

The Evergreen Canvas

An art fair is best remembered for the artworks it displays, and this year, we were stunned by the quality and range of wall-based art—often ignored in the new media overdrive—that was on display at the India Art Fair. Poonam Goel reports

India Art Fair, in its sixth edition, was different for many reasons. Though it was a smaller representation of the art world—the number of participating galleries came down from 106 in 2013 to 81 this time—there was a lot to admire at this annual event. Strategically placed right at the entrance, there was jewellery by Nirav Modi with designs inspired by Mughal miniature art. This was also the start of a Mentor and Protégé Program—Dayanita Singh and Jitish Kallat being the first two mentors—that would connect a young Indian artist with a mentor for a year of creative collaboration. And yes, we had a Chinese delegation of collectors attending the fair for the first time. As one celebrated what was new, it was the return of the traditional canvas that pleased us the most. With larger-than-life installations out of the way—those which existed were stationed outside the tented venue—and wide open spaces welcoming you to absorb the glory of the 'walled beauties', it was easy to gauge that the classic had made a major comeback this year.



SOUZA'S CORNER

At the Dhoomimal Gallery booth, it was difficult to find leg space for more than a few minutes. Viewers were bumping into each other trying to steal a glance or two at the scores of Souza paintings that adorned this booth. There were the quintessential nudes, and also some portraits. Curated by veteran Anjolie Ela Menon, this section also had paintings by B C Sanyal, Krishen Khanna, Anjolie Ela Menon and Redappa Naidu. The response was palpable as the young director of the

gallery Uday Jain explained to visitors how his family came to own one of the largest collections of these masters' works. "The response is fabulous. After the Gaitonde sale at Christie's auction, people are going back to appreciate paintings of contemporary artists," said Uday.

MASTER STROKES

If Dhoomimal offered you just a slice of what beautiful paintings are about, at the Crayon Capital Art booth, you could find the whole cake. The walls of the booth

were ablaze with veteran strokes—M F Husain, A Ramachandran, Ganesh Pyne, S H Raza, Ram Kumar, Rameshwar Broota, Jogen Chowdhury jostled for space with younger names such as Jitish Kallat, Mithu Sen, Bharti Kher, Chittrovanu Mazumdar and others. Brisk business seemed to be on as the gallery representatives ushered visitors to the corner which had some of the most flamboyant Husain works. This was one booth where you would surely be spoilt for choice.



Crayon Capital booth



Syzygy by Jitish Kallat



Customised Kalpavruksha, Manjunath Kamath, pic courtesy Gallery Espace



A painting by Anirban Mitra at Sakshi Gallery booth



Rekha Rodwittiya

CATCH THEM YOUNG

When we recommend paintings one must covet, we don't mean only the blue chip! Younger artists were in their full glory too. At Gallery Espace, paintings by Manjunath Kamath, Mekhala Bahl and G R Iranna sported red dots right on the first day of the fair. At Gallery Nvyu, there was a whole section dedicated to Seema

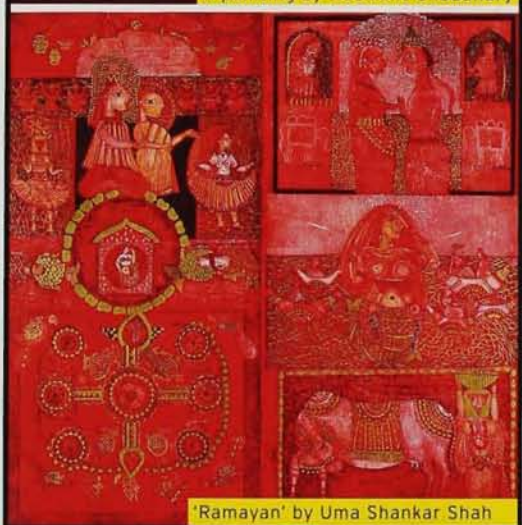
Kohli's canvases replete with delicately executed feminine forms. At the Sakshi Gallery booth, Rekha Rodwittiya's watercolour on paper titled 'Matters of The Heart' was a work that kept us coming back to it. So did Anirban Mitra's psychedelic colours on a canvas, a playful amalgam of tribal art, television adverts and religious imagery.



