

CAPITAL GALLERIES ROLL OUT ART-ILLERY

By Neelam Raj

NEW DELHI: It's just four years old but the India Art Fair has already given Delhi its "art week". Even before the doors open to the big, white tents of IAF at its new venue in Okhla on Thursday, the capital's galleries have rolled out the heavy artillery.

The list of shows is staggering: the Skoda art prize show at Lalit Kala Akademi, the Iranian art show at Devi Art Foundation, one of the biggest shows of Bengal art at the Delhi Art Gallery and a new show titled Crossings at the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art.

And that's even before you get to NSIC grounds brimming over with the hottest names in modern and contemporary art. It is estimated that there is around Rs 50-70 crore worth of art for sale this year.

Last year, 138,000 people, equivalent to Frieze and Miami Basel combined, visited the fair. The organizers are expecting many more to wander the aisles this year even if some of them do bring down an occasional installation (an over-eager visitor brought Subodh Gupta's bartans down in a clatter last year). From bearded artists to LV-toting socialites, they're all expected to come - some to buy and others to see and be seen. Since there is masses of art, almost too much to absorb, here's a quick guide to the event...

This year, the international contingent has grown sizably. When the fair started in 2008, it was almost totally a desi affair. This year almost 50% of the galleries (43 of 93) are from abroad and include blue-chip names like White Cube, Lisson and Hauser & Wirth. They have also brought their stars. White Cube is bringing British contemporary artist Marc Quinn while Hauser's line-up includes Louise Bourgeois, one of the most influential contemporary women artists, as well as new works by Subodh Gupta and Bharti Kher. Damien Hirst's gallery Other Criteria is bringing original Hirst works. Lisson Gallery has Marina Abramovic, a renowned performance artist who has had a stranger point a loaded gun at her head, sat in silence for 700 hours, and arranged her own funeral. But will this translate into sales, especially since Indian collectors have a marked preference for homegrown artists? James Lavender, associate director, Hauser & Wirth, is confident.

"As with any growing collector base, it invariably begins with collecting art by local artists and then broadens to include artists on an international level, and the works that we plan to present at the fair reflect this development. Many of the collectors in India we are close with have an international outlook and are travelling, and looking at work, all over the world."

Even some Indian galleries have brought foreign artists. Tushar Jivrajka of Mumbai-based Volte has a lineup of six artists including international names like William Kentridge.