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Body copy : 10.5



COLLECTOR'S FOREWORD

This book is the culmination of two decades of collecting. It is intended to be a testament to the genesis of the collection – partly autographical, partly scholastic, partly entertaining – wholly interesting.

I started collecting when I had hardly any income, no disposable income at all, and no wall to hang the paintings on. My first acquisition was a painting bought for 25 shekels while loitering the streets of Tel Aviv in the year 2000. Perhaps this is the reason why unlike many other collectors, I have made fewer mistakes while building up my collection. Chronic shortage of acquisition funds meant that I had to spend a lot of time contemplating and researching a purchase before actually going ahead with it.

Twenty two years on from that first acquisition in Israel, I look back on this journey with considerable nostalgia and pride. It has taken me to different parts of the world in search of paintings, introduced me to interesting and knowledgeable people and enabled interesting discoveries. Kushan sculptures in backrooms of galleries in Beijing to Indian miniatures deep down in London basements or iconic pieces in vernissages in Old Bond Street - these moments of discovery and thrill will never really leave me! Perhaps another book is needed for narrating the discoveries in fleamarkets, or that of finding a Daniell Print from Oriental Scenery behind another one on opening the picture frame.

One important feature of this collection is that it was put together from a purely academic standpoint, with scant regard for trends or prevailing fashion. Each piece has been assiduously studied, vetted against expert opinion, and in many cases researched and published. I take this opportunity to thank the numerous dealers, galleries, academics and specially the two dealers that I have had a chance to work with closely. The connection to Prof. Ashrafi Bhagat was made through one of these two dealers. Through this connection the idea of a book came to fruition. My belief is that this book will appeal to a diverse audience. Those interested in a serious understanding of Indian art history will be able to do so through the academic rigour of Prof. Ashrafi's writing. Others that have a passing interest in the subject will be able to treat themselves to a history of Indian art told through 100 objects, and the anecdotal inputs by me.

Anirban Sadhu (Sudip)

Allschwil.

Switzerland. 08 Feb 2022



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THE COLLECTORS Drs. Anirban & Rejina Sadhu



AUTHOR'S FOREWARD

I wish to acknowledge the immense and thought provoking opportunity that was offered to me, when I was invited to write on the collection of art works in the possession of erudite and knowledgeable art collectors Dr. Anirban Sadhu and Dr. Rejina - Sadhu an NRI couple based in Basel, Switzerland. It opened a new vista for me on an approach to art history and the critical aesthetic appreciation that required a different perception in studying the art works in their possession. It was a providential connect with Mr. Qamar an Art Dealer now based in Kolkata who got in touch with me on the social media platform LinkedIn after viewing my profile as an Art Historian and an Art Educator. Through Mr. Qamar I was introduced to the Sadhus' and their varied versatile art collection. Dr. Anirban is knowledgeable about the art he has collected and has also written and published essays in reputed and scholarly art Journals, particularly on the Company Painters. In this respect valuable and authentic information was provided to me by him, which served to reinforce my writing and at the same time enhanced my knowledge. It was a fluid symbiosis that took place between the writer and the collector, which left a deep impression within me.

The collection of almost eighty works spans the period from 18th to 20th century, including a sculpture belonging to the Gandhara period around 2nd to 3rd century C.E is also integral to it. Hence the subject and thematic content from the 18th century miniatures of Rajput and Mughal tradition to the Company Style painting to works by British artists as Danielle's et al finds a spot in his collection. A sizeable portfolio of Modern Indian art works retrospect from early 19th century Calcutta paintings to D.P. Roy Chowdhury to Gaganendranath and Jamini Roy including seminal Indian modernists of the 20th century. The works have been collected with a certain sensibility that reflects Dr. Anirban's deeper understanding of the cultural context of these artists. The names are iconic and represent the movers and shakers within Modern Indian art. The collection does not reflect a conscious artistic uniformity, but celebrates art as a manifestation of shifting moods, modes and memories in Indian Art.

My experience in writing about the historical period that spanned two millennia was not only challenging in terms of researching the cultural context of the period but equally so in the aesthetic evaluation and critical arguments concerning the art works. In many respect I had to make frequent journeys to the Fine Arts Library to literally archaeologise books that I thought had ended with my teaching profession. But it came as a realization that the perspective and approach to writing on these valuable masterpieces had to shift from class room teaching to an in depth study to clarify its relevance as a collectible art work that has acquired a special status having become a so called "Collectors' Piece". It was this transformation of the object of art which required a different approach to its critical evaluation as well as its formal aesthetic appreciation.

In wading through particularly the "Miniature Collection" which is the largest holding with the Sadhus', I realized the mammoth task that awaited me. It ordained or mandated that without

the details of the cultural context, a deeper understanding of the miniature would not be possible. This process of mental churning made me go beyond pure art history to delve into a study of literature, devotional and secular poetry, which forms the basis of the development of visual tradition of miniatures in India. It opened a 'third eye' for me, in which I realized an intimate rhizomic connection between the various arts like music, drama, dance, poetry and literature. I also realized a meaningful connectivity in the correspondence between the verbal and visual, through English translations, which I found it very exciting, particularly the artist who had to be synoptic in his visual representation engaged with objects that translated as symbols to convey the verbal meanings of different love situations of the Shringara rasa, which forms the popular theme and content of Rajput miniatures. It is here that the brilliant creativity and imagination of the Indian artist was foregrounded, which left me in awe of their sparkling originality and thoughtfulness. In addition to Rajput Miniatures, there is also a sprinkling of Mughal, Persian and Provincial Mughal miniatures, which offered a challenge in decoding its visual aesthetics containing as it did many threads of influences that conditioned the visual grammar engaged with by the artist.

The Company Paintings visualized by professional artists who travelled from England to India during the time of the presence of the East India Company, which had established itself from the 17th century onwards within the country. The works by these varied artists particularly the large collection of the Daniells' with the Sadhus' was profoundly interesting and visually intoxicating, considering the details with which the landscapes were rendered that included flora as well as cultural monuments as temples and other secular structures. I literally lived through many of the Indian landscape vistas particularly of South India painted by them, which today is lost to the maze of urban development. In studying these paintings there was an overwhelming nostalgia and sentiments as Edward Weeks Bombay streets, the city where I had spent my early childhood with my maternal grandmother. The writing process for me witnessed a rise and dip in the graph of emotions as the works affected my sensibility, in their renderings of varied vistas of the country to which I could relate through my feelings.

The section of the collection, which I enjoyed, writing the best, was on the Artists of 20th century Modern India. They came from different regions, their academic qualifications, inspirations, and challenges of the time for a new authentic visual language took me on a winding path of seeking knowledge, which made them influential as well as pioneers in the establishment of Modern Art in India. Here my research on Modernity of South India, offered me perceptions, perspectives and insights, which I was able to extend in the study of the varied artists. Of course most of the artists in Sadhus' Collection are iconic names from the early 20th to late 20th century. In analyzing and decoding their visual language, there emerged a highly personalized vision which took into consideration the artists personal experiences and their methodology of finding a correspondence through techniques, mediums and subject to express what they felt deeply. These sense perceptions were empathetic in the process of my writing, which allowed me to meander knowledgeably through their works, providing insights that made writing on their works a sheer pleasure.

The experience of writing was hugely gratifying, fulfilling my love and passion for art across varied historical forms of art. During the period of writing, I lived through every work of art, to the extent it has been deeply internalized within me and will continue to remain fresh in my memory. For this I owe my sincere and grateful appreciation and thanks to Dr. Anirban and Dr. Regina Ramachandran Sadhu for offering me this wonderful opportunity and a non interference on their part to my approach and methodology of writing process. I equally owe my gratitude to Mr. Kamar for his utmost confidence and trust in me in carrying out this challenging assignment. He remains the chief facilitator in this entire exercise.

My best wishes for all the future endeavours, and may the almighty provide you Dr. Anirban with opportunities for a greater and a wider collection of art.



Ms. Ashrafi S. Bhagat Ph.D.
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WORK OF ART ON PAPER & CANVAS



THE THIRD EYE: THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

DR. ASHRAFI S. BHAGAT

The collection of artworks in the possession of erudite and knowledgeable art collectors Dr. Anirban Sadhu and Dr. Rejina Sadhu based in Basel, Switzerland has the romance of nostalgia in revisiting the past, which offers new aesthetic freshness in the present. The collection of almost eighty works spans the period from the dawn of history at Mohenjodaro to the 21st century. The collection spans a wide variety of genres – ranging from sculptures, oil paintings, watercolors, Indian miniature paintings, photographs, prints, aquatints etc. There is impressive diversity in the attributions and authorship too. The Bengal school is very strongly represented, with works from most of the prominent artists in the collection. There is also strong representation by many of the early artists of the Bombay school. Artists from the colonial period – both Indian as well as European – find mention. However, a major part of the collection is occupied works of anonymous authorship like miniature paintings, company school paintings and other similar works that can only be attributed to a school. Modern Indian art works retrospect from artists of the latter half of 19th century who were academic realists as Trindade, Lalkaka, Gangooly, Abalal Rahiman among others to modernists of 20th century as D. P. Roy Chowdhury to Gaganendranath and Jamini Roy to other seminal Indian modernists as Ganesh Pyne and F. N. Souza. The works have been collected with a certain sensibility that reflects the Collectors' couple deeper understanding and their seminal contribution within the artists' cultural context. The names are iconic and represent the movers and shakers within Modern Indian art. The collection does not reflect a conscious artistic uniformity, but celebrates art as a manifestation of shifting moods, modes and memories in Indian Art.

Within this broad category it is possible to make categorization of the subject. The two classifications would be Historical and Modern. Under the umbrella of the Historic would be the Indian Miniature paintings, Early Bengal oils, Company Paintings and Paintings executed by British artists who documented India's flora and fauna, the historical monuments, war events and the scenic landscapes with mountains, valleys and rivers. While modern would enlist artists from late 1890s to about 2000.

BEGININGS OF MODERNITY: EARLY BENGAL OILS

Painting on cloth or wood as a substrate was not a traditional medium of expression in Indian art. Nor were oil based paints traditionally popular with Indian artists. The initiation of modernity in Bengal was partly due to the presence European artists and later mainly because of the establishment of the Calcutta School of Art in 1854 which adopted European techniques and idioms of expression. This art school became pivotal in shaping the art language of the 19th century as well as at the turn of the 20th century. It was also partly because of the Bengal renaissance that witnessed a cultural interface and symbiosis of the East and the West. Yet more importantly was the city of Calcutta [Kolkata] playing a catalytic role in shaping the intellectual and artistic life of the region. This was because of the emergence of new literature,

music, theatre, social reforms as well as the women coming out of the zenanas and taking active part in social life simultaneously enhancing the rejuvenation of the Bengali culture particularly in the 19th century. In this backdrop of socio-political churn, many European artists were attracted to Calcutta, and made the city their gateway to India. Among these artists, the ones with British pedigrees (William and Thomas Daniell; Johann Zoffany; Robert Home etc) have been researched and published well. However, recent research has also thrown light on the existence and contribution of some important non-British artists. Key among these early contributors to Bengal's modernity in art was a German artist called Eduard Sunkel.

Politically too, it was a period of significance. The tension between the colonizers and the colonial power had resulted in the first war of independence of 1857, when nationalism became the focus and encouraged people to speak out. The emergence of Rabindranath Tagore and the start of the Ashram education in Santiniketan brought in another wave of cultural change in the first few decades of the 20th century.

The initial period of modernity in Bengal undeniably would be the early oil paintings that were executed inspired by the rich oils of European in its naturalistic style. Though these local artists lacked the grammar in the naturalistic representation, as they had no concept in the use of perspective for carving space on a two dimensional surface nor were they aware of imparting volume to figures through modelling in light and dark. Nevertheless they solved these issues according to the native intelligence and created works that were, lucid, spontaneous and incidentally brought together three strands of tradition namely Mughal miniatures, European naturalistic art and the indigenous patachitras.

There is not much documentation of the artists of the Early Bengal School, but it has been claimed that these artists were the descendents of court painters of Murshidabad and Bihar. When they lost patronage, they came to Calcutta and began catering to the rich aristocratic Hindu families, as evidenced by the religious paintings in oils that survive.

The thematic content of these early oil paintings by these itinerant artists comprised of Siva's Marriage, Siva's Family, Ganesh Janani, Durga and Annapurna. These works were created in the first few decades of the 19th century. Between 1850 and the turn of the 20th century were painted, Siva's Sanskara, Ram, Lakshmana and Sita, Chaitanya and Krishna and Radha. Within this was a sub group of Chaitanya and Radha Krishna.

Early Bengal painting rendered in oils as that of **Durga** in the Sadhu collection mostly woven around mythological themes, predominated by the representation of Durga and her various iconic battles that she fought which marked the triumph of good over evil. The composition of these paintings reveals sensitive creativity and originality in their approach. Divested of drama or any emotions, the composition has the strength of decorative affinity to the Durga pandals that were created on the occasion of the Durga Pooja. As integral to Siva's family, the representation of Ganesh on the left and Karthikeyan on the right can be observed. On either side of majestic Durga are the representation of Lakshmi and Saraswati.

Another painting from the same period and titled Kali in the Sadhus' collection has the setting akin to the Durga Pooja pandals with a shallow platform on which the enactment of Kali killing the demon Mahishasura is depicted. The movement of the lion on which the goddess stands has the validity of movement as she balances herself on the animal in the act of piercing her trident into the demon. The influence of Mughal miniature tradition finds resonance in the delineation of the jewellery. The composition has symmetry and balance, while the colours used by the artist are complementary as the green and orange to bring the image of Kali alive.

The iconographical representation includes the goddesses Lakshmi and Saraswati as well as the two sons of Shiva and Parvathi namely Ganesh and Karthikeyan placed on either side of Kali and at her feet respectively. The overall effect is one of decorative splendour with the splendid lotus petaled arch within which the dramatic act is played out. The intricacy of rich details in the background which has minute representations of gods and the simulation of the bronze petaled frames are noteworthy of artist's dexterous skills of his firm drawings and deft planning in the arrangement of the composition. Yet he has imparted a sense of movement through postures, gestures and glances which is illustrative of his insightful perceptions of having studied the European paintings but equally his own local urban environment.

This painting is typical of what is referred to as the "Early Bengal" or "Dutch Bengal" school. Executed using oil paints on cloth or canvas, these unsigned works mostly hail from the region around Bengal from the early 1800s, and are thought to be authored by the earliest generation of Indian painters who took to the medium of oil painting. Having set up their colony in India before the British, the Dutch were at that time ensconced in Chinsurah and Chandernagore in the region around present day Kolkata. To cater to the emerging tastes, local artists appropriated the styles, techniques and the media from these Dutch and other European artists, and used them to portray quintessentially Indian subjects and themes. What emerged was a curious and amusing blend of western technique and Indian style characterized primarily by Bengali religious subjects painted in a western style. The figures tend to be of Krishna, Durga, Shiva, Kali etc and are invariably rigid in their stance and posture, as is apparent in this painting. One can see traces of influence of Kangra and Rajput miniatures in these paintings, along with elements of Christian iconographic paintings and the earliest attempts at integrating an element of perspective in the paintings.

