

## A. M. DAVIERWALLA

In the death of Adi Davierwalla contemporary art has lost a sculptor with a clear mind and modern sensibility. His work produced over the last twenty-five years is a legacy which should be cherished, because it is the work of a pioneer, who went forward free from the trammels of the past. Davierwalla could see that he had to start at a new point, finding his inspiration in materials and work rather than in traditional Indian sculpture or the overwhelming Western academicism. It is significant that only a man outside the art stream could perceive the need of the hour.

Davierwalla was not a professionally trained artist and this in a sense gave him a certain freedom as he did not have to conform to the art school conventions or the advice of a guru. He was by profession a chemist and worked for many years in a pharmaceutical factory. So it is very creditable that he started working at sculpture on his own and had enough persistence, imagination and courage to change his way of life and dedicate himself to art. The lack of art school training in a sense isolated him. At the same time it gave him independence; he was aware of the art world of his day, which did not offer him



a path to follow. In spite of his being a beginner he had the will and passion to charter his own course. Davierwalla was by nature introspective and reflective. Though his art may seem to be varied, it is connected by the evolution of his thought and temperament. He was a very methodical person, perhaps his training in science helped him to be precise, careful and objective. He was quiet, unassuming and gentle — in fact we find an orderliness and restraint in his work.

Davierwalla had of course held many one-man shows of his work. He participated in a number of collective exhibitions both in India and abroad and received awards and other honours. He visited Europe in 1952, and worked for a year in the United States in 1968. These experiences only confirmed him in his ideas and helped him to discover himself. Many

of his works are not large or scintillating yet they have had a certain influence in our art world. In Bombay where he worked, art production has been tenaciously commercial, most of the studios producing only monumental portraiture. Into this banal world Davierwalla and other young sculptors set a new emphasis on the creative and original.

Davierwalla did not hold fast to any single material or style. In the earlier years he used stone and wood, gradually trying other materials including lead, aluminium, steel and plastics. Two distinct qualities may be said to characterise his work. The first of these is that his sculptures are formed by an assemblage or putting together of units. Thus they are jointed and have a jointed character like the bodies of crustaceans and insects and therefore appear less rigid and more mobile. A good example is *Leda and the Swan* which is made of drift wood. Another work of this type is a small *Reclining Figure* in lead, in which the composition is clearly based on an association of parts. In this middle period is also discernible an interest in lightness or flight — the artist perhaps attempts to free sculpture from the weight of the material and its anchorage to a pedestal. Examples are his *Icarus* and *Meghdoot*. In these works we also find the beginnings of a feeling for space, which soon begins to function as a positive element in his work. In his later work Davierwalla adopts a more abstract language and works mainly in metal. These metal constructions though they seem impersonal and technological have an iconic presence. Through their geometry he achieves a certain harmony and equilibrium. Perhaps the orderliness, clean edges and restfulness of these pieces were closest to the artist's temperament.

Davierwalla's art clearly takes sculpture into new territories and towards new horizons. It abandons the old narrative subjects and portraiture in favour of forms which have to be judged as works of art simply on sculptural terms. It is very unfortunate that the sculptor passed away at the age of 52 when he was no doubt at the peak of his powers. Nevertheless we are grateful for his life and the rich and varied legacy he has left us.

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*Floating Figure*  
Relief in cast lead, 1964

