

# Lines of Beauty

The Art of Jogen  
Chowdhury



DISCOVER MAP

Jogen Chowdhury is an eminent Indian artist who lives and works in Shantiniketan, located in the state of West Bengal in India.

He was born in a village in present-day Bangladesh. After his family moved to Calcutta around 1948, he first studied at the Government College of Art & Craft, and then went on to train in Paris.

### **DID YOU KNOW?**

Shantiniketan was first 'discovered' by the father of the famous poet Rabindranath Tagore. Today it is mainly known for its university, which was founded by Tagore. [Read this article to learn more about it.](#)

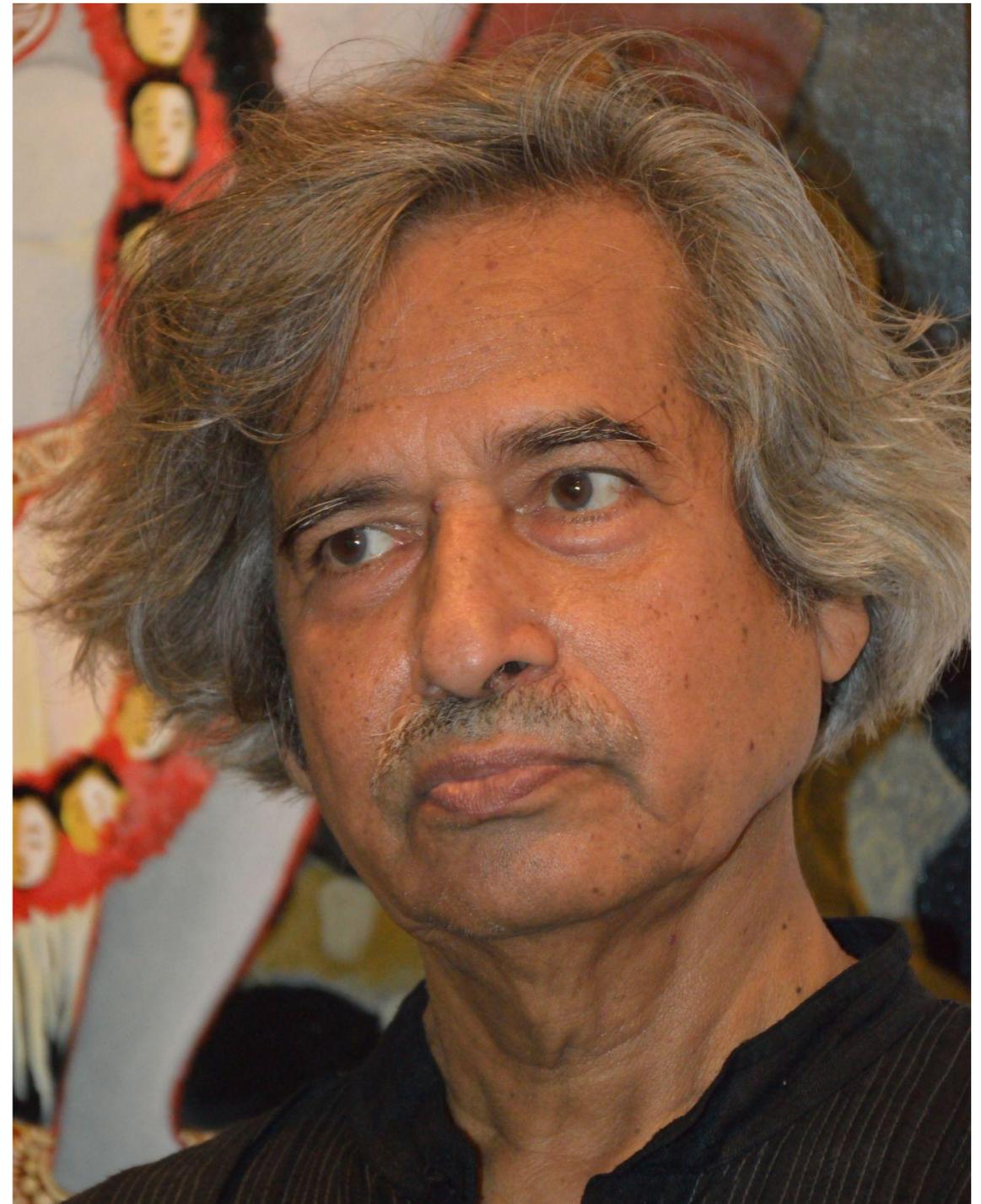


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## **REFLECT.**

What qualities define a good artist? Is a good artist someone who can draw and paint well? Or somebody who experiments with different styles? Somebody who thinks out of the box? Or creates their own unique style? Maybe someone who pioneers an entirely new way of looking at art?

All of the above? Or none of these?

What do *you* think makes someone a good artist?





**Which three words would you use to describe this lady?**

Chowdhury's special skill is his mastery over the line. Using the line in interesting ways, he creates the effect of texture and volume on flat surfaces. Here is one such example.

**IMAGINE.**

- What will the cheeks of this face feel like if you could touch it?
- Will the hair feel the same? Why or why not?
- Do you notice areas that look like they have depth and volume? Which ones are those?

## ART SPEAK!

Texture is one of the elements of art that relates to how something would feel if it were touched. There can be more than one kind of texture in art.

Texture can refer to the real, physical, tactile surface of the artwork (like a canvas), or to a feeling of texture that is created by an ingenious artist. Known as implied texture, this is when an artist uses different techniques to create an effect (like a canvas painting that looks like wood).

## THINK.

As you saw, Chowdhury used lines to create the textures in his painting of the face. What about the texture in this artwork? Do you think it's real or implied and why?

