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CREATIVE MINDS

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Vandana Bhargava

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Ms. Vandana Bhargava, Veteran Jewellery Designer and Art Curator

■ COVER STORY ■

Galleria VSB

A Treasure House of Indian Heritage

By ICM Network

Any talk, discussion or debate on Indian heritage and culture cannot overlook the signal contribution made by veteran jewellery designer, Ms. Vandana Bhargava who is famed for her conservation of Indian heritage. Vandana, a professional jewellery designer, who has designed some of the

most exquisite jewellery pieces, is extremely passionate about Indian Art and Culture. In fact, 'Heritage Collection' adorns her 'Signature Jewels' creations. Heritage Jewels, which she has so painstakingly collected from across India and restored for public display (and not for sale) and her new Heritage Collection

which she designs herself inspired by mythological themes, patterns and motifs of old heritage jewels, are simply captivating.

Vandana remains quite concerned at the fast disappearing traditional Indian arts and crafts. She is saddened that commercial considerations



“ Regal Attitude” Filigree Clutch in Gold
by Vandana Bhargava



“ Regal Attitude” Filigree Clutch in Silver
by Vandana Bhargava

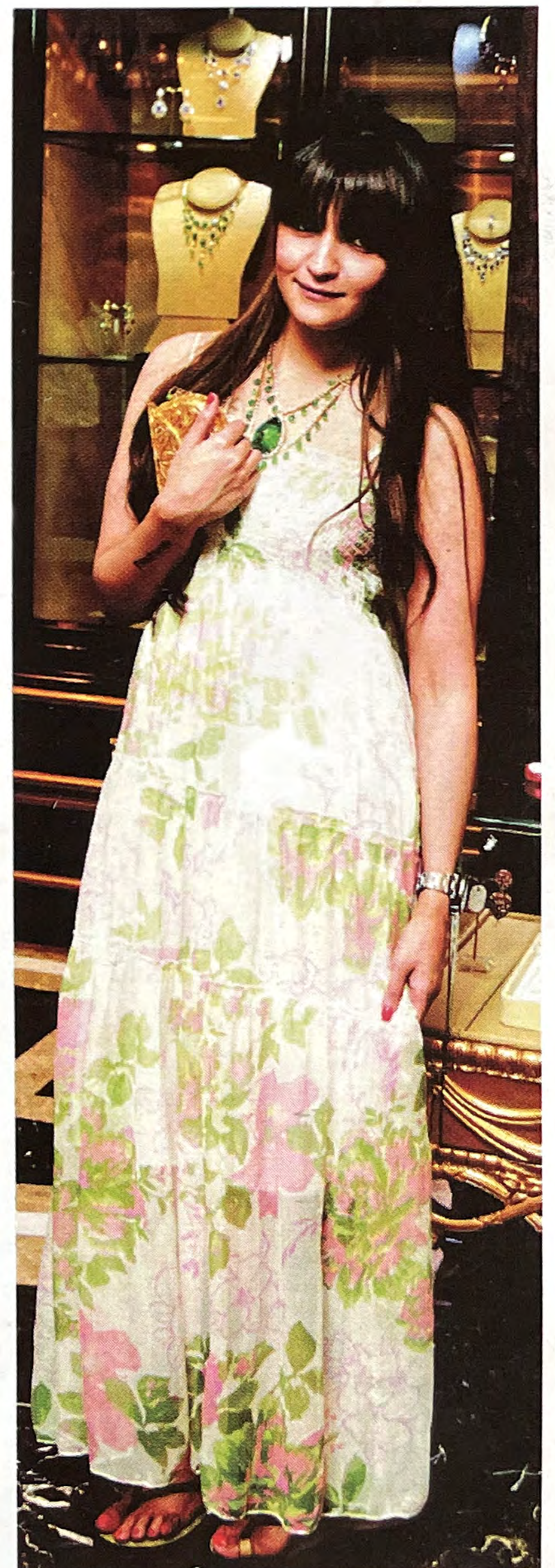
have relegated our rich traditional forms of art and jewellery, evolved over thousands of years, to the background and fears that our future generations may not even realise or recognise our rich traditions if the trend is not reversed. Over the last two decades, she has devoted herself to popularising traditional Indian jewellery by providing her design inputs for various forms of traditional Indian jewellery having their origin in various parts of India. Her design inputs for Kundan jewellery, filigree works, exclusive gold jewellery with motifs and carvings have helped the master craftsmen to produce some mesmerizing jewels that are light and wearable, affordable and more importantly, elegant. Her open setting jewellery embedded with sculpted and carved rare gemstones reminds us of the incredible skills of our traditional craftsmen of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. Her ‘Signature Jewels’, styled ‘Heritage Collection’, ‘Royal Collection’ and ‘Cocktail Collection’, are on display and sale at her flagship store, White & Yellow, at Square One Mall, C-2, District Centre, Saket, New Delhi.

