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Evening Standard
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The London galleries to watch

Ben Lewis, Evening Standard 18.01.08

A new take on the group exhibition: Hayward Gallery
Slick frontline: Aicon Gallery
Beautiful: Spruth-Magers

Arts listings

With no sign of the wobbles at recent modern and contemporary art auctions affecting the ambitions and accounts of private galleries, collectors and dealers, 2008 promises to be yet another boom year for London's art world.

My predictions for the year ahead include a big splash around the opening (finally) of Charles Saatchi's massive space in Chelsea, more hype around contemporary Indian art, greater international recognition for the new generation of serious artists exhibiting in younger east London galleries, a massive comeuppance for the auction houses and greedy collectors in the June auction round, and the invention of a new word to describe the modernist revival: "remodernism".

There's just one drawback - with so much going on, how do you pick what to do and who to follow? London's galleries come in four colours, or should one say, shades of white - public institution, private commercial gallery, not-for-profit artist-run space and the new private museum. Each kind of operation makes a different contribution to the jigsaw of art. It's impossible to remember the names of all the young artists popping up in group shows, so my advice is to copy the strategy of the collectors - pick a few galleries that you like and follow what they do all through the year.

Here is my handy, somewhat idiosyncratic, occasionally arbitrary guide.

1. SPRUTH-MAGERS
With its 19th century carved wood and glass façade, Spruth-Magers gets my vote for the most beautiful gallery in London. This, the London outpost of Germany's leading blue-chip contemporary art gallery, has only been open in its present form for a year, and brings the rigour of German taste in international conceptual artists, photographers and new generation painters to London.

Forthcoming attractions are an exhibition by the legendary LED text-based artist Jenny Holzer, and the unnerving paintings and sculptures of Mike Kelley student Sterling Ruby.
7A Grafton Street, W1 (020 7408 1613, www.spruethmagers.com).

2. HERALD ST
It takes a mixture of bravery and impulsiveness to pick out one of the handful of private galleries which have opened in the East End in the past three years but Herald St, for me, has an imperceptible edge over Kate McGarry, Store and Hotel. It strikes just the right balance between exuberance and earnestness.

Here is the full spectrum of contemporary art practice - the return of figuration (Djordje Ozbolt), investigative architectural fantasies (Pablo Bronstein), modernist nostalgia (Markus Amm), conceptual humour (Peter Coffin) and knitting (Alexandra Bircken).
2 Herald Street, E2 (020 7168 2566, www.heraldst.com).

3. HAYWARD GALLERY
The influence of new director Ralph Rugoff is finally beginning to show on the South Bank. First with the recent Painting of Modern Life exhibition, now with Laughter in a Foreign Language (opening at the end of January) and then with Psycho Buildings, opening in May, the publicly funded Hayward is developing a new take on the group exhibition, combining accessible themes which relate directly to the world outside the gallery with a diversity of artists, many of whom are young, obscure or overlooked.

Laughter is a genuinely funny show about a new globalised set of artists who use humour in their work. In Psycho Buildings, a similarly international cast will become architects, making large structures for the gallery and its terraces.
Southbank Centre, SE1 (0870 3800 4000, www.haywardgallery.org.uk).

4. SAATCHI GALLERY
At some point this year - probably in spring - Charles Saatchi will finally open his new gallery in the Duke of York's Building on King's Road. With 70,000 sq ft of exhibition space, it will be the largest non-government funded institution in London.

The first show will be dedicated to Chinese contemporary art, the latest "trend" in the ongoing art bubble, an area in which Saatchi has been collecting avidly with little regard for cost - he bought at least one work for $1.5 million in 2006 (20 times more than the previous owner paid in 2003).

This expansive survey will hopefully provide the answer to the question of whether the new Chinese artists have come up with anything original, or whether they have simply been applying well-worn pop and conceptual art strategies to their own cultures.
Duke of York's, King's Road, SW3 (www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk).

5. PARASOL UNIT
This time around, Saatchi will not be the only collector in town to have his own private museum. Last year Anita Zabludowicz opened 176 in north London and, following exhibitions in Marylebone last year, David Roberts is opening his own space in 2008.

But the Parasol Unit is different. Here, wealthy Persian curator Ziba De Weck has set up her own space for temporary shows. It sounds like a disastrous vanity project but it isn't. The space is airy (if only the ICA looked this good), the installations are immaculate and the artists mostly well-chosen.

This year, one highlight will be an exhibition of work by Scottish painter and sculptor Charles Avery, which will, unusually, be transferring from this private museum to the National Gallery in Scotland.
14 Wharf Road, N1 (020 7490 7373, www.parasol-unit.org).

6. RIFLEMAKER
Their gallery texts may be overwritten and the art they show is somewhat uneven but Riflemaker's virtues are ambition, zaniness and glamour. Last year, they reinvented their gallery space over and over again.

First they became a gallery exhibiting a gallery, reviving the cult Sixties London art space, Indica; then they turned themselves into a living website, with an exhibition by internet pioneer John Maeda; then they became a novel, covering their walls and ceiling with text from Alisdair Gray.

And all this in an old woodpanelled Soho shop - though they recently opened a second space in another historic building on Soho

Square.

Among the forthcoming highlights are an exhibition called Made By Slaves for Free People, on the theme of brands, from a pair of Madridbased artists, Pablo San José and Cynthia Viera, and the first exhibition of works of art made of Aerogel - the material developed by Nasa and used by Mars probes to trap cosmic particles before they are brought back to earth for analysis - from the American artist Liliane Lijn.
79 Beak Street, W1 (020 7439 0000, www.riflemaker.org).

7. PARADISE ROW
Since he used to write for the Evening Standard, this may seem another instance of the system of favours on which the art world runs, but Nick Hackworth's Paradise Row really has picked out a diverse selection of promising artists and put on some great shows - most notably Diane Bauer's epic, mannerist-constructivist Michelangelo-meets-Judge-Dredd tableaux.

The gallery is also strong on international contemporary photographers such as the underrated Guillaume Paris, who have fallen somewhat foul of art world fashions in recent years.
17 Hereford Street, E2 (020 7613 3311, www.paradiserow.com).

8. CAMDEN ARTS CENTRE
The Camden Arts Centre, London's best public contemporary art space, pursues a policy of spotting international contemporary artists whose first institutional exhibition in this country is long overdue. As erudite as they are elegant, the CAC's shows make the exhibition programmes of other venues look absent-minded. Typically, from next month, they will be staging the first major show in Britain of works by one of Germany's finest new-generation painters, Thomas Scheibitz.
15 Canfield Place, NW6 (020 7472 5500, www.camdenartscentre.org).

9. AICON GALLERY
Most pundits agree that the boom in Chinese contemporary art is being followed, with a time-lag of a couple of years, by India, embracing a broader timeframe of the whole post-war period. The Aicon, operating in Gagosian's old Heddon Street address, is now on the slick frontline of the art market, thanks to its specialisation in this field.

No doubt in four or five years Saatchi and the Serpentine will be holding major exhibitions of modern and contemporary Indian art, but if you want to see the work now you will have to visit this dealer-orientated gallery, which has branches in New York and Palo Alto. As with the Chinese work, pieces of artistic genius are mingled with confections calculated to bewitch flush Western collectors.
8 Heddon Street, W1 (020 7734 7575, www.aicongallery.com).

10. SPACE STATION 65
When one enters the non-commercial precincts of Space Station 65, or other not-for-profit spaces in London such as I-cabin, Cubitt and Studio Voltaire, one can almost forget for a moment that a Francis Bacon now costs £20 million. Space Station 65 is an artist-run space in the depths of south London, best known for their annual fancy-dress pets' picnic.

They do a nice line in performance art pranks - offering last year, at various times, an Ideas Zoo and an artist who made himself available to move furniture around your home. But it's not just a joke: SS's artists have exhibited in London's public galleries, won prizes and been shown at biennales.
65 North Cross Road, SE22 (020 8693 5995, www. spacestationsixtyfive.com).

EXHIBITIONS

Under the Gun. Three shows by Pakistani artists offer a provocative take on the country's tensions

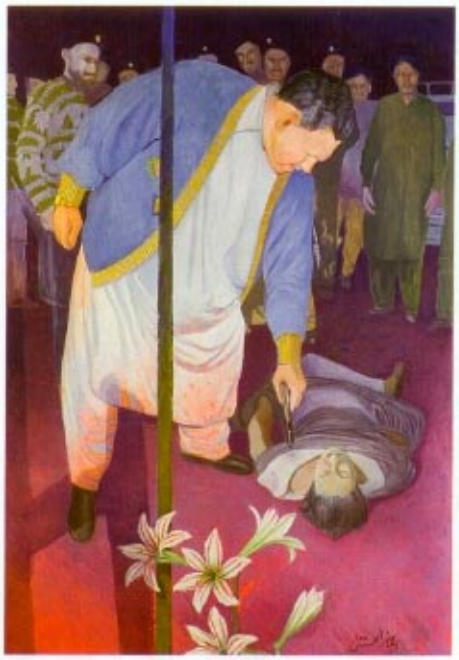
BY CARLA POWER

PITY PERVEZ MUSHARRAF. FOR A MILITARY dictator torn between the forces of Islamic extremism and international opinion, even a trip to the museum is fraught. When the General opened Pakistan's National Art Gallery in August, he was confronted with gutsy pieces tackling an array of provocative subjects—from burqas to madrasahs to militarism. He paused for a long time at *Left Right*, a video installation about the omnipresence of Pakistan's army by the young artist Hamra Abbas, who depicts soldiers patrolling land, sea and desert.

But the Gallery's antimilitaristic exhibits failed to sway its official patron in chief. A few months after its opening, Musharraf declared emergency rule, imprisoning intellectuals along with lawyers and activists; civilians who criticize the army can now be tried by closed military tribunals. So much for the champion of enlightened moderation whose support had made it possible for the gallery to open in the first place.

It's tricky, of course, to act like an old-fashioned dictator in a globalized world. Musharraf can shut down Pakistan's television stations, but he can't silence the criticism swirling on the Internet. He can spook Pakistani artists, but he can't counter the momentum of the global art market, which has begun to take notice of the wealth of Pakistani talent. A burgeoning interest in South Asian art, coupled with the topical nature of their work, has given Pakistani artists an increasingly high profile overseas. Indeed, there are three new exhibitions in Britain alone devoted to Pakistani art.

Most of the artists in these shows grapple with the same topics that capture news headlines—Pakistani nationalism, militarism, the Taliban and state-sponsored terrorism. An eerily well-timed group show at London's Aicon Gallery features the work of Ijaz ul-Hassan, famous as much for his activism as for his art. Imprisoned for his political activities under President Zia ul-Haq, Hassan paints scenes of street violence and government-sanctioned thuggery as stark and bold as tabloid stills. *A View Through a Window* shows a goon with a gun and blood-spattered clothes looming over a corpse, watched by respectful policemen. *Another Madonna*, in which a wailing mother huddles over her three dead sons, their faces daubed in the emerald green of the Pakistani flag, marries a classic theme with a scene that might easily have come from today's papers.



Stilled life *Artist-activist Ijaz ul-Hassan depicts a corpse, a gunman and onlooking police in* A View Through a Window

The artists grapple with the same topics that capture headlines: Pakistani nationalism, militarism, the Taliban and state-sponsored terrorism

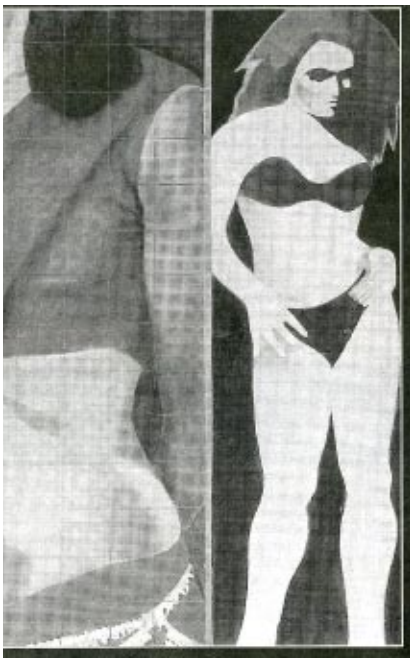
Subtler, but just as topical, is the creepily hypnotic work of Sana Arjumand, also in the Aicon show. Her glassy-eyed women play with the props of Pakistani nationalism—founding father Mohammad Ali Jinnah, and the crescent and star of the flag. In *I am Flexible. Are You?*, a spaced-out woman, dangling like a slack marionette, bends down to pick up a crescent, in a pose of submission, both sexual and political.

It's no coincidence that Arjumand studied at Pakistan's premier art school, the National College of Arts (NCA) in Lahore, and that ul-Hassan has taught there. The only art school in the world to boast a miniature department where students learn the painstaking techniques that Mughal miniaturists employed, the college has produced a string of artists who are reinvigorating old forms with post-9/11 themes. Imran Qureshi, a professor of miniature at the NCA, has a solo show in Oxford's Modern Art museum, which includes his delicate rendering of a bearded mullah blowing bubbles. In 2003, Qureshi and five other NCA graduates collaborated on *Karkhana*, a set of miniature postcards decorated with gorgeous shows of power: thrusting missiles, cloven-hoofed mullahs, and Musharraf and Bush cast as Mughal emperors.

Hammad Nasar, co-founder of London gallery Green Cardamom, argues that the NCA's excellence derives from the fact that it remains one of the few Pakistani institutions that's truly meritocratic. "Why would you bother to bribe your way into art college?" he asks. "Until recently, it just wasn't important enough to be corrupted."

