

News monitored for: Emami Group

LEISURE

THE UNKNOWN (from left) *The Monkey & the Birds*; *Bull Fight* (top); *Rickshaw Puller*; *Untitled* (top); and *Undying Love* by Kartick Pyne

PICTURE COPYRIGHT - KARTICK CHANDRA PYNE



ART

FROM UNDER THE SHADOW

Artist **Kartick Pyne** never enjoyed the fame his cousin Ganesh did. A Kolkata gallery is changing that

IN

artist Samit Das's studio, there hangs the picture of a deer, an 8x10 watercolour on rice paper. Das says he looks at it every day, and every day it makes him look for something new. Only two of the deer's limbs are visible. His antlers are enormous, spanning like wings. The belly of the deer is strange, almost like an archaeological site, its eyeball, magni-

fied. "To me, it stands for the artist's enduring search for an ultimate language. It has been my companion for nearly a decade."

This marriage of the known and unknown and of realism with the imaginary are all traits Kartick Chandra Pyne is known for. Born in 1931, Pyne is the older cousin of the illustrious Ganesh, one of India's foremost modernist painters. Despite his prolific career, though, Pyne's contribution to Indian art has, for the most part, been ignored. Even in Kolkata, his home, not many have heard of him. By hosting a survey show—*The (in)Visible and The (un)*

Revealed: Inside the Secret Worlds of Kartick Chandra Pyne—Emami Art, a Kolkata gallery (on till June 12), is now giving him the credit he is due.

"In Bengal, the demand was for works that demonstrated social concern and Pyne's work could not be bracketed thus," says critic Pranab Ranjan Ray. Bengali artists who went on to become household names—

Bikash Bhattacharya, Somnath Hore, Ganesh Pyne and Ganesh Haloi—all fused their work with socio-political commentary, but the elder Pyne stayed aloof. Even his contemporaries only came to know him much later. Jogen Chowdhury, for example, says he discovered Pyne's work in the 1970s. His art, he says, struck him as "spontaneous, original", an art that "described indigenous objects in a surrealist manner". Pyne's work has also been described as "primitivistic", showcasing childlike qualities and his academic training.

It was not that all recognition passed Pyne by.

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He was awarded the 1973-74 Maha Koshal Kala Parisad Prize in Raipur. But in the 1980s and '90s, he seemed to have disappeared from the zeitgeist altogether. He next surfaced only in 2005, when his 'Bird in Cage' made headlines at a Sotheby's auction. Later, the West Bengal government awarded him the Shilpi Mahasamman in 2014. By the time he passed away in 2017, Pyne had a small but committed following in both India and abroad.

Pranabranjan Ray is of the opinion that one aspect of Pyne's work has largely been overlooked—of bliss and play for its own sake. "Play, not to win but for joy," he says. This is comparable, he adds, to the ancient Indian theory of *leela* (play). He goes on to quote from the Upanishads: "Out of Ananda (bliss) these beings are born, in Ananda they are sustained, and to Ananda, they go and merge again." ■

—Malini Banerjee

Brush with Freedom

A group show in Mumbai illustrates the short trajectory of Indian abstract art

Black for me is the mother colour," S.H. Raza once said. In his iconic 'Bindu' series, the late master flung a black acrylic dot on the canvas as a metaphor for Mother Earth "from which all life forms take birth". Raza's 'Shanti Bindu' (1993) is on display at Mumbai's Akara Art gallery as part of an ongoing group show, *Memories Arrested in Space* (on till May 5). Its intentions are modest but engaging—to map the short trajectory of Indian abstract art from the 1960s to now.

Variouly described as a seed of fertility, symbol of infinity and *shunya* (state of emptiness), the 'Bindu' first captured Raza's imagination in the 1980s even though his art had long embraced abstraction, mostly renderings of French and Indian landscapes in thick impasto. Typically, a Raza black fleck is richly compensated by bursts of bold colours on the surrounding grids, an ode to the drama and diversity of Indian life as well as a reminder to himself that despite the hilltop hamlet in France he had made home, he was an Indian painter. Given Raza's

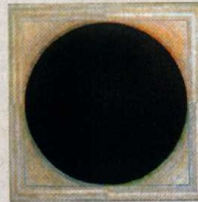
affinity for excess, that's precisely what makes the minimalistic 'Shanti Bindu' a must-see.

The exhibition also features works by Ram Kumar, Ganesh Haloi, Zarina Hashmi and J. Swaminathan—all representing the Indian abstract art canon. For Haloi, painting seems to be communion with the divine. On view at the show, the 85-year-old's gouache work on paper oozes spontaneous eloquence. Turn to Hashmi and you get the familiar strains of exile and loss, themes that the Aligarh-born artist explored right till the end of her life last year. By contrast, it is well-known that Ram Kumar underwent a sharp shift from neo-realist figuration to pure abstraction. The holy city of Varanasi acted as a catalyst.

Kumar is India's abstract superstar. His works fetch crores at auctions. He, V.S. Gaitonde, Swaminathan and Raza have together played a significant role in the genre's ascent. Inspired by spirituality and nature, the Indian abstractionists pursued philosophical purity as opposed to their western counterparts. Wassily Kandinsky, Mark Rothko, Piet Mondrian, Kazimir Malevich and Jackson Pollock all insisted on "freeing art from reality".

By its very nature, abstraction can alienate viewers raised to appreciate realistic representations. How can you have an opinion on something that doesn't look like anything? Abstract art apologists urge us to look at it as an aesthetic and emotional experience. Either way, it remains open for interpretation. ■

—Shaikh Ayaz



AN EXPERIENCE
 (top) *Shanti Bindu* by S.H. Raza; and *Untitled* by Ram Kumar