Bengal Beyond Boundaries.

Aakriti Art Gallery

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Bengal Beyond Boundaries.

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মমতা ব্যানার্জী
ममता बनर्जी
ممتا بنرجی
Mamata Banerjee

मुख्यमंत्री, पश्चिमबंग
मुख्यमंत्री, पश्चिम बंगाल
وزیراعلیٰ مغربی بنگال
CHIEF MINISTER, WEST BENGAL

28th June, 2023

MESSAGE

I am happy to know that **AAKRITI ART GALLERY** is going to organize an exhibition of '**Bengal Masters**', featuring works of eminent painters of Bengal, at Bikaner House, Delhi, from 7th to 16th July, 2023.

I wish this exhibition a grand success and convey my heartiest greetings and best wishes to the organizers on the occasion.

(Mamata Banerjee)

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PROLOGUE

Vikram Bachhawat

Jogen Chowdhury, Satish Gujral, Vikram Bachhawat at
the opening of Time's Whirlwind, Art of Satish Gujral, 2009

"What is Art? It is the response of man's creative soul to the call of the Real."
- Rabindranath Tagore

In the rasping of our existential struggle, a tweak of joy and splash of pathos, there is a beautiful mind that still lives within us and celebrates the delight of art to find solace in the exquisiteness and magnificence of any creation. My journey into the world of art for more than two decades has been a celebration of an association of precious and poignant creations of maestros as well as the leading contemporaries of Bengal.

I have seen art to burgeon, bloom, amalgamate and spread its ethos and aura beyond borders. Bengal has always been a cultural hub of the country and the City of Joy – Kolkata, its cultural capital. I was fortunate enough to initiate my footsteps as a gallerist from this city and eventually travelled extensively across the country.

Aakriti Art Gallery has evolved with the passage of time and with its good will and positive spirit since its inception, it continues to expand the canvas of creation and has been successfully engaged to bring about novel opportunities for the artists, art lovers, art critics, art collectors and the connoisseurs.

And here, I take the opportunity to introduce our new venture – 'Bengal Beyond Boundaries', an exhibition quite unique of its kind. As the name itself connotes it is going to be an all-encompassing journey of the artists from Bengal starting with early Bengal oils to the emerging contemporary art practitioners.

The finest accretion of the old and the new, the Masters and the New Generation artists with the blending of cultures has always been the core fortitude of our gallery. I always believed that it's my responsibility to present the holistic nature of art to the viewers where individual creativity merges with the cosmic beauty and the aesthetics of art – the unison of personal emotion with the universal truth.

This is probably for the first time that such a large scale exhibition has been mounted by our gallery to showcase Bengal artworks from different periods in different styles under a single roof at Bikaner House in New Delhi from 7th – 16th July, 2023. This is a moment of great joy and pride for us that we have been able to create a huge platform where Bengal artists beginning from early oil paintings, works by the Bengal Masters along with significant contemporary artists who are the torchbearers of the modern Indian art will be presented together.

Bikash Bhattacharjee and Manik Bachhawat

We've remained an integral element of the art world for more than two generations and profoundly contributed to the cultural growth of the society. We, the Bachhawats have always given our best to each and everyone related to art, aesthetics, culture and literature through our progressive endeavours. Although our journey in the world of art, literature and culture had initiated with our father Manik Bachhawat's literary contribution as a poet of Hindi literature followed by his invocative art criticisms, the deep bonhomie with the artists and eventually which became an innate aspect of each member of the Bachhawat family. Bikash Bhattacharjee, Sanat Kar, Partha Pratim Deb, Dharma Narayan Dasgupta just to name a few, were close friends of my father and had a great relationship with our family.

Jogen Chowdhury with Manik Bachhawat in Santiniketan

A visitor with Panne Kunwar, Ambica Beri, Wasim R. Kapoor during solo exhibition of Panne Kunwar at Sanskriti Art Gallery Late, 80's

My mother, Panne Kunwar had a keen interest in fine arts and a painter herself. I've fond memories of my mother's solo exhibition held sometime in 1988-89 at Ambica Beri's Sanskriti Art Gallery, Kolkata. Thus, from my being to becoming has been only and only in the true realm of art and aesthetics and nobody can separate me from that. I, the younger son of the Bachhawat family began my journey in the art world through the formation of Konark Collectibles followed by the Aakriti Art Gallery along with my elder brother, Amitabh and thereby, become true successors of our father and we've tried our level best to take the legacy forward.

Amitabh Bachhawat, Darsh Bachhawat, Priya Bachhawat, Vikram Bachhawat and Aman Bachhawat

The best of art exhibitions, workshops, seminars, art-talks, and auctions have been hosted, organized and curated by the Aakriti Art gallery in the last two decades. We never remained limited to a city and extended our artistic endeavours across the country. On one hand, when I've consistently tried to hone young creative potentials getting ignored and lost in the crowd without proper resources and opportunities, one the other, I have put the best of my efforts to portray the classical ethos of the art of India with focus on Bengal Art, to showcase the rarest of the rare artwork.

One of my primary concerns has been to become instrumental in delivering the modern Indian art with its inexhaustible contemporary segments and their different experimentations to the global audience. We have intellectually catered to the society for an age and taken it ahead of the times through eventual innovative ventures in the world of art and aesthetics. Aakriti Art Gallery is the art hub that has been revolutionary in giving a facelift to contemporary Indian art and endorsing young talented artists from all over the country in parallel to the celebration of the art of maestros from the entire country. Even before Aakriti Art Gallery happened, our house was a rendezvous of artists, art lovers and art historians.

Legendary artists and connoisseurs Basanta Chowdhury, Barun Choudhury, Sandip Ray, Parimal Roy, Bikash Bhattacharjee, Satish Gujral, Jogen Chowdhury, Sanat Kar, Dharmnarayan Dasgupta, Samindranath Mazumdar, B.R. Panesar, Ganesh Pyne, Rabin Mondal, Wasim R. Kapoor, and many more along with Art historians and critics Prayag Shukla, Pranab Ranjan Roy, Mrinal Ghosh, Prasanta Daw have always been an integral part of our rendezvous named Aakriti Art Gallery. The oomph and bonding we have shared is everlasting.

The art world is quite closely associated with two of our distinguished exhibitions over the years – 'Masterpiece' and 'Gen Next', where the maestros and the contemporaries, also the promising and emerging ones were presented broadly in two different shows. It is for the first time we have meticulously designed a distinctive show to bring them together.

I must mention here that without the kind and consistent support of our own Jogen da (Jogen Chowdhury), conceptualizing the show 'Bengal Beyond Boundaries' would not have been possible. I'm grateful to art critic and curator, Uma Nair who has agreed to curate this show for us at the Bikaner House and also thankful to Pranab da (Pranab Ranjan Ray) to extend his helping hand for building up the archive section of the catalogue.

I also thank my friends Chhatrapati Dutta and Nanak Ganguly for their help in arranging the movies of legendary artists to be screened in the venue, and helping in organising the interactive 'conversation' session. Gratitude to also Tapas Konar and Timir Brahma who have been helping us to coordinate the logistic support in New Delhi. My gratitude to Samindranath Mazumdar who has helped us with the research!

Above all how can I not take a bow before my collector and gallerist friends who have always shown me the way, rekindled hope and given me the courage and shown me the path to go ahead in the art world!

My never-ending fascination with the kind of works artists from Bengal has been growing in me for a long time and always remained a source of inspiration that has allowed me to surpass all odds and become whatever I'm today. In this vast and prodigious creative world as an art aficionado, I can't be more obliged to the artists who have been a part of my journey in all these years.

I wish and hope that this exhibition becomes a historic event of our times and the aura of the art of Bengal once again reaches out to all the art lovers in a novel way once again, keeping its timelessness and benevolence intact. I heartily welcome you all to witness and enjoy the spirit of 'Bengal Beyond Boundaries'.

FOREWORD

Jogen Chowdhury

Uma Nair, Nanak Ganguly, Vikram Bachhawat, Jogen Chowdhury, Tapas Konar and Chhatrapati Dutta

For many years I wanted to see a Bengal show that would do justice to the past as well as the present. For me Bengal is more than a state. It is a living and throbbing entity that breathes the spirit of art and its history in myriad ways. This exhibition is an edifice in the making because you will discover for the first time in Delhi many Bengal Masters you have never heard of.

Academic and aesthetic

The history of the Bengal School is one of both academic and aesthetic progression. From the educational portals to the human experience, each milestone in its archives is a story of the triumph of modernism.

The East India Company gained a dominant position in India and a lot of art that time was dictated by British tastes. The Govt College of Art Calcutta when instituted in 1854, was founded and run with a syllabus that was designed according to British educative principles. So, even in the post - Independence years we had landscapes and drawings and study of human figures in the realist mode. So the pedagogy in art was dictated according to British academic school.

Bengal Famine and human condition

In the meantime, we cannot forget Bengal history. The East

Bengal famine

Tapas Sarkar, Aman Bachhawat, Jogen Chowdhury and Vijay Kaushik at the Aakriti Art Gallery, Booth No - E11, INDIA ART FAIR 2016

India Company officials got engaged in a systematic orgy of asset-stripping Bengal, contributing to one of Bengal's worst famines, killing millions. Rather than organise effective tax or famine relief, as was common among Indian rulers, the Company maintained its tax harvesting to sustain a high share price. In that time of great famine and human devastation we had artists who created works that exemplified the human condition. This became the most important milestone in the sensibility of the Bengal School.

Reflections of student years

I remember as a student I was going to Sealdah station to draw. Drawing was such an important part of one's academic exercise. But I believe that those were twilight years we were still learning.

In my Paris years, I realised that originality was the key to an artist's realm. But it is one's experience that leads to this discovery and explorations and then take on a new meaning. Now when I look at my early works, it was academic and slowly but surely it grew into its own nucleus. As an artist my return from Paris and working in Chennai as a weaving designer, as well as at Rashtrapati Bhavan, were important experiences that would define my ideology.

But the most important decision was my return to my pastoral Santiniketan. Ultimately the proximity to nature and the living ethos of the educational functioning of Gurudev's vision brought about its own odyssey in my journey as an artist. Gravitas and legitimacy define many decisions of my life as an artist. Bengal has gone through upheavals as well as all kinds of political resuscitation and when you look at the world of artists here there is so much still to be discovered. I wanted this exhibition to be the one that offers many discoveries for art lovers in Delhi at Bikaner House.

Bengal history

Bengal history is an album of pivotal, political and social movements in India, such as the Great Bengal Famine of 1943-44, riots, partition and its fallout that resulted in honest depiction of human suffering.

Refugee

I believe that in the history of Bengal, many artists are to be celebrated for their triumph over the circumstances of their highly principled lives which they devoted completely to art, irrespective of market forces to communicate a truth that was unequivocally their own. If we look at the history at every step, it tells us that we must pause and acknowledge the human condition. It is in this spirit of creativity and being that I wanted this exhibition to speak like none other. The relevance of the Bengal School is social , it is cultural as well as political because that is our ferment, it is resonant even today.

The Bengal School also had pioneers who formed the cradle of the beginning of Modernism in India. However the Bengal School is also one of a rich tapestry of deep resonance and this is the pulse that we wish to offer in this exhibition Bengal Beyond Boundaries.

In Paris Studio (1967)

A Looking Back

Nanak Ganguly

The exemplary presence of Aakriti Art Gallery in contemporary Indian art is exceptional and in all earnest what it has done in the past reveals its commitment to serious and meaningful pursuits. The gallery will showcase works like Early Oil paintings, works done by Masters and contemporary practitioners who have contributed to the making and evolution of Indian art. The works presented at Bikaner House titled 'Bengal- Beyond Borders' conceptualized by Jogen Chowdhury and curated by Uma Nair showcase a wonderful process and spirit that provoke a dialogue that will not question our own notion of culture but will also affect us how we imagine ourselves. The assembly is remarkable, what the show accomplishes is a satisfying mélange, each of whom possesses a sprightly distinctive approach. In this exhibition gallery's main focus will be Masters of Bengal and works done by contemporary practitioners who have contributed to the making and evolution of Indian art. The theme will be "Bengal Beyond Boundaries' that will encompass artists settled within and outside Bengal as well.. The works presented here showcase a wonderful process and spirit that provoke a dialogue that will not question our own notion of culture but will also affect us how we imagine ourselves. The assembly is remarkable here, what these artists achieve is a respectful satisfying mélange, each of whom possesses a sprightly distinctive approach. The accounts and language that the participants offer, make for a lively diversity of angles and satisfying narrative styles. Considering what Aakriti creates a site with works of artists who have been showcased alongwith Masters to ensure the very best representations of contemporary developments. The present may be interrogated in an attempt to decipher in it the heralding signs of a forthcoming event. Here we have the principle of a kind of historical hermeneutics- Anonymous Early Bengal, Abanindranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose, Jamini Roy, Hemendranath Mazumdar, Benode Behari Mukharjee, Gobardhan Ash, Manishi De, Kartick Chandra Pyne, Somnath Hore, Gopal Ghosh, Rabin Mondal, Ganesh Haloi, Lalu Prasad Shaw, Ganesh Pyne, Arpita Singh, Jogen Chowdury, Bikash Bhattacharjee, to Chandra Bhattacharjee, Chhatrapati Dutta, Tapas Biswas and others. The mystique is put across both by suggestions and by palpable descriptions. Eventually we fuse all this knowledge to such moments in history to the present, traditions within the contemporary, change within permanence.

Thus from a profusion of options the gallery has been able to distill a coherent and positive selection. Considering what the gallery has offered in the past quite elucidates the fact derived from its exhibition histories that the policy has always remained a respect for senior and established talent and discernment of new promise through thoughtfully curated exhibitions. We already know that it has also taken enormous care through exhibitions like 'Gen Next' to put contemporary Indian and International Art before the public in a balanced and coherent manner. Though its emphasis has largely been on Indian art, in particular, it has also showcased meaningful works from abroad at regular intervals.

An exhibition of a Master is always a veritable feast for the senses, even the angels would stop in the middle of their flight. The enjoy eloquent and spirited reverberations. In the present body of work, one may notice the capacity of harnessing single forms to plural functions which has been the hallmark of Master's work and is visible here in the present show as well. The practice imparted his work a private, even reclusive character, and the push of this compulsion against the narrow range of overall effect is what gives Master's paintings their ways. However narratively inclined many of these pieces done in either ink on handmade paper or coloured gouaches or reversely done on acrylic sheets, their importance as a whole is that they remind us of one occasion of permanence that seems to lurk in an elucidation. Ultimately it is the Master's sensibility that gives these works their distinction- We can certainly think painting, but he showed that one can also paint thought, including the exhilarating and delightful form of thought that is painting chronicling his impressions unfolding perspective on life as he sees it through a literal prism. It gives us a feeling of catharsis, purification of soul. In all the paintings Master's empirical method makes itself felt as support of underpainting and the like are more or less visible. These worked palimpsests underscore the importance of drawing to his enterprise, even while confounding this initial perception of its holistic nature. In the present work, faring that he might become too adept at this language and so sacrifice that sense of unlaboured freshness which has defined his work so far to questions of veracity and substance.

V.S. Gaitonde, Woman, Oil on Canvas
Catalogue: Masterpieces 2015

Tyeb Mehta, Oil on Canvas, 59 x 49 in, 1969
Catalogue: Masterpieces 2015

The Masters showcased in the past 6 editions of **Masterpieces shows** (in the past here recite to us in grand verse from the depths of the soul and reaches out to us in a world of infinitely rich theatre of their souls that entwine and intertwine a rich spell for all of us who have the effrontery to share in the drama. The Masters' presence and grace are remarkable, and thus becomes a rare visual experience- visual texts that lead to a sort of sensation of meaning and connected with a deeper understanding that from the application of paint, its articulation and of gesture, the paint that are largely capable of an immediate registration of the movement in time of an intuitive-subjective experience with the reaching of a climax of a romantic apotheosis arousing our sensation and reception. Only by identifying, tracking down and determine and connect at the same time the supreme practices of these great Masters allow us to acknowledge those legacies and make them blossom in such a way as to give our life to something original and sublime. The works are irradiate, compositions of moments adorned with a visual felicity by a total expressive efficacious visual text, but it never slip into an external sign but rich in solitude and inwardness revealing the legacy and aesthetic beliefs reminding us that the passage and journey of a painter's work are always toward comprehensibility, clarity and revelation of the soul.

S.H. Raza, The Port of Cochin, Watercolour on Paper, 10.3 × 14.8 in
Catalogue: Masterpieces 2016

The notable exhibitions- eight editions of the 'GenNext' shows, unique solo exhibitions of artists like Nandalal Bose, Satish Gujral, Ramkumar, Rabin Mondal, Ganesh Pyne, K.G Subramanyan, Lalu Prasad Shaw, Bikash Bhattacharjee, Sakti Barman, Rameshwar Broota amongst others.

Ganesh Pyne, The Flower, Tempera on Canvas (Pasted on board), 19.5 x 17.5 in, 2005.
Catalogue: Masterpieces 2016

From the **Birth Centenary Show of Gobardhan Ash**(1907-2007) (July 22- August 5, 2007) to Kartick Chandra Pyne (January 21-29, 2006), sharpest articulations take place as the Masters take a dip into the depths which is massive and subliminal.

In Nandalal Bose, **The Great Journey of Shapes:, Collages of Nandalal Bose**, 2015-it had some unusual and rare works of The Master- the collages that was put up carried that quality of a world whose contents might be said to be suspended in a simultaneous presentness of being.

This End To The Other'; Recent Photographs by Rameshwar Broota (November 7-m 30, 2011) was held in association with Vadehra Art Gallery.
The beauty and idea of these photographs by this Master painter hold us in extreme promises to challenge representation as "formidable tool of domination" but to a redefinition of realism because its high time to realize we will no more be restricted by debased modernism and redefine the definition, of realism, abstraction and cultural representation.

This End To The Other (Recent-Photographs) Rameshwar Broota
In collaboration with
Vadehra Art Gallery
November 7-30, 2011.

In Satish Gujral titled '**The World of Satish Gujral**, March 11-21, 2015), we sense a working out of pictorial conventions, of attitudes and of free associations that spin between dream and reality. The works have an ecstatic and buoyant quality, as figures, both effervescent and robust, take on figurative weight become allegorical as they percolate and sieve through liquid swells and sweep of translucent hues.

Satish Gujral, Pencil on Rice Paper, 42 x 60 in, 2010
Catalogue: Masterpieces 2015

Nanak Ganguly, Ramkumar, Prayag Shukla, Vikram Bachhawat at the exhibition of Ramkumar Lines and Colours at Aakriti Art Gallery, New Delhi

Ramkumar: Drawings from the 60s (June 8 - July 10, 2015) and Lines and Colours (August 16-31, 2016); two shows were held. . About Ramkumar, Richard Bartholomew once written "The placement of the forms, the manner in which they are spaced out or joined, the colour they embody and what these colours suggest build up the complex sensation of a Ramkumar painting."
In this show paintings consist of a visual grip, immediacy and an enigmatic attentive presence. Anyone interested in the power of sublime that extends our sense of life should stand in front of these works done in oil on canvas that reveal the philosophical nature of the Master's work and the consistency of his aesthetic beliefs inwardly precipitated and not imposed. Ramkumar had established 'raison d'être' for his work early in his career that he was determined to resolve.

In the exhibition titled "**Sakti Burman 60s-80s**,'that took place on August 7- 28, 2015; the images here are replete with images retrieved from the times and spaces he has navigated inwardly and intensely with an indiscriminate abandon, unconfined. His work is often linked to the painterly tradition of synthesis of Western techniques and Eastern traditions with nuances of myth, transfiguration effervescent with eclectics; it is at least painterly and most nonrepresentational.

Ina Puri, Mansij Majumdar, Ganesh Haloi and Sakti Burman at the exhibition of Sakti Burman 60s - 80s 2015.

Aakriti also held **Sketches, Scribbles Drawings and Recent Works by K. G Subramanyan**.(July 30- August 27, 2016):Even at the grand old age of ninety two, he was at the peak. His paintings were done on walls, on glass, acrylic sheets, handmade paper, and canvasses. The quality of his attention, the unlikely subtlety and boldness, the harmony he created of tensions, ambiguities, volume, light, elusive moments speaks of an alienation, a simulacra.

Aditi Bengani, Vikram Bachhawat and K.G. Subramanyan at the opening of an exhibition

Human & Urban Space: Paintings and Drawings by Bikash Bhattacharjee (January 8- February 6, 2016). Bikash Bhattacharjee was quintessentially a Bengali, rooted in Kolkata. Bikash was born in Calcutta where one's engagement with modernity arguably is a nineteenth century phenomena. The existing high culture, in a continuous state of making and unmaking, produced the elite reformist empowerment writ large as nationalism and the continuous flow of gestures from that ephemeral body of culture of the street, where Bikash's narrative claims identification with the context of the live experience that is the city in this particular rare works showcased here.

A Gloriuos Journey Through Neo- Primitivism:
Paintings of Rabin Mondal was held on February 6- 28, 2018
We know that over more than six decades as a painter Rabin Mondal has subverted the classical canons to express angst and rage towards bestiality and decadence all around him and

Rabin Mondal in his exhibition

revolved the felicity and fact of using limited means to send complex signals posited between distortion and disquiet. The marks of edge, tradition and handling become part of the living image. So do the measures taken to retard, decay and fend off damage; his pigment trembles with visceral ferocity implores us to look at the rest of painting as if it were abstract. withdrawn from them, the times are fraught with new as well as abiding traumas. He depicts them with extreme sensitivity.

Lalu Prasad Shaw at his exhibition titled "Morning Dew"

An exhibition titled '**Morning Dew**', an exhibition of Laluparasad Shaw paintings took place on January 5-30, 2019. If you look at the fresh series of Lalulprasad Shaw's work there's a literalism about the unhindered fluid imagery that makes the present series so majestic. The eclecticism of the legacy, as an image, as aesthetics, as historical monuments to an imbued romanticism that makes his work so evocative combined with an imaginal vision, formal complexity and luxurious painterly sensuality that makes them work so well. But these artifices do not by any means resist our emotional identification or intellectual response. It is fitting that Shaw's language is implicit in its evolutionary path often evokes and on several occasions actually realize the potentials of a meditative enclosure and are replete with images of a static eternity that substitutes the external one translating feeling and emotions into a visual language- the implacable absolute of otherness

The exhibition – '**Shataborsher Roopkatha-Hundred Years of Fairy Tales**' A rare collection of drawings by Ganesh Pyne: was held from January 30- February 2, 2020.

Shataborsher Roopkatha: Hundred Years of Fairy Tales A rare collection of drawings by Ganesh Pyne: January 30- February 2, 2020.

"We all know that his role as a Master practitioner in tempera was paramount, bristling with his contribution all over with unyielding restrictions.. He truly heralded a genre, appearing at a critical juncture of our art movements, both by unique brilliance of his colour technique, recalling vast fields of painted space and evolution of form, our pre modern texts and cultural traditions. He was able to choose a spectrum and create a symphony with predominating colour as a keynote, the texture laid with luminosity, imagination and precision. He makes pictorial and aesthetic sense out of a personal despair and its experience of a torn and injured world. And yet the energy, intensity, romanticism and sensuousness of the way they are painted provide a celebratory transcendence of the subject matter. Whether this desperate humanism, sustained only by the sheer energy of despair, does not fail to recognize at least one major resource which exists, almost visibly, in the very fact of our language. Being would emerge at last through the image."

At Aakriti, the rich and complex environment of the pre modern greatly eased the advent of modernism, but it also drew on another epochal development that pertained it to mature into a movement more substantial than a mere distraction of bored aesthetes. Climates, even emotional climates, change that our early modernists had its distinct history like all histories both internal and external. Today's art historians must move warily here while they revisit the show at Bikaner House, for the laws of uneven development within and among societies defeat virtually every generalization- the emergence of an Indian contemporary art in the past decades of which Bengal artists contributed enormously and created a vocabulary that remained one of the legacies to younger Indian artists who had looked at their art and then moved from it along very different paths carrying with them the bits of poetic explosion of such work.

It is time to take a hard look, a good look at the prevalent view of our legacies. The tradition is an western construct. We speak so often, of tradition, our history, our dislocated past, our hierarchies and the need to preserve it. Often we fall into arguments. We lapse into the metaphor of purity of signs, the dreadful notion of contamination, behind the walls of unreasoning logic, a retreat tour own narcissism. The eyes are blinkered. Isn't this the politics of vision? Censorship is gentle, but stark, these are our boundaries and beyond them lies the heath, our wasteland. You have all the truth here within these walls. All that is of the essence here, further quest is useless, unnecessary

Should we call halt to the meandering caravans carry our inherited fortunes, of our legacy, which have over the centuries of their wandering collected varied boundaries of experience. Should we prevent them from going further and urge these nomadic spirits to abandon their travel and settle within these walls. We will discuss it here. How much do we stretch our boundaries- Herat, Khurasan, Constantinople? Our parable could do with the instance of centuries-, many millions have written their tales into Ramayana. Mahabharata, the Buddhas of the Swat Valley, The Bamiyan, Mathura, Ajanta frescoes, Jain miniatures, the Mughal atelier, The Company School, The Kalighat or Chitpur woodcuts, Company Lithographs and neo-Bengal school painter as we delve into the modern. Our early modernists. Scholars have produced emended 'authoritative' texts, derided deviations and weeded out various corruptions.

The fact is our legacy is not a sacrosanct definition and the history is not closed book about faraway events. It is present here in the public sphere. It remains open. Once again we open our closed history books here, so far as incorporate, make part of our living, the tender, exciting stories we tell ourselves, of ourselves. Traditions narrow down when it close doors to the outside world, ceasing exploration, abdicating awareness. They speak of boundaries that they have forgotten, it has been long since that they have ventured near them. The boundaries

cannot be defined by centres, they are defined by transgressions. The artist who would draw creatively upon the resources of an inherited legacy, does not admire its funerary urns , does not make a museum of it. He or she fashions those urns into drinking bowls, celebrates the possibilities of renewal. The artist who engages in this spirit is not a curator but an inventor- his or her backdrop becomes an archive , workshop, a studio. Statues do not stand on pedestals here, nor do paintings on walls, merely because they are thousand years old.
The windows here are open, the air breathes through, and also some sand, a certain amount of grit. These are signs of life. You will not find this in propaganda of revivalists or on the agenda of the academics. You will find them in the pages of Yiddish writer I.B. Singer or Italo Calvino or Abanindranath Tagore who spark history with fable. Or Svetlana Alexyvich for her polyphonic chronicles of war with love. These are our alchemists, our magi.

At the forthcoming exhibition at Bikaner House under the stewardship of Vikram Bachhawat, Aakriti's presentation shall attempt to make changes in the perception of the social and cultural future with the body of work by Masters and practicing artists through its interaction with the audience which will instigate in the audience perceptions, understandings of their own creative potential. "Only then can the chronic inattention, of our lives drape itself around us, conciliatory, And with one eye on those long tan plush shadows, That speak so deeply into our unprepared knowledge of ourselves, the talking engines of our day."(-John Ashbery). There is no longer a separate realm capable of acting as a container for the ideal solutions to real problems, no longer a safe distance between day to day actions and the purity which surrounds ones hopes and aspirations.

"The thoughtfully designed shows based on conceptual and thematic subjects of contemporary artists, specifically dedicated shows like 'Affordable September', publication of art magazines like 'Art Etc-News and Views' and so on. Until this conceptualization and execution of this show at Bikaner House has remained to enrich and augment the art world in the best possible way with best possible devices and will always remain the same in the future. We have continuously tried to achieve optimum results with best accomplishments. In a similar way, I look forward to another great event of this kind and association with the dedicated art fraternity, art lovers, art connoisseurs, art historians, art critics, art collectors, and buyers and above all the artists for whom our every journey has been one of its kind that made us possible to reach this position." Says Vikram Bachhawat.

There is no longer a separate realm capable of acting as a container for the ideal solutions to real problems, no longer a safe distance between day to day actions and the purity which surrounds ones hopes and aspirations. The two spheres have merged into one complex hyperspace which is as yet incompletely mapped onto our consciousness that are overwrought and rather ecstatic- emerge through a soft treatment of projected sites to engage the viewers gaze in a variety of orientations. For each of us there are several tracks framed within time, variously traversed, so that cultural change is simultaneously demurred and fast, not just across fraternities or associations, but within socially and historically located selves. The Masters here expressed such human concerns or ideological commitment but at the same time make an archive of their romantic legacy only in their process of their involvement in actual political struggles. Interferences occur for the sake of a new association/position: another binary opposition. Here is a space for cultural poesies-"until only infinity remained of beauty." Otherwise, the legacy is simply there, as printed word, as aesthetics. Things can harden meaningfully in the moment of indecision. "We live our lives, made up of a great quantity of / isolated instants / So as to be lost at the heart of a multitude of things."

Masterpieces 2016, New Delhi

Prelude to Modernism: The Bengal Story

R. Siva Kumar

Ref. No. PR015,
Maa Annapurna, Ravi Verma Press, Karla, 11 X 16 in

The emergence of modernism in Indian art is closely tied to colonialism. This means that although the story of modern art in Bengal is usually told beginning with Abanindranath and the Bengal School, its emergence is intricately intertwined with the history and impacts of colonialism. Europeans who initially slipped in as bit players on the Indian trade scene insidiously grew into disruptors and became a political force by the middle of the 18th century. This brought disruption to all levels of Indian life, and modernism emerged from responses to the alien cultural and artistic values it brought with it. But even before the East India Company became the dominant political arbiter and took over the governance of India, the growing Western presence had a pervasive economic and cultural impact on India.

In art, India's modern contact with the West began with the arrival of European art at the Mughal court, where it made a marginal but interesting presence. Mughal emperors and Indian artists in their courts were drawn to Western realism by curiosity and selectively assimilated it into local art practice without any conceptual disruption. But in due course, this grew into a more complex interaction involving assimilation and resistance and many intermediary shades of emulation and contestations. As the power shifted from the Indian kings to the East India Company, the court artists were forced to seek refuge in smaller regional courts or the markets of colonial cities like Calcutta. Since the Company's employees did not think that Indian art possessed aesthetic qualities, these paintings were not collected as art objects but as mementoes documenting the quaint aspects of Indian customs and practices. The result was cheap and often mass-produced works in hybrid styles resulting from the assimilation of Western realism, materials and techniques with varied local traditions. Naturally, the results varied, and the more skilled Indian artists like Shaikh Muhammad Amir of Karraya were pressed into personal service by Company officials and others like Shaykh Zayn al-Din, Bhavani Das, and Ran Das were for producing natural history paintings that contributed to public knowledge.

The presence of a large and semi-permanent community of English men in India led to the arrival of itinerant European artists in India. By the middle of the 18th century, what began as a trickle became a voluminous and challenging presence. Although visiting artists like Telly Kettle, Thomas Hickey and John Zoffany were primarily seeking patronage among British officers in India and servicing a market for colonial imagery in England, they also westernized the taste of Indian elites. While the larger history pieces they painted were mainly transported back to London and sold there, portraits and conversation pieces depicting the British officials remained in India. Some of their work was also exhibited at the Brush Club exhibition in the city's town hall beginning in 1831. Further, since others like William Hodges, Thomas and William Daniell, and Balthazar Solvyns turned their drawings and studies into engravings and published, they also found wider circulation among Indians.

This, in turn, resulted in the emergence of the Early Bengal Oil paintings, sometimes also erroneously called the Dutch Bengal or French Bengal paintings. Although we know little about the artists who painted them, certain examples show that they were undoubtedly familiar with the work of the itinerant artists and the broader history of European art. Similarly, their primarily religious themes and the use of gold leaf and the iconographic details suggest that they were done for an elite class of Bengalis who were more traditional in their outlook and taste but were familiar with the work of European artists. In a similar vein, European figures and motifs found in terracotta temple reliefs suggest that European presence attracted the attention of artists and patrons beyond the urban centre of Calcutta.

That said Calcutta was the epicentre of art done under colonial influence, and there was a whole range of them. History painting and portrait painting in a realistic manner occupied the top spot in their hierarchy, as in the Western academic system. While Ravi Varma was the most renowned among the Indian artists who worked in this manner, Bamapada Banerjee,

Poreshnath Sen, Annada Prasad Bagchi, and Jamini Prakash Gangooly distinguished themselves in Calcutta. The founding of the art school in 1854 led to a proliferation of Bengali artists trained in the European academic system. However, as there were not enough commissions to go around some of them got together and established printing establishments beginning with the Calcutta Art Studio in 1878, and brought out cheaper chromolithographs of religious paintings for wider circulation. Founded by Anada Prasad Bagchi and four ex-students of the art collage—in the same year as the Chitrashala Press in Pune and 16 years before the Ravi Varma Press in Bombay—this innovation helped popularise academic realism among the middle class. The Calcutta Art Studio was followed by the Chore Bagan Art Studio and the Chitra Silpi & Co. etc., and their prints could have played a role in displacing the Early Bengal Oil paintings mentioned above.

The growth of printing and publishing, beginning with the establishment of the first press in 1877, also led to the proliferation of image-making of various kinds. The printing establishments engaged both English engravers and traditional and art school trained Indian artists to produce a wide range of works ranging from portraits of famous figures, illustrations to textbooks, and literary and religious classics, monthly and weekly magazines, traditional almanacs, farces and so on done in styles ranging from the realistic to conventional traditional. The printing institutions ranged from those run by the government and the missionaries to those run by Indian publishers, many of whom operated from Bat-tala and surrounding areas. The techniques used were primarily woodcut, wood engraving and metal engraving and lithography, depending upon by whom and where printing was done and the price of the publication. Similarly, the themes and styles were chosen depending on the subject matter and the taste of the target readers. The books, though produced in Calcutta and nearby towns, were taken to far-flung villages by hawkers, and thus the new image culture spread across the state along with the texts.

Ref. No. 5359
Radha & Krishna, Old Bengal, Oil on Canvas, 28 X 22 in

The birth and propagation of printed image were technology and technological innovations driven. And one of its distinctive features was that it reached out and addressed the aesthetic needs of all religious and economic sections of the society and spread from the city to the villages. A contrary development was manifested by another and probably the most admired artistic development of this time, namely the Kalighat pat. Following the renovation of the Kalighat temple at the beginning of the 19th century folk painters from rural Bengal migrated to the city and settled around it. While the patuas traditionally earned their livelihood by exhibiting and narrating stories using painted scrolls, at Kalighat, they were compelled to sell pictures painted on single sheets. Since their main clientele were the rural pilgrims who visited the temple and not the city's elites, the paintings had to be quickly produced and cheaply sold, and this influenced their style and subject matter.

Quick production necessitated radical simplification of forms, repletion and spontaneous execution using a few bold lines and flat washes of limited colours on a rectangular sheet of thin paper. It is this stylistic innovation and the visual sensuousness it exude that contrasts with the carefully finished opaque painting done of cloth in traditional scroll pats that endear the Kalighat pats to modern viewers. Initially, in keeping with the location, the subject matter was religious, but gradually, they grew secular and their main focus became pillory of the westernized urban elites and their social mores. Although this gave them a sharp satirical edge,unlike the innovative style, it demonstrated a conservative view critical of the deviations from traditional social practices brought about through contact with the West. But this should have made them attractive to their rural buyers, who would have similarly considered the social changes under the Western influence with suspicion. This also makes them subtly different from the contemporary internal criticisms unleashed by authors like Peary Chand Mitra and Kaliprasana Singha or, for that matter, by Gaganendranath Tagore in his cartoons much later.

Although the Kalighat pats were not collected by the Bengali elites, they drew the attention of the printers and through them the themes and style entered the popular press. However, by the beginning of the 20th century, their absorption by the woodcut artists and lithographers, and the cheaper and easier reproducibility of images in these mediums, combined with the end of the social compact between the Kalighat painters and their clientele, led to its death just as halftone printing led to the enervation and eventual death of woodcut and lithography as mediums of popular art.

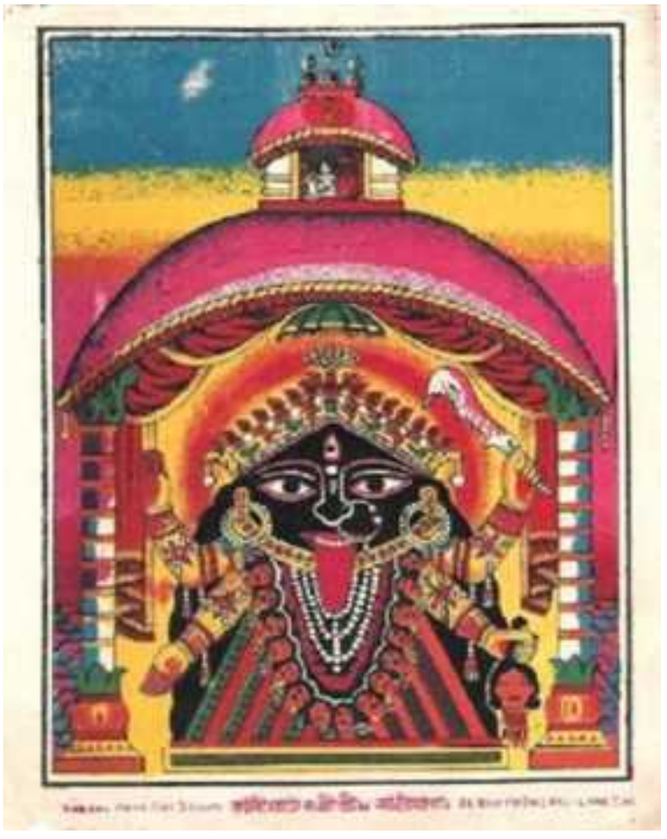
If the response to colonialism was ambivalent initially, it became more clearly divided and polemical by the end of the 19th century. The overlap between high and popular arts we saw so far that gave the scene much breadth and diversity gave way to a greater division between art and craft, which paradoxically was a distinction borrowed from the coloniser. Further, there was a distinct cleavage in the assessment of colonialism among the two groups of artists who visualised what trajectory art in India should take differently. During the 18th and early 19th centuries, there was a general consensus that a small group of Europeans could conquer a large country with powerful kings and large armies because of their advanced technology. The coloniser's

view that they possessed true knowledge in all fields, including art, and the colonised people worldwide lacked these values was generally internalised by the natives. This led to projects of self-improvement by acquiring these Western virtues. The founding of the Calcutta Art Society in 1889 along the lines of the Brush Club, which was an exclusively European affair, the opening of private art schools to teach Indians to paint in a realist manner, and the wholehearted reception artists like Ravi Varma and Bamapada Banerjee received across the elite and westernised segments of the society were based on the idea of self-improvement through emulation.

By the end of the 19th century, this began to be questioned. While everyone agreed on the need for rationality and science, some began to question the validity of extending it to areas of culture, which they felt was an autonomous sphere and need not be universal or culturally neutral. The questioning had begun much earlier with regard to religion, and the formation of the Bhramo Samaj in 1828 was the first signalling of this new attitude. There was assimilation and reform but also resistance in this stance, and sometimes liberal reformism and revivalist-nationalism clashed incongruently as in late Bankim; however, the autonomy of culture was now non-negotiable. In art, the effort at cultural reassertion started at the end of the 19th century, not in opposition to the British but in collaboration with those among them who had overcome the earlier incomprehension and dismissal of Indian art. E B Havell, the English art educator, and Abanindranath Tagore came together to achieve it.

While the new group was represented by Abanindranath and his students—Nandalal, Surendranath Ganguly, Asitkumar Haldar, Samarendranath Gupta, Surendranath Kar, K. Venkatappa, Kshitindranath Majumdar, Sailendranath Dey Asit etc.—who later came to be called the Bengal School, the other group consisting of artists like Ranada Prasad Gupta, Babani Charan Laha, Hemen Majumdar, Atul Bose and Lalit Mohan Sen were committed to academic realist painting and to taking forward the path opened by Annada Prasad Bagchi, J P Ganguly and Bamapada Banerjee. And both had their champions and institutional supports. Abanindranath and his followers were defended by Havell, Ananda Coomaraswamy, Sister Nivedita and O C Gangoly in the pages of the Modern Review and Prabashi, and they exhibited their work at the Indian Oriental Society of Oriental Art. The realist camp, on the other hand, was defended by Upendrakishore Rai Choudhury, Sureshchandra Samjpati, Manmathanath Chakravarty, Upendra Kishore Raichoudhuri in Sahitya, exhibited at the Society of Fine Arts, and their work found space in The Journal of Indian Academy of Art.

Ref. No. T7743
kalighat



Ref. No. Pr004
Kali Mata, Kalighat, Kasari Para Art Studio, 9.5 x 7 in

Although the polemics began with a critique of Ravi Varma's realism as imitative and unsuitable for the representation of Indian divinities by the supporters of the new school in the pages of Modern Review, the main contestation was not nationalism or Indianness, but what style was suitable for modern Indian art. While supporters of the realist camp appreciated the Indian art of the past, they felt that British academic training was essential for the progress of Indian art in the modern age. Similarly, while Abanindranath placed imagination above naturalism and reconnecting from the past, especially the Mughals, Upendrakishore argued that a proper knowledge of anatomy, perspective and chiaroscuro was necessary for the improvement of Indian art and should not be seen as exclusively European values. Suresh Samajpati, going further, took the new painters to task for their unnatural distortions, and Sukumar Ray, anticipating the post-1940s modernist criticism of the Bengal School, wrote that the sacrifice of firm structure and sound techniques in the name of Indianness led to a preponderance of dreamy haze and spineless bodies and gestures in their work.

Today such diatribes look partial and beside the point. To us, Abanindranath, and several of his followers, stand out as very germane artists of the modern period. Similarly, we would not consider realism a style that cannot offer anything to modern Indian artists. Thankfully, there was more overlap in practice than the polemics suggest, and later-day artists like Ganesh Pyne and Bikash Bhattacharya have proved that there was more scope in the work of both groups than their contemporaries believed. However, misplaced as they were, it is amid these criticisms and counter-criticisms that modernism in Bengal took birth, and the two groups had cast a long shadow over the practice and discourse on art in Bengal for a long while.

Gen Next:
A Chronicle of Deep Affinity

Sarmistha Maiti

A creation of artist Huma Mulji at Gen Next IV, 2009
White Cement and Marble Dust C-Print, 29 x 45 in

The notion of the cultural transformation of humanity, reflections on the modern way of living, and beliefs about the symbolic significance of creative motifs have undergone strong shifts in the interdisciplinary practices of art in the new millennium. The narrative of the history of art has evolved with the passage of time with a renewed openness to symbols and individual or collective myths. The new generation artists have embraced both the subjective and objective, iconoclastic and populist, reflexive as well as the ritual dimensions of art worldwide.

Picasso had once declared, "I always try to detach my gaze from reality. What I aim for is affinity - a deep affinity, more real than reality."

The search for this deep affinity has become the 'mantra' of the new generation art- practitioners and to give this 'affinity' a proper channel for exposition Aakriti Art Gallery has been one of the prime initiators in India. With the dawn of the twenty-first century from its first decade itself, Aakriti Art Gallery with its base gallery in Kolkata, conceptualized an exhibition titled – 'GenNext' which has already showcased eight editions since 2006 - an exclusive platform that has catered to a different kind of taste in the art world, a brilliant blend of the conceptual and the new-age art with traditional inputs as well as experimentations with forms and mediums by the young talented and dynamic artists who not only marked the nature of contemporary art but also became the potential representatives of different languages of art as torchbearers of the future.

My association with the young contemporary generation of artists goes back to the initial period when Aakriti Art Gallery began its journey of the GenNext. The profound energy that Gen Next has generated in the past two decades in search and exposure of the pan-Indian new voices in the field of visual arts beyond the boundaries of Bengal is not just commendable, but it shall remain as an emblematic episode in the history of modern art as a decisive contribution and I hope this much laudable initiative to continue.

Apart from the GenNext exhibitions, Aakriti Art Gallery has done quite a number of other exhibitions concentrating on the younger generations with the sole target to give a prospective platform to the newly talented potentials. In fact, the range of artistic works that have evolved from these exhibitions have given birth to the present generation of artists who lead the Indian contemporary art. The budding artist of yesterday is the most rising star of today.

The genesis of GenNext and alike exhibitions – 'No Content Worries', 'Young Contemporaries' etc was of course some visionary's wilful challenge to unveil before the world what charisma younger generations can create, and this visionary is none other than Vikram Bachhawat, the founder of Aakriti Art Gallery who too was very young, fresh and dynamic when he began his voyage as a gallerist. With the support of senior art practitioners, critics, historians, curators, collectors and connoisseurs, Vikram cracked nuanced concepts with very appropriate timeliness of their executions which have marked a lot of difference that he brought about in the perception of the contemporary art scenario of the country. Maverick artists like Jogen Chowdhury, Satish Gujral and others, art critics/historians like Pranav Ranjan Ray, Nanak Ganguly, Mrinal Ghosh and others have integrally honed to the possibilities Vikram wanted to explore and most of them have proved to be immensely

A creation of artist Aharon Rotschild The Other Show Digital C Print (1/10), 23 x 34 in, Gen Next - IV

successful. 'Bengal Beyond Boundaries' – the latest brainchild of Vikram and Aakriti Art Gallery, even before it becomes open to the general public in itself is a testimony of time that how step-by-step, the gallery has functioned and reached to this point of its venture. Yes, it's yet to touch the apex point and until it does, the search, research, discoveries and exploring new ventures in the fields of art, aesthetics and culture to build affinity between art, artist and audience will seamlessly continue. I wish from the bottom of my heart that it should never end and generations after generations should get this privilege that Aakriti Art Gallery has created for the young contemporaries of each generation with the flow of ageless time.

In each edition of the GenNext and its identical shows, on an average fifteen to twenty young contemporaries were selected every year and if sometime the highlight was on the metropolis, the very next year the prime focus would be on the districts and suburbs including semi-rural India. Aakriti Art Gallery has diligently worked to discover upcoming artists from the nooks and corners of the country without any bias of class, caste, creed, gender, religion and region and has always expanded its boundaries. The crux of the whole endeavour was to create a competent podium for unknown talents from different art schools, colleges, self-taught who have novelty in their thoughts, possibility to engage audience with their concepts and last but not the least their ability to express their thoughts skilfully that would communicate and leave impression on the viewers' minds. Thousands of young talents have got immense benefit from this unique platform of Aakriti Art Gallery and most of them from the last two decades have become prominent names in the art circle even at the national level.

The saga of the search for individuals who have made their own identities at a later stage of their career began from this first floor, glass-paned beautiful interiors with classy touch on the Hungerford street in central Kolkata, that's the foundation address of the Aakriti Art Gallery. The promising names that found their flourishing wings of flight in the art world whose roots are tied with the Aakriti Art Gallery and GenNext are Tapas Biswas, Subrata Biswas, Mansoor Ali, Barun Chowdhury, Debashish Dutta, Sagar Bhowmik, Vivek Sharma, Ketan Amin, Pappu Bardhan, Nantu Behari Das, Jayeti Bhattacharya, Jayeeta Mukherjee, Supriya Polley, Leah-Nicole (Australia), Youn Mi Ock (South Korean), Aharon Rothschild (USA), Huma Mulji (Pakistan), Dana Lynn Kleiman (USA) and Jaishri Abhichandani (USA). The exploration has been global too as GenNext brought artists from different corners of the globe. Many women artists got opportunity to begin their artistic career from this gallery and its unique platforms for the young contemporaries. Sculptors Tapas Biswas and Subrata Biswas are also going to be among the presented artists in 'Bengal Beyond Boundaries' – an ensemble of maestros and contemporaries of visual arts from Bengal.

Jogen Chowdhury, Pranab Ranjan Ray, and Rabin Mondal with Gen Next artist's at Aakriti Art Gallery

If we remember the famous few lines from the "Possible Artisto-Chemical Reaction" quoted by eminent artist and writer Raimi Gbadamosi:

"...Artist makes Art as Catalyst; Art influences Reader
Reader seeks to change Art; Reader seeks to change Artist
Reader needs Catalyst; Reader makes Response as Catalyst;
Response changes Artist
Reader is changed; Artist is changed; Art exists"

We get to understand the shifting paradigm of the relationship between art, artist and the viewer in the global context and how the new generation artists have almost reformed the notion of creativity and aesthetics. From content to concepts, from skills to innovations - how perspectives and perceptions have changed in the new age art trend. In fact, there is no closed boundary of an art form or an art medium. If building affinity is the 'mantra', the path to reach it is through embracing and celebrating 'inclusiveness'. The present generation artists don't believe in 'boxes' or per say 'exclusivity'. They look for amalgamation, blending one idea with the other, executing patterns, forms in conglomeration with performances and what not!

A prolific change at the response level from the viewers/readers of art has also occurred. Gbadamosi in the above-mentioned few lines is quite similar to the theory of Post Structuralism; where the author's intended meaning is secondary to the meaning that the reader perceives. The much easier way to understand it would be that how the viewer perceives the piece of art is equally important to what the artist intends to say. And that is how artists all over the world are trying to build connection with the audience setting novel discourses through experimentation in thoughts and executions. The GenNext exhibitions in particular have been that catalytic force to support these novel discourses in India. The names of the artists changed in every edition, the set of creations also got new dimensions, the viewers waited with fresh expectations and in this cyclic process of creator, creation and receiver – plural narratives got built up and art not only existed but got exalted.

I find myself fortunate enough to be a minuscule entity in this marvellous expedition of Aakriti Art Gallery as I was the consistent writer to view these artworks, their impressions and images, talk to the young artists, listen to their verbose, feelings, excitements, angst and so on and try to shape the narrative of the preface of these GenNext exhibitions almost every edition along with a few more. I must agree that I do have a very intimate affinity with the chronicle of GenNext and I believe in the years to come Vikram and his team of Aakriti Art Gallery will gear up with much more zeal and share the oomph of love and compassion for creativity beyond boundaries where even sky should not be the limit. And I hope to be with them again and again!

A BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF AAKRITI PUBLICATIONS

Uma Nair

Vikram Bachhawat's vision for artists' voices, exceptional art, scholarship, design, and bookmaking are at the heart of Aakriti Art Gallery's exhibiting and publishing program. For Bachhawat magazines as well as monographs and books are critical gateways to new ways of thinking and seeing; they provide vital, lasting records of artists' works and ideas and the discourse they inspire. From Art etc to Art News & Views to a series of monographs as well as epic episodes of catalogues with exhibitions, publishing has been a cornerstone of the gallery's activity since its founding in 2005.

Covers that echo the beauty of thematic installations, displays, and programming that invite reflection, creative thinking, and further conversation about the world of printed matter and its connection to artists' ideas and objectives. The process of making a book, no matter what the size , is in many ways comparable to creating an exhibition. In both cases galleries do yeoman's service in trying to provide artists with the instruments necessary to make concrete their ideas and aid historical documentation.

Aakriti's has exhibited a gamut of Indian Masters such Ram Kumar, Rameshwar Broota, Sakti Burman, Satish Gujral , KG Subramanyan as well as a series of Masterpieces amongst Indian Moderns to a niche set of GenNext editions to recognise emerging names as part of its publishing mapping. Historical too was a rare exhibition of Picasso Prints with a novel publication. Artists of national as well as state importance have both been exhibited and published. In India Aakriti has grown to become a leading imprint for unique, monograph-like books that encourage an understanding and appreciation of modern as well as contemporary art.

