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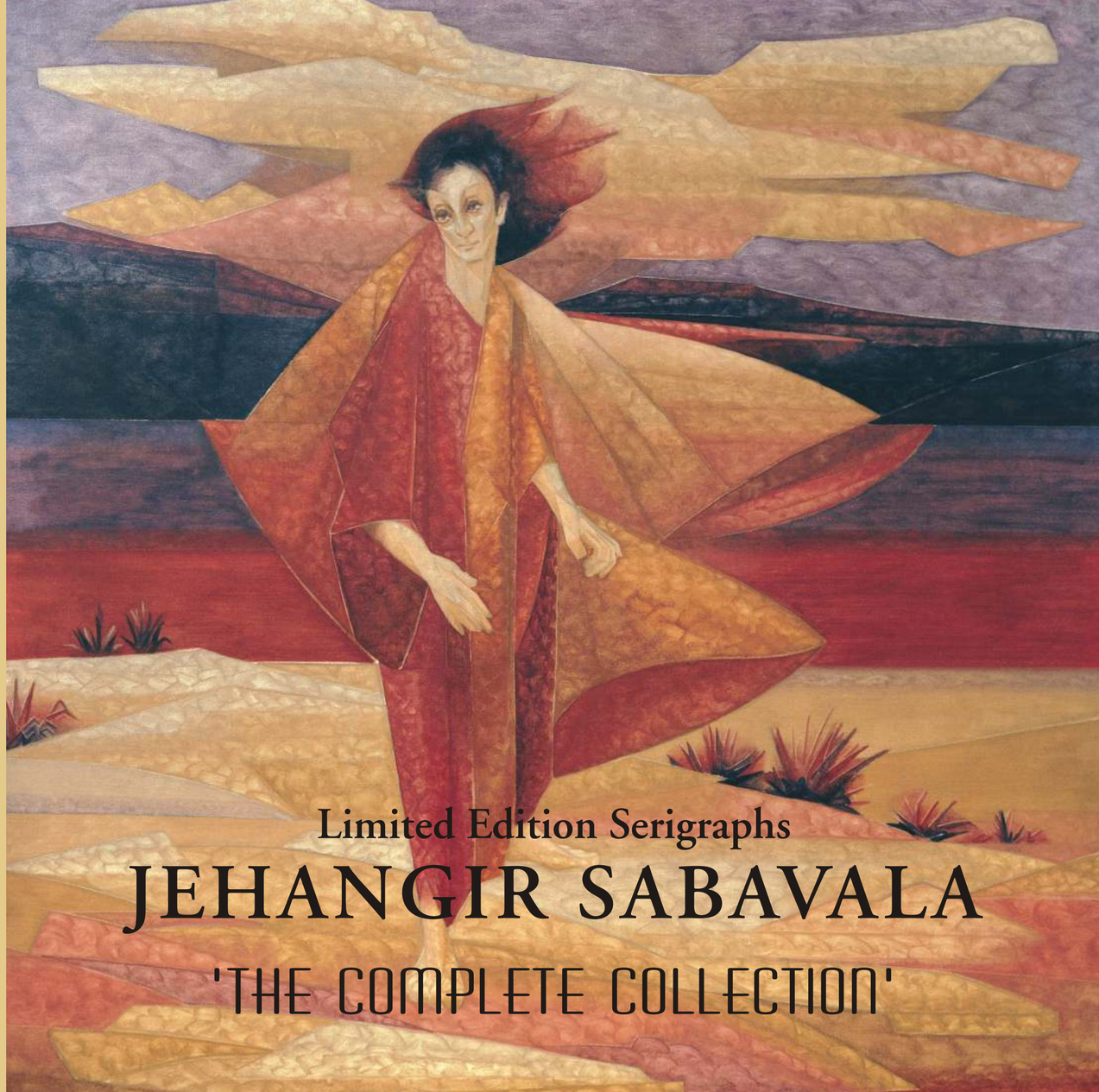
Limited Edition Serigraphs JEHANGIR SABAVALA 'THE COMPLETE COLLECTION'



Limited Edition Serigraphs

# JEHANGIR SABAVALA

## 'THE COMPLETE COLLECTION'

The Serigraph Studio

presents

# Limited Edition Serigraphs

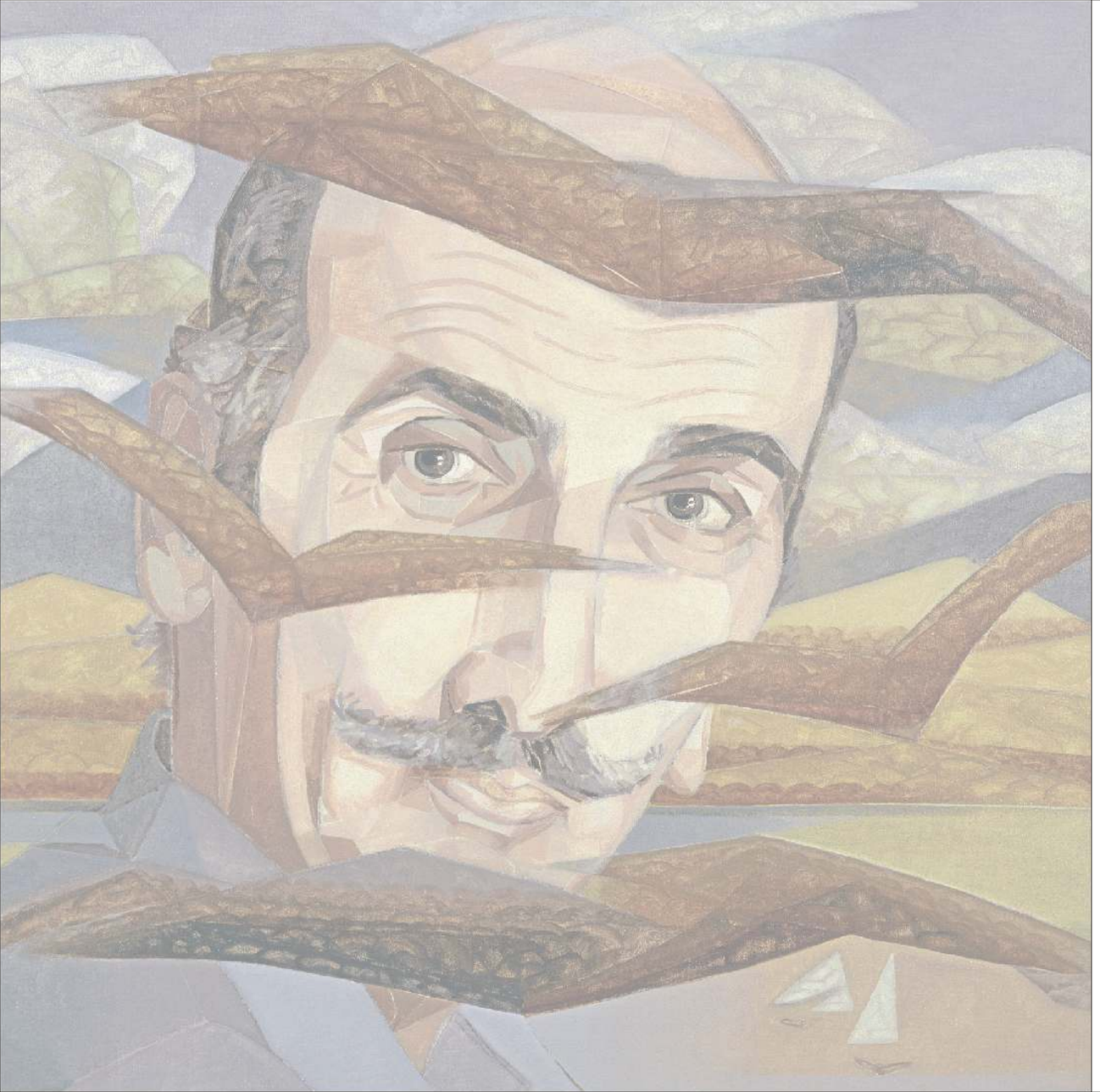
by

# JEHANGIR SABAVALA

## 'THE COMPLETE COLLECTION'

**(A Portfolio of 24 Serigraphs)**

2008



# Experiences of Grace, States of Illumination:
## The Paintings of Jehangir Sabavala

Ranjit Hoskote

A portfolio is, literally, a collection of leaves that you can carry with you. The word is veined with the pleasures of selecting a favourite image, dwelling on an intriguing detail, juxtaposing images from different periods in an artist's career to produce a visual narrative that is richly multi-dimensional. Like a miniature retrospective, a suite of limited edition serigraphs such as the present one, can represent the entire gamut of an artist's contribution and evoke the span of his artistic career. The images that comprise this selection demonstrate the inner logic of Jehangir Sabavala's aesthetic development and the changing nature of his responses to the complexities of self, society, ethnic ancestry and artistic context. A prominent member of the first generation of postcolonial Indian artists, Sabavala is one of the pioneers who first developed a painterly idiom that was attuned to the international languages of art-making yet sensitive to the textures of local culture and visual capability.

The present images stand in an intriguing relationship to the paintings on which they are based: they are not exact reproductions, but have been slightly modified by the artist through digital means, in consultation with the Serigraph Studio, the final images being produced by the screen-printing technique. The accelerated growth of the Indian art market during the last few years, welcome as it is from an economic as well as a cultural viewpoint, has tended to put the works of modern masters like Sabavala beyond the reach of many serious collectors. In such a situation, initiatives such as this limited edition serve to present a novel form of image, to amplify the ongoing conversation about Indian art, and to expand the collector base that sustains this domain of image-making activity.

