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Man in the mirror

AT THE GALLERY

Reality

*Paintings by Jaideep Mehrotra
Jehangir Art Gallery
June 17 - 23*

HE started painting when he was 11. At 13 he had his first exhibition in oils. Jaideep Mehrotra's works are currently on display at the Jehangir Art Gallery. His paintings are stark, intriguing, humane and most important — realistic. They are his reactions to the happenings around him and are marked with an overriding concern for the problems that beset our everyday lives. As Jaideep says, "If I was a writer I would express myself in words but I am a painter so I express myself through my paintings."

Though he always had a passion for art, Jaideep graduated in commerce and got into business. He had stints with an export house, printing press business in the Middle East and an audio and video equipment business in Nigeria.

For a man with a flourishing business what is it that made him make a switch to painting? Jaideep says "After I got back from Africa I had a show of my works at the Taj Art Gallery. The response was so good that after that I started getting a lot of orders. I found that I was dividing my time between business and painting and giving neither my full concentration". So he decided to give painting his everything.

His concentration led to a particular discipline which later evolved into a technique which for someone with no formal training and only seven years professional experience is amazing. Influenced by painters like Salvador Dali, Jaideep is an exponent of surrealism or superhumanism — a movement drawing its inspiration



Jaideep Mehrotra with his painting titled 'The State of the State'.

from its preoccupation with modern society and its problems.

According to Jaideep, "When a beggar comes to beg and you are in your car, your first reaction is to roll your window up and shut the beggar out but you never stop to think about why he's begging." This is what Jaideep wants to achieve through his paintings. He wants us to lift the veil from over our eyes and see the things we want to shut out.

'Fragile' is a hauntingly beautiful picture of a woman balanced by threads with nothing but an illusion of the ground below. She holds something in her hands, something that can't be seen. Jaideep interprets it as being happiness or success or the fulfilment of our desires or anything that we are constantly in pursuit of all our lives — but that evades us.

'The state of the state' is apt for the times we are living in. It shows an obese politician squatting unbalanced on the ground with mike and garland entwining tiny coiled snakes and money. His face an empty shell. On

display are also two 'Installations' Eerie looking shirt-like structures are held in mid-air by threads. Bullet holes on the shirt have blood dripping from them. What Jaideep wants to portray is that all our principles, all that we stand up for and fight for is reduced to nothing but emptiness upon death. The deep folds of the shirt worn by the dead man show strength of character but tell you nothing of the mystery of his soul.

Hard-hitting and thought provoking Jaideep invites you to interpret his paintings in your own way. But getting a message across is not all he wants to do, he also has fun with his work. One of his paintings 'Veil' has a woman covering her face with her mehndi dyed hands. On close inspection one can see snakes and ladders intricately traced in the mehndi.

Blunt, meticulous and gifted this artist with his sensitive portrayals holds a mirror up to us showing us life as it really is and forcing us to see what we choose to ignore.

VANESSA ABRAHAM