

# BEYOND THE OBVIOUS

Moving away from the boring canvas, artists experiment and come up with refreshing exhibitions

by Nidhi Taparua RATHI

IT GIVES ME A STRANGE thrill to watch my work grace a woman's body. I feel like I am hugging her," says 81-year-old painter Syed Haider Raza. The France-based artist bursts into a romantic couplet as he watches women try on his scarves at Satya Paul, Mumbai.

After hours on trans-Atlantic calls, meetings and experimentation, the team at the designer store printed 1,200 scarves depicting four of Raza's works. Says Sanjay Kapoor of Satya Paul: "Unlike Raza's art which is available for Rs 40 lakh and upwards, these scarves are available for between Rs 8,000 and Rs 12,000. It's a steal, especially as they come numbered and with an authentication certificate."

Moving away from angst, anger and pain—all staples on the boring white canvas for contemporary artists—Indian art is going through a transformation. Like Raza's venture into a different medium, much of Delhi-based painter Satish Gujral's work is in graphics, murals and sculpture, and is a favourite of corporate buyers and collectors.

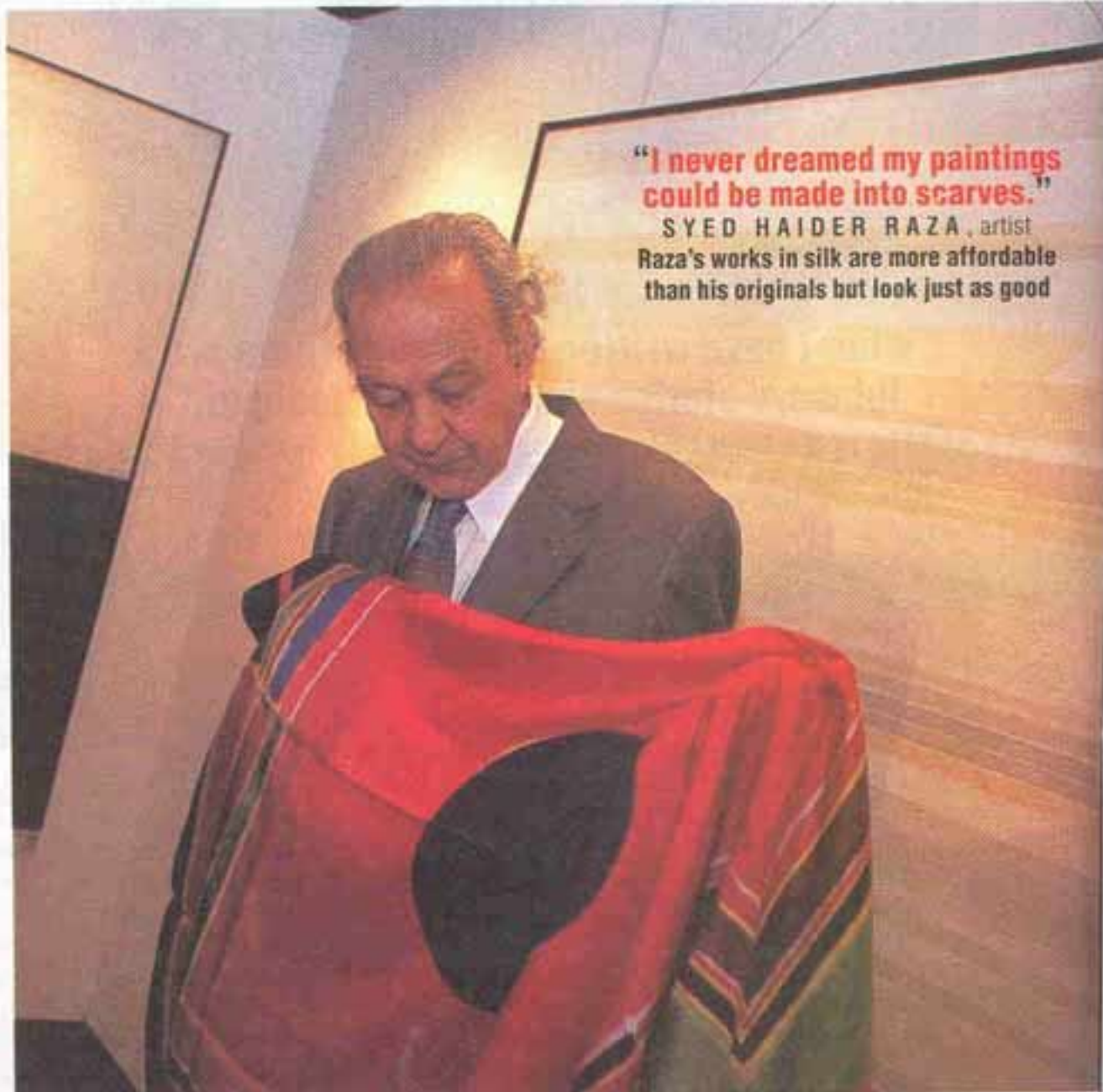
Artist Anjolie Ela Menon began her exploration into different mediums a decade ago when she painted a broken chair just for a lark. The painter, 62 now, went on to breathe life into the trend of arty kitsch in vogue today, exhibiting 53 objects retrieved from dumps—broken suitcases, chairs and altars—and later experimenting with film posters and computer art. But what have been a big commercial success recently are her sculptures in Murano glass, created in collaboration with Professor Antonio Da Roas at the ancient glassworks in Venice over the past two years. Menon has already sold 30 pieces of 78 from this year's col-

