



(Above) Norblin's murals depicting scenes from the Ramayana at the Umaid Bhawan Palace; (right) a mural of the Goddess Durga with signature Art Deco elements. PICS COURTESY/CHITRAANJALI. STEFAN NORBLIN IN INDIA ON YOUTUBE; NATIONAL AUDIOVISUAL INSTITUTE POLAND & EMBASSY OF REP. OF POLAND

Indian Deco through Polish brushstrokes

A rare presentation explores how an émigré artist, Rajputana royalty and ancient Indian myths found common expression through the Art Deco movement that is now in its centenary year

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IN 1939, Stefan Norblin de la Gourdain was a refugee. The Nazis had invaded Poland, and Norblin and his actress wife evaded capture by pawning their jewellery to escape Europe. His journeys would lead him to India, and leave behind a unique legacy of rare murals that reimagined Indian mythology. Hosted by Art Deco Mumbai, writer-podcaster Kamayani Sharma's talk today on Mythologies, Murals and Modernism: Stefan Norblin's IndoDeco will explore this often-ignored aspect of the Art Deco movement.

The talk is part of Art Deco Mumbai's ongoing



Kamayani Sharma

initiative to celebrate the centenary year of the art movement. "Bombay was designed and defined by many European émigrés. This [Norblin's art] is an interesting intersection between art and architecture, where we are looking beyond the traditional built form and into the interiors," shares founder-trustee Atul Kumar. From Norblin's mural works in the Umaid Bhawan, Morbi and Ramgarh Palaces, the presentation will also explore his style and form.

For Sharma, the artist is an old muse. Her first introduction to his work was in 2011 when NGMA Mumbai, in association with the Polish National Museum, had held a retrospective. "I was blown away by his aesthetic,"

says the writer. Describing his life as a classic émigré story, Sharma reveals, "He was already an accomplished artist when he arrived in Bombay. He lived at Nepean Sea Road."

Whether the city's Art Deco had a direct influence on Norblin can only be specu-



Stefan Norblin. PIC COURTESY/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



lated, but Sharma observes, "There was a large group of émigrés, such as Rudy Von Leyden and Walter Langhammer — who did not belong to the Art Deco movement — but were helping to foster modernism in Bombay during this period. Norblin was familiar with them." While there are few artists from Europe who display the sensibilities of Indian myths that Norblin does, Sharma offers



A mural depicting the Sita swayamvara from the Ramayana

Nandalal Bose's Kirti Mandir murals, and Abdurrahman Chughtai's interpretation of Indian myths as a parallel from the period.

A simple Google search on Norblin's art will reveal the strikingly dramatic style of his work. The Ramayana is depicted in the Classical Greek idiom, with defining Art Deco forms and figurines. "Mind you, Indian mythology is not as easy to interpret. You have to be really invested," Kumar points out.

The presentation will focus on the defining Deco elements in the artist's work. The Mumbai-based Sharma says, "For instance, there is a painting of the Goddess Durga at the hunting lodge connected to the Umaid Bhawan Palace in Jodhpur. She is a Durga like you have never seen — basically a Greek Goddess with Indian motifs. There is also the use of the Pharaonic headdress for instance, informed by the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb — a sensation at the time — that finds its way into his work."

Kumar concludes, "The focus of the movement is often limited to industrial and architectural expression, and we wanted to highlight the diverse ways in which it found expression.

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AT Tarq Art Gallery, KK
Navsari Chambers, Fort. **LOG ON**
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