

PRESS RELEASE

Ram Kumar – A Retrospective

Aicon Gallery, New York: 23 November – 18 December 2010
Opening Reception: Tuesday November 23, 6:00 – 9:00pm

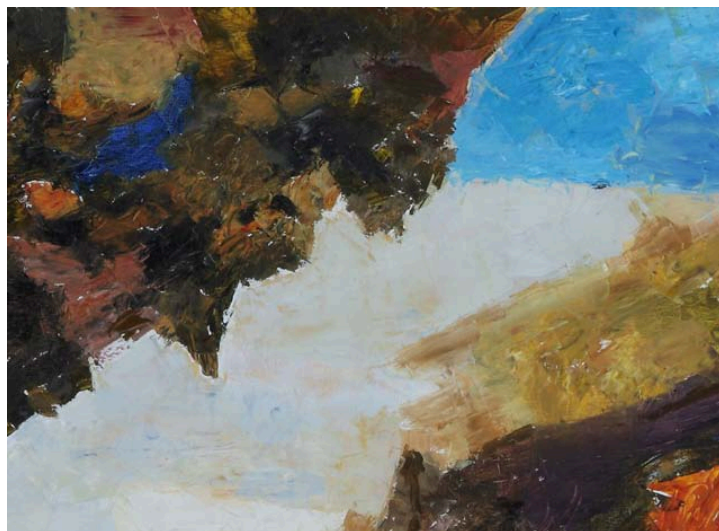
"Contemporary Indian Landscape" a presentation by Beth Citron, Curator, Rubin Museum of Art, to coincide with opening.

The art historian Partha Mitter has noted that the "common thread" of modern Indian art has been "the insistent return of the figure, the perennial subject of India, set against the background of abstraction." One of the seminal and most long-standing exceptions to this rule is Ram Kumar. Although Kumar, like a number of Indian and Pakistani artists who studied in Paris, returned from Europe with a semi-figurative style that drew on post-cubism, he eventually chose to abandon the figure entirely and began working almost exclusively with the motif of the abstract cityscape, a move unique among his immediate contemporaries at the time. This shift took place in a series of paintings inspired by Benares (Varanasi), which was variously rendered as an amalgamation of shades and textures, or as Mitter puts it, "the colorful city reduced to stretches of clay, sand and sky."

In the 1960s, Kumar began another shift in his production, this time away from the cityscape, whose intensity conveyed a despairing urban alienation, towards the natural abstract landscape. Increasingly his works would be made up of forms, detached from his previously conventional figure-ground relationship, which coalesced in the middle distance to suggest a landscape. This focus on the abstract landscape, inspired by Benares, would lead the artist to pursue this singular mode of abstraction, almost exclusively, for the rest of his career.

What is at stake for an Indian artist in doing this? The question is a pertinent one because pure abstraction is rare in the work of Indian artists - many of those who experimented with abstraction soon returned to the figure to a greater or lesser extent. Ram Kumar's work, then, has become difficult to place within the simplistic narratives that have developed around modern Indian art. Indeed, by insisting on the abstract, Kumar demands something that most of his contemporaries do not; a private, contemplative viewing experience. These are paintings to be experienced. Like their counterparts in Western abstract art – Rothko and Hans Hoffman come to mind – these works are less about transcendence and more about the visual encounter between the viewer and the painting in front of them. Thus the evolution in Kumar's work that continues to set him apart from his contemporaries can be understood as the embodiment of a break between depicting something (the individual) to articulating the possible response of that something; between picturing something and being it, if you like.

Born in Shimla, India in 1924, Ram Kumar studied painting in New Delhi and Paris. He is a vital part of first generation post-colonial Indian artists, a member of the fabled "Progressive Artist's Group", alongside F. N. Souza, S. H. Raza and M. F. Husain. Kumar has held solo and group exhibitions worldwide, including London, New York, France, Japan and throughout India. He lives and works in New Delhi. This retrospective spans Kumar's oeuvre from his figurative abstract work in the late 1950s, through his move to abstract cityscapes and landscapes, culminating in a set of stunning new works exhibited for the first time in this exhibition.



Ram Kumar
Untitled Landscape 3 (Close-up of upper left field)
Oil on Canvas (2010)
36 x 48 in.

