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The colours of cyberspace

Namita Devidayal meets painter Jaideep Mehrotra, whose exhibition of computer-generated lithographs is currently on in the city

P.M. Shirodkar

IF you're looking for Jaideep Mehrotra, don't bother asking for his studio address or getting a catalogue of his work. The best place to find him is <http://www.Artistree.co.in>. No appointments required.

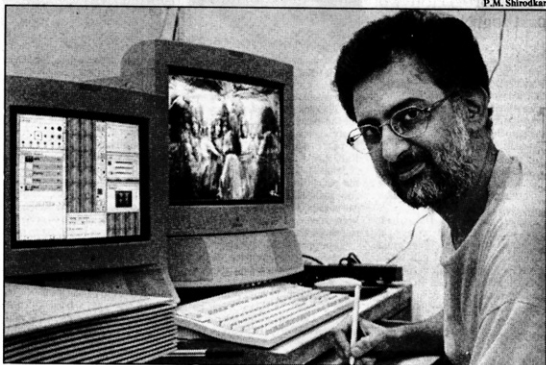
Click on a 3-D image of a Mehrotra mask, and you will find his brooding oils. Try another icon, and you are browsing through some of his water colours. It's all there — from his date of birth to details about his exhibitions.

"I am the first Indian artist to create my own website," declares Mehrotra. "This is a great way to archive my work," he says, adding that sometimes his paintings are whisked away within an hour of his putting on the final brush strokes.

The 43-year-old artist, who has experimented with a range of media, is now an evangelist of computer art. His easel has been displaced by an Apple Powermac, and in place of a paint brush he wields a "cordless" digital pen (a mouse of sorts). An exhibition of his digitally generated lithographs is currently on at Cache, a gallery in Bandra.

"I have always had a fascination for electronic gadgetry," says Mehrotra, a gleam in his eyes, as he sits in front of his computer terminal. His interest in this medium started around 10 years ago. But for a long time his big problem was that he had no way of outputting what he did. The images looked great on screen, but when he made a printout, they appeared as washed-out versions of the real thing. Not just that, but they would often fade away or the paper would fall apart.

Then, a couple of years ago, Iris came into his life. Who? What would Mehrotra be doing with Iris when he had his lovely wife, Seema? "Iris is a high-end printer — one of the most expensive in the world," laughs Mehrotra. He discovered the technology in a computer arts magazine, where he also



learned about PH-neutral paper and inks that don't fade for years. That catalysed his move into computer art — though he has never given up painting.

"This is definitely not money-making," says Mehrotra, who still makes his living through his paintings, which go for as much as Rs 5 lakh a pop. All he wants to do at this stage is "to make people aware that this is yet another medium accepted anywhere in the world." "Why do we always have to be 50 years behind?"

Some gallery owners would agree. "I think it's an excellent medium that's been around for a while in the West, but hasn't fully been exploited in contemporary Indian art," says Pheroza Godrej, director of Cymroza Art Gallery, one of the first galleries to exhibit Mehrotra's oil paintings in the early '70s. "New ideas should be investigated and not just brushed

aside because they are new."

"I've done some absolutely whacky stuff with this," says Mehrotra. "Sometimes the result is both uncanny and photo-realistic." He demonstrates some of his work. "I have, for instance, mixed oil painting with water colour and chalk and thrown in a photograph as well!" He pauses. "Which medium does he like best? "You can't really compare the two (painting and digital art)." Every medium has its own feel, he concludes.

Mehrotra has created a series of computer-generated lithographs which have "limited editions". Pixel points work together with broad brush strokes. They are serialised and numbered, and each one is signed individually by him.

Is any of this considered gimmicky by his contemporaries? "Maybe, but who cares," retorts Mehrotra. "If I tried pleasing everyone, I wouldn't be doing what I

really enjoyed."

The artist turns on his computer and opens up Painter 4.0, a graphics software. "I want a mountain," he muses, stroking his salt-and-pepper beard. He clicks on an icon depicting a mountain scene. "I want some water around it, and maybe an evening sky reflecting on it." The picture morphs into a mountain in the middle of a still grey ocean. (At one point, he clicks on the wrong icon, and immediately a voice pipes up, "Oops, papa!". He has programmed his four-year-old daughter Anushka's voice into the computer.)

"Hmm," he continues, "maybe more light, and let's look at it from another angle." The picture slowly rotates. It takes a few minutes to take shape on the screen. "I think it's more or less set," says Mehrotra, swivelling around. "Like I said, the sky's the limit!"

KEYBOARD CREATIVITY



Jaideep Mehrotra's lithographs may have been created on the computer, but they are art for all that, says **Vaishali Honawar**

Photographs by Vikas Khori

Seven of his lithographs, all created on computer, are available for viewing on the Internet and so are the images of several of his other paintings and sculptures, on the address, <http://www.artisttree.co.in>. There is also a bio-data of the artist here for those not familiar with his work. The site belongs to a friend and Mehrotra says he will change the works on display every couple of months or so.

The lithographs are part of an initial lot of nine, that Mehrotra plans to put out for sale once they are all ready, by January. A limited edition — 50 or 100 at the most — of the prints will be available to those interested in buying them. Already, says Mehrotra, he has received several inquiries and offers for his prints, including one from an artist in New York.

The lithographs are in two sizes — 15 x 20 and 30 x

20 — and Mehrotra intends to price them around Rs 10,000 and Rs 14,000 each. If you think that's expensive for a print, consider this: it is printed on acid-free paper which will never yellow as it doesn't interact with the paint. The print will stay intact for years without any deterioration in quality "even in a hundred years".

What's more, it looks exactly like the real thing, down to the thicker ridges of dried paint along the strokes of a 'brushstroke'. The finish too is perfect and there is no pixillation that can make the print look like, well, a print. Best of all, the buyer gets it for much less than he would pay for an authentic painting.

But Mehrotra is quick to point out that he himself doesn't stand to gain anything at all monetarily. "The technology I have to use to get the prints made is very expensive and is available only abroad, so even if I were to sell all the prints I would just about cover costs," he says.

But he loves doing it anyway, for the computer allows him many finer details and liberties which paint and brush wouldn't. He is like a little boy with a toy as he demonstrates the range of choices he has on the computer. He can choose the type of paint — water-colour, oils, acrylic, — the thickness of the brush, the closest-to-perfect shade, all at a flick of his digital pen. And if he changes his mind, well, all he has to do is flip the pen over and rub it all out with the "eraser".

"It's a hobby," he says indulgently of computer art, but is quick to add that he would never take it up as his sole medium. "I have been painting oils for 25 years now and I love it too much to ever give up. Besides, there are still limitations when painting on a computer — you don't have the complete freedom that you do with paint and brush. It will still take some time and advances in technology before computers allow that freedom of expression."

In the next breath, however, he is talking of how the only limitations computer art has are the ones people create. "People are not yet willing to concede that art done on computer is as real as art done with paint and brush. In fact, it is so much more versatile. But we still think of computer art as being more design media-related than fine art."

But of late, things have been changing, at least in the western world. The Metropolitan Museum in New York has declared that work done on computers can be classified and exhibited as authentic art. And the day may not be far when Indians too begin to think the same way.

Mehrotra, who has held several exhibitions of his work abroad and in India, says he is the only artist in India to be painting the electronic way. There was an attempt by an organisation a few years ago to bring a few of India's top artists together to paint on the computer. But after that one instance things just fizzled out and none of the participating artists showed an interest in exploring this new medium.

But Mehrotra, who usually paints in oils and sculpts, was bitten by the computer bug a couple of years ago and claims that his fascination with it has only grown. "It is amazing to see the advances in computer technology and what they have to offer to art. In 25 years from now we shall perhaps have the perfect substitute for paint and brush and canvas," he says. And he, for one, is waiting for that day.

Jaideep Mehrotra: artist on the Internet

Jaideep Mehrotra is excited. The eyes behind the spectacles are animated as he sketches with a digital pen on an electronic board to demonstrate the versatility of 'painting' on computer. A squiggle here with a 'brush', a curve there with 'charcoal', and then come the colours. All 16.7 million of them. You see, the possibilities are almost endless.

And Mehrotra has already started exploring them.



The artist, with two of his paintings

What's On

At the heart of computer art: Jaideep Mehrotra



SACHIN KALBAG

IN ONE OF HER MORE PHILOSOPHICAL moments, American dancer and

choreographer Martha Graham made an interesting statement – "No artist is ahead of his time. He is his time; it is just that others are

behind the times."

