



A painter on art street

In her country, Brazilian graffiti artist, Nina Pandolfo, has taken street art to the halls of art galleries and museums. Now, she is making her mark on Mumbai

Namita Handa

A large round face of a girl is drawn on the wall, and her hair, in the form of branches, comes out of her head. Around the branches are fruit; the lone flower bud stands out. But the most striking feature of this graffiti is the huge glassy eyes of the girl. Within these eyes you see a different picture — an image within an image. This is the work of 31-year-old Brazilian graffiti artist, Nina Pandolfo.

When Pandolfo paints, the humble wall is transformed into a canvas. The Brazilian artist is currently in Mumbai to showcase her exhibition that began on November 14. Pandolfo's brush with art began when she was 12 years old. She often asked her mother for paints and would paint anything that caught her attention, be it her T-shirt or the cleaning rag in the kitchen. A year later she joined a theatre school, where she soon began to perform on the streets with her friends. But painting has always been her first love. She bought paints and brushes from the money she earned while working in a clothes shop.

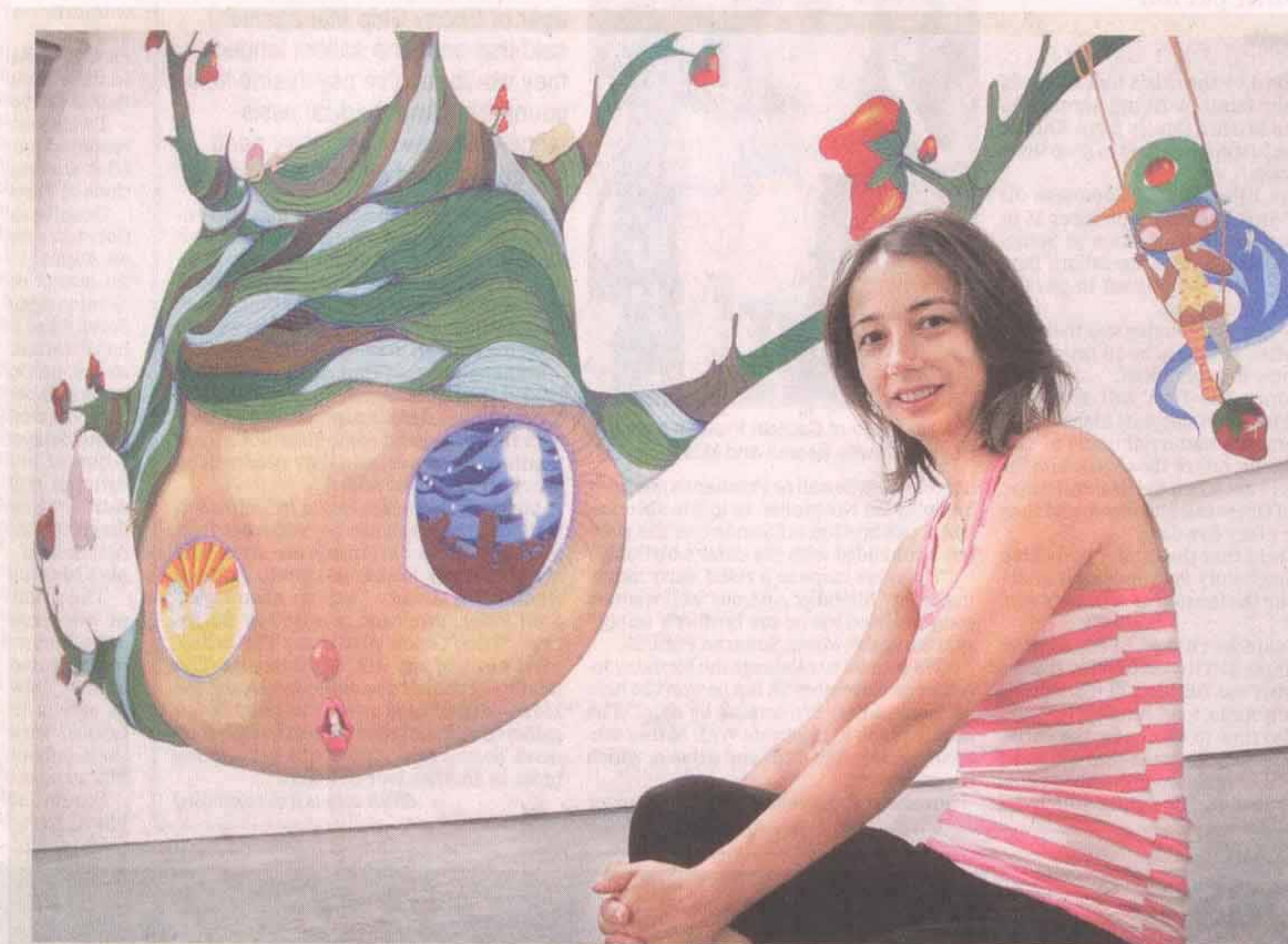
Painting on the streets, she says, gives her a different kind of joy. "The problem in Brazil is that people don't like to visit galleries or museums. So, there is no way that they can see this kind of art. Hence, painting on walls brings people closer to art," she says.

