

SHAPING BENGAL

A Chronicle of Modern Sculpture

Mrinal Ghosh



Aakriti Art Gallery

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Ajit Chakraborty
Bronze

CONTENT

Foreword

Why This Book Matters: From The Publisher by Vikram Bachhawat	7
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Introduction

by R. Siva Kumar	8
------------------	---

Preface

by Mrinal Ghosh	13
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Chapter 1

Early Sculpture: Development From Ancient To Early Modern	17
--	----

Chapter 2	
The First Generation of Modernist Sculptors 1930s and 1940s	41
Chapter 3:	
The Second Generation of Modernist Sculptors 1960s and 1970s	71
Chapter 4:	
The Third Generation of Modernist Sculptors 1980s	99
Chapter 5:	
Development of Modernism: The Postmodern and Beyond	121



This powerful terracotta tableau of Goddess Kali, signed by the artisan Bimal Das, exemplifies the enduring legacy of Bengal's devotional clay sculpture—most notably the tradition centered in Krishnanagar. Though the artist remains undocumented in published records, the stylistic features, material composition, and narrative intensity strongly suggest his roots in the Ghurni school, where generations of potters have modeled sacred and secular figures since the 18th century.

WHY THIS BOOK MATTERS: FROM THE PUBLISHER

It gives me immense pleasure to present ‘Shaping Bengal: A Chronicle of Modern Sculpture’, a publication that seeks to chronicle a vast and underdocumented terrain in the history of Indian art. This volume, authored by Mrinal Ghosh, represents a sustained attempt to map the evolution of modern and modernist sculpture in Bengal—situating it within its social, cultural, and material contexts.

While the modern sculptural idiom in Bengal is often traced to colonial art institutions like the Government School of Art in Calcutta (established in 1854/1865), it is essential to recognize the layered artistic ecosystem that preceded and paralleled this institutional modernity. The rural landscapes of Bengal had long nurtured indigenous sculptural traditions: the clay putuls (figurines) of Narendrapur, imbued with folk vitality and ritual symbolism; the terracotta panels of Bishnupur and Bankura, known for their narrative vigour and architectural integration; and the ritual masks, idols, and woodcarvings that continued to shape rural religious life. These practices, rooted in craft and community, offered a tactile, organic counterpoint to the classical and academic paradigms introduced under colonial tutelage.

The emergence of a distinctly modern sculptural language in Bengal from the early 20th century onward—epitomized by pioneers like Ramkinkar Baij—drew deeply from these vernacular traditions while engaging with international modernism. This synthesis of the local and the global, the folk and the formal, has remained a defining feature of Bengal’s sculptural journey.

As a gallerist, publisher, and collector, I have long felt the need for a comprehensive study that would do justice to this trajectory—spanning colonial academies, Santiniketan experimentation, post-independence modernism, and the post-liberalization shift toward installation, new media, and socio-political commentary. Mrinal Ghosh’s text, supported by archival and contemporary visuals, addresses this need with clarity and insight.

I am grateful to Prof. R. Siva Kumar for his thoughtful introduction, to Ashoke Viswanathan for editorial support, and to all the artists and institutions who contributed generously to this endeavour throughout this project.

It is my hope that this book will serve not only as a reference for students, collectors and scholars, but also as a tribute to the enduring spirit of sculptural innovation in Bengal.

Vikram Bachhawat

INTRODUCTION

Shri Mrinal Ghosh is a prominent figure among those writing on art in Bengal. He writes primarily and voluminously in Bengali, with occasional forays in English. Among the Indian languages, in the modern period Bengali has a very long and rich tradition of art writing that goes back to the late 19th century. Mrinal Ghosh is an inheritor of this legacy, so it might be in place to cursorily look at it before we come to him.

The first books on art in Bengali were published in the 1870s in Calcutta. Shyama Charan Srimani's *Suksha Shilper Utpatti o Arya Jatir Shilpa Chaturti* with the English sub-title *Fine Arts in Ancient India, With a Short Sketch on the Origin*, published in 1874 is considered the earliest. In it, besides drawing attention to the rich antiquity of Indian art, Srimani also countered the Western critique of the absence of realism in Indian art by pointing to the subtle modelling of Indian sculpture and gave the first call for the revival of the Indian past.

But what gives modern art writing in Bengali its special place besides its long history is its diversity and depth. That Calcutta was the first capital of colonial India allowed Bengali intellectuals to engage with colonial archaeologists and historians writing in English from close and to learn from and counter them with equal passion. That also made the art writing in Bengal bilingual, and academically and socially interactive. Rajendralal Mitra, Srimani's contemporary and the author of the two-volume *Antiquities of Orissa* (1875-80), is an excellent example of such engagement. But all writing was not archaeological or scholarly. For instance, Charuchandra Nag's *Chitravidya* (Lessons in Drawing and Painting), also published in 1874, was as a manual for learning Western academic skills.

These different strands became richer and broader over the next few decades. On the one hand, there were some like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, who were sceptical about the aesthetic value of ancient Indian art and

wished to see Indian art improved through the absorption of Western skills; others like Balendranath Tagore saw a possibility for marrying Indian aesthetic sensibilities with Western naturalism, and to him Ravi Varma was as an early exemplar of this. A strong polemical counter position was soon put forward by E.B. Havell and Coomaraswamy, who saw rich aesthetic value in ancient Indian art, which in many ways was superior to the naturalism of Western art.

The art and culture magazines like *Shilpa-pushpanjali*, *Bharati*, *Pradip*, *Sahitya*, *Prabasi* and the *Modern Review* started between 1886 and 1907 opened up the space for art writing and helped in sharpening the debate around the direction modern art in India should take and make it democratic. On one side were Abanindranath and his supporters like O. C. Gangoly, who gradually adopted a Pan-Asian perspective and pitched for a modern Indian art grounded in Eastern aesthetics. On the opposite side were Sureshchandra Samajpati and Manmathanath Chakravarty, who supported academic realism as the most advanced art practice universally and therefore the right thing to be embraced by Indian artists committed to cultural uplift. Yet others like Akshaya Kumar Maitreya thought Abanindranath and his followers did not adhere fully to Indian sastras, and their art was idiosyncratic and fanciful, not Indian enough.

While debates so far were framed as being for or against academic realism, which was the official aesthetic preference of colonialism, by 1920, Benoy Sarkar assumed a positivist position and argued that ancient Indian art was not all spiritual and mystical and could be studied from a more materialist perspective. Looking at it in this way, one could, he argued, notice that the aesthetic values in Indian art are similar to those professed by post-impressionist artists in the West. He further suggested that young Indian artists should move away from the polemics around Western academic art and engage with Western modern art.

Rabindranath, who began to respond to art under the influence of the nationalist/universalist debate, was already subtly steering Indian art away from an identity anchored in the past towards a greater openness to world art cutting across cultural and political divides. The Santiniketan art school he founded was the fulcrum of this effort. Besides encouraging contact with the East, he also invited scholars from the West, including the Viennese art historian Stella Kramrisch to Santiniketan. Kramrisch introduced young Bengalis like Benodebehari to formalist close reading of art developed by Viennese art historians. This, too, helped the art discourse



Fanindra Nath Bose
'To the Temple'

in Bengal to turn away from nationalism and develop firmer art historical roots. While Coomaraswamy had done some fine formalist reading of art-works a decade ago, it was marooned under his swadeshi pitch and made little impact. Kramrisch's approach brought about a broadening of vision across the spectrum of art history and criticism, as reflected in the writings that appeared in the *Rupam* and *JISOA*, as well as in the later writings of Abanindranath, Nandalal and Benodebehari in Bengali. Abanindranath's *Bageshwari* Lectures are less polemical and more liberal than his early writings; similarly, Nandalal's *Silpa Charcha* and *Silpa Katha* and Benodebehari's essays on individual artists are more open to cross-cultural inputs. The rich legacy of art writings in colonial Bengal percolated into post-independence art writing, but certain features that characterized and enriched it gradually dissipated. The polemical edge and dynamics brought by the presence and close interaction between art specialists from outside India and Bengali writers, artists, and intellectuals in general were one of these. The healthy traffic between scholars and artists and between scholarly and popular writing was yet another. Scholars located within academic spaces rather than in the public sphere kept up their contact with cross-cultural exchange of ideas but more from a distance through libraries and books than through personal contacts. Even more debilitating was the snapping of ties between scholarly and popular writing that magazines like *Prabasi*, the *Modern Review* and *Sahitya* facilitated. And finally, new artists did not engage in theoretical debates as their predecessors did.



Ajit Chakraborty
Bronze

In post-independence Bengal, *Desh* moved into the space vacated by popular magazines like *Prabasi* and kept the general public engaged with artistic developments into the 1980s, as did several smaller special publications like *Ekkhan* and *Anustup*. Some of these special publications continue to be published. With serious thinkers and specialists contributing to their pages, they keep the bridge between scholarly writers and general readers open, yet the continuous back-and-forth flow of ideas between academic and popular spaces and between scholars and artists that once characterized the art scene has dwindled considerably. At the same time, a more archival kind of scholarship around the colonial and early modern art practices also began to take shape, largely through the singular efforts of R.P. Gupta and Kamal Sarkar.

Mrinal Ghosh has to be read and placed against this background. Among the several notable art writers who entered the Bengal art scene in the 1970s and 80s, he is one of the more enduring writers. He began by contributing to the short-lived magazine *Pratikshan* in the 1980s. Since then,

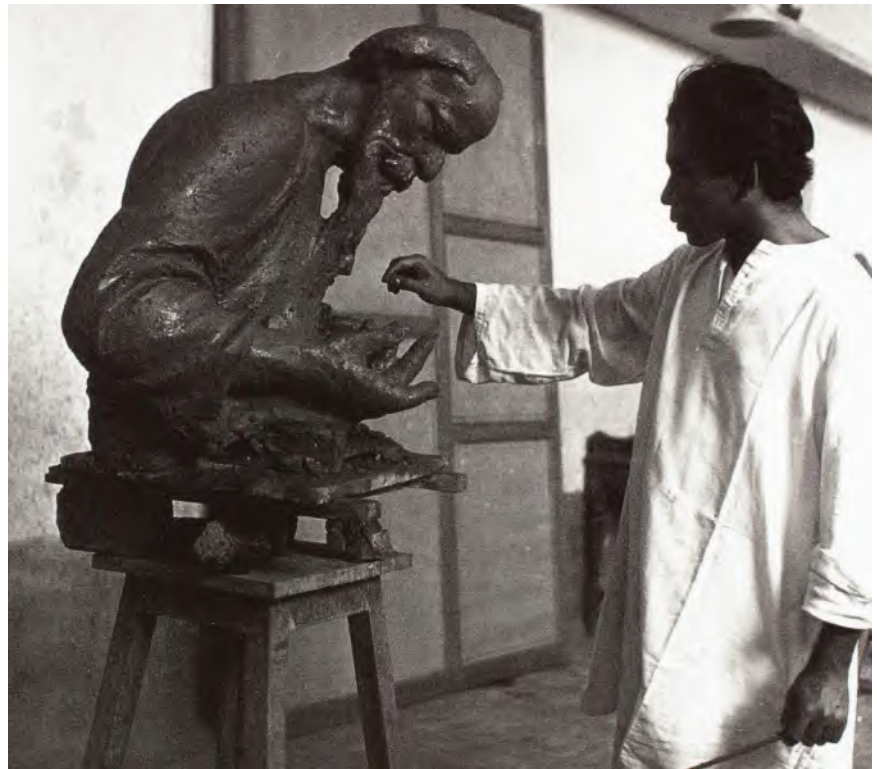
besides writing catalogue essays and exhibition reviews, he has moved on to writing voluminous books in Bengali and has published a string of them over the last twenty years. The mere listing of their titles offers a picture of the diversity of his interests. They include *Bingsha Shatake Bharater Chitrakala: Adhunikatar Bibartan* (Painting in India During 20th Century: Evolution of Modernity), *Biswasilper Ruprekha* (An Outline of World Art), *Pashchatyo Shilpe Adhunikotabadi Andolon o Bharatiya Chitrakala* (Modernist Revolution in Western Art and Indian Painting), *Banglar Adhunik Chitrakala Nana Diganta* (Facets of Modern Painting in Bengal), *Bharoter Adhunik Shilpokalar Naribiswa* (Feminism in Modern Indian Art), *Chhobi O Kobitay: Antargato Samporko* (Painting and Poetry: Intrinsic Relation), *Shilpokalay Santrash o Sanghati* (Violence and Solidarity in Art), *Biswashilpe Rekhar Abhijatra* (Line in world art), *Ramkinkar: Challisher Adhunikata* (Ramkinkar: Modernism of the Forties), *Soundarya Bhabnar Nana Avimukh* (Various Aspects of Aesthetics), *Samakalin Bhaskarya* (Contemporary Sculpture). Besides these, Mrinal Ghosh has also written monographs on individual artists like Rabindranath, Paritosh Sen, Ganesh Pyne, Shyamal Dutta Ray, Tapas Sarkar, Jayanta Ghoshal, Najma Akhtar and Shakila. While this list paints a picture of staggering prolificacy, it does not end there; he has also published several volumes of poetry.

In recent years, he has started to write in English besides Bengali, but his primary language remains Bengali, and I hope it remains so because Bengal needs more art writers in the language. Many in Bengal, especially in academic circles, who can be brilliant bilingual authors have chosen to write exclusively in English. Writing in English allows them to reach readers beyond Bengal, but deliberate monolingualism deprives readers in the local language of access to new and vital ideas emanating from within their cultural sphere and shields them from ideas entering local discourse from other languages and cultural spheres. That gives art writers like Mrinal Ghosh, who publish primarily in Bengali but have access to writings in English, a special place, especially in the absence of a robust translation programme of serious art writing from English and other languages.

Mrinal Ghosh is intrinsically a diligent chronicler with a penchant for recording facts and information rather than a theorist or analyst of the scene. While this might not sound exciting, such work is immensely important. Dependable facts are a prerequisite for insightful analysis and should precede it or go hand in hand. Mrinal Ghosh is one of the few who has dedicated himself to primary documentation with great dedication and humility without going into editorial judgement. The present book

is a reliable compendium of this kind. Those familiar with his book *Sa-makalin Bhaskarya* might find this a synoptic version of the over 300-page Bengali publication. But there are also significant differences. While the larger book introduces the history of modern Indian sculpture to his Bengali readers, the present book presents a concise and art-dictionary-like comprehensive introduction to modern sculpture in Bengal. This would be very useful to those who do not read Bengali. Further, drawing on his intimate knowledge of the scene, the book traces lineages of apprenticeship and professional interactions between sculptors. These will provide helpful leads to anyone who wishes to explore the subject more extensively. Above all, like *Modernity and Indian Art: A Critical Overview* – his other recent book in English, it will also introduce Mrinal Ghosh to those unaware of his prolific writing in Bengali.

R. Siva Kumar



Ramkinkar at work on Rabindranath Tagore, 1940

PREFACE

In this book, 'Shaping Bengal: A Chronicle of Modern Sculpture', we have tried to trace the development and evolution of sculpture in Modern Bengal. As the perspective, in the first chapter itself, the blossoming of the art of sculpture in the Eastern region of India, particularly in Bengal, has been described in short. It is well known that the contribution of India in the art of sculpture is considerable. Bengal had added to this traditional artform in her own way. Due to the geographical and anthropological disposition of the region, the development of culture in Bengal took a separate turn, distinct from the flow in Northern and Southern India. Bengal had thus created her own unique mode of expression.

After the 13th century, the development of classical sculpture in India had been subdued due to various political and social reasons. The same was the case in Bengal. But the blossoming of folk forms and tribal constructs were not affected. Out of this great void in the sculptural activities in the higher echelons of society from the 13th to 18th century, modernity in the field was perceptible during the middle of the 19th century. The British were the ruling agents and dominating force both in the political and cultural arena. To produce artist-craftsmen for their administrative necessities, the British authorities established art schools in different cities of India. In Calcutta, the School of Industrial Art was established in 1854. It was transformed into the Government School of Art in 1865. Modernity in the sculpture of Bengal was initiated by the sculptors trained in this art school and other institutions created in the 19th century. Here they were trained in the academic naturalist form as was followed in the British Kensington School. So the first phase of modernity was alien in nature. But this naturalism played a significant role in later developments.

Out of this background, the sculptors of Bengal played a pioneering role in the burgeoning of modernism in Indian sculpture. Ramkinkar Baij in Santiniketan was the first innovator in the field. He developed his sculp-



Meera Mukherjee
Bronze

Image Courtesy: Abhrajit Mitra & Sreela Mitra



Meera Mukherjee

Bronze

Image Courtesy: Abhrajit Mitra & Sreela Mitra

tures through assimilation of indigenous tribal and classical forms, amalgamating them with Western modernism. The development that continued during the middle of the 1930s was carried forward by other sculptors of the 1940s. The works of Pradosh Dasgupta, Chintamani Kar, Shankha Chowdhury and, above all, Meera Mukherjee and Somnath Hore have enlightened the aesthetic and cultural vision of our country. This outcome in the modernist sculpture in Bengal showed the direction of a lighted path to the other regions of India.

This book traces the progress of modern and modernist sculpture of Bengal up to the first two decades of the 21st century, when globalization and post-modernism also played a significant role. Apart from intricate experimentation in form, the sculptors of Bengal are always very concerned about the social situation. Along with displays of classicism, rebellion has also played a dominant role in the sculptural expressions of Bengal. Considering all these aspects, one can aver that the sculptural field of Bengal is very vibrant at present. We have tried to paint this expansion and experimentation with utmost sincerity.

We expect this book will be very effective as a descriptive and appreciative text for readers and art enthusiasts of the whole of India and beyond. Knowledge regarding the art of Bengal is very scanty so far as readers outside Bengal are concerned. This book is likely to fill that void.

It was Mr. Vikram Bachhawat of Aakriti Art Gallery and Chisel Crafts, who requested me to generate the text of the book. It was a pleasure for me to work on the subject and I felt it was essential that we come out with a book of this nature at the present moment. The renowned art historian Mr. R. Siva Kumar has graciously written an enlightening introduction to this book on my personal request. Mr. Ashoke Viswanathan, the distinguished film maker and theorist has taken an active role in editing the text of the book. I am immensely grateful to all of them. I also thank all the artists who have consented to reproduce the images of their works and helped me through conversation to know about the details of their artistic activities. Mr N.G. Rao and Mr. Sayan Paul of Aakriti Art Gallery have made significant contributions through their administrative and creative activities towards this publication. Some of the images reproduced have been photographed by Mr. Nepal Bhadra. My love and regards for them. I also feel indebted to all my family members, friends and well wishers whose support has helped me to continue with my work. My best wishes to all of them.

Mrinal Ghosh



Meera Mukherjee
Bronze

Image Courtesy: Abhrajit Mitra & Sreela Mitra



Chapter – One

EARLY SCULPTURE : DEVELOPMENT FROM ANCIENT TO EARLY MODERN

INTRO: PIONEERING ROLE OF BENGAL

In the development of modernism in Visual Arts in India, Bengal had a pioneering role. It is true for both painting and sculpture. In sculpture, Ramkinkar (1906-1980) was the first artist, who in Santiniketan, the centre of excellence in education and artistic activities, devised by the poet Rabindranath Tagore, started creating unique Sculptures from the 1930s defying the general trends of alien naturalism, assimilating traditional indigenous primitivism with various Western innovations. That was the beginning of a resurrection in modernism of Indian Sculpture. His *Sujata* of 1935, *Santhal Family* of 1937-38, *Harvester* of 1943, *Mill Call* of 1956, all of which were outdoor environmental sculpture, created with locally available medium of cement concrete, marked new imprints in Indian sculpture of twentieth century. A new awareness appeared in sculptural forms, which was renovated by the sculptors of The 1940s like Pradosh Dasgupta, Chintamony Kar, Shankha Chowdhury and others. This cognizance then spread to the other art centres, especially to Western region and modernism started accelerating.

During the 1960s Meera Mukherjee (1923-1998) of Kolkata after her initial art education from Delhi Polytechnic and specialised training in sculpture in an institute of Germany under Tony Stadler returned back to her native city to have a realisation that without any indigenous societal root no refreshing insight could be aroused in sculptural forms. Finally she devised her original form through renovation of sculptural sensibility taking formal, technical and philosophical inspiration from the indigenous primitive traditional craftsmen, who had been following a special metal casting process from time immemorial. In form and content of her works she could bring an enlightened originality which had no parallel in previous modern and modernist modes. Modernism in sculpture thus achieved a triumph.

The contribution of these two sculptors in devising modernist identity in the twentieth century sculptural development, assimilating local and

global concepts in Bengal and throughout India, is exemplary. Ramkinkar achieved this in the middle of the 1930s. So he should have the honour of being an innovator. We will come to the details of development of these two sculptors in due course. Here we will try to have an idea why they should be marked as modernists in comparison to the modern sculptors, who worked during the period between 1850s and 1920s and trace in our own way the difference between modernity and modernism in the field of art, particularly in the Indian context. Next in this chapter we will track down the evolution of sculpture in Bengal during modern and pre-modern or ancient period and evaluate how 'modern' germinated out of the void generated by a few centuries of dominance of alien forces and the consequent demise of determination.

MODERN AND MODERNISM

During the long period of evolution of art from prehistory to pre-modern identity of the creative artists, the identity of the sculptors remained anonymous. Nobody knows who were the sculptors who built up the dancing figures and other sculptures of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, who were the painters of Ajanta paintings and Byzantine murals. During the Mughal period in our country, the names of some of the painters could be traced but despite their skill and artistry they had to work on the concepts delivered by their patrons, the Mughal Monarchs. Folk and popular art were always community based. Individual artists always lay behind the curtain. The identity of the artist is always an essential feature of modernity, where the artist creates out of his/her own freedom, a choice of themes and techniques.

In our country this could happen only from the second half of the nineteenth century, when both painters and sculptors could work according to their personal choice and freedom, though they had to follow the particular norm of academic naturalism. So modernity emerged at that point. In the similar way, modernity in European art originated during the Renaissance and continued till Impressionism of the nineteenth century.

During the middle of the last decade of the nineteenth century, within the ambience of consciousness about alien dominance in our culture, a few of the artists were perturbed by the question: why modernity of our art should emerge from a foreign root. In painting, Abanindranath Tagore was the first to protest. In his paintings, he attempted an indigenous root. In 1897, he finished his *Radha-Krishna* series of paintings, where he

assimilated the forms of medieval miniature painting of our country with that of the West. Since that beginning, a rebellious movement emerged in the field of painting, known as 'neo-Indian School' that devised an alternative form of modernity, which may be called 'Traditional Modernity'. It played a dominant role in our modern movements till 1930s. The students and followers of Abanindranath like Nandalal Bose, Asitkumar Haldar, Kshitindranath Majumdar and many others of their generation and the next contributed immensely in this field.

In the domain of sculpture, no such 'neo-Indian school' could be developed. So modernity in sculpture followed academic naturalism till Ramkinkar appeared in the field of his sculptural creativity. In painting between modernity and modernism there was a step that we have marked as traditional modernity. In sculpture there was no such middle step. It was elevated directly from modern to modernism. Traditional modernity here, however, at a certain stage, was associated with modernism, as in the innovations of Meera Mukherjee.

'Modernism' is a development of modernity. When the social and temporal values of life and living get complicated, the aesthetics of artistic expression also becomes intricate. Art turns towards pure form instead of expression through narrative rendering. 'Form itself' is a criterion of modernism. According to Peter Brooker, '...modernism signified an impersonal attention to art as composition ... a use of language and level of obscurity well in advance of the expectations and sensibilities of plain readers'. ('Modernism / Post modernism'. Longman. 1992 / 1995. P-6.). Some aspects of comprehensiveness and directness in construction also come into being. Probably through consideration of this aspect, Partha Mitter in his book 'The Triumph of Modernism' defined modernism as 'radical non-illusionist art' (Oxford 2007, p-46). As complications of life and living conditions are essential criteria of modernism, so a sense of evil and rebellion against decay of values play a significant role. These are the reasons for which in our country in the artistic expressions of 1940s modernism played a significant role. In the expressions of most of the artists coming to limelight during that decade 'modern' got transformed into 'modernism'.

In the art of painting in Bengal and India too, Rabindranath was the first modernist due to his non-illusory formal structure and deeper insight into existential turmoil, also the dominance of primitive inwardness. Rabindranath turned into a full-fledged painter since 1927-28. The paintings of Gaganendranath Tagore and Jamini Roy also expressed some aspects of

modernism due to their non-illusory form-centeredness. Most of the artists of 1940s totally absorbed the values of modernism due to their rebellion against shattering human conditions. Such an insurgency of “expression appeared in the art of Bengal.” First, ‘Calcutta Group’ was formed in Bengal in the year of famine, 1943. Jainul Abedin, Chittaprasad and Somnath Hore worked on famine. ‘Inspired by the Calcutta Group’ ‘Bombay Progressive Group’ was formed in Mumbai in 1947. All these facts determine that Bengal played a pioneering role in the development of modernism.

In sculpture, as we have seen, Ramkinkar was the first to devise modernism through his sculptures *Sujata* of 1935 and *Santhal Family* of 1938, where he integrated the forms of indigenous primitivism to express the stark realities of existential conditions of subaltern life of that period. The sculptors of 1940s tried to grasp indigenous traditions both classical and popular along with Western modernist norms. Meera Mukherjee appeared in her sculptural creativity during the end part of the 1960s. She was inspired by the working techniques of the primitive craftsmen, whom she called ‘Viswakarma’; also by their world outlook and devotion to life and creativity. She also had her motivations from classical spirituality, musical magnificence and ways of living of subaltern strata of working people. Her sculptural forms were assimilation of all these aspects and here was her modernism.

Despite all these attainments modernity in our sculpture appeared in a very subdued note out of the prolonged void of a few centuries. We will come to it. Before that it is better if we can have a look at the evolution of the sculptural art in Bengal at the ancient and pre-modern period.

SCULPTURE IN BENGAL DURING ANCIENT AND EARLY PERIOD

It is well known that India had a great heritage in sculptural art, where she excelled more than any ancient civilisation and made parallel contributions. In sculpture she transformed reality into transcendence. Bengal, though now an integral part of India, emerged as a separate region at a much later stage. In the remote past it was a conglomeration of scattered land masses surrounded by water bodies. The word ‘Bangabhumi’, a synonym of Bengal came into being only a thousand years ago. The word ‘Bangladesh’ was first traced in a Tamil inscription of Rajendra Chola (1014-1044) on the Tirumalay Mountains. The region that at present is known as Bengal was divided in the past in several regional spaces like



Woman's Face. Agradigun. Dinajpur.
10th C.E. Ashutosh Museum.

'Banga', 'Harikhel' 'Samatat', 'Punrda', 'Barendri', 'Rarhi', 'Gour' etc. These regions started concentrating into a unit region during the reign of King Shashanka in the beginning of seventh century and flourished as a political and cultural region in the course of the 'Pala' (750-1161) and 'Sena' (1070-1230) dynasty. This region has been divided and bifurcated several times in the course of historical and political development, the last being at the time of the partition of India in 1947. This isolation from northern and southern regions has played a positive role in the historical, cultural and existential development of the people of Bengal. It has given them a stern determination and bold rebelliousness in their world outlook and ways of life.

Despite this lack of regional coherence during the early period it was not a fact that there was a total void in cultural and artistic activities in these disintegrated regions. Since the primitive era several human races came in different regions of this land mass and left their marks of creativity. Thus different heritages of outer regions have made their impressions and affected the art and activities of this region. One of the characteristics of the sculpture of this region is that those were mostly built up of clay. Stone was not available here as the plains here were evolved out of accumulated alluvial soil. During later period some figures of black stones have been traced. There the stones were brought from outside.

A burnt clay woman figure that has been excavated from Tamluk belongs to the Maurya Era that is between 322 and 185 B.C. Its image was printed in the book by Stella Kramrich 'Indian Art Through the Ages'. It was the image of a seated young lady. The vigour in the eyes and boldness in bodily expression of this non-religious figure indicates that it was the creative product of a secular society, where women could enjoy a free ambience and artistic activity was also free from any religious dominance and restrictions. This foreshadows the general existential and cultural trends of this region. The freedom and openness can be traced in the sculptures of Ramkinkar and other sculptors also. Bengal in this respect is different from other regions of mainland India.

There was disparity in nature and style of cultural expressions also. Bengal did not have and could not built up monumental temples decorated with delightful and elegant sculptures in the early part of her history like Orissa, Khajuraho or South India due to her soil condition and lack of royal patronage. Yet there was no dearth of sculptural creativity here. From every region of this expansive land of Bengal, lots of sculptural images have been excavated that were built up of clay, terracotta, metal, stone



Women Figure. Stone. Mourya Era. 322 – 185 BC



Image of the Sun. Stone. Gupta Era. Kashipur

and wood indicating the excellence of creative and aesthetic sensibility of the people here. From The 16th century lots of brick temples decorated with graceful, lyrical and sublime terracotta sculptures were being built in different regions of Bengal through Vaishnava and Shaiva religious inspiration, where devotion and love were the prime points of expression suggesting the special characteristic of aesthetic eminence of the creative people here, which was poles apart from that of the other regions. This was the observation of the eminent art-scholar Kalyan Kumar Ganguly in his book '*Banglar Bhaskarya*' ('Sculpture of Bengal', Subarnarekha, Kolkata 1986).

By the way, in Ganguly's book we find another example. A sculptural image of a young woman's face created in black stone during the 10th century and discovered from Agradigun of Dinajpur. This is also a non-religious secular image of an earthly woman with grace, tranquility and sobriety. This is now collected in Ashutosh Museum of Calcutta University. From these two examples, the first one mentioned earlier and this one, we can have an idea of the sculptural sensibility of the people of this region, which has flowed down from the remote past to the present day hinting at the special features of form and content of sculptural creativity. There are two archaeological centres where innumerable sculptures and artefacts have been excavated. They suggest the variety of sculptural activities that have been taken place in Bengal during the ancient period. One is Chandraketugarh, located at North 24 Parganas. The other is Paharpur Somapura Mahavihara at Badamgachhi, Naogaon, presently in Bangladesh.

At Chandraketugarh the sculptures and other art objects excavated have been classified in seven categories as follows: Period I Pre-Maurya 600-300 B.C.E., Period II Maurya 300-200 B.C.E., Period III Shunga 200 B.C.E.-50 C.E., Part IV Kushan 50-300 C.E. Part V Gupta 300-500 C.E., Part VI Post-Gupta 500-750 C.E., Period VII Pala era. It is revealed from here that in the scattered isolated areas that were later concentrated to form Bengal, artistic and sculptural activities were being carried out giving rise to various sorts of sculptures reflecting diverse religious and ethnic influences. Paharpur Vihara is among the best known Buddhist Viharas or monasteries in the Indian subcontinent and also important archaeological sites in the country. At Paharpur there are some amorous human couples of 8th and 9th century passionately engaged in love making suggesting a link with greater India. In the lyrical rhythm of the body formation the romantic Indian ethos could be felt.

The archaeological and sculptural activities in Bengal continued unabatedly in Bengal up to 10th Century and then after some dispersion were revived again in 16th century in terracotta temples. These were totally terminated in early 19th century due to onslaught of Western political and cultural subjugation. Out of this darkness emerged the feeble light of modernity.

EMERGENCE OF MODERNITY IN SCULPTURE

The British rulers and most of their cultural protagonists were totally ignorant of the glory of artistic activity in India. One of their art scholars, John Ruskin (1819-1900), said: '[the Indian] will not draw a form of nature but an amalgamation of monstrous objects.' Another scholar George Birdwood (1832-1917) remarked that: 'painting and sculpture as fine arts did not exist in India'. Under such a circumstance the British authorities considered the idea of opening art institutions in India to build up artist-craftsmen that would be necessary for their administrative performances.

The first such venture was taken up in Madras in 1850, where the resident surgeon Dr. Alexander Hunter opened an art school in his personal endeavour with the purpose of 'humanising culture of fine arts'. At Calcutta 'the school of Industrial Art' was started on 16 August 1854 at Gharanhata totally as a personal venture. It has a previous history. The 'Mechanics Institute' was established in Calcutta on 26 February 1839 with the purpose of imparting technical education to young people. This school was formed by the initiative of the editor of a monthly journal 'India Review', Dr. Frederic Korb. Some influential people were in its executive committee. Though initiated as a good venture it did not last long. But the necessity was there, which resulted in the establishment of the 'School of Industrial Art' in 1854. Since its inception, clay modelling was in its syllabus. An artist named Mr. Rigaud agreed to teach clay modelling in an honorary capacity. In the beginning, there were 45 students in clay modelling class and 50 in painting. (Ref. Jogeshchandra Bagal: History of Government Art and Craft, Calcutta, Centenary edition). Out of these 45 students of sculpture, one was Gopalchandra Pal, about whom Kamal Sankar has written in his book: 'Bharater Bhaskar O Chitrashilpi'. (Painters and Sculptors of India).

He became a renowned sculptor. Later when H.H.Lock was Principal of Government Art School Pal was appointed there as a modelling teacher. He was included in the team that had gone to Orissa for research in



Bodhisattva Manjusri. 6th – 7th C.E, Bogura

Archaeology under leadership of Rajendralal Mitra. His sculpture was displayed in international exhibition held at Melbourn in 1880-81. Apart from him no other student out of those 45 was known publicly in the later period.

The School of Industrial Art was shifted from Garanhata to Kolutola in the house of Motilal Shil in November 1884. On 29 June 1864, H.H.Lock was appointed Principal of the school and it was shifted again to 166, Bowbazar Street. In 1865 the name of the school was changed to 'The Government School of Art'. In, 1951 this school was upgraded to a college and renamed 'The Government College of Art and Craft. The school was situated at Bowbazar up to January 1892. In the month of February 1892 it took the position in the newly built building at Chowringhee Road beside the Indian Museum.



Image of Yamuna. 7th – 8th C.E. Paharpur

A number of students, after completing their course in art school, since 1854 came out practising sculptors. They were working in the academic naturalist style in which they had their training. Through their works, a trend of modernity in sculpture emerged in Bengal. Some of these sculptors made important contribution in the area of creativity; we will highlight these sculptors later.

Apart from art-school trained sculptors, there were other sculptors, who learnt from hereditary sources and became well known for their works. One such sculptor was Nabakumar Pal. He rose to fame even before the beginning of the school. In the decade of the 1840s, he created portraits of Lord Auckland, H.T.Princep, Dr. H.H.Goodiv, Dr. Egarton and David Hare. Those have been collected in the Calcutta Medical College. The two lions displayed in front of Governor's House in Calcutta are also his creations. He was later appointed modelling teacher in the school of Industrial Art. In Krishnanagar and Calcutta, also, there were many such self trained or hereditarily trained clay modellers or sculptors.

In painting, there were pre-modern trends of practices, such as early-Bengal school, Company School, Kalighat paintings etc. In sculpture, there was no such mode. Many British and European painters arrived in Calcutta and other part of the country, whose landscapes and other genres of paintings turned out to be very popular during 18th and 19th century. In sculpture, also, many European sculptors came to the city, whose works add special features in the outdoor and indoor sculptures here. Kamal Sarkar mentioned in his book 'Kolkatar Statue' that the first such portrait based marble group sculpture was installed in Calcutta during the sec-



Nalanda Vishnu in Bronze Medieval



Buddha Sibbali (Khulna)



Nalanda Serpent-hooded Goddess in Stone Early Medieval



Prajnaparamita (Malda)

ond half of 1803. The sculptors of this image of Marquis Cornwallis were John Bacon and his son. It was first installed at Town Hall, then shifted to Victoria Memorial. The second such sculpture was of Marquis Hastings. It was sculpted by John Flaxman in 1829. Parallel to paintings by foreign painters this was a similar trend in sculpture of Bengal, which may be a part of the modern trend. But the main trend of modernity was the works by art school trained sculptors.

THE ART SCHOOL TRAINED SCULPTORS

We may mention here about some sculptors who were born before 1900 A.D.

Jadunath Pal (1821-1920) was the seniormost among them (in age). He was born at Ghurni area of Krishnanagar in a family of clay modellers. He had his first training in clay modelling from his father Ananda Pal and his uncle. Later he was admitted to Government Art School, when H.H. Lock was the 'Principal'. He was famous for portrait sculpture. After completing his course he was appointed as a modelling teacher in the same Art School. He created a full figure portrait of Maharshi Debendranath Tagore, father of Rabindranath.



*Clay figures of villagers and worshipers, attributed to **Jadunath Pal**. Krishnanagar, India, 19th century.*

Rohinikanta Nag (1868-1895) was the first sculptor of Bengal, who was trained in Italy. His life span was only 27 years. He was born in a Brahmo family in the district of Dacca, eastern part of Bengal and was admitted to

Government Art School, Calcutta, when Henry Jobins was Principal. In 1890 at the age of 22 he went to Italy and was admitted in Royal Academy there. He stood first in the annual examination there in 1891. He was also awarded in other art competition held in Rome. He was one of the convenors of the fine arts institution 'Indian association for the promotion of fine arts and national gallery' established at Calcutta in 1892. While staying in Italy he was attacked with Tuberculosis and returned to Calcutta in that condition. He passed away on 13 May 1895 at his Lansdowne Road residence in Calcutta. He left lots of his paintings and sculptures in Italy. Rabindranath in his own initiative and expenses brought those back to Calcutta. At his premature death India lost an important sculptor of future.

Sitalchandra Bandyopadhyay was a physician by profession. He was born in 1879 and acquired skill in painting and sculpture out of his own effort. The painter Shashikumar Hesh insisted him to go to Italy for training but that was not materialised. A white marble image of goddess Laxmi sculpted by him was very much appreciated by Rabindranath, Jagadishchandra Basu, Sister Nilbedita, when it was shown to them by the famous historian Dinashchandra Sen.



'Spring' by **Hiranmaya Roychowdhury**

Ashwini Kumar Barman (Roy) was born in 1882 in the district of Mymensingha in East Bengal. His son, Debajyoti Barman, became a noted journalist. He had gone to Europe in 1909 and was trained in sculpture in the studio of Charles May in England. He had a friendship with William Rothenstein. Apart from practice in sculpture he earned fame in art writing. A few of his noteworthy sculptures were *Beda Byas*, *Pain of Cavalry*, *Snake Charmer*, *Cupid's Sympathy in Love's Distress* etc. The captions indicate that he was proficient in composition sculptures other than portraits. Possibly he was expired in England.

Hiranmaya Roychowdhury (1884-1962) was an eminent portrait sculptor. The important fact about him is that he was the teacher of the next generation of famous sculptors Debiprasad Roychowdhury, Sudhirranjan Khastagir and Pradosh Dasgupta. From that aspect his contribution in modern sculpture was significant. He was born in Jessore of East Bangal and admitted to Govt art school of Calcutta in 1905, when E.B.Havel was the Principal. He worked as an assistant of the famous architect and sculptor, Leonard Jennings, who came to Calcutta in 1907 and according to his advice went to England in 1910 and got admitted in the Royal College of Art, London. After returning in 1915, he joined the Art school at Srinagar and worked as teacher. In 1925 he was appointed as Principal of the Jaipur

royal art school. In 1929, he joined Lucknow Govt Art School. There he introduced modelling classes. He created portrait sculptures of many eminent persons.

