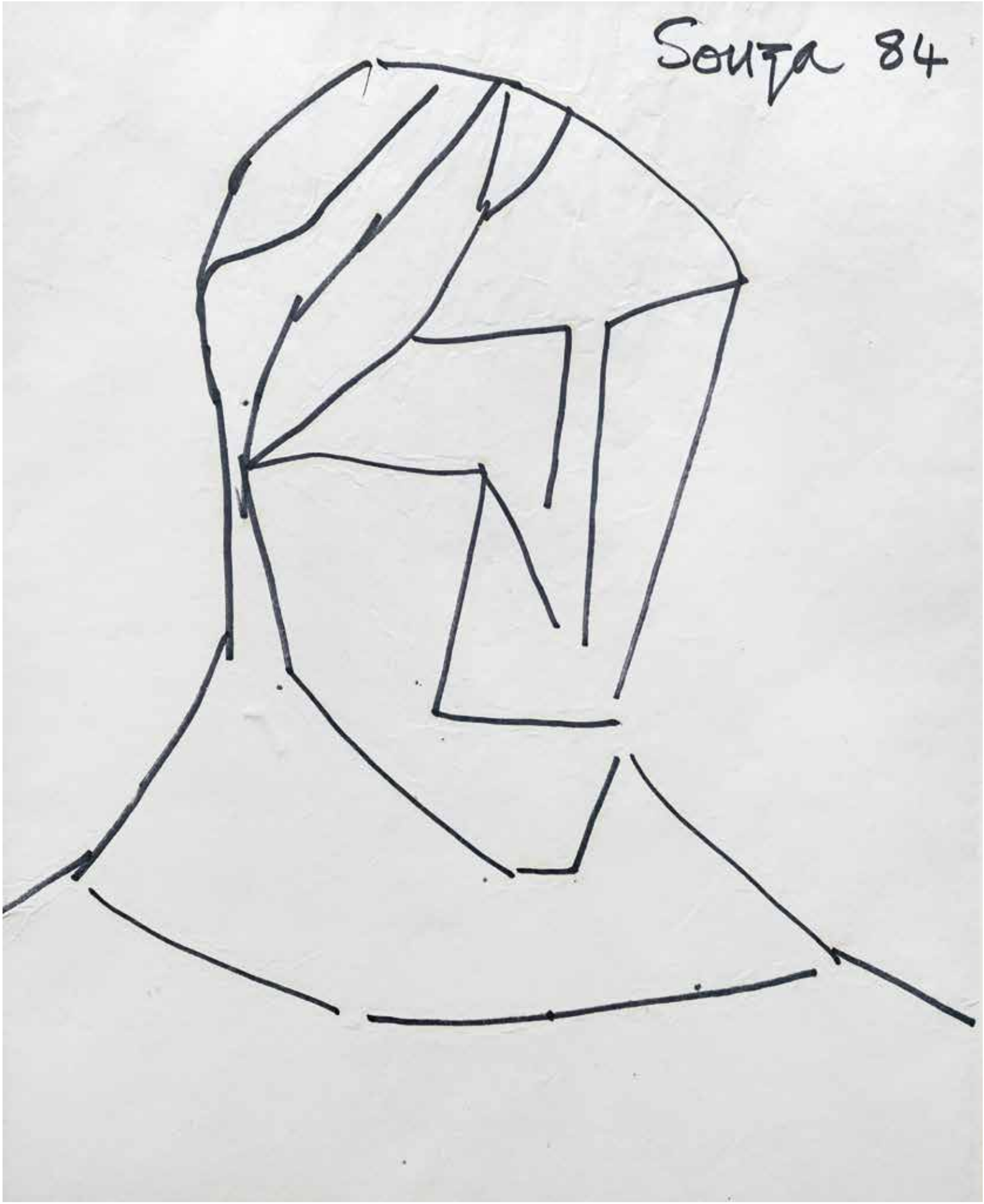

Souza 56

UNTITLED
Drawing on paper
11 x 8.5 inches
1956

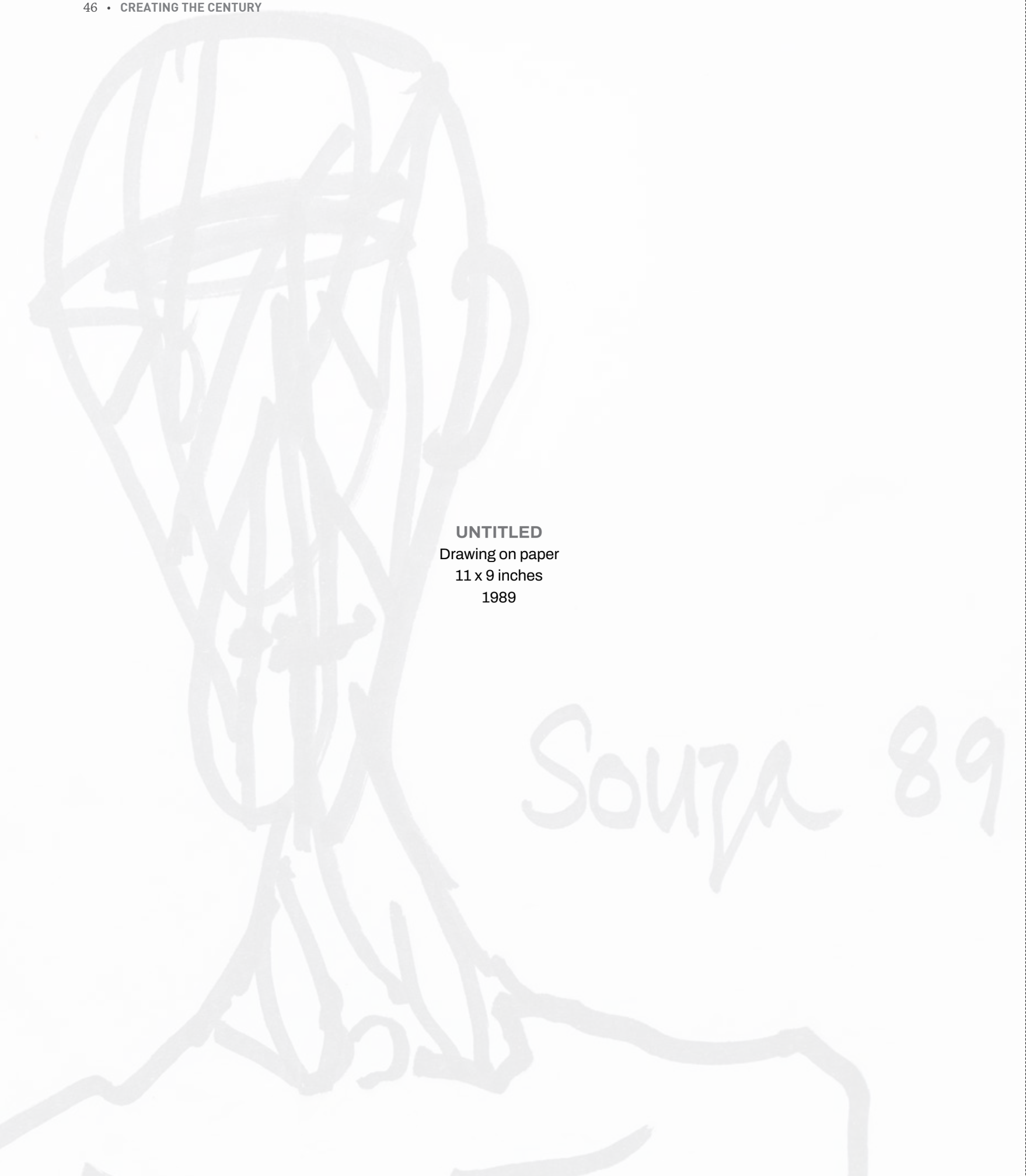


UNTITLED
Drawing on paper
11 x 8.5 inches
1956

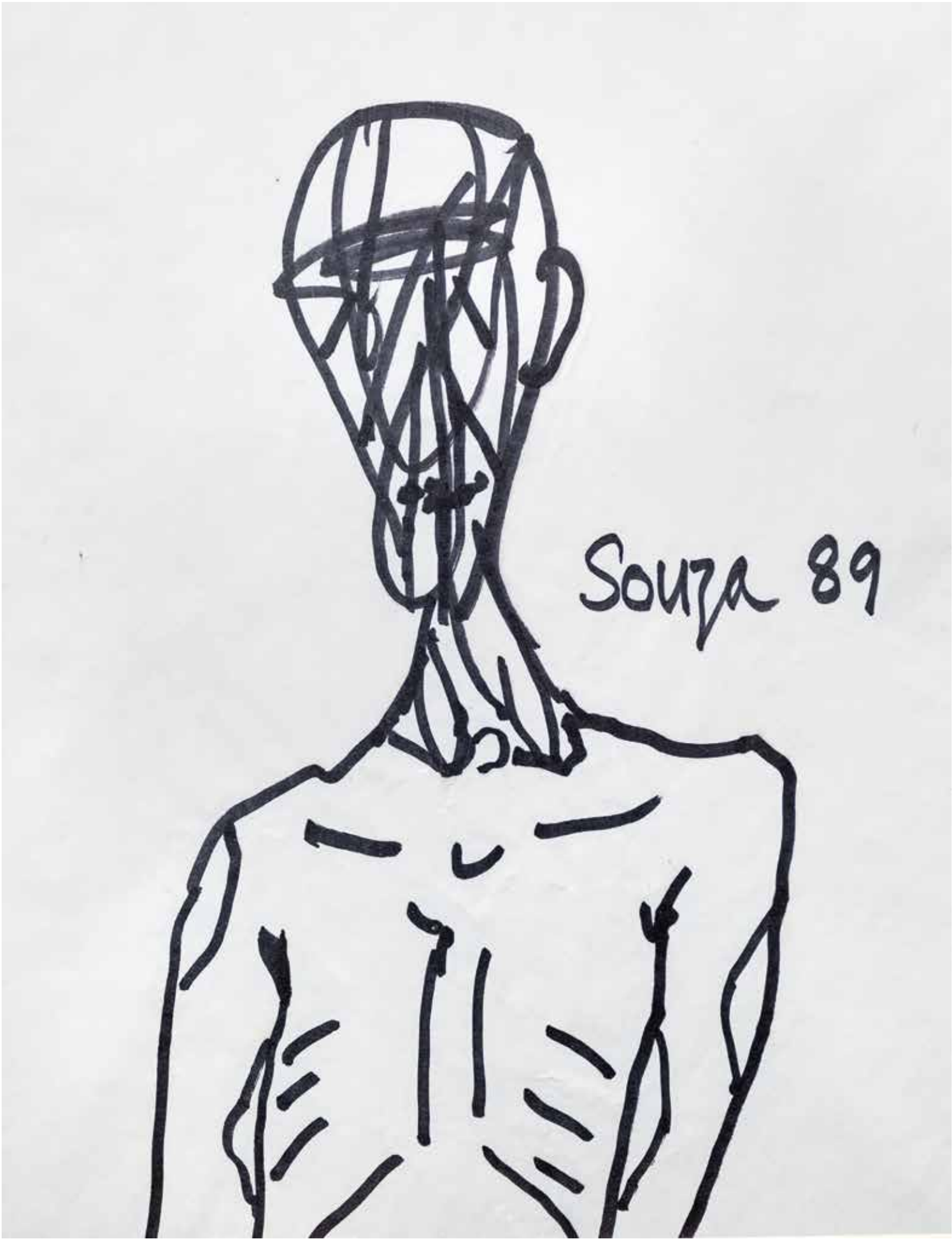


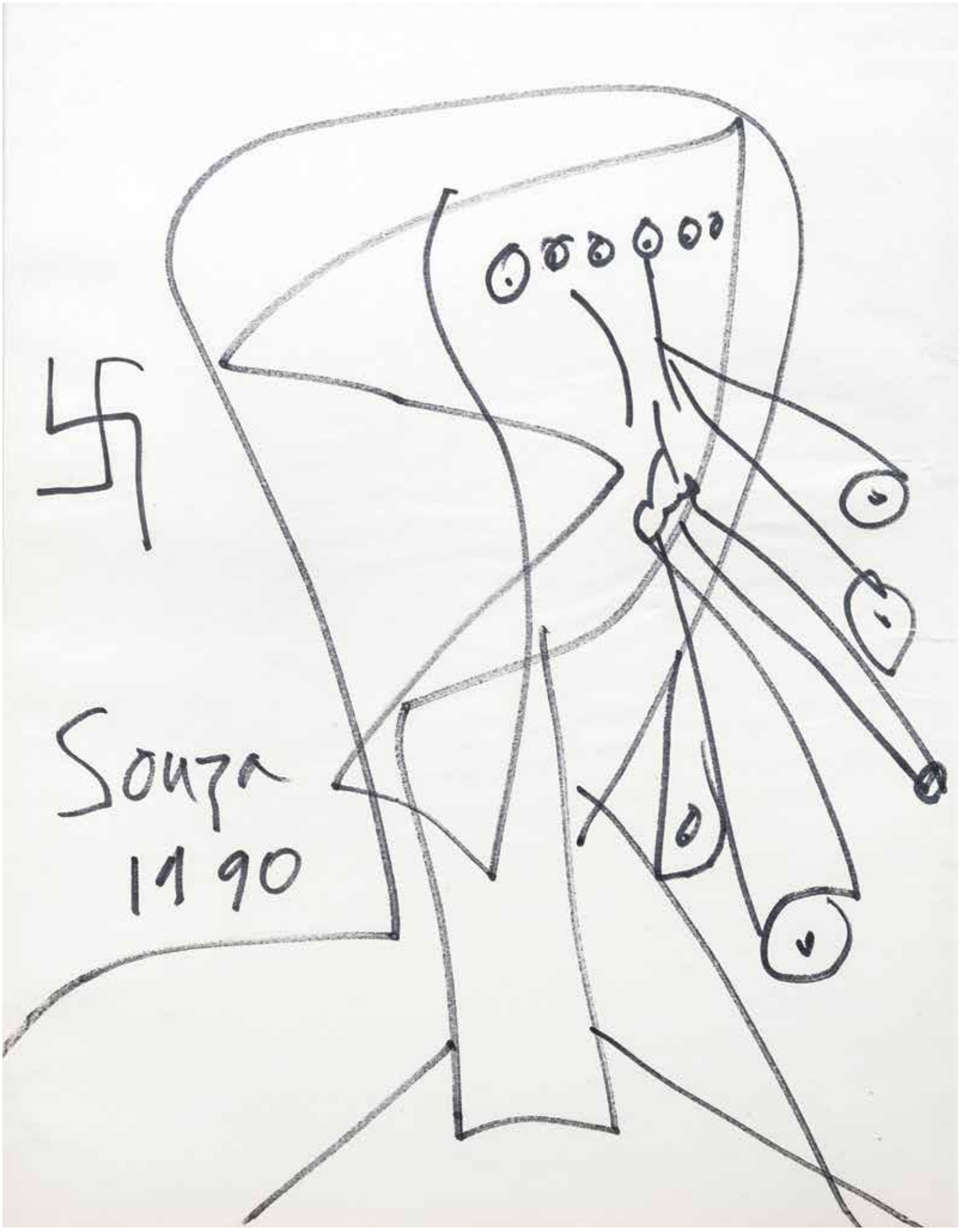

Souza 84

UNTITLED
Drawing on paper
11 x 9 inches
1984

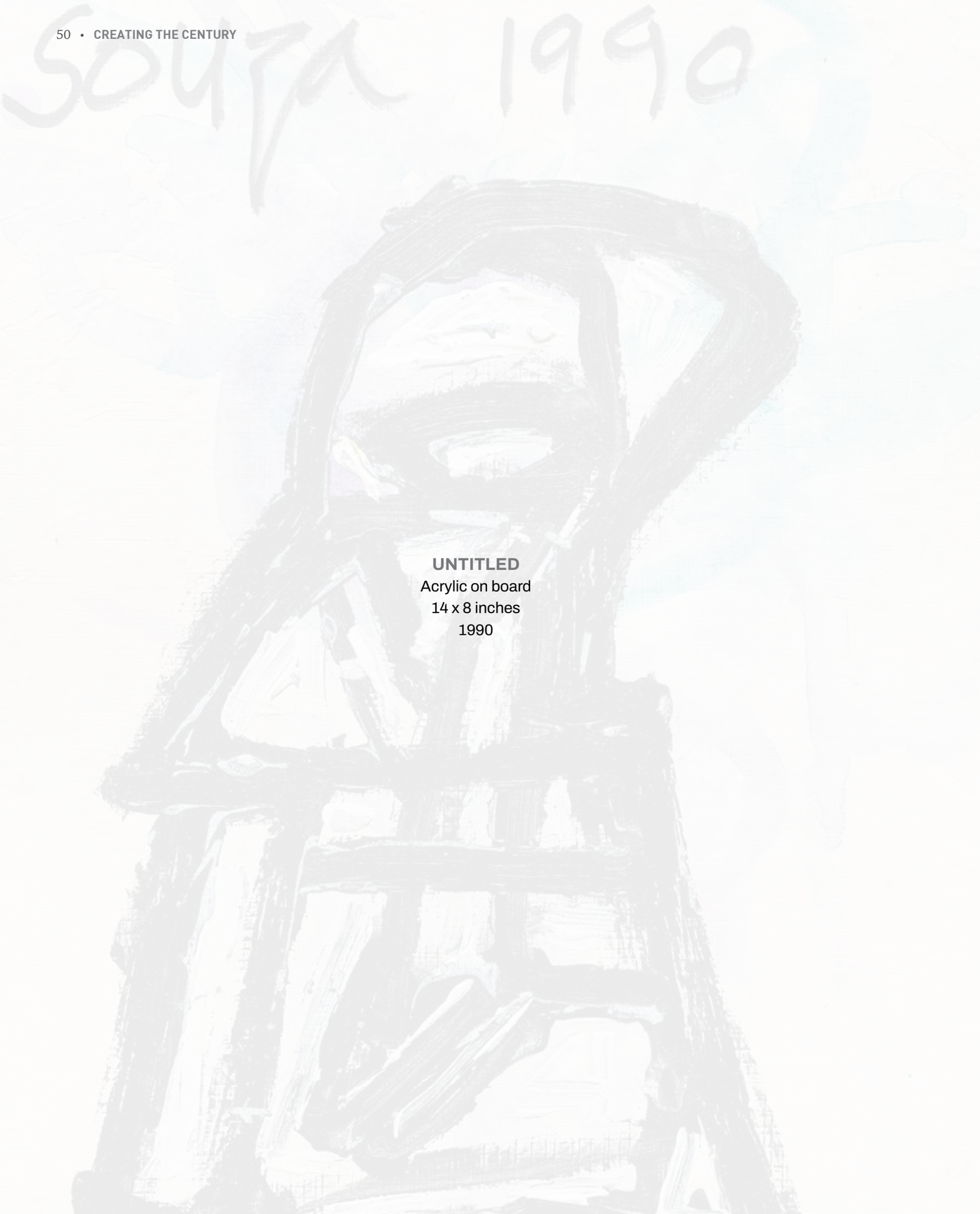