Artist Jaideep Mehrotra would agree. His reputation as one of India's finest contemporary artists

SANTOSH HARHARE

Jaideep Mehrotra's computer art – remarkable for its detail – could also be a trendsetter for artists of the future

is irrefutable. Now he wants to expand his artistic horizons beyond oils and sculptures into the realm of the relatively unexplored – computer art.

While this medium has been delved into by other artists earlier, it is the first time a venture of this kind is being exhibited and sold in limited editions. Mehrotra has worked on nine paintings on his Apple PowerMac 7100, and even to the lay person, the varied brush strokes are as visible as in an oil painting.

The prints of these will be on display from June 2 till June 14 at Bandra's Cache Art and Crafts Gallery.

Mehrotra has used software like Fractal Design Painter and Detailer, of which the latter allows for 3-dimensional, real-time painting. Apart from this he has also used KPT Bryce, Adobe Photoshop and Poser. His wireless pen can give him the flexibility of having 256 levels of pressure.

According to the artist, the amount of work that goes into

computer art is equal to the one put for an oil, and it is as much art as any other. "Why shouldn't it be," he asks. "Computer art is another medium all together. If there is any question of creativity, I think it is answered by my works."

What is pioneering about his works is the fact that these are printed on one of the most expensive printers in the world – Scitex Iris – each priced between half a million and three million dollars, and also that this is the first time that a frontline Indian artist has printed limited editions of his works – 60 to 80 each – and exhibited them.

The paintings, signed and numbered for their exclusivity, have been printed on pH neutral paper. The artist claims that unlike other printmaking methods, where the first print is better than, say, the 50th, his printing method insures that there is not a pixel of a difference among any of the prints. Not that Mehrotra is overly upset

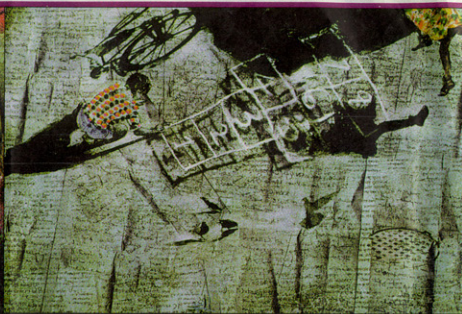
♦ Continued on Page 2

What's On

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Reflections of the mind: Iris lithograph by Jaideep Mehrotra



Untitled: an Iris lithograph by Jaideep Mehrotra

DIGITAL DOMAIN

♦ Continued from Page 1

about losing the exclusivity of his paintings. His reasoning is beautiful in its simplicity. "There are around 6 billion people in the world, and if 60 people have a print of each painting, it means only a minuscule percentage of the world's population owns my works. So, if I am working towards popularising this art medium in the country, why not?"

What Mehrotra is upset, or slightly apprehensive about is the fact that there is very little awareness among the people for this art. "It takes time for any medium to be accepted by art patrons. It was a similar case with acrylics, when they were first used as a medium. Nobody seemed to appreciate them. Understanding a new medium, and especially when it is related to computers, people are resistant."

This new medium did pose some difficulty for Mehrotra. So, he did the next best thing – start at the very beginning. "I had to first learn the basics. And when I did that, the question most people asked was what do you do with the finished work on the computer. There were no good quality output devices. Only the Iris could match up the requirements."

Computer art in India is obviously in its infancy stage, and

has a long way to catch up with the kind of progress made in the west. Obviously, the costs are prohibitive, and according to Mehrotra, even if all the paintings get sold, the proceeds will not be able to cover his equipment costs. "But I am doing my bit to make this art form popular. Most importantly, the works that I have produced are museum quality which means that the prints have a life of 50 years."

In this case, the original painting remains with Mehrotra, and will be destroyed later, a trend that is followed worldwide. But currently, Mehrotra is obsessed with one thing – pushing the technology to its limits. "That is the fun of creativity."

Jaideep Mehrotra's Iris Lithographs are on display at Cache Arts and Crafts Gallery between June 2 and 14.

For the arterrati

Art India launches it's next issue today at Jindal Mansion where they have a panel discussion with curator **SARYU DOSHI**, **GEETHA MEHRA** and **RANJIT HOSKOTE**. Artist **JAIDEEP**

these gigantic volumes of molten steel being moved around, the sheer size of the area it encompassed and the team work it requires, jolted me into realising how fascinating the human mind and human body are. Those little hands working on those enormous machines had also created them!! This idea prompted me to use the symbol of the

hands through the 6 paintings". One of his work is an idiom for prediction, the hand holds a crystal ball with the Basic Oxygen Furnace in it as though showing the future and the years to come. In these times of limited funds and impending economic depression, maybe investing in art is not such a bad idea.



MEHROTRA, unveils his digital works which were commissioned to him by **SAPAN** and **SANGITA JINDAL** for their corporate calendar. Says Mehrotra, "I visited the Jindal plant near Bellary and the first thing that struck me was the enormity of the project. Seeing



Virtually Yours



CANVAS MAN : Govind Nihalani, Shammi Kapoor and Jaideep Mehrotra at Crossword at the launch of Mehrotra's CD

DARK and diaphanous colours run riot on his canvases. His works are as distinctive in style as the scrawl across the bottom — Jaideep Mehrotra. The artist needs no introduction. His versatile portfolio of oil paintings, sculptures, digital lithographs, site-specific installations and mixed media works add attitude to homes across the country.

To be honest, many of us

would love to get our hands on a 'Jaideep Mehrotra' (particularly his older works). Now, the artist has ensured that it's easy enough to do that. No, Mehrotra's not painting frantically across pavements or some such — he has launched a CD-ROM that chronicles his 30 years as an artist.

Actor and Internet-buff Shammi Kapoor joined Mehrotra at Crossword, Mahalaxmi, last evening to launch the CD-ROM.

Wedge between music racks and children's books, artist Brinda Chudasama Miller and filmmaker Govind Nihalani sat among a crowd of others, watching as Mehrotra ran through the hybrid CD that can be viewed on a Macintosh and a PC. Besides Mehrotra's works, the CD includes video clips of the artist at work, press coverage and TV interviews. Here's another first from this dynamic, tech-savvy artist.

"Art is very personal. It comes from the gut. It comes from love." From anyone else, these words would probably sound pompous. But from artist Jaideep Mehrotra, they sound like what they really are — a heartfelt statement, a genuine sentiment, an experienced voice. And for someone who has been painting since he was 10 and held his first exhibition when he was about 13, Jaideep certainly has a vast repertoire of experience to speak from.

Having a mother — Vishni Mehrotra — who was Tagore's student at Shantiniketan and artistically inclined herself, Jaideep had a childhood steeped in the arts. At an age when most little boys were playing *clor-police* in the compound, this little boy was busy visiting Jehangir, Taj and Chetna art galleries in Mumbai. No wonder then, that by the time he was 13, he was holding his first exhibition and earning rave reviews, notwithstanding his school's initial hesitancy in letting him dabble with oil paints.

"My professor first said that oil painting was meant for seniors, but later, he relented," remembers Jaideep. He continued painting and holding shows right through school and college. But after that, work compulsions got the better of him. This was the phase when he was in the Middle East and Africa, for four years each. "I was not holding any exhibitions then, but I was still painting. I wanted to be financially secure. I never wanted to depend on my paintings for a living as then survival starts dictating your art," he explains.

