

STORIES & INSIGHTS FROM INDIAN GALLERISTS



*Art-preneurs
of India*

BY DEVINA PURI



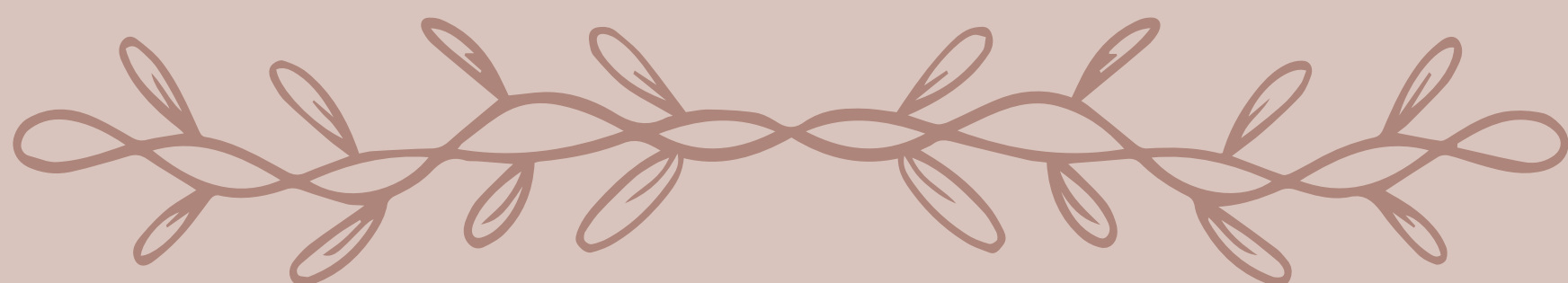
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Hi ! I'm Devina Puri

From a young age, I have been fascinated by art and design. As I grew older, my appreciation for the arts deepened, building into curiosity about the behind-the-scenes work of entrepreneurs in the design world. My twin passions of business management and visual arts, led me to discover the space that lies between, by interning at the India Art Fair. Here, I met some of the best creative minds in India. A few months later, I decided to delve deeper into the world of people who I like to call "Art-preneurs", via this project.



VADEHRA ART GALLERY

D-40 DEFENCE COLONY, /
D-53 DEFENCE COLONY,
NEW DELHI 110024, INDIA



ROSHINI VADEHRA

Director, Vadehra Art Gallery



1. What inspired you to start working in the gallery business

The gallery was started by my father in 1987. I joined in 2004. At the time of inception, the art market was nearly non-existent, and it was more a passion project by my father who was helping acquire art for the Taj hotels as one of his clients for his interiors contracting business. I was lucky that when I joined in 2004, the art market went through a terrific boom period, and art also came to be known as an asset class where several people chose to 'invest' in art, though I always believed that it should be bought for the love of it, rather than something that can be used for monetary gain.

2. How do you differentiate your gallery from others?

Our gallery is different from most others, as firstly, it stands today as one of the oldest galleries in the country – 35 years. Because of the long history, we are lucky to represent artists across 4 generations – from modern masters, to the post-modernist painters, some of the top contemporary artists, and now some emerging artists as well. This gives us the edge as we are able to cater to interests across different audiences – from seasoned collectors to new buyers.

3. How do you select the pieces you exhibit?

Since the gallery has a long history, there are artists who have been represented by us for many years. For younger artists, there are many factors that come into play for us to choose to show their work. Of course, the quality of their work is of utmost importance, but we also look at the artist's history of education and artistic practise, and their drive to continue making good work without external market forces influencing their work. There are also discussions with curators and tastemakers to assess if the work is interesting, both in terms of content and skill.

4. Did you always want to be a gallerist, or did you have a different career prior to this?

I always thought that I would enter the corporate world, and I studied finance in college to achieve that dream. But my father was always keen that I become part of the art world. Once I joined, there was no turning back. It was such an exciting time, and I realised very quickly that the talent I am surrounded by – both intellectual and creative is very special, and I feel honoured to be able to share in that space.

5. What skills or educational background are required to enter the field?

There is no specific educational background needed to run a gallery – just passion and intellectual curiosity to learn. As there is learning everyday – and one must always have the patience and interest to read as much as possible, view exhibitions, and speak and learn from the best in the field.

6. How do you balance the creative and administrative work of running a gallery?

That's the most fun part of work – to be able to do both the creative and the administrative which makes the creative a success by giving it the correct platform and space to thrive and succeed.



