

Cover: *Bhupen Khakhar*

c. 1979/81 by Anthony Stokes © Anthony Stokes

# BHUPEN KHAKHAR

WORKS FROM A PRIVATE BRITISH COLLECTION

**12 April – 3 May 2013**

# BHUPEN KHAKHAR

*Shanay Jhaveri*  
*March 2013*

Bhupen Khakhar travelled to England in early 1979 at the invitation of the Bath Academy of Art, where he would teach one day a week. During this period he stayed at Howard Hodgkin's family home in Wiltshire. On the 20th of June, he opened a solo exhibition at two adjacent galleries in London: Hester van Royen Gallery and Anthony Stokes Ltd<sup>1</sup>. The presentation was a selection, of paintings, glass paintings and watercolors produced by Khakhar in England, along with some earlier pictures sent by Gallery Chemould in Bombay<sup>2</sup>. Geeta Kapur, Vivan Sundaram and Howard Hodgkin, all played integral roles in making this show possible. The exhibition was the result of a trip that Anthony Stokes and Hester van Royen made to India supported by Air India, the Arts Council and the British Council in 1978. Stokes did not meet Khakhar on his visit to the subcontinent, but did acquire a painting by him, *Man Eating Jalebee* (1974), and resolved with van Royen to exhibit his work in London. A correspondence would ensue. In a letter dated 28/10/1978 Khakhar endearingly writes to Stokes:

“Since the last three days I am going through all the ‘Quotable Quotes’ books to begin a letter. In the school our English teacher taught us that when you write a letter or an essay the reader should be impressed by the very first sentence. He taught us all the proverbs, metaphors, idioms from Wren and Martin grammar book. Is it possible to address you a letter like this? All the perfumes of Arabia, will not sweeten this little hand or Why, man, if river were dry, I am able to fill it up with tears. I think I will give up the idea of writing you a letter the way Mr. Godbole taught us in X standard. So I begin -”<sup>3</sup>

The drawings and watercolors on display at Grosvenor Gallery were from Stokes private collection, all of which were given to him by Khakhar on his various trips to England. Seeing this small collection of material in 2013, a decade after Khakhars death, they serve not only as

markers of an enduring friendship, but also provide insight into the shifts taking place within Khakhar's practice at the time. These pieces date from the late 1970's and early 1980's, an occasion when Khakhar "overhauled his long-neglected draughtsmanship. For the first time he began to appreciate the "sketching" tradition of Santiniketan artists"<sup>4</sup>. Khakhar, a trained chartered accountant, arrived in Baroda to study at the Faculty of Fine Arts in 1962 prompted by the painter poet Gulammohammed Sheikh, and this assembly of drawings and watercolors are from "the second phase or layer in Khakhar's work... when he developed a representational project"<sup>5</sup>. He had firmly moved on from his earliest works, a number of collages that were shown at Gallery Chemould in 1965.

Khakhar would continue to draw throughout the rest of his career, having left behind numerous sketch books, with thousands of images, some more resolved than others. This unevenness is evident in this selection. Faces, characters and the spaces from his 'trade series' paintings are reencountered, for example the tailor, a recurrent figure, seen here in *Friends Tailor Shop* has also been met in *De-Luxe Tailor* (1972) which was exhibited at Stokes gallery, the *RAM Tailor* lithograph used on the cover of the 1972 April- May issue of *Vrshchik* or later in the 1988 oil on canvas *Tailor*. However, what else becomes apparent in this suite of drawings is the shift Khakhar was making in the mid 1970's and identified by Geeta Kapur, in which he was "expanding the pictorial field beyond his subjects and constructing a genre about everyday life in a provincial city where the townscape shades into the farmer's field"<sup>6</sup>. The resulting paintings, such as, *The Celebration of Guru Jayanti* (1980), *Death in a Family* (1980), were panoramic in scale and built up of little groups of people either going about their daily routines or simply communing with one another. Versions of those assemblies of persons, their interactions are observed in the swift renderings *The Tire Shop*, *Conversations*, *The Barber's Shop* and more fully in *Couple Arguing or Embracing Figures*.

