



Idol designs

Every luxury goods purveyor, from Lalique to Baccarat to Daum and Lladro, has jumped on the Ganesha trail, offering his images for thousands of dollars, which are being snapped up by the wealthy in India, as well as by the diaspora.

Narendra Agarwal of Ram Creations in Mumbai is a leading stockist of these upscale images and sells everything from Ganesha by Swarovski for \$1,395 (65,000 rupees) to one by Baccarat for \$9,500 (nearly five lakhs of rupees) in a limited edition of 500 pieces.

If you want the best of Ganesha images in silver, then you can opt for the world's largest silver Ganesha, which is five feet tall, known as Malleshwaram Ganesha, made by Episode Jewellers of Mumbai. The firm claims that it is the largest silver Ganesha idol in the world, that stands five feet high, is 4.5 feet in width, and costs Rs. 23.5 lakh. The Elephant God is seated, with a conch shell, the *Bhagavad Gita*, and a lotus in his hands. His *vahan*, the mouse, moves around him playfully, and is depicted in multiple positions around him. His crown is embedded with emeralds, while the ornaments are crafted using rubies and other semi-precious stones.

Idol designer Deepak Vora considers the Malleshwaram Ganesha as one of the toughest pieces he has made. Since it is a life size idol in silver, getting the proportions right was a task. Vora learnt through trial and error, and ended up remaking the idol several times. A team of eleven jewellery experts from Bengal, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Varanasi arrived in Mumbai to design the idol and its jewellery. While it took four months to conceptualise the design, eight months were spent executing it. Vora has made just eleven copies of this artistic treasure for sale.

So far, nobody has thought of creating a gold Ganesha of these proportions. But all over India, there are Ganesha idols covered with kilograms of gold. For example, the Gaud Saraswat Brahmins Ganesha (the short form is GSB) in Mumbai, is the richest in the city. The jewels studding the crown and other ornaments are all real gems. There are a hundred and ten kilograms of silver and fifty kilograms of gold covering the idol, with the crown made of twenty-two kilos. But the idol is an alloy of gold/silver/copper.

If you want to see a 125 kilogram weighing idol of the Elephant God, you can go to the Ganesha Temple in Tasgaon near Kolhapur in Maharashtra, which is more than 225 years old. It is unique as the trunk of Lord Ganesha is bent towards the right and this idol is considered as a Living Lord, always there to bless. It was created by Senapati Parshurambhau Patwardhan, the ruler of Sangli, in 1785. It is priceless as it is an antique treasure of India. But if you were to duplicate it, the gold alone would cost 23 crores of rupees. So far, no Ganesha worshipping millionaire has tried to make a copy.

Then comes the diamond. Orna Trimukha Ganesha, weighing 514 carats or nearly 104 grams. This idol is formed of a single piece of diamond and was found in one of Orna's factories in Africa by a foreigner. The foreigner was awestruck by the resemblance of the diamond to the Indian god. According to Vijay Jain, CEO of Orna, this diamond Ganesha has not been polished and is being displayed in its original form.

It is difficult to calculate its price. But diamond experts aver that it would have to be cut and polished before evaluating it and taking the example of the similarly weighing Wittelbach diamond, it cannot be less than seven million US dollars (32 crores of rupees).

This diamond Ganesha is not for sale. A truly beautiful and unique piece, this fabulous idol attracted a lot of devotees when it was displayed by the Orna company in India in 2007. It was in the country for two years, on display in major Indian cities under the heaviest security possible. The guards were assigned and rotated randomly, so that no one would know who would accompany the diamond or which route it would take.

While the gem was being taken in and around Indian cities, it was transported in a secured armoured van with computerised door locks. The doors opened only at the start of the destination and the end. Any attempt to open it midway, would have resulted in the alarms going off. Through its trip, the van's journey was tracked by satellite system. In India, it was showcased at the company's showrooms by day and kept in an undisclosed bank vault at night. While in the showroom, it was enclosed in a bowl, nicknamed the 'undisclosed bowl'. For if the bowl sensed motion, it would open up and the diamond would go in, into a secure compartment. The bowl could be controlled by remote control to hide or reveal the gem.

From silver/gold/diamond Ganeshas to one made of concrete may look odd. But one must pay our regards to the world's largest Ganesha idol. The 66-foot Chinmaya Ganesha idol in Kolhapur is at present, considered to be the tallest Ganesha idol in the world. The statue was erected in November 2001 to commemorate the Golden Jubilee year of the Chinmaya Mission. It is located at the Chinmaya Sandeepany Ashram in Kolhapur, Maharashtra. The idol sits on a 24-feet *Dhyana Nilayam* (raised platform). Thus, the statue is 90 feet from the ground level. This tall Ganapati is a permanent statue, unlike the idols created during Ganesha *Chaturthi*.

