

**\* LAST CHANCE William Blake:**  
**Under the Influence** A small exhibition to mark the 250th anniversary of William Blake's birth. The display includes contemporary manuscripts and recorded readings alongside works by, and owned by, Blake. The star exhibit is a notebook in which for 30 years he sketched and recorded his poems. Tracy Chevalier has lent the second of the two notebooks in which she wrote her new novel 'Burning Bright', which tells the story of two children who lived next door to Blake in Lambeth in the 1790s. From Philip Pullman there's a portion of the manuscript of 'The Amber Spyglass'. You can also listen to recordings of Chevalier reading from her work and Pullman reading his own work and 'Little Girl Lost', a story by Blake that inspired a scene in 'The Amber Spyglass' and the name of his heroine, Lyra. And there's an opportunity to try out the 'Turning the Pages' feature on the British Library's website, which allows you to zoom in on Blake's notebook to see clearly how he worked, writing sideways and upside down on the densely covered pages and still refining poems such as 'London' and 'The Tyger' even as he was preparing fair copies from which to make his engraved versions. ▶ Mar 21.

## Kew Gardens

020 8332 5655. Kew Road, Richmond, TW9 3AB. ☎ Kew Gdns/Kew Bridge rail. Daily 9.30am-4.15pm, last adm 3.45pm; Until Mar 31: £9.50, concs £6.50, under-17s free.

**\* Kew Palace** Tue-Sun 10am-5pm, last adm 4.15pm; £5, concs £4, under-16s £3 incl guided tour. Built in 1631 by a City of London merchant, the palace is a brick mansion with a distinctly Dutch look. It had a succession of owners, eventually attracting the attention of George II and Queen Caroline of Ansbach. In the eighteenth century, it was here that George III was confined during episodes of the mysterious and debilitating illness that is now believed to have been porphyria. On the ground floor there's an audio visual display about the 15 children George III had with Queen Charlotte and in the breakfast room that doubled as a schoolroom there's a huge dolls' house, furnished and decorated by the daughters of George III. The startling pattern of the fitted carpets and the vivid colours of the walls – designed to be appreciated by candlelight – in the bedrooms and drawing room on the first floor are the result of extensive research. In Queen Charlotte's bedroom there's the black horsehair chair in which she died and in an ante room is the waistcoat that George III wore in his own final days at Windsor. In contrast to the decorated and furnished rooms below, the princesses' bedrooms on the second floor have been left pretty much as they were found, having been shut up since 1816. (S/O) Mar 24 ▶ Oct 28.

**Kew's Spring Festival** The gardens come into their own at this time of year, with five million bulbs flowering during the season. Highlights include the crocus carpet, with two million purple and white plants, daffodils on the Broadwalk and wild mountain flowers in the Alpine House. ▶ Apr 22.

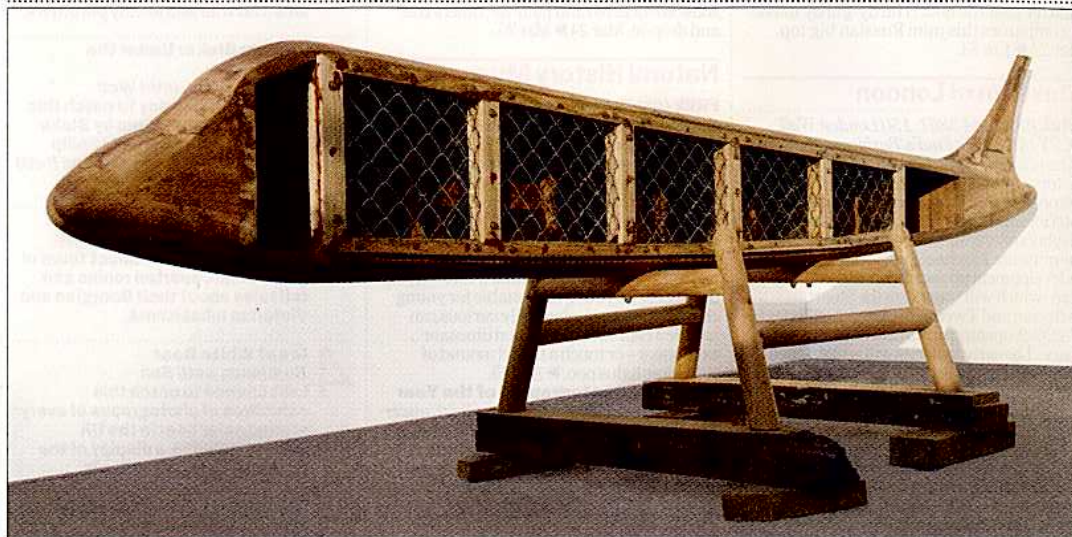
## Spencer House

020 7499 8620 (recorded info). 27 St James's Place, SW1A 1NR. ☎ Green Park. Open Sun only (closed Jan & Aug). 10.30am-5.45pm (last adm 4.45pm); £9, concs & under-16s £7. No children under ten or unaccompanied children admitted. Built in 1756-66 for the first Earl Spencer, this is London's finest surviving 18th-century town house. Eight meticulously restored state rooms are open to the public, with paintings by Sir Joshua Reynolds, objets d'art and furniture on display. Tours begin approx every 15 mins, and last around an hour.

