



MASTERPIECES

OF INDIAN MODERN ART

—•— ❧ EDITION II ❧ —•—



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OF INDIAN MODERN ART

← EDITION II →

JANUARY 2017

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DAG
MODERN

11 Hauz Khas Village, New Delhi 110016, India

Tel: +91 11 46005300 • Email: delhi@dagmodern.com

58, Dr. V. B. Gandhi Marg

Kala Ghoda, Fort, Mumbai 400001, India

Tel: +91 22 4922270 • Email: mumbai@dagmodern.com

The Fuller Building

41 East 57 Street, Suite 708, New York, NY 10022

Tel: +1 212-457-9037 • Email: newyork@dagmodern.com

Website: www.dagmodern.com

PROJECT EDITOR: Kishore Singh

EXECUTIVE EDITOR: Shruti Parthasarathy

PRODUCTION EDITOR: Abhilasha Ojha

RESEARCH COORDINATOR: Poonam Baid

RESEARCH: Kritika Kumari, Simer Dhingra, Supriya Consul, Chandrika Acharya,

Senjuti Mukherjee, Shatadeep Maitra, Lakshmi Krishnakumar

PHOTOGRAPHY OF ARTWORKS: Durgapada Chowdhury, Saurabh Khandewal

DESIGN: Durgapada Chowdhury

PRINT: Archana Advertising Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi

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ISBN: 978-93-81217-63-4

Front cover: F. N. Souza, *Man and Woman Laughing*, Oil on Masonite board, 1957

Back cover: K. S. Kulkarni, *Untitled*, Oil on canvas, 1980s

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Note from the Director

WE CAN OWN THE ART, BUT CAN WE SHARE IT TOO?

As I sit down to write this, I cannot help but wonder how many works of modern art – and because of their inclusion in this volume, pre-modern art – India has produced over approximately a century-and-a-half. Indian artists have built a reputation for assimilation, quality and for being prolific, thereby contributing hundreds of thousands of works that might be included in such a discourse. But as almost everyone will agree, a very minor percentage of those works, good or excellent, would qualify as masterpieces. And of those, too many, if not most, hang in museums or are in permanent or family collections that will never be seen outside of the walls where they are housed. I would wager that a large number have probably been lost due to neglect and apathy. Think now of how many artists India has produced, of whom even the best have disappeared from public gaze because of unsatisfactory museum infrastructure, and a lack of knowledge, documentation and enthusiasm.

Part of our attempt has always been to reintroduce those artists and bring them back into mainstream circulation and, therefore, the collectors' fold. But merely rediscovering old masters is not enough reason for their inclusion in our rigorous search when it comes to identifying masterpieces. While such works of art need to necessarily be seen from the point of view of the milieu and time during which they were created, they must also pass the test of longevity purveyed through an unrelenting eye. Do the works have only emotive appeal? Were they catalysts as harbingers of change? Were they top of their class?

