



JOGEN CHOWDHURY
RETROSPECTIVE 1955 - 2013

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16 February - 20 March, 2016

KALAKRITI
ART GALLERY

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I AM LUCKY ENOUGH THAT I COULD
SAVE A NUMBER OF MY EARLY
DRAWINGS, STUDIES, WATER
COLOURS AND PAINTINGS DONE
DURING THE PERIOD WHEN I WAS
IN ART COLLEGE AT KOLKATA,
DESPITE THE FACT THAT A PART OF
THEM GOT LOST AND DESTROYED.
IN THIS SHOW I AM EXHIBITING
THEM ALONG WITH SOME WORKS
OF LATER PERIOD WHICH ARE
STILL WITH ME AS PERSONAL
COLLECTION.

JOGEN CHOWDHURY

FOREWORD

I am delighted to present The Jogen Choudhury Retrospective show stretched over two of our galleries in Hyderabad. At The Kalakriti Art Gallery, we are fortunate enough to get a selection of the Artist's own collection of his works, and at the Trident Gallery we are happy to display a selection of Rekha & Prshant Lahoti collection that has been developed over a decade and a half. No introduction is required for the Oeuvres of the Master as Jogen Choudhury is one of the most important painters in contemporary India. Contours of sinuous lines with tumescence and flaccid figures, Jogen Da spreads out the human experience simulating the cosmic disposition where flora, fauna and quotidian banality reaches the spiritual heights. The unmistakable style of the master is the insignia of all his creations. I hope this exhibition will offer a chance to experience the art lovers to have mindful viewing of the master's work.

With best compliments,

Prshant Lahoti

KALAKRITI ART GALLERY

Kalakriti Art Gallery was set up by Mr. Prshant Lahoti in the year 2002. Mr. Lahoti, an art lover, his passion for art has brought him to open a gallery in his own space. The Gallery represents emerging and established contemporary artists in Hyderabad. Over the years, Kalakriti has debuted many young artists, and has also hosted exhibitions of some of the leading and distinguished artists like Amit Ambalal, Anju Dodiya, Jehangir Jani, Jogen Chowdhury, K G Subramanyan, Ram Kumar, S H Raza, Surya Prakash, T Vaikuntam, and other brilliant works by many other celebrated artists. Art critics like Aka Pande, Jyotirmaya Sharma, Nancy Adajania, Ranjit Hoskote, Sujata Bajaj, sculptor & writer Radhakrishnan, and many more luminaries have held interactive sessions with the Hyderabad audience, which has helped the Hyderabad art scenario to mature over the past few years. The gallery actively ventures into collaborative programs with Alliance Francaise, Goethe Zentrum, University of Hyderabad, etc. and has participated in few national art fairs, namely Art Expo, Mumbai; India Art Fair, New Delhi; The Luxury Expo, Hyderabad; & the latest being the Kochi Biennale, Kochi.

In thirteen years of its career, the gallery has become renowned for its overwhelming and noticeable work and has come a long way in establishing itself as a well known art gallery in Hyderabad. Kalakriti has published Narendra Luther's 'Lashkar: The Story of Secunderabad', and a multitude of exhibition catalogues of artists with critically analyzed text. Furthermore, the gallery has come up with limited editions of artist-signed art portfolios like serigraph works by Shuvaprasanna, Surya Prakash, Vaikuntam, and a wide range of art accessories.

In 2012, as part of ten year celebrations of its existence, Kalakriti Art Gallery launched 'Kalakriti Award for Achievement and Excellence', which has now become an annual feature to honour an individual from the city, who has contributed to any area that brings forth the spirit of excellence, achievement and human refinement. The award contains a sculpted trophy, a citation and a token amount of Rs.1 lakh. This award is presented every year in January coinciding with the Krishnakriti Annual Festival of Art & Culture. The previous recipients of the honour are Sri Shankar Melkote, Cricketer VVS Laxman, Dr. Mahesh Joshi & Smt. Uzramma.

KRISHNAKRITI ART FOUNDATION

Kalakriti, in association with reputed Institutions and Organizations, has arranged a couple of seminars and cultural activities. The Krishnakriti Arts and Culture Festival in January is an annual expression of this objective. Krishnakriti Art Foundation was launched in 2004 as an extension of Kalakriti Art Gallery, dedicated to the memory of late Sri Krishnachandra B Lahoti. Its aim was to support artists and educational activities in the field of visual arts.

The Festival brings to Hyderabad some of the best talent in the world as a showcase of human endeavor and achievement. The Festival is intended to celebrate three abiding refinements of life — art, culture and education — and to share these with as many people as possible. The Festival offers a plethora of cultural activities, including classical music, theatre, screening of movies and a

series of talks on the visual arts and their place in contemporary culture.

Dedicated to the cause 'Art for education', Krishnakriti's annual festival also includes artist residencies where participants are invited from State, National & International. After the camp, an auction of art works take place, the proceeds of which not deducting any expense of the camp, in the form of scholarships, go towards supporting the education of deserving young arts students and budding artists from across India. Our philanthropy reaches to students through Institutions in Hyderabad, Baroda, Santiniketan, Delhi & Bangalore.

In addition to this, Krishnakriti Art Foundation awards annual residency programs in France every year, in collaboration with the French Embassy. This was initiated in 2007; the recipients have been Dhruvadi Ghosh, Mrinmoy Debbarma, Reji Arackal, Aishwarya Sultania, Ranjan Ghosh, Hetal Chudasama, Dillip Kumar Malik, Megha Katyal, Vikram R V, Biplab Roy, Anupama Kumari, Swathi Vijay, Vaibhav Sharma, Likhita Mahajan, Naresh Kumar, Shubhankar Prakash Bharti & Premdeep Kour Khere.

The year 2016 marked the 12th edition of the festival and continues to pioneer the presentation of novel events in art & culture to the denizens of Hyderabad and beyond. Over the past 12 years, the Festival has transformed the cultural landscape of the tri-cities, and has helped to produce many ground breaking events. The festival is growing bigger and breaking records year after year.

EXHIBITIONS

Kalakriti always encourages and appreciates new ideas to spread wings in its space. Till date the gallery has proudly played host to many major exhibitions and artists. The long list includes, Jogen Chowdhury's Retrospective; 'IT CLOTS', solo show by Prajakta Palav; 'The sound of silence', an exhibition by young contemporary painters; 'Transcapes', a selection of works by Ram Kumar; 'Amidst two waters', by Mahish Pushkale; 'Tradition & Transition', Watercolours from India and China; 'Zoom! A collection', by thirteen renowned Indian contemporary artists; 'Explorations', a group show by Krishnakriti Fellows; 'Homage to the Legendary painter Ganesh Pyne'; 'Saswat, the eternal', solo works of Dipak Banerjee; 'Time past is present' by Sudip Roy; 'Jannis.. A Relook', solo show by Jehangir Jani; 'Living with Great Masters: Kalakriti at Ten'; Shuvaprasanna Bhattacharya's 'Recent & Retrospective'; Surya Prakash's 'A World with a View'; 'Shakti, an unique display of powerful art and subtle divinity', a group show on Shakti series by many eminent artists; Anju Dodiya's 'Cloud Hunter & other works' with talk and slide presentation, and 'VIAPRESENCE by B2FAYS', French Artist, an interactive multimedia show. Some of the early shows were Jogen Choudhry's 'A Calligraphy of Touch & Gaze'; 'Rachana: The art of Rabindranath & the Tagores', an exhibition of Paintings by Rabindranath, Abanindranath & Gaganendranath Tagore followed by a talk on Tagore's visuality by Ms. Shanu Lahiri, former Dean, Faculty of Visual Arts, Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata; 'Recent works by K G Subramanyam'; 'Ahl Intemperance' by Rajeswara Rao; 'A show of Serigraphs by S H Raza, T Vaikuntam, & Amit Ambalal'; 'Say it with wood' by Detlef Schulz, a German Artist; Sujata Bajaj's Paintings and Ceramics with Book launch, to name a few.

SPEAKING OF JOGEN

K.G. Subramanyan

It is hard enough for an artist to write about his own works. But it is harder to write about the work of another. For no artist can handle this with clean hands, soiled as they are with the sweat of his responses. And no artist will readily agree to wear what one may call gloves of impartiality.

I confess I am partial to Jogen's work, particularly its kind of eroticism. I find it quite special a home grown not theatrical eroticism that is more disarming than provocative. And I am struck by the simple devices he contrived this with - a strange fusion of graphic sophistication and naiveté; an over-layering of languor; not tension, on his human subjects, men and women in ambiguous encounters; where males more often than not, look droll, flabby, disproportionate, even helpless in the company of tantalizing females in various stages of dishabile; who look naked even when they are heavily clothed. He unpacks their attractions by a variety of graphic devices, making them fall loose, sagfold, crinkle, almost dissolve into a costume, investing them in the process, a kind of intriguing physicality or nothingness. In reverse, he projects on the things he paints - plants, pots, flowers and fruit - a weird or voluptuous figuration and animates them with an awkward libido.

Art critics have imputed all this to satire and social comment. Jogen himself has perhaps lead them to do so. But one can easily think of other explanations. In the guilt ridden society of ours the body's gifts are unrepresentable unless they are dressed with a moral lesson or shown under the cover of a religious theme. This is an age old practice. Some of the most engrossingly erotic pictures one can think of are those hell scenes that were popular in the east and the west; where sinners were shown to suffer all kinds of physical assault with obvious sadistic or masochistic undertones, making us wonder whether these lurid and salacious scenes did not drive people to sin, and earn thereby the right to undergo such orgies of suffering.

