

**Introduction to Indian Art – An Appreciation**  
**Prof. Soumik Nandy Majumdar**  
**Department of History of Art**  
**Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur**

**Module - 05**  
**Art now: Trends in Contemporary Indian art**  
**Lecture: W4 - L5**

Welcome viewers to MOOCs online course on Introduction to Indian Art and Appreciation. This is the fifth and the last module of the fourth and the last week of our course. And in this week, we will be looking at this transition of Indian art from tradition to modern in the previous module, that is module 4 we looked at some of the developments taking place in the context of Indian art during the post independent period.

And today in module 5, which is titled as art now trends in contemporary Indian art it is a vast topic of course. But still within the given time we will try to look at to pick up at least a few significant trends which seem to be shaping the art activities of contemporary Indian art.

(Refer Slide Time: 01:31)

Trends in contemporary Indian art:

- \* Addressing commonplace subject-matters in an unelevated way
- \* Exploring new and unconventional mediums and elements of art
- \* Using the already existing popular images from the surrounding visual culture and thus creating a collage-composition.
- \* Exploring the outdoor public space outside the confinement of a gallery space as a potential space for art
- \* Temporary multi-media artworks, commonly known as 'Installation Art' is a major trend in contemporary art

Now, what are these trends? at least some of them I mean I am not making a whole list of trends you can keep adding to it as you study more and more contemporary art. And again some of these trends may not look to you in the first glimpse very new or very novel.

For example; the very first one is, as I have listed them addressing common place subject matters in an unelevated way is not it something that you have already found, in let us say Bikash Bhattacharyas works may be also in the works by those artists in the 40's, who responded to the very inhuman situations of society like, famine and partition I am talking about those artists Chittaprosad Zainul Abedin and Somnath Hore.

So, but still we need to find out where it is different. Then exploring new and unconventional mediums and elements of art, now this is I am sure something that has not happened I mean before the contemporary times in such a big way people have tried out, doing little unconventional in terms of medium, but really making a breakthrough in the context of medium and exploring the possibilities of using unconventional materials, mediums, objects in their art work this is something that was not there in the 40's 50's 60's or even 70's.

Its well from 80's late 80's and definitely from 1990's we see an enormous change in the attitude of the artists the whole notion the about the priority of form, that when you are doing oil painting or a water color you should stick to that medium you cannot put this and that you cannot put a little bit of plastic here or paper I mean that whole notion is gone you are free to mix up your mediums, you are even free to use mediums which were never considered as worthy to be used as art medium before.

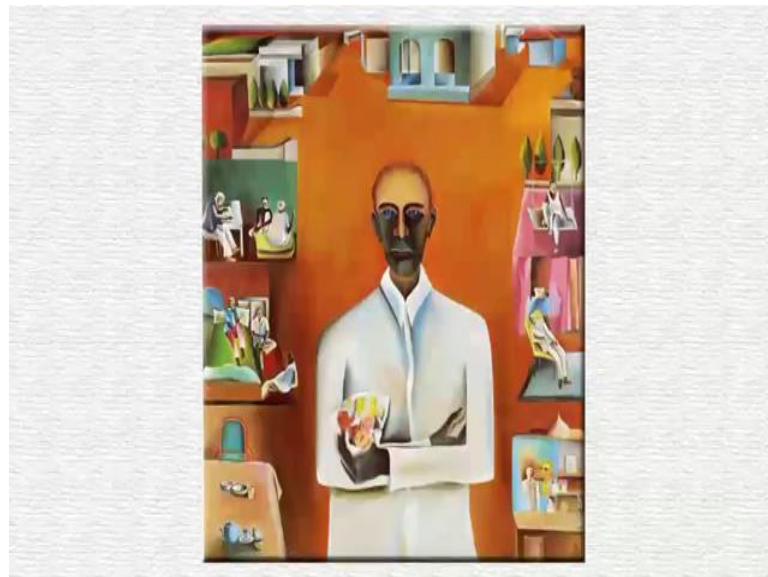
Then another very interesting development that took place in contemporary art, that is using the already existing popular images from the surrounding visual culture and thus creating a collage composition. So, instead of if I am to let us for example, in my painting if I am to draw the figure of a hero instead of imagining a hero and drawing that why do not I straightaway use the image of any already popular well known heroes either real life heroes or screen life heroes. Maybe I would like use somebody like Shahrukh Khan or somebody and then play on it. So, allowing the popular imageries to come inside your art studio allowing them to be a part of your art work this got increasingly very popular among the artists this way of working.

