

AN ARTIST OF MYRIAD MINDS

When it comes to the art of sculpting in the contemporary Indian scenario women artists have been more of an anomaly. Since the time of independence, only a few women exponents like Meera Mukherjee (1923-1998) and Pilo Pochkhanawala (b. 1923) have made significant contributions to this field. Besides these two greats another artist who cannot be overlooked is Uma Siddhanta.

Siddhanta was born on 11 January 1933 in Kolkata in a highly educated family. The rich cultural milieu in which she was brought up kindled in her the passion for visual arts. In her formative stage she received Phani Bhushan Das as a mentor, a protégé of Nandalal Bose. Under his tutelage she acquired expertise in batik, leather craft and pottery along with embroidery and woodcraft. However she chose sculpting over all other forms and delved deeply in it. Her passion for sculpture inspired her to take admission in the Government College of Art & Craft, Kolkata in 1951. Initially, however, the college authorities had discouraged Uma from taking up sculpture, arguing that such a laborious activity would be too difficult for a woman to carry on for long. But she remained undeterred and strove to become a sculptor.

Prodosh Dasgupta (1912-1991) was then the head of the sculpture department of the Government College of Art & Craft. Dasgupta has played a vital role in discovering the artistic abilities of his students. During his tenure (1951-1957), quite a number of students notably Sarbari Roy Chowdhury, Bipin Goswami, Ajit Chakraborty and others emerged as successful sculptors. One may also place Uma Siddhanta in this star-studded list. Uma not only learned the nitty-gritty of sculpture under the able guidance of Dasgupta but also developed a close bond with her *Guruji* that was to thrive until Dasgupta's demise.

During her college days Uma dabbled in conventional realistic work. But after passing out from the Art College in 1956 she

started sculpting forms, which transcended mere statement of facts. Her works from this period were inspired by classical Indian sculpture. Virgin Mother, Blossom, Mother and Child, Mother Cactus etc. are all subjective expressions marked with a quality of being and combined with weight, grace and strength, and the melody of rhythm.

A more significant development can be traced in the next phase of her career. Works of this period were deeply inspired by nature. Since the middle of the 1970s real natural features become flattened in her works with the dominance of lyrical rhythm and sharp curvilinear lines derived from nature. The contours of her works often take the shape of a leaf.

Uma has never adhered to a particular style for a long time. The sculptures from her next phase appear to be instant outbursts of her mind. A lump of clay is twisted, rolled or flattened with the hands for a few minutes and all of a sudden the feelings of that moment finds expression in that clod of clay. The works are small in size and mostly characterized by abstract expressions. Prodosh Dasgupta inspired her to do such work. Dasgupta used to make empirical attempts in search of unknown shapes and structures by creating instant sculptures during his stay at Santiniketan as a fellow of Visva Bharati University in 1978. Uma has carried the same idea to a different intensity and infused it with personal expression.

In the next phase (late 1980s) Uma created a series of faces. Mental states of human beings have been expressed through these portraits. These biomorphic images become the vehicles of dream and fantasy. These crude and raw portrayals of faces were inspired by Sigmund Freud's interpretation of human psychology. One of the works of this series titled 'Primitive-I' was honoured with the National Award by Lalit Kala Academy, New Delhi in 1992.

She continues to work on a variety of subjects though 'Mother and Child' remains her favourite. Even her first open-air sculpture mounted at Jatindas Park, Kolkata in 1957 was on the same subject

(which was later removed owing to the intervention of Metro Rail). She considers the figure of the Mother as a strong driving force that affects human beings and the world at large. But whatever may be the subject she has always presented them in her works in its totality and appeal along with the dynamism of the Indian ethos. It is very difficult to distinguish her expositions from the perspective of a particular style. But it is true that in every phase her primary objective was to create a new vocabulary in the background of earlier forms.

As material she has mainly used bronze apart from wood and stone. Besides sculpting, she has also tried her hand in painting on beetle nut bark. An exhibition of these works was also held at the Academy of Fine Arts, Kolkata in 2004. Her paintings on paper and embroidery on cloth are remarkable for their vivacity. The images are representational and executed in a simplified manner with a realistic sensibility.

In addition to being a successful sculptor, Uma Siddhanta is also remembered as an excellent teacher. She had been the senior lecturer in Fine Arts in the B.Ed. Department of Shri Shikshyatan College, Kolkata till 1995. During her tenure, she introduced a new educational method in Secondary Education, (mass education through folk art) and it was organized by NCERT, New Delhi. She was honoured with National Awards for this invention in both 1979 and 1980.

For her invaluable contribution to the realm of art Uma has been honoured with many prestigious awards. She wholeheartedly acknowledges the support and encouragement from her husband and family members as largely responsible for her success.

She has participated in several group shows across the country and abroad since 1953 and taken part in numerous art camps. She held solo shows at the Jahengir Art Gallery, Mumbai (1988) and at the Information Centre, Kolkata (1989). Her sculptures feature in the

collection of the Gallery of Modern Arts, New Delhi as well as in many private galleries and individual collections.

Author of three books, Uma Siddhanta continues to sculpt regularly with an untiring spirit despite the burden of old age and failing health. This retrospective exhibition presented by Galerie88 reflects Uma's sculptural odyssey in a befitting manner and promises to provide a comprehensive understanding of the art works of Uma Siddhanta.

