CONTEMPORARY INDIAN ART SERIES

# CHINTAMONI KAR

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LALIT KALĀ AKADEMI





#### LALIT KALĀ SERIES

#### OF

#### CONTEMPORARY INDIAN ART

This series dealing with contemporary Indian Art has been undertaken by the Lalit Kala Akademi with the intention of popularising the work of India's leading painters and sculptors.

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# CHINTAMONI KAR

# LALIT KALĀ AKADEMI INDIA





Editor : Jaya Appasamy Assistant Editor : S. A. Krishnan

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# CHINTAMONI KAR

Our national ego has still not been able to get over the wound of humiliation which the alien aggression made in our hearts two hundred years ago, because we not only lost our coun-



try to foreign rule but were also uprooted from the best parts of our culture. Those of our ancestors who received the first blows were confused, demoralised and decimated. The later generations tried to adjust themselves to the situation. The bulk of the intelligentsia was won over by the liberal promises of self determination. The recalcitrants sulked, fumed and fretted, and as they were mainly orthodox men who had preserved Indian civilisation in the form of ritual, they began to revive several parts of the ancient past by shouting slogans like 'The splendour that was Ind'.

About the middle of the nineteenth century arose a small band of intellectuals, led by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, who wished to judge the situation on its own merits. They found that while there was much wisdom and skill in the literatures and arts of the classical and medieval periods, there were also obscruantisms, superstitions and mantras of defeat, like those which left the fate of man entirely in the hands of the God. On the other hand, they found that, in spite of the violence of the West, there were dynamic elements in the dominantly rational outlook of the European renaissance, which offered a corrective to the most introvert of Indian metaphysical systems. Thus they tried to integrate the relevant ideas of the surviving Indian culture with the illuminations which came from Europe. For instance,



the Christian ideal of 'Love thy neighbour as thyself' was, sought to be reconciled with Bhakti or devotion. And the concept that man is born free, but enslaved by social forces, was accepted in toto. And the alien rulers were asked to implement the idea of democracy, that

every person is a sovereign individual, and can rule himself in and through society. The pioneers of the intelligentsia campaigned against the burning of widows on the funeral pyres of their husbands, against caste which had degraded those who were not brahmins and against child marriage.

Of course, the synthesis which was sought by the advance guard was not accepted either by the orthodox men at home or by the foreign bureaucracy.

As a consequence of this, the forward intelligentsia was inclined to live in an atmosphere of bohemianism. Restless, confused, ardent in the search for values, with burning eyes, melting hearts, and heads cocked high in arrogant disdain, these pioneers made romantic gestures.

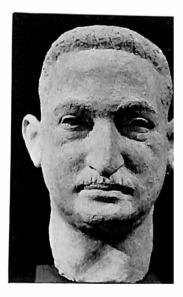
The scene was Calcutta, the then capital of the British Empire in India. The time was the long historical movement when a generation without hope lingered in a surrealist world in which the old idols lay broken on one side, while the mugs of beer were scattered all round, and Bengali verse fashioned on the English iambic pentameter was being recited by hoarse voices to dazzled listening eyes. The bodies sweated in victorian suits and the soul became leaner through the ecstasy of a newly discovered Byronism, Shelleyism and Rimbaudism. The poignancy of adolescent personal love was that there were no women to adore. The tragedy of the philosophical outlook was that it had no roots in the soil but beckoned the shades of Kant, Hegel and Nietzche as pillars of support. The comic element was not absent, in so far as modernism paraded itself in the westren disguises of Brown Sahibs who did not know how the natives of Bohemia in London, Paris or Berlin conducted themselves in the revolt against the upper middle class society.

In the early twentieth century, there had been achieved enough contact with the West to obviate the most reckless excesses of the early Bohemians. Rabindranath Tagore had already achieved some kind of integrity by working out the principles of Raja Ram Mohan Roy in politics, in social life and in his literary works. The modern man torn between India and Europe, had emerged as the hero of his novel And the confrontation by the poet of himself, his own people and the outsiders, was entering upon a phase of poetic realism.

The hangover of orthodox revivalism, however, lasted out even

through the periods of the first world war, until the twenties and the thirties. The national poet of India himself could not do, in his own country, what he thought and felt during his trips abroad. The weaker intelligentsia had not achieved the clarity of purpose which could give up the kind of Indianism that was foisted on the land by religious reaction. The political urges of the lower middle class needed the false sentimentality of ancient totems and hagiology as a background for its assertion of political, social and cultural nationalism.

Thus it was that revivalism in the



creative arts continued to flourish in the name of a strong indigenous tradition.

In the period marked by the last twenty years of Rabindranath Tagore's creative life, a new advance guard was emergent. This consisted of a number of individualists who were nurtured in Bengali revivalism, but sought to break away, through selfconscious experiments under the leadership of the poet, who himself had helped the revivalists but was groping for honesty in the arts.

