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LEAD ESSAYS

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SPECIAL REPORT



According to an estimate, around 40, 000 people attended the Summit

On a High

The India Art Summit in Delhi augurs well for Indian art, says **Meera Menezes**.

IT WAS A SHOT IN THE ARM THAT THE INDIAN ART SCENE badly needed. The India Art

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Summit held between the 19th and 22nd of August 2009 at Delhi's Pragati Maidan generated a frisson of excitement not just among the art fraternity but also among the public at large. The second of its kind, it was clear that the organizers had upped the ante and gone all out to make the event bigger and better. The exhibition space had expanded three-fold from the Summit in 2008. The number of galleries had catapulted from 34 to 54 and the level of display was swankier than it had been in 2008.

Contributing to this was undoubtedly the presence of both international and Mumbai-based galleries, who had adopted a wait and watch attitude in 2008. It was clear that the international galleries were keen to test the waters of an 'emerging market' like India with the number of participants going up from three to 17. While Dusseldorf-based gallery Beck and Eggeling chose to include works on paper by Pablo Picasso in their repertoire, London's Lisson Gallery showcased works by Anish Kapoor and Julian Opie.

The central foyer and the fringes of the display area served as a site for the Purple Wall project curated by Gayatri Sinha - it comprised sculptural installations and photographs. On view were Nataraj Sharma's striking *Air Show* and Subodh Gupta's large-scale sculptural installation *Gandhi's Three Monkeys*. New media got a dedicated space with a video lounge that ran works by both Indian and international artists.

The expectations of the Indian gallery owners prior to the summit had been fairly muted with no one expecting much in terms of concrete sales. Most gallery owners saw it more as an opportunity to network and generate interest in their artists. According to Tuntty Chauhan, Gallery Threshold, "The summit came during the recession, at a time when footfalls in galleries had dwindled. We managed great visibility for our artists, not only in terms of viewership but in terms of international buyers and museums". Gallerist Mamta Singhania of Anant Art Gallery was of the opinion that there was a renewed confidence among art collectors to buy works of art.

For the New York gallery director Thomas Erben, the fair offered an ideal opportunity to present artists like Chitra Ganesh and Yamini Nayar to his customer base in India. It was a view echoed by Alexander Hahn of Anant & Zoo who saw the Summit as a good opportunity

to showcase his artists to an Indian audience while simultaneously forging links with Indian artists.

The fair also served as a platform for new galleries like Bhavna Kakar's Latitude 28 and Bose Krishnamachari's BMB. Galleries also used the opportunity to present fresh talent - Suchitra Gahlot's *One Thousand Tears* by the Shrine Empire Gallery was a striking case in point. The Summit was also used as a platform for the release of a book on artist Sunil Gawde as well a discussion on his practice by authors Ranjit Hoskote and Jitish Kallat.



Princess Pea made an appearance at the Summit. "I can't reveal my identity", she said. "All of us are works of art", she added.

Sudarshan Shetty's contribution was a limited edition of quirky spectacles.

A slew of collateral events hosted in tandem with the Summit also spoilt the art lover for choice after closing hours. While Talwar Gallery presented the elegantly minimalistic and nuanced works of A. Balasubramaniam, Atul Bhalla's *In Another Sweat* opened at Anant Art Gallery's Noida space.

Raqs Media Collective's engrossing lecture performance, *Phantoms and Photographs*, was a mélange of movie clips, projected images, sound and field notes and dwelt on reconstructed narratives of the city. It focused, among other things, on "the civil war between the master plan and the moment". In an intervention, artist Inder Salim went

The media hype and publicity blitz also managed to attract a clientele, which had been too intimidated to enter the gallery space. In keeping with the fairground atmosphere Bangalore's GALLERYYSKE decided to present itself in a different avatar, appropriately termed 'StoreSke'. On offer was a clutch of articles designed by artists, which ranged in price from a few hundreds to a couple of thousands. While Abhishek Hazra had designed a number of black T-shirts with pithy slogans on them, Susanta Mandal came up with a mock toolbox and

through the labyrinth of art galleries holding the book, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, by Jacques Ranciere, and distributed photographs of himself in front of the galleries on the Internet.



Managing Director **Sunil Gautam** and Associate Director **Neha Kirpal** at the Summit.

This year, too, the issue of the exclusion of veteran artist M.F. Husain, due to fears of attacks by right wing extremists was raked up. Artist Shukla Sawant found this "cynical use of Husain" quite disturbing. At the three-day International Speakers Forum, the topics ranged from 'Thick Vs. Thin Globalism' to 'The Valuation of Art' and 'Collecting in India'. A host of speakers who had flown in from abroad included Nicolas Bourriaud, curator at Tate Britain; T. J. Demos, critic and lecturer; Hans Ulrich Obrist,

Director of International Projects at the Serpentine Gallery; Thierry de Duve, Professor, University of Lille 3; Melissa Chiu, Director, Asia Society Museum; and Shaheen Merali, independent curator.

While the morning sessions were devoted to cultural theory, the afternoons were largely dedicated to the art market and discussions with artists, gallerists, collectors and representatives of auction houses. While Nicolas Bourriaud advanced the idea of translation to escape thick and thin globalization, ART *India* editor Abhay Sardesai spoke of how art works "shed baggage and acquired weight as they travelled". Thierry de Duve, author of the book *Kant after Duchamp* gave a brilliant talk on extreme multiculturalism, universalism and hybridization. Ex-editor of ART *India* Girish Shahane spoke of the dangers of interpreting art using the prism of victimhood. Thierry de Duve dwelt on how aesthetic judgment was a matter of feeling. This realisation unfortunately allowed the wrong impression that it disallowed intellectual activity, he added, as he spoke of the importance of critical thought.

