

or not meant for it.

What was the response to your installation in the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II in Milan?

It was heartening to see people queuing up to look at the piece in such an important public space. It's a personal milestone in my career, one that has spanned 25 years as an artist—from 25 years ago, when there was no audience, let alone a gallery that was interested in my work, to such a large audience.

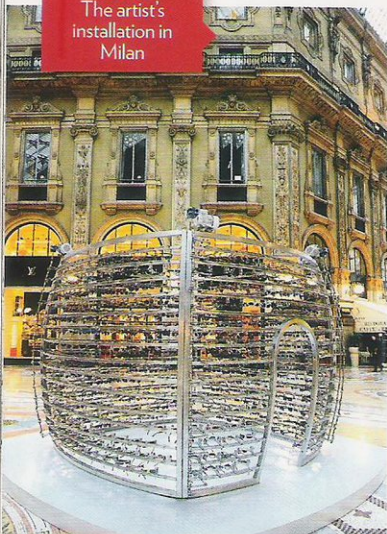
In your installations, everyday objects take larger-than-life avatars. Why?

For most of my shows, the process involved in staging a show becomes an inherent part of the exercise. I'm interested in the fictional aspect of creating a sense of drama or spectacle, and at the same time, revealing the meaninglessness involved in it. Both these positions remain mutually inclusive and feed off each other in the work.

What is the role of installation art in today's world and how does the common man relate to it?

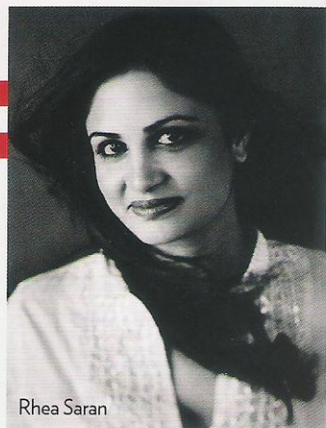
Installation art could include the large number of ways in which art is made, and thus, it is ambiguous in its definition. In order to relate to art, one must always be open to many things, not just what one already likes or dislikes.

FASHIONABLE HOME
The artist's installation in Milan



New girl on the block

GQ's associate editor Rhea Saran turns author with *Girl Plus One*, a racy new novel. By RISHNA SHAH



Rhea Saran

Tell us about your book.

It's a light, fun look at living, working and, most importantly, dating in Bombay, from the perspective of the 20-something protagonist, Laila. She's just moved back to the city, works at a men's magazine, writes a sex column and—except for a few moments of doubt—isn't terribly apologetic about any of it.

What inspired you?

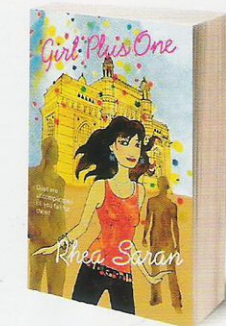
Random House approached me after reading some of my articles. Once I heard the kind of book they were interested in, I thought it'd be great fun.

Are there any similarities between you and Laila?

I knew this question would pop up, especially given the (superficial) similarities between Laila and me, in terms of the kind of work we do and the cities we've lived in. No, Laila is not me. But you tend to borrow from your own life, or from the lives of people around you, when you create characters. It's not like I had to imagine, for instance, being a fisherwoman from a coastal town. So, yes, there are some similarities—for instance, we both have a tendency to say what we're thinking without always filtering it properly!

Is there a Laila in every girl?

There's probably some of Laila or KK or Maya (her two best friends) in every girl, because they're all very different, and I see some part of at least one of them in the girls I know. But



if Laila isn't like you, she's very much like someone you know.

How much of your personal experience inspired the plot?

I think it kills the fantasy to know what's true and what is pure imagination—or, at least, borrowed experience. Let's just say, less than you think!

Who is your reader?

Young women in their twenties and thirties, since the characters are about that age, and the situations they find themselves in are unique to a certain time of one's life: when you're starting out, you've got your first or second job, you're not quite settled, still dating. I'm always going to hope it has broader appeal, after all, one of the central characters is in his mid-forties. And the sex advice (yes, there are sex tips) is actually addressed to men.

What do you think of the Indian chick-lit scene?

There is some really good stuff and some so-so stuff, which is true of any genre. What I find interesting is that it seems to have mirrored how women in

India (and when I say this, I'm talking about a tiny percentage of Indian women who are largely affluent, urban and English-speaking) have started to talk about their private lives. I remember early Indian chick lit being more about dating. And while the tide hasn't completely turned, there's more openness about sex now, which is heartening—because we should be able to talk about it. My book is certainly not shy about it, and I guess we'll see whether people can handle that or not!

What challenges did you face while writing?

Getting the momentum going was the hardest part—getting to know these characters, getting them to do what I wanted them to do. The first half was particularly challenging—some people start with a 'chapter plan' charting the trajectory of the book, but I just went where the characters took me (as weird as it sounds, they often drove the narratives themselves). And finding the time to write a book while keeping up my full-time job was also quite a challenge!

What's the message one should take from this book? It'd be that life has a funny way of not turning out quite like you expect it to—and that's what makes it interesting. Oh, and that sex is not a dirty word, it's actually quite a lot of fun! ■ *Girl Plus One* (Random House India) is out now.