

Forging New Paths

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Sanjana Shah, Tao Art Gallery's creative director and the new India ambassador to the Arte Laguna Prize, spoke to us about the changing nature of art and the many possibilities awaiting artists

Team AI

Earlier this year, in the midst of a global pandemic, Mumbai's Tao Art Gallery decided to celebrate its 20th anniversary with the exhibition *The Tapestry of Time*. Curated by the acclaimed connoisseur and Tao's founder-director Kalpana Shah, the show brought together 70 artists in an experience that tracked the passage of time – on individuals, on communities, on art. A fitting tribute to the current state of affairs, the show highlighted the gallery's one unwavering resolution: to take art, especially the talent in the region to newer, bolder, more wider platforms. Which is why, it makes perfect sense that the gallery's creative director Sanjana Shah recently was appointed as the India Ambassador for the 15th Arte Laguna Prize – the prestigious international art competition that aims to promote the artists and their careers through an array of opportunities.

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– Sanjana Shah

From visiting shows as a child to nurturing and curating the Tao's powerful artistic presence, Sanjana's many trysts with art and her dedication to making it accessible has resulted in a rich tapestry that carries with it the significant lessons of history, and weaves in its very fabric, a collective desire, an understanding that art sustains communities and vice versa. Stepping into her own and actualising her creative visions, Sanjana spoke to us about her new role and how it could potentially affect the Indian art and its global standing.

Excerpts from the Interview

As the India Ambassador to the Arte Laguna Prize, how would you describe your role in the competition process? What do you hope to achieve?

My primary role in the process would be to help create awareness amongst the emerging contemporary artists about the Arte Laguna Prize and its variety of opportunities. The competition, even without winning the final prize, allows one to avail of other potential tie-ups with art galleries and residences around the world, and become a part of an amazing international network! It is a great way for artists to meet other artists, curators, patrons, art consultants and other people that make up the global art world. Through this participation, I hope to help achieve a name for Indian contemporary artists who have all the talent and ability to make their own mark on an international platform of creative expression.



How do you think this opportunity would help expand the significance and the scope of art in India?

Many contemporary artists in India, especially students fresh out of college, have the talent and passion for their art, but are unable to pursue it full-time due to lack of exposure and aid. Arte Laguna Prize, with its reasonable entry fee and scope of opportunities, is a great way to give these young creators a push and a platform. Our local art needs to grow and interact with a global audience. Hopefully in the years to come Indian art would maintain a regular presence and even become a consistent winner at the prestigious Venice art event.





What was the motivating factor? Why did you decide to take on this role right now, when the world seems to be warped in uncertainties?

In today's times, with the COVID pandemic, providing such a global opportunity and support system to young Indian artists goes a long way, in terms of encouragement. Art has been a significant anchor for all of us in such times, and it is our duty to ensure that we keep it alive and help it grow further. The unique expressions that our artists bring, deserve a voice and a larger audience. In fact, I see no better time than today for the world to come closer together and celebrate the irreplaceable value of art in our lives! The instinct to create, connect and convey is perhaps our most basic instinct as human beings.



What do you think might be your biggest challenge in the coming days?

I think getting the word out there is a primary challenge to begin with. Therefore, platforms like this are a big help. I want to be able to reach out to artists not just in the main Tier 1 cities but also the ones hidden away in smaller cities – motivate them to apply and push them to explore this opportunity. **There is also a special 50% discount on the application fee up until August 31st 2020**, so I would like people to avail of this while they can. Bringing the artists opportunities to grow and thrive is my pivotal job and I hope to be able to achieve it.



Finally, what are you most looking forward to with regards to the entries and the overall competition?

I am very excited to explore the range, the variety, the sheer intensity of creativity and talent this country has to offer! As a passionate gallerist and independent curator, it is always exciting to work closely with artists and observe their practises and thought processes. To be able to be a conduit for their art is a privilege – one that I am looking forward to channelling. I am also very enthusiastic about being in Venice next March/April for the competition itself and representing India and Indian talent. At a time like this, looking forward to a progressive and positive future is a much-needed motivation.



Sanjana Shah

All Images Courtesy of Tao Art Gallery, Mumbai

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