The Loss of Light

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In life we often find ourselves in the presence of greatness; be it greatness of mind, greatness of soul, greatness of will or even greatness of body. We find ourselves inspired by such people, who not only encompass this greatness, but also take charge of it and learn how to channel it. Artists, for example, or musicians and poets -- they all pave the way to a brighter and more enlightened future through their works of art. They make our lives more beautiful by displaying the innermost corners of their souls for the public. They encourage us to learn from their experiences by offering us a peek into their lives with no inhibitions. They educate us, and, in some ways, offer us a shortcut through life, by freely bestowing upon us the knowledge that they so painfully acquired.



Still Life, Oil on Canvas, 1957

Such a man was Debdas Chakraborty, one of the most renowned artists and painters that Bangladesh has had the privilege to call its own. Debdas was a versatile artist and experimented with many different forms of art. His noteworthy skills in drawing sketches on paper with pen and ink were evident even in his later works on canvas, in which he often drew outlines first and then went over them with paint, sometimes ignoring the outlines that he originally drew. Initially most of his works of art were figurative. As he grew older his paintings leaned more towards the abstract with fewer figures until finally, they were completely abstract. His death on February 5, 2008, after many years of being ill, left a gaping hole in the country's art world.

Debdas, originally from Faridpur (now known as Shariatpur), where he was born in 1933, spent the earlier part of his life in Kolkata, where his family moved in the hope that some day, they would return. Somehow, they never did and ended up settling there. Young Debdas, a Leftist, completed his Matriculation and began studying in the Calcutta Art College in 1947, where he studied both music and paintwing.

Due to the scarcity of food in West Bengal many students staged a rally, in which police opened fire. This caused a string of protests which eventually led to a demonstration against the governor of West Bengal. He was supposed to appear as a chief guest for the annual exhibition at the Art College and the student protests prevented him from doing so. As a result many students, including Debdas, were kicked out of the college and were banned from being admitted into any institution in the country for the next three years. It was then that Debdas decided to come back to Dhaka. He became a student in the Zainul Abedin Art College in 1948.



Debdas Chakraborty: 1933-2008

"What is very interesting is that he did not have any blood relations in Dhaka," says son and renowned painter, Goutom Chakraborty. "Throughout his life he was surrounded by his friends. He considered these people his family."

Goutom, Director of GalleriKaya in Uttara and of design company and advertising firm, Karukriti, lived with and took care of his father during the last years of his life along with his wife, Sumana Sharmeen and their son.

"I saw my father as a very good friend," says Goutom. "He was obviously a father figure to me, but more than anything, I considered him a friend of mine. There are so many things that I learned from him, things that set him apart from other people. For example, something I remember about him is that he never differentiated people according to their age. He had friends who were both 15 years older and 15 years younger.

"He also never discriminated against people. He always spoke to everyone with an equal amount of respect, whether it was a rickshaw-wallah or a man of some considerable stature. He just felt that if the person was a human being, a good human being with an open heart,