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# barbican

## [The Imaginary Institution of India: Art 1975-1998](#)

Barbican Art Gallery

**5 October 2024 – 5 January 2025**

Press Preview: Wednesday 2 October, 10am – 1pm

*This exhibition is organised by the Barbican in collaboration with the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi.*



L: Gieve Patel, *Two Men with Handcart*, 1979 © Gieve Patel. Courtesy of the Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts.  
R: Nalini Malani, *Remembering Toba Tek Singh*, 1998. Installation view, World Wide Video Festival, Amsterdam, 1998 © Nalini Malani.

From 5 October 2024, the Barbican presents ***The Imaginary Institution of India: Art 1975-1998***, the world's first exhibition to explore and chart this period of significant cultural and political change in India. Featuring nearly 150 works of art across painting, sculpture, photography, installation and film, this landmark group show examines the ways in which 30 artists have distilled significant episodes of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and reflected intimate moments of life during this time. A specially curated film season, ***Rewriting the Rules: Pioneering Indian Cinema after 1970***, will run alongside the exhibition.

Bookended by two pivotal moments in India's history – the declaration of the State of Emergency by Indira Gandhi in 1975 and the Pokhran Nuclear Tests in 1998 – *The Imaginary Institution of India* aims to delve into a transformative era marked by social upheaval, economic instability, and rapid urbanisation.

The exhibition takes the declaration of the Emergency in 1975 and the ensuing suspension of civil liberties as a moment of national awakening, signalling how it provoked artistic responses, directly or indirectly. It surveys the artistic production that unfolded over the next two decades or so, within the turmoil of a changing socio-political landscape. Culminating in the 1998 nuclear tests, the show illustrates how far the country moved from the ideals of

non-violence, which once had been the bedrock of its campaign for independence from British colonial rule.

Unfolding loosely chronologically across both floors of the gallery, *The Imaginary Institution of India* guides the visitor through this tumultuous time. The artists featured grapple with the shifting context of late 20th century India; some responding directly to the national events that they were living through, while others captured everyday moments and shared experiences. All of them combined social observation with individual expression and innovation of form to make work about friendship, love, desire, family, religion, violence, caste, community and protest. This has determined the four axes that shape the exhibition: the rise of communal violence; gender and sexuality; urbanisation and shifting class structures; and a growing connection with indigenous and vernacular practices.

Most artists will be represented by multiple works, providing a fuller view of their practices and highlighting the aesthetic evolution in their oeuvres. In this way, the exhibition also traces the development of Indian art history from the predominance of figurative painting in the mid-1970s, to the emergence of video and installation art in the 1990s. Primarily wall-based art in the upper galleries will give way to installations downstairs, with works presented alongside an exhibition design inspired by the transforming urban landscape of India during the period and the shifting boundaries between the public and the private; the street and the home.

**Shanay Jhaveri, Head of Visual Arts at the Barbican, said:** *“The exhibition takes its title from an essay by Sudipta Kaviraj, which discusses the processes of instituting democracy and modernity in a post-colonial society characterised by diversity and plurality. These negotiations form the core of The Imaginary Institution of India: Art 1975-1998, a show that underscores, through powerful and evocative artworks, the essence of a truly democratic society – where people communicate, coexist, and connect on various levels, from the exuberantly sexual to the defiantly political.”*

**Kiran Nadar, Founder & Chairperson, KNMA, said:** *“The Kiran Nadar Museum of Art (KNMA), in its ongoing partnership with the Barbican presents the second exhibition focused on bringing visibility and critical attention to the practice of Indian and South Asian artists through selected seminal works highlighting social, political, and artistic transformations in India from 1975 to 1998. We are delighted to have loaned a substantial number of major artworks to the exhibition that energise the theme, taking viewers through a spectrum of materials, media, and content.”*

Works on display include:

- **Gulam Mohammed Sheikh’s** painting *Speechless City* which draws on different art historical painting traditions to respond to the oppressive political atmosphere of the 1975-77 State of Emergency.
- **Gieve Patel’s** empathetic paintings which vividly portray daily life in the streets of India’s rapidly expanding, cosmopolitan cities in the 1980s.
- **Sunil Gupta’s** photographic series *Exiles*, from 1987, which makes visible the lives of gay men in New Delhi in and around some of its most recognisable landmarks.

