

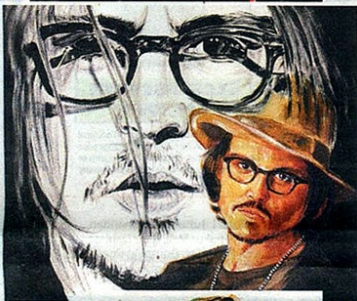
Face of fortune

Corporate wife and fitness entrepreneur Nawaz Modi-Singhania has spent the last one year staring into Johnny Depp's eyes. And she's ready to tell you why



AL PACINO, ACTOR

I must have watched *The Godfather* 20 times, and I'm sure others have shared a similar connection with the movie. I didn't want this portrait to look like Al Pacino's. Yet, if you had to see the portrait from afar, just by the body language, the way the hair sits and the way he places his hand, you'd say that's a young Al Pacino. This style here is different from the other works.



JOHNNY DEPP, ACTOR

He's my favourite actor of all time. I love his movies, his zanniness; that he is a chameleon. When drawing him, I wanted to get into his head, his experiences and psyche.

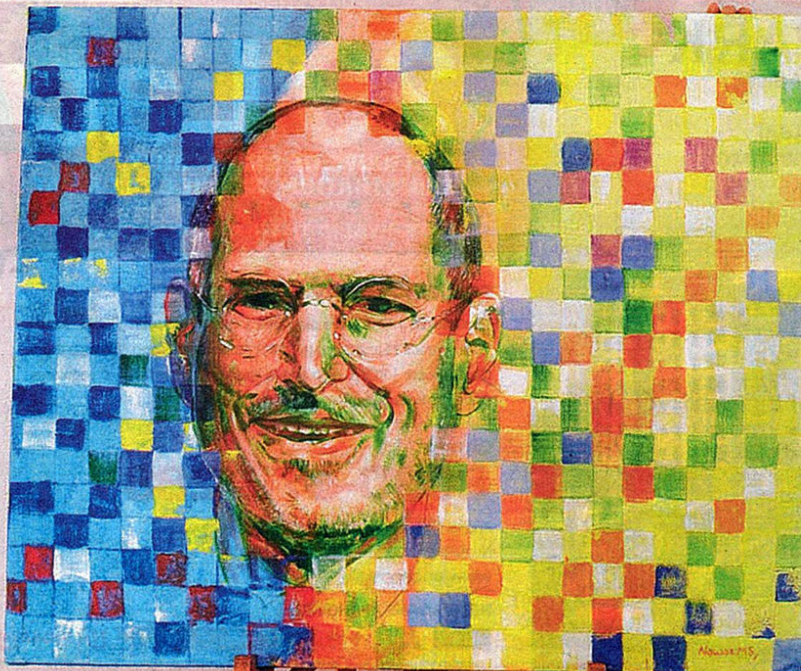


OPRAH WINFREY, TELEVISION HOST

She's been so forceful and vociferous. Through her talk shows, which are brilliant, she has done good work. She is extraordinary. She's Oprah, but she is not someone you can't approach. She's had her personal struggles with weight and looked fat and ugly. Of course, here, my friends say, she's looking more glamorous than she ever has.

STEVE JOBS, INVENTOR

Just as soon as he passed away, my book club (10 friends meet every month to discuss a book of their interest) took up his biography. There was so much about his life we didn't know. He didn't want to ask the people what they wanted. Because, often, people don't know what they want. In terms of digital and IT technology, what he brought to the world is unparalleled. You can't consider any other innovator his equal.



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A portrait of Hollywood star Johnny Depp sits in Nawaz Modi-Singhania's studio space off Hughes Road. He has Angelina Jolie for company on the Thursday afternoon we meet her.

They are both charcoal, acrylic and oil works. A swift turn of the head, and we see Madonna, Tom Cruise, Roger Federer, Albert Einstein and Marilyn Monroe.

The 33 works are part of the 44-year-old entrepreneur, corporate wife and artist's forthcoming show — one she calls, "a portrait study of those who we love to love".

Instead of an art gallery, Singhania will open the exhibition on April 6 at husband Gautam Singhania's flagship store on Warden Road. The choice lies in a simple (some would think, haughty) realisation: she doesn't need a private art gallery. "Artists may want to attach themselves with a gallery because they don't have the reach or network. I'm not in that situation; I didn't want to be restricted," she says, candidly.

Incidentally, of the 33 famous faces she has painted over the last year, none are Indian. "It's tricky," she says, settling gently into a couch. "Why not a portrait of Amitabh Bachchan or Shah Rukh Khan, you'd think. Well, they happen to be known to us. In fact, when Mr Bachchan first came to Bombay, he didn't have anywhere to stay. Since his father knew someone from our family, he was sent

to stay with the Singhania for a fair bit of time. To put him on canvas would have been a bit awkward."

The international names that made it to the final list are those who have "made us laugh and cry, inspired and motivated us, and influenced our character and emotions, both consciously and subconsciously".

Singhania's tryst with art began eight years ago, after the birth of her first daughter, Niharika. "I think I always had an artistic bent, but I took up painting more seriously after she was born because I was housebound," she says.

The interest evolved into her first body of work, *Body Art*, inspired by fitness, which she exhibited six years ago at NCPA's Piramal Gallery. "I requested Laxman Shreshtha to inaugurate it, but he wanted to see my work first," she says of one of the biggest names in abstract art. "I invited him over, and he was all praise. But when he told me he wanted to buy one of my works (a falcon flying through an eye), it was a huge high."

The reaction egged her on to hold two more exhibitions in Delhi. It has been three years since Singhania last showed. "I was pregnant with my second baby, and took my time to work on another collection that explored the surreal and supernatural. But I was not happy with it, and junked it," she says.

Singhania was looking to create something "new and fresh". These portraits worked perfectly, she thinks, because they marry her penchant for art, beauty and fitness. Her aerobic studio functions out of the same Opera House property, she says while browsing through portraits of David Beckham, Rafael Nadal and Maradona on her Macbook.

A keen art collector, Singhania's personal collection packs in Jaimini Roy, M F Husain, Sultan Ali Khan, Jehangir Jani, and Arzan Khambatta. "I admire Bikash Bhattacharya's play of shadow. Ganesh Pyne's dark work gets you thinking, and Bose Krishnamachari's sense of colour and fluidity is interesting," she says.

"Their work inspires me, but strangely, I don't seem to own any of their works."

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ATUL KASBEKAR