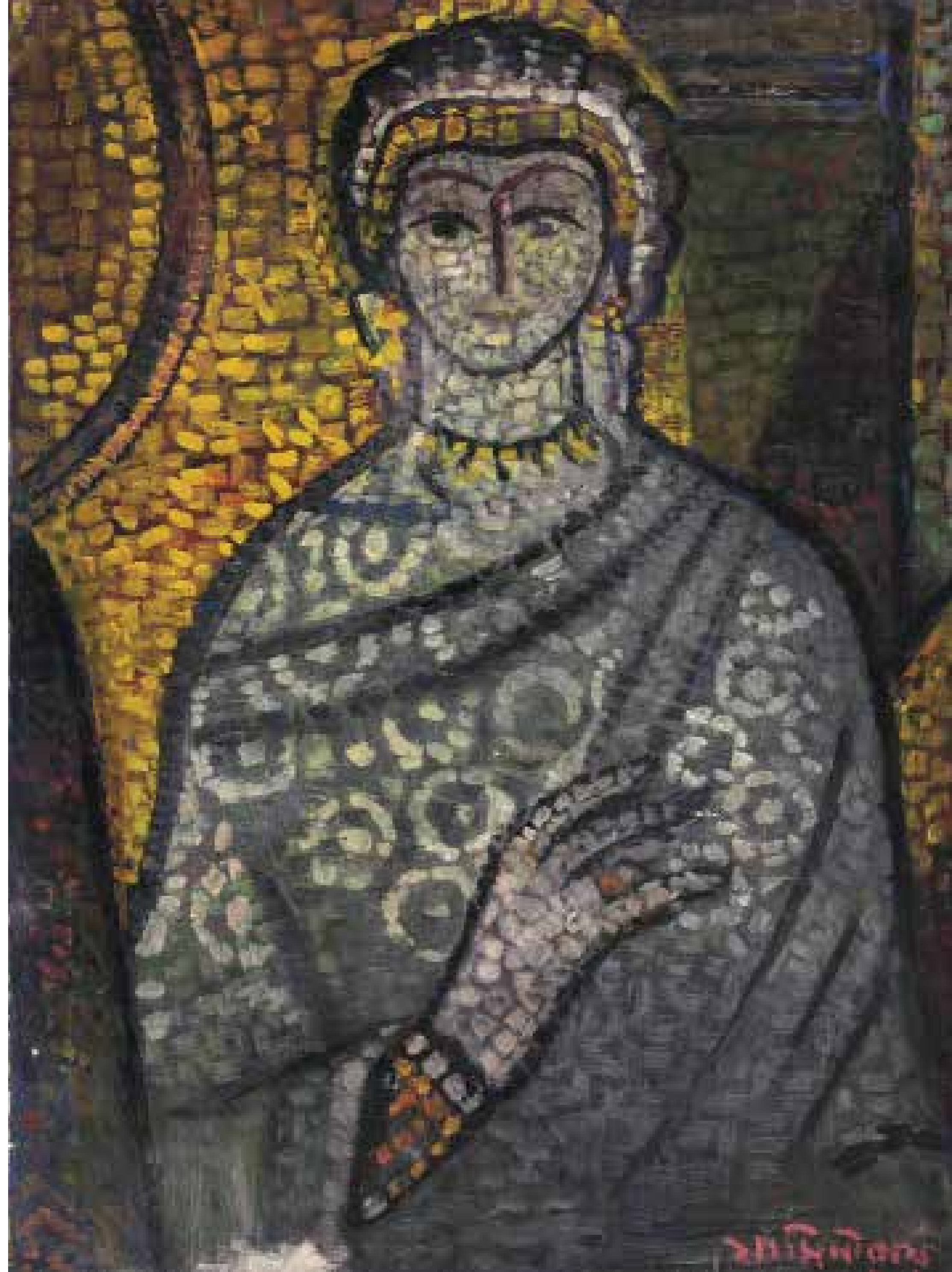
Art requires great sweeps of imagination, but it also needs a boldness to assert one's authority and point of view that may not serve popular opinion. In this smorgasbord before you, there are works and artists you will acknowledge with ease, others you might hesitate to concede, and still others you might reject. That is your subjective conditioning and opinion. In our selection, we have had to force ourselves to be wholly objective. Therefore, some of the inclusions might appear argumentative, but in our view, are necessary. But most of all, what we have enjoyed, and we hope you will too, is the addition of several new artists to the fold whose scope of work represented here will, we hope, blow you away for its ingenuity and confidence, as it did us.

These are not emerging artists but those who we have known, either personally or through their work, but who have remained under the radar for some reason or other. It is this exciting mosaic of Indian art and its entrapments that we have captured here with a sense of scholarly thrill and discovery, one which we hope will reinvigorate your senses and your instincts and help all of us look anew at the treasures our artistic environment has to offer us.

When we undertook to showcase *Masterpieces of Indian Modern Art* last year, I had wagered that such a selection of rare works had never before been captured in any single book, or exhibition, and might never again be replicated. I am humbled, therefore, and am happy to eat my own words, with this presentation which, I wager, surprises even my own imagination and that of my research team. Here are works that soar, that fly free of any descriptive encumbrance. They are stellar in more ways than we can imagine. A task that I set out on with some trepidation has, therefore, turned into one of exhilaration. These are not my rewards, or yours, but those our artists have bequeathed us. I hope we, in turn, do them proud.

The lead essay in the book looks at collecting in India (*Museums, Collectors, Whims, Trends*) from the view of sharing these treasures with the public by way of house museums or private museums. This is still in its infancy in India, especially when compared with countries such as South Korea, which takes the international lead with forty-five private museums. Why are we in India still loathe to share what is, after all, a national legacy, with those less privileged than us when it comes to ownership of art? Appreciation and connoisseurship are not dependent on wealth alone, and we all acknowledge, given institutional ennui, that it is incumbent upon each of us to create an environment of sensitivity and knowledge around the culture of art viewership. Some strides have been taken in this direction, but I remain optimistic that over the next years, more bravehearts will step forward to share their collections with the public at large. Will some of the works we see here find their way into these collections? There's only one way we'll know. Keep looking.

