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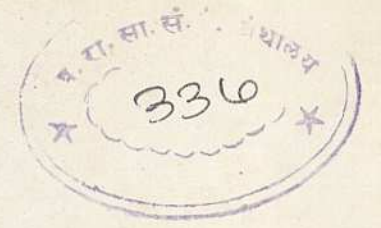
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Shankar Palsikar







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May 1987

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PREFACE



" In professions, like those of the lawyer and the doctor ", wrote Shri Palsikar, " a second rate professional may get along but an artist has got to be first rate ". Shri Palsikar successfully lived this paradigm all his life. He did not give cause to his friends " to laugh at him, nor did he allow society to scorn at him ". He was a master of the art of painting, a prodigee, who commanded respect from everyone in the world of art. He made experiments both in the technique and medium of the art of painting and used the canvas and colours to discover Man and Nature. He attained his objective by a proper blend of " form, colour, space and texture which he described as the elements for an artist ". He described himself as a bird which knew that all birds did not fly alike. He meant thereby that every artist must have individuality of his own. The enlightened artist in Mr. Palsikar had this individuality and, therefore, his paintings were indeed unique.

The Maharashtra State Board for Literature and Culture has always tried to promote and encourage artists by preserving and presenting their creations through the appropriate medium. We are happy that we are able to make available to the world some unique paintings by Shri Palsikar. The Board, earlier, had the opportunity of publishing an album

of some of the famous photographs of Shri Keki Moos. The Board is also bringing out a collection of the wall-paintings of the time of the Peshwas. It has also published a few paintings and sketches by Shri M. R. Acharekar in Shefalika, a translation of Gatha Saptashati of king Hala. In publishing the Album of the paintings of Shri Shankar Palsikar, the Board is experiencing the satisfaction of fulfilment. On behalf of the State Board for Literature and Culture, I express my gratitude to Shri Vasant Parab, former Dean of J. J. School of Art, for giving us an opportunity to publish a beautiful work of an enlightened artist. We are grateful to Shri Vasudev for writing a profile of the development of Shri Palsikar as an artist. It will be only proper to mention the help and encouragement given to us by Hon'ble Shri Sushilkumar Shinde, the Finance Minister of Maharashtra. It is he who agreed to give us an additional grant for this book. But for his promise it would not have been possible for us to undertake the great task of publishing these paintings and sketches. Last but not the least I must thank Shri Alva, Director, Govt. Printing and Stationery, and his staff for bringing out this work in such an excellent manner.

42, Yashodhan,
Bombay
17th March 1987.

S. S. Barlingay,
Chairman,
Sahitya Sanskriti Mandal,
Maharashtra State,
Bombay.

FOREWORD

With the publication of this monograph on Shankar Palsikar, the Sahitya Sanskriti Mandal of Maharashtra State, adds qualitatively to its treasure of publications on Art. Of course, the Mandal has been usually publishing works of literature in Marathi to encourage poets and thinkers.

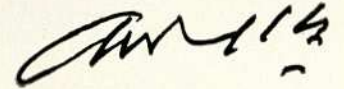
The Jehangir Art Gallery Committee sponsored the retrospective exhibition of Shankar Palsikar in December 1984. As the convenor of the Palsikar Memorial Committee I approached the then-Education Minister, Shri Sudhakar Rao Naik with a request to publish a monograph on Palsikar. He readily agreed to promote the publication provided proper financial provision was made. Shri Sushilkumar Shinde, the State Finance Minister, was most enthusiastic in supporting the idea and extended ready cooperation. We are indeed indebted to both Shri Sudhakar Rao Naik and Shri Sushilkumar Shinde for their valued support.

Shri S. V. Vasudev has written an explanatory interpretation of the mind

of the artist and the man. This brings out the essence of Shankar Palsikar's art and life. I am sure with his introduction this monograph will find a place in the library of art-lovers and of educational institutions.

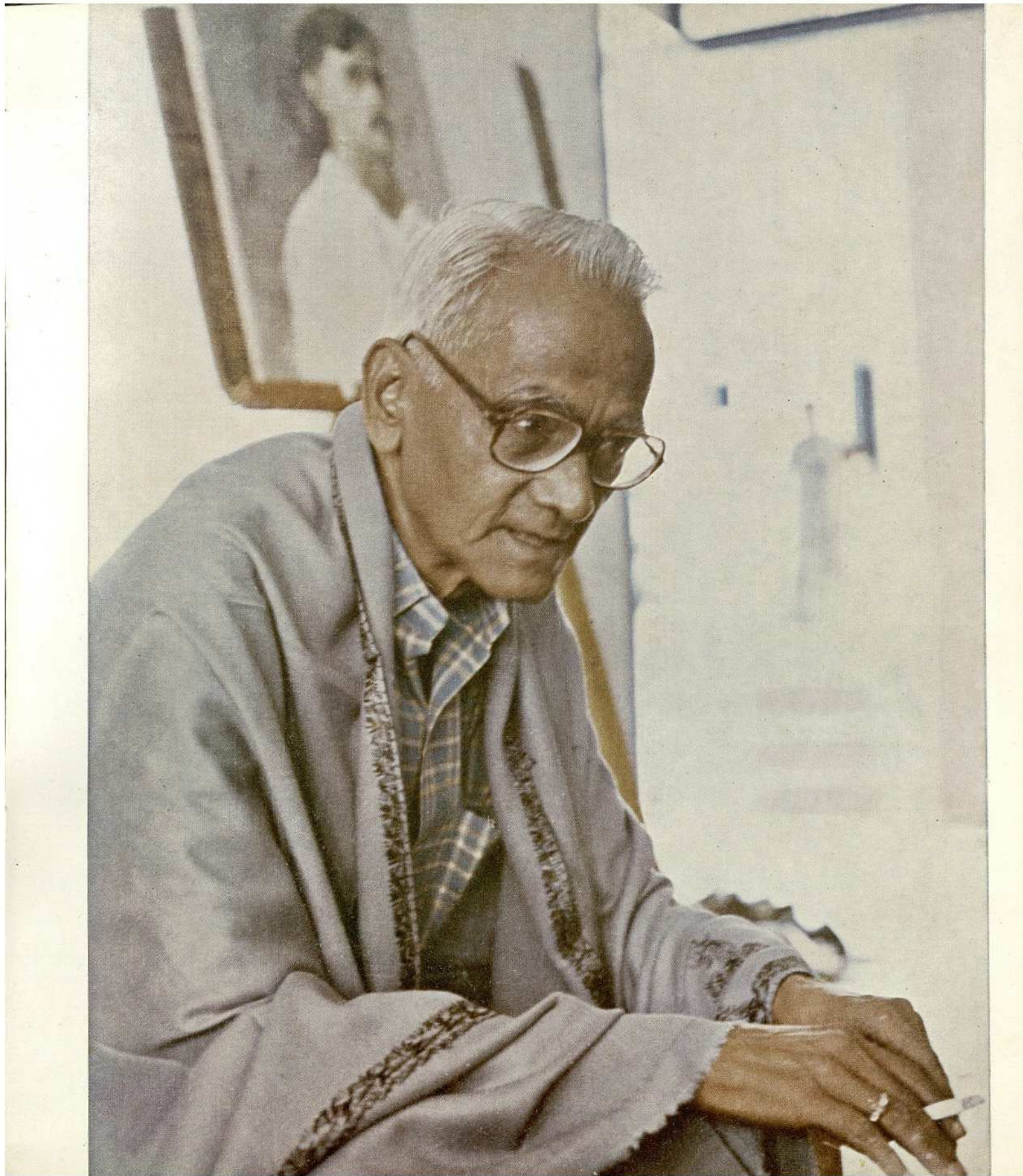
I wish to acknowledge with thanks the kind assistance given by individuals and various institutions for publication of Palsikar's work from their collections.

Finally, I thank Dr. Surendra Barlingay, Chairman, Sahitya Sanskriti Mandal and Shri R. B. Alva, Director, Government Printing and Stationery for taking keen interest in publication of this monograph. I also thank Shri Yeshwant Chaudhary for the tasteful layout and cover-design.



(Vasant Parab,
Former Dean,
Sir J. J. School of Art,
Bombay

Nandanvan,
6, Kala Nagar,
Bombay 400 051





Shankar Palsikar : The Artist

S. V. Vasudev

The black thread of magic . . .

The red thread of religion . . .

The white thread of science . . .

It was Sir James G. Frazer who put forward these three threads as weaving the web of thought. And, to be sure, there can be no art without thought. Certainly, not in the case of Shankar Palsikar, whose journey in art is marked by well-defined stages and stations of the march of the mind in quest of enlightenment, both in life and in art.

But art and thought do not easily submit themselves to minute, meticulous analysis; for, the source-springs often lie deep in the past and far in the distance. The rushing waters of daily existence and experience contribute to the turmoil of thought and carry everything in a flux of time and the fury of felling to make the mind surface in distress, hoping to sight a ray of knowledge, for an unravelling and understanding of a situation.

Shankar Palsikar never presented an image of a seer. Moments of joy may have sought a smile of recognition and revelation. But, all the while, he was questioning the doubts of darkness, the despair of self. It would be true to say he remained a pilgrim till the end, for, in the creative realm, one has to learn to live with one's question. One can never be sure that the answer is correct, for a thinker or an artist has to be an examiner of one's own paper, so to say—and everthing, finally, returns to remain in the void.

To go back to Sir James G. Frazer and *The Golden Bough* : " We may illustrate the course which thought has hitherto run by likening it to a web woven of three different threads—the black thread of magic, the red thread of religion and the white thread of science, if under science we may include those simple truths, drawn from observation of nature, of which men in all

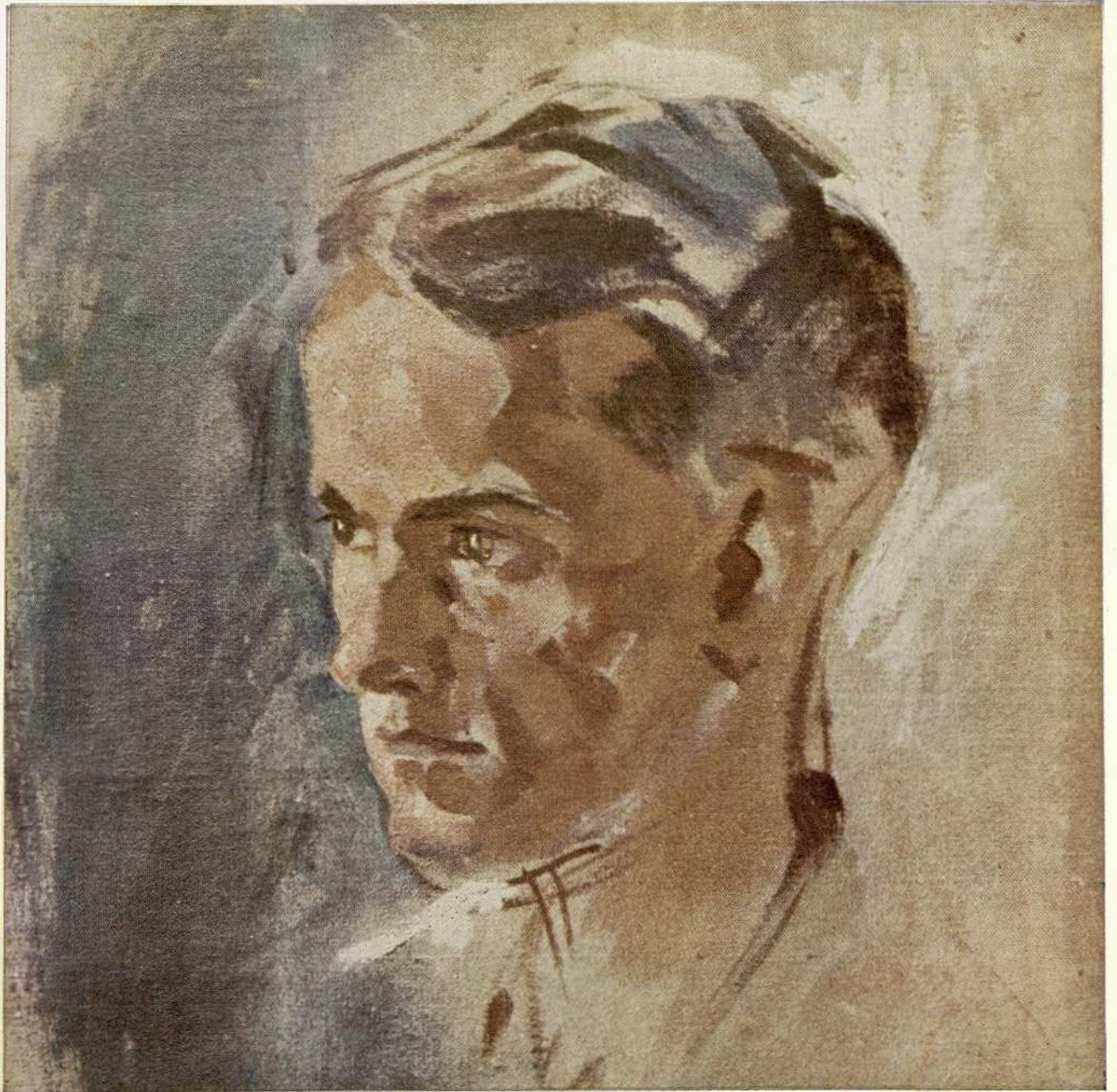
ages have possessed a store To a web thus chequered and stained, thus shot with threads of diverse hues, but gradually changing colour the farther it is unrolled, the state of modern thought, with all its divergent aims and conflicting tendencies, may be compared To keep up our parable, what will be the colour of the web which the Fates are now weaving on the humming loom of time ? Will it be white or red ? We cannot tell. A faint glimmering light illumines the backward position of the web. Clouds and thick darkness hide the other end “.