Complimenting the drawings, in this presentation are three watercolors, two of which were part of Stokes original show, and are all consistent with Khakhar's watercolors from the 1970's which were "mostly of things seen – a still-life, a tree, a shrine, a single figure, or perhaps some vignette glimpsed from bus or train. Unlike the oil paintings, they did not attempt to create some encompassing world"<sup>7</sup>. The very tender watercolor *Two Men in Toilet* (1979) bares the inscription "To Tony and Teresa, with affection and love", making it a moving memento to a friendship, and its date 14/4/79 locates it within the body of material Khakhar made in England in the lead up to the exhibition<sup>8</sup>, which include the paintings *The Weatherman* (1979) and *Man in Pub* (1979), both expressions of Khakhar's perceptions of English life: "*The Weatherman* is a fantasy generated by the desolate preoccupations of an English winter....*Man in Pub* descends a rung or two further into the pit of English glumness"<sup>9</sup>.

These paintings occupy a special place within Khakhar's oeuvre, considering they are amongst his first painted outside India, and they have him negotiating directly with matters and social relations drawn from contexts unfamiliar to him. He would later paint and draw frequently when travelling; works like *First Day in New York* (1983), *British Rail* (1983), *Times Building* (1986), *Landscape in Bali* (1992) *Man from Thailand* (2002), a series of watercolors on the cotton mills of Manchester, to name a few, are all illustrative of his individual experiences and observations made abroad. Khakhar's first trip to Europe in 1976 exposed him to early Italian painting, during which he found that classical Western artists "faced certain problems which I face also as a painter: how to include the narrative aspects in a painting without destroying its structures."<sup>10</sup> The continued attempt to integrate 'the narrative aspects' is clearly borne out in *Man in Pub*. His second journey, in which he had his show with Stokes, also brought on another set of revelations: "after my visit to England in 1979, I saw that homosexuality was accepted. People lived together..."<sup>11</sup> It would seem to be a catalyst along with his mother's passing away in 1980, and the long standing association with his friend Vallabh that would lead to his coming-out, memorialized in the extraordinary painting *You Can't Please All* (1981), which was exhibited at his second one man show in London at Kasmin gallery in 1983.

Khakhar would also use Stokes's shows announcement as a space to share his thoughts and reflections. This is an approach true to Khakhar, who had previously used his exhibition openings and catalogues in mischievous and unexpected ways of "upturning the cultural assumptions of modernist art"<sup>12</sup>. In 1972 to accompany his show at Gallery Chemould, he produced a catalogue, *Truth Is Beauty and Beauty Is God*, which comprised of a fanciful biography and several self-authored interpretations of his paintings. Interspersed through the catalogue are a series of photographs of Khakhar himself posing with a French woman, Marianne Nicaise in a variety of guises. It has been contended that this catalogue gave Khakhar the opportunity "to articulate the complex dimensions of his artistic identity, which he normally avoided .... Khakhar directed attention away from himself as an individual 'artist' and from the product of his painting. In doing so, he broke down certain modernist barriers between the elite high culture of high art and the democracy of the public arena... he developed pioneering work that was in simulated and theoretical dialogue with mainstream contemporary Pop art- then happening and not yet historicized half a world away"<sup>13</sup>.

While not taken to the same degree in the Stokes announcement, his little note *Parable about Painting* is a humor filled account set in Varanasi of a pandit's obsession with putting his head between the horns of a buffalo. Eventually, the pandit after six months of considering this proposition, cannot resist, and fixes his head in the buffalo's horns. Frightened the creature throws the pandit to the ground. The villagers laugh and ask the pandit how a learned man like him could have attempted such an act, without thinking of the consequences, the pandit replies that he has been thinking about it for six months. Khakhar

ends the short note by stating, “painters are like pandit. They have to have an obsession of putting their heads between the horns to suffer the consequences of getting hurt and receiving sneers from the people around.” In putting forth this suggestion Khakhar has with great economy and wit, shared his vulnerabilities and fears, in choosing to be an artist, but also confirmed the desires, needs and compulsions to be one as well.

Khakhar would return to India on the 12th of September, 1979.

## Notes

---

1. In a letter to Geeta Kapur Anthony Stokes writes about the shows reception “We have had an extraordinary press reaction with good, constructive, thumbs up reviews from Bill Feaver, Observer, John McEwen, Spectator, a colour reproduction the Observer Magazine (Caryll Faraldi) with long caption, Timothy Hyman (five pages in London Magazine), next week we’ll Timothy’s other piece in Artscribe”. He ends the letter by saying “How Tree and I would have loved to see you here for this great time. So many people have been involved in Bhupen’s visit and his show, but none has been more responsible than you.”

