



# Modern take on traditions

Italian artist SIMONA BOCHHI's latest sculptures are inspired by nature and her stint in Rajasthan. She tells KARAN BHARDWAJ what makes jute the best material in the world

When you look at the sculptures that talk about religious symbols such as Shiva *linga*, Gangotri, or jute installations depicting portraits with Rajasthani *pagdis*, one thing is clear that the artist is absolutely in awe of the cultural and religious diversity of India. Italian artist Simona Bochhi is a self-confessed Indian fan. She came here six years ago but didn't return. Over the years, she's experimented with her sculptures that are inspired by nature, Indian natives and issues. "Eight years ago, I was looking for a change. I was influenced by India. I didn't know why it fascinated me but I always wanted to be here. Maybe, I was preparing myself for India because I knew it's going to be just a trip. It's my home now. India's humble and people are cordial. I've developed my soul and spirit here," she says.

The artist is showing over 35 sculptures at the gallery space of JJ Valaya's The Home of the Traveler. Mainly crafted in bronze, marbles and jute, these artworks are a mix of installations, portraits and sculptures. Simona has also dedicated one her works to F1 racer Michael Schumacher. "He is struggling for his life in comma. I have dedicated this work, which shows a guy relaxing under a tree, to the racer," she says.

Simona's marbles are characterised by the elegance of the lines



and proportions. She says she loves to work on one part of the block of marble and leaves the other part untouched and natural; the split remains rough and meets with the lines of the sculpted part. It is her way to show respect for nature. "Ever since I came to India, I started perceiving nature differently. How it survived in desert in harmony was fascinating," she says. But what stands apart are her jute installations. "I couldn't get my tools to work with marbles for six months. Then jute caught my attention, which is of the highest quality in India. I'd worked with the material long back and it was the time to start afresh," she says.

Originally from Monza Italy, Simona has now settled down in Udaipur, where she held her maiden exhibition six years ago. "I did it for Maharaja Arvind Singh Mewar and it was called *Meeting Between*

*Contemporary Art And Indian Tradition*. I presented contemporary artworks with gold and mirror inlays. Arvind Singh came to know about my work through an art curator in London. He called me up and expressed his desire to showcase my work. When I visited him, he found me funny, wearing helmet and driving a motorbike crossing the old city. In fact, he still mentions it whenever he talks about me," says the artist whose style is now more of a fusion of contemporary art and old handicrafts techniques, which she learnt from Rajasthan. "I involved artisans in my work. They showed faith in me and introduced me to mirror inlay work," she said.

Simona is busy writing her book which details her experiences in India. "I've always written and drawn sketches based on my experiences, be it philosophic or difficulties. I was born Italian with lots of freedom. That's how I could cover the journey to India. Here, my life got transformed. I wore Rajasthani clothes, experimented with techniques, learnt new media and met simple folks to gypsies. A friend inspired me to share this with the world. Why I became an artist, the impact of places, materials and new people in my life...the book talks about everything. The draft is almost ready. I'm just thinking whether to reveal it one go or release in parts," she shares.