

Unsung Artist—Ashesh Mitra

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The West Bengal Fine arts department organized a memorial lecture on the late Ashesh Mitra on 3 May, 2006 at Abaninda Hall. Cultural head and director Tapan Bandopadhyay, director Kamal Majumdar and other members of the department such as Nirmalya Nag and Prashanto Daw, the joint assistant head of Narendrapur Ramkrishna Mission—Swami Bishmayananda and Ramkrishna Sarada Mission head Vimuktaprana spoke on the occasion. An exhibition of his works was also on from 30 May through 5 June. The exhibition was a retrospective on the artist, Ashesh Mitra, who lived far away from the limelight. His artist wife Geeta Bhattacharya Mitra was the main force behind the presentation of this exhibition.

The artist was born on 11 November 1935 at Khulna from where his father sent him to Burdwan. But Ashesh Mitra's mind was elsewhere. One day, he ran away from Burdwan to visit Santiniketan and Sriniketan. What he saw there inspired him to become an artist. At first, his father opposed his decision but later gave in to his son's wish and allowed him to join Government Art College, Calcutta in 1953-54. The artist was not one to hunt for publicity or advertise himself. He spent his entire life immersed in his work. In 1958, Ashesh Mitra passed his BA with a first class. He also received a first class in sculpture, Indian art and a teachership course. In 1967, Mitra became a professor of the Art College.

His first solo exhibition featured paintings and mosaic art and was held in Belgrade, Yugoslavia in 1965. His second solo exhibition was held in 1966 in Kolkata, the third in 1972 in Delhi; the fourth was held under the sponsorship of Indo-American Society in Kolkata in 1973. His fifth solo art exhibition featured realistic art in 1976 in Kolkata. He also took part in a national art exhibition in Delhi and other places. The artist received the honour of best artist from Birla Academy in 1974. His works of art can be seen in several art galleries in India and abroad. At Gagendra Gallery, 32 of Mitra's works were exhibited. Photographs of his murals and sculpture were also displayed. The realistic colours and form of his work were admired by onlookers. Each painting is complete in itself in execution and the use of colours is splendid. A number of paintings were of his (wife). There were portraits of Rabindranath Tagore, Lenin, Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay, Satyajit Ray and so on. Also on display was a beautiful painting of a woman waiting, a bouquet of sunflowers, Jesus Christ, a painting of Gafar based on Sarat Chandra's story, Mahesh. The artist's painting titled 'Lockout' is full of pathos. Another painting that grabs the eyes is called *The Last Day of Cleopatra*. The photographs on display showcased his relief work on cement which is kept in CPT Park of Haldia. The art history of the fibre glass Jahanara, Shhah Jehan, Jodhbai were also documented. After going through the wide range of exhibits that both attracted and awed and one is led to wonder if, in fact, we are not guilty of forgetting a great artist... ❄️❄️❄️