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Ambanis' art canvas gets much bigger in scope

Starting June 7, Christie's UK Auction Will Feature, For The First Time, Some Of The Private Collections of Tina & Anil



Our Bureau
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JUST a little over a month ago, **Tina Ambani** conducted the 13th annual show of the Harmony Art Foundation, showcasing 350 works, many by newer names on the circuit. Now, she and her billionaire husband, Anil Ambani, will put on display 32 works from their private collection for the first time at Christie's in London from June 7-10. Coinciding with the annual summer sojourn of India's jet-set corporate top gun in the British capital, the couple also intends to raise at least £100,000 (Rs 81 crore) for their foundation by selling a dozen works

at Christie's, according to a statement from the famous auction house, which has profited enormously — \$36 million last year — from increasing interest in Indian art.

The exhibition, which Christie's described as being part of "a particularly fresh + multi-faceted celebration of South Asian Modern and Contemporary Art", includes paintings by veterans as well as young stalwarts, from MF Husain, Tyeb Mehta and SH Raza to Atul Dodiya, Jitish Kallat, TV Santhosh and Riyas Komu. The proceeds of the auction of 12 art works on June 11, in association with Barclays Wealth, will go towards funding future activities of the Harmony Art Foundation. The

highlights of the auction are an untitled Husain that is expected to fetch £12,000-18,000, an untitled FN Souza dated 1956 (£15,000-20,000) and Navjot Altaf's sculpture December 15th, 2000 (£18,000-20,000).

The Ambani show and sale will be the perfect prelude to the rest of Christie's South Asian Modern + Contemporary Art sale on the same day — June 11 — in which another 100 works by South Asian artists, including from India and Pakistan, will be put on the block at considerably higher prices to rake in more than £3.7 million. FN Souza titled Birth, 1955, is estimated to fetch £6,00,000-8,00,000, for instance, while Tyeb Mehta's Untitled (Figure

on Rickshaw), 1984, is pegged at £3,00,000-5,00,000.

Of late, heavyweight foreign collectors have focussed on India, with Manchester millionaire Frank Cohen even putting up an exhibition of his eclectic collection in Wolverhampton — on till 2 August 2008 — and Spazio Oberdan in Milan putting up the India Oggi show that ended this February.

Serpentine Gallery and Saatchi Gallery, both in London, are also coming up with summer shows. Sale of Indian art in public auctions has grown from \$4.5 million in 2003 to \$150 million in 2006, so the Ambanis' London initiative may spark off a trend.