

'I paint my feelings as I see them through nature'

LEEZA MENON

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SINCE she was 5, Shivani Dugar has been doing what she loves best. This Calcutta-born has kept to her father's advice to "follow her heart" by pursuing painting and, in the process, has had a successful career.

These days, her mixture of abstract expressionism and Indian modernist paintings is attracting many people to the RL Fine Arts gallery in Manhattan—from May 24 to June 23.

Dugar says her works are influenced in part by Indian abstract

painter, Vasudeo S. Gaitonde, but her "first love was Monet". Most of her works are oil on canvas paintings, but she also does printmaking such as etching and lithographs.

She says events in her personal life always have an effect on the works she produces, as is the case with all artists, but her love of nature and her passion for its conservation are the predominant themes in her works. Rocks and landscape play a considerable role in her pieces. In addition, "the sun has a fascinating element," she adds.

Therefore, she uses earth tones and bright reds and yellows. One painting entitled "Falling", an oil on ca-

vas piece with multiple shades of brown, is representative of rocks and earth, while the yellow flickering in the piece represents a spiritual element, Dugar explains.

Even though many of her paintings in the exhibition have similar color schemes and textures, "the way each canvas is divided is different and each has a separate glow."

Even though Dugar has always been interested in art, over time, she proved to have other talents as well. Dugar graduated from Georgetown University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration and was set on a path leading to a profession in investment banking, but decided to make a career out of painting.

Dugar says her parents were very supportive about the change. Her mother used to paint, but had to stop due to a back problem, but she always urged her to go for art lessons.

Dugar's first show was in Bangalore in 2003. "Everything was more representational then," she says. "If it was an alleyway I was painting, you could tell it was an alleyway; if it was a sun, you could tell it was a sun."

However, recently, her work has



Shivani Dugar

become more abstract. "In more realistic works, which show more of nature as you see it, there isn't as much of your personality," she explains. "Now I paint my feelings as I see them through nature."

In response to criticism of her works, Dugar says she does not

pay too much attention to it. "That's their perception, that's how they're reading the painting," she adds. "That's how some viewers like it, but the paintings speak for themselves."

Dugar says if she was forced to make the difficult decision between being a commercial success or a critical favorite, she would choose the latter. However, so far, response to the exhibition has been remarkably favorable. Two paintings in the collection have also been sold.

Peter Louis, RL Fine Arts gallery partner, says one customer was "constantly clamoring" to see more of Dugar's artwork after her first show in the gallery a year ago. This exhibition also attracted many new customers who were excited about this latest installment from the young artist, Louis adds.

Louis says the collection "grows

on you the more you look at the paintings." He says his favorite piece was "Summer Evening" because he "responded to its palate and composition and to the romance of it."

Dugar is one among many Indian artists whose works have been shown at RL Fine Arts since the gallery's opening in 2005. Past exhibitions were the colorful selected works of S.H. Raza, the acrylic paintings of Nikhileswar Baruah, and an exhibition called "A Slice of Art in India."

Dugar's works have appeared in exhibitions around the world at places such as Mumbai, Bangalore, Washington D.C. and New York. She said the audiences at all those locations were equally receptive to her work and have all been incredibly enthusiastic. Out of this particular collection, Dugar says, some patrons told her the paintings made them feel "very serene".

So, what's up next for Dugar? "We'll have to see," she says. For now, as the exhibition continues, she is hard at work in her Westchester studio. "I'm constantly experimenting with my artwork," she says.

As for any advice Dugar would offer aspiring artists, she says, all of them should paint what they want to. "Don't try to fit into what other people want or expect. "Just paint through your heart."

One of Dugar's paintings