Then another interesting development took place during this time that is I mean we have had what we call public statues already before we have these statues and public sculptures, but now it is not about public statue or government commissioned statues of well known people. Artworks art to be now visualized in a way that, you do not need any

gallery space I mean it is not meant to be displayed within the confines of a gallery space. We have to display it outside; we have to display it in a public space. Hence, the whole notion the idea of public art emerged and the new medium called though it is very temporary, but because artists they do bring in the possibilities of multimedia into it, so, it is commonly known as installation art.

So, you can have an installation art inside the gallery, you can have an installation art even outside the gallery in the public sphere. I mean this are some of the trends, but there are many others, which we if you want you can later on find out by studying the various developments in contemporary art.

(Refer Slide Time: 06:36)



Now, let us begin by looking at an image of an artist who is definitely contemporary and at the same time who is no more, but he also belongs to slightly earlier age of 1967's I mean they belonged to that same age group, they shared the same age group he shares Bhupen Khakhar is the name of this artist, who shares the same age group with Bikash Bhattacharya Jogen Chaudhary and all. Why I am showing his painting this particular painting is because, I want to highlight this point that now artists are once again getting very intrigued by what is very common place? What is very ordinary? What is very banal in the society? I mean this man is not dying out of hunger or he is not a victim of any particular circumstances, he is a man who has just bought the packet of jalebis and that is why this painting is called the man eating jalebis.

So, it is very interesting that, this kind of urban happenings urban scenes which are absolutely banal very common place very normal and not that these particular subject matters have been elevated in your painting they have simply been painted. In a certain way that, you keep looking at it and you feel a relationship between yourself and the space that you inhabit.

(Refer Slide Time: 08:19)



So, In fact, when you look at these paintings, you do not know much of these people you cannot know through the paintings, but you know that there is something about this environment, something about this colors cape, something about that crumpled towel that is hanging on the rod over there. And all these things make these new group of paintings by artist like Bhupen Khakhar very significant as the new art of the urban modern Indian art.

(Refer Slide Time: 08:46)



Then you also have something like this, done by a much junior artist who instead of making of anything by his own or manually every element every object that you see in this work is either a found object or a collected object on an object be it a plastic doll or a plastic car or an old shampoo bottle or anything everything he collects or buys or picks up.

These are all industrially produced mass produced objects to be consumed at a very cheap price why popular I mean common people these are very popular objects, but nobody would think of using them in a serious art work at least in a previous era, but now it is possible and artists are exploring these possibilities. Look at this work also, hundreds of plastic objects have been used in this painting well can you call it a painting anymore there, has he has he painted.

(Refer Slide Time: 10:00)



Of course there is a painted background, but then rest of everything that you see all the figures all the elements none of them is painted except the background. Rest of all the figures are not made by him they are collected may be you can call them junk, may be you can call them found objects, may be some of them this artist had bought from the shops roadside shops.

But then he has used them in a very intelligent way in a very organized way, so, that altogether they make some sense. But here more than subject matter I am interested in drawing your attention to the possibility of different and unconventional materials in the work of art.



(Refer Slide Time: 10:45)



Similarly, here done by a very consistent painter Manjari Chakraborty and the previous one was by Veena Bolic a very young artist. Now Manjari has been also using very fragile feeble so, called unconventional materials for her artworks. But they create a kind of intimacy well in this work though it is not very unconventional, because we have seen papier mache dolls also in folk traditions.

(Refer Slide Time: 11:19)



But the way Manjari uses them makes it very unconventional. Because she is not doing a folk art. She is doing a modern a contemporary art, but using a medium which is well

may not be very durable, but the artist does not care more than durability more than permanency the artist is looking at a different kind of palpability of the materials, one is using.