UNTITLED
Drawing on paper
11 x 9 inches
1989


Souza 89

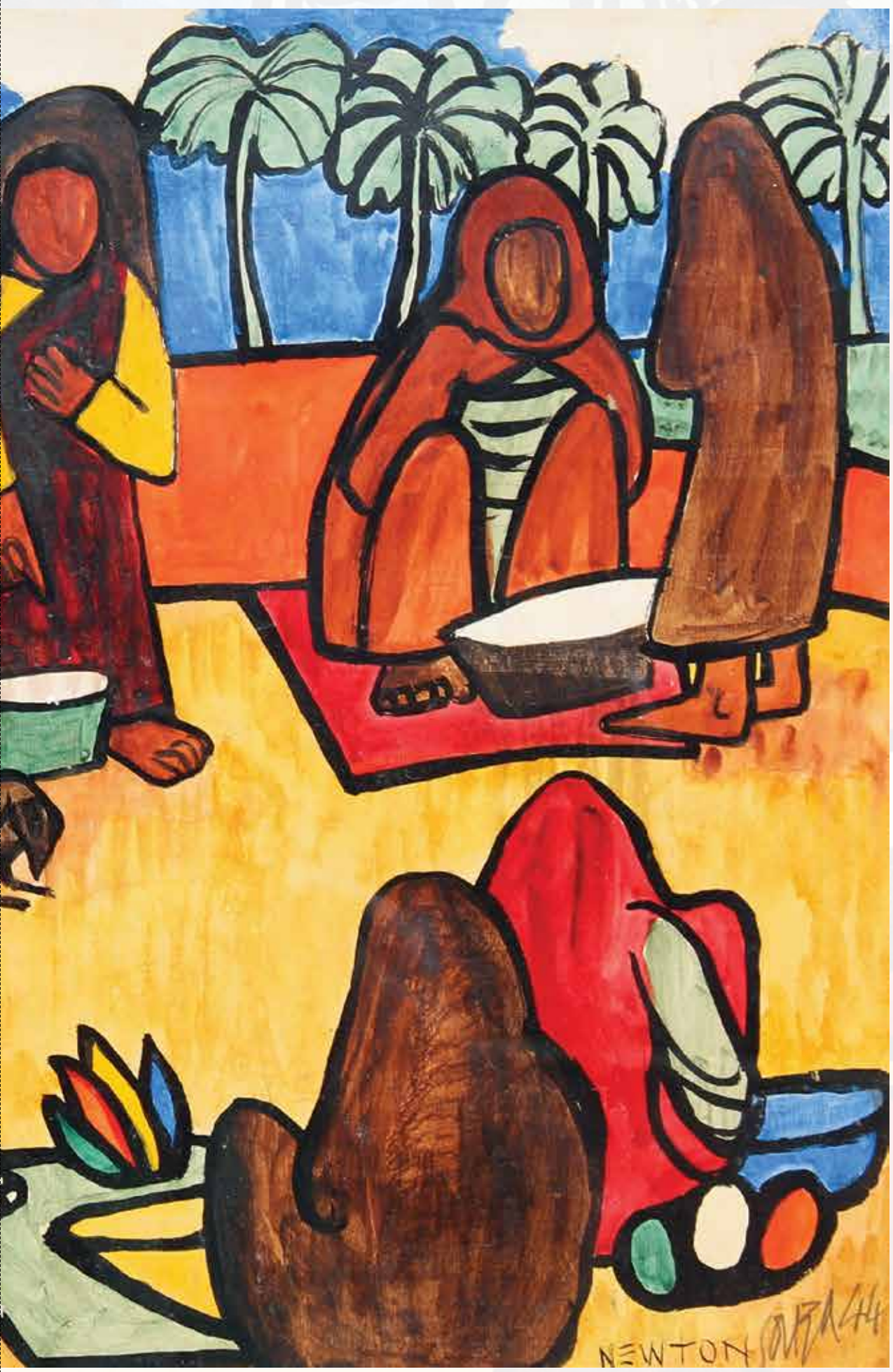

Souza
1990

UNTITLED
Drawing on paper
14 x 10 inches
1990

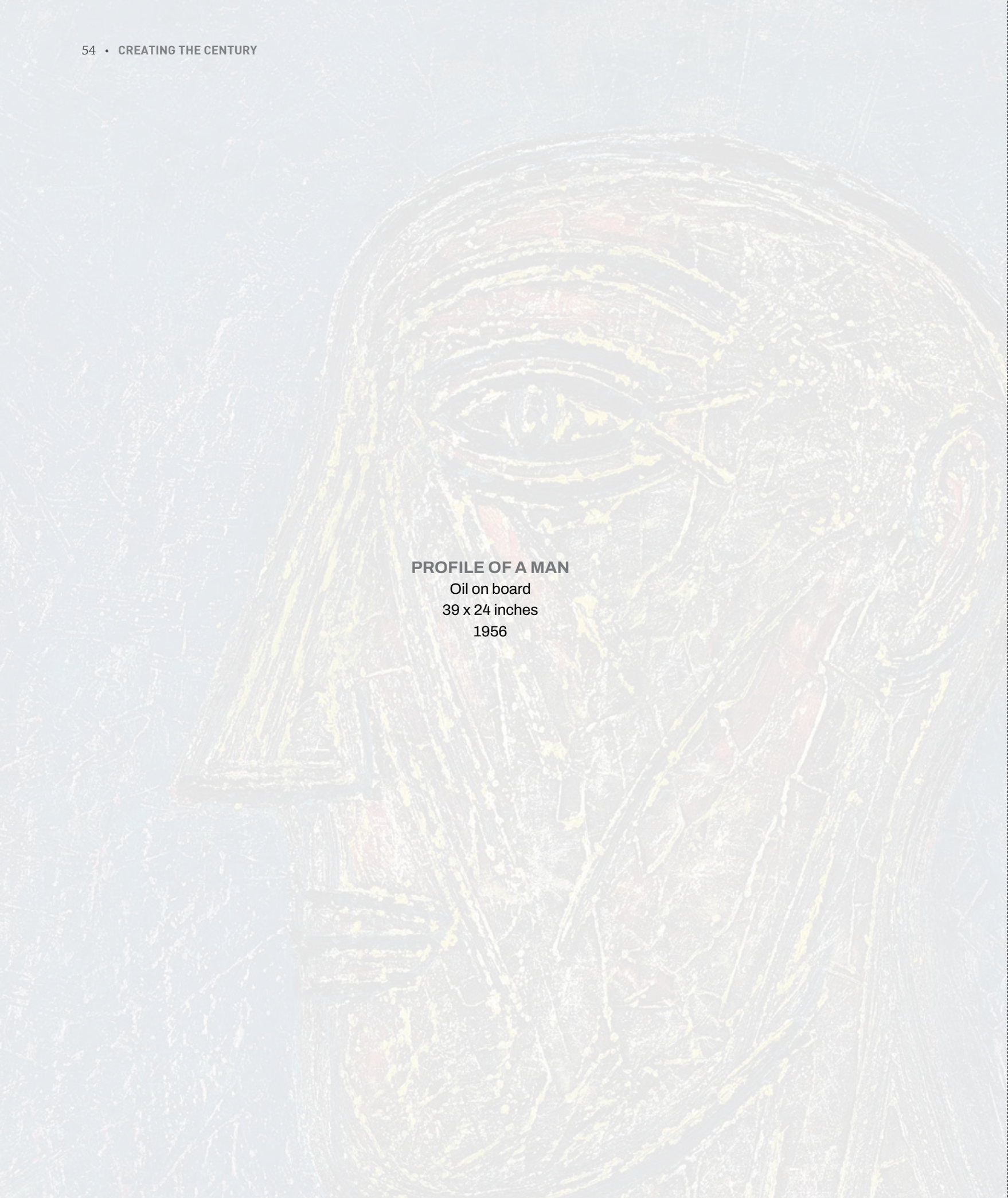


UNTITLED
Acrylic on board
14 x 8 inches
1990

SOUZA 1990



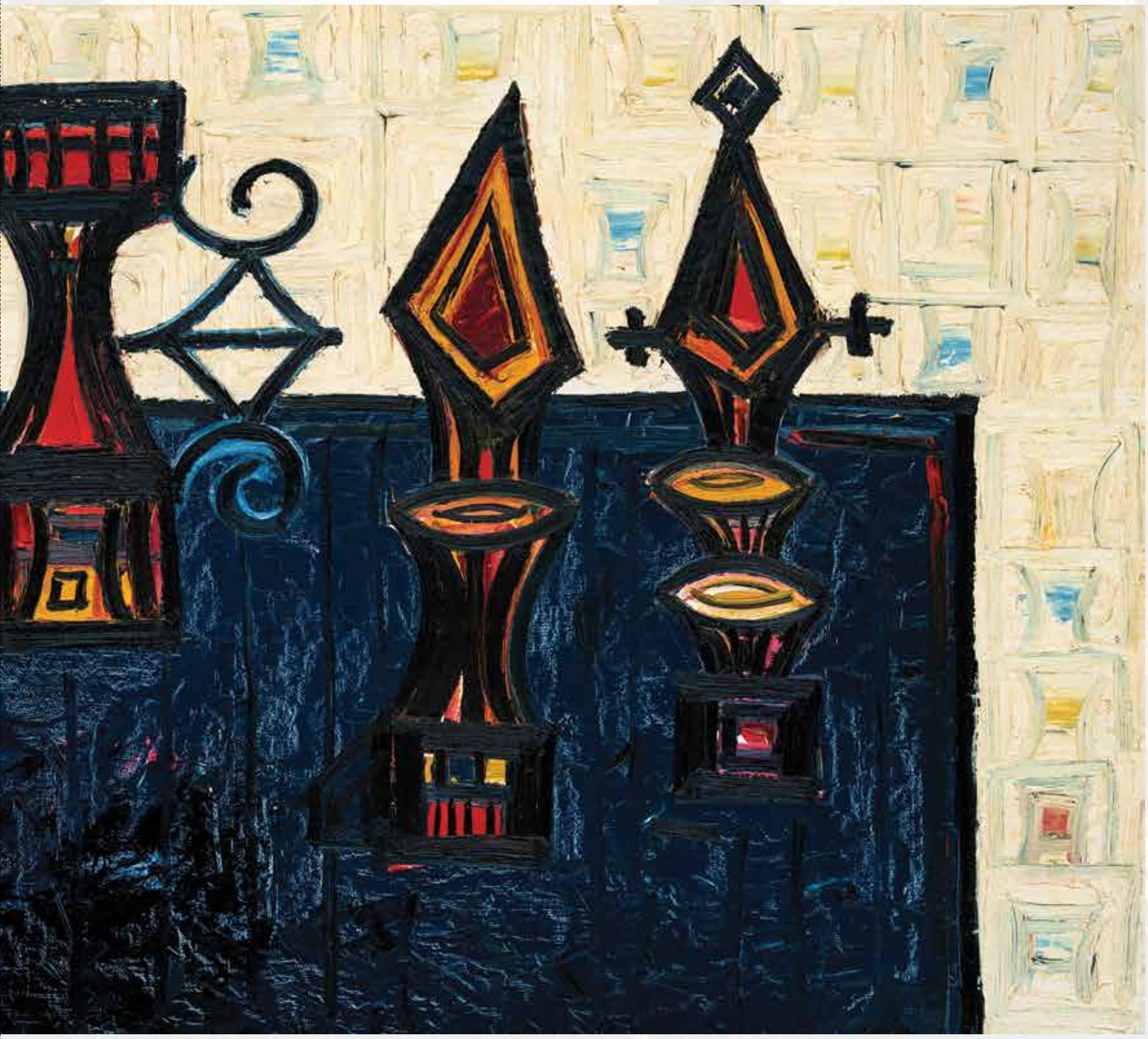
GOAN PEASANTS IN THE MARKET
Gouache on paper
14 x 20 inches
1944

