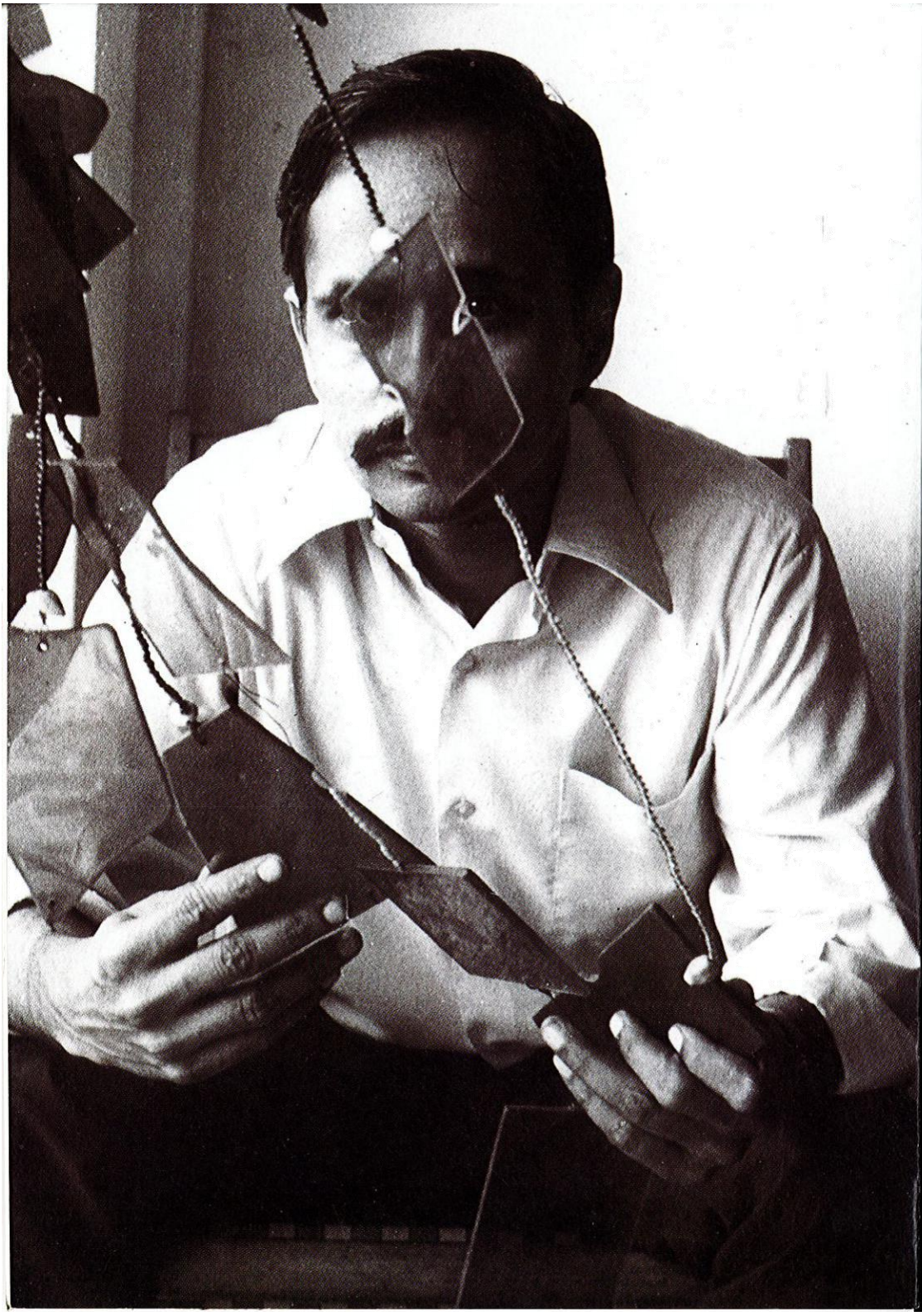


National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi
(Ministry of Culture, Government of India)
presents