The perplexing predicament outlined by Sir James Frazer dates back to 1890. But the outline will remain true forever. If the future course of thought and of civilisation cannot easily be divined, it is all the more difficult to get to the meaning of man, of life, of self, for one has to deal with a microcosm in relation to the macrocosm and individual existence.

One has to appreciate these confusions and contradictions, because what Palsikar finally sought through all the paths was for a realisation for the meaning of the art through an awareness of the mind and the substance of self.

The knowledge that art had to have its sole influence on life is the most noticeable feature of Indian philosophy. Palsikar, as an artist, accepted this truth, a little late in his career, for the beginning was shrouded in the cloud of unknowing. One must remember the fact that for a period of nearly two centuries there was no noticeable evidence of a continuation of Indian thought and that modernism came to us from entirely alien sources, far removed from traditional Indian mores and values.

What is the black thread of magic in India ? It comes through myth, the collective consciousness of a civilisation, unique in its continuity in spite of upheavals and upsurges. The abiding conclusion reached by the Upanishads is the central point of the doctrine that whatever is, is one. We have, even to



A portrait of Shankar Palsikar in oils size 30 × 30 cms by W. Langhammer, 1947

this day, only to find the resonances and responses. The essence of creation and the Universe is, thus, found in the inner self of man, as M. Hiriyanna observes in *Art Experience*.

Apart from development of the intellect and will, the human mind has to cultivate the " culture of emotions ". Refinement is the word—and refinement means elimination of inessentials. Palsikar arrived at this essence of thought and art by fusing the creative principle even in what appeared as contradictory elements. " It is not the world that matters but how attached you are to it "—was one of his favourite quotations.

Palsikar found a profound insight into art, through all these questions and answers. " Form, colour, space and texture are the basic elements for an artist ", he has observed in a note on Tantra Art. (*Lalit Kala Contemporary*, April-September, 1971). " All these create a sound appealing to the eye and the mind. The sound is not possible without space and space is not possible without form and form is not possible without colour and texture. The necessary strength of mind which can go through the reverse process would certainly experience voices of silence, the very core of the cultural richness of any time. "

It is silence that speaks. Not the silence of solitude but the silence of the still centre, the moment of realisation and revelation. Most of Palsikar's later paintings come alive in the silence of calm and contemplation, in the transubstantiation of the perception of senses.

One can legitimately bring in Paul Valery here and quote three of his succinct statements : (1) A creator is one who makes others create. (2) The higher the culture, the greater becomes the role of the intellect. (3) Great art is the work of a whole man.

As a preceptor, Palsikar, drenched in philosophy and thought, stimulated a whole lot of students and colleagues to reach unto themselves and to the phantasmagoria of life, riddled with riddles. S. H. Raza places him as one of

the first artists, among contemporary Indian painters, who was aware of the fundamental elements of art and art experience. What was more he was human to an intense degree, never to consider anyone inferior; a man of culture, he was awake and alert to the contribution of all other distinct civilisations.

Palsikar was eloquent in his own way to put forward an idea of thought in a concise crisp manner and in the exactness of words, not depending on style of speech or rhetoric. This is what made him an ideal teacher for he had a passion to transmit his knowledge, never seeking to keep his findings as a private, personal possession. He came to the younger generation, with love and passion, not to impress his students but to offer them readily the treasures of his mind, gathered from the heritage of humankind and from the deep recesses of introspective thought.

The select galaxy of his colleagues in the art field—S. H. Raza, V. S. Gaitonde, Mohan Samant, F. N. Souza and Pratap Singh, to name a few—help one place Shankar Palsikar in the proper context of the then-emerging contemporary art movement in India.

Palsikar's art sought different directions and distinct stages in transcendental emergence and evolution. In this connection it is advisable to keep Picasso's declaration in mind : " Art does not evolve by itself; the ideas of people change and with them the mode of expression. When I hear people speak of the evolution of an artist, it seems to me that they are considering him standing between two mirrors that face each other and reproduce his image an infinite number of times, and that they contemplate the successive images of one mirror as his past, and the images of the other mirror as his future, while his real image is taken as his present. They do not consider that they are all the same images in different planes ".

However, one can talk of Palsikar's " evolution " from a purely professional painter to an enlightened artist, who finally realised that the thought-content

in a painting does not come from the subject or the sitter, from a facile introduction or incorporation of symbols, but from the mind of the artist, the depth of his awareness of the intricate design of the creative pattern.

True, everyone has a mind but a mind that matters must have quality, immensity and intensity of thought and the brilliance to correlate and coordinate various points of deliberation to come up with a finality and totality of expression—for oneself and for others.

It is not that Palsikar's equation with Tantric thought solves the problem for all painters or is the final answer to an eternal question. Valery presents the eventual dilemma which every artist has to face individually and resolve it according to individual capacities and capabilities : " The artist awaits an answer that must be absolutely precise to a question that is essentially incomplete ".

Palsikar did not jump all of a sudden into the Tantric pit to wrestle with himself and share the moment of triumph by himself. Even in his portraits, one discerns a silent question-mark that ranges from who, what, where and why to an exclamation of quite surprise that the small answers raise bigger questions.

Palsikar's explanation of portraiture to his students has been recorded as follows : " The art of portrait painting is an artist's contemplation on *Saguna Brahman*. It demands, from the artist, love and respect for human beings as well as precision and technical ability to depict in colours, the forms and their meaningful relationships ". Apparently, Palsikar turned to traditional style and symbolics, in the fifties, when he felt that his paintings had to illustrate an idea and present a certain quasi-philosophical thought, not appreciating the fact that art cannot be made to turn to a dictionary setting out the meaning of motifs. How exasperating such exercises can be will be understood when we are told that a snake stands for " the indestructible

element which merely changes its skin as it grows “ or that a fish means “ the force that swims against the current “.

But one must now look at this period of Palsikar as a stage of transition—the questions are being formulated, the answers borrowed, waiting for a catharsis to cleanse the mind of all the titbits gleaned from the garbage dumps of dead tradition. Also, Palsikar was rightly seeking, at that time, to delve deep into Indian thought but had yet to grasp the real strands of arguments and answers to judge the eternal values and arrive at a plausible equation formulated in the wisdom of philosophy.

When the moment of catharsis dawned, it is difficult to surmise. But the dictum quoted earlier—“ The higher the culture, the greater becomes the role of the intellect “—must certainly have found a way into Palsikar’s thought and made him turn to the study of Tantric treatises for edification and self-education on a greater plane of enquiry. An observation attributed to Palsikar makes it clear that at least he became gradually aware of the vast ocean of knowledge and the small puddle of an ordinary painter’s creative contribution “ In professions like those of the lawyer and the doctor, a second rate professional may get along, but an artist has got to be first-rate. Otherwise, his friends will laugh at him and society scorn him “.

How many artists, one wonders, even consider the meaning of creativity ? An artist finally proves his worth by contributing to art—by making the art greater, not by seeking to make oneself great. Palsikar, in his turn, sought humbly to give to art the meaning of thought, in terms of abiding principles that awaken the abstract essence behind the apparent reality. We are told that he declared in confidence that “ the abstract is the only reality ; the rest, maya or illusion “.

But it would be a fallacy to term Palsikar’s later paintings as abstract art. The thought-content is abstract, but the paintings do not belong to the abstract

genre. On the other hand, Palsikar set out to create new images in painting—an image that would gather for itself the sound of a word-symbol and revel in the defined colour of a particular energy. Of course, one need not agree with Palsikar's assertion : " Creation of such sounds and its word symbols should become the subject of any art form " .

However, when we view the art of Palsikar in its total sweep, one appreciates the distance he covered—from, say, " The Three Graces " to the " Sound and Colour " series—with the blessings and benediction of Tantric knowledge.

The point of progress cannot easily be determined, for what one eventually observes in the final phase is the emergence of the whole man. One should recall here Valery's identification of great art as the work of a whole man. Hazarding a guess, one surmises that Palsikar reached unto himself to understand art and thought in philosophical dimension, while working on paintings such as " Sinners Divine ". He had sent a print of this painting to Raza with a telling inscription—" from a bird which knows that all birds do not fly alike ". The realisation is there : to see the bird as oneself and oneself in the bird and to be aware that all birds and human beings are yet different.

Everything, then, dissolves into space—the tranquility of a disciplined mind. The pregnant word becomes sound, shapes and light and everything is transmuted into the other and a new image comes forth in the painting. Can art make an attempt to reach the absolute ? Can a painting seek, a revelation ? Can a painter be a priest and echo a " vast incantation towards the miracles " ?

One can answer in the affirmative only if the artist had the art and thought in him to equal the task. Shankar Palsikar certainly had it in him and,

though his art remains his personal testament, Palsikar's final period of full blossoming, as witnessed in the painting "Freedom", makes one sing with Rimbaud :

" The flowering sweetness of stars, of the sky and the rest descends from the knoll, like a basket before our face, and flowers the abyss and the blue depths below. "

Alas, Palsikar moved away before greatness could really descend on him.



