

KUMAR GALLERY

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Prodosh Dasgupta – Poetry in Metal



Fallen Woman 1970

“In my recent experiments in sculpture, through a chance happening I hit upon the idea of making Instant Sculpture in a matter of a few minutes or even seconds. I made it a point to keep my mind blank and thus have the intuitive approach instead of the intellectual, by way of playing with a lump of clay without having any preconceived notion. In the process of the action ? squeezing, twisting, rolling, flattening, pinching etc. suddenly a beautiful form emerges, sometimes in a very realistic fashion, sometimes in a near-abstract form giving certain clues of verisimilitude ? a composition with human, animal or bird form. The interplay of gliding forms, one merging into another or one emerging from the other creates a sense of rhythm.”

– Prodosh Dasgupta 1979 (Taj Catalogue)

Imagine a sculptor who created a language that wove the power of iconographic intensity with the beauty of classicism—one who blended the poetry of bronze into the lean and lithe language of a minimalist mood. This was India’s pioneer of contemporary sculpture Prodosh Dasgupta. At the Lalit Kala Akademi (LKA) in Delhi, art lovers can stand and stare at, at least 55 sculptures of this great master, and what a sojourn this will be.

In a retrospective held at the Kumar Gallery years ago the art critic Kesav Malik wrote: “Prodosh Dasgupta inaugurated the new contemporary period of Indian sculpture. Though a great admirer of the concepts propounded by master sculptors in Europe, yet he was deeply rooted in the fibre of Indian philosophy.”

Kesav Malik further noted: “Prodosh Dasgupta had wondrous capacity for the close ‘reading’ of artworks as well as the gift of synthesizing ideas that proved helpful in his own creations. Though he a clairvoyant insight into art and aesthetics, these crystallized into no narrow theory. Rather, what he made of ideas were highly original formulations.

“His ideas on art were never random, but tools in favor of artistic practice. His study of form in art, led him to reflect on musical rhythm, especially considering that he was primarily a sculptor. In considering sculpture, which is essentially an affair of solid forms, the word rhythm imposed itself on him inevitably. This is how he pressed into shape hard substance like clay, cement, stone or bronze. He would cut away at the material till the imagined form was seen. These too give out the same solid compelling feel.”

Sensitively chosen compositions, subtly encrusted in the cosmic egg shape, breathing a harmony that at once enables instant connoisseurship of traditions whose famous impact on modern art, via Henry Moore, Giacometti and Brancusi, is incidental to their quality and infinitely better than any modern art, by and large. In fact a few years ago at Museum of Modern Art (MOMA), in a quaint African show of masks it was imminently clear that no Western master improved on the formal genius of the best Fang reliquary figures (made to guard vessels full of ancestral remains) and Kwele masks.

For instance you need to focus on details of the black, glisteningly oiled women pieces: there is a quiet yet quixotic rhythmic elongation and compression of body parts, heads and body domed like cosmic eggs, sublimely abstracted as a woman sitting squat, and her back reflects robust and savvy curvaceousness in rotund planes that flabbergast you for thinking of the time in which it was created. Both powerful and passionate in rendition, others in the show are elegant and a mite marvelous for the conjecture that conjoins the spirit and the spectacle.

Interestingly Prodosh was one whose art affords no handle as easy, or as ingratiating, as “stylistic.” Consciousness of his furious ambition that comes through more as an astute force, and indeed like weather—addles both analysis and aesthetic responses. One’s comprehension of his shaped bronzes always feels inadequate to their conceptual subtlety, sagely sophistication, and, oh the dulcet notes of, size.

All Prodosh’s works consist of curved concavities, often translated from the human metaphor which seals itself with soft-textured rust. Each work is an open, upright invitation of almost identical conical or ovoid or boxed like sections, tilting this way and that along the routes of passage of thought. The understanding of creating works that are both torqued as well as taut sometimes like a study of the ‘Twisted Form’ 1953 of a seated woman is really Prodosh’s breakthrough to subsequent feats of geometric and surface sorcery: oval shapes, whose contours are soft, rounded and infinitely sensual. ‘Sun worshippers’ is a set of identical ovoid works in 3 different sizes that primes the context of the family, as they stand in reverence; side by side, each one’s contours one flare upward and down. Bride is another masterpiece, and the piece de resistance of the show is ‘Concavo-Convex’ a marvel of two nested inner and outer shapes which, when

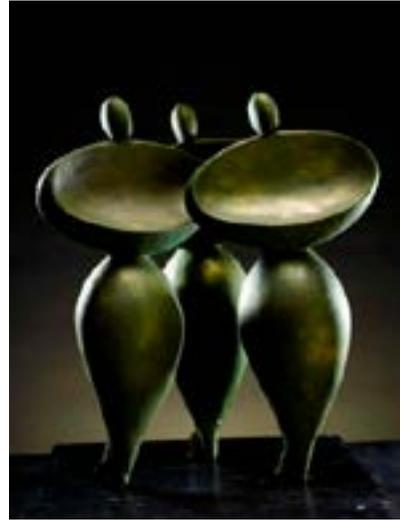
you turn it, goes on just about forever because you are so enchanted. Perhaps it would be like an apt epitaph to echo the sculptor's words: *'In my sculptures, I have found a rhythm pulsating all throughout.'*



Broken Idol 1970



Convicts 1969



Egg Dance 1971



Head & Torso



Queen relaxing 1986



Sun Worshippers 1975