



Delhi

Art Basel Hong Kong: Indian galleries prep their repertoire on contemporary South Asian art for Wong Kar-wai city

Works of seasoned and emerging artists from the Indian subcontinent represented by Delhi and Mumbai galleries are making their way to Art Basel Hong Kong 2025



From Saju Kunhan's series, '11th May 1980 Wedding Day'. Courtesy TARQ, Saju Kunhan

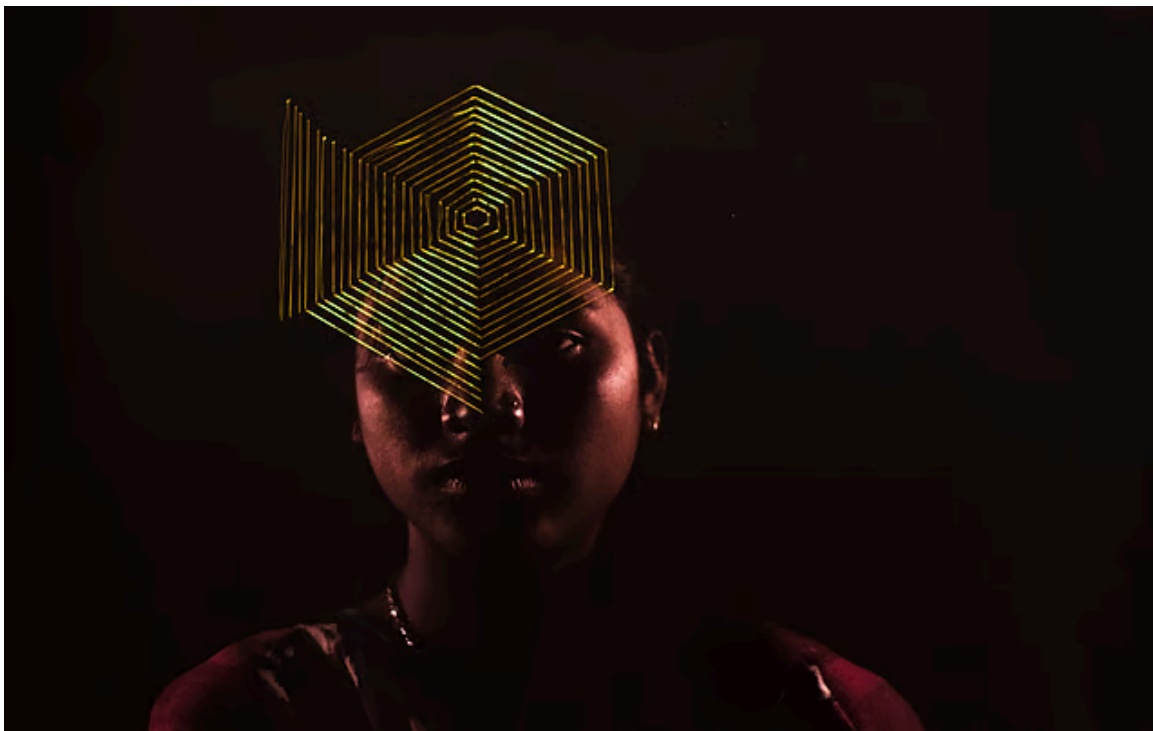
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For regulars at Delhi's Vadehra Art Gallery, many may remember Bangladeshi artist Ashfika Rahman's 2016 work, a photography series on a solar-run television set, a 'powerbox' that aired government propaganda; when silent, covered with a ghaghra, it was as innocuous as a teapot under a tea cosy. A new mixed media series of Rahman is being shipped to Art Basel Hong Kong. This one is on a present-day Behula, whose face seems pock-marked with zari thread; it recalls the mythical Behula, the heroine not of a love story but one burdened by family expectation to bring back to life a dead husband. Gurugram-based Astha Butail's work, 'A Transcendent Scheme', made with archival paper and sheer muslin, is going to Hong Kong as well, as is Pakistani artist Zaam Arif's works in which solitude is etched on large-format paintings and embodied in male figures surrounded by still waters.