(Refer Slide Time: 11:58)



Then what can also use personal materials personal objects like here, the artist Manjari Chakraborty she has used letters and leaves pages from her own diary. I mean this is very interesting that even your personal materials like, you are the pages from your own diary, the notes that you keep, the letters that you write or you receive can also be used within an artwork as not just as an art material.

But also as an intellectual material, as a thematic material and these possibilities can be extended and in contemporary Indian art like elsewhere artists have extended these possibilities of using anything and everything for artwork in the most unimaginable way, but in a very successful way.



(Refer Slide Time: 12:55)



And along with that since, in the previous work we noticed that how personal objects can also become not metaphorically, but really physically a part of your artwork and when particularly it is being done by a woman artist. Certain feminist perspectives are bound to appear as very significant aspect of these paintings.

So, though the paintings may I mean the subject matter in these paintings may look very commonplace like this one by a very well known artist from Delhi Arpita Singh, but when you look at her paintings very carefully, then you gradually realize that what she is doing is she is looking at the world from a certain perspective and here by perspective; obviously, I am not implying a mathematical perspective I mean a psychological perspective and existential perspective.

(Refer Slide Time: 14:03)



And it is this existential engagement with your life, with your work it makes possible for the artists to use even personal materials as a part of your artwork like even this one.

(Refer Slide Time: 14:17)



So, we have artists like for example, Bharti Kher where she creates a huge elephant a very soft huge elephant, but if we look at the elephant very carefully and closely you will find, what seems like a skin beautiful texture skin of the elephant is full of bindis that Indian women use so often.

(Refer Slide Time: 14:50)



So, even something as fragile as that, bindi can become an art material a particular medium for artwork or for that matter, very common steel utensils; sometimes enlarged in a huge scale, sometimes kept in as it is in the same scale. So, this artist internationally renowned artist: Subodh Gupta. Subodh Gupta is very, very successful in exploring this possibility of using stainless steel utensils, which is a very, very, very frequently used material, in the in our Indian middle class society.

(Refer Slide Time: 15:38)



And this is what he is using. And you can look you can really feel the impact of the use of this kind of very common place like, utensils like, tiffin carrier these small little stainless steel boxes, thalis, stuff that we use every day. But when they are arranged in a certain way they create a visual impact and they assume the status of an artwork, and this is what he has been doing.

(Refer Slide Time: 16:00)



So, this is a very new idea for that matter of using not only different materials, but using a different idea, a different concept of art. So, this is neither a sculpture nor a painting you cannot say, that the cycle rickshaw has been built by the sculptor himself no this is something that has been mass produced, even the stainless steel pitchers the pots and pans have been mass produced he simply has collected them and arranged them in a way that it creates a visual impact. And this is where the magic of this kind of artworks lie.



(Refer Slide Time: 16:43)



Similarly, a huge mammoth truck, what is commonly known as the Punjab truck, but when it is made of very unconventional materials very different kinds of materials including the figures that you see standing on the truck because it is also about migration? It is made with very, very feeble metals, and the subject matter is migration people are leaving from one place to another place and when it is placed inside the confines of a gallery it does create a huge impact.

(Refer Slide Time: 17:20)



Con. No: 4947  
Sanjeev Sanyal: Migrant Story on the Paver Blocks :  
Installation - chrome plated steel, fibre glass resin, automotive paints & cement paver blocks : dimensions variable : 2006

You can also have a look at this wonderful installation by another young artist Sandip Sonpimpare and there he uses all kinds of different kinds of materials for his installation like; chrome plated steel, fiber glass resin, automotive paints, and cement paver blocks in different dimensions.

Now even one can use straightaway direct things I mean things that you use in your daily life directly from your life and put them inside a gallery. So, what is important here in this kind of works is, not exactly what material you are using.

(Refer Slide Time: 18:00)



Material can be very banal like this one let us say plastic chair, but you are actually interpreting it. Like this is of course, not a very common plastic chair though the artist has used a very common plastic chair, but then because he has interpreted the plastic chair by creating a strange gap or dissecting the chair in a certain way it changes its meaning and it is up to you now to give it another dimension of interpretation.