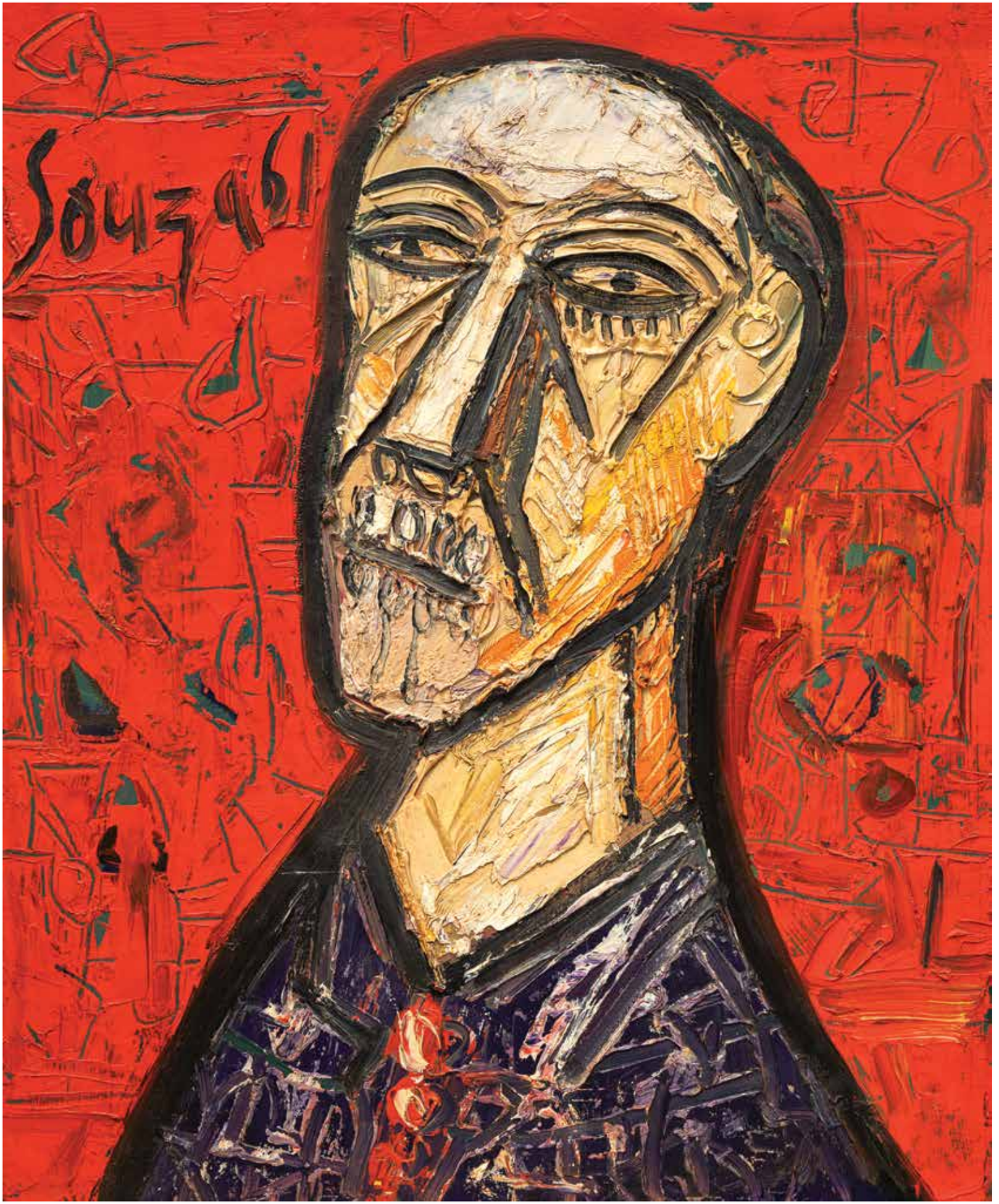


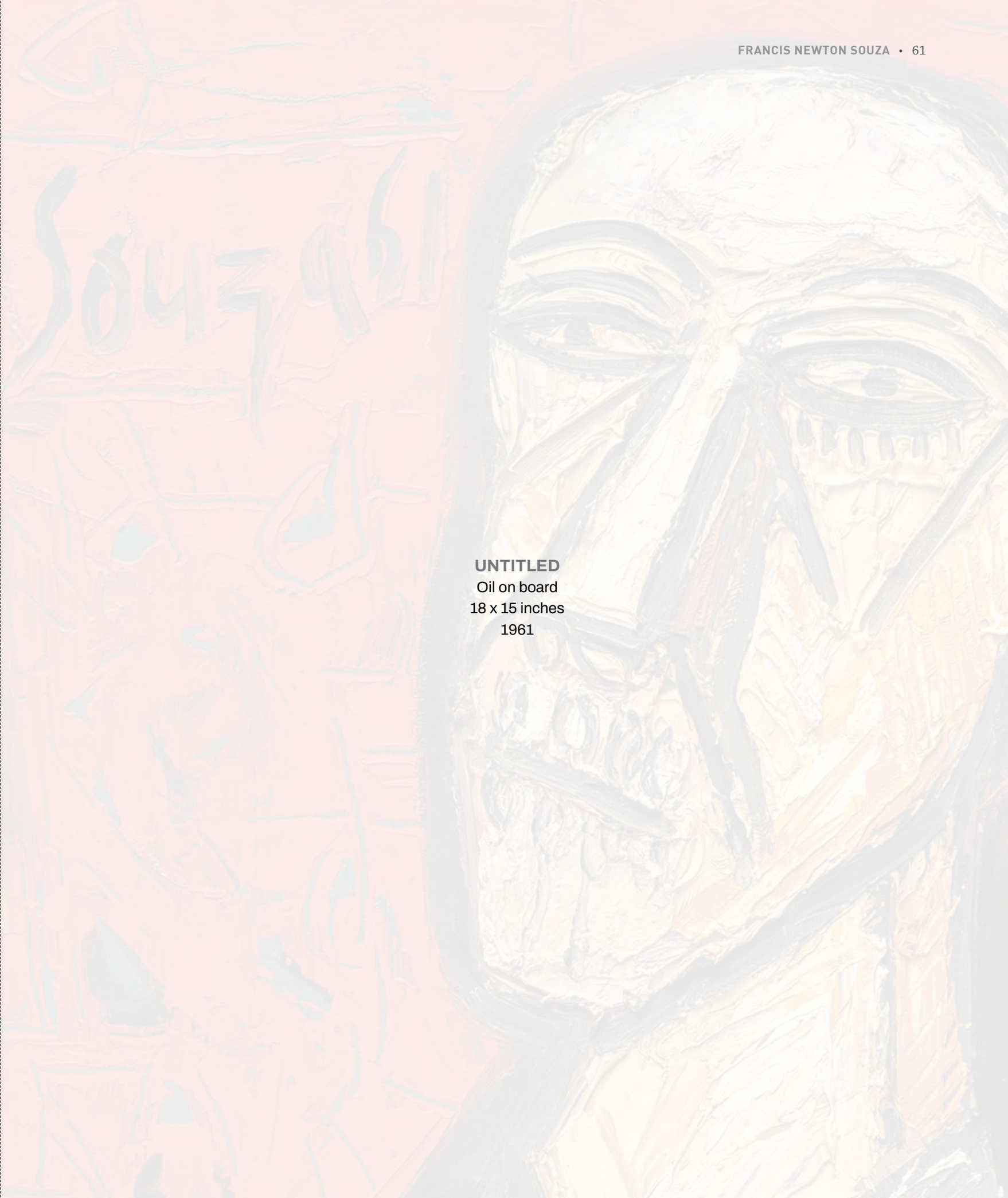
PROFILE OF A MAN
Oil on board
39 x 24 inches
1956

THE CASTLE
Oil on board
48 x 30 inches
1957

STILL LIFE
Oil on canvas
24 x 48 inches
1959




Souzgui



UNTITLED
Oil on board
18 x 15 inches
1961

HAMPSTEAD TERRACES
Oil on canvas
24 x 30 inches
1964

Photograph courtesy: Mr. Vijay Kaushik

KALPATHI GANPATHI SUBRAMANYAN

(February 1924 – June 2016)

K.G. Subramanyan (1924-2016) was a towering figure in contemporary Indian art, celebrated for his innovative techniques and profound engagement with Indian cultural themes. Born in Kerala and later moving to Santiniketan, where he studied under the luminary Rabindranath Tagore, Subramanyan's artistic journey was shaped by a deep appreciation for tradition blended with modernity.

Subramanyan was a multifaceted artist, adept in various mediums, including painting, drawing, ceramics, and textile design. His work is characterised by vibrant colors, intricate patterns, and a unique visual language that reflects the rich cultural heritage of India. He often drew inspiration from folk traditions, mythology, and rural life, transforming these elements into contemporary expressions that resonated with a broad audience. This synthesis of the old and new allowed him to explore complex themes such as identity, society, and spirituality.

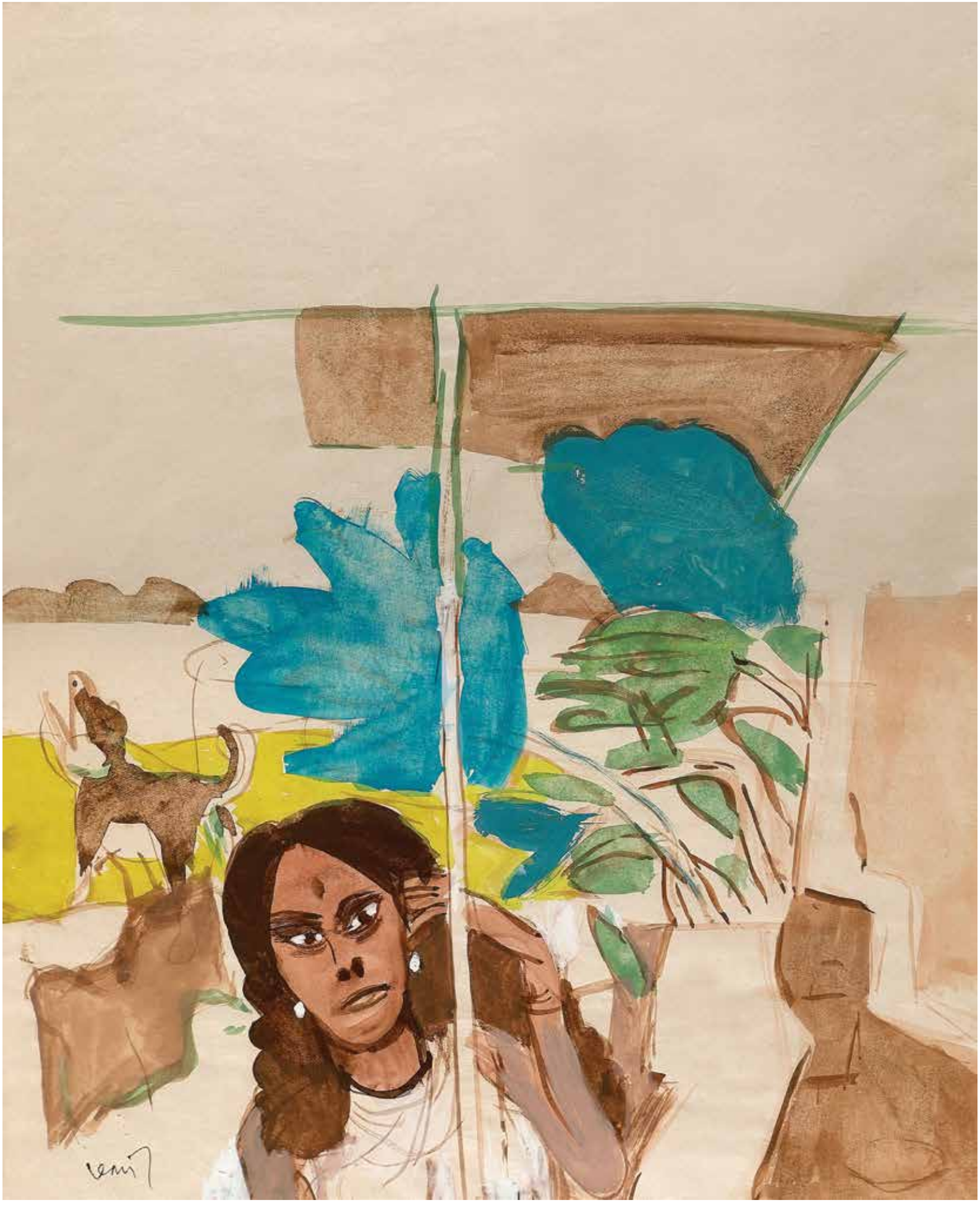
For many years, Subramanyan was a professor at the Kala Bhavana in Santiniketan. He was not just an artist but also an influential educator and mentor. He instilled a spirit of inquiry and experimentation in his students, encouraging them to push the boundaries of their creativity. His teachings emphasised the importance of understanding art as a reflection of one's cultural context, urging students to engage critically with their heritage while embracing modern artistic practices.

In addition to his artistic practice, Subramanyan was an articulate thinker and writer. He published numerous essays and articles on art, discussing creativity's philosophical and aesthetic dimensions. His insights often bridged traditional Indian aesthetics with contemporary global discourse, making him a crucial voice in the dialogue about the future of Indian art.

Throughout his illustrious career, Subramanyan received numerous accolades, including the Padma Bhushan in 2006, one of India's highest civilian honours, which recognized his significant contributions to the arts. His exhibitions were held worldwide, garnering acclaim for their innovative approach and cultural depth.

K.G. Subramanyan's legacy endures in the hearts and minds of many artists and art enthusiasts. His ability to intertwine tradition with contemporary expression and his dedication to education have left an indelible mark on the Indian art landscape. He remains a source of inspiration, celebrated for his artistic genius and his profound commitment to nurturing the next generation of artists.

