

*"We are not looking at art,
Art is not to be looked at
Art is looking at us".*

THESSE few lines from Josef Albers, famous German poet-painter, sum up Shankar Balvant Palsikar's philosophy of art.

Mr. Palsikar who after 21 years as a teacher-artist has just been appointed Dean of the J. J. School of Art is a versatile painter who feels his real vocation is teaching. However two decades of art school have not eroded his artistic personality. "Its growing all the time," he says with conviction.

That is because though he has a firm idea of what art should be he is always experimenting, always trying to evolve different styles. That too is why he is often a man of contradictions.

In the late forties as leader of a small group of talented artists like Laxman Pai, V. S. Gaitonde and Mohan Samant he gave a new direction and a more modern outlook to the Indian miniature style. For many years he refused to make any change in the decorative line and smooth tempera colours of his paintings. Then suddenly he surprised everyone by launching out in the "modernistic" stream.

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Today he paints in both mediums and, as if to emphasise his versatility, has branched out after a deep study of Indian mysticism and its bearing on the theory and practice of art, into Tantric images.

Mr. Palsikar considers that the J. J. School has always been the cradle of art in Bombay and hopes to restore to it its former prestige. "The level of art in Bombay will always be judged by the standard of art in the school," he says.

And the thousands of budding painters whom he has helped to train over the years would surely agree. Their success, he says, is his greatest reward. If so, he has ample reason to be gratified, for a list of some of his students reads like a Who's Who of Indian painting.

Art to Palsikar, is not a natural representation. By its very nature it has to be an abstraction, he says. To him form, colour, space and texture are important—"I try to give form to the formless, that is the basis of my art"—and his work has a discipline of form and an imaginative power which constantly seeks new symbols instead of repeating the meaningless and the outworn.

That is why it is fundamentally contemporary no matter how much it owes to tradition.

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both to the mind and the eye. "The sound is not possible without space," he says, "space is not possible without form, form is not possible without colour and texture."

Palsikar works all the time, though he exhibits rarely because he believes only in the best. "A lawyer or a doctor can afford to



S. B. Palsikar

be second-rate," he affirms, "but not an artist. A second-rate artist will only be laughed at."

No one has as yet laughed at Shankar Balvant Palsikar.

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