— ASHISH ANAND



COLLECTORS, MUSEUMS, WHIMS, TRENDS

India's art collecting history may be recent and limited, but it could change if the record of other countries is any example

KISHORE SINGH

'Buy art, build a museum, put your name on it, let people in for free. That's as close as you can get to immortality'
– Damien Hirst

How do private museums collect art (and what do they collect)? Randomly, for most part, analysts or even curators might say. This is usually true of the private museums that have become repositories of art in recent years, and make news for their exhibitions and acquisitions, as opposed to the moribund approach in government institutions where limited funds and bureaucratic procedures take the excitement out of seminal collecting.

It was not always like this, of course, and the National Gallery of Modern Art would have been a very different place if it had not been bequeathed significant works such as those by the artist Amrita Sher-Gil, whose paintings were gifted to the museum by her father Sardar Umrao Singh, or sold (and therefore acquired through) her husband, Dr. Victor Egan. Institutions at their genesis are vastly more open to acquisition bequests, and Jawaharlal Nehru's personal interest in artists and their work must have been responsible, in part, for some of its more significant choices and sizeable collections. Its choice of director in Dr. Hermann Goetz would have been equally illustrious; he had built a formidable reputation as the director of the Baroda Museum. Even though that too was captive to princely whims, its collection of Raja Ravi Varma paintings alone is reason for its reputation at the time, something it – and, sadly, others of its ilk have not sustained or continued to build over time. Later directors at the National Gallery of Modern Art had fewer liberties when it came to selections or acquisition of art, little or no funding to exercise muscle with, and were held ransom to a procedures manual which makes it nigh impossible for anyone to donate works of art or fund collections.

Private museums, of course, are not subject to such limitations. Their founders have the liberty to follow

their eyes and their heart as long as they have the funds to spread such bounty. Yet, there is a difference in collecting personally versus building a museum (rather than a museum-like) collection. Here, it's important to draw a distinction. The West has a tradition of the house museum, a collection that is open to the public but consists strictly of its owners' collection that they are willing to share with others, as in the case of Justin Art House Museum in Victoria, Australia, Sammlung Hoffman in Berlin, or Maison Particuliere in Brussels.

The Kiran Nadar Museum of Art in the Delhi NCR is not a house museum. It began as a personal collection that simply grew too large, but as it approaches its seventh year, there is no denying that it has showcased some defining exhibitions of art, including retrospectives of Nasreen Mohamedi, Rameshwar Broota, Himmat Shah and Jeram Patel. Now, here's the nub. What might have begun as a collection (and therefore an exhibition from the collection of) Kiran Nadar has been since supplemented with loans from other collectors and acquisitions to fill the voids in its exhibitions programme, thereby complementing the museum's acquisition policy which continues to be led by the promoter's vision. But tempered with the help of curators, its collection has now gathered heft, and will continue to play a significant role in the dissemination and understanding of Indian art.

The Piramal Foundation for Art may not have as extensive an annual budget as the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art but its collection too is based on the promoters' personal thrust, now guided externally by a director who shops for works based on importance, representation, rarity and historicity. Other private museums, still in the works, have yet to declare their policies. Collector Rajiv Savara's upcoming museum near Rishikesh has the makings of a house museum, since it will concentrate on displaying his own carefully curated and built collection of Indian modern art. Abhishek Poddar, who auctioned part of his collection to fund newer works and a museum in Bangalore, may



Copyright: Amrita Sher-Gil. Volumes 1 and 2:
A Self-Portrait in Letters and Writings



above: Jawaharlal Nehru, seen here at the inauguration of Group 1890's exhibition in 1963, took personal interest in artists and their work

left: Amrita Sher-Gil's father Umrao Singh (right in pic) gifted several of his daughter's paintings to National Gallery of Modern Art (top)



The West has had a tradition of the house museum: Some of the homes, including Justin Art House Museum in Australia (above), Maison Particuliere in Brussels (top left) and Samlung Hoffman in Berlin (left), have seen owners' collection open to the public



The works of V. S. Gaitonde (above) and Tyeb Mehta (right) have been gaining currency; getting higher in value and worth



end up displaying part of his own permanent collection for public display. But as a promoter and dealer (he runs the gallery Tasveer), chances are his museum too could extend to curating exhibitions with the help of other individuals and institutions. Other names in the collecting world that are sometimes pulled out of the hat as possible promoters of their own museums include Harsh Goenka, Sangeeta Jindal, Harsh Neotia and Rajshree Pathy.

