

APPLICATION THEORY

RICHA BHATIA

SHE bristles at the suggestion of a second career once her modelling stilettoes were put to rest, and says art has always been something of a hobby with her. Yet, it has taken model-turned-entrepreneur Simar Duggal some time to come up with her own art gallery, Pigment, an online space for interesting artworks. The 40-year-old, who held her first exhibition *Alt+ Refresh* in November, is only just discovering what draws visitors to openings — zany contemporary art, Korbel champagne paired with cheese canapes, and a guest list drawn from her little black book of numbers. Her opening show, featuring 18 artists such as Binoy Verghese, Manil Gupta, George Martin PJ, TM Aziz and newcomers Yogesh Sharma, Sachin Deo and Vijit Sharma, was hosted by Tonino's owner Paramjit Sawhney, Dugal's brother, where 400 guests such as Anag Bedi, designers Shantanu Mehra and Charu Parashar, gallerist Aarti Singh, entrepreneurs Navin Ansal and his wife Raseel Gujral, and designer-turned fashion merchandiser Monisha Bajaj put in an appearance.

"I have been dabbling in art for a long time, and have been collecting offbeat works for the past eight years. A lot of people who visit my Friends Colony residence admire the works and the way it is put up. I have been recommending artists to them, so after a point I decided to set up an online gallery," she says. She is now courting and developing young artists, and helping them through her "connection with the fashion world and placing them in a good environment". The response to the first exhibition was great, informs Dugal and 40 per cent of the works sold out, indicating a good start in the business. Yet, Dugal, also the owner of export house Basta, confesses her knowledge of art is far from comprehensive. So in a bid to educate herself further, she hopes to attend the upcoming Venice Biennale in Italy.

Dugal is of course, one of the many women who are turning to art as a second career in the Capital of late. While women like Renu Modi of Gallery Espace have already established a successful blueprint for it, a bunch of

Are art galleries the latest indulgence for Delhi's ladies looking for a second career?



(Clockwise from above): Dugal hosted her first exhibition last month; Priya Khanna is concentrating on young artists at the moment; Puja Gupta has educated herself in art through museum visits

young women are charting a new course in the business. The master artists have been replaced by bright contemporary art on their sales list and their desks are awash with applications from young artists.

Whether there's a boom in the art market or not, will be decided post the India Art Summit, but that hasn't



deterred the ladies who are banking on their crowd-drawing ability. Puja Gupta, an engineer-turned gallerist, fled down yesteryear actor Deepthi Naval, also an amateur artist, for an exhibition opening at her gallery Indian Art Experience in Gurgaon while Priya Khanna of the newly opened Gallery Joie in MGF Metropolitan Mall in Saket, ropes in a publicist to ensure a sprinkling of socialites. Meanwhile, a select number of senior artists are also part of the guest list to draw media coverage. "This is important as it lends a certain credibility," says Dugal.

Running an art gallery

though, requires more than that. Khanna, who is no stranger to art, knows it well. A former Ernst and Young employee, she quit her cushy job in 2007 to focus on art and motherhood. The 31-year-old has been organising exhibitions since 2005 at the Visual Arts Gallery, India Habitat Centre and the Lalit Kala Akademi with artists such as Sudip Roy and Paresh Maity, before launching her own in November this year. "Tax is something intangible, I was bored of crunching numbers, while art is something I can identify with," says Khanna, sitting at her 600 square feet art gallery, surrounded by large-format works of Nizom Saegayeva and Krishnendu Porel. "The costs have gone up tremendously over the past few years and it is not as fancy as it sounds to run an art gallery. One has to develop a set of buyers and take care of the logistics. Though one likes to support younger artists as much as one can, you can't run the gallery on sympathy alone," says Khanna, who is representing upcoming artists such as Somnath Datta and Biplab Rehman in forthcoming exhibitions. "I have never gone for a Husain or a Raza, simply because I believe in promoting younger artists who are still affordable," she said.

Luckily, rentals are not something that either Gupta or Khanna have had to worry about, since their gallery spaces have been "gifted" by family members. For Gupta, 40, a former information analyst with Discovery channel, the interest in art grew after doing up her home. Now, she curates shows at her 2,000 square feet gallery, wherein high net-worth individuals pore over works of relatively unknown artists such as Rajshri Gupta, Canada-based artist Vishal Mishra, Gurgaon-based Vallery Puri and Palaksh Mondal. "Running an art gallery is akin to running a shop. The rentals are mounting up, one has to invite art critics and big artists to exhibition openings to ensure a certain standard and to attract the crowd," she says.

Gradually, she has educated herself through catalogues and museum visits. "Interacting with senior artists helps a lot in my understanding," says Gupta, who draws on her corporate network to pull in buyers, willing to invest in lesser-known artists.

On the Loose



LEHER KALA

It's hard to ignore the hype around this night, which, going by stories from around the world, usually turns out to be a monumental letdown.

had been on the slower mind ourselves we were. This year, a close friend (banned). He was made (year, where he found his New Year's Eve. The party organised, but best deals tickets are highly sought of guests is 75 and it's a break into the first two or two aunts and attempt of strangers he declared spends another New Year the occasion ensures the out to be less fun than if expectations and keep it watching TV isn't a bad