



Large
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A Story of South Asian Art

Mrinalini Mukherjee and Her circle

The Jillian and Arthur M.
Sackler Wing of Galleries

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A Story of South Asian Art

Mrinalini Mukherjee and Her Circle

Sackler Galleries

31 October 2025 – 24 February 2026

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Exhibition organised by the Royal Academy of Arts in collaboration with The Hepworth Wakefield, who will present a major exhibition in 2026.



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Introduction to exhibition

This exhibition traces a century of South Asian art through the life and work of pioneering sculptor Mrinalini Mukherjee (1949-2015). For the first time, her diverse practice is presented in dialogue with a constellation of mentors, friends, and family who shaped her artistic journey.

Bringing together over a hundred artworks, the exhibition highlights how networks of shared learning, friendship, and exchange gave rise to new modernisms in the region. Each gallery centres on a location pivotal to Mrinalini's development – Santiniketan, Baroda (Vadodara), and New Delhi – and to the broader cultural avant-garde.

Affectionately called "Dillu" (my heart), Mukherjee was born in post-Independence Bombay (Mumbai) to eminent artists Benode Behari Mukherjee (1904-1980) and Leela Mukherjee (1916-2002), both trained at Santiniketan.

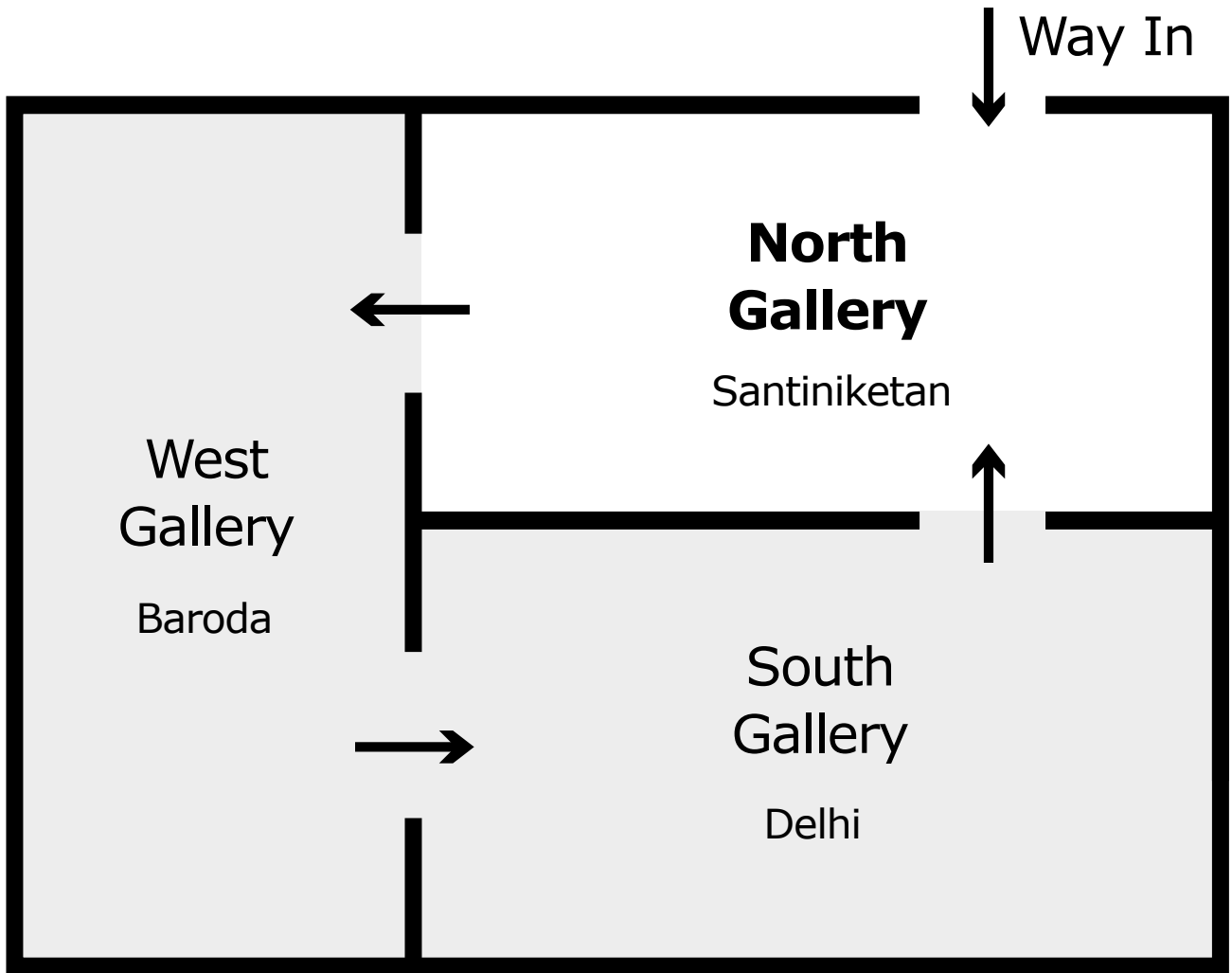
Their legacy of combining India's artistic traditions with a deep engagement with nature had a profound influence on her work. Over four decades, she worked with fibre, bronze, and ceramic, first experimenting with weaving in Baroda under her father's pupil, the prolific artist-educator K.G. Subramanyan (1924-2016). Subramanyan rallied fellow artists to mine folk and craft traditions in unconventional ways, forging a postcolonial vision of Indian modernism.

Artists Nilima Sheikh (b.1945) and Gulammohammed Sheikh (b.1937), students at Baroda and close friends of Mrinalini, extend this ethos, blending global and classical art histories with reflections on India's shifting socio-political climate. In New Delhi, with Mrinalini, they encountered Jagdish Swaminathan (1928-1994) whose exploration of tribal art and iconography encouraged self-determination.

