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THE ART OF  
SUKUMAR BOSE

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THE ART OF  
**SUKUMAR BOSE**

REFLECTIONS ON SOUTH & SOUTHEAST ASIA

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Edited by **Venka Purushothaman**

**ISEAS**

INSTITUTE OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES  
SINGAPORE

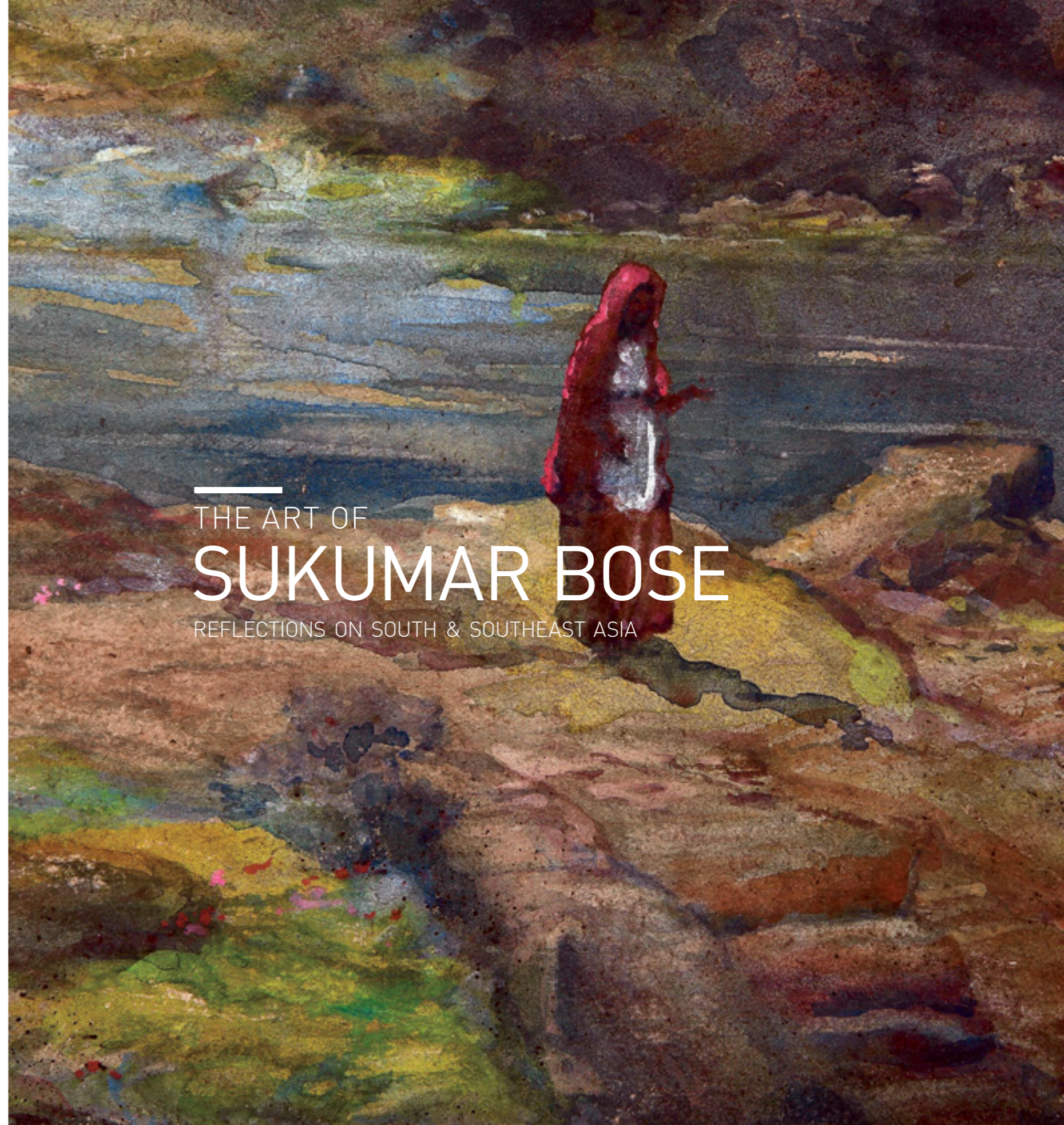


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## MESSAGE

FROM THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA

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I AM DELIGHTED that a book on India's foremost artist Sukumar Bose has been published.

