In transition:

Artworks between the archive and the exhibition hall at the NGMA

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Abstract

In this M.Phil. dissertation I raise questions concerning the mobility of artworks between the archive and the exhibition hall.
The collection of the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi has a vast collection of 17.000 works, I am reflecting on how the works entered the collection, the philosophy of successive directors who gave it shape, and the ways in which the collection have been shared with the public through exhibitions.
The NGMA initiated several exhibitions in the past to show their archival objects to the public, starting in 1994 with Geeta Kapur's exhibition "Hundred Years". Immediately after the opening of the exhibition, a controversy broke out about inclusion and exclusion of works. Later in the 2000s, exhibitions curated by the contemporary Director Rajeev Lochan pursued the same objective. I will analyse and compare their curatorial enterprises based on the archival material.

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Introduction

In the most recent times the museum's landscape in India has undergone major changes and shifts in the administering bodies. This is especially dramatic in case of museums, that had taken first steps to become a site of engagement for the public and revitalised in terms of its projects and visitors in the recent past, such as the National Museum and the National Handicrafts and Handlooms Museum in New Delhi. The government seems to be unable to grasp these signs of turnarounds. The museums and Akademis in India are under a direct mandate of the government of India. Leading positions sometimes remain vacant or are filled with bureaucrats who have hardly an interest. At the same times they are places of controversies. This dissertation will look at the development of the National Gallery of Modern Art in New Delhi since it's foundation. It will consider the influence of successive directors and their bias, as well as the role of the gallery in promoting a national identity within India and abroad.

The National Gallery of Modern Art in New Delhi hosts a collection of about 17,000 art works of the last hundred and fifty years starting from about 1850. The institution is run and administered as a subordinate office to the Department of Culture, Government of India and resides in the Jaipur House, India Gate.

After the establishment of the gallery on the behest of Jawaharlal Nehru, in order to store the collection of Amrita Sher-Gil's paintings adequately, the vast collection of the NGMA was built up over the past 60 years. This dissertation will reconstruct how the works entered the collection. Over the period of the time, the repository of the NGMA has become a pool of objects that represent the Indian struggle of findings its national identity. I want to raise questions on how the different directors have addressed these questions. And if a museum can be instrumentalized by its

government to regain identity lost in the colonial period? How is this exercised through exhibitions at the NGMA?

Starting off as a storehouse for the collections of Indian masters of Modernism, such as Amrita Sher-Gil, Nandalal Bose and Rabindranath Tagore, the collection grew through gifts and buys, often by acquiring large numbers of works by single artists. Throughout its history, the NGMA became a space where exhibition making was exercised, thought of and often in its results criticised.
Parallel histories, such as the India Triennale Dilemma and the Festivals of India, will be critically observed and examined from the standpoint of national representation.

The archive has become symbolic for the ways in which we construct and organize our histories - officially, collectively, and personally. It has also become a point of contest, a theoretical space within which we can challenge the notion of historical positivism and the power structures created in archiving. Assuming that archives are traces of processes and transactions, I raise the question: How is the archive used as a pool of ideas for curatorial enterprises? And perhaps this question addresses an ideal situations of a repository that is accessible and artworks that a verified and in adequate state.

In the last 20 years, the museum initiated four exhibitions to show their collection to the public, starting in 1994 with Geeta Kapur's exhibition "Hundred Years". Immediately after the opening of the exhibition, a controversy broke out about inclusion and exclusion of works. Later in the 2000s, exhibitions curated by the present director, Rajeev Lochan, pursued the objective of developing a chronological interpretation of the history of Indian art under the influence of western artists and practices.

In this dissertation, I analyse and compare their curatorial enterprises and discuss the question of the role of the curator within the museum in post Independent India.

Lastly throughout this dissertation I will repeatedly emphasise the questions on the relationship between the artist, the institution and curator. When and how takes collective memory place and is the individual reaction produced or compounded by the reaction of the entire audience? When and how was the role of the curator introduced? Who defined concepts and terminologies? Who determined the canon and therefore *the* history of exhibitions and in what ways?

Rationale and Intervention

The National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, established only seven years after India became independent, holds the largest collection of modern Indian art. However, in recent history it displayed only a small percentage and rarely extended their collection of contemporary art in the last years. Yet, it remains the most important place where the history of modern Indian art is told. The two museums in Mumbai and Bangalore are satellite museums of the NGMA in New Delhi. My research focussed on the institution in New Delhi, since it has the storage and administrative power over the objects. Nevertheless, some of the exhibitions from Delhi were exhibited in Mumbai and Bangalore as well and whenever this is concerned as being part of my research I will speak about it.

I will trace back the history of the museum, under which standpoint it was founded and then look the process of how the collection grew.

I will talk about early attempts through the history of the collection and institution of showing the collection to the public and then focus on Geeta Kapur's exhibition *Hundred Years* from 1994. Geeta Kapur's curatorial attempt brought up a controversy

among artists and critics in Delhi. I will critically reflect upon the controversy and the questions that were introduced through the same, such as the authority of the curator and curatorial decisions in terms of inclusion and exclusion.

I will then examine the subsequent exhibitions in the following decade under Rajeev Lochan's Directorship, in order to see how the museum reacted to the controversy and the alternative solutions suggested to narrate the history of modern art.

Moreover, my personal interest in the research lies in the museum as a place for knowledge transfer and for public memory. As a state museum, the NGMA plays a major role in visualising the country's culture and cultural identity, often undertaken through individual viewpoint.

Methodological Approach:

To elaborate the curatorial choices of exhibiting the collections of the NGMA and to show them to the public, a comparison between the exhibitions "Hundred years" of 1994 curated by Geeta Kapur, and the later exhibitions "From the collection of the National Gallery of Modern Art: Dialogues", 2001 and "… in the seeds of time", in 2009 all curated by Rajeev Lochan, give an overview of the past attempts.

At first, the exhibition publications and newspaper article were sighted. "Hundred years" was photo documented by Ram Rahman and the images are available online in the *Asia Art Archive*. Even though these images helped me to some extent to reconstruct the exhibition, the photographs do not cover the entire exhibition.

For the exhibitions of the second period, I based my research on newspaper reviews, catalogue texts and interviews. Subsequently, I conceived interviews with Geeta Kapur and Rajeev Lochan, but also SK Saini, the former keeper of the NGMA from 1972 to

the late 90s, who still remains engaged with the institution by giving drawing classes every Sunday. It became apparent that depending on the relationship to the museum, my interview partner would only allow me a limited insight on the institution. The closer people were to the gallery, the lesser they spoke openly about it.

The research in various archives in Delhi was very fruitful. The National Archives and Archaeological Service of India Archive provides access to rare documents until the 1960s, such as letters between the Ministry and the first director of the NGMA, Hermann Goetz, which contain information about the establishment of the museum and its structure. The Lalit Kala Akademi Library and the library and documentation center at the NGMA host a collection of rare catalogues and magazines, but still I could not find all required catalogues. For *Signposts of the times*, curated by Rajeev Lochan in 2004 there was no catalogue available. The ArtAsiaArchive was helpful in terms of press clippings on the controversy of the exhibition Geeta Kapur curated in 1994 and several other lectures scripts of Geeta Kapur, as part of *Another Life: The Digitised Personal Archive of Geeta Kapur and Vivan Sundaram,* which is an excellent record of events of India's art scene over the last 50 years.

Regarding my research concerning the inner life of the NGMA, its lists of artworks for exhibitions and records that talk additions to the collection, it was very difficult to get access. The gallery has handwritten registers, where entries are made, when an artwork got added to the collection, when it was on display or on loan. These travel accounts of works, I had urged to have access to, and even with the indefatigable support and recommendation of my supervisor, access could not been provided, even though access was guaranteed before actively starting this research project.

Furthermore I often noticed, that scholars and museums associates are not comfortable in speaking about the institution. During my interviews I was often exhorted to not reproduce the information I was given. Others I had requested for an

interview, had said from the beginning, that they would not like to talk about the institution at all or gave very biased picture of the institution. Often I came across gossip, private as well as institutional gossip, which offers points of further engagement for future research perhaps.

The theoretical framework I will base my research on deals with the institution of the museum and its function in presenting art to the public and simultaneously with the museums archive, the hidden space that stores the works for future exhibitions or research.

In the recent history of art exhibitions, especially since 1945, since documentation and biennales are established arenas for exhibitions concepts, they have been under massive changes. There has also been a discourse on this topic, whether about the visual space of the room, discussed by Brian O' Doherty in "Inside the White cube" or curatorial concepts. From mainly history or genre focused exhibitions, art history in exhibitions was no longer told only in a chronological manner but more formalist concerns driven and through a new generation of "exhibition makers", such as Harald Szeemann and Rudi Fuchs among many others. The exhibition was thought through in a new way and through which even the institution that hosted the exhibitions was seen in a new light. The term 'archive' is widely used in contemporary cross-disciplinary discourse and covers a wide range of consignations; such as books, letters and art among many others. With *The Archaeology of Knowledge*[1] published in 1969, Michel Foucault was the first theorist who wrote about the archive. Foucault's archive is not a physical space, and differs from the conventional definition of an archive. His

[1] Foucault, Michel: *The Archaeology of Knowledge,* Pantheon Books, New York, 1969.
[2] Derrida, Jacques, and Eric Prenowitz: *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, p. 2.

description of the archive is both, the "system of utterability" and the "law of what can be said". The archive does not reproduce but actually produces meaning and it is an instrument of power and authority, which in many ways can be disposed on museums as well, as I will point out below. As a centre of production of meaning, Foucault's theory on the archive claims that the storage, organization, and redistribution of information are never passive or innocent; they always inform political and historical discourse.

If Foucault removed the archive from its physical space and theoretical framework, Jacques Derrida drew his arguments upon psychoanalysis and Freud's last house which became an archive and a museum. He describes "archive fever" or *mal d'archive* in French (which also means "in need of archives") in a rather poetical manner: "It is to burn with a passion. It is never to rest, interminably, from searching for the archive, even if there's too much of it, right where something in it archives itself" (Derrida, 1996, p. 91). According to Derrida, we not only need archives, we burn for them. Jacques Derrida talks in the Introduction to *Archive Fever. A Freudian Impression*[2] about the localisation of the archive. According to him, an archive is a place that shelters memory. Archives – both national and individual – are memory factories, and memory holds meaning, which seems to be the main concern of theorists since the 1990s.

For both Foucault and Derrida the archive can't be seen as a passive repository. In fact, according to their theory, it shapes and controls the way history is read, which in turn shapes our political reality. The archive has become symbolic for the ways in which we construct and organize our histories- officially, collectively, and personally. It has also become a site of contestation, a theoretical space within which we can challenge the notion of historical positivism and the power structures created in

[2] Derrida, Jacques, and Eric Prenowitz: *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, p. 2.

archivization; as Marlene Manoff has noted in her publication "Theories of the Archive from Across the Disciplines" in 2004.

Power and memory are two tropes that dominate the discussion surrounding contemporary archives. One instance of this kind of work is that of literary theorist David Greetham[3], who has looked at the archive in terms of loss/gap/garbage. In his exploration of the "poetics of archival exclusion" he argues that archives do not tell us the truth about our histories or ourselves; they rather construct idealized images of our supposed collective history.

If exhibitions are the sites where the artworks from the collection meet their publics, in the context of postcolonial India we notice a general absence of systematic public collections and only very few academic art history departments, exhibitions are more than just sites of display and interaction. Curated exhibitions are driven by institutional demands, and art writing accompanying them, have become the primary sites of art historical construction.

In the recent past there has been an increasing interest in exhibition history as a field of research. The London based research and publishing organisation *Afterall*, founded in 1998, published a series of critical analysis of contemporary art exhibitions starting in 2010, called *Exhibition Histories*. It was launched in collaboration with the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna, the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven and with support from Mudam, Luxembourg. *Exhibition Histories* is currently published in association with the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College. Central Saint Martins in London together with Afterall, offer a postgraduate course that examines the history of contemporary art through key developments in the exhibition form.

[3] Greetham, David: 'Who's In, Who's Out: The Cultural Politics of Archival Exclusion', *Studies in the Literary Imagination,* 32, 1 (Spring 1999), pp. 1–28.

In India, not institutionalised but a number of researchers have conducted projects in the past that dealt with exhibition history. Vidya Shivadas', who's research initially started with *Mapping the Field of Art Criticism in India, Post Independence* under a research grantee of Art Asia Archive, 2009 worked extensively on the NGMA and Lalit Kala Akademi exhibitions since Independence. Shivadas's researched helped me immensely to formulate my interest, which is more focussed on the history of the collection, and looks at exhibitions in the more recent times of the NGMA, from when on the exhibitions were based on curatorial ideas. Bombay based art writer Nancy Adajania has worked on the Triennals in India examined them in terms of internationalism.

But where does the interest in exhibition histories come from and what can we extract from it? Bruce Altshuler states[4] that the interest in exhibition histories might have evolved through the interest of the so called 'new' art history in context-specific and socio-historical approaches. One the one hand this refers to the foundation of new biennials and institutions for the exhibition of contemporary art, the expansion of the art market with its countless gallery shows and art fairs, as well as the increasing temporalization of the museum. A critical or artistic engagement with the collection has become almost a necessity for any museum. While these approaches are always based on the permanent collection, the forms of presentation increasingly resemble those of the temporary exhibition, replacing the supposedly rigid, authoritative and atemporal collection display.

In the case of the NGMA we look at a history of inclusion and exclusion, starting from the collection, but often reflected in the exhibitions. This shall be my main concern in this dissertation.

[4] Altshuler, Bruce: 'A Canon of Exhibitions', in: *Manifesta Journal* No. 11, 2010/2012, p. 5.

If national museums play a role in forming national identity, through interpreting history and culture and in promoting national agendas, which place finds Modernism in the history loaded repository of a gallery of modern art? Andreas Huyssen[5] has advanced the

term "modernism at large," by which he refers to "cross-national cultural forms that emerge from the negotiation of the modern with the indigenous, the colonial, and the postcolonial in the 'non-Western' world."

Over the last sixty years, modern Indian art has produced its own narrative, examined by scholars like Partha Mitter, in his publications *Much maligned monsters*, 1977, *Art and Nationalism in colonial India*, 1994 and *The triumph of modernism*, 2007. Tapati Guha-Thakurta *The Making of a New "Indian" Art*, 1995. All these publications serve as an analysis of the transformations that occurred in the art and aesthetic values of Bengal during the colonial and nationalist periods. Geeta Kapur's *When was modernism,* 2000 does not merely focus on the beginnings of modernism but examines the engagement in Indian art with the 'traditional', the 'modern', and the dialogue between nationalism and internationalism, and globalization.

The publications and exhibitions are strongly connected. But to reflect upon the exhibitions, I needed to find out first, how the museum, establish its collection and what can be found in the repository. Looking at the different bodies, I would like to ask: Who determines the canon and therefore *the* history of exhibitions and in what ways.

[5] Huyssen, Andreas: 'Geographies of modernism in a globalizing world', in: *Geographies of Modernism Literatures, cultures, spaces*, edited by Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker, Routledge, New York, 2005, p. 7.

Chapter One

Institutional History

The Collection of the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi

The establishment of a gallery for modern art

The need for a National Gallery of Indian art was first suggested by the artist led All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society (AIFACS) for the Capital Complex in 1930 which was repeatedly rejected by the government.[6] Already in the 1930s the two brothers, and founding members of AIFACS, Barada and Sarada Ukil organized a series of exhibitions of Indian art abroad. Their proposal for a museum contained detailed plans of galleries to represent art from different regions and princely states in India. Additionally, they were trying to set up a public fund to raise money for this project, as well as gathering support from the princely rulers, wanting to make them patrons. In 1946 AIFACS organized the *First International Contemporary Art Exhibition* in Delhi, but could not keep up with their premises. The Bombay based *All India Association of Fine Arts,* and the *All India Academy of Fine Arts, Calcutta* became strong opposing agencies and started fighting among each other for setting up an institution for Indian art.[7]

At a conference in Calcutta in 1949, a Central Advisory Board was formed in order to set up a National Gallery, as well as the National Museum and three Akademis under the National Commission for Cooperation with UNESCO. This was again mentioned in the first volume of *Roopa-Lekha*, New Delhi's first art journal published by the AIFACS, where it says: "The chief objectives of the Society are: (i) to foster knowledge

[6] Letter from Hoare to Willingdon, 8th December 1933, Willingdon Papers, European Manuscripts, E240/3, National Archives.

[7] Shivadas, Vidya: 'Museumising modern art, National Gallery of Modern Art: The Indian case-study', in: *No touching, no spitting, no praying, The Museum in South Asia,* edited by Saloni Mathur and Kavita Singh, Routledge, 2014, p. 149 – 170.

and love of art among the people of India and ultimately, (ii) to establish a National Art Gallery, and (iii) an Academy of Indian Art in the Imperial city of New Delhi."[8]

In 1947, the Central Government had founded an art purchase committee to manage an art purchase fund in order to collect objects for the National Museum. The institution was meant to compile pre-modern art, from 2500 BC to 1857, a collection of the nation's cultural heritage. This can be understood as the young government's vision of a nation untouched by the colonizers to strengthen the new national identity, through the idea that the nation had already existed in a hoary past.

Significant for the late 1940s and 1950s was, that the cultural policy of the Indian government had a strong interest in the conservation of archeological sites and material and crafts, for which purpose colonial institutions such as Archeological Survey of India and the Anthropological Survey of India were reinforced. At that time this was not undertaken for contemporary art until Prime Minister Nehru's support came in.

The necessity for an institution, or moreover a facility for the storage of art works, appeared even more urgent in 1948: Dr. Victor Egan, Amrita Sher-Gil's Hungarian husband was now offering 33 paintings by the artist to the Ministry of Education, which was then in charge of cultural institutions. Amrita Sher-Gil had passed away in 1941. In return he requested a payment of Rs. 50.000 and the permission to practice medicine in India.[9] Amrita Sher-Gil's paintings did not fit into the collection of the National Museum and though the government was eager on collecting national art treasures, it had no provision for the purchase of modern art. Therefore a new committee and a new budget needed to be allocated. But the issue was an urgent

[8] Author Unknown: 'An Appeal for Public Support for a National Art Gallery', *Roopa-Lekha*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1940), p. 2.

[9] Note by Ashfaque Husain, Secretary, Ministry of Education dated 23/4/48, Purchase of Paintings of Amrita Sher-Gil, 27A/19/48, ASI RR.

matter and the Ministry of Education requested the Ministry of Finance to provide them with the needful to execute Dr. Egan's monetary request. The Ministry of Finance, however, refused, based on a directive of the Prime Minister to "avoid all unnecessary expenditure".[10] At the same time, knowing about Dr. Egan's offer to the government, Amrita's father Umrao Singh also offered a large body of work to the government, under the precondition, that the government also acquires the husband's collection: "They serve along with her early works to show the development of her art and talent… But if her later works are not actually acquired by our nation, then what good will the old style work, which she herself did not value, be."[11]

Nehru himself took up the issue, together with the first Minister of Education Maulana Kalam Azad, and promised Dr. Egan the requested amount of Rs. 50.000. The money was taken from the National Museum funds and reduced its budget in half for the year. Dr. Egan was allowed to build a hospital in Uttar Pradesh and Amrita Sher-Gil's inheritance was the first step towards a state-collection of modern art.

The paintings were stored at the Central Asian Antiquities Museum and shown occasionally at UNESCO meetings at the Parliament House.

In 1953, in addition to Amrita's works, a collection of 66 paintings, sketches and drawings by Abanindranath Tagore were offered to the government for purchase. Pratima Tagore, Abanindranath's sister living in Santiniketan, offered her collection of 66 works of her brother to the government. The committee's bid of 15000rs was rejected by her, whereupon Surendranath Kar, director of Kala Bhavana at Visva-Bharati adviced her to sell each painting for the cost of 500rs (33000rs for 66 works). The case was picked up by Dr BC Roy, Chief Minister of West Bengal, who appealed

[10] Note from Ram Gopal, Ministry of Finance to Janak Kumari Asghar, Secretary of the Ministry of Education dated 20/9/48, Purchase of Paintings of Amrita Sher-Gil, 27A/19/48, ASI RR.

[11] Shivadas, 2014, pp. 149 – 170.

to Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad to purchase the paintings in order to avoid them getting sold out of the country or getting dispersed in private collections. Dr Roy suggested a round sum of 30000rs and offered to make an allowance of 10000rs on behalf of the West Bengal Government to which Maulana Azad agreed and provided the remaining sum of 20000rs. Among the 161 paintings handed over to National Gallery of Modern Art at the time of its inauguration, Sher-Gil and Tagore's paintings would comprise more than half of the Museum's collection. In contrast, a few representative works only, indicative of their oeuvre and visual preoccupations were in the collection (didn't understand what you mean by this). The purchase of Sher-Gil's paintings was the beginning of systematic acquisitions of modern art works for the National Gallery of Modern Art. When categorized, organized, and framed by the Museum's authoritative narratives, this body of works would become central to the formation of a canon of modern Indian art. For example, while the 33 paintings that the government acquired from Egan, along with another 33 paintings donated by Sher-Gil's father, formed an important part of the Museum's collection, Sher-Gil's prominence within the Museum's core collection was challenged by precisely the same number of works by the Bengal School artist Abanindranath Tagore, acquired between 1950 and 1954. Furthermore, Abdur Rahman Chughtai was represented by ten paintings while Jamini Roy and Nandalal Bose by eight paintings each.[12]

The National Gallery of Modern Art finally opened its doors at the Jaipur House, the former winter residence of the Maharaja of Jaipur, on 29 March 1954, under the administration of the government of India and under a direct mandate by the

[12] List of paintings of National Art Gallery, Archeological Survey of India Archive: Section/25/7/53.

government. The choice to establish the Gallery in an already existing building might have been made on the grounds of financial issues.