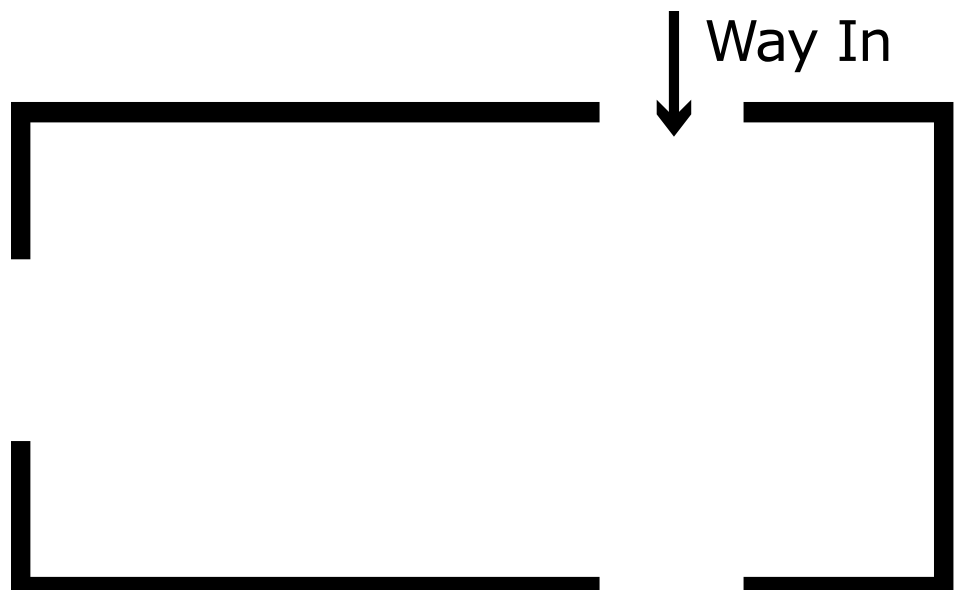
Together, these intertwined practices reaffirm Mrinalini's place within a dynamic artist network that continues to shape cultural discourse today.

When Artists Gather

This video montage brings together photographs drawn from archives across India, including the Asia Art Archive, artists' personal collections, and the work of Jyoti Bhatt. It reflects the networks of family, friendship and collaboration that connect the artists in this exhibition.



You are in North Gallery



Santiniketan

Founded in 1901 by the poet and polymath Rabindranath Tagore, Santiniketan is home to the university Visva-Bharati, meaning “communion of the world with India” in Sanskrit. The Institute of Fine Arts, Kala Bhavana (est. 1919), was a crucible for Indian modernism and challenged the colonial education of the British Raj with a holistic and cross-cultural approach. Students worked in close communion with the surrounding landscape of rural west Bengal, drawing on local craft traditions and international art.

Among its most influential teachers was Benode Behari Mukherjee, whose paintings and collages embodied Contextual Modernism: a movement grounding artistic practice in humanism and the lived environment.

At Santiniketan, Leela Mukherjee, considered one of India's first modern female sculptors, developed her own distinctive sculptural and graphic language, blending influences from as wide as West Africa and Mexico with Indian and Nepalese folk art.

K.G. Subramanyan carried forward the school's ethos as a student and later as a teacher, embracing storytelling and notions of hybridity. In many of his works, he mines the female seated figure as a longstanding subject in art history. Combining classical and experimental stylistic qualities, he explores themes such as mysticism, sexuality, and class struggle.

These key figures transformed Kala Bhavana into a site where modernist Indian art could be imagined as plural, experimental, and deeply connected to place, influencing later artists including Mrinalini Mukherjee.

List of works anti-clockwise in order of hang

**Benode Behari
Mukherjee**

Untitled

1942

Watercolour on nepali paper

Dipen Sabharwal

K. G. Subramanyan

Untitled

1953

Pen and watercolour on paper

Courtesy of Ark Foundation for the Arts, Vadodara

K. G. Subramanyan

Untitled

1950 - 1959

Gouache on paper

Taimur Hassan Collection

K. G. Subramanyan

Girl with Chojalata Flowers

c. 1980

Paint on acrylic

Private collection

K. G. Subramanyan

Untitled (Reclining Woman)

1980

Acrylic on board

K. G. Subramanyan absorbed Santiniketan's global outlook while developing a distinctive visual language.

Admiring the work of Henri Matisse, he reinterpreted Western modernism through Indian traditions that celebrated sensuality, myth, and ornament. This painting exemplifies his ability to fuse diverse influences, ranging from bright Kalighat paintings to Pablo Picasso, into a playful yet incisive style, where line and colour animate the figure with energy and unmistakable modernity.

Collection of Arindam and Alpona Bhattacharjee

K. G. Subramanyan

Untitled

2002

Acrylic on canvas

Collection: DAG

Benode Behari Mukherjee

Patna subject Nepal

1956

Tempera on paper

Collection Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi

Benode Behari Mukherjee

Untitled

1936

Watercolour on paper

Santiniketan's artistic philosophy was initially grounded in a vision of pan-Asian modernity. The institution welcomed visiting artists from across East Asia and sent its own teachers abroad to learn from those traditions. In 1936-37, Benode Behari Mukherjee travelled through China and Japan, recording his encounters in drawings and paintings.

(continued over)

This portrait of a woman carrying her child, completed during that journey, embodies the global cultural exchanges at the heart of Santiniketan.

Collection Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi

Benode Behari Mukherjee

In the Garden

1948

Tempera on silk

Collection Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi

Leela Mukherjee

Schematic Seated Figure

1950-1989

Wood

In 1948 Leela Mukherjee moved to Kathmandu, Nepal, where her husband Benode was curator of the national museum. There she apprenticed with master craftsman Kulasundar Shilakarmi, immersing herself in Nepalese woodcarving traditions. This experience profoundly shaped her practice and remained a strong current throughout her career. She interwove these techniques with Indigenous Indian traditions and influences from West Africa and Europe to form an artistic language uniquely her own.