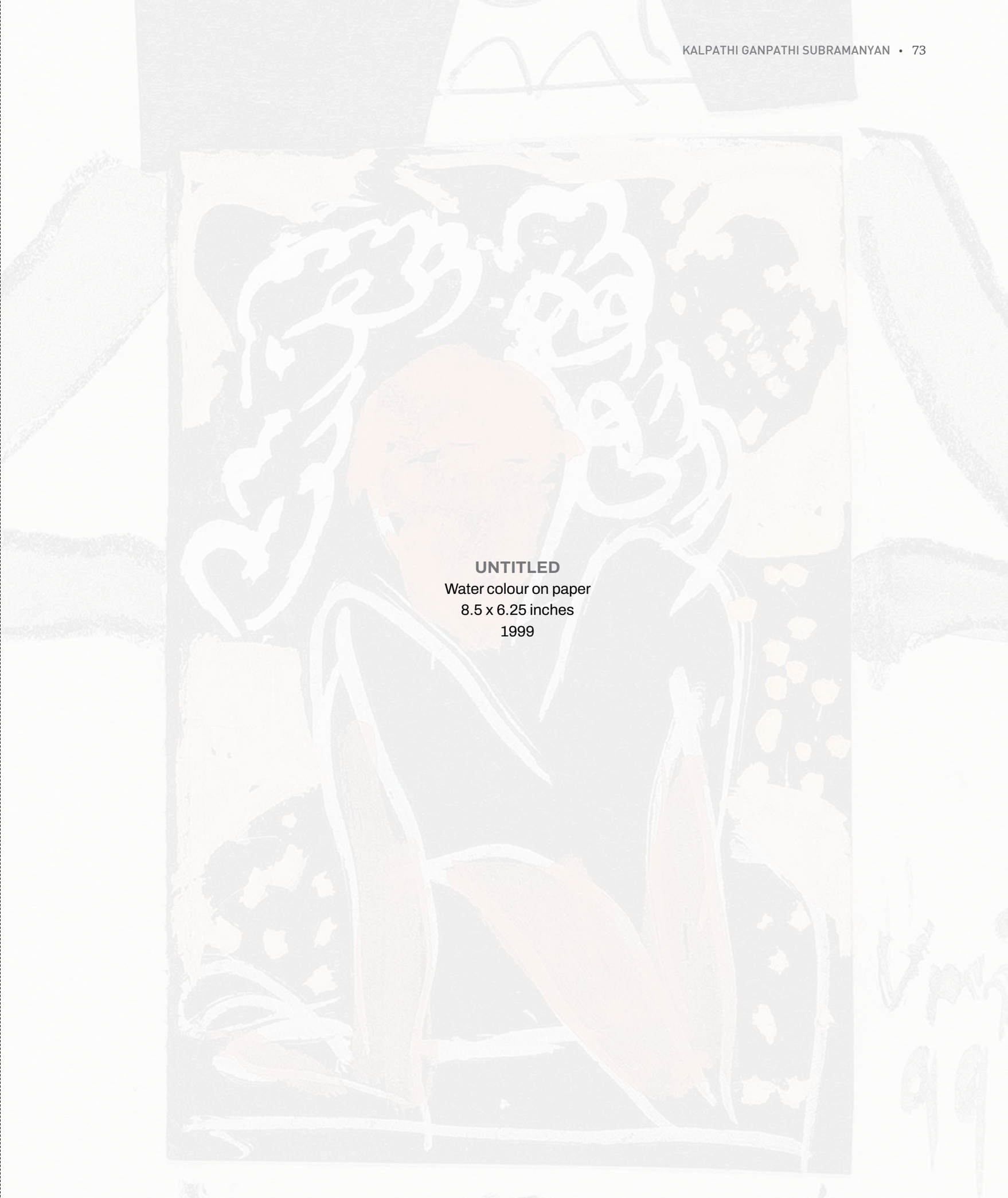
UNTITLED
Water colour on paper
15.5 x 12.5 inches
1991



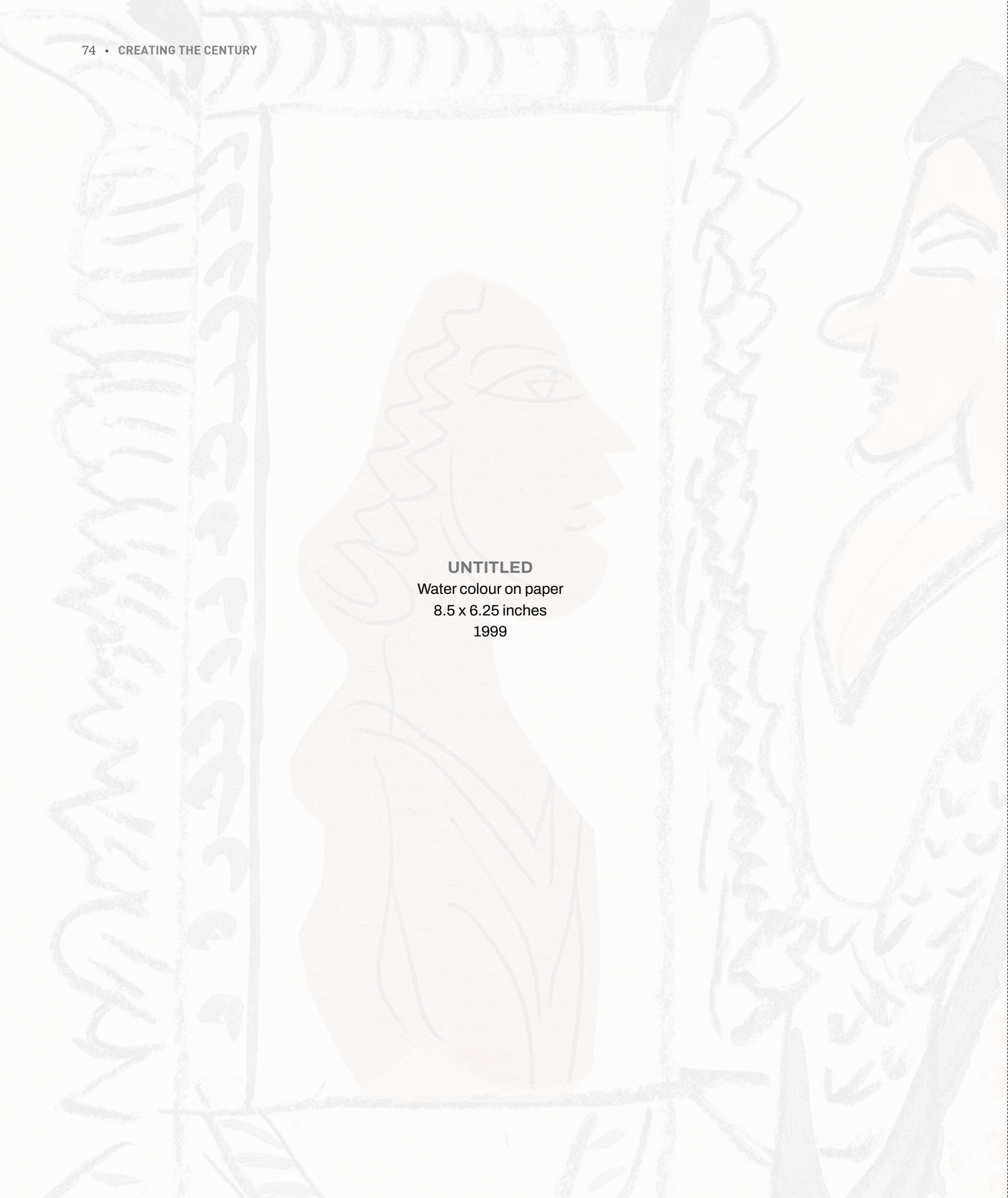
UNTITLED
Water colour on paper
15.5 x 12.5 inches
1991

UNTITLED
Water colour on paper
15.5 x 12.5 inches
1991

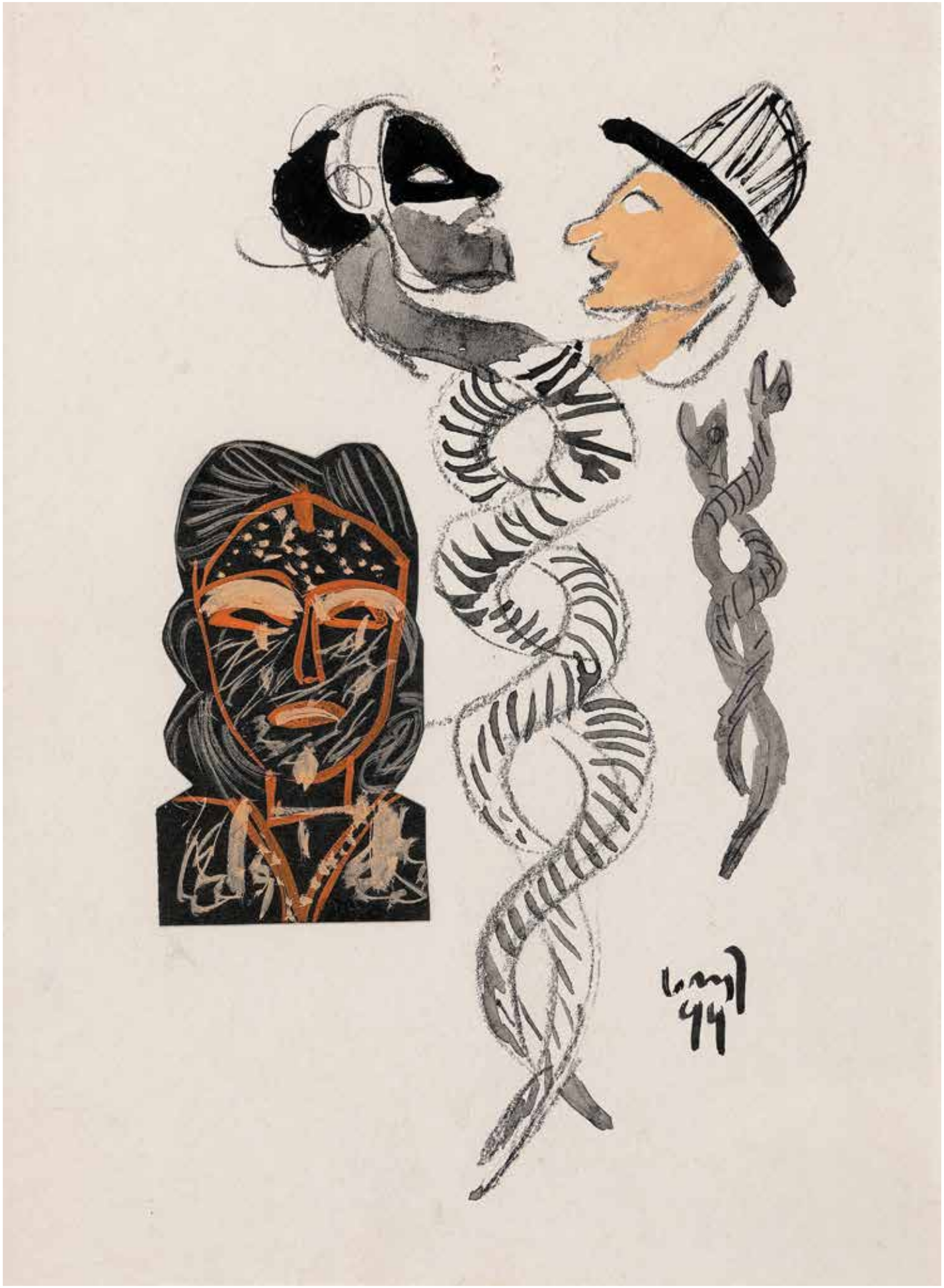
99

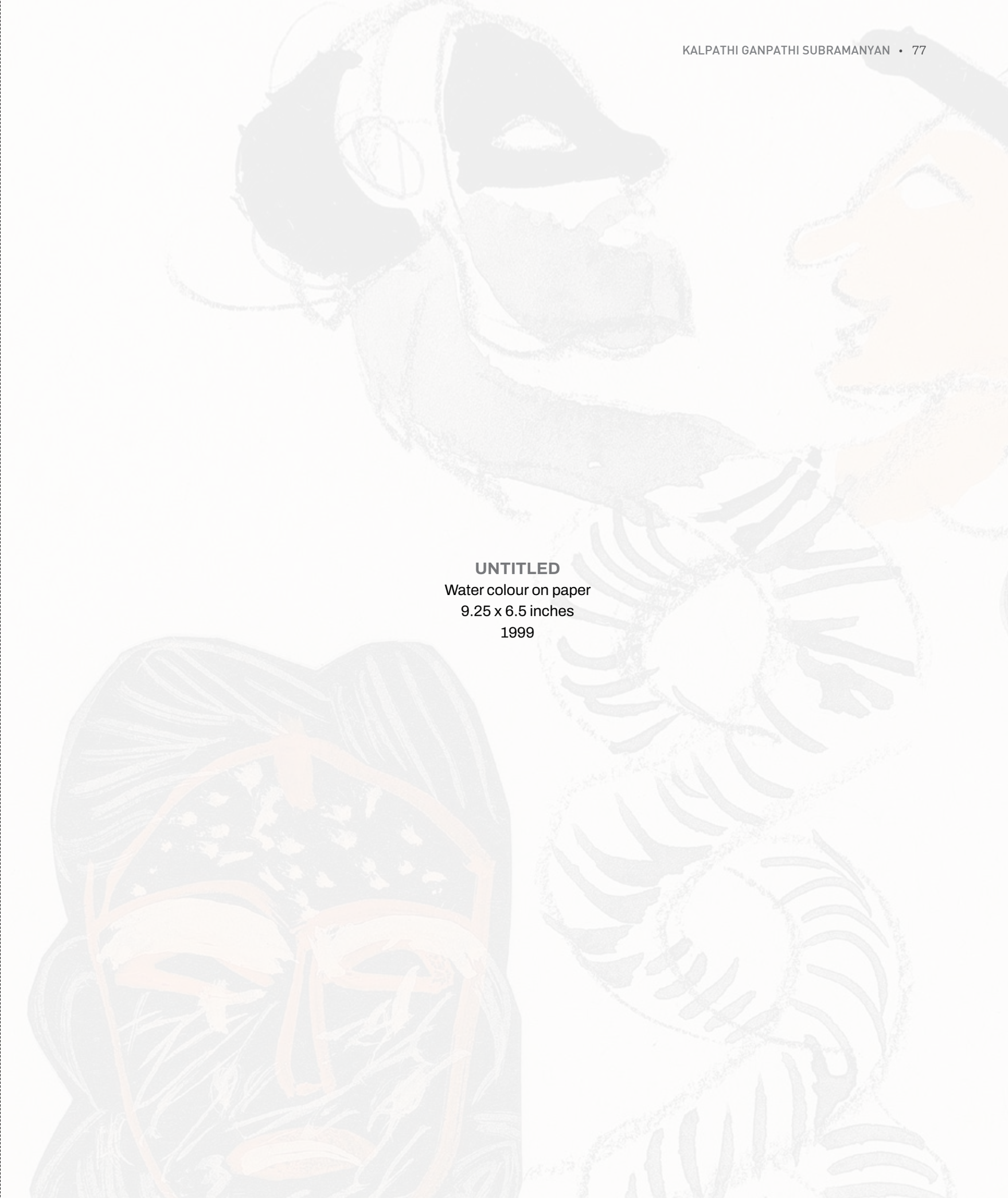


UNTITLED
Water colour on paper
8.5 x 6.25 inches
1999



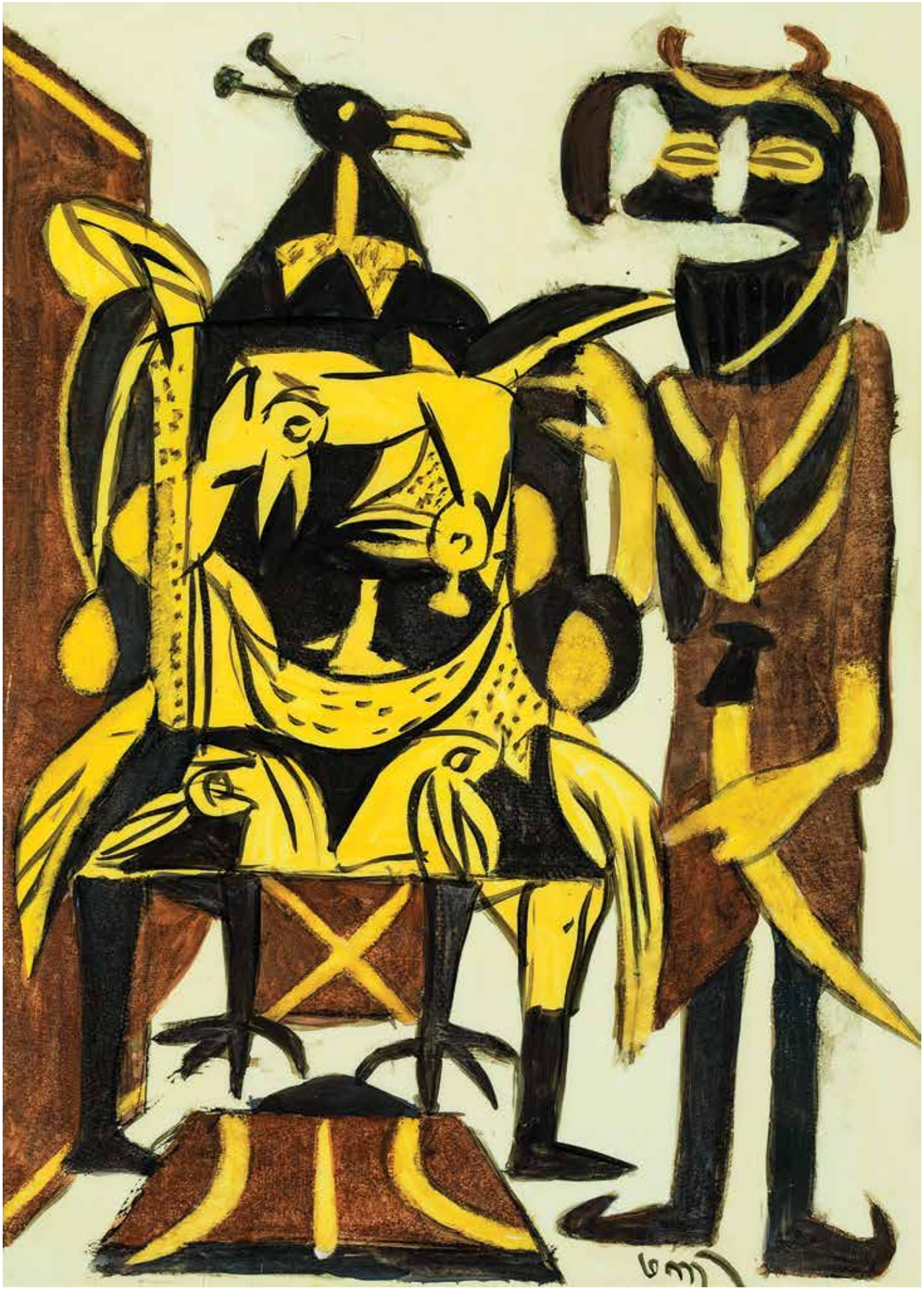
UNTITLED
Water colour on paper
8.5 x 6.25 inches
1999