But one can think of other alternatives; and say that these works carry a larger implication; of how

pleasure, by its own nature, debunks itself; how the body's enchantment becomes a strangulating snare, transforming a Garden of Eden to an Island of Circe. For, in most of the languorous females are the star performers; the males are accessories like the dwarf and clowns in a circus. And the whole show seems to imply that indulgence leads to abasement, that beauty tends to lose its freshness and rigor in no time, but, all the same, this is an engaging and inescapable part of the story of life.

Or again, we may discover in these paintings a deviant grammar for the high-lighting of the erotic; that outlines that the attractions of the physical beauty are most intense when they overstep the canon and loosen up, where a touch of disproportion, inelegance, oddity or aberration enhances them. How lifeless the lacquered mannequins of the beauty pageants look - with their every feature polished to perfection - compared to the youthful peasant girls working in the fields, who take no recourse to cosmetic embellishments!

Paintings like Jogen's are bound to encourage many such readings and speculations in each viewer.

Jogen has had a chequered and eventful career. He is one of those young men who had to move to Calcutta



FOLIAGE STUDY | 1955



TORSO - IN LYING POSITION | 1966

from East Bengal early in life and work hard to establish himself. Trained to be an artist in reputed schools inside and outside the country he had to work, initially as a designer and later as the curator of an art collection to support himself, which experience he, however, still values. He was also, on the side, an art activist involved with various artist groups and art Journals. But his real vocation was to be a teacher, though the chance to be one came to him rather late in life. But it was chance worth waiting for, as this brought him to Kala Bhavana (Santiniketan) - an art institution which had from the beginning upheld the necessity for academic freedom, creative innovation, and cross-cultural interaction. He could not have asked for a better placement.

With a sense of social commitment and keen concern for the environment Jogen took full advantage of it. He had an inborn talent to get close to his students, to put enthusiasm into them the pipe out their latent potential. And besides this, a keen desire to inform them about the speciality of their environment and need to be responsive to it if they wanted to discover their true language of expression. At a time when the rapid commercialization of the art scene is floating around various facile stereotypes his stress on this is most timely and appropriate.

Jogen is however a widely traveled artist and has many foreign artist friends. His work is appreciated by many, cutting across cultural barriers. So when he pleads for responsiveness to the environment he is not being

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chauvinistic; he has enough evidence to show that the world accepts an artist more readily when he is genuinely himself than when he conforms to a running stereotype. What it looks for is authenticity and depth, not easy legibility. All serious art lovers will be pleased to confront and art that needs some unraveling.

Jogen's students adore him. And he, on his side, takes a lot of interest in their welfare. In a country where the official support for the growth of a wholesome art environment is scanty, and often ill-conceived he is always thinking of establishing self-supporting agencies, if, in this effort, his co-workers and followers share his enthusiasm in full measure he is sure to succeed.

*Reprinted from the catalogue published on the occasion
on Retrospective show of Jogen Chowdhury at Kala
Bhavana, Santiniketan - 2013*

ENTICING LIFE: THE ENIGMATIC ART OF JOGEN CHOWDHURY

Soumik Nandy Majumdar

'My journey, like many others' I suppose, is fraught with challenges of various kinds. I decided quite early in my life that I was not going to give up at any cost. I would not allow any defeatist mentality to creep in. I was determined to encounter boldly the trials of life and not to collapse under the given pressures. This is the message that transpires from my journey'

- Jogen Chowdhury

A retrospective show of various kinds of works covering the large time spectrum over fifty years from the early days till now certainly unfolds not only the trials and achievements but also the decisive moments and turning points in the career of one of the most celebrated and prolific artists of our times, Jogen Chowdhury. Truly, the viewers get a chance to witness this long and rich journey that commenced from late 50s when Jogen Chowdhury was a young tenderfoot in the world of art, with eyes full of dreams and fortitudes. For the artist concerned too it is an opportunity to rewind back, to replay the time, as it were, and to relive those moments which shaped him as an artist and drove him to work with an exceptional passion and vision.

Born in 1939, in an East Bengal village, now in Bangladesh, Jogen Chowdhury right from childhood experienced a life troubled with the aftermath of

Partition, displacement from a comfortable homeland and a difficult upbringing in a Kolkata refugee settlement. He lived and experienced the most transformative phase of modern Indian history i.e. 1940s and passing through the trauma and significant social changes he worked his way, along with others, through the following decades to reshape the history of modern Indian art in remarkable ways. Artistically gifted and determined, he completed his art education from the Government College of Art and Craft, Calcutta in 1960 with highest credits. He went to Paris on a Cultural Exchange Scholarship for higher education at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts and the Atelier-17 in 1965. He worked as a textile designer with the Weavers' Service Centre, Chennai (1968 - 1972) and then as a Curator of the Art Collection of Rashtrapati Bhavana, New Delhi (1972 - 1987). Finally he moved to Santiniketan as a teacher in the Painting Department, Kala Bhavana (1987). He formally retired as the Professor and Principal of Kala Bhavana in (1999) to devote full time to art and related activities. As an Emeritus Professor he is still attached to the college closely and carries on with his work actively.

Early in his career and more specifically after his return from France in the late 60s Jogen Chowdhury developed his own individual style. In the context of the emergence of a new phase of modern Indian art in the 60s, when the likes of Hussain, Souza and Raza have already set a standard, in their own individual ways in the post-40s Indian art scenario, Jogen is an atypical artist who preferred to work mostly in pastels, water color and ink instead of oil-painting and strove to develop a visual idiom rooted in Indian soil without taking either any revivalist refuge or sentimental posture. He consciously stayed away from deriving



SKETCH (HOME) | 1958

his art out of any obvious model of Western modern art either. During his stay in Paris, he did respond to the prevalent trends of modern art, studied them carefully and even tried out a few works bordering on abstract expressionism in their tenor, in fact by virtue of his highly laudable proficiency in academic realistic idiom acquired during his college days in Calcutta, he was able to extend, alter and turn the skill upside down to explore newer avenues with great élan. Several drawings, sketches and paintings done during the college days, Paris phase and inbetween are brilliant testimonies to his penchant for personalizing a representational language that had otherwise gone stereotypical and hackneyed. He made it possible, even in his classroom studies and academic exercises, by privileging subjectivity and emotional attachment over objective observation and dispassionate articulation, respectively. A retrospective view of his works confirm that the foundation for his unique stylistic tendencies was laid quietly early in his career and a conscious search later paved the way further. As he wrote in one of his autobiographical essays – *‘We fell back on our own cultural affiliations, scattered readings about the arts and studied art books and albums, driven by the intensity of our creative will, to pursue painting in the middle of all possible difficulties. We began to think seriously about painting the moment we had left Art College. What should we paint? And how? Why should we paint?’* He continues, *‘I started painting along my*

own ideas once I left college. I had meanwhile done such a large number of drawings that their influence surfaced quite prominently in my paintings. I used black ink and a lot of criss-crossing on cheap paper to produce drawings and paintings from my imagination, reflector on the social and political upheavals of Kolkata and the melancholy and complexities that were a part of my own life. Financial strains forced me to draw on cheap newsprint and in oils on a coated pasteboard, but I charged by new ideas.’

Jogen Chowdhury's personal style can be understood as a natural consequence of his own affinity with the organic energies of life manifested in nature and an incisive observation of life around. Even the pitch dark background or the sagging people with distinctive facial features or female figures with disturbing scars on their bodies have direct or oblique references to his own traumatic experiences of life around. These references make his works edgy and expressionistic often bordering on social and political satire. Through the caricature-like look of many of his figures Jogen does ridicule the corrupt and fraudulent characters he encounters in various social circuits. It is from the same stylistic mode that he can endow his images with erotic underpinnings as well. The apparent charm in his drawings, the linear insinuations certainly lead to a quality of elegance; at the same time it also leads to a sense of anguish and discomposure superseding the



IN THE CONTEXT OF THE EMERGENCE OF NEW PHASE OF MODERN INDIA WHEN THE LIKES OF HUSSAIN, SOUZA AND RAZA HAVE ALREADY SET A STANDARD, JOGEN IS AN ATYPICAL ARTIST WHO PREFERRED TO WORK MOSTLY IN PASTELS, WATER COLOR AND INK INSTEAD OF OIL-PAINTING.

comeliness and visual enchantment. Sooner or later the viewer realizes that what one is discreetly drawn to a certain kind of enigma, a deep-seated agony built into the process of his working. The intensity with which Jogen works it out is directly connected to his personal engagement with life and his quest for a viable mode of expression. The anxiety was embedded in this very quest as an artist, as a modernist whose life experience would never allow him to choose between hope and promise on the one hand and despair and edginess on the other.

While explaining the artistic struggles of his early life Jogen writes – *‘What I felt quite strongly about was that we needed to create something new and original – something which could not be accomplished either by replication of Western art or by falling back on ‘Indian art’; in other words, on ancient India and its heritage alone. I felt that it should create something new only out of the genuine feelings that rose from our involvement in our own lives, which of course, could draw quite naturally from the East and the West, the ancient and*

the modern but only as far as they remain related to the artist’s personal quest. The work technique could be essentially personal, with the artist withdrawing from the entire hullabaloo outside to start his creative adventure in a solitary corner in his own small closet. The other idea that struck me was that it was my own characteristics that would define and determine my art and its conventions. My memories, my dreams, my thoughts, my environment – they could all become subjects of my works.’ Yes, certainly they did but not without the pain and sufferings integral to any organic worldview of an artist.