Taimur Hassan Collection

Leela Mukherjee

Bird II

1950-1989

Wood

Taimur Hassan Collection

K. G. Subramanyan

Untitled (preparatory installation
for The King of the Dark Chamber)

1963

Carved wood mosaic

This work relates to K.G. Subramanyan's first monumental mural, commissioned in 1962 to commemorate Rabindranath Tagore's centenary. Installed at the Ravindralaya, a performing arts centre in Lucknow, the final mural stretched nearly 25 metres wide and comprised some 13,000 terracotta tiles.

Its subject was Tagore's play 'Arupratan (The King of the Dark Chamber)', an allegorical drama exploring the search for truth and the unseen presence of the divine, loosely based on the Kusa Jataka, a story of one of the Buddha's previous lives.

Courtesy: Seagull, Calcutta

Mrinalini Mukherjee

Adi Pushp II

1998/1999

Hemp

In childhood, Mrinalini Mukherjee dreamed of becoming a botanist, recalling days in Santiniketan spent describing flowers for her blind father to identify. The visual vocabulary of plant forms infuses her sculptures, yet the stark red and black of 'Adi Pushp II' ("First Flower") make clear that this is no delicate bloom.

The sculpture's central bulges and folds evoke human sexual organs, transforming the flower into a potent emblem of generative energy, and affirming nature as a vital, erotic life force.

Private collection

Centre of room

Mrinalini Mukherjee

Emergent III

2007

Bronze

Taimur Hassan Collection

Centre of room

Mrinalini Mukherjee

Forest Flame IV

2009

Bronze

In her final years, Mrinalini Mukherjee turned to bronze, creating sculptures that progressively grew in scale and ambition. Casting leaves, fronds, and branches into molten form, she transformed nature into something both corporeal and otherworldly. 'Forest Flame IV' recalls the striking "Flame of the Forest" tree of Santiniketan, which bursts into vivid orange blossoms each spring. Here, a trunk-like column erupts into flame-like petals, conflating vegetal growth with bodily emergence. Light animates the textured bronze surface, giving the work a sense of continual unfolding and transformation.

Taimur Hassan Collection

Benode Behari Mukherjee

Somnath Hore (printer)

Untitled

c. 1969-1970

Lithograph on paper

Victoria and Albert Museum. Given by Mr. Anthony
Stokes, 1983

K. G. Subramanyan

Bathers in Moonlight

1958

Oil on board

Courtesy of Ark Foundation for the Arts, Vadodara

Leela Mukherjee

Untitled

1992

Watercolour, sketch pen and pastel on paper

Vadehra Art Gallery, India

Leela Mukherjee

Untitled

1992

Watercolour, sketch pen and pastel on paper

Vadehra Art Gallery, India

Leela Mukherjee

Untitled

undated

Watercolour, sketch pen and pastel on paper

When woodcarving became too physically demanding, Leela Mukherjee increasingly turned to painting and drawing in her later years. Using handmade translucent Nepali paper, she created exuberant mixed-media compositions that blend calligraphic spontaneity with theatrical figures.

Landscapes teem with dancers, musicians, and mythological characters, drawn equally from everyday encounters and pan-Asian artistic traditions. Playful yet firmly grounded in the Santiniketan 'gharana' (lineage), her paintings revitalise inherited traditions through improvisation.

Vadehra Art Gallery, India

Leela Mukherjee

Untitled

undated

Wood

Collection Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi

K. G. Subramanyan

Untitled

1955-1959

Oil, ink and pastel on paper, pasted on board

Taimur Hassan Collection

3. Leela Mukherjee

Figure with Raised Hand

1950-1989

Wood

Taimur Hassan Collection

4. Leela Mukherjee

Intertwined Figures

1950-1989

Wood

Taimur Hassan Collection

5. Leela Mukherjee

Intertwined Figures III

1950-1989

Wood

Taimur Hassan Collection

1. Mrinalini Mukherjee

Burgeoning Cluster

c. 1997

Ceramic

Mrinalini Mukherjee's works frequently fuse seemingly botanical and anatomical forms in unsettling ways. The title of 'Burgeoning Cluster' increases this sense of uncanny fecundity, suggesting a life force growing from the inert clay. A similar uneasy merging takes place in her mother's earlier series of 'Intertwined Figures' sculptures, in which bodies entwine beyond the point of individual identity.

Taimur Hassan Collection

2. Mrinalini Mukherjee

Mound - III

undated

Ceramic

Collection Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi

Mrinalini Mukherjee

Landscape XVIII

2010

Bronze

Private collection

Mrinalini Mukherjee

Untitled 2

undated

Watercolour on paper on board

Rahul & Manisha Gera Baswani

Mrinalini Mukherjee

Untitled 1

undated

Watercolour on paper on board

Rahul & Manisha Gera Baswani

Mrinalini Mukherjee

Untitled

1990-1999

Watercolour on paper

Taimur Hassan Collection

Mrinalini Mukherjee

Untitled

2000-2009

Watercolour on paper

Taimur Hassan Collection

Benode Behari Mukherjee

Mussoorie

1952

Watercolour on paper

Benode Behari Mukherjee spent several summers in Mussoorie, a hill station in the Himalayan foothills renowned for its dramatic landscapes. He was captivated by the shifting atmosphere of the region, recalling: "clouds everywhere; you cannot tell when the sun rises or sets; an all-enveloping grey. Then suddenly, from amid that grey, the side of a mountain, or a house window, or a man shimmers forth in the sunlight. [...] One such fantastic scene dissolves and another takes over". In this work, he turns to diluted watercolour to evoke that fleeting play of light through rain.

