

BY EKATMATA SHARMA

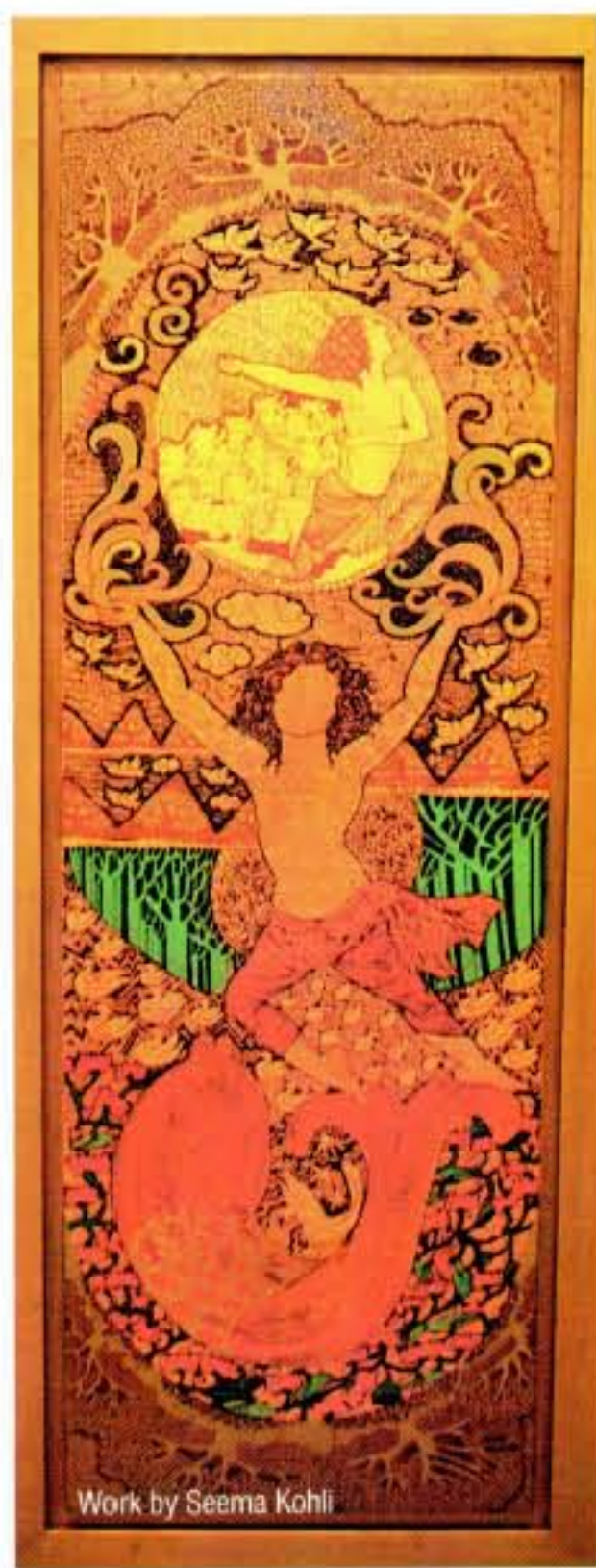
If you are basking in the glory of a Husain painting on your office wall that you bought at a hard-to-believe bargain, then there could be a possibility of it being a fake. Emergence of fake art is a serious concern for artists, art galleries, collectors and art aficionados. After having done with the paintings of modern artists, recently a bronze sculpture by Satish Gujral was faked and sold. There has been no control over the profitable fake art market, running parallel to the real market, and the senior artists are helpless about the grave situation.

Renowned artist Satish Gujral throws some light, "I come across my fakes too often. When possible, I confiscate them but the world is too large to do much. Not one, but several dealers sell fakes of my work and operate just a stone's throw away from my residence in Delhi. Most of the fakes are coming from Kolkata, Mumbai and even Pakistan. It began with the boom in the art prices about two decades ago."

Veteran artist Arpana Caur too had similar encounters with her fake works. "I have encountered my fake works often. A Delhi gallerist bought one of my works from a dealer and when she showed it to me, I realised it was fake. I already had the original work that I had forgotten to sign and had come back to me from Singapore. I was shocked to see the resemblance between the fake and the real. It makes me cry when I see a fake Souza, Raza, Husain or Jamini Roy in front of my eyes."

