

AFFILIATION, WORLDLINESS, AND MODERNISM IN INDIA

THE MODERN IN THE CONTEMPORARY

Everybody Agrees: It's About to Explode was the intriguing title of India's national pavilion at the Fifty-Fourth Venice Biennale in 2011. The ambiguous pronoun "it" could refer to the nation-state, contemporary art, the art market, or a variety of myths about any of these entities.¹ Sponsored by the Lalit Kala Akademi (National Academy of Art) and curated by Ranjit Hoskote, the pavilion marked India's first official representation at the international art event, though Indian artists had shown work there as early as 1954.² This pavilion took its place among others in Venice in a year when the Biennale theme was IllumiNATIONS. That title was a reference to the writings of Walter Benjamin, witness-observer and critic of capitalist modernity par excellence, and reflected how several nations were represented at the Biennale as ruins.³ The Chinese pavilion, "Pervasion," curated by Peng Feng, occupied a warehouselike structure and displayed fragments from a national-cultural past: ceramic pots, ink painting, industrial containers, and rubber tubing. The artworks in this pavilion functioned as artifacts and omens, sprinkling water and spraying incense at viewers to awaken their sensorium. For Benjamin, the ruin was the material of history, a site of destruction that was also a place of production.⁴ The ruin was a tool to separate myths from matter, to see the old in the new, to reconstruct the past and reimagine the present.

At the Indian pavilion, the nation came into view as dream and detritus, or dream-world and catastrophe, to use Susan Buck-Morss's terminology, in the work of the five

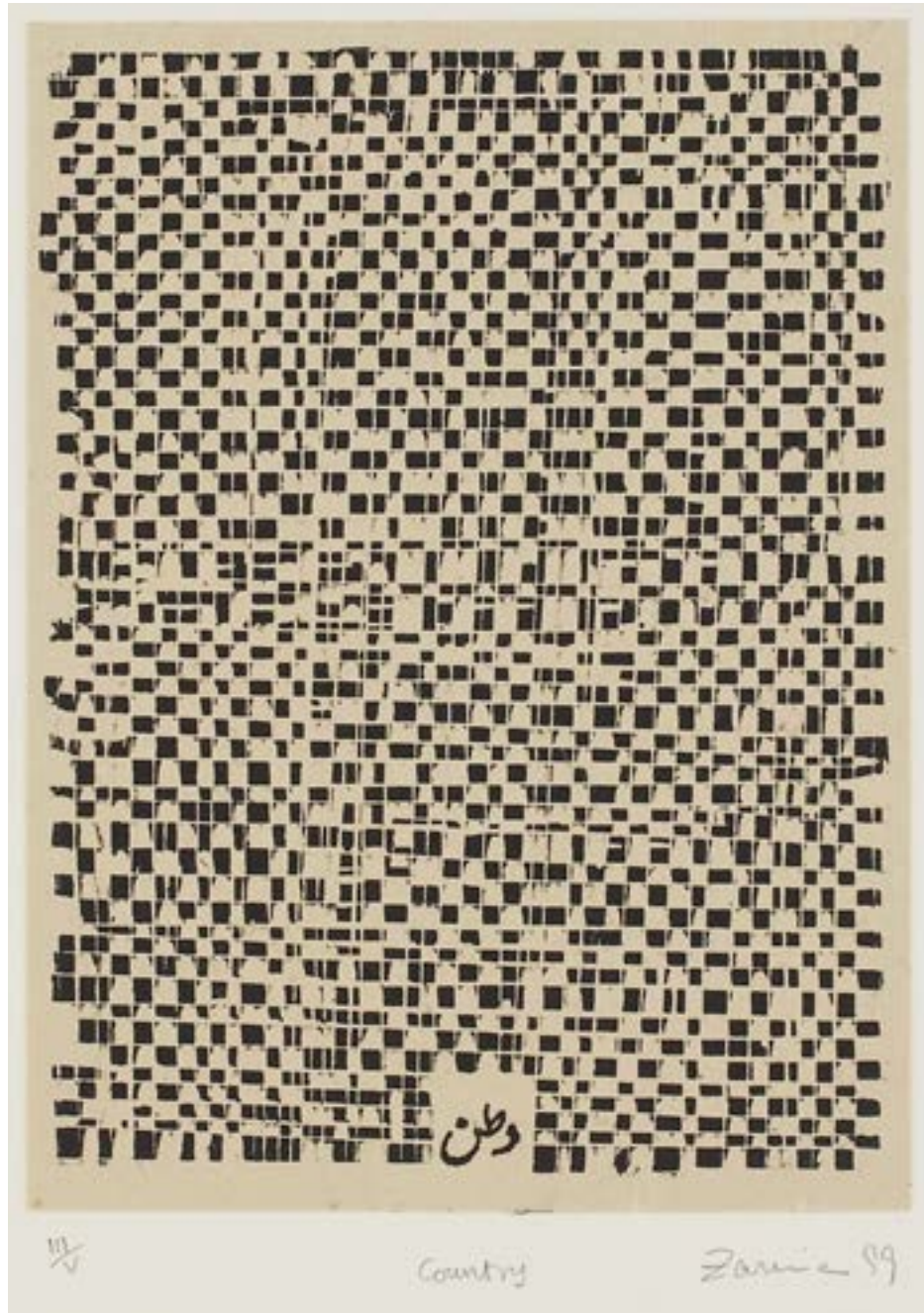


FIGURE 1.

Zarina Hashmi, "Country," detail of *Home Is a Foreign Place*, 1999, portfolio of thirty-six woodblocks with Urdu text, printed in black on Bozo paper, mounted on Somerset paper, edition of twenty-five; Artwork and image courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York.

artists on display: Zarina Hashmi, Praneet Soi, Gigi Scaria, and the Desire Machine Collective (Sonal Jain and Mriganka Madhukaillya).⁵ Zarina's portfolio (the artist prefers to be known by her first name) of thirty-six woodblock prints, *Home Is a Foreign Place* (1999; fig. 1), evokes a sense of no-place and every-place. Spare grids, globes, and lines signify entities such as "country," "sky," "stars," and "distance," testaments to a diasporic life and displaced belonging. Born in Aligarh in 1937, the artist has lived and worked in New York City since 1975. Her *Homes I Made/A Life in Nine Lines* (1997), a portfolio of nine etchings and one cover plate, features floor plans of houses in Bangkok, Santa Cruz, Paris, and Aligarh; and *Cities I Called Home* (2010), a portfolio of five woodcut prints, renders maps of cities from Delhi to Tokyo, precisely and poetically delineated in black and white with Urdu inscriptions. Such homes yield a fugitive image of "Country" as the sum of repeated squares, alternating positive and negative space on a rectangular grid.

In *Residue* (fig. 2), a 35 mm film with sound by the Desire Machine Collective, the camera lingers over giant metal drums, rusted pipes, peeling paint, and proliferating moss at an abandoned thermal power plant near Guwahati in northeastern India. In an age of live feed, split screens, jump cuts, and short takes, the haunting blues, greens, grays, and rusts of the collective's film slow down time as it loops every thirty-nine minutes. It constitutes the nation as a ruin, made up of ruins like the power plant that were once monuments to industrial modernity and socialist planning. This ruin bears accretions that demand analysis, leaking smoky gases and viscous liquids into the atmosphere, spilling substances to be examined by the viewer. It holds together event and thing, carrying the marks of time and the traces of process.

This image of the nation at the Venice Biennale was the antithesis of the spectacle of Antilia, industrialist Mukesh Ambani's towering home in Mumbai, which stands in the center of the city at twenty-seven stories high, employs a staff of six hundred, and has three helicopter pads. Antilia is a glittering sign of the new India, like the shopping malls and office parks that have arisen in recent times. Such signs of the nation are the ones most often on view in the West, noted by business investors and news media alike. These signs, along with images of persistent poverty, disease, disorder, and disaster, have come to represent the dichotomy between a new and an old India in the twenty-first century.

Siddhartha Deb's *The Beautiful and the Damned: A Portrait of the New India* (2012) borrows its title from F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel of 1920s America and begins with a chapter entitled "Gatsby in New Delhi."⁶ Chronicling the lives of capitalists and workers, it presents a nation divided by extremes of prosperity and privation. Between 2008 and 2010, the *New York Times* featured articles on the poor modeling Fendi bibs and Burberry umbrellas as part of an advertising campaign for the Indian edition of *Vogue* magazine; the care of pampered dogs by their doting owners in New Delhi; and of course, the rise of Antilia, so named after a mythical island sought by early modern explorers.⁷ Each of these reports sensationally enacted a contrast between new and old India. Yet contem-



FIGURE 2.

The Desire Machine Collective (Mriganka Madhukaillya and Sonal Jain), *Residue*, 2011, 35 mm film with sound, thirty-nine minutes looped. Artwork and image courtesy of the artists.

FIGURE 3.

Dayanita Singh, *File Room*, 2011, pigment prints. Artwork and image courtesy of the artist.

porary art from India at the Venice Biennale in 2011 offered a more complex picture of a society in transition.

A sense of the modern as passing was conveyed in the official exhibition by Dayanita Singh's elegiac *File Room* (2011; fig. 3). Black-and-white photographs of rooms overflowing with *bastas* (cloth portfolios) conjure the work of the state and its institutions: courts, hospitals, municipal authorities, and district offices. Singh focuses her lens on the materiality of archives, at once weighty and transitory, showing histories embodied in paper and lives escaping the grasp of records. Time stands still on metal shelves and stone floors, silent witnesses to the footsteps of clerks and keepers and the machinery of requisitions and petitions. Ghostly presences inhabit the empty spaces of Singh's photographs of factories, laboratories, cinemas, shops, homes, and monuments in contemporary India. With her Hasselblad camera, Singh has established herself as flâneur of the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first century. Collectively, the artworks by Zarina, the Desire Machine Collective, and Singh at the Venice Biennale summoned the viewer as a critical archaeologist of national remains and offered no visions of future glory. This stance was ironic for the work of national representation at an international art exhibition committed to mid-century notions of progress, culture, and diplomacy evident in permanent pavilions, patronage systems, and public relations for the event. Foreign ministries and departments of culture commission artwork; the exhibition is visited and legitimated by dignitaries and delegations. An official internationalism reigns at the Venice Biennale 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.

By choosing artists working in and from distinct locations (New York, Mumbai, Kolkata, Amsterdam, and Guwahati), Hoskote wished to highlight different perspectives on and ways of being Indian.⁸ This was not 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. Nor was this a postnational forecast of free-flowing artifacts and freely floating agents under globalization. Instead Hoskote sought to decenter notions of nation and world that inform our perceptions of artistic practice. Contrary to popular and scholarly discourses on contemporary art that stress the commoditizing and homogenizing effects of the international art world, he insisted on the importance of specific location and individual belonging. This insistence stemmed from a particular understanding of the relationship between past and present and between modern and contemporary art. Despite variation in the affect and address of the artworks representing India at the Venice Biennale, they shared a mode of memorializing, even mourning, the modern, a mode at odds with dominant discourses on contemporary art and the new world order it marked.⁹

Contemporary Indian art is “booming and shaking,” pronounced the *New York Times* in 2007, employing a metaphor of the “new India” that had come into being since the economic reforms of the 1990s.¹⁰ “A Whole New World” was how the *Economist* charac-

terized the international art market with the emergence of artists, collectors, and dealers in China, India, Iran, and Turkey.¹¹ By some estimates, the Indian art market grew in value from \$2 million in 2001 to \$400 million in 2008.¹² An explosion of interest in contemporary art has been evident in classrooms and museums worldwide and in the rise of biennales and triennales in non-Western locations from Sharjah to Singapore. For many observers, these developments signal a changed landscape for the production and consumption of art in the twenty-first century. As Holland Cotter noted in 2011, “Not long ago the contemporary market meant Europe and America. Now it also means New Delhi, Beijing and Dubai.”¹³ Amid this frenzied commercial and cultural activity, there has been relatively little inquiry into the longer histories of these developments, which is to say, of the modern art movements, artworks, and artists that rendered this contemporary art possible.

