



With museums across the country opening their vaults for a mammoth exhibition currently underway in the national capital, an array of exquisite art objects, ranging from the Harappan civilisation to modern times, have become available for public viewing for the first time at the National Museum.

A few Harappan figures, a monumental Naga Deva, an eighth-century Uma-Maheshvara, an animal-headed anthropomorph and a marble tomb of a Mughal lady are among the artefacts being shown for the first time as part of exhibition *The Body in Indian Art*.

Curated by art historian Naman P Ahuja, the eight-gallery exhibition explores the complex understandings of the 'Body' in Indian art through an entire gamut of cultural artefacts such as sculptures, paintings, masks, jewellery, amulets, posters, video installations, music clips and two large textiles.

The 11-week long exhibition at the museum comes after a successful showing in Brussels as part of the art festival *Europalia* which concluded recently. "Around 20-25 per cent of the 300-odd artefacts in the exhibition have never been shown before and another 60 per cent have seldom been shown as they were lying in museums in small towns and were too fragile to be sent to Brussels," pointed out Ahuja, an associate professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi.

The curator, who has spent years exploring the storerooms (reserve collections) of numerous small regional museums, said he and his curatorial team located many objects that were not on public display. Some were even in the gardens of museums and had thus escaped critical attention from scholars.

A significant new discovery is the boar-headed copper anthropomorph (second or first millennium BC) which was lying unnoticed in a museum storeroom. Exhibited in Brussels for the first time, it has now been catalogued and is on display here.

"It is a rare piece of art that existed between the Harappan civilisation and the Mauryan Empire, and takes the story of Indian gods and goddesses to an earlier date than what we had imagined... It is a huge find and an exciting object for art historians, archaeologists and linguists," said Ahuja.

Equally fascinating are some tiny Harappan figures that are on display for the first time since they were excavated in 1925. They comprise a steatite Seal



Westlers with bodybuilding instruments



Saptamatrka relief panel



Aliza Kanya



Limited (Egg) by Subodh Gupta

# Rare of the rarest

The ongoing exhibition at the National Museum showcases unseen artefacts that belong to the Harappan civilisation, Mauryan and Mughal empires

(2500-1700 BC from Kalibangan, Rajasthan), a terracotta female figurine with animal horns (2500-1700 BC, Mohenjo-daro) and two horned masks (both almost identical). All these objects have been lying in the cells of ASI at Purana Qila.

Similarly, a monumental Naga Deva — a ninth century sculpture — has been lent by the Bhopal Museum, and it has never been shown in a public exhibition before. This remarkable statue is carved from a porous stone that flakes in a manner that gives it the appearance of snake-skin.

National Museum DG, Venu V, said



the exhibition is the most extensive collaboration of museums and collectors across the country.

"Significantly, it has brought into public domain a number of art objects that have remained largely hidden for the outside world," he said.

The exhibition also features some objects which did not go to Brussels. An eighth century Uma-Maheshvara, which has been on display in the Bhopal Museum, is one such for instance. Another object being shown for the first time in India is a marble tomb of a Mughal lady (Delhi region, 17th century). Kept in the ASI's Red Fort Archaeological Museum, it is a wonderful example of Islamic art. Going by its lavish, white marble and fine calligraphy, it must have belonged to a member of the imperial family.

Particularly special is the book *Akitosha-i-Ukha* (Provision for the Next

World). Made of copper pages with silver calligraphy, there are the 99 names of Allah inscribed in this book. Being shown for the first time, this is from the ASI's Museum, Red Fort. It was made during the reign of Aurangzeb.

The National Museum has also opened its reserve collections for first-time viewing. This includes a page of the *Shahnama* (written by Persian poet Firdausi between 977 and 1010 AD), depicting the birth of Rustum, the legendary Persian warrior.

It has also lent a Mughal painting of the birth of Mary, based on an engraving by Dutch painter Cornelius Cort (around 1735). Made in the court of Mohammed Shah, it depicts the bathing of new-born Mary, mother of Jesus, by a group of female attendants. The Odisha State Museum, Bhubaneswar, has lent eight sculptures, collectively known as *Ashta Dikpala* (Gods of Eight Directions).





# Joy of small things

Seven contemporary artists have put together their commentative works on society. By  
**PRIYANKA JOSHI**

Through realistic paintings, cultural photographs and sculptures, *Visual Avalanche* at the India Habitat Center, ponders on various social issues. The exhibition features some 50 artworks by seven contemporary artists. What rather excites aficionados is the fact that the participating artists, senior and emerging ones, are from different backgrounds.

Painter and sculptor Saudamini Mishra is showing 16 artworks. She says, "My work is easy to connect with. My inspirations are as varied as the current socio-cultural scenario to human emotions and a mix of intense colorful influences. I believe, the magic hides under the veneer of what we know as mundane. And therefore, my paintings capture everyday visuals of universal themes of time and money. The *Homemaker* depicts the dual role a woman plays today, the breadwinner and the housewife — the homemaker. In this painting, I have tried to show the socio-economical emblem which the woman has become, whereby she has the ability to nurture her family and make a home while excelling in her career too."

Photographs displaying people, culture and tradition across the globe are appealing. Artist Amit Bhatia has three sets of photographs titled *Raas Leela*. It depicts the story of eunuch who along with his group has come to play Holi in Vrindavan dressed in Krishna's attire. "He is in a playful mood and is spreading the colours peacefully when a rowdy crowd makes fun of him and disturbs him. But he remains unperturbed



and keeps on playing Holi. This photograph depicts the social stigma these individuals go through but they still live with pride, snubbing the circumstances."

Ankur Rana's style is a fusion of pop and conceptual art. His works talk about popular culture and reflect a modern society with a strong concept of romanticism. "I am inspired by pop artists like Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein because they painted people and their surroundings. Andy painted pictures of popular celebrities like Marilyn Monroe, Michael Jackson and others. But in my artworks I paint images of popular culture with common people because I feel that every person is a celebrity at heart. In my present series, the figures on canvas are in love. The woman is in love completely and it shows her relishing the moments after love. I try to capture or freeze that beautiful and rare feeling which comes in everybody's life for a short span of time," said Rana.

There is a sculpture influenced by Carnatic classical music. Though it is influenced by classical music, the creator's approach to it is modern.