4 Unheard voices

Think Bollywood hero and what comes instantly to mind is someone with the strapping good looks of a Jat or a Pathan, astride on his bike, or with a chick on his arm, as at ease taking on the baddies as romancing in a Swiss idyll. But the Indian movie-goer is restless. He wants to venture beyond this comfort zone, challenge himself to confront alternate realities. Suddenly, he is open to new explorations, with a new receptiveness to other influences. This could explain why we have so wholeheartedly welcomed the arrival of Natha (of *Peepli Live* fame), the unwashed, dwarfish loser who is out to take his life so that his family can get the rupees one lakh as compensation. Natha is India's rural Everyman, the eternal victim lashed to his cruel destiny. It is the height of black comedy that his impending death should so arouse the passions of politicians and the media, but Natha's death-in-life, the pathos of his helplessness and poverty, invite no attention at all. The ultimate irony is that, with millions geared to watch Natha die, the little man makes good his escape to the anonymity of a city. In the end, as the credits roll, Natha is seen clinging tenaciously to life, though his lot is no better than before. So, this is a man who cannot live, and cannot die.

Something about Natha's predicament reminded me of Franz Kafka's celebrated short story *The Hunger Artist*. A man, a hunger artist, fasts for up to forty days at a time while sitting in a straw littered cage, as hundreds of curious onlookers surround him. The butchers guard his cage at night to see that he does not sneak in food. If the spectators milling around that hunger artist are there because they love to see suffering, and the prospect of someone's death, we, too, sit in our air-conditioned theatres, munch tomato-cheese popcorn and are filled with quiet, guilty pleasure that our lot is infinitely better than Natha's. Suffering is a spectacle too and that is why, when a man pierces his cheeks, walks over coals, when bulls gore matadors, there is always a crowd for a ring-side view.

Which brings me to share with you a word I learnt recently, and which seems so relevant to what I am attempting to say. This German word is *Schadenfreude*. *Schadenfreude* means pleasure derived from the misfortunes of others. The awareness of this human failing existed since Biblical times and is also mentioned by Aristotle. There have been a number of scientific studies on *Schadenfreude*, as reported in the *New York Times*. Many such studies are based on the social comparison theory, the idea that when people around us have bad luck, we look better to ourselves. Other researchers have found that people with low self-esteem are more likely to feel *Schadenfreude* than are people who have high self-esteem.

It was Mark Twain who famously quipped: "Remember the poor, it costs nothing." But remembering the poor does come at a price, as I found out very early in life. Sometime in the mid-seventies, the redoubtable Sister Linda, she of the contralto voice and lively gait, sold us the idea at school of going to the poor and seeing their lives first hand. We were indoctrinated to see poverty with

Romantic idealism, as if the poor, the sick, the suffering had a Christ-like asceticism and indifference to material needs that we had to somehow emulate. I think our ready enthusiasm for the project had more to do with getting away from the stuffy classroom than any altruism. So, on the appointed

and then a roaring deluge. The school gates were hastily closed, and the alms given out through the compound grilles. I shall never forget the faces that peered in through that wall — eyes maddened by greed, twisted grimaces of fury, skeletal forms, barely human, raging against fate, against the



day, a group of us girls, clad in neat grey and white, our hair demurely braided, dainty hankies pinned to our shirts, walked single file along the city streets. In no time at all, we were under one of the city bridges, in the thick of a loud, squalid slum. Women in torn saris filled water from a tap, carrying on shrill, slanging matches. Men sat on charpoy, swatting flies or playing cards. Babies rolled in the dust. The buzzing flies, the stench of the open drains, the proximity to strangers with serious hygiene issues.... all this was so overwhelming that the idea that when people around us have bad luck, we look better to ourselves. Other researchers have found that people with low self-esteem are more likely to feel *Schadenfreude* than are people who have high self-esteem.

Two days later, our project reached its culmination. We were ready in the school's front courtyard. There were sacks of rice piled neatly, along with a huge mound of blankets and saris. The poor came in, a thin trickle at first, then a stream,

of us roll down our car windows and tip the little beggar child at the street corner. It's not charity, just a reflex action.

Years later, as a student of literature, I remembered those sacks of grain in our school courtyard again when I read Bhabendranath Saikia's masterpiece *Rats*, later made into the film *Kolahal*. Little Moti, running behind trucks to steal grain,

is killed by the toppling sacks. One of the sacks, stained with Moti's blood, is delivered to his mother's hut. At first, she shouts that she does not want it. Then, as days pass, some rats make a hole in the sack and the rice grains fall out. Finally, she cooks the rice each day and in the end, warms herself with the bloodstained sack. The stark beauty of the story underscores the inescapable truth that the poor do not have the luxury to grieve. For them, the struggle to live must go on, and tears must dry as soon as they well up. In his *Sendur*, a fish seller inadvertently cuts his hand when cleaning fish. Instead of tending to his bleeding cut, he wipes his bright, red blood on the fish, hoping to attract customers. Even in his film *Sandhyarag*, the character of the young maid played by Runu Devi is encouraged to marry the elderly driver, who everyone knows is impotent. You realise then that for the disadvantaged, it is enough just to have a roof over one's body and two meals to keep away starvation. Other human needs must be cruelly suppressed.