I am acquainted with his works through my everyday experience at the Rashtrapati Bhavan where his murals and paintings reside. It remains a testament to Bose's artistry and more importantly, India's heritage and contribution to the development of modern art in Asia.

I congratulate the family of Sukumar Bose for embarking on this brave journey and all the writers and contributors for their insightful essays.

This book will remain an important resource for the study of Indian art.

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**Pranab Mukherjee**

President, Republic of India

## MESSAGE

FROM THE PRIME MINISTER OF BANGLADESH

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I AM HAPPY to learn that initiatives have been undertaken to publish a book and hold exhibitions of the artworks of noted Indian artist, Padma Shri Sukumar Bose, marking his birth centenary.

Sukumar Bose, a Bangalee legendary artist, promoted the traditions and art form of the Bengal School across India and beyond. His technical skill and attention to detail, coupled with heart, beautifully showcased the brilliance and beauty of Indian art. Bose was more of a traditionalist, preferring realism over the abstract styles of interpretation.

The exhibition will help people get acquainted with the works of Sukumar Bose and highlight the richness of Indian art.

I was heartened to know that the proceeds of the project will be utilised for the education of under-privileged children, particularly girls.

I wish the exhibitions and the publication of the book all success.

*Joy Bangla, Joy Bangabandhu. May Bangladesh Live Forever.*

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**Sheikh Hasina**

Prime Minister, People's Republic of Bangladesh

## MESSAGE

FROM DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER OF SINGAPORE

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THE ARTIST MONOGRAPH, *The Art of Sukumar Bose*, is a welcome addition to the growing interest and discourse of art in contemporary Asia.

The works of Sukumar Bose are true to his experiences of living and practising under the British Raj, independent India and his sojourn into Singapore. It provides a valuable insight into the changing face of India and Asia.

Unlike western societies where documentation of art is unparalleled, the growing art market sector in Asia requires deeply reflective and well-informed knowledge on modern art from Asia. This book feeds well into the larger enterprise of research and documentation of art of Asia and I congratulate the writers for their engaging personal and discursive essays and the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies for boldly embarking in publishing this important book.

This book is a personal journey for the Bose family as it marks the centenary of Sukumar Bose. I congratulate them for celebrating the centenary through the gift of knowledge to generations hereafter.

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**Tharman Shanmugaratnam**

Deputy Prime Minister, Republic of Singapore



## PREFACE

TO COMMEMORATE THE centenary of artist Sukumar Bose (1912-1986), *The Art of Sukumar Bose: Reflections on South & Southeast Asia*, has been commissioned by the Bose Family Trust to take an incisive look at the artist, his works and the context of his art production in South and Southeast Asia.

Bose was Curator of Paintings at Viceroy House (now known as Rashtrapati Bhavan or the Presidential Palace) in Delhi in 1945, a position that he held in post-independent India until 1972. Alongside such position of power to determine the aesthetics of politicians, Bose had an illustrious painting life. His art varied from the traditional to the decorative and ornamental, with a hint of the Oriental flavour. His work demonstrated traces of the Bengal School styles of Abanindranath Tagore, Asit Kumar Haldar and AR Chughtai. Be it figurative, landscape or abstract, Bose's art synthesized the decorative elements of Indo-Persian miniatures with Chinese and Japanese techniques. In this context, his vision and passion were inspired by traditional art forms, including Ajanta, Rajput and Mughal miniatures. Bose's standing as an important architect of the country's artistic and cultural landscape received the firm patronage of eminent individuals, including Lady Edwina Mountbatten, wife of the Viceroy of India; and in 1950 the Venerable Pope Pius XII commissioned him to produce an art piece for the Vatican. His incisive observations of life, people and cultures, during colonial and postcolonial India and his later sojourn into Southeast Asia, emerge as both a contested yet seamless narrative of history and hope in his art.



## About the Book

The objective of the book is to provide an overview and a critical insight into the work of the artist who seeks to develop a language of pride and hope for Indians living through pre-independence and post-independence India. It is the aim of the book to be of value to visual arts enthusiasts, historians, researchers of art and students. This book is the first of its kind to document and give a critical overview of Sukumar Bose. More importantly, in writing about Bose, we will be partaking in the writing of new art history outside of the conventional modernist lens, which we hope will lend to a new Asian sensibility. The feedback from the various reviewers, on the earlier drafts of this book, have been most useful in ensuring the text remains true to this endeavour.