At its inaugural ceremony Dr. Humayun Kabir, at that time the secretary of the Ministry of Education, stated that Delhi could not establish its claim as a metropolitan city till it had a National Gallery of Modern Art, a museum, a theatre and a library.[13] Two weeks earlier the Sahitya Akademi was founded, "India's National Academy of Letters", an institution to promote Indian literature and to set grounds for a literary dialogue, supporting regional languages as well as English. Later in the same year, on 5 August, the twin institution, the Lalit Kala Akademi was founded to encourage practices in the visual arts through national and international exhibitions, archival projects and publications.

In these years, many more institutions were founded to build up a basis for research and preservation. In the 1950s and 1960s a large number of institutes and initiatives were set up, such as the National School of Drama, the Institute of Advanced Studies in Shimla, the National Institute of Design and the Jawaharlal Nehru fellowship program. These institutions were meant to mark a break with the postcolonial consciousness and to lead the new Nation state into a new direction.

A House for the National Gallery

The Jaipur House was designed by Francis Bloomfield and built in 1936 as a summer residence for the Maharaja of Jaipur. Its floor plan resembles the shape of a butterfly and it has a dome in the centre. The architectural idea is based on Lutyen's concept of the Central Hexagon, and together with other princely potentates like Bikaner and Hyderabad House it revolved around the India Gate.

[13] Lochan, Rajeev: 'Introduction', in: *Treasures of the Collection of the National Gallery of Modern Art,* Unpublished essay, 2013.

The Gallery opened with an exhibition of Indian sculptures, laid out in five rooms of the Jaipur house showing 65 works of 31 artists, like Debi Prasad Roy Chowdhury, Ram Kinkar Baij, Sankho Chaudhuri, Dhanraj Bhagat and Sarbari Roy Chowdhury. This exhibition had been curated by Hermann Goetz and remained on view, even after he left the institution.

The initial objective of the museum was the acquisition and preservation of art works from 1850 onwards, mainly paintings, graphics and sculptures and later also photographs.

The early years of the NGMA – Hermann Goetz

Hermann Goetz, a scholar and museologist from Germany became the museum's first director in 1954.

During the First World War he had been interested in the Ottoman Turks and later he widened his interests to Iran and subsequently India in the age of the Mogul Emperors. He researched Indian miniature paintings in terms of ethnographical questions, e.g. the customs usages of the mogul empire. In the 1930s he was the curator at the Kern Institute for Archaeology and Indian History at Leiden University. He received a grant to work in India, were he interned during the second world war. Initially his task was to explore the history and art of the Punjab Hill States and the Indian Himalayas. The outcome was a comprehensive study on "The Early Wooden Temples of Chamba", in addition to numerous essays on miniature paintings.[14] In 1940 the Maharaja of Baroda appointed Goetz as the Director of the Baroda Museum and Picture Gallery, following the renowned German art historian Ernest Cohn-Wiener, who had been in charge of the Picture Gallery from 1934 until 1939, when he wished to leave India again for health reasons. In Baroda he organised the picture

[14] Jettmar, Karl: 'Hermann Goetz', in: *East and West*, Nr. 26, 1976, p. 540.

gallery with a rich collection of European Paintings. He added also a collection of Indian art as well as western artists working in India. In 1943 he founded the Bulletin of the Baroda Museum and joined the University of Baroda as Honorary Professor.[15]

In 1954 he came to Delhi in order to become the first curator of the NGMA. The initial attempt in building up a collection was rather in quantity and not in quality, the institution was a storehouse for entire collections of artist's works, which had been gifted to the gallery. Hermann Goetz came in to change that and to built up a systematic collection, with works representing an artist's oeuvre.

He asked the Ministry of Education in a letter dated on the 18th March 1953 to change the procedure of asking the purchase committee of the National Art Treasures Fund for allowance of purchasing a work. This procedure was too slow and Hermann Goetz complained in his letter that he had missed out on opportunities of buying pieces. His suggested solution was to have more autonomy to be able to buy works up to 1000rs on his own responsibility within a fixed budget.[16]

In a second letter dated in November 1953 he further comments on his first letter and explains why he is unable to execute purchases. The committee was based on members from different parts of India, who had to appear physically in Delhi to make decisions, whether an artwork should be purchased or not. Therefore Goetz had to gather a large number of offers before the members arranged a meeting. This lead to the fact that only works offered by speculators could be shown to the committee:

> "When I select a picture or other work in exhibitions, the artists agree only under the condition that I may have it for offer to the Purchase Committee, in case nobody else buys it on the spot. But the really good and in this case also

[15]Jain-Neubauer, Jutta: 'Did you know that... one of the pioneers of the museum movement in India was a German?' for the German Embassy, article online: http://www.india.diplo.de/Vertretung/indien/en/13__Culture/Bilaterals/Did__you__know/Hermann__Goetz.html

[16] Letter from Hermann Goetz to the Ministry of Education, National Archives, File: D 7833/53-H.2.

> still comparatively cheap works are almost always sold to some embassy or private person before the exhibition is over." [17]

and secondly:

> "When I request artists, even well-known ones, to make offers, I again obtain, in most cases, just those works which the artist could not sell, i.e. generally his less successful creations. And from private side only very few offers worth consideration have hitherto been received. How under these circumstances we shall be able soon to build up a National Art Gallery, I cannot see." [18]

Goetz letters reflect the difficulties he had to build up the collection and how being under a direct mandate of the government slowed down the process. His idea to solve the problem summons his understanding of the situation and suggests to be allowed to buy pieces worth up to 1000rs on his own responsibility. Furthermore he requests the government to set up a small purchase committee in Delhi consisting of local members that can react ad hoc and decide over more expensive works. He suggests similar committees for Calcutta, Bombay, Madras and eventually also Lucknow, Hyderabad and Bangalore. Once a year a general meeting of all committees should be called in. He names a number of people for the committee.[19]

In return the deputy of the Secretary Mr. Vikram Singh answers on the 24th December 1953, that he had never received any proposal to purchase a work. Yet he inquires with other leading heads of the country whether he should give Goetz the permission and all of them agree, whereupon in April Goetz receives a letter about the same.

In the following letters the requested people all agree to being members of the local committees but it is unclear who decided on the selection. Presumably it had been Vikram Singh, who had decided on this.

Meanwhile the local committees must have gotten together and already suggested a number of works, not to Hermann Goetz's satisfaction, since he writes in a letter to

[17] Letter from Hermann Goetz to the Ministry of Education, National Archives, File 8356/53-H.2.
[18] Ibidem.
[19] Ibidem.

Vikram Singh on the 4th June 1954, that he is "not impressed at all by the selection" and that he doubts "whether most of the pictures are suitable for exhibition."[20] Surprisingly Goetz reports that he is not a member of the local committee and that he does not even know the names of the members of the local committees. It seems that the ministry of education compromised their decision by excluding Goetz of purchase decisions. Therefore the autonomy Goetz had fought for, was entirely taken from him and given to a committee he could not engage with.

His question about the members of the committee gets answered only through the state of Hyderabad, sending a list with the names of all members of the local committee in Hyderabad. The missing answers might be lost or Hermann Goetz never received such answers.

Through the acquisition files it unfortunately becomes obvious, that state politics and slow bureaucracy slowed down the process and attempt of Hermann Goetz to build up a collection for the gallery.

Furthermore here the problems the gallery is still facing today unravelled for the first time: Being under a direct mandate of the government, doesn't allow the director of the gallery to make decisions, purchase work and even curatorial decisions are coloured by state interventions.

Nevertheless during these years, the collection of the gallery grew, again through artist's relatives, who offered entire bodies of work to the institution. In 1955, about 102 paintings by Rabindrananth Tagore were given to the gallery by his son. In return he requested Rs. 50.000, which were again taken from the National Museum's fund.

In the early years of the gallery exhibitions that were held were based on this collection. The institution was therefore built up upon cultural capital, rather than monetary capital, being completely dependant on donors who might have been

[20] Letter from Hermann Goetz to Vikram Singh, National Archives, FS-60/54-H.2.

attracted by seeing their works, or close relatives works in upcoming national institutions. In the following chapter I will draw attention to the different motives of donors to give works to the NGMA as well as searching for a point of change, from when onwards the project of building up a collection was based on conscious decisions, rather than chance.

Mukul Dey, 1956-1958

Mukul Dey, who had been a student of Santiniketan and was a practising artist, became the director of the NGMA after Herman Goetz left to go back to Germany in 1956 due to a tropical illness. Dey stayed in this position until 1958.

Before coming to Delhi, Dey had left Santiniketan to study under Abanindranath Tagore, who initiated the young artist to work in etching. Dey moved on to Chicago and London to expand his practice. After returning to India in 1928 he was in the position of the Indian Principal of the Government School of Art, Calcutta, until he became "the next victim of internecine struggle at the school, being forced to take early retirement."[21] Dey was committed to imposing an Indian identity on the then British-controlled art establishment, he quickly drove teachers too closely linked with Company School painting out of the institution. As a supporter of Jamini Roy he had organised the artists first major exhibition in 1929.[22]

The Bengal School artists, neglected by Hermann Goetz and hidden in the storerooms of the NGMA attracted Dey's attention. During Mukul Dey's tenure, he rediscovered the paintings which were in a bad condition: "lying on the bare floor covered with dust and dirt," bearing "marks of dirty footprints."[23] He facilitated the Bengal School

[21] Mitter, Partha: *The Triumph of Modernism*, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 141.
[22] ibidem, p. 110.
[23] National Gallery of Modern Art Progress Report, Mukul Dey Archive, F27/53/NGMA.

Room and the paintings were put on display. This arrangement remained for several years, the room being mentioned in the Guide to the NGMA, which got published in 1967.

Other than that Mukul Dey did not leave any residue behind, neither as a director or a collector in his relatively short tenure.

The collection of NGMA has close to 390 artworks of Mukul Dey, which include drawings, sketches and prints acquired by the museum from the artist's family and from other private art collections.

From this point in time onwards my research is reflecting upon the Annual Reports and its information on the budget and acquisitions of the NGMA. In 1957 the NGMA is mentioned in the Annual Reports for the first time, uncovering it's budget. It seems that the budget in 1957 had not been spent and was therefore included in the budget of 1958.[24] I assume that Dey had not acquired any art works, but worked with the collection that was already with the NGMA. Unclear is also in which year his own works enters the collection, but if it was in these years he obviously did not pay himself out of the museum's budget.

W.G. Archer's influence on the collection

After facilitating grounds for discourse in setting up an art institution, first publications in the form of journals on modern Indian art were published, such as *Roopa Lekha* and later *Lalit Kala Contemporary* as well as first monographs' on Indian Modern Art.

Therefore it is necessary to look at the influence on the development of the collection of the NGMA from outside the institution. Here foremost to mention for the early years is W.G. Archer. Archer had spent a considerable amount of time in India with the Indian Civil Service (ICS). In 1931, he was posted to rural Bihar where he first

[24] Annual Report, Ministry of Education, CSL, 1958-1959.

encountered Indian religious sculpture. Archer interpreted these as intimate connections between Indian art and modern European art - a relationship that structured his argument in *India and Modern Art* (1959). He suggests a lineage of Indian Art based on three Indian artists, who had formed the basis of the collection of the gallery: Rabindranath Tagore, Amrita Sher-Gil, and Jamini Roy, positioning them in the global modern by drawing parallels between Tagore and Paul Klee, Amrita Sher-Gil's work and Gaugin's and Jamini Roy echoing folk paintings of Bengal was compared to Picasso's interest in African Masks.

W.G. Archer influenced the National Gallery of Modern, as the advisor of the Lalit Kala Akademi. Earlier he had been the keeper of the Victoria &Albert's Indian section from 1949 to 1951.

Apart from Avinash Chandra, other artists recommended by Archer for inclusion in the National Gallery of Modern Art included Sailoz Mukherjee, Gopal Ghosh, Shiavax Chavda, M. F. Husain, Dhanraj Bhagat and KK Hebbar.[25]

Simultaneously Lalit Kala Akademi started publishing artists' biographies and from 1962 onwards published the art journal *Lalit Kala Contemporary*. The first volume of the journal dealt with the Bengal School Artists: Abanindranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose, Asit Haldar Khitindranath Mazumdar, and the landscape paintings of Gaganendranath Tagore, which had become increasingly popular through Dey's intervention of the Bengal Room and W.G. Archer's publications. It is hard to tell from today's perspective who influenced whom at this point. But I assume that Archer played a major role in setting grounds for the Bengal School artists and that the Lalit Kala Akademi Contemporary was highly influenced by his interest.

[25] W. G. Archer in a letter to Ashfaque Husain, National Archives, F3-112/54-A2/1954.

Pradosh Dasgupta, 1958-1970

In 1958, when Indira Sundaram complained in a letter to Jawaharlal Nehru, that more than ¾ of the Sher-Gil collection was locked away and that the storage was in a bad condition, the difficulties of having a state governed gallery on the basis of a collection of mainly only one single artist came up. Obviously Indira Sundaram understood the gallery as a showplace for Amrita's work. The then director Pradosh Dasgupta countered, that in no other museum one single artists has all his or her artworks on display and that only a few Amrita Sher-Gil could be shown, because only one room of the Gallery had air conditioning. Oil painting generally do need be kept in an air conditioned environment, which would have applied on other artists too. But In Amrita Sher-Gil's case the conservation problem seems to be complex. In an interview Sihare stated that "she also painted in such quick succession that before the underlayer had chance to dry she applied subsequent layers."[26] The problem was solved by extending the gallery's exhibition halls by two more air conditioned rooms and 50 of Amrita's works exhibited as part of the permanent collection.[27]

Pradosh Dasgupta, was a Bengali sculptor who had been trained at the Government Art School in Lucknow. In the 1930s, he was awarded a fellowship by Calcutta University that enabled him to study art at the Royal Academy of Arts in London, and the progressive Academie de la Grande Chaumiere, Paris. In 1943, Subho Tagore and Rathin Maitra formed the Calcutta Group, to which both Dasgupta and Nirode Mazumdar were inducted later and became members. Dasgupta joined the Government College of Art and Craft, Calcutta, as professor of sculpture, were he remained until 1958 when he moved to Delhi and became the director of the NGMA.

[26] Kaul, Anita: 'No question of any harm', *India Today*, 31 October 2013.
[27] 'More of Amrita Sher-Gil', reported in: *The Statesman*, 30 July 1959.

During his time, the gallery was allotted a more generous budget by the government and the first purchase committee of the gallery was set in place in 1963. In the same year, according to the Annual Report, 231 art objects were acquired and accessioned. Among those were also 43 art objects, including those of Gaganendranath Tagore and Mukul Dey, which were transferred from the National Museum to the NGMA. Unfortunately the report raises questions about how reliable it is as a source:

> "Six watercolour paintings by Hardie Martin were presented through the then Union Minister of Scientific Research and Cultural Affairs. Two oil paintings by Altamirano, Arturo Pacheco were presented to the Gallery from the artists' collection, and 16 lithographs of the prominent Bulgarian masters were also presented by the Bulgarian Minister, His Excellency Mr. Gancho Ganev."[28]

Then the report says:

> "The remaining objects were purchased through the usual Art Purchase Committee meetings." and "Besides, these, the Gallery received 167 reproductions of the works of the great Western modern masters that constitute a remarkable addition to the newly started Western Section. In this connection mention may also be made of the proposed section of Indian Folk Art for which a few paintings have been purchased."[29]

Calculating all the figures together we count about -3 works, that have not been gifted or transferred from other museums to the gallery, but purchased through the committee.

In the Annual Reports of the Ministry of Education of the year 1965-1966, the budget of the NGMA is not mentioned, but instead the achievements of the museum are noted. According to the records, a western section was established, in order "to acquaint the public with the art trends in the Western countries." The new western section included the works of artists like the British-American sculptor Jacob Epstein, British painter Lawrance Alma Tadema Meck, Serbian painter Peter Lubarda and Bulgarian Painter Boris Georgiev.

[28] Annual Report, Ministry of Education, CSL, 1962-1963.
[29] Ibidem.

Furthermore a restoration-cum-chemical laboratory was built and works of Raja Ravi Varma, Amrita Sher-Gil and others were restored and the art purchase committee of the NGMA has been reconstituted during 1965-66.[30]

The first guidebook of the museum was published in 1967 for the exhibition that was on view at that time, showing works "starting with the Company Period and ending in Bengal School" [31] and contemporary works on the ground floor, among them Rabindranath Tagore, Amrita Sher-Gil, Jamini Roy and Binode Behari Mukherjee in a reversed way.

Criticism came from outside the museum. The art critic Richard Bartholomew wrote that the most important positions in art institutions are led by Bengalis, who are biased in their decisions: "The curator of the National Gallery of Modern Art, Mr Pradosh Das Gupta is also a Bengali. For better or worse, there is the influence of Bengalis at the top official places in Indian Art today."[32]

During the same year, only two art objects were acquired and accessioned: *All is Always Now* by Tyeb Mehta and *Fatehpur Sikri* by Fatima Ahmed.[33]

Also during his tenure, in 1967, the exhibition *Trends in American Painting*, travelled to India, organized by MoMA, New York. The same year Clement Greenberg visited India, and stated that there is "lack of exportable art in India", a statement he became famous for and often criticised.

Until the end of Pradosh Dasgupta's tenure it seems that the gallery was merely collecting the works that were offered to it or the government. It happened that

[30] Annual Report, Ministry of Education, CSL, 1965-1966.
[31] Author Unknown: *A Guide to the National Gallery*, National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, 1967, page 14.
[32] Bartolomew, Richard: 'Art in the Shadow of official Patronage', in: *The Art Critic, An insider's account of the birth of Modern Indian Art*, edited by: Pablo Bartholomew, Bart, Noida, 2012, p. 254.
[33] Annual Report, Ministry of Education, CSL, 1966-1967.

among those works were gifts by relatives of artists or by artists themselves. Often these donations came from Kolkata and therefore the gallery had a growing collection of the Bengal School.

BB Lal, 1970-1971

Braj Basi Lal is an Indian archaeologist, who became the director of the NGMA as a stop-gap arrangement. Simultaneously he was the Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India from 1968 to 1972, and has served as Director of the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla.

In the year 1971, the gallery acquired 66 art objects, of which 23 were prints gifted by the New York based artist Bimal Bannerjee, who was originally from Kolkata. The artist Amar Nath Sehgal, had a retrospective of his graphics and drawings which remained on display until Dr. Sihare took over the directorship in 1972.[34]

Dr LP Sihare, 1971-1984 - Questions of abstraction and identity

Dr Sihare was the first director to hold an art criticism and museology degree from the Faculty of Fine Arts, M.S. University Baroda, and a PhD from the Institute of Fine Arts New York. He had written his doctoral thesis on *The oriental influences on Wassily Kandinsky and Piet Mondrian 1909-17*. His interest in classical modernism from early 20th century Europe should be imposed on Indian Modernism soon.

He returned from the USA to India in 1969 to take up a post in the Birla Academy of Fine Arts in Calcutta as the director-general. After two years he resigned from his job to take up the position as the director of the NGMA.

[34] Annual Report, Ministry of Education, CSL, 1971-1972.

He was a director "with serious commitment to chronology, lineage, precedence"[35] as Geeta Kapur described him, who had studied in New York at the same time. In the early 70's Sihare arranged exhibition rooms of Indian Schools and works according to their resemblance to European genres, such as surrealism, expressionism, and cubism showing Indian Modernist that could be read under these movements, according to his perspective. Furthermore he published handbooks like "Selected Surrealist Paintings from NGMA Collection", "Selected Expressionist Paintings from NGMA Collection", "Rabindranath Tagore as the pioneer of expressionism" and "Surrealism in India" and "Gagendranath Tagore as the first Indian cubist".

It also has to be noted that he organised special exhibitions and weekly film screenings, as well as the first print and photography exhibitions in the late 70's that was showing original works. From the annual report it can be understood that during his directorship an educational program was started, for students and teachers. On average the gallery had about 4000 students yearly to join these programs, which included guided tours through the gallery and slideshows of artworks.

The first exhibition he curated at the NGMA was the first retrospective exhibition of a living artist, Sankho Chaudhuri in 1771.

Also to mention here is the first digital art exhibition on the subcontinent which was titled 'Computer Art' held from 27th March to 21st April in 1972. The event was a collaboration between Max Mueller Bhavan and IBM India. It was one among the first of such similar events held around the world in between 1967 and 1974. The catalogue offers three essays: 'Computer Art: Possibilities and Limitations' by Dr. Laxmi P. Sihare , 'Computer Art' by Herbert W. Franke and 'the Computer in the service of Art' by SL Kapoor (then a system engineer at IBM-India). The exhibition

[35] Kapur, Geeta: 'An Indian Critic and the Bard's Puzzle', in: *The Art Critic, An insider's account of the birth of Modern Indian Art*, edited by: Pablo Bartholomew, Bart, Noida, 2012, p. 17.

showed about 157 works of international artists and their encounter with the digital. Considering the fact that the first exhibitions that dealt with use of the digital in art happened only a few years before, in 1965 the exhibition *Generative Computergrafik* at the Technische Hochschule in Stuttgart, Germany and *Computer-Generated Pictures*, April 1965, at the Howard Wise Gallery in New York.

Looking at the structure of the institution at that time, Sihare explains in an interview with Anita Kaul in India Today, 15 October 1981, how the purchase committee was functioning. The committee was

> "constituted by the Ministry of Education for a period of two to three years. After their term is over, new members are selected. Our basic aim is to have eminent artists, sculptors and art critics in the committee, besides the director. Our purchases follow an open rule policy system, where we advertise in the newspaper for anyone who wants to sell his works. On an average we receive about 1,500 to 2,000 works a year, out of which we select the ones we want."[36]

Furthermore he explains, how uncomplicated and successful his work under the government at the museum had been, and that he had the professional freedom to do whatever he wished to do. About the financial structure, he says, that the museum was given a sum of Rs. 28.5 lakh each year, out of which Rs. 3-4 lakh are used to purchase art works. The rest was used to pay salaries, for restoration and maintenance. On the question what kind of considerations he undertook when the committee is buying works, he said:

> "We are housed in a residential palace which has rooms that have dividing panels. Each room poses a different problem of installation. A large painting cannot be placed where the wall is divided into two by panels. So we have to place two small paintings there instead. It is a matter of keeping the aesthetic value in mind. We always try to show the best works in our exhibition, from the stock of works we possess. We also try to give a whole picture of the country vis-a-vis art in the country as well as the new trends."[37]

[36] Kaul, Anita: 'No question of any harm', *India Today*, 31 October 2013.
[37] Ibidem.