Fanindra Nath Bose (1888-1926) within the span of 38 years of his life earned fame as sculptor in India and Europe. He was born at Bikram-pur of Dacca and was admitted to Jubilee Art Academy and shifted to Govt Art School. He went to Italy in 1904, from there came to London and was admitted to Edinburg College of Art. There he learnt sculpture under Parshi Portsmouth. Next he went to France and met the famous sculptor, Rodin. While staying in Europe, he created many significant compositions of sculptures.



Fanindra Nath Bose
'The Hunter'



Fanindra Nath Bose
'End of the Day'



Fanindra Nath Bose
'The Falconer'



Fanindra Nath Bose
'Boy in Pain'
Courtesy National
Museum Cardiff



Fanindra Nath Bose
'Male Bust'
Courtesy Royal Scottish
Academy of
Art & Architecture

Narayan Kashinath Debal was born in 1894 at Burmah. At an early age he came to Santiniketan for studies. After passing the matriculation examination from there, he went to London, where at Chelsea Polytechnic, he learnt designing and clay modelling. He then returned to Santiniketan and was inspired by Rabindranath towards art. Again he went abroad and got further training in sculpture. He was very proficient in portrait sculpture and other art activities.

Gopeshwar Pal (1894-1944) belonged to a clay modelling family of Krishnanagar. He learnt modelling under Jadunath Pal. He created a portrait of Rabindranath, which was displayed at his 70th birth anniversary celebration at Town hall.

Priyanath Mallick (1894-1983) was famous as a portrait sculptor and was trained in Jubilee Art Academy, later by Binayak Karmakar.



Studio of **Gopeshwar Pal**



Miniature Durga Idols by **Gopeshwar Pal**



G.K. Mhatre
'To The Temple'
Marble, 1900



V.P. Karmakar
'Blowing The Conch'
1924



V.P. Karmakar
'Play Mates'

The three images that we see above are by two very important sculptors from Maharashtra, Ganapat Kashinath Mhatre (1876-1947) and Vinayak Pandurang Karmakar (1891-1967). The three works show how apart from portraits, highly acclaimed composition sculptures were also being created by the first generation of modern sculptors of India. The sculpture by Mhatre titled 'To the Temple' was highly appreciated during that period. Even Rabindranath Tagore wrote about it in two Bengali journals 'Bhatati' and 'Pradip' in 1305 B.E. (1898 C.E.).

DEBIPRASAD ROYCHOWDHURY

Debiprasad Roychowdhury (1899-1975) was one of the most eminent sculptors of Bengal and obviously of India, working in academic naturalist style. He was not trained in sculpture from any art institution. He was a painter and sculptor in the same fold and contributed immensely in both the fields. Besides these two main streams, he also practiced literature and music. He was well known as a flute player. He had also earned fame as a wrestler and hunter. He had an inclination for painting and sculpture since his childhood. His father took him to Abanindranath for training in painting. Abanindranath noticing his interest and skill in making three dimensional images sent him to an Italian artist and sculptor Kari E Bais living in Calcutta for training in sculpture. From him, Debiprasad learnt the basics and then at a later stage, learnt from Hiranmoy Roychowdhury. Trained under Abanindranath, he painted in the Indian style, but his sculpture remained aligned with academic naturalism. At that time, there was no other form prevalent in sculptural practices.

Debiprasad was born on 15 June 1899 at Tajhat at Rangpur in a rich and noble family. His father Umaprasad Roychowdhury belonged to a solvent landlord family. But Debiprasad had no attraction for fame and finance. He tried to stand alone in his endeavour and struggle to be an artist defying the opposition of the seniors of his family. He had no institutional training in art. After being self-trained he tried for various jobs and ultimately joined Government Art School, Madras as Vice-Principal on 28 December 1928. In 1929 he became the Principal of that institution. He worked in that position till 1957. After which he got retired, returned to Calcutta and devoted himself to creativity.

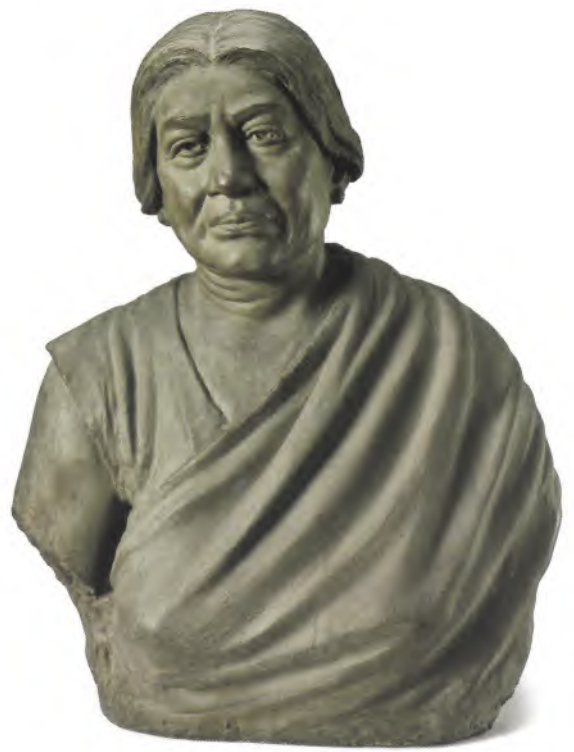
In sculptural creativity, in most cases, he followed academic naturalist form. He had great respect for Rodin. Many have spoken of the shades of Rodin and Bourdelle in his sculptures. There was no reflection of indigenous form in his sculptures, but the same was present in many cases in the choice of his subjects. He created innumerable portrait sculpture throughout his life. Out of which a particular piece stands apart. In 1924, when he was only twenty-five, he created the portrait sculpture of his father, titled as *My Father*. It was most successful in structural strength and expression. The form was basically naturalistic but within that he infused expressionist inwardness. Among many of his compositional sculptures, some stand out as exceptional. *When Winter Comes* executed in 1957 was such a piece. A rural old man sits alone crumpled in the cold. This was the subject, within which he could endorse a deep sense of pathetic reality.



'After The Bath'
Bronze



'Portrait of Charulata Roy Chowdhury (wife of the artist)'
Bronze, 1993



'Bust of Sarojini Naidu'
Plaster of Paris, 1960



'My Father'



'Study of a Man'
Plaster of Paris, 1960

Debiprasad was very successful in creating outdoor environmental sculptures. Out of many three monumental pieces stand apart. In *Triumph of Labour* (1954) he expressed his ovation for the working community of free India. Four well built labourers in muscular bare body each wearing only a short loincloth were trying to remove a heavy stone by inserting strong wooden pole under the stone. This was the subject. In total expression, it was brilliant. It has many copies installed in different part of the country. *Martyrs Memorial* executed in 1956 is also memorable. It expressed his ovation for the freedom fighters of the country. Seven valiant freedom fighters are walking in a row. The rhythm and confidence in their movement express their devotion and confidence. He worked on *Martyrs Column* from 1965 to 1975. Under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, the freedom fighters, men and women from different province are walking in a procession. This 85 ft long, 10 ft wide 7 ft high sculpture was installed on a tall platform. All these express his national feeling.

He enjoyed a prolific and decorated career. But his limitations were critiqued also. His student, the eminent sculptor Pradosh Dasgupta, wrote in 1989 in a catalogue introduction of his exhibition: 'Debiprasad's compositions in sculpture, which are few in number, may have socialistic bias – but authentically they do not unfortunately fulfil the higher noble qualities pertaining to the aesthetics of Indian sculpture'.

This was an inherent problem not only of Roychowdhury's works but of most of the sculptors of the naturalist school. The modernist trend tried to overcome this.



'When Winter Comes'
Plaster, 1954





'Triumph of Labour'
Outdoor Sculpture, 1954





'Dandi March or Salt Satyagraha'
Outdoor sculpture, New Delhi



*Artist with His Sculpture
Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee*



'Dandi March or Salt Satyagraha'



Gandhi by Ramkinkar

Chapter – Two

THE FIRST GENERATION OF MODERNIST SCULPTORS 1930s and 1940s

EMERGENCE OF MODERNISM DURING 1930s

We have seen in the previous chapter how modernity in the sculptural activity of Bengal and India originated during the 1850s through the works of the sculptors trained in the art schools initiated by the British Government. They practiced in academic naturalist style, which was the general trend of training in those schools. Despite all their success, something was lacking in their achievements. They could not connect their forms with the indigenous cultural roots. Modernity in our sculpture suffered from this alienation. Out of that void emerged modernism, of which Ramkinkar was the pioneer.

In the field of painting there were three steps in the course of development from modern to modernism. The first was the modernity of the academic natural style. The second was traditional modernity originated by Abanindranath Tagore and practiced by the painters of the neo-Indian school, the third was modernism initiated through the paintings of Rabindranath Tagore. The paintings of Gaganendranath, Jamini Roy and Amrita Sher-Gil also marked new avenues to emerge from modern to modernism. During the decade of the 1930s, some new consciousness was developing in the social and cultural field of Bengal.

The First World War ended through destruction between 1914 and 1918. The militarism, nationalism and imperialism that were the causes of war perturbed the intellectual and cultural environment of Bengal along with the whole country. These were being expressed in the literature of Rabindranath, Saratchandra Chatterjee, Kazi Nazrul Islam and others. The anti-colonial movement led by Mahatma Gandhi and the leaders of the terrorist activities was taking serious turns. In such a situation, art was also affected. This was expressed in the *Arabian Night* series of 1930 by Abanindranath, also in his *Krishnamangal* and *Kabi-Kankan Chandi* series of 1938. Gaganendranath was trying to grasp the Western modern and modernist idioms in his paintings. Jamini Roy was searching for new idioms; whose roots were deeper in the primitive and folk culture of Bengal.

Rabindranath was working, taking in all these realities under his consideration. At Santiniketan he started *Kalabhavana* in 1919 as part of his Ashram school. In 1921 his school was elevated to *Visvabharati* of which *Kalabhavana* became an integral part. At *Visvabharati* he developed the idea of integration of the ideals and realities of home and the world, synthesis of national and international ideals. At *Kalabhavana*, also, his aim was to develop such a consolidation. Nandalal Basu, despite being a nationalist to the core, developed his paintings beyond mere revivalism towards incorporation of greater realities of life and assimilation of forms of alien cultures like Japan and Europe also. Binodbehari and Ramkinkar developed their art in the true spirit of internationalism. Rabindranath himself, the first innovator of modernism in painting, expanded it beyond national boundaries to incorporate international values and ideology. We have spoken of Gaganendranath and Jamini Roy.

Thus modernist principles were gradually being endorsed in the art since 1930-s. In the sculptures of Ramkinkar, this was fully revealed. Apart from Ramkinkar there were a very few among the sculptors, who could endorse such an extension of form and concept that the modernist approach catered for. Deviprasad Roychowdhury worked with full vigour till the middle of 1970s. Except the occasional dazzle of progressive modern idioms his works, due to the naturalist formal structure, he could not reflect any modernist sensibility. So Ramkinkar was the only sculptor of Bengal during the 1930s, who could extend the formal structures of his sculptures towards the excellence of modernist trends, for which he may be recognised as the pioneer in modernist sculpture of Bengal, which was extended during the next decades.

MODERNISM OF 1940s

The trends and possibilities of inundating the modernist values flourished completely in the art of the 1940s, both in painting and sculpture. It had multiple reasons and grounds. The anti-colonial movements in India and obviously in Bengal rose to the peak during this decade. Mahatma Gandhi started his *Quit India Movement* on 8 August 1942 with the call of 'Do or Die'. Along with this, various branches of terrorist movements also rose to the crest. The Second World War started due to worldwide economic depression, the rise of militarism and failure of cordial relations between nations continued from 1939 to 1945. Taking the opportunity of the war, Netaji Subhaschandra Bose joining hands with Japan and was approaching with his *Azad Hind Military force* towards India. All these things perturbed

the colonial British Government to an extreme extent. They extended their exploitation and torture towards people to the maximum and caused the devastating famine of 1943. After famine came the communal violence of 1946, then in the guise of independence; the country was divided into India and Pakistan through the heinous *Radcliff line*. A number of people turned homeless refugees.

All these aspects devastated Bengal. The artists turned rebellious through their art activities. Consequently the forms and concepts of art were seriously transformed towards modernism. In Bengal, there arose two streams of rebellious movements. One was the extreme plaintive and dissentient forms generated by the reactions of the famine. The Communist Party of India played a serious role in organising the protest and also to help the victims of misfortune to a considerable extent. Some of the artists worked under the leadership of the party. Among these artists the most notable were Chittaprasad, Sonmath Hore, Debabrata Mukherjee, Moni Roy, Lakshmi Roy and others, who started their career through documentation of the suffering of the famine victims. Jainul Abedin was the most important in this regard, but he worked independently.

The other artists, who were not directly linked with the party, were very serious and rebellious; They also searched for new forms, and worked unitedly through setting up artists' groups. Thus the 'Calcutta Group' was founded in Calcutta in the year of famine, 1943. Similar progressive groups were generated in other cities also. 'Bombay Progressive Artists Group' was formed in 1947. But Bengal artists were the first to generate such rebellion. So it can unhesitatingly be said that Bengal artists were the trailblazers of modernism both in painting and sculpture.

Thus the modernism in sculpture was developed in full during the decade of the 1940s. Ramkinkar was the first innovator in this field. We will now look at the trends and developments of these sculptors, whom we call the first generation of modernists.

RAMKINKAR

Ramkinkar was born on 25 May 1906 in a village named Jugipara of Bankura district in West Bengal. His father was Chandicharan Baij and mother Sampurna. Thus the title of Ramkinkar was Baij. The family by profession were barbers. They were submerged in continuous poverty. There was neither any scope nor any opportunity to be an artist for a per-



'Sujata'
Cement Concrete (Outdoor Sculpture)
Visvabharati premises, 1935



'Kacha & Devayani'
Plaster, 1929



'Composition Cement'
1943



'A Portrait'
Cast Stone, 1936

son of this family. Ramkinkar, in this respect, was a remote exception. It was strange that since his childhood he had strong attraction for painting and an inordinate power to draw.

He was growing up through the stark realities of a very plain and simple life. The pictures and paintings, the images of which he used to see in different books and journals during his childhood, were mostly in naturalist style. He had a deep impression of this naturalism in his mind. He could never come out of this even when he was learning under Nandalal Bose in *Kalabhavana* at Santiniketan in spite of Nandalal's strong apathy for naturalism. By dint of his own practice, Ramkinkar earned excellence in drawing and painting within 15 years of his life. Skill in oil painting was also earned in this way. In sculpture, also, he had inborn talent. He came in contact with their village potter and idol maker Ananta Pal in his childhood; he liked very much to look at the process of making the idol of Goddess Durga before the autumn festival. Occasionally, young Ramkinkar also assisted him in his work. He was allowed to paint the eyes of the goddess. In this process, he earned the skill in sculpting in the early days of his youth.

He earned fame as a young artist among the people of his childhood village. Occasionally he had to take part in various nationalist activities by making pictures and posters. Thus, as a child prodigy, he had some fame in his village locality. Ramananda Chatterjee, the renowned editor of the journals *Prabasi* and *Modern Review* and a person very close to Rabindranath in Santiniketan, was the resident of a nearby village of Bankura, where Ramkinkar lived. He came to know about the artistic activities of Ramkinkar. He advised him to go to Santiniketan and meet Nandalal Bosu to be admitted to *Kalabhavana*. Chatterjee wrote a letter of his recommendation to Nandalal and gave it to Ramkinkar. With that letter, Ramkinkar, a boy of nineteen went to Santiniketan and met Nandalal in 1925. He showed his drawings and paintings that he had brought with him. Bose was pleased to see them and told him that he had learnt enough and need not be trained more. However, as he had arrived, he might stay and work at *Kalabhavana* for two or three years, if he liked. That limit of two or three years never ended in his life.

During the initial years in Santiniketan he took lessons in painting from Nandalal, but the greater lessons he received were from the nature and cultural environment of that place and the enlightened wisdom of the poet Rabindranath, which brought a glow of light to him. The village boy was thus gradually transformed into an artist of enormous sensibility. In



'Santhal Family'
Cement Concrete (Outdoor Sculpture) Viswabharati premises, 1938



'Harvester'
Bronze, 1943



'Mill Call'
Cement Concrete (Outdoor Sculpture) Kalabhavana premises, 1956



'Tagore'
Bronze, 1941



'Tagore'
Bronze, 1938



'Head of a Women'
Cast Stone, 1939



'Bull'
Bronze



'Yaksha'
Stone, (Outdoor Sculpture Reserve Bank of India)
New Delhi, 1964



'Yakshi'
Stone, (Outdoor Sculpture Reserve Bank of India)
New Delhi, 1964



'Composition'
Cement, 1943



'Speed'
Plaster, 1953



'Abanindranath'
Cast Stone, 1943



'Portrait of a Lady'
Bronze, 1949



'Profile'
Plaster

Kalabhavana, at that time, there was no opportunity to learn sculpture. Ramkinkar in the initial years practiced out of his own effort. Two European sculptors came to Santiniketan at the invitation of Rabindranath. They were the Viennese sculptor, Liza Von Pot, who came in 1928 and Marguerite Milward (1873-1953), a disciple of the famous French sculptor Antoine Bourdal, who arrived in the following year. From Liza, Ramkinkar could learn the basic methods of modelling, mould making and plaster casting. Milward also demonstrated the methods of modelling and delivered lectures on modern European sculpture. From them Ramkinkar would have the idea of modern and modernist sculpture of Europe. The rest was his personal innovations.

Since 1928, Ramkinkar started his creative sculptures. *Kach and Debjani* was sculpted in plaster in 1929. In this mythical subject, also, he induced some primitive inward sensibility, which was entirely different from the ongoing process of naturalist rendering. In 1935 he created an outdoor environmental sculpture in the open ground of Sangeet Bhavan in Visvabharati premises. It was sculpted in cement concrete based on the tall emaciated figure of Jaya Appasami, a South Indian student of *Kalabhavana*. The scraggy, elongated sculpted figure of a girl stood among the scattered eucalyptus trees like an image of uncanny beauty. Ramkinkar thought of naming it as *Banabala*, that is a girl standing among the trees in a forest. But Nandalal liked to call it *Sujata* as he asked to place a bowl on her head to resemble the girl of the Buddhist myth, who approached the meditating Buddha to offer the saint a pot of sweet rice to break his fast, to associate it with the image of Buddha painted in the opposite wall. *Sujata* may be called the first modernist sculpture of Bengal, where traditional realism was associated with indigenous primitivism.

After this, Ramkinkar created, one by one, his epoch making sculptures that brought a kind of revolution in the modernist sculpture of Bengal and India too. In 1938 he completed the more than life size sculpture *Santhal Family* in the open premises near *Kalabhavana* with the same medium of locally available cement concrete that is the combination of cement and laterite mortar. The sculpture depicts a Santhal couple with their child and a dog also carrying their possessions with them, moving to settle elsewhere to start a new life. In the form there was indigenous primitivism, which was an essential dimension of the modernism that Ramkinkar evolved during the 1930s.

In 1943, he sculpted *Harvester*, the image of a farmer woman thrashing a bunch of paddy. What was unusual in this sculpture was the absence of



'Dog'
Terracotta, 1950's



Bronze



Ramkinkar Baij at Work



Ramkinkar Baij at Work



Ramkinkar Baij at Work, 1939



Ramkinkar Baij at Work, 1939

the head of the working lady. Actually while thrashing paddy her head had leaned back and not visible from the front. Consequently the sculptor did not feel the necessity of depicting it. It was an innovation that added a special dimension to the expression. This was a conceptual idea different from the naturalist approach. With this work, Ramkinkar expressed his feelings about the realities of the famine of 1943. In 1956 he created another epoch making environmental sculpture titled *Mill Call* in the same medium, situated at a distance from the *Santhal Family*. In 1938, he created the abstract portrait of Rabindranath and then again an expressionist portrait of the poet. In 1940, he sculpted *Dandi March*, a full figure portrait of Mahatma Gandhi. *Deepstambha* and *Gati* are two of his abstract sculptures created in 1940 and 1951 respectively. He completed *Yaksha-Yakshi* in the 1960s installed in front of Reserve Bank building at New Delhi, where he used the assimilation of classical and primitive form of Indian sculpture. With all these and many other sculptures of various forms and concepts, Ramkinkar liberated the modernist sculptures of Bengal and India by imparting them with global expansion.

Ramkinkar was also a painter of great originality. He was one of the first after the painter Rabindranath to develop the modernist modes in the paintings of the 1930s and 1940s. We are not going in to the details of it, as we would like to concentrate here on sculpture.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF SCULPTURE OF 1940s

The sculpture of 1940s generally developed out of the social and temporal realities of that decade. In many cases the protest against the moral decay and human suffering was a feature of it. But except for the work of Sonmnath Hore, thematic rebellion was not of that level as was revealed in case of painting. As modernism in sculpture appeared much later than that of painting, the sculptors were more engaged in sorting out the problems concerning the forms of sculpture. They straightaway rejected the extant trend of academic naturalism and tried for an assimilation of Indian classical, primitive and folk sculpture with the Western modern and modernist forms. In many cases, the problem developed out of the lack of proper integration of these diverse elements. So in many cases sculptures by the artists of the forties suffered from lack of coherence. Obviously exceptions were there. We will now look at the works of some of the important sculptors of that decade.

PRADOSH DASGUPTA AND KAMALA DASGUPTA

Both Pradosh and his wife Kamala Dasgupta were founder members of the Calcutta Group formed in the year 1943, the year of the famine. The purpose of forming the Group was to work together for the search of new idioms negating the existing naturalist and revivalist modes in order to rebel against the social degradation. In case of sculpture, revivalism was no issue. But the search of neo-Indian school brought the question of indigenous identity to the fore. In sculpture, many of the artists considered this as appealing. To Pradosh Dasgupta this aspect had some relevance. Kamala mainly worked on portrait sculpture in the realistic style. The problem was less significant to her.

Pradosh Dasgupta (1912-1991) was born in Dacca, at present the capital of Bangladesh in the year 1912. Since childhood he grew up in a cultural environment. His father Nalininath was M.A. in philosophy, a writer and legal practitioner. He worked as judge. Pradosh got the cultural inheritance from him. After graduation from Scottish Church College in 1932 he got admitted to Lucknow Art College and learnt sculpture under Hiranmay Roychowdhury for two years. At that time he took lessons in classical music under Ratanjankar in Morris Music College. From 1934 to 1937 he was a student of Madras Art School and took lessons in sculpture from Debiprasad Roychowdhury. In 1937 he joined Royal Academy of London in its sculpture department. There he made himself conversant with the sculpture of Maillol (1861-1944), Brancusi (1876-1957) and Hans Arp (1866-1961). This modernist trend of Western sculpture appealed to him. In his creations he tried to assimilate it with Indian philosophical ideas.

He returned to Calcutta in 1940 and made his own studio with an unusual name GLYPTOTHER. In 1943, he along with other painters, formed 'Calcutta Group'. The founder members of the group were apart from Pradosh and Kamala – Paritosh Sen, Rathin Maitra, Gopal Ghosh, Subho Thakur, Nirad Majumdar. The other painters, who joined the group later, were Gobardhan Ash, Abani Sen, Sunil Madhab Sen, and Hemanta Mishra. Ramkinkar also participated in the last show of the group in 1953. In 1945 Dasgupta presented his first solo show at Calcutta. In 1950 he joined Baroda University as head of the department of Sculpture. From 1951 to '57 he worked as a professor of sculpture in Govt Art College, Calcutta. In 1957 he joined National Gallery of Modern Art as Curator and retired in 1970. He was totally engaged in creativity from 1940 to 1991 till his death.

His sculptures are mostly figurative, sometimes with stress on positive



'Tree & Twig'
Cement, 1951



Pradosh Dasgupta at Studio



'Jai Hind'
Bronze, 1948



'Untitled'



'Untitled'



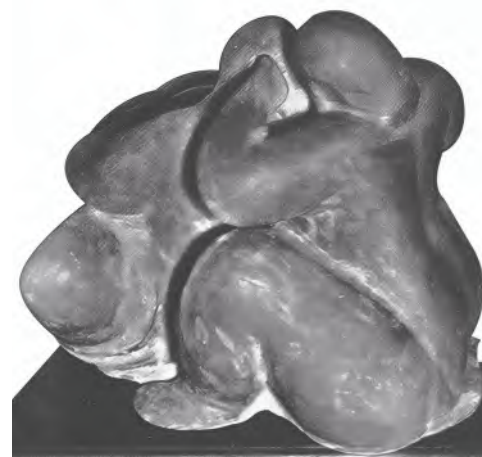
'Toe-point'
Cement, 1951



Cradle
Cement, 1950



'Untitled'



'Picking Lice'
Cement, 1951



'Untitled'



'Women with Bowl'
Bronze, 1970



'Untitled'



'Untitled'



'In Bondage'
Bronze, 1943



Kamala Das Gupta
Portrait of a Girl
Bronze



Kamala Das Gupta
Portrait of Pradosh Das Gupta
Bronze



Cactus Family
Cement, 1953



'Mother & Child Reclining'
Bronze, Edition 3/9, 1976

volume. Very often he addressed some social concern. *In Bondage*, a bronze sculpture of 1943, we see a man seated with folded legs, the hands being turned backward and tied together. *Jai Hind* of 1948 is a procession of rebellious people chanting slogans with raised hands. *Toe Point* is a seated nude lady looking towards her toe. In the fullness of physical volume he tried to convey some sort of sensuousness akin to the Indian ethos. In various points of his life he worked with egg form. In 1948 he created a sculpture titled *Remorse of an Egg*, which was his first experimentation with the egg form. During the 1970s he contemplated his own aesthetic philosophy concerning this form. He considered that this elliptical volume might be the symbolic form of the universe, from which the word 'Bramhanda' of Indian philosophy is derived. Here his forms are often stated to be linked to that of Brancusi, which he, however, does not accept; rather he says, Brancusi was influenced by the concept of fullness of Indian philosophy. Dasgupta's sculptures like *Genesis I* of 1971, *Reclining Eggs* and *Egg Bird* of 1972, *Egg Bride* of 1973 are based on this spatial volume, through which he endeavoured to connect himself with Indian aesthetics. Within the span of eighty years of his life he could devote sixty years to his creativity. He experimented with various forms, where he was concerned with basic abstract geometry. He transformed that abstraction into human-centric and societal themes expressing a positive world outlook.

Kamala Dasgupta (1913-2001) may be considered as the first woman to practice sculpture in modern India. Before marriage with Pradosh Dasgupta, she was known as T.C. Kamala. Her father, Dr. Paduval was a civil surgeon in Madras city. Kamala was admitted to the Madras Govt Art School in July 1934. Here she met Pradosh Dasgupta, who entered the same institution six months before her. Her creativity was limited within portrait sculpture, where she showed considerable skill and sensitivity, which was of such an extent that her husband Pradosh did not hesitate to compare her works to that of French sculptor Charles Despiau (1874-1946).

CHINTAMANI KAR

In an article on Chintamani Kar (1915-2005), Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004) mentioned that 'Indo-Asian synthesis' as the basic concept of his sculpture (in the monograph published by Lalit Kala Academy). Kar expressed his idea about the Indian concept of sculpture in his book published by him in the year 1952 with the following words: 'This ideal of harmonious embodiment of nature in human form did not result from an aversion of the sculptor from flesh or from sensuous appeal in human figure. It was adopted deliberately in an attempt to fuse the material form within the spiritual and cosmic world.' In his sculpture, Kar tried for embodiment of such a spirituality.

Chintamani Kar was born at Kharagpur of West Bengal in 1915. When he was only five he came to Calcutta. He got admitted to the Indian Society of Oriental Art in 1931 to learn painting. Kar was a painter and sculpture in the same fold. He was connected with the ideal of neo-Indian school through his early art education. Kar had the motto to be a sculptor but in Indian Society, its facility was very limited. In 1938 he sojourned to Paris. On 1st October, he reached London, from there proceeded to Paris and got admitted to 'Academie de la Grande Chaumiere' to learn sculpture. He learnt there from Professor Pierre Vlerick (1923-1999), who told him why he had come to Europe to learn sculpture leaving the country of the creators of Shiva, Buddha and Nataraja. This was a great lesson for Kar. In his sculpture he tried for a synthesis of classical and popular Indian sculpture with some essence of Western modernism.

In his bronze of 1960 titled *Heroin* he depicted the image of a seated lady where the simplicity of popular form was expressed in positive volume. The aluminium piece *Buddha* of 1962 was the expression of the serenity of Indian classical sculpture. *Visitation* of 1964 was curved out of wood. It resembled the popular folk toy. The bronze piece, *Cloud Messenger*, reflected the ideals of classical Sanskrit literature. During 1980s and 90s he created five voluminous sculptures, four of which symbolised the four seasons: Summer, Rain, Winter and Spring. These were displayed in Renukut of the Himalayas. At the centre was placed *Sabita and Usha*, a combination of two figures, The Sun god and his wife, around it were placed the women forms representing the four seasons, through which he searched for an indigenous identity.



'Buddha'
Stone



Terracotta, 1947



Bronze, 1987



'Skating The Stag'
Bronze, 1948



'Les Ondines'
Vit. Terracotta, 1963



Bronze



Bronze



'Monolith'
Mahogany Wood, 1962



'Odalisque'
Bronze, 1994

SANKHO CHAUDHURI

Sankho Chaudhuri (1916-2006) was the direct disciple of Ramkinkar at Santiniketan. He once said in an interview to the present scribe about the ideology of his sculpture thus: 'I have tried to exploit the spirit of the industrial age in my work.... I have broken the barrier between art and industry'. He was not much concerned with indigenous identity.



'Untitled'



'Tribute to Bhabeshda'
Bronze, 1992



'Untitled'

Chaudhuri was born in 1916 at Deoghar of Bihar. Their ancestral home was at Pabna district of present Bangladesh. His father Narendranath Chaudhuri was an advocate and scholar in Sanskrit. His mother was Kiranmoyee.. The official name of our sculptor was Naranarayan Chaudhuri. He adopted the name Sankho, which was his family name. He came to Santiniketan at the age of 19 in the year 1935 and learnt under Ramkinkar up to 1945. He presented his first solo exhibition in 1949 at Bombay, where he showed 20 sculptures modelled out of clay and cement. In the same year, he went to Europe. For ten months he stayed in London, and met Henry Moore (1998-1986). From London, he went to Paris and was charmed by Brancusi. There were some classical and folk elements in his sculptures no doubt, as revealed in his terracotta piece *Alhadi* of 1952, *Shinger* in black marble of 1965 and so on. Along with this, he assimilated the 'spirit of industrial age' in the works of his later life, where he used metal sheets and brought out different sculptural forms by cutting and joining.



'Figure'
Wood, 1956



Sudhirranjan Khastagir at Studio

SUDHIRRANJAN KHAstagIR

Sudhirranjan Khastagir (1907-1974) was also a product of Santiniketan at Kalabhavana. He was one year junior to Ramkinkar. He was born on 24 Sept 1907. His father Satyaranjan was an engineer. His mother was Souranalini Devi. In 1929 he came to Santiniketan and learnt under Nandalal Bosu. In sculpture, he took lessons from Liza Von Pot and Marguerite Milward, who visited Kalabhavana in 1928-29.

Later Khastagir learnt stone carving from Kashinath Mhatre (1879-1947) in 1930. He was very proficient in portrait sculpture, created some compositions also. In painting he followed the neo-Indian style, as he was trained under Nandalal, but in sculpture he followed mostly naturalism.



Prabhas Sen
'Fusion'
Glazed Ceramic

PRABHAS SEN

Among the students of Ramkinkar in Kalabhavana, Prabhas Sen (1919-2001) also made an important mark as a modernist sculpture of the 1940s. Apart from his personal creations, he made important contributions in restoring art and casting Ramkinkar's monumental sculptures along with Bipin Goswami. He also contributed towards development of traditional crafts. He was director of Regional Centre of Traditional Crafts, Kolkata and director of Handicrafts Development Corporation. In his own sculpture, he showed textural coarseness and grotesqueness of expression through influence of primitivism.



Prabhas Sen
'Lady Sleeping'
Terracotta

SUNIL KUMAR PAL

Sunil Kumar Pal (1920-2012) was an exceptional sculptor of the forties, who devotedly practiced forms to evolve indigenous identity. He should have been specially honoured for this. He was a very devoted teacher also.

He was born in Simla Palli of Calcutta. His father was Satyapriya Pal and mother Nalinibala Devi. He got admitted to Govt Art School, Calcutta in 1935, when Mukul Dey was Principal. He created many portrait sculptures. One of his seminal works was the relief sculptural panel that he created on the life of Mahatma Gandhi at Barrackpur Gandhighat. In contemporary sculpture, he was a traditional modernist.

SOMNATH HORE

In the proper sense of the term, Somnath Hore (1921-2006) was an artist of the 1940s as the famine of 1943 and the Japanese bombing at Chittagong (during the second world war) were the main motive forces in development of his artistic creativity and world outlook that he expressed in a word 'Wound'. His principal contribution to Indian modernist art was his innovations in graphical print making. Apart from that, he was a great sculptor also, though he was late to come to this field. He started sculpture only in 1974, when he was teaching graphic art in *Kalabhavana*, Santiniketan. He was hesitant to call his three dimensional works as sculptures, as he thought they lacked the volume, mass and other necessary characteristics of sculptures. He liked to call them 'bronzes'.

He started his creative career through the influence of the Communist Party during the 1940s. In this connection, he came in contact with Chittaprasad and considered him as his mentor. In later life he did not continue the membership of the Party, yet he never lost faith in Marxist ideology. He said in an interview with this scribe: 'Why even a single person will remain unfed and unsheltered, while there would be so much wastage of wealth? This is the essence of Marxism'. This was also the root of his ideology of 'Wound'.

In 1975, when Vietnam came out victorious against America in their long aggression, Hore in celebration created a bronze titled *Mother and Child*. The mother with her contorted body holds a child tightly on her lap. The sculpture was unfortunately stolen by miscreants on the night just after it had been finished. His seminal bronze titled *Footpath 1943* or *Pather Panchali* that he sculpted between 1989 and '91 perfectly expressed how he was involved with the tragedy of the famine of 1943. Through his bronzes he continuously expressed his protests against torture by man on woman. *Shakuni Disrobing Draupadi*, *Hounded Draupadi*, *The Disrobed*, *The Molested* are some such pieces. Through his rebellion, Hore highlighted the tragic situation of the contemporary world.



Sunil Kumar Pal
'Abanindranath Tagore'
Bronze



Somenath Hore
Rabindranath
Bronze



'Footpath 1943' or 'Pather Panchali'
Bronze, 1989-91



'Mother and Child'
Bronze, 1975-77



'Compassion'
Homage to Jahanara Imam
Bronze



'Untitled'



'Untitled'



'Untitled'



'Dog'
Bronze, 1985



'Shakuni Disrobing Draupadi'
Bronze, 1995

MEERA MUKHERJEE

Meera Mukherjee (1923-1998) created an alternative form of expression in modernist sculpture not only of Bengal or India but of the world. Her sculptural forms do not follow the general trends of modernist expressions like expressionist or cubist distortions or existential angst as revealed in the works of Edward Munch, Picasso, Ramkinkar, Prabhas Sen or Somnath Hore but creates an opposite mode of positive world view. No doubt her forms imbibe rebellion and primitivism that are the necessary characteristics of modernism, but those are of a different category. She could connect her modernism with traditional indigenous identity, which was the dictum of Abanindranath and neo-Indian school but in an entirely different way. She explored the possibility contained in primitive technique of lost wax casting process that are being followed since primitive period and are still practiced by aboriginal tribal craftsmen, now well known as *dhokra* process of metal casting. She heightened that down to earth form and technique towards a kind of spiritual transcendence, where sobriety and sonority of classical music act as a noble means of expression. In that way her sculptural forms reveal primitivism, classicism, lyricism, expressionist rebellion, folk and feminine sonorousness in the same fold. In that sense Meera was an exceptional and out of the way sculptor within the domain of modernism of Bengal and India.

She was born on the 12th of May 1923 at Kolkata. Her father was Dwijendramohan Mukherjee and mother Binapani Devi. Since her childhood, she was imaginative and fascinated by the beauty of nature. In 1937 at the age of fourteen she was admitted to the 'Indian Society of Oriental Art' to learn painting. But she was not satisfied with the process of their training. She also rejected the ideology of the neo-Indian school. Then after a failed marriage that took place in 1941, she had to shift to Delhi, when she took admission in Delhi Polytechnic; learnt there from 1947 to 1951 and got a diploma in painting, graphics and sculpture. Completing the course of Delhi Polytechnic she had to go to Santiniketan, where she came in contact with the Indonesian artist Affandi (1907-1990), to whom she learnt how to see and express.

She went to Germany in 1953 with a scholarship of the Indo-German co-operation scheme and got admitted in 'Academie der Bildenden Kunst'. She preferred the stream of sculpture, as she had great reverence for physical labour. She learnt sculpture under Tony Stadlar (1888-1982), who advised her that belonging to India, the land of great sculptors, it was not necessary for her to come to Germany to be trained in sculpture.. This



Meera Mukherjee at Kasauli



'Untitled'
Bronze



'Buddha in Badamtam'
Bronze



'Untitled'
Bronze



'Untitled'
Bronze



'Untitled'
Bronze



'Alap'
Bronze



'Ashok in Kalinga'
Bronze



'Untitled'
Bronze



Portrait of Nirmal Sen Gupta
Bronze



Mother and Child
Metal, 1978
Collection and Courtesy Adip Dutta



Sahodar(Brothers),
Metal, 1992
Collection and Courtesy Adip Dutta



'Student'
Bronze



'Untitled'
Bronze



'Untitled'
Bronze



'Untitled'
Bronze



'Untitled'
Bronze



Flute Seller
Bronze
Image Courtesy: Subir Dasgupta



'Untitled'
Bronze



'Untitled'
Bronze



'Untitled'
Bronze



'Untitled'
Bronze



'Untitled'
Bronze



'Shilawanti'
Bronze



'Shilawanti'
Bronze

opened her eyes. She returned to the country after four years completing her education there. For the next four years, she served in different educational institutions and with a strong discontentment searched for her own way through constant endeavours. In 1960, she got a chance to go to Baster and to come in contact with the Gharua tribes. She earnestly tried to work with them and learn their technique and aesthetics of expression. She encountered the working process of other tribal craftsmen also, learnt their casting process. Then she visited South India and worked there with traditional classical sculptors. In the middle of the 1960s, she could arrive at her own forms and techniques based on tribal and classical sculptural norms. She had her first exhibition of sculpture in 1966 at Chemould Gallery of Kolkata.

Her victorious journey with sculpture in her own form started there. She was an avid practitioner of music. She also trained herself in the village art of embroidery and 'nakshi-kantha', which was also a formal element of her sculpture. She used it as texture in the surface of her works. Her sculptural forms and expressions can be categorised in a few divisions, such as: expression of existential reality of the working people; the mythical themes; rebellion against the ills and blemishes of life; visual forms of musical expressions and transcendental spirituality.

Through all these different trends, she expressed the totality of her existential and spiritual vision; where love for life was the supreme reality. Meera Mukherjee thus heightened her sculptural form towards transcendental reality.

We often forget about the contribution of **Leela Mukherjee** (1916-2002) as a sculptor of the first generation of modernists. She was a student of Santinikan *Kalabhavana* and learnt sculpture under Ramkinkar. After her marriage with the celebrated artist, Binodbehari Mukherjee, when they went to Nepal, she took training under Kulasundar Shilakarmi, a traditional Nepalese sculptor. She worked persistently since 1949 and made eight solo exhibitions. Until 1980 she used to carve wood, and then she shifted to modelling from wax and casting in bronze. There was a kind of inwardness in her figurative sculptures influenced by primitivism.

