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As we start this year, here is a list of early-career artists who reflect on our current times

Abhishek Dodiya's 'A House after Cyclone'

By **Rahul Kumar**

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A critic and writer once said to me in context of the arts, “It is important to invest in and engage within your generation—a collector must follow artists of their time, and artists should deliberate with writers and curators of their own generation.” This thought has stayed with me ever since, especially when it comes to younger artists who reflect our current times, things that we are experiencing, and issues that are close to our hearts such as ecological imbalance or political polarity.

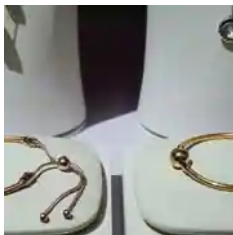
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In context of young contemporary artists of today, few strong themes emerge. Firstly, they are willing to experiment. Rejecting the hegemony of the west or even following in the footsteps of their seniors, their art is void of any baggage of the past. Secondly, there is a renewed focus on skill. Well-executed works, with a strong technical base, seem more common than before. And lastly, the foundational ideas are more rooted in their own traditions, homeland, and immediate environment.

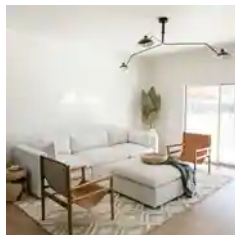
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How self-reflection helps us create the space and time to know ourselves

By Divya Naik



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Abhishek Dodiya: a fresh approach to metal

Dodiya is engaged in dismantling and reconstruction in his works. The inspiration often comes from deep observation of his surroundings. "I invite viewers to experience the open-endedness of the surface of my work that revisits lived events, compounded with complexities of emotions," he says.

His *Cyclone* series is particularly noteworthy, where he has used metal sheets that seem malleable to the softest touch. His documentation of the recent devastating storms in the coastal areas of Gujarat is a grim reminder of the potential impact of climate crisis.

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This comes naturally to Dodiya, who lives and works in Bhavnagar (Gujarat), known for its ship-breaking industry. He says that his choice of material and process is heavily influenced by the 'space, texture, sound, and smell' of his home town. He completed his masters from the Maharaja Sayajirao University, Baroda, in 2020. Since then, Dodiya has been awarded by the Gujarat State Lalit Kala Academy and the Prafulla Dahanukar Foundation.



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Divya Singh's 'Nox Umbra-Fallen Angels'

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Divya Singh: a relook at memory

Singh's practice is primarily rooted in paintings that explore themes of isolation and memory. These emanate largely from a poetic engagement with the very idea of 'time'. "I borrow from disciplines of photography, writing, as well as cinema. These varied elements come together within my work," she says, and this can be seen most distinctly in the recent artist-books she created. Singh is currently working with instant film/polaroid. Her paintings evoke the same sensibility as



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She investigates the idea of time—while oil painting is a slow process, polaroid is instant. Instant photography, initially, was a replacement for drawing. It merely captured the moment that she could reference for her paintings. But gradually Singh's photos began to look like her paintings and vice versa, and she allowed for this cross referencing of qualities to persist. Her art is highly relevant to our contemporary times and encourage viewers to look inwards. Singh completed her Master of Fine Arts from Shiv Nadar University in 2018. She is a recent recipient of the Space118 Fine Arts grant.

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Gurjeet Singh's untitled sculpture

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Gurjeet Singh: sculptures that tell fresh stories

Singh was introduced to art through his family. “As a child, I saw women of the family always engrossed in decorating the house, stitching and embroidering,” he says. He was involved in all these activities and learnt techniques from his sisters. Singh also helped his father at his scooter repairs shop, which helped him immensely in learning the working of machines.

His stuffed soft-sculptures with textile, and embellished with embroidered patterns, are a response to his surroundings and experiences that have stories and humour. He conveys those by creating imagined characters. Singh’s sculptures revolve around “stories behind closed doors, abuse and neglect, identity and loss, and are often highly personal”. Singh completed his masters with a gold medal from the College of Art, Chandigarh in 2019. He is a recipient of Khoj and Kochi-Muziris Biennale grants and a recent awardee of Inlaks Fine Arts Award and the Amrita Sher-Gil Award.

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Koyal Raheja's 'Claustrophobia'

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Koyal Raheja: questioning the systems of the past

In Raheja's explorations, she poses a question on the conundrum between the body as a living organism and the body that loses its signifying behavioural elements, reduced to a tool, regulated by its mechanical efficiency. Her works elaborate on the behaviours and transfigurations of a docile body that shifts to a dictated one. In a recent series, exploring ideas around gesture, space, and self, she draws figures performing the regulatory gesture of a school assembly, each individual equally distant from one another. Raheja's 'bodies' subsume regimented, lyrical, and minute variations.

