CHAPTER 4
CHAPTER 4

ANJOLIE ELA MENON: A Legend

"The connection between the mind, eye and hand guided by emotion and imagination results in the ultimate creation of a work of art."

Anjolie Ela Menon

4.1 LIFE SCATCH OF ANJOLIE ELA MENON

Anjolie Ela Menon was born in 1940 in India of mixed Bengal and American parentage. She went to school in Lovedale in the Nilgiri Hills, Tamil Nadu and thereafter had a brief spell at the J.J. School of art in Bombay. Subsequently she earned a degree of English Literature from Delhi University. After holding solo Exhibitions in Bombay and Delhi in the late 1950s as a teenager, Menon worked and studied in Paris at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in 1961-62 on a French Government scholarship. Before returning home, she travelled extensively in Europe and West Asia studying Romanesque and Byzantine art. She had over thirty solo shows including at Black heath Gallery-London, Gallery Radicke-Bonn, Winston Gallery-Washington, Doma Khudozhinkov-USSR, Rabindra Bhavanand Shridharani Gallery-New Delhi, Academy of Fine Arts-Calcutta, the Gallery-Madras, Gallery-
Washington, Doma Khudozhinkov-USSR, Rabindra Bhavanand Shridharani Gallery-
New Delhi, Academy of Fine Arts-Calcutta, the Gallery-Madras, Jehangir Gallery,
Chemould Gallery, Taj Gallery, Bombay and Maya Gallery at the Museum Annexe,
Hong Kong. A retrospective exhibition was held in 1988 in Bombay, Menon has
participated in several international shows in France, Japan, Russia and U.S.A. 

Her 'Western' upbringing particularly stay in Paris influenced her life greatly. Her
mother having died young, therefore, she was brought up by an American grandmother
for the better part of her adolescence. By the time she reached Paris she already had a
firm grounding in Western culture. The other part of her family was Brahma Samajist
and like many such Bengali families, it was extremely westernized. She got married to
her childhood love, Raja Menon, an Indian Naval Officer who later retired as an Admiral.
After her marriage she lived and worked in India, U.S.A., several countries in Europe,
Japan and the erstwhile USSR, and had over thirty solo shows in these countries. She is
also a well known muralist and has represented India at several shows. In fact, she only
came into serious contact with Hindu culture after her marriage into a fairly orthodox
South Indian family. She has often bitterly regretted these major gaps in her early life.

In one of her interviews she says that the last of her winter break during her
student life she had was in Florence. She spent days in the Uffizi Galleries completely
influenced by the Botticellis and Giovanni Cimabue, and the works of other great Italian
Renaissance painters. That quality of subdued brilliance emerging from layers of glazes
and the hard gloss of the surface, the landscapes bathed in the greenish light of Sienna,

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Isana Murti, Anjolie Ela Menon Mutations Exhibition Catalogue, Apparao Galleries.
were to influence her techniques permanently. She wanted to achieve that place in life which shines like a pristine surface where there was never any muddiness or opacity or even the whites glowing brilliantly. During her motherhood she produced a number of paintings which were broadly defined and lacking in details, but with often supplicating elongated hands of Byzantine art. In many, the Virgin wears a crown of thorns that merged with flowing hair, signifying that her suffering was no less than that of her son. Soon after her return from England in 1966, she was pregnant with her second child and was too ill to paint for nearly a year. The next two years were spent in Russia in the very bleak, bitterly cold and sharply impersonal city of Vladivostok. Many people mistook the icon-like paintings she did on her return to be the result of her Russian experience. However, she had only one brief, wonderful week in Moscow where she was able to see the extraordinary religious art at the Kremlin, the Tretyakov Museum and in Vladimir, a town near Moscow.