Jogen has thus evolved a remarkable way of connecting his art with the human condition. As he himself says, *‘Man and life, their complex co-existence, are the central concerns’* of his art. Simultaneously, he is stimulated by nature’s organic quality, its design value and the rhythmic construction. His associations with the Handloom House and Indian design in general and his fascination for Alpona (traditional floor designs of Bengal) are clearly discernible in his ability to render his forms with a unique sense of rhythm which bequeaths the forms with a tantalizing decorative appeal. This decorative quality provided a new allegory to him – allegory of love and renewal of life. Jogen Chowdhury’s deep faith in the incessant flow of life despite death and violence or the other way round create the necessary ambivalence that sustains his restive edgy quality of line that is partly instinctual as much as the organicity of nature and the sensuality of life.

In most of his works till a certain period Jogen Chowdhury’s proclivity for doodling, criss-cross hatchings and impassioned marking bring in an inimitable notion of drawing figures, vegetations and even objects. Whereas most of the artists draw, trail, build, paint, carve or construct, Jogen Chowdhury stitches, as it were, his figures. *‘Like women cradling apparels, he knits them into shape – squiggle by squiggle – interlocked into quivering, heaving, criss-crossed surfaces.’* -- writes R. Siva Kumar. Even if they melt back into the unnamed pitch dark space they are surrounded with or submerged in, the sluggish, sagging bodies will leave behind the traces of lines, marks and textures planted in our mind, in our sub-conscious. They will hover in a subliminal space radiating ripples of inescapable sensations so effortlessly created by his innate sense of rhythm. As Sivakumar writes, *‘... his (Jogen’s) subtle ability to*



PORTRAIT OF AN WOMAN OF BHATPARA (M.P.) | 1957-58



ZOO STUDY (BIRDS) | 1956

uncover the sensuality at the heart of events, to draw them together and to slip his longings and fears into a variety of things, truly distinguishes his work of the last 50 years. And behind his ability to gather everything in a cadenced, rhythmic embrace lies his genius to reach out and internalize the other. Unmistakably, it is the deep and powerful empathy that makes the process of internalization work efficaciously and the represented object paradoxically ceases to be an object – it rather begins to share the psychological space of the artist. The classical binary is suspended for a while; empathy builds up a new intervention into the representational language of art.

Thematic concerns too have seen an evolution in Jogen's art. Motifs have expanded in identity and style. He has also worked in other mediums (oil, acrylic, serigraphy, and lithography) and explored different techniques and execution methods. Despite these shifts off and on what is consistent is the human warmth and intimacy his art exude. With this profound unflinching concern Jogen Chowdhury's art continues to attract global attention and international recognition.

In many of his later works one finds clear references to specific incidents or moments that surpassed all levels of cruelty unleashed by human greed and inanity. Eschewing any narrative trappings these works however are rich in allusions and shorn of any decorative cryptograms. Consequently, his figures now writhe in pain, their bodies (if not the face so much) scream, howl and bellow in torment. Significantly, in these images evidently the suffering is primarily a physical one. His sublime bodies have become the sites and targets of mindless violence. Earlier if he was drawing his forms like *'crocheting apparels'* and knitting them *'into shape*

– squiggle by squiggle', now it is no more a needle, he has a sharper tool in his hand. He does not mind if the knife makes screechy noise. He even makes the works hold on to that din relinquishing the safety of silence.

Space, whether constricted or open-ended, mimetic or non-representational, more often than not implies time. And time, in Jogen Chowdhury's art, is usually slowed down. Time assumes a lingering character, ticking away slowly like a predicament. This experience is heightened when we respond to the 'waiting', 'anticipating', 'yearning' quality of the relationship between the figures themselves and between the figures and the surrounding space and even between the inanimate objects and produces of nature. Life's eventuality is translated into an intangible experience. We are reminded of the following lines from the poem 'Wristwatch' by Jibanananda Das – the most astounding Bengali poet of the post-Tagore era and one of the favorite poets of Jogen Chowdhury.

'Their life's story will tick on a few moments more.

Dim, and growing ever dimmer,

**They will wake to endless darkness of inexhaustible
sunlight.'***

*Translated by Clinton B. Seely

Soumik Nandy Majumdar teaches history of art at Kala Bhavana, Santiniketan.



THE CLAW AND THE CROSS | 2011

I CAME IN TOUCH WITH A LARGE NUMBER OF STUDENTS ACROSS THE DIFFERENT ACADEMIC YEARS AND THUS FELT MY ENGAGEMENT WITH THE STUDENTS CONTINUED WAY BEYOND THE OFFICIAL TENURE. I BELIEVE I FELT MORE FULFILLED WHEN I WAS DIRECTLY INVOLVED AS A TEACHER.



MAN LOOKING THROUGH HIS RIGHT HAND | 1980

TEACHING ART:

In conversation with Jogen Chowdhury

In 1987 Jogen Chowdhury joined Kala Bhavana as a Reader in the department of Painting where he continued teaching till his retirement as a Professor in 1999. Later he was honored with the prestigious designation of Professor Emeritus. One of the more active teachers in Kala Bhavana, Jogen-da still remains concerned with the well-beings of the institution and his students remember him as one of the most vibrant teachers on the campus. On this occasion Jogen-da speaks on his engagement as a teacher vis-à-vis his journey as an artist. This is an excerpt from a conversation with **Soumik Nandy Majumdar**.

SNM: Jogen-da, how do you reflect on your role as a teacher in Kala Bhavana in retrospect?

JC: When I look back it appears to be a prolonged period of time although in actuality it was a short spell of twelve years only. This is perhaps because of the intensity with which I was involved with Kala Bhavana. Another twelve years have passed since my formal retirement, yet this phase seems to be brief than the former one. This is also because of the fact that during those days I came in touch with a large number of students across the different academic years and thus felt my engagement with the students continued way beyond the official tenure. I believe I felt more fulfilled when I was directly involved as a teacher.

SNM: Many of your students remember you as an active teacher and Principal who continuously encouraged various kinds of goings-on in the campus, beyond the given curriculum.

JC: Yes, I always believed in incessant happenings. I tried to keep the campus thriving with activities. For example, beside the regular academic instructions and teachings – which was certainly my central task – I took a keen interest in all the minute details of other equally important events like Nandan Mela or Nabin Baran program and the general functions on the campus.

SNM: Why did you think that it was necessary to pay attention to extra-curricular activities of the campus? And how far they were connected to the educational framework of Kala Bhavana?

JC: Cultural life of the campus was one very important issue here and also to encourage the students to engage themselves with creativity in various ways like music, performances, literary activities – which I found they were surprisingly good at nonetheless. The idea of dedicating a full day to installation-art and fun-games on the occasion of welcoming the freshers was also introduced with this objective. I believe a creative ambience as such also helps to enliven the environment and safeguards the campus from inappropriate things to take place.

As far as the pedagogy of Kala Bhavana is concerned, I am convinced that all these activities are integral to the educational orientation of this institution. If you look at the history of Kala Bhavana, the vision was quite holistic and the educational program was well rounded right at the outset. The pedagogical requirements therefore have always been very unique here. Hence, beside the regular course works, every cultural and community event like art-fair, excursion, outing and picnic is considered to be a part of a larger learning process. Masters like Nandalal Bose had always fostered these ideas with great enthusiasm. This certainly created a healthy foundation for student-teacher relation.

SNM: Keeping this view in mind how are you visualizing your first ever show at Kala Bhavana?

JC: Obviously I have the students in mind. Hence, I would like to include some of my early works from my student days. I would like them (the students) to see an artist in his formative years. For instance, I would like to show my first oil-painting – done in the third year at college. It is a portrait of my younger brother done at

night under oil-lamp on that very day I purchased my first oil paint. I have a very special personal association with that work.

SNM: This will perhaps give the present students an outline of your journey. How would you like to interpret your journey for the present generation?

JC: My journey, like many others I suppose, is fraught with challenges of various kinds. I decided quite early in my life that I was not going to give up at any cost. I would not allow any defeatist mentality to creep in. My maxim was to face-up boldly to the trials of life and not to collapse under the pressures. This is the message that transpires from my journey which I hope gets reflected to an extent in the present show.

SNM: How much of those difficult times you faced during your early days in Kolkata can be accounted for this unyielding, steadfast temperament?

JC: To some extent yes; hardships had undoubtedly taught us to stay decided and firm with convictions and dreams. Having said that, the external factors apart this unrelenting attitude also comes from within. The urge to do something worthy of doing also keeps one fiercely motivated. And of course, exposures of all kinds – particularly reading and cultural activities are essential to inculcate the positive values, resoluteness and free thinking.

SNM: How far has that left an impact on your art?

JC: Well, these early experiences and more so as I grew up, had empowered me to embrace the whole life as the subject for my art. Nature, human survival, objects around everything informed my world. I never discriminated one from the other. It is precisely in the context of this worldview that I always felt a close kinship with Rabindranath Tagore.

SNM: Could this be one of the reasons why you left Delhi to come and settle in Santiniketan?

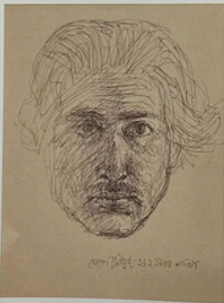
JC: In a sense yes. Rabindranath is certainly a major factor more than anything else. I was drawn to Santiniketan to live in a place built upon his vision.

SNM: And what about your interest in teaching?

JC: Oh yes... I started my professional career as an art-teacher at Howrah Zilla School for about three years before I left for other kind of jobs. Some of the students are still in touch with me. For me, teaching is primarily about human contact and inspiring communication between the teacher and the student with the ultimate objective of carrying on the responsibility of helping them to progress and excel. So, soon after joining Kala Bhavana I got along very well with the students. It was feasible here to spend a large chunk of time in the campus and interact with the students. It was possible to generate a warm and rewarding relation with them.

SNM: How would you go about that vis-à-vis your teaching methodology?