CRAYON ART GALLERY

THE CLARIDGES HOTEL

DR. A.P.J. ABDUL KALAM ROAD

NEW DELHI 110011

PHONE: +91 11 4521 3300

EMAIL: ART@CRAYONARTGALLERY.COM

GAURAV KARAN

Director, Crayon Art Gallery

CRAYON ART GALLERY

1. What inspired you to start your own gallery?

My family has always loved the subject and we've grown up visiting museums and galleries. It became a passion and the entrepreneur in me, combined the spirit and the love for art. What helped immensely is that our mentor, my business partner's husband, ran one of India's most respected galleries. And learning from him during our early days was priceless. Having said that one never stops learning. Everyday.

2. How do you differentiate your gallery from others?

We are a secondary market gallery, and amongst the few in India. We don't represent any artists but represent art works, as opposed to a primary market gallery. Our focus is always to find the best available works by artists, with a greater focus on the rarest of the rare.

3. How do you select the pieces you exhibit?

While we deal in both modern and contemporary Indian art, over the years our focus has been more on Modern. For contemporary art we usually work with other primary galleries and rarely go to artists directly. We prefer collaborating as we have tremendous respect for a primary gallery's role in building an artist's journey and growth. For modern, our sourcing is from a mix of collectors, clients, works that we have acquired and more. The selection also depends on the Theme of the show. Whether it's a solo, group show or if there is a theme

4. Did you always want to be a gallerist, or did you have a different career prior to this?

I've always been passionate about art, and I'm grateful for the opportunities I've had that has brought me here. I also run a second business diametrically opposite to the world of art and culture. A private security business. It balances out cycles and I'm fortunate there too. But my real passion in life is the Arts.

5. What skills or educational background are required to enter the field?

While an academic degree in the subject helps tremendously, as I said earlier one still learns more everyday. It's a large and fascinating world. Nothing compares to real life learning.

6. How do you balance the creative and administrative work of running a gallery?

One has to. There is no choice. And building a good team helps in every way.



BLUEPRINT.12

C- 66, ANAND NIKETAN,
NEW DELHI, DELHI
110021

MANDIRA LAMBA

Director, Blueprint.12

blueprint.12

1. What inspired you to start your own gallery?

Blueprint.12 is an artist-centric contemporary art gallery, focused on the South Asian region. It was completely passion driven with a deep love for experimental forms of art. With a vision that blurs the boundary amongst nations and a critical eye towards commonalities in art practices in the region, the gallery is dedicated to introducing art collectors towards fresh and established talent that constantly push their own boundaries.

2. How do you differentiate your gallery from others?

Contemporary art galleries often have their own unique perspectives and approaches to showcasing and promoting art. While there may be common themes or trends within the larger contemporary art scene, galleries often differentiate themselves by the artists they represent, the types of exhibitions they host, and the way they engage with their audiences. At Blueprint.12 we focus on emerging artists and experimental forms of art, from the South Asian region. We are a space where marginalized communities can talk about their marginalized identity. We aim to engage with a global audience through international art fairs and exhibitions.

3. How do you select the pieces you exhibit?

While most of the time it's intuitive and in line with our vision for the gallery, sometimes it's based on - the context (especially with text and art, book art, etc.), emerging artists (artists who are pushing boundaries and experimenting with new forms or techniques), diversity (styles and perspectives by artists from different backgrounds and with different perspectives). Finally, one of the benefits of an experimental art gallery is the freedom to take risks and showcase pieces that might not be shown in more traditional ways. We like to push boundaries and showcase pieces that challenge viewers.

4. Did you always want to be a gallerist, or did you have a different career prior to this?

We have been in the arts for the last 18 years. We began our career working under our parent's gallery. Working in the gallery provided valuable insights into the art world, including how exhibitions are organized, how artwork is priced, and how to market and sell artwork. Additionally, working with our parents gave us an advantage in terms of building a network within the industry. Then in 2012, we decided to venture out so that we could follow our own voice and vision. Hence came about Blueprint.12.

5. What skills or educational background are required to enter the field?

It's true that running a gallery business requires a range of skills, including art knowledge, business acumen, and administrative skills. While having a background in art can be beneficial, it's not necessarily a requirement for running a successful gallery. In fact, many successful gallery owners come from diverse backgrounds, including business, marketing, and law.

We are a two people team, with diverse educational backgrounds, I am from FIT while Riddhi is an Msc in applied statistics from Oxford University.

