

Right in the gut

Four senior Indian artists are exhibiting their abstract paintings, and they are good enough to hit you in the solar plexus, says gallery hunter Francis D'Sa in this stylised, personal piece on a recent visit to Percept Art at Lower Parel. He writes:

Everything is silent in the gallery as I enter, except for the gentle hum of the centralised air conditioning. Slowly the paintings unveil their creators and a story unfolds, as I softly tread the gallery space and am unwittingly drawn to the almost life size works of one of India's finest abstract painters - Mehli Gobhai!

Soft footedly, he appears as if he's just stepped out of his abstract creation, very real, but even in 3D very soft-spoken as he glides into the space

all three painters. It is a pocket-sized book of a series of conversations that Jesal Thacker and author Jerry Pinto had with the artists over the years, and excerpts were read and discussed with the artists present, much to the delight of the audience.

Jerry Pinto, editor of the book, comments to Gobhai, that 'meaning is hidden in your work, obscured by what I sometimes think of as your almost microscopic gaze'. Gobhai replies, "What is hidden fascinates me. Consider the hidden design in nature, the geometry behind a shell or a leaf formation. Why am I so excited by dried coconuts and seedpots?"

And more in the same, gentle, meandering, utterly fascinating vein. Try not to miss the show.

Coming and going

Indian Mujahiddeen terrorist Yasin Bhatkal, who was wanted in several



Painters Mehli Gobhai and (right) Prabhakar Kolte, in conversation with each other at the gallery showcasing their works in Lower Parel

towards his work.

"If I had to give up either colour or lines, I would certainly give up colour, which I almost have", he muses as he checks out the lighting in the gallery on his paintings and approves. Jesal Thacker, the curator is pleased.

Mr. Gobhai is one of the four painters featured here, the others being Ganesh Haloi (who was unable to make it due to ill health), Prabhakar Kolte and the late Ambadas Khobragade.

There is also a book release titled 'Conversations' that includes

states in India and by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) for his involvement in the Mumbai bomb blasts, Pune German Bakery blast and the Delhi blast, was arrested from deep in the Nepal terrain last September. He had stayed there happily for quite some time.

Now there are reports that another IM operative Afzal Usmani accused in the 2008 Ahmedabad and Surat blasts, who escaped from the high-security Mumbai Sessions Court premises earlier last month, has also gone to Nepal. And no wonder they like it there,



Azad Shrivastav | ADC

Never have truer words been spoken across a hoarding opposite Siddhivinayak temple at Prabhadevi. As the Shiv Sena and the MNS quarrel with each other, guess where the advantage goes, says a member of the aam aadmi. The thing is; no-one is ever going to listen.

given how easy it is to stroll in and out across the border between the two countries at Raxaul in Bihar.

As of now, any Indian can just walk from India to Nepal or Nepal to India. No one asks, makes inquiries or bothers to inspect faces or documents.

Petty Indian criminals who are in the safe haven of Nepal are however, giving the Prahari (Nepal police) sleepless nights and as a result, they are pressing their government to start a visa process or at least some kind of mandatory registration for Indians while coming into Nepal.

Our colleague Vishnudas Sheshrao, who visited the world's only Hindu kingdom (or at least it was till the communists took over), had a surreal experience as a border crosser which he enjoyed very much.

"I got a tonga at Raxaul railway station to cross no man's land at the border. There are two gates flanking no man's land, one for India, the other for Nepal. But the fellow straight away dropped me at the bus station in the border town of Sunauli in Nepal. I was afraid that I would be in trouble as I had

not been subjected to any formalities. What if the Nepalese authorities arrested me, I thought. So, I went back 1.5 km on foot to the Nepal Immigration office at the border.

"I gave my passport and introduced myself to Immigration.

He asked me what I wanted, so I said, 'I want to go to Nepal'. He looked a little puzzled, smiled and said 'Then go'. But he did explain to me that no immigration formalities are required for Indians going to Nepal. So I went."

Pic by Vishnudas Sheshrao



One minute there is no-man's land across the Gate marking the end of Raxaul in Bihar. Next there is another Gate that leads you into Sunauli in Nepal, no questions asked, no papers required. Now things might change.

Pic by Rajan Ranshoor

An inside view of an outsider's world

He is now 57 years old and a resident of Mumbai from the time it was Bombay, so far in the past that most of those early memories have dimmed. But Shridharan from Kerala, also and better known as Purana Nariyalwala Anna, who has his stall at Colaba near the Kailas Parbat Hotel, remembers what is important.

He remembers, for instance, that coconuts cost Rs.60 for 100. The one we bought from him was Rs.35, carefully picked for the sound it made when he tapped it with expert fingers, full of water and also the cream of the young and tender coconut. From Kerala, he said, that's why it was a little "costly", and he smiled almost

apologetically. It was every bit as good as he promised.

Talking is easy for him as he remembers the old days - working with a couple of relatives at the coconut stall, taking time off to make a meal of a vada pav, strolling around the southern tip of Bombay, as it was known then, sleeping safely on the maidans. Prosperity of a kind came inevitably.

"That is this city's gift to everyone who works hard", he says. That is what makes this city a gift from God for people from outside. So business may have slackened a bit, but life is still very good indeed.

Does he not miss his hometown and his people? "But you see," he



In Colaba, secure in his stall, Shridharan, the purana nariyalwala, holds out one more of the thousands of coconuts he has sold in the last four decades, full of the promise of flavour and purity.

will tell you earnestly, "this is my home now and these are my people. When I go to visit relatives, I find myself anxious to come back here. I could never live there again. This is what I know".

For Shridharan, Mumbai is a city that gives and gives and where no-one need ever starve. Of course a lot has changed now but he sets his face against those who would find fault, has little to say to them.

For him, there is nothing sweeter than to listen to a customer, select a nut, carefully pry it open, stick in a plastic straw and bid him gently, to drink from a tender coconut. No wonder it is considered Mumbai's representative fruit, almost as locked in time and space with the idea of Mumbai as the Gateway of India.