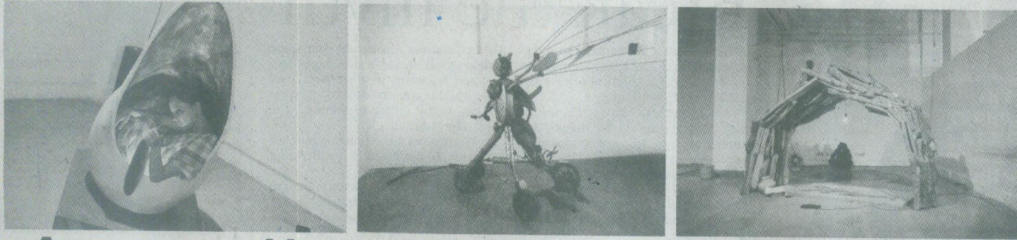


Clip: 1 of 1

MIX AND MATCH TWO HOURS



A walk through memory lane

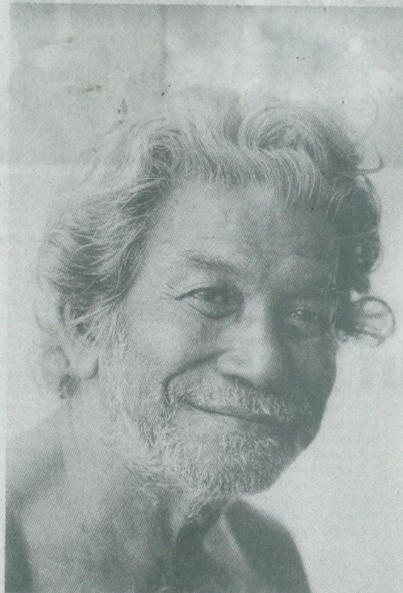
The works and ideas of artist RAM KINKAR BAIJ are brought to life by members of the Vivadi Theatre Group in a unique art-meets-theatre show of two hours. The installations and performances reflect everyday life of the 50s. By SHRABASTI MALLIK

As we made our way through the dimly-lit space to the gallery, a boy who was pulling a wooden horse looked at us, with his face almost expressionless. As we walked further, there were more people busy in strange activities. Like a couple sat on a thatched hut making some patterns on the ground and a mother watched her son play with toys and a girl performing acrobats on a wooden pole.

These people, we found out, have assumed the role of the characters from the works of Ram Kinkar Baij, one of India's first contemporary artists of both sculptures and paintings. His world of sculpture, painting and theatre has literally been brought alive by Vivadi Theatre Group in collaboration with IGNCA through a unique form of theatre called promenade or immersive theatre to create a unique art-meets-theatre exhibition. Titled *409 Ramkinkars*, the presentation has brought together former National School of Drama's director Anuradha Kapur, artists Vivan Sundaram, Santanu Bose, Rimli Bhattacharya and Aditee Biswas, whose untiring effort of two years has resulted in the show. People can have an insight into the mind of Ram Kinkar through a conducted two-hour sculpture, installation and theatre show, which will continue till April 15.

Ram Kinkar was once asked whether he preferred sculpture or paintings and he replied, "I ride both horses at the same time." But he also rode a third horse of performance — of theatre and song — which he loved with equal passion. Every inch of space at the IGNCA ground is a reflection of the ideas of the artist with replica of his artworks placed at various corners.

For the visitors, the journey began from the foyer where 400 miniature clay artworks, sourced and collected from all over the country, are displayed. The gallery is the space where Sundaram has brought to life the objects and characters from Ram Kinkar's paintings through art installations. One of the installations is a sculpture of a hollow shell in which a girl is sitting holding a fish in her hands. But within seconds the girl comes out and start slicing the fish. Once she is done, she quietly



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returns back into the shell with a portion of the cut fish. Sundaram explained, "Visitors move through 12 performance-based tableaux based on Ram Kinkar's works that take place simultaneously. Through this they familiarise and immerse themselves with the concept of his works and explore more about the life and times, both political and social, that the artist lived in."

Matighar at IGNCA has been turned into a replica of the studio in which the artist worked. The visitors encountered actors behaving like animals, orating eloquent speeches of the freedom struggle and sweeping floors.

One runs the chance of being confused and lost because all these things happen simultaneously and from all directions.

Once out of Matighar, we were guided by *Mill, Recall*, an art installation made by Vivan Sundaram, to the open air theatre, *Mill Recall*, made with scraps of old scooters and motorbikes, looks like a human with long glowing antennas.

During his time, Ram Kinkar had suggested that before taking a seat the audience should be asked to walk on the stage and look at his sets. The visitors were invited to become a part of the performance which depicted how modern the artist was in his thoughts and ideas in the 50s. In one of the scenes, a host of characters from his plays — political leaders and actors depicting social and political events — circle an actor playing Ram Kinkar as he works in his studio.

The show concluded with a chorus song where all the actors stood on bamboo scaffolding. Artist Aditee Biswas said, "In *409 Ramkinkars*, there is, in fact, little attempt to reproduce what actually happened, it seeks to dynamise a space where ideas, material, pedagogy and life intermix. Material, text and body attempt to generate and animate a sense of Ram Kinkar's art practice, one that ranged across sculpture, painting, scenography and theatre. Events, beliefs, politics and affiliations are not duplicated, they are instead put into a type of dialogue with the contemporary and for the contemporary."