lection in London and Mumbai.

Other contemporary painters are waking up to mediums like glass, steel, fabric, soft metal, clay and more. Painter Anita Dube worked with Anupam Poddar, product designer and hotelier, using painted fabric in unusual sculptural ensembles, while Subodh Gupta collaborated with Poddar on a series of objects related to life and anatomy. "Anything can sell, if the signature is well known," says Mumbai collector Ashish Balram Nagpal, who has seen the experimental works of artists like Bindu Mehra, Nikhil Chag-ganlal and Raisa Hussain selling like



FAWZAN HUSAIN



**"I never dreamed my paintings could be made into scarves."**

SYED HAIDER RAZA, artist  
Raza's works in silk are more affordable than his originals but look just as good

FAWZAN HUSAIN



**“Experimenting with mediums can be liberating.”**

**ANJOLIE ELA MENON**, artist  
Menon has moved from canvas to furniture, posters and glass

hot cakes.

The trend may have purists fuming, but says Bangalore-based painter and printmaker Balasubramaniam, who is exploring constructs and sculptures: “Funk can be important too. In fact, one puts in as much effort and takes as much pain as on actual canvas.”

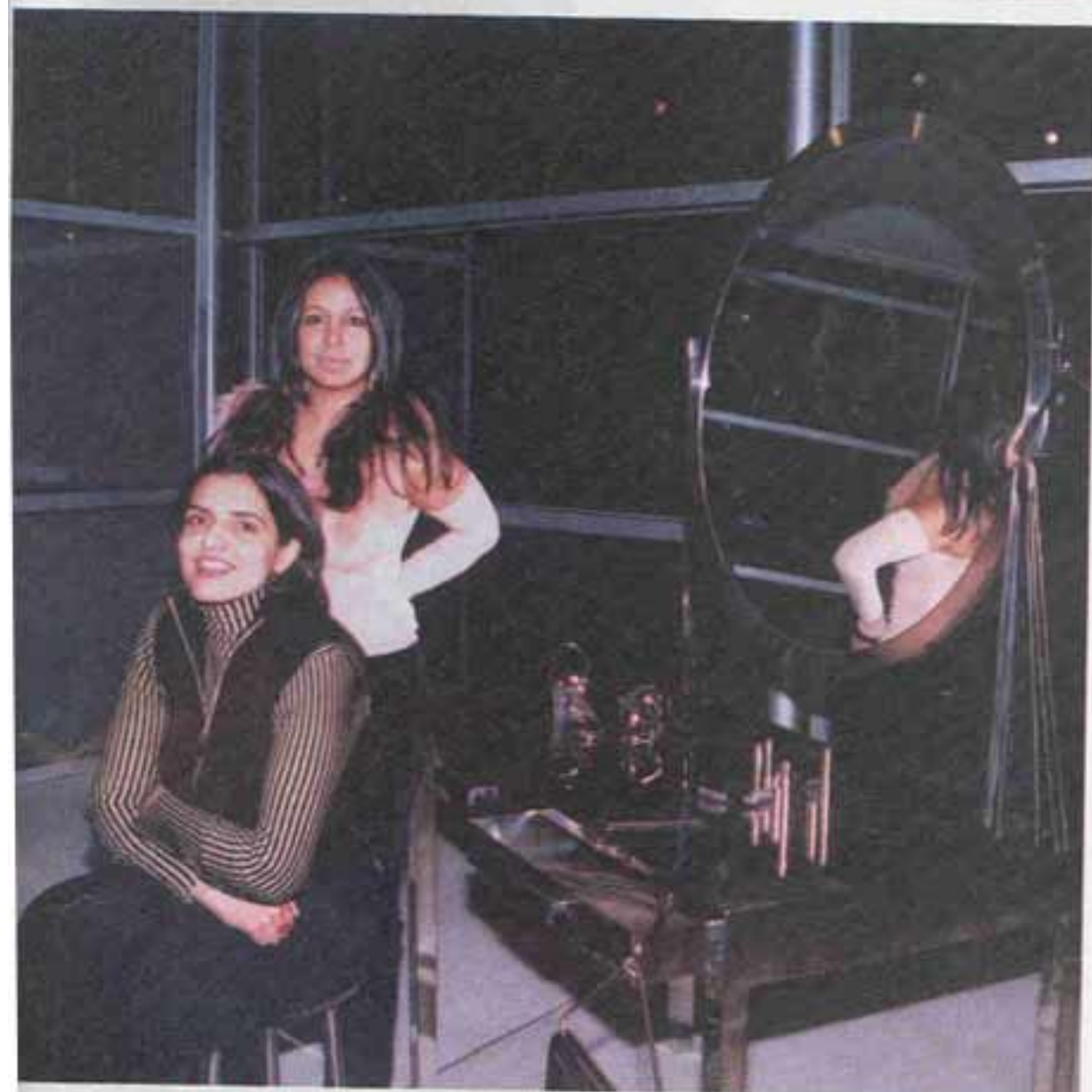
Precipitating the movement in a big way is Chennai-based art collector and gallery owner Sharon Apparao, who has helped artists experiment with mediums and collaborate with other artists. “It’s unnatural the way we have divided creativity into compartments in India and don’t cross the lines,” she says.

