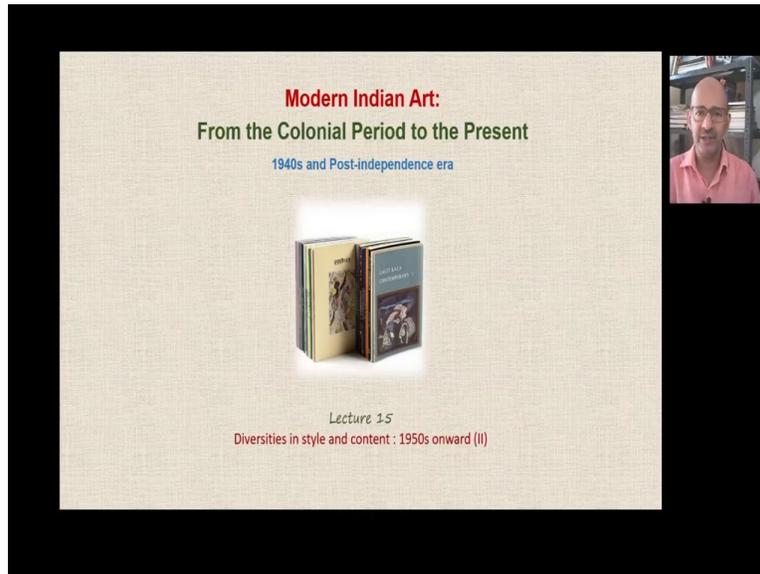


**Modern Indian Art from the Colonial Period to the Present**  
**Professor Soumik Nandy Majumdar**  
**Department of History of Art, Kala Bhavana, Santiniketan**  
**Visava-Bharati**  
**Lecture 15**  
**Diversities in Style and Content: 1950s onward (ii)**

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Hello viewers, welcome to MOOCS online course on Modern Indian Art from the Colonial Period to the Present. Today the 15th lecture from this series that is the last lecture from the third week is a continuation of our previous study that is we were trying to look at the new developments taking place in the field of modern Indian art mainly from 1950s onwards that is we were focusing on the new developments of the post-independent India and we have seen that how different kinds of artworks approached from different thought processes with different conceptual frameworks and also trying to develop distinctively individual styles became the hallmark of the art of this period and not only this period also of the following periods. We have also said that the absence of one or two strong dominant ideologies gave way to a multiple view, ideas, approaches and also ideologies developed by individual artists.

So, we can look at various trends emerging as very important mileposts for this history and not only that we can also see that how contemporary or modern Indian art from this period onwards also getting accompanied by writings on art, publications on art, discussions, seminars on art, therefore modern art particularly from this era cease to remain only a hands-on practice, only a

material and technical practice, it also assumed an intellectual practice, a practice that required reading, writing, thinking, talking.

So, let us see what are the new trends and new signs of modern Indian art now emerging from the artists apart from what we have seen so far who were very active from 1950s onwards. So, the very title page of this lecture signifies that this is very important that we now take care of not only the art that was produced during this period but also art writings.

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1950s, 1960s, 1970s continue to remain a very active period as many artists with different stylistic orientations keep contributing to the diversity of modern art.

The visible trends are –

- Quest for Indian identity
- Incorporation of local elements
- Exploring the neo-figurative styles
- Personal narratives as opposed to grand narratives
- Abstract art
- Reviving the decorative traditions

So, 1950s, 1960s, 1970s continue to remain a very active period as many artists with different stylistic orientations keep contributing to the diversity of modern art. So, diversity still remains a very very important feature of modern Indian art and this is not going to stop because we also need to keep in our mind that we are talking about a country like India with a huge diversity in language, in culture, in history, therefore this is not surprising that the modern art history of that same country is also going to show lot of diversity.

Now, the visible trends are the quest for Indian identity which is going to be there for a long time in spite of internationalism, in spite of certain global characteristic features- by and large most of the Indian artists would really retain this quest, the quest for an Indian identity in spite of internationalism. Incorporation of local elements this is something that we shall see in the artworks of many artists not only in today's lecture but also in the subsequent lectures where

absolutely local motifs, local elements, local experiences, local observations are being incorporated within their own art practice.

Exploring the new figurative style, this has already been clear in the last lecture- that one of the hallmarks of the art of this period is an attempt to re-imagine the figuration, human figure is not just a representation of the human figure anymore, a human figure when properly done with a conceptual understanding it becomes a site of experience, a human figure can also carry memories, it can also carry or at least reflect the socio-political happenings around that time, therefore figuration became a real issue for most of the artists who tried to solve that issue in their own respective individual ways.

Personal narratives as opposed to grand narratives or mythological narratives or epic narratives, now this also becomes increasingly a noticeable feature in the artwork of many artists who would like to incorporate or address their personal narratives- that is autobiographical elements in their works or personal experiences in their works. Often this personal experiences and some of the autobiographical elements may not look very grand or worthy to share but this is where a good artist excels, even a personal experience or a personal narrative which looks banal and it is banal at one point can be elevated to a very significant visual communication for others if properly dealt with.

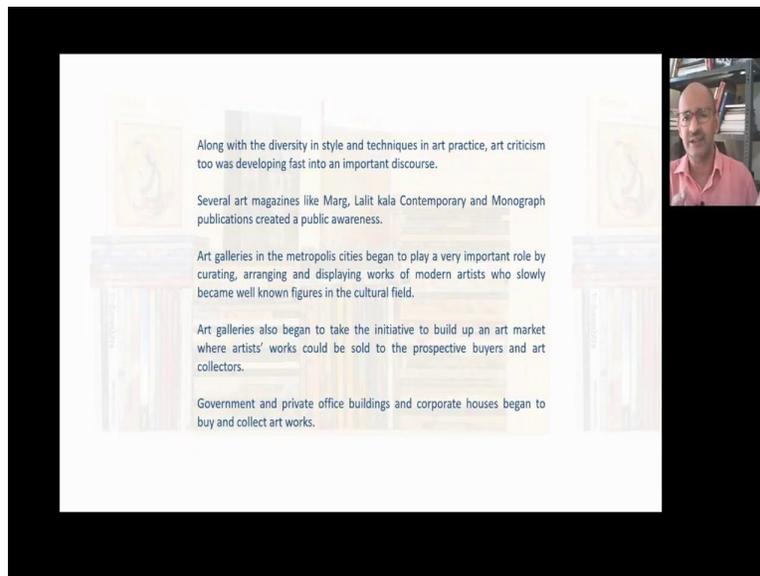
A very important segment of our practice that keeps on emerging from 1950s onwards and this is going to be carried on by many other artists in the later period as well- this is abstraction. Abstract art is significantly, in terms of the quantity in modern Indian art, is less than figurative or realistic art, yes we agree. but the handful of people who are kind of committed to abstract art are also very important artists to study when we look at the history of modern Indian art.