अस्तित्व

Astitva: The Essence of Prabhakar Barwe





DIRECTOR GENERAL'S NOTE

We are honoured to host a retrospective exhibition of late Prabhakar Barwe, a quiet artist who initiated and carved a unique discourse in the narrative of Indian art. *Astitva : The Essence of Prabhakar Barwe*, becomes a crucial moment in history – contextualising the different realms of the artist's life: tracing his beginnings at Sir J. J. School of Art in 1950s, his engagement with Design and Tantric forms in the 1960s to ultimately conclude with his oeuvre of morphing and contriving meanings of mundane objects from his surroundings in the late 1980s, until his untimely death in 1995.

Prabhakar Barwe was known for his profound intellect, one that explored the dimensions of a creative process manifested in his book 'Kora Canvas', which has been subsequently translated and published into English and Hindi in the recent years. His work has been exhibited extensively, both in India and abroad, in various exhibitions, biennales and museums in Tokyo, New York, Germany, France, Washington D.C., Istanbul and Chile.

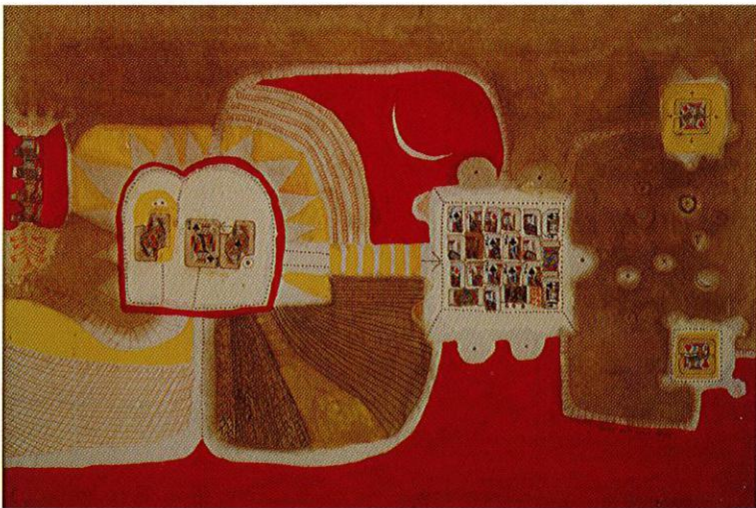
I take this opportunity to congratulate Ms. Jesal Thacker of Bodhana Arts and Research Foundation for researching and conceptualising this exhibition at the NGMA, New Delhi. I thank the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, for their unstinted support. I also express my gratitude to the Advisory Committee of NGMA for their guidance and necessary support. I would also like to extend my appreciation for the sincerest efforts of the entire NGMA team towards the successful execution of this mammoth project.

I wish this exhibition all the success.

Adwaita Charan Garanayak
Director General
National Gallery of Modern Art



Sonali's Moon, Oil on canvas, 33.66 x 39.76 in, 1971.
Collection : National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi



Once Upon a Time there was a King, Collage on canvas, 36.02 x 54.33 in, 1968.
Collection : National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi

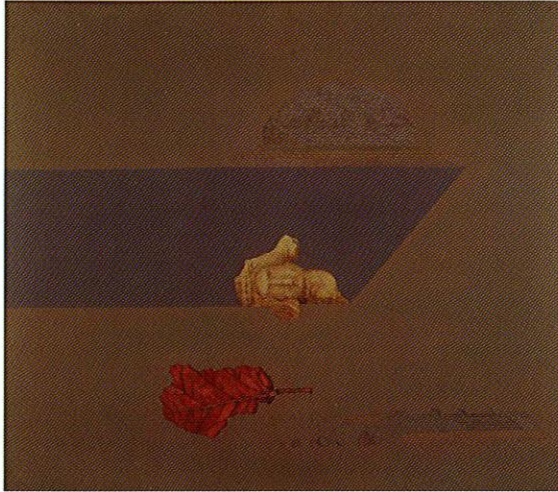
DIRECTOR'S NOTE

We are delighted to present, *Astitva : The Essence of Prabhakar Barwe*, to honour the artist with an exhibition at NGMA New Delhi. To host an artist as inimitable and proficient as Prabhakar Barwe is, indisputably, a rare privilege.