Among these individualists Chintamoni Kar is a significant younger figure, because he did not make an immediate break with the Bengal school but began to experiment with each concept, each piece of stone, or paper, before he accepted the compulsions of his sensibility.

Of course, as has been indicated above, everything was in the melting pot in Bengal before the beginning of the second World War: all the ideals of art, so far aspired to by the revivalists, were being questioned. The fame of Picasso as an innovator had been heightened by the reproduction of many of his paintings and sculptures in India. During the thirties, Dr. Stella Kramrisch, then Bageshwari Professor of Art in the University of Calcutta, had introduced the Calcutta public to the works of Klee, Kandinsky and the German expressionists. The revolt of Jamini Roy against the revivalists and the individualist work of Rabindranath Tagore, as well as Amrita Sher-Gil, shook the confidence of the students in the masters who taught them in the art schools. Some of the young people like Ramkinker, Chintamoni Kar, Prodosh Das Gupta and Sankho Chaudhuri breathed the atmosphere of violent discord which the battle of ideas had created.

Chintamoni Kar began to learn painting in the School of the Indian Society of Oriental Art in 1930, but soon took to carving under an Orissan temple sculptor. His student work in plaster is still within the orbit of the revivalist search for vitality from the folk.

In 1938, however, he went to London and then to Paris, where he studied modelling under Professor Robert Wlerick at the Academie de la Grande Chaumiere, and stone carving at the Atelier of Professor Victor Giovanelli.

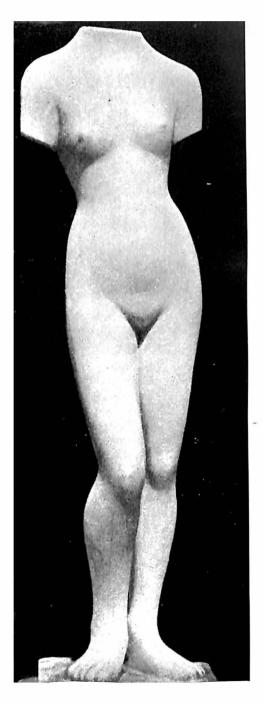
During this time he seems to have advanced rapidly from the provincialism of Bengal to the problems of tension and balance as they dominated the world of Western sculpture.

Chintamoni Kar is widely read in ancient and modern Indian and western literatures and has imbibed the lessons



of Europe with a sensitive mind, by looking at each gift horse in the mouth. The realisation that the tasks before him lay in the "energetic" interpretation of experience, came to him with an instinctive awareness of the inner unity of the ancient Indian natural philosophy and the new dynamic scientific formulae of the West.

In 1940, Chintamoni Kar returned to India and became a lecturer on Art and Crafts at the University in Calcutta. The highly charged political atmosphere of war-torn Bengal did not conduce to creative work. One portrait head in plaster entitled, "My Sister" over life size, shows that he was brooding on the tempestuous sensitiveness of youth, trying to make his hands delicate enough for the small intense body of this Bengali woman. There is no



sentimentalism of the reivivalist period. In fact, the tendency is towards poetic realism in the taut expression of the model, whose heart seems to beat with the sculptor's in fear.

Then he went to Delhi in 1942 and took up work as a professional sculptor, lecturing in the Delhi Polytechnic from 1943-45.

Two portrait heads of this period, one of Rabindranath Tagore and the other of Sir Maurice Gwyer, stand out for the structural qualities he brought to them. The rough incisions on the noble face of the poet, and the harrowing intensity produced by chiaroscuro effects, seek to reproduce the tragic outlook of this sage in his later years. Kar seems to have allied himself with the poet's attitude towards the shattered civilisation of the West. The marble bust of Sir Maurice Gwyer is notable for a certain dignity, built up by deviating from representational values. Another portrait head of Sir Akbar Hydar: in plaster is also notable for the same depth of understanding of disillusionment. The precipitous hours of war, the possible end of foreign rule seem to make the mouth of his model dumb, to screw the eyes and to cast a sombre pallor as on a death mask.

The crystal-shaped marble "Torso" and the delicate head, also in marble, entitled, Freda were both executed in Delhi in 1945-46. The smoothness of the carving of the torso, with the gentle lyrical flow of the slim body is accomplished student work, in which Kar seems to forget his Indian background and enter into the virtuosity of technique. There is a directness in the handling which suggests that Kar wished, at this stage, to reaffirm the mastery of his hands in the belief that the emotion would come through.

In Freda, his feelings have found wings even beyond the fine strokes of the chisel by imbuing the head with the dreamer's vision of the young girl. The lightly raised curved upper eyelids, the high forehead, the refined nose, are all fused in a tender projection above the slightly square jaw, itself poised on a siphon-like neck. In the stillness of her poise, the innocent girl stands before the eager hands of the sculptor with their fantasies circling and intertwining within the hair.