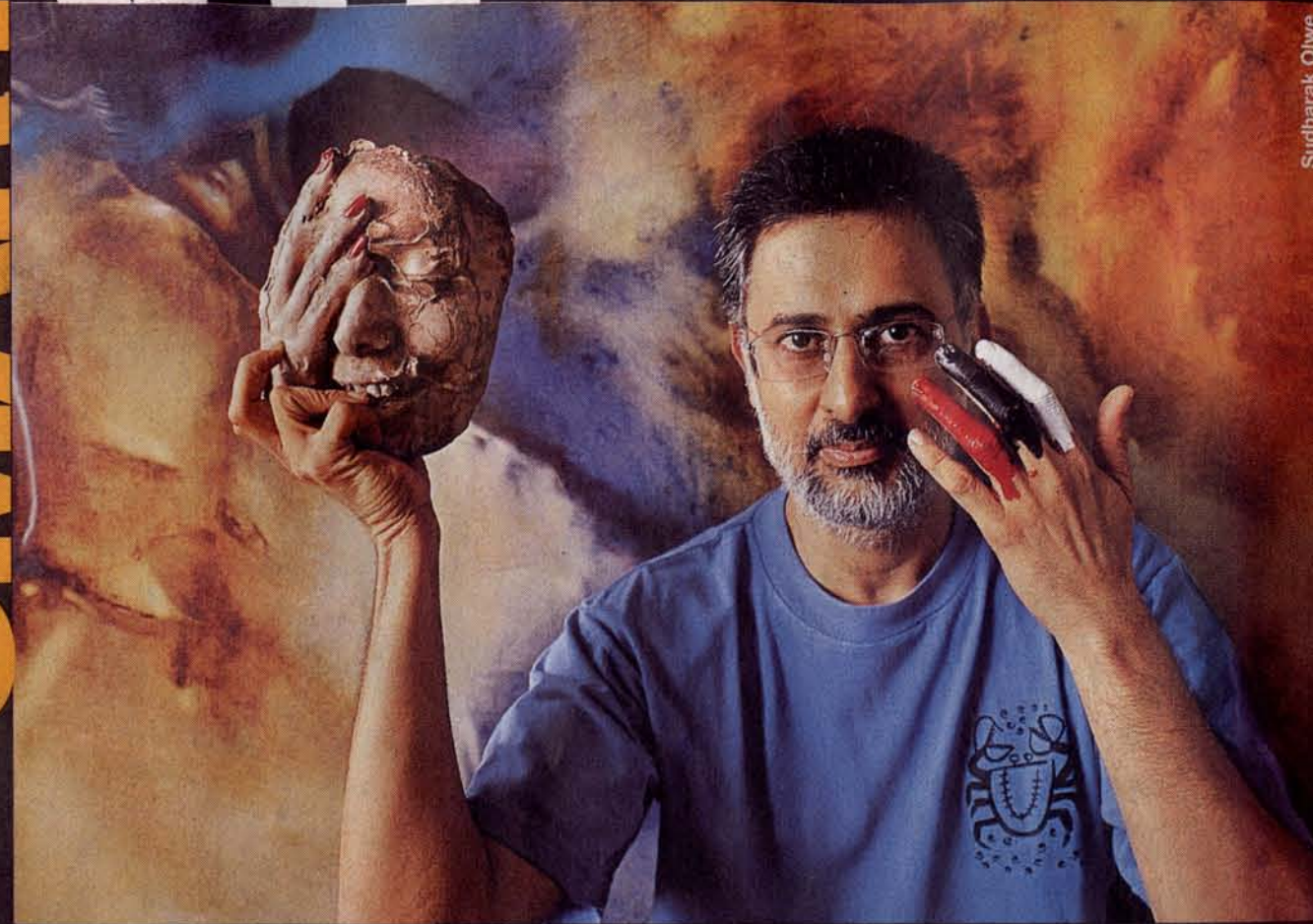
Jaideep's perseverance paid off soon. By 1983, he was back on Indian shores and by 1985, he was painting full time. One of his first — and since then constant — buyers have been banks and corporate houses as "they have the money. Their budget has provisions for expenditure of this kind".

He has not restricted himself to any one format while painting. He is happy with any form of art, be it canvas, clay or computer related. From oils, acrylics, resin and fabric painting to sculpting and then digital lithographs, Jaideep has done them all. And now, moving up another step and living up to the adage of an artist being an animal of contemporary society, he has just presented a CD-ROM that his exhaustive information about his paintings, sculptures, lithographs and the various shows and workshops that he has held and conducted.

This has definitely brought his art closer to the masses. But is it

SMART ART

Mumbai-based artist, Jaideep Mehrotra, is a familiar man-about-town. That's probably why he is able to stay on the cutting edge of things creative as well as technological. Taking a breather from the social whirl, he talks to Abha Srivastava about his latest passion



Sudharak Olwe

also a covert defiance to art being a medium that only the intelligentsia can understand? According to Jaideep, he thought of the CD-ROM because he wanted to familiarise people with his body of work over the last 35 years. "Now the gallery is king. And the gallery obviously exhibits your current work, so the artist's past work is generally forgotten. This CD-ROM is also a showcase of the other things that I have done, like shows abroad, lectures and even my sculpting," he explains. Though Jaideep has dabbled in business before, this is definitely not a business proposition as the CD is modestly priced at Rs 295 and is being sold at Crossword, Mumbai. "This was not about profit. It was just about making people more familiar with my work," he says earnestly.

And that is quite believable as Jaideep strikes one as being very passionate about whatever he does. There are no half measures about him. Whether it's climbing ladders to paint on a 16-foot high canvas or spending nights in someone else's office to finish a painting, he is true to his vocation.

He also minces no words when he says that for an artiste, his paintings are a question of survival. "We just depend on what galleries want. It's almost like between the galleries and the buyers, we are incidental." A brutally honest statement but then, that's vintage Jaideep Mehrotra.

Times News Network

“ The gallery is king ”

The Change

An Artist's Dilemma

JAIDEEP MEHROTRA, 47

It's not easy to brush aside ostracism, but Jaideep Mehrotra is trying. When some art galleries decreed that they would not display his "computer art"—a Wacom cordless pen and digitiser could not replace the brush, they said—Mehrotra was disappointed. "It requires as much creativity, skill and hard work," he argues. But the galleries aren't

listening.

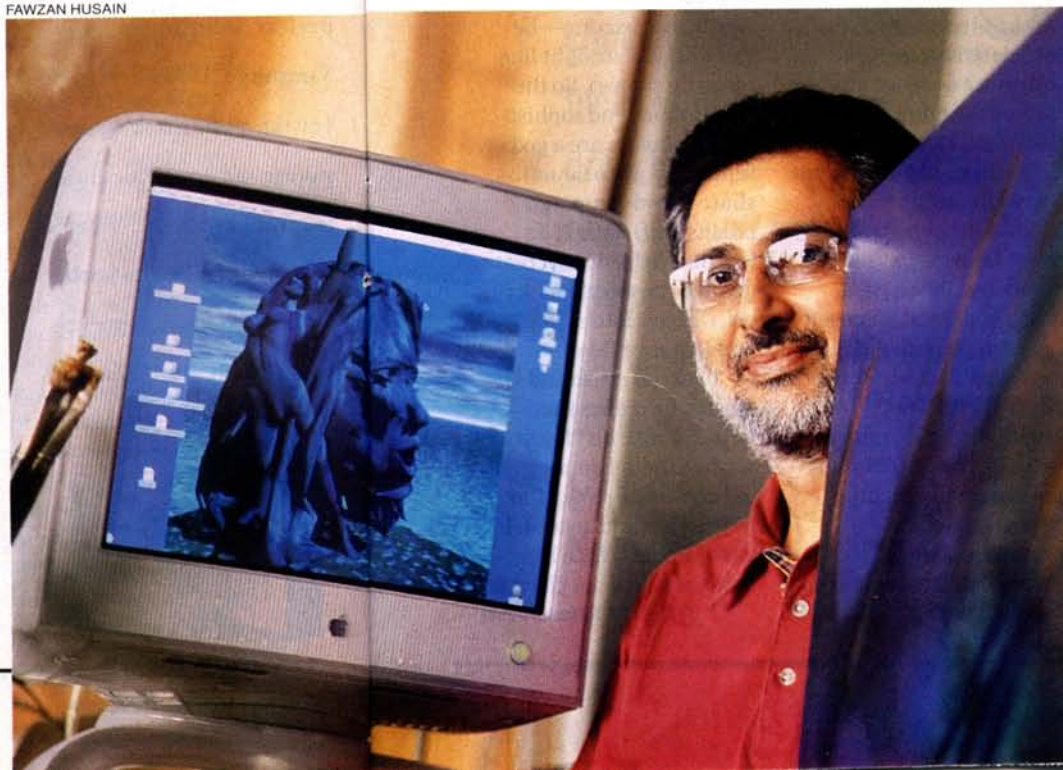
Undeterred, Mehrotra continues to spout tech-art, blending the two worlds—art and technology—with the deft swipe of his Logitech optical mouse. "It's astounding what you can create with one- and two-dimensional software. I'd like to call it digital lithography," says the man who moved from business to art as a full-time profession only a decade ago.

