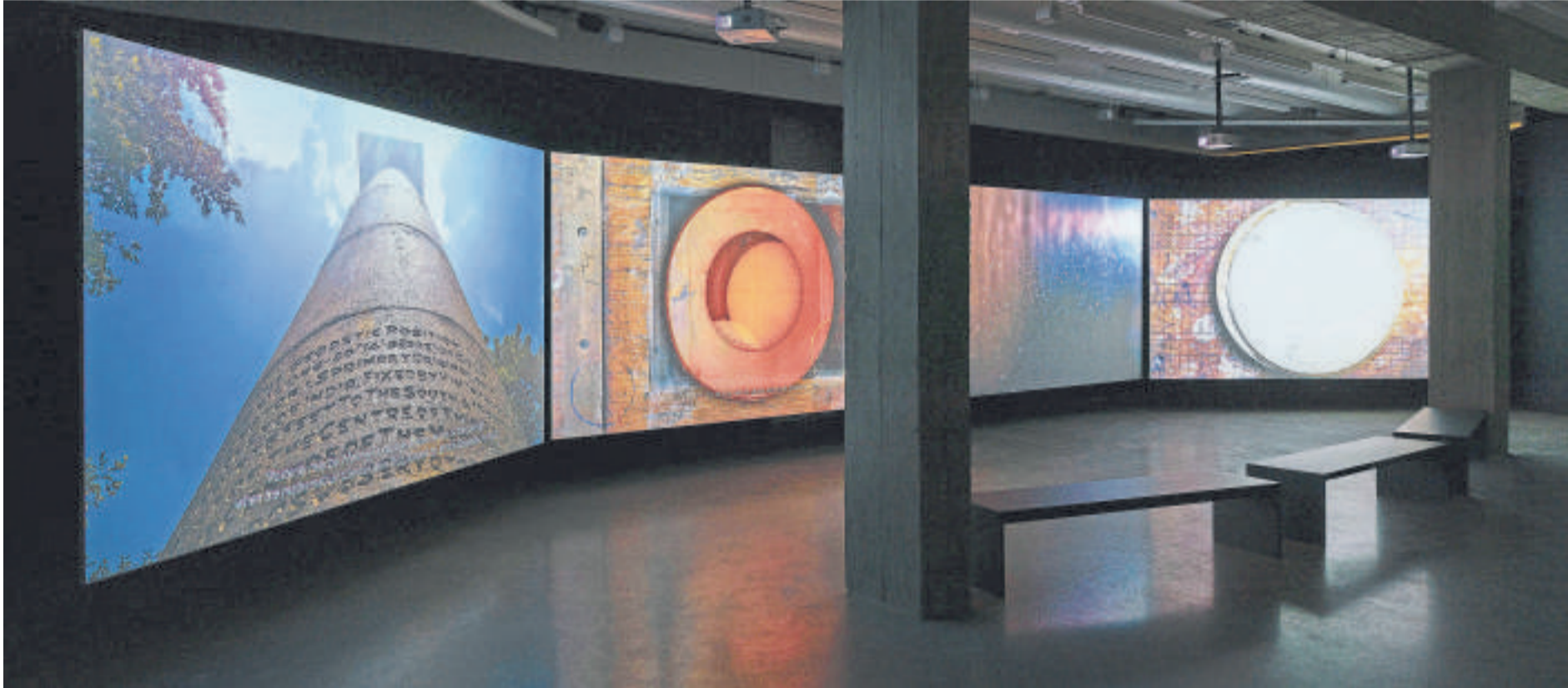


Indian art may be poised for a global breakthrough

MATHIAS SCHORMANN



After a strong 2024, with major works, discoveries and acquisitions on the international stage, the future looks bright for Indian art

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Early last year, Delhi-based Rohini Devasher became the first Indian to be recognised by Deutsche Bank as their 'Artist of the Year'. This led to her first major monographic exhibition, *Borrowed Light*, which opened in Berlin at the PalaisPopulaire in September and will be on display till early March. The first institutional solo exhibition in Europe for the artist took her engagement with the cosmos, and our relationship with it, even further.

In another significant achievement, the seventh edition of the Jameel Prize for contemporary art and design went to Bengali artist Ohida Khandakar for her film and installation *Dream Your Museum* (2023). The work is currently being exhibited at the Victoria & Albert (V&A) Museum, London till mid-March.

