



United Nations
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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

**Speech of Mr Francesco Bandarin, Assistant Director-General for
Culture, on the occasion of the opening of the event dedicated to the
Indian-Hungarian painter Amrita Sher-Gil on the occasion of her
100th anniversary**

**UNESCO, 24 September 2013
Salle des pas perdus**

On behalf of the Director-General, I would like to welcome you to UNESCO Headquarters.

This evening, it is both an honour and a pleasure to inaugurate this exhibition and film screening devoted to the Indian-Hungarian painter Amrita Sher-Gil - on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of her birth.

As a specialized agency of the United Nations, with a specific mandate in culture, UNESCO serves as an international forum for developing and celebrating human creativity. We are dedicated to promote and showcase the immense diversity of cultures and the inspiration and creativeness of artists from across our world.

We are here this evening to pay tribute to an artist of many talents. Amrita Sher-Gil was born in 1913 in Budapest, from Umrao Singh Sher-Gil Majithia, a Sikh aristocrat and a scholar in Sanskrit and Persian, and Marie Antoinette Gottesmann, a Hungarian opera singer. In 1921 her family moved to Summer Hill, Shimla in India and soon the young Amrita began learning piano and violin.

By age of nine she began giving concerts and acting in plays with her younger sister Indira at Shimla's Gaiety Theatre at Mall Road, Shimla. Though she was already painting with talent since the age of five, she formally started learning painting three years later.

At sixteen, Sher-Gil sailed to Europe with her mother to train as a painter at Paris. Her early paintings display the influence of the styles popular in Europe at the time. In 1934, she decided to go to India to explore the sources of what she felt to be an essential part of her identity. She began a quest for the rediscovery of the traditions of Indian art that was to continue until her death in 1941.

Sher-Gil's art is today considered one of India's pre-eminent 20th-century painters. Many consider that her legacy equals that of the Masters of Bengal Renaissance. She has influenced generations of Indian artists, and her depiction of the plight and combats of women has made her art a beacon and example for defenders of human rights both in India and abroad.

By representing humanity in women as a concrete manifestation of universality, the art of Amrita Sher-Gil reminds us that cultures of the world, including value systems, traditions and beliefs, are diverse, but that humankind constitutes, beyond gender distinctions, a single community, united around a common dignity, human rights and fundamental freedoms.

In this context, the work and life of Amrita Sher-Gil echoes UNESCO's humanist vision, particularly regarding building a shared future through dialogue for "intellectual and moral solidarity."

For all of these reasons, UNESCO is delighted to take part in this celebration of her life and work.

In closing, allow me to express my thanks to the Permanent Delegations of Hungary and India to UNESCO for their remarkable joint work in organizing this exhibition, for our enlightenment and enjoyment.