

A CURATED LIFE

Acclaimed historian and gallerist
Sundaram Tagore lives and breathes art.

By HO YUN KUAN

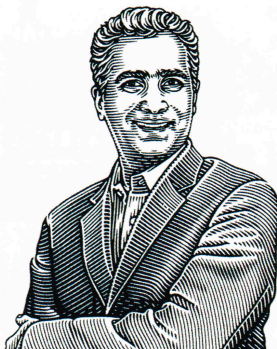


Creativity is in Sundaram Tagore's blood: Asia's first Nobel Literature Prize winner Rabindranath Tagore is his great-granduncle. Living up to his legacy, the art historian and gallerist has been nominated by *Avenue* magazine as one of the 100 most influential Asian Americans in the US. The important role Tagore's Asian roots and Western experiences play in his life is apparent in his curatorial choices. He advocates East-West dialogue through art in his four galleries – two in New York and one each in Hong Kong and Singapore.

My extended family used to live together in an enormous ancient house on Russel Street in Kolkata. We would have an open house every day. Between 4.30pm and 5pm, artists, poets and writers would start showing up. It went on till about 8pm or 9pm, and dinner would be served for the people who stayed on. **My parents used to pull me out** of school to go trekking in the rural areas of Bihar and Orissa. We would live with the Gond and Santhal tribes for a few days. My father would get inspired by what he called the pure art forms produced by these people who were not educated or 'contaminated' by ideas that were modern. Experiences like this gave me another dimension of life.

One of my favourite artists is Jackson Pollock. His works predict the future. When you look at what he was doing in the 1940s with his drip paintings and swirling forms, you see an interconnectedness. He was predicting the World Wide Web then. He's like a shaman. When an artist can see the future, that's when he becomes important.

Art is not for the rich. It never has been. The production of art is by a creative lot, but the consumption of art - direct consumption, which refers to buying and taking art home - is generally by the rich. Then, there is another form of consumption and it's appreciation. Now, anyone can appreciate art, just like everyone can appreciate a beautiful bird that flies past.



Below: Salgado's *Church Gate Station, Western Railroad Line, Bombay India* hangs in the New York home of Tagore (above). Facing page: *Beyond the Blue*, a mixed media work created in 2011 by Jane Lee.

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Curating is like a symphony. The same composition has different resonances when produced under different conductors. The same goes for curating. Based on his ability, experiences, refinement and knowledge, every curator is going

to create a visual narrative that is unique to him. Every curator would represent the same selection of art differently. There is no right or wrong way, but there is definitely an effective way to get the overarching idea across clearly.

The exposure to art in Asia and the West is very different. In the context of modern art, the West had galleries, museums and private collectors as early as the 1800s. In Asia, people didn't have the same sense of collection at that time. But suddenly, they are doing it here. What the West did in 100 years, Asia is trying to achieve in 20. The learning curve here is almost vertical. That's why Asian art is considered postmodern and not modern.

The art I hang on the walls at home never remain there permanently. At the moment, the first thing you see once you enter my home in New York is a photograph by Sebastiao Salgado. In the living room is a piece from the waterfall series by Japanese artist Hiroshi Senju. ■



Illustration MARINA NOVIKOVA Photo SEBASTIAO SALGADO/AMAZONAS IMAGES