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Marion Colomer

Building bridges with brushes

■ Parbina Rashid

Given a choice, Marion Colomer would rather paint than travel long distances to address huge gatherings or meet the Press. But then, when duty calls, she would not hesitate even for a moment to shake off that shy mantle of hers, and get into action. For, this 25-year-old French artist's purpose in life is not just to be a good artist but also build a cultural bridge between India and her own country, which she has been doing for the past three years.

This period has brought about quite a change in Marion's life, both on the personal front and professional. "India happened just on an impulse," says Marion, a little tired after her five hours' drive from Delhi and then getting things organised for a lecture-cum-slide show at the Government Museum and Art Gallery auditorium on her work and her perception of Indian and French art. We catch her at Alliance Francaise de Chandigarh -36.

Marion's knowledge of India was based on the usual beggars and snake charmers' stories that do the rounds in the West. Her first visit to India was with her teacher from her art school in Paris when a group of six landed up in Chennai to attend a workshop on banner making. So, when she came in 2004, her destination was Mumbai where she dabbled in making banners for films. She did not last long. She went back, only to come back in 2006 to New Delhi this time and here she is, spending nine months in the capital and then remaining three months in her native place. "I'm not ready to go back yet," she laughs. "Well, being a foreigner one feels a little unsafe in Delhi in comparison to Mumbai, but there is so much to do here," she confides. Her 'so much' involves exploring the Indian sensibilities and blending it with that of French. "This is how I want to build a cultural bridge," she avers. The huge frames, which are on display at the Alliance Francaise Art Gallery, says it all - in her portraits the concept of colour comes from the West while the motifs and embroidery (yes, she embellishes her figures with real embroidery and patch work) is all Indian.

"I started painting street people from my own locality, Malviya Nagar, and then I graduated to the royalties and well-known personalities, but now I am mostly choosing my subjects from the middle strata," she says. That's because first, interacting with all kinds of people is opening up a self-learning process and second, the West may have a very romantic viewpoint when it comes to India, with all its maharajas, palaces and all, but life has its own complexities here, and as an artist, that is exactly what she will be trying to convey to the world.

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