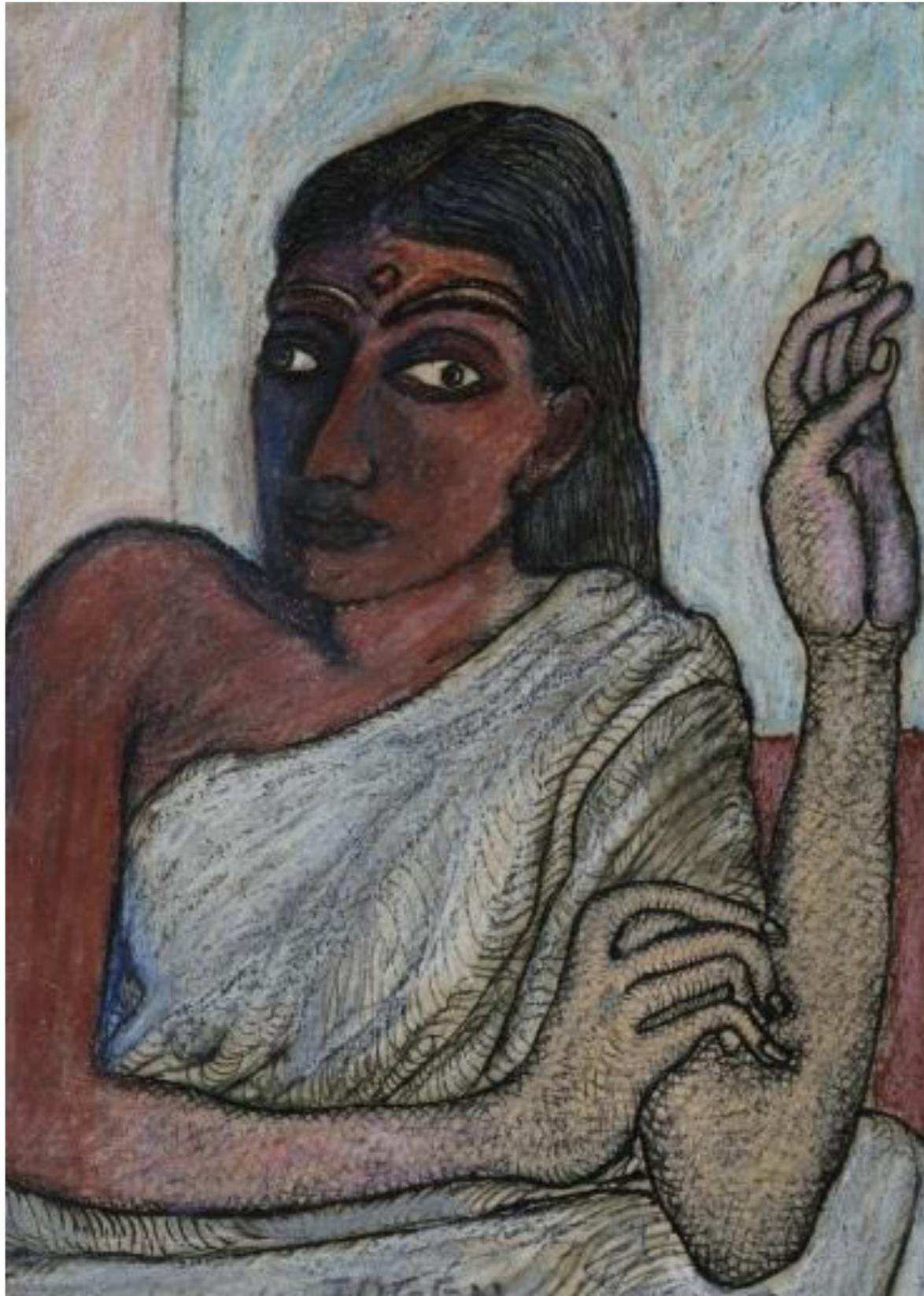


The texture in this artwork is real and you would be able to feel it, if you touched it!

This work is made by the abstract artist C. Douglas, who sometimes uses interesting materials to create textures in his paintings. He has been known to crumple paper, use multiple washes, and even mix mud and glue to create textures. Now that you know this, do you see traces of such a process in this work?

**What would you title this artwork?**





However, given Chowdhury's love for lines, some of his favourite ways of creating implied texture is through the method of hatching and cross hatching.

In this work, he has used both. Can you guess why?

Go to the next slide to see some details of portions where hatching and cross hatching are used.

### **ART SPEAK!**

Hatching is the drawing of closely spaced parallel lines. Cross hatching is repeatedly drawing two lines that cross at angles to create a mesh-like pattern.

Have you ever tried something like that with your paintings?



Can you differentiate the hatching from the cross hatching in this detail?

As you can see, the pattern on the garment is formed of single lines, whereas the skin is drawn using multiple lines that criss cross.

**THINK.**

Why do you think Chowdhury used this pattern for the skin? Look carefully at your own hands. Move them a little. Try replicating the pose you see in the picture. Can you spot any similar patterns?

