

Amrita Shergill

Biography:

1. Country : India
2. Dates : Born 1913, Budapest, Hungary
She died in 1941, Lahore [present day Pakistan]
3. Lives and works :
4. Education :
1929 The Academie de la Grande Chaumiere, Paris (Tutee of P. Vaillant)
1929 Ecole Nationale des Beaux-Arts (Tutee of Luican Simon)
1924 School of Santa Annunziata, Florence

Selected Exhibitions

Selected Posthumous Exhibitions

2013 'Amrita Sher-Gil: Birth Centenary Celebration', presented by National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA), New Delhi and Ministry of Culture, Government of India at National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA), New Delhi

<http://www.ngmaindia.gov.in/pdf/Amrita-Invite-mail.pdf>

2013 the self in making AMRITA SHER-GIL, Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi, India

<http://knma.in/exhibition/self-making-amrita-sher-gil-0>

2011 'Ethos V: Indian Art Through the Lens of History (1900 to 1980)', Indigo Blue Art, Singapore

<http://www.indigoblueart.com/site/exhibitions/ethos-v/>

2010-11 'A Collection', Sakshi Gallery, Mumbai

<http://www.sakshigallery.com/#/EXHIBITION,167>

2009 'Kalpana: Figurative Art in India', presented by The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) at Aicon Gallery, London; The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)

2008-09 'Modern India', organized by Institut Valencià d'Art Modern (IVAM) and Casa Asia, in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture at Valencia, Spain

<http://www.ivam.es/en/exhibitions/2810-modern-india:2008>

2007 'Amrita Sher-Gil', Tate Modern, London organised in collaboration with the Haus der Kunst, Munich; the National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA), New Delhi and the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, New Delhi

<http://www.tate.org.uk/node/237053/default.shtm>

2006-07 'Amrita Sher-Gil: An Indian Artist Family in the 20th Century', Haus der Kunst, Munich in collaboration with National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, Ministry of Culture, Government of India, New Delhi, and Goethe-Institut, New Delhi

[http://www.hausderkunst.de/?id=83&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=87&L=1](http://www.hausderkunst.de/?id=83&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=87&L=1)

2004 'Amrita Sher-Gil: Icon – Works & Memorabilia from Her Last Years', Chatterjee & Lal, Mumbai

2004 'Rabindranath Tagore, Amrita Sher-Gil, Jamini Roy', Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi

2002 'Amrita Sher-Gil', Institut Hongrois de Paris

2001 'Amrita Sher-Gil', Ernst Museum, Budapest

1985 'Artistes Indiens en France', Ministere de la Culture, Centre National des Arts Plastiques, Paris

1941 The Punjab Literary League Hall, Lahore

Selected Exhibitions

1937 Faletti's Hotel, Lahore

1937 Allahabad University, Allahabad

1937 Imperial Hotel, New Delhi

1936 Hyderabad

1936 Taj Mahal Hotel, Mumbai

1935 Allahabad

1935 New Delhi

1933 Salon De Tuilleries, Paris

1933 Grand Salon, Paris

1932 Grand Salon, Paris

1930 Theatre Pigalle, Paris

Participations

1937 Annual Exhibition, Bombay Art Society, Mumbai

1935 Annual Exhibition, Simla Fine Arts Society

Awards / Reviews :

SEE MORE:

TEXT

Overview-Long view of a short life, Sonam Joshi, Timeout Delhi, 2013

<http://www.timeoutdelhi.net/art/featuresclassical/long-view-short-life>

Overview-The easel as her mirror, Vandana Kalra, Indian Express, 2013

<http://www.indianexpress.com/talk/news/the-easel-as-her-mirror/1081369>

Images-In Pictures-Amrita Sher-Gill, The Guardian.

<http://arts.guardian.co.uk/flash/page/0,,2014911,00.html>

Overview-Immortal Amrita, Jane Mikkelson, Time Out Mumbai, 2010

<http://www.timeoutmumbai.net/art/features/immortal-amrita>

Overview-Amrita Sher-Gil, Uma Prakash, Art Etc, 2011

<http://www.artnewsnviews.com/view-article.php?article=artita-sher-gil&iid=22&articleid=561>

Overview-Sad In Bright Clothes,Yashodhara Dalmia,Outlook India,2013

<http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?283591>

Images- Born 100 years ago Amrita Sher-Gil, Marianna Toth, Dunaharaszti Városi Könyvtár.