With the special access given by artists to their writings and archives, Aakriti publishing often brings new and overlooked aspects of an artist's creative practice into focus in their monographs. Bachhawat's backlist offers a robust program that comprises artists' books, artists' writings, biographies, monographs, surveys, exhibition catalogs, and rich perspectives spanning important art movements in Indian art history. Critics like Pranabranjan Ray, Prayag Shukla , Mrinal Ghosh and Nanak Ganguly and many others have added to the vanguard of history for posterity. Publication for Vikram Bachhawat is born out of the belief that it is a keystone resource and references are related to the artists represented by the gallery. Bengal Beyond Boundaries is then an addition to the leaves of history in publishing to Aakriti Art Gallery's distinguished lexicon of publications.

BENGAL BEYOND BOUNDARIES

Uma Nair

Think Bengal and history comes alive through the pages of crests and troughs of life's many journeys. Think Bengal and literary as well as cinematic icons loom large in our minds. Bengal as an art repository is filled with the richness of expression spanning a variety of styles. Think Bengal and the iconic Rabindranath Tagore looms large in the self discovery of an artist who harvested his love for painting late in life.

This exhibition arranged in a chronological fashion presents the shape and variety of human terrains that manifest in Bengal across time. Collected across mediums and themes the exhibition cultivates an elastic approach that welcomes the complexity of human coexistence as well as struggles in the history of Bengal. It begins with Early Bengal and comes into the first modernists and continues in its artistic odyssey to early modernists and hinges into the contemporary framework of masters.

The circle of Tagores

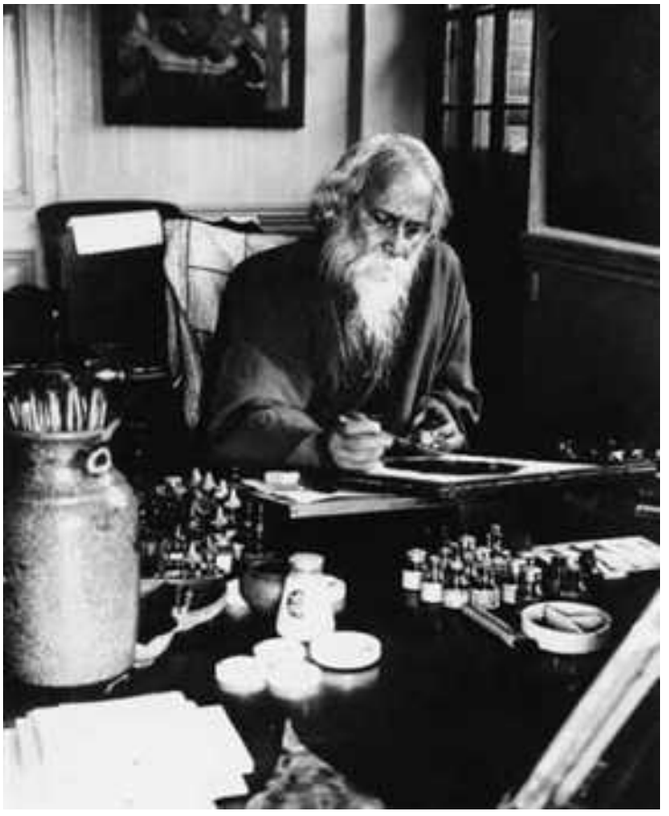
History says the three Tagores, through their extraordinary creative work in their respective mediums, ushered in an era of freedom for experimentation, a sense of confidence and independence, from which the subsequent generations have benefited tremendously. They established the fact that modern art had established deep roots by the time of India's independence in 1947.The Jorasanko home of Rabindranath Tagore became a repository of creativity both in inspiration as well as intellectual ferment in the robust renderings of Rabindranath, Abanindranath and Gaganendranath Tagore. Rabindranath inspired artists to free themselves from the 'hoarded patrimony of tradition,' and strike out on their own. Art for Rabindranath had to be born of inner quality and not an artificially fostered formalism.

Cross cultural contact, eclectic modernism and an experiential rootedness is seen in this exhibition that seeks to represent the Bengal ethos.

Through diverse mediums, including paintings, sculptures, etchings and drawings, the artworks whilst responsive to each artist's context, transcend time. Early Bengal extends itself to find universal resonance and offer a renewed understanding of our past. The Bengal Masters to the moderns and contemporary practitioners, address both patterns of human existence, the cultural fabric as well as the power of the human figure and landscapes as subject. Singed in the pathos of the Bengal Famine and the many incidents of devastation in Bengal are the experiences of human struggles and tribulations.

Tagore's last harvest

Tagore's portrait is one of darkened density and depth. Rabindranath Tagore, was not just the Nobel laureate poet, author, thinker, composer, but he was also a self-taught artist. In this exhibition we pay obeisance to his brilliance as an aesthetician of Indian heritage and experience. According to Prof R Siva Kumar Tagore was the first Indian artist to be considered a representative of modernist internationalism. In his desire to build bridges between cultures he founded Visva Bharati Santiniketan (1921) with the motto : Where the whole world meets in one nest.



Rabindranath Tagore at The Govt. College of Art And Craft, Calcutta in The 1930s

Tagore turned to painting later in his life. By the time of his first exhibition of paintings and drawings at the Galerie Pigalle, Paris in 1930, Tagore, at the age of 69, had been recognised as one of the greatest writers who had ever lived. He had an early inclination toward representational art but had given up hope of being a professional painter around 1900. Over the years, Tagore maintained private journals where he continued to doodle and sketch. Then almost suddenly, in 1924, while in Argentina as his friend Victoria Ocampo's guest, his doodles assumed more elaborate and expressive intent. She inspired him to paint as often as he could.

The world Tagore revealed in his best works was one of self-reflexive evolution, where the images themselves were in the process of taking shape, as was his art. His early paintings were rendered mainly in monochrome, followed by two-toned and three-toned drawings. The pen-point brush was often used laterally, fingers and bits of rag spread the inks and the brush was the last to be adopted.

It is heads and figures executed by Tagore in a variety of styles, that have elicited the most interest. Restrained yet restless, suggestive, bizarre and haunting, these portraits are considered to be among his most memorable works. 'The pensive ovoid face of a woman with large unwavering, soulful eyes was perhaps his most obsessive theme. Exhibited first in 1930, endless variations of the same mood-image continued to emerge throughout. The earlier ones were delicately modelled and opalescent, while the latter examples were excessively dramatic with intensely lit forehead, exaggerated nose-ridge, painted in strong colours, bodied forth from a primal gloom.' (Robinson, The Art of Rabindranath Tagore, Calcutta, 1989, p. 56.)

Abanindranath Tagore's tempera on board shows the artist's transition from the intricate design and workmanship of miniature painting to the emotive nuances of 'wash'.The rooster is a magnificent bird which stands in robust reflection his eye on the environment around him.The subtle notes of staccato strokes on the feathers is a marvel to study.Clarity of composition was his hallmark.The expression of the moment becomes an important component in the study of the bird. The second portrait of a seated figure reflects how in space and scale he had a fine understanding of the essence of form and its anatomical appeal.

Abanindranath Tagore & Rabindranath Tagore

Nandalal the synthesiser

History states that Nandalal Bose (1882-1966) occupies a place in the history of Modern Indian art that combines those of Raphael and Durer in the history of the Renaissance. Like Raphael Nandalal was a great synthesizer, his originality lay in his ability to marshal discrete ideas drawn from Abanindranath Tagore, Rabindranath Tagore, E. B. Havell, Ananda Coomaraswamy, Okakura Kakuzo and Mahatma Gandhi into a unique and unified programme for the creation of a new art movement in India.

And like Durer he combined a passion bordering on devotion with an irrepressible analytical mind that compelled him to prise open different art traditions and unravel their syntactic logic, and make them accessible to a new generation of Indian artists. But he did this so quietly and without self-assertive fanfare that the significance of his work is yet to be fully grasped even in India.Nanadalal Bose's drawing is a heady delight in the art of capering contours and conversation.Published in 'Chitradarshan', Kanai Samanta, Bidyodoy Library Pvt. ltd.it is a narrative of evocative emotions.

Abanindranath Tagore & Nandalal Bose with others

From Abanindranath, his guru, he learned to look at art as a vocation rather than as a profession, and of the importance of freedom for all creative work, even if one were an artist striving to retrieve the lost sense of cultural identity within a colonial context. Rabindranath, who invited him to shape and shepherd the art programme at his University in Santiniketan, impressed upon him that responsiveness to the environment in which an artist lives and shares with others around him is more efficacious than historicism in fostering a sense of cultural identity. It makes one, he argued, both contemporary and locally rooted. He also put before him the challenge of devising an art programme that responded to the needs of the society and refined the minds and sensibilities of the community.

Together these three artistic geniuses sought freedom and independence not just for their art, but for their country. Their life and work embody the universal spirit of liberation - of the mind, the body, and the brush - and is a testament to the boundless power of art in uniting humanity.

Paintings reflecting an epoch

From paintings that recreate the realism of Early Bengal to the anonymous portrait of the Untitled lady with a burnished pot, the tales that meet our eyes begin with beauty of what is of simple sophistication and harmony.

To look at Jamini Roy one of India's first modernists is seen here in two works that extol his love for spiritual stories.

This Christ is a study in the beauty of simplicity and Roy extols that in every square inch of this historic painting. This Christ is a Santhal figure.

The Santhals, the tribal people of the rural districts of Bengal, were an important subject for Roy. He captured the qualities that are a part of native folk painting and recombined them with those of his own. He fused the minimal brush strokes of the Kalighat style with elements of tribal art from Bengal (like that of the terracotta work found in the Bishnupur temple in Bengal, where terracotta was often composed into decorative units – some elaborate in design – over portals and across exterior walls of the temples).

Roy rejected the modern style of painting and his foray into the realm of Bengali folk paintings marked a new beginning in the history of Indian modern art. The little deer curled up in reflective reverie in front of the small architectural facade is a leaf out of the pages of the past. Colour for Roy was a resonant ripple of shades that speak volumes about the cultural fabric of an Indianesque insignia.

Hemen Mazumdar's gouache and watercolour on paper, 1937, is a stellar portrait of a gentleman of aristocracy. Great portraits require time and must translate into its own magic. This gentleman is the epitome of royalty; a beautiful and powerful presence. His eyes reflect within the windows of his soul that must translate to the canvas, this portrait brings back the image to us to add to the essence of an epoch.This portrait was published in the book Pratirodher Bhashya, by Anuradha Ghosh.

Modernist Masters

Bengal history is an album of pivotal, political and social movements, such as the Great Bengal Famine of 1943-44 and its fallout. Ram Kinkar Baij the pioneer of modernism amongst sculptors was also a prolific painter. The cow and her calf are a delightful pair of maternal love that was published in Works by Ramkinkar Baij , pg 320.Pen and ink on paper.The modernist Baij's charming depiction of loose lines of the cow and her calf are as much about rustic rhythms of life around him that were captured with effortless ease. In a simple way he comments on the harmonious relationship between humans and animals. He also creates an image of nurturing in the calf's most natural urge of wanting to drink its mother's milk.

Gobardhan Ash's Vasanta is a lush landscape of joyous mood. Impressionist strokes have their own fervour. Exceptional in quality and bountiful in colour here are staccato strokes of colour as they reflect the falling leaves that drift by the gust of the first wind. The tree in its magnificent overture of just being a lively spirit is a study that goes back to antiquity.

Sunil Madhav Sen's bold and vibrant subjects of life around him woven into the cultural fabric of objects and people and elements /all create a consonance of works that are worthy of scrutiny. The range of subject matter depicted in his paintings is enormous and born of the language of elegance. Great are his number of recurring themes, which should be highlighted as his love for the lust for life. He also studied European masters such as Italian Baroque artist Guido Reni, Dutch master Rembrandt, and sixteenth century Greek artist El Greco. Sen joined the seminal Calcutta Group in 1952.

Founding master of the Calcutta Group (1943), Gopal Ghose created contemporary landscapes that go back in time as well as come forth with plain-spoken modesty and simple handling that gives it a very satisfying coherence.This study of a bird in a landscape is a manifestation of his love for the landscape as well as his understanding of many aspects of nature: trees, flowers and the Indian terrain - paddy fields, bamboo groves and riverside life. Ghose had a deep sense of experimentation, together with his skill in drawing and colouring. His impressionistic zeal is born of lyrical as well as poetic sensibilities. His palette favoured mellow as well as hazy shades alongside patches of sharp colour.

Paritosh Sen's most recognizable and powerful works are his caricatures, which reflect strong underlying socio-political shades. Sen's style of representation was influenced by his exposure to Western Modern art, and has notable traces of cubism. His technique of using two dimensional, structured planes to create an illusion of voluptuousness as well as bold expression is his leitmotif. This portrait of strong lines, bold as well as stylised strokes, all become a part of the impact of the individual with many heads, a crown as well as a teardrop.

Somnath Hore's white pulp paper work expresses the helplessness of the oppressed. Somnath 's work is equally relevant to the continued colossal poverty of India as it is for the ravages inflicted by the war. Born from his Wound series, it expressed the historical traumas of the time as tears, dents, impressions and gashes on paper-pulp surface.

This is emblematic of the ravages of war that are deemed temporary, even if harsh but can be healed, whereas poverty seems almost timeless, even perpetual. Most of Somnath 's works are small in scale , and his imagery a testimony of sobs, soft yet piercing, of the agony of the perpetually oppressed. He experimented on paper-making, using rag paper and papier-machie. He made sheets of paper with effects of wounds casted on them.

KG Subramanyan's monochromatic wonder became a book cover. This 1988 watercolour is an epic episode from his album of works. Subramanyan's works were a delightful melange of characters in animated conversation flitting between the leaves and trees of a make believe forest. Filled with exuberance, men as well as women and creatures basked in morning or evening glow. His love for lush tropicana filled his eyes and stirred his imagination. His own words hold true:
"So the world I observe is naturally a fairy-tale world. It is high-keyed. It is distant. It has a variable configuration. It is ambivalent in image and implication...Not just a bunch of facts, but an intriguing icon.....Maybe there is an assumption, too, of play-acting on nature's own part."

Manik Bachhawat, Manasij Majumdar, K.G. Subramanyan, Partha Pratim Deb & Aditi Bengani

Human faces were his leitmotif. Rabin Mondal's faces were sometimes decorated sometimes filled with anguish and angst of deeper degrees of tenacity and tenuous ,torturous climes. All through he created them in darker densities of strokes and colours that were both harbingers of a certain narrative as well free flowing elements. What sets him apart is his devotion for creating so many human heads that could have belonged anywhere in the world.

Sculptor Ajit Chakraborty's Bull is sophisticated in its simplicity, it stands as an assertion of the transforming power of the human imagination at a time when human values were under siege. The shape the form the mass all attest to the truth that the vital thing for an artist is to have a subject that allows him to try out all kinds of formal ideas—things that he doesn't yet know about for certain but wants to experiment with. In this case the bull figure provides chances that define the character of the subject with gravitas.

Translating the human figure

A number of Bengal artists practice sculpture in all its anatomical attributes, the subject matter is given, and chosen for that moment, and when you know it and like it, you create within the subject a form that is born of a completely new form-idea. This sculpture of the bull by sculptor Ajit Chakraborty, reminds us of the Mexican artists love for the subject, it is possessed of the plasticity of form, as well as thematic significance, that can bear the weight of many inferences, and sustain the profound and far-reaching metaphor by which the sculptor tells us, become an integral part of the world.

Vikram Bachhawat, Jogen Chowdhury, Manasij Majumdar, Shovon Shom & Kartick Chandra Pyne at the Opening of his retrospective.

Kartick Chandra Pyne was an early surrealist of Calcutta. The Bird in the Cage is a study of a bird that frets within its prison bars.It reflects not just a cage of grand dimension but a cage that talks to time through the hourglass of the fabric of freedom. The power of this work lies in the application of colour, the fine characteristics of contoured clarity and the subtle surreal signature. Pyne creates a corollary that flits back and forth through Bengal's history.This painting by Pyne made history at Sotheby's on 22nd of September 2005 . The Bird in a Cage, fetched $10,200 (Rs 4.7 lakh) at a Sotheby's auction in New York.

Phul Chand Pyne's terracotta sculpture of 1973 is a study of the feminine figure, perhaps a pregnant woman. With its rhythmic, sparse, undulating curves and soft organic form, this image dynamically explores one of the central themes that dominated sculptural history over so many years.

Sarbari Roy Chowdhury's Standing Woman with its tender twists and angles have about it a stillness and alertness, a sense of readiness – the legs coming down like columns crossed in a purely feminine statement, His vision of the female form was one of compact grace and imbued with a silent, internal energy.

Prokash Karmakar's nude at the toilet is a page from antiquity. After Indian Independence the Bengali artists were united by a shared desire to move beyond Impressionism and Realism in their work and develop a new pictorial language and style that would accurately reflect their modern spirit.

Uma Siddhanta the student of Prodosh Das Gupta known as one of the first women sculptors of Kolkata creates a work that has apertures and make us think of a couple.The bronze takes on multiple facets as you look at it from different angles.The most dramatic aspect of this sculpture, of course, is that it has been given a texture with incisions as if from a plant.
Shyamal Dutta Ray was known for his watercolours that were steeped in surreal signatures of a colonial episode of time and tide.The ruins in the background a mirror of olden times caught in the decadence of the past and the truth that in time everything changes, everything crumbles. The fragments of two statues speaks of his love for the classical while the shades and shadows tell us of the reality of life and the human being which is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity... A synthesis is a relation between two terms. The fragment of the wrought iron rusted gate with its intricate design is a metaphor for the decadence of everything that is material.

Bipin Goswami's mahout and youngster on an elephant is a small piquant creation that positions the elephant as precious as well as a gentle giant. This sculpture embodies us to imagine the elephant in a scale as the sculptor felt he could feasibly realize in bronze as a cohesively integral, single-piece recumbent figure.

Imagination was his leitmotif as were piquantly shaped large eyes often filled with both despair, desolation and a rare child-like innocence.Minimal strokes and contours defined his portraiture that consisted of subjects of the self as well as a world of many evocations. Sanat Kar the teacher, the printmaker, the artist coalesced most effortlessly the many worlds and mediums with ease.

Sakti Burman's watercolour on paper is out of the dreamworld of March Chagall.Called an alchemist of dreams by a French critic,Michael Bohbot,in 1984, his painting seems to occupy a world of its own, suspended between the spheres of myth and reality. In this work of multiple elements the viewer unwittingly enters the realm of the fantastic. His works are a reflection of his own experiences blending Indian cultural sensibilities with an international aesthetic.

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Amalnath Chakladar's Pet is a masterpiece in dry pastel.Expression and evocation both weave into its intensities and naturality of palette.The old woman with her hat and strangle hair with the dachshund is reminiscent of age old Hollywood films. In this pastel of a pale palette of tones we see the free flowing strokes of pastel as well as deft contours that embellish the portrait of both dog and mistress which Chakladar utilized in order to intensify the effect of his work,

endowing them with an almost three dimensional quality and an air of dramatic realism.

Born of experiences and literature
Ganesh Haloi's abstract landscape is a summation of his own experiences and his love for literature. Haloi says: " For me, abstraction becomes a figure of speech that opens the unconscious mind and allows the truth to emerge and to reestablish a lost connection with the unconscious and the primordial past.

When we think of the universe - we think of the whole. In the same way, when we think of nature - we think of an entire creative spirit all around. Nothing is as unnecessary in this beautiful world as our interference. One may not be identical in appearance to another person. However, behind this superficial or apparent identity, there is a hidden soul - which is homogeneous with the completeness, fullness, and wholeness of our life."

Ramananda Bandhopadhyay known for his riveting contours and whisper touch colour tones creates his lady with fan and parrot born out of old tales of Bengal cognoscenti. Portraits of humans and birds and objects all come from his observations of tradition and rustic simplicity. Inspired by his mother's addiction to eating paan (betel leaves) his use of green, red and brown owe their birth to her presence. Drawing on subjects belonging to the ancient Indian heritage and history as well as mythology, his work is always a narrative born of a story.
The surreal and the darkness of the moment. Bengal's master of metaphor Ganesh Pyne is represented by an important head that cuts through many ages. History says that Pyne was taught by veteran Disney animator Clair Weeks (1911-1996) who had come over from Los Angeles to train artists at a studio in Kolkata. Weeks taught Pyne how to distort and exaggerate features to convey different emotions. Pyne continued to use this stylistic technique throughout his career to instil a sense of the uncanny in his paintings.

This image brings back Pyne's words from an interview in the late 1990s, ' True darkness gives one a feeling of insecurity bordering on fear but it also has its own charms, mystery, profundity, a fairyland atmosphere. 'Pyne's application of multiple layers of translucent colour , burnished to create areas of penetrating light and shadow became his insignia.

Portraiture is the leitmotif of artist Lalu Prasad Shaw ; Throughout his career he has played around with the concepts of representation and avenues of realism, rendering works that found realms in "art" as well as in "truth." Lalu's finely rendered women portraits is the stuff of feminine fables far and wide.The slicing of the contour and the perfection of drape of the sari is the most important quality of the persona he recreates on paper.

Sunil Das's portrait comes from his practice as an artist for over 50 years. Known for his horses, bulls and portraits he created an oeuvre that was unique in compositional framework. Although he resisted facile interpretations of realism and symbols in his art, it is possible to see the differently coloured tenor in the work exhibited as somehow representative of the duality that exists between the physical and spiritual domains. In any event, the ephemerality of life – of humans who will eventually die – reminds us, as did the memento mori art of earlier centuries, of what is truly timeless, and sublime. This portrait celebrates the living and evinces evidence of a unique personal vision.

Playing with abstract notes
Partha Pratim Deb's works on paper unveil him as a weaver and colourist. Within the frame of his intense artistic he creates a series of abstractions that unite traditions of painting, of design, of craft, and of folk art to meld it into a contemporary translation of imagery and insight.

Partha Pratim Deb transposes free flowing drawing and watercolour techniques into the realm of his paintings. Through enactments of warp and weft in the lucid lithe lines , he embraces the variations and idiosyncrasies that emerge in his compositions.

Brilliant abstract master from Bengal, Badhan Das love for the abstract idiom and dimensions of darkness in infinite colorollaries comes through in the glimmer of his rumination. This work by Das is like a surreal statement born of literary allusions. His visual language is uniquely its own and its power lies in its deep understanding of colour.

Landscape and the human habitat
Shuvaprasanna's cityscape is a moody study of a Kolkata fragment created with the veteran artist's attention to details — we can distinguish the little facets of windows and architectural elements that dot the entangled cables above the lanes, purveying the scenes below as he renders the cityscape as a facade of multiple characters and rippled echos of life and the living.

Aditya Basak's meticulously created Inspiration 1 consists of a mannequin as a headless woman created with a gorgeous Victorian dress, it features a dynamic sense of depth only achieved through acts of diligence and care.But elements of destruction in the aircraft, in the tumbling people on the dress folds, and the shadows in the monochrome setting all speak of despair and destruction.

Tapas Konar is amongst the masters of the cast of human characters who play with the levity of light and the character of man and his many predicaments in the face of destiny. Konar combines the mythical and the contemporary and creates a choreography of coexistence in consonance. He is happy to let loose his figures to make sense of themselves in a setting of their own, unfettered by expectations as they flit and float through the samsara.

Exploring the definitive landscape
Two stellar artists from Kolkata who explore the landscape in different ways. Jayashree Chakravarty creates poetic elegies while Jayasri Burman paints eulogies to the abundant eternal flow of nature.

Jayashree Chakravarty's acrylic on canvas redefines the landscape that looks like a mosaic of moorings. Varied textures come together in a densely layered and webbed narrative that is highly reminiscent of the lost water bodies and habitat of Kolkata (1872). Swirling organic forms overlap bustling cartographically inspired images, as shadows and images slowly and subtly emerge through the dense, yet translucent, lines that produce the illusion of constant motion.

Over 40 years she has created a multi-faceted, ambiguous visual language teeming with detail and idiosyncrasies. This visual language is based on personal experiences and images from her childhood, from her many travels around the world, and from her school days in India and France. Jayashree is known as the creator of magical dreams on both canvas and

paper – to look at her works is to peer into an atmosphere which is simultaneously absorbing and intimate. She has built up a repertoire of works that give us a tapestry of memories and experiences, through several places and points at the same time — blurring the notion of time- both past and present.

An influential international artist who works with a variety of mediums, Jayasri Burman's views on creative inspiration, self-identity, childhood memories, as well as perceptions of her own artistic career have all become a narrative for her goddess series inspired from Indian mythology .

Priya Bachhawat, Jayasri Burman & Uma Nair

The careful arrangement of dotted as well as fluid patterns of Prakriti to create a veiled background of lush tropicana, document Jayasri's visual memory of her childhood, and her love for the creation of the feminine figure. Ahir Bhairavi named after the morning raga is both subject and complement , with a pattern of fantasy, the slightly metamorphosed forest leaves and flowers infused with a dynamic energy that stimulates the entire composition.The musician is an allegory for Goddess Saraswati and the surreal nature of ochre tones a means of inviting the viewer to glimpse into her visual fantasies and inner world.

The old masters and luminosity

One of India's finest watercolourists Sudip Roy's watercolour of a Kolkata nightscape is the stuff of nocturnes.His handling of the night sky and the small elements and luminosity of the windows and apertures all speak of his love for creating works in the timeline of Dutch Masters who had such a clear understanding of the magic of the night shades. His love for the Kolkata cityscape goes back to his days at college. This work is a clear mapping of the melancholy of the midnight mood and is also a faithful representations of known sites, as well as more liberally invented ideas of idyllic cityscape. The lantern on the upper reaches of a small wall becomes the silent sentinel that marks the pendulum of time. This work is suffused with innumerable moments awaiting their turn to bloom into the album of a pictorial transcript.

Chandra Bhattacharjee's Silence 1 is a portrait of a man. That from a distance looks like an evocative side profile worthy of scrutiny. Come closer and you see that the facial textures have been worked upon as if his face is scarred by the events of destiny. Within the brilliance of the composition you see a rendition of a rich spectrum of deeper tones calibrated between opalescent and charcoal tints, with hints of fleshy tints and sepia. Chandra renders the human face as a study in the intimations of life in the city. Within the intimations of the reflections of the modern day metropolis he creates a portrait that is filled with a pregnant silence filled with questions and chaos. The manner in which Chandra plays with the glow of realism with a hint of surreal flavour in the narrative has its sojourn of flitting and floating between zones.

Chhatrapati Dutta is a master of the metaphor. Whether he paints a tree trunk or of human conflict his thoughts run like a rhetoric that invites corollaries of conversation about the trials and tribulations of women as subjects of oppression and degradation of nature. The Last Resort, is a robust rendition, a work that contemplates the events and happenings of the past and the present. Chhatrapati is both interpretation and assimilation of his reading that shape his compositions. He gather predicaments, as well as protests that layer the moist soil the memories of protests of women against gender discrimination. His second work is an allegory. An Attempt at Unravelling the Past is an ode to nature and to man. Within the torso is the trunk within the trunk the many adversities of life and its textural terrain that defines human existence.

Bengal's Gurus

If history were to be written about the role of pedagogy in Bengal amongst artists, the Santiniketan Guru Benode Behari Mukherjee would be the crown.Mukherjee's love for nature was non pareil. In this exhibition two works pay an ode to the master who turned blind and still kept teaching.

A spring of blossoms, created as far back as 1945, Benode Behari Mukherjee's flower study is at once a lithe and lean drawing as well as a watercolour that whispers. He had a fidelity to the subtle realistic surfaces of plants and in the translation of his love he believed in rendering a quiet, sublime dignity to nature's perfection and imperfection .

When we study his work closely we realise that he explored the curvilinear rhythms of nature through his own intuitive sense of biomorphic beauty and observation . This work brings to light the infinite canvas of nature in his work and the primary importance of observation in the life of an artist.This study also has Japanese intonations that point to his love for the studies of nature he was following.

Watercolour and ink on paper bring alive this landscape of Nepal by Benode Behari Mukherjee. In the footsteps of the open air painting tradition we see the mountains and the little rivulet running through ; we also see how he transcribed fleeting effects of light and atmosphere on the landscape.

Yet another great mentor was veteran early master Sudhir Khastgir who taught of 20 years at Doon School, became Principal of Govt College of Art Lucknow and then Principal of Kala Bhavan at Santiniketan in 1961. This mixed media on paper of a dancer done in 1955, is a brisk, sensual frame of a classical dancer taking a twirl. This drawing expresses the seemingly boundless range of movement of the body. In this drawing, Khastgir disregards the decorative element of the dance to focus purely on movement and poise for the moment captured.

Kolkata's most famous Guru was Bikash Bhattacharjee who taught at Govt College of Art. The realist master had a deep understanding of surrealism as well as cubist notions born of abstraction. Bikash Bhattacharjee holds a special place in the annals of Bengal's history. Across the course of his career he

painted both men and women in several forms, roles and guises. This 1997 oil on canvas is titled Salvationist and is a statement on war .But this is a tableau of deep desolation because each soldier and the lone horse are all on pedestals. As if they are frozen in their roles for life. Bhattacharjee had a very distinctive discourse on the importance of his observations from life.

In the face of despair he creates an emblematic image which is elegiac as it unveils a truth about contemporary life and reality. He uses the multiple frames of soldier portraits to create a surreal statement. The master of realism, each painting for him was about the unveiling of more than a thousand hidden truths, Then the darkness of everyday idioms was his kernel of desire and his inspiration.

Chittaprosad's love for art

Bengal's most persistent printmaker and master, the humanist who was deeply affected by the Bengal Famine. Chittaprosad was a polymath, the human figure was his elixir. This historical Chittaprosad Bhattacharya painting is taken from the Ramayan. It is an illustrative example of just three colours. Turquoise , yellow and sage green. The three main characters have been drawn in caricature style perhaps for a children's book on the Ramayana. Sita with her hand on her odhini is the epitome of femininity.

Ram and Lakshman with their bows and arrows look every bit the brothers in earnest interest looking at what lies beyond. The elements of birds and deer and the fertile trees in the Dandapani forest all created in lucid fashion create their own oasis in the retelling of a fervent story. The two images complete the story in terms of a narrative that lives through the pages of belief and faith and ritual and reverence.

Stellar Contemporaries

A group of younger contemporaries in Kolkata create works that are born of their own resolutions of observations in life.

In this group are three painters who have abstract as well as realist roots.

Pradip Maitra, yet another realist recreates the Crucifixion as a metaphor for time, the objects and the lantern and the book of pages all come together to give us a work that speaks of a spiritual evocation filled with dim lit moody edits as you look at the book being akin to the Holy Bible and the juxtaposed lantern being the giver of light. This work brings back the words in The Bible: I am the way, the truth and the light.

The two abstract practitioners are Sunil De and Amitava Dhar. Sunil De's acrylic on canvas is a study of forms that flit and float in the miasma of shades of colour fields. Expressionism becomes a mode of rendition. Amitava Dhar creates a corollary with just three colours, red black and a paler shade of ivory that harnesses his linear stay into parameters of poetic cadences.

Jogen Chowdhury's figurative fervour

India's greatest figurative master Jogen Chowdhury's flair for figurative brilliance is one that limns the literature of art history in India. Jogen Chowdhury's portrait of a woman from 1990s is about the expression of emotions and the charisma of a fat lady in a sari. Her bulbous body is covered in folds that are at once both associative as well as enchanting for the manner in which he weaves the folds into her well endowed contours. Chowdhury's powers of observation of both form and curious human attributes all come into play when you look at his love for creating the human figure in an animated climax . The entire composition is the manicured momentousness of the cross hatch that creates its own intonations.

Chowdhury's drawing of the Lady with the mirror is yet another masterpiece in langor. He has always elicited in his viewers' very strong emotional responses Therein lies the magic of this portrait. These responses answer the question regarding his work being singled out as the quintessential example of the expression of emotions in the typical frames of Bengaliness. Chowdhury's tools and felicity with fluidity of the line comes into play to understand his command over the expression of emotions and how he approaches it. Chowdhury's love for theatre, films become his own emotive language.

Ganesh Haloi's early figurative works

Ganesh Haloi's figurative quartet form. The naive and innocent face of the little girl, the couple in conversation, the portrait of the lady with a bun lost in deep thought. Haloi's figurative imagery has echoes of the emotive evocations of Bengali films in the days of black and white classics. Four figurative works, all treated in different palettes, tell us of his love for aesthetic choices.

Ganesh Haloi with his early figurative work

But in these four works we note that his hallmark was his handling of light and of the expressive eyes , which accounts for a great deal of his narrative power. While he plays a darker eventide nuance in two works we realise that expression for Haloi in early years was an important emotive vehicle and furthermore that it introduces us to the idea of wonder and the concept of the sublime in terms of which his depiction of emotions may be understood. Accordingly, we can establish his understanding of the softer shades of the sublime, through the many stories that these four works create for a viewing that is intriguing as well as inspirational.

Printmakers of stirring depths

Aakriti Art Gallery celebrates the Santiniketan studio with three

printmakers. Mukul De,Somnath Hore and his brilliant student Rini Dhumal. While the works of Somnath Hore turn back the pages to Bengal and its Famine and days of despair and despondency , Mukul Dey's dry point etchings created a course in the history of printmaking in India.

Tagores enabled him to receive informal instruction from Abanindranath Tagore and Gagonendranath Tagore at the family's Jorasanko house. At the age of 21, Dey began travelling internationally to study print-making techniques. In 1916, he travelled to Japan with Rabindranath Tagore to study under the artists Yokoyama Taikan and Kanzan Shimomura.

During his stay, Dey was also introduced to Pan-Asianism, an early twentieth-century movement and ideology that advocated solidarity amongst Asian nations against Western imperialism. Mukul Dey's thrice portraits of Tagore, Abanindranath Tagore and the girl reading are succinct dry point etchings while his Praying at the Grave is a dulcet, shrouded whisper in prayer, lost in the tragedy of death. Mukul Dey's dry point etching is a study in the beauty of technique and passion that he had in creating prints. Amongst printmakers in India Mukul Dey a pioneer trained in Japan as well as at the Slade in London and also at Chicago .This work created in softened hues has a quality of line that is much softer than the traditional etching techniques, giving the work a sense of animation and temporal extension. Dey dedicated his life to the artistic revival of Indian art and adapted the traditionally Western technique of drypoint etching to this end, creating many prints that drew on Indian cultural heritage. The artistic revival of traditional imagery helped fuel the Swadeshi movement by fostering a sense of national pride and attempting to develop a new national style. His artworks represent his hope to decolonize Indian art and restore national pride.

Somnath Hore's white pulp paper work expresses the helplessness of the oppressed. Somnath 's work is equally relevant to the continued colossal poverty of India and not just for the ravages inflicted by the war. The Wound series, expresses the historical traumas of the time as tears, dents, impressions and gashes on paper-pulp surface.

Somnath's figurative prints are emblematic of the ravages of war that are deemed temporary, even if harsh but can be healed, whereas poverty seems almost timeless, even perpetual. Most of Somnath 's works are small scale , and his imagery a testimony of sobs, soft yet piercing, of the agony of the perpetually oppressed. He experimented on paper-making, using rag paper and papier-machie. He made sheets of paper with effects of wounds casted on them.His images of the human condition, became the most important milestone in the sensibility of the Bengal School.The human condition as subject led to the compositional clarity of anatomical attestations in the creation of Bengal art history.

Rini Dhumal, the artist who completed her BFA from MS University as a printmaker studied under Professor Somnath Hore, in Santiniketan. and thereafter to the famed Atelier 17 of Stanley William Hayter in Paris.In Paris she picked up multiple techniques and came back armed with the viscosity print magic. Viscosity Printing, also known as 'simultaneous colour printing' was developed by Stanley William Hayter who founded Atelier 17 in Paris in the 1920s. It is a phenomenon of rolling layers of different coloured inks onto a mono print.

Her refined and dense imagery engage with feminine themes and features goddesses in different forms of her own imagination, often appearing matriarchal and lonely but powerful enough to face the world, akin to Bengal's much-revered goddess Durga. The layered imagery, with her direct transfixed gaze, bedecked body and forehead often smeared with red and other symbolic markings, evokes both compassion and confidence.

Rini's prints in this exhibition exude the prowess and power of both knowledge as well as the arduous experimentation of perfecting techniques in printmaking. Her colour treatment on both linocuts as well as etching plates stand as a testimony to her guru Somnath Hore's faith in her work, while her Paris chapter added the density of colour on historic prints.

Paintings of human form and landscape

In pioneering their own distinct style, Bengal artists absorbed a variety of elements from the modern movements of their time – the natural realistic aesthetic and fragmented perspective of Cubism, the vibrant colour palette of the Fauves, the proportionality of Neo-Classicism, the dynamic lines of the Futurists, the dream-like spatial logic of Surrealism and the razor-sharp draftsmanship and hyper-realism to create their own narratives. Amongst the finest in the country today are Arpita Singh, and Anjolie Ela Menon.

Over 60 years in her career, the woman remains a consistent theme for Arpita Singh, one of India's greatest artists. She has developed a distinctive visual language and style, intermingling history myth, fantasy and reality. She silently observes the complexities, and inequalities, of the world around her, and translates them onto her canvas, using a sophisticated combination of forms, colours, brushwork and composition. Arpita often re-incarnates herself to play multiple roles, sometimes within the same picture frame. The feminine perspective, and the perception of the female having to fulfil several roles simultaneously, is a social construct that has found resonance in her works.

This work positions a man and a woman seated at a table, Arpita's works have often featured the reality faced by older Indian women with unabashed candour. She remains guided by empathy for her fellow women and 'remains entrenched in female subjectivity. In the current work, the flowers on the table and all around, the faces in the frame all seem to be part of the moment. Her work maximises visual impact while making viewers think of the tangible and intangible.

One of the first artists to create Madonna-like figures and faces after seeing them in Europe, Anjolie Ela Menon's profoundly autobiographical, surreal and narrative quality is linked to the artist's personal as well as intellectual experiences. Her works are recreations of her profound world vision set in the edifice of her own observations.

Still life studies and personal reflections limned in the shadows of her sensibility remain a staple motif throughout her career that connotes life and death, celebration and mourning, masculinity and femininity, with their complex forms that are at once fragile and fragmentary ,yet deeply organic. Her work speaks expansively and sensitively about the socio-cultural conditions of the world we find ourselves in, causing us to reflect on the internal and external experiences we face whilst making meaning of our contexts.

Weaving the figurative into the landscape

In Bengal amongst many artists the human figure dominates the paintings, but we also see a curious blend of extreme

modernism and classical purity that attracts and surprises, and provokes, perhaps even before conquering completely, a sort of cerebral struggle where these very different tendencies fight with each other until the moment the gaze grasps the great harmony that reigns in these opposites.

Paresh Maity painted an ode to Bengal history as he framed Rabindranath Tagore and the sylvan settings of Santiniketan as an educational institution.Maity. Tagore pinned his hopes on Nandalal Bose and he took charge of Kala Bhavana. Benodebehari was its first student and he realised Tagore's vision. Maity adds integral elements to this work bathed in the rays of the setting sun. The little wooden furniture at Santiniketan is as important as the landscape with its many vignettes and vistas.This painting created in 2017 takes on the impression of a multi faceted chapter in the annals of Bengal history as it weaves both nostalgia as well as the reality of Bengal's greatest names in history.

Sculptures of new expression

Rendering the human form has always been an essential part of art making. The artists of the modern period found myriad ways of continuing the pursuit from the lens of a fast-developing world that had suddenly changed around them. Artists continuously found new expression through the human form, as evidenced by works from the modern and contemporary masters.

Turning torsos and upright figures, small faces and the relief work of the Banaras Ghats. Sculptures in this collection of Bengal sculptors turns back to pages of antiquity, and creates a signature of modernist mores that transform to speak of contemporaneity character. Sculpture with these sculptors is a litany of explorations conceived during a transformative time in their respective careers.

They are aligned with an artistic vanguard that incorporates a three dimensional attempt at both cubism as well as realism. We are looking at a vocabulary of forms and features, and invention of new narratives, Vikram Bachhawat has been a frontrunner inspiration in the practice of contemporary sculptures in Kolkata.

Sculptor Asim Basu's Old Age Home is a tableau reminiscent of the great Henry Moore.Static as they sit on their chairs he creates a quartet encased in wooden chairs, like a collection of aged adults who are integrated with the monotonous sequence of slow time. Each depiction in Asim's hands is a citation of life. Asim Basu's small sculptures have their own curious quaintness. His people in an old age home is a testimony to time and the fragmented family.

Captive Soul, Bronze, 73 x 22 x 12, Edition- 1/5 in by Subrata Biswas

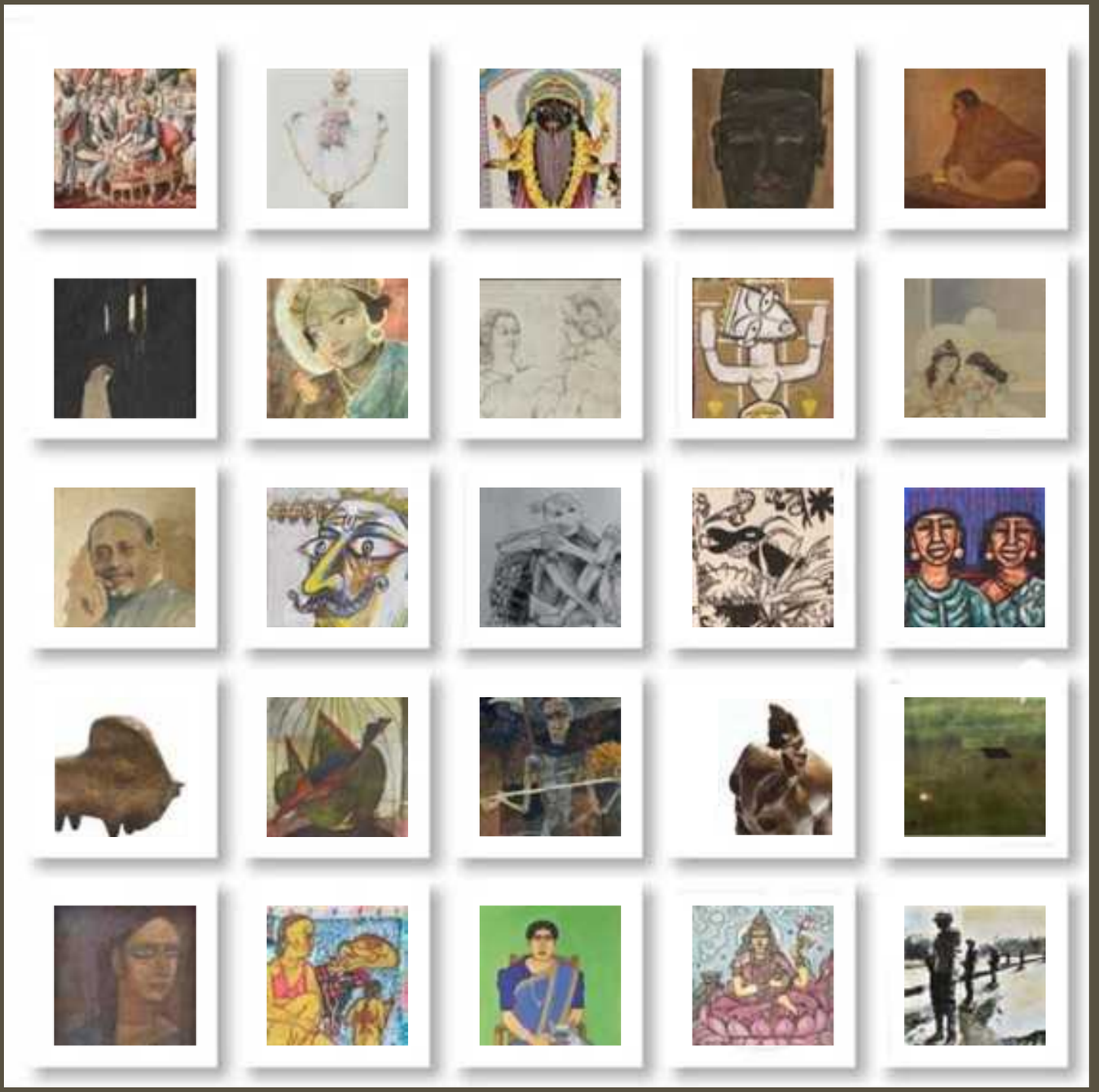
Akhil Chandra Das refines his human figure into a classicizing naturalism, beautifully exemplified in person day depiction. He turns to traditional sculptural materials such as bronze, and wood for perfect pedestals to produce more restrained and elegant works such as the Naga Dancer. Das's perfection is his leitmotif.

Subrata Biswas takes stories from folk art and indigenous tales and recreates sculptural ensembles of families and faces to create perfectly balanced works that echo an ingenuity. Biswas's terracotta works are as enchanting as his ceramic works with perfect glazes and a genesis of new styles born out of antiquity.

Tapas Biswas's Benares Ghats holds onto the traditional academic system of proportions to create a relief study that spins like a free research into the formal sculpture of the past, and a selection from various periods of antiquity giving it a modern synthesis.

Amongst the many sculptures in this show we can see the precarious angle of the shoulders and hands that perfectly balances with the sway of the human figure's hips. These sculptors work with an extraordinary range of fired chemical patinas. Concrete three-dimensionality, including real light and shade, and illusion are combined in many of these sculptures. Contours are employed to create a further illusion of depth, freeing the forms from the plane of the relief. Pedagogy and devotional solitary practice in studios, homes, dining tables and streets all become a part of the tapestry of Bengal Beyond Boundaries.

