

# 'Fakes abound for artists with less repertoire but high demand'

*Artist and art authenticator Samindranath Majumdar is at the forefront of the activism that's recently revealed considerable fake art sold. Speaking with Nandini Sen Gupta, Majumdar, grand-nephew of legendary painter Hemen Majumdar, discussed different ways fake art can be made, spotted – and some of the craftiest fakes he's seen:*

■ **Fake paintings were recently found in a Rabindranath Tagore exhibition after which other Bengal masters are under the scanner. Is the problem specific to Bengal alone?**

Faking isn't limited to the Bengal school – there are makers, takers and fakers all over the world. Fake art is driven by demand and supply. If an artist has a limited repertoire but demand for his work is very strong, there's a chance of fake works flooding the market.

The fake art industry feeds on the interest Indian art has generated across the world. As for the focus on Bengal, there's a technical reason. Artists in Bengal are extremely skilled, so unfortunately the fake art industry feeds on that.

■ **Are these fake works actually reproductions?**

There are two types of fake art works. There are reproduction fakes. Then, there are 'original fakes' where a new work is created using the artist's style. The latter happened with an exhibition of Tagore paintings by the Government College of Art and Craft, Kolkata. This 2011 exhibition had only fakes and used elements from Tagore's different paintings, bringing them together in a single pictorial space.

The exhibition was later withdrawn but the resultant

controversy blew the lid off the fake art cottage industry.

■ **What are other types of fakes?**

There are fakes that use the artist's letterhead, for example, drawing on it to authenticate the work. This kind of back-up helps create a narrative to support fakes. It improves the work's 'provenance'.

There are reproductions which use prints of an original work but tamper with the paper to give the impression of an older work. Other techniques include using varnish, then painting on top of it to make the paint crack – varnish dries faster than paint, hence, the crack – and so, make the work look older. Or even using tea, coffee and mud stains for a sepia effect.

■ **Does technology**

**help in faking art?**

Absolutely. Photocopies of doodles or small paper work are very difficult to identify.

Then there are fakes of graphic prints. These are limited edition pieces but unlike an art work, available in multiple copies.

Using photocopies of graphic prints is very common – and very difficult to identify.

■ **So how do you spot a fake?**

The first look is very important because as an authenticator, I get a hunch that something is not right. But you can't go by hunches alone. You have to back these up with logic. I look for stylistic or material-wise flaws.

Also, I often look at the back of a painting for clues. I look out for nails, impressions of rust and suspicious holes like staple gun marks used to secure the canvas.

In one fake work posing as an old original, the inner frame of the canvas was a thick bar of plywood! But faking techniques also change all the time – once, a colour print-out was sprayed with water to create the impression of a water colour. That was one ingenious fake.

