

# ■ 'The Third Mind' 'Paradigm-shifting' exhibition opens at the Guggenheim

By Jyotirmoy Datta

Revealing the powerful impact of Asia on American art, 'The Third Mind: American Artists Contemplate Asia, 1860-1989,' which opened at Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum New York on Jan. 30, features 270 works, including a large (68 inch by 168.5 inch), joyous abstraction by Gujarat-born New York painter, Natvar Bhavsar.

It has been described as "a paradigm shifting exhibition." It features work in various genres by over 100 of America's finest artists of the past 130 years. 'The Third Mind,' set to run through April 19, 2009, marks the 50th anniversary of the iconic Guggenheim New York building designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.

Guggenheim has fished its own depths, as well as trawled through other collections, to raise to view manuscripts and first editions of T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, and paintings by James Macneil Whistler and Mary Cassatt Mark Rothko and Robert Rauschenberg, to name just a few, to create a monumental and commanding reassessment of the history of American art. It is a summing-up and a new beginning of the awareness of the powerful presence of Asia in American art, an awareness that has been forming piecemeal and fragmentarily in recent decades.

Although there have been attempts by researchers and curators to explore various facets of the dynamic and complex impact of Asian art philosophy and religion on American art, 'The Third Mind' is epochal in that it unites the various threads, making it clear that Asia was more important than just the 'Orientalism' derided by post-colonial critics.

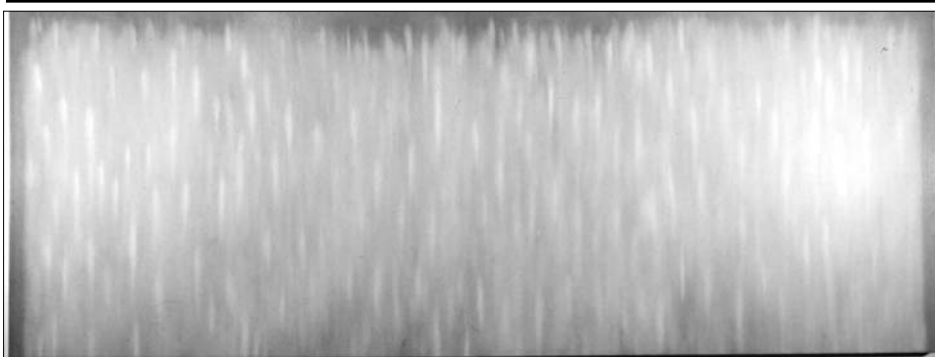
The project received a \$1 million Chairman's Special Award from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and an additional NEH planning grant. These NEH grants have been augmented by significant funding from the Terra Foundation for American Art, E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts and The W.L.S. Spencer Foundation. The exhibition was conceived and organized by Alexandra Munroe, Senior Curator of Asian Art of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, and a leading authority of Asian art.

"The Third Mind promises to be revelatory exhibition," Munroe commented. "Visitors will see 130 years of American creative culture through an entirely new lens and should appreciate the transformative influences of Asian art and ideas on the formal and conceptual achievements of American modern and avant-garde art." Thomas Krens, Director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, remarked: "This extraordinary survey of American art promises to be a paradigm-shifting exhibition at the highest level of innovation and aesthetic refinement." Mr. Krens continued: "We at the Guggenheim are honored by the National Endowment for the Humanities' recognition of the scholarly and educational merit of this exhibition."

'The Third Mind' proposes a new art historical construct, challenging the widely accepted view of the development of American modern art as a dialogue with Europe by alternatively focusing on artists' prolonged engagement with forms and ideas aligned with Asia. The exhibition illustrates how Asian art, literature, music, and philosophical concepts were incorporated, interpreted, and mediated to inspire new modes of experiential, contemplative, process-oriented, and interactive art. The exhibition ventures beyond standard accounts of the history of American modernism in which Asian influence is reduced to stylistic appropriations of Japanese forms among Impressionists, Post-Impressionists, and artists involved in the Aesthetic and Arts and Crafts movements.

The exhibition's scope encompasses the impact

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Delwara 1982, 68 by 168.5 inches., pigment on canvas by Natvar Bhavsar, featured in 'The Third Mind' opening at the Guggenheim Museum, Jan. 30

of the classical arts of India, China, and Japan, and the systems of Hinduism, Taoism, Tantric Buddhism, and Zen Buddhism. The title refers to a "cut-ups" work by Beat writers William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin, 'The Third Mind' Untitled ("Rub Out the World"), ca. 1965, in which unrelated texts are combined and rearranged to create a new narrative, evocative of the eclectic method by which American artists appropriated from Asia to create new forms, structures and meanings for their own art.

The artists represented in the exhibition include: John La Farge, James McNeill Whistler, Mary Cassatt, Arthur Wesley Dow, Georgia O'Keeffe, Augustus Vincent Tack, Ezra Pound, Isamu Noguchi, Mark Tobey, Morris Graves, David Smith, John Cage, Robert Rauschenberg, Nam June Paik, Yoko Ono, Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela, Jordan Belson, Ad Reinhardt, Anne Truitt, Agnes Martin, Dan Flavin, Walter de Maria, Adrian Piper, Bill Viola, and Tehching Hsieh, among others.

The exhibition is organized chronologically and thematically into sections:

**Aestheticism and Japan: The Cult of the "Orient":** American artists' fascination with the East began in the late 1850s and developed from the intellectual circles radiating from Boston, especially the interlocking communities of Harvard University, the Unitarians, and the Transcendentalists.