Vadehra Art Gallery, India

Benode Behari Mukherjee

Two Triangles

1957

Collage on paper

Tate: Purchased with funds provided by the South Asia
Acquisitions Committee 2015

Benode Behari Mukherjee

Untitled

c. 1970

Collage on card

Victoria and Albert Museum. Given by Mr. Anthony
Stokes, 1983

Benode Behari Mukherjee

Lady with Fruit

1957

Collage and graphite on paper

Tate: Purchased with funds provided by the South Asia
Acquisitions Committee 2015

Benode Behari Mukherjee

Reclining Man

1957

Collage on paper

Benode Behari Mukherjee lived and worked with a visual impairment, becoming blind at the age of 53. He described this as “a new feeling, a new experience, a new state of being”.

The artist turned to tactile mediums including collage, pieced together from brightly coloured paper shapes prepared by his wife Leela and student helpers. Benode's intuitive method of constructing collages may have influenced his daughter's later approach to her textile sculptures: working without formal plans or preparatory drawings, Mrinalini used the physical process of knotting and weaving fibres to discover forms, calling the process as "an organic unfolding".

Taimur Hassan Collection

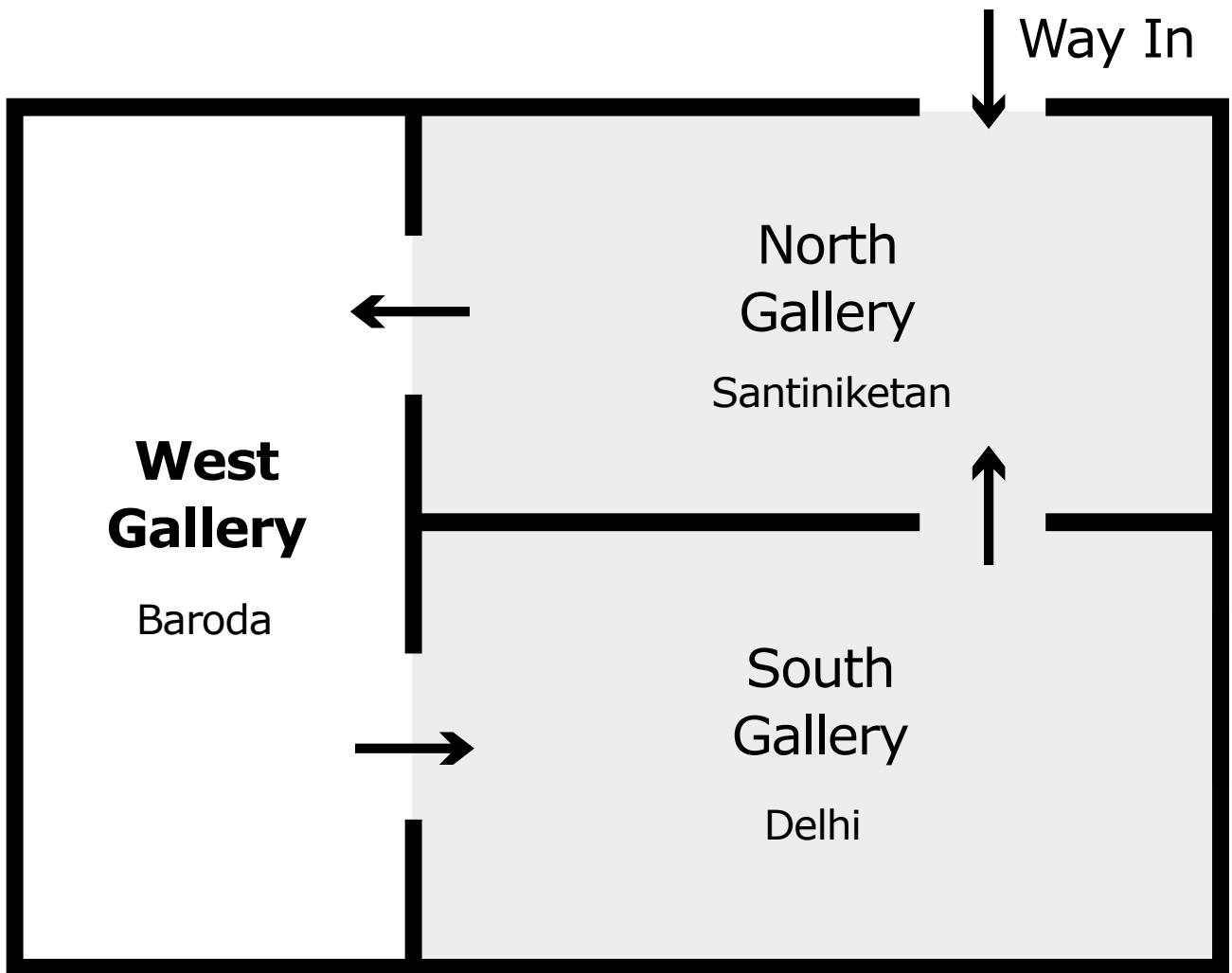
Benode Behari Mukherjee

Untitled

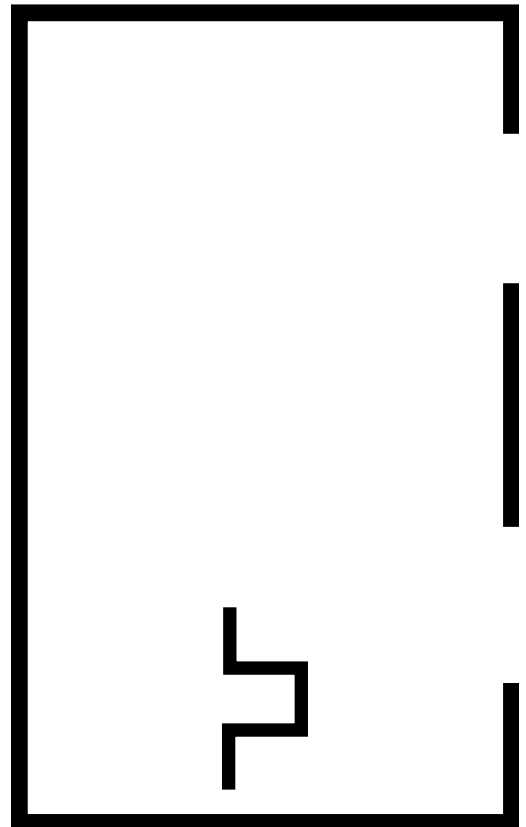
c. 1939

Hand coloured linocut on board

Arindam Chanda



You are
in West
Gallery



Baroda

The Faculty of Fine Arts at Maharaja Sayajirao University, Baroda, Gujarat, was established in 1949, two years after India's Partition and liberation from the British. It became one of the most influential schools for postcolonial artistic experimentation. While conceived in dialogue with Santiniketan, it was distinct in its cosmopolitan outlook.

In 1965, Mrinalini Mukherjee enrolled under K.G. Subramanyan, known to those he was close to as "Madi Da" (brother). A prolific painter, muralist, printmaker, and designer, Subramanyan urged his students to collapse hierarchies between fine art and craft, traditionally insisted upon by the West, and to look to the pluralisms within Indian cultural histories. "Our art tradition has few parallels in the world for its depth, breadth, antiquity, diversity, and unbroken hierarchy," he wrote in 1971.

With his encouragement, Mrinalini became interested in the latent potential of various local materials such as jute and hemp, otherwise judged as poor and non-conventional. She adapted the ancient Arabic knotting technique of macramé into monumental sculptures that fused figuration with abstraction.

Baroda is also home to Mrinalini's closest friends, Nilima Sheikh and Gulammohammed Sheikh, both of whom were taught by Subramanyan. Gulammohammed's practice combines influences including Indian miniatures, medieval and Renaissance painting with political commentary (likely informed by Subramanyan's role as a Gandhian activist). Nilima developed a feminist visual language, layering cross-cultural historical and literary references to address questions of memory and place.

List of works anti-clockwise in order of hang

K. G. Subramanyan

Untitled (Markers)

1967-1968

Marker pen on paper

Courtesy of Ark Foundation for the Arts, Vadodara

K. G. Subramanyan

Untitled

1958-1960

Woven fabric

Courtesy: Seagull, Calcutta

K. G. Subramanyan

Untitled

1958-1960

Woven fabric