2. The full correspondence between Antony Stokes and Kekoo and Khorshed Gandhi is preserved in the Anthony Stokes Archive, detailing the complications of consigning works and making payments related to the show. The archive also includes a detailed list of works exhibited.

It was a total of 24 works, 13 oil on canvas paintings, 2 glass paintings and 9 watercolors. This group included Khakhar’s now well-regarded *Barber* (1973), *Janta*, *watch-repairing* (1973), and *Death in a Family* (1978).

3. The entire correspondence between Khakhar and Stokes can be found in the Anthony Stokes Archive.

It includes letters even after Khakhars return to India, and also one in which Stokes informs Khakhar that he has closed his gallery, and that he should inquire with Kasmin gallery.

4. Timothy Hyman, ‘Panorama and Plentitude (1979–82); in *Bhupen Khakhar*, (Mumbai: Chemould Mapin 1998) 56.

5. Geeta Kapur, ‘*Bhupen Khakhar*’ in Bhupen Khakhar, (Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, September, 2002) 28.

6. Ibid. Kapur, 30.

7. Ibid. Hyman, 63.

8. The other works Khakhar made in England were *Howard Hodgkin’s House on Hand Painted Cushion* (1979), *Wiltshire House at Night* (1979), *Joe Hope and Mary Hope at Box* (1979) and a glass painting *Butcher’s Shop in London* (1979).

9. Timothy Hyman, ‘Vulnerability; Diffidence; Narrative (1975–79); in *Bhupen Khakhar*, (Mumbai: Chemould Mapin 1998) 54.

10. Ibid. Hyman, 52.

11. Timothy Hyman, ‘Sexuality and the Self (1981–95), in *Bhupen Khakhar*, (Mumbai: Chemould Mapin 1998) 68.

12. Geeta Kapur, “The Uncommon Universe of Bhupen Khakhar”, in *Pop Art and Vernacular Cultures*, ed. Kobena Mercer (The MIT Press, 2007) 102. A detail of the poster Khakhar designed for his February 1970 solo exhibition at Kunika-Chemould in Delhi is reproduced in this volume. Also, see Richard Bartholomew’s review of the same exhibition published originally in the Times of India, and now collected in *Richard Bartholomew: The Art Critic* (BART, 2012).

13. Beth Citron, ‘Bhupen Khakhar’s “Pop” in India, 1970–72’, in *Art Journal* (Summer 2012), 60–61.

# BHUPEN KHAKHAR

*Anthony Stokes  
March 2013*

The first Bhupen Khakhar painting I ever saw was at Howard Hodgkin's house in 1978. Entitled 'Tailor' it is one of a series of pictures of tradespeople and depicts a tailor cutting cloth. A little later I saw another from the series, 'Barber', attending to his gowned client who is looking at himself in a mirror which reflects his face back to us. Strands of hair have fallen to the floor, the doorway is complete with a 'welcome' mat and the shop is decked-out with the kind of tat that visitors to India in the seventies found either repulsive or enchanting..

I had a small, hand-to-mouth but neat gallery in Covent Garden, wanted to see more of Bhupen's work but a trip to India seemed unlikely. Teresa Gleadowe, then an Exhibitions Officer at the British Council, and a visitor to India herself, showed me how to fund a trip and managed much of what was to happen. I approached Trevor Turner at Air India, knowing that the airline had an art collection. Would I like to take another gallery owner? Our brief was to look at Indian contemporary art and to make an exhibition within a year.

One very warm and sunny morning in January 1979, Hester van Royen and I touched down in Delhi. Teresa's friend Geeta Kapur, pioneer critic of Indian art (awarded Padma Shri for her contribution to art in 2009) was to be our host and guide in Delhi. The British Council, Indian Airlines and The Indian Council for Cultural Relations were to take us to Bombay and Madras. In Bombay Foy Nissen, for the British Council, was our guide to artists, the two or three galleries there, and sites of that great city. We stayed with Vivan Sundaram in Baroda, dined in style with Nilima and Ghulam Mohammed Sheikh, although we failed to meet Bhupen as he was traveling, too. But we did see many of his pictures at Gallery Chemould in Bombay and, somehow, I brought back, as hand luggage, the near four foot square, beautiful painting of Bhupen's, 'Man Eating Jalebee, 1975'.