According to art critic Suneet Chopra, India has a parallel black market for every field, and now we have the fake art market. Artists and curators believe that fake art works have been around since the beginning, but now their presence is being felt even more. Anubhav Nath, Director of Ojas Art, agrees, "There have been international crackdowns that have happened in the antiquity sector where many big players were involved. In contemporary Indian art, the faking problem is surfacing now."

Fake art is a huge market and is practised globally, Suneet says. "Fakes of Leonardo Da Vinci can be seen all over the world. Fakes are being made and sold all over London,

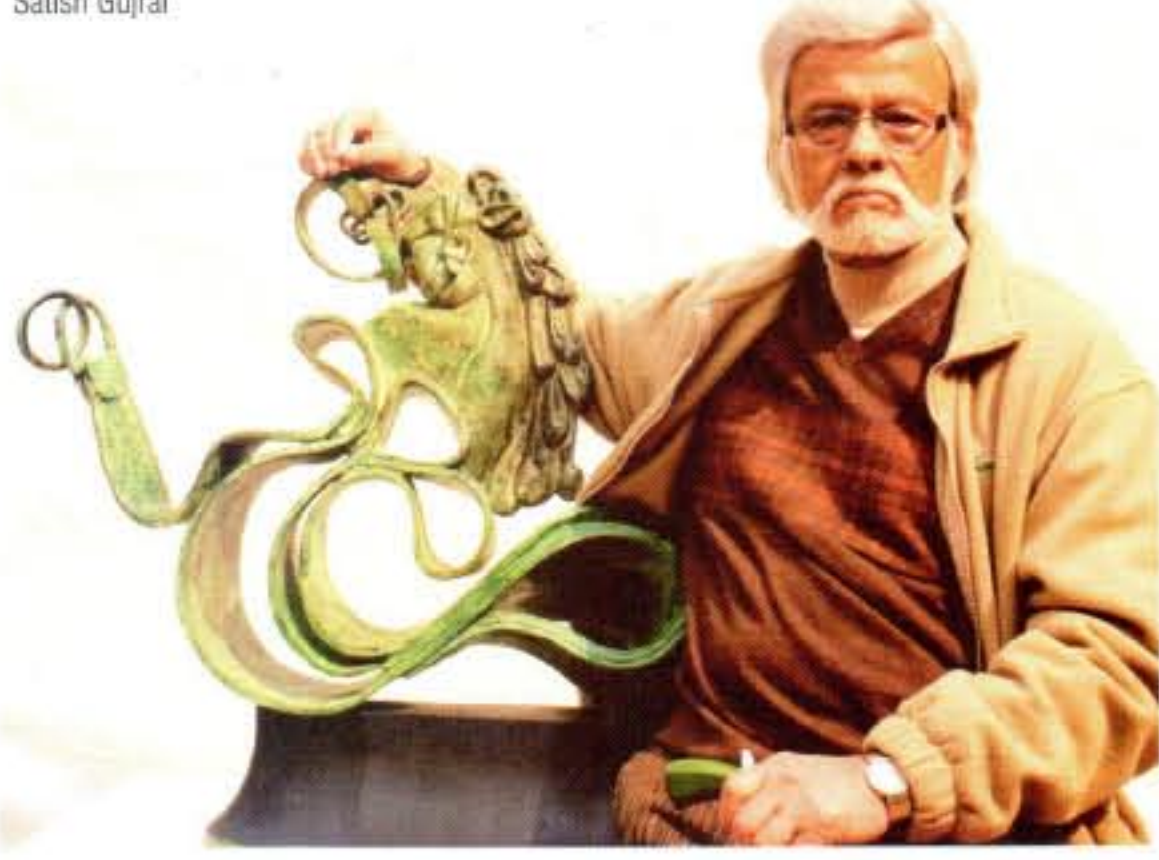


Work by Seema Kohli

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Satish Gujral



Alka Pande



Arpana Caur

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Singapore, Paris, Moscow, etc. People want to adorn their drawing rooms with them not as art pieces, but as status pieces, not knowing the worth of creativity. Paintings and sculptures are high value and unique utility items. Unfortunately, the people who are making fakes are not concerned about the creativity of an art work. At Bristol Hotel, Gurgaon, many fake copies of 18th century paintings can be seen on the walls," he complains. A parallel industry in reproduction art flourishes with the help of hundreds of copy artists—mostly living art school graduates—who eke out a living by copying the masters. "The demand for a fake is the same as that for the real artwork, so there's a boom in the fakes market," adds Babita Gupta, Director, Art Spice gallery.

