

PRESS RELEASE

Graphic Prints by Gaganendranath Tagore, Ramkinkar Baij, Mukul Dey & Rani Chanda

Opening reception on Saturday, 22 April 2017 at 6 pm at Galerie 88, Kolkata. The exhibition will be on view till 30 June 2017

This exhibition will showcase some of the exquisite graphic prints of Gaganendranath Tagore, Ramkinkar Baij, Mukul Dey & Rani Chanda.

Gaganendranath Tagore (1867 – 1938)

The artist was born in Jorasanko Tagore family whose creativity defined Bengal's cultural life. Gaganendranath was the eldest son of Gunendranath Tagore, grandson of Girindranath Tagore and a great-grandson of Prince Dwarkanath Tagore. His brother Abanindranath was a pioneer and leading exponent of the Bengal School of Art. He was a nephew of the poet Rabindranath.

In 1907, along with his brother Abanindranath, he founded the Indian Society of Oriental Art which later published the influential journal Rupam. Between 1906 and 1910, the artist studied and assimilated Japanese brush techniques and the influence of Far Eastern art into his own work, as demonstrated by his illustrations for Rabindranath Tagore's autobiography Jeevansmriti (1912). He went on to develop his own approach in his Chaitanya and Pilgrim series. Gaganendranath eventually abandoned the revivalism of the Bengal School and took up caricature. The Modern Review published many of his cartoons in 1917. From 1917 onwards, his satirical lithographs appeared in a series of books, including Play of Opposites, Realm of the Absurd and Reform Screams. This portfolio of merciless satirical cartoons by Gaganendranath has broken new grounds in Indian art. A glance at these cartoons will show that Gagan Thakur is not a wearer of cap and bell, not an irresponsible humorist only concerned to play with our weakness with the sole purpose of raising a smile, nor indeed friendly optimist content to make fun of our faults and shortcomings. What he has felt is certainly too deep for tears and humorous verbiage that he has chosen vainly covers the shrieks of his heart.

Mukul Chandra Dey (1895 – 1989)

The artist was one of five children of Purnashashi Devi and Kula Chandra Dey. He was a student of Rabindranath Tagore's Santiniketan and is considered as a pioneer of drypoint-etching in India. The entire family of Mukul Dey had artistic talents, the brother Manishi Dey was a well-known painter, and his two sisters, Annapura and Rani, were accomplished in arts and crafts as well.

Mukul Dey chose an essentially Western medium to portray various sides of Indian life. Unlike artists such as Haren Das, whose woodcut printing technique was more indigenous to Indian culture, Dey concentrated on drypoint etching, a thoroughly European practice. Regardless of his adopted Western technique, Dey chose subjects such as river scenes in Bengal, traditional baul singers, the markets of Calcutta, or the life of Santhal villagers in the Birbhum district, near the Santiniketan art school. When the Tagore family of Kolkata created the Vichitra Club at their ancestral home of Jorasanko, Mukul Dey became an active member. At Vichitra Club the young and upcoming artists like Nandalal Bose, Asit Kumar Haldar, Mukul Dey and Narayan Kashinath Deval were encouraged to experiment in ever new creative mediums and art forms.

Ramkinkar Baij (1906 – 1980)

The artist was born in an economically modest family in the Bankura district of the modern state of West Bengal in India. In that sense, he was a Bengali, not an Adivasi, as many people usually think. The surname Baij derived from Boidda and Boijo consequently. His family surname was Poramanik and was abandoned by him in the early 1925. However, many of his artistic creations have been inspired by the lifestyles of rural dalit or Adivasi (Santhal) communities living in and around his place of work Santiniketan.

While in his mid-teens Ramkinkar used to paint portraits of Indian freedom fighters involved in the Non-Cooperation Movement against the British rulers of India. At age of 16 he got noticed by the renowned journalist Ramananda Chatterjee. Four years later Ramkinkar joined the Visva-Bharati University at Santiniketan as a student of fine arts. After obtaining a diploma from the university he went on to head the sculpture department. Eminent painters like Beohar Rammanohar Sinha and Jahar Dasgupta, both students of Shantiniketan were his disciple. Ramkinkar to develop as an artist who was not only a sculptor but was a painter, printer, a theatre person and a singer as well. A set of black and white woodcuts of Ramkinkar Baij is showing dexterity in handling tools.

Rani (Dey) Chanda (1912 - 1997)

The artist was born in the village of Bikrampur in Dhaka district. Her father Kulachandra Dey, was a close friend of Rabindranath Tagore. Rani Chanda lost her father in childhood and encouraged by Rabindranath Tagore, went to Santiniketan where she learned painting, music and dancing under Nandalal Bose. Later she also learnt painting from Abanindranath Tagore. In 1933, she got married to Anil Kumar Chanda, private secretary of Rabindranath Tagore. Rani Chanda earned considerable fame by performing in Tagore's dance dramas at home and abroad. She suffered imprisonment for a short while for her anti-British activities.

Rani Chanda with all her energies for exploring printmaking medium took to linocut and this portfolio is an outcome of one such endeavor. One can see the glimpses of un-idealised rural subaltern life in these relief prints. The artist had handled the black and white distribution with virtuosity and imagination. In 1932 Mukul Dey had published this portfolio. In the introductory note Rabindranath Tagore was mentioned "In these lino prints done by her showing genuine feeling for her subject and natural skill in execution".