## Bhupen Khakhar: You Can't Please All

From 1 June until 6 November 2016, Tate Modern will present the first international retrospective of Indian artist Bhupen Khakhar (1934-2003) since his death. Renowned for his vibrant palette, unique style and bold examination of class and sexuality, Khakhar played a central role in modern Indian art, but was also a key international figure in 20th century painting. This exhibition will bring together the artist's work from across five decades and collections around the world, including major works on canvas, luminous watercolour paintings and experimental ceramics.



Bhupen Khakhar Hathyogi 1978. Courtesy of the Estate of Bhupen Khakhar/National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA), New Delhi. © Estate of Bhupen Khakhar.

Left: Bhupen Khakhar Man Leaving (Going Abroad) 1970. Courtesy of Tapi Collection, India. © Estate of Bhupen Khakhar.

Below: Bhupen Khakhar Night 2002. Oil paint on canvas Courtesy of Kiran Nadar Museum of Art (New Delhi, India). © Estate of Bhupen Khakhar.

BORN IN 1934 IN BOMBAY, Khakhar lived in Baroda (Vadodara), where he completed an MA in Art Criticism at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Maharaja Siyajirao University, which was an important artistic centre. Khakhar continued working part-time as an accountant until his artistic career became established. After experiments with collage, Khakhar's early paintings depicted the ordinary lives of workers and tradesmen, such as The De-Lux Tailors 1972 and Barber's Shop 1973. His portraits captured the modern male subject with extraordinary pathos, echoed in the hollowed eyes and piercing gaze of Hathayogi 1978 or Man with a Bouquet of Plastic Flowers 1975. As he gained confidence as a painter, Khakhar went on to combine popular and painterly aesthetics, absorbing diverse art-historical influences with ease, from Indian miniature and devotional iconography to 14th century Sienese painting and contemporary pop art. He evolved an engaging figurative style, part of a new wave of narrative painting and figuration that moved away from the modernist canon in vogue in Bombay and Delhi.

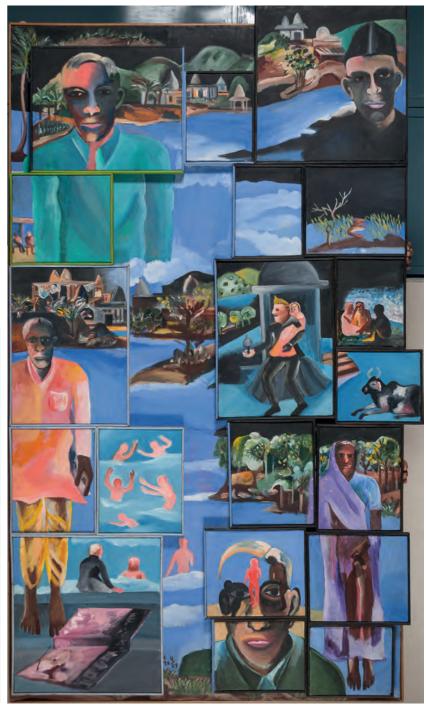
Khakhar was part of a lively community of artists and writers in Baroda where his home became a gathering place to meet and exchange ideas, even for visiting artists such as Howard Hodgkin and Dexter Dalwood. Khakhar spent six months as artist- in-residence at the Bath Academy of Art which cemented his links with contemporary British artists. Following his time in Europe, he painted the seminal work You Can't Please All 1981, depicting a life-size naked figure on a balcony watching characters from an ancient Aesop fable. This confessional painting signalled Khakhar's self-awareness as a gay man and suggests the personal difficulties he faced at the time. Khakhar was influenced by Gandhi and was committed to relating the truth as a guiding principle. He confronted provocative themes, particularly his homosexuality, with honesty, sensitivity and wit throughout his career. Works like Yayati 1987 show mythical figures in frank and fantastical portrayals of same-sex love. The large-scale diptych Yagnya-Marriage 2000 depicts a traditional celebration and feast in a small town with two men receiving a blessing, while smaller watercolours such as Flower Vase 1999 and Grey Blanket 1998 are more intimate visions of same-sex desire.

expressed his very personal battle with cancer. Works such as *Bullet Shot in the Stomach* 2001 and *At the End of the Day the Iron Ingots Came Out* 1999 show the realities of living with his illness in characteristically unflinching detail. The final work in the exhibition, the small gold hued painting *Idiot* 2003, expressively combines beauty, rage and irony as one character laughs at another's grimace of pain.

Khakhar's work was shown in *Six Indian Painters* at the Tate Gallery in 1982 and in Century City at Tate Modern in 2001. Tate acquired his iconic painting *You Can't Please All* 1981 in 1996. Alongside the exhibition, other recent acquisitions from South Asia will be shown in the new Tate Modern's displays this summer, including works by Sheela Gowda and Sheba Chhachhi.

Bhupen Khakhar: You Can't Please All is curated by Chris Dercon (Director, Tate Modern) and Nada Raza (Assistant Curator, Tate Modern). It will be accompanied by a fully-illustrated catalogue from Tate Publishing and a programme of talks and events in the gallery:

## Bhupen Khakhar: Truth is Beauty



Also a writer and playwright, Khakhar was dedicated to storytelling and the illustration of the world in detail. He worked with Salman Rushdie on a special edition of two stories for which the artist produced a series of wood-cuts. Towards the end of his life, Khakhar also made works that 2 July 2016, 14.00-16.00

This event takes its name after the same exhibition and self-written catalogue, Truth Is Beauty and Beauty Is God. Bringing together three speakers who offer a unique insight into a specific period of the artist's career, this panel discussion aims to introduce and situate the artist's practice and life within his particular contexts. Themes explored include Khakhar's use of the biography, iconography, the visual language of the street, and more broadly his personal experiences in and of modern India. Speakers include Geeta Kapur, Sonal Khullar and Karin Zitzewitz, and is chaired by Chris Dercon.

## Curator's Tour

## 11 July 2016, 18.30-20.30

Assistant Curator Nada Raza leads an hour-long tour of Bhuphen Khakhar, which brings together his work from across five decades and from collections around the world. Following the tour guests are invited to explore the exhibition for themselves.