Between 1970 and 1972, she again began working seriously. She was often in her father's home in Calcutta while the Navy sent her husband Raja back to the USSR for long time. This was a period where the influences of her European experience began to unfold. There were nudes set amidst a great deal of flora and fauna. Critics frequently referred to the pre-Raphaelite influence in these paintings. Colour had started to assert itself and she was using a lot of blue. She had a series of exhibitions in Calcutta and Delhi and was glad to be painting once more as a professional. This is a struggle many women go through in coming back into their own after a period of intense domesticity which usually covers the child-bearing years. In 1974 she moved to Bombay and she was offered a solo show by a major gallery. In a small corner of the flat, spilling over into one

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of the balconies, she made a makeshift studio and set out to create a large enough body of work to do justice to such an opportunity. The exhibition was a turning point in her career and was extremely European in flavour. It drew very favourable reviews and most of her paintings were sold out\textsuperscript{29}. This gave her a great courage and confidence. Her children were in school now and, therefore, needing little of her attention now and hence the days holding ladle in one hand and a brush in the other came to an end as she was able to afford a cook for her kitchen.

From 1974 to 1980 there were a spate of exhibitions and several commissions to paint murals for public spaces, hotel lobbies and offices. She planned to do a real fresco for which she had enough training. In the years that followed, she painted several mock frescoes. A real fresco requires wall preparation using slaked lime which is a lengthy process.

In 1979 she along with her husband started building a house in Bangalore and from a junk shop she brought two old windows for painting which served the purpose completely. In an exhibition in 1978 in Delhi she had started using the window as an idiom, looking in on secret interiors and looking out onto mysterious landscapes. She then started using new windows which also became a convenient grid for dividing a painting, often fragmenting an image and re-assembling it in a different order, thus creating juxtapositions. Basically, an aesthetic choice has determined the hues and nuances of her technique, the 'look' of her paintings. Content of course was another matter altogether. Her nature is somewhat melancholic. She thinks this is a very Bengali

\textsuperscript{29}Anjolie Ela Menon Four Decades Ishana Murty 10-20\textsuperscript{th} January 2002. National Gallery of Modern Art, Sir Cowasji Jehangir Public Hall, Mumbai.
trait where introspection and the dream-state inevitably result in the creation of music, painting and poetry which is deeply somber.

At once she says, she is an Indian woman. Sometimes she thinks she is only crypto-Indian and having had the best opportunities-freedom, and indeed, success. Her world is far more immediate-many of the women she paint are her sisters and aunts, close friends, people who have worked with her, brought her up. And, of course, there are women whom she respects and has great sympathy for. She is neither a didactic nor narrative painter. She is hardly concerned with events, though she likes to lay her people bare. She likes to make them bare a bit beyond what is decent, sometimes ripping open a chest to reveal the heart beating within. Of course, there are many who have identified with the women she paints, especially those who are trapped or sitting alone on a chair, or those innocent ones with a newly-awakened sensuality, and those who are waiting. She lives in an extremely peopled world, her days and weeks are replete with events-journeys, happenings, children, food and all the preoccupations and trivia that fill a large household. Added to this, are the complex rituals of Indian life from which she seems unable to abdicate. In the hinterland of this pandemonium she lives alone, finding a secret space from which to touch the sources of creativity. She inhabits a place which she can share with no one for any length of time. This place is subterranean, remote and inaccessible. It is a lonely moonscape of her own making; trespassed upon by the occasional bird or animal, and the protagonist is often the person she yearns to touch, the person she long to be, or just screaming to be let out.