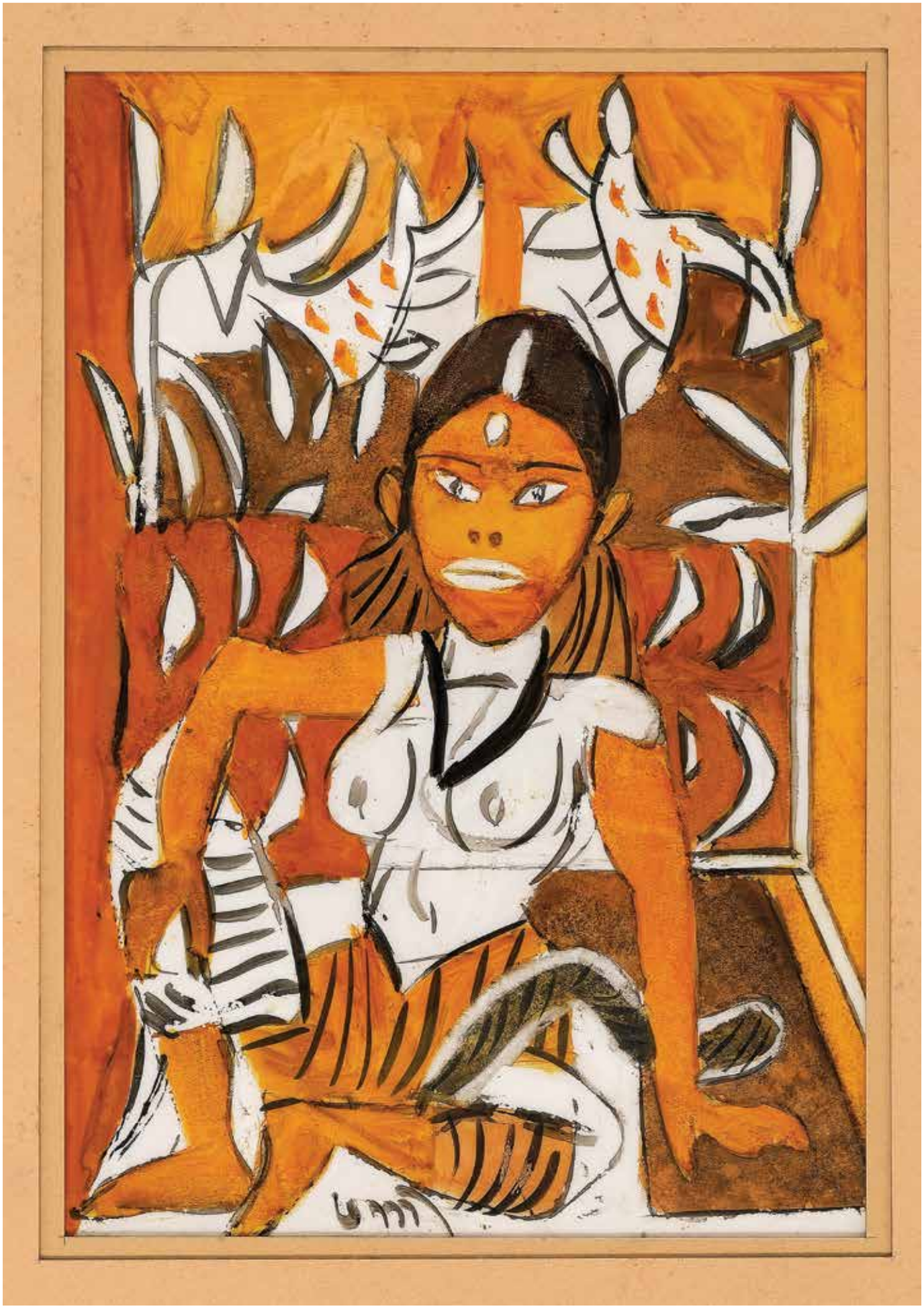


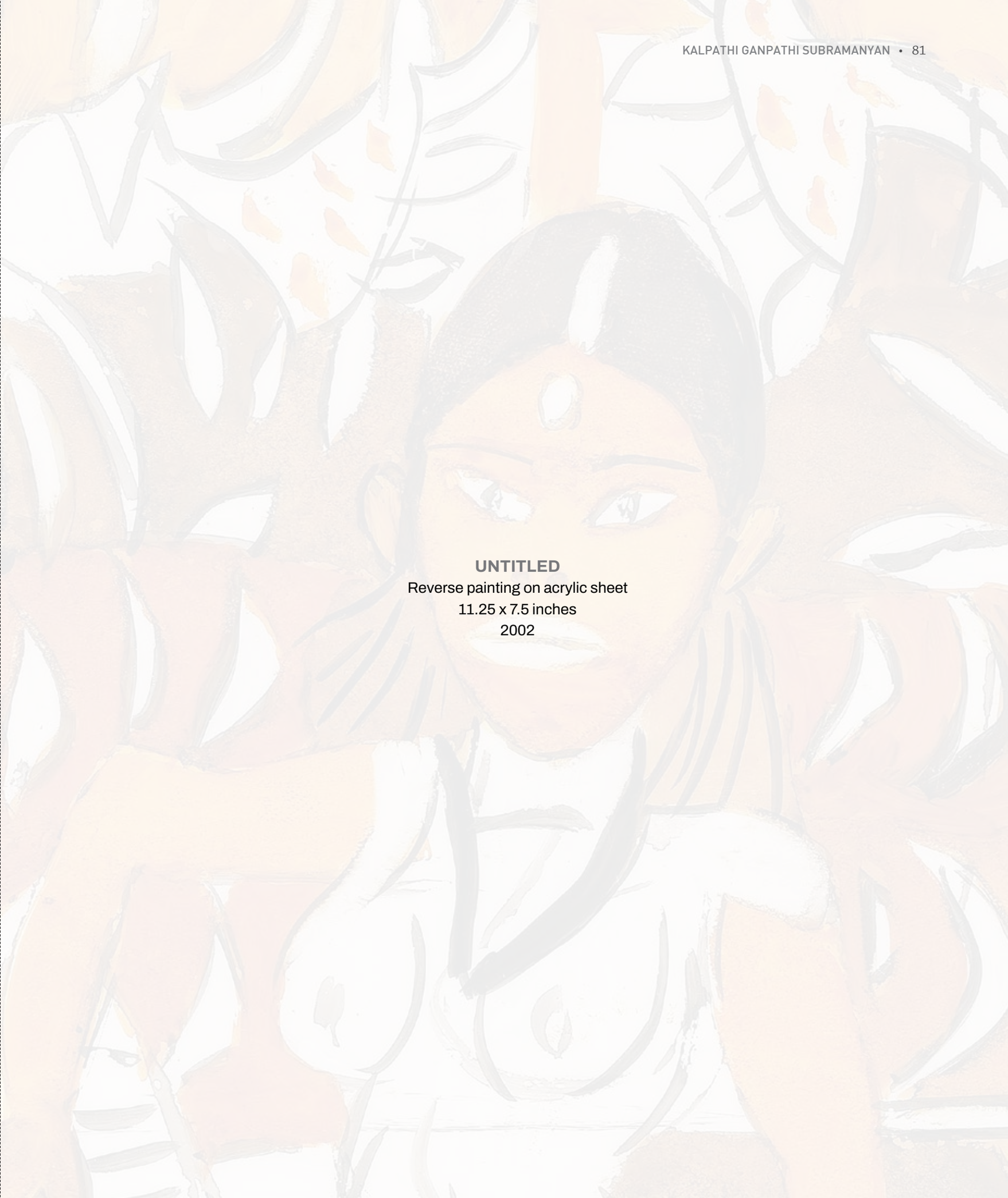


UNTITLED
Water colour on paper
9.25 x 6.5 inches
1999

PEACOCK THRONE
Reverse painting on glass
11.75 x 8.25 inches
2002

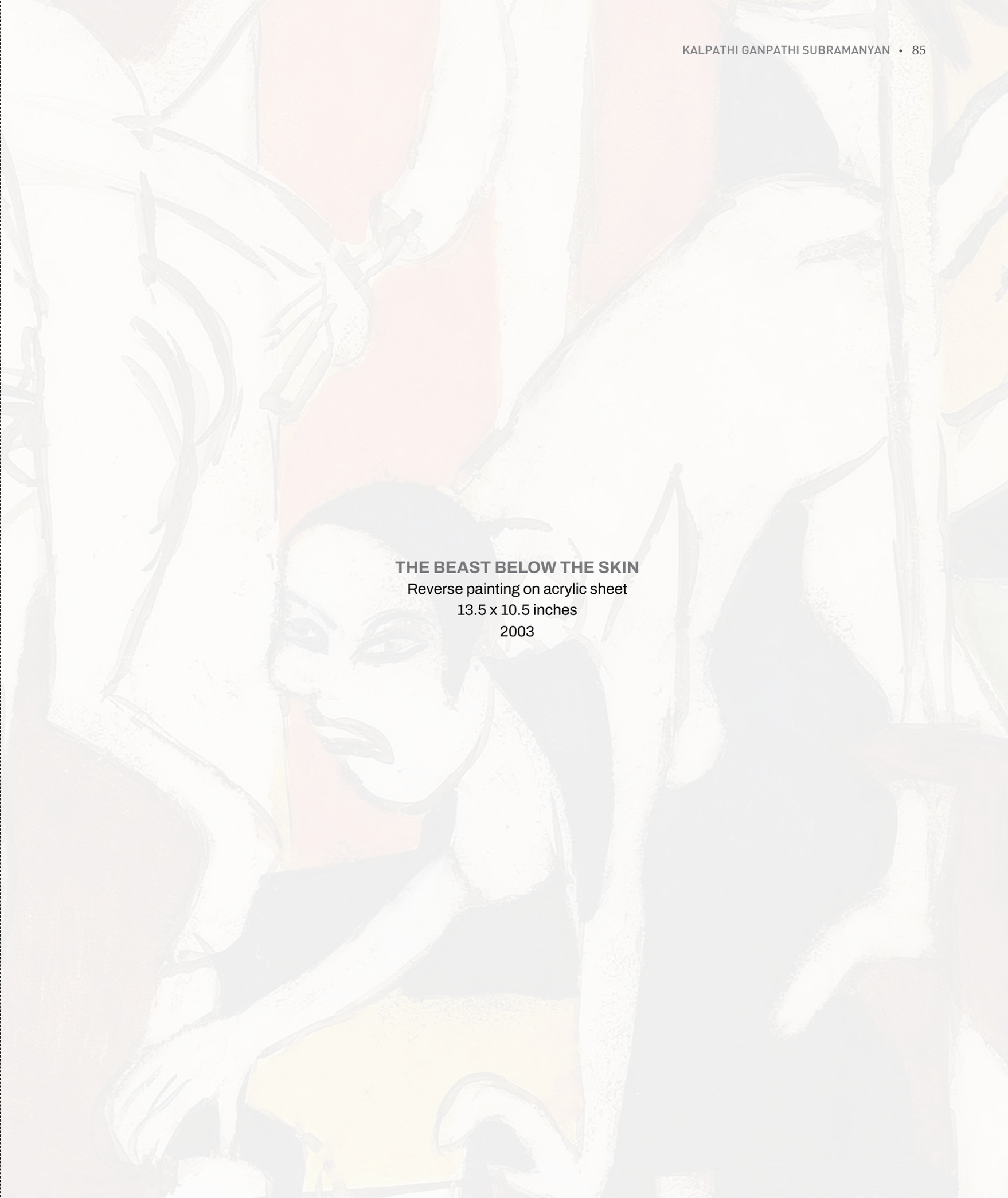






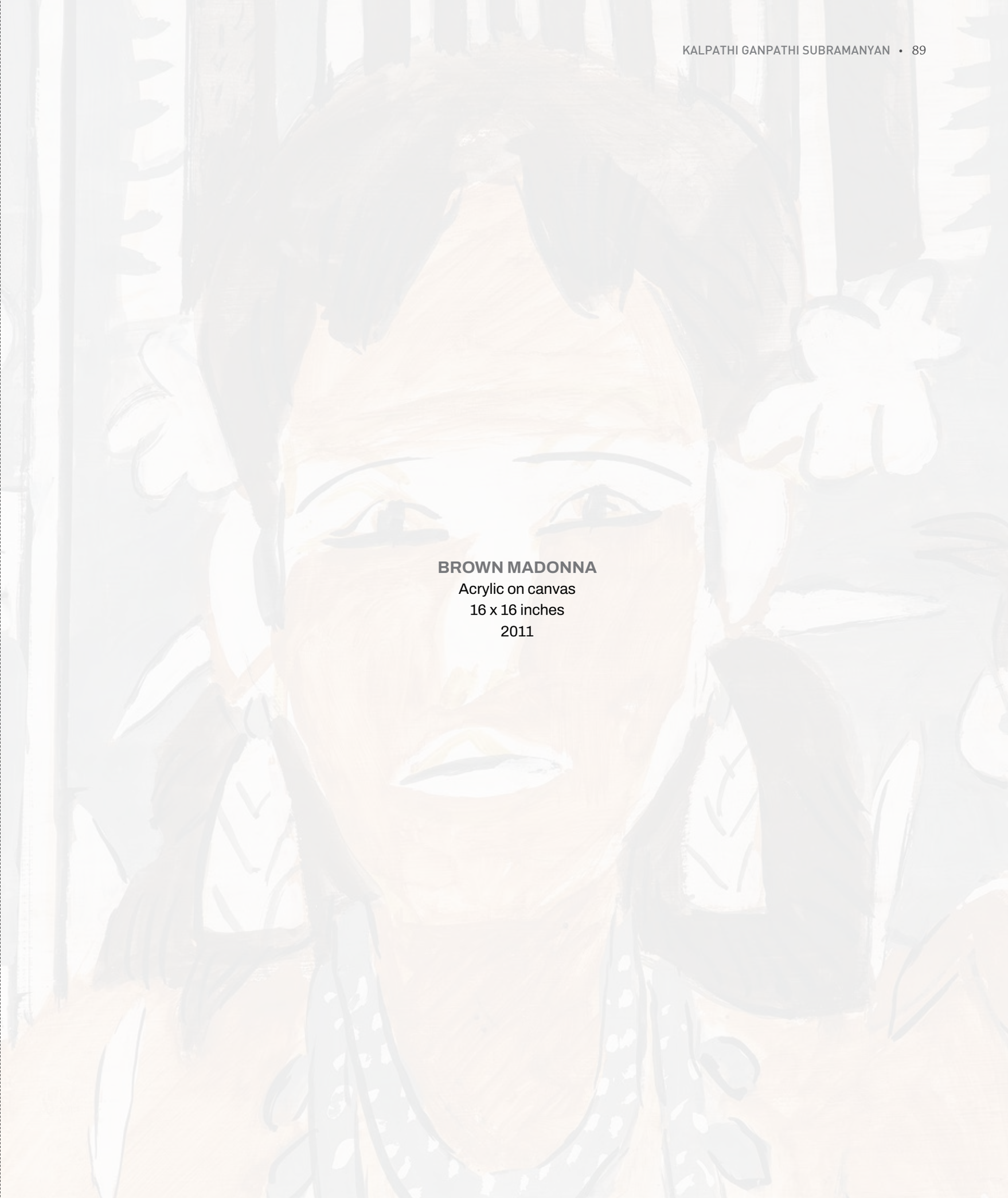
UNTITLED
Reverse painting on acrylic sheet
11.25 x 7.5 inches
2002

