

All fired up



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Ceramic artist **Aditi Saraogi** learned to work with porcelain in China, exhibited her work in France and has conducted many a workshop across India since. **MARWAR** finds out more about her journey as an artist and how pottery has shaped her as a person.

Text * **Beverly Pereira**

Top right: Aditi Saraogi's creation for the 'Matisse Revisited' show at Birla Academy of Art & Culture in 2019

Top left: Aditi Saraogi's work for the 'My Own Muse' show at Art Exposure in Kolkata, in 2019

A TEAPOT SHAPED LIKE A FLOWER; A VASE FASHIONED out of tiny human figurines—these are just a couple of Kolkata-based ceramic artist Aditi Saraogi's creations. In her eyes, the shape of a vase goes beyond convention; or even a teapot, for that matter. Much of her work can be described as fantastical, and even surreal. Saraogi enjoys working with earthenware clay and porcelain, preferring to mould by hand rather than to work on the wheel. The former, she says, is a more organic process. Many of her creations point to a love for the ancient method of smoke firing, which lends her works the appearance of wood. One also sees a lot of colour in her work, a quality which she attributes to her origins in Rajasthan.

Saraogi, who hails from a business family originally from Rajgarh in Rajasthan, had an inclination for art, particularly sketching and watercolour, since she was a child, and along with her elder brother and sister, she was encouraged to pursue the arts since childhood. She, however, was the only one to make a career out of art.

Journeying towards art

Saraogi, who graduated with Honours in Economics from St Xavier's College, Kolkata, and pursued a postgraduate diploma programme in communication with specialisation in advertising from the Delhi School of Communication, has charted an unusual course, from wanting to study fine arts to embarking on a career in marketing. Even as she thoroughly enjoyed the field of marketing, she started to miss art immensely. Pulled in both directions, the craving to return to her artistic roots finally held sway.

Saraogi took her first steps towards becoming a ceramic artist in 2001, when



Aditi Saraogi

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Above: 'Dreams' by Aditi Saraogi for 'Rhythm and Blues' show in Kolkata, in 2018

Right: Aditi Saraogi while working as an artist in residence at Art Ichol, in Maihar, Madhya Pradesh, in 2013



she found herself in Andretta, a village and colony for artists in the scenic Kangra Valley of Himachal Pradesh. Against the backdrop of the mighty Dhauladhar range of the Himalayas, she trained under the celebrated studio potter Mansimran Singh. "This was an extremely interesting point in my life. Mini, as we call him, is a great teacher, who is patient and encouraging."

During these three months, Saraogi learned the ropes from Singh as she worked on the potter's wheel by day. "There were around three or four students at Andretta at the time. Mini and his wife Mary, a Britisher, practically treated us like family. In the evenings, we would either cook or wash dishes whenever it was our turn, and watch movies or play a game of Scrabble or carrom," she says. At the end of three months, after creating what she remembers being a "beautiful work", she realised that the piece had suddenly vanished. "My teacher had liked it so much that he took it. It was only when I made another piece just like that, that he returned the original piece to me."

The initial years

Fresh out of Andretta, Saraogi conducted a pottery workshop for children at the Oxford Gallery in Kolkata. The following year, in 2003, she was commissioned to

work on a mural for the esteemed Wellington Mews, in Mumbai. Saraogi continued to attend workshops, even as she conducted them. Besides being commissioned to work on murals for a resto-bar in Kolkata, she conducted a notable workshop for

army wives at the Bikaner Army Cantonment in Rajasthan in 2004.

Saraogi later trained under Ray Meeker in Pondicherry in 2005 who she describes as a taskmaster. "We were given three days to make 150 works. Works made prior to these three days had to be broken, however exquisite they were," says Saraogi, who came away with more than just a pottery lesson. "At the end of seven months, I was quite pleased with all that I had achieved. And then, Ray asked me to make a perfect jug of a particular height and width using a measured amount of clay. At the end of the day, when he came to inspect my jug, he quietly told me that I had failed him as a student and all the seven months were a waste. I felt miserable and angry. The next day, I made the perfect jug. Well, that was exactly what Ray wanted."

On to pastures new

Saraogi was always in search of gaining more experience. When she wrote to a few artists in Europe after she had read about them in a book, she ended up as an artist in residence in Beaucens, France, in 2007. "Under Isabelle Roux, I learnt to develop my own style. She would quietly point out a few things in my work and that was enough to give me direction," says Saraogi, who was included in a group show curated by Roux. Saraogi has since then been a part of artist residencies in Latvia, Australia and China, where she was introduced to working with porcelain clay.

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Clockwise from top: Aditi Saraogi with family (l-r) Arvind (brother), Aditi Saraogi, Alaka (mother), Mamta (niece), Anjali (sister-in-law); 'Window to the World' by Aditi Saraogi for 'Luminous' show at Gallerie Nvya, in New Delhi, in 2016; A teapot by Aditi Saraogi for the 'Flower Power Teapot Show', at Gallery Sanskriti, in Kolkata, in 2015

She has showcased her work at galleries in India, China and France since she embraced her love for the art in 2001.

Recently, her work was exhibited at the Taoxichaun Art Fair in Jingdezhen, China, better known as the porcelain capital of the world. She retails some of her work out of her house and studio, and also out of the Kolkata Centre for Creativity under 'Afsa'. Saraogi is one of the founding members of Afsa, a group of five women in the city to promote and develop fired arts. "I do my own marketing and business," Saraogi explains, admitting that she finds marketing challenging, especially when it comes to promoting her work on social media.

A lesson for life

Saraogi tells us that every experience with ceramics has helped to develop her personality and broaden her outlook. Pottery, she says, has taught her to be patient because working under stress can rear its ugly head in one's work. While it has taught her to be a perfectionist, it also reminds her to unlearn, to be instinctive, to follow her gut and be humble. Given her Marwari upbringing which has taught her to work hard and give her best to every pursuit, Saraogi hopes to create a public art project in Kolkata and to be a part of the Kochi Biennale someday. *



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