In the 17th-floor studio of his Worli high-rise apartment in Mumbai, he presides over a hybrid world—the canvases share space with the Apple Mac and Palm 5. Mehrotra has "fun" with his Mac G 4500 desktop and Powerbook G3 laptop, he "fiddles around" with QTVR (quick time virtual reality) authoring studio, in which

he feeds the photographic images from his PC 100 digital video camera to create a virtual world. It's also a world where personal life is the subject of endless experimentation—Mehrotra digitally extends his wife's face to create two images connected by an elastic stretch. Other doohickeys include the Palm 5 from 3Com which increases the chance of his doodles finding their way onto the canvas.

For a man who revels in change, who has released a CD profiling his work and life, who may fool around with gizmos to create images he'll preserve even if no one else does but who also has the gumption to sell his traditional artwork, art is not confined to a canvas—or a screen. It's life itself.

—Natasha Israni



FAWZAN HUSAIN

6 Artbeat

It was just a matter of time before computers took over art. Deepak Karambelkar meets one such artist who uses a Wacom pen instead of a brush and intends to make movies on the computer soon

THE New Age painter has finally upgraded his tools. Jaideep Mehrotra, well known for his watercolours, has gone digital with his work. He uses a Wacom pen instead of a brush and an Iris print-out instead of a canvas.

Mehrotra is a BCom graduate and has worked for over 13 years in various companies, which includes a stint in the Middle East. A self-taught artist, he decided to convert his part-time obsession for paintings into a full-time profession. Despite the art market being at a low, his paintings took off and so far he has sold over 100 of them. He is also a sculptor of repute and specialises in uncanny creations out of fabric hardened with resin. His other passion is computers — from fiddling around with PC-XTs, he has graduated to the latest software and hardware. So, in addition to the canvas, the monitor has become an outlet for his creativity. "My main forte and my first love is painting. Digital painting is something I wanted to dabble in. This medium has got massive potential," he says.

But it took him seven years to go fully digital. The reason was a lack of high-quality outputting methods — printers that could match the resolution and pixelation of photos or watercolours on a canvas. "Even if you did great work on the computer, what do you do with it? Make calendars? But now computer prints have become a tangible sales item," he says.

Of course, other things can be done with a computer, but it is expensive. "It is like buying a jet engine, putting up a canvas on one side and throwing paint from the other side to see the impact the paint makes on the canvas. Who can afford to play games like that," says Mehrotra. In the West, they



Effects by illusion

can with government grants. "But here the government encourages virtually nothing. And even if they do, the grant is so miniscule that you probably won't be able to set up even a canvas," he adds.

Mehrotra has invested around Rs five lakh in equipment. He works on a Power PC chip Machintosh OS 7.6 with a 2 GB hard disk and 72 Mb RAM, running on a clock speed of 66 Mhz. "Believe me, that is not enough. But the redundancy rate in computers is so high that if I were to upgrade the system every time a new version came, I would be broke in no time," he says.

The other interesting feature of his setup is the use of two monitors, a 17-inch high resolution monitor and a 14-inch one. This helps him compare images and keep the toolbars on the smaller monitor, leaving the larger one uncluttered and free to work on. He uses a variety of 2-D and 3-D software like Photoshop, Bryce, KPT, Fractal Painter, Design De-

tailer, 3-Studio and others. But the vital components are the Wacom pen and the digitising tablet with absolute coordinates. The pen allows 256 levels of pressure with eraser ability and tilt facility and can be varied in size, opacity and colour. He can choose over 16 million colours from the RGB spectrum. Also, unlike PCs, Macs have the advantage of allowing simultaneous use of a mouse and a pen. Mehrotra starts with either a clean page or works on an existing 3-D emulation. Depending on the pressure he applies on the pads the thickness, colour and texture can be varied.

But he does not agree that this medium is superior to conventional brush-on-a-canvas methods. "You can't compare the two. Both have a different feel and look. Canvas gives you more control, whereas rendering digital images has its own limitations," he says.

One of the limitations is that the files are large, more than 100 MB, and it takes hours to undo commands or render the images. Also, there is the age-old problem of compatibility — importing and exporting images, especially between 2-D and 3-D software, is a major problem as there exists no common format. "But you learn to work your way around incompatibilities," he says.

But the biggest drawback is of colours — what you see is not what you get. While the monitors show RGB, the printer outputs CMYK colours. Fixing up the setting for the right colours can be a tedious and time-consuming process.

Mehrotra prints his images on an Iris printer either in Mumbai or in New York. The images are sent on Zip-disks. The printer sends the output, corrections are made and the image digitally fixed to give consistent output. Each image has a print run of 60 or 80 prints, depending on the size. The resolution is 300 dpi and printing is done on imported pH-neutral

archival paper. The paintings are priced between Rs 6,500 to Rs 8,500. "But the costs are not justified. Even if I were to sell all my paintings, I will not be able to recover my investment," he says. So far, he has created nine different prints. "I had made a lot more images, but somehow they did not jell and had to be scrapped," rues the painter.

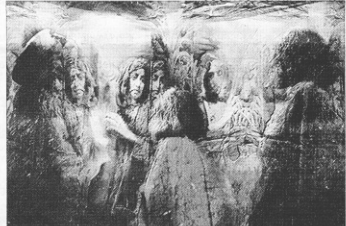
Mehrotra has also set up a webpage on the Net, www.Artist-tree.com, where his paintings can be viewed. "Right now it is just to get exposure. It is like having your bio-data on the Net," he says. The other advantage of having a webpage is that people can see his paintings, which otherwise would never have come on public display. "Usually, the paintings go straight from my home to the buyer's home. But now millions can see them," he adds. Netizens can download the low-resolution images and use them as wallpaper and desktop patterns. Mehrotra is also working out ways in which people can pay by credit card and buy his paintings.

Mehrotra's paintings are replete with allusions. "I work on strong symbolism — something that affects me. I symbolise in the smallest, simplest form which leaves an impact. When I go into a subject, I go deep into it," he says. Lately his influence has been the media and the written word. His inspiration comes from within. He has a brainwave and takes off from there. But his paintings are not for the casual eye. "People don't look at paintings long enough. Mine are so intensive that the apparent thing is one, but if you see it long enough, you see layers within layers, each with a different meaning. People who see my painting repeatedly, discover new things every time," he says.

For example, *The Reflections of the Mind* shows a person looking at his reflections in a hall of mirrors. "But each face, each expression is different. They are the moods of his mind," he says. The multifaceted nature is akin to the real-unreal levels of painting by Escher. "But Escher was more geometric and scientific. I work on a tangent," he says.

Mehrotra's long-term plan is to make movies on the computer. "Canvas is 2-D, it is flat. No matter how much depth you give, you are limited to a still frame," he says. Computers have now made it possible to make a moving frame, right at home.

He plans to start with quick-time movies and, when the technology makes it viable, graduate into real-time movies. "But the prints will go on. I have a lot to do and say with my paintings," he adds. He also plans to add sound and sight on his webpage to make it more alluring.



MIRROR IMAGE: *Reflections* by Jaideep Mehrotra

COURTESY: SHAW WALLACE

6 Artbeat

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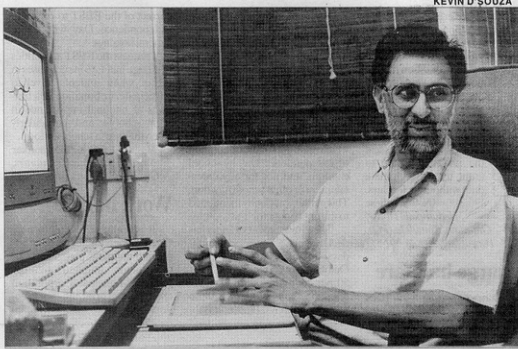
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Of course, other things can be done with a computer, but it is expensive. "It is like buying a jet engine, putting up a canvas on one side and throwing paint from the other side to see the impact the paint makes on the canvas. Who can afford to play games like that," says Mehrotra. In the West, they



Effects by illusion

can with government grants. "But here the government encourages virtually nothing. And even if they do, the grant is so minuscule that you probably won't be able to set up even a canvas," he adds.

Mehrotra has invested around Rs five lakh in equipment. He works on a Power PC chip Macintosh OS 7.6 with a 2 GB hard disk and 72 Mb RAM, running on a clock speed of 66 Mhz. "Believe me, that is not enough. But the redundancy rate in computers is so high that if I were to upgrade the system every time a new version came, I would be broke in no time," he says.

