

Celebrating F N Souza's Birth Centenary: Key Works to Be Auctioned in New Delhi

- Saffronart will host a live auction in New Delhi on 14 September 2024: **Works From a Distinguished Private Collection: Francis Newton Souza Day Sale**
- The catalogue features 48 lots by F N Souza spanning his best-known themes, including his iconic heads, Christ and the Church, and nudes

Mumbai, 16 August 2024: Saffronart will host a live auction of works by F N Souza in New Delhi on 14 September 2024 in honour of the artist's centenary year. The catalogue features 48 lots of exceptional provenance as part of a distinguished private collection. These works span several decades of the modernist's career and encompass some of his best-known themes, such as his iconic heads, Christ and the Church, and female nudes.

Born in Saligao, Goa, in 1924, F N Souza has earned himself an indelible place in the canon of modern Indian art for his incisive draughtsmanship and potent imagery. His rebellious nature led him to found the Progressive Artists' Group in 1947 and forge a new visual style that was inherently Indian in its aesthetic but with a universal significance and appeal. The works in this sale exemplify his lifelong interest in the human form and his many influences that span both East and West—the iconic qualities of Romanesque art, classical Indian sculpture, Old Masters such as Titian and Picasso, Christian symbolism, and the landscape and colourful folk art of Goa.

The leading lot of the sale is ***Untitled (Pieta), 1987, (lot 16, estimate: INR 3 – 5 crores, USD 361,450 - 602,410)*** that depicts the Pietà, an image of the Virgin Mary cradling the lifeless body of Christ after his crucifixion and Descent from the Cross. Besides its religious connotations, the work also explores the more tender theme of mother and child. Souza was extremely close to his mother Lilia Maria Antunes, who raised him as a single parent. The significance of this work, painted in the year of his mother's death, is both of enormous magnitude and deeply personal.

Also included in the sale is ***Californian Girl, 1968, (lot 41, estimate: INR 1.20 – 1.80 crores, USD 144,580 - 216,870)***, which features a curvaceous nude woman holding a mirror, who occupies the centre of the canvas and is placed against an indistinct background of a grey, stormy sky and blue ocean. The female nude was an endless source of fascination for Souza and a subject he frequently returned to throughout his oeuvre. In this work, he takes the conventions associated with the nude in European art and gives it a playful modern spin. The protagonist of Titian's *Venus With a Mirror*, circa 1555—a sensuous ode to the Roman goddess of beauty and love—turns into the quintessential sun-tanned, bleached blonde California girl that The Beach Boys famously sang of a few years earlier in their 1965 hit. Her skin however is noticeably tanned, a subtle commentary on the prejudice that Souza often encountered as an Indian man in London of the 1950s and 1960s.

Untitled (Veiled Nude), 1964, (lot 11, estimate: INR 80 lakhs – 1.20 crores, USD 96,390 - 144,580) was painted during a decade of illustrious output for the artist and features a nude figure wearing a veil resembling those often worn by the Virgin Mary in mass-produced prints ubiquitous in Catholic households the world over. The decorative background of this work with its bold colours and repetitive criss-cross pattern is a departure from the artist's usual flat backgrounds for his figures and is reminiscent of the ornamental textiles hanging behind Henri Matisse's odalisques.

Untitled (The Family), 1984, (lot 42, estimate: INR 70 – 90 lakhs, USD 84,340 - 108,435) is a large acrylic work on canvas that depicts a biracial couple and their mixed-race son, drawn in Souza's trademark bold, fluid lines. There is a sense of the comic twist in style and rendering bringing lightness to the lofty and serious topics of multiculturalism, race and racism.

Untitled (Head with Horns), 1966, (lot 15, estimate: INR 60 – 80 lakhs, USD 72,290 - 96,390) is a powerful painting by F N Souza from among his series of Heads. It is through these figures, for which he is best known, that he laid bare his views on society, the hypocrisy of religion, and human nature and its depravities. Violence and chaos underlie the figure and yet it is also a masterwork of control and structure, the image scaffolded by the thick black line so quintessential to Souza. The work is rendered on a rich and piercing blue cloth support, an example of his many experiments with unusual materials as his canvas during this period. **Head of a Man in Blue, 1983, (lot 31, estimate: INR 40 – 50 lakhs, USD 48,195 - 60,245)** emanates from Souza's engagement and promulgation of the Redmond Theory, or the 'R Theory' as he sometimes called it. His paintings at this time reflected his belief that "nature is the sole principle". This lot exemplifies his quest for a new variation of the human head, one exuding the features and 'make up' of a 'Redmonite'.