- **Sheba Chhachhi's** *Seven Lives and a Dream*, a series of photographs which juxtaposes moving and ferocious documentation of feminist grassroots campaigns in India with tenderly staged portraits of the women at their forefront.
- **Meera Mukherjee's** intimately scaled and intricately detailed bronzes which, inspired by her time spent studying metal crafting traditions across India, use lost-wax casting techniques to address subjects both sacred and everyday.
- **Savi Sawarkar's** bold etchings which deal with issues surrounding caste and untouchability.
- **Rummana Hussain's** floor-based works which use broken terracotta pots to reckon with widespread communal violence across the nation following the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in 1992 by a militant right-wing Hindu mob.
- Installation works made from cow dung, thread, and sacred kumkum pigment by **Sheela Gowda** which make use of materials used as fuel, in religious rituals, and part of the everyday economy of women in rural places to interrogate the value of labour.
- A video installation by **Nalini Malani** in which moving image, projected on the walls and playing on monitors in tin trunks, considers the impact of India's nuclear testing and links it to concerns around violence and forced displacement.
- **Bhupen Khakhar's** exceptional paintings which tenderly evoke queer love and desire.

Participating artists:

Pablo Bartholomew, Jyoti Bhatt, Rameshwar Broota, Sheba Chhachhi, Anita Dube, Sheela Gowda, Sunil Gupta, Safdar Hashmi, M. F. Husain, Rummana Hussain, Jitish Kallat, Bhupen Khakhar, K. P. Krishnakumar, Nalini Malani, Tyeb Mehta, Meera Mukherjee, Madhvi Parekh, Navjot Altaf, Gieve Patel, Sudhir Patwardhan, C. K. Rajan, N. N. Rimzon, Savindra Sawarkar, Himmat Shah, Gulammohammed Sheikh, Nilima Sheikh, Arpita Singh, Jangarh Singh Shyam, Vivan Sundaram, and J. Swaminathan.

Accompanying the exhibition, the Barbican will present ***Rewriting the Rules: Pioneering Indian Cinema after 1970*** (3 Oct-12 Dec) curated by Dr Omar Ahmed, writer and international curator of South Asian Cinema. This season of documentary and narrative films from the 1970s, 80s and 90s considers the emergence of the new Parallel Cinema – one of South Asia's first post-colonial film movements. Like the trajectory traced in the exhibition, this was a time of shifting aesthetic choices whereby filmmakers rewrote the traditional rules of what constituted Indian cinema, opting for a creative hybridity and experimentation that fused together aspects of Indian art and culture with broader international styles.

**ENDS**

**Notes to Editors**

**Press Information**

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**Press images available online**

The image sheet is available on the [press room](#). Please contact the press team for high-res images.

**Barbican Press Room**

All Barbican Centre press releases, news announcements and the Communication team's contact details are listed on our website at <https://www.barbican.org.uk/our-story/press-room/>

**Press Tickets**

All press tickets will need to be booked 48 hours in advance by contacting a member of the Barbican's Visual Arts Press team. Our inbox is monitored Monday to Friday, 10am-6pm. Please let us know if you have any access requirements.

**PUBLIC INFORMATION**

Barbican Art Gallery, Silk Street, London, EC2Y 8DS

[www.barbican.org.uk](http://www.barbican.org.uk)

**Tickets**

Tickets on sale [here](#) from August 2024.

**Pay What You Can**

We will be running two Pay What You Can slots per week.

Select the price you can pay and enjoy the exhibition. If you're able to pay the standard ticket price, you'll be helping to support our Visual Arts programme.

Details will be available on the website [here](#).