Shankar Palsikar with his noted actor brother, Nana Palsikar

Shankar Palsikar : The Man



Shankar Palsikar with his notes

From
the
family album



Wife Subharya



Shankar Palsikar a devotee



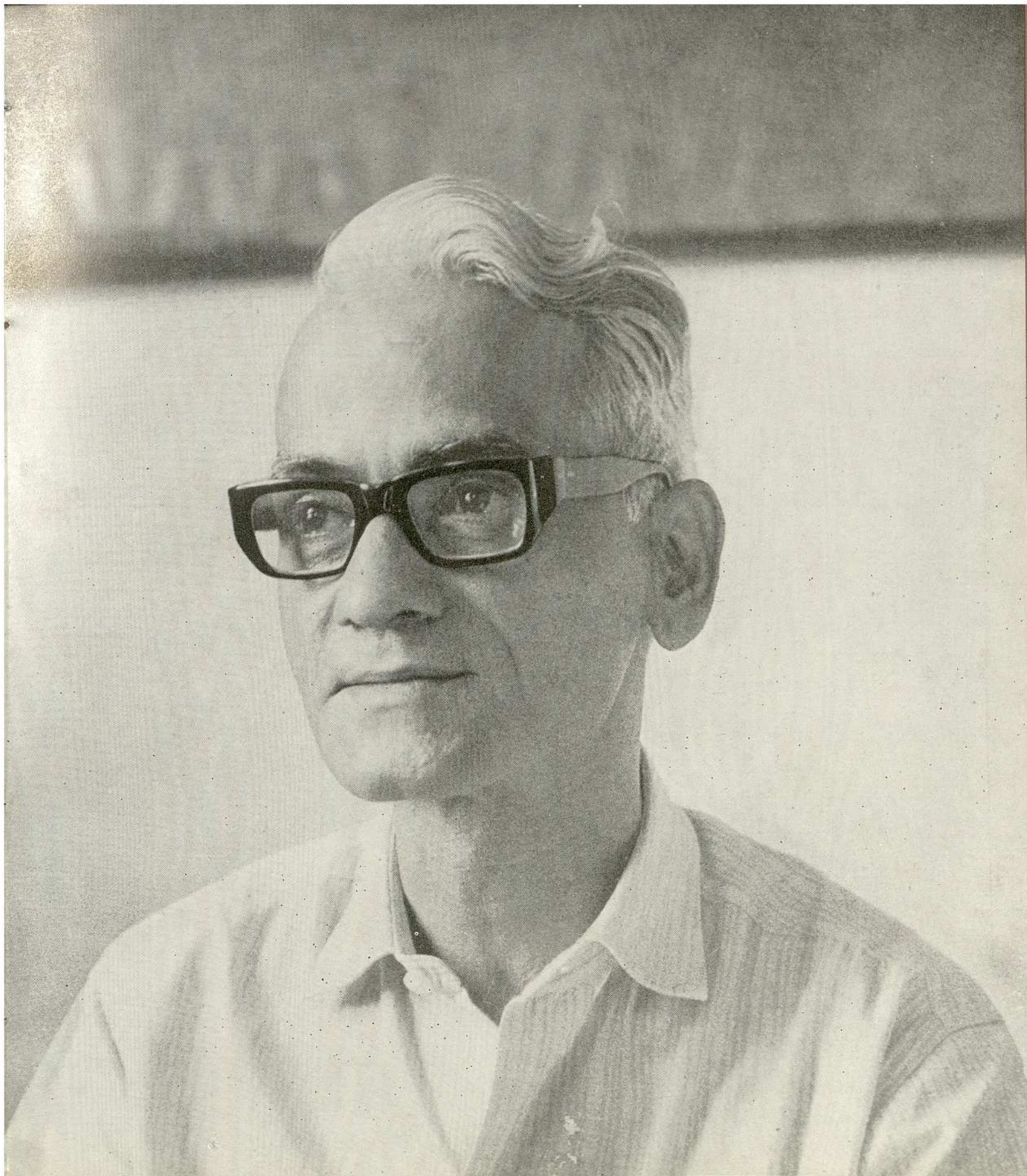
With son Alok



A Family Reunion



With Madhavrao Satwalekar, former Director of Art, Maharashtra State





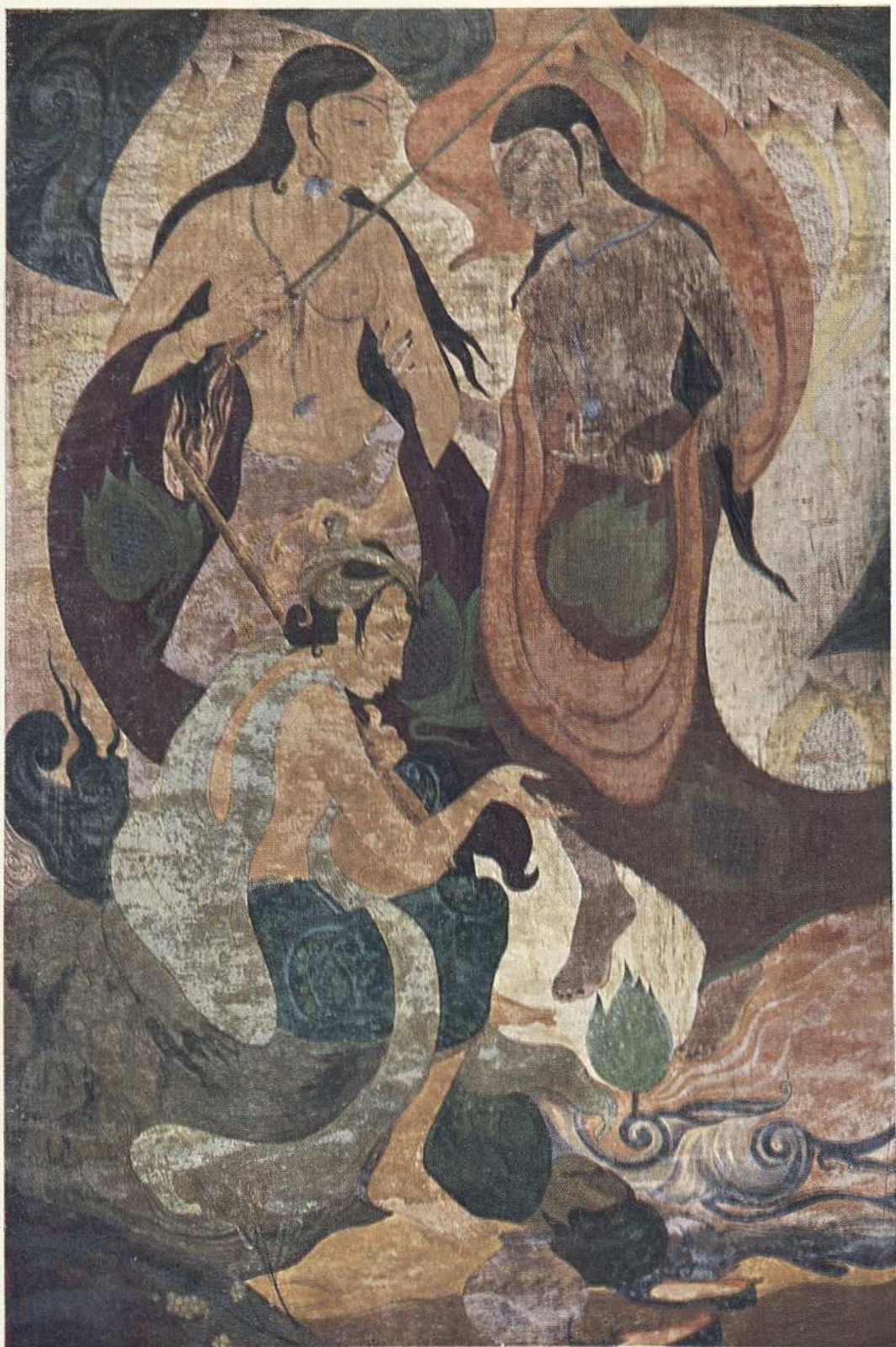
Shankar Palsikar : Paintings



● One without Second, water colour, 1957 ● 18.5 × 18.5 cms ● Collection : National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi



● Sinners Devine ● water colour ● 1950 ● 75 × 90 cms ● Collection : Mr. & Mrs. E. Schlesinger, Germany



● Green Lotus, water colour, 1946 ● 75 × 115 cms ● Collection : Shri Gajanan Bhagwat



● Composition, water colour, 1948 ● 30 × 40 cms ● Collection : Shri Ram Chatterjee



● Goan Life, water colour, 1983 ● 15 × 21 cms ● Collection : Artist



● Composition, water colour, 1943 ● 40 × 50 cms ● Collection : Sir J. J. School of Art, Bombay



● Composition, water colour, 1944 ● 40 × 75 cms ● Collection : Sir J. J. School of Art, Bombay



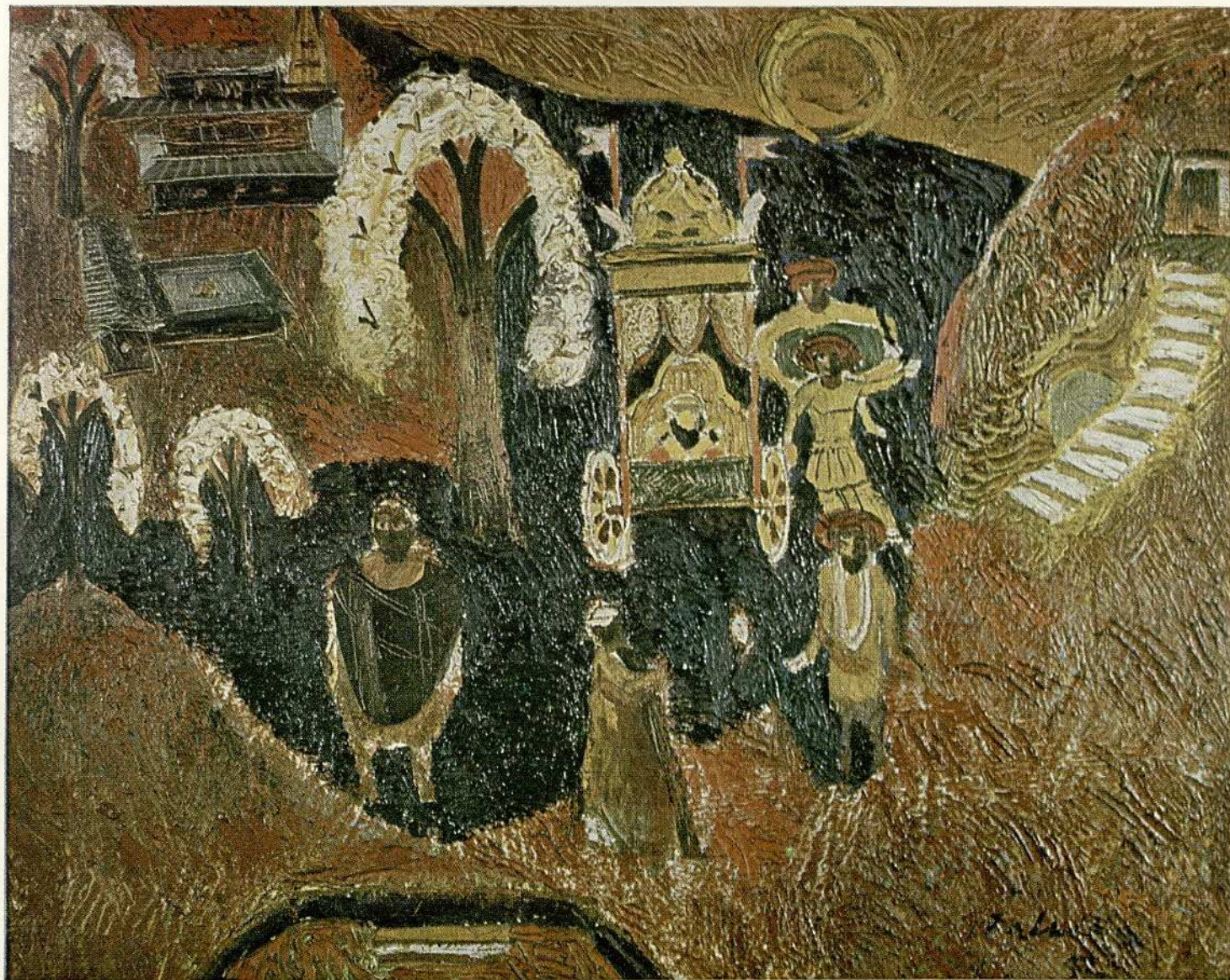
● Composition, water colour, 1945 ● 35 × 75 cms ● Collection : Sir J. J. School of Art, Bombay



