

Shippensburg University
Kaufmann Art Gallery



***Birth Of The Painted World;
Jivya Mashe and the Warli
Tradition of India***



Two Presidents of India have awarded Warli artist Jivya Mashe, 71, for his artistic achievements. His works were most recently shown with renowned British artist Richard Long at Museum Kunst in Germany and at P.A.C. Milan in Italy. This current exhibition, Birth of the Painted World, at Shippensburg University, features a collection of paintings by Jivya Mashe, his son Sadashiva Mashe, and other Warli artists. Also included are rare photographs of the Warli Tribe from the late 1970's and early 1980's by Martin Strasmore and Kalika Stern, as well as two documentary films: Sun and Moon and the God of Rain, by Italian film maker Anna Pitscheider and the Way of the Warlis by Indian film maker Vijay Sharma. Together, these films give a portal into the ancient Warli painting ritual and daily life.

For well over 4,000 years, the Warli Tribe has lived in Maharashtra, a state in Western India. They have only an oral language only and when Jivya Soma Mashe was orphaned at the age of 7, his refusal to speak had great significance. Mashe, however, began to express himself pictorially, drawing figures and scenes in the earth, using the ancient Warli painting style as his reference. The unusual aspect of this is that heretofore, only women of the tribe ever painted, and further, paintings were only rendered on the walls of their dwellings during important rituals as an expression of invocation and blessing.

As Jivya's verbal silence continued for a number of years, his visual expression developed into an artistic voice that would soon be translated to paper and canvas. The traditional ritual paintings, created at times of marriage or harvest, convey a deep connection and reverence to their land, their community and their spirituality. This mood of reverence is embodied in Mashe's works, as well as the works

of other Warli artists. While in one respect Jivya broke with tradition, his ensuing recognition sparked a wider appreciation of Warli art and has greatly increased artistic interest among Warli men and women.

For thousands of years, the women of the Warli tribe have rendered paintings, called *Chawaks* on the walls of their dwellings as an invocation and blessing during important rituals such as marriages and harvests. The elaborate and intricate designs in *Chawaks* are painted from rice, which is ground and mixed with water to form a paste, and applied with brushes made from twigs.

The central figure in the *Chawak* consists of two triangles meeting at the tip -- the bottom triangle symbolizing the masculine and the top triangle symbolizing the feminine -- which signifies the balance of masculine and feminine within individuals and nature; when these come together, there is wholeness.

The Warli paintings in *Birth of the Painted World* communicate a sense of oneness and interconnection, in which each individual is a balanced combination of masculine and feminine existing in a world that is sustained by that balance. Their paintings point toward the importance of their relationships with each other, their family and community, as well as the natural world. Warli art honors the many parts, including children, rituals, work, play, animals, insects, earth and stars, that make up the greater whole.

The use of shapes and symbols in art is a long-standing tradition from India as seen for thousands of years in *Mandalas*, *Rangolis* and *Yantras*, which are geometric designs that symbolize aspects of the universe, and are often used in prayer and meditation as a reflection of wholeness. In some cases these designs contained particular symbols, sounds and hymns that were believed to give birth to the world, and to have healing and beneficial aspects. Inspired by these traditions, the interior space of the Kaufman Gallery is designed with particular geometric shapes defining the space, and invites the viewer to participate in the exhibition with intention and reverence.

Birth of the Painted World explores these themes in a way that honors the ever-expanding Warli symbol of the community spiral.

Birth of the Painted World is a multi-media exhibition that aims to show not only the finest Warli art, but also to provide viewers with insight and understanding into an ancient vision that carries a timeless

message for our modern world. Through the proceeds of sales of paintings and photography, Birth of the Painted World aims to raise funds for non-profit organizations working in Maharashtra, India to provide improved health care, modern medical facilities and much needed reforestation projects. We greatly thank Shippensburg University faculty and students, as well as the many people who have been instrumental in bringing this project together.