Therefore it is very important that we also look at their works and try to understand what exactly abstraction means for these artists that we are talking about and this is not for today's lecture. In the next lecture we are going to have a very special segment on the abstract art or abstract artists of India during this time.

Now, there are artists in whose works you might come across some flavor of traditional decorative art, that is deliberately these artists are deliberately using, adopting certain traditional

and decorative elements from Indian traditional art, Indian past art, Indian historical art but not a copy or imitation but to give a new meaning.

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So, along with the diversity in style and techniques in art practice, art criticism too was developing fast into an important discourse, we have to remember that art cannot flourish on its own unless there are art criticisms, art writings, art discussions nourishing the whole discourse.

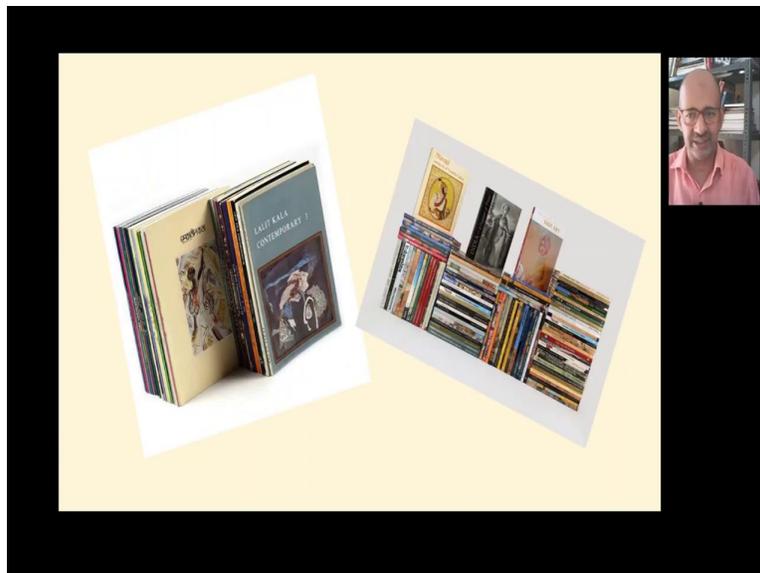
Therefore, Indian scenario from the 1950s actually it started earlier because we know that Abanindranath Tagore and later Benode Behari Mukherji and also sometimes Nandalal Bose and many others have been writing, writing on art, explaining art- not only past or historical art but also modern art but that trend now flourishes, that trend that practice of writing, talking, thinking, discussing becomes very important part of the entire activity of modern art in India during this time.

So, we see emergence of several art magazines like Marg, Lalit Kala contemporary, Monograph publications- one one small books, monograph books on each individual artist- small but very useful, so that even a common people can buy, everybody can buy, so these government publications particularly from Lalit Kala Academy aimed at common people which actually helped the artists a lot to create a very respectful awareness of the presence of modern Indian art among the common people. So, slowly and thankfully, thanks to these publications modern art

activities, modern art images, modern artists themselves became well known and some of them became popular among the Indian audience.

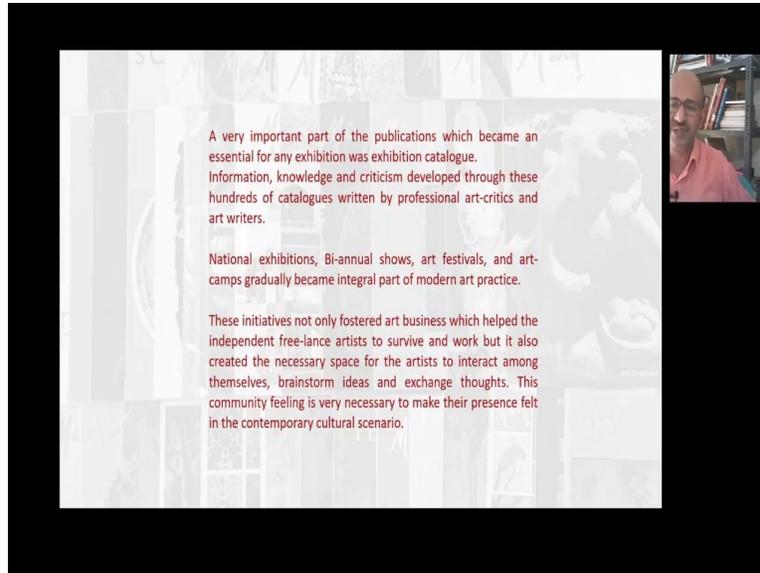
Now, art galleries in the metropolis cities began to play a very important role by curating, arranging and displaying works of modern artists who slowly became well-known figures in the cultural field. Now, art galleries also began to take initiative to build up an art market where artists' works could be sold to the prospective buyers and art collectors, government and private office buildings and corporate houses began to buy and collect artworks.

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So, it is not just about making art or publishing art writings; it is also very important that some initiatives and attempts are being taken to ensure that the artists actually can sustain in real life- that is they can earn their living through selling their works and they cannot sell on their own. you need agencies, so galleries private as well as government agencies now became very instrumental in creating an art market along with these publications- Lalit Kala contemporary and Marg publications beside many other publications who began to publish very useful books on modern Indian art.

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So, a very important part of the publications which became an essential for any exhibition was also exhibition catalog. even today we see that most of the exhibitions are accompanied by a catalog, information, knowledge and criticism developed through these hundreds of catalogues written by professional art critics and art writers. national exhibitions, bi-annual shows, art festivals and art camps gradually became integral part of modern art practice, these initiatives not only fostered our business which helped the independent freelance artists to survive and work but it also created the necessary space for the artists to interact among themselves, brainstorm ideas and exchange thoughts, this community feeling is very necessary to make their presence felt in the contemporary cultural scenario.

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So, number of publications and these were available actually at a very affordable price, made immense difference to the circulation of artworks may not be original but at least through images, through reproductions it make immense differences to the way people or common people or society would be looking at art and artists because it was important to ensure large number of footprints in the galleries in the exhibitions and also to create a space for the practice of fine art among the middle class Indian families and these publications not only in English as you can see in Hindi as well and in other regional languages actually made a very very important difference.