This forgetfulness is neither innocent nor inconsequential. Art historian Kobena Mercer has asked: “Why does ‘the contemporary’ so often take precedence over the ‘historical’ as the privileged focus for examining matters of difference and identity? Does the heightened ‘visibility’ of black and minority artists in private galleries and public museums really mean that the historical problem of ‘invisibility’ is now a problem solved and dealt with? To what extent has the curating of non-western materials in blockbuster exhibitions led to visual culture displays that may actually obscure the fine art traditions of countries that experienced colonialism and imperialism?”¹⁴ Through these rhetorical questions, Mercer points to costs of a new-found visibility for minority and non-Western artists in the art world since the 1980s. The hypervisibility of the contemporary has led to the relative invisibility not only of the modern but also of historical links between the modern and the contemporary.

Yet, as the art on display at the 2011 Venice Biennale suggested, these links have inspired some of the most compelling contemporary art in India from the performances of Nikhil Chopra (b. 1974) and site-specific installations of Atul Dodiya (b. 1959) to the photo-performances of Pushpamala N. (b. 1956) and digital photomontages of Vivan Sundaram (b. 1943). Looking to the modern is a compulsion, one could say, for these artists. It bespeaks an ethical impulse. Contemporary artists in India have adopted a stance that may be likened to Benjamin’s in the Arcades Project as the examiner of traces and excavator of truths.

Inhabiting the persona of Sir Raja or Yog Raj Chitrakar, Chopra performs the role of patron or painter, respectively, in nineteenth- and twentieth-century India (fig. 4). By turns Sunday painter and urban *patua* (scroll painter), Chopra enacts rituals of art-making from getting dressed and setting up, to working *en plein air* and packing up in venues all over the world, including Lal Chowk in Kashmir, the Khoj studios in New Delhi, the Serpentine Gallery in London, and the Mori Museum in Tokyo (fig. 5). His work straddles the space of drawing, painting, photography, and performance, acknowledging its debt to the habits and habitus of princely rulers, native gentlemen, indigenous artisans, Western painters, dandies, and dreamers.



FIGURE 4.
Nikhil Chopra, *What Will I Do with This Land?* 2005, digital photograph on archival paper. Costume designer, Tabesheer Zutshi; photography by Shivani Gupta. Artwork and image courtesy of the artist and Chatterjee Lal, Mumbai.

FIGURE 5.
Nikhil Chopra, *Yog Raj Chitrakar: Memory Drawing VI (18.00)*, 2009, digital photograph on archival paper. Costume designer, Tabesheer Zutshi; photography by Shivani Gupta. Kusten Festival des Arts, Brussels, Belgium. Artwork and image courtesy of the artist and Chatterjee Lal, Mumbai.





FIGURE 6.

Pushpamala N. and Claire Arni, "Lady in Moonlight (after 1889 oil painting by Raja Ravi Varma)," from *The Native Types series*, from *The Native Women of South India, Manners, and Customs*, Type C print on metallic paper, 2000–2004. Artwork and image courtesy of the artist and Nature Morte, New Delhi.

The character Yog Raj Chitrakar is loosely based on the artist's grandfather Yog Raj Chopra, an amateur landscape painter in Kashmir in the early twentieth century. *Chitrakar* literally means image-maker or painter and denotes active communities of folk and commercial artists in India. The name Yog Raj Chitrakar also recalls Yash Raj Chopra (1932–2012), one of the most successful commercial filmmakers in modern India, who had a reputation for shooting on location in Kashmir, one of the settings for his last film, *Jab Tak Hai Jaan* (*As Long As I Live*; 2012). In the *Memory Drawing* series (2007–2009), Chopra as Yog Raj Chitrakar asks: What does it mean to make art and be



FIGURE 7.

Raja Ravi Varma, *Lady in Moonlight*, ca. 1889, oil on canvas. Sri Jayachamarajendra Art Gallery, Mysore. Artwork in the public domain; image courtesy of the Sri Jayachamarajendra Art Gallery.

an artist in India and the world? How do art and artists engage and change the relationship between past and present?

In the series *Native Women of South India, Manners and Customs* (2000–2004), Pushpamala, working with British photographer Clare Arni, restages famous paintings and photographs from the South Asian past, making herself into the subject of Raja Ravi Varma's *Lady in Moonlight* (c. 1889), a demure maiden waiting anxiously for her beloved by a body of water (figs. 6 and 7), and a Toda woman from the Nilgiri Hills, the latter measured in the manner of Maurice Vidal Portman's anthropometric photographs of the Andamanese (figs. 8 and 9). The title *Native Women of South India, Manners and Customs* is a play on ethnographic albums produced by the British during the colonial

FIGURE 8.

Pushpamala N. and Claire Arni, "Toda (based on late 19th century anthropometric study)," from *The Native Types series*, from *The Native Women of South India, Manners, and Customs*, Type C print on metallic paper, 2000–2004. Artwork and image courtesy of the artist and Chatterjee Lal, Mumbai.



period, including *The Oriental Races and Tribes, Residents and Visitors of Bombay* (1863), and *The People of India, A Series of Photographic Illustrations, with Descriptive Letterpress, of the Races and Tribes of Hindustan* (1868–1875). Pushpamala's series mimics the visual and conceptual logic of these albums as she presents female types from a contemporary South India, consisting of a complex visual culture of films, calendars, photographs, and art. Both "native woman" and "South India" are discursively and materially produced by the census and survey and by elite and popular culture, Pushpamala proposes, and are therefore subject to reimagining and remaking. The artist gazes at us, boldly and directly, from these photographs and invites comparisons with the originals. How do Ravi Varma's women—passive, pale-skinned, plump, and pleasing—inform contemporary notions of femininity in India through their circulation in popular visual culture? How do Portman's depictions of *adivasi* (indigenous) peoples and native customs—savage, primitive, naked, and natural—persist in the management of populations by the state and in the everyday perceptions of its citizens? As Pushpamala inserts herself into these frames, she places the artist at the center of social and political inquiry. She

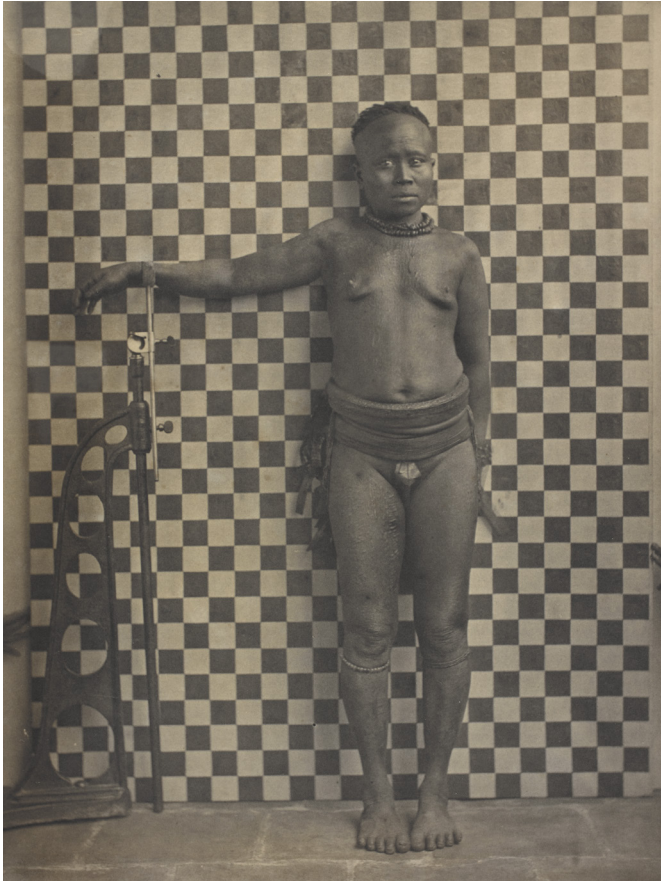


FIGURE 9.
Maurice Vidal Portman, *Anthropometric Study of Andamanese Woman*, ca. 1893.
The British Library, photo 188/22 (22), recto. Artwork in the public domain; image © The British Library Board.

situates her practice alongside that of nationalist painter Ravi Varma and colonialist photographer Portman, asserting a visual-cultural genealogy of her selfhood and subjectivity and admitting her role as agent and effect of history. Her appropriations suggest the debt of contemporary artists in India to a colonial and postcolonial modernity that produced distinct notions of art, the artist, and aesthetics.

MODERNISM AS AFFILIATION

This book charts a history of modernity through the persons, practices, protocols, and publics that constituted modernism in India. As the art of Zarina, the Desire Machine Collective, Singh, Chopra, and Pushpamala suggests, that past is foundational to the representational practices of the present. Through four careers, I trace continuities and change in artistic production from the late colonial through the postcolonial periods that have been treated as discrete, if not disconnected, in art historical scholarship. In both these periods, ideas of national identity were bound up in shifting relationships to

the West because of the legacy of colonialism in the subcontinent. Such cross-cultural negotiations were by no means exclusive to the artists of my study, but were, in fact, the structural conditions for modernism in India.

Despite the rhetorical claims of artists, critics, and movements, modernism in India was not characterized by a period of Westernization followed by one of Easternization. Modernism was an art of calibration between East and West. I focus on four artists, Amrita Sher-Gil (1913–1941), Maqbool Fida Husain (1915–2011), K. G. Subramanyan (1924–), and Bhupen Khakhar (1934–2003), canonical figures in India, if little known in the West, who are taken to represent distinct poles of Westernized (Sher-Gil, Husain) and Easternized (Subramanyan, Khakhar) practice. Yet, as I show, Sher-Gil and Husain's art was influenced by the painting traditions of precolonial India and the everyday practices of rural India as much as it was by the School of Paris, and Subramanyan and Khakhar's art was inspired by Pop and Conceptual art in London and New York as much as it was by the crafts practices, folk arts, performance traditions, and vernacular culture industries of India. In other words, a national art was not a nativist art.

Western painting served as foundation and foil for Sher-Gil, Husain, Subramanyan, and Khakhar. Painting was the preeminent medium in the visual arts in India from the 1930s through the 1980s. Even when these artists worked in other media, notably Husain in film and Subramanyan in terra-cotta, it was with an eye toward their practice of painting. Husain's first film, titled *Through the Eyes of a Painter* (1967), sought to remake the painter into a national worker and continue the village reconstruction imagined by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi in the 1930s.

Each of the careers discussed in this book entailed deft negotiations between East and West, which were highly unstable and generative categories in the modern world. From John Ruskin's *The Two Paths* (1859) to Ananda K. Coomaraswamy's *Medieval Sinhalese Art* (1908), East and West were marshaled as formal and social attributes in art history's most crucial debates on naturalism and abstraction, line and color, art and crafts, masculinity and femininity, nature and culture.¹⁵ They signified a relation; one did not stand without the other. Ruskin viewed fine art (read naturalism) as the prerogative of civilized European nations, races, and cultures, and the Indian taste and talent for decorative crafts (read ornament) as a sign of their barbarism and cruelty. By contrast, Coomaraswamy upheld the crafts of the East as spiritual, collective, idealizing, and superior to the materialistic, individualistic, and imitative art of the West. While my study focuses on such mobilizations of East and West in the context of modern India, we would do well to recall Charles Fabri, a Hungarian-born art critic and naturalized Indian citizen, writing in 1951: "Others before Amrita Sher-Gil had attempted to bring the East and West together by means of painting; there was Bellini, there was Delacroix and there was Gauguin [*sic*] that most successful bridge-builder of all."¹⁶ As Fabri reminds us, bridge-building between East and West was a function of art far beyond the boundaries of modern India, but it achieved new dimensions in the work of Sher-Gil

and her successors as they sought to generate a national culture synthesizing East and West in the wake of colonialism.