Year on year, artists from the subcontinent have been recognised by international art foundations and museums for their unique practices. 2024 saw this being taken a notch further, especially for women artists at different stages of their careers, who won laurels for the nuanced perspective and approach that they brought to their work.

Mumbai-based Prajakta Potnis, known for her interdisciplinary practice—spanning photography, painting, sculpture and installation—themed around transgression of boundaries and the passage of time, became the second recipient of the Loewe Foundation/Studio Voltaire Award in July.

Major works by Varunika Saraf—stemming from her engagement with mythologies and histories, using handcrafted pigments and wasli



A still from Ohida Khandakar's 'Dream Your Museum'; (top) 'Borrowed Light' by Rohini Devasher, PalaisPopulaire by Deutsche Bank, Berlin

paper, to reflect on contemporary realities of social injustice and marginalisation—were displayed at the Queensland Art Gallery as part of the Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT) in Australia. Alongside her works *It Rained This Winter* and *The Sky Set Ablaze*, one could also see recent series by Rithika Merchant. *Terraformation* from 2022-23 showed her signature hybrid creatures leaving the planet and 'terraforming' their new homes. "Drawing on scientific, fictitious and mythological ideas, each work in the series acts as a proposition for sustaining life in a new world," states the exhibition note.

Besides women artists, multidisciplinary practitioners, who look at marginalised histories, were also recognised. Sajan Mani, who lives and works between Kochi and Berlin, was one of the four artists to be awarded the Villa Romana Prize—the oldest German art prize. In February, Mani, who comes from a family of

rubber planters and uses his body as a vigorous means of Dalit resistance, was part of an exhibition series in Berlin which spotlighted artistic explorations into their genealogies and ritual practices.

Last year was also bountiful in terms of representation at major exhibitions. Amol K. Patil, a conceptual and performance artist, who investigates the sound, social structures and architecture of Mumbai's chawl, showed his site-specific installation *Who is Invited in the City*, at the 15th Gwangju Biennale, a global stage for dialogue around contemporary art.

Soumya Shankar Bose's show *Braiding Dusk and Dawn*, which ran at the Delfina Foundation, was about his mother's disappearance as a child and the ensuing family trauma during politically turbulent period in West Bengal. Barbican Centre in London hosted a noteworthy group show, *Imaginary Institution of India: Art (1975-1998)*, featuring works of senior con-

temporary artists such as Gulammohammed and Nilima Sheikh, Nalini Malani, Sudhir Patwardhan, Sunil Gupta, and more. Sohrab Hura's first survey is currently on at MoMA PSI in New York, where he is exhibiting more than 50 of his works.

Last year saw multiple international museum acquisitions as well. Guggenheim Abu Dhabi acquired Afrah Shafiq's video game installation *Nobody Knows for Certain* (2023) and Berlin-based Afghan artist Aziz Hazara's *Rehearsal* (2020). MoMA New York picked up *Bombay Tilts Down* (2022), CAMP's seven channel environment with sound, and a work by the late Vivan Sundaram. The Kunstmuseum Basel acquired *Kunstfloor* (2022), a work by Vishwa Shroff and included it in their recent exhibition *From Holbein to Trockel*.

M+, Hong Kong's premier museum of contemporary art, picked up *TIMELAPSE: Of saturation, summer houses and second homes* (2022), a mixed media work in paper and a digital video by Sameer Kulavoor, and *Kinship (Familial and Found)*, a textile-based work by Bhasha Chakrabarti at the Art Basel fair in Hong Kong. Dubai-based Ishara Foundation, which is focused on South Asian Art, acquired works by Varunika Saraf, Gigi Scaria and Mithu Sen this year and was active during the India Art Fair. Jameel Arts Centre, also based in Dubai, acquired works by Saraf and made its moves in Art Dubai.

Based on the initial signs, the coming year promises to be as exciting. Well-known curator Hans Ulrich Obrist, when asked by Artnet about the one artist he is looking out for in 2025, singled out Arpita Singh. He confirmed that The Serpentine Galleries, his institution, is in talks with her for their Spring exhibition. Ishara Foundation in Dubai is planning Shilpa Gupta's first monographic exhibition in West Asia this January.

Over the last decade, international curators have been more focused on African and Latin American art when it comes to emerging economies. However, with greater access to residencies, art fairs and major museum exhibitions leading to robust recognition—voices of many individual Indian artists are now resonating louder across the globe.

Anindo Sen is an independent art writer.

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