The modern masters are being faked more often as there is immense demand for their works. A demand of fakes comes from spurious dealers who sell fakes as real. Mohit Jain says, "The demand is from those who cannot afford an original but have to prove their status and those who can't arrange a particular artist's work for sale and are desperate for business." Alka Pande, Curator and Art Consultant, mentions that it's only when an artist becomes incredibly expensive that their fake works come in the market. Adds Suneet, "Once the fakes enter the market, the prices of the original works go down. The fake art is killing the art market. The richest of people are going for fakes to churn more money and good profits." Meanwhile, Seema Kohli, who has come across fakes of her own works, feels that it is those artists who have not been able to create a niche for themselves that create the fakes. "These artists are skilled though lacking the power of creativity."

Arpana Caur is sad that many living contemporary masters are struggling to fight the problem because of reasons like difficulty in keeping tabs of their works that have gone abroad and also because most of them are ageing and don't have the energy and resources to trace the fakes.

While at some level, they have tried to take control of the situation, some stay silent about

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Anubhav Nath



Mohit Jain



Shobha Bhatia



Sunaina Malhotra

the situation. Suneet puts forth, "There have been artists who have stood up and spoken against their fake art works. Arpana Caur bought six of her fake works. Anjolie Ela Menon had her assistant, Hamid Safi, arrested for producing fakes of her paintings and selling them off." When Arpana Caur got to know about the fakes of her work, she enquired about its purchase. "When I asked the gallerist the purchase details of the painting, she told me that it was bought by Rajesh Shukla, an art critic. The painting was copied very well but the figure's eyes and face could not be faked to perfection. So, I recognised the fake. The second fake came to me through an art dealer in South Extension and Lado Sarai in Delhi, to whom it was sold by Sharma Framers in Lajpat Nagar, Delhi. I filed a case against him in the crime branch but nothing happened. He has faked a lot of art works. Then, I got to know that a friend of mine was posing as a collector and selling fakes at one tenth the price of my works." She adds poignantly, "As an artist's life has a lot of struggle, the actual money comes in only after 15-20 years of hard work. When the artists become famous and their works start to sell, these fake vultures come and hamper the market."

Anubhav Nath believes that some artists prefer to stay silent on their fake works as talking about it might have a negative impact on the market for them. He says, "People will become very cautious and a lot of authentic work may also land up being declared fake."

"Most artists choose to prudently avoid getting into the cumbersome legal procedure of our country. Imagine, even Indira Gandhi's assassination case took years to reach its end," says Satish Gujral despondently. He adds, "The bigger the artist, the more the fakes fetch. Ninety per cent of the people who purchase the fakes know that it's one. It satisfies their hunger to show off." Artist Sunayana Malhotra agrees, "I was recently dismayed to see a Satish Gujral fake art work in

a Delhi farmhouse. It left me wondering why anyone would buy a fake when they can easily afford the original."

Experts believe that the fake art market is emerging each year, reaping high profits. Babita says, "The fake art market in India has grown phenomenally to at least three times the size of the original market—estimated at over \$400 million—in the last decade. Delhi and Baroda are fast emerging as centres for producing fakes." It is reported that Kolkata is also fast emerging as the main centre for producing fakes, where out of work art graduates make a living by creating them. Shobha Bhatia of Gallerie Ganesha agrees, "Kolkata is well-known as a centre for fakes but Mumbai and Delhi are not far behind, with a number of so called 'Fake Factories'." Sunaina Anand, Director, Art Alive Gallery, says that the discovery of the fakes of Rabindranath Tagore's art, that too in his centenary year, naturally put the city in focus. "It is hard to ignore its existence. The number is enough to sustain the community of fake buyers and sellers," she says.

As the skill of the person faking the work is very high, there have been instances where even the art connoisseurs were not able to recognise the art works. "Even a big auction house like Christie's has been on the spot recently because they sold a fake to a collector and got sued for it," informs Babita.

With experts failing to recognise fake works, it becomes important for buyers to have the right eye and beware of frauds. Mohit informs, "Being the oldest gallery, we have come across a lot of fakes and have dealt with it. The buyer should verify the source of the painting. Secondly, the ageing cannot be hidden, so consider that. Thirdly, if the artist is alive, they should countercheck." Babita meanwhile says that real paintings feel rough on the surface with the natural feel of dried oil or acrylic paint. Fake paintings, on the other hand, are often reproduced on insubstantial paper and have a thin, photocopy-like texture. She advises, "Take the painting