JC: I followed a very simple method. To begin with, I considered each student as an individual being with



SELF PORTRAIT | 1984

his/her unique set of possibilities and limitations. Each one of them came from different socio-cultural backgrounds and hence I could never see them as one singular mass. This brought me closer to the individual students. Further I attempted at an all-inclusive teaching including demonstrations on the one hand and perceptive discussions on related issues on the other. I observed that by engaging the even relatively timid students in brain-storming conversations you could actually instill a spirit of inquiry in them. They became incisive and probing. They began to grow and flourish on their own. You simply needed to extend your helping hand as and when required.

SNM: On a more formal and technical note, what would be your lessons to the students?

JC: When I joined here, I found that barring a few most of the students were tied to what I call table-work. Mostly they stuck to studios. Despite their imaginative power they lacked in keen observation and were not so confident in their practice and concept of drawing. One of my role models in this context was and still is of course Nandalal Bose. His drawings surpass all inadequacies of observations and arrive at linguistically more convincing representations of the observed fact. So, I insisted on vigorous practice of drawings and sketches. I used to show reproductions of various examples of distinguished art works from different parts of the world across time to explain the logic of various kinds of artworks. Comparative analysis of diverse art examples would open up a whole world of possibilities in front of them. At the same time I would emphasize on the importance of being rooted and spread out simultaneously; my favorite metaphor to explain this would be the image of a tree which is firmly rooted to its soil and yet does not hesitate to spread its branches all around. Growth and wellbeing of the tree largely depends on this.

SNM: What exactly would you point out in Nandalal's drawings?

JC: In Nandalal's drawings I would point out for example, how he took note of the joints of forms while say drawing a tree, or an animal or a human being and how the joints became so significant in his idiom. I would also take as example the drawings of Mani-da



LIFE STUDY | 1961

(K.G. Subramanyan) and explain how he identified each segment in a human or animal body and reconfigured the form with them so effectively. For me all these dexterity and understanding presupposes a keen power of observation. And this observation has to be all-rounded. You can't disregard the wood in search of a tree.

SNM: Is it something you learnt from your college days?

JC: Not really. In fact, it is only after coming here that I realized fully the concepts developed by the masters of this place. I wish we were taught these lessons when we were students at Kolkata Art College.

SNM: Lastly, given the kind of pedagogy you are talking about, how far you can 'teach' art considering the massive changes that has taken place in the art scenario in recent past?

JC: Personally I am open to all kinds of approaches and experiments. I would always encourage a positive energy from the students. My job as a teacher is not to stop them but to guide them and provide the necessary inputs when needed. I would try to understand the sensibilities and motivations active behind certain attempts at new artistic expressions and nurture that with respect. I may have my own viewpoints but free-thinking would always be my watchword.

Reprinted from the catalogue published on the occasion of Retrospective show of Jogen Chowdhury at Kala Bhavana, Santiniketan - 2013

“THE BONDS THAT WERE FORGED WITH
THE EARTH, WATER AND NATURE AT
LARGE IN MY RURAL EXISTENCE HAVE
ENDURED TO SHAPE MY PAINTINGS AND
ARTISTIC CREATIVITY.”



ABOUT MY PAINTING

Jogen Chowdhury

Certain experiences and subjects, themes and times leave their trace on the growth of a painter's works. My childhood spent in Eastern Bengal (now Bangladesh), and the special quality of those times and that environment, have remained an integral component of the nature and style of my paintings – as they shaped eventually. The bonds that were forged with the earth, water and nature at large in my rural existence have endured to shape my paintings and artistic creativity. I handled mud and clay from my early childhood as they were freely available in our village. With unskilled hands, I would mould small figures of deities. Though, I could not put them up on their feet and had to keep them lying on the ground. Yet, the feel of the earth and the charm of those forms and the clay may have affected my creativity later, when I started to paint.

I used to roam about then in the woods, in the bamboo groves, along the banks of the village tank. In the courtyard of our house, I tried to plant saplings. Hoping to make a whole garden out of them. With Great concentration I watched the trees with their leaves, the creepers, the flowers and the flower buds and the distinctive shapes. Creepers with several species of gourd spread over the tin shed of our house. The head of the creepers flourished and extended all around. In their growth, I noticed a strange organic structure and a tender rhythmic discipline, as they rose and fell in twists and curls. The natural forms of creepers and leaves had a strange fascination for me then as they have for me even now. All those charms of nature still float before my eyes.

The other subject that had a hold on me was the forms of deities. I would observe the village potter – the kumbhakar – slowly moulding the image, beginning with the straw frame, then adding the coating of clay and then at the end adding on the colouring. All this I would sit and watch closely and patiently. But what fascinated me most was the chakshudan of the Durga image – when the eyes were painted on to the face. I would wait in tense eagerness for that day. When the body of the goddess had been painted all over in

sparkling red and yellow, only then was it time for the eyes of Mother Durgato be painted in, so as to complete the face. And when that colouring too was complete – the goddess came to life. She appeared gazing with eyes wide open – in battle against the demons. At the slightest provocation, those spellbinding eyes still return to my paintings, again and again.

Most of eastern Bengal consists of extremely low lying land, full of tanks, canal and large extensive bodies of water. I made my own angling hooks and caught fish when I was quite young or sifted water flowing along a drain to make a catch. I saw a rich variety of species of fish. My father, too, was fond of angling. Hence, my boyhood days were wrapped in water, fish, creepers and leaves.



GIRL SITTING (OUTDOOR SKETCH) | 1960

When we came over to Kolkata after India's independence in 1947, we were completely cut off from our previous life in Eastern Bengal. We were still living in a village at the time of World War- II and even though we did experience faint repercussions of the war such as the famine that came in its wake which took a toll on life in Bengal, we were spared its real impact. However, the communal riots, between hindus and muslims which we saw after arriving in West Bengal, was the first experience to cast a dark spell on our minds and thoughts.

The main direction pursued at the Government College of Art and Craft in Kolkata, was along the lines of strict academism. It was an art school set up by the British, and thus confined to drawing and painting things like still-life, portraits, life studies ands composition. As a diligent student, I found it quite easy to acquire real proficiency in these academic skills. But there was no creative thrust at all in the teaching methods practiced at our college. We fell back on our own cultural affiliations, scattered readings about the arts and studied art books and albums, driven by the intensity of our creative will, to pursue painting in the middle of all possible difficulties. We began to think seriously about painting the moment we had left Art College. What should we paint? And how? Why should we paint? And then we discovered Rabindranath Tagore's

paintings and writings on art and started reading them. We studied the paintings of Jaminí Roy, Benod Behari Mukherjee, Nandalal Bose, Ramkinkar Baj and several other artists. We also began to look at the paintings of foreign artists, the way everyone looked at them. We studied Degas, Van Gogh, Cezzane, Matisse, Picasso, Russo, Boticelli, Rembrandt, Klee. We even visited an exhibition of Kathe Kollwitz originals at the Indian Museum Hall and came away deeply impressed.

I started painting along my own ideas once I left college. I had meanwhile done such large number of drawings that their influence surfaced quite prominently in my paintings. I used black ink and a lot of criss-crossing on cheap paper to produce drawing and paintings from my imagination, reflection on the social and political upheavals of Kolkata and the melancholy and complexities that were a part of my own life. Financial strains forced me to draw on cheap newsprint and in oils on coated pasteboard, but all charged by new ideas. I painted a few Canvases too, around the same time. But I have been able to preserve only very few of my works from this period. Most of these have been destroyed by termites or from other hazards. A few lie scattered here and there.

My primary subject has been the human being. I was strongly influenced by leftist thought in this phase.



“BUT WHAT DREW ME MORE THAT FRANCE ITSELF WERE THE MUSEUMS AND ART GALLERIES WHERE I SPENT MOST OF MY TIME.”

DANCER AND THE MUSICIAN | 1988

“AS A DILIGENT STUDENT, I FOUND IT QUITE EASY TO ACQUIRE REAL PROFICIENCY IN THESE ACADEMIC SKILLS. BUT THERE WAS NO CREATIVE THRUST AT ALL IN THE TEACHING METHODS PRACTICED AT OUR COLLEGE.”



LOTUS AND THE HAND | 1969

I painted a series of oils titled, Representative from Hell, on the theme of a band of avaricious men who exploited the poor to inflate themselves with wealth far beyond their need and then turned into bloated. It was the same idea that went into the making of my Man on Sofa. I did a lot of drawings too, in this phase, in oil or dry pastels, often large ones, always on newsprint. Simultaneously, in a more dramatic mode I painted quite a few variations on Woman before a mirror and Reclining Woman, which were romantic and poetic. But it was the free fluidity of the line and the complexities that it could create that achieved density in my work. They all bore the marks of the time and my life from that time.

Around this time (1960-1965) I began to deliberate on the structural principles and codes of painting. I became particularly concerned about the issues of indigenous tradition and the influence of foreign art and the urge to paint in an original manner and with a strong sense of individuality. The one thing that remained imperative to me was that my subjects should grow out of my surroundings and my society. Questions of artistic style, aesthetics and modernity were a constant provocation. Before my first foreign visit in 1965, I prepared a few canvasses, planning to paint a few large works. My imagination brought into play a whole series of manifestations on the decrepit way of life that I knew so well in Kolkata. But sadly,

those paintings were never painted. In late 1965, I went to Paris on a French Government scholarship. For long, I had cherished the desire to go abroad, particularly to Paris where I could see the works of my favorite artists and visit museums.

