

## CITY Khaleej Times TIMES

Friday, March 9, 2007

Vol. 5, Issue 326



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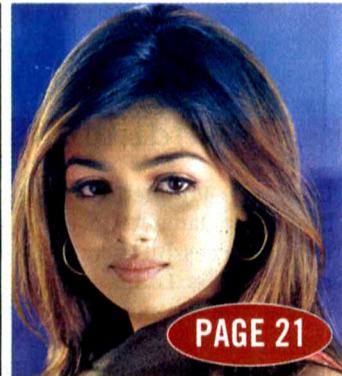
**Dubai has the pulse for art**  
Sundaram Tagore on how the city can be one of the world's most powerful art centres



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# 'I CAN BE YOUNG AND STUPID TOO'

Josh Groban talks about growing as an artist, his African experience and guilty pleasures



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## Fantasia moves out of the past lane

**Singer says that by focusing on her work she's able to keep herself from being subsumed by celebrity**

I'm always going to be the same old country, old loud-talking, chitlin-eating, High Point, N.C. little girl," Fantasia Barrino says.

But the truth is that she's been much more than that since May 2004.

Barrino is, of course, an "American Idol," winner of the reality show's third season over a talented field that also included Jennifer Hudson, Oscar winner for "Dreamgirls." She scored a platinum album with her debut, "Free Yourself" (2004), and in December her second album, "Fantasia," debuted at No. 19 on the Billboard 200 chart. As if that weren't

enough, she has a collection of hit singles such as "I Believe" (2004), "Baby Mama" (2005) and "It's All Good" (2005), as well as a successful autobiography that became a television movie, with herself as star. "I Believe" also made her the first performer ever to debut at No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100 with her inaugural single.

That's a long way from noshing on chitlins in the Tar Heel State, but Barrino says that by focusing on her work she's able to keep herself from being subsumed by celebrity

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# 'Dubai needs to identify the

City Times talks to Oxford-educated art historian and gallery owner Sundaram Tagore, who came this week to Dubai about how the UAE can become one of the world's most powerful art centres

ANNA SHEN  
Contributor

GLOBALISATION HAS created unprecedented change in the art world. Emerging economic superpowers around the world have unleashed an avalanche of new dynamic markets for art, as countries and individuals are purchasing art in record numbers. Case in point: Dubai, where the first ever Gulf Art Fair kicked off yesterday.

With over forty galleries and hundreds of notable contemporary works from around the world, the event is a first ever. Yet how can Dubai become one of the world's great art centres and establish its cultural legacy? City Times talks to Oxford-educated

art historian and gallery owner Sundaram Tagore, who came this week to Dubai about how the UAE can become one of the world's most powerful art centres, to rival already established markets, such as London, New York, Tokyo and Paris. While he is here to promote 12 of his artists, all who are involved in intercultural dialogue, what he is most fascinated by is seeing Dubai develop its cultural legacy. He is well-suited to foresee the future, considering a long background as a serious intellectual and gallerist.

He has advised and worked at some of the world's largest cultural institutions, including the Pace Wildenstein gallery in NYC, where he was a



Sundaram Tagore discusses matters of art with connoisseur

director; the Museum of Modern Art; the United Nations, in Venice for the Guggenheim Foundation, and in NYC for the Metropolitan Museum. His doctoral work was in modern art at Oxford University in England.

In 2000, Tagore established his gallery in NYC's Chelsea, the world's larg-

est art district which contains over 326 galleries. He comes from a long lineage of artists, poets, writers, who were, as he calls them, 'staunch internationalists'. In fact, his great grandfather Rabindranath Tagore was the first non-westerner to win the Nobel Prize. History books are littered with his accounts of friendships with Albert Einstein, Bernard Shaw, and Romain Rolland. In

that is an incubator for the development of new ideas, especially aesthetic ones. These ideas are for creation, promotion and dissemination. Large numbers of international, business and artistic leaders - the cognoscenti - are watching the development of Dubai and they all want

**How can Dubai develop and position itself as a global player in terms of art and culture?**

First, Dubai needs to identify the right thinkers of culture. This is not some nebulous thing; it is very methodical. How do you identify who is credible and expert enough to develop your cultural institutions?

## 'Dubai is at the crossroads of east and west, and it is taking charge as one of the great centres of commerce, tourism, and art'

est art district which contains over 326 galleries. He comes from a long lineage of artists, poets, writers,

1902, Rabindranath established Vishwa Baharati or World University near Calcutta, which became an epicentre for international dialogue and where east still meets west today. It is fitting that 45-year-old Tagore would descend upon Dubai, with its intercultural mix, to extend the dialogue where his ancestors left off.

**Why did you come to the Dubai Art Fair?**

I am intrigued by Dubai. It's fascinating, the mix of cultures is unique and the city is poised to become the one great centres of art because it possesses a vibrant, cosmopolitan and international population

to play a role in this emerging artistic atmosphere of ideas.

**But is it enough for Dubai's leaders to just have ideas?**

No. Put simply, in the modern world ideas cost money. However, Dubai and Abu Dhabi are putting billions of dollars into this effort that includes partnerships with the Louvre Museum, the Guggenheim, and others. Naturally, being placed with cultural institutions of stature will continue to draw a large number of people with serious art backgrounds and experience in the field of culture. Thus, the industry in Dubai should develop very quickly.

