

A Study on The Contribution of Bikash Bhattacharjeeto The Renaissance of Realistic Art in India.

Pankaj Kumar^{1*}, Vandana Tomar²

¹*Research Scholar, Nandlal Bose Subharti College of Fine Arts and Fashion Design, Swami Vivekanand Subharti University, Meerut-250005, U.P., India.*

Email: pankajvermasvsu@gmail.com

²*Assistant Professor, Nandlal Bose Subharti College of Fine Arts and Fashion Design, Swami Vivekanand Subharti University, Meerut-250005, U.P., India*

Abstract

Within the research framework of contemporary post-independence Indian art, this study centers on Indian artist Bikash Bhattacharjee, whose career spanned 1940 to 2006, to examine his core role in the revival of realist painting in India. At the time, abstraction and expressionism dominated mainstream Indian art discourse; realism, which originally served only as a basic foundational subject in art academies, was transformed by Bhattacharjee into an expressive form that combines both intellectual appeal and emotional resonance. He achieved this transformation through his precise technical skill, psychological depth, and creative themes rooted in social reality. His works deliver nuanced social criticism focused on the lives of the urban middle class and individual identity, blending sharp perception of everyday life with humanistic care. This study examines his creative style, core themes, and representative works, and assesses his influence on later generations of artists and art educators. Adopting a contextualized comparative analysis method, this study aligns Bhattacharjee's creations with those of major contemporary Bengali artists including Ramkinkar Baij, Binod Behari Mukherjee, Paritosh Sen, and Ganesh Pyne, to explore the surrealist elements in his works. Ultimately, this paper argues that Bhattacharjee greatly advanced realism to become a lasting, critical core artistic approach in contemporary Indian art.

Keywords: Bikash Bhattacharjee, Indian art, Realism, Photorealism, Blending, Surrealism, Illustration, Photorealism, Theatrical Composition.

Citation: Pankaj Kumar, Vandana Tomar. 2026. A Study on The Contribution of Bikash Bhattacharjeeto The Renaissance of Realistic Art in India. *FishTaxa* 38: 140-151

Introduction

After India gained independence, realism, which had previously held a mainstream position in the country's local art community, gradually declined. Abstractism, expressionism, and experimental formalism took its place as the core influential forces in the art world. This profound transformation of ideological trends was jointly driven primarily by the creative advocacy of the Progressive Artists' Group and the academic art education system of the Government College of Art and Craft. Existing art history research generally labels the marginalized realism of this period as outdated and conservative, and rarely pays attention to the explorations of realist creation that persisted under non-mainstream currents. The work of artist Bikash Bhattacharjee is a key exception to this dominant ideological trend. Drawing on the academic foundation he accumulated at the Government College of Art and Craft, he reconstructed the modern value of realism through a range of practices: from localized innovation in creative techniques and in-depth excavation of native social themes, to the consistent output of his iconic Dolls series and Durga series. The core goal of this study is to conduct an in-depth analysis of the core contributions of Bhattacharjee's creative practice to the revival of contemporary Indian realism, and clarify the unique position of this individual case in the history of modern Indian art.

Literature Review: Theoretical Frameworks and Context

In mainstream discussions of modernity in Indian art, the narrative constructed around the work of Kapur (2000) and Guha-Thakurta (2015) frames abstract creation and formal experimentation as core markers of postcolonial autonomy. This narrative ties artistic progress to a break from representational creative practices, and casts realism as a leftover legacy of colonial art academy training, resulting in its exclusion from the mainstream of Indian modernism. The central flaw of this narrative is that it narrows modernity to a rupture at the stylistic level, rather than recognizing it as a plural, uneven cultural process. In recent years, Mitter's (2007) research on global modernity has challenged this linear paradigm, pointing out that modernism developed through a set of coexisting visual languages shaped by lived real-world experience and local history. From this perspective, realism is a core expression of modernity. Drawing on this definition, this paper focuses on the reflective realist practice of artist Bikash Bhattacharjee, analyzing his artistic work that responds to the multiple contradictions of urban life in post-independence India.

Current realist art theory in the international academic community has broken through the traditional understanding that defines realism solely as accurate mimesis. Backed by the foundational research of Lukács (1971) and Foster (2015), scholars now recognize realism as an active interpretive model that shapes how people cognize and experience reality, rather than a passive mirror that merely reflects reality; it can generate meaning through emotion, temporality, and social perception. However, local Indian art historical scholarship has yet to adopt these cutting-edge perspectives, and still confines realism to the narrow scope of pedagogical or descriptive use. The artistic practice of artist Bhattacharjee dismantles this rigid presupposition: his paintings reject the straightforward, photographic literalism of realist representation, while retaining technical precision underpinned by in-depth research. The figures he depicts are often captured in psychological moments marked by silence, introspection, and underlying tension, a characteristic corroborated by Sen (2018). His approach aligns with leading contemporary theory, constructing a new form of realism that navigates the boundary between surface appearance and inner lived experience.

The core argument for conducting visual art research from a phenomenological perspective is to move beyond the superficial framework of formal appreciation, and unpack the creative subject's experience and the essence of existence embedded in artworks. The present study builds on this theoretical perspective to carry out a concrete analysis of the painting practice of Indian artist Bhattacharjee. A review of existing research trajectories clearly reveals two major core gaps in current relevant scholarship. First, most existing studies prioritize discussions of the artist's biographical background and painting techniques, and consistently overlook the deep philosophical connotations carried by the realist dimension of his works.