I spent two years in Paris, where I had a spacious studio in the Cité Internationale des Arts. I enrolled myself at William Hayter's Atelier 17 and L'Ecole National Supérieure des Beaux Arts. But what drew me more than France itself were the museums and art galleries where I spent most of my time. And, of course, I thought about paintings all the time. The social and cultural differences came as a big jolt to me when I arrived in Paris straight from Kolkata. While there were similarities in several matters, the differences were quite glaring in terms of lifestyle and values. Initially, there was a phase when I could not decide on possible subject. I was quite overwhelmed by the sheer range of the paintings and the great painters that I saw for the first time, and the strange restlessness gripped me in the alien social setting. I was more than ever, intensely disturbed over choosing my own position as an artist, particularly as an Indian artist. Whenever I attempted to paint, restlessness would take over. Then, gradually the human being and the human body, independent of the constraints of time and space, started appearing in my works, quite simply and directly. I did numerous large drawings in this phase and the oil paintings that I



COUPLE - II | 1982

Painted in this phase, the human body – the inside of the body – was my main subject.

Before returning to India, I had the opportunity of visiting numerous museums, churches and galleries and watching paintings, sculptures and other works of art in France, Germany, Holland, England and Italy. They have remained a part of my experience and education in art.

The one anxiety that haunted me on my return to India in 1968 was there was really anything left for us to do after that great achievements of the western masters that I had seen so extensively displayed on my foreign tour. There was no point after all in replicating their paintings or works of art. I had by then rejoined my old employment in Chennai, where for almost one whole year I do no drawing or painting at all. With my knowledge of the state of art in India and the West, my thoughts soon began to take shape. Everyday I spent some time writing down my thoughts on art till they grew to a manuscript of a hundred pages. In January and February 1994, the Bengali fortnightly *Desh* published the text in four consecutive issues. The long track record of my thoughts at that point of time were on the art traditions of this country, Indianness,

“I FELT THAT I SHOULD CREATE SOMETHING NEW ONLY OUT OF THE GENUINE FEELINGS THAT ROSE FROM OUR INVOLVEMENT IN OUR OWN LIVES...”

the influence of western art, modernism and related issues considered as problems for an Indian Artist to negotiate. At about the same time, I wrote a shorter three-page account in English of my thoughts on art.

I found several powerful Indian artists at this point if time enthusiastically and unquestioningly adopting the styles, conventions and forms of modern Western art and abstract art in particular. I felt this was a surrender of sorts on the part of the Indian artists and that this restrained the development of art and divested it of significance. What I felt quite strongly about was that we need to create something new and original – something which could not be accomplished either by replication of Western art or by falling back on ‘Indian art’, in other words, on ancient India and its heritage alone. I felt that it should create something new only out of the genuine feelings that rose from our involvement in our own lives, which of course, could draw quite naturally from the East and the West, the ancient and the modern but only as far as they remain related to the artist’s personal quest. The work technique could be essentially personal, with the artist withdrawing from the entire hullabaloo outside to start his creative adventure in a solitary corner in his own small closet. The other idea that struck me was that it was my own

characteristics that would define and determine my art and its conventions. My memories, my dreams, my thoughts, my environment – they could all become subjects of my works.

Thus when I started drawing in black ink alone, on paper a series of works, primarily in numerous lines, followed my own idea and my own style with fish, flowers, hands, leaves and creepers, apples floating in space, breasts, butterflies, piles of clothes in a mess and teacups as my subjects. I have a feeling that the first picture that came in this phase were more strongly charged with sexuality, with unintended traces of Freudian psychology. I thus completed in this period a long series of works grounded in dream and super-realism. The pictures that came later were more social and dreamlike. This difference can be traced to the fact that the first group was done before my marriage and the second group came after. I consider this a valid factor behind the qualitative difference between the two groups. A few small drawings done in this period went to determine the thematic content of my pen-and-ink works that followed. As a matter of fact, a total human figure does not appear in any of the pictures that I can recall from this period. But the fragments of an inner life and the environment that appear in this works are primarily autobiographical. I did some works in this period centering on the jacquard loom. All these works were products of fantasy and imagination.

After four years of service in Chennai as a textile designer I moved in Delhi in 1972 with a job in the President's Estate. Delhi was then a vibrant centre of cultural activities of the Lalit Kala Akademi and the National Gallery of Modern Art. In the 15 long years I spent in Delhi, I formed numerous contact and connections with artists in Delhi and from all over India.

In my lonely setting in Chennai, I was extremely personal in my choice of subjects. But in Delhi, I considerably extended the range of my subjects drawn from a more extensive life environment, including men and women, political leaders, gods and goddesses, rural people, leaves and flowers. Though the subjects became more varied the technical mode remained almost unchanged. I was still seeking to realize the subject of the picture from numerous criss-crossing lines in pen-and-ink on paper. I had, of course, by then started using oil pastels more frequently. The size of the works grew larger, and I was able to paint quite a few significant works in this period.

In works like *Noti Binodini*, *Sundari*, *Life-1*, *Life-2*, *Tiger in the Moonlit Night* and *Ganapati* – several of them quite large in size – I was able to express my ideas quite closely. But what was most important was that a clear artistic conception and genuine passion went into making of these works. I had seen a performance of the play *Noti Binodini* around this time at the Kalbari in Delhi. I find the persona of *Noti Binodini* to be intense and fascinating. I treated her face with great sympathy, giving it both pathos and luminosity and charged her body with feeling. *Sundari* actually portrays and imaginary prostitute who looks at her naked body reflected in the mirror admiringly. The feet and touch of *Birbhum* terracottas, the *Kalighat* pats and the figures that I carved in my childhood seem to have left their traces on the form of *Sundari* body. *Life-1* grew out of something quite funny: A pile of pillows and bedclothes were lying in a mess in corner of the small room on the terrace that my wife, *Shirpa*, and I had rented in South Delhi when we first arrived there. There was some thing strongly sensual about the accumulation of the layers of bed sheets and the side pillow. *Tiger in the moonlit Night* is primarily allegorical, painted in the days of the Emergency. Painted in a mocking vein, it has fantasy for its main thrust. I found *Indira Gandhi's* Emergency to be an enormous lie. Still, the tiger that represented the Emergency was only a paper tiger, floating clawless, toothless and ineffectual in the air, with India as a woman in disarray lying underneath, with a half moon in the sky. I put all my passion into the work, used minimal colouration, stuck close to grey and black, and allowed my imagination to



UNTITLED | 2009

give it an intensely personal quality.

I did several small 'faces' in this phase, depicting people of different characters and different kinds – bureaucrats, leaders, ministers, film stars, dancers, sycophants, village chieftains and lovers. The sheer range of characters, temperament and manners that I observed in the people that I saw around myself fascinated me. I portrayed them from an essentially personal perspective. In my characterization of these people I crossed the bounds of realistic representation and let imagination take over. Pictorial values have in many cases called for necessary and spontaneous reconstruction and distortion of the anatomy. This is something that has been in my works right from the beginning.

I painted Mona Lisa in my Dream around this time. Several famous painters have painted Mona Lisa from their imagination and according their will. This was a work in the same spirit. I painted a few imaginary still life, all made up of irrelevant subjects, like a plate on a table and an eggplant on a plate. I felt that these simple, everyday objects could very well be the subject for art. At this point, I also painted several pictures of village folk and ordinary people. I found these works to be quite significant. I exhibited

most of these works at the Dhoomimal Art Gallery in Delhi in 1981. In these works, I tried to project- in my own way- the people of this country and particularly their more rounded anatomical forms and postures. In a series of three; Man on the Floor, Man sitting on a Mat and Man Sitting on a Sofa, I sought to project in simple terms the three classes in Indian society.

After a long stretch of 15 years in Delhi, I came to Santiniketan in 1987, and have been there ever since. Before I left Delhi, I painted a few 'couples', men and women sitting together intimately, with touches of satire, humour, and a sensuality in close juxtaposition. While in Delhi, I had also painted in oil a few small works following primarily the forms of men and women, but adding a little reality of my own making. I have always been fascinated by the conventional forms of a sari draping around a women's body, and I have sought through that image, forms of my own making, in a new manner.

At first, I could not quite concentrate on my arrival at Santiniketan. Finding myself in the seclusion of trees and greenery, a setting which was such a departure from the bustle of Delhi, I was for some time in a state of fitfulness about my painting. Though immediately on my arrival, I did paint a series of small

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THEIR FORM AND
THEIR RHYTHM ...



FLOWER AND THE SWORD | 2011

“THE SHEER RANGE OF CHARACTERS, TEMPERAMENT AND MANNERS THAT I OBSERVED IN THE PEOPLE THAT I SAW AROUND MYSELF FASCINATED ME.”



PORTRAIT OF MY BOUDI (ELDER BROTHER'S WIFE) | 1958



MELA (FAIR) | 1956

watercolours and completed some of my unfinished works from Delhi. But then I started working in many ways with pen-and-ink, pastels, pen and brush, oil pastels and oil, dealing with a wide variety of subjects. I did pictures of various kinds and modes.

One cannot imagine a life without arts. I have always felt that the arts enrich and extend life as a whole and that they are not there only to serve life, but rather that they constitute a large part of life. Every field of life bears a trace of art. Whenever I have sought for subjects for my paintings, I have felt the tremendous lure of this life in all its diverse manifestations, the dream relationships that bind man to man, man to nature, the intricacies of relationship and their tugs, strains and mysteriousness. Hence, man and their settings have remained the main subject of my pictures, the same now as 30 years ago. In these last 13 or 14 years in Santiniketan, I have produced a considerable number of works with man at the centre. But in Santiniketan, I have also been under an extremely personal compulsion to engage in a fresh perspective and primarily in line drawing. For a long time, I could not concentrate on any large work. For all these years I have made numerous drawings in simple, easy flowing lines mainly in black oil pastels or black ink and brush.

