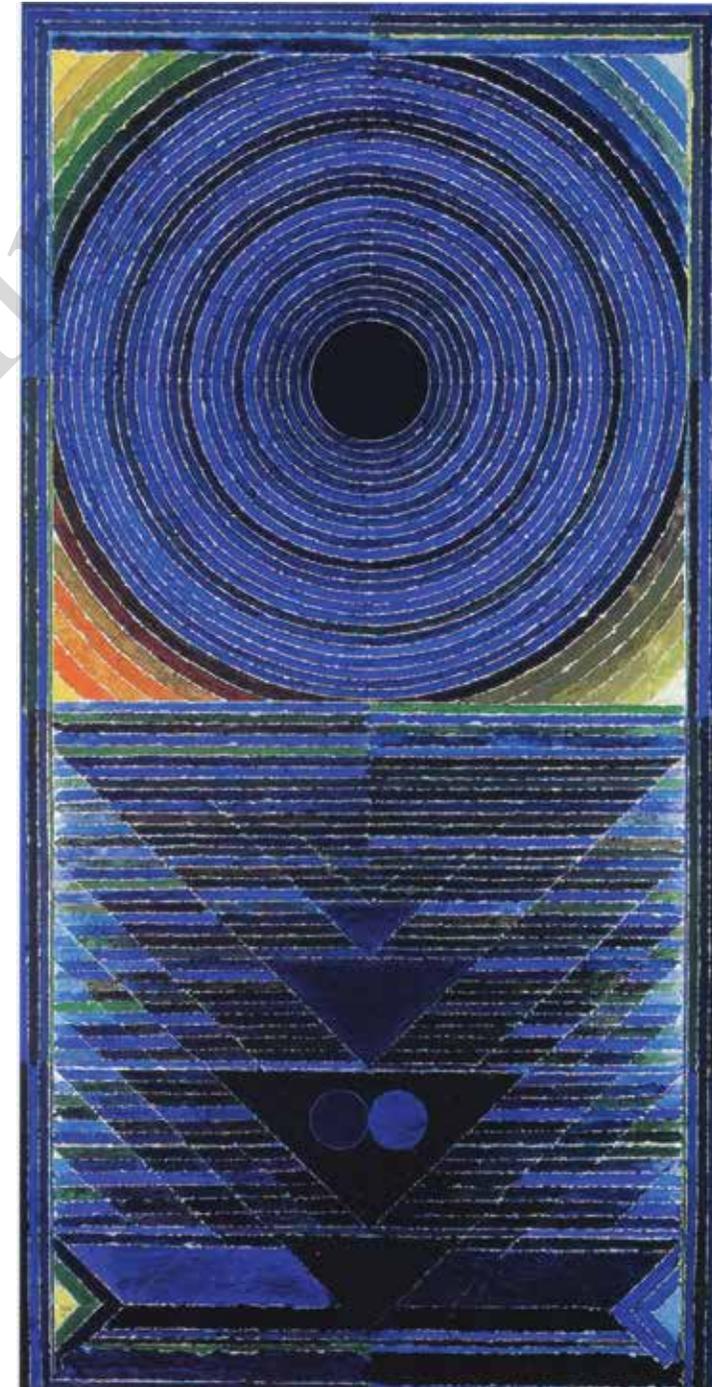


Foreword

As we approach the birth centenary year of Sayed Haider Raza (1922–2016), there is a need to look into both the critical explorations done of his work so far and to encourage fresh insights into the life, vision and art of a master of Indian modern art. Dr Geeti Sen's book *Bindu: Space and Time in Raza's Vision*, first published in 1997, is a seminal work and continues to be relevant for understanding Raza in his plural dimensions, aesthetic sources and unique artistic vision. It has been out of print for many years, and the Raza Foundation is happy to have it reprinted in this slightly revised format. It is a work of critical depth and significance. Hopefully, its publication marks the beginning of a series of publications on Raza, and new studies by diverse hands.

Ashok Vajpeyi



Jala Bindu, 1990
Acrylic on canvas
Painting stolen in
transport

in harmony. In his later paintings, he reaches beyond the scope of the Bombay Progressives. In conceiving this perspective, he had absorbed fundamentals of Indian aesthetics—with colouration and a compositional order that eschews realistic representation.