What's important is having a passion for the arts and a willingness to learn. If you have a strong interest in the arts and are willing to put in the time and effort to learn about different artists and styles, you can develop the knowledge you need to run a successful gallery.

6. How do you balance the creative and administrative work of running a gallery?

Balancing the creative and administrative work of running a gallery can be challenging, but it's important to find a balance in order to be successful in both areas. Having a two-person team with diverse areas of expertise can be a real asset in running a gallery. While Mandira looks into the creative aspect, Riddhi takes care of the administrative. This allows each person to focus on their strengths and ensures that both the creative and administrative aspects of the gallery are being attended to.

VADEHRA ART GALLERY

D-40 DEFENCE COLONY,
&
D-53 DEFENCE COLONY,
NEW DELHI 110024, INDIA



PARUL VADEHRA

Director, Vadehra Art Gallery



1. What inspired you to start working in the gallery business?

The gallery was started by my father-in-law Arun Vadehra in 1987. I joined in 2007.

2. How do you differentiate your gallery from others?

We are one of the only Indian galleries to work with artists across four generations of Indian art: from the modern masters such as like M.F. Husain, Ram Kumar, S.H. Raza and Tyeb Mehta to the subsequent generation of modernists like Arpita Singh, A. Ramachandran, Nalini Malani, Gulammohammed Sheikh and Rameshwar Broota, onto some of the most exciting names in Indian art Atul Dodiya, Shilpa Gupta, Anju Dodiya, N.S. Harsha and Sunil Gupta, as well as young emerging talent like Sachin George Sebastian, Shrimanti Saha and Shailesh B.R.

3. How do you select the pieces you exhibit?

We usually work closely and long term with the artists we show at the gallery. Sometimes the artists approach us and sometimes we seek out collaborations. We also follow the programmes of the Foundation for Indian Contemporary Art (FICA) and other organisations that support young artists to find interesting young talent.

4. Did you always want to be a gallerist, or did you have a different career prior to this?

I started working at the gallery after I got married into the family. Before that I worked at PR firms in Boston and New Delhi and also at an export house for home accents and furniture in New Delhi.

5. What skills or educational background are required to enter the field?

A background in art history is useful. I studied Public Relations/Mass Communications and I feel that helps me immensely at work as it has taught me to communicate well with various audiences. In the art world today, writing skills and design skills are very useful.

6. How do you balance the creative and administrative work of running a gallery?

We are a very flat organisation and everyone does everything when the need arises. In an art gallery the creative aspect often goes hand in hand with administrative work. Both are equally important!

SAFFRONART

THE OBEROI, DR. ZAKIR HUSSAIN MARG
NEW DELHI 110003

DINESH VAZIRANI

Director, Saffronart Gallery



1. What inspired you to start your own gallery?

I studied engineering because of my family. The art was just to appease myself. Eventually the right brain won, and for the immense love of Indian art that I had in my heart, I felt it was my responsibility, and an opportunity, wherein I could provide and educate the Indian Art Market. The thought to make people aware of Indian art, artists and the price point meant I had to start my own gallery

3. How do you select the pieces you exhibit?

Saffronart selects its art exhibits through a rigorous process that involves curatorial expertise, market research, and a deep understanding of the art world.

The selection process typically starts with the curatorial team, which includes specialists in various areas of Indian art. They identify artists and artworks that are both historically significant and relevant to contemporary art trends. They also keep track of emerging artists and new trends in the art market.

Market research is another crucial component of the selection process. Saffronart's team tracks prices and sales trends for Indian art across various auction houses and galleries to ensure that they are offering works that are in demand by collectors and investors. Once the curatorial and market research is complete, the artworks are reviewed by Saffronart's senior management team, who make the final selection based on their expertise and the overall direction of the auction house.

Saffronart also collaborates with artists, galleries, and other institutions to bring new and diverse perspectives to their exhibits. This collaborative approach allows them to offer a broad range of artworks that reflect the dynamic and constantly evolving nature of the Indian art world.

