

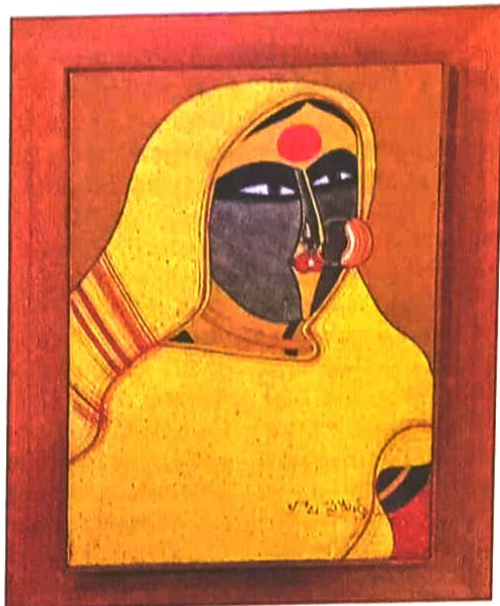
Through the eyes of the masters

VISUAL ARTS

SOUMITRA DAS

Gallery Kolkata's exhibition, *Three Visions — One Legacy: Resonances of Myth, Form & Identity*, brought together three artists, the first two of whom, despite the huge gap between the years in which they practised, celebrated local traditions by forsaking prevailing tired trends. The third participant, a sculptor, simultaneously celebrated singularity and multiplicity. The three are Jamini Roy (1887-1972), Thota Vaikuntam (born 1942) and the sculptor, K.S. Radhakrishnan (born 1956). Roy is well known for his pathbreaking decision to deploy the folk idioms of Bengal, deviating from his early experiments with post-impressionism in his oil paintings. Some of Roy's celebrated paintings in the *pata* style that are reminiscent of figures in terracotta temples were displayed here. He simplified forms and defined them with bold contour lines. Dancing Krishna, Shiva, episodes from the *Ramayana* came alive in his paintings, and so did Santhal women — children of nature with dark, supple bodies barely covered by their *saris*. Roy turned some of them into folk dolls in bright *saris*. His Christ, with large dreamy eyes and an elongated neck, has the gravitas of figures in Byzantine mosaics.

Born in a village in Telangana, Vaikuntam turned the dark-skinned men and women from the farming community he saw around him into polychrome icons in his paintings. The women are soft and sensuous, wearing huge *bindis* and draped in colourful *saris* (picture, top), and the flamboyant moustachioed men don headgear, ear studs and puff away at pipes or play the flute. With their starkly contrasting primary colours, they



resemble temple friezes.

Radhakrishnan was trained at Santiniketan and his mentors were Ramkinkar Baij and Sarbari Roy Choudhury. His signature sculptures

comprise a large, gravity-defying acrobat caught in myriad, everyday situations in conjunction with a host of tiny figures floating like shoal of fish. In the pieces on display here, a similar cloud of these tiny beings emanate, as it were, from objects of everyday use, investing them with an aura not associated with them.

Debovasha's *Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings* featured small works by masters and well-known artists of Bengal obtained from the families of the artist, Atul Bose, and the poet, Bishnu Dey. Tiny though the works were, they afforded rare glimpses into the creativity of the artists. Some of the most interesting were the pencil drawings by Nirode Mazumdar. The elegant painting of a mendicant in a temple is in the palest of pastel shades in keeping with its meditative mood. His keen power of observation and mastery of drawing are noticeable in his sketches of the simple life in villages. Buffaloes enjoy a dip in a pool. A woman sows paddy. A man pushes a heavy cart. The swaying *ghaghra* of a Rajasthani woman suggests movement. There are some preliminary sketches, probably of episodes from the Buddha's life. The most amazing, though, is his sketch of a beautiful woman with twinkling eyes and bare shoulders changing her blouse (picture, bottom). The petticoat is held between her teeth to cover her torso. It suggests more than it reveals.

Shanu Lahiri's red, pastel path winds through a grassy knoll. Pran Krishna Pal's flower studies are impressionistic *tours de force*. Jamini Roy observes, through a haze, a clump of trees before a waterbody. His pussy cat runs a charm offensive. Paritosh Sen's little girl returns after ages. A turquoise and grey partridge perching on a tree trunk demonstrates Gopal Ghose's mastery over both pencil and paint.