<http://dhibiblio.hu/100-eve-szuletett-amrita-sher-gil/>

Overview-White Shadows,Yashodhara Dalmia,Outlook India,2006

<http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?230586>

not sure- <http://www.deccanherald.com/content/60454/amrita-life-letters.html>

Images-Amrita Shergill,The Telegraph.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/3675112/Amrita-Sher-Gil.html?image=1>

other not added-

<http://www.indianexpress.com/news/with-a-million-kisses-amri/582038/0>

<http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/An+enduring+enigma/1/86736.html>

<http://www.frontline.in/navigation/?type=static&page=flonnet&rdurl=fl3004/stories/20130308300409000.htm>

VIDEOS:

TateShots Issue 2 - Amrita Sher-Gil,Vivan Sundaram on Amrita Sher-Gil,2008

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3qwqSsLPb5Y>

Painting Amrita Sher-gil India Painter,2010

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ldr8_JuNB7k

Amrita Sher-Gil

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=slctt-5z_8Y

Amrita Sher-Gil: 'The Threshold of Modernism',Asia Art Society,2011

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=veLJl1EvhOs>

Vivan Sundaram talks about Amrita Sher-Gil,2010

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q_OaBfTp1GM

Not sure-<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-NueiT8mlxA>

Artwork Closeup-Amrita Sher-Gil,2012

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=htqbWT8XCv4>

Text:

Born on 30th Jan 1913 in Budapest, Hungary, Amrita Sher-Gil was the first important woman artist to emerge out of India in the 1930s. In her brief life span of 28 years, she led the modern Indian art movement, which was then taken ahead by the Bombay Progressive Artists Group.

A child of a Punjabi landlord father Sardar Umrao Singh Majithia and a Hungarian musician mother, Antoinette, both loyalists to the British Raj, Amrita had to struggle with the biases that her mixed parentage, her middle class background and her gender raised throughout her brief artistic career.

Sher-Gil received her early art training in Florence. Expelled from the art school a year later for drawing

women in the nude, she moved with her family to Paris, where she worked under Pierre Vaillant and then Professor Lucien Simon at Ecole Nationale des Beaux Arts. She studied there for three years and her painting; 'Young Girls' was awarded the Picture of the Year, making her the youngest person ever to receive this honor. Sher-Gil was also made Associate of the Grand Salon, the first Indian to achieve this distinction. Her earlier works are heavily influenced by the European style of painting, especially by the post-Impressionists.

Yet by the 30s, Sher-Gil was convinced of the need to come back to India to her roots. She returned home in 1934. She once said, "As soon as I put my foot on Indian soil my painting underwent a change not only in subject and spirit, but also in technical expression. It became more fundamentally Indian." In her search for the quintessential 'Indian' style of painting, she came across the Santiniketan School of painting, pioneered by Abanindranath Tagore. She however dismissed their work as being too 'effeminate and sentimental'. She developed her own style that was a mix of the western and oriental art styles, with the themes being predominantly women oriented and feminist. "I realized my artistic mission was not only to paint but to interpret the life of Indians and particularly that of the poor Indians, pictorially, to paint the silent images of infinite submission and patience, to depict the angular brown bodies, strangely beautiful in their ugliness, to reproduce on canvas the impression their sad eyes created on me," she said.

Sher-Gil's women, often drawn in their own private spaces, were not necessarily beautiful ladies from affluent families. Rather, they came from rural communities and villages, from the middle, and lower middle class families. She is considered the single biggest role model for post-independence women artists, in search of their own roots and identity.

'Landscape,' Sher-Gil's first work after she returned to India, depicts a view of the fields from her ancestral home in Amritsar. It is a rare landscape by the artist who mostly worked with figurative images. Her chosen medium of painting was oil, and her style was reminiscent of the post-impressionists artists. She picked up structural elements from the miniature and mural traditions of Indian art. Sher Gill often painted rustic villagers, whom she first interacted with during her stay in Shimla.

Her most prolific period happened to be between 1935 and 1939, when she made some of her famous paintings including 'Siesta', 'The Story Teller', 'Ganesh Puja', 'Hillside' and 'Hill Scene'. Her most celebrated paintings are those depicting women in their private worlds such as 1938 trilogy, 'The Bride's Toilet', 'Brahmacharis' and 'Villagers going to Market'.

Referred to by author Salman Rushdie as the "greatest woman painter", her paintings are considered a national heritage. Tragically, her painting career only spans nine years. Amrita Sher-Gil died in 1941 at the age of 28 in Lahore.

<http://www.saffronart.com/artists/amrita-sher-gil>

the self in making examines Amrita Sher-Gil's self-portraits that were grounded in her self-consciousness of growing up to be an artist and also positioning herself as a modern woman. Her nuanced persona could easily slip from western outfit into a traditional brocaded sari or masquerade the bohemian and get into roles other than the domestic. She drew a series of self-portraits in pencil when she was barely 14, learning the skills to transcribe, transform and transmit varied moods and moments through it.

