

WOMEN SCULPTORS IN MODERN INDIA

Curator: Mrinal Ghosh

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9 - 30 November, 2024

Alakananda Sengupta

Banasri Khan

Chaitali Chanda

Chandana Hore

Jayashree Chakravarty

Latika Katt

Mausumi Roy

Nilima Goel

Ratnabali Kant

Reba Hore

Seema Kohli

Shanu Lahiri

Shipra Bhattacharya

Soma Chakraborty

Sunanda Das

Uma Siddhanta

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An Introduction

In the art world, dividing creativity along gender lines is often deemed unnecessary. However, historically, women's participation in high art has lagged behind that of men. Prevailing assumptions have suggested that women struggle to attain the same artistic acclaim as their male counterparts. Notably, American art theorist Linda Nochlin (1931-2017) addressed this bias in her seminal essay, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" published in *Art News*. In her analysis, Nochlin argued that societal subjugation in male-dominated cultures has hindered women's ability to fully express their talents and creativity.

In Europe, women's involvement in the arts can be traced back to the Middle Ages, albeit primarily in secondary roles. Artists such as Herrad of Landsberg (d. 1195) and Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) contributed to manuscript illustrations and religious art. By the Renaissance and Baroque periods, figures like Sofonisba Anguissola (1532-1625) and Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1652) emerged, although their recognition often came later through scholarly efforts. The Impressionist movement in the 19th century significantly increased women's participation in the arts.

In India, the presence of women artists in high art became pronounced only in the 20th century. The vast landscape of Indian classical and pre-modern art lacks notable female contributors, though women's creativity flourished in domestic and folk traditions. Sunayani Devi (1875-1962) is often recognized as the first woman artist of modern India. Although Mangala Bai Thampuratti (1866-1954), the sister of Raja Ravi

Varma, could have claimed this title, her contributions were largely in support roles. It was not until the arrival of artists like Amrita Sher-Gil (1913-1941) and the post-1960s art movements that women's participation in high art began to broaden, with the gender divide in the art world largely diminished by the 1990s.

II. The Sculptural Landscape

While the number of women participating in painting grew steadily, their presence in sculpture – a discipline requiring significant physical labor, time, and financial resources – has historically been limited. According to the 2006 Artists' Directory published by Lalit Kala Akademi, only 66 out of 280 women artists listed were sculptors, with the majority primarily engaged in painting and graphic arts. Renowned sculptor Pradosh Dasgupta noted that many women chose painting due to the "bone-breaking labor" of sculpture, which, compounded by domestic obligations, limited their ability to engage in this medium. Yet, following the 1990s, as societal roles began to evolve, women sculptors surmounted these challenges through sheer determination and resilience, exemplified by artists such as Meera Mukherjee.

III. Artistic Distinctions

Is there something inherently unique about women's art? Art theorist Lucy Lippard (b. 1937) explored this idea in her 1971 exhibition titled *26 Contemporary Women Artists*. She suggested that women's art might

be characterized by organic forms, curved lines, centralized focus, and a looseness of handling. While some of these traits hold merit, in contemporary post-modern art, distinguishing between male and female artistic expression becomes increasingly complex. Yet, fundamental differences between genders – such as procreative abilities and maternal instincts – cannot be overlooked.

These qualities may infuse women's art with a distinctive perspective. For instance, artists like Sunayani Devi and Arpita Singh channel their uniquely feminine sensibilities into their work. In the realm of sculpture, this can be seen in the creations of Reba Hore, Meera Mukherjee, and Mrinalini Mukherjee.

IV. The Evolution of Modern Sculpture in India

Modern sculpture in India began to take shape in the late 19th century, driven by academically trained sculptors from British art schools. Debiprasad Roychowdhury (1899-1975), a pupil of Hiranmoy Roychowdhury, emerged as a prominent figure of academic naturalism. However, it was Ramkinkar Baij, working at Santiniketan, who revitalized Indian sculpture, propelling it towards modernism with iconic works like *Sujata* (1935) and *Santhal Family* (1937-38).

The first prominent woman sculptor in India was Kamala Dasgupta (1913-2001), a student at the Madras Government Art School and later a co-founder of the Calcutta Group alongside her husband, Pradosh

Dasgupta. Kamala was primarily recognized as a portrait sculptor, celebrated for her significant contributions to the field.

Following Kamala, artists such as Ira Chowdhury (b. 1927), Lila Mukherjee (1916-2002), and the exceptional Meera Mukherjee (1923-1998) made their mark in the sculpture domain. Meera Mukherjee, in particular, integrated indigenous tribal techniques into modernist sculpture, infusing her works with a feminine perspective that celebrated empathy, spirituality, and the resilience of subaltern classes.