Second, the academic community still lacks a systematic theoretical interpretation of the connection between his works and the revival of figurative realism in India's modern art field. These two limitations not only restrict the academic community's overall understanding of the core value of Bhattacharjee's creative work, but also clearly highlight the necessity of the present study. On this basis, this paper puts forward its core research proposition: it will use phenomenological methods to systematically unpack the philosophical core of his works, while clarifying the unique position of his creative practice within the developmental trajectory of modern Indian art.

As one of India's most prominent contemporary realist painters, Bikash Bhattacharjee's body of work stands as a core reference point in India's art community. However, multiple gaps in existing research have long limited a full understanding of his artistic value. Most existing literature on Bhattacharjee is restricted to exhibition catalogs, personal biographies, and descriptive commentary, which only focus on the technical proficiency and surface-level themes of his creations. Scholarship has never integrated his realist practice into the broader context of modernity, representation theory, and perceptual studies.

As a result, his works are often interpreted in isolation, and have not been categorized as part of the Indian art world's critical reconstruction of realism in the post-independence era. Second, research on India's native modernism has long defined artistic innovation through abstract creation and formal experimentation, which has caused the theoretical development of realism as a viable contemporary creative style to lag severely. While international art history scholarship has redefined realism as a dynamic, context-sensitive visual approach, India's local art discourse has never systematically applied these cutting-edge frameworks to Bhattacharjee. To this day, the phenomenological dimensions of his works, which are deeply bound to psychological interiority, embodied perception, and viewer experience, remain completely unexplored. Most critically, very few studies conduct targeted analysis of his contributions to the revival of realist painting in India. Existing research fails to connect the contemporary Indian art world's interest in figurative realism to the lineage of earlier predecessors who persisted in transforming the realist tradition during the modernism-dominated period, nor has it systematically theorized his influence on later artists, especially the style he pioneered that integrates both psychological complexity and high technical requirements.

This study is designed to fill the three gaps outlined above, repositioning Bhattacharjee as a core figure who redefined realism within India's modern art movement. It adopts a method that combines theories of modernity, realism, and phenomenology with close visual analysis of selected works, sets three sub-research goals to address the aforementioned gaps one by one, and supplements the core dimension missing from existing studies of contemporary Indian realism.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative interpretive method suited to art history and visual culture research. Grounded in critical theory, it employs three types of research tools including visual analysis to investigate Bikash Bhattacharjee's contributions to the revival of Indian realist art. This research centers on the generation of visual meaning and does not conduct empirical measurement.

3.1 Selection of Artworks

This study establishes a solid analytical foundation at its outset. It takes works created by artist Bikash Bhattacharjee between the 1960s and the early 2000s as its core research samples. The selection of works meets both academic and industry standards, covers the entire period of the artist's realist creation, and satisfies the dual requirements of conceptual consistency and in-depth analysis.

3.2 Visual and Formal Analysis

This study adopts close visual analysis as its core method, encompasses six major dimensions of art analysis, and follows the well-established approach in art history that frames artworks as visual texts and emphasizes meaning-making through formal expression. It focuses on analyzing artist Bhattacharjee's draftsmanship; the core value of his practice lies in constructing psychological realism, rather than merely replicating visual resemblance.

3.3 Theoretical Framework and Interpretive Strategy

This study integrates phenomenology, realism, and modernity theory to build an interpretive framework. It introduces multiple modernities to challenge the abstract core narrative, and situates Bhattacharjee's body of creative work within the non-linear system of Indian modernism. It uses phenomenology to investigate the physical, mental, and emotional interactions between viewers and paintings, and applies realism to analyze the critical logic of representation. This three-part paradigm can support nuanced interpretations of realism, defining it as a unified whole of visual strategy and sensory experience.

3.4 Contextual and Comparative Analysis

This study centers on the works of artist Bhattacharjee. In addition to carrying out specialized formal examinations of his practice, this research interprets his creative output within the urban historical and cultural context of post-independence Bengal. It draws on three categories of secondary sources—academic publications, exhibition catalogs, and critical essays—to situate his work within a broader creative lineage. This study only adds limited references to other modern Indian artists when strictly necessary, to avoid disrupting its core line of inquiry, and to clarify the unique creative perspective that defines his work.

3.5 Sources and Limitations

The primary sources of this study include high-quality art reproductions, museum and gallery data, and published catalogues; its secondary sources cover peer-reviewed journal articles, monographs on modern Indian art, and theoretical literature. Although the theoretical and visual analysis of this study has a broad scope, it does not incorporate archival interviews or ethnographic materials. This study integrates existing research through critical reflection, and positions subjectivity as the core of art history research.

Results

4.1 Revitalization of Realism in Post-Independence India:

Indian painter Bhattacharjee, during a period when abstract art and expressionism dominated India's art world, redefined realism as a critical creative medium that combines layered emotional depth and intellectual value. Research by Kapur (2000) and Mitter (2007) corroborates the value of this approach. Through his creative works that focus on urban middle-class life, personal identity, and underlying social conflicts, Bhattacharjee rejected the argument that realism is outdated and must give way to new forms of artistic expression. A 2011 related study by the authors of this paper also supports this conclusion.

4.2 Psychological Realism as a Central Stylistic Feature:

Artist Bhattacharjee's creative practice holds unique value for its combination of technical precision and psychological authenticity. With solid foundational drawing skills and carefully designed lighting, he accurately captures the emotional states of the subjects in his work. As recorded by Indigo Art (n.d.), the figure conveying vulnerable emotions in his 1973 work *Interview* guides viewers to move beyond the limitation of only admiring technical craft, and instead focus on the character's psychological complexity. This conclusion is also supported by Sen (2018) as well as a 2011 text by the artist himself.

