

Palette of the Past



By BINDU GOPAL RAO

The kiss of sunlight on walls, the welcome shade of a giant pavilion and the cool touch of water are brought alive by watercolour artist Kudalayya Hiremath in a series of paintings that portray the cultural leitmotif of India. "I try to capture the atmosphere of a place, the weather and its vibe," says the artist in the context of his new show 'Heritage Reflections' at the Vasantha Art Gallery (VAG), Bengaluru, till June 1.

Most artists are travellers who straddle imagination and reality. Hiremath's exhibition comprises paintings documenting his travels to Hampi, Varanasi and Nepal. Masterful brushstrokes give life to the ancient city of the gods, Hampi, and its once grand temples. The ghats of Varanasi along the Ganga have a haunting quality as if life and death linger in its hues. Images of the lanes of Nepal subdued in Himalayan mist seem to have been metaphrased from a dream that knits the past and the present. The difficult part of painting is to capture the right light. The ochres and blues of old buildings against startlingly blue skies, an indigo hill looming over a temple partly hidden in foliage as its saffron pennant flaps in the wind, a riverine marquee topped by a



The paintings at the exhibition; (below) Kudalayya Hiremath

chhatra glimpsed through the archway of a ghat, a mosque with the sun bringing out the whites and soft gold—there it is, again and again, the dappled rainy effect and the playful sky changing its pigments from pale to deep tints. The composition communicates a feeling of partial discovery as if history waits coyly around the corner of unpainted white paper.

The artist's portrait as a young man emerges from the palette of Hiremath's father, an art teacher at a village school, who wanted him to be an engineer. Today the son is ranked among the top watercolour artists of India. C Prabhakar, founder, Vasantha Art Gallery at Grand Mercure Bengaluru Gopalan Mall, says, "Hiremath is a promising artist to watch out for. Watercolour is a direct and difficult medium and cannot be controlled. He is constantly pushing his boundaries as an artist and his mastery over the medium is evident." The paintings have a meditative quality and the compositions are a perfect balance of luminous colours and energy.

Hiremath says, "On location I feel the pulse of the environment. Every location has a unique identity and my paintings reflect it." The paintings are affordably priced, as well. For armchair travellers, the 13 pieces on show are portals to legends of the past.

