

Indian Portraiture

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Indian Portraiture is a dialogue between Prabhakar Kolte (Veteran Artist) and Jayaram Poduval (Art historian) on portraiture making. On the spot portraiture for all patrons and visitors on the day of the preview

Indian Portraiture

Fascination of figurative style

Miniature style portraiture – Mughal emperors' patronage – in portrait making and court room painting

During British rule artists from European countries came to India for Nawabs' patronage and painted a lot of portraits of the kings, their families and the nobles in oil – a new medium and the new realistic style in Indian art scenario.

Raja Ravi Varma – portraiture painting

British art schools in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras – a generation of Indians learnt the skill of realistic painting

Influence of European movement and stylistic portraiture

INDIAN PORTRAITS THE FACE OF A PEOPLE

The art of modern portraiture came to India three centuries ago as part of a new, unexplored tradition brought in by colonial artists from Europe. Indian art till then had tended to depict attributes rather than particularities by way of portraits. The change was led by eighteenth century European artists who came in search of sitters and commissions for portraits in Madras and Calcutta, and later in Bombay. They found enough work in British India but were increasingly

drawn to paint the princes among whom the Nawabs of Arcot and Awadh became major patrons. Soon enough, the practice had become prevalent for artists among royal ateliers to experiment with the new medium of oil and canvas, and to emulate the work of the foreign artists while experimenting with chiaroscuro and perspective.

While artists like Raja Ravi Varma were entirely self-taught, soon after, Indian artists trained in the art schools became celebrated portraitists. Among these were M. V. Dhurandhar, N. R. Sardesai, Pestonji Bomanji, M. F. Pithawalla and J. P. Gangooly. It is interesting to note that photography, which had become popular by then, soon came to influence painted portraits, especially in the manner in which it treated or posed the sitter. Painted photographs too were a rage. The realistic mode of representation was questioned by Rabindranath Tagore, who preferred to work on a psychological rather than a physical portrait of people, a style that would lay the roots for modernism in Indian art. Portraits were painted by Amrita Sher-Gil as well as Jamini Roy, among other early modernists, and among the Bombay Progressives M. F. Husain and F. N. Souza proved most adept at it.

Indian Portraits documents two-hundred-and-fifty-years of portraiture, depicting key catalytic moments as well as its masters. Besides being significant as a work of art, it also has anthropological significance in the manner in which it records the Indian elite, the royal families, the women of India (initially, mostly just courtesans, or at most spouses), saints and sinners, national leaders and historical figures, as well as members of the artists' intimate circle of friends and family.