

EXHIBITION
of
DRAWINGS PAINTINGS
ENGRAVINGS POTTERY
AND LEATHERWORK
BY
SIR RABINDRANATH TAGORE



246 Roses

GOVERNMENT SCHOOL OF ART
28 CHOWRINGHEE ROAD - CALCUTTA

Exhibition of Drawings
Paintings Engravings
Pottery *and* Leatherwork

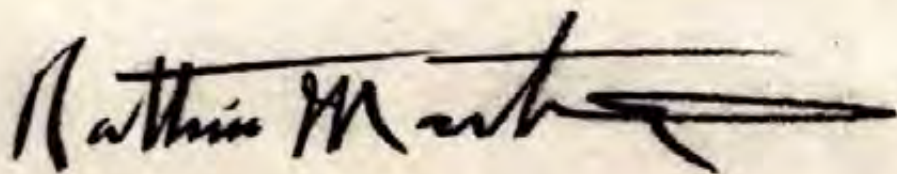
BY

SIR RABINDRANATH
- TAGORE -

Government School of Art
28, Chowringhee Road - Calcutta
February 20 to 29 - - 1932



41 Siva in Kailasa



FOREWORD

WHEN the news first came to India that Sir Rabindranath Tagore was exhibiting his pictures in Paris, it came as a surprise to many of his countrymen who had not learnt that their beloved and world-famous Poet was a great painter too. They were familiar with the immortal contributions of his mighty pen which had excited the admiration of the whole world, but they did not know that he could handle a brush as skilfully. Those who had opportunities of coming into close touch with the living "Rishi" of India knew something more. To a faithful devotee of Art like myself, he is not only a master-mind, a great poet and a thinker, but also a creator of Art as well. It is not only his poetry that appeals to popular imagination and touches the subtle depths of the human heart, it is not only his melodious voice that gives us joy and shows the real man in him, but his paintings, which are no less valuable results of his creative power, have also a profound significance to all lovers and critics of Art.

Those who have carefully studied the life history of the Poet must have been struck by the fact that Rabindranath was born (on May 6, 1861) in a highly talented family,—a family of artists, poets, philosophers and musicians. The Jorasanko House in Calcutta was a place of pilgrimage to men of Art and Letters. Thus Rabindranath's boyhood was spent in an atmosphere throbbing with the pulsation of a new life in the field of artistic creation. Men who had made their mark in the field of letters, young aspirants—worshippers in the Temple of Æsthetic Beauty and Intellectual Joy—all met there and engaged themselves in the study of literary and æsthetic culture. It was not infrequently that celebrated personalities hailing from other parts of the world, carrying with them new thoughts and ideals, came to the Jorasanko House and joined this Intellectual Fraternity. Among them were many noted painters of foreign lands including some celebrated artists and art-critics, especially from Japan, like Kakuzo Okakura, Yokoyama Taikwan, Shimamura Kwanzan, J. Katsuta and Arai Kampo, who executed some fine pieces of drawing and painting in Tagore House at Jorasanko. As a boy of 16, Rabindranath visited England and was fascinated by the works of Turner and other celebrated European artists. His Poetry as well as his artistic

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predilections were among the forces working behind the revival of Indian Art which had begun during the first decade of the present century. When the history of the New Bengal School of Painting is written, the impartial historian will not overlook the immense influence which Rabindranath exerted on his nephews Gaganendranath and Abanindranath, in shaping their ideas and giving impetus to their originality.

It was in the year 1907, when I was a student at the Santiniketan School, that I first came to know of the poet's great interest in painting. Finding that I had already executed some drawings for our school magazines as well as a number of artistic scenes for the theatrical performances organised by the students, Rabindranath encouraged me and provided me with materials as one keenly interested in the art of painting.