Experiencing a glimpse of the elusive world of Prabhakar Barwe during the time of installation of this exhibition, it reinforced my confidence in having this exhibition at the NGMA New Delhi for the people of the capital to experience the same. With over a 100 works, this exhibition will cover the long spectrum of Prabhakar Barwe's practice and also a candid insight into his versatility through paintings, designs and notations. His reputation as a painter and thinker spread far and wide and he participated in major national and international exhibitions including the exhibition on "Modern Indian Paintings" at Hirshhorn Museum, Washington. His works were included in the Menton Valpariso Biennales. He received the 1969 Yomiuri Shimibun award, the 1976 National Lalit Kala Akademi award and the 1988 Residency Fellowship Grant at "Yaddo".

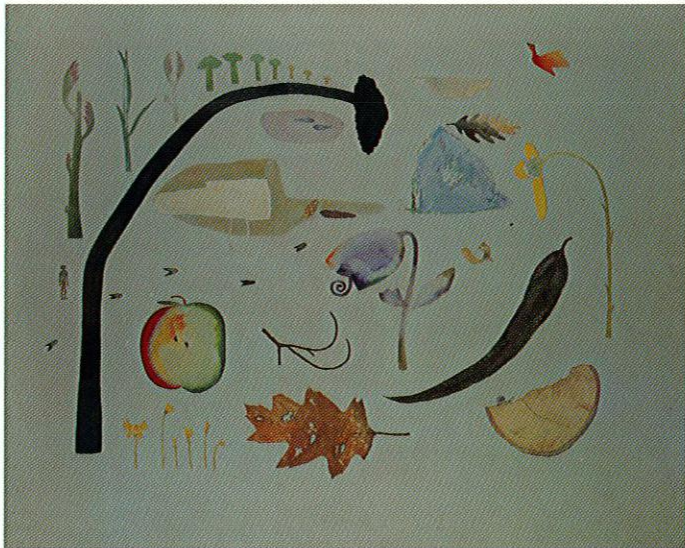
I take the opportunity to thank the Ministry of Culture, Government of India for always supporting our endeavors. I would also like express my gratitude to the NGMA team for successfully materializing this prestigious project.

Ritu Sharma
Director
National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi



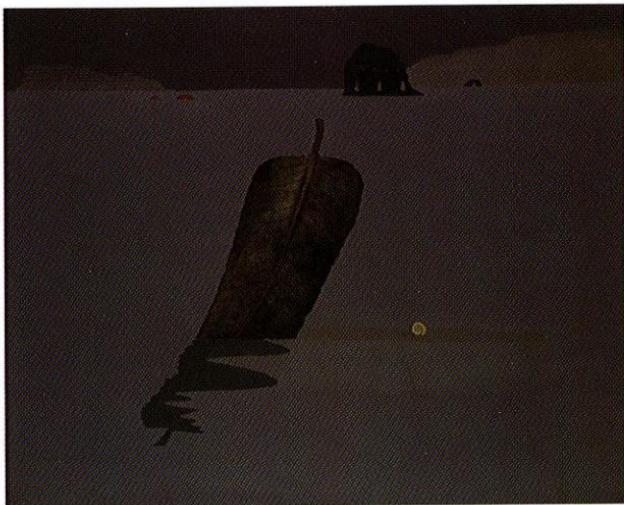
Red Leaf, Enamel on canvas, 42 x 48 in, 1987.

Collection: National Gallery of Modern Art, Bangalore

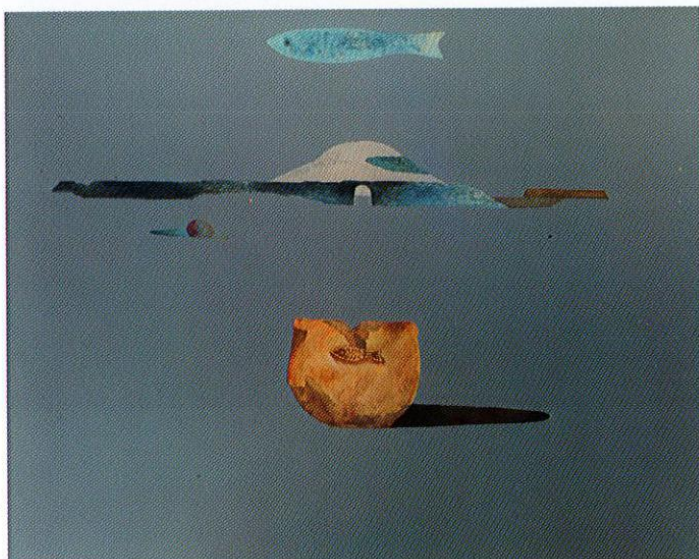


Alphabets of Nature, Enamel on canvas, 48 x 59.8 in, 1988.

Collection : Chemould Prescott Road, Mumbai



Between Leaf and Snail, Enamel on canvas, 48 x 60 in, 1988.
Collection: Priyanka Mathew. Courtesy: Sunderlande



Real Unreal (Fishes), Oil on canvas, 49.01 x 60.62 in, 1988.
Courtesy: Museum of Art & Photography (MAP), Bangalore



Ethereal Transition, Enamel on canvas, 54.25 x 47.75 in, 1969.

Collection: Private, Mumbai

Prabhakar Barwe (1936 – 1995) was a cult name in Indian Art; a rare intellectual mind concerned with the language of painting rather than images and signs. Born in a family of artists, he was initiated into Sir J.J. School of Arts by his grand uncle Vinayak Pandurang Karmarkar – who laid the foundation of his interest in art. However, from a very young age, Barwe sought to define his own language and transitioned from the academic style adapted by Karmarkar into the newly found notions of modernism and abstraction prevalent in the 50's-60's. But he did not fall into the particular idiom of abstraction or figurative narration; his practice did not negate the figure, instead, it included the mundane objects surrounding the figure, creating an unconventional order of things. This became Barwe's unique pictorial language – a process appreciated by artists such as M.F. Husain, Akbar Padamsee, Mohan Samant, Ambadas and Manu Parekh to name a few.

I was introduced to Barwe's art practice during an assignment in 1998, when I was a student of Sir. J. J. School of Art, Mumbai. Intrigued by his preoccupation with seemingly mundane objects like safety-pins, hangers, leaves, fruits, watches and boxes, I initiated an independent study, which soon became a lifelong pursuit into the artist's peculiar style of transforming objects into forms which are objectified again on the canvas with renewed definitions. It was through Bodhana Arts and Research Foundation, that this individual research became a collective effort and I thank all those involved in making this a constructive and educative process.

I am privileged and humbled to present the expanse of this research at the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi and I am sincerely grateful to the Director General Shri. Adwaita Garanayak and the Director Smt. Ritu Sharma to facilitate this endeavour. I would also like to sincerely thank the entire team of NGMA New Delhi for presenting and making this research accessible, which has been in process for over a decade.

A special courtesy to the Piramal Museum, Chemould Prescott Road, DAG, Sunderlande and Mukeeta & Pramit Jhaveri in facilitating the works. An extended gratitude to Deepali Ghanekar & Sandeep Kulkarni of Seculo for producing the animated videos which are being screened for the first time through this exhibition.

Jesal Thacker
Bodhana Arts and Research Foundation

तदेजति तन्नैजति तद्वरे तद्वन्तिके ।
तदन्तरस्य सर्वस्य तदु सर्वस्यास्य बाह्यतः ॥

It moves, and it moves not;
It is far, it is near,
It is within all, it is outside all.

- Fifth verse of Isha Upanishad

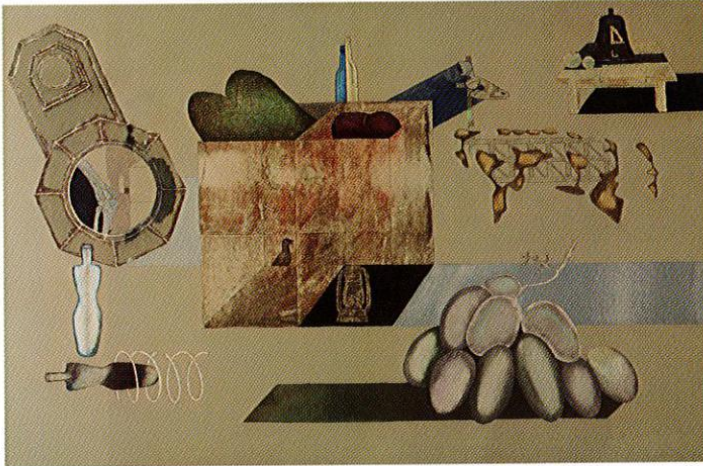
I think that the space that we breath in and out, space that envelopes this universe, and the symbolic illusive space of the canvas, is one and the same. One is intrigued by the inter-relation between inner space that forms our mind and the outer space that contains us and our art. In painting we experience this space, in a way we merge with it and transcend our self.

- Prabhakar Barwe

Prabhakar Barwe was intrigued by the interrelation between the inner space that forms our mind, and the outer space that contains us and our art. He began to redefine this space - creating a distinctive order using objects from his daily life (outer space) and translating them into a notation of forms on the canvas that do not adhere to the outer order. Thus, he creates his own order, one that redefines notions of perception - without distorting the originality of the object. A cognitive flux is at play here, as Barwe carefully accesses and recreates a perception that balances the outer with the inner terrain, a logic infused with sense, memory and intuition. There are two distinct elements, one is the significant manner in which the object is represented (as form/texture/mass/volume) and the other is the relationship these elements have with one another and their surrounding space.

Objects continue to have unique connotations in Western and Eastern visual cultures. In the West, an object is a subject of still life – one must study it's physical structure through the play of light. The object must be rendered exactly as seen by the artist. On the other hand, in the East, an object becomes an entity for self- realization, with the aim to awaken an intuitive light inside the artist and a viewer. There is no compulsion upon realistic rendering, the object is manifested as experienced by an artist. In spite of the apparent differences in both the approaches, there still exists an aesthetic continuity amongst their ideological streams, which invariably constructs the history of art – one that cannot exist with solely static sensibilities.

Artists are shaped by the idioms persisted in their cultures; but they also question and rephrase these constructs with constant enquiries. To evolve becomes the underlying principle of all creation. Objects, too, have been through this cycle comprised of a matrix of memories and evolving consciousness.



Many Identities of the Self, Enamel on canvas, 40 x 60 in, 1995.

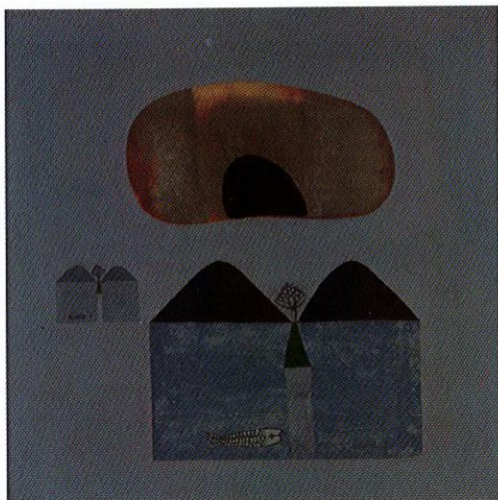
Collection: Sunita and Vijay Choraria

They carry innumerable impressions (fictional & non-fictional); from being an artistic muse in Van Gogh's *A vase with Fifteen Sunflowers* (1889), to being a meditative instrument in Muqi Fachang's *Six Persimmons* (13th Century), or reinventing itself as a found-object in Marcel Duchamp's *Bicycle Wheel* (1913), to ultimately strive towards a futuristic potential in Rene Margritte's *Clairvoyance* (1936).

