

Bhupen Khakhar's Indian Pop Art

Image no: 1

Caption: Bhupen Khakhar, *Interior of a Temple*, 1965, Mixed media on board, 121.9 x 121.3 cm, Christie's. Collection of Abhishek and Radhika Poddar.

Link: <https://www.christies.com/lot/lot-6053251>

Image no: 2

Caption: Bhupen Khakhar, *Untitled*, 1966, Watercolour on paper, 32.5 x 26.5 cm, Mutual Art.

Link: <https://www.mutualart.com/Artwork/Untitled/E9C19562C703024DBB745810CB30B711>

Image no: 3

Caption: Bhupen Khakhar, *Interior of a Muslim House No.1*, 1965, Collage and mixed media on canvas, 91.4 x 76.2 cm, Sotheby's.

Link: <https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2019/boundless-india-in1901/lot.7.html?locale=en>

Image no: 4

Caption: Bhupen Khakhar, *De-Lux Tailors*, 1972, Oil on canvas, 106.9 x 83.4 cm, Tate, United Kingdom, Estate of Bhupen Khakhar. Howard Hodgkin Collection.

Link: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/bhupen-khakhar-2406/five-things-know-about-bhupen-khakhar>

Image no: 5

Caption: Bhupen Khakhar, *Pan Shop No. 1*, c. 1965, Oil and collage on canvas, 83.8 x 83.8 cm, Christie's.

Link: <https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-6073792>

Image no: 6

Caption: Jyoti Bhatt, *Bhupen Khakhar*, 1963, Museum of Art & Photography, Bengaluru.

Link: N/A

Image no: 7

Caption: Jyoti Bhatt, *Artist Meeting During the L K A Protest in Delhi*, 1971, DC.00236, Museum of Art & Photography, Bengaluru.

Link:

<https://map.cumulus.co.in/client/map/collection#/search/7885?src=srh&q=bhupen&oq=bhupen>p= def&view=grid&searchField=All&perPage=20&pageNumber=1&sortBy=UserNumber3&sortOrder=ASC>

Image no: 8

Caption: Jyoti Bhatt, *Bhupen Khakhar, Raghav Kaneria, Pradyumna Tanna and Sunil Kothari, Vadodara*, 1961, DC.00636, Museum of Art & Photography, Bengaluru.

Link:

<https://map.cumulus.co.in/client/map/collection#/search/12878?src=art&q=bhupen&oq=bhupen>p= def&view=grid&searchField=All&sortBy=UserNumber3&sortOrder=ASC>

Image no: 9

IMAGE CREDITS

Caption: Jyoti Bhatt, *Bhupen Khakhar at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Vadodara*, 1971, DC.00394, Museum of Art & Photography, Bengaluru.

Link:

https://map.cumulus.co.in/client/map/collection#/search/12641?src=srh&q=Bhupen%20Khakhar&og=Bhupen%20Khakhar&_qtp=def&view=grid&searchField=All&limit=20&page=1&sortBy=UserNumber3&sortOrder=ASC

Image no: 10

Caption: Bhupen Khakhar, *Man with a Bouquet of Plastic Flowers*, 1975/1976, Oil on canvas, 1400 x 1450 cm, National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi.

Link: <https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/features/man-with-a-bouquet-of-plastic-flowers>

Image no: 11

Caption: Bhupen Khakhar, *A Parsi Family*, 1968, Oil on canvas, 124.5 x 94 cm, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem. Gift of the Chester and Davida Herwitz Collection, 2001.

Link: https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/a-parsi-family/IgFLyzV_cv1uiw?hl=en

Image no: 12

Caption: Bhupen Khakhar, *You Can't Please All*, 1981, Oil paint on canvas, 179.7 × 181 × 0.4 cm, T07200, Tate, United Kingdom. Estate of Bhupen Khakhar.

Link: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/khakhar-you-cant-please-all-t07200>

Image no: 13

Caption: Bhupen Khakhar, *Man with a Bouquet of Plastic Flowers*, 1975/1976, Oil on canvas, 1400 x 1450 cm, National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi.