Hester van Royen and I visited twenty or so artists' studios in India and most of the few commercial galleries there. The contemporary art scene was, let's say, in an



early stage of development. But a handful of artists lived well from their work, or taught to supplement their incomes, much like in Europe or America. Many had attended art school abroad and had returned to practice in India. Generally, their aesthetics were too complex for my narrow vision, showing signs of both Indian tradition and western influence. Right or wrong, we felt most work would translate awkwardly in London. We decided to show Bhupen, simultaneously, at both galleries.

Most of Bhupen's paintings were sent to London from Bombay - courtesy Air India and the Visiting Arts Unit - in a hemp sack, the canvases loosely rolled around their stretchers. You can imagine the sack being thrown onto truck, plane, store, truck again, gallery floor. Bhupen had come to England well before his exhibition, to make pictures in Wiltshire, Cornwall, London, and to teach at Bath Academy. Just as well. He had serious conservation work to do.

Kasmin bought the painting 'Ranchodbai Relaxing in Winter, 1977' and, naturally,

wanted to know what the picture was about. When I put the question to Bhupen he wrote a description on the back of an envelope. Hard to read, I typed up Bhupen's short text. 'This is me on the right, shaving in a mirror, and that is my friend Ranchodbai, lying down with a guilt in his head...etc'. I gave the text back to Bhupen for his approval and he said 'No! It is not a guilt in his head. It's a quilt on his bed.'

Baroda's climate is predictable, so weather forecasts don't really exist there. Bhupen wasn't a fan of British weather but he was delighted by weather forecasts in the UK. Using the television as his model, he made the painting 'The Weatherman', a portrait of BBC's weatherman Jack Scott, with a map of the UK, cloud and wind symbols and so forth. When planning our private view and invitation list Bhupen, who'd become enamoured with the subject of his painting, urged me to invite Mr Scott. A few days after the private view Mr and Mrs Jack Scott had tea with Bhupen at the gallery.



# PLATES



*Man with Glasses (detail)*



[1] *Man with Glasses*

Circa Early 1970's  
Pencil on paper  
Unsigned  
24.6 x 19.9 cm (9 ½ x 7 ¾ in)



