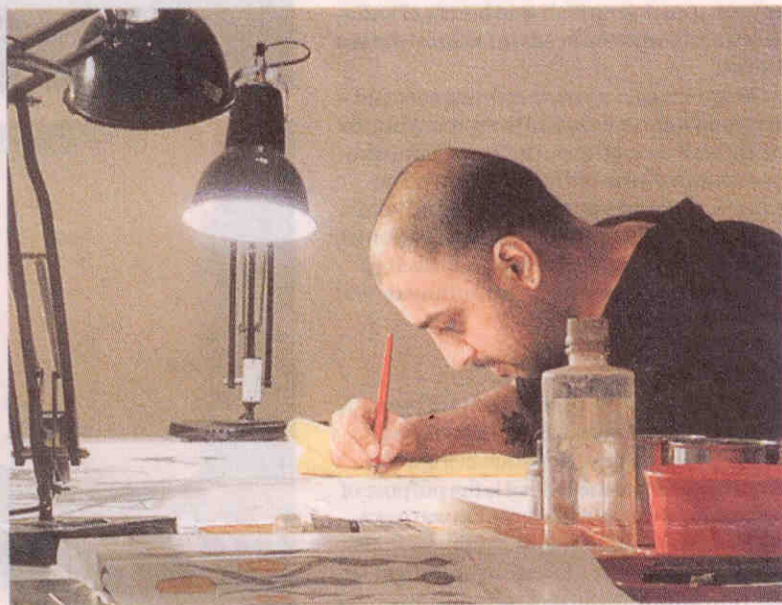


Narendra Yadav's installations: A fibreglass man lying next to a radio (left) and five fetuses inside a shining orb



Aditya Pande (left) working on a piece (right) which combines painting and printmaking



Design Switch

Graphic artists and admen are bringing their own ideas of art to canvases and installations

■ GEORGINA MADDOX



IN THE 1940s, a 17-year-old MF Husain was paid at a paltry rate of "four or six annas" per square foot for a cinema billboard he would paint—a fact he has penned in his memoirs, *Where Art Thou*. It was the untrained artists' sole stepping stone into the world of art.

Seventy years later, young artists from the fields of graphic design and advertising continue to trod a path similar to Husain's—the only difference being that their work is not paid in annas, but lakhs.

Narendra Yadav, 44, for instance, is an adman with the Lintas, who has now also turned artist. He has made installations that are priced between Rs 1.75 and 7 lakh. They were on display at his first solo show, *Pavlov's God*, held this February at Abhay Maskara's gallery, The Warehouse in Mumbai. "I have to dumb things down in advertising. My philosophical musings could only be realised in fine arts," he says. His installations drew compliments from collectors who said that for a first-time artist, his works moved beyond expectations though critics thought his ideas weren't lucid enough.

One installation of his has fiberglass men covered with sheets, lying next to a radio—thus alluding to the pervasiveness of media rhetoric. Another work shows five foetuses—in different stages of growth—within a shining orb. It comments on human mortality and the cosmic universe that indirectly controls it. His entire show is a comment on technology, religion and spirituality—subjects which Yadav says he can't explore in advertising.

Then, there's 35-year-old Aditya Pande who brings his sensibilities as an applied arts student to the canvas. Pande believes his "tangled web of synthetic work could only gain full maturity in the realm of fine art". He contrasts glossy enamel paint against a powdery finish of ink-jet print and throws in collage elements too. His works—which are a collusion of painting, print-making, graphic design and

draftsmanship—hover around the Rs 9.5 lakh tag.

With a solo at the Chatterjee & Lal Gallery in Mumbai, he has confirmed his presence on the art scene. Pande is now in London where his solo is on at the Alexia Goethe Gallery there.

Mortimer Chatterjee of Chatterjee & Lal Gallery thinks the National Institute of Design (NID) in Ahmedabad—where Pande has studied—is bettering traditional art institutes. "I think you're going to see a whole generation of NID artists taking over the sensibilities and tastes of art galleries and collectors. The NID gives its students exposure to different kinds of art such as cinema and their courses are more professional than the curriculum at Baroda's Maharaja Sayajirao University or Santiniketan in Kolkata," he says.

Chatterjee's words find resonance with 33-year-old Jiten Thukral from Jalandhar and Sumit Tagra, 30, from Delhi—both of whom operate under the brand name Thukral & Tagra. Their tongue-in-cheek artwork—that are punned on advertising imagery—are priced between Rs 60 and 80 lakh. Tagra did his post-graduation from NID after studying at the Delhi Collage of Art

(DCA) in New Delhi—the same place where Thukral did his Masters.

Their works draw as much from fashion and advertising as from the history of painting. "Thukral and Tagra create complex puzzles of symbols and styles, paintings that are both science-fiction and journalistic reportage," says Peter Nagy of Delhi's Nature Morte gallery.

That graphic artists and admen are taking the plunge into fine arts has established itself as a trend. Besides seasoned names like Thukral & Tagra, Yadav or Prashant Miranda, there is a new wave of young and upcoming artists—Udisha Kumar whose May solo at Zenzi in Mumbai saw a good response and Gynelle Alves who took a leaf out of Mario Miranda's book and decided to hold a solo of her comic strip characters that were once featured in a popular tabloid in Mumbai. ♦

STUDENTS FROM THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF DESIGN ARE BEST PLACED TO MAKE THE CROSSOVER, SAY EXPERTS