During 1945-56 Chintamoni Kar lived in London and experimented in various media, plaster, terracotta, bronze, wood, stone and marble. In 1947 he was elected a member of the Royal Society of British Sculptors.

The Euro-Asian synthesis of Chintamoni Kar's achievement at this stage must be emphasised. Oscillating between India and Europe, he has perceived, with an uncanny awareness, the exact manner in which the fusion between the Indian sensibility and the new western techniques might be effected. He has foreshadowed those changes in the basis and tempo of the art of sculpture, which reach out towards the organisation of form in an intellectual order of relations, with our concept of the ebb and flow of energies as freed from the restraints of the 19th century Europeanism, which was superimposed as naturalism on the vitalist Indians.

Chintamoni Kar has his own style. The fragments do not stammer, but scatter the voices gently, in the poetry of warm gestures, rounding themselves to circumscribe shapes that await recognition.

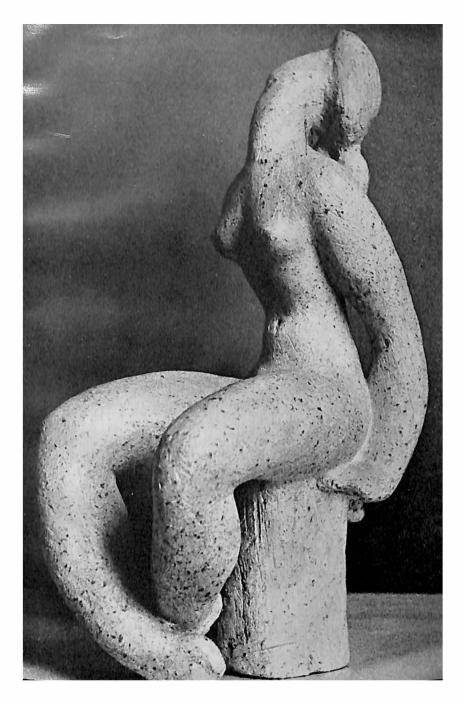
Mulk Raj Anand

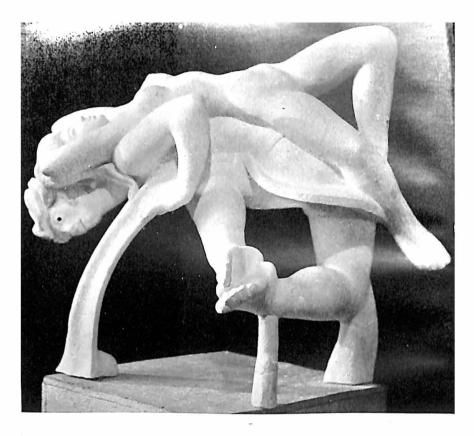


SKATING THE STAG is significant of this period. The search here was for balance on the axis of air, though, like Brancusi, Kar wanted to catch a bird in flight. The lingering realism of the facial anatomy, as against the volume of the torso and the legs, makes this a transitional piece, where the logical understanding of impersonal form, is still held back by an emotional response towards the woman's body. The whirling movement of the full blown skirt already becomes symbolic, being based on the formal laws of sculptural dynamics. This piece was awarded a silver medal and diploma in the IV Olympiad's International Competition of sport in Art held in London in 1948.

PARK FIGURE (1949): began an interest in volumes with the elimination of realistic detail and the handling of material which lends itself to a sense of vital expression. The attempted monumentality fails here because Kar is held backby being an essentially a lyricist. And yet the central mood of a figure growing up in a landscape where days are free from care and the hours stretch out towards the timeless sky is realised by fearful hands abandoning themselves to a generous display of the talent for sheer plastic sculpture.

IN ICARUS, (1953) the dreamer's mood expressed in Usha and Sabitar is transposed by a fusion of volumes and lyrical passages. The abstraction of forms goes further from Kar's early poetic realism. The sculptor is arriving on the brink of departure towards freedom of movement, where a single image evolves its own convolutions, groping here in the dark, to discover how best the light can be shown giving the symbolic openings the necessary depth to bring surface effects before the heightened sensibility. In the building of this image everything is noiseless and smooth and flowing except the incisions of the hair and the beard, the clinging nostalgia for recognisable figure sculpture formulae to an otherwise emancipated sensibility.





USHA AND SABITAR is a development beyond the previous piece, embraced into more integral handling of fantasy. The literariness of the theme seems to disappear in the compulsions of vitrified terracotta. The curvatures of the two forms are intimately related. The recumbent body of Usha, floating in a dream, as it were, is given dynamic flight by the triangular left leg. The gentle undulations of the soft round belly and the protruberant breasts show the continuity of poetry in Kar's chisel. The round eye hole of Sabitar seems to speak to the sleeping fairy, trying gently to awaken her from her dream. The heavy modelling of Sabitar's legs are given momentum by deliberate bands. The whole sculpture is thrown up in the air by the artificial stands with a clear recognition of space relations through which flight can only be poised high and still by the static square space of the stand below.

