

SR

ART

# LUCKY XIII

*Art District XIII, a groundbreaking venture by The Oberoi Group's Kapil Chopra, is infusing new energy into the Indian art scene*



Kapil Chopra

At a time when galleries are either shutting down or are challenged by a slow art market, Kapil Chopra, president of The Oberoi Group, has decided to be a pioneer and bring an unforeseen professionalism to the Indian art world through his non-profit initiative, Art District XIII. He speaks to *Bazaar* about what it entails.

**Given the slow art market, why did you decide to open Art District XIII?**

We are the antithesis of what the art world is supposed to be. We stand out. We are not owner/gallerist-directed. It's important for us to balance the gallery, the artist, and the collector, so no one gets shortchanged. You cannot have a situation, like in 2008, where the moment you buy an artwork you find it has depreciated by 40 percent. A lot of people forget that rule. A lot of people got pissed off post 2008, and walked away. We're challenging every single norm. We're focused on transparency. We spent close to ₹25 lakh doing this space. The whole approach has been reformist in nature. It celebrates our reformist spirit.

**Are you sure it's a reformist and not maverick spirit?**

Mavericks are not logical planners. Mavericks are into reckless jumps. We've been able to grow every initiative we've begun, and sustain it. From our perspective, even if we don't sell for 23 months, we will still be able to sustain ourselves. We work with like-minded people, for instance. Absolut supported our

catalogue and opening, they loaned us their Anish Kapoor installation. Basically, we're not maverick at all. We're thoughtful about our plans. We're working on our second show, we're trying to do something really big in the fund-raising space which will open in July, because nobody opens in July; and in October, we'll have a show curated by Ranjit Hoskote

**You've set up District XIII as a non-profit initiative. Why?**

It's basically not for private profit, and is one among our other initiatives, like Best College of Art, *The Wall* magazine, and the Emerging Artist Award. Whatever profit these initiatives make goes into a holding company called Insignia Art Collect, which pays salaries to employees, but there is no profit trail that goes back to the promoter, which means I do not take a salary. We are so into transparency that everybody knows the other's salary and how much money we have. We

are internally audited. I run 25 hotels in many locations, but I have systems to monitor them. Galleries don't operate on that level of professionalism. Here, however, we're all sitting together and speaking to each other, and that's how we're operating. If this model works, we will open branches either in Dubai or Geneva, not because we love these countries, but because they are art-friendly ports that allow the free movement of art.

Rosalyn D'Mello



Interiors of Art District XIII; above right: *Home in the Blue Forest* by Paul Davies.



David Gerstein

## GLOBAL ART



Striking colours, boundless energy, and a simple straightforwardness of thought defines the oeuvre of celebrated Israeli artist, David Gerstein, who comes to India with his first solo show, *Poetic Mirror*, to Delhi this month. The artist, whose Fauvist-esque installations dot the landscape of countries including Belgium, England, France, and Germany, started out as a painter over four decades ago, gradually expanding his art to include sculptures; his post-pop-art style seeks to be a vivid representation of the reality. His show in India will feature recognised works like *Endless Walk*, *Happy Hours*, and *5<sup>th</sup> Avenue*, that have found favour with international art enthusiasts. "I hope my style finds an audience in India" says Gerstein, who has never been here before, though his works were part of this year's India Art Fair.

*Poetic Mirror* is on at the Visual Arts Gallery, India Habitat Centre, from May 5-15. ■

FROM TOP: COURTESY ART DISTRICT XIII; DAVID GERSTEIN





ART

## TOASTING THE NEW

*Promoting young talent, Bestcollegeart.com and Glenfiddich's Emerging Artist of the Year Award is fostering the future of art in India*



Clockwise from top left: *Finestre* Finestre; *Journeys of a Straight Line II*; *On Parallel Grounds*; (from left) Swapan Seth, Vir Munshi, Kapil Chopra, Peter Nagy, and Nitin Bhayana; Vir Munshi (sitting), Andy Fairgrieve, Rajiv Bhatia, and Sunil Vysyaparth; Chetnaa Verma; *Crossways of Diagonals*.