The reader need not feel the compulsion to read the book from cover to cover, even though they are most welcome to do so. The book is organized in three sections: the first serves as an introduction to give a contextual and critical framework to negotiate the art of Bose. The second section called “History, Memories & Recollections” is an ode to Sukumar Bose by people who knew him personally: his sons and a personal friend. Here, the reader will find an honest rendition of the artist as a person through familial and social networks. The third section called “Visual Narratives: The Art of Sukumar Bose” engages with the art of Bose. Art historians and artists come together to reflect and place Bose’s work within an appropriate set of aesthetic production. This section also contains the image plates of Bose’s art granting the viewer a peak into the narratives that form the stories that Sukumar Bose chose to tell.

**Venka Purushothaman**

Editor

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THIS BOOK ON Padma Shri Sukumar Bose was commissioned by the Bose Family Trust to commemorate the centenary of his birth.

The celebration of the life and influence of Sukumar Bose through the publication of this book would not have been possible without the untiring effort of Venka Purushothaman to whom I am greatly indebted. Many thanks go to all the authors who have contributed to the book. Special thanks to my friend Professor Rajalingam Sinniah, who was very close to my father, took great interest in his work and encouraged the publishing of this book. Special thanks to Carolyn Oei for helping me with my own script. The ISEAS’ invaluable contribution in publishing this book which was initiated by Ambassador K Kesavapany and further supported by Ambassador Tan Chin Tiong, the Director of ISEAS, is greatly appreciated. Triena Ong, the editor-in-charge of the publication, has guided this book through the various stages. Special thanks to the photographers, Choo Ngee Heng, Samar Mondol, Subhas Chandra for the excellent photography of the pictures that appear in this book. I am greatly indebted to Shubho Roy, the designer of the book, for his untiring efforts and artistic input.

We are very grateful for the special contribution from the Vatican, and Ian Goodwin of Broadland, Romsey, UK, for the Mountbatten Collection. In New Delhi, we are greatly indebted to Rashtrapati Bhavan, Gita Bhavan, Modern School, National Museum of Modern Art and many

other individuals in India and abroad who have contributed the paintings in their collections for this book.

Special thanks to my friend, Upal Ghosh, who was very helpful in guiding this project and also introducing me to OP Jain of Sanskriti, New Delhi, whose vast knowledge and appreciation of the artwork helped me greatly. Keshav Malik and Usha Malik for their insight and in-depth knowledge of the socio-cultural influences in the shaping of Indian culture in pre- and post-independent India. Without the help, support and advice of Subir Malik it would not have been possible for me to navigate through the corridors of power in Delhi. Special thanks to Ketika Bose for her editorial and publishing advice and Chandra Mamtani for her secretarial help. To my uncles, Subash Bose and Pradepto Bose for their advice and invaluable support.

Special thanks to the Principal of the Art College in Lucknow, RP Rajeevnayan, and Awadhesh Misra for providing the missing link that has always caused some concern among the experts in trying to pigeonhole my father's artwork.

His Excellency, Mr. TCA Raghavan, High Commissioner of India to Singapore, for helping to locate some of the artworks of my father, and Revered Swami Muktirupananda, President of Ramakrishna Mission, Singapore, for reviewing the manuscripts.

There are many people in the family, friends and even strangers who have helped in one way or another to materialize this project. My special thanks go to all of them.

Special mention goes to Amitavo Roy and Prosoon Mukherjee who had been advising me for this project from the beginning, Anjali Grover and

Kanika Mukerji for their help and support. I would also like to thank my friend, Suman Aggarwal, for her advice and invaluable support.

I would like to thank everyone on the Bose Family Trust. In particular, my gratitude goes to my sister Altu Brahma for initiating the idea, my brother Debashis Bose for lending the pictures in his collection for photography, my son Raja Bose and my daughter Reena Bose for their contribution in supporting this project. All this would not have been possible without the help of my secretary, Patricia Sng.

Finally I would like to thank my wife, Dr. Pushpa Bose, whose support, encouragement and perseverance guided me through the many difficult periods in compiling this book.

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**Kamal Bose**

On behalf of Bose Family Trust



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## CONTRIBUTORS

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KAMAL BOSE is a world-renowned orthopaedic surgeon and former Professor of Orthopaedics at National University of Singapore. Professor (Dr) Bose, the son of Sukumar Bose, is the commissioner of this book and has researched extensively into the history of the Bose Family over thirty generations.

