

WORLD'S LAST MANUAL TYPEWRITERS TURNED INTO 13-FOOT-TALL SCULPTURE

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Top: *THE BLACK KEYS*: Mayer's art installation features a metallic lotus, a bird and mandalas; Above: *HELPING HANDS*: Janak Chudasama (above), a former student of Raffles Design International, and Aditya Rajput, an artist who honed his skills at JJ School of Arts, are assisting Mayer in the project. Pic: Sachin Haralkar

By **Gitanjali Das**

US sculptor Jeremy Mayer is using thousands of parts of the last manual Godrej typewriters.

American sculptor Jeremy Mayer stares intently at a heap of manual typewriters before delicately picking out an assortment of knobs, bolts and levers. He screws one random part to another, fashioning, over a period of several hours, a metal bird that looks like a prop from a sci-fi movie.

The creation is part of a 13-foot-tall installation Mayer, 43, is putting together for Godrej and Boyce, using the last batch of manual typewriters manufactured in the world.

Godrej and Boyce was the last company that made manual typewriters — firms world over have moved to manufacturing only electronic ones — before its shut production in 2011.

Before calling time on manufacturing typewriters, the company made around 100 of them. The machines are now being used by Mayer for the art project. The art installation, which Mayer is

assembling with the help of former students of JJ School of Arts and Raffles Design International, will be put on display at Hubble, a recreational and "collaboration" hall in Godrej and Boyce's Vikhroli complex called Plant 13.

"History should not just be treated as a thing of the past, but also as a path to the future. We wanted to have a tangible memory of the product," Godrej Archives' chief archivist, Vrunda Pathare, said of the decision to commission the sculpture.

"In 1955, we took a technological leap by flagging off the production of typewriters. We wanted to continue that tradition."

Mayer didn't want to ruin the suspense by revealing what the installation would look like, but he said that a metallic lotus would be a prominent part of it.

This is not the first time he is using typewriters to create a sculpture. He has used the machines' components to make 400 sculptures, including human figures, birds and a skeletal Chihuahua with a bone in its mouth.

Brought up in Oakland, a major port city in California, Mayer first used a typewriter when he was only 10. It was his mother's. The machine had a see-through case, which allowed Mayer to see how the parts worked. He dissected his first typewriter at the age of 20.

Mayer, who cited Leonardo da Vinci and illustrator MC Asher as his influences, does not use glue or welding machines to put together his creations. He only uses screws and bolts.

"I was born in a time when the world was making its transition from analogue to digital. The computer had rendered the typewriter dead. But people are nostalgic about typewriters," Mayer said. "Thousands of typewriters are dumped in landfills world over every day. But this [the machines' use for art] is them being reborn."

Mayer started working on the Godrej and Boyce project in March. "I came to India with the idea of creating a figure of Goddess Kali. But as I roamed around the city, observed it, my ideas underwent a transformation. Even back in Oakland, my life has been full of Indian influences, especially spirituality. Those came back to me," he said.

The sculptor said that the colour and shape of some components also prompted him to try something different. "Anodisation has given some parts a golden colour. Some other parts are red. I have rarely worked with such colours while creating something from typewriters," Mayer said.

He said he was fascinated by the fact that workers who were part of the manufacturing lived nearby.

The art installation, which will be unveiled on August 12, will feature mandalas apart from a lotus and a bird. "Some people may attribute political undertones to the lotus, but politics has got nothing to do with it. For me, it is a symbol of purity," he said, adding that the sculpture was influenced by the themes of nature, Mumbai life and future technology.

Janak Chudasama, a product designer and a former student of Raffles Design International, and Aditya Rajput, an artist who honed his skills at JJ School of Arts, are assisting Mayer.

"I have been following his work for the past four years. When I met him the first time, I could not believe my luck. It was a surreal experience," Rajput said, adding that Mayer had set them free creatively.