RAGINI VIBHAS
Reverse painting on glass
11.75 x 8.25 inches
2003



THE BEAST BELOW THE SKIN
Reverse painting on acrylic sheet
13.5 x 10.5 inches
2003

LEELA
Acrylic on canvas
24 x 24 inches
2011



BROWN MADONNA
Acrylic on canvas
16 x 16 inches
2011

UNTITLED
Wood, leather, beads and jute
9.5 x 5.5 x 3 inches
1950's

UNTITLED
Wood, leather, beads and twine
12 x 7 x 3 inches
1950's

Photograph courtesy: The Raza Foundation, New Delhi

RAM KUMAR

(September 1924 – April 2018)

Ram Kumar (1924-2018) was a celebrated Indian painter, printmaker, and writer widely recognised for his significant contributions to modern Indian art. Born in Shimla, he pursued his education at the prestigious Sir J.J. School of Art in Mumbai and later in Paris, where he was deeply influenced by European modernism and abstract art. Kumar's career spanned several decades, during which he developed a distinctive style that combined elements of abstraction with symbolic representation, often reflecting his profound connection to landscape and memory.

Kumar is best known for his evocative depictions of the landscapes of the Himalayan region. His works often capture the essence of nature through a lyrical interplay of color and form. His paintings frequently feature serene vistas, abstracted forms of hills, rivers, and skies infused with a sense of nostalgia and introspection. He adeptly used a rich palette, balancing vibrant hues with muted tones to create an atmospheric quality in his art. This fusion of abstraction and representation allows viewers to engage with his landscapes' emotional and spiritual dimensions.

Kumar also explored themes of identity, solitude, and the human condition throughout his artistic journey. His work reflects an ongoing dialogue between the external world and inner emotions, emphasising the relationship between humans and nature. He often incorporated elements of mythology and folklore, enriching his landscapes with deeper cultural narratives.

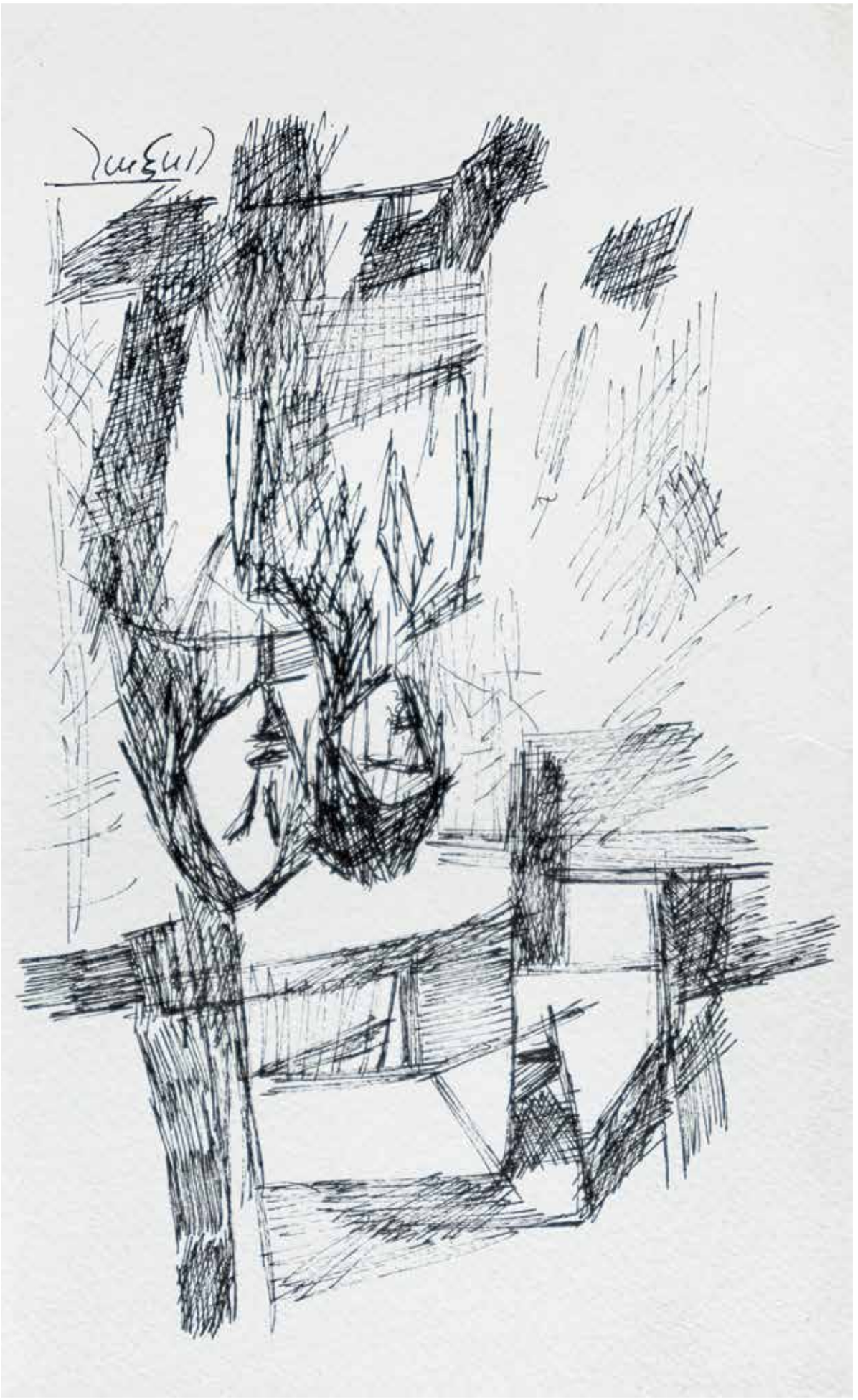
Kumar's contributions to art extended beyond his painting practice. He was an influential educator, teaching at various institutions, including the National Institute of Design in Ahmedabad. His role as a mentor helped nurture a generation of young artists, encouraging them to explore their unique voices.

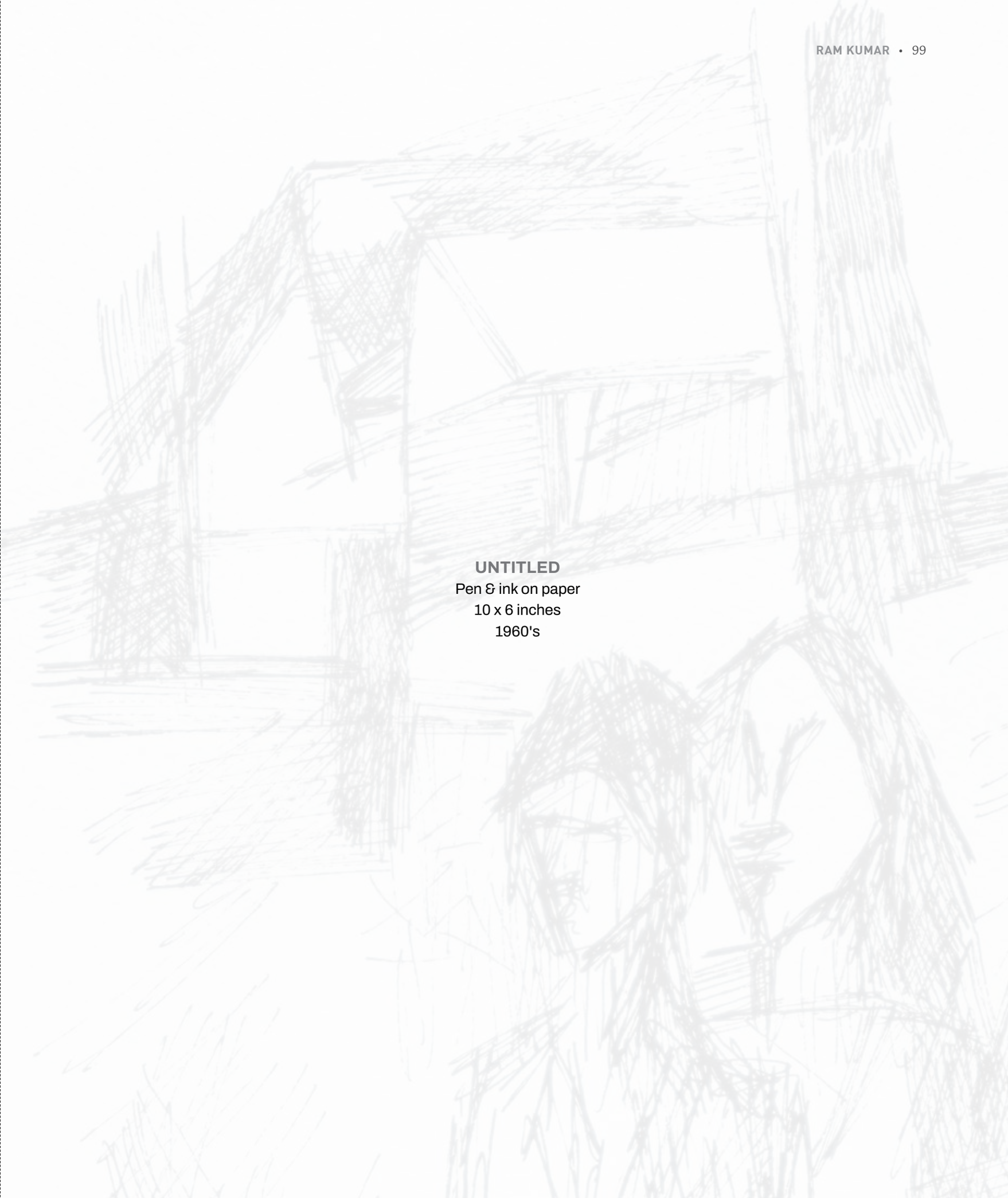
Kumar's work garnered widespread recognition, with his paintings exhibited in prominent galleries and museums across India and internationally. He participated in major exhibitions, including the 1959 Venice Biennale, where he represented India. His achievements were acknowledged with several awards, including the Lalit Kala Akademi Award and the Padma Bhushan in 2005.

In addition to his artistic endeavours, Ram Kumar was a prolific writer, contributing essays and critiques on art, culture, and philosophy. His writings often reflected his contemplative nature and deep engagement with the world around him.

Ram Kumar's legacy continues to inspire artists and art lovers alike. His ability to evoke emotion through landscape and his commitment to exploring complex themes have left an indelible mark on Indian art, solidifying his position as one of the foremost figures in modern Indian painting. His work remains a poignant reminder of the beauty and complexity of nature and human experience.