For a long time, these paintings were neither studied nor appreciated. This has changed substantially in the last decade. Paintings of the "Early Bengal" genre have found a dedicated set of fond collectors both in India and abroad. These paintings sporadically come up in international auctions of Indian art and fetch decent prices. Museums such as the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts hold these works in their collection. Prominent art galleries and collections in India also hold a good corpus of these works.

These paintings are historically important; as the Bengal oils represent an interface between two cultures namely Indian tradition and European realism; as in these paintings an alien medium as oils found a new direction in the local idiomatic language of art.

SELECT REFERENCE

1. *Art of Bengal, Exhibition catalogue, Published by CIMA, Calcutta 2000*
2. *INDIAN DIVINE - Gods and Goddesses in 19th and 20th Century Modern Art. Delhi Art Gallery; 2014*



Figure. 01: "DURGA MAHISASURAMARDINI", Dutch Bengal School, Early 19th Century, Oil on Canvas, (36 x 26 in.), Anirban + Rejina Sadhu collection, Switzerland

...The Devi then assumed her fierce murderous countenance. Himachal, the Lord of the Mountains granted a mighty Lion to ferry her. Vishnu bestowed on her his fabled weapon of choice - the Chakra. From Shiva came the spear. The Lord of Death gifted her his truncheon, and the Lord of Time his scabbard. Her radiant appearance came from the Moon, and the accoutrements of Archery from the Sun god himself.

Vishwakarma, adept at the skills of metallurgy among the Gods, fashioned her invincible armour. Brahma himself awarded his holy necklace and water pot. The bejeweled necklace was bequeathed by Kubera - the god of wealth.

Having decked the glorious Devi in their choicest decorations and armaments, all the celestials then pleaded with the fiercely beautiful goddess to proceed to vanquish the fierce demon Mahisasura!!

Markendeya Purana

Old and established families of Kolkata are the most common source of Early Bengal paintings. In many cases, these works have stayed in the same family for many generations through descent, before they come to the market.

This painting is also from one such family in Kolkata. It had been in the same family for generations, and was actually used as a religious icon for worship. It came to my collection directly from the original owners through a dealer sometime in 2013.

The painting had layers of dust and grime on it, giving it a dull and dark appearance. There was also a layer of vermillion (sindoor) on it which had accumulated as a result of years of ritual worship. Eventually, the painting was professionally cleaned by an eminent restorer, which gave it its present form.

FRANZ EDUARD SUNKEL

THE MANSION BY THE RIVER 1865

He is an artist who apparently introduced the medium of oil painting in the eastern part of India, particularly Calcutta. In a well researched article on Eduard Sunkel, published in the magazine Art & Deal, in November 2011 by the Collector Anirban Sadhu, he says, "Research done by Professor Partha Mitter, for the first time indicated that Gangadhar Dey was the student of German itinerant artist by name Franz Eduard Sunkel. This indicates the he was the first western artist to be responsible for the origin and propagation of oil painting, particularly in eastern India. The discovery of this particular painting in discussion here sheds light on the emergence of oil painting in India generally and particularly in Calcutta, highlights the art historical importance of Sunkel as itinerant colonial painter".

His year of birth is not established but he was active as painter in Berlin from 1884 until his death. He showed his works regularly at the Prussian Art Academy in Berlin that was founded in 1694. In 1862, he set sail for India. The Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 had made news across Europe and by 1862 British rule was well consolidated in India and conditions peaceful for travel across the country. Sunkel stay in India was for sixteen years until 1878.

Since there is a paucity of research on many itinerant painters including Sunkel, and neither did he leave behind any memoir from where it would be possible to glean out important information about his stay in India. Certain evidences point to Sunkel stay in the region of Calcutta and this has been garnered from the catalogue of 1863 of Berlin Academy exhibition, which mentions Sunkel's travel to India. Also Sunkel paintings were considered to be in important private collection like that of Maharaja Pradyot Coomar Tagore. An important aspect of the latter's collection was that Maharaja had the most complete collection of works by European itinerant artists active in Calcutta in 18th and 19th centuries. Since Sunkel's name has not been associated with any other region of India, it may be surmised that the artist did not venture beyond the Bengal region.

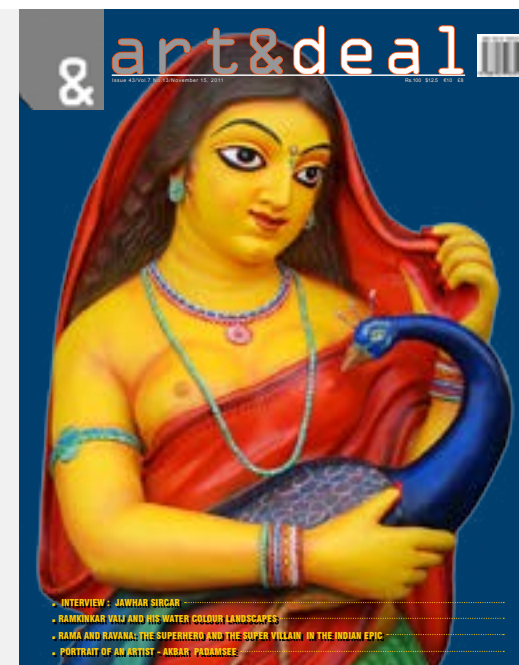
The painting in Anirban's collection was undoubtedly painted in Bengal. It is an oil canvas signed by the artist on the lower right corner and dated 1865. The painting was carried back by the artist to Germany. The subject of this painting is suggestive of a Bengali mansion by the river, which in the 19th century; the nouveau rich had started constructing palatial mansions in the Palladian style, and were premised on the imitation of the contemporary British architecture. It was common sight along the river banks whether it was the Ganges or its tributaries or any rivulet to see these palatial constructions. The two people seen on the step leading to the water are most probably those of the priests evidenced from their shaved heads and their sartorial attire. The foliage and flora surrounding the mansion are typical of the region of Bengal, especially the tall coconut palms.

The composition has a quietude and serenity, resulting from its setting against the thick coconut grove, with the river silently flowing by creating energies that is as serene as it is spiritual. Sunkel has captured the mood of nature in its tranquility. The painting is almost audible as the river gurgles along and the palm swaying in the gentle summer breeze

creating its own soulful rich music that touches the heart more than the mind. In a typical style, generally associated with academic trained painters, the trees in the background are rendered with brownish tones, which suggested the mannered style of using the colours, and Sunkel carries it forward in this painting. His deft drawing skills are evident from the architectural construction of the mansion that has been delineated precisely with accurate perspective. The composition establishes the classical mode, wherein the building in the centre is visually balanced by the thick vegetation on both sides and the verticality of all these elements is balanced by the horizontal river flowing in the foreground. Architecturally the mansion comprises of a single storey, with a colonnaded portico fronting it and a terrace above that is surrounded by a parapet. The upper level has a small structure at the far end of the building, serving perhaps to house the staircase which leads up to this terrace storey. The columns are simple and staid, devoid of decorative capitals maintaining the classical character of simplicity, balance and harmony. The portico is shaded from the summer sun through blinds, which to this day are a common feature across many households in the country. It is woven out of a certain grass, which provides coolness to the interior of homes. In front are the flights of steps, which lead to the water front. The flight of steps on either side has grass and the ground is sloping as well. It is a painting that reveals Sunkel's insightful perception in capturing the details with dexterous skill. He conveys the tranquility, the thick denseness of the grove of trees and the river purposefully flowing by. All these elements establish his artistry conveying that he was not just a skilled painter but had the capacity to capture the mood of the entire scene.

Sunkel could not become very well known simply because he did not have the right nationality to be able to get the impressive letters of introduction. Nevertheless, the quality of his work speaks volumes about his abilities as an artist. Unfortunately the artist died unknown; his failing health, which prevented him from working and the depletion of financial sources, ultimately led him to request for financial help from Berlin Academy. A letter to this effect dated 26th March 1882 is to be found in the archives of Prussian Art Academy. There is no further information on his life after this as to how he lived and when he died.

Art Historically Sunkel will remain important, because he was the initiator and mentor to the first generation of indigenous artists who practiced oil painting in India.



I had first come across the mention of an artist called Eduard Sunkel while reading about the history of modern Indian art in his book titled "Occidental Orientations". After many years of searching following this first mention, I chanced upon this painting at an auction in Dorotheum auction house in Vienna.

After acquiring the painting, I spent significant efforts to research for the art as well as the artist. The 'Akademie der Kunst' in Berlin was very helpful in retrieving the records of the "Prussian Academy of Arts" where the exhibition entries of Eduard Sunkel as well as his biographical information was kept. Using this information, this painting was formally 'written-up' and published in the "Art & Deal" magazine in 2011.

& COVER STORY



FRANZ EDUARD SUNKEL AND THE EMERGENCE OF OIL PAINTING IN INDIA

By Anirban Sadhu

“ Yet to India artists sail,
And if judgment there abide,
India will thy talents hail,
Cheering thee with bounteous pride.

- ANONYMOUS – 1796

THE ORIGIN OF OIL PAINTING IN INDIA took place in the late 18th century, and was by far the most important contribution of western art to colonial Indian art. Oil painting was introduced in India for the first time by the itinerant colonial artists, the first well known among whom was Tilly Kettle (1735 – 1786). These artists initially started out by working on commissions from local rulers and the nobility. As oil paintings became popular with Indians, a steady stream of western artists found their way into India to earn a living. Many of them eventually took on local artists as students or apprentices, initiating them into the medium of oil painting. This led to the emergence of the first generation of indigenously trained Indian oil painters. This aspect of the importance of the itinerant colonial artists to Indian art has unfortunately not received enough scholarly attention. With the exception of a notable few like Theodore Jensen who mentored Raja Ravi Varma, little is known about the contribution of other colonial artists to the emergence of oil painting in India. Among the earliest Indian oil painters, the names of Raja Ravi Varma and his contemporary Ramaswamy Naidu stand out. While both these two artists were practicing in southern India, not much is known about the early oil painters in Eastern India, in the region around present day Kolkata. It is in this context that the discovery of a painting by Eduard Sunkel assumes importance, as it sheds light on the emergence of oil painting in northern India.

ITINERANT COLONIAL ARTISTS AND COLONIAL INDIAN ART

The first steps towards the colonization of India had started with the establishment of the trading posts by the British, French and the Danish. In the ensuing battle for commercial, financial and political supremacy, played out in the backdrop of the political development in Europe and the falling fortunes of the Mughal dynasty, by the third quarter of the 18th century, the British (represented by the East India Company) were a quasi political force to reckon with. With increasing political stability and a concomitant decrease in existential worries of empire building, there was an increase in emphasis on cultural pursuits, which was also fanned by a section of nouveau-rich Indians who owed their emergence and sustenance to the British regime. With the consolidation of the British rule, word of the economic and political importance of the Indian colony soon spread. Added to that was the exoticism that India offered – an exoticism that was

often embellished and overrated. As a result, in part to live and paint the Indian exoticism, and more generally to seek fortunes and to eke out a career, artists from Britain gradually began to trickle into India starting from the latter half of the 18th century.

Over the next 80 – 100 years, this trickle gradually transformed itself into a steady stream – and the artists coming to India were no longer from Britain only, but also from countries in mainland Europe going as far as Scandinavia. Indeed, towards the end of the 19th century, artists from as far as the United States of America and Australia also came to India. Irrespective of whether they were driven by a passion for adventure, a zest for life, a penchant for money or the compulsion of a government job, all these artists could be grouped under the collective epithet of 'Itinerant Colonial Artists'. The collective oeuvre produced by the itinerant colonial artists is spread over a period of slightly less than 200 years. Starting from Tilly Kettle, who came to India in 1769 and was the first of this genre of artists, to the last body of works produced in the 1940s (when India ceased being a colony), this genera of paintings consists of innumerable paintings and sketches that captured the history and social evolution of India over 200 years, and is therefore of great art-historical significance. Though this field has been the subject of a lot of scholastic research work, ironically this is also one of the most neglected areas in the present Indian art market.

The colonial artists painted the exoticism of India, and in this process documented everyday life as well as important historical events. Their paintings also depicted Indian topography and landmarks like historical ruins or royal palaces. However, the colonial artists are important not only for documenting a very important part of India's history, but also because they influenced local Indian artists and initiated the beginning of modern Indian art as we know it today. European art had made its first impact on traditional Indian painting during the age of the Mughals in the 16th century. Throughout the Mughal period however, the appeal of European art remained primarily exotic in nature. With the decline of traditional sources of patronage and its replacement by the East India Company, the European influence on Indian art became more ingrained and institutionalized. However, all of this early Indian art influenced by European art was invariably executed on paper, keeping in sync with earlier traditions.

FRANZ EDUARD SUNKEL AND THE EMERGENCE OF OIL PAINTING IN INDIA

Extant literature points to the existence of an early oil painter called Gangadhar Dey. He worked and belonged to the period before the government art schools had asserted their influence, and had also received training from other European itinerant artists before he started on his own as an artist and restorer. Gangadhar Dey seems to have been an important person in the contemporary society associated with the socio-cultural movements of the day, and was among the innermost circle of the devotees of the nineteenth century Hindu religious figure by the name of Sri Ramkrishna. Apart from being a photographer, by most accounts, he was probably among the first oil painters in the region around Calcutta. Though none of his own works are presently available publicly, he mentored the next generation of Indian oil painters, the most prominent among whom was J P Gangooly. The pre-art school painters have not yet received the scholarly attention that is usually lavished on company painters. Research done by Prof. Partha Mitter for the first time indicated that Gangadhar Dey was the student of a German itinerant artist called Franz Eduard Sunkel. This would have implied that Sunkel was one of the first western artists to be responsible for the origin and propagation of oil painting in India, and particularly in eastern India. Sadly however, no further details about Sunkel were known, nor was any example of his work available to scholars. The discovery of this painting by Eduard Sunkel therefore sheds new light on the emergence of oil painting in India in general and eastern India in particular and highlights the art-historical importance of Eduard Sunkel as an itinerant colonial Indian painter.

Though his exact date of birth is not known, Franz Eduard Sunkel seems to have been fairly active in the Berlin art scene from 1844 onwards till his death, with at least one unexplained break in his career. He was a member of the Prussian Academy of Arts (Preußische Akademie der Künste), and exhibited regularly in its annual exhibitions. The Prussian Academy of Arts (Preußische Akademie der Künste) was an art school set up in Berlin in 1694/1696 by Frederick I of Prussia, the crown prince of Brandenburg and later King of Prussia. It had a decisive influence on art and its development in the German-speaking world throughout its existence. The academy dropped 'Prussian' from its

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name in 1945 and was finally disbanded in 1955 after the foundation of two separate academies of art for East Berlin and West Berlin in 1954. Those two separate academies merged in 1993 to form Berlin's present-day Akademie der Künste.