In twentieth-century India, as elsewhere, the terms *East* and *West* operated as mythical figures and rhetorical devices that artists and intellectuals engaged and disputed. They did not denote historically or geographically precise entities, but represented categories of thought, experience, and analysis. Thus, I follow Dipesh Chakrabarty's description of Europe as "an imaginary figure that remains deeply embedded in *clichéd and shorthand forms* in some everyday habits of thought."¹⁷ The project of "provincializing Europe," as Chakrabarty articulates it, would examine the intellectual genealogies and social effects of these forms as they come to organize modernity. In the context of the visual arts, a dichotomy between East and West was produced and reinforced by British colonial art policies and practices in India, and continued to inform artistic production after 1947, the year of India's independence from Great Britain. As Tapati Guha-Thakurta has argued, this 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.¹⁸ For the period I discuss in this book, the East was associated with the village, crafts, tradition, and nationalism, while the West was associated with the city, art, modernity, and colonialism. Artists interrogated distinctions between East and West, but the terms remained active in forms such as easel and earth or indigenism and internationalism, as I explain in individual chapters. A shifting balance between East and West was the hallmark of modernism in India.

The four artists of my study are not identified with a single region or community in India, making them useful for comprehending the relationships between groups, movements, and schools, and for considering the emergence of a national art. Shergil, Husain, Subramanyan, and Khakhar sought to exceed past attachments to place and parochial forms of expression. They forged an artistic identity that expanded their self-understanding as Hindu and Muslim, Tamil and Punjabi, Brahmin and *brahmakshatriya*, and emphasized instead a sense of being national subjects and world-citizens. National belonging was essential to envisioning worldly belonging and vice versa; neither identity subverted or superseded the other.

These artists pursued an identity without identitarianism, rejecting the chauvinism they associated with the Bengal School, an anti-colonial nationalist art movement dominant in the first decades of the twentieth century that came to equate otherworldliness—spirituality, mysticism, transcendence, and idealism—with Indianness. The artists of the Bengal School rejected oil painting and naturalistic conventions as signs of colonialism, and looked east to evolve a Pan-Asian aesthetic. Their nationalism was invested in a return to the (precolonial) past, rather than in visions of the (postcolonial) future.¹⁹ By contrast, the modernism that is the subject of this book was worldly in the sense of marking a turn to the present, materiality, and a cultural world that included the West. This modernism was not the predicament of rootless, exilic, or nomadic souls

but rather the product of situated practices, cultivated identities, and chosen commitments in the wake of displacements wrought by colonialism. Those displacements were the ground for modernism in India.

The identity sought by the artists I examine is congruent with what Edward Said described as “affiliation,” a critical act by which naturalized bonds, or “filiation,” between the state and culture (or between empire and culture) are dissolved and the worldly conditions, or social and political horizons, of cultural production are revived.²⁰ This book provides an account of modernism as a practice of affiliation between artists in East and West, a system of transnational exchange and critique, and a movement generating artworks with shared visual and material forms. It refutes the idea that artists in India produced either modern art without modernism—disidentification with artistic practices in the West—or modernism marginally modified—Western forms repurposed for non-Western contexts. Affiliation denotes a historical process by which a national art world came together and became conjoined with an international art world. The careers analyzed in this book serve as resources for rethinking our histories of modernism in not only India but also the world. They challenge the notion of modernism as a universal movement emanating from a European center with peripheral variations, generating vernacular or alternative modernisms in colonial and postcolonial contexts, which were either derivative of or distinct from their European counterparts.

In a 2012 review of an exhibition of modernist art from South Asia, *Radical Terrain*, at the Rubin Museum of Art in New York, Cotter summarized a popular consensus on modernism and the state of scholarly interventions in the field: “The West tends to be proprietorial about Modernism, treating it as a Euro-American invention copied, in inferior versions, by the rest of the world. But more and more this view has come to look parochial and wrong. In recent years historians have been studying the reality of multiple (sometimes referred to as alternative) modernisms that developed in Africa, Asia and South America parallel with, or sometimes in advance of, what was happening in Europe.”²¹ Cotter concluded that the series of exhibitions on South Asian modernist art at the Rubin “can only hint at the full history of global modernism, or modernisms, that everyone now knows is the true story of modern art. It’s a story that has yet to make its way into our big museums, but surely that day must come.”²²

In 2013, major exhibitions of modernism in Japan, including the art of the Gutai group, were held at prestigious venues including the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, the Art Institute of Chicago, and the Museum of Modern Art New York (MoMA). In 2013–14, the Asia Society in New York held an exhibition of modernism in Iran from the 1940s through the 1970s, *Iran Modern*, curated by Fereshteh Daftari and Layla S. Diba. In 2014, the Tate Modern (London) and Haus Der Kunst (Munich) organized a conference, “Postwar—Art between the Pacific and Atlantic, 1945–1965,” as part of an eight-year research and exhibition project to rewrite histories of modernism. On a smaller scale, a 1922 exhibition of works by Indian and European artists held in Calcutta was restaged at the Bauhaus Dessau in 2013, an occasion for scholarly reflections on

modernism's trajectories in East and West.²³ A 2013 symposium, "Rethinking Cosmopolitanism: Africa in Europe, Europe in Africa," organized by Salah Hassan in Berlin, directly addressed modernism and postcolonialism in the visual arts. Revisionist historiographies of Neo-Concretism and Constructivism in Latin America have made an impact in the art world and academy.²⁴

While this growing interest in modernism as a global practice is welcome, not all of these projects unsettle a teleology whereby Gutai and Neo-Concretism are significant for anticipating performance art and Minimalism in Euro-American centers, for being what Cotter described as "parallel with, or sometimes in advance of, what was happening in Europe."²⁵ Such accounts of modernism do not interrupt received notions of time and space, nor do they destabilize a narrative of modernism in which artistic developments in Paris and New York (or Vienna and Berlin) are the standard by which all others will be judged. Instead the idea of modernism as affiliation holds matters of identity and difference in tension and allows for spatial, temporal, conceptual, and material divergences between artistic practices and movements across the globe. It enables us to consider modernist art that cannot be easily mapped onto schools and styles elsewhere. It allows us to engage forms and ideas that do not intersect with or converge on the West, rather than treating them as anachronism and anomaly.

My study reveals modernism as a practice of affiliation emerging from a global phenomenon of modernity rather than a set of disparate modernisms situated within differential modernities. Instead of the dominant narrative of a modernism birthed with Jacques-Louis David's *Death of Marat* (1793) in Revolutionary France and ending with Jackson Pollock and the crisis of the easel picture in 1940s New York, the model I propose acknowledges modernism as a global movement with plural forms. This worldly modernism—with centers in Shanghai, Hanoi, Mexico City, and Dakar as well as Paris and New York—accounts for asymmetrical relations of power and histories of colonialism that enabled particular dialogues between artists and artworks. It asks us to consider Diego Rivera (1886–1957) and Lin Fengmian (1900–1991) as exemplars of modernism rather than postcolonial or non-Western outliers. Their education in the West and admiration of Western artists, their commitments to nationalism, their critique of imperialism, and their self-understanding as world-citizens were shared by many artists across the globe, not least in India. Their aims were akin to each other and to their Western contemporaries, even if previous generations of critics and art historians did not recognize their achievements, much less grant them common ground with those contemporaries.

Recent scholarly efforts to decenter modernism have drawn attention to the critical pathways to modernity forged by artists and intellectuals in non-Western and postcolonial societies.²⁶ Exposing the limits of Eurocentric histories of modernism and modernity, they emphasize the need to examine cultural flows on terms more precise and ethical than what Ming Tiampo has called "cultural mercantilism," or the tendency to see influence as unidirectional and universally flowing from West to East.²⁷ By this logic, non-Western cultures come to supply the raw materials for the production of

Euro-American modernisms; they can serve as “export markets” for those modernisms but cannot be sites of original expression or innovation.²⁸ Tiampo’s critique is closely related to what Partha Mitter has termed “the Picasso manqué syndrome,” whereby the citation of non-Western art by European modernists, exemplified by Picasso’s turn to African and Oceanic cultures, is considered original and radical, while the citation of Western art by an Indian artist such as Gagendranath Tagore is regarded as derivative and inauthentic.²⁹ Over the past decade, art historians have enriched and expanded what we understand as modernism, analyzing discourses and practices in Great Britain and the Soviet Union as well as Mexico, Brazil, Senegal, Nigeria, Vietnam, China, Japan, Iran, and Pakistan.³⁰ They have excavated unknown or little-known artists and artworks, casting new light on modernism’s varied forms and multiple lives.

Consider the career of Lionel Wendt (1900–1944), a Sri Lankan artist with interests in music, theater, literature, and photography. Born in Colombo and educated in England at Cambridge University and the Royal Academy of Music, Wendt organized the Group ’43, a collective of modernist artists and intellectuals active in Sri Lanka during the 1940s and afterward. His *Untitled (Still Life with Mask and Statue)* (fig. 10), is a dramatic and controlled composition. It stages a contrast between the shiny black head of the bodhisattva, cradled in a dark, printed textile in the foreground, and the smooth body of the Neoclassical male nude, standing beside a white marble pillar in the background. It allegorizes a relationship between East and West with the mask and the statue embodying the classical ideals and representational idioms of each civilization. It materializes a worldly modernism for which we do not as yet possess a critical vocabulary.

The terms *regional*, *alternative*, *vernacular*, and *non-Western* do not adequately describe Wendt’s modernist style and sensibility, which are as much a product of Aestheticism, Neoclassicism, Surrealism, and the ideology of the Bloomsbury group as of the society and politics of his native Sri Lanka. Such terms provincialize the cosmopolitanism of his endeavor, failing to recognize its claims to global citizenship and international community. They overstate his difference from Western art and understate his identification with world culture. They obscure his participation in a network of cultural practitioners. They reinscribe a hierarchical relationship between the central and regional, normative and alternative, dominant and vernacular, and western and non-Western.

Analyzing the career of Indian playwright Mohan Rakesh (1925–1972), Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker has criticized the related assumptions, common in literary studies, “that in the hands of Indian writers, both English and the modern Indian languages embody ‘vernacular’ culture and experience, and that the postcolony must always and only represent a ‘periphery’ in relation to the imperial ‘center.’”³¹ Dharwadker insists that Rakesh was a “cosmopolitan modernist fully cognizant of Western movements, but also fully committed to an indigenized aesthetic, his cosmopolitanism inhering precisely in the cultural ambidexterity of his vision.”³² The artists of this study have a status similar to the one Dharwadker sketches for Rakesh whereby they are major figures in India, if marginal to histories of modernism in the West. Nevertheless their



FIGURE 10.

Lionel Wendt, *Untitled (Still Life with Mask and Statue)*, 1942, gelatin silver photograph, 25.1 × 30.4 cm. National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. Image courtesy of the National Gallery of Australia.

modernism stands in a complex relation to discourses and practices in the West, and that relation is crucial to understanding their art.

How then do we write Wendt's imagination into history? Our existing narratives of modernism, committed as they are to discrete national and cultural frameworks, cannot accommodate a figure like Wendt (on whom there is little scholarship despite a remarkable body of work). In fact, Wendt is not as unusual as he might seem. Sher-Gil, Husain, Subramanyan, Khakhar, and many of their peers in India would have affirmed allegiance to his worldly affiliations. Their commitment to this artistic identity was a direct response to colonialism and not an aberrant development in spite of it. Take Simon Gikandi's assertion that "modernism represents perhaps the most intense and unprecedented site of encounter between the institutions of European cultural production and the cultural practices of colonized peoples. It is rare to find a central text in modern literature, art, or ethnography that does not deploy the other as a significant source, influence, or informing analogy. And the relationship between the institution of modernism and these other cultural spaces is not, as was the case in earlier periods of European art, decorative: it is dynamic, dialectical, and constitutive of the field of European and American culture."³³ Gikandi explains that postcolonial critics have tended to regard modernism with skepticism, viewing it as "the art form of an alienated cultural

elite, eager to master European form at the expense of local traditions of writing and thus placed at odds with the political project of decolonization.”³⁴ Yet he insists that “without modernism, postcolonial literature as we know it would perhaps not exist.”³⁵ He notes the paradox whereby “the archive of early postcolonial writing in Africa, the Caribbean, and India is dominated and defined by writers whose political or cultural projects were enabled by modernism even when the ideologies of the latter, as was the case with Eliot, were at odds with the project of decolonization.”³⁶

Substitute Gauguin, Matisse, or Picasso for Eliot, and Gikandi’s arguments about literature apply to the history of the visual arts in India, though there are crucial qualifications to be made for the case of the visual arts. The politics of language and, specifically, the debate over the use of the colonizer’s language and vernaculars do not directly map onto the visual arts. This debate finds an analogy in the relative status of fine art and decorative crafts in India, and in the rejection of oil painting by a generation of artists in Bengal. Matters of circulation (the role of the market and public) and periodization (the relationship between the modern and the contemporary) differ for literature and the visual arts.³⁷ Nonetheless many lessons from literary modernisms hold true for artistic modernisms in a postcolonial society. Modernism represented a creative and critical exchange between Western and non-Western cultures, albeit one fraught with tensions and constrained by asymmetries.