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RAM KUMAR

Born 1924, in Simla

Atelier Fernand Leger and Andre Lhote, Paris (1949-52)
M.A. in Economics from St. Stephen's College, New Delhi (1946)
Evening Classes at the Sharada Ukil School, New Delhi (1945)

Ram Kumar, like many of his confreres among the first generation of post-colonial Indian artists - including such figures as F N Souza, M F Husain, Paritosh Sen, Jehangir Sabavala, Krishen Khanna, S H Raza and Akbar Padamsee - combined an internationalist desire with the need to belong emphatically to their homeland. In its internationalist mood, this generation looked to the early 20th-century modernisms of Paris, London and Vienna for inspiration; its need to belong prompted an interest in the construction of a viable "Indian" aesthetic that bore a dynamic relationship to an Indian identity. With Ram Kumar, this quest for an indigenist tenor has not meant a superficial inventory of "native" motifs offered as evidence of a static and essentialist Indian identity. Instead, he demonstrates that a painter can enact the innermost dramas of his culture while maintaining the individuality, even idiosyncrasy of his performance.
- Excerpts from "Parts of a World: Reflections on the Art of Ram Kumar" by Ranjit Hoskote, 2002.

Ram Kumar lives and works in New Delhi.

Select Solo Exhibitions

2010	<i>Selected Works: 1949-2010</i> , Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi
2009	<i>Selected Works</i> , Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi
2008	<i>Homage to Kekoo Gandhi</i> , Chemould Prescott Road, Mumbai Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi
2007	<i>Reflective Landscapes</i> , Aicon Gallery, New York <i>You shall remain hidden</i> , Gallery Espace, New Delhi <i>Materia Prima</i> , Anant Art Gallery, New Delhi
2006	Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi
2005	Pundole Art Gallery, Mumbai
2005	Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi
2003	Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi
2002	<i>Recent Works</i> , IndoCenter, Chelsea, presented by Saffronart and Pundole Art Gallery; Mumbai; New Delhi; San Francisco; New York
2001	Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi
2000	<i>Landscapes from New Zealand</i> , Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi
1999	Pundole Art Gallery, Mumbai
1997	Arks Gallery, London
1997	Amadavada Ni Gufa, Ahemdabad
1996	<i>Pages From a Sketch Book</i> , Pundole Art Gallery, Mumbai <i>Ram Kumar – A Journey Within</i> , Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi
1994	Jehangir Art Gallery, organized by Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi
1993	Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi
1992	Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi Pundole Art Gallery, Mumbai
1991	Chitrakoot Gallery, Kolkata

1990 Pundole Art Gallery, Mumbai
Center for Contemporary Art, New Delhi

Select Group Exhibitions

2010 *Paper Trails*, Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi
The Progressive & Associates, Grosvenor Gallery, London
From Miniature to Modern: Traditions in Transition, Rob Dean Art, London in
Association with Pundole Art Gallery, Mumbai
Master Class, The Arts Trust, Mumbai
Etchings, Lithographs, and Serigraphs, Grosvenor Gallery, London

2009 *Moderns and More*, Aicon Gallery, New York
*Indian Art After Independence: Selected Works from the Collections of Virginia & Ravi
Akhoury and Shelley & Donald Rubin*, Emily Lowe Gallery, Hempstead
Progressive to Altermodern: 62 Years of Indian Modern Art, Grosvenor Gallery, London
Tracing Time, Bodhi Art, Mumbai

2008 *Contemporary and Modern Indian Art*, Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi
Post Independence Masters, Aicon Gallery, New York
Freedom 2008 – Sixty Years of Indian Independence, Centre for International Modern Art
(CIMA), Kolkata
Towards friendship... Ram Kumar marks 50 years of knowing Kekoo Gandhi,
Chemould Art Gallery, Mumbai

2007 *Winter Moderns*, Aicon Gallery, New York

2006 *Shadow Lines*, Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi
Moderns Revisited, Grosvenor Gallery, London

2005 *Resonance*, Art Musings Gallery, Mumbai

2004 *Concept and Form*, Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi

2001 *Ashta Nayak*, Tao Art Gallery, Mumbai
Modern Indian Art, organized by Saffronart and Pundole Art Gallery, Metropolitan
Pavilion, New York

2000 Akbar Pademese - Exhibition of Paintings by M F Husain, Ram Kumar, Krishen Khanna,
Tyeb Mehta, S H Raza and Akbar Padamese, Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi

1997 *Image-Beyond Image*, a Traveling Exhibition of Works from the Blenbarra Art Museum,
Japan, at New Delhi, Kolkata, Bangalore and Mumbai

1996 *The Moderns*, National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA), Mumbai

1995 Gallery Raku, Japan

1988 *Three Indian Artists*, Karachi, Pakistan

1987, 88 Festival of India shows in the then USSR and Japan

1987 *Coups de Coeur*, Geneva, Switzerland

1985 *Artistes Indiens en France*, Fondation Nationale des Arts Graphiques et Plastiques, Paris

1973 *Indian Contemporary Painting*, a traveling exhibition in the U.S. and Canada

