

## Spanish outing

**Latha Kurien Rajeev's collection of mural art called 'Sita' came, saw and conquered ...even the Spaniards**

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***On the right track Latha Kurien Rajeev with the Mayor of Valladolid and Guillermo Rodriguez, left, Latha with one of the Sita's in her collection***

When curator and art historian Lata Kurien Rajeev decided to lend a contemporary touch to mural art in Kerala, the dissenting voices were many. But she quietly went about her mission and the results – 27 breathtaking paintings on Sita, were the re for all to see.

The collection called 'SITA – Bhoomiputri and other stories,' the first work of G 360, Latha's gallery, captivated viewers. And now those very same images of Sita wowed collectors and art critics in Spain.

A jubilant Latha says she was moved by the way people from different walks of life connected with the paintings. "Their faces were a study in expressions. There was not a single person who was not moved by the beauty of the paintings. But then their reaction did not surprise me. 'Sita' has been a winner right from the beginning," says a proud Latha.

### Travelling to Spain

It was an exhibition held at Taj Green Cove, Kovalam, that caught the eye of Guillermo Rodriguez, who was holidaying in Kerala in December, 2007. Guillermo, director of Casa Dela India, Valladolid, Spain, was enthralled by the catalogue that Latha had made in association with artist Rassi. That pulled him to the show and he fell in love with Sita. That was how 20 paintings of Sita finally travelled to Spain.

"I made it a point to sit in the gallery to watch people react to the works (called 'SITA – Hija Dela Terra' in Spanish). It reinforced that art has no borders. Good works of art communicate to all. I also gave two lectures at the University of Valladolid. The talks were was on the mural art of India in general and Kerala in particular," says Latha.

The success of the collection was a vindication of her work as a curator and artist. She recalls that

though there were many who dismissed her efforts as “dead art” and “regressive” and so on, she knew she was on the right track. The way ‘Sita’ conquered the hearts of art collectors has also boosted the confidence of the artists. Initially, Latha had to coax them to step beyond traditional themes and motif.

“But now, they are willing to explore and experiment with concepts and themes. As an art historian, I delve into the past and not live in the past. So my project was to innovate on the stylistics of mural art in Kerala to come with contemporary themes, folk cultures and so on...The moment the collection was put together I knew I had a winner. Mohanlal was the first collector who fell for the timeless grace of the mural artist. He saw a catalogue with my husband, T.K. Rajeevkumar, when they were on a flight and as soon as he landed he called me up to say that he was buying a painting by Sadanandan.”

Danseuse Daksha and her daughter Isha Sharvani were the next collectors who took a painting of Sita home.

After the successful debut of ‘Sita,’ Latha is now working on ‘Blissful Wanderer,’ a project with Parvathy Baul to hold an exhibition of her wood-cut prints. ‘Blissful Wanderer’ will delve into the lives and works of the Sufi and Bhakthi saints and their philosophy.

A collaboration with Liza Behrendt called ‘Water Mark,’ which will focus on water, the elixir of life, would be followed by an exhibition of works by Basanth Peringode called ‘Colours of Silence.’

Latha’s Spanish outing has convinced her that art is not fettered by letters. “It talks directly to the soul. I believe there is a collective consciousness that unites all human beings and art and music are conduits that help us to connect at the level of the spirit and instinct, whatever our cultural or social ethos. I could barely communicate since my Spanish is as good as my Martian. However, the paintings mesmerised the audience even though the language of the art works are completely Indian and Malayali.”