So, how do museums collect? Perhaps the right question to ask is: How *should* museums collect? To an extent, this depends on the mandate and the funding provided to them by their promoters. Visitors will not queue up to view what may be standard fare, even with trophy names attached to the art. After all, a museum has the responsibility to showcase the best, most representative or unusual works of an artist's oeuvre. Some of the pointers that guide a museum's collection would therefore be the following:

Mandate: Motivated usually by the collector's personal interest, this is what drives a collection and also makes it unique. This may not drive the entire collection, but

it does get a basis from some degree of specialisation – pre-modern art, for instance, or the complete history of abstract art, or a representation of the Bengal School. Nor does the collection have to be only Indian; it could, arguably, choose to house works from the 1960s from around the world. Such specialisation is also useful for scholars to study and research, and makes it easier to attract curators looking for works on loan for exhibitions about those artists, or themes, or period.

Historicity: Works that have been catalytic, well published, researched and discussed are obviously an attraction and notch up both visibility for the work under discussion as well as the potential for visitors. It is usually difficult to acquire such works with chances being that they are in other permanent collections – which is also what makes the chase for them exciting for collectors.

Rarity: The rarer a work of art – whether by an artist who painted very little (such as V. S. Gaitonde, or Tyeb Mehta), or in a style not normally associated with the artist's oeuvre – make these finds attractive and add a quality to the collection of the

museum. The more such rare works in a collection, the higher its value and worth. It need hardly be said, however, that provenance in such works is of utmost importance.

Filling up gaps: Any collector's initial impetus is to spread out the collection across a vast spectrum. However, this will leave several gaps in between that become obvious to the discerning curator and, over time, to viewers. Therefore, collectors must expend considerable energy in bridging those gaps. Some of these may not be great works in themselves, but they become an important thread or link in the completion of a story that might otherwise remain incomplete and be thought the less important for it.

Magnets: There's no better way to say this than to insist that any collection must have its showstoppers. Viewers like the biggest and the best. These should include the greatest works executed by an artist, or the most expensive, career highlights, as well as those that have some historic relevance. Sometimes, size alone may be a virtue; however, a well-documented work is equally important, the Mona Lisa of a collection, so to

say, that may be the reason to draw in the initial crowd before they can be taken on a tour of the rest, which, of course, forms the core, or heart, of the collection. We may not necessarily be attracted to the Soumaya Museum in Mexico but for two reasons – it is promoted by the billionaire and world's richest man, Carlos Slim, and its lobby is home to Henri Rodin's *The Thinker*. Enough to arouse our curiosity...

Longevity: The life of a collection depends on its ability to survive time. Art must not just be the story of the times in which it was created but must, simultaneously, be timeless. Great works of art have this quality, but the more a collection is researched, discussed, shown, offered for scholarship, the more important it becomes.

However, few museums in these straitened times have lavish or even adequate funding, and what with committees that vet every aspirational purchase with an auditor's fine lens, getting approvals along with adequate finance has disempowered our institutions. A few, such as the renovated Bhau Daji Lad Museum in Mumbai, may have overcome these compelling circumstances with rigorous programming that includes a gallery kept



alive with a roster of exhibitions, a popular teaching course at the institute, and related events at its plaza, but for most part, government institutions suffer from a lack of grants and interest. The Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya (formerly known as the Prince of Wales Museum) too has a lively calendar of activities and has benefitted in part from donations of collections, most notably the Jehangir Nicholson collection.

Once in a while, governments do step in with projects – such as a large commissioned work from K. S. Radhakrishnan for his home state, Kerala, or Subodh Gupta's installation being acquired for the state capital, Patna. These, however, are a one-off kind and do not represent a larger schematic plan for showcasing works of visual art in public spaces.

A museum collection, besides the points enumerated above, is deserving of gravitas. Nor need a museum be large. The Neue Galerie in New York showcases a small collection, and needless to say Gustav Klimt's *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer* is its main draw. In Naggan, Himachal

Pradesh, Nicholas Roerich's paintings are enough to draw our attention – but if only it was also better lit, arranged and shown, with adequate effort being paid to providing information for the many tourists who pass through its portals and remain ignorant of the merits of the Russian artist who lived here for nineteen years and is labelled one of India's nine National Art Treasures.

Building a collection for a museum may be different from one that is personal and is driven by individual passion, but a serious collection too brings a certain responsibility with it, no matter that it is private and may not be intended for the edification of an art-viewing public. It is incumbent on any serious collector to indulge not only himself or herself but also the merits and artistic and intellectual worth of the collection itself. What may start as a purely personal indulgence has the ability to transcend both the collector's vision as well as time.

In that sense, it is important to try and understand how Indians collectors go about the business of collecting art. According to an ArtTactic art market report:

More than half (57 per cent) of South Asian galleries are located in India; 22 per cent of them are located in – surprise! – Pakistan. Two-thirds (64 per cent) of India's galleries are located in New Delhi and Mumbai, and a collective 29 per cent account for galleries in: Chennai, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Ahmedabad and Hyderabad (a gallery is included in this survey on the basis of having an active exhibition programme, distinguishing it from a mere art shop).