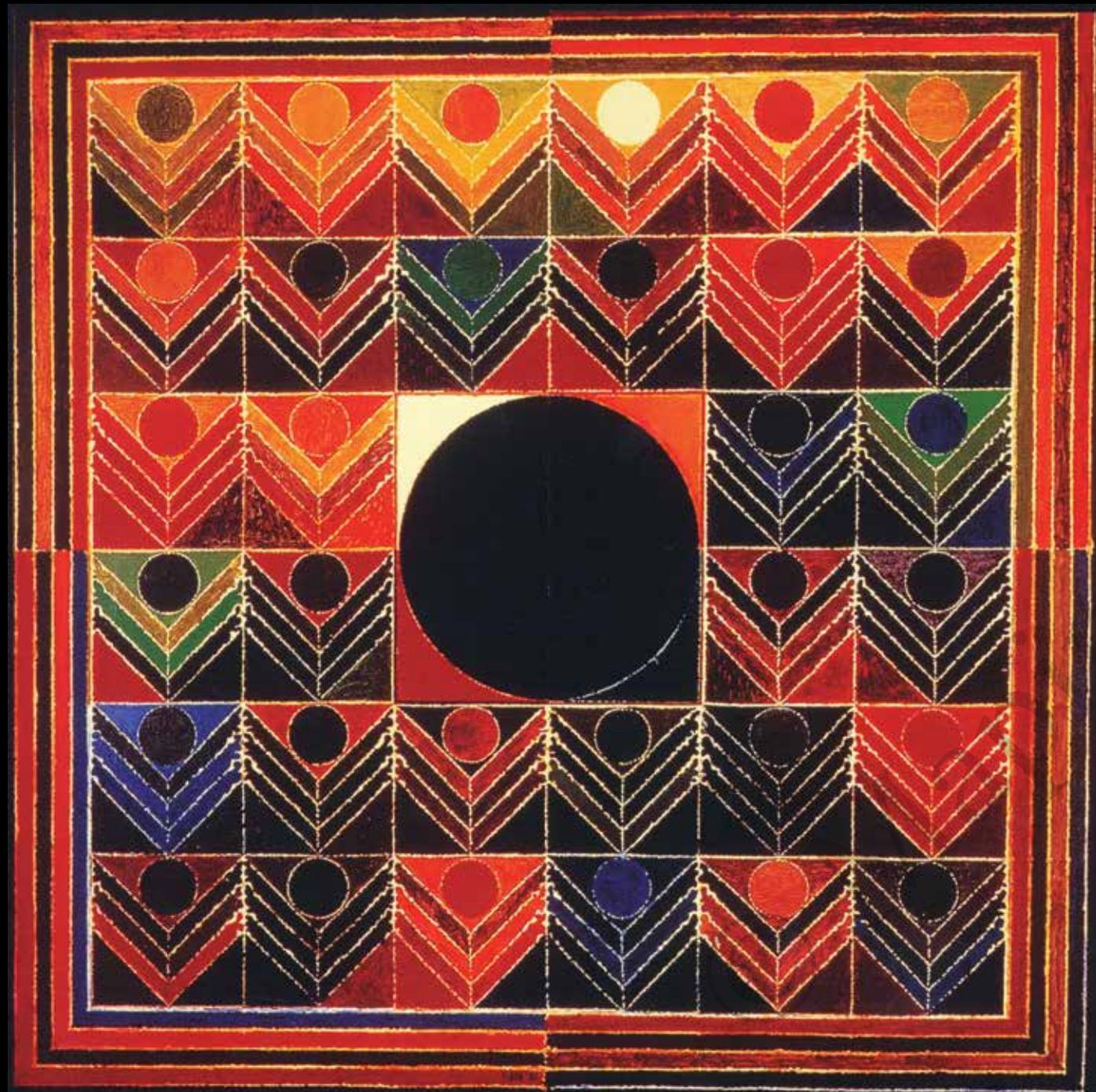
In 1947, three artists who formed the core group of the Bombay Progressives moved to spend some years in Europe: Francis Newton Souza, Sayed Haider Raza and, a few years later, Maqbool Fida Husain in London. Also living in Paris in the same years was Akbar Padamsee. A group photograph taken in 1952 shows the three in a studio in Montparnasse in Paris, along with their paintings. It is a remarkable study of three young Indians in the 1950s: Souza, Raza and Padamsee, suggesting already their differing temperaments and the character in their work, which is beginning to be defined. Both Souza and Padamsee turn to figurative expression, largely as defined then in European Art. Raza's canvas in the photograph is his celebrated painting *Haut de Cagnes*, which makes use of the brilliant Indian yellow-ochre found in miniature paintings and a space order that defies reality.

