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Celebrating Life In A World Of Utter Chaos

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THE LINES on her face tell you how much experience her mind has stored away. Sheila Isham is one of those people who have seen a better and larger part of the last century – from World War II to the September 11 attack on WTO which happened in her neighbourhood – and doesn't know what will happen next. "But the worst experience in my life is the burning of Gujarat happening now. I've a special attachment to this country because of its heritage and values and it is sad that communal violence should be happening of all the places, in India," says this American artist from Long Island.

Isham was in town for the exhibition of her works, *Cosmic Earth Bull Series*, at the Shridharani Gallery, Triveni Kala Sangam. As the name suggests, it was the result of her close encounters with India over the past few decades. "My husband, Heyward, used to work for the foreign service and that gave me the opportunity to travel around the world. Though he was not posted in India, I visited this country while returning from China and was charmed forever," recounts this grandmother of nine. In fact, it was on a trip to Germany with her husband just after the second world war that Isham took formal

training in art. No wonder, "German expressionist paintings form the foundation of my work," she says. Gradually, her work acquired the influence of the places she visited subsequently.

Wasn't the humdrum of New York not quite the atmosphere an artist looks for inspiration to paint? She responds, "that's true, but it taught me how to cultivate my own space." And once she moved her studio to Long Island, she was more at ease. Despite the universal appeal in her works, Isham has amazingly retained the

most basic aspect of life in general in her canvases – she still loves to paint flowers and animals we see around us. "I love to paint flowers in the morning when after meditation, my mind is full of energy," she says pointing to her bright floral canvases. Another lovely aspect is her use of bold colours. "I'm a very active person and love vivacity," she signs off. ■

Long Island artist Sheila Isham loves to experiment with bold and vivid colours on her canvas

PHOTO: ANIL GIROTA