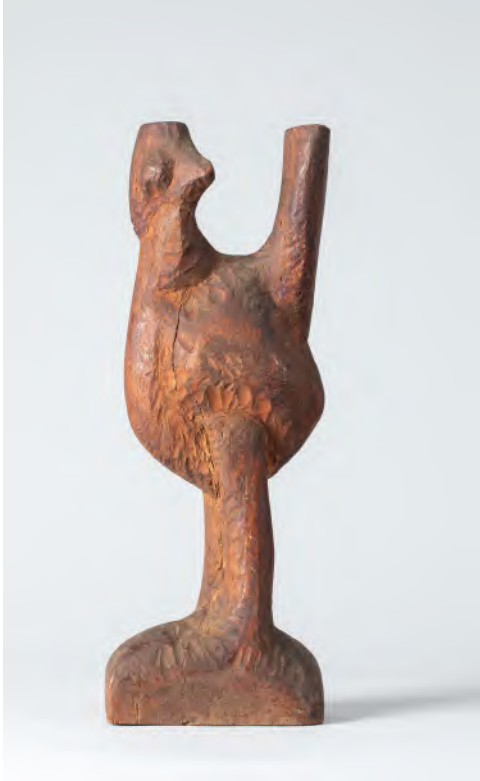


Meera Mukherjee
Bronze

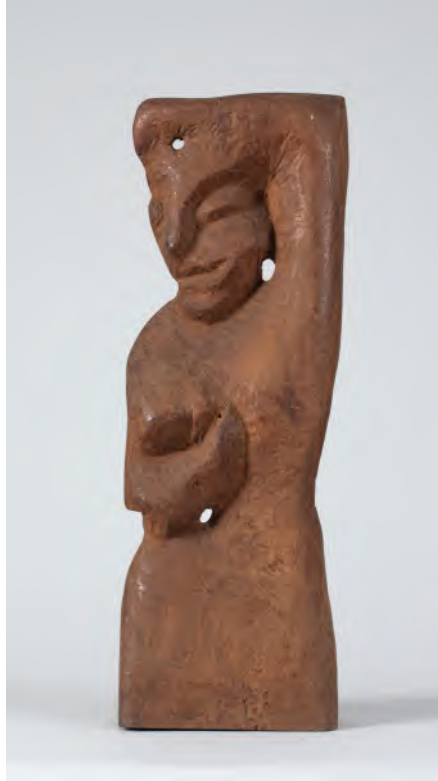
Image Courtesy: Abhrajit Mitra & Sreela Mitra



Leela Mukherjee



'Bird - I'
Wood, 18 x 9 x 48cm
Courtesy of Vadehra Art Gallery and
Mrinalini Mukherjee Foundation



'Female Figure With Hand Over Head'
Wood, 22 x 10 x 64 cm
Courtesy of Vadehra Art Gallery and
Mrinalini Mukherjee Foundation



'Intertwined Figures - V'
Wood, 20 x 18 x 85 cm
Courtesy of Vadehra Art Gallery and
Mrinalini Mukherjee Foundation



'Reclining Figure - I'
Wood, 53 x 15 x 7 cm
Courtesy of Vadehra Art Gallery and Mrinalini Mukherjee Foundation

Though primarily well known as a painter the celebrated Santiniketan based artist, **K.G. Subramanyan** (1924-2016) made immense contribution to the field of sculpture also. His terracotta mural at Ravindralaya, Lucknow, done in 1963, is an enlightened venture in execution of relief murals in contemporary India. Among his other terracotta relief works like *Bathers*, *Generals and Trophy* of 1971, *Fishes and Fossils* of 1976, *Wardrobe Drama* of 1978 and many others are replete with humour and empathy towards life.



'Hunter'
Terracotta Relief, 1971

The above sculptors played a significant role in generating the modernist form in sculpture where search for an indigenous identity played a significant role. They tried for an assimilation of the local with global. Many of them entered into the socio-temporal reality, analysed it and then transformed this into transcendence reflecting the enlightened aesthetic wisdom of the past. The next generation of sculptors were highly inspired by their achievements.



Janak Jhankar Narzari
Monument to Huang He/Yellow River
Black Granite on Pink Base
China, 2015

THE SECOND GENERATION OF MODERNIST SCULPTORS 1960s and 1970s

EMERGENCE OF MODERNISM DURING 1930s

INTRO

It has often been thought that the exuberance in sculptural activities since the early history of our country, as also in other civilisations, has posed a problem to the present artists. It has been difficult for them to overcome that memory to create something new or unique. Uma Siddhanta is an important sculptor among the second generation of modernists. After Meera Mukherjee, as a woman sculptor, she has made a significant contribution in the sculptural field of Bengal. Once in one of her solo shows, while in a casual conversation with this scribe, she expressed such a view. But the problem may not be that serious, as she herself hinted at a solution. Sensibility of every individual human is unique. So his or her expression also contains something exclusive. That exclusiveness contains the possibility of resurrection. This is the way by which the art proceeds.

S. Nandagopal (1946-2017) was a major sculptor from Tamilnadu. He also once dealt with the problem in more or less a similar way but indicated the solution differently. In an article titled *Art and Development* published in the journal 'Lalit Kala Contemporary' No. 35, September 1987, he had written: 'In the third world, the ancient past is still a part of the contemporary experience. It lives on in the way we see things, do things and conceive things. But the modes of seeing, doing and conceiving are changing with the technological and institutional changes that are taking place in our countries'. Through these changes, he felt, contemporary creativity is paving its way towards newer possibilities.

But the problem often turns more acute. The second generation of modernist sculptors of Bengal, on whose creativity we are going to throw some light in this chapter, were at the formative period in the decades of 1950s and '60s, when the country had achieved independence from the colonial foreign rule and was in a formative stage as a free nation. So there were dreams and expectations of developments and progress. But the dream

did not last long. With the advance of 1960s the crude face of reality was gradually exposing. The project of planned development of Jawaharlal Nehru did not cut much ice. Nobody paid any heed to Gandhian concept of development. After the completion of two five years plan there was indication of some development in the general condition of the people. But that did not last long. The poverty increased. The social unrest also escalated. The wealthy turned richer, the poor poorer.

Whither fled that growth? Oppression of the colonial agencies now turned into the exploitation by the capitalist forces and mechanisms. During 1960s and '70s, political movements and protests went on increasing. These were reflected in the creativity of the artists and literary writers. In case of visual arts, it was more prominent and violent in painting than in the works of sculptors. The works of the painters like Prakash Karmakar, Ganesh Pyne, Bikash Bhattachary, Jogen Chowdhury and others expressed the rebellion exceedingly. The sculptors' response was subtle, iconic and symbolic due to the nature of their medium. But the insurgence and unrest against anarchy was revealed there also.

To the sculptors, the search for proper and relevant forms was not an easy task. They had to concentrate more on that problem of proper form. The nation has such a vast enlightened tradition, Western experiments were so engrossing, and primitives were coming to the fore. Out of these sparkles, it was difficult to make a choice. This is what Uma Siddhanta mentioned earlier. But gradually, the confusion settled itself. The sculptors of the forties created some important avenues. That also had some positive and negative aspects. But ultimately the sculptors of the second generation very successfully sorted out the problem and created committed forms delving deeper into tradition and modernity. In this chapter we will try to explore that journey. Most of the sculptors of the second generation learnt their craft and mode of expression from their teachers, who happened to be the sculptors of the first generation like Ramkinkar at Kalabhavana, Pradosh Dasgupta, Chintamani Kar and Sunil Kumar Pal at Govt College of Art and Craft, Calcutta, Shankha Chowdhury at Baroda and so on.

PRADOSH DASGUPTA AND HIS STUDENTS

Pradosh Dasgupta joined as teacher in the sculpture department of Govt College of Art and Craft in 1951. He taught there up to 1957. At the end part of his life in 1991 he organised an exhibition at Birla Academy of

Kolkata titled 'Three Generations of Sculptors' from 6th to 21st of April. Apart from himself, a large number of his students participated in that show. We will try to cast an intimate look at that exhibition to have an idea about some sculptors of the second generation. Dasgupta himself wrote an introduction to the catalogue of that show. There he expressed his feelings about his students: 'When I was a professor in the Govt Art College, Calcutta between 1951 and 1957, I organised the sculptor department of the institution from its very roots. I tried to help my students whole heartedly. Within a short period I noticed many of my students had achieved the rare power to realise the basic aesthetics of sculpture and express them in form and structure. This sculpture department earned all India fame within 1955 and many of my students were appreciated by the press and their works were published.' He also added that the art critic of the news paper 'Statesman' marked the success of the students as 'Sculptural Renaissance'. Among the students of Dasgupta, who participated in that show, the seniormost was Haranchandra Ghosh. He was born in 1927. He had two works. The first one titled *Inclined Torso* of size 90x30 cm was carved from wood. From a cylindrical wooden piece of circular cross section, a minimum portion was cut away to extract the form of the torso of a reclining lady. The work could transcend the classical beauty of a feminine body despite maintaining the characteristic of wood. Here was the success of the work. We may also notice here the assimilation of indigenous classicism with Western modernist attitude. Ghosh's second work was titled *Mother and Child*. It was constructed out of cement and in the exposition of the volume, there was abstraction of the reality. The two works of Gostha Kumar (1932) made of brass were titled *Vishnu Ganapati and Gopal Ganapati*. The physical figure of the mythical god was geometrically transformed to bring a sense of divinity or godliness along with perception of modernist form. Gostha kumar was always involved with the form of the mythical god Ganesha in most of his works.

The two works of **Subal Chandra Saha** (b. 1933) was titled *Victim1 and Victim2*. The first one was of terracotta revealing the expressionist face of a woman. The second one modelled out of cement was the image of a bird. Both the works revealed some sort of existential crisis. The bronze piece of Ranen Dutta (1933) titled *The Apple* revealed the form of an evolving fruit. It expressed the intrinsic life force of nature. The two works of Shankar Ghosh (1934-2020) titled *Reclining and Torso* analysed the internal rhythm of a female body in angular geometry to express the existential crisis in aesthetic splendour. A terracotta and wood of Samaresh Chowdhury (1934), titled *Mother and Child*, worked with elliptical form. Through the conglomeration of volume and void he transformed the physicality of



Subal Chandra Saha



Subal Chandra Saha

a standing lady into simplified and serene abstraction indicating intimate aesthetic magnificence.

Through intimate observation of the above works, we can have an idea of the nature of structure of forms and themes that the second generation of sculptors used to practice. Apart from the above artists there were other important representatives of the second generation like Ajit Chakraborty (1930-2005), Uma Siddhanta (1933-2025), Madhab Bhattacharya (1930-2020), Raghunath Singha (1933-?), Sarbari Roychowdhury (1933-2012), Bipin Goswami (1934-2019) and Manik Talukdar (1944-2019).

STUDENTS OF CHINTAMANI KAR

Chintamani Kar returned from Europe in 1956 and joined Govt College of Art and Craft, Calcutta as Principal in the same year. Up to 1973 he was in this position. Many of his students came out as successful sculptors of the second generation. Among them there were sculptors like Debebrata Chakraborty, Anit Ghosh, Madhusudan Chakraborty, Jugal Chandra Pal, Niranjana Pradhan, Biman Das, Dilip Saha, Sanjay Das, Madhusudan Chatterjee, Asesh Mitra, Surajit Das, Biaksh Debnath and Karabi Ghosh. Kar under his leadership formed an organisation called 'Sculptors' Guild' in 1960, where all his students were members. After the first group show in 1960 the Guild organised their second group show with the works of the above sculptors in 1967 from 26 April to 10 May. The news paper 'Hindustan Standard' wrote in a review of the show published on 30 April: 'We in Calcutta seldom see such well mounted shows as the second open air sculpture show by the present and past students of Chintamani Kar and by Kar himself, now being held at the garden of Govt Art College, Calcutta'.

The Guild organised seven exhibitions, the first being held in 1960 at Calcutta and the seventh at AIFACS, Delhi in 1972 from 24 February to 1 March. In the catalogue of the exhibition, it was written that: 'The Sculptors Guild' was formed by a group of young students of Calcutta in the year 1960 with the objective to cultivate and propagate the art of sculptures in India. The Guild was a good platform for exposure of the above sculptors of the second generation; it was also, an organisational debut of the sculpture of Bengal.

STUDENTS OF RAMKINKAR AND DEVIPRASAD

At Santiniketan, under the guidance of Ramkinkar many of his students made great achievements during and after 1960-s. Among them there were Sushen Ghosh, Janak Jhankar Narzari, who contributed extensively towards development of sculpture in Bengal and India after 1960. All the sculptors mentioned above belong to the second generation.

Apart from them, Phulchand Pyne learnt under Debiprasad Roychowdhury at Madras Art College. Out of all these sculptors, we will highlight details of some of them to have an idea of the nature of work and achievements of the second generation of sculptors of Bengal.

HIGHLIGHTS OF SOME SCULPTORS OF THE SECOND GENERATION

Ajit Chakraborty (1930-2005) was sculptor and painter in the same fold. In painting, he was spontaneous and lyrically free-flowing. There he stressed on emotional gracefulness. In sculpture, he was more structural with emphasis on pure form accentuating a tension between the natural and the abstract. In his own words, as he mentioned in the album of the 'Society of the Contemporary Artists 1960-1991': 'In sculpture, I feel inclined to the unending quest of three-dimensional tactility in order to ensure the impact of form' Chakraborty was born in Chattogram, a city of present Bangladesh. He took his primary education in art from Govt College of Art and Craft and came out in 1954. There his training in sculpture was under Pradosh Dasgupta. Then he went to Czechoslovakia in 1958. At Prague, he learnt sculpture under Jan Kavan (1905-1986), who was a student of Jan Stura (1880-1925). Stura learnt sculpture under Rodin and Aristid Maillol. Thus Chakraborty indirectly inherited the modernist tradition of French sculpture through his education. In his own sculptural creations he is observed to have a strong base in academic realism. On that base he used to transform his form towards expressionist and fantasy oriented abstraction. He also mentioned his inspiration from our temple sculpture, also the intrinsic strength and vigour of primitive and tribal sculpture. In his own works there is an assimilation of all these factors. In 1983 he showed a wood sculpture at Jahangir Art Gallery, Mumbai titled *Hero with Spear*. In the image of a standing soldier his abstraction of form highlighted the inconsequence of violence. Among his innumerable important sculptures, mention may be made of *Holy Aviation of Garura* (bronze), *Bansai* (eboni wood), *Seleimoleto* (wood 1969), *Torso* (wood, 1971), where along with pu-



Wood



Bronze



Terracotta



Ceramic



Bronze, 1997

rity of form he adopted some humanitarian themes. He was a member of 'Society of Contemporary Artists' since 1961 and professor of sculpture at Visvabharati *Kalabhavana* till the end of his life. He rose to the position of Principal and for the time being Vice-chancellor of Visvabharati.

Phulchand Pyne (1933-2000) was the student of Debiprasad Roychowdhury at Govt Art College, Madras. Before going there, he learnt at Indian Art College of Kolkata. At that time, for a short period, Ajit Chakraborty was his teacher. He learnt the technique of academic realism from Debiprasad and Prof. Panikkar of the same art college inspired him towards modernist trend. At the early stage Pyne's works were based on realism. With skill over this realism he transformed his works towards modernist modes, where the tension between the volume and the void created through geometrical angular linearity could generate an original aesthetic sensibility. A bronze piece titled *The Face* of 1960-61 revealed these qualities. The work was displayed in a show at London Commonwealth Institute in 1986, where it was written about his work: 'according to him thought is irrelevant in sculpture. It is only accuracy of technique that is primarily important'. Despite such a remark, it is not true that there is any dearth of thought or sensibility in his works. Rather gradually he reached towards a philosophical transcendence. In his modernist works he had a search towards aesthetic qualities of Indian sculpture. The owl was a very favourite subject of his sculpture. Within the distortion and simplification of form of this subject he could bring a synthesis between darkened and enlightened sensibility through synthesis of modernism and classicism.



Terracotta



Terracotta



'The Owl'
Brass



Terracotta
1973



Terracotta



Terracotta



Terracotta

About the works of **Sarbari Roy Choudhury** (1933-2012) K.G. Subramanian once remarked that there were two trends in his sculptures. One was the portraits of great musicians like Bade Ghulam Ali, Ali Akbar Khan or Kesarbai and others, where he was very objective and realistic. In the other trend, he used to start from a 'non-objective object' and gradually transform it towards objectivity. (Ref. *Indian Sculpture Today* published by Jahangir Art Gallery 1983. Page 49). Roy Choudhury had great attraction for music from which he used to absorb aesthetic inspiration. He once said: 'Sculpture or painting, in every art there is music. Once I turned mad to look at Nataraj at Ellora. I myself started dancing' (Pratikshan, Sanskriti sankhya, 1986). Sarbari was admitted to Government Art College in 1951. Even before that he started to learn under Pradosh Dasgupta. He passed out from Art College in 1956. From 1957 to 1960 he learnt under Sankho Chaudhuri at Baroda. In 1962 he had gone to Florence. In Europe, he came in contact with Henry Moore, Giacometti, Marino Marini and absorbed their trends of abstraction. Even after that, returning from Europe when he met Ramkinkar at Santinikan, he was charmed by his virtuosity and intense sensibility of his works. In his own words, his search was towards assimilation of indigenous sculptural traditions with global modernist and existential characteristics.



Sarbari Roy Chowdhury



'Head'
Bronze



'Standing Women'
Bronze
1960



'Siddheshwari Devi'
Bronze, 1973



'Kiss'
1975



'Ajanta'
Bronze, 1973



'Untitled'

Raghunath Singha (1933-) stressed on indigenous primitivism in his sculpture. He used to look at his sculpture as the extension of life. He transformed intrinsic feeling into a form and reflected in it some truth of life. Such was the concept of his sculpture. His primary education in sculpture was under Pradosh Dasgupta in Govt College of Art, Calcutta. After passing out from there in 1955, he had gone to Baroda in 1958 and completed the course there in 1960. He had gone to Italy and worked under Emilio Greco at Naples during 1963-64. Yet he used to say he did not learn anything from there. He travelled extensively within the country and collected his concept from various sources. So indigenous sensibility was inextricably linked to his works. His sculptural executions often appeared very simple. He took up a cylindrical wooden log of circular cross section, brought a form out of it through minimum subtraction, added a few iron ring and other ornaments to it and captioned it as *Arjun* or *Bhishma*. This is an example of his creation. He was very skilled in naturalist rendering but took the path of simplification to touch the chord of original sensibility reflecting the aesthetic wisdom of his own land.



Raghunath Singha



Raghunath Singha
'Fish'
Glazed Ceramic, 1974

Uma Siddhanta (1933-2025) is a celebrated name as a sculptor of the 1960-s. After Meera Mukherjee of the previous generation, as a woman sculptor, Siddhanta has marked a significant imprint. She is also a student of Pradosh Dasgupta at Govt Art College, Calcutta and passed out from there in 1956. At the initial stage, her works used to reflect some influence of her mentor, Dasgupta, but gradually she could come out of it. There is reflection of multiple visions in form and concept of her sculpture but one aspect was constant. That was her commitment to life and humanism. She had some inclination towards primordial forms and used to transform them to reflect contemporary existential conditions. She used to deal with the contradiction with the positive and negative aspects of life and tried to



Uma Siddhanta
Bronze

show how humanity resurrects itself out of the enveloping darkness. One of her sculptures titled *Mother and Child* was installed at Jatin Das Park in South Calcutta. It was considered as one of the important outdoor environmental sculptures of Kolkata and appreciated by connoisseurs. It was unfortunately removed from there during the construction of the Metro railway. For a long time she was Professor in art and craft department of 'Shree Shikshayatan' of Kolkata. She received the Presidents award for her contribution in educational research.



'Rhythm'
Bronze, 1980-1989

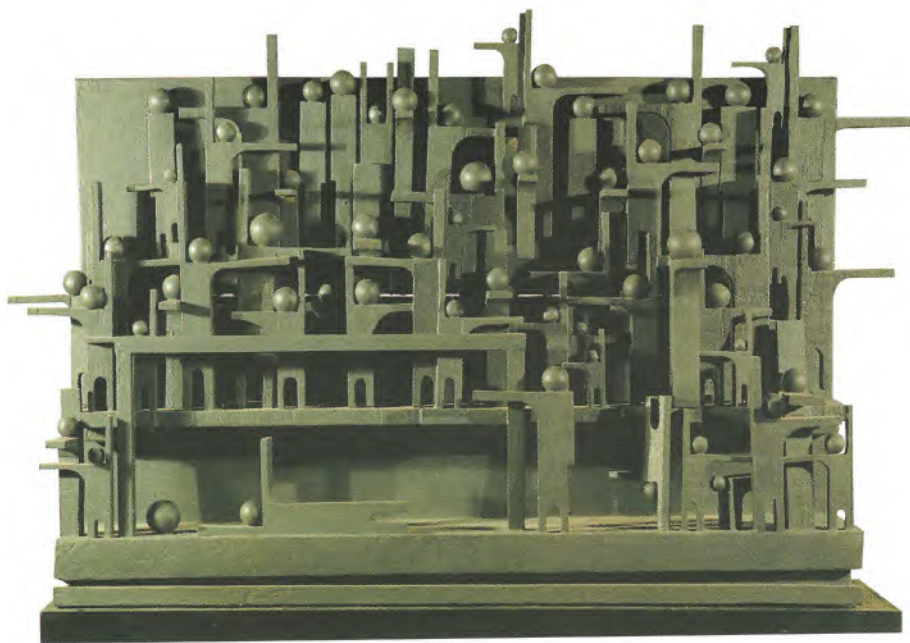


'Mahakaal'
Bronze, 1970-1979

Madhab Bhattacharya (1933-1920) was also a student of Pradosh Dasgupta at Govt Art College, Calcutta. After passing out from there he went to Baroda in 1959-60. There his teachers were Shankha Chowdhury in sculpture and N.S. Bendre and K.G. Subanmanian in painting. Sarbari Roychowdhury and Raghunath Singh were his colleagues there. At the initial stage during the 1960-s, there was social consciousness in his works. He worked with the female torso, experimented with geometry of convexity and concavity of the body. Then he came to the life of urban people and expressed the pleasures, pains and complexity of existence. His media and forms changed. During the later part he worked with transparent media like acrylic sheets, Perspex etc and formed them in geometrical abstraction. There was some originality in his expression at that stage.



'Untitled'



'Football Game'
Wood, 1965



'Musical Note'
Bronze, 1960



Bronze

The Santiniketan based sculptor **Sushen Ghosh** (1940-2023) contributed immensely in the post-sixties sculpture of Bengal and India. He introduced a kind of minimalist form of abstraction based on physical features of humans and other objects. A physical form is there; he takes its geometrical construction and transforms that geometry into his sculpture. This is really unique in modernist sculptural development in India. He was born in Assam and passed his childhood there. In 1959 he got admitted to Kalabhavana of Visvabharati and learnt under Ramkinkar and Binodbehari Mukherjee. In his initial work, there was the influence of Ramkinkar in form and expression. He passed from Kalabhavana in 1963, went to London in 1969 and was admitted to London Goldsmith College. There he had the privilege to learn under Henry Moore and was inspired by the works of Matisse, Paul Klee and Cezanne. Returning, he joined Kalabhavana as teacher and was attached to the institution till retirement. His exposure to the global art scene during modernist and post-modern stage inspired him to create something new in formal approach to sculpture and he did it very successfully. His sculptures are examples of classist-minimalist and transcendental abstraction, where his achievements are unparalleled.



'Untitled'
Bronze



'Untitled'
Bronze



'Elevated (Vertical)'
Bronze, 1970-75



Plaster



Janak Jhankar Narzari
'Monument to River Culture - I
Painted Steel



Janak Jhankar Narzari
'Duel Identity of Woman'
Bronze



Kiran Barua

Janak Jhankar Narzari (1948) is another Santiniketan based sculptor, who also hailed from Assam. After graduation in the general stream, he came to Santiniketan and joined Kalabhavana in the visual arts stream. He is a person of many qualities, proficient in, apart from art, in music, theatre and literary activities. After graduation from Visvabharati, he went to Baroda and completed MFA in sculpture from there in the year 1974. In 1978, he joined as a teacher at Visvabharati Kalabhavana in the stream of Art history. As he had no institutional degree in art history, he completed a course in that stream from Boston University of America under Fullbright scholarship in the year 1981-82 and secured his PhD in the year 1989.

In the beginning, Narzari also had some influence of Ramkinkar in his works. At Baroda, he shifted from conventional norms of sculpture to scrap metal fabrication, which was a new form in the early seventies. Gradually he expanded his forms and concepts. He created installation based environmental sculpture, where he dealt with the grand expansion of life force in the larger universe in a symbolised form. He experimented with the germination of crops from seeds and plant life in sculptural form. The feminine consciousness, her position in the flow of life has also been a concept and subject in Narzari's sculpture. He has thus expanded the scope of sculpture in the above three directions. He has created monumental installation based environmental sculptures in different regions of the country and abroad.

Two other Santiniketan based women sculptors are Kiran Barua and Kiran Dixit Thacker.

Kiran Barua (1924-1997) was born in a small village in Assam in 1924. Part of her education was in Gouripur estate in Goalpara district, where she received home education in the royal family of Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua. Finally she enrolled herself at Kalabhavana in 1943. Kiran with her natural aptitude towards clay modelling was keen on pursuing sculpture. Nandalal put her under the mentorship of Ramkinkar. She completed her studies in 1947 was student of Kalabhavana from 1943 to 1947. She learnt under Ramkinkar She visited Paris and other European countries in 1951. She was accepted as a trainee in the studio of Ossip Zadkin in Paris. In Kolkata she continued to work at home and taught in several schools as Modern High School, Ballyganj Shikshasadan and Path Bhavana as Art Teacher. She had mainly dealt with human form.

Kiran Dixit Thacker also based in Santiniketan completed her diploma in art education from Kalabhavana, Visva-Bharati in 1969. She had her diploma in Fine Arts acquiring the position first class second. Before that she graduated with honours in Philosophy from Visva-Bharati in the year 1965. Then she went to England and underwent several academic and art oriented courses there. Her sculptures display an analytical understanding of both Eastern and Western artistic trends. Her works are mostly figurative with simplicity of form. About her works she says: "Although at heart and in my soul I am an Indian, most of my visual and observational skill was acquired in the West". She created symbolic forms of movements. Cyclist girls are one of the prominent themes of her sculptures. Her recent show at Birla Academy, Kolkata in April 2025 titled 'Glimpses of Santiniketan' revealed how she transformed the ideals of Ramkinkar, her mentor at Santiniketan, towards the contemporary values.



'Procession'
Sheet Metal Fabricated



'Santhal Family'
Scrap Metal

Bipin Goswami (1934-2019) was a teacher of sculpture in Kalabhavana, Santiniketan but he cannot be termed as purely Santiniketan based as his art education was in Calcutta under Pradosh Dasgupte. In his sculptures, he adopted folk based primitive forms to express the existential turmoil of human life. At a certain stage, he was inspired by the form of Kalighat painting and adopted it in his sculpture. Expression of grotesque fun and jocularly through inordinate volume was a trend of his sculpture through which he often expressed the existential crisis. His other contribution was that he organised his resources to fabricate the bronze replicas of the sculptures of Ramkinkar.



'Mother and Child'
Bronze, 2003



'Babu'
Wood (Mehagoni), 2005



'Mother and Child'
Bronze, 2003



'Babu'
Wood (Mehagoni), 2005



Bronze



'Flower Girl Standing'
Bronze



'Babu'
Bronze

Shankar Ghosh (1934-2020) was an important personality among the second generation of modernist sculptors of Bengal and India. He was a direct disciple of Pradosh Dasgupta. He started his art education in Indian Art College in 1951. But after one year, he finally joined Government Art College, Calcutta in 1952 and finished his course in 1957. In painting, he had Gopal Ghosh as his teacher. He was also trained under veteran painter Dilip Dasgupta, famous for his ingeniousness in water colour. But in sculpture, he owes a lot to Pradosh Dasgupta. In some of his early works, one can trace his mentor's influence. But gradually he came to his own style. His search for beauty was always human-centric. He has seldom gone abstract. Even in a few instances when he experimented with the abstract, he has taken his cue from the living form. Vitalism, geometricism and constructivism are three characteristics of modern sculpture. Ghosh, like most of the sculptors of his generation and his predecessors was committed to vitalism. The flow of life and its emotions have always been the motive force behind his creation. His works emanate very subtle passion and love for life. A serene beauty mingled with sonorous compassion was an important characteristic of his expression. Conflict and turmoil were very rare in his works, but subtle and rhythmic drama was there. A serene classical sensibility may be said to be the prime characteristic of his works.



'Tribal Couple'
Bronze



'Couple - II'
Bronze



'Thinker'
Bronze



'Baul'
Bronze



'Music Band'
Bronze



'Prasadhan'
Bronze



'Samrat'
Bronze



'Sitting Lady - III'
Bronze



'Parkour'
Bronze



'Looking Far'
Bronze



'Flower Lady'
Bronze



'Why Kill'
Bronze



'Lovers - III'
Bronze



Mother & Child - XI
Bronze



'Old Man'
Bronze



'Reclining Lady - II'
Bronze



'Family of Four'
Bronze



Debabrata Chakraborty
'Problem with The Queen'
Bronze, 1983



Debabrata Chakraborty
'Turmoil'
Bronze, 2002

Debabrata Chakraborty (1935-) had both Pradosh Dasgupta and Chinatmony Kar as his teachers in Govt Art Collage, Calcutta. He passed out in 1959. He considered Rodin as his ideal in sculpture. Human beings and humanism were his inspirations. He experimented extensively in fibre glass. A few examples of his important sculptures are *Man on the Moon* of 1970, *Folk of Men* of 1971 both in fibre; *Our Leader and We* of 1977 done in bronze, *Cobbler* and *Towards Outer Space* of 1977, *Problem with Queen* and *Cinema Cue* of 1983 and *Spring* of 1988 and so on. In 1980 he made a large outdoor sculpture titled *Students*, 20 ft high and 20 ft wide that was installed in the open premises in Jadavpur University. It was constructed in fibre glass. Three male and two female students were shown in movement. It was one of his public sculptures indicating uniqueness in form and concept.



Surajit Das at Studio

Surajit Das (1935-) was a student of Chintamani Kar in Govt Art College and passed out in 1959. Social and temporal reality was an important characteristic of his sculpture. Expressionist realism was a prime aspect of his executions. His works in bronze of the 1980s like *Stray Dog*, *Morning Walk*, *Modern Lady*, *Street Urchin* reveal this trend. Also his works like *Meditation*, *Padipisi* in terracotta, *Rabindranath* done in marble in 1992 and installed at Jalpaiguri, *Middle Class Couple* in fibre glass, *Ramkrishna* of March 1993 are a few of his major works.

SECOND GENERATION: SCULPTORS OF 1970s

The sculptors, who have been highlighted above belong to the decade of the 1960s. They were mostly born between 1930 and 1940. The next group of sculptors of the same second generation may be categorised as the sculptors of the 1970s. They were born mostly in the decade of the 1940s and came to the limelight during the 1970s. Barring a few exceptions, the second generation may be classified in these two temporal catagories. The following sculptors, in most part, the students of Chintamani Kar and Sunil Kumar Pal in Govt Art College come under the first group: Niranjana Pradhan, Biman Das, Anit Ghosh, Dilip Saha, Manik Talukdar, Madhusudan Chatterjee, Sanjay Das, Kabari Ghosh and Jugal Pal. Apart from them there are Bipul Kanti Saha and Tarak Garai of Santiniketan. We will now highlight on a few of them.

HIGHLIGHTS ON SCULPTORS OF THE SEVENTIES

Niranjan Pradhan (1940) had his diploma both in painting in 1964 and sculpture in 1967, from Govt. Art College, Calcutta. In sculpture, he stood first class first. He was a teacher in this institution. He is a member of 'Society of Contemporary Artists', Kolkata. Pradhan's sculptures are basically vitalistic. But he generates that vitalism out of his experiments with forms. In some cases, he concentrates on meditation of form through which he tries to touch the musical harmony. In his sculpture, life is transformed into abstract dynamism to reveal pure beauty. The popular stream of life of the villages of Bengal acts as a dominant source of his sculpture. He is a skilled portrait sculptor. His full length portrait of the renowned film star Uttam Kumar installed at Tollygunge has made him well known to the common people.



'Swaranang Gachyami'
Bronze, 2015



'Creation'
Bronze



'Birth'
Marble



'Flame'
Marble, 1972

Biman Das (1943) passed out from Govt Art College in 1966. Since 1969 he was engaged as a teacher in Delhi Art College. He has a religious bent of mind and brings a kind of spirituality through his works. A critic, K.S. Kaul, once commented on his works like this: 'Descending a deeper, Biman has merged into the ordinary folk of India to peep into their will and ways, their home span kind of life, their ordinary but unforced state of joy, their frank states of worry, without any attempt to camouflage or hide their sadness.' (from the catalogue of a Mumbai Show). This is true but his 'ordinary folk' merges into the ethereal. He often moulds out of 'ordinary folk', a kind of spiritual Sublimity. In 1994, Biman Joined Govt College of Art, Calcutta, as Principal and was there till his retirement.



Anit Ghosh
'Voice of The String'
Iron Sheet, Brass & Aluminium Plate, 1966



Biman Das
Stone Form



Biman Das
'Mother & Child'
Bronze

Anit Ghosh (1944-2021) passed out of Govt Art College in 1965. Up to the fourth year he had his training under Sunil Pal. In the fifth year, he got Chintamani Kar as his other mentor. Two ways of expressions, lyrical idealised naturalism and geometrical abstraction of that 'natural' received from the above two heritages were assimilated in his works. Shifting away from realistic description of nature he arrived at its geometrical essence in rhythmic disposition. Here he touched the chord of modernism.

Dilip Saha (1944) was also a student of Chintamani Kar and passed out in 1967. Abstracting the human figure was one of the characteristics of his sculpture. He preferred stone as his medium. In both figuration and abstraction, he displayed his poetical vision as a mark of his identity.

Another student of Chintamani Kar, **Madhusudan Chatterjee** passed out in 1966. In the initial stage, during the period of 'Sculptors Guild' he showed preference for abstraction, but afterwards during early nineties, he experimented and transformed Indian classicism into modernist multidimensionality.

Manik Talukdar (1944-2019) was a member of 'Society of Contemporary Artists, Kolkata' from 1976 till the end of his life. He learnt under Bipin Goswami at Indian Art College, and then from 1971 he researched under Sarbari Roychoudhury for two years. He experimented with manifold heritages from pre-Hellenic, then Indus Valley art and finally to folk art. Then he arrived at a decorative figuration. As a characteristic of his form, Surajit Singha mentioned 'fundamental vital forms – the forms that unite the fish and human torso' in a booklet on him.



Dilip Saha
'Roman Voyage'
Terracotta, 1967



Dilip Shah
'Untitled'
Bronze



Manik Talukdar
'Untitled'
Bronze



Manik Talukdar
'Second Skin'
Fibre Glass, 1994



Bipul Kanti Saha
Bronze

Bipul Kanti Saha (1944 -?) was born and grew up in Tripura. From there he came to Santiniketan and passed out of Kalabhavana in 1967, where he came in contact with Ramkinkar. Then he went to Baroda and learnt under Shankha Chowdhury. The power and expressionist vigour of primitivism were the fundamental characteristics of his sculpture.

Tarak Garai (1946) lived the early part of his life in the popular and folk environment of Birbhum. He had an inherent inclination towards the popular and primitive. The most salient feature of his expressions is the rootedness to the soil. In 1967, Garai was admitted to Kalabhavana and got Ramkinkar as one of his teachers. After passing out of Kalabhavana in 1972, when Garai came in to his own creativity, he designed a distinct trend of primitivism entirely different from the other trends. His forms are figurative, akin to the life of tribal village people expressing their rituals, love, norms of their day to day experience. Garai has passed through a scintillating life working in multifarious projects and experimenting on various forms both in sculpture and painting.



Tarak Garai
'Fondness - II'
Bronze, 1990-91



Tarak Garai
'The Virgin'
Wood



Tarak Garai
Bronze

From the above discussions on the modernist sculptors of the second generation, who started their career during 1960-s and 1970-s, it is observed that they have made considerable development in the mode of sculptural forms and concepts. The first generation stressed on socio-temporal commitment and assimilation of indigenous tradition and Western modernist idioms. The second generation apart from this commitment emphasised on more uniqueness of form through geometrical disintegration and abstraction. The first generation of modernists played a pioneering role in the all India development of sculpture. The second generation extended their creativity to absorb the positive qualities and outcome of the all India field to bring out a new harmony of modernist Indian sculpture in a more complex temporal existential condition. There is always a regional difference of expression based on the popular heritage of that region. In that way, the Bengal sculptors have accentuated social rebellion in a secular mode stressing on the positive harmony of experiential and objective reality.



Mrinalini Mukherjee
'Sree'
Dyed Fibre, H-172 cm, 1982
Courtesy of Mrinalini Mukherjee Foundation

THE THIRD GENERATION OF MODERNIST SCULPTORS 1980s

INTRO: RECAPITULATION

In the last three chapters we have seen the development of modern and modernist sculpture of Bengal from the 1850s up to the sculptors who came to the limelight during the 1960s and 1970s. Modernity in sculpture emerged through the works of sculptors trained in the art schools developed by the British Government. They worked mainly in the academic naturalist style. Modernity rose to its highest excellence in the works of Debiprasad Roychowdhury, who had, however no systematic training in any art school. In spite of the skill and aesthetic sensibility of the academic sculptors, something was lacking in our sculptural development. In form and structure it was alienated from the indigenous cultural root. In paintings of Abanindranath and the artists of neo-Indian school succeeded in fulfilling the gap and generating a new kind of modernity, which we have called 'traditional modernity' that continued during the first three decades of twentieth century, after which modernity was elevated to modernism in the paintings of Rabindranath in the first phase and then through the works painters of 1940s.

In sculpture there was no neo-Bengal or neo-Indian school. So the alienation prevailed until the appearance of a sculptor like Ramkinkar at Santiniketan. Ramkinkar singlehandedly elevated the sculptural activities of Bengal and India from Modern to modernism. We have discussed this elaborately in the second chapter of this study. The sculptors, who came to their own during the decades of the 1940s and '50s, developed it further with new spirit and greater sensibility. A new identity of modernist sculpture, a new kind of rootedness to the soil was developed through the works of Meera Mukherjee including the versatile sculptors like Pradosh Dasgupta, Chintamani Kar, Shankha Chowdhury, Sunil Kumar Pal, Somnath Hore and others who formed the field of first generation of modernists.

Against this background appeared the second generation of sculptors, who were mostly the students of the sculptors of the first generation. They

developed their art through assimilation of local and global heritage and modernist idioms. Throughout all these expansions of the first and second generation of sculptors, socio-temporal reality acted as an important feature. The sculptors of the first and second generation of modernists could introduce an enlightened emancipation of Bengal sculpture connecting with all India development, also relating it to global trends of modernism.