Bengal Beyond Boundaries



Aakriti Art Gallery
Presents
Bengal Beyond Boundaires
Curator Uma Nair
7 - 16 July 2023

CCA
Bikaner House
New Delhi

Ref No : T7737

ANONYMOUS

watercolour on paper
19 x 23 in

Provenance
Art Dealer, Paris
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : T7738

ANONYMOUS

Sati & Raja Ram Mohan Roy
gouache on paper
13 x 20 in

Provenance
Art Dealer, Paris
Exhibited at Brahmo Samaj,
Kolkata in 2022
Exhibited at Gallery Charubasona,
Kolkata in 2022
Exhibited at ICCR,
Kolkata in 2023
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : T7797

COMPANY PAINTING

Murshidabad
watercolour on paper
13.5 x 20.5 in

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : T7739

ANONYMOUS

Murshidabad School
watercolour on paper
9 x 13.5 in

Provenance
Chiswick Auction, London
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : T7795

ANONYMOUS

Krishna In Different Forms
gouache on paper pasted on board
32 x 50 in

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : T7794

COMPANY SCHOOL

watercolour on paper
9.5 x 7 in (each)

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : T7792

ANONYMOUS
Early Bengal

wood cut
6 x 4 in (each)

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : T7740

KALIGHAT PAT

Kali
gold & silver leaf and
gouache on paper
15.5 x 10.5 in

Provenance
Millea Bros. Ltd., U.S.A
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : T7741

KALIGHAT PAT

Brahma
gold & silver leaf and
gouache on paper
17 x 11 in

Provenance
Millea Bros. Ltd., U.S.A
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : 5352

ANONYMOUS
Old Bengal

Maa Jagadhatri
oil on canvas
24 x 18.5 in

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : Ob69

ANONYMOUS
Early Bengal

Goddess Durga's Arrival to Her Paternal House
oil on canvas
24 x 30 in

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : 5526

ANONYMOUS
Old Bengal

oil on canvas
44 x 34 in

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

* NATIONAL ART TREASURE,
NOT FOR EXPORT

Ref No : T7742

RABINDRANATH TAGORE
(1861-1941)

ink on paper
11 x 8.5 in
1930
signed lower right

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

* NATIONAL ART TREASURE,
NOT FOR EXPORT

Ref No : T7743

GAGANENDRANATH TAGORE
(1867-1938)

wash
5.25 x 2 in
1927
signed lower left

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

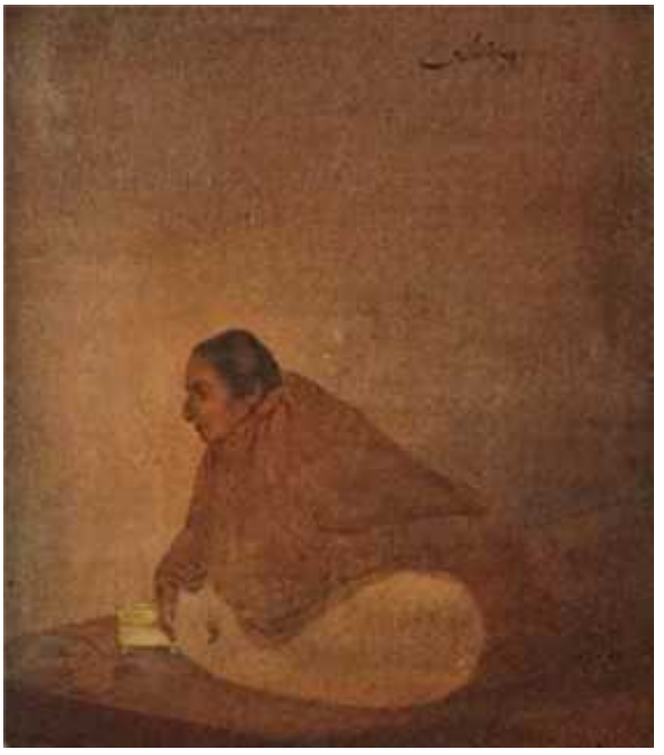
* NATIONAL ART TREASURE,
NOT FOR EXPORT

Ref No : T7744

ABANINDRANATH TAGORE
(1871–1951)

wash
5.3 x 4.75 in
signed top right

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata



* NATIONAL ART TREASURE,
NOT FOR EXPORT

Ref No : 5351

ABANINDRANATH TAGORE
(1871-1951)

tempera on board
5.5 x 3.5 in

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

* NATIONAL ART TREASURE,
NOT FOR EXPORT

Ref No : 4487

NANDALAL BOSE
(1882-1966)

pencil on paper
33.5 x 24 in
1946
signed lower right

Publication
* Published in 'Chitradarshan', Kanai Samanta,
Bidyodoy Library Pvt. Ltd.,
72, Mahatma Gandhi Road Kolkata 700009
* Published in Bharatashilpi Nandalal,
Vol-II by Panchanan Mandal, Visva Bharati.
* Published in Ananda Bazar Patrika

Provenance
Presented by Indra Dugar to his brother in law
Mr. Ratan Singh Nahar
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : T7745

SUNAYANI DEVI
(1875-1962)

watercolour
13.75 x 9.5 in

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

* NATIONAL ART TREASURE,
NOT FOR EXPORT

Ref No : 3403

JAMINI ROY
(1887-1972)

drawing on paper
6.75 x 4.5 in (each)

Publication
Published in The Book
"Jamini Roy" A Painter Who Revisited the Roots by Anuradha Ghosh"

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

* NATIONAL ART TREASURE,
NOT FOR EXPORT

Ref No : 3387

JAMINI ROY
(1887-1972)

tempera on board
12.5 x 6 in
signed lower right

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

* NATIONAL ART TREASURE,
NOT FOR EXPORT

Ref No : T7701

JAMINI ROY
(1887-1972)

tempera on fabric laid on card
24 x 13 in
signed lower right

Provenance
Private Collection, New Delhi

Ref No : T7746

KSHITINDRANATH MAZUMDAR
(1891-1975)

watercolour
11.75 x 9 in
signed lower right

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : 5380

HEMEN MAZUMDAR
(1894-1948)

gouache & watercolour on paper
21 x 15 in
1937
signed lower right

Publication
Published in The Book
Pratirodher Bhashya,
by **Anuradha Ghosh**

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : T7749

MUKUL DEY
(1895-1989)

Portrait of Rabindranath Tagore
etching
9 x 7 in
signed lower right

Provenance
Private Collection, Mumbai

Ref No : T7750

MUKUL DEY
(1895-1989)

Portrait of Abanindranath Tagore
etching
10.7 x 8.3 in
signed lower right

Provenance
Private Collection, Mumbai

Ref No : T7748

MUKUL DEY
(1895-1989)

dry point etching
7 x 5 in
signed lower right

Provenance
Private Collection, Mumbai

Ref No : T7703

MUKUL DEY
(1895-1989)

Birth of Lord Ganesh
dry point etching
10 x 7.5 in
signed lower right

Provenance
Private Collection, Mumbai

Ref No : T7747

MUKUL DEY
(1895-1989)

Girl Reading
dry point etching
7 x 5 in
signed lower right

Provenance
Private Collection, Mumbai

Ref No : T7702

MUKUL DEY
(1895-1989)

At The Grave Praying
dry point etching
8 x 7 in
signed lower right

Provenance
Private Collection, Mumbai

Ref No : T7723

BENODE BEHARI MUKHERJEE
(1904-1980)

Nepal
watercolour and ink on paper
7 x 10 in
1950
signed lower right

Provenance
Private Collection, New Delhi

Ref No : T7752

BENODE BEHARI MUKHERJEE
(1904–1980)

tempera on paper
7 x 9 in
1976
signed lower right

Provenance
Private Collection, New Delhi

Ref No : T7722

BENODE BEHARI MUKHERJEE
(1904-1980)

watercolour on paper
13 x 22.5 in
1945
signed top left

Provenance
Private Collection, New Delhi

Ref No : T7751

BENODE BEHARI MUKHERJEE
(1904-1980)

mixed media
7 x 10.5 in

Provenance
Private Collection, New Delhi

Ref No : T7754

RAMKINKAR BAIJ
(1906-1980)

pencil on paper
12.5 x 9 in

Publication
Published in the book **Works by Ramkinkar Baij**

Provenance
Private Collection, Mumbai

Ref No : T7704

RAMKINKAR BAIJ
(1906-1980)

The Cow and The Calf
pen & ink on paper
5.5 x 7.5 in

Publication
Published in the book **Ramkinkar Baij,** p320
Published in the book **Works by Ramkinkar Baij**

Provenance
Private Collection, Mumbai

* NATIONAL ART TREASURE,
NOT FOR EXPORT

Ref No : T7753

SAILOZ MUKHERJEE
(1906-1960)

Village Scene
oil on canvas
17.5 x 23 in
signed top right

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : T7724

SUDHIR KHASTGIR
(1907-1974)

mixed media on paper
29 x 21 in
1965
signed lower left

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : 3351

GOBARDHAN ASH
(1907-1996)

Vasanta
gouache on paper
11.5 x 11.5 in
1950

Provenance
Acquired from the Artist's Family

Ref No : 3352

GOBARDHAN ASH
(1907-1996)

Rebel
gouache on paper
30 x 22.5 in
1993
signed lower left

Publication
Published in the book
"**Crictical Analysis on Gobardhan Ash's Paintings**" by **GOTI**

Provenance
Acquired from The Artist's Family

Ref No : 5348

MANISHI DE
(1909-1966)

watercolour & tempera on paper
11 x 6 in

Provenance
Acquired from Nandini Chatterjee who
had inherited the work from her father
Late Sri Pranatosh Ghatak who was the editor of
"MASIK BASUMATI" - a Bengali monthly magazine

Ref No : 5529

SUNIL MADHAV SEN
(1910-1979)

Untitled (Double Sided)
mixed media on masonite board
19.5 x 15.5 in
signed lower middle

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : 5347

GOPAL GHOSE
(1913-1980)

watercolour on paper
10 x 14 in
1956
signed lower right

Provenance
Acquired from Nandini Chatterjee who had inherited the work from her father Late Sri Pranatosh Ghatak who was the editor of "MASIK BASUMATI"- a Bengali monthly magazine

Ref No : 5346

GOPAL GHOSE
(1913-1980)

watercolour on paper
10 x 14 in
1956
signed lower right

Provenance
Acquired from Nandini Chatterjee who had inherited the work from her father Late Sri Pranatosh Ghatak who was the editor of "MASIK BASUMATI"- a Bengali monthly magazine

Ref No : T7725

CHITTAPROSAD BHATTACHARYA
(1915-1978)

watercolour on paper
9 x 14 in
1963
signed lower left

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : T7726

CHITTAPROSAD BHATTACHARYA
(1915-1978)

watercolour on paper
9 x 14 in
1963
signed lower middle

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : 4514

BIJAN CHOUDHURY
(1913-2012)

acrylic on canvas
42 x 36 in
2011
signed lower right

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : 5321

INDRA DUGAR
(1918-1989)

watercolour on paper
19 x 13.5 in
1983
signed lower left

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : T7755

SANKHO CHAUDHURI
(1916-2006)

The Lady
bronze
12 x 5.7 x 5 in
2005
signed verso

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : 5485

PARITOSH SEN
(1918-2008)

acrylic on canvas
30 x 24 in
2006
signed lower left

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : 5502

SOMNATH HORE
(1921-2006)

etching
7 x 6 in
Edition - 9/20
1983
signed top right

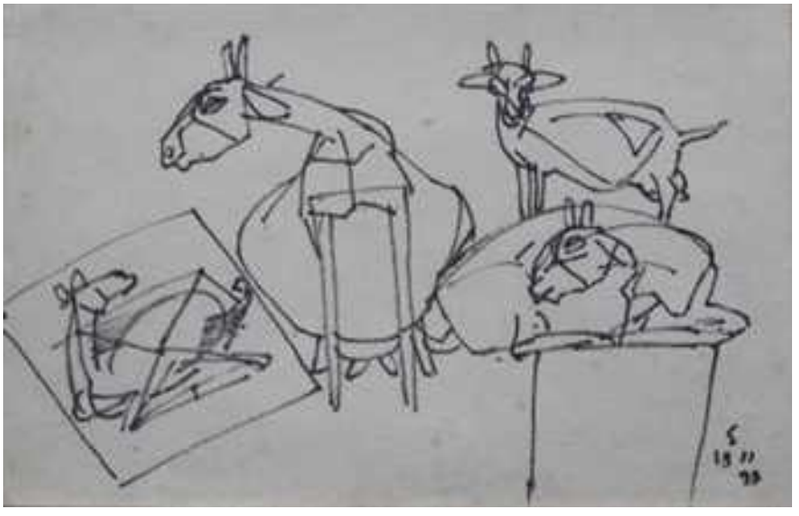
Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : 5505

SOMNATH HORE
(1921-2006)

print
5.25 x 4 in
Edition - A/P
signed lower right

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata



Ref No : 5426

SOMNATH HORE
(1921-2006)

pen & ink on paper
9 x 14 in
1993
signed lower right

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : T7727

SOMNATH HORE
(1921-2006)

lithograph
13 x 17 in
1978
signed lower left

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : T7728

SOMNATH HORE
(1921-2006)

lithograph
13 x 17.5 in
Edition - 8/12 imp
1978
signed lower right

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : T7729

SOMNATH HORE
(1921-2006)

lithograph
13 x 17.5 in
Edition - 13/15 imp
1978
signed lower right & left

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : T7757

SOMNATH HORE
(1921-2006)

White on White (Wounds)
paper pulp print
15 x 17 in
Edition - Variation Proof
1983
signed lower right

Provenance
Artist Family Collection
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : T7756

SOMNATH HORE
(1921-2006)

White on White (Wounds)
paper pulp print
15 x 17 in
Edition - A/P
1983
signed lower right

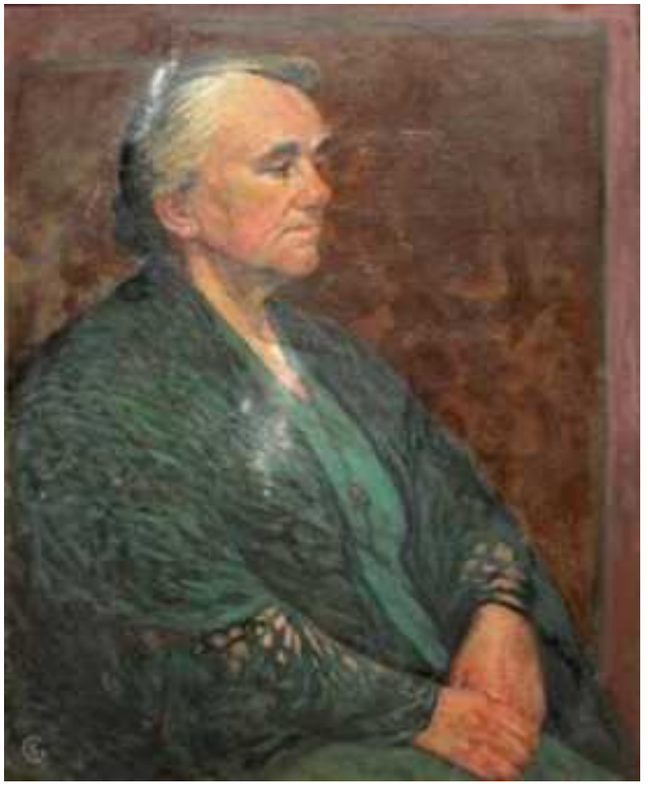
Provenance
Artist Family Collection
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : T7705

SOMNATH HORE
(1921-2006)

White on White (Wounds)
paper pulp print
21 x 26 in
Edition - A/P
1973
signed lower right

Provenance
Artist Family Collection
Private Collection, Kolkata



Ref No : T7759

SATYEN GHOSHAL
(1921-2006)

Portrait
oil on board
29.5 x 24 in
signed lower left

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : T7758

SATYEN GHOSHAL
(1921-2006)

Portrait
oil on board
29 x 24 in
signed lower right

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : 5427

K.G. SUBRAMANYAN
(1924-2016)

watercolour
10 x 15 in
1988
signed lower left & right

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : T7761

K.G. SUBRAMANYAN
(1924-2016)

gouache on handmade paper
15.5 x 11.5 in
2015
signed lower left

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : T7760

K.G. SUBRAMANYAN
(1924-2016)

gouache on handmade paper
15.5 x 11.5 in
2015
signed lower right

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : T7706

K.G. SUBRAMANYAN
(1924-2016)

gouache on handmade paper
15.5 x 11.5 in
2015
signed lower middle

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : T7730

REBA HORE
(1926-2008)

oil on canvas
18 x 24 in
2006
signed lower left

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : 2058

B.R. PANESAR
(1927-2014)

Environment - II
acrylic on canvas
30 x 36 in
2006
signed lower right

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : 5528

RABIN MONDAL
(1929-2019)

Couple
acrylic on canvas
26.5 x 34.5 in
2016
signed top left

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : 5172

RABIN MONDAL
(1929-2019)

acrylic on board
13.3 x 9.5 in
2010
signed top right

Provenance
Acquired directly from the Artist

Ref No : 5108

RABIN MONDAL
(1929-2019)

Face
acrylic on board
13 x 10 in
2016
signed top left

Provenance
Acquired directly from the Artist

Ref No : 5096

RABIN MONDAL
(1929-2019)

acrylic on board
10.5 × 8.5 in
2014
signed lower right

Provenance
Acquired directly from the Artist

Ref No : 5100

RABIN MONDAL
(1929-2019)

acrylic on board
13 × 10 in
2012
signed lower right

Provenance
Acquired directly from the Artist

Ref No : 5099

RABIN MONDAL
(1929-2019)

acrylic on board
12 x 11 in
2014
signed lower right

Provenance
Acquired directly from the Artist

Ref No : 5087

RABIN MONDAL
(1929-2019)

acrylic on board
12.5 × 11 in
2008
signed lower right

Provenance
Acquired directly from the Artist

Ref No : 2791

AJIT CHAKRABORTY
(1930-2005)

bronze
5.5 x 8 x 4 in
1997

Publication
Published in the book **Art of Bengal (Collectors' Series 2)** Pg 7
Published on the cover **Tangential Traverse**
(Modern to Modernism in Bengal Art)

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : 2794

AJIT CHAKRABORTY
(1930-2005)

bronze
7 x 12.5 x 3.5 in

Publication
Published in the book
Art of Bengal(Collectors' Series 2) Pg 9

Provenance
Acquired from Society of Contemporary Artists'
from their Annual Exhibition at
Birla Academy of Art and Culture, 2005,
by the current owner
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : 5339

KARTICK CHANDRA PYNE
(1931-2017)

Bird in The Cage
oil on canvas
34 x 28.5 in
signed middle center & lower right

Provenance
Sotheby's Auction, New York
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : 4012

PHUL CHAND PYNE
(1933-2000)

terracotta
15.5 x 4.5 x 3 in
1973
signed lower right

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : 4019

PHUL CHAND PYNE
(1933-2000)

terracotta
5.5 x 6 x 5 in
signed lower right

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : 4837

UMA SIDDHANTA
(b. 1933)

bronze
9 x 4.5 x 3.5 in

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref. No. 1956

SARBARI ROY CHOWDHURY
(1933-2012)

Standing Woman
bronze
10.5 x 2 x 2 in

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : 2146

PROKASH KARMAKAR
(1933-2014)

acrylic on canvas
30 x 24 in
2002
signed lower right

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : C1305

SHANKAR GHOSH
(1934-2020)

Prasadhan
bronze
25 x 15 x 11 in

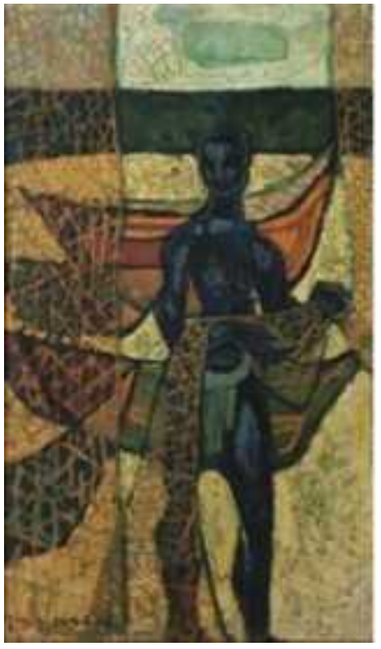
Provenance
Acquired from the Artist's Family

Ref No : C1303

SHANKAR GHOSH
(1934-2020)

Sitting Lady - III
bronze
25 x 15 x 11 in

Provenance
Acquired from the Artist's Family



Ref No : C1302

SHYAMAL DUTTA RAY
(1934-2005)

oil on canvas
32 x 18 in
1961
signed lower left

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : T7731

SHYAMAL DUTTA RAY
(1934-2005)

Broken Bowl
acrylic on canvas
40 x 30 in
2001
signed lower right

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : T7707

SHYAMAL DUTTA RAY
(1934-2005)

oil on canvas
34.8 x 22.5 in
1992
signed lower right

Provenance
Private Collection, New Delhi

Ref No : 5428

SHYAMAL DUTTA RAY
(1934-2005)

Visitor - I
acrylic on canvas
30 x 30 in
1991
signed lower left

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : 5429

SHYAMAL DUTTA RAY
(1934-2005)

watercolour on paper
22 x 31.5 in
1990
signed lower right

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : 5299

BIPIN GOSWAMI
(1934-2019)

bronze
13.5 x 14 x 9 in
Edition - A/P

Provenance
Acquired directly from the Artist

Ref No : 1595

SANAT KAR
(1935-2023)

Faces - 9
tempera on paper
13.5 x 10.5 in
1996
signed lower right

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : T7708

SAKTI BURMAN
(b. 1935)

watercolour on paper
19 x 25 in
1966
signed lower middle

Provenance
Private Collection, New Delhi

Ref No : C0798

AMALNATH CHAKLADAR
(1936 - 2021)

Durga The Terrible
tempera
18.5 x 22.5 in
2006
signed lower right

Provenance
Artist Family Collection

Ref No : C0804

AMALNATH CHAKLADAR
(1936 - 2021)

The Pet
dry pastel
32 x 23 in
2016
signed lower right

Provenance
Artist Family Collection

Ref No : C0801

AMALNATH CHAKLADAR
(1936 - 2021)

Images of Durga
tempera
6.5 x 6.5 in (each)
2003-2012

Provenance
Artist Family Collection

Ref No : 4995

SUHAS ROY
(1936-2016)

Radha
bronze
11 x 14 x 7 in
Edition - 4/9
2015

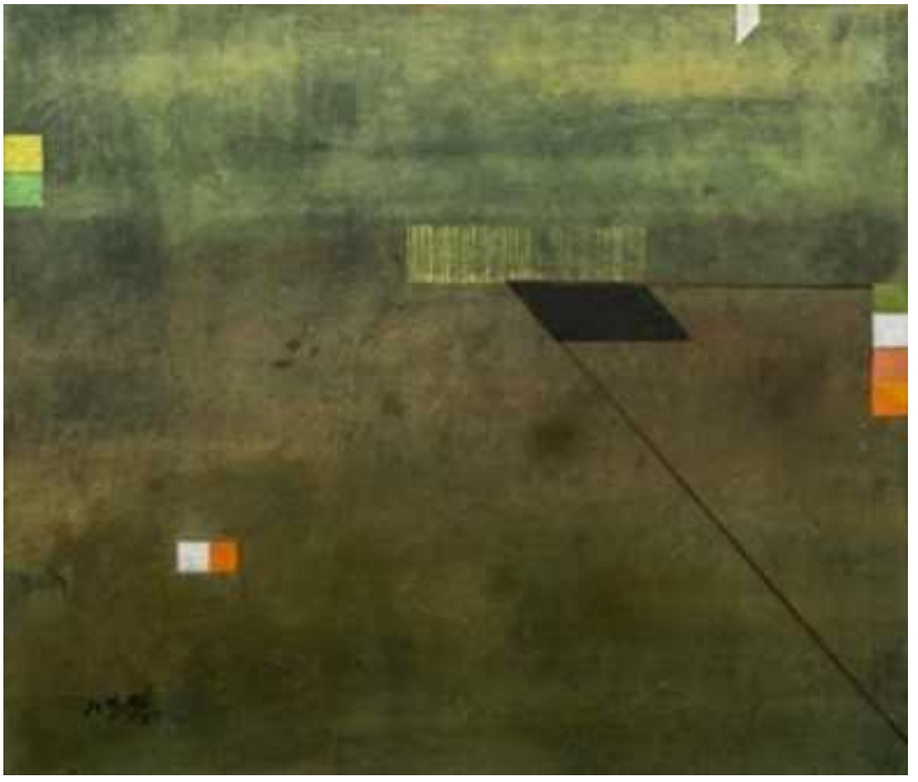
Provenance
Acquired directly from the Artist

Ref No : T7732

GANESH HALOI
(b. 1936)

gouache on handmade paper
laid on board
21 x 30.25 in
2021
signed lower right

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata



Ref No : T7709

GANESH HALOI
(b. 1936)

gouache on handmade paper
laid on board
21 x 24.75 in
2021
signed lower left

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : 5531

GANESH HALOI
(b. 1936)

gouache and pastel on board
19.6 x 18 in
1995
signed lower right

Provenance
Acquired directly from the Artist

Ref No : 5532

GANESH HALOI
(b. 1936)

gouache and pastel on paper
13.6 x 21.6 in
1995
signed lower right

Provenance
Acquired directly from the Artist

Ref No : 5534

GANESH HALOI
(b. 1936)

gouache and pastel on paper
31 x 20 in
1995
signed lower right

Provenance
Acquired directly from the Artist

Ref No : 5533

GANESH HALOI
(b. 1936)

gouache and pastel on paper
21.2 x 27.4 in
1995
signed lower middle

Provenance
Acquired directly from the Artist

Ref No : 4966

GANESH HALOI
(b. 1936)

bronze
8.5 x 11.5 x 2 in
Edition - 4/9
2015

Provenance
Acquired directly from the Artist

Ref No : T7710

RAMANANDA BANDOPADHYAY
(b. 1936)

Lady with Fan and Parrot
mixed media on canvas
24 x 20 in
2005
signed lower right

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : T7711

GANESH PYNE
(1937-2013)

tempera on canvas
pasted on board
11.8 x 9.6 in
2013

Provenance
Private Collection, Mumbai

Ref No : C1243

GANESH PYNE
(1937-2013)

Portrait
mixed media
5.5 x 4 in
signed lower right

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : T7764

ARPITA SINGH
(b. 1937)

watercolour on paper
19 x 14 in
2003

Provenance
Private Collection, New Delhi

Ref No : T7765

ARPITA SINGH
(b. 1937)

watercolour on paper
22 x 32 in
2003

Provenance
Private Collection, New Delhi

Ref No : 5530

ARPITA SINGH
(b. 1937)

pen & ink on paper
5 x 7 in
1994

Provenance
Private Collection, New Delhi
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : C0434

LALU PRASAD SHAW
(b. 1937)

acrylic on canvas
40 x 30 in
2011
signed lower left

Provenance
Acquired directly from the Artist

Ref No : C0428

LALU PRASAD SHAW
(b. 1937)

acrylic on canvas
30 x 38 in
2011
signed in lower left

Provenance
Acquired directly from the Artist

Ref No : 5310

LALU PRASAD SHAW
(b. 1937)

Bibi
tempera on board
23.5 x 19 in
2016
signed lower middle

Provenance
Acquired directly from the Artist

Ref No : 4933

LALU PRASAD SHAW
(b. 1937)

Head
bronze
13 x 10 x 10 in
Edition - 4/10
2015
signed in verso

Provenance
Acquired directly from the Artist

LALU PRASAD SHAW
(b. 1937)

conte on board
20.5 x 15.5 in (each)
2020-21
signed

Provenance
Acquired directly from the Artist

Ref No : T7766

DHARMANARAYAN DASGUPTA
(1939-1998)

tempera on paper
19.5 x 14.5 in
1991
signed in lower left

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : 1623

ANITA ROY CHOWDHURY
(b. 1939)

oil on canvas
36 x 30 in
2006
signed lower middle

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : 1329

SUNIL DAS
(1939-2015)

oil on canvas
8 x 8 in
1995
signed top left

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : C1282

SUNIL DAS
(1939-2015)

oil on canvas
6.5 x 6.5 in
1989
signed lower right

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : T7712

SUNIL DAS
(1939-2015)

oil on canvas
70 x 60 in
1984
signed lower right

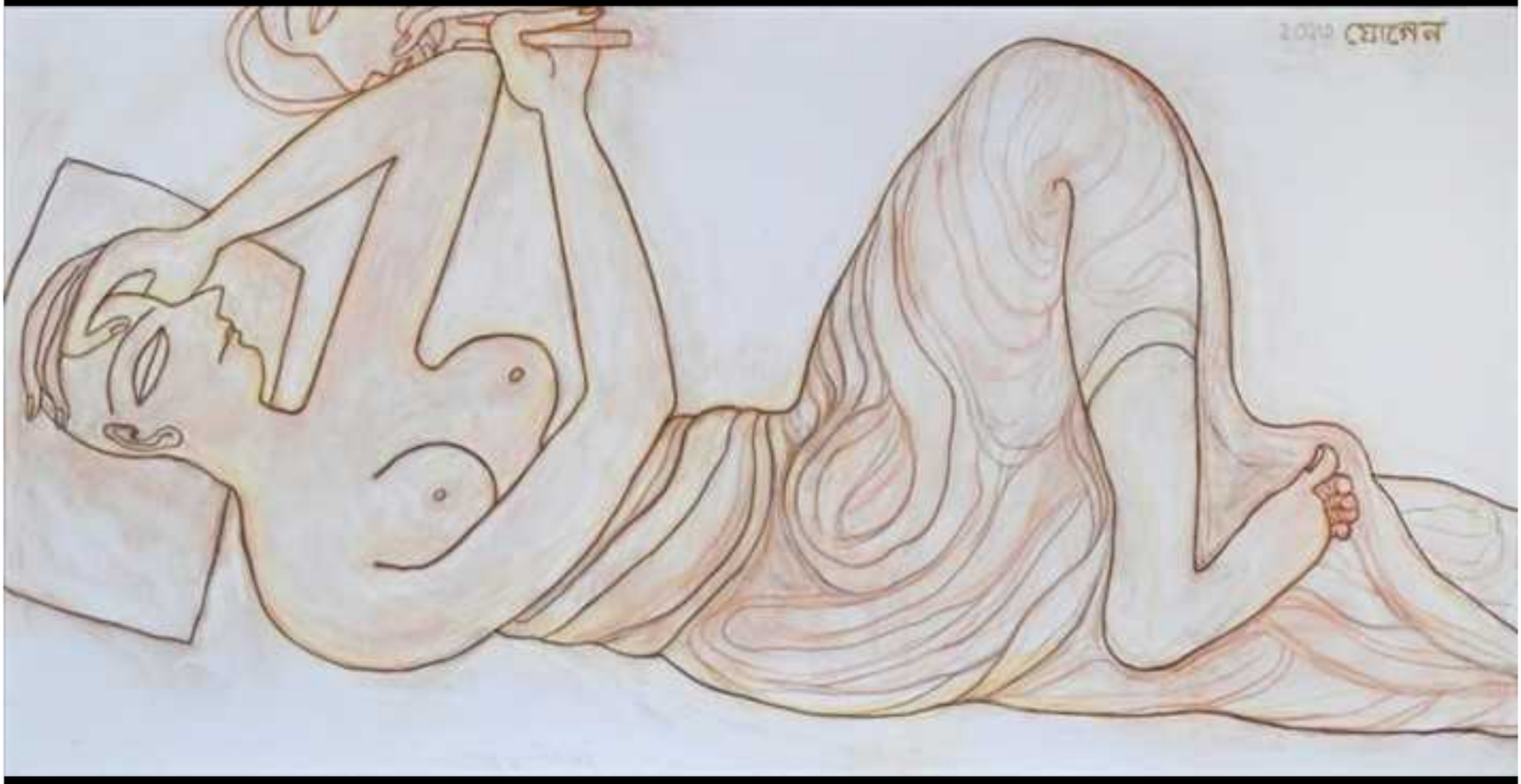
Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : T7733

SUNIL DAS
(1939-2015)

oil on canvas
57 x 69 in
1990
signed top left

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata



Ref No : C1346

JOGEN CHOWDHURY
(b. 1939)

Woman with Mirror
drawing on canvas
36 x 72.5 in
2023
signed top right

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : T7768

JOGEN CHOWDHURY
(b. 1939)

ink & pastel on paper
11.25 x 7.5 in
1986
signed lower left

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : 5535

JOGEN CHOWDHURY
(b. 1939)

mixed media on paper
15 x 11 in
1990's

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : T7767

JOGEN CHOWDHURY
(b. 1939)

Laxmi
mixed media on paper
7 x 6 in
2005
signed lower right

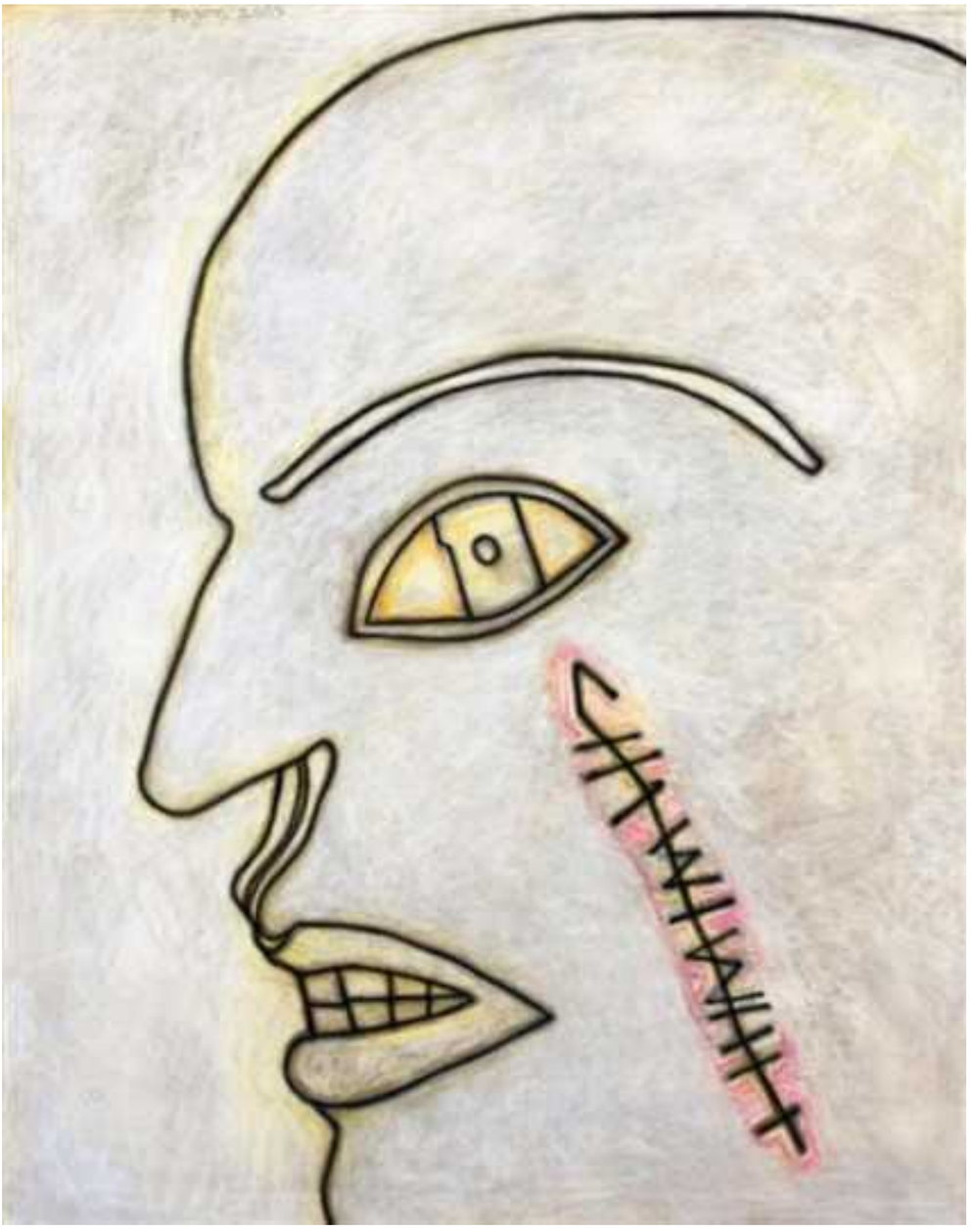
Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : C1345

JOGEN CHOWDHURY
(b. 1939)

Face (Of a Woman)
bronze
12 x 5.5 x 6 in
2023
signed bottom

Provenance
Artist Collection

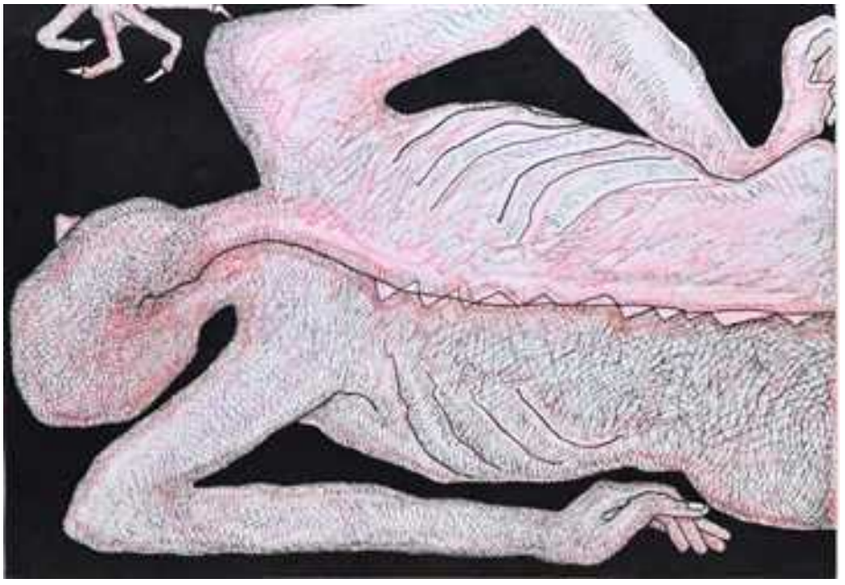


Ref. No. T7713

JOGEN CHOWDHURY
(b. 1939)

Face in Agony
mixed media on canvas
60 x 48 in
2007
signed top left

Provenance
Private Collection, New Delhi



Ref No : C1347

JOGEN CHOWDHURY
(b. 1939)

Untitled B (Dead)
Ink and pastel on paper
12.7 x 18.9 in
2023

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : C1348

JOGEN CHOWDHURY
(b. 1939)

Killer of The Pregnant Mother
ink & pastel on paper
15 x 22 in
2020
signed top right & left

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref. No. T7714

BIKASH BHATTACHARJEE
(1940-2006)

watercolour on paper
20 x 26 in
1987
signed lower right

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref. No. 4446

BIKASH BHATTACHARJEE
(1940-2006)

Urban Space for Human
pencil & conte on paper
14.25 x 20.25 in
1960

Provenance
Acquired from the Artist's Family

Ref. No. 5005

BIKASH BHATTACHARJEE
(1940-2006)

Salvationist
oil on canvas
65 x 78 in
1997
signed lower right

Provenance
Acquired from the Artist's Family

Ref. No. 4456

BIKASH BHATTACHARJEE
(1940-2006)

Body Language - XIII
pastel on paper
29.5 x 19.5 in
1960

Provenance
Acquired from the Artist's Family

Ref. No. 4457

BIKASH BHATTACHARJEE
(1940-2006)

Body Language - XIV
pastel on paper
29 x 18.75 in
1960

Provenance
Acquired from the Artist's Family

Ref. No. 4445

BIKASH BHATTACHARJEE
(1940-2006)

Body Language - IX
pastel on paper
31 x 19.75 in
1960

Provenance
Acquired from the Artist's Family

Ref. No. T7770

ANJOLIE ELA MENON
(b. 1940)

Woman with Fruits
oil on masonite board
48 x 24 in
1988

Provenance
Artist Family Collection

Ref. No. T7769

ANJOLIE ELA MENON
(b. 1940)

mixed media on masonite
32 x 42 in
1988

Provenance
Artist Family Collection

Ref. No. T7798

ANJOLIE ELA MENON
(b. 1940)

Girl
acrylic on acid free paper
15 x 11 in
2004
signed lower left

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : T7734

BIMAN BIHARI DAS
(b. 1943)

bronze
21 x 8.5 x 5.5 in
1989

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref. No. T7771

CHAMELI RAMACHANDRAN
(b. 1940)

chinese ink & watercolour on paper
15 x 22 in
2021
signed lower right

Provenance
Private Collection, New Delhi

Ref. No. T7772

CHAMELI RAMACHANDRAN
(b. 1940)

chinese ink & watercolour on paper
15 x 22 in
2021
signed lower right

Provenance
Private Collection, New Delhi

Ref. No. C1315

PARTHA PRATIM DEB
(b. 1943)

ink & acrylic on acid free paper
40 x 30 in
2023
signed lower right

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref. No. C1314

PARTHA PRATIM DEB
(b. 1943)

acrylic, ink & pencil on acid free paper
40 x 30 in
2023
signed lower right

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : 1502

BADHAN DAS
(1944-2002)

mixed media on canvas
46 x 30 in
1998

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : B80

ASIM BASU
(b. 1947)

Glorifying Humanity
bronze
12 x 10 x 6 in
2014

Provenance
Acquired directly from the Artist

Ref No : C1291

ASIM BASU
(b. 1947)

Gossip on Road Side
bronze
12 x 16 x 9 in

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : A0043

ASIM BASU
(b. 1947)

Peeping into The Headlines
bronze
11 x 9 x 5 in
2010

Provenance
Acquired directly from the Artist

Ref No : A0039

ASIM BASU
(b. 1947)

Thirsty Woman With Child
bronze
8.5 x 9 x 6 in
2016

Provenance
Acquired directly from the Artist

Ref No : T7773

AMITAVA DAS
(b. 1947)

correction pen, permanent
marker on canvas
48 x 48 in

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : T7774

AMITAVA DAS
(b. 1947)

oil, pencil, permanent marker
on canvas (triptych)
45 x 10 in

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : T7716

SHUVAPRASANNA
(b. 1947)

Middletine - I
acrylic & charcoal on canvas
10 x 40 in
2021
signed lower right

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : T7715

SHUVAPRASANNA
(b. 1947)

Middletine - II
acrylic & charcoal on canvas
10 x 40 in
2021
signed lower left

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : T7776

RINI DHOOMAL
(1948-2021)

Sphinx
multi plate etching
10 x 12.5 in
2011

Provenance
Artist Family Collection

Ref No : T7775

RINI DHOOMAL
(1948-2021)

The Red Print
linocut
16 x 15 in
1992
signed lower right

Provenance
Artist Family Collection

Ref No : C0988

SUNIL DE
(b. 1948)

acrylic on handmade paper
23 x 22 in
2021
signed lower right

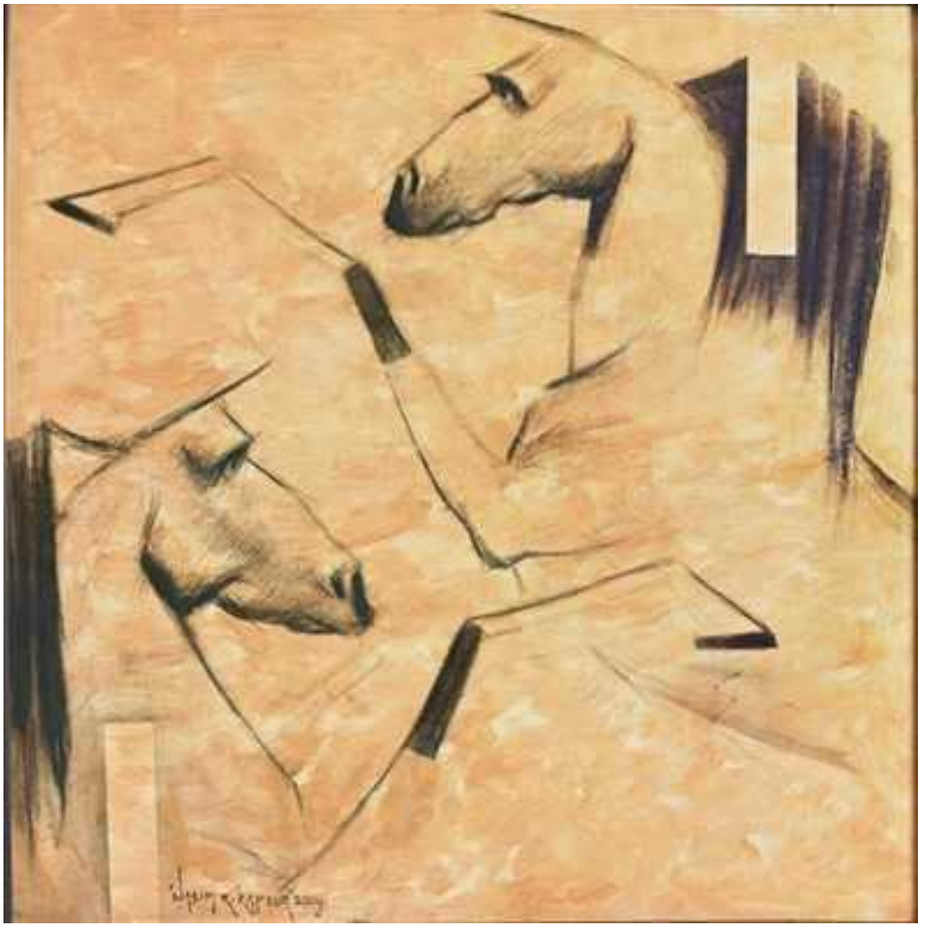
Provenance
Acquired Directly from the Artist

Ref No : C0989

SUNIL DE
(b. 1948)

acrylic on canvas
60 x 60 in
2021
signed lower left

Provenance
Acquired directly from the Artist



Ref No : S0009

WASIM R. KAPOOR
(1951-2022)

Horse
conte and acrylic on canvas
36 x 36 in
2014

Provenance
Acquired Directly from the Artist

Ref No : C1290

ADITYA BASAK
(b. 1953)

Inspiration - II
mixed media on canvas
42 x 27 in

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : C1289

ADITYA BASAK
(b. 1953)

Inspiration - I
mixed media on canvas
42 x 27 in

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : C1357

TAPAS KONAR
(b. 1953)

Celebration & Silence
acrylic on canvas
54 x 59 in
2006
signed lower right

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : T7717

TAPAS KONAR
(b. 1953)

Beyond The Earth The Cloud
acrylic on canvas
60 x 60 in
2006
signed lower left

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : C0300

BIMAL KUNDU
(b. 1954)

Thinker
bronze
24 x 11 x 8.5 in

Provenance
Acquired Directly from the Artist

Ref No : 5489

BIMAL KUNDU
(b. 1954)

bronze
18 x 12 x 7.5 in

Provenance
Saffron Art, Mumbai
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : C1362

SHIPRA BHATTACHARYA
(b. 1954)

She
acrylic & oil on canvas
86 x 54 in
2023
signed lower left

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : C1363

SHIPRA BHATTACHARYA
(b. 1954)

He
paper collage & ink
11.5 x 8 in
2023
signed

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : C1320

TARUN DEY
(b. 1954)

Composition - I
acrylic on canvas
69 x 33 in
2016
signed lower left

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : C1321

TARUN DEY
(b. 1954)

Composition - II
acrylic on canvas
60 x 36 in
2010
signed lower right

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : C1356

PRADIP RAKSHIT
(b. 1955)

oil on canvas
60 x 66 in
signed lower right

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : T7718

PRADIP RAKSHIT
(b. 1955)

oil on canvas
54 x 48 in
signed lower right

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : C1214

CHITTROVANU MAJUMDAR
(b. 1956)

acrylic on canvas
84 x 48 in
2022
signed left middle

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : T7719

JAYASHREE CHAKRAVARTY
(b. 1956)

acrylic on canvas
36 x 35 in

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : T7777

JAYASHREE CHAKRAVARTY
(b. 1956)

acrylic, oil, paper, audio tape,
seeds, synthetic adhesive,
shell flakes on canvas
70 x 63.75 in

Provenance
Private Collection, New Delhi

Ref No : 2581

MANOJ DUTTA
(b. 1956)

pastel on paper
10 x 10 in
1996
signed lower left

Provenance
Acquired Directly from the Artist

Ref No : T7778

SEKHAR ROY
(b. 1957)

tempera on board
30 x 21 in
2023
signed lower right

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : 5487

AMITAVA DHAR
(b. 1957)

acrylic on canvas
40 x 48 in
2007
signed lower right

Provenance
Saffron Art, Mumbai
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : 1752

AMITAVA DHAR
(b. 1957)

oil on canvas
71 x 40 in
1997
signed lower right

Provenance
Acquired directly from the Artist

Ref No : C1355

SAMIR AICH
(b. 1957)

Explosion of Life
mixed media on canvas
60 x 60 in
2023
signed lower right

Provenance
Acquired directly from the Artist

Ref No : C1354

SAMIR AICH
(b. 1957)

Flow of Life
mixed media on canvas
60 x 60 in
2023
signed lower left

Provenance
Acquired directly from the Artist

Ref No : C1313

PRADIP MAITRA
(b. 1959)

The Diplomat's Table
watercolour on paper
40.5 x 27.5 in
2020
signed lower right

Provenance
Acquired directly from the Artist

Ref No : C1312

PRADIP MAITRA
(b. 1959)

Crucifixion
watercolour on paper
40.5 x 27.5 in
2020
signed lower right

Provenance
Acquired directly from the Artist

Ref No : C1285

DEBABRATA DEY
(b. 1959)

News
bronze
20 x 25 x 12.5 in
Edition - 2/6
2022

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : C1284

DEBABRATA DEY
(b. 1959)

Memories
bronze
16 x 27 x 9 in
2023

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : C1339

DIPTISH GHOSH DASTIDAR
(b. 1960)

Maharaj on The Way to Gangasagar
acrylic on canvas
36 x 30 in
2020
signed lower right

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : C1338

DIPTISH GHOSH DASTIDAR
(b. 1960)

Ajay Parer Brityanto
acrylic on canvas
42 x 36 in
2020
signed lower right

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : T7781

JAYASRI BURMAN
(b. 1960)

Hindol Raga
watercolour, pen and ink on
paper pasted on board
13.3 x 10 in
2022
signed lower left

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : T7782

JAYASRI BURMAN
(b. 1960)

Raga Kalyan
watercolour, pen and ink on
paper pasted on board
13.3 x 10 in
2022
signed lower left

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : T7779

JAYASRI BURMAN
(b. 1960)

Bhairav Raga
watercolour, pen and ink on
paper pasted on board
13.3 x 10 in
2022
signed lower left

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : T7780

JAYASRI BURMAN
(b. 1960)

Bilaval Raga
watercolour, pen and ink on
paper pasted on board
13.3 x 10 in
2022
signed lower left

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : T7783

JAYASRI BURMAN
(b. 1960)

Raga Yaman
watercolour, pen and ink on
paper pasted on board
13.3 x 10 in
2022
signed lower left

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : T7720

JAYASRI BURMAN
(b. 1960)

Ahir Bhairav
watercolour pen & Ink on paper
pasted on lucobond board
72 x 55 in
2023
signed lower left

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : T7784

SUDIP ROY
(b. 1960)

watercolour on paper
22 x 30 in
2020
signed lower middle

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : T7721

SUDIP ROY
(b. 1960)

The Moon
watercolour on paper
45 x 68 in
2023

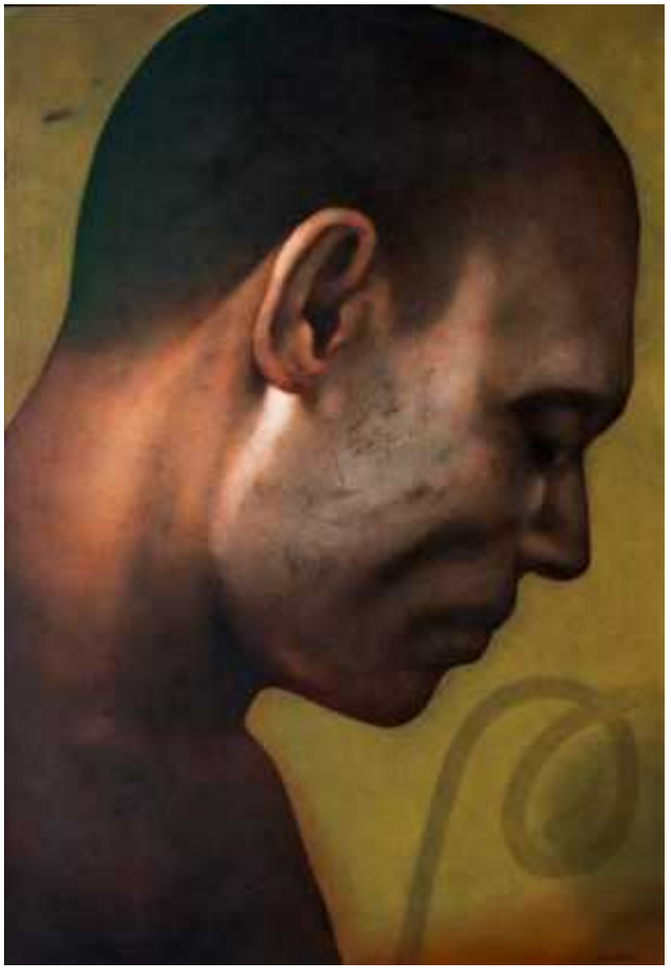
Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : C1293

CHANDRA BHATTACHARJEE
(b. 1961)

acrylic on canvas
72 x 48 in
2021

Provenance
Artist Collection



Ref No : AF1082

CHANDRA BHATTACHARJEE
(b. 1961)

Silence - I
acrylic on canvas
89 x 65 in
2015
signed lower right

Provenance
Acquired Directly from the Artist

Ref No : C1310

SOUMITRA KAR
(b. 1963)

Bhumi - 10
tempera on acid free board
42 x 30 in
2016

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : C1311

SOUMITRA KAR
(b. 1963)

Ratri(Night)
tempera on acid free board
38 x 29 in
2014
signed lower right

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : C1236

CHHATRAPATI DUTTA
(b. 1964)

An Attempt at Unravelling The Past
transfer & mixed media on board
60 x 48 in
2022
signed lower right

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : C1367

CHHATRAPATI DUTTA
(b. 1964)

The Last Resort
transfer & acrylic on canvas
48 x 72 in
2023
signed lower right

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : T7735

PARESH MAITY
(b. 1965)

watercolour on paper
19.25 x 25 in
1986
signed lower left

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : T7786

PARESH MAITY
(b. 1965)

Kopai River
watercolour on paper
40 x 40 in
2001
signed lower left

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : T7785

PARESH MAITY
(b. 1965)

Shantiniketan
acrylic & oil on canvas
84 x 180 in
2017
signed lower right

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : C1342

PRASENJIT SENGUPTA
(b. 1964)

acrylic on canvas
68 x 65 in
2017
signed lower right

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : C1341

PRASENJIT SENGUPTA
(b. 1964)

acrylic on canvas
60 x 62 in
2013
signed lower right

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : C1324

PRADOSH PAUL
(b. 1965)

From Here to Eternity - II
acrylic on canvas
48 x 54 in
2020
signed lower left

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : C1325

PRADOSH PAUL
(b. 1965)

From Here to Eternity - IV
acrylic on canvas
36 x 48 in
2022
signed lower left

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : C1349

ATIN BASAK
(b. 1966)

Mudra - I
etching
30 x 22 in
Edition - A/P
2009

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : C1350

ATIN BASAK
(b. 1966)

Mudra - II
etching
30 x 22 in
Edition - A/P
2009

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : C1351

ATIN BASAK
(b. 1966)

Mudra - III
etching
30 x 22 in
Edition - A/P
2009

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : 2465

SAMINDRANATH MAJUMDAR
(b. 1966)

Landscaping Civilization
acrylic on canvas
48 x 24 in
2007
signed lower right

Provenance
Acquired directly from the Artist

Ref No : C1229

SAMINDRANATH MAJUMDAR
(b. 1966)

The Road Not Taken
acrylic on canvas
69 x 69 in
2022
signed lower right

Provenance
Acquired directly from the Artist

Ref No : C1322

PRASUN GHOSH
(b. 1966)

bronze
8 x 24 x 9 in
1995

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : C1323

PRASUN GHOSH
(b. 1966)

bronze
17 x 5 x 5 in
2008

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : C1360

PAULA SENGUPTA
(b. 1967)

The Spice Garden
etching & aquatint on paper
20 x 13 in
Edition - V/P Two
2018
signed lower right

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : C1359

PAULA SENGUPTA
(b. 1967)

The Serpent's Garden
etching & aquatint on paper
20 x 13 in
Edition - V/P Two
2018
signed lower right

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : C1199

AKHIL CHANDRA DAS
(b. 1968)

Naga Dance
bronze
33.5 x 29 x 13 in
2022

Provenance
Acquired directly from the Artist

Ref No : C1200

AKHIL CHANDRA DAS
(b. 1968)

World Cool
bronze
40 x 22 x 13 in
2022

Provenance
Acquired directly from the Artist

Ref No : C0607

AKHIL CHANDRA DAS
(b. 1968)

