



Chaos within

VISUAL ARTS

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K.G. Subramanyan's works are fraught with the dreams, fantasies and occasional flare-ups of neuroses that disrupt the calm veneer of our everyday existence. Although his works were unmistakably of Indian origin, great scholar and pedagogue that he was, Subramanyan did not hesitate to help himself to the vast banquet of international culture laid out before him. Thus a quiet retreat in Santiniketan is invaded by vestiges of African culture as if these were among the everyday happenings there. This is what we expect to see at this master's exhibitions.

Aakriti Art Gallery's exhibition, *The Poetry of the Everyday: KG Subramanyan and the Art of Seeing*, in association with Seagull, fulfilled that expectation and offered a lot more besides. For example, there was a series of drawings comprising more than preliminary sketches for they had the finish of complete works of art. Notable among these was the pen-and-ink drawing on paper of a woman in a *sari* with a curtain hanging behind her that partially concealed a table with a vessel on it (picture, left). The face of the woman and her delicate hands raised to her chest and the table behind her are exquisitely rendered with copious strokes of his pen. Dark and sculptural, these physical features stand out from the rest of the work. She has the haunting quality of an apparition and the formality of a religious icon.

There is another outstanding drawing — pen-and-ink and wash on paper — of the jagged profile of a woman with deep-set eyes, an attenuated body and stick-like gesticulating arms (picture, right). With a pale blue cast on her face and head, and dark circles under her protruding eyes, she seems to be on the verge of a breakdown. Subramanyan's gaze is pitiless and his technical wizardry is amazing.

Some of his characters seem to have lost it as they burst into helpless tears. Grotesque and ludicrous, they are turned into howling caricatures who have lost all claim to dignity. Subramanyan seemed to have had a delightful time savaging these helpless, pitiful creatures. He revealed the chaos that could rear its head without any forewarning.