

Isle of Bali and Vishnu influence works of Gujarat artist

Gujarat-based veteran artist Amit Ambalal draws his colours and inspiration from the 'leela' (miracles) of Lord Vishnu, the ruler of the Indian religious pantheon who is credited with at least 1,000 avatars.

Amabalal's latest muse is the mystical island of Bali, the land closely associated with ancient Hinduism and the growth of Vaishnavite culture.

The artist's new cache of works, 'Inspired By Bali', is a visual comparison of the legends of Ramayana and the Mahabharata brought to life in the pictorial images that one sees in the eastern countries influenced by ancient Indian culture and in the caves of Ajanta and Ellora in India.

The paintings will be on display in the capital during July 22-Aug 12 at Gallery Espace.

Though Amabalal's forte is watercolours - a medium that he finds friendly and easy to communicate to viewers - a large part of his new body of art is in oil because no other medium can capture the visual richness and colours of Southeast Asia, particularly Bali, where he was invited for an artist's residency this year.

'This is my third trip to Bali. I keep going back to the island because it has always intrigued me with its underlying likeness with our own visual culture. Every time I go to Bali I feel I am in the India of the Vedic ages.

'What is fascinating about eastern culture is the harmonious relationship that man shares with nature, resonating his acceptance to all its forms, be it gods or demons. Vivid images of graceful women in temple processions and idiosyncratic protagonists, human and otherwise, thus find way on to my picture plane,' Amabalal told IANS from Ahmedabad.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a well-documented book on the artist's stylistic oeuvre by independent critic and curator Gayatri Sinha.

Also on view will be a unique installation of 35 bronze crows, which attracted widespread attention when it was shown in [Ahmedabad](#) for the first time.

Born in Ahmedabad in 1943, Ambalal qualified in arts, commerce and law to become a businessman before taking up painting full time in 1979. 'I was inspired by the mother and artists closely following the Bengal school of art. They used to drop into my home. My teacher at Leena Sarabhai's academy in Ahmedabad, where I initially studied, also encouraged me to paint when I was barely 10 years old,' Ambalal said.

According to Renu Modi, director of Gallery Espace, Ambalal's work should be seen within a critical phase of Indian modernity because 'he seeks to create a language that is both recognisable and intensely personal'.

Ambalal, a devotee of Shrinathji or Lord Krishna of Nathdwara in Rajasthan, authored a book on Nathdwara paintings titled, 'Krishna as Shrinathji - Rajasthani Paintings from Nathdwara', in 1987.

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