The emphasis on exchange in emerging histories of artistic and literary modernism points to a two-way traffic between the West and non-West, opposes predetermined models of domination or resistance, and ultimately reconfigures the notion of metropole and periphery. Scholars have shown how non-Western peoples were generators of modernism and not merely its consumers, dissenters, outsiders, or primitive source material. New accounts of a dialogic or transnational modernism have reoriented discussions of modernity and modernism toward translation between cultures rather than focusing on innovation and reproduction or original and copy. They have revised the conventional time and space of modernism as a cultural movement located in Europe and the United States that reached its limits by the mid-twentieth century. In India, modernism emerged during the late colonial period in the 1930s and 1940s and continued well into the 1970s and 1980s.³⁸ In the context of theater, Dharwadkar argues that modernism is an ongoing project, a “postcolonial (and still unfolding) phenomenon.”³⁹

Studies of modernism in the visual arts in India have tended to explore individual artists, movements, and groups in Santiniketan, Bombay, or Baroda.⁴⁰ Recent scholarship has focused on social and political contexts of art, yet it implies that 1947 marked a watershed for artistic production. Partha Mitter’s *The Triumph of Modernism, 1922–1947* (2007) concludes its narrative in 1947, while Rebecca M. Brown’s *Art for a Modern India, 1947–1980* (2009) commences its narrative in that year.⁴¹ For Mitter, Sher-Gil, Jamini Roy, and Rabindranath Tagore exemplify a “heroic age of primitivism” during the 1920s and 1930s that represented “the most compelling voice of modernism in India,” but their influence was limited and their model of art largely ignored by the

Progressive Artists Group, which emerged in 1947.⁴² For Brown, Indian artists forged a new national (Indian modern) culture that significantly broke with the colonial past and successfully challenged Euro-American conceptions of modernity.⁴³ Whereas Mitter stresses affinities between modernism in Europe and late colonial India, Brown highlights the national distinctiveness of art produced in postcolonial India. Although these scholars acknowledge the foundations of postcolonial modernity in a colonial past, neither explicitly examines legacies of that past—namely, the problem of art education, the formation of a public for art, the relationship to the West, the role of tradition, the figure of woman, and the place of the village—in the cultural production of the postcolonial period. A theory of rupture in the visual arts around 1947 neglects the ways in which problems of visual representation from the colonial period persisted through the postcolonial period.

This persistence is the subject of art critic Geeta Kapur's *When Was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India* (2000), a collection of essays written over a period of fifteen years.⁴⁴ Her account of modernism in India borrows its title from Raymond Williams's famous lecture at the University of Bristol in 1987.⁴⁵ Marking her allegiance to Williams, Kapur takes modernism as the object of historical-materialist inquiry and not as the denouement of a universal narrative of modernity; note her insistence on modernism as contemporary cultural practice. Rejecting the production of a disjunctive and depoliticized temporality for modernism, Williams concluded his lecture "If we are to break out of the non-historical fixity of post-modernism, then we must search out and counterpose an alternative tradition taken from the neglected works left in the wide margin of the century, a century which may address itself not to this by now exploitable because quite inhuman rewriting of the past, but for all our sakes, to a modern future in which community may be imagined again."⁴⁶ In response to Williams, Kapur writes modernism into the present. She strategically transforms the rhetorical question of Williams's title—observe her omission of the question mark from his version—into a statement of postcolonial praxis.

Scholarship in history, anthropology, literary studies, and film studies has emphasized continuity amidst change in the cultural production of modern South Asia.⁴⁷ It has shown that colonialism has an enduring legacy and that decolonization is an ongoing process in South Asia as in much of the world. Consider Partha Chatterjee's critique of nationalism, which "produced a discourse in which, even as it challenged the colonial claim to political domination, it also accepted the very intellectual premises of modernity on which colonial domination was based."⁴⁸ Contrary to popular beliefs and nationalist desires, freedom did not arrive at midnight.⁴⁹ Artists in twentieth-century India understood the indebtedness, indeed the embeddedness, of their practice in a colonial past. Representational freedoms would have to be sought from within existing structures.

Multiple forms of continuity with the colonial period were manifest in the visual arts of postcolonial India. The figure of woman, the privileged mode of representing the nation-form for anti-colonial nationalists, and the site of the village, valorized by Gandhi

as a microcosm of the nation, remained the preeminent subjects of modernist art in the 1950s and beyond. The nature of art education, and the relative positions of “fine art” and “decorative crafts” as they had been institutionalized during the colonial period, were debated in the art schools, studios, and journals of postcolonial India. The roles of the artist, critic, and viewing public were constituted and calibrated in response to cultural developments in India and the West, forming a crucial node in the circulation and consumption of Indian art. Many Indian artists studied, lived, or worked in London, Paris, or New York, and even when they did not travel there until late in their careers, as in the case of Husain and Khakhar, those centers offered models through which they conceived their practice. The reception of exhibitions of Western art in India and Indian art in the West, such as *Two Decades of American Painting, 1946–66* (organized by MoMA in New Delhi, 1967) and *Six Indian Painters* (organized for the Festival of India at the Tate Gallery in London, 1982), catalyzed the art world in India, confirming its difference from and identification with an international community.

By making the case for revised periodization, this book proposes conceptual gains from an approach to modernism in India as a project that extends from the late 1930s through the 1980s. It allows us to see how problems of visual representation raised by colonialism and anti-colonial nationalism were not resolved in 1947. These problems persisted into the 1950s—as exemplified by Husain’s existential paintings *Man* (c. 1950) and *Zameen* (Land) (1955), which cited European masters Picasso and Klee to imagine a postcolonial artistic identity—and they animated art well into the 1960s and 1970s, as demonstrated by Khakhar’s critical engagement with the visual culture of the colonial period in *Tiger on the Bridge* (1969) and *Janata Watch Repairing* (1972). Subramanyan’s 1961 essay, “The Artist on Art,” probed the role of art and artist in a postcolonial society in the spirit of Sher-Gil’s 1941 radio talk, “Indian Art Today.”⁵⁰ These artists referred to each other, directly and indirectly, in their work and understood themselves as participating in a collective project (even if they are often written into art history as isolated geniuses and iconoclasts). In a 1971 lecture, Subramanyan counted Sher-Gil among the “creative men” of the “Indian art tradition” who had established a true connection with the “great art” of the past.⁵¹

A significant thread that runs through the work of all four artists discussed in this book is a preoccupation with marginal or precolonial visual-cultural forms that came to represent a national tradition and were associated with authenticity and indigeneity.⁵² These forms were as diverse as the “primitive” seals of the Indus Valley civilization (c. 2500–1500 B.C.E.), “classical” painting of the Ajanta caves (c. 475 C.E.), crafts practices of the village, and calendar art of the *bazaar* (market). Modernism in India was a project of imagining and critiquing the nation-form, as Sher-Gil and others, notably Ramkinkar Baij and Benodebehari Mukherjee, did in the 1930s. Nevertheless art did not follow politics in any simple or straightforward way, though it is commonplace to date the beginnings of modernism in the visual arts in India to 1947, to locate them in the activities of the Progressive Artists Group, established in Bombay that year.⁵³ The nation

envisioned by artists and intellectuals cannot be reduced to the developmentalist enterprise of the nation-state. The nation of modernism was an inchoate form and utopian horizon. Modernists were critical of colonialist and nationalist positions, often seeking alliances and allegiances apart from those of the dominant culture. Like its counterparts elsewhere, modernism in India was oppositional and experimental, positioning itself against conservative and codified practices.

Rethinking the boundaries of art around 1947 would enable us to see links between movements in the visual arts, literature, and theater. The All-India Progressive Writers' Association and the Indian People's Theatre Association were formed in the 1930s and 1940s and had close links to anti-colonial nationalist politics and the Communist Party of India. The short-lived Progressive Artists Group, of which Husain was a founding member, shared with these associations commitments to internationalism and socialism, yet its agenda and trajectory were distinct. Relating these developments to one another would clarify the stakes of modernism in India and render visible its negotiations with colonialism, anti-colonial nationalism, and postcolonial state practices. The purpose of art, Sher-Gil wrote in 1936, was to "create the forms of the future"; she concurred with Clive Bell that great art did not seek to revive "old material" but to bring into being a "new world of aesthetic experience" that did not yet exist "in the world of human interests."⁵⁴ That new world was not limited to or bound by current social and political conditions; indeed, art aspired to change those conditions. An account of modernism's affiliations—of artificial bonds constructed and cultivated apart from or against empire and the nation-state—would approximate art's promise as Sher-Gil and her successors understood it.

POSTCOLONIAL WORLDLINESS

The history of modernism in India not only challenges conventional boundaries of the colonial and postcolonial but also complicates the distinction between national and cosmopolitan identities. It illuminates what Iftikhar Dadi, in his study of modernist art in Muslim South Asia, has called the "transnational" character of modernism.⁵⁵ Dadi discusses artists whose careers unfolded in or were linked to the nation-state of Pakistan, but who were deeply skeptical and critical of the nation. According to Dadi, these artists adopted a different attitude toward the project of nationalism than their peers in India.⁵⁶ He traces this attitude to a long history of Muslim cosmopolitanism in South Asia and the world and to a more recent history of British colonialism and Partition in South Asia. These histories redefined the categories *modern art* and *Islamic art* during the twentieth century. For Dadi, the work of Sadequain Naqqash (1930–1987), whose "calligraphic modernism" had significant West Asian and North African counterparts, exemplifies this phenomenon.⁵⁷ Sadequain's practice, and that of M. Abdur Rahman Chughtai, J. Iqbal Geoffrey, and Anwar Jalal Shemza, suggests a complex relationship of nationalism to cosmopolitanism and a *longue durée* for the globalized art world.

These ideas were not limited to Pakistan or to Muslim artists in South Asia. Modernist art, even one committed to the nation, always exceeded nationalist ideals and goals. Indeed transnationalism was essential to the formulation and dissemination of anti-colonial and postcolonial cultural movements like Mexican muralism and Négritude. The global diffusion of these movements inspired artists like Satish Gujral (b. 1925) to study with Diego Rivera and David Siqueiros in Mexico City from 1952 to 1954 with the support of Octavio Paz, who had a diplomatic assignment in New Delhi in 1951. They inspired critics like Gieve Patel (b. 1946) to denounce the international art system and American hegemony represented by Clement Greenberg during his visit to India in 1967. One has only to glance at newspaper coverage of the visual arts or art criticism published in such magazines and journals as *The Modern Review*, *Marg*, *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, *Lalit Kala Contemporary*, *Thought*, *Link*, or *Design* in twentieth-century India to get a sense of the extent to which artists and intellectuals there acted as part of the international world. The relative merits of contemporary American prints and modernist Korean painting were discussed and debated alongside theories of art from Aristotle to Claude Lévi-Strauss and the art historical legacies of El Greco and Piet Mondrian. The art world included émigré and expatriate critics such as Rudolf von Leyden and Walter Langhammer; art historians such as William G. Archer and Charles Fabri; collectors such as Emmanuel Schlesinger and Davida and Chester Herwitz; and museologists such as Grace McCann Morley and Hermann Goetz. Together with Indian counterparts such as Mulk Raj Anand, Richard Bartholomew, J. Swaminathan, and Ebrahim Alkazi, they were integral to the making of modernist art in India.