These days, when my relatives who have settled abroad come for a visit, they all exclaim how things have changed here and are embarrassed that the Ferrero Rocher chocolates and other goodies they have packed for us are all available here. They marvel at the number of our television channels and the variety of cars that purr along the streets. They cheer the computer savviness of our school kids and are grateful for the efficient travel agents. They think times have changed in India and we play along with them in this little, sly game of make-believe. We take them for cosy meals at the new Italian joint in town, show them around the malls and discreetly point out how our daughters, too, dress like Hannah Montana. But we don't tell them that in a village close to the city, a woman dies at childbirth because there is no doctor at hand. We don't want them to know that young girls are trafficked to brothels because there is nothing to eat at home. We would rather not show them the ruins of a schoolhouse where only cows shelter. And no, we'd rather not know at all about those who sell their blood, or their kidneys, so that their families may survive. In the villages of India, things are exactly as they were when Ray made *Pather Panchali* in 1955. A village going to pieces, doors shaking in the storm, an old woman swallowing pitiful balls of soggy rice. Everywhere it is the ulcer of poverty deforming life. And yet, the poor in Ray's film have a certain poetic dignity about them. However, in *Peepli Live*, you sense that poverty, the imminent tragedy of a suicide, has been commodified as news/entertainment on the television viewer. The more is this issue drummed up, the more certain everyone is that Natha will take his miserable life, the higher the TRP ratings. And all the politicians, of differing affiliations, are in the thick of it, milking the issue to their own advantage. Natha is besieged with gifts — a television set, a hand-pump, but they take away his choice, his chance to tell his side of his story, and his very dignity. Natha must take us outside our comfort zone. Only then can we be the change we want to bring.

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The Other Guys

Cast: Will Ferrell, Mark Wahlberg, Eva Mendes.
Director: Adam Mchay.

Two mismatched New York City detectives seize an opportunity to step up like the city's top cops whom they idolise — only things don't quite go as planned. *The Other Guys* is a cop movie spoof that delivers crude jokes at a rapid-fire pace in a lighthearted tone. This is what Will Ferrell fans expect. However, the inspired casting of Mark



Wahlberg opposite Ferrell, performers who couldn't be more different, is what elevates this effort.

Relegated to desk duty, Terry (Wahlberg) resents working in the shadow of two superstar cops (Samuel L. Jackson and Dwayne Johnson). He's even more upset being teamed with Allen Gamble (Ferrell), a desk jockey who loves paperwork and would rather sit in the office all day, than answer a call. However, a case involving construction permits leads them to David Ershon (Steve Coogan), a business tycoon involved in a corrupt scheme to hide his debts.

Eat Pray Love

Cast: Julia Roberts, James Franco, Richard Jenkins.
Director: Ryan Murphy.

Eat Pray Love poses a particular challenge. Elizabeth Gilbert's 2006 book charts her year long sabbatical to find herself, during which she travelled to the three "1's" (Italy, India and Indonesia) to discover the three "P's"

MOVIE WATCH
Vikram Baskarati

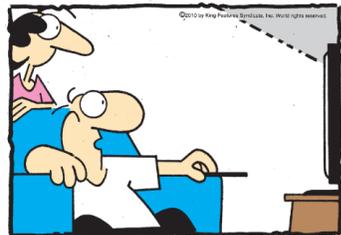
TOP 10 Hollywood

- The Expendables
- Vampires Suck
- Eat Pray Love
- Lottery Ticket
- The Other Guys
- Piranha 3D
- Nanny McPhee Returns
- The Switch
- Inception
- Scott Pilgrim vs. the World

(pleasure, prayer and peace). Nicely cast as Liz is Julia Roberts. In the midst of a nasty divorce from Stephen (Billy Crudup), she jumps into the bed of a younger man, David (James Franco), before realising what she really needs is to learn to love herself. So, she splits New York for Rome, where she eats. Liz's next stop is her guru's ashram in India,



where her unabated appetite earns her the nickname "Groceries". It's in Bali, though, that Liz falls unexpectedly in love with Felipe (Javier Bardem), a soulful Brazilian gem dealer.



"They're showing a rerun of old news because today's news is too depressing!"



"Once you said you'd follow me to the ends of the Earth. Now you won't even follow me on Twitter!"



"We had to upgrade to unlimited text messaging. It takes Stanley 20 or 30 tries just to type my name."



"The insurance company won't pay for your fall because gravity is a pre-existing condition."

