



Recollections, reverse painting on acrylic sheet

# A fitting tribute

Ninety of veteran artist K.G. Subramanyan's works go on display as he turns 90

DR SEEMA BAWA

✓ K.G. Subramanyan turns 90, and as a homage, Art Heritage and Seagull Foundation are showing 90 of his works all over the country. The show highlights his seminal contribution to contemporary art, both as a teacher and a thinker and a practitioner of art. His students, from Baroda and Shantiniketan, comprise a very impressive legion.

Through his body of work and writing, he has been able to establish a continuum between art and craft, not like the morally and socially revivifying Arts and Crafts moment in nineteenth century England imagined it to be. His art is not a mere revival of traditional artistic craftsmanship with themes of simplicity, honesty, function, harmony, nature and social reform.

Rather in Subramanyan's toys, terracotta plates, sculptures and reverse glass paintings, there exists an organic unity between material, ideology and creation.

The singularly original imagery that Subramanyan has been able to create is remarkable. He turns to myth, tradition and

memory for the origins and then inverts them by adding his own visual and ideational comments. The human/beast dichotomy is often breached in the process of inversion or subversion through which new power relations between the two emerge.

A disturbance in the order of things or layers or images, marks his works and allows the viewer to re-interpret religious and social codes embedded in the collective consciousness. This is done effectively in some of his paintings such as *The Brown Madonna*. The process of deification and subsequent sacralisation of nature/human image by adding and abstracting attributes from nature and fertility elements has been visually elaborated in his paintings.

The fluidity of line, the mastery over colours and versatility of themes in KG Subramanyan's form a significant narrative thread in the larger epic of contemporary Indian art.

