

INDIA

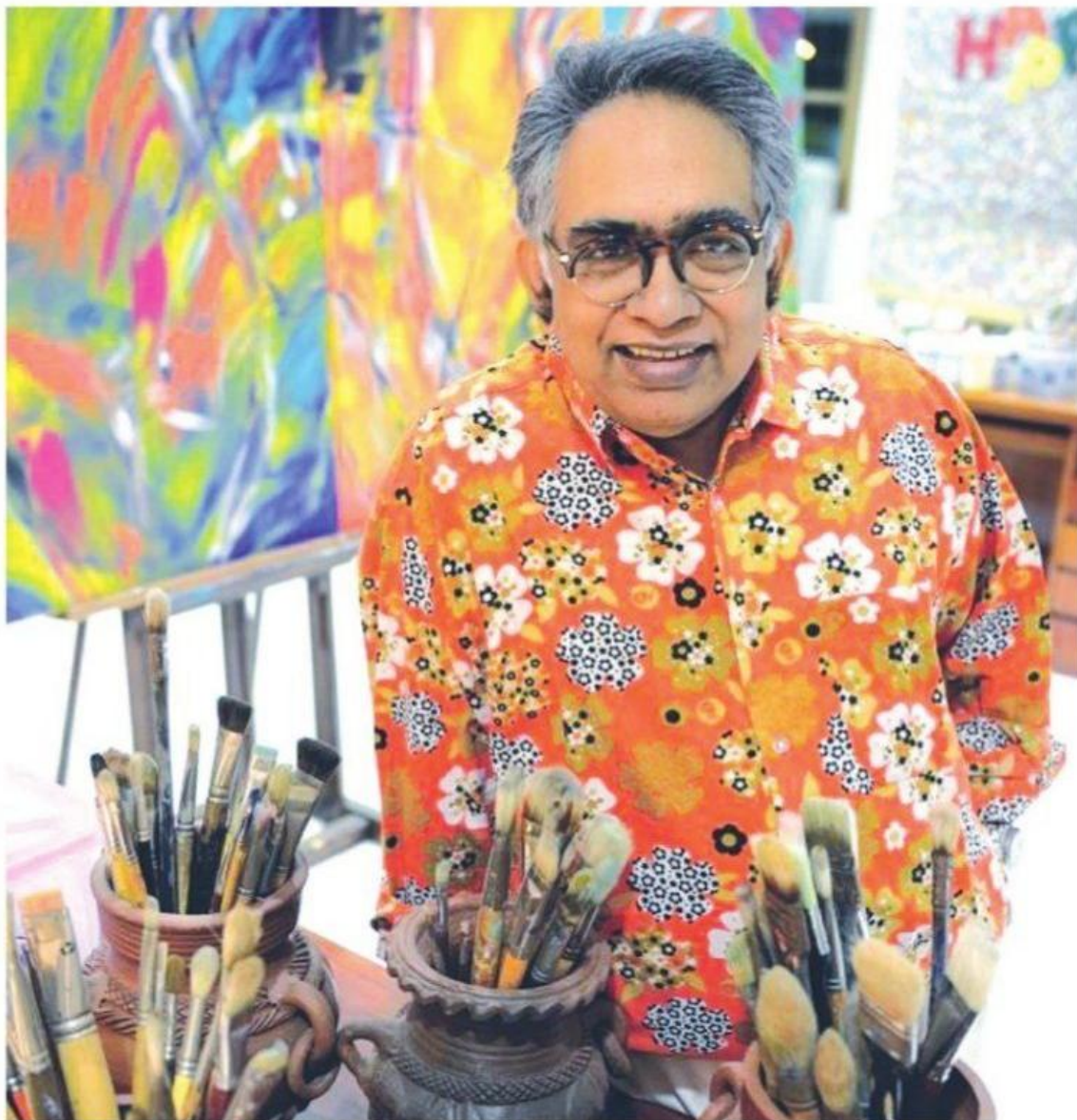
# The Statesman

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**IN CONVERSATION**

## 'Technology should not interfere with art and culture'

**Here's the newest movement in the world of art — Gesturism. Sparked by Kolkata-born Parisian artist, Shombit Sengupta, it's a means for celebrating the impromptu vibrancy of being alive and a whole lot more**



**H**e was raised in a refugee camp in Kolkata's Shahid Nagar. His colony had bamboo walls, mud floors and no electricity, sanitation, or drinking water. His mother had to sell her wedding bangles to buy him his ticket to Paris. When he reached Paris in November 1973, Shombit Sengupta had a mere \$8 in his tattered pockets but was accompanied by an inexhaustible thirst for artistic expression, a yearning that was recognised by all those who he had the chance to meet. Over the last two decades, Sengupta's art has adorned the walls of some of the most recognised museums across the globe. Now, he has sparked the newest movement in art -- Gesturism. Excerpts:

**Q Can you expand on your idea of Gesturism? Do you trust it can be the next big thing in the world of art?**

All living beings have limitless gestures in every stage of life. My art celebrates these gestural movements of being alive. Around 1994, I realised I had to express what my artistic inclination of impromptu, vibrant movements stood for, and coined it as Gesturism Art.