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“Through my work, I try to question systems and structures of the past and present using different lenses of conformity, rebellion, and separation,” she says. Raheja graduated from the Studio Arts College International, Florence, in 2019. Her works have been part of significant exhibits in Italy and India, including at *Cenacolo Fiorentini #8* at the San Marco Museum Library, Florence; *Bring into Play* at Accaenti quattro Casa Galleria, Prato; and *Ghosts of Image(in)Nation* at Gallery High Street, Bangalore.

Kumar Misal's untitled work

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Kumar Misal: shining the spotlight on the farmer

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Misal hails from a farmer's family. His approach to art is based on natural aesthetics that reflect the relationship and significance of nature in rural life. That is visible in the process as well. Misal makes his own paper and often uses mud to stain it. The very surface, therefore, becomes indispensable to him, and being 'farm-made', it becomes important to his cause. The artist's prints evoke the perils of a farmer. He celebrates the act of growing food in a manner that rejects any political undertones. Misal completed his masters from JJ School of Arts, Mumbai in 2020. He has been awarded at the Kochi-Muziris Biennale grant and the Krishna Reddy Award for printmaking.

Sarah Naqvi's 'Caged'

Sarah Naqvi: a bold take on societal stigmas

Naqvi is a multimedia artist, who engages in narratives themed around religious and societal stigmas. With textiles and embroidery being the primary medium in their practice, Naqvi uses the cathartic nature of the process to address relevant



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issues of marginalisation. This stems from her education in textiles at the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad.

“I was a restless child, always creating things but destroying them in the end. That was probably the genesis of the rebel in me,” they say. Their works straddle classical painting, technology, and performance. Naqvi’s creative process is rooted in highly personalised narrative of their experience of the society.

In her recent work titled *Blanket of Solidarity*, Naqvi uses an image of a quilt of a protestor from the Shaheen Bagh site. It embodies the strength and warmth of resilience, and a hope to protect India’s secular future.

They studied liberal arts at St. Xavier's College, Mumbai in 2018, and is currently participating in the De Ateliers Residency program in Berlin. They were the recipient of 'The Phenomenal she' award conferred by the Indian National Bar Association and NID Ford Foundation Grant.

Also read: [How the pandemic made an artist sensitive to emptiness](#)

Sonali Sonam, from the series ‘Reimagining the Mundane’

Sonali Sonam: celebrating beauty in the mundane

Intrigued by the idea of non-static beauty, Sonam observes and draws



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influenced by the miniature style, investigate the natural world in the urban. In her view, beauty is not personal, rather it is very much dependent on the spectator, and it changes with time. "I am interested in how a collection of mundane activities can become a new reality, where once we all exist but at the same time it becomes strange to us," she says. In her recent series titled *Re-imagining the mundane*, she creates scenes of natural beauty through the flora and fauna in city environment *sans* anything manmade. Sonam completed her masters from College of Arts, New Delhi in 2021. She received the Shristi AIF Grant, and National and Zonal awards by the Camel Art Foundation.

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NEXT STORY

Regional recipes from a harvest festival for the New Year

Yelamas is a festival of the farmland celebrated with much fanfare in a few districts of Maharashtra, Karnataka Telangana



On Yelamas, clay idols of the five Pandavas along with food are placed in the farms of Latur, Maharashtra. (Photo: Kunal Vijayakar)



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LAST UPDATED 01.01.2022 | 01:00 PM IST

“You must visit us during *Yelamas*,” Mohanabai Mahalangrekar insisted when we met a decade ago. The 62-year-old retired *lavani* performer is now a farmer near Latur in Maharashtra.

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Yelamas, also known as *Yelvas* or *Wel Amavasya*, is a popular harvest festival and is celebrated with much enthusiasm and fanfare in a few districts of Maharashtra, Karnataka and Telangana. Local governments declare it a holiday as people spend the day at the farm and take part in feasts. If one doesn’t own a farm, they are invited to those belonging to relatives and friends. The new moon day in the Hindu month of *Margasheersh* calls for an elaborate, pre-fixed meal, and it falls on January 2 this year. I was fortunate to have witnessed this celebration during a visit to Mahalangrekar’s farm exactly a year ago.

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Lounge Fiction: New Shoots

The morning I reached her roomy house in Latur, we had plenty to catch up on. Over multiple rounds of creamy *chai*, green peas *appe* and *sushila*—a popular *poha*-like snack made of puffed rice—I was heartened by her warm hospitality. The tamarind and peanut chutney, that accompanied them, reinvigorated my palate with its piquant and spicy flavour. It was prepared by Mahalangrekar who usually doesn't cook. *Lavani* artists are the breadwinners; kitchen and housework are not their responsibility. "Imagine how easy it would be that even I could make it in less than five minutes," she quipped.

