



Painting

WITH FERVOUR

Driven by her need to express, Sunayana Malhotra paints the female form in all its glory. **Charu Roy** talks to the Delhi artist

Sunayana Malhotra (45) was born and brought up in the by-lanes of central Delhi, the cultural hub of the capital. She comes from a family of engineers and doctors, but says that her parents always encouraged their kids to find their own passion and commit to following it. That is how, today her sister is a trained classical singer, while she is a painter. As a child, Malhotra loved to draw and sketch and would spend most of her evenings visiting art galleries, dance recitals and plays. And she would end up meeting a lot of artists as well, at these events.

Malhotra never thought that she would become a professional painter someday, it was a passion and she continued to pursue it as a hobby, long after the age where most people give up their hobbies or forget they even had one. She got married

fairly early and it was only after she had kids did she start to think of a career as a painter. "I have always wanted to express myself and once I started painting, I realised that the canvas was the best platform for me to do so," she says about how she chose this art form. "I had my first exhibition in Ashoka Art Lounge, New Delhi and got a very good response. That is when I started to take it all seriously and work towards it as a career," she adds. She earlier had apprehensions about her art and how it will be received by the audience. "Today I have sold quite a bit of my pieces, some even to art connoisseurs abroad," she shares. Art is also a highly competitive field but "ever since I started my journey, I have tried to paint every single day to hone my skill and to do justice to all those who have believed in me," says the hardworking artist. >

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Women's corner

Talk about painting women and Sunayana's eyes light up. She specialises in painting the female form through which she strives to show the myriad shades of womanhood and all the things we, as women, go through in our lifetimes. It is a way for her to portray her own thoughts and to reflect on them. "My portrayal of women is not meant for the

male voyeuristic gaze and is not like what the media shows them as, either. It is a simple and truthful depiction of real women whose bodies tell tales of their journey from birth to death, which women often camouflage while looking with disgust at their own self and the changes they have gone through the years," she says. In her works, you will often find solitary women, without a man or surrounded by family—the things the society uses to define women. Women are complete beings in their own right and this is what Malhotra strives to show through her paintings.

Women however, are not the only thing she paints. In 2016, for her exhibition *Aham*, that took place in the Visual Arts Gallery, Indian Habitat Centre, she painted a series of lotus ponds. According to her, "lotus is a symbolic flower, with roots in many religions and is very much like women. It lives in muddy water and still remains untouched by the dirt, just like a woman manages to uphold 'beauty' in this evil world." She is also currently working on a series of paintings of Lord Buddha. "I think we are all looking for inner peace as there is so much chaos in this world. I am doing my bit by painting Buddha," she says. She is also a modern painter and enjoys the freedom to play with colours in acrylic and work with abstract designs on canvas.

This and that

Some of Malhotra's favourite painters are Amrita Shergill, Paul Jackson Pollock and Georgia O'Keeffe. "I cannot say that you will see glimpses of their work in mine, but these are the people I look



up to and hope to become and paint like them one day," she says. Apart from calling Delhi her home and dream city, her favourite place for art is the Museum of Modern Art in New York and she will steal any opportunity to spend her time soaking in the art there. She is a singer as well, but unlike her sister, an amateur one and pursues it as a hobby only. She is also a voracious reader and you will always find her with a book, either in her hand or one, at least, in close proximity. She is currently reading the *Awakening Shakti* by Sally Kempton. The book talks about the sacred feminine principle of spiritual awakening, a topic that is close to her heart.

Malhotra continues to expand her involvement with art in whatever way she can. The painter who usually works with acrylic on canvas, collaborates with interior designers in Delhi as well. Through them, she decorates houses of other people and turns them into homes. "When I see my work in other people's houses, I feel extremely happy and proud that I am adding colour and warmth to somebody else's living space," she shares.

Future plans

In the near future, Malhotra talks about the possibility of a show abroad soon. "I want to work more and possibly beyond what my physical capacities will allow. I want my art to reach places all over the world and meet people through it. I want to make a difference in the world we live, in my own way," concludes Malhotra. **F**