As for the subject matter, these drawings have dealt with human figures and nature alike, with flowers,

“I STILL FEEL THAT A LOT MORE COULD BE DONE ON PAPER OR CANVAS. ALL THESE THOROUGHLY USED OLD MEDIUMS CAN TURN NEW WITH CHANGING DEMANDS OF CREATIVITY.”

leaves and creepers, birds, flower vases, butterflies, etc. with these numerous drawings, I have deliberated on the rich significance of lines, particularly their vitality, and along with it, their impetuous flow, their form and their rhythm, and above everything else, their delicate vibrations—super natural vibrations, if there were any. The forms of flowers, creepers and leaves, and the way they approximate to forms of the human body have also been of great interest to me. The trees are as alive to me as is a human body of flesh and blood. This is a belief that I have nurtured for a long time. I find all the objects of the world charged with life. The origin of this notion lies, of course, in the Upanishads, the Bhagwadgita and Rabindranath Tagore. But I find it corroborated by modern science. It is a conviction rooted in my consequences.

In these 13 and 14 years I have practically produced only a few series of drawings in which there has been a sure growth of coloration, particularly in oil pastels and crayons. I have occasionally done watercolours too. Even now, in intervals between other kinds of work, I continue to draw.

A special factor that has emerged in the Indian art scene while I have been at Santiniketan is that a lucrative market has been found for Indian art for the first time ever. The rise in the sell of Indian art is because of various reasons. There was a time when

we would sell just one or two works at the most in a year. But a massive boom in the art market has brought affluence to the artists as well as created a commercial setting for artistic activity in general, something that was inconceivable a few years ago.

This new situation saddled all the established artists with the challenge and responsibility of retaining their creativity and the freedom of their individual contemplation. Through this period I remained involved in teaching at Kala Bhavana in Santiniketan, serving for a spell as the head of the department of painting, and later as the principal of the institution. Hence, for a few years I did even not have the time to devote my mind entirely to painting. But I made time draw numerous small works in pen-and-ink and oil pastels. In 1988, I held an exhibition of a few small works in Bangalore. Soon after, I participated in the exhibition held to commemorate the 25th anniversary of Gallery Chemoud in Mumbai. A few small watercolours were also included there. The CIMA Gallery in Kolkata displayed quite a few of my major works in exhibitions in India and abroad. There were pictures that I think carried the impress of my individual style and my perception for the exhibition entitled Fantasy. I enjoyed working on a number of allegorical themes.

In 1996, CIMA Gallery held a solo show of my works. What was important about this show was that most of the works on display in this exhibition were in oil. I had stopped working in oil for a long time and would once in a while do one or two works in oil. This time, I completed quite a few large works in oil. All these works were defined in simple and straight forward lines, though they had grown out of a few subjects, forms and thoughts entirely of my own. I enjoyed bringing to the same body the contradictory elements of realism and two-dimensionality.

A subject that has often returned to my pictures is the body- realistically formed- with supernatural eyes from traditional Bengali sculpture. I have used realism and decorativeness simultaneously in the structuring of a work. There was another subject with which I had a lot of fun, though in just a few pictures. This was the seeking of a new figural form out of the mingling of the postures of popular dolls, particularly the dolls of Krishnanagar and those of real human beings, facilitating a tone of humour and satire. I have found this subject quite new and creative. My works in this mode have, of course, my usual dramatic spirit, form

and style.

In 1999, I took voluntary retirement from my teaching position at Kala Bhavana, but I occasionally still take classes there. From then onwards, I have devoted myself to my art more single-mindedly. I have completed works in pen-and-ink and pastels, and have dealt with new subjects with a different manner of expression. I still feel that a lot more could be done on paper or canvas. All these thoroughly used old mediums can turn new with changing demands of creativity. I am convinced that it is the creative artist's modern perception that redefines the older mediums of artistic making as modern. The older medium that have been considered powerfully expressive in the past still continue to serve the demands of art, and will do so in the future too. And, the newer artistic mediums will extend the possibilities and scope of artistic creativity still further into the future. At the same time artists will be required to make their choices of the new mediums from the needs that are defined by their creativity. A whole range of new and strikingly original mediums will be put to use in the service of art. But all this will depend eventually on the creative artist's personal will, style and individual quest. The mediums that express art are now entirely free. Driven by my creative urge, I too, may some day use a few of these newer mediums, just as I feel the urge to use mediums such as sculpture, terracotta, or graphics.

Santiniketan, 2000

Reprinted from the catalogue published on the occasion of Retrospective show of Jogen Chowdhury at Kala Bhavana, Santiniketan - 2013





STUDY (RAJANIGANDA) | 1955



STUDY (SHIULI) | 1955



MY BROTHER STUDYING IN LANTERN LIGHT
AT NIGHT | 1955-56



MY BROTHER - MANINDRA | 1955



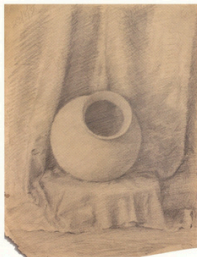
THROUGH THE DOOR | 1955



STILL LIFE STUDY (PA) (CLASS WORK)
IN MONOCHROME (BLACK) | 1956



ANTIQUE STUDY (HORSE) | 1956



STILL LIFE STUDY (CLASS WORK) | 1956



TILED HUT (MY FIRST WATERCOLOUR
LANDSCAPE) | 1956



ANTIQUE STUDY (FEET) | 1957



AN OLD MOSQUE | 1956



TWO COWS | 1957-58



STREET IN PATNA | 1957



COWS | 1957



KHARAGPUR | 1956



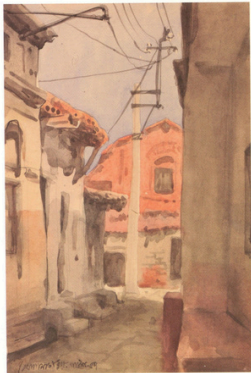
NEAR OUR HOUSE | 1956



MANINDRA, MY BROTHER | 1957
(MY FIRST OIL PAINTING DONE
ON THE LIGHT OF A KEROSENE LANTERN)



NAMITA (MY YOUNGER SISTER) | 1957
(MY FIRST PAINTING IN PASTEL DONE
ON THE LIGHT OF A KEROSENE
LANTERN)



STREET IN PATNA WITH ELECTRIC POLE | 1957



WINTER MORNING | 1957



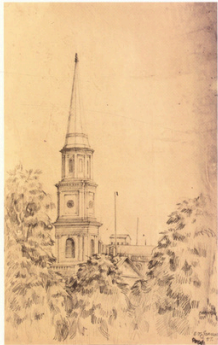
CALCUTTA | 1957



HUTS - THROUGH THE SHADOW OF
A TREE | 1957



THROUGH THE COWSHED | 1957



CALCUTTA | 1957



MUNA | 1957 (MY FIRST COLOURED OIL PORTRAIT)



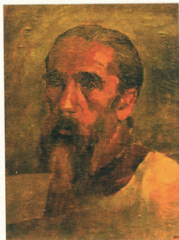
PORTRAIT OF MAN WITH BEARD | 1957



PORTRAIT STUDY | 1957



PORTRAIT | 1957



PORTRAIT STUDY - A MAN WITH
BEARD | 1957-58



STILL LIFE STUDY (CLASS WORK) | 1957



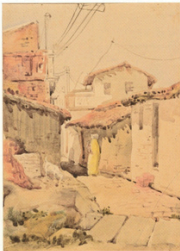
STILL LIFE WITH FRUITS & KETCHUP | 1957-58



'PUTUL KHELA (PLAYING WITH DOLLS)' | 1958



'GIRL' (PATNA) | 1957-58



PATNA | 1959



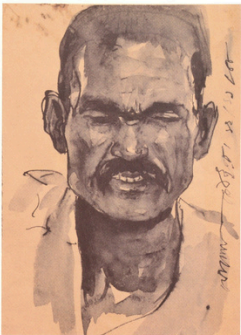
RAIPUR | 1959



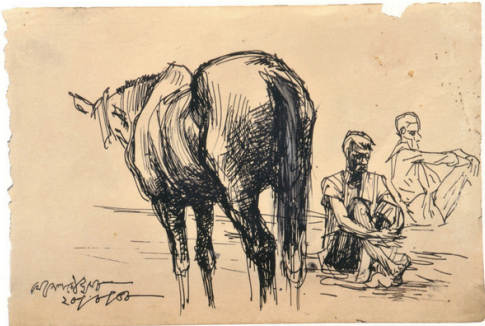
CATCHING FISH (VILLAGE BOYS CATCHING FISH FROM A BOAT) | 1958



