

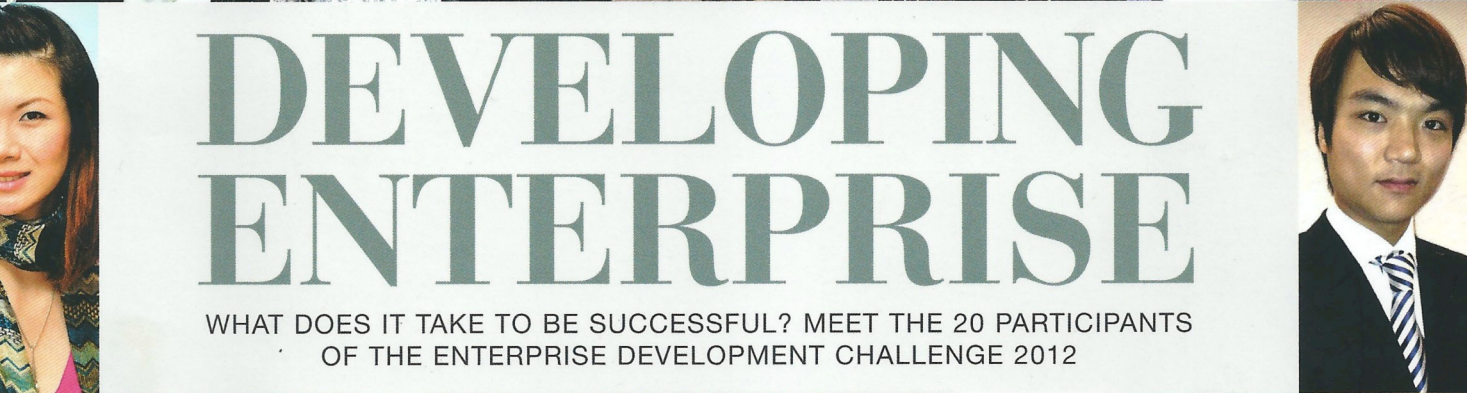
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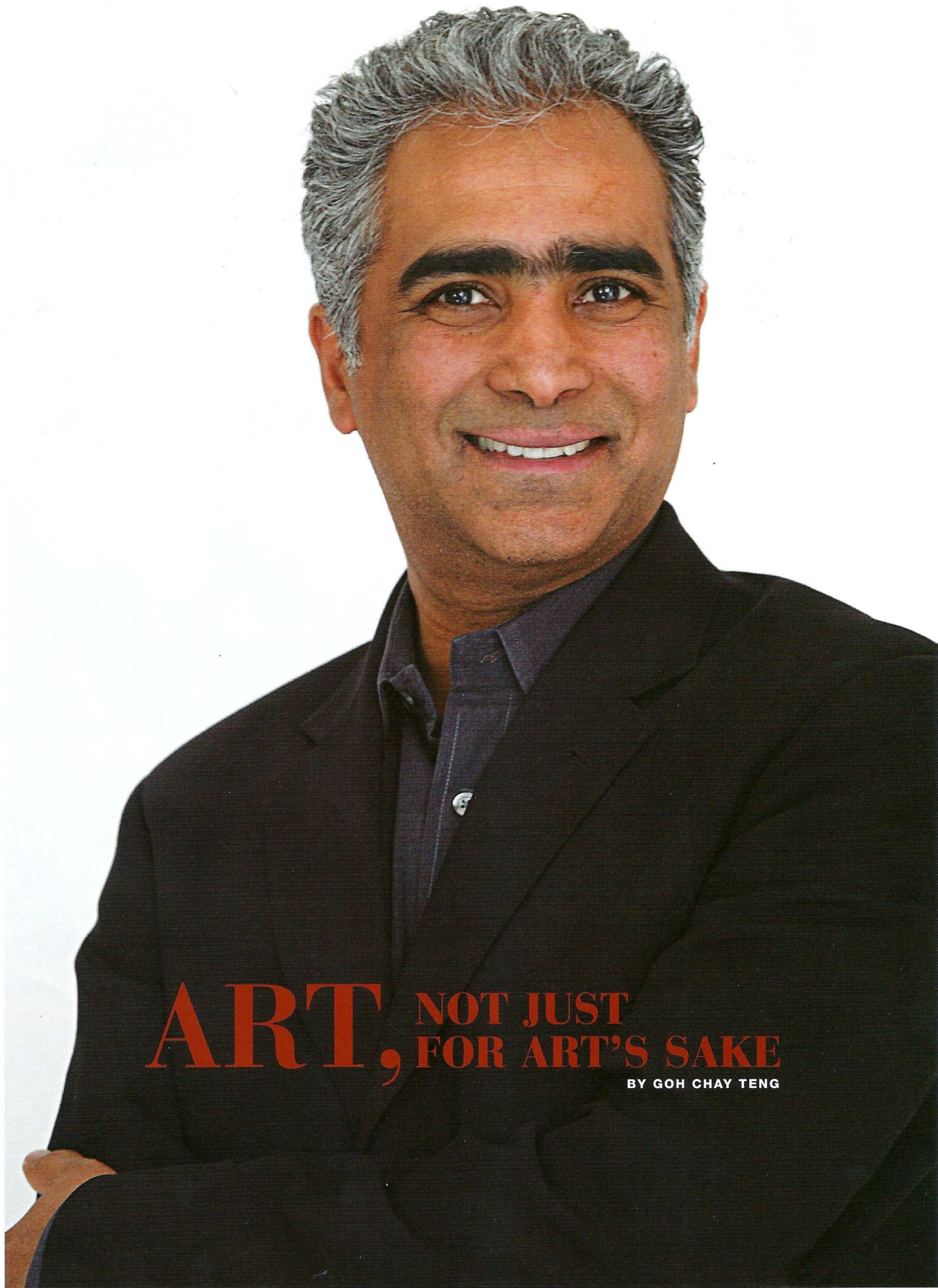
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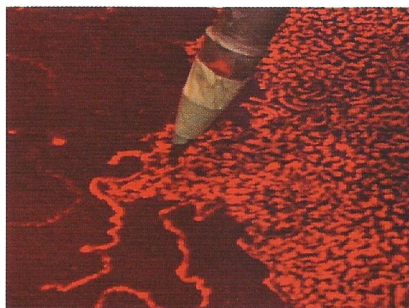
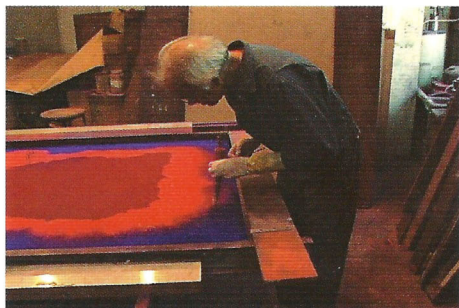
EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW: QI GROUP'S DATO' VIJAY ESWARAN TALKS ABOUT
BUSINESS, LIFE LESSONS AND SPIRITUALITY