In art historian Rakhee Balam's words, "The self-portraits display the artist moving from girl to woman to artist as she explored a sensuality that ranges from the heavy-handed to the subtle. Sher-Gil casts herself in a serious light in her Self-Portrait with Easel (1930), moving deliberately from the domestic and the intimate context of the nineteenth-century woman artist to the monumental and majestic poses recalling those of Rembrandt and later Van Gogh. Indira dressed as a European gentleman with Amrita dressed as her female partner."

Balam further adds, "At stake was not only a serious and viable artistic career as a woman, but the development of a subjectivity that was being defined through the self-portrait. conscious of being both muse and maker, Sher-Gil took on the position of artist and object with a double consciousness of being both."

The glittering life of Sher-Gil and the reality of her untimely death at the age of 28 could lead one to seek her biography in her self-portraits.

<http://knma.in/exhibition/self-making-amrita-sher-gil-0>

The majority of works by Amrita Sher-Gil in the public domain are with the NGMA, which houses over 100 paintings by this meteoric artist. Born of a Sikh father from an aristocratic, land owning family, and a Hungarian mother, Amrita Sher-Gil's life veered between Europe and India. She was blessed with beauty, breeding, charismatic personality and extra ordinary talent as a painter.

In 1929, she joined the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. Her painting skills were recognized and acclaimed; she loved the bohemian life of artists in Paris. Sher-Gil's painting style at this time reflected the European idiom with its naturalism and textured application of paint. Many of the paintings done in the early 1930s are in the European style, and include a number of self portraits. There are also many paintings of life in Paris, nude studies, still life studied, as well as portraits of friends and fellow students. Of these, the self portraits form a significant corpus. They captured the artist in her many moods- somber, pensive and joyous- while revealing a narcissistic streak in her personality.

Her style underwent a radical change by the mid- 30s. she yearn for India, and by 1934, the family returned. This time, she looked at India with the eyes of an artist. The colours, the textures, the vibrancy and the earthiness of the people had a deep impact on the young artist. In India, she appropriated the language of miniatures.

The complexities of her life- she was of mixed parentage and her art school background in Paris made her both, an insider and outsider, as did her ambivalent sexuality- promoted her to constantly reinvent her visual language. She sought to reconcile her modern sensibility with her enthusiastic response to traditional art-historical resources.

<http://www.ngmaindia.gov.in/sh-amrita.asp>

Amrita's initial works reflected the academic style in which she was taught. But later, she started experimenting and tried representing the non-western body in her paintings. Her paintings had a lot of Gauguin's influence. Most of her paintings reflected the rural side of India. She used an abstract style along with vivid colors influenced by European modernism to depict rural India. Her paintings showed

tangible proximity of the figures in her paintings and extensive use of dark tones for the background.

When Amrita Shergill returned to India in 1934, she went on a never-ending journey to study and learn the traditions of Indian Art. She got majorly influenced by the Mughal art works and the Ajanta paintings. Her journey to South India led her to paint her famous South Indian trilogy - Brides toilette, Brahmacharis and the South Indian Villagers going to market.

Apart from the Ajanta style, Amrita was also fascinated by the Paharari, Mughal and Rajasthani styles. The miniature Mughal, Pahari and Rajasthani paintings of the medieval era were an artistic revelation for Amrita Shergill. In the Village Scene you can see her fascination of Pahari miniatures. In the painting, she portrays a group of village women who are engaged in daily chores such as, chatting with each other and nurturing their children. At one corner there is a basket of red chillis and a red sari on the other end. The women are covered in saris and their faces are in shadow, but each of the women's body language is distinct. The painting shows a mix of both foreign and Indian artistic traditions. She always portrayed women in her paintings as individuals in their own right, vulnerable but at the same time strong and dignified. She loved painting women of rural India and their activities. Often in her paintings, you can find the confined lives of rural Indian women with jaded eyes and gloomy faces.

Amrita's paintings showed her typical fascination for the color red and white. The color scheme she uses in her paintings is vibrant, vivid, intense and glowing. In many of her paintings, one thing was prominent - an exception use of whites. According to her, the use of white would effectively liven up a painting and would illuminate the entire canvas. The use of whites in her compositions just adds a lot of drama.

In three Girls, Hill Men and Hill Women, the depiction seems almost impersonal because she does not approach her subject in a narrative manner that would focus on a particular event, but she rather brings a scene come to life. The figures portrayed in her paintings, were slightly superimposed and are posed statically and silently, almost icon-like. The figures in her paintings render a meaningful moment.