Of the two-thirds majority, 40 per cent are in New Delhi and 24 per cent in Mumbai. One-fifth of Indian (18 per cent) galleries have a representation or take exhibitions overseas. Market segmentation is growing, with classical art/antiques now contributing a significant portion to sales of art, doubling over its percentage in 2015; its 59 per cent leap has been at the cost of the market for moderns that saw a negative dip of 24 per cent (though this might be because of the poor post-2016 sales at the height of demonetisation).

Contemporary art remains less than 5 per cent based on auction estimates.

Auction sales of South Asian art increased 1.4 per cent in 2016 over 2015; the slow growth was in part the result of the Indian government's demonetisation drive that impacted major auctions at the tail-end of 2016; the total value of these auctions was \$96.1 million.

Other than the private sector and some media coverage in terms of record prices (which are held up as bizarre more than evaluative), what is providing a push to the domestic collecting climate? There is the India Art Fair (since 2008) which has created an annual event that has become the one point go-to destination for Indian art, though it has had to slough off ennui and flagging interest on account of a sluggish economy in its more recent editions. The Kochi-Muziris-Biennale (since 2012) is another biannual event that has captured global and domestic attention, and has become a showcase for that much abused segment of art struggling to stay afloat in a sea of negative sentiment: the contemporary. Both have spawned replicas, but nothing else with the same energy or bandwidth. There are other art festivals, of course, and audiences for them range from the enthusiastic to the disdainful, but just how far art remains from the



New records in auctions are being set by artists following international retrospectives – Bhupen Khakhar at Tate Modern, London (top), V. S. Gaitonde at the Guggenheim, New York (centre) and Nasreen Mohamedi at Met Breur, New York (above).

Facing page: Bhau Daji Lad Museum is a fine example of how a public museum should get a facelift, encouraging exciting programmes, exhibitions and facilitating courses in art.



The Frick Collection, New York, is known for its Old Master paintings, European sculpture and decor arts

mainstream can be summed up by the reaction I am frequently faced when, at social gatherings outside the minuscule art milieu, I am looked at with a mixture of curiosity and derision when I explain my working status in the field of art. 'You work in art?' might then be the shocked reaction of the wealthy but ill-informed to whom it suggests nothing more than craftspeople with a skill for drawing birds and hills.

Yet, the AXA art report posits a high confidence rating for 2017 with artists outside the earlier mainstream (M. F. Husain, F. N. Souza, S. H. Raza) reporting records at auctions and becoming new favourites following their outings at international retrospectives – V. S. Gaitonde at the Guggenheim, New York, in 2015 has taken him to the very top of the desirability quotient; and Nasreen Mohamedi at Met Breur, New York, and Bhupen Khakhar at Tate Modern, London, have improved their visibility and values. Going by that score, 2017 seems set to be the year for Nalini Malani with a show at Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, and a retrospective (the first for any Indian artist) at Centre Pompidou, Paris. However, outings at major art biennales and similar curatorial engagements also impact the way

artists are perceived and seen, so those at Documenta (Chittaprosad, Zainul Abedin, Sunil Janah) and at the Shanghai Biennale (Rabin Mondal, Vishal Dar, Navjot and six others), and the engagement of Indian curators such as Bose Krishnamachari (Yinchuan Biennale) or the Raqs Media Collective (Shanghai Biennale), co-curator Natasha Ginwala (Documenta) or the presence of curators such as Shanay Jhaveri (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) or Sona Datta (till recently with the Peabody Essex Museum, Massachusetts) serve to enhance Indian presence – and, therefore, legitimacy and visibility – of Indian art internationally. Jitish Kallat's recently opened retrospective at the National Gallery of Modern Art too should make a difference to his perception and market that has suffered, along with the contemporaries, since 2008.

Collectors are happy people – Johann Wolfgang van Goethe

Collectors have diverse tastes, and this shows in how they build their collections, largely leveraged through personal interests. Private museums ride on this subjective criterion. That in itself may not be a bad thing since personal collections, besides being quirky, establish their mettle with the nature of their collecting intensity and insight. Estee Lauder, for instance, collected only works of Cubist artists Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, Fernand Leger and Juan Gris. It made the collection the eye and voice of the history of modernism and gave it historical worth. Now, that seventy-eight works collection has been recently bequeathed to the Metropolitan Museum of Art by Leonard Lauder.

