

# Stamp sparks controversy

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FOR the first time since its inception, the special postage stamp issued by the philately department for Triennale India will feature a painting. This will be used along with the logo, which has so far been the only visual element in a stamp intended to commemorate the most important art event hosted by the country.

However, the work selected is a graphic print by the eminent artist K.G.Subramanyan, which was awarded a gold medal in the first Triennale held in 1968. The stamp will be issued along with a first day cover, to coincide with the 8th Triennale India which opens here on Wednesday.

This selection is seen as an anachronism by many in the art fraternity since the Triennale is expected to explore "new avenues in art expressions." If the purpose is to showcase the most recent trends in contemporary art from different corners of the world, why should not an entry from the last, if not the current,

Triennale be used for the stamp, many have asked.

When this was pointed out to Mr B.P.Kambhoj, secretary, Lalit Kala Akademi, he defended the decision by saying, "Contemporary does not mean just today, or the immediate." It was more important, in his opinion, to ensure that "the work had the spirit of contemporaneity." Art since the advent of the '60s has been a different phenomenon and can be termed 'contemporary,' he said.

Some, who are not opposed to the idea of projecting a work from the first Triennale, expressed reservation about the medium. Graphic, according to them, is a less important medium than painting or sculpture. Besides, the silk-screen print for which Subramanyan had won the gold medal "was not a landmark in Indian art history either in its concept or in its medium," according to an established artist.

The organisers evidently hoped to steer clear of controversy by choosing a work from the first Triennale. "If we had chosen a work from the more recent exhi-

bition, we would have opened the floodgate to artists asking 'Why he?' and 'Why not me?'" an Akademi official responded.

Nevertheless, the organisers are happy that the stamp will be carrying an art work by a leading Indian artist. "After all, the Triennale is a prestigious art event internationally," they point out, "and should be an occasion for projecting work by our artists."

But the same logic has not been extended to the poster designed by a commercial artist for the occasion. Besides a clutter of information in Hindi and English, the colourless work in beige and black shows the Triennale trophy and logo against a newspaper clipping that plays up the earthquake. The artist has obviously tried to tie up the 8th Triennale with a major event of the year. But while the earthquake in Latur was listed among the major happenings of 1993, the poster itself boldly displays the year of the 8th Triennale India - 1994.

Which one is the anachronism in this case - the earthquake or the Triennale - one is tempted to ask.