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**Pratima Sheth's
Dictionary of Indian
Art & Artists helps
you crack the
art-world code**

ANURITA RATHORE

HYPER-REALISM. Intaglio. Repousse. Sgraffito. Stippling. Oleography. Casein. Lettrism. Fancywords, and familiar too! But if I were to stumble upon some of these, I'd ideally choose to refer and unearth their exact meaning and connotation. And wouldn't you, art connoisseurs, aficionados, enthusiasts, who've seen, studied and serenaded through art and all its multifarious forms. Pratima Sheth eases it out for us. Her book, *Dictionary of Indian Art & Artists* (Mapin Publishers), is the "first of this kind" where you have over 1,700 entries on drawings, paintings, prints, sculpture, institutions, galleries and artists. Go through these like you would a dictionary, for its meaning and related information.

You wonder and ask her if it's been a Herculean task, gathering information and compiling it all in dictionary form. "Oh yes, it's taken me 10 years to do this," smiles Sheth, looking at the dictionary that forms a comprehensive picture of the world of art in India. The idea was sown in much longer. "When I was studying in the JJ School of Art, I felt a strong urge to have a book where I could refer to artists and their styles, techniques and forms, but found nothing



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to ease my curiosity. In course of time, I read many foreign books, saw dictionaries, but found that they talk of nothing beyond miniature art form of India, that too not all of its forms, may be just one," says Sheth, who's preserved the desire for a dictionary ever since.

There's no denying an art person would enjoy the book "like a roadmap". Be it movements or monuments, artists or their artwork, you can journey through these picking your choice or even, unhesitatingly, at random. Sheth has travelled long years before she collected adequate information on artists from the length and breadth of the country. "I travelled cities and towns, many a time going with artists to smaller towns. I also realised pre-Independence artists hardly ever held solos, yet their work spoke of specific styles and techniques that could fade if not recorded or learnt of. The art of using colours, forms and style intrigued me. Like, Rutilal Kansodaria's casting and moulding style used even today dates back to the Mohenjo-Daro period. India is us-

ing its old methods, blending them with contemporary styles. Consider Ramkinkar Baij and Kanayi Kunhiraman, who use cement instead of marble and stone, suggesting old styles but with a new method. Now, information as this would surely interest anyone who remotely understands or enjoys art," she says, picking up the dictionary and showing some of its entries. That they

leave you wanting to flip through more is Sheth's win. "I learnt a lot about variety in Indian art—temples, sculptures and hidden meanings in art forms, techniques, figure formations from the north, south, east and west. Because of their traditional styles, each region, every state has a stand-alone aspect in its art, yet there's been an excellent blend of work in these regions," says Sheth, who along with her research, continued her solo shows, often travelling with her husband abroad where "I visited various galleries and museums and kept interviewing Indian artists residing abroad". While most artists have been covered, the few left out are those "who I continually got in touch with but got no response from". The myriad influences on Indian art made it a "daunting" task gathering and compiling it, but as Sheth rests the matter: "I had the courage to do it and I did".

Still wondering what those words in the first few lines mean? Flip those pages, settle on target ones. I just did.

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