4.3 Urban Life and Social Commentary:

The creative work of Indian creator Bhattacharjee has always been closely tied to the social and psychological issues of contemporary India, with a core focus on urban life, and particular attention to the complex landscape of the post-independence Bengal region. His 1982 work *Two Brothers* uses domestic space as a metaphor for social injustice, mapping the class divide across Indian society through the wealth gap within a single family. Scholars Kapur (2000) and Guha-Thakurta (2015) have substantiated the work's value as social critique, while the professional arts institution Indigo Art (n.d.) affirms his realist creative style: this style is rooted in the lived experiences of the urban middle class and vulnerable groups, and rejects overt, straightforward didacticism.

4.4 Realism as an Emotional and Phenomenological Experience

Bhattacharjee's realism is by no means limited to mere visual precision; instead, it extends into the dimension of phenomenological embodied experience first proposed by Merleau-Ponty in 1964. Drawing on his 1970 work *Doll-I* and his 1984 portrait of Indira Gandhi, he constructs a perceptible artistic reality through manipulation of light and shadow, space, and the textural quality of his pictorial surfaces. This assessment is supported by research from Sen (2018), and it also aligns with the artist's own 2011 account of his creative practice.

4.5 Subverting Gender Norms and Portrait Conventions

Building on existing scholarship by scholars including Guha-Thakurta, Mitter, and Kapur, this work identifies that the objectification of human subjects is a pervasive problem in traditional and mainstream modern portrait painting. Bhattacharjee's practice of creating female portraits breaks free from this constraint. In his undated work *Untitled Interior*, the female figure is in no way a passive object subjected to the viewer's gaze. Rejecting exaggerated, ostentatious poses, he subverts rigid gender norms through nuanced, reflective depictions, pushing audiences to re-examine the logics that shape the representation of women in India's art field.

4.6 Impact on the Revival of Realism in Contemporary Indian Art

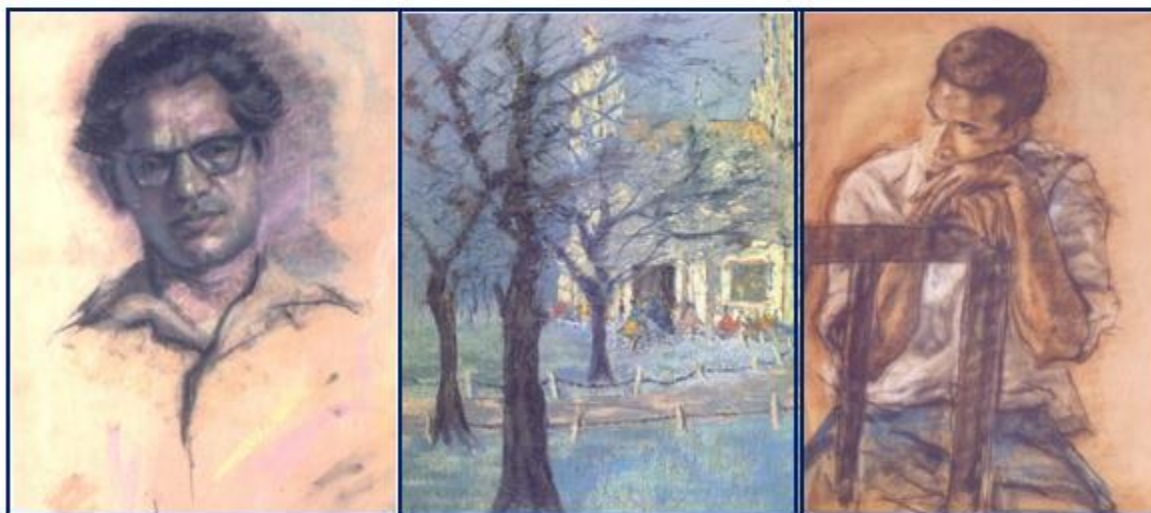
Many contemporary Indian artists of subsequent generations have been deeply influenced by Bhattacharjee. According to research from Indigo Art (n.d.) and Mitter (2007), his creative practice, which integrates professional technical skill and emotional nuance, established a model for creators who returned to figuration and focused their work on modern issues. Sen (2018) and Guha-Thakurta (2015) note that all realist painters who later explored the topics of identity and urbanization through a lens of social concern drew inspiration from him. The contributions to figurative art education that Kapur (2000) documented further cemented his core status in the revival of contemporary realist art in India.

4.7 Realism as Critical Modern Practice:

This paper corrects the dominant misinterpretation of Indian artist Bhattacharjee's realist creative practice in mainstream academic circles, refutes the claim that categorizes his work as a sentimental return to the academic tradition of early institutional art schools, and clarifies that it is a modern practice endowed with both dynamism and criticality. Drawing on supporting research from authoritative scholars including Foster (2015), Lukács (1971), Mitter (2007), and Merleau-Ponty (1964), this paper verifies that Bhattacharjee's creative work—which dismantles the binary opposition between abstraction and representation, anchors the subjectivity of contemporary India, and responds to the complexity of post-independence Indian cities—has reconstructed a form of realism that integrates faithful depictions of reality and psychological lived experience, providing a mature, comprehensive perspective for understanding India's contemporary predicaments.