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Sushila (Photo: Kunal Vijayakar)



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“The real taste comes from the blend of raw items like onion and tamarind pulp,” she shared, and added, “rookie chefs should make it to impress their loved ones just like me.”

We headed to her farm by mid-morning. All farmers in the region celebrate this festival despite their caste and religion which highlights the syncretic nature of harvest festivals. Mahalangrekar comes from a matriarchal community called *Kalwat* that follows Islam. The farmers build a small conical structure of jowar hay and decorate it with flowers and a shiny cloth. Clay idols of the five Pandavas and Laxmi are placed under the structure and worshipped.

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We were invited by several families whose farms we crossed to reach Mahalangrekar’s. “People eat multiple times and at different farms, but the feasting doesn’t end and over-eating doesn’t upset the tummy,” she said with a smile.

A group of 45 comprising her close family and friends gathered under the canopy of a huge Babul tree at her farm. I was eager to see the menu, but there was no sign of cooking. We played some games with the children, swayed on the swings and sang songs.

Finally, it was lunch time and there was a large spread of *jowar* and *bajra rotis*, sesame and jaggery stuffed wheat rotis, yellow garlicky dal, sticky rice, *papads*, pickles and the key attractions of Yelamas—*bhajji* and *ambil*.

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Bhajji is a thick mixed vegetable curry and *ambil* is fermented buttermilk.

Mahalangrekar's brothers and their wives had cooked everything early in the morning, while the *ambil* was made the previous night and allowed to ferment. Although nothing was re-heated, each morsel was filled with flavour.

The *ambil*—with coarsely ground garlic greens, dry red chillies, cumin seeds, salt and a pinch of turmeric powder—is left to ferment overnight. In the morning it's tempered with mustard seeds, crushed garlic and served.

"Some people add jowar flour too," Mahalangrekar's sister-in-law said, and added, "But that may give you a buzz."

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I was already feeling a bit buzzed.



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Ambil (Photo: Kunal Vijayakar)

“How many glasses did you have?” Mahalangrekar asked.

“Four,” I replied.

“Who gave him four glasses, have you gone nuts?” she scolded her grandchildren: “This is fermented buttermilk. It does contain a bit of alcohol.”

In that hazy state, I recalled what she told me 10 years ago: “I have done plenty of *lavani* (the art form) on stage, now I want to try my luck at the *lavani* (sowing) in the farms.”

I looked at the large, lush green farm. She had achieved the difficult task of succeeding in an unfamiliar territory in less than 10 years. It definitely called for celebration. “One more glass of *ambil* please,” I requested and lied down in the shade of the humongous Babul tree.

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Bhajji for Yelamas

Ingredients

- 1 cup peanuts, boiled
- 1 cup green peas, boiled
- 1 cup green chickpeas, boiled
- 1 cup pigeon peas, boiled
- 1 cup carrots, cubed
- 1 cup eggplants, cubed
- 3 cup fenugreek leaves, cleaned and plucked
- 3 cups spring onion, chopped
- 1 and half cup tamarind pulp
- 1 and half cup besan
- 1 and half cup water
- 1 and half cup curry leaves
- 1 and half cup oil for cooking
- Salt and red chilli powder to taste
- 1 tsp turmeric powder
- 1 tsp mustard seeds
- 1 cup paste of garlic greens, garlic pods, cumin seeds and green chillies

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Method

Heat oil in a pan. Add mustard seeds and curry leaves, tip in the garlic-chilli paste. Saute. Tip in the vegetables, add turmeric powder and red chilli powder. Let it simmer for 5 minutes. Mix in the boiled peas. Add salt and tamarind pulp and let it cook. Meanwhile, mix the besan with water. When the cooked peas and vegetables start releasing oil, slowly pour in the besan slurry while stirring continuously. Let it come to a rolling boil. Take it off the heat and serve hot. It can be had cold too.



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Ingredients

1 cup tamarind pulp

1 and half cups raw peanuts

1 onion

1 tsp cumin seeds

1 tsp red chilli powder

Salt as per taste

Sugar, optional

Method

Put all the ingredients in a mixer and blend till you get a nice coarsely-ground texture. Traditionally, sugar is not needed, but adding it may enhance and balance the taste.

Bhushan Korgaonkar is a Mumbai-based writer.

Also read | [How these Telangana women farmers rode out the pandemic](#)

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NEXT STORY

Lounge Fiction: Statue, by Mahesh Rao

A forgotten hero comes to life, a sculptor performs a sleight of hand, and a mysterious overabundance of cloves laddoos puzzles everyone



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Illustration by Jayachandran.

By Mahesh Rao

LAST UPDATED 02.01.2022 | 09:00 AM IST

In spite of the haphazard details that had been made available, almost everyone agreed that Vishwamitra Joshi was a great man. Heroes were often obscured by the opaque murk of history. It took great diligence and perseverance to draw them back into the light. Gradually, over the last few years, Vishwamitra Joshi had assumed a discernible form; every month a new biographical illumination adding to his lustre.

