



View of the booths at the India Art Summit 2011, Pragati Maidan, January 20–23, New Delhi.



Homi Bhabha and Anish Kapoor at the Speakers' Forum.

Art Dekho

India Art Summit 2011, the subcontinent's most ambitious art fair, attracted over a lakh visitors and displayed a wide array of classical and cutting-edge Indian and international art. Its monumental scale, however, left some gallerists overwhelmed, reports **Meera Menezes**.

WHILE HIS WORKS WERE THE CYNOSURE OF ALL EYES AT THE LAST SUMMIT, THIS TIME the star was there in person. Anish Kapoor's presence was certainly one of the highlights of the India Art Summit 2011 – whether in conversation with cultural theorist Homi Bhabha at the Speakers' Forum, or giving away the ŠKODA Prize at one of the Summit's chief collateral events. Held from the 20th to the 23rd of January at Delhi's fairground, Pragati Maidan, the third edition of the Summit surpassed its

organizers' wildest expectations. As director Neha Kirpal put it, "The public response was wonderful. We had over one lakh people visit the fair over the weekend. What was different from last year was that we had several international museums represented and a significant number of international collectors."

Certainly, the art fair, the only one of its kind in the subcontinent as far as its scale is concerned, was more ambitious in scope as the number of participating galleries had increased and there was more exhibition space than last year. Foreign participants, this time around, had more than doubled to 34; many of them played it safe, hedging their bets by showcasing works by European Moderns like Picasso, Braque, Miro and Chagall. Judging by the number of visitors who thronged their stalls, it was apparent that they had succeeded in slaking the thirst of many viewers. Duesseldorf-based Beck and Eggeling and Willem Baars Projects from The Netherlands threw in a mix of Indian artists for good measure – the former concentrated on upcoming artists like Viveek Sharma, Sonia Mehra Chawla and Desmond Lazaro, while the latter exhibited paintings by more established names like Jogen Chowdhury and S. H. Raza. Lisson Gallery showed Anish Kapoor and Julian Opie yet again, but also introduced the works of renowned ceramist Tony Cragg as well as Jason Martin's luscious pigment works.

Participating in the Summit for the first time, Lahore-based Grey Noise's booth definitely stood out both for its sensibility and the quality of its works. Umer Butt showed the works of ten artists on a rotating basis over four days and was keen to change the perception of Pakistani art in India. His focus was on lesser-known conceptual and minimalist works. Among the paintings on display were two exquisite series by Lala Rukh, both of which were snapped up by eager Indian and foreign collectors. Another first time participant, Experimenter from Kolkata, showcased works by artists from India as well as overseas, including the Raqs Media Collective, Bangladeshi artist Naeem Mohaiemen, Pakistani artists Bani Abidi and Mehreen Murtaza and Turner prize nominee The Otolith Group.

The Summit certainly gave visitors the chance to view a broad swathe of Indian art ranging from the ubiquitous Souzas and Razas to recent video art. Artist couple Subodh Gupta and Bharti Kher's works coincidentally dialogued with each other as their respective galleries Nature Morte and GALLERYSKÉ were on either side of the same aisle. Ritesh Meshram's work at Chemould Prescott Road's booth consisted of 'a moving laboratory' where a slow dance of discs revealed fragile glass objects seemingly created from the twisted beakers hanging above them. Project 88's booth shone with Raqs Media Collective's bulb work *Revoltage* and Shreyas Karle's fine drawings.

Vadehra Art Gallery dedicated a large part of its space to Shilpa Gupta's installation *Singing Cloud*. The artist who initially had misgivings about participating later changed her mind. Shrine Empire Gallery introduced some interesting new artists, namely, Fariba S. Alam and Samanta Batra Mehta. While Volte Gallery's presentation focused on videos by Ranbir Kaleka, Latitude 28 had an attractive display with works by young artists like Prajjwal Choudhury and Dilip Chobisa. Some galleries like Lakeeren and Exhibit 320 hosted shows curated by Arshiya Lokhandwala and Shaheen Merali respectively.

This year too, the Husain issue created a small stir. Delhi Art Gallery, which had put up works by the veteran artist, had to hurriedly take them down following threats. However, after assurances by the government and the Delhi Police, the works were up again, albeit under heavy protection.

Besides the galleries, there was also an Art Store for art-related merchandise, a video lounge, and FICA's innovative Project FeedStation by Abhishek Hazra, which allowed people to blog about the fair *from the fair*. The Summit also served as a platform for several book launches and had a special screening of films by Ebrahim Alkazi. The sculpture park, however, came in for a great deal of criticism. The installations by Anjum Singh and Prajakta Potnis, may have worked in a gallery space, but were completely lost on the fairgrounds.

This year there were a number of heavyweights at the Speakers' Forum, which featured renowned Indian and international curators, art theoreticians, writers and museum directors. The gamut of topics ranged from 'Indian art on the international art circuit' to 'The role of the media – art writing and criticism'. Interactive sessions with artists were perhaps the most engrossing; conceptual artist Dan Graham, for instance, gave an overview of his practice in conversation with Hou Hanru of the San Francisco Art Institute. Though the organizers this year had reduced the 'price' of each session, the entry fee was still prohibitive for art students.

A host of collateral events during the four-day Summit ensured that there was a lot on offer even after closing hours. Some of the highlights were the stunning exhibition of V.S. Gaitonde's works by auction house Saffronart, the Khoj Marathon with uber-curator Hans Ulrich Obrist's interactions with some of India's leading intellectuals, the glittering ceremony for The Škoda Prize which was won by Mithu Sen, and artistic interventions by Vishal K. Dar and Asim Waqif at an abandoned house in Jor Bagh in South Delhi.