The magic of Jehangir Sabavala's art remains inexhaustible; and I can say this with some authority, having known his art for several decades, a privilege that has informed the critical biography and the retrospective study of Sabavala that I have published, as well as the lifetime retrospective of his work that I curated for the National Gallery of Modern Art. To view this distinguished artist in the amplitude of his painterly journey is to bear witness to sixty years of questing. Sabavala has never been the hostage of fashion, the voice of ideology or the tactician of political necessity. At his own measured pace, working a lode on his own, without reference to schools, groups and movements, he has logged in a graceful progression from one key theme to the next, one formal discovery to another. The art of his maturity holds within it the reflexes of his apprenticeship to the grand tradition of European art and his training in the dominant styles of modernism, as well as the experience of passing through periods of meticulous self-questioning and the testing of alternatives.

Sabavala's handling of the primary elements of light, colour and texture has changed, at first almost imperceptibly and then more dramatically, over the decades. The hard, even aggressively definite and form-enclosing line of his early work has given way to suffusions of radiance that hint at the openness and limitless expanse of the infinite. The relationship between glazed surface and underlying structure has been determined, variously, by the rigours of pictorial grammar and the impulse towards fantasia. His early bright palette has yielded before subtle, fractured tonalities; the schematic evocation of the actual scene has been transmuted into the shimmering reverie, the imagined vista. And once again, in recent years, he has turned to brilliant colour, hard-edged figures, the interplay of angle, plane, shimmer and destiny. Through all these changes, Sabavala's paintings have preserved an introspective, melancholy lyricism, as well as the ache of the Sublime. These paintings are tinted by a nostalgia, as for moments once possessed, for homelands once known and now forever beyond the horizon of what can be known. Such is the aura that plays around the edges of Sabavala's

works, evoking in the viewer an awareness of transient beauty and imminent epiphany. There is, in each successive phase of Sabavala's career, a persistence of earlier concerns: an anticipation of future consummations; an emancipation of trapped possibilities; a patterning of departures.

Sabavala belongs to a family that is legendary for its patronage of the arts in Bombay; he marked a piquant innovation within its ranks, as a young man, by choosing to become a practitioner rather than a sponsor of the arts. He spent the shadowed years of World War II studying at Elphinstone College and the Sir Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy School of Art in the city of his birth, and left for London as soon as the global conflict came to an end. He was 23, and his ambition was to become an actor. Once in London, he quickly realised that painting, rather than theatre, was his true métier. He joined the Heatherley School of Art to master the techniques of genre and the secrets of vision that the tradition of Western art offered; a few years later, he moved to Paris to study with various teachers, the most important of them, for his development, was the Cubist academician André Lhote. The measured choreography of Sabavala's figurative paintings and the exquisite *mise-en-scene* of his landscapes are the only evidence pointing to his youthful fascination for the stage.

The future direction of Sabavala's art, with its periodic shifts of emphasis, is prefigured in this European programme of preparation. His art is defined by the interplay between structure and immediacy, reason and passion: the key formal problem he set for himself, early in his career, was that of reconciling a Cubist geometrical austerity with a festively Impressionist pleasure in light and colour. A key element in any discussion of his painterly transitions – his shifts of formal concern, thematic preoccupation, stylistic charter – is the tension, within his sensibility, between a movement towards the past and a movement towards the future.

Sabavala's relationship with the idiom and ideology of Cubism is a troubled one. We ask ourselves how he responded to, and re-crafted for his own purposes, a style that originated in a Machine Age technique of vision. Cubism, for Picasso, was a revolution against the stasis of bourgeois society and the smug academic art to which it subscribed; in Leger's Utopian world-view, it embodied the transfiguration of the spirit through technological progress and perfect design. Sabavala was attracted, not to the residual ideological content of Cubism, but to its formal discipline. Cubism ingrained in him a firm appreciation of light and structure; but it constrained him as he forged ahead and grew into an acceptance of a deep-seated classicising tendency within himself. The truth is that he was never, as some observers believe, a Cubist; he adapted the style for his own purposes, and it became one among the tributaries that nourished the river of his development.

Sabavala returned to Bombay from Paris in the early 1950s, exchanging a Europe recovering from World War II for an India emerging from colonial rule. Having decided to conduct his artistic career in the newly independent Republic, he applied himself to modulating the universal languages of modernism that he had acquired, to convey the immediacies of his local context. On making this fundamental decision to return home, he accepted the aesthetic concomitants attendant on it: he took upon himself the project of self-renewal, of re-inventing the self. Despite his pervasive sense of being an alien everywhere, although at home in the world Sabavala has always been proud of his Indian identity: he saw, at once, the need to articulate a clearer relationship with the Indian lifeworld, its colours, textures and densities. He was sharply aware of the fact that he had not simply returned to the subcontinent; but rather, and more crucially, to a nation-state that had paid for its liberation from the British Empire with the trauma of the Partition.

In retrospect, we recognise that Sabavala, as an actor in the cultural turmoil of the late 1950s, organised three discourses of negotiation with his immediate environment – at first by trial and error, and then in a more concerted fashion. First, a pictorial language of reconciliation with the place. Second, a 'legibility' *vis a vis* his own people, that is, a style whose conventions could be apprehended by a subcontinental audience (Sabavala has always been extremely attentive to the opinion of the 'man in the street', who is not a cliché of the newspapers to him; he recalls conversations with viewers



across the years, and has scrupulously preserved the books that he maintains for visitors' remarks during every exhibition). And finally, a location, in cultural terms, for his displaced self: this would involve a deep analysis of motive and position; it would mean an acceptance and even a joyous embracing of the romanticism of deep, rich, warm tropical colour, without a renunciation of the crystalline classical grasp of structure; it would allow Sabavala to engage with harbour and marketplace and streetside, without having to abandon the mountain, the cloud and the watershed. In other words, it has been Sabavala's fortune to be able to tap that longed-for process of organic growth which Jung has described as the marriage of consciousness and life.

The major breakthrough in Sabavala's artistic development occurred in the mid-1960s, once he had begun to question the value of his mannered improvisations within what I have elsewhere termed a 'tropicalised Cubism'. Energies and emotional impulses that had lain dormant in his consciousness for several decades were released. The neat unfolding of his images was disrupted by the sudden manifestation of the visionary landscape. In his magisterial canvases of the 1960s and 1970s, the Alpine lakes and Deccan scarp of his childhood, the banks of the Tungabhadra that he had driven along, as well as the southern seas he had sailed, were all transmuted into crystalline topographies of the spirit. These paintings were illuminated from within rather than from without; they were hymns to infinity and eternity.

From the evidence of this artistic trajectory, it appears that Sabavala's intelligence has gradually been drawn to a *religious* view of the universe. This may seem a controversial description for so secular-minded a person as Sabavala. But religion, to him, does not denote the outward aspect of peremptory dogma and ritual, the worship of idols or the repetition of prayers. It connotes, rather, the recognition of the transcendent dimension of life; a sense of the aura of eternity, which touches us most closely yet remains so distant that we cannot aspire to it by any means more physical than poetry. Religion, to Sabavala, is not the prison of a belief system. To him, it signifies that wonderment in the face of the world which imparts to our lives whatever ultimate meaning they have. He appreciates the mystical experience, without losing the sceptical edge of reason.

After the mid-1960s, Sabavala summons forth a procession of exiles and pilgrims in his paintings; and as they traverse the unbounded distances towards a once and future homeland, he traces the stations of their quest. We have here the tragic vision of a spiritual homelessness; at the zenith of its calm grief, it approaches and turns over into its opposite, a celebration of pantheistic luminosity, of the divine effulgence before which the human must necessarily fade. In this realisation lies the possibility that the exile and the pilgrim may recover the alchemical powers of healing and communion: it is then that the exile-pilgrim becomes the sorcerer. The lyrical tendency, apt by its nature to overflow, is modulated through the stringent organising faculty that Sabavala brings to his work: from this emerges the delicate beauty, at once intimate and remote, of the winged horizons and deserted strands, the distant cliffs and soundless waterfalls that so intrigue and captivate us, in Sabavala's paintings.

Despite the primacy of landscape, the figure has persisted in Sabavala's art as an idealised archetype. His preferred figure is the visitant: the fiery angel, the man arriving by sea, the messenger from another world. The otherness of such beings is balanced, however, by the weaving of one form into another through a sleight of charcoal and brush: the man becomes a tree, the body a peak, the skin of water a rushing cloak. In Sabavala's recent work, this interweaving of figure and landscape has grown insistent and powerful: as though, through the geometer's planar intricacies and the sensualist's tonal play, the artist were trying to bring nature and the human will into harmony.

The most distinctive feature of Sabavala's practice is his continuing devotion to the classical ideals of beauty and serenity, however threatened they may be in a period of absolute war, programmed genocide and forced migration, when human experience has pushed art towards the extreme

conditions of the sublime and the grotesque, the terrifying and the horrible. To Sabavala, beauty remains an experience of grace to be cherished, a state of illumination that gives us the strength to endure existence.

His paintings of the early 21st century emphasise that Sabavala's art derives its crucial tension from the dialectic between the *actual* and the *idealised:* his paintings come to life in the conceptual region between mutable terrain and timeless landscape, raw body and stylised figure, ephemeral flowers and eternal still life. The principal device by which Sabavala transmutes and idealises the forms of nature in his paintings is a *crystalline geometry,* which dissolves bodies, objects and geographies, and re-constitutes them as prismatic structures. By re-arranging reality into composition, he re-formats the fissile and fugitive elements of experience into a mosaic, conducts the visible in the direction of the visionary. This tendency towards classicism is more than a conscious strategy for Jehangir Sabavala; it springs from a need to regulate the contingencies of existence, the contradictions of a versatile self, and the vagaries of a capricious history.

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Ranjit Hoskote is a cultural theorist, art critic, independent curator and poet. He is the author of eleven books, including five studies of art and artists, four collections of poetry, an edited anthology of contemporary verse, and a translation. These publications include a critical biography as well as a retrospective study of Jehangir Sabavala. The most recent of Hoskote's publications are *Vanishing Acts: New & Selected Poems 1985-2005* (Penguin, New Delhi 2006), *Baiju Parthan: A User's Manual* (Afterimage, Bombay 2006) and *The Dancer on the Horse: Reflections on the Art of Iranna GR* (Lund Humphries/ Ashgate, London 2007). Hoskote has curated twelve exhibitions, including a lifetime retrospective of Jehangir Sabavala for the National Gallery of Modern Art, Bombay and New Delhi (2005), and a mid-career retrospective of Atul Dodiya (2001) for the Japan Foundation, Tokyo.