The other interesting feature of his setup is the use of two monitors, a 17-inch high resolution monitor and a 14-inch one. This helps him compare images and keep the toolbars on the smaller monitor, leaving the larger one uncluttered and free to work on. He uses a variety of 2-D and 3-D software like Photoshop, Bryce, KPT, Fractal Painter, Design De-

tailer, 3-Studio and others. But the vital components are the Wacom pen and the digitising tablet with absolute coordinates. The pen allows 256 levels of pressure with eraser ability and tilt facility and can be varied in size, opacity and colour. He can choose over 16 million colours from the RGB spectrum. Also, unlike PCs, Macs have the advantage of allowing simultaneous use of a mouse and a pen. Mehrotra starts with either a clean page or works on an existing 3-D emulation. Depending on the pressure he applies on the pads the thickness, colour and texture can be varied.

But he does not agree that this medium is superior to conventional brush-on-a-canvas methods. "You can't compare the two. Both have a different feel and look. Canvas gives you more control, whereas rendering digital images has its own limitations," he says.

One of the limitations is that the files are large, more than 100 MB, and it takes hours to undo commands or render the images. "Also, there is the age-old problem of compatibility—importing and exporting images, especially between 2-D and 3-D software, is a major problem as there exists no common format. "But you learn to work your way around incompatibilities," he says.

But the biggest drawback is of colours—what you see is not what you get. While the monitors show RGB, the printer outputs CMYK colours. Fixing up the setting for the right colours can be a tedious and time-consuming process.

Mehrotra prints his images on an Iris printer either in Mumbai or in New York. The images are sent on Zip-disks. The printer sends the output, corrections are made and the image digitally fixed to give consistent output. Each image has a print run of 60 or 80 prints, depending on the size. The resolution is 300 dpi and printing is done on imported pH-neutral

archival paper. The paintings are priced between Rs 6,500 to Rs 8,500. "But the costs are not justified. Even if I were to sell all my paintings, I will not be able to recover my investment," he says. So far, he has created nine different prints. "I had made a lot more images, but somehow they did not sell and had to be scrapped," rues the painter.

Mehrotra has also set up a webpage on the Net, www.Artist-tree.co.in, where his paintings can be viewed. "Right now it is just to get exposure. It is like having your bioclata on the Net," he says. The other advantage of having a webpage is that people can see his paintings, which otherwise would never have come on public display. "Usually, the paintings go straight from my home to the buyer's home. But now millions can see them," he adds. Netizens can download the low-resolution images and use them as wallpaper and desktop patterns. Mehrotra is also working out ways in which people can pay by credit card and buy his paintings.

Mehrotra's paintings are replete with allusions. "I work on strong symbolism—something that affects me. I symbolise in the smallest, simplest form which leaves an impact. When I go into a subject, I go deep into it," he says. Lately his influence has been the media and the written word. His inspiration comes from within. He has a brainwave and takes off from there. But his paintings are not for the casual eye. "People don't look at paintings long enough. Mine are so intensive that the apparent thing is one, but if you see it long enough, you see layers within layers, each with a different meaning. People who see my painting repeatedly, discover new things every time," he says.

For example, *The Reflections of the Mind* shows a person looking at his reflections in a hall of mirrors. "But each face, each expression is different. They are the moods of his mind," he says. The multifaceted nature is akin to the surreal levels of painting by Escher. "But Escher was more geometric and scientific. I work on a tangent," he says.

Mehrotra's long-term plan is to make movies on the computer. "Canvas is 2-D, it is flat. No matter how much depth you give, you are limited to a still frame," he says. Computers have now made it possible to make a moving frame, right at home.

He plans to start with quick-time movies and, when the technology makes it viable, graduate into real-time movies. "But the prints will go on. I have a lot to do and say with my paintings," he adds. He also plans to add sound and sight on his webpage to make it more alluring.



MIRROR IMAGE: *Reflections* by Jaideep Mehrotra

"Canvas gives you more control, whereas rendering digital images has its own limitations. I give the render command and go for a walk and when I come back, it is nearly finished"

Breaking the rules for success

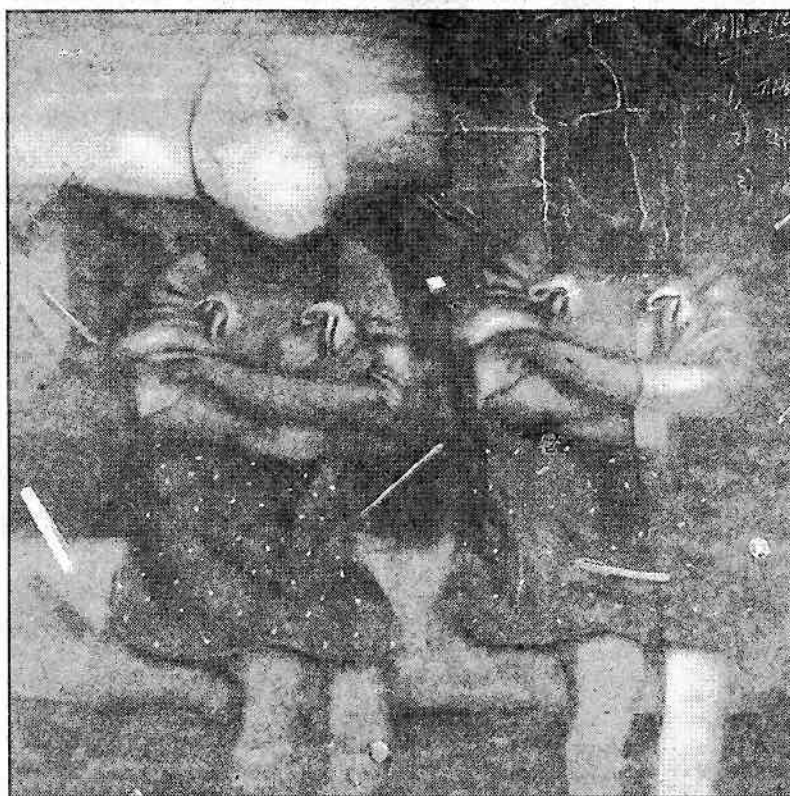
BY JASMINE SHAH

The diversity in Jaideep Mehrotra's work in terms of technique, image, content, texture and the presentation itself makes the artist a genius. Especially so when he isn't trained to be an artist. The commerce graduate has created a wave in the Indian art scene thanks to his technique of digital lithographs brought to mainstream art.

A medium hardly used by anybody else in India, but accepted abroad as an art form, digital lithographs can be described in absolutely simple terms as painting on computer. But digital lithography is a phase that came much later in the life of Mehrotra, who has been painting for the last 30 years. He had his first exhibition when he was 12 years old. The artist has come a long way since and one can see an exhibition of his latest works, titled *Bookmarks*, exhibited after a gap of four years at Jehangir Art Gallery. The seven-day exhibition opened on December 1.

In this exhibition, presented by Max Touch, we see a collection of oils, watercolours, fabric sculptures and digital lithographs. In this collection we see Mehrotra dealing with issues such as the education-system, industrialisation, environment, violence and so on. His work has largely been narrative, about people and their surroundings, culture, tradition and lifestyle. Every painting however is individual and unique in terms of style, symbols and manner of treatment.

"Every painting is different, a whole," he says. "There isn't necessarily a continuity or a flow among the works." There are certain elements which recur, such as the newspaper. Also his peculiar style is that of creating visual illusions. Hidden images within images, created with great imagination, patience, brilliance and play of space and colours, are Mehrotra's forte. This is seen in both



the lithographs and the oil paintings. Another characteristic of his work is its almost photographic quality. The figures have a clarity, illumination and precision of a photograph. Mehrotra loves creating illusions and working on various levels. His works are hardly ever flat in that sense.

In the current exhibition one finds interesting and unusual framing of each canvas. Says Mehrotra, "At one point I did not frame the work at all. I thought it bound the work in some way. But later I felt the work looked

shabby without the frame. In this collection I have included the frames in the composition."

The frames have a role in the narration. In a painting titled *Textbook Twins*, Mehrotra has used 12-inch wooden rulers as the frame. The work, inspired by personal encounters with the Indian education system, comments on how it produces clones rather than individuals.

In another painting he speaks of industrial waste, portraying how obesity, laziness and growing greed go hand

in hand with mechanisation and automation in our lives now. He has used copper to frame this work.

