

From Ram Kumar's atelier

A Retrospective of Ram Kumar's paintings is on at the Jehangir Art Gallery

AT the Jehangir Art Gallery, the Wadhera Gallery of Delhi presents a major retrospect of paintings by Ram Kumar, one of the country's major artist whose work has been totally merged with his life.

Sometime ago, with the impudence of his age a young 'art critic' had so much to say about this senior painter—when one comes to interpret Ram Kumar's present works one is struck by the pathos of the receding tide—going on to borrow from Gerorge Borrow's dictum about - how great it was to have been a genius - and further adding that the artist's later idiom restricts itself to the presentation of states tending towards stagnation, also indicating the tired temporising of the eagle who no longer wanted to stretch his wings; wings that were no longer wings to fly but merely fans to beat the air.'

Today several years later a refined vision continues to harness profound resonances of Ram Kumar's paintings. In fact, over the past decade this vision has steadily progressed towards purer forms conscientiously relying on sensibilities and perceptions honed through decades of life and work.

Contemplating on the entire display of works selected from the graph of his discipline there occur several phenomena that strike the viewer with quite a few surprises. And in this entire intricate and startling tapestry of a life-time's work are strands of various hues and textures that have in evidence a coherent twirl, barely perceptible yet predictable, unswayed by fashion or ruled by prevalent whims but treading-on marked by an affirmed destiny and soft steering.

The implications of his far-reaching mind did not just find noticeable method of form-production, rather freeing loose of trends, traditions and all other traits so familiar with the then pioneering artists making a mark on modern movements



that otherwise ruled the contemporary art scene. With each new oeuvre he metamorphised with an ideology that mirrored the refinement of his mind and vision. Whether he was painting social concerns in his own idolised manner or shaping cubists forms to the landscape and further to his quasi-abstract vistas on canvas or writing fiction, (another of his passions), the images he presented were a product of a purely indigenous iconography that identified with a glorious epiphany. The viewer or reader was always invited to speculate and ponder as to musical compositions.

In all his renderings just as one heard the solitary voice quiet yet deliberate enunciate a personal dictum that has that ultimate acceptance in it, one also found the subtle impacts not of influences but of a confluence of strands picked and woven to match the designs of the larger tapestry.

The artistic journey began through a memorable initiation with eminent painters like Andre Lhote and Leger at whose atelier Ram Kumar did an apprenticeship. At the same time were his encounters equally memorable with illustrious poets like Aragon, Gaudy and Paul Eluard. Days of ideological fervor as a member of the French Communist Party describe the pathos of urban

misery and an unsympathetic machine society. However, later before immersing entirely into the sanctity of Varanasi that would inspire whole new dimensions Ram Kumar on his return from Paris in 1952 found himself in close proximity with the refugee-settlements at Karol Bagh. Experiences at grassroots shook off most of the intellectual fellowship he shared with European thinkers. It was now that he wrote his first novel 'Ghar Bane, Ghar Toote' a tale that did not seek robust or glowing metaphors but in simple language narrated the despair of the uprooted.

From then on transformations and significant impressions took a course that then seemed a hesitant search in an odyssey to describe motifs that were consciously sharpened to preclude a certain iconography. The Human figure became entirely ambiguous while the landscape then just retained suggestive elements. Even these later became like the light veins in a symphony. Visually exciting and resounding a harmony as well. Solitude and desolation cast their veils on floating images. But it was symphonic compositions that touched the heart. And even as one goes through this retrospect one finds the flicker of a spark that promises more subtle promises.

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