SOCIO-TEMPORAL CONDITIONS

This was the perspective in the foreground of which appeared the sculptors of the third generation. Born after the independence of 1947 and during the decade of 1950s, most of them appeared in the domain of their creativity during the decade of the 1980s. The aesthetic field of various experimentations with forms was already prepared for them. On the one hand this was an advantage for them. On the other this posed a problem. The sculptors of the previous generations have worked on multifarious modes, which had drawn a limit to the area of their further extension. Naturally they had to find out the avant-garde zones and thought of developing advanced modes of form and technique. They did this successfully as the social, cultural, scientific and technical development helped them to find fresh avenues. They had to cope with the change; otherwise there was no way of progress.

The decade of the 1980s was a very complicated period in the history of the modernist development of the country. The renowned economist and thinker Bhabatosh Dutta after analysing the situation commented in one of his articles that: "the decade that started from 1981 was so crucial and climacteric that such a period never appeared in the history of independent India. The unhindered rise of the price of the objects necessary for day to day living, the expansion of black money, inordinate deficit in international exchanges, the restlessness in external value of the rupee, extensive loans from foreign countries, all these problems were connected with one another. [Saat Dasak (Seven Decades), Ananda Publishers, 1999, Page 170. Translated from Bengali by the present author.] They did not have the power to cope with this multifarious crisis. Taking it as an advantage, the foreign business and commercial powers started intruding into the market of the country. The foreign multinational companies extended their business strategies that formed a crisis in local market and objective condition. The political condition of the country also rose to the precarious situation. Various forms of unrest accelerated in different regions. The

internal emergency of 1975, June was an outcome of such a situation.

The unrest took its ugliest turn with the murder of the Prime-minister Indira Gandhi on 31 October 1984 and that of Rajib Gandhi on 21 May 1991. All these events were at the background of the artistic activities of the 1980s. There was some increase of art galleries throughout the country. Though patronisation of art in Bengal is always very limited, yet during the 1980s a number of commercial art galleries started operating in the city. Some kinds of patronisation were coming from there. But in case of sculpture, that was very slender. Within such a situation, the young sculptors of that decade had to develop their creativity.

Rise of galleries and commercial patronisation played some positive role in case of paintings. Yet it had some negative aspects also. In many cases the artists had to lose their freedom of expression. They had to work according to the choice of the gallery. Yet the support of the gallery could contribute some confidence to them to come out of the uncertainties and inconstancies. Due to lack of market the sculptors work only out of their commitment. The gallery has played a positive role in the development of sculpture. During eighties and nineties of the previous century the experimentation with in sculptural form and concept has developed considerably.

EXPANSION OF FORM AND CONCEPT

Three aspects of such development and expansion can be marked. The first was the diversity and heterogeneity in a change of medium and technique. Previously the sculptors had to make their expression limited to a few media like clay, wood, stone, bronze etc. Ramkinkar in Santiniketan, however initiated the change of medium during 1930s. The sculptors of the eighties resorted to such change to achieve some sort of diversity in their expression. They used many unconventional elements in their sculptures. Scrap metal was such a medium. There are instances of using sand, paper, leather, straw, hemp thread, water, seeds etc also. Secondly, they attempted to connect the realities of life with their work out of their commitment to the life and factual actualities. Through this commitment they resorted to rebellion and insurgency in their expression. Thirdly for creation of diversity they entered deeper into the traditional aspects.

They strolled into the folk and primitive culture, where Meera Mukher-

jee was their inspiration. Fourthly, they shifted the identity of expression from tradition to contemporary empiric realities. Previously the expression of sculpture was limited within a few set norms. The sculptors of third generation expanded it based on the above four aspects. Some of the second generation sculptors entered into this diversion. But they did this during the development of eighties and nineties. Sushen Ghosh experimented with minimal abstraction based on the reality of the human figure and other objects. Janak Jhankar Narzary used scrap metal during 1970s. Then he resorted to the use of sand, seed, water etc. in his sculpture. There are some other instances. Such trends were more expanded by the third generation.

WHO BELONGED TO THE THIRD GENERATION?

For our convenience of study of the development of forms and concepts of art, we are to put it forward through a system. This is the only purpose to split the discussion in a few time bound set-ups to cope with the changes in social and artistic development. We mark those sculptors to belong to the third generation, who were born between 1947 and 1960, that is in the decade of fifties and came out of the art institutions during the end of the 1970s or early 1980s and arrived at their creativity during 1980s. There may be exceptions but that may be considered as the general trend.

THE SCULPTORS OF THE THIRD GENERATION

Asim Basu (b.1947) is a very important figure in contemporary sculpture and in different aspects, he is exceptional in the field. He was a student of Govt Art College, Calcutta and completed his diploma in commercial or applied art in the year 1970. Only in the first two years of the preparatory course, he practiced sculpture under Chintamani Kar and Sunil Kumar Pal. During the rest of the period of the course, he had no academic connection with sculpture. He studied different aspects of applied arts only. He had his first solo show at Kolkata in 1973, where he exhibited his paintings. As a member of the artists' group 'Chitri O Bhaskar Gosthi' formed in 1973, Basu started creating sculpture around 1984. Therefore, in case of sculpture, he may be considered as a practitioner of the 1980s. That is the reason why we have taken him in this chapter, where we are discussing the works of the third generation. He joined service at Calcutta Port Trust



'A Happy Family'
Bronze, 2012



'Fish'
Bronze



'Old Age Home'
Bronze, 2015



'Inspiration - I'
Bronze
2012



'Glorifying Humanity'
Bronze, 2014



'Garbage'
Bronze, 2015



'Violin Player'
Bronze, 2015



'Cycle Stand in a Factory'
Bronze, 2014

in 1970 as an applied artist and continued the service till his retirement in 2007.

His first solo exhibition with sculpture was held in 1984. In 1986 he got an award in the annual exhibition of the Academy of Fine Arts and in 1992 from Birla Academy. In the initial years, he used to build up his sculptures with cement. Later he took up bronze as his medium. In creation of his sculpture, he was inspired by the works of Somnath Hore. He was very much moved by Hore's commitment to life. Basu has deviated from the form centralism of the sculpture of his previous generation, where he is somewhat unique. There is some narrative element in his sculptures, within which he conceals the structural geometry. The salient feature of his work is to glorify humanism and human relations through humour, wit, pleasure and pain. His sculptures indicate that spirituality is not something devoid of humanity; rather it is there in the existential condition. Basu, through his skilful rendering, amalgamates the inner sensibility and outer activity of the people nearer to the soil. His works with animals and other creatures like goats, pigs, fishes in water are also very life-centric. The adroitness in execution and visual pleasures are the exceptional and unique elements in his works that has helped him to be established as an outstanding sculptor.

Mrinalini Mukherjee (1949-2015), daughter of the celebrated artist Binodbehari Mukherjee, lived most part of her life in Delhi. She studied sculpture at M.S. University, Baroda, from where she graduated in 1970. She learnt mural designing under K.G. Subramanyan. Her years at Baroda coincided with the rise of a new sensibility in Indian art, where boundaries between disciplines—sculpture, craft, design, and architecture—were being consciously challenged. Immersed in the pedagogical ethos of the Baroda School, she was exposed not only to modernist ideologies but also to the enduring legacies of folk and indigenous practices that played a crucial role in shaping her mature aesthetic.



'Untitled'

The unique element in her works is that she deviated from the general notion that solidity and hardness was the only criteria of sculpture. She was one of the innovators of soft sculptures constructed out of threads of hemp and other soft materials. Using techniques such as knotting, braiding, and weaving—traditionally associated with textile arts—she brought a tactile, organic quality to her sculptural practice, blurring the lines between craft and high art. Through her soft and hanging sculpture, she connected modernism with popular, traditional and ritualistic art of village India. This innovation in concept and form of sculpture is one of her great



'Aranyani'
Dyed Fibre, H-142 x W-127 x D-104 cm, 1996
Courtesy of Mrinalini Mukherjee Foundation



'Vanshree'
Dyed Fibre, H-250 x W-130 x D-90 cm, 1994
Courtesy of Mrinalini Mukherjee Foundation



'Naag'
Dyed Fibre, H-200 x W-83 x D-42 cm
1986, Courtesy of Mrinalini
Mukherjee Foundation



'Yakshi'
Dyed Fibre, H-225 x W-105 x D-72 cm, 1984
Courtesy of Mrinalini Mukherjee Foundation



'Unknown Title'
Hemp, 1973, Courtesy of Mrinalini
Mukherjee Foundation



'Black Devi'
H-180 cm, 1980, Bharat Bhavan Collection
Courtesy of Mrinalini Mukherjee Foundation



'Nag Devta - I'
Dyed Fibre, 1979
Courtesy of Mrinalini Mukherjee Foundation



'Rituraja'
Dyed Fibre, H-190 x W-82 x D-86 cm, 1977
Courtesy of Mrinalini Mukherjee Foundation



'Snake Columns I & II (Lotus Pond)'
Stone Ware, H-93 x 28 cm, 1995-96
Courtesy of Mrinalini Mukherjee
Foundation

achievements. Her anthropomorphic forms, often suggestive of fertility, nature spirits, or temple deities, carried a deeply sensual and mythic resonance. Despite initial skepticism from the mainstream art world, her work eventually garnered critical acclaim for its fearless originality. Today, Mrinalini Mukherjee is widely recognized as a seminal figure who expanded the formal vocabulary of Indian sculpture and opened new directions for feminist and material-based art practices.

Diversity of medium, amalgamation or unification of different unconventional mediums, like stone, wood, plaster, leather etc, commitment to life and protest against various sorts of exploitations was the essence of the sculptural art of **Sunil Kumar Das** (1952-2021), who lived a glorious but subdued, softened and muted creative life that ended prematurely by the assault of the deadly disease of covid-19 inducing a tragic void in the field of Bengal sculpture. He was a member of the artists' group 'Society of Contemporary Artists', Kolkata and used to show his works regularly in their annual exhibitions. Only in 2017, Aakriti gallery of Kolkata hosted a solo exhibition of his works that was titled 'Bahana' or 'Vehicle' with 35 of his multimedia works, where he showed how the down-trodden people of the lower echelon of society turn up to be the vehicle to carry forward the burden of the cultivated higher society oppressors to move towards their goal of success.



'Untitled'
Bronze



'Learned'
Bronze, 2015



'Untitled'
Bronze & Wood



'Untitled'
Bronze & Wood



'Untitled'
Bronze



'Head'
Bronze

Another member of the same group 'Society of Contemporary Artists' is **Bimal Kundu** (1954) who came to the field of sculpture after graduating from Govt Art College, Calcutta in 1980. In a personal statement inscribed in the album of the Society (1960-1991) he mentioned the following about his own creativity: "I want to present sculpture in its totality. I pay more attention to the total appeal than the subject of the sculpture. My main theme is the total appeal of a creation through planes, curves, light and shade. ... There must be a mark of simplicity in the total composition, which can be enjoyed wholly in its entirety, monumentality and frankness expressed through subject and technique." He also mentioned there that in spite of innumerable small works in different individual media like wood, stone, bronze, leather, glass rod and so on, he prefers large scale open air outdoor sculptures that attract people from various strata of life. In his expressions, there are appeals to both classicism and romantic rebellion. Diversification of form is an important characteristic of his sculptures.



'Discord'
Bronze



'Thinker'
Bronze



Bronze



Bronze



Bronze



Bronze



Bronze

Tapas Sarkar (1952) completed his graduation in sculpture at the Govt Art College, Calcutta in 1975, where he learnt under both of Chintamani Kar and Sunil Kumar Pal but Pal had greater influence on his creativity. In 1983, he was invited by the British Council, Kolkata for a solo show, where he exhibited his sculptures fabricated from scrap metal. In this exposition, he expressed his lyrical sensibility through an opposite mode of structural form about which the poet and art critic Pranabendu Dasgupta mentioned as “convoluted tense pulled by centrifugal and centripetal forces simultaneously” in the catalogue introduction. He achieved this initial success through the use of an unconventional medium. Sarkar then moved through a long space, where he has expressed his art in various media, forms and techniques, the essence of objective reality through myth, fantasy and geometrical transformation of the natural. Apart from this, he has made significant contribution in the creation of a large number of outdoor environmental sculptures installed in various places within the country. One of the best among these installed in Kolkata in 1992 was titled *Family with a Dream-doll*. In this sculpture, a couple stand in a desolate mode holding their dream for the future. Apparently the sculpture tends to explore a positive view but within its intrinsic level there is an extended shadow of disconsolate existential dilemma. In this contradiction lies the essence of his sculptural creativity.



'Cat with Fish'
Bronze



'Meditation'
Bronze



'Vegetable Seller'
Bronze



'Untitled'
Bronze



'Baul'
Bronze

CALCUTTA SCULPTORS

Another significant achievement of Sarkar is that he organised in 1994 a group with sculptors only, named 'Calcutta Sculptors'. After 'Sculptors Guild' organised by Chinatamani Kar during 1960s and '70s, 'Calcutta Sculptors' was another important venture of group activity with sculptors of Bengal. Initially the following sculptors were included in the group: Uma Siddhanta (1933-2025), who was the chairperson, Debabrata Chakraborty, Surajit Das, Anil Sen, Dilip Saha, Tapas Sarkar, Sandip Chakraborty, Sudarshan Pal, Prabir Kumar Das and Kaushik Pal. Some of the members have expired, some have left the group and others have been included. The group is still functioning in 2024. Among the new members who have joined the group afterwards there are Chaitali Chanda, Subrata Biswas, Prabhat Majhi, Debabrata Dey, Chandan Roy, Somnath Chakraborty and Prabir Kumar Roy.

OTHER SCULPTORS OF THE THIRD GENERATION

Here we would like to mention **Anil Sen** (1951-2020, a member of 'Calcutta Sculptors'. who also expired prematurely. We may refer to two of his works that were shown in the on-line group exhibition of 2022. They were titled *Affection and Lovers*. In the first one, there were two faces of mother and child placed side by side. In the second one, two faces of man and woman were covered with intrinsic melancholy. This indicates that the essence of Sen's work was centered on symbolic expression of existential reality.

Some of the third generation sculptors have extended the scope and concept of sculpture from being a rigid three dimensional element towards many directions and unconventional features. We have seen how Mrinalini Mukherjee created hanging soft sculpture of threads of hemp. We will also see a bit later how Soma Chkraborty made soft sculpture out of cloth, rags and stitching. **Ratnabali Kant**, presently Delhi based, is another sculptor who has assimilated sculpture with dance and performance. Thus she has broken the barrier of three-dimensionality and solidity of sculpture. For a long time, Ratnabali has learnt and exercised in two art forms, sculpture and dance. She is person from Kolkata, graduated in sculpture from Visvabharati, Santiniketan in 1977. Her post graduation was from Baroda in 1979. She has visited extensively different countries of Europe and Africa, where she has been trained both in sculpture and



'Between the Wall (The conversation between two women from two ends)'
Fibre Glass and Goldleaf
2023

dance. Associating these two mediums she has created the art form of performance and presented the same in various parts of the country and abroad. In her sculpture she has experimented and introduced the classical concept of the Indian aesthetic in connection with the concept of primitivism. In her performance, she supported and developed the traditional concept of Indian aesthetics in connection with inter-relationship of other arts. In the form of presentation, she has explored the country's living traditions including rituals, rites, ceremonies and festivals etc. to convey issues related to contemporary life and times. Thus she is the innovator of a sculpture based new art form.



'Facing Nightmare Alone (Draupadi)'
Fiberglass and Cloth (Ensemble of Seven Pieces
Sculpture with 10 Meter Cloth)
2018



AKU
Bronze, 1980



AKU
Leather, 2007



Soma Chakraborty
Soft Sculpture

So far as extension of medium in three dimensional sculptures is concerned **AKU** (1953-2025) is a very significant sculptor. His full name is Arun Kumar Chakraborty, which he shortened to AKU as his identity as a sculptor. He was born in Benaras in 1953. He took his art education both in graduation and post-graduation level from Banaras Hindu University in 1997 and 1999 respectively. His sculptural compositions stand in the middle stage between figurative and non-figurative. He has worked extensively with leather and amalgamating other mediums with it. They reflect some sort of primitive expression. Let us look at two of his works to have an idea of his forms. In one such work he has built a reversed hemispherical form in bronze and added a semi-spherical shape over it that represents the head over the hemispherical body. Then he covers the head with a layer of leather. Over the hemisphere he places a metallic chain that is fixed from one end to the other. With all these he creates a grotesque expression. In another sculpture of 1985-86, constructed out of leather only, he creates the form of a standing person. His torso is only presented from above the legs up to his neck. His chest is covered with a leather jacket. Deep darkness is visible within the body. The negative space forms a contrast with the leather covered positive space of the body. Here also the artist presents an undefined grotesque form.

His wife **Soma Chakraborty's** (1960-2017) innovation in sculptural form is exemplary. In 1985, she completed her M.Fine from Santiniketan. In 1983 at Kolkata, she presented a solo exhibition with facial forms. In another exhibition held in 1988, she has worked in terracotta and other mediums, where she presented expressions based on youthful exposure of man and woman. During 1990-s, she came to the new innovative medium of soft sculpture. She has worked with colourful cloth and rags to bring out three dimensional form. Over this she has worked in painterly form of stitching with coloured thread. Her premature demise at the age of 57 only has unfortunately terminated the possibility of extension of such an unconventional form of sculpture.



Soma Chakraborty
Soft Sculpture

Shipra Bhattacharya (1954) is renowned as a painter. After graduation in science, she learnt painting at the College of Visual Arts under the guidance of Shubhaprasanna from 1977 to 1980. Before that she learnt her craft for some time at Govt Art College, Calcutta since 1975. Desire is a favourite theme for her in painting, where she expresses the passion and predicament of woman. She has come to sculpture at a later stage. There also she works on the theme of Desire. She sculpts the figure, and then paints on it in a fantasy oriented decorative mode. About her sculpture, she has mentioned that she used the body as sight given to free play of surroundings. 'The body has been trans-coded, inscribed in a metaphoric algorithm, described as an *écriture au corps*: a body of writing and an embodied writing – a flux between the imaginary and symbolic'.



'She'
Bronze



'She'
Bronze

Debabrata De (b.1959) was also a student of Shubhaprasanna. He shifted to sculpture and works in social realistic style. The poor and middle class people from the village and suburbs appear in his sculptures with their predicaments and stark realities of life. The ideal of social commitment generated during the 1940-s has been transformed in his works through his love and sympathy for the downtrodden.



'A Madari'
Bronze, 2023



'News'
Bronze, 2022



'Ajker Krishna'
Bronze, 2022



'Journey'
Bronze



'Ganesh Babu'
Bronze, 2022



'Ratha Jatra'
2019

Chaitali Chanda (b.1977), his wife, is also an accomplished painter and sculptor. While her practice remains rooted in reality, she imbues her work with elements of fantasy and sensual pleasure, creating a distinct visual language that balances realism with imaginative expression.



Chaitali Chanda
'Journey'
Bronze, 2022



Chaitali Chanda
'River Side'
Bronze, 2022

Nilima Goel (b.1955) studied sculpture from Indian College of Arts, Kolkata and graduated from there securing first position. She is a member of the women artists' organisation, 'The Group'. Her works, mainly in bronze, are figurative and often transformed into abstracted fantasy. She writes about her work-profile in this manner: 'In my early works I was keenly engaged in exploring the contemporary perspective of the intertwining calligraphic aspects of the lost scripts of ancient Indian languages and the classical forms of sculpture. These bronze works attempt to affirm faith in human dignity and virtuosity and to renew links with what we have already within us'. Later she shifted towards exploring the use of the copper filigree process on copper plate.



Nilima Goel
'Family (Mother and Children)'
Bronze



Nilima Goel
'Shanti Stupa'
Bronze



Shyamal Roy
'Woman with Bird'
Terracotta, 2005

Shyamal Roy (1957) is famous for his terracotta works. Originally he was student of painting and graduated in this stream from Govt Art College, Calcutta in the year 1980. Later his interest grew for terracotta and he acquired skill in this medium out of his own effort. Gradually, within a short time he earned excellence in this medium and earned all India fame. As a founder member of the group 'Painters 80', he exhibited with the group in 1980 and 1982 in New Delhi, then in 1981 and 1986 in Kolkata. His first two solo exhibitions were held in Kolkata in 1983 and 1985. He received several awards including the Governor's Gold Medal from Academy of Fine Arts in 1980. Rabindrabharati and Birla Academy also awarded his works. In the beginning his terracotta works showed some inclination towards popular folk form. Gradually, he has shifted from the conventional trend. At a certain stage he has been inspired by the fantasy-centric orientation of the South Indian painter Panikkar, who brought a special effect in his painting by reducing the length of hands, legs and different limbs of human figures. Shyamal adopted such distortion in his sculptures and achieved a very suggestive, soothing and humorous effect. In his works he uses basic simplified geometrical forms of the cylinder, sphere and through the contrasts of volumes and curves, brings out a special effect of transcendental beauty. He has thus elevated the popular folk form towards a modernist value, thus developing indigenous identity in a modernist orientation. One of the best examples of such a trend is his large and grand terracotta work displayed at Taj Bengal Hotel of Kolkata displaying musicians of Bengal. Several standing figures with musical instruments in their sonorous sobriety and a delicate decoration brings out an ethereal effect in the popular reality of life. Roy, through his terracotta, creates the ideal beauty of a celestial ambience.

Ramkumar Manna is another terracotta artist of great repute. As an instinctive child artist of a village, who used to play and give form to various sonorous objects. He once came to the city of Kolkata and attracted the attention of a poet and artist of an other field, whose affectionate provocation inspired him more and more towards creativity and gradually Ramkumar grew into an artist of original sensibility. Within his subconscious there was a flow of myths and images, which used to come out spontaneously whenever he touched the clay and through working of his figures, he got the shape of mystical figures of various sorts. He needed no institutional or academic training and in that way he is a self-made sculptor. In the initial stage, he was famous for his images of traditional god Ganesha, which gave him money also. In September 1991, Ramkumar exhibited a novel series of sculptures and in this exhibition it was proved that he was not only a skilled craftsman but also an artist of genius. As

the subject of this series, he took up the book of rhymed poetry titled 'Ikom-Bykom' composed and collected by Kamal Kumar Majumdar and gave form in clay to every rhyme of this book. From the rectangular block of clay he carved out in relief the form of flowing village life, the rivers, trees, the creepers, flowers etc. This was the conglomeration of two forms of visuals, painting and sculpture and thus he created a series of fantasy tales. Within the rhyme of the book 'Ikom-Bykom', here was a pastoral sonorous beauty, which Ramkumar transformed into three dimensional forms, where he could convey the eternal essence of the beauty of Bengal. In 1994, Ramkumar created a series with the traditional mythical gods and goddesses of Bengal. Since then he is constantly working on various themes and subjects. He has given form to the 'Guernica' of Picasso in terracotta relief. Now Ramkumar has established himself as a celebrated sculptor of Bengal belonging to the third generation.



Ramkumar Manna
Terracotta



Ramkumar Manna
Terracotta

Satish Chandra (1957) is also a terracotta artist, who has used the folk forms in his works. Completing his graduation and post-graduation in ceramics from Banaras Hindu University in 1982 and 1986 respectively he came to Kolkata and was attached to the Eastern regional centre of Lalit Kala Academy.

Rajat Kumar Ghosh (1956) of Patna is another terracotta artist. Apart from folk forms he has created sculptures with urban complexities of life also.

Gopalprasad Mandal (1949) continuously researches to develop his forms, which he has named 'organic crystalism'. In his own words: 'I tried to invent new forms of sculpture by continuous crystallisation of organic forms into abstract features.' While transforming the physical forms towards abstraction Mandal stops to a limit so that the relation with the natural does not get abolished. This vitalism of form is an essential characteristic of Indian sculpture. This is due to the fact Indian sculptor has always been inspired by nature. Western modernism on one side has used this intrinsic rhythm of vitalism to enlighten the inert matter into aesthetic life; on the other they have created sculpture out of mechanical structuralism irrespective of the natural. The first is called the vitalism, and the other constructivism. The works of Mandal come under the category of vitalism. He has, however, introduced in it the various forms and structures and geometric essence of nature in his search of forms relevant to the contemporary times. In one of his stone sculptures titled *Flood* of 1978 there was the form of the eye. Between the two eyelids the eyeballs are visible. In a corner of it, a drop or tear is frozen. On the other side, the open eyes have taken the form of seeds, as if two petals have opened out before germination. The water drop of the eye has turned into the symbol of the sorrow and suffering of the people during the devastating flood of 1978. He thus connects the sculptural forms to the realities of life through amalgamation of vitalism and structuralism.



'Ganeshjanoni'
Bronze
2005



'Untitled'
Bronze



'Untitled'
Bronze

Among the other important sculptors of this generation there are Indira Purakaystha, who abstracts the natural form through structural presentation, Gopinath Roy (1953-2017), a very important sculptor of the region of inner sensibility, who transformed the natural forms into the abstraction of music, Amitabha Bhowmik (1947) of Delhi, who transformed the natural into geometry, Sushanta Roy (1952), Milan Banik of Agartala, Krishnakanta Dutta (1955), Dilip Sarkar (1955), Rishi Barua (1958) of Santiniketan, Asit Das, Swapan Roy and many others, about whom we could not go into the detailed discussions, but none of them is of lesser capability.

The third generation of modernist sculptors, most of whom were born between 1947 and 1960 and started their creation during the 1980s, expanded the field of sculpture to a great extent through a diversity of form and attempted to build up an identity through assimilation of indigenous tradition and global modernity. Though they could connect themselves with the pan Indian development and be a part of it, yet their works maintained some special characteristics that reflect the cultural heritage of Bengal; After the 1990s and during the twenty-first century, Bengal sculpture will move from modernism to the post-modern and will be more rebellious and global in expansion. We will look into the details of this development in the next chapter.



Bhabatosh Sutar
'Durga'
Sculpture Installation, Clay, 2025

DEVELOPMENT OF MODERNISM: THE POSTMODERN AND BEYOND

INTRO: RECAPITULATION

Art is always a socio-temporal aesthetic expression of human sensibility. In Bengal-art after the 1940-s, both in painting and sculpture, social reality has played a significant role. In the last three chapters we have tried to trace that development. In the evolution of sculpture in India from modern to modernism, Bengal played a pioneering role. Since the emergence of modernity during the 1850-s throughout India, an alien form of academic naturalism had been the principal mode of expression. It lacked the root of indigenous identity. But during the early part of the twentieth century, with the rise of national awareness as a reaction against the colonial exploitation, search for such an identity was gaining ground. In painting, Abanindranath Thakur and the neo-Indian school developed by his students and followers devised a form based on the indigenous tradition and aesthetic conventions of the orient, particularly Japan and China, which may be called 'Traditional Modernity'. But sculpture had no such neo-Indian school. So it had to wait for another three decades to come out of the alien root. In painting during the beginning of the 1930-s, 'traditional modernity' was superseded by 'modernism', where Rabindranath was the pioneer. Gaganendranath Thakur and Jamini Roy also had a dominant role. Social upheaval of 1940-s brought modernism to the fore. It became the principal mode of expression.

Development of sculpture skipped the step of 'traditional modernity'. It evolved directly from modern to modernism, and in the transformation a single personality acted the pioneering role. We are already aware that he was Ramkinkar. Ramkinkar was a born artist. During his childhood and early age, he learnt both painting and sculpture by himself and out of his association with the surrounding environment, where rural, primitive and tribal sensibility were the dominant cultural and existential roots. Coming to Santiniketan at the age of 19 and having art lessons from Nandalal Basu and receiving the enlightenment from the cultural environment of Visvabharati and Rabindranath himself, he was very quick in burgeoning his artistic sensibility both in painting and sculpture. In 1935, he created

an exceptional outdoor environmental sculpture at the open premise of Sangeet-Bhavana known as *Sujata*. In 1938, he completed another more vibrant environmental sculpture titled *Santhal Family*. These two sculptures were the landmarks in the evolution of modernism both in Bengal and Indian sculpture. Since then the genius of Ramkinkar flowered in diverse directions and modernism in sculpture also effloresced. It may be noticed that even in the post-modern development, the influence of Ramkinkar was unabated.

The way to modernism was thus unbarred. It made the way of progress easier for the sculptors of the 1940-s. The decade was tumultuous both from a national and international perspective. The national movement was escalating, so was the repressions of the colonial government. The Second World War was spreading at a quick pace, The Japanese invasion almost came near to the country. The British had to take precautionary measures, consequent to which the devastating famine of 1943 set in. All the creative artists reacted violently against it. Apart from this, the other incidents of the decade like continuous communal violence, bifurcation of the country, the flow of homeless refugees also made the situation deleterious and cataclysmic. The most important trend in the art of 1940-s was the rebellion against all these socio-temporal conditions. In case of sculpture, in addition to such insurrection, there was a search to find indigenous identity through assimilation of classical and primitive Indian and modernist Western trends. The works of Pradosh Dasgupta, Chintamani Kar and so on are exemplary. While Somnath Hore was stubbornly committed to rebellion through images of Wounds, Meera Mukherjee, through her assimilation of primitive and tribal craft-oriented formal structures with an enlightened spirit of indigenous classicism, both in sculpture and music, propounded both the ways of rebellion and identity. This was also a great lesson for the artists having a post-modern attitude in the globalised situation.

During the 1960-s, the sculptors paid more attention towards perfection and sophistication of form along with social awareness and search for identity. The sculptors of 1980-s or the so called third generation, as we suggested to designate them, opened a wide area of development both in form and content.

This is the background against which we have to look at the extension of the sculptural domain offered by the younger generation of sculptors who were coming to the limelight during 1990-s and in the new century. The new generation of artists or sculptors were facing a new kind of so-

cial reality that prompted them towards their creativity. The reality was governed by the so called globalisation and in case of artists and creative persons the aesthetics of creativity was regulated by the philosophy of post-modernism.

GLOBALISATION AND POST-MODERNISM

Globalisation is the extension of the market economy controlled by the capitalist power of the Western world. After the disintegration and demise of the Soviet Union in 1991, the capitalist power of the first world came to the forefront to be the sole agent to control the market and economy of the third world. The colonialism of the previous era turned towards post-colonial colonialism in the second half of the twentieth century. After 1990-s, consequent to the breakdown of Soviet Union, the Western capitalism rose to the peak and Indian economy had no way but to yield to it. After independence, under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, India was proceeding towards development through socialist mode of economic control. It failed completely during 1970-s mainly due to manipulation of local capitalists and severe degradation of morality of the people, who control the Government and social activities. Various kinds of social unrests and popular movements were springing up throughout the country. Various separatists and terrorist powers were playing their mischievous roles. The revolt and movements conducted by the Marxist-Leninist political party were escalating in different part of the country, especially in Bengal due to the failure of economic development. All these social conditions and precarious dereliction of social stability hastened the intrusion of foreign economic powers in the guise of globalisation. The invasion was complete during the decade of the 1990-s.

One of the salient features and tools of the globalisation-centric capitalist growth was the brilliant and speedy development of information technology. Now during the third decade of the twenty-first century expansion of the internet system and cyber technology has soared to such a height that all other socials control and expansion have turned obsolete. Information technology has changed the mode of operation of capitalism. 'The nebulous clouds of cyberspace' have swallowed all the extant systems of manufacture and creativity. Anup Sinha recently wrote in an article: 'The explosion in data has given these large companies unprecedented power to control, manipulate and influence human behaviour as never before'. (The Telegraph, 12 April 2024.). The cyber-centric capitalism, that we may call it, has devoured all kinds of human freedom, both personal and

social, bringing humanity under the control of big capital increasing greed and wiping off all kinds of social and personal morality.

These are the conditions or state of affairs that prompted the artists towards creativity. Naturally the previous modes or paradigms of creativity have completely changed in the globalised situation. The new paradigm is governed by post-modernism.

In Europe, post-modernism, as a rejection and development over modernism, was gradually instituted during the decade of the 1960-s. It has obviously some link with the unprecedented growth of capitalism that shattered all kinds of social and personal morality generated out of the enlightenment of 17th and 18th century. The salient value system of enlightenment based on rationalism, empiricism, liberty, toleration and fraternity were swamped up by the rapid growth of capitalism. One of the reasons behind it was that modernity and modernism were logo-centric: that is, based on some preconceived truth. Logo-centrism, in simple term is excessive faith in meanings of words and their specific uses. Post-modernism attempted to come out of all kinds of established truths and belief-systems. It envisages that truth and reality are not limited within the norms devised by the capitalist system which tends to control society as a guardian agent. So any established truth or fact or practice is to be questioned. There will always be a trend or scope for further development. Gradual journey towards the goal is the motto. There is no end point to stop.

The philosophy of post-modernism brought out a paradigm shift in artistic expressions of the Western world during the 1960-s and 70-s. The two dimensions of painting and three dimensions of sculpture were not considered enough for all round expressions since dimensions of humanity and society are not limited in this manner. Time is also a measure of reality. Expansion of space is also a criterion. So art expanded its creativity through inclusion of installation, video, performance etc. More over in artistic expression post-modern stressed on concept, not on skill. With such paradigm shift post-modernism was to propound concentrated protest against the amorality generated by capitalist growth.

In our country when globalisation intruded with all its power of exploitation making even industrial capitalism invalid, the artists rose to protest through their artistic expressions. Naturally a paradigm shift was necessary. That was generated by the concept of the post-modern. So here, post-modernism arrived through the winds of globalisation. The sculp-

tural expressions that were being exercised up to the decade of the 1980-s changed considerably during the 1990-s and afterwards. Apart from the expansion of mediums like installation, video, performance and so on, in three dimensional sculptures also, the mode of expression was transformed through incorporation of various elements like fantasy, popular and primitive events, movements, essentials from general and subaltern history etc. So the mode of forms and concepts of sculpture generated in the environment of globalisation and post-modernism as also in the domain of cyber-centric capitalism were changed or extended exceedingly. To have an idea of this shift we have to look at the works of the sculptors.

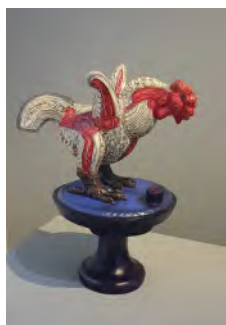
The number of sculptors, who have achieved success in their creative field has increased gradually, decade wise. During the 1940-s, it could be counted on fingers. Through successive enhancements, it has risen to soaring heights during the 1990-s and in the new century. So out of these innumerable we have to select a few to have an idea of the paradigm shift.

SOME SCULPTORS OF THE 1990-s AND BEYOND

As already mentioned, in this last chapter we will think about the works of young sculptors who have worked in the environment of globalisation and post-modernism, that is, who have appeared in the field of activity during the decade of 1990-s and 21st century. Most of them were born after 1960. But the features of the form under the influence of post-modernism have already been apparent in the works of some of the sculptors, who started their journey during the 1980-s. We have seen how Ratnabali Kant has assimilated sculpture and dance in her works through the process of performance. Mrinalini Mukherjee used the apparently unsophisticated medium of hemp threads to build up her hanging soft sculpture representing popular deities of the rural environment. Paritosh Sen, the celebrated painter of 1940-s made an installation oriented sculpture during the 1970-s, where he showed a man running through the busy street and traffic lights were operating. There are more instances of such extensions towards conceptualism. Even Meera Mukherjee's use of popular form of nakshi kantha, a rural house hold stitched cloth, to decorate the surface of her sculptures also foreshadows the essence of conceptualism. In the light of such a trend we will now pick up the works of some the sculptors of the younger generation.



Pankaj Panwar
'Untitled'



Pankaj Panwar
'Untitled'



Pankaj Panwar
'Untitled'



Sandip Chakraborty
'Adoration'
2023

One of the most prominent sculptors of 1990-s is Santiniketan based **Pankaj Panwar** (b.1961). He was trained in art at Kalabhavana, Visv-abharati from 1981 to 1986, and studied for post graduation in sculpture from M.S.University, Baroda from 1986 to 1988. Then he went to England and learnt at Royal College of Art, London during 1989-90. His works are figurative, often narrative, with some glimpse of mythical elements. Within such modern and modernist elements, there are some special characteristics in his works, which are very much relevant in the perspective of contemporary globalised reality. We will try to have an idea of this through the instances of some of his works. In 2006, August, Panwar showed a work of fibre glass in an exhibition titled 'Shilpakriti' held at Aakriti Gallery. The subject was the face of a young girl with two braids of hair hanging on two sides of her head. In the face and eyes there was a grotesque expression. Within this apprehensive melancholy there were some elements of his personal traits. In November 2006, in the exhibition titled 'Nirmiti' another of his bronze works was exhibited. Its subject was three members of family, parents a child moving in a motor cycle in the environment of night. All the three had their helmets or their head. As it was night a strong ray of light, emerging from the headlight fell on the street, and at the rear side of the bike, a coil of smoke was coming out. These two features, headlight and coil of smoke are exemplary to reveal the trend of conceptualism. Another element turns naturalness into fantasy, that is the addition of a pair of wings on the back of the woman. All the three figures look with expanded eyes towards the spectators. The fantasy-centric grotesqueness is the unique element of his work. Thus he tries to analyse the strangeness of temporality. Chess Players is another of his fibre glass sculptures of 2001. In this installation type work, two naked men were playing chess. At the back of both of them there were wings attached. In the sculptures of Panwar, there is a reflection of an indigenous tradition. In that perspective he propounds post-colonial reality in the post-modern context.

Sandip Chakraborty (1961) is now a faculty and head of the sculpture department of Rabindra Bharati University. He has contributed through his experiments with forms, which he has called 'Noumenal Sculpture'. He explained this as 'they are noumenal in the sense of being objects of intellectual instinct'. He abstracts the natural in such a way that the reality is transcended towards a consecrated idea. The creation of suggested minimalism is his contribution to the post-modern discipline.

Debashis Bhattachaya (1966) Completed his graduation and post-graduation from Baroda. Then he joined as teacher in Rabindra Bharati University.

ty. He once said about his works: 'My works in a retrospective view show the significance that can change or break complex relationships between conscious intention and subconscious impulse'. In a group exhibition, he presented a work that was a large image of a brinjal. Throughout its entire body were scattered eyes made of stone, which conveyed an effect of grotesqueness. There lies the novelty of his work.

Prasun Ghosh (1966), a graduate of 1991 from Govt. Art College, Calcutta works through sight specific sculpture based installation as a rebellion against the severe decay of human and social values. As an example, a particular work by him may be mentioned, which was exhibited recently (March 2023) in G.C.Laha Centenary Gallery, Kolkata. It was constructed out of fibre glass but appeared to be built of stone. Here the lower part of three naked men below their waist was placed in standing position one above the other; Their genitals were vividly visible. Going beyond any narrative, the artist created a symbolic domain to express the vigorous decay and compassion ingrained in reality. This is the nature of his expression of the insurgency that he constantly posits through his works.



Prasun Ghosh
Fiberglass
2023



Prasun Ghosh
Fiberglass
2023



Debashis Bhattachaya
Donkey Rider in Pumpkin Market-2022
Multiple Material



'Monk'
Bronze, 2019

Akhil Chandra Das (1968) is a Kolkata based sculptor, who after graduation from the Govt College of Art, Calcutta made his post-graduation from Baroda. He prefers working in mixed media like combination of wood, bronze and so on. The nature of the medium determines the character of his works. About his works, he said in a write up: 'My work reflects my experience. I gather from day dreams, from the loitering efforts of common people to lethargic postures, from myth to mysterious, from landscape of the city to the organisation of the cosmos.' The content and form of his works are varied. From a few examples we have an idea of the novelty and originality of his expression. A composition of 2006 constructed out of iron and bronze is titled *Family*. A large crab is placed in the central position. It is made of an iron sheet. Around it are scattered many child crabs of small size. These are made of bronze. The novelty and originality of his expression and arrangement attracts the spectator. In 2008 he made another sculpture titled *Disaster* based on theme of bird flu. It was based on the figure of a dying hen. It was made of bronze and wood. The body of the hen is placed in the reversed way. It was fluttering its wings. The works of Das reveals various elements of social reality in symbolic expression.