These fragments reflect K.G. Subramanyan's deep engagement with India's textile traditions. From 1959 he collaborated with the newly established Weavers' Service Centres, institutions created to revitalise handloom design as part of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's efforts to promote a collective national identity through art and Indigenous design. Subramanyan saw textiles as a living art form and advocated for the survival of craft in a rapidly modernising world. His commitment to Indigenous traditions shaped his teaching, including encouraging Mrinalini Mukherjee to draw upon textile practices and local materials during her studies with him.

Seagull, Calcutta

K. G. Subramanyan

Banaras Ghat

1965

Oil on canvas

This is one of the few surviving works from a brief period when K.G. Subramanyan experimented with Cubism and abstraction, drawn to their affinity with the two-dimensionality of Indigenous Indian painting. The Banaras Ghats are steps leading to the River Ganges in Varanasi, used to access the sacred waters. Subramanyan distils figures into colourful forms, compressing space and playing with a bird's eye perspective to push the scene to the threshold between figuration and abstraction.

Collection Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi

K. G. Subramanyan

Untitled

1963-1971

Terracotta on board

Taimur Hassan Collection

Mrinalini Mukherjee

Snake Column I

1995

Ceramic

This terracotta sculpture is one of two “snake columns” that reflect Mrinalini Mukherjee’s enduring engagement with fertility and vitality. The cylindrical, phallic form recalls the ‘lingam’ of Shiva, while the serpent motifs and raised hood canopy reference Bankura terracotta vases dedicated to Manasa, a goddess of fertility.

Like 'Adi Pushp II' (previous gallery), the work channels sexuality as a generative power, fusing sacred imagery with organic, body-like forms that pulse with energy.

Collection: DAG

Gulammohammed Sheikh

Dome 1

1995

Ceramic

Courtesy of Ark Foundation for the Arts, Vadodara

Gulammohammed Sheikh

Landscape

1968

Lithograph

Courtesy of Ark Foundation for the Arts, Vadodara

Mrinalini Mukherjee

Ritu Raja

1977

Hemp and steel

Tate: Purchased with funds provided by the South Asia
Acquisitions Committee 2016

Mrinalini Mukherjee

Earthbloom

1996

Ceramic

Collection Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi

Mrinalini Mukherjee

Jauba

2000

Hemp and steel

Tate: Presented by Amrita Jhaveri 2013

K. G. Subramanyan

Poorvapalli

1984

Oil on board

Courtesy of Ark Foundation for the Arts, Vadodara

K. G. Subramanyan

Untitled

1989

Watercolour on paper

Courtesy of Ark Foundation for the Arts, Vadodara

K. G. Subramanyan

Untitled

1989

Watercolour on paper

Courtesy of Ark Foundation for the Arts, Vadodara

Centre of room

Nilima Sheikh

Songspace

1995

Casein tempera on canvas

Nilima Sheikh's 'Songspace' series is inspired by tales of wandering mystics, exiled saints, and separated lovers. Using natural pigments blended with casein to achieve an ethereal translucency, Sheikh draws on folk songs and mystical poetry as a starting point, but rarely illustrates them literally. Instead, she creates mirage-like imagined landscapes in which nature itself becomes a metaphor for time, transience, and the lyrical atmosphere of desire and loss.

