

The Debutante

Kala Ghoda, the premier art district in SoBo, gets a new resident with Galerie Isa, dedicated solely to international art

By Deepali Nandwani

Mumbai's dalliance with art has received a fresh boost – this time in the form of a new art gallery dedicated to international art. The Great Western Building, a 300-year-old colonial-style structure, offers the perfect setting for Galerie Isa.

The brainchild of entrepreneur and art collector Ashwin Thadani, the gallery's interiors resonate the Victorian architectural heritage of the area with its high ceiling and warm wood flooring. "We want to focus on individual art practices with high quality exhibition design and aesthetics," he says.

The gallery opens with 'Indian Mylar Vision', a show by 40-year-old Berlin-based Anselm Reyle, who works with kitsch, colour and found objects from flea markets. Among the foremost proponents of modern abstract art, Reyle references iconic abstractionists ranging from Kenneth Noland to Otto Freundlich. He calls his works "objets-trouvés," a reference to his multi-media installations that include sculptures and found neon lights.



From Reyle's new series 'Paint By Numbers'

His art, which incorporates loud colours like fluorescent pink, glitter, silver Mylar and expanses of black in abstract forms like smears, hard-edged stripes and black monochrome patches, can be found in famous private collections such as The Saatchi Gallery, London and the Daimler Collection, Berlin.

According to critics, in an era when figurative painting is gaining critical acclaim, Reyle is one of the few contemporary German artists to examine abstraction and its place in modern art. His fascination for

high gloss and kitsch has got a lot to do with his critique of the superfluous distinction between “high art” and “low-culture”.

According to Berlin-based art historian and curator Jamila Maria Adeli, who has collaborated with Galerie Isa for the show and also profiled the artist for the catalogue, Reyle’s art blends abstract and modern elements. “Among the found objects he uses are African sculptures. He enlarges and casts them in bronze, chroming and lacquering them. Mylar foil, an industrial kind of foil, is the other offbeat medium he works with,” she says.

Interestingly, Reyle has also collaborated with the luxury brand Christian Dior for a line of accessories, handbags and make-up, which debuted at Art Basel last month, the first of a series of collaborations between the storied fashion brand and an artist. Reyle’s modern take on the bags and shoes come in bright hues such as neon and pink, a shocking break from the minimal Dior aesthetics. Prices start at around \$270 for the bracelets and head up to about \$4,000 for a metallic Lady Dior bag. Speaking about the association to Adeli, the artist says, “I find both trademarks very exciting and I realised that working with them resembled my own working process a lot.”

For the Western world, Reyle’s art breaks the rigid boundaries of traditional art practice in the way it incorporates ornamental and decorative elements, mediums that they find trivial and superficial. Adeli terms his art subversive and much closer to Indian art, which is flexible enough to allow modern and folk art elements to exist alongside vibrant crafts practices.



(Right) Anselm Reyle and (left) his artwork on a Dior bag

She has put together an entire spectrum of works that go from foil paintings to porcelain sculptures and art incorporating found objects for Reyle’s debut exhibit in India. “The idea is to offer Indian collectors and aficionados a glimpse into his rather complex art practice,” says Adeli.

(Indian Mylar Vision will run at Galerie Isa from 16 December to 16 February 2012) ■

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