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These matters were of importance even in a small city with only three multiplex cinemas, two universities, one ancient fort, and no airport. In the staff rooms of



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Vishwamitra Joshi. There could be no doubt that he had been a vital actor in the fight for independence, managing to hoodwink everyone from constables and *tehsildars* to Chief Commissioners and Inspector Generals. His absence from contemporary accounts by prominent British and Indian figures could only be recognised as a sign of the success of his subterfuge. The most remarkable of his campaigns involved the derailing of trains by placing barrels filled with rocks on the tracks. In each barrel, he left a signed scrap of paper, his elegant penmanship only serving to further infuriate the colonial authorities.

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The fact that his name did not appear in any textbooks for decades and was absent from all recognised scholarship was hardly surprising. Everyone knew that the older historians were all charlatans who would go out of their way to neglect or malign great figures. Not satisfied with having diminished Vishwamitra Joshi, they had disappeared him. But the younger, cannier historians, goggle-eyed at new opportunities, were making amends. Among other triumphs, they chronicled Vishwamitra Joshi's formation of a militia to repel attacks from Afghan marauders. Once again, while precise details were scant, oral accounts of his valour and wiliness had been passed down through generations, leaping into the mainstream just as campaigning for the last parliamentary elections began. Sometimes on his own, he managed to ambush

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them tearing meat off the bone with their teeth and trying to catch the eye of beautiful maidens, these enraging images spurring him on to greater acts of bravery. The new volumes of his exploits described how he collected trunks full of turbans as souvenirs of his vanquished enemies before turning the fabric into garments for the poor.

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It was around the time that the local press became aware of the misappropriation of funds designated for a government hospital that the city's municipal authorities mooted their demand for a statue to commemorate the neglected hero. The clamour grew. Tales of Joshi's bravery enraptured millions online but there existed no physical testament to his many sacrifices. Not only would a permanent monument mark the re-emergence of this forgotten victor, it would also be a welcome boost for the reputation of the city, its last appearance in national media coverage being reports of an illegal cockfight that had turned into a huge riot.

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The accounts of Vishwamitra Joshi's benevolence proliferated. He housed orphans, he tended the sick, he educated widows, although not excessively. He set up a string of residential schools where young men would strengthen their



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in the afternoon. The most cited account of his regard for the needy was his encounter with a beggar on a chilly December night. Joshi had spotted the man shivering in a doorway, dressed in a thin cotton shirt and pyjamas. Almost as a reflex action, Joshi had taken off his jacket, purchased in England, where he had lived as a student. It was his only extravagant purchase, although hardly even that as he would not have been allowed into the college dining room without a jacket. He helped the astonished beggar into the jacket, buttoned it, and smoothed down the lapels. Then he waved him on his way, folding his arms across his chest as the wind tore down through the trees. For years, the beggar would seek alms dressed in Joshi's fine tweed, crafted by Worsley and Anderson of Jermyn Street.

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Sculptors from around the country were invited to submit their ideas for a suitably commemorative piece. After a period of deliberation the commission was awarded to the Mayor's brother-in-law. His statue of a woman nuzzling a fawn, their eyes identical, had earned widespread praise, and his busts of the owners of Gupta Steel Works remained on display in all the Gupta family gardens. Funds were diverted from the sanitation department to this important commission and the sculptor was offered a small room in the administration block of the municipal corporation building if his studio proved in any way inadequate. He declined the offer.

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Excitement about the statue continued to mount. It was known that the finest Rajasthani marble would be used and that the statue would be over six feet tall.

Other than that, all the talk was speculation.

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Girl,

“I have heard he will be sitting on a chair, with a book, like a studious fellow.”

“No, someone saw through the studio window. He is holding a gun over his head with both hands. Like a weightlifter.”

“No, no, he is standing in a garden in that famous jacket. The one stitched by a *darzi* in England.”

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As the sculptor chipped away at his creation, the city’s residents paid their own tributes to the great man. Students at the engineering college designed an app that would allow people to access Joshi’s teachings in an approachable way. The jets of the musical fountains in the city’s parks rose and fell in time to film songs repurposed to describe Joshi’s achievements. Every branch of Tip-Top Bakery now sold cakes and buns iced with an image of his favourite bird, the peacock. The elite Harvard Intercontinental School held a Vishwamitra Joshi fancy dress competition. Boys presented themselves in everything from military fatigues to



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covered with peacock feathers. Since the school staff were unable to find any photographs or portraits of Joshi, all the entrants received first prize.

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The rains came in short spurts and continued well into September. They were followed by still, cloudless days of relentless heat. In the markets spinach and mustard greens wilted in a few hours and the election posters on walls around the city faded to a grubby pink. The river shrank from its banks and the musical fountains were switched off to preserve water.

