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'Indian art is Antargyan' Documentary film fest from Feb 19

Vanita Srivastava
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SYED HAIDER Raza, the veteran artist who took Indian paintings to a global landscape, still splashes a colourful smile. He has been living in Paris for the last more than 50 years, but his soul still craves for his roots. "My visit to Madhya Pradesh is like a holy pilgrimage to me", he says. The artist who turns 85 on February 22, discusses his artistic journey, what he had missed out on, the status of contemporary art and more in an exclusive interview with the Hindustan Times.

How would you be celebrating your birthday this time? "For me each day is a celebration", he says with a childlike innocence.

And what was the journey like — the ups and downs? "Oh, it has been an extremely passionate life. As a child I was a black sheep, not really interested in school. But then I chanced upon Bansi Prasad Sathpati who gave a sense of direction to me. He would always say that one should pay attention to where one puts his feet. This lesson helped a lot in honing my skills. He introduced to me the nuances of Hindi culture, the Bhagwad Gita, the Ramayana..."

"I developed a flavour for poetry through G S Lehri-ji and I realised that it was not just the textbook learning that was vital in a child's growth. There should a simultaneous expansion of his mind. This is what I call Yogdan — the gift of teachers. It was D S Rathore, a



SYED HAIDER RAZA

teacher from Rajasthan, who introduced to me the world of canvas..."

And did he feel he had missed out on anything? "Yes, I had to face a lot of material difficulties. I did not have money to buy paintings. I did not have money to buy my colours. But I did not regret. I started selling my paintings and then finally I got a scholarship in 1950 to go to France. I worked very hard and it is this hard work that has been rewarded".

How does he define the contemporary Indian art? "The Indian art has become one of the most vital art expressions in the world today. We have worked very hard and I am proud to say that the Indian painters

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are very talented. It is the spiritual interpretation in the Indian art that radiates. Indian art is not just a representation of the nature sensed by the retina. It is something beyond that. It is an interpretation of the third eye. It is Antargyan or Antaryogi".

Is it true that art caters to only the rich and the affluent? "No, there are people from all segments who are attentive to painting, who savour the art in silence".

And lastly, what lessons had he learnt from life? "I have learnt that three things are very important in life — love, prayer and your profession. But these days I spend a lot of time praying to God".

A FOUR-day documentary film festival will be organised at Shahid Bhavan here from February 19 to 22. The festival is being organised under the joint aegis of Doordarshan Bhopal, Vanya Publication and PSBT Delhi.

The festival will be inaugurated by eminent film director Muzaffar Ali and documentary producer Mike Pandey. Minister for Tribal Development Vijay Shah will preside over the function while director general Doordarshan Leeladhar Mandloi will be the chief guest.

On the inaugural day, Muzaffar Ali's film 'Ghalib-Gadar' and film produced by Vanya Publication 'Smriti Swar' will be screened. The next day, Mike Pandey's 'Earth Matters', Kundan Shah's 'Ram Singh Ki Training, Manju Singh's 'Swaraj' will be screened.

International films produced by PSBT including 'Brain Damaged Take Two', 'The After Life of Einstein' and 'The Giant Buddha' will be screened on February 21 and Naresh Bedi's 'Echoes From The Jungle', Karamjeet Singh's 'Destination Himalaya' and Mukesh Verma's 'Chappal' will be screened.

Following screening of films, directors of respective films will have an interactive dialogue with the viewers. **HTC, Bhopal**

Master of Art

Life and Times of Raza

FROM landscapes to Indian iconography and the much-admired bindu, Sayed Haider Raza has come a long way. Now the Paris-based artist is back in India to celebrate his 85th birthday. Elaborate week-long celebrations called Swasti have been organised by the Raza Foundation, National Gallery of Modern Art, Art Alive Gallery and Alliance Française. The Padma Shri awardee discusses his life and art with VANDANA KALRA.

■ Have there been any rules that have governed your life?

For me three things are of utmost importance: love, prayer and painting. It's important to be most sincere and committed in your relationships; when praying one should feel close to God; and when pursuing your art — whether it be painting, poetry or music — do it with full concentration and dedication.

■ Any comment on the book *Raza: A Life in Art*.

I haven't read the book till now, but I know that a lot of hard work has gone into it. The author has done in-depth research on me and my works for over two years. The book will certainly do justice to me as a person and painter.

■ How do you rate the art scene in India at present?

There is a lot of good work being created in India and a lot is happening in terms of quality art and also the market for art in the commercial sense. Things

are looking up and Indian artists are making their presence felt internationally.

■ Why did you decide to go to France?

Art in France was extremely vibrant and I wanted to be a part of that. I worked towards it — got a scholarship and even

■ Your creation *Tapovan* sold for \$14,72,000 at Sotheby's India Art auction 2006 in New York. What did you think of the bid?

I'm glad and honoured. I've sold the painting and the purchaser sells it further. In the last two-three years my works have fetched good money. Consequently, I have increased my studio prices a bit, but I've still not inflated them to a level where it is out of reach for individual purchasers

FESTIVE FERVOUR

The Swasti celebrations:

Feb 22: Raza retrospective exhibition will be inaugurated at the NGMA
The book *Raza: A Life in Art*, written by Ashok Vajpeyi, will be released at The Taj Mahal Hotel.



studied French. And when I look back, I think going to Paris worked well for me. It provided me with a congenial atmosphere to study painting. Of course, I got several awards like Prix de la Critique in Paris, but I think what mattered most was the exposure to contemporary art that the city gave me. I married French artist Janine Mongilal and then continued living in Paris. But I never forgot my roots in India and visit the country. The Indian influence in my art is eternal.

who are genuinely interested in art.

■ Any plans of coming back to India?

I'm settled in Paris now, but I do hope to open a Kala Kendra in India. It may be in Delhi or Mumbai. Here I hope to give a platform to forms of art like *Worli* and *Madhubani* that are gradually being forgotten in India, their region of origin. I have several of these in my collection and through the Kendra I intend to encourage the authentic forms of art.

Feb 23: Opening of Swasti Roop, an exhibition of Raza Foundation Awardees. At Art Alive.

Feb 24: Poetry Festival at Alliance Française de Delhi.

Feb 26 to 28: Swasti Swar Mudra, performing art festival at Kamani Auditorium.



Home Coming : Raza shares his future plans and (left) two of his art works