Monk
bronze
75 x 27 x 19 in
2019

Provenance
Acquired directly from the Artist

Ref No : T7787

ARINDAM CHATTERJEE
(b. 1970)

dry pastel, acrylic and
oil on board
48 x 48 in

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : T7788

ARINDAM CHATTERJEE
(b. 1970)

Observer - VII
watercolour and dry pastel
on paper
30 x 41.2 in
2021
signed lower right

Provenance
Private Collection, Kolkata

Ref No : C1353

SRIKANTA PAUL
(b. 1971)

Rambha
woodcut & acrylic on canvas
41 x 49 in
2015

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : C1352

SRIKANTA PAUL
(b. 1971)

Titli My Daughter
woodcut & acrylic on canvas
72.5 x 48 in

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : C1019

SUBRATA BISWAS
(b. 1972)

Zootopia
slip vitrified terracotta
20 x 11 x 7 in
2020

Provenance
Acquired Directly from the Artist

Ref No : C1317

SUBRATA BISWAS
(b. 1972)

Rainbow of Happiness
slip vitrified terracotta
63.5 x 21 x 23 in
2023

Provenance
Acquired Directly from the Artist

Ref No : C1016

SUBRATA BISWAS
(b. 1972)

Agony
slip vitrified terracotta
23 x 12.5 x 7.5 in
2020

Provenance
Acquired Directly from the Artist

Ref No : C1224

SUBRATA BISWAS
(b. 1972)

Signature of Civilization
ceramic
50 x 20 x 23 in
2022

Provenance
Acquired Directly from the Artist

Ref No : C1298

MAHULA GHOSH
(b. 1973)

Shifting Landscape
watercolour on handmade paper
22 x 30 in
2022

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : C1299

MAHULA GHOSH
(b. 1973)

Time Still
watercolour & Stitching on
handmade paper
22 x 30 in
2022

Provenance
Artist Collection

SNEHASISH MAITY
(b. 1970)

Ambiguity of the sences - I, II, III, IV, V, VI
watercolour on paper
12 x 8 in (each)
2020-21

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : C0002

TAPAS BISWAS
(b. 1972)

Billie Dancing
bronze
49 x 34 x 57 in
2017

Provenance
Acquired Directly from the Artist

Ref No : C1368

TAPAS BISWAS
(b. 1972)

Unanimous - I
slate stone, resin, steel
39 x 22 x 16 in
2022

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : C1242

TAPAS BISWAS
(b. 1972)

Banaras
bronze
16 x 82 x 30.5 in
2023

Provenance
Acquired Directly from the Artist

Ref No : C1319

SEKHAR BARAN KARMAKAR
(b. 1974)

Ganapati - II
watercolour on paper
41 x 29 in
2015

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : C1318

SEKHAR BARAN KARMAKAR
(b. 1974)

Ganapati - I
watercolour on paper
41 x 29 in
2015

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : T7790

DEBANJAN ROY
(b. 1975)

Gandhi with Shopping Bags
bronze
17 x 8 x 5 in
2019

Provenance
Private Collection, New Delhi

Ref No : T7789

DEBANJAN ROY
(b. 1975)

Gandhi on The Harley
bronze
14 x 25 x 9 in
2019

Provenance
Private Collection, New Delhi

Ref No : C1340

MRINAL DEY
(b. 1979)

Futurist
acrylic on canvas
48 x 36 in
2022
signed lower right

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : C1361

NANTU BEHARI DAS
(b. 1977)

Tracing The Contour of a Convoluted Shape
aluminium pins
24 x 24 x 18 in
2023

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : C1286

CHAITALI CHANDA
(b. 1977)

Nimantran
acrylic on canvas
60 x 60 in
2022
signed lower right

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : C1287

CHAITALI CHANDA
(b. 1977)

Market
acrylic on canvas
48 x 72 in
2023
signed lower left

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : C1295

MITHUN DASGUPTA
(b. 1980)

Gardening During Lockdown
acrylic on marble dust coated canvas
48 x 60 in
2022
signed lower right

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : C1337

PRIYANKA LAHIRI
(b. 1980)

Behind The Rag
oil & serigraph on canvas
42 x 42 in
2023
signed lower right

Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : C1296

KRISHNA SARDAR
(b. 1980)

The Journey of Women
etching
18 x 19.5 in

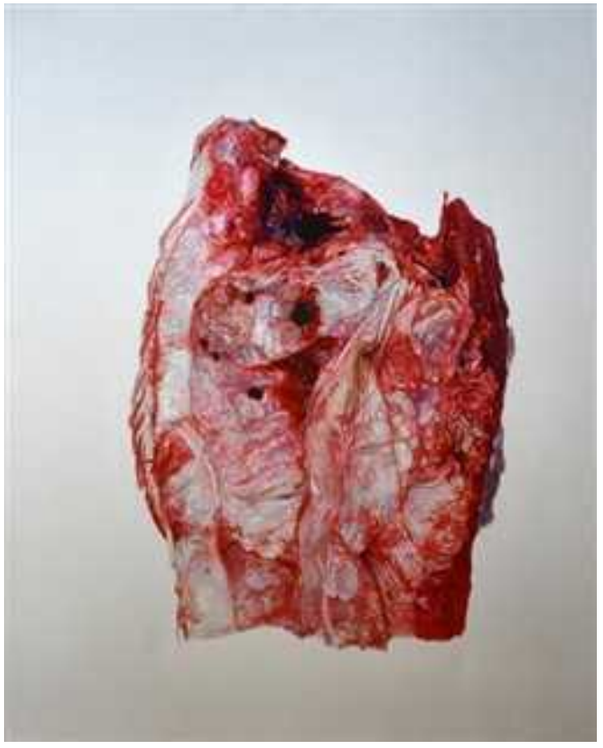
Provenance
Artist Collection

Ref No : C1297

KRISHNA SARDAR
(b. 1980)

The Journey of Life and Introspection
etching
22 x 19.5 in

Provenance
Artist Collection

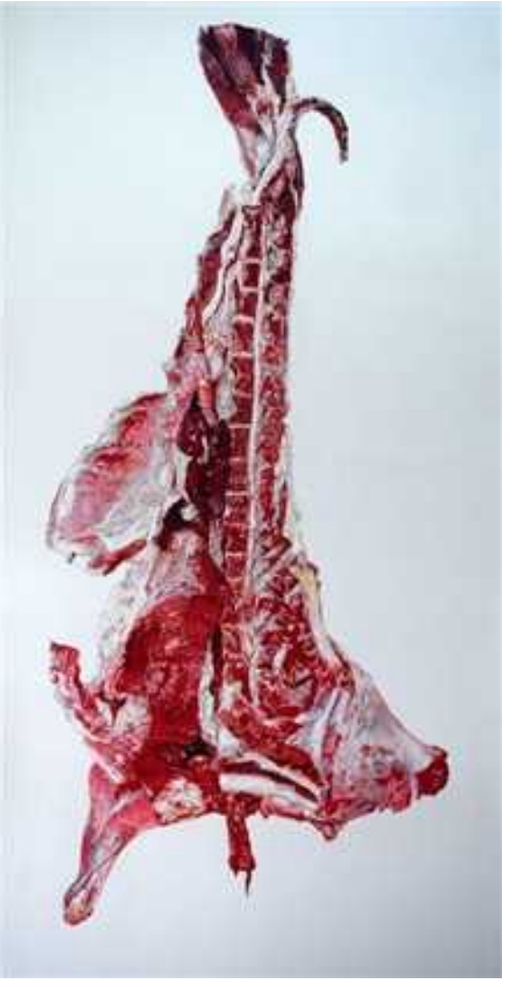


Ref No : C1344

NABANITA GUHA
(b. 1981)

And The Eyes Fizzled Out in The Delirium
watercolour on paper
30 x 24.5 in
2022

Provenance
Artist Collection



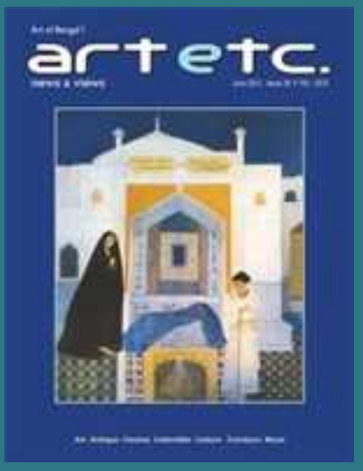
Ref No : C1343

NABANITA GUHA
(b. 1981)

Feast of Mirabilia and The Impetuous Lies of Tranquilty
watercolour on fabriano paper
60 x 30 in
2021

Provenance
Artist Collection

FROM THE ARCHIVES



Guest Editor Pranabranjan Ray
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Company School Paintings of Calcutta, Murshidabad, Patna (1750-1850): Doctoral Thesis of Late Dipak Bhattacharya (1960-2007)

by Nanak Ganguly

Sheikh Muhammad Amir of Karraya, A Nawab Standing by His Horse Drawn Gharry or Carriage Attended by His Groom Bearing a Chauri

The complex entanglements of cultural currents that emerged with the arrival of colonialists in the eighteenth century can only be presented adequately in exhibitions like these and thus become an experience. If Historicism and even the modern, European idea of history came to non- European peoples in the nineteenth century or somebody's way of saying "not yet" to somebody else. If former simple presentation models are abandoned and the dialogues between cultures as open process, the exhibition space transforms into a site of 'European gaze'. The present site provokes a dialogue that will not question our own notion of culture and society but will also affect how we imagine ourselves. The dialogue is a continuous process: it has little to do with past concepts of edification but emerges as a vital process, a landscape where we become familiar with the changes influencing our lives. Thus signals out how an eclectic range of imagery from the changing world of colonial India became instrumental in evolving a visual language of collage and citation, which in turn, acted as a vehicle of cultural force, creating and negotiating as the sacred, the erotic, the political and the colonial modern. The very idea of historicizing carries with it some peculiarly European assumptions of disenchanted space, secular time and human sovereignty and thus Europe becomes original site of the modern. Daniells description, to cite one among the thousands will confirm that feeling of enchantment:

"The banian puts forth its shoots, which strike into the ground, and produce a rapid succession of younger trees. It is the asylum of animals ...who subsist on its fruits, and are protected by its foliage. The peacock here unfolds its splendid plumage, doves nestle on the topmost boughs and monkeys live and chatter among its branches. Beneath its shade, the herdsman watches its flock, the manufacturer plies his loom, the musician touches his pipe, whilst the Bramin (sic!), abstracted from all sublunary objects, performs his solitary though not silent devotions". And the Native is thus born.

Late scholar, art historian and Fulbright Scholar Dipak Bhattacharya (1960-2007) assiduously worked on the artisans in Murshidabad, Patna, Calcutta (Company paintings of Calcutta, Murshidabad, Patna-1750-1850) trained and directed by the company agents in the eighteenth and nineteenth century with the zeal of a missionary and came up with a text laced with an oral tradition, which is any researcher's delight. The list of artists is a veritable who's who of

Sheikh Muhammad Amir of Karraya, A Syce Holding Two Carriage Horses

company painters in nineteenth century. These painters' work constitutes European enlightenment to provide a sustained conversation between historical thinking and postcolonial perspectives and the rich legacy the colonial period has left behind in respect to artistic and cultural activity.

The art practice in Bengal flourished with the rise of Calcutta as a metropolis and its phenomenal growth as the headquarters of East India Company home to the ruling elite of the John Company. Around 1770-1850, an array of artists including the Europeans came to Calcutta to depict the aesthetic city that had grown from Job Charnock's noon day halt. Their charming portrayal of palaces and people, the melee and the melas, has left us with a rich colonial legacy of the graphic records of European Calcutta and the Black Town. Moreover, it was Calcutta more than the settlements at Bombay, Meerut, Madras or Surat that inspired them to most fevered and immortal output.

Within less than a century of Job Charnock's noon day halt on that fateful rainy afternoon of 24th August, 1690, Calcutta had grown both in beauty and importance. Travelers called Hastings's Calcutta a miniature tropical London. It was already the political, commercial and intellectual hub of India.

The colonial rule impressed its presence in Calcutta through the demarcation of new world of 'high art' and exclusive category of 'artists'. European painters and engravers who frequented India from the 1780's with a monopoly over the patronage of the emergent colonial elite, epitomized the new definition of the 'artist'. Emulating the European example, a similar identity of an artist evolved in indigenous society by the mid-nineteenth century. While the western category of 'artist was gradually loosening to accommodate Indians of middle class backgrounds, privately trained in oil painting by European tutors the category of 'artisan' included a mixed community of local painters, the draughtsmen and printmakers, who were responding equally to the pressures of westernization and new market demands. Mughal painters from Patna , Murshidabad, Lucknow who had drifted to Calcutta (as the provincial Mughal courts declined, and locus of power and patronage shifted to the British in these old seats of Nawabi culture, European painters stepped in where the traditional court artists had once thrived. The shifts in the tastes of Nawabs and the dwindling of court patronage reduced the latter to the state of 'bazaar' painters- a new colonial category) and were using western techniques, were picked up by British officials and civilians and made to learn the 'right' conventions of shading, perspective and naturalized drawing and commissioned to paint their masters' houses and servants, genres or ethnological specimens of different Indian 'trades' and 'castes'. These paintings including birds, beasts, flowers and fauna produced under the supervision of East India Company officials came to be known as 'Company School paintings'. There were painters in Chinsurah and Chandannagore who produced paintings that were 'iconographic' representation of Hindu epics, gods and goddesses, popularly known as “Dutch Bengal” or “French Bengal”- still an undefined school. These traditional gouache artists were trained to handle aquarelles, engravings and lithographs. The skills f these miniature artists were valued primarily for their adaptability to western naturalistic conventions and for the flair for their precision and detail in the pictures and

Scenes from the Legend of Gazi, A Scroll Painting, Murshidabad District

Bengal Pat, Murshidabad School

diagrams ordered for them. Caught in changing demands, the traditional artist was reduced to a mere 'copyist' the result was a hybrid manner of painting.

Murshidabad and Patna, till the end of the end of eighteenth century had a strong stamp of a provincial miniature style- stiff stylized figures, ornamental details and a very bright palette. A clear transition of style is evident in Murshidabad around 1790, when local painters took to copying in gouache the oils of the visiting English artist George Farrington centered around themes like the puppet Nawab Mubarak-ud- daulah at the durbar with the British resident or attending local festivals like Holi or Muharram. Among these 'company school' painters, the rarer case of artists who elevated to greater status are known for signing their pictures, as for example, E.C. Doss who painted a stereotype sets of Indian minions like barber, sircar, dewan, munshi or the more talented and distinguished like Sheikh Muhammad Amir of Karraya, pictures that reflect one of the highest points of refinement and grace in 'Company' paintings. His delicate, photo-realistic studies of the horses, horse-drawn carriages and grooms of his European patron became his distinctive trademark. It is clear from these facts that the art activity of the Company men and amateur British painters did help in the setting up of an art school along the western lines. Towards the middle of nineteenth century, art schools in Madras (1853), Calcutta (1854), Bombay (1857), and Lahore (1878) were opened and the syllabi offered were derived from London's Kensington School.

As the colonial power established its rule a number of foreign artists came to India with the hope of becoming rich overnight. These artists worked primarily in three techniques: oil on canvas, miniature painting in water colour on ivory and water colour on paper and prints made from them by engraving process. Prominent among oil painters were Tilly Kettle, Zoffany, Arthur Davies, Thomas Hickey, Francesco Ronaldi, Robert Home, William Beechy, Marshal Clakson, and Vereschagin. In addition, Ozies Humphrey, George Chinnery and Sir Charles D'oyly were notable miniature artists on ivory. Notable engravers and printmakers were Hodges, Solvyns, Soltykoff, James Mofat, Colsworthy Grant, William Simpson and the Daniells. The Great mutiny of 1857 had brought India a considerable attention in Britain and Day & Sons produced a large format book of tinted lithographs by Simpson. William Purser(1789-1852) was a painter and architect , his 'Aurangabad , from the ruins of Aurangzeb's Palace'(from a sketch by Capt. Grindlay) watercolour on paper had been engraved by C.F. Hunt in Grindlay's Scenery, Costumes and Architecture, chiefly on the Western side of India, 1830. While all the attention was being lavished on white Calcutta, the Black Town, seething with life and exotic variety, remained uncaptured on the palette. Madame Belnos, a French artist and Sir Charles D'oyly, minimized this shortfall by to a small extent. But it was Balthazar Solvyns (1760-1824), a Franco-Belgian who arrived in Calcutta in 1791 and placed it on the artistic map. A Flemish marine artist, born to a prominent merchant family in Antwerp, Calcutta was his home for thirteen years. These painters may not be a part of Dipak's thesis but couldn't resist mentioning here to give a clear picture of the art activity between 1750-1850, an area of the late scholar's specialization.

These company school engravers and painters also depicted in great detail certain aspects of the British way of life in India, especially British houses, servants, and modes of travel. In his latest piece of fiction River of Smoke Amitav Ghosh writes about George Chinnery giving a graphic account about the life of Europeans in the subcontinent". Chinnery on the other hand, had earned fabulous sums of money while in Calcutta and his household was as chuck- muck as any in the city, with paltans of nokor- logue doing chukkers in the hallways and syces swarming in istabbuls; as for the bobachee-connah, why, it had been known to spend a hundred sicca rupees on sherbets and syllabubs, in one week....". They also served accordingly as authentic contemporary piece of journal and as a source of information of the day. Even today D'Oyly's and other European painters including Company School artists have a wide intellectual appeal today and the complex cultural, political, social interactions between the West and the sub-continent.

Brilliant but an amateur artist Charles D'Oyly had Indian painters to assist him. George Foster complained, "The Hindoos of this day have a slender knowledge of the rules and proportion, and none of the perspective. They are just imitators, and correct workmen; but they possess merely the glimmerings of genius." D'Oyly, while he was stationed in Patna, set up a lithographic press to reproduce not only his own drawings but those of an enthusiastic circle of amateurs living there.

"In Patna around 1800's, the European community combined the same aloofness from Indian social life with similar interest in the picturesque, and it was this latter trait which gradually gave the Patna painters their expanded market. The city, which must have seemed at one time only a slightly more settled alternative to Murshidabad, was gradually seen to contain a new specialized demand. The Patna artists began to experiment with compositions of local Indian scenes...until about 1830 they had become perhaps the most lucrative branch of Patna paintings. The artists painted whole sets of 'Snapshots' known as 'Firkas' there were the familiar figures of the European compound: washermen, butlers

returning from the market, tailors, maid servants. They portrayed the various bazaar tradesmen and craftsmen, peddlers, bangle sellers, butchers, fish-sellers, blacksmiths etc. They painted familiar town and village sights: elephants, ekkas, bullock carts, palanquins, pilgrims etc. (-Patna Painting. Mildred Archer. The Royal India Society. London, 1947). A similar demand was being met by the lithographs of Sir Charles D'Oyly, which portray the same type of the subject. Archer writes" D'Oyly's career is of great interest, for while he was posted in Patna he set up the Bihar Lithography, where he employed a Patna artist, Jairam Das, as his assistant. Several of his books portraying Indian scenes and costume, which had a wide circulation amongst Europeans in India, were made at Bihar Lithographic Press, and it is interesting to speculate how far D'Oyly may have influenced the Patna painters in their style and subject matter, or alternatively, whether they in making competent sepia drawings of the countryside and sketches for lithographs. Jairam Das received direct instructions from D'Oyly and were shown a wide range of work by Europeans. The results were electrifying. Captain Robert Smith in "Pictorial journal of travels in Hindustan from 1828 to 1833" writes "for productions of the pencil, through, I was informed, the fostering care of Sir C. D'Oyly, who has endeavoured, and with great success, to inspire the natives with some of his own pure taste and artist- like touches, instead of the hard dry manner of the Indian painters. I was much pleased with what I saw". Captain Smith of 44th regiment was himself a talented painter as well. In the Patna Museum there is a large scrapbook of his landscape, one of which shows himself seating under a huge umbrella sketching. While he was collector in Dacca from 1808-1812 he took lessons from George Chinnery the artist, who was living there also.

D'Oyly became an opium agent in Patna in 1818 and started living in a large bungalow at Bankipore on the Ganges. Later it belonged to a Civil Surgeon whose family lived in it till 1942. D'Oyly published several of lithographs and engravings books in his lifetime The Costumes and Customs of Modern India. The European in India was published in London in 1813, followed by the Antiquities of Dacca in Dacca in 1816. In 1828 he published Tom Raw, where he refers Chinnery and Griffin as 'the ablest limner in the land', and it is clear that his style was influenced by Chinnery. Bihar Amateur Lithographic Scrapbook was published in 1828. Mildred Archer mentioned about it- "in 1830

Painting from the Patna School, Mid 19th Century

Sir Charles D'Oyly, Sir Charles D'Oyly Seated at a Table, Smoking a Hookah, His Clerk Seated Nearby, Watching Opium Being Weighed

Views of Calcutta, sketches of the new road in journey from Calcutta to Gaya was published whereas "Views of Calcutta and its Environs", Lithographed and Published by Dickinson & Co, London was published in 1848. This was presented to the Victoria Memorial Hall by Mrs. George Lyell in memory of her husband in 1932. "It is not known whether D'Oyly had any direct contact with the better known Patna painters, though his assistant, Jairam Das, was related to many of them nor do we know whether D'Oyly actively influenced the Patna painters, but if a lithograph such as "The Nautch" (in the Bihar Lithographic Scrapbook) or some illustrations from "Costumes of India" are compared with the Patna paintings it is evident that one or the other has been influenced. It is possible that some of the stone of these lithographs were actually drawn on stone by Jairam Das and his Patna assistants from D'Oyly's drawings. ...as late as 1880 Bahadur Lal II was making free copies of birds from D'Oyly and Christopher Webb-Smith's books, and in the Patna Museum there is a copy of the pictures "Ord Bhawn" or Hindu fakir from D'Oyly's costumes of India. D'Oyly may also have had a great influence on the Patna painters in their choice of subjects. his own subject matter- birds, costumes, scenes of Indian life such as gambling, music, and dancing parties, elephants, a dancing girl holding a dove- identical that of Patna pictures, and it is possible that at a time when the Patna painters were exploring the European market and trying to adapt their style to European fashions, D'Oyly and his press may well have be supplied them with a significant model" (-Mildred Archer, Patna Painting, The Royal India Society, 1947)

The historian's hermeneutic, as suggested by his copious research, proceeds from an unstated and assumed premise of identification that is later disavowed in the subject- object relationship. What fundamentally rends the seriality of historical time and makes any particular moment of historical present out of joint with itself.

Kalighat Pat, a Protomodern Art Tradition?

by Pranabranjan Ray

Durga and Mahishasura

Owing to the waning of the late medieval rural patronage system, resulting from the introduction of new land tenurial arrangement under the Permanent Settlement of 1793 and the Cornwallis Code, the rural crafts lost their demand in the rural areas of the then Bengal and the craftsmen were in disarray. At the same time, colonial trade was leading to the growth of port-centric urban metropolis like Calcutta, especially from the last decade of the eighteenth century. Needless to say, various kinds of compradors or native collaborators of colonial trade were the earliest wealth accumulating settlers of the city, they were soon followed by absentee landlords of rural hinterland -created by the Permanent Settlement. Some from among both the groups soon became the first set of real-estate owners and urban rentiers in the growing metropolis of colonial expropriation. But they were not the only early settlers of the metropolis. The colonial trade as well as the need of durable asset building of the native settlers necessitated the presence of army of skilled and unskilled wage labourers. Although many of them remained seasonal immigrants from rural areas around, some of them, at least the skilled ones became the lower-rung citizens of the metropolis. The skilled artisans who were immigrating into the city in search of secure employment, needed to adapt their skills to cater to new demands of the neo-urbanites. They had to learn cognate skills to tackle new materials and methods. Artisans skilled in carving and engraving, were learning print-taking on paper for making themselves worthy of newly grown printing and publishing industry.

Historically, the genesis, growth and decay of Kalighat pat painting tradition, need to be viewed in this perspective. The history of the school of art, however, is a poor index of its artistic significance. Yet, the aesthetic worth of the Kalighat pat painting increases with the knowledge of its history. The history, however, is largely conjectural as very few of the paintings, by themselves, can hardly be used as documents in evidence.

Ganesha

Shiva-Mahayogin

Shiva-Parvati

It seems that groups of Hindu clay-idol makers and pat painters, belonging mainly to kumbhakar and sutradhar castes (and not to the chitrakar caste - a group ocilating between folkish-Hinduism and Islam), emigrated from Midnapore, and settled down in what was to become the patuapara neighbourhood in the Kalighat region of south Calcutta, in the beginning of the nineteenth century. The push-factor in their emigration from rural areas, needless to say, was waning of patronage. The pull factor - ipso facto was not urban situation, but the streams of pilgrim to the Kali-temple of Kalighat who would inevitably buy some cheap souvenirs from the market surrounding the temple while returning, Calcutta's rapid urbanization from the beginning of the nineteenth century not only led to greater volume of pilgrim visits from hinterland but also frequent visits by Hindu Calcuttans. The increased demand for souvenirs was the prime incentive for the immigrant idol makers and pata painters. Anticipating popular demand they started producing miniature clay idols and painted iconic images of popular Hindu gods and goddesses (mainly of Sakta and Saiva sects). By the second decade of the nineteenth century the Kalighat patuas were turning over hundreds of these cheap paintings on paper per week to be picked up by pilgrims

The necessity of producing painting in bulk and that too at quick pace led the Kalighat patuas to adapt a big technological change, a change from that followed by the rural pata painters traditionally. The Kalighat painters shifted to manufactured paper as support, from cloth and/or handmade paper pasted on cloth that the rural patuas did. Secondly, instead of vegetable and mineral pigments tempered by vegetable glue that the rural patuas used, the Kalighat patuas started using manufactured water-colours (sometimes mixed with opaque whites) and inks (mainly for contour lines).In that too the Kalighat patuas would use improvised brushes with bristles, instead of various kinds of cloth dabbers. The technological change, necessitated by quick production in bulk, calling for less labour intensive process, and availability manufactured material inputs led to a unthought of visualinguistic and

Kalighat Painting

stylistic disjuncture in the Bengal pat painting tradition. But whatever, by way of change in materials and methods, went into the making of the Kalighat pat painting were not, at least to start with, resultant of any conscious choice.
Let us, then, make a list of the disjunctive visualinguistic elements, resulting from change in art technology, that characterize the Kalighat pat paintings distinctively.

First, let us deal with the representation of idols of gods and goddesses, like Kali in her various manifestations and Siva - her consort - in various situations, which formed the three-fourth of all Kalighat pats, painted between the first decades of the nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth century (the one-hundred year life span of the school). Single, almost the whole sheet covering icon - in all its codified iconographic attributes - would occupy the larger part of the pictorial space. The image would be defined by concavilinear and convexilinear parabolically flowing contour lines, denying any anatomical connotation. The innards of the figures would either be coloured flatly or have no colour, denying illusionistic representation of bodily volume. Whatever suggestion of bodily volume there would be, would be the resultant effect of juxtaposition of the convexilinear and concavilinear modeled line. As these extremely linearly and flatly rendered figures would be posited singly on flat surface, without any suggestion of any image elsewhere in the pictorial space, there would not be any illusion-producing visual element in the painting, consequently the painting would be two-dimensional image on a flat surface, so dearly valued by the Modernists.

However, of more art-historical importance, are the paintings with secular non-ritualistic subject matter. Although these did not, in all probability, constitute more than one-third of the total bulk of all Kalighat pats, these were something that represented the mentality, the attitude of the makers. In these they revealed themselves to be more than just caterers of ritual objects. They were artists with mind. These immigrants into the colonial expropriative city were critical of the behavioral immorality and debauchery of the new urban nuveau riche and leisured wealth earners and priestly classes dependent on the former. Through visual narratives of contemporary events and metaphorical representation of human follies by surrogating human images by the imagery of beings like cats and fishes etc., the artists objectified their attitudes and mentality. Visualinguistically these were of the same genre as the iconic pictures, but to the artists their compositions posed greater syntactical problems which they solved with consummate artistry. As in these, they had to configurate more than one figurative and other images, on flat two-dimensional surface without taking recourse of any illusionistic strategy like three-dimensional perspective and relative proportional size-variation etc., they faced the formidable task of integrating a painting. This they achieved by carrying the rhythm, of the parabolically flowing curvilinear lines which contoured each image, continuously through the whole compositions. A remarkably painterly strategy. There is the internal evidence of the Tarakeswar Mahanta and Elokeshi event, on which scores of pats were drawn in Kalighat, that these secular pats could not have been painted before the second-half of the nineteenth century. Form the quality of paper and the relatively large size of some of these pats, it seems that many of these were painted on

Ganga

Narasimha

Krishna-Balarama

Kartikeya

Parvati-Ganesha

Shiva-Parvati

Ravana and Hanuman

commission from connoisseurs like Justice John Woodroff (who translated and edited Sanskrit texts on Tantra under the pseudonym Arthur Avalon), the civilian W.G. Archer and Senior Thomas Bata, whose collections are to be found now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, the Bodlian Library, Oxford and the Charles University Museum, Prague.

With the growth, first of manual printmaking through wood block printing and lithography, and then from the second decade of the twentieth century - through mechanical reproduction, the demand for hand painted pats were declining rapidly. And by the early thirties the demand dried up completely, leading to the demise of the hundred year old Kalighat pat tradition.

Kalighat pat tradition, howsoever it may have differed from the traditional pata painting of rural Bengal, did not lead to the emergence of the self-conscious individual artist, with personal thematic and stylistic concerns. The thematic and visualinguistic concern of the Kalighat patuas, till the end, remained under community hegemony, so much so that the patuas would endlessly go on producing similar images in similar style. The Kalighat tradition of pat painting can at best be assigned its place in the history of Indian art as comprising a school of proto-history of modern Indian art.

The protomodern visualinguistics (as detailed earlier in this article) of the Kalighat pat, impressed the modern Bengal individualist artists like the post-1925 Jamini Roy, Sunayani Devi in the thirties and forties, Nandalal Bose of the Haripura Congress posters, Abanindranath of his Chandimangal and Krishnamangal serieses, Nirode Mazumdar and Paritosh Sen so much, that they appropriated and adapted elements from the Kalighat pat tradition and saved their art from being derivative of Euro-genetic Modernist art and/or revivalist Indian art.

Academic Naturalism in Art of Bengal: The First Phase of Modernity

by Mrinal Ghosh

Sheikh Amir of Karraya, Male Sardar Bearer, Undated, Company School

Modernity in Bengal art showed its first sign of flowering with the emergence of British academic naturalism. The beginning and development of academic naturalism was the outcome of British colonial impact and hegemony of British rule in India.

The official art policy of England during the second half of eighteenth century was dominated by British Royal Academy. The Royal Academy was established in England in 1768 under the patronization of King George III. The celebrated British painter Joshua Reynolds (1723-92) was its founder-president. He was initially responsible for framing the guide lines of the Academy and consequently the policy of art practices and art education of that country. The rendering of mirror image of nature as practiced by the renaissance painters was considered as the guiding norm of art practice. The heritage of the same naturalism was brought to our country as a colonial art policy. This art policy gained ground and proliferated through the art education devised by the Art School established in Calcutta during 1854. The emergence and spread of this first phase of modernity has a pre-history.

Western naturalism made its first imprint in Indian painting during the Mughal period at about sixteenth century. The Mughal court painters tried to assimilate to some extent the naturalistic trends of the art of European 'mannerism'. Conversely Mughal style also cast some influence on Western artists. Paintings of Rembrandt (1606-1699) revealed some traces of it. With gradual decline of Mughal Empire after the demise of Aurangajeb in 1707 the court painters patronized by Mughal monarchs disintegrated. British academic naturalism made its first foothold within this void. Its initial advent started during the reign of East India Company through the visiting British artists who came to India to make an easy fortune. The first among them was Tilly Kettle. He arrived at Madras in 1769 and then came to Calcutta in 1771, and stayed here till 1776. He was followed by John Zoffany (1783-89), Arther Devis (1785-95), George Ferrington, Thomas Hiki, Thomas and William Daniel, Francesco Rinaldi, George Chinnery (1802-25), Robert Home, John Smart (1785-95), Ozias Humphray (1785-87), Samuel Andrews (1791-1807), Diana Hill (1786-1806) et.al. Though these artists were not part of Bengal art heritage, yet their paintings made considerable influence towards propagation of naturalistic form in pre-modern and pre-art school trend of art practice. Their art also influenced the aesthetic taste of the rich and so called aristocratic people of Bengal.

Works of these European artists were instrumental in generating a semi-naturalistic style of painting known as 'Company School'. The paintings of this style were first developed at Thanjore of South India and gradually spread to other parts of the country. The Company painters were originally engaged in Mughal and various other royal ateliers. They lost their job with the decline of these patronages and came to the newly born and growing city of Calcutta and established contacts with visiting European artists. Many of them were employed by the British aristocrats and developed a style as demanded by their foreign patrons. Their inherent skill and subtlety of taste mingled with the newly earned technique of naturalism to give rise to a peculiar form known as Company Style. The Company School continued from middle of eighteenth up to about middle of nineteenth century.

While a section of artists working under

Early Bengal School, Oil Painting

British patronage created the company School, another section of village patuas migrated to the growing city of Calcutta and congregated near the Kalighat temple and painted pictures of religious, mythical and social subjects slightly transforming their own folk style to meet the demands of pilgrims and common people who used to visit the temple. This was known as Kalighat Pat painting and has been famous as a very original indigenous style of Bengal, assimilating both folk and urban ethos. The practice of this style was, however, not limited around the vicinity of Kalighat temple only, it was practiced in different other centres of Calcutta also. Originating during early nineteenth century this style developed up to first quarter of twentieth century, after which it gradually declined. Despite some urban sensibility and rounded voluminousness in delineation of form it had very little link with the naturalist trend. Rather it had created a glorious anti-naturalist but realist original indigenous style linked with deep rooted tradition that had an enlightened impact in subsequent development of our modern and modernist art.

The Bat-tala wood and metal engraving developed during 1860-s and 1870-s was another trend of folk-urban style featuring special characteristics in graphic print media. These prints, though in some cases convey a sense of mass and volume, were mostly flat, decorative, two-dimensional in execution, not akin to any naturalistic form. These

Kalighat Pat

'mechanical reproductions' were responsible for gradual disintegration of the practice of Kalighat paintings.
Another important trend of naïve naturalism came into being through the practice of native artists, between 1800 and a few early decades after 1900, who had come in contact with professional British artists and learnt from them the techniques of naturalist executions but could not master in all its intimate intricacies and the minute geometricity of working with perspective, yet assimilated their newly earned knowledge of naturalism with their inherent wisdom in traditional rendering to generate this new style known as 'early Bengal school'. The artists were mostly anonymous. They worked in oil on canvas or wood mostly on mythological and religious subjects. Previously these were designated as French-Bengal and Dutch-Bengal school, which has now been abandoned. They are now known simply as oils by unknown artists of Bengal.

The purpose of opening art educational institute in India has been very explicitly stated in the Education Dispatch of East India Company of 19 July 1854. It states: 'None can have a stronger claim on our attention than ... education. It is one of our sacred duties to be the means ... of conferring upon the natives of India those vast moral and material blessings which flow from general diffusion of useful knowledge, and which India may, under providence, derive from her connection with England'. To the British authorities naturalism was the only true expression of fine arts. They did not consider the vast spiritual and humanist tradition of Indian art of any consequence from the view point of fine art. They categorized it as minor decorative art. It was therefore entirely discarded. Moreover through training in naturalist form their intention was to create some artist-craftsmen necessary for their administrative and other decorative works. This was the purpose of their imparting art education to the natives of India.

The first Western type art school in India was, however, opened at Poona in 1798 by a British resident Charles Malet. Run by an artist James Wales, it was very short-lived. In Calcutta the very first effort of imparting institutional art education was the formation of 'Mechanical Institute' in 1839. Colsworthy Grant used to teach here constructional drawings. Classes were held first in Town Hall, then in a premise at the eastern side of Governor's palace. But it was very short lived.

After its demise the serious and permanent venture was the formation of 'The School of Industrial Art' on 16 August 1854 at Garanhata. The purpose of opening such school was 'the humanizing the culture of the fine arts'. At first it was a privately governed institution. It started with 45 students in clay modeling and 50 students in drawing and painting. M. Rigaud was the instructor in clay modeling. M. Agyar taught drawing. After some time to accommodate more students the school was shifted to another building at Moti Sheel Street in the Kolutola area. Gradually it acquired financial grant from the government. Finally it was taken over by the Director of Public Instruction of the government. Henry Hover Lock, the superintendent of London School of Design was assigned the charge of the school on 29 June 1864. At the same time the school was shifted to 166, Bowbazar Street. In 1865 its name was changed to 'The Government School of Art'. Finally in 1951 it was upgraded as 'The Government College of Art and Craft'.

H.H. Locke was the Principal of Government School of Art for a stretch of 18 years from 1864 to 1882. He stressed on imparting art education on the basis of model of South Kensington School at London. At Kensington academic naturalism of

Radha Charan Bagchi

Joshua Reynolds style was the primary norm of art practice, though other artists in England during that time were trying to come out of the strict norm of naturalism, movements of Turner and the pre-Raphaelite artists being the examples. Locke was not sympathetic to those new trends. Consequently those were not considered for imparting art education at Calcutta. Academic naturalism was taken up as the only norm, which continued unabated till 1896. In 1896 E.B. Havell joined the art school as superintendent. He made an endeavor to introduce art education based on Indian tradition. But side by side education based on academic naturalism also continued throughout twentieth century.

So during the second half of nineteenth century a number of artists proficient in academic naturalism came out from the Government art School. Among the early students of Locke, Annada Prasad Bagchi (1849-1905) and Shyamacharan Shreemani (?-1875) were two important names.

Annada Prasad was admitted to art school on 13 July 1865. He earned proficiency in wood engraving, lithography and other engraving techniques and finally learnt oil painting under Principal Locke. He earned fame for illustration of the famous book The Antiquities of Orissa by Dr. Rajendralal Mitra, which he did during 1868-69. He was a skilled portrait painter in oil. He also worked on various composition paintings based on mythical themes. In 1878 he formed 'Calcutta Art Studio' along with other students of art school like Nabakumar Biswas (1851-1935), Phanibhushan Sen, Jogendranath Mukhopadhyay and Krishna Chandra Pal. The studio played very important role in the spread of illustrated books and coloured lithographs on mythical subjects in naturalistic style among the elites and common people alike. He became a legend during his life time and in many ways instrumental in spread of academic naturalism in Bengal.

Annada Prasad was very much contemporary to another legendary figure of naturalistic painting in India, Raja Ravi Varma (1848-1906). This Kerala born painter had no institutional training. He was almost self-taught. But his skill and proficiency in academic style was widely acclaimed. He even earned international fame through his dexterously painted works on Indian mythological themes. In the context of Bengal art his importance was that through his prints and oleographs of his paintings he was instrumental in forming art awareness among a wide cross section of the people of Bengal.

Shyamacharan Shreemani was an expert in wood engraving and lithography. In 1869 he was appointed as a teacher of geometrical drawing by H.H.Locke. He was famous not for academic naturalism but how he tried to awaken an awareness about greatness of Indian art heritage. His book on Indian art theory Sukumar Shilper Utpatti o Arya Jatir Shilpa Chaturi (The Rise of Fine Arts and Aesthetic Sensibilities of the Aryans) published in 1874 was the first attempt in serious art writing in Bengal in a vernacular language.

We do not know much about the artists who were coming out of art school during its earlier years. They might have been engaged in various jobs. Very minimum of them have come to lime light as creative artists. Among the painters who have made some imprints in creativity a few of the important names are: Bamapada Bandopadhyay (1851-1932), Shashi Kumar Hesh (1869- ?), Jamini Prakash Ganguly (1876-1953), Bhabani Charan Laha (1880-1946), Gangadhar Dey, Pramathanath Mitra et.al.

Bamapada Bandopadhyay was famous not only as a portrait painter but also for his paintings on mythological themes done in academic style. The oleographs of his mythological paintings were circulated within the country four years before those of Ravi Varma. The first series of oleographs based on his paintings on the themes of Mahabharata like Arjun and Urbashi and Uttara and Abhimanyu was circulated in 1890. He is also famous for his paintings on secular themes. His oil titled Juggler and Monkey was awarded in third Calcutta Fine Exhibition in January 1879, when his age was 28. Parallel to Ravi Varma his contribution to create an excellence in naturalist form on nationalist subject was very important and far fetched.

Shashi Kumar Hesh, after his initial training in Government School of Art, went to Italy in 1894 and was trained in Royal Academy of Rome. After that he also received training at the Munich Royal Academy. Hesh was famous as a portrait painter. He painted portraits in oil and pastel in immaculate academic technique of various celebrated persons of the country among them Maharshi Debendranath Tagore, Dadabhai Nouraji, Bipin Chandra Pal, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Ramesh Chandra Dutta, Rabindranath, Jagadish Chandra Basu et. al. are important. Possibly he died during the decade of 1940-s while visiting America.

Debiprasad Roychowdhury, Triumph of Labour

Jamini Prakash Ganguly was famous both as a portrait painter and landscapist. He was related to the Tagore family of Jorasanko and was intimate to Rabindranath and Abanindranath. Like Abanindranath he also had initial training in painting under Olito Gilardi and Charles Palmer. He was appointed Vice-Principal of Government Art School on 19 June 1916 and acted in this post till 1928. He made unparallel contribution in landscape painting, where he to some extent idealized naturalism. His landscapes of Himalayas, Bengal villages and river Padma exemplify such assimilation.

Bhabani Charan Laha assimilated naturalism with some sort of Indian sensibility. Apart from portrait and landscape painting in water colour and oil he also worked on various mythological subjects based on Ramayana, Mahabharata and other literary themes.

Among the sculptors Rohoni Kanta Nag (1868-1895) was an important figure. He is famous as the first Indian sculptor to have academic training in Italy. Within a short span of life of 27 years, he proved his talent. When he died in Calcutta on 13 May 1895 after returning from Italy, leaving behind all his sculptures and paintings there, it was Rabindranath Tagore who had to exert himself to bring back the late sculptor's works from Italy at the poet's own expense.

Other important sculptors who made who made important contribution in academic naturalism were Jadunath Pal (1838-?), Shital Chandra Bandopadhyay (1879-?), Ashwini Kumar Barman Roy (1882-?) and Hiranmay Roychowdhury (1884-1962) et.al.

To round of the topic of sculpture let us include here the illustrious name of Debiprasad Roychowdhury (1899-1975). He was a towering figure both in painting and sculpture. As a painter he was trained under Abanindranath and expanded the horizon of neo-Indian school of painting. As a sculptor he was confined mostly within naturalism, occasionally infusing influences of Rodin and Bourdel with a romantic fervor. Debiprasad was a significant portrait sculptor. Only in later life he created a few composition sculptures like Triumph of Labour (1954), When Winter Comes (1957), Martyrs Memorial (1956) etc.

Since the inception of 'School of Industrial Art' in 1854 trends of academic naturalism went unabated among the art school trained artists. It was stalled when E.B. Havell (1861-1954) took charge of the Art School as Superintendent on 6 July 1896. He questioned the validity of art education to Indian students through an alien naturalistic form and professed that art education should generate from the indigenous traditional root. So discarding training in academic naturalism he introduced training in Indian traditional norm of painting. This was the period of nationalist movement in Bengal. Awareness was growing in all corners of society against colonial hegemony. Even before coming of Havell, Abanindranath, though initially trained in academic naturalist art, started his search for an Indian identity in his painting. This awareness gradually spread into a movement of the neo-Indian school.

But this nationalistic spirit was not accepted by all. There rose a protest among the art school students against indiscriminate indianisation of art education discarding academic naturalism. Lead by Ranada Prasad Gupta (1870-1927), a third year student of the art school, they formed 'Jubilee Art Academy' at Baithakkhana Road of Calcutta in 1897. Its purpose was to intensify naturalist training in art education. Number of students who in later life became famous as artists was initially trained in this institution. Among them some of the important names are Narendranath Sarkar (1881-1943), Phanindranath Basu (1888-1926), Jogendranath Shil (1895-1926), Atul Basu (1898-1977), Basanta Kumar Ganguly (1893-1968), Hemendranath Majumder (1894-1948), Pramathanath Mallik (1894-1983), Abhay Charan Das (1886-1956) and Prahlad Chandra Karmakar (?-1946).

Among all these artists special mention should be made of Hemendra Nath Majumder and Atul Bose. Hemendranath's mastery over execution both in oil and watercolour is exemplary. He heightened physical sensuousness to a superb aesthetic level. Mainly famed as a portraitist Atul Bose's few works on Bengal famine of 1943 and number of his landscapes show how he could amalgamate naturalism and realism. Jamini Roy (1887-1972) in his early works showed great skill in naturalism. Being inspired by nationalist feelings he gradually shifted to folk idioms to build up an indigenous identity. But his proficiency in naturalism and post-impressionist technique added a lot in formation of his original style.

Through these artists, naturalistic trends were carried up to 1940-s and beyond. Even today it exerts considerable power in building up forms of contemporaneous value. Naturalism, despite various projects of defying and surpassing it in different phases, has turned out to be a vital idiom in the formation of our modern and modernist art.

J.P. Gangooly

Under the Banyan Tree - The Woodcut Prints of 19th Century Calcutta

by Dr. Paula Sengupta

Sri Panchanan Karmakar's Work

The Bat-tala woodcuts, together with the Kalighat pats, were the popular art of the Black Town of 19th century Calcutta. They comprise perhaps the only indigenous art activity of the time that may be termed a 'school', so prolific was its impact and so far-reaching its influence.

The art of the Black Town catered essentially to the semi-educated masses that thronged the suburbs of the city and the mofussil towns. These patuas and engravers were of a different breed from the 'gentleman' artists who catered to the drills and demands of British commissions. The term 'Bat-tala' is earned from the area of north Calcutta where this indigenous school of printmaking developed. It soon became a flourishing trade and picture-production outfits began to mushroom all over Shobhabazar, Dorjitola, Ahiritola, Kumurtuli, Garanhata, Simulia and Baghbazar.

The Bat-tala relief prints made their maiden appearance in the first half of the 19th century as book illustrations. Bat-tala books consisted of a huge volume of crass literature that was cheaply printed on cheap paper. With the sizeable increase of the literate or semi-literate public of the 1850's, there was an ever-growing demand for printed material. Books on the natural sciences, history and law were no longer as much in demand as were pauranic mythology, pedagogical literature, narrative fantasy, historical and legendary romance and the like. As Bat-tala literature was aimed at the semi-educated reader, the publishers, cleverly enough sought to supplement the text with interesting visuals. Thus the publisher's demand for the engravers and printers who clustered around the presses began to grow. As more and more publishers and printers sprouted, printmakers increasingly began to set up studios in the vicinity and were employed to illustrate the literature churned out by them.

It is these same printmakers who in later years, perhaps the late 1920's or early 1930's, began to turn out big single-sheet wood engravings and woodcuts.

The engravers at Bat-tala mostly belonged to the traditional artisan castes of the sutradhars and the shankaris though there were occasional exceptions. For generations they had practised their skills as metal engravers, blacksmiths and goldsmiths. They were well versed in cutting, furrowing, carving and chipping in various metals. Though it is often assumed that their woodcut skills were learnt from European printmakers who worked in India at the time, this is highly unlikely for various reasons, the first and most obvious being that intaglio printmaking was the preferred European medium. Secondly, it can be proved from the character of the lines of the Bat-tala wood engravers that they did not use the bully or the burin of their European counterparts. Rather, they used jeweller's needles both for wood and copper plate engraving, employing the traditional jewellers techniques for engraving.

Thirdly, until the advent of Bengali printing presses in the early 19th century, the English-owned presses established since the last quarter of the 18th century, employed goldsmiths, ironsmiths, coppersmiths, carpenters and wood-carvers from traditional artisan communities to work their presses.[1] Regular printing of maps and charts began in 1792. It is certain that these were printed in the intaglio process. It was in these presses that the artisans learnt to put their traditional skills to new applications and also learnt to take impressions. The rudimentary training that they received at these printing and publishing outfits taught them the technology of a new art, but not an art itself.

The 'new' art was perhaps born of the social milieu in which these printmakers lived. At the time, the colonial presence was the predominant presence. The subject people were greatly impressed and influenced by all that was held in high esteem by the European. This was a time when the Europeans were strengthening their political and economic hold over Bengal and the printed word, naturally, became of great importance. Coupled with this was a steady influx of art objects, paintings and prints from Europe. To make the printed word more effective, the demand for book illustration grew. The traditional craftsmen had before them European art objects as role models. However, coupled with this was their tradition-bound outlook. Putting their inherent skills to new use, these artisans developed a technique and a style that is unique in the history of printmaking the world over. While European artists had practically no role in effecting this alchemy, British imperialism played the role of the prime mover in transforming the traditional craftsman. With the advent of the Bengali printing presses in the beginning of the 19th century, this school of printmaking, by now identified as Bat-tala, received a fresh impetus.

The second half of the 19th century saw the entry of art school products into the fray of Bengali book illustrators. Though many of them hailed from the traditional artisan communities, they were, nevertheless, products of European academic art education. They brought about a considerable change in the content, style and technology of the Bat-tala reliefs.

Thematically, the Bat-tala reliefs may be divided into five categories --- iconic representations of pauranic divinities, mythological pictures of pauranic and syncretic divinities in action, the social pictures, the narrative scenes based on memories of stage productions and finally, the visuals of advertisements.

The first category is by far the largest and includes both book illustrations and a large number of single-sheet display prints. These include among others, images of Parvati in her many manifestations, Vishnu's Dasavatara, the Hindu Trinity, the legends of Ganga, and even, very occasionally, unusual representations of Christian icons such as the Infant Jesus.

The second category of mythological pictures is comprised of narratives based on episodes from the epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. The Krishna legends from the Bhagvatpurana, the Devipurana, the Kalikapurana, the Chandi and the Chandimangal provided the most popular subjects for illustration. The myths concerning Shiva, particularly from the Shivayana, were also popular. Other popular subjects of illustration were stories from the Annadamangal, the medieval Bengali ballads and the Durga legend.

The third group of social pictures deals with contemporary social life. They are often satirical comments in a narrative vein on the babu and bibi culture of the time or visual reports of contemporary social scandals and occurrences such as the Elokeshi and Mahanta prints. Some are simply straightforward descriptions of contemporary rituals and practices without sarcasm or comment. Others are representative of the mounting friction between the colonial rulers and the native population. Yet others, such as the sophisticated print of a Hand holding tiger prawns are subtle comments on the eccentricities and opulent lifestyles of the middle class Bengali.

The fourth category of prints came into vogue in the latter half of the 19th century and, in all faithfulness to the theme represented,

Ravan and Hanuman

they are highly dramatic. They represent the academic style of the Art School products who had by now entered the fray of commercial printing activity in Bengal. So too the last category of prints which comprise some of the earliest illustrations in advertising.

Thematically, particularly in the aforementioned third, fourth and last categories, there was a fair degree of Europeanism visible in the conception of indigenous themes. The influence of the rural pat tradition of Bengal, however, remained much stronger other than in the stage narratives and the advertisement visuals.

While technologically and thematically, European influence on Bat-tala reliefs remained minimal, stylistically, there were several foreign and indigenous influences that contributed to the unique nature of this ingenious art form.