### ‘At the Desert’s Edge’ (1975)

Surveying his landscapes of the 1960s and 1970s, Sabavala admits that, despite his multi-cultural predilection for the exuberance of the French and Italian countryside, it is the soil of India that moored these paintings: “I seem more drawn to the sea and sky of the western seaboard and to the ridges and dunes of our desert areas. To the arid wastes of Rajasthan where all is adobe-coloured, and land and sky merge into one, but no focal point is ever lost.” In the cinematic-seeming ‘At the Desert’s Edge’ (1975), Sabavala combines the felicity of an Antonioni with an attentiveness to the rhythms of labour and repose. His figures, shown at rest, speak of work and wandering; the pause they wait upon seems to have come at the end of a long period of travail, or marks the beginning of another bout of combat with the elements.

Paper size : 22" x 30"
Composition size : 17" x 24"
Paper : Somerset 250 gsm
Edition size : 125



**‘The Wandering Shades II’ (2003)**

‘The Wandering Shades II’ (2003) gathers together several threads in Sabavala’s art: it fuses the wandering pilgrims of his 1970s paintings, envoys of lost tribes and nomadic populations, with the intimate yet operatic visitants that entered his frames during the 1980s. They gesture and sing silently to the moon; they speak of stars that have died but continue to transmit their light across the vast distances of space; they bear augury and disquiet yet also the promise of repose. The form and stance of these “extra-terrestrials”, as the artist calls them – visitors from other worlds, who arrive in radiance and mystery –owes much to Botticelli; but a little, also, to Chirico’s masked or faceless protagonists in their blank piazzas, and to the Bengal School’s evocations of the Bodhisattvas of Ajanta.

Paper size : 30" x 22"
Composition size : 24" x 16"
Paper : Somerset 250 gsm
Edition size : 125



**‘The Stranger I’ (1990)**

‘The Stranger I’ is an incarnation of the fire principle. He commands a beach on which he appears to have only just made landfall, its drifts of marbled sand pricked with clumps of agave. His robe, seemingly made of flame, billows around him like a sail or canopy. Red and amethyst mountains rise up behind him, breakers frozen in mid-surge, and the radiant cloud that serves him as backcloth also invests him with effulgence. The genealogy of this magisterial figure includes Botticelli’s Venus arising from the ocean as well as the risen Christ immortalised by numerous Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque interpretations of the sacred theme of the Resurrection. ‘The Stranger I’ also draws upon the Bengal School’s dream-like evocations of the Bodhisattvas of Ajanta. A sumptuous yet sombre phantasm, he takes his place in the gallery of ‘visitants’ that Sabavala has painted since the 1980s. They arrive robed in radiance and mystery, emissaries from other worlds, other planes of consciousness.

Paper size : 32" x 30"
Composition size : 24" x 24"
Paper : Somerset 300 gsm
Edition size : 125



**‘The Friends’ (1983)**

Sabavala’s ‘Purdah Women’, and their associated choric arrangements of women, bring back to mind Cartier-Bresson’s exquisite photographs of Kashmiri Muslim women taken in 1947, figures that are almost mythic in their power and yet portrayed in everyday settings; the eye rests on their pleated robes and veils, their gestures of prayer or communication. It is possible that the memory of this suite of images, which Sabavala admires, informed his ‘Purdah’ series. In ‘The Friends’, the artist establishes a pleasing visual rhyme of heads turning, hands poised and legs stepping in synchrony, almost as though the simple act of women walking to the market in a village in the Himalayan foothills had been transformed into the ceremonial procession of fashion models down a catwalk.

Paper size : 44" x 30"
Composition size : 32" x 24"
Paper : Somerset 300 gsm
Edition size : 125



**‘The Sorcerer II’ (2003)**

In ‘The Sorcerer II’ (2003), Sabavala takes over the techniques of photography: this painting is a close-up, time-lapse, double-exposure revisiting of one of his most moving works, ‘The Sorcerer’ (1989). In both paintings, the austere phantasm of a wizard, robed in topaz and purple, throws out his arm in a curse. All around, the lakes harden into rock, while two trees take the brunt of the malediction. With entwined trunks, like twin pythons, their foliage like mottled clouds, they stand – cursed, created. In this bivalent moment of negation and affirmation, a moment that is maimed and gloried all at once, the wizard stands revealed as the painter himself. As an allegorical self-portrait, this vista of the fabulist and his enchantment marks an impressive mutation of dormant images: the sorcerer incarnates the protagonists of Sabavala’s *japonisme* phase of the 1950s, his appearance being partly of Kabuki provenance and partly a debt to Aubrey Beardsley.

Paper size : 30" x 44"
Composition size : 24" x 33"
Paper : Somerset 300 gsm
Edition size : 125



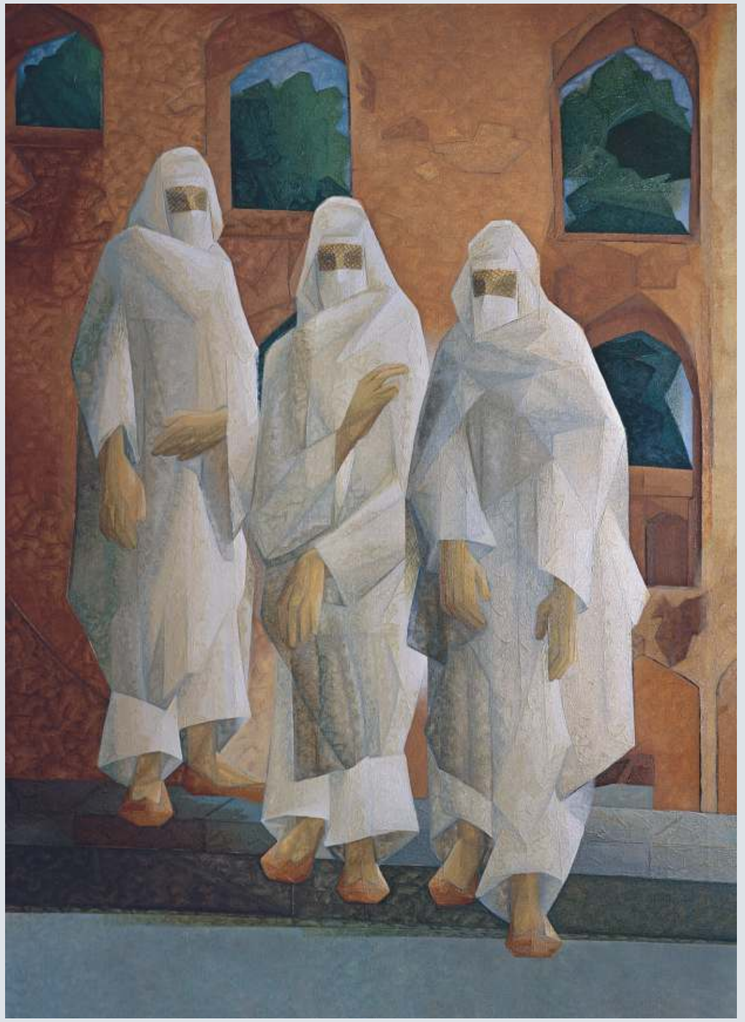
**‘Purdah I’ (1982)**

Sabavala is, by temperament, oriented towards withdrawal and retreat. He desires to enter another order of being where vespers and matins, the offices comprising sheaves upon sheaves of psalms, calibrate the magical hours of silence and create new forms of attention to the word and the world. And in his paintings, it is the repose of liturgical time, rather than the restlessness of its horological counterpart, that we experience: the sense of duration envelops us, and time itself has become the space of our effort.

In ‘Purdah I’ (1982), the artist works with another kind of cloister, with the robe and the shell of the guarded interior space. Statuesque, monumental, partaking of the textures of the pink terracotta walls behind them, framed against the windowed sky, the three women in ‘Purdah I’ remain ethereal, almost floating above the steps that ground them and earth their electricities. As though officiating at some secret rite, at the threshold of speech, these women glide forth from their cloisters: the swaddling, placental volume of the burnous cannot hide the determination of the limbs, nor can the veil mask the face.

Paper size : 30" x 22"
Composition size : 24" x 17"
Paper : Somerset 250 gsm
Edition size : 125





### ‘The Sorrowing Men’ (1974)

How do individuals who have renounced human attachments in their quest for transcendence express grief when confronted with loss? Sabavala dwells on the emotional complexity of such a moment in ‘The Sorrowing Men’, a drama of feeling that is signified by gesture rather than manifest expression. The painting is dominated by three tonsured men wearing the anchorite’s austere robes: in their unspoken mourning, the freight of anguish collides with long-practised disciplines of restraint. The men attend a verdant shrub: is this an ancestral tumulus, marking diaspora or massacre? Who, or what, lies buried there? The background suggests a cave monastery, and the painting’s elegiac browns and ivory greys are offset by the living green of the shrubbery. This palette indicates an affinity with that of Zurbaran; and Sabavala’s elongated monastic figures, which rhyme with the cypresses or stalagmites rising from the earth, render homage both to the mystical El Greco and to the Buddhist visionaries of paradise who painted Dunhuang.

