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DRAWING THE LINE

TAKING THE LINE FOR A WALK SHOWCASES 45 WORKS OF MASTERS IN AN ATTEMPT TO TURN THE SPOTLIGHT ONCE AGAIN ON DRAWING

It is universally believed that lines are the basis of every pictorial experience. *Taking the Line for a Walk* takes a look at drawing and lines as the end result rather than as a mere tool in a final product. The title has been inspired by the Swiss-born German artist, Paul Klee's famous quote: "The line is a dot that went for a walk."

Kamini Sawhney, curator, Jehangir Nicholson Gallery, says, "Most of our exhibitions so far, have focused on paintings, and as we were sitting down and brainstorming over ideas for our next exhibition, it occurred to us that we have so many wonderful drawings in the collection which we needed to put out in the public space for our viewers to enjoy. In recent years, drawings have been overshadowed by paintings and newer art practices like installation, video art and more. We felt it was time to return to the drawing board and put viewers back in touch with the purity of the line and the intimacy of a drawing. As we explored

the Jehangir Nicholson collection we discovered that we had drawings by many great artists. All of them have at some point in time worked on drawings – whether it was from early in their career like Souza and Raza or much later like a 1998 sketch that we have by Tyeb Mehta. There are wonderful drawings even by artists who were primarily sculptors like Pilloo Pochkhanawala and Sadanand Bakre."

Forty-five works from the Jehangir Nicholson collection are a part of this showing and include a whole range of drawings dating from 1940 to 2000 by acclaimed artists including Tyeb Mehta, K.H. Ara, V.S. Gaitonde, Akbar Padamsee, FN Souza and more. Also on view are actual sketchbooks that show the finished artwork in its various stages.

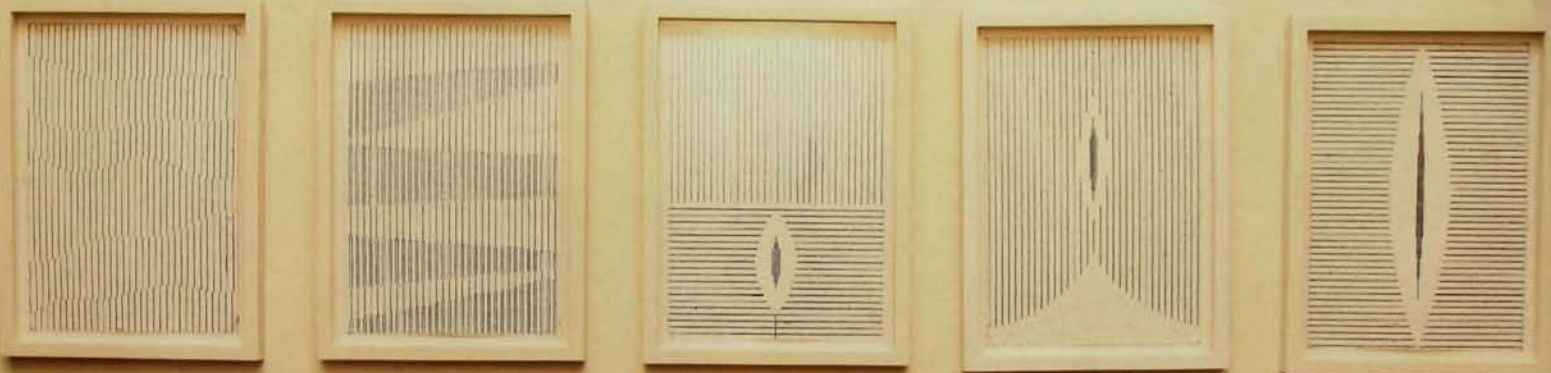
Taking the Line for a Walk is on show till August 30, 2014, at the Jehangir Nicholson Gallery, 2nd floor, East Wing, CSMVS, Mumbai.