With the influx of European art in India in the 19th century, the Indian artist, for the first time, became aware of the lack of three-dimensionality in his indigenous art. His major preoccupation became the effort to endow his pictures with this quality, which meant "composing with motifs in perspective, imparting of volume to individual motifs and foreshortening to indicate the movement of a voluminous body.... But since they did not know the optical principal of the vanishing point, the principle of

Radha-Krishna

distance-size interrelationship, the effect of light from a single source in the revelation of volume and distance and anatomical drawing in light-and-shade, they could never achieve what they were trying to do." [2]

This struggle to create spatial distance in the picture by the Bat-tala printmakers is seen in each of the thematic categories previously described. The earliest examples of the iconic representations of pauranic divinities are two-dimensional with neither background nor inward depth. Marginal progress was seen in later years when some attempts at introducing a foreground have been made in occasional prints by drawing the furniture or architecture in linear perspective or by placing a bird or animal therein. However, despite being in the foreground, the trees, peacocks and deer are smaller in size than the people or the deities housed within the temple or on the pedestal. This may be due to the Bat-tala printmaker's ignorance of European perspective or, alternatively, it may be due to his indigenous practice of representing the divinities and earthly beings in their correct hierarchical order. However, the very fact that he attempted the use of perspective at all is indicative of European influence.

However, as the traditional artisans who made these prints were unfamiliar with the correct manipulation of relative proportions of the motifs according to distance and with the principal of foreshortening, these attempts fell flat. Far more successful aesthetically are the naïve iconic representations of gods and goddess placed in background spaces or surrounding environments that have been created without any consideration towards proportion or perspective. The only consideration here is design and the level of sophistication achieved by the Bat-tala printmaker in this regard is more than evident in the skilful and uninhibited arrangement of various pictorial elements. So too in the case of the icons placed flatly in an unadorned picture-space.

In addition to this effort to create dimension in the picture space, the Indian artist was also concerned with the endowment of volume and effecting liveliness in physical gestures in his representations of objects of the phenomenal world all through the 18th and 19th century.

The endowment of volume was attempted by defining the figure or represented object with contour lines and then filling it up with hatching. These hatchings were often curvilinear lines, concentric to the contour lines that further accentuated the volume of the body. However, more often than not, the technique of cross-hatching was used, thus endowing a decorative tonality rather than volume. The Bat-tala woodcuts soon became, not merely linear representations, but rhythmic organisation of decorative areas lineally enclosed in a flat space to form a composite whole. This unique adaptation of a basically atonal medium by the Bat-tala printmakers reached its peak in the 19th century. However, with the entry of the Art School products after 1858, this element of decorative design so admired in the Bat-tala prints, began to disappear. The figures were now defined by semi-anatomical contour lines and motifs were conceived in light and shade, defined in tones and masses with chiaroscuro effects typical of western academic art traditions.

The Bat-tala printmakers effected liveliness in physical gestures by resorting to caricature and exaggerating facial features and physical actions. This is typical of classical and rural Indian art traditions. Battle-scenes are fine examples of exaggerated physical action. Fierce battles are seen in progress, opposing armies locked in combat, arrows flying to and fro, charging elephants and steeds, dismembered bodies strewn across the field of battle, and blackbirds flying ominously across the sky. However, the Art School come-outs of the latter half of the 19th century discarded this naïve, but effective ploy of the traditional artist, and took to anatomically correct representation of figures and objects. They thus resorted more to dramatic compositions and theatrical chiaroscuro effects so as to bring about liveliness in the figures.

The compositions of the Bat-tala prints are widely varied, though lacking perspective almost altogether in any conventional sense. In some narrative compositions, motifs are arranged in a row on a single flat picture plane, or in two consecutive rows, one behind the other or one above the other. At times, motifs are decoratively arranged all over the picture surface, the ground seen as a meandering path zigzagging across the picture-plane. While the narrative sequence is not necessarily maintained, some hierarchical

order is maintained in the arrangement of motifs. In yet other compositions, there is an assumed three-dimensional space not necessarily visible in terms of perspective but indicated as open spaces that could be oceans or battlefields. Some compositions are multi-perspective and arranged in a decorative manner. Yet others display an isometric perspective as in the Maharas prints. All these methods of composition are derived from our rural pats of Bengal and Orissa and from our classical conceptions of perspective as seen in the miniature paintings of the Rajasthani or Provincial Mughal schools where perspective is assumed rather than effectively achieved.

However, the late 19th century Bat-tala prints were of a different nature having been effected by the Art School come-outs trained in British academic art traditions. These compositions, conceived with a vanishing point in mind, contained both background and foreground, motifs arranged accordingly in decreasing or increasing sizes at different distances, spatial depth created by an appropriately placed horizon line, and light and shade effects to enhance volume and movement. Thus, towards the close of the 19th century, the Bat-tala woodcuts increasingly came to be executed in accordance with Western art tradition and lost much of their innovative appeal.

The last sphere of influence lies in the elements of the phenomenal world that were used as motifs in the Bat-tala prints. These motifs are a peculiar conglomeration of European influences and Indian art traditions that gave the Bat-tala prints their unique imagery and language. For example, while the use of stiff, doll-like figures with exaggerated facial features and physical gestures are reminiscent of the Bengal terracotta or wooden dolls, they are dressed in the north Indian ghagra seen in Rajasthani miniatures rather than the sari worn by the women of Bengal. So too with the rich decorative patterns that crowded the Bat-tala prints - the richly decorated costumes, the carefully delineated flora and fauna, the architectural detail are all derived from the miniature tradition.

However, the intrusion of European influence is evident in the new visual vocabulary that the Bat-tala printmakers developed. Often the babu is seen in his traditional attire of dhoti and kurta but with the English 'pump' shoe on his feet. At times these intermingling influences even made their way into the mythological pictures, though more evident in the social pictures. The Nayak and Nayika, resplendent in their Indian attire, are seated on European furniture respectively strumming an Indian stringed instrument and smoking a hookah. A step further is the picture of a European couple in exactly the same setting but with a liquor bottle and glass in the hands of the gentleman and a violin in the hands of the lady. To the right of the gentleman stands a kitmatgar in Indian dress. The furniture and the objects d'art are all Victorian. It would seem that the Bat-tala artist had an overwhelming desire to include the European in his art for sometimes, he found his way into the most unexpected places as heralds atop a temple or even as guardian angels and doorkeepers! Scalloped curtains and Corinthian columns frame many an interior scene, while Palladian mansions are peopled by gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon. Even bidi label designs began to sport portraits of Nelson and Napoleon.

The Kalighat pats too had their influence on or interaction with Bat-tala woodcuts. While the linear quality and sweeping contours of the Kalighat pat-chitras had their impact on the wood engraving and woodcut drawings of the Bat-tala printmakers, the assumption that the Bat-tala prints were a mere cheap translation of the Kalighat paintings is incorrect. It is true that the Kalighat patuas had their paintings replicated by the Bat-tala printmakers to enable

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cheaper and more voluminous production and, therefore, greater circulation. However, this interaction between the two marks neither the beginnings nor the growth of the Bat-tala school, which developed on its own impetus as an independent and unique art form. Nevertheless, the impact produced a style, which is neither Old Chitpore nor Kalighat, the exponent of which was Gobindachandra Ray. His highly individualistic style, though it was derived to some extent from pre-Renaissance European portraiture, consisted basically of woodcuts with white dots and minute decorations done by engraving. The Kalighat patuas and the Bat-tala printmakers vied with each other through the 1860's and 1870's. The engravers gradually invaded the market of the patuas with their new improved technology. However, this same factor soon led to the rapid decline of the craft and trade of the Bat-tala printmaker himself when lithography and oleography entered the popular art market in the 1880's, thus ushering in a new model of urban commercial art.

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The Arabian Nights and the Web of Stories

by R. Siva Kumar

Sheherzade Telling Stories, 1930

"A doctor is talking to you: 'This pill will erase your memory. You will forget all your suffering and all your loss. But you will also forget your entire past.' Do you swallow the pill?" (-Yann Martel)

The above sentence is from the penultimate page of Yann Martel's Beatrice and Virgil, an allegorical tale about representation of the holocaust. But the question is agonisingly existential and would be relevant to an artist in a colonised country, to immigrants or refugees in alien lands, and to men and women in many other circumstances for whom memory has become painful. They would all want to forget and let life move ahead and yet they wouldn't want to forget, or welcome amnesia.

To lose one's memory is to lose oneself, to get lost in the world just as one gets lost in an unknown city. This is what amnesia teaches us. Without memory what was once familiar becomes alien, what once belonged to you becomes estranged. Without these ties of belonging one doesn't know who one is. And not knowing who one is can drive us mad or make us depressive. The thought of dementia does not promise bliss but makes us see dread. Thus the loss of memory is not merely the loss of self but also of humanity. Without memory and our many ties with people and things we shall be turned into a thing among things.

Our world is a web of stories that connect us with others, and men with things, and hold everything together with ties of belonging and non-belonging, of oneness and difference, of friendship and hatred, of love and enmity, of fraternity and domination, of equality and hierarchy, of compassion and cruelty, of help and exploitation. And this web of stories is ever changing, one overlapping the other, one rescinding the other, or one mutating into many recensions or into other new stories, changing with every teller and every hearer, worming itself into the womb of other stories and transforming it from within or re-emerging and taking a new birth and a new identity. A living society is in short a web of living stories.

Colonialism arrived in many societies like a marauder who came to plunder but stayed on to rule. But the new emperor, and sometimes the new empress, who ascended the throne being not witty enough to understand the stories decreed them to a halt. They replaced storytellers with taxonomists who came in various guisesdressed as geologists, archaeologists, zoologists, botanists, linguists, and the like. They turned land into maps; caves, temples and mosques into monuments; objects with which one told stories of life and dreams into objects in museums; put animals into menageries and plants into herbariums; and transformed speech into grammar. In their hand life became knowledge, and life being too restless and unruly to be classified was dismantled, everythingmen, beasts, plants and thingswere detached from the web of stories and put into appropriate boxes or columns and tuned into items that could be studied and analysed without hurry.

Initially this was not totally unpleasant to the native storytellers and the readers and listeners of their stories, turning stories into taxonomic knowledge

appeared to them to be the work of a marvellous magician. There was so much about themselves and their world they hadn't known, and they now looked at it as into a mirror and marvelled at what were being revealed about themselves, and they felt very pleased. In the mirror of knowledge they saw each thing in a clear scientific light that lit it up independently, and presented each thing detached from its distracting settings and without obfuscating shadows. In the stories one thing ran into another, and always hurrying forward they never stood still; their contours blurred, they lost weight and became part of shifting kaleidoscopic patterns. In contrast to this in the encyclopaedic book of knowledge, rendered in the round and in full clarity, things stood still on the page, became as substantial as the learned dons who turned the clear light of science on them and acquired a new ponderous gravity.

This was new and enchanting but not so very new either, because there were as many pundits as there were storytellers among the natives and the pundits were no less erudite and weighty then the colonial taxonomists. They too categorised and tried to hold things still within their assigned places. But they were not always successful in stemming the flow of stories, no sooner than they had given shape and clarity to a system a wave of stories would lash at them and erode their contours or cover them up with polluting sediments. Clever as they were life was never easy for the pundits; they could not avoid wrestling with the storytellers. The storytellers having been silenced, the invading taxonomists triumphed in a way the native pundits could not. In the past systems and stories intermingled and they moved together like the waters of a big flood.

But gradually the enchantment wore off and the natives discovered that with no more stories the world stood still like a city that has been cursed into sleep. The natives realised that without resuming the telling of stories they could not bring life and movement back into their world, but the storytellers had lost their voices and forgotten the art of drawing things and times together. One among those who realised this was Abanindranath Tagore. Unlike in Mughal or Rajput paintings in which life merged with the stories, in the paintings Indian painters did for the Company officials everything stood separate even when they were placed together, like cut flowers in a vase. He wanted to connect the flower to the plant, the plant to the garden, and the garden to the gardener and to the lovers who came to dally in it. But in summiting themselves to the rule of the alien taxonomists the artists had forgotten the art of narration. So Abanindranath talked of art as a magic-wand, and of awakening the sleeping beauty as the artist's mission. And with that awakening he believed that the flow of stories would start once again.

Abanindranath's career can thus be read as a slow endeavour to revivify the links between things, men and the world, to regain the native voice and to restore the flow of stories. Seen from this perspective his early paintings like the Krishnalila Series were an attempt to salvage the fragmentary remnants of ancient stories he found in old texts, and the attenuated practice of craftsmen. Into these pictures based on the padavalis and palakirtans he introduced textual inscriptions in a script reminiscent of the Persian calligraphy found in Mughal paintings and painted them using watercolour in the way he had learned from his western teachers and gilding he had learned from a native craftsman. Thus into these images based on narrative remnants from the past he infused a more hybrid and secular present in which the West was as much a reality as memories of pre-colonial India. Thus from the outset it was not a revival of stories but a revival of storytelling that he was after.

Bowing to the more secular and hybrid present he soon moved from religion and mythology to history and to styles made richer and more personal through a further amalgamation of Mughal and Japanese elements. Paradoxical as this may sound Abanindranath moved towards an individual style and voice through an assimilation of elements from various cultural pasts and the re-articulation of internalised memories. Even when he turned to history, be it episodes from Mughal history or Todd's Annals or the life of Buddha, he read it more as fable and story than as an analysis of facts or a still-life of truth. In his paintings and literary texts the line between history and literature progressively became indistinct, and emperor Shahjahan became in his imagination a close kin of the wine, love and agnostic-thought intoxicated philosopher of the Rubaiyat.

In his writings he is even more clearly a recounter of stories. Popular folk tales, literary classics, modern day annals are all made his own through re-narration. As we read or rather listen to themyes listen, because he wrote his texts in such a manner that he makes us listen even if we are only reading them to ourselvesthe story teller, through whom narrations emanating from various social and literary registers pass through and remerges transformed, begins to gain the contours of an individual sensibility. He has compared this to the transformation of sunrays into moonbeams through lunar intervention; and in both cases the transformation brings the transformer into focus.

Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, Verse II c. 1910

In painting to achieve something similar he moved beyond historicist themes and representation and infused a denseness of mood and feeling into painted images, making a bird, an animal or a landscape a thing of thought and feeling more than a thing of nature. This gave his images of a tired camel or a radiant white peacock or a Shelidah landscape an evocative denseness. These pictures are not narrative but they promise stories like overcast monsoon skies that promise a rich downpour. And they make us ache for meaning and make our minds rove looking for it in our own memories.

A different kind of denseness is brought into some of his other paintings. In these the subjects are not from life but from the world of culture. Based on some visual experience or an earlier text, these images can be characterised as either representational or illustrational. But by picking on certain details and making his viewers refocus their attention, he turned them into retakes that displaced the original or familiar meanings attached to the source material. His paintings based on the actors of the popular Bengali stage and the images based on Moha-Mudgara the devotional composition attributed to Shankaracharya belong to this category. And their denseness is more intellectual than emotional, of thought rather than feeling.

While this looked like satire it was not, because it did not displace one meaning with another, or privilege one over the other, but held them together in a kind of intertextuality where primacy and judgement were at least provisionally suspended. This became clearer in his writings where the same speech was delivered in rustic patois, in affected babu-speech, and in starched literary style, and in theoretical writings where a deeply serious discourse on art was conducted in a mixture of literary and colloquial Bengali with liberal infusions of words and phrases from other languages. Such linguistic diglossia and collage of styles endorsed the enlivening co-existence of interlocutory registers rather than call for exercising a standardizing choice. And occasionally going further and signalling the final triumph of imagination, he reversed the conventional relation between plots and words, and let wordsfreed from their subservience to plotsdetermine the progress of his stories.

Sinbad the Sailor, 1930

A collage of voices and imagination are the two elements at the heart of his storytelling. In the Arabian Nights paintings using a collage of styles and multiple registers of narration Abanindranath emerged as a triumphant storyteller creating through the series a whole web of stories. Everything he had tried and achieved piecemeal in his earlier works came together in these paintings. The Arabian Nights was not merely a text his chose to illustrate but was in itself a palimpsest of memories culled from many cultures and churned into a labyrinth of stories which he used to add depth and resonance to his readings of the present. We could call it a collage or a narrative conjoining of different times and spaces. He did this partly by painting narrative recensions where elements were changed and their relationships were sometimes inversed, and by driving home the differences by keeping other texts behind or besides his own image and in constant focus.

The fragmentary inscription of the tale into the painting on a different register or ground act as a visible sign of different narrative voices within the picture. While the inscribed text is physically conterminous with the painting and chromatically harmonises with it, it does not belong to the space of the pictured scene and is thus a simultaneous presence and not an integral part of the image. Further that the stylistic sophistication of the pictures stands in contrast to the vulgar patois of the inscribed texts reiterates the simultaneous presence of different narrative voices and cultural registers. And within the paintings themselves the rendering of different figures often carry echoes of different visual traditions. Such stylistic differences within the paintingsubtle as they areare yet another devise that gives a narrative edge to visual representation. All these taken together compel us to read these pictures as forming a web of stories which in turn is part of a larger web of stories carrying the memories of different cultures and many pasts.

While the Arabian Nights paintings contain many thematic strands the one that focuses on storytelling is of special interest to us here. The Arabian Nights is not only one large labyrinth of stories but its narrator Sheherazade like Abanindranath himself was also a victim of circumstances whose only weapon of salvage was her skills as a

storyteller. That she succeeded in winning her freedom and those of her gender should have served a beacon of hope for the painter who used her stories as a trope for gaining his own narrative voice. To see how he signals this we may now turn to Abanindranath's representations of storytellers in the Arabian Nights paintings.

The first of these shows Sheherazade with her father and her younger sister. Clearly the three form a family of storytellers. It is an art that needs to be cultivated; they are each shown with a book in their hands, and the Arabian Nights also makes amply clear that she is well read. And it is a skill that is enriched through sharing and assimilation. The old Vizir and the elder daughter are masters who occupy and share the storyteller's seat; the younger daughter is by comparison a neophyte taking her first tentative steps into the world of storytelling. Each one has a different physiognomy and is also painted differently. The young daughter is a wisp of a girl on the threshold of youth, the elder one represents life in the fullness of bloom, her figure recalls that of Abanindranath's Zebunnisa and is painted with a translucent richness of colour, and the Vizir's is a grave patriarchal figure modelled with the material palpability of a Titian portrait. Their three different physiognomies and representational styles are also indicative of the three vital aspects of storytellingtruth, enchantment and wisdom.

The second painting showing King Shahriyar listening to Sheherzade's narration of a story attended by Dunyazade who had been planted according to the Arabian Nights to ask for a story, for storytelling cannot begin without a listener who wishes to hear a story. However, the focus of the painting is on the effect Sheherzade's storytelling has on Shahriyar. While he is represented as the cruel and unrelenting misogynist in the text and remains so until wisdom dawns at the end here is shown as a man emotionally thawing as he listens to her story. Abanindranath represents him not as brute but as a hookah smoking aristocrat and a refined reader of books. The stories have clearly awakened old memories, and Sheherzade watches him as he, listening to her story, slips into reverie. It is an image about the transformative power or curative potency of stories.

The third picture is based on the story of Sinbad the Sailor; but through a kind of reversal of it Abanindranath represents the triumph re-emergence of the native storyteller. While in the Arabian Nights story Sinbad is an adventurous world traveller who returns home to tell wondrous tales of the world to Sinbad the Landsman and other listeners. In the painting Sinbad is essentially a wise landsman and a traveller in imagination. It might be further noted that the artist's signature in this painting appears on the edge of the storyteller's seat suggesting a self-identification of the painter with the storyteller, who in fact is not one but a twosome combination of a wide-eyed boy and an erudite old man. While the eyes of the child looks into the distance that of the old narrator is turned inward, in a of similar gesture binary opposition the old storyteller has one hand resting on the pile of books before him and the other raised to his chest. The sources of his story lie both outside and within himself, and they emanate from within and travel outwards. That his Sinbad is an imaginative landsman is further clarified by the manner in which the ship on the backdrop before which he sits is painted. It belongs not to the space of the storyteller and his audience which is rendered as palpable space, but to that of the inscribed text; it is flat and abstract like the written word and belongs like the text to a register folk cultural. In this world of imagination proportions do not matter, the lamp can be larger than the sailor and heavier than the mast from which it hangs, real birds can a alight on painted ships, and carved animals can come alive. The adventurer's boat is an emblem of the mind's freedom, and of the storyteller's imagination which is all that counts. And Abanindranath's Sinbad, like the painter himself, is a landsman and a storyteller who has travelled only in imagination but to whom the world comes to listen to his stories. With this image he announces the re-emergence of the native storyteller who has regained his voice and awakened the sleeping city and its web of stories.

The Vizir and Sheherzade, 1930

Gaganendranath Tagore's Satirical Drawings and Caricatures

by Ratan Parimoo

In the theatre activities and stage performances of the Bichitra club, Gaganbabu had been fully active as an actor and stage designer. An interest in the 'comic' and 'comedy', as contents of a play and challenging assignments for an actor would have been immediate inspirational stimulants. This brings us to the predecessor writers on the 'comic', which are social satire, the playwrights of comedies and staging of farces. The sources for Gaganendranath's caricatures were his own responses to Bengali society of his generation. But there are precedents by social reformers exposed to western education as well as well as writers of plays to be performed on stage i.e. farces for theatre.

Satirical plays in the context of Gaganendranath's caricatures connect with the best farcical play of Jyotindranath Tagore, first titled Eman Karma Ar Kabo Na, I won't do such a deed again, (1977), later changed to Alik Babu, The False Baboo, 1900. It had been performed with a signal success. An immediate phase of theatrical development which certainly influenced Gaganendranath, are the plays written and performances directed by Girish Ghosh (1844-1911) at the turn of the 19th century. Utpal Dutt had tremendous admiration for Girish Ghosh's contribution to contemporary Indian theatre rather than the narrow negative opinion the Bengali literary critic, Sukumar Sen, had of him. Gaganendranath's criticism in his satirical drawing is of a different category than the Hindu reformers who took to European destructive reformation. The latter view was actually held by Vivekananda.

By the Sweat of My Brow I Try to be Mistaken as Sahib but that Man Calls Me Babu (Caricature), c. 1915/16

The following quotation from Vivekananda, selected by Utpal Dutt, would also suit Gaganendranath's caricatures. Vivekananda was critical of the copper-bottomed educated pillars of the society whose one ambition was to be blessed by the English Government with a responsible job. The quotation is as follows: "You think yourselves highly educated. What nonsense have you learnt? Getting by heart the thoughts of others in a foreign language and stuffing your brain with them and taking some university degrees you consider yourselves educated? Fie upon you! Is this education? What is the goal of your education? Either a clerkship, or being a roguish lawyer, or at the most, deputy magistracy which is another form of clerkship mist that all". (See Gaganendranath's drawing satirizing 'university'). I quote from the only written statement left by Gaganendranth in the preface for Virupa Vajra (Birup Bajra) Strange Thunderbolt (1917), "When deformities grow unchecked, but are cherished by blind habit, it becomes the duty of the artist to show that they are ugly and vulgar and therefore abnormal". J.C. Bose, the great contemporary scientist was the subject of one of Gaganendranth's drawings, despite his intimacy with the artist. Seeing the cartoon Bose said: "Gaganendranth's cartoons are not the sour delineation of a cynic but scenes which must have wronged the artist's soul with sorrow".[2]

What was the status of pictorial satirization before Gaganendranath? The pictorialization of social satire had already been initiated in the visual medium by the Kalighat painters. Kalighat painters could easily adopt facets of contemporary life simultaneously with religious Icons, but naïve folk painters did not realize that the 'style' of their language did not have the expressiveness for the imageries of the 'comic'.

I presume that Gaganbabu along with other Bengali intellectuals of the time would be aware of such satirical weekly journals as the German SIMPLICISSIMUS, which regularly published (between 1896 and 1926) serious satirical drawings of prestigious artists (including Expressionists). It is considered to be one of the greatest picture magazines in the history of Journalism, which "appears in retrospect as a monument of German culture in the first half of the 20th century",[3] Gaganendranath's drawings are closer to Rudolf Wilke, whose drawings were published between 1900 and 1908. George Grosz's drawings were published from 1916 onwards with which Gaganbabu would not be so familiar. Both are exact contemporaries. The comparison with Daumier the French mid 19th century realist painter and pioneer political caricaturist in the medium of lithography is justified. Gaganbabu adopted the same technique as well as the coining of captions in pithy phrases.[4]

Birupa Bajra, Strange Thunderbolts and Adbhut Lok, Realm of Absurd, both these sets of caricatures were published in 1917 and are among the earliest such satirical paintings by Gaganendranath. A careful observation would reveal a remarkable sophistication of style, because of which it is possible to link them with Gaganendranath's Chaitanya series, most of which had been completed by 1914. The use of thin wirey lines going over the surface of the paper as well as large patches of black, not only

shows Gaganendranath's sensitivity for surface design, but also is an attempt to give them a quality like Aubery Beardsley's much acclaimed illustrations.[5]

By babu we should not necessarily imply all middle class Bengalis as perceived by the British colonial administrators, or babu as a section of the Bengali middle class who were looked at as the 'other' or 'them' and who thus deserved to be severely criticized by the enlightened middle class. I think that the satirizing of the 'babu' is also part of the efforts of the middle class towards self-criticism, if not leading to social improvement but certainly to face the facts and laugh at human weakness.[6] The babu's mentality of looking like and being accepted as a Gora or white sahib has been satirized in several witty drawings by Gaganendranath. This made him exclaim that 'By the sweat of my brow I tried to be mistaken for a sahib, but still that man called me Babu'.

A Noble Man

The Maharaja of Bardhman has been adopted as the archetypal rich Bengali. His natural bulkiness provides the comic imagery, elevated as an icon placed on a pedestal. Needy hands extended in front of him are shooed off by brandishing a stick held in his left hand. On his backside is depicted his wealth as heaps of coins, vulgarly spent on festivals, prostitutes (suggested by the female hand) and psychophants, (symbolized by the eagles). It is executed neatly in the same style of thin wiry lines.

Pyare Mian

The drunkenness of the husband and mistreatment of his wife, who still addresses him as pyare mian or my dear husband, has been delineated in one of the most expressive satirical drawings. Here, Gaganendranath used colour quite suitably especially for the blood dripping from the wife's forehead. The babus' attitudes, toward women not only represent further comments on the middle class mentality but also imply Gaganendranath's sympathy for women's plight.

Marriage

With an intense social sensitivity, Gaganendranath created a complex satirical drawing on Bengali attitudes and practices concerning marriage. Though the bridegroom may be a romantic dreamer holding the book of Romeo and Juliet, the father is preparing for the funeral of the dead daughter-in-law. The butterfly on her coffin cloth represents 'Prajapati', the mythical priest of wedding rituals. Most telling is the conspicuous imagery of the mother 'fishing' out a little bride from an earthen pot. It is a Bengali practice to feed a sick man with a freshly caught live fish preserved in a water-filled pitcher. The title has been coined quite thoughtfully, Sold Per Force versus Soul Force.

The Dance or Ball Room Dance (also called Waltzing Mahila), is available in many versions, especially one with the male figure of dark complexion and a flat nose thereby giving him an Indian identity, is important. He is wearing a coat with tail to refer to his westernization, while his feminine counterpart's dress is a cross between sari and skirt. Their dancing together is an attempt toward harmony that is slated to failure. It is also titled Colour Scream, colour referring to racial prejudice. These caricatures use pictorial allegory and hence are fascinating from an interpretative point of view. depicts the western gown. The woman looks admiringly at her male partner. Gaganendranath has very ably caught the sprightliness, the grace and intimacy of a waltz style of western dancing.

Some feminist commentators see in it the depiction of Bengali women leaving the boundary walls of the home and interacting with the world and men outside. The transformed dress represents the emancipation of the Bengali women, reminding one of the roles of Jnanadanandini Devi, Rabindranath's elder sister-in-law, wife of Satyendranath. She was one of the first women to emerge from the seclusion of the inner apartments. She had felt the inadequacy of the traditional Bengali sari wrapped around the naked body for the purpose of going out. She evolved, along with some other ladies, first a contraption combining a frock with a scarf thrown over the torso and then the Brahmika sari adopted from the Parsi way (Bombay style) of draping on a sari.[7]

The connecting link among Gaganendranath's satirical drawings was contained in the third and the last volume. Reform Screams, (published in 1921) is the announcement of the Report of the Indian Constitutional Reforms: The Montague-Chelmsford Report. The Report formed the basis of the Government of India Act 1919, which came in to operation early in 1921. The drawings in Reform Screams reveal Gaganendranath as a bold nationalist, which must be acknowledged as a significant pictorial document of that period of the independence struggle. Obviously, Gaganendranath had observed

East and West. Indian Lady Dancing with an European Gentleman (Caricature), c. 1915/16

crucial contemporary political events for nearly three years (1919-1921) and gave them expressive form. The reforms of 1919 did not satisfy the national aspirations of our countrymen and their effect upon the national struggle for independence had been like fresh fuel. Mahatma Gandhi was at first inclined to try to make the reforms work, but in a special session held in Calcutta in September 1920, he changed his judgment, and the famous resolution of Non-cooperation was adopted by the Congress party. The object of the National Congress was now defined as the attainment of Swaraj (self-rule) by all legitimate and peaceful means. Swarajya was taken to imply 'self-rule' within the Empire if possible, without if necessary.

Terribly Sympathetic 1921

The vast looming bespectacled man in western dress is a metaphorical image of both the colonial power and the immediate author of a series of new proposals, known as the Montague Chelmsford Reforms. (Sometimes he is identified as Lloyd George). One of the reforms was to announce dominion status as well as to initiate a system of Government in the various Presidency states to be run by elected representatives. Almost simultaneously, with the Reforms of 1919, the colonial Government had passed a set of new coercive measures, known as the Rowlett Act.

State Funeral of H. H. Old Bengal

The immediate casualty after the

Poet's First Flight from London to Paris
Caricature of Rabindranath, c. 1921

implementation of the Act of Reforms, 1919, was the disbanding of the existing Legislative Council of Bengal. This occasion was pictorialized by Gaganendranath as a grand western style funeral. That it was a severe jolt to India's journey towards self-rule is definitely the artist's intention. Gaganendranath appropriately turns it into an elaborate narrative episode, not only raising it to the level of serious painting by also reminiscent of his earlier narrative series of Chaitanya Charitamala. While the dead body is not visible, the Indian and British personages (some of whom have been identified) are clearly delineated in distinct mourning dresses.

Satire on lack of or false patriotism

Auto-Speechola or An Automatic Speech Making Machine

In the Birupa Bajra (Strong Thunderbolts) of 1917 he had already targeted zamindars, Maharajas and nominated councilors of Bengal for their lack of conviction and passive intellect. The speeches they delivered in public were prepared for them by others like automatic machines, when writers are merely thoughtless automations conforming to colonial restrictions.

My love of my country is as Big as I am

The cartoon titled My Love of My Country Is as Big as I Am is a satire on false patriotism in which Gaganendranath has depicted himself as the ordinary Bengali listener sitting in the right corner. Wearing simple indigenous dress and smoking the traditional hukka, he is amused to listen to the boastful lecture of the big-bellied figure who dominates the pictorial space. Wearing western dress complete with a cigar held in the left hand, he stands authoritatively, thus an unmistakable satire of the Maharaja Bijaychand of Burdhaman.

Chemical Scream

In the Chemical Scream, the famous chemistry professor, P.C. Roy is trying to wash out patriotism signified by 'Indian ink'. It has an explicit title: Out Damned spot, out I say.[8] It is a dig at the Indian scientist's new inventions during the Swadeshi movement, most of which for the purpose of indigenous manufacturing were unsuccessful.

Poetical Scream

Latest Flight of the Poet, Query: Is it cooperation or Non-cooperation? Gaganendranath did not even spare his uncle Rabindranath, when a precise comment had to be made. Seated on his easy chair, and holding an ektara in his right hand, the poet is depicted flying in the sky. His notebooks attached with pen and reading glasses (pince-nez) are scattered in space and he looks bewildered. There are at least two undated drawings in which the sky is dark, in one case filled with stars and crescent moon and in another case, full of white clouds. In the dated drawing of 1921 assuming it to be the final version, the sky is of light tone. An enlarged nib of a pen is turned into a platform on which several inquisitive journalists are perched. The names of the newspapers are written below them such as Young India, The English Man etc.

In a witty manner Gaganendranath has juxtaposed two events together so that one signifies the other. It has been recorded that Rabindranath's journey to London on 16 April 1921 was also his first travel by air. Nihal Singh had interviewed the poet and asked him, if that would be his first flight. 'Quick as flash', the poet had replied, that he had been flying all his life, but this would be the first of that sort.[9] The other was the ongoing Non-cooperation movement led by Mahatma Gandhi. Naturally everyone was eager to know the poet's opinion on the momentous stage of the independence struggle, but he was air-borne or flying in the sky. The journalists assembled on the pen are looking in various directions to ascertain which side of the earth is his destination this time.

That Rabindranath had disagreed with Mahatma Gandhi has been recorded in the letters exchanged between them.[10] Even the personal meeting that Mahatma

Vision at the Club, Old and New (Caricature), c. 1921 (Another Title: State Funeral of H.E. Old Bengal)

Gandhi had with him did not elicit his active support. That is why Gaganendranath resorted to an additional phrase in the title of his caricature in the form of a 'query', 'is it cooperation or non-cooperation?' Since this trip was decisive in fundraising to set up the International University at Santiniketan, non-cooperation with Mahatma Gandhi for the 'non-cooperation movement', only underscored cooperation with the British establishment. This 'dithering' on the part of Rabindranath followed soon after his much-hailed decision to return the Knighthood back to the British Crown in response to the Jalianwala Bagh massacre in the Punjab (1919). Gaganendranath had recorded his own agony caused by the political situation in the Punjab in a satirical drawing entitled Peace Reigns in the Punjab which was displayed in an art exhibition in Calcutta inaugurated by Lord Chelmsford.

The notion of 'flight in a dream', when one is hovering aloft the sky and traversing though various lands, derives from Dwinjendranath Tagore's imaginary description in his poem Swapna Prayan, which has been mentioned earlier. The Charkha versus Everything Else (The Modern Review, July 1921) conclusively states the position taken by Rabindranath as well as some other thinkers of the country who held different viewpoints from that of Mahatma Gandhi. Here, Gaganendranath inverts the imagery putting the charkha in the place of the dreamer in the sky, whereas the earthly priorities below are clearly labeled such as: Hospital,

Knowledge, Research, Art and so on.

Among the extensive satirical drawings of Gaganendranath many of them were finished by him as lithographs. It has been noted that Gaganendranath's cartoons had been printed on the lithography press by a Muslim technician. (i) How did Gaganendranath transfer the drawings on the litho stone? (ii) How were the drawings transformed and adjusted for the lithographic technique to impart to them the aesthetic of graphic art? (iii) What was the role of colour, as many of these are also coloured - lithographs? From the corpus of his drawings, we must distinguish those which were worked out on lithography stone and the kind of devices that are particular to this process of print-making.

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Gaganendranath's Moments with Cubism: Anxiety of Influence

by Soumik Nandy Majumdar

City in the Night, c. 1920/25

"While thinking of Cubism I was reminded of something. When the potter turns his wheel the centre appears to be simultaneously whirling and yet remaining still." (-Nandalal Bose in a letter written to Asit Haldar, 1922)

Gaganendranath Tagore (1867-1938), one of the brilliant artists and cultural activists of his time was unabashedly open to various kinds of artistic influences and sources throughout his life. Following the chronological sequence it is evident that Gaganendranath moved with great élan from one mode of pictorial style to another in different phases of his career eschewing any singular stylistic consistency but exploring a range of variables cutting across culture and time. The specific contexts of his art at various points of time also provided him with the necessary logic for each stylistic framework. Despite a certain kind of continuity in the early phase when he was producing the portraits and figure sketches with commendable accuracy or the Puri landscapes (up to 1911) or even the Chaitanya series (1911-1915) and illustrations for Jeevansmriti (1912), he was clearly responding to diverse stylistic sources like Japanese brush techniques, wash paintings, sumi-e (black ink method) and possibly Chinese ink paintings as well. The variations in brushwork attempted by him in his political cartoons at the cost of contrived elegance are also a testimony to his penchant for sourcing and consequently appropriating techniques in spite of highly empirical and local subject matters. Similarly, the so-called Cubist phase is one such group of paintings done during the period from 1921 to 1925 leading to a highly complex and personal imageries of the late paintings before he was unfortunately debilitated by cerebral paralysis.[1]

Gaganendranath's Cubist paintings have been a major issue for a number of writers who debated over the validity of such an influence on an Indian artist in the time of nationalist art movement catching the imagination of some of the leading artists of the time including Gaganendranath's younger brother Abanindranath Tagore. According to Dineshchandra Sen, although Abanindranath was more enthusiastic than Gaganendranath about collecting and archiving traditional Indian art, the latter did take part in removing the European paintings from the walls of their drawing rooms and replacing them with indigenous artifacts including Mughal and Rajput paintings. Historian Dineshchandra Sen wrote in the obituary, 'In divesting their house of everything of foreign origin, the brothers seem to enjoy the iconoclast's pleasure. They were also moved by patriotic zeal and they were anxious that Indian art should receive the due recognition.' [2] Gaganendranath's scathing criticism of the British colonial rule through the witty cartoons also testifies his patriotic zeal. Yet, his responses to Cubist

paintings (mainly through monochrome reproductions in the beginning) are not completely unexpected since he has always been interested in the intellectual developments of the modern West and kept himself informed on a regular basis. What is interesting is to take a note of how others were reacting to this.

That Nandalal Bose was quite comfortable with Gaganendranath's cubist take is evident when he wrote, '(Gaganendranath Tagore) was inspired by the experimentalist art of modern Europe, but it did not sweep him off his feet; indeed his later paintings are splendid examples of how fresh forms and moods can be created through a complete assimilation of the alien and the familiar.'[3] By emphasizing on the aspect of assimilation Nandalal Bose was openly declaring his faith in eclecticism.

When the first series of cubistic paintings by Gaganendranath were reproduced in Rupam in 1922, it seemed that he had seized the 'modernist moment' to realize his artistic vision through Cubism. Stella Kramrisch in the accompanying article significantly titled as An Indian Cubist gives credit to Gaganendranath for introducing Cubism in India albeit a different dimension.[4] According to her, French Cubism "... dislocated the solid volume and rebuilt it as a continuum of movement and change." In Gaganendranath's paintings on the other hand, she noticed a dissolution and fragmentation of the dynamic character of objects and not of the static. Further she pointed out the expressive nature of Gaganendranath's Cubism wherein 'the turbulent, hovering or pacified forces of inner experiences' were projected in terms of planes, facets and cubistic forms. Kramrisch argued that despite the influence of such a 'foreign' form Gaganendranath had internalized the peculiar cultural experience of India by turning the interpenetrating order of vertical and horizontal units into an expressive 'three-dimensional context or emotional pattern'. Though she thought that 'Indian Cubism is a paradox', she justified the case by arguing how Gaganendranath was successfully reinventing Cubism by evoking and tracing similar formal tendencies evident in the phantasmagoria of rocks and mountains in Ajanta painting. For Kramrisch it was both the cultural experience and the traditional vestiges that validated Gaganendranath's brand of Cubism. This was in tune with her assertion that even though Cubism was a European discovery, its formalist simplicity was neither unique nor significantly different from the objectives of other forms of non-illusionist art. However, she cautioned that Gaganendranath's dynamic diagonal compositions tended to set up a contradiction between the 'flowing life and lyricism of Indian art' and the 'geometric rationality' of Cubism.

In complete contrast to Stella Kramrisch's thoughtful appreciation of Gaganendranath's cubist works, W. G. Archer in his influential account Indian and Modern Art (1959) dismissed these

Nandini, Heroine of Rabindranath's Drama: Rakta Karabi, c. 1925

Somnambulist, c. 1920

Jagadish Chandra Bose Demonstrating His New Apparatus, Watercolour

works by scoffing them as derivative and as product of cultural misunderstanding.[5] According to him they were simply bad imitations of Picasso. For him the use of the syntax of Cubism, a product of the West, by an Indian artist was a sign of inferiority and slavish mentality. Archer in other words questioned the integrity of the artist for all the wrong reasons. Obviously, he failed to see, or did not want to acknowledge that Gaganendranath was responding to Cubist paintings as a new linguistic possibility. For Gaganendranath it was a new point of departure to address his own predilections for themes dealing with the mysterious quality of light, movement and spatial conundrum. Gaganendranath was on the threshold of a peculiar experimental modernity. The avant-garde in him discovered a whole set of possibilities in the flexible revolutionary syntax of Cubism. Truly he was the only Indian painter until 1940s who made use of the language and syntax of Cubism in his painting. Many critics have

noticed close and illuminating resemblances between Gaganendranath's works and that of by European painters like Robert Delaunay, Franz Marc and Lyonel Feininger, Alexander Rodchenko and the works by the Rayonists. Needless to say that Gaganendranath was highly inspired by the original works he saw at the exhibition of water-colours and graphic prints by Bauhaus painters held in Calcutta in December 1922 sponsored by Indian Society of Oriental Art. Artists like Feininger, Johannes Itten, Kandinsky, Klee, Gerdhard Marcks and George Muche were included in this show. Not only for Gaganendranath, but for the entire artist-critic community this show symbolized the moment of 'graduation of Indian taste from Victorian naturalism to non-representational art'.[6] More interestingly, Gaganendranath's Cubist fantasies, including his well-known House of Mystery, had their first public exposure alongside this Bauhaus exhibition of 1922. Hence it is obvious that his run-up to cubist works started long back in his Jeevansmriti illustrations, in his great interest in proscenium lighting for dramas and in his eagerness to pick up the delicate ink-and-brush technique from Japanese Nihonga artist Taikan. Moreover, around 1915 Gaganendranath was quietly withdrawing from Abanindranath's nationalist preoccupations and moved into a poetic fairytale world feeding on Bengali literature and performances. The cover image on the book Satbhai-Champa written by Gyanadanandini Devi is one such captivating example. A style emerging out of several fragmentations of the facets in terms of its spatiality and tonal gradations is of course suggestive of a Cubist connection but the indigenous personal cultural content of such visualization is unmistakable.

Composition No 2, c. 1920

Plan of Stage, Probably Rabindranath's Drama: Dakghar, c. 1916

His criss-cross colour beams seemingly evoking light, quick washes of prismatic colour tones and fragmentation of the pictorial surface into several indefinite interweaving planes are detectable in his works prior to 1922. Tagore Reading His Poem at the Congress Session and Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose Demonstrating His New Apparatus are two remarkable paintings in this context in terms of their interplay and juxtaposition of light and shadow, of course without any cubist break-ups. But a lightness of being brought about by a maze of intersecting lights in varying tones and thereby evoking a sense of mystery leaving a definitive meaning less important has been a characteristic trait right at the outset. He was drawn to the prismatic experience of light almost instinctively. Hence, neither it was a mere coincidence that Gaganendranath Tagore discovered Cubism at a very significant juncture of his artistic career nor it was a compromise as Archer suspected. But it was almost like a confirmation of what he was up to in his experiments. In an interview with Kanhaiyalal Vakil in 1926 Gaganendranath says, "..... (The new experiments) have enabled me to discover new paths and I am now expressing them better with my new technique developed out of my experiment in Cubism than I used to do with my old methods. The new technique is really wonderful as a stimulant".[7]

Much has been said regarding the influence of Picasso on Gaganendranath's works. But Gaganendranath's brand of Cubism was a far cry from Picasso's explorations. In the latter's case the emphasis on the flat surface of painting and drawing led him eventually to show that objects could be realized in all their tangibility without giving us the discreet identity of these objects. The representational and narrative strategy of image making one of the most long-standing norms of pictorial art seems to have been proved dispensable in Picasso's Cubism which was initiated by Le Demoiselles d' Avignon in 1907. For the Cubists, it was a kind of linguistic exploration, constantly moving in its analysis of how reality could be grasped. It was an art of memory not only in its approach to its subjects which it evoked by re-presenting those accumulated, remembered experiences which constituted knowledge of these subjects but also in its approach to its own pictorial language. However, with Gaganendranath the representational aspects and the spatial depth never took a back seat. Elucidating the essential differences with the European Cubists, Stella Kramrisch brought to attention Gaganendranath's strength as a narrator through his own brand of Cubism and also his ability to soften Cubism's formal

severity and often ruthless geometry with 'a seductive profile, shadow or outline of human form'. [8] Perhaps, as critics have evocatively written elsewhere, the 'visible music and pulsating light' in Gaganendranath's Cubist paintings and the solicitously selected themes toss him out of the more formalist program of European Cubism and raise an important issue regarding the reception of the Western modern within the orientalist / nationalist orbit. Beside softening of angularity and rigorous linearity of the Analytic Cubism the amazingly fecund period of French Cubism from 1909 to 1912 Gaganendranath was extremely keen on addressing his preoccupations with prismatic luminosity, imaginary interiors (mysteriously illuminated by hidden artificial lights) and his enchanting fantastic fairyland. This naturally led to most experimental yet satisfactory methods of conjuring up almost surreal, interwoven, indefinite spatial depth teasing our optical habit and reminding us of someone like the Dutch artist M.C. Escher. In fact for Gaganendranath, the dynamic forms of the Futurists were more suitable than the more static Analytical Cubism. The fact that his sincere association with Cubism was rooted more in his personal imagination and literary culture rather than anything else can be argued as well. The lyricism and theatricality inbuilt in his works also on the other hand prompt us to see the dissolution of the harder side of Cubism and an invocation of a certain kind of orientalist proclivity. However, Gaganendranath's moments with Cubism played an extraordinarily important role in the normative feature of his pictorial art. He began to conceive, more effectively than before, of the pictorial components as tangible elements, to be freely arranged, to far greater extent than he could do earlier. He was no longer tied to illusionistic or naturalistic space; he was now able to arrange its elements at will, following his own ideas and visions of space and atmosphere. Hence his cubist paintings, as Benodebehari Mukherjee writes, 'leaves a lasting impression on our mind than the pressure of matter'.[9]

Beside an indifference to the formal implications of Analytical Cubism, Gaganendranath Tagore was effectively representing a decontextualizing tendency much favoured by many important artists of the modernist project. It is said that Cubism was a passing phase in Indian art and Gaganendranath had no follower as such. But, interestingly enough, a less discussed artist of Santiniketan who picked up from where Gaganendranath left was Prosanto Roy (1908 - 1973) a direct student of the former. A

Dwarkapuri, c. 1925

Composition, c. 1922

thorough study of the Roy's cubist paintings would be extremely useful to construct the history of this unique legacy.

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Abanindranath as Teacher: Many Moods, Some Recollections

by Supriya Roy and Sushobhan Adhikary

Abanindranath Tagore

Abanindranath's role as a teacher overlapped in a number of spheres. In 1905 he was made Vice-principal of the Government Art School in Calcutta. He would work in his studio at the school and work on his paintings while his students would sit with him doing their own work, watching him and asking him for suggestions now and then. Among his first batch of students were Surendranath Ganguly (1885-1909), Nandalal Bose (1882-1966), Asit Haldar (1890-1964) and K. Venkattapa (1887-1965). Surendranath and Nandalal studied under Ishwari Prasad, a traditional painter of the Patna qualam. These various influences helped to produce the new entity of Indian painting. A traditional scholar was employed by Abanindranath to recite the Ramayana and Mahabharata to his students in order to familiarize them with the epics. They were also encouraged to paint themes from these epics.

The second sphere of his role as guru, or master was at the southern verandah of his home at Jorasanko. Here the three brothers, Abanindranath, Samarendranath and Gaganendranath would sit and work all day. They would be visited by Abanindranath's students, other artists, Japanese artists, European art critics and art dealers. The brothers were connoisseurs of Indian art and were collectors. This milieu gradually evolved into the Vichitra art club. In the evenings there would be poetry readings, dramatic performances, musical soirees and lively discussions by the members of this club who were leading litterateurs, artists and intellectuals of the time. But during the day Vichitra was an art class and studio. Abanindranath would work with his pupils. Talented women from the Tagore household like Sunayanidevi and Pratimadevi joined as students.

Asit Haldar

Nandalal Bose

Abanindranath's active participation in the Indian Society of Oriental Art was of immense benefit to his students. The society arranged exhibitions of their works regularly; prints were made of their works. Patronage and support needed by all artists at the beginning of their careers were provided. These artists and their works were being recognized all over India; several exhibitions of their works were successfully held in some of the cities of the West. By the end of the second decade of this century Abanindranath's students were heading art schools in Lucknow, Jaipur, Lahore and Madras.

Abanindranath was no ordinary teacher taking formal classes in drawing and painting. He created an atmosphere where teacher and students would work together in a spirit of camaraderie; he was the guiding force using a variety of methods to get his point across. Each student had to be tackled differently, but what was common to all students was his love and affection for them. Once Nandalal had told Dhirendrakrishna Devvarma that the first step towards learning is respect for the teacher and the teacher's love for the student. He then spoke of his own deep feeling of respect for Abanindranath and recalled Abanindranath's love for him. When Nandalal left Calcutta for Santiniketan, the teacher felt he had lost everything and when Nandalal returned, he said he felt so exhilarated it was like having had a whole bottle of whisky![1]

Dhirendranath writes of another incident. In his early years as a student, Nandalal had painted The Tapasya of Uma; he took the painting to Abanindranath, who on seeing it said, "The painting is well-executed, but there is a lack of colour, put some colour." Early next morning, Nandalal sat with his palette and colours, wondering where to add the colour, when he heard the sound of a car; Ababindranath had come himself to stop his

K. Venkattapa

student from adding colour. He said, "Yesterday, after I told you to add colour, and you had left, I realized that this was a painting of Uma's austerities, the colour was within Uma, there was no need to add colour to it. Thinking of the painting, I could not sleep all nightI feared that you might add colour and so I rushed to you so early in the morning." Nandalal recounted this incident to Dhirendranath and then added, "My guru had ordered me to add colour, so to keep his word, I added a little green stone to Uma's grass ring, and you have to look very closely to spot it!"

There was something about Abanindranath's relations with his students that touched a chord in the hearts of people who came into contact with them. William Rothenstein, on his visit to India was thus affected: "At Calcutta, at the Tagore house and at the Government School of Art I met a group of charming young artists, who gave me a touching welcome. Had I but come to India earlier, I would gladly have stayed among these students, so perplexed betwixt two traditions. Nandalal Bose, Asit Kumar Haldar and other gifted young painters, under the guidance of Abanindranath Tagore, were reviving a purely Indian tradition of painting..."[2]
Another student of Abanindranath was the French post-Impressionist painter, Andrée Karpelès. She recalled her experience of learning from him: "...Squatting on a low armchair, Abanindra is painting; he dips his fine Japanese brush in an ancient bowl of burnished silver; a perfect pink lotus floats on the water, beautiful and pure like the lines and colours flowing from the artist's brush. In short sentences, full of meaning, he sums up his ideas on Art; his teaching is rich and deep; the listener feels that none of Abanindra's words ought to be lost. He hands her a small sheet of paper, where he has hastily written a few sentences: The lotus of the mind (Manasapadma) is blooming because the spirit is resting on that...a work of art is the carrier of this perfume of the hidden Lotus, the unseen flowering of the mind.

The keener the sight, the surer the hand; the stronger the bow, the swifter the arrow flies. Lines flow unchecked from a good brush, so the perfume of the mind comes out uninterrupted through the finger tips, quick and skillful.

