



What happens when a boat-builder leaves the paddle and takes the paintbrush? If he is the Swiss artist Marcellus Steiner, he effortlessly brings an elemental feel to the canvas — with some fluid strokes and an ecru earthiness that has dried on it a long time ago but is still tangible. Steiner, who wandered in the foothills of the Himalayas and waited on the ghats of Haridwar, has done the holy tour of India that has been his home for the past eight years. And if you are looking for the leitmotif of his mirth, you can stop at the portrait of a sadhvi at the Kumbh Mela, with a *lota* in her hand, smiling with naked joy.

Steiner is one of five Swiss artists whose works are on display at the Swiss Embassy.

Swiss Palette Knife

Three of them, Jakob Jenzer, Johanna Näf and Guillaume Estoppey, painted in Varanasi as part of a six-month residency programme sponsored by the Conference for Swiss Cities on Cultural Questions, Thun, Switzerland, while Fabienne Zimmermann was drawn to the Osho Ashram in Pune.

And their works are as dif-

INDIA INK: Marcellus Steiner beside his canvas

ferent as they come. Naf, a sculptor, turned to painting and designing silk shawls, since she couldn't sculpt in the chaotic India that sprang around the first-time visitor. While Zimmermann's bold strokes show demons being chased away, ambidextrous Jenzer's work in charcoal is drawn with both hands to bring out the vivacity of folk artists. "My right hand dominated the left one but it lent an interesting aspect," he says with a roguish grin. For the left image, in a spin, seems to be still turning around.

The exhibition at the Swiss Embassy is on till November 30

— RICHHA BHATIA

