

CONTEMPORARY ART AND ARTIST

In the previous lesson, we learnt about company painting. In this lesson, we will learn about contemporary art and artists. At the beginning of the 20th century, some Indian painters began painting new themes which were directly inspired by the ancient culture of India.



OBJECTIVES

The learner will be able to:

- write about the origin and development of contemporary art;
- identify the work of enlisted Contemporary artists;
- name the title of the enlisted painting; and
- explain the contribution of some of the eminent artists.

During the contemporary uncertainty the biggest name that emerged was Raja Ravi Varma from the state of Travancore. To this day, paintings under his signature are fascinating. He painted stories from epics and ancient texts such as Ramayan, Mahabharat, portraits, etc. These paintings were influenced by European art. Some bold new revivalists emerged that changed the face of the art scene in India. At the forefront were Abanindranath Tagore and Nandalal Bose from West Bengal, who developed their style of art and built up the 'Bengal School', followed by other artist, like Sarada Ukil, Chughtai and Asit Haldar. When Bengal school was spreading its wings in other parts of India, a Hungarian-born Indian artist Amrita Shergill who received her art training in France, appeared in the Indian art arena.

MODULE - 2

Contemporary Art and Artist

Historical Appreciation of
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Rabindranath Tagore created a style of his own. Jamini Roy introduced a modern style based on Kalighat Pata. Then the 'Calcutta Group', the first group of modern artists in India, formed in 1943 in Kolkata. Its leading members included the sculptor Pradosh Das Gupta and the painters Paritosh Sen, Gopal Ghose, Nirode Mazumdar and Zainul Abedin.

Another group of progressive artists decided to express their talents during the turbulent days. Landscapes, nature, and portraits were some of the themes that artists chose during this time. These artists gave a completely new meaning to Indian art in the following years. 'The Progressive Artists Group' had a long list of famous artists like Hussain, Raza, Souza, Bendre, Gade, Ara and Bakre. They held their first exhibition in 1949. Laxman Pai, Kathy Langhammer, Krishen Khanna, Sadanand Bakre, D.G. Kulkarni, A.A. Amelkar, Tyeb Mehta, Kekoo Gandhi, Manishi Dey etc. followed this group later, K.C.S. Panikar and Srinivasalu, student of D.P. Roy Chaudhury established themselves in southern India.

11.1 RAJA RAVI VARMA

Today, many artists are producing great works of art and exhibiting them in India and abroad. Most Indian paintings are finding buyers in other countries too. The uniqueness of Indian Art still lies in its rich cultural heritage.

Basic Information

Raja Ravi Varma was born on April 29, 1848, in the royal palace of Kilimanoor, a small town in the southern state of Kerala. At the age of five, he filled the walls of his house with pictures of animals and drawings from day-to-day life. During these learning years, he had many opportunities to discover and learn new techniques and mediums in the field of painting. His later years spent in Mysore, Baroda, and other parts of the nation enabled him to sharpen his skills and blossom into a complete painter. He was recognized by the British Empire as well as by the Indian Maharajas. Raja Ravi Varma owed his success to systematic training, first in the traditional art of Thanjavoor and then European art techniques. With oil paints applied thickly, Ravi Varma created lustrous, impasted jewellery, brocaded textures, and subtle shades of complexions. He cleverly picked particularly touching stories and moments from the Sanskrit classics. Ravi Varma's representation of mythological characters has become a part of the Indian imagination of the epics. He is known for realistic work and the use of subtle tonal values in his style. His work remains very popular in India. Besides portraits, and portrait-based compositions, his Indian myths and legends. "Nala Damayanti", "Shantanu and Ganga", "Radha and Madhava", "Arjuna and Subhadra", "Vishwamitra and Menaka", "Sitaswayamvaram", "Young Bharat and a lion

Cub”, “The Birth of Sri Krishna”, “Keechaka and Sairandhree” took new forms under his skillful brush. He brought Indian painting to the attention of the larger world. Raja Ravi Varma breathed his last on 2nd October 1906.



