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Sundaram Tagore on Sparking Dialogue Across Oceans



NEW YORK—**Sundaram Tagore** is an art historian, collector, curator, and dealer who founded his first New York Gallery in SoHo in 2000 and moved to his current premises on Chelsea's 27th Street in 2006. But his operation stretches well beyond the confines of that space. Tagore, a native of India's West Bengal and a descendant of the influential poet and **Nobel Prize** winner **Rabindranath Tagore**, is a true internationalist and an art-fair zealot (he estimates that his gallery will participate in up to a dozen fairs in the next year) committed to the expansion of the global art community in

which he sees his gallery as a key player. This week he expands *his* operation with a new gallery in Beverly Hills, and in April he will open a space in Hong Kong. He spoke with ARTINFO last week about his new space, his artists, and his philosophy.

Sundaram, you're opening your new gallery in Beverly Hills on Saturday. What do you think you can contribute to the L.A. art scene?

We're going to bring a totally different vitality to L.A. The spiritual basis of our gallery is to create and support an intercultural dialogue between a world community of living artists. We represent 24 artists from across the globe: artists from Japan, India, Holland, Korea, China, Italy, England, and America. We're getting Islamic artists, and we have Jewish artists.

That could be a recipe for chaos.

I don't care where art comes from. It dissolves barriers. The question is, "How do you make it cohesive?" When I choose the artists for the gallery I have to really like their work, but more importantly, they have to have a philosophical quest.

You sound less like a dealer than someone who's heading a not-for-profit.

Originally I wanted to create a not-for-profit organization, but I realized I'd have to go back and sell the idea to get sponsorship and raise money. You sell the art and plow the profit into the cultural activities. That's the basic principle of this gallery.

So the operation just breaks even?

Better than that. We've formed a foundation. The seed money comes from the gallery. It's called the "Tagore Foundation International" and it will disburse ten scholarships of \$10,000 each to students from across the globe. They're disadvantaged boys and girls who have talent but aren't able to attend art schools or art organizations.

That sounds a long way from Beverly Hills.

One of the reasons why we opened the gallery in Beverly Hills was because I thought to myself, "Where are the really cultural individuals?" Not necessarily art people, but cultured and accomplished people.

I suppose it doesn't hurt that many of them are also cultured and rich?

In this day and age you always need money. To support ideas you have to pay for them.

I know you spend a lot of time on airplanes. Where have you been recently?

In the last six weeks I've been to maybe 18 countries. So I feel the pulse of what is happening.

What does globalization mean for the art world?

The plus side of globalization is that the world is right next door. If you tell people that there's an exhibition by a critically important artist in Guatemala or mainland China, they'll show up. The minus side is that it flattens everything out so there's no identity.

Art and culture used to be in the forefront of ideas. Now they've taken a backseat to finance. That has to change for the world to come together and be at peace.

Is your gallery playing its part in making that happen?

We're dedicated to intercultural dialogue, and to dialogue across the oceans. When this takes place, with Europeans and Americans going to Asia, and Asians coming here, then people are touched by each other's presence, and their minds open.