



the pioneer

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The social inclusion of art

Renowned artist Shombit Sengupta discusses with AVANTIKA BOSE what values Indians could inculcate in their art, whose works fascinate him, and why and how art is forever

Shombit Sengupta is a renowned French artist of Indian origin who has participated in shows in Louvre in Paris, Venice, Milan, and Tokyo. On March 2, he gave a talk at the Confluence 2017 Conference organised by Mahindra Real Estate on the theme "Building Cities to Last". Not only did I attend the talk but also had the pleasure of interviewing him.

In "Building Cities to Last", he focuses on the importance of visual art in building cities. He explains about how India from the ancient times has always been a very inclusive society and that there is *désordre* (which in French means disorder of physical objects) literally everywhere — in infrastructure, in housing, way of living, public amenities, transport, the market place etc. A futuristic planned city or layout in India creates isolation from this inclusive, *désordre* society. For Sengupta to build a city that would last, you need to keep these points in mind — high blend of social inclusiveness, *désordre* architectural view, ability for regular change, man-material ergonomic blend, intertemporal artistic beauty, natural



calamity proof, dreamy sewage, and friendly elegant technology.

The following interview sheds light on the prolific artist Shombit Sengupta, who, much like his work, is a dynamic person.

Why do you do what you do?

I have been painting ever since I was a kid, it gives me an elevation that catapults me away from my surroundings. I love it. In my childhood it was perhaps a form of escape to avoid conventional basic schooling. Art is freedom of expression, there is no boundary; that's what attracts me the most. Artistic freedom of imagination is why I paint and create works of art.

What kind of art is unappealing to you?

In my opinion, every form or style of art is beautiful in its own way. But when an artist replicates his own painting to become repetitive or copies others, it irritates me. There is nothing wrong when an artist draws inspiration from other artists and interprets that artist's art in his or her own way. For example, Vincent van Gogh, when he was admitted to a mental asylum, made ditto copies of 21 paintings of Jean Francois Millet. He acknowledged that he copied Millet, but van Gogh's own style finally came through in these paintings.

Indian Masters, those who paint with the influence of British western art, have literally copied the Western style of certain painters from the West without acknowledging their inspiration or influence. This is disgraceful. This does not help young Indian artists to understand the origin of different sources of art.

What art movement or artist would you say influences your work the most?

I am highly inspired by the French school of art in every sense of art. According to me, no country in the world has this art flair which is above politics and religion. I love the inclusiveness of India's extremely heterogeneous society, India's non-conformist colours and the physical *désordre* you find in every aspect of life here. It has a terrific charm.

Inspiration from Jean Francois Millet was critical to my entering into Modern Art. I hugely admired how the artistic palette of immigrant artists in France changed when they migrated to France. In particular, Dutchman Vincent van Gogh's paintings from "Potato Eaters", the dark painting done in Holland to the bright "Sunflowers" painted in France, show this radical change.

Claude Monet, has always astonished me in the way he created the context for his paintings. He builds his own house and garden in Giverny, 70 km from Paris, and painted that throughout his life. So now when you visit Giverny you can understand the ingenuity of this context creating Impressionist painter. You cannot capture this context in MOMA New York where some of his paintings are now kept. Breaking Realism to arrive at the Impressionism form was really work of ahead of time at that time.

Leonardo da Vinci is a big inspiration for me. His visionary thinking was 600 years ahead of his time. He is the only artist who proved that an artist can do everything in society, from perfection of art to science to engineering to medical science. Anti-art Dadaism has created incredible art from the time of World War I, and Surrealism also engrosses me a lot.

If there was one dead artist that you could hang out with for a day, who would that be? Hands down, Leonardo da Vinci!

What are your thoughts on being an artist in today's world?

For me fine art defines futuristic vision without any boundary. It is a metaphor of beauty. It improves our way of living, contributes to changing the perception of society, and adds value to create uniqueness in economic growth. It sensitises and intrigues people to imagine differently. It revives and regenerates all forms of art like cinema, theatre, literature, fashion, design and architecture. The dimension of fine arts is always at a higher platform.



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The intrinsic value addition of fine arts in a country's economy cannot be compared with any other industry. In November, a painting Modigliani did in 1917 was sold for \$170 million at Christie's auction house. It was bought by a Chinese billionaire Liu Yiqian. Just look at how China, a developing country, is nurturing fine arts openly in the western society to bring outstanding cultural elevation into their society. This is proof of the value of art being at the summit in developing societies.

I feel today's generation of Indian artists are creating magnificent works of art. They should not be overshadowed by so-called Indian Master painters. Of course social media brought the world of art into their hands. That's a big advantage. If they have the will they will know about the art they are doing and in what context. Indian collectors or viewers or gallerists should pay extreme attention to these artists; their ideology and style should get huge admiration in India and around the globe. I have seen that lots of Western style contemporary Indian artists have very interesting global values in their

paintings. That can become big only when art promoters believe in them and inspire them to grow without blocking the market door with the Indian Master paintings.

Young Indian painters can explore more things which are absolutely Indian to add to their works of art. For instance, in rural parts of India you would see women wearing bright and colourful clothes and this represents a certain type of elegance. But in urban parts you see people following more of Western trends. I believe these new gen artists should follow western style art but keep some Indian-ness for their identification. I can express myself here. My inspiration is French but my bright colours are non-conformist Indian colours with *désordre* form on the painting subject.

Where do you think your creativity comes from?

This world is a magnificent, beautiful place. My Gesturism art form is surrounded with human gestures from birth to death. It is totally impromptu. We don't know what could happen to us after one second. I derive inspiration from this momentum and by mixing with different people of the

world, their culture, way of living, their relationship with nature. Every single thing that this universe offers stimulates my creativity except human jealousy, anger and hate.

As an artist, have you ever experienced a 'creative block'? If so, how did you manage to overcome it?

I have never had a creative block. According to me artists don't have this so called issue. I feel it's all made up. This world is such a beautiful, positive place and there is so much that can inspire us, so I find it nearly impossible that a concept like 'creative block' can exist. It's all in our minds. Even if an artist experiences creative block, this creative block itself could be a subject of painting to create hundreds of works of art.

What has been your most touching or amazing moment, that you have experienced as an artist?

The most touching and amazing moment for me as an artist was when my *désordre* installation was exhibited in Carrousal du Louvre, Paris in 2015. In this global art fair so many viewers came and touched my *désordre* painting just at the bottom of the gigantic monument that houses the paintings of Leonardo da Vinci, Rembrandt among others. This was the summit for me as an artist.

If there was a magic power you could use in your art making, what would it be?

Art can never be magic. When a magician is on stage you see his performance and when his act is over, it no longer exists. Art on the other hand, is forever. It doesn't disappear even after the artist finishes the painting or dies. Magic is a trick, it can't be compared with art or be used to make art. Art is a vision, artists go way ahead of time; art requires creativity and has no boundaries. So to answer your question, I wouldn't use any magical powers to make art. Art started before civilisation and every time incredible visionary artists left their art work for the future imagination.