IN DRYADS (1952), in terracotta, there is a distinct departure towards the linear rhythms of moving forms, held together by their own momentum. The mass is broken by the hollow near the torso. The attitude is again of near flight. The rounded curves of the figure are merged into the organic distortion of the fabulous creature embedded in the earth and yet arising from it almost like Henry Lauren's SIREN of 1944.

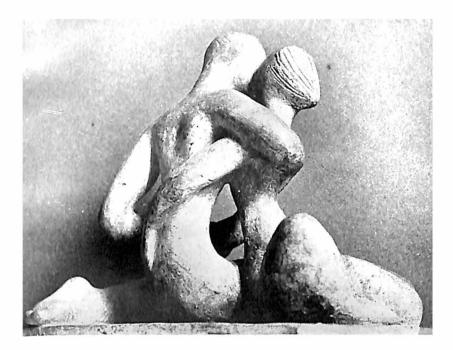


The portrait bust of USHA NATH SEN in bronze, (1955), is notable for the fact that he was keeping his hand in for sensitive portraiture. The resilience of the hard, cynical face is brought forth in characteristically stern lines, pendulous eyes and a cruel mouth. Was this a comment on the character of a typical member of the Indian intelligentsia ?

Being an inveterate craftsman. he carved CARYATID almost as a monumental structure, imbuing it with the volumes and graceful lyrical lines significant of his previous works in other materials. It is likely that he was still determined to show his brother artists and students that he had not departed from the conventional idea of mass, merely because he had lived in Europe, where the tendency to abstraction had led to thousand forethoughts even beyond Brancusi to embrace all living forms with muted expressions accepted at random and stretching out against space in new dynamic movements. The imposition of figurative art in the incisions of a clear face and rounded breasts including the nipples remains a major default in the carrying touch of the structure along the lines dictated by the block of wood. The curvature of the back and the scooping out of the hips from the rougher edges indicate the lingering influence of Rodin. The vitality of the outstretched arms gives the figure the feeling of suspension before near flight. The remnants of realism are disappearing.





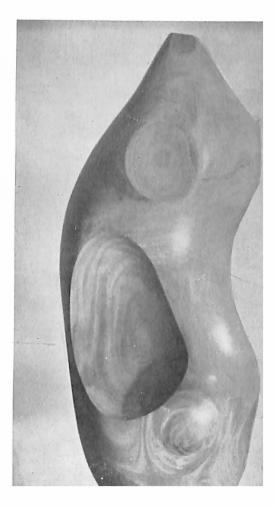


EMBRACE is another literary piece saved from illustrativeness by the juxtaposition of the volumes in harmonious curves, though Kar insists on the realistic incisions of the hair on the female head with a stubborn lyricism,

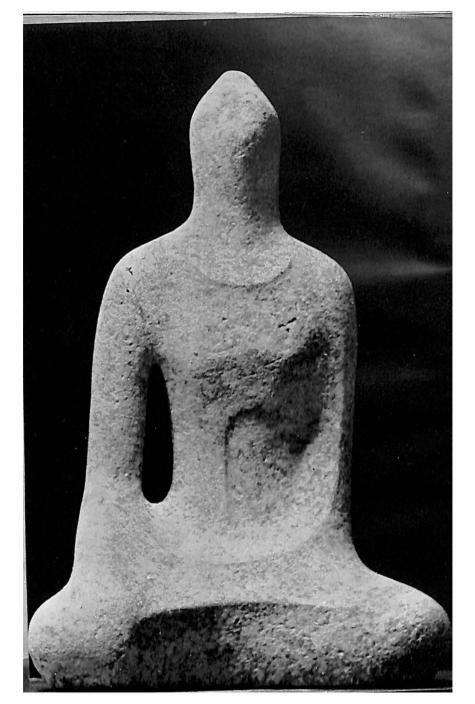
SEATED FIGURE in vitrified terracotta (1960) attempts the incipient volumes again in Henry Laurens manner by ponderous massing of rounded forms. The hollow of the torso, with its almost triangular shapes, sets off to effect the contours of the head and adds to the play of light and shade in the airy, insubstantial atmosphere, which Chintamoni Kar has been seeking in his literary period.