She thinks her paintings in particular provide much grist for the mills of such

\[\text{Website www.redhotcurry.com.}\]
speculation. Preoccupation with the human condition has always informed her canvases. Even when there is an empty chair dominating the picture, it speaks of the person who is absent. Whereas the loneliness that asserts itself is essentially her, it speaks as eloquently for the solitary state of the viewer. The browed-out eyes of her subjects are hard to answer. She thinks her earlier work was far more autobiographical or subjective, and the manifestations of this introspection often stopped short of revelation, keeping the final secrets unrevealed, behind hooded eyes. She would describe the treatment of some of her later figurative work as interpretative impressions where she views her subjects a little more objectively, reserving to herself the right to add, eliminate or exaggerate certain qualities. She does this particularly with portraits. If in her later work the eyes begin to open or reveal something, it is not because she was being consciously secretive earlier on. When she views her subjects it becomes far easier to be open, to respond to the brilliant colour and light that is ubiquitous if one lives in this country. She always had a theory that colours are born from the bleak wastes of the desert. She thinks of Rajasthan or of Ladakh, or the driest parts of Marathwada and Andhra. This also seems to be true of her work when she look back on it. It was in her moments of greatest despair that the hooded eyes of her subjects opened to let in the light, and vivid colours invaded her canvases totally against her better judgment.

She says that she hardly draws. She thinks she colours and paints lines in reverse. Colour is everything. Its depth or density, translucence or opacity forms the nuances of one's whole creative output. It is with colour that one sings, with colour that one plummets to the depths of sorrow and pain. When she dreams she sees colour, some of it obliterated, some overlaid with yet more pigment, causing harmonies, discords, syncopation. Slowly it gets peopled, the emerging shapes still defined by colour as
recognition dawns. She finds herself, in the 1990s, in a more mature and cosmopolitan cultural milieu, in an age where the globe has inevitably shrunk. During the 1960s or 70s, she was often made to feel like a freak for being so European in her approach, though it baffled her at the time that all the abstract painters in India escaped this particular criticism.1,2,3

As we approach the turn of the century, we are closer than ever to a global art where the barriers separating East, West, ethnic and avant-garde are crashing rapidly. As the dogma and ideologies of the mid-twentieth century begin to crumble and regional identities are less clear, emergent art forms become ingredients of a vast multi-cultural mosaic. As part of this flux, distinctions dissolve but artists still strive towards new horizons, new ideologies, annihilating the past constantly in search of an unknown future.

She felt a very early affinity, indeed adulation, for Amrita Shergil. She may have grown out of that obsession but she often speculates as to what further heights she would have soared had she lived. Coming from a comparatively secure background, in economic terms, is perhaps considered a disadvantage by many of those who entertain romantic notions of the artist as starving in a garret. Perhaps it is true that suffering is often the well-spring of creativity, but people suffer in many ways as she says that she is sure, Shergil did, despite her background. She has done time in the garret too and it did inspire and temper her work with a certain sobriety. She doesn't, however, make a virtue of physical hardship as do many of her crypto-communist peers. She thinks it would be a handicap to be 'privileged' only if it cut one off from the rest of humanity, and that has

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not happened. What she finds hardest to shed from the conditioning of her background is 'good taste'. Beauty has become a dirty word in contemporary art. She finds it impossible to divorce herself from beauty and, in the context of the 1990s, this could be a serious shortcoming. The current iconoclasm has led to the worship of a genre that is essentially in favour of the ugly, the obscure, and against the qualities of harmony and balance that were once revered. On the Indian scene there has been an unparalleled visual vulgarization in all spheres of life. With sudden modernization, the twin deities of consumerism and the box-office hit have led to an unmitigated explosion of hideous kitsch which manifests itself in clothes, architecture and life styles and is epitomized by huge film posters of extraordinary vulgarity. Living for many years in the concrete jungle of Bombay in the mid-1970s, her sole companion during the long days of painting alone in her flat was a crow which was her regular visitor and grew friendlier each day till stepped into the paintings, insinuating itself into nearly every frame during that period. Ultimately, the crow, who is one of the most friendly creatures, became a sort of alter-ego, an observer demanding to be let in and he has been there ever since, though with diminishing frequency. She thinks 'symbol' is perhaps too big a word for the small things that insinuate themselves into her canvases. 'Symbol' is a critic's word, surely, the threads, the necklaces, the kites, the little animals or draped cloth, transparent or opaque - these are the accoutrements and trappings that accompany the figure in her work. These are no conscious attempts at symbolism, though much has been written about the optimism of the kites or the sadness of sailing boats and so on. Sometimes it is mere ornamentation, the essentially feminine need to embellish or embroider, at other times it is the need to accent or to focus on the colour for purely painterly reasons.
In addition to paintings in private and corporate collections, her works have been acquired by museums in India and abroad. She is also a well-known muralist and has represented India at the Algiers Biennale, the Sao Paulo Biennale, Brazil and three triennials in New Delhi. She has been invited by the British Council, the U.S. State Department and the French Ministry of Culture to confer with leading artists in those countries. Menon has served on the advisory committee and the art purchase-committee of the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, where she was co-curator with Henri Claude Cousseau for a major exhibition of French Contemporary Art in 1996. Her work recently went under the hammer at the Christie's and Sotheby's auctions of Contemporary Indian Art in London. A book titled "Anjolie Ela Menon: Paintings in Private Collections" has been published on her life and work.