Proof of this meritocracy hangs at Nasar's gallery in a show by NCA graduate Khadim Ali. Raised in Quetta, the son of Afghan refugees, Ali taught himself to draw using charcoal scavenged from bakeries. His artistic inspiration was his family's only book: an illustrated copy of the *Shahnameh*, a 10th century Persian epic revered in Afghanistan. The Taliban co-opted the poem's hero, Rustam, as a propaganda figure, telling Afghans that they, like him, were winged heroes endowed with arrows to defeat evil. Ali's phantasmagoric show, "Rustam," features a devil-figure with horns, wings and the unmistakably Pashtun features of many Taliban. Occasionally, an Arabic numeral floats mid-frame, a nod to Ali's earlier works, which riffed on Afghan schoolbooks that taught counting and reading through the language of war and religious extremism: I was for Infidel, J for Jihad. In one of Ali's early works, two exquisitely rendered grenades face the number 2. Pakistan's radicals and despots may try to squelch democracy, but as these works show, its artists have a talent for speaking truth to power. ■

The Independent, November 20, 2007
Exhibition: Figurative Pakistan, November - December, 2007
Artists: Ahmed Ali Manganhar, Naiza Khan, Ijaz Ul Hassan, Sana Arjumand
Aicon, London



Protest pictures

The Pakistani artist Ijaz ul Hassan has been censored, threatened and even imprisoned because of his work. As martial law descends on his homeland once more, he tells Arifa Akbar why he will never stop fighting

In 1977, Ijaz ul Hassan was forced into a blindfold and a noose tightened around his neck inside the infamous prison housed in Lahore Fort, as his torturers pretended he was about to be executed. As a young artist who had done little to hide his contempt for the martial law imposed by General Zia-ul-Haq's repressive regime in the 1970s, his activism had left him in the line of fire. For four weeks, he was held in solitary confinement, routinely placed under a dangling noose and taunted with threats to his family, friends and "collaborators", before his guards reluctantly freed him.

The incarceration was the culmination of decades of political activism that began with Hassan's protests as a student at Cambridge University against the Vietnam War, and continued with his efforts to organise union protests in his home city of Lahore and the poster artwork that he produced to inspire a resistance movement against the military dictatorship in charge of his homeland.

The artwork Hassan made was deemed so explosive that it was censored, refused entry to exhibitions or taken off the walls of museums by gallerists who feared the wrath of the country's brutal regime. Even today, works by Hassan deemed too obscene and seditious for display in the 1970s have still not been shown in Pakistan, although the Canvas Gallery in Karachi recently staged a retrospective of "declassified" works that had previously been hidden from public view.

This week, the Pakistani-born artist is showing some of his images as part of a group exhibition, Figurative Pakistan, opening tomorrow at the Aicon Gallery in central London.

For someone who has always believed in the power of art to affect changes in the real world, today's political climate in Pakistan – where President Pervez Musharraf's declaration of martial law has chilling parallels to ul-Haq's regime three decades ago – leaves Hassan with a bleak sense of repetition. The anger against authoritarianism that he first felt as a young man has in no way diminished.

While he is now one of Pakistan's most revered contemporary artists, Hassan's work is still regarded as subversive, with its graphic images of violence, references to the Vietnam War, and representations of bloody street protests. Until he left Pakistan two days ago, his every step was followed by military guards, while his son, a Harvard-educated lawyer, faces house arrest.

For Hassan, his anger cannot be disentangled from his artistic vision. "I have never been able to distinguish between politics and painting. Politics was unavoidable, right from the beginning. There is always something nasty left behind by the army, when it comes. In the Seventies, I was working with a specialised group of artists and writers to strengthen democracy.

"One of the reasons democracy is so fragile in Pakistan is because we do not build up institutions such as the arts, which are essential for democracy. I wanted to create a culture of resistance. Art and poetry can express a form of not surrendering and present the 'other' view," he says.

The fact that expressing the "other" view endangered his life was a risk Hassan was willing to take then, just as now. "Of course, everybody has a sense of fear at times like these, but sometimes the events and your passions become larger than your fears. My work has reflected what is going on and where my passions lie. When you are involved, you don't stop to reflect on whether your work is dangerous or not. You are too involved," he says.

During the most repressive days of Zia's regime, when every form of dissent was crushed and Hassan's artwork was removed from every gallery in the land, he resorted first to putting his painted messages on posters and political leaflets, and then to using nature imagery and symbols to get his message across. "My paintings were constantly being censored. One time, during the transitional period that led to Zia's rule, I was part of a group show at Lahore Museum that a general, who had been appointed Governor of Punjab, was due to attend. My work was ordered to be taken down. I thought: 'How can it reach people if it's not on show?'

> 'Everybody has a sense of fear at times like these, but sometimes your passions become larger than your fears'

"Since I couldn't get my works out using human symbols, I got them out by drawing on images from nature. A lot of my work was based on phenomena from nature, so my painting called *The Wild Berry*, for example, shows a tree with new shoots, and where an axe falls on a branch there are several shoots growing out of it. Nature excited me and there was always something political in these works," he says.

Hassan was born in 1940, nearly a decade before India was partitioned to form Pakistan in 1947. Throughout his life, he existed in a political landscape riven by death, torture, and the fight for freedom against authoritarianism. "I was seven when partition happened, so I saw people shooting at each other at railway stations and dead bodies coming in from the other side on trains. Then, later on, there was the war with Bangladesh and the military dictatorships. You had to be a very insensitive rascal not to be influenced by such events," he says.

Now 67, Hassan has not lost his appetite for politics or for art. He has begun sketching works that deal with the nature of Musharraf's reign, in which he intends to reconceptualise Pakistan's flag in camouflage tones and a bouquet of flowers entangled with barbed wire.

"It's absolutely frightening, what's happening," he says. "We have army courts in place, there is no habeas corpus, there is no bail before arrest. The paintings I'm working on will reflect what's happening and my experience of events, which has brought out the same kind of anger I had as a young man, but disenchantment also.

"There are lots of recently witnessed images in my head, images of women protestors being dragged by their hair over the footpaths. I've learnt from the past, the army always leaves something nasty behind and my art reflects that."

Figurative Pakistan, Aicon Gallery, London W1 (020-7734 7575), Wednesday to 8 December

Pakistani Political Artist Harassed by Military / New Group Show Opens in London

Figurative Pakistan is a group show opening at the Aicon Gallery in London, UK featuring four prominent Pakistani artists, Ijaz ul Hassan, Naiza Khan, Sana Arjumand, and Ahmed Ali Manganhar.

Ijaz ul Hassan is a long-time activist and dissident who came to prominence as a political artist in the 1970s when he was jailed for his public condemnation of martial law under General Zia-ul-Haq. Hassan was arrested, held in solitary confinement for four weeks and endured threats to his life and to the lives of his family and friends. Hassan's artwork was deemed so dangerous that is was removed from galleries and refused entrance into group exhibitions after his release from jail. During the worst of the political repression under General Zia-ul-Haq, Hassan painted messages on handbills and posters and distributed them by hand. Even today some of his paintings remain "classified", although many have been declassified, some of which were shown in a recent retrospective at the Canvas Gallery in Karachi.

Hassan is considered one of Pakistan's most revered contemporary artists, but his work continues to attract suspicion and fear from state officials for its graphic images of violence and images of political protest. In the midst of Pakistan's current turmoil, he is once again being forced to endure military harassment and initmidation and his son, a lawyer, faces house arrest. Hassan left Pakistan early this month to be in London for the opening the Figurative Pakistan exhibition.

Hassan, who turned 67 this year, has begun creating images addressing Musharraf's current crackdown...

Hassan, who turned 67 this year, has begun creating images addressing Musharraf's current crackdown in his attempts to retain political and military power. In a recent article in The Independent, Hassan said that "It's absolutely frightening, what's happening. We have army courts in place, there is no habeas corpus, there is no bail before arrest. The paintings I'm working on will reflect what's happening and my experience of events, which has brought out the same kind of anger I had as a young man, but disenchantment also."

Also appearing in the group show are up and coming Pakistani artists Naiza Khan, Sana Arjuman and Ahmed Ali Manganhar.

Naiza Khan is known for her work exploring the representation of women in Pakistani culture. Khan writes in an artist statement that "My recent work has been visibly less about the nude, and more about the body. The clothes she wears, began as a strategy to create a more explicit code of seduction between the viewer and the work. A sort of hide-and-seek, full of contradictions....the boundaries between them are fluid and unstable. Constellations of attire have surfaced in recent works, to shadow the body. I feel this attire is the skin on which we must mark the emotional and the physical as a lived experience. Lingerie, chastity belts, straight jackets and other objects of fetishistic desire, play the stage. The narrative becomes more difficult and confrontational. The figure has been slowly erased out of the picture, as in the Henna Hands on the streets of Karachi , where the people on the street had dismembered the body made on the walls in henna pigment."

Artist Sana Arjuman describes her work as "not just looking at the mirror, but also what events take place which bring about the expression on my face. The expression of shock, of questioning, of anger, yet acceptance, are all captured at once in my work. Since childhood," she writes, I have always wanted to be part of theatre. Therefore as a child the mirror became my stage and I became my own audience. But later in life when i got the opportunity to be part of theatre, media, and dramas, set ups in society, pressures from family and reactions from public forced me to turn down any such opportunities that came my way."

Artist Ahmed Ali Manganhar describes his work as a reinterpretation of the genre of "Company" painting, from the era of the East India Company. He writes that "I have often looked at these concrete memories of British Empire in India and wondered about relationships of betrayal and of continuity...Although this present body of work had begun in drawings of colonial buildings on Lahore's Mall Road, when I returned to live in Karachi. Sindh's metropolis had grown and decayed in equal measure, but I realized for the first time that "English Karachi" did not accept me. While I taught in a public sector university and looked for myself, I ploughed the Sindh archives in the

live in Karachi. Sindh's metropolis had grown and decayed in equal measure, but I realized for the first time that "English Karachi" did not accept me. While I taught in a public sector university and looked for myself, I ploughed the Sindh archives in the search of the life stories and pictures of the city's local and foreign rulers and also for the changing definition of these terms."

The exhibition runs until December 8, 2007. To see some of the exhibition go to the Aicon Gallery's website.

Posted by Michael Lithgow on December 3, 2007

THE ART NEWSPAPER, No. 185, NOVEMBER 2007

Asia Week auctions, New York

Indian contemporary stronger than ever

Market has gone up five times in five years, say dealers

LONDON. It is an important time for South Asian contemporary art. Until recently the market was based around Indian money and there was little evidence of the kind of sums being spent on Chinese art by major international collectors. However with François Pinault showing off his giant Subodh Gupta skull in front of the Palazzo Grassi in Venice this summer and auction prices increasing at least five times in as many years, it is now clear that the tide is turning and showing almost no evidence of a loss of confidence as a result of the recent turbulence in financial markets which has affected contemporary Western art (p72).

This trend was very much in evidence in the auctions of South Asian modern and contemporary art held on 20 and 21 September during New York's Asia Week. Across the board results were mixed, but works by the top young South Asian contemporary artists sold for well beyond their estimates, in many cases to non-Indian buyers, and modern masters proved resilient.

"The market has gone up five times in the last five years and I had fully expected it to retreat," says Prajit Dutta, director of Aicon Gallery, New York. "The fact that it held steady is really a miracle and shows that something broader is going on."

Christie's had the higher results of the week with a total of $10.1m (78% sold by lot) for its combined sale of modern and contemporary art, but suffered the embarrassment of having to withdraw the cover lot, a Bhupen Khakhar painting strongly rumoured to be fake.

T.V. Santosh's untitled painting sold for $205,000, ten times its low estimate, at Sotheby's

Sotheby's ploy of spreading its contemporary sales over two days dissipated interest and was arguably premature at this transitional time. Indian art including modern paintings and miniatures on 19 September made $6.3m with 75.4% sold by lot, while the auction of contemporary art from South Asia on 21 September, made a total of $3.2m with only 73.8% of the lots sold.

Market loves the new

While the highest prices were still commanded by the old guard, the real stars of these auctions were the younger emerging artists, many of whom have a distinctly pop aesthetic.

At Sotheby's, T.V. Santosh's untitled 2005 painting of a curled up child, rendered in his slick and colourful solarised style, flew past its estimate of $20,000-$30,000, to sell for $205,000 to a Chinese buyer.

Subodh Gupta is India's biggest art star and his life-size sculpture of an Indian family on a Vespa made $277,000 (est $200,000-$250,000). In comparison, eyebrows were raised at the estimate of $400,000-$500,000 for Chintan Upadhyay's *New Indians*, 2007. Nevertheless the installation of 33 gold fibreglass dancing babies—which sources say was consigned by the artist's Mumbai-based dealer Ashish Nagpal, although this could not be independently confirmed—sold for a record $529,000.

Sotheby's top contemporary lot, Atul Dodiya's *Father*, 2002, painted on rolling metal shutters, more than doubled its estimate, making a record $601,000 (est $230,000-$280,000). It was nearly matched the following day at Christie's when the same artist's *Three Painters*, 1996, went for $541,000 (est $150,000-$200,000). Dodiya has never broken through internationally, and while Sotheby's reported that *Father* went to a Chinese private buyer, the purchase is rumoured to have been on behalf of a gallery in India.

But mature artists still more expensive

The highest prices were still commanded by veteran artists. At Sotheby's six works by 92-year-old M.F. Husain made six figure sums with *Pagan Mother*, 1956, top of the pile at $658,600 (est $500,000-$700,000). Christie's took the honours for the week's highest price when Tyeb Mehta's *Mahishasura*, 1996, sold for $1.1m, despite restoration which had deterred some prospective buyers. The buyer was rumoured to be Crayon Capital, a Delhi-based art fund run by Amit Vadhera, and advised by his uncle Arun who is Christie's long-standing consultant on Indian art as well as director of the Vadhera Art Gallery in Delhi, where *Mahishasura* was exhibited in 1998. With Mumbai-based dealer Dadiba Pundole advising at Sotheby's, both auction houses maintain close ties to leading players in the trade that seem less justifiable as the secondary market develops.

