

# The Monk Who Paints The Foliage

VANDANA KALRA

IT is simple, sparse, almost like a Zen koan: a twisted bamboo, with a few leaves sprouting from it, that occupies the length of a rice paper. There is a quietude to the free-flowing strokes of ink. The only hint of colour is an orange orb, drawn with pearl ink — maybe the sun, more probably the circle of life. Lines are never ordinary streaks if the artist is the twelfth Tai Situpa, one of the highest ranking lamas of Tibetan Buddhism.

Dressed in a maroon robe and comfortably seated in a room full of paintings at the Kumar Gallery, the Tai Situpa explains the work, "The tree becomes more lush as it grows. Similarly people do a lot of things... they should do what they want, but they need to realise why they are doing. Awareness is important." Here is a 54-year-old monk

who paints the foliage to interpret the world. And also because "it makes me happy and I hope to make others happy too", he smiles beatifically, holding the catalogue of his solo show "Shadow of Inner Light" that begins on December 1. "What we do is reflective of our thinking. It is our shadow."

He was recognised as the Tai Situpa when he was an 18-month-old toddler named Pema Donyo Nyinje in eastern Tibet and has vague memories of scribbling on the floor with charcoal. "My nanny told me it was difficult to keep my clothes clean," he quips.

The Tai Situpa, who founded a monastic seat in Himachal Pradesh as far back as 1975, however, could put up a solo show in the country only now. "All my exhibitions are organised by others. But my art is simple, without many twists and distortions. I paint spontaneously and ask for paper

and brushes even while I'm traveling." Not all of his works survive — those which he doesn't like end up in flames — nor will you find his room crowded with his artwork. "My room usually has sign boards with the message 'Don't waste your time... You are getting closer to the end of this life.' That keeps reminding me that there is still a lot to do."

*The exhibition at Kumar Gallery, Sainik Farms, will go on till December 7*

**AFTERGLOW: The Tai Situpa (below, left); his works**



TASHI TOBGYAL