Paper size : 44" x 30"
Composition size : 31" x 24"
Paper : Somerset 300 gsm
Edition size : 125



**‘Pilgrimage II’ (1996)**

From the late 1960s onwards, Sabavala has invoked the train of pilgrims, who conduct their doubts and yearnings through a terrain of crags and waterfalls, caves and abysses, deserts and mirages, on their way to the receding horizon. Sabavala, as stage designer, lavishes his love of ceremonial and drama on the arrangement of the visual stresses in such paintings as ‘Pilgrimage II’ (1996). In Sabavala’s paintings of the 1980s and 1990s, the universe speaks in a voice capable of many nuances. “One is moved,” the artist says, “by the sweep, the drama, the magnificent changeability of nature.” Transposing his interior drama of turmoil and exhilaration onto the tide, the wind, the awesome spectacle of a storm rending the earth open, he offers homage to the cosmos, the original creation. As a humanist, Sabavala holds that “on this threshold of beauty and pain, man is yet the great achiever”; and yet, the humanist dogma that man is the measure of all things can hardly be said to lie at the core of his vision. Man’s chief achievement, in Sabavala’s paintings, has been to arrive and depart in silence, with something of the furtive apologia of the interloper in the grand spectacle. Sabavala’s figures seek sanctuary in a terrain that is all possible home, even as it is all minatory fastness. As though reverting to the Indo-Iranian religion of his ancient forebears, Sabavala affirms the sacredness of the universe: the creative and regenerative principle of the cosmos far overshadows man and his works.

Paper size : 30" x 22"
Composition size : 24" x 16"
Paper : Somerset 250 gsm
Edition size : 125



### ‘The Disciples’ (1981)

A complex relationship of attraction and doubt has nourished Sabavala’s experience of belief in a Transcendent. An umbilical connection links the sanyasins of the Bihar School of Yoga’s Munger ashram, where the artist has sometimes retreated, to the protagonists of ‘The Sorrowing Men’ (1974) and its successor, ‘The Disciples’ (1981). It is from these seed paintings that Sabavala’s anchorite figures of the 1980s and 1990s were to take their cue. In ‘The Disciples’, three monks walk wrapped in stillness, each in his own inward, private calm. The *tulsi* sprig in one monk’s hand, the *mudras* brought into being by the other monks’ fingers, suggest a life of the soul that is constantly distilled from the life of the body. And yet the body makes its imperious claims, rings through the confident stance of the feet, the poise of the carriage, the nobility of the domed heads. In both paintings, the men might be yogis, Buddhists, Essenes, or beings from some futuristic scenario: the ideal type in Sabavala’s figuration is northern, carrying with it the tranquillity of the Tibetan monastery of legend, or the unease of the lands exposed to Hun and Mongol assaults, or the resilience of the mountainous frontier between the Pamir highlands and peninsular India.

Paper size : 30" x 22"
Composition size : 24" x 17"
Paper : Somerset 250 gsm
Edition size : 125



### ‘The Guiding Light II’ (2004)

Sabavala has often paid pictorial homage to the figure of the beckoning prophet, the magus who tracks the star of prophecy, and the musician-sage who sings of the glories to come through the dark night of the spirit. In ‘The Guiding Light II’ (2004), he invites us to consider two figures who are about to be transformed by the unearthly magnificence of a light in the firmament, neither sun nor moon, but the radiance of a transformation both hoped for and held in awe.

Paper size : 30" x 22"
Composition size : 24" x 17"
Paper : Somerset 250 gsm
Edition size : 125



**‘The Lost Tribe’ (1975)**

In ‘The Lost Tribe’, Sabavala summons up the image of white-robed pilgrims or exiles traversing a bare plain, forming a momentary focus of life in a desert of rock and petrified bushes. Fatigue or death has brought the journey to a halt. A group within the group huddles on the ground, weakened but secure within the envelope of community; it is only barely protected from vaster uncertainty and hostility, from the predators of history and nature. Sabavala demonstrates his consummate mastery over colour here, teasing a range of moods and gradations from his deliberately muted palette of brown and white: the painting is composed in harmonies of sienna, umber, ecru, taupe, tan, cream and chalk. ‘The Lost Tribe’ rises in parallel strata: first rocks, dunes and shrubs; above them, receding horizons; higher still, snow-capped peaks and mountain-like clouds; and in the sky, minatory birds, their wings spread wide above their potential prey, circling above the lost tribe like great clouds.

Paper size : 30" x 44"
Composition size : 24" x 32"
Paper : Somerset 300 gsm
Edition size : 125



# Between the Plain and the Precipice: Jehangir Sabavala's Art of Travel

Nancy Adajania

*In Jehangir Sabavala's paintings, we interact with different personae: those of an alchemist, a monk, a visitant, a pilgrim, a refugee, a mystic; or the veiled figure whose identity will always remain a mystery. These questing figures, painted against enchanted, spectral landscapes, are bewitching projections of Sabavala's personality. Although his landscapes are departures from actual geographical sites – it could be the Sahyadris or Lac Leman – they are essentially private conundrums where the universal drama of exile, loss and longing is performed. In the course of this conversation, we spend an evening travelling into the landscapes of the past, haunted by the bleached aura of distance, and of the future, coming to birth in the artist's eye.*

***Nancy Adajania:*** *There was a time when the art of travel was oriented towards an amplification of the self, the refinement of the spirit, especially for an artist of your privileged background. Today travel is computed in frequent flier miles and marathonic canvas races organised by art camps. As a painter of sublime landscapes, of land-locked seas and cavernous mountains, of petrified trees and simmering volcanoes, what are your earliest memories of travel to distant and not-so distant lands?*

**Jehangir Sabavala:** One was truly privileged to indulge in pure travel. There was no coercion, no deadlines and if there were any, we happily broke them as children. My brother Sharokh and I spent months in Matheran, the Sahyadris, the Nilgiris and the Palni hills. We never stepped into the gymkhanas of those places, the other boys and girls thought we were snobbish, but I could not participate in their silly competitive games, instead we spent time talking, trekking and looking, and meeting the local people. We went on magnificent walks into the valleys, tried to make contact with the people and gathered knowledge of the rich flora and fauna.

*NA: You had a natural curiosity towards your environment and bonded easily with strangers, even though at the core you were a lonely child.*

**JS:** As a child, I would play by myself, devise my own games and make my own rules. I outlined my own little world and planned it for myself. It wasn't a very happy home, my parents eventually separated. Father was keen on politics but did not succeed in it. Mother was a maverick, she yanked us in and out of school and we spent months on end happily travelling with a retinue of servants and a



menagerie of dogs ensconced in their baskets, a variety of birds and Siamese cats, seal point or chocolate point. And wherever we went, mother dragged us into the galleries and the museums, the Louvre in Paris, the National Gallery and the Tate in London, the Prado in Madrid and the Uffizi in Florence. Bellini, Veronese, Tintoretto, Zurbaran, Greco, Rubens, Rembrandt, Delacroix, Gericault and the Impressionists followed us like ghosts on our travels.

I was always interested in meeting people from other backgrounds. Being Zoroastrian didn't mean that I was partial only to Parsis, What was important was forging a sympathetic bond with people, as we did in Ceylon and elsewhere. In Ceylon we visited the marvellous sites of Sigiriya and Anuradhapura. My eyes instinctively searched the landscape: the clouds, the trees, plants and snakes, and the perverse lure of the fall over the great precipice.

*NA: One of the people you bonded with as a teenager seems to have been an Italian prisoner-of-war. I am speaking of your handsome portrait sketched in the early 1940s. How did this encounter transpire?*

**JS:** I met him in Ahmednagar with ENSA, a group put together by the British, of young people who could entertain the troops and the prisoners-of-war who were being rehabilitated at the hospital. The former were to be shipped out to their postings, the latter to be eventually repatriated. We were selected for showing some talent at singing or dancing. You were booed or given a glad eye if you were pretty [laughs mischievously]. The Italian asked me to sit for him. The Indian talent was mainly drawn from Parsis and Christians – and the resident English helped out – but not from the others. I don't know why.

*NA: That is because the Parsis were a comprador elite in the British Raj and as Ranjit Hoskote says in his critical biography on you, they were dwibhashis, the pragmatic two-tongued ones who knew how to speak the language appropriate to the occasion. Paradoxically, the wealth some of them made from the opium trade was used for setting up charities, money was donated not only to the Parsi community but also to demobbed soldiers of all nationalities and Sanskrit scholars, as well as to educational and medical institutions.* [1]

**JS:** That's true. Mother did charitable work for her own community, as well as for others. She set up 'Swabal', a chain of cooperative stores to promote self-reliance and dignity of labour among poor Parsis, especially young, unqualified Parsi males. There was instant opposition to the scheme from both sexes, especially from men who felt it demeaning to undertake such work. So, to set an example, it was Mother herself who swept the floors of the shop clean. Subsequently, a 'Swabal' chain was established in Bombay, successfully.

*NA: The gifted child is almost always solitary, don't you think?*

**JS:** I was different. I did not like the rough and tumble of rugger, football and hockey. I was the butt of attack because of my looks. But equally because of my background, somehow it was the foreign teachers who treated me like one of themselves.

I was a solitary child. I was bored to death in class. The teachers used to complain that the other children were distracted because of me. In my Swiss school in Montreux, my eyes were inevitably fixed on the enchanted garden outside the class and the still exquisite beauty of Lac Leman. In *Les Avants,* the village above Montreux, I received private education in the broadest sense from my Anglo-Burmese tutor Ronald Fischer of Dulwich College. Here I did not have to fit into a formal academic pattern, which suited me admirably. But this was an exceptional phase in my dreary school life. Incidentally, I once by accident almost shot my instructor at the Cathedral School's rifle range.

*NA: Did the panoramic landscapes of tropical profusions, fissures and placid lakes work as a release, a foil to your loneliness?*

**JS:** As I said before, it was not a happy home and there were tremendous tensions. The landscape served as an escape, a liberation from pain. Father was under strain and went to a clinic in Vienna. Remember that the influence of Freud was relatively young, but pronounced, in those days.

