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Book on painter Natvar Bhavsar by noted historian released in N.Y.



From left, publisher Neville Drury, painter Natvar Bhavsar and collector Ben Heller on the occasion of the release of the book, "Natvar Bhavsar: Painting and the Reality of Color," at Heller's New York home on Oct. 15. (Photo: Jyotirmoy Datta)

By Jyotirmoy Datta

The inner circle of art in New York City, which in the years immediately after World War II replaced Paris as the art capital of the world, in an informal ceremony last week placed its crown of recognition around the brows of a man born in the obscure Gujarat village of Gothava in 1934 and who came to the United States in 1962 to study art at the University of Pennsylvania.

Although he has had no exhibition of his paintings in India, New York artist Natvar Bhavsar's works are part of the collection of some of the most prestigious museums and corporations all over the world, and every year at least two galleries on the average in Europe hold Bhavsar shows in great style and with much fanfare.

A recognition of his place in the mainstream art world today was the release on Oct. 15 of a book on Bhavsar, written by a noted authority on American art, Irving Sandler, and published by Craftsman House of Australia, at a reception at the home of noted art collec-

tors Pat and Ben Heller here on Oct. 15. The book, titled "Natvar Bhavsar: Painting and the Reality of Color," contains 42 plates of color that reproduce the complexities and nuances of the original, which ordinarily elude reproduction, with notable fidelity. Sandler, who is contributing editor of "Art in America" and author of such distinguished works as "The Triumph of American Painting: A History of Abstract Expressionism" and "The New York School: The Painters and Sculptors of the Fifties," told *India in New York* that he traveled to India with the Bhavsars in 1997 to soak in the artist's background before he completed the book, which took him almost a year to write. "I have known Natvar since 1968; indeed, I don't write about an artist unless I have really followed his work from the beginning," said Sandler, whose "American Art of the 1960s" is acknowledged as the definitive work on the period. "Bhavsar is a true New York artist in that he was one of the originators of the color-field style of painting; he is also true to his Indian heritage in that he applies his color powder in the spirit of rangoli."

The release of the \$50 book was followed by a brisk book-signing session by Bhavsar, watched by Craftsman House representative Neville Drury, who had flown from Sydney for the event. Sandler, who complained of a pain in the stomach, left before the signing, but was later declared fit after a medical check-up.

The host of the evening, Ben Heller, is a legendary collector who bought early works of De Kooning, Pollock, Rothko and others in the 1960s. In New York art circles, he is regarded as a touchstone. He made news, for example, when he sold Pollock's "Blue Poles" for \$2 million to the Australian National Gallery in Canberra. One of the rooms of his Manhattan home where the reception was held was lined with five Bhavsar paintings.

Bhavsar's works are included in the collections of numerous museums and corporations, including the Australian National Gallery, Boston Museum of Fine Art, the Guggenheim and the Metropolitan, American Express, Estee Lauder, Exxon, Reader's Digest, Union Carbide, Volvo and Young and Rubicam.

There were exhibitions of Bhavsar's works in Zurich, Cologne and Ascona last year, organized by ACB Viviane Ehrle Galerie of Zurich. The gallery is hosting another exhibition this November in Cologne. The show, called "Art Cologne," at the International Art Fair is scheduled to run from Nov. 7 through Nov. 15.

The exhibition opening in Cologne will be marked by a ceremonial dinner sponsored by the UBS (Union Bank of Switzerland) Art Banking.

Bhavsar has had exhibitions of his paintings all over the world, but none in India, except for two minor shows of works on paper in 1988.

"Perhaps that is because there are few exhibition spaces large enough to accommodate my paintings," Bhavsar told *India in New York* with a rueful smile. "Anyway, we have a very representative section of the Indian community here at the reception, which is unusual for any of my former shows and events."

Apart from members of the community, many mainstream artists, curators, directors of museums and collectors attended the reception.