AMALDA | 1958



'FACE' OF A ROAD SIDER | 1958



HORSE STUDY | 1958



HORSE STUDY | 1958



HORSE STUDY | 1958



HORSE STUDY | 1958



HORSE STUDY | 1958



BOUDI (ELDER BROTHER'S WIFE) | 1958 - 59



UNTITLED | 1959



UNTITLED | 1959



REFUGEE | 1959



KABULIWALA | 1959



REFUGEE GIRL | 1959



NAMITA SITTING ON A CHAIR | 1959



SKETCH | 1959



REFUGEES IN A CAMP (FROM MEMORY) | 1959



LIFE STUDY | 1960



LIFE STUDY - GIRL DRESSED | 1960



"YOUNG GIRL - CLOTHED" LIFE STUDY | 1960



REFUGEE - MOTHER & CHILD | 1960



FACE OF A REFUGEE GIRL | 1960



REFUGEE GIRL | 1960



SELF PORTRAIT | 1957



SELF PORTRAIT | 1963



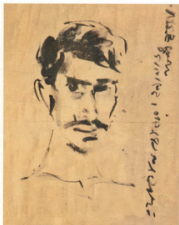
SELF PORTRAIT | 1960



SELF PORTRAIT | 1964



SELF PORTRAIT | 1960



SELF PORTRAIT | 1960



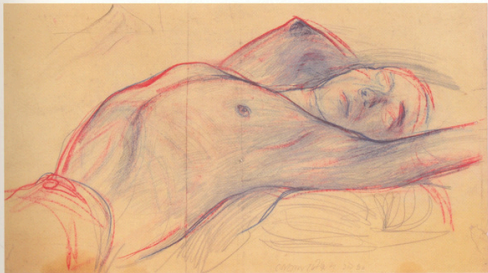
SELF PORTRAIT | 1960



HORSE (SKETCH) | 1960



HORSE (SKETCH) | 1960



LYING | 1960



GIRL (MODEL) | 1960



LIFE STUDY | 1961



RECLINING WOMAN | 1960



THINKER | 1960



THINKER (NEHRU) | 1961



FACE OF A THINKER | 1960



THE RIDER | 1961



THE SITTING GIRL | 1961



UNTITLED | 1961



NUDE WOMAN WITH LEANING HEAD | 1961



IN THE DARKNESS OF
QUARTER MOON | 1961



DREAM | 1961



RECLINING LADY | 1961



RETIRED WOMAN (NUDE) | 1961



UNTITLED | 1961



GIRL IN GREY AND BLUE | 1962



FACE OF AN ACTOR | 1961



UNTITLED | 1962



THREE PIGEONS | 1963



NANIYA | 1964



BAKKU | 1964



POET SAKTI CHATTOPADHYAY | 1964



STUDY - SEATED MAN | 1964



LIFE STUDY (NUDE) | 1964



RETIRED HORSE | 1964



TWO FACES | 1964



COUPLE | 1965



MAN SEATED ON A CHAIR | 1965



REPRESENTATIVE FROM HELL | 1965



NINA | 1966



WOMAN | 1965



UNTITLED | 1966



SLEEPING WOMAN | 1966



RECLINING MAN | 1966



MAN ON SOFA | 1966



TORSO COUPLE | 1966



TORSO | 1966

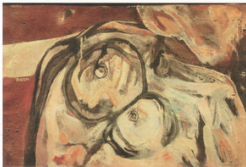




FROM MY WINDOW IN PARIS | 1966



UNTITLED | 1966



UNTITLED | 1966 - 67



UNTITLED | 1966 - 67



PAINTING - II | 1966



COMPOSITION - I | 1966



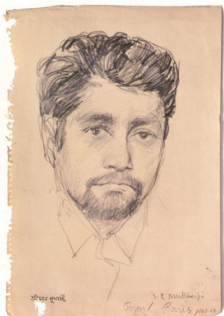
PAINTING III | 1967



CREEPERS - A | 1967



CREEPERS - B | 1967



SRI CHARAN MUKHERJEE | 1967



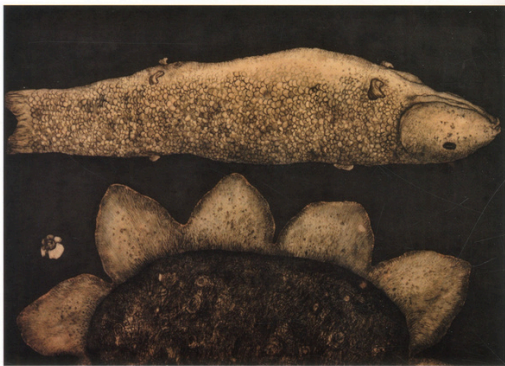
UNTITLED (COLLAGE-II) | 1968



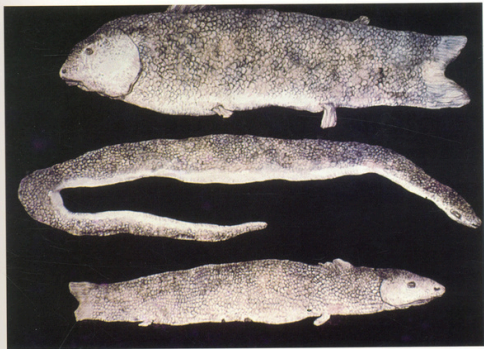
JIMI HENDRIX, LONDON | 1968



KATHLEEN ETCHINGHAM
(FRIEND OF JIMI HENDRIX), LONDON | 1968



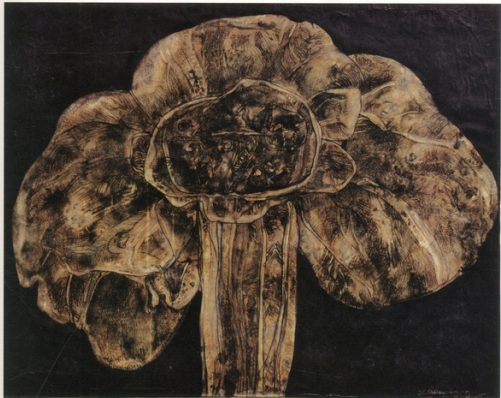
REMINISCENCE OF A DREAM - 1 | 1969



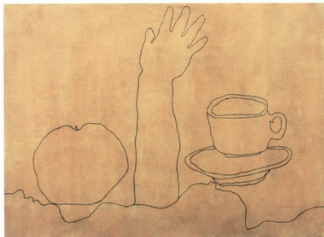
REMINISCENCE OF A DREAM - 5 | 1969



REMINISCENCE OF A DREAM | 1969



REMINISCENCE OF A DREAM - 6 | 1969



STILL LIFE WITH HAND, ORANGE & TEA CUP | 1969



LOTUS AND THE BUTTERFLY | 1970



"TUMI ESHE DHORO HATH, TUMI ESHE HATHER PATAN RODH KARO" | 1970



REMINISCENCES OF A DREAM : 44 | 1973



UNTITLED | 1974



COW | 1973



THE INTELLECTUAL | 1973



APPLE | 1974



DREAM | 1974



LIFE II | 1976



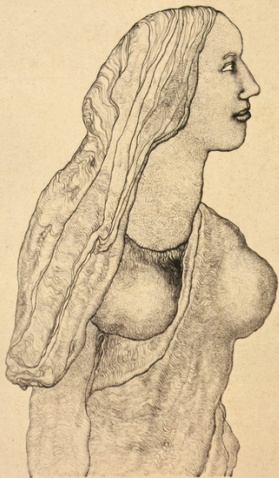
REMINISCENCE OF A DREAM : B | 1977



IN MY DREAM | 1977



STILL LIFE II | 1977



SHE | 1979



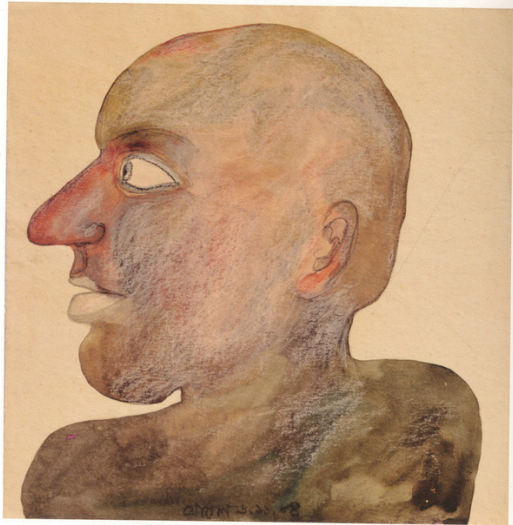
FLOWERS | 1981



WOMAN - 1 | 1982



WOMAN WITH ORANGE BLOUSE | 1982



FACE OF A MAN | 1984



LADY IN A SARI | 1984



UNTITLED | 1988



UNTITLED | 1991



RECLINING WOMAN | 1991



SATYAJIT RAY (IMAGINATIVE PORTRAIT) | 1992



THE WINDOW | 1992



STILL LIFE WITH FISH AND MOON | 1992



UNTITLED | 1993



LADY WITH VASE | 1994



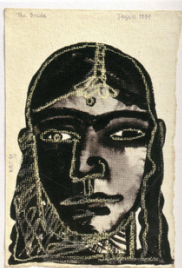
UNTITLED | 1992



UNTITLED | 1994



KING & THE MUSE | 1992



THE BRIDE | 1999



FLOWER VASE | 1998



FACE OF AN ACROBAT | 2001



WOMAN IN BED - A | 2001



IN BED - B | 2001



MAN LYING ON A PILLOW | 2000



STILL LIFE WITH FLOWER VASES AND A LAMP STAND | 2001



FLOWER VASE | 2001



FLOWER, TREE AND BIRDS | 2001



ANIMAL | 2001



THE BIRD | 2001



HEAD OF A HORSE | 2001



CREEPER & FLOWERS | 2001



FLOWER ON DREAM | 2001



MAN RECLINING | 2001



CREEPER | 2001



FACE IN THE MIRROR | 2001



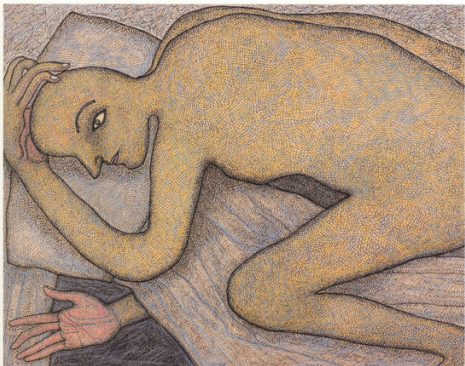
WOMAN | 2001



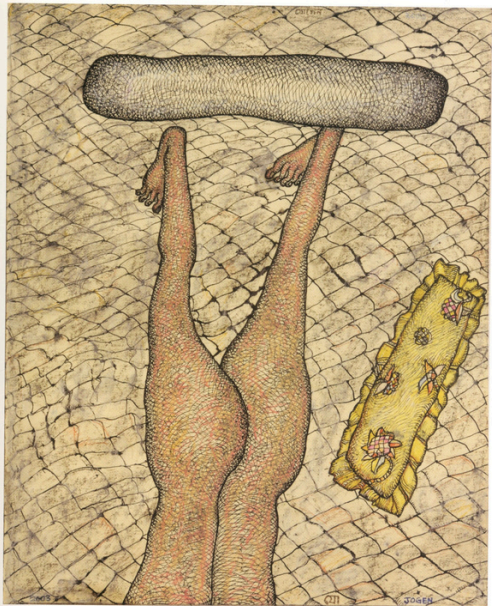
FLOWER | 2001



INTERIOR | 2002



MAN IN BED | 2002



YELLOW AND BLUE PILLOWS | 2003



ANIMALS | 2003



UNTITLED | 2004



UNTITLED | 2004



BOY AND THE SWAN | 2005

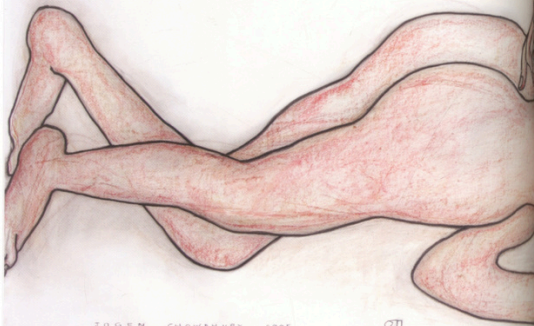


MOTHER AND CHILD | 2004

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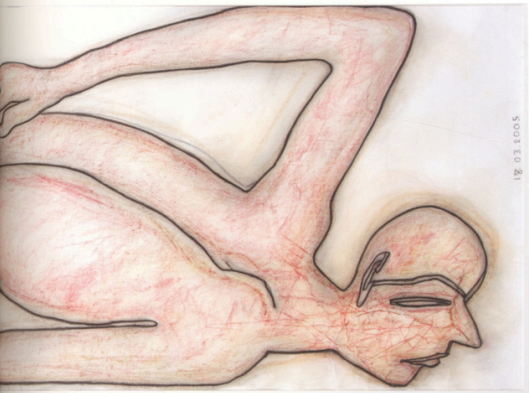
