

Moving with *The Times*

- Art for the 'international India class' SOUMITRA DAS



An assemblage of Adip Datta's work from the catalogue

The art of making contemporary Indian art gain a high visibility abroad — certainly beyond the bounds of the NRI — is becoming as serious a business as the art itself. At least one gallery based in America for now, is sparing no expense to promote two Indian artists it will exhibit at its brand-new gallery in London soon.

James Collard, a senior reporter, and Graham Wood, a photographer (he is dead against digital cameras) from *The Times*, London, flew back home early last Wednesday after spending two days with young sculptor Adip Dutta whose exhibition opens in London next month.

The Collard-Wood team initially visited Mumbai to meet Riyas Komu, who belongs to the so-called Bombay Boys group of artists, with whose exhibition Aicon Gallery will be inaugurated on March 16. But the gallery owners, Prajit and Projjal Dutta, who sponsored the trip, wanted *The Times* team to visit Calcutta, meet Adip Dutta and to look for themselves art as practised in the city.

An exhibition of Calcutta artists titled Eastern Edge and curated by Jayashree Chakravarty is currently on at Projjal's New York gallery. But Projjal declares that he is not putting his money on Calcutta artists for sentimental reasons (they were raised in Delhi, anyway) but because he thinks they have a great potential and talent which has not been tapped yet.

Projjal, who is an MIT-qualified architect, and his brother Prajit, who is an economist and a professor at Columbia University, had started with an online gallery named *ArtsIndia.com*.

"Ever since we moved abroad we wanted to give contemporary Indian art a boost. After 9/11 we opened a gallery in New York and called it Gallery Arts India. We showed Indian art on the road in the San Francisco area. We opened our second gallery at Palo Alto close to Stanford University in 2004. And now we are all ready to open Aicon Gallery in London in the old Gagosian gallery space. It is street-level. Her Majesty the Queen is our landlady. This is the most upscale space for displaying Indian art," claimed Projjal. Even before that gallery opened they have already spent \$ 1 million.

Projjal had hired Bolton & Quinn, a public relations agency specialising in art, which pitched the idea of covering the artists *in situ*. The offer was accepted by *The Times*.

James Collard, who writes on social issues, predicted that after Brit art and Chinese contemporary art, Indian contemporary art would be the next big thing. He has visited India five times, although he never came to Calcutta before.

When Selfridge's, the most prestigious department store after Harrods, celebrated Bollywood, Collard came to Mumbai to interview Dimple Kapadia and remembers the plush party at designer duo Sandip Khoshla and Abu Jani's place. This assignment too was handled by Bolton & Quinn.

He admitted that it is mostly the NRI who buys Indian contemporary art, but the scene has changed "incredibly quickly", infrastructure has developed and dealers too have become more "committed."

Collard was dead on when he said suddenly, the "international India class" — with friends and family all over the world — has developed a Western approach to contemporary art. It has become "cool" for this class to buy art.