



In the fairytale home of the Samdanis, the art is the hero

Bangladesh-based Nadia and Rajeeb Samdani are among South Asia's biggest art collectors.

Diana Campbell Betancourt

NOVEMBER 15, 2017

The Samdani Art Foundation



Rajeeb and Nadia Samdani

Diana Campbell Betancourt, the couple's art advisor, ties together the strands of thought behind the third rehanging of their evolving collection.

The Samdani residence, featured in *AD*'s first anniversary issue in March 2013, is named 'Golpo', which, roughly translated from Bengali, means 'fairy tale'. An important part of this fairy tale is art, and the Samdani home was designed so that the young couple could share their art with the many people who visit them. While this is very much a private residence, Nadia and Rajeeb regularly open their home to school field trips, embassy visits and art enthusiasts, who book appointments to come and study the collection.

“The joy it gives us to share our art with the young, local artists and art enthusiasts is priceless,” says Nadia.



Inside the home of Rajeeb and Nadia Samdani: An untitled 1965 work by Mohammad Kibria hangs above Ai Weiwei's Fairytale-1001 Chairs (2007); to the right are Novera Ahmed's Standing Figure (1960) and Alicja Kwade's Hypothetisches Gebilde (2017).

WINDOW TO THE WORLD

Because Bangladesh lacks a museum for contemporary art, the Samdanis have envisioned their personal collection as a glimpse into contemporary art practices from around the world. This is a distinct entity from their Samdani Art Foundation collection, which focuses on South Asian art and international art practices inspired by South Asia. I work on both of these collections with the Samdanis. My most gratifying experience with the Foundation was acquiring the late Bangladeshi sculptor Novera Ahmed's 1960 Standing Figure from Pakistan—a two-year process that resulted in bringing back one of the most important works of modern Bangladeshi art into the country.

This is the third rehang of Golpo and it reflects the Samdanis' journey as travellers and collectors. To this end, we have built a storage facility to international standards, with the advice of our producer, Eve Lemesle. Using mocked-up models, we go back and forth together, and with Eve, before deciding how to transform the five floors of the space with art. Sometimes, we hit unexpected technical difficulties—such as the one we faced while installing Alicja Kwade's monumental 2016 sculpture *Hypothetisches Gebilde*. The only way to do it was to lift it up to Golpo's sixth floor with a crane, and remove all the windows to get it inside!



*Inside the home of Rajeeb and Nadia Samdani: In this room are (from left) Lynda Benglis's *Wing* (2002), Ettore Spalletti's *Girandola* (2013), Christodoulos Panayiotou's *Untitled (50-10-50)* (2016), Lee Ufan's *Dialogue* (2016), and Anish Kapoor's untitled 2014 piece on the adjacent wall. On the floor is Daniel Steegmann Mangrané's *Systemic Grid* (2014).*

WONDERS OF THE WORLD

It is important to note that Golpo is not a museum; it is a home. While there are strands of thought running through the rehang and the collection, some decisions are taken keeping in mind the practical needs of the home. A key

example would be the floor sculpture by Brazil-based Spanish artist Daniel Steegmann Mangrané titled *Systemic Grid*. This work was commissioned for Srihatta—our art centre opening in Sylhet at the end of 2018—and is three times the size of the work that is currently exhibited at Golpo.

Another example is Ceal Floyer’s 2005 work *‘Til I Get It Right*; the Samdanis acquired the sound work after experiencing it at Documenta 13. Though currently installed at the residence, it will eventually be displayed as intended—in an empty room in Srihatta. We think that these artworks are great teaching tools for emerging artists; so rather than keep them in storage, we are exhibiting them.