2. How do you differentiate your gallery from others?

Saffronart is a leading online auction house specializing in modern and contemporary Indian art, and there are a few factors that set it apart from other auction houses:

- **Hybrid model:** Saffronart was one of the first auction houses to move to an online-only and then to the Hybrid model, which allows it to reach a global audience and offer bidding 24/7.
- **Focus on Indian art:** Saffronart's specialization in modern and contemporary Indian art allows it to offer a unique selection of works that may not be available at other auction houses.
- **Transparency:** Saffronart prides itself on its transparency and provides detailed information about each artwork, including provenance, condition reports, and artist biographies.
- **Customer service:** Saffronart provides excellent customer service, with dedicated specialists who are available to answer questions and provide assistance to buyers and sellers.
- **Innovation:** Saffronart has been at the forefront of innovation in the auction industry, introducing features such as online bidding, live streaming of auctions, and mobile bidding.

SAFFRONART

THE OBEROI, DR. ZAKIR HUSSAIN MARG
NEW DELHI 110003

DINESH VAZIRANI

Director, Saffronart Gallery



SAFFRONART

4. Did you always want to be a gallerist, or did you have a different career prior to this?

I have a degree in Industrial Engineering from Stanford and MBA Honours from Harvard Business School. The initial plan was to take over the family businesses, WMI Cranes and WMI Power. However, after putting in 5-6 years, I realised I was not meant for it and pursued my love for art. A few years later I formed Saffronart with my wife Minal Vazirani.

5. What skills or educational background are required to enter the field?

We typically look for candidates with a combination of art expertise, business acumen, and strong interpersonal skills.

Some of the skills and backgrounds that may be required to join Saffronart include:

- **Art history or fine arts education:** A degree in art history, fine arts, or a related field is often preferred, as it demonstrates a deep understanding of the art world.
- **Business and marketing experience:** Candidates with experience in business or marketing can bring valuable skills to the table, such as strategic thinking, market analysis, and the ability to build relationships with clients and partners.
- **Knowledge of Indian art:** A strong understanding of Indian art history and contemporary art trends is essential for success at Saffronart.
- **Communication and interpersonal skills:** The ability to communicate effectively with clients, artists, and other stakeholders is crucial in the auction industry, as is the ability to build and maintain relationships.
- **Digital skills:** Saffronart is an online auction house, so candidates with experience in digital marketing, e-commerce, and other digital skills are highly valued.

In general, Saffronart looks for candidates who are passionate about art, have a deep understanding of the industry, and are committed to providing exceptional service to clients.

6. How do you balance the creative and administrative work of running a gallery?

Balancing the creative and administrative work of running a gallery can be a challenging task, but it's essential for the success of the business. Here are some tips on how I try and achieve it - by setting clear goals and priorities, delegation of tasks, use of technology to streamline and improve the tasks, collaborating with others and most importantly scheduling time for creative work.

SHRINE EMPIRE

D-395, DRON MARG,
DEFENCE COLONY, NEW DELHI,
DELHI 110049

SHEFALI SOMANI

Director, Shrine Empire



SHRINE EMPIRE

1. What inspired you to start your own gallery?

We started Shrine Empire in 2008. We started with a conviction to work with practices and voices from South Asia that were not getting visibility through the gallery circuit.

2. How do you differentiate your gallery from others?

The gallery over the years has established itself as a platform for experimental practices. We were one of the first galleries to show a full exhibition of video and sound works by artist Gautam Kansara in 2010. Our programme was also one of the first that focused on the South Asian region rather than just India.

3. How do you select the pieces you exhibit?

We exhibit the artists we represent, through solo shows. Once their works are ready, we do an edit along with the artist and curator, to short list the works we finally show. Group shows are conceived by a curator, and the participating artists produce works according to a concept, which are finally displayed in the exhibition.

4. Did you always want to be a gallerist, or did you have a different career prior to this?

I always wanted a career in the arts, but wasn't sure what my trajectory would be, till frequent visits to Kolkata and interactions with young art practitioners helped me decide that I wanted to start a gallery.

5. What skills or educational background are required to enter the field?

A degree in art history or business would both go a long way for anyone wanting to enter the field, though I have neither and have learnt mostly on the job.

6. How do you balance the creative and administrative work of running a gallery?

It's a difficult balancing act because both are crucial to the running of a successful gallery. It's a 60:40 divide with 60 percent time being spent on admin and sales.

INSIGHTS INTO GALLERISTS OF NEW DELHI

ART-preneurs is a short interview series- exploring the art business with insights into the lives of gallery owners who have successfully and passionately merged their interests for art and commerce. ART-preneurs is for students interested in either or both of these fields, inspiring them to create a new path, one filled with creativity as well as entrepreneurial skills.

BY DEVINA PURI

Rachel El