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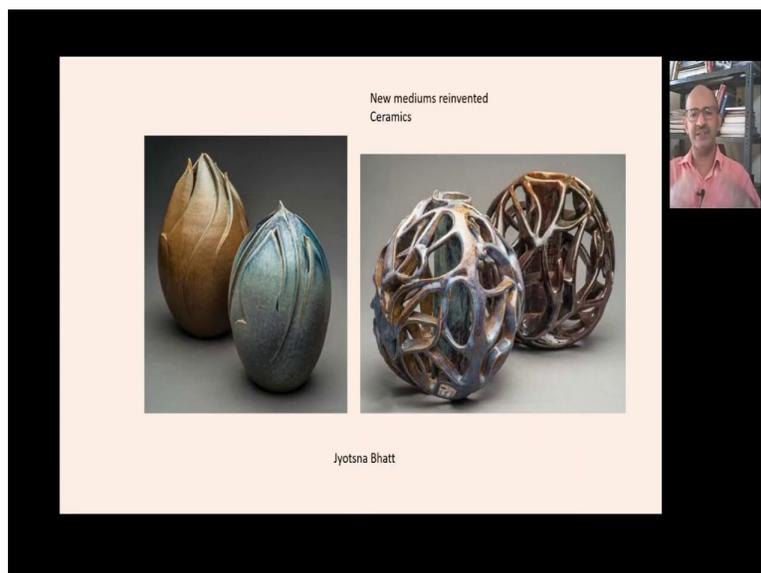
And another magazine is of course Marg, producing a number of issues on ancient art, medieval art, historical art, modern art and of course, contemporary art. Marg magazines are slightly more expensive than Lalit Kala publications, yet the presence of these magazines and journals in the art field made a difference because artworks became known to not only common people because now we need professional buyers, now we need professional collectors. So, these magazines helped the artists and their artworks to reach this new client, this new group of art buyers and collectors in India.

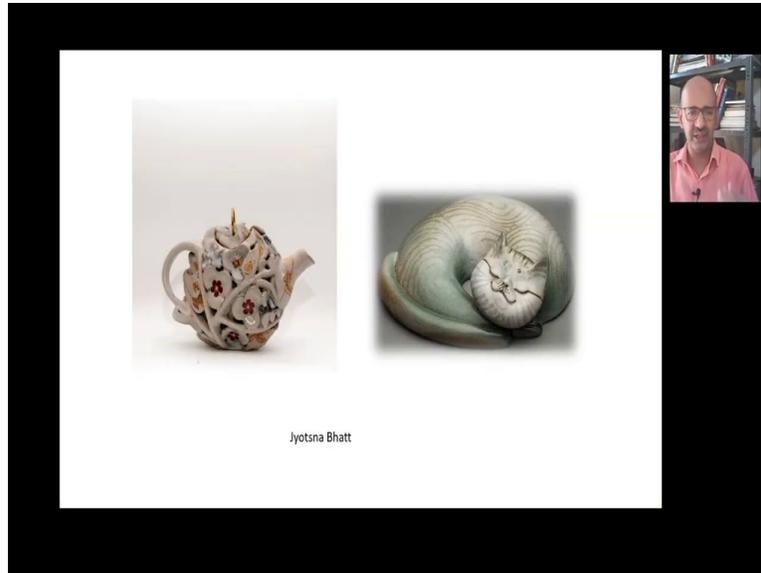
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And therefore, various issues published from either Marg or Lalit Kala academy became very much a part of that active art environment in India and these magazines, these issues reached almost every major metropolis city in India, therefore became accessible.

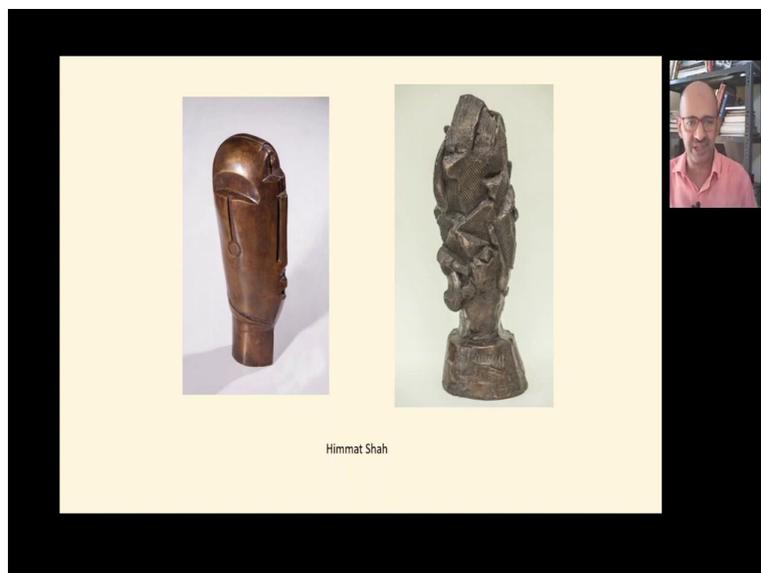
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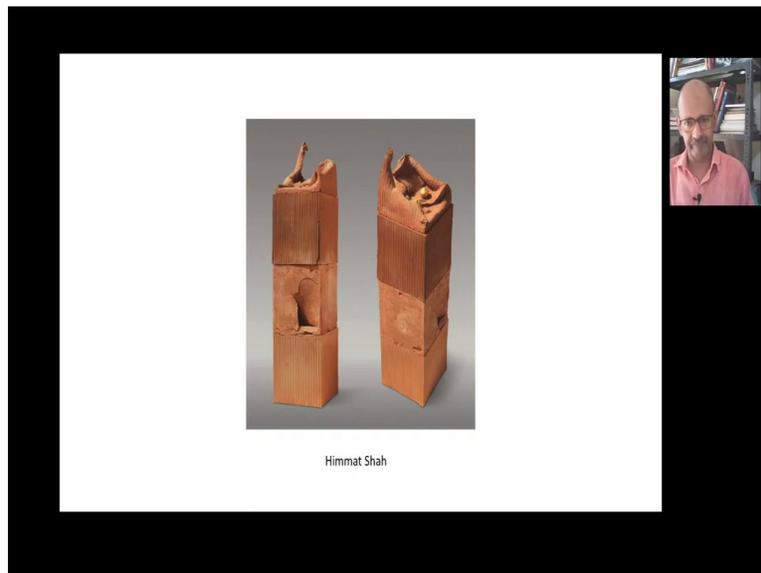




Now, when we look at the different art and artists during this period that is in post-independent India from the 1950s as I have already mentioned that certain new mediums are being used, introduced for example, ceramic. ceramic as a medium is not new but somebody like Jyotsna Bhatt reinvented the medium, reused it and created artworks, not functional objects. So, reinvention of a medium like ceramics is one such example by Jyotsna Bhatt which allowed the artists to make beautiful forms, playful, light and aesthetically charming.