The raw colours of expressionism in European paintings left its impact on Raza's depiction of churches: *Chapelle Bleue* and *Eglise at Calvaise Breton*, 1956. According to critics such as Lassaine, Soupault and Waldemar George, his works did not fit into any category of Western art or into what they described as neo-orientalism, but they were moved by his passionate outbursts of energy. There was an inherent dilemma for Raza who was living in Paris. A new world order of ambivalence seemed to have become inevitable, when the east was turning westward for influence, while the west was moving eastward for inspiration.

I was fortunate to have met Raza Sahib in the 1980s, in the crucial decade when he was embarking on rediscovering the significance of the Bindu. It

“The first lesson I learnt after visiting the galleries was that I had not understood what modern art is all about; so, I had to make a fresh beginning. This did me good. Modern sensibility is mainly about the formal values of line and form and colour. Suddenly I realized that all this was already there, existing in Indian painting! The two-dimensionality of objects, on a single plane, the space divisions of colour, and the arbitrary use of colour orchestration. I began looking at the art of my own country with new eyes.”

—Paritosh Sen



Ankuran: Germination

*Hidden in nature, which is mine on,
I emanate forth again and again
All these multitude of beings
Necessarily by the force of nature.*

—Bhagavad Gita IX, 8



Interior of Raza's studio

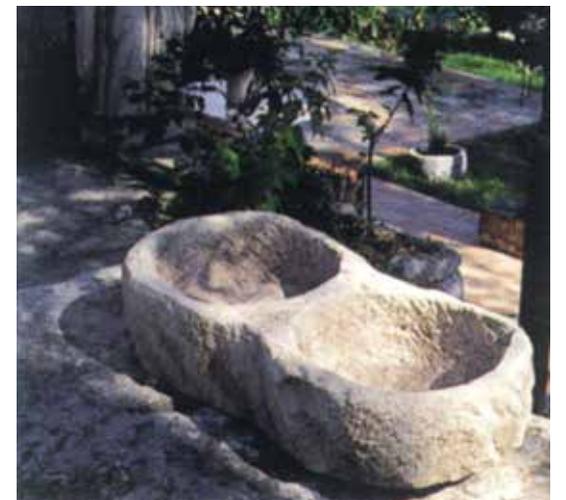
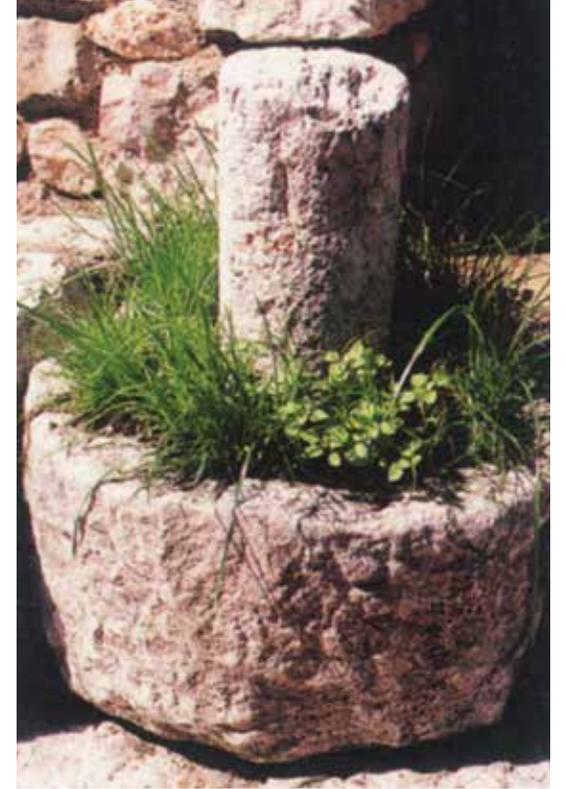
home state of Madhya Pradesh, a wooden figure from the eaves of a temple in Gujarat, a few pots with cactus, a pair of Tibetan gongs that sound with a deep resonance when brought together.

Outside, Raza would sit in the stone patio near the door leading to his studio, in the open air, his paints on the floor, his blank canvas placed on a wooden easel or on the floor. Janine, his wife and an established artist, could be found in another part of the garden, working on her collage of assembled tea bags or assembled paper, or occasionally preparing lunch in the kitchen. If Raza's paintings of this time are pared to their essence, Janine's work takes on the challenge of further complexities—of exploration into new areas and mediums of experiment.

