

# 'First cries of a newborn'

## Emami Expo A Welcome Addition To Artists' Annual Calendar

Ratnottama Sengupta | TNN

The first Emami annual exhibition was held in the city recently. It's "the first cries of a newborn," as Ramnanda Bandopadhyay described it, in the presence of Ganesh Haloi, Dhiraj Chowdhury, Wasim Kapoor, Niranjana Pradhan, Partha Pratim Deb and a host of other artists present at ECA's expansive gallery.

Bringing as does an award along with the honour of exhibiting at a prestigious forum is a welcome addition to the annual calendar of Indian artists on the ascent. So far they'd vie for positions in the annual shows of the Delhi-based Lalit Kala Akademi, Kolkata's Birla Academy of Art and Culture, and the Academy of Fine Arts, which once led these events nationally. With AIFACS going out of the national radar, Emami is poised to give artists across the length and breadth of this land another sturdy platform to showcase their creative output.

In spite of being the first year, the number of entries had crossed 500. The catchment area can be widened in the coming years, with publicity in art journals and columns. But the best way to enhance the reputation of any award is its credibility. Confidence in an award is built only with the best works winning it, year after year. It's a Catch 22 situation, though. The best works will be entered only when the award builds up a reputation. It's unrealistic to expect that in its very first year.

The five awarded streams, painting,



drawing, graphics, sculpture and new media, cause some soul searching.

Should painting be further classified into watercolour, oil, pastel, tempera? Or should it be categorized idiom-wise into Indian style and folk art? And what should define 'New Media' - installation or performance art? Photography? Where do we place textiles or stained glass? In sculpture, how would ceramics fare against bronze, fibreglass, or cement/tyre/organic fibre?

The jury members were not perturbed by any such debate while viewing the works. One notices a tilt towards contemporary practices though nothing path-breaking is on view.

The jury, including this writer along with masters such as Sanat Kar and Dhiraj Chowdhury, closely scrutinized the graphic images and drawings. While the woodcuts and etchings are loyal to age-old treatments, the drawings throw up some pleasant surprises. Leading the list is 'Sarkas da' by Surajit Biswas: the artist has used his croquis pen to create a fine body of textured image.

The oil painting by Soumya Samanta attracts attention with its painstakingly built panorama. At the other end, a small-sized tempera composition delights with

its treatment of two figures. The warmth of their embrace pervades the canvas. In watercolour, 'Top View of Holy Hardwar', walks away with the laurels not because of the image but because of its treatment. How effectively Kashinath Das has evoked the feel of a massive turnout? And with what? Mere dots. Delectable.

An oriental style of work has been chosen only to honour an indigenous tradition. When shall we see greater experiments and startling use of the lens in this city? Digital technology has made photography ubiquitous but, as in any other form of art, it is the mind behind the lens that must visualize the possibilities of the medium.

Finally, it was sculpture that offered the most interesting use of classic mediums. Be it the evocation of a shanty or a waterbody surrounded by trees, sculptors seem to be rooted to the soil while their imagination is reaching for the sky.

How can the Emami award stand apart from the others already in the field? Should it award a body of work by an artist rather than a single work or two? Should it set up a 'minimum three solos' norm to ensure maturity in entries? Should it set up a particular theme for entries in all the streams? Should the award entail collection in addition to the handsome prize money of Rs 50,000 for each stream? Or should it be a platter of opportunities, say to visit an art centre in Paris, London, New York, Tokyo, St Petersburg?

The future will answer the thoughts.