Untitled (Head of a Man), 1949, (lot 4, estimate: INR 20 – 30 lakhs, USD 24,100 - 36,145) is a colourful work by Souza made when he first moved to London in 1949 and battled poverty and uncertainty as he tried to break into the city's art scene. **Untitled (Numbers), 1958, (lot 7, estimate: INR 2 – 3 lakhs, USD 2,410 - 3,615)** is a rare work that displays the artist's signature cross-hatched lines. It was included Edwin Mullins' 1962 monograph on Souza, published when he was at the height of his career.

Minal Vazirani, Saffronart President and Co-Founder said, *"Saffronart is pleased to celebrate F N Souza's centenary year with a sale that offers an opportunity for seasoned and first-time collectors to acquire works from pivotal periods in his oeuvre. In his works, the monumental figuration of classical sculpture meets an appreciation for the paintings of Old Masters, Christian symbolism merges with influences of Rouault and Matisse as well as the environment of his home state of Goa. Yet his style was distinctly his own and driven by constant experimentation with a vast range of mediums and techniques. Souza could often be unnervingly confrontational and brutal in his exploration of human nature—as you can observe in many of his iconic 'Heads'—but there was also a paradoxically vulnerable side to him seen in his depictions of mother and child and some of his more tender nudes. He was not only a prolific painter, but also a brilliant writer and philosopher. From his very beginnings, he struggled against adversity—poverty, racism, and conservatism—to carve a new path in Indian art that was unflinchingly honest and unapologetic, one that won him international recognition and has ensured he remains just as relevant and a much sought-after artist at auctions globally even today."*

The **Works From a Distinguished Private Collection: Francis Newton Souza Day Sale** will be held at The Oberoi in New Delhi on 14 September 2024 and will be preceded by viewings in Mumbai and New Delhi. All lots can be viewed on saffronart.com.

AUCTION DATES

Works From a Distinguished Private Collection: Francis
Newton Souza Day Sale | 14 September 2024, 5 pm

VENUE

Ballroom, The Oberoi
Dr Zakir Hussain Marg
New Delhi 110003

PREVIEW IN NEW DELHI

Thursday, 12 September 2024
6.30 pm to 10.30 pm
Saffronart Gallery and Ballroom, The Oberoi, Dr Zakir Hussain Marg

VIEWINGS

MUMBAI

16 – 30 August 2024
11 am – 7 pm, Monday to Saturday
Sunday (by appointment only)

VENUE

Saffronart, Industry Manor, Ground Floor
Appasaheb Marathe Marg
Prabhadevi, Mumbai 400025

To make an appointment, please contact +91 22 6855 4100 or email us at auction@saffronart.com

NEW DELHI

6 – 13 September 2024
11 am – 7 pm, Monday to Saturday
14 September 2024 | 11 am – 5 pm

VENUE

(7 – 12 September 2024)
Saffronart, The Oberoi, Dr Zakir Hussain Marg
New Delhi 110003

(12 – 14 September 2024)

Ballroom, The Oberoi, Dr Zakir Hussain Marg
New Delhi 110003

To make an appointment, please contact +91 11 24369415 or email us at delhi@saffronart.com

ABOUT SAFFRONART

Founded in 2000 by Minal and Dinesh Vazirani, Saffronart is a leading international auction house, and India's most reputed, with over three hundred auctions to its credit. Its flagship gallery is in Mumbai, with offices in New Delhi, London, and New York. At the forefront of selling Indian art, Saffronart has held online and live auctions, exhibitions, and Dialogues in Art, working with collectors, gallerists, and artists to develop a strong market for art and aesthetics. Its focus is to bring transparency to the auction process and provide easy access and information to collectors around the world. Saffronart's services go beyond auctions to include private sales, appraisals, and valuations for clients. Saffronart has set several global benchmarks for online auctions and was the subject of a case study at Harvard Business School in 2005.

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