

Numero uno masterstrokes  
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Friday, May 19, 2006 20:14 IST

Artist Anjolie Ela Menon is set to make history of sorts tomorrow – becoming the first Indian woman to show at the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco.

“What is more important is that it is probably first of a series featuring ‘contemporary’ Indian paintings,” stresses Anjolie, speaking from New York.

“As you may know, the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco is one of the world’s greatest museums of traditional Asian art, so this new direction is important for them, for India and for me.”



The new collection entitled ‘Pilgrimage’ will include eleven paintings, some of which are female nudes, personal portraits and intimate still life paintings.

The centerpiece is called ‘Yatra’ – a large triptych of oil on masonite board donated to the Museum by Gallery ArtsIndia, New York. “‘Yatra’ is inspired by the annual migration of virtually millions of ‘Kavadiyas’ or barefoot pilgrims to holy sites in the Ganges,” explains Anjolie.

“They carry the ‘Kaavad’ or gaily decorated bamboo poles from which they suspend two pots in which they collect the holy water to take back (sometimes 500 miles away) for the abhishekan of the shiva lingams in their village shrines.”

Having had over 35 shows worldwide, does she feel that Indian artists are finally getting the international recognition they deserve?

“We are getting there slowly. But isn’t it unfortunate that recognition only comes when the prices of Indian art reach international levels? That has certainly happened in the last two years. It’s boom time!”

Ironically, back home, bearing in mind the recent volatile outbursts caused by MF Husain’s ‘Bharat Mata’, is artistic freedom still being curbed?

“We have been so lucky to have lived and worked in a free society. The great flourishing of the arts in India has been nursed by this freedom. It is therefore execrable that of late there has been an attempt to curb and censor artistic freedom. We artists have fought tooth and nail against these fundamentalist interventions and will continue to do so,” states Anjolie adamantly.

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