THE EMERGING ARTIST OF THE YEAR AWARD is one of the biggest in the country. Now in its third year, it is brought together by Bestcollegeart.com, the reputed online art gallery, and Glenfiddich. The award, as the name suggests, is to recognise and promote talent among young artists, and the winner gets a ₹10,00,000 cash prize, a three-month residency in Scotland with Glenfiddich's globally acclaimed Artists in Residence (AiR), and a solo exhibition at New Delhi's Nature Morte art gallery.

Bestcollegeart.com invites entries (five works of their choosing to be uploaded online) from across the country. The process starts in January, and over two months, the jury—a panel of luminaries like Andy Fairgrieve, Kapil Chopra, Peter Nagy, Rajiv Bhatia, Sunil Vysyaparth, Veer Munshi, Rajshree Pathy, Thukral & Tagra, Swapan Seth, and Nitin Bhayana—debate, vote, and bring down the applications (655 young artists applied this year) to just five.

For Peter Nagy of Nature Morte, art is subjective and choosing a winner is based on many factors. "Art is not like sport where somebody runs faster than somebody else. You cannot say that this painting is really better than that painting; beauty is in the eye of the beholder. The important thing about this is that through a selection process, we are trying to see how the artist will use the residency for their own development, how they articulate their work and interact socially, because they will be representing India (at AiR)."

Last month, Delhi College of Art graduate Chetnaa Verma was named the winner for her linear, minimalist works *Crossways of Diagonals* and *On Parallel Ground*. The second runner-up was Baroda-based Shrimanti Saha, and first runner-up, Tauseef Khan of Delhi. As Rajiv Bhatia, director of William Grant & Sons, India, says, "In India, there are budding artists everywhere. And this gives them the platform to express themselves. Even the four who don't make first place still get massive exposure from this; it puts them on the map." ■

Ami Unnikrishnan

AMAN MANKAR





PRINCESS ESRA IS WEARING A SEA GREEN SARI, her *pallu* modestly draped across her shoulders. While she has refused a seat at the head of the country's grandest table—the 101-seater at Taj Falaknuma Palace—there is no doubt that she is holding court.

• The first wife of Mukarram Jah, grandson of the last Nizam of Hyderabad, Princess Esra is back at the Nizam's erstwhile guesthouse and now one of the Taj Palace hotels to launch the Falaknuma Festival, one rooted in Nizami traditions of hosting the finest talents from across the world. The first edition has Susheela Raman and British Ska band The Dualers, followed by a Hyderabad dinner.

Culture and heritage are two of Princess Esra's major concerns. They were top of mind when she oversaw the 10-year-long restoration of the Taj Falaknuma Palace and when she worked on her 'pet project', Chowmahalla Palace. The latter, one of the country's finest palaces—on which she worked with celebrated architect Rahul Malhotra and textile expert and founder of INTACH Martand Singh—is now both a museum and cultural venue, hosting exhibitions of the Nizam's armoury, photographs, and costumes, while also serving as a backdrop to private events. "I wanted to bring the history back to the palace," she says. She adds simply, "It is our heritage."

She might be divorced from Mukarram Jah, but as the mother to the heirs Azmer and Shekhyar, and with the authority over Jah's estate, Princess Esra is indeed the keeper of the flame. But neither does she think the past can be brought back ("we just have to make best of what there is and help the younger generation to appreciate it") nor does she consider herself as a princess. "India is a country that likes heritage. Whether it's business, whether it's royalty, it's dynastic. People are very nice and polite because of what they are used to. Not because of the person, not because of me."

Born in 1938, Esra Birgin grew up in Turkey before moving to England at the age of 13. At 21, she married Mukarram Jah and moved to Hyderabad where she lived till her divorce in 1974. Now she divides her time between London, Hyderabad, and California where her son and daughter live. Both are in attendance at the Falaknuma Festival. Princess Esra meanwhile is already working on another of the Nizam's palaces, Purani Haveli, where she is putting together a section for widows and girls to earn money. She has also opened up the Chowmahalla Palace for any researcher to come and stay free of cost. "It's not only a museum," she says. It's the same with the Festival, the Taj is not just a hotel—both have become cultural destinations. ■

ART

## THE PRINCESS DIARIES

*From patron of the Falaknuma Festival to the force behind the restoration of Chowmahalla Palace, Esra Jah is driving the revival of Hyderabad's grandeur*

*By Nishat Fatima*



From top: Princess Esra Jah; Susheela Raman performing at the Falaknuma Festival; the Taj Falaknuma Palace; The Dualers in concert.