'Phantasmagoria - 9'
Wood & Bronze



'Headless'
Bronze, 2021



'Naga Dance'
Bronze, 2022



'Meditation'
Bronze, 2021



'Goat'
Bronze, 2022



'Gomira'
Bronze, 2022



'Horse'
Bronze, 2015



'World Cool'
Bronze, 2022



'Polymorphic'
Bronze, 2022



Bronze



'Obstinate'
Bronze, 2022



'Mask'
Bronze, 2017



'Target'
Bronze, 2022



Bronze
2022



'Towards Sainthood'
Bronze, 2020

Sutanu Chatterjee (1968) had deep attraction for rural life. He was born and brought up in a village in Burdwan. The simplicity of life, beauty of nature, the soil-centric music of village musicians had a great impact on him and inspired him towards creation. He had written in his memoirs that the impact of this innocent beauty was the root cause of his coming to artistic creativity and selecting sculpture as his medium of expression. From his village he came to Bolpur in 1980. After completing his school education at Bolpur, he was admitted to Kalabhavana in 1990, did his graduation in 1995 and post-graduation in 1997. In 2001, he joined Kalabhavana as faculty in sculpture. He was greatly inspired by the sculptures of Ramkinkar and said that had he not had such inspiration, he might not have selected sculpture as his way of life. In his own sculptural creativity, there is a strong impression of rural life and popular art; along with it he has assimilated geometry derived from Western modernism, minimalism and grotesqueness of primitivism. There is a search for traditional indigenous identity in his works. In the sculpture *Uprooted* he shows an upright inverted man, whose head is fixed to the ground and hands and feet are spread like branches of a tree. In *Crying Bird*, a bronze of 1994, the form of the bird is distorted geometrically to express the existential pain. In a wooden piece he reflects the linear simplicity of a village doll through minimal expression. *Kali*, a painted wood of 2001 is a minimal form of the primitive with its grotesqueness. Similar is the case with another painted wood titled *Nostalgia*. He integrates modernism with the post-modern.



'Traumatic Child'
Bronze



'Seated Lady'
Bronze, 2012



'The Revenge'
Bronze, 2018



'The Cry'
Bronze, 2015

Rishi Barua (1958) is also a faculty in sculpture at Kalabhavana, Santiniketan since 2005. He is a painter too. He works in terracotta, metal scrap and various other mediums. His sculptures are structural, often constructivist, rebellious against the crisis of humanity. For example, in a sculpture constructed out of metal scrap, he depicts a seated mother with her dead child on her lap. Here the influence of the famine of 1943 is very much apparent. He has turned it into an eternal crisis of humanity. In another one, constructed out of iron sheets and rods he depicts the dilapidated condition of humanity. In a large constructed outdoor environmental sculpture, Barua constructed a gate, where human glory is resurrected from the mechanised victory of the civilisation. Thus globalised situation of present civilisation is vividly expressed in his works.



'Home-Sweet-Home - I'
Iron & Scrap, 2014



'Insect - I'
Iron & Scrap, 2025

Adip Dutta (early 1970-s) after graduating in Social Science completed his art education in sculpture from Rabindra Bharati University in 2000. He creates his sculptures based on post-modern conceptualism, most of which are centered on some sort of installation. His first solo exhibition was held in 2001 at Birla Academy of Kolkata. There he showed an installation based work titled *Making of a Statesman*. The floor was spread with paper negatives of various news papers. On it stands a few human figures clad with strings throughout their bodies. Underneath there were scattered, in a square format, large number of terracotta built human figures. In his work titled, *Construction of Eye Witness* he depicted the relation of life with spread of information technology. In *Buddha Smiles* he incorporated his protest against the nuclear blast held at Pokharan. In an installation of 2008 he constructed a large insect in the form of an aircraft

in front of which he placed a panic stricken child. These are a few examples of his works, which indicate that Dutta derives his ideas from the decays of globalised post-modern situation.



Adip Dutta
*'Reimagining The Archaic -
A Set of Objects'*
Bronze, 2023



Adip Dutta
*'Reimagining The Archaic
1st of Object'*
2023



Adip Dutta
Fiberglass and Steel, 2011



Adip Dutta
Bronze

The sculptures of **Subrata Biswas** (1972) simultaneously address two perennial problems that our modern sculpture is often forced to confront. First is the question of identity, the second is that of socio temporal commitment. Subrata, through his skill and meditative tackling of forms, brings out assimilation within the two. Primitivity and folk traditions have played a significant role in his approach towards form. He completed his Masters from Rabindra Bharati University in 1997 and is now attached to the University as faculty. He has worked both in terracotta and bronze. Both these media have their own trends of expressive properties. But his conceptual rendering has energised one with the property of the other. Particularly his bronzes display a kind of sonority, which is very much an inherent characteristic of terracotta. Let us cite as example two of



Subrata Biswas
'Hide and Seek'
Bronze



'Power Unprotected'
Bronze



'Deception'
Bronze



Bronze

his works. In a terracotta piece, we find two totem trees that have grown up from two sides of the ground and merged decoratively into one. Under it there is another figure with elongated terror stricken eyes and properly masked to cover his face and nose. It has been created out of the pandemic of Covid 19. In another bronze piece, he displays the seriousness of pollution. A high monument rises up in a conical form. On the top of it there is a human figure crouching. Upon his curved back there is a motor car. The smoke is emitted from the car. The artist makes a pitiful tragic journey through the devastating time and picks up various ingredients from the remote past and present and synthesises them to build up an artistic identity of his own expression and also of the trends of the contemporary sculpture.

Debanjan Roy's (1975) sculptures are iconic through transformation of naturalness into expressionist and constructivist rebellion against the crisis of extinction of moral values. Very often his works are installation based. He did his graduation and post-graduation in sculpture from Rabindra Bharati University. He often uses mythical icons to denounce the contemporary crisis. In his *Dancing Nataraj*, the face of the mythic icon turns to be the face of the artist himself. Mahatma Gandhi is now an iconic figure. He invokes a value system, which was ideal for survival of humanity. All his values and preachings have been made trivial and of inconsequence. Debanjan depicts the image of Mahatma to express his violent and sarcastic protest against this serious decomposition. His Mahatma clad in immaculate pajama and kurta, being seated beside a golden cow with a smart phone in hand is immersed in taking his selfie. In another one, Gandhi walks taking a bunch of shopping bags in his two hands. Gandhi moves driving a motor bike. Bapu sits on a running ox flying with an aircraft held in his right hand. The sculpture *Swachha Bharat* shows, Bapuji standing with a long sweeping pole holding it with his two hands. Choukidar Gandhi appearing to be made up of cylindrical wooden pieces standing erect with a tall stick in hand. These are a few of the examples how the artist through his humour and anger lashes at the contemporary decomposed society through the iconic symbol of Mahatma.



'The Men with His Shadow'
Painted Fiber Glass, 2022



'Portrait of Shankar Ghosh'
Bronze



'Bapu with Ipad'
Fiber Glass with Acrylic Paint

Sumitabha Pal (b.1967) after graduating from GCOAC, Calcutta in 1990, did post-graduation in Sculpture from Baroda in 1992. He says about his sculptural expressions thus 'I try to give shape to human emotions. My sculpture speak on a very personal note. The works transcends mere physical objects in order to express human emotions. ...Apart from anecdotal or personal references my works remains extremely minimalist in approach.'



'Evaporation of Emotion'

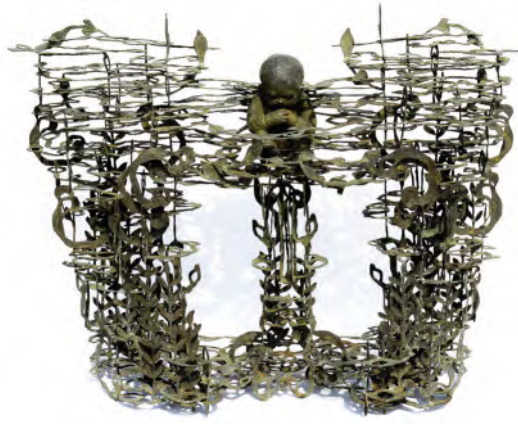


'Hand - I'
Polished Brass Metal

Tapas Biswas (1972) is a very significant and promising Kolkata based young sculpture. About his own form he said: 'In short, the root of my work lies in line to line, shape to shape and line to shape and vice versa.' Biswas completed his BVA from Govt College of Art, Calcutta in 1998 and MFA from Benaras Hindu University, in 2000. Since then he is exhibiting in different art galleries throughout India. His works bring forward the decay of human values. He expresses the inner void through various types of textural complexities on the surface of the body. In an untitled bronze of 2017, he shows innumerable human figures running in conglomeration clasping each other's hands. In a 2018 bronze titled, *Going to Fly*, he depicts a boy seated on a pole like structure, where the top part of the pole appears like two wings attached to the back of the thoughtful boy. In *Vertical Cities* a brass piece of 2021 he constructs a totem pole made up by human bodies rising one above the other. These are a few examples of his works, where he depicts the complexities of contemporary reality.



'Billie Dancing'
Bronze, 2017



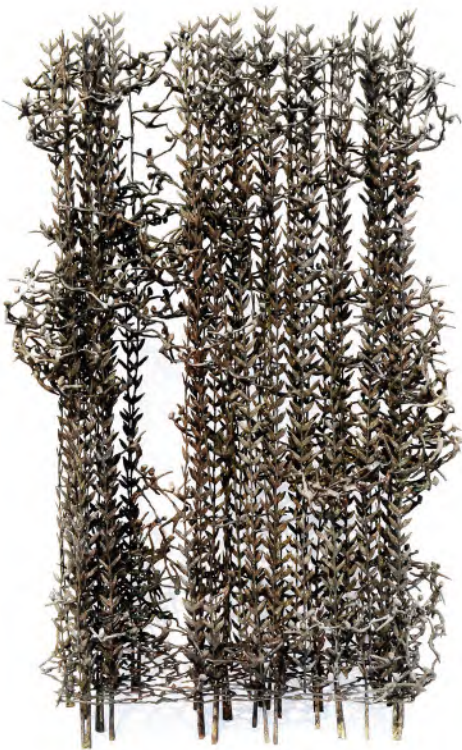
'Innocense - I'
Bronze



Slate Stone, Resin & Steel
2022



Bronze
2014



'Had It Been So'
Bronze, 2016



'Benares'
Bronze



'The Decorative Pond'
Bronze



Terracotta



Bronze



'Benares'
Bronze



'Benares'
Bronze

Nantubehari Das (1977) completed his post-graduation in sculpture in 2006 from Rabindra Bharati University. He uses a combination of unusual multiple mediums in his sculptures to express the intrinsic void within the globalised contemporary reality. We may look at a few of his works, which are humorous and contemptuous in expression to posit subtle rebellion against the contemporary situation. In a work we find a helmet placed on the floor. A small dog peeps out from the opening in front. With this composition the image appears like a tortoise. Here lies the humour. He constructs the head of a deer. Its two elongated and branched horns are decorated with various mechanical and electronic elements like a switch, a knob, a bulb, a clock, a speedometer etc. revealing the essence of electronically opulent contemporary society. A monkey wearing a mask sits on a stool stretching its tail, with a banana in hand, which it cannot swallow due to mask on the face. From these few pieces we can have an idea of the nature of his expression.



'Tracing The Contour of a Convoluted Shape'
Aluminium Pins, 2023



'Untitled'
Brass, 2021



'Untitled'
Fiber Glass



'Untitled'

Mukulendu Pathak Completed his BVA in sculpture from Govt. Art College, Calcutta in 1989 and M.A.(Fine) Sculpture from Baroda in 1991. He held his first solo show at Kolkata in 1996 and the second solo at Rabindra Bhavan, New Delhi in the year 2003. His sculptures are figurative and human centric, expresses the inner turmoil of dilapidated existence.



'Dancer'



'Naked King - I'

Mrinal Kanti Gayen (1971) has traversed in an entirely different field, where a very few sculptors of his generation have preferred to dwell. He has sculpted landscape, which is mostly a painter's domain. After post-graduation in sculpture from Govt Art College, Calcutta he has completely immersed himself in creation, despite his busy schedule of duties as a faculty in his Alma mater. Being a person belonging to Sundarbans of Bengal, which is rich in natural beauty, he has opted for sculpting nature in various forms, where Meera Mukherjee may have been his inspiration. Gradually he has perfected his poetic skill of execution and has given forms to land, water bodies, leaves, branches, creepers, flowers of trees and such other lyrical subjects. In a globalised situation, where human suffering is mostly



'Rhythm - I'
Bronze, 2022

highlighted, Gayen has preferred an opposite area as the subject of his creativity, the pleasant beauty of nature. In this positive outlook, he has made a mark in creative field.



'Rhythm - II'
Bronze, 2022



'Rhythm - III'
Bronze, 2022

Bhabatosh Sutar (b.1974) completed his graduation in painting from G.C.A &C, Calcutta in the year 2000, but out of his own endeavour and interest in sculpture, he has projected himself as a very important sculptor and installation artist in the contemporary art field of Bengal and India. His contribution in the creation of public art is also very significant. 'Chander Haat' is an exceptional artists group of Kolkata of which he is one of the founders. Through incorporation of various mechanical and electronic engineering feats, he makes his sculptures and installations multidimensional with concerns about the encompassing social decay.



'Gap'
Used Hammer, Glass Jar,
Terracotta Head, 2021



'In Between'
Wood & Bronze
2017

In the post-modern situation, art is considered more as a concept and expression of imagination than skill. As an instance, we may look at the

installation based sculptures of **Pabitra Kumar Ganguly** (1973). By profession he is a police officer. Before the 30th year of his life he had no intention to inculcate art even in a leisurely way. At the age of thirty, he was attracted towards painting and started to practice it in free time. Ultimately he shifted to sculpture and preferred unconventional media and ways of execution. Within a short period, he has progressed in such a way that in the present art scenario of Bengal, he cannot be ignored as a sculptor. After he started, he took a short course in sculpture at Visvabharati Kalabhavana. We may look at a few of his works. *The Speed* is a large format junk sculpture of size 7' 10" x 8' x 5' 5" installed in the open premise of a vacant land at Salanpur Police station of Paschim Bardhaman. The observer can identify a running horse fabricated by joining various parts of iron sheets, rods, nets, bolts etc. *Mother and Child* of 2023 is nothing but a large format safety pin (97x17x3 cm) formed to represent the image of *mother and child* with minimal distortion. *Allegory of Sun* of 2023 is an arrangement of steel wrenches on a wooden platform. These are ideal examples of how concepts give rise to life-centric expressions through minimal possible manipulation.



Pabitra Kumar Ganguly
'The Twister'
Junc Parts Materials

Another characteristic of post-modern conceptualism is how sculpture is generated out of painting and how indigenous popular elements are used in construction. As an example we may mention a work titled *Destruction* by **Rabin Roy** (1974), a BVA (1997) of Govt Art College, Calcutta. It is built out of paper, paper pulp, hair, graphite and water colour. Basically it is a painting but the burning architecture protruding out of the flat surface begets a prominent 3-d appearance. Another of his sculptural work, the image of which is presented here, is unique due to its form and concept. It is constructed out of indigenous popular elements like bamboo spikes, clay etc, which gives it a special look. It shows an entrapped crawling person, who strives to come out of the entanglement.



Rabin Roy
'Destruction - I'
Paper & Paper Pulp, Hair, Graphite &
Water Colour on Paper



Rabin Roy
'Avoiding Conflict'
Paper Pulp, Clay, Bamboo, Iron Wire
2025

Sourav Roy Chowdhury (b.1977) Completed his BFA and MFA from Kala Bhavana, Visva-Bharati in 1999 and 2001 respectively. He has received the Birla Academy award and Emami Chisel award in 2005 and 2015 respectively. His works are mostly figurative expressing super realistic entanglement of existence.



Saurav Roy Chowdhury
'Untitled'



Saurav Roy Chowdhury
'Untitled'

Three women sculptors have recently come to light due to their compassionate and jubilant works. **Alakananda Sengupta** (1963) works in terracotta, ceramics and metal through which she expresses the pleasures and pains of mankind, particularly the dignity of women. Her ceramic work, *Girl of Gaza*, indicates how the recent history of suffering of women gets reflected in her works. In another ceramic piece, an owl sits on the shoulder of a girl, both having melancholic expressions.



Alakananda Sengupta
'Power'
Terracotta



Alakananda Sengupta
'How do you find me...a loaf of meat!'
Terracotta

Banasri Khan (1974), a self-taught sculptor, creates victories of humanity through her bronzes like *Desire*, *Love Creeper*, *Erotic Rock*, etc. Nature for her has not been confined to the popular sense of the term but has gone much beyond. As a city-bred being, her 'nature' has been severely influenced by her urban tensions. All of her works center around human interest in figurative abstract structure. Her exposition echoes exploration of an inner soul in search of a vision. Her bronzes not only reflect life in them but a sense of synchronization and various rhythms. She has been awarded for her sculptures (3 awards) and paintings (one award).



'Entwined in Love'
Bronze, 2024



'Erotic Rock'
Bronze, 2015

Mousumi Roy (1982) is a ceramic artist and works with commitment towards life. She completed her graduation and post-graduation in ceramics from the Government College of Art and Craft, Calcutta, and completed her master's in the year 2007. In her ceramics, she stresses the predicament of women and various rituals of life. In animal sculptures, she shows her sympathy towards pets. In a depiction of a dog, she paints a girl on its back, who clutches the dog with her two hands. This kind of fun and frolic is occasionally expressed in her works. But her concern is on the starkness of reality. She uses paint on her sculptures that brings a new dimension to the work. Lately, she has reduced the amount of colour in her works and is using some gold lustre and other mediums such as copper. Her work focuses on animal-human duality, and also on child and woman abuse.



Mousumi Roy
'Scaredy Cat'
Ceramic Stoneware, 2024



Mousumi Roy
'Hunger'
Ceramic Stoneware, 2024

Tamal Bhattacharya (b.1974) is a ceramic artist, but he came to ceramics at a later stage. He completed his graduation in painting from Kala Bhavana, Visva-Bharati in the year 2001 and post-graduation from Baroda in murals in 2003. While in Baroda, he came in contact with the artist P. R. Daroz, who inspired him to practise ceramics. From then on, he has been working in this medium. At present, he is widely known for his ceramic installations, sculptures, and murals. He is inspired by the formal simplicity of the folk art of Bengal. He is the first artist who installed the entire pandal and idols in ceramics in 2007 at Barisha Club, Kolkata.



Tamal Bhattacharya
'Untitled'



Tamal Bhattacharya
'Untitled'



Tamal Bhattacharya
'Untitled'

Jayanta Bhattacharya (b.1974) completed his M.V.A. in sculpture from the Government College of Art, Calcutta in 2004. His recent works are based on balloons. About his sculpture, he says: "Resemblance between the character of a balloon and the character of modern life has inspired me to shape this form in my art. In my art I have depicted the contemporary social, economic and political culture around me."

He received the National Academy Award from Lalit Kala Akademi in the 47th National Exhibition of Art, 2004. He also received a grant from The Pollock-Krasner Foundation (New York) in 2016.



Jayanta Bhattacharya
'Untitled'



Jayanta Bhattacharya
'Untitled'

Here we come to the end of this dissertation as we have to work within a limited space. The arena of sculptural activity in Bengal is constantly growing parallel to the all India field. Large numbers of young sculptors are working sincerely through various sorts of new inventions of form and concepts. In the time of this severest turmoil and anarchy, they are working as rebels to highlight the tumult of reality; also to show the way of transcendence. We have endeavoured to show the trends only through the creativity of some artists. The modernism that originated through the works of Ramkinkar at Santiniketan has blossomed in various directions in the realm of the globalised condition, where virtual cyber reality is reigning supreme. Contemporary sculptors are doing their best to broaden the field. Bengal sculpture is a part of the Indian panorama but it has some special features that we have tried to trace.

FROM THE ARCHIVES



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Guest Editor Satish Gujral
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Prelude

Is the Sculpture Boom round the Corner?

Why devote one full issue to sculpture? After all, sculpture has always been the forte of the more seasoned collector, and it has never been easy for sculptures to find a surefire market in recent times.

The reasons actually are not far to seek. A cursory look at the global art market will make it evident that sculptures are back with a bang. I use the term 'back with a bang' very consciously. Because it is not always that a three-dimensional piece retains the price tag of the world's top selling piece of art even if it is for about five months.

The Indian contingent on the world map has Anish Kapoor leading from the front, with his mirrors still making people gape at the enormous potential of illusions on giant three dimensional masterpieces. Subodh Gupta and Bharti Kher are commanding great prices at international auctions, while Somnath Hore became the first Bengali sculptor to command a staggering price of 157,250 GBP at an international auction with his *Khanjani Players* this year.

Actually, when sculpture sells, it proves that the market is rock solid. And standing on the precipice of 2011, one is happy to note that sculptures are no longer lacking in patrons.

That is reason enough to take a very close look at sculptures at this point of time. What is evident in the recent Art Fairs around the globe, sculptures and three-dimensional objects have come to grab people's fancy. Reports from museums and galleries do also bear out this fact. It seems that after the downturn sculptures and three-dimensional art have experienced a new lease of life. It is likely that sculptures may turn out to be the art form drawing maximum patrons, and we may get to hear the names of Anish Kapoor, Subodh Gupta, Bharti Kher, Satish Gujral, Ravinder Reddy, Mira Mukherjee, Somnath Hore and many more.

Vikram Bachhawat

Editorial

This issue of ART news & views is based on sculpture, trying to bring into focus the current trends of sculpture in Indian contemporary art.

Whatever the medium, art to me, is the expression of the adventures and discoveries of the human organism reacting to the environment of the perpetual readjustment. Creativity, I believe, being an expression of freedom and originality, knows no boundaries except those inherent within itself. It claims no favourites among styles or "isms". To create is to select or invent elements significant to a given purpose, and organize them into a new and unique form. Creative process depends on a certain attitude of mind. It is an invitation to free thinking, exploration and progression. Its opposite is imitation that spells conformity, reaction and decadence.

I believe creativity is like a living organism. It germinates, evolves, grows to its full heights, and ends. What it leaves behind are the peaks of its developments that we call traditions or periods. There are many peaks of development of varying heights, in a people's cultural growth, as it is in the evolution of an individual artist. We consider these peaks as complete because every peak is complete when it has reached its zenith. Art, like peaks, does not admit of improvement; what it admits of is its growth.

Painting, sculpture and architecture are equal manifestations of a single aesthetic. Determined by the force of necessity, all three are locked together in a common structural frame work, measure and proportion, system of movement, sonority and echo. It is this homogeneity that has made the dream of achieving a synthesis of the three, almost as old as has been their isolation from each other.

We leant to overcome the "lack" of third dimensions in painting by the use of linear and atmospheric perspective and strove to give our depictions as natural a look as was possible. It was to be years before I was to be exposed to that new datum of space which instead of subscribing to the dictate of nature would reduce nature's role in the creative process to only as a point of departure. Better still I would learn to determine my own power of transformation by the distance I would achieve from nature.

By this new datum it would be the process of creation itself that was to create its own reality. The reality of this new architecture of painting was to be its existence. The proof of its creation was to be its being.

The space by this new datum, in the architecture of painting was to become as much an internal experience as it was an external object. It was to become indivisible from the human condition and man himself. It gave the artist a choice of either enlarging his self within the space or enlarging the space within himself.

Call it whatever you may; a victory of non-sense over sense, a triumph of dialectic over logic. That is what art means to me.

SATISH GUJRAL

Creative Impulse

'PUBLIC SCULPTURES ARE THE PUBLIC'S OWN CONSCIOUSNESS'

Johny ML in conversation with K.S. Radhakrishnan

Internationally acclaimed Indian sculptor, K.S. Radhakrishnan speaks to JohnyML about his post-Ramp phase works. While speaking about the status of bronze sculptures in India, he comments on the relevance of public sculptures, saying that public sculptures are in a sense the public's own consciousness about art and their times.

JML: Let me call the present creative phase of your life as the 'post-Ramp' phase. The Ramp was an ambitious project. You could exhibit this huge work in four cities including Kolkata, Delhi, Mumbai and Trivandrum. Before we go into the post-Ramp phase, could you please tell us about the 'Ramp Experience', I mean the making of it, transporting it to cities and your decision to rest it finally etc?

KSR: It took two years to make the Ramp (Liminal Figures and Liminal Space) and it was started in 2006 completed in 2008. This was just after my Freehold Series, where the air bound Musuis and Maiyas were placed on the crest of the pillars that were embedded with the miniature human figures (Firefly figures as Shiva Kumar described). Those figures were not depicting a



The artist in his studio

particular movement but they were movements from within evoking an extreme lightness with the very minimum contact to take off from the pillar. Prior to this freehold I had done two sculptures titled The Ramp which had a foot size figures of the Musuis and Maiyas ascending to reach out to the large figure placed on an independent platform on the Ramp. Those two sculptures which had Musui as Ramkrishna and Maiya as Maa Sharadha were conceived to be integrated and exhibited juxtaposing both. The sculpture was initially exhibited in Delhi then traveled to Baroda and Bombay.

The Liminal Figures and Liminal Space is the result of integrating the freehold movements on the ramp depicting the inherent and evolving nature of human forms from the first take off figure to the last landing one. The whole Ramp had to be conceived as a long project with myself involving for two years in the making and also the structure intended to be long enough for a viewer to walk along till the last wall. Here the figures on the Human pillars that starts with a horizontal taking off and cart wheeling to evolve the vertical landing figure. The beginning of the Ramp is seen from the top and you see the figures at the end on an eye level along with symmetrically modeled Maiya and where all the movements within the ensemble meet. The shadowed wall is not depicting the end of the movement and probably it's the beginning of the space beyond.

I could not exhibit the Ramp with Ramkrishna and Maa Sharadha in Kolkata. But I wanted this Ramp (with liminal figures) to open first at Kolkata before traveling to other cities. The Birla Academy

sponsored my show in 2008 and last year I exhibited the piece at Lalit Kala Academy in Delhi. It was in April this year the sculpture was shown in Thiruvananthapuram. The Kerala Tourism sponsored the show at Kanakakunnu Palace. It is a tough task for sculptures of this scale to travel from one place to another but I have trained hands to take it around. My Studio Assistants are with me for many years and their support is extremely valuable not only in the making of such projects but also packing and shifting. The sculpture eventually will find a permanent place in a museum in India.

JML: I am very keen to know why a public art project like Ramp finally ended up in a gallery situation. Ramp was a huge hit with the audience. Even the installation artists of our country appreciated the scale and daring of the Ramp. But somehow, I could not find any public or private patron to 'mount' it in a space for a larger audience? Does it show the lack of patronage for large scale bronze sculptures?

KSR: The Liminal Figures and Liminal Space (The Ramp) is conceived from the very beginning in an internal space with artificial light. This is to avoid uncontrolled lights and the noise from the outside world. The Sculpture is best seen and felt in a closed space because of the intensity of the movements of the figures that leads to a meditative space. If it is exhibited in open it will contradict the movements of the surroundings and one won't be able to focus the

movements that evoke evolving. I do not see the sculpture in a private collection and I am sure that it will be mounted permanently for a larger audience at some point of time. There are not many private museums in this country and one can only hope this will happen in places like Kolkata or Baroda.

JML: *In our contemporary art scene, perhaps you are the only 'sculptor' who sticks to a single medium that is bronze. However, many young artists are not interested to pursue this medium. Is it because the process is tedious, or is it too traditional in nature? Do you think that the aversion for this medium originates from the feeling that it would not find adequate patronage? What exactly is happening in/to the medium of bronze?*

KSR: It is true that I have been working on bronze as the final medium for my sculptures from the time I took to sculpting. When one says working on bronze, it is the casting in bronze. I have been using clay as the main medium and the forms were such that it could only possibly be cast in bronze. From clay, you have a plaster cast and with the help of molding you make a cast in wax before it goes to the foundry for firing and casting. Sometime I wonder whether I conceive my sculptures knowing the

limitless scope of the strong medium even though it is traditional in nature. Many sculptors choose to work on various materials especially modern synthetic mediums thinking that the traditional materials will not give room for their modern expression.

I am afraid whether one can only be modern by working only on modern materials. It depends on the artist's perception how he visualizes the imageries and how he invents his own interpretations and techniques whether it is modern or traditional material. From the ancient time, many Sculptors worked with bronze and all kinds of forms and techniques were explored in the medium and to find a different language with this age old medium isn't an easy task that many people may not pursue to work with it. With the attitude of looking for shortcuts many artists keep away from bronze as a medium as there are many techniques involved in the making of it. But bronze will always play an important role as one of the respected medium in the world of sculptures.

JML: *I am always surprised at your energy in organizing national and international sculpture symposiums. While interacting with many of the sculptors from abroad, I could gather*

that most of them do not do works in bronze mainly because the production cost is too high. In India, when they are in symposiums they get really excited and do large scale works. This shows that more than the West, India has cheaper production costs. Don't you think that we need to take this as an opportunity to promote bronze sculptures in the international scene?

KSR: I have been coordinating many sculpture workshops where sculptors from various states of our country and sculptors from other countries participate. It is obviously exciting for most of us to do large



Liminal Figures Liminal Space: a glimpse



*Detail:
Liminal Figures
Liminal Space*

scale sculptures meant for public spaces. Sculptors working on bronze in India are exposed to the technique of casting and finishing in bronze where sculptors from other countries depend on commercial foundries. We do not have many commercial foundries in India that the sculptors have to do everything by themselves. It is because of the lack of demand for creative sculptors/sculptures and the sculptors worked on statues made their own arrangements of casting. I remember working in Paris in the early nineties and the cost of casting in foundries there is six times more than casting in India.

We still follow indigenous techniques and materials for casting in bronze and the sculptors from

other countries find it extremely interesting as they can participate in the foundry activities. It is true that the production cost is much less in comparison to the west that we should explore and promote bronze sculptures in international scene.

JML: *Let's come to the Post-Ramp phase. After Ramp, I believe you have grown many years lighter. A kind of playfulness has come to your work since then. Of course, the playfulness of characters was a hallmark of your works all the times. However, the recent works have a sort of simplicity, which like playing with simple images. For example, I have noticed the way you create twigs, shrubs, foliages, group figures, boats, lamps and so on. Please tell us about this play with simple forms.*

KSR: After the Ramp I started working on sculptures of intimate scale where objects/forms like boat, lamp etc. are inserted

inside the firefly figures. And these figures together create shapes of human web ascending and descending, flying and falling, and also creates a kind of special 'cocoon or womb' protecting certain forms from memory. Sometimes these tiny figures descending from an infinite space to the ground reverse their movement and are seen going up in the air. I cast hundreds of these tiny figures and sit with my welder to join them like a script written at the site.

The emotional orientation almost like mindless exercise yet opens or creates a new space. When I make a life-sized Musui or Maiya walking with certain objects, their association with it is focused like Maiya with a Home or Musui with a Palm Leaf. The human squares with ascending and merging figures or with a portal in the center were also an attempt of this continuous flow of the collective with the individual movements of the figures on the table. The twigs and the foliage with figures are again to experience the impishness from within and the lightness it evokes. Musui or Maiya are characters that they have always been playful and harmless with their mischievous movements. The works I have been involved after the Ramp became simple in terms of concept and execution because of the complexities of the large Ramp.

JML: *An artist's maturity is often measured with his/her ability to move between the past and future through the mediation of the present. Handling the past knowledge and images systems with a certain kind of contemporary efficiency is always looked up to as clear mark of maturity. Your works and your personality show this maturity as you and your works move between the image repertoire of the past and that of the present. In the post-Ramp phase, I believe, the image repertoire from your nostalgic past started negotiating with the present in an apparent fashion. How do you look at this negotiating the images from the past, I mean, the images like a boat, a*



threshold, a lamp, Musui walking with palm leaf and so on.

KSR: Yes, that's what exactly happens in my post-Ramp works. Every time, I start my work on clay, there is a pre-meditation about the theme and form. But at certain level, as the modeling progresses, certain elements come in from the nostalgic memories. There is a greater need to protect the organic cohesiveness of the primary image, which is in clay and you feel the urgency to incorporate the new images; I think it is an interesting challenge that as a sculptor I always enjoy to face. With all modesty what I could say is that each work is a benchmark for a newly found maturity till an artist moves towards another work.

JML: *Musui and Maiya, the famous protagonists of your works have hosted several historical and mythical characters in/through them. Their transformations are without any crisis. This time you have created the image of Gandhiji picking up salt from the Dandi sea shore for the show that I have co-curated with Anubhav Nath. The interesting thing that I noticed is that you have introduced a split base for the Gandhi-Musui image that at once gives different dimensions to the image in question. Mythical, historical, folklore, political, social and aesthetical aspects are brought into this split base with different levels in one go. Also you have used salt-like objects in this work. I find it is a new twist in your work. Could you please explain?*

KSR: I have always been expressing the ideas through Musui and Maiya, the two characters imagined and I didn't feel the necessity of bringing in any other character as they stand for the male and female protagonists. Musui was modeled after a Santal boy when I was a student in Santiniketan and in the process of connecting with him after many years of my stay in Delhi; Musui is transformed and evolved to become one with the self. Maiya's presence had to be important in terms of interpreting the stories of their hosting various icons.

I did a series of sculptures where they are inseparable yet hosting individual actions. She is sometime a writer or an angel or a Mona Lisa and Musui is Jesus, Brahmin or a rat catcher. They hold each others' heads as they are conceived to be two halves.

And the work that I am involved at present is where Musui is an action collecting salt like Gandhiji did at Dandi. He is placed on a platform created on the center of a slanting structure. He bends like Gandhiji and picks up salt and there are other salt beds formally created around. The very act of bending and picking up the salt is shown as a monumental act that made such a strong influence in the mind of the people. Different levels are created on this base. There was no alternative to the crystal like object which I used on the salt beds and probably this would open a new way of juxtaposing different materials with bronze.

JML: *I am told that you are going to erect a Terra Fly Threshold in front of a forthcoming public museum in Goa. Terra fly and threshold have been your interesting subjects for long time. Could you please explain your affinity for these two images?*

KSR: I am happy for having chances to do large sculptures for the public spaces and the one I am working on is to be installed on the river bank of Mandavi in Goa. Musui as Terra Fly was done in Santiniketan in 2006 where he is placed on the top of a column and looking at the activities on the ground. The very word itself defines as terra-the earth and the fly is connected to the air bound. So the figure is air bound with the legs thrown up in space and holding on to the top base and taking an aerial view. You may not look at it but you are looked at and you cannot escape from it. It is positioned to be much above all of us. So this Terra Fly will be placed on a specially created base on the roof top of the portal where people pass through. From the distance it will be like a gate that brings you close to the piece and you are monitored by the Terra Fly on the roof top. You may make an effort to escape from many things but you cannot escape from yourself, the sculpture would remind you! I conceive Terra Fly as one's own consciousness, which is alert and dynamic.



Ramp with Ramakrishna

A good public sculpture represents the consciousness of the public as it represents the aesthetic preferences of a time and authority that constitute this 'public'.

JML: *You are going to curate a retrospective and tribute show of Ramkinkar Baij in the National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA), New Delhi in 2011. You have been working on this project for almost three years. Could you please tell me about it? As a student of Ramkinkar Baij you relentlessly worked towards the fulfillment of this project. What is the status now?*

KSR: It was a pleasant surprise that I was chosen by one of the advisory committee of the NGMA to curate an exhibition of my teacher Ramkinkar Baij. And I took it as a chance to pay tribute to the great sculptor who is considered to be the father of Modern Indian Sculpture. I was chosen probably because of my close association with Kinkar Da when I was a student in Santiniketan and I was also the last student of Kinkar Da. There has not been a proper documentation done of his work and it has been challenging since his works are spread all over. Fortunately the NGMA has a good collection and with the involvement of other senior artists we would be able to mount the Retrospective exhibition of Ramkinkar in the near future.



Iconic Shrine, Jawahar Kala Kendra, Jaipur

STIMULATING THOUGHTS!

Pankaja JK in conversation with Chintan Upadhyay

Disturbing Chintan Upadhyay in his busy schedule and ultimately getting an interview was a kind of annexing a difficult citadel. But here it was not my efforts but his kindness and friendly gesture helped me to get his interview for "Art : News & Views" magazine. This short and precise conversation shows his stronghold over his beliefs and sensitivity towards everything that he confronts in his life, be it human relation, technology or nature. The following conversation highlights it:

PK: As your name goes 'Chintan' you are really so concerned with the social causes. Are you 'an artist for social cause'?

CU: I would say that directly or indirectly every artist is in one way or the other related to social cause. They

are concerned with the social issues. And even I feel sensitivity towards some issues and express my feelings against them in my art.

PK: Your creations, or say, installations are based on practical aspects of life rather than just giving an artistic pleasure. Do you enjoy this status of being a thoughtful artist and not purely an artist portraying romanticism with life?

CU: I am a thoughtful artist. People cannot say that an art is created purely for artistic pleasure. Art is not a creation in isolation, it has got some stimuli, some subject. So it extends beyond just artistic pleasure.

PK: Your 'Alec Babies' created wonder and stir in art world. How did this idea strike you and was there any particular reason to paint them with miniature paintings?

CU: If you look at these babies you will find them homogeneous. So they represent homogeneous concerns. But the only thing that differentiates them is the Indian miniature paintings on them. Without these paintings they would be nowhere. In fact these paintings are their identity. I have chosen it deliberately. If we look at the modern trend of the world, we find everywhere in the world people are developing similar tastes in terms of clothing, food and lifestyle. There is a development of mall culture, famous brands which are widely available, so there is a kind of analogous behaviour throughout the world. So when one tries to move out of this identical zone, he searches for ethnicity. This ethnicity is an attraction. Alec babies portray this ethnicity, they stand out as Indian and therefore they stand out



Umbilical Cord

from others.

PK: *Your installations have been developed as factory products and also developed with the use of native skill. Do you find any difference between the use of technology and handcrafted installations?*

CU: Technology works as a tool for me. I use it as a medium to develop my images. Traditional knowledge that I amalgamate provides me with information. They give me new ideas. But it is not always necessary that I adopt these ideas and work upon my original thoughts. But at times I do think over them.

PK: *Were you always inclined to be an artist? Has any artist influenced you?*

CU: No, I never wanted to be an artist. In fact, I wanted to be an architect. But I think being in any of these fields involves creativity. So my creative urges are satisfied as an artist. Speaking about influences, I have

many. I cannot name anyone in particular. My influences range from people of art world to a layman. My thinking process is influenced by the situation around, the nature, the technology and almost everything.

PK: *How do you analyse it?*

CU: You see,

everything around you is changing. Take an example of Bollywood; the outfits and the dance have got under western influence. After the Chinese product have taken hold over our market we find even a common man has started believing and getting attracted towards Feng Shui along with the Vastu Shastra. And all these things do influence my creative process. A man has to be thoughtful and when we start thinking, we start creating. Now we all know about Obama's visit to India, its purpose and its outcome. Still, as an artist I think over it. My thinking may be different from others, and in the same way hundred minds may think in hundred different ways. That's good for progress. And it is personally good for me as an artist, for it acts indirectly or unknowingly as a metaphor in my work.

