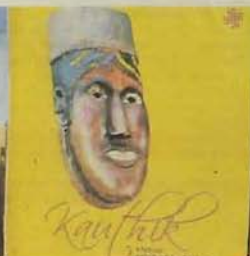


PAGES from the past

TREND Are art brochures, once valued collectibles, giving way to the soft copy culture?

Afghan Contemporary Women Artists



Many of us must have experienced the tragedy of having our collection of favourite brochures thrown away by an irate parent or spouse on an unwelcome spring cleaning spree, on the grounds that aging paper attracts dirt, takes up space and ultimately falls apart anyway. Nowadays they would also argue that most such documents are to be found on the internet, and if your stuff is really so precious, you might as well scan it and keep as many copies of its digital version as you like – at least you won't have to worry about dust mites and silverfish infestation.

So out go your carefully saved pamphlets from the annual 'DCM' Ramila, the autographed movie folders, the booklets with pictures of a painter's works alongside a glowing assessment by an eminent art critic, and along with them, your memories that tingle pleasantly with every fresh touch of this memorabilia. The charm of the brochure, with striking pictures and nuggets of information that would be hard to lay hands on otherwise, militates against throwing it away after you've been there, seen that.

But, what with the growing popularity and accessibility of the internet, plus changing notions of convenience and value, it seems the art galleries, the performing artists and the film distributors – among the biggest producers of printed collectibles – seem to be succumbing to the lure of the soft copy.

The weight is over

Yes, technology has changed our lives irrevocably – even for practitioners of India's classical performing arts, which even in their modern or neo-classical format go back a century or so.

Before information technology brought computers within our reach, a generous portion of the suitcase of a classical artist travelling for a performance tour, whether in India or abroad, would be reserved for a stack of brochures detailing the artist's training and accomplishments to date. Every serious aspirant to a performing career needed to find the funds to get a photo shoot done, arrange an impressive sounding write-up and then go to a designer and printer who would produce a pamphlet that aesthetically combined these elements.

Eminent Kathak dancer Aditi Mangaldas, who has been performing for over three decades, recalls that she used to travel with her brochures and

photographs, but these paper documents were usually "shoved into the dustbin," and were moved into CD format. "Now," says Aditi, "nobody wants paper or CD. Now everybody says please upload it."

Only recently, she says, she discovered the term "EPK" – an electronic press kit.



"This contains brochure, photos, video, everything. You upload it to (video and photo sharing websites like) Dropbox or Vimeo or iCloud." This is a sensible innovation, she notes, since one is not filling up some individual's email inbox, and if organisers want to refer to the material, they can, in-

stead of wading through old mails, just ask the artist to send the link.

Aditi is saddened, though, by the disappearance of the hard copy. "I like brochures, I like to hold paper in my hand, I still take all my notes on paper." However, artists have to move with the times too, and with luggage weight and size a big issue these days, it is only practical. "You can even check it on the phone, ye haal hai!"

She does feel brochures should be printed for significant programmes, though not all. "I think it's a very nice thing, if the brochure is well brought out. It also becomes an archival document."

Young Kuchipudi dancer Abhinaya Nagaraj says that technology allows artists to frame their own programme notes and distribute these as handouts instead of going to the expense of printing brochures. "A brochure is pleasing to the eye, it's soft, the texture is good. But if you need information (on the performance), you can get it from a handout just as well," says Abhinaya.

A.R.

Pages of tradition

For Odissi dancer Jyoti Srivastava, aesthetically designed brochures are as important as the getup of a dancer.

"My students tell me this is a waste of money, but I say why then do we perform at all? That too can be called a waste. Why do we wear particular costume and jewellery?" When artists are considered authorities on a certain tradition, she says, they might as well uphold other angles of its aesthetic and etiquette. Her annual programme

in memory of Guru Srinath Raut has been documented every year with brochures, but this year, she admits, she is cutting costs with black and white printing.

Celebrated Hindustani vocalist Madhub Mudgal, principal of Gandharva Mahavidyalaya, has a simpler logic. Nowadays online 'events' substitute for paper invitations, and all the news about an upcoming event can be had from twitter. "No," says Mudgal, "our kind of people don't look at all those things."

Catalogues out, books in

After an art lover suggested some months ago that it's a good idea to get a catalogue signed by the artist, one started asking for catalogues from art galleries only to be disappointed. Galleries didn't bring out a catalogue on Sudershan Shetty, who is showing in Delhi after 10 years; nor did Nature Morte on L.N. Talwar. One waited for National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA) to bring out one on Subodh Gupta but that didn't happen either.

The premier public art institution dedicated to modern art brought out related merchandise instead. Though NGMA did produce a catalogue for Atul Dodiya's show, at Subodh Gupta's show "Everything is Inside" the visitors were handed a rather cute booklet that carried excerpts from Germano Celant's monograph on the famed artist with essays by Bharti Kher, Sunil Khilnani, Rags Media Collective and Celant. But nothing could better the beautiful monologue (priced at Rs.7500) that Vadehra Art Gallery (VAG) came out with post Atul Dodiya's show. Edited by Ranjit Hoskote, the gallery produced it in collaboration with Prestel.

In the art industry, catalogues are no longer the norm. They have come to be replaced by lavish tones with the artist with multiple essays probing his art practice. "I think over the years, people who are involved with art had started feeling the absence of

substantial material on the artist. And that's the gap art galleries are trying to plug," says senior art critic and writer Ella Dutta. She credits Renu Modi's Gallery Espace and Ebrahim Alkazi's Art Heritage for coming up with some splendid catalogues in the '90s, the period when catalogues enjoyed huge popularity. Dutta distinctly remembers



Roshini Vadehra of VAG, one of the first few galleries that took to producing books on artists, says they still do catalogues depending upon various factors. "The idea behind doing a book is to document. While a catalogue can pass on limited information, a book is more comprehensive. We believe that they do help in overall promotion of art." The gallery hasn't published any catalogues for S.H. Raza's ongoing show "Parikrama: Around Gandhi," instead it has

released two books on the stalwart – "Geyers" and "A Journey of a Master". For Nalini Malani's "Cassandra's Gift" and the Jaysree Chakravarty's ongoing "If you will stay close to nature", it has, however, brought out a catalogue.

Delhi Art Gallery is another major player when it comes to art books and most of its recent shows such as "Manifestations N", "Mumbai Modern" and "Indian Portraits" were accompanied by books and not catalogues – but it did bring out one on the latest edition of India Art Fair.

"I think most Indian galleries, such as ourselves, are concentrating on larger books on their artists, at least trying to bring a number of exhibitions together into a single book, often collaborating with other galleries to do so. We have done this with a number of our artists including L.N. Talwar (with Arario Gallery in Seoul and now, on a new book, with Jack Shaiman Gallery in New York); Mithu Sen (with Gallery Chemould); Pushpamala (also with Chemould). These books have more substance and a much longer shelf life than the small, 10-20 page catalogues documenting a single show, which were the norm in India 15-20 years ago. The internet has a lot to do with this. We can now make that small 10-20 page catalogue of only the works in a show at the gallery and send it out free as a PDF. In many ways, those old fashioned catalogues were just glorified mailers in the days before email," says Peter Nagy of Nature Morte, which has recently brought out two new books on the work of Thakral & Tagra – "O".

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