Menon lives and works in Delhi. She has artistically furnished residence in Nizammudin area. She displays an interest and zest for life, often relating incidents unconnected with her work. She also displays a surprising knowledge of the position of the artist in society, whether capitalist or Marxist. Many of her new works are still in the experimental stage. She reveals, "she is very lethargic basically. She has to be driven to do something. She admits, that she has been really driven to paint, in fact it is the only thing that she is driven to do."

Driven, she certainly has been. After a brief spell at the J.J. School of Art, Bombay, she earned a degree in English literature and held her first solo exhibition when she was just 18. As she recalls, "Work metamorphoses slowly. There are no quantum jumps as such. No sudden successes. Just small milestones at a time."

Anjolie has always believed in being focused. "She remembers her first exhibition very fondly. But she also realizes that when one is young, there is a certain arrogance of age. She had put up all of her 53 paintings in that exhibition. Today she wouldn't dream of putting up more than 20 pieces, and she'd be very selective. Despite that her exhibition was immensely popular.

In the early fifties she won a French Government scholarship to study at the Ecole Nationale Superieure Des Beaux Arts in Paris. Before returning home, she travelled extensively in Europe and West Asia, studying Romanesque and Byzantine art. Her husband's career in the navy also took her to interesting and often exotic destinations. However, she shrugs off any illusions that travelling with her husband gave her the much-desired international exposure.

Apart from travelling, she believes that her family has been immensely supportive of her work. Reflecting not just on her own issue, but an issue that poses a challenge to every working woman, she says, "I think it is very important for a woman to have a supportive family. It is important for a woman's work to be taken seriously. And I think our generation tried to balance both things out. We did our work well too, and still cared for our families, irrespective of our profession." Anjolie feels that the present generation has not been that successful in juggling office and home. "She thinks young women now spend a lot of energy fighting those feminist battles. In a way it is easier to give in and play your various roles simultaneously." Indeed that is something she has done very well.

Eccentric, volatile and outspoken, Anjolie Ela Menon's personality makes an impression as strong as her art. Menon's early canvases exhibit the varied influences of van Gogh, the European Expressionists, Modigliani, Amrita Sher-Gil, and M. F. Husain.
Mainly portraits, these paintings were dominated by flat areas of thick bright color, with sharp outlines that were painted with the vigour and brashness of extreme youth. Some of her solo shows include the ones held at Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi, 2003, 2002, 1996 and by The Gallery, in New York, 1989. Her works were exhibited in the Paris Biennale, 1980 and International Triennale, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, 1975, 71 and 68. A retrospective of her works was held at the National Gallery of Modern Art, Mumbai in 2002. Some of her group exhibitions include, Saffron art and Apparao Galleries in Los Angeles 2001 and Saffron art, Hong Kong 2001. She has been an invitee of the British Council, the U.S. Department of Culture and the French Ministry of Culture.

One of the most creative women artists of South Asia, Anjolie Ela Menon has held over 30 solo shows and several group shows. Her works were exhibited in the fifty years celebration of Indian art at the National Gallery of Modern Art in New Delhi and in 2000 the Indian Government has honoured her with a Padma Shree.

