

Painting Pairs 2024-25: Ursula Griffiths & Benjamin Singer

Sorab Pithawalla

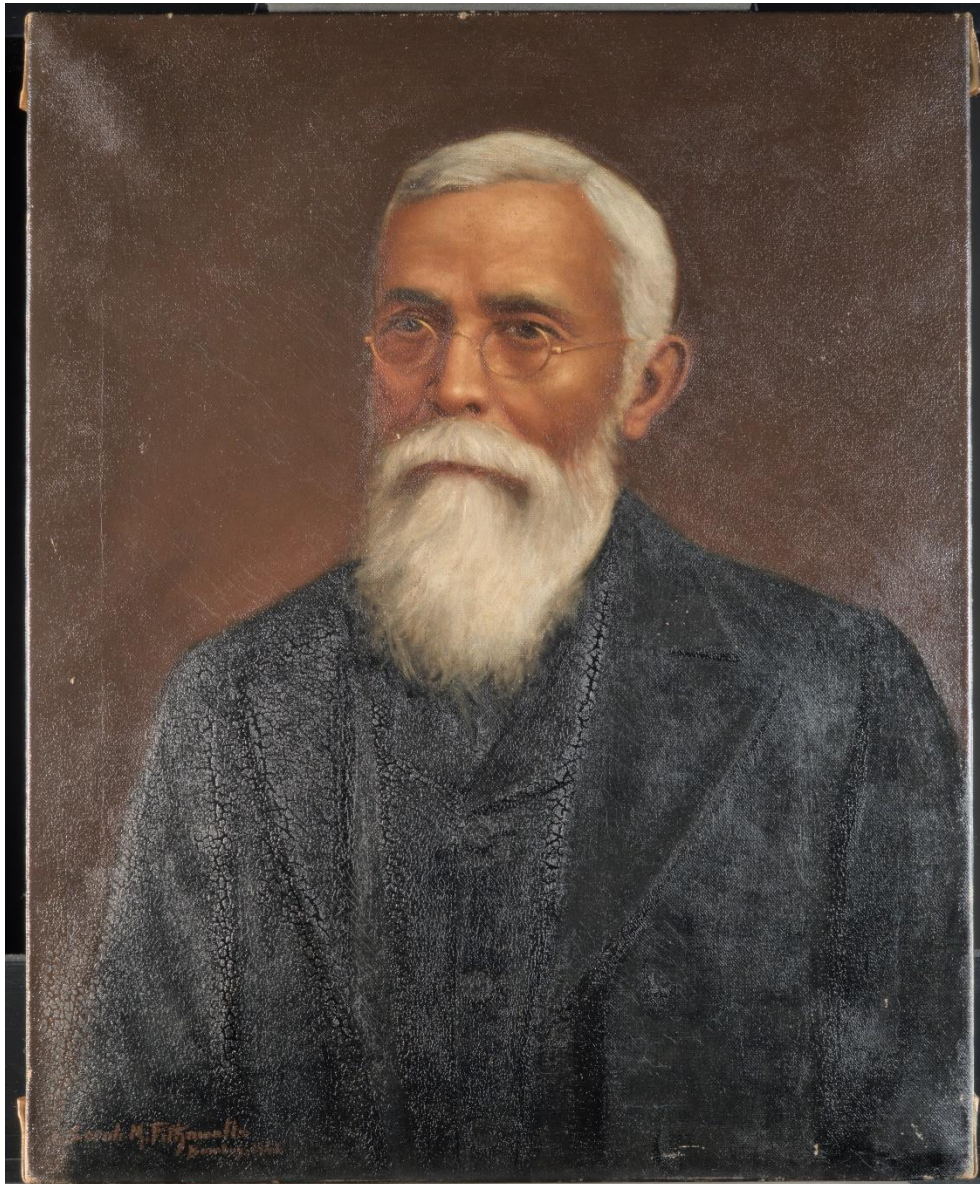
Portrait of Dadabhai Naoroji

1946

Private Collection: Formerly of The India Club

Oil on Canvas

756 x 615 x 24 mm



Abstract:

This paper details the technical and art historical findings of a study undertaken on *Portrait of Dadabhai Naoroji* by Sorab Pithawalla, painted in 1946. The study results from a collaborative research project conducted by MA History of Art student Benjamin Singer, and MA Conservation of Easel Paintings student Ursula Griffiths, as part of the Painting Pairs Project (2024-25) organised by The Courtauld Institute of Art, London. The painting is privately owned and formerly hung in The India Club, The Strand from the painting's documented acquisition in 1946, until the club's closing in 2023.

The sitter, Dadabhai Naoroji (1825-1917), is a highly significant figure in the Indian Nationalist movement and was notable in his career as an Indian activist, scholar, economist, and the first Asian MP in Britain. The artist, Sorab Pithawalla (1911-1959), is a second-generation artist of the western academic school of painting in India, which itself emerged during British governance of India, disseminated through western art schools. The project aimed to position the painting in the colonial, and immediate post-colonial period of Indian art and investigate its visual and material elements, with two distinctive foci. Firstly, the depiction by Sorab Pithawalla of Dadabhai Naoroji was investigated alongside comparable and contrasting depictions of Naoroji, in order to aid understanding why such a depiction was chosen and its implications for the artist at the date of painting. Secondly, the painting was investigated with technical and scientific methods in order to explore the materials and techniques employed by the artist, Sorab Pithawalla. Subsequent research was undertaken to situate these findings within the context of oil painting production in India under British colonial government.