

Interest in contemporary art among youngsters encouraging

SUPPORT The recent auction by Saffronart, which saw the sale of 32 works by contemporary artists, is a testimony to the renewed interest in this art form, especially among the younger profile of collectors

To those who follow the Indian art scene, it remains a known fact that the contemporary art scene has been lagging in comparison to the modern section in terms of demand, and recorded market performance. A serious shot of patronage has been the sought order of the day, though it hasn't been particularly forthcoming. This isn't to say that there has been an absolute vacuum in terms of support from various market quarters. Within the contemporary spectrum, there have been a number of highly visible public art projects and commissions that have been announced and unveiled over the past 5 years. However, constant support from the collector community hasn't been forthcoming. In this light, Saffronart's auction from the previous Friday offered some encouraging news.

For starters, it was a White Glove sale, meaning every single consigned work found a buyer. Such an occurrence is celebrated since it still is relatively rare to find interest in all consigned lots. A side observation is that this was easier to achieve since the catalogue carried only 42 works. However, one must note that it was a predominantly a contemporary catalogue, as 32 among these were works by contemporary artists.

Artery India's post-sale report highlighted another excellent development. Over the course of the evening's sale, there were new price records that were set for 5 artists, four of whom are Contemporaries. This activity presents clear indications of resumed interest in this section, especially from a younger profile of collectors. In the private domain, we have increasingly been receiving collecting requests from this demographic for works by contemporary and emerging bracket artists, typically in the price range of between ₹1 to 5 lakh. The fact that this auction was being conducted for a charitable cause added a further edge to the noteworthiness of the event, which raised a total sum of ₹3.2 crores for the Chief Minister's Distress Relief Fund of the government of Kerala.

From one bright highlight to another. A highly welcome event that we witnessed earlier this week was the opening of the Arvind Indigo Museum in Ahmedabad. The role played by a museum in the direction of cultural sensitisation

of a resident community is tremendous. India has sorely lacked till recently in terms of presence of these institutions, certainly at a state level, and most visibly as private initiatives. While the United States of America and Europe have historically been leaders in the domain of private museums, which are open to the public, countries like Brazil, Indonesia, Korea, Japan and China, amongst many others, have taken huge strides over the past two decades. Industrialists and assorted billionaires the world over have long since appreciated the value and importance of establishing such institutions that showcase their passion for culture, and philanthropy, all the while retaining at the fore, the name of their family and/or brand.

In the Indian context, we have recorded a sudden rise in the number of private museums over the past two years in particular, and not a moment too late, if I may say so. The more, the merrier (wiser, rather).

The Indigo Museum, built under the command, and following upon the vision of Sanjay Lalbhai, chairman and MD of Arvind Limited, showcases a collection that is inspired by the hues of the dye that colour their world-renowned denim fabric. The result is a unique blend of mediums, scale, genres and presentation, all guided by a striking common leitmotif. I will share my thoughts on this collection in further detail in a following edition here.

I have written about how much I cherish the tours of private museums and collections. I shared my experience last week at a guarded collection in Geneva. During my time in the city, I was able to enjoy a viewing of art of a different sort as well. I visited the Salon International de la Haute Horlogerie, commonly referred to as SIHH. Currently in its 29th edition, SIHH is a leading event on the watchmaking calendar, wherein several specialist brands unveil their latest models and innovations. Fine watchmaking is an exquisite art form, which demands precision and craftsmanship.

Nearly every brand showcased their pedigree to the hilt at the event. The brand that held an edge from the perspective of art, however, was Bovet — a brand that has, from its very inception nearly 200 years back, produced watches with exceptional miniature paintings on its dial.

Subjects presented on their exquisite dials include religious iconography, animals, floral motifs and portraits, which are created using the painstaking painting technique of polished lacquer. The richness of these precisely detailed miniatures are heightened further with the use of gold and silver leaf gilding on elegant material like mother-of-pearl. A viewing of works of a different sort, nearly all of which could sit comfortably in a museum — a private museum, perhaps.

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