

## Ashwin Thadani on Contemporary Art in India

BY SNEHA MANKANI    MAY 27TH 2014



Ashwin Thadani

When Ashwin Thadani opened Galerie Isa in Mumbai in 2011, his vision was to bring international contemporary art to India, sourcing it from across the world while at the same time revolutionising its perception here.

The gallery is housed in a beautiful 300-year-old colonial building, giving it a unique old-world charm, juxtaposed with cutting edge modern art.

This time around, the gallery will showcase works of four iconic artists from different parts of the world in an exhibition titled *Between Worlds*, and the artworks will be on display from June 26, 2014 onwards.

We spoke to Thadani about his journey and inspiration in the art industry, and below are excerpts from our conversation with him...

### **My journey in the world of art...**

I was always drawn towards art. In the early '90s I started collecting Indian contemporary art.

I happened to visit Art Basel with a collector friend from London in 2007 and was taken aback with the scale of the fair and the art on display. I started visiting more fairs, like Frieze in London, regularly, and slowly began acquiring works for my own collection.

I was often asked during my travels why there was no platform for international art in India and I really had no answer. I was keen on doing something related to art and had this project playing on my mind. But I knew how complex it would be, so I was giving it some serious thought. Then, in April 2011 I met renowned German artist Anselm Reyle in Berlin at his exhibition opening and had the opportunity to speak to him about what I had in mind. He agreed to do the opening show for me and from then on there was just no looking back!

### **Reaction of the Indian audience...**

I think the Indian audience is now slowly appreciating international contemporary art more. Though the collector base is small, it has grown since inception. It is a slow and gradual process and that is why the programme is also structured in the same mode.

I can see that more people are taking art seriously and passionately and understanding it also from an investment point of view.

### **The upcoming exhibition...**

The upcoming group exhibition titled *Between Worlds* is a show that I am tremendously excited about. All four artists explore the terrain between abstraction and figuration, and each enjoys the physicality of painting and its process. The show has been curated by British curator Jane Neal; all the four artists have made a great body of work for the exhibition in India! The artists in the show are Iranian-born American artist Ali Banisadr, Romanian-born artist Marius Bercea, New York-based Puerto Rican artist Angel Otero and British artist Fiona Rae.



Curtain of Leisure by Marius Bercea

### **Art at Galerie Isa...**

I do an immense amount of research and travel to see exhibitions and meet artists that I feel would work well for the programme. The combination of mid-career established artists to the younger and more emerging ones is what you can find at Galerie Isa.

Besides traditional canvas paintings I am also drawn towards art of varied and challenging mediums. Like the works of German artist Anselm Reyle, who works with industrial foil as a medium, American artist Louise Despont, who draws on old ledger book pages, Puerto Rican artist Angel Otero uses oil skins in his work and Welsh artist Dan Rees, who makes stunning art works from plasticine, artex and gravel.

### **A moment in my art journey that I will never forget...**

Standing at the National Gallery in Berlin in September 2013 for the opening of a major museum show curated by the legendary Udo Kitleman of four artists - Martin Eder, Michael Kunze, Anselm Reyle and Thomas Scheibitz. It was a proud moment to be in such a great museum where three of the four artists in this institutional show are a part of Galerie Isa!

### **Future plans...**

Future plans would be to increase the shows slowly and to continue to make the programme grow successfully.