(Refer Slide Time: 18:34)



Now, contemporary art has also, I mean given us this freedom to do things which are extremely ephemeral; extremely temporary in nature like this one. I mean whether you call this art or not that is a different issue, but definitely this is an art activity, where one of the artists one fine morning draws a series of windows and a big door on the bricks which have been stacked and very soon these bricks will be taken away to build a real house.

So, the house you see on the bricks either it is a dream house or these bricks will have to collapse this house this drawn house with white chalk in order to make the real house. I mean possibility of doing lot of interpretations with these kinds of works is there also because, more than a work of art it is about an art activity that we are talking about.

(Refer Slide Time: 19:31)



(Refer Slide Time: 19:39)



So, contemporary art has given us this freedom of making art activity and art objects also very temporary if you desire, so, it need not always be very permanent. Then contemporary art and if you are talking of various trends another important trend which we have already mentioned at the beginning is the use of multimedia. So, you can have a whole installation with various projections with using multiple channels and video projections.

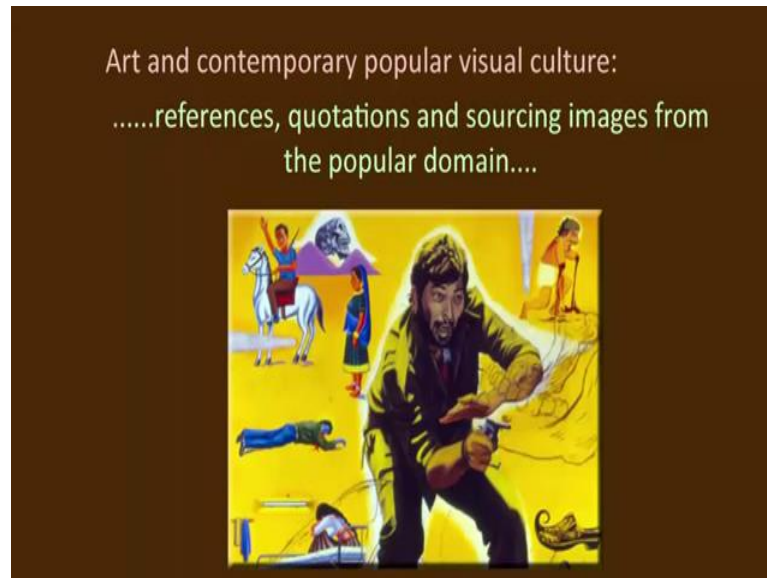
(Refer Slide Time: 20:23)



And then making a statement official statement pertaining to the subject that you are working on; multimedia, digital art is at the one end of the spectrum, and at the other end of the spectrum you also have something that is very ephemeral, something that is very non permanent you use deliberately objects that will that is perishable that is not going to be there even after 10 days or 15 days.

So, art is going to disappear. So, these various notions of what an art is it is not now about when we talk about contemporary art we do not necessarily talk about painting, drawing or sculpture any more. Yes, these art forms are there, but at the same time we talk about digital art we talk about multimedia art we talk about these kinds of arts.

(Refer Slide Time: 21:00)



For example this one by Atul Dodiya very well known contemporary Indian art, who has been using directly using popular images like in this one he has used the image of the Gabbar Singh from Sholay, and most of the images he has used are either from this or that popular film or some popular publicity images. So, this also become a very interesting game for the artists, to play with references quotations or sourcing images from the popular domain.

Now, you can say even Husain has also done this. Using the image of Madhuri Dixit; using the image of Mother Teresa so on and so for. But Husain has kind of stylized those motifs in his own even when he draws Madhuri Dixit or Mother Teresa, it is husain it is Husain's style that ultimately overtakes that image. But in this case Atul Dodiya does not distort the original look of these popular figures. So, his style can wait it stays back, what is fore grounded is the popular style the visual style that is rampant and that is that is something people are very familiar with.

(Refer Slide Time: 22:37)



So, when Atul Dodiya is using a particular shot from a very famous film by Satyajit ray, Apur Sansar there you can actually see from that Apu Trilogy. That he is Atul Dodiya is not actually playing with the main motif that has been collected from that shot from that film, rest is up to him how he manages the composition.