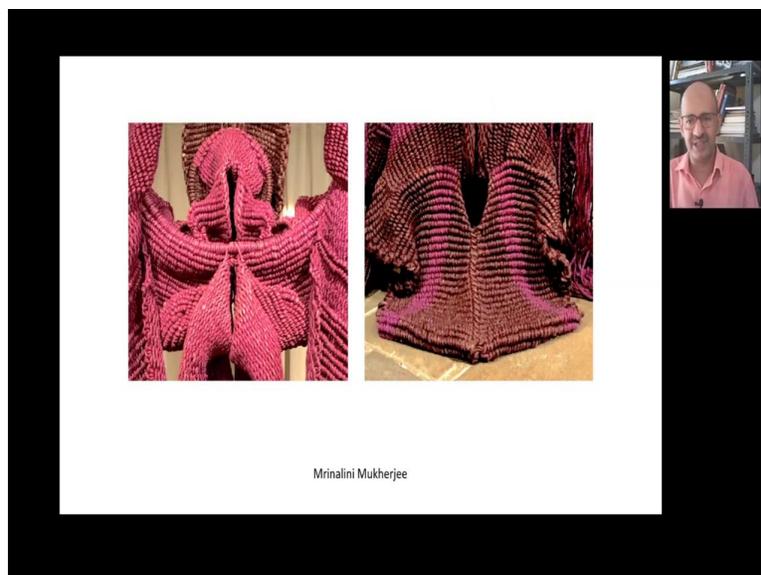
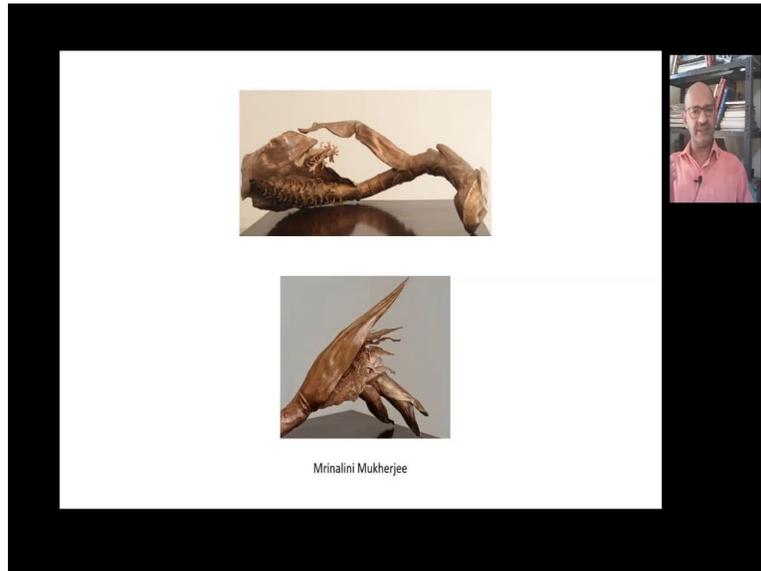
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Then we also have a very famous artist from Delhi- Himmat Shah who also explored different materials- bronze, wood, terracotta and became a very much sought after artist later on because of his absolutely committed exploration of materials along with very simple but extremely robust and strong imageries like this or like this.

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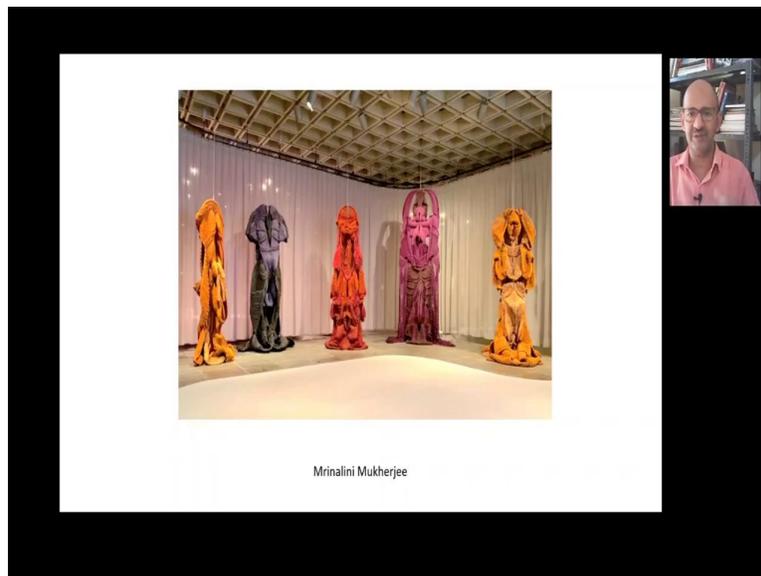


Mrinalini Mukherjee another very important artist who started off with conventional materials but as you can see the material is conventional that is bronze mostly, but her forms cease to become conventional and desire to become something else and it is at that moment that Mrinalini Mukherjee began to use fabric material, she started weaving her sculptures.

So far we have heard about modeling sculpture, we have heard about carving a sculpture, casting a sculpture we have never heard of weaving a sculpture. So, this is a very important contribution to the field of sculpture by Mrinalini Mukherjee where she used a completely unconventional

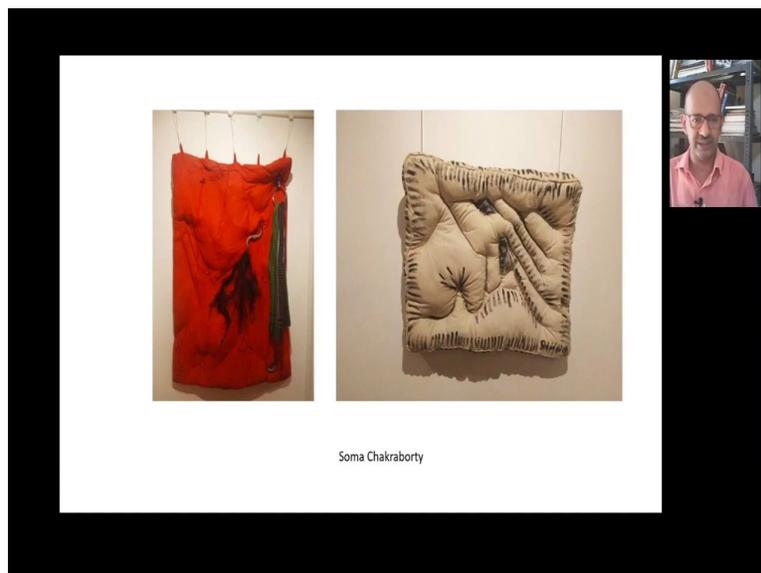
and hitherto unknown medium like cord and woven material and fabric and using the technique of weaving and also knitting.

