

Paint, Peel, Recreate

COURTESY: LEHMANN MAUPIN GALLERY, NEW YORK

Puerto Rican artist Angel Otero uses pieces of art for his very unconventional oil paintings

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ON a shimmering gold dining table with a single visible chair, sit a vase with flowers in it, a teapot and some other pieces of crockery. All of these are also a brilliant gold, immediately attracting the viewer's attention and keeping it there. It's almost hard not to imagine kings and queens sitting at this table with a lavish spread before them.

This is, however, not an image from a fancy fairy tale, but a painting titled *Leftovers* from among Angel Otero's latest works. This and a number of other recent works — some created especially for the show — are on display at Galerie Isa, Fort, for Otero's first show in India. The show opens on Friday.

The Puerto Rican-born artist works with oil paints — a conventional and historically significant medium — to create works that are unconventional and stunning. In his works, however, the process holds more importance than the subject of the painting. "My art is more about the material and the process than the figurative aspect," says Otero.

While in university, Otero began collecting bits of paint from older oil paintings, scraping it off paintings he wasn't particularly fond of. These bits of paint he then stuck on to a fresh canvas, creating paintings such as *Leftovers*. His subjects — which he repeatedly stresses are not the focus of his work — were usually still life, such as the dining table and objects in *Leftovers* and the flowers and vases in *Blooming* and *Blooming Gold*, also on display at the gallery.

Otero's more recent works, however, are much more abstract and employ a completely different process of creation. "Eventually, when I ran out of dried oil paint, I decided to start painting on glass," says the New York-based artist



Leftovers, a 2012-work created using bits of oil paint, scraped off other paintings, stuck on to a new canvas and spray-painted gold



After the sheets of oil paint have been draped over the canvas, the finished work looks like this 2011-painting titled *Royal*; (left) Otero creates a work using sheets of oil paint peeled off a glass slab

ished work look like a wrinkled, and perhaps wet, thick fabric draped over a canvas.

with a laugh. This process, he says, begins in a rather conventional manner as he applies a layer of oil paint on a large slab of glass. This layer is allowed to dry, following which, more oil paint, usually of a different colour, is applied to the glass. The dried sheets of oil paint are then carefully peeled off the glass — a process for which, he says, he requires the help of a couple of more people — and draped over a new canvas.

During this process, these sheets — which are still malleable — get folded in places, making the fin-

The history of oil painting goes back many centuries but was formally recognised in the 15th century in Europe, following which, it became one of the most popular mediums at the time. This rich historical significance, Otero says, is one of the things that attracted him to the medium. "I started out with oil paints because it was a more traditional and historical material, but then I ended up using it in an unconventional way," he says. As far as materials and mediums go, "My art," says the 30-year-old artist, "is about exploration".