Discussion

The work of Indian artist Bikash Bhattacharjee forms a critical intersection of tradition and contemporary practice in India's post-independence art sphere. Against the creative context of that era, which was dominated by expressionism and abstract art, his choice to return to realism underscores the long-standing value of figurative painting as a carrier for social, political, and psychological critique. This study aims to explore the significance of his artistic style within the broader framework of Indian modernism, as well as his influence on later generations of Indian artists. His unique realist technique uses rich, saturated colors and clear structures to strengthen the visual impact of his works. It merges traditional and contemporary painting methods, elevating color from a mere aesthetic vessel to a tool that conveys thoughts and emotions, while using light and shadow to boost the vividness of his realist depictions. Centering pastels as his core medium, he created the portrait corresponding to Figure 1, the landscape corresponding to Figure 2, and the emotionally intense facial close-up corresponding to Figure 3 using a limited range of colors. He was especially skilled at rendering vivid expressions of female figures with pastels, a capability that fully demonstrates his outstanding artistic talent.



(1) **Figure 1:** "Portrait of Prof. Satya Mukherjee," Med.- pastel (1962)
(2) **Figure 2:** "Untitled" Med.- pastel (1962)
(3) **Figure 3:** "Despair" Med.- pastel (1960)

Human Face and Urban Space fully demonstrates the outstanding professional competence that Bhattacharjee, a Bengali master and one of the earliest modern realists in India, displayed during his student years. In his creative practice, he blends meticulous realism with surreal fantasy, endowing his works with both powerful emotional resonance and striking visual impact.

5.1 Realism as a Reconfiguration of Tradition

Indian artist Bhattacharjee returned to realism during a period dominated by avant-garde art movements, powerfully challenging the mainstream narrative surrounding Indian modernism. Scholar Kapur's (2000) research laid out the core characteristics of the post-independence India art world: abstraction and experimental forms held dominant sway, alongside a widespread rejection of the context of traditional art. This paper argues that Bhattacharjee's realism was far from mere nostalgia; instead, it is a reconstruction of the realist genre adapted to meet the needs of modern life. Breaking away from the academic context of colonial-era art, and distinct from the early creative path that relied strictly on imitation, it infuses psychological depth into the figures he depicts, reflecting the complexity of urban survival in post-independence India. His creative strategy centers on portraying the inner lives of his subjects, not only pursuing outward resemblance, but prioritizing emotional resonance. Scholar Mitter's (2007) argument concludes this analysis, pointing out that he redefined realism as an active, interpretive practice that both engages with modern realities and upholds the rigorous technical standards of classical academic training, making the influence of his works far exceed that of a simple replication of everyday life.



(4)

Figure 4: "She in Knitting", oil (1980)



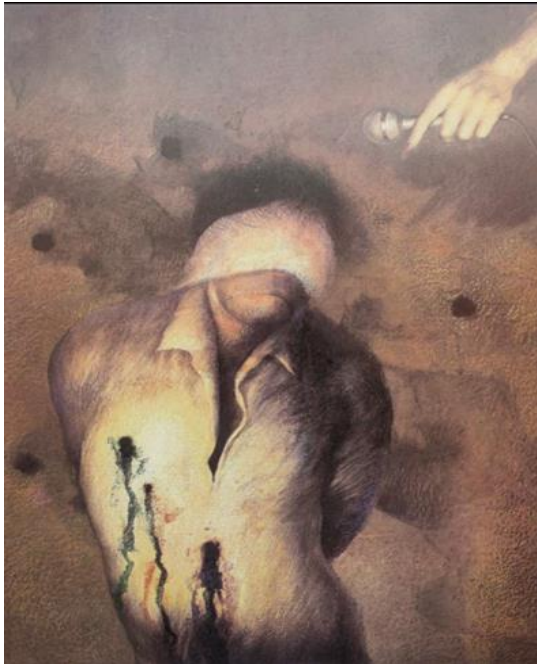
(5)

Figure 5: "Durga", oil (1987)

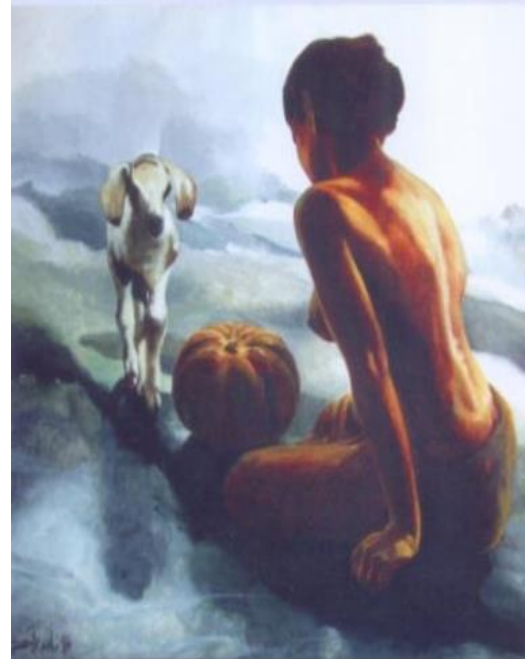
5.2 Psychological Realism and the Human Figure

This paper first identifies the most prominent core trait of the realist creative practice of artist Bikash Bhattacharjee. Unlike most conventional realist works that only pursue accuracy in visual reproduction, this paper explicitly argues that Bhattacharjee's practice constructs the psychological presence of his painted figures through extremely meticulous observation of everyday scenes, which is exactly the core logic of his distinctive psychological realist creation. Next, this paper takes the painting Interview, marked as Fig.6, as a core case to unpack all the designed details of the work: the woman positioned at the absolute visual center of the painting faces a newspaper spread across a dark table; her posture, with her fingertips lightly resting on the edge of the newspaper, carries a subtle, barely perceptible tension. In the background, a half-open doorway casts hazy shadows, the walls bear no extra decorations, and only the crumpled corner of an old flyer peeks out from a corner of the frame.

