



SKETCHING



A ROYAL PICTURE

Rajasthan's royalty conjures myriad pictures dominated by rich brocades, well-maintained antiques and palatial lifestyles.

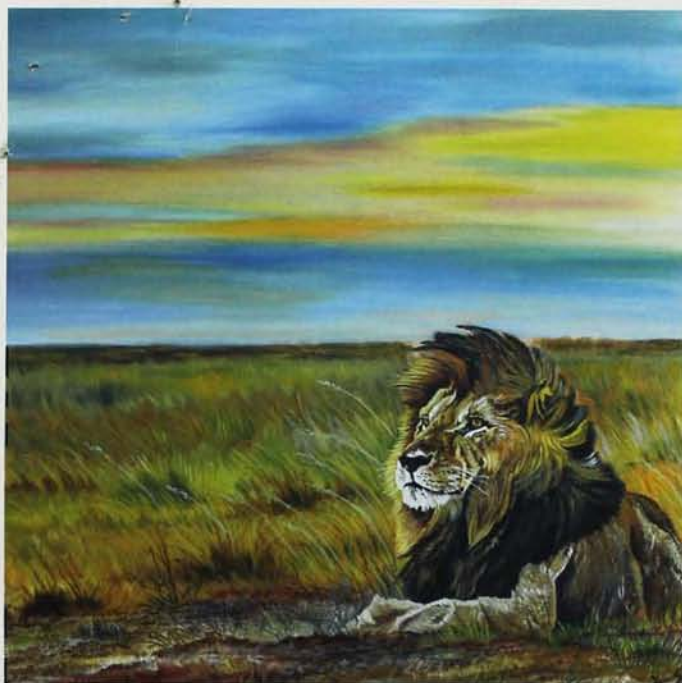
Aapji Sahib Vikramaditya Singh however, presents pictures of an entirely different kind—pictures where a rhino's horn is vividly displayed and a tiger's eyes seem to bore a hole in your very heart until you too come to appreciate wildlife just like he does. In a first-person essay for **MARWAR**, he talks about his love of tigers and India's rich wildlife, and why he feels the need to capture their beauty on canvas.

Aapji Sahib Vikramaditya Singh is a self-styled wildlife artist. Even as he wears the coat of arms of the royal family of Palaitha (largest principality of Kota, Rajasthan), drawing and painting wildlife remain his first and true passion. Inspired by his father, the late Aapji Sahib Ashok Singhji of Kota, he is an accomplished artist who has won acclaim for his beautiful depictions of wildlife. Singh's formative years were spent in Canada and England and his childhood was spent in Rajasthan. Armed with a degree in economics from the University of Toronto, he returned home to India to pursue art. Singh is also an ace shooter, which allows him to spend more time outdoors. He has also represented Rajasthan in the Double Trap shotgun shooting event. Having competed with the likes of Ronjan Sodhi and RVS Rathore, he has even won a gold medal in the Karni Singh Memorial Shooting Championship.

Above, facing page and in consecutive pages: The sketches and paintings of Aapji Sahib Vikramaditya Singh that depict magnificent tigers, lions, leopards, rhinos and elephants of the wild.



Today, he is based in Jaipur and surrounded by sanctuaries and historic hunting lodges of Rajasthan and neighbouring Madhya Pradesh. He has spent a lot of time travelling to these parks, taking photographs and studying wildlife in different settings. He has also spent six months in Kenya as a resident artist at a wildlife camp, where he created his latest collection, *Wild-Works*. Dramatic and edgy, the collection exhibits his passion, his attention to detail and his evolution as an artist. Romantic in its depiction, his sketches and paintings are stark with charcoal strokes embodying the energy of the beasts and colour echoing their light, variety and texture. His exhibitions in the past include *Tiger Tiger* at the Lodhi Hotel in 2011, sell-out shows at The Polka Art Gallery and Arushi Arts in 2011 and shows with Royal Fables in 2012 and 2013. His art has shared space with renowned names from the art world including Bose Krishnamachari and Sanjay Bhattacharya, and his private commissions comprise top industrialist houses, including the Kilachands and DLF Universal.