*In the Tailor's Shop (detail)*



[2] *In the Tailor's Shop*

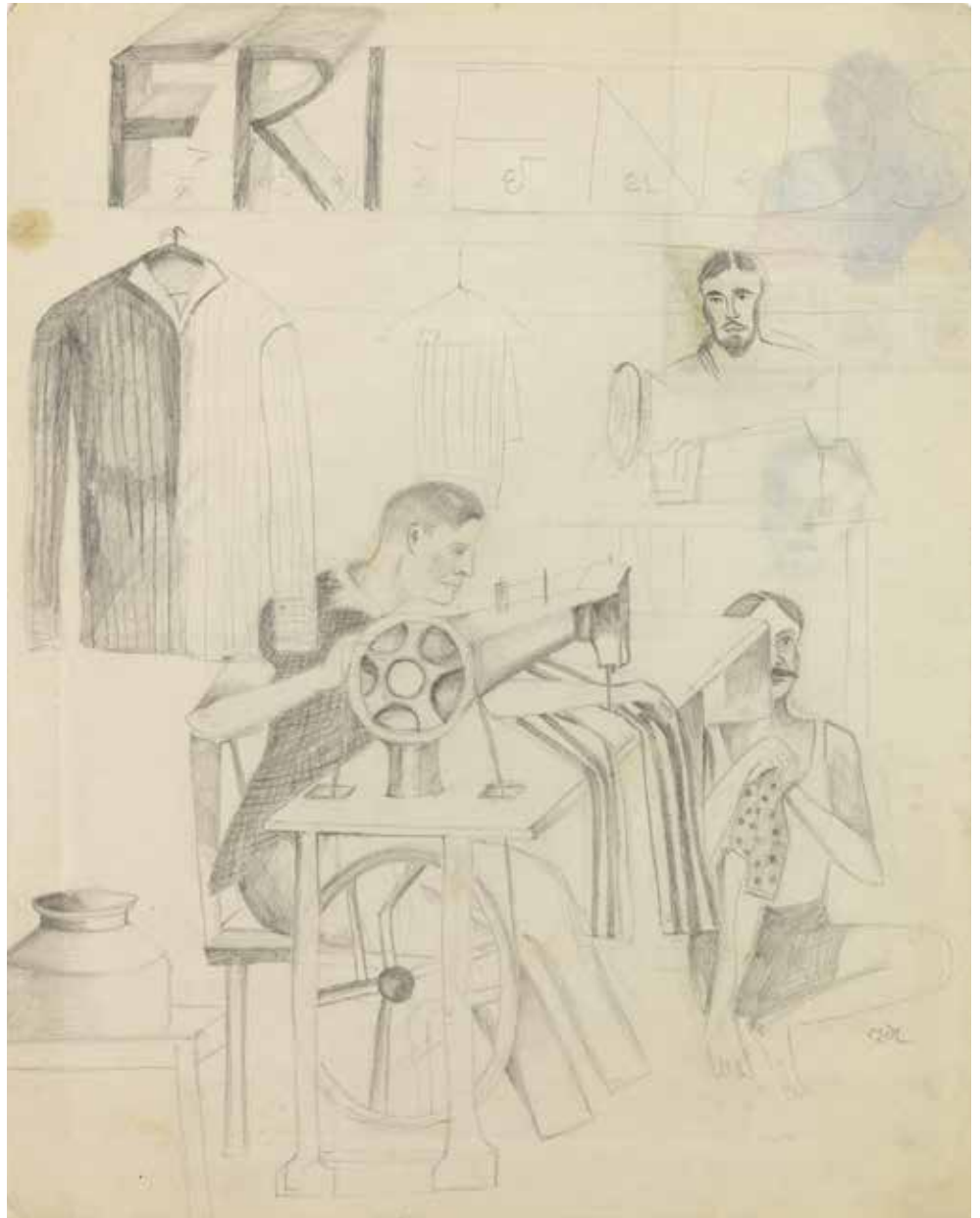
Pencil on paper  
Signed in Gujarati lower right  
23.6 x 25 cm (9 ¼ x 9 ¾ in)



[3] *The Spice Shop (verso)*

Double sided drawing  
Color Pencil on paper  
39 x 31 cm (15 ¼ x 12 ¼ in)





See: Hyman, Timothy,  
Bhupen Khakhar. Mumbai:  
Chemould and Mapin, 1998.  
p.91 image no. 28

*Study for The Tailor Shop (recto)*

Double sided drawing  
Pencil on paper  
39 x 31 cm (15 ¼ x 12 ¼ in)



[4] *Study for Death in the Family (verso)*

Double sided drawing  
Pencil on paper  
Unsigned  
24.6 x 27.5 cm (9 ½ x 10 ¾ in)



See: Hyman, Timothy,  
Bhupen Khakhar.  
Mumbai: Chemould and  
Mapin, 1998. p.33 image  
no.14

*Study for Guru Jayanti (recto)*

Double sided drawing  
Pencil on paper  
Signed in Gujarati lower right  
24.6 x 27.5 cm (9 ½ x 10 ¾ in)



[5] *Head of a Man (verso)*

Double sided drawing  
Pencil on paper  
Signed in Gujarati lower right  
26.9 x 20.8 cm (10 ½ x 8 in)



*Friends (recto)*

Double sided drawing  
Pencil on paper  
Signed in Gujarati lower right  
26.9 x 20.8 cm (10 ½ x 8 in)



*Man with Fan (detail)*



[6] *Man with Fan*

Pencil on paper  
Signed in Gujarati centre  
32.4 x 26.7 cm (12  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 10  $\frac{1}{2}$  in)



[7] *Study for Tailor Shop (verso)*

1979  
Double sided drawing  
Pencil on paper  
Unsigned  
31.1 x 38.8 cm (12 ¼ x 15 ¼ in)





*Man Smoking a Cigarette (recto)*

Exhibited: Bhupen Khakhar  
- Paintings, Glass Paintings  
& Watercolors 1972 - 1979,  
Hester von Royen Gallery  
and Anthony Stokes Ltd, 20  
June - 14 July 1979, no. 8