After the Accademia dei Lincei in Rome and the Académies Royales in Paris, the Prussian Academy of Art was the oldest institution of its kind in Europe, with a foundational mission similar to other royal academies of that time, such as the Real Academia Española in Madrid, the Royal Society in London, the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences in Stockholm or the Russian Academy of Sciences in St Petersburg. For a long time it was also the German artists' society and training organization, whilst the Academy's Senate became Prussia's arts council.

The archived records from the Prussian Academy of Arts indicate that Sunkel was known as a painter of genre scenes, portraits and landscapes (genre, bildnisse und landschaften). The description and titles of the works that he exhibited at the biennial exhibition of the Berlin Academy (Berliner Akademie-Ausstellungen) support this classification. The earliest mention of Eduard Sunkel dates to the catalog entry of the 1844 arts exhibition of the Berlin arts academy. In that year, four works by Sunkel were selected for display at the exhibition. There were two portraits and a landscape done using pastels/chalk (Kreidezeichnungen) and four oil paintings of genre scenes, portraits, and of a horse drawn carriage. In the next exhibition held in 1846, a total of 8 works by Sunkel were selected for display. These included 5 oil paintings and 3 drawings. Judging from the names (eg "An interesting meeting", "A party in the garden" etc), the subject matter of the paintings seems to have been very generic in nature. Two years later, the

exhibition of 1848 also had a total of 6 entries by Sunkel, three of which were portrait drawings.

During the years from 1844 to 1848, Sunkel seems to have been living in Berlin, though his official home address is different in each of the three exhibitions. In the absence of further detailed information, one is free to speculate about Sunkel's professional status and life during these years. While a changing address could be indicative of changing fortunes, regular participation in the Berlin Academy's exhibitions seems to indicate that Sunkel was a popular and acclaimed artist. Strangely though, his name ceases to be mentioned in the Berlin academy records for the 12 years following the 1848 exhibition. After exhibiting in the 1848 exhibition, the next appearance of Sunkel's painting is in the Berlin academy's exhibition of 1860. This exhibition took place at the Royal Academy in Berlin from 1st September to 31st October, and contained 5 entries by Sunkel, all of which were either portraits or human studies. In the exhibition catalog, which lists a Berlin address for Sunkel, works intended for sale were specially marked. It is interesting to note that none of the works by Sunkel were intended for sale.

It is difficult to explain the gap of 12 years in Sunkel's career from 1848 to 1860. One explanation could be that he moved out of Berlin, but was exhibiting in other art exhibitions or salons. Had he given up painting altogether, he probably would not have been re-admitted to exhibit his work in the 1860 exhibition. Further research may lead to unearthing of more information that may shed light on these missing years.

EDUARD SUNKEL IN INDIA

In 1862, Sunkel set sail for India. The sepoy mutiny of 1857 and its brutal suppression had made news all over Europe. By 1862 however, British rule was well consolidated in

India, and conditions were once again peaceful enough to travel. The academy exhibition in 1862 started on the 7th of September. By this time however, Sunkel had already left Berlin. Instead of mentioning an address in Berlin, the exhibition catalog specifically mentioned that the artist had left for Calcutta. There was only one painting by Sunkel at this exhibition, and it was intended for sale. His next appearance at the academy's exhibition would be in 1878 where quite predictably, there was one painting by him for sale titled 'Portrait of a Lady from Bengal'.

Sunkel's stay in India was to be a long one, though not much is known about it. Judging from the records available, he probably stayed in India for up to 16 years. Apart from the well patronized English painters there is a general paucity of good research on itinerant European painters in India in the 19th century. In the absence of any known memoirs by Sunkel, information about his stay in India can only be pieced together from fragmentary evidences. Multiple lines of evidence point to Sunkel's stay in the region around Calcutta. Firstly, the catalog of the 1862 Berlin academy exhibition mentions Sunkel travelling to Calcutta. Secondly, Gangadhar Dey, Sunkel's student and one of the first Indian painters known to have used the oil painting technique, belonged to Kolkata. Moreover, paintings by Sunkel were known to be in some prestigious private collections in Calcutta. Most prominent among these was the collection of European paintings owned by Maharaja Prodyot Coomar Tagore. Apart from containing works by European masters like Van Dyke, Rubens and John Constable, the Tagore collection was the most complete collection of works by itinerant European painters active in Calcutta in the 18th and 19th century. This collection was dispersed in the 1950s, and it is difficult to trace the fate of all the individual paintings thereafter. The only painting exhibited by Sunkel after his return to Berlin in 1878 was also of a Bengali subject titled 'Portrait of an Indian from Bengal'. Since Sunkel's name has never been associated with any other region in India, based on currently available evidence, it may be surmised that he probably did not venture much beyond Bengal.

The painting that is the subject of this discussion was also undoubtedly executed in Bengal. It is an oil on canvas work signed by the artist on

the lower right corner and dated 1865. The painting therefore was completed in India, but was carried back by the artist to Europe. It measures 13 by 21 inches, and is presently framed in a contemporary frame. The canvas and the stretcher however are still in original condition, and are supportive of the age and attribution of the painting. Though the canvas has not been relined, there is evidence of recent expert restoration. These consist of some minute retouches in various regions of the canvas that are visible only under UV light. There are also one or two small dot like holes that are visible only on examination under strong light. Other than this, the painting is in amazingly good overall condition, given its age. The signature on the lower right hand side is partly overwritten. There is a second signature by the same hand visible under the top one, but is very difficult to visualize under normal illumination.

The painting surfaced most recently in a sale in Austria, where it was wrongly described as a temple scene in south India. Further research into the provenance indicates that the same painting had previously been sold in another sale in Germany in the 1990s. The subject of the painting is a 19th century Bengali mansion by a river. In 19th century Bengal, the nouveau rich and the nobility had started building their mansions in the Palladian style in imitation of contemporary British architecture. The building in the painting seems to be one such villa. It is conceivable that the villa still exists, and that someone with expertise in the

colonial architecture of Calcutta may actually be able to identify the building. Most of these luxury buildings used to be built either on the banks of the Ganges or its tributaries, or by the banks for some other rivers, rivulets or pond, as is the case in this picture. The two human figures on the bank of the water almost certainly are two priests, as is clear from the shaved head and the dress. The foliage and the flora are typically tropical and indicative of Bengal. The treatment of the foliage, the water and the attention to detail together point to an expert hand, and are indicative of the skill of Eduard Sunkel as an artist. If more paintings by him are discovered from old collections in the future, a greater and deeper understanding of his oeuvre will emerge.

Existing records attest to the fact that Sunkel was back in Berlin by 1878, and entered a painting in the 1878 exhibition. This was to be the last recorded participation by him in the Berlin academy exhibitions. Available evidence indicates that the artist stayed on in Berlin at the same address (Halleschestrasse 21), though he seems to have fallen on to bad times. Physically, he was no longer fit. Whether this was purely attributable to ageing, or was in part related to his travel in India cannot be known for sure. Financially as well, Sunkel was not doing well. By 1882, the combination of failing health and drying finances had reached such a state that Sunkel was forced to write to the Berlin academy pleading for some financial help to be extended to him. This letter, dated 26th March 1882 and signed in full

(Franz Eduard Sunkel) is in the archives of the Prussian Academy of Arts. The academy considered his plea, and in April 1882, extended the desired help to him. It is not known how Sunkel fared thereafter, and how long he lived and worked.

In conclusion, the discovery of this painting by Franz Eduard Sunkel is more than merely the discovery of a new itinerant colonial artist. While most of the other European artists in India in the middle of the 19th century were British, Sunkel was German. At a time when patronization depended on letters of introduction, it is possible that Sunkel could not become very well known simply because he did not have the right nationality to be able to get the impressive letters of introduction. Nevertheless, the quality of his work proves his merit as an artist. Art-historically, Sunkel is important because he was the initiator and mentor of the first generation of indigenous oil painters in India. Thus, he played an important role in the beginning and propagation of oil painting in India, and certainly in east India. ☺

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Acknowledgement:

I would like to thank Dr. Ulrike Mohlenbeck from the Akademie Der Künste Berlin for kindly providing the archived records relating to Eduard Sunkel.

Letters written by Eduard Sunkel



Sunkel could not become very well known simply because he did not have the right nationality to be able to get the impressive letters of introduction. Nevertheless, the quality of his work proves his merit as an artist

REALISM AS A LANGUAGE

HEMENDRANATH MAZUMDAR [1898-1948]: PENCHANT FOR REALISM

"There is a perfect balance between the divine and earthly dimension in Hemen Mazumdar's works, which emerges from a very personal poetic vision that creates a new and singular aesthetic". C. Corni

He was part of a new generation of academic painters that challenged the nationalist Bengal School of painting led by Abanindranath Tagore in the early decade of the 20th century. With Jamini Roy and Rabindranath Tagore, Hemen Mazumdar became one of the pioneers in the emergence of "modern Indian art" from the geographical locus of Bengal. This was made possible through their respective visions that had the inspiration from the tradition of Indian folk art, European modern expressionism, and western academic realistic style. Mazumdar gave Indian modernity new iconography of women partially draped in a saree or walking home after a dip in the river with the wet garment clinging to her revealing her sensuous contours as well as her skin. There was an elegant charm and enigma about the partially revealed and concealed body draped in a saree that was as evocative and provocative with poetic effect. This visual imagery became integral to Mazumdar's artistic vocabulary marking a signature style of his works. Representation of women in Indian visual art fully or partially clothed was a ubiquity on the sacred walls of temples across the country as well as in Indian miniature tradition. But under the colonizers with Victorian values girding the society, Mazumdar's semi nude nubile would have been considered unorthodox and immoral, but nevertheless a ubiquitous feature of much European art of the 19th century. According to Partha Mitter, "Mazumdar's polemical attack on the ideological foundations of the Bengal School, which he contended, was out of touch with contemporary India. Believing in the universality of naturalist art, he insisted that only direct observation of nature could provide an objective standard. Mazumdar waged relentless war against the Orientalist till the end of his life".

Born in a village of Gachihata in today's Bangladesh, Mazumdar had shown a predilection towards art from a young age, and took a decision to join the Calcutta School of Art in 1910, which he did much against his father's desires, who belonged to a landowning family in Bengal. Unhappy with the pedagogy of the art school Mazumdar discontinued and later joined the Jubilee Academy that laid particular emphasis on academic realism, but his quest for acquiring knowledge in drawing and painting remained unfulfilled and dissatisfied decided to educate himself. He thus learnt figure drawing through books and prints that were easily in circulation at this time in Calcutta. In the 1920s, he had the fortune of meeting Atul Bose, and Jamini Roy and the three became close friends, making their ends meet by executing odd artistic jobs.

Having understood the pulse of his Bengali patrons, Mazumdar who was intensely and insightfully imaginative carved the image of the seminude nubile and youthful women which he rendered in his personalized style, engaging with the language of realism to realize his intentions. Unlike Ravi Varma who manipulated the oil medium to arouse tactile sensation in the viewer through textures of silk saris and lustrous gold and gems embedded in the jewellery, rendered with absolute clarity through his felicity of the brush strokes, Mazumdar's works stand at the opposite polarity. He marginalized opulence, had judicious choice of ornaments adorning the body as large ear rings or a neck piece that attempted to draw attention on the



In 20th Century India, specially in Bengal, there were only a few artists who drew voyeuristic and semi nude images of women. In addition to Atul Bose and Jogesh Seal, Hemen Majumdar was the most important among these artists.

My fascination with Hemen goes back a long time. I had wanted to own a work by him since the time I started reading up on Indian art. For some reason, his works were always difficult to lay hands on. And then there were a few notable scandals involving his works – the most prominent one that involved a stolen work surfacing in a bowrings auction.

In 2010, I identified a new painting by Hemen in an auction. It was a small provincial auction house in the UK whose name I do not remember anymore. The image of the lot was published as a dirty stamp size photograph without any attribution whatsoever. On enquiry, the auction house confirmed that the lot lacked a signature. However, one look at the work, and it was clear to me that I was looking at a work by Hemen. The lot was estimated at GBP 800, but went up considerably higher. I dropped out of the race at around GBP 8000. Subsequently, a few months later, to my surprise, the same lot appeared at Sothebys and sold at a handsome price. Upon enquiry with Sothebys, they conformed that a signature had emerged in the painting after it was cleaned. Whats even more mysterious is that there is no trace of the painting in the Sothebys website even though it was sold in their auction.

body of the woman. He consciously contrasted the play between opposition of texture as smooth and rough made obvious in the sensitive smooth skin and textured sartorial attire through his masterful and dexterous controlled brush strokes. This resulted in visual titillation reinforcing the sensuality. Mazumdar was adept at handling all media, oils, water colours and crayons and his principle emphasis had been the study of the female form.

It was the simplicity of his vision that dynamically powered his composition, which though overtly sensuous was neither erotic nor sexual. He made this possible by his sensitivity towards women, whom he depicted not as brazen and bold locking her gaze with the viewer. Rather as demure and shy, with her eyes averted in an expression of self introspection or contemplation. Her involved acts of self adornment, lost in a reverie, or at the river after a dip has always been representative of her serenity and calmness, as there is nothing serendipitous about her activities. A resonance to nayikas in Indian poetry and particularly in pictorial art from Rajput miniature tradition was obvious. Would this be a reflection of the artist's persona? Undeniably concealed within the layers of his subconscious was the desire of the artist in sublimating the beauty and grace of the woman with dignity, which also inscribed his visual aesthetics. Yet it is also possible to read the power of patriarchy in a male dominated middle class Bengali society. Hence the male gaze was made manifest, a voyeuristic display through the objectification of the female body.

Considered one of the finest Bengali artists, but was not sufficiently recognized, as he remained in the shadow of academic realism of Ravi Varma. The images of women with their 'wet look' was based on his expertise in the creation of the true Bengali romantic language in visual arts, which had varying moods of languor or states of undress, yet through their suggested identities as wives and mothers and ideal feminine types he kept up a respectable veneer and came to occupy 'legitimate' areas of middle class taste. This genre of women studies by Mazumdar fed directly into the genre of the 'calendar art' stereotype spreading through prints and repeating itself through a host of other obscure artists.



Tanmoy (The Rapt Lady)" is my first acquisition of a work by Hemen, made much later in my collecting career. This is among the most important and popular of paintings by Hemen. It is a well known fact that Hemen often revisited themes and subjects that had become very popular. As a result, multiple versions of his important works exist. In addition, various studies in watercolor and crayons also exist of the important works. The different versions of Hemen's painting of the same subject are never identical. There are distinct differences in the backdrop as well as in the main subject. These paintings are treated by collectors as unique and individual works in their own right.

This particular work was originally sold by the famous delhi based private dealer Mr. Vikram Singh around 1995, and since then has been in the same private collection before coming to me. It is well known that Hemen painted multiple versions of this work. However, this is perhaps the most vivid and certainly the biggest version. It is also a signed version, unlike some of the other ones. Taken together, this strongly hints towards this being the primary or most important version of the painting.