Though not all galleries are as supportive as Apparao Galleries or the experimental Apeejay New Media in Delhi, Mumbai-based art collector Shanti Chopra is optimistic. “Those who buy sculptures and other experimental art

forms now will be as happy as those who bought Husains and N.S. Bendres for Rs 500 a decade ago,” she says. While big names are selling because of their well-known signatures—Menon’s glass sculptures are as expensive as her paintings, priced at Rs 2 lakh and upwards—others view the trend as experimentation. “Profit is the last idea on our minds,” says architect Priti Paul, who worked with painter Bharathi Kher to produce an installation in stainless steel.

Playing with varied mediums is hardly as easy as picking a different colour on a palette. Says Menon about sculpting glass: “Everything has to be planned to the T before we start working with it.” But the experimentation, she says, “can be extremely liberating”.

Perhaps this sense of freedom prompted fashion designers Rohit Gandhi and Rahul Khanna of H2O to design clothes inspired by a collection of paintings from various artists. An exhibition titled “Bad Taste?!” in Delhi, showcased product designer Vibhor Sogani and fashion designer Puja Nayyar’s sculptures in metal and soft surfaces. Says Nayyar: “Dabbling with another medium gives you a whole new confidence. Besides, fashion and art have always been very closely connected.” Their work is a reminder that the best creativity is not just seen on canvas—or on mannequins. ■



**“Profit is the last idea on our minds.”** **PRITI PAUL**, architect  
Paul (standing), has collaborated with Kher on a steel installation