*NA: Did private pain and a natural reticence lead you to wearing masks? I mean mask in the Jungian sense, that is, of assuming different personae to deal with the world. Your friend of many years, Richard Lannoy, has astutely observed that, "It is the sheer difficulty of finding the you (Shirin and Jehangir) in both of you, because one trait you practice to perfection – that is the subtle art of being oblique, understated, allusive. Your social self, the mask you put on for social occasions, is a very elaborately wrought item, as if straight from the workshop of the finest Renaissance or Baroque or Mughal goldsmith!" [2]*

*I ask you then, Jehangir what if the persona becomes you, and does not allow the growth of the self? Can it happen that the mask might become the true self, over time? Or that one becomes what others think one is? How do you preserve the secret life of the spirit behind the mask?*

**JS:** Eventually, you reveal yourself through your paintings. I realised that I have to be firmly engaged with my chosen profession – and that it was not only my paintings, but also myself that was on display. And so the mask had its uses. But the mask was not fake, it also communicated a strong aspect of one's personality. When we returned to India, we wanted to present ourselves with our plus points and our minuses and be accepted by India. Whether one was accepted or not, one



had training and technique enough to sail through socially speaking. But most importantly: How would I be accepted as a painter? How would I integrate myself via my work into this young new republic of India?

*NA: Nilima Sheikh in her essay in the art journal Vrishchik, 1973, alludes to this very problem, your inability to integrate Cubist style with your own environment. She writes: "There is absolutely no harm in subscribing to the devices of Western art or traditional Indian painting.…But whether they guarantee the same conviction in a changed environment is a problem the modern painter here is constantly faced with. The problem [arises] …when a painter like Jehangir Sabavala tries to impose the devices of Cubism on pastoral scenes…."*

**JS:** The Hungarian art historian Charles Fabri woke me up. I realised that emotion and feeling had to enter my work. I was looking for a breakthrough that would take precedence over technique and school. You should be conscious of what you are doing, but if you are self-conscious, then the stance is artificial and disaster awaits you.

Hide-and-seek in public has to be intelligently handled. Was I frightened to make the breakthrough? No, I knew that it was correct and important. Work and experimentation do not frighten me at all. However, feedback is very important. You get nothing from people who you should be able to talk to. If I attempt a conversation with my peers, the persona seems to come in the way. The persona has to be integrated with your work and social presence, otherwise it is like play-acting.

*NA: How did you relate to the changed India on your return from Paris in 1951, where you were exposed to Impressionism and Cubism?*

**JS:** Figures in India lent themselves to Cubism, our sharp light helped. My mentor André Lhote's teachings came alive. For instance 'A Shop in Jaipur', which I painted in the 1950s, is composed of triangles and cubes, sharp-edged, but forming a whole without obscuring the figuration.

*NA: The cowled figure in the foreground of 'A Shop in Jaipur' and in the mid-ground of the 'Pavement Dwellers', 1956, reappears as a visitant, a stand of trees, or a purdah woman. The veiled figure is also pared down to a notation against the immenseness of nature. Does this figure serve your need for secrecy?*

**JS:** Perhaps not consciously, but now that you put it this way, may be it has to do with the fact that, although I do interact with the press and the public, deep down I have the need to be distinctly private.

*NA: When did the first stirrings of an idealised landscape occur in your painting? Was it in 'In the World's Afterlight', 1966, that you softened the contours of a razor-sharp Cubism to a broken palette?*

**JS:** I personalised my painting with 'In the World's Afterlight'. I didn't care whether it was figurative, mystic or abstract. It is not a happy painting. There's mystery, depth, a seeming tranquillity with a strain of disquiet. Earlier I was afraid to let the viewer into my world. Fabri said: "Don't be afraid. Just express yourself and other aspects of your personality." Today I relate more and more to my painting, and I don't see the man as separate from his work.

*NA: You were attempting to fuse the realms of the private with the painterly. 'Darksome Hour' made two years before 'In the World's Afterlight' clearly exudes menace. Mountains sharpen their knives, a pair of blade-wings scar the night sky.*

**JS:** It is true that this painting has an apparently lyrical quality with an underlying menace. It does not deal with a volcano bursting forth or with political issues. The menace is a personalised one, but distinct.

*NA: An archetypal fear of the unknown is a constant ground note of your work. Could it be related to the Parsi psyche, which is lacerated by fear, melancholia, and a persistent death wish? A deep sense of loss due to exile is dramatised through the increasing isolation felt within the community.*

**JS:** In principle, I would say that my work is not overtly related to Zoroastrianism, but in the deep subconscious, perhaps it is. In a way it has to do with a person who belongs nowhere and yet everywhere.

*NA: To move away from the twi-dark zones, 'Sails on a Blue Day', 1967, is a calmer although a no less intense work. During that period you had observed that you were "seduced by a palette of broken tones…by a visible search for a more distilled essence". The half tones tempered through a palette of blue, violet, green, yellow and the shimmer of white turns the monumental sail into a cloud sculpture. But the wings seem to have caught the sunlight and are gently ablaze.*

**JS:** I was influenced by Lyonel Feininger's use of light. In 'Sails on a Blue Day', I was projecting the light beyond the core of the subject, I worked on the surrounding atmosphere to soften the hardness of my earlier figurations.

*NA: In 'Lost Tribe', 1975, an ode to political and ecological refugees, strange figures part frozen bird, part Stonehenge, part petrified trees, stand before a landscape picked out in light and dark planes. The light planes are wintry, the dark ones lure you to cross or rather fall through them.*

**JS:** These strange figures are at once real and not real. I have moved from more academic solid figuration to a wraith-like, distant, ghost-like rendition. At the same



time, I have returned often and again to monumental figures in heavy drapes which give volume to the body. Take the sari for instance, it is infinitely mysterious. Or look at my 'Purdah Women' from the early 80s, they are not the conventionally perceived veiled figures. They form a bastion, ranged as they are like an army.

*NA: Are you metaphorically magnifying their regimented lives?*

**JS:** Not all Muslim women feel suppressed under their veil. The veil could work like an armour against society, they can look out at the world but not be seen in return. Today the veil is deployed as a political statement by women in Islamic countries.

*NA: The figure in 'Caverns Measureless to Man I', 2004, perplexes us, we don't know whether it has fallen over the valley's edge or it is floating.*

**JS:** We can never know for sure. Caverns are frightening places. For me, they represent the unpredictable and the unfathomable.

*NA: Also, flight and death are linked in an uncanny way in your work. For me, the magnificent vulture in 'The Predator', 1987, does not hold menace in its claws. Instead we receive a punch of cold fear when a gigantic tree, deadwood of many centuries bursts forth from the vulture's wings.*

**JS:** It's true, the bird's fierceness is not expressed predictably in its claws. Rather, the emphasis is on the power of the wings laden with the weight of doom. I feel this work is emotionally charged and powerful.

*NA: The figure of the visitant, the stranger or the mystic is of indeterminate gender. Is it a Jungian play of animus/anima or is it an unspoken play with sexuality?*

**JS:** These androgynous strangers are perhaps, for me, more male than female, but their sex does not matter. They provoke a sense of mystery. What is important is the epiphany of arrival.

*NA: That is such a beautiful phrase, Jehangir. To return to the beginning of our conversation, artists today rarely share their inter-cultural experiences with their viewers. They seem to be on auto-pilot, bound by the Faustian logic of endless production.*

**JS:** Today you don't need to be wealthy to travel, globalisation has created many opportunities for our artists to travel and consume the world. And yet when you ask younger artists about their experience of confronting another culture, they are evasive. You can't get a word out of them – I wonder why.

*NA: If I asked you to travel in the forest of your mind, which direction would you prefer to travel in and who would you like to meet?*

**JS:** To be honest, I would like to travel westwards. There are two or three people I would like to meet. One of them is part-Japanese, part-English, she has a deep empathy for me and my work. We write regularly to each other. The others are men who have reached out to me. However, this is not what has happened, I seem to have traveled in the forests and deserts of the East, essentially pursuing a mysterious trail.

*NA: If you had decided to stay on in the West, how do you think your career would have shaped out?*

**JS:** I don't know what turn it would have taken, but I would not be pessimistic. Why is it that if you are born in one country you cannot belong to another? We belong to the world.