However, collectors who once aspired to donate all or part of their collections to US museums have now taken to opening their own museums; initially because museums seemed a tad difficult about accepting works, preferring donations by way of funds, and now because the Pension Protection Act of 2006 makes it difficult to enjoy a tax break for donating works to a museum while also being able to borrow them for hanging in their homes. In 2013, BMW published an art guide with some astonishing statistics in terms of private collections being turned into museums. Take a look at the numbers:

| Period | Private museums established |
|------------|-----------------------------|
| 1960s-'80s | 25 |

| | |
|---------|-----|
| 1990s | 25 |
| 2000-05 | 41 |
| 2006-13 | 125 |

While an eagerness to share and be applauded for it may be the reason why some convert their collections into museums, the personality behind the collection is often the reason for its shape and destiny. The private collection of the Guggenheims was put on display at its Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, introducing the public to works by artists Wassily Kandinsky and Rudolf Bauer, later housed in the unique Frank Lloyd Wright building. This may have been inspired by Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney's rebellion when her offer to donate her collection to the Met was not favourably received, as a result of which she simply opened her own museum. Its focus remains firmly on American art and artists. (More recently, Charles Saatchi offered a large collection of works to London's museums, and was similarly disdained.) The Frick Collection is everything such a museum should be – one of the most inspiring collections of art and sculpture, many of them masterpieces, housed in a historic building.

In Los Angeles, a spurt of private museums have recently come up. The Broad has free admissions to some jaw-dropping American art; the Frederick R. Weisman Art Foundation has a smaller collection but includes works by Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Rauschenberg, Ed Ruscha and Willem de Kooning, among others. Similar sentiments have guided the setting up of Pier 24 in San Francisco, Ceineros Fontanals Art Foundations and the Rubell Family Collection, both in Miami, Judd Foundation, Texas, the spectacular Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville, Arkansas, and the Fisher Landau Center for Art in Queens, New York.

We now know that of the approximately 400 private art museums in the world, most have been founded in the current century. These include Fondation Louis Vuitton in Paris that houses its chairman, Bernard Arnault's collection of art including works by Jean-Michel Basquiat, Gilbert and George, and Jeff Koons, among others; the Fondazione Prada which houses the Prada collection of twentieth and twenty-first century art in Milan; Belgian construction tycoon Walter Vanhaerents' collection of contemporary and pop art at his Vanhaerents Art Collection in Brussels;



Nalini Malani's retrospective at Centre Pompidou, Paris, in 2017, is the first for any Indian artist. Malani also has a show opening at Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, this year

Dasha Zhukova's Garage Museum of Contemporary Art in Moscow; Chinese billionaire Liu Yiqian's Long Museum where, if you're lucky, you might spot his recent purchase of Amedeo Modigliani's *Nu Couché*, though it's mostly devoted to Chinese art; or Turkey's Elgiz Museum which houses a collection of influential world as well as Turkish artists and was set up by Dr. Can Elgiz. Thanks to art market knowledge media company *Larry's List*, we also now know that South Korea has the distinction of housing the largest number of private art museums in any country of the world, but a number of other countries vie for a similar status:

| Country | No. of private art museums |
|-------------|----------------------------|
| South Korea | 45 |
| USA | 43 |
| Germany | 42 |
| China | 26 |
| Italy | 19 |
| Japan | 11 |

As far as cities go, Seoul has thirteen such museums, Beijing and Berlin have nine each, Miami has eight, Athens seven, Guangzhou and Moscow have six each,



Rich, famous and museum-owners: Bernard Arnault's Fondation Louis Vuitton in Paris (top); Garage Museum of Contemporary Art by Dasha Zhukova, the Russian-born businesswoman, art collector and magazine editor (centre); Chinese billionaire Liu Yiqian, seen here with his prized possession, a 500-year-old Ming dynasty cup, founded Long Museum (above) in 2012

New York City has five, and Brussels, Istanbul, London and Shanghai have four each.

There are literally hundreds of instances of private collector museums internationally, of which these are a few examples. Back at home, we have far fewer instances of such collectives, but their ambitions are by no means less noble.

Kiran Nadar Museum of Art: Held up as the benchmark among India's collectors who chose to showcase her collection in two temporarily housed buildings in New Delhi and nearby Noida while it hopes to build a permanent space in the capital, the museum houses some of the most noteworthy works by both modernist and contemporary artists, and is a fair representation of the vicissitudes that have guided twentieth and twenty-first century art practices in India. Its programme of exhibitions is active and its exhibitions or works have gone on loan to leading museums around the world.

Piramal Art Foundation: Set up by Dr. Ajay Piramal and his wife, Swati Piramal, in Mumbai, it consists of their private collection and works acquired specifically for the foundation. It occupies a small space, but the acquisition programme points to more ambitious aspirations. The collection includes miniature paintings, Western art as well as India's modernists.

