



Sundaram Tagore's "World Art" Fills a Venetian Palazzo

By Casey Lesser

Artsy

May 8, 2015

Sundaram Tagore had his first taste of the Venice Biennale as a graduate student, when a scholarship from the Italian Ministry of Culture landed him in the city to study museology at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection. "That was 1989, the first time ever I was exposed to the idea of the Biennale," Tagore remarks. "Someone actually from the Guggenheim told me to go to the Biennale and drop something off. And that's when I learned—wow, there's this thing called the Biennale." Now, 26 years on, with eponymous galleries in New York, Singapore, and Hong Kong, Tagore has returned to mount his own exhibition to run alongside the 56th Venice Biennale.



Eddi Prabandono, After Party/Living the High Life, 2013. Installation view of "Frontiers Reimagined," Museo di Palazzo Grimani, Venice. Courtesy Sundaram Tagore gallery and the artist.

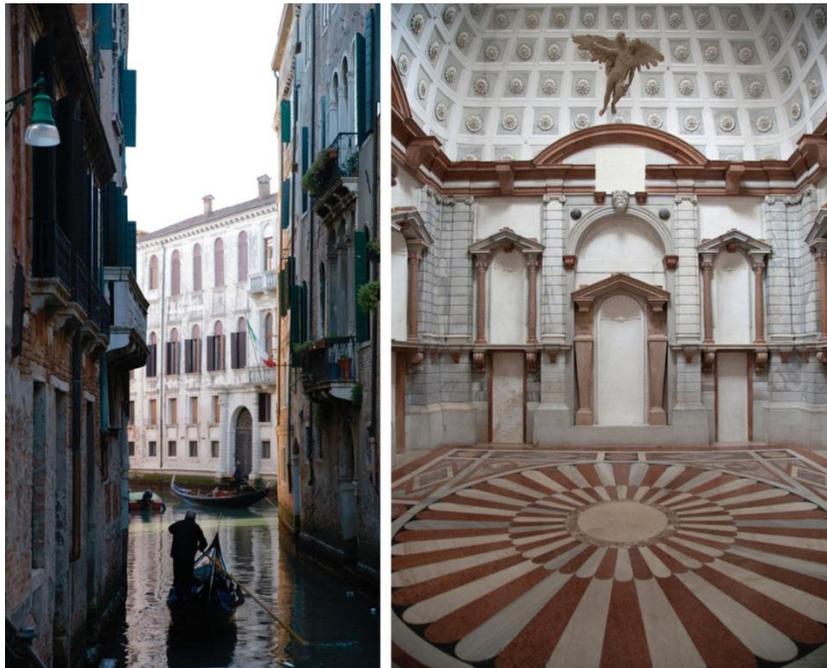
"My interest has always been about cross-cultural dialogue and globalization," Tagore tells me over the phone from a Venetian plaza with children's screams ringing in the background. His Venice exhibition, titled "Frontiers Reimagined," embodies this interest, as do his galleries and his nonprofit Tagore Foundation International, which seeks to promote arts education. "When I formed the gallery in 1999–2000 about globalization, people would ask me, 'What are you representing? Are you representing a niche market or are you representing any particular area of art?' And I would say, 'I'm representing

artists globally—world art.’ And they would ask me, ‘World art? What does that mean?’” he recalls. Tagore’s inclination to embrace a global grouping of artists was prescient; in the current, increasingly globalized art world, the idea of “world art” goes without question—and there may be no better place to experience it than at the Venice Biennale.



View of Museo di Palazzo Grimani, Venice. Courtesy Sundaram Tagore Gallery.

The show is not just a global vision of art, though; it celebrates interactions between cultures and the ideas that artists propose in order to confront global issues. “All these issues that exist—whether it’s the environment, technology, gender issues, violence against women—all of these things, how can we make them better? How can we think about them? That’s what this exhibition is about.”



Views of Museo di Palazzo Grimani, Venice. Courtesy Sundaram Tagore Gallery.

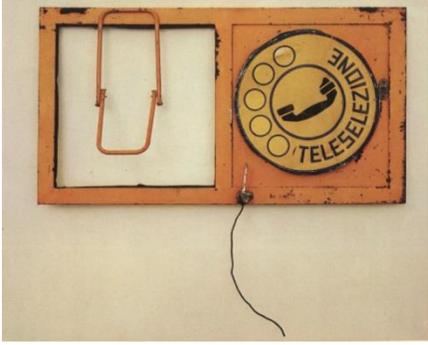


Sebastião Salgado, Church Gate Station, Western Railroad Line, Bombay India, 1995.

