



ARTS ILLUSTRATED



Editor's note

While working on this issue, and now on this edit note, it comes to me slowly, like a ball rolling to a stop at my feet, that this word 'reverse' is a clever little word. It asks you to do two things – one is to go back in time (walk with forward steps or backward steps, your choice, it tells you generously), and the other is to re-look or maybe re-do whatever was done before, but with a dramatic shift in perspective, and a hyper awareness of time and space. In our otherwise very linear lives, reverse is like the walls you hit in a maze, making you change direction till you find the next opening, and the next, and the next, till you realise your steps are moving to an altogether different rhythm. Like I said, clever.

Initially, we tried to ride this unpredictable wave with what we thought was us being clever – consciously reversing our interpretations, trying hard to break linear structures and sequencing, thinking of ideas too big for their own boots – and then quickly gave up. The only way was a reversal of our roles – we had to submit, meekly, to its many whims and fancies and trust in that process.

Our stories, therefore, have marched to entirely differing tunes, swirling and twirling around dots we see every day and yet drawing completely new patterns each time. This issue was a breathless experience of being mere spectators, watching and observing and marvelling, and knowing through it all that without this boundary of an audience, the stage would become non-existent. I suspect that the thing called reverse, being clever and all, knows it too.



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Cover Artist



My paintings are like a memoir. I reference stories from the ones I heard as a child, the games we played to my life in a rural setting (I was born in Sanjaya, a small village in Gujarat). Inspiration from folk and tribal traditions can also be seen in my renditioning. Motifs, symbols and an overall sensibility of design, like borders to my frames, emerge from the decorations of a typical courtyard in a village home or handmade textiles.

I began exploring painting in reverse on a glass sheet in 2006. I saw works of KG Subramanyan and Nalini Malani. I was very curious to try it for myself. Soon I realised that it was very different from painting on paper or canvas. On paper, the paint gets absorbed and adheres quickly. In contrast, on a glass surface it remains wet and catches every stroke of the brush. Plus, one had to think in reverse

too. What I paint first will be most visible on the other side, unlike painting on canvas, where the first layer becomes the background and what I paint on it shows as the final image.

For the cover of this issue of Arts Illustrated, I used the reverse technique to paint a work titled 'The Magician'. Various elements emerge from his headgear and he appears entertaining and amusing. As a child, I never missed the opportunity to see the *Ram-Lila* performances. The over-the-top costumes they wore were fascinating. Every evening we used to wait for snake charmers and monkey trainers, and would run after the *beheroopiyas* (impersonators). Those vivid memories never leave my mind and I continue to draw my inspiration from them.



Madhvi Parekh

Cover design curated by Rahul Kumar.



Collective Commons

The Art of Everywhere

Entrepreneur-artist-photographer-collector Vir Kotak's office is on the top floor of an old-school building in Lutyens' Delhi. There is art in the lift lobby, walkways, conference rooms, and work areas, hung on the wall and stacked on the floor. Most often they are works of artists collected by Vir, but occasionally his own works too. 'I like to curate spaces and make connections with the way art is displayed, not just hang paintings for the aesthetics of it alone,' he said on a warm May afternoon, when we talked about his passion for art.

RAHUL KUMAR

Photographs by Shantanu Prakash



I was born in Mumbai and my grandfather was my inspiration. Coming from a business family that lived in Mumbai, my biggest influence was my grandfather. He travelled the world at a young age and that gave him a global perspective at a time when no social media existed. He voraciously absorbed aspects far beyond business, be it sports, music or art. He bought books and interacted with people to enhance his understanding of things. I credit him for bringing the sensibility of art appreciation into our family.



My grandmother's camera collection initiated my love for the medium.

There is no denial that I had a privileged childhood, but my upbringing was normal, requiring me to do all that is expected of a growing child. I had access to a wide variety and types of cameras that my grandmother owned. She would let me use them; the idea then was to document and not necessarily make art. I would explore the equipment with great enthusiasm and that led to my natural affinity to image-making. At the age of twelve, I was given my first camera...an Olympus. It was not a point-and-shoot, which allowed me to really experiment, play with exposure and shutter speed. Without a conscious intent, I was honing my skills. I would challenge my own aesthetics and that expanded the way I saw things.



Barring a couple of Hebbbar paintings, I have grown the collection myself.

My grandfather ended up acquiring a few paintings of KK Hebbbar. When he bought them, it was because he loved them and not as a calculative purchase for investment. I inherited two of those works, but everything else that we now have has been a personal and gradual process. I do not limit myself to fine art alone. I like to pick up things that have a narrative. And it could be a work of craft or folk wooden sculpture. Some of the works I enjoy the most are made by upcoming artists or crafts persons.



I enjoy customising my space to display an aesthetic.

When I place a new work in a space, in my mind I am almost curating the display. It must work together and this is not merely visual aesthetics, but rather as a narrative story. Cluster of works on a wall or how one work has a conversation with another on the opposite wall is like poetry in itself. I am formally involved in developing spaces for my family-run businesses. It is my personal responsibility to populate any new space with things that are pleasing. There is a fund earmarked to buy art for any new space. I began by buying works for my personal collection and now I am leading this to build our corporate collection. I see this as a practice, a discipline by itself. I like the idea of bringing art out of white-cube gallery spaces.



Going deep into an artists' practice is rewarding.

I do not think of my collection as a portfolio and I am not interested in checking boxes





when I am buying art. I should like the work visually. And then I am always interested in knowing more about their practice, thought process, and work methodology. It is like an arranged marriage. Slow and steady with several things falling in place. And how-famous-the-artist-is is not a criterion for me. Some of my favourite works are in fact from fresh college graduates or those who have only a few years of practice. I like the works and I know it would have been encouraging for them.

While I lead the buy decision, my wife Simran is very much interested in art.

There are times she spots works that we both enjoy. At the India Art Fair earlier this year, she liked a work but it was already booked by someone. The same evening, we were meeting a few friends. We were exchanging notes on what they enjoyed at the fair, and they told us of a work they acquired...it was the same work my wife wanted to have. It was serendipitous and knowing our passion for art, they let us have the work.

I personally take care of the art and, yes, we have insured the works.

A lot of the collection is stored at the moment, but I take a personal interest in deciding even how to frame the works. A considerable amount of time goes into making those decisions with the framer. I feel half the battle is won if one frames the work nicely and store it carefully. You reduce the ageing process considerably by getting that right.

A work of Zarina Hashmi is my all-time favourite.

If I were to choose one, it will have to be the work of Zarina Hashmi. It is easy to lose oneself in her works. And, her style is something I personally relate to, minimalist yet narrative. In one word, it is magical.



Vir Kotak



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