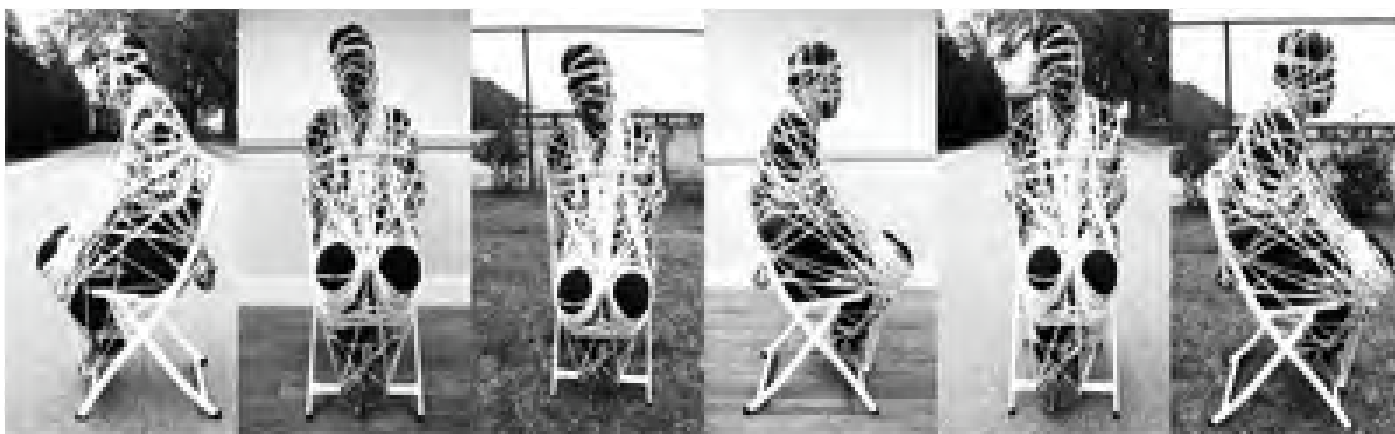
PK: *Can we have a peep in the lighter mood of Chintan Upadhyay? Do you remember any humorous moment in relation to your artistic progression which has made a mark on you?*

CU: I love partying! I hail from Rajasthan which is a very colourful city, and so I love colors. The thing that I find very

humorous is when people ask me to stop making 'babies'. People always look out for sensation and they have a kind of consumer mentality where they constantly look for 'latest' or change. They develop boredom when they see same thing for longer time. They expect me to give them some thing different from these Alec babies and that makes me laugh and feel sad towards their way of thinking. These Alec babies are not just products; they are the thoughts, expression and feelings. Don't have a surface view, understand the depth of it. Of course, I don't want to force anybody to admire it. But when they ask me to stop producing these babies I feel sorry for them. They seem to ironically conflict their own thought process. I doubt their admiration for art. Basically I am a provocative artist. I like to provoke people. If they show mediocre attitude and feel dejected if I do not stop producing these babies, then I think I have provoked them and by repeatedly boosting on stopping to produce them, they are provoking me. But my art is not based on someone's guidance about what I should be doing. It's totally my world and my creation... whether you like it or not...

PK: *Your artistic journey is filled with social causes, awareness and rebellion against male chauvinism. Do you intend to write an autobiography in future?*

CU: Oh! I am not a biography material. I cannot write about myself. Though I like to read autobiographies, I might not do justice while penning my life (smiles... signs off).



Captivating, Performance in Moultry, USA

SCULPTURAL TRADITIONS AND CONTEMPORARY ART PRACTICES

by Prayag Shukla



Sculpture at Konark Sun Temple

Over the centuries various sculptural traditions all over the world have created an oeuvre which is large, and which stands in forms of classical monuments, relief murals, statues, and image-bound deities, even today. And if one was to include in the old and classical traditions various other forms of sculpting in folk and tribal art practices also, we would find that the sheer range and beauty of all these traditions and art practices is not just wondrous but also mesmerising. Thus, in our country alone when we look at Elephanta, Ajanta Ellora, Konark, Khajuraho, Mahablipuram and Sanchi, to name only a few significant art monuments, we are reminded that whatever they offer to us to enjoy and study in terms of volume, line, texture, creative energy and imaginative perceptions, along with the technical excellence, is really endless, and inexhaustive. Then there are Chola bronzes, wood carvings, and

many metallic creations spread all over the country. The terracotta temples of Bishnupur, and various clay, and terracotta images from Rajasthan (like Molela) and from Southern states, from central parts of India also keep us enthralled. Tribal technique of creating images in bell metal Dhokra casting, has earned world-wide acclaim. One can go on adding to this list, and the list will not be completed. This offers ample proof in itself that our classical and folk-tribal art practices have given us a treasure, which has to be explored time and again. And to our delight we know that some traditions of sculpting are still active and continuing, parallel to the contemporary art practices, and are exploring newer modes and material to create new images.

Since the second half of the 20th century especially, contemporary/ modern art practices in the genre came alive and started treading a path, which was aligned to or was in tune with the classical mode, yet was independent of it. With Ramkinker

Baij working with cement, and with a vision to create something which breathes the sensibilities and concerns of our times, and yet does not negate or overlook the classical traditions, a new era was heralded. Fresh works started coming in from the generations after him, contributing to the modern oeuvre. The works of Sankho Choudhury, Dhanraj Bhagat, Somnath Hore, Meera Mukherjee, Sarbari Roy Chowdhury, Nand Gopal, Nagji Patel, Balbir Singh Katt, Himmat Shah, Latika Katt, Dhruv Mistry, Madan Lal, Ravinder Reddy, Mrinalini Mukherjee, Rajinder Tiku come to our mind instantly. Their dynamic and enchanting creations stir the viewers' minds. The way Meera Mukherjee explored the tribal technique of Dhokra bell metal casting to her own creative urges and uses, is unforgettable. This trend continued from fifties to the end of 20th century, and is still evolving. Yet new trends in art practices in the last two decades have somewhat overshadowed the works which were in tune with classical modes or were influenced by classical art monuments in some form or the other. New trends have also somewhat blurred the dividing line between sculpture and installation. The hype being given to newer trends has also resulted in the use of 'newer' art material, and in this scene, and situation, one finds that from fiberglass, to fibers, wires, bulbs, sands, twigs, leaves, metals of various kinds are being tried and tested in the medium of sculpture, including man-made other objects like utensils, cans, bottles and various mechanical parts of products. Anything under the sun has been explored in the making

of sculptures, and water, sand, tree trunks, pebbles etc. are included in the list of the material for sculptures. Undoubtedly this has enhanced the perception of the artist and viewer alike, yet there are questions, and concerns, which also come to mind.

Great heritage of art is 'moving' tourists world over, and number of visitors in Khajuraho or in Angkor-wat has increased annually. But the newer generations of artists in our country do not seem to refer to this heritage, the result of which is that in the contemporary art-discourse one seldom finds references to the great and monumental works of art these days. The 'classicality' which is well-defined in these monuments seems to have been forgotten by the artists of younger generations.

During the Bengal School period, artists including Nandalal Bose painted on the themes depicted in these monuments, and, as such, through their works people at large were sensitised towards the great heritage we have, and in the art-discourse, also the classical arts of India were present in some form or the other. Works of artist like Amrita Sher-gil are cases in point, where she herself refers to this heritage of sculptures and paintings, specially Ajanta and miniatures.

But the sudden shift in the field of sculpture and installation has seemingly de-linked the contemporary from the classical arts. Such things

happen when a new generation of artists aspire to be in tune with the issues and concerns of its times, and try to innovate. Yet too much emphasis on the current issues only, and the 'negation' of basic questions of life, and aesthetics, results in a situation where the viewer continually feels 'threatened' or 'demoralised'.

The freedom given by twentieth century art to the artists to use any material they like in painting and sculpture, was a great opportunity, and with this freedom a number of artists explored newer directions in terms of presenting the intent of their works, and with their technical skills and perceptive qualities enhanced the explorative use of concepts, themes and material per se. In the West a clear departure from the 'Renaissance' occurred, and a new art was born in the works of Braque, Brancussi, and Geocommeti, to name only a few, with the element of classicism in it.

Now we find that most of the times, the material is used to give a jolt, a shock only, and the very intent of an artwork remains 'un-specified' in visual terms as well. Hurriedly and half-heartedly created works present social and political comments, which do not seem to connect the viewer either with the work or with the issue they apparently are trying to highlight. This is not to deride the 'new art' produced by the younger generations, and we know some young artists are seriously involved in their creative pursuits, and are creating works with a new intent, and a fresh aesthetic feel; but the increasing tendency to 'pass' or present anything and everything in the name of 'new' or new artistic khoj, should certainly be the cause of worry.



Dhruv Mistry

In sculpture especially, with its three dimensional construct, it is somewhat simpler to locate, the touch of sublimity, 'spirituality' or the absence of it, and we know from our experience, that this touch is most valuable in art. I, for one, would like to believe that without a touch of sublimation, the 'created' work would definitely miss a certain inner core of the human heart. It is in this sense also, that the great heritage of art may remind us of the very essence of creation, and may provide us with the insights to our own times for certain basic issues relating to art and life. It would definitely add much to the artistic pursuits, if we bring once more the classical, as well as other sculptural traditions in our art discourses, afresh.



Rajinder Tiku



Madan Lal



Nagji Patel

SCULPTING OUT A THIRD DIMENSION FROM MADHYA PRADESH

by Saba Gulraiz

The history of sculpture in Madhya Pradesh is as old as our civilization. The tradition harks back to the splendid sculptures of the pre-historic and historic sites. The temples of Khajuraho and Stupas of Sanchi are its clear evidences. The élan of magnificent sculptures of Khajuraho temples still exemplifies the exuberance of their executors. The erotic sculptures built during 900 AD to 1000 AD by Chandela rulers, depict varying human relations and expressions, arousing both visual and sensual delights, whereas the majestic sculptures of Gautam Buddha at Sanchi feature his meditative state, evoking a sense of spiritual peace. These intricately carved sculptures portray the scenes from the life of Buddha and Jatakas; the stories are related to the Buddha and his earlier births. The magnificent stupas, monasteries, and monumental pillars built by the Maurayan emperor, Ashoka around 1st century AD, bear the clear impression and style of Mathura and Gandhara schools of sculptures. These sculptures embody



Khajuraho Sculpture

an intertwined relation of art with faith and religion. Like any other ancient historical monuments, these have become the sites for religious and cultural discourses mapping out the cognitive contours of elapsed times. Be those the Khajuraho temples or the Stupas of Sanchi, or any other historical sites for that matter, those sculptures have virtually become the religious and cultural repositories of India's otherwise ambiguous past.

Drawing inspiration from the wealth of sculpted artistry of this ancient past, the artistic journey of sculpting was constantly evolving. This was the time when art of sculpture came out of the temples to embellish the royal palaces, parks and other public places. Royalty had always had a great fascination for art, especially for sculpture; to not only add to the beauty of their luxurious palaces but to speak of their glorious victories.

Gradually, the purpose of art saw a transfiguration from the numinous to the transcribing of the glory of royal patrons. Madhya Pradesh also witnessed the same change, especially in the art of sculpture. During the early 20th century Raghunath Phadke, a famous portrait sculptor of his times, was invited by the Maharaja of Dhar who asked him to be his courtier. Phadke was born in 1884 at Vasai, Maharashtra and had his studio at the same place, but having been invited, he decided to move to Dhar in Madhya Pradesh, where he was allotted a plot of land to start his studio. Phadke's studio flourished under the royal patronage, but after his death in the year 1972, it came to be neglected due to the apathetic attitude of the government and lack of funds. Now it is almost in a dilapidated state, waiting for a new lease of life. Phadke's contribution should be recognized not only as a master sculptor but also as a pioneer in providing the much-needed training to the new generation sculptors.

Like Phadke, Rudra Hanji, who, though not

born in Madhya Pradesh, belonged to this place heart and soul. He was born in 1911 at Tarikere Karnataka, moved to Shantiniketan to receive training in sculpture from the master sculptor Ramkinkar Baij. Upon the invitation sent by Vijay Rajya Sindhiya, he shifted to Gwalior. He did not leave the place in his life time because of his sheer dedication to his job as a teacher in Padma girl's school, and for his deep attachment to the cultural milieu of Gwalior. The aspect of discipline and modesty of his own persona is quite visible in his sculptures. His sculptures of Saraswati, Natraj, Gautam Buddha, can be seen at various places in Gwalior like the precincts of Padma School, Kala Vithika and other public places. In these statues one might not find modern experimental idioms, but the classical grace he imparted to them is astonishing. In this sense he revived the classical Indian expressions. Rudra Hanji will always be remembered for his determination to bring out the art



Sanchi Sculpture

of sculpture from the royal courts into the academic institutions and within the reach of the common man.

As art was slowly extricating itself from the closed world of temples and palaces, coming into an open space, interest of the artist was also shifting from the purely formal approach to the expressions of his personal experiences. Now he could afford to free himself from the dictates of his patrons that had curbed his individual artistic emotions. He had now come to collaborate with the natural surroundings to draw inspiration from, but at the same time he realigned his own identity with the artistic legacy of his historical past. This dual vision, one grounded in the past, other in his immediate cultural and social milieu, helped him explore his own space in the contemporary world.

Madan Bhatnagar was the name among such artists who were exploring this new space in the sculptural art. Born in 1931 at Gwalior, he went to Shantiniketan to receive training from Ramkinkar Baij who was a trail blazer in quickening the modernist movement in Indian sculpture. In order to imbibe the spirit of modernism, Madan Bhatnagar veered towards abstraction. He has always been known for his experiments into various mediums and material. Being a teacher, his experiments were always for the benefits of his pupils. He was the driving force behind the opening of sculpture department in Government College of Fine Arts in Gwalior. Whether it was the organization of camps or any other art activities, he had always shown his enthusiasm while working with his students. Perhaps this was the reason why a big group of young sculptors emerged from Gwalior only. Among them there are names like Robin David, Jaya Vivek, Anil Kumar, Om Prakash Khare and Shashikant Mundi. They have now come up as the prominent sculptors of India.

Robin David carves out his own path from the hard stony ways of life, and never allows his spirit fade away in the midst of adversities. In his eventful life, initially there were many curves that finally shaped his destiny as a sculptor. This happened in 1979,

when one day after resigning from his post in Kala Parishad, he, just like a disillusioned filmy hero, started off from Gwalior on his two-wheeler and stopped only when he reached Bhopal. He joined the newly born Bharat Bhawan as an Assistant Director, but later, by some quirks of fate, landed in the marble world of Makarana (Rajasthan). His passion for Makarana marble is not new. It was growing with him since his childhood when he would bunk his school and would go to watch stone carvers making idols along the road side. He never had any liking for the mundane methods of academic teaching in his school and college. He would rather simply love to hang out with the sculptures of Gwalior fort to learn from them his lessons of sculpting.

His preference for Makarana marble is his conscious choice, as it has the extraordinary qualities of brilliant lustre, whiteness that does not fade away with time. So his understanding of the qualities of his material and his knowledge of the technique helped him explore new dimensions in his sculpture. While chiseling out marble to create a particular form, he takes care so that it retains its original characteristics. His sculptures titled 'Together' maintains stone's real quality beautifully, where there is a black sculpture with white veins and a white sculpture with black veins. He never deliberately tries to lay bare the hidden characteristics of his material by chiseling it



Robin David

out in one go, and does not disregard the claims of the outer appearances of the stone. His hand patiently moves on while he chisels out the extra mass to create his abstract form, where rhythm and movement have always been the primary concerns of the artist.

For him lines are the most important elements of any sculptural form, as it is inevitable in presenting a particular expression, else a slight ill-judgement in curving lines damages the whole expression. So it is always a matter of right judgement. In Robin's works one can see this perfect match between his perception and technical skill. Work is executed with a keen eye and focused hand. In this process spontaneity is never compromised.

Another significant sculptor from Madhya Pradesh who finds in marble a great potential to translate his artistic aspirations is Anil Kumar. Robin David and Ramesh Pateria's passion for marble took them to Makarana, while Anil Kumar didn't have look too far for his material. Being Born and placed in Gwalior, Gohra marble was easily accessible to him. The unique quality of this marble that attracts Anil is its natural grey, green and black colour. Initially Anil carved out his animal kingdom in this marble, the turtle being long the most favourite motif of the artist. Other creatures that are metamorphosed by him are fish, frog, and rhino. What might have attracted him about these otherwise slimy creatures, are their rough and hard stone-like bodies and the delicate beings inside. His rounded and sleek forms are the projections of this feeling. He is disinclined to reveal any elaborate details in his forms. Absence of details renders his basic forms rather abstract. He does not attempt to put forth any dominant scheme of thought, and believes that it is precarious to relate a new experience with the past stories. He simply seeks to explore the real diversity in the natural world of fauna along with their dynamics. His concern is to transform mass into an illusion of motion. His stone quivers with life at the slightest touch. The dimensions in their postures and positions are such that forms do not remain petrified,



Anil Kumar

they are eager to take a leap.

He yokes together many binaries in his single pieces--organic and inorganic, smoothness and roughness, motion and stillness. His sophisticatedly polished smooth forms lull us into an erotic dreamland. Anil has literally left no stone unturned. He has tried his hand in every stone available to him ranging from Gohra to Makarana to Basalana. Recently he is working in granite as it offers him a wide range of colour to enliven his faunal world.

Chandrasen Jadhav moves into an entirely new dimension. He moves away from the traditional style of sculpting where artists are preoccupied in etching out even the minutest details. He is unmindful of such detailing. What he tries to capture are the various moods, not the beauty frozen in marble. His sculptures are alive with poignant emotions. The magic of his hands transforms stone into glass. This transparency is a unique part of his art. The glimmering white gives an illusion of faces being strewn with a transparent cloth, concealing sculpted features, and distilling human moods.

In today's India when many artists in their enthusiasm have been carried away by the current of globalization, Om Prakash Khare goes back to his roots. He seeks inspiration for his art from the Indian tribal world where art of sculpture is firmly anchored in their rituals and traditions, in their practice of raising memorial pillars, in their carving of images of their deities. All these have a clear bearing on his creativity. Khare believes creativity is the cumulative effect of our society, religion and nature. His preoccupation with the images of Gram Devta (village deity) springs out from this belief. His inspiration comes from his close association with the amorphous stone images resurrected under the

shade of Peepal and Banyan trees which are common sights in Indian villages. These images always give him a sense of some supernatural presence. His images assume strange and awful shapes that evoke a feeling at once pious and fearsome.

Born in Gwalior, this unconventional sculptor is known for both his individualistic manner of sculpting, and his quality of draughtsman ship. Whether it is his theme or the use of varying material or colour, he has carved out his unique individual place as a sculptor. His sculptures are endowed with the quality of simplicity. His forms evolve naturally; these are always in the process of taking shapes. He makes no efforts to make his forms congruous. They seem to take their own shapes out of deformities. These deformities sometimes instill in us a strange feeling. Most of his sculptures are done in terracotta and wood to give a tribal feel, but in his recent series of 'Human figures' and 'Nature' done in stone, he creates highly



Om Prakash Khare

polished surfaces in contrast with textures.

Metal has always been used as a medium of expression even from the primeval days. Its ductile and malleable nature offers an artist a good number of possibilities in terms of flexibility in casting forth his artistic expressions. Though metal is extensively used today, women sculptors seem to be a trifle reluctant to accept this medium, mostly because of the common notion that this is not a woman's domain, as it demands a great deal of physical strength. Jaya Vivek dispels this notion by not only accepting this medium as a challenge but using it with consummate ease in the realization of her aesthetic sensibilities.

Born in Gwalior, Jaya comes from a family of painters but she always found painting to be too constricting in its two-dimensional space for self-expression. After getting a diploma in sculpture from Gwalior Art College, like many of her artist friends she moved to Bhopal to become a comrade in J. Swaminathan's haunt for collecting tribal artefacts from various parts of Madhya Pradesh, and since then she has been living and working here with her husband who is also an artist.

Traveling down the lanes of memories of her juvenile days, Jaya creates a play field where boys and girls in their carefree moments are performing their acrobatic feats. In their impassioned enjoyment, they throw up their body weight in air playing gullidanda, flying kites, rolling wheels. Jaya is not weaving dreams; she is letting them loose from the gravity to float in a fluid space. She casts her dreams with great care and skill, where forms are reduced into lines. Her figures in their postures and expressions have a rare grace. In their action sequences she creates a dynamic equilibrium, a momentary balance that makes the viewer standstill, and the placard reads, "Stop here or gently pass."

In today's contemporary sculptural practices where marble and metal have emerged as strong mediums of expression in terms of their durability



Jaya Vivek

and natural lustre, Devilal Patidar makes a deliberate choice of using clay as his medium, as in clay he finds a greater freedom of expression than in any other medium. The responsive nature of clay offers him a great degree of flexibility in modeling his sculptures into desired shapes.

Born at village Sundrel in the Dhar district of Madhya Pradesh, Patidar initially took up painting as a vocation after graduating in fine arts from Indore in 1984. Getting an assignment of designing a book written by J. Swaminathan, he came to Bhopal, and later joined Bharat Bhawan as the Deputy Director of the ceramic workshop there. This is the apparent reason behind his switch-over to sculpture from painting. Both in his paintings and sculptures, Devilal uses a tactile vocabulary of erotic nature. He explores a possible aesthetic space in the physical proximity of mutually generative forces—male and female. The key images that consistently emerge in his art are the male and female genitalia manifested in the simple self-assertive utility objects of rural India. It will be an over-simplification to interpret his works as the

representation of erotic desires. There is a deeper symbolic significance where he sifts through the Indian mythological heritage to contemporize the myth of Ardhnarishwar, the Lord of creation. In this manifestation, the right half of the icon is male at its most virile, while the left half is female at its most bewitching feminine.

His 'Lantern' series explores the same myth of Ardhnarishwar. He uses lantern as the symbol of man's intense desire to unite in the physical act of sex. The subject itself is very challenging as there is always a thin line between the aesthetic and the obscene. Patidar is candidly vocal when he talks about this aspect of his art, saying that he had to spend seven complete years in studying the various aspects of sex. For him it was difficult to overcome this obsession. "Every thing seemed to have turned into a phallic imagery. There was no difference between a finger and a penis." He confesses that his initial works had a tinge of this vulgarity.

Images of genitalia keep informing his works in one or the other inanimate objects. "I am obsessed by a central concept", says Patidar. But his obsession sometimes makes a departure from his central theme to other concerns



Devilal Patidar

of human life. His series of 'Time' delves deep into the ever-recurring universal phenomenon of destruction; the very nature of human race. This context is represented by him in the form of a table clock that records all the destructive times. He also finds a great fascination for aquatic plants and animals. What attracts him are their delicate and fragile streamlined forms and the rhythm they create while moving in water with quick agility. To create this illusion is not easy in a solid medium like his. He does a lot of experiments in his technique to achieve the illusion of delicacy and rhythm.

To understand Devilal's art one does not need any minimum qualification, as his expressions deal with very intimate human desires, dreams and concerns; capable of direct communication without barriers. However some might put in a larger question of ethics.

If we talk of sculptural art in totality, we will notice that it has suffered from some limitations that put a restraint on both its expression and process. Dominant use of traditional modes and material sometimes makes the work process strenuous and limits the possibilities of refinement. I do not mean that our contemporary sculptors are not receptive to modern techniques and tools, but like our contemporary painters, who have already ventured forth in the modern vistas, they need to overcome their reluctance to embrace innovative methods to create new possibilities in their art. There are still other constraints that limit the possibilities of widening the space of sculpture in Madhya Pradesh. Today sculptors confront the problems of feasibility, neither galleries nor their houses or workshops, if they have any, are feasible enough to properly preserve the fragile nature of sculptures. The other big question can be raised on the role of institutions. They are neither well-equipped nor do they have any earnest desire to provide proper training in sculpture. Under these conditions, if young artists ever endeavour to invest their faith and energy in sculptural art, they deserve our accolade.

ABOUT NOSTALGIC DRAGONFLIES AND HOMES IN THE BAGS: SCULPTURAL SNAPSHOTS FROM THE NORTH-EAST

by Moushumi Kandali

It is an intermingling dyad of two predominating strands --- the trend of a pure formalist international modern, and the trend of amalgamating of the local technique, material and themes driven by the indigenizing spree. Taken further, it is a dyad of two categories of material-usage, one that of the ready-made/found-object/junk material and the other, the conventional mediumistic/materialistic exploration. If urbane ethos and contemporary concerns infuses one trend, the other yearns for nostalgia, a refuge in the realm of innocence, universal, eternal, the natural ... This is how one would describe the state-of-affair in the sculptural manifestations of the contemporary/ modern art scene in the geographic space that we are talking about. An interesting observation in this regard is-- whereas paintings in this region are highly politically reflexive capturing the socio-political realities, the genre of sculpture seems more metaphysically oriented seeking ontological/ epistemological / existential truths of life-world! If the relationship between man/ woman/ nature finds a centre-stage and the mythical continues to evoke inspiration (Read- the subject "Deity" rendered by many artists like Dipika Saha, Atul Baruah, Krishna Goswami, Ruma B Sharma and others), the questions of selfhood expanding to the politics of Identity (the likes of Shiv Prashad Marar of Adivasi/ "Tea tribe" community, or Sanchita Gogoi's rendering of

feminist/ feminine in the gender identity) makes up for that another strand in the dyad. This is how one would like to map the sculptural developments in the contemporary/ modern art scene of the "North-East" in India. The "North-East" a loaded expression for many a people carries in itself the burden of homogenisation of an uneven trajectory of multiple cultures, multiple histories and multiple narratives. The process of deduction /reduction adhering to the principle of uniformity is a slimy process. However, as a place of people with multi-lingual, multicultural, multi-racial, poly-ethnic diversity, the North-East also shares a commonality in the context of their vibrant plastic traditions or visual arts with specific reference to sculpture making.

Among the artists who paved way for this modernist/ postmodernist/ contemporary development in the sculptural realm in this region, a few have been also able to contribute in a broader way with greater implications to the pan-Indian scenario with their innovative deviations and variations. As

Shivaji K Panikkar mentions in his Introduction to the book *Twentiethcentury Indian Sculptures* (Marg, 2000), Prithpal Singh Ladi, an artist from Meghalaya, and one of such highly competent artists from the North-East, along with others like Dhruv Mistry, G Ravinder Reddy and Pushpamala N, revealed "a frontal rejection of the sacrosanct modernist values of the pedestal-oriented quasi-abstraction that was in vogue till date in the late seventies and eighties." With his



Prithpal Singh Ladi

penchant for the eccentric and the bizarre, his works manifests subtle autobiographical tinge. Through intricately detailed dragonflies with thin delicate wings and frog torsos, mechanical devices like an antique typewriter, animals made of old battery cells joined together and limp human figures, Ladi imbibes morbid humour and wry satire in his works. Fine, intricate and rich in materialist experimentations in glass, gemstones and metal, Ladi's world is vibrant with memory, dream, fantasy and nostalgia about his childhood days in Shillong. As shards of whiskey bottles, broken tube-lights, fused bulbs, old chandeliers and scraps of old trophies find their ways into his works, they spring up as signifiers of layered suggestions to capture the realities lying underneath the surface. He seems to weave certain narratives about the subconscious/ unconscious realm, in a definite idiom through these every-day materials, which speak volumes about a creative impulse charged with innovations and relentless exploration. There are many artists in this region who are working ceaselessly in spite of many socio-political and infrastructural hurdles in a place which teeters on the periphery of the imagination of the nation, in pockets tethered to the margins of the "mainstream" away from the glitter of the art world of the metros with its galleries, cognoscenti and media glare. One such artist is Shobha Brahma, whose sculptures in wood are fine expressions of the eternal relation between man and nature or the formal and symbolic parallelism of nature and the feminine, and other cosmological/ universal meanings in life. His masterly handling of wood and skilful play with the forms speaks in volume about the deep understanding of the medium. Another artist (presently a Santiniketan -based eminent sculptor who hails from Assam), Jhanak Jhankar Narzary too delves into the similar realms of nature/ cosmos and of human conditions, thereby



Shobha Brahma

evoking an element of monumentality and vastness. The Metaphysical and the Natural play a great part in the parallel quest for the existential meanings in life and the cosmos. These artists who were trained in art centres like Baroda or Santiniketan paved ways for the successive generations to go for further development both at the conceptual and the lingual level.



Jhanak Jhankar Narzary

Talking about the artists of the successive generations, two artists of calibre draw our attention. Of the two artists, Banamali Sharma is based at Imphal in Manipur, and the other, Ganesh Gohain hailing from Assam is presently based at Baroda. Banamali Sharma



Banamali Sharma

of Manipur belongs to that category of sculptors who go for the indigenizing trend by using indigenous material, themes and techniques. A pointer to this approach is his Maya Series. He seems to be spiritually and ontologically inclined as evident in this series of Sculptural installation. An eclectic ontological quest charged by existentialist phenomenology and Vedanta epistemology seem to be manifested in these works. At times his works convey messages of the Heideggerean Being and Time, and at other, uphold the principle of cosmic illusion of the Vedantic Maya. This entire dialectics of Physicality/ Metaphysicality or the Masculinity/ Femininity (a take-on of Purusha-Prakrity of Sankhya?) of the world /time-space is translated into certain signifiers and motifs like a bamboo mattress, entwined ropes, bamboo poles, hand woven textile etc -- all take-offs from indigenous material and cultural rites. Interpolation of material as metaphor is the strategy here. This ontological/ existential quest of Banamali as seen in his translation into sculptural experimentation is also about the condition of being in betwixt and between. Taking recourse to cultural signifier/ symbolisms and transposing them to broader avenues of life to further their universal meaning seems to be the artistic strategy of Banamali Sharma.



Ganesh Gohain

Sculptor Ganesh Gohain shares a similar metaphysical quest but manifests a finer lingual sophistication and innovation. Be it the Baul-like mystique of mind or Buddhist monk-like incantations of certain typological series with recurrent metaphors and signifiers evolving into a conceptual language of art, this sculptor-painter's discourse seems to be philosophically contemplative. With professional training in centres like Fine arts faculty of MSU, Baroda, Glasgow school of art, or Berllandery sculpture workshop, Wales, UK, Ecole Superieure Des Beaux Arts, Le Mans, France and the initial study in the college of Arts and Crafts, Guwahati, Assam; Ganesh Gohain, who emerged in the Indian art scene during the mid nineteen-nineties, has been fervently mastering the fine skills of the sculptural hands. Whenever we see his works we see in them a triadic relation of the spiritual, cultural and the personal. The interplay of physical/ metaphysical, real/ surreal in his renderings speaks about a covert transcendentalist. Certain recurrent motifs a foot, eggs, trees in their web-like formations, a solemn meditative face, door frames, chair, etc. springing up as some personal iconography gathered in the process of the lived-experiences can be seen in his artistic oeuvre. At times we see the re-location and re-collection of your past/

previous works as in *The Table or Letter to Father*. His works like "The seed becomes Mountain" seem to contemplate on the dual identity of any being or object. It is indeed an interesting contemplation as to how multiple or dual realities co-exist within the deep recess of human self/ psyche, and how identity emerges as a complex formation of transformation/ transmutation and various reductions / deductions. From Homer to Ulysses, Sartre to Tarkovsky, the concept of "Home" as a phenomenological, intra-psychic, multi-dimensional experience has been a much speculated subject. In some of his works such as "In my bag", we see a similar kind of speculation. The work signifies the urge to carry on ones "Homes" in the bags, the cultural and geo-political baggage that we carry in our shoulders and the eternal quest for the home in the process of migration and the trans-migration of human race. At times it also acts like the mirror of the Self, a complex terrain of multiple implications and possibilities in the existential predicaments. Ganesh Gohain also seems to adhere to the notion of "Material-as-Metaphor" or this belief that sculptural material has/ ought to have a metaphysical meaning of its own. Therefore for him, the stone is the painted polyester resin. Mapping his artistic transition from the "Nine Pots", "White Coffee Blue pillows" to "Letters to Father" or the "The Road Which I Passed Through" one can observe a lingual inclination to a minimalist/ conceptual/ abstractionist mode of expression. One can also see an inherent link between the various simplistic/ minimalist/ abstractionist kind of traditional sculptures, the iconographies, the simple, un ornate architecture, or various cultural forms of his native place Assam and his gamut of lingual expression. The central place of worship in the inner precinct of the Kamakhya temple where we find no idol but a dark sacred pool of water called the Yoni of the Goddess or the Shiva Linga of the Shividoul of Shivsagar are for us some of the finest examples of such abstractionist imagination. For artist Ganesh Gohain, past, present and future seems a continuum of being, be it in the historical/ cultural level, socio-political level ("Torso from Vadodara") or in the personal and collective sphere.

It might sound like a cliché and a direct take-off from those glossy tourist handbills, but one is undoubtedly overwhelmed by the richness and diversity of the traditional sculptural rendering of the "Folk/ Tribal Craftsmen" of the different indigenous people and culture groups of the North-Eastern region. One can really get wonderstruck by their usage of material, the deft handling of the medium, its fine execution and their imaginative splendour. Compared to the realm of traditional manuscript painting which grew under the patronage of royal courts and religious institutions like Vaishnavite monasteries called Satra, sculptural rendering was more expansive and predominating in the public space. But surprisingly, when it comes to the "Modern" art scenario, one can see a predominance of the painting over sculpture with comparatively fewer artists opting for the latter. Historically speaking, it was perhaps at the seventies only when a few sculptors of significance emerged on the scene bringing in a new mode of expression. Artists like Shobha Brahma, Sonaram Nath, Pranabendu Bikash Dhar, Atul Chandra Baruah, Saleha Ahmed, Dipika Saha and others who were mostly trained in Santineketan or Baroda and came back to the region to continue their pursuits, ushered in the trend of the formalist international modern in terms of both figurative and abstract expression. As decades passed by, newer experimentations with regards to the technique, material and themes could be seen with the emergence of successive generations of sculptors like Krishna Goswami, Naorem Labango Maiti, Ruma B Sharma, Joychandra Sharma, L Raman Singh, Wairokpam, Naorem Rajesh Singh, Ratul Chandra Gogoi, Gautam Goswami, Sanchita Gogoi, Shiv Prashad Marar, Ejanbemo Yo-anthan, Kumar Thankiew, Indrani Konwar, Mohan Bhuyan, Keshav Narzary, Krishna Basumatary, Srikanta Sinha, Nutun Mazumder, Asha Debbarma, Niboto, Lano, Onen, Ato Loren, Cavilzo Nikha and others. The demise of Bhupen Barman, a Baroda-based young sculptor from Assam was an unfortunate ending of a potential possibility... Nevertheless the show is going on and seems to be heading for vibrancy and experimental innovation.

A CONCISE CHRONICLE OF BENGAL'S MODERN SCULPTURE

by *Prasanta Daw*

In the domain of visual art India is best known for its wonderful sculptures from the Harappan and Mahenjo Daro civilization dating back nearly 5000 years. This streaming tradition of sculpture creation got almost suspended in the medieval period as the Mughal Emperors were against idol worshiping, though painting and architecture reached a high aesthetical paramount. However, practice of sculpting as an art was revived in the colonial period, where western academic style of art was significantly dominant before the beginning of twentieth century. "School of Industrial Art" was established in 1854 and western academic art was much emphasized in the curriculum. On the other side affluent local inhabitants took pride in placing European paintings and statues in their houses or gardens, which was a part of western style of living. Consequently, the European style was adopted by a number of local sculptors such as Rohinikanta Nag (1868-1895), Kashinath Khater (1876-1949), Fanindranath Bose (1888-1926), Pramathanath Mullick (1894-1983), Binayak Pandurang Karmakar (1891-1967) and Hiranmoy Roychowdhury (1884-1962), to name only a few.

In such a milieu art of painting took a different direction under the leadership of Abanindranath Tagore (1871-1951) when he originated his new approach of painting at the turn of nineteenth century. It is known as 'Neo- Bengal School' of painting which spread almost across the whole country through his disciples. So Indian traditional painting was revitalized carrying a modern mark of identity. But unfortunately no such art movement was initiated in the realm of sculpture, and therefore further development of creative sculpture remained a bleak prospect.



Deviprasad Roy Chowdhury

With the passage of time a spark of modern vision found expression in the works of Deviprasad Roy Chowdhury (1899-1975). It is evident in the half bust portrait of his father Umaprasad Roy Chowdhury in 1924, 'God of Destruction' (1934) and the tribute sculpture of his Guruji Abanindranath Tagore besides others. His perfection of skill and knowledge can be traced in the unique sculptures of 'Triumph of Labour' (1954), 'Martyrs Memorial' (1956), 'When Winter Comes' (1957), 'Martyr's Column' (installed after artist's demise in 1982), to name a few. His sculptures occupy a significant position in the history of Indian sculpture for its meticulous precision of anatomical details with high technical excellence'. Amongst the western artists, Epstein and Bourdelle were highly esteemed by Deviprasad, but he considered Rodin as the greatest.

A versatile genius, Ramkinkar Baij had been an artist of dynamic temperament who enjoyed exploring new pastures in search of his new vocabulary. European art movements like impressionism, expressionism, surrealism, even abstraction boosted his artistic enthusiasm. Probably Ramkinkar

was the first Indian sculptor who appropriately employed abstract idiom in his creation, as evidenced in the outstanding composition of 'Lamp Stand' (1941). The sculptures like 'Sujata' (1935), 'Santhal Family' (1938) and 'Mill Call' (1956) represent the originality of Ramkinkar's thought and expression. Amongst others 'Katch and Debjani' (1929), 'Mithun' (1931), 'Harvestor' (1943) are noticeable sculptures as well, revealing a sense of primitive vigour and wild vitality, movement and monumentality. Moreover, it could be discerned that many of his concrete cement sculptures reflect rugged quality of the medium suggesting high standard of sculptural values. In fact, he was appropriately acknowledged by the art historians as the first successful modern sculptor of India.

In continuation of the modernism, a few other sculptors of the country like Dhanraj Bhagat, P.V. Jankiram, Rajanikant Panchal, A.M. Daveriwalla, Raghav Kanoria, Balbir Singh Katt et al have also contributed creditably to the development of the Indian sculpture. A handful of Bengali sculptors too came forward with their fresh vision. Let us take note of some of them.

Prodosh Dasgupta (1912-1991) is one of those few sculptors who were enlightened by the twentieth century's global interpretation of



Prodosh Dasgupta

art. The embodiment of his three dimensional works has a western bias, but the vital spirit is anointed with the alliance of classical Indian sculpture. One can mark in his art works, the simplification of form and an attempt to bring a state of stability in weight and rhythm through mass and volume, and also the inspiration of Brankusi, Arp and Henry Moor. Though in the first phase of his creative journey, Epstein and Burdel had inspired him a lot. At a particular time of his career his works moved from concrete to abstract also. 'Bondage' (1943), 'Toilet' (1947), 'Egg Family' (1973), 'Cradle' (1950) are worth mentioning for their lively rhythmic expressiveness and anatomical volume and values.