It is not perhaps known to many that the poet walks in a manner which makes his entrance difficult to be felt by anyone who had not seen him coming, and it was for this reason that we, the teachers and boys of Santiniketan, used to be always on the alert lest we should be taken unawares by our "Guru Dev" who was in the habit of quietly slipping into our rooms when we least expected him. One incident still survives in my memory. It was a sultry afternoon in the month of April in 1909, in the quietude of my room at Santiniketan Asram I was busy with my brush painting a large picture in European style—that picture is still in my possession—forgetful of time and space and utterly lost in the beauty of creation. As I went on with this, suddenly I felt a touch on my shoulder, and turning back I saw our "Guru Dev" smiling on me in his ever-pleasant way. I looked up to him in astonishment, but soon realised that it was one of those pleasant surprise visits which kept us on the *qui vive*. With his mysterious smile on his lips, he asked me to follow him in his rooms upstairs of what is now known as the "Guest House." There he opened a drawer, pulled out a magnificent black leather bound drawing book containing some head and figure studies from life, done in pencil, and some decorative designs in ink, done with his writing pen on pencil drawings. Among the pure pencil-sketches I noticed a portrait of his wife and among the decorative designs there were scenes depicting a boat floating on the waves of the sea with a fair damsel reclining on it. He handed over the drawing book to me along with those sketches done by him, which were a revelation to me,—and I think even to-day they will be a revelation to many of my friends—to make sketches in the same book which

contained the first products of the world-famous Poet's attempts at drawing. He also gave me some reproductions of old Rajput and Mogul drawings, telling me that if I wanted to copy any style, I should copy the style followed in these drawings by Indian Masters. When handing over the drawing book and the reproductions to me he particularly asked me to show him all my efforts at painting, and I used to do so.

In 1912, when Rabindranath went to England he became a great friend of Sir William Rothenstein. The Poet came into the most intimate contact with the great painter.

It was in the year 1913 that I accompanied the poet to Ramgarh Hills near Almorah. When I was engaged in my work, he used to sit by me and keenly watch me at work on my pictures. One morning he took my sketch-book and made three pencil sketches, one portraying his daughter-in-law (Srimati Pratima Devi) and the others portraying my humble self. These drawings are still in my possession. An idea of his skill in colour-painting at that time can be gathered from the fact that one day he told me, smiling in his usual way, that if it were possible to show up in colour the dazzling brilliance visible on the oakleaves glittering in the sun by the hill-side, he might have produced that effect by striking a diamond on the picture.

About the end of 1915, he took three of us to his estate at Shilaidah to do some sketches of village life and rural scenes, and he showed great interest in them.

His interest in painting had deepened so much that he began to take a lively interest in Indian paintings and drawings and started making a collection of art specimens and books on art and took Indian pictures with him on his tour. His keen interest in Art induced him to select an artist who would accompany him in his tour in Japan towards the beginning of 1916. The selection fortunately fell on me and I availed myself of this rare opportunity. There, again, he became the guest of the greatest artist of Japan, Yokoyama Taikwan. He always made a point of never letting slip any opportunity of seeing Japanese pictures. Going only on a week-end visit to Mr. T. Hara's brilliant art collection at Yokohama, he remained there for three months to study the various phases of Japanese and Chinese paintings. When he returned to India in 1917, he decided to start an Art School at Santiniketan

and it was founded in 1920. How deeply he was attracted by the beauty of the art of painting could be seen from the fact that after starting the Kalabhavan at Santiniketan, he inaugurated a competition of paintings, himself contributing pictures and becoming one of the judges of the competition. Painting was taken up seriously by the poet in 1928. Drawing, designing and painting of varying sizes were first to engage his attention and he produced some excellent work. In July, 1928, he stayed with me for a period in the Government School of Art and keenly noted the different aspects of Art.

Friends and admirers of Rabindranath have often wondered at the sudden transformation of the Poet into the Painter. But it is not generally known how keen a student and lover of art the World-Poet has always been and it is no exaggeration to state that in his extensive tours, no museum of art or studio worth visiting in any country, has escaped his close attention. Works by Zorn, Wiegand, Rodin, Albert Besnard, Bourdelle, Epstein, Bone, Sturge Moore, John, Orpen, Rothenstein and others have been studied and appreciated.