Fig. 11.1: Subhadra's Abduction

11.1.1

Title	:	Subhadra's Abduction
Artist	:	Raja Ravi Varma
Period	:	1890 C.E.
Medium	:	Oil on Canvas
Size	:	330 × 59"
Collection	:	Maharaja Fateh Singh Museum, Vadodara, Gujrat



Notes

**Notes****General Description**

This painting is based on an incident from Mahabharata, the great Indian epic in which Arjuna, one of the five Pandavas and Subhadra, are shown. Subhadra is the only daughter of Vasudeva and Rohini. Arjuna is in Sanyasi getup and trying to embrace Subhadra, and Subhadra is trying to avoid it. With oil paints applied thickly, Ravi Varma created lustrous, impasted jewellery, brocaded textures, and subtle shades of complexions and has cleverly painted this moment with the backdrop of the jungle on one side and sanyasi's seat on the other. Sanyasi's seat is adorned with two animal skins, one for sitting and the other as a sun shade. The entire painting has a harmony beyond the mere composition, making it a memorable work.

**INTEXT QUESTIONS 11.1**

1. Where was Raja Ravi Varma born?
2. Raja Ravi Varma owed his success to what?
3. On which epic is this painting based?
4. Who is Arjuna disguised as?

11.2 ABANINDRANATH TAGORE

Now, let us learn about another contemporary artist, Abanindranath Tagore.

Basic Information

In contemporary Indian Painting in Bengal, Abanindranath Tagore is also credited with a key contribution. Born on 7th August 1871, at Jorasanko (Kolkata) at the family residence of Tagores, Abanindranath grew up in a family environment of creativity. He was educated at Sanskrit College, Calcutta and took his painting lessons from British and Italian instructors on a private basis. Havell was instrumental in freeing Abanindranath from European influence and drawing his attention to Mughal and Rajput styles. His later works show some of these influences. Abanindranath's paintings were exhibited in London and Paris in 1913, followed by another international exhibition in Japan in 1919. The largest number of paintings by Abanindranath, over 500, form a part of Rabindra Bharati Society's collection at Jorasanko, Calcutta. His work has been declared as National Art Treasures. Abanindranath's inner urge for liberating Indian art was further inspired by Okakura, a great Japanese artist and art critic who came to India with Swami Vivekananda. Okakura believed that the spirit of a nation expressed itself in its art, and that from the point of view of art all Asia was one. Later, Abanindranath studied



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Japanese art under the guidance of two other Japanese artists, Yokoyama and Hishida. The Japanese influence can be seen in 'Diwali' and "The Siddhas of the upper air". During his tenure at the Government School of Art and Craft, Kolkata, Abanindranath made several changes. He replaced the European paintings on the school walls with Mughal and Rajput paintings. He started a department of fine arts and invited well-known artists from all over India and made it possible for the students to meet them. He made arts like stencil cutting and origami compulsory for all students. In 1907, Tagore established the Indian society of Oriental Art and developed a style known as 'Bengal School', which was responsible for pioneering the Bengal Revivalist movement. Under his guidance, a new generation of painters like Nandalal Bose, Asit Halder, S.N. Gupta and others created their distinct stamps. Some of Abanindranath's famous works are Journey's End 'Bharatmata' and 'The passing of Shahjahan'. Abanindranath Tagore, regarded as the father of India's modern art, died in 1951.



Fig. 11.2: Journey's End

11.2.1

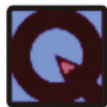
Title	:	Journey's End
Medium	:	Watercolour, wash technique
Artist	:	Abanindranath Tagore
Period	:	1913 C.E.
Collection	:	National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi
Size	:	21 × 15cm



Notes

General Description

Abanindranath combined the Indian tempera techniques with the Japanese water colour evolving a new style of painting called the wash technique. He also developed a mystic style with diffused light background and elongated lyrical figures. Abanindranath had painted this dying camel as a metaphor for the end of a journey; perhaps life has been compared to the journey of man. The scene is bathed in warm evening light. The falling figure of the animals is in deep sorrow, through which the artist has brought out the sombre reality of the cruel final moment. The camel’s folded front leg and neck touching the ground enhance the expressive gesture. The artist has sensitively painted the composition using red, ochre and brown shades. Treatment in this work is influenced by Mughal and Rajput miniatures.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 11.2

Choose the most appropriate option.

1. What is the birthplace of Abanindranath Tagore?

(i) Birbhumi (Kolkata)	(ii) Jorasanko (Kolkata)
(iii) Puri (Odisha)	(iv) Kullu (Himachal Pradesh)
2. What is the medium of the painting ‘Subhadra’s Abduction’?

(i) Pastel colour	(ii) Pencil colour
(iii) Watercolour	(iv) None of these

11.3 JAMINI ROY

Now, you will get to know about one of the famous contemporary artists Jamini Roy.

Basic Information

Jamini Roy was one of the greatest painters of the 20th century. He was born in Bellator village in the Bankura district of Bengal in 1887 into a middle-class family of landowners. At sixteen he was sent to study at the Government school of art in Kolkata.

However, he soon realised that he needed to draw inspiration from his own culture, so he looked to the living folk and tribal art for inspiration. He was most influenced by the Bankura terracotta toys and Kalighat Pata Chitra with its bold sweeping brush strokes. He prepared his earth colours crushed in tamarind glue or egg white. Jamini used the traditional tempera technique. In preparation for the canvas, he used cow dung. His underlying quest was threefold: to capture the essence of

simplicity embodied in the life of the older people, to make art accessible to a wider section of people, and to give Indian art its own identity. Jamini Roy's presentation of Santhal drummers, blacksmiths, Krishna-Balram and women figures like Radha, Gopis, Pujarins, Kitten, Queen on tiger and Mother and Child became very popular.



Notes



Fig. 11.3: Mother and Child

His work has been exhibited extensively in international exhibitions and can be found in many private and public collections, such as the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. He spent most of his life living and working in Calcutta. In 1934, he received the Viceroy's gold medal in an all-India exhibition. In 1954 he was awarded the Padma Bhushan by the Government of India.

Jamini Roy died at the age of 85 in Kolkata in 1972.



Notes

11.3.1

- Title : **Mother and Child**
- Medium : Tempera on canvas
- Artist : Jamini Roy
- Period : 1940
- Collection : National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi
- Size : 46.5 × 116.5

General Description

Jamini Roy developed his own style, which is based on Bengal Folk art form. He prepared his earth colours. For the grey colour he used river mud, for red, he used ritual vermilion used by women. For blue colour he used indigo and for white, he used lime. Moreover, when he wanted black, it was the black of lamp soot (Kaajal). His paintings show a remarkable economy of lines, simplicity of drawing and solidity in compositions. His works are graphic and interesting and beautifully mesh modern and the traditional in flat planes of colour. The unique features of his painting are the dark contour lines, big fish-like eyes and small nose and mouth. This painting is in tempera on canvas showing the mother’s curvy figure in the centre of the painting, holding the child in her left arm. Perfectly balanced with the right arm’s Aalta (red) colour and one foot at the bottom. The child’s arm, leg and forehead have been decorated with white strip marks.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 11.3

Fill in the blanks:

1. the birthplace of Jamini Roy?
2. traditional technique did Jamini use?
3. is the medium of Jamini Roy’s painting?



ACTIVITY

Collect some photographs of contemporary artists and artwork. Now paste the photographs of the artists and their work. Now write the differences between their work in respect of colour use.

Artist	Work	Difference

11.4 AMRITA SHERGIL

Now, let us learn about another famous painter, Amrita Shergil.

Basic Information

Amrita Shergil, one of the most famous painters of India, was born on 30th January 1913 in Budapest, Hungary. Her mother was a Hungarian singer. In 1921, her family shifted from Hungary to the beautiful hill station of Shimla. During her stay in Shimla, Amrita became interested in painting and started taking tuition from an Italian sculptor living there. Amrita Shergil received exposure to the works of Italian artists. She received formal training in painting in Paris under Lucien Simon. During that time, she was greatly influenced by European painters like Paul Cezanne and Paul Gauguin. Her paintings reflect a strong influence of the western modes of painting.



