



PRESS RELEASE

THE LAST HARVEST: PAINTINGS OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE

“The Last Harvest” exhibition showcasing paintings by Rabindranath Tagore, curated by Professor Raman Siva Kumar of Visva-Bharati University, developed under the auspices of the 150th birth anniversary celebrations of Rabindranath Tagore, was inaugurated on 19th April, 2013 at the National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA), Mumbai. The works of art in the exhibition are drawn from the prestigious collections of Rabindra Bhavan, Kala Bhavan, Visva Bharati, Santiniketan and from the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi.

The exhibition in Mumbai has been made possible under the able leadership of the newly appointed Director of NGMA, Mumbai Mr Shivaprasad Khened.

The NGMA Advisory Committee – Pheroza Godrej (chair), Maithili Parekh, Shanta Gokhale, Tasneem Mehta, Sudhir Patwardhan, Dhruva Mistry, and Sabyasachi Mukherjee – extends its thanks to Prof Rajeev Lochan, Director of NGMA Delhi for enabling this exhibition to travel to Mumbai.

The exhibition was inaugurated by eminent artist, Akbar Padamsee, who released a specially commissioned illustrated catalogue, The Last Harvest. This catalogue will be available at the NGMA Mumbai throughout the course of the show.

TAGORE

Rabindranath Tagore, India's polymath made significant contributions to the fields of literature, poetry, philosophy and art. Born in Calcutta in 1861, Tagore was perhaps the most important literary figure of Bengali literature; he was indeed the first non-European to win the esteemed Noble Prize in Literature. An ambassador for India and its culture, his international influence and popularity was considerable and could arguably be compared to that of Gandhi, who himself referred to the artist and poet as 'Mahatma' – the great soul. Tagore started painting relatively late in his life, but this did not prevent him from becoming one of India's most revered Modern artists.

Tagore at the age of 67, to use his own words, "fell under the enchantment of lines" when he discovered that his hand was moving automatically across the pages of his manuscripts transforming the scratches and erasures into designs. For the next 12 years of his life he harnessed his new-found love for painting and produced nearly 2,000 paintings.

Tagore has left behind an extraordinarily rich heritage of words, music and poetry, theatre, literature, paintings, of ideas and of ideals. He not only excelled in all these creative pursuits but also contributed immensely in the freedom struggle and in nation-building specially in education and rural empowerment. Today, 150 years after his birth his works in diverse creative fields remains as relevant as when they were first created.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

To commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore, the Government of India constituted a committee to plan a number of programs nationally and internationally, including showcasing Tagore's paintings at select museums across the world from 2011 to 2012. *The Last Harvest: Paintings by Rabindranath Tagore*, curated by Professor Raman Siva Kumar of Visva- Bharati University, comprises works on paper.

The majority of the works comprise haunting heads, romantic figures, and melancholy landscapes. Then there are dancing figures as well as fantastic and bizarre forms. What is remarkable about these works painted some 75 to 80 years ago is their timeless quality. Rising beyond its immediate context, Tagore's art continues to communicate with new generation in new ways and with new meanings.

The drawings and paintings of the poet had richly traced the extraordinary inner journey of a complex individual through the ecstatic affirmation of existence manifest as rhythm-articulate inherent in form self-referent, towards, to the convinced cognition of individuated imagery as dramatic characterization of concepts and associations, being the total fantasy of the emotional world.

This exhibition has been mounted at nine major museums across three continents.

- Asian Art Museum, Berlin (01.09.2011 to 30.10.2011)
- Asia Society, New York (15.9.2011 to 2.01.2012)
- National Museum of Korea (19.9.2011 to 27.11.2011)
- Victoria and Albert Museum, London (13.12.2011 to 4.3.2012)
- The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago (28.01.2012 to 15.04.2012)
- Petit Palais, Paris, France (30.01.2012 to 11.03.2012)
- National Gallery of Modern and Contemporary Art, Rome (28.3.2012 to 27.05.2012)
- National Visual Art Gallery of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur (2.04.2012 to 15.07.2012)
- McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Ontario, Canada (24.5.2010 to 15.07.2012)

CURATOR'S NOTE

Rabindranath's life, his works and the history of his institutions mark a progress from nationalism to universal humanism. His paintings belong to the period of universal humanism and linked as they may be to personal experiences they have a universal appeal. In consonance with it Rabindranath did not title his drawings and paintings. He

also did not date most of them. Thus they come to us as an open-ended oeuvre, encouraging us to respond to them with our sensibilities and find linkages between them. In other words he encourages the viewers to embark on a curatorial process. This exhibition is one such effort.

In this exhibition the works are grouped into what may be considered four important facets of his oeuvre. His earliest paintings grew out of the doodles he did in his manuscripts while attempting to turn crossed out words and discarded lines into visually exciting motifs. These have an element of playful inventiveness and involve morphological cross-projections that defy perceptual experience. If the subliminal played an important part in his first paintings, painting itself led him to pay attention to the pageant of forms in nature. The landscapes included in these selections are a token of this shift. As he progressed he also began to see the human body not merely as form but as gestures carrying within them the seeds of visual narration and theatre – ambivalent as they may remain without the benefit of names. A third group of paintings bring this into focus. And finally there are his representations of the human face; hovering between hieratic masks and individualised portraits, they turn countenance into characters.

The four groups may be highlighted thus:

Group 1 This group contains some of his earliest paintings, they are either geometrical or arabesque and have an element of playful inventiveness involving morphological cross-projections that defy reality.

Group 2 Nature was an enduring theme in Rabindranath's writings and songs, he felt a deep companionship with nature since his childhood. A more meditative and observant come through in his landscapes and flower pieces.

Group 3 As a playwright and actor Rabindranath was sensitive to gesture and its dramatic and narrative potential; the paintings in this group bring this into focus.

Group 4 This group consists of his representations of the human face into which he reads traces of social and personal life. They are products of observation and psychological probing.

Finally a word about the title. For Rabindranath who welcomed contact with other cultures to foster creativity, and for whom the touchstone of authenticity was not the lineage of one's language but one's ability to make it one's own, the value of art lay not in its source or style but in being an imperative of life. And painting was the last enchantment of his life, his last personal imperative. 'I am hopelessly entangled in the spell that the lines have cast all around me.... If I were a free agent... unburdened by any care,' he wrote to close friend in 1928 just when he was embarking on his career as a painter, 'I would live by the Padma and gather a harvest of pictures and nothing but pictures to load the Golden Boat of Time with.' He was burdened with too many commitments to allow himself that privilege but the harvest has been good (well over two thousand paintings in thirteen years) and this exhibition carries a small part of it eighty years after he himself had ferried it across the world for the first time.