


# Metrolife on the move

Vikas Khanna on Indian influences in Middle East cuisine. P3 

## ● Art workshop

# Identity crisis through photography

In the globalised world, the word 'identity' has become a part of everyday vocabulary. And someone who has experienced this dilemma is the best man to explore the subject further. This is what Owais Husain, son of M F Husain, is doing through an ongoing project 'House of Cards' where he is working with students and institutions across the globe to help the present generation answer difficult questions related to 'identity'.

Through the workshops, the India-born, Dubai-based

artist encourages students to delve into other subjects like displacement and immigration. Using the photography medium and giving personal context, he asks them to portray their own identity through photographs.

"We inhabit a ceaselessly dysfunctional world where a flux of identity in the nuclear and larger domains is evidently an element of human nature. There is chaos at multiple levels. For example, an Indian living all of his or her life in a country in the West is



PHILOSOPHICAL Owais Husain

an 'immigrant' whereas, in reverse, if the foreign national decides to reside in India, he or she is called an 'expat'. Even if you take the same principal to levels as varied as nationality, community or race, it still remains consistent," Husain tells *Metrolife*.

These dialogues with students, he says, helps understanding their perspective and implications from decisions made by their predecessors.

Having grown up under strong influence of his father's art and that of his contemporaries, he says he often finds it challenging to relate culturally with the traditional upbringing of his parents.

He incorporates poetry into a mixture of visual elements (comprising videos, large suspended paper houses, light and reflection) but the 'House of Cards' was inspired from a painting, 'Nobody is where he wanted to be'.

"The painting was my reaction to witnessing the post 'globalised', changing India of the late 90's, when the weight of over 40 years of migration from across the country to the larger metropolitan cities was

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Owais Husain

overbearing, resulting in no more 'small towns' as a consequence," he says.

"In addition to all of the socio-cultural implications, it was only later that I realised how much the idea of 'displacement' has continuously influenced nearly all my conceptual processes," he adds.

From the very beginning, it was essential for him to identify with his roots, which belonged to an urban ecosystem.

"Today, wherever you find yourself, the only important fact to know is where you are from? Or who you are, or even what you are?"

It is difficult to separate the philosopher out of Husain. He lives the image of an artist who craves to understand the world. During his career he has worked with different mediums, but he loves the medium of painting.

"Over time, even as plastic arts have been my visual language of choice, I began to feel more at ease with marriage of mediums. This became more obvious to me whilst working with films, which requires a holistic approach, armed with an understanding of multiple disciplines that is poetry, music, production design and photography that need to be appropriated or changed frequently," says Husain.

He recently completed a body of light box work called 'There is no present. We only live between the past and the future' which is to be exhibited as a travelling show in 2016.

Ruchira Talapatra