Nothing seems to dampen Anjolie Ela Menon's intense desire to create. One of India's most celebrated artists, she remains down to earth and retains a keen interest in people and happenings all around her which are reflected in her works. She is capable of painting for 15 hours a day. A punishing schedule for a person even half her age. But for her, it is a part of her creative life.

Speaking of inspiration, one sees a constant recurrence in her work of human figure. Has she generated a special empathy for the people she has put on her canvas? She thinks, and then replies, "Sometimes, not always. But, a figure as a recurring motif in

her work tends to point to certain phases of life, or her thinking at that point of time. It is autobiographical. It could refer to a romantic phase, or motherhood." Then her face breaks into a smile as she adds, "she is painting babies again, because of her grandchildren. So you see, it doesn't refer to anyone specifically." Her work in terms of its content, subjects and themes as well as her choice of medium and treatment is symbolic of the coming age of women artists in India.

People who know her well tell that besides babies she has a special fondness for her old school, Lawrence, Lovedale. She admits, "Yes, she certainly does miss her old school a lot. She often goes there. She thinks it is the most beautiful school in India. She has visited Doon and Rishi Valley schools and they are not a patch on Lawrence. It has such beautiful old buildings, a lovely environment and lush lawns, forests and the bluest skies you ever saw. She has had her grandchild registered there, though at the moment he is barely two years old. She loves spending time with her family and friends. She spends quite a lot of time looking after the house, and now that she has a small grandchild, she also spends a lot of time with him.

She goes to her studio, around 10.30 a.m. every day, but this also depends on the amount of work she has to do there. When she is in Delhi, she goes out quite often in the evenings. As she says, "She is lucky for her work that her day doesn't have to be structured in any way." "She thinks the younger artists have become very greedy. They don't wait to define a medium of their own or struggle to find a niche or style of their own. Youngsters who have just come out of college are already charging Rs. 50,000 to Rs. 75,000 for their work which she thinks is both foolish and very presumptuous.
She doesn't think the 'market', is that big, that it can sustain so many people at that price. She doesn't think any of us ever thought of money until it really started to happen to us despite ourselves."

Yet, Anjolie also hastens to add, She feels that these auctions have added credibility to the purchase of contemporary Indian art. Their catalogues provide an excellent reference point both for individual buyers and for galleries and museums. They establish not only prices but the provenance of Indian contemporary art.

It is perhaps best to sum up with Anjolie's own conception of the passion to paint that has driven her life. She says, Creative confidence is the hallmark of the great artist. The connection between the mind, eye and hand guided by emotion and imagination results in the ultimate creation of a work of art. Sometimes she feels that the people she paints will come out and talk to her. There is perhaps nothing more left to say beyond that. Art speaks for itself when in the hands of Anjolie Ela Menon.

4.2 WORK AND STYLE OF ANJOLIE ELA MENON

Anjolie Ela Menon, one of the most creative women artists of South Asia has held over 30 solo shows and several group shows. Her works were exhibited in the fifty years celebration of Indian art at the National Gallery of Modern Art in New Delhi and the Indian Government has honoured her with a Padma Shree.

Anjolie Ela Menon has worked for a six month solo at the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco from 20th of May 2006 featuring her large triptych entitled “Yatra” (Fig. 1). This large work is inspired by the annual march of the Kavadiyas to the holy sites on
the Ganga, where they gather in their millions each year during Shravan to collect water in pots to carry back to their village shrines for the worship of Shiva, sometimes walking barefoot 500 miles\textsuperscript{35}.

**Style**

When she was about eighteen she was drawn to the romantic, elongated forms of Modigliani, and to the lyricism of that great Indian painter, Amrita Shergil. Shergil epitomized perfect aesthetics, distilling into her very still pictures all that was most beautiful in rural India. In France she shared a studio with a young Mexican painter called Francesco Toledo now much celebrated, and they shared the same problem, even though they had no common language initially. They influenced each other greatly; his sensitive, colorful paintings were replete with mythological creatures from Mexican lore, strange images floating in coloured spaces garnered from the bright hues of her Indian garments-pinks, oranges and purples.