V. Conclusion: A Celebration of Women Sculptors

This exhibition showcases the works of sixteen women sculptors, exploring the unique qualities that define their art. These artists present existential and aesthetic values that reveal distinctive identities within their creations, affirming that women's creativity significantly enriches the landscape of modern Indian sculpture.

MRINAL GHOSH

Curator

Acknowledgements: Tapas Sarkar, Prasanta Dawn, Sutanu Chatterjee

ALAKANANDA SENGUPTA

(b.1963)



Ref No. C1616

Power
Terracotta
14 x 7.5 x 30 in

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No. C1617

How do you find me.....a loaf of meat !

Terracotta

14 x 7.5 x 30 in

Provenance

Artist Collection



BANASRI KHAN

(b.1974)



Ref No. C1448

Entwined in Love

Bronze

15 x 7 x 10 in

2024

Provenance

Artist Collection

Ref No. C1447

Erotic Rock

Bronze

9 x 19 x 21 in

2015

Provenance

Artist Collection



CHAITALI CHANDA

(b.1977)



Ref No. C1536

Journey

Bronze

21 x 14.5 x 6 in

2022

Provenance

Artist Collection

Ref No. C1537

River Side

Bronze

6 x 17 x 13 in

2022

Provenance

Artist Collection



CHANDANA HORE

(b.1964)

Ref No. C1640

Bronze
2.5 x 16 x 7 in

Provenance
Artist Collection



Ref No. C1639

Bronze
3 x 16 x 12 in

Provenance
Artist Collection



JAYASHREE CHAKRAVARTY

(b.1956)

Ref No. C1623

Bhukhand - I (Part of Terrain)

Mixed Media

8 x 18 x 15.75 in

Provenance

Private Collection, Kolkata



Ref No. C1624

Bhukhand - II (Part of Terrain)

Mixed Media

10.25 x 15.75 x 15.75 in

Provenance

Private Collection, Kolkata





Ref No. C1625

Bronze
9 x 4 x 6 in
Edition 3/6

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No. C1626

Bronze
11.5 x 13.25 x 7.5 in
Edition 3/6

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata



LATIKA KATT

(b.1948)



Ref No. C1628

Roots

Marble

18 x 12 x 12 in

Provenance

Artist Collection

Ref No. C1627

Deterioration

Marble

24 x 12 x 12 in

Provenance

Artist Collection



MAUSUMI ROY

(b.1982)



Ref No. C1582

Hunger
Ceramic Stoneware
17 x 12 x 6 in
2024

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No. C1583

Scary Cat

Ceramic Stoneware

26 x 20 x 13 in

2024

Provenance

Artist Collection



NILIMA GOEL

(b.1955)



Ref No. C1630

Family (Mother and Children)

Bronze

14 x 10 x 10 in

Provenance

Artist Collection



Ref No. C1629

Shanti Stupa

Bronze

26.5 x 18 x 18 in

Provenance

Artist Collection

RATNABALI KANT

(b.1956)

Ref No. C1631

Facing Nightmare Alone / Draupadi
Ensemble of Seven Pieces Sculpture with 10 Meter Cloth
Fiberglass and Cloth
84 x 84 x 72 in
2018

Provenance
Artist Collection



Ref No. C1632

Between The Wall
(The Conversation Between Two Women from Two Ends)

Fibreglass and goldleaf

60 x 66 x 24 in

2023

Provenance

Artist Collection



REBA HORE

(1926-2008)

Ref No. C1641

Bronze
3 x 11 x 5 in

Provenance

Acquired from the Artist's Family





Ref No. C1642

Terracotta
6.5 x 4.5 x 3 in

Provenance

Acquired from the Artist's Family

SEEMA KOHLI

(b.1960)



Ref No. C1633

Yogini
Bronze
23 x 21 x 12 in

Provenance
Artist Collection

SHANU LAHIRI

(1928-2013)



Ref No. C1636

Head

Wood

15.5 x 7.5 x 6 in

Provenance

Acquired from the Artist's Family



Ref No. C1635

Figures

Bronze

16 x 4 x 4 in

Provenance

Acquired from the Artist's Family



Ref No. C1634

Faces

Bronze

22 x 11 x 5 in

Provenance

Acquired from the Artist's Family

SHIPRA BHATTACHARYA

(b.1954)