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Therefore, the very look of the sculptures now begin to change.

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Much later, younger artist Soma Chakraborty from Kolkata also began to use very unconventional materials for her sculptures like this one- soft material like pillow, cotton and she

would stitch and weave and she was doing these things in late 80s and 90s when this kind of non-conventional material was actually not a very in thing. So, she was much ahead of her time.

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Almost contemporary to Soma Chakraborty or could be little junior to her also we also have somebody like Rimzon from Kerala who not only used different materials but he also used absolutely iron cast industrial objects to create a space for the sculpture where the extraneous elements are no more the part of the whole sculpture. Therefore this could be understood as early signs of installation in modern Indian art and installation or art of installation is a subject we are going to discuss in later lecture, subsequent lectures of this course.

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Now, apart from materials or mediums a very important trend which is clearly discernible during this period is the expansion of the scopes for figurative painting, for example, Manjit Bawa. Maybe in some of his paintings you do find references to or allusions to Indian mythological themes, like this one Krishna or Kali but the figuration that he uses, Manjit Bawa uses is a completely non-traditional, non-conventional figuration, the concept of figure.

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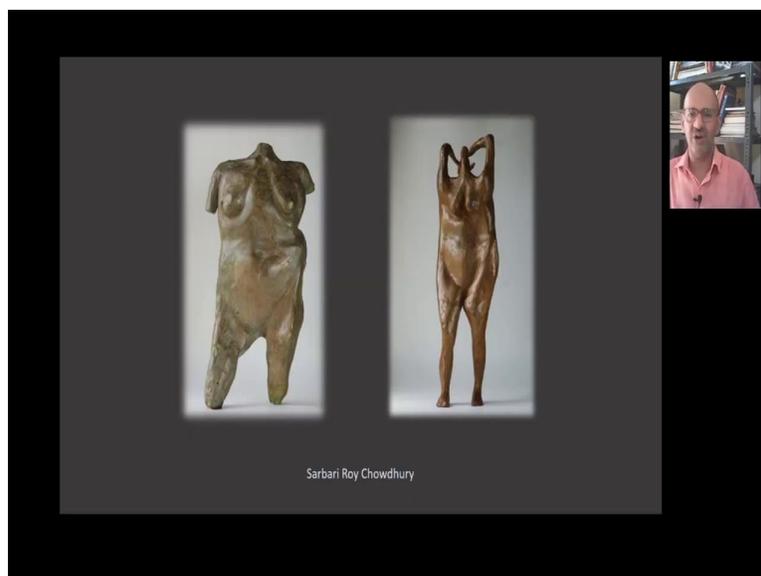
This is his own, this is where an artist can contribute by devising his or her own figuration.

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But Manjit Bawa also does contemporary figures like this which look very iconic but nevertheless they come from his own experience of looking at the world around but figuration happens to be very much his own and it is through this figuration or the overall style that now we can identify an artist just by that figuration, just by that style.

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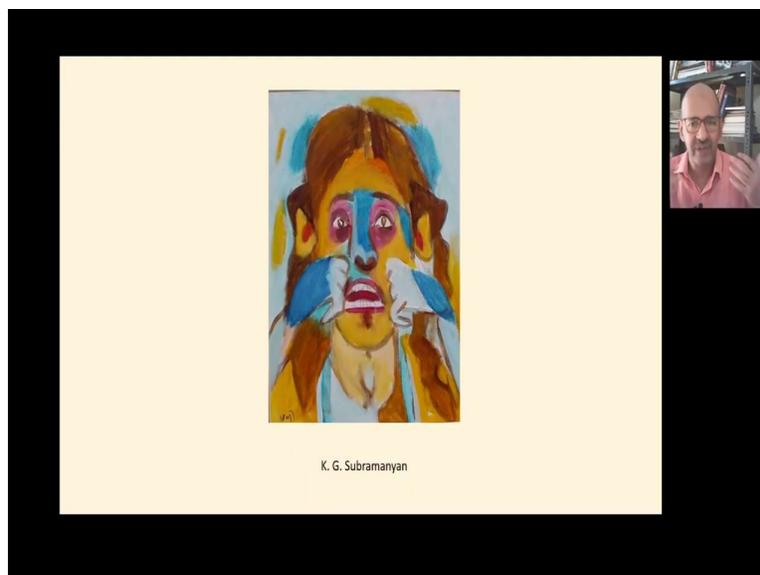
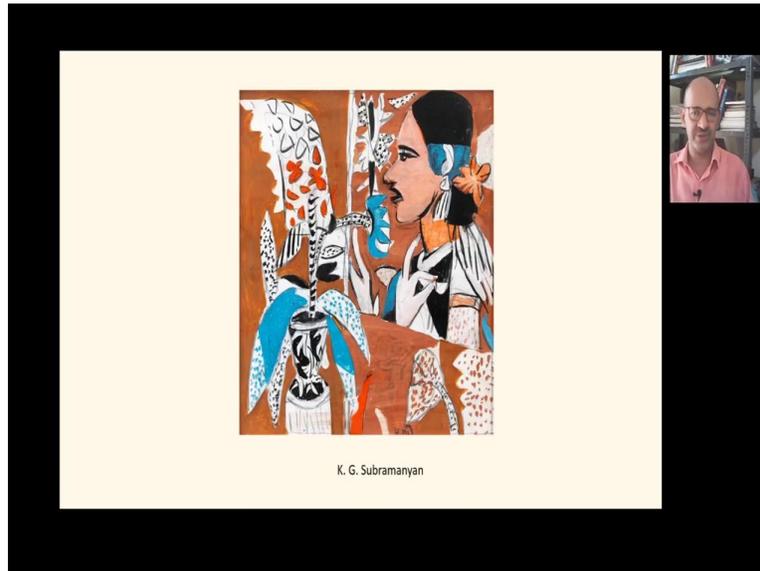
In sculpture too we have different kinds of figuration, we have already seen Himmat Shah.

