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## #57

*Harvest Festival (detail)* by Jivya Soma Mashe  
Date unknown. India  
Gouache on brown wrapping paper



Soma Mashe belongs to the Warli, an indigenous ethnic group. The Warli live in the Indian state of Maharashtra, about 150 kilometers north of Mumbai. Their stories and myths are transmitted through oral tradition or in pictorial representation; there is no written record.

Until the end of the 1960s, the so-called Warli paintings were traditionally created only for ceremonial occasions such as weddings or harvest festivals.

The women prepared the walls of their huts with cow dung and red clay (gheroo). Using a bamboo stick and white paint made from rice paste, water and rubber resi, they draw the stories and myths on the walls. A sparingly used, bright red as a second color is called sindur, and is borrowed from the top painting of married Hindu women.

At the beginning of the 1970s, the painter Bhaskar Kulkarni travelled to the villages of the Warli. He was employed by the Handicrafts and Handloom Corporation, that was founded by the government to preserve the traditional culture. He tried to make the women copy their paintings on paper without any ceremonious occasion and failed.

Jivya Soma Mashe was the first man that started to create these paintings apart from ritualistic causes, but to paint every day.

The depiction in his paintings is based on the traditional graphic vocabulary of circles, triangles and squares. These forms result from the observation of nature by the Warli - the circle is made up of moon and sun, the triangle of mountains and trees. Mashe's figures are always in motion; lines between them show the traces and paths that arise when walking through the landscape. Stripes, lines and dots frolic on the painting ground, they vibrate and weave into compositions that characterize life as movement.

Soma Mashe has received several national and international awards, including the Netherlands Prince Claus Award in 2009: „Jivya Soma Mashe is honored for his creative reinvention of a vanished art vocabulary, for his vivid presentation of the Warli vision of nature and culture in balance, for highlighting the contemporary relevance of local forms of knowledge and its significant contribution to the culture and development of the tribal peoples.“

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