

Lancelot Ribeiro: Heads – In and Out of Our Time

Ben Uri Gallery NW8 0RH (18 September – 29 November 2024)



Lancelot Ribeiro, *Paranoid*, 1965 Estate of Lancelot Ribeiro

Working in partnership with the Estate of Lancelot Ribeiro, Ben Uri is delighted to announce *Lancelot Ribeiro: Heads – In and Out of Our Time*, borrowing its title from the artist's own long-planned but unrealised concept for an exhibition. Featuring 20 paintings and drawings, it focuses on Ribeiro's preoccupation with portraiture and imagined heads from two of the most innovative decades of his practice, the 1960s and the 1990s.

Born into a Catholic Goan family in India, Ribeiro began as a poet, turning to painting in 1958 and turning professional two years later. His early work was inspired by Indian and Goan architecture and the Christian tradition in which he was raised, as well as the work of his older half-brother F N Souza (1924–2002), who preceded him to Britain in the wake of Indian independence and the horrors of Partition. Ribeiro utilised his heads and portraits to explore concepts of power and evil, through subjects listed by one reviewer in 1961 as: ‘Colonialists, kings, tyrants, Christ (resurrected), tycoons, women and thugs’. Notable 1960s’ works addressing these themes include the monumental *Crowned King* (c. 1963), anticipating his subsequent *King Lear* (1964, Ben Uri Collection), and a radical set of faceless abstracted heads, known as the *Psychedelic Man* series, arising from Ribeiro’s experiments with new materials, among them, polyvinyl acetate or PVA (a precursor of acrylic paint), sometimes mixed with other non-traditional media including string. In his later work, Ribeiro often worked on a large scale, employing brilliant acrylics mixed with elements of collage, while disassembling, reimagining and reinvigorating the head in works including the vivid blue *Madonna, Rising from the Banks of Main*. Yet Ribeiro’s close friend and fellow poet, Indian translator and critic R. Parthasarathy suggests that Ribeiro’s ‘true subject’ was always his ‘origins – Goan roots, estrangement from India, and exile in London’.

A supporting display in the lower galleries features a display of stylistically diverse and innovative paintings, sculptures and works on paper of heads and portraits from the Ben Uri collection by artists including Moich Abrahams, Frank Auerbach, David Breuer-Weil, Dodo, Susanna Jacobs, Paul Richards, and Bruno Simon. The final room explores an early work by painter and poet Samuel Fyzee-Rahamin (né Samuel Rahamin Samuel), born into a Jewish Indian family, who studied as a scholarship student at the Royal Academy under John S. Sargent and Solomon J. Solomon. Afterwards, he returned to India, married and converted to Islam, gaining an international reputation after adopting the two-dimensional figuration traditionally associated with Rajput painting. The display concludes with two works from the six-panel collage *The Bands of Pride* (2017) by contemporary Indian-born artist Hormazd Nariewalla.

A series of related talks and events and a fully illustrated online publication with essays by contributors including the artist’s daughter, Marsha Ribeiro, poet and critic R. Parthasarathy and conservator Patricia Smithen, will accompany the exhibition.

Ben Uri Gallery & Museum, 108a Boundary Road, St John’s Wood, London NW8 ORH
Open: 18 September–29 November, Wednesdays to Fridays: 10 am – 5.30pm.

Notes for Editors:

This exhibition reflects Ben Uri’s core research focus on the Refugee and Immigrant contribution to British visual culture since 1900 – see buru.org.uk & diaspora-artists.net

About the artist: Born into a Catholic Goan family in Bombay (now Mumbai), India, Lanceloté José Belarmino Ribeiro (1933– 2010) first moved to England to study accountancy in 1950, taking part-time classes at St. Martin’s School of Art. After returning to Bombay in 1955, he became an artist in 1958; his first solo exhibition in 1961 sold out and he executed a large mural commission for Tata Iron and Steel, also participating in the exhibition tour (Europe and North America) of *Ten Indian Painters*. Nominated for the All-India Gold Medal, Ribeiro returned to London in 1962, co-founded the Indian Painters’ Collective, UK (IPC) in 1963, initiated the exhibition *Six Indian Painters* in 1964, and held a solo exhibition in Hampstead in 1965. He also exhibited alongside his half-brother F. N. Souza in shows including *The Arts of India* (Towner Art Gallery, 1966) and *Five Indian Artists* (1976), organized by Maria Souza’s ARTS 38. In 1976 Ribeiro co-founded the Rainbow Art Group, which evolved into the Indian Artists UK group in 1978. In all, he participated in around 70 solo and group exhibitions across India, the UK, continental Europe, the USA and Canada. Lancelot Ribeiro died in London, England in 2010. His work is represented in UK collections including the Ben Uri Collection, the British Museum, Burgh House, Hampstead, New Walk Museum & Art Gallery, Leicester, Tate, the University of Sussex and the V&A, as well as in public and private collections in India and the USA.

Ben Uri artists include: Moich Abrahams (b. 1941 Herts, England), Albert Abramovitz (1879 Riga, Russian Empire (now Latvia) – 1963 New York, USA), Frank Auerbach (b. 1931 Berlin, Germany), Jack Bilbo (né Hugo Baruch, 1907 Berlin, Germany – 1967 Berlin, Germany), David Breuer-Weil (b. 1965 London, England), Alfred Daniels (1924 London, England – 2015 London, England), Isaac Dobrinsky (1891 Makarov, Russian Empire (now Ukraine) – 1973 Paris, France), Dodo (née Dörte Bürgner, 1907 Berlin, Germany – 1998 London, England), Samuel Fyzee-Rahamin (né Samuel Rahamin Samuel, 1880 Poona (now Pune), India – 1964 Karachi, Pakistan), Alfred Harris (b. 1930 London, England), Eugen Hersch (1887 Berlin, Germany – 1967 London, England), Susanna Jacobs (b. 1966 London, England), Lom (né Alfred Lomnitz, 1892 Hessen, Germany – 1953 London, England), Gerald Marks (1921 London, England – 2018 London, England), Hormazd Narielwalla (b. 1979 Mumbai, India), Oscar Nemon (né Oskar Neumann, 1906 Austria-Hungary (now Croatia) – 1985 England), Mosheh Oved (né Edward Goodack 1885 Poland – 1958 England), Paul Richards (b. 1949 England), and Bruno Simon (1913 Vienna, Austria-Hungary (now Austria) –1999 Bergamo, Italy).

Ben Uri was formed in 1915 in London’s East End to support Jewish artists working outside the cultural mainstream; the Collection was initiated in 1918. In 2002 the remit widened to include all first- and second-generation immigrant artists, irrespective of national, ethnic, and religious/non-religious origins, who have helped to enrich Britain’s visual culture. The Collection today reflects three waves of migration: first- and second-generation Eastern European Jewish migration prior to 1914; the so-called ‘Hitler émigrés’, both Jewish and non-Jewish (1933–45), and wider multicultural immigration after the Second World War.

For further information on Ben Uri: see www.benuri.org

Curated by Sarah MacDougall and Marsha Ribeiro

For further information and press images, contact: Sarahm@benuri.org