

Sandhya Raga

- Rupika Chawla

Life runs its natural course much as the way the day moves towards its closure. The evening sun glows redly on its slow way towards darkness, so reminiscent of a life ebbing away.

The exhibition *Sandhya Raga* is the title given by Chameli Ramachandran, who daily, over months, saw the life and genius of Ramachandran, her husband, move towards its gradual termination.

At some stage he knew it too, as his strength slowly declined, even though his will and wish remained unconquerable. He painted *Pilgrimage to Obeshwar*, which remains his last ever triptych to be made. He had always been the consummate master of diptychs, triptychs and pentptychs, paintings of infinite length, which now were no longer possible. But *Pilgrimage to Obeshwar* was made in 2023 and still has his masterful touch. Straight Mughal-style floral designs, combined with curvilinear ones, flood the panels, with strong assertions of red, mauve, and green effortlessly blending together. His eyes were weak by now but a lifelong experience of line and colour were there to guide him.

The nine views of Eklingji are his last series of single oil on canvas works. Memories of Eklingji and deep nostalgia of such happy places made him make these paintings, with the awareness that now these ponds were never to be visited again - nor the sketching of youthful Bhil girls with their fluorescent ribbons.

Near Udaipur is Eklingji, with a breathtakingly large lotus pond hidden behind an ancient stone wall interrupted by a majestic archway. Further, beyond the pond is a strangely shaped hill

jutting skywards, keeping company with gentle, green slopes that surround this rocky structure. This is where Ramachandran's engagement with lotus ponds began and where it finally ended when he died. In these paintings, his mind incessantly explores Eklingji in a manner that his body no longer could, his practiced hand conjuring Eklingji in calm and stormy weather, or in the meditative blue of a sparkling night.

Beginning with 2023, Eklingji's hill, pond, lotuses, sky, birds and other aspects of nature were obsessively painted by Ramachandran. Over time, his energy was gradually diminishing, and his health problems were mounting. The hill was always present, providing a great pictorial device surrounded by the many charms of the lake. In these nine oil paintings, Eklingji's landscape is presented; yet the landscape is not what the eyes see because reality and interpretation have combined to make another reality. These are memory's real images and an artist's artistic beliefs brought together.

Ramachandran's constant play with his subject matter had reached a point that man, animal and natures were free to do what they wanted in his paintings, watercolours and sculptures. On display at this exhibition are the much earlier bronze sculptures of a day and night oil joint as Siamese twins with his image. A bronze apsara joins the fantasy world.

Complications slowly invaded his body. The stubborn passion that made him push forward had begun to tire him. A practiced stroke of an oil brush so much always taken for granted now became difficult. Sitting before a canvas was an impossibility, standing was out of question.

Refuge was found in watercolours continuing with the same Eklingji rhythm. That too had to be gradually discarded as

problems increased and the “inactive artist” – as he mocked himself to be - came into being. He sketched with halting strokes, his wry humour manifesting in the sketches that he made. He was dignified in the knowledge of his future, which was so limited, and drawing was his great refuge.

A month before he died, Ramachandran made a sketch of what he then felt he looked like with a shaky hand, fatigue and discomfort making it more impossible to manage.

The sketch appears below, his adieu to life.