Figure. 04:
Title: TANMOY (The Rapt Lady)
Medium: Oil on Canvas
Size: 34 X 46 inches
Signed: In English, Lower Left

Mazumdar's academic realism endowed his style with lyricism and poetry. Though his iconography was intrinsically the representation of the female form, he was able to lend power to his compositions through a dignified simplicity. He created an aura of intimacy and immediacy through his subdued play of light which intentionally avoids dramatic tones. The charm of his lighting lay in enhancing the emotions and sentiments of his protagonists. He manifested mastery of expression through postures, gestures and glances that made his female forms more alluring and attractive. The landscapes in which the women are placed are full of nature's bounty, green glades that are as refreshing as the beauty of the woman. Mazumdar had said, "There are no fixed rules or traditions in the domain of painting, which has got no universally recognized lexicon of its own". It was this freedom in his thinking that made him evolve the particularized iconography of the women in his art.

The disturbing power of Mazumdar's women to lay in their palpability and immediacy: his subject either middle class housewife or a mother or a village belle returning home after her bath. The artist's tantalizing silence about the identity of the model heightened the mystery surrounding her. It is this ambiguity that made such a powerful appeal to the Bengali middle class.

The three paintings in the Sadhus' collection defines and makes obvious the salencies of Mazumdar's individual personal vision in casting the youthful women in a subtle dramatic manner if the poses and postures are taken into consideration The paintings are "Lady by the Mirror", "Lady wearing the earring" and "The Rapt Lady".

HEMENDRANATH MAJUMDAR (1894 – 1948)

Hemendranath Mazumdar, popularly referred to as Hemen Mazumdar, was born 1894 in Gachihata village of Mymensingh district, which is currently part of Bangladesh. Coming from a relatively wealthy landowning family, at the age of sixteen, Hemen dropped out of school and ran away to Calcutta to pursue his passion for painting. His early exposure to art seems to have been entirely through illustrations that appeared in magazines and books.

Appearing at the doorstep of his sister's home in Calcutta, after futile attempts to dissuade him to pursue his dream of being an artist, he enrolled at the Government College of Art in 1911. The Government College of Art that Hemen entered had undergone a remarkable transformation over the previous fifteen years. It had evolved from an institution "established by a benevolent government for the purpose of revealing to the Indians the superiority of European art."¹ Under the successive leadership of Ernest Havell, Abanindranath Tagore, and Percy Brown, the college had moved away from mandating students to copy western academic art as part of their training to espousing Indian art as the basis of the curriculum. Frustrated by abandonment of western academic tenets in instruction, Hemen left Government College of Art in 1912 for another institution in the city. Jubilee Art Academy was sympathetic to academic naturalism, but Hemen was more self-taught with the help of art books he sourced from overseas. By 1915, he left Jubilee Art Academy to start earning his living through portrait painting. Abanindranath Tagore's coterie had banished any artist following the western academic approach. In response, in 1919, Hemen Mazumdar with Atul Bose and Jamini Roy, established The Indian Academy of Fine Arts. In 1920, the first issue of the journal Indian Art Academy appeared to showcase art of those following academic naturalism. The 1920s helped establish Hemen Mazumdar as a major Indian artist with a national reputation. Starting in 1920, Hemen won the gold medal at the annual exhibition of Bombay Art Society for three consecutive years. His paintings, such as Pallipran, also won awards at exhibitions in Calcutta and Madras. Between 1920-24, the five-volume set, The Art of Mr. H. Mazumdar, was published. By then, Hemen paintings appeared regularly in various magazines and periodicals. To popularise his art, Hemen published in album of paintings entitled Indian Masters edited by A.M.T. Acharya in 1920s and launched a new art journal Shilpi in 1929. From 1930, for the rest of his life, Hemen Mazumdar remained a celebrated Indian artist. His popularity attracted the attention of Indian royalty. Among his patrons were Maharajas of Bikaner, Cooch Behar, Dholpur, Jaipur, Jodhpur, Kashmir, Kotah, Mayurbhanj, and Patiala. At each of these courts, he painted the portraits of the royal family, and on their requests, his most famous paintings of solitary Bengali women such as Ear-Ring (Kaner-Dul), Image (Roop), Monsoon (Barsha), Secret Memory (Smriti) and Soul of the Village (Pallipran). This royal connection reinforced his national stature as an artist.

"After the death of Maharaja of Patiala in 1938, Hemen returned to Bengal. He set up studios in Calcutta as well as the Dhiren Studio in Hooghly district under the patronage of the local zamindar. After participating in the All India Exhibition at Eden Gardens, Calcutta, Hemen Mazumdar died on 22 July 1948.



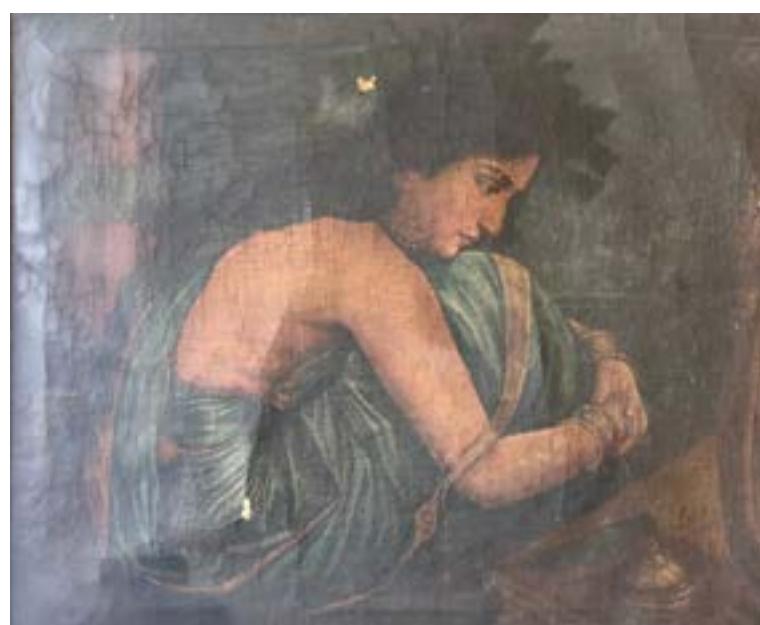
Figure. 05:
 Title: Lady with a Mirror
 Medium: Oil on Canvas
 Size: 61 X 76 cm (2 X 36 inches)
 Artist: Hemendranath Majumdar
 Signed: Lower Left, in English.

The “Lady by the Mirror” is an elegant poetic work that has its ambience enhanced by an imminent light emanating from within the composition, imparting an appearance of the celestial realm. Her greenish blue sari with gold border resonates with minimum jewellery that adorns her. Yet the enticing aspect of about her is the deeply contemplative eyes that reflect the narrative of her thoughts. Her adornment ensemble is placed next to the mirror but she is lost in a reverie. The mirror translates as a metaphor of alter ego and at a deeper level to spiritual contemplation. This latter element was definitive of nayikas in Indian pictorial tradition. The setting of the closed interior is perhaps reflective of her mind in which the churning thoughts make her unaware of her surroundings reinforced by her posture of hugging herself tightly. The psychological insights apparent in this work is truly remarkable, marking Mazumdar’s work a notch above the academic realist who portrayed landscapes and portraits with similitude and artistic veracity.

The influence of western salon painting on Hemen is clearly visible in this painting. A beautiful woman with a seemingly lost gaze, looking at a mirror is a composition whose timeless mystery has been captured by western artists since the time of the renaissance. Hemen's genius lies in adopting the timeless elements of this composition and adapting them to the context of 20th century Bengal.

The painting came to my collection from a collector in Mumbai, and could be traced back to previous collectors in Bengal. The painting was covered in a thick layer of grime, and had suffered hugely in the heat, dust and humidity of India. A long and painful cleaning and restoration process brought it back to its current state of glory.

WHAT RESTORATION DOES TO A PAINTING



Before



After





Figure. 06:
 Title: PRASADHAN (Lady wearing the Earring)
 Medium: Gouache/Pastel on Paper
 Size: 20 X 24 inches (with mount)
 Artist: Hemendranath Majumdar
 Signed: In English. Lower Left

“Lady wearing the earring” has been fashioned in the Western tradition of nudes or semi nudes in front of a mirror. The beautiful painting is a masterpiece of Mazumdar’s technical dexterity and masterly artistic skills, defining the smooth rose petal coloured skin, which has taken on a translucent texture with the play of light; making it equally enchanting and magical. Further he has reinforced with his subtle rose and crimson coloured palette in the delineation of her feathery soft powder pink sari. The neatly coiffeured hair held in place by an artistic appendage, her gold chain languorously resting around her neck with gold bangles and armband evokes an image of a heavenly nymph though her face is not shown. It is in these type of compositions that Mazumdar revealed his imaginative acumen, making the viewer restless to know more about her enigmatic appearance; but she will remain eternally mysterious. The painting is an intimate conversation between the youthful girl and the mirror in front. Mazumdar makes no effort to delineate any other details of the interior through the agent of the mirror. It is this simplicity which allowed him to focus on his protagonist. Neither do the brush strokes distract from the composition laid on with painterly smoothness and with a touch of ambient light caressing the appropriate parts of the compositional structure.

The two paintings described have its protagonists placed within interiors, but Mazumdar was equally a master in composing scenes in a natural landscape. “The Rapt Lady” is the representation of a young village belle stepping out of the river carrying a pot of water and simultaneously distracted either on sighting somebody nearby or it is her mental preoccupation. Typical of his compositions the representation of the landscape is limited with emphasis on a clump of bamboos behind her and the young woman herself. The ‘wet look’ appearance the signature style of the artist though appearing naturalistic is apparently stylized as the sari does not contour her body naturally but appears to be consciously draped and arranged. This painting is not in the same league as the other two within the collection. Mazumdar has revealed his controlled mastery in rendering various textures as that of the metal pot, the softness of the sari, the fresh foliage, the murky waters with lotus, leaves and grass and the stones of the pavement lining the river.

SELECT REFERENCE

Caterina Corni, Nirmalya Kumar [Eds], “Hemen Mazumdar: The Last Romantic”, This book has been published by Singapore Management University in conjunction with Hemen Mazumdar: The Last Romantic, an exhibition organized at De Suantio Gallery, Singapore Management University 23 January to 17 February 2019.

This work came to my collection in 2019 from a Kolkata based private collector. The father of the current owner had bought this painting from a Kolkata based dealer in 1972, following which it had stayed in the same collection till it came to mine.

Just like Jamini Roy, multiple versions of Heme's paintings exist, each one a unique piece of Art with its own subtle differences and variations in size, composition and medium of execution. The more well known subjects tend to have more versions. For a list of the other known version of this work, please refer to the “Hemen Mazumdar - The Last Romantic”, edited by Caterina Corni and Nirmalya Kumar.

A hundred years of vagaries of the elements has taken its toll on the paper of the painting. The work went through a long restoration process by a very competent restorer to stabilize the substrate before being displayed in its current frame.

GAGANENDRANATH TAGORE [1867-1938]

RENDERINGS OF ENIGMATIC LIGHT

Considered a poetic cubist, he was the only artist before 1940s to have engaged with the language and syntax of cubism to realize his artistic vision. He was an individualist and impressed people by his intelligence and personal charm. He was a self taught artist who had learned the Japanese wash technique from visiting Japanese artists at Jorasanko. A few years older to brother Abanindranath Tagore, his early works comprised particularly in wash technique of rain drenched crows, a common sight in Calcutta [Kolkata]. Till the 1920s he was best known for his brilliant and sharp lithographs that satirized the social mores of urban Calcutta. Then in 1922 he seized what Partha Mitter calls a 'modernist moment' to realize his artistic vision through cubism. Stella Kramrisch the art historian who analyzed his works in an essay wrote rather provocatively that the formalist simplicity of cubism was neither unique nor significantly different from non western non illusionist pictorial tradition, making a reference to Indian miniatures. She wrote that the cubes Gaganendranath used to construct his systematic geometry was in fact an externalization of the turbulent forces of inner experiences that dismantled the static geometry of Analytical Cubism into an expressive device. The geometry that Gaganendranath devised was premised on curved lines and forms essentially imparting a dynamic character to his works, which juxtaposed with lyrical symphonies of brilliant colours and mysterious light resonating to works of Rembrandt was structured poetry and evocative spiritual light.

The two works in the collection namely "The Mountain Temple" and "Lady in Black" are both in water colour medium. The former work has a mysterious ambience, rendered in shades of grey with values range from thick black to spiritual whites. It has the representation of a massive cave with entrances set amidst craggy mountain peaks with a few temples looming in the background, set against a dark and foreboding dark grey cloudy sky. A path has been carved out in the icy ground as steps could be seen leading up to the temples. He may have visited the sacred Himalayan region or it is a work of a creative and fecund imagination. Nevertheless it exudes an aura of spiritual mysticality, considering elements such as the mountains, the caves and its association with Siva and the temples situated amidst it.

His fascination for light was the result of his engagement with plays that were staged at Jorasanko, dramatization of many of Rabindranath Tagore's writings. Having moved away from the representation of nationalist culture in his art, that is, following Abanindranath Tagore in the representation of the subject that were mainly derivatives of popular tales, folk tales and with literary content it was light that captured his imagination. It was in its inter weaving of shadows, which became a challenge that he faced with a sense of experimental spirit. The nuanced brush strokes emanated an impression of brush dipped in light gently caressing the surface of the paper to create the effects he desired.

The painting "Lady in Black" has the representation of a young woman her face partially covered in her saree and rendered in profile. Her face is hardly visible and what strikes is her beautiful almond shaped eye with lowered gaze together with partially revealed face imparts an enigmatic character. The question that begs is her identity. The mysterious character is enhanced by the series of light haloes that surround her. Apparently she seems to be carrying a lamp which lights up her beautiful young face as she threads the darkness, the cast shadows repeating her form, which Gaganendranath has capitalized upon to mantle her with. The inherent lyricism emanating from her shadows delineated with values of tonal greys creates a mesmerizing effect on the viewer.

In his composition, an observed saliency is the design that remains as a manifest strength. The sense of design is strong in this particular work, in the manner her sari is draped and her carrying the rest of it over her arms in front is dissolved in the light of the lamp. The floral print on the saree is meticulously rendered and the dynamic and organic shapes of the floral constellation are contrasted with the fine white lines in her skirt below. Gaganendranath has cleverly created an arched doorway made visible by the pillar on the side, but melded it craftily with the haloes of sequential shadows, which he surrounded her with. It is this play of forms and shapes inter weaving with light and shadow that he creates the mystery and enigma in his works. His understanding of light, with its capricious evanescent character, handled with confidence and in a masterly way. That is the graded shadows continue to surround her as he played with the darker tone of black to evoke architectural elements. There is a dream like blending of shadowy of forms. Gaganendranath sensitivity to the subject of women, the mystery and delicacy that he invested them with is seen in this painting.

SELECT REFERENCE

Partha Mitter, *Triumph of Modernism*, Oxford university Press

Gayatri Sinha, "Poetry and Patriotic Fervour: Indian Art Pre Independence, DAG Delhi Art Gallery, New Delhi 2003



Figure. 07:
Title: Lady in Black / Standing Lady
Artist: Gaganendranath Tagore
Size: 10.9 X 7.9 inches
Medium: Watercolor on Paper
Signed: 'GT', Lower Left Corner
Acquired: 2013



Figure. 08:
Title: The Mountain Temple
Artist: Gaganendranath Tagore
Size: 12 X 9 inches
Medium: Watercolor on Paper
Signed: 'GT' - Lower left Corner
Acquired: 2013



Both of these two paintings by Gaganendranath Tagore are authenticated and certified by the eminent art historian and critic of the Bengal School of Art, Sandip Sarkar.

