



## **Circle of Art: The Three Tagores**

Curated by Ella Datta

An exhibition at the National Gallery of Modern Art, Jaipur House  
8 May to 15 June, 2011

The 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) is an appropriate time to remember the impact of his art on modern Indian visual culture. The Twenties of the last century when Rabindranath blossomed as an artist was an interesting period when all kinds of pulls were guiding the course of modern Indian art.

Rabindranath's artistic genius had a spontaneous beginning but one must also remember the role of the creative and aesthetic milieu that he came from. Rabindranath's family circle was engaged endlessly in creative experiments in language, literature, music, dance and theatre. Visual art was not an alien practice

for them. Other family members, besides Rabindranath, who gave a new direction to modern Indian art, were nephews Gaganendranath Tagore (1867-1938) and younger brother Abanindranath Tagore (1871-1951) who were also searching for a new visual language.

The amazing artistic experiments of a single family were nurtured by the cultural stirrings that began in Bengal towards the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century and dominated the mindscape of the Bengali elite through the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The search for a new political, social and cultural identity had a profound impact on the Tagore family of Jorasanko in north Kolkata. Added to this ferment, there was the influence of the awakening national consciousness. Rabindranath's individual genius, as also those of his nephews, Gaganendranath and Abanindranath, were rooted in and nurtured by this milieu but they were also stimulated by the dynamics and expressions of the different cultures of the world.

From 1928 onwards, Rabindranath began to paint images laden with memory and fantasy with a frenzy. He used very simple material – any available paper, coloured ink, crayon, gouache pigment, brush, rags, fingers with a manic passion. He painted heads, figures, bizarre animals and flora, and landscapes of the mind.

At the time Rabindranath blossomed as an artist to reckon with in 1928, Abanindranath was already a well-established painter and writer. Unlike his uncle and elder brother, Abanindranath had formal training in art from Olinto Ghilardi and Charles Palmer. However, he was instinctively drawn towards the delicacy and subtlety of Mughal miniatures and to the wash technique that he learned from visiting Japanese artists and that enabled him to create an atmosphere, a mood.

In the late Twenties of the last century, when Rabindranath poured out haunting images from the deep recesses of his imagination, Abanindranath had emerged from his nationalist phase and was painting portraits of people real, historical and imaginary. He was also painting landscapes and doing paintings of animals and birds.

Gaganendranath, Jaya Appasamy says, also began paintings at an advanced age, although he was very much involved in the new art movement shaping up at the south verandah of Jorasanko. He painted for his own pleasure and attempted a wide range of subjects. Of particular interest are Gaganendranath's satirical caricatures of the society of his times. Gaganendranath's fascination for theatre, photography and the play of light and shade is reflected in his images. Although Gaganendranath was very experimental in his visual language his Cubism was not exactly what was practiced in Paris in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. As Jaya Appasamy says that the forms are created from small, angular shapes used "to achieve a kind of futurist disequilibrium and motion."

This exhibition has been mounted from the substantial number of works by the three Tagore's in the permanent collection of the National Gallery of Modern Art, to celebrate Rabindranath Tagore's 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary.