

## 5. Paintings and Illustrations

### Synopsis

This module introduces the painted image and illustrations – two closely related visual media that communicate in similar and yet different ways.

### Lectures

5.1 Introduction to paintings and illustrations

5.2 Paintings

5.3 Illustrations

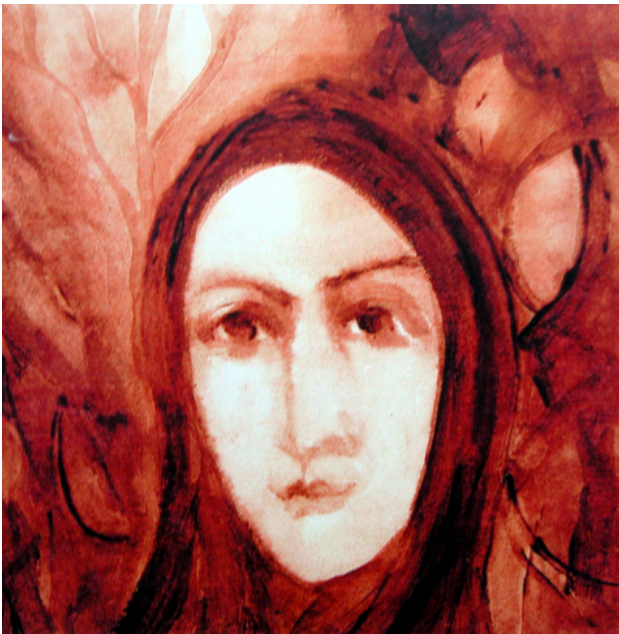


Fig 5.2.00

### 5.2 Paintings

To paint is essentially to apply pigments such as water-colours, oils, acrylics, wax-crayons, pastels, gouache on a surface that typically include paper, canvas, wood, metal, glass or at times, walls. This could have some application such as a shop-sign or a poster, but is largely associated with creative visual expression.

Paintings invite classification such as realistic, surrealist, figurative, abstract, impressionistic, traditional, contemporary. Motivations for painting include the personal, the political, or the spiritual. At times paintings take the form of visual narratives.



Fig 5.2.01

It is important to cultivate the art of seeing without demanding immediate interpretations. The verbal measure of visual languages has this tendency to short change the silences of the visible world.



Fig 5.2.02a



Fig. 5.2.02b



Fig. 5.2.02c

A painter primarily paints just as a sportsperson plays a sport. There is a grammar of painting, just as there are rules for playing a game. However, within the rules there is scope for tremendous improvisation, spontaneity and creativity. Akshat Charate, a painter was commissioned to paint the walls of schools in the Dhar district of Madhya Pradesh. The paintings made by him have elements of illustration, but have a unique colour logic about them.





Fig. 5.2.03

The Buddhist frescos on the walls of Ajanta are the first historical paintings that make an appearance after a long hiatus, following the Indus Valley civilization. It were as if we are suddenly confronted with a highly sophisticated and philosophical visual art that emerges from no previously known tradition.



Fig. 5.2.04

Many of the traditional visual arts of India are closely linked to religious thought. The same is true of visual arts elsewhere. The ascendancy of the sciences that was paralleled by the emphasis on individuality, gave birth to an entirely new artistic response, that we broadly describe as 'the modern arts'.

Writers and scholars on art and painting are interested in the evolution of the work of a painter and the aesthetics of the work. This could include the formal aspects such as colour, intensity, and composition; it could include the content, meaning and the context in which a work is created. Collectors are keen to understand the provenance of a work and play the role of patrons

Paintings reflect the worldviews and outlooks of the painter and typically offer a subjective interpretation based on a personal engagement with the world around. Unlike a mathematical statement that is often either true or false, a painting does not insist on a single valid interpretation. It is possible that the interpretation made by a viewer is quite different from the intent of the painter and the interpretation made by different viewers, different too. A painting can lend itself to multiple interpretations.



Fig. 5.2.05 a



Fig. 5.2.05 b

Miniature painting embodies a very fine understanding of line, colour, and composition that was distinctly different from medieval Western paintings based on Cartesian perspective. It was popular in several parts of medieval India. The schools of painting in Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh were influenced largely by Vaishnavite traditions, the Hindu epics and poetry such as the Gita Govinda. The contact with Persian miniatures brought in secular subjects and paintings of royalty and life in the courts. There were several schools of miniature painting with ateliers where young apprentices learnt



from an association with master painters, Many of these works are known to belong to specific painters and are not anonymous. There has however been a difference in the understanding of individuality in the West and in the East. The East has always regarded the individual as a part of a cosmic entity, but regarded art as one of the vehicles for achieving a cosmic unity and seldom as an end in itself.



Fig. 5.2.06

Thangka painting practiced by Buddhist monks in Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan, is very different in its philosophical basis from the miniature traditions that are associated with Hindu religion or with the Mughals. The formal affinities suggest that painting and the visual language is a religion of its own.



Fig. 5.2.07

The colonial encounter brought India in contact with the forces of modernity and one can notice both ruptures and reaffirmations with tradition. Rabindranath Tagore stands out as a person who claimed roots that were far more subterranean than the “boundaries of narrow domestic walls”. Renowned as a poet and a musician, he started painting in the later phase of his life to create haunting portraits, creatures from fantasy and scrawls that populate the spaces between words.



Fig. 5.2.08

Amrita Sher-Gil was trained in the Western art tradition of oil-painting in Paris but moved back to India and chose subjects from rural neighbourhoods, many of whom were women. She developed an approach that may be interpreted as having feminist undertones. However, like any good work of art her work defies such easy categorizations. Raja Ravi Verma, who also learnt oil paintings in the manner of Western artists, used it to for subjects from Hindu mythology and his oleographs mark the beginnings of visual culture. These were cheap reproductions that people liked to put up in their homes, very much

in the manner of calendar art of gods, goddesses and landscapes, that is popular to this day. Interestingly, Dadasaheb Phalke who was drawn to the new medium of cinema, also chose mythological subjects for his films.



Fig. 5.2.09a





Fig. 5.2.09b

The divergence between the traditionalists and the moderns is evident in the works above. The dancing figure by Jamini Roy, draws its inspiration from folk-art-traditions. Tyeb Mehta's work shows the influences of Braque and Picasso's cubist paintings. Though contemporary art schools in India are far more homogenized, there is a distinctly different sensibility in the metro-urban centres and the smaller towns and villages. Urbanisation as a shaping force for the desirable in aesthetics unleashes its powerful hegemony that is not greatly different from the attitude of the colonial rulers.



Fig. 5.2.10a



Fig. 5.2.10b

Ram Kumar has painted both figurative works as well as works that are abstract. A close study of such work goes on to underline that textual descriptions of painterly responses may be convenient for the purposes of the student or the critic, but by no means should be regarded as superior to direct observation.

Critics and scholars often seek to bring on aspects of 'taste' to a work of art (or a painting) and in their attempt to write about a visual image, argue favourably or otherwise. As a beginner to the world of visual art, it might be useful to bear in mind, that our responses to visual art require an inclination to engage with it. It is also possible that in spite of such an inclination, we fail to respond to some work – and in such cases, it is best to pass by rather than pass judgment! An act of creative expression is primarily to satisfy a need to express. After having created it, we are often inclined to sharing it with others. Evaluation of a work for its merit appears unavoidable at this juncture. Indeed it often appears that the tendency to ascribe merit is merely a fall-out of what has come to be called the inescapable-logic-of-the-marketplace. It would not be a bad idea, to side-step considerations of price and learn the art of seeing without wanting to attach a financial value to a painting.