Meera / Desert

Collection of Czaee and Suketu Shah

Absence / Mahadevi Akka 2

Shalini & Vivek Gupta's Private Collection

Chenab 1 / Encampment

From the Collection of ACG Worldwide

Sawan 2 / Meghdoot

Courtesy of the Museum of Art & Photography (MAP)

Singer / Crossing 1

From the Collection of ACG Worldwide

Nilima Sheikh

Postcards from Umbria

1998

Mixed Tempera on Vasli Paper

Nilima Sheikh created the 'Postcards from Umbria' series when she joined her husband, Gulammohammed, in Italy as he participated in a workshop. The small tempera paintings act as visual letters, reflecting on travel, companionship, and her encounters with European art.

Blending Indian miniature techniques with European Renaissance references, the series evokes memory as both intimate and art historical.

'Tired Angel Traveller Madre'

Nitin Bhayana Collection

Nilima Sheikh

While Reading (Dptych)

1982

Oil on canvas pasted on board

Nitin Bhayana Collection

Gulammohammed Sheikh

A City is Known By Its Statues

2013

Watercolour on paper

For artists trained in Baroda, engagement with art history was central to their education. Gulammohammed Sheikh, who studied and later taught at the Faculty of Fine Arts for over three decades, draws here on the city's sculptural landmarks. He includes the equestrian statue of Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III, the benefactor after whom the university was renamed in 1949. By evoking these public monuments, Sheikh reflects on how civic memory and identity are inscribed in Baroda's fabric, grounding the city's modern artistic practice in historical legacy.

Taimur Hassan Collection

Gulammohammed Sheikh

Meanderings

c. 1990

Etching-Aquatint

Courtesy of Ark Foundation for the Arts, Vadodara

Gulammohammed Sheikh

Riot

1971

Etching and aquatint on paper

Collection: DAG

K. G. Subramanyan

Birth of Mahavir

2002

Oil on canvas

Painted in the aftermath of the Gujarat riots, K.G. Subramanyan created several works responding to reports of violence against women during clashes between Hindus and Muslims. While this painting carries no overt brutality, it recalls the Jain saint Mahavira's birth and the religion's tradition of non-violence. Using flattened planes, rhythmic lines, and saturated colour in vertical, grid-like panels reminiscent of tapestries, Subramanyan reimagines sacred themes with dynamism, drawing on his early experiments with terracotta murals.

Nitin Bhayana Collection

Gulammohammed Sheikh

About Friends 3

(Composition in Green and Black)

