



ART BEAT

Son of the Soil

Veteran artist C D Mistry creates paintings packed with minute strokes, inspired by the folk art of Gujarat

PHOTOS BY PAWAN KHENGRE



C D Mistry (above); one of the paintings at the exhibition

RUSHIL DUTTA

CD MISTRY from Gujarat is over 80 years old, yet his hands are steady, as he explains his strokes with his finger on the petal of a pink flower placed on the table. The collection of his paintings being exhibited at India House Art Gallery till November 30 isn't the work of past genius but the manifestation of the aged artist's perennial creative prowess, created in the last one-and-a-half years. The artist in Mistry has always abstained from the glamour of Western fashions in art and has dedicated himself towards building a style modelled around indigenous folk traditions.

"I have toured tribal areas extensively and examined their art closely. During these visits to Dang, Saurashtra, Kutch and

some smaller districts around Ahmedabad, I got engrossed in the forms of the local art of the respective areas," recounts Mistry, adding that he was enticed by their inherent simplicity. Mistry found artworks on every day surfaces and objects such as walls and utensils, and remembers being intrigued by the candour of the art. "Their art revolves around religion and mythology. The style is naive for the lack of formal education in fine arts. But they aren't bothered about proportions and technicalities. They are concerned with visualising what's embedded in their hearts," says Mistry.

Following folk traditions, Mistry renders his paintings in acidic colour tones, often marked by contrasting hues. Explaining the practice, he says, "Folk art employs easily procurable colours. They (folk artists) derive



their colours from the direct application of sundry items such as vermilion, indigo, turmeric, and some naturally occurring whites. They are oblivious of the concept of mixing colours."

It is easy for the viewer to be beguiled by Mistry's modest claims of simplicity. His paintings, when viewed from a distance, appear woolly and carpet-like. The border of every figure seems almost frayed, looking like nothing less than folk motifs embroidered onto cloth. It is in this deception where Mistry's mastery dwells. On being inspected

closely, the paintings display a composition of precise, minute strokes packed in fields of contrasting colours. "It is a laborious process. The effects I try to create in my paintings can be induced only when the paint is wet. Therefore, it requires me to finish my paintings in one sitting. Each large canvas takes about 20 hours to complete," he says.

"I employ the 'dry-brush technique'. The tool is a tiny brush, only a few millimetres in length, containing a few filaments. I, then, use the tool to overlap two fields of wet paint to

achieve the frayed borders," explains Mistry.

Mistry's art has come of age through years of research and nurturing. Each individual stroke in this tedious process is irrevocable and must be so to create the desired embroidered effect. A close examination of the paintings will also reveal tiny, circular strokes that have been applied during the finishing stages of the painting to give it a cloth-like appearance. These details, says Mistry, "add a certain amount of vibration to the painting and gives it an organic quality."