

There is an old and still popular joke about the difference between a lady and a diplomat, of which only the reference to the diplomat is still acceptable. The joke goes that when a diplomat says “yes,” s/he means “perhaps.” When a diplomat says “perhaps,” s/he means “no.” And when a diplomat says “no,” s/he is no diplomat!

The joke can be used, somewhat unfairly to some diplomats, to suggest that diplomats are not always the suave agents we have grown accustomed to in films. Rather, they are dull, bureaucrats who are trapped with rules that allow them little leeway to act meaningfully. It is a rare diplomat who is able to cut through the red tape, act with aplomb, break out of elite circuits and reach out to the common person. Pedro Cabral Adão (1969-2006), who was the Consul of Portugal in Goa for about a year, was one such diplomat. Goa is something of a taxing and tense posting for Portuguese diplomats, thanks to the often irrational protests they have to deal with. They tend, therefore, to restrict the amount they socialise within Goan society, preferring the safe and narrow path. Adão, however, reached out to a community larger than the small cluster of Portuguese speaking elites in the territory. His most significant outreach was to the artist community in Goa. A group that is largely, but not exclusively, composed of bahun Hindu, this was not the first, nor perhaps obvious, choice for a Portuguese diplomat. And yet, this is exactly where contact needed to be made, among the common person of Goa, who have no first-hand experience of Portugal, nor of the Portuguese, and whose images of the country and people maybe otherwise provided by the rabid hate-speech of some segments of the Goan population. The scenario was promising, and one looked forward to interesting times in Goa art until his life was tragically cut short in November 2006.

It is a testament to the power of his outreach that his name continues to be recollected in Goa, notably through the intervention of a lady, the artist Yolanda de Souza Kammermeier in the form of the annual Dr. Pedro Cabral Adão Promising Artist Award. In her own words “Dr. Adão was a huge supporter of art and artists in Goa and in his short span of life in Goa had an exhibition of paintings at the consulate of Goan artists and collected works from them in his personal capacity. He showered Goan art and artists with a kind of respect and love not experienced by the art community here before from a diplomat, Goan, Indian, or otherwise.”



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The Lady and the Diplomat

Yoland de Souza Kammermeier had been marking the diplomat's passing every year, it was from 2013 that she instituted the promising artist award. Taking inspiration from Adão's action, the competition is held every other year to support fresh graduates who otherwise find it hard to find to make an entry into the world of art.

The format of the competition is fairly simple. Every other year, young artists are encouraged to present a sample body of work for evaluation. The jury of the competition usually comprises an artist, an art critic, a gallerist, and a collector. Marked individually, the competition throws up a winner, as well as a 'People's choice award' and the award for the 'Most Commendable Entry'. In the first edition of the award, 2013- 2014 the Dr. Pedro Cabral Adão award was won by Rohit Bhosale, while this year the privilege was Deepak Shirodkar's.

Souza Kammermeier's initiative should first be applauded for the generosity of spirit that it displays, both in recognising the genuine interest that Adão took in Goa, as well as the outreach to younger artists. What is, however, more interesting is the manner in which she has made this award work. Not necessarily in possession of a large fund to award every year, Souza Kammermeier makes an intelligent use of the resources at her disposal. In possession of a gallery space, she offers the space free of cost for the winner to hold a solo exhibition the following year. Added to this, she is able to summon her resources to offer an opening night and promote the event among the regulars at the gallery space. This is a very clever use of existing, but scarce, resources to encourage fledgling artists who may otherwise not have access to such an opportunity. Indeed, this intervention is very much in the spirit of Adão who often spent his own income to fuel his cultural interventions in the state. In addition to the support that is offered, the award also ensures that the award winner has a deadline to work towards. Given that self-discipline is a critical component of persons who do not work within an office environment, the promise of a solo show ensures that the year after the award is spent in a focussed and productive manner.

The joke about the lady and the diplomat ends with a line suggesting that if a lady says no, she means perhaps, and if she says yes, then she is no lady. In Yoland de Souza Kammermeier's case, what makes her a lady is precisely the fact that in organising this biannual award and making productive use of scarce resources, she has said yes to

generosity.



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