Maqbool Fida Husain (1915-2011) was an influential member of the Progressive Artists' Group (PAG). PAG was one of a number of Left-wing groups that were active in the 1930-40s Indian cultural scene. In this context, theatre professionals, writers and visual artists united under the 'progressive' banner and loosely endorsed Left-wing ideals to produce and circulate art together. PAG, founded in Mumbai in 1947, included artists Francis Newton Souza, Krishnaji Howlaji Ara, Syed Haider Raza, Hari Ambadas Gade and Sadanand Bakre. PAG members rejected the nationalist art propounded by the Bengal School and embraced the Surrealist, Expressionist, Primitivist and Cubist styles of the international avant-gardes.

The painting depicts the figure of Mother Teresa, an Albanian Roman Catholic nun, founder of the Missionaries of Charity in Kolkata (1950), in a semi-abstract and geometric style. Mother Teresa, portrayed in her iconic white sari with blue border, cradles a baby in her arms and has a small child lying at her feet. Mother Teresa, who ministered to the poor, sick, orphaned and dying of Kolkata for over 45 years, appeared in many of Husain's later canvases. In this instance, the artist has applied the paint in a flat manner with thick, pasty brushstrokes. The faceless Mother Teresa is set against a dull green and black background.

**Descriptive line**

Painting, Mother Teresa, by Maqbool Fida Husain, oil on canvas, India, 1980

**Physical description**

Painting, in oil on canvas, depicting the figure of Mother Teresa, an Albanian Roman Catholic nun, founder of the Missionaries of Charity in Kolkata (1950), in a semi-abstract and geometric style. Mother Teresa, portrayed in her iconic white sari with blue border, cradles a baby in her arms and has a small child lying at her feet. Mother Teresa, who ministered to the poor, sick, orphaned and dying of Kolkata for over 45 years, appeared in many of Husain's later canvases. In this instance, the artist has applied the paint in a flat manner with thick, pasty brushstrokes. The faceless Mother Teresa is set against a dull green and black background.

**Dimensions**

Height: 103 cm, Width: 59.2 cm, Height: 114.5 cm With frame, Width: 70.5 cm With frame, Depth: 3.4 cm With frame

**Museum number**

IS.38-1984

**Object history note**

Purchased from Mrs Sara Abraham. RF: 84/106 and 1997/861

**Historical context note**

Maqbool Fida Husain (1915-2011) was an influential member of the Progressive Artists' Group (PAG). PAG was one of a number of Left-wing groups that were active in the 1930-40s Indian cultural scene. In this context, theatre professionals, writers and visual artists united under the 'progressive' banner and loosely endorsed Left-wing ideals to produce and circulate art together. PAG, founded in Mumbai in 1947, included artists Francis Newton Souza, Krishnaji Howlaji Ara, Syed Haider Raza, Hari Ambadas Gade and Sadanand Bakre. PAG members rejected the nationalist art propounded by the Bengal School and embraced the Surrealist, Expressionist, Primitivist and Cubist styles of the international avant-gardes.

Born in Pandharpur, Maharashtra, Husain received a haphazard education. From 1932-1934 he attended evening classes at the Indore Art College. In 1934 he was admitted to the Mumbai J.J. School of Art but could not pursue his artistic education due to his family's precarious financial conditions. In 1937 he left his family and migrated to Mumbai where he lived for many years doing odd jobs including painting cinema hoardings. Unlike artists Souza, Ram Kumar and Satish Gujral, who depicted contemporary urban scenes, Husain chose subjects from rural life and themes from Hindu and Urdu mythologies.

Around 1947 he developed a style that assimilated the visual syntax of Picasso, Georges Henri Rouault, Max Beckmann and Emil Nolde with the Indian sculptural vocabulary of the Khajuraho temples and the Yaksis figures of the Kusana period. Viennese Expressionist works were available to the artist through the private collection of Austrian Jewish émigré, Dr E. Schlesinger, Husain's earliest patron. The artist also turned to the folk and primitive features and colour layout of Rajasthani and Pahari miniature paintings. These consisted of hot, bright and dull
colours applied in an ultra-flat manner. After 1957, he modelled his figures after the geometric, well regulated and highly-stylized movements of the Bharata Natyam and Odissi dancers. The artist's later cycles of painting scenes from the Mahabharata and the Ramayana can be seen as developments of his early preoccupation with the folklore, ritual and mythology of the Indian peasant.

In 1952, Husain had his first solo exhibition in Zürich and over the next few years, his work was widely circulated in Europe and U.S. gradually becoming the most successful contemporary living artist from India. In 1996 some of Husain's works became controversial because of their portrayal of nude Hindu deities in an allegedly sexual manner. The controversy escalated and in 1998 Husain's house was attacked and his paintings vandalised by extremist Hindu groups Bajrang Dal and Shiv Shena. Protests against Husain also led to the closure of an exhibition in London. In 2006, another series of cases were brought against him resulting in the artist's self-imposed exile. Husain was India's most well known artist from the Post-Independence period, he died in London in 2011 at the age of 95.

URL
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O133829/mother-teresa-painting-husain-maqbool-fida/