



ART HOUSE REALITIES

THE land of the Great Rann of Kutch is known for its mesmerising white salt desert, but one must see the handicrafts and artists of the villages of Bhuj – they are even more magical! Bhuj, a small town in Kutch, was torn apart by the massive earthquake of 2000 – today it has not only come back to life but also produces some of the best Indian handicrafts. Each village is a treasure in itself with its interlinked, colourfully diverse craftspeople.

One such village is Nirona – a quaint dusty village that one can reach by heading into the interiors off the road linking Bhuj to Khawda. Nirona's communities are engaged in different types of art forms – noted ones include Rogan art, copper bell art and lacquer. Having visited each of their work areas and watching the artists show their work, one thing was evident – while each of their art form was a marvel, they were unforgiving as well. Artists had very little scope for making a mistake!

Rogan art is about Rogan, a local name for castor globs. Artists deftly control a small glob of boiled castor oil jelly mixed with mineral pigments on the tip of a metal applicator on one hand, and the cloth on which the design needs to be made on the other. This glob is then carefully laid out on the cloth with precision. The designs have to be preconceived as it is done instantaneously with the castor glob falling freely on the cloth. Once done, the cloth is stretched and folded to stunningly vivid symmetrical images of floral and Islamic motifs.

Copper bell art includes the traditional cow bells, door hangings, masks, sun signs to name a few – but everything in copper. As I entered their homes, I saw the completed bells hung for drying creating soothing sounds of 'Om'. The process here involves applying copper and bronze slivers mixed in mud paste on the metal cast of the objects, which is then baked in the furnace to give it the shine. It seemed a phoenix-like birth of a new bell emerging from mud and fire in many shapes, sizes and forms.

From there, I moved to the homes of the lacquer artists. They belonged to a community named the Vadhas, whose skill was in coating wooden implements and toys with lacquer in a rather interesting variation of hues. They used the lac resin from the trees, mixed it with different kinds of minerals and pigments to generate a vast array of colourful shades. These were then meticulously applied to a mixed batch of kitchen implements, toys and small utility items.

Their art and craftsmanship was a truly humbling experience. As a salutation, I 'created' pictures of some of the best Indian artists that reside in the simple homes of Nirona – an example of an ideal crafts village of Bhuj! ■

