

# THE 'UDAY' OF CONTEMPORARY INDIAN ART



UDAYRAJ GADNIS: Reaching across the world with art

By A Staff Writer

"**T**O the painter Udayraj Gadnis' canvases the sense of colour, light and texture come riding on celestial wings of conviction... Uniquely, the sensuous and spiritual are genuinely integrated, and what is natural light for academic painters becomes a shining, mystic light for Udayraj's palette. Blessed thus with a worshipped state of mind, Udayraj succeeds in attaining a state of divine serenity on canvas," wrote the renown writer and art/theatre critic Dnyaneshwar Nadkarni of contemporary Indian art's most promising painter.

All perfectly true, no doubt, because Udayraj was recently honoured by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) with the Yuva Ratna Award for his "outstanding services, contributions and achievements". Mr. Vasant Sathé, president of the ICCR, while making the presentation in New

Delhi said of the young painter: "Udayraj will be the messiah of Indian contemporary art, to reach across to the world at large".

And as if to prove a point, tomorrow, at the Y. B. Chawan Art Gallery, Hafiz Contractor will inaugurate Udayraj's seventh show of paintings. Called "Vididhyasanam" (The Trance), it is show, to give art buffs a sneak preview, is "diematically simple, conceptual, complex... but not complicated". The painter's very words, not our own! With each of his six earlier held shows, Udayraj has delved deep into spirituality, discovering new planes. "Existence is an ever evolving mystery and Being is evolution for me; art can never solve these mysteries, it can only rejoice in them. Spirituality is extremely sensuous in its own way," he says.

The six earlier shows have dealt with simple themes: "Brahmand" (The Universe); "Parabrahama" (The Cosmos); "Sanathan" (The Eternal); "Purna" (The

Complete); "Divya" (The Divine) and "Dyuti Shrot" (The Luminous). Udayraj commands an unusual respect in the art world. Art connoisseurs and top interior designers wait patiently for his canvases, and people who have bought his works have even been known to change their interiors to feel the painting in totality.

A practising psychologist and painter, Udayraj uses his canvas as his medium to journey into the depths of existence, opening up life in its multitudinal forms and vibrant blend of colours. He has been asked, at his shows, to take

the paintings off the gallery walls, because critics find the colours proclaim a unique luminosity — a manifestation of brightness pouring out of the canvas — and wished to see if there was something hidden behind the canvases. To which he says, "I simply believe that the body is only a medium — divine forces intervene and your body gets charged and forms merge and emerge. Painting is a *tapasya* for me."

His philosophy towards life is deeply ingrained with the philosophy of his paintings, his being, his existence. "It cannot be separated. I sometimes look up in wonder and ask the Lord the cause of his entire creation... and



SATORI — The flowering of the conscious

I simply laugh! It may be as small as a grain of sand or as vast as the infinite cosmos," says Udayraj. Finding that his philosophy was way beyond our understanding, he went on to explain: "The mind can never grasp it and suddenly, its genesis is like one of those awakening visions which happen once in a lifetime — when the miraculous landscape of reality is lit up by a sudden flash of

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lightning, only to disappear again into the normal twilight world, where time stops and everything is intensified a thousand times and existence luminates in full ecstatic wonder. Only the soul can grasp these lone moments."

His work, critics have pointed out, has moved away from "the sacred geometry" to a style of his own. Udayraj explains, "It feels like it goes on from a beginningless to endless... like leaves falling from trees. New leaves appear, the old ones disappear, and again new ones appear to replace those that have fallen down. It is



SANTULANAM — The divine balance between life and death, between reality and unreality

constant change. But in the essence, nothing changes. Only on the periphery — only on the circumference — but never in the centre. The core is untouched and that's the crux of my Being and my work. There is no effort to establish an individual, distinct style."

He continues, "In my case the 'traditional' role of an artist in the creative process is totally reversed. I am vulnerable/receptive/passive... there is no question of my branching things the way I see them. I am no longer producing a

'work of art'. I am often asked whether I mentally visualise images before painting, or I first paint and then the philosophy flows. Now, how can I answer a question like that? The brush stroke and its meaning are integrated, like the drops of rain. Like inhaling and exhaling... Somewhere, somehow, everything that it has its own deep significance. There is no way of knowing this whole existence. It is unknowable, and that's its real beauty. Like my painting 'Surya' which has a deep, black centre. Isn't it amazing that even the sun is in darkness. If it was not surrounded by darkness, how would we see it?"

To which one critic has said, it may not be too presumptuous to suggest that the creative process of an artist like Udayraj parallels the creation of the universe, the separation of light from darkness, the emergence of form from the abyss, the breathing of life into form.

When he dropped by our office, clad in white *khadi dhoti-kurta*, to invite us for his new show, we asked Udayraj how it felt to receive a major recognition like the Yuva Ratna at such a young age (he is 26). To which he replied, "Well it is 99 per cent 'the divine grace' and one per cent 'immense hard work'."

An artist baring his soul on canvas, and seeking the truth through art.