

India's Seven for the world

From a dealer of Indian paintings, Ravi Kumar moved on to niche publishing

RAVI Kumar began his long innings with art about 44 years ago when he started promoting Indian contemporary paintings around the world. "But by 1962, I was so enamoured by Paris that I decided to settle down there. And the fact that I fell in love with a French girl also helped me to decide on coming back to live in Paris after all the globetrotting," he says. Since 1965, Kumar has been a art publisher with major books to his credit that have helped put India on the world art map. "Those were the days when the West was waking up to Indian art and ideas. But my books have been my own creations and completely original. I have always



JITENDER SHARMA

ART & SOUL

started from scratch and taken over five years to fully develop each idea into books," he says.

Two of the early art books from Ravi Kumar Publishers were two works on *Tantra* and another on *Ragmala Paintings* in 1966, 1970 and 1973. An interesting aspect of Kumar's books is that he never goes for reprints. "I would rather move on to something new. In fact, the only book of mine that

was reprinted was the *Tantra* book after Random House bought the distribution rights," explains Kumar.

An important influence on his career as art publisher and collector was Daniel-Henri Kahnweiler, a dealer of Picasso and Matisse and the best of Cubist painters. "When Kumar met him in Paris, he was already 70 years old. Our friendship lasted till his death and it was he who introduced me to famous curators and

museum directors around the world," says Kumar.

And though he has dedicated his life to promoting Indian art and artists, his interest in art has been very global and universal. "Though I was a big art collector, now I have become a wanderer. My daughter has married a Frenchman and I have a lovely grand-daughter. I'm still friends with my ex-wife who has a large collection of western masters paintings," he says. "As for myself I don't collect anything any more," says Kumar, a descendant of Maharaja Anang Rai of Ujjain, whose interest in art started at the age of 18. His latest book called *Seven* is a collector's item that focuses on 7 Indian contemporary abstract artists, four of whom, Rajendra Dhawan, Sujata Bajaj, Velu Viswanadhan and Sayed Haider Raza live in Paris. The other three Seema Ghurayya, Manish Pushkale and Akhilesh are from India. Priced at Rs 4000, the book has a limited edition of 600 copies and is distributed in India by Variety Book Depot. A special portfolio of seven original serigraphs signed by the artists at Rs 50,000 is a companion to the book. The texts by Ashoke Vasipet, eminent poet and critic, who had earlier collaborated with Kumar on a monologue on the Paris-based painter Raza.

The new offerings together Indian artists of three generations across continents. I will also curate *Seven* shows, three in India at Mumbai, Chennai and Delhi and the others in Paris, New York and Tokyo to showcase the works of the seven artists. Each show is designed to be independent of the others," says Kumar.

ISHANI DUTTAGUPTA