Immediately, Dubai should look at the curriculum vitae - which galleries have candidates worked for, but equally important is someone who embodies the spirit of Dubai, which is very cross-cultural. Thus, someone with cross-cultural background, with professional and personal experience in east and west, since this is what Dubai is. Someone who is a global citizen, because Dubai's population is global. The person must relate to their audience and their artistic needs.

**Why is Dubai an important place geographically? How can the arts community serve Dubai?**



Playing to the gallery: Tagore mesmerises another art lover with his knowledge of art

# right thinkers of culture'

Dubai is at the crossroads of east and west, and it is taking charge as one of the great centres of commerce, tourism, and art. It is proactively taking the helm - and that is impressive. Everyone wants to be a part of Dubai's activity because the UAE is embracing the rest of the world, and the arts and culture community wants to be a part of it.

## How can the artistic community contribute to Dubai's development?

The world arts community is always looking for a venue and if it happens to be a new venue there is more excitement, so people are not jaded. Excessive amounts of culture already exist in New York, Tokyo, London - this is high culture that is promoted, disseminated and consumed. Dubai is a new space and it is very exciting to open up the possibilities of new ideas and vital for interesting ideas to take place and blossom. Old established



Dubai has firmly established itself firmly on the global art canvas, believes Tagore

**'Running a gallery is both complex and complicated to create - because it has to have a spiritual and intellectual mission. It's a propelling forward to follow - that means every day, we must convert one individual to that mission'**

art stomping grounds like NY, London, or Paris are already defined in terms of artistic terrain and structure that can be predictable

## How can you see art blossoming in Dubai?

For art to grow here, it requires new terrain and space to create new kinds of artistic forms - space in terms of geography and in terms of cultural mindset. Dubai is a crossroads at east and west and is ideal in engaging people who are more globally-placed and engaged as opposed to being too eastern or too western.

## Are you talking about you? Is your gallery engaged in east and west?

Well, I guess so - though I was just thinking in general terms. However, the Sundaram Tagore gallery from its inception has devoted itself to examining the confluence of cultures - and the ideas of tradition versus modernity. We promote artists that are involved in examining cultures other than their own - it makes for an interesting mix. We also want to help shape intercultural and international artistic dialogue, and we do that by hosting non-profit events of other art forms, such as poetry, dance, literature, and film. I also established a not for profit organisation named the Tagore Foundation International, which

works to educate children in developing countries, especially girls.

## Has anything like this been done before?

Not really. We are extremely mission-driven and every artist and activity we promote must have this kind of idea of cross-cultural understanding and dialogue. If cultures don't speak to each other, they continue to misunderstand. In the early days, as long as 15 years ago, I was interested in bringing forth an artistic idea that had to do with the global community and a world.

In the mid 1990s, I was involved in an organisation called Art for the World. Most people would

ask, "What does it mean, this world art?" Today, people understand what this means with the ever-present buzz of globalisation.

## Who is your inspiration?

Larry Darell, the character in the book *Razor's Edge*. He was someone who was a rebel without being a rebel - in his heart he is a rebel but also knew how to fit in. He is a 'quiet rebel'.

## How have you defined your life?

I have defined it by the way I want to lead and it hasn't always been easy because I haven't taken a conventional route. Breaking new ground takes enormous effort and conversion of others to our gallery's mission. Running a gallery is not about slapping a painting on a wall. Boutique galleries are in excess.

However, running a gallery is both complex and complicated to create - because it has to have a spiritual and intellectual mission. It's a propelling forward to follow - that means every day, we must convert one individual to

that mission. One by one, month by month, year by year, you are converting people. Then there is a tipping point, through osmosis, the gallery gains a public trust and that this is what its about. Or else it's a

**'This is the first time that the roster of galleries are truly from all over the world - not just west, but from east too. Once people arrive, they should just look and absorb'**

brick and mortar job and there is not a solid foundation.

## Who is your favourite artist?

Difficult to say. That could get me in trouble. I have many from the Lascaux and Ajanta cave paintings to Munch to Pollack and beyond. My great grandfa-

ther Rabindranath too, not because he was a relative but because his work has a maverick quality and is powerful - haunting images of people full of deep emotions, with moody, dark, silhouetted forms - power that strikes you directly in the heart and eyes. Luckily I own quite a few - in case I get into trouble someday.

## What advice do you have for people attending the Gulf Art Fair?

Be excited, really excited. This is the first time that the roster of galleries are truly from all over the world - not just west, but from east too. Once people arrive, they should just look and absorb. Looking is different from hearing - keep the eyes open. Art is about looking and most people forget that. If they look, the quality becomes obvious. I would say 70 per cent of the world consists of the visual. Without your sight you'd have nothing.

## Is there a way to avoid buying bad art?

The art fair has gone through vetting process, only galleries were allowed in if they were of a certain standard. Also, assessing quality comes through

education and experience and being around people who have certain understanding of aesthetics. Your education and the education of those around you is key. Don't fall victim to buzzwords that are more about marketing and trends rather than the most important thing, which is art that endures. ■