Pandolfo has met many people who she says are apprehensive about visiting art galleries because of class differences. Also, youngsters are too busy studying or applying for jobs. "Painting on the streets makes people pause from their busy lives, and appreciate art. Art can also, in turn, educate and bring about awareness," she says.

If Nina spots a plain white wall she takes the permission of the owner to fill it with her art. "I love painting on walls, and I pay for these 'missions' from my own pocket. All that the owner does is give me permission. I don't get any money," says Pandolfo.

In Brazil, Pandolfo is part of a group of five artists who helped pave the way for graffiti to enter the hallowed halls of art galleries and museums. All their work is pre-planned, and the concept is established from the start. She adds: "Working as a group for so long has developed a kind connectivity and understanding between the members. This makes things simpler."

Pandolfo's work deals with the universal idea of internal and external identity. The main subjects of her art are children and nature. Her focus has always been the eyes. Even as a child, she says, she enjoyed drawing big eyes, and this motif appears in almost all her paintings. "I think eyes express everything; eyes are every important. You look at the per-



DRAWING FACES: Artist Pandolfo, seen here with one of her works at the Warehouse art gallery in Colaba —Kamlesh Pednekar.DNA

A brief history of graffiti

■ The first known example of "modern style" graffiti survives in the ancient Greek city of Ephesus (in modern-day Turkey). Local guides say it is an advertisement for prostitution. Located near a stone walkway, the graffiti shows a handprint that vaguely resembles a heart, along with a footprint and a number. This is believed to indicate that a brothel was nearby, with the handprint symbolising payment.

■ The ancient Romans carved graffiti on walls and monuments, examples of which also survive in Egypt. The eruption of Vesuvius preserved graffiti in Pompeii, including Latin curses, magic spells, declarations of love, alphabets, political slogans and famous literary quotes, providing insight into ancient Roman street life.

■ It was not only the Greeks and Romans that produced graffiti: The Mayan site of

Tikal in Guatemala also contains ancient examples. Viking graffiti survive in Rome and at Newgrange Mound in Ireland, and a Varangian scratched his name (Halvdan) in runes on a banister in the Hagia Sophia at Constantinople.

■ There are also examples of graffiti occurring in American history, such as Signature Rock, a national landmark along the Oregon Trail.

son's eyes and you come to know if he is happy or sad," she says.

Pandolfo sticks to drawing girls. "I don't think I can draw boys, and even if I do, they turn out to be girls. My art, at some level, is a reflection of myself. My work reflects who I am; what I feel. It's the way I express my feelings to the world. In fact, people often tell me that I look at myself and draw."

Her paintings are marked by simplicity. She focuses on the smallest and simplest of things; things that many would simply take for granted. "When you're young, you notice each and every thing around you. Even the smallest

thing looks beautiful to you. But all this changes when you grow up; as adults we stop noticing our surroundings." And that is what Pandolfo is trying to do with her work — make people notice and appreciate the smallest things around them.

She has travelled around the world with her art. But India, she says, is an experience to remember: "Graffiti art is not that popular in India, so it is always good experimenting, whereas in America, it is well established."

Pandolfo prefers to use vivid and strong colours such as red, pink, blue and green. In the US, she says, graffiti art has a lot of browns

and dirt green. "I think strong colours have a lot of life and attract people's gazes. Looking at these colours makes one feel happy and satisfied," she says.

There's a lot on the artist's plate. Pandolfo will be return to Brazil in a week's time, and then head to Spain to take part in an art fair. But she's hoping to return to India, "but this time for a longer period, hopefully a month."

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Nina Pandolfo's work will be on display at the Warehouse at 3rd pasta in Colaba till December 31