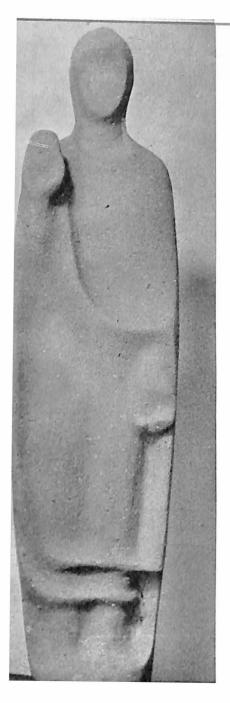


MONOLITH, in mahagony wood, (1962), again approaches the sense of balance, by concentration on an elemental ovoid form. The spheres and hollows reveal textures which are used for chiaroscuro, while the conoid forms raise one's inner eye towards the near fish mouth in a fine posture. Chintamoni Kar is attempting here to reach back to the fundamentals of primaeval forms, with an extraordinary poise, which conceals all the restlessness, the relentless effort, and the intellectualism reminiscent of the youngest Parisians.



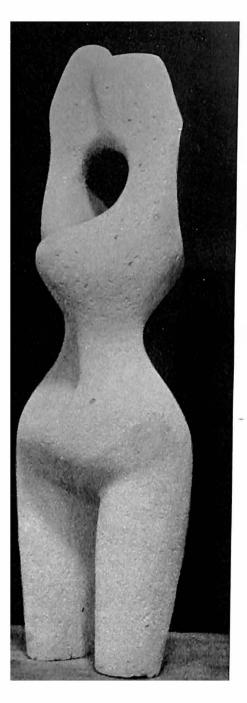
DUO in mahagony wood (1962) shows two cylindrical vehicles carved with a superb simplicity, in linear rhythms. reminiscient of his DRYADS AND CARYATID, except that here, a Brancusi-like aura of light is created, 'lifting us to the radiance of a connection between two figures, which is present in the mere placing of them near each other'. The improvisation of the forms is again achieved with an inherent grace of spiri-The tuality. stillness between the two figures created by the space relations hearkens to an accent which sculptors seldom breathe. Our contemporary national style being expressionist, the silences are often lost.





The current period is significant for new experiments in abstractions. The two BUD-DHA FIGURES, in vitrified terracotta approximate towards the balance of all those elements which had helped to make Chintamoni Kar's chisel a pliant medium. The lucid bold rotundities of the seated Buddha with the deliberate hollows on three points of the torso throb to the juxtaposition of the two raised hands. The coherance of the body is emphasised by the effect given by intrinsic use of volumes.

The study of the Buddha standing(1963) applies a similar technique as in the previous vitrified terracotta. Although this figure is only nineteen and a half inches high, there is nothing small about the monumental effect it gives with the dynamic folds of the clothes and its cylindrical form. The structure unfolds itself into colossal shape.



THE COUPLE (1963) in Chintamoni Kar's favourite material, vitrified terracotta, now rationalises what might have come much earlier. The incipient poetry of the lyrical line is infused with dynamic volumes. The emotion that holds the figures together is blended with a genuine plastic sense in the hushed rapture of union.

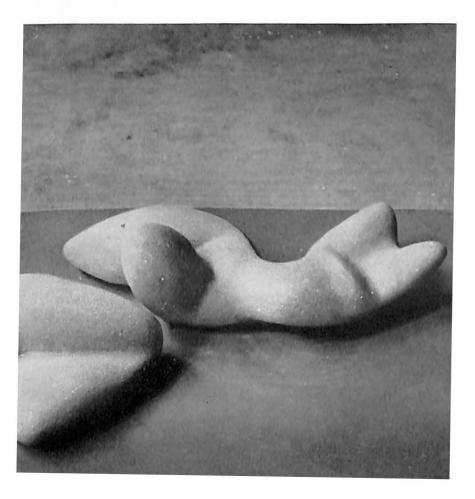
#### ODALISQUE

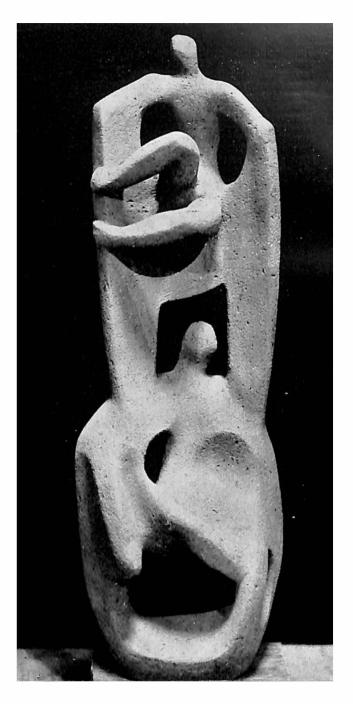
Is another study of a dream figure, the veins of the wood in the artocarpus integrifolius work to etherise the volumes and with the help of resounding hollows the sculptor is able to create resonances of The whispered soft music. airs are a little heavy and brooding with the abstracted loosened hair, the silence of the whole structure is emphasised by the resilience of the material. The gracious bend in the middle and the swelling hips and the inexorable mildness of the stance reverberate in hidden sequences.

