

Hand Colour



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photographs by
RAJESH SONI


ARTSPEAKS
INDIA

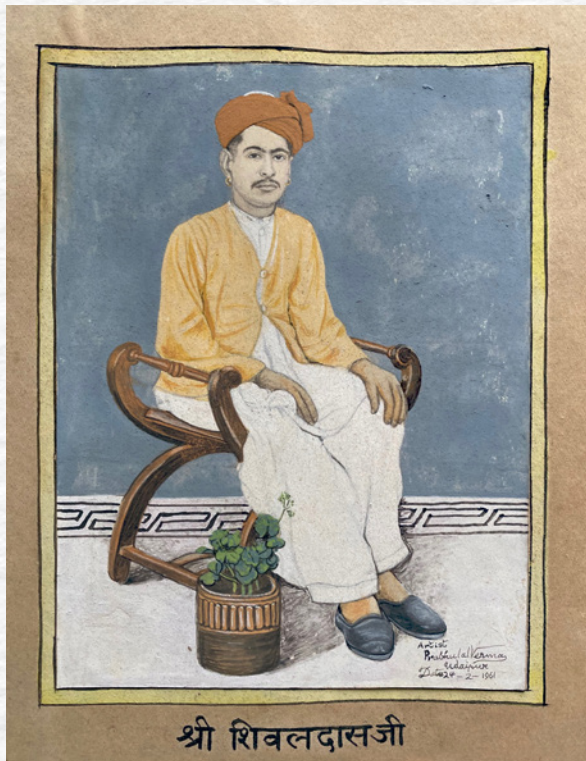




Handpainted around 1957 by Prabhu Lal Soni, Rajesh Soni's grandfather

Handcoloured Photographs

Handcoloured Photographs or Indian painted photographs began to be produced in the nineteenth century, only few years after the introduction of photography to India. Following the decline of the tradition of photographic studio portraiture, Indian artists came to be hired to work for some studios. Their long practiced art of miniature painting was combined with the newly-developed technique of photography, adding color to the black and white or sepia images using mediums such as watercolor, oil paint, and gouache. This genre of embellishment created a hybrid form of visual culture called Indian painted photographs, a result of a deep visual tradition and mainly catered to the needs of the princely and elite classes in the country.



श्री शिवलदासजी

Handpainted in 1961

As a creative technique and tool, hand painting offered unlimited scope in adding emphasis to an image: The Indian painted photographs could be partially painted or completely painted over, leaving little trace of the original image. The final result revealed the artist-photographer's rich tradition of artistry and workmanship. The painted photograph is a genre that marks a significant chapter in the history of Indian photography. Yet it is now almost disappearing as a technique due to the advent of colour photography and digital imagery.



Rajesh Soni in his Studio

In India, only a handful of artist-photographers are still continuing the legacy of this genre and tradition. Rajesh Soni as one of them is the third generation descendant of skilled artist-photographers who pursue the hand colouring technique for photographs. His grandfather Prabhu Lal Soni (1905-1958) had worked as a court photographer and painter for the late Maharana Shri Bhupal Singh of Mewar in Udaipur. He passed down his skills of hand-painting to his son, Lalit, who himself passed them down to his son Rajesh. At the age of eighteen Rajesh began his forays into photographs, by photographing and then handpainting them. Ever since Rajesh has been consumed by this vocation, and continues to be engaged in this art, continuing his family 's legacy of hand-painting photographs.

The 1966 *Rajdoot* Bike Series presented in the show *Hand Colour* continues to be one of Rajesh Soni's most popular and endearing bodies of work. Stemmed in nostalgia and wishfulness of an era gone by, the concept behind it, was to halt local citizens on their way to work and induce them to agree to be photographed on a vintage 1966 *Rajdoot* motorbike. *Rajdoot* the word is very significant as it translates from Hindi into English as *ambassador* and *doot* also refers to a means of transport. In a small town or city where owning a vehicle is considered to be a symbol of success and an aspiration in life, Rajesh wanted to capture their sense of achievement while sitting on a bike. Each photo of the series tells a tale of its own and he has been fortunate to meet and capture some of the truly captivating moments of glee and curiosity from passers by as they take a pose on this bike.



The Rajdoot doodhwaala

Those of a certain generation will recall that the *Rajdoot* was a successful bike of its era with brisk sales and immense popularity amongst semi - urban and rural India especially in the dairy business. All the *doodhwallas* or *milk suppliers* of that period would be visiting urban homes to provide milk on *Rajdoot* bikes with large milk containers dangling on either side.

