

# Husain celebrates Varanasi, India's syncretism in unseen paintings

**Prasun Sonwalkar**

prasun.sonwalkar@hindustantimes.com

**LONDON:** The last 24 paintings by the iconic artist MF Husain celebrating India's syncretism, history, festivals, family life and modes of transport — including one devoted to Varanasi — went on public display at the Victoria & Albert Museum on Wednesday.

Husain, who passed away here in 2011 aged 95, was commissioned in 2008 by Usha Mittal, wife of Indian industrialist Lakshmi Mittal, to work on a series titled 'Indian Civilisation', also known as 'Vision of India through Mohenjo Daro to Mahatma Gandhi'.

The 24 hitherto unseen paintings reflect Husain's syncretic oeuvre and include paintings of religious and historic figures as well as depictions of Delhi, Varanasi and Kolkata.

Divia Patel, curator of the exhibition, said: "The V&A Museum's association with Husain goes back to 1990,



■ **Brahma-Vishnu: One of Husain's unseen works.**

USHA MITTAL/HT

when we set up the South Asia section, when he used to come here barefoot. This exhibition is a good introduction to Indian art to those who are largely unfamiliar with it."

Husain's depiction of Varanasi includes images of Swami Vivekananda, Bismillah Khan, Hanuman, 'ghats', temples and 'sadhus'. He describes each of the 24 paintings (owned by Usha

Mittal) in his handwriting.

Usha Mittal, who was present at the opening, said that Husain was 'sad' when he talked about India, but happy when he painted. "He loved India, and his desire was that one day he would go back to his country," she said.

The exhibition, titled 'MF Husain: Master of Modern Indian painting', is on until 27 July.