**Landscapes of the Mind: Early Modern Conceptions of Nature:** This section features leading artists of the early to mid-twentieth century who championed modern and abstract art in America while invoking Asian aesthetics and philosophies that conceived of nature as a unity of matter and spirit.

**Ezra Pound, Modern Poetry, and Dance Theater: Transliterations:** This section explores American translations of classical Asian literature and dance theater spanning World War I and the interwar period. Featured are rare first-edition books by such influential writers as Ezra Pound and Lafcadio Hearn, as well as manuscript pages from T.S. Eliot's imagist language.

**Calligraphy and Metaphysics: The Asian Dimensions of Postwar Abstract Art:** This section explores the transformative influences of calligraphic brushstroke and metaphysical speculation that were based on Asian traditions in postwar American abstract art. The traditions of metaphysical speculation in Hinduism, Taoism, and Zen Buddhism provided artists with a conceptual basis for the understanding and representation of the spiritual and universal potential of abstract art. Natvar Bhavsar, Gordon Onslow Ford, Lee Mullican, and Isamu Noguchi reinterpreted Asian cultural theory and artistic practices to enhance the meaning and value of abstraction during a period

when it was considered the most significant and progressive form of modern art.

**Zen, and Buddhism and the Neo-Avant-Garde: Cage Zen, Beat Zen:** This section follows three interconnected collectives of artists and writers whose sustained if eclectic connections to Zen and other forms of Mahayana Buddhism emerge as critical methodological and philosophical influences in the American postwar neo-avant-gardes.

**Art of Perceptual Experience: Pure Abstraction and Alternative Minimalism:** This section traces the development of a new iteration of Asian rhetoric in America art of the 1960s that recast the art object as a specific focus of contemplation and perceptual experience aimed at the transformation of consciousness. Ad Reinhardt's radical conclusion of art as a perceptual experience with the specific power to purify consciousness through the act of concentrated contemplation was constructed from his close readings of Asian art and religious thought. The "pure abstraction" and reductive forms of Reinhardt, Agnes Martin, and Robert Irwin shifted the conception of seeing from an optical event to a phenomenological process, and made durational time (of looking at the object) a medium of ontological awareness. In addition to painting and sculpture associated with Minimalism, this section features the experimental cinema of James Whitney and Jordan Belson, and the site-specific sound and light environment, Dream House, by La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela. During the course of the exhibition live performances of Young's innovations in North Indian Classical Raga will be presented by Young and Zazeela with The Just Alap Raga Ensemble. Meditation, Performance Art, and Video: The Body in Time The final exhibition section presents video, installation, and live performance art of the 1970s through 1989. Artists such as Linda Montano, Bill Viola, and Tehching Hsieh explore endurance and extreme duration as techniques of meditation and self-awareness.

Three site-specific installations are featured in the Guggenheim Museum show. The James Lee Byars' chamber that once hosted the performance 'The Death of James Lee Byars' (1982-1994), overlaid entirely with sheets of gold leaf, will be constructed in the High Gallery, and a new commission by Ann Hamilton will be unveiled on the Museum's ramps upon the occasion of this exhibition. In addition, Young and Zazeela's Dream House will be created in an adjacent Tower gallery. The Third Mind examines the aspirations to understand and internalize Asian art and thought among Asian-American and Asian-born artists working in the United States, identifying the catalytic effect of the transmission of "Eastern" sensibilities and forms into the American vanguard by artists such as Yasuo Kuniyoshi, Isamu Noguchi, and Natvar Bhavsar.

## ■ Show & Book The book on Natvar Bhavsar marks New York City painter's Beverly Hills show

By Jyotirmoy Datta

Sundaram Tagore Gallery in Beverly Hills is presenting works by Natvar Bhavsar in his exhibition entitled RANG. In conjunction with the show, Skira, the leading Italian art publishing house, has published a monograph on the artist.

The show was to open on Jan. 31, and run through Feb. 15, 2009. Using his characteristic style — sifting layers of pure

pigments onto canvas — New York-based Bhavsar produces brilliantly colored paintings with fluid, dense color. The works are inspired and informed by the vibrant palette of India, with colors floating in the center of the canvas, expanding like a cloud. Gallerist Sundaram Tagore says, "Bhavsar's work is striking and luminous—the colors expand and contract and there is an endless alternation of light and dark. He evokes the feeling of fluctuation with static images. Bhavsar's style has evolved over decades, and his technique of painting with dry pigment is groundbreaking and unique."

Tagore adds, "Bhavsar was touched by the visual impact of Holi and Rangoli, during which festival goers throw bright pigments on each other in celebration. This inspired Bhavsar to explore the language of color-field painting."

He was also awarded a Guggenheim Memorial Fellowship in 1975. His paintings are in more than 800 public and private collections, including those of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Boston Museum of Fine Art and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney.

In 1934, Bhavsar was born in Gujarat, and gained his early artistic education at the C.N. School of Art in Ahmedabad. In 1962, Bhavsar left India to further his education at the University of Pennsylvania's Department of Fine Arts. Since 1965, he has been an active member of the New York School of Colorists. In 1965, Bhavsar received a John D. Rockefeller Grant, which launched him into the New York art world. He was also awarded a Guggenheim Memorial Fellowship in 1975. His paintings are in more than 800 public and private collections, including those of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Boston Museum of Fine Art and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney. His paintings are included in the university museums of Cornell, Brown, MIT and Delaware. Bhavsar's work is also featured in many corporate collections, such as AT&T, Exxon, American Express, Swiss Bank, Hilton Hotels, Mobil, NBC and Reader's Digest Association.



Cover of the book on Natvar Bhavsar by Marius Kwint and Irving Sandler.