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27 Jul 2012 | *Hindustan Times (Delhi)*

*Batham wants each and every home to have a work of art. He wants to make it affordable for the middle class. BURHAAN KINU / HT PHOTO Rajkumari Tankha rtankha@hindustantimes.com*

## Working towards art for all

Most days a number of artists are busy painting or making sculptures here. These artists come in the morning around 11am and remain here till about 6pm, and during this period they are not just provided with all the raw material needed to paint or sculpt but also a steady supply of eatables by an art lover, RN Batham.





A resident of Sector 33, he has put to use a big hall in the premises of his art gallery in Sector 58 for the use of artists who can come here and indulge in their passion. He doesn't charge anything for this.

The artworks thus prepared are put on show at the Kala Mitra Gallery and when sold, the profit is divided equally between the gallery and the artist. Significantly, an artist doesn't have to pay for anything, neither the space and material nor the show, or even the printing of catalogues. All this helps bring down the production cost and hence the price of the art piece. Moreover, from time to time art camps are also held at the gallery and senior artists are called to guide and educate the young and upcoming ones.

"This is my way of contributing towards the growth of art and artists," says Batham. "There are many artists in this city who are poor, they work out of their homes where there isn't ample space for putting canvases, easels, brushes and paints," he says.

"I want each and every home to have a work of art. Only if an art piece, be it a painting or a sculpture, is affordable can a middle class person buy it. This concept of art was first propagated by artist Jamini Roy. His underlying quest was to make art accessible to a wider section of people; and this is what I also believe in," he adds.

"It is a very good initiative for young artists who cannot afford to hold shows at costly galleries," says **Kaustav Mukherjee**, an upcoming artist, who was part of group show held recently at Kala Mitra.

What Batham is doing today is the culmination of decades of passion. It was in 1970 after he completed his MA (drawing and painting) from Kanpur University that he thought of doing something for artists. Along with some like-minded friends he formed an organisation, Kala Mitra, literally meaning friends of art.

"There were 12 of us, all students who were moved by the plight of artists. Back then, there were no art critics or historians. There were few books on art in English but none in Hindi or other Indian languages, which was a big drawback for artists from small towns," he says.

Kala Mitra began with organising shows for painters, sculptors, musicians and literateurs. It also started bringing out an English-Hindi quarterly journal of art. "We used to pool in for holding shows and bringing out the journal. Artists were called from different cities of UP as well as adjoining states of Bihar and Madhya Pradesh," says Batham.

The activities had to be discontinued in 1972 after Batham joined the National Gallery of Modern Art as museum lecturer. During his service life, he was involved in developing new educational programmes for school, college and university level students. While he was doing what he loved, he wasn't satisfied. That there wasn't even one book on art terminology bothered him a lot. And this is what he began working on.

The Paarithashik Kala Kosh, a dictionary containing various terms used in art, finally came out 1985.

It contains meanings of all the terms used in various forms of art, not just in English but other languages like German, French, Italian, etc. The book is in the libraries of all the art colleges and universities in the country. Its second edition was released earlier this year.



The Kala Mitra Gallery and the studio for artists was opened last year. And since then upcoming and veteran artists have been regular here.

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