In her efforts to preserve and promote our rich Indian

heritage, Vandana made an exclusive addition to her line of



Varun Bhargava, Jewellery Designer and Art Collector



Swati Bhargava, Fashion Designer and Art Collector

Pattachitra depicting 'Tree of Life' by Kailash Chandra Meher, 28"X75", natural colours on silk



Signature Jewels, limited addition of Signature Clutches titled 'Regal Attitude' in 2015. These were inspired by the wealth of India's heritage and she designed and created Regal Clutches in silver and gold in different shapes and sizes using the filigree technique. Every Regal Clutch is one of its kind and unique with elaborate and delicate spider web work. Vandana adds that filigree jewellery is an ancient form of jewellery being practised in India for over a thousand years. Unfortunately, today this ancient form is being practised in only two centres in India - Cuttack in Odisha and Karimnagar in Andhra Pradesh and even in these centres the craft is fast declining. According to her, many reasons could be attributed to this trend, including lack of initiative by prominent jewellers to promote and sell these products, lack of innovative designs, financial exploitation of the poor artisans and poor finishing and marketing of filigree products. Her team closely worked with the craftsmen for over a year in training the traditional craftsmen on various motifs with flower/leaf themes and modern techniques of finishing to impart elegance to the final product. She expresses her deep satisfaction on her efforts aimed at reviving India's age old glamorous craft and providing livelihood to the families of filigree craftsmen by ensuring a readily available market for their products.

While designing jewellery is her profession, Vandana is extremely passionate about art.

She has her gallery, Galleria VSB at Square One Mall, Saket running for over a decade now. The Gallery boasts of possessing some rare old works of traditional Indian art and old master works. Galleria VSB regularly holds art camps, art workshops and discussions with prominent Indian artists and maintains a delicate balance of contemporary and modern art and traditional Indian art by contemporary artists. She states that traditional Indian art reflects our self-esteem and reminds us of the strict discipline, precision and effort practised by our master craftsmen to create these masterpieces. She proudly states that half of her energy is devoted to conserving and promoting our heritage art and the rest to promoting contemporary and modern art.

Vandana is ably assisted by her young children – Swati and Varun Bhargava, both professional designers themselves and all the three are intensely involved in curating art. The rich, diverse collection of Indian heritage art, at Galleria VSB, includes some glorious old works of Pattachitra, Thanjavur paintings, Pichhwais, Nathdwara paintings, rare oleographs and alluring Calendar art. These works just leave you spellbound. One wonders at the incredible skills, creativity and precision possessed by the artists who painted these master works to near perfection.

Over the last decade, Galleria VSB has collected and restored some of the finest old master works of Pattachitra, perhaps the oldest traditional Indian Art, being practiced for



Pattachitra depicting 'Tree of Life' by Kailash Chandra Meher, 28"X75", natural colours on silk



Pattachitra depicting Shree Jagannath , Devi Subhadra and Shree Balabhadra by Kailash Chandra Meher, 36"X48", natural colours on silk



Pattachitra depicting Lord Shiva by Gajendra Prasad Sahu, 36"x60", natural colours on silk

over a thousand years. Adding to its collection of restored old Pattachitras, Galleria VSB has roped in some of the best known contemporary artists from Odisha and West Bengal to work on Pattachitras. As Vandana says, Pattachitras are magical works of art, appreciated by art lovers across the globe for their simple, elegant style, fine lines and space usage, and natural colours. Most of the old Pattachitras are based on Hindu Mythology, Bhagabat and Ramayana tales, religious stories and folk lore and are largely inspired by Shri Jagannath, Vaishnava and Shaiva Sects. However, contemporary



Pattachitra depicting Radha Krishna by Gajendra Prasad Sahu, 44"x34", natural colours on silk