Link: <https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/features/man-with-a-bouquet-of-plastic-flowers>

Image no: 14

Caption: Bhupen Khakhar, *Mukhti Bahini Soldier*, 1972, Oil paint on canvas, Tohu Magazine, Photographed by Pablo Bartholomew. Collection of Devinder and Kanwaldeep Sahney.

Link: <http://tohumagazine.com/article/pleasures-other-flesh>

Image no: 15

Caption: Bhupen Khakhar, *Man in Pub*, Oil on canvas, 101 x 101 cm, Bonham's, London.

Link:

<https://www.bonhams.com/auction/23933/lot/18/bhupen-khakhar-india-1934-2003-man-in-pub-man-in-pub/>

Image no: 16

Caption: Bhupen Khakhar, *Portrait of Pandoo*, 1977, Oil on canvas, 104.8 x 83.8 cm, Grosvenor Gallery, London.

Link:

<https://www.grosvenorgallery.com/artists/40-bhupen-khakhar/works/443-bhupen-khakhar-portrait-of-pandoo-1977/>

Image no: 17

Caption: Bhupen Khakhar, Detail, *Barber's Shop*, 1973, Photographed by Jean-Louis Losi, The Guardian.

Link:

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/may/21/bombay-dreams-how-bhupen-khakhar-captured-spirit-of-city#img-1>

Image no: 18

Caption: DD Neroy, D Lal Art studio, *Portrait Depicting Mahatma Gandhi, Buddha, Jesus Christ and Krishna*, early 20th century, Chromolithograph print on paper, 49 x 36 cm, POP.10305, Museum of Art & Photography, Bengaluru.

Link:

https://map.cumulus.co.in/client/map/collection#/search/10530?src=srh&q=Gandhi&oq=Gandhi&_qtp=_def&view=grid&searchField=All&perPage=20&pageNumber=1&sortBy=UserNumber3&sortOrder=ASC

Image no: 19

Caption: *Nehru's life*, depicted in a poster, 1950s, Wikimedia Commons.

Link:

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nehru%27s life, depicted in a poster probably from the 1950%27s.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nehru%27s_life,_depicted_in_a_poster_probably_from_the_1950%27s.jpg)

Image no: 20

Caption: *Pavan Putra Hanuman*, 1957, Lithography on paper, 98 x 72 cm, POP.10130, Museum of Art & Photography, Bengaluru.

Link:

https://map.cumulus.co.in/client/map/collection#/search/11731?src=srh&q=hanuman&oq=12&_qtp=_flt&view=grid&searchField=Department&perPage=20&pageNumber=1&sortBy=UserNumber3&sortOrder=ASC

Image no: 21

Caption: *Promotional Calendar for Ciba (India) LTD*, 1937, Litho offset print, 71 x 51 cm, POP.00819, Museum of Art & Photography, Bengaluru.

Link:

https://map.cumulus.co.in/client/map/collection#/search/9439?src=srh&q=calendar&oq=12&_qtp=_flt&department=&view=grid&searchField=Department&perPage=20&pageNumber=2&sortBy=UserNumber3&sortOrder=ASC

Image no: 22

Caption: *Hindi Film Poster for 'Insaaf'*, 1966, Offset lithograph, 102.7 x 76.2 cm, POP.00890, Museum of Art & Photography, Bengaluru.

Link:

https://map.cumulus.co.in/client/map/collection#/search/8314?src=srh&q=film%20poster&oq=12&_qtp=_flt&department=&view=grid&searchField=Department&perPage=20&pageNumber=1&sortBy=UserNumber3&sortOrder=ASC

Image no: 23

Caption: Bhupen Khakhar, *A Parsi Family*, 1968, Oil on canvas, 124.5 x 94 cm, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem. Gift of the Chester and Davida Herwitz Collection, 2001.

Link: https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/a-parsi-family/jgFLyzV_cv1uiw?hl=en

Image no: 24

Caption: *Parsi couple on their Wedding Day*, 1942, Wikimedia Commons.