Experimenting is something that keeps Mehrotra on his toes. He imagines freely and works out ways to bring his imagination into reality. That is what his fabric sculptures are. Just as he taught himself to create art on the computer, he researched for years to find a technique to materialise his imagination. He worked in wax, metal scrap, teak wood, the regular medium for sculpture. "Having set in a routine, I was restless," he says. "I took to fabric for a little more character. I wanted a transparent and flowy feel in the sculpture."

His fabric sculptures look astonishingly like metal. The solidity, stiffness and feel that Mehrotra renders to them make the fabric look traditionally sculptural, yet at the same time maintaining a feeling of flow, movement and agility. Mehrotra's mantra of creating the new and eventually succeeding is: "For success you have to break norms and reinvent." Says Mehrotra, "I had the idea for almost 10 years until it finally materialised."

Mehrotra's work keeps growing just like his imagination. In one of his works he has illuminated the fabric sculpture from the back, rendering a completely different effect. In yet another installation, called *Hanging for Life*, behind a wall of fabric there are feet and hands. When you look behind you don't see where the feet and hand are emerging from. Mehrotra imparts a mysterious element to it. Left to the viewer's imagination, this work is certainly remarkable.

Jaideep Mehrotra has worked to arrive where he is today. He is a self-taught artist in the true sense. He continues to experiment and is fascinated with that medium of endless possibilities, the computer. His exhibition is a must see.



NO NORMS: Self-taught artist Jaideep Mehrotra with something like a self-portrait (above); *Textbook Twins* (top); and *Relevance of Time*, two of the exhibits at his show titled *Bookmarks* at the Jehangir Art Gallery (above right).



Beyond the pale

In Bookmarks, Jaideep Mehrotra reinvents an entire text of experiences in canvases, sculptures and lithographs, writes **Deepak Karambelkar**

Jaideep Mehrotra excels in testing boundaries. Not within, — for his imagination is unconfined — but without. Always extending the limits of the medium he wants to reach out through, Mehrotra hovers on the precipice of the possible and occasionally tips over into the abyss of the impossible. He is either a pioneer or an oblivious amentia.

The immense diversity of his creations is now on display until December 7 at the Jehangir art gallery. Called Bookmarks — which marks the various chapters of his life in the last four years — the exhibition is part of the Cultural Heritage Series by Max Touch. This is Mehrotra's 15th solo exhibition in his 30 year pursuit of art and showcases around 75 of his creations — sculptures, canvases, lithographs. Bookmarks is a journey down the sidewalks of life with an observer whose psyche has been impinged and sensitivity violated by events around him — whether a birth or a death, a newspaper article or even plastic waste on the beach.

So this time the colours are stronger and the details often starker. You may like the result — or detest it —



but you just can't ignore it. Mehrotra's creations talk back to you, disturb you. "I'm not ruled by the market. Some of the paintings displayed are those that even I won't buy!" The creations are not "decorative" items. Mehrotra has reached a rung in his career — "a happy position" — where he can paint exactly the way he wants to. "If it is not sold, eventually I'll have to find some storage space — that's about it!" Among the paintings that "nobody will touch with a barge-pole" is one educated from photos and articles about Indonesian girls tortured and mutilated by 'macho' soldiers, who later distributed pictures showing off their

'skills'. Another comes from his visit to Alibag beach, where he was shocked to see the whole area swamped with plastic bags.

Mehrotra's paintings brim with allusions and work on multiple levels. Underlying the per se, seethe statements of discontent and intent. For example, *Still Life With Flowers* shows a dead man with tattoos on his arms — the death of art. "It is a statement about impermanence of life. So what is this thing about permanence of art?"

He has constantly forsaken the trodden path for the woods.

Mehrotra has been among the first of the New Age artists to substitute the computer for the canvas and a Wacom pen for a brush.

The result is digitally rendered paintings he created on a Macintosh and printed out on a high-resolution Iris printer — eight of which are on display at the exhibition. These lithos exemplify his style of

"doing it to a point where the material itself manifests its limitations". They look like watercolours but aren't, they look like photographs but aren't. So what are they? "As yet undefined. That gives the viewer an option of perceiving how far one can go with a medium," he explains.

Every medium has its inherent potential, and Mehrotra goes about adding new dimensions to it. Each step is halfway between the familiar and the neoteric. Now, after using the computer to paint, he seeks to use it to sculpt. "A cross between the two. That is my midway point I haven't come to yet," he says. He isn't bothered that such creations may be considered as fringe-art, or perhaps, not as art at all. "Being on the cutting edge is always a risk. If you wait for every opinion to make you, then you will definitely stagnate," he says, adding that if Spielberg had waited for others to tell him how movies are made, he would have never come out with a *Jurassic Park*.

Mehrotra believes that to agree upon a parameter is to drench the spark of creative thought with a downpour of mediocrity. Says he, "The minute you break that boundary and go beyond, your creativity starts flowing. To be creative is to look at things all over again."

Bookmarks is on view at the Jehangir Art Gallery until Dec 7

Putting Indian art on the information super-highway

Zeenat Potla

IN a world where computers are fast becoming an indispensable part of our lives and opening up new horizons through the information super-highway, Jaideep Mehrotra's work is an amalgamation of digital technology and aesthetic skill.

Established as a contemporary painter well known for his oils and sculptures, Mehrotra is exploring new ground through digital lithographs. He creates his lithographs directly on the computer with a mind-boggling variety of tools such as a sensitive electronic grid, a cordless

pen and a range of 16.7 million colour shades. The prints are digitally printed on PH neutral paper by an Iris Inkjet and the results are truly stunning.

Mehrotra is the first Indian artist to have his own web site on the World Wide Web. Anybody in the

world can access Mehrotra's home page through their computer and view his oils, sculptures and lithographs which are on display in a virtual art gallery. Limited editions of the lithographs will be released for sale some time in January next year and interested buyers can directly E-mail



Jaideep Mehrotra: exploring new ground through digital lithographs

their order to Mehrotra who will mail them an actual print. The price will vary between Rs 10,000 to Rs14,000 for print sizes, 20 by 15 to 20 by 30.

"Miheer Mafatlal who is a good friend suggested that I should get on the web and within three days time I had my own home page through the Mafatlal server," said Mehrotra. It has been a month since Mehrotra's page was launched and about 300 to 400 people have already visited his site. An artist from New York recently inquired about his work and "this is only the beginning. I hope to reach out to a larger international art market and the Internet allows unbelievable access," remarked Mehrotra.

Mehrotra started dabbling with art at an early age and apart from oils to acrylic, he continues to experiment with interesting media such as fabric and resin sculpture. Since he was fairly comfortable with electronic gadgetry, the move to work with digital technology was "an instinctive attraction." However, he is quick to point out that "like any other paint-

ing tool or medium the computer has to be mastered. Besides painting, one must learn to manipulate the image, apply and create effects."

Mehrotra has been working at his lithographs for the past 11 months and seven prints are ready out of his planned ten. 'Paperways' is a hugely symbolic lithograph with a woman dressed in a saree made out of newspaper, surrounded by burning flames. The print is of extremely fine quality and contrary to what computer sceptics might believe, there is no pixellation. Instead the hugely complex lithograph called 'Polo', which has an image of Polo players on horseback, has the effects of a water colour brush.

"Digital work so far was confined to graphic artists. I want it to be expanded to the realm of fine arts and open up the avenues for Indian art all over the world. The prints are no different from an ordinary lithograph and they are now considered museum standard in the United States," said Mehrotra. His World Wide Web address is www.artisttree.co.in

Net Art

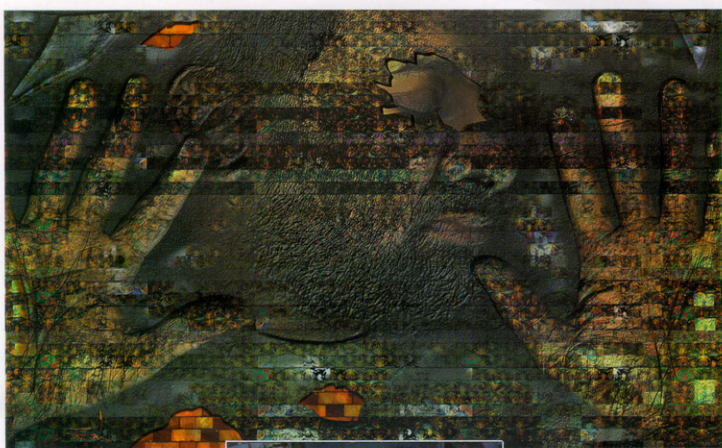
GET ONTO THE Internet Access Mihir Mafatlal's server and get onto the pages there. The first to greet you will be Shamsher, or rather Shammi Kapoor's home page - a detailed guide through the Kapoor family history. A bright Jazz India later is something called 'Artistree: Jaideep Mehrotra's personal gallery'. Click and enter. What, you may ask, is Jaideep Mehrotra doing on the Net?

