

To be a student at Baroda's MS University in the 60's under the tutelage of stalwarts like KG Subramanyan and NS Bendre, meant that one was living in the midst of a major movement in the Indian art world – one that sought to re-engage with tradition in a postcolonial context. During this period a final year student called Vrindavan Solanki, with the prodding of his teacher, put up his first exhibition of paintings at Jehangir Art Gallery in Mumbai in 1969 – back when the gallery rent was only Rs 50 per day. All the paintings sold out, prompting the tremulous young student to discontinue college and travel to exhibit his art. Back in Mumbai this October 2016, for his solo exhibition hosted by **Aura Art at UBM Index Fairs**, Solanki says that the city has always been close to his heart – “Mumbai made me an artist.”

his continuing fascination remains with the Rabari tribals – nomads who wander Gujarat and Rajasthan, rearing cattle and selling milk products. The artist is drawn to their “innocence and purity”, and art critic [Johny ML](#) describes him as a “silent chronicler of his own land.” What's striking about Solanki's work is that male and female subjects stand on an equal footing – confident and poised. “Rabari women are very powerful,” Solanki emphasizes. “They run their family businesses. They are the ones to ensure that the milk from their cattle makes it to the markets in the morning.”

“You have to talk to your work, from the beginning to the finish,” says Solanki, who paints at his house in Ahmedabad, “Sometimes the canvas says ‘no’. That's when I take a break from painting it.” This eclectic creative process is so personal that when the time comes to hand over his work to the galleries, he feels saddened, as if real people are leaving his house. When one chapter draws to a close, there is therefore a tendency to slip into a downward emotional spiral. The only way to escape it is to immediately embark on another project – “There is no end to creativity. You have to keep working. When that process stops, you are finished.” It is this belief that makes him an admirer of Picasso – who was ceaselessly energetic and prolific in his lifetime.

Solanki works around 12 hours a day, creating around 30-40 paintings in a year. And the Rabaris are not his only preoccupation, for he has painted subjects as diverse as New York city, the Ahmedabad pols, and the *macchliwalas* and *dabbawalas* of Mumbai.