স্মৃতিসংকলন



JOGEN CHOWDHURY 2005

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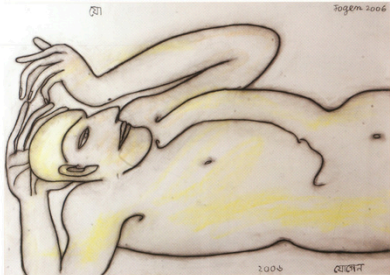
ABU GHARLB | 2005



UNTITLED | 2005



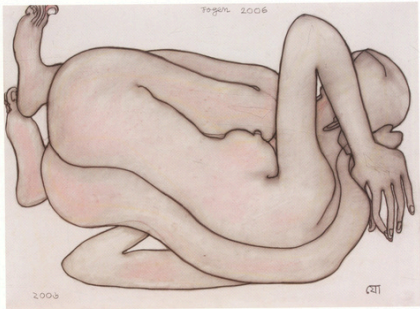
FACE | 2005



MAN IN RELAXATION | 2006



WOUNDED | 2006



WOUNDED | 2006



AFTERMATH | 2005



DEAD | 2008



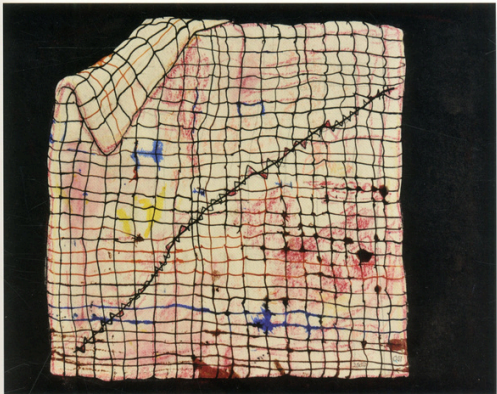
FLOWER VASE | 2006



RED SQUARES | 2006



PORTRAIT OF A WOMAN | 2006



UNTITLED | 2009



HOMAGE TO NANDIGRAM | 2008



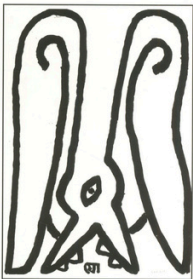
THE CLAW | 2009



BAKASUR - I | 2009



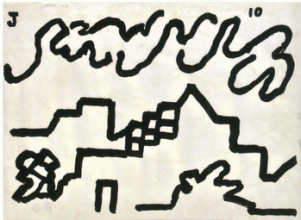
FLOWER | 2010



BAKASUR - III | 2009



FACE | 2010



CITYSCAPE WITH CLOUD | 2010



FLOWERS AND THE SWORD - I | 2010



SKULL - I | 2010



SKULL - IV | 2010



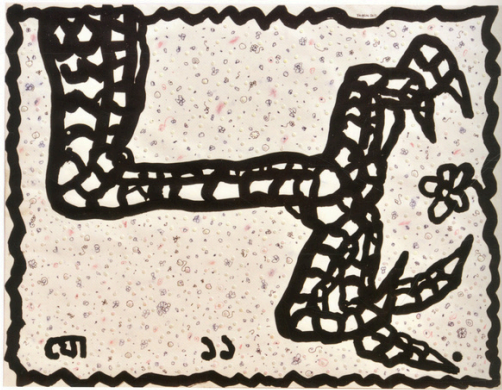
SKULL - VI | 2010



UNTITLED | 2011



THE HIDDEN EYE | 2011



THE CLAW | 2011



CHOKH (EYE) | 2011

796/10 200



JOGEN CHOWDHURY RETROSPECTIVE 1955 - 2013

FOLIAGE - 1 | 2011



THE SECRET EYE | 2011



LOTUS AND THE TREE - I | 2011



LOTUS AND THE TREE III | 2011



LOTUS AND THE TREE IV | 2011



THE SWORD | 2011

শিল্পকলা একাডেমি



FLOWER AND CREEPERS | 2011



BAKASUR - 8 | 2013



POSTER DESIGNED FOR BOOK FAIR 1981
 PUBLISHED BY
 SANDIPAN CHATTOPADHYAY | 1981



ONE OF THE SEVERAL POSTERS - WRITTEN
 & DRAWN BY JOGEN CHOWDHURY ON THE
 OCCASION OF SHAKESPEARE'S 400TH BIRTH
 ANNIVERSARY IN 1964. SAMIK BANDYOPADHYA
 ORGANISED AND PLANNED THIS EVENT ON
 WORLD THEATRE DAY. | 1964 - 65



UNTITLED | 1989



DURGA - 2 | 2003



CARPET | 1992

THE OLDER MEDIUM THAT HAVE BEEN CONSIDERED POWERFULLY EXPRESSIVE IN THE PAST STILL CONTINUE TO SERVE THE DEMANDS OF ART, AND WILL DO SO IN THE FUTURE TOO. AND, THE NEWER ARTISTIC MEDIUMS WILL EXTEND THE POSSIBILITIES AND SCOPE OF ARTISTIC CREATIVITY STILL FURTHER INTO THE FUTURE. AT THE SAME TIME ARTISTS WILL BE REQUIRED TO MAKE THEIR CHOICES OF THE NEW MEDIUMS FROM THE NEEDS THAT ARE DEFINED BY THEIR CREATIVITY. A WHOLE RANGE OF NEW AND STRIKINGLY ORIGINAL MEDIUMS WILL BE PUT TO USE IN THE SERVICE OF ART. BUT ALL THIS WILL DEPEND EVENTUALLY ON THE CREATIVE ARTIST'S PERSONAL WILL, STYLE AND INDIVIDUAL QUEST.

JOGEN CHOWDHURY

Jogen Chowdhury was born in 1939 in Faridpur, in East Bengal. Jogen Chowdhury studied at the Government College of Art and Crafts, Kolkata, in 1955-60, and later at Ecole Nationale, Superieure des Beaux -Arts, Paris in 1965-67 on a French Government Scholarship.

He returned to India in early 1968 and went to Madras as a textile designer in the Handloom Board. He stayed there for four years till 1972. The same year he joined the Calcutta Painters Group. He held his first solo show during this time.

Chowdhury moved to Delhi in 1972 as the curator of the art collection at Rashtrapati Bhawan. In 1975, he along with some leading Delhi artists founded Gallery 26 and Artists' Forum. From 1976, onwards, Chowdhury participated in several exhibitions and art camps in India and abroad. In 1987, Chowdhury joined Kala Bhavana, in Visva Bharati University Santiniketan as the professor in the department of painting. Subsequently he became the head of the department and also the Principal of the college from which he took retirement in 1999. He remains closely attached to the institution and has been endowed with the prestigious status of Emeritus Professor. Five years back, along with a group of enthusiastic fellow artists from Santiniketan and with the generous support from many others across India and abroad, Jogen Chowdhury founded SSVAD (Santiniketan Society of Visual Art & Design) - a dynamic art activity hub located in Santiniketan. Within a few years this center has become a cultural hub and is growing as a major art center in Bengal.

Apart from innumerable significant shows in India and abroad, Jogen Chowdhury has received major prestigious awards. Way back in 1966, Chowdhury was awarded the Prix le France de la Jeune Peinture in Paris - the first ever Indian artist to have received this award. In 1986 he received Award In the 2nd Biennale of Havana, Cuba and he is also the recipient of Kalidas Sanman award by Govt. of Madhya Pradesh, 2001, to name a few.

He continues to live and work in Santiniketan and remains to be one of the most prolific painters in the Indian art scene.