FORECAST

AUGUST 30 - SEPT 5, 2010

ARIES (MAR 21-APR 19)
You like obstacles. Obstacles give you something to work around at the outset of the week. Wednesday and Thursday, when all the barriers before you suddenly lift, you and your comrades march toward victory in a shower of confetti. You have no time to celebrate on Friday and Saturday, what with your family's demands on your time, but Sunday is all yours. Call your friends. A small party is in order.

Taurus (APR 20-May 20)
You wake up early this week feeling like a character in a romance novel. Wednesday, you're too busy thinking about your wallet to spend much time thinking about your heart, and Thursday finds you crippled with indecision about your work life. But the weekend returns you to the realm of red roses and boxes of chocolate. If you're single, Saturday's your chance to do something about that.

GEMINI (MAY 21-JUN 21)
If a spreadsheet has you cross-eyed on Monday or Tuesday, don't panic. Wednesday and Thursday will have you seeing things more clearly than you have in a while. You will also meet more new friends in the span of a few hours than you've met over the last few months. Friday and Saturday might be thwarted by infighting among friends, but Sunday is pure love and peace and laughter.

CANCER (JUN 22-JUL 22)
There was a time when most people thought Columbus was nuts. The lesson: The wildest notions are sometimes also the wisest. Not that you have any broad theories about the Earth to impart on Monday or Tuesday. Wednesday finds you overwhelmed and irritable, but you don't have to let anyone else know that. Put your best foot forward on Thursday. Be alert and communicate clearly. Emotions are running high at the end of the week, but so is your energy. You are indefatigable. You have the energy of an early explorer.

LEO (JUL 23-AUG 22)
You are a success. You are almost a legend among your coworkers. But enough about what they think: How do you feel about what you're doing? That's the big question on Monday and Tuesday, and it stays in the back of your mind all week. When someone asks casually about your life goals on Wednesday or Thursday, don't be shy. Modesty and pride are major themes on Friday, and Saturday finds you feeling happy and in control. Sunday is one of those top-of-the-mountain days. Get out your diary, because it's a day you'll want to remember.

VIRGO (AUG 23-SEPT 22)
An open, philosophical approach — rather than a strictly practical approach — is the way to go during the first half of this week. You are the master of your destiny. Thursday, in particular, has the potential to be a great or terrible day, depending in large measure on you. On Friday, if your energy is flagging, ask your friends to rile you up (they'll be happy to oblige). Saturday's a good day to spend around others as well, although Sunday's a stay-at-home sort of day.

LIBRA (SEPT 23-OCT 22)
A diplomatic tele-a-tele may be necessary to smooth things over between you and an important (if volatile) ally early this week. Midweek, you and your friends are laughing nonstop about an inside joke, but on Friday, there's really not much time to do anything except work. Find a way to appreciate beauty and harmony while getting things done. You'll have all of Sunday to be social.

SCORPIO (OCT 23-NOV 21)
The push and pull at the start of the week isn't a light per se, it's just several people trying to establish interpersonal boundaries. You'll need as many people on your side as possible on Wednesday and Thursday, when stressful money matters require immediate attention, but Friday is all about foreign restaurants, ocean journeys and long cerebral conversations. On Saturday, you get what you want without even having to ask for it. On Sunday, take it easy.

SAGITTARIUS (NOV 22-DEC 21)
On Monday, think small. Don't be so concerned with how you're going to harvest apples from a tree you haven't planted yet. Worrying in advance isn't a good use of your time, especially on Wednesday and Thursday, when you already won't have enough time to get done all the things you need to. On Friday, you'd like to rely on the help of your friends, but your energies are mismatched. You may have to go this one alone. Some good news: Sunday is a lucky day.

CAPRICORN (DEC 22-JAN 19)
If you have nothing else to do on Monday or Tuesday, spending some time with Nature would be a swell idea. By Wednesday, you won't have a spare second to yourself. Thursday promises to be zany, too. Energy levels surge on Friday, and by Saturday, all the havoc in the rest of your week seeps into your home life. On Sunday, if you feel like turning off the phone, everyone will understand.

AQUARIUS (JAN 20-FEB 18)
An unexpected phone call gets you thinking about someone you haven't thought of in years. The start of the week is defined by strange discoveries made in strange places, and the middle of the week is defined by — lucky you — love. Wednesday is pure bliss and Thursday is the sequel. It only follows that Friday will be something of a letdown. This weekend, organise your feelings and get plenty of sleep. Sunday is an energised day.

PISCES (FEB 19-MARCH 20)
It's a cold, hard world sometimes. Thankfully, there are blankets. Monday and Tuesday are cozy days, and Wednesday is a fairly dreary day, too. On Thursday, try your hand at being creative, but don't be too specific about what you do. Friday is a romantic day, and Saturday puts you in a creative mood again, but Sunday is a day for practicalities.