Also read: [Lounge Fiction: Milk and Water by Perumal Murugan](#)

Finally, it was the day of the inauguration, Vishwamitra Joshi's presumptive birthday. A tent was set up in front of the municipal corporation building, where the statue would be unveiled in front of some of the most influential people in the country. It would then embark on a tour of twenty-five cities before settling in its permanent home, the courtyard of the city's sole museum.

In the makeshift kitchen behind the tent, giant bags of *besan* and sugar were slit open, their contents heaved and poured into battered aluminium pots. A junior cook accidentally spilled an extra-large bag of cloves into the *laddoo* mixture. Panic-stricken by his mistake, he stirred the cloves into the *besan* until they were barely visible. Since no one seemed to have noticed, he backed away from the stove, washed his hands, and in about twenty minutes was on a bus that would take him to the next town.

Guests arrived from all over the country, their stomachs still churning from the state of the last fifty kilometres of the road into town. Even the Mayor's wife had returned from Dubai, where she had been learning to ski. Silver bunting glinted high above the scrubby patch of grass in front of the tent. *Laddoos* and plastic cups of sugary tea were passed around. Raucous crows in the *neem* trees did their best to overpower the drone of chatter from the crowd and the contained

[argument unfolding in the kitchen](#)



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The VIPs were led to their seats and the tent began to fill up. A nose in the second row twitched: someone a few seats away was peeling an orange. Near the steps leading up to the side of the stage, a stray dog settled down to lick its balls.

“I really thought this day would never come,” said the Assistant Mayor, *laddoo* in hand.

“It is a miracle,” said the Mayor, extracting a couple of cloves from his mouth and dropping them on the ground.

A hot breeze whipped grit and grime into the air but even as the audience clapped handkerchiefs over their noses and mouths, their spirits remained high. It was as though their actions had managed to literally raise the dust off their history.

As instructed, albeit two hours late, teachers from the government medical college scattered rose petals from the first floor of the municipal corporation building on to the path leading to the tent. The dhol players picked up the tempo, the seated guests fanning themselves with their invitations in time to the rhythm. The rose petals slowly drifted to the patch of grass behind the tent to mingle with the many cloves discarded there earlier by the guests.

Also read: [Lounge Fiction: Orumai's Choice by Gautam Bhatia](#)

The Minister of Cultural Affairs had been afforded the honour of unveiling the statue. The precise nature of this unveiling had been the subject of prolonged discussion with his aides. If he whipped the covering off in a flash, he might resemble some street magician brashly revealing a monkey in a cage. If he were to tug slowly at the covering, inch by seductive inch, he feared a lascivious element would creep into these momentous proceedings: this was not a striptease.

When the time came to reveal the statue, the speed and gravitas of his actions were perfect. He beamed. He executed a little bow. He handed the covering to an underling and awaited the sounds of jubilation. But for the first time that afternoon, there was silence in the tent. The dignitaries closest to the statue took in its pristine pearly features and then turned to look at its creator. The sculptor’s face was inscrutable. They gazed at the statue again and this time turned to look at the sculptor’s three daughters, seated in the second row, all of whom resembled him closely. Father and daughters had the same protruding eyes; the same nose with nostrils that looked flared even when in repose; the same delicate mouth, as though pursed in pre-emptive disapproval. The dignitaries shifted their gaze from the daughters back to the statue. The sculptor



had rendered the statue in his own likeness. The protruding eyes, the flared nostrils and the delicate mouth, all appeared again, this time hewn in marble.

The Minister of Cultural Affairs cleared his throat and looked up at the red and yellow swirls on the ceiling of the tent. A child at the back began to bawl. One of the mikes on stage emitted a ghostly murmur. After a few seconds, the sculptor's face showed some signs of life: he blinked and turned towards the dazzle of daylight far beyond the tent poles. One of his daughters blinked too.

Someone in a middle row began to clap. The clapping rippled across the row and over the central aisle. A man stood up near the front and pulled his neighbour to her feet. The applause grew louder. More people stood up, there were loud cheers at the back, and the bawling child was hoisted on to broad paternal shoulders. The Mayor put his fingers in his mouth and a sharp whistle cut through the tent. Almost the entire audience was on its feet now. The sculptor stood up, faced the assembly and humbly put his hands together. The ovation grew thunderous, a kind of feral euphoria sparking through the air. Loud acclamations settled in the thick atmosphere, already rich with the sense of old wounds being healed. The stray dog fled from the roars. In a circle of blazing light, the statue glowed. The noise pulsed towards the stage, its beat making its way into the bones of the people in the crowd. The pitch grew so frenzied that it seemed likely that the flimsy tent poles would soon snap and bring the entire tent crashing down.

