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IT WAS a warm afternoon in 2004 when Munna Jhaveri, owner of Joy Shoes, was sipping chai with his regular customer-turned-friend, late artist MF Hussain at the Golden Dragon, Taj hotel. He had news. "My shop was expanding to 500 square feet from 1200 square feet. When I told Hussain this, he shocked me in return, by deciding to design the new store. What would he do, I wondered," recalls Jhaveri, who till date has not painted over his green and orange walls, shades that Hussain chose.

On the store window is a fascinating rack to place shoes and bags, with a dancing girl figure in the centre. "Earlier, when customers walked in, they were grumpy, irritated and had little patience. They would want to be attended to immediately. After the addition of Hussain's touch, they walk in with a huff and walk out with a smile," laughs the 61-year-old.

In spite of being a shoe and leather accessories store, the store window is dimly lit. "Every store that sells products flamboyantly highlights its windows. Flashlights are fitted in and the bulb wattage is high. But Hussain had a point. He told me, 'Let the customer take a closer look at your goods. Let them appreciate the works.'"

A splash of Holi

Zoom in to 2012. In March, painter Mike Stilkey was hired to create an installation for Hong Kong's high-end fashion retailer, Joyce's store window displays. He created large-format paintings on various book assemblages and multiple shelf displays with smaller pieces, typical of his style.

Closeto home, The Hab, an experiential haberdashery store by Usha that opened in Khar in March this year, roped in Delhi-based designer Manish Arora to design a star installation for the shop window. "The

WHEN A STORE WINDOW IS ART

A large, brightly-coloured sewing machine stops you in your tracks on Linking Road. A scissor-happy Buddha arrests you outside a storefront. Why are store owners roping in artistes to create quirky art installations that make an impression on you even before you step in?



When an artist's work is displayed in a store window, it does bridge the huge gap that exists between common man and artists.
— MANISH ARORA
fashion designer

installation is inspired by the vibrant colours of the playful festival of Holi and symbolises energy. It was divided into three parts — a chandelier, a sewing machine and a fabric tent that's suspended from the table on which the machine was kept. The chandelier is made using pickhairs. Its bursts of colour and vibrant motifs are inspired by the annual Jaipur Elephant Festival," explains Arora, known for his bright, colourful designs.

The trend of brands bringing in renowned artistes to set up window displays has been a regular practice internationally. While the importance of window displays in India has grown in the last 10 years, roping in artistes has only kickedstart recently. Installations help draw the consumer's attention and create an exciting impact, explains Sheetal Choksi, a retail consultant from Mahim. "When a renowned artist is brought in to design a window, he adds a different perspective and brings the window alive. When designers create installations for their own stores, they end up creating a perfect fit, as they make a relevant statement about the brand," she explains.

When Arora was invited to chat with the Usha team, the discussions revolved around the concepts of colour, joy, creativity and the festival of Holi. "We went to Manish Arora for his innovative technique of blending colours with unique design elements and

When a store...

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intricate surface textures. There are some attributes we wish to reflect at The Hab, which is an experiential space where an individual can explore one's own creativity through sewing and design," says Chhaya Shiram, executive board director, Usha.

And it seems to have worked. Customers are taking their time to stop and appreciate the intricate designs on the installation, says Shiram.

Scissors maketh the man

Others, like store owner-cum-designer Rajesh Pratap Singh, wanted to add an element that would represent the brand. Singh, in 2009, created what he calls the meditating man made of scissors that now sits imposingly at the men's garment store on Linking Road, Khar. "It was welded in our backyard and was a lot of fun to put together. Any kind of creative element lends an interesting twist to a store," says Singh, who enjoys working with metal.

"This came about because of my experimentation with a ramp show for the finale at India Fashion Week in 2007 where we used scissor-welded flowers encapsulated between a glass case on which the models walked. The collection was a juxtaposition of hard and soft, strong and malleable and it seemed appropriate at the time to use scissors to make flowers to convey this mood of the collection. I created this man especially for the store, as it brings in an unexpected element of surprise for a customer," says Singh.

Stick to budgets

It's also a new experience for the artiste. This, even though retail storeowners work with tight budgets. Riddhi Mehta, owner of a Goregaon-based visual merchandising company explains, "Sometimes, it is difficult to take creative liberties as we have to stick to the budgets. This is why not many artistes have contributed to store windows."

Still, some enjoy it. Thirty-three year-old artiste Maadool Mukherjee, who created quirky figures of a man, woman



Installation by Manish Arora at The Hab in Khar. PIC/PRADEEP DHIVAR

and a dog out of scrap metal for the store displays of two major denim brands in Khar and Kemps Corner in 2007 says that although he had to follow the brand's brief, it was a new experience. "I worked with metal scrap, which is my forte. Using ferrous metal, I created random figures by moulding, hammering, shaping and culling the iron," explains the Andheri resident, who studied metal craft at the JJ school of Arts.

"The work of an artiste is like plating up a food item," he feels. "The way a practised chef will garnish his dish, an artiste will lend an out-of-the-box touch to a store window. An artiste will always take a left when the world takes a right, and that makes all the difference," Mukherjee grins.



I CREATED THIS MAN ESPECIALLY FOR THE STORE, AS IT BRINGS IN AN UNEXPECTED ELEMENT OF SURPRISE FOR A CUSTOMER

RAJESH PRATAP SINGH
Fashion designer

DAVID LYNCH'S WINDOW TO WOMEN

In 2009, one of Paris' biggest department stores, Les Galeries Lafayette, invited American filmmaker and artiste David Lynch to design 11 of their store windows which he based on the theme Machines, Abstraction and Women. One, titled Woman with a

Dream, featured a fully functional model train that drove non-stop along the tracks. As he describes, "I see these windows like a labyrinth, a street museum where to move through indices. A window, it is a transparent door on the unknown."



Artiste Maadool Mukherjee at his Andheri studio. PIC/SANTOSH NADWEKAR



This installation was created by MF Hussain in 2004 at Joy Shoes, Taj Arcade. PIC/BIPIN KOKATE