



COLOUR ME BRIGHT:  
Marion Colomer, doing  
what she loves  
— best — painting achievers

# Painting the Indian party

French artist Marion Colomer lives in Delhi and paints society's high-fliers, because she feels that India is about more than just pictures of 'village people'

There's a constant intermingling of traditional values and modernity... Because Indian art has retained those values, it's monetary value will keep going up



Alyssa Padmanabhan, painted and embroidered

SIEMENS ARTS  
THRU NEW DELHI

French artist Marion Colomer's studio in her home in a quiet, tree-lined South Delhi colony is full of the colorful chaos of an artist's workshop. Her paintings are rolled up and propped

up in a corner window partition that's been painted green. The walls also feature Indian people — Raja Patsoli, Mufikha Kalyani, Aiyaz Padmanabhan, designer Ravi Gargi and Ajaib Singh's paintings. It's not that Marion is French. The pretty 25-year-old has been living in India for the better part of three years, and says she only leaves Delhi for Paris for a few months in the summer because she goes back to visit her family.

"Europe usually thinks of India in terms of just clichés," she explains. "It's either the Maharaja and the elephant, or it's the slum street kids. I first came here in 2003 with my class in my institute in France to study cinema painting — those who paint posters for Hindi films, and then I came back the next year for a workshop, because I couldn't make up my mind whether I hated India or I loved it. In 2006, again, I returned to do portraits of some members of my family. Although in they have visited here in India, they'll ask you if you've had to deal with the widespread poverty, or they'll think of it in terms of the maharaja, but India is not like that, I discovered. I've spent three years here, and sometimes I think that I'm ignorant about the place as I was when I first arrived."

Marion says she didn't want to paint an impoverished picture of the country. "I'm not interested in showing pictures of the village people," she says. "For my subject, I choose Indians who've achieved something, who've done something for society, people recognise them." Of course, the village pictures are also images of India, but there are already many artists presenting that side of the country. I want to present the people who are on the

point of confidence between tradition and modernity in India. In my own expression, modern India — people like Nawab Patsoli, Aiyaz Padmanabhan, people who've worked and doing well in their respective fields. That's not like Marion has no contact with the other India. She gets her paintings commissioned, and she says that even the workers who do that understand an her paintings, who might not be well-off, recognise the subjects of her paintings, identify with them and feel proud that they get to work on their portraits.

She emphasizes that she doesn't paint for just a French or Indian audience. "My work is for everyone," she says. "In France, I used to show that I'm working with a good balance of people — the ones whom I paint, and the workers who understand my paintings. I use elements from the Indian art tradition, but the right motifs were traditional painting, brass patterns, and elements from the western tradition. I do their portraits in the traditional western way. My whole point is to build bridges — a communication between the two styles is important. That's why I paint in Paris. It's meant to be symbolic of the many layers in society, art and life."

She says that her perception of India has changed completely since she came here. "Of course, I was reading up on it already, so I wasn't that badly off, but it's so different from the cliché. There's a constant intermingling of traditional values and modernity. And it's important to preserve those values, not just as life, but as art," because Indian art has retained those values, she says, its monetary value will keep going up. "Indian art sells a lot more in India," she explains. "But many western artists can get into Indian galleries. The stories that Indian art tells are more familiar to the Indian buyer. It's traditional art, nourished by influences within the culture. It doesn't take too many risks."

Coming to India for someone who lives no one here was a risk, she agrees, but one worth taking. "Of course, it's tough, but no other country makes me need to paint everyday," she says. "Am here and everything I see around me makes me want to sketch it. It's like a proper love-hate relationship."



Marion's sketch of Mansoor Ali Khan Pataudi



Genarav Gupta, captured

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**Painting the Indian party**

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Artist Marion Colomer's studio in her home in a quiet, tree-lined South [Delhi](#) colony is full of the colourful chaos of an artist's surroundings.



Marion Colomer

Her [paintings](#) lie rolled up and propped next to a carved wooden partition that's been painted green. The works also feature Indian people – Tiger Pataudi, Mallika Sarabhai, Alyque Padamsee, designers like Gaurav Gupta and Abu Jani-Sandeep Khosla... It's just that Marion is French. The pretty 25-year-old has been living in India for the better part of three years, and says she only leaves Delhi for Paris for a few months in the summer because she goes back to meet her family.

"Europe usually thinks of India in terms of two clichés," she explains. "It's either the maharaja and the elephants, or it's the starving street kids."

I first came here in 2003 with my class in my institute in [France](#) to study cinema painters – those who paint posters for Hindi films, and then I came back the next year for a workshop, because I couldn't make up my mind whether I hated India or I loved it. In 2006, again, I returned to do portraits of some members of the royalty. Abroad, if they hear you've been to India, they'll ask you if you've had to deal with the widespread poverty, or they'll think of it in terms of the maharajas. But India is not like that, I discovered. I've spent three years here, and sometimes I think that I'm as ignorant about the place as I was when I first arrived."

Marion says she didn't want to paint an impoverished picture of the country. "I'm not interested in showing pictures of the village people," she says. "For my subjects, I choose Indian icons who've achieved something, who've done something for society, people recognise them... Of course, the village pictures are also images of India, but there are already many artists presenting that side of the country. I want to present the people who are on the point of confluence between tradition and modernity in India. To me, they represent modern India – people like Nawab Pataudi, Alyque, Piyush Pandey... people who're working and doing well in their respective fields." But it's not like Marion has no contact with the other India. She gets her paintings embroidered, and she says that even the workers who do that [embroidery](#) on her paintings, who might not be well off, recognise the subjects of her paintings, identify with them and feel proud that they get to work on their portraits. She emphasises that she doesn't paint for just a French or Indian audience. "My works are for everyone," she says.

"In France, I want to show that I'm working with a good balance of people – the strata whom I paint, and the workers who embroider my paintings. I use elements from the Indian art tradition, like the court motifs from miniature painting, henna patterns, and elements from the western tradition – I do their portraits in the traditional western way. My whole point is to build bridges – a communication between the two styles is important. That's why I paint in layers. It's meant to be symbolic of the many layers in society, art and life."

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