

Horizon Gallery

The Horizon Gallery opened in London in January 1987. It was established as the visual arts wing of the Indian Arts Council (IAC) whose headquarters were at Marchmont Street in London. The Gallery's inaugural exhibition was the work of Prafull Dave, a leading contemporary painter of the Indian diaspora, (Switzerland) who was showing his work for the first time in London. Throughout the Gallery's five-year lifespan, it held numerous exhibitions showcasing the artistic talent of British south Asian, Indian and European artists. The Gallery also held lectures, readings, books, launches and other activities relating to sub-continental visual art in the UK.

Horizon's parent organisation, The Indian Arts Council, evolved from several former organisations, each with individual aims and objectives. The first of these was the 'Indian Painters Collective UK' which was formed in 1963 by a group of UK-based Indian painters. This group reformed in 1976 as the 'Indian Artists Collective UK' to embrace cross art forms. In 1978, the organisation was renamed 'Indian Artists United Kingdom (IAUK)' with the desire to establish an Indian Academy of Visual Arts in the UK. On 20 February 1983, one of the influential founders of the IAUK, renowned Sri Lankan editor and poet, Meary James Thuraiajah Tambimuttu (1915-1983), known to his readers as Tambimuttu, published a Provisional Outline for an organisation, which he called the 'Indian Arts Council UK'. The text of this outline emphasised that the purpose of the establishment of such a council was to foster greater understanding between the art traditions of the Indian subcontinent and those of the Western world. Tambimuttu's initial idea for the Indian Arts Council was 'to establish an Indian Arts Council in New Delhi, London, and the USA for the purpose of facilitating the presentation of Indian artists, poets, dancers and musicians in the form of fine books, exhibitions and performances'. Unfortunately, after only the first few inaugural meetings of the IAC, Tambimuttu had a heart attack and passed away on 22 June 1983.

However, in honour of Tambimuttu's original principles, the Indian Artists UK renamed itself Indian Arts Council (IAC). It structured itself to include a Board of Trustees and a general body of membership. The general body consisted of prominent South Asian and non-South Asian members of the artistic, academic and business community. The IAC became a registered charity governed by a constitution and had three sub-committees, Visual Arts, Membership and Literary. Founding members, co-patrons and board members included the poet Tambimuttu, prolific writer Dr Mulk Raj Anand, writer, William Cooper, writer/translator Dr Ranjana Sidhanta Ash, Amal Ghosh, Balraj Khanna, Ibrahim Wagh, Mali and Suresh Vedak. In addition, a number of practitioners and academics working in South Asian art, literature and culture the fields sat on the IAC's Board of Trustees.

The Indian Arts Council sought to promote South Asian arts through a programme of visual art exhibitions, artist workshops, literary seminars as well as a performing arts and an educational programme in Indian Art and Culture. A long-term ambition of the IAC was to establish a gallery for the promotion of visual artists, especially artists from the South Asian diaspora. The impetus behind featuring South Asian artists was that the IAC Board recognised that they were under-represented in mainstream arts organisations.

In addition to traditional South Asian based art, artists, especially those of dual cultural influence, were producing more contemporary, culturally diverse work. British South Asian artists, working in all genres were influenced by distinctly contemporary techniques and multicultural concepts. The nature of work ranged from experimental art and sculptures to ceramics, charcoal drawings, oil paintings and multi-media installations. With this wide range of exhibitions, Horizon Gallery's artistic policy developed into featuring diverse artistic

identities, rather than a single approach to a particular genre. Many of the artists featured at the gallery were of dual cultural backgrounds.

In addition, the gallery focussed on the work of unknown artists, especially women of South Asian origin and disabled artists as well as established artists from the Indian sub-continent. In October 1988, Horizon established an archive to document artistic endeavours by contemporary (British) South Asian artists. It was hoped that access to the archive would facilitate a greater recognition not only for established artists, but also for up-and-coming artists.

According to an unfinished plan compiled by Yvonne Modlin in 1989, Horizon Gallery intended to embark on a new development programme to identify the needs of South Asian artists. The programme aimed to initiate relationships with similar organisations who were committed to providing a space for the representation of South Asian culture in Britain. The gallery's ultimate objective, outlined in this plan was to complicate the notion of South Asian arts within the mainstream artistic community. The gallery sought to dismantle various stereotypes of South Asian art by replacing them with contemporary, positive images.

This endeavour however, required a level of funding commitment the gallery was unable to attain from grant giving organisations. During this time, external funding bodies were not so open in accepting the newer genre of British South Asian art; they were more inclined to fund institutions which carried work that had for so long defined the British perception of 'art from the subcontinent'. As a result, the gallery was unable to generate sufficient annual funding. In 1987, Horizon Gallery's initial core funding came through the IAC from the Ethnic Arts Sub Committee and the Greater London Council. Horizon also generated financial support from a few artists and individual donors from the Asian and business communities.

In spite of these financial challenges, the gallery became and remained the only one in Britain, which specifically supported British Asian artists. In light of this, Horizon implemented a national touring policy, whereby four touring exhibitions were held annually at Nottingham Playhouse. Horizon also established an education policy, which was to include workshops and lectures. It was in the process of implementation when the gallery closed down.

Since its founding in 1987 until its closure in 1991, the Horizon Gallery showcased ten exhibitions annually. Significantly, the exhibitions were issue-based, concerning identity, class, nationalism and spirituality. These themes were expressed in photographic, sculpture, painting, multi-media performance and a range of creative craft exhibitions. Just before its closure in July 1991, Horizon launched the 'In Focus' catalogue in conjunction with a second showing of the corresponding exhibition - 'In Focus Restated'. This major exhibition and catalogue displayed the work and biographies of twenty-six prominent South Asian artists from the British diaspora.

For many artists such as Amal Ghosh, Balraj Khanna, Juginder Lamba', Sutapa Biswas, Prafulla Mohanti and Chila Kumari Burman, during its lifetime, the Horizon Gallery provided a historic platform for British South Asian visual art. It existed as a dedicated space in the country's capital for the promotion of British South Asian visual art. Currently these renowned artists as well as countless others, continue to push back artistic and cultural boundaries by incorporating diverse artistic traditions and promoting the highest calibre of art. To a great degree, Horizon Gallery brought today's British South Asian artists further recognition and appreciation of their artistic contribution to British multicultural arts and arts education sectors.