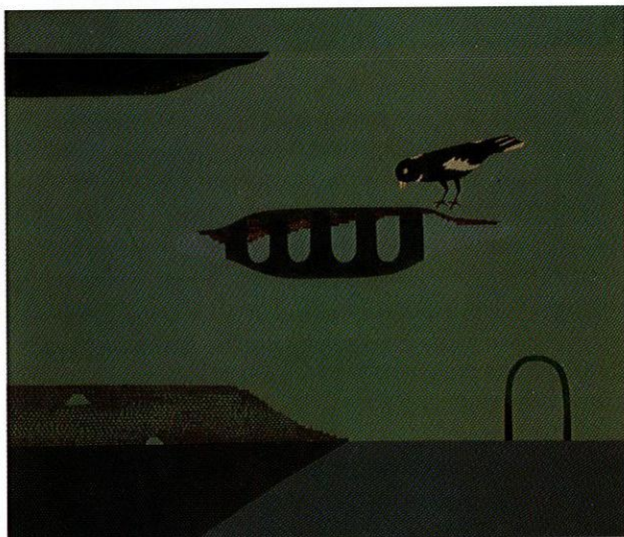
In the Tantric tradition, an object becomes a catalyst for an evolving consciousness – representing the collective aesthetic sensibility of the period. Art thus, invariably becomes a part of this evolving process. Prabhakar Barwe's ceaseless engagement with forms and their continuous formations (object-form, form-form, form-space), witnessed through his oeuvre and iconic book '*Kora Canvas*', makes him a protege of this evolving ideology.

We are all linked by a fabric of unseen connections.
This fabric is constantly changing and evolving.
This field is directly structured and influenced by our behaviour
and by our understanding. The unbroken wholeness of the totality
of existence as an undivided flowing movement without borders.

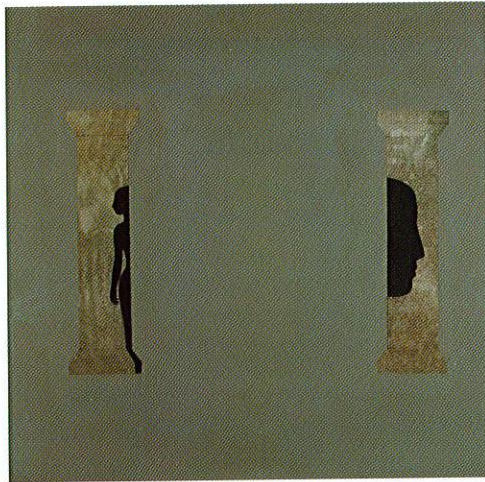
- David Bohm



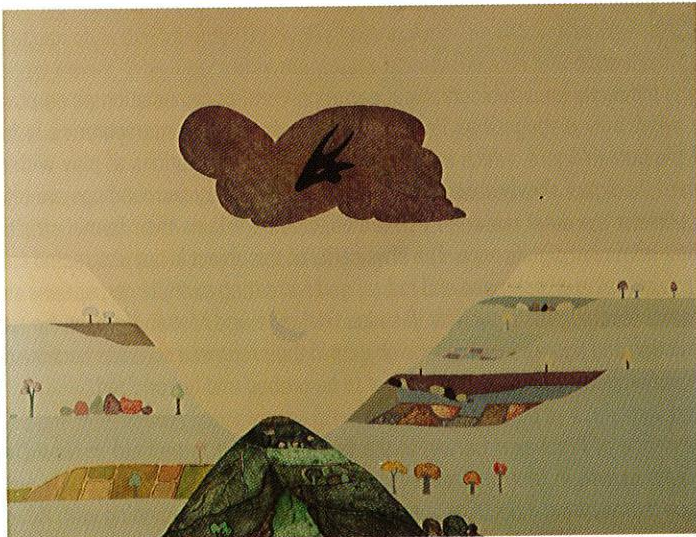
Blue Lake, Oil on canvas, 36.10 x 36.10 in, 1977.
Collection : National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi



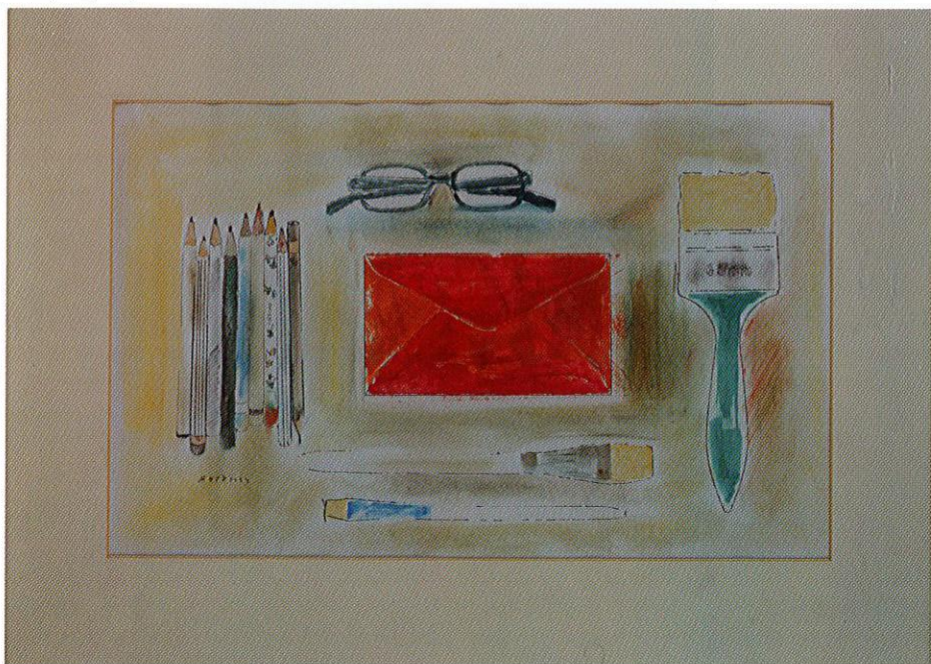
Reflection, Oil on canvas, 36 x 42 in, 1981.
Collection: Priyanka Mathew. Courtesy: Sunderlande



Echo, Enamel on canvas, 36 x 36 in, 1977.
Collection: Private, London



Silent Observer, Enamel on canvas, 36 x 42 in, 1983.
Collection: Sunita and Vijay Choraria



Red Envelope, Enamel and water colour on paper, 13 x 19.5 in, 1995.

Collection: Ajit Gadgil

Every painting is indirectly an autobiographical narration with its composition as an abstracted form of reality. But what truly distinguishes Prabhakar Barwe from his contemporaries is his conscious elimination of the human figure, which is replaced with visual perceptions at play within the human mind. The form of the figure slowly abstracts itself while its ordinary surroundings are reformed. Here too, he doesn't distort the outer materiality of the objects, he retains their formal structure and only recomposes their relational significance. The physicality of the object is not abstracted completely; instead, a cognitive meaning is rephrased and rearranged – creating multiple perceptions simultaneously. Although Barwe revered artists such as Vasudeo Gaitonde and Mohan Samant, he refrained from complete abstraction and figuration. Mundane objects in their renewed contexts became his endeavor, creating a peculiar language of visual imagery yet to be probed and historicized.

