

The Infinite Episode 2015. Sculpture made from dental plaster by Jitish Kallat



VERVE'S GOT THE

# NERVE

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IMAGE COURTESY: GALERIE DANIEL TEMPLON, PARIS

NERVE CULTURE

## A CHANGE OF ART

*Walk through a gallery today and you're not greeted just by paintings on the wall. Watch a theatre performance and witness much more than actors reciting lines. From brushstrokes to music beats, Verve discovers that the arts are evolving into cross-bred creations*

The Mughal era was a fascinating period. Grand monuments were built everywhere, political alliances were formed, and art and culture in the Subcontinent got patronage like never before, thanks to the six great Mughals. Emperor Humayun brought Persian artists to India, who became a part of the ruler's court. And Akbar's atelier saw master artists create miniature paintings, influenced by European and Persian art. Hybrid artworks, right from their several influences to the various techniques used, these paintings are marvelled at in museums even today.

The contemporary world too is a fascinating period. When every field is seeing evolution and merging elements, how can the world of the arts be far behind? From techniques and materials to concepts and creations, boundaries are blurring, and whether painting, dance, theatre, sculpture or music, every genre is becoming increasingly hybrid.

### BREAKING FREE

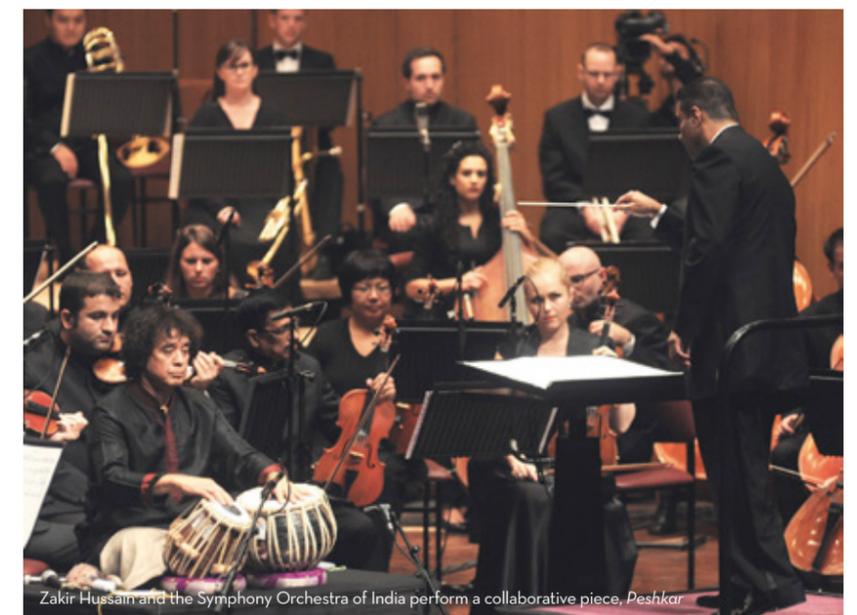
Even till just two decades ago, one wouldn't think that a tabla would fit perfectly within a Western classical orchestra or that photography, videography, painting and sculpture could be merged to create a single artwork. But three months ago, music maestro Zakir Hussain worked his magic on the same stage as the Symphony Orchestra of India

for a collaborative piece, *Peshkar*, at Mumbai's National Centre for the Performing Arts. And, around the same time, artist Sonia Mehra Chawla had an exhibition of her work *Scapelands*, in which she used a melange of techniques to create artworks. "My practice combines various artistic mediums on surfaces such as wood, paper, glass and canvas. I am interested in the idea of cross-pollination between mediums and metaphors," Chawla explains.

Working with a medium called photopolymer gravure, she creates 'drawings with light' by combining forms of art – like photography

and printmaking – with industrial processes, digital formats and breakthrough scientific technologies. "Working with mixed media enables me to traverse the limitations of a single medium," she says. And so it is, for several other artists too.

Five centuries ago it was just a myriad of influences that artists worked with, but today, it's a hybridisation of techniques as well. If M. F. Husain and many others from his Progressive Artists Group were masters of the canvas, today's artists are masters of works that transcend the boundaries of a traditional easel. "Various strands of art have



Zakir Hussain and the Symphony Orchestra of India perform a collaborative piece, *Peshkar*

NATIONAL CENTRE FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS



*Uncharted Terrains*: acrylic, layered silk screen, drawing, tinted varnishes and archival pigment print on canvas by Sonia Mehra Chawla



**“ARTWORKS ARE AMALGAMS. THEY ARE COMPOSITE AND HYBRID BY DEFAULT.”**

– JITISH KALLAT, ARTIST

informed my work, ranging from the conceptual, performative and mythic to the minimalist...film, print and television media, literature, poetry and architecture, as well as real-life experiences that go well beyond the art historical,” says contemporary artist Reena Saini Kallat, whose last solo show, *Hyphenated Lives*, at Chemould Prescott Road in Mumbai, even saw her create hybridised flora and fauna to illustrate the unison of beings. “Hybrid practices expand the possibilities for experimentation and innovation in contemporary art the world over,” says Chawla.

**ALL THE WORLD’S A STAGE**

It’s not just paintings and installations that we’re talking about. Stage arts – from the world of Hussain’s tabla to

that of Shakespeare’s Globe – are witnessing a merging of genres, skills and techniques. Flamenco and Kathak artistes collaborate to create foot-tapping masterpieces, and theatre actors too push the boundaries of their field. Actor Jyoti Dogra’s 2013 creation *Notes On Chai* had her include Tibetan chanting techniques within the live performance, and *K to the power of zero* saw her collaborate with a German film-maker on a multimedia piece based on Franz Kafka’s writings.

“Often one of the biggest challenges of working with various media to create a hybrid piece is to know how they confront and support each other. There is both construction and deconstruction happening,” elaborates Dogra. “When you work

with multiple forms, the makers as well as the audience are required to constantly shift their positions in the acts of doing, watching, performing, and reacting. It is more layered and challenges you at different levels,” she adds.

International music label Desi Hits went a step further and got Indian artistes to remix popular US numbers: Sonu Nigam worked on a version of *I Wanna Go* with Britney Spears and Lady Gaga collaborated with Salim-Suleiman for a desi-style *Born This Way*. Hussain too made merging the beats of a tabla with the notes of an orchestra seem quite easy. ‘The tabla interacts easily with instruments that do not belong to Indian music...I knew that I had to get the pitch of the tabla to fit in harmoniously with the other instruments,’ he explained at a discussion on bridging boundaries between Western and Indian music, a night before his *Peshkar* performance. Artistes know that merging forms and creations is but the way forward.

**IN HARMONY, WE EXIST**

If hybridisation of arts is the future, does that mean we’re seeing the end of traditional forms? Certainly not. “I hope both traditional and hybrid forms can coexist. Traditional arts are still in practice... We have a deep-seated connection with them,” feels Dogra. And Chawla adds, “Making meaning in art, whatever tools, materials, or techniques are used, remains central to artistic practice. It is important for viewers to keep this in mind as they explore innovative art.” No matter how much art evolves, the base will always lie in traditional ways – old and new forms of art will grow together.

As ace artist Jitish Kallat aptly puts it, “Artistic work is nothing but a looped fusion and fission of the various emotional, spiritual, ideological, academic and formal inquiries that make up the journey and processes of the artist. Artworks are amalgams. They are composite and hybrid by default.”

– HUZANTATA