

A brush with the big guns of Indian art

THE Delhi Art Gallery (DAG) will be presenting the 11th edition of its Manifestations XI, a highly regarded signature series of exhibitions, in Mumbai between August 22 and September 22. Mumbai's art lovers are in for a treat: the exhibition will showcase the works of 75 of India's best known artists.

At this show, we can expect to see the works of artists categorised as modernists beginning with the former progressives, MF Husain, SH Raza and FN Souza. Along with these stalwarts, there will also be old and new masters like Raja Ravi Varma, Nandalal Bose, NS Bendre, Satish Gujral, Ganesh Pyne and Ram Kumar, as well as 'a whole host of trailblazing artists from all regions of India'. The works have been carefully selected for the exhibition from the gallery's impressive collection of more than 30,000 artworks.

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It has also been said that India lags behind in this particular genre. Although Indian artists may have dabbled in abstractionism, Ram Kumar is the only artist who fits the category of an abstract artist and his works might well be the most sought after in the show. Other important artists include VS Gaitonde, SH Raza, FN Souza, Biren De, Prabhakar Kolte, KM Adimoolan, Ganesh Haloi, Jeram Patel, AP Santhanaraj, Achutan Kudaliar and others.

At another exhibition on abstract Indian contemporary art, held at Delhi-based Gallery ArtMotif in 2006, I remember overhearing a young girl ask her parents: "But what are those patches in the painting?" An artist who had also heard her question stepped forward to answer: "An abstract painting is open to suggestions. The patches may mean different things to different people. Why not look at it as a combination of shapes and colours? If you look at it long enough, you may see things that you did not see before."

The catalogue for the show, which is still with me, carried a rather interesting introduction by Prabhakar K, which was translated from Marathi. He writes, "How does one go about appreciating art? ...When a piece of art defies all standards, methods, rules and regulations or simply avoids them and speaks to the mind independently, it reaches its true potential meaning. A viewer might depend on aesthetics but a piece of art never does. It does not need to because that is what it already is... It simply continues to stimulate purely at a visual level. It gives up all it possesses to the viewer and yet remains selfsufficient."

(The writer is an author and a former art gallery owner)