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Palpitations

Miss Demeanor



By Anuvab Pal

Global beauty pageants, taken terribly seriously in booming new economies like ours, Brazil, Uzbekistan etc, appear more as blips on the glamour calendar of Western Europe and the United States, which, of course, doesn't hinder certain Western production companies that understand the value of limited swim-wear, a good foreign business opportunity, exotic teenage women, fireworks, assorted talents (Miss World has fire-eaters and a midget who does cartwheels), moral catch-phrases ("Iraq means a lot to me" – Miss Venezuela), vague concerned questions ("If you had one thing

on the planet to save, what would it be?") and parading young women on fibre-glass in front of middle-aged businessmen, to turn it into a billion-dollar spectacle or, as modern speak has come to know it, "bling".

I was particularly taken by a Philippines-based contest called Miss Earth whose runners-up (the winner being declared Miss Earth, naturally) were Miss Earth – Fire, Miss Earth – Water and Miss Earth – Air, which I initially confused with an open-air circus a la Cirque Du Soleil but later found out that it's an environmentally-conscious pageant. (Question to the woman from Slovenia, "If you were a shrub, what would you do to help other plants?") In 2007, an Indian woman was chosen as Miss Earth – Air and she mentioned without irony that she wouldn't treat the gravity of the title lightly.

Smaller pageants are quirkier and fashion shows

follow closely in their experimentation. Last year, the Great Wall of China played host to what turned out to be the world's longest ramp for a fashion show, hip designer Stella McCartney turned her ramp into a tropical jungle, someone at an Indian fashion show read out the first page of the novel *Shantaram* before the models strutted, a South Asian fund-raising pageant (for street urchins) in New York featured models dressed as urchins to magnify

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their plight and more recently, the Gateway of India in Mumbai played host to a fashion show choreographed to Sufi mystic music but sadly, the models did not whirl like well-dressed dervishes (or is the plural dervi?)

Motivated by these imagina-

tive departures in the methodology of showcasing beautiful women who have things (causes) they stand for, I decided to come up with a list of three possible shows. My hope is that the tanned, botoxed, gelled set that organise these things will use these as inspiration for a sparkling night under a gold dome, perhaps in some intellectual hotbed like Dubai.

- Miss Ulysses: The greatest novel of the twentieth century will be read out in its entirety as beautiful worldly women walk confidently across a stage designed as a page. The one least resembling the author James Joyce will be declared a winner.

- A fashion show prominently featuring aluminium (perhaps models wrapped in them, similar to, but careful not to imitate, a casserole).

- Miss World (Convict): Hopefully, self explanatory. A pageant of the loveliest unmarried female criminals, globally. The winner is set free.

Morparia