A recent flood of works by F.N. Souza has kept prices reasonable for one of the most esteemed of the Progressive group artists. In total, 25 Souzas were on offer in these two sales, and while a number failed to sell, the $657,000 made by his fine 1958 painting *Nude With Fruit* at Christie's, seemed a bargain despite well exceeding its estimate of $350,000-$500,000.

Lucian Harris

IS INDIA THE NEW CHINA? IT'S THE QUESTION BEING ASKED BY MANY IN THE ART WORLD AS INDIANS AND WESTERNERS ALIKE ARE SPENDING RECORD SUMS ON WORKS BY ARTISTS FROM THE SUB-CONTINENT. SOPHIE BISHOP REPORTS

Passage to India

"Last year we had a show of Jagannath Panda and we sold out in 26 minutes," says Peter Osborne from Berkeley Street gallery Osborne Samuel. "They were all Indian buyers and we just couldn't stop it happening, although we tried."

This tale typifies the current market for Indian art: sell-out shows by artists whose names are obscure to the Western ear yet whose works are bought in a frenzy by Indian collectors.

The market in India has taken off. Driven by the immense growth of the economy, coupled with a raised awareness of Indian artists, the home market has transformed into a buzzing art scene.

Galleries specialising in Indian art are springing up in London, New York and Delhi, with newly rich collectors beating a hasty path to their doors. And now Western buyers are catching on, with many collectors of international art turning an eye towards the East.

It hasn't always been this way. Before the late 1990s the market was undervalued and unappreciated, with hardly any interest shown by Westerners, apart from the revered American collectors Chester and Davida Herwitz.

The turning point came in 2002 with the sale of Tyeb Mehta's triptych Celebration for $1.7m, marking a record price for any modern Indian painting. Four years later, Mehta became the first Indian artist to have a work pass the million-dollar mark, with Mahisasura selling for $1.7 million at Christie's in New York.

The frenzy spread: New York auctions of Indian art that were making less than $700,000 in 2003 jumped to more than $17.5 million in 2006. The prices of Indian art have now risen to more than 20 times their values in 2001.

But the market is now levelling out, with recent auction sales showing buyers to be more selective. While big blue-chip works by the masters of Modern art such as F N Souza and S H Raza still sell for huge sums, middle-of-the-road ones do not.

And so attention turns to the contemporary market.

Aicon Gallery is the largest dealer in Indian art outside of India, with showrooms in New York, Palo Alto, California and more recently in Haddon Street in Mayfair. While the gallery has a huge inventory of works by established Modern artists, the London showroom is dedicated to contemporary Indian art – an ever-rising market, according to Aicon's managing partner Pragti Dutta, who says: "The contemporaries are still a very small fraction in terms of dollar volume as the average price points are still quite a bit lower for the contemporaries. But if you look at year-to-year change, it is clear that the momentum is with the younger contemporaries."

As Peter Osborne puts it: "The market is now about reflecting what's happening next in Indian art as opposed to what has already happened in Indian art."

The shift from established "safe" artists to emerging contemporary ones is typical of a maturing market. Prices are cheaper, collectors more confident, and works more abundant. In the Indian market, the contemporary works are also seen as more visually accessible to the Western eye.

For many collectors, Modern Indian art has been seen as

Who's who in Indian art

MODERN:

Almost all artists of the 1930s were associated with the Mumbai-based Progressive Artists Group. Major names and masters include Maqbool Fida Husain (known as the Picasso of India), Francis Newton Souza, Syed Haider Raza and Tyeb Mehta.

CONTEMPORARY:

Subodh Gupta (recently hailed as the Damien Hirst of Delhi), Mithu Sen, Shilpa Gupta, Atul Dodiya, Sudarshan Shetty, Jagannath Panda, Riyas Komu, T V Santhosh, Pratul Dash and Raqs Media Collective.

ABOVE: 'UNDERTAKERS' BY RIYAS KOMU. LEFT: 'MAHISASURA' BY TYEB MEHTA (1997). OPPOSITE: UNTITLED – POTS & PANS (2004) BY SUBODH GUPTA. COURTESY AICON GALLERY

too conservative, too old fashioned and, well, just too 'Indian'. "Indian art is complicated," concedes Mr Osborne. "The iconography is difficult to understand and to analyse, and it just doesn't translate as effectively and so doesn't necessarily travel well to other art-buying communities."

Themes of partition, national identity and religion are dominant and, coupled with the idiosyncratic style of Indian painting, it's no great surprise that the Modern art market is almost entirely driven by NRIs – Non-Resident Indians.

With the contemporary market, however, things are different, both in terms of the collectors and the artists.

"The most striking difference between the younger and the older artists is that the contemporary artists on the most part don't deal in a self-conscious way with questions of national identity," says Mr Dutta.

"They are Indian artists, no question," he adds, "but this whole issue of 'How am I different from the West' is something that seems to focus their minds much less than it did with their predecessors."

The sprawling diaspora of the Indian population means that many of the contemporary artists have studied in the West or at least travelled and familiarised themselves with today's international scene. Their reference points are global and their works more universally accessible. And, as in the West, photography and video are now rife.

So what next? Most agree that, for the market to mature further, it needs some reciprocal education and understanding from West to East and East to West.

In this vein, Grosvenor Gallery in Ryder Street has recently teamed up with New Delhi gallery Vadehra. A long-time supporter of Modern masters such as Souza, Grosvenor Gallery has now turned its attention to the contemporary market. As director Conor Macklin puts it, "Modern works are both hard to find and expensive". The aim of the tie-up between the firms is to show Indian art in the UK and International art in Delhi. An exhibition has just been held in Delhi of Bacon and Freud, Souza and Mehta. According to Mr Macklin, it attracted "strong sales" and "fantastic" interest.

And so it seems for the Indian market as a whole. With a home economy growing at 10 per cent a year and a similarly prosperous diaspora, the potential for Indian collecting is huge. Add to that the increasing Western interest and it would seem that the market has only just begun to take off.

"We have to look at what is happening in similar emerging markets," says Yasmin Mehta, head of Modern and contemporary Indian art at Christie's in London. "Chinese artists are now being integrated into post-war sales. It's just a matter of time before we see Indian artists start becoming part of the larger pool."

New Wave: Contemporary Indian Art runs until October 21 at Aicon Gallery, 8 Hoddon Street.

Critics' choice

VISUAL ARTS JACKIE WULLSCHLAGER

Andy Warhol
National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh

Last chance to see Warhol at his best. Life and death; intoxication with glamour and detachment from it: this major show is a serious re-evaluation of a complex artist of foreboding and tragedy, as well as one whose exhilarated prescience about the way we live and look in a media-drenched age makes him still a towering, topical figure.
www.nationalgalleries.org, +44 (0)131 624 6200, to October 7

Brueghel to Rubens: Masterpieces of Flemish Painting
The Queen's Gallery, Palace of Holyroodhouse, Edinburgh

Edinburgh's superb run of exhibitions this year continues with the first ever showing of the Queen's Flemish paintings. Produced during the turbulence of the 80 Years War, they include Pieter Brueghel's "Massacre of the Innocents", a savage satire on Spanish suppression, Rubens' self-portrait, presented as a gift to Charles I, Quinten Metsy's moving portrait of Erasmus, Jan Brueghel, Memling and Van Dyck.
www.royalcollection.org.uk, +44 (0)131 556 5100, to April 6

Pop Art Is...
Gagosian Gallery, London WC1

The Painting of Modern Life
Hayward Gallery, London SE1

"Pop Art is: Popular (designed for a mass audience). Transient (short term solution). Expendable (easily forgotten). Low cost. Mass produced. Young. Witty. Sexy. Gimmicky. Glamorous. Big Business. This is just the beginning . . ."

It is 50 years since Richard Hamilton made this visionary definition of the movement that dominated the 1960s, gave Britain a world role in the arts for the first time, and continues to cast its glitzy sheen across the 21st century. This autumn, a crowd of London's public and private galleries launch stellar 1960s shows, from Alan Cristea's "Allen Jones" and Helly Nahmad's exploration of 1960s Picasso to the National Portrait Gallery's "Pop Art Portraits". First off the mark is the hard-punching Gagosian Gallery's "Pop Art Is", which traces the rise of the transatlantic movement through iconic works by Hamilton, Rauschenberg, Johns, Lichtenstein, Ruscha and Warhol and unpacks its legacy in their expensive contemporary descendents: Koons, Prince, Kelley, Takahashi Murakami.

Queasy... Richard Hamilton's 'Swingeing London' Richard Hamilton

The Hayward takes up the narrative with a focus on how photography pervasively changed the nature of figurative painting from this period to now. Warhol ("Death and Disaster"), Hamilton ("Swingeing London") and Richter – with queasy painterly adaptations of advertisements and newspaper snapshots – and Hockney are godfathers: among recent artists, the accent is on European conceptualists Kippenberger, Tuymans, Dumas, Doig. Different family trees, but both exhibitions pose the same intriguing questions about lineage and the subversion of painterly inheritance.
www.gagosian.com, +44 (0)20 7841 9960, to November 10; www.southbankcentre.co.uk +44 (0)20 7921 0813, from Thursday to December 30

The Turner Prize: A Retrospective
Tate Britain, London SW1

How does "Lights On and Off" look six years on? Here is the year-by-year account of what happened to art in Britain – or at least in Serota-land – since Malcolm Morley received the first award in 1984, and Tomma Abts won in 2006.
www.tate.org.uk, +44 (0)20 7887 8888, from Tuesday to January 6

Alan Gouk, The Ulysses Series
Poussin Gallery, London SE1

Recent surprises, when ceramic pots and a boatshed formed the winning exhibitions, were nothing compared to the astonishment that a show of abstract paintings carried off the Turner Prize last year. Abstraction is about as unfashionable as painting gets today, but the Poussin Gallery, devoted solely to the genre, is fighting back. The fierce, large scale canvases by Alan Gouk, an unusual colourist in a theatrical, modernist tradition, promise to be an autumn highlight.
www.poussin-gallery.com, +44 (0)20 7403 4444, from Thursday to November 10

Indigo: A Blue to Dye For
Brighton Museum and Art Gallery

Burial clothes in Roman Egypt, 18th-century Asian textiles imported to Europe by the East India Company, the earliest pair of denim jeans, Jean-Paul Gaultier: the story of the world's oldest and most distinctive dyestuff in fashion, design and crafts.
www.brighton.virtual-museum.info, +44 (0)1273 292882, from today to January 6

New Wave
Aicon Gallery, London W1

High profile show of new work from young Indian artists, several of whom – "Bombay Boys" Riyas Komu and Bose Krishnamachari; Subodh Gupta – have already achieved world fame as work from the sub-continent follows Chinese art to become the latest global must-have.
www.aicongallery.com, +44 (0)20 7734 0090, to October 31

Joana Vasconcelos
New Art Gallery, Walsall

At the last Venice Biennale, Joana Vasconcelos opened the Arsenale show with a giant chandelier constructed from 25,000 tampons. For her first UK solo exhibition, her kitsch sculptures, often made from domestic objects, include "Red Independent Heart", constructed from interwoven plastic cutlery.
www.artwalsall.org.uk, +44 (0)1922 654 400, to November 25

YOGESH RAWAL AT AICON GALLERY

Untitled 8

At first, the works appear like abstract paintings, but the show is actually comprised of large collages made from tissue paper, cellulose and synthetic resin on treated wood. In this respect, Rawal questions the hierarchy of different media and elevates the status of crafting. It is hardly instinctual to appreciate collage for its formal aspects but this hanging has post-minimalist implications. As the type of material allows light to seep in, an otherwise rigid surface adopts a translucent quality. Light hence becomes an integral part of the medium. Rawal works in monochromatic series and fleshes out the variations in shades. This is evident in his red and tonal sequences such as 'Untitled 19' and '23'.

Most interesting are the black and white works which were hung separately on their own wall. For the first time, Rawal ponders the possibilities of light and the color black. He buttresses his 'no matter equals matter' logic by alluding to a sheet of glass in complete darkness: 'you can still see its reflection, so light must be present' he remarks. His project is adequately summarized in Untitled 4. It features four blocks of varying shades which point to his range in this show. Fittingly, it hangs at the end of the narrow space in climatic conclusion.

Humbly, he points to his least favorite work, 'Untitled 8'. He feels he did not achieve his goals. As the catalogue's cover and already bearing the prestigious red bullet on its label, I had to inquire further. Rawal explains that it only hinted at his intentions. However it definitely marked the beginning of his future project which involves a move in the opposite direction, into darkness. It seems Rawal is not so frightened anymore.

By Natasha Bissonauth

Trapped in a gilded cage?

By Jackie Wullschlager

Is India the new China? The global jargon is already in place: Bollywood, the Bombay Boys, the Damien Hirst of Delhi as Subodh Gupta's one-ton skull, sculpted from stainless steel pots and pans, leers out of the Palazzo Grassi courtyard at every passing tripper during this year's Venice Biennale. But is Indian art really ready for an international audience and are we ready for it?

In the UK, its major showcase is Aicon. Founded by Prajit Dutta, professor of economics at Columbia University, it opened London's largest gallery of Indian art in March as an offshoot of successful ventures in New York and Palo Alto. The inaugural exhibition, featuring hip Bombay Boy 36-year-old Riyas Komu, cannily confronted head-on the old problem with Indian art - that it is perceived as too local and self-consciously absorbed in issues of national identity. In a double display with the American Peter Drake, titled "Other ", Komu showed world-class conceptual sculpture such as "Tragedy of a Carpenter's Son III " - a large wooden missile inscribed with an Islamic prayer said before a journey, yet not by chance echoing Christian narrative too. Here, as in "Designated March of a Petro Angel ", his series of monumental photo-realist images of a bewildered, veiled Iranian woman looking dramatically in different directions, struggling to find her place in society, which are among the strongest contemporary paintings on show in Venice, Komu co-opted an Islamic vocabulary to make work of urgent, international resonance.

