

# Because Modernity Needs Tradition

An exhibition titled 'Rocks and Ragas', a collaboration between artists from three continents, presents unique interpretations of Indian culture through contrasting perceptions

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FATE IS a matter of chance and choice. And is chance that brought together three artists — Arti Kirloskar, a painter from Pune; US-based photographer Alyssia Lazin and Czech Republic-based abstract painter Pavel Kapic — from three different continents. The three have now collaborated on an exhibition that showcases traditions of India through their individual expressions.

The exhibition titled "Rock and Ragas", denotes ragas from India and rock 'n' roll from the West. The 12-day exhibition has a wide variety of artforms on display and includes sculptures, photographs, etchings, art installations and 3D printed models.

"Pavel and I visited India seven years ago and fell in love with it. We met Arti (Kirloskar) during that time. The three of us are from different countries, even different continents, but when we saw our work we noticed that there is some similarity. We interpreted our cultures in our different ways. The theme of the exhibition is "Modernity needs Tradition" because we are talking about the culture in India and each of us is showing it in our contemporary artistic style," says Lazin. She has put up the installations as large silk panels of pictures so that people will get the experience of walking through a silk forest. She is also showing her project, "Portraits of Allure", which is a diptych and has two images budded together. "One side will have the portrait but not of a person's face. I am looking at it from behind, so I took the backside of the person and complemented or contrasted it — depending on how one looks at it — with a semi-abstract image which tells a fictitious story," she adds.

The reflection of Indian mythology is conspicuous in the abstract paintings made by Kapic, which are vivid and radiant with his added interpretations. One of his horizontal paintings depicts the famous Samudra Manthan or churning of the ocean from Hindu mythology, which shows Gods and demons fighting for amrit (the elixir of



Artwork on display at the exhibition "Rocks and Ragas"

life). "It's my interpretation of the tug of war between the good and the evil. I contemporised it by adding the contemporary characters in modern dresses, still holding on to the rope, which means that they are still holding on to the tradition," says Kapic.

Kirloskar, whose last big exhibition was at the Kochi Muziris Biennale 2015, has created art pieces in mixed media, which explore the movements, rhythms, colours and strength of the traditional sports fought in India under a traditional rule. This includes kushti (wrestling) and malkhambh (exercise for wrestling, which is sometimes practiced as a different sport too) in Maharashtra.

A painting of two pahlwans intertwined in the circular movements is explained by her as the circle of life. "I've come to view kushti almost as a circle of life where human bodies are doused with mitti, affirming the truth that we come from mud, it

nourishes us, and unto earth we shall return," says Kirloskar.

Ask her how she chose taleem as her subject and the artist says that it's because it has become a dying tradition. "Aamir Khan's Dangal showcased how international wrestling competitions use mats instead of mud in the akhadas. So nobody learns kushti the traditional way. People prefer gyms nowadays. But I'm proud of the traditional way and was amused when I saw that lal mitti of an akhada is mixed with buttermilk and lemon juice. The room smells so fresh, like wet rain instead of the smell of sweat. Thus, I have used the terracotta clay to make the sculpture and give it a raw look. I also painted with mud and used that lal mitti colour in my canvas. My etchings, photographs and digital prints will also have this colour, which gives a traditional look," she adds.

While Kapic and Lazin's art is filled with

vibrant colours, Kirloskar confesses that hers is more monotonous. "I like how Kapic and Lazin see India and bring out so many colours in their pieces. The visual language used by them is a general view which is then converted into something beautiful. While I tried to conserve the hidden truth about a disappearing art, they went back in time and constructed the Indian mythology in contemporary ways," says Kirloskar.

Kapic and Lazin, a couple who travelled and discovered Indian cultures in northern and western part of India, now plans to travel towards the south of India to study and explore more. Kirloskar is now planning to document and research more about taleem and use new technology in photography and printing.

The exhibition is on from December 27 at Indian House Art Gallery in Balewadi, 11am to 5pm.

