

Shreya Answers:

1. Could you tell us about your background in the arts?

I joined Sotheby's in March 2016 and was based in the India office. I helped build the brand and develop their business. I was responsible for client liaison, editorial placements & digital marketing.

I organised events that helped to connect new and existing collectors in India with Sotheby's global network of specialists and auctions. This included organizing the Sotheby's Institute of Art courses in New Delhi & Mumbai, Vogue Art Report 2016, & launching the Sotheby's museum network program in India.

I graduated from King's College London with a Msc. In International Marketing, where the subject of my thesis was 'Building brand equity for an artist in the visual art Industry'. I also completed a diploma in Art, Criticism & Theory from Jnanapravaha, Mumbai in 2015.

Prior to joining the Sotheby's India office, I interned in the valuations department at Sotheby's in London. I assisted to prepare valuation reports for The Duchess of Devonshire collection. The items offered at auction came from The Chatsworth Estate & achieved a sale of 1,777,838GBP.

2. Could you talk about some art memories from your time at Sotheby's?

Reflecting on my time at Sotheby's, it's hard to pick just one memory, as the experience was so rich and multifaceted.

Working in London, I had the opportunity to meet individuals from diverse departments and backgrounds, which led to lasting friendships and invaluable professional relationships.

Some of my fondest memories are undoubtedly from organizing the traveling exhibitions. Each show was a huge undertaking, requiring meticulous coordination across various areas—shipping, event planning, guest list management, and liaising with the press to ensure coverage. It felt like producing a large-scale event, with weeks of planning culminating in a two-day exhibition. The sense of accomplishment and teamwork during those projects is something I'll always treasure.

Then, of course, there's the electric atmosphere of auction days. The buzz, the excitement, and the energy in the room are unparalleled. Being behind the scenes, witnessing the auction unfold, was a privilege. I also had the chance to train in various roles on the auction floor, whether assisting with telephone bidding to help clients secure works they loved or sitting at the desk to manage bids. The entire experience was both exhilarating and deeply educational.

3. *What got you into collecting art?*

My journey into art collecting began in my teenage years, when my family moved into a new home. We needed artwork to fill our space, and so my parents started visiting art galleries and charity auctions. I often accompanied them, and that's when I first began to experience the world of art.

One pivotal moment came during the summer before high school, when I took a three-day course on Indian art through Avid Learning. The course delved into the inner workings of galleries, art funds, and auctions, and it was there that I gained my first real understanding of the commercial side of the art world.

I found the subject incredibly engaging, and the insights stayed with me long after the course ended. In fact, it inspired me to focus my college thesis on art as an alternative asset class. As I delved deeper into research papers and explored the intersection of art and investment, I realized that I wanted to start building my own collection. That was the moment when the idea of collecting became a serious goal for me.

4. *What was the first piece you bought? And your most recent purchase?*

My first art acquisition was from a charity auction organized by Concern India, which hosts its *Art for Concern* shows. I had just returned from London, where I was deeply inspired by my thesis work, and I was eager to expand my collection. At the auction, I ended up buying two pieces that were quite different in their approaches and styles. One was a striking black-and-white floral work by Jogen Chowdhury, and the other a compelling abstract piece by Achuthan Kudallur.

As for my most recent purchase, I recently acquired a stunning figurative landscape by Jamini Roy. The piece resonated with me as it was a serene depiction of boats in a harbor, with its vibrant colours and simple forms.

5. *Who do you collect and why? What qualities or characteristics in a work of art tend to draw your attention?*

I primarily collect South Asian art because it speaks to me on a personal level. There's a familiarity and emotional connection I feel when engaging with these pieces, which makes the collection all the more meaningful.

I love learning about the story behind each piece. Understanding the artist's intent gives me a deeper connection to the work and enhances my appreciation for it.

I'm particularly drawn to works that reflect nature—whether through landscapes, flora, or more abstract interpretations. Nature holds a powerful emotional resonance, and I appreciate how artists can capture that energy in their work.

Ultimately, what draws me to a piece is how it makes me feel—whether through the strength of its narrative, the beauty of its technique, or the emotions it stirs within me. It's the combination of personal resonance and artistic integrity that makes a work truly compelling.

6. Could you name a few artworks from your collection and why you chose to acquire them?

One of the most memorable acquisitions in my collection is a landscape painting by *Narayan Shridhar Bendre*. The meticulous use of dots creates a sense of vibrancy and movement, while still maintaining the serenity of the landscapes he depicts. I was drawn to this piece because it reflects Bendre's innovative vision and his ability to fuse Western techniques with the soul of Indian natural beauty.

I also collect works by the husband-and-wife artist duo *Paresh Maity and Jayshree Burman*. Paresh's dynamic use of color and texture, particularly in his vibrant landscapes, brings a sense of energy and life to any space. Jayshree Burman's works, on the other hand, explore themes of mythology and femininity, blending traditional Indian iconography with contemporary abstraction.

