

Identifying fake art from the original an easy task?



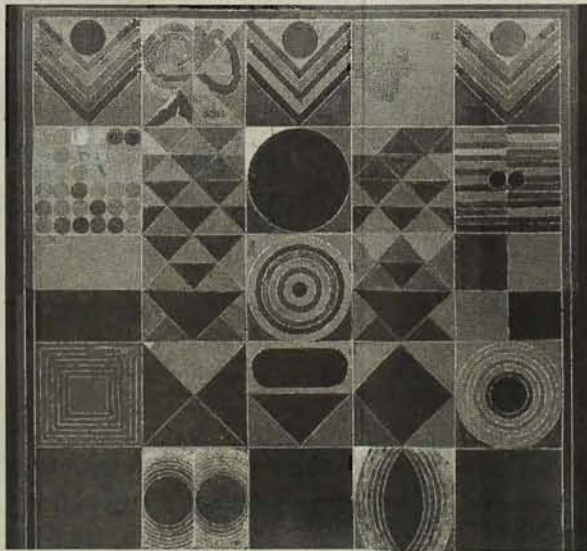
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artscope

Like many mysteries that get curiousest and curiousest, this one is absolutely unravellable: of what constitutes fake art. The most commonly understood description of a fake is an artist's signed work copied by another, be it his student, understudy, intern or another artist. The work could be an exact copy or similar one with a few changes this way or that way. What about an art work "directed" by an artist to his assistant/intern and signed by himself?

Then how about works "inspired" by an artist in the same style? I recall how an art dealer once took me to show a few works of a junior and unknown artist. I had one look at the works and immediately asked him if the artist worked with a particular very senior artist? He looked in amazement. How do you know? He asked. I said, 'Just look at the heavy textures created on canvas. That senior artist's last show featured works on the same style of textures. Even though the

subjects were completely different, there was hardly any difference in style. Does it not tantamount to fake art?' While the story of fakes is as old as art itself, the reason to yet again talk about it is a caveat that was passed against an auction house Bid and Hammer from Bengaluru at the behest of Delhi-based Raza Art Foundation and the National Gallery of Modern Art about a couple of paintings that were coming up for sale at a proposed auction.

I have nothing, but disdain and huge aversion for fakes of any kind whatsoever but simply on the basis of assuming that an artist doesn't usually replicate himself, can a painting be dubbed as fake? There have been so many occasions when artists have worked on a series that look very similar that it is difficult to tell one from the other. Many artists, including yours truly have done a work that has found favour with a buyer who wanted a bigger or smaller size and artists almost always oblige



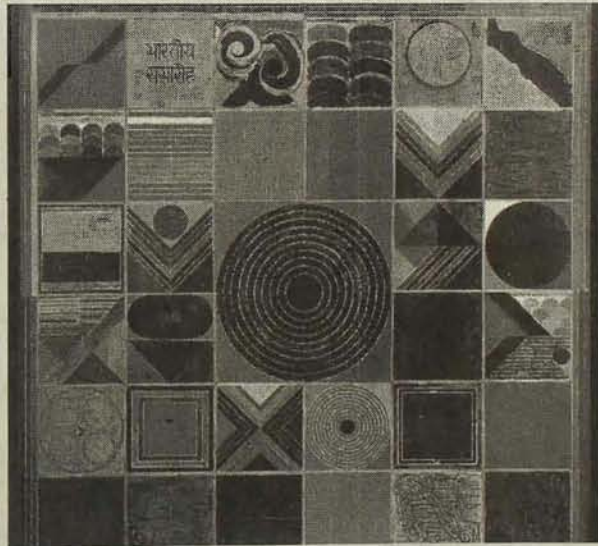
Artist S.H. Raza's *Prakriti* and *Festival* paintings

by creating a replica. Even this can lead to confusion later?

Senior artists are known to disown many of their earlier works after having become associated with a particular style in later years. A few years ago S.H. Raza's nephew had put up an exhibition of his earlier works at a not-for-sale show

in Delhi and the senior artist was supposed to inaugurate it. On reaching there, the doddering artist and the managers of his foundation kicked up a shindig claiming that all the works in the show were fakes. Who in their right mind will put up a show of 100 per cent fakes and why will he call the very same

artist to inaugurate whose work was purported to be on show? Curious, right? European maestros from the Renaissance period had multiple interns who would regularly assist them as they learnt with the masters and so steeped were they in their style that it would be impossible to differentiate the work. In the



mid 90s when Manjit Bawa's assistant blew the lid about having done a large number of Manjit's canvases there was a hushed silence in the art world, for this was one of its murky secrets that few were willing to talk about. The hapless assistants would be doomed for life — for the powerful artists wouldn't

allow them to survive. Contemporary painting is one discipline where there are no gharanas unlike Hindustani music and Kathak or bannis of dance a la Bharatanatyam, or followers of a style like in folk or traditional painting, so there are no disciples. In fact, imitation and influences are frowned upon in

modern art practices. In such a scenario, where every artist strives to be an original, interns too are a total no, no for evident reasons. While a large number of senior and middle level artists have juniors filling in to do the more labour exhaustive work for them, seniors like M.F. Hussain who drew each and every line themselves, are laudable. While younger artists are very conscious of copyrights and authenticating their works, in the absence of any single body that can authenticate art works of older and departed artists, it is a situation fraught with pitfalls for there are commercial interests involved in the transactions. Obviously it cannot be given to a private party to hold the art world to ransom. Government panels are a bad idea for reasons of expertise. Families of dead artists are known to demand their pound of flesh when authenticating works. Not only unscrupulous art dealers and galleries families of dead artists are also known to help sell good quality fakes being passed off as the real thing. Who does one believe?

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