

## San Jose Museum of Art Unveils New Works by Tam Van Tran, Bari Kumar

by Chris Wright on Oct 9, 2009

### Commissions Celebrate SJMA's 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

SAN JOSE, California (October 9, 2009)—In honor of its 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, the San Jose Museum of Art yesterday unveiled new commissions by two nationally known California artists. *Most Secret Butterfly* by Tam Van Tran, whose work was featured in the 2004 Whitney Biennial, marks the first time that the Museum's Council of 100 has commissioned a new work of art. *Blind Faith* by Bari Kumar is the first piece by an Indian-American artist to enter the Museum's collection and the first of Kumar's fabric pieces to be publicly exhibited in the United States. The two new additions to the Museum's collection of modern and contemporary art by prominent West Coast artists were unveiled at a members' preview on October 8 and go on view to the general public on Friday, October 9.

"Throughout our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, we showcase the San Jose Museum of Art's permanent collection, which has grown rapidly over the past decade. We are thrilled to further celebrate the collection with these special commissions by Tam Van Tran and Bari Kumar—innovators who both vigorously re-imagine the possibilities of painting," said Susan Krane, Oshman executive director of the San Jose Museum of Art. "We are grateful to the Council of 100 and to the Collections Committee, important Museum support groups, for making these acquisitions possible and for their belief in supporting the artists' creative process."

Van Tran's *Most Secret Butterfly*, 2009, a mixed media work of acrylic, staples, color pencil on canvas, and paper measuring 90 x 85 x 35 inches, is part of the artist's acclaimed "Beetle Manifesto" series. Van Tran uses natural materials like spirulina and chloroform mixed with acrylic, paints on canvas and paper, and then shreds his painting into strips. He then uses ordinary office staples to reassemble the work into a three-dimensional wall piece.

"Tam Van Tran's unusual materials and working methods result in works of exceptional beauty. He comments simultaneously on the natural world, the industrial world, and even science fiction," said JoAnne Northrup, chief curator at the San Jose Museum of Art. "It is a thrill to acquire a work that is so representative of this artist's most important and renowned style."

*Most Secret Butterfly* was created in part with funds provided by the James Irvine Foundation and was commissioned by the Council of 100.

Bari Kumar has a similarly unusual and meticulous approach to creating his work. Known for his paintings, Kumar most recently has been creating "paintings" with fabric, inspired by the spectrum of colorful fabrics found in the shops that sell liners (or petticoats) for saris in his native India. He composes his representational images out of thousands of individual "pixels," each made by wrapping a small block with a different colored fabric. Measuring seven feet by five feet, *Blind Faith*, 2009, is Kumar's most detailed fabric painting to date; 10,500 fabric-wrapped pieces form the face of Gandhari, a character from the Indian epic *Mahabharata*.

Like much of Kumar's work, *Blind Faith* refers not only to the artist's Indian heritage but also to the Latino culture of Los Angeles, where Kumar now lives. His work simultaneously evokes traditional Catholic iconography, Mexican American folk art and Indian art.

"The image has a reference to the Virgin Mary from the western world, but with the addition of the bindi on her forehead, [she] instantly becomes an Indian figure," said Kumar of the blindfolded female figure in this work. "There is a character in the Indian epic, Mahabharata, called Gandhari. Her husband (who is the king) was blind, so she takes it upon herself to wear a blindfold so as to not see the world that her husband cannot see."

Northrup, who closely followed the artist's progress on *Blind Faith* in his studio in Hyderabad, India, through Skype, calls the result "magnificent," noting that "in particular, the tonal range of the skin is amazing, with subtle variations in hue from celadon to peach."

*Blind Faith* was created in part with funds provided by the James Irvine Foundation and was commissioned by the Collections Committee in honor of Deborah D.D. Norberg and her many years of dedicated service to the San Jose Museum of Art.

Both works are now on view in the exhibition *Variations on a Theme*, which highlights the Museum's support of emerging and mid-career California artists. *Variations on a Theme* is on view through January 31, 2010.

#### TAM VAN TRAN

Born in 1966 in Vietnam, Tam Van Tran lives and works in Los Angeles. He graduated from the Film and Television Program at the University of California, Los Angeles and holds a BFA in painting from the Pratt Institute, Brooklyn. He has received the Joan Mitchell Foundation award, Pollak Krassner Fellowship, among other honors. Numerous galleries in New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco have presented solo exhibitions of Tran's work. In addition to the Whitney Biennial in 2004, such museums as the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, UCLA's Hammer Museum, and the Asian American Art Center, New York, have exhibited his work.

#### BARI KUMAR

Kumar was born in 1966 in Andhra Pradesh, India, and was educated at the Loyola Institute of Visual Communication, Madras. He moved to Los Angeles in his early teens and received a BFA from the Otis/Parsons School of Design, Los Angeles. His exhibitions include solo shows in galleries in London, New Delhi, Mumbai, Los Angeles, and New York, as well as inclusion in museum exhibitions at the The Craft and Folk Art Museum, Los Angeles; the Queens Museum of Art, New York; and the San Jose Museum of Art.

#### SAN JOSE MUSEUM OF ART

Now on view at the San Jose