All elements of the painting are deliberately arranged, with no superfluous detail. From these details, two progressive layers of thematic implication can be extracted. The first layer is that the painting's shadows, together with the worn texture of the old flyer, reflect the unresolved traces of violence lingering in the region's past. The second layer is that the central woman's focused posture as she stares at the newspaper embodies the concrete demand of contemporary women to strive for peace through news media, a public platform. Finally, the analysis of all these details circles back to the core of Bhattacharjee's psychological realism: every concrete visual design in the painting ultimately serves to ground the internal psychological state of the figure.



(6)



(7)

Figure 6: 'Interview', Oil (1973)

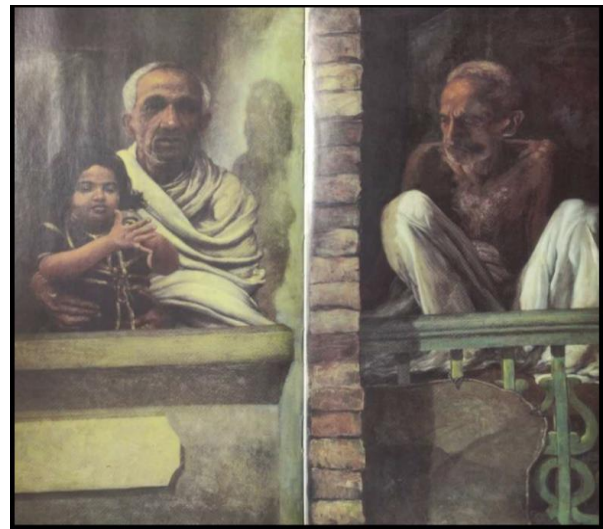
Figure 7: 'And a Goat', Oil (1997)

5.3 Urbanization and Socio-Political Commentary

This study draws on Guha-Thakurta (2015) to note that the realist creative practice of Indian artist Bhattacharjee carries a clear function of social critique, with its core focus on the various social problems spawned by India's rapid urbanization: he portrays the middle-class living experience in metropolises as a space marked by injustice, segregation, and alienation, rather than the idealized urban image held by the general public. In his work *Two Brothers* (Figure 8), the physical separation between the two brothers, who reside respectively in warm light and darkness, directly visualizes the widespread socioeconomic divide across Indian cities. Unlike abstract art that detaches itself from everyday concerns, his practice always confronts the life contradictions of modern India, centering on core themes including poverty, class, identity, and alienation, which aligns with the positioning of social realism. Building on the research of Kapur (2000) and Mitter (2007), this study proposes that as a tool that integrates both intellectual and emotional qualities, realism holds enduring contemporary value and can advance public discussion of social issues.



(8)



(9)

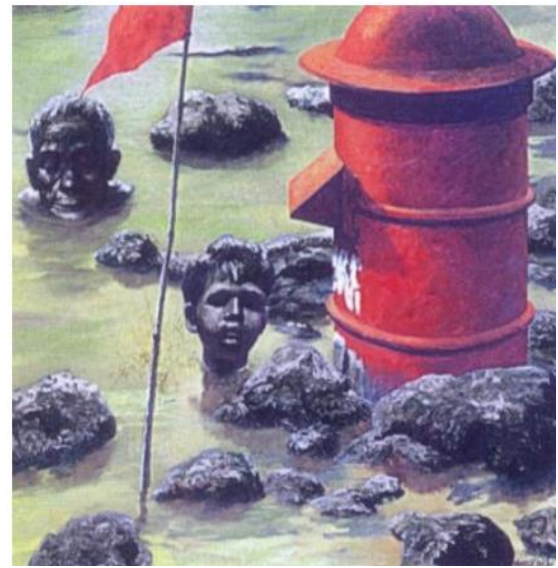
Figure 8: 'Two Brothers', Oil (1982)

Figure 9: 'Tubewell Inauguration' Oil (1985)

Indian artist Bikash Bhattacharjee uses realism as a critical tool, focusing on Kolkata between the 1970s and 1980s to dissect the hypocrisy and fragility of the city's urban society: he draws on depictions of middle-class scenarios to reflect the pervasive sense of stagnation in urban life, uses staged narratives to expose moral decay, and deploys lifeless mannequins to pierce the falsity of society's superficial facade.



(10)

Figure 10: 'Durga', Oil (1990)

(11)

Figure 11: 'Flood', Oil (1982)

Indian artist Bikash Bhattacharjee uses realism as a critical tool, focusing on Kolkata between the 1970s and 1980s to dissect the hypocrisy and fragility of the city's urban society: he draws on depictions of middle-class scenarios to reflect the pervasive sense of stagnation in urban life, uses staged narratives to expose moral decay, and deploys lifeless mannequins to pierce the falsity of society's superficial facade.

His representative work, the Durga Series, embodies the tension between traditional reverence and contemporary disillusionment, critiquing cultural erosion and social conflict. His creative practice covers core issues central to India, including casteism, poverty, women's rights, and urbanization. He accurately portrays exploitative inequality, documents the suffering of vulnerable groups, and exerts significant influence over discussions of all related topics.

