

nishajamwal



# Colour my world

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Artist S H Raza's protégé Sujata Bajaj finds her identity in colour, even as the guru-shishya team prepares for a joint showing in the city

## Of chance, kismet and life

**W**HEN Rune Jul Larsen bought a six by five foot painting from an Indian artist exhibiting in Paris in 1989 and requested her to deliver it to him, did she know she was going to be his wife? That she would marry and live with this Norwegian research scholar and make a home with Rune in Paris, Norway and India. "I had always felt there was going to be magic one day and then I would have found my husband," she says, adding, "My marriage sari was woven by my parents Radhakrishna and Anasuya Bajaj."

## France, Raza and evolution

But let us backtrack even further to how she went to France in the first place. Had Sujata Bajaj ever imagined that she would be the chosen protégé of the celebrated progressive Padma Shri artist S H Raza when she invited him to her studio in Pune to see her works, that he would even travel from Bombay to see them? From her Gandhian home with her parents at Vardha, this fervent Gandhian pursued her love for art, joined the J J School and went to meet Raza in connection with a research tutorial. He met her and in her work found a vibrancy of colour, form and pictorial space, reminiscent about his foray into the world arena of art, his own travel to Paris where the world opened up for him and his discovery of *vocula* (*drishti*) and organisation of pictorial space. "Libraries were inaccessible back then at Rs 50 a month. In October 1950 I went on a French Government Scholarship to France, to see the world, and then art and life were never the same again."

To this end Raza encouraged her to study in Paris, "There was a pulsing energy in her works, the search that came through, that I had felt in around 1978 when I left India. My growth was slow and it took me 15 years to get a command over painting only to discover that I could not find myself in my works. The world was sitting up and recognising my work, but for me I was dissatisfied — where were my genetics, my racial and cultural consciousness?"

Sujata went on to win a French Government scholarship at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des beaux-Arts and went on to develop her individual synthesis of folkloric, modern, primal,



**Top Left:** Sujata Bajaj with mentor Raza  
**From top to bottom:** The honeyed tones of the wooden floor are juxtaposed with the splashes of colour that her works render and a touch on India in the hanging stuffed birds; A wall-sized picture window deftly picks up the deep blue of the couch; Vibrant floor level seating in jewel clarets and mirror work emeralds compliment the mauve carpet and the sheen of wood

tribal compositions with parts of verse and text in Devnagiri script in her 'energy' series. "I want to prove that there is no conflict of generation. I see in the works of the younger generation what I had been searching for — dynamics of colour and fundamental form." There is a connection Raza feels with Sujata's work and his own journey in the '70s through the early themes drawn from his memories of a childhood spent in the forests of his native village of Barbaria in Madhya Pradesh and later his expressionist landscapes, which became rigid, geometric representations of landscape in the 1950s. Then lines blurred and colour dominated, metamorphosing into the non-representational geometrical 'bindu' the icon, sacred in its symbolism, and placing his work in an Indian context. Today, the acharya-shishya are in India on the eve of their joint show to open on the February 20 when Raza's works from the '70s, on loan from collectors, will be shown with Sujata's recent mixed media works at the Guild Gallery.

## Mixed media

I had visited Sujata while travelling last summer and we discussed her journey through art and life. It had intrigued me and I have followed her work since then. Her quaint French faced with very Indian accents had described to me her love for minimalism and non-cluttered spaces, and her home is representative of all that she spoke of. Wooden floors and white walls are a backdrop to vibrant floor level seating in jewel clarets and mirror work emeralds, huge wall-size picture windows reflect light onto brilliant blue throw cushions and bolsters atop upholstered sofas. Accents of India in the form of a row of stuffed birds and quilted bedspreads are connected by the contemporary Indianess of her paintings, the signature of her Indian home, away from India. Colour is the essence of her ethos, her work and her surroundings — "I was fortunate to be born in Jaipur, the land of colour, and it flows in my veins. Colour has taken hold of me."

No longer do I have to chase after it. I know that it has hold of me forever. That is the significance of this blessed moment. Colour and I are one. I am a painter..." She quotes the words of Paul Klee as Raza, she and I make our way to lunch at Indigo.

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