A large work I have is an enamel work on stainless steel by *Phaneendra Nath Chaturvedi*, this work, featuring colorful butterflies, captivated me with its intricate design and the symbolism it carries.

Additionally, I have a sculpture by Prodosh Das Gupta, the figure of the woman with a basket is symbolic of both strength and nurturing, which resonates with me personally.

I recently added *Ayesha Sultana's* "Breath" works from Experimenter. These works left a profound impact on me, not just because of their intricate abstract forms, but also due to the emotional weight they carry in the context of our recent experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

7. Who are some artists whose practices you follow closely?

I primarily follow South Asian art, with a particular focus on Modern Indian artists.

Raja Ravi Varma, whose blend of traditional Indian themes with European techniques continues to influence contemporary Indian art.

S.H. Raza, whose abstract expressions and exploration of the bindu (the dot) as a symbolic form have deeply influenced the way we think about space, spirituality, and geometry in Indian art.

M.F. Husain, often referred to as the "Picasso of India."

8. How do you keep track of your collection—do you catalog, photograph, or use other methods?

As much as I would love to maintain an updated valuation report, like I did for clients during my time at Sotheby's, the reality is that I keep things relatively simple. I maintain a basic Excel sheet where I log key details for each piece, such as the artist's name, title, medium, and any important dates. It's an easy way to keep track of the essentials.

In addition to this, I keep a physical file for each artwork, which includes invoices, certificates of authenticity, and any related documents that come with the work. While it's not as comprehensive as a professional valuation report, this system allows me to stay organized and ensures that all important information is easily accessible when needed.

9. What are some collecting trends you notice at the moment?

One trend I've noticed, particularly among younger collectors, is a strong interest in contemporary art. People are increasingly drawn to works that are innovative and reflect the issues of today. Another shift is that collectors are now looking at art globally. With increased travel and access to international art scenes, many are expanding their collections beyond Indian artists to include works from around the world. This global outlook is reshaping how people approach collecting, making it more diverse and interconnected.

10. How did your journey as a collector lead you to start an advisory?

It sort of happened naturally. My passion for art—visiting shows, fairs, and engaging deeply with the art world—has always been a driving force for me. While working at Sotheby's, I had the chance to advise collectors, and many of those relationships turned into lasting friendships. Even after I left Sotheby's, collectors I had worked with continued to reach out for advice, which made me realize there was a genuine need for more personalized guidance.

Initially, I found myself talking about art for hours on the phone—whether it was identifying emerging artists, understanding market trends, or ensuring authenticity. My husband, recognizing how much I enjoyed this, encouraged me to streamline the process and formalize it into an advisory. This was the catalyst for starting my advisory, where I could leverage my experience to help others make informed decisions while nurturing my passion for art.

It's been a rewarding journey—one where I'm able to share my knowledge and help collectors build meaningful, well-rounded collections that resonate personally and are also strategically aligned with the market.

11. Could you talk about your plans with the advisory?

My main goal with the advisory is to bring more transparency to the art world. There's a lot of information that can be opaque or intimidating, especially for younger or newer collectors, and I want to bridge that gap by helping people buy art they love while ensuring they're getting it at the right price with verified authenticity.

A significant part of my work is **educating younger collectors**, helping them navigate the complexities of building a meaningful collection. I believe in hand-holding through the process—offering personalized guidance as they discover their tastes, understand market trends, and appreciate the intrinsic value of art beyond just investment potential.

Another important aspect of my plans is to help **artists and their families with legacy planning**, ensuring that their work is preserved and continues to have value for generations. This extends to helping families navigate the complexities of managing an artist's estate and legacy, ensuring the work remains respected and valued over time.

In the longer term, I want to establish a **community-driven circle or club** for younger collectors, where they can engage in discussions, share experiences, and learn from one another. It would be a space to foster a collective appreciation for art and its value, both personally and financially.

Lastly, I'm also focused on helping **foundations manage their collections more efficiently**, providing strategic advice on acquisitions, conservation, and overall management. This ensures that the foundations I work with are not just curating, but also preserving and expanding their collections in a way that aligns with their mission.

Ultimately, my goal is to provide a comprehensive, transparent service that supports both collectors and artists while helping to preserve the integrity and legacy of the art world.

12. How do you envision your collection growing in the future?

Living in Dubai gives me a unique opportunity to expand my collection and include more international art. I recently visited a Lebanese collector's home and was inspired by the beautiful works from their region, which sparked my interest in exploring more Middle Eastern and global art.

While I'll always focus on South Asian art, especially modern and contemporary pieces, I see my collection growing to include emerging artists from around the world. I'm particularly excited about artist collaborations and pieces that push boundaries, offering fresh perspectives and new narratives.

Ultimately, I want my collection to be diverse, dynamic, and reflective of both local and global conversations in contemporary art.