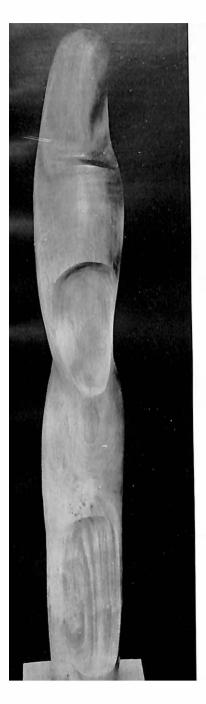




The incidental feature which was a blemish in earlier sculptures disappears in 'LES ONDINES' (1963), in vitrified terracotta, where the three figures or the same figure in three forms, reveal the acceptance of the basic assumption of ovoid form itself in Chintamoni Kar's synthesis. The sap of life breathes through the rounded curves of the hips. The curvacious lines of the torso mingle with the ups and downs and makes the three improvisations into studies of pure linear rhythm. The play of light is intended to show the ripeness of the fruit, the marriage of the sculptor with form itself. The spaces between the three figures leave areas of disconnection which suggest that spatial relations are now the dominant preoccupation of Chintamoni Kar.



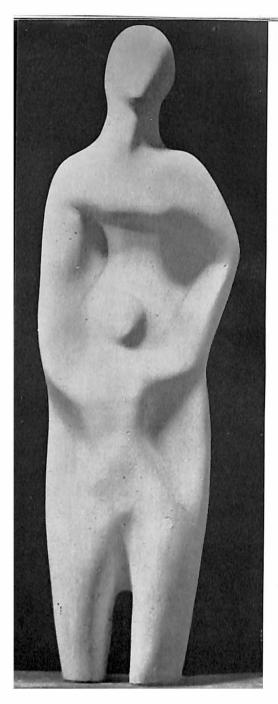




DAEDALUS AND ICARUS If we forget the myth for which the title of this sculpture is taken and concentrate on the plastic situation, we see that Chintamoni Kar unfolds the figures from the fathomless base upwards by skilful manoeuvering of the volumes in space. The hollows are deliberately created to lighten the burden of the lines. The depressions further elevate the mass until one gets glimmerings of the music in the rhythmical accents which rise upwards. The memory of the myth is thus poised within the organic structure. The heads, torso and the legs of the figures being used like expressive beats in the uppermost arches to heighten the surges of perception. The ultimate balance of the sculpture is a tremulous passage between space and light.

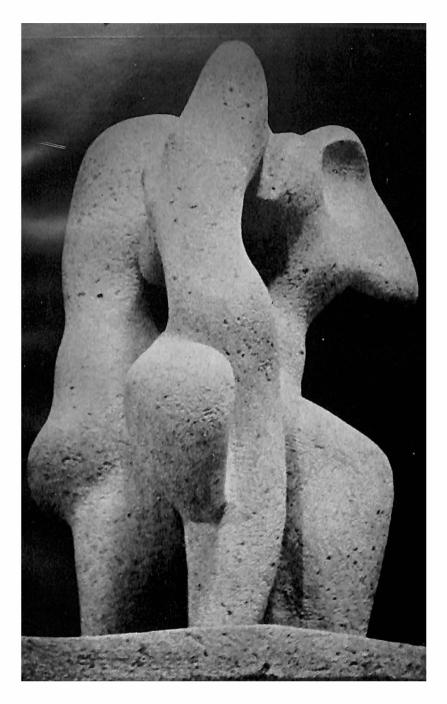
#### VISITATION

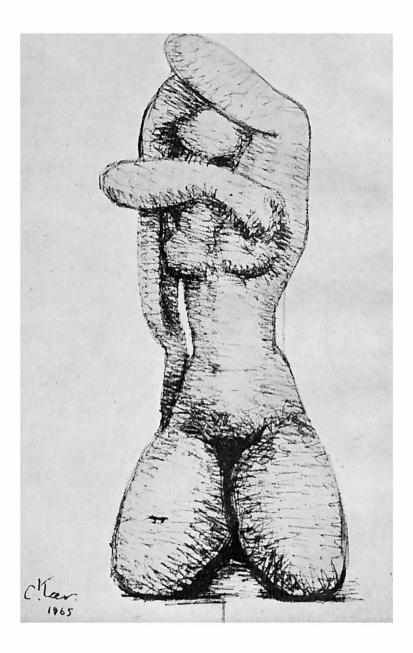
Behind the sleek tree of this figure one can see the green of mahagony wood almost like the juice running through and slowly forming the shapely structure. The taciturn face rapt in the anonymous mould is inclined beyond the furrow of pain almost like a bird which might scream — the hollow in the torso is reminiscent of a lofty reproach lifting itself against the rounded upper part of the body, matched by the other hollow which breaks the continuity of space between the legs. The airy form proffers an eerie experience until one might say : If you lovely light reflecting female should haunt my night enraptured soul, I might be tempted to carve you and keep you by me as a reminder of my poet's dream !