Link:

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Parsi_wedding_portrait_with_Dastur_MN_Dhalla.jpg

Image no: 25

Caption: *Group portrait of Parsee women wearing saris*, ca. 1900, 28.7 x 23.3 cm, 574822i, Wellcome Collection, London.

Link: <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/t6bum62s>

Image no: 26

Caption: Suresh Punjabi, *Untitled (Family Portrait Taken Before a Pilgrimage)*, Suhag Studio, Nagda, Madhya Pradesh, 1979, Celluloid negative, 6 x 6 cm, PHY.12258, Museum of Art & Photography, Bengaluru. Gifted by Suresh Punjabi & Family / Studio Suhag.

Link:

https://map.cumulus.co.in/client/map/collection#/search/10216?src=srh&q=Suresh%20Punjabi&qtp=_def&view=grid&searchField=All&perPage=80&pageNumber=2&sortBy=UserNumber3&sortOrder=ASC

Image no: 27

Caption: *Family Portraits*, Art 365. Collection of Raghav Kohli, New Delhi.

Link: <https://www.art365.in/studio-portraits-photographs>

Image no: 28

Caption: *Family Portraits*, Art 365. Collection of Raghav Kohli, New Delhi.

Link: <https://www.art365.in/studio-portraits-photographs>

Image no: 29

Caption: *Family Portraits*, Art 365. Collection of Raghav Kohli, New Delhi.

Link: <https://www.art365.in/studio-portraits-photographs>

Image no: 30

IMAGE CREDITS

Caption: Suresh Punjabi, *Untitled (Group Portrait of a Family)*, Suhag Studio, Nagda, Madhya Pradesh, 1986-1987, Celluloid negative, 6 x 6 cm, PHY.12225, Museum of Art & Photography, Bengaluru. Gifted by Suresh Punjabi & Family / Studio Suhag.

Link:

https://map.cumulus.co.in/client/map/collection#/search/10184?src=srh&q=Suresh%20Punjabi&qtp=_def&view=grid&searchField=All&perPage=80&pageNumber=2&sortBy=UserNumber3&sortOrder=ASC

Image no: 31

Caption: *Jamsetji Tata with family*, Economic Times.

Link:

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/magazines/panache/famous-tale-of-tatas-will-soon-get-a-reel-spin-t-series-acquires-rights-to-a-novel-about-the-renowned-family/articleshow/91767109.cms>

Image no: 32

Caption: William Johnson, *A Parsee Family from the series Photographs of Western India Volume I, Costumes and Characters*, ca. 1855-1862, Albumen, 26 x 20 cm, Southern Methodist University, Central University Libraries, DeGolyer Library.

Link: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:A_Parsee_Family_\(9806715795\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:A_Parsee_Family_(9806715795).jpg)

Image no: 33

Caption: Bourne & Shepherd, *Parsee wedding*, India, between 1890 and 1923, Washington, D.C. Frank and Frances Carpenter Collection.

Link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Parsee_wedding_India_LCCN96511787.jpg

Image no: 34

Caption: Bhupen Khakhar, *Padmanabhan*, 1990, Watercolour on paper, 97.8 x 114.3 cm, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem. Gift of the Chester and Davida Herwitz Collection, 2001.

Link: <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/padmanabhan/XAHOsdjBXUIOUg>

Image no: 35

Caption: Bhupen Khakhar, *Death in the Family*, 1978, Oil on canvas, 111.5 x 123 cm, IS.45-1979, Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

Link: <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O72180/death-in-the-family-painting-khakhar-bhupen/>

Image no: 36

Caption: Bhupen Khakhar, *Twins*, 1990, Oil on canvas, 86 x 86 cm, Grosvenor Gallery, London.

Link: <https://www.grosvenorgallery.com/artists/40-bhupen-khakhar/works/444-bhupen-khakhar-twins-1990/>

Image no: 37

Caption: Bhupen Khakhar, *Two Men in Benaras*, 1982, Oil on canvas, 160 x 160 cm, Sotheby's.

