

'Indian abstracts are at par with the best'

Curator and art book publisher from Paris, Ravi Kumar, releases a first-of-its-kind coffee table book on seven Indian contemporary artists today

Shougat Dasgupta

BACK IN 1960, Ravi Kumar left India to promote contemporary Indian art in Europe, Japan and the US. Six years later he stopped curating exhibitions and concentrated on publishing comprehensive, lavishly-produced art books. Since then he has published landmark books on topics ranging from Jain cosmology to Indian dance to Tibetan paintings. Now, Kumar is in town to launch his latest book, *Seven*, an examination of the work of seven contemporary Indian artists spread over three generations.

"Nothing serious has been published collectively on Indian abstract painters, even though their work is on par with any great work of art anywhere in the world," Kumar

says. "*Seven* took about 15 months to put together and I had to work extensively in both India and France to select each artist and the works I wanted displayed," he adds. Ashok Vajpeyi, prominent poet and founder of Bharat Bhavan wrote the essays that form the book's text. Price: Rs 4,000.

Seven will be released at the India Habitat Centre today and is accompanied by an exhibition, curated by Kumar himself, of the works of the seven artists profiled in the book—Raza, Dhawan, Viswanadhan, Bajaj, Akhilesh, Seema, Sujata and Manish. Kumar says, "it is the quality of the work of these artists that inspired me to return to curating." The exhibition is being toured around seven cities worldwide: "Mumbai, Chennai and Delhi, followed by London, Paris, New

York and next year Tokyo."

Despite having lived in Paris for almost 40 years, Kumar, born close to Sadar Bazaar, describes himself as "a Delhiite through and through." But the present Delhi skyline, "all those ugly skyscrapers on the Barakhamba Road," saddens him. Kumar pines for the Delhi of his childhood: "The most beautiful city in the world to me, totally green. In 1950 you could stand in CP and look out at Rashtrapati Bhavan in the west and the Jama Masjid and Red Fort in the north. It was a city of well-mannered people. Even now when I visit Delhi I take all my friends to Paranthewali Gali, a fascinating area and still the heart of Delhi."

On till March '31 at India Habitat Centre. Call: 24682001.