Notes

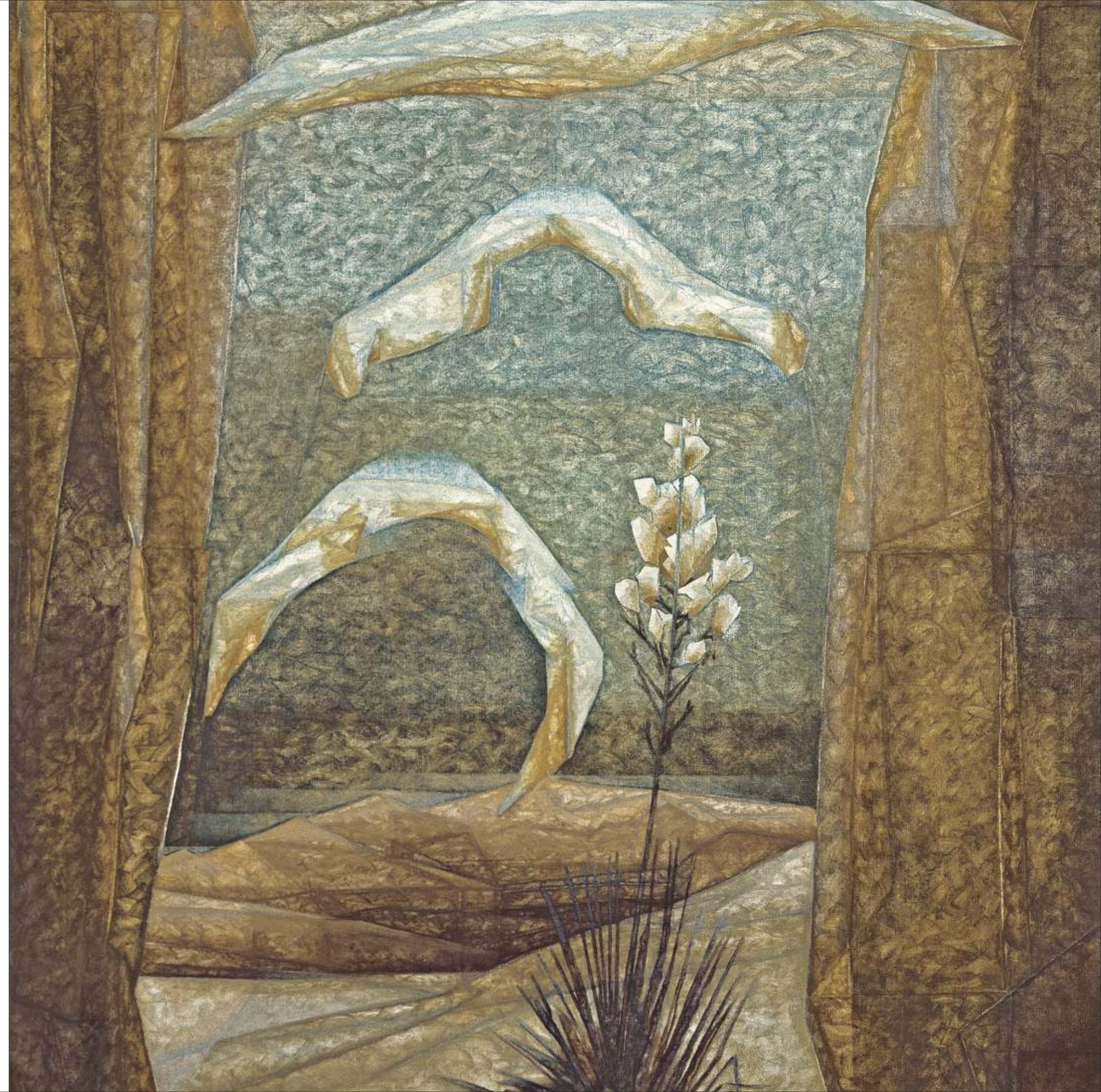
1. Ranjit Hoskote, *Pilgrim, Exile, Sorcerer: The Painterly Evolution of Jehangir Sabavala* (Bombay: Eminence Designs, 1998), p. 25.

2. Ranjit Hoskote, *The Crucible of Painting: The Art of Jehangir Sabavala* (Bombay: Eminence Designs/ National Gallery of Modern Art, 2005), p. 80.

Nancy Adajania is a cultural theorist, art critic and independent curator. She has written and lectured extensively on contemporary Indian art, especially new-media art and its political and cultural contexts, at international venues such as Documenta 11, Kassel; the Zentrum fur Kunst und Medien, Karlsruhe; the Neuer Berliner Kunstverein and the Transmediale, Berlin; the Danish Contemporary Art Foundation, Copenhagen; and Lottringer 13, Munich, among others.

Adajania is a contributor to *Springerin*, Vienna, and *Metamute*, London, *Public Art*, Minneapolis, *Art 21*, Paris, *Art Asia Pacific*, New York, and *X-Tra*, Los Angeles. She was Editor-in-Chief of *Art India*, in which capacity she developed a discursive space for emergent new-media and public art practices on a global level. Adajania was co-curator for the exhibition 'Zoom! Art in Contemporary India' (Lisbon, April 2004) and curator for the exhibition 'Avatars of the Object: Sculptural Projections' (Bombay, August 2006).





**‘Under Sail’ (1959)**

Sabavala spent the 1950s in transit between decisions: between countries, styles and orientations to the world. As a wanderer, he was attracted to ships and birds, motifs that assumed a particular importance to his art during this period. The ship is an invitation to paradox: you remain stationary while being in motion on it, and so it presents itself as the most fitting rendition of Sabavala’s underlying theme of a passage between a ‘here’ and an ‘elsewhere’ that shift definition all the time. The bird, by negotiating between the enclosure of gravity and the openness of flight, negotiates a dialectic of freedom for itself. These impulses of passage and freedom are best portrayed in the 1959 seascape, ‘Under Sail I’, which presents the viewer with the billowing profile of a boat that slices into the sea and the wind like a wedge: it splits apart the foam and the reflections in water, tears through water and cloud in a joyous invocation of speed.

Paper size : 30" x 22"
Composition size : 23" x 18"
Paper : Somerset 250 gsm
Edition size : 125

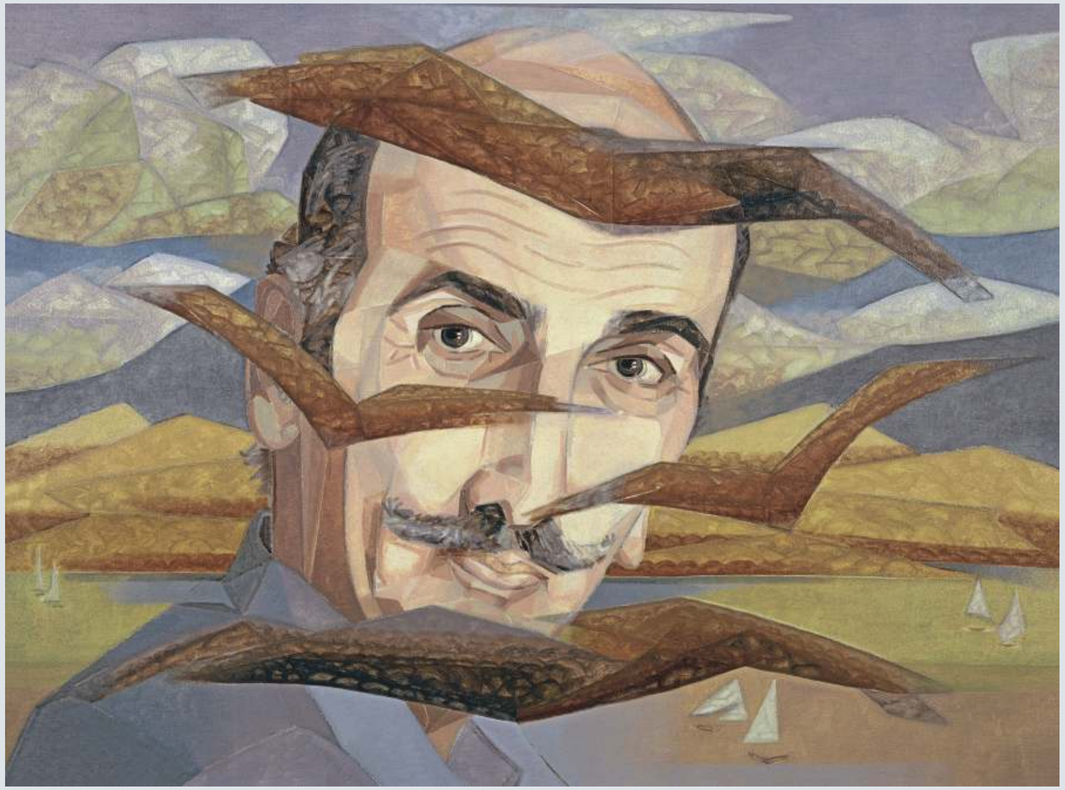


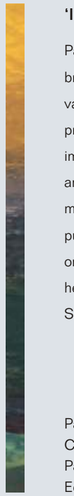
## ‘Mirror Image’ (1997)

‘Mirror Image’ (1997) stands in a lineage of self-portraits that Sabavala has executed since the late 1940s, when he painted several romantic self-portraits of himself, including one in which he appears as Mephistopheles in a cathedral. In these candid self-reflections – which part the carefully maintained curtain of reserve that Sabavala customarily places between his personality and his painting – the painter emerges as a narcissist curious about himself, about the untapped currents coursing beneath the outward surface formed by eye and cheek-bone, the supple weave of muscle and ligament. These are rare moments of confessionalism, though: Sabavala is a deeply private person. He enjoys the pleasures of conversation and company, but is not addicted to them; he can withdraw, gracefully, into the sanctum of his solitude. An introvert, he has trained himself to be, in Jules Laforgue’s phrase, “inflexibly polite to man, woman and destiny”. This basic unwillingness to expose himself to the gaze of others beyond the call of politeness, coupled with an equally genuine warmth towards his interlocutors, explains why Sabavala abandoned his early hopes for a career on the stage. Not that his attraction to theatre simply vanished: it took other forms, entering his paintings and surviving even into his most recent works, executed in the 1990s. Whether it is in the choice of costume and the stance of the figure, or in the drape and fall of cloth and water, or in the ceremonies of recognition and revelation that his protagonists conduct, Sabavala’s love of theatre recurs, resurgent. And the self-portrait is, after all, at once the most private and the most public form of self-dramatisation.

Paper size : 22" x 30"
Composition size : 18" x 24"
Paper : Somerset 250 gsm
Edition size : 125







**‘In the World’s Afterlight’ (1966)**

Painted in 1966, ‘In the World’s Afterlight’ is one of the key works in Sabavala’s *oeuvre*. It brings us a panoramic view of multiple horizons that rise to accompany the sun as it vanishes in a great, golden twilight. The pilgrim figures gathered near a lake, perhaps to pray at dusk, are the precursors of other such questing figures, whose advent would soon impart a distinctive mystical cast to Sabavala’s paintings. His paintings of the late 1960s and early 1970s incarnate the passage from the material to the essential as an upward movement striving from earth to heaven; it mirrors his retreat, in life, from the world of public situations, relationships, alliances and enmities. Withdrawing to that sanctum where one may hear one’s inner voice – and where, soon, even that voice hushes itself and one hears only the wind rustling through the trees, the rain spraying the window panes – Sabavala immerses himself in the contemplation of spires, trees, flames.