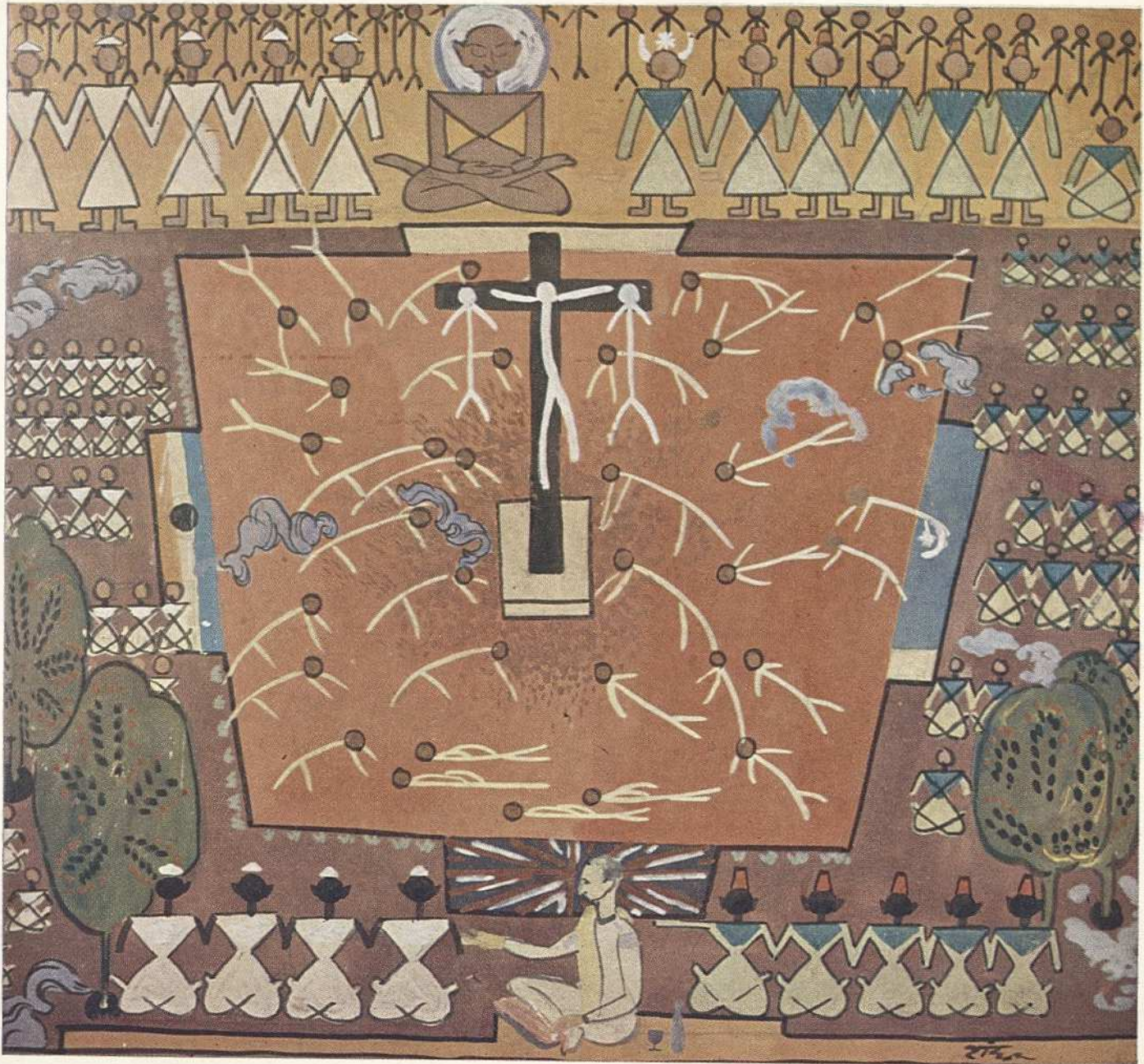
● Dikkal, water colour, 1983 ● 35 × 40 cms ● Collection : Artist



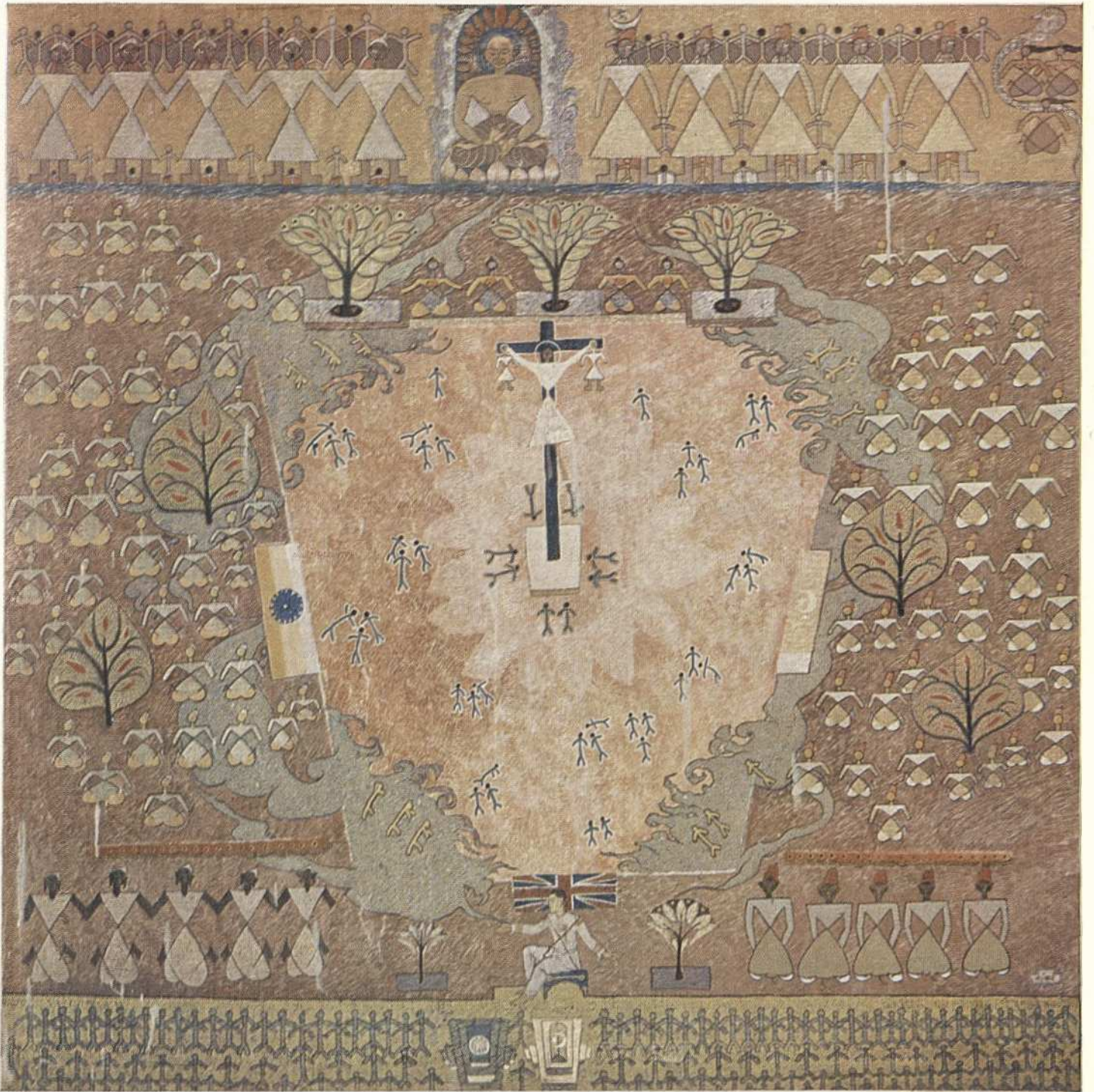
● Prestige, water colour, 1948 ● 35 × 35 cms ● Collection : Shri Kashinath Salve



● Composition, oils, 1954 ● 61 × 49 cms ● Collection : National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi



● Swatantrya Yajna, tempera, 1942 ● 40 × 40 cms ● Collection : Shri Prabhakar Kolte



● Crusade for Freedom, tempera on asbestos, 1949 ● 150 × 150 cms ● Collection : Saptaput Lalit Kala Bhuvan, Khiroda

“ In professions like those of the lawyer and the doctor, a second-rate professional may get along but an artist has got to be first-rate. Otherwise his friends will laugh at him and society scorn him. ”