Swaraj Art Archive: Set up in Noida, the collection of Vijay Kumar Aggarwal is on view by appointment only and houses works by most Indian artists including the Progressives, the masters of the Bengal School, those practicing in New Delhi, Chennai, Hyderabad, Baroda, as well as Company School paintings, Kalighats, Early Bengal Oils and prints.

Devi Art Foundation: At one point this was among the more vibrant spaces with regard to contemporary art, to which it proved a great support, and housed the collection of the mother-son duo, Lekha and Anupam Poddar, showcasing not just visual art practices in India but those from neighbouring countries as well, but has been reticent in recent times. Art-lovers are hoping for its revival.

Besides, there are collections of miniature paintings in palace ateliers in several tourist cities, O. P. Jain's

Sanskriti Foundation which houses the Museum of Everyday Art in New Delhi is not strictly 'art' in the narrow sense of the term, and there are other instances of at least textiles and kitchen objects, among others, but they are more eclectic than art museums. In Hyderabad, the Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art is an eclectic and free-ranging collection, but has proved important for its research potential for scholars.

In Dhaka, Bangladesh, Nadia and Rajceeb Samdani have displayed the comprehensive collection of South Asian art that they house in their home, and are promoters of the biennial Dhaka Art Summit. Their preference for contemporary art may yet translate into a private museum. The rest of South Asia is more arid in regard to private museums, but a couple in Chicago is considering the possibility of opening the first private museum of Pakistani art in that city – a first such endeavour. The upcoming Lahore Biennale some time this year, under the curatorship of artist Rashid Rana, should provide a boost to Pakistani art both within South Asia as well as globally.

India has the potential to open several more museums both in the public and private space with a greater specialisation in terms of both house museums as well as formal museums. With government support a chimera, private promoters need to look at the building of infrastructure and sustenance beyond just the building of a collection. The potential to look at art through a sharp focus has still to be undertaken – specialised spaces for sculpture, or video art, a specific genre or group or movement, a collection on the basis of medium, or a specific theme: the possibilities are boundless. But the success of that collection, if it is not to be merely an eclectic one, lies in how well it is curated, mounted and shown. Does it include the preparatory sketches for the paintings, for instance, or the maquettes for a sculpture? Is an artist's career, or a phase, or a series, well represented? Are all the artists of a particular group or movement included? Is there a regional, chronological or historical bias?

In essence, there are three types of collectors. The first is the kind that enjoys the thrill of the chase, scouring artists' studios, other collections, galleries and auctions in search of works that excite them, often spending long hours and arduous labour in search of the one