1967 Joint exhibition with M.F. Husain in Delhi and Prague, Czechoslovakia

1957 Graham Gallery, New York
Gallery One, London

Awards and Fellowships

2003 Officers Arts et Letters, French Government

1986 Kalidas Samman by the Madhya Pradesh State Government

1972 Uttar Pradesh State Government for short stories in Hindi

1972 Padmashree from Indian Government for short stories

1970 JD Rockefeller fund fellowship

1959 Honorable Mention, Sao Paulo Biennale

1958 National Award, New Delhi

1956 National Award, New Delhi



Vision

Aicon Gallery's curatorial vision begins in India but reaches outwards internationally from there. The two gallery spaces are located in New York and London, and each provides a vital platform for artists based in the Indian Subcontinent to exhibit in the United States and Europe. Alongside in-depth, focused solo shows the galleries present a program of curated group exhibitions that are international in their scope and ambition. Following recent debates in institutional curating, the program deliberately thinks together art produced very recently and art made through the latter half of the 20th century. Through this we aim to produce unexpected congruencies, shed light on other modernities, make complex the designation 'contemporary' and signal a shift away from simple survey exhibitions. In short, Aicon Gallery presents recent and contemporary art from India and beyond.

History

Aicon Gallery was developed from Gallery ArtsIndia, which was one of the first major outlets in the United State for art from India. Initially Gallery ArtsIndia connected collectors, critics and curators to artists in India via an on-line platform, and after the initial positive feedback, opened as a gallery space in New York in 2002. Aicon Gallery was launched when our second major space opened in London in 2007. The New York space shifted location to its new premises in the Lower East Side in 2008. The gallery has presented significant solo exhibitions of a number of artists - many of which have been their first major exhibitions outside the subcontinent. Solo shows have included G.R.Iranna, Bose Krishnamachari, Anandajit Ray, Talha Rathore, Muhammed Zeeshan, Adeela Suleman and Atul Bhalla. It has also re-examined the oeuvres of artists working from the 1950s onwards, including F.N. Souza, M.F. Husain, K. Laxma Goud, S.H. Raza and Shyamal Dutta Ray. More recently the gallery has started participating in international art fairs such as Arco, Art Dubai, India Art Summit and Art Hong Kong and will be developing further participations going forward. Aicon Editions, launched in 2008, is the first venture to enable artists from the Subcontinent to work with limited edition projects.

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MOTHER
1957
OIL ON CANVAS
32.5 X 20.5



UNTITLED
C. 1960S
OIL ON CANVAS
19.7 X 25.2



UNTITLED ABSTRACT 11
1970
OIL ON CANVAS
50.5 X 50.5



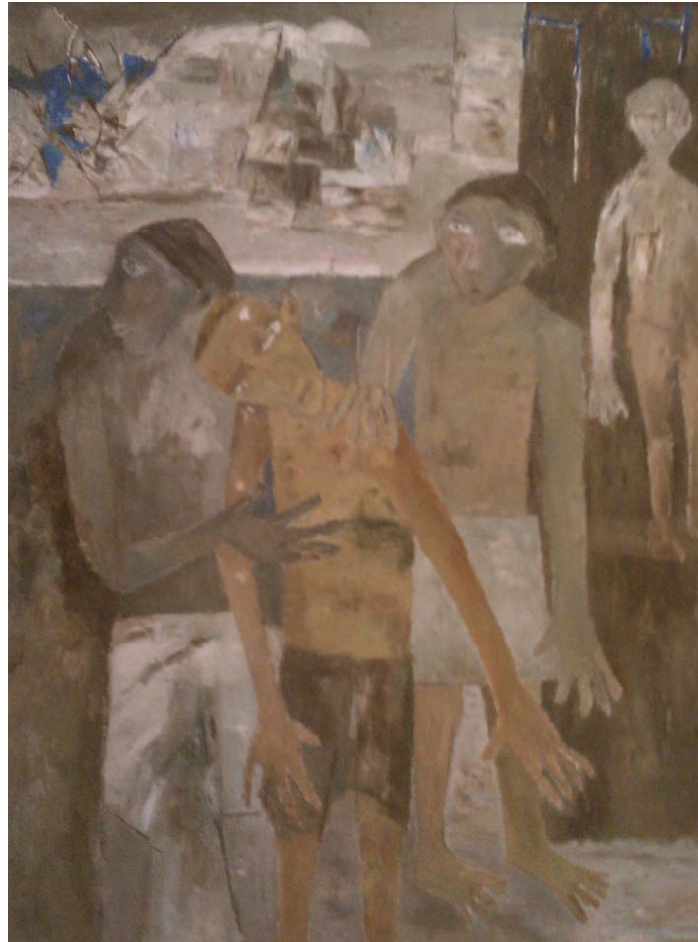
UNTITLED
1973
OIL ON CANVAS
40 X 34



UNTITLED LANDSCAPE 9
CA. 1975-1980
OIL ON CANVAS
58 X 70



TOWNSCAPE
1991
OIL ON CANVAS
22.25 X 35



UNTITLED (FIGURATIVE)