MOTHER AND CHILD Silence is the dominant theme of the fundamental connection between mother and child. whose forms are fused here as though forever part of one another. The figure of the child with the upraised arms reclines back into the arms of the mother with sinuous grace. The smoothened torso of the female with the almost breathless hollows surveys the state of pain of forth, of taking bringing back and ushering forward of the child. the swelling forms of both lives in the rhythmic accents which are like cycles of beginnings, endings and beginnings.

THREE FIGURES (1963), vitrified terracotta seeks to integrate volumes against silent areas with a haptic sense of the curves. The warm lush expression of the full rounded hips is lightened by the graceful bands of the backs to give the effect almost of the figures revolving in dance. The hollows help the movement. The abolition of the irritating reprefeatures sentational of the early sculptures now creates a sense of monumentality.





SEATED WOMAN The preparations for sculpture are often done in the visualisation of kinetic gesture, through preliminary drawings. The triangle of the pudenda here is almost the starting point, via the ovoid haunches, upto the cylinder of the waist, the extension of the torso being dramatised, above the breasts, by the verticality of the left arm contrasted with the horizontality of the right, the aura of the magical hair flowing down with a snake-like twist, completing the structure within the self-imposed limits of a solid mass in which the volumes speak to the inner ear.

RECUMBENT FORMS There is an empty place in the inspirational centre where the feeling for the twists and turns of kindred forms murmur softly. The loosening of the torso, from its axis in the hips is the attempt to release energy from the heavy mass.

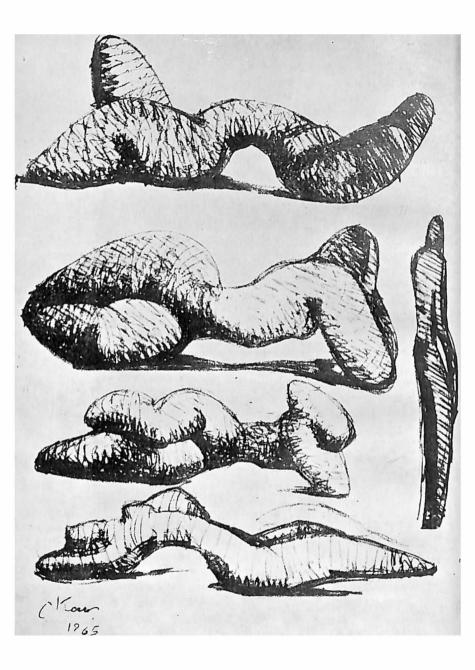
The bending limbs, moving from the recollection of a freer rhythm, convey the dexterity, to gyrate forms at will.

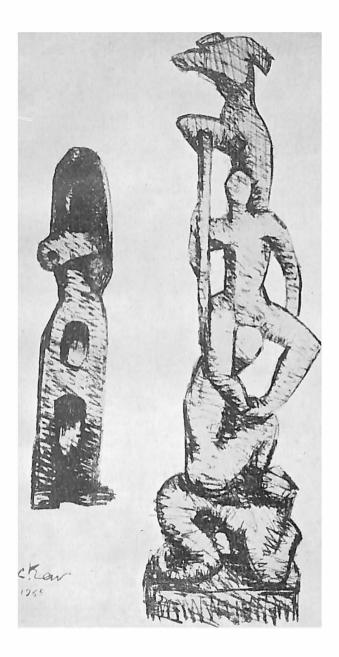
The rigid self-containment of the curvature of the fourth figure, is an exercise in control of materials, necessary in wood or stone, so that the form is not a mere bundle but clear in its vital flow.

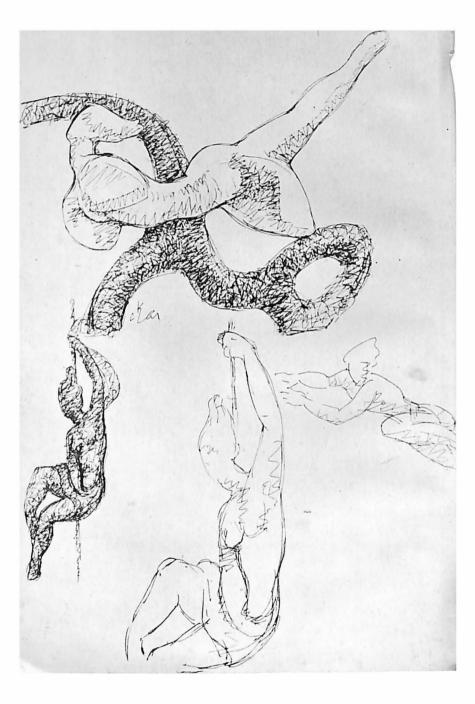
ACROBATS There is no idea to begin with: only an image. The artist half closes his eyes and gathers his visual experience within the structure which is hard and unbending. Therefore, he follows the quick of his heartbeat, at the recollection of the acrobats' skill nervous, agitated but poised, describing the inward glance, as it glides from the bended curves below, to the seated figure, extending the linear rhythm up into the inseparable strain of the neck, the left shoulder and distorted left leg, until the top figure rises in an awkward balance, in a kind of breathless bound.

