

DEBUT

# ART AND SOUL



Born in Puerto Rico and currently based in Chicago and New York City, artist Angel Otero is dedicated to pushing the boundaries of art and bringing something unique to the canvas. *L'Officiel* India catches up with him on the morning of his show opening in Mumbai when he talks about art being a spontaneous discovery and how it should surprise oneself.

By Praachi RANIWALA

**Tell us about your foray into art.**

I started making drawings when I was six years old though I didn't really understand art. An exploration about what it really means kept me going and intrigued me so much that I challenged myself. When I turned 12, I saw this incredible painting and it drove me crazy. That's when I realised that I would love to do this for real someday. So I just followed a little dream.

**You are famed for using unconventional techniques. So what inspires your art?**

I came out of school speaking a lot about my grandmother, not because she inspired my work, but because I simply used her as a reference for certain paintings. There are personal elements in my work—family, a photograph, a book or a memory that sparks an idea—but my work is not a narrative and deals more with the process, the subject specifically being oil painting. My plan has always been to maintain a balance between the history of painting and at the same time confront it. A painting doesn't necessarily need to be beautiful, you just need to find conversation between you and the object.

**What was the thought process that went behind the work exhibited in India?**

Every painting that you see in the show is made with oil paint in a very unconventional way. People say that painting is dead and there's nothing new to bring to its history. So I wanted to stick to a fundamental medium and use it in a very unexpected way to create a conversation between painting methods. Everything is a big chunk of dry oil paint. I decided to start constructing interesting collages of dry paint but I wasn't sure of the imagery, so I went with the flow and decided to let the paintings surprise me. What unifies everything is that they are alternative oil paintings using a conservative medium.

**Why did you choose India as a location to showcase your work? What would you like to**

**explore while in the country?**

The most incredible thing about art I think is that it lets you travel and meet people. I thought this was an amazing opportunity to see how my work will be approached in a context like India. I want to explore the culture and catch a glimpse of the real thing while here. I want to walk around, see things and get inspired. And I definitely want to visit the Elephanta Caves.

**Which is the one place in the world that inspires you?**

I love meeting people, understanding cultures and finding ways of getting inspired no matter where I am. But I like Prague a lot. I lived there for several months during art school and it made a big impression on me. It doesn't have a big contemporary art scene but the romantic city blew me away. I did a lot of writing, reading and drawing while there and it opened up certain attitudes towards art in me.

**Which is the city that you're dying to visit next?**

Rome!  
Angel Otero is currently showing until 7<sup>th</sup> June 2012 at Galerie Isa, 132 Great Western Building, 1st floor, SBS Road, Opposite Lion Gate, Fort, Mumbai—400 023. For more information log on to [www.galerieisa.com](http://www.galerieisa.com) and [www.angelotero.com](http://www.angelotero.com).



TOP  
ANGEL OTERO.  
ABOVE RIGHT  
BLOOMING GOLD, 2012.  
RIGHT  
LYING AWAKE, 2012.



LEFT  
ROYAL, 2011.