Manava (Mankind) is God's Manasputra (child of the mind); all our great works should be born of our Mind. So an artist from the very beginning must learn to express that which his mind sees and feels. This training of the mind should not be deferred till the artist has mastered the methods of drawing, etc. The bird must try to fly from the very beginning; otherwise it will never be able to use its wings."[3]

For Abanindranath, no student was unimportant. His presence was often enough to transform a person. He has narrated an incident in his memoirs, Jorasankor Dhare (By the Side of Jorasanko): Mr. Thornton, an engineer at Martin Company, was involved with the Art Society; he was a close friend of Abanindranath. One day, before he left for England, he brought to Abanindranath his peon who he said had flair for drawing, and if Abanindranath would accept him as a student. He would pay for all expenses. The peon came the next day to attend classes. He had drawn some Calcutta streets, tramways and the like with Mr. Thornton's red and blue office pencil. The peon was asked to sit near Nandalal; Abanindranath told his students that he was a student like them and they should not look down on him. In his class, all students were equal. The poor fellow stood quietly on one side; in spite of repeated requests he kept standing. It took the teacher quite a number of days just to make him sit properly! However, he would come every day and draw pictures. He even started improving. When Mr. Thornton returned, he had to go back to his work as peon. Mr. Thornton met Abanindranath and asked him, "What have you done to my peon? Leave alone his drawing; he is now a changed man. He has amazed me with his behaviour, his good manners and his manner of talking. He is not the old peon now, he has completely changed, how did you do it?" Abanindranath replied, "Not much, I only taught him to sit!"

Rani Chanda was another of his students. To her goes the credit of patiently recording her teacher's memoirs. Without her help, these memories of Abanindranath's life would have been lost. She has left behind lively memories of

Andre Karpeles

Benodebehari Mukherjee, Intaglio

Abanindranath, herself; as a teacher, he could be very strict with his students. She recalls how her brother, Mukul Dey, rather authoritarian in character, would stand sheepishly while Abanindranath would expound on the flaws in his work.

Binodebehari Mukherjee had once gone to Jorasanko to show some of his paintings to Abanindranath. He took the first painting, looked at it and asked, "What is this?" Benodebehari answered that it was a boy playing the flute. "Is he playing the flute, or is he eating a banana?" The second was of a hunter with a bow. Abanindranath told him that at the exhibition, he would also be exhibiting a painting of a hunter; "Let us see whose painting is better," he told young Benodebehari. He refused to look at the other paintings, saying they were painted with dirty colours! He was asked to show them to Gaganendranath. The older brother first picked up the painting of the flute-player; he then asked Binode if he could play on a flute. When the boy said he could not, Gaganendranath said, "Try and blow through one, you will know where you have gone wrong."

Rati Petit came from Bombay to Santiniketan in 1934 to study art and Manipuri dance. She later married a professor of German language in Visva-Bharati, the Buddhist Lama, Anagarika Govinda; she too became a Buddhist and adopted the name Li Gotami. She was in Santiniketan for twelve years, but it was only in 1942, that she first met Abanindranath. From her memoirs and diary notes we get more insights on Abanindranath as a teacher.[4] She wrote, "Abanindranath had his own ways of teaching and they were as different from the traditional ''path'' as anyone could possibly imagine. Whatever he taught, he taught naturally and playfully, so that for me it was like learning new things from a clever little school-mate."

During his later years, he would talk to her about art, about his strange fears and dreams. One day, in 1943, he said, "Art is like Nature. Nature is always there for those who need her. She does not throw herself at any one. If one does not feel the need to see her, she does not mind. It does not disturb her. Art is like that but in my dream Hazrat came and said: 'Teach them the REAL art.' How to teach the real thing? It took me 72 years to learn it. But he commanded me. Can I refuse...I am afraid, I tell you franklyI am afraid. Where is the strength? Where is the time? How to do it, when on all sides you students are surrounded by unreal things and unreal ideas? ...Then, like a flash, it came to me last night! Hazrat came and made it plain as plain could be. Yes, I said to myself. Hazrat is right. This is not art, what I am teaching them. And then, like a cloud all the old methods vanished. I will now teach you in another way but if you do not catch it, do not blame me."

"Hazrat" was the word Master and pupil used to denote inspiration. It had originated from a story he had told Rati about a Muslim magician who would take things from his audience and make them vanish into thin air, and then, by clapping his hands and calling out "Hazrat" three times, he would make the things reappear!

"But in fun sometimes lies real magic, and it was in such fun, perhaps, that he reached into the air and, saying "Hazrat-Hazrat-Hazrat" caught something invisible for me and, pressing it into my hand, said, 'Hold it tight. It is my very own Hazrat and I am passing it on to you...'"writes Rati.

Perhaps, of all his teaching methods, this giving of Hazrat to his students was the most precious and the one that stood by each of them in their lives as artists.

Surendranath Ganguly, kartikeya

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Profile

Atul Bose: A Short Evaluation

by Sritama Halder

Portrait of Surendra Nath Banerjee

Atul Bose was an artist whose long artistic life was marked by various important moments of the history of a country that had long been colonized by a foreign power and was engaged in a constant struggle for independence. Thus it would be more appropriate to judge the artist against the socio-political contexts than to judge his formal achievements as an individual artist, for the formal achievements are often subjective but the social and political conditions are operative in the making of an artist and to place to him/her in a larger context of the history of humanity. The artist Atul Bose whose artistic life was marked by a continuous confrontation with the Bengal School artists and the Orientalists must be evaluated in the context where art is the expression of politics. Also it should be kept in mind that Atul Bose must be seen as a pioneer in the field of Indian art education. His artistic achievements are throughout punctuated by his engagement with various art institutions and his tireless attempt to assimilate what was considered an alien language within the indigenous culture.

With the introduction of British Academic art in the 19th century a profound change occurred in the history of Indian art. According to Partha Mitter one of the most powerful and immediate effects of the British rule was felt in the realm of artistic taste of the people of India. The academic style and naturalism prevalent in the Victorian England began to be patronized by the rich Indian class as the inevitable symbol of aristocracy and social superiority even before the art institutions were established by the British in the 1950s. Later the art institutions, through its syllabi and trainings, attempted to transform the artistic taste of the Indians. Raja Ravi Varma, even though he lacked a formal academic training, became the pioneering and the most sought after artist of this style. However, Ravi Varma was initially praised by the early nationalists for his use of puranic themes as the subject of painting but was denounced by the nationalists of the later period for using the colonizers' style of art.

Nationalism hailed the Bengal School style as the purveyor of the true Indian identity and ethos as against the apparent decaying of the country caused by a conflicting foreign culture. The Bengal School founded by Abanindranath Tagore and carried on by his disciples and followers at the wake of a colonized people's realization of a 'nation' propagated the concept of a golden past of an ideal land as against the current political and social repression and the humiliation of being ruled by the colonizers. This Nationalistic idea was more involved with the abstract concept of a 'nation' and the abstract figure of the 'mother nation' and in the process it negated the tangible existence of its people who merely served as the instruments to bring in a freedom and future seeped in an ideal past. With the rise of Bengal School style and as the Government Art School - the largest art establishment in Calcutta at that time under E. B. Havell and Abanindranath Tagore continued to Indianize its syllabus, the prestige and patronage of the Calcutta based academic artists was beginning to wane.

Because the Government Art School neglected academic art various private art institutions were established that offered courses in academic art. The Jubilee Art School was one of them. Atul Bose began his training as an artist in this institution where Hemen Mazumdar who later became the widely acclaimed painter was his fellow student. However, after Havell's retirement

Self Portrait

Percy Brown joined the Government Art School as the principal and he allowed the learning of the western style to be restored in the school. After a few years at the Jubilee Academy, Bose enrolled in the Government School of Art. Here he proved to be an artist of immense merit.

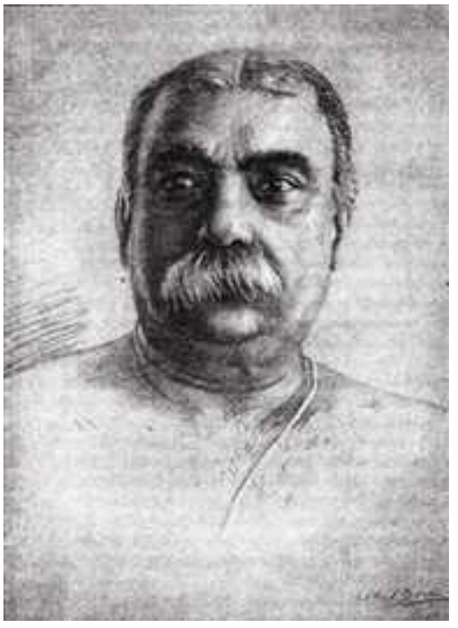
After finishing his studies Bose along with Hemen Majumdar and Jamini Roy embarked on his artistic career as a scenery painter for theatres and producing the portrait of the deceased from photographs which was a popular Victorian custom. During this time the silent war that they waged against the romantic mysticism of Bengal School as students became even more consolidated. The Bengal School artists used to publish their works in journals such as Prabashi and with a large Government subsidy published their own scholarly magazine Rupam. The trio decided to publish their works in various journals to bring public attention to their works. Upendra Kishore Roychudhury who was an ardent admirer of academic art helped them to publish their own journal Indian Art Academy. It was open to all the artists from all over India but it was primarily a platform for Atul Bose, Hemen Mazumdar and Jamini Roy who published full page colour prints of their prize winning works in this journal. Furthermore, from behind the veil of a nationwide oblivion, this journal brought the academic artists to the forefront and asserted their right to take part in the collective effort towards an overall artistic achievement. Bose and his friends also made portraits of the leaders of the freedom struggle and sold the portraits for low prices. This simple action apart from providing the much needed money for the artists also had a greater significance; it proved that all art forms at that time were rooted in a nationalist feeling with different modes of expression which not necessarily always involved a glorification of the past. Secondly the Bengal School's approach towards art was from an elitist point of view. They excluded a large number of ordinary people who were given only marginal places in the puranic/mythic or the royal history of India. By making portraits of the well known leaders Bose and his friends not only dealt with 'here' and 'now' they also communicated directly with those people who were forever outside the grand narrative of the past.

During the time when the Bengal School and the oriental style of art flourished government patronage shifted to the Indian Society of Oriental Art from the Art Gallery which was in favour of academic art. The selection was restricted only within the orientalist works which resulted into the exclusion of any kind of academic art. As the academic artists were forced to send their works to the exhibitions held outside Bengal even though few could afford it an urgent need was felt for a space that would enable the academic artists to exhibit their own works. Thus the rival Society of Fine Arts was established. The space for their first exhibition (22nd December, 1921-4th January, 1922) in the Government School of Art was given to them by their former teacher Percy Brown. Partha Mitter informs that Abanindranath Tagore was invited to join the Society as a honorary member but he simply ignored it. In the second exhibition held next year Atul Bose's work Comrades was highly praised by The Statesman as a 'fine, strong work'. Other critics also praised his bold yet simple treatment of his subject.

Around this time Bose made a pencil sketch of Sir Ashutosh Mukherjea, titled Bengal Tiger. The portrait sketch of the educationist's reveals the artist's ability to capture his seater's characteristic facial expressions and anatomical peculiarities. This sketch was so appreciated that it was used by the Times Literary Supplementary for Sir Ashutosh's obituary. In 1924 he received a scholarship to study in the Royal Academy of Art. He stayed in England till 1926 and made sketches and oil paintings from the nude. However, he learnt his most valuable lessons during his stay in England, when he worked with the English post-Impressionist Walter Sickert whose influence could be detected in Bose's use of grey and brown in some of his later works.

After his return from England, Bose was invited by

Portrait of the Artist's Wife



Portrait of Ashutosh Mukherjee

Portrait of a Young Man

Percy Brown to teach at the Government School of Art. But after Brown's retirement from school within just two years the Orientalists returned to the School this time with Mukul Dey as the first Indian Principal. Even though Dey had a rigorous art training in England under various eminent artists he was a close associate of the Tagores. Bose and Dey had already formed an uneasy relationship in England when Bose refused to work with Dey when the latter was decorating the Indian Pavilion at the Empire Festival. So when Dey began reorganizing the syllabus, introducing various reform programs in teaching and student discipline and most of all his open hostility towards the associates of Brown including his Deputy Jamini Gangooly who had to leave Bose was not entirely comfortable in the school. So even though he was appointed as the successor of Gangooly he had no other choice but to leave.

That his pedagogic approach was continuously challenged led him to co-found an art society which he hoped would be devoid of any faction politics. Under the aegis of Maharaja Pradyot Kumar Thakur, the society resolved to form an all-India association in order to promote Indian art with the central government's help. This association Indian Academy of Fine Arts, however, had its share of problems. Calcutta's hope to organize a nationwide exhibition was rebuffed as the Bombay artists created tensions over a previously done collaborative project. As a result of this tension the word 'Indian' was dropped from the name. On 23rd December, 1933, Atul Bose, as the joint secretary, organized the society's first exhibition.

In the 1940s Indian art experienced an ideological shift in its course and a part of it veered more towards Marxist socialist ideals. For the first time in the history of Indian art those artists emerged whose political consciousness was based on their immediate realities that became the basis of their arts as well. Atul Bose was among this group of artists whose reactions to the social injustice and repression were immediate and harsh. The Bengal Famine (1943-1944) was one of the greatest cruelties ever to happen to the human race for in this man-made famine thousands of farmers died of hunger because of a section consisting of a handful of people benefitted from the war. The British government's scorch earth policy and natural disaster destroyed most of the crops in Bengal. The rest of it was stocked and hoarded. Black market and excess greed of some people created a shortage of food and grain. The people from rural areas migrated to the cities in search of food only to die on the streets. Artists like Chittaprosad Bhattacharya, Zainul Abedin, Gobardhan Ash and Gopal Ghosh poignantly captured the inhumanity of the situation. Atul Bose also was a part of it. He made sketches and some oil paintings. But his works such as The Birth of Kalki was evidently dominated by his training as an academic artist. The numerous preparatory drawings show detailed studies and repeated rearrangement of the figures and other objects. Thus the final painting lacks the immediacy that is required in such paintings and could be found in the works of Chittaprosad and Zainul Abedin and look more like a precisely planned, well balanced composition done in the studio.

Because of Bose's aspiration to establish art institutions where an otherwise neglected art style would find its space somehow sidelined his identity as an artist. The immense potential shown in the portrait of Sir Ashutosh Mukherjea or in the studies of the nudes during his stay in London was not fully realized in the works of his later period. Thus the preliminary study of his wife in red chalk and the final production in oil both done in 1939 show a minutely observed face looking out at the viewer prove his extreme mastery over the medium but becomes only the naturalistic rendering of a human face that lacks the communication between her inner and outer self. It could be because of the artist's overt dependence on his idea of objectivity empirical observation required in representational art. The boldness and spontaneity so evident in the Bengal Tiger is lost. Atul Bose was a teacher who was not entirely understood and an artist with a series of irreversibly lost opportunities, forgotten hopes and unmitigated frustrations.

J.P. Gangooly: Landscapes on Canvas

by Anurima Das

Art knows no boundaries and so should the artists. In the community of the 'patuas' or scroll painters of Bengal, one may find the perfect manifestation of that spirit. They are a community of both Hindus and Muslims by birth, but follow a common religion of art painting and modelling images of Hindu Gods and Goddesses.

The 'patuas' dominated the native villages of Bengal during the Middle Ages and practiced a distinct traditional style of painting on cloth. The journey of the 'patuas' from their native village to the city of Kolkata, during the 19th century etches out a distinct painting tradition in the history of Bengal. The devastations and the loss of village life pushed the rural painters to take rescue at Kolkata and they started painting Gods and Goddesses on cheap paper instead of cloth. Unable to sustain an income they began selling these paintings to pilgrims and devotees visiting the Kalighat temple. But it was too soon that the subject of the paintings started bearing an urban flavour. While, the 'Kalighat patachitra' still finds a prominent mention in the art history tradition of Bengal. But it was towards the middle of the 19th Century that

Work by JP Gangooly

the idea of painting got revived under the canvas of Jamini Prakash Gangopadhyay (better known as J.P. Gangooly).

The artist in question practiced his art form during the period of late 19th century to the early 20th century. But his works have remained buried by the dominance of the neo nationalist and modern revivalist art movements of that period. But J.P.Gangooly practiced oil on canvas and simply reinvented the idea of landscape painting. The concept of light and shade and the notion of space in his paintings found a new dimension as compared to the other modernist paintings of the same period. Unlike the other prominent painters of that time J.P. Gangooly's work clearly bore evidence to a western naturalistic tendency. Even though he worked with several genres and practiced a variety of paintings but it was the landscapes and portraits that he excelled in. Mountain ranges, rivers and the rural landscapes have always dominated his oil canvases and painting the natural scenes at various times of the day was the painter's favourite. Capturing the sunrise and sunset and thereby painting canvases at varied light exposures was what J.P. Gangooly excelled in.

Born in the year 1876, the artist had his first stint with colours and canvas at his Jorasanko home. Being the nephew of Rabindranath Tagore proved helpful for Gangooly as, he got introduced to painting and Western education at home and was home tutored for quite a long time. He remained a student of young Abanindranath Tagore and much like the affluent artists of the period he was taught by British painter CL Palmer. His stylistic abilities and his idea of oil painting was a result of the upbringing he had within the Thakurbari premises and the Western connections he nurtured through his Painting teacher. The western naturalistic style always intrigued and influenced Gangooly and it was during his tenure at the Calcutta Government Art School. It was this association that helped the artist attain that firm grip over his liking and thereby made him more focused in his ways. He has always used oil colours as the medium of his paintings and thereby has produced charming, naturalist landscapes like that of the Himalayas at the Sunset or Sunrise or the Padma River at Dawn. His associations with the Calcutta Government Art School became stronger when he was actually shouldered the responsibility of running the college as its Vice-Principal. After Abanindranath decided to leave the college, the entire responsibility was on Gangooly's shoulder. And he had to even work on commissioned oil paintings that the Principal of the college Mr. Percy Brown brought his way.

Guiding the students with their assigned works was a part of Gangooly's daily routine and he even instructed and taught them watercolour even though he himself was not so fluent with the medium. Teaching his students righteously and helping them understand painting and colours better was a duty for the artist. He

completely discouraged the use of artificial colours and was keener on making use of handmade pigments. His works on canvas reflects the natural in the way it is and essentially brings out the real flavour of existence. Tranquility prevails through his painting ushering peace and comfort.

Apart from the most famous landscape paintings and portraiture, Gangooly also painted religious themes on canvas. Few of his most remarkable works on this theme borrowed from the Indian Epics are Raja Shudraker Sabhay Shuka-Shari, Buddher Grihatyag, Shri Krishner Yugal Rupa, Pujarini, Birahi Yaksa, Sandhya Aradhana. Colour played a very important role in all his works and he loved working with tones of yellow, blue and red. Working with hues of these colours and bringing alive each shade through his canvas to bring alive a rhythm, was what came naturally to the artist. His paintings presented the Himalayas in a very distinct manner. It was the snow capped mountain peaks, which took the centre stage in his paintings. He worked with the same mountain ranges but tried inducing the rugged flavour of the Mountainous region with the tender affection of the snow capped peaks. The tenderness of the snow capped mountain ranges at midnight varied from the stylistic beauty of the same at noon or even when the first ray of sun fell on them. Gangooly knew the variations and has worked quite carefully with oil colours to bring those serene yet appealing flavours out on the canvas. His paintings were a regular attribute in famous journals like Pradip, Bharati, Prabashi, Victorian India, Modern Review, Bharat Bharsho, Sachitra Shishir, Masik Basumati and journals of Academy of Fine Arts and Visva Bharati.

After his early home tutoring years, Gangooly also got himself enrolled at the City Collegiate School and later at the Metropolitan Institution at Calcutta. The artist possessed invincible skills in working with the oil medium and practiced a consummate oil applicability technique. His ideas of shifting gradations and variations of light came out quite clearly in his canvases and his mastery over the oil medium still remains a benchmark for the Indian painters. His abilities and skills not just became prominent through his nature paintings but also

Work by JP Gangooly

Work by JP Gangooly

through the transience of the human face, captured in relation to changing light.

All through his career the artist has been justly awarded and honoured for his brilliant painting style and the grandeur he brought out through his oil canvases. In the year 1902 he was awarded the Simla Art Society award at Simla, and received an award at the Bombay Art Society Exhibition in the same year. Apart from that he was also felicitated with a Gold Medal in 1910 at the Bombay Art Society along with the title Cavalier to the Crown by Victor Immanuel also known as 'William Turner' of India. He had also received an award at the Indian Society of Oriental Art, Calcutta in 1908. The award was procured to him just a year after he had laid the foundation for the Indian Society of Oriental Art, Calcutta

Gangooly did not only excel with his paintings but was also a man of discipline. His efforts and skills were not only restricted towards his oil paintings but was also extended to his administrative duties. In 1905 he was elected the joint chair person of the Bangiya Kala Samsad, Calcutta who later went on to become the father of the Oriental Art, Calcutta. In 1936 he was also elected as the joint director of the Academy of Fine Arts, Calcutta. The artist began his endeavor by working on mythical paintings and also tried his hands with portraiture. But it was soon that he discovered his true talents lies with landscape painting and thereby he began relating himself with the nature. The rivers, bathing ghats, paddy fields, fishing boats etc drew his attention and entangled him within a bond. His observation of these mundane places during sunset and sunrise resulted into the extravagant oils. It was his extensive training that gave birth to the professional yet distinguished artist J.P.Gangooly. The great artist declined to slumber forever in the year 1953 leaving behind his serene oil paintings. It was his work made on coarse Jute cloth, that attained him fame even in the last years of his life. The painting was titled Ulka.

The Jorasanko connect and his early teachings from renowned and prominent teachers paved the way for J.P. Gangooly to nurture himself as a painter. But it was essentially his unique understanding of the landscapes and his abilities to decipher the essence of the same that brought out the real painter in him. He over the years developed a bond with the Himalayas and the village landscapes which indeed helped him paint his canvas and represent the nature in its real essence with her own naturalistic tendencies. But apart from the mountains what attracted him more was the river Padma. He, all through his lifetime, had painted nearly a hundred oil paintings of the sun setting on the river Padma for which he was ultimately given the name of 'Painter of Padma'. His oils still speak the language of grandeur and can adorn walls of the affluent homes much like in the times of the Zamindars.

Defined by Absence: Hemen Majumdar's Women

by Anuradha Ghosh

Wounded Vanity

It is an encounter with moments of privacy that we are drawn into, as we view a series of works by Hemen Majumdar. For the viewer, this journey also involves moving from the point of recognizing the familiar to the discovery of its altered countenance, because of the situating of the commonplace in a subtly (often subversively) rewritten reality. Women who appear in dripping wet white sarees (Majumdar is traditionally famous for his paintings of Siktabasana Sundari, possibly because of the sheer tactile drama that he succeeds in creating with transparent folds of wet cloth on skin) are surrounded by moments of privacy that, in a sense, redefine them.

Apart from that initial sense of wonder that verisimilitude rarely fails to evoke, this visual experience can probably be explained in terms of a negotiation between two distinct modes of appreciation: one is an aesthetic engagement with the formal aspects of the paintings, the other is a need to make sense of the offered, if rather loosely-threaded, narrative that appears in the paintings. But there is also a third way in which the point of contact of some of these works can be read: it seems to have considerable potential to make voyeurs out of us, with the artist's signature blend of concealment and disclosure working on various levels. In a sense, the viewers are 'voyeured' not only by the strong erotic element present in most of Mazumdar's works, but also by the frame of isolation within which he situates his solitaries, thereby allowing the viewers a peep into that most private human moment: a silent dialogue with one's self.

In all probability, the painter worked with the prior assumption of a heterosexual male viewership, which, in a sense, is privileged by both the story told and the devices used in its telling. Most of his paintings depict solitary female figures. Some of these lone women are also sad women, each situated in an intense moment of suffering. The uses of certain visual details as well as the choice of titles adequately uncover the reason for their suffering: this seems to be, almost always, inflicted by a man, by way of separation, betrayal and/or abandonment. For example, in the work titled Porityokta (The Abandoned) we have this woman who is presented in a recognizable gesture of distress. There is partial frontal nudity, and the interesting fact is that, in

Barsha

spite of her undress, she is still ornamented. Both her ornaments and her state of undress speak of the man who has just departed. The narration hinges upon such hints, remains open-ended and lends itself to diverse interpretations. For instance, we find ourselves wondering whether it is a wife or a prostitute we're looking at, and we try guessing at the circumstance of the desertion. We are allowed our own preferred version, which, however, does not compromise the hegemonic positioning of the painter, as we do see what he wants us to see- a woman defined by a man, even in his absence. The painting titled Abhiman (Wounded Vanity) also hints at a recentness of a male departure (though here it is less indicative of abandonment) with the white flower, a gift, still held loosely by the woman. Alternately, this may also be read as a tale of waiting; the man she waits for has not arrived, and the flowers meant for him are therefore torn and scattered on the floor out of frustration and 'wounded vanity'.

It would indeed be interesting to see the viewer (who is allowed to gaze at these private moments) as one who identifies with the extra-textual male presence and assumes a position of power in relation to the woman in the painting. We must also keep in mind that the gazer and the object of the gaze are locked together in a relationship of power, the former obviously privileged over the latter. These visual texts, therefore, seem to address the empowered voyeur, his power flowing not only from a sense of control, but also from a sense of erotic gratification. It is the apparent passivity of the object of his gaze that invests him with agency.

Ear Ring

John Berger in Ways of Seeing observes that from 17th century (he has the European context in mind) paintings of female nudes reflected the woman's submission to the owner of both women and painting. In our present context the concept of ownership is problematised, because while the male viewer may or may not be the owner of the original painting, he definitely owns the printed reproduction of the paintings that frequently appeared in various Bangla magazines and were widely popular. This further problematises the position of the female viewer. Do we agree with Paul Messaris when he asserts (speaking about advertisements in his book Visual Persuasions) that in the female figure women see themselves as men may be seeing them, or in other words, they are invited to identify both with the person being viewed and with an implicit, opposite-sex viewer? Or is it, for them, a tale of colliding with the complex politics of collusion that implicitly exists between the male painter and the male spectator?

Majumdar's women frequently appear absorbed in the act of looking at themselves; their preoccupation of looking intently into a mirror, or mirror-like reflective surface (such as still water) can be read in interesting ways. In fact, the figure of the mirror-gazing woman is recurrent and familiar across cultures, and sparks off a number of diverse interpretations, ranging from vanity to auto-eroticism. In Majumdar's paintings women are typically captured as oblivious to their surroundings, looking intently into the mirror, their faces pensive, even anxious. A mirror, in a sense, creates a double of the self, and mirror-gazing can be read as a silent dialogue between the subject and her image, a practice directed at the reading of selfhood. But what if this doubled self in the mirror is appraised by an appropriated gaze? Does the woman stare at the mirror in order to understand what she looks like to the man in her life? This appropriation of the gaze of an absent male instills a sense of otherness in the reflected self within the mirror. Thus this solitary woman staring at herself is also defined by an absent man. In a sense, therefore, the painter's technique of situating his women in a space that speaks of the presence of an absent male frame, defines their individual narratives. This also relates to the theory of the dual identities of the surveyor and the surveyed in women, co-existent yet distinct, where she shifts

Summer

from being herself to being an imaginary male who gazes at her (when she appraises herself critically and considers the probability of appreciation) back to the role of the passively 'surveyed', her selfhood now heavily mediated and thereby modified by the appreciative/critical gaze of the man whom she has imagined and inhabited. We feel compelled to agree with John Berger when he insists that 'To be born a woman has been to be born, within an allotted and confined space, into the keeping of men.' What he means therefore is that, the social presence of women has evolved through a process of acclimatizing oneself to this limited and limiting space, and the inexorable tutelage of men, and thus her self is split in two- 'A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself.'

The private moments in Mazumdar's paintings are, therefore, rather paradoxical. The woman in question is continually watched, surveyed and judged, either by herself or an extra-textual male presence, and this meticulous creation of privacy works as an ambient factor. This embedded sense of being on display makes for an interesting and intensely observable alternation between the public and the private, the representational and the experiential.

Indra Dugar: A Profile of a Painter

by Sandip Sarkar

Indra Dugar was born in Jiagunj in 1918 and died in 1989 in Kolkata. He was the son of Hira Chand Dugar (1898-1951), a major painter of the early modern period of Indian Art.

Whenever I discussed with Indra Dugar about his art, he would invariably say in all humility: "my father, Hira Chand, was the melodious music. I am just a very faint distant echo. If you insist writing about my works, then you should write about his contribution in great detail. He is s a key that would, as it were, open the small lock of my humble treasure chest. "

I shall abide by Indra Dugar's express request and concentrate on the works of the father before I focus on the paintings of the son.

I still remember going to Kumar Singha Hall with my father. I was just 14 years old. It was my first exposure to actual paintings. Before it, I had only seen art reproductions in books. The Hall was dimly lit but the pictures were fabulous. My father told me most of the works were done in pure transparent watercolour. A couple of them were in gouche. He pointed out that most of them were on paper. Two were on silk. There were exquisite flower studies done in sundrenched colours with stems curling up in the posture of dance. There were hillscapes with undulating fields with trees moving to catch the mildly clouded sky in the horizon. He was a poet of lonely landscapes.

The Dugars are Jains and strict followers of the Tirthankaras (Saviours) who preached non violence and austerities to reach a perfect state of emancipation. Philosophically, it takes an extreme agnostic position. Both the monks and the laity practice vegetarianism.

The Dugars migrated to Murshidabad, the seat of Mughal governor of Bengal, during the tenure of Murshid Kuli Khan, more than two hundred years ago, from Rajasthan. They finally settled in Jiagunj, Murshidabad district, became engaged in trading and business. Hira Chand Dugar's father Surajmal was a successful entrepreneur like his forefathers and a very enlightened person.

According to the information that Indra Dugar gave me, Surajmal was attracted to Rajasthani miniature painting, Jain miniatures of Western India, Jaipur Frescoes, and also Haveli paintings done on walls of rich merchant houses of the Marwari clan. Surajmal was so enamoured to visual art that he did not object to Hira Chand's joining the Government School of Art and Craft, Kolkata, at the age of 16.

He worked diligently under Ishwari Prasad Verma, a great exponent of the Patna 'Kalam' (Style) of provincial Mughal Art. In 1919 Nandalal Bose took over the charge of Kala Bhavan, Santiniketan from Asit Halder, the first head of the institution who, shortly afterwards, left to join as principal of Jaipur Maharaja Art School. Bose insisted Hira Chand to quit Government Art School and join Kala Bhavan. His classmates were Dhirendra Krishna Deb Barma, Krishnakinkar Ghosh and Ardhenduprasad Banerjee.

Work by Indra Dugar

In Santiniketan Hira Chand trained rigorously under Bose and took to landscape in right earnest. Bose was by then moving away from Abanindranath Tagore's Schooling of Wash Painting and beginning to experiment with Gouche, Tempera and large Frescoes and mural on walls of Santiniketan. Hira Chand however preferred transparent watercolours.

After completing the art course in Santiniketan, Hira Chand was recalled by Surajmal to take over the family business in Jiagunj. Soon after this he lost his wife. For twenty years he was so busy that he found no time to paint.

Indra Dugar told me: "During a trip to Madhuban, Parasnath in Bihar, with my family, father accompanied us. For Jains it is a pilgrimage, an abode of Tirthankaras. You walked nine miles to reach the hilltop. There is a Jal mandir, a temple surrounded by water. We observe the rituals and I found time to paint in watercolours."

"One day, father was stirred up by the scenic beauty. He quietly asked me, 'would you lend me your brush, paper and cakes of colour for a while? In the intervening twenty years I have forgotten how to draw and paint' I gladly gave them to him. He looked at the scene before him for a while, drew a deep breath, and began to paint. Then as if by some magic, the scene emerged and transformed the paper. From then on I watched him when he worked. He would be deeply absorbed as if in a trance. He painted hills, valleys, lakes, and rarely family events like marriage. In Rajgir, Bihar he painted Gridhakut, the temple of Keshari Ji, the Kund or hotspring and the Ban Ganga. In Udaipur he painted the Fatehsagar Lake, in Jaipur Nahargar Fort. This is the type of paintings that were exhibited in the Kumar Singh Hall, Kolkata. This was the only solo exhibition that he had during his lifetime".

Shortly after the death of Indra Dugar I curated Hira Chand Dugar's only posthumous exposition. It was homage to Indra Dugar and his devoted love for his father. Mrs.Dugar opened up the art treasures of her father in law. It was a huge success and the Indian museum and some collectors bought paintings from the solo exhibition.

Indra Dugar told me: "My father went with my family on a pilgrimage to Palitana in Saurashtra. The temple was up the hill. While climbing he would stop to gasp for breath, sketch and paint. During the last stretch, he suddenly collapsed and died. He had a massive heart attack. It was on the 3rd May, 1951. He was only 52, I had no formal art training in an art school. In my childhood I lived in Santiniketan with my parents. Through my father, I met his mentor Nandalal Bose. When Abanindranath Tagore came on a visit, my father took me along to see him. Occasionally he would take me to Rabindranath Tagore. I frequently met his fellow students like Dhirendra Krishna Deb Verma, Ramendranath Chakraborty, Benodebehari Mukherjee and Ramkinkar Baij. I grew up in an electrifying atmosphere. I had my first rudimentary lessons from my father. When my grandfather recalled my father to Jiagunj, I stayed back in Kolkata and got through school and completed matriculation. In college I passed Intermediate of Commerce. In 1941, I received my B.Com degree from Calcutta University. During holidays I would go to Santiniketan. Nandalal Bose, who was called 'Mastermoshai' by everyone, gave me private lessons in painting. Every time I went to Santiniketan I took some works to show to Mastermoshai. He would tell me what was good or what had gone wrong."

Work by Indra Dugar, Manik Bachhawat Collection

"In Kolkata, Rathin Moitra, the famed painter and a founder of the 'Calcutta Group', gave me a short course on oil painting, privately. He had by then joined the Government School of Art and Craft as a mentor. I took some of my oil paintings to show to Mastermoshai. He became furious: "You have broken the taboo. You have eaten beef." (Before independence, Indian Nationalist artists took oil painting to be a sign of foreign domination).

Lady Ranu Mukherjee took a liking to Indra Dugar. Gopal Ghosh and Rathin Moitra were the joint secretaries of Academy of Fine Arts. Indra Dugar became the arc between the two solid pillars.

He remembered Mastermoshai's flushed angry face and gave up oil painting. Most of his works are in transparent or opaque water colour, or tempera.

He told me: "The Academy of Fine Arts Annual Exhibition was held during the Christmas and new year season. Artists from every corner of India sent their works. They would receive one of the many awards. Consult their biodata you would find what I am saying is true. A great artist like Jamini Roy to major ones like M.F.Husain had won an award. Rathin Moitra, Gopal Ghose,

Work by Indra Dugar, Manik Bachhawat Collection

Nirode Mazumdar and my work were displayed with a 'Not for competition' tag: but it was Mazumdar who stole the show."
Indra Dugar was a versatile artist and very professional too in his approach to art. Many of his works are visual passion and poetry. He portrayed the atmosphere of rural life with compassion and feeling. Most of such works are done outdoors. Sometimes he did a series of colour sketches and at other times he painted directly on the spot. Indoors he would at times develop the sketches he liked the most. Through his close contacts with Rathin Moitra, Sunil Paul and Satyen Ghosal he moved out of the orbit of the neo-Bengal School. His landscapes did away with unnecessary details. From modern Indian masters like Nirode Mazumdar and mentors like Rathin Moitra he learned the technique of structuring his landscape. His colours were not as sundrenched as Hira Chand's, but a bit subdued and rather diffused. Even then his works reflect real life and glories of nature.

He retained the tradition that he inherited from Hira Chand. This was watercolour painting on silk. He told me: "You see, I have seen my father doing beautiful paintings on silk. Much later, I saw Manicklal Banerjee's exquisite watercolours on silk. From Banerjee I picked up the technique and experimented and adapted to my style and pictorial content."

His oil paintings are not as strong as his work in other media. He did a portrait of Mahatma Gandhi during riot torn Noakhali district (presently in Bangladesh) just before the partition of Bengal. He told me: "I used a photograph for this realistic painting. Ramendranath Chakraborty, my father's class friend, was then the principle of Government Art School. After I finished the painting I took it to him. He studied the painting and gave me some valuable suggestions. Oil has one advantage when you compare it to other pictorial media. You can erase and change things that have burdened the work."

Unfortunately I have not seen his mural paintings. He, I have heard, painted mural for the Jain temple in Kolkata and the Parliament House in New Delhi. In 1987 he donated forty paintings to Dr. Karan Singh for the Amar Mahal Museum, Jammu.

His works have been collected by individuals and museums around the world. In this respect a special mention must be made of new Japanese Art Association, Tokyo: The Academy of Fine Arts, Indian Museum and Raj Bhavan, Kolkata.

He participated in many international exhibitions at home and abroad. The most prestigious one was the UNESCO sponsored art exhibition, held in Paris in 1946. He received many awards, but the Academy of Fine Arts silver medal he prized the most.

The main body of his work is in either transparent or opaque watercolours. He used to paint landscapes on the spot. The images are like runways that he uses to lift off into the azure sky of his imagination. His paintings depict and do not depict, reflect and do not reflect, the actual scene. Through his bold and dancing brush strokes he reaches out behind and beyond what is on view. His paintings do not describe the actuality, illustrate a site, but launch out into the realm of poetry and music.

Through the elements of pictorial settings, he tries to reach out into regions of musical sensibility and feeing. He tries to evoke the incommunicable stuff of which our dreams and imagination are made of.

His painting Music of the Mountain does not only depict the scenic beauty of mountainous region of Darjeeling. It seems to allude a celestial music through effects of misty contrasting shades and hues. There is series of watercolours he did on river views. There are two that come immediately to mind. They depict the riverfront of Jiagunj during the day (titled: Sadarghat) and night (titled: Ratri). One can almost hear the wind blowing through the leaves and rustling waves of the river. He uses the subtlety of colour contrasts and complimentaries to reach out beyond the bounds of reality.

He had travelled around various places in the country. He depicts the Ajanta caves, the temple at Mamallapuram, the approach to the Konark temple. These works are not photographs, tourist posters are picture postcards that a traveler sends home. There are hints of inner feelings, a supple form beyond the realm of the familiar scene. Reality seems to dissolve, break off and reassemble. There is a precision in the arrangements of space and depth.

He does not break up the manifest real world but rearranges everything into his personal idiom. He does not disfigure but stylizes the parts into harmonic improvisations of visionary content. The onlooker is given an entry point with a familiar scene before the eyes. As the viewer observes, he is absorbed into an unfamiliar area of visual experience. Dugar does not carry the observer to the region of the abstract. There is a mystic hint of this. The viewer, if willing, may explore it all alone.

Women in Rabindranath Tagore's Paintings

by Uma Prakash

Poet, artist, writer, playwright, composer and philosopher Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) painted different moods and forms of women. He was greatly influenced by the fascinating women who were part of his life. They were his sister- in- law Kadambari Devi (Srimati of his writings, committed suicide in 1884), his wife Mrinalini Devi (died of illness in 1902), and Victoria Ocampo (his companion in Argentina, Tagore's 'Vijaya' whom he met in 1924 and 1930). Tagore's artworks are more important about space, about childhood and love. It is only right that he should make our eyes and mind empathize with that which he has seen and felt.

Kadambari Devi was the nine years old child bride of Tagore's elder brother Jyotirindranath Tagore. She was nearly the same age as her young brother- in- law and was the poet's playmate and become his best friend, his mother, his strongest critique and his muse. He saw her first as a lost princess that needed protection, then as someone who mothered him and finally they were both teenagers developing a love for poetry.

Portrait of a Woman

Four months after Tagore's marriage to Mrinalini at the end of 1883 Kadambari Devi committed suicide. Though Kadambari Devi died very early, she continued to be the motivation for Tagore's writing for the rest of his life. The interplay between idea, poetry and painting is necessary to understand the artist's work. About 30 years after Kadambari's death Tagore composed the First Sorrow.

I was walking along a path overgrown with grass, when suddenly I heard from someone behind, "See if you know me?"

I turned round and looked at her and said, "I cannot remember your name."

She said, "I am that first great Sorrow whom you met when you were young (twenty-five)."

Her eyes looked like a morning whose dew is still in the air. I stood silent for some time till I said, "Have you lost all the great burden of your tears?"

She smiled and said nothing. I felt that her tears had had time to learn the language of smiles.

I asked, "Still today you've kept with you that youth of mine when I was twenty-five?"

Said she, "Here, just look, my garland."

I could see, not a petal had fallen from the garland of that springtime back then.

I said, "Mine has become completely withered, but my youth at twenty- five is still this day as fresh as ever, hanging there about your neck."

Slowly, she took off that garland, placing it around my neck. "Once you said," she whispered, "that you would cherish your grief for ever." I blushed and said, "Yes, but years have passed and I forget."

She added, "He who is the bridegroom of my inner thoughts, he had not forgotten. Since then, I've sat here secretly beneath the shadows. Accept me now." Then I took her hand in mine and said, "But you have changed."

"What was sorrow once has now become peace," she said.

Like this poem, First Sorrow, Kadambari seemed to be present in Tagore's paintings. He has felt her presence even in his Landscapes: the narrow path of the river shrouded with trees on either side leading to the golden horizon, lost in the lucid waters of the river, in the dark clouds of July, in the golden incarnations of September. Apparently, till his death Tagore felt the presence of Kadambari Devi's spirit around

Portrait of a Woman

Dancing Woman

Portrait of a Woman

him which even prompted him to write a song - Timiro obo-gunthone, bodono tobodhaki, ke tumi ke tumi ke tumi momo ongone? This song corresponds closely to the painting of a heavily veiled (obogunthon) women surrounded by darkness (timiro). Timiro obogunthon – The veil of darkness is a very good description of the heavy dark veil seen in Portrait of a Woman, a familiar image from many Tagore paintings and is widely believed to be that of his sister-in-law, Kadambari Devi.

Some of his paintings hauntingly bring out a strange sense of melancholia and death reflecting the loss of Kadambari that obsessed Tagore throughout his life. The sad faces, the shades of grey and black in most of his paintings and Tagore's references to Kadambari Devi as a subject of his paintings, give us an insight into the poet's creative subconscious. With dense crosshatching technique he created mysterious tonalities in many of his works. In Two Figures both the man and woman are lost in the whirlwind of sorrow trying to reach out to each other. Done in browns and subdued colours the painting evokes memories of his youth.

It was speculated that it was Kadambari who probably fell in love with Tagore, while he was more in love with her memories after she committed suicide. Tagore's platonic relationship with his sister-in-law Kadambari (his only muse), comes alive in his novel Nastanirh (The Broken Nest) made into a film Charulata by the renowned filmmaker Satyajit Ray.

To a young Amiya Chakravarty of about 16, who would a decade or so later become Tagore's literary secretary for a period of time, Tagore wrote in 1917, and he translated:"Once, when I was about your age, I suffered a devastating sorrow, similar to yours now. A very close relative of mine committed suicide, and she had been my life's total support, right from childhood onward. And so with her unexpected death it was as if the earth itself receded from beneath my feet, as though the skies above me all went dark. My universe turned empty, my zest for life departed."

On December 9th of 1883 at the age of 22 Tagore himself was married to a girl of 11, whom he renamed Mrinalini and with whom he had five children. Was Tagore's painting Mother and Child inspired by the birth of his first born, or is it the memory of his mother who passed away when he was very young? These are speculations and not conclusions to the love and life of the great poet.

In 1924 soon after his arrival to Buenos Aires Tagore met a 34-year-old ravishing beauty, Victoria Ocampo. She had serious literary interests and had read Andre Gide's French translation of Gitanjali. Besides having a keen intellectual understanding of his (Tagore's) books, she was deeply attached to him. He named her Vijaya and dedicated the poems he wrote in Argentina to Victoria Ocampo under the title Purabi, His poems display his extraordinary control over the erotic and the sensual. On the faces of Untitled featuring a man and woman a languid sexuality pervades. The delicate nuances of the erotic, the mystical and the haunting visual appeal of the figures are to behold! It is evident that there is much more happening beyond the confines of the frame. The two met six years later in Paris where Victoria found a gallery to display Tagore's paintings. In an Untitled Head the painter portrays a western beauty which could have been Victoria.

Women from Tagore's novels seem to inevitably find their way into his paintings like the a Portrait of a Woman that evokes memories of the sad story of Bimala, a housewife tragically drawn to a fiery Indian nationalist, in his great novel Ghaire Baire (The Home and the World). Here Tagore's veiled woman raises her arm to her face, either about to rest her head or wipe away a tear. The emotion is further emphasized by her exposed breast, suggesting that she had just torn her clothes in mourning. Bimala's voyage into self discovery and experiment are intense in this painting. This work is painted in varieties of brown. With his understanding of line and awareness of minimal colour the artist emanates a naturalness that makes this work captivating.

The fictitious character that Tagore created in his novels and poems seem to invade his canvas. It appears that the innocence and delicacy of Kamala from Noukadubi (Boat Wreck) is captured in Lady with Flower. Swirling with tonalities of black and grey the artist addresses the loneliness of Kamala.

Head (Westmer)

Four Figures

Portrait of a Woman

Lady with Flowers

The emancipated Hemnalini is evident in the Head Study. Tagore brings sophistication to the expression of the girl. The focus is on her eyes. They are eloquent, they speak. Tagore uses crayons, ink and vegetable colours to create portraits that succeed in depictingthe smile in the eyes of a young girl or the sadness of a lonely woman.

Tagore's Veiled Woman and his Tableau of Shrouded Women with their backs have a mysterious appeal: the private world of Indian women is peeped at but not revealed. Tagore reflects the attitudes towards women of his times although he himself was a part of reform movements that propagated social reform, education for women and widow's remarriage. In another Untitled piece the light from the tiny window that enters the home of the woman summed up the limitations of the freedom of women of that era.

We move from real life to fiction in his paintings. The Untitled Lady with a Fan, is believed to be an image of Lady Ranu Mukherjee, the socialite and patron of arts in Calcutta. While one Head brings to life Rajan, the orphan girl from his novel The Post Master, another is a lady he created from the ideals about womanhood he cherished in his imagination - the Manipuri princess Chitrangada.

With no formal training, Tagore began painting at the age of 63. He referred to his art as 'Sesh boisher priya' - an affair in the sunset of life. Art (drawing and painting) took over from words to aid him in expressing his deep and unexplained feelings and emotions. Tagore breathes life into his images with the stroke of his brush often resonating characters that belong to his novels and poems. He used this medium to communicate during the later part of his life. In 1924 Tagore visited China and Japan with Nandalal Bose where he researched the brush and wash technique. The artist did not indulge in any preliminary or preparatory sketches, in fact his art often originated from corrections and deletions in the manuscripts he was writing, as he transformed them into his visual narratives.

A recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature, Tagore was the founder of the Art wing at Kala Bhavana of Visva Bharati in Santiniketan (Abode of peace). His earlier works began as doodles executed while he wrote his poems and stories. His work later evolved into masterpieces and lyrical pieces of art. He himself confessed that the only thing he possessed from his young days was training in rhythm and sound. The inner rhythm of Tagore surfaces through his master strokes in the motions of Dancing Woman, allowing the protagonist the freedom to fly in the air. Through the light colours and flimsy clothes Tagore has created a woman who could be a modern-day dancer, contemplating, as she prepares to glide on the stage with the most incredible movement. His work was ahead of his time and through his abstract lines he portrayed the Figure in yellow and orange. These works places him in the league of today's contemporary painters. He shows how an artist who is playful with lines, even lyrically playful, can consciously move from figurative to pure abstract expressionism.

Ramkinkar Baij's Santhal Family

by Pranabranjan Ray

In Visva-Bharati's, Kala Bhavana campus, in Santiniketan, among others, there is a sculptural ensemble, comprising an adult male and a female - obviously a couple, with the female holding a child on to the left flank of her body with her left arm, while the male is carrying the other child sitting on front-side basket-balance of the weighing-scale hanging from the bamboo pole carried by the man on his shoulder. A dog struts along side. As it comprises more than one figure standing on a base, in close physical relation, it should be called a sculptural ensemble. The figures are one-and-a half times larger than their real life equivalents.

It is evident, from the scanty body-clinging thin clothings which barely cover the erogenous areas of their youthful bodies and the nakedness of the children, that it is an extremely poor family. From the accessories and the manners of carrying those, like the bulk weighing basket-balance hanging from bamboo-rod being carried from shoulder by the male, with his thin cotton-woven all-purpose gamchha now going up his head like a turban, and the female balancing a smaller basket full of essentials topped by a rolled up mat they had spread on ground for resting, make the family out to be a rural subsistent level agriculturist family. The suggestion clearly is that the family had taken three basketful of primary produce of land to the market and waited there to sell those for procuring small amounts of processed essentials, with the proceeds of the sale. From their physiognomy and the ubiquitous company of the dog, it is apparent that they belong to the Santhal community, one of the larger autochthonous communities of eastern India, known for its expertise in dryland cultivation. The sculptor, Ramkinkar Baij (1906-'80), himself had willed the family to be identified as a Santhal Family. Hence, the name.

Mill-Call

When installed in 1938, in open space, on a ground-level concrete base, on a plot of prickly grass on degraded red Lateritic soil of the semi-arid Rarh region of western Bengal, the ensemble stood just fifty feet to the south of, a twelve feet wide dusty red road, paved with lateritic granules, gravels and earth. The ensemble with its back to the east faced the setting sun in the west -parallel to east to east-west alignment of the road. The Santhal Family, thus seems to have been conceived as a site-specific sculptural assemblage. In its present state, with a canopy overhead and a protective barrier around, rows of building within a viewer's field of vision and the road made tar-macademised with black top, the ensemble has lost its site-specificity. But it still adorns Visva-Bharati's Kala-Bhavana campus, which Ramkinkar had set out to do at the bidding of the founder, Rabindranath Tagore himself. And to Tagore and his visva-nidham he owed a debt for widening his mental and intellectual horizon and combining that with intensification of response to experience of here-and-now.

The ensemble is made of lateritic granules and gravels, from the degraded lands, called khowai in local parlance, available freely from around the site; mixed with just enough cement to bind the makra pathar- the mix gives a granuler feel on the surface.

The family is on their way back from the nearest market place and is hurrying homewards. They evidently took basketful of home produce, waited long by spreading a mat on ground, to sell them off at distress price, to buy some primarily processed

necessities like salt and oils, and return home with relatively dear essentials all in a small basket, balanced on her head by the woman with her raised right hand. The act of balancing the load on head with right hand, makes her upper body more erect, in contrast to the male partner, and her youthful motherly fully rounded breasts move forward with each stride. All these situational and quantitative information can be derived by reading and following the indications thrown up by the images of the named objects and features, in the manner those have been presented. Thus read, these function as signifiers. The family is in a hurry to get back home before the dusk descends. Significantly again, they are heading towards setting sun with their back to the east.

The hurried movements get visualized through the gap between 'forward placings of the left legs of the couple and their right legs about to be raised from their former positions in their strides forward; the woman's right leg gets a little bent at the knee, when the man's right leg bends a little with bulging calf muscle. Both their left legs stride straight forward in strength. The legs form triangles with solidly grounded base to hold the waist-up bodies. Commensurate with the forward striding movement, the right arm of the male swings back straight, at a 50° angle to the ground, holding a string from which hangs the basket at the back from the pole carried on the shoulder. This hand-swing gives a diagonal thrust to the forward movement and speeds it up. The weary left hand of the man rests on the front part of the weighing pole after breaking at the elbow to form a horizontal to the ground triangle. The elbow touches the sheen of the spouse, just below her right breast. The quite out of proportion elongated forward bending neck expresses an eagerness to go faster. The slight spouse-ward leaning male head, on the neck, has been carved with more expressive details than the rest of the body, to express a combination of weariness, eagerness and anxiety alternately - depending on the viewer's angle of viewing. Such an excellence in visual execution of conception was reached only once in India, in the Gupta era. But Ramkinkar's achievement is greater. Unlike the sculptors of Mathura and Sarnath, Ramkinkar could combine the expressions of several conflicting emotions with vital physical action, and that too with far more coarse material than the very fine grained Mathura sand-stones the earlier sculptors had worked with. To return to the ensemble itself, weariness and anxiety notwithstanding, the poor young Santhal couple moves resolutely forward to the security of home, especially for the children.