Their individual and collective identities evoke Said's notion of "affiliation," which he defined as "the implicit network of peculiarly cultural associations between forms, statements, and other aesthetic elaborations on one hand and, on the other, institutions, agencies, classes, and amorphous social forces."⁵⁸ Affiliation, according to Said, functions "as a principle of critical research and as an aspect of the cultural process itself."⁵⁹ It challenges the reifications that have produced East and West as opposed, and culture and the state as unified. Affiliation operates in contrast to filiation, a process whereby relations between text and world are naturalized and depoliticized, whereby culture is managed and mobilized in service of the state. Said specifically critiqued the process whereby civilizational values were mapped onto nation-states in the nineteenth century, citing Matthew Arnold's conflation of culture with the state. One can extend Said's critique of national literatures in the nineteenth century to art histories from the same period. Owen Jones's *Grammar of Ornament* (1856) and Alois Riegl's *Historical Grammar of the Visual Arts* (1898) mobilized theories of racial-cultural difference and development to propose ontologies and epistemologies of art. Their claims were predicated on the relative place of various civilizations within a world-historical order.

The work of culture, Said insisted, was not bounded by nation-states or civilizations and the work of the critic was to revive the conditions of its worldliness: "To recreate the affiliative network is therefore to make visible, to give materiality back to, the strands

holding the texts to society, author and culture.”⁶⁰ This materiality was not apart from discourse, as Said emphasized “the bonds between text and world, bonds that specialization and the institutions of literature have all but completely effaced.”⁶¹ The worldly criticism proposed by Said can be linked to Gayatri C. Spivak’s notion of the “worlding of a world,” which she described as a purposeful “vulgarization” of Martin Heidegger’s dialectic of world and earth as adumbrated in his “Origin of the Work of Art.”⁶² As Spivak called attention to worlding as an act of power in the colonial context by which an “axiomatization of imperialism” produced “the Third World” and its subjects, she pointed to its possible “reinscription” and “deconstruction.”⁶³ She illuminated a process of clearing and concealment under colonialism, showing how the colonized were earthed in the worlding of the colonial self, how the expression of *Jane Eyre* hinged on the repression of Bertha Mason. The occlusion of “the native female” in this instance was emblematic, for Spivak, of the processes by which a global capitalist modernity and its institutions came into being.⁶⁴ Spivak developed Heideggerian notions of worlding and earthing into a mode of critical inquiry in her writing on postcolonial literatures, identities, and politics.⁶⁵ Her exercises in reworlding showed how constellations of the global and the local come into being and generate reifications like “Third World” and “First World” or “native female” and “male norm.”

Whereas Said’s notion of the world privileges social relations and material conditions, Spivak’s emphasis on reworlding shows how the world is produced by and through the imagination. Art is constituted by the world, and art constitutes the world. Said’s affiliation and Spivak’s reworlding present critical tools for writing an art history of relations between image and world. Such an art history would elucidate the process of translation by which the world is made visible in the image and the image becomes a world, invoking a world of other images. This book seeks to understand the image in the world—its social efficacy—and the image as a world—its aesthetic economy—within the context of modern India. The worldliness discussed here is national and cosmopolitan, material and imaginative, and is committed to artists and artworks as agents of history. As several scholars have noted, modernism in the visual arts has been resistant to this kind of worlding because of geopolitical, institutional, and epistemological factors.⁶⁶ Yet this obduracy of modernism makes it all the more necessary to scrutinize it, in order not only to locate its biases and omissions but also to provide new narratives of its forms and ideologies. These new narratives might include Anne M. Wagner’s study of British sculptors in the early decades of the twentieth century and Elizabeth Harney’s research on Senegalese painters in mid- to late-twentieth-century Dakar, works that evoke Barbara Hepworth and Henry Moore exploring the world of the British Museum in the 1930s and Léopold Sédar Senghor addressing the First World Festival of Black Arts in 1966.⁶⁷ The worlds conjured by these modernist practices correspond neither to a multiculturalist unity-in-diversity proposition nor to a universalist sameness-in-difference model. They highlight the contingency, if also the constraints, of affiliation, which is to say, of cultivated relation and constructed community.

An affiliative network cannot be limited to an analysis of center-periphery relations, with a deterministic view of flows and directions, nor can it be reduced to a critique of origin and derivation. The terms *center* and *periphery*, or *origin* and *derivation*, and their corollaries *domination* and *resistance*, or *inclusion* and *exclusion*, would be necessary but not sufficient for a history of affiliative networks, which would attend to other worlds imagined by artworks and their makers and preservers. As this study shows, artists and intellectuals in India sought a national identity that was also international—often critical of, yet constantly engaged with, ideas in the West and elsewhere. Anti-colonial and postcolonial intellectuals from Gandhi and Frantz Fanon to Said and Spivak have made worldliness—in various historical articulations such as universalism, internationalism, and cosmopolitanism—their ethical demand.

This worldliness is not equivalent to belonging in the current order of globalization, nor can it be equated with the world imagined by world systems theory. It follows the notion of the world articulated by Pheng Cheah:

The world is a form of relating or being-with. The globe, on the other hand, the totality produced by processes of globalization, is a bounded object or entity in Mercatorian space. When we say “map of the world,” we really mean “map of the globe.” It is assumed that the spatial diffusion and extensiveness achieved through global media and markets give rise to a sense of belonging to a shared world, when one might argue that such developments lead instead to greater polarization and division of nations and regions. The globe is not the world.⁶⁸

Cheah emphasizes the world-making function of world literature, which is “a fundamental force in the ongoing cartography and creation of the world instead of a body of timeless aesthetic objects.”⁶⁹ He encourages us “to see the world as a dynamic process with a practical-actional dimension instead of a spatio-geographical category or only in terms of global flows, even if the latter constitutes an important material condition of a world.”⁷⁰ The nation is not irrelevant to this world, for worldliness “takes place and is to be found in the intervals, mediations, passages, and crossings between national borders.”⁷¹ The world is open to reworlding. The cartographies we inherit are subject to revision, and this revision is the work of culture.

The world is subject to the imagination, and as such it is contingent, indeterminate, and permeable. For Cheah, literature, and one can infer art as well, provides “the structure of opening through which one receives a world and through which another world can appear.”⁷² Moreover, worldliness is a special prerogative for postcolonial peoples: “The devastating impact of globalization for the lower strata of these [postcolonial] societies makes opening onto another world especially urgent in these spaces.”⁷³ In his reading of Nuruddin Farah’s *Gifts* (1992), set in 1980s Somalia, as exemplary of world-making literature, Cheah privileges contemporary forms of “world-belonging,” but acknowledges the need for “imaginings and stories of what it means to be part of a

world that track and account for contemporary globalization as well as older historical narratives of worldhood.”⁷⁴

Such narratives would surely include the careers of artists and intellectuals who were denied world-belonging by colonialism and who asserted citizenship in national and international community as a response to an unjust world system. In India, Rabin-dranath Tagore’s and Jawaharlal Nehru’s embrace of cosmopolitanism as “a strategy of *anti-colonial* nationalism,” to quote Antoinette Burton, represents but two well-known examples of a widespread phenomenon.⁷⁵ This cosmopolitan stance, an anti-colonial nationalist and postcolonial gesture, was shared by a majority of the artists and critics surveyed in this book. Rather than embracing a timeless or ideal notion of national culture, they crafted a worldly identity through which the relation between East and West was remade.

The case of Octavio Paz in India exemplifies postcolonial worldliness as lived experience and utopian horizon. In 1951, the Mexican poet and diplomat traveled from Port Said to Bombay on the *Batory*, “a German ship given to Poland as part of the war reparations.”⁷⁶ His shipmates included a monastic maharaja and his entourage; a group of nuns and pair of priests from Poland; Constantin Brancusi’s widow; W.H. Auden’s brother; Indian writer Santha Rama Rau; and Rau’s American husband, Faubion Bowers, a former aide-de-camp to Douglas MacArthur and expert on Japanese theater.⁷⁷ John Bicknell Auden, a geologist, gave Paz explanations for the “strange appearance” of the Taj Mahal Hotel, built in 1903 and based on plans imported from Paris, with “its front facing the city, its back turned to the sea.”⁷⁸ Paz in turn observed: “The mistake seemed to be a deliberate one that revealed an unconscious negation of Europe and the desire to confine the building forever in India. A symbolic gesture, much like that of Cortés burning the boats so that his men could not leave.”⁷⁹ Paz’s poetry and prose abound in comparisons between India and Mexico and their experiences of European colonialism. The train journey from Bombay to New Delhi in 1951 reminds Paz of one he took “near the end of the Mexican Revolution” between Mexico City and San Antonio, Texas, and of “massacres along the railroad track, the same in India as in Mexico.”⁸⁰ The Taj Mahal Hotel, which greeted Paz on his arrival in Bombay harbor, embodied paradoxes of colonial history and postcolonial identity. Like India, it was “real and chimerical, ostentatious and comfortable, vulgar and sublime.”⁸¹

In *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1950), drafted in Paris, where Paz was active in Surrealist circles, he wrote: “The Mexican is always remote, from the world and from other people. And also from himself.”⁸² This alienation was a legacy of colonialism and a form of belonging for the colonized. The Mexican, as Paz put it, was “Nobody,” a figure who practiced the art of dissimulation and whose existence was “transparent” and “phantasmal.”⁸³ The task of the artist was to make meaning of that unbelonging and remake belonging to the world.

Such ideas of masking, mimicry, savagery (what Paz called “barbarism”), and sly civility as postcolonial identity were evident in Indian artist Francis Newton Souza’s

autobiographical essay “Nirvana of A Maggot,” published in 1955 in the British literary magazine *Encounter*. In that essay, Souza writes of coming to language—verbal and visual—as a struggle: “How can one articulate in Anglo-Saxon with a jeweled mandible that was fashioned by the ancient Konkan goldsmiths of Goa?”⁸⁴ For Souza, writing and painting engender profound insights on colonialism: “My inarticulation was due to England having possessed a lot of boats which had netted India into its vast empire.”⁸⁵ A founding member of the Progressive Artists Group, Souza was a comrade of Husain. Husain’s painting *Zameen* (Land), also of 1955, presented the artist as masked performer in a manner akin to Paz’s Mexican, the archetype of postcolonial man. For Paz, Souza, and Husain, the ideal artist and citizen was gendered male. In chapter 3 of this book, I situate Husain’s and Souza’s painterly and performative strategies in the context of their self-understanding as postcolonial artists speaking to and through modernist masters Picasso, Rodin, Klee, and Kafka.

Paz’s notion of *indigenismo* inspired Kapur’s thinking and writing during the 1960s. Her 1969 master’s thesis at the Royal College of Art in London was entitled “In Quest of Identity: Art and Indigenism in Post-colonial Culture with Special Reference to Contemporary Indian Painting.” For Kapur, indigenism was a means of articulating national and cosmopolitan identity and achieving political and intellectual emancipation. In 1962, Paz was appointed Mexican ambassador to India (and Afghanistan and Sri Lanka), a position he relinquished in 1968 in protest of the Mexican government’s actions against student protestors. During his time in South Asia, Paz befriended artists and intellectuals including J. Swaminathan, a journalist, critic, and painter.⁸⁶ Swaminathan, who had studied printmaking in Poland in 1958, was a key member of the radical Group 1890, established in 1962 in Bhavnagar. Paz wrote a catalogue essay, “Surrounded by Infinity,” for the group’s first and only exhibition in 1963 in New Delhi, inaugurated by Nehru.⁸⁷ In chapter 5, I discuss Swaminathan’s model of art and the artist and Khakhar’s “indigenist” critique of that model in the 1960s.

