

The Grand Performer

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Performance artist, Nikhil Chopra, concocts fictional characters influenced by India's colonial history and his own experiences

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Switching from the traditional canvas and paint forum, Nikhil Chopra is a performance artist whose endearing works created in 'real time' have been deeply influenced by his Kashmiri roots as well as certain historical stereotypes.

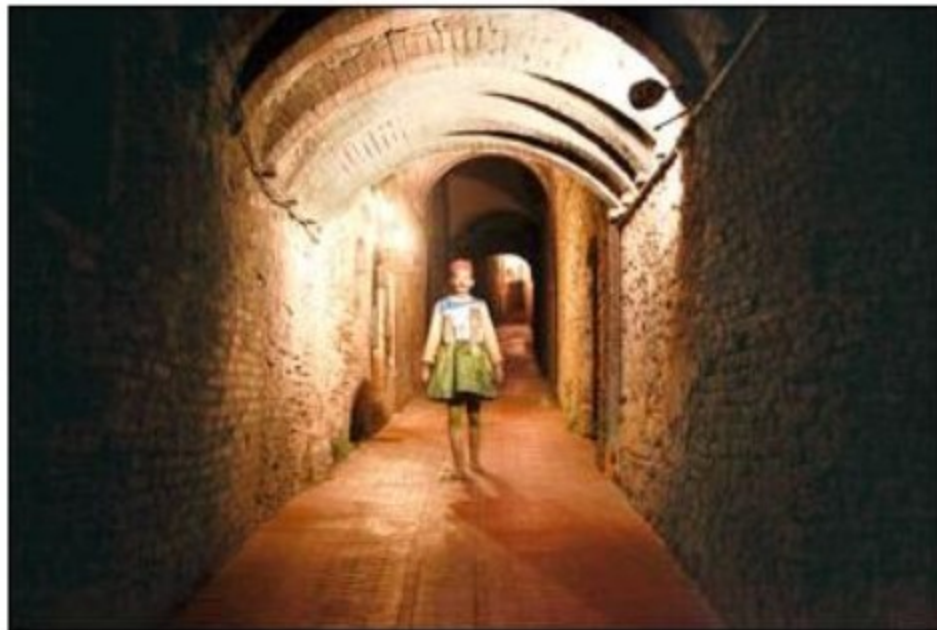
At this year's edition of the 'India Art Fair' in New Delhi, Chopra's (a graduate from the Faculty of Fine Arts at M.S. University, Baroda, Maryland Institute, Baltimore, and Ohio State University) works occupied pride of place amongst the exhibits and drew rave reviews from

critics and the general public as well.

Internationally renowned curator for Le Meridian, Jerome Sans, describes Chopra's work as "refreshing, unique and a complete sensory experience." A proclivity towards the stage and the thrill of performing in a 'live' space coupled with the idea of marrying art and theatre made this enterprising artist fixated on this style of narration. "Drawing inspiration from life and reclaiming history" is how Chopra tends to describe his epic performances.

As a performance artist, Chopra blurs the boundaries between theatre and several other artistic forms, such as set design, costume and make-up, as well as photography and video documentation. The artist is renowned for his aloof role-playing; when in character, he never speaks and seldom makes eye contact and he inhabits these characters in improvised performances that last up to three days.

Another interesting aspect of his performance is that it is usually site specific: an amalgamation of everything from the forces of nature to city lights, architecture, the hustle and bustle of city life, evidence of mental and physical stress, and excavations of personal and private experiences are amalgamated into the grand story examining issues of identity, the role of autobiography, and the politics of posing and self-portraiture.



A recent stint in Tuscany resulted in a mind-blowing series of live performances entitled Inside Out. Chopra dressed in various garbs lived amongst nature in the scenic San Gimignano region as tourists and locals filmed and watched his daily movements with awe. "The feeling of connecting with audiences on all levels was truly inspirational," he avers.

"Benozzo Gozzoli was the artist who painted the celebrated fresco cycle in 1464, Storie della vita di Sant'Agostino (Scenes from the Life of Saint Augustine), in the chapel of the choir in the Church of Sant'Agostino in San Gimignano. Inspired by Gozzoli and his frescoes Inside Out is a site-specific performance conceived by me for the Galleria Continua in San Gimignano," Chopra explains. The performance, the longest realised to date by the artist, lasted 99 hours last year. During this period of time, Chopra assumed the guise of different personae to embody history and memory, and walked around in the streets of the town and in the surrounding areas. In the course of the performance, Chopra produced a series of drawings of San Gimignano and The Tuscan landscape as well.

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