The trouble is that there are not many Komus or Guptas around. I found Aicon's next two shows, of the sculptor Adip Dupta and the miniature painters Talha Rathore and Hasnat Mehmood, "Lahore Lovelies ", embarrassingly provincial. At the same time this spring, the Indian auction sector got a shock when, after madly rapid rises - from a $5m market in 2003 to $150m today - a significant number of works were unsold at Christie's and Sotheby's, whereas Chinese contemporaries achieved record seven-figure sums.

But Aicon is fighting back. From the Vault, a sober, stately exhibition of paintings by blue-chip modern artists, opening next week, offers essential background on the sector and goes to the heart of a crucial difference between Indian and Chinese art. That difference is history, and how western art has or has not shaped it. Powerful nudes; angular figures in a golden landscape; a face at a window that is the picture frame: the first surprise at Aicon is that there is no surprise, so thoroughly are these paintings rooted in modern figurative traditions.

In China, by contrast, there was little western influence until 20 years ago, when Chinese artists gulped down recent trends from pop to conceptualism in one mouthful, spewing out violent, sensational responses to it that resounded with their own immediate political experiences and appeared mostly to ignore traditional Chinese painting. That makes Chinese art fresh, innovative and appealingly distinctive to audiences across the world. Indian art, entangled Raj-like between western history and a fidelity to Indian myths, has to work harder to invent its own language.

No collection explores 20th-century painting from the subcontinent, and its seamless absorption of European styles

- the absence of British influence is notable - more comprehensively than that of Chester and Davida Herwitz of Massachusetts. Begun in 1961 when the Herwitzes, fashion accessory manufacturers and owners of Daveys Inc Handbags, visited India looking for supplies, it was sold in 1995 and forms the bedrock of Aicon's stock. Displayed here along with a choice selection of complementary works, it unfolds the Herwitzes' three-decade love affair with Indian art and highlights in particular the intriguing duo of Francis Newton Souza, a Catholic from Goa expelled from art school as a communist activist, whose early flamboyance dwindled under alcoholism, and Maqbool Fida Husain, a Muslim from Madhya Pradesh who began as a billboard painter for cinema posters and chose to stay in India during the partition, becoming a controversial, extrovert figure whose performances have included painting, then destroying, massive canvases before crowds of onlookers. Sharing a vision grounded in the modernism of the Ecole de Paris, this pair were founder members of the Progressive Artists' Movement in Madras in 1944.

This, it turns out, was not very progressive at all. Souza was a cubist and, as the Christian, the one whose overriding interest was manipulation of the human form. His 1950s nudes, with rounded trunks, high breasts and girdles, were influenced by classical Indian sculpture, but by the 1960s the aggression and tough lines owed more to Picasso: monumental figures and bulbous forms, as in the voluptuous "Nude Standing in Front of Brocade "; cruel exaggerations such as the swelling body and breasts rolling into spiky claws for the top-hatted monster in "Untitled, Jester "; black figures almost sculpted into a jewel-like black background in "Couple in the Dark ", evocative of the French postwar craze for noir. Demonic, machine-like profiles in "Three Heads " recall futurism; harsh graffiti scrawl overlaying a glossy page torn from a magazine and dissolved using special solvents in "Untitled - Frontal Nude " (1975) is typical late modernist distortion. Then, it seemed grotesque; now, it looks lyrical. Yet "painting for me is not beautiful, " insisted Souza. "It is as ugly as a reptile. I attack it. It coils and recoils making fascinating patterns. I am not, however, interested in patterns...It is the serpent in the grass that is really fascinating. "

Husain, whose paintings are full of serpents - "Untitled - Snake and Crows ", pitting the symbolic animals against twisting naked grey figures, is a typical drama of life and death, beast and man - is a fabulist more consciously rooted in Indian life and legend, but formally shaped by surrealism and the dynamic angularities of expressionism. The girl and steed in "Blue Moon ", the rearing horses, their bodies fractured among sun, moon, star, in "Victory ", the white woman whose head has morphed into a red elephant's round stomach in "Elephant and Woman 2 ": everywhere broad strokes, billboard scale, robust figuration and primitive heroism edging towards sentimentality bring to mind Husain's origins in popular Indian cinema. Also strong is a debt to experimental western filmmakers such as Buñuel; strikingly absent is reference to those postwar styles - abstraction, pop, minimalism - that came of age during this 91-year-old painter's long career.

Can contemporary Indian art escape a heritage of conservatism? Souza and Husain hold this show because they are palpable influences on all the younger artists in it. The decorative fantasies and delicate distortions of Laxma Goud's pastorals of couples and animals in forest settings; Anjolie Ela Menon's nostalgic gazing figures, with their dead Modigliani eyes and Frida Kahlo-like internal organs prettily sketched on to their skin, in canvases whose ornamental surfaces recall 19th-century Tanjore paintings; the Pakistani artist S. Sadequain's dashing calligraphic nudes with expressionist overtones: this is a sort of Tandoori-fusion modernism whose loyalties to a double set of traditions hold it in a time-warp. How Indian artists break out of this gilded cage will be one of the dramas of 21st-century global culture; Aicon here has elegantly set the stage.

'From the Vault', Aicon Gallery, London W1, from July 20 to September 2. Tel: +44 (0)20-7734 7575

Talha Rathore, The Heart Settles II,
2007, Gouache on Wasli, 14 x 11 in.

Contemporary Miniatures by Talha Rathore and Hasnat Mehmood

LONDON.- Aicon Gallery presents Lahore Lovelies: Contemporary Miniatures by talha rathore and Hasnat Mehmood, on view 22 June – 15 July 2007. Miniature painting, the centuries-old atelier practice of the Mughal Empire, has had an impressive resurgence in recent years. Pakistan's oldest art school, the National College of Arts, has led this rekindled interest with one of the only Miniature Painting departments in existence.

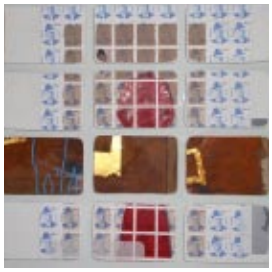
Artists talha rathore and Hasnat Mehmood, along with a handful of highly-acclaimed graduates, have reinvented the tradition by breathing new life and creating a distinctly contemporary context to the form.

talha rathore (b. 1969) and Hasnat Mehmood (b. 1978) have unique, individual slants to their practice. Both artists have developed their freedom to improvise, but retain a political charge to their strategies. The visuals may appear subtle in subject matter – either in the organic forms created by Rathore or the restrained colours and appropriated imagery of Mehmood's, but strong underpinnings of innate political issues are evident in their reading. Considering the multi-layered history of Pakistan, colonisation followed by partition, then nationhood, such foundations formulate an acute sense of past and present in the artists' respective themes and motifs.

Both artists exhibited in the highly-acclaimed touring exhibition Karkhana, A Contemporary Collaboration, 2005-2007 (touring, 2007: Asia Society and Museum, New York; 2006: Asian Art Museum, San Francisco; 2005/06: The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, USA;) and in Contemporary Miniature Paintings from Pakistan, 2004 (Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Japan)

Aicon Gallery are delighted to invite Hammad Nasar, Curator of Karkhana, to give a talk exclusively on the artists and their work on Wednesday June 20th.

Exhibtion: Lahore Lovelies, June - July, 2007
Artists: Talha Rathore and Hasnat Mehmood

Exhibition Private - Europe & Africa

Lahore Lovelies: Contemporary Miniatures by Talha Rathore and Hasnat Mehmood

Detail: Miniature painting, the centuries-old atelier practice of the Mughal Empire, has had an impressive resurgence in recent years. Pakistan's oldest art school, the National College of Arts, has led this rekindled interest with one of the only Miniature Painting departments in existence. Artists Talha Rathore and Hasnat Mehmood, along with a handful of highly-acclaimed graduates, have reinvented the tradition by breathing new life and creating a distinctly contemporary context to the form. Without state patronage to adhere to, the new wave of this movement has witnessed an innovative approach to the miniature: its contemporary counterpart incorporates a myriad of sources, without losing its allegiance to the rigorous training of historicist styles and techniques. Today, the experimental play offers ways to appreciate its history by pushing the boundaries of tradition in addressing contemporary society. Miniature painting is one of the region's most significant art forms again.
Talha Rathore (b. 1969) and Hasnat Mehmood (b. 1978) have unique, individual slants to their practice. Both artists have developed their freedom to improvise (an option not afforded by dictatorial Imperial courts), but retain a political charge to their strategies. The visuals may appear subtle in subject matter – either in the organic forms created by Rathore or the restrained colours and appropriated imagery of Mehmood's, but strong underpinnings of innate political issues are evident in their reading. Considering the multi-layered history of Pakistan, colonisation followed by partition, then nationhood, such foundations formulate an acute sense of past and present in the artists' respective themes and motifs.

The Independent, June 25, 2007
Exhibtion: Lahore Lovelies, June - July, 2007
Artists: Talha Rathore and Hasnat Mehmood
Aicon, London

Of Mughals and Manhattan

Visual arts

LAHORE LOVELIES
Aicon Gallery
LONDON ★★★

First of all, set aside a few moments to swallow your irritation with the silly and trivialising title of this show of work by two young painters from Pakistan, both associated with the art school in Lahore – one as a teacher, the other as a former student. The show has nothing sexy or come-on-ish about it whatsoever. In fact, quite the opposite. It asks useful and interesting questions about the nature of contemporary art from the Indian subcontinent, and it is staged in a new gallery which is devoted exclusively to showcasing that art. Such a gallery represents a first for London, and therefore it is much to be encouraged.

Contemporary Indian art is on the rise and rise (the gallery scene in Mumbai is especially healthy) and just a few weeks ago – exactly in time for the audiences who attended the Venice Biennale, as it happens – there appeared on the Grand Canal-facing terrace of François Pinault's Palazzo Grassi a giant skull made of metal kitchenware by Subodh Gupta, considered the Damien Hirst of contemporary Indian art. Who said a questionable idea never strikes twice?

This show, in the former Gagosian gallery space, is as restrained in its hang as in its content, and that is a bit of a problem – the size of the works threaten to be engulfed by the available space. One of the artists, Talha Rathore, manages to fight back, and to make her presence felt; Hasnat Mehmood has a harder time of it with his sequences of small paintings set within paintings. There is one exception that stands out: a magnificent drawing of a Mughal prince on the back of a caparisoned elephant (it looks a bit like a colourless Mughal miniature scaled up to make its presence felt in this very space).

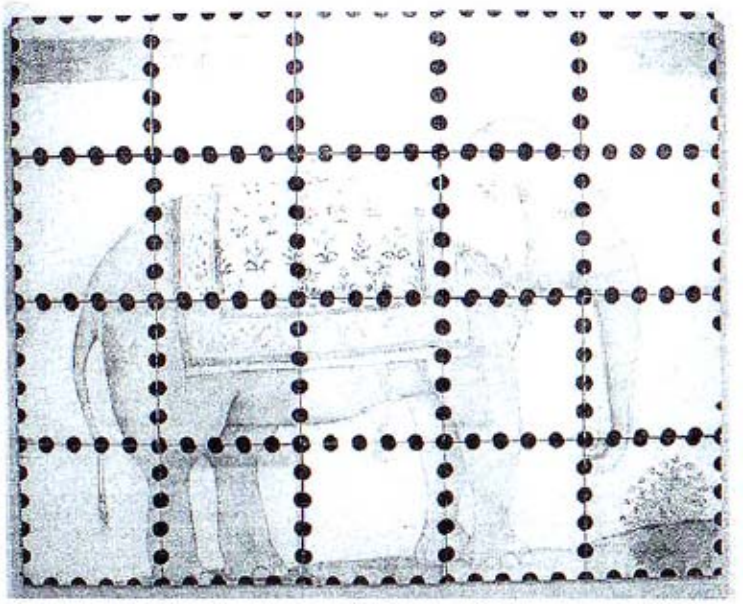
The interesting fact about the art school in Lahore is that in the recent past it set about consciously endeavouring to revive the Mughal art of miniature painting by using the techniques that Mughal painters used, and both these artists are a direct consequence of that experiment. What does this mean in practice? Four things. It has to do with the paper you use, the kinds of brushes you wield, a manner of painting, and an attitude towards content. That last point was expressed somewhat vaguely – and quite deliberately so. This is not an art which is slavishly backward-looking. It is not in the business of anachronistically reconstructing models of courtly behaviour, for example. It is not an art of pastiche.

Take Talha Rathore, for example. She trained at the art school in Lahore, but these days she lives in New York. She therefore belongs to a diaspora, and her work clearly acknowledges that fact. It seems to hang, quite delicately poised, between past and present, between New York and the elsewhere of her distant homeland. The paper she uses is called *wasli*, and it is made by herself – just as her ancestors would have done. It is not a single, smooth sheet, but a build-up of layerings of paper. It has a certain appealing coarseness and roughness and thickness. When she uses colour – one favourite is a very strong maroon, for example – it thickens until it seems to begin to aspire to the condition of a very thin carpet. Well, almost. Her images consist of a collaged layering of images. The ground is often some ghostly image of the map of Manhattan – perhaps it is the subway map. The borders are sometimes fragments of maps, too. This is where she is now, caught within this entrapping city, all this seems to be telling us.