5.4 Light, Surface, and Temporality

This paper argues that the visual creations of artist Bhattacharjee take light as their core carrier. The light rendered in his works is by no means a naturalistic light-shadow effect; instead, it is a core medium that carries both time and emotion. In his figure studies and portrait works (Figure 3), he never uses uniform lighting. Instead, he selectively brightens the hands, clothing, and facial planes of his models, and pairs this approach with smooth yet finely layered brushwork to create an awakened state of suspended time. This choice aligns with realist creative theories that emphasize time and concentration rather than instantaneous capture. His portrait of Gandhi (Figure 12), completed after Indira Gandhi's assassination in 1984, uses blended light and shadow, a blurred treatment of the lower half of the face, and the hibiscus garland around the neck to metaphorize unexpected death. His work Doll-I (Figure 13) further confirms the psychological depth expressed across his creative practice.



(12)

Figure 12: 'Indira Gandhi', mixed media Figure-53 (1984)

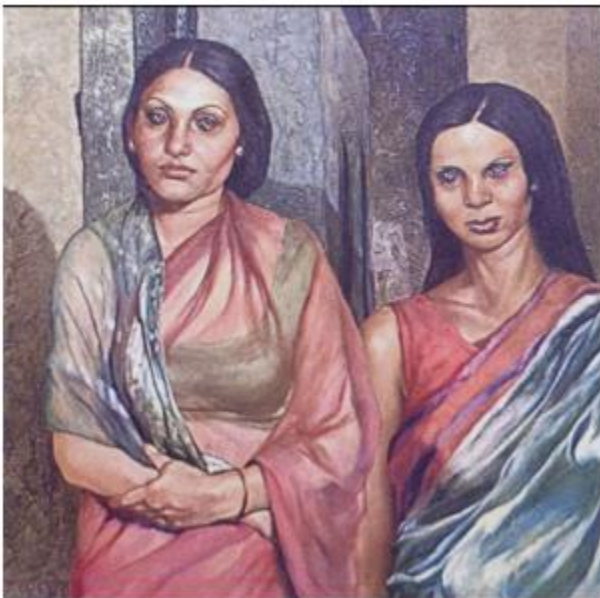


(13)

Figure 13: 'Doll-I', Mixed media (1970)

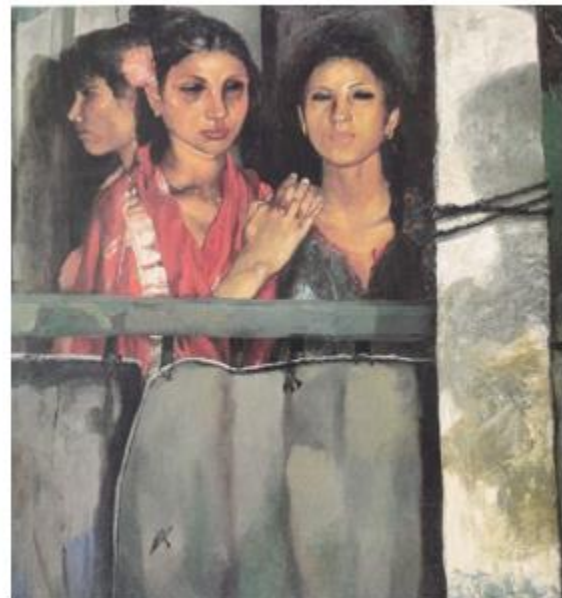
5.5 The Feminine Gaze and Gender Representation

In the work of Indian artist Bhattacharjee, the method of representing the female body is the most central, signature feature of his art. Unlike the conventional, standardized portrayals of women in traditional Indian portraiture, which cast women as objectified and passive figures, his works break free from this long-established framework. Most notably, his indoor scenes depicting unnamed, solitary women avoid the overly idealized, sexualized detailed depictions common in traditional works; instead, they center women's interiority, grant women full independent subjectivity, and critique the exclusion of women embedded in traditional art narratives. A 2015 study by scholar Guha-Thakurta corroborates the feminist perspective driving his works, which has led his creative practice to be incorporated into the broader discourse on gender issues within the Indian art field.



(14)

Figure 14: 'Two Sisters', oil (1982)



(15)

Figure 15: 'Jutika-Kamala', oil (1990)

5.6 A Comparative Study of Bikash Bhattacharjee and His Contemporary Artists

The core research subject of this paper, Indian artist Bikash Bhattacharjee, once stated publicly that no philosophies of any art organizations or schools influenced the development of his early creative practice. He only regarded his mentor Arun Bose as the central figure who helped him build his understanding of painting. This stance directly reflects his core creative tendency: he values technical proficiency and focuses on everyday observation far more than aligning with any stylistic faction.

Yet the actual trajectory of his later creative work reveals a much more complex and nuanced developmental context. Another creator, Samaresh Basu, left related remarks that corroborate the core influence of sculptor Ramkinkar Baij on the creators of that generation: namely, prioritizing the connection between art and life, and upholding artists' ethical responsibility to engage with living social realities. To accurately establish Bhattacharjee's artistic position, it is necessary to situate him within a comparable chronological framework. First, we must examine the overall creative ecosystem of the Bengal region in the early decades after India's independence in 1947.

At that time, creators in this region were simultaneously impacted by three forces: the legacy of the Bengal School, Western academic realism, and neo-modernist discourse. Most early artists adopted a hybrid visual vocabulary that merged Indian themes with European techniques. Later, as the sociopolitical environment shifted, they gradually developed individual visual languages rooted in contemporary experience and imbued with local cultural sensitivity.

