



Dr. Svetoslav Roerich speaking on Rabindranath Tagore's paintings under the auspices of the Lalit Kala Akademi at the Raj Bhavan in Bangalore on Wednesday. Governor A.N. Banerji is also seen. Left: Some of Tagore's paintings. See Page 3 for review

DECCAN HERALD, Thursday, September 25, 1986 5

ART REVIEW

Tagore's poetic art

On the verge of poetry and painting, Rabindranath Tagore's art erupted during his last years. A visionary blend of long cherished child-like naivete, freshness and enchantment transformed by the maturity and wise-bitter contentment of old age. The hand was indirectly influenced by the discipline of writing. In Tagore's words: "The subject of a poem is present in the mind, however nebulously, before the writing of it begins, and then like Ganga as she falls from Shiva's matted locks, the cascade of words carves out of the banks through which the streams of rhythm may flow. But the kind of pictures I draw, behave contrariwise. A line first comes forth from the tip of my pen and, as it goes on evolving a particular form in persuance of its own suggestiveness, it more and more captures my mind, rousing my enthusiasm by the very novelty of such creative process."

Tagore's ink drawings began as doodles. Initially mat black horizontal stripes emerged among manuscript verses — nearly aggressive in their dynamism. Relationships with letters, decorative in themselves, crystallised to gradually give more emphasis to drawing itself. The dark, graphic silhouette of a seated man structured by angularly breaking straight lines acquires life through the rough white gleams alongside. The net of softer washes and unpainted ground brings in the effects of chiaroscuro and space. On the other hand, the thin wiry squiggles too were used. Their dense entanglements form heads. Strong gradations between shadowy meshes and piercing lights dramatically evoke textures, plasticity, pulses and tensions. Such faces mingle Expressionistic inspiration with Tagore's own reductions, distortions and universal-

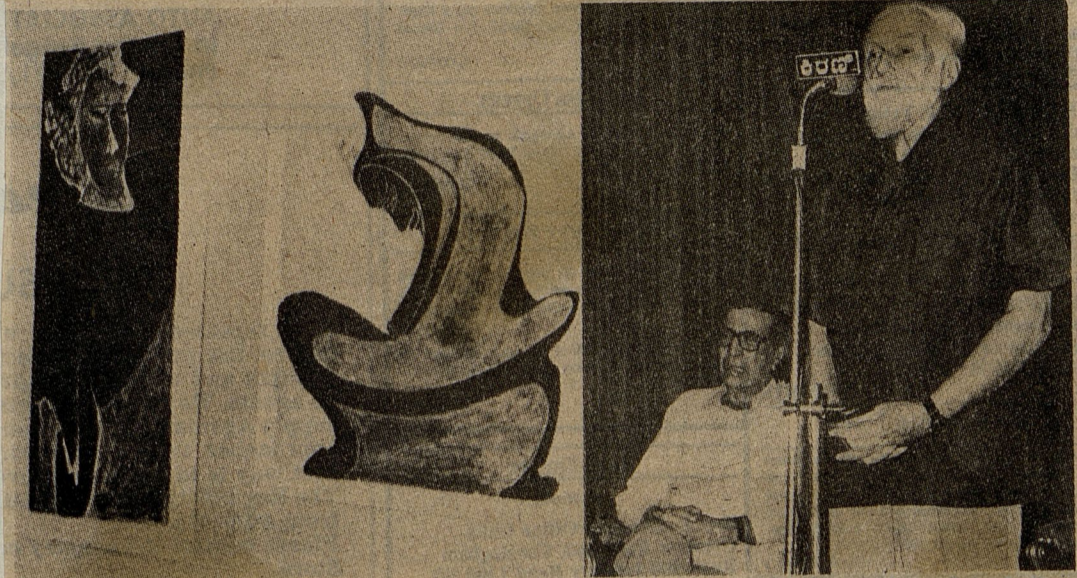
sations to create strikingly modern and eternal images.

Some compositions of ink and gouache prove utterly painterly. The soft colour washes develop fairly realistic shapes of tactile volumes brought out by mildly plaintive outlines and throbbing smudges within — abstract but real in their feel. The most beautiful are Tagore's mysterious women — delicate, pure but knowingly sensuous. The hues are dark with many greys and intense murky browns. The flowing curves of saries over slender oval faces have distinct contours. There complexity consists of sharp colour contrasts that evolve, without actual drawing, a soft vibrant line. Similar simplifications need great mastery like in the portrait of a lady seen from behind. Her figure was divided vertically by the difference in light the contrasting hues of her sari reciprocal in their rhythm.

The most painterly results were achieved in Tagore's landscapes. However, the pigmentation here still retain his affinity for enmeshed lines. Powerfully reduced, these nature views are dark and atmospheric. The hardly discernible trees and slopes pulsate under the light touches of the brush as if ready to soar, but distinct against the muted glow of golden yellows. Drawing and painterly qualities join in the arabesque images of black lines curving boldly to enclose patches of tactile hues. These forms resemble Art Nouveau motifs reinterpreted at their Oriental sources.

The works are on display at Raj Bhavan till September 27. The Lalit Kala Akademi put up the show on the occasion of the poet's 125th birth anniversary. Passes are available at the Chitrakala Parishat, Kumarakrupa Road.

— Marta Jakimowicz-Shah.



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