Link: <https://www.sothebys.com/en/buy/auction/2019/coups-de-coeur/bhupen-khakhar-two-men-in-benares>

Image no: 38

Caption: Bhupen Khakhar, *In a Boat*, 1984, Oil on canvas, 172 x 173 cm, Painting: Now And Forever, Part III, Greene Naftali Gallery and Matthew Marks Gallery, New York.

Link:

<https://matthewmarks.com/exhibitions/painting-now-and-forever-part-iii-06-2018/lightbox/works/in-a-boat-1984-4422>

Image no: 39

Caption: Bhupen Khakhar, *You Can't Please All*, 1981, Oil paint on canvas, Support: 175.6 × 175.6 cm, Frame: 179.7 × 181 × 0.4 cm, T07200, Tate, United Kingdom. Estate of Bhupen Khakhar.

Link: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/khakhar-you-cant-please-all-t07200>

Image no: 40

Caption: Bhupen Khakhar, *Twins*, 1990, Oil on canvas, 86 x 86 cm, Grosvenor Gallery, London.

Link:

<https://www.grosvenorgallery.com/artists/40-bhupen-khakhar/works/444-bhupen-khakhar-twins-1990/>

Image no: 41

Caption: Bhupen Khakhar, *Manchester Cotton Mills*, Watercolor on paper, 40.6 x 30.5 cm, Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, Delhi NCR.

Link:

<https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/manchester-cotton-mills-bhupen-khakhar/bwENKzaogUaRrw?hl=en>

Image no: 42

Caption: Bhupen Khakhar, *Gossip*, 1985, Oil on canvas, 63.2 x 49.5 cm, Grosvenor Gallery, London.

Link:

<https://www.grosvenorgallery.com/artists/40-bhupen-khakhar/works/445-bhupen-khakhar-gossip-1985/>

Image no: 43

Caption: Jogen Chowdhury, *His peaceful life in Heaven - Homage to Bhupen*, 2013, Oil on canvas, 121.5 x 152 cm, Ocula.

Link:

<https://ocula.com/art-galleries/galerie-mirchandani-steinruecke/artworks/jogen-chowdhury/his-peaceful-life-in-heaven/>

Image no: 44

Caption: Atul Dodiya, *Shri Khakhar Prasanna*, 2005, 36 painted fibreglass busts on 3 metal stands with 2 fibreglass crocodiles, Stand: 182.8 x 274.3 x 38 cm, Busts: 73.6 x 38 x 30.4 cm, Crocodile: 25.4 x 81.2 x 228.6 cm, Chemould Prescott Road, Mumbai.

Link:

<https://www.gallerychemould.com/artists/43-atul-dodiya/works/2889-atul-dodiya-shri-khakhar-prasanna-2005/>

Image no: 45

Caption: Gulammohammed Sheikh, *Thinking of Bhupen – I/6*, 2015, Digital collage, inkjet on Harman by Hahne-Muhle canvas, 38.1 x 125.8 cm, Grosvenor Gallery, London.

Link:

<https://www.grosvenorgallery.com/exhibitions/11/works/artworks-112-gulammohammed-sheikh-thinking-of-bhupen-i-6-2015/>

Developed in the 1950s, the Pop Art movement is distinguished by its use of bold colours, humour and satire, references to everyday imagery and criticism of consumerist culture. Through the integration of irony, imagery from popular, religious and secular visual cultures, and representations of disparate classes of people in ordinary environments, Bhupen Khakhar is known for developing a unique approach to Pop Art.

Background

Khakhar was born in 1934 in Bombay, and moved to Baroda in 1963 to study art criticism on the artist Gulammohammed Sheikh's (b. 1937) invitation. Part of a vibrant circle of artists that were shaping the debates on Indian art and aesthetics of the time, he experienced social freedoms in Baroda that would have been impossible for him at home in Bombay. Here, he simultaneously worked as a chartered accountant, a painter and a writer until his death in 2003. Let's now turn to some of his iconic works that reveal how he developed a unique visual language within the frame of Pop.