Old Tanjore Painting (Restored) depicting Goddess Lakshmi , 36"x48", Natural colours and gems on wooden plank



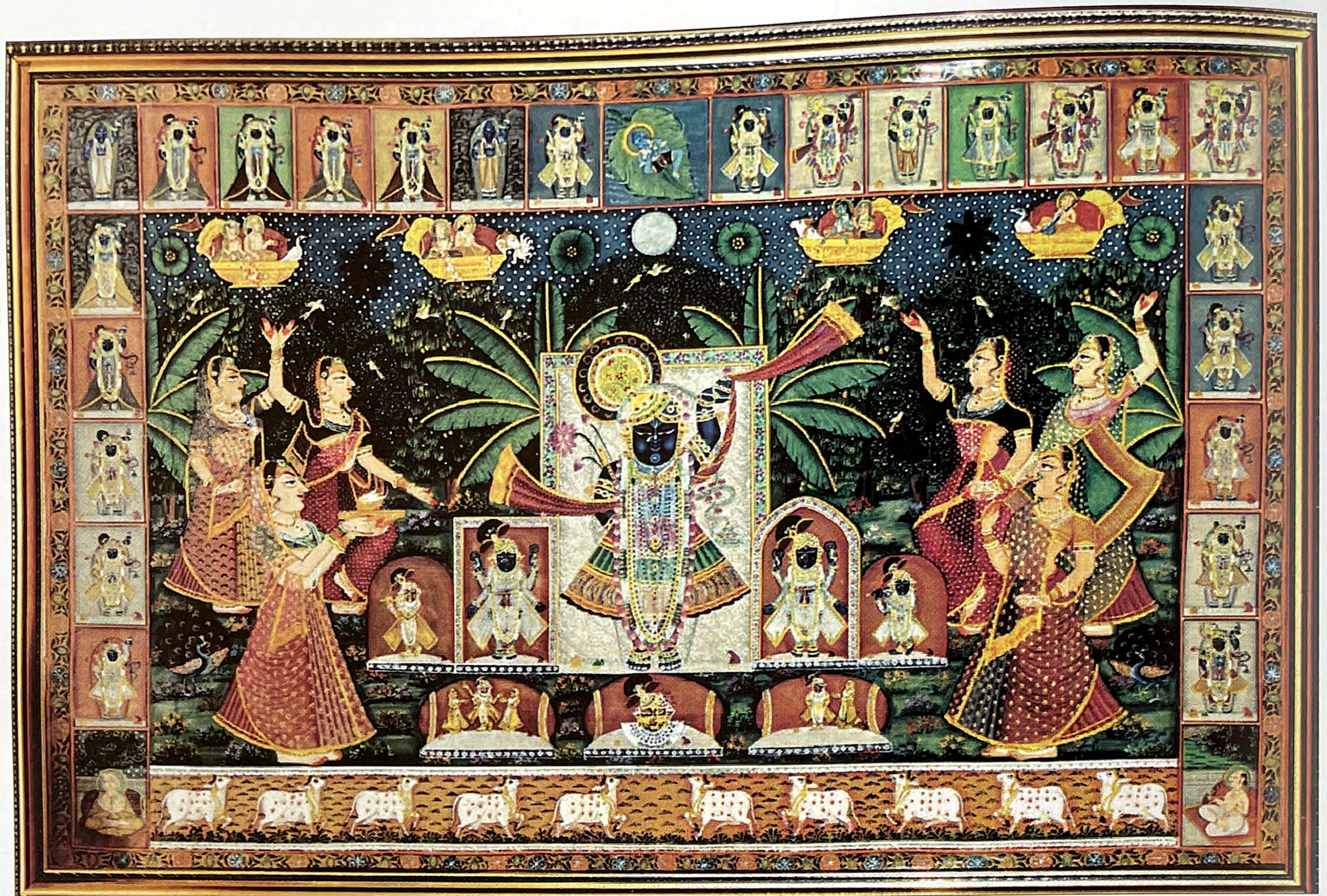
Old Thanjavur Painting (Restored) depicting Lord Ram's Durbar, 36"x48", natural colours and gems on wooden plank

Pattachitra works are also experimenting with new themes depicting religious stories, individual paintings of gods and goddesses and social processions. Be it our old Pattachitras or the contemporary ones, they retain their glamour. These paintings, done on silk or canvas with rich colour applications, portrayals of simple themes with creative motifs and designs, are simply enthralling.