It was often said in those days “where there were no roads in India, there were *Rajdoots*.” Middleclass Indians lived and breathed the style, stability and sensibility of this motorcycle. As the name reiterates, *Rajdoot* was the *Doot of King or the Lord* for Indian aspirants. Rajdoot, evolved into an integrated part of life of almost every middle class family in the nineteen sixties, seventies and eighties. It continued to be much more than a regular bike it was an emotion and an aspiration because of its dynamic application in different phases of life especially signifying upward mobility for a certain class. Independent of the condition of the roads of the country, the Bike had always supported it’s owner but unfortunately because of the Euro II Emission Regulation in 2005, it was phased out from the market. The motorcycle division of Escorts Group started manufacturing the Polish SHL M11 175 cc motorcycle under the brand name Rajdoot from 1962. Various derivatives were produced with slight changes in cycle parts, suspension and transmission. Production continued for over four decades. It was powered by a two-stroke engine. The two models of Rajdoot of 2-stroke engine were Rajdoot 350 and **Rajdoot 350** and **Rajdoot Excel T**. The **Rajdoot 350**, or **RD 350**, was a two-stroke Yamaha motorcycle made in India by Escorts group from 1983 to 1989. RD stands for ‘Race Developed’ series, In India promoted by Rajdoot in collaboration with Yamaha Japan. The **Rajdoot Excel T** is a 173 cc two-stroke motorcycle that was made in India by Escorts Group.

Popularly going by the moniker of *jeevan saathi* or life partner the long life and less maintenance issues of the *Rajdoot* Bike were the two parameters why this was the most loved Bike and the reason that in that time in history, families would be giving this as dowry in several marriages. Everyone recalls an instance of this bike playing a role in getting them through difficult situations and romantic interludes. Memories abound of recollections of witnessing around four to five people seen sitting on the bike at the same time, in dire emergency situations. In some ways this defined a very pure relationship between man and machine. It was also in its time, the political choice of any political party. In each rally, one usually saw hundreds of Rajdoots running across the street. As a symbol of power, it added this power back to the driver and empowered him like none other.

The enigma of the Rajdoot era still remains with a generation filled with nostalgia and can be appreciated and revisited through Soni’s hand coloured photographs in this seminal show *Hand Colour*.



Jhadoowala, Bike Series | Handcoloured Photograph | 2021



Dhabliwali, Bike Series | Handcoloured Photograph | 2021



Bansuriwala, Bike Series | Handcoloured Photograph | 2021



The Baba ji, Bike Series | Handcoloured Photograph | 2021



The Holy Man, Bike Series | Handcoloured Photograph | 2021



Time to Relax, Bike Series | Handcoloured Photograph | 2021



Kids having Joy, Bike Series | Handcoloured Photograph | 2021



Sadhu, Bike Series | Handcoloured Photograph | 2021



Young Photographer, Bike Series | Handcoloured Photograph | 2021



Dariwala, Bike Series | Handcoloured Photograph | 2021



Radhey Shyam, Bike Series | Handcoloured Photograph | 2021



The Holy Man, Bike Series | Handcoloured Photograph | 2021



Kids on way to worship, Bike Series | Handcoloured Photograph | 2021



Policemen on Duty,, Bike Series | Handcoloured Photograph | 2021

All Handcoloured Photographs available in various sizes:

5 inches x 7 inches

12 inches x 18 inches

16 inches x 24 inches

24 inches x 36 inches

Price: On Request



Rajesh Soni

Born on 6th August 1981. Rajesh is an artist living in Udaipur, Rajasthan, who has become known primarily for his abilities to hand paint digital photographs. He is the son of artist Lalit Soni, and the grandson of Prabhu Lal Soni, who was once court photographer to the Maharana Sir Bhopal Singh of Mewar. Prabhu Lal Soni (also known as Prabhu Lal Verma) was not only a court photographer, but also a hand-colorist who painted the black-and-white photographs that he produced. The skills of hand-coloring photographs were passed down to Rajesh through the intermediary of his father Lalit.

Rajesh Soni's talents for sketching and drawing were noticed at an early age and fostered by his father. As a young boy, Rajesh sketched from life the historic havelis and architecture of Udaipur's old city, sometimes looking over the shoulders of art students who gathered to sketch on the ghats, and also eagerly teaching himself English from visiting tourists. In 2007 Rajesh met the American photographer Waswo X. Waswo, who encouraged him to work on reviving the tradition of hand-colored photography. Working on Waswo's digital prints, Soni blended his grandfather's traditional craft with the new technologies of photographic printing. This collaborative effort between Soni and Waswo, combined with a series of collaborative miniatures Waswo had done in conjunction with the painter Rakesh Vijay, was eventually to become an exhibition that toured India under the name A Studio in Rajasthan.[1][2] Since the success of these exhibitions Soni has travelled to Italy, Switzerland, and beyond. [3]

A portion of these photographic collaborations between Rajesh Soni and Waswo X. Waswo was released as the book Men of Rajasthan, published by Serindia Contemporary in 2011.

