

Buzz up!

Know Your South Asian Art



Arpita Singh's *Fifteen Clouds Three Flower* (2006-2007) *Courtesy of Christie's*

As the euro-smug international art world continues to drop millions on chalet décor at this week's Art Basel in Switzerland, American collectors at the fair — and there are fewer than usual this year — have been talking excitedly about the bargain investment opportunities presented by a relatively untapped market: contemporary Indian art. Pegged as the next phenomenon to catch fire among international collectors, Indian art is also about to receive a prominent platform next Wednesday when work by the hottest artists goes on the block at [Christie's South Asian Modern and Contemporary Art auction](#) in London. For those whose grasp of the field doesn't extend beyond Anish Kapoor (who's based in London anyway), here's a quick primer on the heavies of Indian art.

Subodh Gupta

Born in 1964, Gupta is both one of the most recognizable and the most Pop-friendly artists to emerge from the vibrant New Delhi scene — and as a result one of the priciest. Sharing Kapoor's affinity for shiny surfaces, he's best known for building art out of the ubiquitous stainless-steel containers that Indians use for transporting food, either painting them, casting them, or, most striking, forming them into imposing sculptures like *Very Hungry God*, a gleaming cookware skull. At Christie's another such sculpture is expected to fetch up to \$1 million, and a triptych painting of his already sold for that price on Basel's opening day.



Anju Dodiya's *Untitled* (1993) *Courtesy of Christie's*

Atul Dodiya A painter and multimedia artist based in Mumbai, Dodiya makes melancholy works that bring together imagery from India's past — [Gandhi makes frequent cameo appearances](#) — with the present, such as depicting the many-limbed Hindu goddess Durga as an airport metal detector. A member with Gupta of the so-called Bombay Boys, India's answer to the YBAs, Dodiya also forms one half of an estimable power couple with his wife, the artist Anju Dodiya (whose work, on sale at Christie's next week, is pictured, left).

Nalini Malani

One of India's most provocatively political artists, Malani draws on sources ranging from Lewis Carroll to Greek myths to address what she sees as political and intellectual stagnation in her country as well as India's hot-button nuclear program. One well-known 2003 work, *Game Pieces*, features an apocalyptic slideshow created by streaming light through rotating cylinders that display animal and human figures alternated with mushroom clouds.

Arpita Singh

A painter whose flattened and brightly colorful works suggest Matisse or Frida Kahlo gone Bollywood, Singh specializes in domestic scenes that provide an intimate glimpse of the interior lives of women, sometimes wryly, sometimes to tragic effect. Her enigmatic yet accessible oils, often featuring [Giottoesque floating figures and scattered toys](#), have made her one of the most widely known artists in India.

M.F. Husain

At 91 years old the elder statesman of Indian art, Husain had worked steadily as a painter since the thirties, turning out a massive body of inventive work that has won him [long-standing comparisons to Picasso](#). Despite his prominence in the country for so many years, Husain had to flee into exile in Dubai after coming under fire from conservative critics in 1996 for a series of nude paintings of Hindu gods and goddesses — that he had made in the seventies. Last month a judge in New Delhi finally threw out an obscenity case lodged against Husain, declaring that the artist should return home and continue his work. In March a painting by Husain [fetched \\$1.6 million at Christie's in New York](#) amid protests from detractors camped outside the auction house.

—Andrew M. Goldstein