Pichhwai Painting
Rajasthan

The word Pichhwai is derived from the Sanskrit word ‘pich’ meaning back and ‘wai’ meaning hanging.

Pichhwai are intricate paintings, done mostly on cloth or paper, portraying Lord Krishna. This art form has its roots in the holy town of Nathdwara in Rajasthan. Krishna is shown in different moods, body postures and attire. It is a very ancient form of art passed on from generation to generation. The purpose of Pichhwas, other than its artistic appeal, is to narrate tales of Krishna to the illiterate. These artists mostly live in ‘Chitron ki gali’ (street of paintings) and ‘Chitrakaron ka mohallah’ (colony of painters) and make a close community with constant interaction.

Pichwai paintings are works of art that are used to adorn the walls of temples, behind the idol. The Pichwai style is from the Nathdwara School and is identified by characteristic features of large eyes, a broad nose and a heavy body similar to the features on the idol of Shrinathji. While the paintings depicting summer have pink lotuses, the paintings depicting ‘Sharad Purnima’ comprise a night scene with the bright full moon. Festivals such as Raas Leela and Holi are also themes that are often depicted. Sometimes rich embroidery or appliqué work is used on the paintings. Enclosed in a dark border, rich colours like red, green, yellow, white and black are used with a lot of gold decorating the figures.

On a starched cloth, the painter first makes a rough sketch and then fills in the colours. Traditionally natural colours and brushes made of horse, goat or squirrel hair were used. The use of pure gold in the paintings adds to their value and charm and it may take 3-4 days to just prepare colour from pure gold.

Sushil Soni was born in 1981 and started painting at the age of 10. He holds a degree in drawing and painting from Nathdwara College, Rajasthan. He has also learnt Miniature paintings from Ghanshyam ji Nimbank and introduced intricacies of miniature into folk Pichwai paintings. His works have been exhibited at the Jamaat Art Gallery, Mumbai; the Jawahar Kala Kendra, Jaipur; Marushree Parishad, Kolkata; Crafts Museum, New Delhi; Dastkar, New Delhi; Dastkari Haat Samiti, New Delhi and the Chitakoot Art Gallery, Kolkata. He has conducted several workshops for Paramparik Karigar in Mumbai; for Marushree Parishad in Kolkata; and for SPIC MACAY in Kolkata.