Fig. 11.4: Bride's Toilet

Amrita Shergil returned to India in the year 1934 and, from then onwards, began her never-ending journey in the field of the traditions of Indian art. In the country, she was influenced by the Mughal miniatures schools as well as the Ajanta paintings. The paintings of Amrita Shergil show a significant influence of the western modes of painting. Her works also reflect her deep passion and sense for colours. Her deep understanding of Indian subjects is visible in her paintings. The works of Amrita Shergil have been declared National Art Treasures by the Government of India. A number of her paintings adorn the 'National Gallery of



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Modern Art' in New Delhi. 'Fruit Vendors', 'Group of Three Girls', 'Hill Women', 'Woman at bath' and 'Sleep' are some of her famous paintings. Amrita married her Hungarian first cousin, Dr Victor Egan, in 1938. After that, she moved with her husband to her paternal family's home in Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh. Later, the couple shifted to Lahore. In 1941, at the age of 28, Amrita Shergil departed this world.

11.4.1

Title	:	Bride's Toilet
Medium	:	Oil on canvas
Artist	:	Amrita Shergil
Period	:	1937 C.E.
Collection	:	National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi
Size	:	144.5 × 86cm

General Description

Although her works were very varied, Sher-Gil's women are of special interest. Her aim was always to create an art imbued with soul. The women in Sher-Gil's paintings are grave and calm with suppressed feelings. 'Bride's Toilet' is a composition with five figures and two earthen pots. Colour contrasts of the bodies of the bride and the maids bind the composition. The rhythm of the painting is achieved by the use of hand gestures. One maid is doing the bride's hair, and the other is holding a pot. The bride's hands are painted with red colour (Alta). The polka dot pattern blouse of one maid is a unique feature in this painting. The colour of this painting is red, pink, green, white, pale brown and mauve makes it a well-balanced and harmonious artwork. This painting is influenced by the Ajanta murals and Rajput paintings. Here she has combined her European technique with the Ajanta style. The influence of Paul Gauguin in this painting can be clearly seen by matching the face of the central maid and the painting of 'Tahitian women' of Paul Gauguin.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 11.4

1. Name the place of birth of Amrita Shergil.
2. Where did she spend her early childhood?
3. Write the names of Amrita Shergil's three famous paintings.
4. What is the medium of this painting?

11.5 M.F. HUSSAIN

M.F. Hussain is one of the famous contemporary artist; you need to know about his contribution in the field of art.

Basic Information

M.F. Hussain, or Maqbool Fida Hussain, was born on 17th September 1915 in the Pandharpur town of Maharashtra. He is one of the most famous artists in India, both at the national and international level.

He moved to Bombay (Now Mumbai) in 1935. MF Hussain started his painting career as a painter of cinema hoardings. It was only in the 1940s that this work started getting some recognition. In the year 1947, he joined the Progressive Artist's Group.



Notes



Fig. 11.5: Naad Swaram - Ganeshayem

Hussain has done a series of paintings on several subjects, including the British Raj, on major cities such as Calcutta, Banaras, Rome, and Beijing; on the Epics- Mahabharata and Ramayan; a whole series on Mother Teresa, on the major nine religions of the world and a series on horses. He has been awarded the Padma Bhushan. Some time back, Hussain started directing and producing movies. His movies include Gaja Gamini Meenakshi: A Tale of three cities. His film 'Through the Eyes of a Painter' was shown at the Berlin Film Festival and won a 'Golden Bear'.

M.F. Hussain passed away in London on 9th June 2011 after a silent heart attack.