It may be asked why the World-Poet, in the evening of his life, has almost forsaken his masterly pen to wield the brush. The reply is not far to seek. What appears to not an inconsiderable number of critics as the effeminate characteristics which mar the beauty of the productions of the New Bengal School of Art, has not escaped the notice of such a keen observer as our Poet. On the other hand, in Rabindranath's opinion, it is idle in these days to make efforts to revive anything approaching the sublime grandeur of the Ajanta School. The Poet-Painter makes an entirely new departure in representing the reality of life with his own vigorous master-strokes which know no faltering. In his seventieth year, the poet's fingers are tense, and show no sign of tremulousness. His pen and ink pictures are veritable masterpieces. The figures drawn by the Poet with a single stroke of the brush vividly bring out the vitality of the inspired art of Rabindranath. His paintings have in them great movements. His portraits are the very embodiments of vitality of expression. His ultra-modern delineations baffle description. He is a great designer, and his subjects bear eloquent testimony to his grand conception.

It is a common complaint that Rabindranath's paintings are more or less unintelligible. It cannot be denied that his paintings appear at first sight to be shrouded in mystery. That is what should be naturally expected from the

High Priest of Mystic Poetry. It is true that a sense of mysticism pervades the majority of Rabindranath's paintings. But once the veil is lifted, their meaning becomes as clear as daylight.

What shall I write about the technique of our great Poet-Painter? His genius for originality is marvellous. His facile brush sweeps with ease on all kinds of paper and he will not disdain painting on a sheet of newspaper when the ordinary sources fail him. He uses all kinds of paints and pigments, although he prefers the use of liquid colours. It must be admitted that the subtle effects produced in his masterpieces, depend a great deal on the use of mediums which are peculiarly his own. As a primer, he has been successful in using even juices from the petals of various flowers. He uses different kinds of oil, such as cocoanut, mustard, etc., to produce a pleasing gloss.

As regards the composition of his paintings, our Poet-Painter displays masterly skill. Once he determines the subject of his picture, the outline and spacing come off spontaneously. There is not the slightest faltering and indecision. The work progresses with a series of sweeping movements and the balanced composition remains intact. The lines are drawn with a sure hand and the spacing is so accurate as is only possible from the most experienced artists with years of practice behind them. I have often marvelled at the supreme ease with which he spaces the composition and carries the work through.

During last year he has done some coloured chalk drawings, pastels, and a series of marvellous dry-points and etchings, and I shall not be surprised if he takes up modelling and sculpturing next year.

In conclusion, I invite my countrymen to give the first art-products of the world-famous Poet a careful study. One has to realise, in trying to assess the true merit of a work of art, that Art has a language of its own which none but the initiated can understand and fully appreciate. The paintings of the poet which have come to light by this time, have a long history behind them. They are, like his poetry, thought-provoking and mysterious. There is some peculiarity in his method of painting which is not to be found elsewhere. He does not sit down like an ordinary artist after collecting the necessary materials, as brushes, colours and so on. The main instrument he requires is his pen whereby he usually draws his pictures or gives a concrete

shape to his emotions. Rabindranath's paintings are simple but full of vigour. It must be remembered that the work so far done by the poet is the result of the poet's unconscious acquisition of the technique of painting over more than half a century, his close association with the most celebrated painters of the world and his minute observation of the details of the technique of the art of painting. If we give his pictures a careful and sympathetic study, their great merit and their true significance would undoubtedly be clear. Already his paintings have attracted world-wide attention. Very high prices were paid for them in Germany, America, France and other places. Museums and Private Collections in the west bought his pictures and paid prices to the extent of 400 to 700 dollars each. This exhibition offers an opportunity for the first time in this country to secure specimens of his priceless paintings and drawings with his autograph at a moderate price as the illustrated catalogue will show.

The country is indebted to Rabindranath in many respects. The world expects more illumination from the bearer of the great torch—the real teacher of mankind guiding all in the thorny walks of life. The country offers her united prayer to the Almighty that he may be granted a long life to continue to give to the world his great message of spiritual love and serene pleasure and joy in the Limitless (*Bhuvananda*).