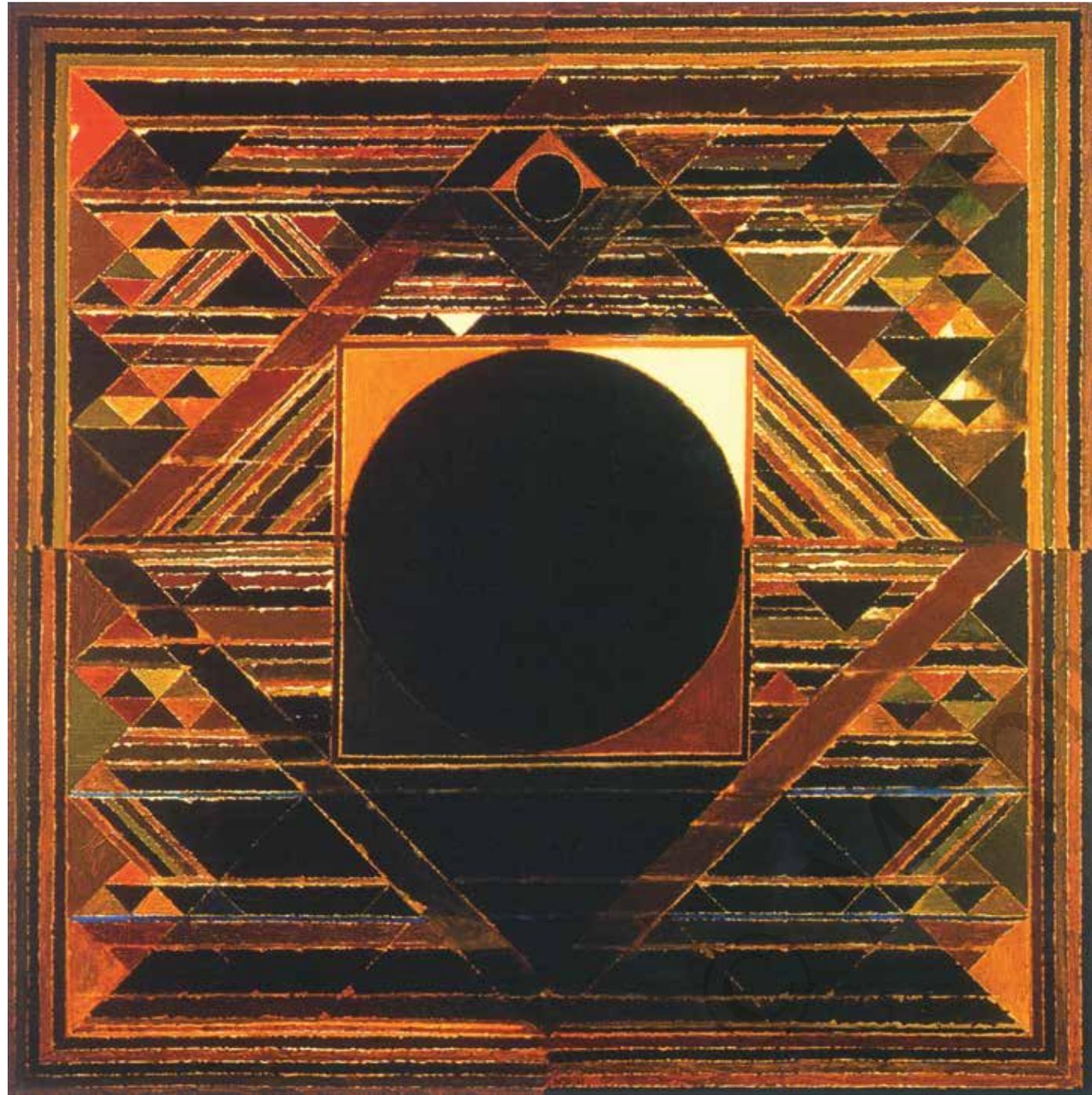
Bona, the black cat, would sleep in the sunshine, on a stone slab, black against white.

Amidst these plants and flowers of every conceivable colour are placed tall Greek jars of stone, bringing a sense of order and clarity. Stones of natural shape have also been chosen and placed in this garden—stones of forms that share an affinity with Raza's paintings.

A large circular stone, for instance, like a *bija*, is placed within the frame of a roughly hewn square of stone, corresponding to Raza's circle within the square. A vertical column rises from a circular stone pot, to suggest the male–



Stones in Raza's garden at Gorbio: a vertical column planted with grass, and a figure of eight.



“It’s strange that I needed forty years to understand my passion and love for nature, and to transpose this on to canvas. I’m glad that I took all this time, because it was not a gift to me by someone—a teacher, a book, or something else; it was the conclusion of a lifelong experience!”

Painting is something alive as human beings in its different manifestations ... It is a vital process of becoming. Just imagine how fascinating it is that the seed contains the total inherent forces of a plant, of animal life, and so on and so forth. And that could be the same process in Form too!”

—S.H. Raza