Mahesh Rao is the author of the novels The Smoke Is Rising (2014) and Polite Society (2018), and a collection of short stories, One Point Two Billion (2015).

Also read: [The Lounge Fiction Special: original short stories](#)

FIRST PUBLISHED 02.01.2022 | 09:00 AM IST

TOPICS [Fiction Special](#)

Why you shouldn't be bummed about your mum tum

Struggling to lose that lower abdominal pooch that has developed after the birth of your child? You shouldn't w so much, says our expert.



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A mum tum is the lower abdominal pooch that women often experience after the birth of their child. (Pexels)

By Jen Thomas

LAST UPDATED 02.01.2022 | 11:30 AM IST

We all know what a mum tum, the protruding stomach that women often experience after the birth of their child, looks like. And, unfortunately, much to the frustration of many new mothers, this belly usually sticks around even after she has lost her pregnancy weight.

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If you're struggling to imagine what it looks like, think of a beautiful Victorian painting of a half-clothed woman. These lovely ladies are generally depicted with a rounded lower belly, a good depiction of a "mum-tum."

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However, in a world that congratulates women on returning to their pre-baby figure and flat tummies, having a mum tum can feel like a defeat or a compromise, rather than a part of life.

Also read: [How many seemingly feminine illnesses can also affect men](#)

This "falling short" from the social media ideal encourages new moms to join boot camps or exercise programs that promise them flat stomachs - and it makes me cringe. If you spent twenty minutes on Instagram, I'm sure you'd find plenty of fitness enthusiasts and influencers showing you mountain climbers, planks, and crunches as part of their "flat belly" program. Combined with your doctor's permission to resume exercise, these messages create a false sense of confidence when retraining your body, which can lead you to do exercises that your body isn't quite prepared for.

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There is hope, however. You can not only regain your strength with the proper program, but you can also minimize the look of "the pooch".

What's really happening?

After having your baby, the very structure of your body has changed, and therefore, how we train our core must also change. Unfortunately, typical core exercises, such as crunches (squeezing the abdominals together) or planks and



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sighted solutions that don't achieve the results you're looking for. In fact, by doing them without first building up your deep inner-core strength, you could be doing more harm than good.

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What's the core for?

To begin, we have to understand the core's purpose. It's not just the six-pack abs that you see rippling on fitness models. It also includes your diaphragm, pelvic floor muscles, obliques, back muscles, and, some would argue, your hip muscles as well. If you were to see your core sketched out on paper, it would look a lot like a can of soup - with a bottom, top, and wrap-around sides, all of which are important to train. To have the best physique and better chances of being pain-free, you must balance all of these muscles in your core program, not just the ones you see in the mirror.

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The first place to assess a new mother's core is her rectus abdominis, the "6-pack" muscles. You'll notice that connecting the two sides of the rectus abdominis is a slight dip or line connecting her sternum to her pubic symphysis, called the linea alba. The linea alba is designed to be flexible and adaptive, and it will stretch to accommodate the growth of a pregnant belly.

Immediately after giving birth, a woman's abdominals act like a popped balloon. Imagine the linea alba, once stretched out like an elastic band to accommodate the belly, is now lax. As a result, it can't generate tension or power to help support her body and prevent her from aches and pains in her back and pelvis. This condition is called diastasis recti, where her relaxed linea alba creates a gap of over 2cm (2 finger widths) between the sides of her six-pack muscles. This can be found anywhere along the linea alba; above the belly button, at the belly button, or below. Diastasis recti can also create a "belly pooch," leaving them still looking pregnant.

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Also read: [Why you need to eat healthy when you are pregnant](#)

Nature is beautiful, and this gap will heal for some women within weeks after delivering their babies. However, the research found by physiotherapy resource *Physiopedia* indicates there is a healing plateau approximately eight weeks post-delivery, and as a result, some women need guidance to rehabilitate their core. The good news is that anyone, at any time, can retrain their abdominals and close that gap - saving them from potential future pain!

What do I do if I have it?

If you do have diastasis recti, it can feel a little freaky at first. Don't be surprised if palpating your stomach for the gap makes you feel a little vulnerable. That's a



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men and newborn babies, not just new moms. So if you notice it, it's not to be feared. You can start healing it with the help of a pelvic floor physiotherapist at any point.

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If you do have this condition, you may be wondering what your body is allowed to do. You can reconnect your core muscles with some simple breath work which will allow you to use your diaphragm and pelvic floor to help reconnect your core muscles.

According to the *National Academy of Sports Medicine*, one of the key ingredients to a stable core is realigning your posture post-delivery. As our bodies have become accustomed to bigger bellies, our posture tends to suffer, creating tight, short muscles in some places and weakened muscles in others. By strengthening your "posture position," you'll notice you'll have a better connection to your deep inner core muscles.