In the same year he initiated major exhibitions at the NGMA, showing international artists such as Paul Klee and Ernst Barlach and in 1983 an exhibition on Rodin's sculptures.

In 1982 the exhibition "Trends in Modern Indian Art", accompanied Indira Gandhi on her trip to America, which was presented at the Hirschhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institute, Washington. "A few years ago such an exhibition would have been impossible because there was nothing of calibre to send. We have not produced any Picassos, Braques, Mattiesses or legers, but what has been produced in the past ten years certainly merits the attention of the international art world."

Sihare was a promoter of Neo Tantric abstraction, and included artists like G.R. Santosh, Biren De and Om Prakash into the collection, artists who had become increasingly popular in the late 60s and 70s. Again publications had worked towards their popularity, as well as Ajit Mookerjee's *Tantra Art* in 1967 and *Tantra Asana* in 1971.[38] His supportive position towards the Neo Tantric artists was a drastic change of course, from imposing western –isms on Indian art to an art movement, that is representative of traditional interpretations of abstraction based on spiritual and transcendental philosophy. Furthermore he exported the Neo Tantrics for exhibitions in the west.

A collection of about 500 of Ram Kinkar Baij works came to the NGMA two years after the artist had died and benefited by its restoration efforts.[39]

In the mid 70s, the gallery acquired a collection of the body of work by the late Jamini Roy. Also in these years, the annual reports talk about 180 works per year entering the collection of the NGMA, about half of them usually gifted by private persons or through embassies. Exhibitions in these years often cover a show of the donor of a

[38] Shivadas, 2014, p. 149 – 170.
[39] Padmanabhan, Chitra: 'Being universal by being local', in: Frontline, Volume 29, Issue 05, March 10-23, 2012.

large body of work and foreign thematic shows, such as German expressionism or British landscape paintings. Publications cover Picasso, Modern French Paintings and the earlier mentioned Guide for the NGMA in 1967.

In the years 1981-1982 it seems the gallery again focuses more on Indian art by organising a special exhibition of Rabindranath Tagore, containing 85 works for sending abroad under the Cultural Exchange Programme. Out of these, 60 works were borrowed from Rabindra Bhavan, Visva Bharati and Santiniketan. Additionally the project of preparing bronze cast of a big monumental sculpture by the late Ramkinkar Baij titled "Santhal Family" displayed at Santiniketan had been initiated, since the gallery had the facilities now.

Again Richard Bartholomew critiqued the institution. He was the Secretary of the Lalit Kala Akademi at that time and pointed out, that the state had been a bad patron, when it comes to inclusion or exclusion:

> "Inclusion in the National Gallery of Modern Art – a measure of the reputation of the artist whose work is included – has followed the same erratic pattern of official patronage. A peep into the Gallery itself will indicate something of the purposeless attitude the State has towards art."[40]

Furthermore he criticised that there is no catalogue for the visitor, paintings are not titled, the lighting is poor and development of Indian art is not shown.

In 1983 the gallery acquired an extensive collection of Nandalal Bose's body of work, including 6744 paintings, drawings and sketchings, which was bought from Professor Bose's son and daughter in law, Bishwarup and Nibedita for a total sum of Rs.7,5 Lakh.

[40] Bartholomew, Richard: 'Criticism and Contemporary Indian Painting ll', in: *The Art Critic, An insider's account of the birth of Modern Indian Art*, edited by: Pablo Bartholomew, Bart, Noida, 2012 , p. 42.

Anis Farooqi, 1985-1994

In 1985 Anis Farooqui took over the directorship of the NGMA, in which position he remained until 1994, when he passed away.

Anis Farooqi had initiated the publication of the catalogue of collections Vol 1, in which 3000 out of the at that time 14.000 works of the repository were documented, with artist's name, acquisition number, title and medium. In the foreword he mentions, that the subsequent volumes will also reproduce about 3000 works each. Unfortunately this task was not followed up and there was no other catalogue published after this first volume of 1989.[41]

Together with GM Sheikh and Geeta Kapur, Anis Farooqui was also part of the curatorial team, at that point in India still called commissioners, in 1989 to put together the exhibition *Birth of Modernity* for Festival of France in India at the NGMA. I will talk about the Festivals of India in chapter two.

In 1994 Geeta Kapur was invited by the acquisition committee to curate an exhibition on Indian Modernity based on those works that were already on display and additional works from the collection that could be taken out of the repository on short notice. The exhibition *Hundred Years. From the Collection of the NGMA* opened in two parts in the Jaipur House and created a controversy among the artists and critics at that time, as well as it raised valid questions on the role of the curator and the institution, and also the status of the NGMA as a government institution. The exhibition and the controversy will be discussed in detail in chapter two of this thesis.

Anjali Sen, 1994-2000

After Farooqui's tragic passing, the position of the director remained vacant for a couple of months until the government decided to promote Anjali Sen, a bureaucrat

[41] *Catalogue of the Collection*, Vol 1, National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, 1989.

who had been in various leadership positions in the Indian Civil Service, as the new director.

During her tenure a series of exhibitions took place, all laid out during the last month of Farooqui's directorship, by the advisory committee as a subsequent follow up on Geeta Kapur's exhibition of 1994, all drawn from the collection of the museum. Among those exhibitions were "Indian Sculptures" and "Delhi Silpi Chakra", curated by Prem Nath Mago. Even though Anjali Sen was a bureaucrat by profession, she undertook the challenge to push through these exhibitions with the department. She knew the process and executed it sufficiently by protocol.

Between 1999 and 2002 the Rasaja Foundation, an institution created in 1984 by the artist Jaya Appasamy, gave a perpetual loan of 1273 works to the gallery. The foundation was a reflection of a philosophy that there should be a museum movement in the private sector. But in the 1990s after Jaya Appasamy died, the board of trustees, among them Sankho Chaudhuri and Rochan Alkazi, had found it difficult to continue with the museum in her home. The works mostly comprised Company Paintings, Kalighat Paintings, Tanjore Painting, Mysore Paintings, and "enhanced the gallery's collection of the early period of modern Indian art when the interface between Britain and India accelerated the process of change in the traditional styles of expression."[42]

In the years 2000-2001 Mukta Nidhi Samnotra and K N Shrivastava, filled the position of the director of the NGMA, but only as stop-gaps. No major accessions or exhibitions took place during their tenure.

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42 Lochan, Rajeev: 'Introduction', in: *Treasures of National Gallery of Modern Art*, unpublished catalogue, 2013.

Rajeev Lochan, since 2001

Artist and former Professor at the Jamia Millia Islmia University in New Delhi, Prof. Rajeev Lochan became the director of the NGMA in 2001 and is holding this position until today.

He had great interest in pulling out works from the collection and to present them to the public: One of his first attempts to do so, was to set up a series of exhibitions called: *From the Collection of the National Gallery of Modern Art*, that was thought as a Bi-annual exhibition. The series started with the exhibition: *Dialogue: Interactions in Indian Art 1850 onwards*, and opened in July 2001 and focused on the "interaction that went behind the development of pictorial language in the formative years of modern Indian art".[43] The exhibition gathered around 150 works divided into seven broad sections.

Another exhibition, celebrating 50 years of the NGMA was *Signposts of the times: The Golden Trail*, was also conducted by the Director Rajeev Lochan in 2004. The show included 213 works from the gallery's permanent collection. The landmark works chart the development of modern Indian art 1850 onwards. The show aimed to reflect on the dialogues and the dialectics that went into shaping the character of modern Indian art, of artists like F N Souza, Bhupen Khakhar, KCS Paniker, Tagore brothers, G R Santosh, J Swaminathan, K G Subramanyan and Tyeb Mehta.

The expansion of the museum building, designed by the architects TEAM, led by Ramanathan, façade of red and white sandstone, brought in an additional exhibition space of 25,000 square metres, an eight-fold increase of gallery space in 2009.

... *In the seeds of time*…. traced the trajectory of modern Indian art from the colonial encounter from the 18th century to current trends in the 21st century. Rajeev Lochan mentioned in an interview: "Indian art from every region is an amalgam of different

[43] Rajeev Lochan in an interview with „The Hindu", Sunday, July 15, 2001.

locals that are now globally experienced and shared with remarkable developments in information-technology and web-based sharing."[44]

This exhibition will be discussed in chapter three of my thesis.

[44] http://ngmaindia.gov.in/ce_seeds.asp

Chapter Two

Exhibition Histories

Geeta Kapur's "Hundred years: From the collection of the NGMA"

This chapter embeds the exhibition *Hundred Years. From the collection of the NGMA* curated by Geeta Kapur in 1994 and exhibited at the National Gallery of Modern Art in New Delhi into the history of 'canon-making' exhibitions and major publications in India. Hereby I define the making of a canon as a process of defining and re-defining through the significance of an artwork or artist, the representational meaning for one group, location or stream/school and the aesthetically most important work. Nowadays the canon is constantly being revised and every generation reconstitutes it. In India before and after Independence, art tested the tension of ideological compulsions of nationalism and simultaneously developed a modernist aesthetic language.

The history of exhibitions, which mirrored negotiations between artists, curators and institutions, can be traced back over the past 70 years. In this context I am looking especially at exhibitions that aimed to narrate the history of Indian art, which sometimes resulted in the establishment of a national institution, as the first example will show. In other cases the institution demanded a curatorial concept to be able to show its collection to the public.

First I will try to lay out the ground, on which Geeta Kapur set out her curatorial concept of Indian modernism, giving a broad overview on major modern art exhibitions in India and abroad since independence. In a second step I will discuss the exhibition *Hundred years. From the collection of the NGMA* in detail, with its turn into the curatorial approach of narrating history, as well as reactions by the art world. The controversy that broke out after *Hundred Years* will help to understand the

contemporary confusion about the role of the curator, state patronage, but also a debate among artists about inclusion and exclusion.

Narrowing it down from: 5000 Years of Indian Art (1948)

The writing of a narrative for Indian art had concerned the country's intellectuals and art connoisseurs since the early years of the 20th century. Art was rediscovered as a tool producing the 'national', precisely for self-representation of the nation and widely used for this purpose in art exhibitions in India. An early example of an exhibition in terms of exclusion for the same reason will be given here.

The exhibition *Masterpieces of Indian Art* took place at the time of independence, organized by the Royal Academy of Arts in London and was first shown at the Burlington House in London in 1948, to mark the occasion of the transfer of power in British India. After quicken (?) only a limited interest among a viewership in London, the exhibition then travelled back to India and was displayed at the President's residence, the Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi. Roughly about 5000 years of artworks from India had been gathered, from museums and private collectors of the entire country that showed the history of Indian Art in historical sequences, a culmination of trajectories marking the beginning of independence. The exhibition became a location for a strategy to transform the representational content of the art object itself: "The historicised and aestheticized object of Indian art had emerged as a chosen field for the self-representation of the nation."[45] After the exhibition was over, the government was keen on keeping the objects in Delhi to which effort the National Museum was built, after the collection had been kept at the Rashtrapati Bhavan from

[45] *Guha*-Thakurta, *Tapati*: '*Marking Independence*: The Ritual of a National *Art* Exhibition', in: *Journal of Arts & Ideas*, No. 30-31 (Dec 1997) p. 90.

more than a decade, where it gradually expanded.[46]

The organizers of the exhibition in London had included the two sections on "British Artists in India" and "Modern Paintings, Drawings, and Sculpture", showing contemporary Indian artists. The contemporary artists of that time were included on the behest of government officials, to express that India is not a "static community living upon the glories of the past"[47]. The motley selection of artworks comprised of some 'Oriental-style' paintings from Bengal, a few works by Amrita Sher-Gil, a random figuring of the new modernists and progressives, such as Zainul Abedin from East Bengal, NS Bendre and FN Souza from Bombay, and Dhanraj Bhagat and Kanwal Krishna from New Delhi. The works had been loaned primarily by individual collectors or by organizations such as the Indian Museum, Calcutta, or the All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society (AIFACS), New Delhi. They were cut out of the exhibition display in Delhi, because the authorities felt, that it was needless to show them here. At the time of independence no need was felt to integrate the contemporary art of that time into the process of institutionalising culture. The Indian identity and the nation state were built up upon the historic past of the country, rather then looking at the contemporary representatives of culture.

Not only contemporary art, but also Indian paintings by British artists, such as Thomas and William Daniells, William Hodges and Tilly Kettle, a group that would find its way back into the discourse of Modernism in Partha Mitter's publication *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1850-1922: Occidental Orientations* in 1994, had been cut out. These British records of Indian culture and architecture were pointing out the

[46] *ibidem*.

[47] Letter from G.S. Bozman, Esq., CSI, CIE, ICS, Secretary to the Government of India, Department of Information and Arts, New Delhi, to Sir Water R. M. Lamb, Secretary Royal Academy of Arts. Dated 16th May 1946, New Delhi. V&A Indian Section (IM Gerneral), 1945-49, Part XVl NF, taken from Kavita Singh: 'The Museum is National, The Indian case-study', in: *No touching, no spitting, no praying, The Museum in South Asia*, edited by Saloni Mathur and Kavita Singh, Routledge, 2014, p. 126.

'picturesque', which had "served as a potent tool of translation and appropriation"[48]. The attempt was to show a purely Indian culture, without foreign influence.

This can be understood as an early conscious decision about inclusion and exclusion, at this time on the side of the government, not in terms of single artists or even single art works, but the section of the modern in the history of art in India.

Yet the exclusion of modern art at the time of independence was compensated soon, through institutionalising modern art in the 1950s with the establishment of the National Gallery of Modern art and the Lalit Kala Akademi in 1954 at the behest of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, to now manifest a cultural and national identity through modern art, as discussed in the first chapter. The Lalit Kala Akademi was originally sought of as an institution to support artists in practice and research from all over India.

Delhi Triennals, Lalit Kala Academi worldwide (1968-2005)

Another series of mammoth exhibitions that were heatedly discussed in terms of inclusion and exclusion were the Delhi *Triennals*. The Triennals were state-organized periodic exhibitions of international art, executed by the Lalit Kala Akademi.

The first edition in took place in 1968 and was initiated by the novelist, art critic and editor of the magazine *Marg*[49] Mulk Raj Anand.

Anand's aspiration was to align the global south to oppose imperialism through an exhibition that bypassed the West and consciously articulated the Nehruvian internationalist vision of non-alignment that sought solidarity among Asian, African

[48] Guha-Takurta, 2004, p. 8.

[49] Anand had founded the art magazine *Marg* a year before India's Independence with the architect Minnette de Silva and Minoo Mistri. The magazine dealt with urban planning, architecture and contemporary Indian art.

and Latin American countries, marking a 'third position' in Cold War politics, the Nehruvian project of unity in diversity whereby difference, of caste, class, gender, ethnicity, region, and religion, was placed in service of a centralized nation-state.

Anand stated that the growth of industrial civilisation had led to higher sensibilities of the contemporary artist, as well as modern life in big cities in a 'machine world' had influenced people immensely and therefore it had become increasingly difficult to "be human"[50].

The first Triennale featured about 609 works from 31 countries. The artists Krishen Khanna, who was the commissioner for the Indian section of the *Triennale*, seemed to support Anand's concept, saying in his curatorial note that he had chosen artists that did not take an extreme standpoint, but are closer to the middle. For him the avant-garde of the early 1960s was inspired by folk and local traditions, and did not rely on ideologies or doctrines, remaining in a state of perpetual re-valuation.[51]

Among the artists exhibited in the Indian section was a strong emphasis on the Neo-Tantrics Biren De and Gaitonde, contemporaneously with Ajit Mookherjee's publication *Tantra Art* (1967) and about 14 years before LP Sihare would (re-)discover the Neo-Tantrics, appropriate them institutionally and send them abroad as Indian abstraction. Furthermore works of the artists Satish Gujral, MF Husain and Bhupen Khakhar were shown, as well as two painting by Krishen Khanna himself. During the Triennale artists were honoured with medals, selected by a jury consisting of artists. Krishen Khanna, as the commissioner of the Indian section of the Triennale, was also a member of the jury, as well as he had put his own artworks on display. When the jury

[50] Anand, Mulk Raj: 'Introduction', in: *Catalogue of the First Triennale*, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, pp. 5-8.
[51] Khanna, Khanna: Indian Section, in: *Catalogue of the First Triennale*, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, p. 36.

selected his work for receiving a gold medal he was widely criticised.[52] This was the first Triennale scandal and rightly denounced. Not only the commissioner curating his own works but also promoting himself to a price. But nevertheless, this was eventually the first curated exhibition in India. Krishen Khanna had picked the artworks and thought them through in context of the avant-garde.

The following Triennals attracted a lot of criticism among artists and critics and today the Delhi Triennals are widely thought of as a failed exhibition concept. On the other hand the art critic and curator Nancy Adajania constructed the thesis that the Triennale actually manifests globalism from the south and that even before globalization. According to Adajania the Triennale was mired in misunderstandings and it fell victim to a struggle over the scarce resources of state patronage: represented by the Lalit Kala Akademi, which had become increasingly intransigent and bureaucratic during the 1970s and 1980s.[53]

The controversy around nationalism and internationalism peaked when Vivan Sundaram protested against the Triennale in the early 1970s and requested emphasising the need of a mere focus on India's rich history and modernity. He hereby questioned the concept of the Triennale at its foundation, as an international exhibition. At the same time his focus turned towards the Akademi itself and he criticized that the Lalit Kala Akademi was largely run by bureaucrats. The protest manifested itself against the structure of the Akademi, with a request for including artists in the general council and the running of the Akademi, without making suggestions. Again this is was a case of institutional critique and a claim for inclusion.

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[52] Sinha, Gayatri: *Krishen Khanna: A Critical Biography*, Vadehra Art Gallery, p.184

[53] Adajania, Nancy: 'Globalism Before Globalisation: The Ambivalent Fate of Triennale India', in: *Western Artists and India: Creative Inspirations in Art and Design*, The Shoestring Publisher, Bombay, 2013, p. 168-185.

Then the protest spread out to Baroda, at the Faculty of Fine Arts of the Maharaja Sayajirao University, where the artists GM Sheikh and Bhupen Khakhar had initiated the magazine *Vrishchik*[54]. The magazine became a focal point of institutional criticism and sought to represent an alternative credo. The second and third issue of the magazine were the filled with the 'Triennale Letters', in which artists discussed their concerns, anger and disappointment among each other in form of open letters, revealing the different standpoints of the moment.

Two years after the first Triennale already, in one of these letters the former commissioner Krishen Khanna stated that the Akademi is a "dead horse"[55], blaming the bureaucracy of the institution for the failing of the Triennals. The same collection of letters shows the opinion of Roshan Alkazi, who was heading the Delhi based gallery Art Heritage. She pointed out in her letter, that none of the artists would want to take the responsibility of an active role in the Akademi and writes furiously: "Either one makes state patronage and involvement, dynamic from within by the right person accepting total responsibility or create a live and vital art movement in the country and relegate State patronage to the dust heap."[56] However the subsequent Triennals remained widely neglected by the Delhi and Baroda artists of that time.

Geeta Kapur, also an opponent of the Triennale, who initiated the discourse around internationalism, regarded the Triennale as a mere extension of the large format commercial exhibitions on an international level, in the interest of art dealers and agencies of different countries promoting their national culture to the world art

[54] *Vrishchik*, which means scorpion, was a magazine founded by GM Sheikh in 1969. Published from Baroda, the magazine was edited by artists GM Sheikh and Bhupen Khakhar until its last issue in 1973. *Vrishchik* became an active forum for contemporary artistic and literary expressions, and also a catalyst for artists' views about the art field, art institutions and social concerns. The magazine featured an array of content that included poems, stories, critical essays, and folios of printed artworks.
[55] Khannah, Krishen: 'Triennale Letters,' in: *Vrishchick*, Year 2, No 1, 1970, p. 2.
[56] Alkazi, Roshan, Triennale Letters, in: Vrishchick, Year 2, No 1, 1970, p. 5.

scene.[57] She claimed that the imposed internationalism, in this context was becoming a problem of the local artist who has to appeal to a world audience, opposing Nancy Adajania's thesis of the internationalism before globalism as a possibility for artists.

The Triennale was in the crossfire for following the concept of the Venice Biennale unquestioningly, in merely gathering art and artists from all over the world, without a political tangent. In comparison with the Sao Paolo Bienal for example, which was founded in 1951 and is the second oldest after Venice (1895), I try to point out how the government and patronage influences the Biennale and then in a second wave even the artists.

In Brazil during the 1970s, after artists boycotted the 10th edition in 1969, the Sao Paolo Bienal was facing a series of structurally discontinuous exhibitions. In 1969 the political leader Emílio Garrastazu Médici's set up a military government (which lasted until 1974) and the nation was suffering under repressive state control, such as censorship, arbitrary arrest and torture. The Biennale was co-sponsored by Brazil's right-wing military regime and by 1971 the boycott against participating in the Biennale was in full flow. The boycott of the Biennale was supported by prominent Brazilian artists and writers, and gained solidarity in Europe and later in the USA. National agencies, including the British Council, maintained a diplomatic but distanced mode of participation until political change became apparent in the early 1980s.[58]

Of course the two periodic exhibitions evolved from different backgrounds, but they can be compared in term of historical importance, and that both situations offered a potential to stimulate an animated and self-conscious discussion among artists and critics about their position on internationalism. Could the Triennale in India have developed as other such periodic exhibitions did elsewhere in the world through even

[57] Kapur, Geeta, in: Vrishchick, Year 3, No 1, 1972, p. 6-7.
[58] Whitelegg, Isobel: 'The Bienal de São Paulo: Unseen/Undone (1969—1981)', in: Afterall, 22-Autumn/Winter, 2009.

more turbulent periods of national history, like the Sao Paulo Bienial through the years of Brazilian military dictatorship?

