

A mosaic of colours

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Sector 50 resident Shilpi Aggarwal does something which few art galleries do. Through her website and her shows she promotes Indian art, artists and artisans. "I want the whole world to know about what is hidden in our villages and towns," she says.

Her plan is simple. Aggarwal puts the images of art works of various unknown artists on her website and also takes them to her shows, all free of cost.

"Only if a piece is sold do I take a small percentage of the artist's earning," she says. The artists are happy since they get a platform without the hassle of running from one gallery to the other and they don't have to spend a penny on renting a gallery," she says. Renting space in an art gallery is Aggarwal's headache.

Her website displays works of Madhubani, Warli, Gond, Tanjore, Dhokra, miniature art, sculptures, marble statues and chalk art besides modern and contemporary pieces.

Preparing for the India Art Summit to be held in February 2013, at NSIC grounds at Okhla in Delhi, Aggarwal is busy meeting artists and artisans whose works she will carry to the forthcoming art summit.

So far she has participated in four art shows, one at Mumbai Art Expo, and three at Delhi (one in Connaught Place and two at India Habitat Centre).

But, the journey till here has not been easy. Aggarwal belongs to a conservative Azamgarh, UP, family where even higher education for girls is a taboo. But armed with her grit and ability to talk things through, she not only did her graduation from Banaras Hindu University but also got an MBA in finance and marketing from the Fore School of Management, Delhi.

"I had to literally fight with my parents for getting out of Azamgarh. Belonging to a small town, it wasn't easy for them to send me to a hostel for studies but my hunger strikes made them give in to my demands," she smiles.

After completing her MBA in 2006, Aggarwal joined a company, but it took her less than two years to realise that juggling with dry mathematical figures was not something she wanted to do all her life. "I had achieved so much and secured a well paying job, but I wasn't satisfied with what I was doing," she says.

That's when she started thinking of what to do. And her thoughts drifted towards the field of art. "Although I never drew or painted myself, different

forms of art and artisans always interested me," she says.

Aggarwal started reading about art and artists. She sifted through the books to know about the art forms that existed in India; and was fascinated by the vast wealth of art that is there in our country. "I also got to know about the artisans who dot this country and the beautiful art pieces they make," she says.

While she was happy about such rich wealth in art that exists, the life of artisans and small artists bothered her a great deal. "There are many art forms in our country and artists who are so skillful and creative, but most of them are living in penury, unknown to masses," she says. "All this spells doom not just for the artist, the art form but also for the general public since people are unaware of their own art and culture," she adds.

After much thought she launched her website wherein she put in all the information she had gathered on Indian art, along with the propagators of these art forms.

She also started travelling to remote places in search of artists and artisans. Aggarwal met tribals of Rajasthan and Maharashtra and procured some of their art works. And all this she uploaded on her website. "After an initial lull, people started inquiring about the art pieces. Artists too started contacting me and the network grew," she says.

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