Chintamani Kar

At heart a figurative sculptor, Chintamani Kar (1915-2005) has harmoniously synthesized the sculptural elements of east and west. An emerging kinetic energy pervades the physical features of his figures, evoking palpably alive feelings. Kar has expressed his impressions in a variety of

mediums, and also in different manners. The central truth about his themes is contained in a balanced blending of myth and reality. Sometimes he has adopted a symbolic approach, and has often carved out native and alien legends into mythical images. Time and again love for music of his early years finds expression in his rhythmic and vibrant figures. 'Cloud Messenger' (1949), 'Usha and Sabita' (1952), 'Skating the Stag' (1948), 'Sabita and Usha' (1993), 'Mithun' (1983), 'Nayika' (1960) and a series of mother and child and Buddha images in varied forms are notable for strikingly beautiful and faultless techniques used.

Another important sculptor Sankho Chowdhury (1916-2006) has received inspirations from various schools of art, but has not been directly



Sankho Chowdhury

influenced by any. On a minute observation of his retrospective works, one cannot fail to see that he is a research-minded artist. With an unprejudiced consciousness and alive to the spirit of his time he has created forms which are modern, though not untraditional. The most important aspects of his artistry are the mobility of the formations and deformations of trials and experiments with lines, plains and interplay of curves. Apart from formations he has rigorously experimented with unconventional material, such as coloured cement, ebony planks, copper, brass, aluminium sheet, stainless steel, smoked pine, thermocol etc. His significant sculptures include 'Cock' (1951), 'Head of a Girl' (1958), 'Seated Figure' (1956), 'Woman' (1960), 'Sringar' (1965), 'Music' (1966), 'Chemist' (1961), 'Totem' (1965) and others.

Sunil Paul (1920), a notable creative artist, cannot be said to be the product of any particular school of art, because ancient and modern art ideals of many countries have stirred up his visual art. His sculpture is manifold and reveals variety, such as realistic, idealistic, decorative etc. For instance, the statues of 'King Tribhuban' (1943) and 'Judha Samsher' (1943) are specimens of extreme realistic sculpture. Another sculpture called 'Eureka' (1941) bears the evidence of influence of Rodin. 'The Two Women' reflects the Egyptian style, while 'Meghdoot' (1946) and some three dimensional representations of God and Goddess uphold the evidence of tradi-

tional Indian Art. In a word, the sculptures of Sunil Paul stand out as a holy confluence of various streams of art.

As a sculptor Meera Mukherjee (1923-1998) stands on a separate pedestal introducing absolutely marvellous forms of art and their technical methods. She has learnt the technique of 'Dokhra' process from the village artisans and has imbibed that tradition making some changes as per her own convenience. Her visual language is simple in expression charged with a vigour of rural art. Mainly myth and real life have been her main subjects. Another potential sculptor Uma Siddhanta (1933) has been devoted to the execution of organic beauty of human figures for a long time.

Essentially a painter, Somenath Hore (1921-2006), became absorbed in sculpture almost in an advanced age. His distorted and terribly thin hungry figures like 'Mother and Child' (1975-77) reflect the theme of starvation and social injustices. These distressed and twisted figures register a strong protest against establishment and social systems. Subsequently the name of other two artists i.e. Sudhir Kashtagir and Bhabesh Sanyal may be recalled who have excelled in painting as well as sculpture with equal ease.

The above discussion clearly conveys how Indian sculptors have always tried to merge tradition with individual talents, coming out with new sculptural concepts. Their works exhibit significant artistic assimilations of western art philosophy into archaic Indian perceptions of art. Apart from embodying manifestations of life and nature their creations have been imbued with social consciousness. This dynamism has introduced a new insight to the creative process of art as a whole, and has acted as a stimulant to the development of Indian sculpture in a period of transmutation.

The sculptors of the next generations i.e. the 1960s have expanded the metamorphosis of their forerunners in multidimensional features. For instance, Ajit Chakraborty's (1930-2005) strong structural forms are massive, unrealistic and mostly characterized by surrealist or abstract sign. Sculptures by Sarbari

Roy Chowdhury (1933) generally feature a blend of the academic realism and abstract quality creating distinctive style, apart from her other works done in different manners. In order to discover a modern look



Meera Mukherjee

Madhav Bhattacharjee (1933) has turned from academic realism to machinery impact, from formal construction to architectural, and then again to the geometric abstraction. Physical beauty of the human anatomy has been bestowed in the configurations of Bipin Goswami (1934) in a simple embodiment related to mass, volume and space. Shankar Ghosh's (1934) sculptures are inspired by various facets of his environment that have importantly coupled with manifold human forms and shapes.



Somenath Hore

Debabrata Chakraborty (1935) has created marvellous susceptible forms with logical arguments of aesthetics. Surajit Das's (1935) human figures in diverse expressions convey a variety of mood and movements. Niranjana Pradhan's (1940) sensitive executions are marked by swift motion of sharp spiral lines spreading all round the twisting figures evoked from vibrating tensions all over, sometimes with blending of concavity and convexity. In

addition there are many sculptures like Haran Chandra Ghosh (1927) Raghunath Goswami (1933), Ranen Datta (1933), Subal Chandra Saha (1933), Samaresh Chowdhury (1934), Subhas Saha (1935), to name a few who have also contributed to the developmental process of modern Indian sculpture. Their perfection of knowledge and extraordinary skill can be traced in their multifarious aesthetic appeals. The important key note is the distortion of organic structures aiming to capture the inner feelings, tensions with an emphasis on global aesthetic perception.

This streaming dynamism has diverted into myriad manifestations in the sculptors of the next generation i.e. the 1970's. Their explorations indicated a vital potential. Let us take an overview. One of the important



Ajit Chakraborty

sculptors of this period is Biman Bihari Das (1943). His works are vertical, suggesting upraised growth, whereas many others are composed in semi circles. It appears to emerge out of the combination of lines, spheres, circles and from the warp and woof of void and solid space. Dilip Saha, Manik Talukdar, Anit Ghosh are all contemporaries having been born in 1944, but their plastic art contains divergent values. Dilip Saha's abstract configurations denote psychological subtlety and precision, whereas Anit Ghosh's abstract geometrical works maintain logical relations between time and space. Manik Talukdar predominately portrays diverse expressive modalities of women's sensuality. Janak Jhankar Narzary (1948) conveys his realization through non-realist genres, where the physicality of the objects is de-contextualized. Another sculptor Gopal Prasad Mondal (1949) is working effectively for a long span of time to explore a new pasture in the tune of Micro to Macro organic sculpture. Simple childlike sculptures of Tarka Garai (1946) capture the rugged vitality of primitivism.

Difference in attitude and search of the sculptors of the succeeding generations can be detected in their artistic pursuits. As for instance, Bimal Kundu (1954), eschewing substantial mass and volume, builds up varied intriguing human and celestial figures



Sarbari Roy Chowdhury

alongside his other abstract configurations which are transmuted to new realms of meaning. He employs some unusual material, such as broken scrap wood, cheap leather etc. to mark a divergence of method. Bimal's colleague Sunil Kumar Das (1952) has ventured for mixed media almost from the beginning of his career successfully. Many characters and events germinate his ideas that take shape in combined mediums with fantastic look. Nowadays many sculptors of the new generation prefer to use unconventional, sometimes useless material, in their sculptures. There are sculptors who are working really hard for exploring new sensibilities. Anil Sen (1951), Tapas Sarkar (1953), Shyamal Roy (1957), Rishi Barua (1958) Sudarshan Pal (1953). Pankaj Panwar (1961),



Bimal Kundu

Ram Kumar Manna (1961) and Sandip Chakraborty (1961) figure prominently among this new breed of sculptors.

In fact, it is the time of transmission, gradually opening up a new vista which is challenging the established practice. Mass and volume, monumentality and massiveness are not always momentous, even irrelevant details have been eliminated keeping an eye to bringing out inner pure form of the object. Therefore images are not always faithful to realistic approach, these are sometimes distorted or deformed, sometimes elongated or abnormal. Besides the eternal themes like human and social problems, themes like global chaos and crisis are progressively drifting into the Indian sculptors' creative focus.

NEO-SCULPTURAL IDENTITY: SIX YOUNG SCULPTORS

by Sarmistha Maiti

"The twentieth century was marked by a new subjectivity of thought, and old paradigms gave way to new. Einstein's theory of relativity overthrew more static beliefs in physics. The atonalist musical composers overthrew the old common system alive for four hundred years and shifted aural attention away from the keynote and musical scale. Psychoanalytical thinkers continued to undermine confidence in conscious thought and reason.

Even economists introduced new ideas of subjectivity into economic thinking, and saw prices as the result of shifting sentiment of supply and demand rather than based in firm factors such as costs of production.

All of this was part of a new mentality that saw a dynamic universe, and artists shared in this new vision..."

- Excerpts from 1000 Sculptures of Genius

Artists have come across a long way in the process of making and breaking of subjectivity in the last century and especially sculpture has found its expression in the form of ephemera that

are raised to the level of high art. And in this way the found object of the early twentieth century in the sculpting art has been renewed in the art of contemporary installations in the late twentieth century and the early twenty-first century. In India, as in other parts of the world, the entire new generation of sculptors have re-invented the traditional sculpting trend and also led to the evolution of a neo-language that was quite alien in the Indian context.

As Herbert Read comments, "...the modern period has seen the invention of three-dimensional works of art which are in no sense 'sculpted' or moulded. They are built up, like architecture, or constructed like a machine". The passion behind sculpting motivated by the joy of procreation has revolutionized post-modern art in every sense. If we observe the tradition of image-making and now the latest trend of sculpting as one of the most innovative, conceptual and ideational discourses of aesthetics, it will be eminently noticeable that sculptors have remained engaged in experimenting with techniques, material and mediums at every moment of the execution of their art. But now with the ballyhoo of globalization, sculpting has become an amalgamation of various art forms defined and shaped by a much broader connotation and syntax totally new to the art world.



*Akhil Chandra Das
Bronze, Wood & Iron*

The new generation sculptors in Bengal on whom this essay will precisely concentrate also have essentially gone beyond conventions in the handling of material or medium. On the one hand, the conventional bronze, wood or terracotta, and on the other scrap and junk material are being used to generate fresh concepts by the young generation sculptors. It is in fact the birth of a new genre. The whole idea has changed from moulding, shaping and



Tapas Biswas
Bronze

recreating a material to that of the material itself getting recreated in a piece of art. Diffusion of style and technique with a flare of innovative ideas where sculptures mark the unique confluence of tradition and modernity has become the hallmark of the sculpture of the present era. This is the generation which, if not born out of the cyber revolution, has indeed been hugely influenced by the age of networking and digitization.

Here are six young sculptors from Bengal who are being celebrated across the country for their discourse allowing the birth of a novel generation in sculptural art. They are Akhil Chandra Das, Subrata Biswas, Tapas Biswas, Nantu Behari Das, Adip Dutta and Debanjan Roy. All of them have formal education in Visual Arts from different art institutions and universities in the country.

These six sculptors share a convivial yet a contrasting platform. Among them a few believe in purity and perfection of form that is being created without concentrating on the original quality of the material being used. And the other few, without changing the original quality of the raw material, give a new form and content to what is being created. But despite the formal dichotomy between these two sectors of young sculptors, all of them possess a novelty in their ideation, thought-process, and an energy to change their creative discourse.

As Akhil Chandra Das is more concerned in breeding purity and tranquility in the feel and realization of the content of the sculptures like the saintly figures with minute detailing of posture,

the created form finally relates to the devising of the real essence though in the form of the inanimate sculpture. Akhil always puts effort to retain the organic quality of the subject. Akhil knows very well that what his viewers would prefer, and imparts a sentiment to his works that his audience invariably falls for.

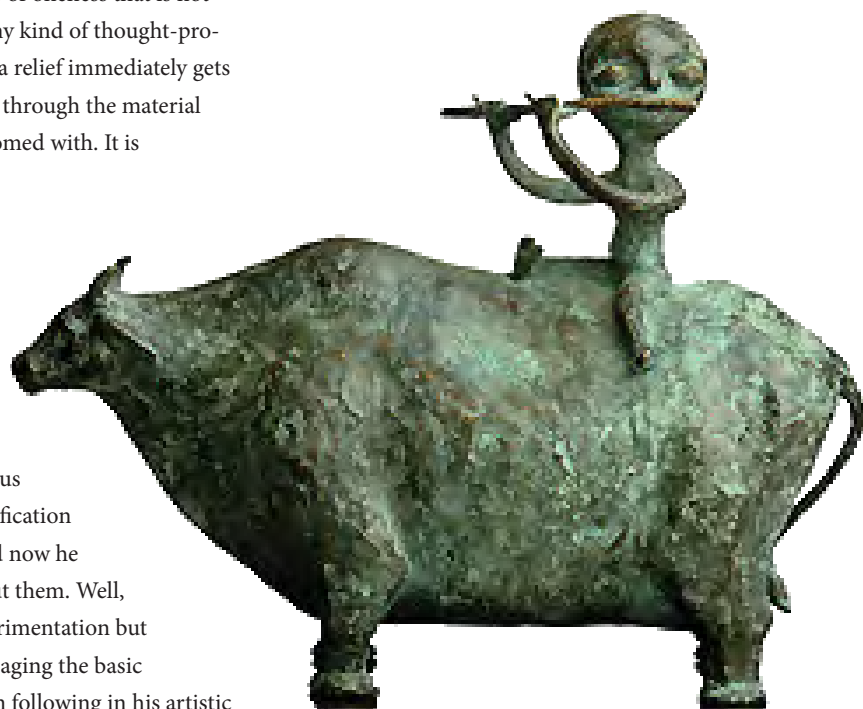
The integrity of the raw material with its depth, hollowness, texture, lustre all matter a lot for an artist, especially for a sculpture like Akhil, who yearns to transform and transcend the material to a different level altogether. But at the same time, handling the same kind of material too gives a deep sense of oneness that is not at all nullifiable. So any kind of thought-process that searches for a relief immediately gets down to be identified through the material the artist is so accustomed with. It is obviously the

artist's forte to be able to keep alive the essence of the same raw material over the years. Akhil himself puts it in a very spontaneous way regarding his unification with the material, and now he just cannot do without them. Well, Akhil welcomes experimentation but not at the cost of damaging the basic yardsticks he has been following in his artistic career. In the new generation art sculpting has undergone several changes, as the raw material itself has evolved as a sculpture since the artist

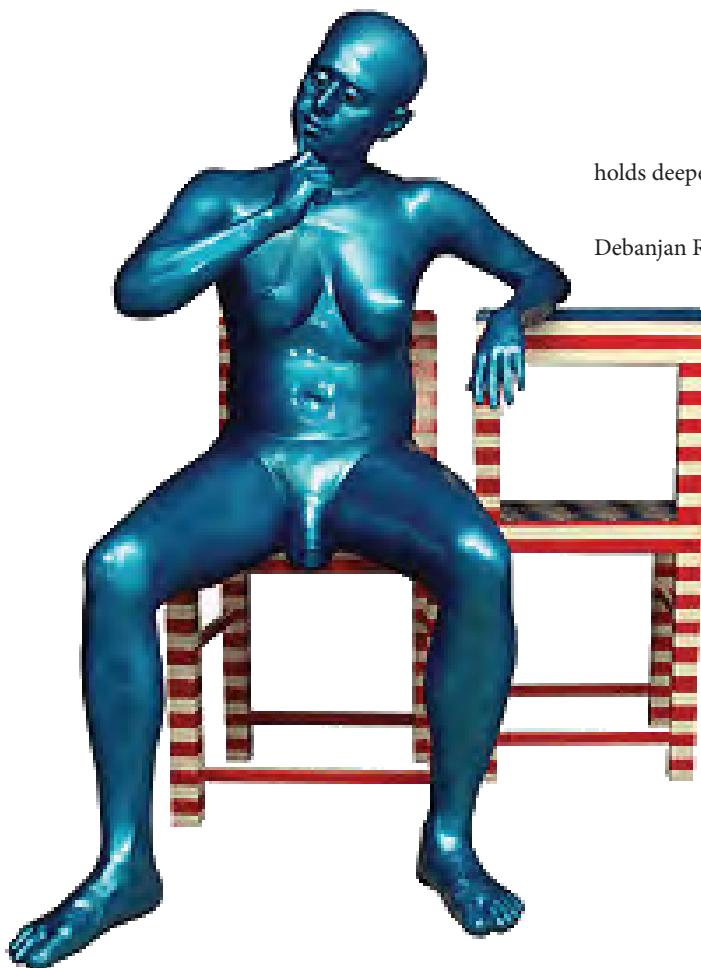
decodes the basic quality of the material and associates with it a new denomination of signifier-signified relationship. Akhil is not apathetic towards it, but has a certain kind of discomfort in at least appropriating it in his own works. Probably there lies the significance of the artist's individuality that evolves with time but does not imitate the trend of the hour.

Tapas Biswas's journey in the exploration of metal casting is more experimental and tentative. He always engages himself in the creation of a volume. The opacity of the volume is diverted into wonderful hollowness where the eddy of energy that floats within the harmony of the structure attracts and builds a close association with the space and liveliness the particular work of art radiates for its audience. Metal becomes subjective in his works and he creates magic in the way he executes hollowness and gradually proceeds to the finest structure of concrete identity through different sculptural forms. The content devised by him leads the audience to a thought-provoking area where again and again he addresses the issues of refugee settlement, migration, and transformation of identities, eternity, solace and final release from the entrapment of the material world.

In case of Subrata Biswas, his engrossing attitude towards formal pattern of casting bronze which



Subrata Biswas
Bronze



Adip Dutta
Painted Fiber Glass & Wood

conceptually deals with the tales from Indian mythology with a blend of folk culture must be reckoned with as a trendsetter in Indian art. The most intriguing aspect of his works is the engraving style he applies on wide bronze plates like the engraved seals of the ancient civilizations in his creations. Subrata draws us to the nostalgic world of his childhood, and in a very native as well as naïve style executes his works with eventual processing and tender touch. Agony and ecstasy walk hand in hand in his sculptures, and his childish being evolves in his works as we trace the journey of this artist over a decade.

Adip Dutta has transcended sexuality and sexual identity especially in the true nature of the body though his compositions that is confrontational and erotic. Adip is into installation art with sculpting format building statements on personal identity and desire merging with social and political state of being. He gives birth to human figures with radical plastic quality that are a rare combination of ardent intellectual concentration and physical action and manage to create a space that is copious in atmosphere and

holds deeper inner significance.

Debanjan Roy also executes figures and in volume that are life-size both in realistic and semi-realistic trends. His exposition is minimalist yet carries weight in the conceptualization of the content, and in this rare combination he addresses the complex through a bewitching simplicity.

Nantu Behari Das has given birth to a bigger difference from the existing set parameters of sculpture making. His work of art can be a gateway to theorize new generation sculpture of the



Debanjan Roy
Fiber Glass with Acrylic Paint



Nantu Behari Das
Fiber Glass & Iron Nails

contemporary context. Nantu has eventually allowed the raw material itself to evolve as a sculpture. In this process he has led to the decoding of the basic quality of the material and has given it a new identity of signifier-signified relationship. He does not imbibe the installation quality in any form. On the contrary, he sculpts in a symbolic way and conveys a different meaning where, through content, form and medium, he induces the viewers to reciprocate with his works through a cerebral journey. The mock element in his work is intense and he transposes his intended ideation with much conviction when he plays around with different material that have been at a far remove from the tradition of sculpture.

The invariable dynamism and conceptualization in the working styles of new generation sculptures has promulgated a panorama of new ventures in the trend of modern sculpting. The novel challenges in vibrant thoughts of procreation do indicate the possibility of a new movement in the art of sculpting in totality. And the debate that sculptural ornamentation has disappeared to the detriment of society, and that the functional form leaves little room for sculptural ornamentation, will once again get the chance to be revised and revived in a new way with sensitive anecdotes and refined structures in the hands of the new generation sculptors. Bengal sculptors really stand as the initiators of an altogether new creative process!

FROM OBJECT TO EXPERIENCE: NOTES ON AMERICAN SCULPTURE

by Sunanda K Sanyal

To put it rather bluntly, it is impossible to write an exclusive history of modern sculpture. Though one could make the same argument about modern painting, it certainly is more relevant to sculpture; for unlike painting's occasional insistence on purity and self-critique (as with Abstract Expressionism), sculpture of the last century has been more consistently engaged in self-deconstruction, opening itself to complex dialogs with almost every other medium and mode of expression: painting, photography, architecture, landscape, video, light, sound, motion, language, not to mention the human body. Sculptural practice today is thus infinitely more hybridized than the enterprise of painting. Instead of attempting a survey of such a complex history, this brief essay touches on some of the key attributes of American sculpture of the 1960s.

Civilian life in the United States was unscathed by World War II. So while much of postwar European art bore dark memories of trauma and destruction, American art from the same period was largely indifferent to the social and political changes at home and abroad. Instead, it was deeply involved in its own discourse. The differences among them notwithstanding, all the post-war American trends – Abstract Expressionism, Pop, Happenings, Minimalism--- were essentially hermetic in character, underscoring self-referentiality as art's primary goal. But whereas Abstract Expressionism's high-winded,

anxiety-ridden, author-centered rhetoric of self-referentiality was all about the processes and materials of art-making, Pop art in the '60s insisted on the self-referentiality of signs by collapsing the barrier between "high" and "low" cultures. The tawdry images of soup cans, coke bottles, Mickey Mouse and living as well as dead celebrities emerged as unstable, thoroughly mediated signs in a media-driven consumer culture, with no hierarchy of values. Pop owed much to the Dada strategies of Marcel Duchamp, yet it bypassed Duchamp's biting social critique to eagerly embrace capitalist materialism with a non-committal gesture, articulated through wit and irony--- an attitude often summarized in the expression "deadpan cool". Thus repudiating the conventional supremacy of the artist-author, Pop's self-referential images signaled the end of a discourse of art that had reigned

since Manet and Courbet. Minimalism emerged in the late '60s with curious ties to Pop.

Minimalism's rigorously reductionist simplicity seems to recall the geometric abstractions of prewar Europe: Mondrian, Malevich, Gabo, the Constructivists, and the Bauhaus. But what legitimates it as a movement is its specific context; and in that regard it is quintessentially American. Sculptors like Carl Andre, Donald Judd, Robert Morris, Tony Smith and a few others exhibited simple, abstract shapes that are no less recognizable as objects. A cage-like metal structure by Judd, painted with industrial color; or a stack of bricks on the gallery floor by Andre, with its original texture, are thoroughly literal,



Donald Judd. *Untitled*. 1966. ARTstor. Web. 10 November 2010



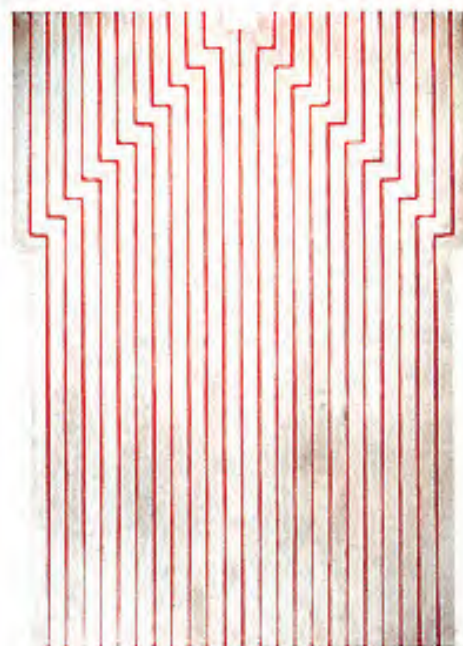
Andy Warhol. *Brillo Boxes*. 1964
ARTstor. Web. 10 November 2010

impersonal constructs: what you see is what you see.

Among other things, Minimalism was a response to the emotional vibrancy of Abstract Expressionism. "Sculpture", the veteran Abstract Expressionist painter Barnett Newman supposedly remarked in the '50s, "is what you bump into when you back up to see a painting." Whether factual or not, the comment offers a glimpse of sculpture's marginal status in a movement that adamantly privileged painting as the ideal medium of self-expression. And it is this Modernist attitude that Minimalism snubbed. Rejecting the pedestal ---the conventional marker of the boundaries of sculpture--- and denying any underlying notion of utopia, transcendence, or, in Rosalind Krauss's terms, "internally dictated outer limits" (1), Minimalist sculpture unequivocally stands apart from all other legacies of abstraction. The strictly serial, repetitive order uses the grid as its structural unit, echoing the monotony of industrial mass production as much in material as in appearance. Even while appreciating its abstract shape, one is likely to be puzzled by the realism of its object identity ---a box, a metal cage, a stack of bricks--- in a gallery

setting, which would then beg the question: is it art? Minimalism thus draws on the Duchampian Readymades via Pop. Warhol's Brillo Boxes are cardboard replicas made in the same scale as actual brillo boxes, with the brand meticulously painted on all sides. Thomas McEvilly identifies this sort of work as "anti-sculpture" (2). Stacked up on the gallery floor like a supermarket display, it denies any depth or narrative. It is what it is. Take away the brand and the colors, and it will be a Minimalist piece. The Pop "cool" will turn into cold fact.

This matter-of-factness of Minimalism is precisely what enraged Modernist critics like Clement Greenberg and his disciple Michael Fried. Fried argued in an influential essay that in order to become a sculpture, an object must be aesthetically transformed by shedding its objecthood. Minimalism, he contended, depended too much on what he called theatricality ---its incongruous relation with the gallery space and viewer participation--- to be considered serious art. (3) It soon became clear that language was crucial to the shaping of the discourse of such a reductionist art, and this motivated the Minimalists to take up the pen to combat Fried's rhetoric. In numerous essays and reviews, almost all of them defended their individual positions, if not a seamlessly collective one. Intense word games became integral to



Frank Stella, Luis Miguel Dominguin
(First Version). 1960. Collection of the artist
ARTstor. Web. 10 November 2010



Carl Andre. *Equivalent VIII*. 1966.
Tate Gallery London. ARTstor.
Web. 10 November 2010

American art discourse in the late '60s.

Frank Stella, however, occupies a particularly intriguing position in the same milieu. In his Luis Miguel Dominguin (which predates most Minimalist work), not only do the pin stripes on a ground of shiny aluminum paint cover the canvas edge to edge (even around the edges of the thick stretcher bar), but the shape of the canvas and the design on it faithfully echo each other. It was Stella who actually popularized the remark "what you see is what you see" about his own work; yet what exactly does one see here? Casting real shadows on the wall, the thickness of the stretcher bar accentuates the objecthood of the image, like a relief work on the wall; but then again, the imprecise pin stripes of varying thicknesses occasionally bleeding into the ground of the canvas also betray the painted character of the surface. Thus, the tension between its identities as a shape and an object becomes more intense than with any Minimalist sculpture: it also becomes a fundamental tension between sculpture and painting. Precisely because of this, Stella was denied serious attention by Greenberg; but Michael Fried argued in his



James Turrell. *Afrum-Proto*. 1966. Collection of M.J. Klein. ARTstor. Web. 10 November 2010



Dan Flavin. 'Monument' for V. Tatlin I Late 1960s. ARTstor. Web. 10 November 2010

favor. According to Fried, the shimmering surface of the canvas covered with aluminum paint generates an optical effect, which, despite Stella's manipulation of the conventional pictorial format, sustains the integrity of the image as a painting. (4) For Fried, therefore, it is an object like shape, rather than a shaped object. Carl Andre, on the other hand, saw it precisely from the other end, so that Stella could be identified as a Minimalist painter.

If Stella, then, straddles the line between Modernism and Minimalism, Dan Flavin provokes the debate over objecthood and opticality in quite a different way. His fluorescent rods function on two levels. The lights turned off, the wall-mounted simple compositions are no less Minimalist objects than those by Andre or Judd. And once lit, they become a tongue-in-cheek response to Modernism's insistence on opticality. After all, what could be more optical than light? Needless to say, Greenberg and Fried considered this an outright travesty, since opticality to both of them was exclusively an effect of painting, caused by the interaction of paint pigments and the picture surface. Nonetheless, such a stretch of the

Modernist logic of optical effect was effective in moving sculpture toward what Rosalind Krauss identifies as sculpture's "expanded field", where sculpture is characterized by absence rather than presence--- by what it is not rather than what it is.(5) Unlike Flavin, the Los Angeles-based artist James Turrell drives a wedge between three-dimensionality and tangibility by concealing the source of his light. His *Afrum-Proto* is a bright halogen projection on the gallery wall, a luminous presence that produces an illusion of a solid cube suspended in mid-air. If a sculpture is a body projected into the void, then *Afrum-Proto* is a projected body indeed (quite literally so), albeit not a tangible one. Rather, it totally sacrifices its objecthood to become an experience of light in space. Drawing on Minimalism's reductionist strategy, Turrell transgresses the Minimalist mandate to produce a paradox of presence and absence: what you see is what you see (light), yet you also see what isn't there (solid cube).

Turrell would later produce deeply enigmatic, giant installations in outdoor settings by manipulating natural light. In such endeavors, he would be one of a group of artists ---Robert Smithson, Michael Heizer, Christo & Jeanne-Claude and others--- who moved beyond the gallery walls to make either permanent or temporary marks on sites of architecture and landscape. Loosely labeled Earth

Art or Land Art, theirs were immense undertakings that were meant, among other things, to defy commoditization of art and farther expand the field of sculptural practice.

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- 1) See Krauss, Rosalind, *Passages in Modern Sculpture*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990: 250.
- 2) McEvelley, Thomas. *Sculpture in the Age of Doubt*. New York: Allworth Press, 1999: 44.
- 3) See Fried, Michael, "Art and Objecthood". In Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood: reviews and Essays*. University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- 4) Fried, Michael, "Three American Painters". In Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood*: 256.
- 5) See Krauss, Rosalind, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field". In Rosalind Krauss, *Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985.

"IN THE DOMAIN OF DRAMA"

SCULPTURES OF S. NANDAGOPAL

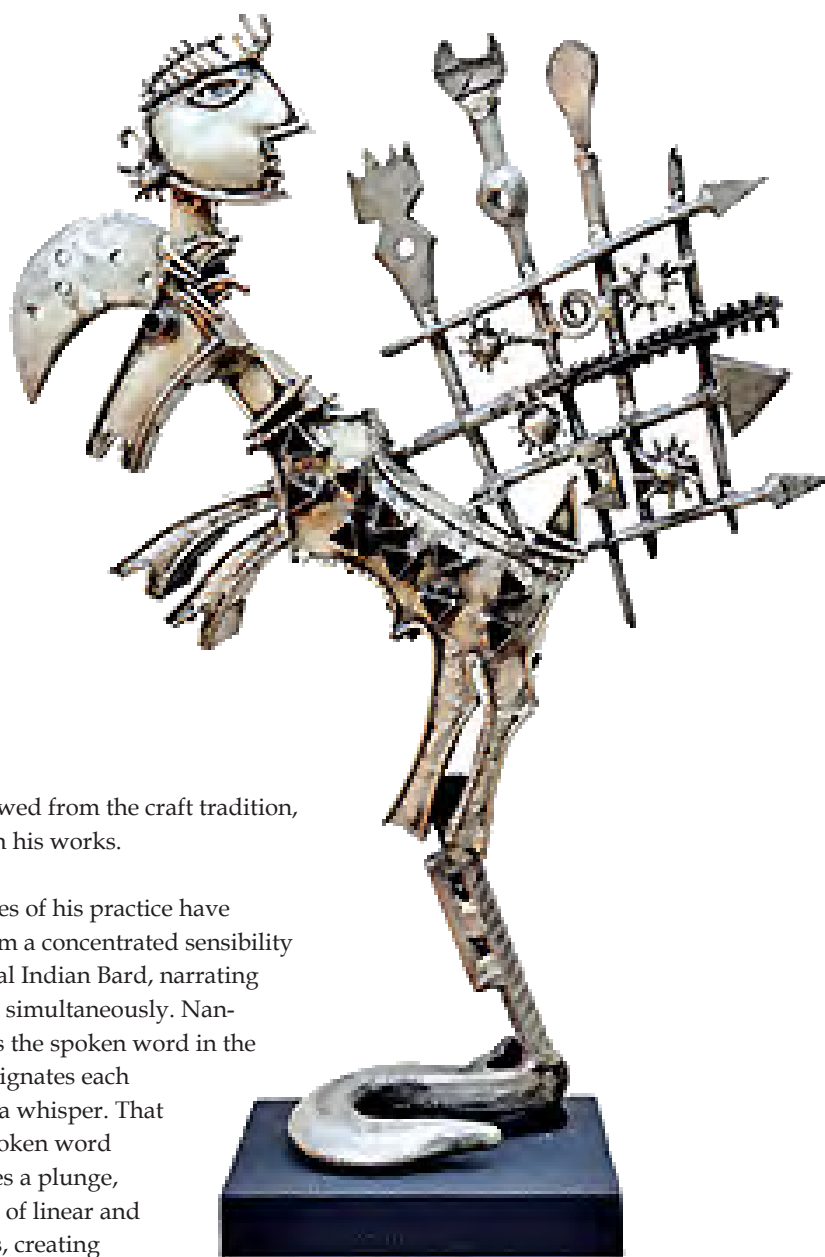
by Koeli Mukherjee Ghose

S. Nandagopal, born in Bangalore in 1946, lives and works in Cholamandal artist's village in Chennai. He graduated with a degree in physics from Loyola College Madras in 1966, and received a first class Diploma in Fine Arts from the Government College of Arts and Crafts, Madras in 1971.

In Nandagopal's works the convergence of disparate receptivity towards the theories of western art and the practice of working with eastern traditional sensibilities make his sculptures effervescent and coded; this is discerned by the art historians and scholars. His ability to integrate linearity and flatness in his sculptures adds a painterly dimension to his work and imbues it with graphic quality. The forms he creates are caught with an element of vitality of the primeval wall paintings. In his earlier works, the artist was inspired by the theory of "asymmetry in symmetry" introduced by Josef James in the late 1960s. Josef's concept was inspirational for almost all artists connected with the Madras Movement, but Nandagopal's appropriation of this principle was fruitful while he was working on "Ritual Image" in 1970 (which won the grand prize at the Fourth International Triennale, New Delhi). By extending the length of the sculpture as much as it would take before toppling over, he successfully reinforced the element of asymmetry in his sculptures; this was closely followed by a series of pieces where lyricism, graphic details and

elements borrowed from the craft tradition, began to inform his works.

The four decades of his practice have generated in him a concentrated sensibility of the traditional Indian Bard, narrating and unraveling simultaneously. Nandagopal infuses the spoken word in the title that he designates each work with like a whisper. That is where the spoken word begins and takes a plunge, in the interplay of linear and rhythmic forms, creating well-defined characters - specific though performing multiple roles,



Dancing Goat

in being the hero and simultaneously changing and becoming part of all other forms that construe the total sculptural image.

The four decades of his practice have generated in him a concentrated sensibility of the traditional Indian Bard, narrating and unraveling simultaneously. Nandagopal infuses the spoken word in the title that he designates each work with like a whisper. That is where the spoken word begins and takes a plunge, in the interplay of linear and rhythmic forms, creating well-defined characters - specific though performing multiple roles, in being the hero and simultaneously changing and becoming part of all other forms that construe the total sculptural image.

This cyclic notion of feeding a tale into the

form introduces an element of animation to the form. In the real sense the sculpture does not move from its place, but in the mind of the viewer, forms and elements from the composition continually have an effect, in stirring each other. Hence the forms are always in the state of becoming. Each element has the potential energy to burst out of the composition. The kinetic force prevalent in the lines and forms are reminiscent of the Kandiskian sensibility that is expressed in his essay on the point and line to plane; "The line is the product of a force. It is a point on which a living force has been applied in a given direction, the force applied on the pencil or on the paint brush by the hand of the artist. The produced linear forms can be of several types: a straight line, which results from a unique force applied in a single direction, an angular line, which results from the alternation of two forces with different directions, or a curved or wave-like line produced by the effect of two forces acting simultaneously. A plane can be obtained by condensation, from a line rotated around one of its ends." said Wassily Kandinsky.

What Michele Henry wrote in the essay, "Seeing the Invisible, on Kandinsky", can be imagined and appropriated as integral to Nandagopal's work as well. "Kandinsky was fascinated by the expressive power of linear forms. Lyricism is the pathos of a force whose triumphant effort enters into action and encounters no obstacle. Because the straight line results from the initiative of a single, unopposed force, its domain is that of the lyric. When two forces are present and thus enter in conflict, as this is the case with the curve or the zigzag line, we are in domain of drama." (Michel Henry, *Seeing the Invisible, on Kandinsky*, p. 52).

The linear forces placed in opposition to each other in Nandagopal's sculptural compositions reinstate that we are now in the domain of drama.

The Vastu sutra in the Upanishads emphasizes on the line and states that it is the line that conveys the bhava which comprehends the image; the



The Cow

lines are the truth and the lines are the cause of form, and the line is the support of the composition. While the rekha or the line displays the emotional character of the image, the bindu or the focal point is the source of the image's artistic energy. These are however the machineries to arrive at a pictorial formation which completes itself in the mind of the creator as Nandagopal brings to context the visionary experience.

Myths and legends add strength and magnificence to his forms but certainly their references are kept alive by a sense of respect and faith in his cultural heritage. Nandagopal deliberates, "When I look at a sculpture, I do not really see it as religious or secular. I am not aware of this distinction as I plan my sculpture. What are true to life are simultaneously one and the other. In this sense, my work is more to do with religiosity, which can occur even when confronted with a powerful Western abstract expressionist work of art".

Nandagopal reflects that traditionally classical art in India has been related deeply to religion. As the kings assigned the building of temples to master craftsmen, they were the bastion of this tradition. "The craftsmen were both designers and sculptors. These assignments brought master sculptors



Flight



The Fisherman

to conceive and execute powerful making of the sculptures at Mahabalipuram, Ellora, Pattadakal, Konarak and other temples in India. By about the fifth century A.D., in Gupta sculptures, the Indian sculptures had abstracted the image out of individuality of the human subject and arrived at the figure instead of fashioning the image as if it might be that of some individual person. With the figures, they could abstract from widely ranging spheres and give appearances to rarer natures and states. Traditional Indian sculpture has been distinguished by this particular method of abstraction", articulates the sculptor.

Perspective is an internal consideration to define the spirit of the idea or the form with reference to traditional Indian sculptures, unlike the notion of perspective that is

considered to be an external aspect in the Western art, expressed mostly through foreshortening in sculptures. "Shilpa Shastra, the ancient Indian treatise on sculpture, provided yojanas or coded measurements for the various parts of the body. Accordingly an intellectual, when portrayed, would be represented with a broad forehead; a great man by his hands extended well below his knees this does not mean that, by knowing these measurements, anyone could draw a figure; in the hands of a great artist, the code helped create a masterpiece." To explicate further Nandagopal mentions how Rodin's acknowledgement of the Nataraja image, as the greatest creation by the human hand, generated in him a sense of curiosity that

drove him to carefully examine the Chola piece; he noted the palm, that was turned downwards, was larger than the other facing upward. This he reflected was a deliberate effort by the traditional sculptor to render perspective, not by varying depth, as in the West, but by varying size.