# Your HOROSCOPE

## GEMINI

MAY 22–JUNE 21

Those encouraged by an uplift in certain work-related or financial areas mustn't lose perspective. One or two people in particular tend to over-invest in areas which are yet to be tested. Find your voice and remind them there could still be hidden pitfalls.

*Motto of the month* Resentment and oil will surface.

## CANCER

JUNE 22–JULY 23

Having fought shy of an area in which much is expected of you, you'll now want to step up. A lot will depend on the support you're given. Don't lean on it indefinitely, but learn from the experience.

*Motto of the month* The way to be safe is never to feel secure.

## LEO

JULY 24–AUGUST 23

People anxious for your advice might have to wait in the queue—loved ones will feel they deserve your help more. Carefully decide where your loyalties lie and hold on to your values. If you're too materialistic, you could miss out in other ways.

*Motto of the month* One small tear can ease a great sorrow.

## VIRGO

AUGUST 24–SEPTEMBER 23

Though others are right to question the cost of your exotic ventures, you won't want your behaviour to be censored. Try not to overreact. Most, if not all, areas of conflict will be best approached with intelligent arguments rather than slanging matches.

*Motto of the month* A good plan today is better than a perfect plan tomorrow.

## LIBRA

SEPTEMBER 24–OCTOBER 23

By investing money in your long-term future or home, you will undoubtedly get a good return. Perhaps you won't realise how impressed certain individuals will be when they witness your determined attitude.

*Motto of the month* Too much laughter, too little sense.



Roberto Coin cuff, price upon request.

## TAURUS

APRIL 21–MAY 21

*Foreign travel or daring exploits might appeal. Let everyone see how independent you can be, especially with the Sun allied to Pluto early in May. Others might try to dissuade you from abandoning something safe and secure, but you're about to feel more determined than ever. Enjoy what it brings you.*

### MOTTO OF THE MONTH

*No matter how tall the mountain, it cannot block out the sun.*

## SCORPIO

OCTOBER 24–NOVEMBER 23

People will be curious about an arrangement which they're nervous to enter into themselves. Admit that you have your own misgivings and let them see that you're taking a calculated risk and are confident.

*Motto of the month* A good thing is not known till it is lost.

## SAGITTARIUS

NOVEMBER 23–DECEMBER 21

Although mindful of guidelines, you mustn't let them cramp your style when dealing with situations. Around May 10, tackle a set-up that can only be handled successfully if you allow yourself to bend the rules. Just make sure no one's watching.

*Motto of the month* A little stone may upset a large cart.

## CAPRICORN

DECEMBER 22–JANUARY 20

Try not to rebel when it's suggested you knuckle down to routine tasks. And don't challenge others who are able to indulge in more exotic episodes. You'll soon see why you need to be dutiful.

*Motto of the month* When money talks, the truth remains silent.

## AQUARIUS

JANUARY 21–FEBRUARY 19

As you flip-flop between confidence and caution, you might struggle to find the best way forward. Tell yourself that by May 24, you'll be able to strike the right balance. Until then, negotiate a get-out clause.

*Motto of the month* Every day must have its night.

## PISCES

FEBRUARY 20–MARCH 20

Secrets must sometimes be kept—you're about to contest those insisting that news about the home or family shouldn't be disclosed to anyone on the outside. You're growing tired of having to deal in cover-ups. If anyone can implement change, it's you.

*Motto of the month* Better a white lie that soothes than a truth that hurts.

## ARIES

MARCH 21–APRIL 20

Money matters aren't serious, but you need to keep an eye on the bank balance. Don't allow anyone to accuse you of being extravagant—one person in particular needs to know how financially aware you can be.

*Motto of the month* A bold attempt is already half success. ■

MAY PREDICTIONS BY PETER WATSON