Another fascinating collection at Galleria VSB deserving a specific mention comprises rare and classic Thanjavur paintings. Curators Vandana, Swati and Varun enthusiastically reveal the efforts and time devoted by the Gallery to procure these rare old Thanjavur works framed in solid rose wood. Each Thanjavur paintings along with the frame weighs between 50 to 100 kgs, comprising the weight of the wooden plank on which the paintings have been done along with the weight of the frame. A simple look at these works generates an oomph in you. Vandana adds that these rare Thanjavur paintings when procured carried a lot of dust and faded colours at



Old Thanjavur Painting (Restored) depicting Nataraja Flanked by Sivagami, 36"x48", natural colours and gems on wooden plank



Old Pichwai (restored), 70"x47", vegetable/ mineral colours on traditional cloth

many places and Galleria VSB had to hire some very professional restorers to restore these works to the best state possible. These old Thanjavur paintings are exclusive collections of the Gallery and are meant only for display and not for sale, for the benefit of our future generations.

Swati adds that the old Thanjavur paintings, done on wooden planks with rich and vivid colours, overlaid with glittering gold foil and inlay of semi-precious and in some cases precious gems, were primarily done on religious subjects and holy places including gods, goddesses and saints of all religions, including Hindu, Jain, Sikh and Muslim and occasional portraits. However, the most prominent subject in these paintings centred around Hindu gods and goddesses. She expresses her happiness that Thanjavur paintings have continued to survive even in modern times and continue to be in demand as souvenirs for festive occasions, or as colourful pieces of art to decorate walls and the tradition continues.

Rare old Pichhwais from Nathdwara is yet another entrancing collection at Galleria VSB. This form of art is fast declining since it is extremely difficult to make Pichhwais and the work is very intricate and time consuming. Pichwai literally mean a backdrop. However, for the artists of the holy town of Nathdwara in Rajasthan, these have remained a form of art,



Old Pichwai (restored), 45"x68", vegetable/ mineral colours on traditional cloth



Old Pichwai (restored), 43"x75", vegetable/ mineral colours on traditional cloth



Lord Shree Jagannath by Pradosh Swain, Master Key, 48"x48", Oil on Canvas

involving incredible skills and imagination. Pichhwai mainly depicts Lord Shri Nath in different motifs, attire, body postures, settings and seasons, and invariably has a devotional theme around Lord Krishna. Pichhwai is basically a miniature form of painting and the artists aim to narrate tales of Krishna through these paintings. Being practised in Nathdwara in

Rajasthan since the last few centuries, Pichhwais are largely a group effort and many skilful painters execute the work together under supervision of the master artist. Vandana mentions that these paintings are always in demand, especially among the rich and the affluent primarily for their association with divinity and opulence. These have always been the preserve of a

few as the paintings have always been expensive on account of their intricacies and the length of time taken to paint these. Unfortunately, only a handful of original Pichhwai artists exist in Nathdwara town and the original Pichhwai work involving natural colours is fast disappearing. Today, newer cheaper forms of embossed art with chemical colours is flooding the market,



Lord Shree Jagannath by Manash Ranjan Jena, 48"x48", Acrylic on Canvas

which poses a major challenge for the original Pichhwai artists.

Galleria VSB has recently embarked on another great mission of spreading Lord Shri Jagannath Culture. The Lord Jagannath Temple at Puri is one of the four Dhams of the Hindus and the Rath Yatra of the Lord which happens every year in Puri, and across India and the globe, is world famous. The

curators of the Gallery, Vandana, Swati and Varun, have decided to bring out a Coffee Table Book on Lord Shri Jagannath for the benefit of the devotees across the world. Galleria VSB is presently engaged in taking on an indepth research based on the Skanda Purana, Madala Panji and other scriptures to trace the origin of the Lord, His bhogas, His rituals and jatras in a year

and innumerable bhesas of the Lord. Galleria VSB has made a team of prominent Odia artists to depict the origin of the Lord and major events associated with Lord Shri Jagannath for the benefit of one and all. Indeed this is a commendable effort being put in by the Gallery to spread Indian culture across the globe. ■