

Pichwai art, back to the fore



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Darshan: Shrinathji exhibition will be held at India House Gallery, Balewadi from December 19 to 22.

Artist **Trilok Soni** tells **Meeta Ramnani** how Pichwai paintings that serve as backdrop in temples are now in demand for home decor

In Rajasthan, the painting that serves as a backdrop for the idol in Lord Krishna temple, is called Pichwai. The word Pichwai is derived from 'Pich' which means back. Hence, Pichwai paintings form the backdrop for Lord Krishna idols. With changing times, this art, known for fine, intricate handiwork, has found new takers — interior designers who are using them to decorate urban living rooms. Trilok Prakash Soni, a Rajasthani artist is holding an exhibition of his Pichwai paintings titled 'Darshan: Shrinathji' to introduce Puneites to this art.

Born and brought up in Bhilwara, Rajasthan, Soni has undergone training in Guru-Shishya tradition from his father Shilp Guru Badri Lal Chitrakar.

"Pichwai paintings in temples don't have the image of God in them as the idol is already placed in the temple. But the ones that I make for home decor include Lord Krishna in the paintings," says Soni.

Pichwai is a 200 year old art and is mostly found in the temples of Mathura and Vrindavan in Uttar Pradesh and Nathdwara in Rajasthan. Pichwai paintings are made on cotton cloth and only natural colours are used. "For red colour, I use the 'Hinglu' stone. We grind the stone and mix natural glue that comes from trees to make the colour," Soni informs. "Similarly Kaja is used for black colour and a plant from Kerala for blue colour,"

he adds.

Retaining the traditional design of paintings, Soni has experimented with colours to give a contemporary look to his paintings. Says he, "Usually the colour of water is blue or grey in paintings, but when I painted yellow and golden water, it was liked by people. Also in a painting, instead of a white cow, I tried silver cow, which was appreciated."

Soni uses lead made from real gold and silver to give these colours to the paintings.

One Pichwai painting can take from seven days to four months to complete. The cloth is stuck on the floor with a paste made of all purpose flour and it is not removed till the painting is complete. Soni also makes these paintings with an antique finish. "I mostly get orders from interior decorators whose clients demand antiques, so I give a particular finish to the painting that makes it look old. This is called 'new antique look,'" says Trilok.

From 50 to 100 years, Soni can make a new painting look as old as you want.

At the exhibition, Soni will display 25 of his Pichwai paintings. The smallest is 2x3 feet and the biggest is 7x10 feet. "I have never exhibited my art before in Pune so I don't know what the people here like, but I am hopeful that Pichwai will be appreciated by them," says Soni.

The paintings can cost anywhere between Rs 25,000 to 6 lakh.