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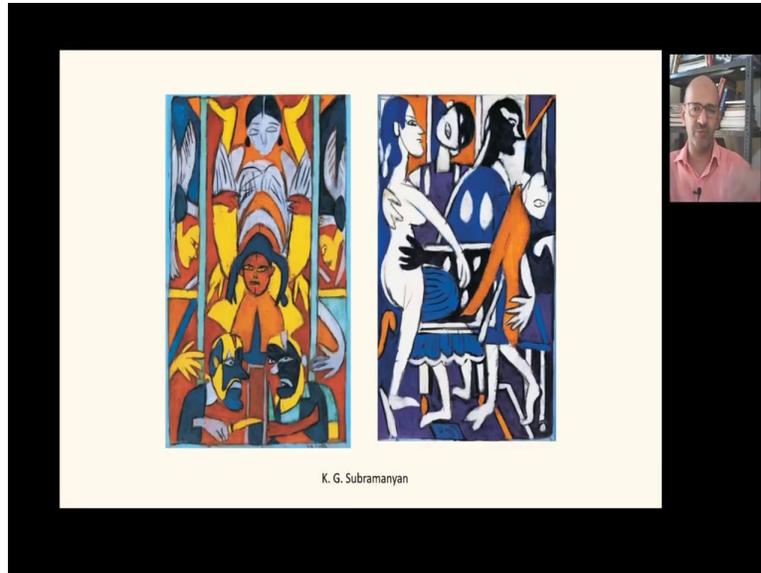
Now, you look at the works of Sarbari Roy Chowdhury again a very different kind of figurations where the identity of the figures, expressions of the figure on faces or facial expressions are not important anymore. You look at the shape of the figures, you look at the expression in the anatomy, you look at the formal aspects and qualities embedded within the figuration and you respond to that.

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Similarly, in painting also we have somebody like K. G. Subramanyan vigorously and sometimes aggressively plays with the figures, dismantling its units, realigning them with a different logic and therefore creating unexpected or unpredictable expressions. Subramanyan's figurations or the process of figuration often comes from his close observation of the craft traditions of India where a figuration or making of an object is usually achieved in terms of units which can be dismantled and can be rearranged like the way you play a toy.

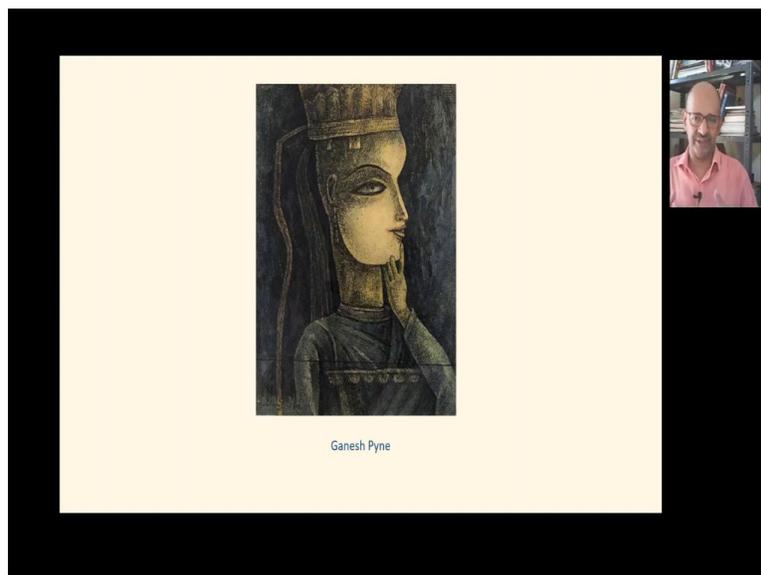
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K. G. Subramanyan

Subramanyan's world of imageries are like an enactment, a space for performance where all these figures keep changing their positions, expressions and also their inter relationships. So, this is a very different kind of figuration which Subramanyan pursued and developed and also produced a lot of varieties throughout his career.

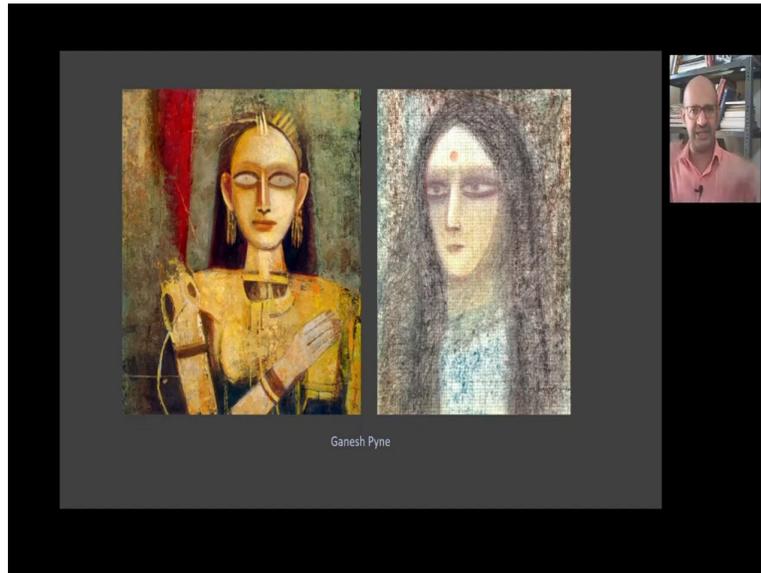
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Ganesh Pyne

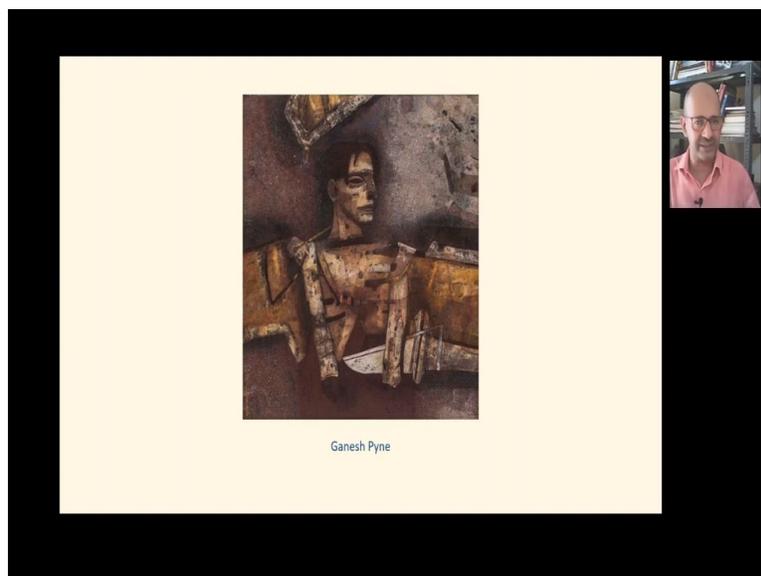
Now, from Bengal we have Ganesh Pyne who from the 60s began to create a new kind of figuration which is halfway between an iconic mythological look and a stereotypical look or a stylized look but sometimes his figures do have a reference to reality.