**Opening Hours**

Saturday – Wednesday 10am - 6pm (last entry 5pm)

Thursday – Friday 10am - 8pm (last entry 7pm)

Bank holidays: Please check the website as opening times vary.

**Exhibition**

*The Imaginary Institution of India: Art 1975-1998* is at Barbican Art Gallery from 5 October 2024 to 5 January 2025 and is curated by Shanay Jhaveri (Head of Visual Arts) with Amber Li (Curatorial Assistant) and support from Qamoos Bukhari (Research Associate). Architectural design is by Apparata. The exhibition is organised by the Barbican in collaboration with the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi.

## **Book**

The exhibition is accompanied by an illustrated catalogue co-published with Prestel, featuring original essays by Devika Singh, Diva Gujral, Rahaab Allana, Rattanamol Singh Johal, Tarun Nagesh, Roobina Karode and texts by Shanay Jhaveri and Qamoos Bukhari. Designed by Daly & Lyon. Price: £45

## **Events**

Alongside the exhibition and specially curated film season, an events programme including talks and gallery tours will accompany *The Imaginary Institution of India: Art 1975-1998*. Please check the website for more information: [www.barbican.org.uk/artgallery](http://www.barbican.org.uk/artgallery)

## **Barbican Art Gallery**

Our visual arts programme embraces art, architecture, design, fashion, photography and film. Many of our exhibitions explore the interconnections between disciplines, periods and cultures, and aim to imagine the world in new ways. Designers, artists and architects are our collaborators in this process.

Our exhibitions are complemented by comprehensively researched catalogues and a full range of public events. In partnership with renowned museums and art galleries, many of our exhibitions travel to reach both national and international audiences.

## **About the Barbican**

The Barbican is a catalyst for creativity, sparking possibilities for artists, audiences, and communities. We showcase the most exciting art from around the world, pushing traditional artistic boundaries to entertain and inspire millions of people, create connections, provoke debate, and reflect the world we live in.

We are an international arts and events centre rooted firmly in our own neighbourhood, collaborating with local communities and putting the City of London on the map as a destination for everybody. Central to our purpose is supporting emerging talent and shaping opportunities that will accelerate the next generation of creatives.

As a not-for-profit, we rely on the generosity of individuals and organisations, including our principal funder the City of London Corporation. Every ticket purchased, donation made, and pound earned supports our arts and learning programme and enables the widest possible range of people to experience the joy of the arts.

Opened in 1982, the Barbican is a unique and audacious building, recognised globally as an architectural icon. As well as our theatres, galleries, concert halls and cinemas, we have a large conservatory with over 1,500 species of plants and trees, a library, conference facilities, public and community spaces, restaurants, bars, and a picturesque lakeside oasis.

We are the home of the London Symphony Orchestra, and a London base of the Royal Shakespeare Company. We regularly co-commission, produce and showcase the work of our other partners and associates: the Academy of Ancient Music, the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Boy Blue, Britten Sinfonia, Cheek by Jowl, Drum Works, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and We Are Parable.

For more information, visit our [website](#) or connect with us on [Instagram](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Facebook](#) | [YouTube](#) | [Spotify](#) | [LinkedIn](#)

**About KNMA**

Founded in 2010, Kiran Nadar Museum of Art (KNMA) is a pioneering private museum of modern and contemporary art in South Asia, with branches in New Delhi and Noida. The not-for-profit organization produces rigorous exhibitions, educational and public-focused programs, and publications. Through its rigorous and multiple programs, KNMA emphasises its commitment to institutional collaborations and support-networks for artists and creative communities, while extending its reach to diverse audiences. The museum houses a growing collection of more than 14,000 artworks from South Asia, with a focus on the historical trajectories of 20th century Indian art, alongside the experimental practices of young contemporaries. KNMA was established through the initiative of art collector and philanthropist Kiran Nadar and is supported by the Shiv Nadar Foundation. The new standalone building of KNMA is due to open in the next three to four years, near Delhi's Indira Gandhi international airport.

[www.knma.in](http://www.knma.in)