Few contemporary Indian artists have created a body of work of such beauty and depth as Anjolie Ela Menon over the last four decades. Her paintings reveal an extraordinary sensibility. The early paintings were characterized by a moodiness, profoundly influenced by Romanesque art. The brilliance of a Byzantine palette and sensibility illuminated her work of the late 1960s and her subject matter included priests, prophets, Madonna's and brooding nudes\textsuperscript{27}. By the 1970's Menon's work began to acquire an allegorical, narrative quality but the myth was of the artist's own making—a strange amalgam of east and west. Goats, dogs, crows and lizards often attended the

\textsuperscript{35}Celebration painting by Anjolie Ela Menon, Text by Gayatri Sinha, May 19-June 11, 2006. An Arts India publication.
central protagonists. Diaphanously clad women, animals, birds, reptiles and apocalyptic male figures inhabit and impinge upon a mythical world excavated from the artist's subterranean existence. Later there was a transition in her work from the nude to the window and a concomitant shift in perspective from the very subjective to a more literary and cerebral mode. From painted windows Menon incorporated real windows in her work as 'objects trouves'. The actuality of the window and its irreverent ornateness connects the viewer to a grid of fractured spaces and multiple images. In the most realized works of this genre, Anjolie evokes that which is hinted at the unsung song that wafts across disturbing landscape-the unrealized dream that beckons through the window that serves as both metaphor and visual device.

The windows persisted through the 80's but now allegory gave way to an engagement with subjects from Kerala inspired by early photographs—seated figures, poised against fake backdrops, empty chairs and ascetic poojaris emerging from dark interiors. Throughout the 80's Menon painted in America every summer in the house of Aditya her eldest son. Many of those paintings are being seen for the first time in India. The 90's were marked by diverse explorations and innovations in a bold departure from her earlier work. In 1992 Menon turned towards an astounding source-the kabadiwallah. Entitled ‘Follies in Fantastical Furniture’, this tongue-in-cheek resurrection of abandoned junk was both audacious and innovatively amusing. As the noted art critic, the late Krishna Chaitanya noted, it was rewarding to share the mood in which she has created them, a mood of venturing into new directions, inspired by the modern, post-modern,
post-everything spirit of restless enquiry that probes fresh perspectives without any prior fanatical commitment. Chairs, tables, cupboards, boxes off junk heaps—little seemed to escape the artist in imparting these objects with an aesthetic autonomy. In an inimitably impish way, Menon broke fresh ground with irreverent panache.

The innovative experiments of the mid 1990s with computer aided images were amongst the first in India. The superimposition of overlapping images using computers, photography and collage painted over with acrylic, oils and inks results in an impressive tour de force entitled Mutations. In these works unexpected juxtapositions intrigue the viewer. While the complexity of the structure heightens the element of surprise, the elements of chance liberates the image from its familiar moorings. Nude, serpent, boy and crocodile remake themselves repeatedly, giving birth to unrecognized mutants, which claim a life of their own. Underlying the slick surface of the totally new picture are echoes the artist’s earlier work, reinforcing those elements that have been associated with the Menon idiom while achieving a new sense of scale.

In the next phase, the artist, for the first time, explores the non-figurative—inspired by the Buddhist iconography of Ladakh. The continuous chanting of a 'mantra' is transmuted into image, evoking metonymic reverberations in these meditative paintings of 1998. The late 1990 saw Menon doing a volte face in terms of the choice of medium. The long standing ‘Riyaz’ with paint was put on hold. A completely different medium—glass—challenged the artist's creativity. Working in Murano with local Venetian mastery, Menon has created a body of exquisite crystal sculptures—entitled ‘Sacred Prism’ where

38Anjolie Ela Menon Lalit Kala Akademy, New Delhi, 2006
the austere precision of the finished object is sensuously beautiful. In her latest work Menon navigates the world of kitsch with empathy and engages with the familiar image from the calendar in the local riwallali’s shop or the cinema hoarding that dot the urban landscape. As Gayatri Siriha perceptively observes of this new genre: "Menon emerges in the vanguard with investigation of the subversion of myth. She introduces the extremely recognizable figures from her own painting with the appurtenances of kitsch, thereby forcing a confrontation: between notions of elite 'high' and popular 'low' art."