Astiva : The essence of Prabhakar Barwe, is the first of its kind to be held in New Delhi that will present his artistic oeuvre in four distinct phases. The artworks are chronologically orchestrated in each space, each representing a peculiar phase of Barwe's practice. Beginning with Roop Tantra, one encounters Barwe's early works from Sir J.J. School of Art and their transition into Tantric formations. Accompanied with designs made by the artist during his years at the Weavers Service Centre and a

few textile works will be displayed, depicting Barwe's engrossment and turn from design into Tantra, and ultimately into his own Swatantra, reflected through his work Ethereal Transitions. Works beginning from 1958 until 1977 form a part of this space.

Moving into the next segment, Roop Artha traces the cognitive shifts in the mind of the artist; the paintings with subtle tones remain vibrant in their compositions. Transitioning from Tantra into Tao, this section comprises Barwe's oeuvre from 1972 to 1988, wherein a flux of indigenous forms is transformed into a cognitive flow of mundane objects. The apparent bold and primitive palates shift into soft and dreamy mindscapes that draw the viewer into its emptiness.

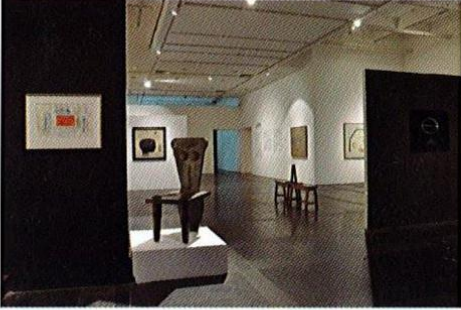
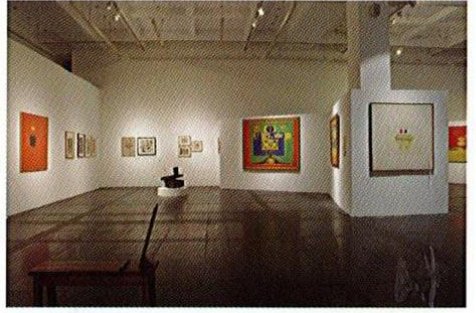
Emptiness here doesn't imply an absence of meaning; rather it marks the presence of a space pregnant with a plenum of intuitive abstracted sensations – an ideology that resonates with Zen philosophy. Barwe adapted this sense of emptying the mind of its 'natural form', enabling a perception of the abstract surrounded by an empty space. An obvious recognition of mundane objects draws the viewer inside. The objects then begin to float and reform, dissolving their linear perspective into a flat empty expanse that triggers a viewer to contrive multiple perceptions of a single object. This empty space thus becomes an invitation; the viewer is no longer external, but enters the void within the canvas. Objects are transformed into space-form logic as paintings are perceived within the quantum of an empty box.

We then move into Roop Tattva, which becomes an allegory to Barwe's work, Many Identities of the Self. Paintings from the late 1980s to his last unfinished canvas are displayed here, conceptually hinting towards an objective identity. The works here include The Clock, The Staircase and The Gramophone amongst others, which personify the artist's affinity towards elements illustrated in singular formations, rather than his earlier collective compositions. It almost seems as though he identified himself inside each of the distilled elements in this section.

An intriguing feature of this exhibition is the section Roop Vichaar, that will exhibit a selection from Barwe's 52 diaries – displayed as diary pages, animated videos and facsimile reproductions of a few diaries. Creative spaces that form extensions of Barwe's paintings and experiments will form a unique feature of this section, to create and take back a piece of Barwe's thoughts. Spell your own Alphabets of Nature, Flying Postcards, Tortoise and the Mirror and Fruit & Conversation are the activities that will bring out an artist within each viewer.

A documented timeline, which chronicles the artist's life, accompanied by a reading corner with collated archives also forms part of the exhibit.





At

**National Gallery of Modern Art,
Temporary Exhibition Hall,
Jaipur House, New Delhi 110003**

The exhibition will be on display
from 13.06.2019 to 28.07.2019

Tuesday to Friday: 11.00 am to 6.30 pm
Saturday & Sunday: 11.00 am to 8.00 pm
Mondays Closed.



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