Swaminathan and Khakhar’s activities in India relate to what Joan Kee has called, in her account of Tansaekhwa (Korean monochrome painting), “the world as practice.”⁸⁸ During the 1960s and 1970s, practitioners and proponents of Tansaekhwa understood the world as “a process necessarily in formation, rather than as a circumstance over which artists, critics, and artworks had no control.”⁸⁹ Like the Gutai artists in Japan, they imagined their practice as critique of a system that reproduced logics of colonialism and capitalism, creating dominant centers and marginal peripheries in the art world.⁹⁰ They embraced an internationalism that opposed Orientalism.⁹¹

Such critiques of the art world resonate with the efforts of Mulk Raj Anand, a novelist, critic, and editor, who organized the Triennale of Contemporary World Art exhibition in New Delhi in 1968, an inspiration to the artists Kee discusses and a model for postcolonial art exhibitions in the 1970s. Anand received his doctorate in philosophy at the University of London in 1929, worked for T. S. Eliot’s *Criterion* and Leonard Woolf and Virginia Woolf’s Hogarth Press, and authored social-realist novels on poverty,

untouchability, and rural life, including *The Untouchable* (1935), *The Coolie* (1936), *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937), *Lament for the Death of a Master of Arts* (1938), *The Village* (1939), and *Across the Black Waters* (1940).⁹² Gandhi and Marx were political and intellectual touchstones for Anand. In 1946, Anand founded a journal for the arts in India, *Marg*, which became a vehicle of the postcolonial worldliness he embodied. In a 1948 editorial, Anand wrote: “For, firmly convinced as I am that Asia cannot do without Europe and Europe without Asia, we in India have positive things to achieve: the integration of a synthesis between the values which we have inherited from our past and those which Europe has evolved.”⁹³ Anand’s career was marked by acts of reworlding such as his account of a greater Asian cultural world as exemplified by the book *Persian Painting* (1930), his advocacy of Sri Lankan artists and intellectuals in support of the idea of South Asia (as opposed to India) in the 1940s, and his participation in the Afro-Asian Writers’ Association at their first meeting in Tashkent in 1958.⁹⁴ These cosmopolitan modernist projects of South-South solidarity rejected the world as it had been ordered by capitalism and colonialism. It reimagined the world through art and ideas.

Yet most histories of modern and contemporary art rely on predetermined or inherited notions of the world, and the exchanges between its areas. Consider Terry Smith writing on the “postcolonial turn” in the international art world since 1970:

Think of a toy globe, a metal or plastic sphere with a world map on its surface. Think of it as a double cup, cut at the equator—two halves to be fitted together. So it might serve as a container. Think of it, circa 1750–1970, as having the Mercator world map on it with the top and bottom halves connected by the two-way trafficking of global circuitry, but the whole being turned by the greater force of northern metropolitan cultural centers. This kind of iconogeographic twisting persists until sometime in the 1970s, when the cultural centers in the bottom part of the world, and in all the souths present in the northern hemisphere, themselves start to generate enough energy to do some turning.⁹⁵

Here Smith rehearses the equation of world with map and globe that Cheah cautions against, and erases the longer histories and political possibilities of “iconogeographic twisting” prior to 1970. In fact, the modernist practices discussed in this book achieved, with varying degrees of success, precisely the “turning” Smith attributes to our present. From the first decades of the twentieth century, artists in India reworlded commonsense notions of East and West or North and South. Such reworlding is by no means the exclusive prerogative of contemporary art; it has crucial antecedents and analogs in modernism.

The controversial reception of Clement Greenberg and his views on modernism in India in 1967 pointed to a postcolonial critique of world and globe or, perhaps more precisely, of the conflation of world and globe. On assignment from the U.S. State Department, Greenberg accompanied a MoMA-sponsored exhibition, *Two Decades of American Painting, 1946–1966*, on its travels to Japan and India. Noting “the spirit of unrest” among Indian artists, Greenberg compared their predicament in the 1960s to American

artists in the 1940s.⁹⁶ He exhorted them to follow the school of New York in devising a unique, modern, and “exportable” expression of their national identity.⁹⁷ Indian artists and critics rejected this possibility even as they were compelled by the art on display. They challenged Greenberg’s view of modern and contemporary art, claiming that it imposed capitalist logics and reimposed colonial norms whereby Indian artists were expected to conform to European models. They considered American art as neither providing a model for their practice nor establishing a universal norm.

Writing in a little magazine edited by Swaminathan, artist and critic Gieve Patel recalled the experience of British colonialism in India whereby it was “not Constable or Turner, but the schools of Landseer and Lord Leighton” that were exported.⁹⁸ He asked: “Is the officially exported contemporary art of a country ever representative of the most vital things then going on in that country?”⁹⁹ In the 1970s, Patel joined hands with other artists, including Khakhar, to produce a critical realism in art, upholding figurative and narrative imagery as a rejoinder to the perceived dominance of Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art, the American “exports” Greenberg touted while in India. Their efforts culminated in a group exhibition, *Place for People* (1981), in which Kapur participated as a critic-member of the group. Her catalogue essay for the exhibition charted a genealogy of modernism different from the Greenbergian model, citing Bertolt Brecht, José Clemente Orozco, Max Beckmann, Francis Bacon, Andrei Tarkovsky, R. B. Kitaj, and Federico García Lorca as exemplary artists and world-citizens. This genealogy enacted a postcolonial worldliness that neither opposed the West (as idea or influence) nor corresponded to nationalist ideals of purity and authenticity.

In chapter 5, I present a full discussion of *Place for People* and the role of these figures (Swaminathan, Patel, Khakhar, and Kapur) in reworlding modernism. That exhibition signaled a history of modernism that remains significant for contemporary art. Its legacy was the subject of a 2012 exhibition curated by Chaitanya Sambrani, *To Let the World In: Narrative and Beyond in Contemporary Indian Art*, at the Lalit Kala Akademi, Chennai. In an essay commemorating Anand’s career, Kapur outlines the stakes of the modern for the contemporary:

While the youngest generation of artist-intellectuals in India, situating themselves pretty firmly within a postmodern ear, may have little patience with modernity and modernism, there is reason to believe that the issue, in discourse as in practice, is not so quickly disposed of. Not if one rescues it from the nostalgic mode and re-evaluates the logic (or lack of it) in arguments relating to “the death of modernity,” revises canonical periodization of the complex category of the “modern,” calibrates it from the vantage point of the contemporary, and sees it as a web of counter-currents resurfacing on a global scale in flows that are far from frozen.¹⁰⁰

Here Kapur suggests that contemporary art has a recursive relationship to modernism. Its global flows can and should be understood within a longer history of modernism and

modernity. Paz, a critical figure in that history, described his experience of these flows as “circumambulations, circumnavigations, and aerial circumvolutions in Asia, Europe, and America,” rather than a path of linear progress.¹⁰¹

The view of modernism as a practice of worldly affiliations promises to transform our notions of the modern and the contemporary. Instead of contemporary art marking the end of modernism (and the “death of modernity,” as Kapur puts it), it comes to represent continuity with many projects of the modern: translation, democracy, secularity, and cosmopolitanism. In chapter 6, I explore these continuities through the 2012 Kochi-Muziris Biennale, an art exhibition held in Kochi (Cochin), Kerala, and a self-conscious response to the Venice Biennale. A reevaluation of modernism and modernity, as Kapur proposes, might yield an image of the contemporary as radical potential, not a commodified currency of the global art market but the possibility for world-making. Rather than the stereotype of contemporary art representing a homogenous practice across ever-expanding art fairs and international exhibitions, and performing endless repetition across differential geographies, we might arrive at a vision of its rootedness in history and politics. Against widespread (neoliberal, ethnic nationalist, or religious fundamentalist) injunctions to forget or erase what came before (Gandhi and Nehru, Bandung and Budapest, decolonization and socialism), we would see modernism’s persistence and understand its identity with and difference from contemporary art.

THE ALMIRAH AS ARCHIVE

Gazing at Singh’s *File Room* in Venice in 2011, I was reminded of visiting the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) offices in New Delhi in 2007 and requesting permission to enter its archive. Days and weeks passed until a frustrated employee asked what exactly I was looking for. I described a room full of paper, documenting individuals and institutions in the 1920s and 1930s. “Oh,” he said, finally registering the nature of my request with clarity and understanding, “you are looking for the ‘old file room.’” The old file room of the ASI houses records of the colonial period; the (new) file room houses records from 1947 onward. This was neither the first nor the only time I would have such an exchange in the course of researching this book and searching for an elusive archive. What was the file room of modernism in India, I wondered, and how might one write an art history attentive to its peculiar character?

At Maharaja Sayajirao University in Baroda, the site of postcolonial India’s premier art school, I was directed, after days of waiting for permissions, to a Godrej almirah (closet) in the library and informed that that was “the archive.” Treasures—loose-leaf papers, tattered catalogues, faded brochures, and fiery manifestos—spilled out of the freestanding steel cabinet, technically the Interio-Storwel, designed by Indian entrepreneur Pirojsha Godrej (his brother, a lawyer turned inventor and engineer, Ardeshir, was a master locksmith) and manufactured by the Godrej Group of Companies since 1923.¹⁰² Established in Bombay in 1897 by Pirojsha and Ardeshir, Parsi (Zoroastrian)

brothers committed to *swadeshi* (of one's own country) goods, the Godrej Group is a family-owned conglomerate that manufactures locks, safes, typewriters, refrigerators, vegetable oil, animal feed, consumer soap, and the Interio-Storwel. The Godrej almirah is a common feature of middle-class homes, offices, factories, laboratories, libraries, and public institutions across India where there is little built-in storage. This indigenous armoire, frequently referred to as a Godrej in much the way "Colgate" signifies toothpaste, keeps moisture, mold, termites, and burglars out. In Baroda and other sites I visited, it holds objects of value and accumulations of knowledge, carefully guarded by custodians and curators.

The Anglo-Indian word *almirah*, derived from the Hindi-Urdu *almari*, Portuguese *almario*, and Latin *armario*, points to the mixed-up origins of Bombay (now Mumbai), the Godrej Group, and colonial modernity.¹⁰³ The almirah I encountered in Baroda was less magical cache than Kafkaesque nightmare for a scholar on the track of facts and truths, in pursuit of a paper trail of the art world in India. Much information in that art world, in the 1930s and in the 2000s, circulated through social networks and oral traditions. In my quest for the archive, I was often redirected to the anecdote, to individuals who held unofficial stores of documents and potential answers to my questions.

Fashioning an archive from disaggregated almirahs and anecdotes was not what I had in mind as I began this project as a doctoral student at Berkeley. My training had been with books, papers, electronic resources, inanimate artwork, and above all, dead people. It afforded little preparation for the work I would do in India: cold-calling, visiting, waiting, and wandering. The research for this book was conducted in art schools, museums, galleries, universities, libraries, auditoriums, theaters, homes, garages, private collections, and storage facilities in Santiniketan, Baroda, New Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Chandigarh, Lucknow, Bhopal, Ahmedabad, Jaipur, and Durgapur in 2006–2007 with follow-up visits in 2009 and 2010. It entailed the study of original artwork and art criticism, as well as interviews with artists, critics, collectors, curators, and academics. It was supplemented by consulting books and journals in U.S. libraries; the archives of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; and the Manuscripts and Archives Division of the New York Public Library. Research trips to Paris, Brussels, Amsterdam, and Munich in 2005–2006 enabled me to see a major exhibition of Sher-Gil's work at the Haus der Kunst as well as art she admired as a student in Europe during the 1920s and 1930s. Visits to the Venice Biennale in 2011 and the Kochi-Muziris Biennale in 2012 brought into view new and old constellations of nation and world and reshaped my understanding of modernism's foundations and futures. These exhibitions enacted complex relationships between modern and contemporary art and confirmed long histories of a globalized art world.

The multi-sited and transnational nature of this archive reflected the art world in which Sher-Gil, Husain, Subramanyan, and Khakhar operated. The almirah was an apt metaphor for its active, mixed-up, improvised, and dispersed quality. In the United States, scholars often asked about my "fieldwork" in India: what is your site? That ques-

tion bespoke the intellectual legacy of area studies and persistence of a social scientific model in the humanistic study of non-Western societies. The answer I think they expected was a village or ruin such as Molela in Rajasthan or Hampi in Karnataka. Given the subject of my study, my village was Santiniketan, the location of the anti-colonial nationalist Visva Bharati (literally, World-Indian) University, and my ruin was the nation. I found the archive in museums and galleries, buildings and gardens, almirahs and godowns, calendar art and contemporary art, films and photographs, individual and collective memory. Indeed the archive of modernism in India was everywhere and nowhere in particular.