1979  
Double sided drawing  
Pencil on paper  
Signed in Gujarati lower left  
31.1 x 38.8 cm (12 ¼ x 15 ¼ in)



*Study for The Celebration  
of Guru Jayanti (detail)*



See: Hyman, Timothy,  
Bhupen Khakhar. Mumbai:  
Chemould and Mapin, 1998.  
p.37 image no.18

[8] *Study for The Celebration  
of Guru Jayanti*

Pencil on paper  
Unsigned  
26.6 x 24 cm (10 ½ x 9 ½ in)



*Man Drinking at Table (detail)*



[9] *Man Drinking at Table*

Pencil on paper  
Signed in Gujarati lower middle  
24 x 26.9 cm (9 ½ x 10 ½ in)



*Interior Study I  
Residency Bungalow, Baroda (detail)*



[10] *Interior Study I*  
*Residency Bungalow, Baroda*

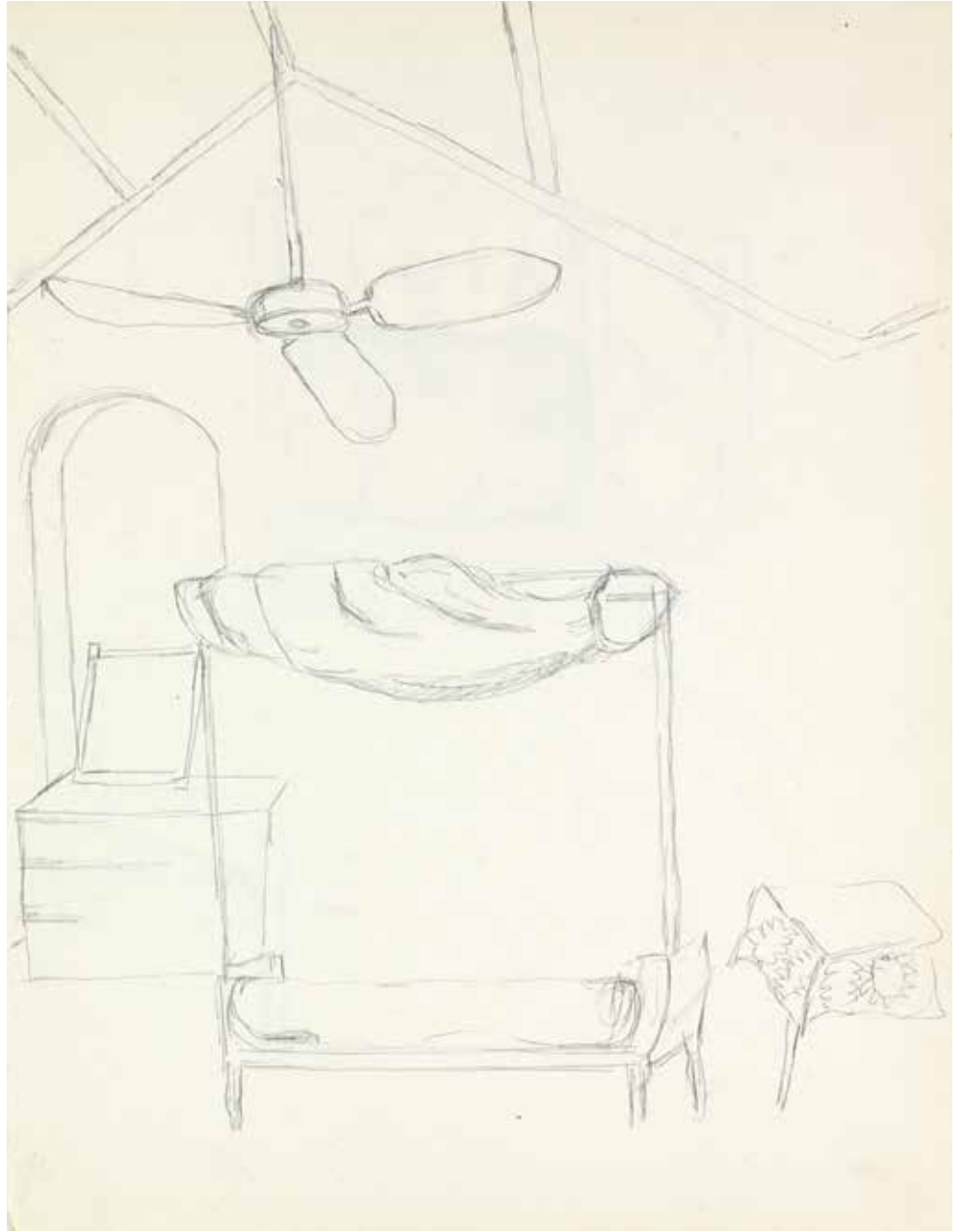
Pencil on paper  
Signed and dated in Gujarati lower left  
26.8 x 20.9 cm (10 ½ x 8 ¼ in)



