

# Artist & Empire

25 November 2015 – 10 April 2016

Room 6

Out of Empire

Large Print Guide



Please return after use



## 6 Out of Empire

By 1900 the British Empire had created a vast interconnected culture of collecting. Objects from Asia, Oceania, Africa and the Americas were displayed in British and colonial museums and at international exhibitions, influencing the styles and techniques used by modern British painters and sculptors. In cosmopolitan cities such as those in the Indian Raj, art schools established on European principles encouraged a complex identity on the part of artists graduating within the colonial system. While some rejected Western illusionism in favour of indigenous traditions, others such as Rabindranath Tagore regarded art as a universal ideal that transcended divisions of nationhood, ethnicity and religion.

After the Second World War, in the era of decolonisation, many young artists came from across the Empire to study and work in London. Aubrey Williams and Donald Locke arrived from British Guiana; Ben Enwonwu and Uzo Egonu from Nigeria; Avinash Chandra and Balraj Khanna from India; and Sidney Nolan from Australia. Employing a range of motifs and practices, they each developed a language of expression to evoke memories of the past while allowing for critical comment and introspection. This tendency was reflected in international careers that moved between the artists' countries of origin, Britain and other locations.

Work captions and labels  
Clockwise from right of wall text

John Griffiths 1838–1918

**The Temptation of the Buddha by Mara  
(copy of a mural inside Cave 1 at Ajanta)**

1875–6

Oil paint on canvas

Victoria and Albert Museum, London. X53407

Christiana Herringham 1852–1929

**Fragment of the Hamsa Jataka**

c.1910

Watercolour with gouache  
and graphite on paper

Royal Holloway, University of London. X55244

Amrita Sher-Gil 1913–1941

**Figure, Possibly Adapted from a Flying Apsara  
inside Cave 17 at Ajanta**

1939

Watercolour on paper

Bradford Museums & Galleries, Cartwright Hall. X54222

These three works were inspired by the Ajanta caves in India's north-west Deccan region. The caves formed a complex of Buddhist monasteries and meditation halls carved from rock between the second century BC and the 6th century AD, and were decorated with scenes from the life of the Buddha. Following their rediscovery by the Madras Army in 1819 the frescoes became the focus of artistic and archaeological study.

The large painting formed part of a project to copy the frescoes under the direction of John Griffiths, who wanted to learn more about the technique and imagery of the murals.

A later phase of copying, more aesthetic than documentary, was carried out by a team led by Christiana Herringham, an authority on fresco and tempera. These facsimiles passed into the care of the India Society, established in London in 1910 to promote the appreciation of Indian art in Britain.

Amrita Sher-Gil's work, influenced by a visit to Ajanta in 1936, demonstrates the artist's use of earth colour and simplified forms in her painted depictions of Indian village life.

Uzo Egonu 1931–1996

**Northern Nigerian Landscape**

1964

Oil paint on hardboard

Egonu arrived from Nigeria in 1949 and worked in Britain for 50 years. Artist and scholar Olu Oguibe argues that he and artists like him broadened modernism: 'They gave it edge, expanded its formal vocabulary, and ensured that it engaged a broad range of ideas and issues relevant to the human condition.'

Here winding lines suggesting trees, paths or rivers split the painting. Texture, patterns and earthy colours recall ancient Nigerian Nok sculpture as well as Western contemporary abstract art.

Tate. Presented by Hiltrud Egonu 2014. T13898

Benedict Enwonwu 1921–1994

**Head of a Nigerian Girl**

c.1957

Bronze

Ben Enwonwu developed an international style, drawn from both Western and African traditions, with local and global influences.

This work entered the Royal Collection in 1957, around the time Enwonwu made a full-length portrait of the Queen. Both subjects were a fusion of African and classical European forms and chimed with movements to promote African art on an international stage.

Lent by Her Majesty The Queen. X53716

Isabel Rawsthorne 1912–1992

## **Three Figures I**

c.1961

Oil paint on panel

Rawsthorne learnt about traditional African art while studio assistant to Jacob Epstein. In 1961, following Nigerian independence, she studied modern African art at the College of Arts in Zaria where it was believed African artists should have all ideas at their disposal. This tendency was called 'National Synthesis'.

Three cloaked men evoke the colour and texture of ancient terracotta Nok heads which the students had studied.

Private collection. X54119

Aubrey Williams 1926–1990

**Tribal Mark II**

1961

Oil paint on canvas

Williams was one of the migrant artists who came to represent a new spirit of internationalism in British art. Born in British Guiana (now Guyana), his experience of the culture of the indigenous Warrau people defined his artistic practice.

The title of this painting may allude to the ancient Timehri markings found on rocks in the interior of Guyana. The heavy application of pigment carries connotations of trauma, revolt and destruction. The ravages brought about by colonisation on colonised peoples and the natural world was a theme that preoccupied Williams throughout his career.

Tate. Purchased 2011. T13342

Sidney Nolan 1917–1992

## **Woman and Billabong**

1957

Polyvinyl acetate paint on hardboard

Tate. Purchased 1957. T00151

## **In the Cave**

1957

Polyvinyl acetate paint on hardboard

Tate. Presented by Lord McAlpine of

West Green 1983. T03557

The Australian painter Sidney Nolan rejected the conventional styles in which he was trained in favour of experiments with international modernism. These pictures are part of a series dealing with the legend of the Victorian Scotswoman Eliza Fraser. She was shipwrecked and lived with the Aboriginal Butchulla people on the island of K'gari.

The naked figure in **Woman and Billabong** challenges conventional imagery of European women by showing her 'going native'. **In the Cave** depicts an escaped convict in a striped uniform who helped Fraser to return to a British settlement: here she is shown as an Aboriginal rock drawing.

Balraj Khanna b.1940

**Forest Walk**

1969

Oil paint on unbleached calico

Balraj Khanna trained at Punjab University in Chandigarh, northern India, and pioneered abstract colour-field painting in London. He was integral to the 1960s international abstract movement which chimed with theories of abstraction in Indian art. Forest Walk marks a decisive event of his early career: in 1969 he suffered a serious motorbike accident and was taken to rural France to recuperate. The work blends sensations of coming back to life with memories of the wooded hills of his youth in the Punjab and resonances of fairy tales and Indian myth.

Bradford Museums & Galleries, Cartwright Hall

X54223

Samuel Fyzee-Rahamin 1880–1964

**A Rajput Sirdar**

c.1914–15

Watercolour, gouache, and pen and ink on paper

This is a portrait of Maharawal Udey Rana, a warrior and **sirdar** (courtier) at the Court of Udeypoor, Rajputana. According to Fyzee-Rahamin's widow, he was from the 'Chawan clan descended from the Sun and the Moon – painted from life where we were the guests of the Ruler'. The palette, decorative border, and absence of perspective in the background conform to Mughal artistic practice, while the three-dimensional treatment of the **sirdar's** head shows Fyzee-Rahamin's European training.

Tate. Presented by the State of Bhavnagar 1925

N04096

Samuel Fyzee-Rahamin 1880–1964

**Raagni Todi, Goddess Tune**

1913

Watercolour, gouache, and pen and ink on paper

Fyzee-Rahamin was the first Indian artist to enter the Tate collection. He trained at the Bombay School of Art, and at the Royal Academy Schools under John Singer Sargent, who influenced his early style as a portrait painter. This watercolour exemplifies his move away from Western illusionistic art to explore two-dimensional Rajput painting. It is one of 12 illustrations for a book by his wife, Atiya Begum, on Indian musical modes. She described the Raagni Todi, one of the female melodies, as a 'young maiden... catch[ing] the gold of the rising morning sun – the time for performing this tune'.

Tate. Presented by Sir Victor Sassoon 1925. N04095

Rabindranath Tagore 1861–1941

**Head of a Woman**

1939

Watercolour and coloured ink on paper

The poet-philosopher Rabindranath Tagore pursued a pluralistic language of expression that transcended political and national division. Best known as a poet, and in 1913 the first non-European to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, Tagore was very much a polymath. He took to painting later in life, developing what began as doodles on manuscripts. The head study shown here is one of many images in which an enigmatic face emerges from dark veils of paint and has a mystical quality typical of his work.

Nirmalya and Maya Kumar Collection. X54228

Jamini Roy 1887–1972

## **Santhal Drummers**

c.1936

Tempera on card

Jamini Roy is widely regarded as the first Indian artist to reject the fashionable art world of cosmopolitan Calcutta (now Kolkata). In the 1930s he adopted the style and working methods of the patuas or village artists of rural Bengal. For Roy the indigenous Santhal people represented the antithesis of urban existence, having retained an uncorrupted sense of their own identity under colonial rule.

The bold design is painted on handmade card using organic pigment in keeping with the artist's pursuit of a distinctive Indian pictorial idiom.

Nirmalya and Maya Kumar Collection. X53721

Avinash Chandra 1931–1991

**Hills of Gold**

1964

Oil paint on canvas

Avinash Chandra trained and taught in newly-independent India and, like many Commonwealth artists, moved to Britain to seek an international context, becoming a leading proponent of abstract painting. He employed motifs derived from studies of Eastern and Western philosophy and psychology, particularly Carl Jung's concept of universal archetypes or symbols. **Hills of Gold** employs ambiguous brushwork to conjure abstracted memories of the hilly scenery of Chandra's native Simla.

Tate. Presented by Dr and Mrs Gerhard Adler 1965

T00724

Plinth

Eric Gill 1882–1940

**Eve**

1928

Bath stone

Gill belonged to a generation of British and European artists familiar with non-European culture through imperial collections and the creative interactions enabled by Empire. Acknowledging the impact made on him by early Indian sculpture, he told the painter William Rothenstein: 'Heaven is via Elephanta, Elura, and Ajanta'.

Gill was also impressed by the writings and lectures of Ananda Coomaraswamy, which introduced Indian traditions of hand-carving to the British Arts and Crafts movement. **Eve** fuses the hieratic elongation of medieval saints with the sinuous curves of Hindu goddesses.

Tate. Bequeathed by Hugh W. Rawlinson 1963. T00583

Plinth

Dora Gordine 1895–1991

**Malay Head**

1931

Bronze on wooden base

Dora Gordine's work was characterised by an austere simplification and grace evolved through studying Chinese and Indonesian sculpture in European collections and in the East. Malay Head is one of a series commissioned by the British administration for Singapore City Hall to represent the physiognomic characteristics of different races of the area.

Tate. Bequeathed by Mrs Rhoda Symons 1937. N04860

Plinth

Ronald Moody 1900–1984

**Midonz**

1937

Wood

Ronald Moody, who came to London from British Guiana (now Guyana), was inspired by ancient Greek, Indian and Chinese figures he studied in the British Museum.

The head of Midonz represents a 'goddess of transmutation'. Moody later stated: 'My present is the result of the friction of Europe with my past, a mixture of African, Asian and European influences.'

Tate. Purchased 2010. T13324