Paper size : 30" x 44"
Composition size : 24" x 33"
Paper : Somerset 300 gsm
Edition size : 125



**‘The Flight III’ (1979)**

The contours of mountains and the flight patterns of birds have fascinated Sabavala ever since he was a child, growing up in western India and Alpine Europe. In ‘The Flight III’, he brings these visual preoccupations together, orchestrating a magnificent theatre of verticals and horizontals. The verticals, fleshed out in green, ochre, slate, Naples yellow and sienna, are shafts of colour: torrents flowing down a rock-face, or the multiple spines of a canyon rising to heaven like a wind-hewn cathedral. And against them, the painter releases his horizontal energies: a flock of migrant birds, winging its way from winter’s ice and darkness to the countries of summer. ‘The Flight III’ is imbued with the sudden, inexplicable, miraculous quality of an epiphany: it draws us into the silent, millennial processes of nature, into migration and the turning of the seasons, the transmission of instinct down the generations and the irrelevance, from a stratospheric perspective, of the temporary borders drawn by humans.

Paper size : 44" x 30"
Composition size : 32" x 24"
Paper : Somerset 300 gsm
Edition size : 125



## ‘The Casuarina Line II’ (2002)

Sabavala loosens up his painterly grid in his works of the early 21st century, such as ‘Sunburst’, ‘Smouldering Sunset’, and ‘Lunar Magic’ (2001-2002). In these, he revels in the pyrotechnics of the rising and setting sun, in the relaxed vocabulary of stippling and striation, construing an imagery of stars, sails and nested figures into hymns to various times of day and night, marking aubade and nocturne. The cycle of day and night exercises him in the 2002 sequence titled ‘Casuarina Line I-III’, in which he invokes the same landscape of a rocky beach at night, at sunset, and by moonlight.

This cluster of works refers back to themes that Sabavala has addressed before, but in each case, the treatment is strikingly novel. Most unusually for him, Sabavala reveals the machinery of his composition, makes it the real subject of these works: the painting is demonstrated as the result of heaped bands or stacked panels, formats drawn from tradition; or else, the artist borrows the architect’s device of the exploded view, and the photographic techniques of the close-up and the aerial view, to re-define, not only his subjects, but also his form.

Paper size : 22" x 30"
Composition size : 14" x 24"
Paper : Somerset 250 gsm
Edition size : 125



**‘The Pavilion’ (2000)**

‘The Pavilion’ is an essay in enchantment. Sabavala invites us to follow the faceted play of crystalline planes rendered as mauve, blue-grey and yellow shards, from which emerges a pellucid lake held among mountains like a jewel in a giant hand. At the heart of the lake, materialising as if from mist, is an island; and on the island stands a Chinese pavilion. Exquisite in its isolation, the pavilion appears to symbolise the grail waiting at the end of a quest, or a place of rest for a turbulent pilgrim soul. And indeed, three such pilgrims wait at the lake’s edge, looking across but without visible means of crossing. Sabavala’s signature sails do not appear in this painting, and it is clear that the pilgrims will have to brave hidden currents and secret spells to reach the island. ‘The Pavilion’ could also be read as an autobiographical painting, invoking the solitude that the artist loses to the demands of sociality.

Paper size : 30" x 44"
Composition size : 23" x 38"
Paper : Somerset 300 gsm
Edition size : 125



## ‘The Radiant Cloud’ (1975)

The seizure of beauty and terror, the blood-quickening trance of ecstasy is best embodied in Sabavala’s clouds: illumined, shadowed, dragon-winged, do they signify hope or fear to the wanderers who gaze up at them? The image of the predatory clouds begins in such works as ‘Tenebrous Cloud’ (1967), an aerial conflagration of greys and browns flecked with white accents, and ‘The Hooded Day’ (1970), in which a bird-shaped cloud swoops at the waxy moon quivering in a grey and violet sky. The predatory cloud, gripping moon or sun in its sulphurous claws, achieves a dramatic climax in ‘Radiant Cloud’ (1975), where it is transmuted into the sign of a covenant with the Divine. Like a serene and terrible angel, that golden cloud envelops the vaulted sky, redeems the exile-pilgrims with its blessing.

Paper size : 22" x 30"
Composition size : 17" x 24"
Paper : Somerset 250 gsm
Edition size : 125



### ‘The River II’ (2000)

The river has always served Sabavala both as a visual excitement and as an image of the passage of time, the self and the world growing older, pursuing a strict course yet performing variations on destiny. In ‘The River II’ (2000), the artist enthrals us with his pursuit of the swift-changing rhythms of water, the progress of the river’s current as it surges against the rock massifs along its course, now purling and eddying, now meandering and postponing the moment when it must come to the cataract, cascade over the cliff. In Sabavala’s account, the river is an animal of powerful moods; Sabavala’s handling is not Cubist in the works of this period, so much as it is suggestive of the mediaeval German *Zackenstil,* a dialogue between angularity and the arabesque. The river is treated as a form of electricity, darting and trilling, working riffs of its own startling melody; or purling between mountains; or singing past the melancholy hooded figures of trees and veined rocks that strain to life.

Paper size : 44" x 30"
Composition size : 36" x 24"
Paper : Somerset 300 gsm
Edition size : 125



**‘The Predator’ (1987)**

The predatory clouds that had dominated Sabavala’s paintings during the 1970s sharpened themselves into whirring birds of prey by the late 1980s: portraits based on eagles and vultures, hawks and kestrels seen in the Western Ghats and in Arizona. The finest of these ruthless conquerors of the air, arguably, is ‘The Predator’ (1987), a masterwork in which the artist orchestrates the planarity of a compelling foreground with the deep recession of the background. The great bird, seen in close-up, firmly occupies our attention, carved and presented like a sculpture in motion, while we can glimpse serene distances through the maelstrom of its wings, which furl with the energy of Hokusai waves. The predator holds a fish in its beak, death shown as an essential element of the natural cycle of arrival and departure, and the bird is not so much a brute force as a majestic and ancient actor in a primeval theatre scripted by the instincts.

Paper size : 22" x 30"
Composition size : 17" x 24"
Paper : Somerset 250 gsm
Edition size : 125



### ‘Caverns Measureless to Man I’ (2004)

Sabavala has always been moved by poetry, and often drew the titles of his paintings from the masters of phrase and cadence, especially during the 1960s and 1970s. In this recent work, ‘Caverns Measureless to Man I’, Sabavala invokes the primal springs of insight and illumination, paradoxically but not surprisingly held in the softness of the earth, in spaces of darkness and water. The title is a gift from Coleridge, in whose fragment, ‘Kubla Khan’, the sacred river Alph is said to run through “caverns measureless to man” until it empties itself in a “sunless sea”. Sabavala brings his robed pilgrim figure to the very threshold of the Coleridgean caverns of spiritual transformation in this painting.

Paper size : 30" x 44"
Composition size : 24" x 33"
Paper : Somerset 300 gsm
Edition size : 125

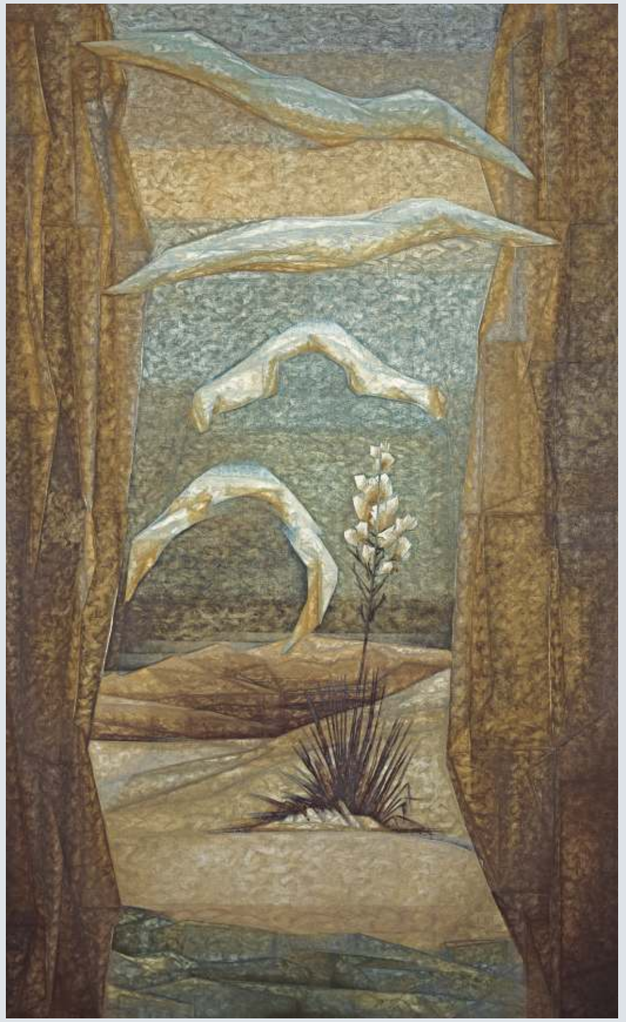


**‘Bird Forms III’ (1985)**

A sinister yet alluring aura plays around the siren shapes that float in a gorge or dry canyon in Sabavala’s ‘Bird Forms’ series of the mid-1980s. The combination of noiseless, almost inanimate and alien forms with the sparse vegetation and uninviting rockiness of the terrain makes for an ominous composition. Curiously, a painting like ‘Bird Forms III’ (1985) addresses the sense of hearing as much as it does the sense of sight. It proposes a hint of music held in reserve, as though a score had been rehearsed but not released in this silent performance, requiring only the attentiveness of a viewer to bring it to light and audibility.

Paper size : 44" x 30"
Composition size : 36" x 22"
Paper : Somerset 300 gsm
Edition size : 125





**‘The Casuarina Line III’ (2002)**

In ‘The Casuarina Line’ series (2002), Sabavala absorbs the topographical features of a landscape in a broken grid of sight lines and link lines, releasing the energies of the moon or the sun into an interplay of the celestial object and its reflection in water, or producing a system of linear echoes that unites the stand of trees with the expanse of sky and water that surrounds it. The variety of surfaces fascinates the artist in these works, as he explores ways by which he can organise the limpidity of water, the porosity of sand, the thickness of leaves and the effulgence of light into a harmonious, coalescent polyphony.

