

LifeToday

A colourful representation of life itself

Reena Amos Dyes sits down with one of India's most successful painters to talk about what inspires him

Jaideep Mehrotra may be a successful and famous artist now, but life was not always so easy for the determined Indian painter.

Today Jaideep's work, which is on display this week at 1x1 Art Space in Dubai, sells for thousands of dirhams, but there was a time when he was unable to afford basic equipment or go to art school. But Jaideep's determination and passion meant he pushed himself in order to get where is now.

"My journey to fame was not easy. It was a long hard struggle as I was studying, working and painting, all at the same time, but it paid off," says the 52-year-old from Maharashtra.

Today Jaideep shows his work in India, the United States, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, France, Germany, Hong Kong, the UAE, Sweden, Ireland, Singapore and Nigeria – his work can also be found in private collections the world over.

A FAMOUS FOLLOWING

Some of his famous clients even include Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan, the former queen of Jaipur Maharani Gayatri Devi, former Miss India and Bollywood actress Juhi Chawla, Bollywood actress Tina Ambani, and famous Indian business tycoons Nussli Wadia, Yash Birla, Harsh Goenka and Vijay Raheja.

The late Dubai-based Indian business tycoon Manu Chhabria and his son-in-law Manohar Godhwani are also among his clients.

By the time he was 12 Jaideep had launched his first solo exhibition.

Recalling the moment he says: "The gallery where my first exhibition was held was next to a café. A gentleman who had come to the café saw my work and was impressed."

"He asked my mother who the artist was and when she pointed to me he was stunned. He bought my first painting for just Rs75 (Dh7)."

"It was a princely sum in those days, a whole family could live very well on a salary of Rs100 (Dh10)."



■ His paintings are sought after by the rich and famous

The Indian press went into overdrive about the young child prodigy with almost every newspaper in Maharashtra carrying the story of this prolific little painter.

From then on Jaideep held an exhibition every four years. And at each show he sold up to five paintings.

As he got older and more and more people began to acknowledge and appreciate his work the paintings started to sell for larger sums.

But it was not until Jaideep was 30 that he had his first sell-out show.

Jaideep has always loved art; his mother was an accomplished Manipuri dancer and classical Indian singer and played a major role in developing his taste for high culture, often taking her children to exhibitions in Mumbai.

"The first oil painting that I saw was by a famous Indian called artist Jhangir Sabavala. I was eight years old at that time and it blew me away,"

says Jaideep, who is inspired by artists such as Picasso, Salvador Dali and Mark Tansey.

"The next day I went to school and told my teacher I wanted to paint with oils. Unfortunately, I was told that only the older students got to paint with them."

But Jaideep was determined to paint and when he returned

them back to school to show to my teacher.

"He was very impressed so made a special concession for me to be able to paint with oil. If it hadn't been for my mother buying me those paints I doubt I would have continued with art," he admits.

Despite belonging to a wealthy Indian family, tragedy

were the luxuries they were used to; no more private school, no more holidays, no more eating out.

"However my step-brother, who used to run the family business, took care of me, my two older sisters and my younger brother."

"The matter went to court and the assets were sealed."

"So even though I went to a good school in my childhood, thanks to my step-brother, I had to work my way through college."

"I used to be in college at

6.45am, attend classes till 8.45am and then by 9.30am I would be in an office working for a trading company, doing their accounts," recalls the father of two.

However, even with morning college and a full-time job, Jaideep did not let go of his passion for art and all his spare time was spent painting.

In 1975 Jaideep came to the UAE, where he worked for five years.

"I joined the Emirates Printing Press in Dubai in 1975 and then in 1977 I was working for a company in Abu Dhabi marketing printing products."

"I left the UAE in 1979 and went to Nigeria to join a electronics firm."

"One-and-a-half years after joining the firm I set up my own business."

AT HOME AGAIN

In 1983 he moved back to India to take care of his mother. It turned out this was the



■ Jaideep Mehrotra once lived in Dubai and has returned to showcase his most recent collection at 1x1 Art Space



CHANDRA BALAN

best decision he ever made. The art market in India was growing like never before and there were many opportunities for someone like Jaideep.

"I held an exhibition that did very well."

"Air India bought a few of my paintings so a year later I quit work and decided to follow my passion full time. My mother was not very happy about that, but I was determined to follow my dreams."

"Luckily for me the next show I had in 1987 was a sell out and I have not looked back since then."

Though his forte is painting in oils, he is quite comfortable working with different mediums like acrylics, sculptures in fabric and resin, wood, digital-based prints, films, large-scale murals and installations.

Jaideep's work is quite surreal and iconic, but the underlying theme is always hyper-realism and the creative quest of not confining to parameters.

■ Jaideep's paintings will be on show at 1x1 Art Space in Dubai until tomorrow. Visit www.1x1artspace.com for more details.

THE INTERVIEW

Yet for Jaideep, the biggest inspiration comes from life itself.

"I get my inspiration from life and thinking. I see something and then react to it and represent it in my own way," he gushes.

■ Jaideep's paintings will be on show at 1x1 Art Space in Dubai until tomorrow. Visit www.1x1artspace.com for more details.