

OLINA BANERJI NEW DELHI, JANUARY 26, 2012 | UPDATED 21:07 IST

India Art Fair kicks off with a full house



Visitor looks at sculpture at the India Art Fair in Delhi on the opening day on Thursday, January 26

The Art Fair in Delhi has a shed of all its pretensions of being a cultural enlightenment. With bids being made for Steven Mccury photographs, and Anish Kapoor's famous 'mirror' going for as much as 600,000 pounds, the newly anointed art 'museum' was up and running right from day one.

Bigger and better than its predecessors, the fourth edition of the India Art Fair (formerly the India Art Summit) in Delhi was heavily attended by the intellectual glitterati of collectors, gallery owners and art enthusiasts.

The biggest addition to this year's fair is the presence of international galleries, most of which are exhibiting for the first time. It was an art lover's heaven with a Mark Chagall as accessible as a Salvador Dali, with usual suspects Bharti Kher, Subodh Gupta, Atul Dodiya and other Indian contemporaries being exhibited by both Indian and international galleries.

"It's a confidence," said Sundaram of the Sundaram Tagore Art Gallery, "of the emerging Indian art market. It's a real transformation, both in terms of artistic production and its audience. It's gone from being an insular market to one where appreciation builds everyday."

Pareesh Maity displayed his installation of old tin speakers, piled up on a rickshaw cart, at the Art Alive, Delhi stall. "It represents the dying culture of old world speakers and their romantic sound. In a world of iPods and phones that can play music, these speakers have become extinct. This is a memory from my childhood," Maity said.

The fair, he added, was a chance to understand one's own standing in the global art stage, as he posed in a black cape adorned with images of tiny birds.

Sculptor K.S. Radhakrishnan exhibited his signature Maiya bronze statues, waxed eloquent on the need for institutionalising art in the country and developing a museum culture of appreciation.

It was artist L.N Tallur's first art fair, and as he stood appreciating what seemed like a blank white painting of a wall, he admitted to the Fair being a business proposition to the art world, more than a cultural opportunity. "It's a good place to network in, and that's what is needed to survive in the market."

Haggle for Husain's work

Delhi did what Delhi does best - haggle. Even if it meant that a Husain masterpiece was at stake. On exhibit (and without security) by the Marvel Gallery of Ahmedabad were three Hussain originals, that had already been enquired about. "They asked for a 30 per cent discount on a Husain," claims owner Dhanvi Shah, adding that he had come prepared for such haggling in Delhi. "No one wants to pay the full price for these works anymore."