

## **A SHOW OF HANDS**

### ***In Memoriam: Gieve Patel***

Gieve Patel (1940–2023) bequeathed to posterity a superb corpus of achievement in all the three art forms at which he excelled – poetry, drama, and the visual arts. He published three volumes of poetry, *Poems* (1966), *How Do You Withstand, Body* (1976) and *Mirrored, Mirroring* (1991), followed by a *Collected Poems* (2017), which brought these collections together with a memorable set of new poems and a translation of the Gujarati saint-poet Akho. He wrote three plays, each one a masterpiece of psychological portraiture and the power dynamics of intimacy, *Princes* (1970), *Savaksa* (1982) and *Mister Behram* (1987).

And Gieve (he was a dear friend; I shall not distance myself from him through the use of the neutral ‘Patel’) created an extraordinary oeuvre of paintings, drawings and sculptures across a period of six decades. His work as an artist was distinguished by its visionary perspectives, its representations of the vulnerable and the marginal, its clear-sighted understanding of the human condition and human behaviour in all its unpredictable complexity. If Gieve responded to the exhilarating yet also terrifying conditions of his particular time and place, he also brought into his frames a love for the paintings of the Gothic and the Renaissance.

In addition, Gieve has left behind another vibrant legacy. This is the tapestry of friendship and influence, inspiration and generosity that he wove throughout his life. It is this legacy – which remains precious to those who knew him and loved him, or who responded strongly to his work – that we celebrate through this exhibition in remembrance. I have titled it *A Show of Hands*, this image bringing to mind both an affirmative vote and, more literally, an assembly of diverse styles and media that are, nevertheless, united in their connection with Gieve.

Among the celebrants gathered here are artists who formed Gieve’s close circle of friends and colleagues, as well as artists who engaged with his ideas and his art from other points of vantage, or in whose work he had a close and sustained interest. Some of the themes that connect Gieve and the artists invited to participate in this exhibition include the vulnerability of the human subject; mortality and how to present it through the image; the relay between a finite consciousness and an infinite world of sensations and experiences; the mystery of Otherness and how to bear witness to this through the figure or the landscape; and the persistence of earlier forms of art, whether as art-historical reference or as absorbed trope.

We also see, in the practices of several of the invited artists, the dialogue between figuration and abstraction that became increasingly important to Gieve in his later years, both at a conceptual and at a painterly level. Eventually, he came to see the world as a weave of selves and objects, rather than as an environment against which human individuals had to etch themselves through sharp, even antagonistic self-assertion. This is the meditative, sometimes pensive yet also playful spirit of osmosis, exchange and redemptive transfiguration in which we present *A Show of Hands*.

**Ranjit Hoskote**  
**Curator**