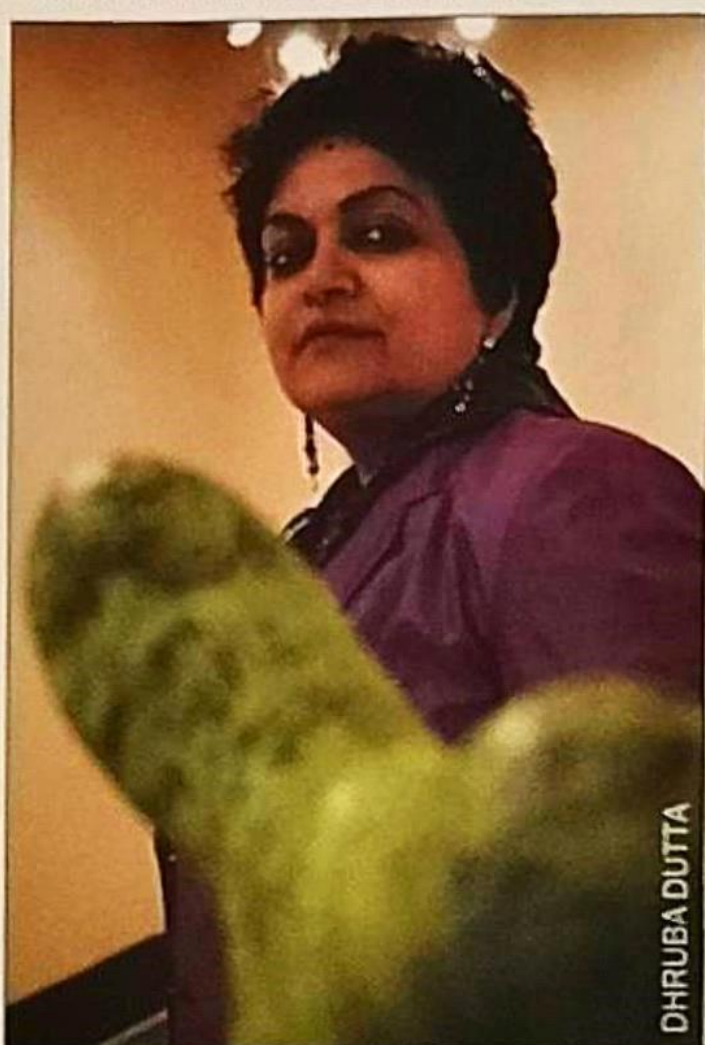


Graphic detail

Alka Pande



DHRUBA DUTTA

From her vantage point at the Visual Arts Gallery, Alka Pande has a finger in many artistic pies. The curator of several shows this fortnight, including S Ayesha's *Different Faces*, talks art to **Sonal Shah**.

People see you as educator, curator, author... How would you define yourself?

I would like to say that I am a cultural theorist and an independent curator.

Do you believe there is a nurturing community for artists in India?

No, no. In India, the nurturing of artists was in the days of traditional societies where there were true patrons of art, whether the Guptas or the Mughals... We lack that; we don't have a clear, defining policy towards nurturing culture or a true public avenue for art. Ten years ago, girls were sent to do fine arts and artists were seen as that "poor fellow", and that's no longer the case. But we need more museums and both public and private initiatives that focus on creativity that may be ephemeral.

What is the state of art criticism in this city?

There are lots of schools: the aesthetics course at JNU, the National Museum's programme... but true art criticism is not finding its voice. That's because there is no place where it can be printed. Catalogues are no longer a good arena for criticism. I hardly write catalogues unless for an artist I am promoting – after all, if you are paid to write in a catalogue, where does that leave critical objectivity? Where does a true critic write? To

some extent *The Hindu* has criticism, but where else? While there are departments that teach art criticism, there is no domain where they can share it.

You work internationally with people on global themes. How do you explain this to insular art lovers?

I'll be very honest. It is a global world and everyone knows it – the enlightened collector who travels is exposed and open to this. But how do we promote this? A magazine like yours which talks about such events in advance is important. The more people can experience these things, the better – but it is difficult with so much emphasis on selling. I feel very lucky to have a space like the Visual Arts Gallery, which is a very dynamic, challenging space – where we can bring these sorts of shows.

Any upcoming artists to watch out for?

There are so many. But each one of us has to be careful about how we go about promoting them.

What about S Ayesha, whose exhibition you are promoting in May?

I think that Ayesha's language is the language of a truly contemporary Indian artist. It is a movement away from the tradition of completely pure fine art drawing or pure sculpture.

What do you see it moving towards?

It is a maturing of a graphic medium. Graphic art is becoming a mainstream visual art; it has its own very contemporary immediacy to it. Ayesha is taking photography, design – every technique of graphic art – and turning it into a new language, which comes from a language of communication.

As a curator, what's your goal in showcasing this?

For me it's really a discovery of an artist with a very strong personal visual language. I want to bring this language, the voice of contemporary India, into that more conservative space – the white cube of the gallery – and develop it further. See Preview on S Ayesha's *Different Faces and Visual Arts Gallery in Exhibitions*.