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Artless lifestyle

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Fine art prompted people to imagine differently in Western societies. When royalty patronized paintings, Kings were glorified; the Catholic Church utilized artists to decorate religious buildings. From mid 19th century, master ideators like Claude Monet, Renoir and Degas broke away from stifling French neo-classicism techniques to start the art revolution of Impressionism. This influenced French culture and spread around the world. Later, different schools of art brought disruption. Expressionism in the 20th century was inspired by 19th century's Vincent van Gogh's colours and strokes; Cubism, Surrealism, modern art, graphic art to street graffiti followed.

You may not visit art galleries regularly, but you will connect to how art has changed modern living by knowing the history of orukter amphiboles as an illustration of art in daily life. In the 14th century, Italian painter Simone Martini imagined a moving machine, expressing a man-powered carriage with four wheels in a painting even when reigning Catholicism prohibited such esoteric ideas. This was the very first imagination of human mobility with inanimate aid. He named it automobile, from Greek word "auto" meaning self and Latin word "mobils" meaning moving. Artist, inventor and all time genius Leonardo da Vinci did an

engineering drawing of a 3-wheeler moving machine in 1478. French military man Nicolas Cugnot, in 1770, put vapour in a prototype steam-powered machine that crawled the Paris streets at 2mph. In 1792 American inventor Oliver Evans made a high-pressure steam engine and dredger he called orukter amphiboles. It moved on both land and water. This name was so difficult that *The New York Times* resurrected the name automobile in 1897, made it popular, so it's since stuck. Germans Karl Benz and Gottlieb Daimler experimented with working internal combustion engines around 1886, and in early 1900s, Henry Ford's Model T was the first design that went into mass-production. So just imagine the influence of art; the most demanding toy for all age groups, the automobile, is the extension of artist Martini's painting canvas.

In innumerable consumer home visits I've observed that about 20% Indians flaunt money on lifestyle aspiration. They keep adding electronic and digital gadgets in their homes, but don't bother to live artistically with the equipment. A Rs 1 lakh (1200₹) flat TV is installed with wires hanging to the set-top-box, video player and power point. Similarly, the digital album's wire visibly droops to a faraway switch. Fancy wall clocks and expensive lamps lose their elegance with unkempt wiring. When I ask why wires are not concealed in the wall, the answer is more money will be spent, and it's not necessary. If I suggest spending Rs 75,000 (900₹) on the TV and using Rs 25,000 (300₹) for decorative work to neatly hide

exposed wires, there's total revolt. Such wire-concealing jobs will not give better visual effect or status-cum-show-off value in product display. Besides, it's difficult to get odd masonry jobs done, so they'd rather put the entire budget on better quality products. Some say they regularly change equipment, so why waste time in artistic work when no family member or friend notices such neatness? Clearly the art in living style is totally demeaned.

The other day a friend's wife asked for interior decoration ideas for their new million dollar villa in a sophisticated housing layout. Of course I agreed to design without charging fees, but estimated Rs 50-75 lakhs (60000₹ - 90000₹) to decorate their 6000 sqft individual home. She revealed she could invest Rs 6- 8 lakhs (7200₹ - 9600₹) only. Money was not the holdup for this senior professional in a multinational company earning an 8-figure annual salary. Spending Rs 5 crores (600,000₹) for lifestyle bragging was enough; they saw no purpose in budgeting for décor. However, when you have money, unless you allocate some of it to live artistically with an aspect that distinguishes you, your mindset can never change. After 12-14 hours at work and travel every day, you need an artistic ambience at home to recharge yourself, to enjoy your life's dream. Allowing your family to experience artistic taste is a leap in imagination that gets embedded in the subconscious. Even into the future, this brings many intangible benefits to raise the quality of life.

This leap in imagination was what I was searching for when working for a paints company in 2004. In blind tests, this brand's product quality was as good as the leader's. In India, wall paints are sold in non-aspirational hardware stores where consumers never visit for decoration purposes; professionals or contractors buy the paints. How could we involve consumers in paints selection so they participate in the celebratory, hygienic,

artistic activity of painting their homes? The objective was to make the brand synonymous with decorative art, and rouse people towards artistic living.

In this client's office one day I saw an old picture of a European hanging in a corner. I discovered he was the founder of paint blends in 1773, the famous "colour maker" who invented Prussian Blue. That immediately sparked off a string of activities. In consumer research, both consumers and professionals were inspired by the idea of home decoration with paints that bore the signature and expertise of the founder of paints. We positioned the brand to invite consumers to "Paint your Imagination" and renamed the decorative paints of Berger brand to Lewis Berger. In the container's back panel we wrote the founder's history, illustrating his photo from the office wall picture. The branding symbolically represented a painter's palette; the container was redesigned to look like a cosmetics box. This authentication of direct descent from the paints inventor together with the branding's artistic approach made the brand grow seriously in the market.

Nonetheless, it still bothers me that Indian consumers are more conscious of home painting but not of rendering it a piece of art. How we can make artistic influence enter and transport our society to a different level? Only then will people realize that without a creative touch, lifestyle is artless.

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