



EPILOGUE

By **Keshav Malik**



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THIS BOOK IS an important contribution to the work of an artist not readily known to the Indian art world. I applaud this opportunity to showcase and contextualise the work of the artist through this book edited by art writer and academic, Venka Purushothaman. Going over decades of Sukumar Bose's art, we are led to ponder on the meaning of art as much as the life of its maker.

In thinking of Bose it becomes clear that though artists, like every one else, use their eyes, they do so more lovingly. Such looking is no mere act of recognition, no convenient labeling to distinguish one object from another. A word may well supply an exact definition or hint at indescribable wonders and looking may be an act of convenience or the means of rapture. It all depends—not on the eyes, except in so far as they are an essential mechanism—it depends rather on the mind, and the will and the heart; yes, the whole spirit of a man.

Our eyes, allowing for defects, which can be adjusted, show us all the same world. It is for us to choose how we will direct them. It is clear remembering Bose's lifework, that he did not waste his time getting a kick out of the latest newspaper sensation, but would rather, like all sensitive artists, look out of the window watching a view for other kinds of messages whether from the changing light or the landscape, etc. The light and his eyes were a means to a specific end. Seeing, as a mechanism is of course a miraculous affair of lenses and vibrations governed by

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(Detail) **Landscape**, c. 1970s
Watercolour, 22 x 29 in.
Private Collection

exact laws for all men. But that greater miracle of individual perception cannot be formulated or legislated – or restricted. In this way there is no limit to the artistic vision or to an individual's artistic spirit. Since art or artistic vision are free, art making is an adventure beckoning artists to life's mysteries and then on to the expression of mystery in paint, on canvas or any other material.

Bose puts no limit to his ability to achieve his heart's desire by sheer looking – a dispassionate looking. His sense of adventure did not fade nor did his eagerness dwindle. It appears that his goodwill directed his eyes for amassing an 'income' of delights. It was this look, laden with intent, which he possessed in abundance that all artists cultivate. After all, it is not things we are forced to look at that matter, as opposed to things we choose to look at. Such is the lesson that artists like Bose leave us. Emulating him we can quicken that sensitivity which lifts us above mere humdrum procedures into a practice that is almost devotional.

This is how Bose got right down to the anatomy of nature, a feel for its underlying structure, and the flow of living form into another living form. His was no sketchy, hasty business. The human figure offered the artist an ideal means of developing his perception, as much as the qualities of the rhythmic movement. In landscapes this same task awaited him repeatedly. Still the subjects he chose from nature were of course a very personal matter. Thus we have his blemishless mountainscapes of a calm beauty; while in still other such compositions we have on the branch resting birds and the spectacle of sweet scented foliage. In many works, the artist attempted figures like those of Meera Bai or ones in line with the Ajanta style. In several monochromatic compositions he excels himself with a delineation of maidens clad in keeping with the gentle, customary draperies of an old-time India. The painter also turned out work in the miniature genre as well as historical painting. All this is

evidence of his creatively restless mind as though in search of fresh visual forms in all their variety. Doing so he became an excellent guru to his wards. Pliability was his inborn facility, plus all that goes with it. Many of his portraits are of an enviable quality. In these he searched his sitters' souls to the nth degree. The genre implied that truth was beauty for him. A leaf from an artist like Bose's life would surely put them back on the straight path and also connect them with the ground on which they have taken birth.
