

With Indian roots and a diverse upbringing in Leicester, **Jemisha Maadhavji** is redefining beauty standards through her vibrant, fashion-inspired portraits, writes Ayesha Shehmir



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Facing page: Jemisha Maadhavji, *Diamond of Beauty*, 2020. Oil, crystals and gold paint on linen, 30x30cm;
This page: *Symphony of The Libertine*, 2019. Oil, crystals and gold paint on canvas, 122x80cm



Jemisha
Maadhavji.
HYPNOTICA, 2018.
Oil on canvas.
29.98x45cm

“I HOPE MY WORK PLAYS A SMALL PART AND PEOPLE
START TO ACCEPT THEMSELVES NO MATTER WHAT
SKIN COLOUR OR SIZE THEY ARE”



Jemisha
Maadhavji.
Roses, 2018.
Oil on canvas.
190x100cm

Born and raised in Leicester, England, Jemisha Maadhavji was introduced to the world of art and design early on in her life. Her Indian ancestors, including her father, made a living from designing, manufacturing and selling gold jewellery in her hometown, Gujarat. Despite this, the creative fields never really piqued her interest. “I always loved looking at art that other students made, but I couldn’t create a stick figure for myself,” Maadhavji laughs. “Surprisingly, I started drawing portraits at the age of 14 and couldn’t stop.”

Then, in 2015, she enrolled into a Fine Art BA at De Montfort University, paving the beginning of her career as an artist. As her work began to garner recognition in many competitions through open calls, her confidence grew.

The artist’s figurative paintings, comprising strong patterns and a mix of bold colours, note inspiration from her rich Indian heritage and culture, taking cues from detailed traditional *saris*, block prints, hand-embroidered and printed textiles. “It all started after I bought my first floral piece of clothing in 2016,” she reveals. “A Joules shirt with roses all over the top half. Wearing it didn’t give me enough joy, I needed to do something with it.” And so, she painted it.

Not a fan of painting flesh, each work reveals the story of the subject through evocative clothing, bright colours and patterns. “I think clothes show personality,” says Maadhavji. “I once heard the global definition of fashion as: ‘Showing more and wearing less’, but my definition is wearing more and showing less.”

Luxury fashion has always remained a constant inspiration for the artist; the subjects of her work are often dressed in Gucci-inspired clothing, vibrant patterns and jewellery, for instance as seen in *Diamond of Beauty* (2020) and *Roses* (2018). “Whenever I’m in London, I always visit Liberty London and I never get bored of it,” she says. “It’s like a living and working museum where you can touch, feel and experience the wearable pieces of art such as the silk scarves, oriental rugs, carpet furniture and fabric. Walking on Bond Street and seeing the beautiful diamond jewellery, I’m always thinking of ways I can use this in my work.” For the artist, clothes are wearable pieces of art. “They’re not just for the sake of wearing clothes. I feel pattern defines me as person. So when I’m painting a subject, it has an essence of me.”

Maadhavji’s work has been showcased at art fairs and exhibitions around the UK and most recently, three of her works were housed exclusively within gallery London Connoisseur, founded by Helen Chislett. In 2018 the artist participated in the renowned Columbia Threadneedle Prize: Figurative Art Today at Mall Galleries in London and in 2019, in the annual FBA Futures exhibition and The Other Art Fair in King’s Cross, London.

Defying traditional gender stereotypes and labels, *HYPNOTICA* (2018), featuring a young fashion designer and student based in Leicester delicately painted and sculpted onto the surface, depicts the message that beauty is not only the quality of a woman. “From the first time I saw him on social media, I instantly wanted to create a series of painting of him,” admits Maadhavji. The colours on his face reflect his flamboyant, multitalented, colourful and honest qualities. “What I love about him is that he wears what he likes including jewellery and patterned shirts. He carries himself in a unique and individual manner,” she explains. Mesmerised at first sight, the painting’s title has been derived from the artist’s

awe of the man. “For centuries, women and flowers have been seen as desirable and beautiful subjects, however, I believe beauty is genderless. In this painting, I really wanted to break that stereotype.”

Another work of note, entitled *Nasreen* (2017) explores the intimate relationship between a woman and a rose. “She’s not a model, she’s a student like me,” explains Maadhavji, of the work. Nasreen, the subject of the work, was raised in a similar environment to the artist, sparking an instant personal connection. “Naturally when we see flowers, in this case a rose, that moment becomes very silent and speechless,” she says. “We start to concentrate on the flower more than anything else. Our mind becomes still and we don’t feel the movement around us. This painting reflects her personality: she’s calm, patient and very natural.” The work also marked the beginning of Maadhavji’s idea for the painting *Roses* (2018).

Entitled *Jemabelle’s: The Mirror of Magic* (2020) and *Perfumed*

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Jemisha Maadhavji. *Roses Without Thorns*. 2016. Oil on board. 55x43cm



Jemisha Maadhavji. *GUCCYOTIC*. 2018. Oil on canvas. 122x70cm

Jemisha Maadhavji.
Nasreen. 2017. Oil on
paper. A4



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“LIFE IS COLOURFUL,
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EVERY BIT OF IT ”

Jemisha
Maadhavji. *Only
Me*. 2018. Oil on
wooden board.
100x50cm



social media and at other times, from natural encounters on the street. Through her work, the artist hopes we can celebrate ourselves, our beauty and imperfections, in the same way modern society praises a celebrity. “I feel a lot of young people believe what they see on a screen is real and that’s how they start following trends,” she sighs. “However, I think people are becoming more confident with themselves in accepting one another. There still is a long way to go, so I hope my work plays a small part and people start to accept themselves no matter what skin colour or size they are. Everyone is special.”

Maadhavji leaves us with one piece of advice which resonates with her and is told through each of her jovial and carefree characters: “Life is colourful, live and breathe every bit of it.” ■ londonconnoisseur.co.uk

Dreams (2020), the artist’s newest self-portraits created during lockdown represent the freedom of her mind to wander and escape to an ethereal, more peaceful world. “They are a representation of me and how I think, see and feel about someone or something and my desires,” she smiles. “During the lockdown, I felt very dreamlike. My mind felt more liberated and so, this work is quite different from my previous works.”

The former work depicts Maadhavji’s yearning desire to visit the majestic Flower Room at Annabel’s Mayfair in London, drawing inspiration from its otherworldly charm. “It feels like the enchanted, dreamlike world has been brought to life by Martin Brudnizki,” she says. “It’s human nature to look into the mirror to see how gorgeous we’re looking, but this mirror is so beautiful that anyone looking into it will not be credited as much as the mirror itself. Everything in this is spectacular; from the wallcovering by La Maison Pierre Frey, the jewel-like chandelier by Sogni Di Cristallo, lined with my favourite perfume Goutal Paris, Rose Pompon.”

The second work, *Perfumed Dreams* is a miniature drawing on paper, revealing the artist’s ‘dream room’. The work features House of Hackney wallpapers reimagined with yellow skirting boards, a Gucci chair and carpet from the fashion house’s AW17 campaign and the artist’s favourite *Tutti Frutti* necklace by Anabela Chan. “Whenever I like something, owning it will never get me enough of it,” she laughs. “So I need to make a drawing or painting of it. The process is very different than usual. Everything in this drawing was unplanned. I started off with a line drawing of the chair followed by the lamp, carpet and wallpaper, having no idea how it was going to end up. It was almost like shopping.”

Each work showcases the beauty in diversity and multiculturalism. At times, the subjects are sourced through