

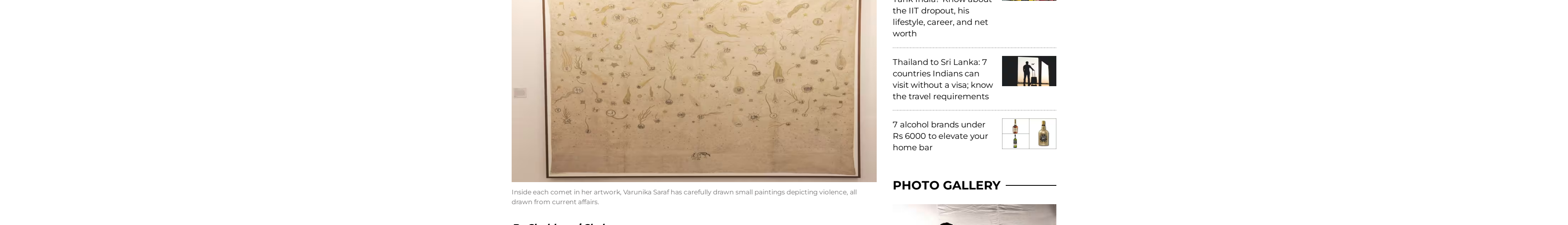
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## Writing on the wall: Varunika Saraf's artwork stirs you up and makes you think of events that are unfolding around us

In a way, Saraf's creation is an amalgamation of different worlds—of present-day India, medieval Europe, on a Mughal-era surface, and a future that is yet to unfold.



Inside each comet in her artwork, Varunika Saraf has carefully drawn small paintings depicting violence, all drawn from current affairs.

**By Shubhangi Shah**

When you look from afar, artist Varunika Saraf's Portents II feels pleasant to the eyes with all its differently-shaped comets. But as you tread closer, the reality unfolds, and pleasure turns into distress. Inside each comet, the artist has carefully drawn small paintings depicting violence, all drawn from current affairs. "Many of the images that you see within the comet are images of actual events that have taken place in India," Saraf says.

This large painting along with several of her smaller ones are on display at the ongoing Indian Art Festival in New Delhi. Elaborating upon her work, Saraf says: "The word 'portent' means worrying sign. And it is for us to think if these signs are of public concern or not. What this work does is that it brings together all the portents that have appeared since independence."

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The artist is represented by the Mumbai-based Chemould Prescott Road Gallery. For 'Portents', she has used watercolour on Wasi backed with cotton textile. Wasi is a Mughal technique in which the surface is made by binding together layers of paper. It's specifically used for painting miniatures.

The comets in Saraf's painting are drawn from medieval Europe manuscripts, which deal with wonder and prophecies. "During the medieval time, people used to look at the sky to interpret comets and other astronomical events, if they were a sign of an impending drought or a war," she says. So, the painting uses that idea of prophecies and juxtaposes them with images of actual events that have taken place in the Indian subcontinent. "Then it is presenting these as portents that have appeared in our sky," the artist explains, adding: "It makes people think that these signs are appearing and with much frequency and that they are a foretelling of a future that is yet to unfold." Not just that, it stirs you up to think if we want to go on that path.

In a way, Saraf's creation is an amalgamation of different worlds—of present-day India, medieval Europe, on a Mughal-era surface, and a future that is yet to unfold. All of these when bound together are enough to stir you up and think of events that are unfolding around us.

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