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3rd
Anniversary
Issue

IN MEMORY OF

RAM KUMAR

23 SEPTEMBER 1923 - 14 APRIL 2018

*While **Rahul Kumar**, himself an artist, writer and curator reflects on the master strokes of **Ram Kumar**, photographer **Parthiv Shah** shares a few candid glimpses of the master artist caught in his lens.*



Pic: Parthiv Shah

Ram Kumar, the last of the three living associates of the Progressive Artist Group passed away in Delhi on April 14, 2018. Born in Shimla in a middle-class family in 1924, Kumar studied Economics at Delhi's St. Stephen's College. As a child he had interest in art and joined evening classes under the guidance of Sailoz Mukherjea, an early modernist and one of the nine masters on the list of Archaeological Survey of India. Kumar's art depicts the angst and pain of the society originating from the freedom struggle and partition that he was himself witness to. Later, struggles of the common man of newly independent India took over his expression. Kumar left for Paris in 1950 to study under Cubist painter Fernand Léger and sculptor André Lhote. The stay in France at the time had influenced his ideology towards communalism and he ended up joining the French Communist Party. The experience led to heightened compassion for the marginalised and suppressed members of the society. In his inexhaustible and long career, Kumar developed a unique style of renditioning, that of short blocks of strokes and bold lines. The initial works had an evident influence of western modern art. The paintings were monochromatic with dark shades in browns and greys. His palette changed to include brighter tones after he visited Benaras with MF Husain in early sixties, though the emotion at core of the works remained to depict sorrow and pain, of life and of death. Like other artists and colleagues of his times, the works had a strong reference to the homeland and concerns of the contemporary Indian society.



MF Hussain with Ram Kumar
Pic: Parthiv Shah



Pic: Courtesy of Vadehra Art Gallery



Pic: Courtesy of Vadehra Art Gallery

I happened to be at the residence of Krishen Khanna on the morning of Ram Kumar's passing away. A close friend and also an associate of the Progressive Artist Group, Khanna was extremely disturbed with the news. "My father fondly narrates stories of the friendship he had with Ram Kumar. In the mid 1950s, Kumar was not selling a lot of his work. By way of support, my parents invited him to hold a home-show at 115, Loyd's Road, (then) Madras. It was the house where they lived when my father was serving at the Grindlays Bank. While the show was well attended, nothing sold.

Distressed as he was, Kumar stepped out of the house to get fresh air. On his return my mother doled out Rs. 350/- telling him that someone came and bought a work. Many years later Ram Kumar got to know that it was my mother who actually bought the work, and we still have it with us," shares Krishen Khanna's son. A humble man and gentle soul, Ram Kumar was a man of few words. He will be remembered by generations for his contributions to the modern Indian art and will live on through his paintings for all times to come.

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