

It promises to rain big bucks as estimates at three auctions move north

# Gold rush at the art mart



V. S. Galtonde's oil on canvas (1971) is the top-notch work at the inaugural Bid & Hammer auction in Bangalore. ESTIMATED PRICE: Rs 50-60 lakh



TWO BROTHERS (1961), an oil on canvas by Tyeb Mehta, highest estimated canvas at Osian's Mumbai auction. ESTIMATED PRICE: Rs 2-2.5 crore



KALI-III: Tyeb Mehta's oil on canvas (1989) is set to get top billing at the Emami Chisel Art auction in Kolkata. ESTIMATED PRICE: Rs 4-5 crore

by Archana

The gavel is ready to pound again as the auction season of modern and contemporary Indian art opens in 2008 with two auctions in January, followed by another one in February. Here are the facts — on January 19, the first auction of modern and contemporary Indian art (100 Years of Wonder) in 2008 will be held at Mumbai by Neville Tuli's Osian's; on January 24, new auction house, Bid & Hammer, promoted by entrepreneur Maher Dadha, will hold its maiden auction in Bangalore and on February 23, another newbie, Emami Chisel Art that was born last year, will conduct an auction in Kolkata.

For the connoisseurs and lay art lovers alike, this translates into a mindboggling quantity of quality art coming up for grabs early on in the year. For the artists, it means an opportunity to push the envelope



"Tyeb Mehta (left) is a favourite at the auctions for the rarity of his work and the global critical acclaim he has earned"

Sharon Apparao, Auctioneer, Chennai

further and for the Indian art market, well, it is moolah time once again.

It is pretty fashionable for artists to be dismissive of the auction business, but whether they like to admit it or not, auctions have definitely contributed in setting new standards for the art world. An artist's worth inevitably gets linked to his showing in any auction of repute, whether it reflects true his worth or not. Veteran artist Jogen Chowdhury had summed up the emotion best at the launch of Emami Chisel Art last year, "Competition is good for art. When our economy and the art business are booming, auctions are inevitable."

The operative word is India's robust economic health — it is

the swivel on which the art wheel is spinning. Says Maher Dadha of Bid & Hammer, "Given that our economy is growing and more Indians are buying art, there is room for more auction houses." Operating from Bangalore, the third largest art centre in the country after Delhi and Mumbai, Bid & Hammer will be able to catch untapped potential in South India, he says.

It's the same philosophy which drove the Rs 1,500 crore personal health care major Emami Group of Kolkata into the arms of Chisel Crafts, parent company of Kolkata's Aakriti Art Gallery. Vikram Bachhawat, director, Emami Chisel Art, says, "With most prominent auction houses based in Delhi or Mumbai, artists from other parts of India

were being ignored. We hope to fill that void."

The bouquet of options across the three auctions is a heady mix but the catalogue of names and works being offered are most voluminous at Osian's. That is understandable, considering the long experience of Osian's in the field.

The most striking feature of Osian's auction is a wide variety of canvases from hitherto unseen private collections of renowned families, like the Dr. Suhrid-chandra Sinha Collection (1901-1982, featuring works of Abanindranath and Gaganendranath Tagore among others), Dinesh and Varsha Thacker Collection, Mumbai and many others.

Besides the regular biggies, Emami Chisel Art also has

works by seven new artists who have never showed at auctions before. An interesting canvas in its kitty is *Safdar Hashmi* by MF Husain, which is the first Indian canvas to have crossed the Rs 10 lakh mark in 1987 at an auction. Apart from this, none of the canvases have ever showed at any auction before.

Obviously, auctioneers are upbeat about prospects in the new sale season, with good reason given that the Indian art market corrected and stabilised itself last year. In an earlier interview with *Mail Today*, Neville Tuli had said a while ago, "The Indian art mart has matured and the next boom is just round the corner." Perhaps, his auction this weekend may herald this boom.

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## Stories in stone from Vadodara

by Archana

AT 70 years, Vadodara-based sculptor Nagji Patel is exactly what a sculptor of his age and history is likely to be — once he gets absorbed in his work, he forgets everything else, including the hassles of presenting that work to the world. No wonder, his solo show of sculptures and drawings, *The Enshrined Object*, that opens this evening at Gallery Espace, comes after a decade. "I'm not of that temperament — working is what I enjoy, I don't bother much about exhibitions," he says.

Patel doesn't bother much about exhibitions as some of his best sculptures are already in public domain, gracing squares



Vadodara-based sculptor Nagji Patel at work (above left); (Left & above right) Sculptures from his recent solo show

In Vadodara, Seoul and Aji-Mure Town in Japan among other cities. "The best space for showing a sculpture is a public place," he says, adding "Unfor-



tunately, not much attention is paid sculptures today. Architects should work in cooperation with sculptors while designing buildings — a sculpture

should be factored in any big public building coming up."

One is instantly reminded of the gargantuan Yaksha and Yakshi figures outside the building of the Reserve Bank of India in Delhi, sculpted by Ramkinkar Baij. Patel's favourite medium is granite and he adds that the raw material and size/weight of a sculpture have proved deterrents in the popularity of sculptures so far. "Things are changing with increased focus on Indian art. Though major beneficiary has been the painting, sculpture too has benefited," he says. Hopefully, sculptures, which have graced Indian monuments since ancient times, will find favour even today.

—The show is on at Gallery Espace, Community Centre, New Friends Colony, till Feb 8