Seema Kohli's canvases at Gallery Nvyu



A painting by Neelkant Choudhary



'Ramayan' by Uma Shankar Shah

BACK TO THE ROOTS

Speaking of tribal imagery, the canvases at Gallerie Ganesha booth were equally resplendent. Whether it was tribal artist Jangarh Singh Shyam's untitled work, a Madhubani-inspired watercolour by Neelkant Choudhary, Uma Shankar Shah's mythological work or Dipak Banerjee's tantric symbolism, each canvas told us a story of where it all began. Shobha Bhatia of Gallerie Ganesha says, "A strong heritage can influence descendants for generations. Tradition, which is considered old, is reviving and reinventing itself. These canvases focus on what lineage influences each artist and how they choose to take that inspiration forward."



A sculpture by Julien Salaud



Sharmi Chowdhury's 'Irreplaceable Drop' made in tempera on silk, hunji paper and paper pulp



Ravinder Reddy



Valay Shende's work

Small And Sensible

There were sculptures too, small, delicate and appealing. The ones that stood out for us—Julien Salaud's beaded sculpture of a head, Sharmi Chowdhury's paper girl titled 'Irreplaceable Drop', Valay Shende's onion cut into half and Ravinder Reddy's wall-mounted sculpture.

AMAZING ABSTRACTION

At the fair, a lot of paintings were based on photo-realistic forms that fall into the figurative genre, but abstraction also had its day. Artist Sujata Bajaj's canvas at gallery Art Alive's booth was one such work. Bursting with colour, her artwork was also displayed at Indigo Blue Art, a booth where more abstracts by G R Santosh, Jani, Sohan Qadri and Zarina Hashmi were on display. Abstraction was also found at the Parisian gallery LTD Gallery where Katrin Fridriks seemed to have sprayed cans and cans of vibrant colours on large canvases, although there was indeed a method to this energetic splatter.



Sujata Bajaj



Katrin Fridriks

FOREIGN PALETTE

Canvas seems to be the inspiration also for foreign gallerists as many of them chose to show wall-mounted works this year, giving a miss to experimental installations. At London's Scream Gallery, figurative paintings by Sally Fuerst took centrestage while Pakpoom Silaphan's pop-art also attracted many visitors. Germany's Die Galerie swanked a flamboyant front with who's who of European art. Picasso, Andre Masson, March Chagall, Joan Miro, Carl-Henning Pederson—every wall of this booth had canvases galore. Galerie Lelong of Paris chose to show a solo booth by Indian artist Nalini Malani, who incidentally is equally well known for her installation based work. "Showing paintings is easier at the fair," says Patrice Cotensin of Galerie Lelong, "You need a lot of equipment like projectors, dark rooms and a dedicated space for installations."

Impressive Installations

Subodh Gupta's signature steel utensils in a work titled 'Aura'.
Chintan Upadhyay's 'Lost Soul', a colourful baby head in fibreglass.
'Path Finder', mixed media installation by L N Tallur.



'Aura' by Subodh Gupta



L N Tallur's 'Path Finder'

Chintan Upadhyay's
'Lost Soul'



Painting titled 'Saraswati'
by Sally Fuerst at Scream
gallery



Die Galerie



Miniature works by Waswo X Waswo and R Vijay Kumar

MINIATURE MAGIC

When we speak of the traditional and the time-tested, we have to mention the art of miniatures. There was a solo booth jointly created by American artist Waswo X Waswo, who has now made India his home, and miniaturist R Vijay Kumar. Inspired by W S Merwin's poem 'Separation', the two artists have created works that bear titles such as 'A Dream of Death' and 'Convergence' which revolve around the visuality and aesthetics of separation. Whether mounted on the wall, or framed like a table piece, each work speaks of a technical maturity and finesse that only miniature art can boast of.

This & That

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Wang Fei



Dr Ho Kah Leong



Seah Kang Chui

EXHIBITION

Event: Group show

Date & Venue: March 12-24, Art Spice Gallery*, Delhi

Twenty-two artists from the Singapore Art Society get together for an intriguing exhibition. The artists, each with a unique style of painting, are all representatives of the 'Nanyang' spirit. The term 'Nanyang' is used to denote the idea of a regional identity and culture for the overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia. The works are a blend of multiple stylistic techniques from the east and west. The participating artists are Terence Teo Chin Keong, Chan Chang How, Lim Choon Jin, Dr Ho Kah Leong, Wang Fei and Seah Kang Chui, among others.

EXHIBITION

Event: Show by Neha Talwar

Date & Venue: On till March 5, Shridharani Art Gallery*, Delhi

For the show 'Many Worlds in One World', artist Neha experiments with colours, and as a silent spectator chronicles the world around her. Her paintings focus on the psychological and emotional aspect of human beings. Each painting begins with a focus on gesture, light and composition. The theme of her works is varied—ranging from figures, flowers to women, on printed paper and canvas.

