

# Of women by women

What does the contemporary *Nayika* look and feel like? **Jasmine Shah Varma** checks out interpretations by 16 women artists at Tao Art Gallery

An opening of an art exhibition marked by live performances is unique to Tao Art Gallery giving a twist to the evening. This Saturday an interesting art show titled *Nayika* will open with an apt recital of *thumri* by vocalist Rajshree Pathak.

*Nayika* is a group exhibition of 16 women artists curated by Anupa Mehta. As the name of the show suggests, the collection of art works in this show are about women by women. Women or the female form have been themes of several shows, curated or otherwise, but Mehta's show differs as the idea of the show, was to, "reinterpret *Nayika* who is looked for the beloved in classical Indian literature and art forms in today's context."

*Nayika* in Indian classical dance, drama and miniature paintings has perpetually been the lover shown in different *rasas*. The women artists of today represent the woman protagonist in their art as more than the lovelorn and in contexts other than romance. Anupam Sud, Arpana Caur, Bharti Kapadia, Brinda Chudasama Miller, Dhruvi Acharya, Gogi Saroj Pal, Kanchan Chander, Lalitha Lajmi, Manisha Gera Baswani, Meera Devidayal, Naina Kanodia, Rini

Dhumal, Shakuntala Kulkarni, Surekha, Seema Sathyu and Vasundhara Tiwari have participated in this show, giving works created especially for the show.

Bharti Kapadia presents an interesting work which she hesitates to call a painting, installation or sculpture. Let's call it an amalgamation of all these for convenience. It consists of two life-size wooden frames which have a transparent film of nylon bolting cloth. The cloth is woven with thread and used as thread and she has painted on it. The painted pattern in the form of the a scroll is like a love letter. Lyrics from a famous song *Mera Gora Ang Laile* which is also the title of the work are written on one side. The artist depicts the longing and the wait for the other through the work in a very innovative way. Words can't do justice in describing the nature of her work which has layers of connotations.

Dhruvi Acharya, showing her work for the first time in Mumbai, is showing an impressive work. A New York based artist, her complex work is called *Saturday Night*. There is a lot happening in her canvas a woman is seeing watching TV, and at the same time another woman trying to paint,



**SATURDAY NIGHT:** A painting by Dhruvi Acharya

and yet another with kitchen utensils, another sleeping and waking up (very interestingly portrayed). Subdued colours and curious details make you wonder where this artist was all this while. Says Acharya about her inspiration: "My paintings deal with the identity of women from my perspective. I have been in New York for five years and I have been observing the differences between the way women are treated in India and there. The concept of self-worth and the importance of having a profession in their culture comes through my work." Gogi Saroj Pal who has been working on the woman subject for a while has called her work Anandit

*Nayika*. Says Mehta about the Delhi-based artist, "While the women in her work looks like she is offering herself, Gogi parodies it by calling the work Anandit *Nayika* which stands for someone who seeks pleasure for herself." The bright colours and bold contours is Pal's trademark, making her work rather enjoyable.

Manisha Gera Baswani's work brings out the theme of the show exceptionally well. A palace in Moghul style and the palette like that in miniature paintings is contradicted by the presence of a phone and a mobile phone number instead of the figure of the *Nayika* or the woman protagonist.

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Titled *Cyber Nayika*, this work is beautifully executed.

Lalitha Lajmi's largish work in oils is a bit different from the usual fruit dishes and masks that one finds in her work. One finds her woman with cats. The colours are inspired by miniature paintings says the artist who has placed a glass of wine to show sophistication observed in contemporary women.

Arpana Caur's work comes across as rather somber. A lack background has contours of women asleep. Says Mehta, "Arpana uses the postures of sleep to comment on passivity in women's lives. Her protagonists though have the choice to free themselves from their cloistered environs if they so desire, as indicted by the metaphorical ray of light illuminating her canvas."

Bangalore-based Surekha's work is most appalling. The artist has framed hair and she quotes lyrics describing the *Nayika*'s beauty.

In all, the show has highs and lows. But, on the whole, it comes across as successful. One may miss some important women artist in the show not in the group. Nevertheless a good show to perk up your weekend, especially the *thumri* recital.

The show opens on July 15.

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