Wedding-day photographs that have been digitised, enlarged, cut into pieces, coloured and placed on recycled wood by Malayali artist Saju Kunhan—he is represented by Mumbai's TARQ gallery—to re-imagine his uncle's wedding day as a tragedy and a migration story, is another Art Basel Hong Kong 2025 entrant.



From Bangladeshi artist Ashfika Rahman's series, 'Behula These Days'. She is represented by Vadehra Art Gallery.
ASHFIKA RAHMAN

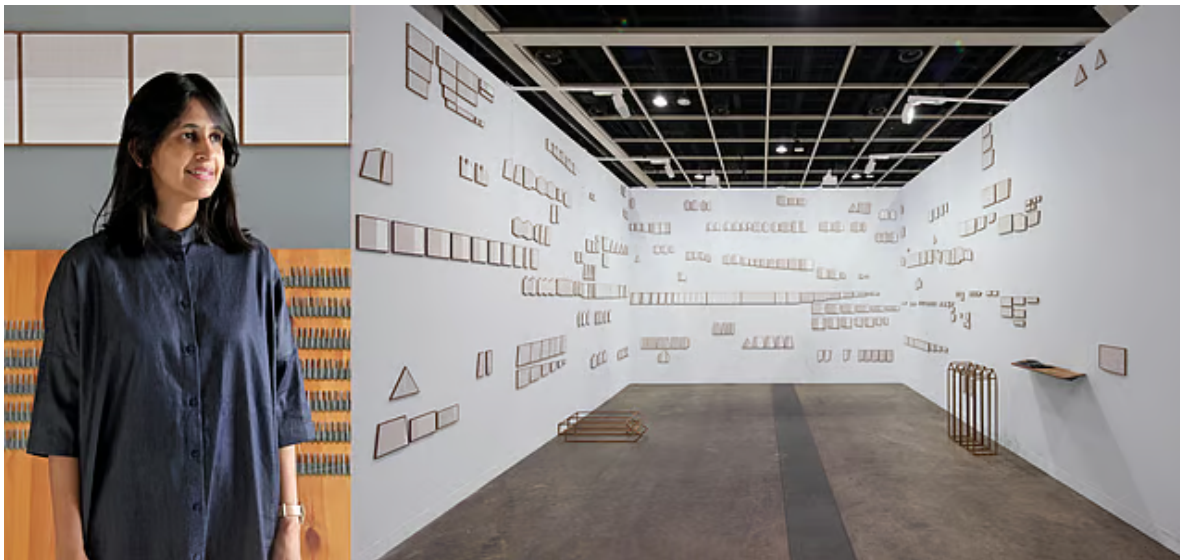
South Asian imagination and art practice will be visible in its many forms in Asia's mega mart of contemporary art, Art Basel Hong Kong, billed the "Rolls-



Royce of art fairs”, next week. From March 26 to March 30 (including preview days), the 55-year-old fair, which began its Hong Kong edition in 2013, will showcase monumental works to smaller-format artworks through top-line modern and contemporary art galleries of the world, besides curated events. The fair brings together 240 exhibitors from 42 countries and territories, including 23 newcomers, showcasing artistic practices that reflect its commitment to global diversity and regional representation.

Collecting the Global South

Young artists from the Indian subcontinent whose works are going to Hong Kong are refreshingly not standing on any hard identitarian slab of their respective nations. Their concepts and artistic languages are local-global. They have embraced different subjects, they play with diverse textures and tools, their storytelling is from emotional geographies and experience. Much of the attraction of a fair like Art Basel is, therefore, not just getting to see the Great Indian Painting—Indian galleries do take their MF Husains and FN Souzas just like a one-off Picasso can sometimes float into circulation at art fairs in Europe —or The Great Pakistani Painting as much as to see when a painter from the region is hitting or about to hit his or her stride.