THE HISTORY OF THE 'LADY IN BLACK' PAINTING



208	
Gaganendranath Tagore (1867 - 1938)	
Estimate	20,000 - 30,000 USD
Sold	35,000 USD
Description	
Gaganendranath Tagore	
Untitled	
Initialed 'GT' lower left	
Watercolour on paper	
Provenance	
From the collection of Giles Eyer	

For a substantial part of his career, Gaganendranath obsessively studied light and shade. The oeuvre produced during this time is in mostly in monochrome, as shown by the two examples in this collection - both of which came to my collection from private collections in Kolkata where they had stayed for a long time.

While researching the 'Lady in Black', I came across another similar painting that had come up for auction at Sotheby's in 2011. This was from the collection of Giles Eyer, who may have obtained it directly from the artist. These two paintings are thematically identical, and are likely part of the same set or series of paintings. They must have gone to different collectors directly from Ganagendranath before being rediscovered as being part of the same set by me.

ABANINDRANATH TAGORE

With his career beginning in the emergent years of the Swadeshi movement, Abanindranath Tagore was an active proponent of nationalist revivalist art. He studied at the Government School of Art, Calcutta, learnt painting under the guidance of Olinto Ghilardi, Charles Palmer and Japanese brushwork under Yokoyama Taikan. A meeting with E. B. Havell turned him towards the study of Mughal and Rajput painting, propelling the change in his style. Famous as the founder of what came to be known as the Bengal School, Abanindranath's works are modelled on these broad genres - Ethereal landscapes, historical events, and fairy tales of Bengal.

He retained his European-trained realist base even in his nationalist years, with selective assimilation of Ajanta frescos, Kalighat pats, Mughal, Japanese and Persian elements. His artistic journey moved from a nationalist framework to an intensely personified world of painting and writing, from a public to private domain. A highly influential teacher of repute who trained artists like Nandalal Bose and Asit Haldar, Abanindranath's views on art can be seen in his Bageswari Lectures, and are epitomised in his work Arabian Nights and his assemblage of sculpture called Kutum-Katam.

Within a few years of the artist's death in 1951, his eldest son, Alokendranath, bequeathed almost the entire family collection of Abanindranath Tagore's paintings to the newly founded Rabindra Bharati Society Trust that took up residence on the site of their famous house on No. 5, Dwarkanath Tagore lane. As only a small number of the artist's paintings had been collected or given away in his lifetime, the Rabindra Bharati Society became the main repository of Abanindranath's works throughout his life. Banished into trunks inside the dark offices of the society, these paintings have remained in permanent storage ever since. As a result, the full range and brilliance of Abanindranath's works has never be effectively projected into the public domain. They remained intimately known only to a tiny circle of art connoisseurs and scholars in Bengal, some of whom like K. G. Subramanyan and R. Siva Kumar have long argued that the true measure of Abanindranath's talent is to be found in his works of the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s but could do little to offer up a comprehensive profile of the master for the contemporary art world.

This particular painting is an undated watercolor on paper, and epitomizes Abanindranath's mastery of the 'wash' technique. As an artist who limited himself exclusively to working on paper, these small paintings are veritable jewels of art. Light filters through the mist, giving it the appearance of an ethereal winter morning. A lone passerine bird sits on a desolate branch. There is no other strong narrative element in the painting. But the viewer is free to build up a story mentally based on their own viewpoint. Just like in many other paintings of Abanindranath, what you see in the painting is the reflection of your own mind.

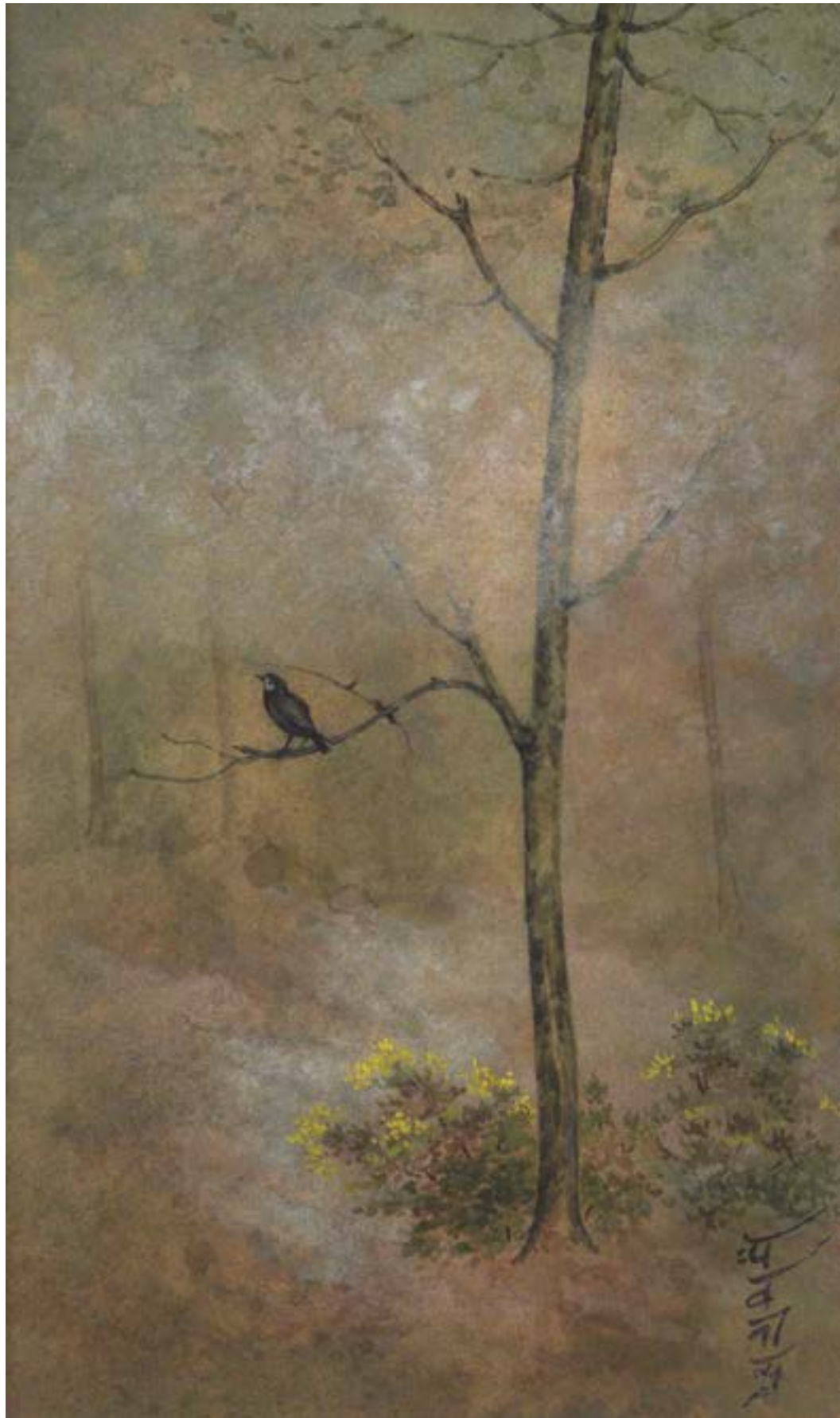


Figure. 09:
Title: Untitled; (Bird on a Tree)
Artist: Abanindranath Tagore
Size: 10 X 6 inches
Medium: Watercolor on Paper
Signed: Lower Right Corner

NANDALAL BOSE [1882-1966]

RUSTIC NATURALISM

Nandalal Bose is considered a leading artist of the 20th century, whose pioneering vision enhanced the visual ingredients of Modern Indian Art. He was not only an artist who practiced in a wide gamut of mediums from water colours, Chinese brush and ink drawings, Japanese wood cuts, dry point, lino-cut, lithography, drawings and sketching, but a pedagogue with innovative ideas in art and art education within the broad context of social concerns as well as a theorist. He was interested in the art for the community and collective of artists. His inspiration came from Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi. The former was focused on cultural resurgence while the latter on the political and economic independence.

A student of Abanindranath Tagore belonging to the charmed inner circle of his group of students at the Calcutta School of Arts, Nandalal initially painted in the wash technique pioneered by his 'master' with themes derived from history and mythologies. But he realized by 1910 when he had left the Art School that the intimate style of his 'master's' sensibility was not suitable to his temperament and he moved away to paint in his individual style. Thus the charisma of Nandalal's style lay in his maintaining a link between the old 'Indian art' style inaugurated by his master and his digression to include spontaneity and vigour and boldness and colour. It is this approach that was the basis of his modernity.

At Jorasanko Nandalal had met Coomarswamy, Rabindranath Tagore and Sr. Nivedita. He was inspired by Coomarswamy's perception of tradition. In 1912 he met Count Okakura from Japan who advised him to bring together elements of tradition, environment and individuality in his art. This precept became the guiding force of Nandalal's life as an artist and a pedagogue. Among Abanindranath's students the Poet Laureate had found Nandalal resourceful and responsive to his ideas. When Rabindranath decided to set up Kala Bhavan at Santiniketan in 1919 as part of Rabindra Viswabharati he invited Nandalal to take charge of Kala Bhavan.

It is important to emphasize that the art and pedagogy of Nandalal was conflated. As a teacher he put learning above teaching with a belief that student should strike out his individual path in his creative quest. The Swadeshi movement had foregrounded culture particularly of indigenous tradition that resided in the rural villages where according to Mahatma Gandhi the soul of the country resided. Hence moving away from literary ideal of naturalism that was impressed upon them by the 'master', Nandalal began to engage with is immediate environment of Santiniketan and in the realization of realistic images of the form be it humans, animals, landscape or trees. He also redefined the popular of folk art tradition to make it an important ingredient of India's modernity. He thus connected the classic with the folk, the artists and the craftsman. This was an important approach that marked the saliency of his pedagogy, which reflected in his art too.

His connectivity to nature and its representation in his water colours, sketches and drawings was premised on his methodology of contemplating in the presence of nature a mnemonic exercise where he internalized the forms from nature and reduced them to visual codes which he could store in his memory and recall to produce it when required. This resulted in the

aesthetic of his form acquiring beauty and not sentiments, thus enabling him to produce a large number of works of the landscape around Santiniketan. Having moved away from the mystifying tones of the wash technique, Nandalal's works of the 1930s and 1940s were replete with the life of his environment. As he had professed that he now saw his Shiva in the trees, Krishna in the cowherd, Arjun in the local archer and the Sabari in the Santhal women. His "Evening Lamp" rendered in tempera in 1931 and "New Clouds" painted in 1937 bear testimony to the rhythmic spontaneous strokes of his brush and the vigour of life that manifests in the painting of New Clouds where the village women are rushing home to avoid the imminent thunder showers.

In the collection is the work on paper rendered in tempera of a "Woman Carrying the Pitcher", which marks Nandalal weaving the strands of the old with the new. The form of the woman is sculptural with pinched waist and large bosom that defined the aesthetic of feminine beauty in India's plastic tradition. But the woman's sartorial attire resonates to the local village tradition particularly the design of the free rhythmic diagonal strokes of her saree juxtaposed with the circular dots had the saliency of folk tradition. Her skin painted in green arouses the nostalgia of a yakshi. Nandalal has represented the woman a charming beauty carrying a pitcher of water, white lotus plucked fresh from the water and her luxuriant hair cascading down on her back. Her meditative eyes are lost in a reverie. In the thin transparent drape of her saree clinging to her body seductively is the resonance of the wet semi clad women in Hemen Mazumdar's paintings. Nevertheless it is possible to trace here the influence of Ajanta painting particularly the lithe bodily charm.

Since no date is available of this particular work, it also has consanguinity to Nandalal's Haripura Posters which he had designed in 1937 for the National Congress conference on the request of Mahatma Gandhi. Here Nandalal had recreated the rhythm of a typical village life representing the daily chores of the women, activities of a barber, tailor, ear cleaner, an archer, women cooking, playing with the baby, farmer busy in the field. The style was spontaneous, organic and synoptic capturing the essence of activity in a lively and vivid manner. Many of these salencies manifest in his painting of "Woman with a Pitcher".

SELECT REFERENCE:

Partha Mitter, "Triumph of Nationalism: India's Artists and the Avant-Garde, 1922-1947", Oxford University Press, New Delhi 2007

Tapati Guha Thakurta, "Visualizing the Nation; Nandalal Bose: A New National Art for the People" an article in the Journal of Arts and Ideas Number 27-28, Tulika Print Communication Services, New Delhi, March 1995

A large corpus of Nandalal's work was donated to the National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA) and to the Vishwa Bharati Archives in Shantiniketan. This, coupled with the fact that Nandalal's name is included in the list of heritage artists, means that it is difficult to come across his works these days. This makes this work all the more important as a part of my collection.

This work has an unusual shape, rather large size, and uses a very limited palette. The work came to my collection in 2013 from a Kolkata based dealer. The authenticity of the work is backed up by a certification and authentication from notable art historian and critic, Sandip Sarkar.



Figure. 10:
 Title: UNTITLED (Woman with Pitcher)
 Artist: Nandalal Bose
 Signed: In Bangla, with seal. (Lower Left)
 Size: 19 inches X 10.5 inches
 Medium: Watercolor on Paper
 Acquired: 2013.

KSHITINDRANATH MAJUMDAR [1891-1975]

NAÏVE EVOCATIONS

Kshitindranath Majumdar was a student of Abanindranath Tagore and he adopted the transparent water colour wash technique developed by the 'master'. He was born in Nimtita, a remote village in Murshidabad District, West Bengal and had no formal education in art. He lost his mother when he was just a year old and grew up under the warm and loving mantle of his father who took extraordinary interest in nurturing his artistic talents. In his village he witnessed the local dramas, which were religious in nature and also participated. This early experience was to become the mainstay of his art later thus becoming the foundational knowledge that was acquired from village plays and devotional hymns. As a teen, he acted in local theatre group that his father owned. His artistic abilities were recognized by the Zamindar of a nearby village. On his suggestion he joined the Government College of Art in Kolkata in 1905 when E.B. Havell was the Principal and Abanindranath Tagore was the Vice Principal, becoming one of his early students. Through this inner circle of students, that also included many luminaries, emerged the new art movement- the Neo Bengal Art Movement; with paintings which broadly confirmed to Abanindranath's formula of an "Indian-style". It is this core group which helped in disseminating the layered wash technique developed by Abanindranath Tagore.