Ref No. C1638

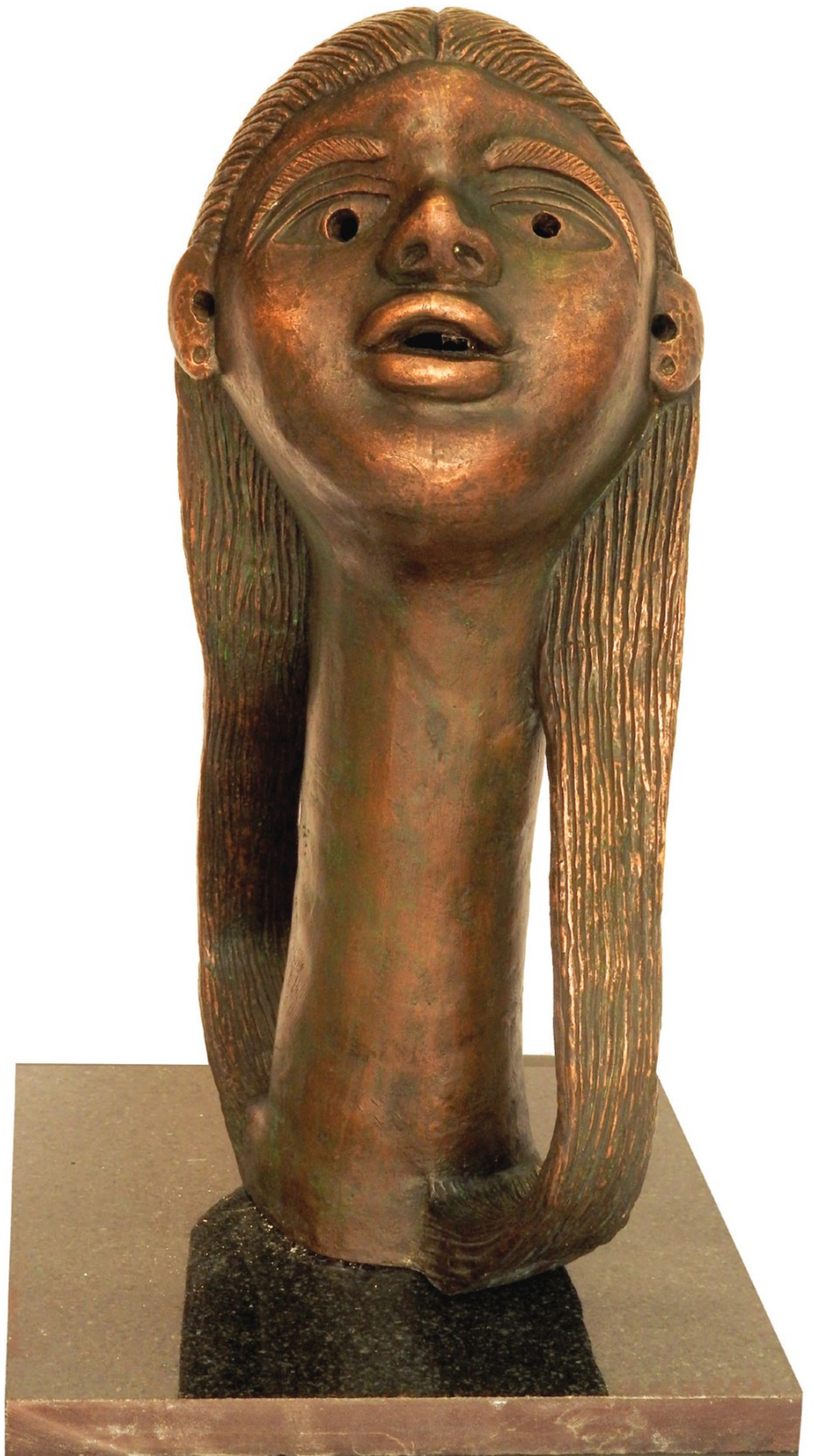
She
Bronze
14 x 5 x 6 in

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No. C1637

She
Bronze
13 x 6 x 5 in

Provenance
Artist Collection



SOMA CHAKRABORTY

(1960-2017)



Ref No. C1643

Soft Sculpture
54 x 42 x 4 in

Provenance

Acquired from the Artist's Family

Ref No. C1644

Soft Sculpture
48 x 60 in

Provenance
Acquired from the Artist's Family



SUNANDA DAS

(1962-2020)



Ref No. C1554

Summer

Bronze

19 x 9.5 x 7 in

Provenance

Acquired from the Artist's Family

Ref No. C1555

Abandoned

Bronze

23.5 x 4 x 5 in

Provenance

Acquired from the Artist's Family



UMA SIDDHANTA

(b.1933)

Ref No. C1452

Mahakaal

Bronze

10.5 x 8 x 7.5 in

1970 - 1979

Provenance

Artist Collection





Ref No. C1451

Rhythm

Bronze

35 x 9.5 x 7 in

1980 - 1989

Provenance

Artist Collection

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