



KAMAL RANA

Plays with fire, kerosene and gunpowder to colour and embellish his artwork

Above "Fresh sweet fish," 2008.
Fire, ink and pen on paper
15"x 20"

Right Kamal Rana works with
fire to achieve the desired effect

Kamal Rana, Vadodara
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While fire inevitably evokes a sense of fear in most, for Vadodara-based artist, Kamal Rana, it is the opposite. Fascinated by the flames, which would dance around him as a child, he chose to experiment with the idea of burning paper and creating art that is a result of this feat. "I have been using this technique for over 25 years and am always learning something new – for example, the manner in which different inflammable materials like kerosene or gunpowder (used in firecrackers), react with the paper, creating a hue and range of shades," he explains. The charred, rough edges, soot stains and brown-ochre burn marks, play the role of pencil or colour in the paintings.

Inspired by nature and the simplest elements of daily life or human form, Rana's works can take from days to months to execute. After drawing an outline of his subject with an ink pen, he proceeds to burn the canvas with assorted inflammable materials and explains just how difficult it is to control the flame.

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Of the 27 paintings that were displayed at a recently concluded exhibition at Mumbai's Jehangir Art Gallery, many were embellished with gold foil and textures in order to add richness and layers to the works.

All the colours seem to blend harmoniously and tend to be subtle in nature, which is a remarkable feat since Rana is never sure of the final outcome once he sets the paper on fire. Having exhibited his works around the world, from Japan to Canada, this unique artist has captured the imagination of his fans by successfully negotiating with fire to make beautiful illustrations. "Fumes pollute the atmosphere, but for me, they ignite my creative urge," he concludes. ♦

Fareeda Kanga