Paper size : 22" x 30"
Composition size : 14" x 24"
Paper : Somerset 250 gsm
Edition size : 125

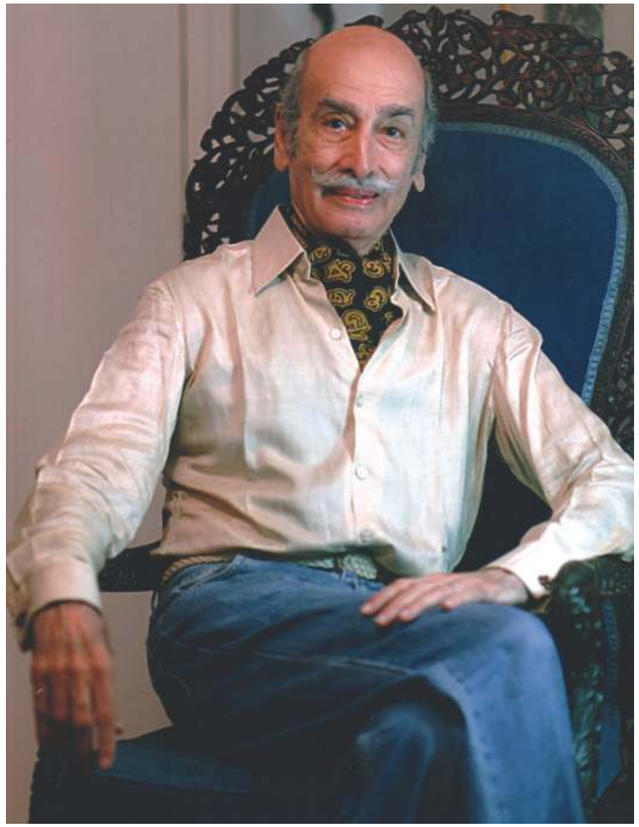


**‘The Woods, Palni Hills II’ (1994)**

Sabavala crafts magical effects of light, movement and allusion in ‘The Woods, Palni Hills II’ (1994), which is set in southern India’s Nilgiri Hills. The rhythm of the slender boles of the trees echoes the dance of spears and horses’ hooves in Uccello’s famous war piece, ‘The Battle of San Romano’. The viewerly imagination may be excited but also disturbed to find this resonance of the choreography of combat in a painting ostensibly cast as a meditation on natural beauty, on the redemptive solace of the forest. On closer viewing, though, we realise that ‘The Woods, Palni Hills I’ is also a study in counterpoint. The plantation seems divided in its loyalties between sunlight and mist. The crispness of the boles is held in check by the soft handling of foliage. The splash and draggle of light passing through mist is registered in lively yellow dabs on pebbled green bark. An Impressionist freshness animates the compositional rigour of the painting.

Paper size : 30" x 44"
Composition size : 24" x 36"
Paper : Somerset 300 gsm
Edition size : 125





Courtesy : 'The Week', Malayalam Manorama



**Jehangir Sabavala**

(b. 1922), Bombay, India.

Sabavala studied at the Elphinstone College and moved to the J J School of Art, Bombay, in 1942. He left for London in 1945 to train at the Healtherley School of Art. In 1947 he moved to Paris to study at the Academie Julian and the Academie André Lhote where he remained till 1951. He returned to the Academic Julian, Paris in 1952-54, and to the Academie de la Grande Chaumiere in 1957

Since 1951, he has held 34 major solo exhibitions across the subcontinent, and in Europe. By now, he is a veteran contributor to over 150 group exhibitions the world over, and is a regular contributor to Christie's and Sotheby's auctions in London and New York, and to Osian 's and Saffronart.com in India.

His work is in several important collections, both private and public, in India and abroad, eg: the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, the Birla Academy of Fine Arts, Calcutta, Parliament House, New Delhi, The Punjab Government Museum, Chandigarh, Air - India, Bombay, Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Bombay, The National Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, to mention a few at random.

There have been five publications on his work starting with "Sabavala", Sadanga series, Vakils, Bombay 1966".

"The Reasoning Vision : Jehangir Sabavala's Painterly Universe", Tata Mc-Graw Hill Publishing Co. Ltd, New Delhi, 1980. "Jehangir Sabavala", Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, 1984. " Sabavala-Pilgrim, Exile, Sorceror" Eminence Designs Pvt Ltd, Bombay, 1998. And " The Crucible of Painting- The Art of Jehangir Sabavala" Eminence Designs Pvt Ltd, Bombay 2005.

A National Award winning film "Colours of Absence" was made on his life and work by documentary film maker Arun Khopkar in 1993.

He is the recipient of a "Padma Shri" in 1977, a "Citation" for his contribution to the field of Modern Art from the National Gallery of Modern Art, Bombay, in 2000, and the "Kala Ratna" award from the All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society, New Delhi, in 2001. The Dadabhai Naoroji Millennium Awards, Mumbai, in 2002, K.R. Cama Oriental Institute, 172nd Anniversary Lecture "Through the Biographer's Prism : Jehangir Sabavala, His Life and Art", in 2002. The 43rd Maharashtra State Exhibition Award for Eminence and Distinction in Painting, in 2003. The Lalit Kala Ratna Award, New Delhi, in 2004.

To quote Jehangir Sabavala: "It has been a long and arduous journey, but one that has steadily evolved, without harsh leaps or suicidal reverses. My graph is easily deciphered from the start to where it stands today.I am essentially a figurative painter with a strong predilection towards landscape. It is central to my work, and yet, the figure whether wraithlike or human, is often present as a part of the whole"

His career has been described as a steady progression, a journey-"with the paintings as steps, in a difficult, highly formalized pilgrimage towards a metaphysical truth".

# Limited Edition Serigraph

## What is a Limited Edition Serigraph?

**A Limited Edition Serigraph is a Limited Edition Fine Art Print.**

A Serigraph is a Fine Art Print which has been produced using the screen printing method thus more precisely making it a Fine Art Screen Print.

The word ‘Serigraph’ literally means to draw through silk, In Latin ‘seri’ means silk and in Greek ‘graphos’ means to draw.

The name ‘Serigraph’ was coined by Carl Zigrosser, an eminent curator of prints of the Philadelphia Museum of Fine Arts, to distinguish Fine Art Screen Prints from other commercial and industrial Screen Prints.

## What is a Fine Art Print?

Print making is one of the oldest forms of pictorial communication and of artistic expression, dating back to the 14th century in Europe and even earlier in China. Yet, despite the fact that most people know what a “print” is, it has become difficult to tell the difference between a ‘Fine Art Print’ and an ‘Art Poster’ which is a pure ‘Photo-mechanical Reproduction’.

This confusion has intensified over the past twenty years as artists have expanded the definition of a ‘Fine Art Print’ to include a variety of new and innovative print making techniques.

One of the primary characteristics of print making is that many nearly identical images can be made by inking and printing the same block, plate, stone, or screen, again and again. This makes it possible for many people to see and/or own an image.

Besides, what needs to be eradicated is the general notion that anything produced by the artist even in a partial indirect manner such as using the help of assistants or availing printing facilities outside of the artists’ studio does not deserve to be seen as a work of art. The human mind can certainly put to use currently available technology to create works of art of a high caliber, but the artist has to ensure that the painterly approach and feel is not diluted in the process. What also matters, is the concept along with the manner of execution of the print. The concept would always be original and reflect an individual signature style in the case of each artist.

There is no reason why an artist should be denied the facility of a practitioner in an allied creative field such as printing to assist him. What matters is the “authorization” of the print, this being the sum total of all the above i.e concept, technique, process and approach. These would be deemed to be accepted by the artist



as his by putting his signature on the print, thereby accepting it as a work either executed by him or under his supervision and thus regarding it as a ‘Fine Art Print’.

However, an exception to note in this regard would be the recent instances of ‘Offset’ prints and ‘Digital Reproductions’ being signed by artists and released either as a ‘Limited Edition’ or as an ‘Open Edition’. In spite of these ‘Offset’ prints and ‘Digital Reproductions’ bearing the signature of the artist and/or being released in a ‘Limited Edition’, they do not qualify as ‘Fine Art Prints’ and are segmented as ‘Photo-Mechanical Reproductions’ in art markets across the globe. These types of ‘Offset’ prints and ‘Digitally Reproduced’ prints are treated as mere ‘Art Posters’ having no value as collectible works of art.

## What are the different types of Fine Art Prints?

There are various types of Fine Art Prints and they are differentiated by the process or technique by which they have been printed.

The different types of Fine Art Prints that would qualify as an artist’s print and the print regarded and accepted internationally as Fine Art Prints or Multiple Original works of art are Serigraphs, Lithographs, Linocuts, Woodcuts, and various types of Intaglio prints such as Etchings, Engravings, Drypoints, Aquatints and Mezzotints.

## What is a Limited Edition Fine Art Print?

As explained above a ‘Fine Art Print’ is not a commercially reproduced poster printed on a high-speed web press from photo-mechanically produced metal plates. ‘Fine Art Prints’ are regarded as ‘Multiple Original’ works of art. When these ‘Fine Art Prints’ are printed in a limited quantity or restricted in the printing run to a specified number they are said to be printed in a ‘Limited Edition’. This limiting of the number of prints is conceived as such by the artist to make the print rare and add value to it.

“Proofs” of the work are pulled until they meet the artist’s approval. The number of prints for the edition is then pulled, print by print, where upon they are signed and numbered by the artist. For example 4/50 means it is fourth impression from the total of fifty impressions. ( Although this does not necessarily represent the actual order of printings ). The artist keeps some ‘Artist’s Proofs’ for himself, usually marked "A.P." or "A/P".

Generally after the number of prints in a ‘Limited Edition’ are pulled, the plates, stencils, blocks etc. are meant to be destroyed or defaced making it impossible to reprint or restrike the same image again, thereby genuinely rendering it as a ‘Limited Edition’ .

**Lavesh Jagasia**

The Serigraph Studio

Contemporary Art Prints

www.serigraphstudio.com