

## International News

Oswald Malura - *As a painter through India*

Philipp Grieb

India has increasingly attracted the interest of literate Europeans over the last centuries. It began with the first travel reports from India. Philologists and philosophers directed their interest towards the ancient writings of India. The recognition that the northern Indian languages are part of the large Indo-European language family spurred the research. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 facilitated travel from Europe to India and vice versa. In 1913 Rabindranath Tagore was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. His impressive personality, writings, travels, visits and speeches all over Europe received great attention. Young artists eager to travel were also attracted by the distant subcontinent, its millennia-old culture, spirituality and its people. One of them was a young Munich artist: Oswald Malura (1906 - 2003).

Malura had successfully completed his studies at the Munich Art Academy. The academy awarded him a travel scholarship for his outstanding achievements and talent. At that time, graduates usually used this annual award as an opportunity to explore the art scene in Italy or Paris. Not so Malura - inspired by reading the Bhagavad Gita, his dream country was India. He ignored the fact that his travel capital was too limited for the long journey.

On 12 June 1930 he left Munich by train for Genoa. On a cargo ship, he started the journey to Colombo, where he arrived three weeks later.



Oswald Malura in India (1930-1932)

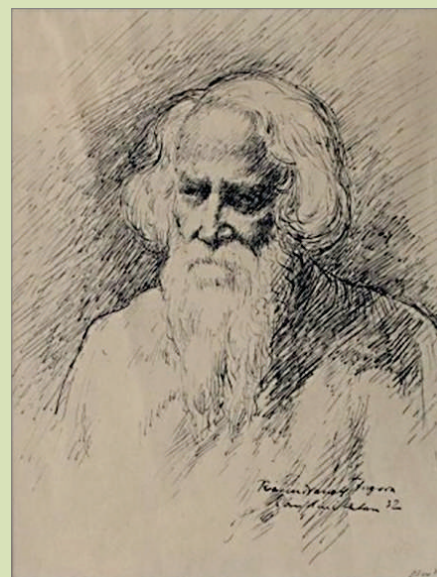
Malura first spent more than a year in Sri Lanka (then British-Ceylon), painting and drawing and longer than planned. He was able to supplement his travel budget by successfully selling paintings and drawings.

In September 1931 he crossed over to Rameswaram on the Indian mainland, bought a train ticket for the whole of India and travelled by train, partly by car, for 15 months with many stops across India, up to Kashmir in the north and Kolkata in the east. He wrote down his memories in his book "Als Maler durch Indien" (German, 1949, Broschek Verlag, Hamburg).

From Kolkata, on the last days of November 1932, he wanted to visit his ultimate destination, the Vishva-Bharati University in Shantiniketan.

He was creative and managed to get access to Rabindranath Tagore. The famous founder of Visva-Bharati took time for a conversation and allowed to portray him while working on manuscripts. Malura also met Abanindranath Tagore and Nandalal Bose, the directors of the art department of Vishva-Bharati. They talked animatedly, among other subjects about fresco painting, which both wanted to revive. As a trained decorative painter and "Lüftlmaler" (mural painter) at Bavarian Tegernsee, he was able to contribute relevant experience. Shantiniketan and the visit to Tagore were the impressive highlight and conclusion of his journey. From there he returned via Bombay to arrive in Munich two weeks later.

In the following decades Malura established himself in Munich-Schwabing, the trendy quarter of



Rabindranath Tagore 1932, drawing by Oswald Malura

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Panoramic view from Oswald Malura's Studio

fine artists, musicians and writers. His Schwabing domicile became a meeting place for the quarter's committed artists. Christian Ude, Lord Mayor of Munich from 1993 to 2014, himself an active writer,



Rabindranath Tagore 1932, painting by Oswald Malura

was and still is a friend and supporter of this circle.

In 1958 Malura built a studio house with a panoramic view on the heights of a moraine tract in the Bavarian Oberland near the small village of Oberdiessen, 75 km west of Munich. Later he acquired an old farmhouse in the village to establish it as a cultural centre, an idea inspired by Visva-Bharati.

Today it is a museum that preserves and presents Oswald Malura's art, including his paintings of India. It serves as a venue for temporary exhibitions, concerts and readings by regional artists and writers. His son Andrew Malura continues to run it, supported by the association of friends of the Malura Museum e.V.

The Museum celebrated Rabindranath Tagore's 150th birthday with a special exhibition of Tagore's works. The Indian Consul General in Munich provided an extensive collection of replicas for this show, which Sujatha Singh, then Indian Ambassador in Berlin, opened to a large audience.



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M: 8276000207 / 9674747972  
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