The Neo Bengal School of Painting marked the beginnings of Modern Art in India in the early decades of the 20th century. It was premised on the visual content of 'Indianness' to mark a distinct departure from the works of Raja Ravi Verma in its articulation with oil medium and realism as the visual language. Majumdar was one of the most brilliant representatives of this 'Indian' style of painting pioneered by Abanindranath. His languid representation of Chaitanya in his most celebrated 'Chaitanya series' was consanguine with the visual vocabulary of his teacher Abanindranath Tagore but with greater refinement of form and line and delicacy in the negotiation of the technique. This resulted in Majumdar creating an ethereal sublime ambience that belonged to a mystical realm, offering appropriate correspondence to the character of the protagonist Chaitanya. Majumdar was able to convey the power of meditative contemplation in the representation of Chaitanya with lucidity. This was made possible due to his understanding of the concept of Bhakti rasa. Tremendously influenced by Chaitanya's Vaishnavism, he abstracted the Bhakti concept in his works, which he visualized through the element of light and the denial of the representation of either man or nature, evoking the power of spiritual stillness through his transparent layered wash technique. He leaves the viewer with a feeling of contemplative serenity, a dialogue that establishes Majumdar's powers of the visual language in its interface. The expressive quietitude he imparted to his representation was also his accomplishment as a singer, singing songs from Krishna Leela and also sang hymns.

With drawing as his expressive tool, he made it central to his conception of images, considering it as a skeleton which can be fleshed out accordingly. The wash technique that he adopted was an intensive process requiring initially the delineation of drawing on paper and the application of the first layer of colour wash. Next step was dipping the paper in a water bath and when partially dry the second coating or layer of water colour wash was applied. The water bath was repeated to enable the strengthening of colours evenly that resulted in creating a seamless



effect. The final lines and colours and other details were reinforced which marked the painting as finished. Tempera was Majumdar's preferred medium to enhance details particularly for fine jewellery, flowers, adornments, etc. The influence of Japanese art was manifest particularly in the wash technique, and the two artists who made a deep impact on Majumdar sensibility and generally on the modern Indian art were Hisida Shunsho and Yokoyama Taikan.

Majumdar worked in the layered wash technique, as his visionary subject-matter lent itself appropriately to the fulfillment of his passionate devotion to familiar Hindu eternal themes of Radha- Krishna and Chaitanya. This approach made his art introspective that marked a turn away from nature and man. The representation of the human form was equally expressionistic in its attenuation, which reflects his idea of spirituality, wherein he transformed them to belong to a transcendental realm. Majumdar's lyrical and sentimental style was expressed through spatial compositions with fine outlined drawings, detailed ornamentation and highly mannered postures and expressions that became representative of his visual expression, which later reflected in his paintings based on the life of Chaitanya. Vaishnava stories suited his personal faith and hence chose to engage in painting scenes from the life of the Vaishnava saint Chaitanya, which were characterized by sadness and resignation.

His notion of engaging with line was to create a sense of exquisiteness in compositional structuring that resulted in manifesting this seminal tool with a poetic character that was as mellifluous as it was subtle, as graceful and charming as it was spiritual. Reinforcing this were his somber subdued coloured tones that remained the hall mark of his visual language, intensifying his personal approach in evoking his meditations on this subject and undeniably was his own personal vision. The compositions had clarity with subdued and suffused light with firmly outlined images, thus marking his individual posturing of style, in moving away from the haze that characterized Abanindranath's works. An ambient aura of spirituality characterized his paintings consequent to his technique, thus bringing about a correspondence of his concept with the visual language and the technique that remains at the heart of his works.

In many ways it connects to the past tradition of Indian miniatures because of the small format he preferred to work with. According to Tapati Guha Thakurta, "line and tone blended, often to contribute to delicate and supple figure drawing combined with the sharpness and precision of Mughal miniature drawings. Such spatial compositions with fine outlined drawing, detailed ornamentation, and highly mannered postures and expressions became typical of most of the paintings of Majumdar". His works thus characterized by simplicity and sincerity, lacked the romance of sophistication which had been set as parameters for defining modernity by the contemporary critics then, and hence the rich acknowledgement of his art was consequently denied to him. Binod Behari Mukherjee referred to his works as "modern expression of India's traditional art".

In 1921, Kshitindranath was appointed Principal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art, Calcutta and from 1942-64 he became Principal of the Art Department at Allahabad University.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Jaya Appaswamy, "Kshitindranath Majumdar", Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, 1967

Tapati Guha Thakurta, "The Making of a New 'Indian' Art: Artists, Aesthetics and Nationalism in Bengal, c.1850-1920", Cambridge South Asia, 1992

Partha Mitter, "Art and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1850-1922: Occidental Orientations", Cambridge University Press, 1995



Figure. 11:
TITLE: UNTITLED (Lord Chaitanya and his Retinue)
Artist: Kshitindranath Majumdar
Medium: Watercolor/Gouache on Paper
Size: 15.5 X 22.5 inches
Signature: In Bangla. Lower Right.



Figure. 12:
TITLE: Untitled (Lord Chaitanya)
Artist: Kshitindranath Majumdar
Medium: Watercolor/Gouache on paper
Size: 11.2 X 18.5 cm
Signature: In Bangla. Lower Left.

THE PROBLEM OF FAKES IN BENGAL SCHOOL

In the genre of Modern Indian art, most of the early doyens belonged to the Bengal school. The bengal school was also the first formally recognised Indian art movement. From an art historical point of view, its importance is also accentuated by virtue of its association with, and contribution to the Indian art movement. In the "National Art Heritage" list that the government of India compiled in 197X, a majority of the artists hail from the Bengal school.

The term "Bengal School" today refers loosely to any art by a bengali artist. By this definition, this includes artists such as Rabindranath Tagore whose style and ideology were different from the bengal school. It also includes artists such as Hemendranath Majumdar, whose artistic ideology and philosophy were at odds with that of the bengal school.

Many artists of the bengal school rose to fame far and wide quite early. They also hailed from a time when the market for Indian art was non-existent, and there was no formal record keeping. Gallery receipts, certificates and formal provenance documents are therefore almost non-existent for Bengal school paintings. A combination of these factors colluded together to facilitate a market for fake paintings of Bengal school artists.

Today, the value and importance of bengal school paintings has not faded. Seasoned collectors still vie for good works, though other genres and school of Indian art have become popular. However, the abundance of fakes in the market has dampened the enthusiasm and also the buoyancy of the market in terms of prices.

Fakes are often executed by duplicitous dealers conniving with art school graduates. These fakes are then given a false provenance and passed on through galleries, middlemen and auctions. Fake paintings on paper are particularly difficult to detect. Watercolor paintings executed on 'aged' paper, and made to go through an 'accelerated ageing' process are very difficult to tell apart from the real ones. The fact that many bengal school artists used paper as a medium makes it easy to fake them.

Oil paintings on the other hand are easier to scrutinize for fakes. Over a period of time, the paint layer develops a unique fingerprint of a network of cracks called 'craquelere'. This craquelere is difficult to faithfully replicate artificially, and any amateurish attempt to do so is relatively easily detected by an experienced eye.

Other factors by which a fake can be told apart from the original are good knowledge of the choice of subjects of the artist, choice of colors, brush strokes etc.

GEORGES PERCIVAL SPROULE KEYT [1901-1992]

INDIGENOUS CUBIST

"Symmetry is not essential to my work, nor concealment, not softness even: but curvature is and roundness is, and I must dislocate and rearrangement my forms, the rearrangement must itself be in curves" George Keyt

In the first few decades of twentieth century, there emerged artists within the country some not native to Indian soil as well as other Indian artists made a rich career inspired by the Indian visual tradition and its equally diverse wealth of cultural heritage. Some were Chinese artists who had painted portraits of Parsee women in Bombay. Other Indian artists as Almelkar for instance combined traditional Indian style with elements from folk and tribal art. Jamini Prokash Gangooly developed paintings in oil to recreate the picturesque and sublime aspects of nature. Trindade painted with realism. They developed their independent personalized visual language which was either pure realism or a meld of European modernism with eastern aesthetics. One such artist who made a notable contribution was George Keyt.

Keyt lived a life of bohemian. An intellectual who was a voracious reader, he was attracted to Buddhist and Hindu mythologies and wrote extensively on art, customs and Buddhist philosophy. Rules and restrictions suffocated him and found it difficult to conform to a structured or disciplined life. He was born in Kandy in Ceylon [Sri Lanka] to parents who belonged to genteel Dutch Burgher heritage and integral to the high echelons of the Ceylonese society. Belonging to a stock of Christian faith, the parents had embraced Victorian style and children educated in English missionary schools. Keyt joined Trinity College in Kandy which was an obvious family choice for his pedagogy and it was here that he picked up his love for art, literature and music. Uncomfortable in the life of submission and discipline, Trinity College could not hold him and he decided that he would not enter any classrooms.

He was self-taught and it was at the age of twenty-six that he decided to become an artist. Art in his hands became a powerful tool of his empirical experiences, which also allied with his exposure to various styles within the modern art historical framework and he created a rich visual language. He became the distinguished and celebrated Sinhalese artist, writer and a poet of the 20th century. He finds his place within Modern Indian art by virtue of his thematic content. Within his native context of belonging to Ceylon [Sri Lanka] he was one of the rebel artists who went against the orthodoxy of the Ceylon Society of Arts in the newly formed group in 1943 to assert his individuality, which incidentally also earned an identity for Sri Lanka within the context of international art. In 1946 he arrived in Bombay where his works were given visibility through an exhibition organized by Mulk Raj Anand.

His large oeuvre of over seven decades foregrounded his stylistic artistic influences, which were reinvented strategically at different moments of his career to demonstrate a wide range, varying from Sri Lanka's mural paintings to the Modernist as Cezanne, the Fauvists, Cubist artists as Picasso and Braque. From the Indian pictorial tradition it was the Kangra miniatures belonging to Rajput tradition and particularly the Srīngara rasa, captivated his imagination, as

love was considered the supreme rasa. In addition, Hindu sculptures as well as Indian ragas of the classical musical tradition bewitched him, not forgetting the magic of Walt Disney. His vision was unique; and his visual language combined judiciously the European modernists' innovation with the ancient South Asian fresco techniques found at Ajanta and Sigiriya. The thematic content was rooted in local tradition, depicting dancers, nayikas and gods, drawn from Hindu and Buddhist mythology.

Keyt developed a predilection towards developing figurative compositions with women as protagonists, celebrating their forms through manifestations of sweet sentiments and set amidst the rustic milieu. This engagement marked his art to have commonality with many of the Indian artists belonging to the nationalist phase as Sailoz Mukerjee. In his artistic repertoire he consciously explored and navigated through line and colour. These elements became a dominant centrality of his artistic creations, which enhanced and reinforced his tropical colours - an inheritance carried over from his native island of serendipity. On the strength of line and color, Keyt advanced his deft artistry by melding modernist stylistic formula of cubist faceting, Fauvist colours and an expressive vocal line. With the integration of occident and Asiatic traditions, he established his distinctive style with a flair that allows easy recognition of his works even today.

With dramatic admixture of shifting and fractured planes, the ethnicity dominant in the characterization of the feminine forms particularly, Keyt created a large gamut of works in which with easy facility he established his distinct and different posture. His Nayika paintings were romantically mantled, visualized with a lyrical sense of grace, charm and poetic reverie, wherein the nubile maidens were totally absorbed with their tasks of either beautifying herself, gazing in the mirror or lost in nostalgic reverie. This genres of works stand at the intersection of romantic poetry and nationalist ideologies, which Keyt represented with utmost simplicity sans bodily adornments as common in frescoes of Sigiriya.

In his "Untitled" painting executed in 1965, the thematic content obviously gestures towards the representation of the Nayika, as she stands with her legs crossed, resonating with the nubile female forms of the 'alasa kanyas' in temple architecture and holding a mirror in the hand and admiring herself. The painting is as enigmatic as it is simple, yet the representation of the woman who apparently appears at the window is shown to be older and is peeping into the room and gesturing to the young girl with her finger. Is this a matriarchal concern as the room also has the representation of a man reclining on a bolster? The strength of his impeccable drawing comes through powerfully having balanced the appropriate curves of the young girl with the reclining male. Colours are earthy and warm projecting the erotic warm mood within the room, with eroticism further enhanced by the blossoming flowers that equally glances to a sense of covert sexuality. The floor is indicated through fractured linear spatial organization in the tradition of cubist masters. Though the forms are abstracted and stylized, Keyt has given a distinct aura of intimacy in the relaxed posture of the reclining male and the nayikas unabashed nudity, lost in the admiration of her beauty in the mirror.

The Nobel Prize winning poet Pablo Neruda eloquently had declared - "Keyt, I think is the living nucleus of a great painter. Magically though he places his colours, and carefully though he distributes his plastic volumes, Keyt's pictures never-the-less produce a dramatic effect particularly in his painting of Sinhalese people. These figures take on a strange expressive grandeur and radiate an aura of intensely profound feelings".

The "Reclining Nude" 1989, executed in oil is a large canvas which in its compositional organization with the nude reclining languidly and the sun shining represented in the extreme upper right hand corner has echoes of Egyptian hieroglyphics. The feminine form is linearly

cubist in its structure. Yet it is marked by a strong sense of sensuality as an aura of sentimental nostalgia engulfs her. Keyt's sensibility attracted him to the cubist visual language, but the trope he offered was endearingly decorative in the way he choreographed his lines and created flat planar spaces which he filled in this instance with pastel tones of attractive blue, orange, green and brown, thus making his approach distinctly personal.

Compositionally the geometry is formatted on ovals, semi circles and circles and other inorganic shapes that convey impression of fragmentation reinforced with lines that are bold, defined, taut and energetic. Keyt remains Sri Lanka's most celebrated painters to this day. According to S.B. Dissanayake an art critic, "Keyt's ruling instinct has been to produce forms admirable to the eye by continual transformations and exaggerations of the natural features themselves. For him symmetry was not essential but curvature and roundedness was and if it had to be dislocated and again relocated then it had to be through curves".

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Kishore Singh. "Indian Modern: Narratives from 20th Century Art", New Delhi, DAG, 2015

S.B. Dissanayake, "George Keyt", National Art Gallery, Colombo, Exhibition Catalogue 1993



Figure. 13:
 Title: Vilande Kvinna/ Untitled/Reclining Nude
 Medium: Oil/Acrylic on Canvas
 Size: 60 cm X 120 cm.
 Signed: Lower right. '89
 Provenance: Swedish private collection;
 Norrkopings Auktionsverk; Acquired from there in 2011

GEORGE KEYT

- *Great artists often reinvent themselves multiple times in the course of their careers. Many, like Picasso pass through various phases before they find an idiom of expression that they stick with for the rest of their lives.*
- *George Keyt started painting at the age of 26, and quickly went on to be recognized as Sri Lanka's most famous painter. In a career spanning 66 years, he left behind a prolific corpus of paintings that show his genesis through different styles and themes. Great artists reinvent themselves multiple times through the course of their career before they settle on a permanent idiom of expression. Such was the case with George Keyt, as the two paintings illustrated here clearly show.*
- *Keyt's work has fascinated me since the beginning of my collecting career. They have an 'Indianness of spirit', yet an appeal that transcends national and cultural boundaries. Most of his canvases are in large format, which enhance their presence and appeal. The subjects are quintessentially Indian, even when they are generic in theme. The skin tones of the men, the lushness of the tropical vegetation, the doe eyes of the women, the banana leaves and the bamboo shoots – all these lend an unmistakable sense of cultural identity to the paintings.*
- *Most of Keyt's early works lack the angularity characteristic of cubism that is apparent in his later works. The figures are often in earthy tones, and in this phase of his career Keyt uses the curvature of the figures to convey a sense of motion. As he progresses in his career, a certain angularity becomes apparent in the figures. The angularity becomes more pronounced in his later works, where cubism induced distortion of the figures is also more pronounced. Another characteristic of Keyt's canvases is that his compositions are 'tighter' than his earlier works compared to his later ones. A comparison of the two paintings adjacent to each other clearly illustrates how Keyt's composition became 'loose' over the years – probably also due to age related difficulties in painting large canvases.*
- *Keyt's fame started rising during his lifetime, and has been on an ascendant ever since. Today, his works have a broad collector base internationally and command high prices in auctions. In as far back as I can remember, not a single work by him has gone unsold in auctions. Art investment handbooks and manuals list Keyt among the very few investment grade South Asian artists at an international level.*
- *George Keyt's canvases are characterized by an unmistakable undertone*



Figure. 14:
Title: UNTITLED/ The New Bride
Artist: George Keyt
Medium: Oil on Canvas
Size: 48 X 27 inches
Signed: Lower Left, in English. Dated: 1965.
Acquired: 2018.