While the fair met with an enthusiastic response, there were several areas that gave the galleries cause for concern. Peter Nagy of Gallery Nature Morte opined, "I do think the organizers are being overly ambitious about the fair and need to scale it back a bit so as to provide a better quality of experience for everyone concerned, both the audience and the exhibitors". Abhay Maskara of Gallery Maskara felt that there needed to be "more editing in terms of who comes in, who shows and how the fair is managed," referring to the need for clearly demarcated business and public hours. This point was addressed by Neha Kirpal who said, "To provide as much exposure as possible, we have decided to extend the art fair by one more day from next year



Mansoor Ali. *Dance of Democracy II*. Wood. 200" x 96" x 96". 2010. Supported by Gallery Maskara. Displayed at the Sculpture Park, India Art Summit 2011.

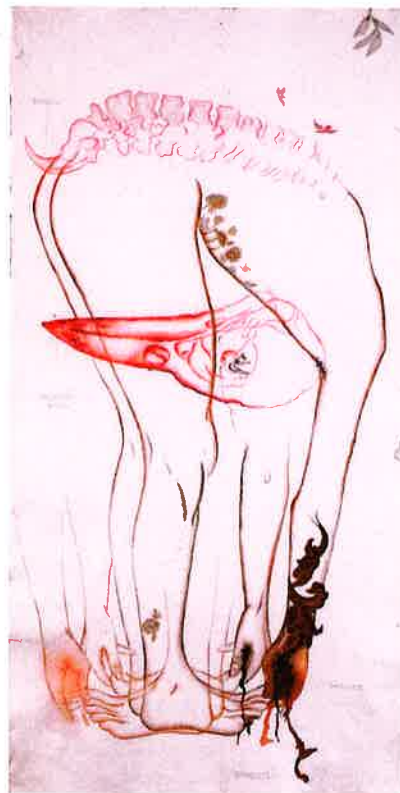
onwards and we will have separate business hours for collectors each day"

For the foreign participants the issue of customs duties and the lack of clarity on government procedures was a sore point. Nina Miall of Haunch of Venison gallery, London, was forthright about what it would take for more foreign participation, "In order for international galleries to be interested to come, they need to feel confident that the big Indian collectors collect international art". This view was also echoed by Beck and Eggeling's Katja Ott.

Deepak Talwar of Talwar Gallery, however, summed up the general sentiment succinctly: "The summit has become *the* event, especially for people coming from abroad. The organizers are on a steep learning curve and I hope they continue on that curve."



While Mithu Sen was delighted to receive The ŠKODA Prize 2010, the “real prize”, she said, “was viewers’ appreciation”.



Mithu Sen. *Twist Your Pelvis, Scratch Where It Itches*. Mixed media on custom-made, handmade acid-free paper. 83” x 42”. 2009.

The jury initially consisted of Tasneem Mehta, Director, Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum, Mumbai; Rajshree Pathy, well known collector, businesswoman and philanthropist; and Dr. Kavita Singh, Associate Professor, School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi. For the selection of the winner, two other jury members joined the panel, namely, Andrea Rose, Director of Visual Arts at the British Council and Marianne Burki, Head of the Visual Arts at the Swiss Arts Council. Respected art critic and former Editor of *ART India*, Girish Shahane, was a special consultant to the project. Said Tasneem Mehta, “The response from the art community was very good. The Prize will encourage artists to create a strong body of work”.

On A Fast Track

Mithu Sen’s drawing-and-sound installations, which explore male sexuality and psyche, win her The ŠKODA Prize 2010, informs Meera Menezes.

BLACK CANDY WON IT FOR MITHU SEN. AT A SPECTACULAR EVENT AT NEW DELHI’S TAJ PALACE, the artist was declared the winner of The ŠKODA Prize for the year 2009-2010. Nudging past fellow competitors Alwar Balasubramaniam and Kiran Subbaiah, Sen was handed the trophy by none other than celebrity artist Anish Kapoor.

The ŠKODA Prize is already being billed as India’s most prestigious art award. A brainchild of 70 Event Media Group, India, and ŠKODA Auto India, the award, which includes a sum of 10 lakh rupees, aims at recognising talent in Indian artists under the age of 45. Each artist was judged on the basis of her/his solo exhibitions or work presentations in the year preceding the award. Said Martin Da Costa, CEO, 70 Event Media Group, “The ŠKODA Prize really exceeded our greatest expectations. We had felt it would take some years to embed itself into the consciousness of the art community. However, it has become part of the fabric of Indian Contemporary Art in its very first year”.

Black Candy, mounted at Chemould Prescott Road, Mumbai, consisted of large-scale drawings in which Sen explored male sexuality through various narratives. Accompanying the rather explicit paintings were sound installations, which lent another dimension to the works. This exhibition edged past Balasubramaniam’s minimalist yet powerful solo (*IN*)*Between* at Talwar Gallery and Kiran Subbaiah’s solo *Sleepwalker Daydream* at Chatterjee & Lal.

The jury met in Mumbai and Delhi to finalise the top 20 artists from a total of 169 entries. Among them were Shine Shivan for his show *Sperm Weaver*, Hemali Bhuta for *The Hangover of Agarlum*, Atul Bhalla for *...In Another Sweat*, N. S. Harsha for *Cultural Debris* and Jagannath Panda for *The Action of Nowhere*.

Talking about her award-winning show, Mithu Sen said, “I gave my heart to make it”. About the award ceremony, she added, “The day was wonderful as I could share it with my parents... it was a special gift! The prize is a bonus for my practice as I can now use the money in my next venture.”