

ARTIST'S CORNER

A crowd on canvas

Sophie Jouannet Bech, or Sophie Jo as she's better known as, is a widely travelled French artist. Her early experiences in design, advertising and illustration have contributed to her journey of becoming an internationally acclaimed painter and artist. Sophie Jo's brightly coloured canvases are inspired by everyday life which she captures with a sense of humour. She elevates the ordinary and the mundane to a different dimension as she creates portraits of places and its people by emphasising shapes in tightly composed pictorial spaces. Excerpts from an interview:

Tell us about your early life and the influences that played a part in you becoming an artist.

My life for the last 30 years has been highly influenced by different countries, cultures, people, languages, colours and smells as I have been moving every four to five years across the globe.

I grew up in Normandy and started designing book covers at 14. Between 1982 and 1990, I worked with a few French publishing companies creating covers and making



INDO-FRENCH A painting by Sophie Jo.

illustrations for books for children and adults.

In 1990, I became a freelance designer and did work for companies like Action, BBDO, McCann-Erickson and Shell.

From 1992 to 1996, I worked as an art teacher at The French High School in Bangkok. During this period, I also did freelance design for reputed companies, one in Boston, USA.

How did you decide to become a full-time artist, and when did this

happen?

It happened over two decades ago when I realised that in order to become a 'professional', I would have to spend all my time painting. I joined the Pan Americana Art School in 1997, and I held my first solo exhibition in Sao Paulo, Brazil in 1998.

Tell us a bit more about what your paintings are about?

Nature and travel are my greatest sources of inspiration. As an artist who has lived in different continents, the noise, light, shadow and shape of each place evoke different emotions in me. I use vibrant colours to accentuate the overall effect. I believe that 'all colours are alive' and have a personality and temperament of their own. I respect and enjoy them, catch and lay them carefully on the canvas.

Please give details on your body of work so far and the past exhibitions held?

I held my first solo exhibition, *Cores do Brasil 1*, in 1998 in Sao Paulo, Brazil. I followed that up in 1999 with '*Cores do Brasil 2*', and in 2000, with *Cores do Brasil 3*, both in Sao Paulo. I also participated in the *Chapel Art Show* in Sao Paulo in 2000.

In 2004, I held an exhibition titled

Couleurs de la-bas in Champagne, France, and in 2007, I followed that up with an exhibition at Modus Gallery, *Place des Vosges*, in Paris.

My foray into Indian space as an artist began when I had a solo exhibition at the Apparao Galleries in 2008.

I've done paintings for corporate collections too, and in 2009, I did a series of nine paintings for a Danish MNC, for their offices in Chennai, and a collection of paintings for their China office.

Has your art evolved over the years, and if so, could you give more details on this?

I've got to a point where I can play with elements. The ordinary happenings of life inspire my paintings, and at times, I like to infuse a bit of humour in these. *People of the World* is a series of paintings I've done, which is now in Apparao Galleries in Delhi.

What are your plans for the future?

There's an old saying that life is what happens while you're busy making other plans. I have reached an age where I have chosen to live in the moment and appreciate contacts, honesty and enthusiasm, and share ideas. There is less 'planning' and more 'living'.



REJI VARGHESE