

A Second LIFE

PROFESSIONALS
FROM VARIOUS
FIELDS ARE
MAKING THEIR
MARK IN THE ART
WORLD. WITHOUT
EVER ATTENDING
AN ART COLLEGE,
THEY EXIST
ALONGSIDE
FULL-TIME
ARTISTS

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BOHEMIAN French painter Paul Gauguin began his life as a doctor, and French Post-Impressionist artist Henri Rousseau was a tax collector. In India, Bhupen Khakhar, one of the country's first openly gay artists, began his professional life as an accountant, while Mumbai-based contemporary artist Sudhir Patwardhan, whose compelling solo show was recently put up at Lalit Kala Akademi, was a radiologist till he retired a year ago. Pursuing their passion alongside professional commitments, several prominent artists have, over the years, created an oeuvre which is different from the artwork of full-time artists like Atul Dodiya or Subodh Gupta.

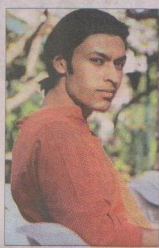
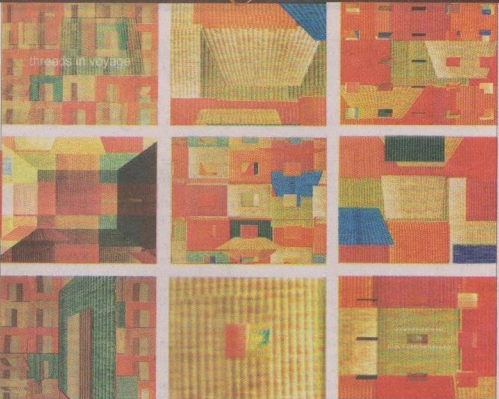
Gauguin, Rousseau, Khakhar or Patwardhan never attended an art acad-



emy, and created their own styles through trial and error even as they strove to crack the glass ceiling of intellectual art. Some of them let their varied professions feed their art — Patwardhan's medical practice gave him an added empathy for the working class, some of whom were his patients, while Khakhar's mundane life as an accountant marked his humorous portraits of working class men involved in unlikely risqué encounters.

Not everybody is convinced of the importance of this group that exists alongside full-time artists. "There are many hobbyists who do decorative pictures; but that is not art that I would take seriously. For me, a painter must have a distinctive visual language. A person can excel in only one field, either their profession or their art. After retiring, however, he or she can concentrate more on art," says Renu Modi of Gallery Espace.

Last month, the director of the National Gallery of Modern Art, Rajeev Lochan, inaugurated an exhibition of paintings by Indian diplomat Abhay Kumar at the Russian Centre of Science and Culture in Delhi. The exhibition was titled 'We Have Come Far', and addressed issues relating to the environment and spirituality. A few weeks earlier, Chief Minister Sheila Dixit did the



honours for civil services officer Sudha Pillai who showed her paintings on the lawns of a friend's bungalow.

"Being a diplomat feeds into my artwork because I travel a lot and that makes me aware of global issues that get channelled into my works," says Kumar, whose paintings lean toward abstraction while trying to capture the cosmic beauty of the

earth through geometric forms and colours. "I'm also a poet and a writer and I feel all these aspects of my life work together in a synergistic way," says Kumar, who has also displayed his works in Paris and St Petersburg

(Clockwise from above) **Animated Tapestry** by **Tilak Samarawickrema**; **Revanta Sarabhai**; **Abhay Kumar**; an image from **Kumar's** exhibition; **Samarawickrema**

In April, Gallery Art.Motif hosted an exhibition of tapestries and wall hangings by Sri Lankan architect Tilak Samarawickrema. Titled 'Contemporary Woven Art', the exhibition displayed Samarawickrema's interpretation of traditional Sinhalese weaving work with the contemporary twist of the Bauhaus design flair. "My work as an architect informs much of my design sensibility as an artist since I'm more inclined toward geometry and symmetry," he says Samarawickrema.

While visual arts like painting and sculpture require training and skill, new media projects are making it possible for many younger "artists" like Ahmedabad-based classical and contemporary dancer Revanta Sarabhai to indulge in experimental video art. His first project is a multimedia performance piece on long-distance relationships. "I want to use the webcam as my tool to convey the challenges that couples face when separated by time, distance and life," says Sarabhai.