MUKUL DEY

28 CHOWRINGHEE
CALCUTTA

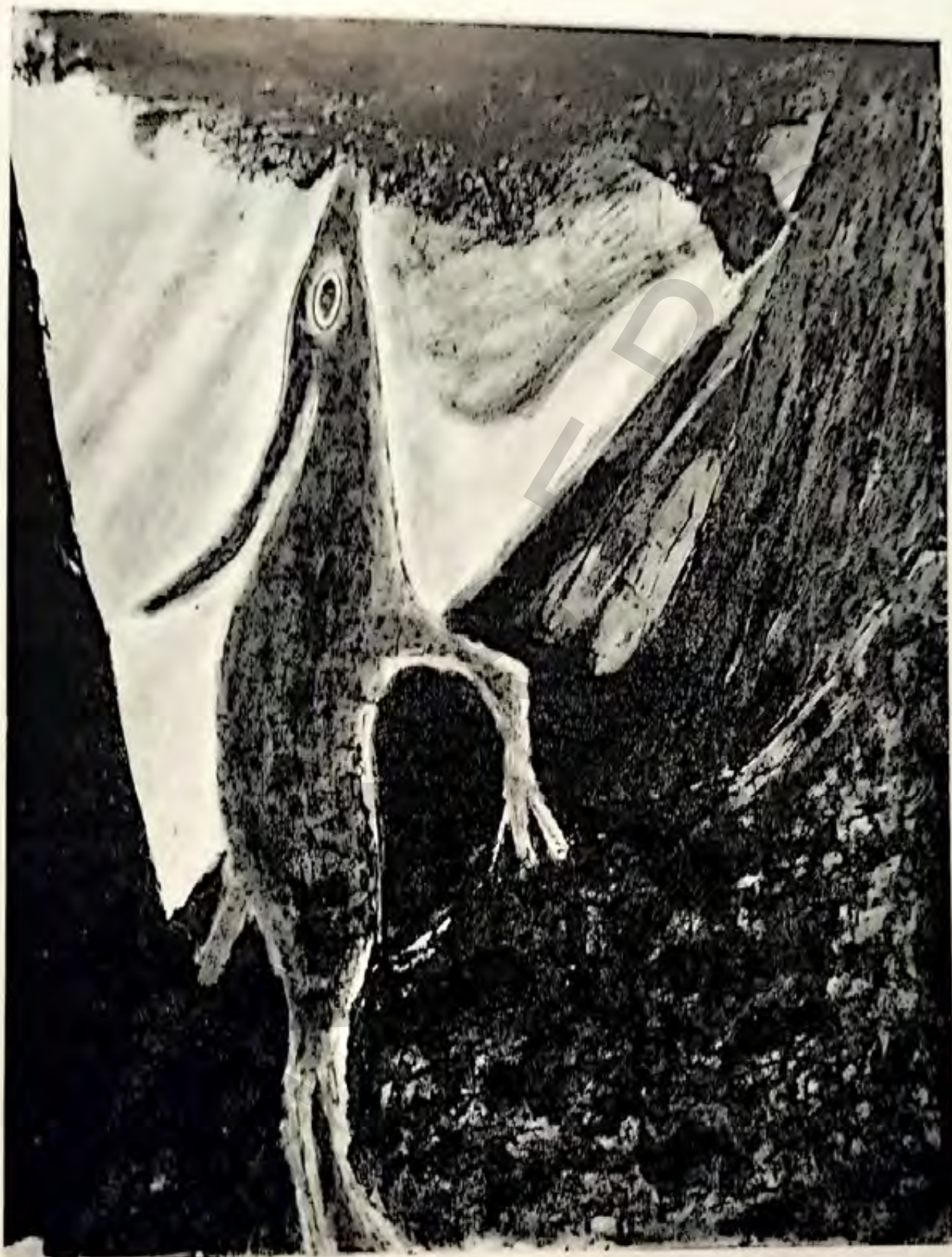
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8 Rescuing the Victim



