

For all the women you are

Out of the barrel

The only Indian finalist in the Jack Daniel's worldwide art competition, Sheyna Baig combines art, spirituality and travelling with her inimitable zest for life. By **Purabi Shridhar**



Sheyna Baig saw a bunch of buttercup yellow butterflies perched on a rock suddenly burst into flight together.

The magical sight imprinted itself on the psyche of the nature loving artist. It was this very image, painted on a barrel, which catapulted her to the group of seven artists worldwide shortlisted for the Jack Daniel's Art competition.

"In my barrel, I strived to express the delight and feeling of timelessness that I felt then, the togetherness I felt with and within nature," says Sheyna, about the work that is on display at the Mumbai airport. "Being an Indian artist, I painted my lady in an Indian outfit with a bright orange *dupatta*. On the surface of the barrel, she is Indian, but from within—the inner side of the barrel—she is nature, part of the painted forest, trees, leaves and sky," she continues.

And for those who might raise a brow over artwork on barrels, Sheyna's retorts, "I enjoyed working on the barrel. My work is quite classical, but I also enjoy experimenting and playing with new ideas and mediums. It was a challenge, and I had to be innovative with my ideas. Actually, it

has inspired me to work more in a three-dimensional way in

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the future. As long as you put your heart and soul into your work and believe in what you do, there is nothing demeaning about it."

The international recognition, which

Sheyna considers

an honour, has also

convinced her that art is what she was meant to do. "I took to art from the age of three when my parents put a paint box in front of me to keep me quiet," says Sheyna, laughing.

A BOX OF PAINT

Sheyna credits her parents—former Indian cricketer Abbas Ali Baig and ▶

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social worker Veenu—for encouraging her passion. After schooling at Millfield School, Somerset, UK, Sheyna did a foundation course at the Chelsea School of Art, UK, followed by a bachelor's course in fine arts and English literature in St Martin's. However, her days in the UK were not just about art and literature. "I discovered London and cocktails! It was a lot of fun," she recalls.

In fact, Sheyna and her friends were once put on remission for not having done enough work. "So we stayed back and spent the night studying in the college. In the morning, when we were ready to go back, shower and return, we found we had been locked in! We had to jump over the big gate. My Japanese friend Mutsumi and I made it to the top of the gate but were too scared to jump down. Just then, a police car drove by—we must have looked like robbers. They stopped to look at us. We were so shocked that we forgot our fears and jumped down in a jiffy! They didn't think real robbers could have made up a story as bizarre as ours and kindly offered to drop us home!"

For someone back after studying at the prestigious St Martin's, she would have been expected take up art with

a flourish. Not Sheyna! Instead, she started working with kids. "When I came back from college, I wasn't ready to start working towards a show immediately. I felt many art classes were mundane and decided to start classes where I could share creativity with my students and enjoy it while we were at it. I invested in 12 tables and chairs and began with phone calls and letters to explain my idea. Those were incredibly happy times. My class and I went to the train museum, polo matches and Lodhi Gardens and learnt about shading, colour and perspective by drawing even our favourite shoe," says Sheyna, whose students at one time included her mom and friends.

However, it was not all just merry-making. Sheyna had a natural yearning in her to give back to the society. "I wanted to do something with my time. The art classes I took were for privileged kids, and I earned a going rate through those. As I started getting other freelance and design works, I started setting aside time for giving free art classes to kids who could not afford them. I worked with Hope, Butterflies and Saalam Baalak Trust and became

a founder member of Youthreach. I got back so much more than I gave."

Another major learning ground was the interaction with craftspeople. "My mother helped revive the amazing works of craftspeople from all over India. We had many artists walking in and out of our house, and I learnt patience, generosity and goodwill from them," recalls Sheyna.

NATURALLY INSPIRED

The artist in Sheyna, however, continued to find expression, and her debut show, Child Within, earned her a residency at the Columbus School of Art and Design, USA. "I was invited to their college as an artist-in-residence. I had never been to America before, so it was a very exciting and special time. I had to show my work to the students and speak about it. I was so nervous that I readily agreed to a shot of brandy," Sheyna remembers.

An ardent follower of Isha Yoga, Sheyna was always spiritually inclined. She gave the inclination a physical expression by travelling to Mount Kailash and Lake Mansarovar before working on her last solo show last year. In fact, Anantya—Beyond Any Boundary, her solo show, was inspired by her travels. "I painted the seas of Goa, Bali and Greece. Mostly, my recent journey with Sadhguru to Mount Kailash and Lake Mansarovar inspired me. I was in awe of the immense space, vibrant colours and varying textures of the magnificent Himalayan landscapes. I felt a sense of oneness—with nature, my fellow travellers and myself. This is what I was striving to express."

And it was Anantya that propelled her into the international league, participating in the Jack Daniel's worldwide competition—a long way, indeed, for someone who was given a paint box to keep quiet! ●

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TIMELESS ART

To really appreciate art and develop a love for it, the best beginning would be to look at works of some of the famous names. Here are some of Sheyna's favourite names.

Vincent Van Gogh: I love Van Gogh for the passion in his work.

Matisse: His compositions seem to come alive, dancing.

Amrita Shergil: I love her for her Indianness.

Monet and Manet: Their space and colours interconnect all forms.

Madhav Satwalekar: His works have the essence of India and yet are so universal in spirit.



FEMINA north



Women we love

In this issue of *Femina north*, **Sheyna Baig** (above), the only Indian finalist in the Jack Daniel's worldwide art competition, talks about her passion for arts in *For all the women you are*. In *Just passing*, we catch up with **Katrina Kaif** who talks about being a brand ambassador. And finally, our *Model of the fortnight*, **Sheena Chohan** (right).