

get your work done  
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Kanpur UP  
23rd Oct.

Here I am again in old Raze. You see you have to listen to me whether you want to or not. God only knows what hour of the night it is. I am lying on my bed, resting on my left elbow & scribbling this to you. As sleep is hovering over my head, this letter may become somewhat incomprehensible - but you'll understand.

In Rome I went to see Corrado Capli, a painter with a big name and reputation in Rome. As can therefore be expected, a friend of Jean & Krishna's & also Narayana Itanous. I took my slides & my pocket viewer with me and showed him a selection of my slides. He was most favourably impressed and said he liked my work very much indeed, particularly my most recent work. He said that he was an adviser (a la Akbar) to a Gallery in Rome and he was definite that I would be given a show if I wanted it. He suggested this December, but as I will have hardly enough for a show I suggested that next autumn might be better. He agreed & gave me the address of the Gallery & its owner with whom I was to correspond. He said that he would do the talking & I could be certain of a show. Now this sounds fine, but what I want to know is this - is a show in Rome of any



importance? I don't want to go to a lot of trouble in sending my paintings there + possibly going there myself, if it is going to be inconsequential. So let me have your views about this. Cagli added that the Italians were not great buyers but the tourists were!! One hardly paints for the tourist trade. — While we are on this subject of sales, the Gallery sold another painting on the 14th, that is a day after I had telephoned from your flat. This was the red bird which I had painted in your studio last year with your paint + your brushes + knives + canvas but not with your ideas! It sold for £30 (Rs 400) which isn't bad for such a small painting. That makes a total of 11 till the 14th. I'm waiting to hear what happened till the 20th.

Old Bal wasn't at the airport though I had written to him about my arrival. I got to Delhi at 2.30 on the 18th + was met by my parents — much excitement of course. Unfortunately I could not spend the night in Delhi as I was supposed to join duty on the 19th, so after five hours or so I caught a train to Kharupur. While I was in Delhi I was able to meet Prabhakar + Narayana + Rekha — gave them all, your love. They wanted news of you which I gave



There was much excitement when I arrived here. The children were just awaking + very soon were digging into my bags for their presents. I gave her the cheese which you gave for her + then began telling her the news. There is so much to tell + it now comes out in bits + pieces. I have lived a whole year in this month - feeling a little tired but most happy. I have been sleeping late + am making up for lost sleep.

Before I go on any further, how is Janine's hand? I hope it is completely normal by now. And the cat which was under observation? I hope there was nothing wrong with it + it was only old age which troubled her into biting Janine. Do write about this when you write.

I tried to telephone Bal on the 20th night but there was no response, so I wrote him a letter. Last night he rang me up from Bombay. He's been ill and is staying with his brother. Could it meet me at the airport as he was out of Bombay when my letter arrived. The new gallery which he was hoping to open by the 30th will not be formally opened + he said that certain serious things had arisen for which our friend Hussain was responsible.



As it was a long matter he couldn't tell me over the telephone but would do so when we met. Incidentally I wasn't able to meet Husa in who was in Delhi the day I arrived but was going to Kashmir. He promised my father that he would come to Kashmir for some days after his return from Kashmir. I shall believe this when I see him! While on this subject - Cagli, the Italian painter, thought Husa's exhibition in Rome was very poor indeed. He said it was Academic and Studios + certainly not representing what is really going on in painting. — Bal is planning to leave on the 30th. He will go to Cairo + Alexandria first + then go to Paris. I told him that we were a bit fed up waiting for him to + that he should write + let you know when he's coming.

Although I know that you enjoy meeting old friends, I appreciate that it does mean doing no work while the fun lasts and this is obviously not a good thing, at least not for too long. — I discussed the possibility of the Paris exhibition with Bal and he said that Akher had already discussed it with him + that he would like to sponsor it. I think it would be best if he could discuss it with you + Akher while he is in Paris. I also discussed it with Rekha though rather briefly. She was interested but added that her organisation hadn't a lot of money + would therefore like to do



all the organisational work with little financial liability. Anyway I shall write & put up the scheme in a concrete form and then see what they can or can't do. I think they will play specially as this exhibition will be of tremendous importance.

I received two write ups from the Gallery which I have copied and am enclosing. I think they will be of interest to you & Janine. Butcher hasn't been as bad as I had anticipated, in fact his concluding paragraph about "Elegy to Makeyo Dero" is a compliment. What do you think?

I have begun painting - began it the second day after my arrival in Kanpur. I have finished it after working on it for 3 days and am quite happy with it. When I have a sufficient number I shall send you colour slides. I hope you have sent me the catalogue. So so please if you haven't sent it already. I wish you had had more of your paintings for me to see. Why don't you take colour slides of yours and keep a permanent record? It is not a bad idea to do this.

When you meet Akbar please tell him that I have posted the Spoons to Bombay. Unfortunately there was no space in my bag (which was small) in home and I had to abandon the box. I hope he & Solange will forgive me this.