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Y JOURNEY WITH WILDLIFE ART has a very intimate connection to my desire for peace within. I grew up in the West during a very turbulent period, the '70s and '80s, when racism toward minorities was common. It was a time of turmoil and change and it was these experiences that moulded my senses and made my perceptions of the world different from that of other kids at the time. I also developed a great love for the outdoors and an abiding respect and fascination for nature during the many treks and field trips we went on when I attended The Doon School, which encouraged such trips every term. I learnt very early on that there is a mental and physical rejuvenation one feels in nature, which cannot be replicated by any other man-made source of gratification.

My affinity to the natural world was also a result of my family and background, especially my father, Sahib Ashok Singh. He came from the erstwhile royal family of Kota, mainly Palaitha, which is an integral part of the old Kota state. He was a very talented man, a financial analyst, a great nature photographer by hobby and a brilliant artist. He could even make furniture himself and do pretty much anything he put his mind to! Tigers and

nature were very close to his heart, due to his childhood years in Rajasthan and the then rich jungles of the state. There are many stories of hunting and encounters with tigers and leopards that he grew up hearing from his elders, who narrated them to him and his siblings. I also loved these old stories and felt very close to the subject matter of what would later become my passion. I would often observe my father drawing and painting wildlife, especially tigers, in his free time—and like all little boys, I wanted to copy whatever he did! It helped that I was also very creative as a child and took to drawing, colouring and painting like fish to water.

I believe that all creative processes are very personal to the creator; for me too, it is personal memories which evoke inspiration, leading the progression of strokes as my artwork develops. My childhood and exposure to the world at large as well as my parents' liberal upbringing were the main elements in my evolution as an artist. Though I have lived all over the world, there is a part of me that is very connected to the old world of Rajasthan.

To exhibit these memories and showcase the beauty that I cannot contain within myself,



I take on the canvas. I love the medium of charcoal and pencil as it imbues fluidity and allows limitless expression. I also enjoy oil painting and try to constantly learn new ways of approaching art. When I finish a piece I like, I feel inspired to try and do better; for example, learn new techniques of creating depth for the next work of art.

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I can only hope that as the years roll on, I will continue to be inspired by nature and wildlife. For artists like me, apart from inspiration, it is also crucial to have a platform that provides the right exposure. In my case, it was Art

Ortiga, a passionate project by renowned architect and my friend Sarabjit Singh, which did that.

Set up for the growth of wildlife art and to showcase the work of artists passionate about nature and animal life, this project is a boon in a country like ours where this sort of work is still in a stage of infancy. It is my endeavour to enhance the experience of nature that surrounds us by recreating it in its magnificence and through my personal interpretation of it. *Wild-Works*, my recent art collection, brought nature closer to the audience and I felt honoured by their



response. It reminded me of my own response to the wild.

I recall a few years ago, that my family and I were on a safari in Bandhavgarh National Park and were nearly attacked by an injured tigress. That probably is one of the most impactful experiences I've had with nature. On another safari during the same trip, I was lucky enough to see three tigers walking through the forest close to my jeep—these creatures are just so graceful, you can't even hear their paws touch the ground! They, and in fact everything in the natural world of the wild, will always provoke a deep and personal response from me.

That is the reason that the subject of poaching is so disturbing to me. What is the point in even having an opinion when our government neither evinces any interest nor has a clue about what to do to eliminate or curtail it? The irony is that while the number of tigers decreases at an alarming rate, the government continues to paste images of tigers on all tourism-related material for India! Although there are many other issues plaguing the country, I believe that ecological factors like preserving our tigers from extinction and taking care of our natural habitat are essential to create the balance the planet needs, so that our future generations have a habitable home. Issues of global warming, melting polar ice caps and general urban colonisation are destroying a future for our planet. It is for us as a species to try and become responsible rather than be eternally obsessed with material gain—otherwise there will be nothing left.*