Prasanta Daw

Art Historian & Critic

Achievements

Designed the emblem for the National Institute of Science, India (presently the National Science Academy)

B. M. Birla Gold Medal for the best sculpture in All India Exhibition, Academy of Fine Arts, Kolkata, 1953

National Award on the Thoughts & Experiments in Secondary Education organized by NCERT, New Delhi, 1980 & '81

National Award in Sculpture from Lalit Kala Academy, New Delhi, 1992

West Bengal State Academy Award for Lifetime Achievement in sculpture, 1998

'Satabdir Kanya' felicitation by Biswa Banga Sammelan at Netaji Indoor Stadium, Kolkata, 2000

'Jewel of Bengal' conferred by Rotary Club, Kolkata, 2000

Bharat Nirman Award, Kolkata, 2001

Lady Ranu Mukherjee Memorial Lifetime Achievement Award from Academy of Fine Arts, Kolkata, 2005

Books Written & Edited by Uma Siddhanta

LOKOSHILPEY LOKOSHIKSHA (a book on mass education in Bengali), published by Ray Mitra Prakashani, Kolkata, 1979

ANANDA (in Bengali), published by Raktokarabi, Kolkata, 2007

Edited "BIBHA (in Bengali)," published by Raktokarabi, Kolkata, 2007

LIST OF EXHIBITS

Sculpture

NO.	TITLE	MEDIUM	DIMENSION	YEAR
1.	<i>Mother & Child – I</i>	Bronze	8 x 10.5 x 6 in	1952
2.	<i>Mother & Child – II</i>	Bronze	11 X 10 X 11 in	1954
3.	<i>Mother & Child – III</i>	Bronze	20 x 17 x 17.5 in	1954
4.	<i>Sister Nivedita</i>	Bronze	12 x 4 x 4 in	1967
5.	<i>Agony</i>	Bronze	5 x 11 x 6 in	1974
6.	<i>Instant Sculpture</i>	Bronze	Variable	1985
7.	<i>Reclining Women</i>	Bronze	Variable	1987
8.	<i>Jackal Woman</i>	Bronze	9 x 9 x 9 in	1987
9.	<i>Primitive – I</i>	Bronze	10 x 9 x 9 in	1988
10.	<i>Bull</i>	Bronze	9 x 13 x 4 in	1988
11.	<i>Vigilance</i>	Wood	29 x 14 x 52 in	1989
12.	<i>Kolkata</i>	Bronze	17 x 4 x 4 in	1990
13.	<i>Blossom – I</i>	Bronze	29 x 8 x 7 in	1990
14.	<i>Blossom – II</i>	Bronze	31 x 8 x 7 in	1990
15.	<i>Kalpobrikscha</i>	Bronze	10 x 6 x 5 in	1993
16.	<i>Virgin Mother</i>	Fibre Glass	45 x 8 x 8 in	1994
17.	<i>Portrait</i>	Bronze	9 x 8 x 8 in	1994
18.	<i>Mahamanab</i>	Bronze	6 x 6 x 7 in	1995
19.	<i>Reclining Woman</i>	Bronze	6.5 x 9 x 10 in	2003
20.	<i>Dancing Girl</i>	Bronze	13 x 4 x 4.5 in	2005
21.	<i>Parama – I</i>	Fibre Glass	23 x 72 x 15 in	2005
22.	<i>Parama – II</i>	Fibre Glass	20 x 10 x 10 in	2005
23.	<i>Parama – III</i>	Fibre Glass	20 x 9 x 9 in	2005
24.	<i>Bonolata</i>	Bronze	17 x 6 x 4.5 in	2006
25.	<i>Bull</i>	Fibre Glass	39 x 22 x 67 in	2007
26.	<i>Horse</i>	Wire & GI Sheet	22 x 25 x 12 in	2009
27.	<i>Cow</i>	Wire & GI Sheet	24 x 23 x 12 in	2009
28.	<i>Ajir</i>	Fibre Glass	28 x 17 x 10 in	2012

LIST OF EXHIBITS

Drawing, Painting & Embroidery

NO.	TITLE	MEDIUM	SIZE	YEAR
1.	<i>Untitled</i>	Tempera on Paper	7 x 8.5 in	1952
2.	<i>Untitled</i>	Tempera on Paper	8.5 x 12	1952
3.	<i>Untitled</i>	Wash on Paper	8.5 x 12	1952
4.	<i>Dusk</i>	Pastel on Paper	4.5 x 5.5 in	1956
5.	<i>Paradhinotar</i> <i>Suchona</i>	Embroidery	5.5 x 7 in	1958
6.	<i>Untitled</i>	Embroidery	5.5 x 7 in	1958
7.	<i>Untitled</i>	Embroidery	5 x 5.5 in	1958
8.	<i>Untitled</i>	Ink & Brush on Paper	8 x 12 in	1986
9.	<i>Untitled</i>	Pen & Ink on Paper	5.5 x 7.5 in	2000
10.	<i>Untitled</i>	Pen & Ink on Paper	4 x 7.5	2000
11.	<i>Singho Bahini</i> <i>Saraswati</i>	Watercolour on Beetle nut bark	5 x 8 in	2003
12.	<i>Timir Binashi</i>	Watercolour on Beetle nut bark	6.5 x 6.5 in	2003
13.	<i>Aakrosh</i>	Watercolour on Beetle nut bark	6.5 x 7 in	2003
14.	<i>Obhibyakti</i>	Watercolour on Beetle nut bark	4.5 x 10.5 in	2003
15.	<i>Parama</i>	Watercolour on Beetle nut bark	6.5 x 10 in	2003
16.	<i>Aatongko</i>	Watercolour on Beetle nut bark	8 x 13 in	2003
17.	<i>Parama</i>	Conte on Paper	9.5 x 12.5 in	2004
18.	<i>Untitled</i>	Ink & Brush on Paper	9 x 11 in	2006
19.	<i>Untitled</i>	Ink & Brush on Paper	8.5 x 11 in	2006
20.	<i>Untitled</i>	Ink & Wash on Paper	9 x 11 in	2007