Gulammohammed Sheikh's *Corner of a Railway Station*, 1994, Charcoal on Paper; 178 x 126.5 cms. Courtesy: Jehangir Nicholson Art Foundation

ARTFUL ENTERTAINMENT

SOCIETY LADIES IN DESIGNER WEAR...WINE AND CHEESE EVENINGS...AND, OF COURSE, ARTWORK – SOPHISTICATED IN CONCEPT AND EXECUTION. DEVANSHI MODY WAS DRENCHED WITH THE VARIOUS HUES OF THE RECENTLY CONCLUDED ART CHENNAI THAT WAS AN 'EXCLUSIVE-INCLUSIVE'



Chennai, India's 'culture capital', evokes Carnatic music, Bharat Natyam, Thanjavur paintings, bronze Natarajas spectacularly poised – classical art preserved and perpetuated, seemingly in unadulterated splendour. Some 25 years ago, industrialist Sanjay Tulsyan descended upon Chennai and began collecting modern art. 'His collection is so vast he has paintings sticking out from under his bed and stashed in his bathtub,' jokes a close friend who has known Tulsyan since his advent in Chennai.

Creator and convenor of *Art Chennai*, Tulsyan deemed it preposterous that developments in modern and contemporary art were the prerogative only of New Delhi and Mumbai, and sometimes Kolkata, where he grew up. Therefore he launched *Art Chennai*, South India's biggest art confluence that has been short-listed by an international glossy as one of India's top four art initiatives.

This year's edition was a nine-day splash awash in artwork sophisticated in conception and execution: resolutely modern paintings and sculpture; scintillating installations/

projections; daring photos and films; interactive projects; speaker forums and that prerequisite for all art events nowadays – entertainment! The theme was 'Conservation, Heritage, Environment', although the glitzy environs in which the concomitant entertainment unleashed weren't remotely conservative or heritage-inspired.

Tulsyan revealed that when he inaugurated *Art Chennai* three years ago, this ode to modern/contemporary art was met in conservative Chennai with disconcertion. But this year's response has been tremendous



THE SENSATIONAL HEADLESS HORSEMAN PRESIDED AND CUTTING-EDGE ART THAT SEEMED TO HAVE WALKED OUT OF LONDON'S TATE MODERN EXCITED THE CURIOSITY OF TEENAGERS GENERALLY MORE TITILLATED BY THE LATEST FASHION TRIFLE THAN ART

and Tulsyan is sanguine that the CM will help sponsor subsequent events – which he has hitherto funded solo. Jayalalitha's national political ambitions, one hears, will ensure support, exemplifying a point pervading the artistic discourse throughout the event: the inevitable socio-political enmeshment of art.

Naturally, then, Tulsyan is emphatic, "This time we wanted to be both exclusive and inclusive." Hence, eminent and, therefore, 'exclusive' artists, art collectors, historians, museums and critics convened from the world over. However, art also displayed or 'happened' outside the posh purlieus of galleries like Veda or luxury boutiques (Bergamo) at IIT or in popular spaces like Phoenix Market City and Express Mall where the sensational *Headless Horseman* presided and cutting-edge art that seemed to have walked out of London's Tate Modern excited the curiosity of teenagers generally more titillated by the latest fashion trifle than art.

That's not to say that artistic affairs

aren't fashionable. They are just where society ladies come to strut Prada bags wider than their waistlines and sport designer wear that extorts more comment than the art itself. And here's where Art Chennai's 'exclusiveness' flaunts itself.

The inclusive-exclusive line was tread also by the event's hospitality partner, unsurprisingly, Hyatt Regency Chennai, a hotel whose inception concertedly confronted and consternated Chennai with avant-garde art bewilderingly bee-themed, and left the tradition-enslaved Tamils with an acquired taste for the adventurous and made Chennai an evolved contemporary art destination. (Notwithstanding, predominantly Chennai's immense North Indian community and expats patronised the event).

The exclusive art auction of modern and contemporary art and gala transpired at the hotel as diamond-drenched hands and Swiss-watch wrapped wrists banded paddles. Works that merited

extravagant prices generally fetched them. Encouraging, the discretion displayed by bidders in spurning the two not especially fetching Husains, one but a prop idling from *Gajagami* going at over a million. Soon, however, all but the most ardent connoisseurs who'd flown in from across India dissipated and occupied themselves with executive chef Gopi's banquet. Chennai fulfils international norms in that the attraction of art events is notoriously commensurate with the enticement of accompanying food. Hence, Sotheby's generates more enthusiasm than Christie's because it is better-catered.