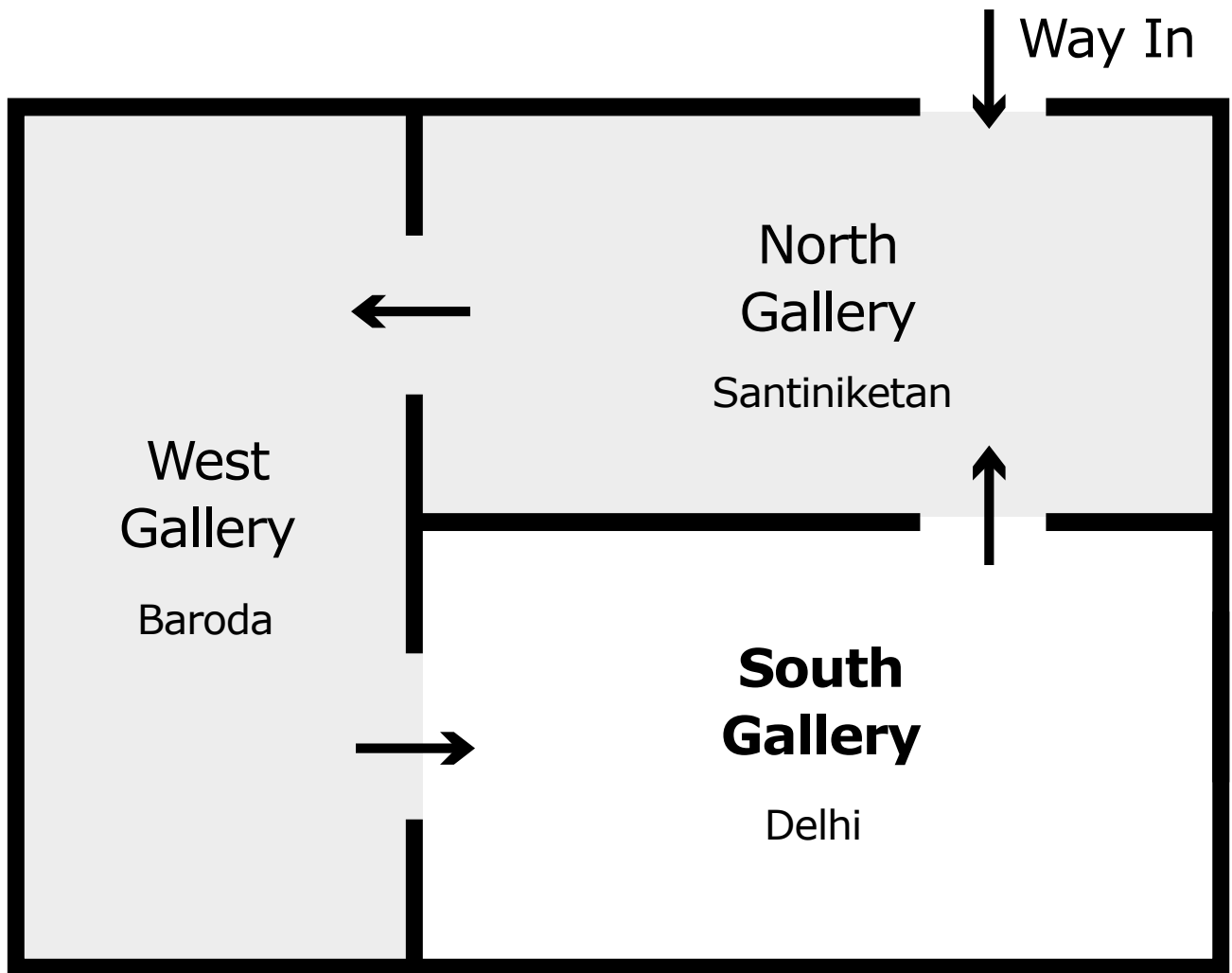
1965-1966

Oil on canvas

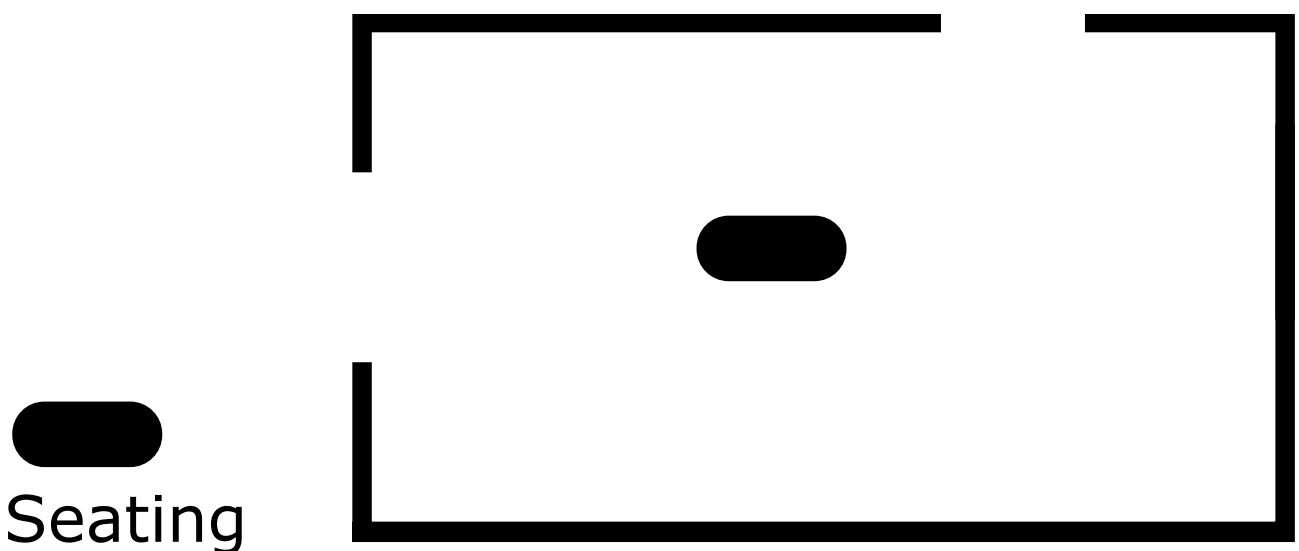
Painted during Gulammohammed Sheikh's studies at the Royal College of Art, London in 1963-66, 'About Friends 3' depicts his flatmate, the architect Martin Hewitt.

Shown in Gulammohammed's 1966 degree exhibition, the work reflects a pivotal moment in the artist's practice. Moving away from earlier expressionist tendencies, he began experimenting with the compositional strategies of Pop art and collage, while also developing a growing interest in Indian miniature painting traditions. The combination of figuration and abstract graphic elements here marks an early step towards the hybrid visual language that defines his later work.

Private Collection, New Delhi



You are in South Gallery



Delhi

After her formative years at Baroda, Mrinalini Mukherjee returned to New Delhi in the early 1970s, entering a community of artists and intellectuals grappling with what it meant to create art in an independent nation. At the centre of this milieu was Jagdish Swaminathan, a close interlocutor who championed plural, non-hierarchical approaches to modernism. Known as “Swami” to friends, his artistic practice was inseparable from his political activism. He had been instrumental in forging the short-lived but radical collective Group 1890 in 1962 with Gulammohammed Sheikh. Formed in Gujarat but staging its sole exhibition in New Delhi, inaugurated by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, the group rejected the notion that Indian art should be measured by European modernist paradigms.

Equally important to Mrinalini's circle in Delhi were Gulammohammed Sheikh and Nilima Sheikh, who, between the capital and Baroda, sustained dialogues on narrative, memory, and vernacular traditions, extending debates first encountered as students under K.G. Subramanyan.

For these artists, Garhi Studios, founded by the Lalit Kala Akademi in 1976, became a vital site of exchange. Mrinalini's mother, Leela Mukherjee, maintained a strong presence there, producing bronze sculptures and prints while fostering mentorship and solidarity. More than a working space, Garhi was a living community where younger and established artists shared knowledge, tested materials, and worked collectively amidst shifting institutional and political structures.

List of works anti-clockwise in order of hang

Mrinalini Mukherjee

Afternoon

1979

Etching

Taimur Hassan Collection

Mrinalini Mukherjee

River

1983

Etching

Taimur Hassan Collection

Mrinalini Mukherjee

Garden

1979

Etching

The British Museum

Mrinalini Mukherjee

Garhi

1983

Etching

At Delhi's Garhi Studios, an important hub for printmaking, Mrinalini Mukherjee took up etching during her fellowship here in the early 1980s. Working during breaks from her time-consuming and physically laborious hemp practice, in print she explored the natural world through finely observed studies of plants, weather, and landscape. Though never exhibited in Mrinalini's lifetime, these works reveal a more intimate dimension of her creativity, linking the organic forms of her sculptures with the imagery of flora and fauna that populate her etchings.