UNTITLED
Pen & ink on paper
9 x 12 inches
1960's



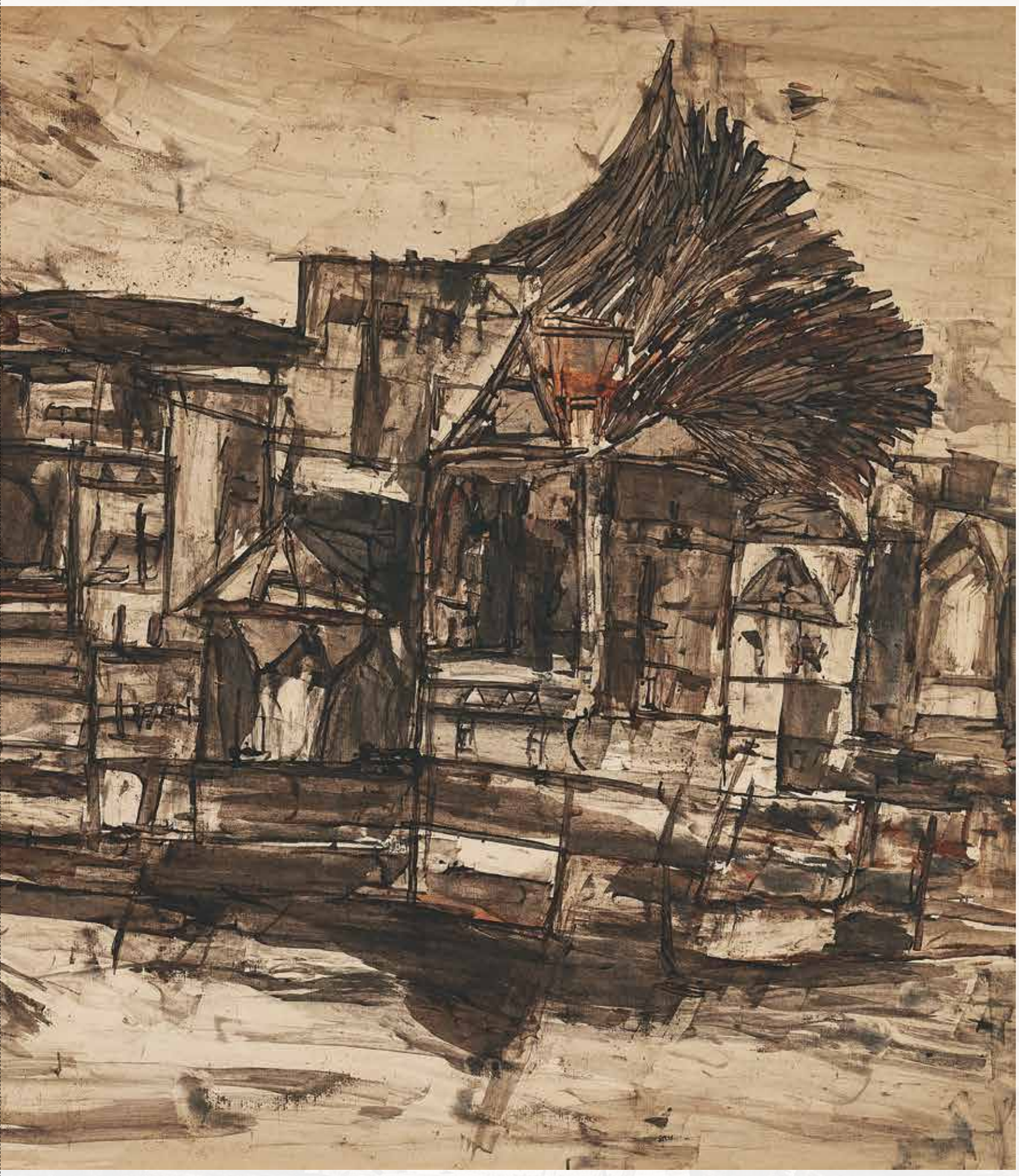


UNTITLED
Pen & ink on paper
10 x 6 inches
1960's

UNTITLED
Pen & ink on paper
9 x 12 inches
1960's

UNTITLED
Acrylic on paper
22 x 35 inches
1981

UNTITLED
Acrylic on paper
23 x 36 inches
1983



UNTITLED
Acrylic on paper
22.5 x 30.5 inches
2012

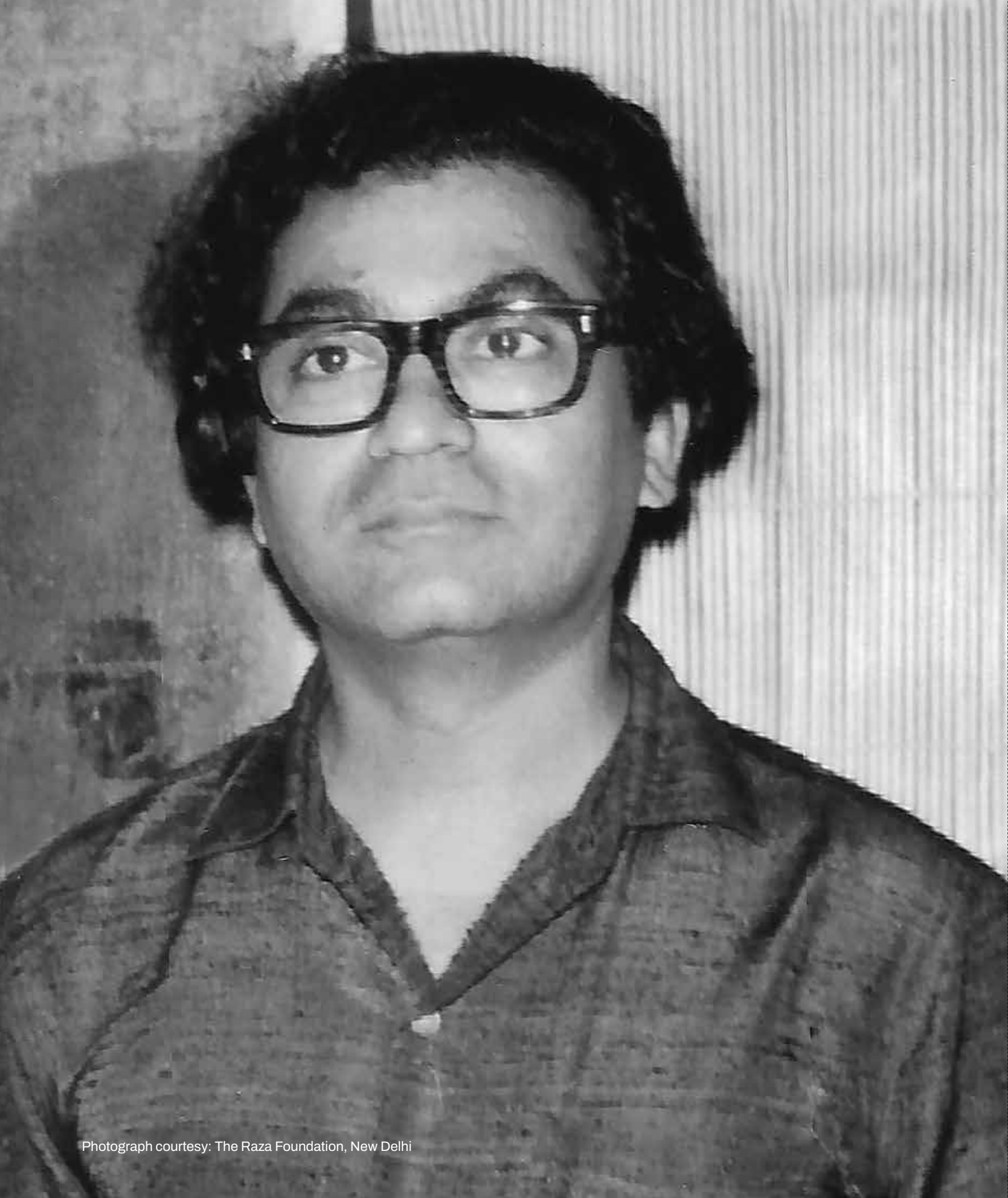
UNTITLED
Oil on canvas
27 x 15 inches
1961

UNTITLED
Oil on canvas
26 x 26 inches
1961

IN MEMORY OF BENARAS
Oil on canvas
24 x 12 inches
1989

UNTITLED
Acrylic on canvas
23.5 x 32.5 inches
1990

UNTITLED
Acrylic on canvas
36 x 36 inches
2015



Photograph courtesy: The Raza Foundation, New Delhi

VASUDEO S. GAITONDE

(November 1924 – August 2001)

V.S. Gaitonde (1924-2001) was a seminal figure in Indian abstract art, renowned for his unique approach that combined spiritual themes with a deep exploration of color and form. Born in Nagpur, Gaitonde moved to Mumbai, where he became integral to the Indian art scene. He studied at the Sir J.J. School of Art, where various artistic movements influenced him and began to develop his distinct style.

A profound sense of abstraction and a meditative quality characterises Gaitonde's work. He believed that art should transcend the physical realm, serving as a medium for spiritual expression. His early works were rooted in figurative art, but as he matured, he gradually moved towards abstraction, seeking to convey emotions and experiences rather than representational imagery. This shift marked him as one of the pioneers of abstract painting in India.

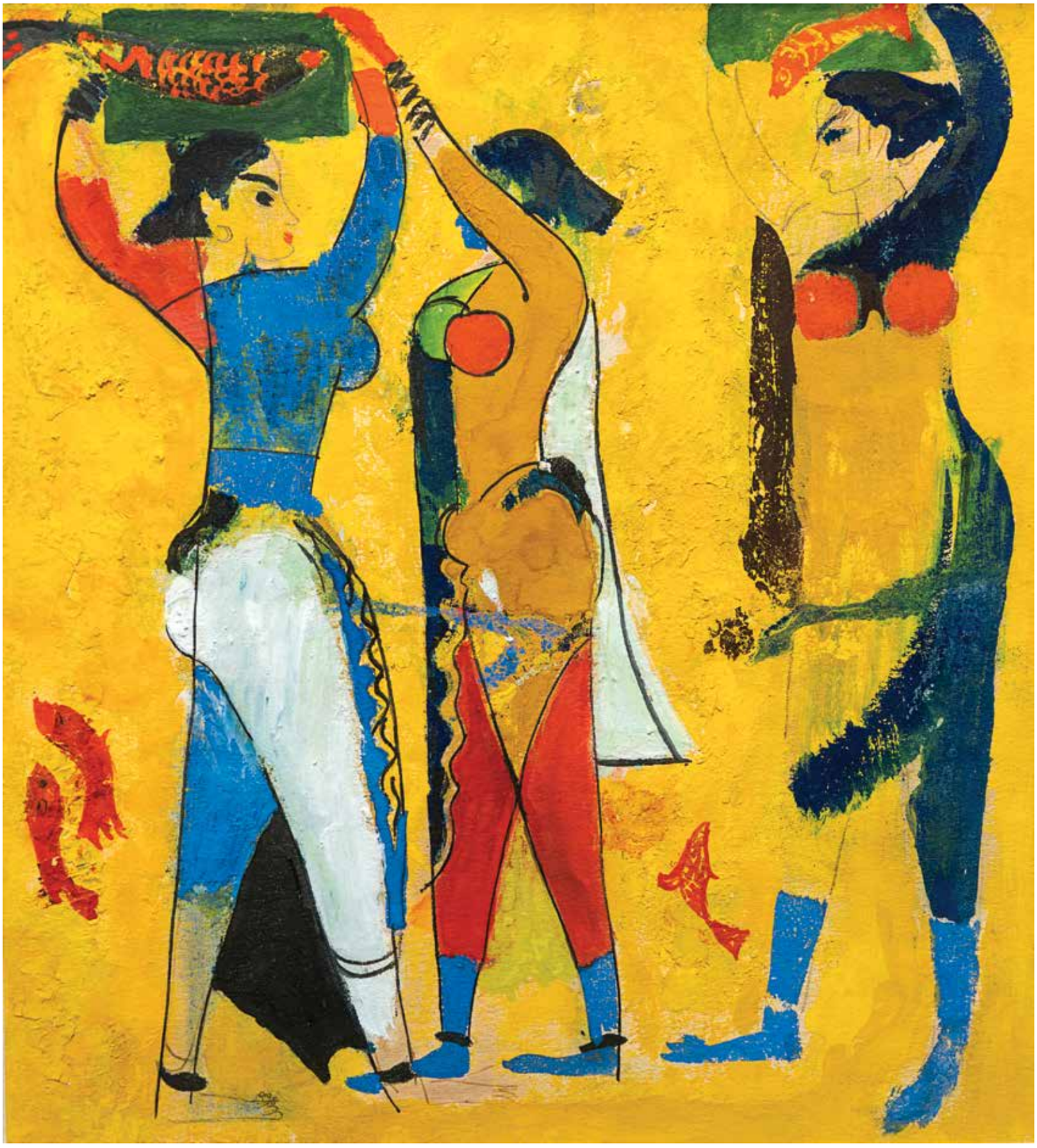
One of the hallmarks of Gaitonde's art is his mastery of color. He often employed a rich, layered palette, using subtle gradations and textures to evoke a sense of depth and movement. His canvases are known for their dynamic interplay of colors, which create an immersive experience for the viewer. Gaitonde frequently explored the concept of physical and metaphysical space, allowing his compositions to resonate with a quiet yet powerful energy.

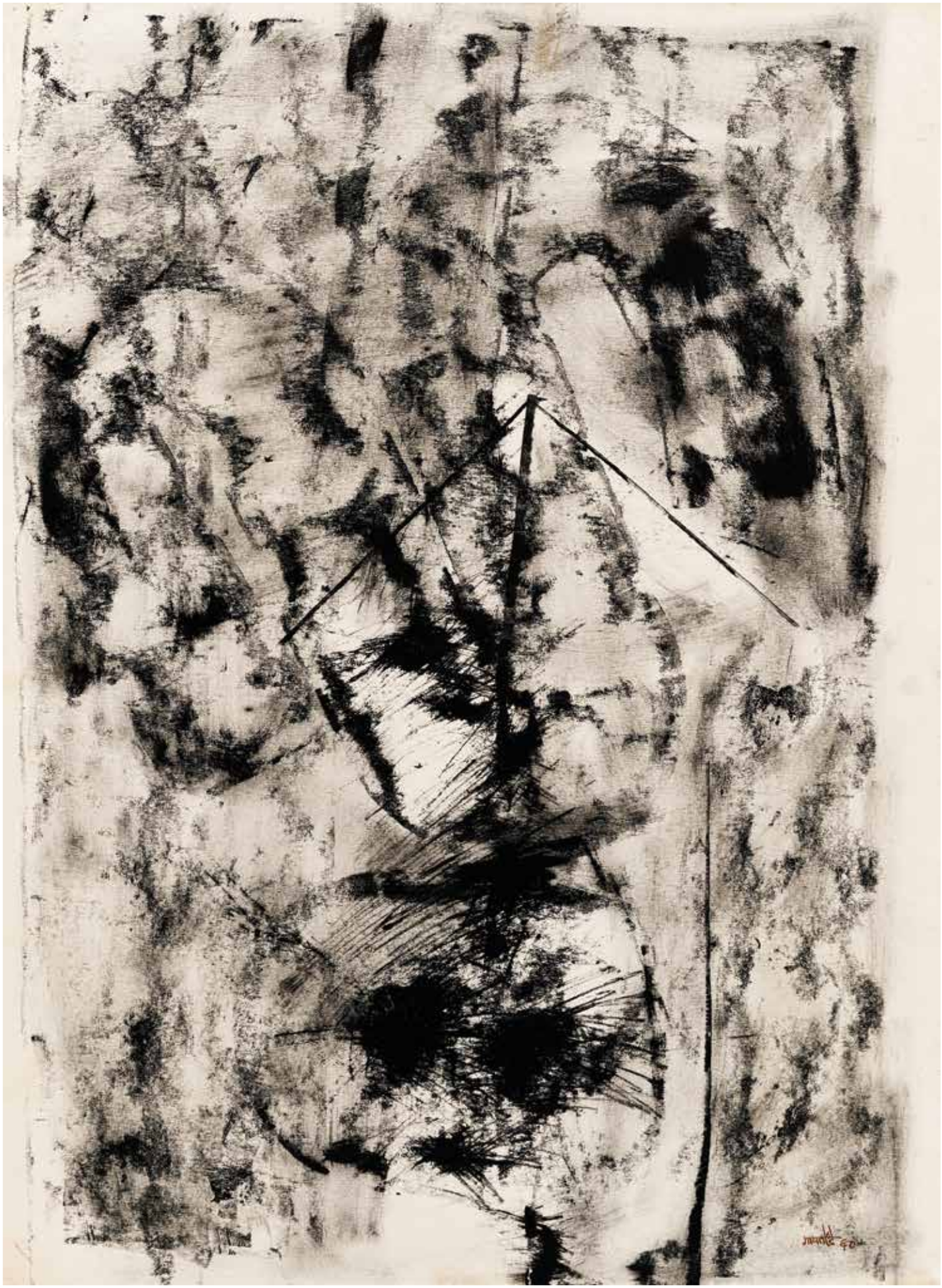
Gaitonde's works reflect his philosophical inquiries and his fascination with Zen Buddhism. He believed in the importance of meditation and introspection, often engaging in a contemplative process while creating his art. This approach allowed him to imbue his paintings with tranquillity and timelessness. His canvases usually appear as landscapes of emotion rather than literal depictions, inviting viewers to embark on their journey of reflection.

Throughout his career, Gaitonde exhibited widely, both in India and internationally. He received numerous accolades, including the prestigious Padma Bhushan in 1989. His works are in significant collections, including the National Gallery of Modern Art in New Delhi and the Tate Modern in London.

Gaitonde's influence on contemporary Indian art is profound. He inspired generations of artists to explore abstraction and personal expression, and his legacy continues to be celebrated today. His ability to merge the spiritual with the artistic has left an indelible mark on the landscape of modern art in India, making him a vital figure in the narrative of Indian abstraction.