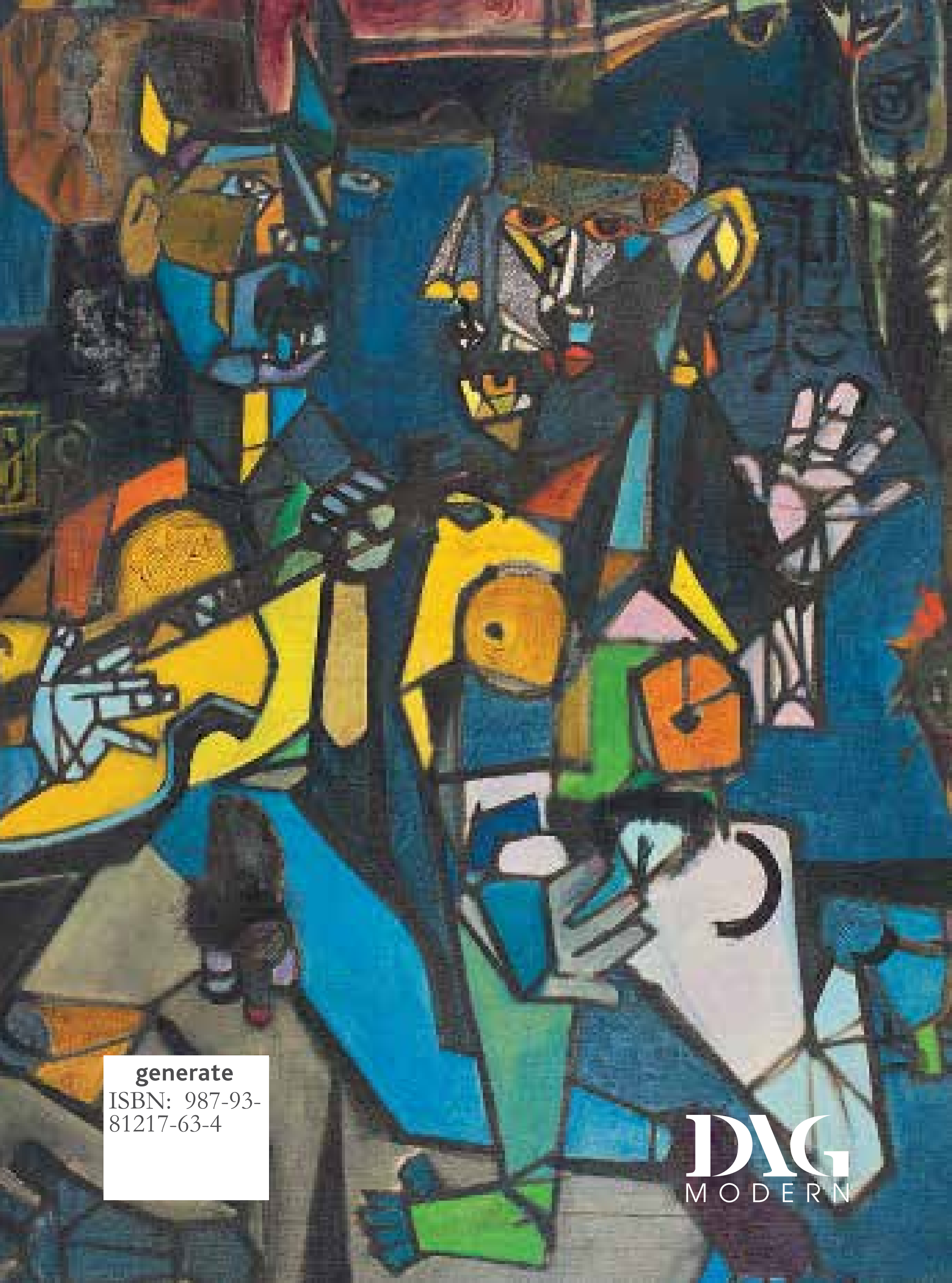
Photographer Dayanita Singh's exhibition was held last year at Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi

work they 'must have' at any cost – and that cost is not just by way of value – through a mixture of cajoling, bullying and some component of emotional blackmail to part with a work that the owner may not be willing to sell. This kind goes by its gut instinct, and it forms the major (65 per cent according to art insurance company AXA's art collectors survey) collector segment. The second kind is the informed collector with advisers who look for relevant works to add to the collection, and the consultants can range from those with an interest in the secondary market to others who are proficient in the contemporary scenario, thereby bringing depth to the collection's intent. This kind of collector is willing to be guided, but is intuitive and takes most final decisions regarding purchase himself, or herself. The third and final collector is almost dispassionate about the art itself, trusting a team of advisers to select the works, thereby picking on trophy works or artists' signatures for the collection, whether for the purpose of collecting or investing. AXA believes that 21 per cent of collectors use such expert services. According to artist Kelly Borsheim, 'Many people simply do not trust their own taste. Having someone else – other than the artist – tell them the work is good often gives them *permission to buy*.'

According to AXA's survey, though, there are not three but four different kinds of collectors: the art aficionado with a strong enthusiasm for art (37 per cent), the traditionalist bound to the family tradition of collecting (16 per cent), the investor (24 per cent), and the hybrid collector who can't be categorised (23 per cent). According to the same survey, despite the inroads online art companies are making, they account for only 34 per cent of sales. In India, this number is bound to be smaller.

Who are these collectors? It is a truism that people start collecting fairly late in life, with the average age for collectors being 59.5 years, according to *Larry's List*, or between 40-69 years based on the AXA survey, three-quarters of them being men. They visit art fairs to the extent of 95 per cent, but their buying is still gallery driven, where 73 per cent of it occurs (AXA).

There is a downside to private museums too, of course. A promoter – or collector – might simply lose interest. Or the collection might be banal or mediocre at best, as Carlos Slims' is accused of being. But in a country such as ours, with a poor infrastructure for, and a poor exposure to, the arts, the distinction between high quality and low, the mediocre versus the excellent, may yet be too much to ask for. While the murmurings of incentives by way of tax breaks might prove an incentive for more collectors to enter the fray and share their vision and art with the public, for now one can only hope that the reasons for doing so can range from a passion for sharing to a need to leave behind a memory of one's insight (and name) for generations to come. Art, no matter who actually owns it, is also part of our national narrative and heritage, and the only way for it to count as part of that discourse is by being viewed – whether in somebody's home through a ticketed visit, or by way of a private museum where it can help us change the way we look at and consume art.



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ISBN: 987-93-
81217-63-4

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