But within the limits of that frame there are other images, overlayed upon the modernity of map-making. These other images are more fluid and organic. Sometimes they look like burgeoning seeds, or some gloopy thing glimpsed down a microscope, and each of these fluid forms is painted – even its outline, which is often the thinnest of thin whites – with meticulous attention to the finest detail, the tiniest arrangements of dots, for example. She can paint with this degree of painstaking punctiliousness because she is using the kinds of brushes that Mughal painters would have used – that fine, that hair-thin. These works feels like the thin, albeit elegant, cries of an exile.

MICHAEL GLOVER

To 15 July (020-7734 7575)



Magnificent exception: Hasnat Mehmood's 'Original Image May Vary 1', 2007

Art That's Hotter Than Curry

Susan Adams

Is Indian art about to cross over?

Prices for contemporary artwork from the Subcontinent have been climbing quickly in the last five years, breaking the seven-figure barrier in 2005 when a piece by Tyeb Mehta fetched $1.6 million at a Christie's auction in New York. But so far, most of the buyers have been Indians, or so-called N.R.I.s, non-resident Indians living abroad in London and New York.

In the last year, however, signs point to increasing Western interest in contemporary Indian art. "More than half the works in our first show were bought by non-Indians," says Prajit Dutta, a Columbia University economics professor who runs Aicon, the largest gallery of Indian contemporary art in the U.S., with showrooms in Palo Alto, Calif., and New York City.

Aicon opened in London's posh Mayfair district this March in a 4,000-square-foot space formerly occupied by top-flight contemporary dealer Gagosian. At its first London show, the gallery featured hip Bombay artist Riyas Komu, 36, whose works are selling for as much as $200,000 each. Komu is also exhibiting at this year's Venice Biennale. (Dutta also runs two investment funds that invest in contemporary Indian art.)

"It's only a matter of time," observes Yamini Mehta, head of the Indian art department at Christie's auction house, pointing to the inclusion of London-born Bharti Kher, 38, in the Basel, Switzerland art fair this coming spring. At the Documenta art fair in Kassel, Germany, likewise, two mid-career Indian artists, Atul Dodiya and Sheela Gowda were offered for sale.

Before the likes of Gupta, Kher and Komu came on the scene, modern Indian art was dominated by the so-called Progressive Artists' Group, founded in 1947, the year India won independence. Top names include M.F. Husain, the flamboyant, prolific 92-year-old known as the Picasso of India, who sold a piece two years ago to a London buyer for $2 million. Other Progressives include Francis Newton Souza, Sayed Haider Raza, Ram Kumar, V. S. Gaitonde and Tyeb Mehta, who still holds the auction record.

Some members of the group studied in Europe, and their work, to the Western eye, can seem derivative of European cubists and other modern masters. But the vibrant colors and stances of the figures are uniquely Indian, drawing on the hues and poses of ancient Indian miniatures and sculpture.

A notable feature of the contemporary Indian market: It does incredibly well on the Web.

Seven-year-old Saffronart sells Indian work online for prices Western art rarely achieves in the digital world. The site has repeatedly broken the seven-figure mark for individual works. Its strongest auction to date, in December 2006, reaped a total of $16 million. Saffronart president Minal Vazirani says the number of Western buyers is steadily increasing, from about 5% in 2001 to 12% today.

Art & Deal Magazine, October 1, 2007
Exhibtion: The Street, June - August, 2007
Artist: Yusuf Arakkal
Aicon, Palo Alto

"STREET" - An Essay on the Reality and the Abstract of Yusuf Arakkal

Shoma Das

The identity of the characters is principally established through iconological and iconoplastic attributes although their figures are derived from those seen in Bengal folk paintings and icons. No alternate sociological or socio-historical affiliations are discernible in the rendering of these images.

Yusuf Arakkal, *The Street*, 60" x 48", Acrylic & Oil on Canvas, 2006.

Forty-five years ago, a boy fled the narrow confines of home for the freedom of the sidewalk. Out of this experience emerged a young man, deep and solitary, with a profound understanding of the agonizing, unfortunate human conditions. A 'reality' that, years later, would find expression in art. We are talking about Yusuf Arakkal - peintre par excellence.

His life has been far from easy. Born in 1945 into a wealthy family inhabiting the picturesque backwater regions of Kerala, he underwent intense pain and trauma when he lost both his parents at the tender age of seven. All of a sudden, "home" lost meaning, the atmosphere became stifling, and expression became difficult. By teenage, the free-spirited boy could stand it no more. With only thirty rupees in his pocket, he took a train to Bangalore where his uncle lived. Little did he know that Bangalore was a big city and that he would not find his uncle. Yet, the courageous boy refused to give up his freedom. He ended up on the streets, working in wayside restaurants and construction sites, living from day to day on daily wages for one and a half years, until his uncle found him. "I got my best education there," he says modestly. Today, Yusuf Arakkal is a renowned Indian artist in the international arena. That is why this brief history was necessary. It is important to understand the man, to understand his art. The truth about Arakkal is - you can take him out of the streets, but you can't take the streets out of him. Years of work on street-centric themes has only helped in evolving a distinctive style that is acquiring more depth and dimension with every successive series. The complicated parameters of painting are being refined in such a way that his art has acquired that masterful touch, while making his message direct and forceful. Arakkal's new series in oil is entitled "Street". It is a portrayal of solitary, unknown pedestrians on the streets of London - men of different age groups, from different walks of life, with unknown destinations. You never see their faces properly - they are passing strangers who have been caught in the action of walking, hurrying,

Yusuf Arakkal, *The Street*, 60" x 48", Acrylic and Oil on Canvas, 2006.

Yusuf Arakkal, *The Street*, 60" x 48", Acrylic and Oil on Canvas, 2006.

standing, stopping. Man with a crutch talking on a cell phone, burly gentleman carrying a bag to the office, young man stopped in his tracks by a newspaper report. Arakkal caught them on camera, digitally manipulated them into black and white graphic images and then transferred them onto the canvas by 'serigraphy'. These concrete, realistic images have become the sole central figures in highly abstracted, visually dynamic fields. Sometimes he has used multiples of the same images for maximum impact - a technique that also helps the street to seem busy, peopled and active.

This strong human element, undoubtedly gives his paintings their enduring character. It is indeed remarkable that Arakkal is able to grab our attention so powerfully, compel us to focus so successfully and leave indelible imprints of his paintings on our minds. The "Street" has an extremely dynamic environment. Active figures placed in active fields give a sense of palpable motion. First, figures caught in mid-action and use of a single or multiple images in a diagonally progressive plane, lends movement to the expression. Second, the 'abstract field of existence' --- ground on which the figure or figures are placed --- is itself dynamic, being a collection of linear planes that move towards or away from each other at different angles. These serve as strategic lines of illumination and light sliding along these planes or emanating from behind or below these planes reinforcing movement. However, it is the large color fields on the walls or pavements that give the maximum momentum. The atmospheric use of colors - yellow and brown in some paintings or bluish green and greenish black in others - endows these areas with a throbbing, pulsating sensation. Short detailed brushstrokes creating highly textured currents move in different directions within the color field to bring about intense fluidity. Semantically, this mobile field with active currents may be the part active - part dormant mind of the individual. Fuzzy color strains gently move into gloomy black spaces - those dark, obscure, dilapidated walls that talk about the individual, or not. In contrast to the atmospheric colors, the black is local, flat and closed.

Arakkal uses lines, color and chiaroscuro in a clever way to make his figure the focal point in the canvas. "I use the right amount of light and darkness to make the figure stand out," he says. In true ténébriste fashion he does not like using too many colors - it distracts the mind and dilutes the message. Rather he works with primary colours, to arrive at a few subdued shades and few glowing tones. This allows him a high degree of control in portraying the emotional and existential state of the subject. Different tonal values interact with the different planes to create an optical sensation that powerfully transmits the melancholy. Arakkal makes "every square inch of the painting talk." Into this world where the figurative meets the abstract, enters symbolism, sometimes subtle, sometimes strong. Like the cross on the back of the man with a crutch, the stop sign where the young man reading a paper has suddenly stopped in his tracks, or the graffiti on the wall. Technically, they provide an excellent visual connect between the realistic figure and the

Different tonal values interact with the different planes to create an optical sensation that powerfully transmits the melancholy. Arakkal makes "every square inch of the painting talk."

abstracted space to produce cohesion in the entire painting. Fluid fields and graphic forms anchored within rigid structures - that is what "Street" is all about. Solitary figures in a fluid state of existence, moving within walls that are closing in upon them. There is light beyond the darkness of the walls but the protagonist is oblivious of this light that illuminates his space. Immersed in himself, in the immediacy of existence and action, he does not look, nor search the beyond. And so he exists, hemmed in by his 'closed space' from which he cannot escape. Stark realism and superb abstraction combined together make a powerful statement of human existence. Yusuf Arakkal has arrived at a mature art language that is all his own - to evolve or to change. We wish him all the best!

Note : The "Street" is a series of fourteen to sixteen paintings that is going with Art India, USA and Art Alive, New Delhi to Los Angeles in June, 2007. They will be exhibited in the Art India Gallery, L.A, in mid-June.

Indian Summer

By Meredith Etherington-Smith
Published: May 9, 2007

Photo courtesy Aicon Gallery
Rathin Kanji, "#18 Bottles (Diptych)" (2005)

LONDON—Like the sprawling subcontinent itself, modern and contemporary Indian artists have a marvelously bold way with color, and they produce work that is resonant with their region and with the Indian past. This makes much of the work uplifting, rich, and quite strange to our eyes, which are used, perhaps, to thinking that Indian art consists primarily of exquisite Moghul miniatures.

Yes, many modern Indian masters refer back to the iconography of the past, but a younger generation of artists is more concerned with contemporary issues engendered by the globalization of culture and how it affects their—and our—world.
Auction prices have recently been going through the roof for modern Indian masters such as Laxma Goud, M.F. Husain and F.N. Souza, and the Indian art sales to be held in London this summer will no doubt push prices for these well-known artists even further up the seismic scale. The pace grows; the Serpentine Gallery for instance, is planning an off-site Indian art show in November, as they did with Chinese contemporary art last year at the Battersea Power Station.

If the masters have begun to be taken up by major collectors and institutions, Indian contemporary art is still extremely accessible to the younger collector who does not have unlimited funds. The problem for seasoned and new collectors alike, however, has been that for many years very few Indian artists had representation; indeed, until recently there were hardly any locally owned art galleries in the subcontinent.

Representation is a new concept in India, whose artists have traditionally sold straight from their studios, which could be anywhere in the country, making it virtually impossible for even seasoned and major collectors from abroad to become familiar with the fragmented Indian art scene.

Added to this is the fact that art made in Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) or elsewhere in the country has its own quite distinct cultural reference points, so generalization or categorization is virtually impossible.
But guidance, and an opportunity to see Indian art without touring studios in far-off cities or deep in the countryside, is at hand.

The Aicon Gallery, which opened a month ago in London in the former Gagosian Gallery, specializes in Indian contemporary art. An off-shoot of galleries in the United States—in the Flatiron district of New York and downtown Palo Alto, Calif.—Aicon began as the first online gallery of Indian art based in the States. Apart from its three branches, it also runs two private equity funds that invest in contemporary Indian art.

In 2002, Aicon pulled off a coup when it acquired a substantial part of the Herwitz collection of works collected over a 35-year period, which contained major pieces by all the modern Indian masters. The mandate for the new London gallery, however, is to exhibit contemporary Indian art, and its current show "MAN/NAM" is by Adip Dutta—a Kolkata-based artist best-known for sculptural installations that deal with gender and displacement issues. The exhibition represents his U.K. debut.
The highlight of this show is undoubtedly The Requiem, a sequence of Egyptian mummy forms laid out on what looks like a huge light box, printed with images.

Another compelling work is The Mould Confronting the Snake, in which a large, calm genderless figure confronts a rearing cobra, both inlaid with ritualistic written text. A series of sculptural steel wool "garments" are suspended from the ceiling or hung on the wall. Also on view are some exquisitely detailed and delicate drawings, which might be a very good—and inexpensive—way to start collecting Dutta's intriguing work.

Sneaking into the private clients' room at the gallery during the show, I also very much liked the flat, rather graphic paintings of Rathin Kanji, who is, according to Director Farah Rahim Ismail, "a very young artist with very young prices." Kanji's work concerns itself with the human interface with technology, as well as contemporary cultural tensions between East and West, tradition and modernity, language and image.

He's an interesting artist in that his work addresses themes common to the new generation of artists working in India today: the increasingly fast pace of urban existence, the 24-hour barrage of information and media that characterizes the modern experience and the loneliness brought on by advancing technology as popular culture becomes a truly global phenomenon. Kanji delineates these themes by means of vivid, saturated color and elegant symbolism—a particularly Indian combination.

The Grosvenor Vadehra is a recent collaboration between Grosvenor Gallery, a well-established London gallery with a history of dealing in modern Indian art, and the Vadehra Art Gallery in New Delhi. Their current show features modern masters, including F.N. Souza, and runs though May 11.

Guidance of another, independent sort can be found through Amrita Jhaveri of AM ART, a Mumbai-based Indian art advisor who really does know what is happening in the Indian art scene, as she herself has been a knowledgeable collector for years. Amrita advises private clients, taking them and an increasing number of curious international curators on studio tours of important and emerging artists. Her book 'l0l' Modern and Contemporary Indian Artists, published last year, can be hard to locate, as it is the only decent independent guide to the present Indian art scene. It features well-written essays, which are fully illustrated, on the 35 best-selling Indian artists and 66 other important and emerging artists. It also lists every Indian art gallery.

As an introduction to the entire art scene of the subcontinent, it could scarcely be bettered. I couldn't recommend it more. While it is very difficult to find, you can buy it online from publishing@ibhworld.com. For other services Amrita offers her clients, go to her excellent Web site, which shows some of her own superb collection in situ.