—Shankar Palsikar

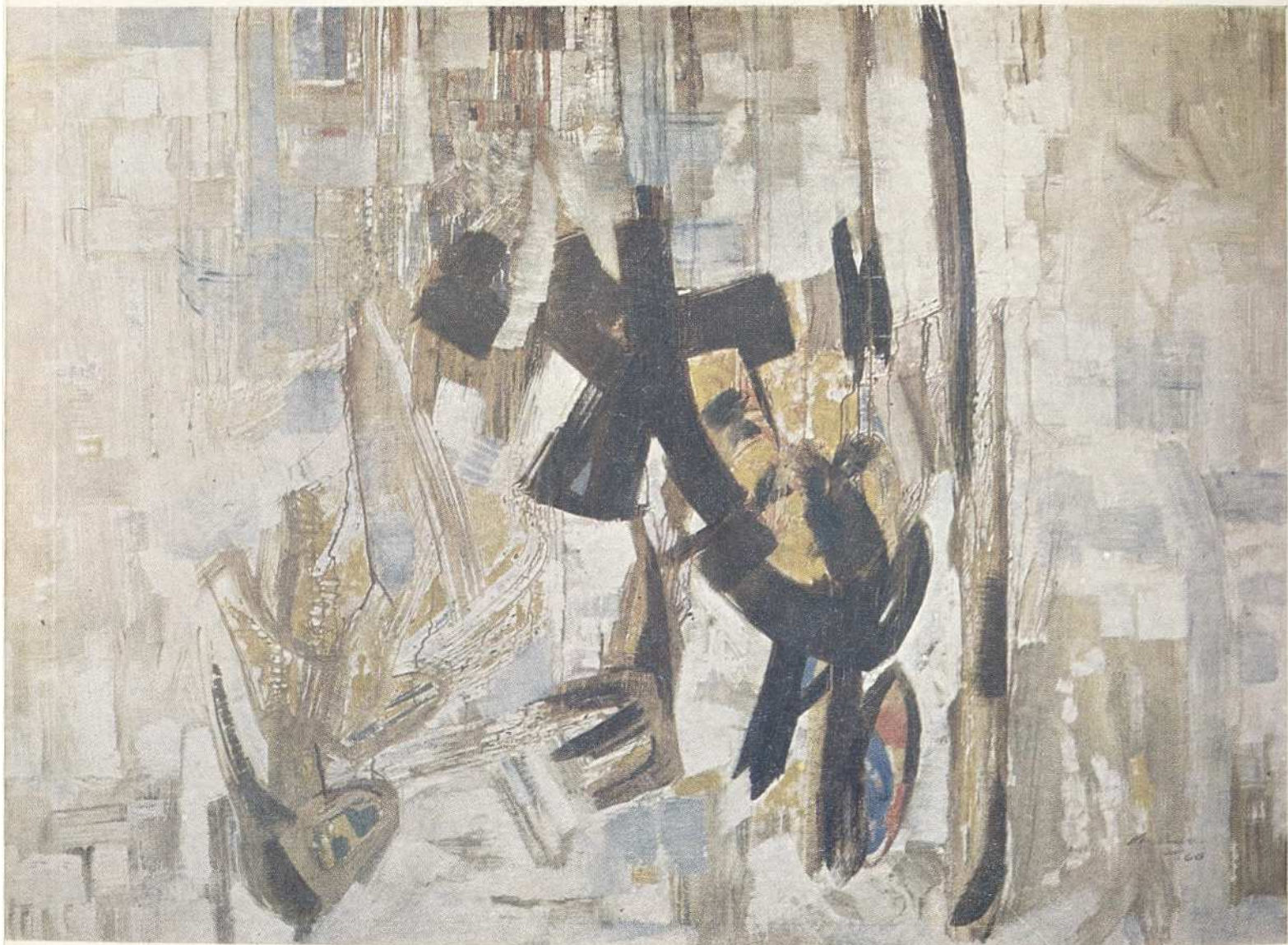


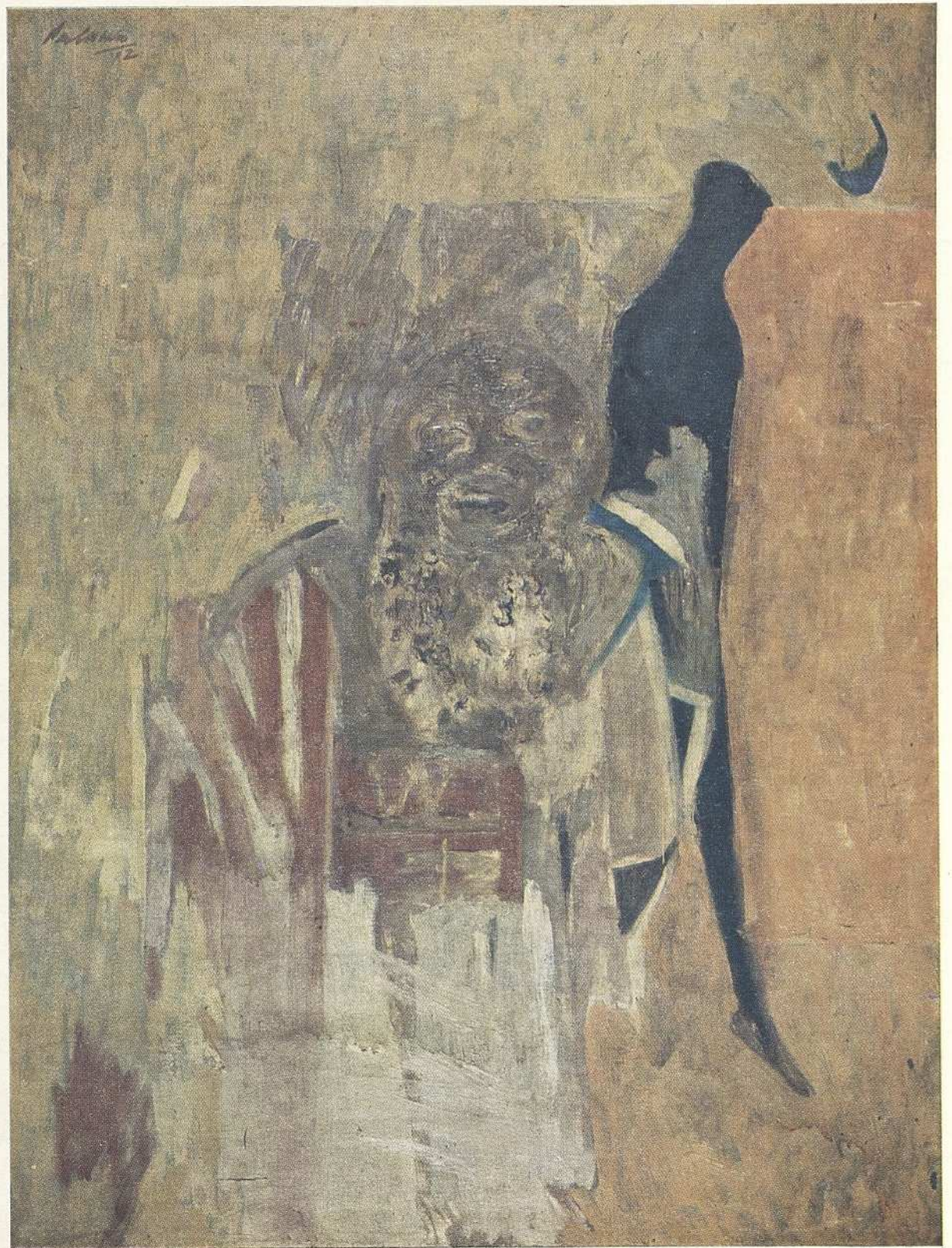
● Maya, oils, 1950 ● 61 × 50 cms ● Collection : Artist





● Three Graces, oils, 1958 ● 140 × 160 cms ● Collection : Artist





● Composition, oils, 1972 ● 150 × 165 cms ● Collection : Shri Madhu Gadkari



● Freedom, oils, 1974 ● 175 × 175 cms ● Collection : National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi



● Painting, 1970 ● 150 × 160 cms ● Collection : Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi

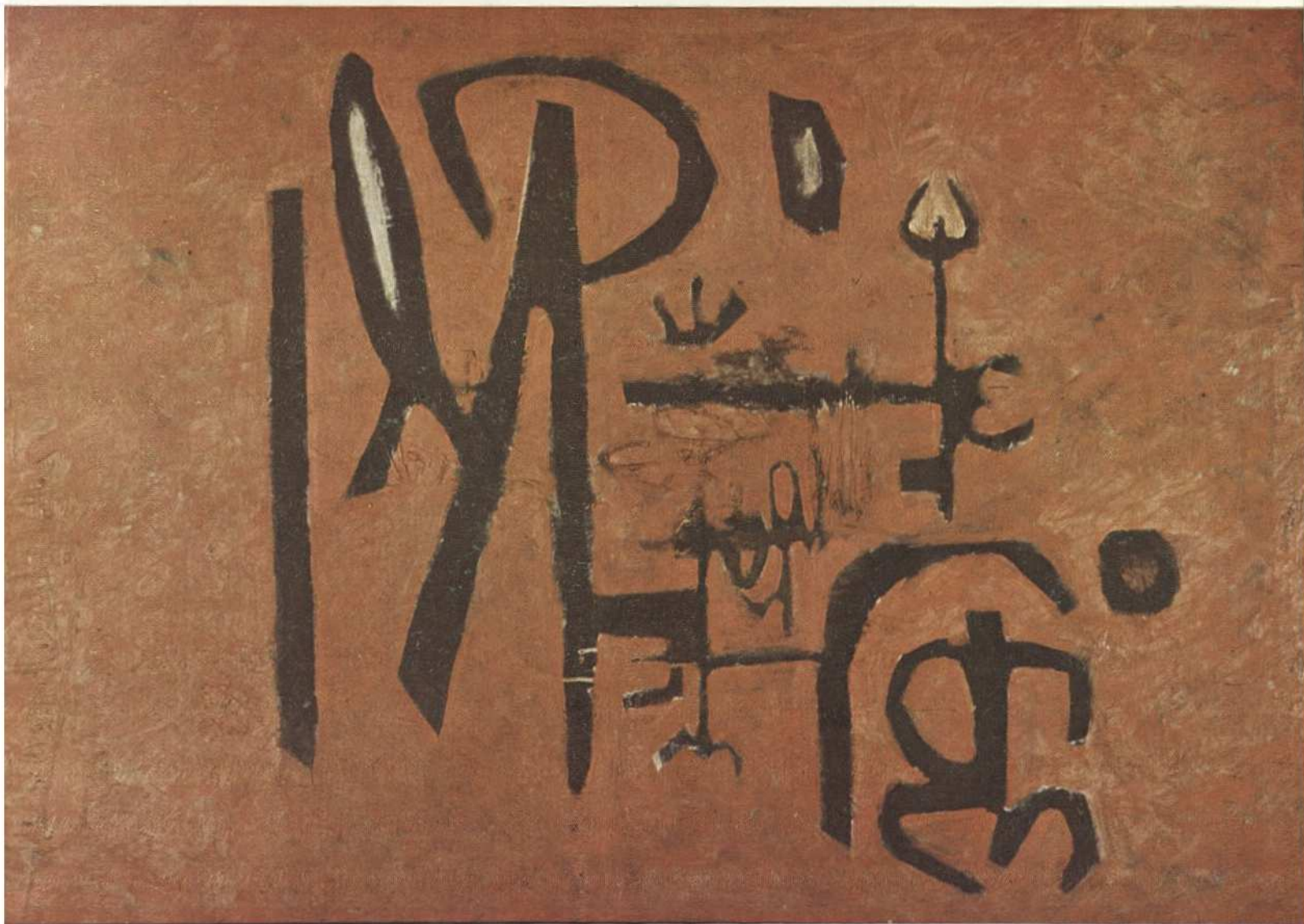




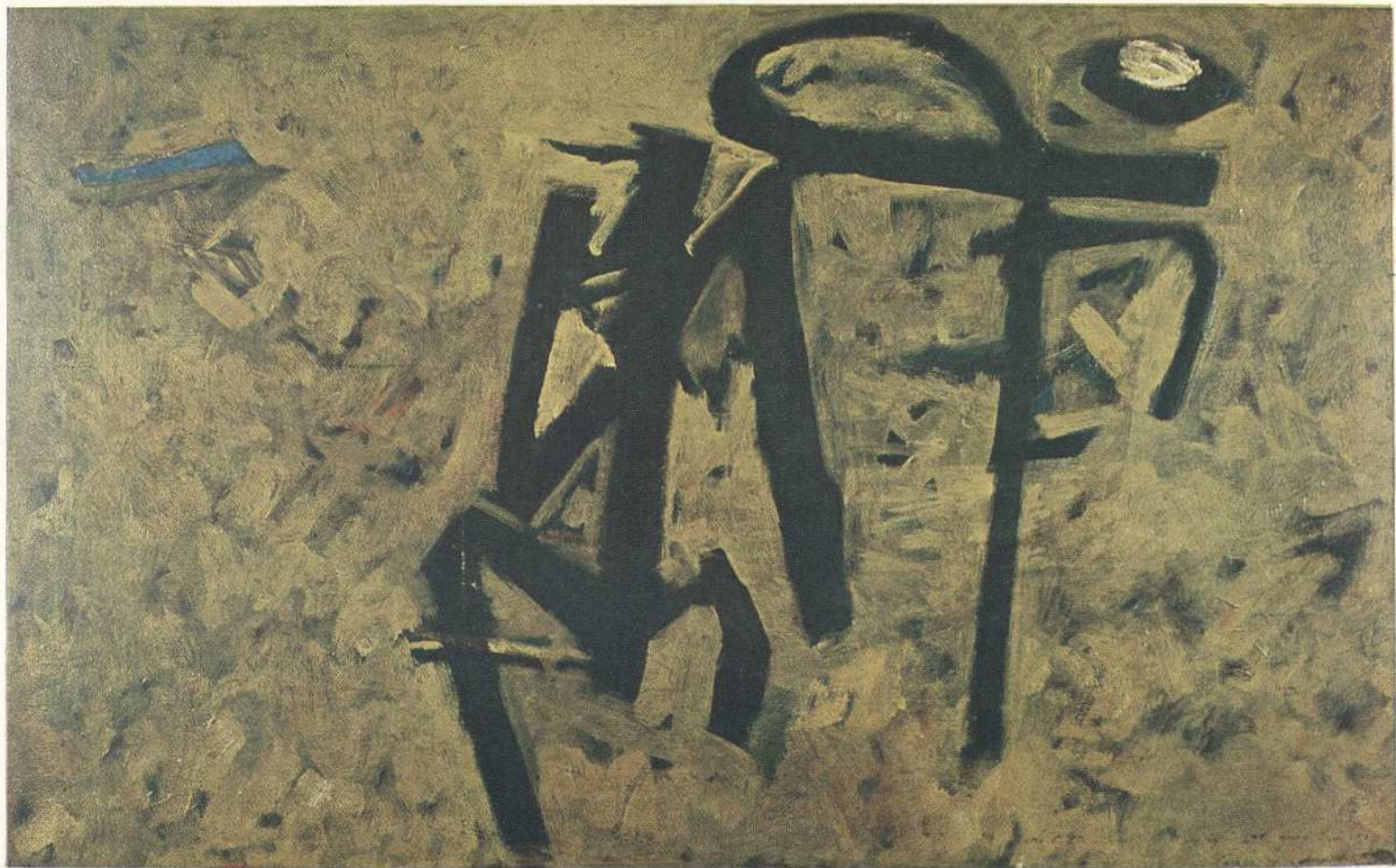
● E = MC², oils, 1983 ● 175 × 175 cms ● Collection : National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi



● Rhim, oils, 1970 ● 60 × 75 cms ● Collection : Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi



● Shrim, oils, 1972 ● 165 × 150 cms ● Collection : Artist



● Colour & Sound, oils, 1973 ● 160 × 100 cms ● Collection : National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi



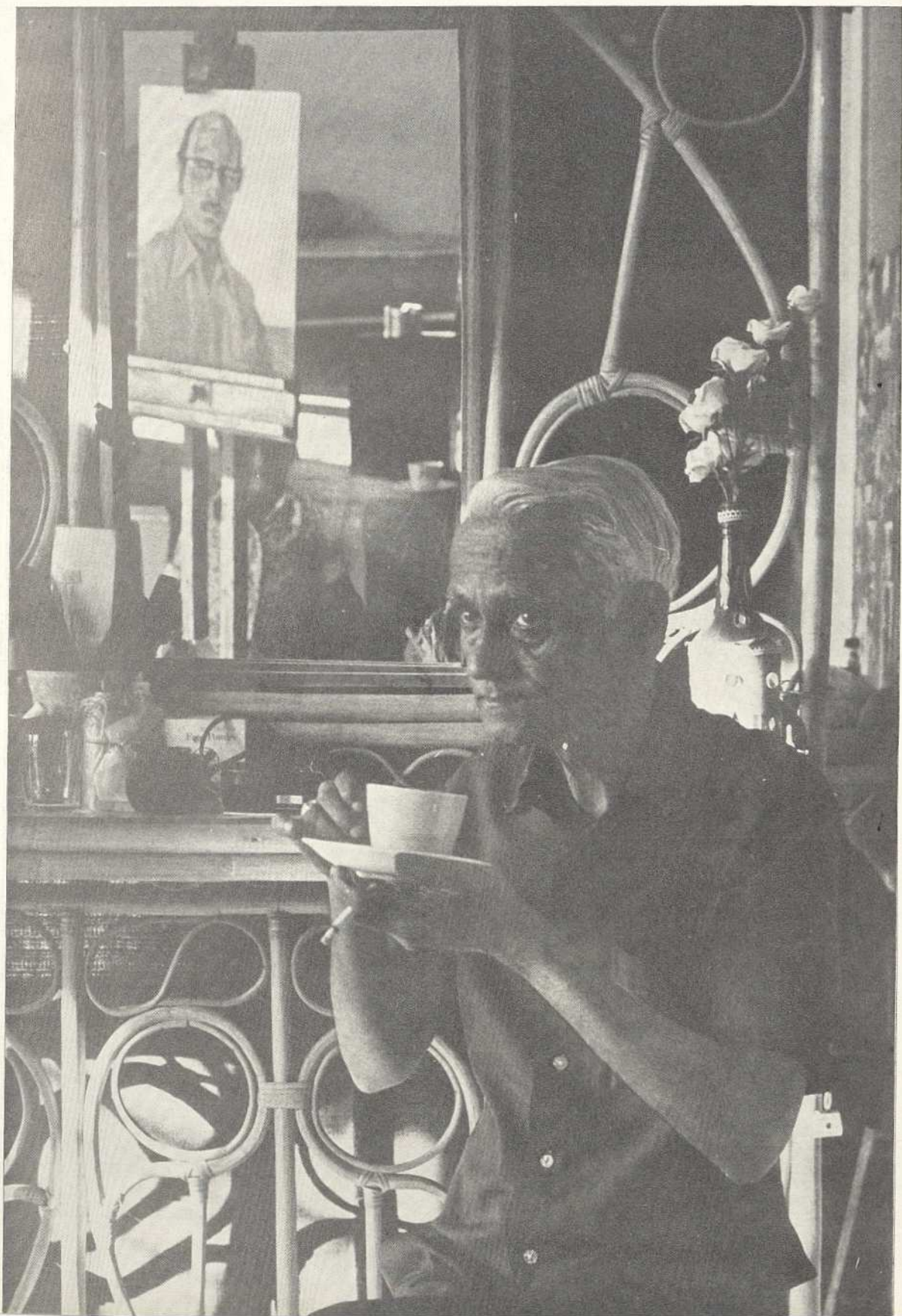
● Klim, oils, 1968 ● 61 × 45 cms ● Collection : Artist



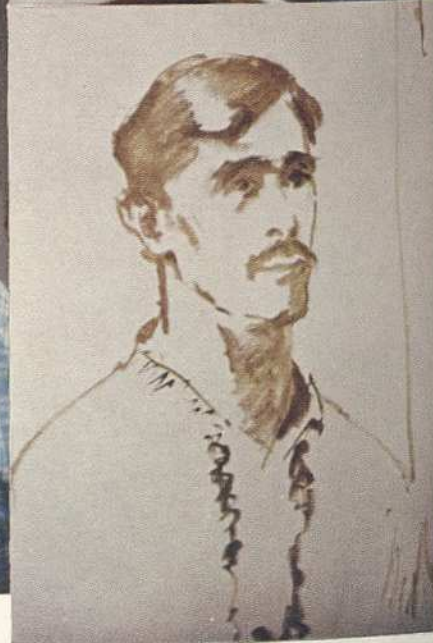
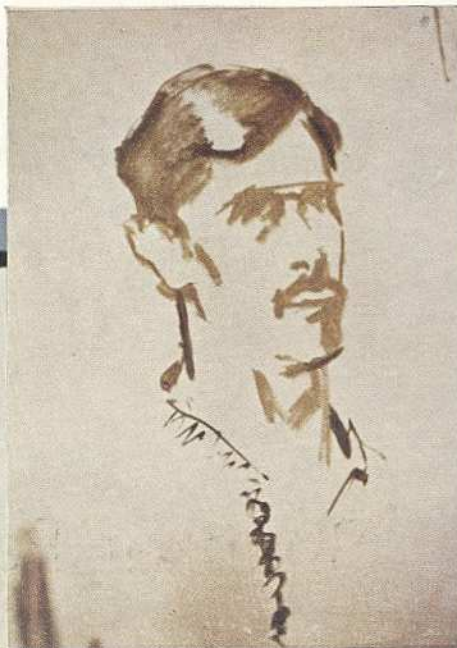
● Colour & Sound, oils, 1974 ● 76 × 71 cms ● Collection : Artist



