



Jawahar Sircar

Creative Impulse

A conversation between Uma Prakash and Jawahar Sircar

The buzz in Jawahar Sircar, Secretary of Culture's office is infectious. Sircar attends to his telephone, gives his immediate attention to incoming emails, discusses future events, and views the news channel. Sircar's multi-tasking helps him achieve his objective which is to promote and create an awareness of Indian art and culture from antiquities to contemporary art.



Jawahar Sircar, Secretary,
Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India

A nephew of the famous artist Hemendranath Mazumdar Sircar was imbued with appreciation of art and culture from a young age. This he combined with his acumen of and Finance which he acquired when he headed senior posts in the Finance and Commerce divisions of the Indian Government, making him the natural choice for the post of Secretary, Ministry of Culture in the Government of India.

An alumni of the Presidency College, Calcutta Sircar is aware of both: the integral role culture plays in transcending boundaries as well as the necessity of promoting Indian art and culture in the international arena. He facilitated in bringing Anish Kapoor to India in the National Gallery of Modern Art and the Mehboob Studios in Mumbai and was instrumental in persuading the government to participate at the prestigious Venice Biennale which will open in June 2011. For the first time, India will have a pavilion at the Venice Biennale,

with the support of its Ministry of Culture and the Lalit Kala Akademi. The pavilion is curated by Ranjit Hoskote who has selected Zarina Hashmi, a printmaker and sculptor, Gigi Scaria, a painter and video artist, Praneet Soi, a mixed-media artist, and The Desire Machine Collective, made up of the husband-and-wife team Mriganka Madhukaillya and Sonal Jain. The pavilion's theme is "Everyone Agrees: It's About to Explode."

Sircar is as deeply concerned about the neglected state of antiques in our country and is actively searching for qualified dedicated scholars to head the many museums in our country. He is involved in the celebrations of Rabindranath Tagore's 150th centenary in India and abroad as the world commemorates the great poet.

UP: There is talk of this revisal Indian Antiques and Art Treasures Act of 1972. Do you find it a welcome development for the future?



Sircar with Mrs. Sonia Gandhi & Anish Kapoor at National
Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi

JS: I think the Ministry of culture stands committed before parliament that we would take up the required amendments for this act and Archeological Survey of India has set up a committee of experts, whose recommendations are supposed to be on the way.

UP: We would cherish our heritage treasures to be better appreciated abroad. Which would be the best method to do so? Via museum exhibitions, workshops, lectures where our heritage treasures are loaned for a given period of time?

JS: A lot of our heritage treasures are abroad. They do get exposure like the Amravati in the British Museum and Kalighat paintings in Victoria and Albert Museum. We send exhibitions periodically and also have loans and exchanges like the small arrangements we have with The Asian Civilization Museum in Singapore.

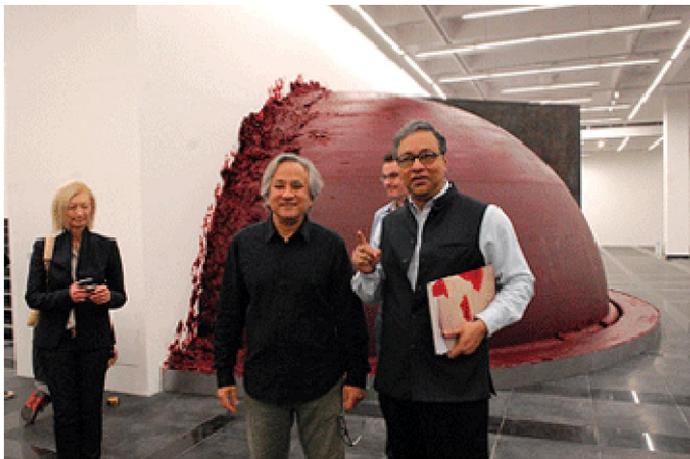
UP: Do you favour a regular flow of art treasures from one country to another in order to increase worldwide appreciation of the heritage art of different countries? If so, how should we organize it from India's point of view?

JS: There is a two way flow happening like the Chinese Antiquities in India and several Victoria and Albert Museum's Indian art exhibitions over the last few years.

UP: It would give India status if we could hold a representative example of world art both ancient and modern in our museums. Would it therefore be a good practice to allow some of our own heritage art to grace the museums of different countries?

JS: It's difficult to mix the modern and the ancient although not completely impossible. For this a skillful curator is required who could bring out the links between ancient civilization and modern art. It's difficult to club the two. It's like wearing red socks, shoes with a dhoti.

UP: In order to achieve high standards of exhibition would we have to review the present state of our museums in India?



Sircar with Anish Kapoor

JS: Of course it is under continuous review. Unfortunately antiques have not been given due attention for a long time. I am in the receiving end of this. I have been trying very hard to revive the interest in antiques. We have been looking out for qualified people who would head our museums to fill the vacancies of these posts.

UP: Naturally we would also like some of our national treasures imported back to our country like

Gandhi's spectacles which were recently auctioned abroad and other works of art. How would you facilitate such a movement without penalizing the person wanting to bring back some rare pieces of heritage to the country where it belongs?

JS: We are giving it our strong support. Gandhi' spectacles will be housed in our own national museum. We have declared that Indian art and antiques that are meant for public viewing will not be taxed.

UP: Should the movement of heritage art be restricted in such a formal manner or do you see a day emerging when an ordinary person is able to buy such an object for the

love and joy it will give him?

JS: At a personal level I feel there should be a greater movement of art objects within India to reflect aesthetics and economics. However before heritage objects are taken abroad there should be greater scrutiny.

UP: Don't you think the Antiquity Act has destroyed the antique market in India?

JS: That is a speculating question

UP: How did India's participation in the Venice Biennale happen?

JS: It took a lot of convincing. Lalit Kala moved in, appointed Ranjit Hoskote our curator and we now have an Indian Pavilion at the Biennale.