

IT'S SHOWTIME!

# NAWAZ SINGHANIA

**A FITNESS PURVEYOR AND PIONEER, A YUMMY MUMMY TWICE OVER, AND AN ARTIST CONSTANTLY FINDING NEW MODES OF EXPERIMENT, HELLO! GETS CHATTING WITH A SINGHANIA DAUGHTER-IN-LAW WHO WALKS HER OWN TALK**

**S**he may appear to be petite and surprise you with her little-girl voice, but make no mistake. Nawaz Singhania wields the mechanics of her busy universe with power and punch. There is a sense of precision about her – she knows what she wants, has her facts crystal clear, and if she appears to multi-task with aplomb, it's because she respects time – her's and yours.

mum the second time around, which actually meant a good nine-month sabbatical from the paintbrush. "I wasn't allowed to work with paint because inhaling the fumes are not good for a growing foetus. I was not even allowed to work with dry substances like charcoal, because the dust can also be ingested," she explains. Nysa is now two, so her new collection of paintings – a series of portraits of Hollywood celebrities – has been a return of sorts to an activity she clearly finds nourishing. "I have always been attracted to faces... the spaces between eyes, nose, mouth, how they actually come about... like the space between two eyes will be the space of an eye, and it's fascinating how each one of these proportions slightly changes with each face and makes every one an individual. It has always really fascinated me, and when it comes to faces you can't be 99 per cent right. You can't say this portrait is 99 per cent right, it looks pretty much like him or her. It has to be immediate recognition. A 100 per cent, or it's worth nothing. That's a huge challenge. I really wanted to be upto that challenge... really wanted to grow and take myself to that level."

One recalls talking to many eminent artists who claimed that with abstracts being the dominant mode of expression, the core skills of drawing and sketching had taken a backseat, rendering a lot of average talent 'popular' and commercially successful. Nawaz's words concur: "It's important to do a lot of portraits because that's what really develops you as an artist, to get to the core of your craft, then it's important. Portraiture helps strengthen your skills in terms of sketching, colouring, blending. I have also taken on a lot of different styles in this collection. You know, one is always experimenting. So if you see the Al Pacino, or the Elvis, or Bill Crosby – I have experimented with different styles for each! *The Godfather* image of Al Pacino has a more rough, impressionistic feel but the important thing is even if you are squinting in the dark or looking at it from afar, you can tell just by the way he is sitting and his expression, that it's *The Godfather*! The idea was to enter their psyche, then capture that expression, that essence of the celebrity," shares Nawaz, who opens her show at the Raymonds store in Breach Candy, Mumbai, on the fifth of this month.

In a nation which saw hundreds of widely celebrated artists and sculptors attempt visual interpretations of the Big B on his 70<sup>th</sup>, ►

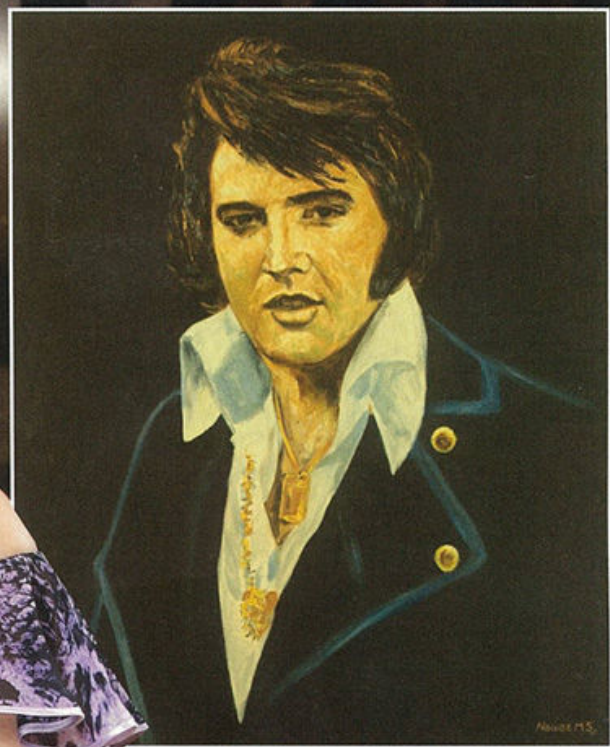


Marilyn Monroe, in mixed media, (acrylic base, oil layers), one of the paintings featuring in her show this month, with the theme, *Portrait Study of Well Known Personalities*

A few years ago when she was going to showcase her collection of paintings titled, *Body Art*, one had asked her if she had a disciplined approach to her work, or if she just followed her heart? Her answer was, "Both. You totally follow your heart, you totally go with your emotions, you totally go with your sensibilities with what works, what doesn't work, but it's not chaotic, you work with a system. Time is always very tight, so I don't have the luxury of working as per my mood, like a lot of artists do. So mood or not, I will have slotted in chunks of time to be able to paint, and I try to work within those chunks."

