

OBITUARY

## Paritosh Sen (1918–2008)

By Hanae Ko

**KOLKATA** — Bengali artist Paritosh Sen, a founding member of the 1940s Indian modern art movement known as the Calcutta Group, died of a lung infection on October 22, 2008, in Kolkata.

Born in 1918 in Beltoli, Dhaka (now in Bangladesh), Sen completed his school education at 17. He fled from home to join the Madras Art School, which he chose for his admiration of its then principal, sculptor and painter DP Roy Chowdhury, a fellow Bengali. In 1943, after a brief stint as a teacher at the Daly College in Indore, Madhya Pradesh, Sen moved to Calcutta and formed the modernist art league, the Calcutta Group, along with his friends, which included sculptor Pradosh Das Gupta and painters Gopal Ghose and Nirode Mazumdar. The artists, who held regular exhibitions together, were known for combining the Bengali folk idiom with contemporary modernism.

In 1949, Sen left for Europe, where he studied art history at the Académie André Lhote, the Académie Grand Chaumier, the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. In the mid-1950s, Sen met Pablo Picasso, who greatly influenced his paintings.

After returning to India in 1954, Sen taught art at the Netarhat School in Palamau, and design at the School of Printing Technology at Jadavpur University in Calcutta. In the early 1960s, Sen returned to France, where he was commissioned by the French government to design Bengali typography based on a script devised by Bengali poet and Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore. In 1969, he was awarded the French Fellowship for Designing and Typeface.

Considered a leading figure of modern Bengali art, Sen was also an accomplished writer in Bengali and English. One of his most renowned works is *Jindabahr Lane*, an autobiographical vignette named after the street where he lived in Dhaka.

Sen's last major show took place on his 88th birthday, at Galerie 88, Kolkata, in 2007. There, the profile painter Sen, who had desired an "88" themed exhibition, displayed 88 vibrantly colored paintings from the past two years, many of them portraits with twisted, contorted forms and self portraits showing himself working at his easel. ■

ROUND UP

## Woe is the New Black

By HG Masters

**VARIOUS LOCATIONS** — Doomsayers, short sellers, cynics and catastrophe junkies everywhere—join hands for a chorus of *schadenfreude*: the global recession is upon us! Though long anticipated, the economic downturn has besieged the buoyant, money-besotted art world in a matter of months. Many will proclaim that the reversal of fortunes is "good for the art" or a "necessary correction," but only a few will survive.

Some will not be missed. In mid-January, the fashion house Chanel canceled the worldwide tour of the commercial Chanel Mobile Art Pavilion, a Zaha Hadid-designed "image operation" resembling a nautilus shell and filled with artistic homages to the fashion label's 2.55 quilted handbag by art-world luminaries such as Sophie Calle, Subodh Gupta, Yoko Ono and Yang Fudong. After debuting in Hong Kong in February 2008, the advert-as-exhibit toured to Tokyo in May before reaching its final resting place in New York's Central Park in October.

Other ventures, however, will be mourned. The globe-spanning gallery Bodhi Art announced it was closing its New York, New Delhi, Berlin and Singapore branches, consolidating its operations in Mumbai. The gallery's downsizing represents a blow to its roster of top-flight artists and gallery-goers.

Taipei's Esliet Gallery is undergoing a happier relocation, moving into a new space on Songgao Road, not far from Taipei's city hall and the gallery's old space. Michael Lin presents the first show in March, a sanguine gesture for sullen times.

Those who can afford to wait out the doldrums need to keep things interesting. To that end, London's Aicon Gallery tapped Niru Ratnam as its new director. Ratnam, the former director of London's STORE gallery, brings an experimental curatorial edge to the gallery's programming. His first show for the gallery, "Poetic Documentary," opened February 6 with Sanjeet Chowdhury's video, a cultural history of meat in India.

Seeking higher ground is another way to survive. Word came from Shanghai (via Switzerland) on January 20 that ShContemporary director Lorenzo Rudolph would not be returning to the two-year-old art fair. Instead, the former head of Art Basel will run the international development

program at Luxrule, which operates over 200 fairs worldwide including Artparis.

Three days later, ShContemporary's parent company, BolognaFiere, announced that former Ullens Center chief curator Colin Chinnery will guide the fair into its third year. Chinnery will have to contend with the unruly state of China's art market when the fair opens on September 9.

As many emerging markets take a giant step backward in 2009, museum building in the Middle East continues at record pace. Robert Mandle, director of the Qatar Museum Authority (QMA), speaking with Carol Kino for Abu Dhabi newspaper, *The National*, confirmed the QMA's plan for three more museums: a Herzog & de Meuron-designed venue devoted to Orientalism, a space for modern and contemporary Arab art and a photography museum.

Culture shock meant something else to venerated Indian modernist SH Raza, who arrived at an exhibition of his works at New Delhi's Dhoomimal Gallery only to proclaim that the 30 paintings on view were all fakes. Loaned by Raza's nephew, the paintings were taken down immediately. The 86-year-old Indian Progressive filed a lawsuit against his nephew, who denied wrongdoing, saying that the works were taken from Raza's former home in Madhya Pradesh.

Denial, whether psychological or official policy, is a predictable coping mechanism in the face of crisis. Expect a wave of stories in the following months along the following line: As major auction houses are cutting staff, *The New York Times* reported on rumors that debt-laden auction houses Sotheby's and Christie's may be put up for sale. Executives at each company denied the rumors.

The same situation prevails in China, where Beijing's grapevine is speculating on the future of the nonprofit, Belgian-owned Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA), which also denied rumors that it was considering selling off its collection or closing the one-year-old space in Beijing's 798 Arts District. UCCA saw record attendance to its recent corporate-sponsored exhibition "Christian Dior & Chinese Artists."

At other 798 venues, however, the story is officially dour. After reports that three-dozen galleries had closed, on January 15 the Beijing Culture & Development Fund, under the aegis of China's Propaganda Bureau, launched the Art Beijing Fund, a bailout for struggling galleries. The RMB 5 million fund (USD 732,000) is available to galleries who apply; the needy will be assessed by a sympathetic committee that includes UCCA director Jérôme Sans, Boers Li gallery director Pi Li and Leng Lin of PaceWildenstein Beijing. ■

