

WHISPERING GALLERY

By D.T.

The biggest powerbrokers, tastemakers and rain-makers from Beijing, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Tokyo, Seoul, Delhi, Mumbai, Paris and London descended onto New York City in late March for what was arguably the most exciting Asia Week ever, as far as all things contemporary are concerned. **AMIT JUDGE** of the Bodhi Art empire in South Asia looked on with delight as one of his artists, **V. S. GAITONDE**, broke the one million dollar barrier at **CHRISTIE'S DEDICATED SALE OF MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY INDIAN ART** on March 30. The husband and wife duo **CHRISTOPHER DAVIDGE** and **AMRITA JHAVERI**, both alumni of Christie's, came to their old local haunt together, however, sitting far apart in the salesroom. Meanwhile, **RODERICK STEINKAMP**, secondary art dealer to the fashionistas of two hemispheres, attempted to secure the **SUBODH GUPTA STAINLESS STEEL BUCKET INSTALLATION** on



offer, but a close friend of **SAKSHI GALLERY** was determined to bring it home, and did so for US\$120,000 plus commission. Immediately after the sale, dealers **RENU MODI** and **KAVETTA SINGH** were whisked away in a large town car to inspect private collections of Indian contemporary art in Manhattan. And **CONOR MACKLIN** of Grosvenor Gallery returned to London with many works overflowing from his suitcase, including the striking fiberglass readymade head, *Woman of Kapulapadu II*, by Ravinder Reddy (\$140,000 plus tax). The biggest topic swapped among many of the dealers from India was how to crack the American market now that interest in Indian art has soared into the eight-figure zone.

Meanwhile, on March 31, **SOOTHEBY'S** first sale of contemporary art from East Asia ushered in so many dealers, curators and collectors that it was standing room only at the first session (SEE P. 25). Dealers were prominent among those bidding on works by stars like **ZHANG XIAOGANG** and **XU BING**, whose rarity proved favorable that day.

MAX PROTETCH, **JEAN-MARC DECROP** of Galerie Loft and **JUNG LEE** of Gana Art all sat in the front rows. **ETHAN COHEN** snapped up a **FANG LIJUN** with **MIRA RUBELL** at his side, while **STEPHEN MCGUINNESS** worked hard to obtain the only **DING YI** on the auction block. The avid ink collector, **ARNOLD CHANG**, sought to outbid his rivals for Xu Bing's impossible calligraphy. Observing the proceedings with elegant restraint were the lovely ladies of the Upper East Side: **ALEXANDRA**

MUNROE freshly arrived at the Guggenheim, **MELISSA CHIU** of Asia Society and **FRANCE PEPPER** of the China Institute. Curiously absent was **FRANK ELLSWORTH**, president of the Japan Society.

That week he was discreetly requested to step down from his venerable role at the Society to make way for a new dawn.

Meanwhile in the background, Korean entrepreneur **C. I. KIM** has been commissioning very large works by Zhang Xiaogang to cover nearly every square inch of his new **BEIJING** outpost. Some weeks after, Mr. Kim was spotted on yet another spending spree, this time in **INDIA**. Armed with his Black-berry, he was personally securing all future works for the next three years by the young darlings of the Indian art scene, including Subodh Gupta and Jitish Kallat. Another man about town was **DAVID ROSS**. First seen in **BANGKOK** and then days later in **DELHI**, he seemed to be shadowing Mr. Kim as he plotted the territory for future Asian centers of the Artist Pension Trust, which he heads. Specialists from **CENTRE POMPIDOU** in Paris were also seen sniffing out the Thai art scene after Jacques Chirac's state visit to Thailand in February.



In Hong Kong, the **WEST KOWLOON CULTURAL DISTRICT** continues to sputter towards a sad and slow death. Just weeks before the District project ground to a full halt, real estate development group **SUNG HUNG KAI** spent **HKS10 MILLION** to showcase the monumentally huge, but still **B-LIST PICASSO** canvas, *Parade* (1917), on loan from the Pompidou—incidentally, one of the cultural institutions bidding for a role in Hong Kong's new museum mall—not out of selflessness, but rather **TO DISPLAY CULTURAL AWARENESS**. If the West Kowloon elephant can be resuscitated, competing developers will hopefully

appoint real art advisors to help them get an "obscenely good deal."

And in Asia, auction fever seems as contagious as the bird flu. It is rumored that **SAKSHI GALLERY** in Bombay is joining the club and will soon **START THEIR OWN AUCTION HOUSE**. Maybe it will pick up the handful of specialists who recently resigned from **NEVILLE TULI'S OSIANS AUCTION HOUSE** in Delhi after many months of not being able to advise on acquisitions and consignments. And after a long spell working as a consultant to Xiaoming Zhang on the March Contemporary Art Asia sale at Sotheby's New York, **PHILIP TINARI** left immediately for China armed with much valuable information gained from York Avenue. He is rumored to be heading contemporary sales for a leading homegrown Beijing auction house.

Also in Beijing, **MEG MAGGIO** has managed to persuade many of the artists at Courtyard Gallery—where she ran the show—to join her new gallery Pekin Fine Arts. Many say that **JEREMY WINGFIELD** could not deliver what Meg has promised the defectors. Another artist who will opt out of his gallery all together is the impresario **TAKASHI MURAKAMI** in order to start his own. Maybe just like his Superflat movement, he will pave the way for other artists to follow suit?

In the midst of all this battling for the big bags of money flooding the market, many dealers still seem to have artists' best intentions at heart. Apparently the friction between **YI CHEN** and **PLUM BLOSSOMS GALLERY** only produced heat after Manhattan gallerist **MARIANNE BOESKY** offered Chen an opportunity to let his talents as a young gifted painter flourish with formal representation, and without the desk job attached. And Bodhi Art seems to be following in similar footsteps—during **ATUL DODIYA's** recent residency at the Singapore Tyler Print Institute, **AMIT JUDGE** flew his own personal chef from Delhi to Singapore to cook the forlorn artist his favorite home-style dishes.

And after many months of indecision, the **SAIGON BIENNALE**—under the directorship of **DO THI TUYET MAI**, **GRIDITHIYA GAWEEWONG** and **RIKRIT TIRAVANIJA**—has finally been canceled. However, the funding obtained for the event from organizations such as the Ford Foundation will be spent on a series of art education and development projects in Vietnam over the next two years. Perhaps the erstwhile directors should also address the unsavory practice of forging artworks by **BUI XUAN PHAI**, **NGUYEN TU NGHIEM** and **NGUYEN THANH BINH**, some of the most sought after names in Vietnam. Or perhaps auction houses will hold sales of the best fakes on the market?

■ Subodh Gupta — *OK MHI* (Undated) Stainless steel utensils, armature, CD-ROM, dimensions variable, edition of 2. Courtesy Christie's New York.

■ Melissa Chiu of Asia Society, New York.

■ C. I. Kim of Arario Gallery, Cheonan.