


SPECIAL FEATURE
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ARTSINDIA.COM



a credit card or by cheque. Artsindia.com has recently introduced limited edition reproductions of select works of art from its collection. These reasonably priced products have received a favourable response from the market.

"We are interested in educating our viewers about the vibrancy of contemporary Indian art and crafts," says Dutta, director of artsindia.com. The interest generated by the site can be gauged by the fact that in November alone artsindia.com registered 86,000 hits. That's because artsindia.com features some big names, including Jamini Roy, Shyamal Dutta-Ray, Ganesh Haloi, Sanat Kar, Sakti Burman and Jai Zharotia. But big names are not the only ones to be featured. The gallery also features the works of the younger crop of talent.

There are separate sections for oil paintings, watercolours, graphics and sculptures, as also for abstract art and figurative representations. Every month the gallery features two special sections: a Featured Artist section in the art gallery and a Featured Theme section in the crafts gallery.

When Prajit K. Dutta, an economics professor at Columbia University, and his American wife Susan, designed their New York apartment three years ago, they sourced many works of art from India. They were surprised to discover that those paintings by well-known names in Indian art circles cost much less than what works of lesser known American artists fetched in the US. And so artsindia.com was born.

This website, featuring works of Indian artists, is a treat for art aficionados. The online gallery simultaneously showcases an artist's works and provides information on the context. Over 20 artists and over 150 pieces of art are featured on the site. Visitors to the site can order paintings and other works, either through

For those artists in India worried about having their paintings locked up in art gallery abroad, not knowing when the sale will occur, artsindia.com could offer some help.

The only American online art gallery devoted exclusively to gallery devoted exclusively to contemporary Indian art and high end craft, it receives over 90,000 hits a month from not only the US but also from South America, Canada, France, UK, Sweden, Spain, , Israel, Australia, and over 50 other countries

"The page views have been increasing at the rate of 100 percent per month and an individual day high was reached on December 20 of 17,000 hits", says Prajit Dutta, a Columbia University economics professor, and a founder of the site.

The two-month old site- located at www.artsindia.com- owes a lot to the professor who was raised in India, and Susan F. Sobolewski, his Polish American pianist wife, who was raised in Detroit. Four years ago the couple were expecting their daughter, Mayanka, and wanted to move into a larger apartment. The apartment above their own in New York's Upper Westside fell vacant, providing them with an opportunity to create a duplex. To design their new apartment, Prajit and Sobolewski took the help of Prajit's brother Projjal and his wife Mamta Prakash, architects, then in school at MIT.

"We wanted the design to reflect the multicultural character of the family. That led to acquiring from India a large selection of traditional Indian crafts that could be seamlessly incorporated into the project. The buying of art and crafts in India and the subsequent transportation to the US proved useful if somewhat daunting, education," says Prajit.

"We realized that Indian art is very undervalued. While relatively unknown artists showing in a New York gallery or even in a graduation show of an arts school often got mid to upper four figure sums for their work. Indian artists with critical and commercial acclaim, people who routinely sold out their shows in India fetched considerably less abroad," says Dutta.

"Many of our friends also admired the Indian crafts elements - the sandstone panels, and the ceramic tiles and the antique doorways that we had incorporated into the apartment design. They were amazed at the prices of such finely wrought items," he says. There was another reason to start artsindia.com. "There are scores of Indian artists, well known and emerging, whose work has universal appeal," Prajit says. "Indian paintings have sold well at recent Sotheby's and Christie's auctions and Indian artists have won prizes at many international shows. So naturally one thought of a gallery that highlights their art all year round." But running a physical gallery in New York City is very expensive. Instead Prajit and his partners started artsindia.com. They have agreements with over 40 Indian artists representing a variety of styles, medium and expression, and reputations. Artists range from Jamini Roy, Shyamal Dutta-Ray, Sakti Burman, Somnath Hore and Sanjay Bhattacharyya to younger talents like Ananda Moy Banerji, Sohini Dhar, Tamal Goswami and Sandip Misra. Recently Jai Zharotia, Biman Das and Sanat Kar were added to the site. The crafts featured (on the site) have been used by eminent Indian architects such as Joseph Allen Stein, Balkrishna Doshi and Charles Correa. The website also features high quality reproductions of select paintings in art poster format. "We want to educate our viewers about the vibrancy of contemporary Indian art and crafts," Dutta says, "To that end we feature in-depth articles on topics in Indian art such as recent developments, Delhi Silpi Chakra, as well as general discussion as in Art: A Guide to Terminology." The Dutta brothers have been cautious about going too wide too soon. "We have received feelers from potential venture capitalists," says Prajit "(but) we wanted to retain full creative control over the direction of our company so at first we were a bit lukewarm to the idea. But now we feel that we are sufficiently far along that an infusion of new capital will allow us to make certain large-scale business decisions that we would like to make and spend aggressively on advertising."

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