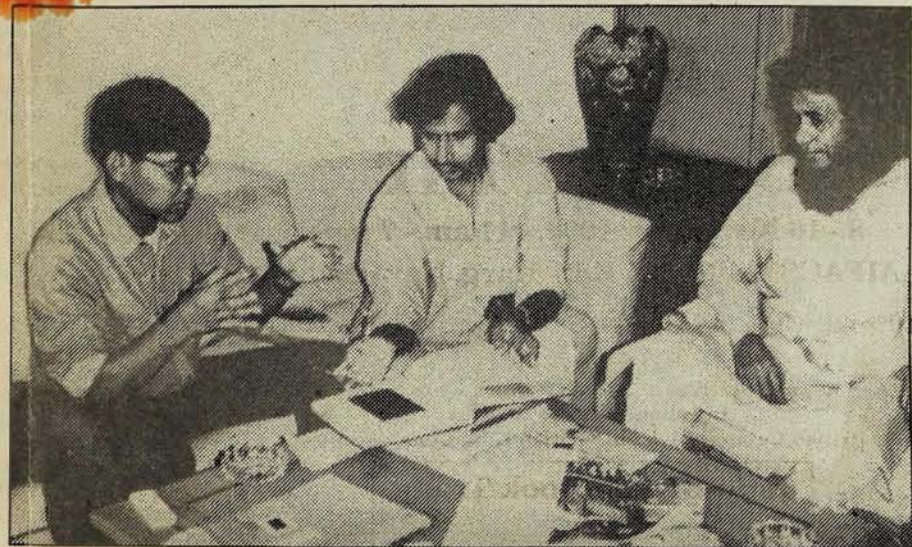
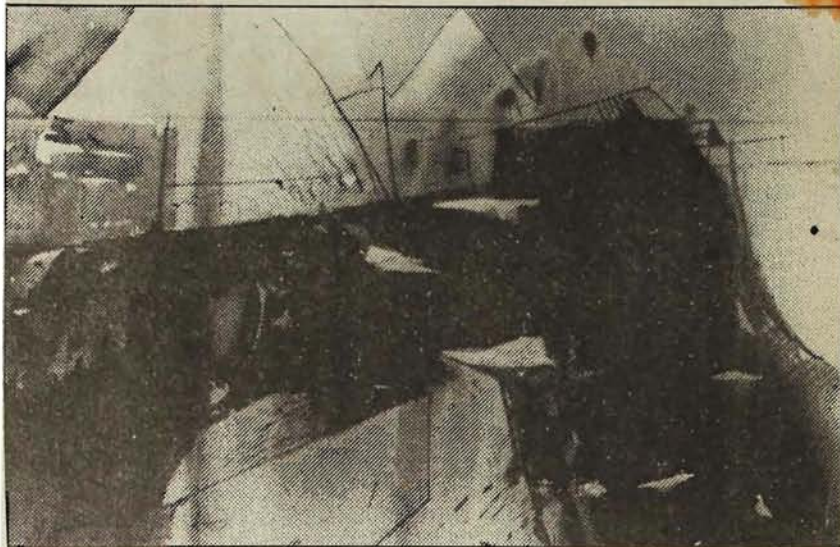


MARQUEE



EAST-WEST ASCENT: Paresh Maity's painting at Gallerie Aspekte and (right) a Thal artist with Jogen Chowdhury and Manjit Bawa

Paresh Maity is veering towards abstraction. Not one devoid of realism but one that takes off from it as if to tease the imagination. The impatient brushwork sweeps colour through the canvas in hurried but unerring strokes. Ranked among the best of our watercolourists today, Maity seems to be giving a new twist to the idiom in the works he is showing at Shridharani gallery these days. Works that he did while he was in Germany last summer. For an exhibition at Gallerie Aspekte. An exhibition that was inaugurated by the mayor of Heidelberg. One that was written about, in newspapers and magazines like Rhein-Neckar Zeitung and Passagen. One where most of the works got sold out.

