

SON OF THE FOIL

Mumbai's newest gallery, which focuses entirely on international art, opens with German contemporary art star Anselm Reyle

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Mumbai's art district, a strip of galleries that starts at Fort and stops at the end of Colaba, got a new addition this week. Galerie Isa opened in Great Western Building, a hulking timbered structure opposite Lion's Gate that houses a warren of offices, shops and galleries. It's the first gallery in the city to focus entirely on foreign art.

The idea, says gallery owner Ashwin Thadani, is to introduce Indian collectors to cutting edge international art. Thadani is himself a collector and owns a travel and events company. He plans to bring artists in the "mid-career, well-established range". Thadani says he picks artists that are supported by major galleries abroad and have collections that would appeal to the eye of the Indian collector.

It's a major challenge as Indian collectors rarely venture beyond south Asia in their acquisitions. But Thadani is convinced that local collectors will gradually be persuaded to buy foreign art. "There's so much cutting edge art in India itself and I'm sure that true collectors will



not ignore international art," he says. "Eventually it's bound to happen."

The opening show is *Indian Mylar Vision* by Anselm Reyle, 41, a star of the German contemporary art scene. He's so acclaimed that Dior recently commissioned him to design a line of accessories and bags. He's the first artist Dior has worked with.

Reyle uses mixed media to create canvases and sculptures that are riotously textured, colourful and ironic. Mylar refers to a material he works with. He's famous for specialising in the use of found objects. For instance, he has made extensive use of foil to create works in which crumpled sheets of foil are fitted into transparent boxes. For the Mumbai show, Reyle has painted his foil canvases in bright colours that he thought would reflect the colourful Indian landscape. Reyle says that he came across foil in a store one day and was suddenly "fascinated by this very artificial appearance". The foil series is ironic as it questions itself. It jokes that a piece of foil can also be a work of art. At the same time,

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it takes a semi-humorous look at the tradition of monochromatic modernist art in America and Europe. "I think a lot of art is about believing in it," Reyle says. "So if you don't believe then it doesn't make sense. But it's not just ironic. I believe in it too; I like art that's just monochromatic." By using kitschy, decorative elements like foil, Reyle is also cocking a snook at European artistic conventions. "I work with elements in a provocative form because in European art, things like effect and decoration are more negative," he says.

BREAKING CONVENTIONS: Reyle uses mixed media to create canvases and sculptures that are colourful and textured

Reyle enjoys using found objects as "there are so many interesting things around us with different surfaces that I can use as an artist". A series called *Painting by Number* is composed entirely of various textures. The paintings have figures of animals divided into numbered sections — the sort that one finds in children's colouring books. The sections are filled with things like bits of mirror and tinsel. Reyle



finds these drawings amusing as they're meant for those who aren't very good at art. Another series refers to the convention of dripping paint in abstract art, a form that Reyle studied. Again Reyle ironically drips large legs of paint in jarring colours on canvases. "I was always interested in the dissonance of colours," he says.

One of the most dramatic works is a sculpture of discarded Meissen pottery. When he found a box of porcelain pottery that was still wet and malleable, he took the whole lot and fired it in the oven. The result is a tumbled heap of white cups delicately edged in gold and broken bits of figurines. It's almost eerie to see limbs, heads and upturned birds lying amidst all this aristocratic crockery.

Thadani plans to have just four shows a year. Next up is Puerto Rican artist Angel Otero, whose paintings often draw on his life and his family. ■

'Indian Mylar Vision' is on till Feb 20, 2012 at Galerie Isa, Great Western Building, Shahid Bhagat Singh Road, Mumbai