(Refer Slide Time: 23:11)



And while sourcing images from external sources like; advertisements, popular films, publicity images in contemporary times we see a very visible tendency also to be very self reflexive one often finds that the artist is painting or drawing himself or herself



directly. So, artist also makes his or her presence felt right on the canvas on the sculpture, but not with great reverence I mean artist does a makeover, he may like in this painting he may make himself almost look like a James Bond.

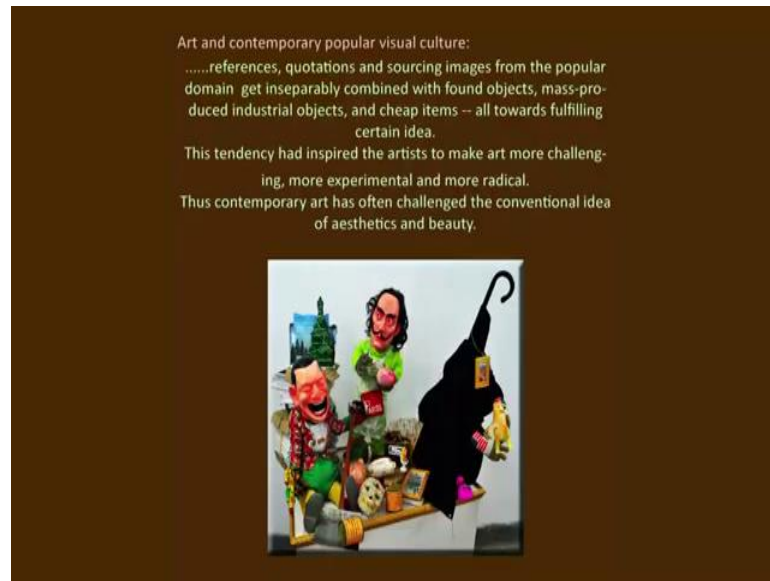
So, by using his own image the artist can create another visual statement. So, for the artist artists own image is not a very neutral image, it is a very potential image which can be used to underscore certain statements or ideas in his paintings. Another painting by Atul Dodiya you can see more later on in different books and publications and of course, there are catalogs.

(Refer Slide Time: 24:21)





(Refer Slide Time: 24:32)



So, this one aspect is has gained lot of popularity among the artists that is use, use of references quotations and sourcing images from the popular domain, but it is important to note that, this particular habit this tendency gets inseparably combined with the found objects, mass produced industrial objects, cheaply available items and all towards fulfilling a certain idea. Now this tendency has inspired the artists to make art more challenging more experimental and even more radical in terms of the subject matter. Thus contemporary art has often challenged the conventional idea of aesthetics and beauty.

(Refer Slide Time: 25:27)



And I would like to add that contemporary art has not only challenged the idea of aesthetics and beauty it has also challenged the idea of what is art now. So, you see when we trace the history of art whether it is Indian art or western art or any art does not matter. Any history of art pertaining to any place from tradition, from ancient times through the traditional history and when you finally arrive at the modern times and then ultimately when we reach our own time the contemporary times; definitely we observe a whole lot of changes that have taken place in medium, in technique, in subject matter, in purpose so for.

I mean there is lot of change that has taken place so on and so for. But have we ever given a thought to this that whether, the whole definition or idea of art itself has undergone any change or not, it seems when we finally reach contemporary art.

(Refer Slide Time: 26:51)



For example, when you look at this artwork, by an Indian artist globally reputed very well known Indian artist Anish Kapoor, who now lives and works abroad in England. When he makes these kinds of artworks, so, the whole idea of what is art has changed, I mean it is very difficult to categorize. I mean until sometime back, it was not difficult to categorize well this is painting this is sculpture now people use art form, people use art activity, people use the term art experience.

I mean the whole idea that art is an object; necessarily has not disappeared, but it has taken a backseat. So, one of the important trends of contemporary art is, and will always

be to challenge theoretically speaking conceptually speaking the whole definition of art  
what is art now.

Thank you.