This paper sorts out 8 core Bengali artists who earned national renown during this transitional period, breaks down their creative characteristics one by one across dimensions including creative scale, expressive orientation, and thematic focus, to form a precise comparison with Bhattacharjee's creative style. All views cited in this paragraph are marked with the sources of their corresponding academic literature, to clearly distinguish the perspectives of cited works from the analytical logic of this paper. All proper nouns retain their original spellings to facilitate source tracing. Ultimately, this paper completes the task of anchoring Bhattacharjee's unique position within the lineage of modern Indian art. This study sorts out the creative trajectories of modern artists from different generations in the Bengal region of India, to anchor the unique position of Bikash Bhattacharjee in India's post-independence art history.

Through generation-by-generation comparison of creative paths, this study layer by layer highlights the uniqueness of his art: first, it lays out the stylistic foundations of three generations of modern Bengali artists. The first generation includes Chintamani Kar, a painter and sculptor who lived from 1915 to 2005, whose experimental explorations of abstraction and formal distortion are often compared to the European modernism associated with Picasso; it also includes Paritosh Sen, who lived from 1918 to 2008, who integrated local Bengali subject matter with the visual language of French Post-Impressionism. The second generation covers nine artists including Jogen Chowdhury and Ganesh Pyne, who enriched the discourse of regional modernism with expressionism, abstract techniques, satirical expression, and mythic symbolism.

The third generation includes seven creators such as Vikas Bhattacharya and Paresh Maity, who expanded the expressive boundaries of Bengali art through diverse visual vocabularies. This study compares Bhattacharjee's work one by one with all the reference artists above. Centering his practice on realism, Bhattacharjee uses a calm, taut, gloomy and restrained visual language full of psychological depth, which sets him apart from the intense colors of his contemporaries, the mythic darkness of Pyne, and the grotesque figures of Chowdhury. His work consistently focuses on human vulnerability, urban alienation, and symbolic substitution. His core body of work, the Doll Series, is regarded, drawing on the academic research of Mitter (2001) and Banerjee (2010) as well as interpretations from art media outlets including Daak and Get Bengal, as a silent witness to the social division and political bloodshed in Bengal during the Naxalite uprising. This study ultimately argues that Bhattacharjee was not an isolated realist, but a unique modernist who integrated the artistic experiences of his peers to forge a deeply personal visual language, and a core driver of the development of post-independence Indian art.

(Majumder, 2007; Mitter, 2001).

(Majumder, 2007) – for Bhattacharjee's artistic philosophy

(Guha-Thakurta, 1992; Mitter, 2001) – for post-independence Bengal art context

(Som, 2015) – for Ramkinkar Baij comparison

(Daak, 2023; Get Bengal, 2022) – for the *Doll Series* and political context

5.7 Impact and Legacy

The influence of artist Bikash Bhattacharjee, which this paper analyzes, on India's contemporary realist art and art education, is a core research proposition in the process of India's realist revival. Backed by research from Indigo Art (n.d.), Sen (2018), Kapoor (2000), and Mitter (2007), his creative practice that integrates classical realist techniques with contemporary sensibilities has inspired a large number of creators in India and abroad who use figurative methods to explore psychosocial issues, unpack the complexity of contemporary Indian identity, and examine urbanization and social change.

His work has also pushed art academies to reform their realist teaching models, encouraging teachers and students to delve deep into the human body, space, and emotional depth. His artistic style has become a core component of modern realism, remains a key research focus for art critics and art school students to this day, and further verifies the vitality of realism in directly engaging with contemporary issues.



(16)

(17)

(18)

Figure 16: Sanjay Bhattacharya's Untitled, Oil**Figure 17:** Sudip Roy: The Busyness of Creation, Watercolor**Figure 18:** Pranam Singh: Indian Beauty, Acrylic

5.8 Realism as Critical Modern Practice

Bhattacharya's realist creative practice serves as a core balancing strategy that bridges personal experience and artistic representation. Rooted in his solid foundational skills in academic painting, he rejects rigid, pre-determined definitive readings of his works. Through techniques such as restrained composition, he reserves ample open space for interpretation that enables viewer participation and aligns with the context of contemporary art.

Conclusion

This study positions 20th-century Indian artist Bikash Bhattacharjee as the core force driving the revival of realism in India's modern art field, whose creative practice has exerted a long-term, pivotal influence that transcends era boundaries. During his active creative period, mainstream Indian art discourse was entirely dominated by the trends of formalist modernism and abstract art. Through continuous creative exploration, Bhattacharjee reconstructed realism, turning this mode of expression—once judged outdated by mainstream discourse—into a dynamic modern language capable of addressing complex psychological, social, and cultural issues. Art historical research by Kapur (2000) and Mitter (2007) supports the academic value of this groundbreaking methodological breakthrough. The work of Guha-Thakurta (2015) and Sen (2018) verifies that his creations closely align with the socioeconomic context of post-independence India, carrying strong relevance to the times he lived in. Research by Foster (2015) affirms that his innovations expanded the space for diverse forms of expression in Indian modern art. Industry tracking data from Indigo Art (n.d.) further shows that his work still exerts a profound influence on the new generation of Indian artists today, cementing his irreplaceable, enduring status in the field.