Besides the sensual, *Art Chennai* challenged the intellectual with conclaves conceived and moderated by the witty Girish Shahane. The subjects of conferences were fascinating, speakers generally less so. Certain artists even deployed the platform for self-promotion – thus, a talk purportedly on the *Future of Art* degenerated into a monotony of bashless 'I'm-so-talented'. TM



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Krishna, however, enthralled when he spoke (as opposed to reading from a script like most others) on the *Future of Tradition*. Experimenter, iconoclast and Carnatic music's most famously controversial vocalist, with characteristic subtle irony, declared that the present preoccupation with the classic is nostalgic and betrays a disturbing complacency and inclination to remain rutted in the familiar. Contrast Krishna's jolting regenerations of the classic. His was a speech cunning in craft, cogent, incisive, irreverent, with an argument taut like a string of pearls, itself a work of art. His successor, Sadanand Menon's disjointed musings provoked more interest, even though they were like a cluster of coloured beads, each bold and vibrant, but jostling in nebulous pointlessness. Like overly ambitious, formless and, therefore, thoughtless artwork.

Richard Blurton (whom I mistook for actor Richard Burton and resurrecting him would've been not art but a miracle) who heads the British Museum South Asian Department spoke eruditely, eloquently on the *Future of Museums*. However, ironically, nobody alluded to the Hyatt Regency Chennai that is a modern museum of sorts or a live-in art gallery housing arguably the world's largest collection of bee-themed art. Surely,

given the increasing commercialisation of art, a vexatious topic (for isn't commercialised art a contradiction in terms?), hotels like HRC that commission art for art's sake enable the creation and conservation of startling artwork that isn't necessarily commercially viable. Such works would become obsolete if not for a passionate collector's commitment to commissioning and creating interest in off-beat or off-bee-t (as the case might be) art. Private collections exhibited in hotels might well be the way of piquing those who wouldn't otherwise venture into a museum/gallery.

Visiting galleries showcased their fare at the hotel over a wine and cheese evening. Satish Gupta's *Chandrashekhra* at the entrance stupefied those not petrified before the cheese array (probably more expansive than the artwork). A mad rush ensued towards the art installation projected on the hotel façade, but only because champagne lured. Predictably, once the champagne dried, guests returned to drain the wines inside, whilst the desolate installation continued flashing banalities like 'Life is wonderful', courtesy of a certain Sameer whose talents seem keener at procuring champagne than conceiving art. Bacchus inspired art. Bacchanalia doesn't necessarily...

Undistracted art enthusiasts happened to be children (debarred at the bar) as they gambled about avidly imbibing a Seema Kohli, almost an Indianisation of Klimt. Several tableaux seemed desi-fications of Dali, Bosch or Picasso. However, the Princess Pea miniatures, a cheeky twist on local miniatures, were refreshingly different. I, stationed before Satish Gupta's *Nine Goddesses*, find myself effusing, "I want them all." Someone besides me murmurs, "Don't we all darling?" The event pours into midnight, not signifying the enduring appeal of art, but of sustained wine and cheese supplies that outlasted those at Sotheby's.

The festival culminated in an extravaganza hosted by Gallery Veda at Park Hyatt Chennai. The exhibition was *Deep (skin) Skin Deep: A proposition on Art, Textiles, Fashion*. Socialites thronged; artily attired, baring skin, fashionably, they seemed the exhibits. Token 'firangs', those requisite adornments at glamorous events, obligingly presided too. Fine canapés and cocktails happened at the hotel's fantasy Flying Elephant restaurant, the most en-vogue address in town, before select guests retired for much-sought Chef Balaji's minimalist but manicured supper in the exclusivity of the Park Hyatt's NYC-meets-Paris-style apartments. **●**