Artist Jaideep Mehrotra's

brush is a By
digital mouse, *Kiran*
his canvas an *Manral*

Apple Macintosh. And he
creates images for posterity.

After all, he has been through the computer often enough in his computer room at home. He knows the medium — with all its functions and facilities and pitfalls. And getting on the net was the next obvious leap from creating art on the computer. Fine Art mind you, not the computer graphics which are the realm of the commercial artist. "It's like having my own brochure on the net," he says. It took him three days to actually set up his entire page on the net,



and not that is complete. In fact, he spends most of his time on the Net checking it up and constantly updating it. "It's never really complete. I always find there is something more I can add on, or something I can alter and create better effects."

Thanks to his familiarity with the visual arts and the facilities provided by his computer, his home page is a visually pleasing one. The entire effect is rather like a stroll through a hushed gallery with the works of art up on the walls. "Obviously being an artist who does know how to use the computer helps because I can actually design my page, instead of having to randomly put in all the elements I want." His home page has different sections, the first is his biodata for the curious, then the two visual sections — the paintings and sculptures and his lithographs. Each section has around seven works of art each, which he keeps updating and alternating and each work can be accessed separately with all the individual details about the work available for the curious.



The artist at work... Mehrotra in his studio.
No easel and no messy paint.

"If I tried to get this on my own it would have probably cost me a bomb, but since Mihir was kind enough to offer it to me, I have told him that I will owe him a certain commission if I do manage to sell any work through the net. I think it's only fair that I do so." So far he hasn't been able to check how many visits to his page have been registered, but he has already received some e-mail both from within India and abroad appreciating the concept and the page.

Jaideep Mehrotra got into computers some years ago, when the medium was still alien to most Indians. He got into the stylus before the mouse was a familiar term to graphic designers in India. And he was creating computer generated art much before the term was fashionable in this cyber age. His limited edition computer generated works have a certain demand in the art world, despite the ongoing debate about the validity of this art vis-a-vis that of the more traditional forms. He debates this issue furiously. "When

photography was replacing painting as a form of portraiture it raised similar questions. But with the advancement of technology which allows photography to have an extended life due to special inks and treated paper, the life of a photograph today can be comparable to the life of any work of art. Similarly, with the right paper and inks the life of a printout can be as much as that of any other work of art."

The other questions raised are those of the validity of the computer as a tool, as a medium. The very concept of allowing an 'artificial' medium to be the one through which an artist seeks to create an art form is something which has been hotly debated in India and abroad. One school of thought finds it totally acceptable that the computer should substitute for the brush or the stylus should emerge as the contemporary medium of art, given the rapid evolution of the cyberage. The opponents feel that the very reliance on an artificial intelligence which has within itself the programmes to create the required hues and textures and tonalities deprives the artist

of the capacity to create on his own—the end result being that which is born of a machine, with the hand on the mouse or stylus a distant creator. "The very sensuousness of the contact with the charcoal stick

or the oil pigments and brush is lost with the computer. It is all antiseptic, very controlled and aesthetically pleasing. Another drawback according to me is that there is no chance of serendipity changing the final outcome of the work, when you can undo a watercolour wash and paint oil over it, technically through the computer what element of luck can interfere with the process of creation."

Then there is also the ethicality of limited edition prints. "Well, it is technically possible to have 21 prints from an edition which is supposed to have 20. Who is to know. I guess it all depends on the artist himself and

his own conscience," avers Mehrotra. Says an art dealer, "Computer generated art, despite all the hype, still has a very limited market. The mark-ups are too high to risk dealing in them if one cannot be sure that the artist will not, someday, dash off an extra print to tide over. Then there is also that perception that anything that can be stored on a floppy has no exclusivity,"

But all these protests are old hat to Jaideep, who has found a medium he is comfortable with and continues to work with. "The brain of the artist is always his own. As is his creativity. No machine can substitute that." Amen.



Mehrotra got into the stylus before the mouse was a familiar term to graphic designers in India. And he was creating computer generated art much before the term was fashionable in this cyber age.



50 Documents
sans paper



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Internet



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way through

Digital Tools

Technology For Personal and SoHo Productivity

Aparna Krishnakumar

Armed with easel and paintbrush, canvas and oil paint, a Web site, a CD-ROM, an Apple G4, a 22-inch LCD Cinema Display, and more than a fair share of common sense, Jaideep Mehrotra is quietly conquering new worlds.

Mehrotra on the art scene is just like the view from his elegantly comfortable home on the Mumbai seafront—calm,

is as important as any other contemporary major artist.

He is also a pioneer—he was the first artist in India to set up his own Web site, and later, the first to create and market a CD-ROM of his work.

It is not an exercise in vanity; in fact, it is a productivity tool few can afford to miss.

It has been a long time since Mehrotra set up his Web site, and began marketing his CD-ROM. Three years, in fact. And his tech-

nology training has taken the same route as his art education—everything he does is self-taught. Whether it is creating art installations, wood art or even fabric art, Mehrotra has never had any formal training.

First Among Equals

It was not a Eureka moment that brought about the idea of a CD to showcase his art, and expand his audience manifold. Mehrotra has been drawn towards technology

Jumpstart

A Brush With Technology

Jaideep Mehrotra is India's first artist to use a CD-ROM and the Web effectively to promote his work. Here's how he has harnessed technology to take his art across the globe

serene, and almost noiseless. Which is why, although he is one of India's most accomplished painters and sculptors, his name is hardly taken in the same breath as his other media-savvy colleagues. It is a pity, really, because Mehrotra's work

for quite some time now—he was VSNL's 35th customer for an Internet account at a time when it cost in excess of Rs 10,000 for a 100-hour registration. Prior to that, he was also part of the LiveWire Bulletin Board Service run by the Nanda brothers—Suchit and Anish—India's pioneering digital entrepreneurs, whose foray into BBS was viewed with much scepticism in 1992.

It would take three days for a message to reach the US, and another three for a reply if it was posted. "It was



Photograph: Mery Xavier, imaging Anil Deshmukh

How it Works

The artist creates his painting

He then archives them on a CD

These CDs are sold through retail stores

CDs are also retailed through Web sites

Thus are generated enquiries about CDs

Paintings are sold. The artist's work is longer restricted to geographic boundaries

faster than snail mail, though," says Mehrotra.

The Internet, therefore, was a natural progression. He created a self-titled Web site, for which he learned to author HTML pages. "It was great fun," he remembers.

It all began when, in the late '80s, Mehrotra began experimenting with digital lithographs, something he would develop into a fine art, and a constant revenue stream. He was in New York then.

Later, in the '90s, he created exquisite works of art using both two-and-three-dimensional software. Adobe Photoshop and Fractal Design Painter were his easels; his Wacom cordless pen and a digitiser, his brushes.

And A CD Takes Birth

The CD-ROM would seem a run-of-the-mill idea, but when Mehrotra pioneered it in 2001, it was nothing less than revolutionary.

Even today, no other Indian artist has developed a CD-ROM. Mehrotra is quite reticent about it, though.

"I have done a lot of diverse work since 1967. I felt I should preserve my work in a medium different than a glossy catalogue. The CD-ROM idea came primarily with that objective in mind."

Mehrotra also wanted it to be interactive. A CD-ROM would be the best medium, then, given his needs. The medium, he hoped,

The CD-ROM is an important step in making people aware of my work... I am happy that several artists are now going digital.

Jaideep Mehrotra

would make his work accessible to a larger section of art connoisseurs and peers, both Indian and from across the world.

The CD itself is a digital journey into the artist's life. Divided into sections that detail his life, his work is in the form of paintings and lithographs.

It even includes his poster design for the Dev Benegal film *Split Wide Open*. It then records his views in the form of newspaper and television interviews.

"It has my work from 1984 onwards. Each of the paintings includes a description of the work along with the attached price, if it is still available for sale. You can find my sculptures and other art work too."

Interestingly, Mehrotra authored the CD on his own for both Windows and Apple platforms compatibility.