After her southern expedition, her paintings became more grounded with everyday realities. Her later paintings were not overly romanticized or characterized by majestic poses, but were more relaxed and distant. Some examples are - The Swing, Woman at Bath and Woman Resting on Charpoy (all from 1940).

<http://www.itsaveer.com/artsmart/articles/art-style-of-famous-indian-artists/colors-and-style-of-amrita-shergill>

Early Life of Amrita Shergill

Amrita Shergill was born in Budapest, Hungary on 30th January, 1913 to Umrao Singh Shergill Majithia, a Sikh aristocrat and a Sanskrit and Persian scholar and Marie Antoinette Gottesmann, a Jewish Opera singer from Hungary. As her life unfolds, we come to know that she spent most of early childhood in Budapest. She was the niece of Indologist Ervin Baktay. He guided her and gave her an academic foundation to develop on.

Education of Amrita Shergill

In 1921, her family shifted from Hungary to Shimla. There Amrita developed an interest in the art of painting. Thus, she took tuitions from an Italian sculptor in Shimla. When in 1924, her teacher moved back to Italy, Amrita and her mother also followed him. In Italy, she joined Santa Anunciata, a Roman Catholic institute.

Amrita Shergil received exposure there to the works of the Italian masters, which furthered fanned her interest in painting. She received formal training of painting at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, under Lucien Simon. At that time, she was deeply influenced by some European painters. Her paintings mirror a strong influence of the Western modes of painting.

Career of Amrita Shergill

Amrita Shergil returned to India in 1934 and since then, began her never-ending journey in the field of Indian art traditions. In India Mughal miniatures schools and Ajanta paintings had a great impact on her. When she journeyed to the southern parts of India, the famous South-Indian trilogy paintings came into being by her brush and paint. She evolved her own distinctive style. According to her, it was basically Indian in spirit, subject, and technical articulacy. Now, her paintings took the villagers, the poor and beggars as subjects.

Famous Paintings by Amrita Shergill

Amrita Shergill's gangling and sharp figures of the poor are cloaked in homespun materials. They look flimsy and forlorn. Perhaps, reflecting her inner glum. The originality and uniqueness of Ajanta and Ellora, the sumptuous murals at the Mattancheri Palace in Cochin and the power of the Kushan sculpture she saw at Mathura, portray her work. She became familiar with Indian miniatures and adored the passionate Basohli School. She attempted to embrace some elements of Rajput painting in her later works, with feeling and flamboyance.

One of her early paintings 'The Torso' was a skillful study of an undressed which was known for its intelligence of drawing and bold modeling. Amrita completed 'Young Girls' in 1933. During her time, India was just coming out of the Purdah age, obligatory during the Muslim rule. So, great courage was required to paint nudes and this she did boldly and beautifully. She was a non-conformist. She painted herself gracefully in the nude. These paintings are today's art treasures. In the negotiation, she blazed a radical trail which has served as a guiding light to other Indian painters.

It is said that she didn't identify with the national struggle for independence. The reason can be perhaps, she didn't know that she would not live long enough to witness how soon that power would revivify Indian art.

Awards, Achievements and Legacy

Amrita Shergill was amongst the most gifted Indian artists of the pre-colonial era. Her works reproduce her unfathomable passion and sense for colors. Her profound understanding of the Indian subjects can also be seen in her paintings.

The Government of India declared her illustrious works as National Art Treasures. The National Gallery of Modern Art in New Delhi is adorned by a majority of Amrita's paintings. Also, there is a road known as the Amrita Shergill Marg in Lutyen's Delhi.

A postage stamp was released in 1978 in India which depicted her painting 'Hill Women'. She inspired a number of contemporary Indian artists. It was in the year 1993 that a renowned Urdu play 'Tumhari Amrita' (1992) by Javed Siddiqi came into being. Her work is the main theme in the contemporary Indian novel 'Faking It' by Amrita Chowdhury.

Amrita Shergill's life was filled with passion and color just like her canvasses. She lived life on her own terms, with exceptional ways. In 1938 Amrita married her Hungarian first cousin, Dr. Victor Egan. With him, she moved to her paternal family's home in Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh. Later, the couple shifted to Lahore. Prior to her untimely demise, she left behind a body of work that establishes her amongst the leading artists of the century and a wonderfully eloquent symbol of synthesis between the East and the West. Amrita Shergil left this world on December 6, 1941 but achievements of Amrita Shergill are eternal, splendid and intense. They are keeping her alive amongst us.

<http://www.itsaveer.com/artsmart/articles/top-10-painters-of-india/achievements-of-amrita-shergill>

check out- <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/amrita-sher-gil/amrita-sher-gil-room-1-early-years-paris>