**If you could, what would you change about this work?**

**LOOK CLOSELY.**

What are the different patterns and textures you can spot in this work? Do you think they accurately reflect textures in the natural world?





**Why are the features of this figure distorted?**

Chowdhury also uses these methods to help him create volume or weight in his figures. Can you point out the areas here where the illusion of volume is created using lines?

**EXPLORE.**

Try making a sculpture of this head using play doh or even actual dough!

How do you usually show volume in your paintings? Do you use darker colours or shading using a pencil?

How about trying this method instead?



**What materials do you think were used to make this bird?**

Over the years, Chowdhury became really good with his use of lines, drawing them with incredible balance and precision.

He could just pick up his pen and begin to paint, without creating rough outlines or pre-sketches!

**LOOK CLOSELY.**

Trace your finger over this bird. Can you tell how many times the pen was actually lifted from the paper?

Take special note of the lower portion starting from the leg and move up to the neck of the bird.

## CREATE.

Now let's make an artwork inspired by Chowdhury's expertise over unbroken line drawings. For this you will need: **a blank A4 sheet, one pencil** and **one dark sketch pen**.

**#1.** First make a simple sketch on paper with your pencil. Keep it simple and preferably to one object. In our example, you will see we've drawn only one face. For this, you can make a regular drawing and do not have to stick to using a single line!



