

JMS Mani

Artist Interview

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At what stage did you decide to take up Art as a profession?

I come from a family where all are teachers. My uncle had an art school in Srirampuram. Also in my earlier days in school, I used to participate in various activities relating to art. As during various festivals and New-Year celebrations, I volunteered to do all decorations. Thus I was considered a local hero. When I completed my SSLC board exams in Bangalore, the headmistress of my school encouraged me to do a detailed course in Art, in process widening my knowledge about Art. Soon after, in 1969, I studied at the Chitrakala Parishath, the art institution in Bangalore. But due to personal family problems, I discontinued after 6 months. I did not indulge in any art practices for the next 4 years. I used to play sports at that time. I enjoy gymnastics and football. Then in 1974, I visited Ken’s school of Art in Bangalore where I watched Hadpad the founder of the institution doing some clay modeling. I watched him work and asked him if I could join. I showed him the art work I did after school and he asked me to join the very next day. I have been there since. First as a student, then a faculty member and now the principal.

In most of your work, the consistent theme of Badami is featured. The folk in their rural settings. What inspired you to choose this subject –matter?

While studying in Ken’s School, I used to have long talks with Hadpad, who was born in Badami. I got curious and then in 1975, I visited Badami along with other fellow students.

I remember my first impression when I entered Badami at 6:30 am. The narrow muddy path with mountains and a beautiful golden sky. Lot of tangas, the bus-stop with a single tree. It is Badami and its simplicity that inspires me. The tangawallas at bus-stops, the golden morning skies, men with turbans and banana shops at every corner... Makes my imagery and makes me go there again and again.

Then we traveled around the town, observed people with large turbans sitting in groups, smoking ‘beedis’. Also I remember the sounds of ladies washing clothes at the lake. We made sketches of people while they were at work.

After 10 days we had an exhibition there in a compound with a broken wall. I remember we cleaned the entire place and exhibited our sketches and paintings. It is an experience to cherish. Till today I frequently visit Badami.

Could you comment on your choice of media and colour?

In the beginning I used to mainly do sketches. I did a lot of them. Then I started doing oils and acrylic. Presently I have also done graphic works, and when I do landscapes I use

water colours.

My abstract rock structures have influences of colours I see in Badami horizons. Also now I am doing some bronze sculpture, which I shall be exhibiting in the coming year.

When was your first exhibition? Comment on it?

It was in 1978, when I was in my 4th year that I had my first show. At that time, Hadpad used to take hobby classes at the Bangalore University. He encouraged me to have an exhibition. My first exhibition was in a bus garage at the Bangalore University campus. We both cleaned the place at arranged my works. A lot of friends and well-wishers came for my show. It gave me a lot of confidence. It was this show that made me realize that art is my life. I remember telling Hadpad that. The very next day he asked me to join as a teacher at Ken.

How has your family been influenced by your Art?

My wife and my children are very supportive of my Art. My son has specialized in painting and is presently in the final year at the Chitrakala Pariahath, the art institution in Bangalore. Since childhood he has been doing a lot of sketches and use to love to play with color. My daughter is doing an interior design course.

What do you see yourself in the present Indian contemporary art scenario?

I think most of the artists these days depend on experimenting by using different mediums and applying different techniques. I have done a lot of works in different styles. But my Badami series works are the best acclaimed. As I am a teacher, I am used to working with many medias together. Like in one day I start a work in water-colors and then the same day switch to an oil painting. But I am waiting for my retirement to concentrate on my painting and experiment further.