AICON GALLERY OPENS IN WEST END

NEWS/LONDON

by Deeksha Nath

ART DEALING BROTHERS PRAJIT AND PROJJUL K. Dutta inaugurated their new London gallery dedicated to contemporary art from the Indian subcontinent with the opening of Aicon Gallery in March in a 4,000 square-foot two-floor space in the heart of the West End, near the Royal Academy of Arts. The space was previously occupied by international franchise Gagosian Gallery. Aicon's inaugural exhibition, "Other," was a dialogue between two artists, Indian Riyas Komu and American Peter Drake, who met in New York and have a shared interest in outspoken political commentary.

The gallery's presentation of rising Bombay star Komu, included in Robert Storr's Venice Biennale (SEE P. 84), is a bold move. Komu comes from the communist state of Kerala, and this background has informed his multi-pronged attack on market-led economies and moralities. The new work on display at Aicon included a massive wooden sculpture of a missile inscribed in Urdu alongside *Emmanuel*, a large-scale painting of a young shirtless boy sewing a football.

Aicon, abbreviated from Arts India Contemporary, is the Dutta brothers' third gallery, after New York, established in 2002, and Palo Alto, California. Formerly known as Arts India, the whole group will now be referred to as Aicon. While the North American galleries have shown a combination of modern and contemporary Indian artists, the new London space will focus primarily on solo exhibitions for young artists. When asked about the split programming, Prajit K. Dutta explained, "The division creates a cleaner line for our viewers and clients for whom it may be a first encounter with Indian art."

The gallery opens at a time of sharp increase in interest in contemporary Indian art. In October 2006 Grosvenor Vadehra, a collaboration between Vadehra Gallery, New Delhi, and Grosvenor Gallery, London, opened in London and has already had three successful group exhibitions. Berkeley Square Gallery, founded in 1988, has since 2005 focused on exhibiting modern and contemporary artists from India. Saffron Art plans to open a gallery in London this year. Institutions such as the Baltic Centre in Gateshead and Tate Modern in London have presented solo shows for Subodh Gupta (SEE AAP 48) and the modernist painter Amrita Sher-Gil (SEE P. 123), respectively. While Indians based in London have fuelled much of the interest so far, galleries are betting that increased recognition will expand the market further.

The Times, April 7, 2007
Exhibtion: Other, March - April, 2007
Artists: Riyas Komu and Peter Drake
Aicon, London

THE BOMBAY BOYS

India's answer to Brit Art comes with an explosion of bold new artists riding the wave of the nation's economic boom

REPORT **JAMES COLLARD** PORTRAITS **GRAHAM WOOD**

Bombay Boys outside the JJ Art School in Mumbai, where many of them studied: from left, Bose Krishnamachari, T.V. Santhosh, Riyas Komu, V.N. Jyothi Basu and Anant Joshi (above). Komu, in front of his painting *The show must go on, sir*, part of his show at the Aicon Gallery in London (right)

"At the Saatchi gallery?," we ask, incredulously. "There's a Saatchi gallery in Bombay?" We've heard, back in London, that Indian contemporary art might be *the next big thing*. That just as money and art collided in Britain in our Nineties Cool Britannia moment, so a new generation of Indian collectors are spending some of the wealth generated by India's current economic boom on the work of an equally happening new wave of Indian artists. And that savvy Korean dealers – and they're pretty sharp about these things in downtown Seoul – have decided that the *last* big thing, which was Chinese contemporary, is now overhyped and overpriced, which makes its relatively affordable Indian counterpart a promising "real-estate" investment. We've taken all of this on board in a kind of crash course in Indian contemporary art from Mumbai to Kolkata, our eyes occasionally glazing over at at the mention of another utterly unfamiliar but locally illustrious name – and then popping wide open again when we see the quality of some of the art.

Rathin Kanji? Never heard of him, until last month, but *what* a way with colour. And back then if you'd told me Baiju Parthan was a vegetarian dish from Tamil Nadu, I'd have believed you. Today, I'd say that this Kerala-born, Mumbai-based artist has my absolute respect. But a Saatchi gallery in India? Even given Charles Saatchi's reputation as an early adopter of up-and-coming artists, that's too far ahead of the curve, surely.

"No, the *Sakshi* Gallery," explains artist Riyas Komu, smiling broadly. Komu has shown several times in the Sakshi, one of a cluster of galleries in Mumbai's emerging "art village" in south Mumbai. Now Komu's work can be seen in London – in the first show at the Aicon Gallery, a new showcase for contemporary Indian art in the former Gagosian space on Heddon Street, which is central, prestigious and big enough to display to good effect Komu's mesmerising, large-scale paintings and his fine sculptures in wood and metal. Meanwhile back home, Mumbai's commuters drive past billboards of Komu's work, to the din of car horns: appropriately enough, as these are portraits of the mechanics from the car-repair shop where Komu also has his metal-work studio, currently displayed on the roadside as part of the city's "Mumbai Unbreakable" campaign against inter-communal hatred. But arguably the weirdest place to view Komu's work is in Kolkata, where one of his paintings hangs in a group show of Italian and Indian

Above, from top: Adip Dutta working on a sculpture for his upcoming London show, and painter Rathin Kanji, also based in Kolkata; Bombay Boys Baiju Parthan and ceramic artist Anant Joshi, who lived in the slums when he first arrived in Mumbai. Right: the prolific artist Bose Krishnamachari in his large Mumbai studio with some of his paintings in acrylic

‹‹ contemporary art in the vast, late-Raj wedding cake of a building that is the Victoria Memorial Hall.

In India, most monuments of Empire have been shunted out of sight, forgotten or renamed, just as Calcutta has become Kolkata and Bombay, Mumbai. But "the Victoria" remains pretty much as it was, in all its dotty glory – which leaves a large white marble statue of Queen Mary standing right by Komu's painting, her eyes fixed on her husband, the late King-Emperor, standing across the hall, equally oblivious to this edgy new art all around them. "It's part of our history," says Rathin Kanji, the Kolkata artist showing me around, "so it's important to preserve it." Which is true. Yet somehow leaving all this Imperial kitsch stranded here, utterly irrelevant to what India has become, seems a far more powerful anti-colonial statement than dynamiting the whole pile would ever have been.

"I think it's gone beyond argument," says Riyas Komu affably, of the change from Bombay to Mumbai, though like many inhabitants of the city, he uses both names interchangeably. But Komu himself seems set to be known as a Bombay Boy for some time to come. For back in 2004, Komu's art appeared in an influential group show in New Delhi of work by 12 Mumbai-based artists entitled *The Bombay Boys*. It seems to have been a fairly throwaway handle for the show. There are successful female artists in the city; there just weren't any in this line-up. But it's a sexy title and it stuck, and while in the long-run, the group identity might prove irksome, just as it can for even the most successful of boybands, for the moment the artists find it amusing, and it seems to work for them – collectively raising their profile, both in India and beyond in the wealthy Indian diaspora, scattered everywhere from Silicon Valley to Park Lane. For as well as the flash new rich of Mumbai and Bangalore's Brahmin geeks, striving for a

'WHAT'S STRIKING IS IT'S MORE OF A BRAND THAN A MOVEMENT'

well-earned rise and a good marriage, the prosperity generated by the free-market reforms of the Nineties has produced a new Indian art-buyer – and a new breed of gallerist keen to sell them not a Hirst or Barney, but something closer to home by a Komu or a Kanji.

"What's striking about the Bombay Boys," declares Abhay Sardesai, editor of *Art India* magazine, as we sip wine at an opening at the Sakshi Gallery, "and so appropriate for this moment in India's history, is that it's more of a brand than an artistic movement." True, at the core of the Boys is a group of friends who support each other and party together in Mumbai's lively social scene. But their characters and art are very different – and they're happy to point up the paradoxes of the "brand". As the ceramic artist Anant Joshi explains, "We're in our thirties or early forties, many of us have got married also, so it's not like we're really *boys* any more." What's more, they're not from Bombay, precisely. Joshi, for example, was born in Nagpur, in central India, while Bose Krishnamachari (generally known as Bose), T.V. Santhosh, Baiju Parthan, V.N. Jyothi Basu and Komu himself are from Kerala, the poor but beautiful, highly literate and historically communist-voting state in the south. But what these Boys all have in common is that like countless Indians, educated or illiterate, in order to make their way in life, they first made their way to this, the Maximum City, where some 14 million lives rub up against each other and compete for space, food, water and success. (That's 14 million and counting, with perhaps another 10 million in the outer suburbs.)

Bose has called Mumbai "an all-embracing space of opportunity and optimism where people come to try to realise their dreams". But ››

and Muslims of 1992-3. Similarly, Joshi's feeling for the place must have been both challenged and enriched by the experience of living for a time in a single room in Dharavi, reputedly Asia's largest slum (which must be saying something). Other Boys faced professional challenges: Parthan, working as an illustrator at *The Times of India*, initially struggled to be taken seriously as an artist. Bose achieved early success, but in 1992, just as the free-market reforms began, some of his bolder works must have seemed a step ahead of the *Zeitgeist* in India, as one critic recently recalled: "The triumphant trumpet blasts of the YBAs [Young British Artists] received critical endorsement and art-historical approval... By contrast, Bose's catchy ouput didn't find sympathetic, critical counterparts who would read it as reflective of a changing nation and its fast transmogrifying art world."

Today, it's a different story – just as India is a different country, with a generation of Indians for whom MTV seems more relevant than Gandhi or Nehru (whose left-wing, Fabian-influenced economic policies were arguably one of our less useful gifts to India). For many Indians this transformation feels, in a sense, like another revolution, a second independence, bringing with it the freedom to consume – and while not every dotcom start-up is going to produce an Indian Medici, enough Indians, at home and abroad, now have the money and taste to have transformed the Indian contemporary art scene.

"There's *huge* interest," says Zara Porter-Hill, head of the Indian and South-East Asian department at Sotheby's. "With the growing Indian economy, of course Indian collectors will want to buy art from their country, art with which they feel a particular connection..."

'THE ART SCENE IS PART OF INDIA'S NEW STATUS AS A GLOBAL PLAYER'

Serious Indian collectors are also interested in international art, Porter-Hill insists, a trend likely to continue as the work of international artists – including Mumbai-born Anish Kapoor – increasingly show in the city. But Abhay Sardesai agrees with the suggestion that for a Non-Resident Indian (NRI) living in California, a piece of Indian contemporary art on his wall might also express a pride in how well his country is doing – and a belief in how glittering its future could be – as well as his or her love of art or eye for an investment. "We can't claim modernity through this, exactly, as that can constantly be punctured by what you see in the villages or even here in Mumbai, but the art scene can be seen as part of India's new status as a global player."

Buying up-and-coming Indian art for a hundred grand or so seems a far cry from *swadeshi*, Mahatma Gandhi's policy of boycotting British-milled cotton (which made white homespun the uniform of the new Indian ruling elite for decades). But for an earlier generation of artists, many of whom (in Kerala especially) simply gave up on the idea of being a professional artist, the thought of an Indian gallery setting up shop in London's West End must feel as cheering as Mr Tata buying Corus. Gallerist Projjal Dutta's story straddles the divide between the old Indian art scene, underfunded and unglitzy, and the new. In 2002 Projjal and his brother, Prajit, both US-based academics, launched Arts India – itself a dotcom start-up, albeit one selling Indian art online. Next they opened a gallery space beside their Manhattan offices, followed by a larger space in the Flatiron district and another in Palo Alto, in California's Silicon Valley. And now Aicon in London: an ambitious statement of where they feel Indian art is heading, apparently justified Indian contemporary art. But they grew up in New Delhi, where their father, "a bureaucrat really, running the government fine arts academy, developed a love of art and artists, who were always staying with us when we were growing up. There was *no* money for artists back then."

"Everything has changed in the last few years," agrees Komu. Joshi says that, "before to be an artist wasn't appreciated, but the money changes things." The Bombay Boys all welcome the emergence of a Western-style art infrastructure, operated by dealers who are prepared to nurture artists for the long term and to promote their work. This enables "more risk-taking," Komu argues, while Joshi claims, "It gives me freedom to experiment, rather than worrying about will this sell or how I'm going to survive for the next two months."

Given that survival – as Joshi knows perfectly well from those months in the slums – is still a daily challenge for many Indians, outside the malls and swanky new apartments with white walls just made for a great piece of art, not everyone sees the new art scene as an unmixed blessing. Soumitra Das, who reports on art for the Kolkata *Telegraph*, asks whether this "isn't just another kind of consumerism, in which the poor get left behind?" Perhaps he has a point. India and China are often touted as the future, but seen up-close they often look spookily like our past, in which enterprise and bold technological innovation existed cheek by jowl with squalor and grinding poverty. Nehru-style socialism wasn't much cop at eradicating poverty, I point out, and Das agrees, but it's still a hard argument to counter: why buy a painting for a few grand when that money could feed a family for years or put a dozen poor children through school? Still, those kind of judgments apply to the rest of us when we buy "must-have" bags or sports cars, as much as they apply to prosperous Indians, even if the Indian kind of poverty isn't something we drive by every day in air-conditioned limos.

