



"UNTITLED", 2012 BY ARUN KUMAR. 228 PAINTED PLATES COMPRISING 3 FORMS. 170 DIA X 17 CM (EACH).

Open TO *All*

AI caught up with Sunita and Vijay Choraria on a sunny Chennai morning to discuss their passion for art and their latest project in Phoenix Market City, which showcases the works of some of the most prolific contemporary artists from India and around the globe. It is a commendable project to bring art to the masses and increase its understanding, acceptability and relevance in our society.



AT THE OPENING OF THE VENICE BIENNALE, 2013. SUNITA AND VIJAY CHORARIA ATTENDING A PRIVATE DINNER IN HONOUR OF MASSIMILIANI GIONI, THE CURATOR OF THE 55TH INTERNATIONAL ART EXHIBITION ENTITLED IL PALAZZO ENCICLOPEDICO (THE ENCYCLOPEDIC PALACE).



How did your art journey together begin?

Whenever my husband and I travelled abroad, we'd spend a lot of quality time with each other, exploring and enjoying a city, its museums, churches, architectural sites. We realised that back home, our interaction was limited to lunch or a movie. It was then that we recognised our common passion was art – in any form, be it architecture, paintings, monuments, sculptures. Unfortunately, in our early years we could not afford to acquire all that we liked, we had to save, sometimes for months, to purchase a piece of our choice. Little did we realise that this would turn into an addiction!

What are your insights as a buyer?

The only rule imposed by Vijay as a buyer was that we don't do luxury on credit! If it's affordable, collect your money then buy. We followed this golden rule even when we were tempted by galleries who recognised us as serious buyers and art appreciators and would be willing for us to pay in instalments. So the rule is that we only buy when we can afford it.

What was that first artwork that you both bought and fell in love with?

Our first purchase was a Sakti Burman. Over the years we have had quite a few favourites. It's like having so many children and you can't choose one! At this point, we do enjoy video art a lot.

Your thoughts as an art collector/buyer.

I think what's important is the engagement. So it's engagement that leads you to understand when you are collecting. One should be actively involved in the process of collecting art. Unfortunately, in today's world, the collector very often engages the services of an art advisor and looks only at the commercial appreciation. Collectors like Harsh Goenka were collectors in the true sense of the word.



"HEAD" BY RAVINDER REDDY.

GILDED POLYESTER
RESIN AND FIBERGLASS
DIMENSIONS: 9 X 6 X 10 FT

IN CONVERSATION WITH VIJAY CHORARIA

About the Phoenix Market City endeavour, how did this venture to make it a public art space begin?

Phoenix is a project between Phoenix Group and Sharyans which is my company. For Sunita and I the question always was about the lack of engagement - why don't we have more public art like we have experienced overseas? At Phoenix we realised an opportunity for a potential public art space. The challenge is how to integrate pieces and sculptures and what sort of medium of art to bring in, so that it can be interactive with the people as well as be there without obstructing retail space.

How did you go about choosing the type of artworks to be placed in the space and specifically in Chennai?

Once the decision to bring art in was made, we created a team of international experts that included two women - Diana Campbell and Eve Lemesle. A lot of the artists and gallery owners (being our friends) have supported us. The works are on rotation and would be here for a year or two. Obviously you have options and you think about what would look good in that city, what people would feel connected to, but then you also try and push the envelope. For example the robot by T & T is worth more than one crore. It is put up there for a reason, as it is symbolic to consumption, identifiable with the robot in Rajinikanth's film.

What is your main objective for this project?

I want the public to come interact with the space. My biggest joy is when I see a family enjoying the space, even if they don't understand the work, the very fact that they are appreciating it is interesting. Every day around 30- 40,000 people visit the mall and at the end of the year even if two of these kids convert and understand the video art medium and might pursue or engage in it, then our objective has been met. This is just the beginning of the whole programme which actually goes way beyond this. I am now trying to work with schools to have directions or guided tours on how to get from one artwork to the other.



"BAR CODA", 2012 BY SAMIR PARKER. MIRROR FINISH ACRYLIC AND PLYWOOD. 8 X 190 FT



"UNTITLED" (FROM THE SERIES BLIND BULB ETC...), 2005 BY SUNIL GAWDE. AUTOMOTIVE PAINT COVERED FIBERGLASS WITH MATTE AND GLOSS LACQUER. 167 X 90 CM X 90 CM.



Tell us a little bit about some of the new media artworks in the mall.

There are themed video art works on each of the lobby levels. Then you take a step ahead and there is text art on the escalators and in the atrium, where we have created the platforms which are installed with these stickers that can be fed in with information, including drawings. So the technology in place will not be used to sell the soul of the mall by commercializing it with ads but instead used to interact with some of these leading contemporary artists. And yes, sound art is coming up in the mall as well. Have you ever noticed that when you walk into an elevator there is an awkward silence? So I actually experienced sound art in a few places and thought why can't we have sound art in elevators to break that awkward silence? So I got students from Whistling Woods, an institute in Mumbai that I helped build, to create a mix of music from various films, dialogues, one after the other, which included everything from *The Godfather* to *Dilwale* to may be incorporate some South Indian music as well. There is also a lot of design in the mall. One of the information and valet desks is designed by Rooshad Shroff who is now designing furniture, which galleries are selling as artwork.

So what are future plans?

We plan on bringing in interesting poster art into passages, galleries, toilets, leading down to the multi-level car park. For example, Andy Warhol posters from his collection, showing his actual photographs etc. We are doing photography art and a lot of installations. So there will be sound, text, video, sculptures, photography, posters and wallpaper art. So all possible mediums apart from print and canvas.

We would like to know your thoughts on public art in India?

We are at zero and I think it's about how we can encourage corporates or individuals who claim to love art to agree to do their part. So if you can get an artist, a gallerist and this individual together I think you have a winning combination. An example would be the work by Anish Kapoor in Chicago.



APOCALYPTRON - 1 (FROM THE SERIES THE DAWN OF DECADENCE), 2009 BY THUKRAL AND TAGRA. RESIN, IRON AND DECALS. 4.26 X 2 X 1.37 M.