Orchard Street. Bugis Street. Simlim Square. Nayang Academy of Fine Arts. Dhiraj Chowdhury's sketches, displayed at Beaux Art Gallery, are an artist's view of Singapore. The senior artist's exhibition there in June was opened by the Indian High Commissioner in the presence of the Japanese ambassador among various other diplomats. Although the show was not organised at the government level. For, it is not very often that contemporary In-

All the world's a gallery

Germany, Japan, Singapore, Thailand, London: contemporary Indian art has gone global. It compares well with the art of these countries in aesthetic terms, but not in its prices. Will the recent interactions change the scene? Ratnottama Sengupta reports

Whether in the east or the west, so far people have seen either classical Indian art or traditional ones - miniatures and folk styles. The government, whenever it has organised a festival abroad, has not thought it fit to showcase our contemporary art. Simultaneously, the emergence of a growing middle class with considerable purchasing power has created a demand for art within the country and outside, an awareness about a contemporary India that is as vibrant as it was in ancient times. This has, in all likelihood, resulted in the spurt of exhibitions in various parts of the world, sponsored by private galleries, museums and even auction houses like Sotheby's and Christie's.

The art camp in Thailand, for instance, was organised by Media

which should augur well for our contemporary art, bringing about a marked change in the situation where Indian artists sell at prices "much lower than, say, an artist from Singapore" although, in terms of aesthetics or execution, "they can hold against artists from any country, eastern or western," as Masanori, an art collector from Japan, had said.

Arun Vadehra of the Vadehra Gallery finds this quite unacceptable. "There may be a huge gap between the economies of India and UK. But when property prices are comparable, why can't it be so in art too?" he argues. But the fact is that it isn't, nor do our artists ever get invited to exhibit at Tate or the New York gallery of modern art. This is only "because

there is no awareness in the west about our contemporary art," Vadehra insists. Further, the media - including in India - does not focus on the market value of Indian art, so the buyer "has no idea of what its real value is." To tackle this Vadehra is collaborating with Christie's of London on an ambitious auction that will "widen the appeal of contemporary Indian paintings."

The successful sales of works by Jamini Roy and Husain in Sotheby's March sales has been "a definite morale booster," admits Vadehra. The Christie's auction, to be held in London early next year, will include the works of "the best names in Indian contemporary art" including M.F.Husain, Satish Gujral,

Ganesh Pyne, Anjolie Ela Menon. Christies will bring out a detailed catalogue including picture of the works and a note on each of the 25 artists. "The catalogue would be placed in all the Christie's offices in New York, Geneva, Hong Kong, Tokyo, Melbourne..." There will be previews in Delhi, Bombay and "of course" London. "We will collect bids here though we expect that the works will get higher prices in London," Vadehra said. "After all, a lakh of Rupees is only 2000 pounds!" That's a throwaway price for works by the top line of artists of a country like India, he maintains.

With part of the proceeds going to a charity involved in the promotion of art, the huge expenses involved in organising an international event of this scale "when unit prices are not comparable" will probably not be realised by the organisers. What probably explains Christie's interest is their plan to have a representative office in Bombay. As for Vadehra, the prime objective is to place Indian art in international market. "We're going global in every other field, so why not in art?" he asks.

was inaugurated by the mayor of Heidelberg. One that was written about, in newspapers and magazines like Rhein-Neckar Zeitung and Passagen. One where most of the works got sold out. Orchard Street. Bugis Street. Simlim Square. Nayang Academy of Fine Arts. Dhiraj Chowdhury's sketches, displayed at Beaux Art Gallery, are an artist's view of Singapore. The senior artist's exhibition there in June was opened by the Indian High Commissioner in the presence of the Japanese ambassador among various other diplomats. Although the show was not organised at the government level. For, it is not very often that contemporary Indian art is seen in this eastern land where traditional painting still retains a stronghold, as in China.