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Notes

11.5.1

Title	:	Naad Swaram Ganeshayem
Medium	:	Acrylic on canvas
Artist	:	M.F. Hussain
Period	:	2004 C.E.
Collection	:	Private collection
Size	:	48.2 × 58.4 cm

General Description

Hussain's name is a metaphor for contemporary Indian art, and his paintings speak for themselves. His paintings are a combination of mythology and modern life. He developed a simple style using strong, bold lines and bright colours after going through rigorous self-discipline in his works. Here Ganesha has two heads in different colours; the heads have one tooth each. Playing Naad with one hand, from an other hand he is bouncing a pale modak or may be a moon. Again one arm is yellow in colour and the other is red. The multicoloured background has red, brown, grey, ochre, green and black. To create maximum contrast, the white dhoti in Indian style is depicted. The treatment of background and foreground reminds us of Paul Cezanne's work.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 11.5

1. What is the medium of this painting?
2. Name the instrument shown in this painting.
3. Name five colours used in this painting.

11.6 K.K. HEBBAR

Dear learner, now we will learn about one of the most well-known contemporary artists K.K. Hebbar.

Basic Information

During his early years, known as his Kerala Period (because he extensively painted landscapes of the state), Hebbar was highly influenced by Paul Gauguin and Amrita Sher Gil. Hebbar's style was a unique combination of impressionistic and expressionistic techniques. A strong social concern made him focus on subjects



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like poverty, hunger and destruction. At the other end of the spectrum lie his drawings and paintings that capture the grace of dance performances, influenced by his study of the classical Indian dance form, Kathak. Throughout his career, Hebbar never hesitated to experiment and enriched his artistic vocabulary through several trips around the country, including those two important historical sites like the ancient caves at Karla and Maharashtra. One of the sketches from this particular trip won him a gold medal from the Bombay Art Society. Kattingeri Krishna Hebbar was born in 1911 at Kattingeri in the Udupi district of Karnataka. Despite training in the Western tradition, Hebbar's body of work remained rooted in the folk traditions of India. After some initial training in Mysore and later in Mumbai at the Sir J.J. School of Art, he started his career as an art instructor at the Sir J.J. School of Art and taught there between 1940 and 1945. He then went to Europe to study art at the Academy of Julian in Paris. Hebbar was honoured with a number of awards through his career, including Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan and the Maharashtra Shasan 'Gourav Puraskar'. Hebbar died in 1996 at the age of 85.