George Keyt for me epitomizes a truly global artist. A Ceylonese of Dutch origin, the bulk of his artistic training was in Shantiniketan. In his life as an independent artist, Keyt's style went through some notable evolutions. His early works from the 50's and 60's had a realistic style, which gradually morphed into a figurative style with fluid lines, and subsequently became angular and heavily influenced by cubism. Irrespective of the change in style, his subject matter heavily borrowed from buddhist and Indian folklore – the Jataka tales and from Vaishnava mythology.



In India, Keyt is known and collected by a few discerning and well informed collectors. He does not have a mass appeal. Globally, his works are highly sought after by an international collector base. In Sri Lanka he is regarded as an artist of national fame and enjoys cult status.

I have liked Keyt's works since the early 2000's His choice of themes (Indian), his choice of colors (stark), his choice of format (large), the tender eroticism – every element of his works appeals deeply to me. But his prices were always beyond my affordability. A seminal milestone of my collecting career would surely be the purchase of this work from a German auction in XXXX.

Keyt's works have been going up in valuation steadily. A few pieces come up in auctions every year- and almost without exception, each one sells far above its estimates.

Keyt's talents were not limited to the realms of arts only. His translations of the Vaishnav Padavalis along with the associated line drawings are beautiful pieces of work too.



J. P GANGOOLY [1876-1953]

Gangooly's reputation lay in his skilled dexterity in rendering realistic and naturalistic painting that included mythological subjects as well as landscapes and river scapes. He was also a sensitive portraitist rendering his sitters with incisive precision. This was the consequences of his essential training in oils from English and Bengali artists, resulting in making him integral to the formation of the new professional artists in colonial India. In a sense Gangooly was privately tutored and not a product of the Calcutta School of Art. He practiced his art during the late 19th century to the early 20th century. But his visibility was hampered due to the consequences of nationalist and Neo Bengal Art Movements that took prominence in the first decade of the 20th century.

Gangooly was born in Jorasanko Thakurbari in Calcutta, the aristocratic household of the Tagore's. From a young age he showed predilection towards art and was privately tutored by the English artist Charles Palmer, whose art training was from South Kensington. In addition he also received tutoring from Olito Ghilardi and Gangadhar Dey and later from his uncle Abanindranath Tagore. Gangooly consciously and with intense interest completed his training under Palmer, and mastered the art of rendering chiaroscuro or modelling in light and shade with impressive brushwork that manifested later in his favored genre of landscapes and river scapes. He further developed and perfected his skills in oil painting and exhibited his virtuosity by rendering atmospheric river scapes creating moods and romantic scenes of peasant life. He illustrated the Sanskrit play Kadambari by Banabhatta, which he dramatized on the model of European History paintings. These illustrations by Gangooly were much appreciated by Rabindranath Tagore, who argued for a case of developing in India a new genre of history paintings, but by gleaning out subject matter and themes from mythology and classical literature. Tagore in taking up the cudgels for Gangooly not only aided him in establishing his Western style oil painting as an epitome of naturalism, but also drawing his themes and subjects from the rich reserve of pictorial images inherent in ancient Sanskrit literature. Tagore felt that 'picturesque' images and metaphors in the passages of Kadambari that Gangooly had illustrated were appropriate that translated with ease into visual forms.

Gangooly's rendering of themes particularly derived from Sanskrit classics were premised on the style of academic naturalism with formats of European history paintings. In late 19th century in Calcutta a strong argument was centered on pictorial naturalism in art that was strongly supported by Balendranath Tagore, Ishwari Prasad and Rabindranath Tagore. At the turn of the century Gangooly's works continued to flourish as a strong strand of Academic oils painting, which had acquired the strength of social and professional niche.

His interface with the peasants and the romantic studies of country life was at the heart of his works until he developed his love for the genre of landscapes. The subject of peasants and countryside had resonance to the romantic French artists of 19th century as François Millet, Gustavo Courbet or Jules Breton. Gangooly and his brand of 'melancholy' mood paintings rendered in Western style and medium was able to make a mark and found acceptance within the fluid peripheries of the new art movement, namely Abanindranath Tagore's Bengal Art Movement. An exhibition organized by the Indian Society of Oriental Art in 1907-08, Gangooly's works were displayed alongside the paintings of Abanindranath Tagore and Nandalal Bose; and later colour prints of his paintings became a regular feature in Prabasi and The Modern Review over the following years.



Figure. 16:
Jamini Prokash Gangooly
21 X 29 inches.
Oil on Canvas
Seascape in Vishakapatnam
Signed – Lower right

Jamini Prokash Gangooly was one among the gentleman artists of colonial Bengal. An extended member of the Thakur family by virtue of matrimonial connections, he did not have a formal art school pedigree. He was home-schooled in arts by Olinto Ghilardi, Charles Palmer and subsequently by his uncle Abanindranath Thakur.

I got introduced to J P Gangooly and his art while reading Prof. Partha Mitter's book "Art and Nationalism in Colonial India", many years back during my PHD years. Apart from a few stray images on the internet at that time, it was difficult to come across any paintings by him. My interest and intrigue took me to the Imperial Hotel in New Delhi, where I had heard that a big painting by him hung in the corridor of the 6th floor. I remember sneaking up to the 6th floor late in the evening as soon as we had checked in to the hotel.

For a long time, the painting from the imperial hotel was the only work by Gangooly that I had seen. Then, around YY, a beautiful Himalayan landscape came up for sale at Dobiaschofsky in Berne. I was one of the bidders, physically present at the auction where the painting sold for CHF 7000. I had just finished studying and started working. That amount was unaffordable for me. Later on however, I made multiple attempts through the auction house to buy back the painting from the purchaser, but nothing materialized.

This particular painting surfaced in an auction in Germany. The consignors were an Indian family who had been in Germany since the 1950s. Perhaps this explains why the painting was in such impeccable condition. The painting depicts a view of the dawn in Vishakapatnam, where the artist is known to have taken a long holiday and painted other seascapes.

Since the time we bought our own house in Allschwil and moved in, this painting has been hanging in what used to be Kriti's room, right above her bed. This was the first painting that she got formally introduced to, and knew about Gangooly as an artist at a very early age. The great condition of the painting, the sublime colors of the dawn, the ethereal beauty of the scene – all these together certainly make this one of the best available works by J P Gangooly existing today.

Sotheby's has been interested in having this work for their sales since many years. The painting has been cited and displayed in various relevant contexts (without my permission) on the internet. Private collectors have shown interest in this work. I remember receiving a call from an Indian gentleman many years back enquiring about this painting. When asked for a personal introduction, he politely cited his daughter's name – Rani Mukherjee, the hindi movie actress.



By now Gangooly had realized that his affinity and aptitude lay in painting the specialized genre of dusky sky, atmospheric landscapes and river scapes. It eventually became his chosen genre in the 20th century, when he developed his specific style of densely mist laden atmospheric effects of sunrise and sunsets on bathing Ghats, river banks and mountain ranges. He surpassed himself in the picturesque views of the Himalayas and in the village and river scenes of Bengal. He executed many a river scapes. The river Padma was a recurring theme in his paintings as well as the mountain scene from the lower Himalayas situated near Mussorie where Gangooly often spent his holidays, and was known to have executed also the Himalayan mountain views. He painted hundred oils on the sun setting over the river Padma which led him to acquiring the sobriquet "Painter of Padma". It can be reliably said that no other painter in India at this time possessed the unique quality of an engagement with oil technique like Gangooly. It was specifically his manipulation of the shifting gradation and variations of light, which he not only studied from nature but the transient and changing play of light on the human face too.

As an artist his visibility was made possible by active participation in the exhibition circuits and winning awards regularly. These exhibitions were held at Simla, Bombay, Madras and Calcutta. The artists who exhibited at these salons or the exhibitions were generally trained at art schools, but not all of them, the exceptions being Ravi Varma who belonged to a princely family of Kerala and Gangooly who was related to the wealthy Tagore's. The exhibitions hosted at Simla particularly, did not debar Indians but most of the Indian artists could not afford to exhibit outside their home towns. The exceptions were Ravi Varma, J.P. Gangooly and few others and they became the regular prize winners.

Gangooly's familial connection to the versatile, artistic, literary, influential and intellectual Tagore's' served him in good stead. His rising success and popularity could be attributed to the Jorasanko connect and his early teachings from renowned and prominent teachers that paved the way for Gangooly to nurture himself as a painter. Artists specializing in the oil medium and

Academic naturalism were churned out by the Art School who could be painters, portraitist or draughtsmen, but despite the presence of a large numbers of these artists; Gangooly managed to stay afloat. The reason being many opportunities of exhibiting his works outside the home city, critical opinions penned extensively by critics in the various local print media and found appreciation, patronage and acceptance at the home of the Tagore's. But there was also the x-factor in Gangooly who had specialized in the particular genre of landscapes, mountains and river scapes creating romantic and sentimental effects that aroused a response of emotions in the viewer. This genre of works that Gangooly engaged with made a sentimental appeal of mood and sublimity, which captured the viewer's eyeballs.

Over the years he developed a magical attraction to the Himalayas the river Padma and the scenes of rural serenity that enabled him to create the picturesque and the sublime that became the saliency in his understanding of the various forms of nature in its geographical formation and configuration. But apart from the mountains what attracted him most was the river Padma. His oils spoke the language of grandeur and majesty of nature.

According to Anirban Sadhu, the collector, "This particular painting, namely the "Seascape at Vishakhapatnam" surfaced in an auction in Germany. The consignor was an Indian family who had been in Germany since the 1950s. Perhaps this explained why the painting was in such an impeccable condition. The painting depicted a view of the dawn in Vishakhapatnam, where the artist was known to have taken a long holiday and painted other seascapes".

REFERENCE

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Figure. 17:
21 X 29 inches.
Oil on Canvas
Riverscape
Signed – Lower right (Requires close inspection).

STAGES IN THE CLEANING OF THE RIVERSCAPE PAINTING



Before



After

Cleaning, restoration and framing is to a painting as make up is to a woman. If properly done, the results in both instances are spectacular.

When I originally bought this painting in June 2014, it was on an impulse. I had been looking for a work by JP for sometime, and having been unable to find one for some time, was getting rather desperate. On second thoughts, I was almost sure that I had overpaid for a painting in poor state of preservation.

The canvas had been relined in India shortly before it came to my possession. In Basel, the painting subsequently went through some cleaning and restoration by the old restorer near Petersplatz who had cleaned the Early Bengal Durga. This intervention stabilized the paint layer, and took away some of the old varnish and grime. The craquelere was clearly visible, but the painting was otherwise OK.

I love craquelere. For me, craquelere gives a sense of originality and righteousness to a painting. For paintings that have lived in India, where the alternation of seasons is pronounced, craquelere endorses the genuineness of the work, because it is almost impossible to fake.

J P Gangooly executed many a riverscapes. The river Padma is a recurring theme in his paintings. This however, does not seem to a scene from the gangetic plains. Going by the looks of the pine trees and the mountains beyond, this seems to be a scene from the lower Himalayas (probably around Mussourie) where Gangooly often spent his holidays, and is known to have executed a few other mountain views.

DEVI PRASAD ROY CHOWDHURY [1999-1975]

EXPRESSIONIST EVOCATIONS

He was a sculptor par excellence, a dexterous and insightful painter, reputed pedagogue, powerful writer of short stories, wrestler, hunter, cartoonist and a skilled flute player. He was initially the disciple of Abanindranath, at the Indian Society of Oriental Art, Calcutta. His bold experimentations in water- color, oil and mixed media attracted the attention of many western art critics in the 1930s. In his paintings he used Chinese technique, Japanese wash process combining it with his scratching method. His works pictorially had consanguinity to Kshitindranath Majumdar with a predilection toward attenuated linear forms, but with a difference. Conceptually the former's works were visionary bordering on the spiritual while Roy Chowdhury's manifested a world of feelings and emotions establishing an earthy expressionist mood.

Roy Chowdhury shifted his medium from painting to sculpture, which according to him afforded not only great power of expression but also negotiation with different materials like stone, clay and bronze to suit his sensibilities. As a teacher, at the Madras School of Arts and Crafts he effectively guided the hands of his students and inspired their minds. As an administrator he directed the institution with energy and authority. He was instrumental in introducing the fine arts curriculum with two programmes in painting and modelling or sculpture in 1930. He described his mode of teaching "I can perhaps teach the skill needed to draw and paint but no one can be taught to be an artist. The perception and sensibility needed to be an artist are inherent in a person. I do not think they can be taught or acquired". This was a mode of thinking and perception based largely on the Nineteenth century romantic notion of a 'genius', but within the modern paradigm his approach and conceptualization in art expression was that of a modern romantic. Roy Chowdhury as a pedagogue demonstrated profound contempt for conventions and hence did away with the use of antique plaster casts for drawing. In his pedagogy he laid emphasis on drawing and structure of the human body, which was to become the hall mark of his teaching. Life study was insisted upon with drawing and painting from live models and day long trips to the surrounding suburbs. This laid a strong foundation for perceptual observation. The drawback in his teaching was his lack of contact with modern European art, with the consequence that his students remained ignorant of the innovations and experimentations of modern European masters.

Roy Chowdhury's art can be categorized as elitist and not rustic as was the trend at Santiniketan where the art movement came to draw sustenance from the earthy lineage of folk art and indigenous cultural traditions. His elitism in art was to reinvent portraiture in its realism and valorize subject matter as labour. In his persona it was his aristocratic lineage of landed gentry reinforcing his subjectivity of aloofness and a consciousness of authorial power and influence. Despite all this he nevertheless seemed to have sown the seeds for a future development of the modernity in South, namely the Madras Art Movement, with his modern romantic/ westernizing agenda.

