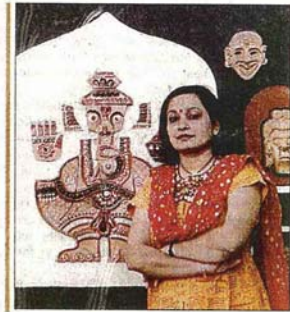




## Chisel by choice



Tribal art inspired by far-flung Africa, the Far East and Egypt? Kalpana Amin's studio in Anand, Gujarat, sources local talent to produce striking work, writes **Sudha Menon**.



Flo Art is a unique studio that enchants the eye with its warm earthy hues and cheerful interiors in which art forms of various kinds jostle for space. With over 1,000 sq. m at her disposal, Kalpana decided she wanted to increase the scope of work. The bungalow and surrounding space was transformed into an art gallery and production centre where artisans from nearby areas soon began to converge.

"Gujarat is uniquely gifted with craftspeople and artisans with a variety of skills, but poverty and middlemen have pushed them into abandoning their inherent talent and migrating to towns for menial jobs that do not even give them enough to eat," says Kalpana. "I decided I would do my best to give them an opportunity to utilise their skills and make a decent living out of it."

Today, teams of artists work round the clock at the production centre, their work resulting in art inspired by diverse civi-

lizations like Africa, Egypt, the Far East and India. Which is why visitors are likely to see idols of Ganesha, figureheads of animals from Harappa and Mohenjodaro, busts of Egyptian pharaohs, tribal face masks and statues of African women.

"What I like about the pieces of art we make is the fact that no two pieces are the same. Each piece is the handiwork of an artisan who gives his own interpretation to that work of art. While they contribute their inherent talent, I lend them guidance in the form of my knowledge of what the market wants," Kalpana points out.

While sculptures are what Kalpana is fond of creating, sheer pressure from visitors wanting diverse things has resulted in a wider variety in Flo Art. Today, it specialises in creating decorative frames produced from high and low relief terracotta plates, painted in attractive natural colours that literally brings the past into your drawing room. Typically, these

frames are images of animals, religious figures, tribal masks and traditional symbols, mounted on wooden frames and ready to be displayed. Kalpana's studio also specialises in attractive murals that bring alive bare walls. In addition to individual buyers, her list of patrons include corporates who have commissioned her to create murals and sculptures for their corporate offices and manufacturing facilities.

The last few years have seen Kalpana and a group of her artisans display their work in various cities, including Mumbai, where her work was an instant hit. "My eventual aim is to set up a trust so that the artisans can continue to work, and at the same time train talented youngsters in the villages who will then carry traditional art forward into the future," says Kalpana.

But that is in the future. She has lots more of work to do to satisfy her own creative instincts, she says with a smile. ■

**K**alpana Amin's work is a reiteration of the old adage that beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder. An artist by profession, her idea of beauty lies in nature and its creations with all the raw edges in place.

Not for her a cold, chiselled profile of a woman or a picture of a perfect sunrise. She recalls an incident from her life in Kenya to illustrate. Walking through the marketplace one day, she was enchanted by the sight of a Muslim beggar woman, "dark as the night" with a child hanging on to her rags and a veil that hid her face upto her thick, purple lips. "The sight affected me so much I rushed back home and worked at a feverish pitch till I had recreated that woman in a sculpture form," smiles Kalpana.

That was years ago. Kalpana has now been in India for more than a decade and lives in a rambling bungalow in the quiet surroundings of Anand in Gujarat. Though she was busy setting up home and bringing up children, her love for art was what led her to set up a tiny studio in the corner of her bungalow. The sculpture of the Muslim woman holds centre-stage in her studio though it causes a lot of raised eyebrows from visitors.

"I love working with my fingers and creating shapes and forms," says Kalpana. News of her work spread in the town and soon people were flocking in.

