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BOOKS

Divine Artistry

Behold the lifetime work of award-winning artist Indra Sharma in an extraordinary collection of paintings of Gods and Goddesses

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Last year I was honored with a

visit from Indra Sharma and his daughters. While we were chatting, his daughter Nimisha noticed a Ganesha print on the wall and casually remarked, "My father painted that." Sharma's dedicated pursuit of devotional art has had a greater impact on modern Hindu culture than he ever could have imagined. Most Hindu homes worldwide will have at least one poster made of his paintings, which has resulted in generations of Hindus being touched by Sharma's artistic interpretations of the Divine. "Prayer through painting" perfectly describes Indra

Sharma's life and work. "I paint with my heart and through meditation," he says, "I approach my work with a sense of devotion—bhakti. I study scriptures to understand the nature of the characters I paint, and then I use my imagination and recall any faces I have come across that match the scriptural description. It is difficult to convey how all this works, but basically I carry the feeling of Godliness. The main magic is to put soul into the painting to enliven it. And I have given all my life to it." A retrospective of Sharma's work, In a World of

Gods and Goddesses, (194 pages, Mandala Publishers, USA, 2001, ^{us}\$49.95) allows art lovers, Hindu or otherwise, to savor the richness of his gift. Winner of the 2001 prestigious Benjamin Franklin Award, in the metaphysics and spirituality category, this magnificent book is a tribute to the genius of Sharma, who currently lives in Mumbai, India.

Following a short biography of his life by Dr. Yogesh Atal, a personal endorsement from

Satguru Sivaya
Subramuniaswami and
sweet words from Sharma's
daughter Nimisha, the
remaining eight chapters
provide a short history of
Hindu art, mythology and the
rich oral tradition of India,
followed by individual
chapters on the images of
God. Ganesha, Siva, Devi,
Vishnu, Krishna, the
Ramayana and the
Mahabharata are gloriously
personified in a bold and
dramatic style. In one

line-drawing, Ganesha appears so alive, it is easy to believe He is ready to dance off the page. Sharma's artistic portrayals of the Hindu Gods show them with not only strength and inner power but filled with grace and beauty.

Each chapter has a page devoted to the iconography of the Hindu pantheon. Throughout the book, the

mystical drama of Hindu mythology, told through Puranic stories, is combined with Hindu philosophical beliefs such as karma, practices of yoga, the impermanence of all things and worship of the divine in all its many forms. This provides an informative and colorful textual accompaniment to Sharma's work while a deeper significance of each painting is unfolded.

This book would grace every Hindu home. Each oversize page of glossy, colorful photographs is a treasure trove of Hindu portraiture. You will find the soul of the divine in each of Indra Sharma's works, and a precious remembrance of a life's work from one of India's premier modern painters.