**Stuart and the Spencers** Mar 27 6.30pm; £10, ticket for both lectures £18. First of two lectures planned to coincide with the V&A's exhibition on James 'Athenian' Stuart. Tonight: 'James Athenian Stuart's Masterpiece: the Painted Room at Spencer House'. The next lecture takes place on Apr 25.

# Art

## From tiny Aicons...



Air we go Rias Komu's 'The Tragedy of a Carpenter's Son III'

## Zehra Jumabhoy examines the flights of fancy coming from India to London as a raft of artists head for the UK

A new gallery has landed in London, with an eighteen-foot wooden airplane heralding its arrival. The Arabic prayer thanking the Almighty for the blessing of flight that is inscribed on its side seems a little ironic – the craft's flammable frame, chicken-wire screens and truncated tail-fin suggest that invoking divine protection might be more expedient. As if in pessimistic preparation for catastrophe, nearby stand carved tombstones decorated with tiny skulls.

The installations are part of Mumbai-based Rias Komu's first show in London and if they seem an alien intrusion into the usually pristine spaces of the West End gallery circuit then that is precisely what the artist wants. Together with anti-Bush paintings by New Yorker Peter Drake, Komu's offerings are part of 'Other', the first exhibition at Aicon: a brand-new launch pad for Indian art in the capital.

Komu's mangled airplanes included, art from the subcontinent seems to be taking off big time in London, with a spate of shows opening and others planned for the near future. Grosvenor Vadehra on Ryder Street is the result of a recent tie-up between London's Grosvenor Gallery and Delhi-based Vadehra Gallery to promote Indian art. Mainstream institutions are muscling in on the act too. Tate Modern is holding a retrospective of painter Amrita Sher-Gil, while the Royal Academy is linking with India's Saffronart Auction House to show the octogenarian Krishen Khanna's paintings. And on a commercial track, May 21 will see Christie's stage the inaugural Contemporary Indian Art auction in London (in September, the first New York sale amassed \$9.5 million). But are these just temporary stopovers or is con-

temporary Indian art going to become a permanent fixture on London's landscape?

Admittedly, the talent pool is varied. Next to another new gallery Noble Sage – whose repertoire of South Asian art includes 74-year-old AP Santhanaraj's doe-eyed damsels amid abstract swirls – Aicon is flying in a more radical direction. Raised a Muslim in Kerala, Komu makes work about religion and political oppression: 'This isn't the time to be silent – especially not in a Western climate,' he says.

Projjal Dutta, co-owner of Aicon, also wants Indian art to speak for itself. Aicon – which can be decoded as Art Indian Contemporary – is the latest incarnation of

## Are these temporary stopovers or will Indian art be a permanent fixture?

his New York-based venture Arts India. This 'rebranding' marks Dutta's transition from offering the old-fashioned fare of Indian Modernists – think the predictable spiritual meanderings of SH Raza and FN Souza's mean-faced nudes – to promoting younger talent. Although the US branch will retain its traditional focus, the UK gallery can be more experimental, because, Dutta says, 'In my humble opinion, London is much edgier than New York'.

There are the inevitable murmurs of dissent to all this optimism. An ex-Christie's representative (who prefers to remain anonymous) hints that all is not rosy on this Western front. In New York, thanks to established galleries like Bose Pacia, so-called 'cutting-edge' art from India has had a platform for years. London, she argues, does not have a vastly different collector base to contribute (after all Indian art is still mostly bought by Indians – even if some make up that

unusual cocktail known as the 'NRIs' or Non-Resident Indians) and the British public isn't known for its gleeful embrace of non-Western contemporary art.

Mumbai-based gallerist Mortimer Chatterjee agrees with some of this: 'I just don't see Indian buyers hanging out in their punk T-shirts and buying mad art in London like Tallur LN's giant phallus, even if it is called "Made In England".' Chatterjee concedes that London is important for contemporary art as a gateway to Europe: 'The introduction of Indian artists to non-Indian sales is big news,' he says, referring to the inclusion of Subodh Gupta (dubbed the 'Damien Hirst of Delhi'), in a recent auction of works owned by Swiss art connoisseur Pierre Huber.

For Dutta, such cross-cultural pollination is key. 'Arts India was easy to categorise as Indian, but as we spread our wings we are also going to be working with non-Indian artists. The idea is to diversify and be part of Indian art going global.' Aicon's first contribution to this subcontinental invasion shows promise, but perhaps falls a little short of outright conquest: in his intricate depictions of the misery of the underdog, Komu posits himself as a political artist toppling Western Imperialism. This might be a great way to create a novelty rumpus (especially with a show whose very title separates it from the usual art on offer) but seems a bit tame in a city where political art is not a new phenomenon and is currently lodged happily at Tate Britain in the shape of Mark Wallinger's re-working of Brian Haw's peace protest. Whether Indian art is more than a temporary flavour in the city's cultural melting pot is up to the palette of the ordinary, gallery-going Londoner. Zehra Jumabhoy is the former Visual Arts Editor of Time Out Mumbai. 'Other' is at Aicon Gallery until April 15. See West End listings for details

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