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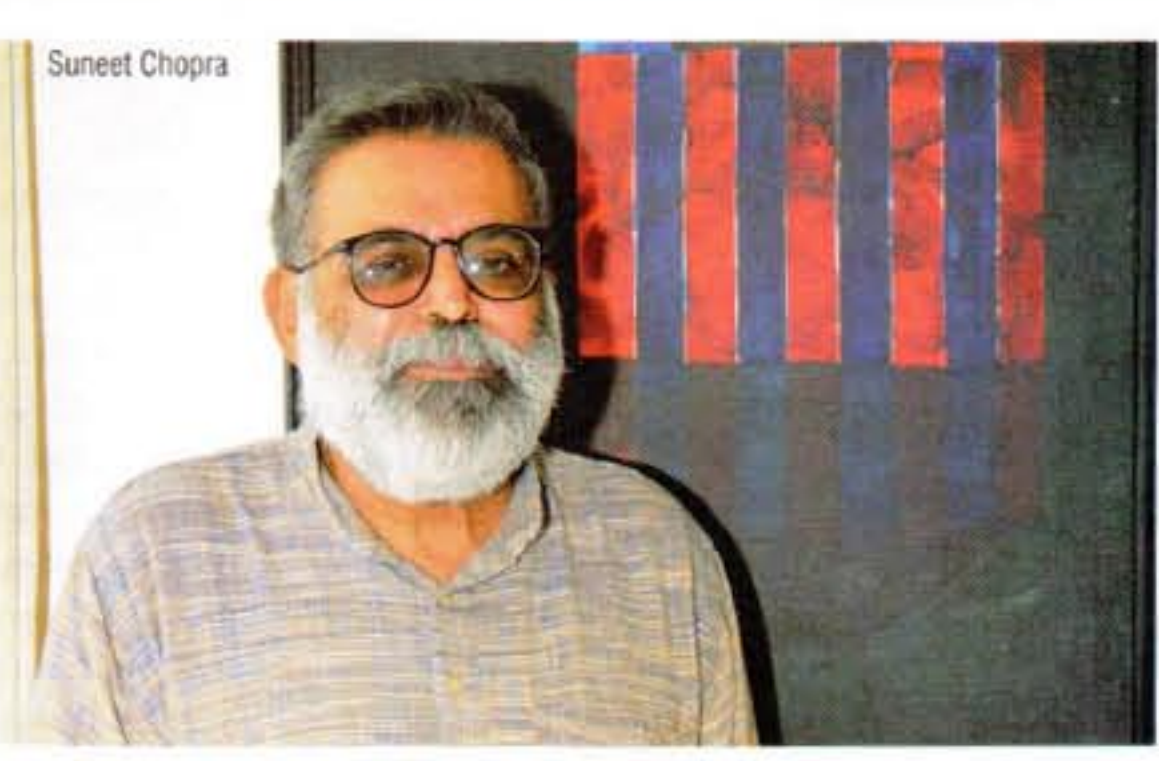
Babita Gupta



Seema Kohli



Suneet Chopra



to a professional art authenticator, ask him to perform a thread count-irregularity test; it is most advantageous for spotting a forgery."

Alka Pande gets that it's very important for the buyers to say that authenticity certificate from the gallery. There are so many Jamini Roys and Husains floating in the market. "Husain did not sign many of his works, so when some of his works were sent to him for verification, he refused to accept them as his. As a curator, I think 10 times before identifying the work as fake. The gallerist should be honest to its buyer and the buyer has to be aware." Suneet suggests, "Don't go for bargains. Nobody will agree to sell a real work for one tenth the original price. Unfortunately, leading art galleries in India are inviting copied works of senior artists. The art galleries are doing it deliberately."

Hopefully, the art market is realising the gravity of the situation and taking steps to control it, but not much has been done in this regard. Mohit says, "We are all getting conscious and have started issuing authenticity certificate for our works. At the same time, I would like to say that it's not enough." Sunaina adds that artists should number each of their works and keep a record before releasing them in the market. Some artists like Anjolie Ela Menon and Jogen Chowdhury follow this practice."

Disappointed, Arpana says that she has told the Lalit Kala Academy to hire a lawyer to approach such cases, but there has been no response. "In our country, when people get away with murder then what is faking in front of it? Sunaina has a long term suggestion. She feels the need to institute an all-India association of art galleries and dealers who can take a stand against such practices confronting the art world—just like the UK's Society of London Art Dealers. "It is in the interest of all serious art aficionados that we get together and finish this illegal practice. It is nowhere when the market is too good. It is nowhere when compared to the 2G and the coal scams in India," Suneet concludes, full of hope. <<<

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