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NUZHAT KAZMI is an art historian and academic. As Professor of Art History, she currently heads the Department of Art History and Art Appreciation at the Jamia Millia Islamia University, New Delhi. A Commonwealth Scholar trained at the School of Oriental and African Studies, UK, she has written numerous articles on art and is the author of *Islamic Art: The Past and Modern* (2009).

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KESHAV MALIK is a renowned Indian poet, critic, arts scholar and curator. Malik served as personal assistant to Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister from 1947-1948. Malik has published eighteen volumes of poetry including *Between Nobodies and Stars* (2008), *Storm Warning* (1978) and *The Lake Surface and Other Poems* (1961). He has also edited six anthologies of English translations of Indian poetry and written monographs on visual artists including Nandalal Bose (1997). In 1991, he was awarded one of India's highest civilian awards, the Padma Shri, for his contributions to literature.

MANASIJ MAJUMDAR is a well-known art writer and academic in India. A Reader of English at Calcutta University, he wrote about the arts in all the major dailies and magazines, notably *Hindustan Standard*, *Desh*, *Sananda*, *The Telegraph* and *Ananda Bazaar Patrika*. He has written extensively on major Indian artists, including Gopal Ghose, Paritosh Sen, Bikash Bhattacharjee, Sakti Burman, Sunil Das, Jatin Das, Shuvaprasanna, Rini Dhumal, Jaya Ganguly, Sipra Bhattacharya and many others. His major books include *Sakti Burman* (2008), *Close to Events: The Works of Bikash Battacharjee* (2007), *Art Moves: Works by Sunil Das* (2005).

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MAHIRWAN MAMTANI (b.1955) is a painter, graphic and multimedia artist and art writer who works and lives in Munich.

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AWADHESH MISRA is a well known Lucknow-based painter. Highly awarded and decorated for his research and art, Dr. Misra has held numerous solo exhibitions all over India and internationally. He has attended several national level artist camps organized by LKA New Delhi at Guwahati, by NZCC Chandigarh at Rishikesh, by SLKA UP at Dhanolti and Almora, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi and Lalit Kala Akademi, Chandigarh.

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LEENA MISRA is a well-known educator and arts writer whose research and published work spans art, education and Sanskrit literature. Dr. Misra is an expert in translations having written and translated many articles for the important journals such as *Sanskriti* (Govt. of India), *Sanskriti Samvad* and *Kala Varta* (Govt. of Madhya Pradesh), *Kala Traimasik* (State Lalit Kala Akademi, Uttar Pradesh, India), *Samkaleen*



*Kala* (Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, Govt. of India), Uttar Pradesh (Govt. of Uttar Pradesh), *Kala Dirgha*, *International Journal of Visual Arts* (Utkarsh Pratishthan, Lucknow).

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MK PURI is an artist and art critic. He is a specialist in mural works having worked extensively on murals and ceramics under Shri Gurucharan Singh and Mansimran Singh. He has exhibited internationally including the 2nd Havana Biennale. He is a three time recipient of the AIFACS award, the National Academy Award, the Sahitya Kala Parishad Award and Senior Fellowship by the Government of India.

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VENKA PURUSHOTHAMAN is an art writer, academic, and arts and cultural manager. He is currently Vice-President (Academic) and Provost at LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore. He has researched and written extensively on visual arts, performing arts and arts management with an interest in contemporary art. He has written essays on numerous artists including Pierre & Gilles (France), Nathalie Junod Ponsard (France), Parvati Nayar (India), Atta Kim (South Korea). His artist monographs include: *Dance Me through the Dark: The Photography of Tan Ngiap Heng* (2008); and *Salleh Japar: Gurindam dan Igauan* (2004). His books on arts and culture include *Making Visible the Invisible: Three Decades of the Singapore Arts Festival* (2007) and *Narratives: Notes on a Cultural Journey, Cultural Medallion Recipients, 1979-2002* (2002). Purushothaman is a member of the Association of International Art Critics, France (AICA) and Fellow of the Royal Society of the Arts, UK (RSA).

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RAJALINGAM SINNIAH is a medical doctor of international renown. He was the former professor of pathology at the National University of

Singapore, and currently is the Clinical Professor of Pathology, Royal Perth Hospital, University of Western Australia. He has published books and over 200 medical scientific papers in international journals. Amidst his scientific contributions, he is a celebrated art collector with a knowledgeable interest in the arts and has written articles on several artists, including Tan Swie Hian, Yao Youdou, Yao Youxin, Chen Hsii Hwa and Sir Roy Calne.

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