*Courtesy Sundaram Tagore Gallery
© Sebastião Salgado/Amazonas Images*

An official collateral exhibition of the Biennale, “Frontiers Reimagined” represents 25 countries through 44 artists and 65 works—all within the 16th-century Museo de Palazzo Grimani. The historic site, which has undergone an extensive restoration, adds undeniable charm and context to the exhibition, but has posed logistical challenges. “We can’t put a single nail in the wall. We have had to have every mounting structure custom-built. That’s been in the works since the summer,” Tagore explains. “Since 2007, essentially, I was planning to hold the show at the Biennale, and then the financial crisis took place and that was a dream—and the reality is now.”

While many of the artists in the show hail from his gallery’s roster, many others do not. “The idea was it can’t just be about the gallery artists,” Tagore says. The exhibition encompasses a broad range, from Robert Rauschenberg, whom the gallerist remembers as a friend, to major contemporary names like Vik Muniz and Christo, to world-renowned photographers like Edward Burtynsky and Sebastião Salgado. That said, Tagore has been careful to give just as much exposure to a host of emerging and lesser-known artists. “Venice is a place for discovery,” he notes. “People are coming here to learn about what’s happening in the art world, and it is your role, when you’re presenting an exhibition, not just to show the same thing.” Among the emerging artists included are Singaporean Jane Lee, Swiss-Haitian Sasha Huber, and Bangladeshi Tayeba Begum Lipi.



Robert Rauschenberg
Giallo Call Glut
(Neapolitan), 1987
Sundaram Tagore
Gallery



Christo
The Gates, Project for
Central Park, New York
City, 2002
Sundaram Tagore
Gallery



Ricardo Mazal
Black Mountain MK 2,
2014
Sundaram Tagore
Gallery

As visitors enter Palazzo Grimani's grand piano nobile, they encounter Thai artist Nino Sarabuttra's installation of small ceramic skulls, which they must walk over as they head for the main floor. "Sarabuttra used her family members, friends, and her students to create hundreds of thousands of little skulls," Tagore explains. "The idea is, what does it mean to walk in this reimagined, new space? And while you are thinking about it, the title of this piece is What will you leave behind? So while you're walking, you're going through this process of transformation, thinking about what we have to do to create a better world." Other highlights that lead the way into the show include Mexican artist Ricardo Mazal's spiritual paintings, inspired by the holy site Mount Kailash and the traditional prayer flags found there, and Lipi's sleek razor blade-laden furniture pieces.



*Nino Sarabutra
What Will You Leave Behind?, 2012
Sundaram Tagore Gallery*



Tayeba Begum Lipi
My Mother's Dressing Table, 2013

This global vision of the arts runs in Tagore's blood. He grew up in Calcutta, in a family that was at the core of the city's cultural scene during the 20th century, surrounded by the legacy of his Nobel Prize laureate great-grandfather, Rabindranath Tagore, and the artists and intellectuals who attended the university he founded, Vishva-Bharati. "People from all over the world were stationed there," Tagore recalls. "They'd come, they taught, and they imparted and imbibed in the culture." Additionally, Rabindranath Tagore (a polymath if there ever was one) was a key player in the organization of the first international Bauhaus exhibition in Calcutta in 1922. "So that's been part of my thinking pattern, and it's been a part of my DNA, and that's part of my world. I've lived in dozens of countries," the gallerist says.



Hiroshi Senju
Suijin, 2015
Sundaram Tagore Gallery

“Expression is a human necessity. We need to express—and with that probably transform the world, hopefully in a better way,” Tagore replies when asked what he hopes viewers will take away from the exhibition. “Hopefully, that’s what the audience will carry with them—that it’s been meaningful, that they went to a place and it wasn’t about glitz and glamour. It allowed me to think and it extended my vision of the universe in some sense through these incredible works of art.”



View of Museo di Palazzo Grimani, Venice. Courtesy Sundaram Tagore Gallery.

“Frontiers Reimagined” is on view at Museo di Palazzo Grimani, Venice, May 9–Nov. 22, 2015
Follow Sundaram Tagore Gallery on Artsy.

Online: <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-sundaram-tagore-s-world-art-fills-a-venetian>