

With two exhibitions showing in the city, H S Raza looks back on his artistic evolution. In conversation with Georgina L Maddox



insideout

■ Back in Mumbai, H S Raza gazes into the green lawn from a window at his present sanctum, the CEAT guest house.

Looking back on his years of creativity, he says: "Marking significant milestones, I think I can divide my journey as an artist into three main spheres." The first began with the Rajput and Mughal miniatures that he was studying, back in the 1950s. "I used to make cityscapes in gauche, based on my experience of the miniatures. I feel it was an important phase. I painted *Haut De Cagnes* and *Italian Village* in 1953," he says.

■ From those early days, he moved on to his adventure with French art.

"I realised that I didn't want to only practice what I had learnt in India. I wanted to learn more and, like the saying goes, 'Let noble ideas come from all sides'. I turned to oil and acrylic paints, I wanted to discover all the secrets that the great masters like Cezanne, Van Gogh, Gauguin and Picasso had given to France," he says. His interest in nature persisted and he executed many paintings of the French landscape.

■ Despite several shows in Sao Paulo, New York and Canada, he felt a void, a missing connection...

"In the solitude of my studio, I asked myself, 'Where are you in your work? Where is the seed of your origin, your genetics?' In 1975-78 I revisited the land of my birth. I returned to my village in India, Babaria," he says. Here he remembered the bindu that his first teacher, Nandalaji Jhoria introduced him to. "At a tender age, it was my teacher who gave me a sense of direction. I was a bad student. He took me out to the veranda and drew a bindu on the wall. 'Look at this bindu,' he told me. I realised, later on, how important the bindu is for the visual arts, the same way *Om* is for music."

■ The bindu became the symbol of the origin of life — and the beginning of his third phase.

"It was in the 1980s that I began to paint using all the fundamentals of what I had learnt in France — using colour, line and balance with the essence of all my being. The Bindu. Now, I have reached a stage where I want to eliminate all but the essentials. People may get a little surprised when they see my white and off-white paint-

Playing the city

LOTS discussing urban life's labyrinthine problems. Monologues making candid comments on society's insensitivity towards marginalised people. Stories subtly lambasting our attitudes towards the absurdity of war, or environmental degradation. The plays showing at the Kala Ghoda Art Festival, in a sense, reflect the eclectic nature of metropolitan life.

Divya Bhatia, who conceived the festival's theatre segment, says: "Originality and the contemporary nature of the performances — both in content and style — were two important criteria for the selection of the plays. Almost all the plays — in English, Hindi and Marathi — are by young directors and new productions in their initial run of shows."

It kicks off with Zubin Driver's *Toba Tek Singh*, based on Saadat Hasan Manto's acclaimed story set in a mental asylum in Lahore. Says Driver: "*Toba Tek Singh* symbolises the hate which engulfed the subcontinent during Partition, when even inmates at a mental asylum were divided on the basis of religion. We are fighting with the same dark forces of hate and prejudices today." This director also presents *Stump*, a monologue which discusses the existential problems of a vagrant. "It's an attempt to look at the life of an

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AT THE PRITHVITHEA
SANGH & BAL BHAVA

The Experimental Theatre presents its fourth annual *Natya Utsav*. Determined to form that voice issues, children, this year, the focus is on children's Rights and Civil Liberties. Around 400 children from across the country will participate in this national festival. The festival has also won UNICEF

UNTILL FEBRUARY
AT THE NEHRU CENTRE
11.00 AM TO 7.00 PM

The gallery is showing about 35 drawings and paintings by Prakash Ghosh and Kishor Nadavdekar, who used to work together, eventually leading to this group of works predominantly

ings," he says with a smile, continuing, "But it's all part of the process."

■ His spirituality leads to art. Or is it the art that leads him to spirituality?

"It works both ways. I think spirituality is the quest and painting is the medium to attain it. The ambition is to reach the essential. What is known as *adhyathnik khoj*," he intones, in an almost meditative voice. "The master of this realm was the late Gaitonde. Among the younger artists, there are Yusuf, Akhilesh and Seema, all from Madhya Pradesh," he smiles, looking fondly at the painter Akhilesh, who has come to Mumbai for the Raza shows.

■ One wonders why a man, so much in love with his country, is still based in France.

Some loves are greater than others and, in this case, it is his wife who has held him back. "I was smitten... it was like the line of *kajal* in a woman's eye, that once drawn cannot be easily removed. She did not want to leave France, so I stayed on," explains the artist, who visits India once or twice a year.

H S Raza's retrospective, The Sacred Search, is showing at the Jehangir Art Gallery till February 28. His prints on canvas are showing at the Tao Art Gallery till February 26



Surviving Picasso

PICASSO is one artist that I can never get enough of. Every time I have seen his work — which has been often — I come away feeling rejuvenated. The word that I would use in conjunction with him is: astounding. Keeping that in mind, when I visited the show *Tribute to Picasso* that is currently on at the Guild Art Gallery, I failed to get any energy from most of the works.

Though the show has been done with the best of intentions, it does not tap the full potential of working with an artist as multi-faceted as

Picasso. I found the interpretations of 'tribute' far too literal. It was rather strange, that most artists deemed it necessary to actually portray the artist, in order to offer a tribute. With an exception of Krishnamachari Bose, who has been making photo-realist images of many artists besides Picasso, I found that artists were not exploring Picasso's persona or his works, at a deeper level. The only other artist whom I felt had come close to capturing Picasso's spirit was Madhav Imarte. His sowing machine, with its indulgent brush work, touched on that vitality that Picasso is known for. Even if one were to refer to any one page of Picasso's diary, there is so much that coloured his life. But none of that



GUEST ARTIST
ANAHITE

is brought to the front.

It comes as a surprise especially, artists like Laxma Gaud and Laxman Shreshtha are whose work I have a high regard for, how, it just seems too con-