**ART, NOT JUST
FOR ART'S SAKE**

BY GOH CHAY TENG

A gallery owner and an art historian, Sundaram Tagore is a man who wears many hats. With the documentary, *The Poetics of Colour: Natvar Bhavsar*, Sundaram added yet another hat to his collection – that of a film director.



With his first documentary, Sundaram Tagore doesn't stray far from his life's work in the art world. His film chronicles the life of an Indian artist trying to make a living in New York, focusing on the clash, and then unity, of cultures. As a champion of inter-cultural dialogue, Sundaram has always used art as a vehicle to create an understanding between people and cultures.

Film aficionado

Making films was always in the pipes for Sundaram, who grew up in the cultural art capital of SoHo in New York. "I have always been interested in making films. When I was living in New York, a lot of my friends were from the film culture and they were always talking about filmmaking, and we would have exchanges," he said.

It was the poetry of neorealist films like *The Bicycle Thief* and Roberto Rossellini's *Stromboli* that drew him in. "It was so full of poetry, so full of human struggle. If they don't have that bicycle, they'll not get the job, and without the job, their family was going to suffer and get left behind. Finding that bicycle soon becomes the most important thing in their life.

It is this starkness that is full of poetry," Sundaram explained, using Italian neorealist classic, *The Bicycle Thief* as an example.

Originally from India, Sundaram came from a family of artists. Ironically, it was because of this that he chose to work behind the scenes, supporting young artists as a gallerist instead. "There were so many artists in my family, so I didn't want to do anything with art at all," he laughed. But Sundaram is not terribly concerned with labels, believing that borders have dissolved in this post-modern age. "Every one of us is an artist, it's all about how you express yourself. If you are using an artistic tool to express yourself, then you're an artist. And I do that all the time."

Art as a bridge

As a prominent figure in the arts scene, Sundaram has devoted his life's work to bridging Eastern and Western cultures – making a conscious effort to represent artists who have lived away from their native countries and showcase their unique perspectives in cultures that are different from their own. According to Sundaram, borders are dissolved in the art world and the emotions evoked by a great piece of art have the ability to

humanise an entire culture. "As you get engaged in the form, you will want to know more about the cultural context behind it and the content of the society. What this does is that it humanises the whole interaction process," he explained.

Even though the appreciation of art can be a very personal experience – where the creator and the audience have different interpretations of a piece of work, Sundaram believes that great works of art actually facilitates this difference in discourse. He also believes that although the consumer's experience with art is personal, the emotions behind it are born out of universal struggles. "Why is Shakespeare's work so widely read? It's because it universally touches people. The Merchant of Venice may be a merchant of Venice but those conflicts and resolutions make sense today. That's why it's a great piece of art."

Ultimately, Sundaram's philosophy is that art is the saving grace of humanity. "Animals are more morally upright than us, they kill only because of food, while humans may do the same for greed. But when we produce art, we tap into divinity. When you see a spectacular piece of art, you realise that there's beauty and that everything else is worth it because of that."