UNTITLED
Pencil, ink and gouache on card
8.5 x 7.5 inches
1950's



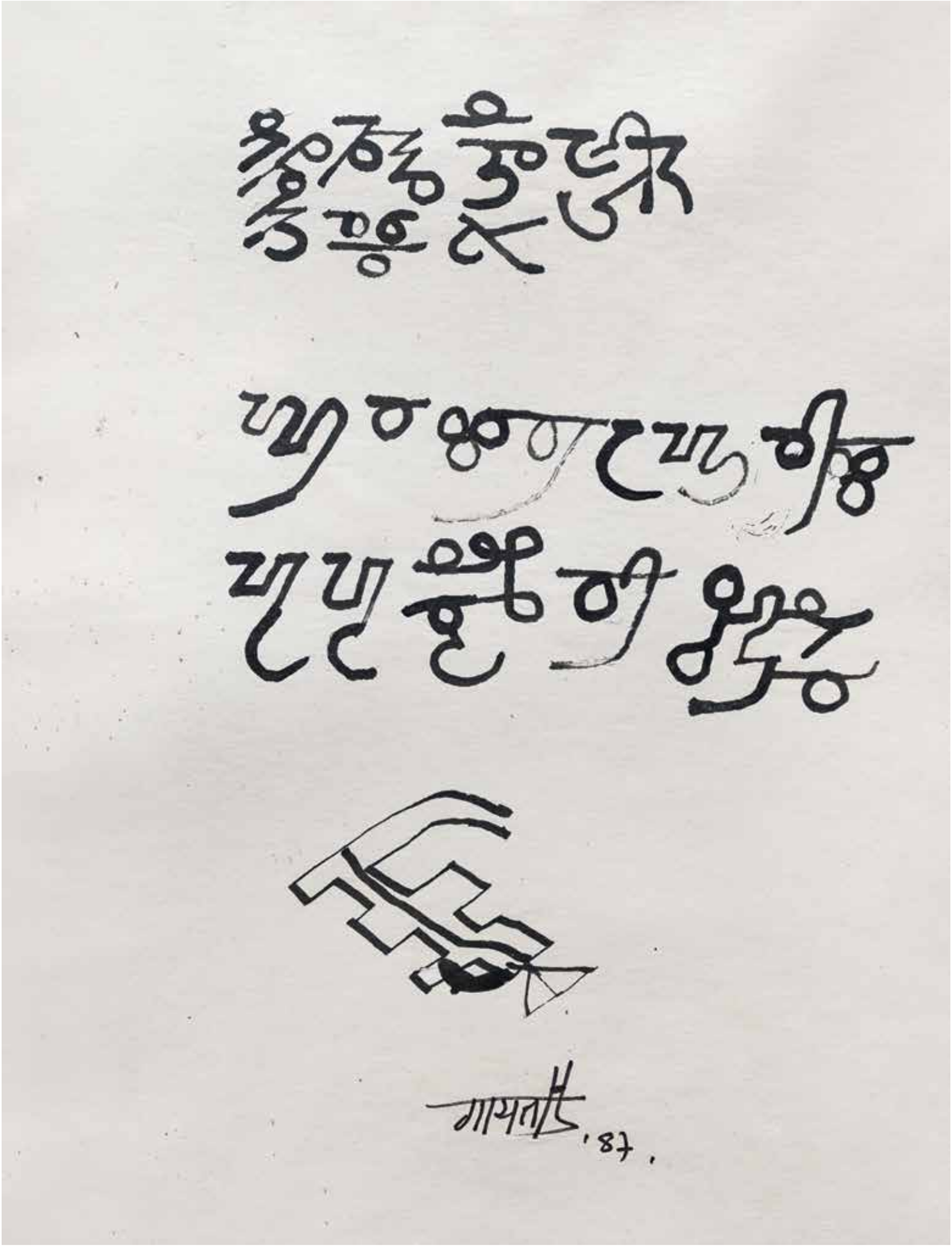


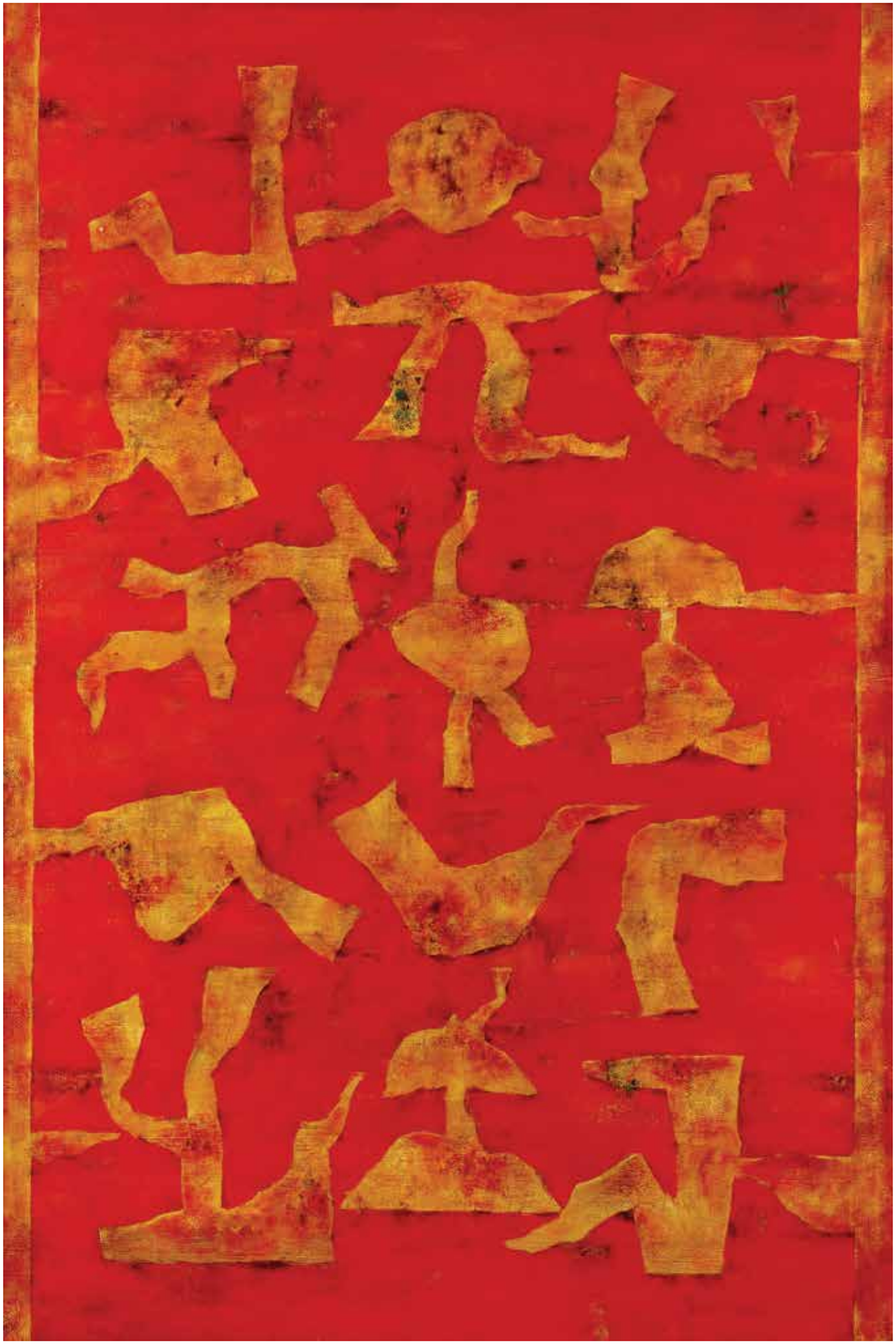
UNTITLED
Ink and wash on paper
30 x 22 inches
1960

UNTITLED
Oil on paper
30 x 22 inches
1960

UNTITLED
Pen & ink on paper
14 x 11 inches
1985

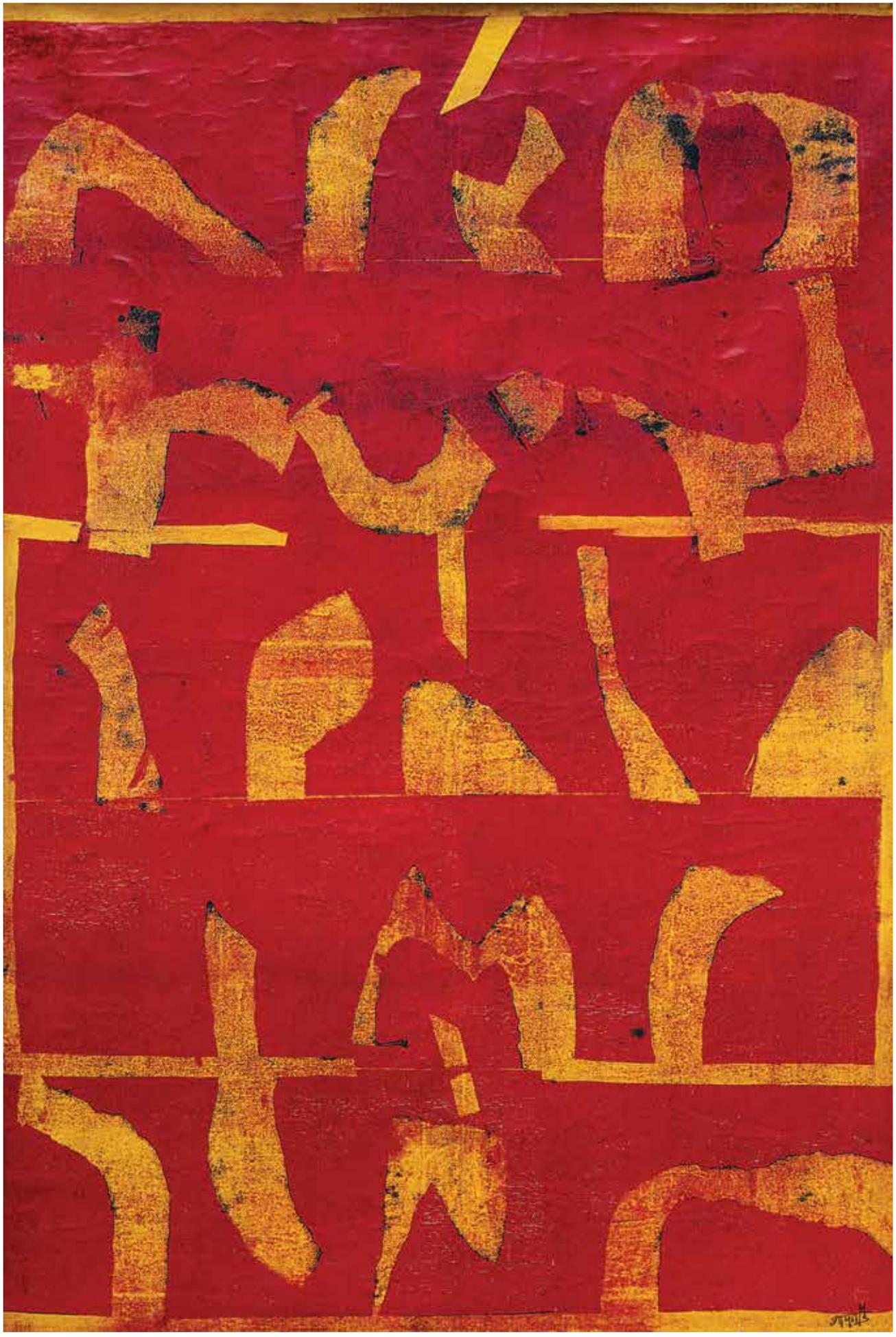
UNTITLED
Pen & ink on paper
14 x 11 inches
1987


गायत्री '87.



UNTITLED
Oil on canvas
60 x 40 inches
1991

UNTITLED
Lithograph on canvas
36 x 24 inches
1992



HUS

CELEBRATING 75 YEARS OF

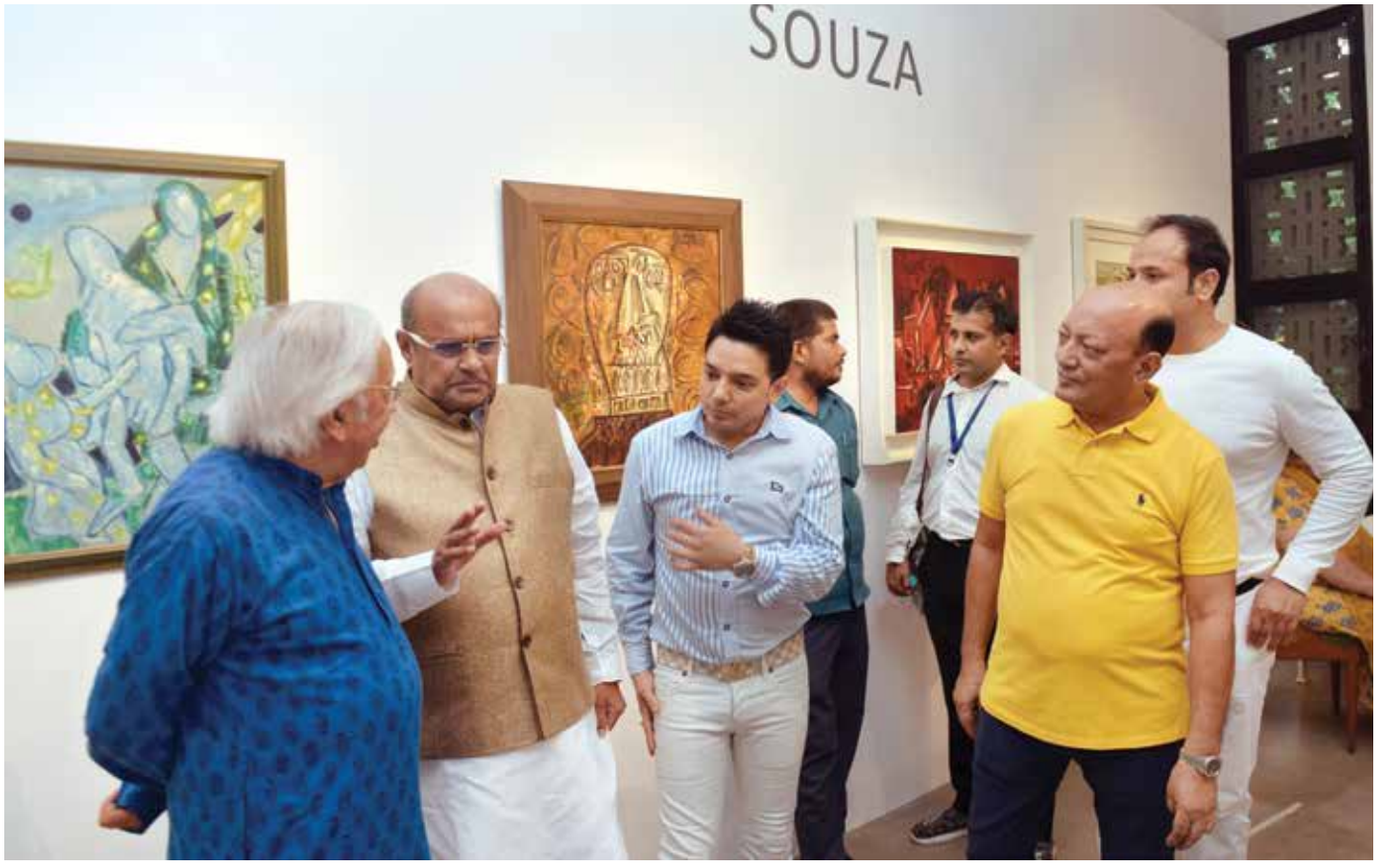
AIN

PROGRESSIVE ARTIST GROUP

GADE
ARA

LUMINOUS LEGACY
Celebrating 75 years of Progressive Artists' Group
SAYED HAIDER RAZA
SADANAND K.BAKRE

SOUZA


SOUZA

RAZA

RAZA THE OT

HER MODERN

DRAWINGS & SKETCHES

PG
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