SNAKE FORMS AND MODELS Oh, the grace of dream forms, like desires, flowing across the horizon to the uttermost acrobat's skill in balancing !

Can such dream images be translated into stone? The pencil roams across the tree trunk of the axis, which rests firmly on the ground, as it were, in spite of its curvatures, and then goes off at tangents, as in the ballet on one leg, so that the torso can fly into space, a winged victory.







## CHINTAMONI KAR

## LALIT KALĀ AKADEMI

No.	Title	Medium	Year	Size	Collection	
1. :	Skating 'The Stag'	Bronze Vitrified	1948	Ht. 53 cm.	Artist	
۷.	lcarus	Terracotta	1953	60 cm.	Paul & Michael D'Aguilar, London.	
3	Park Figure		1949	36 cm.	Artist	
	Usha & Sabitar		1952	45 cm.	Artist	
	Dryads		1954	25 cm.	Artist	
	Sir Usha Nath Sen	Bronze	1955	42 cm.	All India Fine Arts & Crafts Society, New Delhi.	
7	Caryatid	Wood	1959	150 cm.	Artist	
	Seated Figure	Vit. Terracotta	1961	40 cm.	Chandigarh Museum	
9.	Embrace	Terracotta	1950	30 cm.	Private Collection, Paris.	
10.	Duo	Mahogany	10/2	01.5	<b>.</b>	
		Wood	1962	91.5 cm.	Artist	
	Monolith		1962	122.5 cm.	Artist	
12.	The Enlightened One	Vit. Terracotta	1964	53 cm.	Artist	
13.	The Buddha	**	1963	49.5 cm.	Donated to the Indian Red Cross.	
14	Couple		1963	42 cm.	Artist	
	Odalisque	Wood-Artoca-				
	oddinigate	rpus Integrifol-				
		ius	1964	90 cm.	Artist	
16	Ondines	Vit. Terracotta		length 90 cm.		
	Daedalus and			- 8		
	Icarus		1963	52 cm.		
18.	Visitation	Mahogany Wood	1964	90 cm.	Artist	
19.	Mother & Child	Plaster	1964	45 cm.	Artist	
20.	Three Figures	Vit. Terracotta	1963	39 cm.	Artist	
21	Seated Woman	Drawing	1965	<b>U</b> ( )	Artist	
22	Recumbent Forms		1965		Artist	
23	Acrobats	Drawing	1965		Artist	
	Snake Forms &	Diawing	1705		/ d tist	
2 11	Models	Drawing	1965		Artist	
Illustrations with the Text :						
١.	My Sister	Plaster	1940	over life size 40 cm.	Artist	
2	Sie Akhar Hydari	Plaster	1944		Artist	
	Sir Akbar Hydari Freda	Marble	1945		Sir Maurice Gwyer	
	Torso	Marble	1944		Artist	
	10150	1 12:010	1717	17 CH		



#### CHINTAMONI KAR

- 1915 Born at Kharagpore, West Bengal.
- 1930-31 Studied painting under Shri Kshitindranath Majumdar and sculpture under Shri Giridhari Maharana (hereditary carver from Orissa).
- 1935-37 Served as a School Teacher in Bengal.
- 1938 Studied sculpture under Prof. R. Wlerick at the Academie de la Grande Chaumiere, Paris and stone carving at the atelier of M. Victor Giovanelli.
- 1940-42 Lecturer in Art and Craft at the University of Calcutta, Teachers' Training Department.
- 1943-45 Lecturer in sculpture at the Delhi Polytechnic Art Department.
- 1946-56 Worked as a free lance sculptor in London ; elected as a member of the Royal Society of British Sculptors (1947).

Awarded a Silver Medal and Diploma at the International competition of Sport in Art at the XIVth Olympiad, London (1948). Regular exhibitor at the Royal Academy, London, 1949-56.

- 1956 Appointed as Principal, Government College of Art and Craft, Calcutta.
- Worked on Restoration of paintings under the Direction General des Musees de France on a French Government Scholarship.
  Author of 'Classical Indian Sculpture' (Tiranti, London 1950) and 'Indian Metal Sculpture' (Tiranti, London 1952) 'Pharasi Silpi O Samaj' (1940) and 'Sannidhya' (1959) in Bengali.
  Widely travelled in Middle Asia, Greece, Italy, Spain, Austria, Germany, France, Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Norway and Great Britain.

One-man Shows :

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