Yet what struck me about all of the artists I met in India was a kind of engagement – social or political – that I think would be unusual on the Western art scene today. In Kolkata, sculptor Adip Dutta's studio is open to the street, just like the nearby motor-repair shops, with passers-by staring at his works-in-progress – sculptures which sometimes boldly explore issues of gender and sexuality (and which form the second Aicon show). Santhosh's paintings are beautiful as objects, but scratch beneath the surface and he shows a passionate interest in the victims of both terrorism and the war on terror, while Kanji's paintings might contain graphics about communal violence or ecological destruction. There's engagement; there's also faith, which I don't recall being a major theme for the YBAs. Kanji shows me the Anglican cathedral in Kolkata where he worships most Sundays (with its memorials to long-dead subalterns), and Komu, whose work often features Arabic calligraphy as well as the communist iconography he grew up with, has talked about "a guiding force" that helps him. In Kolkata, artist Debanjan Ray shows me his image of a Hindu god as Superman – the kind of thing that can get you into trouble with Hindu conservatives (who can be as hardline as any mullah on such matters). But do you believe, I ask him. "Yes, of course!" And when pressed – as I'm drawn to such things and have just bought an image of Lakshmi, sitting on her lotus leaf – he patiently demonstrates to me how to pray to this, the Hindu goddess of wealth and wisdom. So perhaps even amid the pizzazz and profits of today's Indian art scene, there are moments when the Mahatma would feel completely at home. ■

Riyas Komu's Other, a joint show with Peter Blake, is at the Aicon Gallery, 8 Heddon Street, London W1, until April 20. Adip Dutta's show, Man – Nam, runs from April 27 until June 5 (www.aicongallery.com)

Western galleries and expatriates fuel million-pound Indian art boom

By Arifa Akbar

Five years ago, artworks by a group of Indian artists known as the "Modern Masters" fetched modest prices at auction and appealed only to niche collectors.

But this week, Christie's Modern and Contemporary Indian Art sale in New York will attract international buyers in hot competition to acquire the latest artworks.

The boom of Indian art, like Chinese art before it, has created one of the fastest-growing markets in the West, with wealthy non-resident Indian collectors and Western gallery owners vying for the works of painters from the 1950s and a younger circle of contemporary artists known as the "Bombay Boys".

Aicon gallery, a permanent exhibiting space in central London showcasing the works of these younger artists, has just opened and is displaying the works of Kerala-born Riyas Komu, and Tate Modern is showing the works of the seminal modern Indian artist, Amrita Sher-Gill.

Prices of Indian art have risen to more than 20 times their value since 2001 and last year's total sales of about £106m are expected to double this year. Sales of Indian art at Christie's and Sotheby's have soared in recent years, with paintings that would have sold for a few thousand pounds half a decade ago now edging towards the £1m mark.

Zara Porter Hill, the international head of Modern Indian and Contemporary art at Sotheby's auction house, which is holding an Indian art sale this month, said it was estimated to be a "high-value" sale, with some artists' work having risen by 70 per cent in four years.

The estimated total for the sale of 117 paintings and sculptures at Christie's is $10m (£5.1m), and a work by modern master, Tyeb Mehta, entitled *Diagonal XV*, is expected to go under the hammer for $1.6m.

Yimini Mehta, the head of Modern and Contemporary Indian art in New York said that the first Indian art sale in 2000 fetched a total of $600,000, but a sale last year made $18m.

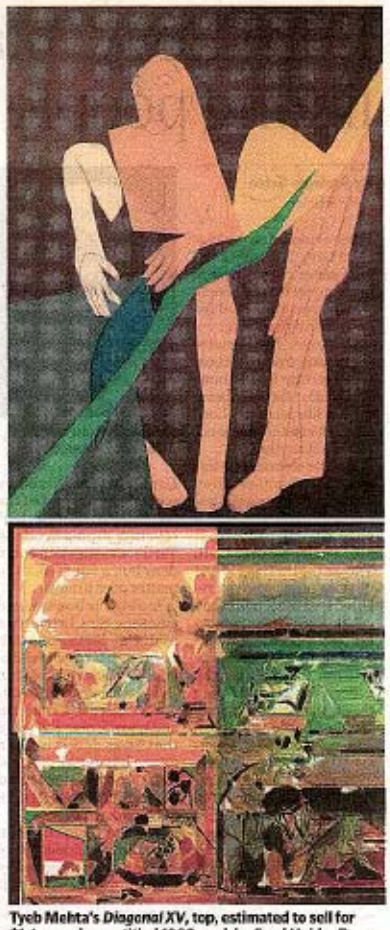
"Indian art is one of the hottest, fastest-growing areas in the market," she said. "It started with non-resident Indians, many of whom work in technology or banking, who turned towards their cultural heritage, and then it broadened out with more and more interest from Western collectors."

Although the circle of "modern masters" including Tyeb Mehta, Francis Newton Souza and Syed Haider Raza command the highest prices, the contemporary arts scene in India is attracting greater international interest.

Prajit Dutta, a co-founder of Aicon gallery, who also launched a gallery showcasing Indian art in New York in 2002, and in San Francisco, a year later, said he had seen a "surge in interest" from collectors, museum curators and art critics, in contemporary works, and that the top-selling works had increased in value by 550 per cent since 2000.

"They are very different from the 'modern masters' and they grapple much less self-consciously with the idea of being Indian, whereas some of the older generation draw on myths and legends from India," he said. "The India these younger artists depict is a globalised multicultural society. The growth in sales is powered by Indian expatriates and the rise of the Indian economy."

Ryas Komu, 36, whose work, exhibited at Aicon, deals with themes including terrorism and imperialism, believes Indian artists are now much more international rather than inward-looking, which is reflected in their work. "There is a sense of confidence in Indian society," he said.



Tyeb Mehta's *Diagonal XV*, top, estimated to sell for $1.6m, and an untitled 1982 work by Syed Haider Raza

Time Out London, March 21, 2007
Exhibtion: Other, March - April, 2007
Artists: Riyas Komu and Peter Drake
Aicon, London

Art

From tiny Aicons...

Air we go *Riyas 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 Riyas 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 contemporary 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.

Projal 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 face 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

art@timeout.com

Emerging markets

New York-based Indian gallery comes to London

Aicon joins growing number of dealers selling South Asian work

LONDON. The opening of Aicon (Arts India Contemporary) Gallery in the Heddon Street space formerly occupied by the Gagosian Gallery, is the latest and most high profile manifestation in London of the booming market for Indian contemporary art. The gallery opens on 15 March with an inaugural show of the work of Riyas Komu (until 19 April), one of a group of young Mumbai-based artists known as the "Bombay Boys". Although it is Komu's first show in London, his work has been selected by director Robert Storr for the 2007 Venice Biennale and he is the latest Indian artist to be embraced in the west.

Work by Peter Drake, a New York artist who has collaborated with Komu in the past, will also be in the opening show. Future plans include shows for artists such as Jayashree Chakravartry, Ashim Purakayastha and Shibu Natesan, as well as group shows of Pakistani and Turkish contemporary art.

Arts India Group, which is behind the new gallery and which has branches in New York and Palo Alto in California, is run by brothers Prajit and Projjal Dutta. Prajit Dutta, who is a professor of economics at Columbia University in New York, told *The Art Newspaper* that while the New York gallery will concentrate on modern work, the London gallery will show younger contemporary artists. "For a long time there has been an apologetic attitude to the promotion of contemporary Indian art, but now we feel that artists are producing work that can hold its own on the international stage," he said.

For the past five years modern and contemporary Indian art has been undergoing a resurgence as wealthy Indian collectors around the world have rushed to invest.

Although some of the biggest collectors are based in the US, London, where many rich Indians have second homes, has always been an important hub for the market. Until recently this revolved around the auction houses, but there are now signs that commercial galleries in the city are tapping into a market perceived to have a huge potential beyond high priced modern masters like Husain, Souza and Metha, among others.

"There is so much interest among curators and critics, as well as collectors" says Prajit Dutta. "Many people who have been priced out of the market for Chinese contemporary art are looking at what is coming out of South Asia."

Last year London also saw the launch of Grosvenor Vadhera in Ryder Street, a collaboration between Grosvenor Gallery and Delhi-based Vadhera Art Gallery which is currently hosting "Here & Now: Contemporary Voices from India" (until 11 March).

Also in Mayfair, Peter Osborne has been holding regular exhibitions of Indian contemporary art in the Berkeley Square Gallery and at Osborne Samuel in Bruton Street. The arrival of Aicon seems set to give Indian art a footing in London's contemporary art scene in a way that these more conservative galleries are not attempting and may provide a window onto a generation of young and exciting artists as yet unseen in the UK.

Lucian Harris

The work of Riyas Komu, seen here in his studio, goes on show in London this month

Tongue-tied but still expressive

Visual arts

OTHER: RIYAS KOMU AND PETER DRAKE
Aicon Gallery
LONDON ★★★

It's a risky business opening a new gallery in London, and trying to judge, in a competitive market, what will make it. Aicon is the new kid on the block; it has taken over the old Gagosian space in Heddon Street. It's the latest venture of Arts India, a gallery that primarily shows contemporary Indian art and has spaces in New York and California, and has now crossed over to this side of the pond.

The inaugural show features two artists, Riyas Komu, one of the group of successful young painters from Mumbai called the Bombay Boys, who showed in the 2007 Venice Biennale, and Peter Drake, an American painter based in New York. The exhibition reflects their own cultural locations as well as their reactions to the Iraq war. They see London as the geographical mid-point between their two countries, so have chosen to juxtapose their work throughout the gallery. The result is visually confusing.

Of the two, Drake's work is the more coherent. His series of *M/oral Pathology* paintings link the pathological lies of the Bush administration with traumatic diseases of the mouth; he sees an equation between the corruption of the physical body and the body politic. The inside of the mouth is neutral; race, religion and gender remain, on the whole, unknown. Yet as we speak and open and close our mouths, we publicly reveal our most vulnerable interiors.

Like Francis Bacon before him, Drake has turned to medical text books to source his lurid images of tongues and teeth that become veritable oral wonderlands of lurid pinks and reds. He believes that most violent actions begin with violent speech and has embedded seven phrases in Arabic and English, which have been uttered by the Bush administration and helped to precipitate violence around the world, within these paintings. These (like lies perhaps?) break down into fluid areas of patterning.

His other group of paintings based on the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, though not consciously related, create a dialogue with the mouth works. Here, tanks are surrounded by collapsed heaps of suburban houses. For most Americans, war is what happens elsewhere, to "others" in far-off lands. The lamentable response to the victims of the hurricane saw the reduction of an American city to Third World status and those left in need were treated with the same cavalier indifference as the US usually reserves for foreigners.

Komu makes two very different types of work, paintings that in their precision and hyper-reality look like advertising hoardings and carved wooden objects. Working from photos, he has painted children from the slums of Brazil and Mumbai. A boy sits stitching up a football, that universal emblem of aspiration, while another, found in a Mumbai slum, a migrant from Kerala – from where the artist comes – stares at the viewer from a huge, partially finished portrait that reveals the pencil grid beneath the paint and is stronger for that incompletion.

More striking than the paintings are his wooden sculptural objects. *Ego Brain* depicts a flat, carved skull that transmogrifies into a flame with roughly the same outline as the United States, while *Undertakers*, situated in the gallery basement, suggests a series of wooden Islamic tombs set on gun carriages, where each minaret-shape is carved with a heart. The metaphor behind the piece is overcomplicated, but with its attached red stars, a sort of shorthand for the American flag, it evokes a certain compressed anger.

More powerful still is *The Tragedy of a Carpenter's Son III*, a large wooden missile on wheels, where one side has been removed and replaced with wire mesh. Carved along the fuselage is a prayer in Arabic. Part religious relic, part Heath Robinson contraption, a wooden rocket that cannot fly or drop bombs stands as a graphic and articulate cry against military intervention and expansionism.

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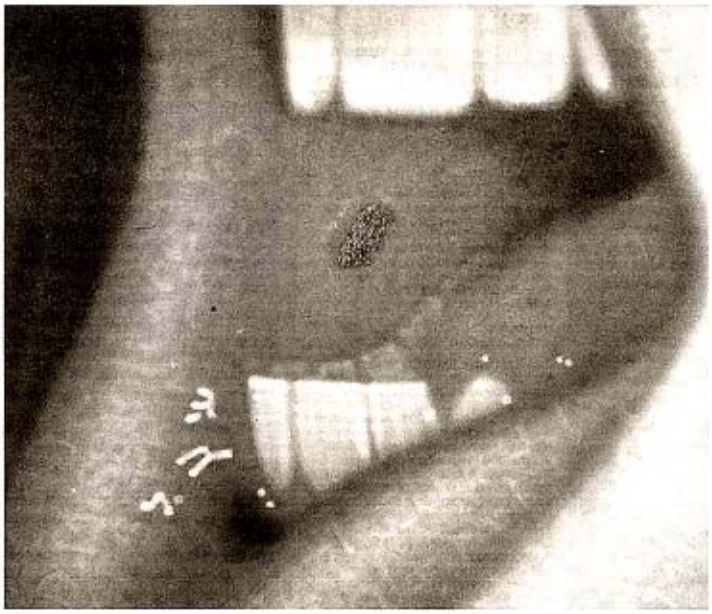


Art with bite: Peter Drake's 'M/oral Pathology' explores the origin of lies

Moving with The Times
- Art for the 'international India class' SOUMITRA DAS
March 12, 2007

An assemblage of Adip Datta's work from the catalogue
The art of making contemporary Indian art gain a high visibility abroad — certainly beyond the bounds of the NRI — is becoming as serious a business as the art itself. At least one gallery based in America for now, is sparing no expense to promote two Indian artists it will exhibit at its brand-new gallery in London soon.
James Collard, a senior reporter, and Graham Wood, a photographer (he is dead against digital cameras) from The Times, London, flew back home early last Wednesday after spending two days with young sculptor Adip Dutta whose exhibition opens in London next month.
The Collard-Wood team initially visited Mumbai to meet Riyas Komu, who belongs to the so-called Bombay Boys group of artists, with whose exhibition Aicon Gallery will be inaugurated on March 16. But the gallery owners, Prajit and Projjal Dutta, who sponsored the trip, wanted The Times team to visit Calcutta, meet Adip Dutta and to look for themselves art as practised in the city.
An exhibition of Calcutta artists titled Eastern Edge and curated by Jayashree Chakravarty is currently on at Projjal's New York gallery. But Projjal declares that he is not putting his money on Calcutta artists for sentimental reasons (they were raised in Delhi, anyway) but because he thinks they have a great potential and talent which has not been tapped yet.
Projjal, who is an MIT-qualified architect, and his brother Prajit, who is an economist and a professor at Columbia University, had started with an online gallery named ArtsIndia.com.
"Ever since we moved abroad we wanted to give contemporary Indian art a boost. After 9/11 we opened a gallery in New York and called it Gallery Arts India. We showed Indian art on the road in the San Francisco area. We opened our second gallery at Palo Alto close to Stanford University in 2004. And now we are all ready to open Aicon Gallery in London in the old Gagosian gallery space. It is street-level. Her Majesty the Queen is our landlady. This is the most upscale space for displaying Indian art," claimed Projjal. Even before that gallery opened they have already spent $ 1 million.
Projjal had hired Bolton & Quinn, a public relations agency specialising in art, which pitched the idea of covering the artists in situ. The offer was accepted by The Times.
James Collard, who writes on social issues, predicted that after Brit art and Chinese contemporary art, Indian contemporary art would be the next big thing. He has visited India five times, although he never came to Calcutta before.
When Selfridge's, the most prestigious department store after Harrods, celebrated Bollywood, Collard came to Mumbai to interview Dimple Kapadia and remembers the plush party at designer duo Sandip Khoshla and Abu Jani's place. This assignment too was handled by Bolton & Quinn.
He admitted that it is mostly the NRI who buys Indian contemporary art, but the scene has changed "incredibly quickly", infrastructure has developed and dealers too have become more "committed."
Collard was dead on when he said suddenly, the "international India class" — with friends and family all over the world — has developed a Western approach to contemporary art. It has become "cool" for this class to buy art.