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Another thing you can do is adopt a walking program; this will help you sync your breath, your core, to movement itself. Once your diastasis recti has healed, you can slowly increase the demands your place on your core with a well-thought-out core strengthening program. Your body will thank you!



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Harry Potter actors were at 'peak hormone' during Goblet of Fire

In the Return to Hogwarts reunion special, Daniel Radcliffe recalled how teen hormones were flying around on set of the fourth film



(from left) Emma Watson, Daniel Radcliffe and Rupert Grint arrive for the premiere of 'Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2' in 2011. Photo via Reuters

By ANI

LAST UPDATED 02.01.2022 | 11:45 AM IST

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Seems like hormones were flying all around by the time the Harry Potter kid actors became teenagers in *Goblet of Fire*.

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According to EW, Daniel Radcliffe confirmed that instalment did indeed mark "peak hormone" for the troupe, who were coming of age themselves over the years making the eight movies.

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During the *Harry Potter 20th Anniversary: Return to Hogwarts* reunion special, Radcliffe said, "That film was probably peak hormone, at least for me. It was exactly what you expect."

He added, "The fourth film was the one with the Beauxbatons and the Durmstrangs. So, like, you had a bunch of hormonal teenagers anyway and then bring in two massive groups of new people, all of them purposefully hot for the film. So, yeah... it was all kicking off."

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Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, which was directed by Mike Newell, adapted from the fourth book of same name in J.K. Rowling's best-selling series



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Lounge Fiction: Perfect Flowers

In this instalment, students from the French Beauxbatons Academy of Magic and northern Europe's Durmstrang Institute arrive at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry to compete in the Triwizard Tournament.

Harry (Radcliffe), though underage, is mysteriously entered into the competition and chosen as one of Hogwarts' representatives alongside Cedric Diggory (Robert Pattinson), which kick starts a new mystery for him and his best friends Hermione (Emma Watson) and Ron (Rupert Grint).

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Radcliffe and Grint were 11 when they were first cast in the first movie, 2001's *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, while Watson was 10. By the time *Goblet of Fire* started filming in May 2004, Radcliffe, Watson and Grint had all entered their teenage years.

Bonnie Wright, who played Ginny Weasley and Harry's main love interest in the franchise, said, "That film is just all about teenagers having crushes for the first time, asking someone to the date to the Yule Ball. They just mirrored all those awkward phases you go through as a teenager. And they really felt like that, too, because we were literally having the same experiences."

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Grint reiterated there were "a lot of hormones flying around" on set. Matthew Lewis (Neville Longbottom) remembered, "There were crushes, and people went out with each other and broke up, just like you do at school. It was exactly the same environment, but it was just in a Defense Against the Dark Arts class."

As per *EW*, Radcliffe explained that, at this point in the movies, Harry is "a slightly awkward teenage boy in a very unremarkable way, which I suppose feels remarkable for a hero character in something. It did not take a huge acting stretch to tap into my awkward nerdy teenage side."

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Harry Potter 20th Anniversary: Return to Hogwarts is on Amazon Prime Video in India.

Also read: Memorable moments in Indian cinema in 2021

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How to get the best skin of your life

A dermatologist on how consistent skincare habits make the biggest difference to your skin



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A proper skin care routine can stave off any external interventions in later life (Pexels)

By Sejal Saheta

LAST UPDATED 03.01.2022 | 11:34 AM IST

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The online and offline marketplaces are full of 'instant solutions' for every conceivable skincare need. But in my years of practice as a dermatologist, I still have not come across any true miracle cures that can instantly solve skin problems.

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The only thing that truly works miracles is consistent skincare habits. The earlier one starts with a proper skincare routine, the more one can stave off any external

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interventions in later life. Good skincare is all about habits, and I encourage my patients to start with healthy skincare habits right from their teens.

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Before starting on any skincare regimen, the first thing to do is to know your skin type. For example, you have oily skin if your T-zone (forehead, nose, chin) and the C-zone (outer area of the face) are oily to touch or shiny in the morning. On the other hand, if your entire face feels stretched or taut in the morning, your skin is probably dry. Most people, however, have combination skin--when your T-zone feels oily, but the C-zone feels taut or stretched.

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Also read: [Just because it's cold doesn't mean you ditch the sunscreen](#)

The second thing to know is that scientific skincare is based on five pillars that never change: hygiene, nutrition and hydration, protection, exfoliation and restoration. So let us look at them.

What about skin hygiene

Skin Hygiene is a lot more than showering two times a day. People with oily skin and acne-prone skin need to keep their faces clear of excess oil production with



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the aid of mild cleansers and gentle face wipes throughout the day. This ensures that your face stays clear of any bacterial growth.

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A cardinal rule of skincare is that one should never fidget with pimples or boils on their skin. This can lead to the spread of bacteria to other parts and cause serious scarring of the skin. In addition, rubbing the skin with your hands, towels, or tight clothes can lead to serious issues with pigmentation and texture of your skin.

