

Dictionary of Indian Art and Artists by Pratima Sheth

Pratima Sheth represents the best that the cultured, educated Indian has to offer: Reggie Massey

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This monumental volume is much more than a dictionary. It is an encyclopaedia. There are 1300 entries on painting, drawing, prints, sculpture, galleries and institutions with over 600 entries on artists living and dead. A veritable feast for the eye are the 300 colour illustrations and 21 black and white photographs. Many artistic terms and concepts are explained and the various techniques, styles and schools of Indian art (from Ajanta to Yantra) are commented upon. The book is a pleasure to handle and the cross references are a tremendous asset which make it a user-friendly information tool for professional and amateur alike.

Mumbai based Pratima Sheth, an established painter, was trained at the well known Sir JJ School of Art in that city. It was on the campus of this art school that the Nobel prize winner Rudyard Kipling was born in 1865 when his father, Lockwood Kipling, was the first dean of the school. Kipling, few are aware, was the first writer in the English language to have become a Nobel Laureate.

During her first exhibition in Germany (in 1991) Pratima Sheth became aware of a tragic gap that hindered an understanding of contemporary Indian art. Much had been published on Mughal and Rajput miniatures, and even the Company style

and the Tagore school had received attention, but there was no up to date record of what was happening in present day India. She decided to set matters right and started work on this book in 1993. Now, at last, her labours have borne fruit.

She says: 'Comprehensive research, spanning several institutions all over India, contacts with nearly 2000 artists through detailed questionnaires, personal calls and visits covered this period of trial and tribulation.' I know exactly what she is talking about since I too have had 'trial and tribulation' when tracking down musicians and dancers. Artists of all kinds, including actors and writers, are a difficult lot to deal with. Those whom the gods have cursed with the creative urge are always suspicious of well meaning men and women who try to help them. Artists are not used to meeting up with straight forward people trying to be of use. They labour under the impression, erroneous as it happens to be, that the whole wide world has ganged up against them. This, patently, is not so. Pratima Sheth, being an artist herself, sides with the artists. As I do and always will.

This book is a testament to the author's belief and faith in art in general and to Indian art in particular. Her spread is catholic and her interests widespread. She represents the best that the cultured, educated Indian has to offer. We have, for instance, entries on subjects as diverse as Abstract Painting, Academic Art, Arabesque, Bengal Revivalism, Ceramics, Cross-Hatching, Cubism, Devanagari

Script, Expressionism, Fauvism, Glass Painting, Hyper-Realism, Islamic Art, Jain Miniatures, Kalpa-Sutra, Lost Wax Process, Mandala, Naturalism, Oleography, Papier Mache, Raga, Sand Painting, Stained Glass, Tantra, Underpainting, Varnish, Wall Painting, Yoga, and Zinc.

Pratima Sheth has very sensibly got contributions from

four scholars each of whom is a specialist in his own subject. Thus 'Glimpses of the Evolution of Indian Art' by Alan Amroliwala and Radha Kumari; 'Art, Nation and Identity: Colonial India - The First Phase' by Partha Mitter; and 'Preservation of Art Objects' by O.P. Agrawal add greatly to the value of this marvellous book.

Reginald Massey's latest book is *India: Definitions and Clarifications* (Hansib, London). Last year he was *Writer-in-Residence* at the Wolfsberg think tank in Switzerland.