The potential of Triennale in India was destroyed by creating an inward-looking programme and by institutionalizing a narrow parochial attitude. While the protesting artists of the early 1970s thought they were attacking the bureaucracy, they ended up strengthening it. It is unfortunate though, that the India Triennale could not grow, partly because of the effort of the protesting artists, lack of curatorial concept, by only inviting embassies to identify artists, through cultural organisations nominated for this task, mechanical procedure, but compared to the efforts of Brazil's protesting artists, the issues in Delhi seem minor and perhaps not pushed up to its full potential.

In 2005, during the 11th and last edition of the Triennale, Geeta Kapur suggested a New Delhi Biennale during a symposium at the School of Arts and Aesthetics at the Jawaharlal Nehru University. But out of a lack of state support, this idea was never followed up on. Perhaps also, because the idea of initiating a Biennale in South India had already occurred. Foreign ministries and departments of culture commission artwork; the Triennale exhibition is visited and legitimated by dignitaries and delegations. An official internationalism dominates Biennales and Triennales, even as individual artists and artworks are often critical of the nation-state and of market logics that prevail at the exhibition and in the art world more generally in today's time.

Pictorial Space - A Point of View on Contemporary Indian Art (1977)

The exhibition Pictorial Space – A Point of View on Contemporary Indian Art was held at Lalit Kala Akademi, at the Rabindra Bhavan galleries from December 1977 to January 1978. Geeta Kapur was commissioned for this exhibition.

> "[...] in an art situation that appears to be so diffuse - without any 'schools' or

> movements as we understand them in the West - a survey of the approaches to pictorial space will help sift the scene at a basic level, and to discern distinct clusters, or natural groupings of artists on the basis of true affiliations."[59]

The exhibition looked at Indian art in terms of metaphysics of space. As a broad topic, it allowed the curator to show a wide range of artists, accumulating in her interest in defining space through art, where perception and knowledge and the "concept of a continuum between space and time has been introduced".

Perhaps at this point Geeta Kapur expresses her approach to Indian modernism through western art movements: Repeatedly in the catalogue she draws the comparison to cubism and how Indian Modernists have rediscovered their past through the west and western artists, that were engaging with traditional arts.

According to Kapur, the 46 participating artists of three different generations represented a good cross-section and are significant examples of Indian art. They were divided into four sections that represent what Kapur considers to be some of the "natural groupings":

'Surface Configuration: Marks, Motifs, Geometry', was the first cluster that looked at the flatness in Indian art, as opposed to a three dimensionality in western art since Renaissance. The flat pictorial space can either relate to the surface pattern, the texture or the decorative and ornamental qualities of art. Her argument is built upon the structure in Indian Miniatures, discovered by western modernists, the "primitivist approach" as in Cubism and then rediscovered by Indian artists.[60]

'Apparitions' showed a group of artists that dealt with the moment in space, as it might appear through a flash, revealing its ambience. This section categorized artists who have spiritual claim in their work or a "quality of magic immanence. These works

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[59] Kapur, Geeta: *Pictorial space. A point of view on contemporary Indian art, an exhibition*, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, 1978.

[60] Artists in this section: Mohan Samant, Rajesh Mehra, Madhvi Parekh, Mona Rai, K.C.S. Paniker, Arpita Singh, Himmat Shah, Jeram Patel, Somnath Hore, Ved Nayar and Nasreen Mohammedi.

are composed with geometrical shaped and coded meanings, some of them might even have a meditative character".[61]

'The Horizon' looked at landscape paintings, figurative as well as abstract, appropriated for the Indian Modernists through Cezanne and American abstract Expressionism.[62] And the last section **'Situation: Scenario: Dramatic Projection'** looks at the scenario, created by artists in their paintings. Again the emphasis is on moments in time, but now more tangible situations.[63]

At this point Geeta Kapur already formulates some of her later in *When was modernism* concluded concerns, but also ideas she would show again in the NGMA exhibition *Hundred Years*. Her curatorial concept doesn't follow a chronological or geographical approach in gathering artists together, but in a formalist way, of engaging with the surface of the work or its grade of abstraction.

Festivals of India

From the 1980s onwards a series of Festivals of India were 'celebrated' in western countries (not only India was represented through a festival, but also other 'Third World' countries, such as Mexico and Egypt). These Festivals, proposed between politicians at that time, like the in the case of the USA version between Indira Gandhi and Ronald Reagan 1982, aimed at increasing international trade, diplomatic cooperation and cross-cultural understanding.[64] The festivals took place in the United States, in France and in the United Kingdom.

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[61] Artists in this section: J. Swaminathan, Prabhakar Barwe, Amitava Das, Arpita Singh, Ganesh Pyne, Ramanujam, Paramijt Singh, Nilima Sheikh and P.Gopinath.
[62] Artists in this section: S.H. Raza, Ram Kumar, Akbar Padamsee.
[63] Artists in this section: M.F. Husain, A. Ramachandran, Bhupen Khakhar, K.G. Subramanyan, GM Sheikh, Laxma Goud, Gieve Patel, F.N. Souza, Krishen Khanna, Nalini Malani, Bikash Bhattacharia, Vivan Sunderam, Ranbir Singh Kaleka, Satish Gujral, Manu Parekh, Jeram Patel, Tyeb Metha.
[64] Brown, Rebecca: 'A Distant Contemporary: Indian Twentieth-Century Art in the Festival of India', in: *The Art Bulletin*, 2014, 96:3, pp. 338-356.

These 'Festival exhibitions' had to deal with distance, distance between India and the west but also to bridge the developments in Indian Art since the last exported exhibitions discussed in the beginning of this chapter. Modern Indian art was packed and shipped abroad, expected to present a contemporary identity.

As Saloni Mathur points out, these festivals have been criticised widely for its repackaging of culture to serve ideological interest of the nation state, an early phenomenon of the representation of culture in the globalized world.[65] Geeta Kapur, together with Richard Batholomew and Akbar Padamsee was part of the Visual Art Committee (a sub-committee of the Indian Advisory Committee, Festival of India), that was asked to bring together the exhibition.

According to Yashodhara Dalmia[66], a new internationalism emerged with the festivals of India in London, Paris and in the US in the 1980s, which spurred a greater awareness and opportunities for Indian artists to interact with other countries. While the representing contemporary art might have pushed exposure of Indian artists in the West, it is difficult to trace back whether it created greater awareness for Indian artists.

The curator: Geeta Kapur

Geeta Kapur's involvement as a facilitator of exhibitions started with the landmark show *Place for People* (Delhi, Bombay, 1981), in which she had not been the curator of the exhibition, but was a member of the group of artists and took the role of the critic and writer for the event. It was her first attempt at theorising the narrative painting between artists from Baroda and Bombay. The artist's concerns, together with visiting faculty Timothy Hyman, were centred around questions of belonging (to a place), the

[65] Mathur, Saloni: *India by Design: Colonial History and Cultural Display*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2007, p. 165.
[66] Dalmia, Yashodhara: 'Introduction' in: *Contemporary Indian Art and other realities*, Marg, New Delhi, 2002.

vernacular culture and narratives of the every day, foremost to mention here are Bhupen Khakhar and GM Sheikh. Later the dialogue moved from Baroda to the Kasauli Art Centre under involvement of the Delhi based artists Vivan Sunderam, Nalini Malani, Jogen Chowdhary and Sudhir Patwardhan from Bombay. In Kasauli the politics of locality and class became the main topics that were discussed among the artists.[67] These were concerns that would accompany Geeta Kapur in her later career as well. From this time onwards Geeta was involved in a large number of exhibitions in India and abroad.[68]

Despite these early attempts at curation, in an interview from 2011 Geeta Kapur attests India a general lack of a discourse on curatorship, because of the missing infrastructures of institutions such as the museum or the academy unlike in the West. She herself explains about her work, that "criticism forms the foundation of my curation" and that "it is my discursive and critical formation that is the primary, so I consciously maintain the difference, therefore I am a critic first, then curator"[69]

For Geeta Kapur *Hundred Years* was the third major exhibition. Before, in 1977 the Lalit Kala Akademi had commissioned her to curate *Pictorial Space* and in 1982 *Contemporary Indian Art* for the Festival of India at London's Royal Academy of Arts.

[67] Kapur, Geeta: 'On the Curatorial (Part 2)', in: *Afterall*, with Natatsha Ginwala, 2011.
[68] Festival of India, London, 1982, Dispossession', Johannesburg Biennale (co-curation), 1995; 'Bombay/Mumbai', Century City, Tate Modern, (co-curation), 2001; 'subTerrain', House of World Cultures, Berlin, 2003; 'Aesthetic Bind', Chemould, Mumbai, 2013-14, F
[69] Geeta Kapur, On the Curatorial (Part 1), in: Afterall Online, Interview with Natatsha Ginwala, 2011.

Hundred Years (1994) – Re-hanging the Collection

> "Nothing serves the cause of investigation better than a point of view for seeing, refocusing, finding alternate perspectives. That is why even if it were possible, it would not be useful to present a conclusive exhibition. A great part of the history of modern art in India not having been written — yet— what we can do best of all is to re-place and sometimes also dis-place the images and their attendant signs and meanings. Thus one begins to make out from the unmade meanings a historical argument. Which is the form of history I, at any rate, would privilege."
>
> - Geeta Kapur, Working Notes, 1994

In 1994 Anis Farooqui was holding the position of the director of the NGMA. Unfortunately he was suffering from severe health issues at that time. To avoid stress for him and also to make sure procedures were unobstructed at the museum, a very strong advisory committee had been appointed. The committee comprised of the artists Manjit Bawa, Krishen Khanna, Anjolie Ela Menon, Mrinalini Mukherjee, Santo Dutta and art critic Geeta Kapur. Soon it was decided, that Geeta Kapur should be designated to curate an exhibition on the basis of the collection, mainly on those works that were already on display in the Jaipur house and those works from the repository that could be taken out on short notice.

According to Kapur, there had been objections already at that point, that a committee member should not be a curator for a show. But the arguments that she had not been commissioned from outside and would not be a burden on the financial structure of the museum, convinced the members of the committee and they decided to have her curate the exhibition.

As mentioned in the first chapter, the exhibition *Hundred years. From the collection of the NGMA* was meant as the beginning of a series of exhibitions that the committee had laid out for the future and was followed up by Anjali Sen, when she became the director of the gallery after Anis Farooqui's tenure.

Looking at the condition of the gallery and artworks, Kapur reports about her experience that the collection had been in a bad state. Water had leaked into the upper halls of the storage and therefore the repository needed to be emptied out completely. The works were stored in no particular order, some of them even in the bathroom, in the tub. She had the task to go through these works in order to rearrange them. Therefore she had to look at the works physically and not going through index cards to request works from the repository. But even then she was limited in accessing the works physically: She reports that there were folios with about 5000 works of Nandalal Bose, and she simply did not have the time to go through each and every work in these collections.

In February and July of 1994, the exhibition *Hundred Years. From the Collection of the NGMA* opened in two parts at the Jaipur House and created a controversy among the artists and critics after the second opening. Nevertheless the controversy raised valid questions on the role of the curator and the institution, as well as the autonomy of the NGMA as a government institution.

The exhibition

The first part of the exhibition *Re-View 1930-1993*, opened in February in the upper galleries of the Jaipur House and the second part *Hundred years: From the collection of the NGMA* opened in late July, in 1994. The second part was meant to complete the first part and reflect upon modern and contemporary art in India. The exhibition included about 300 art works, starting roughly from 1893.

Just like Kapur would later treat her literary interpretation of Indian modernism, in the publication from 2000 *When was modernism*, the exhibition does not follow a chronological or geographical sequence, nor does it limit the discussion of a particular

artist or concept to only one section of the exhibition. The curatorial concept of the exhibition did not aim at retelling the history of connections between art and the making of the nation-state, neither between modernism and traditional arts, but focussed merely on the juxtapositions and possible ruptures between works and artists.

Re-View 1930-1993 (February 1994)

The first part of the exhibition looked at artworks from the later period out of the two parts, starting with after 1930. The exhibition opened in February 1994. The 1930s are described as a turning point into the modern for Indian art, the time of the "pioneers" among the artists.

The first room of the upper galleries was dedicated to the initial artists from the Santiniketan school: Nandalal Bose, as a developer of an iconography that is a crossing between folk and popular idioms of the everyday and his pupil Benode Behari Mukherjee, whose work is meant to resemble his murals in the Hindi Bhavan, Santiniketan. Kerala born KG Subramanyan is shown here alongside with his mentors, under whom he studied from 1940- 1948. And Jamini Roy, not a student from the Santiniketan school, but placed here in terms the Kalighat influence on his work, combining popular and folk motifs in his work. Interesting here is the fact that Kapur never uses the term "indigenous", when talking about folk, unlike the catalogue texts of Ella Datta and Rajeev Lochan. In her publication in the Vrishik Magazine from 1973, she states that "indigenism is an imperative for colonial peoples: at the initial state it is a means for claiming one's dignity and one's liberty: at a more complex level it is an instrument for the re-appraisal of the morass of values that survive colonialism,

by an understanding of history and tradition in terms of contemporary needs."[70]

Noticeably Kapur does not start with the 'makers' of the Bengal school who are often seen at the beginning of the uprising of Indian modern art and the nationalist project, which will be discussed in detail in the chapter three through Rajeev Lochan's exhibition.

But she brought out the influence of traditional forms, such as Kalighat in Roy's work and the interested in the everyday.

The subsequent two rooms were dominated by the works of the earlier Santiniketan artist Ram Kinkar Baij. His work depicts scenes from rural India, following up on the main theme of the every day in the first room, but challenging different forms against each other. His sculpture of the peasant figure was held against MF Husain's monumental frieze *Zameen,* as well as *Farmer's family* while the narrative was now turning from rural India to the urban city space, showing the "Indian working class: as simple labour, as the poor, as the proletariat" in monumental despair.

Zameen from 1950 has the form of a long frieze, retelling stories from Indian villages and towns. MF Husain represents a vanguard for the developments in Indian society between the rural and the urban. From the topoi of labour in the pre Independence times, the exhibition moved on to the artists of the 1950s generation like Ram Kumar and Satish Gujral. The artists NS Bendre, and Nagji Patel are represented through works that reflect upon mythologies, but in form of metaphors. Geeta Kapur delivers this opinion *When was modernism*, where she clusters the artists Ram Kumar, MF Husain and Mexico-trained Satish Gujral, as artists of the 1950, inspired by the French left and pushing expressionist realism forward, in their commitment to social transformations

[70] Kapur, Geeta: 'National Consciousness and Indigenism', in: *Vrishchik*, Year 4, 1973, Baroda, p. 7.

in India.[71] Ravinder Reddy's pop art sculpture of the sleeping couple was lying on the floor. Without having Kapur mentioning the metaphorical meaning of the sculpture, it can be seen as a metaphor for the erotic and the fetish.

Room 5 resembled parts of the 1977 exhibition *Pictorial Space* in which the artists Madhvi Parekh, Prabhakar Barwe and Ved Nayar were also exhibited together under the topic of mythology and dreamscapes. Madhavi Parekh representing affinities with folk art forms, using dots, scratches and net-like patterns that are references to traditional wall painting. Ved Nayar's work can be a high degree of craftsmanship attested, with the cut outs and geometrical patterns, reflecting upon allegorical topics of immortality.

Jatin Das, Arpita Singh and Jehangir Sabavala are shown in Room 6, brought together to represent the shift from semi-figural to abstraction in their works, put together under a formal vocabulary.

Taking the argument further into the immanence of Neo-Trantric art, the following room is dedicated to J Swaminathan as a "round chapel of his memory". The Neo-Trantrics Biren De, KCS Paniker, are show together with works by PT Reddy, SH Raza, Jeram Patel and then juxtaposed with Nasreen Mohammedi, Vishvanadhan and Palianappan "to transfigure the metaphysics of abstraction into a mathematical diagram". Krishen Khanna, Bal Chhabda and Raza along with four sculptures of Ram Kinkar Baij, including two versions of the striding Gandhi, are shown together with works of artists of a much younger generation such as Rekha Rodwittya and N. Pushpamala who had just finished her studies.

In the last room Kapur again follows up on a curatorial idea she had already executed in 'Horizon' again part of *Pictorial Space* by selecting a group of artists that is interested in working on the picture surface of the work: Mohant Saman, VS Gaitonde,

[71] Kapur, Geeta: *When was modernism*, Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2000, p. 304.

Ramkumar, Akbar Padamsee, Dhawan, Prabhakar Kolte and others in terms of a cubism origin in their work and modulation of the surface of the painting. Again there is a strong presence of Ram Kinkar Baij and his four sculptures of striding Gandhi.

The final room of the first part of the exhibition is true juxtaposition in the sense that artists from different genres, schools and mediums are put together under the subtopic of the gesture and representation. Kapur almost seems to foreground the artist here over their work and process of making the work in coding and decoding, which is worked out here in the concept.

In the first part of the exhibition Kapur showed the proto-Modern period (late nineteenth century) versions of European Neo-classicism, alongside positioned within the Indian cultural renaissance and placed them side by side with artists who are at the threshold of the modern.

Second part: *Hundred years: From the collection of the NGMA* (July 1994)

The second part of the exhibition opened in the last week of July in 1994 and was meant to extend the temporal delimitation of the first show to as early as 1893. The exhibition opened under the much argued-about title of *Hundred years: From the collection of the NGMA.*

In the first room of the exhibition, Kapur showed the oil paintings of early Indian portraitist Raja Ravi Varma along with the much younger, but later Amrita Sher Gil. They were paired together under formal determinations: The medium of oil painting, first picked up through Raja Ravi Varma in India and the use of rich pigments. Unmentioned in the concept note, Sher-Gil was trying to find an individualist language in portraits, unlike Raja Ravi Varma.

The same room showed works of the artists Pestonji Bowmanji, MF Pithawala and a large watercolour painting by Hemen Mazumdar, portraits in the academic style with a

strong realistic language. Kapur points out the origin of the modernist movement in India, and the struggle of finding an Indian identity within Indian nationalism. In showing these artists at the beginning of the second show, she pointed out her non-teleological approach in narrating history and differs between leaning techniques from the British and developing a visual language in India. Still even though she did not intend to represent the modernists in a chronological manner, she still starts Raja Ravi Varma and carries on with the Bengal school, which follows the canonical narration of Indian Modernism.

The small second room showed works by Abaninadranath Tagore. Abanindranath signifies here a turn, away from the realism thought by the British schools, but painting in an orientalist manner. Here the beginning of the Bengal school is marked, through "the mixed modes of orientalism that became the conduit for a syncretic revivalism"[72].

The next room was dedicated again to Amrita Sher-Gil, but showed her later paintings, when she returned to India after her stay in Paris and started developing an interest for traditional forms, such as Ajanta and Mughal miniatures and Basohli[73]. Along with Amrita Sher-Gil's paintings of women in rural India, are works of the artist Jamini Roy, in order to work out "that these two artists, seemingly so different, are working somewhat in tandem in the matter of sensuous stylization that is fitted into the picture frame with such formal confidence and intimacy."[74]

From the context it can be reasoned, that Sher-Gil's paintings of native women were shown here, in which she worked out a perspective, inspired by miniature paintings. Unfortunately I do not know, which painting by Jamini Roy were shown here, to show similarities, but perhaps images of mother and child, if Kapur mentions confidence

[72] Kapur, concept notes, 1994.
[73] The first school of Pahari paintings, which evolved into the Kangra paintings school by mid-eighteenth century.
[74] Kapur, concept notes, 1994.

and intimacy. This shows how Kapur continuously changes between similarities or differences in motifs and image formations.

Another sculpture of Ram Kinkar Baij is situated between these artists. From the fourth room the viewer was still able to glance back at Amrita Sher-Gil and Abinadranath Tagore, as well as forward to the next room which was showing Nandalal Bose. In this context Ramkinkar Baij work appears in all its radicalness that differentiated him from the artists of the Bengal School and the struggle for an Indian visual language in the arts.

The next room show works of the artist KK Hebbar from Karnataka, whose subjects often deal with poverty, contrasted by Nandalal Bose and his monumental and earliest known work depicting the archer Arjun(a), the imagery that articulates Bose's nationalist sentiments. The espousal of legitimate and authentic Indian essence located in the past and articulated in the embodied mythological persona of Arjuna is shown to be an evolving practice that was "a witness to major changes in aesthetic tastes".[75] In the concept note, Kapur suggests that his work should be discussed in the context of the right wing *Hindutva* (Hindu nationalism). This task is left to the reader/viewer. Geeta Kapur's leftish *liberal agenda is certainly in a conflicting situation here and leaving the interpretation open seems logical, regarding that the NGMA is a state museum.*

The next two rooms are showing Gaganendranath Tagore and Rabindranath Tagore subsequently. Among the more prominent paintings of these two artists are Rabindranath Tagore's figures, faces and doodles which were presumably juxtaposed with his nephew Gaganendranth Tagore's Japanese influenced paintings, who had been a pioneer in adopting Indian styles of painting after training in western art, and then absorbing Japanese styles.

The next room dealt with genre painting, where she had put together a number of

[75] Guha-Thakurta, 2004, p. 141.

works showing landscapes. From Jamini Roy and Gopal Ghosh to Amrita Sher-Gil to Souza and Akbar Padamsee, among other artists from Bombay.

Room 10 had a collection of allegorical works of artists in an unlikely combination, a set of old and young artists, "an early KCS Paniker chronicling his life along the Malabar coast"[76] juxtaposed with genre depictions of the subaltern figure in younger artists work, like NN Rimzon, Ramesh and Savarkar.

Ramachandran's *Gandhari* and Vivan Sundaram's work *Arabesque*, an "ironical picture of oriental seduction echoed in a caricature by Jaya Ganguly, Dilip Sur's large comic strip landscape and Rimzon's male pariah figure, again like a life size doll, here sitting naked and staring everything down".

The last site is the sculpture gallery on display with Latika Katt 's artist-teachers' portraits in bronze of Bendre, Somnath Hore and Jeram Patel, juxtaposed by Madhura Singh by Ramkinker Baij. The corridor is flanked by the bronze peasant figure of Meera Mukherjee and Zainul Abedin's drawing of a dead person's hand in a field, who had died of famine. The next space had works of Satish Gujral, Subramanyan and Himmat Shah, strong non-representational expression of the erotic, and the knotted rope deity Rudra by Mrinalini Mukherjee.

It becomes obvious that the exhibition bears some absences. Nalini Malani for example, who Geeta Kapur dedicated a whole chapter to in her book *When was modernism* and she describes as one of the most influential artists in India was left out of the exhibition because the gallery was owning one work by her at that time. Geeta Kapur writes, which read like an apology to close friends: "The absences in the exhibition and in the Collection include some of the artists I cherish most, and it misses works, some of them emphatically iconoclastic, that I would wish to see boldly

[76] Kapur, concept notes, 1994.

enshrined in any exhibition I conceive." In an interview Geeta Kapur said, that she could just not find the right works even though they are with the museum or that the museum had not acquired any works of the artists up to that time.

Geeta Kapur picked up hierarchies among the artists and writes in her concept note: "Nandalal Bose and his pupil KG Subramanyan disapproved of Jamini Roy and here they were placed together to understand whether that was justified." She suggests here that we revisit the disapproval and offers the juxtaposition to the viewer to draw her own conclusions.

The controversy

The exhibition opened on a Saturday afternoon and people already complained about minor issues, such as invitation cards that never arrived, or the fact that the exhibition did not have a catalogue, or that the captions were incomplete or even just wrong. In defence, Kapur said there had been no funds for a catalogue and that she had written a concept note instead. The text had functioned as wall texts, and copies, which were available during the opening. These were later withdrawn from circulation after the controversy broke out.[77]

The exhibitions opened in two parts, but a controversy did not arise after the first part of the show had opened. Presumably artists who had strong objections after the second opening, must have hoped after the first opening in February that they would be included in the second show, that had already been announced to come up half a year later.

[77] Jain, Madhu: Exhibition at NGMA turns into lacklustre affair and a let-down, India Today, August 15, 1994.

The title in itself created a series of questions: Why 100 years? The title of the show is always referred to as "Hundred years" which led to people expecting a complete narration of the history of Indian art. Geeta Kapur seemed to sense these problems beforehand and writes already in her concept note:

> "But I want to reiterate that there is no desire to present a definitive History of Modern Indian Art, nor is it possible to do so, given the fact that even a Collection such as the NGMA is inevitably incomplete, rich in one aspect, scanty in another and tardy with committing itself to the more non-consensual works of the contemporary period."

She also talks about the "artificial boundary" of 1883, but at the same time justifies her choice by saying that there is "the nineties signal, a turn of the century romance with nostalgia and change."

A break or caesura is always just constructed from a singular perspective. As the curator she could have separated herself from this artificial boundary, that doesn't seem to serve any other purpose than that of a catchy title and resembles earlier exhibitions and publications of "5000 years of Indian Art". However "5000 years" still can be justified, since no reader would understand a large number as 5000 and as a sharp border. 1883 was not a remarkable year in the development of Indian art.

However the major issue that was to cause the greatest uproar was on the question of exclusion and inclusion. Artists whose works were in the NGMA's collection, and yet were not included or highlighted in the show, were outraged at their marginalization. Leading the charge was senior artist and art educator Amarnath Sehgal. A prominent modernist sculptor and painter, Sehgal was personally hurt and deeply shocked when he found that he was not included in the exhibition. The slight was all the more personal as Sehgal had been Kapur's art teacher when she was a schoolgirl at Delhi's Modern School.

Sehgal decided to make an official protest and called for a meeting at the Ministry of

Culture. By this time Sehgal was already well-known to officials and the press. Just two years previously, he had mounted a publicity campaign to protest against the government's casual attitude towards his work. A mural that he had made in the 1960's for Vigyan Bhavan, a prominent governmental conference centre, had been dismantled without his consent. Sehgal's protests had won a great deal of publicity and he had even filed a case against the government in the Delhi High Court. Now, as he aired a second grievance against the government, a senior bureaucrat in the Minsitry, Komal Anand, was sympathetic to him. She ordered Anis Farooqi for "damage control" and to add works of seven artists, Amarnath Sehgal, Anjolie Ela Menon (member of the advisory board of the NGMA at that time), Pilloo Pochkhanawala, S. Nandagopal, A.S. Haldar, D.P. Roy Chowdhury and Kanwal Krishna, according to a list Amarnath Sehgal himself had put together.

On Monday, the NGMA was closed and by Tuesday morning works by these artists were included in the exhibition through removing others.

Komal Anand had instructed Farooqui to intervene and rehang the exhibition, and it was he himself who chose the works according to the artists on the list. His statement and justification was, that "we have to include many painters who are historically important."[78] Ironically by this time, Sehgal's list had already doubled. Madhu Jain writes in her review that this was not even all. Farooqui soon also announced that there had been talk of insufficient representation from states like Rajasthan, Bihar, West Bengal – and also: Cholamandal, the artists colony[79] in Madras. This is not entirely true, since its founder KCS Paniker was part of the exhibition.

In the meanwhile Geeta Kapur had resigned from the NGMA advisory committee and

[78] Madhu Jain: Exhibition at NGMA turns into lacklustre affair and a let-down, India Today, August 15, 1994.
[79] ibidem.

stated that she wants the exhibition to be dismantled or at least her name should be withdrawn from it. Upon this pressure, joint secretary Komal Anand agreed on a meeting with Kapur. According to Kapur, in this meeting she explained importance of the authority of a curator to the Ministry. Her claim was acknowledged and the on Thursday morning the alterations had been removed. Furthermore this case is of significant importance, because here an individual as a non-government body has the power to persuade a secretary of the ministry to revert an earlier decision, by claiming her authority as a curator.

Whether this was that decisive reason for the controversy in the press or not can only be understood through categorizing and interpreting the press texts that were published afterwards.

The controversy in the press

The exhibition and its follow up with the ministry of Culture were widely discussed in the press. It turns out art critics and journalists interpreted the exhibition on many levels, in terms of inclusion and exclusion, as well as the power structure within the art scene as well as the interferences of the state.

The reviews of the exhibitions came in three waves. In the first week after the second opening there are no articles to be found. It seems like the journalists were quiet for the duration of the negotiations with the Ministry of Culture. After a week or so, the first angry and disappointed voices are expressed in articles, which were printed in most Indian magazines and newspapers, after Geeta Kapur had put her foot down and the exhibition had been set back into the initial form.

1. Articles and letters that focussed on the controversy:

The report *Geeta Kapur stirs up a storm*, which was published one week after the opening

carries a caricature, which shows Geeta Kapur in a careworn manner, at the same time authoritative. Alka Raghuwanshi and Sumita Thapar[80] are pointing out rather harshly the denial of artists, of Geeta Kapur's power with which she executed the exhibition. Artists took offence of an individual taking the liberty of a constructed narrative of their work.

The article quotes a comparable instance, when artist Satish Gujral was a member of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) committee and did not approve of Geeta Kapur's application to visit Cuba on the grounds that as a member of that panel herself, she could not be personally benefitted. Her being a member of the advisory board of the NGMA and getting to curate a major exhibition naturally let feeling ran high. The very same report also quotes a member of the committee whose name is not given, that: "My vote would not have stopped the decision, but I would have borne the brunt". Finger-pointing and an awareness of nepotism are understandable, looking at the experiences of the artists with the Triennale. The perception of "insiders" get to curate or to exhibit had been proved true in the past. At same time there seems to be a fear of the influential curator and since behest to Kapur there were only artists on the advisory board.

Concerning the issue whether Geeta Kapur was paid for her curatorial work or not, Alka Raghuwanshi and Sumita Thapar report that she was at that time intended to be paid, but the amount unclear and the file with the ministry. Up to that day, according to the authors, the procedure normally was, that a curator was appointed, who researched a curatorial idea, wrote a suggestive format and a report, on which basis the advisory board would decide then, whether the exhibition would bet set up in the suggested way or not. In the case of the "Hundred years" no report had ever been written, but given the circumstances, if would not have made much sense either,

[80] Raghuwanshi, Alka and Sumita Thapar: Geeta stirs up a storm, August 2, 1994.

having a curator who is already part of the advisory board to rehang a collection that is with the gallery and even on display already.

Praveen Swami[81] for Frontline magazine, is quoting art historian Mala Marwah, saying that "Geeta Kapur's Marxism blinds her to the contradictions in the evolution of modern Indian and leads her to universalize an essentially western historical transition." Artist GR Santosh had the same opinion and attested Geeta a western point of view, wondering when this would finally end.[82] Swami writes goes one step further: "New leftist critiques: her exhibition is in fact simply a narrative of a triumphal nation-state." While the latter statement seems extreme, it is said here, that the writers were disappointed with her interpretation in terms of western idioms in Indian art and the foregrounding of Amrita Sher-Gil's work.

This opinion is peaking in later articles, such as one published on August 14 in the Economic Times, where artist Subba Gosh[83] writes that the exhibition lays bare the structure of the NGMA itself and is asking why the gallery would do such an exhibition. He accuses Geeta Kapur of favouritism and exclusion and describes the confrontation of history with contemporaneity, which characterizes this exhibition: "semi-historical analysis as well as to trace the ideological flow of the contemporary situation has vexed many a mind".

This opinion among the public might have let to the narrative of Indian art that Rajeev Lochan had perceived in in exhibition, meaning, starting at an earlier point of time, to point out the western influence and then opposing it with a strong nationalist project through the Bengal school, in a chronological order, with special exhibitions representing canonical masters. This interpretation is much safer from public discontent.

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[81] Swami, Praveen: 'A show and a row', in: *Frontline Magazine*, September 23rd, 1994.
[82] Raghuwanshi, Alka and Sumita Thapar: Geeta stirs up a storm, August 2nd, 1994.
[83] Gosh, Subba: 'Shearing the exclusivity of Art', Economic times, August 14th,1994.

2. Sympathetic to Geeta, but disagreeing on the exhibition:

The idea of juxtapositions and a curated exhibition in general was misunderstood by artists and writers, in questioning the curator's role and right to construct narratives or suggest new clusterings. like for example Delhi based artists Jatin Das, who was represented in the exhibition. He pointed out that the act of "curation", cannot yet be understood by the public and the exhibition will be understood as history. He blames the cultural policy for this.[84] Satish Gujral, who was also in the exhibition, had issues with the title and he says, that there were artists who did not succeed in the sense that they are represented in the collection or even have become very well known, but influenced artists in that era. He suggests, that the exhibition should have been divided into decades, to represent artists of a wider spectrum.

These statements attest the public immaturity to recognize the legitimate role of the curator, which was only introduced at this time. Geeta Kapur was not only the commissioner, but made her presence felt through the juxtapositions.

I do think, that a great deal of discomfort with the exhibition, can be understood through nearness of Geeta Kapur to the institution and the power she was given and which was confirmed in agreeing on her authority after the incident with the Ministry of Culture. Many of the writers and artists strongly critiqued the power structures within the museum but also in the art scene. Juliet Reynolds for example, a British journalist for The Pioneer[85] praised the exhibition, but criticized the power structure, that only Geeta Kaput gets to curate exhibitions and no other curator has a chance to show their "bias", she claims that India is always looking for number one. Suneet Chopra[86] writes that "official patronage is perhaps an all time low" and points out that

[84] Alka Raghuwanshi and Sumita Thapar, 1994.
[85] Juliet Reynolds, The Pioneer, Saturday, 6thAugust, 1994.
[86] Chopra, Suneet: 'Much ado about nothing much', *The Hindustan Times*, 7th August, 1994.

all those who loudly protest over the exhibition have benefitted the most in the past. He, among many others critiques, the "pretentious title, giving the impression of a definitive show". He feared that the heated discussions could lead to the problem, that eventually the authorities will never allow such free hand again, with might mean less interesting and less controversial shows in the future, since in the west according to the Suneet Chopra, the directors of state museum act at co-curators. Opposed to many other writers who published their take on the controversy, he talks about the exhibition itself and single works: He says that the exhibition lacks sculpture and suggests that Adi Davierwalla's *Falling Man* should have been shown. Furthermore he shares that the exhibition is lacking graphics and that there is an absence of works by Chitta Prasad. Sculptor Ved Nayar is presented through a painting. He says, that "our Contemporary art owns a lot to the European tradition. The point is well taken but it has been laboured too much". Amrita Sher-Gil almost swamps the work of Jamini Roy, who made a far more radical break with Western styles. Gagandranath Tagore, shows how our artists could tune into global movements (cubism) and yet emerge with their own original expression. He attests located two trends in the exhibition: A derivative modernism and equally derivative orientalism.[87] Chopra wrote furthermore that an exhibition of this format was based on the collection of the museum, which was "pushed and pulls of bureaucrats who often know little or nothing about contemporary art and gallery owners off-loading unsalable works for a tidy sum" plus it was based only on those works out of the collection that can be taken out of the storage on short notice.

In a public letter by Kekoo Gandhy, Akbar Padamesee, Tyeb Metha, Kamala Kapoor,

[87] Points out: Antonio Xavier Trinade, Amrita Sher-Gil, Sarada Ukil, Abanindranath Tagore, Ramikinder Baij, Laxman Pai, Moham Samant, Gaganendranath Tagore, Rabindranath Tagore, Zaimul Abedin, Arpana Caur.

Bombay, 10th August[88], the artists show their disappointment with the structure of the gallery in terms of selection and power, questioning whether the government should be in power to interfere with institutions like the NGMA, which should be under autonomous charter.

Geeta's friends Jehangir Sabavala, Nalini Malani and Ranjit Hoskote composed a public letter, saying that the autonomy of the curator had been disrespected and that by inviting her to curate an exhibition one should have knows of her critical standpoint.

3. Reviews (Gayatri Sinha, Yashodhara Dalmia)

There were only very few reviews written, discussing the exhibition, rather then expressing anger and disappointment. One of them was written by Delhi based curator and writer Gayatri Sinha,[89] who wrote a review only one week after the exhibition opened, for the *Sunday Times of India*. She talks about the events of the controversy in detail.

Sinha points out, that Geeta had to choose from 14.000 works. She probably did not know, that the exhibition was only based on works, that were easily available. Sinha also wonders whether a different structure of the exhibition would have been better, by schools or perhaps chronological, she would have liked to see awardees and recipients of art grants.

But on the other hand she also writes positively about the exhibition and walks the viewer through the exhibition. She closes with saying that Geeta played chess with history.

[88] "Curator's vision" was a public letter by Kekoo Gandhy, Akbar Papdamesee, Tyeb Metha, Kamala Kapoor, Bombay, 10th August

[89] Sunday Times of India, July 31st, 1994/19

Yashodhara Dalmia's extensive review *That brief thing called modern* was published in *The India magazine of her people and culture* only in October 1994. She writes in favor of Geeta Kapur that she was trying to develop an iconography for art and India itself, starting from 19th century. She appreciates Geeta's curatorial decision to show Amrita Sher Gil and Jamini Roy together, the two of them „working in tandem in the matter of sensuous stylisation that is fitted into the picture frame with such formal confidence and intimacy".

And also the repeated appearance of Ram Kinker Baij's works, she describes as "subverting the Indianness in Indian art, by being avant-garde." Furthermore the "Indianness" is explored in the works of the Neo-Tantics, like Biren De and GR Santosh.

Generally she sees the choice of artworks in a positive manner: "Here are artists who set themselves apart from the modern, from even that ambiguous and brief thing called the Indian modern, which shows its strong imagist, iconic, formally compact and linguistically homogenous form in the upper galleries. I set up the display for a subliminal undoing of that in the downstairs galleries so as to test the nature of the categories we work with."

> "Circuitous route to modernity and one which has many alleys and by-ways. On casting a glance backwards and the forwards and the into oblique spaces one becomes impressed with inter layered images. And if that thing called modern is brief, it has at the same time a richness, which suffuses its corridors with meaning."

Geeta had argued already before with the ICCR to appoint curators for exhibitions, and not commissioners or committees, (critic, art historian, artist), committee exhibitions never work. The role of the curator was explained to government bodies before, but not taken seriously enough. Function of the curator had been exercised before, but they were still called commissioners.

One of the articles reports that Geeta Kapur was also a member of the purchase committee. Apparently in the first meeting she suggested that the chairman should be neutralized. When she was told that the constitution did not permit it, she said, that the annual budget of 30 lakhs should be divided among the six members of the committee to make the purchases. When this was disallowed, she recommended the panel to visit artist studios and produced a list of artists and studios. Again, the members disagreed and therefore she and Akabar Padamsee resigned from the committee.

Of course, committee members are elected in order to shape the collection and one should be aware of the personal colour every member would bring to a collection through preferences and emphases in their liking or research. Dividing the budget among the members would have had the advantage of a democratic structure of decision making, in terms of artists. But perhaps it compromised the transparency of the decision.

From the articles published in the press, it becomes obvious, that there were roughly three main criticisms: Firstly the role of the curator played a major role to the public. Secondly about the institution and its mandate and thirdly the way it was curated.

Generally it can be said, that there was a kind of fear of Geeta Kapur among the public, for which it is surprising that there are so many voices in the press. The fear of Kapur holding strings to the government patronage, that she has too much power as an individual and as a member of the committee, as a member of the Department of Culture panel, that gets to decide about scholarships to artists, foreign exhibitions and trips. "She holds history" one artist said and might be right with his assumption.

The effects of future exhibition and publications are quite visible. Geeta Kapur's most popular publication *When was Modernism*, published in 2000, can be seen as a

consequence of this exhibition. The collection of essays written under a fellowship at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Teen Murti, between 1987 and 1997 situating the modern in in contemporary cultural practice. The second section of the book is looking at artists and artworks. Her complex engagement with Santiniketan artists in regard to a post cubist expressionism, Jamini Roy in terms of iconicity and urban commodification and Souza and Husain in their near working class thinking, all those topics from her exhibition are reworked in the essays of her book.

In her essay about the role of the curator she also picks up issues that she had been experiencing during the controversy and says that the curator can be acting against the interest of the artist, in order to act in favour of some new relational premise between works and with the beholder. The exhibition is an itinerary argument with a democratic impulse. [90]

The NGMA had a series of subsequent exhibitions on Indian Sculpture, the Delhi Shilpi Chakra, which was curated by Prem Nath Mago and others (Chapter 3). The institution seemed to act more consciously in their choice of curators. Either they followed concepts thought off by the advisory committee or they invited other curators from outside.

Yashodhara Dalmia curated the exhibition "The Moderns" at the National Gallery of Modern Art in Bombay, in 1996, which was followed by a book on her research of the Progressives: The Making of Modern Indian Art: The Progressives, which looked at the Bombay Progressives and their associates and R. Siva Kumar curated for the NGMA in Delhi "A contextual Modernism" which was followed by a publication and

[90] Kapur, Geeta: Curating: 'In the public sphere', Manuscript, Faculty of Fine Arts, Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Baroda, 2006.

had a strong emphasis on the Santiniketan artists Rabindranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose, Benodbehari Mukherjee and Ramkinkar Baij.

The reactions to Geeta Kapur's *Hundred Years* are linked to Triennale problems, in the sense of their simplicity of arguments on the part of the art community, who did not show interest in developing curatorship, modes on presentation or a discourse on contemporary art. Both cases where merely questions of authority and insider relationships. Inclusion and exclusion became the centre of concern. On the other hand can these be read of events in the process of canon formation in post colonial India, during the tension of nationalism and internationalism, a question that has not been answered today.

Today the gallery hosts retrospectives of living artists alongside with the exhibition …*in the seeds of time*…, which is on permanent display since 2009, which seems to cater in a much safer way to the demands of a nation state and the art community.

Chapter Three

The gallery in the 2000s

This chapter focuses on the developments of the National Gallery of Modern Art from the beginning of Rajeev Lochan's tenure in 2001 until more recent exhibitions in 2014. Through my reading of this period, I will illustrate how the past and representations of the past can be readjusted to demonstrate historical continuity, serving the interests of specific groups as particular historic moments. This becomes immensely interesting if the NGMA is read as a repository of national identity built upon the moment of independence, the moment of nation-making.

During this period, Rajeev Lochan, as Director of the NGMA, mounted a series of major shows from the collection. Two prominent shows mounted at the time included, the show *Dialogue*: *Interactions in Indian Art 1850s Onwards* was co-curated with Ella Datta, while the two latest exhibitions *Signpost of the times* in 2004 and the current exhibition …*in the seeds of time*, which opened in 2009 with the expansion of the new wing, were curated by Rajeev Lochan.

To highlight certain masters of modern and contemporary art, solo exhibitions have also been on view, either in form of living artists retrospectives, such as Anish Kapoor, Subodh Gupta or Atul Dodiya, or shows representing canonical modernists like Nandalal Bose, Ram Kinkar Baij, Jamini Roy and Amrita Sher-Gil, based on the works from the collection. Often, for these specific exhibitions, the gallery invited external curators who brought a special expertise on these artists.