Much of the original artwork I studied was housed in structures with intimate links to the history of modernism and modernity that I relate in this book. My base was Jaipur House, the former residence of the prince of Jaipur, completed in 1936 as part of British architect Edwin Lutyens's plan for the colonial city of New Delhi, and now the home of the National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA), established as a museum of modern and contemporary art in 1954. I would read in the library there and step into the galleries, finding myself face-to-face with Sher-Gil's self-portraits or village scenes from the 1930s and with the work of her contemporaries: Jamini Roy's bold icons and Santhal figures, Rabindranath Tagore's vivid birds and wild beasts, and Nandalal Bose's *patchitra* (narrative scroll painting)—inspired posters for the Haripura meeting of the Indian National Congress in 1938. Not far from the NGMA, films and lectures at the India International Center and the India Habitat Center provided escape from poring over dusty papers. Both of these cultural centers were designed by American architect Joseph Allen Stein (1912–2001), whose buildings abound in central Delhi near Lodi gardens and have given rise to the name Steinabad, a riff on the seventeenth-century Mughal city of Shahjahanabad, built on the river Yamuna.

I made regular excursions to other sites, such as the Rabindra Bhavan galleries of the Lalit Kala Akademi, designed by MIT-trained architect Habib Rahman (1915–1995) and built in 1961, and the Triveni Kala Sangam, an art space and cultural center founded by philanthropist Sundari K. Shridharani (1925–2012) in 1949, designed by Stein and completed in 1963. The tea terrace at Triveni is a legendary meeting place for artists and intellectuals. Both Rabindra Bhavan and Triveni Kala Sangam, situated in the Mandi House *chowk* (intersection) of New Delhi, were central nodes in a network of cultural institutions that emerged in newly postcolonial India: national academies of art, literature, and the performing arts, as well as art schools, technical universities, design institutes, auditoriums, theaters, galleries, and museums. They are icons of a mid-century modernism that felt very distant—conceptually and geographically—from the spaces in which contemporary art was being displayed and viewed in early-twenty-first century India, including the sleek, futurist Apeejay Media Gallery on Mathura Road, where I saw a solo exhibition of Shilpa Gupta's projected drawings and interactive videos; the white cube interiors of Vadehra Gallery in the Okhla Industrial Estate, where I viewed many a show of India's modernist masters and contemporary classics; and the brick

fortress of the Devi Art Foundation in Gurgaon, a private collection turned museum of contemporary art, where I attended the opening of *The One Year Drawing Project*, a collaboration between four Sri Lankan artists curated by London-based Sharmini Pereira. These galleries, located in the suburbs or on the outskirts of an expanding megapolis (population 22 million and growing), represented a different configuration of the art world than the one that is the subject of this book, centered in the art schools of Santiniketan and Baroda with the cities of Delhi and Bombay serving as hubs of display, criticism, and commerce.¹⁰⁴

Writing the history of modernism was a strange project to pursue at the height of the art market boom in India. At art openings and academic seminars alike, where the contemporary—the very new, the just now, the up-to-date, the *au courant*—was the rage, my interest in the modern, and its outmoded artists, artworks, institutions, and exhibitions, provoked curiosity and confusion.¹⁰⁵ Why was I interested in modernism? Wasn't it past in the sense of having passed, of being *passé*? When was modernism, indeed, I thought to myself, restating the title of Kapur's postcolonial response to Williams. Despite the apparent disinterest in modernism, its ruins and traces could be glimpsed on the streets and sidewalks of many Indian cities even as they were in the throes of radical restructuring, not least in New Delhi, the site of the 2010 Commonwealth Games.

To some extent, this book is an artifact of an art world quite different from the one in which artists and audiences find themselves in 2014. Major players in the art world such as the Bodhi Art Gallery and Osian's Auction House have all but disappeared, and new institutions such as the India Art Summit (now renamed the India Art Fair) and the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art have appeared. In 2006–2007, there was a heightened sense of flux and a sensation of vanishing in the air. The nation was under construction and in need of renovation; the old was giving way to the new. “Everything [the nation-state, nationalist projects of education and culture] is slowly being taken away,” said an art historian at Visva Bharati University in Santiniketan in 2006. “It's [modernism, modernity] all over now,” declared a curator and archivist in 2007 at Gandhi Darshan, a memorial and museum to Gandhi in New Delhi where many artists, including Subramanyan, installed their work in 1968–1969. The bust has transformed some of these conditions, but the boom informed my perceptions of modern and contemporary art.

Take for example fragments of Husain's Ramayana mural (fig. 11) produced for the Dhoomimal Art Gallery in the 1960s; they stand in Connaught Circus, the center of Lutyens's New Delhi, recently reinvented in the name of restoration. This mural was an attempt to retool notions of art and crafts inherited from the colonial period, and to create a new public for art in postcolonial India. In the late 1960s, Husain exhibited his oil paintings in village performances and staged folk theater in city galleries. The three male figures walking past his mural in New Delhi in 2010 without a second glance and the female art historian recording this work with her camera, visible in the reflection on the window, suggest how these artistic practices are at once forgotten and remembered. The collaged surface of Husain's ceramic mosaic serves as the foundation for art in the

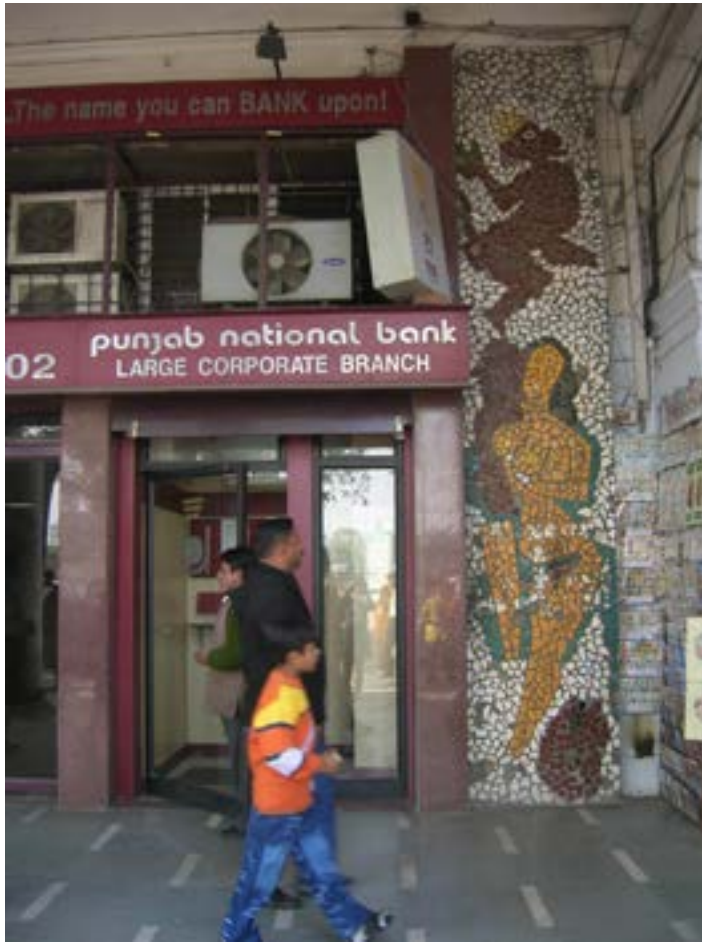


FIGURE 11.
Maqbool Fida Husain, detail
of Ramayana mural, ca. 1967,
Dhoomimal Gallery, Connaught
Place, New Delhi. Artwork © Estate
of the artist; image © Sonal Khullar.

present even as its aesthetic vocabularies appear past. The disinterested pedestrians and interested scholar testify to modernism's history and future, its immediacy and obscurity, its ephemerality and monumentality. My photograph recalls how a dialectic of forgetting and remembering, appearance and disappearance, and interestedness and disinterestedness has been central to the history of modernism and modernity in India and the world. For Baudelaire in the nineteenth century as for Benjamin in the twentieth century, a vanishing past was the necessary ground from which to imagine futures.

By contrast to the frenetic pace of change in Delhi and other "metros," as India's metropolitan centers are known in the English-language news media, time stood still in Santiniketan, or so it seemed to me during my visit there in 2006. At Kala Bhavan, the art school of the anti-colonial nationalist university established by Rabindranath Tagore in 1919, students worked on the ground mixing paints and weaving textiles, literalizing the Santiniketan spirit of staying close to the earth and learning from nature, as Sub-

ramanyan did when he was a student there in the 1940s.¹⁰⁶ Elsewhere on the campus stood murals by Nandalal Bose, sculpture by Ramkinkar Baij, and mosaics by Benodebehari Mukherjee, testaments to national community and international collaboration. Bose, Baij, and Mukherjee were Subramanyan's teachers and among the first students at Santiniketan in the 1920s. Their art had diverse sources and influences, including the ancient wall paintings at Ajanta and Tibetan *thangkas* (devotional scroll painting); Egyptian and Mesopotamian "frescoes"; trecento masters (and nineteenth- and twentieth-century British copies of that painting); Edo-period scrolls and contemporary *nihonga* (Japanese-style painting) practices of artists such as Yokoyama Taikan, Hishida Shunso, and Arai Kampo, who came to live and work in India between 1907 and 1915.¹⁰⁷ On the exterior of the Department of Design, Subramanyan's exuberant, if fading, black-and-white murals (fig. 12), completed in 1990, continued the earlier-twentieth-century practice of his mentors.¹⁰⁸

Durgapur, the Nehruvian-era steel town some thirty-five miles away from Santiniketan, represented another utopia altogether, one committed to heavy industry and technological progress. Designed by Stein and his American compatriot Benjamin Kauffman Polk in the 1950s, the town and its steel plant were organized along grids, creating rationalized, modernist housing and factory spaces for workers and their managers in a modernizing India. Both utopias—Santiniketan and Durgapur—were monuments to particular visions of modernity and modernism in India, corresponding to the Gandhian and Nehruvian periods, respectively, during which the artists of my study came of age. They seemed a world apart from the Khoj workshop where I first encountered Chopra as he performed *Memory Drawing* for the open studios of Performance Art 2007, the culmination of artists' residencies supported by nonprofit artists' association and arts incubator Khoj (literally, "quest" in Hindi-Urdu).¹⁰⁹

Along with an international group of young artists, Chopra activated the experimental space of the Khoj studios, located in a modern building near the fourteenth-century Khirkee mosque in South Delhi. As Yog Raj Chitrakar, clad characteristically if anachronistically in natty tweeds, Chopra opened a brown paper package to reveal a landscape painting of snow-capped mountains and green meadows that he proceeded to transpose with sticks of charcoal on to the white walls of the studio. In between he paused to shave, undress, don women's clothes, put on makeup and a wig, and gaze at himself in the mirror. Then he returned to work on the drawing. During his four-hour performance, some of us grew bored and left, others chatted to pass the time, a few watched intently and took photographs.

Among the other performances that day, S. S. Listyowati, an Indonesian artist, heavily made up and dressed as a Javanese bride in jewels and silk, rode a golden chariot through Khirkee village, a mixed-income neighborhood, and we followed her in a procession. She returned to the Khoj studios, performing wedding rituals under candlelight to the sounds of live gamelan music. Then she cooked seven eggs and ate them. Later that evening Ni Jun from Shanghai read out loud from a slim paperback volume,



FIGURE 12.

K. G. Subramanyan, detail of untitled mural, 1990. Department of Design, Kala Bhavan, Visva Bharati University, Santiniketan. Artwork © the artist; image © Sonal Khullar.

while Motti Brecher from Tel Aviv jumped off a roof in a monkey costume. A reference to the *Ramayana*, a Hindu epic poem, or to Delhi's infamous monkey menace? we speculated.¹¹⁰ The audience was a mix of expatriates and Indians, students and artists, critics and dealers—not unusual from my experience in the art world.