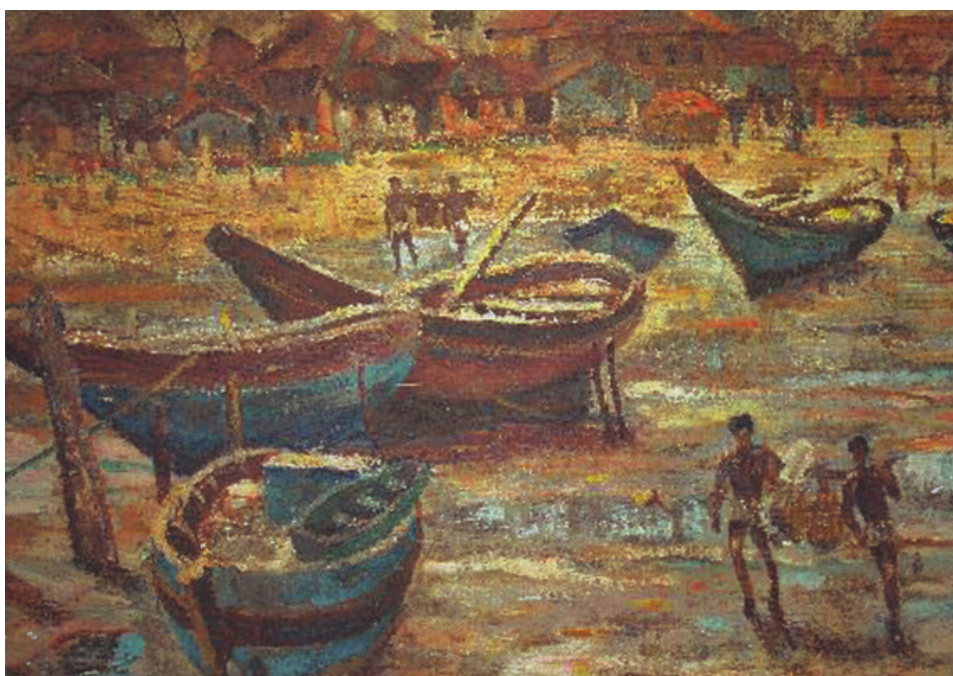


Fig. 11.6: Untitled

11.6.1

Title	:	Untitled
Medium	:	Watercolour on handmade paper
Artist	:	K.K Hebbar
Period	:	1938 C.E.
Collection	:	Private collection

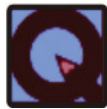
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General Description

K.K Hebbar is known for his artworks reflecting the reality of India. He is greatly cherished for his paintings of human beings that are drawn from the forms and colours of India. In this painting, he has drawn a coastal town of Kerala. Fishermen and their boats are shown in the foreground and their huts in the backdrop. The hustle and bustle of morning activity is visible. Ochre, brown, orange, blue and grey shades have been used to create a perfect coastal scene. A bold brush stroke with the transparency of the water colour can be seen.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 11.6

1. Write the names of the Indian and foreign artists who influenced K.K. Hebbar the most.
2. At what age did Hebbar die?
3. Write the names of colours used in this painting.



WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT

Art	Contemporary	Artists
Subhadra's Abduction	→ Work	→ Raja Ravi Verma → Kerala
Journey's End	→ Work	→ Abanindranath Tagore → West Bengal
Mother and Child	→ Work	→ Jamini Roy → West Bengal
Bride's Toilet	→ Work	→ Amrita Shergil → Hungry
Nand Swaram Ganeshayam	→ Work	→ M.F. Hussain → Maharashtra
Untitled	→ Work	→ K.K. Hebbar → Kerala

LEARNING OUTCOMES

The learner can

- use the wash technique and style in their artwork;
- apply the new method and medium in the field of painting.



TERMINAL EXERCISE

1. Who are the famous Indian Contemporary Artists?
2. Write a short note on Raja Ravi Verma.
3. Why did Progressive Artists' Group become more popular?
4. Write about Jamini Roys's painting style.
5. Write down the short profile of Amrita Sher-Gil.
6. Who called M.F. Hussain the Picasso of India' and why?
7. Name the Paris Academy where Hebbar got his higher education of art.
8. What was the highest award bestowed on Hebbar by the government of India?
9. Naad Swaram Ganeshayem painting is influenced by whom?
10. Write the colours of Ganesha's arms.
11. What is the size of Naad Swaram Ganeshayem painting?



Notes



ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTIONS

11.1

1. Kilimanoor, a small town in the southern state of Kerala.
2. He owed his success to systematic training, first in the traditional art of Thanjavoor and then in European art
3. Mahabharata
4. Sanyasi

11.2

1. (ii) Jorasanko, (Kolkata)
2. (iii) Watercolour

11.3

1. Bankura district of Bengal
2. Tempera
3. Watercolour

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Notes

11.4

1. Budapest city of Hungary.
2. Spent her early childhood in a village in Hungary.
3. 'Hill Women', 'Woman at bath' and 'Sleep'.
4. Oil on canvas.

11.5

1. Acrylic on canvas
2. Naad
3. Red, brown, grey, ochre, green and black..

11.6

1. Paul Gauguin and Amrita Sher-Gil.
2. 85 years.
3. Ochre, brown, orange, blue and grey.

GLOSSARY

Fascination	arousal of interest
Revivalists	a person who brings back former ideals
Heritage	ancestry
Lustrous	glowing
Enchant	to attract
Embrace	to put one's arm around
Abducted	to carry forcibly
Oriental	The east
Evolving	Develop gradually
Metaphor	a literary figure of speech
Enhancing	to increase
Extensively	in a widespread way
Aristocrat	a member of noble class
Controversial	disputation
Thrived	to prosper
Cherished	to care tenderly