

the pocket arts guide

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Contents

TPAG October 2011 / Issue 24



14 IN THE FRAME

Roberto Cortázar:
Contemporary Humanist



22 FEATURE

Indonesian Eye:
New Perspectives



28 ART LANDS

INDIA: Changing Faces



38 GLIMPSE

Deadlocked



34 STORIES

IN LIGHT

Painting on Shadows

4 EDITOR'S LETTER

8 ART WIRE

Galleries updates and events

42 PORTFOLIO: MARKET VOICES

Sundaram Tagore: Tradition and Transcendence

48 PORTFOLIO: COLLECTORS

New China Hands:
Art market boosted by mainland Chinese buyers



50 PORTFOLIO: BUSINESS MODEL

Belgravia Gallery: Etching out a niche

53 SPACE

Simone Boon: Shaping the Flow

57 MAP

Art Galleries in Singapore

63 DIRECTORY LISTING

68 CLASSIFIED

Sundaram Tagore: Tradition and Transcendence.

By Remo Notarianni

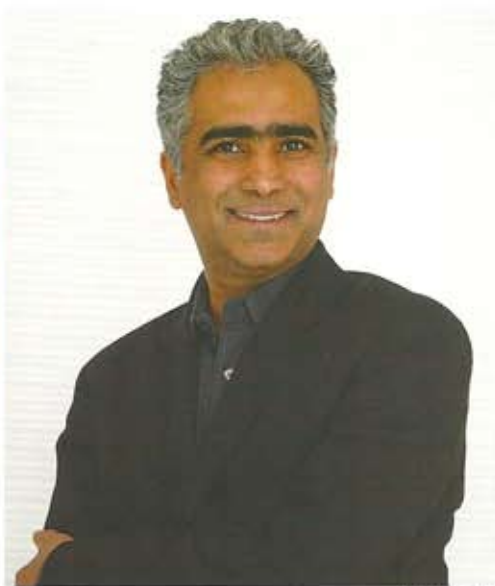


Madame Adelaide Robert Polshoff, Cabinetintérieur de Madame Adélaïde, (56 C), Chateau de Versailles, France, 1986, archival inkjet print, 33 x 43 inches.

"We are encircling both Western and Eastern artists who bring in that dialogue between figuration and abstraction."
– Sundaram Tagore



Sundaram Tagore Gallery, Hong Kong



Sundaram Tagore

Sundaram Tagore Gallery has supported Fine Art Asia since the fair started in 2006. It has branches in Hong Kong, New York and Beverley Hills. The gallery specialises in artwork that interweaves the modern, the cultural and the abstract. TPAG talked to founder Sundaram Tagore on the importance of the gallery at the fair and its enduring role in the context of a changing art world.

TPAG: How has Sundaram Tagore appealed in Asia?

I established the first gallery in SoHo in New York in 2000. From the very beginning, Sundaram Tagore Galleries devoted itself to examining the exchange of ideas between Western and non-Western cultures. The galleries focus on developing exhibitions and hosting not-for-

profit events that engage in spiritual, social and aesthetic dialogues. In a world where communication is instant and cultures are colliding and melding as never before, the goal is to provide venues for art that transcend boundaries of all sorts. With alliances across the globe, their interest in cross-cultural exchange extends beyond the visual arts into many other disciplines.

TPAG: What is the importance of Fine Art Asia and the significance of the work at the fair?

Sundaram Tagore Galleries is extremely mission-driven and hence highlights artists of cross-cultural values. As we are in Asia, it is important to recognise that there is a great tradition, and that the past is of high relevance to the present artistic production, i.e., an artist working today

will incorporate and engage in the refined aesthetic training and philosophy of more than 6,000 years in order to make his work valid as contemporary art. In the West, however, because of Modernism and the idea of rejection, there was a break from the past. Artistic activities hence are more post-modern in value in Asia than in the West since Asian works are overarching the worlds of both tradition and modernity. Therefore, presenting contemporary art in the context of antiquities is valid and necessary at times.

TPAG: Sundaram Tagore's artists seem to be defined by a universal abstract style that communicates beyond the figurative. Is that part of the vision?

Sundaram Tagore Galleries is devoted to examining an exchange of ideas between Western and non-Western cultures. We focus on developing exhibitions that engage in spiritual, social and aesthetic dialogues. We only want to present art that is enduring and universal. Initially, it was the universal style and language that was the reason for my growing towards Abstract arts. But in Asia, figural art is tantamount to being the basis of culture, and the human figure is the foundation of most Asian cultures and arts. It would be wrong to deny that, so we are encircling both Western and Eastern artists who bring in that dialogue between figuration and abstraction. They speak a language much more universal and still main-

tain their roots, which gives them their validity.

TPAG: What do you think is driving art sales in Asia and globally at the moment?

Art has been in existence for 60,000 years, since the earliest cave paintings, and will continue to exist as a spiritual diet. In addition to that point of view, economies in the Asian context are growing fast and Asian countries are rapidly developing and changing and along with that, a new taste for acquiring contemporary art has developed. A certain segment of people are still buying art for spiritual purposes. Those are the most cultivated of all and the ones we are looking for as our clients. However, we cannot deny the fact that new collectors are people who have success in their business and have started collecting art, but they are more interested in collecting art as an investment opportunity. Generally, we do not encourage that part of the story, we are not speculating with our artists.

TPAG: Do you think that it is good to buy art for investment purposes?

The concept of collecting art has developed differently in Asia and the West. The West has had a head start of over 200 years of serious collecting. However, in the East, the collecting of contemporary art is more recent. When collectors in the West decide to spend millions of dollars, they are very careful about



Sundaram Tagore Group Show Hong Kong



Sebastiao Salgado, The Global Photographer install, Sundaram Tagore Gallery Hong Kong



Hiroshi Senju Show 2008, Sundaram Tagore, New York.

Photos: Sundaram Tagore

the artist they choose. These collectors are both educated and acculturated in the art context and they tend to buy art they like and not necessarily for investment reasons. In Asia, it feels that people are more interested in talking about art as a commodity although that is quickly changing and the aesthetic reasoning is coming to the front in their needs for acquisition.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of Hong Kong and Singapore as art markets?

Obviously, the current advantages of Hong Kong are that it is Asia's world city with a perfect transportation network, low taxes, free trade, and a great pool of potential clients. The disadvantage may be that Hong

Kong is becoming oversaturated. It has to rise to the challenge of being a chosen destination for many international and local galleries, for art collectors, and for art aficionados. There is the risk of having too many galleries in a small place, and the system could implode. We need to hope that Hong Kong will develop further into an internationally renowned and important artistic center as we were among the first ones who helped initiating this process.

Hong Kong is becoming more a consumer center whereas I have the feeling that Singapore is becoming more and more of a production center. Whether this is true or not and whether both cities are able to fulfill these, their aspirations or not, only time will tell.