SAVING A LOT WITH LITTLE

The Indian Cartoon Gallery has serendipitously become the proud owner of works by Frederick Joss (1907-1967). We uncover more about Joss and his legacy of minimalist art.

There are collections by several eminent cartoonists which he has ensured are showcased here. "My aim has always been to forget the lost. It's cartoons for our viewers." Still, it was a pleasant surprise when he received an email from the son-in-law of cartoonist Frederick Joss around the time when he was planning the 100th exhibition for the gallery, Vasant Shingde, in an email, offered to donate books and "exhibition-worthy" cartoon prints from his other-in-law's collection. "I had known a bit about Frederick Joss since I had read about Abber's journey to the US," says Narendra.

He refers to one of India's famous exporters of Abber, a cartoonist who published his work in the 1930s on the basis of a one-line instruction from Joss - "When are you coming?" Joss, a regular visitor to India, had recognized the talent of Abber and offered to cover him on the front page of the magazine. One of the editors had called him to the "black and white champion of the underdog", who had no sympathy to the core of the subject. After the war, he was able to draw from all sides, including literature and film. Highly gifted in capturing movement, he was able to sketch popular characters and foreign film characters, including the film "The Nutcracker" and the famous black and white dancers.

Joss was a cartoonist who could bring out a person's character with the minimum strokes possible. That is the hallmark of a good cartoonist," points out Narendra, who, after receiving the email, asked the cartoonist to come to Joss. Three things, according to Narendra, needed to be kept in mind in order to bring the cartoonist to life: "Look at the caricature of Nana in the newspaper. I believe he is alive in it," he says. The technique comes next. The brush stroke and the line drawing are well executed. The third point, of course, is that the caricature is drawn with the minimum number of lines.

The UK cartoonist, who had migrated from Austria in 1938, was known as "the cartoonist of The Star" who drew cartoons from the front page of the paper and was even set to cover European political meetings and conferences, particularly in Geneva. His pen portraits of world leaders were regularly featured on the front page of The Star. One of the editors had called him the "black and white champion of the underdog", who had no sympathy for the core of the subject. After the war, he was able to draw from all sides, including literature and film. Highly gifted in capturing movement, he was able to sketch popular characters and foreign film characters, including the film "The Nutcracker" and the famous black and white dancers.

Joss travelled to India in the 1940s. On his return, he compiled a large body of work that was never part of any portfolio but was based on the observations of the world and people around him. His cartoons were sold to the Illustrated London News, the New York Times, and the New Yorker, among others. His work was also featured in several Indian newspapers including the Times of India and the Indian Express. In 1968, Joss was elected to the fellowship of the Royal Society of Arts and won the New World of London, which awarded him an honorary fellowship. His work didn't suffer but Shingde notes, "Joss did many caricatures but they had to be produced on paper but not on metal plates, which were more expensive."

Narendra, the second daughter of Joss, speaks of her father's influence. "He was listened to and looked in all the right places and everything. He was very different and very joyous when I learned anything new. I think he was probably the same. He was admiring that a caricaturist or cartoonist needed to be an artist and that the human form is not to be attempted to be caricatured." Narendra launched some of the titles amongst the 25 books that have come into the collection. "The Art of Indian Art" (1940), "The Art of Indian Art" (1942), "The Art of Indian Art" (1943), "The Art of Indian Art" (1944), "The Art of Indian Art" (1945). Nanda feels, "He would have studied for a long time attempting caricatures." Joss travelled to India in the 1940s. On his return, he compiled a large body of work that was never part of any portfolio but was based on the observations of the world and people around him. His cartoons were sold to the Illustrated London News, the New York Times, and the New Yorker, among others. His work was also featured in several Indian newspapers including the Times of India and the Indian Express. In 1968, Joss was elected to the fellowship of the Royal Society of Arts and won the New World of London, which awarded him an honorary fellowship. His work didn't suffer but Shingde notes, "Joss did many caricatures but they had to be produced on paper but not on metal plates, which were more expensive."

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