



Jaideep Mehrotra with the late Maharani Gayatri Devi and his portrait of Her Highness (Left and below) Untitled works from the upcoming exhibition, *Reflections in Mercury*

You can touch my paintings, use a wet cloth over them, and even hang these upside down," says artist Jaideep Mehrotra, implying

how his latest abstract canvases are adaptable to change and in the least bit fussy.

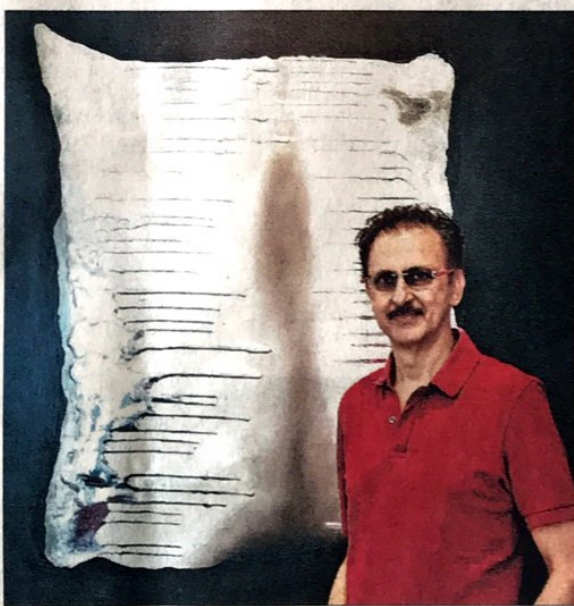
Abstract as a medium, all this while, served as a palate cleanser in private quarters before Mehrotra would hurl himself into the next exhibition. So with these canvases from his upcoming *Reflections in Mercury* at Mumbai's Tao Art Gallery, Mehrotra has, for the first time, drifted away from his usual suspects – oils, acrylics, cast resin sculptures, giclee prints, site specific installations or video art. Moreover, the technique of producing these highly texturised surfaces of what mostly appear as liquefied frozen metal, ate up seven years of his life in trial and error. But he chooses to stay mum about this lengthy process. "All I can say that it was long and tedious," reveals Mehrotra, who addresses these artworks in silver, gold, copper and dark grey metallic tones, as 'paintings'. Though he lets slip that these works had to be kept flat while layer over layer of material was applied, each layer taking its own merry time to dry. "Unlike acrylic and oil, this medium doesn't let me paint over a mistake. Some experiments have ended up peeling or breaking off," says Mehrotra.

Reflections... also takes off from his past exhibits, sprinkled similarly in metallic stardust. *The Welder's Handbooks* had 2D books in mixed on glass fibreboard sliced, torn apart or placed with abandon to caution how the printed word is being pulp fiction'ed as e-books become mass mentality. *Cognitivus* had books, either laid open or in a pile to reflect diffusion of knowledge.

Regaling the same spine, these new works also resemble pages of a book in fluid, frozen metal. They point to our fickle minds that are averse to industrial waste and instead encourage shiny new products. The smudgy reflective surfaces invite the viewer to participate in this realisa-

EXPERIMENTS in metal

Artist Jaideep Mehrotra's canvases of 'frozen metallic liquidity' in his upcoming exhibition are the culmination of seven years at developing a new painting technique, finds Ornella D'Souza



tion. "The viewer can see themselves, what their wearing, and life around the painting, while the painting itself remains unmoved."

Now if the silvery books and bookshelf in Mehrotra's painting, *Mantleshelf of Consciousness* reminds you of Shilpa Gupta's similar installation, *Someone Else*, and if you tell him, then he's enthusiastically adds how such coincidences are frequent in the art world. "In fact, at a lit fest in 2008, both of us had exhibits made from microphones. I guess, everything in life is borrowed from life," he reasons. This means borrowing from his own life experiences as well. For instance, *Letters from Home*, is a painting that

juxtaposes his grandparents' portraits with an old trunk and handwritten letters – the umbilical cord that held together his family that the Partition displaced to both sides of the border.

Sticking to one style is what Mehrotra finds limiting. "When it becomes a formula, I leave it," says the artist, who buys powdered pigments as he is very particular about how he makes his acrylic and oil paints. That explains how he's found himself to be the artist who painted the last portrait of the late Maharani Gayatri Devi after being commissioned by a diamond conglomerate who replicated Her Highness' jewellery collection. Or his role behind the public

sculpture of Sachin Tendulkar, a commission by RPG, that is yet to find a permanent address after it's uprooting from the city's various promenades following clashes with the local citizens.

The self-taught artist is also the proverbial tech-hawk, who follows scores of science and mechanics' e-zines. His many experiments in digital art can be attributed to his experience of growing up with the gramophone, watching his first television interview at a neighbour's house when he didn't own a set, and now enjoying his "AC3 surround system where music sits in digital code". Initially, 90s Mumbai couldn't fathom these sci-tech works. "One gallery said, 'if you can't smell the paint or feel the work, then it must not be art,'" recalls Mehrotra. In time, such works – *Divine Bovine* where one chunk of a bull's body is a barcode that upon scanning, enlightens the viewer about the perils of a frivolous lifestyle – gained repute.

Mehrotra is already itching to experiment with materials that unify science and art. So what's cooking next? "Perhaps, a tangible 3D illusion that you can put your hand through..." Well, if it's similar to a Star Wars' floating 3D Princess Leia hologram, we're game.

Where: Tao Art Gallery, Worli
When: September 23-October 22

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