**#2.** Now pick up your sketch pen and go over this drawing by connecting one portion to the next (like playing drawing by numbers!). You can see we started drawing from the nose and ended at the neck. Don't worry about the extra lines added when you are moving from one part to the next, that adds to the uniqueness of your work!

Chowdhury also uses the line creatively to make some very interesting figures, like this one.

### LOOK CLOSELY.

- Is this a representation of a real insect or an imaginary one? Why do you think so?
- How does this image make you feel? Scared, slightly creeped out, curious or nothing at all?

### EXPRESS.

Can you think of a short story keeping this insect as the main character? Head to our **Stories With Art** extra for more storytelling activities inspired by Jogen Chowdhury's art.



You would have noticed by now that Chowdhury uses a lot of black in his paintings. In fact, black is his favourite colour and he has a backstory as to why.



*When I was a child, we did not have electricity at home. I used to make all my paintings by the light of a kerosene lamp and black was the only colour that was dark enough for me to use in that little light.* ”

Do you have a favourite colour that you use a lot? Is there any reason for that?



**Is it a pumpkin, jackfruit or something else altogether? What makes you think so?**

## REFLECT.

In an interview, Chowdhury once said that he also uses black as a reflection of what he felt growing up in a poor household. What do you think this feeling might be?

## EXPLORE.

What colour would you choose to represent emotions like happiness or anxiety? What about concepts such as patience, friendship or freedom?

Make a family game of it!  
See how well you can explain your choices and how many of them match!



**If you were to recolour this painting your way, what colours would you use?**



Although Chowdhury uses black often, he does experiment with other colours and styles too.

### **LOOK CLOSELY.**

- Is the background an indication of time or season? How has its texture been created?
- Which direction is the wind blowing in? How can we tell?
- Which direction is the light coming from? How do you know?

**If this was a film poster, what do you think the film would be about?**

And lastly, in this fun experiment Chowdhury used an old artwork by an unknown artist, and completed it in his signature style.

## LOOK CLOSELY.

- What do you think is happening in this picture?
- Can you figure out which portion was filled in by him and which bit was the original artwork? How can you tell?

## REFLECT.

In this unique situation, is this still an artwork by Jogen Chowdhury? Why or why not?

## CREATE & EXPRESS.

Check our **Activity Sheet** extra for a fun game inspired by this idea!





Untitled, c.1990s  
C. Douglas  
Mixed Media on canvas  
H. 124 cm, W. 95 cm  
MAC.00543



Girl in white sari, 20th century  
Jogen Chowdhury  
Mixed Media with pastels  
H. 25 cm, W. 18 cm  
MAC.00543



Crab, 20th century  
Jogen Chowdhury  
Pen and ink on paper  
H. 36 cm, W. 27 cm  
MAC.02791



Girl with bird, 20th century  
Jogen Chowdhury  
Mixed media on paper  
H. 22 cm, W. 15 cm  
MAC.01245



Seated man with flower, 20th century  
Jogen Chowdhury and unknown artist  
Mixed media on paper  
H. 45 cm, W. 31 cm  
MAC.01417



Reminiscences of dream VII, 1969  
Jogen Chowdhury  
Mixed Media on paper  
H. 46 cm, W. 61 cm  
MAC.00693



Man, wife and birds, 1989  
Pastels on paper  
Jogen Chowdhury  
H. 54 cm, W. 73 cm  
MAC.01207



Fruit - I, 1977  
Jogen Chowdhury  
Ink and pastel on paper  
H. 34 cm, W. 35 cm  
MAC.01085



Face of a man-I, 1980  
Jogen Chowdhury  
Pen and pastel on paper  
H. 34 cm, W. 35 cm  
MAC.01063



Drawings for the crockery, 2000  
Jogen Chowdhury  
Ink on paper  
Diameter: 28 cm  
MAC.01662



Girl with two plaits, 1984  
Jogen Chowdhury  
Mixed media on board  
H. 27 cm, W. 28 cm  
MAC.02904



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& Photography**

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