Based purely on artistic freehand skill, it is boundless energy in human conduct, unprompted, dynamic and awash with essential pulsations. It's a provocation to take on challenges, and implement the shock of the difference to make an impact that can sustain.

I cannot commit to how big it can become in the timeline of art, despite my own humble belief in it, but will work continuously to expand its manifestation. Gesturism is not a single imaginative idea blocked in time; it can be expanded into different artistic disciplines or even to different events or themes in fine art. On the 72nd anniversary of the dropping of the atom bombs in Japan, I have created a painting called Love sans AB.

**Q How do you imagine Gesturism can be incorporated in the fields of poetry, photography and modern art? Why do you believe it cannot be adopted in the scripts of films and theatre?**

In the 19th century, French poet-philosophers Baudelaire, Paul Verlaine and Rimbaud influenced Modernism. In this century that's imbedded with digital technology but my art is anti-digital and pro-human. I have no quarrel with technology's convenience; in fact, I appreciate and embrace it. But it should not interfere in the domain of art and culture because the digital aspect has no imagination. Modernism

condemned industrialisation in the 19th century, and in this century, Gesturism condemns digital technology from interfering in art and culture.

French photographers Henri Cartier-Bresson and Marc Riboud invented the practice that a photograph should never be re-edited for size. The spectacular momentum of a given time has to be captured without the assistance of image editing. Gesturism photography can never be with a multitude of technical photographic instrument arrangements. Photographs have to capture the unprompted factor. Gesturism Art photography cannot be considered without movement, because the gestures of humans and other living beings have movement.

On the other hand, modern art was defined as timeless art. In the contemporary movement, when a piece of art has substantial imaginative power, it enters the realm of modern art. In my paintings, you will first find it to be abstract, but the more you go into its detail, you will discover figurative aspects.

To me, film is artificial "prop-etry" - that is a sequence of pre-fabricated emotion, love, greed and passion. These props can never be a part of Gesturism Art. But if cinema is done in a documentary way without pre-empting or elaborate preparations, there is scope of making directors make impromptu feature films.

Theatre has the possibility of falling into Gesturism Art, but not in the way it is today. Let me explain how. If an actor or a group of actors have the capacity to come on stage, without any preparation, start to act, and by watching him, the light and sound works follow suit, this impromptu spirit would make it Gesturism theatre.

**Q How do you find this movement becoming relevant to the general masses?**

Fine arts are not objects of opulence. It is not possession of a BMW, Louis Vuitton, Cartier or Porsche. Art started before civilisation, so art accessibility is for everybody. Picasso had said that every child is born to be an artist. But when children grow up, they forget how to paint. Everybody may not possess a piece of art, but everybody has the right to enjoy the imaginative power of art.

I feel India has lost its artistic bent of mind. But art should come back because an artistic sense automatically leads to growing a sense of hygiene, civic sense and beauty. Art is a medium of how to create differentiation in any object.

Industry in India is totally artless. If we can create art-sensitive generations,

the artistic bent of mind can generate outstanding industrial designers, communication designers, fashion designers and architectural designers. To industrialise India, you need huge industrialisation discipline, consistency of coherency in productivity, and a huge artistic sense of differentiation for any product.

**Q Which previous movement in art and literature has influenced you the most in the conception of this idea? How do you find it different from those movements?**

Here is my bouquet of inspiration and influences -- the kick off of Modern Art in 1870, then Impressionism, Expressionism, Cubism, Dada movement for Surrealism, authors like Baudelaire, Victor Hugo, Proust, Verlaine, Jacques Prevert; music masters like Muddy Waters, Cab Calway, Edith Piaf, Elvis Presley, the Beatles, John Lennon, Leonard Cohen, Leonard Bernstein, Freddy Mercury, and in recent times, Lang Lang the Chinese pianist, photographers Man Ray, Cartier-Bresson and Mark Riboud; mime expert Marcel Marceau and Bengali writers Sarat Chandra Chatterji and Mani Shankar Mukherji.

Gesturism is a word I have coined myself. It is defined as being human, natural and about living life with a specific manifesto. This five-point manifesto is articulated as -- impromptu, boundless energy, dynamic pulsations, shock of the difference, free of manipulative digital art.

I cannot compare, but I don't see my manifesto being reflected in, or having similarity to any past art movement. The principle and its articulation can be used by any other artist, but the palette of my irreverent Indian colours is my own interpretation.

**Q How far has the city of Kolkata, known for its culture in art and literature, shaped your movement and its ideologies? What do you miss the most about this city when away?**

My refugee colony's local handicrafts and clay-pot makers have had a huge influence on me from childhood. The imposing buildings and remnant cultures of Victorian and French Bengal have contributed in my understanding of global art. But when I was there I lived in such poverty and unnecessary bent of politics that I felt relieved to pull myself away recklessly at 19 to go to France, even though I had no money and knew nobody. Now I visit this neighbourhood to meet my old friends, and bring my new French friends to visit my semi-rural one-time home.