[11] *Interior Study II and III*  
*Residency Bungalow, Baroda (verso)*

Double sided drawing  
Pencil on paper  
Unsigned  
27 x 20.8 cm (10 ½ x 8 ¼ in)





*Interior Study II and III*  
*Residency Bungalow, Baroda (recto)*

Double sided drawing  
Pencil on paper  
Unsigned  
27 x 20.8 cm (10 ½ x 8 ¼ in)



*Pullover (detail)*



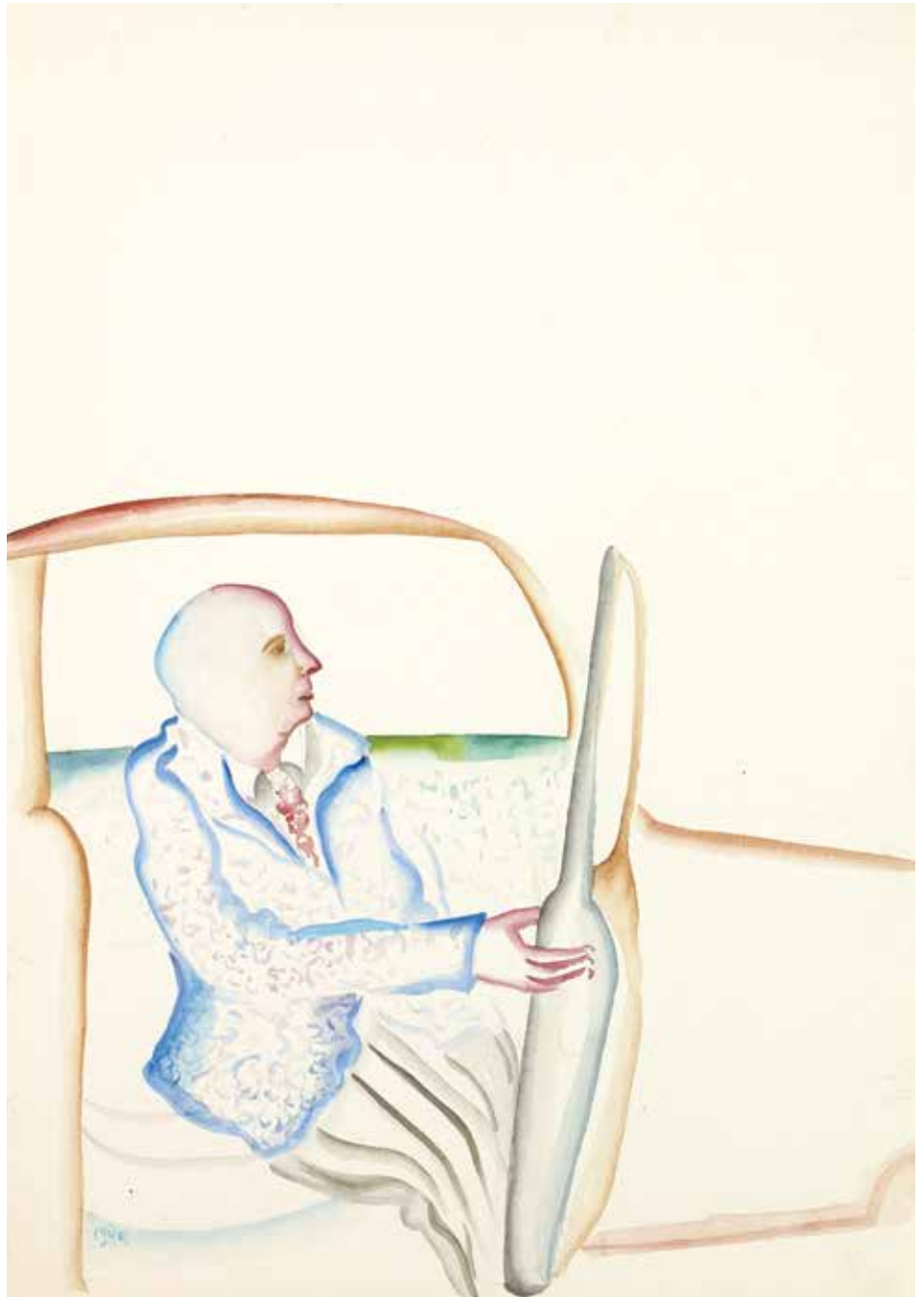
Exhibited: Bhupen Khakhar  
- Paintings, Glass Paintings  
& Watercolors 1972 - 1979,  
Hester von Royen Gallery  
and Anthony Stokes Ltd, 20  
June - 14 July 1979, no. 2