Nandagopal begins his sculptures by enlarging his drawings to the size that he wants his sculptures to be, he then transfers the drawing on boxboards, bending them to get an idea of the depth of the sculptures, the boards are then taped and put up to visualize how the sculpture would look when transferred in the metal. The drawing then is transferred on sheets of copper or brass and cut by the process of annealing. The metal is heated in the furnace to a red hot condition, it softens when it is cooled and then it is ready to be worked with, as it bends more easily. After it has been welded

properly with an Oxyacetylene flame, the sculpture is then cleaned with nitric acid and electrically buffed to get an equally spreading shine. As the last step the sculpture is sprayed with polyurethane lacquer for preserving the Patina. He also retains the natural blackening of the metal as a result of being heated. The blackening creates a sense of painterly depth in defining forms. Various textures on his sculptural panels, such as cross hatching, triangles, arrows projecting outwards from the edge of the sculptures, punched holes, and spiral shapes create special points of interest in building the amazing tale within the elaborate sculptural arrangement that is massive and yet gives the impression to be light due to its frontality and equally spreading shimmer. The element that defines contemporaneity keeps changing in contemporary Indian Art, but surely it is not to be perceived as a cosmetic mannerism. The stance that the artist declares has to be taken into consideration. Nandagopal has incorporated his experience in working as a painter, a jewellery maker,

a ceramist, and a metalworker, in his sculptures; he is uninhibited in his approach towards the assimilation of traditional crafts of Indian origin. His involvement and transference of the experience of learning from the master craftsmen in the art school, is reflected in what he says "I have always sensed in me the liveliness of a drawing, the feel of colour, the genius of design and the preciousness of material, I work with. This understanding of the "preciousness of the material" has removed stringency of compartmentalization and conferred sensibilities to make everything work in his favour. Thus to him the legacy of craft does not mean a light-hearted repetitiveness; rather the skill of crafting translates itself to the rudimentary strength. If an artist of Indian origin is free to imbibe and appropriate elements from Western art practices in his work, the fact that he would respond to the sensibilities of his own traditions, be it that of craft, is quite natural. Tales emerging from his soil navigate his environment and daily incidents. Thus understanding the preciousness of one's tradition, holding on to it so that it does not fade, is a contemporary stance as opposed to being swayed by general consensus that makes us alienated and unresponsive to our own language.

The drama is enhanced by the massive sculptures of a dancing goat and a man merging in the same structure; their moving in opposite directions creates a dual focal interest from left to right and vice versa. The arrow, the sickle and the sharp tools, take control of, and at the same time, mislays their belligerence, to a sense of rhythm and harmony. The air around the sculpture is made to be a part of the sculptural surface, and in that space, the cows, people, insects and trees are in the process of crawling or leaping about with an ultimate sense of freedom. The bending of trees to become hillock-like forms and the fisherman on a tilted mound, and the predator ready to torture and engulf are legendary, and yet telling a new tale, culled out from the three rasas, or the essential mental state of *veeram*, *bhayanakam* and *adbhutam*.



Predator

SATISH GUJRAL : SCULPTING THE INNER FORM

by Dr. Seema Bawa

Satish Gujral is a consummate artist for whom painting, sculpture and architecture are equal manifestations of a single aesthetic. In his artistic worldview the art forms are “determined by the force of necessity, all three are locked together in a common structural frame work, measure and proportion, system of movement, sonority and echo. It is this homogeneity that has made the dream of achieving a synthesis of the three, almost an old as has been their isolation from each other.” It is no wonder then that sculptures have played such a significant role in his artistic growth. His sculptures have synthesized movement of life and industry with the stillness of the soul, the darkness of dense material with the luminosity of enlightenment, of playfulness of an artist with the wisdom of the experienced sage.

His recent sculptures can only be termed monumental, rising up to twelve feet and yet their towering verticality has a lightness of being, reaching out towards the spiritual, the divine. In this series he has melded man and machine into a unified energy matrix; the mechanical and biological confront and complement each other. The artist remarks that these make forms make him feel “more akin to the present age.”

He had previously created some of the same sculptures on a smaller scale but felt that the increased size will be able to give greater expression to this form. In fact, he feels that perhaps they could have even been made double their current size; but even the indomitable artist admits that logistical constraints sometimes restrain ones creative instincts, for example how

would one transport and where does one exhibit such large works.

Though Gujral was not formally trained in sculpture, he was fortunate in getting primary training at the Mayo School of Arts where John Lockwood Kipling was the principal. The curriculum in this institution was predicated on the belief that all three- painting, sculpture and architecture are arts of ‘space’. They represent an artist’s attitude towards spatial organizations. They could not exist in a vacuum nor fully develop in isolation from each other. Gujral does not have to drop one medium to start on another. There have been times that he has worked on architecture, painting and sculpture simultaneously though in the last ten years he has eschewed architecture he continues to be an avid sculptor, though he admits that architecture has helped him in approaching and internalising form.

Gujral has been inspired with the play of space in architecture, but feels that each art form should be approached from its individual perspective. Thus he perceives sculpture strictly in sculptural terms. He reached this conclusion after observing Le Corbusier with whom he was associated with in the designing of Chandigarh. Le Corbusier called architecture “form in air” where “an idea is subordinated by the form.”

Additionally, Gujral started his early artistic career in Mexico under Siqueiros and Diego Rivera who were practicing the public art in form of murals. Besides being influenced by the ideological underpinning of mural as an art form, Gujral realised that the mural is a combination of sculpture and painting. Murals have a third dimension and this element led the artist towards exploring sculpture as a medium for his artistic expression. From the

1960’s, soon after his return from Mexico, along with his paintings Gujral began to create free standing sculptures.

While creating a sculpture, Gujral does not begin with an idea. He lets his feeling convert itself into form. Form is not guided; it grows out of a feeling. He elucidates, “If an idea comes before form then it is as

unlikely as an arrow that reaches its target before its sound; only after a baby has been born that we think of a name.” This is one of the reasons that the artist does not give any title to his forms, he wants to allow the beholder to find own



form in the sculptures. He is convinced that art should liberate and not enslave either the artist or viewer.

Even before the form may emerge, many a times the artist is provoked by a medium. He recalls that when Louis Kahn was asked as to why he was working in brick for his building in Ahmedabad, the architect responded "that I conceived a form and then I asked it what material it wanted to be clad in and it replied brick." For sculpture Gujral, similarly, feels that that a certain form needs a particular medium. His shift from one material to another is part of his adventurous creative nature and in his long career he has worked in burnt wood, plain wood, fiber glass, and ceramic as well as bronze.

Lest it be thought that medium is only a superficial change, for Gujral this shift from one medium to another is crucial to his creative process and has sometimes been impelled by form and sometimes stemmed from observation of things and life forms. He never predetermines what he will be creating in the future for he says, 'If I know what I will be doing tomorrow I will do it today.' Thus the experimentation and creation of new forms in different mediums has an organic evolution starting from lived reality and delving into the very essence of the substance.

This is exemplified by his burnt wood sculptures. Once at Lohri the artist was struck by the beautiful pink, red and multi coloured cinders emerging from a burning log. Both the texture and colour attracted him, and immediately he knew that he wanted to work in burnt wood. He did not know what he wanted to create but only that he wanted to work in burnt wood like Vincent van Gogh said to his brother Theo "I want to paint red, I want to paint red, I want to paint red with all the passion in my heart." Gujral too was obsessed with the sooty blackness of burnt wood from which he then created deities and other forms interspersed with a hint of vermillion and gold like the glowing embers of the elemental fire. The medium was particularly suited to

the interplay of tradition with contemporary sensibility which Gujral infuses into it.

He was once walking in the back lane of his house when he came across a group of buffalos with bells around their necks. He was attracted to the curious texture of the metal. After making enquiries he realized that the texture came from the rough and ready technique of poor people who could not afford brass and instead would buy junk metal, grind it to make a powder and then melt this onto a tin plate. This gave the metal its texture and peculiar patina. This discovery marked the birth of his metal sculptures in which he worked for over a decade.

But before Gujral could become complacent in metal and burnt wood, he arrived at the third phase of his sculptural journey, and started exploring the colours and textures of granite. The play of many shades of grey and differing depths of carving give the animal and human forms in granite a tactile quality.

For the last ten years, since he abandoned stone, the artist has chosen bronze for his sculptures. He first moulds his forms in clay which allows him the freedom to turn them around. More importantly for the artist in bronze, like in ceramic, he has the option of playing with patinas. "The variety of colours is bewitching" admits the artist, this along with the serendipitous discovery of the final product mesmerize him. Just as a mother cannot see her baby before it is born, in ceramic one can only know the colour after opening the kiln, and in bronze the final appearance cannot be predetermined. The patina creates its own feeling; in fact the artist feels that dissimilar patina can impart different character to two similar pieces having the same form.

Change defines Satish Gujral's art whether it is his painting or his sculptures. He has never submitted to the concept that once one has created a style one is sold to it. According to him a style must not enslave you. He feels that "like a medium, style is engaging because it curbs your freedom to choose and therefore he changes not just the thematic, but the very language of his art every few years. He avers that "I have always lived in my own image and not an image others have of me. Once you learn to change, no other consideration can stop you."

Over the decades, deities, tribal forms,



geometrical projections, animals and humans, entwined harnesses and now mechanical devices and human forms have been the subject of his sculptures. All have been infused with the artist's original vision and energy, never stale and ever relevant.

Over the last half a century, Satish Gujral's sculptures represent a dynamic dialectic with the changing milieu on the one hand and the deeply personal need to continually seek a changing vocabulary for his art on the other.

TRANSFORMATION OF ARTICULATIONS: MRINALINI MUKHERJEE

by Mansi Dhiman

Elocution / articulations always have different meanings but it matters most when it comes to articulating the chain of thoughts through a three dimensional form portraying the artist's creative expression, in order to make a statement.. It often comes through the personal and sensory experiences.. Accepting reactions as means of visual creations also can be considered as the responsibility of an artist to depict what s/he sees around, and the changes happening in the society. The process of receiving or grasping ideas may not necessarily be unilinear.. Reactions are the chain of events that are unfolded through the human forms/non-human forms that are three-dimensional, which gains tremendous power of expression as it becomes an easy process for the sensory perception to understand articulations having self-generated meanings.. A three-dimensional medium, such as . sculpture, is in itself is very powerful medium but it becomes even more powerful when it is used for articulating the thoughts of a veteran artist like Mrinalini Mukherjee.. An artist of rare bequest and sensitivity. who has her own visual language of art form, and still is creating new visuals., Mrinalini has in her own accord made a place among the greatest Indian artists.

Born in Mumbai in 1949 into a surrounding of art Mrinalini is the only daughter of the renowned artist Benode Behari and Leela Mukherjee.. She studied painting from the Faculty of Fine Art, M.S. University of Baroda and later studied mural designing under artists like K.G. Subramanyan, receiving a Post-Diploma in the same. Studying art would have been just like



enthraling legacy from her parents. Mrinalini belongs to the group of Indian artists, who have contributed in shaping contemporary Indian art..

As an artist who has seen a long way of changing styles, isms, transitions from

traditional to modern, dimensions and meanings in the history of Indian art, Mrinalini. has also witnessed art growing and developing in her own surroundings. This has led her to cultivate herself as a professional artist, creating a style of her own,



the most sensitive and vigorous facets of an artist. The images she deploys create an illusion of being human as well as plant, underscoring the unity between flora and human body. They show that she is not only showing her love and affection towards the nature but also questioning the relationship between man and nature and responding to it. There was a time when the transition period came at its end, and maturity which gave a different form to the imagery, the iconic figures started emerging with the concave and convex curves of the three-dimensionality. The transformation in the imagery is also there,

which is rooted in her personality and environment. By creating a new visual language, the artist communicates her artistic abundance, wrought with power and energy. Mrinalini's works relate inevitably to her Indian origins and experiences, the affinities with the astonishing craft practices of our country, the spontaneous dialogue between high art and colloquial speech sources.

The sculptor has been experimenting with the visual vocabulary as well as with the medium of her works since early years of her career. Her work has from acquired inspiration from the surroundings she lived in and experiences of her life. Scrutinizing the imagery of Mrinalini's sculptures one can easily analyze, ascertain and interpret a gradual process of augmentation, in the context of visual vocabulary and medium. The early works of Mrinalini were a response towards the town she was living in, towards the vegetation and the flora. Leisurely, the process of augmentation started when the biomorphic elements enlivened the plant forms and the interplay of planes/surface tension grew more intricate as well as multifaceted and acquired the recognizable body.

The transitions sometimes show

slowly these figures transform into a semi-abstract and then into an absolute abstract form. Abstract forms/visuals have different levels of text and sub-text within, which sometimes work as the hidden quality of the works. The hidden qualities even give a strong note on sexuality in Mrinalini's works. There is a sensuous, tactile quality in her work which exercises a compelling hold on the viewer.

There are many more aspects of a three-dimensional visual which also include the surface/medium on which an artist is working on. The medium itself becomes the tool of the art work, which is seen in the art works of Mrinalini. The transformation of the imagery the medium, too, behaves in the same manner in her vocabulary. The medium of her works travels from coloured fiber hemp to fiber to ceramics to bronze, which reveals Mrinalini as a veteran sculptor. Earlier her works were inspired by nature, by its energies and elements. Mrinalini Mukherjee intricately works with material like wax, rope, clay and metal. At times, the medium speaks of many aspects of an artist, including her personal and social existence. Through the procedure of weaving, firing and casting, she forms spirals, loops and hollows which give the sculptures a heavy vegetal drape, or in other words, voluptuously enveloping curves with unmistakable tactile quality. Using a more malleable medium such as bronze, at this time, the visuals are transformed into the



abstract. The mysterious folds and orifices, the quality of textures and surface, the subtle play of light and shadow, the gleam of the patinas, the viscosity of the varnishes, the iridescent sharpness of the metal chasing, the muted tones of the coloured dyes as well as the intricate curves and drapes bring forth the experiences as well the maturity of Mrinalini as an artist.

She uses the traditional as well as the pioneering medium through which the work emerges out in an innovative and fresh look. Mrinalini's works dwell in a remarkable quality of fluidity. The formal quality of her works grows from each fold, and sprouts as a whole. The tactility and monumentality of the sculptures come together in a single form which defines Mrinalini's works. Giving the observer a liberty to decipher the art work/ sculpture according to his understanding and at the same time positing the observer within a limited space, the three-dimensionality of the work takes on its own meaning.

THE EXPERIENTIAL QUOTIENT IN THE SCULPTURES OF RAVINDER REDDY

by Koeli Mukherjee Ghose

Ravinder Reddy, born in 1956, in Suryapet of Andhra Pradesh, lives and works in Visakhapatnam.

The full-bodied, monumental sculptures in fiber glass, of wide-eyed women that he creates, spawn a sense of bewilderment in the viewers. This expression of bewilderment casts a field of magnetism around the sculpture and the onlooker that is difficult to disengage from.

The entire form when viewed in the round, is difficult to grasp in its totality. Physical distance and increased frequency make the total form graspable visually. The conceptual forms, their colour and making, in their apparent simplicity of presenting frontal standing and seating, nudes and embellished personas, flaunting the power to captivate the onlooker, raise questions that are not satisfied with easy answers of pushing the impending form of discussion under genre charts of Pop and Kitsch. Understanding that the pop art is aimed at employing images of popular as opposed to exalted cultures in its emphasis on the banal or kitschy elements of a culture, mostly expressed through irony, the pop and the Kitsch plays only a part in the making of these experiential forms.



Woman

Consciousness plays a twofold and distinct function in cognition. All cognitive experience is an active process that lends an objective or a determined form to knowledge. The mind does not engage in an awe-inspiring relation with any superfluous object which it studies without interest. "It is the cognition that leads to recognition" Harsha V. Dehejia, (Aesthetic Implications of Divine Consortship), that the object of cognition eventually leads to the recognition of the subjective or personal.

The experience that looms large is not that of the familiarity of the feminine forms of the sculptures but the conflict the presence brings up, whether to perceive the created persona as the consort, an object of desire or divinity. The position is somewhat analogous to the relationship of adoration and passion of the artist, while in the process of creating, and the viewer, as he or she is contemplating the sculpture with some doubt as well as desire. This in turn imbues the sculptures with a sense of consortship of the beholder.

The wide-eyed feminine forms manifest a sensibility of adoration of the alluring form that wields the power to gaze back at the beholder of her charm, in complete blatancy. In history the creation of the feminine, be it the Yakshi, Mother Goddess, Parvati and Lakshmi, has forever been the reflection of the inspired vision informed with feminine sensuality and its strength. The form when attributed with iconographic signification, informs it with specific notions, of properties, significance and mythological narration.

Ravinder Reddy's powerful embodiments of feminine presence reinforce their sexual selves, exude desire and bring up the notion of desire and its ethics to discussion, the viewer is steeped in perplexity in the process of controlling his or her own aspirations to respond to the monumental signification of desire. The shape of the breasts and suggestive folds and flab, the visibility of the pudenda in the



Woman Braiding Hair

seated nudes and the woman bathing builds a sense of being down to earth, it also seems to say that all sculptures have their own "physical reality as an object". The wide-eyed gaze carried from the temple goddess, the embellishments and the golden smear of paint, enacts the notion of the divinity of the feminine and yet in the contemporary social context establishes the paradox of life,

divinity and objecthood. Given the notion that the gender of the artist is an influencing factor in the construction of their style and content, especially in the context of dealing with the human figure, Ravinder Reddy's sculptures are experiential forms of fragmented paradoxical contexts of tradition, symbolism and myth on the one hand and, on the other, that of the gaze of and for the feminine sexual body, the notion of divinity and power adhering to the cultural perceptibility and an apparent objecthood.

The contemporary sculptors from the west and other south Asian countries reflect their preoccupation with the human body, as Judith Collin construes in her writing in *Sculpture today*. Human body is to be seen less as a conquering hero or embodiment of symbolic virtue and more as a victim of Global diseases and threats. Ravinder Reddy perhaps creates an experience of reality, effect and triumph of desire that exist in the contemporary socio- cultural context.



Woman Holding Her Breasts 2



Lion Gate

SHRESTA RIT PREMNATH A PASSION FOR STRUCTURE

by Franck Barthelemy

Shresta Rit Premnath caught my attention most probably for a wrong reason : he was the only Bangalore artist at the last Art Basel presented by a Bangalore gallery. I became curious and wanted to know more about him. The work he showed at the fair, Zero Knot, is an installation organized around a statue. Well, around a form that looks like a statue. Maybe a beautifully sculpted one but we don't know. Shresta chose to present the statue covered with a tarp. What is it all about? Is this a statue that is going to be taken down? Is this a statue that is going to be inaugurated? Who does it represent? Adeposed leader? Or an upcoming one? The artist surrounded the statue with different signs of past and future in order to continue playing with the contradiction brought



Zero Knot

to us by the tarp. When I talked to Shrestha in Bangalore a few weeks ago, he talked to me about the Zero Knot theory. "Zero Knot is a mathematical structure. It is a loop where there is no end. It is a structure that reveals multiple numbers of forms. It is infinity, at the same time it always comes down to zero." The revealed / non-revealed statue is the perfect representation. It could be a whole, and at the same time it could be nothing.

Looking at Shrestha's body of works, we can probably say that he is fascinated by one subject : the structure. A possible illustration of it is the last exhibition he had in Bangalore, LEO, where the artist explores different representations of powers. The lion is one of them. Shrestha strongly demonstrated that the symbol is well-rooted into our mind. The MGM lion we all saw on movie theatres' screens shows the power of the American film industries over the world. And, with more subtlety, he showed us that we are surrounded by lion representations in the

form of statues in our cities. At the borders, at the courts' gates, at the city halls' gateways, in all places where the political power, i.e. the power of the city, is exercised. Shrestha believes those symbols of powers are in place to convince the people the power is legitimate. They define most of the time an imaginary inside and outside. And this is another theme Shrestha likes thinking about : boundaries. His work *A Cage Went in Search of a Bird* is a beautiful illustration of his personal quest. And the title he chose, borrowed from Franz Kafka, is another illustration of Shrestha's passion for structure. When I questioned him on his reasons to refer to Kafka, he answered: "The structure". Kafka wrote structured fiction. It is hard to read without thinking about a moral. But it is hard to find out what that is." Like Kafka, Shrestha is interested in questioning the viewers. He wants the viewer to become an investigator for sense. He wants the viewer to create sense out of the objects he proposes. And he helps or motivates the viewers by proposing different structures. He said: "I find there is something in the structure that makes a whole. I want to find the formal or conceptual relation between the objects I use." The context can play an important part in the meaning. And this is something Shrestha acknowledges with emphasis. He strongly believes in continuous change and his loop videos are a clear indication of his belief. He immediately refers to Borges and his Pierre Menard allegory. Shrestha can repeat video scenes endlessly with the only objective to question the viewers. The main challenge is to pull the viewers in the video rather than creating a distance between him and the art piece. Shrestha associates easily still slides and animated scenes in his videos and tries to 'present unrelated forms in a structured way that makes sense'.

Shrestha's search for structure makes him a fascinating artist. I enjoyed talking to a global artist who is from Bangalore and lives in New York since he started studying art, who creates multi-cultural communities through his journal *Shifter* and who commits to boost art debates. I look forward to Shrestha's next project, maybe in Berlin soon. Keep his name in mind!

THE ANATOMY OF MELANCHOLY: SCULPTURES OF RAJESH P SUBRAMANIAM

by *Rollie Mukherjee*

It is interesting to see that despite a growing preference for new media art particularly for installations, performances and video art, there is a return to conventional forms of art making. Though there are a few artists involved with the traditional mediums, their continuance does provide fresher approaches even today. It's also inter-

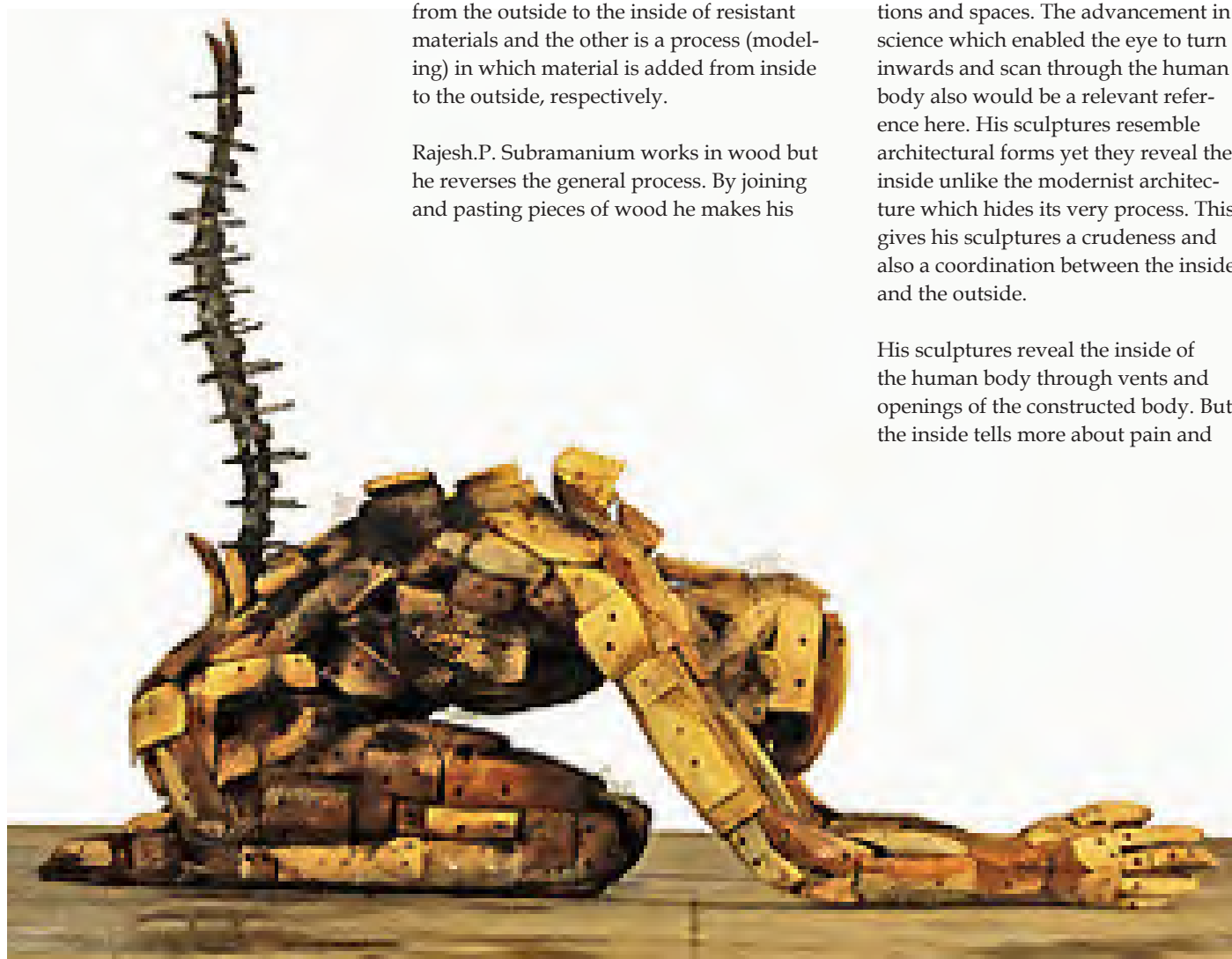
esting to see how these traditional modes of art-making engage with the new aesthetic demands by working in ways where the practice doesn't look obsolete and yet connects to the contemporary. One can see an overlapping of modernist and contemporary approaches in the handling of the medium/themes creating a peculiar concoction.

Sculpture, generally includes two different practices carving and modeling. One works from the outside to the inside of resistant materials and the other is a process (modeling) in which material is added from inside to the outside, respectively.

Rajesh.P. Subramaniam works in wood but he reverses the general process. By joining and pasting pieces of wood he makes his

process additive rather than subtractive. Here one can find a resemblance with architectural constructions. He follows the architectural model where the basic design is geometrical and calculated and the exterior performs a formal function. The contemporary (glass/translucent) architecture opens up for viewing the spectacle inside these unapproachable/elite spaces, always luring us to desire those positions and spaces. The advancement in science which enabled the eye to turn inwards and scan through the human body also would be a relevant reference here. His sculptures resemble architectural forms yet they reveal the inside unlike the modernist architecture which hides its very process. This gives his sculptures a crudeness and also a coordination between the inside and the outside.

His sculptures reveal the inside of the human body through vents and openings of the constructed body. But the inside tells more about pain and



When The Time Permits us, The Symphony Started....., Wood, Screw, Iron, Sealing Wax, & Chicken Mesh



Resurrection for a Land of Anticipation, Wood & Screw



Portraits of The Architects Who Stood for Their Conqueror, Wood & Screw

suffering not just of the body but also refers to the bigger world - the society. His works follow a geometrically calculated internal structure similar to the armature of any sculpture. The exterior is then added up by screwing and gluing up pieces of wood on to the armature. The pieces of wood acquire a definition only in relation to the part which is placed. They look like any other piece in the sculpture but for a few minor changes. They don't follow the logic of human anatomy but follow the convenience of the structure. The further additions and pieces define themselves in accordance with the surrounding piece. Every piece gains its positional meaning only in accordance with the other pieces in the sculpture. In a way his sculptures define the very process of their making/coming into being. This however makes many of his sculptures look alike varying only in the differing themes and issues he is dealing with. Though his subject talks about deep physical and mental pain of the body/mind, his construction technique is not expressionistic or emotionally charged. Rather it is more mathematical and calculated. These are formed not with a process of immediacy but rather by premeditation. He joins small pieces of wood with nails and sometimes with rusty iron nets to cover the face or the vocal chord. This enhances a choked expression in his work. His sculptures are bodies conceived as construction sites.

He refers to Biblical themes and stories about resurrection and also Christian postures to depict pain and agony. His bodies talk about the human frailty to conquer pain and death, our fragility and vulnerability. One can thus see a strong sense of surrender. We can also read the humanistic impulse in many of his sculptures which bring the discourse of modernist tradition to the fore referring to Christian origins. The centrality of the human being and the longing for a redemptive savior affirms his modernist beliefs. Though his technique refers to an alienated and fragmented being, they perform an organic function rather than playing relatively localized and contextual roles.

A CRUSADER OF/FOR SITE SPECIFIC PUBLIC ART: SUBODH KERKAR

by JohnnyML



The Tenth Planet

Subodh Kerkar does not wait for someone to tell him what is worthy as an art object or what could be done to make public art projects. Subodh goes around and like an artist who sees only shapes in a canvas or a sculptor who sees only forms in blocks of marbles he sees ideas and forms in anything and everything that surrounds him. He converts sand dunes into planets, sea shells into permanent and temporary installations. For him abandoned boats are treasure troves of forms. Subodh who confesses his liking for Richard Long and Andy Goldsworthy, is a contemporary artist who lives and works in Goa.

Trained as a medical doctor, Subodh

got initiated into the world of art as a young boy. His father was a painter who used to chronicle the life of Goa in his works done in the western academic style. Subodh grew up as a watercolourist and a student activist. Activism took him to medical profession for he thought that he would serve the society better as a doctor. But his true calling was art. He established himself as a major watercolorist in the Goan art scene. But as an artist who wants to constantly transcend his ideas and mediums, he soon found public art and site specific works closer to his own personality. As a student activist, he was always connected to the people and as an artist too he wanted to do the same.

Perhaps, Subodh is one artist who proved to an artistically conventional society of

Goa that if there is a will there is a way, too. Despite the presence of a few monumental sculptures and a few portrait paintings Goan art scene was almost barren during the 1980s and 90s. Though Goa Art College has produced some of the finest artists in India, only a few stayed back in Goa. With no patronage other than the occasional art buying tourists, it was really difficult to develop an indigenous art scene there. Subodh, having no formal art education as his 'biggest handicap' pitched himself into the contemporary art scene of Goa with some interesting site specific works, which got the people to sit up and think about art.

Andy Goldsworthy once said that you could do anything as art but you just need to get into the rhythm of it. Subodh, too, is always in tune with the nature around him and not a single public art project or site specific work that he has done over a period of last eight years look forced or contrived with difficulty. The works look monumental, experimental and above all relevant to its surroundings. It all started when the artist took a few copper lamp shades that he had designed to the Goa beach. He and



The Sea Anemone



The Moon and The Tides

his friends dug up few craters on the beach bed and placed the lamps inside it. Once they were lit, it looked as if they were a constellation of new planets. Subodh rightly called them the 'Tenth Planet'.

It was in 2002 and there is no looking back for the artist ever since. The sea has always been a backdrop and inspiration for Subodh. Growing up in the vicinity of the sea, like Hemingway, Subodh finds it really difficult to move away from the music of it. All his works, even if they are paintings, gallery installations, public projects, designs or digital images, have got inspirations and images from the sea life. In 2005, at the Goa beach, he did another site specific installation titled 'Sea Anemone'. He collected sea shells from the beach and arranged them in the shape of an anemone and lit them up from inside. This spectacular site specific work was visited by more than two lakh people. Subodh has been invited to international bienales and art projects to do public sculptures and his site specific work was awarded by the Busan Biennale in 2006. It is his site specific work in Dubai got him international acclamation.

An avid promoter of Goan art and artists, Subodh finds it imperative to work with artists from all over India. He invites established and young artists to do public projects in Goa. It is interesting to see a single artist's



The Sea Remembers

efforts yielding good results for the Goa art scene. As an activist with a lot of grass root connections Subodh is always capable of convincing the authorities to get funds for doing public projects, often for the other artists. Never does he discriminate public art projects as commissioned works, funded by art agencies, self funded and so on. Any work of art done in the public and left for the public consumption without engaging the work with commercial dealings should be seen as public art, Subodh says. He also adds that there should be special bodies to judge the aesthetical validity of such works, if it is produced by using public funds.

Working with different materials and objects, the artist extensively uses the boat forms. He buys unused wooden boats and cut them up into different sizes and shapes to produce his site specific as well as gallery

based installations and sculptures. For him, the boat is a powerful symbol of any community that lives by the sea. The image of a boat shows the quality of endurance and power. When Subodh uses the cut up boats and paints them on, both the male and female principles appear in them. Through a series of works that he has done recently, Subodh speaks of the different facets of terror and power. Citing the incident of the terrorists coming by the sea route to attack Mumbai, Subodh says the traditional boats are no longer the medium of

conveyance. Fitted with information technology devices, they carry terror too. Hence, this series of installations has the circuit boards and other computer devices as integral parts.

As an artist who would like to work with different mediums and people with different expertise, Subodh incorporates theatre actors and people from the local areas into his works. In the public performances in, around and with the works, they act out various movements which the artist captures selectively and converts them into digital works, which are displayed along with his sculptures and installations in galleries.

Subodh always like to work on issues that are socially relevant and demand public attention. 'Water', is a site-specific installation in which he placed a series of half-filled wine glasses along the Goan beach. In another series he created large-scale water drops in fiber glass and installed along the walls. To elucidate on the environmental concerns, Subodh created an installation using the locally available coconut leaves and shells.

Subodh Kerkar believes that art should be beyond all kinds of boundaries, and that art should not create any religious or parochial divides. To voice his ideas, he regularly writes in magazines and newspapers. As a crusader for site-specific art, Subodh has created a platform for the young artists in Goa. Now it is their turn to make use of it.



The Fisherman and The Boat



INSTALLATION PRACTICES IN AND AROUND SANTINIKETAN

Ashish Ghosh, Creepers Revealed

by Vishal Tondon

Since its very inception, Santiniketan has had a practice of ritual-based community events. Initially, these helped foster the spirit of nationalism, inculcate a spirit of community, and create a role model for civic life in the soon-to-be an independent and free young India. Tagore made a conscious effort to appropriate the models of religious rituals and apply them to the non-religious, secular community activities such as Briksharopan (a ceremonial planting of trees) and Vasanto-Utsav (celebration of spring, more popularly known as holi). Integral to these rituals and programs was décor; the decorative paraphernalia and hand-made objects. Things were arranged, installed and new connotations created. Kala Bhavana participated in these events with its own

unique inputs mainly from Nandalal Bose, and also invented certain details of these rituals. Being characteristically secular, these rituals were open to creative interventions and had a close association with nature; invocation of nature was one central objective of these rituals. For instance, special attention was paid to using locally available and natural material like foliage, flowers and the vocabulary of indigenous art and craft. Even the clothes used as decorative edgings or for canopy and costumes were spun, dyed, embroidered and painted locally all of these can be regarded as a precursor of what we today know as installations and outdoor sculptures.

Of particular interest is the practice of outdoor art as a kind of public art especially that by Ramkinkar Baij absolutely different from the prevalent practice of Nationalist statues of Baij's time. These were made open air, without much fuss about longevity or sanctity accorded to the material used. They were intended to be a part of the environment, and for the enjoyment of the local inhabitants. They were inspired either by the ways of the indigenous people or by literary characters.

We now have a specific definition of what installation practice is. It is interesting to note that Briksharopan even now fits the bill as far as a contemporary definition of a performance-installation is concerned. A tree is ceremoniously planted every year on this day, and the ritual is a symbol of the larger efforts to create greenery in and around Santiniketan. To analyze the activity according to modern criteria, Briksharopan is a site specific and recurring event. It follows real-time practices, and is of a performative nature as the process involves the intention and active participation of the public.

In the West, site-specific and performance-oriented installation practices began with the motive of

challenging the constraints and the hold of the white cube that is the gallery space, and moving the art object and the creative activity out of this space. Traditionally an art object, a painting to be more specific engaged with the viewer in a visual dialogue. Now, an installation transforms visual dialogue into a multisensory experience, where the viewer who is either participating in or intruding into the space of the installation is engaged with the installation through sound, sight, and physical relationship with the objects. In Kala Bhavana, this discourse happened by way of casual workshops and Nandan Mela activities, rather than as a part of the curriculum. This owed to the tradition of considering art as a community activity rather than as an elitist one reaching out to a discerning few. Also, the annual activity of *Jago-Jhomp* a musical play enacted every year during the Kala Bhavana annual art fair 'Nandan Mela' used the technical aspects of projection images, light and shadow, and live performance as improvisations of theatrical activity. Though not done with the intention of performances and installations as done in the West, *Jago-Jhomp* did experiment with visual tools, spaces and multimedia.

On the occasion of Nandan Mela, outdoor or environmental works are done with great zeal and creativity. Here often the idea is to enliven the campus space with something stunning in terms of the visual idea, scale, and most importantly, the material. One



Josmartin LX

such example is the light installations by Kaumudi Patil. Simple material like dry leaves, or bamboo structures convert the space into something unusual, different, and unfamiliar. They transform a known space into a new experience, as in the installation by Ashish Ghosh and his friends. The outdoor sculptures affect the visual atmosphere greatly. Last year, the giant interactive puppet created by the students engaged the visitors, young and old alike, in a playful and fun activity.

The newer practices of performance and installation in the West by influential artists were not to directly influence their inclusion in the curriculum at Kala Bhavana. In fact, Kala Bhavana yet does not officially have installation and performance arts in the curriculum. The transfiguration of community based activities which were so inherent in the fabric and the lifestyle of Santiniketan into newer versions like "installation art" and "performance art" came through the



Asghar Ali, Melting Stones



Ashish Ghosh and Others



Briksharopan



Kaumudi Patil



Sanchayan Ghosh, A Few Hanged Stars and a Crossed Memoir

interventions in the early 1990s by foreign students accepted into the MFA programs.

In the year 2000, Sanchayan Ghosh created 'A Few Hanged Stars and a Crossed Memoir', a site specific installation performance. The performance-installation was created in the space between the two Ramkinkar Baij sculptures, 'The Santhal Family' and 'The Mill Goers'. The performers read out, as a homage, letters written by now famous artists who were unacknowledged in their own times. Thus, Ramkinkar Baij was witness to the readings of the letters of the poets Jibanananda Das and Sukanto, the film maker Ritwik Ghatak, and the artist Van Gogh amongst others; a new space was created out of every day, regular space. The transformation of space provoked and transformed our activities around it.

To re-assess the outcomes of a living tradition like Briksharopan, on 1st August 2004 Sanchayan Ghosh and a group of students went out on a bicycle expedition around Santiniketan to locate the trees planted annually since the times of Tagore. A census of the trees was conducted,

and placards mentioning 'the year of birth' were installed by the trees that could be located. As for the trees that had disappeared, the placards mentioned 'missing'. The study revealed a newer geometry of a now much fragmented Visva-Bharati. The authorities were notified; where had so many trees gone missing? This was a kind of an excavation project into the history of Visva-Bharati which was originally meant to be an open campus interspersed with indigenous units of locals. But now the space had evolved itself into disjointed parts.

Kaumudi Patil's installation for Vasanto-Utsav showed her concern for the nature; she tied sacred threads around the tree, the flowers of which are used to make the natural dye used in Vasanto-Utsav, and gave us the message that we should revere and use natural resources judiciously.

Similarly, Ashish Ghosh's installation "Creepers Revealed" at Sriniketan, is an example of art that doesn't interfere with space, but becomes a part of it. Further, it fondly remembers the creepers that are now becoming rare in the surrounding landscape due to rampant human interference.

Activities that elicit the participation of viewers, as in the case of "Evolving

Sculpture" by Sajad Hamdani during the year 2002, are a clear example of how art transcends the private domain and becomes public. Rejects from the Sculpture and the Ceramics Departments were shared with the students and viewers, and they were encouraged to develop a structure out of it as per the dictates of their own choice.

More recent activities include installations like "Melting Stones" by Asghar Ali, which reveals social concerns. Some installations are about more personal concerns and subjective feelings, like Josmartin LX's work made during the students' submission this year.

Thus we see that though not all installation art practices are saleable due to their temporality and site-specificity, they are important interventions and intellectual discourses on society and our relation with our surroundings. Also, if one is more aware of the aesthetics and implications of such works of art, we can encourage the proliferation of this kind of cultural practice in public and corporate spaces.



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