Veteran actor and one of the early adopters of the Web in India, Shammi Kapoor, launched the CD in 2001, and Mehrotra has since sold over 300 CDs, a unique achievement for something that is as niche as an art CD-ROM. Mehrotra later sold through mid-day.com (the Web site of a popular evening newspaper in Mumbai) to sell the CD, a move that resulted in a lot of enquiries from the US about his work.

Why CD-ROM?

Mehrotra feels that a CD-ROM is important for any individual or

Online Art Will Be Big... Soon

Experts say technology will only enhance the art experience. It is only a matter of time before artists in India begin to process, catalogue and archive their works digitally. Art critic Jasmine Shah Varma believes the Internet has opened a new vista for Indian artists.

Dinesh Vazirani, co-founder of Saffronart.com's India chapter, says the Net has helped promote art in a big way. "It has provided an objective platform for artists to display their works to a global audience."

He adds that the Net is increasingly being used by artists to experiment and usher in new movements in terms of style.

Mehrotra is probably the first Indian artist who experimented with digital media, but others are following suit. Says Vazirani: "Digital art is not a hot trend due to lack of awareness, and due to the misconception that digital art can be reproduced a million times over. This has resulted in a cautious approach towards this medium."

Shah Varma, meanwhile, feels that technology has some way to go before it we can confidently say that the time for it has arrived.

"It is a relatively new field, and only two other major contemporary artists—Akbar Padamsee and Gulammohammed Shaikh—have experimented with this medium," she says. "The awareness of digital art and use of technology in art among art buyers is practically non-existent, and art buyers are more comfortable with traditional media like oil and watercolour."

"It is hard to say whether the market for digital art will thrive in India in the current scenario."

But she is also certain that technology is making inroads into the field of artistic creation. "Many artists have been using video and computers as media to make and display art. Gradually, we will see greater use of technology, but it is hard to predict how soon and to what extent."



1/2 pg V Ad

small company as an effective marketing tool. "A CD should be created from the long term business point of view. Unlike music or films, the success of a CD cannot be just determined by sales alone; people buy the CD and may even take years to buy my work; this is just a step towards making my work known to people."

The initial reaction to Mehrotra's CD was that of fascination, since nothing of this sort existed in the art world before. "But now I see a change," he says, "Several colleagues of mine are now going digital." There is a sense of accomplishment in his eyes when he says this, even if some of the purists have not accepted this form of building awareness.

Technology And Art: Do The Twain Meet?

Mehrotra defends digital art not with the irrational fanaticism of a blind supporter, but with the reasoned rationale of a seasoned parliamentarian: "Digital art is equally creative. There is a misconception that digital art is dependent only on the computer's capabilities. This is simply not true. Unless you give the necessary commands to the machine, and incorporate your ideas, how in the world is the computer going to create art?"

"Technology has ensured that art sites have mushroomed; one is now able to look at pieces of work that were not accessible earlier. It has brought art to the common man. Earlier, making a film was considered a multi-layered process; today one can shoot on a personal video camera, and edit pictures at home on a personal computer."

Even as art dealers and artists try to get comfortable about the use of technology, Mehrotra has only shown the way. He says the day is not far when the world's first digital painting with a digital signature of a prominent artist would go on sale for half a million dollars. "This will make people notice digital art," he believes.

Meanwhile, at Crossword, a nationwide chain of bookstores, Mehrotra's CD sells as the sole representative of a CD-ROM on art. For now, he can be happy that he still remains the only Indian artist to have dabbled in this medium. It won't be long before he has followers. ☒

aparna_krishnakumar@thinkdigit.com

Man and mouse

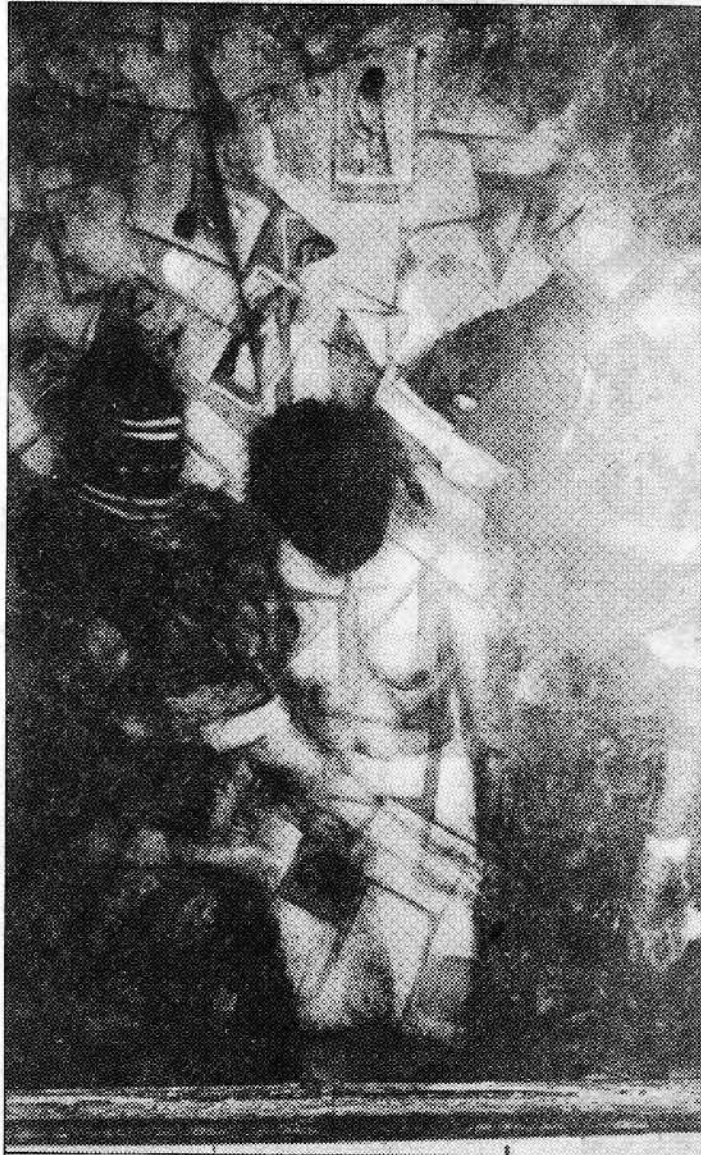
Jaideep Mehrotra's cyber art is on show at Jehangir Art Gallery, Bombay, from December 2-7.

PRIYA NAIR

WHEN Jaideep Mehrotra approached the RBI for some US dollars to fund his project, he was told to guarantee that his product would be exported. But in this case it was not a commercial product: it was art. And Mehrotra needed the money to pay for his computer lithographs.

A computer lithograph is a painting that has been created using a mouse instead of a brush, on a computer screen instead of a canvas, and using 16.7 million colours instead of the traditional 16-odd colours of the palette. And if Mehrotra is to be believed, wielding a mouse is just as satisfying as wielding a paintbrush. He says, "On a computer, there is no limit to one's imagination. It is possible to create levels between paintings and photography and also to undo levels of the painting."

Added to this are other advantages. It is quicker, works out cheaper in the long run, and also has the



same shelf-life as any other painting. That means it is possible to store the painting for 100-150 years, using certain types of inks and paper. Even museums now display computer paintings.

Speaking about the response of people to computer paintings, Mehrotra says, "Those who can afford to buy an oil painting at any cost will always do so. But for others, this is a great option. It is the same as any other painting of mine, done by me, and there is no other like it." But he stresses that the computer can never be a substitute for other mediums like oil or acrylic. "Certain mediums express something better. It is very difficult to make a computer lithograph look like an oil painting or a watercolour. I want people to accept a computer painting for what it is."

Mehrotra might succeed in this endeavour with his latest exhibition, 'Bookmark', where he will display his computer lithographs along with his oils and water colours. He says, "I am holding the exhibition after a gap of 15 years, and the title is to suggest that this is where I have stopped for now. Like a bookmark, the paintings don't tell anything about the past or the future." Personally, he finds it difficult to title his works, as he feels that it can work both ways. It can either tell people to look for something or take them away from the actual meaning of the work.

Mehrotra hopes that computers will be soon taught in art schools as an alternative medium to oils, watercolours or acrylics. And as for the acceptance of computer art, he says, "Acceptance of art is the domain of the rich. If people decide that they are worth buying, then they will become art."

As of now, Mehrotra is satisfied that he has tried to do something that did not exist before. "I am happy that I have set a trend and I hope people will want to do more computer paintings."