In reflecting upon these exhibitions I will discuss the present achievements and difficulties of the gallery. Often the NGMA is accused of only showing a miniscule percentage (11% is often quoted, unclear based on which figures) to the public, or of being slow and bureaucratic. On the other hand, we do find a number of initiatives

taken by the NGMA which are not perhaps given due regard. For instance, the permanent display includes works that are not necessarily part of the canon of Indian modernism as yet. The show needs to adapt constantly according to special exhibitions, when works are withdrawn from the display and therefore create gaps in the narration of Indian modern art. At the time of writing this thesis there not a single art work by Jamini Roy on view at the NGMA in Delhi. The works are exhibited in Bangalore, as part of the Jamini Roy retrospective.

And at the same time, the exhibition seems so stagnant for showing almost the same set of 300 works for the last 6 years.

Moreover I wish to discuss the decisions in the curatorial work of Lochan, focussing mainly on the last exhibition …*in the seeds of time*, due to its physical accessibility for research. I will briefly reflect upon earlier exhibitions too to underline the way he constructed his interpretation of modern Indian art by including Company Paintings, European Traveller Artists/Salon Artists and traditional forms such as Tanjore and Kalighat paintings among the modernists. I will endeavour to contextualise his curatorial interventions in terms of a discourse that might have influenced him, such as Partha Mitter's publication *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1850-1922: Occidental Orientations (*1994). I will also compare Rajeev Lochan's interventions with Geeta Kapur's layout of the gallery's collection discussed in chapter two.

Looking at the museum in the 21st century, I also wish to elaborate on the role of contextual information in form of wall texts, the catalogue or educational programs to mediate between the object and the subject.

To frame the museum and its possibilities I would like to close this chapter with looking at theories the museum that could be re-thought in order to create a place with visitor engagement. New Institutionalism, borrowed from sociology, discusses the role of the (art-) institution since the 1980s and the way the institution interacts with society

and its influences on it. Against the theoretical background I would like to reflect upon the present developments of the museum. Hereby of interest is the bureaucratic backdrop of the public museum.

The museum in the 21st century

In 19th century museums in the era of western expansion, museums had the prior role to collect, display and store colonial objects. They also "researched and preserved curios, exotica, rare, and sanctified objects."[91] The way the view/anticipation was narrated in a distance constructing way. It was a systematic production and legitimation of knowledge, collected from far cultures. The British maintained the accumulation of objects through the East India Company, and showed great interest in the connection of knowledge and control.[92]

The museum in post independence India, for which the NGMA serves as an example, it traces "modernity as it was enacted since the mid-19th century within what are now the boundaries of the Indian nation-state."[93] The collection of the gallery, as described in chapter one, grew trough gifts of artists or their descendants and therefore only owns Indian art or that of European artists, that have travelled and worked in India. This leads to an collection that is strong in terms of its possibilities of equip the permanent exhibition with modernists, but lacks contemporary art, not to mention art from outside of India.

On a larger picture, the democratic museum has become a social agency, which is able to interact with the public. In particular, it seems as though the museum has become a

[91] Weil, Stephen: *Cabinet of curiosities. Inquiries into Museums and their prospects*, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, 1995, p. 38.
[92] Singh, Kavita: 'Material Fantasy, The Museum in Colonial India', in: *Art And Visual Culture in India, edited by Gayatri Sinha,* Marg Publications, Mumbai, 2009, p. 40.
[93] Singh, Kavita: 'A History of Now', in: *Art India Magazine*, Mumbai, June 2010 Volume XV, Issue I, p. 27.

geographically universal or global institution, with a wide range of international exchange. The history of trans-global exhibitions in the past and present signifies this. At the same time, museum discourses are almost inevitably entangled with political questions, implying definitions of cultural values and privileges of interpretation. The NGMA New Delhi did host a series of international exhibitions in past, not drawn from their collection of course but with the support of cultural institutions, such as Romanian Cultural Institute, when an exhibition showing the works of Brancusi was mounted at the NGMA.

However, in contemporary times, it often has been said, that the new museum performs, meaning a radical shift in the pedagogical development and within this process of new production the viewer's position is constantly changed. The museum operates to index and iterate relations and identities and to mediate, contest and reclaim cultural knowledge and knowledge of culture. The performativity is located in the knowledge transfer between institution and the viewer, through the object.[94] An example are the walkthroughs, which were part of the Raqs Media Collective exhibition *Asamayavali/Untimely Calendar* in 2014-2015 at the NGMA. For the duration of the exhibition every Sunday an expert from a different field (Anthropologist, Activist, Artists, Writers) would walk a group of visitors through the exhibition, explaining his or her critical observations of the objects. It created an open discourse between the viewer and the institution and between the viewer and the object, led to literary or artistic interpretations of the work. And it enabled a play between the public narration of the institution and the personal narration of the viewer. The shift lies in enabling new ways of seeing. The museum also becomes a place for self-observation; it triggers the intellectual border traffic between the familiar and the foreign. Since the

[94] Garoian, Charles R.: 'Performing the Museum', in: *Studies in Art Education*, Vol. 42, No. 3, Spring, 2001, and: Casey, Valery: 'Staging Meaning. Performance in the Modern Museum', *TDR* (1988-), Vol. 49, No. 3 (Autuum, 2005), pp. 78-95.

viewer is now involved on such high extent, at this point his personal memory also comes into play to create his own narrative on the viewed objects. The viewer is personally challenged to address his cultural knowledge for identity building questions.

The contemporary museum should look for change and rupture, and not find generalizations and unities to invoke the viewer's interpretation. But it also controls ways of seeing by curatorial input, and since there has to be a selection on the objects made through another person, they gain their importance and validity by being exhibited in a museum.

The repository of the post-colonial museum in India is filled with colonial patrimony, but how does the museum engage with national identity of modern times and how does it reflect upon its past? How is the history of modernity told, regarding western influence and how is the viewer involved?

New directions

Before becoming the director of the 2000s, Rajeev Lochan had been in the position of a professor at the Jamia Millia Islamia University. He had studied Painting at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda in the years of 1972-79 and holds a series of awards for his creative work as well as fellowships as a scholar. His nomination as a new director created expectations among the artist community, and hope for fresh wind in the NGMA.

He had shown great interest in pulling out works from the collection and presenting them to the public, for which one of his main innovations was to integrate works by European Traveller Artists and Company Paintings into his exhibitions.

Before Lochan's tenure the gallery was keen on showing purely Indian art through, disregarding western influence. The following chapter examines how Lochan places the western influence on modern Indian art in a national museum, by adding

subsequently different Schools and movements to the overview exhibitions, narrating Indian modern art, starting from as early as 1850, while before exhibition had started with the last decade of the 20th century only. This shift from the nationalistic project of the Bengal School as an entry point to the colonial era, had a major impact on creating national identity through art history.

Dialogue: Interactions in Indian Art 1850s Onwards

One of his first attempts to show pieces from the collection was to set up a series of exhibitions called *From the Collection of the National Gallery of Modern Art*. This was conceived of as a series of bi-annual exhibitions. The planned series started with the first show *Dialogue: Interactions in Indian Art 1850s Onwards*, which opened in July 2001 and focused on the "interaction that went behind the development of pictorial language in the formative years of modern Indian art"[95]. The exhibition gathered around 150 works divided into seven broad sections.

Already in this exhibition Rajeev Lochan introduced his curatorial intervention in retelling the history of modern art in India, through an inclusion of western influence. Unlike earlier exhibitions, which had focussed on Indian artists, this exhibition included the works of the European artists, who had travelled and worked in India in the late 18th and through the 19thcentury. While they were shown as part of the *Masterpieces of Indian Art* in London in 1948 in order to represent the British Traveller artists as part of the developments of Indian art, in exhibitions in India they kept being excluded from the narrative of Indian art history as representatives of foreign influence on modern Indian art. The new nation-state wanted to part from the colonial power and rather promote a 'pure' national identity. This had been partly exercised already by

[95]Lochan, Rajeev: 'Introduction' in: *Dialogue, Interactions in Indian Art from 1850 onwards*, National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, 2001.

the pioneers of the Swadeshi movement[96] in Bengal as well as post independence, as part of nationalistic project.[97]I will return to this later in this chapter.

Already part of this exhibition, Lochan included another facet of Indian art that was to feature later in …*in the seeds of time* - the traditional art forms South Indian Tanjore and Calcutta based Kalighat paintings. Here, Tanjore paintings were meant to trace the co-presence of traditional Indian arts on Indian modernism. I will discuss this addition in detail later in this chapter, when Tanjore paintings appear again together with Kalighat paintings in … *in the seeds of time*.

Much like Geeta Kapur's setting up of a caesura with the artificial boundary of 1893 for her exhibition in 1994 in favour of a catchy title, a move which received heavy criticism, the year 1850 also appear as an inconsistent point of time for the history of Indian Modernity. Ella Datta explains in the introduction of the catalogue[98] that picking the year 1850 as a starting point was an arbitrary decision, but is meant to represent the point of time in history, when the Mughal rule had declined and the British had built up the ruling position in India. This has the impact of tying modern art in India to the presence of western powers.

The first section of *Dialogue* was titled '**Confluence**' aimed at giving an overview starting even earlier than Kapur's show. Confluence began its survey with the 19th century art of the subcontinent; starting with south Indian Tanjore paintings, which had just been transferred from the National Museum in New Delhi to collection of the NGMA. Tanjore paintings combine a mix of many styles, such as Deccani, local Nayak

[96] The Swadeshi movement was part of the Indian independence movement and aimed at the development of Indian nationalism. Mainly an economic strategy, to remove the British Empire from power and improving economic conditions in India by following the principles of swadeshi (self-sufficiency).

[97] Mitter, Patha: *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1850-1922: Occidental Orientations*, Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 377-378.

[98]Datta, Ella: *Dialogue. Interactions in Indian Art from 1850 onwards*, National Gallery ofMondern Art, New Delhi, 2001.

style and Vijaynagara, and later adopted the style of the Company Paintings to cater to a European taste. The early painters of the Tanjore tradition were often attached to the princely courts and the origin of Tanjore paintings has been dated back to the Maratha court of Thanjavur in Tamil Nadu in the 17th century. The style flourished through the 19th century as artists inspired by European techniques produced album painting – many of which were carried back to Europe by their European patrons. They often carried embellishments of semi-precious stones, pearls and glass pieces which gave them a relief like effect. Some parts had layers of gold, while the remaining parts were coloured in bright colours. Mythological themes were suited to the taste of the employees of the East India Company. The paintings sometimes even carried brief descriptions in English. As such, Tanjore paintings are hybrid objects that show the complications of the 19th century. Traditional art continues to be made, but is often transformed by contact with European art and patrons.[99] By starting the exhibition with Tanjore painting, Lochan was locating the early impulses of modernity in Indian art in such works, created at the bazaar level, rather than just in the works and worlds of more elite groups who attended the academy and participated in salons.

Also included in this section was a series of Company School paintings from mid 19th century. 'Company School' is the term for the work commissioned by East India Company officials and army officers from traditional Indian artists who had earlier made paintings provincial courts. For their new patrons, the miniaturists often showed an ethnographic emphasis in their work, as well as architectural studies and studies of the flora and fauna of India.

As well as the Tanjore Paintings, the collection of Company Paintings had been handed over by the National Museum, New Delhi. The National Museum was

[99] Appasamy, Jaya: *Tanjavur painting of the Maratha Period*, New Delhi, 1980.

supposed to have post-1857 works. Although these belong to kinds of art that have longer histories, since they were made in the later part of the 19th century they were transferred to NGMA. The transfer must have taken place partly during Mukul Dey's (1956-1958), and also Pradosh Dasgupta's (1958-1970) tenure, according to the acquisition numbers. The Company School paintings had been on display before. The first guide book to the NGMA from 1967 suggests, that "we can follow the evolution of modern Indian art from the adjoining corridor what has a collection of Rajput paintings." The Paintings were exhibited alongside with textiles, like Cutch embroidery, which had also come from the National Museum. I assume that these exhibits were put on display, because they had just entered the collection of the NGMA.[100]

Inclusion of European Traveller Artists

The same section also showed works of European artists who had travelled and painted in India between the late 18th century and early 20th centuries.

The works of Thomas and William Daniells were shown in this section. The two British artists travelled India for nine years between 1785 and 1794, mapping and painting Indian landscapes and ancient architecture. Their paintings functioned as records of ancient and medieval monuments, ruins and landscapes, and at the same time they appear as testimonials of the longing the 'exotica', an exaggerated and alien 'Other' of the early orientalists. Thomas and William Daniells' expertise was based on the fashion for the picturesque, an aesthetic category popularised in England in the late 18th century. Irregularities and asymmetries were prized within the picturesque aesthetic, and artists sought landscapes with appropriate features. Views of crumbling ruins were popular among picturesque artists. As the Daniells travelled in India, they painted views of ancient architecture, set in the Indian landscape. Images such as

100 Author Unknown: *A Guide to the National Gallery*, New Delhi, 1967, p. 18.

Thomas Daniells' *Benanras, The Manikarnika Ghat* were impressive in their accuracy. The artists painted architectural sites all over India, with the help of an early version of the camera obscura, Their paintings appealed to both European officials as well as Indian royalty and patrons from both groups bought these paintings. However the intention was to bring back these paintings to Europe, to bring images of India for those who stayed in England and the paintings became the basis for prints that sold well in Europe, where a market for such images already existed. In England these paintings were to have a major influence on the architecture, such as the Royal Pavilion in Brighton Furthermore their works attracted the French Orientalists and were reproduced in many publications.[101]

Tilly Kettle, who was the earliest British artist to work in India, was included in this section. He had arrived at the port of Madras in 1768. Kettle was a portrait artist by profession and painted a number of British officials and Indians, which were tied up to them, like the Nawab Muhammed Ali Khan. His oil painting *Dancers*, part of the collection of the NGMA, is one of his non-portrait art works and shows a night scene of dancers before a temple. Kettle is depicting two dancing women draped rich garments with gleaming ornaments and the dramatic lighting is supporting the rhythmic movements very effectively. Surrounded by a group of spectators, standing and sitting down, partly involved in conversations, but pointing and looking at the dancers, this might depict a situation Kettle witnessed during his time in India as a portraitist of wealthy men.

The painting fed perfectly into the Orientalists vision of India and can be seen as a mere aesthetic representation of its historical evidence of dance, garments and life of the royals. But a critical dimension or even locating of the work in its context is not given in an overview exhibition, where Kettle's work is just one among many. It is

[101] Mitter, 1994, p. 129.

critical to exhibit a piece like this, without a embedding the work into any discourse on the west's patronizing perception of India.

The second section '**Indian Academic Realism: New Expressions**' looked at the influence that the Europeans style of portrait paintings had left on the Indian artists in 19th and early 20th century. Ravi Varma from the princely state of Travancore (presently in southern Kerala & some parts of Tamil Nadu), is represented here in the context of introducing of oil as a medium. Adapting the medium, Pestonji Bomanjee and MF Pithawalla, of the earliest academic realists trained at Sir J.J School of Art in Mumbai. With the 19th century's upcoming of art societies and salon artists, Indian artists slowly emerged on annual exhibitions, organized by the British, in Bombay, Calcutta and Simla.

The grudging nature of Raj patronage of Indian salon artists was indicated by the special category under which they were exhibited: 'excellent of their class'. Indian artists were marginalized in rubrics such as: 'native work in a particular medium', among these artists was also Raja Ravi Varma, who won prizes in these categories. This segregation was an echo of the racial discrimination in the bureaucracy, where coveted posts were almost exclusively reserved for Europeans, while Indians filled the lower echelons. And yet, for a successful implant of naturalism in India, the aim of the officials, Indian artists could not be indefinitely excluded from the mainstream. So-in practice the successful salon artist soon transcended the category, 'native artist'. A concept of difference, nonetheless, defined colonial art policy.[102]

In this context the argument Rajeev Lochan is making, in placing the works of Raja Ravi Varma subsequently after the company paintings, as the first Indian portraitist in the medium of oil paintings, seems unsatisfying. Born to an aristocratic family in

[102] Mitter, 1994, p. 145.

Kerala, he never visited an art school, but gained the reputation of an "artist genius" during his lifetime. Raja Ravi Varma's position needs to be read in context of his eclectic style, using elements form Tanjore and Company Paintings, and working out his career through the terms and conditions of colonial culture in India.

Both artists worked in a distinctive imperialist promoted style as descendants of the British art academies. So was Raja Ravi Varma's oeuvre based on colonial culture, which both remains uncommented in the exhibition and the catalogue.

'Search for Identity', the subsequent section, introduced the viewer to the process of artists finding their own identity in their making and artists in the context of cultural nationalism that reacted against colonialism. In order to do so, these artists looked back at their traditional inheritance and focused on miniatures paintings: As examples, Lochan picked the Bengal School artists, associated with Indian Nationalism, this art movement flourished in Calcutta and Santiniketan in the early 20th century. The most prominent Bengal School artist was Abanindranath Tagore, who rejected his training in the European style painting, instead turned to Indian miniature painting for inspiration. And Nandalal Bose made use of multi-perspective, he had leant from miniatures and their complex spatial division. Among the other artists in this section are Kshitindran Majumdar and AR Chughtai.

This section was followed by the canonical artists and their designated achievements, which served as titles for the sections. In Hungary born, at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris trained Amrita Sher-Gil is represented in her attempt to create an **'Individual expression'** in her portraits**.** She was critical of Indian art in general and dismissive of the Bengal and Bombay schools, in saying "The Indian art committed the mistake of feeding almost exclusively on the tradition of mythology and romance." She saw

herself as an individualist evolving a new technique that would be "fundamentally Indian in spirit".[103]

In 'Interface with folk', represented through the late colonial era and the artist Jamini Roy. His modernist vision of folk traditions of Bengal such as Kalighat and Bankura scroll paintings, is located in his local identity. Perhaps Roy should have been exhibited before Sher-Gil, since his take on an alternative interpretation of modern Indian identity influenced Amrita Sher-Gil in her work.

Subsequently the artists of the Bengal School were shown: Rabindranath Tagore's doodles in '**Soliloquies' and** '**Personal interactions',** reflects upon artists in dialogue with their source of inspiration, such as Abanindranath Tagore and his uncle and guide Rabindranath Tagore, and Ram Kinkar Baij's portraits of his Manipuri muse and lover Binodini.

'Public art and the mural tradition', the last sections showed artworks from the mid 1920s, when Nandalal Bose just began a bold experiment of reviving the mural tradition in Santiniketan and he invited the traditional mural artists Narsing Lal from Jaipur. His students Ram Kinkar Baij and Benode Behari Mukherjee took part in these experiments and murals were translated into paintings, which were shown in the exhibition.

The last section '**Communication with nature' again dealt with the works of** Nandalal Bose, Ram Kinkar Baij and Benode Behari Mukherjee in form of landscape paintings in Santiniketan, who had picked up a calligraphic brush style. The subjects of their art works focused on the man/nature relationship. As the catalogue text says, the artists aimed to to oppose the European approach of landscape paintings, which accurately depicted architecture and privileged naturalism.

[103] Sher-Gil, Amrita: 'Modern Indian Art', in: *The Hindu*, November 1, 1936.

In the exhibition *Dialogue: Interactions in Indian Art 1850s Onwards* Lochan sets out the foundation for his claim on modern Indian art and its inclusion.

Partha Mitter publication from 1994 may have been an impulse for layout of a formative phase in Modern Indian art, and influenced Lochan's exhibitions. While Mitter's earlier publication *The Triumph of Modernism*[104] the artist's generation of the years 1922-1947 examines, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1850-1922: Occidental Orientations* traces back the rise in the second half of the 19th century of a new class of professional Indian artists, that adopted the "occidental orientations" of the British in an "era of optimism" when Indian artists were keen on picking up European practises, foregrounded here is the introduction of the oil paintings in the Art Schools of Calcutta and Madras. These schools also attracted a new type of artist, which was the 'gentlemen artist' and not the artisan. From the 1870s onwards the Indian Salon Painter began to appear, and private patrons vanished. Instead there was a new public and quicker and cheaper ways of art production were needed, therefore printmaking was practiced. "Wunderkind" [105] Raja Ravi Varma culminated these changes in becoming an 'genius' Salon artist, whose academic style paintings were reproduced in cheap prints and sold widely in India. The second part of the book focuses on Abanindranath Tagore, and the swadeshi movement in order to reject Western influence in technique and taste. The Bengal school sought to express an indigenous nationalistic aesthetic in their work.

Mitter's chronological approach is highlighting certain movements, and developments and introductions of new mediums. In an old-fashioned manner, just like Lochan, Mitter picks a handful of influential individual artists and discuses their life in detail. Lochan pursues the same approach of narrating the entry of western influence through

[104] Mitter, Partha: *The Triumph of Modernism, India's artists and the Avant-garde, 1922–1947*, Reaktion Books, London, 2007.
[105] Mitter, 1994, p.181.

the European Traveller Artists, the Academic Realism, and then the Bengali counter movement and return to traditional forms in his exhibition, as well in *Dialogue* and in …*in the seeds of time*. Solely the Company Paintings are not subject of Mitter's interest and therefore not mentioned in the publication.

Signposts of the Times: The Golden Trail

It is not clear why the biannual concept of *Dialogue* was not followed up., Three years later in 2004, another exhibition based on the collection was held, which could conceptually be seen as a follow up on *Dialogues*. *Signposts of the Times: The Golden Trail* intended to celebrate 50th anniversary of the NGMA. Unfortunately there is no catalogue for this exhibition and no records are available, therefore it cannot be discussed in detail here. The NGMA webpage recalls the exhibition as a show that included 213 works from the gallery's permanent collection, again gathering landmark works, which chart the development of modern Indian art from 1850 onwards.

While the previous exhibition had ended with the developments in Indian modernism in the 1920s, this exhibition showed the subsequent following generations of artists[106] and meant to be seen as the second part of continuing history of Indian art.

The NGMA branch in Bangalore borrowed the same title for the exhibition on permanent display, tracing the history of modernism from the 1850s to the current trends in the 21st century, which was inaugurated on the occasion of the opening of the museum in 2009.

