

Amrita Sher-Gil: The Passionate Quest

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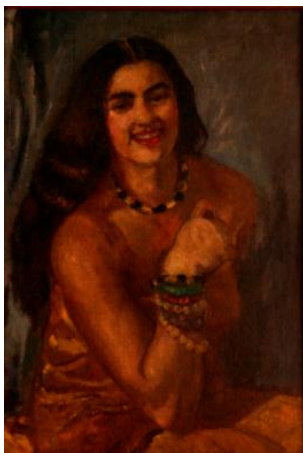
Curated by Yashodhara Dalmia

National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, Ministry of Culture, Government of India has mounted this extensive exhibition *Amrita Sher-Gil: The Passionate Quest* on the occasion of the closing of the birth centenary celebration of Amrita Sher-Gil (1913-1941).

Amrita Sher-Gil was recognised as an outstanding artist during her short, experientially rich life. The remarkable variety of subjects and styles in her work indicate the diversity and range of her interests that touch, with empathy, on all aspects of human experience. The works map the journey from the genesis of her art to its triumphant culmination in the last period. This consists of the essential conditions of her paintings which can be traced to the training at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, her return to India in 1934, the subsequent experiments in her work resulting from the exposure to Ajanta and Ellora and Indian miniatures as well as her last paintings which point towards another fruitful breakthrough. As Sher-Gil's attempts at modernity and loosening the shackles of academism became increasingly successful, she was to make iconic works which created a distinctive interweaving of Eastern and Western art.

As a comprehensive show, this displays the NGMA collection almost in its entirety. It also has photographs evoking nostalgia as well as her personal letters. The curator has sensitively showcased the richness of her visual language and her dramatic experiments with form and composition. This impressive and arresting collection of her paintings is supplemented by an illuminating display of text and images, *Remembering Amrita Sher-Gil*. This focuses on the artistic genius and mercurial personality of Amrita Sher-Gil, which have a bearing on her paintings. To further contextualise Amrita Sher-Gil's modernism, an audio-visual highlighting the European art scene in the early 20th century, conceptualised by Ella Datta, is an additional feature of this significant show. Yashodhara Dalmia has approached the oeuvre from four different perspectives described as *Threshold*, *Icon and Iconolastic*, *Hungarian Manifestation* and *Indian Journey*.

The complexity of Amrita Sher-Gil's personality and the brilliant versatility of her work invite varied reactions. Viewers remark on the sensuousness of her representations, her sensitivity, her melancholy faces and her intimate projections of a female identity. And indeed all these readings are inescapably true.



Self-Portrait (7)

Oil on canvas, c.1930,
50x73cm, NGMA