I am despatching you a parcel of Asamese cushion covers - in different colours. They are not new and we have had them for about ten months or so. I would have bought you new ones but Kanpur has none to offer & rather than wait indefinitely I thought I might send these.



Hope you will both like them. I haven't forgotten about the bed spread - but you may have to wait some time.

Have you sent Hannu's application to Reserve Bank of India, Bombay? Send my letter to B.D. Kashaker separately and put in the same cover. I meant to tell you this but forgot. I hope he runs into luck. I am sure that if he works hard & honestly, he will make good. Many people have talent but few give themselves the chance for their talent to grow and manifest itself by working hard. This is all one can ever do in life, the rest is a matter for History to judge and is of little immediate importance. That is why the work of living artists interests me far more than the old masters. I don't think it is sacrilegious to say that I am more interested in a painter like yourself or Jkhar or Aban than in say Van Gogh or Gauguin. They had their lives & made their mark and are part of history now. What does matter is the act of becoming & to be a witness to it is exhilarating. —

Well old boy, I have waffled enough & you will be thinking that not only is this chap content not to do any work himself, he even prevents me! I shall write to you again as soon as I receive the colour slides which I would like you to send on to Mr. Lamer. — Did any parcel arrive from London? Did you get the catalogue of my exhibition from London? — I don't expect an immediate reply to this letter, so relax & feel without obligation. Write when the spirit moves you or when you need anything. Renu sends her love, and much from me to you both. As ever,  
Krishen



extract from Art News Review  
22/x/60 by George Butcher.

My own opinion is that significant painting must necessarily be either avant-garde in a linear-temporal sense or cross-cultural. The former breaks new ground in the same way as an advance is made in any field of activity, while the latter discovers new possibilities as the result of mutual exposure. In these terms, Krishna Khanna is as 'inventive' in the cross-cultural sense as was Pollock in the linear-temporal sense. Khanna, whose first English exhibition is the present one, is an appropriate subject because he was also once a public school boy in England. And in private life (from the painters point of view) he is a young banker from Kanpur in Central India).

Now it must be understood that the younger and more venturesome Indian painter of today - of whom Krishna Khanna is one - is poised ambivalently between the attractions of Western Attitudes and standards and a more or less antipathy against the values by which he has for so long been overshadowed. This parallels exactly the emerging political consciousness of Afro-Asia.



But it is only the beginning of the matter, for an attitude of ambivalence - when it does not descend into simple confusion - functions as a kind of motive power for the search for identity. Khamu's particular case is further complicated by his apparently being almost as aware of the painting and culture of the Far East as he is of the West. Consciously, he wishes to be accepted as a painter amongst painters, but the evidence of the present exhibition seems to me to indicate that he is still very much involved in a struggle to find a "style" which is not only a mature expression of his own personal being, but an expression of his identity as an Indian. His own explanation for the rather disparate character of the paintings on view is that he prefers to approach different subjects with manners appropriate to each one. This is never-the-less, to mistake either the dissipation of one's energies, or the failure yet to find one's way, for a convention of suitability. This would not matter if it were not for one of the dangers to which other promising Indian contemporaries have already succumbed. Nor would it matter much for Khamu, if only he were as advanced in his ideas on this point as certain of his paintings themselves seem to be.



As I have already overrun my space, I will comment on just one painting: Elegy to Mohenjo Daro. This is based on a real visual experience of seeing an archaeological plan of what Mohenjo Daro is supposed to have been like thousands of years ago. It is painted in an entirely 'free' manner, but after a long period of re-visualisation in the mind's eye. It appears to be non-objective but to anyone who has ever seen a plan of Mohenjo Daro, the mood - the rasa - is unmistakable. This mood is the underlying 'structure' which gives the image its reality as a 'presence' worth communicating. In this one painting, the general dilemma of the recognition of Subject for our own time is resolved as effectively as in any other single work I can think of at the moment. Whether Khanna can carry on at this level of achievement, we cannot yet know; but he has made a very handsome beginning.

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Extract from The Times 12th Oct 1960

~~The~~ the three painters at the Leicester Galleries work in three totally different traditions, but they are alike in being comfortably ensconced in styles which no longer have anything much to communicate except the comfortable quality of the style.

In the case of Mr. Krishen Khanna there is, indeed, a local problem to be solved, that of getting an Indian tradition back on its feet taking cognizance of the international "modern" style and it would appear the style of Far Eastern Art as well. To the European eye, the result is a tasteful semi abstract manner of darkish dabs and strokes over a light ground in the mesh of which a conventionally attractive figure can occasionally be half seen. "Sun in my garden", however, or "Pandemonium in a hedge" (a rather misleading title) do suggest in their rhythmical foliated pattern and sense of colour that something of the Mughal tradition is here being brought up to date . . . . .