1994

OIL ON CANVAS

25 X 33



UNTITLED ABSTRACT 3
2005
OIL ON CANVAS
36 X 24



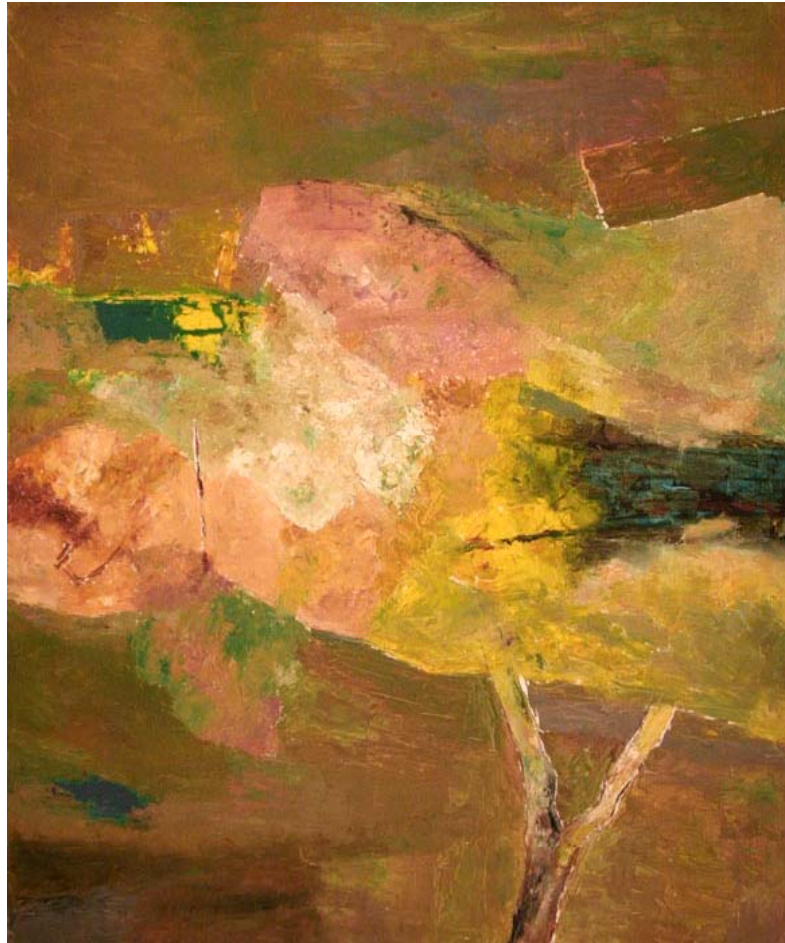
UNTITLED ABSTRACT 7
2006
OIL ON CANVAS
36 X 30



UNTITLED ABSTRACT 4
2007
OIL ON CANVAS
30 X 40



UNTITLED ABSTRACT 6
2007
OIL ON CANVAS
30 X 36



UNTITLED ABSTRACT 8
2007
OIL ON CANVAS
36 X 30



UNTITLED LANDSCAPE 1
2010
OIL ON CANVAS
36 x 36



UNTITLED LANDSCAPE 2
2010
OIL ON CANVAS
36 X 48



UNTITLED LANDSCAPE 3

2010

OIL ON CANVAS

36 X 48



UNTITLED LANDSCAPE 3

2010

OIL ON CANVAS

36 X 48 in.



UNTITLED LANDSCAPE 4
2010
OIL ON CANVAS
36 X 24



UNTITLED LANDSCAPE 7

2010

OIL ON CANVAS

24 X 36



UNTITLED LANDSCAPE 8

2010

OIL ON CANVAS

24 X 36



UNTITLED LANDSCAPE 10
2010
OIL ON CANVAS
36 X 48



UNTITLED LANDSCAPE 5

ND

OIL ON CANVAS

36 X 36



UNTITLED (BLACK BIRD)

ND

OIL ON CANVAS

34.5 X 31



UNTITLED LANDSCAPE 6
ND
OIL ON CANVAS
36 X 48



BLUE AND WHITE ABSTRACTION
ND
OIL ON CANVAS
40.25 X 33



BLUE AND BLACK ABSTRACTION
ND
OIL ON CANVAS
25 X 36



UNTITLED LANDSCAPE (YELLOW)

ND

OIL ON CANVAS

17 X 32