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Gestures on canvas

Artist Shombit Sengupta and his paintings in gesturism style



ORNELLA D'SOUZA | Sun, 6 Nov 2016-06:50am , Mumbai , DNA

All set to unveil a Renault Kwid car painted in a self-invented style called gesturism, French artist of Indian origin Shombit Sengupta tells Ornella D'Souza his rags-to-riches story

When 19-year-old Shombit Sengupta arrived in 1973 Paris with \$8 and tourist visa in pocket and no knowledge about French, it was clear he had trod where angels feared. The lad had dropped out of Kolkata's Indian College of Arts to make it big in Paris as role models artists Dutch Vincent Van Gogh or Spaniard Pablo Picasso had. Sengupta left behind his home, a mud hut on the outskirts of Kolkata in which his refugee family of 14, from war-torn Dhaka, lived.

In fact, if his morals were loose and his lust to study art didn't overpower easy money, he could've become a pimp in Paris as that offer was made to him within few days of his stay.

Jump to 2016. Sengupta has exhibited in Venice, Milan, Tokyo and Kolkata, the artist has developed his own style called gesturism. On November 9, along with his paintings and installations at Mumbai's Institute for Contemporary Ideas and Art (ICIA), curated by renowned Italian curator Alberto Moiola, the French artist will unveil a Renault Kwid model that he's painted at the behest of the French carmaker. The painted model will head to the Artists Village in Barbizon before making the Renault Heritage Museum in France its permanent home.

"I was not given any boundaries and told to do whatever I wanted with the car. Except for the front logo, I've painted the body, bumper, interiors and even the tapestry of the seats," says Sengupta.

Always ready with a joke up his floral-shirt sleeve, he says, "Even my underwear is colourful," he says looking up from his mobile phone with a cover that sports Parisian doodles.

Paris is what made him. In '73, samaritans like scientist CK Pyne gave him shelter and Jacques Gourdon gave him a job as a sweeper in his lithographic printing atelier. Here he met renowned artists such as Leonor Fini, Alain Bonnefoit, Jean Carzou and Yves Brayer. Sengupta would wake up at 4am everyday to

juggle his day job with courses at Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts and Ecole Supérieure d'Arts Graphiques, both institutes he got through on pure merit. Lack of funds prompted Sengupta to discontinue his education and become a product designer instead. But not before he made the best out of his student life.

"I arrived at a time when the influence of Andy Warhol's pop art and Salvador Dali's surrealism in Paris was very high. Picasso had just died, but cubism was still alive. These art movements inspired me."

But by 1994 he decided to breakaway from the influence of these art movements and arrive at his own style. He stopped exhibiting, and cocooned himself in his studio and painted feverishly.

What emerged were paintings in charcoal, watercolour and oil canvases had brushstrokes as if done in a frenzy to appear spontaneous. As is gestures gained a form on canvas. "Instant actions in everyday living may result in some corporal substance that people call thinking, so the more actions we perform, we create stimuli for others," he explains. In 2015, when he mastered this style, Sengupta began exhibiting the world over.

Common sights in his paintings are of a cow dropping dung, cold drinks stalls, a sari clad woman riding a bike, a Baul singer, Naga babas, Howrah Bridge, Victoria Memorial...caricatures of bucolic and urban-day Bengal that could draw flak for its touristy themes. But what saves the day is Sengupta's treatment to these themes, which emerge from a thicket of gaudy green, rani pinks, blues and yellow scribbles. Indian colours combined with Parisian learnings of pigmentation and composition.

This style of merging Bengal's colonial traces against modern-day Kolkata, he calls Ville Enigmatique, which is rooted in gesturism.

His 'désordre' works are interactive installations. A group of his paintings appear like pieces of a jigsaw-puzzle on a grid structure for the audience to unscramble. "There are markers to indicate which is the right way but the viewer can use their discretion to arrange it as they wish."

Sengupta's latest eccentricity is making gesturism paintings using jelly, jam, chocolate, caramel and blueberry sauce as paint on canvas. "I can eat my painting once done."

<http://www.dnaindia.com/lifestyle/report-gestures-on-canvas-2270529>