Santhal Family

Although their movement forward appears somewhat circumstantially compulsive and destiny driven, yet their striding confidence and countenance, especially of the woman, suggest as though they are energized by a youthful life force, of which sexuality is an aspect. The last bit is not an over reading; the bodily signifiers are there.

A very important noticeable aspect of the vital dynamics is the rhythmicity of the movements visualised. While the synchronised movement of the straight linear falls and rises of the legs gives out a staccato rhythm of almost drilled togetherness, the child encircling left arm of the women and the languid left arm of the man resting on the horizontal pole, give to the middle-upper part of the body a harmonised ripple movement comprising two different kinds of rhythms - animating the bodies. The erect trunk of the woman and the slightly forward bending trunk of the upper body of the man balances two opposing rhythms to build up a complimentarity. The rhythmic presentation of movement, in the sculpture, thus, seems to have a suggestive function, apart from its function of uniting the ensemble and accentuating the quality of movement. Without this variation of rhythms in the different parts of the three bodies (the dog included), the artist could not have expressed his mixed feelings and layered the comprehensions of meaning. At the end of the story, it is the visual transfer of artist's response, in terms of image, to worldly experience. The meaning content of it is more important than the phenomenon the ensemble represents.

What we have done so far, is a descriptive analysis of the visual data contained in the Santhal Family. This by no means gives full idea about the historical importance and the intrinsic greatness of one of the most significant signature work of Ramkinkar, done by the 1906-born artist, when he was just thirty-two. What we need to do now, is to go into a discourse on the intrinsic quality of the sculptural text, giving due importance to the historical context. In doing so, we shall enter the ensemble through the physical data it provides.

This sculptural ensemble is one of the earliest on different counts, as we shall slowly discover as we proceed. Take the material and method first. The medium basically is cement-concrete. It was developed, in Europe in the cold-war years just before the First World War of 1914-18, for construction of solidly standing high defensive constructions, like the Maginot Line and the Siegfried Line. In the immediate post-war period, it led to the boom in skyscraper construction in the USA. Yet, in so far as I

Sujata

know, no major Western sculptor thought of using it as a medium of sculptural expression. The cement-concrete as a constructional material began to be used in India from the early thirties only. That makes Ramkinkar the first sculptor in India, and one of the pioneers anywhere, to have innovated the use of cement-concrete as a medium of art. Even if someone, somewhere had used the medium before him, the materials he processed to make his medium, and the methods he employed to construct his imagery, were innovated entirely by him. Instead of stone chips and sand, he used lateritic granules, gravels and coarse lateritic earth; mixed the whole thing up with just enough cement needed for binding and bonding the mix. He had used this particular mix of ingredients, for the first time in 1935, to make an eleven-feet high slim open-air sculpture, in the same campus which he titled Sujata. It had a difference in structure. All concrete constructions need armatures or skeletal supports from within, for the concrete mix to grip and hold on to. In Sujata, he had used bamboo poles and splits tied with canes for armature - the cheapest material for him. But for erecting such an elaborate and complex ensemble as the Santhal Family, he found the material unsuitable. He, therefore, opted for an iron rod and steel wire armature, grounded to the foundation. Two years hence, in 1940, he would be making a smooth-surface sculpture with a compound of colour mixed white cement, stone chips and sand, in reversed proportions, on a skeleton made with iron pipes and steel wire. That was designed to function as a lamp stand, in the open. It is very much an abstract composition on the theme of rhythmic correspondences between floromorphic growth and human dance. It demands to be recognised as the earliest example of visual objectification of an abstract idea in Indian art, of the modern period of history.

To go back to the main discourse, let us now look at the technique Ramkinker had adopted to accomplish the self-imposed task. After tying the armature to a skeletal approximation of the final form, the sculptor would take fists full of the concrete mix of desired consistency (moisture content) and start throwing those for piling up at selected portions of the erect armature; with a crudely made scalpel he would scrape off excess of unwanted concrete while the mix is yet to dry, to bring out the shape. Upto this stage of operation, Ramkinker's techniques were akin to the additive mode of the clay idol makers' of his native Bankura, whom he had observed at work in his adolescence, before moving to Santiniketan. But what he would do next, would be what the stone carvers do. After proper drying of the mix, with a hammer driven chisel, he would painstakingly carve out - accentuated details of physiognomical characteristic features of ethnic identity and age-group, in the first place. The second function of such intensive carving would be capturing the mental state, of the characters - perceived by the sculptor - as get expressed through subtle changes in the physical features. To make the expression perceptual enough, the sculptor of the ensemble in discussion, clearly had taken recourse to gestural accentuation of featural changes, coupled with very subtle smoothening out of anatomical details from those parts of the body not needed. But, the most significant aspect of the treatment has been the carvings, for getting the feel of rhythm of movement. The markers of contrasting rhythms of forward stride and tired drag, suggesting eagerness and anxiety at the same time, can easily be seen all over the ensemble. To achieve such effects with an experimentally arrived at medium, was not a convenient matter. We need to enquire as to why the sculptor had chosen to walk the path.

Was Ramkinkar driven by a will to adapt the newly developed construction technology for expressional purposes only? Why then he changed the ingredients? Was this change needed as a cost-cutting measure only? Execution of such a big project at a minimum cost definitely was the first parameter. Execution of an ensemble of similar dimensions in any conventional sculpture-making medium would have multiplied the cost several times over. Like all other art for public viewing in the Visva-Bharati campus, the Santhal Family too was not a commissioned work. Visva-Bharati then had no means to commission. Tagore had to beg, borrow and pay from his royalties to run the

cash-starved institution. Visva-Bharati could barely manage to meet the minimally expensive inputs. For the artist it was a labour of love. But the bigger question is, was the choice conditioned by lack, of fund only? It does not seem so. A deeper motivation might have been to give to the represented bodies of the sons and daughters of soil the look and the feel of the soil on which they toil and move. Only in terms of this will, his experiment with untried ingredient for making cement-concrete can be accounted for.

Another pertinent observation needs to be made on the use of the materials and methods which perhaps was to establish the prime truth that the ensemble, by no means, is a surrogate of a phenomenon. While there should not be any doubt about the fact that the constructed subject was the resultant effect of Ramkinkar's deep empathy for the toiling daughters and sons of the soil and experience of their modes of living, he had the other - no less urgent-desire to construct the ensemble as a distinctive entity and not just a representation of a probable event. The chosen medium and the methods adopted were ideal for making the distinctinction physically perceptible; subtler treatment which took the distinction further would only follow.

The descriptive analysis we started with and the discussion on the materials and methods we initiated inevitably lead us to a further probe into the subject matter, a part of which we have already covered. Let us re-view the ensemble, once again. While describing it in details we have just stopped short of saying that the ensemble narrates a story. The narratology includes the very perceptual present, with suggestions of the precedent and the antecedent, revealed through use of visible indicators and markers strewn all over the body of the ensemble, as we have taken notes of, through our viewing of the work. Reading the subject matter with due importance given to the suggestions signaled by the indicators and markers, makes the beholder aware of a deep theme that had motived the maker of the ensemble as it appears to the eyes. With such an awareness dawning, the very perceptible subject matter appears to be a construction, an objective correlate as T.S. Eliot would have maintained. The subject is the artist himself, his response to his experience of life-and-nature. This ensemble, like most of Ramkinkar's yet to be made later work, is an expression of his realization of dynamic interactivity between various forces of life and nature. It is also to be seen as an expression of his own psychological responses to different manifestations of this dynamism. He rejoices the manifestation of elan vital that moves the youth to forward positions, to procreate and make the earth fertile with their joyous labour. Manifestations of forces of retardation like the spread of soil-degradation, tiring fruitless toil on degraded soil etc. make him anxious. Ramkinkar's Santhal Family, is a sculptural ensemble that expresses, as if with supreme ease, a complex mix of conflicting emotional response, to a long experience of life-and-nature.

For the present, I am refraining from an assessment of the ensemble's significance in the socio-cultural history of modern India. I have already given some hints in my discussion on this aspect.

Mithun

The Birth of Freedom in Moments of Confinement

by Koeli Mukherjee Ghose

Reading of Benodebehari's work from the essay The Integrative Vision by Paranabranjan Ray, along with references from writings of K.G. Subramanyan, and R. Siva Kumar.

Laughter, Tempera on Paper

Sri Pranabranjan Ray in his essay, The Integrative Vision published in, Pratikshan Essay in the arts 1- Bengal Art - New Perspective, throws open a conspicuous debate at the very beginning of the essay, that pitch for perspicacity in Benodebehari's stance from that of Nandalal and Ramkinkar, with reference to contextual response of the three artists in relation to their times and its reflection in their works. For a better understanding of the artist Benodebehari, the author navigates through Benodebehari's creative work, along with his discursive writings.

He mentions “Benodebehari Mukherjee is often quoted as saying that unlike his teacher Nandalal Bose and contemporary Ramkinkar Baij, he was never drawn to the politics of the time, and that his objective was to be creative.” Rays findings from Benodebehari's writings of the artist's interpretation of himself as an aesthete also surfaces with the fact that Benodebehari was not complacent to the colonization affecting the art and culture during his time either. Ray points out that “the fairly large corpus of Benodebehari's Bengali and English writings, very few of which have been anthologized, on the state of the visual art and crafts in British India, We learn how greatly interested he was in the question of cultural contact in the overarching situation of domination-subjugation, hegemony-acquiescence.” Here Ray has clearly denoted the underlying sensibility at work for Benodebehari in deciding to paint in a certain manner and what he thought was important for him to paint.

At the backdrop the influence of the British rule was full to overflowing; Benodebehari was fully aware of the contradictory options that branched out as an outcome of the Imperial domination on cultural expression and that of a sense of activism against the infringement of rights for a National identity but Benodebehari, chose to stay away from either and be free to amalgamate his creative responses to the life around him that changed considerably due to the meeting of two different cultures; the Indian and the British.

The possible permeation of Tagorean sensibility, as part of Benodebehari's education in Santiniketan in 1917, when he was twelve, cannot be ruled out. During this time Tagore was focused towards building on the foundation of a holistic science of education and the correct use of instructive strategies in Santiniketan rather than being on an overt nationalistic drive against colonization.

A discerning look at Benodebehari's attention and study of ordinary people, going about their chores, in their

natural and habitual surroundings, nature's reward expressed in flowers and trees, cheering those who are forlorn and at times the pleasing vista, for cherished connection between people, found expression as either transitory or enduring - as subjects, and emerged in his works and all these reflect; life and its manifestations. - This validates Ray's findings, as he points out "with an absolute lack of interest in mythology, iconography and ritualistics" and since mythology, iconography and ritualistics, are elements that were fundamental to and a characteristic feature of the Nationalist's language and projection of ideals through artistic impetus, that which defined the artistic panorama of Benodebehari's time.

Benodebehari's complete bypassing of these elements is what makes the author cogitate upon the fact that perhaps the introduction to Tagorean thought as part of Benodebehari's didactic upbringing in Santiniketan and his responsiveness towards it reflected in his art and the thought behind it to be individualistic and free in his response.

Benodebehari wrote, "whatever is significant in my life, has found expression in my painting, without seeing my paintings no one can know my life's essence."

Ray calls to mind the year 1919, the time Benodebehari went to study in the newly established Kala Bhavan, the very next year Nandala Bose took charge and in 1921 the Gurukul school evolved into Visva Bharati, "bringing the world into one nest". He informs that The Academic plan that Rabindranath and his likeminded associates had drawn at the inception of Visva Bharati was focused on attainment of knowledge of inspiring achievements from different parts of the world, of different historical times that which is free from the repression of needs and its diffusion. In the context of Kala-Bhavana this model had a unique implication. According to Rabindranath, creativeness is the bountiful energy which is not bound to just securing skills or grades to earn a livelihood. While in opposition to the British dominion on culture, as the Nationalist movement for the political sovereignty progressed, it also created indicators for cultural distinctiveness, for the nation, on the basis of undeniable ethnicity and customs, advocating their inclusion into artistic engagement, In reality the progress for political autonomy, was tying creativity to obligations and opposing the lack of, that was restrictions for making choices that is necessary for creativity."

Ray mentions – "Talking about the influence of art on art practice, Benodebehari could have asked, and indeed in many of his writings has implied as to when art had not been influenced by art, as also by non-art factors. As long as influence remained unilinear, i.e. confined broadly within one cultural tradition, very few would recognize that as an influence. But as soon as inspiration and linguistic devices began to be applied, the influence came into prominence. But the arts of societies in transition-through the struggle between colonialism and nationalism, from a herd -mentality to the discovery of the Individual, from consanguinous solidarities to democracy-were destined to be eclectic. The moot points to consider are: (a) whether the artist is appropriating elements, devices and ideas he / she considers as relevant and significant; (b) whether the artist is being able to internalize and transform the borrowed items and (c) integrate the loaned elements sufficiently to give the created art an organic wholeness."

At the earliest point of his artistic calling, Benodebehari began his landscapes of locations from his native place of Pabna district for example Padma-Jamuna basin, he also drew and painted on the site of creased landform of the khowai of santiniketan and the rural surroundings along the winding river of Kopai. Ray defines the works as essentially "not description of places with natural and constructed features. To call them impressions, in the Impressionistic sense, would also be misleading, although these indeed were impressions." The significant features of Benodebehari's work were suggested by lines which were boundless and flowing rather than contour

The Tree Lover, Tempera on Paper

defining, that emphasized their rhythmic excellence. Other than the relative proportioning of the physical features by rendering contour lines, the effective positioning of unconnected lines on the plane instantaneously validate a sense of spatial distance, creating a unique space.

In his temperas,of the mid thirties globular drops of colours from the brush drunk with colours, rendered the foliage, the rugged landforms and the human form expressed with a rhythm, rendered a figurative quality. The sweeping calligraphic lines and its interplay with the forms perhaps appear expressionistic, but Ray elucidates that "One may only be partially right to assume that. In his use of both masses and lines there was nothing of hurried gesturalism; all indicators were carefully crafted to represent phenomenal entities, but only as summaries."

One fine exemplar of his earlier accomplishment in assimilating appropriated rudiments selectively as Pranabranjan Ray describes – "The almost iconic portrait of his Tree Lover colleague Tejeschandra Sen, that Benodebehari painted, in tempera, in 1932 is a remarkable non ceremonial portrait, wherein the rendering of the standing figure is resultant of a sensibility to capture the characteristic features of the personality at a point of time. It is an example of an artist's personal assessment of another person, constructed by fusing the Japanese mode of minimal delineation of contours, with caricaturish

Grooms Bridge, Tempera on Nepalese Paper

Grooms Bridge, Watercolour with Pen and Ink on Paper

overstatements and understatements of selective limb-postures and gestures developed by the expressionists."

An early attention to the knowledge of representation of the visually discernible unique world, prompted Benodebehari to study Far-Eastern art and not a realistic representation of the copied world. He felt that the discreet representation of the phenomenal world that Far-Eastern art offers "makes art intrinsically worth". His interest in Far-Eastern art took him to China and Japan in 1936-37. He studied the plant life and tried out a range of support surfaces, with Chinese and Japanese colour pigments and solvents. By using instruments brought from there, he illustrated the techniques he had learned and also used the Chinese and Japanese tools. But before long, he demonstrated his unique way of using the tools and techniques. This he figured out in his own practice and emerged with a flourish to deal with, the challenge of imagining the phenomenal space on the picture plane, further activating it with evocative images and subtle trace of narratives. "He first tackled all these issues even before his Far-Eastern sojourn in a mural he did on the ceiling of the Kala Bhavana boys' hostel. "Benodebehari did a mural in a tapered and interrupted space of the staircase walls in Cheena Bhavana after he returned from his visit to the Far East. Equipped with his new earned skill he composed a depiction of the Santiniketan ashramites of the early forties, engrossed in their pursuits. It success fully indicated moving figures and through permutation of lines, gesturally shaded masses, he united a spreading composition with a sense of rhythm.

In 1946-47, Benodebehari completed his most exceptional mural project that established him as a figural painter, on the three walls of Hindi Bhavana, in Santiniketan. Depicting the medieval saints of India, many of whom had been from the peasantry and professions of crafts and laborious work. But each of the saints in their poetry, music and teachings extended the significance of love, devotion and mutual aid as an alternative to ritualistic practices, in order to bring down the barriers of division based on religion and cast.

Ray illuminates that "With Rabindranath's active encouragement, from the twenties, Santiniketan scholars like Kshitimohan Sen, Bidhusekhar Sastri, Haridas Mitra, Sukhamay Sastri, Hazariprasad Dwivedi and others were engaged in researches on Kabir, Dadu, Nanak, Namdas, Gaudiya Vaishnavism and variations of Ramkatha, etc. In the background of the communal politics of India, which culminated in the Calcutta, Bihar, Noakhali and the Punjab riots of 1946-47, leading to the partition of India in 1947, the non communal mode of religiosity, assumed significance. All these factors seem to have played their part in Benodebehari's choice of subject matter. But the problems at Benodebehari's hands were many."

"..... In the representation of the individual saints Benodebehari hardly ever attempted to give an individual identity, except by means of iconological attributes. He would, however, give indication of their places of activity, by placing indicative images around each of their figures; configurated in separate niches... served the purpose of representing them as individuals from different backgrounds and from different times. The niches or the surrounding space of each saint are placed at differing

height with figures varying in size, suggesting their actual spatio-temporal distance."

The placement of each of the saints in the mural is conceptual. He flowed with the rhythm of the irregular niches that provided him with vertical spaces to work on; he avoided building enclosures and enhanced the interplay of horizontal lines, moving them into the adjoining spaces, to signify limitless interchange. Additionally the flow of the river meaningfully goes around the alcoves.

K.G. Subramanyan informs in his essay published in Benodebehari Mukherjee - A centenary retrospective, that "Benodebehari did not prepare any cartoon...but made numerous postcard size drawings... The technique of Fresco buono imposed the constraint of piecemeal work since it was not possible to work on more than two square feet within a day...It allowed him to rework structural components. Redrawing and the repeated layers of contours evolving from the rectifying process enhanced the density of the figures and pronounced their physicality. Thus in the absence of a pre- planned structure, the entire mural evolved in units measured by a day's work."

In the fifties, Benodebehari spent a number of years in Nepal where he did a large number of works on paper, in ink, watercolour, tempera, wash and ink. One noticed the minimalizing of the defining contours, masses of colour appeared to represent architectural elements, indicating space and its relationship with the positioning of figures. R. Siva Kumar in his essay, Benodebehari Mukherjee: Life , Context, Work, informs that – Life in Nepal was for him the opposite of life in Santiniketan, which was Spartan though rich in intellectual companionship ...he became more openly responsive to the sensuous in life which came alive fused with an exotic charm in Nepal. And the absence of intellectual companionship was offset by educative encounters with accomplished artisans like Kulasundar Shilakarmi who made him realize that art could be lifted to a higher plane, even given individuality, through consummate skill or a total oneness with one's means and openness of mind. This brought an important change to his aesthetic outlook and approach to art."

The works created in Nepal is further described by Prananb Ranjan Ray as he draws attention to the transformation in Benodebehari's work, he says, "The figures themselves had become substanceless forms without details. But typological social identities were never missing. Subject matter again comprised common people engaged in work and enjoying leisure, pilgrims and devotees in temples and ghats, albeit devoid of their exalted majesty. It was the simulation of the rhythm of life constructed on surface, the relentlessly unified common uneventful life's transformation into joyous paintings laced with pathos."

Benodebehari's creative pursuit continued even after the loss of his eyesight. Pranabranjan Ray Mentions that "so unvanquished was his nurtured spirit that he would refuse to regard his unseeing eyes as organs for spiritual vision." The artist created collages of figures with mass and arranged them on flat surfaces. He also made lithographs with squiggles of unbroken lines suggesting actions of people in their daily chores. Resultant of this practice with the marble paper collages and the lithographs; the mural on the wall of the Kala Bhavana canteen in glazed tile, came which R. Siva Kumar in his essay reflects upon a subtle integration of his past and present work as he writes "...this mural encourages

Restaurant, Tempera on Silk

Sayed Mustapha Ali and Benodebehari, Tempera on Nepalese Paper

us to read it with reference to our body and its movement.

Pranabranjan Ray in his conclusion of the essay evoke Rabindranath's vision of the Nation in harmony with its own array of regional and eventual cultural identities, a true reflection of the universe and its ways that again finds expression in Benodebehari's creative stance.

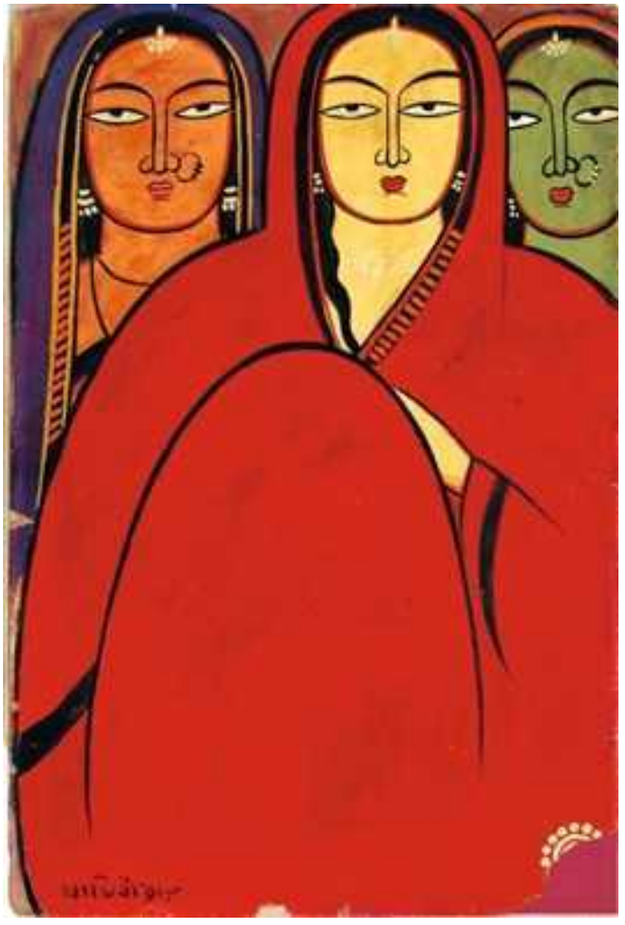
In this context Ray ruminates that "Unity in diversity has lost its meaning through political overuse and has become a cliché. But it was not so when Tagore had for the first time coined the phrase in one of his essays on Indian history, in the early twenties of the last century. More than a description of situation, it was a will that needed to be realized. Benodebehari's lifelong endeavour in art had been a celebration of the diversity with the aim of holding those in rhythmic unity. More than that, his was a grand endeavour of uniting art and reality-without compromising each other's sovereignty, in a symbolic relationship."

Jamini Roy's Art in Retrospect

by Pranabranjan Ray

Rural born, Jamini Roy (born in 1887 at Beliator village in folkish art and craft-rich Bankura district) left the village, at the crucial age of sixteen in 1903, for art education at Calcutta's School of Art, is no more a significant fact for an aesthetic evaluation of the greatness of mature Jamini Roy painting, than a similar counter-fact of his sojourn back to the world of medieval terracotta-reliefs, rural patas and folk toys, some eighteen years later.

Jamini Roy need not also be remembered for the maximum illusion of likeness producing portraits, called the academic ones, which he did in oil on canvas, for meeting his cost of living in Calcutta. Of a little more interest are the more or less similar portraits he did after the first set, in tempera and in gouache in a la prima mode - retaining the brush-work marks, reminding one of the post-impressionist academic portraits painting. These brushwork marks, denoting but not simulating chiaroscuro, would take him towards surface 'modernism'.



Three Ladies

Jamini Roy is an art historian's despair, for he never dated his works, and he was in the habit of often going back to his earlier themes and styles after time-gaps. Although most of his better seen post-Cezannesque Fauvist landscapes probably come from the forties, that is from the period when he had already touched the zenith of his signature style, there is strong chronological logic of their being first experimented with in the early twenties, and then abandoned for not being relevant to the artist's quest. These chromatically brilliant rich in texture free-Cezannesque landscapes would have made Jamini Roy an Indian Fauvist painter, but that was not what he was trying to achieve. However, he did learn his lessons in colour and texture on pictorial space which were to be integral elements in his signature style.

In the next developmental step, Jamini babu experimented with an Abanindranath-derived stylistics to integrate landscape and human figure, in a suggested landscape of land meeting sky in the horizon (in actuality a sky-colour area and a land-colour area), with a semi-silhouetted village-bell or a rural lad looming large in the foreground with her/his form (on being silhouetted). This sentimental short phase would have been a washout but for the lesson he learnt in transforming worldly three-dimensional space into pictorial space of colour-planes, and indicating figural-form by clearly contouring it. And there was third and more important latent element in this shift. Touched, probably, by Abanindranath's nationalism, Jaminibabu - for the first time realized the necessity of giving to the pictorial image a continuity clue and an identity. What else but a reference to the idyllic rural life could serve as a better instrument? Jaminibabu would soon pass over the period, retaining as he did, the three most important lessons he learnt from the experiment. It must, however, be admitted that on being infected by Abanindranath's nationalistic affliction, in 1921, Jaminibabu undertook a cultural journey back to re-discover the still living arts and crafts of rural Bengal, in terracotta reliefs, scroll patachitras, wooden patas and above all in folk toys (wooden and clay) of Bengal. The year 1921 in which Jaminibabu undertook his journey of re-discovery was the year of culmination of the first satyagraha launched by Gandhiji, the most important component of which was mobilization of masses around rural life as it was lived. This Gandhian movement undoubtedly had given Jaminibabu a solid substance for action on what till then was an Abanindranath Tagorean set of nationalistic aesthetic ideas which was not exactly Jaminibabu's cup of tea. Through the twenties both Abanindranath and Gandhiji remained with him, in his work.

Agnipariksha

Yet, it was not exactly in the twenties that Jamini Roy had arrived at the threshold of his signature style. Another little known event had to happen towards the end of the twenties, or at the beginning of the thirties, to act as catalyst. The novelist Tarasanker Bandyopadhyay, who was a neighbour of both Jamini Roy and the anthropologist and Gandhian, Nirmal Kumar Bose, writes in his autobiography that some time at the beginning of the thirties, Nirmalbabu had gifted a few pata paintings of one of the last generation of the famous Kalighat patuas to both Jamini Roy and Nandalal Bose, making them both excited and happy. In Jaminibabu's case the final break-through came through a study of these and in Nandalal's case a study of these led to the Haripura murals/posters. My teacher Nirmalbabu did, in the sixties, indeed confirm that he introduced the two masters to Kalighat pata. However, one should not come to the conclusion as one is apt to do, that once he had found this source it became Jamini Roy's only visual-linguistic source of appropriation. Far from that, Jamini Roy appropriated only a few elements from the Kalighat pata tradition, as he did with other Bengal folk art traditions. But what he appropriated from the Kalighat tradition he transformed those into cardinal visual-linguistic component of his personal style. Two of these were: one, the curvilinear (of elliptical or parabolic propensity) band-like contour line to define the outline of an image, and two, juxtaposition of the concavilinear and the convexilinear contoured area to connote the volume of the area without chiaroscuroistically denoting it. And the third, colouring all areas of a painting flatly, without resorting to chiaroscuro. At the same time, he totally rejected the irregular configuration of images seen in Kalighat pata for visual narrative effect, signaling his rejection of narration in visual art - a very 'modernist' fetish per se.

It is not that, once Jaminibabu had arrived at what he was seeking, by traversing the path the Western art had traversed from academic illusionistic naturalism to Fauvism to abstract art of some kind, Jamini Roy stayed put and did not do much experimentation. Indeed, he did quite a wide ranging research from choice of pictorial surface offering variations in textures to frame-image spatial relationship and the linear determination of extra-painterly identity of the human images posited on pictorial surface. However, in spite of experiments with configuration of negative space i.e. background and positive space i.e. image-occupied space, linearly divided pictorial spatial areas and variations indicated residual worldly identity of the images, certain formal visual-linguistic concerns remained constant through half of the thirties to the first couple of years of the seventies and became hallmark features of Jamini Roy's style. Let us first enumerate these and then discuss about their effects.

That the two cardinal visual-linguistic elements of Jaminibabu's paintings are lines and two-dimensional pictorial surface is a simplistic truism. A slightly better truism is that he used the line both to divide the pictorial surface into negative space and image-filled space of balanced proportions and to enclose the images as contour lines. Of greater significance is the quality of lines in Jaminibabu's paintings. The lines that divide the surface of his paintings as contour/image-defining lines are more bands than lines. And the band-like thin-to-thick-to-thin massey, gently gliding curvilinear lines of parabolic propensity often simulates vegetal/floral linear-pattern, thereby endowing the images with organism semblance. Can we trace the root of this in the collective unconscious of a rural-agrarian culture from which Jaminibabu came? We should not, however, hasten to categorise Jaminibabu's art with what Wilhelm Worringer had termed organic as opposed to geometric. Jaminibabu's works defy this western binary. If we look closely at his images, which are basically flat and two dimensional, these reveal themselves as agglomerations of geometric shapes. Due to their being defined by the kind of contour lines,

Jesus

Ganesh

as has just been enumerated, these do not appear as geometric as these really are. This, precisely is, one of the reasons that makes Jamini Roy a 'modern' Indian who cannot be contained within the Eurocentric concept of 'modern'. More about this will come later.

Another very significant function of the band like thin-to-thick-to-thin gently curving contour lines, in their flowing patterned laying bind the configured negative and image spaces in vegetal rhythm. This type of rhythmic patterning of floromorphic lines camouflage the perfectly geometric comprising shapes of the images (oblong, parabolic, hyperbolic, roundish and trapezoids etc.) and present these as organism entities. Being agglomerations of basically geometric comprising shapes, the vegetal contours of which turn those into organism entities, Jamini Roy's indicated images tend to contain and strike a balance between geometric and organismic. This balance striking repose is a significant feature of Jamini Roy's art. Rhythm plays the prime role in the striking of balance between negative and positive space, geometric and organismic approach to delineation and finally in the distribution of luminosity of colour areas. The cumulative resultant effect of the visual-linguistic arrangements into style, inevitably gives to his paintings a balanced equilibrium, of background space and image space, geometrically divided space and organism endowed by contour lines and, warm and cool, bright and sombre colour areas. The regular and predictable surface sequencing of these visual-linguistic elements further heighten the sensation of balanced equilibrium, making his art poised, cool and classicist, and consequently devoid of the vital élan.

Jaminibabu was perhaps aware that the perfect painterly construction of painting he was heading to would not do with beholders; he therefore endowed the flat areas with non-chairoscuroistic brushwork textural embellishments and made his contour lines a little less regular than these apparently are. These little deviations from regular application make his pre-forty three paintings less decorative and livelier than the later paintings where colour-areas are flatter and lines almost mechanically curvilinear.

We have so far been talking only about the formal and constructional aspects of Jamini Roy's art, as these should, particularly in his case, be given a priority. Images, with known cultural and social associations especially with folk life of the rural agrarian Bengal, have immediate presence in Jaminibabu's art. Youthful peasant housewives and rural workforce, Krishna Balaram and Subhadra, Krishnaleela, Rama Lakshmana Seeta and other characters from the Ramayana, Jesus Christ Mary Joseph, the nativity, the last supper, the crucifixion and the resurrection of Christ, the Kamadhenu cow, bovines of gostha-leela and cats fishes lobsters etc. of Kalighat pata and sitting birds of the Santal wall decoration are the immediate images of Jaminibabu's painting. Jamini Roy even painted episodes from the Ramayana, over and over again, in the forties and the fifties. Not to mention of the paintings not based upon known narratives, even those based upon known mythical narratives appear as disjointed scenes of events frozen in time, just as his Krishna's and gopinis in dancing postures, look frozen at a moment in perfectly balanced poises, with each part of a moving human body balancing another part. This lesson about the point of equilibrium in a time-series, Jamini Roy must have learnt from studying the iconology of dancing Nataraja. Even if Jaminibabu depended on iconological marks, like sarees on bare bodies with a ghomta over head for a rural housewife, bare-bodied men in loin cloth with implements of production, blue bodied Krishna with a flute, Balarama with a plough, Rama with his bow alongside Seeta and Lakshmana, Subhadra and Seeta invariably accompanied by Krishna-Balaram and Rama-Lakshmana, from gestural and postural interactional stances, spatial placement of character-images, and gazes of the imaged-characters, in Jaminibabu's painting it is well-nigh impossible to formally differentiate images based on real life from those based on myths, and images based on one myth and another myth. Simply for the reason that Jamini Roy was never too interested in narratives (the only exceptions have been Jaminibabu's paintings based on myths and legends centering the

Krishna and Cow

life and death of Jesus Christ. Without being moved by a feeling of deep empathy for the subject matter these paintings could not have been painted. Interestingly, the visual-linguistic means for the visual objectification of this empathy was derived not so much from the Bengal folk art as from another Fauvist, albeit a Christian painter -George Rouault. Let us not dwell so much on the Fauvism inspired language of Jamini Roy's Christ-paintings, for we know that he had half-a-life-long not so secret love affair with varieties of Fauvism). To go back to Jaminibabu's object-images once again, by contouring a wide variety of human, animal and bird images with lines of similar character, stylistically delineating their physical features similarly and painting them flatly, he reduces them to agglomerations of a shape, albeit with iconographic identification marks. Even when these denotatively indicate, these do not connote phenomenal stories. The positing of such internally balanced indicator images on plain surface in rhythmic regularity, make his paintings design-like with no phenomenal content, even when these have distant objective references. Even with object-indicators Jamini Roy's paintings are purist painting. The balanced equilibrium of purely visual elements exude from them a far from maddening world calmness.

The personal history of the development of Jamini Roy's art, as we have already noticed, followed the path of development of occidental modernism up to a point. Gandhian and Tagorean ideas then intervened to change his trajectory a bit. He with a classicist mentality of giving importance to the communication function of art, Roy found in the visual-linguistics of the living traditions of the folk arts and crafts of Bengal resources which could be appropriated, transformed and used to communicate with potential spectators. Thus was born a 'modernist' Indian individualist artist's art, in a language format derived from the quintessential structure of folk art of Bengal. A highly logical inference led Jaminibabu to arrive at this personal solution of the vexed question of visual character of 'Indian modern art'. He had probably argued, that if the autonomy-seeking 'modernism' of the Western artists had led them to some kind of formalism in which the phenomenal image was inconsequential, and yet be besotted with either the fetish of geometry of industrial existence or the industry-negating primordial organicity, what then was wrong with an artist coming from the rural-agrarian background, who unlike his western counterpart was not alienated from that life, to fall back on the store house of familiar visuals for formalistic appropriations. Thus was born an object-based purist/formalist art, true to the world of visual experience possible in an under-developed colonial country.

Jamini Roy's rural simplicity, in retrospect, appears to have been more a cultivated quality than real. The development of his own aesthetic parameters of creative action followed exactly the trajectory of Euro genetic 'modernism'. The change of trajectory of Jaminibabu's art praxis too had a solid logical base. If 'modernism'

Four Ladies

Santhal

in art was an action-oriented movement to create an autonomous system of art, with an independent visual-language, and if such a 'modernism' practiced in the West had sprung there from the spring board of specifically Western visual culture and experience, why should not then, an autonomy seeking 'modernist' Indian art take off from the storehouse of memory of its own visual forms. For Jaminibabu it was not only an apologetic reasoning. He, with a latent belief in classicist values, believed that to reach out to a wide spectrum of spectators and appreciators, a linguistic continuity was sine-qua-non for even the most individualist artist. With such reasoning, Jaminibabu created an individual Indian 'modernist' artist's unique kind of art, with an unmistakably Indian identity of a kind. That precisely is the reason why Jamini Roy needs to be celebrated as 'modernist' Indian artist, of highest significance, even if his art was not contextually as relevant as some of his contemporaries and juniors. Significant though as non-abstract purist art with 'Indian' visual association, any reference to Indian life and the hopes and anxieties the life inevitably generated, is totally absent from Jamini Roy's art. Jamini Roy's is a self-contained autonomous art, at peace with itself.

Jamini Roy Images: From the Collection of Konark Collectables

The Great Journey of Shapes: Collages of Nandalal Bose

by Samindranath Majumdar and Anuradha Ghosh

It was quite a while ago that I came across a catalogue published by the National Gallery of Modern Art, on occasion of Nandalal Bose's centenary, and that was my first brush with his collages. But a substantial, and somewhat staggering encounter came about a year back when I had the opportunity to view a whole body of these astounding works, and hit upon the realization that these in fact stand out in a singular manner, with a deeply embedded significance. In fact the collages constitute a chapter in his career as an artist and art teacher that needs to be closely studied, unraveled and understood in order to be able to make better sense of Nandalal's life and work. A practicing artist who is an art teacher too negotiates between identities that are hardly bipolar, hardly self-limiting, yet the two can be observed and considered distinctly. The collages offer us a fascinating- and useful- reading of this duality.

The point of origin of the collages amply illustrates this. Nandalal, in a 1954 letter to Sagarmoy Ghosh, describes in detail how the collages came to be: he was watching Mr Perumal teach students the study of ducks and hens at Gouri Bhanja's home, and the students started showing him their works. With no pencil or drawing paper at hand, Nandalal gathered the paper shreds lying around and tore them to shapes of the birds being studied in order to instruct the students. The next day the students brought some of these back to him, mounted on board, and this was, indeed, a moment of revelation to him: 'thus began a manner of work more powerful in its import than the kind of work with hesitant pencil lines.' The teacher formulated a fresh technique of teaching, and the artist reveled in the possibilities of the newly discovered medium. Nandalal narrates how this new technique fired his creative passion: 'I was constantly picking up pieces of discarded paper, letters, torn envelopes, and giving them shapes.' He had further subdivided the collages into two distinct groups, a classification that clearly underlines the twinness of his identity, the artist as a teacher and the teacher as an artist. He mentions a manner in which the paper is torn without premeditation, the artist yet clueless about referentiality (this also includes 'found' pieces of torn paper), which then undergoes minor parings, a few lines are added to form a shape and a picture. Here is an element of the automatic, the

Sob Sesh Holo, Aar Bhage Kaaj Nai,
Collage

Komor Soja Koro - Pakistan,
Collage

Pradip Shikha,
Collage

instinctive, that pays court to the intuition of the artist. The other technique, as he himself insists, is wonderfully effective in case of teaching. This involves deciding upon the shape first, and tearing the paper according to the dictates of the preconceived shape. This manner, Nandalal agrees, effectively lacks 'simplicity' and 'boldness'- it is interesting to see that for him it is still acceptable only because this proved invaluable for learning, and teaching, the features of shape and form. The collages provided, in a manner of speaking, a fresh new creative space for the artist, and an effective tool to the teacher.

Nandalal himself called these works 'hela-felar kaj'. I can roughly translate 'hela-fela' as 'uncared-for', but then this labeling would ignore the basic element of meticulous care that underlay every work that he ever produced. I would rather connect a certain kind of playfulness, a perceived freedom, with this singular group of works. One notes, though, umpteen correspondences here with his earlier drawings- maybe with the exception that Nandalal's drawings include, in most cases, the use of careful detailing. Having considered the incidental nature of the beginning, one would still wonder what impelled the ageing artist to engage in creating this sizeable series with such passion and verve. We may remind ourselves, though, that old age and infirmity had effected notable alterations in the manner of work in case of quite a few artists, opened up new directions, destinations unknown and exciting. The name

Page from Rabindranath Tagore's Sahaj Path/Pratham Bhag, illustrated by Nandalal Bose in linocuts, Visva Bharati, 1401 Bangabda reprint

Koutha, Collage

that we readily remember in this connection is that of Matisse, whose stint with cut-out/collage started when he was seventy-two, and confined to a wheelchair: physical infirmity had clearly been an operative factor here. We stumble upon a very interesting coincidence when we note that Nandalal himself was seventy-two as well, and physically ailing, when his preoccupation with the collages began. Matisse's artist's book 'Jazz' published in 1947 includes many of his cut-outs, most of which are principally designal. These differ from Nandalal's series primarily on the point of deliberateness of intent. Matisse used scissors, thus effecting a cleaner edge, cutting away a shape that he had already decided upon, while Nandalal- as I had already mentioned before- largely depended on unpremeditation. He was working almost like the Zen artists, working with accidents, molding an existing shape into significant form with minor alterations. I am reminded of the 'readymade' sculptures, especially the one by Picasso, the 'Bull's head', where he brought together the seat and other parts of a cycle to create a unique referentiality. Or, maybe, Abanindranath as well. His famous 'Kutum Katam' utilized found objects- parts of tree branches, mostly- and with the help of playful additions and deletions created interesting formal structures. Abanindranath had used collage in his 272-page scrap book titled Khuddur Yatra (1934 to1942) and Rabindranath too, if we care to remember, had pasted cut-out parts of his paintings onto another surface. It is extremely probable that the subconscious recollection of such experiments had honed his eagerness for the new medium, however accidental the starting point might be. There are other links too, interesting ones, worth observing closely. For one, the collages are, principally, silhouette forms, with minimal lines that indicate and emphasize the form- whether human/animal/bird- and this recalls the Tagores once again. Gaganendranath Tagore had used silhouette figures in his paintings, and one is also reminded of Rabindranath's silhouettes, with their notable dirth of details. One can only observe, and ponder upon, the feasibility of connecting these separate yet similar strands- but a clear pronouncement would probably be somewhat presumptious. But what is unquestionably present as a strong stylistic connection is Nandalal's abiding interest in graphic art. Nandalal, almost a founding father of linocut in India, experimented with this medium in the unforgettable illustrations of Sahaj Path- a Bangla primer for children written by Tagore which has not lost its relevance till this day. The talking point is, these works treat figures and objects as a solid, monochromatic mass- black, in most cases- while only a few white lines, details, situate and define them. In a sense, Nandalal is using the same technique in his collages. Same, yes, but this sameness is also mediated by the possibilities of a separate medium. For example, the clean, sharp contour lines typical of linocut are completely absent here. They are replaced by serrated, yet sensitive, contours induced by the edge of the paper torn by hand. There is no sharpness, no abruptness of demarcation, as if the piece of paper falls into place against the background in a

spirit of easy companionship. The paper scrap finds belonging here, while the background gains animation and meaning from this tiny piece. A scissor cut spells complete secession: these serrated tearings are situated in a diametrically opposed point, they bind and blend.

Nandalal's use of space- blank space, that is, which usually forms the background and often surrounds the elements-, has interesting dimensions. Blankness, emptiness as backdrop is not a new encounter for us: it is present in our folk tradition, in our chouko pat/kalighat pat, even in innumerable Jamini Roy works. Yet it is evident that Nandalal's use of empty space owes less to the various strands of our folk tradition than to the distinctive use of void in Chinese paintings. In most kalighat pats, the empty backdrop is just that- a backdrop- which exists only as negative space, the emptiness operative in foregrounding the full-focus spectacle. It is not meant to exist on its own, and in many works we hardly get to see a sufficiently large part of it. The focus, understandably, is on the centre-stage story narrated by the pictures - bright, adorned and voluminous- and therefore it would be unjustified to link Nandalal's use of emptiness to the folk tradition. Void in Chinese painting is a distinct story altogether, with its philosophical underpinning, its felt presence: the void is instrumental in signifying the harmony of the universe, the very flow of life in a sense. Emptiness, thus, is almost a signifier here, and in Nandalal's collages too, we recognise a similar import. There are some works, though, where the skilful use of perspective and arrangement transform the blankness into a recognizable topographical unit, situating the figure with a visual rationale. For example, this work dated 3 March, 1954 portrays a woman from what appears to be a high-angle point of view. The empty space, within which the figure would have seemed suspended otherwise, visually rearranges itself around the figure because of the perspective so that she appears to be solidly situated. The pictorial space beneath her feet transforms, therefore, into a clear foreground. Whichever way we look at it, one can pronounce with considerable justification that the collages treat empty space with considerable reverence.

A notable feature of the collages is the airy lightness of temper that accompanies them as a continuing undertone. We must remember that these works were done speedily, and this very fastness of execution had possibly lent these a flavor of a passing, fleeting thought. Here's no weighing down with serious reflections, pensive musings- rather, at times, a barely noticeable strain of humor emerges and defines the mood of the work. This impression is reinforced by the frequent commentaries that Nandalal added to the collages, text that helped him situate his figures within a clear narrative frame. And in many cases, such text hinged upon contemporaneity: these sought to capture the temporal through allusions to recent events. Shall we call them, then, pictorial chronicles? A case in point would be this very interesting work where two pieces of paper have been joined and pasted on board in such a manner that the shape denotes a Muslim man- his posture clearly indicates some ailment involving the waist and midriff. This collage, executed on 5 March 1954, carries the text 'Straighten thy back, Pakistan!' A straightforward political commentary? Or, perhaps, an astute observation from a person who is wide awake to the political equations all around him? The work that portrays three monkeys displays the same awareness. The monkeys are seen to divide a cake among themselves- three pieces, understandably- alluding to the popular adage of cake-sharing of monkeys. The whole narrative takes on a deeper significance as soon as the text 'no need to divide things further' is added to it; one may justifiably surmise that the three pieces refer to India, Pakistan and East Pakistan (which later became Bangladesh). We must keep in mind that in spite of technically being the same country, Pakistan and East Pakistan had always been somewhat distinct entities in popular imagination because of their geographical and cultural distance. 'The Flame', too, is an interesting work. The woman who bears the lamp here is clearly a foreigner with short and curly hair, her elongated frame clothed in a gown: does she resemble Sister Nivedita? Sister's contribution to Indian art movements can hardly be over-emphasized- it is thus entirely possible that she inhabited the imagination of Nandalal more as the actual glowing flame rather than as its bearer.

Equally interesting is the 1954 work titled Everest Expedition, which is very clearly a chronicle of a contemporary event that rocked the world and took place less than a year ago, in May 1953. This is a singular work which differs substantially from another collage concerning mountains- Snow Man, in which one catches the impression of mountains stretching away. This sense of a wide hilly expanse is conspicuously absent in the Everest collage (though the cloud on top of Mount Everest has a unique tactile quality, created by peeling off an outer layer of paper, thus achieving a translucent thinness) . Here the mountain seems to be snipped, recast

Snowman, Collage

Everest Abhijan, Collage

Fur Coat, Collage

The Lady, Collage

Baire - Bhitore, Collage

in a fixed frame with space all around, rather like a clipped newspaper snap. I'd venture to say that he is pictorially representing a rather significant snippet of news, and that is precisely why he refrains from focusing upon the panoramic expanse. The principal focus here, after all, is the feat of humans, the victory over nature. The mountain, as a vanquished element, lies framed (bounded?) and therefore reduced.

These representational works can hardly be called realistic: the simplification of form and gesture that had been instrumental behind their creation is also the principal factor in infusing, what may with facility be called a certain quality of abstraction. A case in point would be the work titled 'Fur Coat', where a brown paper envelope and its gummed, darker side is used to bring out a figure considerably simplified, yet recognizable as a person wearing a long, sweeping fur coat. The sense of control of the artist is admirable, especially when we consider the fact that not a single line is drawn to define the collage further.

Abstraction essentially involves the factor of deconstruction and reconstruction of meaning, the viewer is inexorably drawn thus into the creative process. In some of these works, the narration too deviates from the space of a fixed discourse and attains semantic fluidity. I am reminded of this notable work where two longish pieces of white paper are pasted on a yellowish board, the pieces resembling two tall figures with upturned faces. One is akin to a lion-like animal, the other appears to be a calm, composed sage. The first has the word 'outside' written beneath it, while the second figure has 'inside' written below. We can only wonder at what he might have wanted to denote: since the work is titled 'oneness is what the philosopher sees', we are led to ponder upon whether a visionary splits the apparent into mutually opposing, yet congruent, selves. Or better still, we are confronted with the projected coexistence of the god and the beast! And it is precisely here that the significance of the denotation lies, in the opening up of multiple directions through the vocabulary of hints.

Rabindranath had mentioned once, talking about his doodles, that his work was 'akarer mahajatra'- the great journey of shapes. Precisely this feeling returns again and again as a resounding echo during our encounter with Nandalal's collages, which justifiably constitute one of the most significant phases of his career, one which is both a culmination and a new beginning.

Matisse, Blue Lady, Cutout Collage

Picasso, Bull's Head, Readymade

Nandalal Collage Images: from the Collection of Vikram Bachhawat

Haripura Posters by Nandalal Bose: The Context and the Content

by Soumik Nandy Majumdar

Elementary Concern

Nandalal Bose (1882-1966) had a natural flair for designing architectural constructs, interiors and stage settings for performances and ceremonies on various occasions and rituals in the campus of Santiniketan. He fostered the idea of 'art for the community' and 'collective art initiative' by setting innumerable examples, along with his associates and students, throughout his life. It is true that his innovative philosophy concerning art and art education within the larger context of social concern was influenced to a large extent by the ideas of two of his eminent contemporaries, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) and Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941). While Tagore's focus was on the cultural regeneration of India, Gandhi's primary concern was the political and economic independence of our country. Inspired by both these personas and convinced by his own exposure and extensive field studies, Nandalal's spectrum of art-practice continuously and emphatically embraced the entire breadth of Indian art heritage, both living and past, with a strong prominence on the rural craft traditions. He upheld the significance of these traditions that were fast succumbing to the pressure of urban colonial culture. Like a true researcher he was extremely keen in his perception and understanding of handmade utensils, handmade toys and other household objects. He always paid tribute to the village potter and village artisan who fashioned his wares with simple tools and simple ideas.