Man with a Bouquet of Plastic Flowers

Man with a Bouquet of Plastic Flowers (1975–1976) exemplifies the use of irony and artifice, which were two hallmarks of Pop. The composition is centred around a man in a characteristically stiff or intentionally awkward posture, typical of many of Khakhar's figures. This painting can be read within the context of Indian 'calendar prints' which often featured prominent figures like politicians, as we see here. By drawing from such styles of prints, postcards or posters that were found across homes and streets in India, he bridges the gap between the highbrow, academic art of oil painting and popular visual culture.

Understanding this work hinges in large part on the fact that the flowers the man holds are plastic, and therefore artificial and devoid of life. This may make us pause as we read his expression and body language. He looks straight at us, his face shaded and mouth downcast. Is he melancholic? Is he to be read as sincere? Further clues can be found in the everyday events portrayed in the background. Instead of scenes of glory or admiration that were conventions of calendar art, this

man is surrounded by empty interiors and scenes that speak of alienation, and the darkness of ordinary life.

Let's now turn to another work where his figures are painted in a deliberately awkward and unsettling manner.

A Parsi Family

The painting *A Parsi Family* (1968) presents a traditional group portrait seen from an unusual distance. Instead of the warmth we might expect from a family portrait, we find the figures placed in an uninterrupted, unmarked and strange setting. The family is framed by two potted floor plants on each side, without much indication of liveliness among them otherwise, almost like a still life. The distance of our viewing and abstraction from normal life add to the wryness of this portrait. The work is also a clever comment on the long tradition of studio photography in India, whereby families might have their portraits taken in front of aspirational backgrounds signalling ambition or other desires.

The family is presented as Parsis, a small Indian community primarily associated today with the history of Bombay, and including some of the most prominent citizens of the city. Parsis, or Zoroastrians, are an ethno-religious group who fled from persecution in Iran to ports in Gujarat beginning in the 8th century. It's ironic and almost humorous to see the family stripped of any further context.

Employing techniques of satire and humour to reflect on societal conditions and familial lives, Khakhar also turns his lens inwards in his later works, presenting deeply personal narratives with a sense of vulnerability.

You Can't Please All

Beginning in the early 1980s, Khakhar's work took a more personal turn, making him the first artist in India to address his homosexuality through his paintings. Khakhar's iconic 'coming out' painting *You Can't Please All* (1981) shows a nude man on a balcony in the foreground as he watches a layered townscape below. The

balcony acts as a physical and metaphorical edge of his private life, and the man's position and gaze indicate his engagement in the public realm.

In the narrative scene below, we see ordinary elements of village life amidst a representation of one of Aesop's fables about a man and his son who unintentionally end up killing their donkey by obeying the guidance of their community. The very title of Khakhar's painting comes from the last line of the story, when an old man advises the father and son, 'Please all, and you will please none', implying the difficulties Khakhar himself faced with not being accepted in society. In this way, the painting integrates the personal, the everyday and the symbolic, all of which remain central to Pop and elements of Khakhar's work through the rest of his life.

Khakhar not only left a deep imprint on the trajectory of Indian art through his radical subject matter, but also through the influence he had on a closely-knit circle of artists in India. Following his death in 2003, his legacy has been celebrated in a number of works his friends and contemporaries such as Jogen Chowdhury (b.1939), Atul Dodiya (b.1959) and Gulammohammed Sheikh created in his memory, as we see here.

Postscript

Works by Bhupen Khakhar (1934–2003) have also contributed to the narrative figuration movement that he was a part of in Baroda. His painting, 'You Can't Please All' was exhibited as part of the landmark exhibition 'Place for People', which toured from Bombay to New Delhi in 1981. This exhibition is now regarded as a turning point in Indian modernism, moving from symbolic and abstract imagery to personal and narrative subject matter.

* Please note that Bhupen Khakhar passed away in 2003 not 2013. We apologise for the error in the video.

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