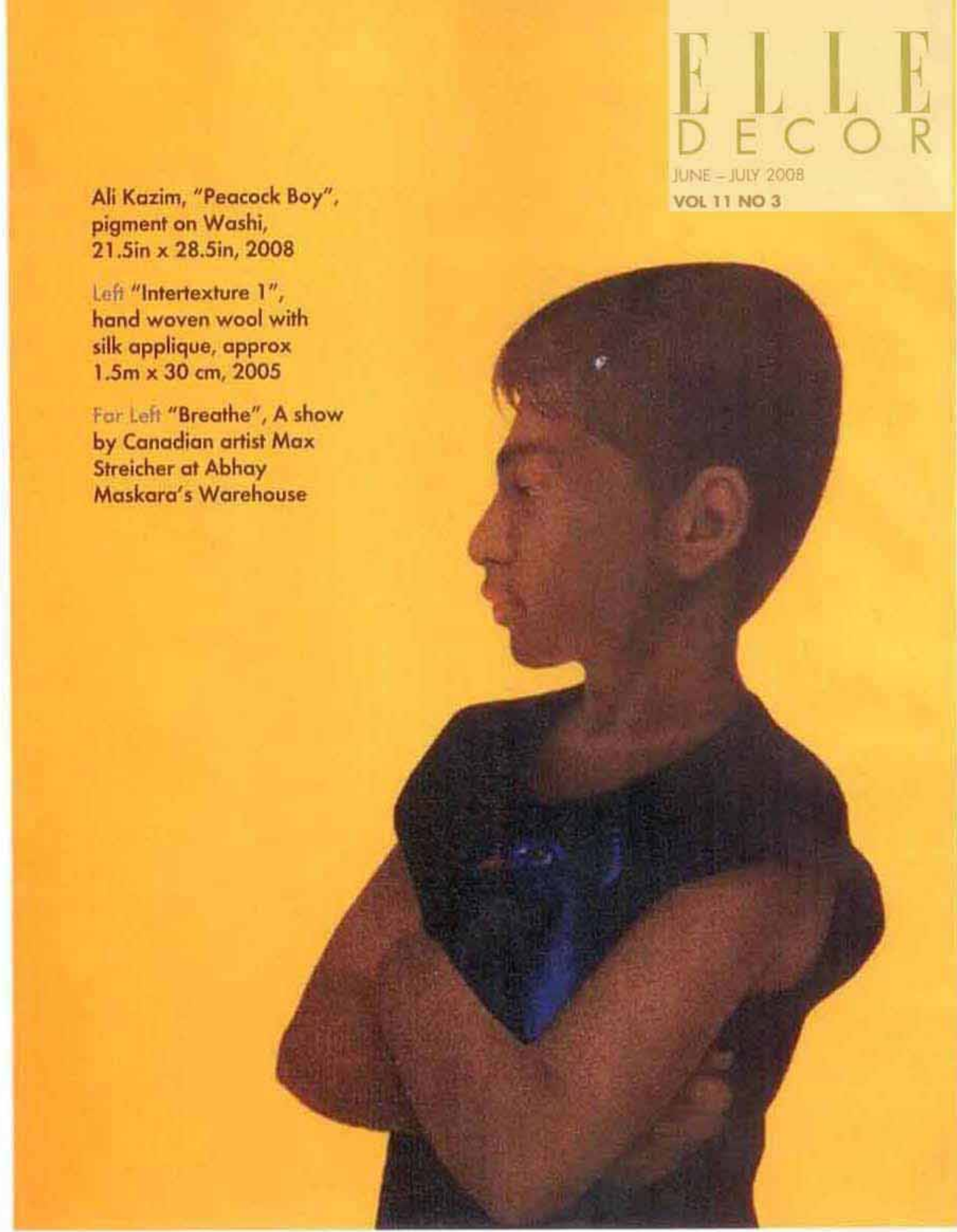


Ali Kazim, "Peacock Boy",
pigment on Washi,
21.5in x 28.5in, 2008

Left "Intertexture 1",
hand woven wool with
silk applique, approx
1.5m x 30 cm, 2005