All the new experimentation is still characterized by the old masterish technique, reminiscent of Renaissance paintings, for which she is best known but endures as a parody of itself. Self-mockery and sly satire, tranquility and disturbance imbue her work with an aura of paradox that transcends the melancholic romanticism that appears to be an integral part of her persona.

### 4.3: Exhibitions

**Exhibitions**

1959  First solo exh, Gallery 59, Bhulabhai Institute, Bombay. 1963 Solo exh., Alliance Française, Bombay.


1976  Solo exh, Gallery Chemould, Bombay.

1978  Exhb, New Delhi.


1989  Solo exhb, New York.

1993  Reflections and Images, organized by Vadehra Art Gallery, Jehangir Art Gallery.

1996  Exhb, organised by Vadehra Art Gallery, Hong Kong.


2002  Solo exhb, organized by Vadehra Art Gallery, National Gallery of Modern Art, Mumbai.

2003  Solo exhb, organised by Vadehra Art Gallery, Shridharani Gallery, New Delhi.

Collections

National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi.
Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi.
Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi.
Apparao Gallery, Chennai.

4.4 AWARDS AND HONOURS CONFERRED ON ANJOLIE ELA MENON

Menon who has been awarded the Padmashree is amongst the most important artists in the current scene in contemporary Indian art. Indian artist Anjolie Ela Menon has been honoured from different luminaries worldwide. Isana Murti writes in the portfolio published by Lalit Kala Academy in 2006 ‘Anjolie Ela Menon, one of India’s best known artists’ that she had her first solo exhibition in 1958.38

38Anjolie Ela Menon, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, 2006
Richard Bartholomew, a renowned critic, wrote, 'I have no doubt that before long this
gifted young woman will be joining the ranks of our very best painters'. These words
have been truly prophetic and Menon's trajectory over the last five decades is testimony
to the evolution of an artist who has defied easy classification and who has broken fresh
ground with confident panache.

Ranjit Hoskote writes 'Menon has always prized what she terms the 'aura' of the
paintings. This aura has been achieved in her finest works.' Gayatri Sinha writes 'Her
panoply of figures, as they appear, signify non-space and non-time...like a wanton
fabulist, Menon brings accretion, division, conjunction to play upon the conventional
image. Nothing seems to dampen Anjolie Ela Menon's intense desire to create. One of
India's most celebrated artists, she remains down to earth and retains a keen interest in
people and happenings all around her which are reflected in her works.\(^\text{35}\)

Awards

1959-61 Received French Govt. Scholarship for higher studies in Paris.
1980-81 Invited to study art by the Govt. of France, UK and USA.
2000 Awarded Padmashri, one of the highest civilian honours in India.

Anjolie Ela Menon has been nominated on the board of trustees of the Indira Gandhi
National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), the only visual artist to have been. Here's what
she has to say about her objective in accepting this new responsibility:

"My aim in serving on this trust is to build upon the great work that's already been done
specially in terms of scholarship and the collection of material which is of national

\(^{35}\)Celebration painting by A’njolie Ela Menon, Text by Gayatri Sinha, May 19-June 11, 2006. An Arts India
publication.
importance culturally”. She says that she would like to help in whichever way she can in the speedy implementation of the building plans. It would also be her humble endeavour to add to the credibility of this institution by ensuring a greater interface with the public and the contemporary practitioners in the field of the arts, so that the activities associated with the IGNCA are more participatory in nature. 

38 Anjolie Ela Menon Lalit Kala Akademy, New Delhi, 2006