

Delhi ready for mega tryst with art and its business

The capital is gearing up to welcome what could perhaps be the country's most eventful art season. The first of three back-to-back mega art events in the capital starts Wednesday.

Global art auction house Christie's will get the ball rolling with a preview at the Imperial hotel here of a collection of South Asian modern and contemporary art for its Sep 26 New York auction.

The preview will be followed by the country's first art fair on an international scale at the Pragati Maidan Aug 22-24 - the India Art Summit.

International auctioneer Sotheby's will bring to India a body of 15 works by the world's most expensive artist Damien Hirst at the Oberoi hotel Aug 27-28.

This is the first time India will get to see works by the leading British contemporary artist Hirst, whose installation art, 'For the Love of God', sold for a record \$100 million in an auction last year.

'The show, part of a collection, 'Beautiful In My Head Forever', will be accompanied by a lecture on the art of Damien Hirst by a close confidante of the artist, Oliver Barker,' deputy director of Sotheby's Maithili Parekh told IANS over phone from Mumbai.

'We will also organise two lectures - one on the influence of post-war master Francis Bacon on top-selling Indian artist Tyeb Mehta and another on the opulent jewellery of the 1950s.'

According to Parekh, this is one of the most exciting art shows Delhi is going to see this season.

At the moment, however, the big buzz in the capital is about the India Art Summit 2008, which according to the artists' fraternity is one of the most important events - vis-A-vis industry and art - in the capital's social calendar.

The three-day summit - primarily a buyers', industry, art sellers' and artists' interface - will see 34 galleries hawking their niche wares. It will be accompanied by 'meet-the-artist' sessions, panel discussions and lectures on the development and business of Indian art.

The spotlight will be on modern and contemporary art works in the context of the changing art market in India. Sotheby's, along with Christie's, are supporting partners of the summit.

'India has enjoyed a rich artistic heritage of 5,000 years and this week marks an appreciation of this legacy. The summit will try to make art accessible to the maximum number of people,' Neha Kripal, its associate director, told IANS.

There are many reasons why the India Art Summit is important. 'The summit is going to address several contentious issues in the business of art,' art promoter Vikram Bachhawat, director of Kolkata-based Emami Chisel Art and the Aakriti Art Gallery told IANS.

'Transporting art from [Kolkata](#) to places like [Mumbai](#) and Delhi is difficult because of the government regulations in place. The process involves complicated paperwork,' Bachhawat explained.

Moreover, there is also the vexed issue of value-added-tax (VAT) levied on art works for buyers in Delhi that the fair plans to address.

'In Delhi, buyers have to pay an additional 12.5 percent as VAT on purchase of art works. But legally art should be exempted from VAT as it is categorised under handicrafts by the government of India, which do not come under the VAT regime. In West Bengal, we have managed to abolish VAT on purchase of art. There must be parity in prices,' Bachhawat said.

The organisers of the art summit, however, refused to comment on master artist M.F. Husain's absence from the fair. 'There are a several other big names,' a top official said.

Renu Modi, director of the premier Delhi-based Gallery Espace whose gallery is also taking part in the art summit, feels that this is one of the most happening seasons in the capital's art world. She is organising a unique show, 'Keep Drawing', an exhibition of large format drawings by 34 artists to coincide with the closing of the art summit Aug 24. Her show will be on till Sep 13.

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