

"Feel Art Again"

Today's "Feel Art Again" post lands us in **India**, the third country in [our quest](#) to cover a different artist from a different country in each post for the month of June. Reader Tuhina requested a post on **Raja Ravi Varma** (1848-1906), considered "the greatest painter of India," "the father of modern Indian art," and a "prince among painters and a painter among princes." Varma became renowned both for his portraiture, such as "Ramanadha Rao and Son" (*left*), and his paintings of Indian mythology, such as "Riddhi Siddhi" (*right*).

1. Ravi Varma's talent was first discovered on the walls of his family's home. Around age 7, Varma began drawing animals and scenes of daily life on the walls of Kilimanoor Palace with charcoal. Luckily for Varma, his family was artistic and his uncle, Raja Raja Varma, began giving him painting lessons. By age 14, Varma was taken to Travancore Palace to be taught watercolor painting by the palace painter. By age 17, he was trained in oil painting by Theodor Jensen, a British artist.

2. During an eight year time span, Varma painted portraits of many members of the Indian aristocracy as well as British officials, which bolstered his fame. According to one site, Varma became so famous that Kilimanoor Palace was "compelled to open a post office" due to the countless painting requests that arrived "everyday from everywhere." Varma was well-compensated for all his work: he was paid Rs50,000, "an astronomical sum for the time," for a 14-painting commission by a maharaja.

3. Varma was the first artist whose work was available to the mass market, including "ordinary people" and not just the rich. Determined to bring "real art" to millions of Indians, Varma decided to mass reproduce his works. In 1894, he set up an oleography press, Ravi Varma Pictures Depot. (Oleographs are, basically, lithographs that look and feel like oil paintings.) Thousands of reproductions (including oleographs, lithographs, and prints) were made of Varma's work; even today, his works can be found in almost every home in India.

4. In 1873, Varma was introduced to the West when he won the first prize at the Vienna Art Exhibition. Winning prizes was nothing new for Varma, though. Apparently, he received so many awards in India that at one point he announced he would no longer take part in competitions so that other artists would have a chance.

5. At least four films have been made about Varma's life and art. For *Before the Brush Dropped*, a 30-minute documentary on Varma and his artistry, director Vinod Mankara conducted three years of research. Director R. Sarath cast a Varma descendant in the lead role of the artist for his two Varma works, *Divine Love* (a documentary on Varma's art) and *Prince Painter* (a feature film on Varma's life in Baroda and Mumbai). *Rang Rasiya (Colors of Passion)*, Ketan Mehta's "epic movie," tells the love story of Varma and Sugandha, "his ethereal muse."

6. According to the *Limca Book of World Records*, the most expensive sari in the world is a 15-pound sari valued at \$100,000 that pays tribute to Varma's paintings. [The hand-woven sari](#) features Varma's "Lady Musicians" in the center, as well as 10 other smaller Varma paintings along the border. Twelve varieties of precious stones and metals are inlaid in the sari. About 30 weavers spent 7 months making the sari for Chennai Silks

Read the full text here: <http://mentalfloss.com/article/21937/father-modern-indian-art-raja-ravi-varma#ixzz2hUDY9EB9>

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