[106] FN Souza, Bhupen Khakhar, KCS Paniker, GR Santosh, J Swaminathan, KG Subramanyan and Tyeb Mehta among others.

The New Wing in 2009

These temporary exhibitions were mounted in Jaipur House, the original art-deco building of 2300 square metres. A development that was to have a profound influence on the exhibitions of the NGMA was the development of the new wing, which would add 12000 square metres of exhibition space, and immediately make a more ambitious exhibition programme possible. The expansion also brought in more space for display, administration as well as storage.

As early as in 1985 a new wing was planned for the NGMA, for which a design competition was held.

The design proposed by TEAM architects - comprising AR Ramanthan, Snehanshu Mukherjee and Anurag Gupta - was selected through a national competition, but it took twenty-three years for the new wing to be opened to the public in 2009. Financial constraints caused delays; construction that was begun in 1997 continued sporadically for the next twelve years.

The new wing is divided into three blocks, of which the first one hosts the permanent collection and a museum's shop. The exhibition space covers four floors and two side-wings, which can be accessed through bridges between the first and second block. The asymmetrically placed levels are lit by both natural and artificial light. Areas open from one to another, while the walls give way to glimpses of the outdoors. All levels are accessible by wheelchairs, through ramps and elevators, which was not given in the Jaipur House. The second block has an additional space for specific exhibitions and the third block hosts the administrative offices, a library, an auditorium and drawing rooms.

Although First difficulties already evolved in as early as 2011 when the gallery hosted an retrospective of Anish Kapoor, split between the NGMA in Delhi and Mehboob Studios in Mumbai when a wall of the new wing had be taken down in order bring in

one of his large scale sculpture. Clearly the plans of 1984 had not been planned in accordance to installation works.

The architects had tried to match the stone of the Jaipur House in favour of an aesthetic appeal on the outside. Unfortunately the interiors of the gallery in their functionality and aesthetic experience are limited. The exhibition halls are divided by countless mobile walls and all floors appear in the same format. While walking anti-clockwise on the first floor, the following two floors would need to be walked through clockwise to follow a chronological order. The two floors in the second block do not offer any orientation for the visitor at all, and it is easy to miss entire corridors. Another problem is in the lighting, which often reflects on the surfaces of the artworks and the viewer is constantly struggling in finding a position in front of the artwork, where he or she would not be bothered by the reflections.

The reactions by the artist community were unenthusiastic. "It is so open and naked," photographer Raghu Rai had said in an interview with Himanshu Bhagat. "It doesn't contain the space. I'll hesitate to have a retrospective here." Also Photographer Pablo Bartholomew and artist Vivan Sundaram went a step further stating the problems of the museum mirrored in its architecture; it was too bureaucratic and was not a lively space. They also noted that that the gap between the art scene and the museum was constantly growing, as was the gap between the public and the gallery: "Private art is for a niche, moneyed class. There is a huge middle class that wants to see art but can't buy it."[107]

[107]Bhagat, Himanshu: 'Change in the wings', *livemint*, January 30, 2009.

…in the seeds of time (2009)

With the opening of the new building six times more space than the Jaipur house needed to be filled, 23000 square metres were made available for display, which led to the installation of a large permanent exhibition over six floors plus the floor that shows special solo artists exhibitions. At the same time, the Jaipur house still hosts exhibitions too.

The new wing opened on January 19, 2009 when Sonia Gandhi inaugurated the exhibition ...*in the seeds of tim*e.[108]

. …*in the seeds of time* was announced as an exhibition "tracing the trajectory of modern Indian art from the colonial encounter in the 18th century to contemporary works in the 21st century"[109], showing paintings, sculptures, graphics and photographs. Now that there was so much space available, the exhibition could offer a much larger range of works and give an overview of modern Indian art from the late 18th century till contemporary times.

Foreign influence during colonial times

The first part of the exhibition, laid out on the second floor of the new wing, appears very similar to the themes of the previous exhibitions discussed above. But this time, Lochan went back in time even before the British traveller artists and showed early paintings of Indian artists during the British Period. It is debateable if miniature paintings from the Company Period have their place in the history of modernism. Miniature paintings do play a role in Indian modernism as Modernists later turned

[108] At the same time opened *Rhythms of India: The Art of Nandalal Bose*, which represented 85 works by the artists, on the ground floor of the new wing and was followed by a series of retrospectives on Indian masters from the collection. Presently the ground floor hosts an exhibition showing Amita Sher-Gil's works from the collection.

[109] http://ngmaindia.gov.in/ce_seeds.asp

towards miniature paintings for inspiration, but not necessarily Company Period paintings. In the exhibition, Lochan tried to give an idea of the arts in India under the influence of the British East India Company from the 19th century onwards with the fading of local patronage. In the catalogue Rajeev Lochan mentions the replacement of the earlier patrons by British officials, but he does this without embedding this in a context of how it might have influenced the work of the artists. Among the works exhibited in this section, we find a painting of *Krishna and Radha and the Gopis* and *Romance of DholaMaro* from the Company Period, and also a Ragamala Painting from the Madhava School.

In the following section, he shows the European Traveller artists, Thomas and William Daniells and Tilly Kettle, whose work is, as described in the introduction of the catalogue, "filtered through the 'orientalist' lens"[110]. As Lochan describes the paintings, his own language appears orientalist. He describes the motifs as "an exotic and mysterious land in paintings depicting the ghats of Benaras, dancing girls in princely courts, colourful caste costumes, portraits of local rulers and their courtiers, different native occupations and the local flora and fauna." Thomas Daniells' painting of the *Ghats of Benaras* (1813) is juxtaposed with another painting of his, called *View of Fort Merani, Oman* (1814). The latter painting Daniells must have made when he travelled from Bombay to Muscat, after leaving India. Either Lochan aims here at making a formalist comparison between the Fort in the desert in Oman and the architecture of temples by the Ganga in Benaras or he is pointing out the wide-ranging travels of these artists, discovering the world eastwards from their native country. The juxtaposition

[110]Lochan, Rajeev: 'Introduction', in: ...*in the seeds of time*, National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, 2009, p. 2.

also raises questions on how the painting had travelled from Oman to India, which remain unanswered.

The subsequent Company School paintings and early experiments with printmaking are described in the catalogue, as a "potent encounter between local artistic traditions and the newly learnt styles which resulted in hybrid and vibrant images" and the wall text says about their purpose, that they were made to "document, categorize and archive a country that was too vast and complex for the Company and the British rulers to fathom". The language of the wall text and the catalogue seems to whitewash the fact that these paintings were painted by Indian artists but targeted towards a European audience, the aesthetic conventions mediating the Indian making and the European taste. These paintings exemplify the 19th century interest in classification and ordering, which is widely seen in the surveying, and later the census activities, of British colonial administrators and soldiers such as Colin Mackenzie (1754-1821) and Francis Buchanan (1762-1829). Lochan could have mentioned here the purpose of Company Paintings, the European market and its disappearance with the arrival of photography in India.[111]

Interestingly Partha Mitter does not give the Company painters any attention, probably because they were miniaturists, did not paint in oils and could not be considered "gentlemen painters" of the kind trained and polished by the art schools.

Refocus: Traditional Arts

As attempted in earlier exhibitions, Lochan includes a section on the 'Traditional Arts' of India, showing paintings from the centres of Tanjore and Mysore. The wall texts says that they were made for a market and gained prominence in the 18th and 19th

[111]Branfoot, Crispin: 'Painting Processions: The Social and Religious Landscape of Southern India in a 'Company' Album', in: *Orientations*, SOAS Perodical, Issue: November/December 2007, p. 73.

century, with subjects that range from decorative elements to sacred subjects and religious deities. Also part of this section are the Kalighat paintings from Calcutta, which were not included before.

With the rising prominence of the Kalighat temple in Calcutta in the 19th century, Kalighat paintings gained more prominence and were sold widely as inexpensive tourist souvenirs by the temple to be taken home by pilgrims and prayed to at a home altar. These relatively small watercolour drawings on paper initially depicted deities. Soon other representations were included, such as Islamic prophets and taziyas (tomb models). Kalighat painters are best known however for their secular works, particularly their satirical depictions of contemporary life. British presence was reflected through Hindu goddesses wearing Victorian crowns, playing western instruments and being painted in front of English interiors with heavy curtains, resembling the wealthy Calcutta houses of the time.[112] These paintings were made by traditional *patua* (scroll painters), who had migrated from rural areas in Bengal to Calcutta. From multi registered patas (scrolls) painted on cloth their medium transformed in the city to single images on paper and they increasingly used quick drying watercolours in place of gouache and tempera, in order to produce a large number of paintings in a quick and cheap manner. Kalighat paintings thereby participated in the emergence of Bengali identity in the colonial capital in the face of the increasing Europeanization of Calcutta's intellectual and cultural life.[113]

The wall text in the exhibition hall tells the viewer about the motifs of Kalighat painting and the fact that they dealt with a number of religious subjects, "but also with current incidents, scandals and satires to show the hypocrisies of the nouveau rich",

[112] Jain, Jyotindra: 'Kalighat Painting: Other perspectives', in: *Indian Art, an overview*, edited by Gayatri Sinha, Rupa & Co, New Delhi, 2003, p. 8-21.
[113] Gosh, Pika: 'Kalighat Paintings from Nineteenth Century Calcutta in Maxwell Sommerville's "Ethnological East Indian Collection"', Penn Museum, Volume 42, Issue 3, 2010, p. 13.

but paintings of this latter type cannot be found on display, which makes the information secondary to the experience. It does perhaps help in introducing the viewer into the influence Kalighat paintings had on later artists, like Jamini Roy, who returned to traditional forms and is abundantly represented through the collection of the NGMA.

Indian Academic artists

The next section turns to the Indian artists who received western training in art schools, describing them as a platform for Indian Academic artists emulating European Gentlemen artists whom "they deeply admired." Lochan's language seems euphemistic about this phase, which has been analysed as a time of deep racial bias.

The next section devoted to the Indian Academic Artists, showing Raja Ravi Varma together with MF Pithawalaa. In this show perhaps Ravi Varma is here less foregrounded than in Geeta Kapur's exhibition, where he and Amrita Sher-Gil together represented Indian acceptance of oil paintings and different approaches to the study of the human body. Raja Ravi Varma is here shown in the context of the establishment of art schools under the British in the 1850s to serve the demands of the British industry and making art education a part of the colonial project. The wall text here describes the British idea of art education "aimed to affect a moral amelioration of the colony through an improvement of its aesthetic taste" which was taught in the art schools of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, with a syllabi based on the School of Industrial Arts in South Kensington, London. Again this section offers no critical examination of the influence of this strategic step of the British in setting up schools in order to 'produce' art works for a western market and to propagate Western values in art education along with the colonial agenda.

The catalogue asserts that local artists and craftsmen had been trained in the schools, while scholars like Partha Mitter locate gentlemen artists differently. According to Mitter, these schools only attracted young men from financially well-situated families due to high admission fees. This new generation of artists, which had been schooled by western artists, asserted their individuality unlike earlier court artists. The high degree of individualisation and intellectualism of these artists made them stand in opposition to craftsmanship and artisanal skill.[114] From this context, the concept of the artist as a genius evolved, whose ingenuity is not based on skill or talent, but inventiveness in terms creating an image the carries an 'idea'. The realistic portrait, rapidly overtook other genres taught in the schools, especially in Calcutta. Portraits catered to the interest of the European patrons as well as the Indian elite and were sold to the high society in Calcutta.

One of these 'artist geniuses' placed by Lochan in this section was Ravi Varma, This was confusing perhaps, since Ravi Varma never attended an art school and was a self-taught artist whose career pre-dated the generations trained in art schools. In his early life in Travancore, Ravi Varma had studied traditional Tanjore from his uncle. At the palace a collection of palm leaf manuscripts, Tanjore glass paintings and a few oil paintings by European artists was kept.[115] The Varma family had a tradition in amateur panting; his uncle Raja Raja Varma, younger brother C. Raja Raja Varma and sister Mangalabei Tampuratti were all artists. The western artist Theodore Jensen had travelled Travancore in 1868 and met the twenty year old Ravi Varma, who was allowed to watch him working, as Mitter suggests.[116] Furthermore the scholars, who are interested in representing Ravi Varma as a purely self-taught artist claim, that Jensen

[114] Mitter, 1994, p. 80.
[115]Ramachandran, A.: 'Raja RaviVarma, The Marketing Strategies of a Modern Indian Artist', in: *Indian Art, an overview*, edited by Gayatri Sinha, Rupa & Co, New Delhi, 2003, p. 23.
[116] Mitter, 1994, p. 184.

did not want to relinquish his technique. Mitter assumes that Jenson simply lacked the time to mentor the young artist.

Still Lochan seems not be interested in making a connection between the Tanjore paintings and Ravi Varmas's works. In …*in the seeds of time* Lochan focuses on the later Ravi Varma, an example of an artist catering to the tastes of his foreign patrons, and painting portraits, feminine subjects as well as genre paintings in a highly realistic manner, but he is not presented as a transitional figure between the pre-modern to the modern. Amrita Sher-Gil, who was placed alongside with Ravi Varma in Geeta Kapur's exhibition, holds this place in Lochan's exhibition, and he grants her a solo exhibition on the first floor.

Bengal School

The next section is subtitled as the 'nationalist project in art' foregrounds the efforts of Abanindranath Tagore in collaboration with EB Havell[117]. Together, these were the two main forces behind the Bengal School of painting, a deliberate turning away from the academic realism of the Western artists, popularly practiced by Indian artists such as Ravi Varma. As more artists began using Western ideas of composition, perspective, and realism to illustrate Indian themes, the artists of the Bengal School rebelled against these styles. The paradox at the heart of the situation is that it was the very creation of a 'school' of art, which came from the solidification of the 'movement' that drained it

[117]Havell was close to the swadeshi movement of Indian art and a first step in his position was to abolish the British teaching system. He included Oriental art in the curriculum, which, according to him, should be the basis of all art instructions. Also he introduced several techniques such as fresco decoration for walls, stained glass windows, lacquer work, and stencils, which opened up a wide range of opportunities for remunerative employment for students. At a time when his predecessors such as the archaeologists James Fergusson and Alexander Cunningham adopted a Eurocentric approach in their scholarly discourses, Havell edged them out with discourses of aesthetics and Indian ideals of art. In his opinion, Indian sculptures, should be ranked with the noblest creations of the West. These ideals and attitudes had worked behind his reformative methods, which he introduced in the curriculum of art teaching.

of its revolutionary and nationalist goal. Unfortunately, as Tapati explains, "it was a tendency towards standardization rather than innovation which came to dominate Abanindranath's 'new school' of painting."[118]

The Bengal School arose in the early 20th century as an avant-garde and nationalist movement reacting against the Western academic art styles previously promoted in India. Also known as "Indian style of painting" in its early days, it was led by Abanindranath Tagore and supported by British art teacher EB Havell who was the principal of the Government Art College at Calcutta at the time. Abanindranth Tagore, turned away from western art and devoted his interest fully to his search for 'Indianness', in researching traditional Indian art forms and engagement with murals, Mughal and Rajpur miniatures, Kalighat *patas*, Ajanta frescos, at the same time he had an aversion to the consolidation of a formula of an "Indian-style" to set against the established formula of Western academic art. As principal of the art college in Calcutta, EB Havell, was engaged in a parallel project of rediscovering India's heritage in art and using it as the basis for training a new generation of art students. The convergence of their thinking eventually led Abanindranath to join Havell's call to join the Bengal School as vice-princepal in 1905, besides these efforts at rejecting Western aesthetics in his own work. As a paid employee of the British Government he was able to disseminate his unique teachings on art to young Indian artists. His acceptance, although reluctant, to become a government employee in the name of spreading the ideas of a "nationalist" art movement is the perfect embodiment of the nature of Abanindranath's nationalism.[119]

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[118] Guha-Thakurta, Tapati: *The Making of a New 'Indian' Art: Artists, Aesthetics, and Nationalism in Bengal, c. 1850 – 1920*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 285-286.

[119] Kumar, R. Siva: *The Paintings of Abanindranath Tagore*, Kolkata, Pratikshan, 2008, p.84.

Abanindranath Tagore is represented through a series of paintings in the exhibition, expressing his call for 'swadeshi', but also his interest in Japanese art. Abanindranath had come in contact with Japanese art through the critic Okakura Tenshin who had visited Calcutta in 1902. This contact left a lasting impression, as the Bengal school artists learnt the wash technique from visiting artists from Japan, innovating and modifying it to better suit their own needs. Tapati Guha-Thakurta has argued, the dichotomy between East and West was maintained, even if the hierarchy of terms was reversed, by anti-colonial nationalists in Bengal who sought to establish Eastern spirituality as superior to Western materialism.[120]

Abanindranath's works are followed by other artists of the early Bengal School, like MAR Chugtai's and his watercolour paintings and Mukul Dey's drawings and prints, such as *Santhal Maiden*. These works are representative of the style, developed at the Bengal School, showing the turn eastwards though their techniques and depicting local motifs.

In 1997 the NGMA hosted the exhibition *Santiniketan: The Making of a Contextual Modernism*, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of India's Independence, curated by R. Siva Kumar. He offers a different reading of the Bengal School and Santiniketan in claiming that the Santiniketan artists did not believe that in being indigenous, one has to be historicist either in theme or in style. And that in order to be modern one has to adopt a particular trans-national formal language or technique. R. Siva Kumar separates the Santiniketan school from the Santiniketan movement. The movement was shaped by the artists Nandalal Bose, Benode Behari Mukherjee, Ram Kinkar Baij and Rabindranath Tagore, by not working in the same style but agreeing on the same ideas. Accumulating this in his for this case developed theory of 'contextual

[120] Guha-Thakurta, Tapati: *The Making of a New 'Indian' Art: Artists, Aesthetics, and Nationalism in Bengal, c. 1850 – 1920*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1992.

modernism', R. Siva Kumar states, that "the Santiniketan artists were one of the first who consciously challenged this idea of modernism by opting out of both internationalist modernism and historicist indigenousness and tried to create a context sensitive modernism."[121]

This exhibition does not seem to have left an impact on Rajeev Lochan's reading of the Bengal School and Santiniketan, since he doesn't make a distinction between the movement and school, but reflects upon them as a unity. In contrast, Lochan points out Rabindranath engagement with international modernism by organising encounters through exhibitions, between his peers and contemporary western art, such as Bauhaus school.[122]

Santiniketan

The Bengal school eventually paved the way for future modernist movements, and its influence declined in the 1920s. The next floor shows only artworks by artists who had studied in at the Kala Bhavan in Santiniketan, from the days of its greatest prominence (1920's to 40's) till the 70's when its influence had declined.

S Vinayak Masoji's *The Farmer's Joy* has inscribed on it birthday wishes for Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in 1952. Nehru must have gifted it to the NGMA. Other artists shown on this floor are Haren Das, SB Palsiker, Nirode Mazumdar, YK Shukla's *Portrait of a Chinese artist*, Zainul Abedin's *Gorki* and numerous oil paintings by DP Roy Chowdhury and a large number of drawings and paintings by Ram Kinkar Baij. Benode Behari Mukherjee's *Sunflowers* are kept in a not very prominent corner, and are followed by works from Nandalal Bose, Gaganendranath Tagore and Rabindranth Tagore. The last named artists are introduced through short wall texts,

[121] http://humanitiesunderground.org/all-the-shared-experiences-of-the-lived-world-ii/
[122] Lochan, 2009, p. 5.

giving the information about the main criteria of their style and whose pupil or teacher they had been. While Kapur's *Hundred years* often clustered a group of artists around an outstanding individual, gathering Santiniketan artists around the figure of Ram Kinkar Baij as the most influential and most radical representative of this school for instance, in …*in the seeds of time* Baij's peers are shown in almost equal parts. If modernism in India can be understood as a project of imagining and critiquing the nation-form, as Ram Kinkar Baij and Benode Behari Mukherjee did in the 1930s, it is not pointed out in this exhibition.

Nandalal Bose in Lochan's exhibition is only mentioned as a member of the Kala Bhavan while Kapur was reading him in his nationalistic expression and put Bose together with artists prejudiced against the Santiniketan school: KK Hebbar, SB Palsikar, Mohan Samant and especially Laxman Pai, who were working on developing an Indian visual language as well, but from a different angle and a generation later.

One-fourth of space of this floor was devoted to Jamini Roy, who formulated a style based on traditional art forms and "initiating a workshop manner of painting and printing in which apprentices could produce large numbers of works for easy and cheap dissemination."[123] Presently the space dedicated to Jamini Roy remains empty, since the work are given on loan for of a special exhibition at the NGMA in Bangalore, which I will discuss later in this chapter.

Rajeev Lochan has an interest in showing printmaking in India, which again is examined against its colonial past. The British introduced printmaking as part of art education in the 19th century. A growing printing and publishing trade in Calcutta created a demand for the illustrations and so woodcut prints flourished in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Similarly, in Santiniketan in the 20th century, a vigorous publishing programme of Bengali Primers for children saw the encouragement of the

[123] Lochan, 2009, p. 6.

graphic medium. The Santiniketan masters actively experimented with engravings, woodcuts and linocuts. Both at the Government School of Arts at Calcutta and at Kala Bhavana in Santiniketan, printmaking facilities became an important part of art education. Later, as displayed by the works at NGMA, the art school in Baroda also built up its printing process considerably. Although graphic art initially fulfilled the need of publishing, before long it excited the artists with its potential as a medium. The artists Somnath Hore, Haren Das, Anupam Sud, Jyoti Bhatt represent the development of printmaking in the exhibition, but were honoured with a larger special exhibition *Celebrating indigenous printmaking in India* in 2015.

Sculptures of the artists A Ramachandran and Jyoti Bhatt are exhibited alongside the paintings and prints along with their school or groups they belonged to. The centre of the second floor has a kind of theatrical scene with sculptures by A Ramachandran in front of red curtains and with a bowl of red pigment placed in front. The layout of this scene seems to resemble a temple scene.

