

The Right Frame of Mind

Gallerist Sundaram Tagore's latest collaboration brings him to Manila, where he partners with Collective 88 and Ayala Museum to highlight some of the world's most iconic photographers

SUNDARAM TAGORE'S enduring relationship with art stems from a prolific lineage that traces its roots to Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore (his great-granduncle), but his view of the creative medium as a vehicle for cultural and geographical transcendence comes from a vibrantly nomadic childhood. Today, he is an established proponent of artistic dialogue between East and West, with two galleries in New York and two of Asia's leading art capitals, Hong Kong and Singapore.

In 2016, the search to highlight cultural diversity culminates in a groundbreaking collaboration with art and design company Collective 88. Staged at the Ayala Museum, the exhibit focuses on the works of photographers like Annie Leibovitz, Robert Mapplethorpe, Sebastião Salgado, Edward Burtynsky, Robert Polidori, and Steve McCurry.

How has your own taste developed over the years? Obviously the art world has changed dramatically. So much has developed since I was a student in the 1980s and '90s. Our eyes are muscles. The more we look, the stronger they become—the more exposure we have, the more critical and appraising we become. I've attended and participated in many biennales and art fairs across the globe for more than two decades, so my taste has become more refined over the years. My own personal collection has developed and expanded due to having lived in so many countries. I found ways to create cultural connections with art.

Your *The World We Live In* exhibit focuses on photography. Why did you choose that particular medium? I believe photography, like painting, sculpture, and video installation, has become an integral part of the art world. Last year when I was invited to participate in a Christie's panel discussion in Manila during the art fair, I had many conversations about photography. The interest was clearly there. In addition, as a gallery, we are at the forefront of showing photography, so it was a natural outcome of this dialogue.

In terms of impacting and affecting an audience, how do you think photography differs from other mediums? Today



Above: Sundaram Tagore.
Right: Steve McCurry's *Sharbat Gula, the Afghan Girl*, at Nasir Bagh refugee camp near Peshawar, Pakistan, 1984

photography is fully accepted as an art form and often fetches huge sums in auction. It has been fully elevated to the status of fine art. It can be presented in a gallery or museum setting as well as on a digital platform. However, one does not have a complete understanding of the work unless you see it in person. Photography as a medium translates very well in terms of today's technology. You have to directly use the technology to create the work of art. However, although everyone knows how to take a photograph, very few know how to take photos of great depth, beauty, and power. This also applies to literature. Everyone can write, but very few people can produce writing of depth and power.

What details do you gravitate toward in collecting photographs? I've been in a very fortunate position of not only collecting art for myself but spending an inordinate amount of time with artists. There is no one particular detail that stands out, but rather, experiences that have influenced me. For instance, many years ago I was having a conversation with



the world-famous Brazilian photographer Sebastião Salgado, whose work you'll see at the Ayala Museum. He explained to me that because he grew up in Brazil directly under the sun, he is able to look directly at the light. As a result he can see shapes and forms against the light that many others with the naked eye will not. Since then I have been focusing on his work and I've seen many details in his prints that come alive. When I buy art for my collection, very often conversations of this kind will influence me. It's very personal. —Carlo Cruz

The World We Live In: Through the Lens of Contemporary Photography, presented by Sundaram Tagore Gallery and Collective 88 in partnership with Ayala Museum, runs from February 17 to March 27 at the Ayala Museum, Makati; ayalamuseum.org, sundaramtagore.com