Fukuoka Museum is "concentrating only on Asian contemporary arts," informs Janchen Chander, just back from Japan. The graphic artist was one of the three Indians in the international workshop the museum hosted last month. "In fact, furators from Canada and America also said they will be coming to India," Kanchen reports. From what they have seen at the show, they discerned "tremendous possibility."

"We must increase our interactions with the east," says Manjit Bawa, one of the six Indian artists who participated in an art camp in Thailand in August. Contemporary Indian art has evolved a lot and "we should let our neighbours in countries like Thailand, Singapore, Dubai, even Australia, know that," he adds. So far the effort has been to project ourselves in the west though they care a damn about us. "Bahut gulami kar li angrezon ki (long enough have we been subservient to the west)," he states, calling for increased relationship with neighbours "through private enterprise and not through government alone."

Bawa touches upon two key elements of the contemporary art scene: increased interaction, through private enterprise.

The government, whenever it has organised a festival abroad, has not thought it fit to showcase our contemporary art. Simultaneously, the emergence of a growing middle class with considerable purchasing power has created a demand for art within the country and outside, an awareness about a contemporary India that is as vibrant as it was in ancient times. This has, in all likelihood, resulted in the spurt of exhibitions in various parts of the world, sponsored by private galleries, museums and even auction houses like Sotheby's and Christies.

The art camp in Thailand, for instance, was organised by Media TransAsia, the publishers of magazines like *Swagat*, *Discover India*, *Architecture + Design*. It was perhaps a limited attempt at creating an awareness about Indian contemporary art in a land that shares its traditions - both Buddhist and Hindu - with India. "But there's nothing to show for the ancient links now," says Manjit Bawa. Whether in installations or in painting, contemporary Thai artists are borrowing heavily from the west: "even when they are not copying masters like Miro, Picasso, Renoir or Rembrandt," Indian artists Ram Kumar, Arpita and Paramjit Singh, Manu Parekh, Jogen Chowdhury and Manjit realised as they traded experiences with Thai artists and critics. They also completed some paintings which, when exhibited in galleries, will introduce Thai viewers to contemporary Indian art.

The organisers of the camp have planned other exchanges of import. Apinan Poshyananda, eminent art historian of Thailand will be in India this December to study many facets of Indian contemporary art. Several Thai artists are to visit India for a parallel experience. A group show of Indian artist in Thailand is in the offing next year, while Dr Poshyananda will jointly curate, with Vishakha Desai, six shows in museums across the world. All of

"much lower than say, an artist from Singapore" although, in terms of aesthetics or execution, "they can hold against artists from any country, eastern or western," as Masanori, an art collector from Japan, had said.

Arun Vadehra of the Vadehra Gallery finds this quite unacceptable. "There may be a huge gap between the economies of India and UK. But when property prices are comparable, why can't it be so in art too?" he argues. But the fact is that it isn't, nor do our artists ever get invited to exhibit at Tate or the New York gallery of modern art. This is only "because

not focus on the market value of Indian art, so the buyer "has no idea of what its real value is." To tackle this Vadehra is collaborating with Christie's of London on an ambitious auction that will "widen the appeal of contemporary Indian paintings."

The successful sales of works by Jamini Roy and Husain in Sotheby's March sales has been "a definite morale booster," admits Vadehra. The Christie's auction, to be held in London early next year, will include the works of "the best names in Indian contemporary art" including M.F.Husain, Satish Gujral,

works by the top line of artists of a country like India, he maintains. With part of the proceeds going to a charity involved in the promotion of art, the huge expenses involved in organising an international event of this scale "when unit prices are not comparable" will probably not be realised by the organisers. What probably explains Christie's interest is their plan to have a representative office in Bombay. As for Vadehra, the prime objective is to place Indian art in international market. "We're going global in every other field. So why not in art?" he asks.

