

## *Video Transcript*

*Title: Raqib Shaw | Isolated Renaissance*

### *Summary:*

Raqib Shaw's studio is filled with flowers, candelabras, bonsai trees and beehives. It's in this former sausage factory in South London, that the artist and his team create some of the most spectacular paintings of the 21st century. We visit him to learn more about his passion for the Renaissance, his self-imposed exile, and his desire to surround himself with talent and beauty.

*Duration: 08:29*

### *Transcript*

#### *Raqib Shaw*

Of course I've been in a self-imposed exile, and there is something very, I think, liberating about that psychological isolation which I think I've been able to achieve in the studio. Because it's a bit of a bubble, and all we do there, me and my team, is – there's a crisis if an orchid doesn't bloom at the right time. I think it is, in my opinion, the most dedicated atelier, that can only be compared to the time of the Renaissance.

When I decided that I was going to dedicate the rest of my life to painting, it was a rebirth of sorts, and that was 20 years ago, and I'm still on this journey. And frankly speaking I had, when I was growing up, absolutely no clue that I was ever going to be an artist or a painter.

The whole creative process, I think, starts with, regardless of art – it's that thing that, do you have another painting in you? And what is that painting? Is it good enough? And you only know when you finish.

A six foot by five foot painting would take one person four and a half years to complete with one day off a week. And that's why no one here is full time. Everyone has their days off, because it's the perfect recipe to bake anyone's brain. Because I do not want to see difference of hand in absolutely any work whatsoever. So to keep that seamlessness is not easy at all.

If you really look at the process, it's not actually very much like *painting* painting. It really is tiny areas, and it's very much like enamel work. So everything is super tiny sections, and when they all come together, with the different techniques, they somehow make sense and you can see the whole painting and the whole image taking shape.

### *Studio assistant*

The nature of the practice is such that the paints are poured directly onto the surface, and then manipulated whilst on the surface – rather than using a palette. So they quills just allow you to move quite thick paint around on the surface, basically. So you sort of jab it and swirl it around.

And we've got this machine, sort of a cocktail making machine, for colours. And it's got all the pigments in it. We're matching the colour from the original Cranach painting, so it's all based on that same colour spectrum

### *Raqib Shaw*

I remember the first Renaissance works that I saw in New Delhi, at bookstores. And when you know nothing about Western art, and you see these images and they're absolutely incredible, and when I saw the first Cranach at the National Gallery, which was Venus and Cupid, and what struck me was that Venus is wearing the hat of the day, so it is a fashionable lady of that particular moment in time, and you see that marriage of antiquity with so-called current fashion, and I thought that was a fabulous painting.

One of the most fabulous things ever for an artist, and I think for me, is that I never imagined that my painting would ever be shown next to the original, and I think that really means a lot to me. I do hope that my interpretation does have the so-called qualities that

we see in the original Cranach, but at the same time I think that this is – it's more experimental and it's more fun, I think. And it'll be lovely to see them together.

Let's not forget that painting back then was a way that people could live in a different reality. And that's what painting is supposed to be – they're supposed to suck you into a different reality, and a situation that you feel that, for that one little moment you're transported into some other world.

My generation was a large generation when Kashmir was not as troubled as it has been over the last twenty years. Overnight, Kashmir, from being an absolute paradise on earth – it turned into an absolute living nightmare and hell, and it's very sad to see that. One of my most vivid memories was going to one of the shrines in the morning with my mother, and it was one of, what you would call, separatists. And he was shot, and there was warm blood along the steps of the shrine, and accidentally I put my foot in it. And I will never forget that feeling – that smell. The feeling of warm blood under your feet, and it's very, very hard to see so many young people die for nothing. It's very, very sad.

I don't feel a need to leave this place because it's a work in progress, always, for absolutely everyone. We all are trying to cope with day-to-day existence, and trying to make sure that the day-to-day existence is somewhat palatable. To have this incredible cornucopia of talent, I love life that is surrounded with talent and beauty. And that's what they are. And I know, also, based on my experience how a peaceful state can turn into something very, very drastic, and can turn into something very disturbed. So I don't take stability for granted at all. Things can flip around, and turn around very quickly.

Perhaps it was the only way I could try to suture my psychological wounds, is by bathing the wounds in talent and beauty. And I do hope that when people look at the paintings and they see that there is that element of symphony, element of construction that is sophisticated – what it might translate to beauty – I don't know.