Gurugram-based artist Astha Butail with her work 'Turning Towards Pure White'. She is represented by Delhi's Vadehra Art Gallery. Courtesy Astha Butail



Pakistani artist Aisha Khalid, a neo-miniaturist. She is represented by Delhi's Anant Gallery. Courtesy Anant Gallery

“Art has moved beyond identity politics at art fairs,” says Mamta Singhania, founder of Delhi’s Anant Gallery. As one of the leading galleries promoting contemporary South Asian art practices, Anant is making its debut at Art Basel Hong Kong in the Insights sector and will be presenting a significant collection of artworks that explore the concept of duality within unity, blending traditional techniques with contemporary narratives by neo-miniaturist Aisha Khalid from Pakistan. “Earlier, art was viewed through the lens of heritage, identity, and the diaspora. However, the themes of engagement have been shifting towards what is relevant today—materiality, environment, and socio-political issues that concern us all. South Asian art is receiving global attention, institutional support, and significant representation at museums and art fairs compared to a decade ago,” says Singhania.

The Behula series is, for instance, an Everywoman’s tale. [Rahman’s work is being introduced at Art Basel Hong Kong by Vadehra through this work.] “All men want a Behula, a woman who sacrifices, in their lives,” says the artist. Rahman’s work ‘Powerbox’, which went to another art fair, for instance, shows a remote village with a long monsoon disconnected from the world but dependent on news of the outside world through state-run television. It is open ended. “A silent or non-stop television; it’s the portrait of many nations today,” says the artist. Art that anybody can connect with from anywhere, that’s where the money lies. It also works for major museums, which, Rahman says, are now actively promoting “diversity, cultural exchanges, local arts and crafts”.





Bangladeshi mixed-media artist Ashfika Rahman. She is represented by Vadehra Art Gallery.



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The launchpad

Hena Kapadia, founder of Tarq gallery in Mumbai, is returning to Art Basel Hong Kong for the fifth time with six works of artist Saju Kunhan's series, 11th May 1980 Wedding Day. Kunhan, whose ancestral home is in Kerala, is a nominee—out of 20 artists three have been nominated—for the inaugural MGM Discoveries Art Prize, which aims to support emerging artists and foster new talent. Artists and gallerists affirm that Art Basel is the place to launch an international career. The winner will receive a \$50,000 cash prize shared between the artist and their representing gallery, along with an opportunity to exhibit in Macau, China.

Astha Butail—now represented by Vadehra—was the recipient of the BMW Art Journey prize at an earlier Art Basel. “It’s the place to meet curators from all over the world,” says Butail. This year Vadehra is returning to Art Basel Hong Kong with a group presentation featuring work by leading and emerging South Asian contemporary artists across generations, including Nalini Malani, Anju and Atul Dodiya, Gauri Gill, Praneet Soi and Shilpa Gupta, besides Astha Butail, Ashfika Rahman and Zaam Arif.



Roshni Vadehra, director, Vadehra Art Gallery, with Adeline Ooi, former Director Asia for Art Basel Hong Kong

Courtesy Roshni Vadehra

Roshni Vadehra, director, Vadehra Art Gallery, says the plan is to take a mix of seasoned artists and hope to place the works of younger artists in institutions and private collections. “As gallerists you need to show ambitious work and



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exhibit what is the best from your programme — artists who already have museums’ interest, along with emerging artists to introduce their work on a global platform.”

Lawyer Akshay Chudasama, an avid collector of contemporary art from several Indian galleries including Vadehra, Jhaveri and Tarq, affirms that the bottom line at art fairs is business and Art Basel HKG is one of the buzziest places for everyone in the ecosystem—the artists, the gallerists, the curators,

the dealers, and the collectors. “The vibe, the scene.... Art Basel HKG usually is sold out,” he says. “It gives you an excellent idea of the state of the art market, particularly in Asia.”



Mamta Singhania, founder of Delhi's Anant Gallery Courtesy Anant Gallery

Art fairs like Art Basel Hong Kong also serve the purpose of exhibiting art that may not be seen in the artist's home country. “Beyond her solo work,

Aisha Khalid's pieces that we are introducing at Art Basel, we hope will spark broader conversations about contemporary South Asian art in a postcolonial scenario,” says Singhania.

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