References

1. Bhattacharjee, B. (2011). Bikash Bhattacharjee: Paintings and drawings. Lalit Kala Akademi.
2. Christie's. (2024). Bikash Bhattacharjee: Items for sale, auction results & history. <https://www.christies.com/en/artists/bikash-bhattacharjee>
3. Christie's. (n.d.). Bikash Bhattacharjee (Untitled, Doll series) [Oil on canvas]. Christie's auction archive. <https://www.christies.com/lot/bikash-bhattacharjee-1940-2006-untitled-doll-series-6495195>
4. Daak. (2023, March). A discomfiting witness: Bikash Bhattacharjee's Doll series. <https://daak.substack.com/p/a-discomfiting-witness-bikash-bhattacharjees>
5. Foster, H. (2015). The return of the real: The avant-garde at the end of the century. MIT Press.
6. Get Bengal. (2022). Famous Doll series of Bikash Bhattacharjee is a silent witness to Bengal's Naxal movement. <https://www.getbengal.com/details/famous-doll-series-of-bikash-bhattacharjee-is-a-silent-witness-to-bengals-naxal-movement>
7. Guha-Thakurta, T. (2015). The making of a new "Indian" art. Cambridge University Press.

8. Homegrown. (2021). What do eyeless faces see? The haunting beauty of Bikash Bhattacharjee's visions. <https://homegrown.co.in/homegrown-creators/what-do-eyeless-faces-see-the-haunting-beauty-of-bikash-bhattacharjees-visions>
9. Indigo Art. (n.d.). Bikash Bhattacharjee. <https://www.indigoart.in>
10. India Today. (2000, February 13). Calcutta celebrates painter Bikash Bhattacharjee's current muse; recalls his past passions. <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/society-and-the-arts/story/20000214-calcutta-celebrates-painter-bikash-bhattacharjees-current-muse-recalls-his-past-passions-779537-2000-02-13>
11. Jyotish Joshi. (2013). Signatures of modern Indian art. Publications Division.
12. Kapur, G. (2000). When was modernism: Essays on contemporary cultural practice in India. Tulika Books.
13. Lukács, G. (1971). The theory of the novel. MIT Press.
14. Majumder, M. (2007). Close to events: Works of Bikash Bhattacharjee. Niyogi Books.
15. Merleau-Ponty, M. (1964). The primacy of perception. Northwestern University Press.
16. Mitter, P. (2007). The triumph of modernism: India's artists and the avant-garde. Reaktion Books.
17. Prinseps. (2022). Bikash Bhattacharjee: Early cityscapes. <https://prinseps.com/research/bikash-bhattacharjee-early-cityscapes/>
18. Rainbows and Hues. (2020). Bikash Bhattacharjee: The realist visionary of Indian art. <https://rainbowsandhues.com/bikash-bhattacharjee-the-realist-visionary-of-indian-art/>
19. The Arts Trust. (n.d.). [Image(s) from Bikash Bhattacharjee past exhibition]. <https://www.theartstrust.com/pastexhibitions/bikash/>
20. The Heritage Lab. (n.d.). Art — Bikash Bhattacharjee. <https://www.theheritagelab.in/art-bikash-bhattacharjee/>

Prinseps/TheArtsTrust image links (figures)

1. The Arts Trust. (n.d.). Lot images: Lot-6.
2. <https://www.theartstrust.com/pastexhibitions/bikash/assets/images/lots/Lot-6.jpg>
3. The Arts Trust. (n.d.). Lot images: Lot-24.
4. <https://www.theartstrust.com/pastexhibitions/bikash/assets/images/lots/Lot-24.jpg>
5. The Arts Trust. (n.d.). Lot images: Lot-84.
6. <https://www.theartstrust.com/pastexhibitions/bikash/assets/images/lots/Lot-84.jpg>
7. Story Ltd. (n.d.). Auction: Bikash Bhattacharjee, lot 40.
8. <https://www.storyltd.com/auction/item.aspx?eid=4870&lotno=40>
9. Simply Kalaa. (2021). Bikash Bhattacharjee: An impeccable surrealist.
10. <https://simplykalaa.com/bikash-bhattacharjee/>
11. Wikipedia contributors. (2024). Bikash Bhattacharjee. In Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia.
12. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bikash_Bhattacharjee
13. Wikipedia contributors. (2025). Bikash Bhattacharjee. In Wikipedia.
14. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bikash_Bhattacharjee

Yadav / Gallery Pioneer / Artist pages (figures)

1. Gallery Pioneer. (n.d.). Sanjay Bhattacharya — artist profile.
2. <https://www.gallerypioneer.com/artists/sanjay-bhattacharya~50>

Auction/collection images and social media

1. Google Arts & Culture. (n.d.). Doll — Bikash Bhattacharjee.
2. https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/doll-bikash-bhattacharjee/IAEHH_D_J1R-Zg?hl=en
3. Facebook. (n.d.). Photo by [user] (Bikash Bhattacharjee image).
4. <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=2436514593472131&set=a.130570670733213&type=3>

Additional catalogue/portfolio sources

1. Lalit Kala Akademi. (2004). Portfolio of Bikash Bhattacharjee. (Portfolio).
2. Bhattacharjee, B. (2011). Bikash Bhattacharjee: Paintings and drawings. Lalit Kala Akademi. (Listed above; duplicate removed)
3. Sen, S. (2018). Realism and the contemporary Indian painter. *Journal of Indian Art Studies*, 12(2), 45–58.

Prinseps / TheArtsTrust lot page

1. The Arts Trust. (n.d.). Bikash — lot 8.
2. <https://www.theartstrust.com/pastexhibitions/bikash/lots/lot8.html>

Story/auction image

1. Story. (n.d.). Lot image: Story auction.
2. <https://www.storyltd.com/auction/item.aspx?eid=4870&lotno=40>