Over a period of time I noticed that while the broad contours of the exhibition remained the same, sections were occasionally rehung when works of an artist were removed special exhibitions, such as the ones on Jamini Roy and Amrita Sher-Gil.

Post 1950s – Artist Groups and Collectives

On the third floor of the New Wing, Lochan continues to narrate in a chronological manner. After leaving Bengal and Santiniketan, he carries on with artist groups and collectives, starting with the Bombay Group of Contemporary Indian Artists, also often referred to as the Young Turks. The group was formed by PT Reddy, MY Kulkarni, Bhople, Majid, Clement Batista in the 1940s, revolting again the British taught style at the Sir JJ School, to formulate an "artistic idiom that synthesised traditional Indian art with international trends." Among the groups and collectives

Lochan also introduces the Progressive Artist Group with, the Calcutta Group, mentions Madras as a centre and the Group 1980 as well as Delhi Silpi Chakra. As well as the schools Sir JJ Art School in Bombay, Faculty of Fine Arts in Baroda and Santiniketan as creative centres. He shows a number of paintings by Pran Nath Mago, who was the leader of the Delhi Silpi Chakra and was not given space in Geeta Kapur's exhibition at all and BC Sanyal's *Old Man with Birth* is in the centre of this part of the exhibition, flanked by the much more influential artist Satish Gujral who joined the group later.

While until now it seems that Lochan has an democratic attempt in showing art from all parts of India, he excludes the Kerala Radicals in this section, a group formed in the 1980's. It was the first concerted movement by a group of avant-garde artists, mainly sculptors and painters, majority of who were Keralites. Incidentally, this movement was, an extension of anti-caste, anti-feudal and anti-establishment movements that erupted during Emergency (1975-1977) in Kerala as well as in other parts of India. The informal group consisted of 'differently thinking' artists like KP Krishna Kumar, NN Rimzon, Alex Mathew, Prabhakaran, KM Madhusudhanan, Akitham Vasudevan. This group is not represented in the exhibition even though the NGMA possesses works of these artists. Before Geeta Kapur had exhibited NN Rimzon's large sculpture of a naked man in *Hundred Years*, which "drew much attention and flak"[124], as described in chapter two. In Lochan's exhibition it remains unclear, why he is not showing the Keralites.

[124] Conversation with Geeta Kapur, March, 2015.

1960s onwards

The two floors in the second block the building complex which is reached through bond bridges from the second and third floor of the main building shows contemporary artists starting roughly around 1960s/70s up to the early 2000s.

Unfortunately this section does not follow up on any curatorial concept and without wall texts or chronological order walking the halls feels like being in a storage rather then looking at works in an exhibition setup. It seems that Rajeev Lochan is constantly looking for artists who are in search of the traditional or intermingling languages of European influence and Indian art forms. From the 1960s onwards, he refuses to curate the artists. From this point onwards his concept rests upon representation of groups, movements and mediums.

Large format paintings, such as A Ramachandran's *Indian Resurrections*, are hanging opposite Paramjeet Singh's abstract paintings and Tyeb Metha's falling figure. Anjoli Ela Menon's *Mutations* is sharing a narrow corridor with Bhupen Kharkhar's iconic work *Man with a bouquet of flowers* next to an urban scene by Sudhir Patwardhan.

There is a loose gathering of artists who engaged with abstraction. KCS Paniker, the principal of the Madras Art School for nine years from 1957 onwards and founder of the Cholamandalam artists' community represents one of very few South Indian artists. Despite his western training he turned towards Tantric symbolism for its aesthetic impact, rather than out of a spiritual interest. DP Chowdhury's oil paintings and sculptures are exhibited in the Santiniketan section, where he had studied under Abanindranath Tagore, even though he could have found his place here as an influential teacher of the Madras Art School.

MF Hussain's relief *Zameen* (1955) exemplifies how problems of visual representation raised by colonialism and anti-colonial nationalism were not resolved in 1947, through the citation of European masters, such as Picasso or Klee. In the display, this painting

appears lost, as it is being over the ramp that connects the two floors between artists from the 60s-80s and from the 90s onwards. It is too high to see properly, and it does not fit chronologically in this location.

The second floor of the second block, which shows more contemporary works, hosts also a collection of photographs of Sanjeev Saith, Parthiv Shah, Dayanita Singh, Vivan Sundaram and Nemai Ghosh, but also the drawings of the much earlier artist Nasreen Mohammedi together with contemporary city maps of Zarina Hashmi.

Lochan describes the 1990s as an important point in time in the wall text. With the opening up of the Indian economy to the forces of liberalisation and global industry and trade, arts too entered a new phase. Lochan explains, that Indian art is now part of global movements and that he wishes to observe how "Indian artists respond to being placed in the global spotlight."[125] He might refer here to works of Subodh Gupta, who is represented through a large painting as well as two permanently installed sculptures in the garden of the gallery. Subodh Gupta also had a retrospective in 2014 at the NGMA and embodies the hybridized fusion between local and global, as Lochan points out in context of the retrospective: "The artist has always experimented with his art practices and has successfully elevated local experiences to the global plane even as they are rooted in an indigenous context."[126]

The youngest work on display is a painting by the Mumbai based artist Prajakta Potnis[127] from 2004. The artist who now works mainly in installations and ruptures between the public and private, urban alienation and its effects on an individual's domestic sphere, as well as political themes seems to badly represented through an

[125] Lochan, 2009, p. 10.
[126] Press Release of the exhibition: 'Subodh Gupta – Everything is Inside', National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, 17 January - 16 March 2014.
[127] Potnis was born in 1980

early painting of flowers. This illustrates the difficulties of collecting contemporary artists who are in the process of finding their visual language.

All in all, Rajeev Lochan seems to attempt a chronological approach in …*in the seeds of time*. His inclusion of Salon Artists and Company Paintings is congruent with Partha Mitter's exegesis of the beginnings of Modernism. Mitter's publication might have had an impact on Lochan's curatorial decisions, to exhibit the works of the Daniells, Kettle and Hodges and the Company Paintings. The overall concept traces back modernity through Indian art, pointing out its initial western influence and then continuing with the succeeded national project of the Bengal school and retelling a non-western modernity.

The exhibitions traces back the foreignness of the past, just like Partha Mitter's publication 'Art and Nationalism in Colonial India 1850-1922' suggested in 1994. While Mitter describes extensively the participating parties, such as artists and art educators, as well as patrons and critics, Lochan constructs as representative narrating based on the collection. He gathered the landmark works, representing single artists, movements and schools and based upon this works re-tells the history of foreign influence on Indian art, by mere showing of representatives and not providing the context.

On the other hand it may be unreasonable to think one person alone can curate an overview exhibitions covering 150 years of creative output of a country like India, hold a bureaucratic position at the same time and follow the tight constrains of a low budget.

On this account the gallery hired external curators for the special exhibitions, out of which I would like to discuss the two exhibitions with are on view during the time period of writing this thesis.

Special single artist exhibitions

Amrita Sher-Gil: A passionate quest, 2014, curated by YashodharaDalmia

While …*in the seeds of time* initially opened accompanied by an exhibition on the works of Nandalal Bose on the ground floor of the New Wing, presently an Amrita Sher-Gil show is on view since more than a year already. Initially the exhibition was planned for three months only. A multitude of Amrita Sher-Gil's works are stored at the National Gallery of Modern Art in New Delhi. The Government of India declared her paintings as National Art Treasures, and they cannot be taken out of the country.[128]

Yashodhara Dalmia, who is the author of two books and various articles on the artist, curated the exhibition displaying the NGMA collection almost in its entirety. The exhibition was put together in 2013 on the occasion of the closing of the birth centenary celebration of Amrita Sher-Gil (1913-1941) and opened in 2014. It includes a collection of photographs, as well as many quotes of her personal letters on a free standing text panels *Remembering Amrita Sher-Gil,* as researched material offering an introduction for the exhibition. Furthermore the exhibition features a power point presentation highlighting the European art scene in the early 20th century, conceptualised by Ella Datta. The slideshow educates the viewer on the genres and movements at the beginning of the 20th century, including the artists who had an influence on Amrita's work, like Paul Gaugin, as well as the movements that were "too radical" for her, such as Cubism and the Fauves. It situates Amrita in as a member of

[128]Singh, Kishore: 'A National Treasure', *Business Standard*, March 14, 2014

the School of Paris, while the exhibition is taking a stronger claim on Amrita's longing for her home country, India.

Yashodhara Dalmia suggests that is was the Hungarian musician Bela Bartok who came to visit the family and advised the young Amrita to start drawing her surroundings.[129] In the age of sixteen (1928), young Amrita left India for Paris, where she studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. The first section out of four, *Threshold* shows Amrita's early works, when she just started studying in Paris. Her early work comprises still-life studies and figurative works from models. Also shown is the painting *Portrait of a young man* showing Amrita's friend and classmate Boris Taslitzky, for which she won a price in her first year at the Ecole des Beaux Art in 1931. In *Marie Louise Chasseny* (1932)Amrita painted her colleague with a masculine appearance and earnest face expression. Marie Louise Chasseny shared a studio with Amrita during these years. In the painting *Professional Model* (1933), Amrita painted in a very sensitively manner the features of an aging woman. Dalmia writes that Amrita creates "an awareness of being separate and apart from the Eurocentric frame of reference albeit, the fair skinned and objectified form, particularly that of women is transformed into a darker hued persona in control of her destiny."

Later in her work, Amrita becomes increasingly interested in depicting women not just in portraits or nude studies, but also as non-passive subjects. In the second section *Icon and Iconoclastic* Dalmia shows the paintings offering the viewer an "alternative to the male gaze". In 1934 Amrita returned to India, where she stayed in her ancestral home in Amritsar in Punjab, finding her own style. Returning to Indian subjects, *Indian Journey* clusters the works together that show Amrita's return to her cultural background. Artisanal practices, peasant in landscape studies were influenced by transformative use of the Ajanta

[129]Dalmia, Yashodhara: *Amrita Sher-Gil: A passionate quest*, National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, 2014, p. 3-19.

and Ellora murals. An example of her new aesthetic sense is *Group of three Girls* (1935) with its strong contrasts and somehow isolated from each other figures. After leaving Amritsar she moved to Shimla, where she worked in her own studio. She visited Bombay, where she met art historian Karl Khandalalvala, who became a close friend. The caves sanctuaries of Ajanata and Ellora in western India left a deep impact on her, which resembles in the paintings *Bride's Toilet* (1937), she had made soon after returning to Shimla. In 1938 Amrita married her first cousin Dr. Victor Eagan and spent some time in Hungary, where she followed up on her interest daily life motifs. Back in India she and her husband stayed in Saraya in Uttar Pradesh, where she, fascinated by Mughal miniatures, eliminated the naturalistic perspective from her paintings: *Woman on Charpoy* (1940) and *Woman at Bath* (1940). *Hungarian Manifestation* shows a small section of paintings Amrita painted on short holidays in Hungary with her Hungarian husband. Again her main interest focuses on the peasant, busy market scenes and portraits. Amrita Sher-Gil died at the age of 28, just days before the opening of her first major solo show in Lahore. The circumstances of her passing remain unknown.

By giving Amrita Sher-Gil a special space for her works, Lochan did not need to place her into his narrative of modern Indian art. Amrita's rejection of nationalist project of the Bengal School but being inspired by artists like Rabindranath Tagore and Jamini Roy as well as her background in western art training, would have required to create a third direction in Lochan's layout of Indian art before 1947. However the special exhibition is centred solely around the western influences on Sher-Gil's work and the return to Indian traditional forms.

The Jamini Roy Collection of the NGMA (1887-1972)

In 2013 art historian Ella Datta had curated a major exhibition to honour Jamini Roy's 125th birth anniversary. Many of the exhibits were drawn from the substantial

collection of the NGMA, while some were given on loan from the private collections of Abishekh Poddar and A. Ramachandran.

Jamini Roy's birth date, as well as the year he joined art school and the dates of many of most of his art works are unclear. However the assumption that Jamini Roy was born in 1887 in the village of Beliatore in West Bengal is widely accepted among scholars. His father had left a government job, to become a cotton farmer. Jamini Roy joined the Government school of Arts in Kolkata (then Calcutta) and soon after he turned away from academic realism taught at the school, and looked into the folk art forms of Bengal, Kalighat amongst others.

In the collection of the NGMA are 217 works by Jamini Roy, of which many were acquired during the artist's lifetime from his studio. Additionally some 15 paintings and 23 drawings had been obtained in 1954, when the Hermann Goetz was the director. The majority of the works had been acquired in 1975, during LP Sihare's tenure and three years after the artist's passing. The works were bought from Jamini Roy's wife and other family members.

In 1988 a collection of wooden sculptures were acquired from the artist's grandson, Debabrata Roy during Anis Farooqui's tenure as the director.

The NGMA collection holds a number of paintings and sketches, from 1920 onwards. These show Roy's early experiments with forms: during this time, for example sketchings of cats which must have lead to one of his well-known painting *Cat with Lobster*. Another sketch shows the Greek mythology figure *Icarus*, a winged man, who might have been the prototype for later angels in his religious paintings, like *Mary and Christ*.

After rejecting academic realism, he developed his very own pictorial language. Until 1930s he was not using impressionist styles, but rather painted almost monochromatic

works, like bauls, mother and child scenes and *Bal Gopal*, with strong calligraphic lines, like they can be found in Kalighat Patuas.

Another rarity in the collection, are sculptures made from wood. Roy had carved and chiselled any kind of wood he could get hold of, often using simply window and door frames. Six of those heads and figures are in the collection, showing pure bare forms.

The collections comprises a number of his better known paintings, such as the *Santhal Dance* and *Mother and Child,* but also a collection of thumb-nail sized pencil sketches of seated women with the names of collectors who had commissioned each version.

Jamini Roy died in 1972. In 1976 the Government of India declared his work as a National Art Treasure. The exhibition was on view in New Delhi and Bangalore.

New acquisitions and physical verification

Presently the NGMA has a collection of 16480 art works, paintings, sculptures, photographs and graphics. Since 2006 it has not acquired any new artworks, and since 2000 no physical verification of the works in the collection has been conducted.[130] The High Powered Committee (HPC)[131] report states that since 2003 no new art works has been added to the collection through purchase, but that after many years the Government has set up an art acquisition committee comprising eminent artists in 2014. Interestingly the report suggests that the new committee should publish their selections online on the NGMA webpage to inform the public. The structure of the new committee is has three components: three persons are members by virtue of their

[130] *HPC Report*, 2014, p. 78.

[131] Set up by the Government of India, Ministry of Culture the HPC report reflects upon the functionality of cultural institutions in India, for example the National School of Drama (NSD), Lalit Kala Akademi, National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA), Indira Gandhi National Centre of Arts (IGNCA) etc. and monitors their performance in terms of management problems, lack of clarity of vision and policies, unclear distribution of authority, powers and responsibility, transparency, eliticism, accountability, coordination and strategy in these organizations.

offices, the director of the NGMA and six eminent artists including the chairperson. Both NGMAs in Mumbai and Bangalore are supposed to have committees consisting of their directors and two artists. The artist members of the Delhi committee would have a say in the purchases in Mumbai and Bangalore, but not vice versa.

The advisory board chairperson Manju Singh said in interview from 2013[132] that "something we (the NGMA in Delhi) had acquired in the past had led to court cases over allegations that norms had not been followed. Those cases have now been successfully resolved and my next effort will be to suggest to the Ministry of Culture to have a purchase committee in place. The earlier purchase committee is in limbo, it has not been shelved and some in our advisory committee have suggested that it be revived or revamped."

This all said, the NGMA is also responsible of spending public money carefully. The gallery has no facilities to store installations or sculptures that contain materials, that are likely to be damaged due to heat or humidity, which already excludes a number of contemporary Indian works, by artists like Sheela Gowda and Subodh Gupta. Furthermore there might be an anxiety of dealing with contemporary artists, because of this would mean a dealing with and interfering in the market. There might be a fear that the gallery would be accused of favouring one gallery and boosting the value of young and living artists who are still producing work. Even the HCP report mildly expressed this concern of finger-pointing[133] after new purchases would me made.

Another question is how an institution can write contemporary history and decide which works to include into the collection. A historical distance is needed, to decide whether an artwork becomes part of the canon or not, and even more so if it becomes representative of its time or the artist's oeuvre. And this too works vice versa: art

[132]Manju Singh in an interview with Gargi Gupta: 'NGMA plans more retrospective shows after Atul Dodiya's' , *DNA*, Wednesday 27, November, 2013.
[133] HPC report, 2014, p. 83.

works become canonical through entering important collections, but the NGMA has not been able to built up an reputation as an important collection of contemporary art. The collection often only grew because of works gifted to the gallery and is now dependent on such gifts from contemporary artists again. But why would an artist give a work to the NGMA, since it might not be shown publicly, or adequate storage facilities are not provided?

Singh furthermore reports that 98% of the collection has been verified in the past and the remaining 2% is housed in areas, such as the prime minister's house or office, or the offices of other senior officials.

A case from 2010

Even though Manju Singh states that about 98% of the works are verified, a case from 2010 points out the nessesecity of verification, when twelve painting of Raja Ravi Varma disappeared from a South Indian Museum, but were found in the NGMA.

The paintings got missing from the state-run museum Sri Chitra Art Gallery in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala. The paintings were given to the museum on a 'permanent loan' by the Kilimanur Palace, in accordance to the wishes of the painter. Kilimanur Palace has hand-written records, saying that at least 75 original paintings by the artist were handed over to Sri Chitra Art Gallery between 1935 and 1940. But the gallery's records show it has only 63 paintings in its custody. While 43 of them are on display at Sri Chitra, nine paintings are exhibited at another government museum in Kozhikode. One is on loan to the governor's house and 10 have been kept in storage for want of space. Unfortunately the Sri Chitra Art Gallery does not have early records about the transfer of the paintings. The earliest report only dates back to 1970.

In her book, *Raja Ravi Varma: Painter of Colonial India*, published in 2010, Rupika Chawla talks about the two paintings, Maharashtrian Lady and Maharashtrian Lady

with Fruit, that Raja Ravi Varma carried to Kilimanur for the purpose of putting them up in an art gallery for which he had initiated talks with the Travancore authorities. These paintings, are not in the Sri Chitra Art Gallery. The first is on display at the National Gallery of Modern Arts (NGMA) in New Delhi and the second at Thiruvananthapuram's Kowdiar Palace, which belongs to the Travancore royal family.

Rajeev Lochan defends the NGMA, by saying, that "he has no idea how the painting landed there, stressing that it has been at NGMA for over 50 years."[134]

The NGMA in context of New Institutionalism

New Institutionalism or neo-institutionalism is a theory that focuses on developing a sociological view of any kind of institutions, the way they interact and the way they affect society. New Institutionalism in context of museums and galleries discusses series of curatorial, art educational as well as administrative practices that from the mid 1990s to the early 2000s, globally, most publicly funded art institutions. New Institutionalism being a Eurocentric theory model offers possibilities to engage with the museum as a social construct. Museums do have a political power, they can validate social claims and legitimize relations of power, and they can be agents of social change. Flora Kaplan suggests "that museums are purveyors of ideology and of downward spread of knowledge to the public, thereby contributing to an historical process of democratization"[135]. State museums are central to the efforts of nation-states. The NGMA has emerged from the moment of nation making after Independence, with a collection that is built upon the country's colonial past.

[134] http://www.telegraphindia.com/1100725/jsp/7days/story_12723603.jsp
[135] Kaplan, Flora E.: 'Introduction', in: *Museum and the Making of „Ourselves": The Role of the Objects in National Identity*, London, Leicester University Press, 1995, p. 3.

At the NGMA we find an entirely institutional framing of the art object, that reveals itself mostly to insider audiences. The lack of contextual information such as wall texts turns the museum visit a visual experience only, without providing a deeper understanding.

Looking at the exhibition itself in form of a social project, the NGMA as a publicly funded institution has made progress over the recent decade and operates alongside discursive events, such as film screenings of art related documentaries and educational programs for children. The integrated library is widely visited by scholars and seems to function as a meeting point for older employees of the institution. The book-shop offered a wide selection of books, that have been published by the gallery. The art institution thus functions as a site of research and space for debate. Viewers are usually accorded an active role, becoming part of artistically conceived social arenas.

At the same time, strong administrative ties limit the possibilities of the gallery, the gatekeeper of the repository denies access to researchers and artists, but still the public has not stopped being interested in its development and artists have not stopped re-imagining the function of the National Gallery of Modern Art.

Conclusion

The collection of the National Gallery of Modern Art was from its beginning in 1954 until today's time mainly based on chance rather then systematically collecting of artworks. Unlike in its beginning, when the first director Hermann Goetz searched for works that would represent creative practice in India, later works were offered to the gallery and the purchase committee decided whether works can be afforded or not. Other works and entire collections were simply gifted. In today's time works are not purchased anymore due to fiscal limitations, limitations and perhaps the anxiety of interfering with the marked and being accused of favourism of artists and galleries.

Positioning these the two successive exhibitions of Geeta Kapur and Rajeev Lochan side by side, I found out that the attempt of a different reading of modern Indian art, one of juxtapositions and perhaps exclusions, could not be appreciated by the Indian public. While the public's expectation are of a democratic nature, as in a museum should show representative works from all generations, parts of India, schools and movements as well as genres, exclusions could not be accepted. The present exhibition, which is tracing modernity through Indian pointing out its initial western influence seems to be more at ease in the relationship between the artist, institution and the public.

The museum plays a role in forming national identity, in interpreting history and culture and in promoting national agendas. Looking at the relationship between national ideology and national museums, and the gallery as a repositories of cultural patrimony and national identity, the current exhibition is promoting Indian national identity by emphasising the nationalist project of the Bengal School and it's deliberate turn away from western influence.

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