

KUMAR GALLERY



Time and the connoisseur

Art, for Virendra Kumar, was about an expressive vision and depth. With his passing, India lost a passionate art patron and collector, says Uma Nair



Last month, Delhi lost one of its finest collectors and gallery directors in the world of art — Virendra Kumar of the prestigious Kumar Gallery. For almost 60 years, Virendra had been collecting everything from miniatures to antiquity and specialised in contemporary Indian art, especially the Progressives as well as Bengal School Masters.

Among his prodigious collections, he was one of the main patrons of great Indian artists like the Progressives as well as Gopal Ghose and Sohan Qadri. In fact, it is commonly said that he would pay sums of money to them each month for a work of art. With galleries in New York and Delhi, his knowledge of both antiquities and contemporary art was likened to being a collector with an epicurean eye. In the 1990s, most of Francis Newton Souza's solo shows in Delhi were held at the Kumar Gallery. In fact, when Tyeb Mehta moved to Delhi from London, it was Virender who gave him a small place to stay in exchange for a work of art every month.

Over the years, the artist with whom he became closest was Francis Newton Souza. In the 1990s, Souza would come and stay at Yatri Niwas for a month and Kumar Gallery would keep his suite replenished with canvasses, paints and paper. Souza preferred to come to Delhi during winter. Two important Souza retrospectives were held in 1999 and 2000. Yet another seminal retrospective

was that of Gopal Ghose in 2015. The Sunder Nagar Gallery is a quaint and cute space for an art show but some of the shows were held at Sainik Farms in the Kumar estate. Yet another historic showing was Krishen Khanna's solo as well as a historic solo of Prodosh Das Gupta. Most of the Kumar Gallery buyers were the ex pat population from the embassies in Delhi.

Then Kumar Gallery would open the year with an epic celebration series consisting of the gallery series and a number of emerging artists. Among these, one of Virendra's greatest discoveries was Ashok Bhowmick an artist of rare mettle who creates stunning figurative with the cross hatching method. Bhowmick's solo shows at Kumar Gallery were some of the finest you could ever glimpse in terms of composition, depth of vision and expression.

Virendra had a deep interest in Buddhism, Jainism as well as the ancient sacred texts of India. As an individual, he was deeply spiritual as well as practical and knew his art. If there was one person who Souza trusted it was Virender Kumar.

The Kumar Gallery shows always justified the dynamic nature of the art they reflected. The very visuals of each of their shows would denote imperial majesty, laden with a certain ingenuity and depth of compositional clarity in the range of mediums and expression. One of the finest abstract collections in the country could be seen unveiled in chapters during their celebration shows each year. Art for Virendra Kumar was about an expressive vision and depth. In his passing away, India loses a collector and patron of the art world who had a passionate desire to collect the best.