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Clothes that do not breathe or retain sweat can lead to skin infections. Always make sure that your clothes and your skin are free of sweat and extra moisture (think damp clothes)

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Always pay special attention to the areas in the folds of your body. (behind your ears, your underarms, your groin, between your fingers and toes) These are the areas that are generally easily affected by infections.

Also, as a part of hygiene, one should remember to always clear their skin of makeup before they sleep, as makeup tends to block the skin's pores and can cause complications.

You are what you eat and drink

The single line advice that I give to my patients about nutrition and its relation to the health of your skin is to always opt for a balanced diet that does not favour a particular food group. Fad diets that favour a particular macronutrient tend to have disastrous results on the health of your skin. Like the rest of your body, your skin absolutely needs carbohydrates, proteins, and fats to maintain its health.

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As for micronutrients, I recommend that one opt for foods rich in vitamins, minerals, and fatty acids, recommend that one and antioxidants. This is because the skin's health in terms of its barrier function, its elasticity and its oxidative stress levels depends on the consumption of these micronutrients.

Regarding water intake, the general guidelines that one should try following are consuming about 2.5 litres of water per day for women and 3.5 litres of water per day for men. This is because water consumption plays a major role in the hydration levels of the skin and its biomechanical functioning.

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Why protection matters

Moisturiser and sunscreen are your skin's guardians. The role that a moisturiser and sunscreen play in the health of your skin is much more important than any serum or lotion that you will ever come across.

Moisturisers, in general help, maintain the moisture level in the upper layers of the skin and hence help maintain a smooth skin free of any inflammation or itching. More importantly, a moisturizer slows down the process of wrinkle and line formation.

Also read: [The air you breathe is ruining your hair health too](#)

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Meanwhile, a good sunscreen goes a long way in reducing damage to your skin from exposure to UV rays. Such exposure leads to pigmentation issues and premature ageing of the skin.

While I would recommend speaking to your dermatologist to help you select a good moisturiser and sunscreen, as a thumb rule, I would request you never to buy a moisturiser based on the packaging and how it is marketed. Instead, I always recommend that my patients buy a moisturiser from a major, trusted pharmaceutical brand that has been adequately tested for performance and safety.

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One should remember that a moisturiser should be applied immediately after showers and then as needed. In addition, every time you step out, you should apply a layer of sunscreen on all exposed parts of the body. Also, remember that no matter what the season, both sunscreens and moisturisers need to be applied.

Exfoliate, but gently.

Rubbing and scrubbing are probably the worst thing that one can do to their skin. Exfoliation of skin needs to be gentle in nature else; it can lead to issues like hyperpigmentation or degrading the texture of your skin. I recommend that one use gentle face washes, toners and cleansers with very mild levels of alpha-hydroxy acids (AHAs) and beta-hydroxy acids (BHAs).

If a stronger exfoliation is needed for your skin, it should be done in your dermatologist's clinic. The dermatologist may recommend chemical peels or microdermabrasion if such a need arises.

Time to restore your skin

Ageing and environmental exposure take their toll on the health of our skin. However, now there are an adequate number of skincare products with ingredients that can help stave off the signs of ageing and skin damage for a long time. Therefore, I commonly recommend serums with the below ingredients to patients above 25.

Vitamin C: This reduces oxidative stress on your skin and increases collagen synthesis. These features help control the melanin formation in your skin and help decrease fine lines and wrinkles.

Retinoids: These are derivatives of vitamin A which encourage cellular turnover and stimulate collagen production. This is often hailed as an elixir for anti-ageing.

Hyaluronic acid: This molecule can hold large quantities of moisture and help it penetrate the deeper layers of the skin, hence effectively making the skin more



The sequence of a skincare routine

The products you use are important for your skincare routine and the sequence in which these products are used.

A basic morning time skincare routine can look like this:

Gentle facewash

Gentle soap for the body

Full body moisturizer

Targeted corrective serums

Light moisturiser for face

Sunscreen

A basic nighttime skincare routine can look like this

Makeup removal

Cleanser or mild facewash

Targeted corrective serums

Moisturiser for face and body

Things to never try in your skincare regimen

Over-the-counter products

I always urge my patients to stay away from such products as the ingredients in these products are generally not understood by most patients, and some of these can contain harsh ingredients and have steroids in them. These can lead to irreparable damage to one's skin.

Home remedies

I sincerely believe that if one has an issue and needs a solution, they should go to an expert. But, unfortunately, most home remedies act as placebos, while some



Comparing skincare regimes

As they say, one man’s food is another man’s poison. The same holds for skincare products too. Therefore, it is best to speak to a dermatologist rather than your friend when starting a new skincare product.

Sejal Saheta is founder-CMO, InUrSkn Skin & Hair Clinic.

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