The last few years saw her become a



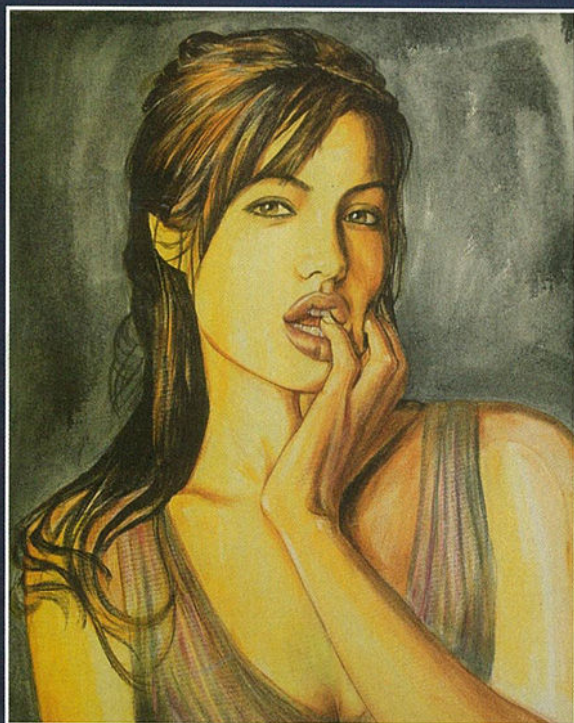


A portrait of Elvis Presley

**'It's like freezing a smile for the camera... if you hold your painting impulses in for too long it kind of fritters away... so I found a clever device where I did the first coat in acrylic, because it dries right away, and then the top layers in oil because then it can take as long as it wants to dry'**



**'Gautam is very fair, very equal to both the girls... he veers a little on the side of the younger one right now, keeps insisting it's because she's younger and a baby that's why, so I am kind of watching like a hawk to make sure it's just that...' (laughs)**



Angelina Jolie with a water colour effect; "when I want to create a water colour effect, I use acrylics," shares Nawaz. Her portrait of Al Pacino as *The Godfather* (below) has an almost Van Goghish Impressionistic style, and she agrees that she has attempted variations in her approach across the 31 canvases



one can't help but ask Nawaz how or why no Indian icon has made it to her collection. She says it's due to the fact that many stars took refuge in the Singhanian home during their struggling days, and it now felt a bit odd to canonise them on canvas. That, and perhaps many of the movie world's stunners are close friends which made it possibly hard to objectify them. "Juhi (Chawla) just lost her brother two days ago," shares Nawaz, when one tells her one is going to watch *Gulab Gang*.

It must surely be a whirlwind life for Nawaz, given she wears many hats on an average day. To many in Mumbai, she is synonymous with her Body Art studios, where she has over the years pioneered many fitness routines. Says she, "Everyday is different. There's nothing boring, stale, unexciting. I might be up from six o'clock, teaching classes at my studios, I might be painting, or doing something for my own self in terms of fitness. There are times I won't be up so early because of a late night, catching up with stuff, meeting deadlines. I write quite a lot in terms of fitness, and so am constantly meeting a deadline. It's just a lot of things happen. I master train all the trainers. We have our managers at the top end but I still look into everything. In fact this morning I had a 7.30am class which I was supposed to be teaching, but my father had a major lung problem and I had to rush him to the doc. So I delegated that class."

Ask her the secret to surviving as a corporate-wife trying to be taken seriously as an artist, and she says, "I think being a little thick, when you need to be thick, is important. There are times when people can be a bit nasty, whatever, and you need to know when to be thick, when to give it back. And of course, a bad memory is a wonderful thing!" she laughs out loud. "You may not forgive, (I am a Scorpio), you may forget... but in my case it's more like I will get even, even 40 years later (laughs uproariously!)" By and large, she feels, if you dwell in negative thoughts, you attract negative events and people. "It's the law of the Universe. Like attracts like. Whatever you are, you attract that. Stay light, stay happy, stay positive, stay young..."

And if her plate were not full enough already, Nawaz is also exploring a long-term position in the Singhanian family ventures. "At the moment I have just gone through a process of understanding various aspects of the family business; it's very expansive, very diverse, and I am finding my role in it at the moment, so yes, much remains to be seen still."

In the meanwhile, she greatly enjoys being Mrs Singhanian, confessing that "Gautam is a great dad, and very generous in spirit. He's fantastic in the

way he is always making time to be with the girls, hanging out with them, travelling with them. And even if he is around working he will make sure to have them in his orbit... he's a very supportive guy... I mean stupid things that shouldn't matter to him, don't matter to him. Often husbands put a lot of pressure on kids or wives for little things. But he is very relaxed that way, often understanding things without needing any explanations." Ask her for a 'story' that demonstrates this, and she laughs, "I can think of stories which I shouldn't be sharing. Ok, for example, the kids are on holidays by the weekend - Niharika finishes her exams, she has holidays, and so we are travelling. Gautam has his YPO forum in Singapore, so we were to join him there Sunday onwards and then go forward to other places. Just days ago he saw my Mick Jagger painting - which I have just done this week in charcoal - he saw it and said, 'Ah.. I am going to see him on Saturday night... I am going for the Rolling Stones concert in Singapore!' And I told him, 'How can you not tell me? I am coming there Sunday! I would have come a day earlier...'

So he said, 'then come!'

And then I said 'But I am not allowed, it's a guy forum... nobody else is allowed in.' And he said 'no I will get you in...' And he put me on speaker phone with a forum guy and that was clever because they couldn't say no to me on speaker phone! He told his colleague 'ok my wife is on speaker'... and the guy said 'Gautam you did a really sly thing, we can't say no to her now!' And I said 'I won't bother you guys. Won't even say Hi to you, I just want to come for the concert...' So you see, my husband is just sweet, just nice that way..." she smiles, happily.

Little wonder her strength and inspiration seem to be rooted in three things - the family, exotic excursions with generous helpings of nature-gazing, and of course, travel in general. And don't be fooled. She can be her harshest critic. "I had originally started on a completely different series, on a 'spiritual series, I started developing that, and I did a lot of work on it, at least 12-15 canvases done... and then I decided I hated it and didn't want to do it, so I junked the whole lot... that happens... you know sometimes it just comes to you like a lightning bolt, and it's there, and you know this is it, sometimes it can take a while and sometimes it can take really long. You know I don't like any interference at that point from anybody else. I am very clear what works for me, what doesn't work for me, it's kind of a private process." We can truly imagine! ■

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