

Nadia And Rajeeb Samdani projecting South Asian art to the world



Zahangir Alom

Celebrated art connoisseurs, collectors and entrepreneurs Rajeeb and Nadia Samdani are the founders of the Samdani Art Foundation that has been organising Dhaka Art Summit biennially, bringing together curators, artists, critics and other art professionals from around the globe. They are also the founding members and Co-Chairs of Tate's South Asian Acquisitions Committee, a member of Tate's International Council, and the founding members of The Harvard University Lakshmi Mittal South Asia Institute's Arts Advisory Council.

The Samdanis' vast collection includes modern and contemporary artworks by the artists of South Asia and the world. The avid art supporters strongly feel that a well-equipped and permanent modern and contemporary art museum is for the benefit of Bangladeshi artists and audience.

According to Rajeeb Samdani, Bangladeshi artists are now reaching the global art scene as Kamruzzaman Shadhin's works are on display at the GARAGE Museum, Moscow. He further noted that Ayesha Sultana and Naeem Mohaiemen's works are being showcased at Tate Modern Museums, UK while Munem Wasif has covered a wall with framed cyanotype prints of rice seeds in the 12th edition of Gwangju Biennale, South Korea.

“If we don't give artists proper space to develop and display their works, we'll be liable to the history,” he says. Rajeeb feels that a crying need of the industry is to immediately initiate public-private partnership in promoting art involving corporate conglomerates, banks and other private institutions.

In 2014, the pair was nominated for the Forbes India Art Award in the Young Collector of the Year category in recognition of their collection. It included works of Indian artists such as Anish Kapoor, Bharti Kher, Jitish Kallat, Ravinder Reddy, Chitra Ganesh, and Subodh Gupta. At the Venice Biennale in 2017, their Samdani Art Foundation unveiled plans for a permanent exhibition space in Northern Bangladesh.

The first work Nadia Samdani collected was a watercolour piece by S M Sultan, the only Bangladeshi artist to exhibit alongside Picasso, Dalí, and Braque at the Victoria Embankment Gardens, Hampstead, London, in 1950.

The Samdanis have been selected for the fourth time now as one of ARTNEWS Magazine's top 200 collectors. They also came into the Art Review's Power 100 list in 2015, 2016 and 2017.

They will be leading a lecture on the title, 'The Dhaka Art Summit and the Future of South Asian Contemporary Art' at the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) of Canada. With 10,000 objects that encompass over 5,000 years, the ROM's South Asian collection is one of the foremost in the Western world.

They have also conducted a lecture at the university UC Berkeley in California with New York-based Artist Chitra Ganesh on 'South Asian Art | Past, Present, Future: A Conversation between the Dhaka Art Summit founders, Nadia and Rajeeb Samdani and New York-based Artist, Chitra Ganesh.' They also spoke at the second edition of the Private Museum Conference. The Samdanis were the first South Asian art patrons to receive the prestigious Montblanc de la Culture Arts Patronage Award.