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THE BEST, most cutting-edge Indian art was on view at the art summit. But did it move the *aam junta*?

looksharp

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Contemporary, conceptual art is not for the uninitiated. So naturally, the Indian Art Summit (IAS) — the country's biggest art jamboree which ended yesterday — did not have a 'popular choice' award, as beauty contests and television reality shows do. But assuming, for a moment, that it did, and that it was the *aam junta*, and not the 'insiders' — collectors, galleryists, critics, curators, artists and their ilk — who were voting, which of the hundreds of works displayed at the Pragati Maidan do you think would have walked away with the popular endorsement?

Not Subodh Gupta's *Three Monkeys*, for all its bigness and pride of place in

the foyer of the summit space. However much Gupta's conceptual wizardry may wow audiences abroad, it seemed to leave viewers at home a little befuddled.

"Why *Three Monkeys*?" young Arjun Narang, a student who had joined the 'curated walk' by students of Jawaharlal Nehru University's School of Arts and Aesthetics, wanted to know.

"He's referencing Gandhi's here," second-year MA student Dipsa Dondo, who was contacting the walk, tried to explain. "I think he's commenting on society, on the element of fear everywhere," she continued, pointing to the gigantic soldiers' heads trimmed with eye shades, masks and helmet, and fashioned out of Gupta's trademark antique brass pots and pans.

Arjun didn't look too convinced.

Anish Kapoor, the other big-ticket artist at the IAS, fared slightly better at the popularity stakes. Lisson



NEW FANGLED: Visitors admire a work at Arario Gallery's stall; Jitish Kallat is on the wall behind; (R) Megha Joshi's *Peace and Grace* at arts.i-Religare

Gallery had brought in Kapoor's smaller works, stainless-steel, wall-mounted concave plates lacquered red and dark grey. Young boys, and even adults, thronged near, stopping close and then back to check out their reflections in the mirror polish.

"Oh, I can see myself upside down," someone commented. "No no, come closer and you'll see yourself straight up," another corrected, while a little boy flailed his hands to see how it looked magnified.

But if crowds and sheer gmp-mouthed wonder count for anything in the estimation of an art work, then it was clearly *Sandata ni Lata*, an interactive installation in metal by Filipino artist Lito Salvador in the stall of Manila gallery



RISING MAN: Prithpal S. Ladi's fibreglass installation flopped at the arts.i-Religare Arts Initiative stall

PHOTOS: JAGJEET PLANKI/HT

