

Controversy over 'fakes' hits art auction

Neelam Raaj | TNN

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Even as Rabindranath Tagore's ink sketch of three dancing figures lies in the vaults of Visva Bharati in Santiniketan, an identical work will come up for auction in Delhi on Friday. Nandalal Bose's painting of a woman sitting under a tree hangs in

the National Gallery of Modern Art in Delhi but a similar work has made its way to the auction catalogue.

A copy or two have cropped up in the most respected of auction houses but Bangalore-based Bid & Hammer's forthcoming auction has been assailed by what perhaps is the biggest controver-

sy to come to light in the Indian art market. Besides the Tagore and Bose works, questions have been raised about the authenticity of several other pieces by celebrated artists like K K Hebbar, Bikash Bhattacharjee, Hemendra Nath Majumdar and K H Ara.

Rukhsana Pathan Ara, daughter of the famous Pro-

gressive artist, calls one of the paintings on sale "an insult to Ara's oeuvre". "There are a lot of Ara fakes around because people think his style is simple. But that's deceptive, and this one is easy to tell," says Rukhsana, who has a large collection of her father's works.

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Experts question authenticity of signatures, dates in auction art

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The Tagore work that is raising eyebrows at Bid & Hammer's forthcoming auction in Delhi on Friday is titled *Nritya* and dated 1933. "The work is locked up in our vaults, and it is extremely unlikely that Tagore would have painted two identical works in the same year," says Susobhan Adhikary, curator of the Kala Bhavan museum of Visva Bharati.

Prof R Sivakumar, an art historian, also points out a discrepancy in dates. "If the book, the cover art of which is in the auction, was published in 1949, how did Tagore do a cover in 1933?" asks Sivakumar, who has authored a book on Tagore's works.

Another painting of Tagore's that is under a cloud is an untitled portrait of a lady. Jamini Roy was once known as the country's most faked artist but Tagore seems to be quickly catching up. In 2011, a counterfeit racket was busted at a Kolkata art college, and its principal arrested. But fake factories, which usually use art college students, are still flourishing, says Adhikary, who walked into a show of 40 Tagore works last

INDIA'S MOST FAKED ARTISTS



An original Tagore work. (R) Painting to be auctioned



M F Husain | The story goes that a co-passenger proudly showed off his fake Husain to him on a flight

Jamini Roy | Probably the most faked painter before Husain took the crown

Tagores (Abanindranath, Rabindranath and Gaganendranath) | The three were once the staple of

the counterfeit market though Rabindranath is clearly the favourite

S H Raza | Walked into a gallery to open a show of his own works and found they were all copies

Gaitonde | The recent auction record has given a new spurt to the counterfeiters

month and found that most of them were fakes.

The family of Bikash Bhattacharjee, a cornerstone of the Bengal school of art, has also doubted the veracity of two works. "The signature

does not match," says Balaka Bhattacharjee, the painter's daughter.

TOI made several attempts to contact Bid & Hammer's chairman and managing director M Maher Dadha

but there was no response. The auction house was caught in a similar controversy in 2010 over the veracity of a Souza work.

Some prominent art industry representatives have called for the creation of a regulatory authority to address concerns regarding the sale of fake works to unsuspecting consumers.

"The recent alarm with regard to the authenticity of works by masters at a forthcoming auction has set alarm bells ringing once again. We need to look at how we can regulate this," said Ashish Anand, owner of Delhi Art Gallery and one of the signatories.

Rajani Prasanna Hebbar, an art historian and the painter's daughter who authenticates his work, says the work that features in the auction catalogue has not been authenticated by her or her sister. She also adds a cautionary word for collectors.

"Don't blindly trust the certificate of authenticity. Unscrupulous people are handing out these for a price so rely on someone who is an expert on the artist," says Rajani, who has taught art history for 20 years.