

Gopal Damodar Deuskar

(Birth : September 11, 1911 – Death : February 8, 1994)

The establishment of art institutions in cities like Bombay, Calcutta, Madras and Lahore was an important event that took place at the beginning of the British Raj in India. Generations of artists, educated in the Western academic style of painting, emerged out of these art institutions. A few self-expressive artists coming to the forefront of the art scene at that time, had style of their own. The painters like Pithawala, Lalkaka, Dhurandhar, Haldankar, Trinidad, Pestonji Bomanji who were trained from Bombay's Sir. J J School of Art in the first half of the twentieth century, worked in their respective styles. Artist Gopal Damodar Deuskar was one of them.

Born on the 11th of September 1911 in Ahmednagar, Gopal Deuskar had his earlier education in Hyderabad. He joined Sir J J School Of Art in Mumbai at the age of 16. After 4 years he secured the Diploma with a first rank and a Gold Medal. He was awarded, during the course of his brilliant career, a number of medals and prizes. Bombay Art Society's Gold Medal, Viceroy's Medal at Simla Art Exhibition, First Prize of the Indian Railways, to mention some. The then Nizam Government granted him a scholarship for executing further studies in painting for 5 years in Europe. He received specialised education in painting at the Art Academies in London, Paris, Vienna, Madrid and Berlin.

London's Royal Academy of Art was considered to be very significant and prestigious. It was a great honour to the artist whose work was accepted and exhibited by the Academy. Gopal Deuskar was the only Indian to receive this honour for 5 years in succession. The Royal Academy selected his paintings in order to exhibit them in the British Commonwealth.

After his return to India from Europe, he was selected the Deputy Director of Sir J J School of Art in 1940 by the Public Service Commission of the Bombay Presidency at that time. With his determination to live with dignity of a professional painter, Deuskar, however, was not at all interested in serving anywhere. He tendered his resignation by giving up his service and started molding his career as a professional portrait painter. He painted the portraits of the persons of the royal families from the states of Hyderabad, Baroda, Jaipur, Cooch Bihar etc.

Gopal Deuskar was one of the 9 celebrated Indian artists who were honoured by the Lalit Kala Akademi in 1959. He worked in the Akademi for 6 years on various posts. It was a matter of pride for him to represent India at the Inter-National Conference on 'Plastic Art' at Vienna in 1960.

Artist Deuskar earned a name in Portraiture along with years. In 1965, he was selected at the National level to carry out a portrait of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru by the

all-party committee of the Indian Parliament. The walls of Parliament House, Rashtrapati Bhavan, Delhi Municipality, Victoria Memorial Museum of Calcutta, Baroda Museum, Vidhan Bhavan at Mumbai, Supreme Court, Mumbai High Court, Residence of Industrialists, Public Buildings are adorned with the artistic works of Gopal Deuskar. The portraits of Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak in India House, London, as also the life-size portraits of the Bal Gandharva at the Bal Gandharva Theatre, Pune stand as the testimony of the prolific brush in the hand of Painter Deuskar.

Gopal Deuskar painted the artistic and outstanding murals at Bal Bhavan, Mumbai and Tilak Smarak Mandir, Pune. Yet he was intensely and passionately involved in the world of Portraiture throughout his life time. The portraits of the founders of the Deccan Education Society viz. Tilak, Agarkar, Namjoshi, Chiplunkar and the famous alumni of Fergusson College, Dr. Mahajani, Acharya Atre, Humorist P. L. Deshpande, Actor Dr. Shriram Lagu show how fond he was of the art of portraiture!

Artist Deuskar has his own unique style of portrait painting. The complete visual impact of the personality of the subject – whether living or dead – is brought forth with his consummate artistry. The creation of a painting needs deep study and hard work, according to Deuskar. He did not rely on the available photographs while portraying a picture of the dead person. He made use of a model who looked similar to the subject in hand. The details of costumes and accessories shown in the painting exposed his artistic sense and sensibility. He would design his picture, taking into consideration the peculiarities and the uniqueness of a person's individuality. The fusion thus realised through the grasping of the subject, its composition in the visual and the overall style and technique of the portrait painting had a distinct mark of Deuskar, the artist.

This supreme artist whose signature on a painting meant excellence in the works of art of Modern Indian Portraiture, thus left his legacy of the rich cultural heritage behind.

Artist Gopal Deuskar bid farewell to the world he loved on February 8, 1994.

Translated by:
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