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**ASIA SOCIETY MUSEUM PRESENTS EXHIBITION OF NOBEL LAUREATE
RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S PAINTINGS AND DRAWINGS**

***RABINDRANATH TAGORE: THE LAST HARVEST MARKS 150TH ANNIVERSARY OF TAGORE'S
BIRTH AND FIRST U.S. MUSEUM EXHIBITION DEVOTED TO HIS ARTISTIC LEGACY***

ON VIEW SEPTEMBER 9 THROUGH DECEMBER 31, 2011



Rabindranath Tagore, Untitled (Striding bird), 1928.
Ink on paper. 8 5/8 x 13 5/8 in.
Rabindra Bhavana. 00-2208-16

Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) is lauded around the world as a poet and writer, yet few outside India know that he was also a highly regarded visual artist. Marking the 150th anniversary of the year of Tagore's birth, this exhibition comprises more than 60 works on paper, drawn from three collections in India. Many of the works have never been shown in the United States.

The exhibition is curated by Professor R. Sivakumar of Visva Bharati

University and is coorganized by the National Gallery of Modern Art, Ministry of Culture, government of India and Asia Society Museum, New York. The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue, edited by Professor Sivakumar and featuring essays by leading scholars on Tagore's writing, philosophy and artistic practice.

A transformative figure in the modern cultural history of India, Tagore began painting in 1924 at the age of 63. He had no formal training; his artistic practice grew from his habits as a writer and poet, with revision marks and scratched out words on his manuscripts becoming free-form doodles. Tagore's cross-cultural encounters during his many trips abroad influenced his work—tribal artifacts of the Pacific, Javanese music and dance, ancient bronzes from China, arts and crafts of Japan, and European modernism are all evident.

Tagore's friend Victoria Ocampo, an Argentinian socialite and poet who was part of the vanguard scene in France, saw his drawings and encouraged him to pursue art. With Ocampo's help, Tagore mounted the first exhibition of his artwork in Paris in May 1930. The show traveled to Europe, Russia and the United States, earning him critical acclaim in the West, where Expressionists and Surrealists were celebrating the subconscious and exploring

raw sensations as a means of breaking from academicism and stylistic conventions. Despite favorable responses to his artwork abroad, he was hesitant to exhibit his works in India and did not do so until 1932 when he held a major show at the Government School of Art in Calcutta (Kolkata). He continued to paint until his death at the age of 80 in 1941.



Rabindranath Tagore, Untitled (Landscape with yellow sky framed by silhouetted trees), ca. 1935–36. Colored ink and poster paint on paper. 14 3/16 x 12 1/4 in. Rabindra Bhavana. 00-2076-16

Exhibition organization

The exhibition is divided into four thematic sections. A section titled **The Beginning** looks at the origins and development of his drawing and painting. **Beyond the Pages** explores Tagore's landscape paintings. Tagore's landscapes were less a depiction of actual scenery and more a focus on rhythm and the universal spirit of life that he felt permeated all of nature. Many of his works depict acrobatic figures that sometimes morph into various forms found in nature.

Discovery of Rhythm considers how his creative work in other fields, particularly music and dance, enabled Tagore to project movement and gestures into pattern, forms and fields of color in his drawings and paintings. The **Faces of the World** section explores Tagore's representation of the human face, the most frequently recurring form in his painting. Some may resemble Peruvian or Indonesian masks

that he saw during his travels but most are recognizable as universal types or *bhab* (a character, spirit, or quality in Bengali). They may be viewed as an extension of Tagore's own emphasis on commonality and coexistence, rather than divisions based on caste, culture and country.

About Tagore's life

Tagore lived during one of the most turbulent periods in history—through two World Wars and India's struggle for independence. Born in 1861 to a wealthy and prominent Bengali family, he published his first poetry collection at the age of 17. He attended school at the University College of London in 1878, but soon returned to India to manage his father's agricultural estates.

As Tagore's fame grew in the West, he remained devoted to political and social progress in his home state of Bengal. He founded the Santiniketan School devoted to rural education in West Bengal in 1901. Twenty years later, this school that initially began with only five students and five teachers was formally inaugurated as Visva Bharati, a progressive, experimental university still in operation today.

Tagore received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913—the first non-European to win the prize—for the English translation of his work *Gitanjali*. In 1915 he was knighted



Rabindranath Tagore, Untitled (Portrait of a woman with veil), 1934. Colored ink and opaque white on silk. 35 5/8 x 23 13/16 in. Rabindra Bhavana, 00-1849-16

by the British government, but later renounced this title in protest of British involvement in the massacre of civilians in Punjab.

Tagore was an advocate for the abolition of the caste system and for Indian independence, and he became good friends with Mohandas Gandhi, whom he was first to dub Mahatma (“great soul”). He wrote the national anthems of both India and Bangladesh. He died in 1941 without seeing an independent India.

Exhibition funding and related programs

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Asia Society will present a series of programs in conjunction with the exhibition including:

- Meet the Author with **Tahmima Anam**, who will discuss *The Good Muslim*, the second novel in her planned “Bengal Trilogy,” with **Samina Quraeshi**, on Tuesday, September 13, at 6:30 p.m.
- Members Lecture with **Sugata Bose** of Harvard University discussing Tagore’s literary and artistic achievements and India’s independence movement, Thursday, September 15, at 6:30 p.m.
- Inaugural Phillips Talbot Lecture with Dr. **Amartya Sen**, Harvard University, on the revival of the ancient Buddhist university Nalanda, Thursday, September 22, at 6:30 p.m.
- Coca-Cola **Family Day** celebrating the Diwali festival of lights and New Year on Saturday, October 22, from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.
- Discussion with **Rahul Mehrotra** on contemporary Indian architecture, Thursday, October 27, at 6:30 p.m.

For more information about programs visit AsiaSociety.org/nyc

About Asia Society Museum

Asia Society Museum is located at 725 Park Avenue (at 70th Street), New York City. The Museum is open Tuesday through Sunday from 11:00 a.m.–6:00 p.m. and Friday from 11:00 a.m.–9:00 p.m. Closed on Mondays and major holidays. General admission is \$10, seniors \$7, students \$5 and free for members and persons under 16. Free admission Friday evenings, 6:00 p.m.–9:00 p.m. The Museum is closed Fridays after 6:00 p.m. from July 1 through September 15. AsiaSociety.org/museum

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