The British Museum

Mrinalini Mukherjee

View

1983

Etching on Archival mountboard

Courtesy of the Mrinalini Mukherjee Foundation and
Jhaveri Contemporary

Nilima Sheikh

Majnun Grieving at Laila's Grave

2006

Etching and lithograph on paper

Courtesy: Nilima Sheikh

1. Gulammohammed Sheikh

Landscape

1995

Ceramic

Courtesy of Ark Foundation for the Arts, Vadodara

2. Gulammohammed Sheikh

Animal

1995

Ceramic

Courtesy of Ark Foundation for the Arts, Vadodara

3. Gulammohammed Sheikh

Column 1

1995

Ceramic

Courtesy of Ark Foundation for the Arts, Vadodara

4. Gulammohammed Sheikh

Landscape with Flying Figure

1995

Ceramic

Courtesy of Ark Foundation for the Arts, Vadodara

5. Mrinalini Mukherjee

Untitled

2001

Ceramic

Nitin Bhayana Collection

6. Mrinalini Mukherjee

Blue Work 1

2000

Ceramic

Private collection

7. Mrinalini Mukherjee

Untitled

1999-2000

Ceramic

Collection Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi

Nilima Sheikh

Home, Land 2

2024

Mixed tempera on Sanganer paper

Sunita & Vijay Choraria

Nilima Sheikh

Excerpts from Shalimar 3: the beautiful village of Pachigam still exists

2006

Tempera on Sanganer paper

Trained as a historian before turning to painting, Nilima Sheikh often uses art to reflect on the Kashmir region's turbulent history. Her series 'The Beautiful Village of Pachigam Still Exists' takes inspiration from Salman Rushdie's novel 'Shalimar the Clown' (2005), in which the fictional Kashmiri village of Pachigam is destroyed in conflict.

(continued over)

Nilima counters this erasure by evoking the village as a place preserved through memory and art, an image of harmony that resists violence and loss.

Taimur Hassan Collection

Jagdish Swaminathan

Untitled

1960-1969

(from the Colour Geometry of Space series)

Oil on canvas

In the mid-1960s, Jagdish Swaminathan embarked on the 'Colour Geometry of Space' series. Inspired by the use of vibrant colour in North Indian Pahari school miniature painting, he constructed flat planes in resonant shades, to explore the relationship between colour and space.

For Swaminathan, geometric abstraction was not a formalist exercise but a way to order space through distinctly Indian references. This short-lived but vital phase laid the foundation for the luminous landscapes of his later 'Bird, Tree and Mountain' series.

Taimur Hassan Collection

Jagdish Swaminathan

The Sign Comes to Rest

1965

Oil on canvas

Taimur Hassan Collection

Centre of room

Mrinalini Mukherjee

Pakshi

1985

Woven dyed hemp

Courtesy of the Museum of Art & Photography (MAP)

Leela Mukherjee

Untitled

1983

Etching

After moving to Delhi in the late 1970s, Leela Mukherjee turned to printmaking at the Garhi studios. Between 1983 and 1988 she produced a striking body of etchings and lithographs, exploring both technical experiment and intimate observation.

Her subjects range from dancers rehearsing at the cultural centre, Triveni Kala Sangam, to portraits, animals, and imagined scenes. Like her drawings produced around the same time (first gallery), Leela's prints capture the rhythm of everyday life with vivid energy.

Vadehra Art Gallery, India

Leela Mukherjee

Untitled

undated

Etching

Vadehra Art Gallery, India

Jagdish Swaminathan

The Temple

1965

Oil on canvas

Private collection

Jagdish Swaminathan

Untitled

1993

Oil on canvas

Taimur Hassan Collection

Jagdish Swaminathan

Untitled

1980

Oil and mixed media on canvas

By the 1980s, Jagdish Swaminathan's art reflected his deepening engagement with India's tribal and Indigenous traditions.

Moving away from the pristine colour planes of his earlier works, he adopted earthy palettes, textured surfaces, and symbolic forms. Shapes such as triangles and serpentine lines evoked mountains and snakes, resonant with Hindu mythologies of the god Shiva.

These later canvases fuse abstraction with spiritual metaphor, recalling Swaminathan's lifelong insistence that art should reveal nature and myth in their primal, symbolic essence.

Private collection, London

Jagdish Swaminathan

Tribal Motifs

1982

Oil on canvas

Private collection, Switzerland

Gulammohammed Sheikh

समिर्ग और पारियाँ

Simurgh and the Paris

2019–2024

Acrylic on board

Taimur Hassan Collection

Gulammohammed Sheikh

शकिर Hunted

2018–2024

Acrylic on board

Taimur Hassan Collection

Gulammohammed Sheikh

Unmoolan – 2

1970

Etching and aquatint on paper

Collection: DAG

Gulammohammed Sheikh

Myths in the Making

2022

Watercolour and gouache on Wasli paper

Courtesy of Ark Foundation for the Arts, Vadodara

Gulammohammed Sheikh

Expelled Angel

c. 1990

Silkscreen

Courtesy of Ark Foundation for the Arts, Vadodara

Jagdish Swaminathan

Untitled (Lily by my Window)

1970-1974

Oil on canvas

Jagdish Swaminathan's 'Bird, Tree and Mountain' series embodies his quest for a pure, non-naturalistic representation of nature. Rejecting Western modernism and the naturalism of the Bengal School, he turned instead to tribal and folk visual traditions to uncover what he called "phenomena in its virginal state". Here, above a lily whose lush leaves and thick stem hint at burgeoning sexual imagery, a bird and stone hover motionless. Their improbable scale and suspension create a meditative, otherworldly landscape where metaphor takes precedence over realism.

Private collection, Switzerland

Jagdish Swaminathan

Untitled (Miniature Painting)

Undated

Oil on canvas

Collection: DAG

Mrinalini Mukherjee

Night Bloom II

1999/2000

Partly-glazed ceramic

One of six 'Night Bloom' sculptures created during a residency at the European Ceramic Work Centre in the Netherlands (1999–2000), this partly glazed terracotta reveals Mrinalini Mukherjee's intuitive approach to the medium.

Made by layering individual slabs of clay to create an organic form, 'Night Bloom II' is one of her most legibly human sculptures, suggesting a female body seated in lotus position. Its folds of clay bear the impression of textiles, while its surface shifts between muted tones of unglazed earth and the intentional artifice of vivid blue and red glazes.

The British Museum

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