● Klim, oils, 1983 ● 60 × 60 cms ● Collection : Artist

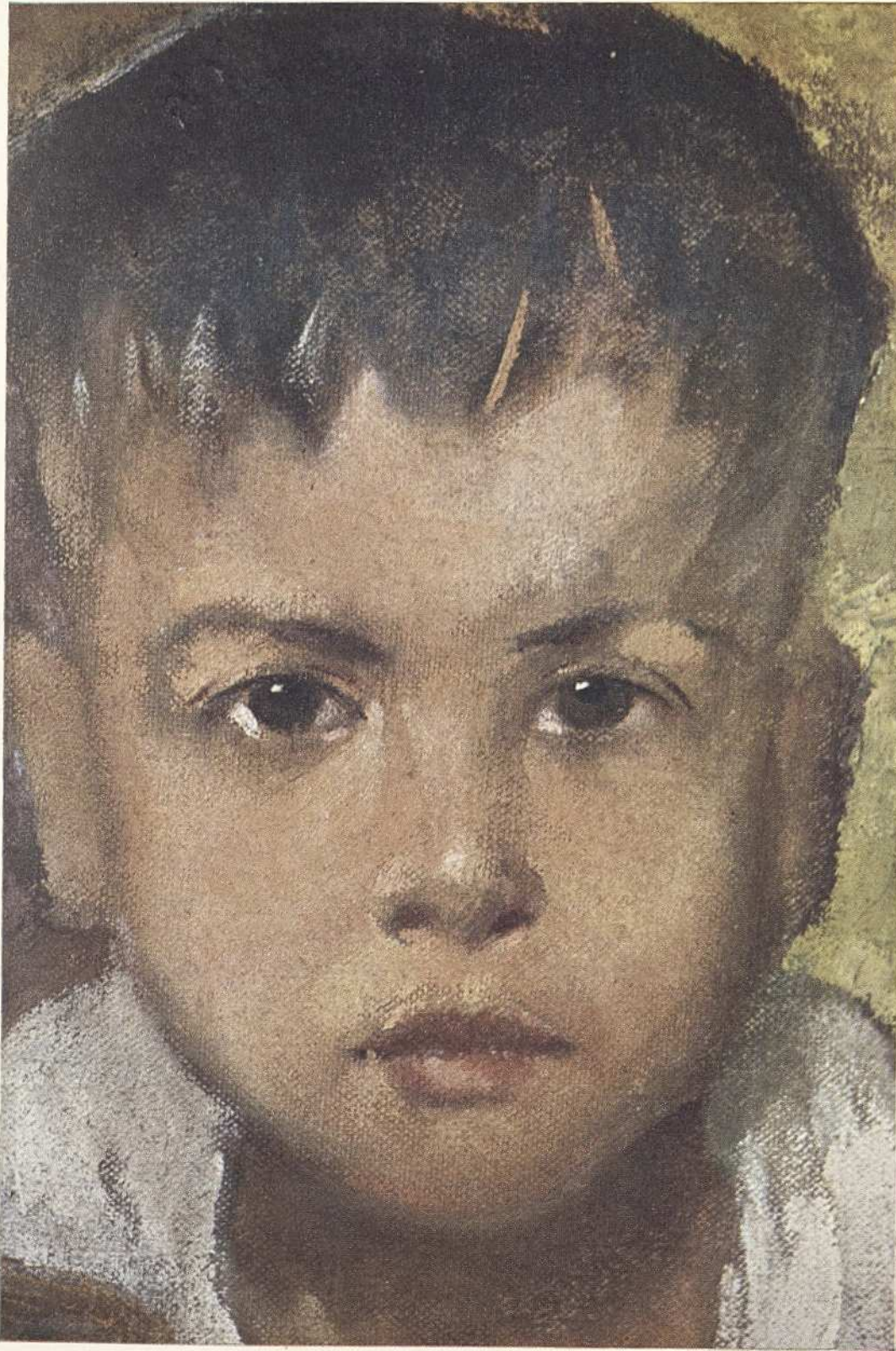


Shankar Palsikar : Portraits



● Shankar Palsikar giving a demonstration in portrait painting







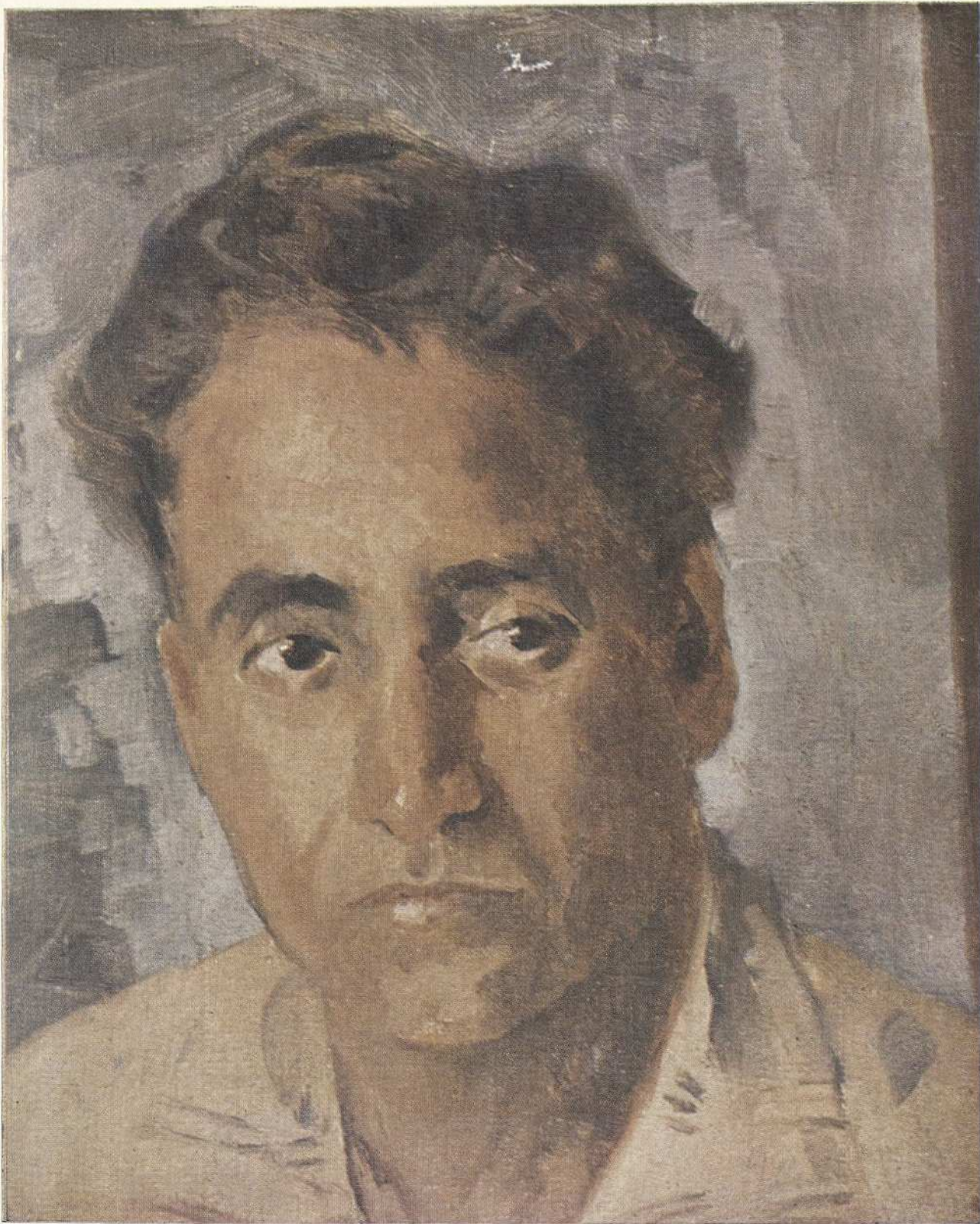
● Portrait of Miss K., oils, 1952 ● 75 × 45 cms ● Collection : Sir J. J. School of Art, Bombay



● Portrait of Ku. Anandkar, oils, 1960 ● 61 × 56 cms ● Collection : Artist



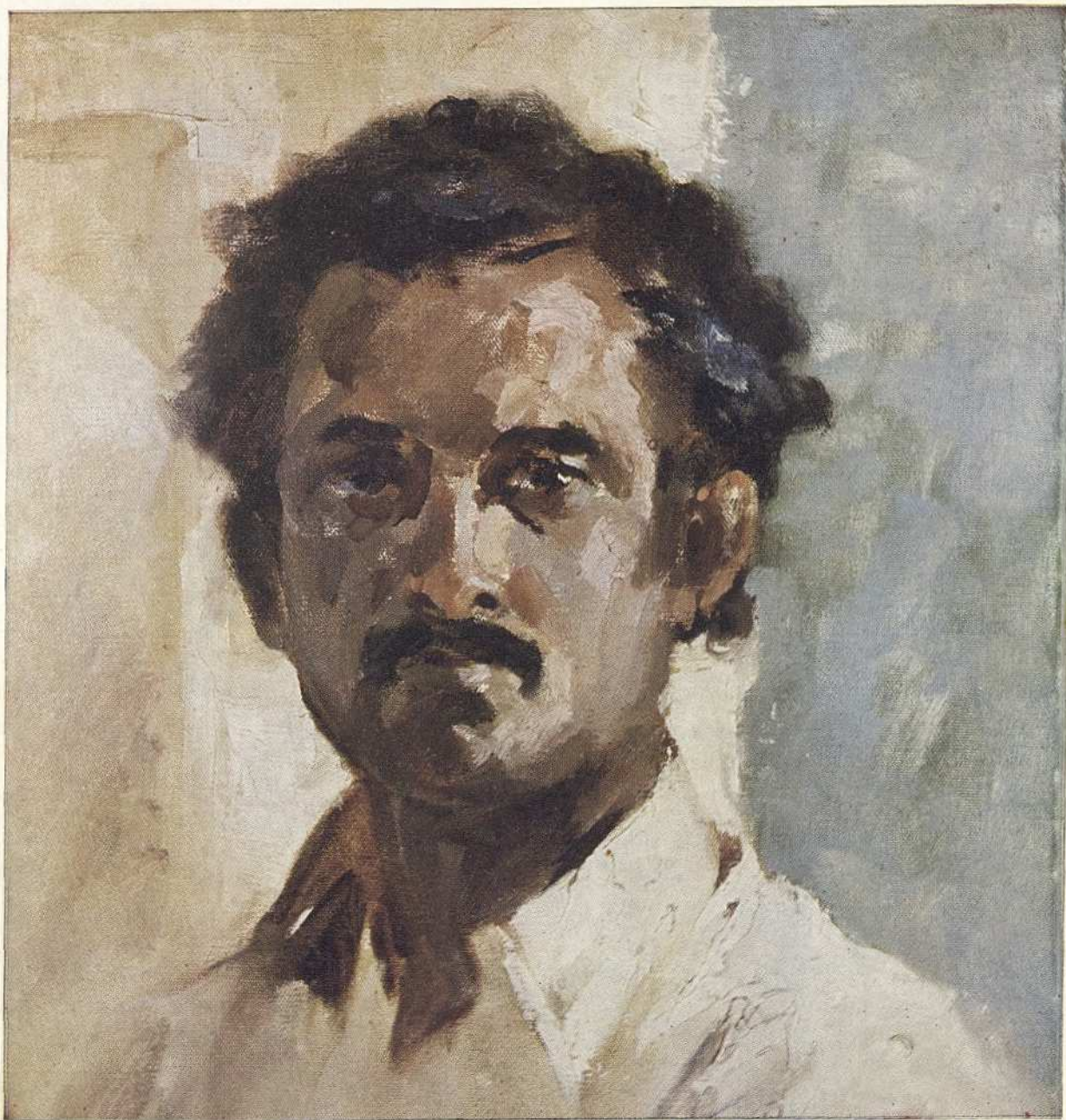
● Portrait of the celebrated Marathi playwright Late Vishnudas Bhave, oils, 1964 ● 61 × 56cms ● Collection : Ravindra Natya Mandir, B'bay



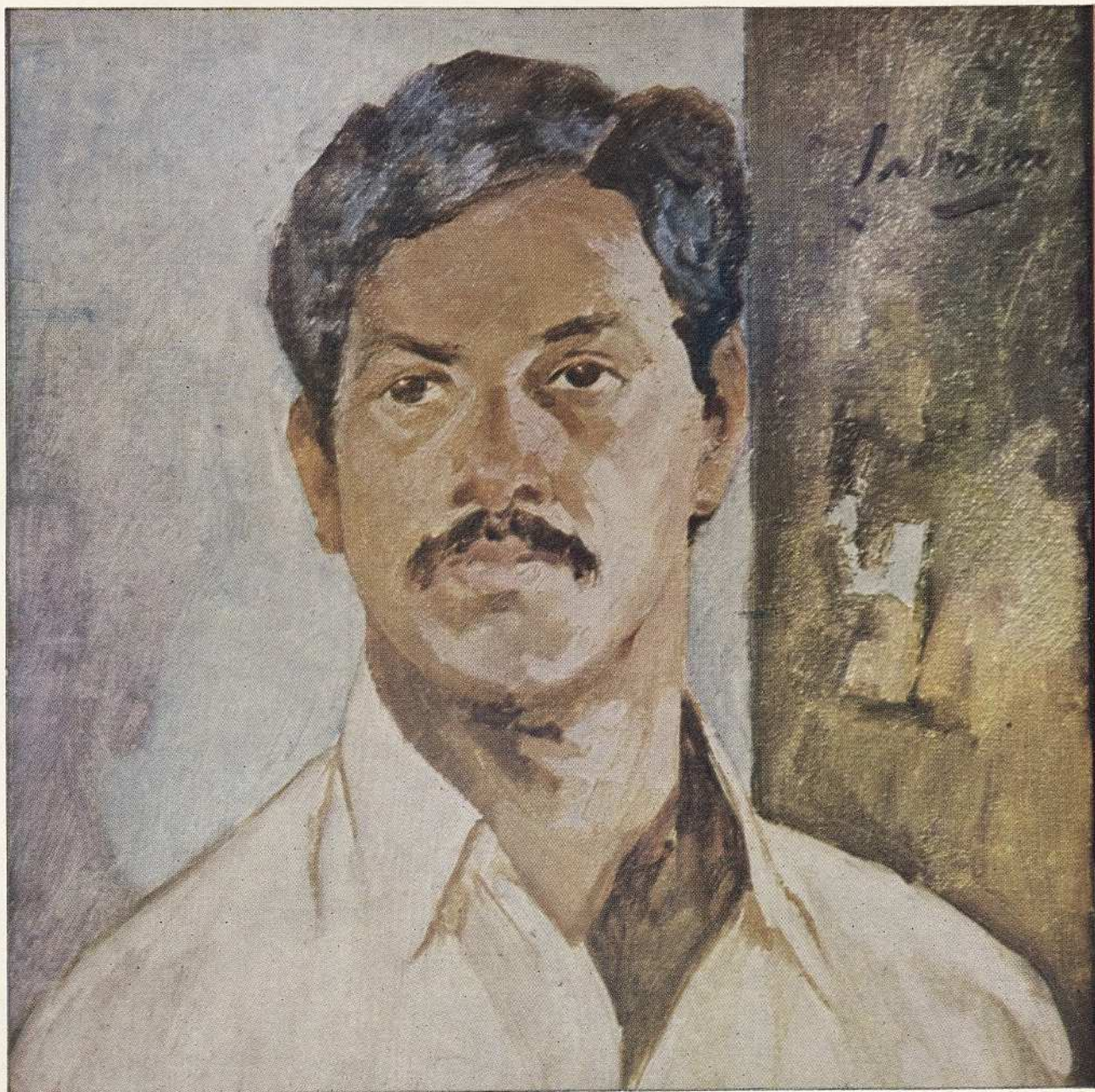
● Portrait of his brother Nana Palsikar, oils, 1956 ● 25 × 35 cms ● Collection : Artist



