

FDELHI, THURSDAY 16-22 NOVEMBER 2017 | PRICE: ₹ 10 | PAGES: 24 VOL. 2 ISSUE 44

AN ART GALLERY THAT WAS AHEAD OF ITS TIME — GREAT BANYAN ART — STARTED BY NEERAJ AND RADHIKA BATRA, ESTABLISHED A VIRTUAL IDENTITY WHEN NO ONE HAD HEARD OF ONLINE SHOPPING IN INDIA

Shilpa R

ATTHE beginning of the 21st cen-tury, India was slowly getting acquainted with the expansive world of the Internet. It was quite fashionable to have an email with chat messengers as our latest form of amusements. The video chat, connecting friends and families living in a faraway land, was an unbelievable concept for many. But times change and the realities of yesteryears became compelling anecdotes to be retrieved from a faded memory only to be cher-ished and retold. But among this ished and retold. But among this handful of generation were people who were way ahead of their time, possibly because they were well-travelled and could very well see the positive sides of the technolo-gy. The couple, Neeraj and Radhika Batra would definitely fall into this category. Primarily because they created an online art gallery, Great Banyan Art way back in 2004 when the world was all about blog-ging and no one had heard of

online shopping before.
"I think they had foreseen the trend," says Sonali Batra, co-founder of the gallery. "After invest-ing decades in serious art collection, they both wanted to display their collection. And since the fixed cost space is reduced in the online space, they thought that it is a good

place to be in."

The operations of the gallery were strictly restricted to the online space until about two years ago before Sonali took over. She decided to revamp their decade-old business model by introducing some changes. She first turned her gaze towards the international art market and meticulously started following auction houses like Sotheby's and Christie's and a slew of online resources for art collec-tion and education like Artsy and Saatchi Art to identify young and emerging international artists. "It is important to have a niche in the art market, which is extremely competitive. Our collection was dominated by Indian modernist masters and I want to encourage



THIS GENERATION TRAVELS EXTENSIVELY AND THEY DO VISIT GALLERIES IN OTHER COUNTRIES. SOMETIMES THEY EVEN LOVE A PAINTING BUT **BRINGING IT TO** INDIA ENTAILS SEVERAL HASSLES Sonall Batra Great Banyan Art



EVERYDAY AGONIES: Lyra Garcellano's oil on canvas, 'Moondward'



MUNDANE TO EXTRAORDINARY: Anjum Singh's 'Foot Path'

young artists whose works could be appealing to Indian millennials, who want to invest in art," says

This generation travels extensively and they do visit galleries in other countries. Sometimes, they even love a painting, but bringing

it to India entails several hassles like packing, logistics, and shop-ping, so I am positioning us as a platform where they would get the best from both worlds," she adds. If this step was taken to explore

new waters, Sonali also invested in an offline show, which basically is

an important marketing exercise. "Since our inception, we have never really marketed our com-pany or invested in branding. Having an offline show gives us the right eye-balls and also an opportunity to meet new and potential buyers in person. Now we strategi-

PHOTOS: GREAT BANYAN ART

cally plan two to three shows in a

Bringing a slice of the global representation of artists in the exhibi-tion, Pandora's Box wherein Sonali has handpicked works that establish the analogous nature of angst, stress, distress and the fragile nature and times we live in. Works of over 20 artists including of of over 20 artists including of India's leading contemporary artists such as T.V. Santhosh, Shilpa Gupta, Rameshwar Broota, Sunil Padwal and Anjum Singh and emerging contemporary artists from Indonesia, Philippines, China, South Korea, Vietnam, Institute of the China South Carlo Ca Russia, Netherlands, Spain, Czech Republic, Poland, Romania, Israel

and a few others are on display.

For her monumental 90X216 inches 'Foot Path 1-6 (work of six panels), oil on canvas composi-tion, Delhi-based Anjum Singh has tion, Delhi-based Anjum Singh has borrowed from everyday Imagery to represent the ubiquitous footpath. "It always amused me how footpaths supposedly meant for pedestrians were used for just about everything else. The usage of differently patterned tiles with other images in the form of objects and shadows layering on it highlights my presecutation with

lights my preoccupation with simple urban imagery," she says. There is a significant representa-tion of global issues such as war and terrorism in the collection. For example, Indonesian artist Deny Pribadi's paintings portray humans as predators and their innate greed and need to dominate, colonise and fight even if it's done for levity, Philippian artist Lyra's Garcellano's works revolve around the politics of identity and issues of displace-ment, movement, and history.

"This collection highlights the universal nature of the world and emphasises why issues shouldn't

emphasises why issues shouldn't be viewed in isolation. These works highlight how the world is battling the same evils," says Sonali who has also curated this exhibition. For Deny, this platform enables young international artists like him to reach out to a larger audience. "In Indonesia, we have many art auction houses and galleries, but young painters are rarely ever given the opportunity to showcase their artwork, so I am happy to be

associated with them."-Unlike the West where online art galleries are flourishing, India is still getting used to the concept of buying art in the virtual world. This is why Sonali ensures that poten-tial buyers get a chance to view the work they are interested in buying by organising its private screening. The act of touch and feel would

always be pivotal to art buying, feels Rameshwar Broota. "Technology is great and a boon for the art community because we are updated about the global art trends. But when it comes to buy-ing, I feel that the colours of a painting on computer screen always appear too bright and you will also don't get an idea of the texture. Hence, buying should always be done after viewing," he says. This debate is never-ending. but the choice is always in our hands.

The show is on from November 11 to 19 at the Stainless Gallery