

S.H. Raza's lifetime works on display

AN EXHIBITION of the lifetime works of veteran artist S H Raza is being held at the National Gallery of Modern Art here to celebrate his 85th birthday.

The exhibition, titled 'Swasti' showcases Raza's broad spectrum of work from his landscapes in water colours to his evolved modern art.

'Swasti' features 45 paintings collected from NGMA repository, Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal and private collections. Some of the works have been specially created for this exhibition by Raza, NGMA Director Rajeev Lochan said.

Speaking on the eve of the inauguration of the exhibition, Prof Lochan said "artists of Raza's stature don't need recognition. Rather, they need celebration... It took us five months to research, conceive, conceptualise, document, compile and finally put on display his exquisite work," he added.

Raza is one of the most prominent contemporary Indian artists working around the themes of *Bindu*, *Beej*, *Prakriti*, *Panchtatva* and *Kundalini*, making these age-old Indian concepts come alive.

Living in France since 1950, he was conferred Padma Bhushan this year for his invaluable contribution to contemporary Indian art.



AJAY AGGARWAL/HT

A NEW CHAPTER: Vice-President Bhairon Singh Shekhawat releasing a painting book of artist S. H. Raza in New Delhi on Thursday.

UNI

Genius with a manic edge

There's a method to the master painter's madness

Ripu Daman Singh

JASJEET PLAHA

HE IS not a very handsome, old man. But his charm and candour could make you think otherwise. Blowing 85 candles on his cake, Sayed Haider Raza, the renowned artist, sings "Abhi to main jawaan hoon" in full gusto.

Dressed in a pale yellow *kurta-pyjama*, this great master of contemporary art describes his journey from being an expressionistic landscape painter to a more abstract one as rather "amazing". His spiritual *bindus* on canvas reveal the introspective side of his personality. But give him a white canvas and his imagination runs wild, "I feel as if a nude woman is lying in my bed," he chuckles.

After having spent over half a century in Paris, Raza still feels his heart beats for India. "I have never left India. I read the Bhagavad Gita in Paris and communicate in Hindi with my friends," he says. Ask him to compare Indian art vis-à-vis that in France and pat comes the reply: "Europeans see the world with their retina and we Indians see it with our third eye, the *antardrishti*," he adds, "*Budhhi to hriday ki daasi hai*."

For the past 20 years, Raza has moved to geometric abstraction and the *bindu*, which he explains is "the centre of creation." In fact, he adds, "I have been using a lot of Indian iconography, *bindu* and *prakriti* in my works." Though this

Padmashree awardee has many books in his name, and the recent one by Ashok Vajpeyi *A life in Art* released on Thursday he feels success came a bit late in his life.

The worst criticism was when people said "yeh paagal hai" in his earlier



[HEADLINE HUNTER]

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days. This apart, he himself is very critical about his work. "I do not sign my painting unless I feel it's good." Or else, the canvas meets the fate of black paint. "I destroy my work if I think it is weak," he admits.

A tinge of melancholy sets in when he talks about his wife. In the 50s when his scholarship from the French govern-

ment came to an end, he had fallen in love with Janine Mongillat, a painter, who he married later. "I stayed back for her. Today, I live there alone," he adds. "She died of cancer in 2002. I wish she was here to enjoy our success."

As an artist, how does he explain the essence of life? "Whether it's love, prayer or art, it has to be pure. You cannot love 50 women at the same time. It has to be one," he replies.

Obsessed with his work, Raza's day begins at two in the morning (or night, depending on your perspective) with painting in his studio. "This obsession is essential. Even in my sleep I'm concerned about my work. I am a slow painter though," he adds. He takes at least 10-15 days or even a month to finish a painting.

"It amazes me how so much has happened in such a short span of life." And somewhere throughout, he exudes that pride of Indian art being recognised all over the world.

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