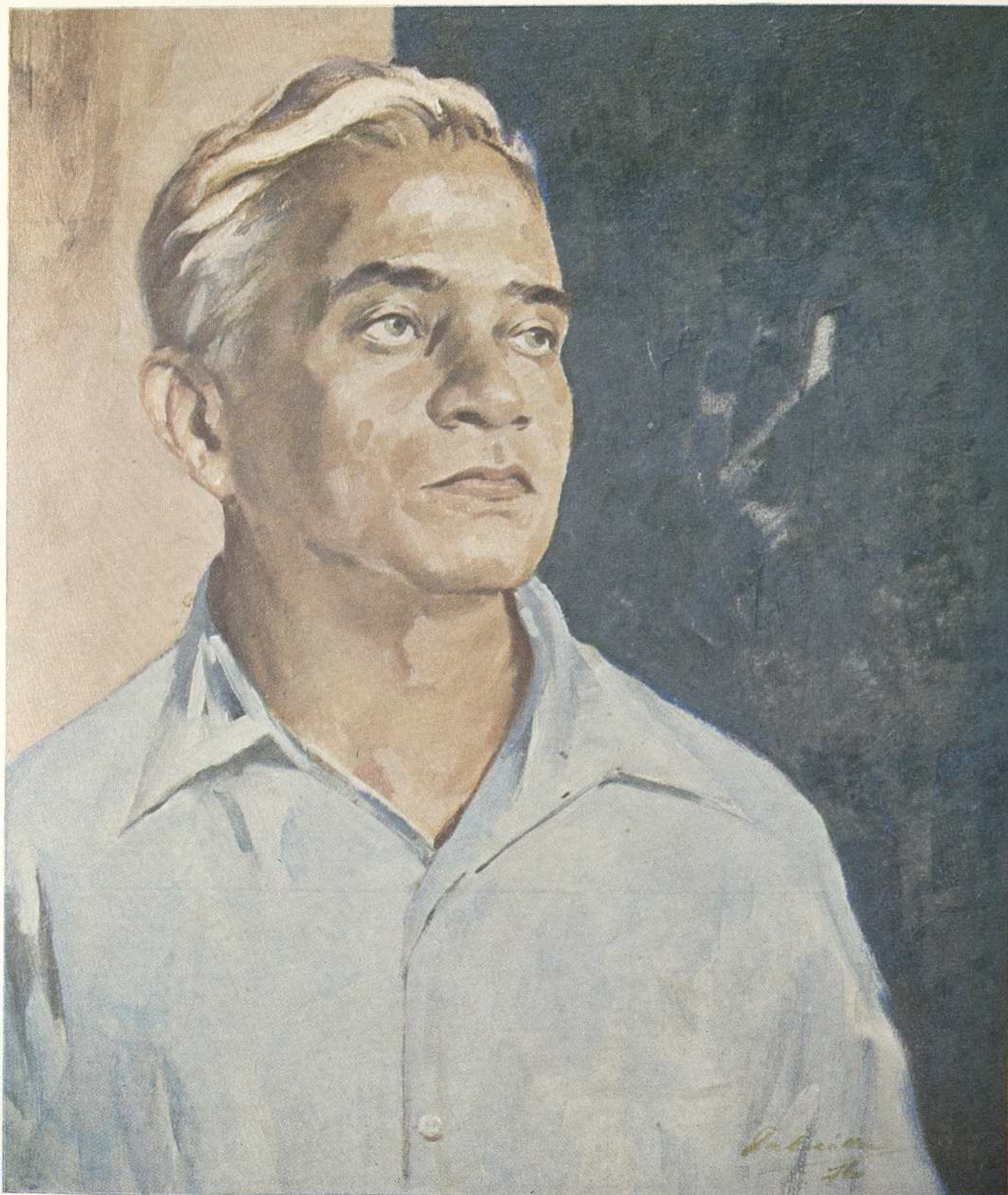
● Portrait of Mrs. Rajni Gadkari, oils, 1980 ● 105 × 90 cms ● Collection : Shri Madhu Gadkari



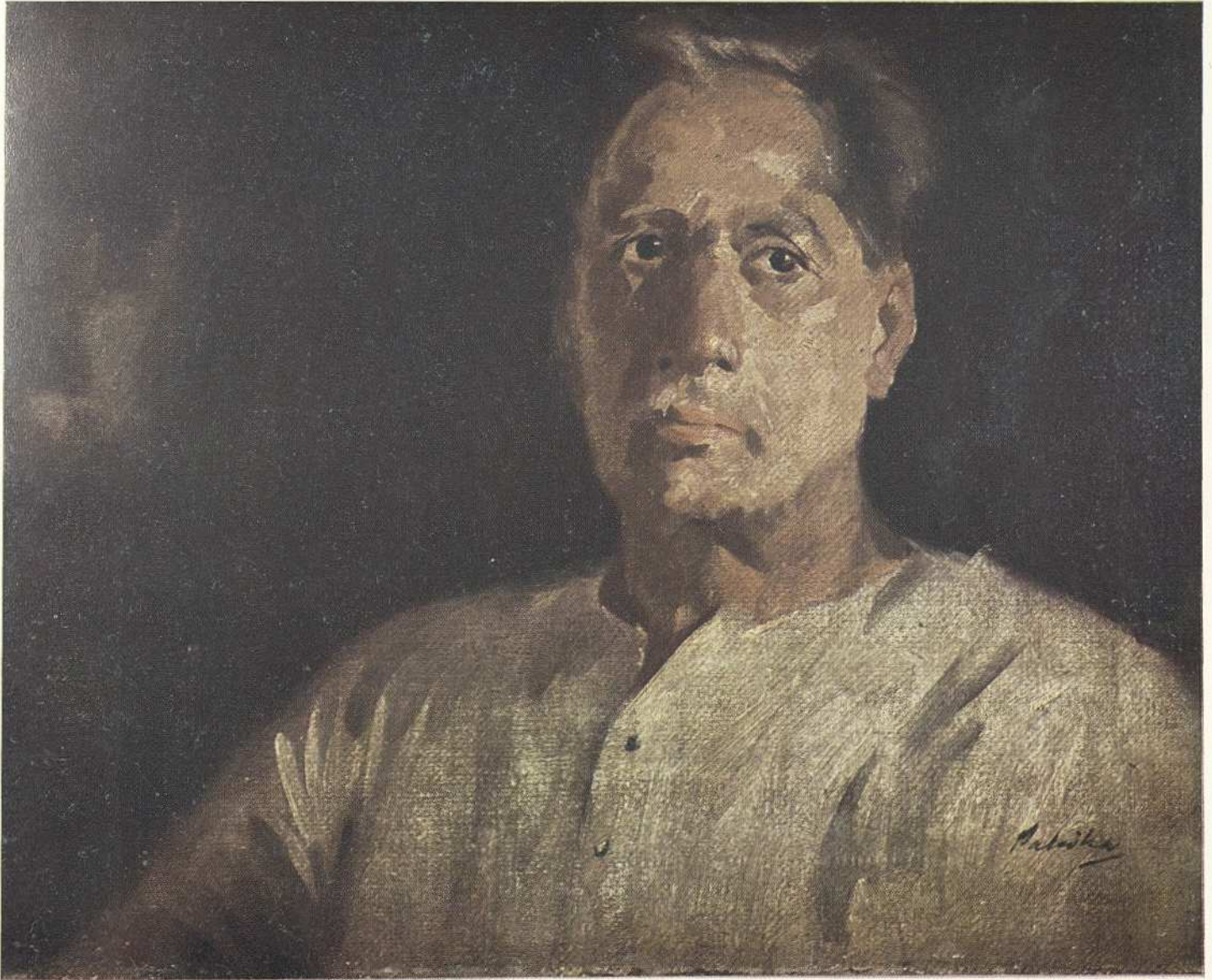
● Portrait of Shri Prabhakar Kolte, oils, 1974 ● 45 × 60 cms ● Collection : Capt. P. K. Mitra



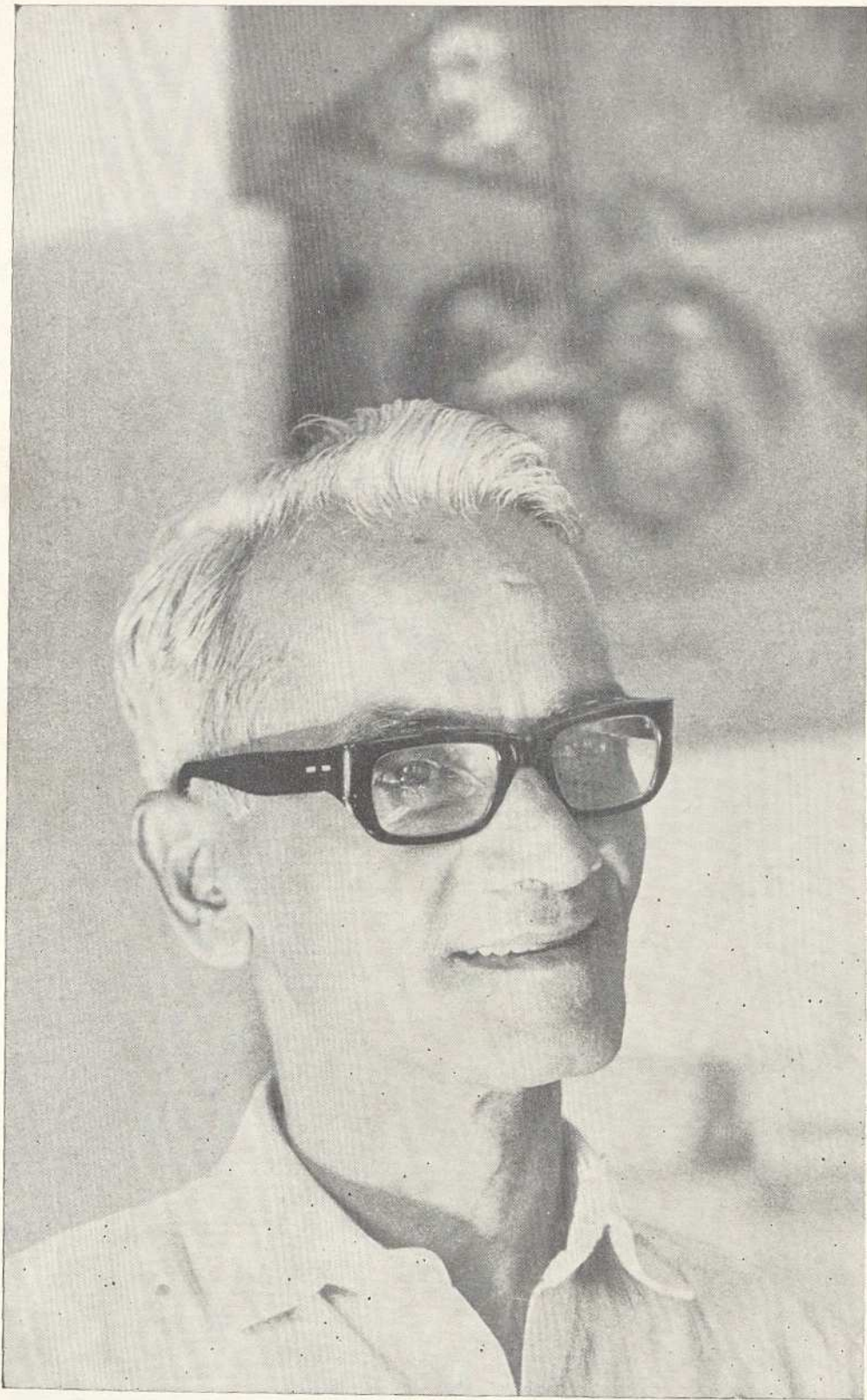
● Portrait of Shri Paul Koli, oils, 1970 ● 45 × 45 cms ● Collection : Shri Paul Koli



● Portrait of Vishnupant Bhagwat, oils, 1976 ● 45 × 60 cms ● Collection : Mauj Printing Bureau, Bombay



● Portrait of Mr. Sharma, oils, 1968 ● 34 × 57 cms ● Collection : Dalvi's Art Institute, Kolhapur



Shankar Palsikar : Sketches

















Shankar Palsikar : BIO-DATA

- 1917 Born on 17th May, at Sakoli, Dist. Bhandara, Maharashtra State, India.
- 1940-42 Studied under the guidance of Prof. N. S. Bendre.
- 1942-47 Studied painting at Sir J. J. School of Art, Bombay.
- 1947 Awarded Mayo Medal for First Class scholastic career.
- Appointed Fellow, at Sir J. J. School of Art.
- Continued as a teacher.
- 1950 Gold Medal by Bombay Art Society.
- Gold Medal by Fine Art Society of Calcutta.
- Recipient of the first Cultural Scholarship in Fine Art, Govt. of India.
- 1965 Represented India in International Plastic Art Conference held in England.
- Visited France and other countries of Europe to meet important artists and sculptors.
- 1968 Appointed Dean of Sir J. J. School of Art
- 1973 Invited by Govt. of Sri Lanka, as an Art-Educationist, to plan the Academic programme for Sri Lanka art-institutions.
- 1975 Retired as the Dean of Sir J. J. School of Art.
- 1982 Honoured with a Gold Medal and Life Membership by Art Academy of Italy for his outstanding services in the field of Art and Art-Education.
- Beside the major honours mentioned above, he was awarded many Silver and Bronze medals.
- Represented by his works at various International exhibitions.
- Nominated as one of the nine eminent artists of India by Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi.
- Worked as a member of art committees in various universities.
- Commissioned to paint portraits of eminent Indian Leaders such as Lokmanya Tilak, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri, Smt. Indira Gandhi.
- 1984 Expired on March 4th.