

# 'I am not interested in beautiful paintings'

...says London-based artist Anj Smith, who is holding her first exhibition here

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**R**enowned London-based artist Anj Smith's works are intense and minutely detailed. *Woods Without Pathways* is her first exhibition in India. Here are excerpts from a candid chat...

**Your paintings are often executed on a small scale, yet are highly detailed...**

I enjoy the nature of things that burn slowly. People who have my work in their homes tell me that every now and then, a detail will emerge that they haven't seen before. I think small works often pack a more intense punch. Also, I have always responded to the intimacy of small works. They demand the viewer to physically bend and look into them. But if the concept of a work dictated it to be large scale, I wouldn't hesitate.

There are areas of minutiae in most of my paintings, which I paint with tiny brushes imported from Italy. Once they arrive, I often give them a haircut, so that I can use them exactly the way I need to. There are different types of painting within each work. Sometimes, very detailed areas are often juxtaposed with solid colour-banks that have been built up with sheer layers.

**What exactly is 'your style' of painting?**

I see narrative as operating in multiple layers, each on top of the other or lying in fragments. No literal story surrounds the figures. The characters themselves can be seen as part of the furniture of the painting, and not complete entities in their own right.

**Some of your works depict strange-looking, scary women...**

I am not interested in making a 'beautiful' painting. For me, the term is redundant conceptually and also totally subjective. After a close friend's experience of sex change, he has become a sort of muse. His struggle to identify with either gender and post-surgery depression left a vivid impression on me. My friend's experience made me think further about existing in a state between or beyond gender.

**What inspires you the most?**

It's a cyclical process. The

more I research, the more something will absorb me, and make me want to look and think further. One reason why I love living in London is the access it grants to museums and galleries. I never feel that I struggle for inspiration. Travel has

Pics: Courtesy the artist, IBID PROJECTS, London and Hauser & Wirth, New York



Anj Smith (Inset) one of her works on display



Mumbai. I feel a connection to the city because of this. I've been immersed in different aspects of Indian culture for years, the most obvious being

the miniature painting. The delicate intricacy of Zardosi and Ari embroidery has also been a source of inspiration ever since I was given some by a friend. I have only visited India once before. So, I'm aware that I have much to learn about. Recently, I saw a brilliant exhibition in Beijing called Indian Highway, showcasing works by some of my favourite artists, including Nikhil Chopra and Jagannath Panda. I'm looking forward to seeing as much art as I can while in Mumbai.

**Why have you chosen to showcase in Mumbai? What do you have to say about Indian art?**

I have close Indian friends, many of them from

become important, too. Recently, during a trip to China, I saw some things that will stay with me forever — exquisite porcelain, barely-there embroidery and delicate carvings, to name just a few.

**The exhibition is on till November 17, at the Galerie Isa, SBS Road, Fort from 11 am to 6 pm from Tuesday to Saturday.**