

didyouknow? The idea of India International Centre germinated during a conversation between American philanthropist John D. Rockefeller III and Indian Vice-President Dr S Radhakrishnan in 1958

'AN ARTIST NEVER STOPS'

Before cutting his 88th birthday cake, painter SH Raza talks about life of an artist as an old man



PHOTOS: MAYANK AUSTEN SOOFI

Artist SH Raza during his birthday celebration (seen in left corner of the picture); at work in a basement room in Hauz Khas Enclave

Mayank Austen Soofi

On February 22, a few hours before his 88th birthday celebration at The Lalit hotel, Syed Haider Raza is struggling alone in a basement in Hauz Khas Enclave. Despite painting for 60 years, he is unsure of how his new creation will appear on completion. Staring at the mostly blank canvas, he says, "I'm trying to give a feel of Rajasthan."

Born in Babariya, Madhya Pradesh, and living in France since 1950, Raza is visiting Delhi to attend a special show in which private collectors will mark his birth anniversary by exhibiting his paintings, that are much sought after internationally. La Terre, for example, fetched £13 million at a Christie's London auction in 2008.

But fame and fortune aren't

helping. "My sight has grown weaker; so has my memory," says Raza. "Standing up is difficult. I'm afraid I'll fall down." Picking the red colour from his palette, he says, "Once I start walking, I gain confidence. It's the first step that's difficult."

'Fake' memories

Raza last came to Delhi in January, 2009 to inaugurate an exhibition of his works at the Dhoomimal Gallery in Connaught Place. He walked from one painting to the next, before informing the organisers that most were fakes. "I was sorry, hurt and angry," he says. "It's like stealing somebody's chequebook and signing it off." The organisers immediately cancelled the show.

Early life

Raza had his first solo show in

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— SH Raza, artist

1946 in Mumbai (then Bombay). He later moved to France. "That country has a wonderful climate for a young artist to work and evolve. In the India of 40s, artists like me were hobbling in the dark."

Those were the decades when contemporary Indian art was guided by English sensibilities, which emphasised a world as seen through the eyes. "But the retina-view was never the Indian way. We see through the third eye,"

says the artist. Pointing to his canvas, he says, "I want to paint a Rajasthan, the essence of which is seen as much by the eyes as it is by the mind and heart."

For 20 years, Raza has been making annual trips to India. Noting the necessity of studying the works of artists such as Amrita Shergil, MF Husain and Tyeb Mehta, he says, "People shouldn't be taken in by prices." But he adds that he doesn't underestimate the "economics" of art. "The prices that my paintings command help me in having a decent living," he says.

The show must go on

In Paris, Raza lives in an old convent that was home to nuns in the 17th century. It has 30 apartments and he owns two. He gifted one to his artist wife, Janine Mongillat. She was the

reason why he stayed back in France.

"Being the only daughter, Janine's mother didn't want her to move to India." The wife painted in her studio, Raza in his. They would meet for lunch. "Once the day ended, she would return to my apartment."

In 2002, Janine died of breast cancer. "It has been a sad life since." The couple have no children. "I told myself that the Lord called her and has let me live. And as long as I live, I must be happy. So I started taking care of my health and kept working regularly."

In his apartment, Raza has a maid for housework and an assistant helps him with medical appointments. But no one touches his canvas. "My health is not good," he says. "But an artist never stops."

Dil Se

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apne bahut tez awaj main
baat ki thi. yaad ho jab apne
mujhe refreshment baatane ke
liy kaha tha. i love you madam

— Pratibha

bewafa na hota.
Yaad uski saath nahi chhodti
afsoos me dil hai rota.
Na jane kyon usko in gamo ka
ehsas bhi nahi.
Ye mun uske khwabo me mast
raat-din nahi sota.
Tera Dewana.

— Kapil

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the girl whom i saw at supreme
bakery sector-8 rk puram at
17th feb about 2-3 pm
you r wearing black dress and

spects i m the guy who was
standing beside u in grey shirt
I LOVE THE WAY wen u said
wow kitni sweet h after seeing
the purple cake.
i want i know more about u so
plz reply through this space
DONT MISLEAD ME I M
SEARCHING YOU SINCE 17TH
FEB TILL DATE AT ABOUT 6
PM EVERYDAY plz meet me
once i hope 4 d best bye
Manish

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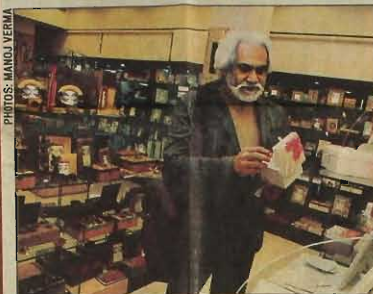
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FDCI president Sunil Sethi at the exhibition



Rakesh Kumar (L) and Robert Vadra

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overseas buyers. "The designs are innovative and we even have 20 designers from Philippines with us," said Rakesh Kumar, executive director of EPC. Businessman Robert Vadra, whose firm, Artex, also put up a stall, said, "Talent from the smallest of villages is taken to the best stores across the world, because of such events." He added, "The exhibition is very well organised, thanks to the hard work put in by Rakesh Kumar and his team." FDCI president Sunil Sethi, also present at the fair said, "I'm usually associated with fashion but handicrafts is my real business and a true passion."

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