[12] *Pullover*

1979  
Watercolor on Paper  
Signed in Gujarati Lower right  
36 x 25 cm (14 x 9 ¾ in)



*Man Getting Out of His Car (detail)*



Exhibited: Bhupen Khakhar  
- Paintings, Glass Paintings  
& Watercolors 1972 - 1979,  
Hester von Royen Gallery  
and Anthony Stokes Ltd, 20  
June - 14 July 1979, no. 3

[13] *Man Getting Out of His Car*

1979  
Watercolor on paper  
Signed in Gujarati lower left  
36 x 25 cm (14 x 9  $\frac{3}{4}$  in)



*The Barber's shop (detail)*



[14] *The Barber's shop*

Pencil on paper  
Signed in Gujarati lower middle  
26 x 36.9 cm (10  $\frac{1}{4}$  x 14  $\frac{1}{2}$  in)



*Two men in a Toilet (detail)*





Exhibited: Bhupen Khakhar  
- Paintings, Glass Paintings  
& Watercolors 1972 - 1979,  
Hester von Royen Gallery  
and Anthony Stokes Ltd,  
London, 20 June - 14 July  
1979, no. 5

[15] *Two men in a Toilet*

Watercolor on paper  
Signed and dated lower right;  
signed and dated 14/4/79 verso and inscribed  
*To Tony and Teresa, with affection and love*  
25 x 36 cm (9 ¾ x 14 in)

Invitation card  
*Bhupen Khakhar - Paintings*  
Glass Paintings & Watercolors 1972-1979  
Hester von Royen Gallery and Anthony Stokes Ltd  
20 June-14 July 1979, © Anthony Stokes, London





BHUPEN KHAKHAR was born in 1934, he was brought up in Bombay; he holds degrees in Economics, Auditing and Public Finance, and while in Baroda he still continues to work each morning as a chartered accountant. A parallel to Lowry has been suggested; what makes both representative is their refusal to break with their past, to reject what most people will pay to avoid.

Sayings of Bhupen Khakhar

"For me painting is not a very serious thing. It is a day to day activity. I feel I've done my work as a social being when I've done my morning accountancy."

"A bouquet of plastic roses is an eternal joy to the eye."

"Carved wooden fruits and vegetables look luscious. Neon high light adds fluorescent richness to their form."

"Good taste can be very killing."

"I should not be forced to relate to anything. I may want to relate to something that others do not consider art."

Regular one-man exhibitions in Bombay and New Delhi since 1965.

Represented India in:

Art in India, London 1966  
Sao Paulo Biennale, 1968  
First Indian Triennale, 1968  
Contemporary Indian Painting, Washington, 1973  
Menton Biennale, 1977

Will represent India in 1982 during the 1982 Festival of India, at the Tate Gallery, London.

# Grosvenor Gallery

Photography  
**Matt Pia**

Design  
**CHK Design**

Print  
**Silveredge**

We would like to thank Shanay Jhaveri,  
Anthony Stokes, Timothy Hyman and  
everyone at Grosvenor Gallery for their help.

For a full list of Exhibitions and a Biography  
on Bhupen Khakhar please visit our website.

**Grosvenor Gallery**  
21 Ryder Street  
London SW1Y 6PX

T +44 (0) 20 7484 7979  
F +44 (0) 20 7484 7980  
E [art@grosvenorgallery.com](mailto:art@grosvenorgallery.com)

**[grosvenorgallery.com](http://grosvenorgallery.com)**