Far Left "Breathe", A show
by Canadian artist Max
Streicher at Abhay
Maskara's Warehouse



BEYOND BORDERS

A growing number of exhibitions of foreign artists on Indian soil and vice versa seem to suggest that a levelling is around the corner

The Warehouse on 3rd Pasta, located in bustling Colaba in South Mumbai, is a harbinger of things to come. Its director Abhay Maskara is a man with a fresh vision and an eye to the future. The gallery's inaugural show, *Breathe* by Canadian artist Max Streicher, a site specific response to the gallery's cavernous innards, was an appropriate opening statement with which to describe its credo. Commenting on the show, Maskara said, "Inflatables (sic) conjure memories of play and innocence, yet it also brings forth the fragility and impermanence of existence. I first encountered these weightless and playful works in 2006 on a trip to South America and was immediately drawn by the pain and the ecstasy that the works evoke. Max was invited for a one month residency in Mumbai so that he could dialogue with the space and finish the works using locally sourced material."

In retrospect, *Breathe* could be viewed as a marker of sorts. The space and

the exhibit both exemplify the shape of things to come. Undoubtedly, a strong wind of change is sweeping through the Indian contemporary art arena. Its drivers are several: The advent of art funds, boom time at auctions, a plethora of international art fairs plus a small, yet definite demand for quality work from seasoned and alert collectors worldwide are among key factors responsible for this re-shaping.

It's a change that has been palpable over the past year. As part of it, art spaces are being re-furbished, strategy is being re-thought, and clear curatorial programmes are virtually the order of the day. Increasingly, leading galleries are breaking the mould to show international artists of repute along with some lesser known names from other countries, possibly to expand the repertoire.

Globetrotting Pakistani superstar Rashid Rana and Jonathan Meese are among names to have shown in Mumbai recently. Currently, the drip effect painterly expositions of Beijing based

Chinese artist Cai Fu Jun, described as a leading member of Chinese avant-garde, can be seen at Kalpavraksha in Mumbai, while Espace in New Delhi is showing Pakistani artist Ali Kazim. Anant art gallery regularly shows Pakistani artists and has shown the work of other artists from overseas, including the art-textiles of Australian textile designer, Maggie Baxter.

Interestingly, it's not just in India that the scenario has changed. Well known Indian galleries and auction houses, which have had a presence in the UK, US and Singapore, are reporting better tidings. That prominent international exhibitors such as Arario are presenting solos of Indian artists overseas, and select Indian galleries are being invited to prestigious art fairs is equally significant – for one, it marks a welcome departure from the days when Indian artists were agog at the thought of showing overseas, regardless of whether or not the show was just a bazaar type, theme show at an inconsequential international venue.

Industry watchers view these developments as potent signs of a market whose time has come. For the implications of such crossovers and exchanges go beyond just artistic worth. Market pundits who opine that the (approximately) Rs 1,500 crore market is growing at a healthy rate of 30-35 percent annually, believe that this interesting trend is likely to impact overall pricing substantially. Till recently, the past, the gap between prices of works by

Opines Renu Modi, director, Espace, New Delhi: "Right now, except for a few known names, there is no market for artists from other countries. But with everything converging into a global village and with collectors becoming more aware of international art, it is imperative that galleries start showing overseas art. It is a slow process but will flourish eventually. Prices are lower than that of Indian artists of the same calibre and quality."

INDUSTRY WATCHERS VIEW THESE DEVELOPMENTS AS POTENT SIGNS OF A MARKET WHOSE TIME HAS COME

European or Western contemporary (and even Chinese artists) versus prices of contemporary Indian painters, was vast. But now the work of key artists like Subodh Gupta, Atul Dodiya and Jitish Kallat is viewed as sound investment by a few of the world's most seasoned names.

Among gallery owners too there is optimism about this two way international exposure.

As things stand, the market for contemporary Indian art is tipped as being the fourth most buoyant in the world. In the long run this breaking down of borders can only mean better things for the state of the art and assure a greater leveling of prices.

By charting new territories there is nothing to lose but barriers. ♦

Anupa Mehta