30 The Exhausted Pilgrims



37 The Fawn

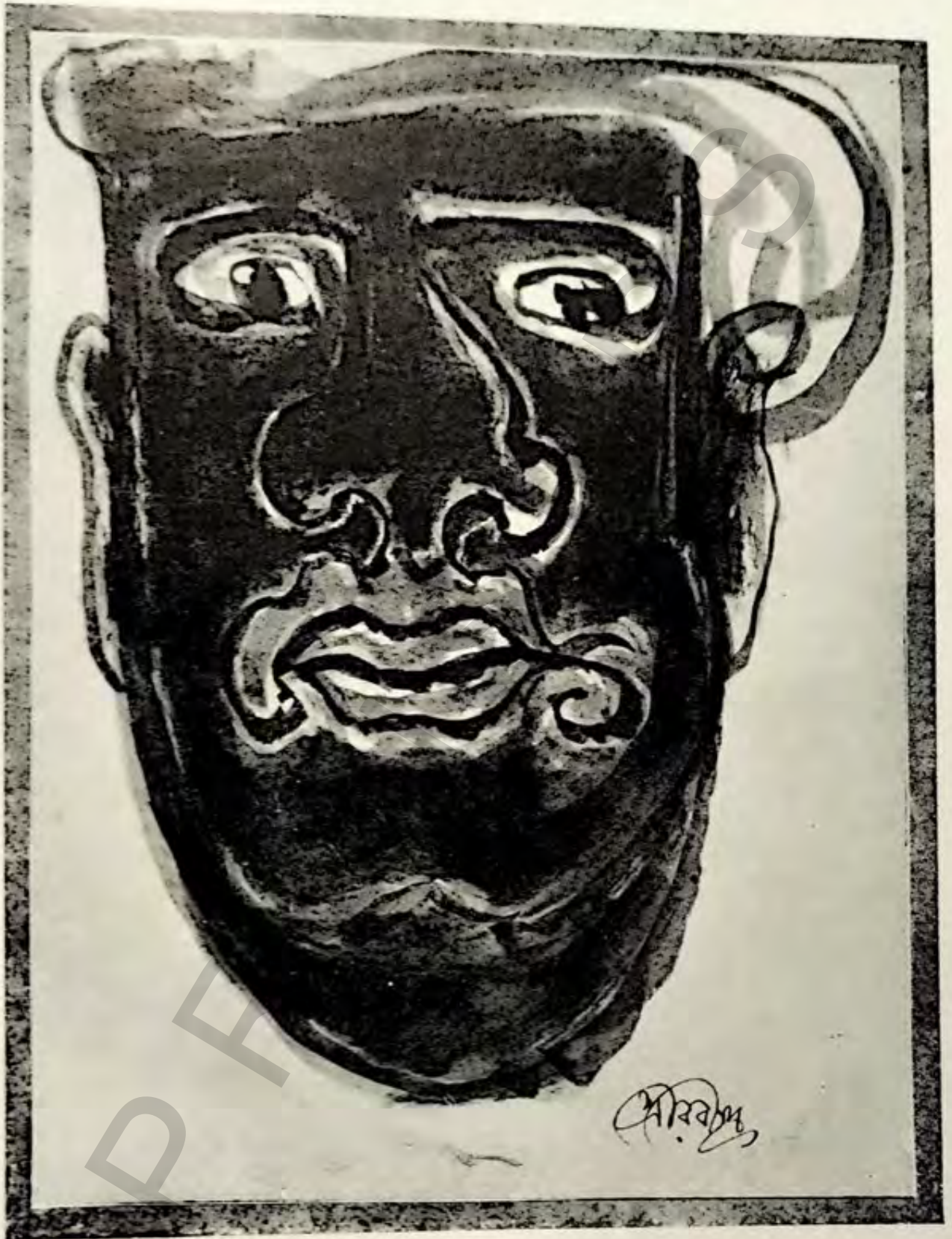






85 A Lady of High Degree

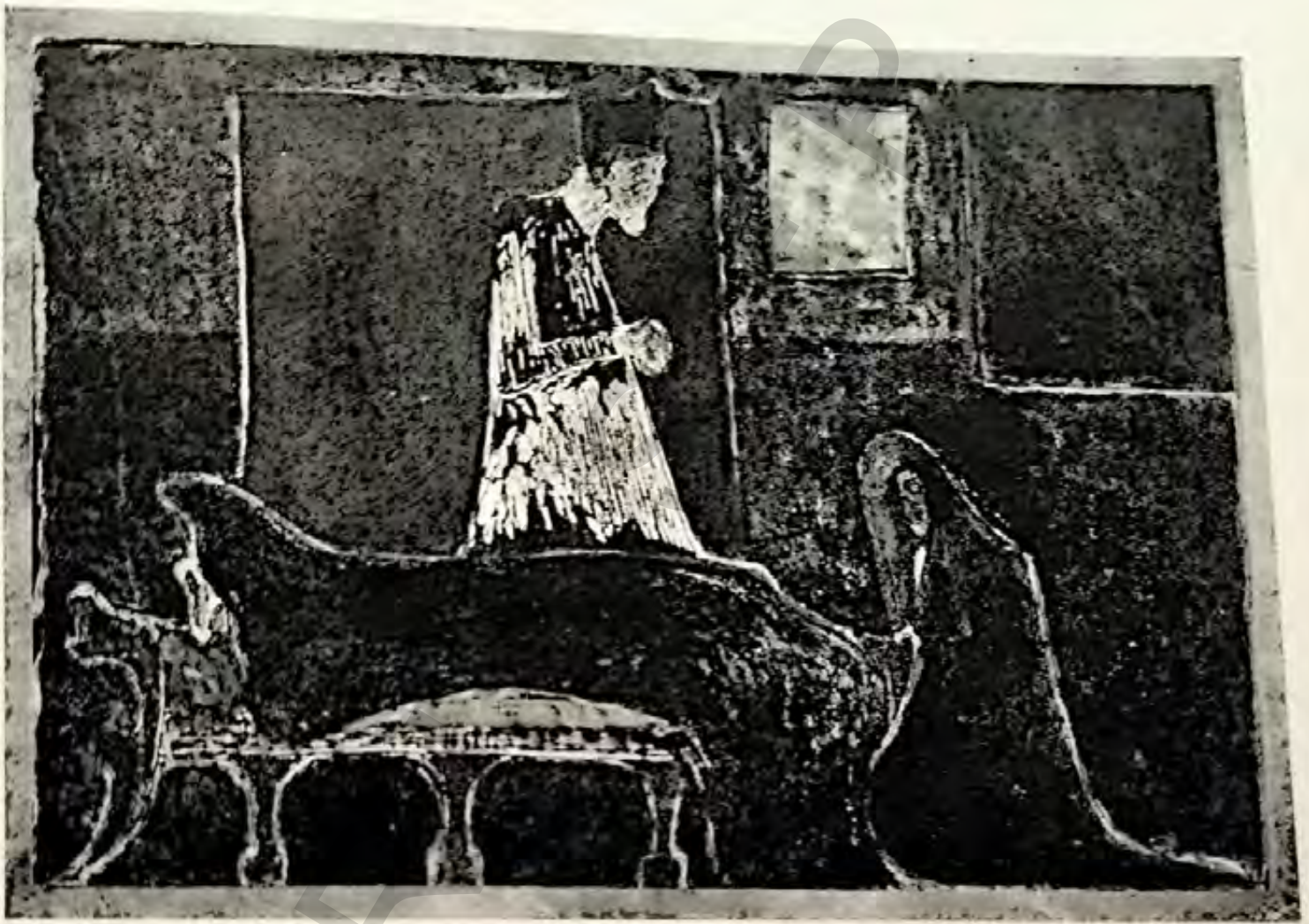




176 Design for a Pottery Vessel



181 The Abode of God—In the Heaven or in the Temple?



191 She has Committed Suicide!



203 In the Moon Light



208 The Pierced Heart



213 Lovers in the Moonlight



223 A Landscape



232 Pallaram, a Durwan—Illustration of a Character from a Story



251 My All in All



255 Awaiting His Arrival



259 Mother and Child

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265 A Terra-cotta Vase designed and painted by the Poet—
Rabindranath's first and only Pottery work