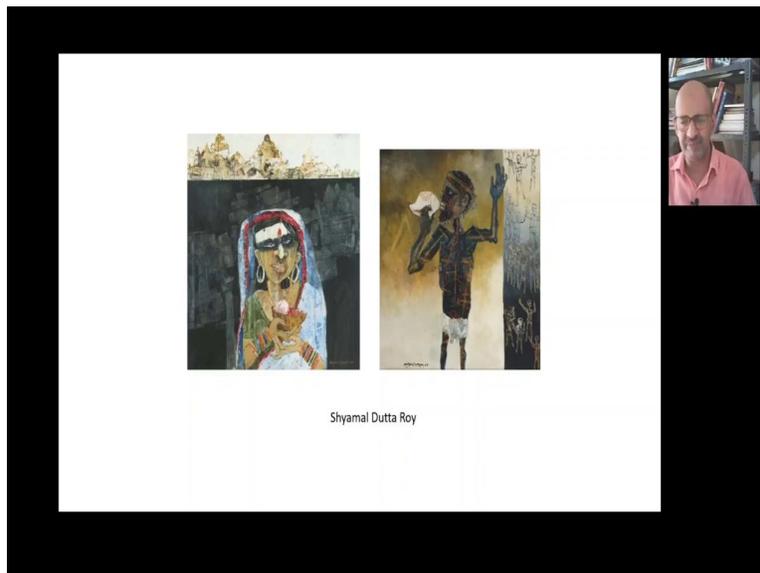
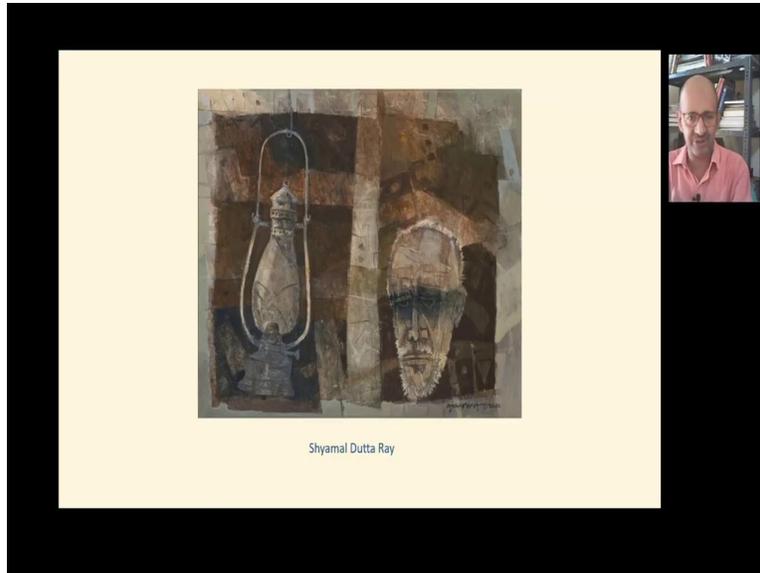
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For example, when you look at these figures they look very iconic- as if you are looking at an image of a goddess whom you are just going to worship but as you look at these figures very closely you realize these images are also having references to reality. So, this is the kind of style Ganesh Pyne adopted for his figuration.

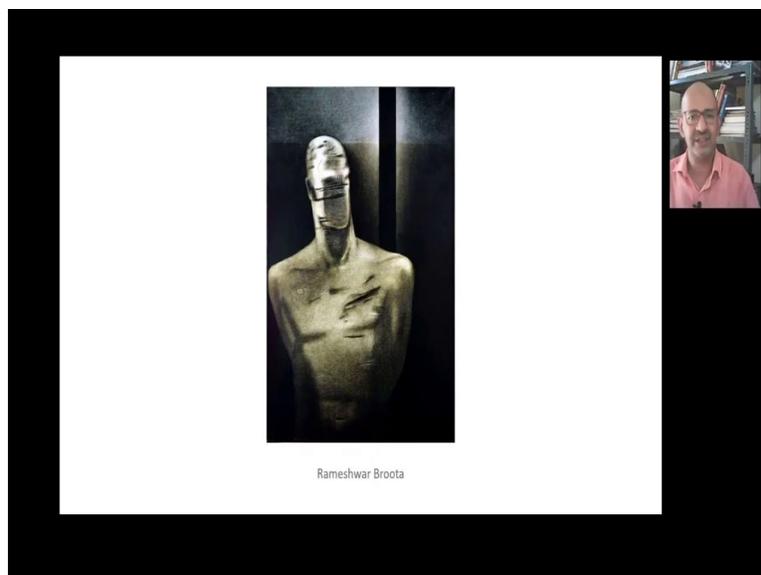
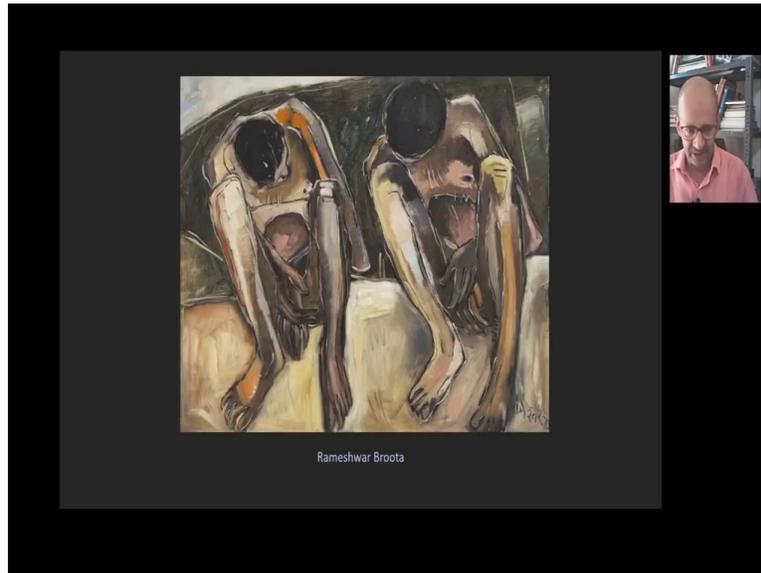
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And this is also true when you look at these figures whether it is Ganesh Pyne or Shyamal Dutta Ray there is something very common among them not in style. Shyamal Dutta Ray's style is evidently and clearly different from Ganesh Pyne or from K. G. Subramanyan but the connecting thread not even the theme there is some concern or a couple of concerns which are shared knowingly or unknowingly by these artists.

