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- ▶ Head stories
- ▶ Local
- ▶ Regional
- ▶ International
- ▶ Analysis
- ▶ Business
- ▶ Sports
- ▶ Features

### Columns



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- Government sites
- Newspaper sites
- University sites
- Other sites



## Australian artist chronicles the Ganga's journey

Fri, 16 July 2010



Contemporary Australian artist Kevin Pearsh has chronicled the 2,500 km journey of river Ganga from an icy cave in Gaumukh to the Ganga Sagar in West Bengal in a series of 21 large format canvases.

The seminal exhibition, "Ganga 21: The Story" that opened at the Indian Council for Cultural Relation's Azad Bhavan auditorium on Thursday in the capital, divides the journey of the river in three segments, "a walk along the bank of Ganga", "a drive across the Gangetic plains" and "a boat ride through the Ganga". The medium of the work is in oil.

In the spring of 2006, Pearsh completed his first phase of hike from the massive ice cave of Gaumukh to the temple town of Haridwar.

In October 2006, he covered the Gangetic stretch from Haridwar to Varanasi and to the border of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

Pearsh completed his third and final voyage from Buxar in Bihar to the delta in Bengal and Ganga Sagar in the spring of 2007.

The canvases are serialised in numbers to narrate the birth, ebb and flow of the river that is considered the country's lifeline for centuries supporting great civilisations along its banks.

The works documents geographical features of the river in its course and maps pilgrimage routes in details.

The first canvas depicts Gaumukh flanked by icy Himalayas that sweeps up in formidable slopes like a shield around the cave. Pearsh describes Gaumukh as the "spiritual source of the Ganges".

Eighteen kilometres down is Gangotri, the glacial swathe of ice where the river is said to have touch the earth for the first time. The composition highlights a cluster of stones leading to the river with a priest guiding the viewer down the steps.

The locale moves to Devprayag in the third canvas, where the feeder rivers of Bhagirathi and Alaknanda meet to become Ganga. The river then flows to the foothills of the Hiamalaya at Haridwar.

The subsequent canvases capture the river on the plains, its broad meandering curves, peopling the water-scapes with figures and bustling activity.

The last three compositions in the sequence are realistic in their depictions of the river in its deltaic flow as it lashes against the eroding mud banks of Bengal villages, past the ancient islands of Kahalgaon to Ganga Sagar where it meets the sea.

The palette is close to life with raw daubs of paints giving the river its blue and aquamarine photographic quality.

Pearsh, born in 1961 in Melbourne, studied in Perth and Zurich. At the age of 23, he contributed to the permanent collection of the Tate Gallery in London.

In 2000, Pearsh began to work on his aqua-series (water compositions), inspired by his visit to China and later in Morocco.

Ganga 21 will travel to the Rabindranath Tagore Centre in Kolkata on August 7. — IANS

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