In his independent creations, his sculptures reflected socialist subjects as the 'Triumph of Labour' and Martyr's Memorial. Cast in bronze, the style shows the influence of French sculptor Auguste Rodin and deals with the theme of man's struggle for existence. The rough unfinished surfaces, creating rich textures and an animated play of light and shade, reflect the influence of Rodin. The poses are exaggerated for dramatic effects and are highly theatrical. He retired as principal in 1957 after serving for 28 years – the longest tenure in the history of art schools in India.

Roy Chowdhury's work in dry brush oil technique has the delineation of the female nude form rendered with patchy brush strokes was as evocative as it was provocative. A concealed note of romance manifested his work as the protagonist face is concealed in darkness with her face turned to one side. Roy Chowdhury's excellence in manipulating various mediums was the high point of his painting career. A melancholic mood pervades his works, residue of sentimentalism of the Bengal school continued to haunt his works. But he infused it with expressive power through his distortions and accentuation of forms.

The work in the Sadhu's collection is an "Untitled" representation of a nude woman in profile. It is executed in the dry brush technique of pen and ink with judicious brush strokes that gestalt in certain parts to form the compositional whole. The extreme contrast of light and dark imparts a strong realistic quality. Equally also is the manipulation of positive and negative spaces that gives the work an oriental feel.

His versatility in controlling the element of line in a painterly way with its nuances of flowing graceful rhythm, soft construction of the human form and the conscious dry ink brush strokes is voyeuristic through the nude female form. His youthful women reflected the paradigm as canonized in Indian poetry and aesthetics. Within the history of art, the female nude was not simply one subject among others, one form among many; it was the subject, the form. The female nude was the sign of those other, more hidden properties of patriarchal culture, which were possession, power and subordination. Moreover representations of the female nude created by male artists testify not only to patriarchal understandings of female sexuality and femininity, but they also endorsed certain definitions of male sexuality and masculinity. The focus is on her body as the face has been sans any features. Roy Chowdhury's oeuvre has limited works of the female nude.

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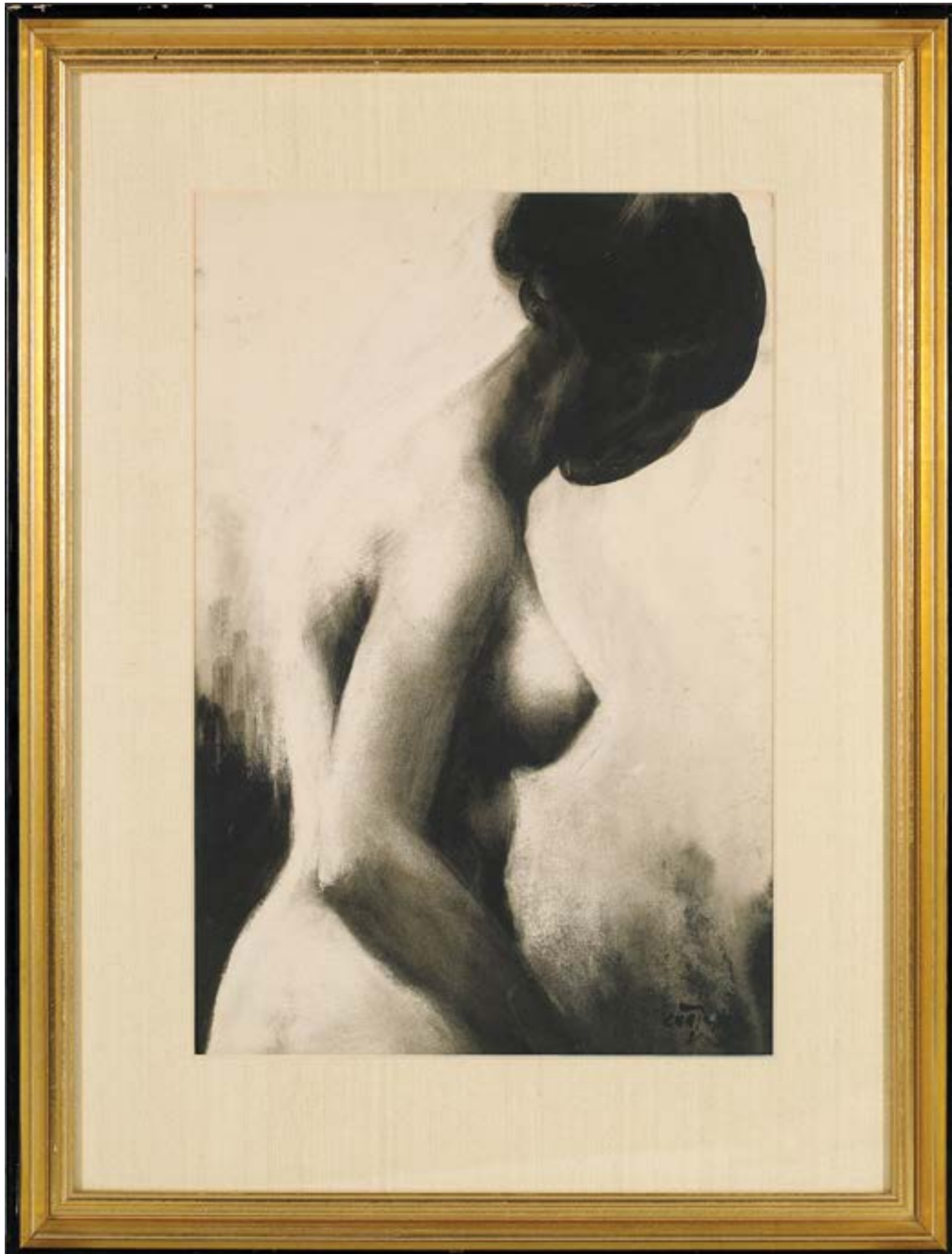


Figure. 18:
The Shy Nude
Tempara/Gouache on Paper
10 X 14 inches
Signed in Bangla (Lower right)

This painting came to my collection in 2010 from a Hollywood based auction house. It was bought directly from the artist in 1969 by the previous owners and had stayed with the same family since then.

- **Debi Prasad Roy Choudhury (1899–1975)** is known for his bronze sculptures, including *Triumph of Labour* and *Martyr's Memorial*, and is rated by many as one among the major artists of modern Indian art.[2] He was a fellow of the Lalit Kala Akademi, selected in 1962. The Government of India awarded him the third highest civilian honour of the Padma Bhushan, in 1958, for his contributions to Art.

He learnt painting from Abanindranath Tagore, the renowned Bengali painter, and his earlier paintings showed influence of his teacher. Turning to sculpting, he initially trained under Hiromony Choudhury, and later, moved to Italy for further training. It was during this period, his works started to gather western influences. Returning to India, he joined the Bengal School of Art for further studies. In 1928, he moved to Chennai to join the Government College of Fine Arts, first as a student and then worked there as the Head of the Department, vice principal and the principal till his retirement in 1958. While Principal at the Chennai College, he was honoured by the British Government as an MBE in 1937.



ZAINUL ABEDIN(1914-1976): THE SOCIALIST REALIST

He is an artist who developed his personalized visual language to paint and sketch reality that he observed and witnessed around him. Zainul Abedin a Bangladeshi artist is considered among one of the modernist pioneers of Bengal who in the early decade of 1940s moved beyond the sentimental lyricism of the Bengal School to create a powerful visual vocabulary that poignantly communicated and evoked empathy among the viewers with his art. His pen and ink drawings that documented the man made famine of 1943 with its suffering, struggles, poverty and death in a graphic manner had his expressive lines carrying the burden of his emotions and sentiments. He had recorded these tragic scenes with documentary style objectivity and artistic power the likes of which were unknown until then. The Bengal famine had taken three million lives and during the Second World War, its colonized subject had supported the western efforts leading to the diversion of food resources and drain on the economy with thousands of native troops joining the allied forces.

Having graduated from Calcutta School of Arts and with a secure teaching job at the institution, he decided to give it up in order to record the horrors and shocking reality that famine had brought upon the humanity. With a sketch book and pen and ink as his basic art materials he set forth to have it represented through his quick sketches the unholy reality. A sensitive and keenly observant artist, he made rapid sketches with a few synoptic lines to capture the essence of the starving, dead and dying forms that had cluttered the streets of Calcutta as poverty stricken villagers migrated from rural areas to find sustenance in the urban city.

His drawings had the potential power to move the viewer, as it was cryptic and rendered with brevity. The pen and ink sketch work in the Sadhu's collection and titled "**The Figure of the Boy**" has the rendering of the starving young child in desperate need of food, scavenging the bin in the street with equally hungry crows surrounding him. His intense self absorption sorting out remnants of food from other rubbish that he is unaware of the crows watching him closely and waiting to receive some morsels which he would discard. The work's expressive character is the result of the young child almost skin over bones form and the sketchy lines to contextualize the urban environment. It is indeed a moving portrait of penury and starvation. A similar pen and ink sketch from the same collection and titled "**Mother with Baby**" reveals the same poignancy, particular the way she holds her child close to her equally starved body and with the formers arms around her seeking protection and security. Perhaps these scenes had become a ubiquity when the famine had ravaged the land. But their evocative power and poignant rendering even today moves the viewer.

According to Sanjukta Sunderason, "This visceral presence of sights of emaciation and death as part of the everyday cityscape made famine imagery a staple of artists, writers and performers. As cultural production strove to visualize hunger and displacement, art was re-imagined as testimony, and the artist as activist. Realism was born in the streets of Calcutta, noted Burhanuddin Khan Jahangir, biographer of Abedin. In the early-1940s, Zainul Abedin was the youngest teacher at the Government School of Art in Calcutta, his finesse in drawing already establishing him as one of the most promising academic realists in the city. The famine thrust Abedin into a new form of realist visualization, as he encountered along his daily route, those who were destitute, competing with dogs and crows for morsels from garbage bins. Abedin drew these subjects, in haste, on cheap brown paper using common ink. Such sketches ran to the hundreds, the pressure of these events and situations, as he recalls, forcing him to change his style from impressionistic watercolour and naturalist drawing into a stark expressionistic idiom – in 'very easy yet strong lines, in somewhat geometrical patterns'."

He was originally from Mymensingh in East Bengal and Abedin had come to Calcutta in the 1930s, to train at the Government School of Art, a nineteenth-century colonial art institution committed to Western academic realist training. Since the 1930s, along with his fellow academic artists, Gobardhan Ash and Abani Sen, Abedin had begun sketching the city's underbelly, industrial stretches, also retreating to rural outskirts, to portraying activities related to harvest and leisure, as well as tribal life and livelihood around Dumka in the Santhal Pargana division. Through the predominantly urban repertoire in his work through the 1930s, realism graduated from rigid naturalism to a social realistic aesthetic. Alongside the works of Chittaprosad, Sunil Janah the photographer, and others, they recount a common struggle of the avant-garde under colonial rule. Abedin remained a cultural organizer, pedagogue-activist working across the region, establishing art education as part of the public school system in Bangladesh (then East Pakistan), and he became engaged in the Bangladesh Liberation War movement.

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THE FAMINE SERIES

The Bengal Famine 1943-44 wrecked over three million lives across undivided India during the Second World War while its colonized subjects supported the Western war effort leading to a diversion of food resources and a drain on the economy due to wartime industrial production and thousands of native troops joining allied forces.

With the threat of a Japanese invasion of Burma, the British Raj carried out the scorched-earth and boat-denial policy that resulted in mass starvation, displacement, chronic disease, as well as private hoarding and profiteering by the landowning elite of the Bengal province. Despite the catastrophic conditions arising from imperial policies, the hostile Churchill government continued to prevent the import of food grain and other foreign aid.

Leaving his teaching job at the Government School of Art in Calcutta, Zainul Abedin set forth to unveil the horror in his famine sketches. Made with rapid brush strokes, the sketches not only form a gripping account of the famine's vicious spread and expose the structural ties between hunger and imperial violence, but, alongside the works of Chittaprosad, Sunil Janah, and others, they recount a common struggle of the avant-garde under colonial rule on the Indian subcontinent. Abedin remained a cultural organizer, pedagogue-activist working across the region, establishing art education as part of the public school system in Bangladesh (then East Pakistan), and he became engaged in the Bangladesh Liberation War movement.

This painting belonging to the my collection sold at Bonhams in 2014.

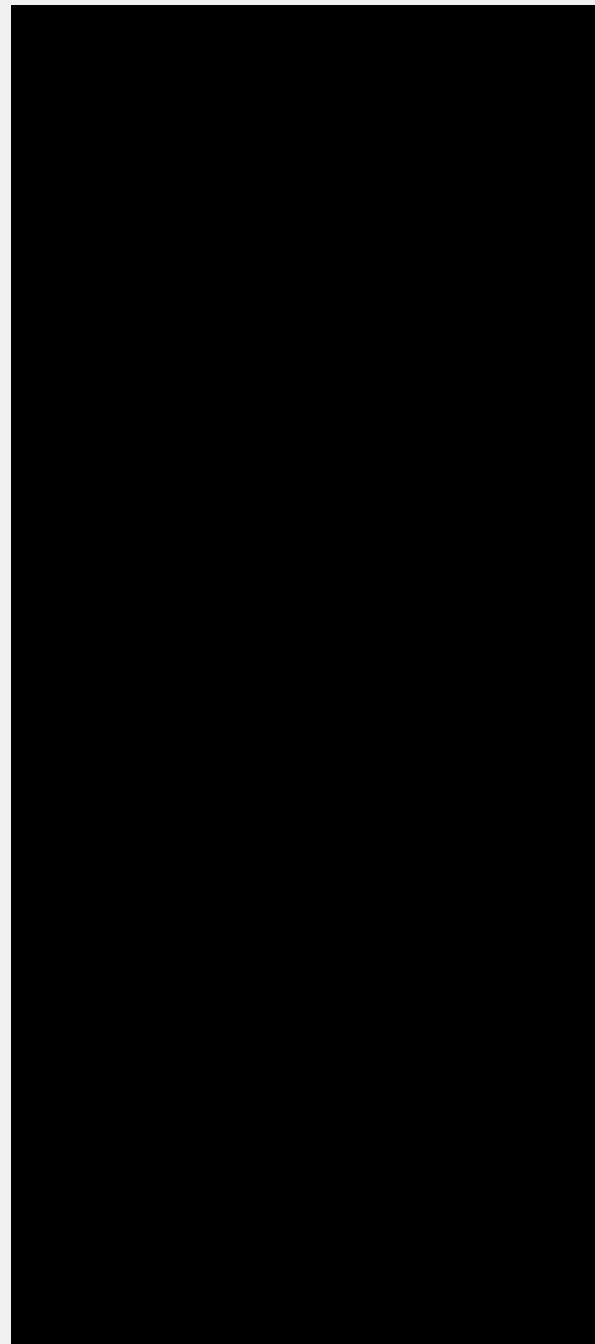


Figure. 20:
Title: UNTITLED (Famine Series - Boy scouting for food)
Artist: Zainul Abedin
Medium: Ink on Paper
Signed: In English. Lower right. Dated 1943
Size: 18.6 X 14 inches
Acquired: 2016