How Sudhir Patwardhan Became a 'Painter of the People'

Image no: 1

Caption: *Sudhir Patwardhan,* 2017, Courtesy of Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi.

Link: https://openthemagazine.com/art-culture/sudhir-patwardhan-an-artist-every-day/

Image no: 2

Caption: *Aerial view of city of Mumbai with skyscrapers Mahalakshmi,* Mumbai, Maharashtra, 2022, Envato Elements.

Link:
https://elements.envato.com/aerial-view-of-city-of-mumbai-with-skyscrapers-mah-NSYHBDA

Image no: 3

Caption: *Rising drone shot of a classic Mumbai scene with trains, traffic and large buildings,* Envato Elements.

Link:
https://elements.envato.com/rising-drone-shot-of-a-classic-mumbai-scene-with-t-WRDYSCU

Image no: 4

Caption: *Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus timelapse from day to night Mumbai,* Envato Elements.

Link:
https://elements.envato.com/chhatrapati-shivaji-maharaj-terminus-timelapse-fro-EFM7TDQ

Image no: 5

Caption: Sudhir Patwardhan, *Death on the Street,* 2007, Acrylic on canvas, 96.5 x 116.8 cm © Sudhir Patwardhan and The Guild, Mumbai.

Link: N/A

Image no: 6

Caption: Sudhir Patwardhan, *Ceremony*, 1984, Oil on canvas, 106.6 x 127 cm © Sudhir Patwardhan and The Guild, Mumbai.

Link: N/A

Image no: 7

Caption: Sudhir Patwardhan, *Untitled-2*, 2007, Acrylic on canvas, 182 x 243.8 cm (diptych) © Sudhir Patwardhan and The Guild, Mumbai.

Link: N/A

Image no: 8

Caption: Sudhir Patwardhan, *Accident on May Day,* 1981, Acrylic on canvas, 121.9 x 274.84 cm © Sudhir Patwardhan and The Guild, Mumbai.

Link: N/A

Image no: 9

Caption: Sudhir Patwardhan, *Bylanes Saga,* 2007, Acrylic on canvas, 182.8 x 243.84 cm (diptych) © Sudhir Patwardhan and The Guild, Mumbai.

Link: N/A

Image no: 10

Caption: Sudhir Patwardhan, *Street Play,* 1981, Oil on canvas, 91 x 182.8 cm © Sudhir Patwardhan and The Guild, Mumbai.

Link: N/A

Image no: 11

Caption: *Textile workers strike of 1982-83,* Photograph, Published in "Two Struggles in a Changing India: Bombay Mill Strikes and Farmers' Agitation", *The Leaflet,* 30 March 2010.

Link:
https://theleaflet.in/two-struggles-in-a-changing-india-bombay-mill-strikes-and-farmers-agitation-rights/

Image no: 12

Caption: *Datta Samant was a popular trade union leader,* Photograph, Published in "Veteran Unionist Dada Samant Dead", *Mumbai Mirror,* 23 May 2020.

Link:
https://mumbaimirror.indiatimes.com/mumbai/other/veteran-unionist-dada-samant-dead/articleshow/75907039.cms

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Image no: 13

Caption: *Bombay's Textile Mill Strikes,* Photograph, Published in "Explained: Forty Years Later, Looking Back at the First All India General Strike of 1982", *News Click,* 18 Jan 2022.

Link:
https://www.newsclick.in/Explained-Forty-Years-Later-Looking-Back-First-All-India-General-Strike-198

Image no: 14

Caption: Sudhir Patwardhan, *Overbridge*, 1981, Oil on canvas, 121.9 x 121.9 cm © Sudhir Patwardhan and The Guild, Mumbai.

Link: N/A

Image no: 15

Caption: Sudhir Patwardhan, *Another Day in the Old City,* 2017, Acrylic on canvas, 121.9 x 274.3 cm © Sudhir Patwardhan and The Guild, Mumbai.

Link: N/A

Image no: 16

Caption: Sudhir Patwardhan, *Lower Parel,* 2001, Acrylic on canvas, 121.9 x 243.8 cm © Sudhir Patwardhan and The Guild, Mumbai.

Link: N/A

A self-taught artist and radiologist, Sudhir Patwardhan (b.1949) began to paint professionally when he moved to Bombay from his hometown Pune in the mid-1970s. The cosmopolitan city, its suburbs and neighbouring areas offered him new opportunities, as he began to participate in its emerging leftist subculture. His paintings frequently reflect his politics, his affinity with the working classes and his aspirations of being 'a painter of the people'.

Patwardhan conflates multiple moments of a narrative onto a singular canvas, representing life in the city. We see this, for instance, in Accident on May Day (1981), which depicts a crowded train platform with passersby carrying an injured man on a stretcher. Building off principles of realism, he represents his subjects and surroundings in an accessible manner. With Street Play (1981), Patwardhan offers perspectives on mill workers' struggles in the city in the early 1980s. Here he divides his composition into three parts bringing together disjointed segments of an urban panorama. We see a shadowed textile mill on the left, with a group of seemingly overburdened workers exiting the building. A car, possibly belonging to the mill owner, is split by a pillar, uniting the left and centre panels. Behind the pillar, we see a figure who bears resemblance to the artist watching a street performance by a leftist theatre group in central Bombay. The performance, likely focusing on social injustice, is seen by oppressed workers, upper-class citizens of the city as well as other passersby. Patwardhan continues the narrative through a reflection of the scene in a glass storefront in the right panel. Through this image, Patwardhan, who we see as a participant or observer, equates his own artistic practice with the role of the street performers, speaking up against the exploitation of textile labourers in the city's mills, foreshadowing the historic 1982 strikes.

Concerned with the interplay of intimacy and distance, Patwardhan chooses the style of narrative figuration to convey his messages. His works not only portray the masses, addressing local issues of social mobility, poverty, and urbanisation, but are also legible across class and educational divides.

Postscript

The 1982 strike referred to in this video involved approximately 250,000 workers from 65 textile mills in Bombay. They demanded increased wages and bonus payments in light of their poor living and working conditions. This event resulted in the booming textile industry in the city disappearing, as over 80 mills in the city closed down, resulting in more than 150,000 workers being left without employment. Sudhir Patwardhan (b.1949) has frequently reflected on this aspect of the city's socio-political history by representing textile mills, workers, their families as well as living and working conditions to explore broader themes of urbanisation, labour and social change.

In 1995, the name of the city was officially changed from Bombay to Mumbai, as it is known today. Since this video discusses a time period before the official name change, we refer to the city as Bombay here.

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