



A LIFETIME OF EXPERIMENTS IN SOLITUDE

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M.R. Deshmukh is one of India's most reputed painters, with works that have made it into some of the most prestigious collections across the country. Still, when his niece, Vidyashree Pawar-Dake suggested he show his most recent works, he regarded her with something akin to horror. "My works are personal, I don't want to exhibit them," he maintained, although her powers of persuasion, coupled with her affection bordering on reverence did eventually convince him! It's been eight long years since the expressionist master showed his work and the occasion, which took place here in Bengaluru, was met with fitting aplomb, as patrons, artists and collectors gathered together for the opening at the Taj West End, an event at which he was noticeably absent!

Solitude has become, over the years, his most prized possession, his days are spent lost in painting, study and in tending to his beloved garden. Few people chance upon the man himself; Deshmukh would much rather do without the public glare. He dresses simply, in white from head to toe and drives around Kolhapur, where he lives, in his Maruti 800 (which is also white, seeing as it's his favourite colour). *Elite Strokes*, his month-long show in Bengaluru, which opened a couple of weeks ago, is his first in eight years, taking place only at the

What: *Elite Strokes*, by M.R. Deshmukh

When: Till Dec. 31

Where: Sublime Galleria, UB City, Vittal Mallya Road

behest of his beloved niece!

"He had an exhibition at the Jehangir Art Museum in Mumbai back in 2008 and then decided he didn't want to show his works anymore," said Vidyashree, who, for the last eleven years, has spent her days sitting in his studio, lost in total reverence for a man she considers almost akin to a God. "He had no interest in having a show even now, I had to emotionally blackmail him into doing it," she laughed. How? "I'm like a daughter to him, a father cannot refuse his child!" Despite his total apathy toward worldly achievements, she persisted, saying she wanted to bring his work back to art lovers across the world.

72-year-old Deshmukh is known for his abstract expressionist work, that captures the constantly changing landscape of life itself. Light and its essentially fleeting nature holds a deep fascination for him, which he expresses through short, decisive strokes and his bold use of colour. "He's always learning," said Vidyashree. "Study is very important to him - he reads extensively about other artists, some of whom inspire him and others who don't - either way,

I hear about it the next day!"

Deshmukh grew up amidst the stunning landscapes of the Sahyadri mountains, where he spent his childhood contemplating the relationship between nature and art. His career as an artist began with landscape paintings, all of them celebrating the glory of nature. "He grew up surrounded by art, because Kolhapur has a rich cultural heritage as well," Vidyashree explained. It was only later that he turned his attention to urban scenes and to the human form, which she describes as his "evolutionary phase."

Despite the change, however, his reverence for nature has remained at the epicentre of his philosophy as an artist. He has two great loves - his art and his garden! "Every morning, he and his aunt step out into their precious garden, to water the plants and to talk to them," Vidyashree chuckles. At 10 am, he retires into his studio, where he proceeds to spend the rest of the morning. The evenings see him retire to his trustee armchair, placed on a balcony he designed himself, where he proceeds to read late into the night.

He has his three devoted pupils - the artist Sanjiiv Sankpal, Vidyashree's husband Atul Dake, a sculptor and Vidyashree herself, who remarks before she takes her leave, "This is my art school," she smiles. "We're the devoted students and he is our headmaster!"