



# The Foreign Hand

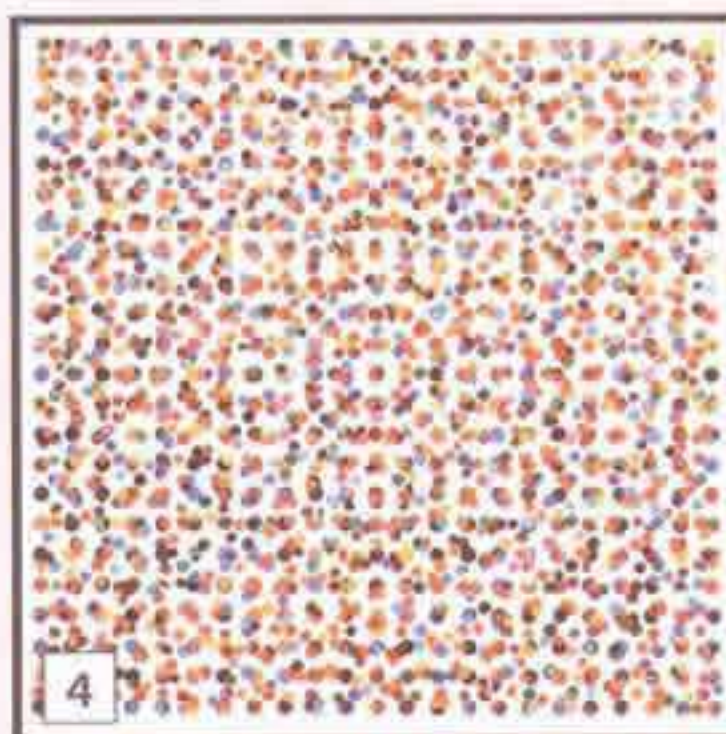
Feast your eyes on diverse forms of visual art from different parts of the world. Plumb the depths of foreign art, but beware of some 'rubbish'

Maria Louis

The ripples of art from overseas, that began a couple of years ago, have become a wave that is sweeping the shores of major Indian cities. Belgian artist Peter Buggenhout's sculptural installation has been in place at Abhay Maskara's gallery since July 18. For his first solo show in India, curated by fellow Belgian Sofie Van Loo, Buggenhout shipped crates full of rubbish to Mumbai.

Viewers are invited to navigate their way around alien, terrifying and/or disgusting creatures born out of the artist's fecund imagination. Created from discarded polystyrene, wooden planks, dust, rusted metal and the like found in garbage heaps, some of them are displayed in glass boxes while others lie naked... so you could, if you like, get close enough to plumb the depths and explore their innards.

By now, art aficionados in India have grown accustomed to such strange



sights – and many readily applaud this artist's monumental exercise in creativity.

But is it the novelty of the exotic that attracts them to such shows, or is there a more serious interest? Independent curator Ranjit Hoskote agrees that "novelty seizes the attention," but he does not consider it as the sole

reason for the trend of art from abroad coming to India.

"The vast volume of capital that has come visibly into the Indian art world in recent years has had the effect of identifying India as a serious art-buying country," he says. "Artists from elsewhere are thinking of India as an audience to cultivate and take advantage of, with this emerging collector interest." Sunaina Anand of Art Alive, Delhi, who has been showing contemporary Indian art abroad for the past five years, has also observed the interest in India by foreign artists and galleries.

From August 7, the Thomas Erben Gallery, New York, brings to the Chatterjee & Lal Gallery in Mumbai a selection of their artists. There's Chithra Ganesh, born in Brooklyn, New York, of South Indian parents, with an instantly identifiable visual vocabulary enriched with her Indian sensibility. Matthias Mueller (Germany), an experimental,

1. Yamini Nayar 2. Dona Nelson 3. Chithra Ganesh 4. Mahbub Shah 5. Haeri Yoo

post modern filmmaker whose work is often based on found footage.

There is Yamini Nayar (USA), who is known for her handmade miniature sets of private interiors, which she then photographs. Dona Nelson (USA) is regarded as one of the most vital, aggressively tactile and physically inventive American painters of her generation.

Mahbub Shah (Pakistan) creates collages that show a palpable relationship to geometry and aesthetics yet questions the nature of visual literacy by converting legible codes into conceptually surrealist tools. Haeri Yoo (Korea) is known for her ability to weave disrupted narratives of feministic, culturally-attuned mayhem.

They will share space with Kiran Subbaiah (India), a sculptor and filmmaker who takes the ordinary and makes it extraordinary, and Krishna Reddy (India/USA), an internationally-celebrated printmaker who was involved with the European Modernist movement of the 1950s.

This is exciting – for, as Ranjana Steinruecke of Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke says, "Indian collectors are now interested in informing themselves about international trends and prices." However, she sounds a warning bell when she adds, "While the market can certainly be cultivated



locally, just showing any 'phoren' artist is not the point." Her gallery has the distinction of bringing Kiki Smith, acknowledged as an art icon worldwide, to Mumbai. Earlier, in their show of Vietnamese art, they featured, among others, Tran Luong (internationally the most active Vietnamese artist) after thorough research on the country's art scene.

Hoskote thinks it is time Indian art audiences learn to distinguish the truly major foreign artist from the merely ordinary who happen to be foreign. After showing the works of Baroda-based artist Kim Kyoungae at

Hacienda, Jasmine Shah Varma felt the need to place her in the context of artists from her home country... and she maintains that the group show of four Korean artists she co-curated with Kyoungae, last year has given the audience a greater understanding of the artist's work. Vibhura Kapoor of Gallery Beyond, who co-presented Pakistani artist Chand Saigol with artist Bernadette da Cunha, dubs exhibitions by artists who are not really established on the international scene as "tentative moves to check out the feasibility in the Indian art market."

Come September, The Loft will show Manchester-based Stephen Dixon's plates and drawings based on Bollywood, the Raj legacy and classical Hindu goddesses. The artist, who has been offered a residency in India with support from the Art India magazine and JSW Foundation, hopes to create a new body of work for an exhibition next year. Truly, the boundaries between countries are blurring as the global village shrinks!

Belgian artist Peter Buggenhout's *res derelictae II* is on at Gallery Maskara, the Warehouse on 3rd Pasta, Mumbai, till September 7.

Works by artists from the Thomas Erben Gallery, New York, can be seen at the Chatterjee & Lal Gallery, Mumbai, from August 7 to 31. □