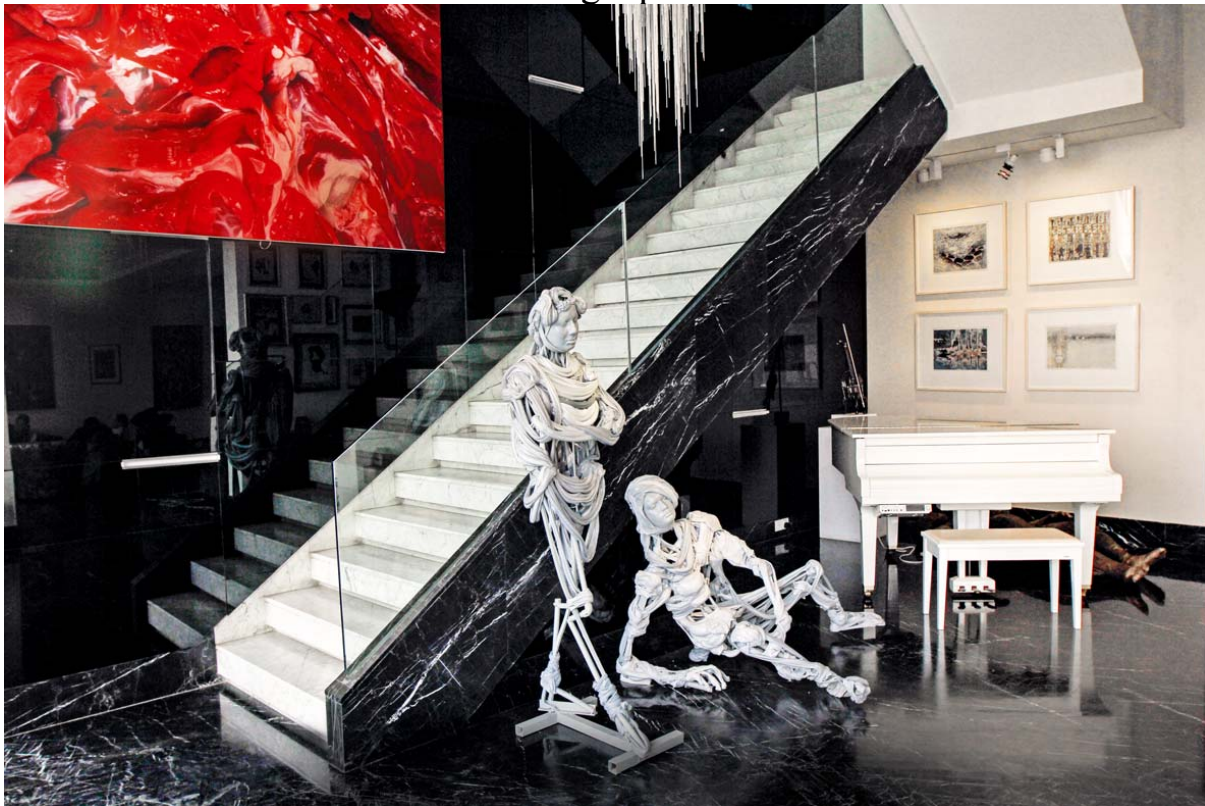


Inside the home of Rajeeb and Nadia Samdani: A series of untitled 2016 artworks by Matti Braun

The gallery was also rehung to exhibit works that engage with ideas of colour, and the phenomenological wonders of the world. Girandola, a sublime pigment painting by Italian Arte Povera artist Ettore Spalletti, relates beautifully with Korean artist Lee Ufan’s 2016 *Dialogue*. Ufan believes that “the highest level of expression is not to create something from nothing, but

rather to nudge something that already exists so that the world shows up more vividly”.

This philosophy is also seen in the 2014 Anish Kapoor sculpture hung adjacently, as well as in works by artists Neha Choksi, Rana Begum and Ayesha Sultana installed in the same gallery. Begum, in particular, was delighted to see her installations in this context, and the colourful works in this rehang have really resonated with local Bangladeshi audiences, who can relate to the plays with pigment via their local alpana traditions that involve the creation of colourful motifs using a paste of rice and flour.



Inside the home of Rajeeb and Nadia Samdani: Marc Quinn’s Meat Painting (2013) hangs by the staircase. On the floor are Pawel Althamer’s figures Safik and Nahid (2011). On the wall are four Krishna Reddy artworks: (clockwise from top left) Whirlpool (1963), Demonstrators (1968), Apu in Space (1970s) and Waterlilies (1959).

ACTION, REACTION

A recent strand of the collection looks at the fluidity of gender. Works by Tejal Shah, Chitra Ganesh, Lionel Wendt, Michael Armitage, Gazi Nafis

Ahmed, Christina Quarles, and Chris Ofili are going to look spectacular one day in Sylhet.



Inside the home of Rajeeb and Nadia Samdani: On the walls (from left) are an untitled 1975 piece by Rashid Choudhury, Anwar Jalal Shemza's Red and Green Relief (1976) and Rasheed Araeen's Burgundy Light (1971). On the table is a Mimosa Echard sculpture.

In the meantime, they are a joy to encounter in the Samdani home and offices at a time when LGBTQ rights need to be protected. It has been wonderful to see the enthusiastic local reaction to them. This is the kind of call-and-response interaction that a rehang hopes to achieve—not a fairy-tale ending, but hopefully, the beginning of many new stories.