

Abdul Rahim Appabhai Almelkar

10 October 1920- 12 December 1982

Abdul Rahim Appabhai Almelkar is well known for his own distinct 'Almelkar style' inspired by Indian miniatures. Almelkar was obsessed by traditional values of Indian art and by an Indian ethos, while the Progressive Artists Group was challenging all forms of art traditions in Mumbai. Almelkar started working vigorously in his Indian style and remained faithful to it all his life. The experimental modernists from the Progressive Group dismissed his style in derogatory terms saying that 'He recites the same old Raga', but Almelkar never took the comments seriously, because Almelkar had deep faith in the roots of Indian Art. The way he put all his skills and efforts in his work, traveled extensively and the favorable response he received and felt confident led to his lonely crusade against academic realism and the Modernists' radical experimentation of the post independence era. The art movement was divided in streams, one led by radical reformists like Souza, Husain, Raza and Bakre from the Progressive group and the other one explored by Almelkar the traditionalist.

Almelkar created his paintings by making a skillful use of luminous colours and decorative elements in a variety of compositions preferring khaki mountboard to canvas. Many times he applied colours with his fingers instead of brush. Texture created by jute, comb and rags was the hallmark of Almelkar's style. His paintings were completed after defining the contours with lyrical and tender black lines. Almelkar, who was doing landscapes in emotive colours, was attracted to Indian miniatures by 1945. He started doing paintings based on kings and consorts, heroes and heroines and Raga-Raginis of the Hindustani music. Afterwards he was lured into the primitive world of adivasis. The Indian villages full of diversity and rich culture along with nature, birds and animals proved to be an added inspiration for Almelkar to paint pictures.

It is evident from his paintings that he was attracted towards the beautiful and dynamic side of the adivasi life and expressed it, but never dealt with the reality of adivasi life in remote places full of misery, poverty and exploitation. May be because Almelkar felt that, only 'the enjoyment and happiness in life should be shared with each other', he painted his pictures in typical 'Almelkar style' throughout his life. It remained his strength and also his weakness.

He was recipient 20 Gold Medals, 24 Silver Medals and several cash awards. He had 44 exhibitions in India and abroad.