

Iconic Afghan Girl photograph expected to fetch Rs25.5 lakh

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Her green eyes flecked with gold transfix you, while her torn headscarf tugs gently at your heartstrings.

We have all seen her image on the cover of the National Geographic magazine; but now you can see the first Chromogenic print of the iconic image, taken by photo-journalist Steve McCurry, on Fuji crystal archival paper at the India Art Fair.

Priced between `7.5 lakh and `25.5 lakh (\$15,000 to \$50,000), the photograph is up for sale at Sundandram Tagore Gallery, New York.

The Afghan Girl, as she is known to all, is Sharbat Gula, an Afghan woman who fled to Pakistan during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. McCurry stumbled upon her in 1985 and immortalised her with this famous photograph that was carried on the cover of the National Geographic magazine's June 1985 issue.

'We at the Sundaram Tagore Gallery are committed to bringing under the scanner, the exchange between the East and the West.

'For this Art Fair, since it is our first time participating, we are presenting a special section on photography done by photographers from the West on subjects pertaining to the East,' says Tagore, the owner of the gallery and after whom it is named.

While McCurry has done an open edition of the Afghan Girl, it is the first time that it is available on Indian shores. There is another image by McCurry, titled Jodhpur Fruit Vendor, which was taken in 1996.



Debut: The iconic photograph is available for viewing for the first time on Indian soil

The only other photographer to grab as much attention as McCurry at the Fair is Annie Leibovitz, whose portraits of America's secretary of state Hilary Clinton and actor Steve Martin are iconic in their own right.

Among other photographers being showcased in the India section is Sebastião Salgado, whose quintessential 1995 image of Church Gate Station in Mumbai aka the city of migrants, has been an inspiration for many photo-journalists.

Young artist steals the show

Artist Varunika Saraf's work has been brought to the India Art Fair by Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke (Ranjana Steinruecke in the picture).

Saraf is all of 30 years old but is already a force to be reckoned with in the industry, commanding prices unheard of for a young artist — one of her works was sold for ₹16 lakh at the Fair.

Layered, the said image creates a beautiful illusion. What at first seems to be just dense foliage, gives way to figures hidden beneath on a closer look -- some of them military men with guns, others of headless youths and a few of demons from the fairytale world of Hamsanama.

Her work is defined by its intricacy, with rice paper as her canvas. Each creation is the result of painstaking effort, reminiscent of the work that goes into traditional miniature art and Jatra theatre tropes.

Rashid gets his due

Dedicating two booths to one artist is rather unusual at India Art Fair.

But for artist Rashid Rana, it was perhaps slightly overdue, given that his works have been showcased at illustrious venues such as the Musée Guimet in Paris — which hosted his solo project Perpetual Paradox in 2010 — and the Whitechapel Gallery, London, as part of the Where Three Dreams Cross exhibition, the same year.

Not to forget the fact that he is seen as one of the most important voices of Pakistani art.

"We felt Rashid has not been adequately represented in Delhi.

So we were keen to make a big splash at the Fair," says Mortimer

Chatterjee of the Mumbai-based gallery Chatterjee & Lal that represents Rashid.

New York's Lisson Gallery too has brought Rashid's works to the Fair for the first time.

Chatterjee says his body of images — digital photo-montages — looks at iconic artwork from Western art history overlaid with the 'white noise' that is created by hundreds to thousands of images sourced from billboards in Lahore that blur out the main image.

One work that left many puzzled was a black rectangle placed over an image. 'Here I am talking about and provoking the viewer by playing the role of censor,' says Rashid, 43.

Art of Life

Australian artist Sam Jinks' works were one of the major draws at the India Art Fair, that kicked off in the Capital on Wednesday.