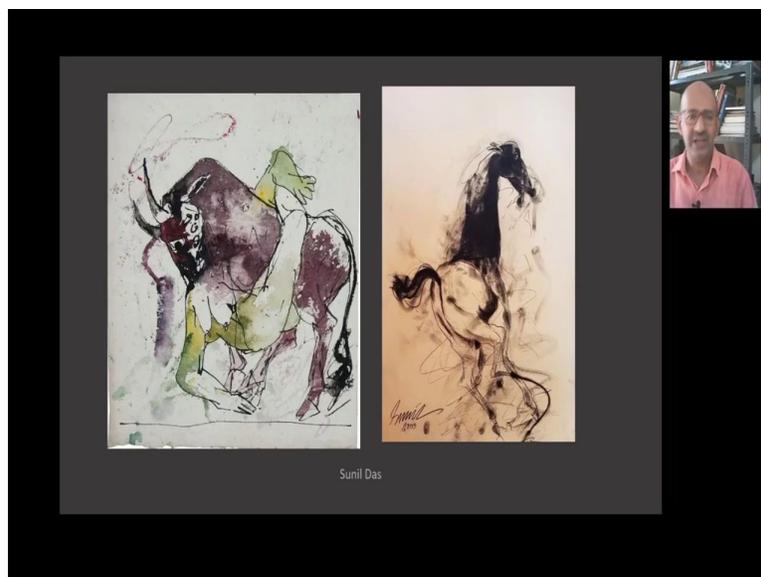
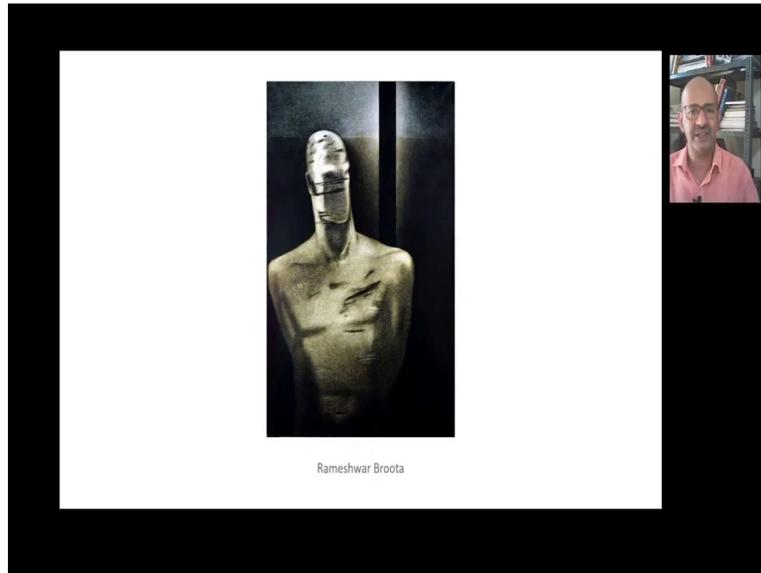
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Or for that matter Rameshwar Broota- what is that connecting theme, what is that common thread which can be discovered from the paintings by these artists who are using their new kind of figuration to express certain anxiety of the time? Yes, anxiety of the time is the connecting thread.

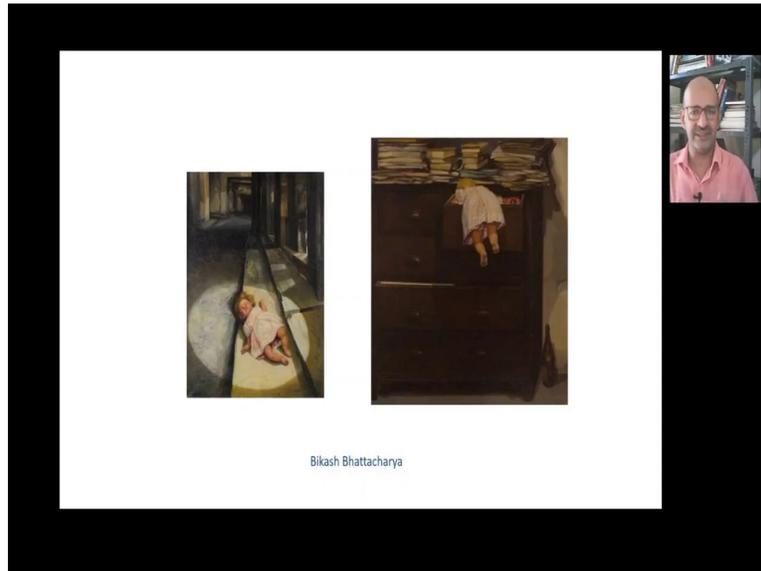
The drama of human life, the fact that human life is not so well pre-planned or well curated in a sense that human life is full of unexpected moments, full of drama, full of theatricalities, full of social, political, personal, psychological crisis.

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So not literally, not through any narrative sometimes through symbols and sometimes through metaphors and sometimes through the expression of the figures- all these artists tried to capture that, the signs of the time, the anxiety, the psychological crisis.

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And finally for today's lecture this is the last artist that we are talking about that is Bikash Bhattacharya, who started off with some surreal images, early in his career which also kind of reflected certain anxieties of the modern life of 1960s and 70s but soon he developed a quasi-realistic idiom where his figures look absolutely naturalistic almost bordering on photographic realism, yet he could create an other-worldly feeling, some surreal feeling, some mysterious feeling or some enigmatic feeling.

Again, the feelings evoked in all these paintings painted by different artists could be different but the relation with the real life is almost sharing the similar predicaments or fate or even anxiety and as we continue to look at a few more artists who are approaching figuration with a new idea, with a new concept we shall also see that how sometimes in the hands of an artist like Sudhir Patwardhar or Gulammoammed Sheikh or Bhupen Khakhar or Nilima Sheikh and many others, these figurations are also embracing local experience, local motifs, real-life narratives.

So, almost symbolic expressions of the figures in the works by these artists whom we just saw will be now different when you look at the figuration in the art works by Sudhir Patwardhan, Bhupen Khakhar, Gulammohammed Sheikh and others because their figurations now partake, their figures partake in narrative networks. So, storytelling gets incorporated in their figurations whom we are going to look at in our next that is the 16th lecture. Thank you.