SAN FRANCISCO

Anjolie Ela Menon:

PILGRIMAGE: A SELECTION OF PAINTINGS
ASIAN ART MUSEUM

Sandwiched between a display case of devotional sculptures to the Hindu god Vishnu and a selection of artifacts decorated with Islamic calligraphy, Anjolie Ela Menon's small exhibition at the Asian Art Museum (AAM) is in good company, emanating an aura of treasured timelessness. Breaking through the fence separating traditional and contemporary Asian art, the AAM prompts its audiences to appreciate the continuum between old and new.

Born in 1940, Menon, who started exhibiting in 1958 as a teenager, is one of India's most celebrated realist painters, honored with the Padma Shri, one of the country's highest cultural distinctions, in 2000. This exhibition of 11 oil on masonite paintings is her first solo show in a U.S. museum, and was complemented by a concurrent solo show at bicoastal gallery Arts India's Palo Alto branch. Two mid-size works depict lovers together, with rich colors and patterned textures enlivening her characteristically flat drawing style. Most of the smaller paintings are from Menon's ongoing "Yatra" series, inspired by the Kavadiyas, a sect of Shiva devotees who make yearly pilgrimages to bathe in the Ganges. These in turn seem to be preparation pieces for the feature work in exhibition—the life-size triptych, *Yatra*, completed in 2004 and donated to the museum by Arts India, New York.

Like a Mercatur map that skews the earth to portray it on paper, *Yatra* is a surface rendition of a circular life cycle, its use of the Western triptych form evoking Christ-like associations of righteous suffering. The central panel shows a man toting a wooden carrying frame festooned with marigolds and shiny ribbons accentuated with metallic paint. The left panel shows half the body of a second devotee exiting the painting and a mother swaddling her child. Mirroring the form on the left, the right panel depicts an old man squatting in the posture of the mother and another parading devotee half-entering the scene.

In all three frames, a strange outlined object vibrates luminously from the background, a rectangular scaffold, unsettlingly built to human size. Is it a cradle or a grave? A bed or a table? Its function hovers at the edge of viewers' consciousness and adds a hint of abstraction to what is otherwise a realistic tableau. It also adds a puzzling element for viewers struggling to understand the painting's perspective. The side panels show the same strange object from different angles, begging the question, do the two halves of the second man belong to the same person? Is this really a circular scene? Does life, or the painting, ever end? Or ever begin? Raised in India, but trained at the École des Beaux Arts in Paris, Menon has a cunning way of incorporating Hindu philosophy into her Renaissance-inspired works. ■ JESSICA KRAFT

Anjolie Ela Menon ■ *Yatra* ■ 2004 ■ Oil on masonite board ■ Courtesy Asian Art Museum

Art & Antiques, May 2007
Exhibtion: Other, March - April, 2007
Artists: Riyas Komu and Peter Drake
Aicon, London

Back to the 'Burbs

ARTISTS USED TO FLEE AND NEVER LOOK BACK. NOW, A NEW GENERATION IS FINDING INSPIRATION IN AMERICA'S SUBURBAN SPRAWL.

BY EDWARD M. GOMEZ

Suburbia, that vast, automobile-loving antidote to the aggravations of the big city, promised post–World War II Americans "the good life." With relatively easy home ownership, shopping malls aplenty and eight-lane highways for simple trips to the post office, the suburbs supposedly offered room to spread out in, free of crime, grime and congestion. Of course, it didn't exactly work out that way, and many suburbanites—who today account for more than half of the country's population—are realizing that the world they inhabit can exhibit many of the same kinds of problems as the concrete jungle, in addition to newer ills like ugly, green-space-devouring, runaway sprawl.

Lately this self-contained world has become a source of fascination to numerous American artists who either grew up in, or later became rooted in, "the 'burbs." Overall, their shared outlook is more that of inquisitive cultural anthropologists than of polemical social critics. Neither sentimental nor damning, they regard the suburbs as an intriguing environment whose inhabitants and customs—backyard barbecues, car pools, bake sales—are at once the stuff of real, "normal" life for millions and, for outsiders looking in, the perplexing trappings of someone's wildest dreams. (University of Memphis art historian Sara Doris offers a lucid account of the social and cultural forces that accompanied the suburban boom and helped foster the emergence of new art forms in her new book *Pop Art and the Contest Over American Culture*, Cambridge University Press, 2007.)

"The suburbs are neither one extreme nor the other," notes the New York–based painter Peter Drake. "There's the David Lynch model, which looks at the suburbs as a completely tarnished experience; there's also the 1950s 'Father Knows Best' model, which is hopelessly naive. I believe both visions are true and false, simultaneously." Drake, who grew up in Garden City, Long Island, one of the earliest American suburban developments, dating from 1869, teaches art at the Parsons School of Design in Manhattan. Among the themes his paintings examine are what he refers to as "the idiosyncrasies and metaphoric power" reflected in the traditional roles of many men and women in the suburbs, including stay-at-home housekeeping moms who oversee their families' interior living spaces and go-to-work dads whose domain is the yard or lawn (think mowing, snow-shoveling and masterminding the barbecue grill).

Drake's artistic observations can be provocative and rather nuanced at the same time. Of his recent acrylic-on-canvas pictures of heavily armored tanks rumbling through ordinarily tranquil, residential streets, he notes, "We take for granted the images of war in faraway places, in other people's living spaces, that we see in the news. But what would war look like in our own backyard? To imagine such a scene and paint it creates a jarring image." By contrast, Drake's large-scale "Delightful Garden" brings together every kind of ceramic gnome and decorative lawn sculpture imaginable in a composition that evokes a classical convocation of deities.

Peter Drake, "Dads," 2005, acrylic on canvas, 12" x 11".

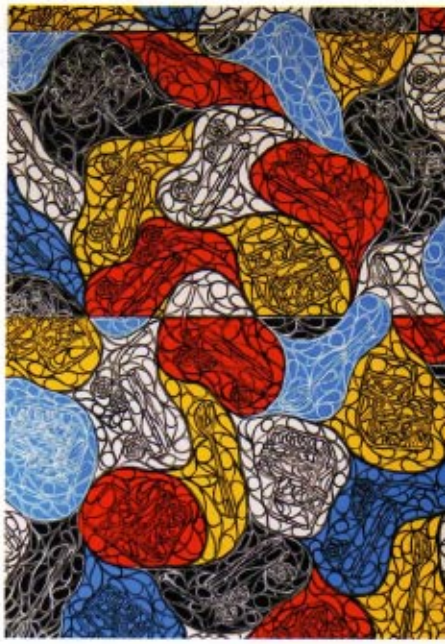
For the painter, it recalls Bosch's "Garden of Earthly Delights," albeit "as a place where what is delightful or revolting is entirely up for grabs," Drake says. "Many people have become so accustomed to the David Lynch vision that they assume that when artists look at the suburbs, they have to be cynical. To me, though, 'Delightful Garden' may be seen as pastoral."

A native Northeasterner, Jon Waldo cuts stencils based on his own simple line drawings of familiar objects—picnic tables, cars, children's toys. Combining those repeated images with seemingly random patches of color and bold, shape-defining outlines, he creates dense compositions whose deep pictorial space becomes a repository of some of suburbia's most enduring icons. "A recliner, a little red wagon, an electric iron—on one level, these things are totally banal," Waldo observes. "But in a Thoreau-like way, they can be extraordinary, too, because they symbolize the promise of the suburbs: comfort, family life, security. For me, these common objects are deeply personal and packed with emotion."

In gouache-on-paper works like "Peaceable Kingdom," 2005, Amy Chan, who is based in Richmond, Virginia, subtly comments on sprawl and the use—or abuse—of physical space in the car-dominated suburbs. "I don't think the average person there sees the changes in the landscape in an aesthetic way," Chan says of those temples to corporate marketing prowess that are among the jewels in suburbia's crown. "Instead, with each new store that's built, I think people are seduced by the idea of what products they'll be able to buy."

Barbara Griffiths, an Englishwoman who moved from London to a Connecticut suburb nearly a decade ago, says she has purposely tried to view her adopted hometown through an anthropologist's eyes. "I'm fascinated by the various 'tribes' that populate my suburb," she says, citing, for example, "the tribe of women who like cats, the Episcopalian flower-planting committee and the tribe of wives of Canadian men who once lived in Singapore." A painting like Griffiths' "The New Pioneers," 1997, offers a somewhat surreal take on the aspirations of suburban homebuilders in an image of a well-dressed couple whose dream house appears to be taking shape amidst the rubble of old and new civilizations—ancient statuary, a toilet bowl and PVC pipes. To better understand the dynamics of suburban "tribes," Griffiths joined one—a local book club. Such groups, she says, are "all about seeking and finding a sense of community."

Carson Fox gives physical form to ideally beautiful versions of suburban lawns or gardens in wall-mounted or on-the-floor mixed-media works that bring to mind expanses of grass or colorful flowerbeds. In these psychedelic creations, birds flutter (but look closely; they might be fighting),



Amy Chan, "Peaceable Kingdom," 2005, gouache-on-paper. Jon Waldo, "Joanna" (above, right), 2007, acrylic and oil on canvas.

Carson Fox, "Yellow Kissing Ball" (detail), 2005, artificial silk flowers, butterflies and birds with glitter, glue and fiberglass. Robert Selwyn, "Untitled (House)" (below), 2003, oil on linen.

and flowers grow in exuberant profusion. "These works are about indulging myself in a fantasy environment I've always wanted to create," Fox says of her suburbs-related essays in ornament.

If flowers, gnome statuettes or mirrored globes on pedestals help make the front lawn the quintessential decorative venue of suburbia, the design and looks of suburban houses themselves may express a variety of attitudes or emotions, from aspirations to affluence to homeowner's pride. Last year, when the Katonah Museum of Art, in Katonah, New York, presented an exhibition titled "I ♥ the 'Burbs," the museum's curator, Ellen J. Keiter, pointed out that the house has long been "the central symbol" of the American Dream. For many generations, she noted in the show's catalogue, the house has served as "a metaphor for family, security, prosperity and American values."

For painter Robert Selwyn, such a sense of stability was shaken up by the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Selwyn grew up in suburban Bethesda, Maryland. His hallucinatory images of "squiggly" houses, as he calls them, resemble reflections on a pond's rippling surface. What do they mean? "They're open-ended," he admits, then thinks for a moment and adds, "But I think they refer to memory in general and to the memories we have of growing up in the suburbs, some very clear and others fuzzy."

Chicago dealer Linda Warren, whose gallery has shown the work of Drake, Waldo and Fox, observes: "The suburbs as a place where you're obliged to fit in—that's a theme that seems to interest many artists and viewers alike, even, or especially, those artists who grew up there or live there now. That's because many feel themselves to be, by nature, different. They're natural outsiders, natural observers."

Thus, if what the 'burbs-inspired art they create has to say about its subject matter sometimes seems ambiguous, that may be because these artists can and do appreciate the very human hope for a better, more secure and comfortable life even as they realize that dysfunction or tragedy *and* moments of unabashed joy can occur anywhere, anytime, under any roof. "Whether in the inner city or in the suburbs, human nature is still, well, human nature," Drake observes.

It's that sense of understanding of what makes human beings tick and what attracts them to the suburbs that gives Drake's work and that of his fellow artists their resonance; it is echoed in their sense of wonder about this conceptual and actual place that so many people call home.

For these artists, the suburbs are definitely more than just a place on the map. They are also an indelible place in the heart.

ART & ANTIQUES New York correspondent and art critic Edward M. Gomez grew up overseas after attending kindergarten in Levittown (now Willingboro), New Jersey.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Claire Oliver, New York. 212.929.5949. www.claireoliver.com Represents Peter Drake and Carson Fox.

Linda Warren Gallery Chicago. 312.432.9500. www.lindawarrengallery.com Represents Peter Drake and John Waldo.

Bernard Toale Gallery Boston. 617.482.2477. www.bernardtoalegallery.com Represents Amy Chan.

Barbara Griffiths New Canaan, Conn. E-mail: fishgrit@yahoo.com

DFN Gallery, New York. 212.334.3400 www.dfngallery.com Represents Robert Selwyn.

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