

## The Contemporary Kalighat Artist: Jamini Roy

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Reference to this paper  
should be made as follows:

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*The Contemporary Kalighat  
Artist: Jamini Roy*

Artistic Narration 2024,  
Vol. XV, No. 1,  
Article No. 2 pp. 5-9

**Online available at:**  
[https://anubooks.com/  
journal/artistic-narration](https://anubooks.com/journal/artistic-narration)

### **Abstract**

*Among the individuals who led the way in promoting self-respect for the artistic production of indigenous peoples was Jamini Roy, who had a significant impact on the prevailing viewpoint on art in that era.*

*Western art ideas were the basis of Jamini Roy's art education, but he rejected the Bengal Art School's aristocratic viewpoint in favor of drawing inspiration from folk style traditions to develop his own unique indigenous style. He discovered that the artistic spirit that endures in the scrolls, Kalighat paintings, Puja images, and the masses of objects made for rituals—all combined with the visual effects of Kanthas and Alpana's—still possesses a character of freshness, directness, and robustness. His immaculate style was characterized by strong beauty in line work, bold color schemes, and flawless patterns.*

*Roy really started a trend by modeling the popular style of the 1930s, which was for painters to recondition their works of art by including folk elements and style. His painting technique is still applicable in the context of contemporary art today. Jamini Roy's use of imagery, themes, symbols, and idioms served as an inspiration to many contemporary Indian painters.*

## **Introduction**

Jamini Roy was born in Beliatiore village, in the Bankura district of West Bengal, on April 11, 1887, into a landowning family that was quite well-off.

At the age of sixteen, Jamini was sent to study at the Government College of Art in Kolkata, from which he graduated in 1908 with a diploma in fine art. He had painting instruction in the prevalent academic tradition of oil painting and drawing classical nudists. He soon discovered, though, that he needed to find inspiration in his own culture rather than in Western customs, so he turned to the local folk and tribal art. The popular market paintings known as “Kalighat Pats,” which were sold outside Kolkata’s Kalighat temples, had the biggest influence on him.

Between 1921 and 1924, he started his first phase of experimentation, departing from his earlier impressionist landscapes and portraits, using the Santhal dance as his starting point. Painting on canvases was Jamini’s traditional method; instead, she began painting on linen, matting, and even lime-coated wood. In addition, rather than using European paints, he began experimenting with natural colors and pigments made from dirt, chalk powder, and flowers. Roy developed a new style based on Bengali folk traditions, departing from his academic Western background.

His main goals were to give Indian art its own character, to make art more widely accessible, and to convey the spirit of simplicity found in the lives of the folk people. The paintings of Jamini Roy were initially displayed in 1958 on British India Street in Calcutta, or Kolkata. His fame peaked in the 1940s, when his primary customers consisted of Europeans and the middle-class Bengali population. His artwork was shown in London in 1946 and in New York City in 1953. In 1954, he received the Padma Bhushan.

In 1972, Jamini Roy passed away. His successors, who reside in Kolkata, are his four sons and a daughter (daughters-in-law, grandchildren, and their offspring).

His creations have been widely shown in international exhibits and auctions, and numerous public and private collections, including those in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, the Lalit Kala Akademi in Delhi, and institutions in Germany and the United States, own them.

His works were named as one of the “Nine Masters” by the Archaeological Survey of India, Ministry of Culture, Government of India, in 1976. His creations will now be regarded as “art treasures,” considering their creative and aesthetic significance.



### Style and Technique

Jamini Roy was an artist of many talents. He did not follow any one school or style, nor did he worship at any art shrine. Instead, he painted in whatever medium and in any manner that pleased him. He painted with oils and watercolors with the same audacity and abandon as he did with tempera. Despite having received training at an art school and being able to support himself by creating in a presently popular style, he felt driven to continually alter his approach. An underlying restlessness followed him until he found his own, “new,” adaptable style that nevertheless offered him room for creativity without being too unconventional.

In his quest for form, color, and technique, he spent hours observing the potter at work, the Patua painting a scroll, or the village women creating a ritual motif using fingertip applications of native colors, or at most, cotton-covered reed brushes, which reduced figures to their most basic components: the head, torso, and limbs. The most prominent feature was now the head, which was driven by just one element: THE EYE. The nose, lips, ears, and even the hair took on a secondary role. He was greatly impacted by this idea, to the point where, in the majority of his paintings, “the eye” serves as the central motif, sometimes taking over the full canvas in addition to the head. He occasionally adapted folk toys just as they were, as seen by the now-famous “Bankura Horse.” The Bankura is a common decorative item in many homes. Its body is structured like a barrel, and its tail is abnormally short. Its neck is long and straight, like a giraffe’s. He was so taken aback by it that he painted it exactly as it was, almost like a drawing, requiring no additional improvisation or embellishment. such as “Red Horse.”



Paintings by Jamini Roy are renowned for their symbolic quantity and purity, as well as their simplicity. He combined elements of Bengali tribal art with the restrained brushstrokes of the Kalighat style. One example of this type of art is the terracotta found in the Bishnupur temple in Bengal, where the material was frequently composed into decorative units, some of which had intricate designs, over portals and across the exterior walls of the temples.

### The Collection

The last time Jamini Roy’s complete body of work was shown in the city and available for purchase was in October 1980 at the Jehangir Art Gallery in Bombay.

The precise number of paintings and sketches produced by the renowned prolific artist, who passed away, is unclear, but it was at least twenty thousand. The exhibition’s

systematic curation took a long time and was difficult. Nevertheless, the outcome is definitely worth the time spent.

When sorting through the items for the show, provenance and documentation were crucial and took precedence. Works that were not certified by the late artist's family and were not sold by them were excluded.

The last body of work comes from the collection of seven well-known Bengali collectors in Kolkata who bought their pieces straight from the late artist's family. Authenticity certificates have been issued for the works by Amiya Roy (Patol), Reba Roy (Son and Daughter-in-Law), Debabrata Roy (Grandson), and Sanghamitra Roy (Granddaughter), all of whom initially acquired them for their own personal family collection.

A rare pitcher, sculptures, and a sara are among the many rare and iconic pieces on display, which include paintings from his Post-Impressionistic Landscapes, Oriental Portraiture, Ramayana, Christ, Mother and Child, Dancers, Two Cats with Lobster, and other series. The works are created in a variety of media, including tempera, cloth, burnt clay, ink on paper, woven board, slate, wood, and watercolor.



The show offers a visual tour of the artist's career through a variety of subjects, techniques, and media.

### **Conclusion**

Among the most well-known artists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries was Jamini Roy. In terms of current Indian art, Jamini Roy's work was revolutionary. It disproved the idea that art was only the domain of the wealthy and that it was required that works of art adhere to European styles. It also elevated the status of folk art. The introduction of a strong yet understated use of lines also ushered in a new trend of simplifying images to their most basic elements while yet conveying the meaning clearly.

Jamini Roy's art has taken a different turn and eschewed the new modern art ideas, not just because it is loosely influenced by Indian folk art. For a very long time to come, many people will be guided and inspired by the artist's creations and the principles he upheld.

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