



(ABOVE AND LEFT) RECENTLY, ING VYSYA ESTABLISHED A MILESTONE WHEN THEY OPENED THE WORLD'S FIRST ART BANK IN INDIA. BELIEVING IN THE CONCEPT OF ART OF BANKING AND TO GIVE THEIR CLIENTS AN EXPERIENCE OF NOUVEAU BANKING EXPERIENCE, THE BANK GOT TOGETHER WITH DR.ART+DESIGN, A BRAINCHILD OF MITALI BAJAJ, AND MADE THEIR BRANCH AT CUFFÉ PARADE, MUMBAI, AN INTERACTIVE SPACE WHERE THEIR CLIENTS CAN INTERACT WITH ART. SONALEE PANDA, BUSINESS HEAD WEALTH MANAGEMENT AND MARKETING, ING VYSYA, SAYS: "ING IS GLOBALLY VERY ACTIVE IN ART. THEY HAVE OVER 25,000 PIECES OF ART. THE ART BRANCH IS THE FIRST STEP IN INDIA TOWARDS MERGING WEALTH MANAGEMENT AND ART. OUR IMMEDIATE FOCUS IS TO EXPLORE AND MAKE THIS CONCEPT SUCCESSFUL."

established artists as well as new voices. "Associating with art not only ups our company's brand value, but we feel by supporting artists, we are doing our bit to power Indian contemporary culture's growth," said Thomas Kuehl, Director Sales and Marketing Skoda Auto India.

Another point in case in the recent award given by Asia Pacific Breweries Foundation to a public art installation, "The Water Diviner", created by Indian artist Sheba Chhachhi, which draws on the symbolism and importance of water in the Indian culture. Says Sarah Koh, General Manager, Group Corporate Communications, APB Limited, "The aim of the APB Foundation Signature Art Prize is to celebrate significant contemporary artworks created in the past three years. The Foundation has a firm commitment to nurturing the development of a vibrant arts scene in the region and wants to grow an audience for contemporary art with the Singapore Art Museum, whose focus is on contemporary art from Southeast Asia."

Going domestic, Bajaj Capital has constituted the annual Bajaj Capital Art House (BCAH) Art Positive Fellowship Award, which is usually given to young, emerging artists. But they also nurture this talent by giving the winner a solo show at their gallery space at Lado Sarai in Delhi. Though the reason for Bajaj Capital entering the art advisory and consultancy market was largely business-driven, they have ensured through their gallery space an equal emphasis on promoting young talent. Says Rajiv Bajaj, Vice Chairman & Managing Director, Bajaj Capital: "We believe besides equity and property, art is one of the major growth assets where people can create wealth over long term. Also, over the years, we have seen that our high-net worth clients invest 5-10 per cent of their total surpluses in art, primarily because of above reasons, but more importantly, due to their art passion."

But when it comes to corporate philanthropy, no one can do it better than HCL founder Shiv Nadar's wife, Kiran Nadar, now more aptly known as the brain behind one of India's most vibrant private art museums - the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art in Saket, New Delhi. Concur Mukesh Panika, Director, Religare Arts, one of the few multi-holistic art initiatives launched by a corporate house in India: "Kiran Nadar has changed the perception

that corporate social responsibility needs to be limited to developmental issues alone. Art is an intrinsic part of our living culture and the ideal scenario would be where every corporate house, which has a legacy to share, can build a museum and bring it into public domain."

Ask her if the growing corporate interest in arts is the way for the future and you get one big nod. "It's a good thing for art and culture as it has been in the background for too long. This impetus although belated is a new beginning and a necessity for modern and contemporary Indian art. Good commissioned art projects can come to artists. Some of them can be seen with relation to public and private architecture in different parts of the city. Though in a nascent stage, I am sure there would be possible ways of expanding the partnership in future."

Corporate interest in arts, hence, has to extend beyond the glittering award ceremonies and gallery launches. As Panika points out, "It has to be a 360 degrees platform." And that is precisely why Religare Arts has had the kind of success since it was founded in September 2007. Having supported emerging artists through well-thought out curatorial shows, ongoing residency programmes, well-documented and researched publications, it is today considered aspirational to be part of the Religare brand. "With the kind of financials a corporate house has, it is easier for them to take risks and invest in artists with a long-term vision," says Panika, who believes that merely going philanthropic is not going to serve the purpose.

It's a win-win situation for the corporates as well. For instance, at the Mercedes-Benz supported Saffront auction, held in September last year, the opportunity was used to unveil a customized Mercedes-Benz S-Class 'Art Edition', one of a limited edition of two cars specially made in Germany.

Yet, the other truth is that in the absence of a trained and specialised team to guide even the well-intentioned corporate houses, the corporate-art union may turn out to be just a passing affair. As Panika cautions, "Corporates need to be patient with the results." What is really needed is corporate support at the seeding stages: to art colleges, innovative art organisations and build infrastructure. &