Senhai Players, Image Courtesy: Rhythms of India Catalogue, SDMA, California, USA,2008

Elementary and even complex shapes arrived at effortlessly and somewhat intuitively by the master-craftsmen attracted his ever watchful and unerring eye. Be it a metal-ware, a wooden toy, or a potter's bowl Nandalal admired with great regards every product created by rural artisan-artists. In his childhood years, the artisans' workshops in his hometown of Kharagpur held an enticing attraction for him, and he often visited them and watched the woodworkers, metal smiths, scroll painters and others working with grace and a natural élan. "This fascination", K. G. Subramanyan writes, "fed his desire to become an artist. ... Even after he became a renowned artist and educator, he continued to see art and artisan practice as a connected panorama that ensured aesthetic creativity in a modem environment."[1]

Nandalal keenly followed their methods and picked up certain technical nuances like a faithful disciple. He had observed that rural areas of India were adventurous in the use of colour on person, in textiles, in toys and in paintings. He clearly saw that the art which harnessed the vitality of folk art and rural simplicity could stand against the general rot ushered by a misconstrued industrial revolution. E. B. Havell and Ananda Coomaraswamy had already drawn attention to the indigenous craft conventions of our country and made it an imperative concern for the Swadeshi art. Historically speaking, the time was ripe for the crusade on behalf of indigenous craftsmanship and art. For all the variety of artistic explorations it is undeniable that Nandalal's faith in the rural culture was the kernel of his creativity. For instance, Khadi to Nandalal was not a mere coarse cloth made out of hand-spun yarn. It was full of infinite variations of textures born out of human sensibility. As Dinkar Kowshik writes, "Khadi (for Nandalal Bose) was an aesthetic equivalent of our will to work and our homage to the hands." [2]

Run-up to Haripura

For Gandhi, art and Nandalal were synonymous and he was proud and happy to have 'discovered' Nandalal as the artist of the Indian National Congress. On the other hand Nandalal too was witnessing how Gandhi strove to emancipate the country from colonial rule and soon became one of Gandhi's admirers. His respect for the Mahatma increased when his action

Girl with a Tambourine, Image Courtesy: Rhythms of India Catalogue, SDMA, California, USA,2008

Hunter, Image Courtesy: Rhythms of India Catalogue, SDMA, California, USA,2008

program 'broadened its purview to include the economic independence of India and the strengthening of its widespread artisan traditions to achieve this.'[3] Obviously, Gandhi's focus on India's artisan traditions had a special appeal for Nandalal. Nandalal's admiration for Gandhi is clearly evident in the famous lino-cut he did in the wake of Gandhi's historic Dandi march in March 1930. His war against the Salt-law that charged the entire nation was symbolized in a black-white lino-cut of modest size depicting Mahatma stepping out with his walking stick, evoking a sense of strong will to overcome all obstacles. That this image eventually became a visual prototype of the iconic image of Gandhi is now well known. Incidentally, Nandalal did not come to know Gandhi personally until 1935 when Gandhi sought Bose's help to install an art and craft exhibition at the Lucknow session of Congress in 1935. However, the first such exhibition to be organized in connection with a convention of the Indian National Congress took place at Indore in 1934. Gandhi recognized the importance of such exhibitions and believed that it should continue at all subsequent Congress sessions. Though Nandalal was initially apprehensive, he took it on his stride and despite severe paucity of funds got Benodebehari Mukherjee, Prabhat Mohan Bandopadhyay, Vinayak Masoji and Asit Kumar Haldar to assist him in this task. Nandalal and his associates undertook to arrange a historical panorama of Indian art including Copies of the Ajanta and Bagh murals, Jain paintings, paintings from Rajput and Mughal Schools, Kalighat Patas and works of Abanindranath and his disciples. While Nandalal was busy putting up all this together, Mhatre, an architect from Bombay supervised the construction including a novel gateway.

Gandhi was greatly pleased with the austere aesthetics of the show and appreciated the simple bamboo, reed, and timber structures that housed the exhibits, as well as the straightforward mode of display. In his opening speech at this session Gandhi referred to the aesthetic arrangement that touched the base and urged the gathering to spend some time in appreciating the display and the labor that had gone into making it so successfully. In fact he announced that the exhibition he was going to declare open was the 'first of its kind'. He made everybody realize that village artisans from all over India were gathered, 'from Kashmir to South India, from Sindh to Assam' to make the display a memorable and learning experience. This on part of Gandhi was certainly a manifestation of his serious engagement with the issue which is further reflected in his nation-building activities, especially those related to economic independence. One such program was the All India Village Industries Association, which operated under the auspices of the Congress. In fact in a letter dated November 1934, Gandhi invited Tagore to lend his name to the advisory body of the All India Village Industries Association.

The Faizpur session of the Congress followed almost on the heels of the Lucknow session and barely five months had elapsed Gandhi summoned Nandalal again hoping to put Nandalal's ability to the test in Faizpur where the next Indian National Congress session was to be held at the end of 1936. He wanted Nandalal to take charge of the entire work of the Faizpur meet. Nandalal intimidated by this many-sided assignment cautiously wrote back to say that he was just a painter, while much of the task was architectural. But Gandhi would not accept refusal. The artist later recalled that Gandhi wrote to encourage him with this cryptic message: "I do not want an expert pianist; I want a devoted fiddler." Subsequently the entire work in Tilak Nagar – near Faizpur was once again handled by Nandalal and Mhatre and they also received help from a group of young people who accompanied him from Santiniketan and the local artisans. For the Faizpur meeting, which was intended to be kept as free from urban influences

as possible, Gandhi envisioned an entire township (Tilak Nagar in Central India) built with local materials – wood, bamboo, and hay – and wanted the exhibits primarily to be the handiwork of the local village artisans. The resulting exhibition and built environment exceeded all expectations, and Nandalal's resourceful use of simple local down-to-earth materials became a model for young designers in the years to come. In the main pandal where the exhibition was arranged, Nandalal had the ingenious idea of sprouting wheat seedlings around the central pole. When the exhibition was thrown open to the public, visitors saw a round oasis of live greenery in the middle of a graveled floor space. This novel way of beautification by pressing nature into a wonderful service received spontaneous admiration from all quarters.

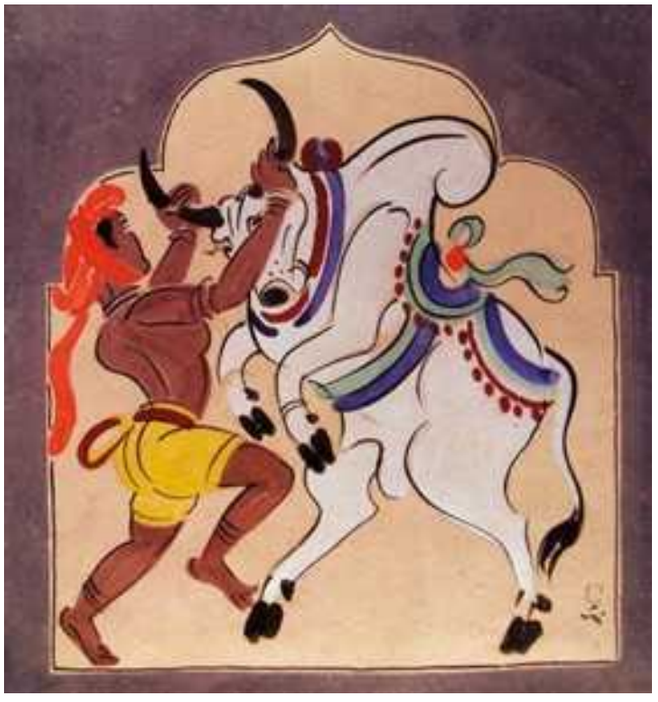
Right from the opening day of the session Gandhi repeated his praise for Nandalal almost every day. As K. G. Subramanyan writes, "Before the Faizpur session, Nandalal's reputation as an artist had been confined primarily to the elite artistic community in Bengal (and elsewhere), but Gandhi's unstinting praise of his work brought him national fame: in essence, he became the artist laureate of nationalist India." [4]

Dinkar Kowshik reminds us that 'The work at these sessions was purely a labour of love, but to Nandalal it had a special attraction. It provided him with a site and material for trying out his novel experiments in art for the community. Gates, pandals, landscape gardening and posters for social education could be planned and executed. It was an opportunity for creating art with social relevance. Above all, he could be close to Mahatmaji, a privilege he would not have liked to miss.' [5]

Haripura Posters

The next Congress session was to be at Haripura, near Bardoli in Gujarat in February of 1938. Once again Gandhi placed Nandalal in charge of creating a unique environment infused with local art and craft. And once again Nandalal pleaded his inability, partly because he was not keeping well and partly he was demoralized to hear that some local artists gave public expression to their parochial feelings as they were unhappy to have somebody from outside Gujarat. But within a week of his letter to Gandhi he turned up at the Bardoli camp to Gandhi's surprise and relief. Consequently Nandalal proceeded to Haripura and studied the site and surveyed the availability of local materials and craftsmanship. At Haripura, Nandalal turned the sprawling area into an exquisite example of environmental art. Gates, pillars, exhibition, cluster of stalls, thatched shelters, landscape garden, meeting areas and residential tents were all decorated with local material of bamboo, thatch and khadi of different hues. Earthen pots and vessels were adorned with designs; tassels of paddy grass hung in rows, baskets and cane work – made by the hands of local craftspeople – were all used to lend the session an elegant rural atmosphere. As a significant component of this huge public art Nandalal planned separate paintings which were later to become famous as Haripura posters depicting Indian life in all its variety.

Reportedly, Nandalal painted nearly eighty posters himself, mostly about two feet by two feet large in size, and his student and teacher associates then made close copies of them, multiplying their number to close to 400. Created on handmade papers stretched on strawboard, these paintings or posters were executed with brilliant colors prepared and mixed from the local earth pigments. Bamboo, thatch, and homespun cotton were employed to construct the display panels all around. Gandhi wanted the posters to catch the attention of passersby, so they were displayed at the meeting compound's main gate and on the exterior of the pavilions. One can imagine that the whole vista turned out to be a public art of a huge hitherto unseen scale. Nandalal Bose himself



Bull Handler, Image Courtesy: Rhythms of India Art of Nandalal Bose Catalogue, SDMA, California, USA,2008

Cooking, Image Courtesy: Rhythms of India Catalogue, SDMA, California, USA,2008

Dhaki, Image Courtesy: Rhythms of India Catalogue, SDMA, California, USA,2008

Mughal Warrior, Image Courtesy: Nandalal Bose Centenary Exhibition Catalogue, NGMA, New Delhi, 1983

writes with enthusiasm, 'Following the pata style we did a large number of paintings and hung them everywhere on the main entrance, inside the volunteers camps, even in the rooms meant for Bapuji and Subhasbabu, the President.' [6]

Haripura posters celebrate the Indian rural life and culture sharing a vibrant earthy color palette and bold, energetic lines with a vividly modernist graphic quality. A sweeping look at the available images reveals that these posters draw attention to the different activities, professions and trades that constellate the moments of village daily life in a picturesque continuum. Most of the imageries culled from his observed reality around were developed from the rapid sketches Nandalal did during his survey of rural areas and people living near the location. The swift, spontaneous strokes contouring the forms and figures encourage an equally effortless viewing reminiscent of the character and temperament of Kalighat pata and various other folk paintings that eschew any labored or affected idiom. The charm and the playful gaiety exuded by the linguistic features blend perfectly well with the contents depicting subjects like Hunters, Musicians, Bull Handlers, Carpenter, Smiths, Spinner, Husking women and modest scenes of rural life including animal rearing, child-nursing and cooking. The simplicity of these works also lies in the unvarying use of the point-cusped niche that frames the principal subject. The vigorous dynamic forms of certain figures of course cut across the frame thus saving the images from monotony.

According to Binodebehari Mukhopadhyaya, "In these Haripura panels painted for the session, there is an ineluctable harmony of tradition and study based on observation. Each poster is different from the next in form as well as in colour and yet there runs all through a strong undercurrent of emotional unity, lending a familial stamp. The artist has not looked towards any ideals either traditional or modem, but keeping an eye on the contemporary situation, has worked out his own goal. The stream of form and colour which flows over the subject, subordinating it, brings these posters into kinship with mural art." [7]

Considered to be his greatest contribution to the popular culture of mass nationalism, Haripura paintings brought Nandalal accolades and widespread recognition. Through these paintings, in a certain sense he came close to Gandhi's purported mission 'to make Gods out of men of clay'.

Reference

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2. Dinkar Kowshik, 'Nandalal Bose, the doyen of Indian art' (National Book Trust, India, 1985) p. 37
3. K. G. Subramanyan, op.cit., p. 92
4. K. G. Subramanyan, op.cit., p. 99
5. Dinkar Kowshik, op.cit., p.49
6. Nandalal Bose, Vision and Creation, (Visva Bharati, 1999) p.235
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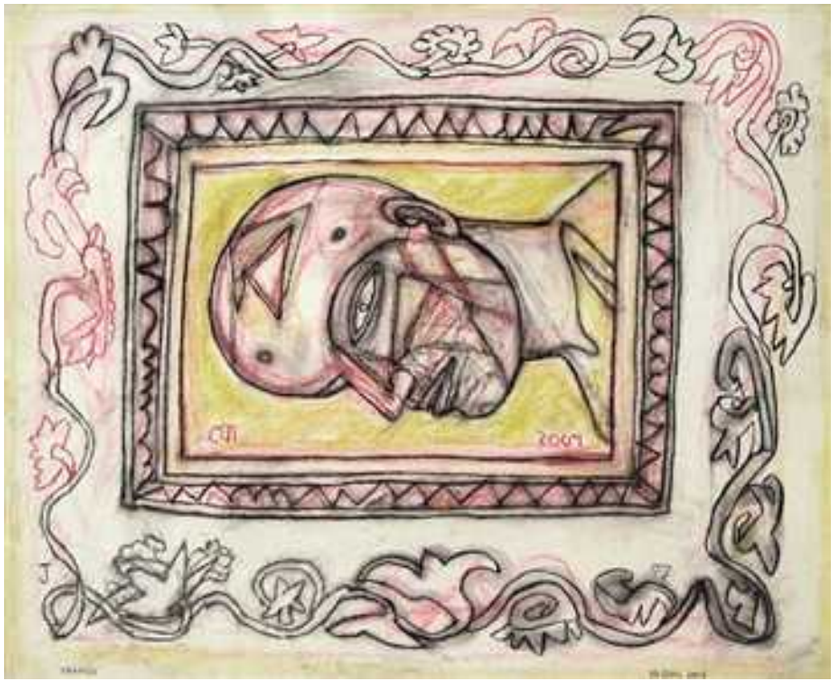
The Post-1960s Scenario in the Art of Bengal

by Dr. Nandini Ghosh

Post-1960s modernist art practices in Bengal began to be increasingly marked by subjective concerns. Such subjectivity worked itself through political consciousness, engagement with social issues, as well as a concern for defining identity especially within a regional aspiration however subliminal all of these might appear to be, when anticipated in terms of the immediately evident at the visibly formal level in an art object.

The post 1960s generation had spent its childhood, adolescence and subsequent maturity at a time when Bengal as a region was passing through one of the darkest phase in its post-independence history. This refers to the socio-economic dislocation caused by several factors and their after-effects the famine, post-war presence of the allied forces in the city of Kolkata, communal riots in Bengal and in the neighbouring East Pakistan subsequently leading to a large diaspora of the Hindu community shifting over into West Bengal, and so on. These were followed by political disturbances spurned by severe mis-



Jogen Chowdhury, Framed Face, Pastel on Paper

governance during the decades of the 1950s and the 1960s, resulting in violent protests against economic disparity, joblessness, shortage of food and fuel etc. As a consequence of all of these, Bengal saw a massive peoples' movement for food, public upsurge against hike of transport (tram) fares, labour movements in major industrial sectors, and protest-movements for acquiring democratic rights, which served to provide a considerable jolt to the socio-cultural status quo in the region.

The decade of the 1950s was also witness to protest movements within the academic milieu, most importantly from amongst students. It was this decade when student bodies and unions began to assume a strong voice in academic institutions with significant extended contribution and active participation to mainstream politics. This was a significant development, for it was in these sensitive and socially conscious young idealistic revolutionaries wherein lay the future succession of the forthcoming decades from politics to culture, from development to economy and from governance to humanity. All these developments in the decade of the fifties would hold an immensely significant implication for the decades of the seventies and later as a foundational backdrop for forthcoming developments.

The end of the 1960s and the early 1970s was a moment of political transition. The Naxalite movement and its associated violence, the economic situation and the pressure generated thereby, as well as the imposition of the Emergency with its characteristics of censorship of public voices and the media (newspapers, magazines etc) once again generated the ground for protest-

Bikash Bhattacharjee, (From the Doll Series), Oil on Canvas

Robin Mondal, Head, Acrylic on Board

Ganesh Pyne, Head, Pastel on Paper

Prokash Karmakar, Untitled, Acrylic on Canvas

movements.

Coupled with the contemporary socio-political disturbances, and a gradual fading through temporal distance from the pre-colonial and colonial memories, was an intense feeling of loss and rootlessness within individuals who had immigrated to this side of the border in Bengal from East Pakistan; their uprooted status created an atmosphere of aimlessness on the one hand, and a desperation on the other, to ensure a mere minimum of subsistence. The sum-total of this socio-cultural situation may well be presumed to have structured the response patterns in the responsive artists.

The gloom that characterized the situation continued into and through the 1970s, and reached a peak with the imposition of political Emergency in mid 1970s; even more severely, individuality and voices of freedom found themselves threatened and at stake. The visual artist, as part of the same ambience, was obviously extremely unhappy with the turn of events, but saw no immediate way out of the ensuing turmoil and violence. Amidst such a bleak circumstance the visual artist's search for a new language of protest found expression through the modes of formal distortion, satire and pun, in a way that the art of the post-60s was characterized by changes that focused more on the regional identity.

Distinct from their immediate predecessors, the early modernists of the nineteen forties and fifties, whose visual practice concentrated on the formal aspects of art, based on the pictorial styles and languages imbibed from developments in the Western modern (consider the instance of the Calcutta Group referring to Impressionism, Cubism, Surrealism etc, both in their proclamation as well as practice), artists of the nineteen-sixties through seventies embarked on a different trajectory.

Among the young artists of the post-60s to be reckoned with, a significant segment were art school graduates, mostly in their twenties. While these rising aspirants shared a strong disapproval of the existing state of visual arts, they were neither entirely clear nor immediately certain about a valid alternative in visual expression to be able to formulate a mature linguistic structure. Much like the nineteen-forties, this was once again a moment in transition, seeking a contextually relevant mode of expression that would be a valid voice to the then-current status of the modern.

To envisage the 60s and the post-60s in terms of broad categories and tendencies in visual arts, one could possibly begin with artists who continued into the decades from an earlier era, carrying along with them the directions that they had been exploring since then. Amongst such artists one could probably draw upon the instance of Somnath Hore (and to an extent his senior contemporary Chittaprosad, though the latter was mostly stationed in Mumbai), and mark this trajectory as that of a politically conscious genre triggered off through the artists' ideological consonance with a Marxist ideology, however personally interpreted. On the other hand, one could claim a simultaneous though distinct trajectory of formalist modernism in the individual efforts of another section of artists. A third trajectory could be classified as a continued transmutation of the "Bengal school" idiom, sometimes in consonance with its philosophy and world-view and at other moments merely as a formal mannerism.

Both the formal modernists as well as those continuing along the parameters of the Bengal school provided possibilities of a

Work by Chittrovanu Majumder

Chhatrapati Dutta, The Screen, Acrylic and Serigraph on Canvas

continued line of heritage, if to be followed. But more importantly, a significant point of departure within an otherwise shared continuity of concerns would be evidenced in the instance of Ramkinkar Baij in Santiniketan, who most profoundly proposed a "contextual modern" that in varied ways brought together tradition and modernity at a crucial juncture.

The post-60s generation was certainly informed about their predecessors, characterized by an awareness of international politics and a modernist commitment to express the contemporary human situation. Visual art shared a close proximity with Bengali literature especially poetry and theatre. However, despite the fact that the young generation tended to idolize/idealize the past, they also felt the urge to outgrow established trends. The new generation art of the mid-1960s and the 1970s differed from that of their seniors; instead of a stress on equating with the formal aspects of the Western modern, the focus was now concentrated on subjectivity and the immediate social ambience sometimes even a marked discomfort regarding the adoption of elements from western tradition.

Jogen Chowdhury's images emerged out of his memories of the land he left behind. Forced by socio-political circumstance to emigrate to India, nostalgia in the symbolic form of dream and fantasy cloaked his pictorial statements. In the mid-60s he made a concerted attempt to break out of the academism of his art school training, through the usual devices of distortion, an eerie form and the harshness of a critical line. In the following decade of the 70s, the grim fantasies reached a formal clarity, but the darkness of content persisted. Through this decade, his thematic concern became tinged with the desperation that typifies common man's attempt to survive in difficult times. But this commitment to social reality did not manifest in a directly descriptive mode either he transmuted the theme into symbolic imagery, or else the portrayed characters emerged as types rather than specific individuals. Such an allegorical and satiric mode invariably involves a reinterpretation and contextual re-reading of traditional mythic material. His series of "Ganesha"-s are a case in point.

On the other hand, Rabin Mondal's clustered groups placed in claustrophobic compressed spaces form an enactment of social symbolism it is possible to read through them the experience of teeming multitude of refugees in Kolkata, and the psychological disquiet of urban space dislocated by a disruptive social fabric. While the restless application of impasto pigment draws analogy to the condition of suffering, the iconic presence of the human forms subtly recalls the persisting pride in lineage that one desperately hangs on to despite an utterly debased present.

By contrast, the watercolours by Shyamal Dutta Roy would be typical examples of romantic symbolism from the decade of the seventies. The iconic recurrence of the ruined and the spent became an index to the economic helplessness of a social class, and the pleasant landscape of the 1950s-60s seems permanently lost. On the other hand, Ganesh Pyne's world of private fantasies is a distinctly different strategy, where mysterious shadows balanced by ethereal light re-invoked a lingering lyricism identified with the Bengal school in an distinctly different context. His credit lies essentially in the successful harnessing of the lyrical language into images of silent expressionistic vigour, through the strange and even the morbid (a constant reference to death, for instance, in the skeletal forms), such that these eventually reached a point far from the mythical fantasies of the Bengal school

tradition. Surreal fantasy also characterized Dharmanarayan Dasgupta's tempera paintings, but in their image potential they remained distinct from the world of Ganesh Pyne. At a primary formal level, the common territory between the two could be located in a coincidental mystery of the dark void, but in contradistinction to Pyne's mode of expression, Dasgupta combines more readily the essence of indigenous miniature painting traditions of the past with a thematic-conceptual concern for the then-present times, such that the resulting lyricism has an exceedingly contemporary look.

It was in the decade of the seventies that Bikash Bhattacharya's Doll series emerged as a gesture of shattering the silence forced upon a community, defying political threat through sharp yet subtle pictorial statements. The duality of real-surreal in these images arose out of the self-conscious engagement with an illusory naturalistic pictorial language which was then transported beyond the obvious and the immediate through eerie and uncanny disjunctions, amplified moreover by the absent presence of the human element. Conventionally the series has been viewed in the context of the Naxalite experience, and the symbolic implication of the content manifests as much in the uncanny loneliness of the vacant city as in the primary object of meditation, the dolls, painted against it.

The response to the social violence of the period resulted in fragmented forms in the paintings by Prokash Karmakar. Convulsive, raging animal forms most often, horses lashed out across the pictorial space. However, these were not singular wholes, but rather aggregates of numerous splintered silhouettes that seem to came together only to disperse back into blasted fragments again. As the unbridled energy on a rampage fragmented itself, there was no optimistic promise of a better day to come. The conventional resolution of good-wins-evil was absent here; rather, it stood out as a document of the troubled times in the garb of secular mythologies.

Jayashree Chakraborty, Mixed Media on Paper

Work by Debanjan Roy

Where and how could one position the post-1070s in relation to the characteristics of the post-60s? Would it be proper to view the subsequent decades as a total rupture with the past and a stepping-in towards an entirely different generational distance, or could we map continued concerns and negotiations that evidence transitions, however disjunct and abrupt or smooth and gradual?

While in certain instances the post-70s scenario might appear to be a diluted continuation of the previous era, with a merry crop of landscapes, playful myth-making and storytelling, and the rapid adaptation of elements of folk forms, in an overall sense the earlier gloom which manifested through dark colour-tones and intense textural applications began to give way to illuminated pastel shades, and an associated 'lightness' of expression. Concurrently, the seriousness of engagement from the previous decades extended in artists like Bikash Bhattacharya, who continued to remain active in the post-70s decade, as well as in younger artists like Shuvaprasanna and Samir Aich who too evolved into individual and personal directions.

The post-70s era saw the Left front regime of a decade in existence, more stabilized and in assured control. Simultaneous to this was a gradual shift in economy; the post-70s saw the rise of private art galleries, an index to the developing impact of an art-market in the making. This transition forms the backdrop for new trends and in artists like Jayashree Chakraborty and Chittravanu Majumdar welcomed new trends in medium and format as well as subjectivity. This was the moment of advent of new media/new expression in the region the inception of which, however, needs to be traced in artists of a relatively senior generation, like Parthapratim Deb, who had begun working in these decades though he achieved a due recognition in more recent times. Even painters like Badhan Das, who continued along the high-modernist principles of abstraction, turned to mixed media as a liberating gesture.

But a more radical mode of departure would be the introduction of installations, site specific or otherwise, in which the exploration of new media crossed boundaries of the conventional, dissolving the traditional distinction between varied forms of cultural expression. From Jayashree Chakraborty and Chittravanu Majumdar to Manjari Chakraborty, Chhatrapati Dutta, Paula Sengupta and the much younger Sraboni Roy, the conventional distinction between the painted and the constructed space was increasingly blurred. On the other hand, painters like Prasanta Sahu and Amritah Sen as well as sculptors like Pankaj Panwar and Debanjan Roy redefined the limits of the traditional formats without necessarily venturing into multi-media explorations.

Curiously enough, what was once upon a time an aspiration for the 'international' now transformed into a conviction in the 'global', but the 'post-modern' simultaneously recalled the category of the 'regional' and the 'local' so that it is the complex dynamics of all of these, and the varied negotiation and resolution of the same that characterizes contemporary visual practice.

Social Concern and Protest

by Rita Datta

Chittaprasad, Zainul Abedin, Somenath Hore. These three names always occur together, as though they were triplets. And, in a very significant way, they were. Beginning their art around the same time, in the same region, motivated by the same thematic and stylistic concerns, they are so alike that it is difficult to tell them apart in their early work in the 1940s. For it was the 40s that shaped their sensibility, their creative identity.

Chittaprasad, Bengal Famine

In fact, the tumultuous decade of the 1940s proved critical in predicting the future of the subcontinent. Four clear trends had emerged early on. To begin with, the Quit India Movement, launched in '42, showed that the people were ready to take on British might even without the guidance of the big leaders who were all in jail. Independence now seemed inevitable and not a distant dream any more. Particularly crucial in this context was the second trend: the people's stir in the Princely States. It wouldn't be easy to unite the latter with the rest of the country, but the will of the people certainly helped.

But the third trend exposed the fissures in India's social fabric: communal and caste divides. And though the Poona Pact in 1932 brought about a compromise solution to the demand, from Dr B.R. Ambedkar, of a separate electorate for the castes called "untouchables", the Lahore session of the Muslim League in 1940 had made it clear that nothing short of a separate nation for Muslims would satisfy it. Possibly, the only development that could have countered caste and communal conflict was a committed Left movement. And that, indeed, was there, the fourth trend. Peasants and workers were being organized by idealists of the Communist Party which, under PC Joshi, sought to rope in middle class intellectuals as well and the IPTA emerged in 1942. But neither the nationalists, nor the Communists had fully realized the reach of communal politics and that allowed the League to grow, making Partition and the bloodbath around it, India's own, shameful holocaust.

Meanwhile, the Second World War had been thrust upon the subcontinent and began devouring its resources, causing a famine in Bengal. Famines were pretty frequent in pre-British India when the land revenues extracted ranged from one-fourth to one-third of the produce and that could

Chittaprasad, Bengal Famine

Zainul Abedin, Bengal Famine

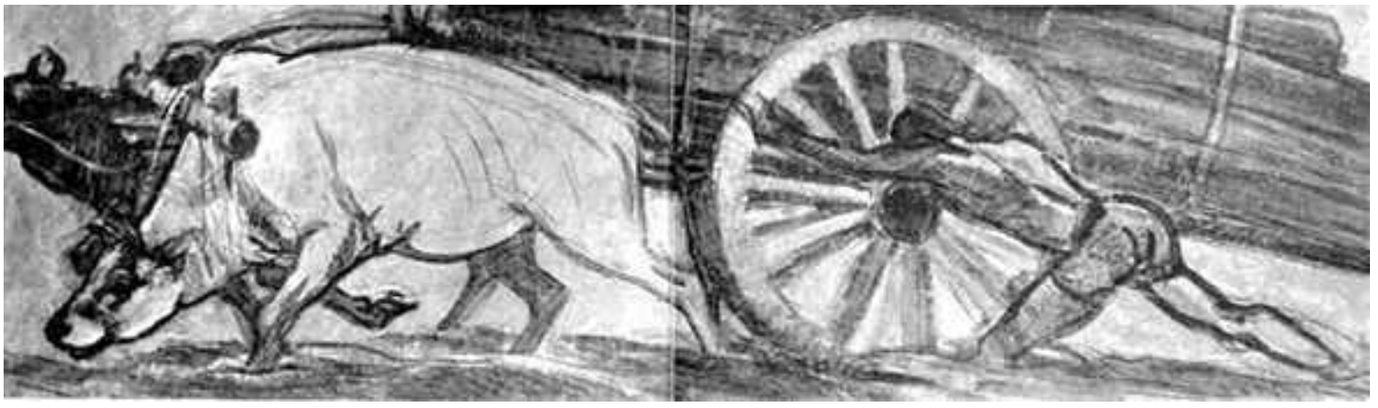
become even higher with additional imposts and middlemen's exploitation. But things actually became worse during Company rule because, not only did excessive revenue demands deny peasants the cushion of a marginal surplus, no relief was given even when crops failed. Besides, unlike the free kitchens that would be opened to the starving people during the medieval age, the British had absolutely no interest in providing succour to the affected. This was so even when the Crown took over the administration from the Company.

But the Famine of 1943 was different. The shortage faced was to a very great extent the result of the war and the failure of the British government to act in time. Between 7 and 10 million may have died of starvation, malnutrition and disease, even those who dragged themselves from the villages to Calcutta, dropping inert, says folklore, perhaps in front of well-stocked food shops. Yet no windows were broken, no shops looted. Their plaintive cries, "phan dao go phan dao" became the anthem of the streets. "Phan", the starch drained after boiling rice, was all they were asking for.

These then were the circumstances that fired the zeal of the three artists. Circumstances that were, verily, inscribed in their creative conscience. They were young and idealistic and sought to expose the truth. The truth, at that point, was the socio-economic reality before their eyes. Their commitment to the cause of the people and to their ideals is written all over the sketches, paintings and prints done during those early years.

It begins, for Chittaprasad, with his name. Born in 1915 in Naihati, his surname was Bhattacharya but he refused to wear his Brahmin identity for public display. This was his own private protest against the caste system. In the two photos we see of him in vests we notice that they are both torn and that there's no sacred thread peeping from underneath. The sharp, lean face and intense gaze that characterize both portraits could have belonged to a movie star, but suggest fierce individuality. His contemporary, Zainul Abedin born in 1914 in Mymansingh - shows a milder disposition in the one old photograph available. In following their careers, you find that the former, heroic in his defiance of conventions, remained a disillusioned rebel, not at home with codes established by society. The latter, however, became a part of the Establishment in East Pakistan, as the founding principal of what was then called the Government Institute of Arts and Crafts.

And what about the third artist, Somnath Hore, the Communist Party comrade and follower of Chittaprasad? Born in 1921, he was younger than the other two by some 6/7 years. Driven by the same passionate humanism, Hore had become a Communist activist early in life, and though his sympathy for the wretched of the earth remained undimmed, its ambit extended beyond millennial prescriptions to a universal vision as he grew older. Indeed, the narrower socio-economic concerns came to be distilled into a philosophic paradigm for suffering which afflicts man and beast alike. It wouldn't be inaccurate to say that he never quite came to terms with entrenched power structures. But the rebellion of his younger years had mutated into pained empathy for suffering



Zainul Abedin, The Struggle

Zainul Abedin, Bengal Famine

in his prints and bronzes.

In terms of the testamental force of his imagery, the barb of satire, you have to turn to Chittaprasad first. His early works chronicle major trends from the subaltern perspective. Possibly, scorn of art business made him leave many works unsigned as they were meant for Communist propaganda. Quite a bit of his pamphlet art has, therefore, been lost to posterity. It's incredible that this talented artist was denied admission to Calcutta's Govt. School of Art and Santiniketan's Kala Bhavan. Yet it's fascinating the way messages have been articulated as stark, powerful visuals. The famine of 1943 is what brought the artists wide recognition among the people and earned them the ire of the British government, which banned and burnt Chittaprasad's Hungry Bengal where his famine pictures and reports were compiled. If the irony of fighting Hitler in the name of democracy while borrowing the Great Dictator's Fahrenheit 451 measure occurred to the British, it bothered them not. But there is much else besides that indicates Chittaprasad's awareness of socio-political issues.

A woodcut focuses on a cinematic angle in recording a rickshaw puller lugging his car with its load: a well-fed couple. The work is as much about his sympathy for urban wage earners as an indictment of the middle class, represented by the riders, with the man frowning in irritation at the rickshaw puller. There's a bristly suggestion here: that the rich are easy to mark out as exploiters, but the middle class, behind its liberal slogans, is actually as uncaring. Another work has a peasant, face down, tied to the ground like Gulliver, while an elaborate pageant of war preparations unfolds on his prone back. Hyperbolic as this sounds - poster gists can't but be hyperbolic - the clarity of his analysis is indisputable. For it is true that the war effort in Asia was funded from the revenue paid by the peasants. Aspiration towards a pan-Asian identity, which needed to be protected from the West, is the subject of an ink drawing. The Tebhagha movement of sharecroppers in Bengal demanding two-thirds rather than half of the produce, the Naval Revolt, and communal peace stimulated this crusader, too. And it's important to note that he clearly felt that armed rebellion was the only resort of helpless victims assaulted by powerful enemies from all sides.

His sympathies did not change with Independence. Like most Communists he must have felt that "yeh azadi" was "jhuta". So though the policy shifts and factional squabbles in the Party had already disillusioned him, his anger still simmered in an ink drawing that saw the Indian state as a many-armed monster policeman, wielding guns, handcuffs and the tricolour to suppress the grievances of the people in the year of the first general elections, 1952.

If masculine lines, fullness of stylized forms and caustic political allegories defined Chittaprasad's art, a lyrical romanticism suffused much of Abedin's work, revealing glimpses of a Santiniketan influence in his watercolours. Even in depicting the famine he seemed more reticent with fewer lines that are, however, as evocative in their power. While both the artists painted landscapes in lucid watercolours, the sketchy spontaneity of Abedin's lines is often noticeable. Nature was an inspiration, obviously, for it was his tribute to the river Brahmaputra that earned him the Governor's Gold Medal in an all-India exhibition in 1938. His social sympathies thus often came to be muted with the romantic's retreat into rural idylls. If Santhals figured in his watercolours, it wasn't so much as icons of struggle as of svelte grace that echoes the sensuous beauty of Nature.

In the absence of the entire body of their works, it's difficult to define them fully, yet another difference seems to suggest itself. Though animals do find a place in Chittaprasad's tableaux, these are not imbued with individuality. In Abedin's drawings and paintings, however, cows and crows are characters. Hence, his art is less activist ardour and more a reflection of forms and the rhythm of lines that capture them in different moods. An oil that he did somewhat late in life, probably in 1976, and called Struggle shows a bullock cart toiling forward under a heavy load of logs. If the bare-bodied villager, straining every muscle to push the wheels, affirms the emotional affiliation of his young days, the bullocks, heaving laboriously, too, remind you that life's a struggle for both man and beast.

When the famine descended upon Bengal, Somnath Hore was only 22. That did not stop him from documenting the dance of death for a Communist

Somnath Hore, Tebhaga

Party journal, though. And by the time the Tebhaga stir erupted in 1946, 25-year-old Hore was ready to serve the Party with his art once more. His sketches from this period boast supple and fluent lines. But in the wood engravings that represent night scenes, you notice a deft technician at work, with a chiaroscuro treatment that captures cinematically the glow of light emanating from an unseen lantern that throws patterns of shadows to break up the faces of seated figures and leaves a looming darkness beyond.

Hore would, of course, live to become one of India's major artists, particularly with his sculpture which he preferred to call, simply, bronzes. That was because mass and volume were replaced with bronze "sheets" that wrap hollows combined with stick-like limbs, so that the skeletal economy of the prints and drawings is echoed. "Wounds were what I saw everywhere around me," he wrote. "A scarred tree, a road gouged by a truck tyre, a man knifed for no visible reason…the object was eliminated. Only wounds remained."

This excerption of "wounds" from his experiences takes him much beyond any ism and gives an insight into his meditation on life which is seen as a sum of suffering, approximating Buddhism. Quite remarkably, he'd moved away from the anthropocentrism of Western thought, including Marxism, to feel intuitive pain for not only lower creatures but inanimate objects, too. When he talks of a "road gouged by a truck tyre" in terms of "wounds", they become a metaphor for the attrition of existence; or if a man is killed for "no visible reason" there's helpless despair at a contingent universe that does not have a supreme design. A position that was far removed from the ultimate dawn of Marxism.

Like all serious Indian artists of early modernity, the three had, of course, rejected European academicism. And, given their Leftist activism, they wouldn't allow Bengal School sentimentalism to creep in either. What researchers might be interested in plotting is their stylistic journey as they discovered in 19th and 20th century European art models to inspire them. Abedin may possibly have found Degas and Rouault worthy guides in his mature phase, while Matisse and Picasso seem to have influenced both him and Chittaprasad. And Hore's affinity with Kathe Kollwitz has been generally acknowledged.

It certainly seems that, of the three, Chittaprasad was the one who did not get his due. For example, there were only two shows of his art that were held during his lifetime. He shifted to Bombay (now Mumbai), stayed in a one-room apartment, lived alone, and charged modest rates for his work. As he distanced himself from the Party, politics retreated to the background in his art, with birds, still lifes and common people claiming his attention. His illustrations for children's books reveal a little-known aspect of this social and political rebel. The immensely gifted man read and wrote poetry, learnt puppetry from a Czech friend, and generally lived life on his own, not-so-usual terms.

Abedin's life had its surprises, too. With Independence for the new state of Pakistan, his role changed: from a protester he became a builder. But the political upsurge of the Bengalis urged him to protest once again but its language, after more than two decades would be very different. A 65 ft scroll done in ink, watercolour and wax, lent support to the 1969 mass movement for autonomy for East Pakistan. It was, significantly, called Nabanna, or the harvesting of the new paddy.

Both he and Chittaprasad died in their early 60s. But while Abedin had been called Shilpacharya and was able to set up institutions in different parts of Bangladesh, the latter died unsung in Calcutta, and his many talents, if at all these had been known beyond a niche group of admirers, faded from public memory.

Fortunately for Indian art, Somnath Hore and his wife Reba - very talented artist herself - had begun to concentrate more on their art than on Party activism from the 1950s. Fortuitously, he lived to be 85, though an incurable lung condition had disabled him cruelly in his final years. But by then his place in modern Indian art had been ensured. The affective images of suffering his bronzes insinuate have often been read in Marxian rather than metaphysical terms. There's no doubt that this frail, gentleman's faith in secular humanism was unshakable. But the agony of The Fallen Ox, as it lies collapsed, rib cage heaving, cannot be mitigated through any kind of ism. The face flat, mask-like, dead that seems to be sucked in by a surge of shredded bronze sheets in Flood could be the remains of a proto-human buried in some primeval stratum, arousing an ellipsis of terrible wonder at this epic and unfathomable drama called life. Old age, one of the sights that set the Buddha thinking, had drawn him repeatedly as a theme in works like The Old Man, The Old Woman, Draupadi in Old Age. For old age is a chastening reminder of transience and mortality; a reminder of the only truth that endures.

Somnath Hore, Tebhaga

Profile

Gobardhan Ash: The Committed Artist of 1940-s

by Mrinal Ghosh

Self Portrait 2, Watercolour on Paper

Gobardhan Ash was one of the pioneering artists who had considerable contributions in devising the modernistic forms of the Indian painting during the decade of 1940-s. He had deep commitment both towards the socio-temporal reality and towards his own life and creativity. He struggled a lot during his formative years against his personal poverty and also against lack of creative infrastructure within the artistic environment of that time. He was rebellious both as an artist and art activist. All these characteristics devised his personality and the forms of his art.

When Ash arrived at his own creativity during the middle of 1930-s, the art situation of Bengal was within a dilemma. There was struggle between the two modes of modernity. One was British academic naturalist trend originated after 1850-s through the works of the Art School trained artists.

The other was neo-Indian school originated by Abanindranath Tagore during 1897 and expanded by his disciples like Nandalal Basu and others towards various modes of expressions, which was considered to be a prototype of national identity. By 1930-s both of these modes showed the signs of stagnations and degeneration. The poet Rabindranath Tagore first detected these limitations and tried to find ways and means of regeneration. In 1919 he established Kala-Bhavana at Santiniketan where he tried to broaden the aesthetic outlook of the artists. Two artists, however, within the environment of neo-Indian school were working to expand the field of form. They were Gaganendranath Tagore and Sunayani Devi. Rabindranath himself approached towards visual creativity since 1923-24 and appeared as a very original and intuitive painter since 1928. Out of his dissatisfaction with the extant trends, Jamini Roy also paved a new way taking the cue from the popular art of Bengal since early 1930-s.

This was the art environmental situation in Bengal when Gobardhan Ash appeared in the field. Like other artists of his generation he had his dissatisfaction which induced him to find a new way. He had considerable skill in academic naturalism. But he could feel that form to be anachronistic to express the social reality of his time. He could not accept the revivalist trends of neo-Indian school. He noticed the achievements of Jamini Roy to generate forms from the folk. Personally he also had a rural background and adequate knowledge of popular expressions. He tried to induce it within his won constructions. He also felt, one aspect was lacking in the existing modes of modernity. Western modernistic forms generated out of impressionism, post-impressionism, expressionism and cubism had not been adequately explored, which, he could feel, was necessary to express the social turmoil and humanistic decay that darkened the life of Bengal during 1940-s. In

Hobu Gobu, Gouache on Paper

building up his own form he made this synthesis through assimilation of naturalism, folk and western modernistic distortions.

The social situation in India and particularly in Bengal during the decade of 1940-s was very tumultuous. The freedom struggle rose to its peak along with the colonial exploitation. The famine of 1943 was the highest expression of the callousness and inhumanity of the alien rulers. Ash made his art a vehicle to express his rebellion against such inhuman decays. Like Jainul Abedin, Chittaprasad and Somnath Hore he was also an important artist of 1940-s, who made artistic documentation of the famine of Bengal, painted extensively on this theme and generated a form out of this decay that made considerable imprint on his further development. He looked towards beauty from these roots of dilapidation. His forms were thus an amalgamation of the beauty and the void.

Gobardhan Ash was born on 5 August, 1907 at the village of Begampur in Hoogly district of West Bengal. His father was Haricharan Ash and mother Gouri Devi. He spent all his life in this village and died here in 1996 at the matured age of 89. He was admitted to the Government School of Art, Calcutta in 1926. Percy Brown was the Principal at that time. He was not happy with the system of education there and left the school after four years. In 1932 he went to Madras and joined as a student at Government Art School there and learnt under Devi Prasad Roychowdhury, who was the Principal. There also he did not felt happy and returned back to Calcutta after a year without completing the course. As an art activist he had an inclination towards artistic group activities. In 1931 he formed the group 'Young Artists Union' in Calcutta. Other members of the group were Abani Sen, Kalikinkar Ghosh Dastidar, Renu Roy and others. These young artists in 1933 formed the group 'Art Rebel Centre'. Gobardhan Ash was its first secretary.

'Calcutta Group' was formed in 1943 in the year of Bengal famine under the leadership of Prodosh Dasgupta. The other important members of the group were Paritosh Sen, Gopal Ghosh, Nirod Majumder, Rathin Moitra, Shubho Thakur and some others. At the invitation of Dasgupta Gobardhan Ash joined the group in 1949. Calcutta Group had considerable contribution towards development of forms of modernity of the 1940-s through assimilation of Western modern and Indian folk that considerably reflected the social reality of that time. This they did before Progressive Artists Group of Bombay formed in 1947 entered in the field. Calcutta Group in this way has a pioneering role. Gobardhan Ash, as member of the group, made considerable contribution in this direction.

His life was full of struggle. He started his professional career by joining as 'Supervisor Artist' in Central Ordnance Depot, Agra in 1944. Before and after that he struggled with many professions, both personal and institutional. In 1953 he joined as teacher in Indian School of Art, Calcutta. He had financial constraints through out his life. But that could not deter him from his artistic integrity. Painting for him was a kind of spiritual meditation. Through out his life he experimented with various forms, scaled from one peak to the other and left behind him enormous number of paintings that were both documentation of the flowing life and reality, also reflection through form the cultural wisdom of humanity.

Vasanta, Gouache on Paper

Same State, Watercolour on Paper

Winter, Oil on Canvas

Gopal Ghose

by Sandip Sarkar

Gopal Ghosh, Watercolour on Paper

Gopal Ghose is one of the major artists of the 20th Century Modern India. He was born on the 5th December, 1913 in Kolkata. He once told me: "I am a 19th century product. 20th century began rather late. History had to do a caesarian section to deliver the baby. The Great War that started in 1914 was the gynaecological surgeon. This explains what went before and after the event in the field of visual art. Dada and Surrealism are, as it were, miscarriage of the foetus and not the baby; if you understand what I mean!" He would sometimes speak in parables. His life was a paradox also.

One day in November 1973 I went to interview Ghose for Samar Sen's Weekly Frontier, where I was doing a series titled Artists' of West Bengal, which tried to analyze an artist in the light of his life.

I still remember going to his house in Haripada Dutta Lane, Tollygunge. I found him waiting for me in a nearby stationary shop, squatting on his haunches and chatting with the people of the neighbourhood. As he saw me getting down from the cycle rickshaw, he stood up to take me home. He showed me his small garden which had mango, lemon and several fruit and flowering trees and a cute cactus. His personal atelier-come-bedroom was over full with furniture, books, note-books and watercolours, pastels and sketches. There were besides two unfinished canvasses done in oil on two easels. The room did not have anything of affluence in it, but there was enough proof that the artist was hard-working.

Probably no artist in the country, during contemporary times, has loved the Indian landscape as Gopal Ghose. No one has been able to point out it's majesty and grandeur as he has. Others have leaned on tit-bits from classical and medieval times, mixed it with Far Eastern calligraphy and wash technique, hooked as they were with Pan-Asian world view. Others have gone to the opposite extreme. They have exposed their affinities to Western Academic style landscape painting, both the naturalistic and geometrical abstract type.

His father was an army captain. Most of his childhood was spent in Shimla where his father was stationed. The next phase of his life was spent in Allahabad and Benaras where his father was transferred. After passing matriculation he enrolled in the Intermediate of Arts Course in the Anglo-Bengali College, Allahabad. He could not complete it as he joined the Civil Disobedience Movement led by Pandit Nehru. Ghose's indulgent father allowed him to join the Maharaja School of Arts, Jaipur. From the age of eighteen to twenty-two (1931- 1935), he trained rigorously in the techniques and theory on Neo- Bengal School of Art, under Vice Principal Sailendra Nath Dey. He stood 1st Class 1st. In Jaipur he was not happy with the teaching staffs' insistence on tradition and heritage. In editor Ramananda Chatterjee's twin monthlies Prabashi (Bengali) and Modern Review (English), he saw reproduction of Debi Prosad Roy Choudhury's works, his illustrations for novels and articles. Like students from other regions of undivided India, Ghose felt attracted and joined the School. Roy Choudhury was then the Principal of Government School of Art and Craft, Madras. Here Ghose also stood 1st Class 1st in painting. After passing out he toured the length and breadth of undivided India on a cycle. In 1938 he came and settled in Kolkata and wrote an illustrated travelogue in Bangashree (a Bengali monthly).

This venture paid off and he was offered

Gopal Ghosh, Tree, Watercolour on Paper

an art teacher's job in the B.T. teacher's training course in Scottish Church College. He also worked as a part- time lecturer in architecture department of B.E. College, Shibpur. From 1940-45 he worked as an art teacher in Indian Society of Oriental Art. In 1951-52 he joined the Government School of Art and Craft, Kolkata. Soon after this, it became a 'College'.

"It was my father who inspired me and provided for me, even during the long years of my art school days. He sponsored my cycle tour and arranged for my stay in military cantonments throughout India." Evidently he not only strongly identified with his father but also his feeling for him verged on adoration. Not a single word did he utter about his mother. However it seemed strange that, he an artist, did not paint a portrait of his father.

Ghose began to recount his travels abroad. He could not forget the impressions that the works of ancient and modern masters made on him. He felt, however, they could not or should not be aped, for their life-style and climate was different. The social conditions that had influenced them were dissimilar to those of India. The Indian sun was different than the sun that shone in Paris. The trees, flowers, people and rivers of the sub-continent were different. Each season was different from the seasons elsewhere in the world.

Like all artists his works remain scattered with collectors around the world. One has to browse through some of his works collected by the National Gallery of Modern Art, AIFACS and Academy of Fine Arts to get an idea of the range of his paintings.

Together with Nirode Mazumdar, Prodosh and Kamala Dasgupta, Rathin Moitra, Subho Tagore, Paritosh Sen, Prankrishna Paul, Ghose was also one of the founders of the 'Calcutta Group'. Later due to the resignation of Subho Tagore and prolonged absence of Mazumdar and Sen in France, Prodosh Dasgupta in 1950 had no other option left. He quickly included Abani Sen, Gobardhan Ash, Hemanta Mishra to keep the group and others moving. Formed during World War II and the Bengal Famine in 1943, the Group spelt out the contours of Modernism in Indian art some years before Progressive Artist Group, Bombay could project itself. Gopal Ghose was basically a romantic dreamer, a rebel in some sense, who had been unable to atune to the

Gopal Ghosh, Tree, Watercolour on Paper

Gopal Ghosh, Bird on the Tree, Watercolour on Paper

complexities that urbanization brings. Cut-throat competitiveness, corruption at all levels, devaluation of values, breakdown of established norms had upset him. He had gone back to nature. His approach may remind one of Wordsworth. But even if one studies a sample of his works, one makes out immediately that he is not a pantheist who believes in mechanical determination. Rather he is a Tagorean who tries to be one with nature. In art-historical terms he has imbibed the basics of modernity from Post Impressionism down to Abstract Expressionism, Indian miniatures to the landscape paintings of brothers Gaganendranath and Abanindranath. Yet he has moulded such opposites into a perfect style that is personally his own.

He quickly developed from his apprentice period in Jaipur and Madras and moved into his own domain. During the 1940s art Critic and Historian William Archer was stationed in Dumka, Bihar as a civilian administrator. His wife Ms. Margaret also an art critic and historian was with him. They invited Mazumdar and Ghose over to spend a month with them. Suddenly the dams burst and both came into their own. Later Bishnu Dey, the poet, took both to Rickhiya, Bihar. Here what they had achieved earlier came to fruition.

Ghose concentrated on landscapes and worked away on undulating hills and vales of the Chotanagpur region. The rugged fields with lonely trees, rice fields spreading to the horizon are the subject of his works during the Dumka period; In them rarely does an aboriginal woman or perhaps a cow comes into view.

Trees, birds, mountains, the sea, valleys, clouds have all attracted him and he has lovingly tried to capture nature's various moods – the light and shades of glorious glowing colours, the change of seasons, the atmosphere. His lines are aflame with the nuances of nature's beauty.

Later in life when he travelled to America, he was not attracted to skyscrapers, city scenes or the people. It is the Rockies, the expansive prairie, the winding mighty rivers and sometimes even the lonely cactus in the sand dunes that caught his attention. He has identified with the grandeur of the vastness of North American countryside. Strangely enough, he has no comments to make about American people and the pattern of their culture.

Gopal Ghose's watercolours and pastels make it almost seem that India or even America does not have people. Most of the time he seems to have left out men and beasts. His botanical kingdom may sometimes seem to lack human warmth. Devoid of human existence, conflict and compassion, it is, in a sense a search for mystical joy. This is his strength and also his weakness.

He died on the 30th July, 1980. With his death the passé-partout of Indian landscape painting, was handed over to his younger contemporaries.

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