Courtesy : Wikipedia

ARTSPEAKS INDIA

Artspeaks India was founded and conceptualized as an arts and culture initiative. At the heart of its philosophy is a desire to liberate a language and vocabulary intrinsic to the arts themselves, to provide a scaffolding for form and matter to enunciate their own aesthetic and interpretive frames. In short, to facilitate, highlight, sensitise, and bear witness to the singular and myriad ways in which the arts might speak: to us, to each other and most significantly, for themselves. Artspeaks India's first show organised at Epicentre Delhi, and titled Art for Art's Sake was an attempt to flesh out this idea and explore the possibility of unburdening art from preconceived categories and lenses of perception. The team at Artspeaks India never hesitates to ask a pertinent question regarding the role of the viewer, and the need to consider more seriously the implicit and fresh art critical resources a viewer might bring to the appreciation of art. Inspired by this vision, and refusing to limit its understanding of the field of art to canonical definitions only, Artspeaks India has over the years been at the helm of a wide range of artistic endeavours. These include design, public arts, literature, promotion of heritage, local and indigenous art forms, multimedia initiatives encompassing cinema, theatre and other performing arts and pedagogical ventures like workshops and talks.

Over the last decade, Artspeaks India has organised a plethora of exhibitions in various media and formats ranging from fiberglass sculpture to painting, both figurative and abstract, photography and film. Some exhibitions include "Heard, unheard" (2010), a group show of twelve emerging artists working in painting, ceramics, sculpture, photography and installation; "Masters of Modern Art" Group show of 40 masterpieces of modern Indian artists in collaboration with Audi. Shruti Gupta Chandra's solo show "Urban Space, Counter Gaze" (2011), exploring the



status of the human body in the context of rapid urbanization; “Hemi Bawa (2012) a collateral event of the India Art Fair 2012, featuring Hemi Bawa’s sculptures in cast glass, mix media, and fiberglass with copper patina.” “Alternatives of Mainstream Art” a group show conceptualized as a mini version of generic art fair aesthetics (2013); “Faces of reclaimed identities:” Paintings of Interpretations of photographs by Puja Kshatriya in collaboration with Austrian Cultural Forum (2014) and more recently a solo exhibition of paintings by Vijay Anand “Of Dichotomous Journeys” (2017) which demonstrated versatile and multidimensional works of wood with adhesives, resins and veneers and “One Soul Many Lives” group show of fifty artists showcasing multiple mediums curated to Laxmana Dalmia’s poetry (2018). “Bodies of Light”, Virtual Exhibition of Hemi Bawa Glass Sculptures (2020), Launch of “The Glass Makers Club” (2020), Covid Relief Fundraiser 2021- Remembering M F Hussain (2021), Contemporary Avatars of Ancient Myths, Virtual Solo Exhibition of Watercolour Paintings by Shekh Hifzul Kabbeer (2021), “Hand Colour”, Solo online exhibition by Rajesh Soni of Handcolour Photographs (2021). Poetry of Lived Spaces, A Brush with the Lens” Hybrid Virtual Exhibition of Photographs. Group show with eleven artists (2021).

ASHWINI PAI BAHADUR



Ashwini Pai Bahadur is an entrepreneur, arts advocate-purveyor , marketing professional and writer. For over two decades she has been passionately involved with the arts as a patron, collector and commissioner. She has worked in multiple genres and media bringing to them her skills in marketing, relationship management and communications. She combines a unique inclusive artistic vision with her entrepreneurial expertise. Ashwini continues to strive to articulate a broad, interactive and inclusive idiom for the arts, allowing for different forms and sites of expressions: public art, architecture, indigenous arts & crafts, art house cinema, poetry and theatre.

Ashwini extends herself to reach out to a wider artistic community and actively emphasizes the participatory dimension of art, she has interacted and mentored multi-cultural teams across a wide spectrum of categories-catalyzing innovative initiatives in the Times of India and British Council among others.

Her skills in communication have been instrumental in the success of the extensive media presence at the various international visual art events organized by the Lalit Kala Akademi .

She is presently Director of Delhi based arts & cultural development initiative Artspeaks India, Founder of The Glass Makers Club, Consultant- Assistant Editor, Virasat, INTACH, Member-Commonwealth Cultural Forum, and Member-National Scientific Committee Intangible Cultural Heritage, ICOMOS India.

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Published by Artspeaks India.

On the occasion of online inauguration of virtual show
HAND COLOUR, September 2021

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