My first encounter with Pushpamala was at Gallery Espace in New Delhi in 2009, at the finale of “Video Wednesday,” an annual forum for video and new-media work initiated by curator Johnny M. L. in 2008 as part of the gallery's outreach activities.¹¹¹ In a panel discussion with artists, critics, and collectors about copyright, property, authenticity, and piracy in India, I saw Pushpamala in the audience and thought she looked familiar. I recognized the ace archivist and clever copyist from her art and that of others, from published images in books and original works in exhibitions, and from knowing and studying a history of images. It was like seeing Ravi Varma's *Lady in Moonlight* come to life in the twenty-first century. She was both that coy nineteenth-century damsel and the fierce twentieth-century *hunterwali* (one with a whip), a figure she performed in an earlier series, *Phantom Lady or Kismet* (1996–1998). Inspired by the life and career of Australian-born Fearless Nadia (née Mary Ann Evans), a Bombay film star and stunt-woman in the 1930s, Pushpamala wore a cape, mask, and feathered fedora, roamed city

streets at night, and leapt from balconies as she was photographed by Meenal Agarwal. That evening in Delhi, in response to a dialogue between a gallerist and a collector, Pushpamala questioned the entanglements of art and commerce and expressed a desire for art to be accessible to a public. Art was an argument about society and a form of social action; it was made to engage and be engaged, she said.

These encounters with Chopra and Pushpamala in art and life made me rethink the connection of modern and contemporary art in India. They confounded my assumptions of their proximity to and distance from each other. In their search for new publics, in their citation of historical practices, in their commitment to location, were Chopra and Pushpamala as disjunct from their predecessors as I had imagined? Or were they extending a project inaugurated by modernist art? Williams, in conversation with Said, provided a partial answer: "The analysis of representation is not a subject separate from history, but . . . the representations are part of history, contribute to history, are active elements in the way that history continues; in the way forces are distributed; in the way people perceive situations, both from inside their own pressing realities and from outside them."¹¹² It became useful to think of contemporary art as "active elements" in the continuation of a history of modernism. What is the role of artists, artworks, and aesthetics in a postcolonial society? How does a national art perform its distinctiveness from discourses and practices elsewhere? How do artists signal their allegiance to place? These questions remain as crucial to the contemporary art world in India as they were to the modernist art world that Sher-Gil, Husain, Subramanyan, and Khakhar built.

In the 1990s, many artists in India turned to conceptual photography, site-specific installation, video art, and performance as a response to conditions of globalization. This period witnessed the rise of new patronage for the visual arts, especially in urban India, and the articulation of new relationships between art and politics. Hence the art of Chopra and Pushpamala and the institutional spaces of Khoj and Gallery Espace in which I found it displayed and discussed. In a rapidly changing environment for art, the attachments to specific positions, practices, and places—to the artist's studio and art world, to early film and landscape painting, to Kashmir and South India—visible in Chopra and Pushpamala's work argued against the fetishization of the new and homogenization of culture. Contemporary Indian art was not a commodity form representing a total break with the old and a seamless link with the global, a view promoted by its detractors and admirers alike. This was an art keenly attuned to its past, to its society and community.

TRACKS OF THE ART WORLD

This book traces the coming together of a national art world and a project of modernism from the 1930s through the 1980s. Modernism in India was a critical response to colonialism that produced complex forms of national and cosmopolitan belonging or "worldly affiliations." The worldliness of the modernism imagined by Sher-Gil, Husain,

Subramanyan, and Khakhar cannot be accommodated by either a history of styles or a sociology of art. Each chapter entails formal analysis of artworks alongside a social history of their production and reception. The chapters are sequenced in roughly chronological order so as to chart the history of individuals, institutions, and image practices that constituted the art world in India. This organization is not intended to suggest organic or inexorable progression, but to show how artists build upon and depart from earlier practices, to analyze the changing role of the critic and criticism, and to discuss the impact of major exhibitions. Each chapter portrays an artist, artworks, and art exhibitions that would not have been possible without specific predecessors and precedents. Cumulatively these chapters track the emergence and consolidation of modernism in India.

The visual artists who are the focus of this study represent a distinctive and influential trajectory of modernism in India. I discuss their contributions alongside those of their contemporaries and artistic interlocutors: Jamini Roy and Ramkinkar Baij with Sher-Gil, Francis Newton Souza and Ram Kumar with Husain, Satish Gujral and Riten Mazumdar with Subramanyan, and Jeram Patel and Sudhir Patwardhan with Khakhar. There are other significant trajectories of modernism in India, notably those of artists in Bengal who have been studied by Mitter, Guha-Thakurta, R. Siva Kumar, Debashish Banerji, and Ratan Parimoo.¹¹³ This book is indebted to their scholarship, but departs from it by locating the beginnings of a national modernism in the figure of Sher-Gil in the 1930s. Her art, unlike that of Rabindranath Tagore, Gaganendranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose, and Jamini Roy, was a self-conscious and systematic modernist counterproposal to the art of the Bengal School and was recognized as such by contemporary critics and a subsequent generation of artists including Husain and Souza.¹¹⁴

A considerable literature on and by Sher-Gil, Husain, Subramanyan, and Khakhar enables larger arguments about the relationship between modernism and contemporary art and their national and global histories. This book is a response to art histories and criticism that have analyzed these artists' work through an autobiographical or minoritarian lens, often reducing their achievement to a personal struggle with gender and sexuality and rehearsing logics of a dichotomy between private and public spheres. Those methods have yielded overdetermined readings of Sher-Gil as "woman artist" or Khakhar as "gay artist" despite each artist's vexed relationship to these identities and to identity politics more broadly. They have overlooked the masculinity of Husain's "masterly" and Subramanyan's "craftsmanly" artistic identities. By contrast, I concentrate on arguments made by the artists' work, visual and verbal, and less on developments in their lives. Thus, I aim to reorient discourses on these artists beyond categories such as "woman," "Muslim," "Brahmin," and "queer," even as I acknowledge that these categories have been significant for the reception of their work. The artistic identity practiced by modernists in India was opposed to an identitarianism based on gender, sexuality, region, religion, class, and caste. Contrary to contemporary understandings of the term, identity in the context of the cultural politics of twentieth-century India was a shifting

relationship between self and other (nation and world), and it was the unstable ground from which to articulate aesthetic goals and political aspirations as evident in Kapur's essay "In Quest of Identity" (1969), which I discuss in chapter 5.

Chapter 2, "An Art of the Soil," examines Sher-Gil's efforts at synthesizing East and West, which by the 1930s had come to represent distinct modes of visual representation. The Paris-trained artist embraced oil painting and inaugurated a tradition of modernism to which the most significant artists in twentieth-century India professed allegiance. In her paintings of the 1930s and 1940s, she engaged two precolonial artistic traditions that she took to represent an authentic India and could therefore serve as the basis for a new national art. Her engagement with the wall paintings of Ajanta and Mattancheri in the South India trilogy of 1937 recast the relationship between national tradition and modernist art, giving visual form to the masses. Her engagement with the miniature painting of the Rajput and Mughal courts in her paintings of 1938–1940 offered a feminist critique of dominant representations of women and the village, which were the object of male nationalist reform and remaking. Although Sher-Gil is usually considered an iconoclastic or isolated figure, her work was in critical dialogue with artists and intellectuals in late colonial India on questions of the nation-form, citizenship, and aesthetics.

Chapter 3, "Man and Mahabharata," traces the development of Husain's artistic career and visual imagination from his existential portrait *Man* (c. 1950) to civilizational tableaux based on the Mahabharata, a Hindu epic, for the Bienal de São Paulo (1971). A founding member of the Progressive Artists Group, Husain offered a postcolonial critique of modernist notions of originality and mastery in his paintings of the 1950s. His first film, *Through the Eyes of A Painter* (1967), shifted the boundaries between "modernist" art and "traditional" crafts and enacted a dynamic exchange between the city and the village. Its achievement hinged on translation between media (cinema, painting) and sites (village, city) that were perceived as separate and opposed. In paintings and performances of the late 1960s and early 1970s, Husain reenvisioned the role of art and the artist by adopting the persona of picture showman, a creative figure common to India's rural and urban cultures. Through a committed practice of translation, he recast modernist art as nationalist work and transformed the relationship between artist and audience.

Chapter 4, "The New Primitives," relates Subramanyan's visual thinking on art and crafts, and their corollaries easel and earth, to his ideas on art language in the 1960s and 1970s. These ideas were a response to particular histories of colonial and anti-colonial nationalist art education in India, which the artist engaged as a teacher, theorist, and practitioner of art. His involvement in emergent crafts revival, textile art, and mural movements in mid-twentieth-century India was visually and materially manifest in his Ravindralaya terra-cotta relief in Lucknow in 1962–1963, textile paintings and rope sculptures for the 1964–1965 World's Fair in New York, and sand-cast cement sculpture at Gandhi Darshan in New Delhi in 1968–1969. During this period, the artist

was director of design for Weavers Service Centers of the All-India Handloom Board in Bombay (1959–1962) and dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts at Maharaja Sayajirao University in Baroda (1968–1974). These institutional positions in the world of crafts and art, respectively, were crucial to the development of his theory of art language, first articulated in his 1961 essay, “The Artist on Art,” in which he likened postcolonial artists to “the primitives of a new age.” This art language was worked out in Subramanyan’s toys, paintings, murals, and reliefs of the 1960s and early 1970s that linked distinct domains of cultural practice and modes of artistic production with an aim to make a postcolonial modernism in the image of Indian tradition. Chapter 5, “*Paan Shop for People*,” analyzes how Khakhar came to appropriate visual forms and modalities associated with the bazaar in his art of the 1960s and 1970s. His turn to the city and material-cultural legacies of colonial modernity was unprecedented in mid-twentieth-century India. In the 1950s and 1960s, Husain and Subramanyan, despite their differences in method and materials, privileged the space of the village or the figure of the craftsman to mark commitments to national tradition. By locating national tradition in popular culture and urban lifeworlds, Khakhar’s art participated in contemporary debates on “indigenism” and “internationalism,” which stood for a fraught relationship between East and West. In the 1960s and 1970s, these terms defined distinct and competing aesthetic and political agendas. Along with other Indian artists and critics in the 1970s, Khakhar engaged in a critique of internationalism, or the perceived dominance of Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art, through indigenism. This critique culminated in the group exhibition *Place for People* (1981), which called for a critical realism in art and political engagement with the space of the city. Khakhar’s painting *Paan Shop* (1965) and installation *Paan Beedi Shop* (1992) referred to the ordinary and ubiquitous *paan* shop—at once the vendor of *paan*, tobacconist, corner shop, and social meeting ground in Indian towns and cities—and proposed that art should be like a *paan* shop for people.

Chapter 6, “Globalization, the New-Media Nineties, and the Persistence of Modernism,” discusses the ongoing relevance of modernism in light of violence against artists and artworks by right-wing Hindu groups in India and a series of international exhibitions of contemporary Indian art including *Kapital and Karma* (Vienna, 2002), *Edge of Desire* (Perth, New York City, Berkeley, Mexico City, Monterrey, New Delhi, and Mumbai, 2004–2007), *Indian Summer* (Paris, 2005), *Indian Highway* (London, 2008, with restagings in Oslo, Lyons, Rome, and Beijing), *Horn Please: Narratives in Contemporary Indian Art* (Bern, 2007), *New Narratives: Contemporary Art from India* (Chicago, 2008), *Chalo! (Let’s Go!) India* (Tokyo and Seoul, 2008–2009), and *Paris-Delhi-Bombay* (Paris, 2011). These developments represented a simultaneous contraction and expansion of aesthetic and political possibility under globalization. Even as interest in contemporary Indian art has grown exponentially worldwide, artists and artworks representing modernism, most prominently Husain, have been under threat in India. Persecuted for his depiction of nude Hindu goddesses from the mid-1990s, Husain left India in 2006 and lived in exile in homes in Dubai, Qatar, and London until his death in 2011.

What future, then, for modernism and its cosmopolitan secularity in India? I turn to contemporary art—Vivan Sundaram’s digital photomontages *Re-take of Amrita* (2001), Nilima Sheikh’s series of paintings *Each Night Put Kashmir in your Dreams* (2004–2010), Sheela Gowda and Christoph Storz’s sculptural installation *Stopover* (2012), and Atul Dodiya’s photographic installation *Celebration in the Laboratory* (2012)—for provisional answers. These artists take up a history of modernism in India with an aim to reveal the past and remake the present. They propose that modernism is a ruin in Benjamin’s sense. Not dead or done with, but alive with potential, pulsating with energy, and stirring with ideas.