

Her magical brush

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As artist Arpita Singh receives a Lalit Kala Akademi Fellowship, she talks to **Shailaja Tripathi** about the wanderer in her

Arpita Singh's dreamscapes have often had viewers sucked into them, set them off on an exploration figuring out recognisable and not-so-recognisable and then foraging links with her flowers, guns and objects of daily life. How the visual imagery arrived at the artist's canvas, at times vanished and then emerged in an absolutely transformed manner — a sort of journey that Arpita has made to date would be unravelled in "Other Narratives/Other Structures" an exhibition of selected works from her artistic career mounted on the occasion of Lalit Kala Akademi (LKA) fellowship being conferred on the 77-year-old artist. While LKA confers fellowship every two years and has in its list illustrious names like M.F. Husain, S.H. Raza, A. Ramachandran and Kapil Vatsyayan but it is for the first time an exhibition of the artist has also been organized. But the exercise hasn't been very easy to organize, admits Arpita, who last showed at Vadehra Art Gallery in 2010. In a free-wheeling chat, the senior artist, who trained at School of Art, Delhi Polytechnic under Sailoz Mookherjee



talks about various facets of her journey.

On becoming a fellow of the Akademi

It's very prestigious but frankly, I don't know what it means. It has taken so long to decide for things to start moving that I lost a bit of excitement but Ella Dutta has been able to collect some really significant works from collectors in Delhi and Mumbai, National Gallery of Modern Art, Vadehra Art Gallery and LKA. The viewers after seeing the works can imagine how my work progressed. The Akademi is even bringing out a portfolio and a monograph.

On her journey

This whole business of

painting is a lonely process. You are making new things at every step and you don't know where you are heading. It's a tunnel and you are walking in the dark. While travelling like this you can learn some magic, some witchcraft and then happen some miracles.

On the influence of miniatures

I began loving miniatures over a period of time. I am influenced by the style and even the border that I make comes from there. This whole thing about how contemporary art is a breakthrough is something I don't agree with. The aesthetics are forever flowing.



On crucial phases of her artistic career

I started with figuratives and then I came to abstracts. It was sometime between 70s and 80s that I felt painting wasn't coming to me. So, I started drawing. I think it was an important period in my life and they were not very recognizable figures. It was like practising your

TEEMING WITH LIFE (Left) Arpita Singh; works by the artist

handwriting and then I came back to colours with a show organised, if I remember clearly, by Richard Bartholomew. 'Flags' in that sense is a seminal work. I put these small marks of colour and they looked like flags. This work is here and so is 'Whatever is here' from Kiran Nadar Museum of Art (KNMA). It was based on Mahabharata. A lot of my work is based on mythology. Even now I am doing a work for KNMA which is based on Ramayana. Though the monumental 'Wish Dream' —

Art critic and curator Ella Dutta on the collection

The exhibition comprises some seminal works from Arpita Singh's life like 'My Lilypond' from 2009, 'Whatever is here' (2006). Her works always carry her point of view. 'Whatever is here' is such a layered work. Besides the war and a playful portrayal of Sanjay, she shows a group of widows mourning by the stream. This humanism and awareness of loss of women in the work is so poignant.

There are semi-abstract works like 'Flag' (1983) which is particularly important because it marks the beginning of her textured brush work.

'Munna Aapa's Garden' (1989), important watercolours, 'My Mother' (1993), 'Ashwamedha' (2008) are also part of the show.

a mural based on the Tibetan version of Ramayana which went on to fetch Rs.9.6 crore and break several crores — won't be part of the show because of its sheer size (16 panels; 24 by 13 feet), its reproduction would be there

(The show is on at LKA, Ferozeshah Road from October 10 to 24)